

Many Isles

Zinafae:
From Citadel to Empire

History

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Simon Belt



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Zinafae: From Citadel to Empire
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Zann'Elth

The historical context

Strong centralised governments were a rarity in Khali drow (pronounced *dr-aoh*; i.e. dark elf) society. A millennia, the Citadel of Zann'Elth, had been ruled by the Tyrana, a single ruler nominally vested with authoritarian powers. However, Zann'Elth was hardly a unitary state, and still featured considerable political autonomy among the noble houses.

The emergence of an authoritarian state in the form of an ideologically driven totalitarian authority did not occur in a vacuum. The Orc Wars acted as a catalyst for change across Oshmondu, forcing states into new alliances and social changes. Zinafae Naflshein's regime, just like many other new forms of government across the surface nations, was given its opportunity because of massive economic, social, and political disruption, and disillusionment produced by the old regime's failure to successfully lead the citadel in war. The replacement of the old state system led to the emergence of a regime that, through repressive measures, attempted to wield complete authority and eventually to control every aspect of the life of its subjects.

Historical precedents such as Tyrana Zeanel's ascension and rule in Sunell and the Boen model of imperial governance served as inspirations for Zinafae. The factors explaining Zeanel's rise in Sunell (2'702 - 2'680 b. OW) show similarities with those that promoted the growth of Zinafae's popularity in Zann'Elth. Zann'Elth's case (115 b. OW - 101 OW) illustrates how a totalitarian regime emerged after the failure of the previous, more representative government to assert its central authority in wartime.

There followed a period of rapid expansion, imperial consolidation, centralisation, and social change. This is an exceptional case in the previously highly fragmented Caverealm, and furthermore offers many fascinating insights into the precise workings of the Khali cultural-political system both at the level of a single citadel, and at a vast imperial level.

Timeline

The Scarlet Parade: Ninza To'Fezzen becomes Tyrana	142 b.	
	137 b.	The Fungal Garden Accord produces the legal framework for a participative Zann'Elth
Economic crisis as a result of the wraith-kings' occupation of Gol Ungrath	115 b.	
	112 b.	Tauzein and the National People's Alliance attempt to take power
The Ruby Era: trade and conquest	102 - 61 b.	
	61 - 53 b.	Shadowthreat War, resulting in the Sied Breche Settlement
Early internationalism: Freegard allies with Zann'Elth	14 b.	
	33	Cneinghen Catastrophe, House Naflshein is destroyed
The Ungrathmyr Crisis destroys faith in Ninza's participative government	37	
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1. Zinafae's rise to power

Zannyr society

The dark elven Citadel of Zann'Elth had ancient roots. For millennia, the city had uniquely been governed by a single ruler, the **Tyrana**. She was in name an absolute dictator who spoke with the voice of Vorash; accordingly, she had ultimate authority over the small central bureaucracy called the Tyranaen government as well as the Zannyr military. She did not, however, have the goddess-given right to arrest or prosecute drow.

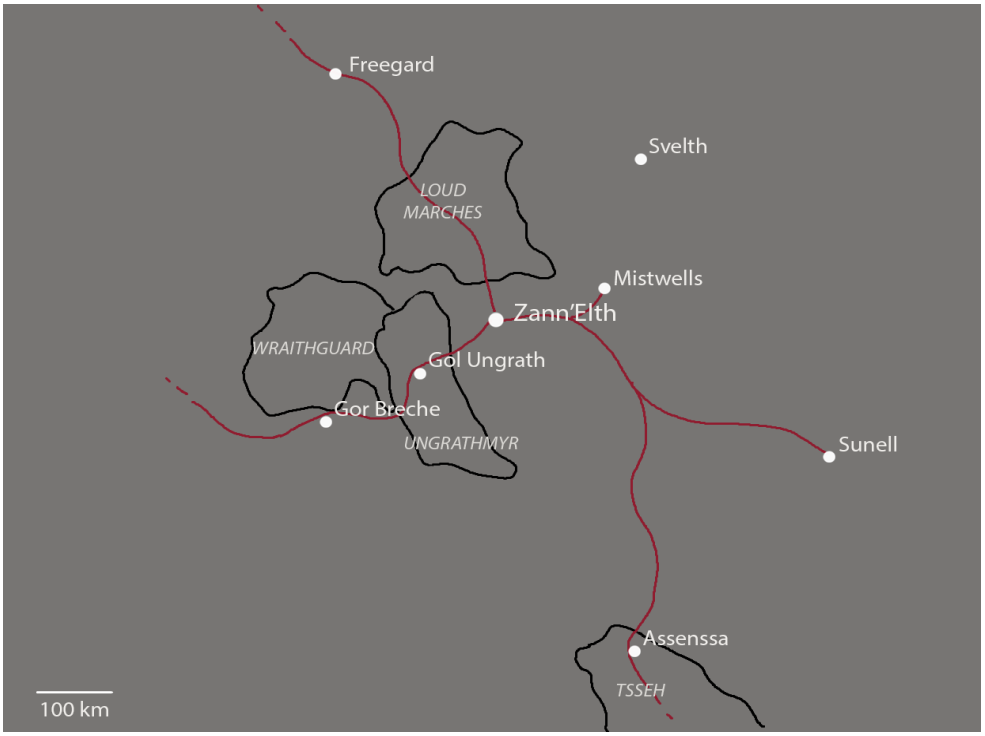
Khali Culture

Khali was the predominant form of drow culture and religion. This society was strictly hierarchical, with Vorash alone at the top and noble women prime among mortals. It was also a society prising individualism, ruthlessness, and sadism.

Geographic and historical preconditions however dictated a different balance of power. The citadel was built inside a dense network of large, twisting tunnels with very few larger caves, and Khali drow society was traditionally extremely disunited, with all factions seeking as much autonomy and influence as possible. The vast majority of drow subjects were part of noble **houses**, the building block of Zannyr society. Though customs and structures differed from house to house, these were essentially autonomous political units ruled by a matron with their own soldiers, priestesses, and merchants. Apart from the immediate noble family and servants, houses also counted sizeable numbers of commoner subjects. To exert their political influence, the matrons gathered in the **Council of Matrons**, which "advised" the Tyrana and fulfilled many other important roles of government, including making citadel law and appointing the Tyrana's two heiresses. The major houses also had merchant-masters who governed their economic assets and gathered in the **Council of Merchant-Master Advisors**, which fulfilled the dual role of advising the Tyrana and administering state funds.

The **Church of Vorash** prayed to and interpreted the wishes of the goddess Vorash, exerting huge influence on all layers of drow society; in practice, the Church's High Cardiness and its council of ecclesiastics called Vorash's Coven were on equal footing with the Council of Matrons. The priestesses wielded overwhelming magical and legal force and evoked fear and respect among all parts of drow society. The Church had a powerful executive branch, including the inquisition - which wielded a holy mandate to uncover and punish all betrayals to the Way of Vorash - and a corps of war-priestesses which served as the military's magical branch. The Zannyr **military** was split into divisions and armies, each commanded by an archaness, and stood directly under Tyranaen command. This professional force was relatively small, however, and law enforcement in the citadel proper fell under the purview of the **city guards**: paramilitary forces trained by the army. The First City Guard was constituted out of house guards, accordingly well equipped and trained, and small. The Second City Guard was drawn directly from the commoner population, and had many non-drow in its ranks. The **Academy**, finally, was an educational institution which almost every drow born in Zann'Elth attended. It featured four schools: Zinith-Vorash for priestesses, Zinith-Magus for arcane spellcasters, Martere for soldiers, and Marte-Azaneth for elite guards, scouts, and officers. It wielded huge economic power, moulded the young drow generations with its curriculum, and had access to a sizeable and well-versed armed force called the Spellwatch.

Of course, Zann'Elth featured many other informal yet influential factions. These included sizeable merchant guilds that had popped up outside of house control; unions of artisans; and even one or two mercenary forces which could be hired for house or state business.



1.1. *Zann'Elth and surrounding cities, 140 b. OW.*

Ninza To'Fezzen's regime, 142 b. OW - 37 OW

Zann'Elth had a central government headed by a Tyrana. The most recent dynasty of To'Fezzen stretched back three generations, and had seen generally stable economic development and few conflicts with neighbours. The citadel was now one of the richest and most powerful polities in the Caverealm, and it ruled over a fairly sized state in the mid-depth layer.

Because of this peace, many institutions had gained increasing levels of autonomy. The Tyrana had had no need or reason to justify strong central rule, allowing houses to build up their own militias and slave forces, and merchants to privatise large sections of the economy. As a result, the political influence of the Council of Matrons and Council of Merchant-Master Advisors was greater than ever before. In 142 b. OW, when Tyrana Mine'Zer To'Fezzen departed the world of the living, these groups used their influence to support her second-born daughter Ninza's accession to the *Tyraellefionzz*, the Tyrana's crown.

Below is an overview of the most notable events of Ninza's regime as Tyrana, linked to the question of why her rule was regarded as a failure and why she was replaced by Zinafae. Ninza's administration was plagued by domestic and external problems that allowed problems to grow and resentment to fester.

The Caverealm

The Caverealm was a vast expanse of tunnels and caves beneath Oshmondu, the prime material plane. It was very varied: in some areas, the network of tunnels was very dense, while other areas were almost exclusively hard rock. The Caverealm's biotopes were far more diverse and numerous than on the surface, including bat-infested crevasses, twisting corridors filled with ores and gems, and large caves of fungal forest.

Everything was in three dimensions, including the borders of polities. When travelling, altitude was a much greater barrier than distance; it was hard to move up or down, and to find tunnels at a suitable incline. The Caverealm's depth - where the surface represented the ceiling, and the groundwater level, known as the Bedwater, marked the floor - also varied. It was relatively shallow in the east and extremely deep in the west.



A new Zann'Elth: the Fungal Garden Accord

Old Mine'Zer To'Fezzen had two formal heiresses: her malleable and inexperienced second-born daughter Ninza, and the capable high priestess Maleze Mal'Maern. The vested interests decided to hand the Tyraellefionz to the less capable of the two, claiming a *"dynastic right of inheritance and certificate of ability"*; in truth, they were more interested in further weakening the Tyrana's monopoly of power to strengthen their own position.

Zenthyr Protection

In Zannyr society, certain individuals - such as heiresses - enjoyed Zenthyr Protection. By holy directive, this gave them absolute protection from being killed.

Ninza was well aware who she had to thank for her unlikely nomination; this was made exceptionally clear when Maleze Mal'Maern died mysteriously just days after she lost her status as heiress and Zenthyr Protection. Though she did attempt to strengthen her position by making approaches to the clergy and deploying the To'Fezzen house guard for her own protection, she did not have the political weight in 137 b. OW to stop the Council of Matrons from hosting a great convention in the Fungal Garden estates.

Representatives of various political forces met in the lavish grounds to discuss Zann'Elth's future course. The Tyrana, the nobles of the entire Council of Matrons, some private and house merchants representing business interests, and a group of professional officers led by Archaness Zea Tauzen were in attendance. It was decided that the houses should be granted greater political freedom; concretely, it would once more be legal to own drow slaves, and neither the Tyranaen government nor the clergy would have any authority to regulate what went on within the walls of a house compound. The merchants were also promised more rights, such as the right to demand a military escort if they didn't belong to a house, and market freedom within the citadel. Finally, a new governmental institution called the **Mizenkyr Diet** was created, to act as the legislative body for the state, and which had to ratify any motions put forward by the Tyrana by majority vote before they could be enacted into law.

Participative government

The term "participative" is used here to describe the non-authoritarian form of government espoused by the Mizenkyr Diet.

Seats in the diet were distributed among several political entities. Three fifths of the four hundred seats were assigned by the Council of Matrons, and accordingly went primarily to the most powerful houses; one fifth went to Tyranaen officials from the entire bureaucracy, selected by a convoluted system; and the rest was given to individuals in certain positions, such as the high priestesses, the top five merchant-masters, and ten officers.

Soon after the Diet's implementation, factions formed alliances to control larger sections of the vote, ideally attaining a majority in the form of a coalition. Within the first few decades, seven major "parties" had emerged and were vying for influence.

The main political parties in the Mizenkyr Diet

Party	Ideology
Tyrana's Loyals	Anti-participative nobles supporting the power of the Tyrana against the other noble houses. Mainly Houses To'Fezzen, Naflshein
ZSP (Strength Party)	Noble conservatives, intent on preserving the autonomy and influence of the houses. Mainly Houses Fezzen, Mal'Maern, Zizze Paramilitary forces: First City Guard

Vorash's Loyal Servants	Religious traditionalists; anti-participative, pro-powerful ruler Paramilitary forces: Red Robes militia
ZPP (People's Party)	Liberal, commoner drow seeking reform through participative influence Paramilitary forces: Second City Guard
ZNPP (Nationalists)	Well-funded party linked to major commercial interests. Seek strong traditional rule, anti-participative Paramilitary forces: Steelshirts
NPA (National People's Alliance)	Anti-participative, favouring the establishment of a nationalist authoritarian regime, also militaristic and religious
VPZ (Visionary Party)	Extreme reformist party with support from commoners and House Dolbreza

Early problems for the regime, 137 - 102 b. OW

Despite the strong influence wielded by the noble houses in asserting their authority, they were neither monolithic nor dominant. The Council of Matrons had been mostly united in deciding it wanted to participate in the government, but already during the Fungal Garden talks, disagreements appeared. In effect, the political landscape after the accord was more fractured than before; a variety of factions were now vying for power in the diet and, by the turn of the century, building up full-fledged militias of their own.

Though commoners had no direct representation, they managed to exert considerable weight in diet politics. Large masses could gather their strength, coordinate, and support various parties in a system reminiscent of guilds. The bulk of the party militias was also drawn from commoner ranks.

The eve of the Fungal Garden Accord, a group of Millee cult fanatics called Teinzerkists attempted to overthrow Ninza in the intention of establishing a theocratic regime *"in keeping with Sizza's [a legendary avatar of Vorash] purpose"*. Realising her vulnerability, Ninza concluded a pact with Archaness Zea Tauzen, Chief of Staff of the Zannyr military. In return for military support against enemies of the Tyrana and her new government, she allowed the army to become a virtual state within a state. Rather than being a servant of the Tyrana, the military acted in its own interests. Its support proved conditional throughout Ninza's rule: the army chose when it would act in defence of the government, and when it would not. Thus, when the Zannyr People's Party attempted organising mass rallies, the army readily moved to disperse them, but it refused to intervene when units of Steelshirts surrounded the Tyranaen Palace and demanded concessions from the diet.

Key features of the new government were often blamed for the failure of Ninza's regime. One major weakness of the system was the provision that the diet could only reach decisions with an absolute majority. In practice, the plethora of political parties, alliances, and individuals were often unable to form long-term stable governments, either on their own or in coalitions. Another critical provision allowed the Tyrana to suspend the diet and rule by emergency decree "in the event that the order and security of the citadel are seriously endangered". This made sense in case of social turmoil or threat of attack, but it also allowed the Tyrana to ignore the diet if she so pleased. Overall, it is clear that the diet government was riddled with issues, but to blame the system is simplistic: no matter the system, participative government requires a certain degree of willingness and cooperation



of the participants to function. Many parties were actively hostile to participative government and intended to use it as a stepping stone to install their own authoritarian ruler, while others looked back fondly to the days of strong Tyrana rule.

The economic crisis of 115 b. OW

The Zannyr economy had stagnated for nearly a century: no new markets, in the Caverealm or above, were opening up, and there were very few trade partners in the citadel's immediate vicinity; besides, transport costs through tunnels were very high. As a result, merchant-master profits were drying up, and the major houses were increasingly having trouble covering their expenses. The Mizenkyr Diet fell back to the mints, producing more money to satiate the economy.

The "currency delirium" that convulsed Zann'Elth by late 115 was the result of events around the city of Gol Ungrath, an ancient dwarven fortress and Zann'Elth's metallurgical heartland. The city's guilds had run up high debt with Wraithguard, from where they drew much of their primary material, and now the wraith-kings demanded their due. Because most of Gol Ungrath's production flowed directly to the noble houses that owned the city, which preferred to pay by credit, the guilds defaulted, and the wraith-kings decided to occupy the city until the debts were repaid - and possibly hold on to it for longer. The reactions to the occupation were passive resistance and non-cooperation by the skilled drow and dwarven workers, along with Tyranaen support for the guilds in term of wage payments, regardless of the fact that production had collapsed. Because of the suddenly huge financial deficit, the government once again resorted to the mints, accelerating inflation to levels that destroyed confidence in Zannyr currency and in the government's ability to defend the territorial and economic interests of the nation.

Zannyr currency

Zann'Elth had a currency, which was mostly used in the form of state-issued "slips of value". Letters of credit were also commonly used.

In the longer term, the inability of Ninza and the diet to cope with the crisis undermined confidence in the system and contributed to anti-participative feelings. This provided the basis for the growth and popularity of authoritarian movements.

For many, from minor houses to trade conglomerations to commoners, savings they built up over years were wiped out. Those on fixed incomes or relying on savings were ruined and a barter economy emerged. In contrast to the general misery, larger institutions such as major houses and the clergy had invested most of their wealth in precious metals and gems, real estate, slaves, and other assets, meaning the loss of currency savings didn't affect them equally hard. The ruling coalition was replaced by a new alliance of the ZSP, NPPA, and Vorash's Loyal Servants, which also failed to stop inflation.

When diplomatic efforts failed with no financial solution in sight, the military moved in, forcing the wraith-kings out of Gol Ungrath. After this, the diet - bailed out by loans from Sunell - was able to recover from the economic disaster, though the situation remained precarious and it took time until the new currency, called *Spizekun*, was trusted.

Tauzein's revitalisation programme

The young heiress Tauzein Mal'Maern was asked by her house and the Tyrana to keep an eye on the National People's Alliance (NPA), a political party consisting of outsider houses and officers. She instead chose to join them, helped them decide how to end the plight of participative rule - by installing a strong autocrat as Tyrana - and swiftly became one of their leaders.

The NPA was a rather weak party, with few seats in the diet and no outright support from any significant houses. Instead, the NPA attempted to grow in popularity by pursuing the



"revitalisation programme", which was a broad campaign supposed to appeal to everyone. Some policy points favoured a strong ruler in power; others argued for increased funding and status of the military; yet more promised more financial and religious freedoms for houses, and fewer restrictions for commoners. During the 115 b. OW economic crisis, the NPA's popularity surged, and people began arguing Tauzein would be a better Tyrana than Ninza.

Once the crisis abated, however, the People's Alliance saw a drop in popularity. Its political portfolio was already covered by established parties with a stronger individual appeal, and the demand for systemic reform lessened. In a bid to regain influence, the NPA turned increasingly radical, appealing to weak groups in disadvantageous positions. Tauzein went so far as to publicly state that priestesses of Vorash should use moderation and justify themselves when taking punitive action; this made her very popular among the radicals. By 112, the NPA counted among its allies the Gor'Brekyren (a marginal activist group from Gor Breche advocating Patronism), large numbers of young would-be reformers, and some junior military officers.

Patronism

An ideology advocating more rights and a higher social status for Khali men.

The NPA regularly hosted rallies in Manufenkyr, the second-largest cave of Zann'Elth, and was immensely popular among its minority of supporters. However, due to the party's radicalisation, and especially due to the insolence of its leader in questioning Vorash, a large part of the noble elite united against it. The Tyrana herself felt threatened by her heiress, who had the support of both the Tyrana's Loyals and Zannyr Strength parties, as well as the People's Party and the Second City Guard. If it came to open conflict, Tauzein would likely have had a majority of the involved forces on her side - including a large part of the military, several militias, and all the strength of Gor Breche and Wraithguard.

However, it never came to open conflict. In 112, the clergy of Vorash sent a small squad of inquisitors led by a high priestess, all clad in the flamboyant red garb of Vorash's servants, to arrest Tauzein in her own party headquarters. The vast majority of her supporters respected and feared the drow goddess too much to intervene, allowing the squad to discreetly usher Tauzein out and bring her to the Tyrana's feet. There, she was whipped with holy snake-flails as a sign of Vorash's condemnation, then exiled - since she had stood under Zenthyr Protection, killing her would have been problematic.

The rise and fall of Tauzein reveals which factors supported reformist movements, and which ones were detrimental to them. Clearly, periods of social unrest greatly boosted the appeal and popularity of the revitalization programme, whereas stability favoured the status quo. In addition, though Tauzein managed to find a strong base of supporters by turning to extremism, she made the mistake of directly antagonising the Church of Vorash which, though barely represented on the political playing field, had immense influence. The party's extremism also pushed many factions from being neutral to joining the opposing camp, and meant there was no widespread support. Finally, Tauzein failed to concentrate her strength and protect herself in a society notorious for assassinations and politics by armed force.

As a result of the NPA's fall from grace, the powerful and influential Tauzein Mal'Maern was replaced with a lower-status woman from a loyalist house unlikely to be a big threat: Zinafae of House Naflshein. The NPA also changed its political line, publicly condemning Tauzein's actions and incorporating stringent orthodoxy into its portfolio.

The Ruby Era, 102 - 61 b. OW

Archaness Zetta Nullen commanded the Western Army, which was responsible for Zann'Elth's western reaches including Gol Ungrath. For decades now, the Wraithguard



and Gor'Brekyr had been probing that region by sending in savage tribes with no clear link to their drow and wraith-king masters; they could plausibly deny any involvement in the attacks, while also testing where Zann'Elth might be vulnerable.

As a result of this constant fighting, much of the border area had become unsafe, and doubts were emerging whether Zann'Elth was capable of protecting its people from raiders. Thus, Zetta mustered a large part of her army and marched against one of the most notorious raider groups, a large tribe of orcs with "outcast" drow commanders called the Bloody Fanged Teeth. The expedition was a full success, as Zannyr soldiers surrounded the raiders' hideout and slaughtered them by the hundreds. Zetta returned triumphant and even paraded through the streets of the citadel, becoming something of a popular hero.

It did not take long for the Tyrana to capitalise on Zetta's popularity. The newest government was once again fledgling, so she made Zetta the Warden of Zann'Elth, a Tyranaen office tasked with *"protecting the security and interests of the citadel"*, but without a clear definition of powers; when the diet continued failing, she appointed the woman to Elevate Marshal, the supreme commander of all Zannyr forces, to comfort the people that their safety was assured.

