Many Isles



# Ferdrskjisle

History

Simon Belt

# Ferdrskjisle

1’389 - 200 b. OW



Many Isles

**Ferdrskjisle**

Copyright © 2023 Many Isles
The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

First published in September 2023

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the author or the Many Isles.

**Many Isles**
Neudorfstrasse 33
8810 Horgen (CH)
www.manyisles.org

# Contents


Maps 4
Origins in Deepwater 6

**Grodsesk, 1’389 - 1’050 b. OW ..... 9**

The Fundament of Providence 9
Ferdskjon Expansion 11
Conquest of Providence 11
Clan Society 15
International Connections 17
Economic Progress 17
Orcish Aggression 18
Drubark Occupation 19
Orcish Offensive, 1’050 21

**Zvergleden, 1’050 - 627 b. OW ..... 24**

Zvergleden Culture 25
The Pilgrim Trails 28
Foreign Contact 29
Drubark Empire 29
Luchian Densk 29
Andan Densk 30
Hawkroost Fidelty 33
The Trekling Wars 33
Ferdskjonner United 36

**Folksesk, 627 - 200 b. OW ..... 38**

Ferdskjon Kingdom 38
The Age of the Land: Ferdr the Builder 39
The Age of Cities: Ferdr the Simple 40
Folksesk Culture 42
The End of the Ferdskjonner 44
Political Fracturing 44


MRUGGENRYKZ
MUNA
MOONSEA
FERDRSKJISLE
NORTHERN OCEAN
TURLU
CONIINENI
DENSK
ZVERGRYKZ


MJNFAR PENINSULA
FARNUSEL
Venfer
SKUSEL
Neustad
EJNSEL
Eyfloss
MOON STRAIT
FERDRSKJAND
Skristad
Ferdrheim
Nordaler
GRODSKJUSTE
OSMUND
Jokurcairn
Contje
Caer Farn
BLÖNJAND
Fjorrfarn

# Origins in Deepwater

Human colonists first reached Densk in 2'000 b. OW. With help from the Dwarven Empire, they built a powerful colony on the island. It was very rural, with many frontier areas where the capital Deepwater's rule wasn't felt. People lived as they pleased.

However, as time went on, the cities grew in power and started imposing themselves more strongly. Villages became regional capitals with town halls and militia bases. Eventually, even the most outlying villages were subjected to central rule.

One community lying in the wooded foothills of the Spear Mountains did not accept Deepwater's rule. These people were all of Nord ethnicity, which clearly set them apart from the Archaen rulers: while the nobles had dark brown skin and were of average build, the Nords were light-skinned, had blue eyes and blonde hair, and were quite tall. They also had their own set of traditions and cultural heritage which did not have much in common with Deepwater's.

### Luchian Colonial Administration

Deepwater was a colony founded and ruled by the Luchian Empire. Its elite, drawn from the Archaen people, ruled Densk with an iron fist. Their aim was to build a great colonial empire in the east, so they made sure everyone - including the Nord minorities - followed their lead.

In order to settle their differences, Deepwater dispatched a large militia force to "conquer" the Nords. Being far outnumbered, the farmers and hunters had to surrender. They were forced off of their homeland and on a long march north to the capital. There, they were attributed small lodgings and told to get to work. They primarily did unskilled jobs, such as porters for merchants, or as workers in the city's manufactories or the new naval arsenal. Some Nords also enlisted as fishermen, learning how to sail the choppy waters of the Pear Sea.

Despite all the rulers' efforts, they could not break up the Nord community and incorporate it into "civilised" society. Instead, the former farmers lived very close to each other and held regular tribal meetings which they called *taches*. Nord men caroused in taverns and caused street fights. The situation escalated in 1'389 when questors tried splitting up the community. Multiple leaders, including the brawny young Ferdr, were incarcerated and beaten on



repeated occasions. Eventually, the Nords decided they had had enough and that they would leave, heading back to their ancestral land. But the militia barred the gates, causing a verbal fight that degenerated into a brawl. Outraged city authorities decided to exile Ferdr - not from Deepwater, however, but from Densk itself.

The man had no way to pay for a voyage across the ocean back to the west. Instead, a group of merchants offered him a deal: they would help him buy a number of light sailing ships if, in exchange, all the Nords sailed to another human colony known as the Mruggenrykz in the far north and became their workers there. The voyage was extremely dangerous because of the presence of numerous goblinoid and orc pirates; the merchants saw in the Nords good and cheap sailors who might just be able to make it.

The Nords agreed. 68 men, women, and children set off in four longships, heading northwards. They had few weapons and no escort. Their only map was dwarf-made and thus labelled in a language none could read, and they didn't know whether the Mruggenrykz humans would welcome or reject them. But this didn't matter to Ferdr and his followers: they had no intention of going that far north.

Instead, they veered eastwards south of Turlu, away from the most dangerous waters. They sailed along the rough and quasi-uninhabited islands of the Moonsea, eventually landing on a nice-looking spot on the southern coast of the largest island. They were in the middle of wild lands, where no Luchians would ever find them. In fact, no humans had ever set foot on these islands. So the Nords got to work, building a first small settlement among tall trees and naming it in honour of their leader: Ferdrheim.

It was a small and frail settlement in the middle of a very dangerous and wild country. Despite their naval exploit, the settlers were very unprepared, and knew nothing about fighting or wilderness survival. They did not yet have a mythical leader they could name themselves after, or even gods to pray to. They were completely alone.

# Grodsesk, 1’389 - 1’050 b. OW

In *Skijspik*, the language of the settlers, "Ferdr" meant "providence". The name they gave the first island they set foot on was *Ferdrskjand*, "great land of providence". But these were rather hollow names at first, because the Nords didn’t even know many of the native plants and were incapable of growing local crops. They relied heavily on fishing with their four longboats.

## The Fundament of Providence

Luckily for the settlers, they were not alone for long. The Dwarven Empire, a world power, had a naval base on a neighbouring island, an outpost primarily used for scouting the Drubark orcs further west and making sure they did not expand into the Moonsea. This meant that Dwarven warships regularly patrolled the islands. Three years after the humans had arrived, a patrol ship spotted a longboat that was out fishing and intercepted it.

The dwarves were very interested in the humans and decided to help them along. This was a standard Dwarven policy: they tried to foster the growth of human states to help limit the spread of "savagery", namely, to get human armies to keep orcs from spreading too far.

Engineers built a dock and a merchant’s relay in Ferdrheim. Despite the fact that the humans were struggling to survive even occasional goblin attacks, the Dwarves did not station soldiers on the island. Instead, merchants occasionally came by to trade surplus military equipment and some other goods at a cheap price in exchange for fish and, later, more interesting human produce.

The Dwarven presence and economic aid were extremely helpful for the humans. Merchants who were staying for a few days socialised with them and helped them discover the native flora. The Nords could start collecting berries, making clothes from pine fibres, and even building small gardens. The military equipment was also very important. The few knives and axes they had before were replaced with leather cuirasse parts, iron hoes, and battleaxes. Neighbouring goblin tribes stopped being a threat and eventually, the humans became a threat to them.

## Ferdr's Saga



Ferdr was the leader of the settlers, and his heroic legacy was described in Ferdr's Saga, written around 1'330 b. OW.

*"And so one day, when the fresh fish were caught and the longboats rested on the shore, and the gardens were full and the maidens rested in their homes, Ferdr called to his warriors: 'Come! There is yet an island to conquer!' The men set off, all brave and wearing warrior-gorgets and wielding dwarven-axes, and marched into the depths of the green forest. [...] Finally, they encountered a fearsome beast: tall as three men, with thick brown skin and a coarse voice, and wielding a massive stump that could smash a warrior to nothing-pulp. It was Ferdr-jōten, the master of the island. 'Leave, for I am this island's master, and only he who has my name may rule.' The brave men refused, and attacked it; Grifentjier and Grune Eidarkson were killed, but Ferdr beat it to its knees, and he defeated the giant and took its name. And so he became Ferdr, the Father of the Isles."*

Since Ferdr died with his name, he never lost his title, and became the god-like patron of the Ferdskjonner.
The origins of the name are unclear; perhaps Ferdr was always called that and the islands were named after him, or perhaps he really took the slain chengorot's name.

# Ferdskjon Expansion

Ferdr's foreign policy turned aggressive in 1'360 b. OW, by which point Ferdrheim had a human population of 120, among which 45 could fight. They were equipped with Dwarven weapons and had gained some battle experience in the skirmishes against neighbouring goblin tribes. This army won a row of glorious victories, disbanding or eradicating the surrounding goblins and also gaining other kinds of glory, such as killing jackals and a chengorot. Ferdr's reputation soared, going from exiled leader to powerful warlord despite his age. Ferdrheim's actual population and economic resources were sapped by Ferdr's fighting, but its self-esteem had grown considerably. The people no longer called themselves Nord but rather Ferdskjon, already had a proto-culture of their own, and believed they were destined to rule the islands. An annalist wrote that *"Ferdr took a village of sad refugees, gave them weapons and vigour, and crafted a people with an invincible spirit - the Ferdskjonner"*.

