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CHAPTER ONE
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NATION

Nations of all sorts fill the maps of the fantasy campaign world. Their political boundaries trace the topography of seacoasts and river valleys and mountain ranges, hinting at areas of conflict where they butt up against each other or overlap, and revealing the most dangerous, forsaken areas of wildland where they do not exist at all. Sprawling, expansionist empires, xenophobic theocracies, idealistic republics, and yes, kingdoms aplenty and every other sort of state possible under our sun or any other are the homelands of the heroes, villains, and most of the other peoples of the fantasy milieu.

In a basic or even rudimentary sort of campaign, where dungeon-stomping and monster-hacking are the be-all and end-all of action and role-playing, the existence of nations and their various characteristics are little more than a backdrop for the milieu. If that backdrop can be given greater detail, however, more intense colors, and even three dimensions, the depth and breadth of the roleplaying experience can be expanded upon commensurately. Game Masters have it within their ability to increase the enjoyment of the games in this way and to create nations that are tangible, believable, and enjoyable.

Understanding what a nation is, and what its various attributes are, is the first step in this process.

ATTRIBUTES OF NATIONS

A nation is a large group of people united by a common ancestry, culture, history, or language—and perhaps all of these things—that is ruled by an independent government within a specific geographic area and is recognized by other nations (typically through such mechanisms as an exchange of ambassadors).

Frequently, the word "nation" is used to mean a group of people with a feeling of national unity and a shared culture, history, or language; the word "state" to an area of land whose people have an independent government; "nation-state" to a single political entity that combines the attributes of both a nation and a state; and "country" to a geographically cohesive region. These are fairly technical applications for these terms, however, and in this book these definitions are blurred to a large extent and the words "nation," "country," and "state" are all used fairly synonymously.

Historically, nation-states as we understand them today began to develop in the late Middle Ages, during a time when travel and communication began to improve and people became progressively more aware of the parts of their country that lay beyond their own communities. As a result, loyalty to local and religious leaders was weakened and allegiance to national monarchs grew stronger. By the 18th century, England, France, Spain, and a number of other countries had become nation-states in the wholly modern sense.

Many of the states that exist in a fantasy world are not likely to conform to the modern definition of a nation, and instead be proto-states constituted upon such things as ethnic, racial, or tribal origins, religious affiliations, personal loyalties, and vassal relationships with the powers-that-be. Such "nations" might exist for indefinite periods of time—even several generations or centuries—but will not generally have the characteristics, size, stability, or permanence that we tend to associate with most current, real-world nations (exceptions to these assertions can, of course, be found throughout both history and the modern world). Great empires aside, most of the "nations" in a fantasy world—like so many of those in the ancient and medieval worlds—are not likely to be much bigger than counties or perhaps the size of medieval European states.

Nations are generally assumed to have distinct rights and responsibilities. What one nation sees as its own rights and responsibilities, however, will be defined by its collective experience, ethos, needs, and other factors, and may diverge considerably from what other nations consider its rights and responsibilities to be. In the modern world, these typically include such things as the right to freely navigate on the high seas and the responsibility not to threaten or wage war on other nations. In our own world, however, these rights and responsibilities are abridged or violated almost daily. The extent to which this will be the case in a fantasy game milieu is wholly at the discretion of the Game Master and will say much for the character and stability of the campaign world he has created.

In the context of the game, a nation might be quite small by modern standards, perhaps as few as 5,000 people if it is politically autonomous and meets the various criteria listed in the previous paragraphs. Certain types of nation are more likely than others to be this small, foremost among them city-states. (Luxembourg is a modern example of such a nation.)

Likewise, a nation might be quite large, and have several million residents within its borders. Certain types of nation are also more likely than most to be this large, most notably empires. Within such large nations, there may be numerous political entities that, while ultimately subject to the will of the greater power, are largely autonomous and are, essentially, nations unto themselves.