Zetta, an assertive and determined woman expecting as much discipline from a government official as from a soldier, ushered in a period of stability and economic growth known as the Ruby Era. Though the government had already run up high debts and the coffers were nearly empty, Zetta took thorough action to put Zann'Elth back on track.

- She invested massively in large infrastructure projects: the renovation of tunnels leading to Gor Breche, and the construction of a road south to the yuan-ti city of Assenssa. This allowed a serious uptick in trade, especially in precious stones from the south.
- The newly formed Marcher Army engaged in a slow but steady campaign to incorporate the infested caves north of Zann'Elth called the Loud Marches. Two new drow settlements and four military outposts were built; thousands of captured humanoids were put to use as slaves in fungal farms below the citadel.
- In order to finance her projects, Zetta introduced a new tax on transactions. This kind of formal tax had never been seen before, but it was relatively easy to implement in citadel markets and brought considerable fresh funds into state coffers.

Was Zann'Elth's government democratic?

Zann'Elth's government was participative, meaning that many factions beyond the Tyrana had a voice. However, the individual commoner, serf, or slave had no representation or right to participate; the "people" enacted their will through groupings such as unions, guilds, or minor houses. It was the collective influence of its supporters that granted a political party power.

Initial resistance to all three of Zetta's projects could be overridden by her popularity and the somewhat consistent majority she could rally in the diet. Her taxation policy, though never actually popular, already showed its success in 99; first military victories in the north were made in 92; and trade began gearing up in 85. The end of government standstill, the onset of social stability, and economic progress all exemplified Zetta's success.

Perhaps Zetta's strongest base of support were the armed forces, which were dangerously autonomous when she became Warden. However, she had no intention of antagonising the officers, and in fact greatly strengthened their position. The majority of state funds were sunk into the military; soldiers were key in fighting the Marches campaign, defending the western reaches, and building the road south. During the Ruby Era, the three active-duty archanesses saw their personal power grow considerably.



The Shadowthreat War

Fighting on the western border around Gol Ungrath between Zannyr forces and "unaffiliated" raiders had been escalating for decades. In recent years, the situation had come close to outright war, with the Western Army quintupling its numbers and soldiers even blocking the road to Gor Breche. Clearly, this was in part due to Western officers wanting to gain some glory of their own; as their archaness declared,

> *"it is the duty of all the Zannyr armed forces to protect the realm of the Tyrana, and to punish all aggression with superior force. We will do our mistress proud and conquer more land for her realm."*

The wraith-kings and Gor'Brekyr did not intend to avoid conflict; they had for a long time set their eyes on the wealth of Gol Ungrath, and recent trade had only further increased the resources they had available to sink into conquest. For Gor Breche, the war began in 61 b. OW when Zannyr forces blocked the trade tunnel to stop a Gor'Brekyr-affiliated orcish force from travelling east. Its noble houses mobilised the city's army, while the allied Wraithguard advanced its countless legions to attack.

The Zannyr Western Army was relatively small and outnumbered ten to one by Wraithguard's undead legions. The drow had to remain in a few key defensible locations, fighting off Wraithguard attacks; however, the supply lines to these static positions were vulnerable to mobile Gor'Brekyr forces. Because of the omnipresent danger from raiders, and the fear of being turned into undead themselves, the drow soldiers called the war the Shadowthreat War.

For the eight years the fighting lasted, Zann'Elth repeatedly demonstrated its inability to marshal its military strength effectively. It faced a powerful enemy which was more numerous and, being supported by Gor'Brekyr skirmishers and wizards, would be able to face up to Zann'Elth even with equal numbers. But the Tyrana never formally declared war because of pressure from the diet, and accordingly the Western Army had to fight more or less on its own. Those few units the Marcher Army and other divisions sent did not obey Western headquarters, but used their own command structures and sometimes even their own supply chains. To compound problems, the clergy refrained from sending its priestesses to bolster Zannyr troops with magic, because Vorash's Coven wanted to leverage its political power over the army and the army refused. Accordingly, the Zannyr military performed extremely poorly, regularly suffering defeats and ceding ground to the enemy.

In 53 b. OW, enemy hordes stood at the gates of Gol Ungrath, and the Western Army was on the verge of collapse. Both the Warden and the diet realized it was pointless to continue fighting; even though Zann'Elth might eventually win, the cost in resources and land, not to mention the risk of morale collapse or social unrest in the citadel, was too high. So the Tyrana sued for peace and traveled to Sied Breche, the large cave where Gor Breche's main gate stood.

The Sied Breche Settlement

Despite the precarious situation, a large part of the army and wider population wanted to continue the war; questions of pride were valued higher than the costs of fighting. The Tyrana and her government argued that they were waging a losing war, that the state could not bear the cost, and that early peace was better than late defeat. Critically, several important public figures, including Elevate Marshal Zetta and High Cardiness Icoshe, did not publicly support the government's decision. Thus, when the Tyrana signed the Sied Breche Settlement and subjected Zann'Elth to its terms, many people believed she was a feeble politician stabbing the war effort in the back and undeservedly subjecting the nation to the terms of the defeated.



Summary of the Sied Breche Settlement

Article 3: The "Defeated Clause", in which Zann'Elth was declared solely responsible for and defeated in the Shadowthreat War.

Territorial provisions: Zann'Elth lost two settlements and five non-drow tribes that had been invaded by Wraithguard during the war.

Additionally, the region of Ungrathmyr, including Gol Ungrath, would be occupied by Wraithguard troops for nine decades. During this period, no Zannyr soldier was allowed to enter the region, and Wraithguard could freely forbid passage to any Zannyr subject. Gol Ungrath also took over the management of the city's guilds.

Financial penalties: Zann'Elth had to pay considerable reparations in the form of metal and gems, as restitution for the "loss and damage" to the people in the Ungrathmyr.

Social provisions: Zann'Elth had to allow temporary entry into its territory to any visiting Gor'Brekyr, and offer an easy immigration procedure.

Indirectly, religious and social restrictions had to be relaxed. The church was no longer allowed to arbitrarily persecute certain types of behaviour, clothing, and ideology; especially, religious agnosticism and patronism were legalised, though of course not destigmatized. Restrictions on party lines were also removed.

The failure of participative government

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the government had to deal with the fallout of the Sied Breche Settlement. Its demanding terms were hard to enact, and especially enforcing the liberalisation of Zannyr ideology was troublesome. Though Tyrana Ninza ordered the High Cardiness and the Church to stand down and tolerate new behaviour, priestesses continued to arrest and persecute people, leading to the declaration of martial law and tense standoffs between different institutions. Eventually, the Tyrana succeeded and the terms of Sied Breche were properly implemented, but not without animosity from the Church and other factions.

A much bigger, long-term problem were the reparations Zann'Elth had to pay. In order to meet the sum, the government - which did not have a full treasury as it was - had to take up loans from abroad and from commoner merchants, and it had to rent out or sell Tyranaen land and property. Even so, Zann'Elth was only able to pay two thirds of the sum, and had to accept an extended payment period with high interest that would become a constant drain ruining the government; 40% of state revenues went to paying off the interest.

Economic problems were compounded by two factors. The Spinekuz continually lost value due to high public debt and a weak bargaining position, decreasing Zann'Elth's competitiveness in the Caverealm market and leading to the appearance of several foreign currencies in domestic trade. Additionally, there were increasing numbers of bandits on the road to Assenssa, some of whom were doubtlessly sponsored by Gor Breche; but Zann'Elth was unable to protect its traders, because it did not have the resources or the manpower for it. Trade with the citadel's most important partner thus ground down to a trickle, crippling its import-reliant industrial sector.

Because the government was all but ruined, and because it struggled with social issues, majority coalitions in the diet rarely lasted long. The diet routinely saw new governments in rapid succession and was continuously frozen in inaction. The only things keeping the state alive at that point were the Tyrana's own hold of power, the efforts of a few large houses, and political inertia.



The Azeka Infeness era

Though the broader government was gradually succumbing to inefficiency, parliamentary deadlock, and general paralysis, the Tyranaen administration was still quite capable of operating successfully. This became apparent in the Azeka Infeness era, when Archaness Azeka, the successor of Zetta as the Tyranaen Chief of Staff, engendered a period of territorial growth and international strength despite the failure of domestic government.

Azeka's rise

Azeka Mal'Maern, of the Infeness branch, had graduated from Zinith-Vorash with flying colours and was on her way to become a prominent official of the Church when a deal was struck between House Mal'Maern and the Tyrana: Mal'Maern was unhappy about its weakened position since the disgrace of its heiress Tauzein, while the Tyrana desperately needed capable and respected people to represent and underpin her government. Thus, Azeka took a shortened course in Marte-Azaneth and became archaness in just a decade; Ninza then made her Chief of Staff in 16 b. OW. Following a dispute within Mal'Maern, she founded her own House Infeness in 5 b. OW.

Though Azeka had lacked personal ambition and was unhappy about her forced career change from religion to government, she was as cunning in manoeuvring and intrigue as her colleagues and was additionally endowed with a fierce determination to strengthen the citadel and the influence of Vorash across the Caverealm. This drive for influence would become the hallmark of Tyranaen foreign policy for a century.

The Chief of Staff

The Chief of Staff was a nominally civilian office, part of the Tyrana's government. Accordingly, a Chief of Staff did not require a military officer's career, although this was usually expected.

Though the Chief of Staff was traditionally a simple role, serving as a bridge between military command and the Tyrana, Azeka built up a sizeable staff of her own, largely constituted out of young officers and priestesses as dedicated as her. She swiftly took a more active role in controlling the various armies and divisions, and also bypassed the archanesses by placing some units directly under the command of her staff officers, including the Thylvunnyr rangers and the new Aid and Support Corps. She also informally took over the Tyrana's "construction ministry". By expanding her control and using the military to set Zannnyr foreign policy, Azeka and the Tyrana could be flexible, dynamic, and use very limited resources to build a vast sphere of influence.

Internationalism and alliances

The Tyrana ruled a modest dominion beyond the Citadel of Zann'Elth proper, including some non-drow settlements. The mere administration and protection of these territories had already shaped the army into a relatively flexible, mobile force. Under Azeka, Zann'Elth extended its influence well beyond its immediate neighbors, notably by sending out Thylvunnyr foot-units to range far into the Caverealm to both represent and protect the interests of Zann'Elth there, and by slowly expanding the network of usable tunnels under the control of Zannyr-aligned guilds.



1.2. *A Thylvunne, 57 OW.*



Perhaps the first sign of Zannyr internationalism was its alliance with the citylords of Freegard in 14 b. OW. Freegard was a patchwork city of many different races, which exerted huge influence over its surrounding settlements through its guilds. Two Zannyr guilds now controlled the major tunnel leading to the city, Thylvunnyr units protected this route, and drow soldiers of the Aid and Support Corps served two citylords as "peacekeepers" - an elite armed militia extending Zann'Elth's influence.

The powerful yuan-ti empire of Tsseh, which stretched both above and below ground some distance southeast of Zann'Elth, had been mostly closed to foreign overtures, preferring to maintain a policy of strict uninvolvement and tolerating only cursory trade due to constant internal troubles. However, Tsseh was now quite stable and the rise in importance of merchant-princes - who had already been treating with Zannyr guilds for several decades - made it receptive to Zannyr offers of alliance. The two completely opened themselves to trade; Zann'Elth promised to protect the tunnels and make sure Tsseh merchants and spies had access to Wraithguard, the Mistwells, and even Freegard; and Tsseh in exchange made Feshnek a drow vassal. Feshnek was a very large, powerful, and strong-willed lizardfolk clan, which the weaker merchant-princes who expected to remain at peace for many decades struggled to keep in check; ruthless drow overlords were much more effective at managing the clan. Zann'Elth made very good use of the lizardfolk troops, which were essential to bolster its thin numbers and supply some muscle to promises of "military support" in some Freegard border regions and outlying places such as Aunengnein and Manezheim.

Manezheim and Zelina

Manezheim was a drow citadel far to the west of Zann'Elth. It also adhered to the cult of Vorash, and was engaged in a religious war against the heretic Citadel of Zelina.

The Orc Wars

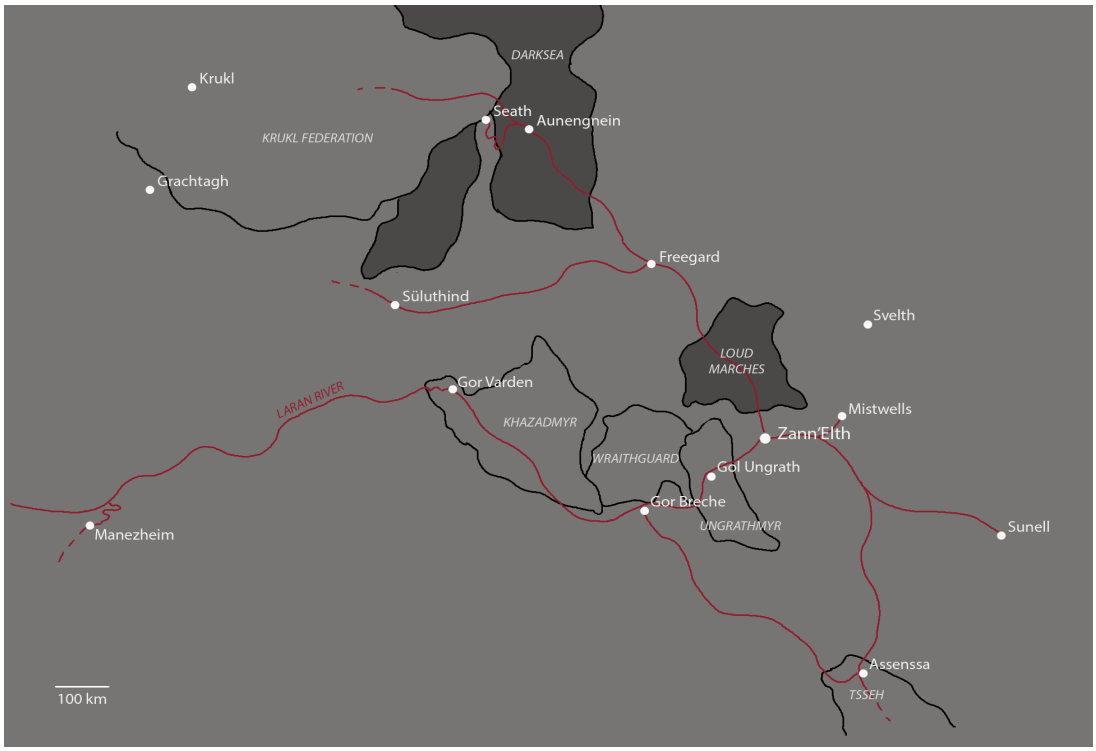
The Orc Wars, 1 b. OW - 61 OW

The Orc Wars was a surface conflict between the Boen orcs and their Andan goblinoid allies on one hand, and a coalition of "civilized" peoples on the other: the Dwarven Empire and the human states of Ochebana and Cuprien.

In 4 b. OW, Zann'Elth seemed to be a small drow empire with Caverealm-wide influence and a huge army. The drow had already sent out feelers to the Northern Ocean, to the new orcish superpower of Clan Bonebreaker. The orcs seemed on a heading to invade all Oshmondu, and they were on the lookout for allies to their cause. Well-connected Zann'Elth was an excellent candidate, and the drow could see only benefits to allying with the greatest power on the surface.

The main motivation for allying with the orcs was, of course, internationalism. Zann'Elth was given complete command of all Boen-aligned operations and forces in the Caverealm, had officials in high positions within the Orcish Guard, and represented the Bonebreakers in dealings within the Caverealm. An immediate benefit was also the acquisition of 6'000 orcish foot soldiers, an auxiliary corps which would over time grow ever larger.

Zann'Elth made several significant diplomatic engagements in the name of the Bonebreakers. Thanks to their powerful ally, the drow closed the Tenfaye Treaty with Gor Breche, which allowed Zannyr troops to cross Gor'Brekyr territory and forbade the Shadow Compact (the alliance of Wraithguard and Gor Breche) to set up diplomatic relations with the Bonebreakers directly. Thanks to Tenfaye, Zann'Elth was able to annex the Khazadmyr, which the Boens had recently conquered from the Dwarves; this would have been impossible otherwise, since those territories were much closer to Gor Breche and almost solely inhabited by subjugated dwarves and orcs rather than drow. Khazadmyr auxiliaries and economic resources, especially mines and forges, allowed Zann'Elth to considerably strengthen its feeble position; after all, its territory had tripled. Tenfaye also overrode parts of the Sied Breche Settlement, giving Zann'Elth some more breathing room. Besides,



1.3. *The central eastern Caverealm with its primary transit tunnels, 16 b. OW.*

the Boen alliance also offered direct economic benefits: as the Bonebreakers' partners for underground trade, the drow made a fortune, notably by selling the orcs high-quality weapons, armor, and sulfur from the Mistwells.

But the official alignment with Clan Bonebreaker barely impacted Zann'Elth's policy of open internationalism: the clan had virtually no leverage on the drow and they went to great lengths to make sure the Orcish Guard did not gain a foothold in the Caverealm, so they could continue doing as they pleased, utilizing the extra clout of Boen and Andan support to bolster Zann'Elth's bargaining position. Azeka could use her vast network of Thylvunnyr to exert influence wherever she pleased, including to forge an alliance with far-away Manezheim to attack even further-away Zelina, or to continue "supporting" Aunengnein's cause against Krukl. In a celebrated move, the Tyrana made a deal with western humans from Armuria and Cuprien, coordinating the transport of weapons and personnel from the Manezheim region, through the Khazadmyr, through the Zannyr trade network to Tsseh, and to Ochebana beyond; this paid very well, and guaranteed that whichever side won the Orc Wars, Zann'Elth would be its ally.

Though it had no issue playing both sides, Zann'Elth was primarily loyal to the Bonebreakers; both Azeka and the Mizenkyr Diet dismissed out of hand any possibility of ending the alliance with the orcs. Despite the orcish empire's growing frailty in later years, the Tyrana believed that it was too strong of an ally to risk openly betraying. This policy was uncommonly unpopular.

To what extent was Zann'Elth truly an international power?

Zann'Elth's policy of unbridled internationalism had its limits. Through Freegard, Zann'Elth made contact with the Citadel of Aunengnein, a free rock gnome and druegar citadel which had become the leader of a loose alliance of druegar states refusing to join the expanding federacy of Krukl. The Tyrana personally promised *"complete support to the cause of Aunengnein"* and dispatched Thylvunnyr and Aid Corps peacekeepers; the hope was to both control the sizeable and growing druegar separatist faction, and gain influence in the region to perhaps reach the wealthy cities of the Darksea below. But Aunengnein was



impossibly far away - 500 kilometers, and half of this across insecure tunnels - such that the little support Zann'Elth sent was insignificant and druegar leaders paid only cursory heed to the Tyrana's prestigious representatives. Huge resources were invested for essentially no return.

Another issue with Zann'Elth's impressive network of influence and alliances was its frailty. In name, it had a presence in much of the eastern Caverealm, and was capable of applying precise or strong force where needed with the Thylvunnyr and the Feshnek respectively, but in truth it had no way of maintaining its power if it came to it, as was apparent in the Tyrana's inability to deal with the later Ungrathmyr crisis right on her doorstep. The Zannyr forces were welcome in the outlying cities for the free brawn and trade they offered, and leaders across the Caverealm knew to exploit them, but in truth Azeka would have been unable to assert her authority if it ever became necessary, and Zann'Elth had few allies loyal enough to actually fight for it.

Perhaps the largest problem in the Zannnyr "empire" was its lack of structures to enforce central authority internally. Azeka spread her forces very thinly over a vast area, and she had few resources left to actually enforce the orders she gave or even communicate with her agents. Local Tyranaen officials in Aunengnein or Manezheim were so far from any form of central oversight that they were essentially left to their own devices. This phenomenon could be beneficial, as it was for Arachness Envoy Zinafae when she used her freedom to effectively consolidate control over Freegard, but it also enabled Principa Toikina of the Thylvunnyr to kidnap a Manezheim noble, steal a Feshnek unit, and go over to Zelina as a wealthy hero.

A weak Tyrana

Though Zann'Elth was considered a rising star and a minor world power during the first half of the Orc Wars, the actual citadel's government was constantly paralyzed, social stability vacillated, and many believed anarchy was imminent. Drow society remained standing primarily thanks to the considerable inertia of the noble houses and their political factions who maintained the status quo, and the numerous religious and law enforcement institutions which ruthlessly enforced order. In more than four decades, Zann'Elth had seen no new policies of any importance, and several discordant social elements had appeared and festered. The military, by far the strongest and most loyal Tyranaen institution, had been almost fully deployed away from the city - even the Reserve Division had been redeployed to Khazadmyr - leaving the Tyrana a largely powerless, symbolic leader in her own capital.



1.3. *A high priestess performing a sacrifice, 9 OW.*

The clearest sign of Tyranaen weakness was the rise in power of the Church. At the time Ninza became Tyrana, Vorash's Coven already had considerable influence in many parts of drow society; but it had accrued immense power over time, commanding a militia larger than the entire army presence, a City Guard Corps larger than either the First or Second City Guards, and it had considerable informal influence among the academic priesthood, the



guilds due to its wealth, and drow society in general due to its spiritual leadership role and its connections to all noble houses. In political circles, the High Cardiness's voice was heeded more than the Tyrana's.

Though a semblance of social order was maintained, many organisations and movements which in other ages would have been immediately suppressed were allowed to fester, simply because there was a lack of central will or strength to do so. The autonomous slaves were among the first to eke out more freedom for themselves. There were extensive, largely self-managed "slave" farms in the humid caverns below Zann'Elth, and, because no noble houses could claim direct ownership of them, they grew ever more autonomous and enjoyed all the freedoms of trade guilds or drow agricultural settlements further out. There was also a growing number of houseless, guildless folk inhabiting Zann'Elth's increasingly large and lawless warrens; the many tunnels were impossible to police or regulate adequately. The guilds were also hungry for greater freedoms, profiting from a lack of regulation to increase their profits and eliminate their competition. This resulted in an unsafe market and many guilds employing mercenaries and assassins. The guilds and artisans also detached themselves from houses and merchant-masters, resulting in a growing class of wealthy commoners - the *bourgeois*.