## Conquest of Providence

Ferdr dreamt of a *Grodsesk*, a "great big conquest", in which armies of Ferdskjonner would invade all the Ferdrskjisle. He didn't live to see the Grodsesk armies, but he did take the first step. He led 40 warriors on a march through Ferdrskjand to its highest point, which he called *Skrihōte*, where he built what he saw as his greatest achievement: a tall wooden tower, up which he sent his young daughter to *"sing eternally for the spirits to hear"*.
Ferdr died soon afterwards, leaving behind a young warrior culture hungering for expansion. Initially, new settlements - with the exception of Skristad, up on Skrihōte - were built along the coast of Ferdrskjand, where ships could easily reach them and where they could fish, leaving the more dangerous and less accessible inland areas alone. Ferdr had hoped to create a centralised kingdom on Ferdrskjand; however, the advantages of the coast encouraged many

### Early Ferdr Religion

After Ferdr's death developed a religion that idealised him as the Ferdskjonner' protector. It was mainly focused on bravery, loyalty, and fighting ability: warrior-like traits useful for the conquest. The most important religious ritual was the Skrifesst: each new moon, the people of Ferdrheim would march to Skrihōte's tower, around which a small settlement had grown. A young woman, often the chief's daughter, would sing through the night to call forth Ferdr's spirit and bless the Ferdskjonner, while all kinds of rituals were performed: boys were promoted to manhood, diseased were blessed by healing spirits, couples were married.

All supernatural beings were spirits who inhabited the Ferdrskjisle. The most important was of course Ferdr, the island father and patron of Ferdskjonner; however, other spirits appeared with time, such as the war spirit Sakkerbold, the spirit of health Freya, and the seafarer spirit Jofnur.

settlers to opt for a cluster of small islands to the southwest called Grodskjisle. By 1'290, most of the villages were located there. United, the Ferdskjon navy was quite powerful, and could muster about 150 highly mobile soldiers who could land anywhere on the surrounding coasts.

The islands were mainly inhabited by goblin tribes with limited naval abilities. Their warriors, usually armed with no more than wooden spears and sometimes bows, were no match for the Ferdskjon *Varskjis*. These professional warriors emerged relatively quickly out of the ship-based settlers of the Grodskjisle. They sailed special light longships with square sails called oarships which could be steered directly onto land. Their crew was usually only lightly armoured, because good equipment from the Dwarves wasn't that common. They used large roundshields with a central handhold, giving them much control over the shields' orientation, in combination with "bastard axes". Many were also trained in the use of the longbow, which was the only Varskji weapon made by humans - dwarves didn't use bows.

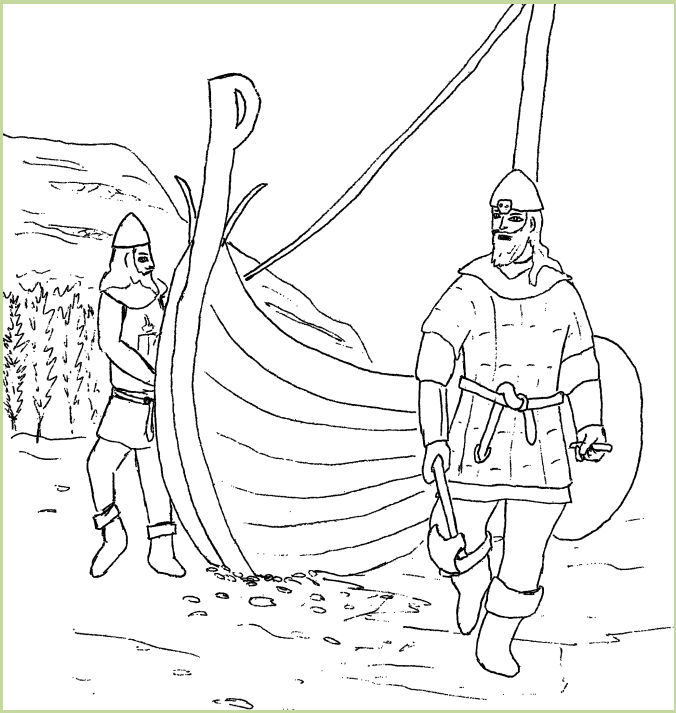
Early Ferdskjon expansion was limited much more by natural dangers than by live enemies. The Ferdrskjisle waters were exceptionally choppy and often featured strong currents which required some skill to navigate. Also, building a new settlement was difficult. It usually required about a hundred people clearing forests, building huts, and planting gardens. Such an undertaking

sapped much of the parent clan's resources; since there were very few villages capable of leading a successful settling expedition, the rhythm of expansion was rather slow.

## Grodsesk Warriors: Knots and Equipment

The Ferdskjonner held warriors, especially Varskji, in high esteem. Their whole culture was built around war.

The first gear available to the Ferdskjonner was Dwarven military surplus. In 1'370, the Fjorrfarn base had an excess of outdated parade uniforms, which they liquidated to the humans. Among these were thick leather gorgets, which were extremely heavy and impractical; to the Ferdskjonner, however, they were invaluable pieces of armour that marked a warrior's status. The gorgets' decorations even became their symbol, the *warrior knots*. Over time, though, the gorgets came in disuse as Varskji preferred to use lighter gear than the "traditional" armour they still wore at ceremonies.



Another quirk among their equipment were the axes: dwarven two-handed dainaxes were too short for humans to wield as such, and they in any case didn't have the necessary armour, so the weapons were instead used as "bastard axes", unwieldy one-handed weapons that a warrior had to train with for years to be able to use proficiently.

When going into battle, some Ferdskjonner deemed it reasonable to protect their heads. The dwarves were in the process of replacing their conical nasal helmets for *Farnstjerne* ones; thus, the Ferdskjonner got them. However, dwarven skulls were differently formed, and the helmets' nasal protrusions got in the way; thus, warriors removed them.

Nearly all metal gear one could find in the Ferdrskjisle was made from copper, because the Dwarven Empire foundries down south mass-produced it cheaply. Thus, copper, and the orange-brown colour in general, became a symbol of warriors and chieftains. Corrugated copper, meanwhile, became a religious symbol, because many artefacts were made out of copper and left exposed to the elements.

### Inter-Clan Warfare

Clans competed, and so battle as a matter of honor was a common thing. An inter-clan battle was always approached with careful ceremonies, however: surprise raids were frowned upon, chiefs were encouraged to touch wrists before and after battle, and warriors were expected to wear "traditional gear": heavy armour (including the gorgets) and large round-shields. Bows were also formally forbidden; if someone died, then it had to be from honest, man-to-man combat.

## Clan Society

Ferdr's dream of a Ferdrskjand kingdom never came true. The splinter settlements, even those on the main island, did not remain subservient to Ferdrheim. Instead, each set up their own self-contained society which they proudly called their clan. Clans always competed with each other. This resulted in tribal warfare, but was also perhaps the strongest encouragement for the Grodsesk expansion. Even though satellite settlements unerringly broke off and formed their own clans, it was a mark of great prestige and power for a clan to succeed in an overseas expedition, and the blood ties gained in the process greatly strengthened it; hence, big clans regularly sent out their Varskji to help build a new village. The settlers themselves were also motivated, because they knew they could found a new clan of their own.

A clan's smallest element was the family. These were large groups of people, usually spanning three generations, that lived in a common building called a longhouse. A family usually had its own gardens, fishing boat, and livestock. Grandparents looked after the raising and education of children, while parents and able youths did most of the outdoor work, including hunting, gardening, fishing and - more often than not - fighting. A family was typically expected to muster around five warriors, two of which were highly trained Varskji who could participate in expeditions.

### Naming Traditions

When attaining maturity, a child chose their second name. These were usually those of their mothers or fathers, but could also be those of more distant relatives, with an added suffix. Thus, a boy could become *Enjakson*, while a girl would be *Enjaksdotter*.

Children without family, perhaps shipwreck survivors or exiles, were called *Ferdotter* or *Ferson*. Some clerics also chose this name.

The most famous bloodline was, of course, that of Ferdr. Claiming his name was difficult, and a child had to prove their worth to their clan in a series of trials. Thus, the *Ferdrsdottren* and *Ferdrssonner* were admired and often became clan leaders or high clerics themselves.

From this naming system also emerged the collective name; *Ferdskjon* meant "great son of the land".

Children were given basic education (usually training in practical work) until they were 13, at which point they were considered mature. At this age, a child chose their last name and their new family. This did not mean choosing a mate; they simply switched families. Once in their adult family, people could only change in special cases, such as when they "married". Marriage was an informal tradition that varied between settlements, but a freshly married couple always chose a new family to join. This meant a Ferdskjon could have as many as three families: their childhood one, their adult one, and their married one.

Families together formed a clan, which could consist of anywhere between 4 and 50 families. Each family chose its "sage": this person was the most charismatic or powerful, the one that could best represent the family's interests in the village. Availability also played a role: a sage always needed to be around when needed, so it was very rare for Varskji - despite their status - to be sages. Clans were ruled by councils of sages. During monthly meetings, the clan taches, the council made decisions that affected the whole village. This was often about war: attacking goblins, declaring war on a neighbouring clan for a month, or participating a Varskji ship to a multi-clan expedition.

Additionally, each clan had a *chief*. Usually Varskji men, these did not have much political power, but were a settlement's generals. They organised forces in case of attack, and led expeditions, but otherwise were carefully kept out of the hierarchy: they attended taches but could not vote, and had to obey the council's decisions.

### Ferdrskjisle Food Sources

The Ferdrskjisle featured many plants found on the mainland Continent. Topnamb and carrots were the most prominent garden crops. Due to the difficulty of cultivating the dry and often steep ground, however, fish and other marine mammals were a much more important part of the diet, especially in young settlements.

# International Connections

In the early years of the Grodsesk, when brave sailors started hailing Jofnur's name and started exploring far and wide, an explorer sailed across the Moonsea and reached a northern continent, the Mruggenrykz. Ships sailing up a river found human settlements there, and there was occasional trade.
Around 1'250, however, the northern humans started seriously expanding, claiming nearly the entire continent for themselves. Ferdskjon adventurers and dwarven merchants helped these people build ships on the southern coast, and soon after, a first trade flotilla, laden with goods, headed south.
It was guided into Ferdrheim's small port by proud Varskji oarships, where it traded large quantities of Mruggenrykz foods, dark oak, and a dark oak ship.