Like people, nations have a lifespan and, depending on their resilience, internal strengths, and outside pressures might last anywhere from a few years to millennia; a couple of centuries is probably typical. As such, one nation is usually built on the ruins of the last, and with the ones that preceded it; only very rarely will a new nation be established where none existed before. This is possible, of course, and there are a few ways it could likely occur. One is when a political entity is established in a country that has not been previously inhabited to any extent (e.g., a new continent, a new planet), for example. Another is when a quasi-national entity like a colony is founded in an area that has only primitive peoples with governance that has not surpassed the proto-national level.

by design? Did some previously unknown or hidden region suddenly become accessible, perhaps via a magic portal, and now ecosystems are mixing? Or perhaps a familiar predator, vital to the nation's economy and identity, is suddenly dying off or disappearing. The Player Characters might be tasked with discovering the cause. In an interesting twist, perhaps the Player Characters are the cause, having systematically slain one or more of the major predators, either for monetary gain or simply "the experience." Now the ecosystem has been disrupted, and some other creature that the main predator kept in check is flourishing uncontrollably, causing unforeseen problems.

A real world example of this can be found in the rabbits that were loosed in Australia, which flourished because there were no natural predators to check their population. Dogs were then brought in to hunt the wild rabbits, but these animals soon degenerated into the dingo, the feral dog of Australia that prefers domestic sheep to wild hare. Similarly, wild swine might prove to be a problem for the United States in the coming years . . . .

NATURAL RESOURCES

No discussion of nation building would be complete without addressing natural resources. Most nations will seek to exploit their territory to the fullest extent possible—limited, of course, by technological, social, religious, and perhaps other factors— and advantages can be found in even the most inhospitable terrain. Mining for ore, harvesting lumber and crops, and hunting or trapping valuable animals are all key drivers of a nation's economy and identity, especially at a medieval technological level.

One of the most important natural resources for any nation is fresh water for its people and animals, and possibly for the irrigation of crops. All communities will have a water source—a well, oasis, pond, stream, river, or lake. Of course, waterways also serve as transportation arteries, a palpable resource unto themselves.

First, decide what resources the landscape might be able to provide that would be of value to the nation, or of value to other nations as a trade good. Natural resources are going to form the backbone of trade in your world, and how important each nation is in the worldwide economy. The GM must decide if there are mineral deposits beneath the surface, or if the forests within the nation's borders produce lumber useful for construction. It is important to always keep in mind the character of the nation that you want to develop when making such decisions. For example, if the nation you want to develop will be a proud society of horse warriors, then mineral assets and lumber are probably not important when determining resources. Instead, such a society is more likely to have sprung up from a land with ample plains and plentiful herds of horses or similar riding animals.

Next, when looking at how a nation might seek to develop its natural resources, several factors must be considered. How does the ruling government view its territory? Are they willing to exploit the available resources and, if so, to what degree? A nation of dwarves might have extensive mining operations, for example, but completely ignore lumber resources on the

surface, save for such timber as is needed in their diggings. A community of elves might oppose cutting down forests for timber, but be willing to trade furs and pelts gathered from hunting. In an extreme case, a nation governed by nature priests might eschew disrupting any part of the ecosystem with commercial ventures, preferring to leave the landscape in a pristine state. Such a nation would, of course, be a primitive one in most regards.

This is not to say that a nation cannot have resources that it chooses to leave unexploited. Such situations can present many options for adventure hooks. But as a general rule, a society tends to be shaped by its surroundings, which include the natural resources available. If you are making determinations for your nation in a reverse order, building the land around a desired culture, then keeping to this rule is a good way to keep focused on a national identity that is supported by all aspects of that nation's composition.

LAND AS A RESOURCE

The first place to look for potential resources is the terrain itself, the geography. Are there mountains or hills that might provide ready access to mineral assets? How much arable land is available? If good farmland is scarce, the nation will either have a scant population or have to import basic foodstuffs, which means relying on trade and cultivating other natural resources to produce trade goods. If the land can raise more food than its people need, then that becomes a viable trade good. Do not forget to look at rivers and other bodies of water, as well. Oceans, lakes and rivers can provide both a source of food and a source of transportation and trade. If the technological level is high enough—virtually anything above a Stone Age level—the power of flowing water can be harnessed through waterwheels and dams. The presence or absence of these resources will have far-reaching effects upon the character of the nation you design.

Next, look to the flora that the land provides. Again, crops fall under this category. What kinds of crops will this nation's geography and climate support? Edible crops—especially grains like wheat, barley, rice, and maize—are the most important to feed a growing populace and support cities, but other crops can be grown and converted into trade goods to cover any lack of food production. Spices are the truly upscale kind of vegetable produce of a nation. Tobacco, textiles (silk is akin to gold, cotton to silver, and linen and wool to copper and iron), and extracts for dyes can all become sources of national identity.