Perhaps the most problematic new development was the emergence of alternative, often extreme political parties outside the diet and noble houses. These factions had roots everywhere, in students' or teachers' unions, in fanatics disillusioned by the Church, in the bourgeois class, in the military, sometimes even in the masses of commoners. Hot political topics were the diet's failures, more militarism, more tolerance of non-drow, and drow male emancipation. This final topic was heavily supported by Gor Breche, minor nobles, and several insurgent cells, and the Patronist movement was considered a growing threat which no one was properly taking action against. Of course, the established elite had no wish to see males joining its ranks, and many commoners also saw men in power as a threat: the evil Gor'Brekyren had male leaders, and male inferiority was deeply instilled in all drow minds.

The Ungrathmyr Crisis

Under the Sied Breche Settlement, the Ungrathmyr was occupied by Wraithguard. Steps towards relaxing tensions had been taken, including the Tenfaye Treaty and the establishment of a Zannyr military "embassy" in Gol Ungrath to make sure the Wraithguard occupiers did not overextend their authority. But in 37 OW, when Wraithguard was due to leave, the Shadow Compact announced it had to *"protect the interests and sovereignty of the people of Ungrathmyr"*, and prepared to hold a plebiscite whether Ungrathmyr wanted to secede from Zann'Elth; in the meantime, the Wraithguard occupiers remained.

Of course, near everyone was outraged by this, from simple commoners to house nobles; representatives in the Mizenkyr Diet denounced Shadow Compact brashness and asked the armed forces to intervene. But the Tyrana was in a tricky situation: her military forces were spread incredibly thin to the point of nonexistence, while the Shadow Compact had a large, professional military in a fortified position; additionally, the Compact controlled the tunnels to Khazadmyr and further west. Going to war would be disastrous, and would result in a rapid collapse of Zann'Elth's Caverealm-wide influence. So the Tyrana instead spoke of conciliation, to the outrage of everyone.

The Ungrathmyr Crisis sparked overt protests against the Tyrana. While some small armed factions attempted to fight Wraithguard on their own, many other powerful players instead decided it was time for Tyrana Ninza To'Fezzen to go.



The Successes and Failures of the Azeka Infeness era

- Zann'Elth became an extremely influential player in the Caverealm, and was recognized as a minor world power
- Zann'Elth's diplomatic, military, economic, and allied resources increased greatly
- The Tyranaen government remained nominally popular despite decades of legislative deadlock
- The diet failed to enact any kind of policy or rule the citadel, eroding trust in the system
- Domestic order and social cohesion declined drastically
- Zannyr military power was eroded to the point of ineffectiveness in larger conflicts
- Nongovernmental factions, especially the Church of Vorash, were allowed to accrue immense power
- Divergent political movements and organisations, such as emancipated slaves and Patronists, were allowed to fester

Zinafae's emergence

The young drow Zinafae, of House Naflshein, was the third-born daughter of a young matron, with an unknown father rather than the matron's regular consort. She struggled to find a place for herself when two elder, better-born sisters were outshining her at every turn.

She was low in her matron's cares. She received preliminary clerical training at her house, then began studies in Zinith-Vorash, but subsequently changed profile in favour of Marte-Azaneth. After graduating, she served a while as a terenzenfia in the Marcher Army, but was recalled to the citadel when Matron Naflshein's second-eldest daughter was assassinated by political rivals. Zinafae became a low-level political official, serving as a courier between the military, the Mizenkyr Diet, and the Tyranaen administration.

The career of Heiress Zinafae

Zinafae's career was launched into the uppermost spheres when she was made heiress by the diet in 111 b. OW. House Naflshein was a long-time, loyal supporter of the regime, Zinafae had the required portfolio, and she was hardly a threat to the established elite.

The young heiress, after going through the rites and serving the Tyrana personally for a year, became a functionary of the diet, occasionally acting as its chairman and in general making sure its decisions were enforced. Though she was quite good at the role, she was also a young drow who didn't like to be stuck with such a "boring" job, especially since her rival heiress Alezza De'Marno was a popular figure at gatherings of young nobility and served in the fashionable Thylvunnyr. Eventually, she moved to staff work in Thynenvelve, the military's seat of command, and then became a zenfia in the Marcher Army in 87 b. OW.

Zenfia of the Marcher Army

Zinafae was not appointed to a fixed regiment, but rather given an area of responsibility around Nennenkyr, a tower outpost on the upper northern border, some distance above the main trade routes. Though the front-line appointment was somewhat prestigious, Zinafae's superiors considered the outpost strategically irrelevant and accordingly she commanded an eclectic assortment of troops, including *tevnyr* (non-drow) forces, low quality levies, and occasional Thylvunne foot-units.

Despite her unassuming posting, Zinafae managed to first come to public attention while serving in Nennenkyr. Instead of adhering strictly to her military mission and merely keeping her area free of intruders, she occasionally struck out on rangings and dealt with



nearby factions; she made peace with goblin tribes, made contact with a myconid grove so it would leave her patrols in peace, and approached the mischievous individuals of Cavehide. This small city had been founded by humans and many different Caverealm inhabitants, who had gathered to live in peace and a modicum of safety. The city was also home to a very powerful group of mercenaries, the Lurkers, who did business with warring goblin tribes and by smuggling goods to some Zannyr settlements. In 63 b. OW, by offering military protection, permanent employment for the Lurkers, and a guarantee of autonomy, she managed to make Cavehide join Zann'Elth and founded the new province of Zinaemyr above the Loud Marches; the required funds and authority for this she could access thanks to her bureaucratic connections and status as heiress.

> *"The people of the Prestigious Free City of Caves [Cavehide] are welcome into the protection of Zann'Elth and the Tyrana, who protects and guides all those who loyally pursue the Way of Vorash."*
>
> - Zenfia Zinafae Naflshein, 63 b. OW

The Cavehide incorporation was an amazingly popular event, because it came just when the Marcher Army was struggling to make progress in the Loud Marches, and because both a heiress doing extraordinary things and the renowned Lurkers were very fashionable. When Zinafae paraded through the citadel with a soldier and Lurker escort to pay respects to the Tyrana, she was cheered by a sizeable crowd. She entered popular myth as a capable commander and politician who had cunningly expanded Zann'Elth by an entire province.

Still, Zinafae was far from a prominent figure, and her moment of glory passed when she returned to the field, outside public perception. Her various rivals, especially Alezza De'Marno, saw this with relief and continued focusing on their personal networks of influence in the citadel; but in the meantime, Zinafae strengthened her position and influence in the north. With Tyranaen funds and the support of the Lurkers and their numerous goblin allies, she was able to continue expanding "her" province. She was lovingly called "Little Tyrana" by the goblinfolk of Cavehide; Lurker officers, who had seen the way she commanded and fought, instead called her "Lady of War".

The Shadowthreat War broke out soon after, but Zinafae remained in the north; in fact, she worked hard to keep the Marcher Army out of it. It was then that she, alongside two aides - Zenfia Nanene Crystal-Caves and the cunning human Teiner the Scared, the Lurkers' captain - began developing her own foreign policy doctrine. She discreetly argued against open, destructive war, which was expensive and never worth it, and reached a small audience in the Marcher Army and the citadel. As a result, the disgrace of defeat and Sied Breche was blamed on the Tyrana and some officers, but Zinafae was untarnished, and her reputation as a capable stateswoman grew.

Arachness Envoy in Freegard

Zinafae held the titles of Proconsul of Zinaemyr and Urbarch of Cavehide, was a prominent Marcher Army commander, and had the rank of arachness. She occasionally represented her Army at general staff meetings, before the Mizenkyr Diet, and at the Tyranaen government; she also did a few more stints in Thynenvelve staff work. She knew Chief of Staff Azeka personally and was selected for her *"extraordinary skills as a diplomat, ability as a policy-maker, and expert knowledge of the region"* to orchestrate Zann'Elth's internationalist expansion in the north.

The city of Freegard was the metropolitan centre of the untamed northern Caverealm, though it was not without its fair share of problems; the tunnels to the Darksea and south to Zann'Elth were unsafe and trade was difficult, several unruly neighbours were attempting to encroach on the Freegard citylords' satellite settlements, and a pestilent fungus was growing from Bedwater level, consuming cave after cave. Zinafae arrived in



this troubled city as an Arachness Envoy, a direct representative of the Tyrana, at the head of an impressive-looking column of stylish Thylvunnyr in black leathers, threatening war-priestesses in red, and a sizeable contingent of chain-clad *azanyr* professional drow troops. Instead of trying to incorporate the entire city, or forging an alliance with the entirety of the citylordship, she approached a few of the rulers individually and made them offers too good to refuse: she promised them military assistance and the skill and power of Zannyr spellcasters. The wealthiest of the citylords was swiftly removed, and the next two - who had sided with Zinafae - became her close associates.

From Freegard, Zann'Elth could spread out its wings. Zinafae established a sizeable headquarters next to a citylord's compound which served as a garrison for troops escorting traders and for Thylvunnyr ranging further out. Her static position as arachness envoy actually suited her very well, because she stood at the very centre of things: she ruled Freegard and the vast territories around it, she had the final say in all Zannyr military operations north of the Loud Marches, and she had considerable political weight, especially concerning foreign policy decisions.

Zinafae mostly used her position to build up her status and image back home; after all, she did not intend to stay in Freegard forever, and she was heiress. Aside from becoming a respected military commander, assuring her the support of the troops in the north, she continued developing her reputation as a capable, fashionable woman ahead of her time. She formed her own honour guard, nicknamed the *Free Guards*. This small corps was as much for politics as for protection. It consisted of capable folk completely loyal to her, dressed in silver plate and crimson silk. Though most were drow women, it also included men and Lurker humans of great valour. Whenever she visited Zann'Elth with her good-looking escort of heroes, she was hailed by the people.

Despite appearances, Zinafae was not the top decision-maker, and her ideas in foreign policy occasionally diverged from the government's. Though she always supported further investment of resources in the north, she feared overextension; when the Tyrana announced Zann'Elth's complete support to the cause of Aunengnein, she wrote a letter tactfully condemning the government's foolishness. She also disapproved of the usage of the free-minded Thylvunnyr, fearing they had become too influential and independent; but, given just how thinly Zann'Elth's forces were spread, there was no choice.

Return to Zann'Elth

Zinafae returned to the Citadel of Zann'Elth in 8 OW as a popular hero. Though some people wondered why she had returned, the answer was clear: she wanted to grow her power. Freegard was no longer the only - or even the most important - internationalist effort of Zann'Elth, and things in the capital were growing increasingly chaotic.

Zinafae sensed the opportunity to gain power, and accordingly focused on building the necessary base. She went to formal balls and social events to forge connections with the elite and built up her personal mythos, becoming an upright figure standing for leadership, order, strength, and piety. She understood that ideology as a political force, the principle that the Mizenkyr Diet's parties were built on, was much less important in Khali society than personal influence. Zeanel Dear'Clith, the first Tyrana, had risen to power based solely on her own charisma; so Zinafae took care that she based her influence only on herself, and not on some ideology or political alliance. The Tyranaen government also understood the value of popularity, which is why she was made Warden of Zann'Elth in 27 OW.

The government's reasoning for appointing Zinafae as Warden was quite clear: it had become unpopular, and needed someone as a storefront. Ninza and Zetta both saw the young Zinafae as an upstart insufficiently versed in the realm of politics to be much of a threat; Zetta believed that she would be *"like Azeka, but for the citadel"*. Chief of Staff Azeka, though she also supported the choice of Zinafae, was less certain of her



inoffensiveness - a feeling which would turn out to be quite perspicacious. Nevertheless, she also believed Zinafae could be handled, and hoped the energetic woman could perhaps curb some of the Church's aspirations to power and force the numerous administrative and law enforcement institutions out of their lethargy.

Zinafae's cult of personality

Heiress Zinafae was much more than a commander of troops. Many people believed in her as a legendary figure; it was not her command that gave her power, but her myth. Zinafae the Hero had a religious aspect to her, and she in fact heavily leant into this. The drow were a deeply religious people, and pious fervor had increased in these troubled years even while the government was growing increasingly secular. Zinafae had been educated as a priestess, often used religious rhetoric, and maintained that the Word of Vorash governed all mortals and that every individual should be loyal and true to the goddess.

Many soldiers and officers also supported Zinafae, in no small part thanks to the powerful ideas she represented. She had a successful career behind her and was known as a competent and well-liked commander. To the civilian folk, she was a renowned warrior who was seen much more often in heavy chain and a military-style red cloak than in the elegant silk dress of a noble. It was believed she had taken much of Zinaemyr and Freegard by force rather than diplomacy and thus her militarist views were well received. She embodied drow strength and superiority much better than the meek politicians (sometimes internationalism's success was attributed more to her than to Azeka) and was nicknamed Lady of War.

Though the government was unpopular, Zinafae knew it had been in such a situation for decades, and she added some fuel to the flames: urgency was needed if things were to change. So she and her allies fostered the idea that the Patronists were a real threat, constantly plotting to usurp good drow values and steal Zannyr territory (the Ungrathmyr Crisis would be a confirmation of this accusation). Other fringe groups were similarly blown up to be far more threatening than they actually were. In Zinafae's words, the evil and manipulative minorities were attempting to usurp good Zannyr drow. Recent demographic changes, wherein non-drow immigrants, enfranchised slaves, and merchants were growing in numbers and status, provided a basis for these fears.

Zinafae communicated certain values and fears, all of which she was the perfect answer to. The pious needed someone to turn to, someone loyal to the Word of Vorash and less self-interested than the Church. In an atmosphere of fear and foreign threats, the reassuring presence of the Lady of War was required. Zinafae was fashionable, both by embodying fresh new ideas and by having impeccable style, but she also had a stern, capable, traditionalist, and conservative side. She was the best of the old and the new; she appealed to everyone.

Zinafae's seizure of power

The final steps from prominent figure to authoritarian ruler were a hurdle Zinafae chose to overcome by force, making use of her authority as Warden and her broad network of allies.

The Cneingnhen catastrophe

In 33 OW, Warden Zinafae had to deal with a grave crisis: a large stalactite called Cneingnhen broke from the cave ceiling and annihilated the compound of House Naflshein below it, killing the matron mother.

Zinafae was quick to act. The Second City Guard and the Academy's Spellwatch were deployed to track down suspects; several dozen people, including minor nobles, were arrested, accused of treason and treacherous thinking, and incarcerated or killed. Zinafae



vociferously blamed the incident on a Patronist attentat and announced that *"[the Patronists] threaten us all"*, making common cause with all the people of the citadel. Though there were serious doubts as to the truth of her accusations, Zinafae's words were believed by many people, and no one dared move against her.

A heavy atmosphere of danger loomed after the Fall of Cneingnhen. People were terrified of Patronists and other traitors, but the Tyrana seemed deaf to their pleas; only the Warden listened. As long as she didn't move directly against the established elite, Zinafae had uncontested power in the city streets.

The Red Mist

The Ungrathmyr Crisis was the final blow to Ninza's regime; almost no one supported her or the diet after that. The majority of the diet's factions condemned Ninza, the associated houses did likewise, and much of the common folk began calling for her removal. The Tyranaen government knew its days were counted and held several emergency meetings to decide what to do; the idea of fleeing to Sunell was floated. But Heiress Zinafae, who was a close associate and even a friend of many high Tyranaen officials, proposed an alternative: that Ninza should step down silently.

Zinafae's actual seizure of power took place in 38 OW, during the citadel's night cycle when the public lighting turned dark blue and red. It was an unusually cold night during which the mists from the city's many water sources lied heavy on the streets. Orders were received by the Second City Guard to lock down all major thoroughfares, by the Spellwatch to surround and isolate Church buildings, and by the two regiments in town to deploy around government buildings. Zinafae, dressed in the garb of a great Zannyr general and wearing a triumph's steel crown, marked her presence in the Tyrana's palace; Ninza, Azeka, and other key officials were all placed in custody. The next morning, Zinafae called an assembly of all house matrons and asked the other political leaders to attend as well. She announced that the Tyrana had been deposed, and that Heiress Alezza De'Marno had fled the citadel. Under general acclaim, Zinafae Naflshein was made Tyrana before midday.



1.4. *Tyrana Zinafae, 41 OW.*

No attempt to overthrow the Tyrana before the Red Mist coup had ever succeeded. Tauzein Mal'Maern, who had had arguably stronger forces and the support of major political parties, had failed. But Zinafae had been very careful and thorough: though she only had a small base of support, there were very few people who actually opposed her. Through her contacts in Thynenvelve, she controlled a good half of the armed forces in the citadel, more than enough for a well-executed coup. And, critically, she also had the unspoken support of near everyone in power: the Tyranaen government sided with her out of necessity, the Mizenkyr Diet was unable to do anything anyway, and the major houses would side with whoever came out on top. Thus, by making sure with physical force that neither the Church nor Heiress Alezza could intervene, she was able to convene all relevant political leaders and get legitimacy from



them without trouble. No one dared to protect Ninza, and Zinafae was the stronger and more popular of the two heiresses; the choice was obvious, and by the end of the Red Mist, that choice was legitimised as well.

Though the Red Mist coup was often misinterpreted as a military takeover, because that is what it looked like to commoners and to the opponents of the regime, in truth Zinafae had used methods very similar to those of Zeanel Dear'Clith, the Sunnyr Tyrana of ancient times. Much like Zeanel, Zinafae had slowly ingratiated herself among the ruling elite, becoming an ally of the important institutions: the military, the house nobility, some major armed groups, and - crucially - the very government she overthrew. In truth, the Red Mist was a largely symbolic affair, because all persons in power had already agreed to let Zinafae become the ruler. The establishment's cooperation cannot be understated: Ninza continued to live outside of politics for another century, Azeka served under Zinafae, and many major matrons - prime among them Zetta - immediately sided with her by electing her as Tyrana. In the end, the troops were used only to prevent the few potential sources of resistance from taking action, and for their ideological value: thanks to the Red Mist, Zinafae was seen as a vigorous leader representing a radical new government, rather than a mere successor of Ninza.

Conditions in which Zinafae's authoritarian regime emerged

Though Ninza had nominally led an authoritarian regime, and had direct personal control over important branches of government including the armed forces and foreign policy-making, she was a Tyrana only in name, and her power and influence were in fact in the hands of others. The actual government, and the forces of order, were outside of her control and additionally woefully ineffective; Zann'Elth was participative and bordered on anarchy. Various conditions in this environment were propice to Zinafae's rise to power.

1. A discredited participative system that, due to ineffectiveness and policy errors, produced a high level of disillusionment and frustration
2. The humiliation and economic difficulty produced by the Sied Breche Settlement of 53 b. OW and the subsequent Ungrathmyr occupation, which caused revanchism, nationalism, and eroded support for the regime
3. Economic difficulties that produced social and economic troubles, i.e. political extremism emerging from economic instability
4. Fear of the Patronists, which was increased by the presence of the strengthened Gor Breche and the perceived growth of Patronist and non-drow movements in the citadel
5. The collaboration and capitulation of the existing political establishment and institutions, i.e., when the vested interests supported Zinafae
6. Seizure of power through peaceful collaborative means, despite subsequent claims of a "forceful seizure of power"
7. The extraordinary ability, resources, and charisma of Zinafae, in terms of:
    a. political leadership
    b. piety and loyalty to Vorash
    c. propaganda
    d. paramilitary forces and the use of violence to control the streets and suppress opponents



The emergence of Zinafae's regime cannot be reduced to one simple cause: it was the result of circumstances leading to institutional and popular disillusionment with the preceding governmental system. This led to powerful players turning against Ninza, popular demand for change in uncertain times, and the unwillingness of the population to defend Ninza's regime from overthrow. Zinafae's own rise, meanwhile, was predicated on a lengthy and tricky process to amass influence, status, and popular support.

Zinafae's consolidation of power

Though the Red Mist coup was successful, Zinafae found herself at the head of a weak government, attempting to control a fractured and hostile population and an array of noble houses and political factions which were more interested in their own power than any kind of central order. Her rule was legitimate but far from secure.

Martial law

There were about 2'000 soldiers, 1'000 guardsmen, and 1'000 other armed individuals deployed in the streets and around key buildings. Instead of withdrawing these forces after the Red Mist, Tyrana Zinafae considerably grew their ranks. Five regiments were brought into the capital and ordered to patrol the streets; they were bolstered by several thousand guardsmen of the First City Guard, from those houses which were the most friendly to Zinafae. Simultaneously, several thousand Lurkers were deployed in the streets and warrens outside the citadel bounds, controlling in and out traffic.

Martial Law

In drow tradition, "strict" martial law meant the military and its commanders received complete authority, and all non-military activity was halted. Except for entering the property of noble houses and holy ground, soldiers could arrest, harm, or kill whoever they pleased, and people were supposed to remain in their homes.

There was also "loose" martial law, during which military units complemented the city guard force.

The Tyrana was very careful in her establishment of strict martial control over the citadel. She made sure all active armed units were loyal to her or at least followed her orders; and she used her monopoly of force to arrest the leaders of other armed groups. She notably had the Spellwatch raid church grounds and arrest officers of its dangerously large City Guard Corps, and had soldiers capture the masters-at-arms of some house militias. In this way, any kind of armed resistance was made impossible.

The "state of emergency" following the Red Mist lasted for thirty days. During that time, Zinafae made good use of her direct military control to get rid of any major opposition to her power. Her first target was the Mizenkyr Diet: though it had been politically ineffective in the past years, it was still a powerful participative institution which might hamper the Tyrana's authoritarian rule. While the martial law lasted, she explicitly forbade the diet from convening and ruled by emergency decree, and afterward the diet's physical meeting site was used as a military headquarters. In addition, Zinafae busily disbanded the major political factions by gaining the individual loyalties of their supporting houses. She also prohibited the Council of Matron Mothers from convening again, so that it could not appoint any officials or make any problematic policy decisions; with important posts such as the citadel's warden being vacant, this gave the Tyrana free rein to implement her policies.

But the period of martial law was not only used as an immediate measure to ward off a coup. She made use of troops to make sure no one overthrew her while she was at her most vulnerable, but she did not intend to rule by force; it would only be a matter of time before the free-minded drow staged a counter-coup, and the house militias and Church Guard



alone outnumbered Zinafae's loyalist forces. Instead, she profited of the martial law's suppressing the government bureaucracy to build direct links to the noble houses. That was her primary objective in the first thirty days: get the full support of the houses.