## Economic Progress

Mruggenrykz crops turned out to be very useful for the Ferdskjonner. Grain-plant, a tall grass with large seeds that could be used to make bread, was not native to the islands but grew very well. It could only be used by larger clans, who had the manpower to clear large fields and work the land. It required much effort, but gave enormous yields compared to traditional gardening techniques. Additionally, bread filled a hole in the Ferdskjon diet.
Dark oak ships were also exceptional. The various Ferdrskjisle pines that had been used before to build oarships were very light and not very thick, lending themselves only to the construction of relatively small and light ships. Additionally, the pine wood rotted quickly, meaning much work had to go into ship maintenance. Dark oak however was very wide, watertight, and could be used to build large, durable ships. Although initially the Ferdskjon had imported some wood for their own use, this quickly stopped and they instead directly purchased ships from Methsterk, a Mruggenrykz port city. Many Ferdskjon moved to that city, building their own ships there.
The new naval vessels revolutionised Grodsesk society. Heavy dark oak cargo brigs owned by the larger clans made trade relatively cheap. Thanks to the rather large resource variation between the many islands, ties between villages grew much stronger. The larger clans gained in influence and even built thalassocratic trade alliances, leading to more political unification and less infighting. Resource exchanges also improved living standards across the settlements.

# Orcish Aggression

The orcish clan Drubark expanded its reach into the Moonsea in 1'150 b. OW. A large fleet sailed onto Muna, setting up a fortress and farming colony there. This island was part of a chain in the middle of the Moonsea which was uninhabited, but occasionally used as a waystop by merchant ships. Orcish presence proved disastrous for trade: Drubark warships blockaded the Moonsea and captured any human vessels that tried to cross, enslaving the crews, and stealing the cargo and ship.

Ferdrheim and other prominent clans decided to mount a counterattack. They summoned a fleet of 30 oarships from a variety of settlements, which sailed on Muna. The Ferdskjonner did not think or care to call for the support of heavy Dwarven ships. The light coastal assault craft were no match for the battleships defending the orcish fortress; most of the fleet turned around, and only about 80 Varskji made it to the coast. They found themselves completely outnumbered by the hundreds of orcs in the fortress and its surrounding settlements and had to quickly fall back. This expedition was a disaster, and the Ferdskjonner didn't attack Drubark again.

The loss of all contact with the Mruggenrykz didn't cause an economic crisis. Some goods, such as badeep hides, could no longer be imported, but this only had a minor impact. The Ferdskjon shipbuilding capacity, however, was completely paralyzed: the Ferdrskjisle lacked dark oak, and there weren't any ship-wharves that could build heavy vessels anyway. This meant it was impossible for the humans to build a fleet able to face the Drubark warships.

Instead, the Ferdskjonner decided to ignore the issue and continued expanding within the archipelago. The population grew at a nearly unchanged rate as Grodskjisle settlements expanded and new ones were founded.

**Where were the dwarves?** Initially, the Dwarves were taken by surprise by the speed of Drubark's expansion. The Farnrykz Legion did not have the resources to stand in the orcs' way, and instead became an observer until reinforcements could be spared. Thus, the Dwarven Empire allowed Drubark to slowly claim Northern Ocean islands, encircling and eventually invading much of the Mruggenrykz. Farnrykz was not reinforced.

## Drubark Occupation

The relative calm ended abruptly in 1'080 b. OW, when a large Drubark fleet sailed south from Muna, around the Mjnfar peninsula and into the Ferdrskjisle. Without warning, it occupied Ferdrheim and other trade cities.

Drubark's intention was to seize the important cities, thereby forcing the loose human federation to cooperate economically without having to actually conquer and occupy each village. After some initial bloody fights, during which the orcs were surprised by a tenacity unseen during the Mruggenrykz conquest, things were quite calm, and only a few troops were assigned to garrison the cities. The Ferdskjonner had realised that they couldn't throw the orcs out, mainly thanks to the ardent argumentation of Gaya clerics, and instead passively complied. The orcs were merely shunned and regarded with hostility, and they repaid this with large fares and occasional molestation or arrests. The taxes didn't fare well, however: to the orcs' surprise, very few goods came through the ports.

This was because every single Ferdskjon, imbued with the "Ferdr Spirit", refused to submit to the orcs. The people went to great lengths to circumvent orcish constraints: trade ships sailed only during the day, hiding in secret overgrown bays at night, and goods were smuggled in and out of occupied cities without using the ports. There were hardly any cases of betrayal: families were tight-knit and loyal to Ferdr before any occupiers, and the orcs had nothing to offer the Ferdskjonner to betray their kin. When they tried shutting religious occasions such as the Skristad convention down, the people threatened to abandon their houses completely and live in the woods; in the end, the orcs gave in, allowing clerical rites to proceed as usual - and allowing much smuggling and resistance communication in the process.

Though passive resistance was the more widespread strategy, a few Varskjis and their supporters actively took up arms against the occupiers. These were based in the "Free Isles", which encompassed all of the unoccupied settlements, largely in the hard-to-navigate Grodskjisle. They hid their oarships among the trees, so that surprise visits by orcs would reveal nothing suspicious, but the Varskjis could set sail on short notice. Speed and stealth were the fighters' main advantages. Sometimes, a dozen oarships came out of nowhere, attacking a dozing garrison at midday, completely slaughtering them. Sometimes, the orcs punished a raided city's inhabitants, but this did not dim the Ferdr Spirit and caused serious economic damage. Drubark's morale suffered severely:

they had invincible warships, vastly superior numbers and armament, but still imperial garrisons could be noiselessly wiped out by the "axe demons". Troops had to be regularly rotated to maintain morale, meaning few occupiers had experience, making it difficult to track down smugglers or resistance fighters over longer periods of time.

### War-Taches



The chiefs regularly met in secret places, often shrines or cairns devoted to one spirit or another, to discuss their plans. Raiding garrisons was a very complicated undertaking that had to be carefully coordinated. These secret meetings were usually organised by hearsay, and chiefs found their way to war-taches by following carvings on trees or stones.

**Caer Farn and the Zvergaid.** While the Grodskjisle Free Islands fought in the traditional Varskji way, western settlements turned to other methods. Orcish warships did not sail beyond Ferdrskjand's westernmost tip, even when pursuing smugglers, because Dwarven warships were sure to destroy them. The Ferdskjonner reached an agreement with the dwarves, since neither wanted the orcs in the Ferdrskjisle: an insignificant village on Blōnjand, Farnstad, was

expanded and fortified by Dwarven engineers, and a ship-wharf was built in a common effort. There, Dwarven engineers helped Ferdskjonner to properly process pine wood and build large ships.
It took years before the first warships could be completed. These, with the support of Farnrykz Dwarven battleships and their fireball ballistae, could properly face down Drubark fleets. Out of 18 major battles fought between 1'072 and 1'052, 14 ended in a human-dwarven victory. It seemed as if the Caer Farn fleet, now 10 ships strong, might even be able to push forward into the Grodskjisle, helping the Free Islands get completely rid of Drubark.

## Orcish Offensive, 1'050

It never came this far, however: the thousand or so occupying forces were unexpectedly reinforced in 1'050 by a 12'000-strong force under the command of Warlord Grishne. Drubark had had enough of the unending sabotage and guerilla campaign against the occupied territories; it wanted to end smuggling, to finally start levying substantial fares, and to remove the annoying thorn in the side that was Caer Farn. The orcs were profiting from two advantages, namely, their long and expensive campaigns in the Mruggenrykz had drawn to a close, and the diplomatic situation around the Chelid agreement meant that the Dwarven Empire was formally at peace with Drubark and could not interfere beyond Blōnjand's western coast.
The inhabitants of Ferdrheim were shocked by the scale of orcish operations: a score warships landed in port, and a fortified camp fitting a thousand soldiers was built nearby. Three further, even larger bases were built on Ferdrskjand, especially near the Moon Strait. Soon afterwards, dozens of ships sailed into the Grodskjisle, formally occupying settlements and torching any that resisted. If hidden oarships or other traces of resistance were found, all men of the village were enslaved, and orcs settled in their stead.

### Grishne's Assimilation

Some Ferdskjon villages, especially in the Grodskjisle, were "assimilated" into the Drubark Empire. All men (above the age of nine) were either killed or enslaved, and replaced with orcish civilians. The women were expected to bear orcish children; Durbark was fine with a largely human and half-blood population, as long as it was loyal to the state.

The humans did not give in, even though they were far outmatched. Some warriors moved completely out of the villages, hiding in small bays and sneaking in only to get food and other supplies. Raids on orcs, especially in the "assimilated" villages, were ongoing, but reprisals on civilians were even more severe. In the west, Caer Farn's fleet was defeated at sea, and the surviving ships had to flee, seeking refuge among the remains of the Free Isles. Caer Farn, with its stone wall and loyal dwarven "mercenaries", withstood a long siege, but eventually went up in flames.

The Ferdskjonner might have *"lost their famed spirit"*, as Grishne put it, if not for the threat of complete annihilation. The orcs were merciless, and the brutal policy of assimilation compelled even children and cravens to resist.

In 1'049, surviving chiefs and rebel leaders met for a general convention in Eyfloss, a fortress that was still untouched by the orcs. A small delegation of undercover Dwarves also attended. This meeting was widely hailed as the first arktache: a convention of the united chiefs of Ferdr's children. Under the directives of Lalein, a red-haired woman who was both a charismatic orator and great chief, war efforts were coordinated across all rebel cells and villages. Bases far in the Ferdrskjisle wilderness were established, where efforts were coordinated, weapons were repaired, and wounded could be brought to recuperate. The dwarves pledged to bring weapons and armour, specially reforged to fit humans, to secret locations - marked by cairns - in the southern Ferdrskjisle. The arktache not only coordinated the Ferdskjon war effort, but also set the foundation for a united human people - Ferdr's dream.