As with the ecosystem, try to select a limited number of crops that the country in question is known for. Unless the nation controls a large and varied territory, it is unlikely to produce everything that it needs. Deciding that the nation produces the finest dyes in the world, or is sole source of a valuable medicinal herb (and jealously guards the secrets of its cultivation) can add to the unique flavor each nation. Such monopolies can also make for great story hooks. The party could find itself sent to a far-off land in search of a rare herb to cure a local ruler, or find itself escorting an enterprising merchant seeking to negotiate trade rights to the fine wines that only one country produces.

Arable land is not the only source of vegetable wealth, however. Forests can provide valuable lumber, either for general building (e.g., cedar, oak, pine) or as a luxury wood used for fine ornamentation (e.g., mahogany, teak). For societies that oppose cutting down whole trees, value can still be gained by harvesting nuts, sap for syrup, or leaves. Jungles can provide medicinal herbs and rare spices, and the fiercer and more inhospitable the terrain, the greater the value that will be attached to the resources it provides. Do not forget that the wealthy might be willing to pay top coin for exotic plants and flowers solely based on their aesthetic appeal. If your group of players tends to act with too heavy a hand for your taste most of the time, try challenging them with a quest from a soon-to-be-married noble who wants them to return with a rare flower that he can present as a wedding gift to his betrothed. Of course, the flower only grows in some suitably inhospitable place (the more difficult to get, the greater the display of the noble's devotion, after all). Protecting such delicate beauty from the rigors of travel might be just the lesson the party needs on appreciating subtlety.

UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

Once various peoples have found a collective use for the land, they need ways to measure or otherwise express or record information about it. Following is a non-comprehensive list of terms from a number of different historic and fantastic systems of measurement—as well as some useful ways for thinking of distances in the game—which Game Masters can employ as needed or use as the inspiration for their own systems of Dwarven Hectares, Theran Meters, and the like.

Acre: An area of 43,560 square feet (4,840 square yards), 640 of which make up a square mile. It is based on the area a yoke of oxen could plow in one day.

Bowshot: A distance of 220 yards, the same length as a furlong, from the distance at which longbowmen shoot at butts for practice.

Chain: A length of 66 feet, based on the surveyor's tool of the same name, 10 of which make up a furlong and 80 of which make up a mile. It is divided into 100 links.

Cubit: A length of 18 inches. Derived from the Latin word for "elbow," it represents the distance between a typical human's elbow and the tip of his middle finger.

Dwarven Chainlength: A length of 60 feet (20 yards), used by dwarves and other subterranean folk for measuring distances underground or in built-up areas. Fractions of this measurement are typically expressed in sixthes and twelfths, especially when used for map keys and notations.

Fathom: A distance, specifically a depth, of six feet. While this unit of measurement is usually used to refer to depth beneath the sea, it is not unreasonable to assume that those dwelling beneath the earth might have adopted a "subterranean fathom" for measuring depth below ground.

Furlong: A length of 660 feet (220 yards), eight of which are equal to a mile. A tenth of a furlong is called a chain.

Hand: Typically four inches, the measure of an average hand's breadth.

Hunter-Gatherer's Section: A square unit of measurement 1.32 miles on each side, calculated on the assumption that

a single man-sized hunter-gatherer requires an area of 1.75 square miles for adequate game and forage. GMs can use this unit of measurement when calculating the area required for non-agricultural hunter-gatherer communities, using one section for each person in the group. Sophisticated groups of such people in the game might actually use this unit of measurement to calculate the amount of space they need to survive.

Hunting Radius: Assuming that a single man-sized predator, scavenger, or omnivore requires an area of 1.75 square miles, it would have an operational radius of about 740 yards from its lair. This distance is for forests, jungles, moors, and plains and assume the existence of hunting trails. Because some areas have a smaller density of resources than others, multiply the given distances by 1.5 for hills, mountains, and swamps, and double them for deserts/sandy areas and tundras/frozen areas. All these distances should be extended as appropriate for creatures larger than man-sized.

League: A variable measure of distance, usually used to mean a length of three statute (land) miles. It is derived from the medieval Latin word leuga, meaning "a measure of distance."