The soldiers not only carefully policed the streets, but they also performed several raids within and beyond the citadel's gates, officially under the pretext of rooting out Patronists and other plotters. All individuals had to have the protection of a house or fear being arrested; in this way, hundreds of autonomous merchants and artisans were brought into the fold of the houses, and sizeable stretches of warrens could be cleared. By the time the martial law was lifted, the house militias had become a well-oiled arm of the city's law enforcement, order had returned, and the houses were far stronger and loyal. As a positive side effect, the autonomy of merchants was considerably curtailed, since the houses now at least in name had direct authority over most of them.

Tyranization

Fearing popular discontent and economic slowdown, Tyrana Zinafae ended the martial law and announced things should restart "as normal". However, she did not draw off the troops, and there were frequent armed patrols by soldiers garrisoned inside the city. Over the duration of a year, she continued to impose brutal order and remove all possibility of resistance in a forceful process called Tyranization.

Zinafae's single greatest political rival was Alezza De'Marno. The ex-heiress did not have the support of her house, but she was still an influential personality, especially among the young nobility which was reformist, tended to ignore the orders of its matron mothers, and occupied many important offices in the military and civilian society. Alezza had retreated to an isolated De'Marno mansion outside the citadel with a large following and refused to recognize Zinafae's authority. Twice, the Tyrana sent out soldiers with orders to arrest the troublemaker, and once she promised to honour her Zenthyr Protection if she recognized her Tyranaen authority. But Alezza stayed entrenched in her mansion, surrounded by her guards. In the end, Zinafae made a deal with the Church: the priestesses pronounced Alezza a heretic and traitor to Vorash, and a squad of *executors* of the Church Inquisition assassinated the renegade drow. This was the first time in Zannyr history that Zenthyr Protection was revoked, and it set a dangerous precedent. But Zinafae's mission was not to honour the traditions: she wanted to enforce Tyranaen authority, and troublesome customs would have to make way. There would be a time for honouring traditions later.

Though the period of strict house arrest and arbitrary persecutions had ended, Zinafae maintained the regime of fear. Units of soldiers, though now usually with religious warrants, continued to break into houses and make arrests in the name of tracking down extremists. These efforts were indeed largely successful at wiping out any trace of political activism, though of course the Tyrana used arrests to eliminate political rivals of all kinds as well. In the end, the terror proved successful at wiping out all traces of the Patronist movement, and the government's support for the matriarchic house system also helped defeat Patronist goals. The arrests would never stop: after the Tyranization ended, the Imperial Inquisition perpetuated the terror.

Another issue was the considerable spiritual autonomy of drow outside the citadel proper. There were numerous freeholding fungal farms and rural villages run by drow citizens in the immediate surroundings of the citadel, but the cultural and political influence of the centre was barely felt there. These people did not belong to any house, and they only nominally heeded Khali customs and religion. This was dangerous, as they could become safe havens for free thinkers or political opponents. So, much as she had done for the independent city-dwellers, the Tyrana declared all houseless drow in the citadel's



surroundings to be outlaws. Very quickly, Lurkers and house militias coerced the farms to obey their new matrons, and religious enforcement through house priestesses and the Church followed quickly enough.

The Tyranization functioned surprisingly well, facing very little protest. Many Zannyr drow were ready to endure the consequences of authoritarian rule if that was the price for a strong, effective government. The last gasp of urban resistance manifested in the form of House Tauzen, whose powerful matron believed she could become the new Tyrana. The house denounced Zinafae's intrusions into house sovereignty and the rights of private citizens, as well as her divergence from Vorash's tenets, proposing a more zealous leadership putting Vorash and her faith, rather than the secular military, first and foremost. Tauzen had the support of the Red Robes, a political paramilitary force whose ideas matched Tauzen's, as well as a sizeable chunk of the people who were unhappy with Zinafae for one reason or another. House Tauzen had attempted to associate itself with the "legitimate, holy heiress" Alezza while she was still alive, and afterwards attempted to ally with the Church of Vorash, which was known to have had disagreements with Zinafae. But both these proposals remained unanswered, and House Tauzen stood isolated on the political stage.

Zinafae could still not move against a major house on her own, however: this would signify to the other houses that she was ready to depose a matron mother, and thereby endanger their loyalty. So the Council of Matron Mothers was convened, and, given that Zinafae had the favour of Vorash, which contradicted some of Tauzen's accusations, it condemned Matron Tauzen of treason. The First City Guard attacked the Tauzen compound, the matron was executed, and the Red Robes were disbanded; Tauzen's cooperative second daughter became the new matron of the house and accepted the Tyrana's graceful mercy. This was the first instance of Zinafae relying on the Council of Matrons to build consensus and legitimise her decisions, and it marked the end of the military-totalitarian Tyranization period.

A nation reborn

By 39 OW, Tyrana Zinafae's control of the elite - now structured more or less completely under the noble houses, and ridded of its political alliances and independent merchants - was just about achieved. It was time to form a government for the people of the citadel, and to consolidate the loose empire beyond, a problem which Zinafae had until now largely ignored.

Zinafae announced she would *"return the citadel to whom it truly belongs"*. She began routinely addressing the people, speaking from podiums in front of public buildings, in front of barracks, or on the market square. Each time, she drew more people than the available space could hold, and her proud lauding of Zannyr superiority was widely cheered. These efforts were successful at presenting Zinafae's regime as something new, building up a new nation.

In the vein of strengthening the nation, the Tyranaen government introduced several policies advantaging citizens. Notably, all non-citizens now had to purchase a licence to travel the main tunnels of the citadel, which included public buildings and the marketplace. Citizen merchants were given certain tax freedoms and reduced fees at gatehouses. And the formal promise was made that if a citizen disappeared on the road in the Caverealm, a squad would be sent to search for and rescue them. As a result of this policy package, the status of citizenship became much more valuable, and a wider gulf was drawn between citizens and other inhabitants; in a way, the nation of Zann'Elth had been returned to its people.



The most important thing for Zinafae was to get all her subjects to identify with Zann'Elth as a nation to be proud of; the citadel was only a small part of Zann'Elth's sphere of influence. There were many smaller drow cities, and then there were allied settlements which were loyal only because of shared interests and not because of any sense of fraternity or respect.

The process of bringing these outside settlements into the fold was slow and gradual. The army was an important tool to communicate Zinafae's ideas and decisions, and the Lurkers were an effective support when needed. Zinafae was a relatively popular figure, but she nevertheless found it difficult to enforce her central authority and ideology beyond the citadel's borders.

Foreign appeasement

Zann'Elth's empire was built on trust and hopes, and the Tyrana had ignored foreign issues for more than a year. The situation now looked dire: Zannyr forces in Aunengnein and Manezheim were in serious need of reinforcements, the citylords of Freegard were attempting to increase their autonomy and the local drow nobles were running into financial problems, and the Ungrathmyr at Zann'Elth's doorstep was still occupied by foreigners. In addition, Zinafae's armed forces were severely limited: of the 40'000 regular soldiers, only a few thousand were available for deployment, the Feshnek auxiliaries were spread thin, the 9'000 orcish auxiliaries were demoralised and busy fighting pests in the Marches, and the Lurkers only had 3'500 troops available. If Zinafae called up the more than 100'000 marksunyr levies she had available, she would quickly drain the city's population and run into financial issues. All in all, despite Zann'Elth's impressive military resources on paper, there were essentially no troops available to achieve foreign policy goals.

The most pressing problem was of course the Shadow Compact's occupation of the Ungrathmyr. Wraithguard had held a plebiscite there as to whether the people wanted to join the Shadow Compact instead of Zann'Elth, but the results of the vote were unclear and the whole thing had been cancelled. It was clear that Wraithguard would not easily let go of the rich province of Gol Ungrath, and Gor Breche was very hostile to everything Zann'Elth stood for, but Zinafae did not have the military strength to evict the Compact by force.

Instead, Tyrana Zinafae bravely decided she would deal with Wraithguard personally. With only a 300-strong escort of Free Guards and Thylvunnyr, she traveled to Gol Ungrath, and - under the watchful eyes of hundreds of wraiths - met with two wraith-kings. She offered an excellent deal: a bilateral alliance between Wraithguard and Zann'Elth. As a further sweetener, she would allow the wraith-kings to occupy the currently orc-held Upper Khazadmyr and parts of the surface of Eisenhowl, including its mines and its dwarven infrastructure, and she would give the wraiths 30'000 live humanoids to consume. To make these prizes possible, Zinafae convinced the Boen orcs, who were her allies, to give up the Eisenhowl territories, and shortly after kidnapped over 9'000 non-drow living in the warrens and sent them to complement the hapless dwarves of Eisenhowl. In exchange for all this, Wraithguard agreed to become Zann'Elth's ally and to withdraw from the Ungrathmyr.

Though Zann'Elth's most pressing foreign policy problem was handily resolved, the citadel's vast sphere of influence still threatened to fall apart. To stall things out, Zinafae made strong promises to anyone who would listen; she promised thousands of regular troops to support the cause of Aunengnein, committed herself to supporting a Manezheim war effort, and declared war on the bandits of the Freegard road. These were empty words, but they were bolder promises than anyone had made before, and they were enough to keep belief in Zannyr imperial power alive for a little while longer.



At home, Tyrana Zinafae's actions were lauded. She had finally succeeded in freeing the Ungrathmyr, clear proof of her excellent leadership abilities. Her promises of campaigning and war were also well received, and many believed already in 39 OW that she was a great military conqueror, even though so far all of her foreign policy was based on diplomacy.



2. Building an empire

Zinafae's rule over the Citadel of Zann'Elth and the Tyranaen apparatus was secure, and her position was no longer in any imminent danger. She would spend the first decades of her rule, from her claiming the Tyraellefionzz until the late 70s, making compromises with other Zannyr centres of power to build up a vast empire.

Zinafae's Folk

Traditional Zannyr thinking saw the citadel as the centre of Khali civilisation, and the few "provinces" with their capital cities as insignificant satellites. But Zinafae introduced a new way of thinking: she saw all drow citizens as members of one folk, inhabiting a vast empire. Zann'Elth was no longer just the citadel, it was the empire as a whole; and everyone was equally part of the Zannyr folk.

The majority of Tyrana Zinafae's social policies were based on this idea. They focused on standardising, centralising, and unifying the folk, to make it possible for the Zannyr people to exist as a vast empire. The old systems, adapted to a single city, were simply not suited for use in a larger empire.

In fact, Zinafae already intended to go further; she was aware of the strong drow drive for autonomy, their tendency to reject any kind of political authority. She had plans to curb this behaviour, ways to regiment imperial society such that the Tyrana could be a true political authority. Yet she was far from the power she needed to attain such goals, and so instead focused on easier policies: making administrative reforms and working together with other centres of power, so as to both affirm her position and to lay the groundwork for the much deeper changes that would follow decades later.

The Curzei Vitai

In 41 OW, Tyranaen authority was still weak, and the military was not a very good tool for political reform. The government decided to formalise its citizens' path of life by writing down the **Curzei Vitai**, regulations and guidelines as to which steps a young drow's career should follow. They were extensive documents which carefully outlined all possible curricula, but they were not a major intervention in private life or Khali culture: the Curzei Vitai were very close to traditional drow life paths. The formal incorporation of these customs into law simply served the purpose of standardising curricula and allowing the government to easily introduce a few small social changes. As Zinafae herself described it, the Curzei Vitai was *"a lever with which to grasp and control the people"*.

The Curzei Vitai was a branching tree, starting with very few options for the young and then branching out across different educational paths and careers. The beginning was the same for everyone: around ten years of basic nursery education. Young nobles received this tutoring from their houses' priestesses and masters-at-arms, while commoners had to rely on their parents or a community tutor for this basic training. After this, the vast majority of people pursued professional training from artisans, enrolled in the church and became lowly acolytes, or joined house guards with minimal martial training.

Nobles would instead pursue either the Curzei Academi or the Curzei Azaneth. The **Curzei Academi** was the traditional path of pursuing higher education in the Academy of Zann'Elth, and was still regarded as the standard path of life even for noble children from



The Academy of Zann'Elth

The Academy was a very important and ancient institution in Zann'Elth. It had four schools: Zinith-Vorash for priestesses, Zinith-Magus for arcane mages, and Martere and Marte-Azaneth for fighters.

The institution was very powerful, notably through the influence of its boards, its wealth, its access to much of the young generation, and its religious guard branch, the Spell-watch.

distant cities. Young drow would choose one of the four schools of the citadel's Academy, follow the curriculum, and afterward join their houses as legal adults trained in one of the three great arts. It was also increasingly common for students at Martere or Marte-Azaneth to take up the Curzei Azaneth at the end of their education and become soldiers.

The military **Curzei Azaneth** meanwhile began with basic education at one of the several military academies scattered across the empire; future soldiers and officers were trained for their jobs, and then joined the army. The Curzei Azaneth also covered the typical journey through military functions and ranks.

Very prominent individuals intending to pursue politics had to take the **Curzei Archa**. Picking up after basic education, this curriculum began with service in the army as a quartermistress or paymistress, then as an active-duty commander, and finally as a staff officer before the high positions of government opened up. The Curzei Archa was special because all officials, military or civilian, had to serve in the army; starting in 52 OW, even the positions of cardiness of the Church and instructor at the Academy required the Curzei Archa. The Zannyr Empire was very reliant on its military, and accordingly its key officials needed military experience to properly govern the state.

It would take around a decade for the system to be fully implemented in the citadel, and much longer in outlying cities. The Curzei Archa however was enforced universally, because it was the government's best tool for the quality assurance of high officials.

The Word of Vorash

Zinafae was not a close friend of the Church, and during her seizure of power had treated it as a potential opponent. Several important Church officials had spent some time in cells. Already well before the Red Mist, Zinafae had preferred to separate herself from the Church, presenting herself as a pious follower of Vorash free of all the material interests and perversions of the ecclesiarchy; the extravagant and domineering high priestesses were not popular. And because the Church, which notoriously pursued its own political interests first and foremost, controlled more troops than both city guards combined, Zinafae had taken rapid action and paralyzed its Church Guard and City Guard Corps before they could intervene against her.

Moving so openly against the Church of Vorash did not pose any real popularity problems. Of course, the faith of Vorash was very strong, and Zinafae was extremely careful not to tread beyond the bounds of what was socially acceptable. She regularly visited chapels and prayed to the Mother of Spiders, kept a deferent tone when speaking of the goddess, and treated all her servants with due respect, releasing any priestesses she arrested within a few days. She also took care to separate the Word of Vorash, the holy intent of the goddess, from the teachings of the Church; in this way Zinafae was following Vorash's will even when she was going against the words of the high cardiness. In a sense, Zinafae was even more strict in applying Vorash's tenets than the Church was, because she truly feared Vorash's words and obeyed them more closely than most cardinesses. She was quite worried about the goddess's state of mind and feared some sort of viceful betrayal; if Vorash condemned her *coup d'état*, not only Church priestesses but also house priestesses would hear, and she would swiftly end up sacrificed in the main cathedral. But Vorash was uncharacteristically silent during much of the Tyranization period, and in the one vision she gave Zinafae, she both warned her of becoming too pretentious but also seemed to congratulate her.



At first, Zinafae expected she would have to oppose the Church, and this was obvious in her early stance towards religion. She underlined how carefully she followed Vorash's tenets and argued that a pious drow should follow only Vorash's Word, stripped of all the artifice and political malice of the Church. But as the Church did not move against her and even helped her legitimise her position as Tyrana, she began to see it as the powerful tool for order that it was. She always remained wary of its influence, however.

The Church in the Tyranaen

In 41 OW, the uneasy relationship between the Tyrana and Vorash's Coven finally ended when they came to an agreement. The Church would retain most of its functions and powers, and play an important role in the new imperial society, in exchange for cooperating with the Tyrana and considerably cutting down its paramilitary forces. The two realised that their interests were mutual: they both had the favour of Vorash, and they both wanted a pious and stable realm.

Zannyr Distribution of Power

The Tyrana's powers were sharply limited by law and custom. She commanded the executive and could make some law. The Church, however, had traditional judiciary roles, and was also the primary law enforcement institution. It investigated and policed with its Inquisition, and its priestesses - the only officials who could use violence against drow - commanded city guard squads.

The Church would become an important part of imperial government, helping to implement the Curzei Vitai and supporting the Tyrana's frail public administration system. Nevertheless, the two still deeply mistrusted one another, and a key feature of the partnership was the near impossibility for either side to wipe out the other: the Church's paramilitary was reduced so it could not threaten the government, while the Church's unique social importance in performing rites of passing, sanctioning ritual raids, exclusive policing authority, and branding heretics made it irreplaceable. As another means of essentially forcing Tyrana and Church to work together, the formal procedure to grant or revoke Zenthyr Protection now required the participation of both parties.

The motivations for and form of the accord are one of the most debated facets of Zinafae's rule. Historians with a Spiderpolitik approach, rather than seeing the accord as a decision founded on mutual interests, believe the agreement was made because neither side was capable of eradicating the other without mortally wounding itself. This interpretation has value, because doubtlessly the Church, if it had had the noble support to do so, would have usurped Zinafae; Vorash's Coven debated the issue and only refrained from attacking Zinafae because none of the major houses would support it. This can inform further analysis of Zinafae's politics: in the Khali world, the focus is on a balance of forces and fear of betrayal. Destinists however argue that the accord was unnatural and could only happen because Vorash told both factions to make peace and support one another. Again, this view is valuable, because the direct impact of Vorash on individual actors in Khali politics is often underestimated or overlooked. Doubtlessly, Vorash's support for both factions encouraged them not to attack one another.

The main schools of thought

Constrainism, the dominant historical school in the context of Zinafae, interprets factions as driven by goals, and all decisions as pragmatic means of attaining these goals. **Spiderpolitik** meanwhile sees politics as a constant challenge of strength, with the strongest factions rising to the top and the weakest being annihilated. Finally **Destinists** believe everything is part of a plan designed and directed by Vorash herself.

The Rites of Raiding

Raiding was an important part of Zannyr traditions as a ritual of passing, a display of house strength, a religious custom, and an outlet for pent-up aggression. Though there was no formal definition of "raiding", everyone knew what it was, and most female nobles led at least one raid in their lifetimes, males participating in a few more. The "typical" raid consisted of a party of a few house nobles and a dozen or more guards as escort, heading



out across the Caverealm to attack some unsuspecting target, causing bloodshed and mayhem. Raids were a relatively dangerous occupation, so successfully performing one was very presitigious for both the individuals and for their house; sometimes, there were religious factors at play as well, when Vorash demanded a raid or a house attempted to regain Vorash's favour by performing a spectacular expedition.

Though this system had worked fine while Zann'Elth was a strong drow citadel with a small number of inoffensive satellites, Zinafae's sprawling empire built on fragile trust did not tolerate young drow sporadically attacking its own subjects. The raids were a major diplomatic problem, because over two thirds of raids were undertaken for easy clout and thus targeted nearby underground settlements, nearly all of which were now inside the Zannyr sphere of influence; the issues were compounded by the increasing number of minor drow houses and drow people overall. As an initial measure to reduce the problem, the Tyrana announced in 49 OW that all raids had to be sanctioned by a priestess. It took some time to implement because of social inertia, but thorough investigation and prosecution by the Church's *questators* helped stop uncontrolled raiding by minor nobles within a few years.



2.1. *The aftermath of a Zannyr raid on Silur, 165 OW.*

As Zinafae's government apparatus grew stronger, she decided to regulate raiding even further; the Church was a good brake on rampant raiding, but it did not help bring more government control over the whole thing. Raiding became standardised in Tyranaen law, taking three forms: *training*, *beyond the nation*, and *ritual*. Training "raids" were little more than long-range patrols, during which a small group of armed drow would spend up to two tendays scouting tunnels around a settlement or a road. These became a standard part of nearly all Curzei Vitai, because it was an easy way to give citizens an insight into military operations while also serving a practical purpose. Uniquely, the objectives of training raids were determined by military officers, though they had a "priestly mission" to do so. "Beyond the nation" raids meanwhile were what most would consider regular raids, consisting of an armed expedition to some underground target with the aim of causing it harm and perhaps come away with some loot. Permissions for this type of raiding were often requested by noble houses because of the prestige it gave. Finally, ritual raids were the most holy and valorous type of the three. Led by one or more clerics, the party would make its way to the surface and attack a light elven village, in the single aim of killing as many elves as possible. Though this did not have any practical benefits for anyone, it was a very important part of Khali religion, and Zann'Elth performing more surface raids than any other drow state was also a confirmation of its primacy among peers and in the eyes of Vorash. In fact, it became the norm for a prominent noble's Curzei Vitai to include a ritual raid.



Military society and army culture

The army already occupied a position of relative importance in Zann'Elth when Zinafae came to power, but with time it would see its importance multiplied. What was initially primarily a tool for staying in power and enforcing the Tyrana's rule evolved, first becoming essential for the imperial expansion and consolidation of new provinces, then actually becoming the sole focus of Zannyr society. In just a few decades, drow society was transformed into an system designed to produce armies, to fight wars, and to repress any kind of domestic unrest.

Changing the "culture" of units was an important early policy goal of Zinafae's. Since she relied so strongly on the army for nearly everything, she needed to guarantee its loyalty first and foremost. This need grew even more pressing as the empire grew larger, because units deployed far away from the capital had little to no Tyranaen oversight and there was a high risk of insubordination, units breaking away, or officers making bad decisions on their own. Thus new military values were relentlessly drilled into soldiers of all ranks. They had to be loyal and follow orders to the letter, even orders given from very far away and a long time ago. Officers had to go by the book and, in a difficult situation, prevent any losses by maintaining the current situation and asking headquarters for orders. Officers should not make major decisions on their own initiative, soldiers should make no decisions at all, and soldiers should not operate in small units, always sticking to a larger force when possible. The traditional rule that only drow women should be in command positions was strictly enforced, and the number of women fighting as front-line soldiers was reduced as much as possible; clear distinctions were also made between professional *azanyr* units, *marksunyr* citizens doing military service, and non-drow *tevnyr*.

As was the case with many elements of Zinafae's ideology, there was a strange contradiction in her efforts to change the army. As she underlined the importance of rigid, inflexible units, the number and diversity of battlefields the army had to operate in exploded. The "Light Regiments" sent out across the world to expand the Tyrana's sphere of influence, with their compositions of Thylvunnyr, special operators such as assassins or war-casters, and Diplomatic Corps women, went the other direction, being very autonomous by necessity. In many cases, officers as junior as a principa made major foreign policy decisions on their own. This ended up creating a rift within the army between its conventional battlefield units, and its various special operators, which bore great potential for tensions and would have very detrimental consequences down the line.