### The Lalein Warrior Spirit

Not only was Lalein an exceptional leader: she also reformed the Ferdskjon warrior culture. Red hair became a symbol of braveness and charisma, and female warriors were no longer surprising, but a clan's pride. Lalein herself, while covered in black blood from the final Ferdrheim battle, was formally given the Ferdrsdotter name. Decades later, a cult venerating her as the spirit of sexuality was born in Eyfloss, which became a religious and military center.

The Ferdskjon faced their enemy with renewed vigor. Villagers would sneak out of their homes to help build new oarships in secret groves, while mysterious assassinations in assimilated villages were extremely common. The orcs found

it very difficult to communicate: single ships almost invariably disappeared at sea, and heavy convoys were expensive and impractical. Supply chains failed as storehouses went up in flames. Occasionally, large forces - such as units searching a forest, or even entire city garrisons - would silently be wiped out. Terror slowly spread among orcish ranks, and Grishne found it increasingly difficult to maintain control over the sixty or so occupied settlements, even though his forces were nearly equal in number to the entire human population, and his navy was uncontested.

### Lalein's Saga

Lalein, a fiery red-haired woman, was born in a Grodskjisle settlement in 1'071, and participated in the insurgent cells, quickly earning the title of Varskji, then chief. At the 1'049 arktache, she gained a large following, and became the leader of a very special unit, the feared *Varmirskji*.

*"Lalein was dressed as a fearsome warrior: two red braids, bound in black leather, flying behind her. A coif of zverg-mail on her shoulders and arms. A thick leather warrior-skirt and shoes. Red war-paint on her face and in circles on her torso. And behind her came the Varmirskji: women all, dressed like her, wielding their axes with a never-seen agility and speed.*

*"When they burst from dark trees, smashing upon what had been a Ferdskjon village, the orcs shook in terror. 'You want our breasts for your children?', Lalein shouted, 'then you shall have them!' And, in three swings, felled six treklingr heads. The Varmirskji could defeat a hundred orcs to one; and when they so did, their red war-paint turned black from trekling blood. And Lalein, the unstoppable Red-Black Terror, would dance on the bodies of her foes, and still call for more."*

# Zvergleden, 1’050 - 627 b. OW

Eventually, the orcs were defeated. Grishne’s communications and infrastructure collapsed, and the troops’ morale sank; units would surrender at the mere sight of rebels. In addition, due to domestic turmoil, much of Grishne’s fleet had to be drawn off, and his one advantage against the Ferdskjonner disappeared. Ferdrheim’s and the other military camps were abandoned in 1’039.
With Drubark gone, the Dwarves could finally step in officially: one hundred Farnrykz ships, packed with food and construction materials, sailed into the ravaged cities. The humans, now endowed with Ferdr’s Spirit, took to the task of reconstruction with great fervour. Damage to cities was repaired in days, and large piers were added.
In order to plan the future of the Ferdrskjisle, an open arktache was called in Skristad. Leaders from across the human isles gathered, and a delegation of Farnrykz officers and engineers also attended. The conglomerate settled on a number of policies, which were to be followed by all clans:

- The Ferdskjonner were formally united into the “Ferdr Federation”. Representatives appointed by clan councils would gather each year for the arktache in Skristad.
- Inter-clan warfare was banned. Feuds between clans that could not be settled through discourse would now be decided in *honour duels*, one-on-one fights between the aggrieved sides’ champions.
- A *“redistribution of riches for the children of Ferdr”* was introduced. This primitive taxation system saw that clans would pay tithes to their nearest religious centres, usually in the form of work, manpower (such as a family’s third daughter, or the eldest son), or food. This allowed the creation of large clerical institutions, notably the Eyfloss domen, Jokurcairn monastery, and the iconic stave churches.
- In light of the recent war, the “Sakkerbold-Ready Stele” was erected. This ratified that in case of a serious threat, the arktache could appoint a Sea-King, the leader of all Ferdskjon forces. A theoretical Sea-King could then call a *leidangr*, under which all clans had to supply a certain number of ships and fighters to his forces.

- Economic policies were outlined, though not precisely specified. Approximately, the clans were to expand their fleets by building heavy ships in the Caer Farn style, and by building large docks. This could greatly encourage trade.

## Zvergleden Culture

Thanks to the economic opulence of the Zvergleden era - first due to Dwarven trade, then also to Luchian, Andan, and Hawkroost merchants - the Ferdrskjisle population soared. Demographically, what had earlier been wild land scattered with small rural settlements subsisting on fishing and gardening turned into a more densely populated area, with towns of stone and timber houses and expansive fields. In 1'000 b. OW, there were around 25'000 Ferdskjon; by 700, they had become 310'000, and spread across most of the Ferdrskjisle.

Various new traditions emerged, as the end of the war and subsequent rebuilding were a major change from Grodsesk life. Most of these changes were marked by an increase in women's self-determination and agency, as well as a greater tolerance for other races. With the institutionalising of religion, many teenagers - usually at 14 - went on a pilgrimage to a shrine of their chosen spirit, so as to prove both their physical ability and devotion. Those who preferred Lalein, for example, traveled to Eyfloss domen, while those who liked Jofnur sailed to Jokurcairn. To marry, couples usually sailed to certain isolated islands, where they were blessed by priests of Gaia. This common voyage was supposed to foster cooperation and understanding in the couple. The dead, finally, were buried in unmarked graves in community cemeteries. Their bodies returned to the earth and Ferdr.

Social structures did not evolve extensively. Houses still fit a family each, and clans were ruled by councils of family representatives. Some clans, however, grew beyond the scope of manageability; Ferdrheim, the largest city, had 2'700 families. Small councils in the traditional sense, where everyone had a voice, could not be held. In Ferdrheim's case, the clan subdivided into several *terklan*, each of which had some 50 representatives. Five sages, full-time politicians appointed by the terklans, coordinated the decisions of the smaller councils and essentially ruled the city. Other cities, such as Jokurstad, instead opted for huge councils, called senates. These were chaired by randomly chosen

representatives and were based on speeches and voting rather than direct dialogue. The arktache, which numbered up to 700 representatives, used a similar system.

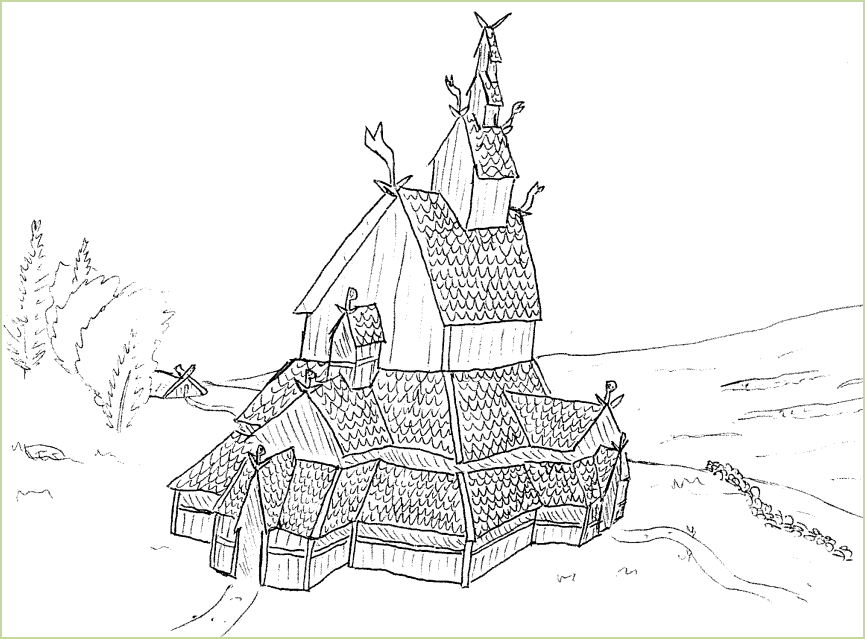
The Ferdskjonner had to deal with a plethora of nonhumans: native marins and firbolgs, orcs, elven refugees from Elanthor, dwarves, and even goblinoids. Some of these were asocial by nature; for instance, the marins were allowed to live in their small isolated forest homes. Firbolgs served as travelling shamans, often offering healing magic; they were typically seen as clerics of Ferda, the forest spirit, although only some firbolgs actually converted to the Ferdr religion. Some races formed families of their own within a clan, mingling very little with others; this was largely the case with dwarves and goblinoids, who could not interbreed with humans. Elves and foreign humans, however, could also integrate into existing families, dissolving their blood over generations.

As for the orcs, tough Drubark retreated, the treklingr (Skijspik for "orc") never really went away. In the aftermath of the war, the Ferdskjonner had to deal with hundreds of treklingr and half-bloods in their numbers. Though in some cases, the humans sought vengeance by killing them all, most often coexistence was necessary. Some orcs founded communities of their own race, either on the outskirts of major cities, or establishing completely new settlements in the Grodskjisle. This second kind of orcish community generally succeeded well at integrating themselves: they accepted the help of much more experienced humans and, in typical orcish fashion, easily changed their social customs to fit the Ferdskjon ones. They had families, sage councils, and chiefs just like the humans. The first orcish representatives were accepted into the arktache of 1'024 b. OW.

### Metals in Late Zvergleden Culture

Copper, due to its Dwarven origins, remained a prestigious metal. Iron, however, was the opposite: extracted from low-concentration deposits in swamps, it was often of bad quality. As iron armour grew disused, replaced by Dwarven gear, iron was used for different purposes. Chain mail notably became a decorative accessory for poorer people and was used as clothing by prostitutes.

## Stave Churches



The iconic stave churches were generally found near major settlements.