Link: A length of 7.92 inches, 25 of which are equal to a rod and 100 of which are equal to a chain.

Megalithic yard: A unit of measurement derived from precise measurements of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments from several European countries, equaling 27 ¼ inches.

Mile: On land, a statute mile is a distance of 5,280 feet (1,760 yards). At sea or in the air, a nautical mile is a distance of 6,076 feet (c. 2,025 yards). Derived from the Latin mille passuum, meaning "a thousand paces."

Pace: A variable length that is generally taken to be 30 inches. The ancient Roman measure of the same name was considerably longer, some 58.1 inches.

Rod: A length of 16 ½ feet (5 ½ yards), 40 of which are equal to a furlong.

Stone's-Throw: A length of 100 feet, often used by farmers, villagers, and other common-folk, especially for measurement of agricultural land, the distance between farmsteads, the depth of groves of trees, and the like. It is based on the assumed distance that a typical human can, with a bit of effort, hurl a fist-sized rock. A rough measure, it is sometimes expressed in halves, but is usually just rounded up or down (e.g., "five or six stone's-throw past the edge of the village").

Sylvan Bowlength: A length of 500 yards, often used by elves and other forest dwellers as a convenient measure of distance. It is based on the normal maximum range of an arrow fired by an elven warrior.

MONSTERS AS A RESOURCE

Animals, both magical and mundane, can also provide valuable resources for a nation. Livestock can help feed the populace, furs and pelts can clothe, and certain creatures might produce the ingredients for valuable medicines. Other animal resources might serve as mounts and beasts of burden, carrying riders and cargo swiftly across land, or even the skies and oceans. Domesticated predators might serve as companions, guardians, trackers, or beasts of war.

Livestock is probably the first use to which most civilizations will put available animal resources. In our world, most livestock consists of relatively harmless and non-aggressive herbivores, such as cattle, horses, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens. This is because such creatures are easy to control and feed. But in a fantasy world, herbivores might have developed unusual defenses, and an exceptionally hardy or strong race might domesticate more fearsome creatures. And, as humans have historically succeeded in domesticating large mammals like cattle and horses, so too might the members of other races learn to selectively breed other sorts of creatures.

Example
The Lizardfolk of Uxatan. Just as humans have domesticated many sorts of warm-blooded creatures, so to have the reptilian folk native to the jungles of Uxatan capitalized on a racial affinity with scaly beasts. Even before leaving the swamps for the mud-brick cities of their jungled land, these cold-blooded humanoids had domesticated all sorts of crocodiles, giant snapping turtles, and even some varieties of dinosaurs—using them for variously for labor, food, and warfare.

Closer to the core campaign setting is the phenomena of the Theran War Lizard, a creature bred over centuries for use in the armies of the Greek confederacy and trained for use as a mount, pack animal, and mobile weapons platform. After the great cataclysm that destroyed the Theran culture a century before, many of these beasts became feral or came under the control of other powers—even humanoid tribes—and at the time the campaign is set are one of the most widespread beasts of war, second only to horses .

Even if a creature cannot be domesticated and thus used for food, there is always hunting to consider, for sustenance, sport, and even a rite of passage. Nations with larger areas of wilderness frontier might come to rely on the resources brought in by hunters and trappers. In more settled lands, nobles still might set aside preserves to ensure good hunting is close at hand. Adventurers wandering into such preserves might find a cold reception if they kill any of the creatures within. One of the most famous versions of this adventure hook is the origin of England's Robin Hood and his Merry Men, who became outlaws after killing the king's deer out of desperation or ignorance. Imagine the looks on the Player Character's faces when they retell at the next village the tale of their desperate battle in the forest with a rampaging manticore, only to be greeted by accusations of poaching in a royal preserve!

Example
Leopards of Chatal Hueyuek. In the anachronistically Neo-lithic society of Chatal Hueyuek, leopards are a protected species that can only be hunted by the Elders of the community (e.g., characters of 6th level or higher, many of them nature priests or pathfinder warriors, who are citizens in good standing). Traditionally, each Elder will slay one such beast in the course of their lives, thereafter wearing its skin as a badge of office. Lower level characters and foreigners, on the other hand, are prohibited from harming leopards, under pain of severe censure.