Simultaneously, the armed forces gained in importance in all drow lives. As the size of the army, and the number of staff officers it required in the capital, grew, so increasingly many people went through military schools and did some amount of service. By 58 OW, three decades of military service out of every ten was required of all citizens, so soon enough the entire population was familiarised with the mores of the service and military traditions crept into civilian parts of life as well. All civilian Tyranaen officials had to go through military schools, and officer training, standardised in the Curzei Azaneth, guaranteed that all new commanders would be so dedicated to their Tyrana as to broach on fanaticism.

Despite the warlike image she liked to paint of herself, Zinafae was not a military woman in the beginning, and many Constrainist historians argue her early speeches and letters indicated she did not intend for the armed forces to play a central role in her empire; she rather hoped to utilise religion to control her subjects, and diplomacy to expand. However, as her ultimate goals demanded authoritarian control and constant expansion, she was pragmatically forced to make the military's role greater and greater. Alternatively, Spiderpolitik offers an easy answer to the question why the army grew so important: the military was in a strong position, and exploited this to continuously enlarge the war machine and engage on ever wider fronts. Since the military was strong, it simply used its power to get stronger.



The Zannyr imperial system

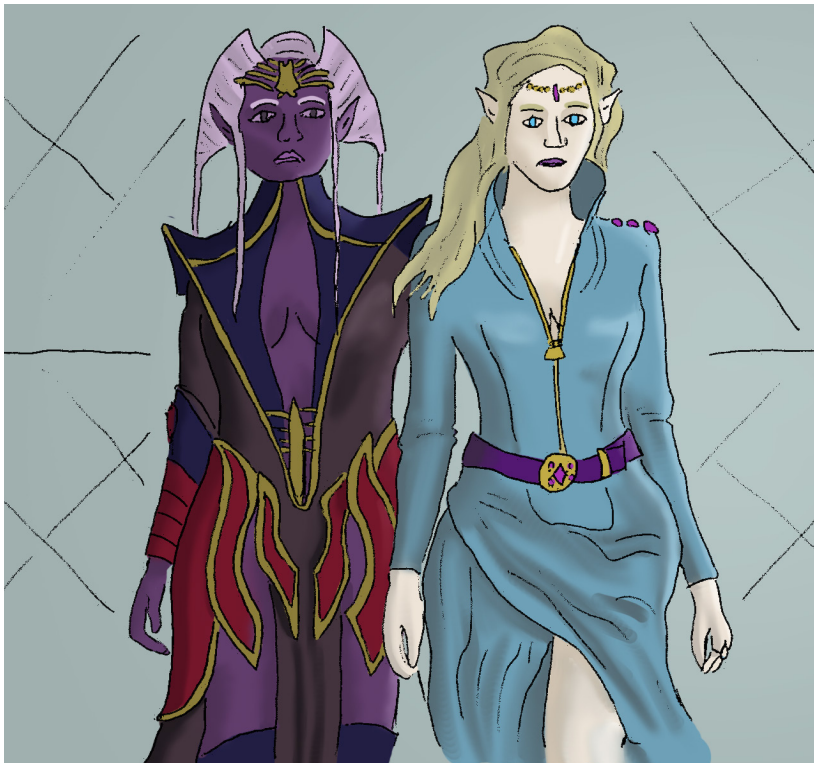
The government Zinafae inherited was essentially a one-city system with a few ineffective measures in place to govern nearby satellite settlements. She would make no fundamental changes to it, simply extrapolating the Zannyr citadel system to an imperial scale. Though this worked well enough, it inherently struggled to maintain control over the provinces, a problem which would grow over time and eventually forced the Tyrana to resort to armed repression and wartime measures to keep her empire together.

The imperial Tyranaen apparatus

Although Zinafae began implementing administrative reforms as early as the martial law period following the Red Mist, the apparatus of the imperial Tyranaen government was only brought into an early functioning form around 41 OW.

The provinces

Every part of the Zannyr dominion beyond the core citadel and its periphery was sectioned into provinces. These provinces were essential: because the Tyranaen lacked any kind of extensive bureaucracy and thus could not administer its vast territories directly, they had to operate mostly autonomously. The only requirement Zann'Elth imposed on its provinces was that they supply the small amount of taxes, and much larger amount of troops, that it demanded. The provinces were also supposed to heed drow authority and allow Zannyr guilds to operate freely in their territory, and, as citizenship expanded to many cities, cultural and legal expectations followed.



2.2. *A drow and an eladrin matron, 91 OW.*

Tyranaen governance focused on capital cities and all but ignored the expansive rest of the provinces. In principle, the ruling official in peacetime was the - at first, locally appointed - *matron mistress*, who had the final say and oversaw the local government. In cities with a significant citizen population, the government was supposed to consist of a matrons' council, though in many cases local forms of governance were kept and so the matron mistress might preside over a citylords' council, a diet, or other eclectic forms of governance. All matron mistresses had a seat in the Imperial Representative Council, which had nearly as much influence on the Tyrana as the Council of Matrons did, and had the additional authority to make empire-wide law.

Another important imperial official was the *proconsul*, an office appointed directly by the Tyrana. They were exclusively responsible for tax collection in the entire province, though rates were usually low and they often subcontracted their duties to private tax collection firms. There was very little bureaucracy in the centre to manage the "imperial" provincial officials, so they often had very free rein until something went wrong.



On the military side of things, each province was assigned a division, commanded by an officer called *citadel archaness*. However, as the number of provinces increased and the number of available troops seriously decreased, the local garrisons became much smaller; sometimes, the regular military was bolstered by a semi-professional local militia.

In some situations, such as when a city was facing serious threats or unrest, the military could appoint an urbarch who had authority over the city's security forces and imposed martial law. In times of war or widespread unrest, the military could declare martial law on the entire province, in which case the citadel archaness would take over from the matron mistress and strict military order was imposed.

Zannyr citizenship

Citizenship was a very valuable status: it granted an individual full protection from arbitrary secular violence and arrest, allowed them to own land in valuable regions, considerably reduced taxes at gatehouses, allowed them to attend public schools and serve in the regular army, and gave them access to various services. On the side of obligations, citizens had to adhere to the Curzei Vitai, pray to Vorash and only Vorash, and, since the Tyranization, had to belong to a house.

The way the Zannyr had understood citizenship up to now was that all dark elves of the citadel were citizens, and no one else. However, this was not suitable for the empire. In an attempt to broaden the citizenry, cities - which by default were "autonomous imperial" cities - could gain the "citizen" title. Citizen cities had to have a cluster of drow-style houses and a council of matrons governing them; all members of these houses would then be given citizen status. In citizen cities, this system helped transform local society into the Zannyr house system: in order to enjoy the advantages of citizenship, people joined or formed houses. Since houses were the only politically relevant social unit in the Tyranaen, this in turn made further cultural and religious assimilation possible, and transformed the city into a functional part of the empire. However, the flip side was that the many autonomous cities which kept their local systems of rule and had only a small drow population also had no chance of attaining citizenship and had little attachment to the empire.

Though many prominents in the capital insisted that only drow of good houses should be given citizenship, the issues of ruling a vast empire with a relatively small, impossibly stretched racial group were insurmountable. There simply were not enough drow women to command the many army units and occupy the necessary religious and Tyranaen offices, and even in citizen cities drow populations were often a small minority. So Zinafae was forced in 48 OW to allow non-drow to become a special class of citizen, *dhoine*. The naturalisation process was hard: the easiest way consisted of serving as tevnyr for around a decade and then being accepted into a house.

Dhoines had fewer rights than their drow counterparts, though already allowing them to join houses was a massive upset that antagonised numerous conservatives. They also did not have to adhere to the Curzei Vitai, and most of a citizen's religious obligations - including years of religious service - were waived, replaced by the Curzei Dhoine, broad guidelines tailored to individual races. Dhoine were socially inferior to drow citizens, could only serve as marksunyr, could not become officers or priests, and - up to a few rare exceptions - dhoine could not be matrons of their house. One wealthy human house in Freegard paid a drow woman to be its figurehead matron.

Military commands

As the scope of Zannyr operations across the Caverealm expanded, the military very rapidly grew from a small, mostly professional force composed essentially out of the citadel population into a vast army drawn from all across the empire.



"We used to have just two armies, and just six archanesses. Now we have more than I could bother to count, and our ranks are filled with all kinds of dubious creatures."

- Archaness Azeka Infeness, Eighth Army, 71 OW

The ever more full cave of Thynenvelve hosted the military headquarters, where the *archaness strategе* and her staff made operational decisions and dispatched orders to archanesses in the field. Thynenvelve was also where the Chief of Staff had her office, and many different institutions and units also crammed in their own headquarters. It was the nevralgic center, where officers and planners of all kinds met and controlled the complex Zannyr military machine.

The army was subdivided into large bodies commanded by archanesses: divisions for each province, which acted as border guards, military police, and the strong arm of the Tyranaen government; and armies for each active campaign, which were usually far larger forces. Both were subdivided into regiments, principons, and foot-units. The smallest regular operational unit consisted of eight principons under a zenfia, and principons were the smallest tactical unit on the battlefield. Other major parts of the military included: the academies, under the command of the *archaness martere*, in which future soldiers were trained - either troop schools for auxiliaries, or boarding schools for citizen soldiers, followed by cadet schools for officers - and in which most of the citizen population received elementary education; and the new Diplomatic Corps, whose operatives performed the varied tasks of diplomacy, infiltration, assassination, and governance of foreign countries, sometimes even on the surface.

There were three main kinds of troops, separated by how they were recruited and trained, what their equipment was, and ultimately how they operated. The best were azanyr, professional drow soldiers who had eight decades of training. Typical units were heavily armoured, used two-handed weapons, and rode giant lizards or spiders. The other kind of citizen soldiers, marksunyr, were typically drafted by the houses, received less training, and served on foot in shield formations. Finally, the tevnyr were a wide variety of non-drow which nonetheless belonged to the regular army because they went through troop school and had drow officers. They were poorly equipped and often used their own tactics. An average regiment was thus built up out of a handful azanyr, a third marksunyr, and the rest tevnyr. Certain units, especially those deployed in important cities, had more citizen soldiers. In later decades, the proportion of drow would decrease, and full-tevnyr regiments appeared.

One should note how important drow were in the Zannyr army: they formed both its elite core and its cadre. When dark elves, and especially women, became a scarce resource, the army was forced to bolster its ranks with non-drow, force all enlisted women - no matter their qualifications - into officer positions, and even allow drow men into the lower officer rungs again. One should also not underestimate the importance of noble houses here, even though the military was notionally centralised: they were the source of citizen soldiers, and they supplied fully equipped azanyr and marksunyr units. More often than not, houses also ran military academies as subcontractors.

The Citadel of Zann'Elth in the imperial system

The Zannyr Empire was, in fact, the empire of the Citadel of Zann'Elth. The sprawling capital, consisting of many intertwined tunnels and small caves densely packed with buildings, was several times larger than any other city in the empire; and, beyond being the administrative centre, it was the primary source of spellcasters, expert artisans, and officers. Virtually all the political weight was concentrated inside it: the Council of Matrons was always dominated by locals, as only one or two houses in each provincial capital were considered important enough to be allowed a seat.



Special laws applied in the inner tunnels of Zann'Elth by tradition, and the Council of Matrons continued to expand on them. People were only allowed to enter the citadel proper with weapons if the Church vetted them. The grounds of a noble house, hallowed by priestesses, were inviolate and no one - not even soldiers under martial law - could enter without Vorash or the house nobility allowing it. Likewise, bothering, harming, or stealing from a drow noble was punishable by incarceration or enslavement to their house. Priestesses also had a special status, being allowed to use their whips on anyone they pleased and, if offended, could publicly flog the perpetrator. Finally, all individuals with special authority outside the citadel, such as officers or Tyranaen officials, did not have any inside. Even an archaness could not give orders to a city guard outside her purview.

Under secular law, the police and military forces had only limited powers inside the citadel - City Watch squads relied on priestesses to accompany them most times - and accordingly the Tyrana had very little direct authority. The only means she had of overriding the houses would be to declare martial law, thereby antagonising the nobles, the merchants, and the clergy, and even that would give her only limited power. Zinafae, the autocratic ruler of a vast empire, did not have the say in her own capital.

Nevertheless, the Tyrana's legal restriction of powers should not be taken at face value. She still had considerable freedom of action, and any single individual opposing her would be annihilated. The Church was her ally, the matrons obeyed her, and she controlled most armed groups in the citadel. Furthermore, she could always fall back on covert actions; among Khali drow, as long as no one has explicit proof against you, you can do whatever you please. The Imperial Inquisition, aside from its official roles, specialised in this. Its squads occasionally broke into houses, assassinated nobles, or kidnapped priestesses who went too far. As early as the Tyranization, the Inquisition utilised terror to make sure the Tyrana was respected.

The noble houses

Much of the Tyrana's authority was based on the houses, and they were perhaps the only institution from which Zinafae failed to take almost any power. At the core of their influence lay the fundamental order of drow society: to keep the dark elves from bloody anarchy, they had to be placed in large social units with a clear hierarchy, channeling their drive for personal power in strict social ladders. Houses were also essential tools for policing, as they were the best placed to identify criminals or heretics; and they were the only institution, aside from the clergy, with the power to prosecute wrongdoers. Thus, there was no other alternative but to tie citizenship to houses, and give them several other freedoms so they could continue to perform their essential social functions.

Houses' internal business had to be left alone. Matrons and their close families governed their subjects more or less strictly, utilising tools such as priestesses and guard militias to do so. The priestesses guaranteed the house's adherence to the Word of Vorash and uncovered plots within the family, such as an eldest daughter's plans to kill her matron or a jealous master-at-arms' attempts to discredit the matron's current consort. When dealing with their own subjects, houses had free rein; priestesses would judge and deal out whatever punishments they felt adequate. The house's militia protected it from internal or external threats, and kept its estates inviolate. Secular guards or the church would only intervene with matters which went beyond a single house's business.

Building on their freedoms, the houses - united by the major matrons' council - had a broad base of influence. Because citizenship was an essential advantage for merchants, they all had to belong to the houses, and the guilds had to heed the directives of house merchant-masters. The houses thus controlled much of the Zannyr economy as well, and they often made use of their militias to enforce their interests - sometimes intervening in guild business which exceeded their legal authority.

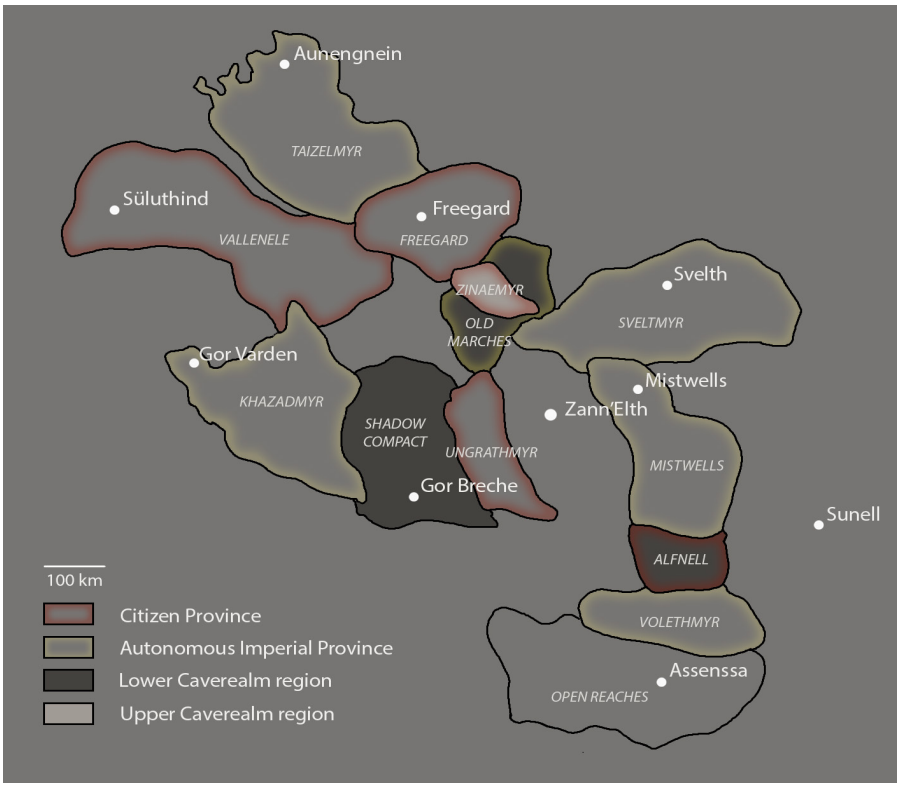


The Tyrana was happy with this state of affairs; the matrons took care of public administration and the economy for her, while she only had to maintain control over the few nobles at the top, a much easier task. She even helped the houses expand their power, trying to get rid of freeholders, autonomous slave farms, and non-citizen bourgeois, groups which did not fit into the imperial system and as a result paid few taxes and did not do military service. But the house system only existed in Zann'Elth and a few citizen cities in the provinces, and the empire was far too large for the urban houses to manage. Accordingly, the Tyranaen had to rely on local government systems, and in a few cases military governors, to administer the broad population outside house control.

Imperial conquest and assimilation

For decades before the Red Mist, Azeka Infeness had been expanding the Zannyr sphere of influence: the Loud Marches, Zinaemyr, Freegard, building up a presence in many places even further away. Zinafae, who had participated in this process, decided to drastically pick up the pace.

> *"My goal is to broaden the Zannyr sphere. Through internationalism, we will reach the places far beyond the dark tunnels, and we will grow. The larger our territory, the greater our number of allies, the more our nation's prosperity and security will be guaranteed."*
>
> - Tyrana Zinafae, 42 OW



2.3. *Zannyr provinces and strategic regions, 100 OW.*

The preconditions of Zannyr expansion

In nearly half a century, Zann'Elth had just about doubled its footprint, and considerably grown its army considering the large auxiliary contingents it now commanded. However, expansion under Zinafae would be drastically faster and far more violent; in little more than a decade, drow units would be present all across the Caverealm, playing a role in



virtually every major event. This would not have been possible without Zinafae making some changes to the internationalist doctrine and bolstering the resources she had available.

Expansionist doctrine: from internationalism to imperialism

The question why exactly Zann'Elth, at great cost in resources, administrative capacity, and drow lives, absolutely had to expand its borders was not one Zinafae or her commanders asked. It was a self-explanatory matter: a large nation with large armies would simply be better off and less vulnerable in the Khali understanding of the world, where the strong eat the weak.

Zinafae had clear ideas how she would achieve this expansion, which she presented on numerous occasions both in closed-door meetings and private letters, as well as in grand public speeches. Having grown up with internationalism, she believed that was the way forward. The number of places where Zannyr influence existed, even if that influence consisted solely of a group of diplomat advisors, was all that mattered; so far, none of these "assimilated" states had rejected Zannyr advice or turned against the drow. Of course, so far Zannyr interests had always aligned themselves to the interests of its allies, so there had been no opportunities for rejection.

The internationalist doctrine as seen by Zinafae was relatively simple: start by gaining a foothold of diplomats and aid soldiers in the target settlement. By political manoeuvring and investment of resources, expand that foothold and gain influence via proxies and allies. Once control is sufficiently established, move in larger drow forces and prop up the government. Finally, incorporate the place as an autonomous imperial city and use it as a base from where to assimilate yet more regions. If a small region resisted, disposable auxiliaries could be used to subject it by force. This had functioned very well for Zinafae in Cavehide and Freegard, and with her greater military power, assimilating further cities should only be easier.

The weak fabric of assimilation was exposed when "assimilated" states suddenly found other allies and turned away the Zannyr diplomats. The failures of assimilation, and the growing need for armed force generally, saw Zinafae increasingly turning to coercion or even armed occupation to keep her territories in line. In order to assimilate unwilling cities, Zann'Elth also had to threaten force; simple promises of aid rarely sufficed. Thus the empire had a reputation to maintain, having to continuously demonstrate its supremacy by engaging in massive military campaigns or repressing unrest. This only ever went one way: utilizing more force to expand was always a possibility, but the armies could never slacken or retreat from a battlefield, because that would entice entire provinces to break away. So Zinafae's expansionist doctrine turned from mostly peaceful internationalism to violent, unforgiving imperialism.

One might wonder, as the merchant-masters once did early in Zinafae's reign, why conquest was necessary. Couldn't Zann'Elth simply make peace with neighbors who refused to join it, thereby saving on the massive costs of war and benefitting from trade? Her answer was clear: annexing a new area meant gaining access to its economic production and to its troops, and made it available as a springing board from where to expand further. Expansion, no matter the cost, would always be more beneficial than peace and trade. Besides, two decades later, this question no longer made sense at all; by then, the empire was only holding together thanks to constant warfare and the liberal use of martial law.



Increasing Zann'Elth's manpower

The armed forces which Zinafae inherited were considerable: 40'000 standing troops, and a potential 120'000 levies in the capital and its surroundings. However, the existing forces were already spread quite thin; the Tyrana needed to increase her manpower drastically.

The traditional measure consisted of calling up more levies in the empire proper. Draft quotas were set for the houses and the existing training facilities were massively expanded. Several thousand drow, and many more non-drow (for whom military service, with its social benefits and decent pay, was very attractive), were raised in this fashion. The ever-growing recruitment and draft system in the empire was a sustainable source of fresh, well-trained troops which would populate the officer corps and most of the better regiments.

However, even battlefields in the 40s saw armies approaching the 100'000 mark; the regular army would not even have been able to maintain the empire, let alone lead one of the several campaigns Zinafae engaged in. This was where the drow relied on vast auxiliary forces, drawn from various allies in the internationalist network. Most useful auxiliaries came from Caverealm provinces and allies, notably the Shadow Compact's undead, dwarven legions from Khazadmyr, the famous Mistwells Regiments, the Sveltmyr Gnomish Infantry, massive druegar contingents, and even small azanyr and officer units from Sunell and Manezheim.

The orcish auxiliaries

Large contingents of surface orcs fighting alongside Zannyr forces were an ubiquitous sight in Caverealm battlefields. The surprisingly large numbers of orcish auxiliaries consisted of tribes which fled the Boen collapse in search of sanctuary and found themselves fighting to the death below ground instead.