Religious institutions were a spawn of the Zvergleden period's opulence. Places such as Eyfloss and the expansive Lalein clergy could only emerge from a society able to afford them. Due to a growing work market, Ferdskjonner had less time to visit shrines, and piety was centralized. Some settlements built one or two chapels, staffed by part-time priests, where the community could meet and pray. However, it was common for many clergies to have buildings of their own in remote locations. Monasteries did some of the building and food production themselves, but they usually depended on donations by visiting pilgrims or nearby clans.

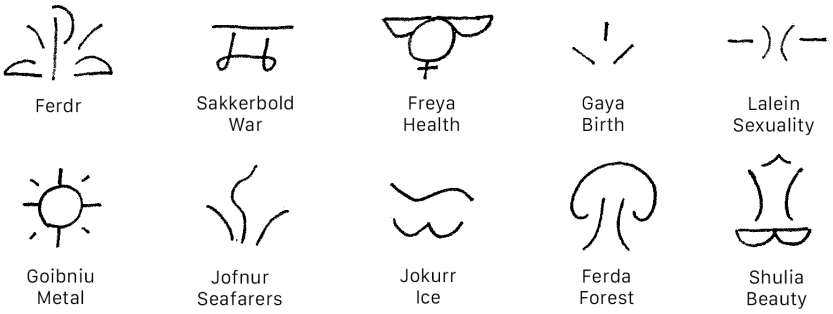
## The Pilgrim Trails

To connect the many new religious buildings, the Ferdskjonner set up a network of footpaths and sailing routes. Due to the archipelago nature of the Ferdrsk-jisle, most of these pilgrim tracks went over water. Starting in holy locations, they wound through dense, uninhabited forests, opened into hidden rebel bays including a few canoes, then crossed over choppy waters to other hidden trails. The routes were traced in a way that only a person intentionally following the trail could see them.

The main point of a pilgrimage was, of course, spiritual. Voyages could take anywhere between five to one hundred days, and were seen as a spiritual emancipation: pilgrims were one with nature, living off the land and sleeping among the trees. This gave space for philosophical reflection and communion with the spirits. The many shrines, chapels and churches along the way could only reinforce this connection.

There were a variety of reasons for people to go on a pilgrimage. Some social customs required it: for example, youths attaining adulthood usually went on a tenday voyage to their spirit's church, then caught a merchant ship back home. Some offices, including that of chief and many clerical positions, also required certain pilgrimages to be accomplished. They were even a punitive measure: Ferdskjonner guilty of certain crimes that did not warrant the death penalty or duels of honor could affranchise themselves by proving their devotion and purging themselves. Punitive pilgrimages were usually rather long round trips, at the end of which a pilgrim was allowed back into the community.

### The Ferdskjon Spirits



# Foreign Contact

Mere years after the destructive orcish offensive, the Ferdskjon realms were restored to unparalleled might. Ship-wharves in Ferdrheim and Jokurstad started churning out larger ships that not only brought heavy goods and stone to the villages, but that could also sail beyond the Ferdrskjisle into the open seas. Ambitious Ferdskjon merchants became renowned seafarers, heading as far south as Densk in their light but tough ships.

## Drubark Empire

After its defeat, Drubark didn't go far: it still garrisoned one Moon Strait fort, still had a huge fleet, and controlled both Intralu (the former Mruggenrykz) and Turlu, effectively surrounding the Ferdrskjisle. Despite knowing better, the first merchants who decided to explore the wide world only encountered more Drubark, and were convinced that the Ferdrskjisle were the only non-trekling realm. Still, the orcs had interesting wares to offer, and animosity from the war quickly faded away. Merchants started importing dark oak for warships from Intralu, and construction stone from Muna and Turlu. There was even some population exchange.

Luckily for the Ferdskjon, Drubark's naval power was far from what it had once been - due to domestic issues, much of its modern fleet fell into disuse - and the empire did not try to limit Ferdskjon travels. In any case, pressure from the Dwarven Empire and Luche forced Drubark to remain at peace with the humans.

## Luchian Densk

A first Ferdskjon expedition, with a Dwarven escort, reached the far southern island of Densk in 1'022. It had been four centuries since Ferdr's exile. At first, the Luchians were greatly worried by the human arrival: their Chelid agreement with Drubark could not be jeopardised by a third party. However, Deepwater quickly came to see the inherent advantages of having a Ferdrskjisle ally: its considerable fleet would have a base and auxiliary forces in the far north, infinitely improving its ability to operate near Chelid and securing its access to dark oak; and the old imperialists saw in this an opportunity to finally expand the eastern Luchian colonies.

Trade very quickly picked up. The Dwarves produced excellent-quality metal items, but not as affordably as Densk, and the Ferdrskjisle could offer very useful items such as blubber fat and pelts in return. In 1'019, the arktache accepted Deepwater's request to build a Luchian base near Nordalen, on Ferdrskjand's western coast. The two armed forces learned from each other, with Luchians dabbling in oarship landings - though they looked *"like disabled crabs, and slow as oysters"*, according to one Varskji - while Luchians taught some warship tactics that didn't rely on the presence of armoured Dwarven support.

There was considerable population exchange. Many Luchian soldiers in Nordalen brought along their wives and children, who liked to dally with with the crude but charming natives, while some young Ferdskjon headed south to explore this exotic, different human people. Children of mixed Archaen-Ferdr ethnicity, who often featured one light blue and one black eye, were called *brunlings* after their tanned skin color. In fact, the regular emigration of Ferdskjon southwards led to the emergence of the more light-skinned Eastern ethnicity in Densk's rural areas.

## Andan Densk

The goblinoid Trensandor clan invaded human Densk in 935, after being provoked by Deepwater. During the fighting, the Ferdskjon of course had taken Deepwater's side, notably trying to break through the Andan blockade of the island's inner Pear Sea. Though relations started off on the wrong foot, the Ferdskjonner soon realised that the native humans had welcomed the goblinoids as liberators, and the goblinoids seemed to be rather tolerant. Most Andan merchants coming north were the same humans as before, too.

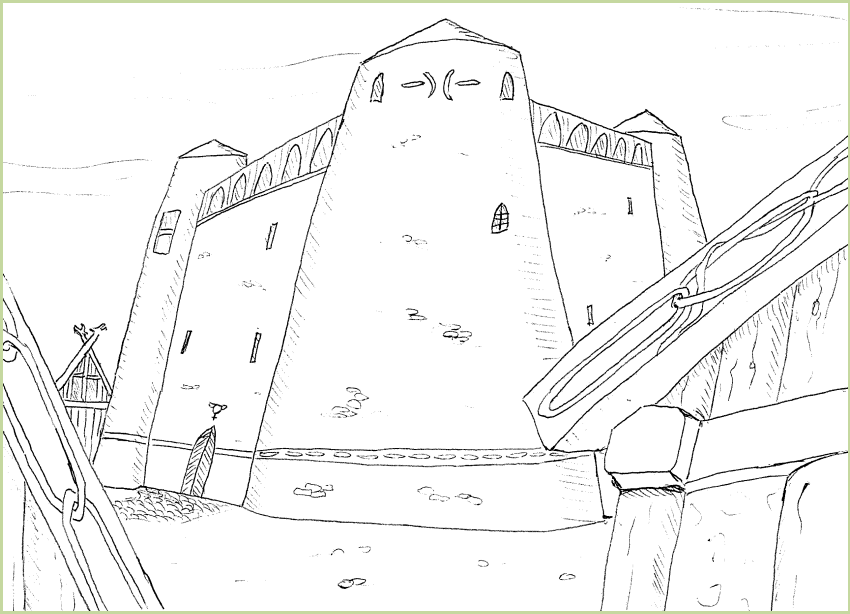
Few Ferdskjon sailed south anymore: Andan warships only allowed them into certain cities, where they could trade, but under close guard. The goblinoids did not want Ferdskjon values, including free-mindedness and a liking for guerilla fighting, to "infect" their Subjugated people. With this, the only overseas location of interest was gone, and the trend of great exploration died down.

On the other hand, travel the other way increased dramatically. The number of Andan merchants increased as demand due to domestic economic reforms shot up, and some ships also smuggled human refugees. Drubark dark oak and Ferdrskjisle produce continued to be sold, but directly in the isles. Marketplaces

were set up in town plazas, and new cities - a few of which popped up, due to the influx of wealth and people - built large port-facing marketplaces with warehouses and inns, setting them apart from traditional older settlements.
Over time, however, the number of human merchants fell, and increasingly many goblinoids arrived. The economic benefits of trade encouraged the arktache to make some sacrifices. Two decades after the Luchian base was abandoned, goblinoid warships took up residence there. In fact, the base was expanded, and three further forts were built. Trensandor established consulates in three cities, and even started stationing troops in Ferdskjon villages to guarantee both the security and loyalty of its hobgoblin subjects.
The population adapted to the goblinoids. The most notable difference was the increased demand for entertainment and lodgings: many of the visiting hobgoblins were not merchants, but soldiers on leave from their harsh lives in regimented imperial society. Most renowned were the fierce "chain ladies": legends of the Varmirskji had spread and morphed into a sexual idea. The temptation of good payment encouraged young ladies to clothe in frisky chain mail and entertain lusty hobgoblins. Chain houses, using the old warrior knot as storefront signage, popped up in all major cities.
**Coin Currency.** With Trensandor came the great novelty of real coinage, which allowed for much more efficient transactions than barter trade. At first, the Ferdskjon traders were deeply suspicious of imperial coin and did not accept it as payment, but the few who did quickly outcompeted the traditionalists. Andan currency spread as a means of exchange, though there was a very limited supply - there being no mint in the Ferdrskjisle - causing massive deflation and giving goblinoids great buying power. One hobgoblin said that *"in the Ferdrskjisle, you have no [imperial police], cheap booze, cheap food, and cheap women!"*
This imbalance ended in 770 b. OW, when the arktache recognized Dwarven coinage as a valid currency, and set an exchange rate to its imperial counterpart. Dwarven money flooded the market, quickly swamping out imperial coins and leading - in goblinoid eyes - to a massive increase in prices.

