

Vornae (Dark Elves)

The Vornae, or Dark Elves, reside in massive underground cities beneath Wayside, and extending into parts of the Ternian Empire. On the surface, Vornae occupy the above-ground Duchy Koshinari and the city-state of Gatik in eastern Wayside. Above ground, Koshinari is populated by a mix of all races, but the Vornae are unquestionably the leaders - all others are considered second-class citizens at best or indentured serfs at the worst; and even the lowliest Dark Elf can feel a sense of pride in his heritage. Vornae society tends to be very insular: they rarely allow non-Vornae access to their underground cities, and even then, visitors are not permitted to move freely without an escort. Consequently, members of the other races are largely unaware of how numerous the Dark Elves really are - in reality, they are the third most numerous race in all of Terna.

Although each is defined by various distinguishing characteristics, most Vornae Houses share similar values, and believe in the importance of honor, tradition, and family. In fact, the idea of honor is so important to some of these elves that, if disgraced, they may be forced to take their own lives in an attempt to reclaim their honor. Family ties are also very important to the Vornae: individuals feel a strong sense of loyalty to their immediate family as well as to their Clan. There are two major clans, Dragon and Spider, as well as a number of smaller clans, whose members wield less influence but are no less proud of their heritage and history. Each of the larger clans is ruled by a Princess - or, less often, a Prince - and is divided into a number of Houses, each of which can usually trace the purity of its bloodlines across many generations. Vornae society generally observes a strict hierarchy, with the Princess the unquestioned leader of a clan, and the heads of various Houses controlling parts of the cities and the lands above.

To the other Duchies, the Vornae present a united front; but the cities beneath Koshinari are not always in accord. Although currently the major clans are not overtly at war, minor or major power struggles constantly threaten to shift the balance among the Houses and between the Dragon and Spider clans. For the moment, the Dragon Clan is positioned as the dominant clan, and until her recent death the Dragon Princess of House Koshinari ruled over all of the Vornae underground cities.

The Houses:

All Dark Elves, from the Matron of a Great House to common merchants and craftsmen, can claim membership in one of the Houses. However, what membership in a House means for those near the top of the hierarchy is very different from what it means for the lower classes. While the lowlier members of a House claim membership as a matter of pride and may keep or break with their Houses' traditions as they will, the members of the ruling class are expected to adhere to a certain standard of conduct historically associated with their House, in order to uphold the honor of the House. Each House has a particular tactical style which their most prestigious warriors are expected to adopt, and particular professions which their aristocrats are expected to study. Members of some houses also tend to adopt a distinctive style of dress, so as to recognize their kinsmen upon first meeting.

The Dragon Clan

House Koshinari

Members of House Koshinari specialize in the art of Celestial magic, and important figures in the House are expected to show at least a degree of Celestial casting and formal proficiency. Several high-ranking members of Wayside's Celestial guild, the Solars' Guild, are members of this ancient House. Until her death in the recent Vampire Wars, ca. 309, a Princess of the Koshinari was considered the symbolic head of the Dragon Clan, and was often consulted in difficult times on behalf of the entire clan. No one has yet officially replaced her as the face of the House. The Koshinari were the first of the three original Houses to form the Dragon Clan, and are easily identified by their wardrobe of black and red.

House Masashi

The second of the three original houses of the Dragon Clan, House Masashi is by far the most artistic. They see beauty in nearly every aspect of life; even in the midst of tragedy, members of House Masashi have been known to comment on the poetic elegance of their suffering. Among the noble members of the house, their respect for art can extend so far that they are willing to challenge friends to honorable combat if they do not agree on the quality of a favored work. The clothing of House Masashi is often very elegant and arrayed in various shades of purple.

House Toru

The members of House Toru, the last of the three original houses of the Dragon Clan, are easily recognized by their choice of attire; unlike most Vornae, they tend to wear simple clothes in neutral colors such as brown and grey. This allows them to blend in more easily in their travels among the surface races. While most members of House Toru travel whenever they can, they tend to understate the extent of their wanderlust when interacting with the other houses. This wanderlust can lead to a certain recklessness, especially among the younger members of the house. Many members of House Toru can be found in Gatik, which they tend to use as a central hub for their travels.