Despite the great efforts that went into making deals with the major surface powers, the auxiliaries that stemmed from them were generally weaker both in numbers and in underground fighting ability. There were 9'000 Boen orcs, which Zinafae enslaved in 40 OW but kept using as cheap infantry, and a few hundred mixed infantry from Cuprien's 7th Caverealm Corps in the 50s. The biggest ally of Zann'Elth was Tsseh: already thousands of Feshnek infantry fought on the toughest fronts, which were joined by some Ifkesh as well as Tsitoxa units when their objectives matched. Altogether, the diverse auxiliary forces often outnumbered their Zannyr counterparts by a factor of ten.

Ideological concessions

In order to make expansion possible, Zinafae was forced to make concessions concerning Zannyr customs and religion. These changes were no doubt necessary in the short run to peacefully assimilate peoples or keep them from rebelling immediately, but in the long run they allowed the seeds of discontent to sprout.

The concessions began when Zinafae appeased the Shadow Compact, giving Eisenhowl and the Upper Khazadmyr, alongside 30'000 humanoid subjects, to Wraithguard. This was the beginning of a strong alliance, in which undead troops fought as Zannyr auxiliaries and Zann'Elth gave them parts of the land they conquered in return. However, to make this possible, Zinafae gave many resources to a widely hated enemy, which angered numerous drow who had shed blood against Wraithguard. Furthermore, the Compact became an autonomous province, meaning heretic Gor Breche was suddenly part of the empire. Though the Church would manage to influence Gor'Brekyr society into a more acceptable form, the unexpected acceptance shown for Patronists and deviant cults of Vorash was off-putting for Zinafae's staunchest early supporters.

Only drow women could be officers. Yet in 45 OW, and increasingly often thereafter, druegar "exceptional commanders" led tevnyr units as large as regiments. This decision was made out of tactical necessity, because capable drow officers were becoming scarce,



and the recently acquired druegar units did not like serving under drow commanders who did not understand their unit culture and tactics. Many noble-blooded officers would be enraged by the humiliation of having coarse non-drow as peers or even theoretical superiors.

The introduction of *dhoine* citizenship in 48 was a scandal for conservative drow, but a necessary concession to maintain the empire.

Meanillaue, the Weeping Goddess

The Black Lady was an ancient drow goddess whom Vorash had usurped. She was unknown in most Khali cities, but sometimes her sad songs attracted drow who wanted to escape Vorash's unforgiving yoke.

Breaking from its long-standing alliance with Manezheim, Zann'Elth suddenly decided to side with Zelina's new revolutionary government in 56 OW and even formally declare the distant citadel an imperial province. The strategic benefits were considerable, but the concessions were similarly large. Though the new regime was formally agnostic, the Zelinyr venerated Meanillaue and were openly heretical; and now there was a heretic matron mistress with a voice in imperial governance. The theological issues were immense, and Vorash's Coven almost denounced Zinafae herself as a heretic.

It is evidently clear that Tyrana Zinafae's priority was to expand her empire, and sticking to the values she touted domestically was much less important. Though the domestic impacts of her decisions are not evident, as there was rarely an immediate response as clear as Vorash's Coven's reaction to the Zelina incorporation, their long-term consequences played a role in the opposition that emerged against her in the 90s.

Expansion by word and sword

The initial phase of internationalist expansion, achieved both by diplomacy and limited violence, started soon after the Red Mist and slowly petered out, with the Mistwells assimilation being generally identified as its final gasp.

Assimilation was the focus: getting provincial governments to declare their allegiance and start supplying military auxiliaries. Many new provinces had a tiny imperial presence. Zinafae intended to utilise cultural assimilation and the lure of citizenship to bind the provinces into the empire over time, though more often than not she would have to fall back on armed force to keep them in the fold.

Northern consolidation

Zinafae inherited the Marcher Army's constant conflict against a fungal infestation and local peoples in the Loud Marches. She bolstered the mostly orcish army with the Lurker mercenaries, Feshnek, and fresh levy regiments, and gave them clear orders: eradicate anything that threatens drow citizens. Over the span of a decade, soldiers fought hard to make progress while citizen settlers came in behind them, consolidating whatever ground was gained. Though this war was atypical for early Zannyr expansion, fighting in the Loud Marches was necessary to secure territory that was now enclosed by Zannyr provinces on all sides and make campaigns beyond it possible. In 49 OW, Zinafae declared the war over, established the Old Marches Province, and left only the weary orcs behind as the local division to continue containing the infestation.

Zannyr firearms use

Guns were a major innovation in the Orc Wars on the surface, but their impact was very limited in Caverealm warfare. Reasons included the requirement for weapons and ammunition to be easily portable, since troops had to be highly mobile on foot; a lack of experience utilizing the new weapons; the magical superiority of Zannyr forces making guns unnecessary; and the Church's ban on antimagic metals making them useless in some military contexts.

A large part of the Marcher Army, including its archaness, went over into the Sixth Army, whose mission was to back up a unit of the Diplomatic Corps which had gone to the gnomish miner city of Svelth and begun the assimilation process there. Because they were interested in ending the



constant Sunnyr and Zannyr raids, and feared the prospect of facing the army poised on their border, the gnomes slowly gave in to the envoys' pressure. Military deployments were limited, consisting mostly of principon-sized units escorting Diplomats and punitive forces sent out to pillage the settlements of clans which tried to resist drow annexation. In 59 OW, the Sveltmyr became an autonomous Zannyr province as the major clans agreed to join even while an insurgency was simmering.

Zann'Elth imposed martial law less than a year after it had promised the gnomes not to do so, deploying the Sixth Army with its fresh Sveltmyr auxiliaries to suppress the insurgency, which was already spreading out into the Old Marches. Drow retaliation caused more gnomes to go over to the insurgents, leading to ever more escalation. Rumours of Gezznyr troublemakers among insurgents had started as early as 55 OW, and within a decade commandos from Gezneth were openly operating in the province, attacking Zannyr units. It would take three decades of destructive war, and the opening of a new front against Gezneth further north, for the Sveltymr insurgency to finally die down.

The Mistwells assimilation

The Mistwells, a mixed-population cluster of caves east of Zann'Elth, was its primary source of sulphur and some types of gems; the sulfur was essential for many of Zann'Elth's trade agreements with foreign powers. The city had been on good terms with Zann'Elth for a long time, but had managed to remain independent thanks to its economic strength and the buffer of numerous semi-vassal tribes inhabiting the caves and tunnels around it which prevented easy conquest.

Envoys from the Diplomatic Corps began residing in the Mistwells already in 43 OW, trying to make deals with guilds or cave militias and find a way to gain control. Parallel efforts involving numerous diplomats and soldier escorts in the city's surroundings to ally with the many orc, kobold, and deep gnome tribes were somewhat more successful, because military threats, *coups d' état* by killing chiefs, and plain annexation were much easier there. In 48 OW, surrounded by Zannyr-controlled satellites, infiltrated from within, and lured by the promise of *dhoine* citizenship, Mistwells became a citizen city and the capital of its new province. The city's assimilation went off with very little violence and mostly on the inhabitants' own accord, which is why it often serves as the prime example for successful Zannyr internationalism.

Except for guaranteeing its source of sulphur, for which annexation was not at all necessary, the Mistreach Province was useful to Zann'Elth in two ways. Firstly, though the city proper did not have a notable armed force, its surrounding tribes supplied impressively effective tevnyr units which fought on all the hardest fronts and became known as the *Mistwells Regiments*. Secondly, it was located in a prime strategic location to reach the east: a small army set out from it two years later to annex the Alfnell Province, and it was relatively close to the tunnels of Sunell and the Balebian surface above.

Though Zann'Elth got closer to Sunell, it opted not to attempt to assimilate this Khali drow citadel. The Sunnyr were strongly territorial and would not tolerate attempts at infiltration, and their dislike of Gezneth was critical; if they chose to side with Gezneth against Zann'Elth, it could spell trouble along the entire eastern border rather than just in the Sveltmyr. Besides, there were never any combat troops available to start a war against Sunell, as the forces were always tied down in battlefields to the north or south. Instead, the two citadels chose to remain informal friends. Who the stronger side was in this friendship was obvious; Zannyr light infantry used Sunnyr tunnels in efforts to support Ochebana against the Bonebreakers, and Sunnyr units supported Zannyr armies on faraway battlefields. In return, the Tyrana gave only polite heed to the advice of her Sunnyr envoy.



Approaches to analysing the internationalist expansion under Zinafae

The dominant school of history in Zann'Elth itself argued that the expansion was possible only because Vorash willed it and because she influenced events along the way. Indeed, the new provinces joined Zann'Elth without being directly coerced, something which Zinafae would fail to replicate after Mistwells. Vorash's appearances seemed to correlate with these events: she was very present in the decade following the Red Mist, often sending visions to priestesses and confirming that Zinafae was in her favour; but afterwards, priestesses rarely received a sign from her. This Destinist approach is limited, however, because it is difficult to pinpoint evidence of cause and effect when dealing with the supernatural and sources are very unreliable. Furthermore, this approach tends to oversimplify and overlook critical points which can help gain a greater understanding of history.

Various criticisms of the Destinist interpretation have been brought forward. One of the most convincing is the consideration that, as a result of the Sveltmyr annexation, drow forces were plunged into a decades-long insurgency war. There is a general consensus that the fighting there, which caused manpower issues for the War of Stones and led to the loss of many lives, counterbalanced the benefits of the annexation; the Zannyr empire would have been better off at peace with an independent Svelth. It seems unlikely that Vorash intentionally made Zinafae, who was in her favour, shoot herself in the foot.

Another compelling approach, also held by a minority of Zannyr historians, is the Spider-politik framework of analysis. Despite Zinafae's public assurances, there was very little benefit to incorporating most provinces, and the costs of administering and protecting them were high. The units they supplied to the battlefield could also have been drawn up through mercenary contracts, and by saving on the manpower needs of provincial divisions. Yet in drow foreign policy, interstate anarchy reigns and the strong eat the weak; Zann'Elth was powerful, so it had to incorporate the defenceless regions on its doorstep.

The fragile nature of Zinafae's empire meant violence was necessary to maintain it; the Sveltmyr insurgency was but the first of many. Much of the empire was built on threats of overbearing violence and promises of protection, so the army had to remain capable of both or everything would fall apart very quickly.

Military campaigns

Zinafae's internationalist efforts came to rely increasingly heavily on armed force to conquer new territory and to protect outlying provinces. Zannyr commanders were very confident in their army's ability to deliver:

> *"There is no one, not the rich hordes of snakefolk, not the metal-encased druegar, that can resist the armies of Zann'Elth. If the entire military of our nation were to cross blades with the entire military of any enemy in the Caverealm, their blood would trickle down the tunnels and we would stand victorious."*
>
> - Archaness Vallenel Dolbreza

Despite their overpowering military strength, the drow leaders would find that the manpower demands of the conflicts they plunged into easily matched the size of their armies, no matter how many new regiments they raised or auxiliaries they recruited.

The War of Stones

The expeditionary group of Zannyr diplomats, military advisers, and skirmishers in Aunengnein had grown over the years leading up to 43 OW, as Zann'Elth grew increasingly involved in the separatist alliance's desperate war against the druegar superpower of



Krukl. At the urgent request of the arachness envoy, Zinafae decided to send reinforcements. They grew very quickly from a few regiments to relieve Aunengnein and another besieged citadel to a massive army under the command of Archaness Taizenel Fezzen. Zinafae decided to get actively involved because Zann'Elth had already promised its uncompromising support to the citadel; her nation's reputation, upon which her internationalist efforts relied, was on the line. And she relished the opportunity to demonstrate the Zannyr military's power.

The War of Stones, called so because the tough, grey-skinned druegar were nicknamed "stone men" and because the first battle transpired in large rubble-strewn caves, would last over two decades and involve armies of a scale neither side had anticipated. Krukl had a large army with a core of heavily armoured infantry backed up by fearsome war machines, and close-quarters battle with coherent druegar units was a very dangerous affair.

Krukl transitioned from mostly empty threats into armed force to subjugate its neighbours, primarily because of Zann'Elth's intervention, and the drow scrounged together troops wherever they could find them. The War of Stones was a massive drain of manpower and the enemy's ranks seemed inexhaustible as it continuously drew up new regiments from cities to its rear. Gezneth also gave support to Krukl, though on a much smaller scale than what Zannyr officials made it out to be; reports that regular Gezznyr units had been seen fighting alongside the druegar circulated often, but they were unsubstantiated.

Zann'Elth, making liberal use of auxiliaries and tevnyr to hammer against Krukl's packed ranks, soon invested so many troops that it essentially took over the separatist effort. The separatist states found themselves struggling to supply food to the Zannyr regiments stationed on their territory. In 49 OW, Archaness Taizenel officially took over command of the separatist armies.

Zinafae took advantage of her troops' presence around Aunengnein to continue expanding her sphere of influence. Some separatist cities agreed early on to join the Zannyr empire, and the rest would be annexed with time; but the Diplomatic Corps also stretched its feelers further out, including to the wealthy Citadel of Seath located beneath the battlefields, on the shore of the Darksea. This druegar city had also recently faced attacks from Krukl, but had refused to join the separatists because it did not want to go to war; but this did not stop the drow from making an alliance with them. The Taizenel Army used it to attack Krukl from a new direction, Krukl responded by raiding Seath farms, and soon enough Seath forces fought alongside the separatists.

The War of Stones ended in 66 OW, as Krukl had suffered too much damage to continue offensive operations and Zann'Elth needed its troops for two new wars. The costs to both sides in lives and resources had been enormous, and the entire region was devastated. Tunnels which had earlier been dotted with groves and small settlements were now empty and infested by Caverealm monsters. Nonetheless, Zinafae saw the War of Stones as a success, because Zann'Elth had demonstrated its toughness to everyone and the erstwhile separatist regions were incorporated into the autonomous province of Taizelmyr. As for the high losses and mediocre battle record, she explained those away with tactical errors made by Taizenel and her subordinates.

The region would not be free from violence for some time; Taizenel ruled her subjects, most of whom did not want to be in the empire, through ruthless martial law. And the fighting with Krukl would not stop for another four years, as Zannyr expeditionary forces clashed with druegar in their operations for, then against Cuprien on Bao-Mou. Taizenel made peace afterwards, because she needed the breathing space to repress rebels in her province.



The strengths of the Zannyr army

The Zannyr army performed exceptionally well in Caverealm battlefields. Though it did lose battles, it virtually never lost a war; it rarely suffered devastating defeats, but often inflicted such defeats on its opponents. It enjoyed many advantages which, taken together, made it nearly unbeatable.

- Zann'Elth had a vast military reserve. Soldiers (or their houses) had to buy their own equipment, and most drow did military service in their first century of life; as a result, there was a huge supply of armed veterans that could be called up when needed. The Zannyr system was also exceptionally effective at mobilising its entire society for war.
- For the challenging terrain presented by the Caverealm, the army had exceptional logistics. It had more transport lizards and beetles than many of its opponents had soldiers, and within the empire, engineers worked tirelessly to flatten and widen tunnels connecting the major cities and frontiers.
- The battlefields were often beyond the provincial borders, and always far away from the imperial core. This meant that the destruction of war hurt the enemy most. Furthermore, if a battle was lost, the army could always fall further back into friendly territory; there was virtually unlimited space to retreat.
- It enjoyed an excellent communications network, which was continuously modernised. There were large dedicated messenger units; fixed and mobile gem relay stations were used to link headquarters; and magical wire communications linking the provincial capitals was set up.
- It often made use of allies and mercenaries, which gave it an inexhaustible stock of numbers, brute strength, and specialised skills useful in complex battlespaces.
- The Zannyr political willingness to bear the sacrifices of war was always unmatched. On the one hand, no one but the Tyrana had anything to say about war anyways; on the other, the population was very militaristic, and conquest was often a holy prerogative. Few wars were ever unpopular.

Archaness Vallenel's campaign against Süluthind

As soon as the War of Stones ended, many units of the Taizenel Army were immediately reassigned to bolster the ranks of Archaness Vallenel Dolbreza's army, a fresh force already larger than Taizenel at its peak. Vallenel's objective was the broad region north of the Khazadmyr, and ultimately the industrial metropolis of Süluthind which had considerable influence in the area. The Diplomats had already attempted to assimilate various cities and factions in the region, but they had been humiliatingly rejected or killed, bandit groups from the region were entering Freegard or aiding the Taizelmyr insurgents, and the undead legions of Wraithguard were becoming restless - they needed a war, or the wraith-kings might try to reclaim their autonomy.

The opening years of the Vallenel campaign were similar to those of the War of Stones, except that they were marked by even larger and bloodier battles; portable gunpowder tubes utilised as short-distance grapeshot caused enormous casualties in druegar auxiliary ranks. Additionally, Vallenel's forces suffered from sporadic deficits of manpower as troops were drawn off to reinforce the Eighth Army against Tsseh, for an intervention against Krukl in 70 OW, and for other battlefields. As a result, Vallenel suffered abnormally high casualty rates and was defeated in several major battles, where the biggest problem was that she lost many azanyr and officers in addition to replaceable auxiliaries.



Despite the extreme losses for a relatively unimportant region, Zann'Elth continued to sustain Vallenel's campaign and give her the reinforcements she needed. Zinafae could simply not afford to retreat: if she did, Wraithguard would rebel, and the ongoing insurgencies would be considerably fueled.

The slow grind of numbers against a much smaller and disunited enemy nevertheless allowed Vallenel to advance. Zinafae, having started to involve herself in military matters around 80 OW, occasionally gave her archaness direct orders or even travelled to the Vallenel Army headquarters to take over directly. More often than not, her orders to push forward even harder caused unnecessary loss of life, and the Tyrana made some tactical errors, notably leading to a devastating defeat against a Süluthind mercenary army.

The campaign did finally end in 93 OW with the occupation of Süluthind, but not after extreme sacrifices. Drow citizen numbers were more depleted than ever; some estimates judge Zann'Elth lost five times as many drow citizens, and twice as many lives overall, as it did in the War of Stones. Another problem was that Zinafae, an excellent stateswoman but a poor commander (having no prior generalship experience), began involving herself in military business in the belief that she had to take over for things to function properly. She would continue doing so to an even greater degree in following campaigns, antagonising some of her senior commanders.

The Big Wars

The age of peaceful expansion was well and truly over in the 70s. Big military campaigns had dominated Zannyr foreign policy, and this would be even more the case in the following decades. The focus would also shift away from expansion as Zann'Elth found itself needing to protect its empire from foreign threats and internal rebellion.

Zinafae had expected to go to war with Tsseh for a few years before fighting finally started in 67 OW. Disagreements between the states had been building for a long time and Zinafae, extremely confident in her military, was willing to go to war over them after her attempt at assimilation failed. Her intention was to defeat the disunited, unprofessional Tsseh army in the Caverealm, annex some territory, and force concessions on the surface. But Tsseh, it turned out, had a very capable Caverealm force as well; its federal army, including the current drow auxiliaries of Tsitoxa, Ifkesh, and Feshnek - most of which returned to Tsseh after a brief internal conflict - was very large and very cohesive. The large Zannyr Eighth Army would be bogged down in the featureless tunnel network called the Open Reaches, and fighting there would last years without either side appearing to make much progress. Both sides had the potential to escalate, but because of other preoccupations, neither did so, and the balance was maintained for decades.

In order to stifle Gezznyr support for Sveltmyr insurgents, the Second Army under Tuzzaei De'Marno, the heiress, invaded gnomish-orcish territories aligned with Gezneth to the northeast of Taizelmyr in 87 OW, *"bringing the fight to our real enemies"*. Surface politics also motivated this decision. It was a dangerous timing, as Zannyr forces were already engaged in three major conflicts, but early successes thanks to unprepared defenders and Tuzzaei's cunning use of Thylvunnyr and spare Light units for shock operations beyond the front lines gave the Sixth Army enough space to finally bring an end to the Sveltmyr insurgency and reinforce Tuzzaei in time for the main Gezznyr army's arrival. Much like the Tsseh war, the war with Gezneth would remain stuck in no man's land between the two powers as both deployed huge armies, but neither could invest enough to actually make decisive progress.

Zinafae's heiresses

As tradition demanded, the matrons appointed Zinafae's heiresses. They chose Tuzzaei De'Marno, an ex-Thylvunne; and soon after Tuleine Lezzimon, a cardiness from a destroyed house. They represented the noble elite and the clergy, respectively.

Zinafae did not interfere with the selection process, as she had more pressing cares on her mind.



The constant draining wars became everyday normalcy for the Zannyr empire. Zinafae rarely considered alternatives to violence, and as soon as a unit was freed up from one front, commanders looked for the next place to deploy it. War for war's sake replaced expansionism in the Caverealm, though it did not stop Zinafae from continuing to pursue internationalist-style plots for influence on the surface.

Reaching beyond the empire

Zinafae's ambitions were not limited to her empire and the neighbors she could reach by armed force. She intended to be someone powerful, a woman sitting in the center of a sprawling web of influence and plots through which she could manipulate and control the entire world. To become this likeness of Vorash, Zinafae was ready to go to great lengths and sacrifice whatever wealth and valuable drow lives it took.

Zann'Elth's special operations forces

For her many long-distance plots, Zinafae needed special units. They had to be capable of operating autonomously far away from the empire, often through twisting and difficult to traverse tunnels, or in the blinding light of the surface, with only crude gem-based magical communication available; and they had to be able to achieve whatever was needed of them, whether it be diplomacy, political or economic manipulation, spying, assassination, or sabotage operations. In some cases, these units' missions could be as broad as taking over a state.

The elite unit tasked with such ambitious activities was the Diplomatic Corps, a military branch whose mode of operation was a far cry from the regular infantry's. These Diplomats were drow women trained both in combat as well as diplomacy and politics, and naturally magic, typically nobles with centuries of life experience behind them. They could work in tiny teams and had the authority to make Zannyr foreign policy, as long as they stuck to their one objective: expand drow influence.

The Diplomats' need for military support existed from the very moment they set out from the empire, as they required armed escorts in the Caverealm. In the early years, these tasks were fulfilled by Thylvunnyr, house militias, or whatever suitable units were available; however, as the scale of Diplomat operations grew, so did the need for dedicated unconventional armed forces.