## Eyfloss Domen

The clergy of Eyfloss domen, due to its position as the clergy of Lalein, the spirit of sexuality, as well as its position as the spiritual and economic patron of the entire chain house industry, recorded a considerable increased in prestige and funds.



The settlement of Eyfloss became the first town run by a clergy. It was dominated by the domen, a large, squat building with four thick towers. It had a main praying hall, where any woman could come at any time to commune with the spirits. The towers were devoted to various spirits, notably one to Freya, where healers operated, and one to Gaya, where midwives helped those with trouble giving birth. The settlement itself was defended by a guard, unique in that it had the only good iron gear in all the Ferdrskjisle. It allowed entry to the safe sanctuary for all human women, but forbade men entry to the holy inner town.

## Hawkroost Fidelty

Ferdskjonner on expedition in Intralu to chop dark oak logs came across a group of humans in 751. As it turned out, a new human state called Hawkroost Fidelty had arisen on the continent. For the hunters and loggers, this was bad news: local competitors to Intralu's resources could damage their trade. There were even some skirmishes with the Fidelty guard. But, after a trade outpost was set up in the Meth Delta and merchants started making deals, relations warmed considerably.

Much like with the Mruggenrykz humans before, it was hard for there to be any more contact than limited trade. But this time, the Ferdskjonner had a sizeable merchant fleet, and the major clans had enough population to afford major expeditions northwards. Several large flotillas were sent, partly to trade and exchange knowledge, but also to settle. Intralu became the Densk of the new generations. In the century of contact, nearly 3'000 Ferdskjonner settled on Intralu's southern coast.

The Fidelty - which had close relations with the Dwarves - set up an embassy in Ferdrheim. There was some "tourism", Fidelty citizens seeking to explore the legendary island folk, but to a much lesser extent than the goblinoids. As a consequence of this contact with a relatable human culture, the Ferdskjonner further developed their own identity as a human people, and port cities turned into true mixing pots for all kinds of races and cultures.

# The Trekling Wars

In 633 b. OW, the Ferdrskjisle were surrounded to the north by the resurgent Drubarks, and to the south by Clan Bonecrunch. Drubark was making advances towards Hawkroost and the colonies, simultaneously cutting off Intralu's connections to the south, while Bonecrunch forces made forays onto the Continent's northern coast, invading several Ferdskjon colonies there. Angered by this affront, several southern clans, mainly from Osmund and Skijsel, raised armies to retake the land. There was serious fighting in the Continent's forests. During that year's arktache in Skristad, when the singer's voice failed in the early evening - a very bad omen - it was decided that the Ferdskjonner would not go to war against Bonecrunch. Both Hawkroost and Trensandor were neutral or friendly to the orcs, and offending overseas allies did not seem wise.

### Cremlings, the Scum of the Earth

Skijspik grouped all humanoids dwarves would call "savage" into the *cremling* category. The most prominent cremlings were *treklingr* (orcs), *fenlingr* (goblins), and *jōtenen* (giants of all kinds).

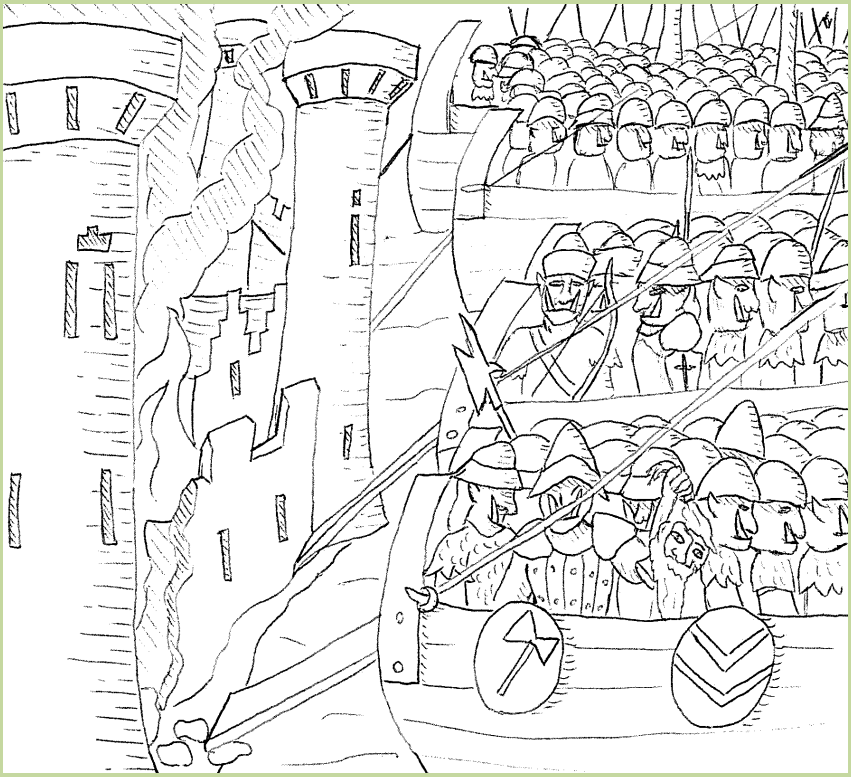
But this amounted to nothing: shortly after, the humans learned Drubark and Bonecrunch had formally allied, and a vast orcish fleet sailed against Blōnjand. A Drubark host of 3'000 simultaneously invaded the Mjnfar Peninsula. The orcs intended to surround the Ferdskjonner, cutting them off from their foreign allies.

There was very little the Ferdskjonner could do. They were taken by surprise, and the arktache had just ordered peace. Several hundred people, those used to comfortable urban life and foreign trade, took to the ships, following close behind the evacuating goblinoids. They got through the orcish "blockade" near Blōnjand thanks to the orcish fleet's disorganisation and its suffering several defeats to human warships. Down in Densk, the large refugee population - strengthened by elven blood - nearly submerged the few natives, participating to the formation of the Munite ethnicity.

Though initially, some cities' navies scored victories against Drubark, the war did not go well for long. The large and growing orcish force on Mjnfar Peninsula was nearly unstoppable, and it was not looking to occupy. Human villages were burned to the ground, the population enslaved and shipped off far inland. Drubark coastal forts, erected through the winter, proved very difficult to destroy, while the Drubark navy slowly made progress from west to east using sheer numbers. The united Ferdrskjisle fleet, which only came to bear around spring 632, numbered 22 battleships; Drubark had a hundred.

For a few years now, the Dwarven Empire had been fighting a losing war against the orcs. It had held territory in Elanthor and the northern Continent, but its legions there were slowly beaten back. Similarly, further west, the Farnrykz legion at first tried to resist the orcish offensive, siding with human fleets near Blōnjand. They were far outpowered by the orcs, however, and the naval base Fjorrfarn itself was sacked in 632. Thereafter, the Dwarven Empire had to make a non-aggression agreement with the orcs, and no longer defended the Ferdrskjisle. The empire would even cede all its territory on Intralu to Drubark in 629.

## Orcish Destruction



A Ferdskjon illustration of Drubark troops leaving after the pillage of Caer Farn.

Severed from the large grain fields on the Continent, and with the hardly defensible granary island of Farnijsel suffering attacks from the occupied Mjnfar just to its north, the large Ferdskjon population began running into food supply problems.

There were riots as people tried taking food from city granaries. With the orcs progressing slowly, consolidating their hold each time before continuing, tensions erupted between people as they sought to let out their anger and fear. Ferdskjonner accused "outsiders", primarily orc or elf citizens, of looting and collusion. Some cities saw outright genocide.

## Ferdskjonner United

It had been three years since the war began. All Ferdskjon settlements on the Continent and the Mjnfar Peninsula had fallen, Farnijsel was under siege, and the ocean to the west was cut - orcish ships were harassing Ferdrskjand. Ferdr unity and discipline seemed gone, with each clan fighting for itself. The arktache had not gathered for two years because each time, too many chiefs were busy fighting. Very few had enjoyed much success.

Olvar Manegson was an Eyfloss-born Varskji who fought for Jokurcairn. He had been elected by the monastery as the city's chief, and had had some success raiding orc-occupied cities on the Continent; he was regarded as one of the better commanders. Using his influence, and his personal relations with many important people including the clerical elite of Eyfloss and Jokurcairn, he called for the gathering of an arktache in a forest near Ferdrheim where the Sakkerbold-Ready Stele stood.

The leaders were desperate; some chiefs had died or been wounded, and their young and inexperienced replacements stood in their stead. It was clear the war was being lost, and Olvar was able to build on the chiefs' regret and shame that the traditions of the Sons of Ferdr had not been upheld, that they had not gathered in an arktache for too long. He declared that they had to return to the old ways and follow the precedent of their brave ancestors to win. By the end of the day, Olvar was hailed as the first Sea-King of the Ferdskjonner. He would lead the folk to victory.

The Ferdrskjisle had great military potential: they had a sizeable population, military gear and ships were available in sufficient quantities, and social structures were in place to mobilise the population effectively. All that was needed was unity, a figure of central authority to coordinate the clans. Sea-King Olvar did just this, calling a leidangr in the villages of Skijsel and Eijnsel; through it he raised an army of 2'500, with which he sailed to Farnijsel and swiftly routed the orcish armies besieging its major holdfasts. He also fought two naval battles against Drubark flotillas, arrayed out of crudely-built skiffs, and won both. The successful eastern campaign made him very popular; the word was he embodied the spirit of Ferdr.