House Kinryuu

Members of House Kinryuu value strength of arms and the fighting spirit. In times of war, Kinryuu warriors are the first to answer the call to defend the honor of their people. They are often employed as bodyguards by other houses, and in rare cases can even be bound into an "honor contract" with other Vornae; if the warrior feels they owe a substantial debt to the other house, they will serve that house loyally until their death. These Vornae appear a bit more rugged than most, and bear their many battle scars with pride. They wear their hair short and adorn their clothing with yellow and red accents.

House Kazuo

While Kazuo is often seen as a house of diplomats and middlemen, they take pride in their diligence and loyalty. It is said that if one truly needs a task seen through to the finish, House Kazuo is the first place to which you should go. One story passed down amongst their families tells of a man who was charged with delivering a marriage proposal from one house to the Koshinari Princess where the courier, having faced incredible trials on his journey, managed to deliver the letter with his last few steps and died at the princess's feet. A true Kazuo courier can be identified by a green sash around their waist.

The Spider Clan

House Nagamiya

Nagamiya is a very conservative House, holding tradition to a high standard. As the oldest house in the Spider clan, Nagamiya is the House of the architects, builders, and craftsmen that helped to create the Clan from the ground up. Some of the oldest Vornae in Terna are Nagamiya, and occupy the highest positions in the hierarchy of this House and of Spider Clan. As the keepers of the ways and tradition for the Clan, Nagamiya are kept as the arbiters of most disputes within Spider. They prefer simple and elegant clothing in whites and greys, and adhere to traditions passed down through the House for centuries.

House Shiroto

The most influential House in the Spider Clan is Shiroto. The elders of this House occupy the highest positions of authority in their Clan, and are responsible for ensuring the security and welfare of all the Houses of Spider Clan. Some of their members are chosen at birth to become what are commonly called "Ghosts," who are kept as the guardians of the underground cities. Ghosts, who can be recognized by their pure white uniform, are trained from a young age to be watchers over the Houses, and are assigned to watch outsiders the few times when groups of the surface races are allowed to travel through the Spider territory.

The Obsidian Phalanx

The Obsidian Phalanx, a house primarily made up of contract mercenaries, places the prosperity of the house above the honor of its members. Their members make an effort to blend well when hired by another house and are only identified by a white marking on their face. While there are a handful of casters among the Phalanx, they recognize the superior magical strength of the other houses and will work with them when necessary, trading military strength for magical skill.

House Haasahina

Once known as the Naga Clan, House Haasahina was centuries ago absorbed into the Spider Clan, whose leaders were impressed by Naga's extensive expertise of Earth magic. Haasahina is the smallest Spider House, and its members constantly struggle to wield their influence and not be lost amongst the larger Houses. Many great Houses of Spider and Dragon alike employ Haasahina healers, and casters of this House are the most important line of defense against undead incursions into Vornae territory. The Earth scholars of this House wear green to represent the Earth and black to represent Chaos.

Beyond the Spider and Dragon Clans, there are a handful of smaller Clans who vie for power alongside the Houses of the major clans.

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion Clan was originally a faction of the Spider Clan, but centuries ago broke off due to a divide in House belief and structure. Though there are many theories, most of the true reasons for the split have been lost to history.

They are often associated with guile and treachery and members of the Spider and Dragon Clans generally treat them with suspicion. They often blend in with the other clan's houses to gather information and have been known to keep secrets in order to use them later against their enemies. When out in the open or on the surface they travel in groups and are identifiable by their yellow and orange accents in their black clothing.

[Due to their particular role in Dark Elf society, at this time PCs are not allowed to play members of the Scorpion Clan.]

The Leviathan Clan (The Umibozu)

House Taki

The Leviathan Clan primarily live their lives around underground bodies of water. As such they are excellent swimmers and they get most of their food from fishing. The few members of the Leviathan Clan living on the surface prefer to spend most of their time around rivers and lakes and are said to be excellent spear fishers.

House Taki is the only major house in the Leviathan clan. They are led by a small group which they call the Trinity which is composed of a Master Shin, Mistress Aya, and a "Leviathan" only known as Umi. The three of them were the first to decide that the Clan needed to split from Dragon to become more independent.

Members of the Leviathan Clan are characterized by blue scale-like tattoos on their face or hands and the aqua and the blue accents in their clothing.