Zinafae's solution were the Light Regiments, units which were comparable to infantry regiments in doctrinal structure but little else. They were composed of elite troops, largely Thylvunnyr but also war-priestesses, mages, bodyguard details, firearms and explosives specialists, and military advisors. Light Regiments were assigned to theatres with Diplomatic Corps headquarters and did whatever the Diplomats required. Their extraordinary ability to achieve the impossible became legendary, and they participated greatly to the Zannyr empire's extraordinary reputation and influence far beyond its borders.

Noblewoman service as Spezziveinyr

The Diplomatic Corps consisted of drow women and men who served professionally, dedicating half a century or more of their lives to training for and operating on their special missions. However, the vast numbers of emissaries Zinafae needed for her close management of Ochebana and other near-satellite states far exceeded the Corps' limited numbers.

The institution of *Spezziveinyr*, "special advisors", emerged without clear central direction. In the late 50s, as Zann'Elth was broadening its network of operatives in Ochebana, it needed more manpower than the Corps had; so Zinafae called up the best



diplomat-manipulators she had available, drow noblewomen from the ever-plotting houses, and sent them off as advisors to humans. Their true mission was to control their assigned human and his entourage in the name of the Tyrana.

Spezziveinyr numbers were massively expanded from 63 OW on, when hundreds were needed to cover all the senior officials of Ochebana. This improvised affair quickly became regular, as years of Spezziveinyr service - usually the duration of a human's political lifetime - became a mandatory part of the Curzei Archa, and a customary part of other drow citizens' careers.

From a Constrainist perspective, Zinafae's choice to send her elite drow, those who had chosen to pursue politics or faith rather than serving as military officers, was natural. They were the best at manoeuvring governments and intrigue, and would thus be best suited to supply her with the information and the control she needed. However, Spezziveinyr service seriously upset drow customs, including traditions Zinafae was trying to promote through the Einandelvyr, and caused fundamental changes in the worldview and perspectives of the drow demographic she sent to the surface.

Special advisorhood shared some uncanny similarities with the hardships of younger Khali noblewomen. As advisors, they were at the service of their humans, standing below them while also trying to influence them, acquiring information and weaving plots; this was very similar to a young drow's life trying to navigate her elder sisters' whims and the house priestesses' whips while eking out a position of her own. Whereas some Spezziveinyr served as equals with their humans or even were the dominant element of their relationship, many others faced the same contempt they would have given a non-drow; these experiences, which could range from bowing their head to demeaning physical servitude, were extremely humiliating for individuals used to being their own person and in a position of power. But the consequences they would face at home if they failed their mission were far worse than the few years' worth of humiliation they had to endure on the surface.

A different mentality emerged among those who had been Spezziveinyr. For one, they could no longer see themselves as naturally superior beings who, by virtue of their race and gender alone, were entitled to domination. In addition, they had seen far more of the world, living for some time in a radically different culture, than any drow before them. Rigid, unforgiving Khali life under Vorash was no longer the only thing they knew.

Over four decades, the a significant part of Zann'Elth's younger nobility had served as Spezziveinyr, and the social consequences were not something Zinafae or anyone else could have foreseen.

Treating with surface powers

Whereas Zinafae saw other states in the Caverealm as enemies to annex, she had more respect for the surface. Certainly drow inability to see or to use Vorash's magic in sunlight played a role, but she also understood that the surface humans were far more numerous and wielded more advanced technology than any Caverealm adversary. Their power attracted her: she wanted to control the surface states, wield their awesome might, and strengthen her empire with their resources.

Tsseh and Trensandor

Zann'Elth's relationship with Tsseh, a Caverealm neighbor with a substantial presence on the surface, had ancient roots. Merchants from Assenssa and other cities came up to the citadel to trade, and the two states had made various deals; throughout the Orc Wars, they had worked together to transport weapons for the humans and make great profits along the way. Tsseh also loaned the Feshnek lizardfolk tribe to the drow, and Tsitoxa - Tsseh's version of the Light Regiments - could operate throughout the Caverealm only thanks to



Zannyr help. When Zinafae broke off relations with the Bonebreakers, she understood that Tsseh, despite being a nominal ally of the orcs, would remain on friendly terms with the drow.

At Tsseh's bidding, the Tyrana joined its alliance with the goblinoid Trensandor Empire in 46 OW. At first, this was only a formal affair, and Zann'Elth only cursorily participated in the alliance's war against the Boens by staging Light Regiment behind-the-lines raids. Through political maneuvers, and by leveraging its influence among the human powers, Zann'Elth rose to the point where it was the dominant member of the alliance despite not deploying a single principon on the battlefield. Its strong influence over the Andans and Tsseh was instrumental for other Diplomat operations on the surface; it could notably deal with Ochebana from a position of power.

In the aftermath of the Orc Wars, Zann'Elth tried to abuse its position to gain control over Tsseh. Ochebana recognized Tsseh as a Zannyr vassal before the fact and Diplomats were present at the tribal and federal government levels, trying to wrestle control from above and below. However, because Tsseh society was ruled by snakefolk exclusively, the Diplomats struggled to take control and were finally expelled in 66 OW. Zinafae responded by declaring war, hoping to annex Tsseh by force of arms; but this devolved into a Caverealm stalemate, while the two states coexisted on the surface.

Wartime assistance to Ochebana

The human state of Ochebana, expelled from its Balebian homeland and reduced to a single embattled island in the early stages of the Orc Wars, was one of Zann'Elth's most long-time partners. Already in 6 OW, well before the Red Mist, Zann'Elth had been running the longest section of a supply route running from human production facilities in the west all the way to Ochebana. By helping transport cannons, and later muskets and rifles, and also selling Zannyr-produced gunpowder, the drow enriched themselves massively by depleting the humans' remaining stocks of gems and precious metals, while at the same time gaining access to the peak of weapons technology.

Starting in 22 OW, Zann'Elth directly supported Ochebana's war effort. In exchange for payment in wealth, weapons, and even slaves, drow scouts guided Ochebanian soldiers through the Caverealm so they could attack the orcish hinterland on Balebu, and escorted wounded guerillas and human refugees in the other direction.

When Zinafae took power, she increased the scale of the Ochebanian operations from a few foot-units to an entire regiment of several thousand. This was an expensive effort, which also necessitated diplomacy with Sunell and the annexation of the Mistreach. But it gave the Diplomats a foothold in the Ochebanian administration, such that starting in 55 OW, when the humans began building firearm factories of their own, Zann'Elth was their main partner supplying them with primary resources. Zinafae was proud to regularly entertain Hopebringer messengers in the Tyranaen Palace: the red-cloaked humans in lustrous plate steel married well with the black-and-red of her Crimson Guard. Prominent humans coming to her doorstep was visual proof for the people that her influence was real, that she had made Zann'Elth a great power.

Ochebanian Hopebringers

The Hopebringers were the emperor's elite messenger-warriors, whom he sent to allies across the world as ambassadors authorized to speak in his name.

During the Ochebanian conquest of Balebu in the 60s, Zannyr forces actively helped the humans by getting information on orcish troop movements and concentrations, and in some cases by targeted assassination of key commanders. Diplomats convinced the emperor to continue fighting further and further north, hoping he would invade Intralu, the continent above Gezneth, and then open a second front against Zann'Elth's archenemy. When the Intralian campaign lengthened, Zinafae ended up sending active-duty troops to bolster Ochebanian forces.



Already in 61, the emperor had run out of means to pay for Zannyr aid, building up a considerable debt which Zinafae was able to cash in right after his reconquest, when he suddenly ruled the largest continent on the surface. Ochebana sent tens of thousands of orcish and human subjects into the Caverealm, some of whom were enlisted as auxiliaries and the rest sent to slave farms in the provinces. Much more importantly for the drow, the thin network of Diplomat "advisors" they had established among the human elite could, with explicit imperial support, be massively expanded. Hundreds of Spezziveinyr went to the surface, where they were assigned to senior officials and nobles. They controlled the humans through whatever means necessary to gain information and implement Zannyr plots. Thanks to the Spezziveinyr, Zann'Elth *de facto* ruled Ochebana, making such things as the humans' continued Intralian campaign against Gezznyr-allied orcs and the emperors' recognition of Tsseh territory as belonging to Zann'Elth possible.

Expeditionary forces in the western Caverealm

Efforts to influence Ochebana had largely succeeded, encouraging Zinafae to reach even further and try to build up similar power networks in the human states to the west. Because they were further away, she relied on totally autonomous Diplomats and Light Regiments, who were vested with the authority to make foreign policy decisions on their own. Zinafae hoped that by utilising the Light Regiments' special capabilities of raids and assassination, as well as the powerful promise of Zannyr support, her emissaries would be able to gain influence comparable to what she held over Ochebana.

Nominally, the various units spread out in the western Caverealm were under the auspice of the Western Expeditionary Army headquartered in Manezheim, but it was little more than a communications and logistical relay; they were mostly on their own.

2nd Light Regiment: Zelina and Holderhold, 56 - 65 OW. Zann'Elth's longtime ally, the Citadel of Manezheim, had waged an intransigeant war against the Zelina-led Terphyr Federation for decades and was on the verge of overrunning the heretic drow and their allies. But Zann'Elth, more interested in influence than eradicating Vorash's enemies, saw the strategic and economic attractions of Zelina and decided to "mediate peace", essentially forcing Manezheim to stop its offensive and taking power in Zelina in the process by supporting a local revolution.

From their position of strength, the Diplomats treated the new Zelina government as little more than a figurehead. Zannyr guilds set up shop and the military took over Zelina's alliance with human Holderhold on the surface, aiding its war efforts in exchange for positions of power in the human government.

Soon, however, Zann'Elth's power began waning. The soldiers were just a few hundred, with little support from Manezheim, trying to control a major citadel. While Zelina enjoyed its status as an honorary imperial city and some nobles even became citizens, it set up a bilateral economic alliance with Holderhold, cutting out the Zannyr middleman. By the late 60s, all pretence of Zannyr political power over either Zelina or Holderhold was gone, but there was still fruitful trade; the guilds exported worked metals and magic items in bulk, and imported prized communications apparatuses.

Inizzina To'Fezzen in Cuprien, 63 - 70 OW. The operators under Arachness Inizzina found an access to the Cuprien humans in the northwest in 63 OW, when a group called the Surface-Yearners needed help navigating across the Caverealm to conquer territory on Bao-Mou, a continent above Krukl. Luckily, by then the War of Stones was dying down, so the two regiments under Inizzina were able to escort Surface-Yearner convoys without too much trouble from the druegar.

Inizzina proceeded to manage much of the new Baovuldian Cuprien states' operations in the Caverealm, and to wield some influence among the warlord governments



on the surface. She gradually expanded her hold, calling for drow reinforcements and building up fortified enclaves throughout the tunnels below Bao-Mou and just outside Krukl influence.

In 70 OW, the freshly promoted Archaness Inizzina - frustrated by the Cupriens' refusal to tolerate drow manipulation - attempted to assassinate Baovuldian leaders and take power. Her plot failed and she found herself at war with Cuprien. Her operatives on the surface were executed, and she was caught between humans from above and their new druegar allies from below. Fierce fighting ensued, including a gargantuan effort by regular Zannyr armies to push through Krukl and relieve Izitiana.

The war ended in a pyrrhic victory: Krukl was defeated and forced into peace, and the Caverealm enclaves were saved. However, all influence in Cuprien was lost, and the sub-Baovuldian territory was anyways impossible to secure because of Krukl's presence in the way; the bases became part-time Thylvunnyr outposts, used for information gathering and as waystops for raid parties heading west.

A second attempt to infiltrate what was now the Cuprien Empire a decade later involving several hundred Spezziveinyr was a similarly doomed undertaking. In the end, the drow were executed or exiled, and the most successful Zannyr operation turned out to be peaceful trade and investment in Cuprien companies by the merchant-masters.

Zann'Elth's failed western efforts help to illustrate what factors made plots to gain influence and control possible. Clearly, Zannyr agents were able to wield some power, as they operated effectively even at the other end of the world and Zannyr diplomats had access to those states' leaders. Drow soldiers played important roles in both Holderhold and Cuprien's military efforts. Nonetheless, this illusion of control would eventually shatter as the humans' need for drow help ended and Zann'Elth was incapable of propping up its authority.

The essential difference between the successful plot in the east, and the failed plots in the west, was Zann'Elth's concrete ability to back up its efforts with political or military strength. In the west, it had neither; in the east, it could leverage its allies to exert political power, it had direct economic influence, and it was close to its homeland, able to send hundreds of diplomats and, if need be, even more troops to support its efforts.

The failures in the west, perhaps the most ambitious and most frail attempt at internationalist expansion, were a decisive step in the transition from peaceful internationalist expansion to armed imperialism. They helped Zinafae understand the limitations of diplomacy and plots and, in the case of Cuprien, forced her to resort even more to military means.



3. Zinafae's consolidation of imperial power

Tyrana Zinafae began focusing more heavily on domestic affairs, and her hold on power, from the 70s onward. Her empire's borders were stabilizing: the age of expansionist internationalism was all but over, and likewise the massive wars waged by her army would become political and defensive conflicts rather than wars of expansion.

Her rule, however, was mostly predicated on the support of the Church, the major houses, and their merchant-masters. She still had little direct authority over her society, and there was a high risk of the ambitious Khali people's hunger for power to surface in the form of infighting or an overthrow. There were many legal citizens, but few of them adhered to the values and traditions she - and many other elites - wanted to see in her empire. Zinafae wanted to transform the multicultural, multiracial patchwork of regions she controlled into a tough, well-ordered, and coherent society; this would be the final step in her transformation of Zann'Elth.

Zinafae's policies to rule the drow

Zinafae would utilise two methods, leveraging her own personal influence and making use of the armed forces, to bring about social change. She was ruthless and did not fear upsetting people in her quest to forge the empire into an orderly, drow-dominated nation.

Einandelvyr, the perfect citizens

The Citadel of Zann'Elth had ancient traditions. Among them were values such as a woman's rightful position in society being a provider for her house and her subjects, a leader in wartime, and a priestess who knew the ways of Vorash; the knowledge that drow were the superior race, whose right to rule the Caverealm was obvious; and that respecting the order of Vorash's Word, where the older women led their houses wisely and everyone else obeyed, was essential.

Zinafae knew and appreciated the customs, originating from a strongly traditional house herself. She believed that by restoring and spreading Zannyr traditions to the folk of her new nation, she could forge the unity, the order, and the obedience she desired. The concept of *Einandelvyr* (literally "united, strong people" in Khalisk) emerged in this context, as the drow needed a way to describe good Zannyr citizens who abided by the rules.

In a sense, Einandelvyr was just the next step in Zinafae's creation of the folk: in addition to abiding by the obligations of citizens, her subjects would now live like good citizens as well.

Domestic reforms

It was clear that the houses, alongside the Church, were Zinafae's staunchest asset, and they were the best suited to attain her aims of social reform. Zannyr administration, and to some extent policing as well, was based on the houses. In order to strengthen her society's backbone and make sure the houses would be able to assert their authority over the many parts of the Zannyr empire, she gave matrons somewhat greater authority to command house militias and control merchants, to the point where the City Guards, and later the City Watch, were mostly constituted out of units "loaned" from house guards. In the longer run, this helped the matrons assert their dominance over all people in Zann'Elth and other



cities, while smaller houses - fearing extinction because they were outdone militarily and economically by their larger rivals - began consolidating their strength by merging, forming the *Newborn Houses*.

There was still the problem of an autonomous bourgeois class in the empire. Though most merchants were now legally subjects of houses, the inclusion of new provinces had also opened the market so much that merchants trading in outlying, autonomous regions did not have to be accountable to their houses, or even assume citizenship at all. In order to curb this powerful independent class, the Tyrana decided to force merchants to have commissions issued by house merchant-masters, to tax non-citizen business more heavily wherever she could, and to expand house powers such that matrons could issue arrest warrants against their subjects in the name of the public authority. The merchant-masters were also a handy tool for the small Tyranaen financial bureaucracy to control and tax the economy.

As a side-effect of empowering the houses, Zinafae weakened the Church of Vorash, something that was not immediately obvious to the clerics. Matrons with more authority were able to better control their house priestesses, such that the Church had fewer opportunities to leverage them for information and influence; and the increase in house jurisdiction meant the Church's criminal enforcement authority and its ability to involve itself in house matters was restricted. For instance, now only house priestesses usually went beyond whipping to punish heretic citizens, and outside of its own holy ground the Church was not allowed to take action against any citizen priestess. While in the case of houses that adhered to the Word of Vorash, this was not an issue, increased house freedom meant houses were free to embrace deviant or even heretical religions, and that the Church would be unable to intervene if a house's religious control over its subjects slipped.

What were the characteristics of Einandelvyr culture?

To Zinafae and other advocates of the Einandelvyr, the traditions implied by this vague term were obvious. However, the definition of Einandelvyr culture could vary in the details, as different Zannyr historical traditions were considered important or not, and as new constructs were introduced in the hope of "cleaning up" and ordering imperial society.

Some of the Einandelvyr hallmarks were the following:

- Adhering to "old traditions" in matters of faith, values, and rituals was essential. This could vary from house to house, but a deep respect for Vorash and certain major religious festivities were universal.
- The rules of the Word of Vorash had to be followed. Drow had to welcome in and offer polite hospitality to visiting individuals of a higher station, anyone insulting Vorash deserved to be whipped (usually with a "snake-tipped" whip which could inject painful venom or cause serious psychic pain), and drow could only bathe in running water.
- A woman had the right of authority over her close family, much like a matron had over her house. A mother could order her children to do anything as long as she lived, and only the matron mother could overrule her. Likewise, obedience to all figures of authority - matrons, priestesses, officials - was underlined.
- Drow should dress sharply and formally; being modest and respectful was valued, showing off was not. Women wore draping robes of black with silver or grey accents, while clergy, military, and officials enriched their clothes with red. Men could also wear more close-fitting or revealing clothes, including leather; they had little status to display. Hair was worn long and straight, and tied up in formal contexts.



In practice, Einandelvyr did not spread quickly beyond the circle of house elites. The issue was the contradiction between clean, regimented Einandelvyr and the far more pragmatic composition of the larger empire. Many provincial houses had no drow at all, and Zann'Elth's primary motivation when founding provinces was not the locals' cultural similarity, but material interests. There were few Khali-style houses and families, and even fewer actual drow, such that Einandelvyr's reach was limited from the start.

Zannyr pragmatism also undermined the fundamental values of Einandelvyr. The superiority of drow women and Vorash's authority were supposedly paramount, yet Zinafae did not hesitate to present herself as the supreme authority and in some cases overrode priestesses, and drow inviolability was casually violated when important nobility were sent to be bedded by inferior humans on the surface, or priestesses condemned of treason were sent off to slavery under savage goblinoids.

To what extent was Zann'Elth a nation-state?

The Tyranaen rarely referred to its dominion as an "empire"; it simply called its state Zann'Elth, and liked to present it as a nation. The political advantages of doing so, underlining harmony rather than minority rule, were obvious. However, one can rightly wonder whether the polity which Zinafae commanded was truly a nation.

The strongest argument in favor of seeing Zann'Elth as a nation, in Zinafae's own words, was that *"all citizens have rights and representation in the Tyranaen. The Zannyr folk are proud and strong"*. When considering only the Einandelvyr citizens, which did encompass minorities in all provinces, one can identify the characteristics of a nation-state: a legal status and protections for the inhabitants of the nation, a shared social structure, shared culture and religion, and some patriotic sentiment. Zinafae's folk, especially the folk of the capital and its surroundings, could be considered a nation.

However, drow tended to ignore non-citizens from most considerations, which is an error no analysis should make. The vast majority of people living under Zannyr rule were not, in fact, Einandelvyr, and 70% were not citizens. Even focusing on provinces incorporated by peaceful means, a majority of people - and also their culture, their social structures, and in many cases their identity - were not part of anything resembling a Zannyr nation. From a wider perspective, including all regions and all people under drow rule, it is clear that the state in question was an empire where one ethnic minority subjugated and ruled many other ethnic groups.

Imperial rule: martial law and military suppression

The powerful tool of house rule was effective in the capital and the other cities which used the drow system. However, in the rest of the empire, Zinafae could not rely on matrons, and she had to fall back on other means of rule.

Typically, local governments - whether just the old system, or, in provinces which had not been one political entity before Zann'Elth, an often disjoint amalgamation of small states - were preserved as they were, because the Tyranaen did not have the administrative capacity to restructure them. A pretense of Khali-style social structure was only required for citizens, and the only requirement for local systems was that they supply troops and taxes as asked and that they respect drow authorities.

Zinafae became more and more dissatisfied as her expectations and the provinces' submissiveness went in opposite directions: she expected her subjects to gradually adopt Einandelvyr customs, become more obedient, and supply more troops, whereas the locals grew bolder and claimed as much autonomy as they could get. Tyranaen provincial officials, usually the proconsul and the citadel archaness because the matron mistress and her staff were locals, maintained imperial rule as best they could by making deals with



certain factions and weakening others, and making threats against everyone. Sometimes, however, this was not enough, and military intervention was necessary to bring the province or subregion back into the fold. The conditions for intervention varied, but Zannyr tolerance was quite high: attacking important drow individuals, failing to supply troops, insurgency, and outright declarations of independence were usually where it drew the line.

In a standard intervention, an army - or sometimes just the reinforced local division - would march into the province, attacking and defeating any kind of rebel forces there were and arresting the leaders. Soldiers then remained for some time to enforce loose martial law, during which Tyranaen officials tried to make reforms while troops brutally maintained order. Often, settlers - either slaves or loyal citizens - were moved in to displace some of the local population and "bring stability". The exact terms of martial law varied as well, and sometimes smaller units remained deployed in troublesome areas, administering them as an *ersatz* government for decades.

The apparatus of imperial rule did expand over time, as the Imperial Representative Council increased its staff and volume of legislation. Starting in the late 70s, the highest provincial authority - the matron mistress - was no longer a local, but a Zannyr official appointed by the capital. The imperial matron mistresses saw to it that their provincial governments functioned smoothly and obediently, sometimes forcefully implementing house systems but rarely going deeper.

Opposition to Zinafae's regime

In the aftermath of the Red Mist and the Tyranization, few drow in Zann'Elth would have believed it possible for opposition against Zinafae to emerge. The young drow was charming, capable, and a strong Tyrana; the Church was in her camp; and she controlled the houses and the population with an iron fist.

Though Zinafae found herself ruling a very broad array of people, who required different methods of rule than drow and often resented being conquered, no real threat would stem from the non-drow of the empire; they were simply a matter for the city guardsman's baton and soldier's blade. Real, dangerous opposition came from the drow of Zann'Elth, where the Tyrana's power was based.