The clans of Osmund and Skijsel were told to coordinate their efforts to sink Drubark ships and raid the Continental coast, while the Sea-King led his fleet on a campaign against the western islands, defeating minor Drubark fleets

at sea and destroying several orcish fortresses west of Blōnjand. This was a dangerous move for Olvar, because if he was ever forced into a direct engagement with Drubark's Moonsea fleet he would likely be thoroughly routed, but the western campaign brought him much popular support and helped motivate the Ferdskjonner to fight. He was in luck, because the alliance between Drubark and Bonecrunch fell apart and soon after Bonecrunch's armies collapsed. The settlements on the Continent could be reclaimed and trade with Dwarven cities for much-needed war material restarted.

By now the Ferdskjonner were all united and convinced of their imminent victory; the Sea-King went by the name of Ferdr Ferdrsson. Though he now began the most difficult and costly part of the campaign, the slow uprooting of inland orcish strongholds on Mjnfar which would take another four years, the people's support for this was strong and the Sea-King's victory inevitable.

# Folksesk, 627 - 200 b. OW

Though fighting on the Mjnfar Peninsula continued, the Trekling Wars were already won. Olvar Manegson, now known by the title Ferdr the Strong, had become a popular hero and held authority over the clans far beyond what a wartime Sea-King was supposedly due. He was a cunning politician, and since the early arktache had taken steps to consolidate his power: he had made friends with the strongest clan leaders, and employed priests of Jofnur, Sakkerbold, Lalein and others to make sure the leidangr was heeded and his orders followed. Now that the war was nearing its close, a large portion of the male population was still mobilised in five fleets under his control, and priests loyal to him held influence in all the cities.
Ferdr the great Sea-King did not intend to give up his title and return to mere chieftainship; he had in the palm of his hand a nascent state, and he decided to forge the Ferdskjonner into a real power.

## Ferdskjon Kingdom

Ferdr the Strong, the second king of the Ferdrskjisle, the heir of Founding Ferdr's line, was inaugurated with great festivities on Skrihōte. He made Ferdrheim his seat, and opted to rule with an iron fist; his extensive wartime powers had made his rise possible, and he intended to rule his kingdom with the same methods. Though the leidangr armies grew smaller, especially after the Mjnfar campaign's successful conclusion in 625, Ferdr retained the power of calling it and used his army regularly for small border wars on the Continent and in the north. He would also deploy it to enforce his authority domestically, using it to crush clans who tried to oppose his unexpected rule.
Though having the strongest military was valuable, perhaps Ferdr's greatest instrument of power were the clerics. He had good relations with two of the most important churches, and made sure to gain the loyalty of nearly all others by supporting them and professing his own piety or their moral mission to guide the Sons of Ferdr. Clerics served as royal officials, making sure that Ferdr's rule was respected and that calls for leidangr were properly heeded. Thanks to the religious support, Ferdr also legitimised his rule in the eyes of his subjects.

The young kingdom's source of income was quite cunning: there was only one Dwarven city on the continent which served as a trade hub, and Ferdr made sure he kept a monopoly over it. Thus, nearly all worked goods went through his hands and those of the priests of Goibniu, and he had a sizeable stream of income for private and state affairs; funds were primarily invested in the clergy and as "bonus payments" to soldiers serving in the leidangr.

## The Age of the Land: Ferdr the Builder

Ferdr the Strong died in 594 b. OW and was replaced by his son Ferdr, later known as the Builder. During the later years of the Strong's reign, discontent about the strong central control he exerted and the lack of autonomy for the clans had been growing; the king's control over his subjects had become very tentative, and the only source of state income in the form of a monopoly over dwarven imports had by then been largely undermined. Ferdr the Builder, though a military man as well, had had much contact with clan elites and knew that he had to relax tensions; there was no real war anymore, and the Ferdsk-jonner were yearning for their ancient freedom to live and do as they pleased.



Under the Builder, central authority was reduced to give more freedom to the backbone of the Ferdskjon realm, the elites who administered cities and lands. The king was a mostly military and spiritual leader; yet Ferdr the Builder's policy aims were economic. Thus, he reduced the standing army even more, and stopped using the clergy as a tool of direct rule. The clans were powerful social units, and their sage councils ruled all major settlements. However, there were also extensive rural areas on Mjnfar, Farnijsel, and the Continent which had come under the control of military leaders, called the jarls. Thus Ferdr agreed to respect the authority and property of clans and jarls, exerting only limited military control over them, and his rule saw the rapid rise of jarls as a political force on par with or even exceeding the clan sages. Huge swathes of exploitable land came under jarl control, to a point where some jarls were wealthier than entire clans. Still, despite considerable local autonomy, the Ferdskjon generally lived in a unitary state which was tied together by personal ties of friendship, blood, or allegiance between various jarls, sages and chiefs, and the archipelago-spanning religious institutions.

The priesthoods, largely freed from their service as public officials but still in the powerful position Ferdr the Strong had given them, became political players of considerable influence. They took on an active role in society, with priests serving as arbiters and law enforcers across the realm. Holy standards were emitted dictating a good Ferdskjon's behaviour and that certain transgressions were unacceptable, binding even the most powerful jarl to the rules of the priests. The followers of different spirits didn't compete, either; though priests could usually dedicate themselves to only one spirit, common folk could love all the spirits at once and respected the word of Eyfloss domen just as much as that of Skrihōte.

## The Age of Cities: Ferdr the Simple

The process of decentralisation started by Ferdr the Builder continued over decades, though very gradually. Clan sages, who were increasingly a conservative, established city elite, consolidated their authority and amassed both wealth and influence, primarily thanks to their control over ports; meanwhile the jarls built up followings of their own. They had trusted men who pledged them oaths of allegiance and administered some of their land, who became known as the *landmannr*.

Ferdr the Simple took the crown in 566 b. OW, and he lived up to his name, taking few initiatives and letting events happen unabated. Thus he oversaw the elites' growth in power to a point where he held no authority over them at all. One after the other, parts of his territory *de facto* broke away; often a city and its allied jarls would form a "clan" polity with full autonomy. When Ferdr grew old and passed away, no new heir of the island-father took rulership in his hands; the kingdom had faded away, replaced by a network of polities and elites bound together by personal ties as much as a sense of cultural unity.

The new age was known mainly for the rise of cities as primary economic and political forces, rather than the land-based jarls. This change was driven in the first place by a modernising economy and subsequent specialisation of jobs and uptick of trade. The continental farms, using better tools and techniques to cultivate staple mainland crops on arable ground, produced a decent surplus which in turn freed up people to take on more specialised jobs. An influx of foreigners brought knowledge with them, so a small metallurgy industry sprung up, and many artisans began manufacturing higher-quality, more expensive goods like decent clothing, leather shoes and belts, clay pottery, and stone buildings.

The cities' primary asset were always their ports, which enabled trade with foreign states including Dwarves on the Continent and in the east, orc and goblinoid clans, and increasingly human traders from the south. Ferdrheim, Nordalen, Caer Farn, Jokurcairn, Contje, Neustad, Eyfloss and Venfer grew into budding metropolises of several thousand inhabitants, using both the personal wealth of their citizens and the sizeable fares levied from ships in port to improve their infrastructure and expand. Ports were of course the primary focus, but stone houses, sewage systems, and city walls for continental cities were all common improvements.

The Dwarven Empire was a rising power in the region, and the Ferdskjonner felt the dwarves' strengthened presence. Their cities on the Continent coast grew into thriving hubs, and convoys of heavy dwarven brigs sailing through the Ferdrskjisle became a quite common sighting. There was also some direct exchange with Ferdskjon society, as dwarves immigrated in the hundreds. Caer Farn's population was a third dwarvish and its leaders worked closely with Dwarven naval officers in Fjorrfarn; several primarily dwarven villages popped up across the archipelago as well.

# Folksesk Culture

The Ferdrksjisle of the Folksesk were richer and more diverse than ever before. The rise in personal wealth and the growing population coincided with the arrival of strong cultural influences from neighbours both near and far. Though the Ferdrskjisle were - at least initially - quite centralised politically, culture was very different. It followed different influences in different places, the geography and plain distance limited travel and thus cultural exchange, and traditions adapted themselves to local environments. The individual lives of people could look very different depending on their social class and the region they lived in.

**A Peasant Family, 403 b. OW.** Elga Marinsdotter was a stout woman who managed her family and farm with great love and discipline. She had been born into this very house and had been tending the animals and the crops all her life, and there were few in the village who were a better mother than she. Three generations lived in her home, from her ailing mother to the babe who had barely started walking, but they were still quite a small household, only nine people to feed. They lived in a single-roomed longhouse Elga's father had built after the last one burned down. There was ample space, enough for everyone, a stock of food in the attic, and a fireplace with a metal-plate stove. A shed, an outhouse, and low stables with a cobblestone fundament for the twenty mooders were all part of the family holding, along with some good farmland and pastures spread over several plots around the village. Elga's husband, who did most of the field work, had married into her family over two decades ago, and they had five healthy children together.

Elga's family was a good member of the village community, helping out others when their harvest was bad. Her husband liked to kill time with the other men around a barrel of ale in winter. The peasants were happy to live their lives in peace, though sometimes Elga and her children had to suffer periods of great fear when the leidangr was called and her husband and eldest son had to go to war. But so far the family was lucky and both had been spared, though her son had lost an ear in battle, and there were no problems of raiders like there had been in her father's time. The village was under the protection of Landmann Mickar who lived in a small keep some distance from the village: he made sure the village knew when and how much food they had to prepare for the

jarl's men, he listened to the villagers' complaints, and he led the village men in battle. Mickar was sworn to the great Jarl Magnes, the Protector of Venfer himself.

**An Urban Household, 348 b. OW.** The house was slim, a three-story affair with clouded glass windows squished between two other buildings, but it was the most expensive thing Tergen Tergenson - or any of his ancestors, for that matter - had ever bought. He was very proud of it. It stood on an important side-street near the port of Nordalen, so plenty of people came by his stall on the bottom floor. He had a potter's workshop there, and in the backyard there was enough space to make and dry all his pots, though he needed to fire them in a shared, clan-owned furnace. There was just enough space for the six members of his family to live in the three rooms on the floors above. While he worked, helped by his two eldest daughters, his wife Teia managed the entire household. She cleaned and cooked, and she also sold pots at the stall when Tergen had his hands full. Their two younger sons, no older than 10, helped out where they could.

The family was a member of Clan Hemmligsfjarn, one of the sixteen major clans in Nordalen, and Tergen's ancestors had been of that clan as far back as the family annals reached. The clan was the family's most important social network: many of their friends and relatives were from Hemmligsfjarn, and Tergen's accountant for shop finances was provided by the clan. Teia and Tergen honoured the old traditions; after all, they did not want to live the strange lives of the merchant men from the south, and Teia's maiden clan was also still strong and active, so breaching traditions would not be well regarded. On their marriage, the couple had sailed to Osmund and gone on a 20-day pilgrimage through woods and hills to the Pinienkirke, a stave church of Freya's. This had formed the proper basis for their marriage by bringing them together as man and wife, and had won Freya's favour so that all the family was in good health.

### Folksesk Religion

The ancient spirit-mythology mixed with the theistic religions of foreigners. There were ever more tangible ways of praying, and the spirits were represented as individuals with independent agency rather than philosophical concepts and forces of nature.

# The End of the Ferdskjonner

The Ferdrskjisle in 300 b. OW seemed more advanced, wealthier, and stronger than ever before. However, it was obvious to many that the spirit which had made the Ferdskjonner of old one people was gone. As the cities modernised, they grew more internationalised and societies mixed, becoming more culturally and economically dependent on the outside. The Ferdrskjisle were also politically fractured. Some people went so far as to declare there was little resemblance left between the inhabitants of the islands today and the free-spirited warriors of the Grodsesk age; Ferdskjon culture had become decadent and lost its ancestral values.

Of course, many Ferdskjonner still identified with their ancestors and their rites, and there were efforts to preserve them. Clans as social constructs survived for a long time, though by 300 they resembled guilds more than they did systems of governance. Many of the elaborate and time-consuming ancestral rites had been simplified or forgotten, and a large part of the Ferdskjon population now lived as settled, barely free peasants rather than enjoying the independent and very mobile lives of Ferdr's sons.

There were attempts to rebuild a common Ferdskjon identity, or at least to undo some of the political fracturing. Often churches would play an important role in these efforts. For instance, people tried to reinstate the arktache, but each time the attempt either failed or only a small part of the political players in the archipelago attended, to the point where these arktache had little more than symbolic value. The desire for personal, fractured political power among regional leaders as well as the economic and political influence from outside simply pulled the Ferdskjon people apart.

## Political Fracturing

In the end, there was no clear line when the Ferdskjon people simply ceased to exist. In fact, cultural remnants could still be found centuries after the last Ferdskjon polity disappeared, as people continued to live the spirit-faith and followed the ancestral ways; in fact, when Ochebanian soldiers reached the Ferdrskjisle in 63 OW, they discovered human "tribes" on Eijnsel who still spoke Skijspik and lived like the clans of old.

But the political fracturing and assimilation of the Ferdrskjisle began far earlier. Some polities would form which no longer resembled the Ferdskjon model in any way, and outside powers would slowly encroach on the archipelago.

**Dwarven Incorporation.** The Dwarven Empire had a large foothold in the Ferdrskjisle, which it gradually expanded. It held sovereign territory on both sides of the archipelago and, in the years following 300 b. OW, was waging a major war on the Continent which resulted in thousands of Dwarven ships carrying troops and supplies crossing through the area. Still, there was never an armed annexation of Ferdskjon cities by dwarven forces; instead, Dwarven influence simply grew over time. In some western cities, their economic and social influence became so large as to eclipse the local systems. These places were included into the Dwarven sphere through pacts such as defensive alliances and protectorates, resulting in even more political influence to a point where these places were essentially wholly administered and inhabited by dwarves, with the humans forming a small, socially assimilated subgroup.

The Dwarven armies retreated from their last foothold on the Continent in 225 b. OW, but they did not abandon their holdings in the Ferdrskjisle. Though the intensity of dwarven trade reduced considerably, they continued expanding their local sphere of influence, eventually *de facto* controlling all of Blōnjand, Jokurcairn, and the southern half of Ferdrskjand.

**Orcish Incorporation.** Though there was little love shared between the Ferdskjonner and the treklingr, there were still many powerful orcish clans and tribes that shared borders with Ferdskjon people. They had to coexist, and with time trade and demographic mixing followed.

The polity formed by Venfer and its powerful jarl-based armies, widely hailed as a Ferdskjon bastion, would end up incorporated into orcish clan society. What began as coexistence and cooperation between landmannr and neighbouring tribes grew into full military alliances and the acceptance of thousands of orcs - including orcish landmannr and jarls - into the polity, until an orc became the Protector of Venfer in 190 b. OW. The polity would gradually adopt orcish norms and social structure afterwards.

Orcs were known for violence, and the continental Ferdskjonner got more than a taste of it. With the Dwarven provinces gone, these people found themselves completely surrounded by orcs, including some quite large clans. Some border territories became orc-ruled because a tribe simply invaded, and some others

agreed to swear fealty to a warlord out of fear of being violently annexed. But most resisted fiercely and there were many wars; Contje was besieged a grand total of eight times, and sacked twice.

By 100 b. OW, there were virtually no autonomous human settlements left on the mainland. It was around that time that Clan Bonebreaker attained primacy in the orcish world, and it also had some interest in the wealthy human islands. Bonebreaker incorporation was nearly as slow and smooth as Venfer's had been: the Boens would promise rewards, military resources, and rulership positions for jarls and landmannr to convince them to join the clan or overthrow their rulers. The advantages of remaining an autonomous jarl, but receiving military aid from Bonebreaker were quite alluring; with time virtually all the Ferdrskjisle would be part of the Bonebreaker empire due either to intrigue, or to invasion by brute force in the later decades of the century.

**New States.** Many of the small polities on Osmund, Eijnsel and Skijsel centralised over time, a process which was accelerated by threats of military conquest from other human polities or from orcs. The jarls, the cities, and sometimes hybrids of the two amassed considerable central authority. These states were above all effective at war, being good at raising funds and men to form well-equipped armies to face foreign threats.

Though the states were majoritarily human and drawn directly from the Ferdskjonner, they finally crossed the cultural line. When building up central power, the states abolished the last vestiges of clan authority; and when they built up the systems to effectively raise their armies, they destroyed the last Ferdskjon customs. The warring made pilgrimage to holy sites outside the states' small territories near-impossible, while some even abandoned the spirit-faith altogether. In essence, the new states had become modern human kingdoms which were effective at the task of withstanding orcish annexation for some time, but which had lost the heritage of Ferdr in the process.

**The Last Varskji.** In a few places, mostly remote areas with low population density and no major ports, villages which honoured the old ways continued to exist. They were not valuable enough to include in the centralised states, and were so isolated that even when the Bonebreakers eventually came and incorporated the entire island chain into their empire, they remained virtually untouched, or existed as one of the many irregular "tribes" under the Boen auspice.

Despite their freedom from outside influences, the capacity of small, isolated communities to keep a culture alive was limited. In most cases, other cultures still had an influence, and the villages eventually lost their heritage, while for the rest, oral transmission and plain cultural divergence meant that the communities looked less and less like Ferdskjon clans. The last of these isolated clans, including the last longboats sailed by the last Varskji, were finally "discovered" by the Ochebana Empire around 63 OW, and soon after disappeared.

# Glossary

chengorot: *a lesser kind of giant*

cremling: *Skijspik for "savage being"*

Dwarf: *a citizen of the Dwarven Empire*

Dwarven Empire: *a powerful dwarven empire*

Ferda: *(religious entity) the forest spirit*

Ferdotter: *see Ferson*

Ferdr: *1: (religious entity) the island-father spirit; 2: (person) the founder of the Ferdrskjisle; 3: a Ferdskjonner name, generally attributed to leaders)*

Ferdskjon: *inhabitant of the Ferdrskjisle*

Ferdrsdotter: *see Ferdrsson*

Ferdrsson: *a prestigious Ferdskjonner last name*

Ferson: *a Ferdskjonner last name, usually that of exiles and clerics*

Freya: *(religious entity) the health spirit*

Gaya: *(religious entity) the birth spirit*

Goibniu: *(religious entity) the metal and forge spirit*

Jofnur: *(religious entity) the seafarer spirit*

Jokurr: *(religious entity) the ice spirit*

jōten: *Skijspik for "giant"*

Lalein: *1: (religious entity) the sexuality spirit; 2: (person) a famous war chief and Varmirskji*

leidangr: *a call-to-arms of the civilian population*

Luche: *a powerful western human empire*

Sakkerbold: *(religious entity) the war spirit*

Sea-King: *a wartime leader of all Ferdskjonner*

ship-wharf: *see wharf*

Skijspik: *the language of the Ferdskjonner*

tache: *a meeting of Ferdskjonner leaders*

trekling: *Skijspik for "orc"*

Varskji: *capable sailor-soldiers*

Varmirskji: *fierce warrior women*

war-tache: *a wartime meeting of Ferdskjonner chiefs*

wharf: *a shipbuilding complex*



The islands off the Continent's Moonsea coast were rugged and windswept. They featured dense pine forests, steep cliffs falling directly into the thrashing waves, and hostile goblinoid populations.

Nevertheless, humans there built up a fierce society that withstood rough weather and a devastating wars for a thousand years. These proud people called themselves Ferdskjonner, the children of great Ferdr.

manyisles.ch