Sources of opposition

Opposition inside the capital arose due to various factors. Though following the Tyranization, essentially all of the citadel stood behind the Tyrana, with time new factions and movements emerged which did not fit into the perfect order Zinafae imagined in the Einandelvyr. In effect, the term "opposition" became synonymous with any and all divergent movements, because of the Tyrana's unvarying decision not to tolerate them, and sometimes to actively persecute them. Anything that did not adhere to the Tyrana's social order, even if it did so peacefully, became opposition.

Religious factionalism

The Church of Vorash's monopoly over Zannyr religion ended as soon as the empire expanded and began adopting non-drow citizens, who hadn't gone through the decade of religious training usual for drow. At first, despite the vociferous yet unrealistic demands by Vorash's Coven that all citizens convert to its faith, this was not a major threat to it - as long as it controlled the capital, it controlled Zann'Elth.

The monolithic Church's fundament started to be eroded when citizens of alternative faiths began residing in the city, notably as prominents from provincial houses. Zinafae's tolerance of the Gor'Brekyr church, which was similar to Zann'Elth's but had a different



hierarchy and greater tolerance for men, was the end of the Church's monopoly on faith. Other clerics, from Sunell, Manezheim, even Gezneth, began competing with Vorash's Coven. The Church also failed to spread its influence far from the capital beyond a few missionary temples, because of the dual bane that it held the new citizens in very low esteem and because its extreme theology turned away would-be adherents.

The first battle that the Church chose to fight was the one against Zelina. Upon becoming an autonomous imperial citadel, Zelina's priestesses of Meanillaue were given legal protection and began preaching to proper followers of Vorash. This was unacceptable and even prompted one of Vorash's rare missives: destroy the followers of the False Goddess. The Church made its position eminently clear and took whatever actions it could, mostly by appealing to matron mothers and making their house guards do its dirty work outside the citadel. But Zinafae was more interested in tangible benefits than adherence to doctrine and assigned her most agnostic commanders to punish and prevent those who attacked Zelina. In the end, the Church failed to eradicate Meanillaue from the empire, and the fact that it no longer had a monopoly of power was abundantly clear.

The greater freedoms for houses encouraged the proliferation of smaller, alternative cults of Vorash which were free from the Church's brutal authority. They banded together into a loose organisation known as the Unity Church, so as to share resources and offer prayer circles, seminars, religious initiation, and priestess training just like the Church of Vorash, which was becoming known as the "Old Clade". A large part of Unity's leaders were in fact members of the Church of Vorash who decided to split for personal and political reasons as much as for ideology. The Old Clade could not sensibly go against the popular splinter faction within its own ranks, so, aside from heated plotting and occasional assassinations, it was forced to watch impotently as Unity grew stronger.

Towards the end of the century, the Old Clade's Word of Vorash was simply not the only religion in Zann'Elth. The citadel had become more open and other faiths had entered with the many new citizens, while the drow people themselves realised there was more to the world than just Vorash's darkness. Of course, the religious freedom of drow citizens - especially that of the Zannyr nobility - should not be overestimated. Deviance from the Word of Vorash was still punished harshly, and everyone who mattered adhered to it. Unity itself was barely different from the Old Clade, having undergone a political rather than theological split, except that it was somewhat more tolerant in matters of behaviour and other faiths.



3.1. *An Aimehzenyr woman, 73 OW.*

Youth defiance

The Einandelvyr ideas of order and formality were attractive to the older generation of drow, who had spent all their lives in a closed Khali citadel and whose only interactions with non-drow consisted of slaves and bloody raids. But the empire of Zinafae was very different from the old citadel. It was a vast patchwork of peoples and places, in which drow dealt with living mushrooms in pungent, colourful groves, haughty eladrin-humans in crystal caves, tough but honest druegar in their



cities of metal, and forceful, power-hungry humans on the surface. The new generation of drow had seen an amazing variety of peoples and ideas, all of which the Word of Vorash was simply blind to.

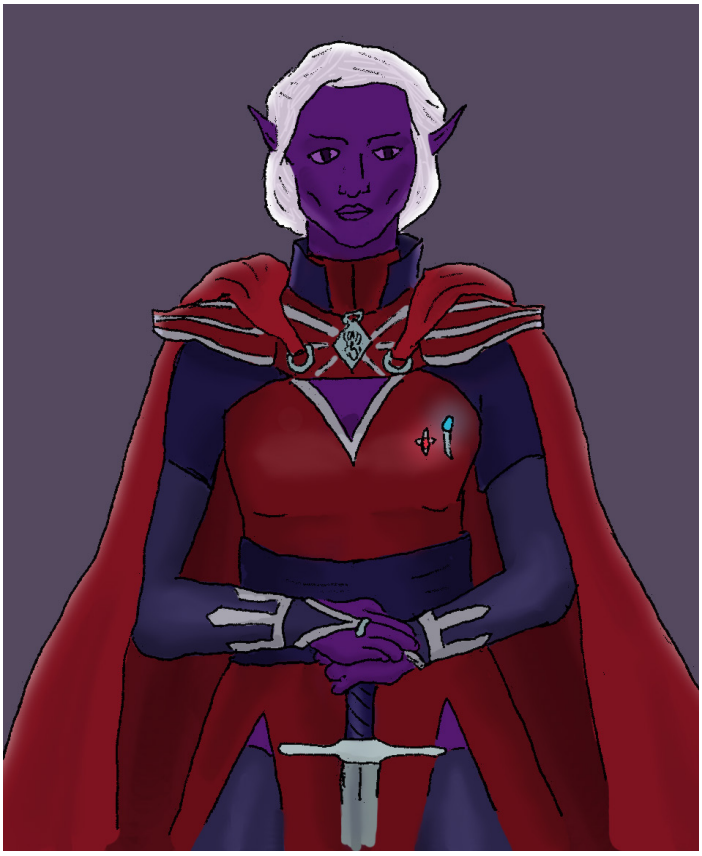
In disjointed, spontaneous outbursts at first, the young drow began defying the order imposed on them by their matrons. They were strong, worldly individuals who, after having had a taste of freedom, did not want to live under strict rules back home. However, there were no open political spaces where the youth could share their ideas; the City Watch would intervene and disperse any such gatherings.

Instead, youth defiance emerged organically out of popular icons and movements as the young looked for ways to express themselves. There were key inspirations for these movements. Most prominent were the Thylvunnyr: they dressed provocatively in black leathers, roamed the Caverealm freely, and fought with blade and magic outside the regimented ranks of the regular forces; they were legendary heroes many young women admired and looked up to. Similar role models could be found in the famously free and stylish Gezznyr. There were also cultural precedents of liberal Zannyr activities and dress styles which the Tyrana and her predecessors had quenched.

So the young defied the Einandelvyr in ways echoing their inspirations. They formed student fraternities and secret, cross-house clubs. They met discreetly for parties in the foreign style, involving hallucinogens and frenetic dancing. Women adopted the Aimehzenyr fashion, a new trend among the young of the Newborn Houses and those who had served as Spezziveinyr; having seen different styles and undergone emancipating experiences, they refused to be subjected to the norms, dressing in tasteful black dresses and wearing their hair short and undone.

Discontent in the military establishment

Zinafae always saw the armed forces as her staunchest supporters, and she was likewise popular among both senior and junior officers. However, through the years of campaigning, she managed to antagonise part of the senior establishment.



3.2. *Archaness Azeka Mal'Maern, 56 OW.*

Fundamentally, the problem was that Zinafae was not a general by trade. She did not have field headquarters training, and aside from a few skirmishes had not commanded a unit in battle. If she had allowed the professional officers to ply their trade, this would not have been an issue, but unfortunately she did not. As the Zannyr army made slow progress in Vallenel's campaign, and Zinafae was increasingly convinced of her own infallibility, she began playing an active part in military operations, giving out orders and making military appointments.

Though she had a passable understanding of the art of generalship, her real mistake was the way she treated her archanesses and staff officers: as contemptible, barely capable individuals, whose war she had to manage on her own if there was to be any chance of victory. The fact that Zinafae's skills were poor and that she suffered a major defeat only exacerbated her commanders' annoyance.



Many senior officers also had other reasons to dislike their Tyrana. She often used the army to enforce her less popular decisions, such as protecting heretics or beating down militarist uprisings in the provinces, which naturally angered the conservative, militarist nobles who occupied the senior ranks. And she increasingly treated the military as a blunt tool, to use in the provinces, while she focused on social reforms and worked closely with the civilian house nobility, which naturally included most of the political rivals of the professional officers.

Attempts at Zinafae's regime

There were several major attempts by disgruntled factions to resist Zinafae's rule, or to remove her outright. These actions unfailingly led to a wildly stronger response by the Tyrana, which usually engendered further discontent.

The Fulin'Delp calamity, 82 OW

The Phratry of Fulin'Delp was a group of aliphids, alien creatures with psionic powers who procreated by implanting tadpoles in humanoids' brains, which had successfully infiltrated Zann'Elth over the span of two centuries. When the Imperial Inquisition finally began uncovering it, the phratry's network encompassed twelve drow houses and influenced both City Guards as well as the mercenary group Malen'Feir.

Removing the aliphids by force would be a difficult and dangerous undertaking, and would most likely miss cells which could continue infiltrating the empire. In order to make sure she removed all the aliphids, Zinafae made some major concessions which she kept as secret as possible. The monsters were given Zannyr protection to set up a new home for themselves far in the south, and were allowed to take along with them all their thralls and all their belongings.

How Zinafae dealt with Fulin'Delp was already a scandal, but she then proceeded to disband the City Guards and introduce a new district-based City Watch force, and also to ruthlessly wipe out all the houses which had suffered incursions. Any remaining minor houses either consolidated into the Newborn Houses conglomerates or were disbanded. Naturally, these actions antagonised many nobles.

The protests of the houses, 83 - 89 OW

There was pent-up anger among all three types of noble houses - major, Second, and Newborn - about the transgressions committed against them in the aftermath of Fulin'Delp. Without allowing the Council of Matrons to express its opinion, some important houses had been wordlessly wiped out, others suffered serious financial losses as parts of their property was sent off with the aliphids, and yet others had seen some of their own nobility be spirited away by the Inquisition on counts of collusion with aliphids or of being "mentally compromised".

The houses still held much administrative, police, and political power, but they wanted more protections against the Tyrana. They wanted house property and nobility to be inviolate from Inquisition operations, and to have greater political sovereignty.

The first group which expressed these desires were the younger nobles, those who had not yet had political careers and who were not prominent enough to fear abduction by the Inquisition. They would gather to discuss political issues, write letters to the Tyranaen Palace, even hold masked speeches at the Tyrana's own court. Zinafae, initially intent not to antagonise the houses any more, soon had enough

The Inquisition's mode of operation

The Imperial Inquistion's mission was to protect the Tyrana from internal threats, and to take action against them. Aside from surveillance, the Inquisition was also careful to maintain a backdrop of terror so no one would speak openly against the Tyrana. Its favored means of doing so was to spirit away a target, then use priestess-inquisitors to whip and torture her, releasing her after up to a year in the dungeon.



and utilised priestesses or the City Watch to discourage such actions through violence. The instigators continued to meet inside Newborn House compounds, but their activity definitively died down after the Inquisition began showing interest in them as well.

The matrons and their close circles decided to step in instead, believing the youth had acted too brashly and that they, without breaching the social codes, would calmly get the situation in hand and explain their younger peers' woes to the Tyrana. However, they often met closed doors and deaf ears, and the Tyrana herself occasionally broke outside the social norms by ridiculing them and their arguments. Petitions to give the houses more autonomy were met with the response that Gezneth had strong houses, and that the matrons were frisking treason by making such suggestions.

The protests died down as they yielded no results. Few nobles were so unhappy as to go further, because Zinafae had already afforded the houses considerable freedoms and she even tolerated the youth's fringe movements, as long as they remained private.

Civil war, 93 - 95 OW

Unhappiness with the Tyrana continued to simmer and finally burst into the open in 93 OW, when a small group of very powerful individuals including Taizenel Fezzen, now the matron mistress of the Academy, and the influential cardiness Izitana Naflshein, a cousin of Zinafae's lost house, decided to speak out against the Tyrana and force her to make some changes. Their motivations were varied and deeply rooted in the previous decades: they included anger among the military elite about Zinafae's meddling in their jobs, widespread unhappiness about the war against Manezheim, and the untenable political split within the Church of Vorash and the wider theological troubles in the drow faith which Zinafae was utterly ignoring. The elites, confident in their important names and personal influence, believed that they could force her to see these things and concede changes.

While Zinafae was ready to make some concessions to have stability in her empire, she was not willing to tolerate any kind of open treason, which she considered such criticism to be: *"these treacherous elves have formed a league against me! They must bleed, and I will show them the pain of Vorash's whip."* Taizenel and her allies had intended a painful but peaceful political process, and were shocked to find themselves branded as traitors and suddenly facing the Tyrana's wrath.

They had to flee Zann'Elth in all haste, barely escaping the Inquisition, and took refuge among friendly houses and soldiers in Gor Breche. Not seeking any kind of dialogue, Zinafae immediately mobilised an army against them, and a civil war began.

Large military units moved into the capital, forming "District Guards" which acted as peers of the City Watch but had greater numbers and equipment, *de facto* enacting martial law and protecting the Tyrana against any kind of uprising from inside. Zinafae's new special political police, the *Velzyrae*, began enforcing her rule where the Inquisition did not, building up a reputation of deadliness which helped discourage people from joining the traitors. Meanwhile, the civil war drew Zannyr troops exponentially as Zinafae tried to get rid of her opponents as quickly as possible. She succeeded two years after the conflict began, when a series of massive explosions breached Gor Breche's outer gates and the defenders finally surrendered.

The drow women who had instigated the protest and war readily handed themselves over to the Inquisition, realising they would be punished but believing it wouldn't be too bad: they were still very popular figures from important houses. At the worst, they expected a quick execution.

But Zinafae did not want to forgive. She had based her power on a policy of terror, and she wanted to remind everyone why they should be afraid. Instead of one of the expected punishments, the Tyrana humiliated the traitors in a series of public events, popularising



the stigma against them that she had seeded during the war, and then made them disappear without risking a martyr's death. Some languished in the Inquisition's dungeons, while others were exiled as slaves of Trensandor.

The Thynenvelve Coup, 98 OW

The extermination of traitors after the civil war did not still discontent: it continued to foment and reemerged a short three years later. Many people had been shocked by Zinafae's decision to start a civil war and invest massive resources into it, leading to unnecessary deaths across the empire, and especially by her treatment of her opponents afterwards. Many had sympathised with Taizenel and Izitiana.

This time, however, the resistance sprung from a different demographic, one largely outside the Inquisition and Velzyrae's focus: the corps of professional officers and the lesser nobility. The officers had many reasons to attempt a coup, including their anger at Zinafae for her controversial foreign policy decisions and for her mismanagement of military assets, and of course they controlled armed units and so had a good chance of success. Perhaps the primary instigators however were the fashionable nobles of the Newborn Houses. They were unhappy with their lot and believed they were freer, more brash than the older generation which had bungled the civil war; accordingly, they would use a much more elegant solution, a quick and easy overthrow. Even the Church promised to support the plotters, because Zinafae tolerated various deviant cults to the point of going to war against Manezheim, which followed Vorash's Word, alongside heretic Zelina.

Feeling that they were in a position of strength, and having Heiress Tuleine's support, the plotters kicked off their coup by taking over the cave of Thynenvelve and from there declaring martial law over the citadel. Short of capturing the palace, they were successful initially: they got so far as forcing the matrons to legitimise Tuleine Lezzimon as the new Tyrana.

However, the plotters failed to capture the Tyrana herself, and they failed to garner support on nearly all fronts. The Old Clade chose to watch how things developed first and kept the Church Guard in its barracks. Most major matrons were afraid to give their allegiance to a traitorous regime while the Tyrana was still at large. Decisively, the vast majority of the citizenry did not particularly prefer the noble and military establishment over the Tyrana, seeing them as one and the same breed. When Tyrana Zinafae denounced Tuleine and the plotters as traitorous putschists, and gave the news that the much more popular Heiress Tuzzaei was leading a Thylvunnyr unit to the capital to support her, the plotters' cause was lost.

Zinafae's counterstrike was quick and brutal. She ignored traditional customs, bringing troops into the citadel without holy sanction and freely violating property rights. The loyalist Crimson Company forcefully retook the buildings held by the plotters and the Inquisition apprehended anyone who was connected to the coup. There were no lengthy public humiliations: people were dealt with expeditiously, first questioned and then either incarcerated or sent away, as exiles to the provinces or slaves to the surface.

Yauntyrae's plight and the Inquisition dungeons

Zinafae feared to create symbols for public resistance, and parts of the public humiliation rituals following the civil war had been reminiscent of the folk hero Yauntyrae's legendary plight. There were no public martyrs after Thynenvelve: when the Inquisition got its hands on someone, they disappeared completely.

Totalitarian measures

Zinafae's response to domestic resistance was consistently to maintain her authoritarian power and shirk compromise, unless it was absolutely necessary. She believed that in order to effectively lead her folk and hold her empire together, she needed unquestioned central authority.



It can be argued that her measures against dissent and overthrow infringed profoundly into Zannyr society, to the point of forcibly suppressing and changing social customs. Without doubt, her direct armed measures had an impact on social policies such as the Einandelvyr. However, one should remain aware that the primary purpose of these measures was not to control individual lives and effectuate changes, but simply the practical need for the Tyrana to stay in power and enforce her political decisions.

The context should also be kept in mind: whereas absolute control and order within the citadel was important for the Tyrana, she tolerated a much looser hold on the rest of her vast empire. Political power was from the beginning almost totally concentrated within the capital, and accordingly the totalitarian measures were focused within the city walls. Prominent matrons, religious figures, and senior officers could threaten Zinafae; provincial matrons and popular leaders did not.

The political use of terror

Terror was Zinafae's primary method of enforcing control from the very beginning. During the Tyranization, she had arrested many of her political opponents, keeping them in dungeons for decades, and as a result opposition against her died down. Out of her most loyal adherents Zinafae founded the Imperial Inquisition, a new institution whose official task was to investigate political crimes and whose covert function was to arrest and terrorise enemies of the state. The Inquisition's operations were rare and kept a low profile, but the memory of the Tyranization and the occasional disappearance of outspoken critics was enough to keep the elite in line. The terror served its purpose well: no one of importance criticised the Tyrana publicly.

The usage of terror had to be carefully balanced, however. The Inquisition's purpose being to silence discontent, it could not risk to spark more. Indiscriminately attacking anyone, anywhere would be a certain way to unite the nobles against the Tyrana. Thus, Zinafae's forces carefully adhered to secular law and customs, respecting such things as property inviolability, Zenthyr Protection, and the wills of the Council of Matrons and Vorash's Coven. The Inquisition usually had a good reason for its arrests, and individuals were almost always released after some time in the dungeons - or they were given to Vorash's priestesses to sacrifice.

Still, the Imperial Inquisition was exceedingly unpopular, and was becoming increasingly ineffective. In the early 90s, the primary source of opposition stemmed from broad popular movements among the youth, which the covert, surgical tool of the Inquisition was unsuited for. The intervention of blunt tools such as the District Guard usually just encouraged the protests even more. A different, more popular answer was needed; the Velzyrae were founded.

The Inquisition was strictly traditional, so Zinafae's new tool of terror would break the norms and be fashionable. The Velzyrae operated publicly in small, autonomous units; and they dressed sparsely in alluring red velvet, indicating their important position as Tyranaen officials. Though the government carefully avoided making the comparison, the Velzyrae were strongly inspired by the Thylvunnyr in structure, fighting style, and dress. In essence, the Velzyrae tried to be popular and fashionable while doing what the Tyrana needed. They were supposed to be the public alter ego of the Inquisition, visiting institutions and matrons and keeping them in line by their presence alone.

The Velzyrae did not succeed in the same way as the Inquisition: they were widely known, popular, and influential, but they did not have the ability to make long investigations or even spirit individuals away.

The Velzyrae's holy mandate

The Velzyrae's role as enforcers of order was confirmed by the Church and by Vorash herself. This gave them certain extra rights, such as the right to physically harm drow and to bear arms at all times.



Thus, they were mostly effective as messengers and intermediaries for the government, or, as they were increasingly put to use, in the provinces where - thanks to the greater freedoms they enjoyed - they were deadly enforcers of imperial authority.

Terror would return to the capital in full force during the period of martial emergency.

To what extent was Zinafae's use of terror necessary and useful?

Zinafae's methods of terror were not popular. In addition to the many private critics, the occasional open rebels against the Tyrana's regime mentioned her policy of terror as one of their main points of contention. Ninza To'Fezzen herself argued against the terror:

> *"Perhaps my government was ineffective, and perhaps I was weak. However, under my rule, there was relative security and freedom for the people. I never had to resort to violence and force the houses to follow my will, and I never had to call upon a Tyranaen Inquisition. All could pursue their goals and the Way of Vorash as they pleased."*



3.3. *A Velzyrae soldier, 96 OW.*

Judging by the resistance it provoked, one might wonder to what extent the policy of terror was effective at all. And, if it was, to what extent it attained its goals.

One of the strongest arguments for the necessity of terror, as was often brought forward by Spiderpolitik historians and the Tyranaen government, were the events of the Purple-Spore Mushroom Plot. Towards the end of the Tyranization, Zinafae ordered the early release of many people, including a cardiness which the Inquisition wanted to keep locked away for several decades. Profiting of her freedom and the perceived weakness of the new regime, this cardiness met with other nobles and guild representatives, planning a political cabal. It was uncovered a few years later, but the example is clear: as soon as the Tyrana failed to assert her strength and her subjects didn't fear her, they began plotting against her. After the sweeping arrest of cabal members, there were no other similar attempts.

It is clear beyond doubt that the terror helped the Tyrana push through some policies, or at least rule without having to deal with an opposition. The protests of the houses died down because no one really dared to oppose her, without any explicit effort on her part.

However, the uncertainty of the terror's necessity is best expressed with a question. The inquisition's rate of operations never decreased, however there were overt rebellions throughout the 90s. With more arrests and greater terror, would those rebels never have dared to act? Or would there merely have been even stronger resistance? The ambiguity of the answer cannot easily be resolved.

The terror's effectiveness can similarly be put in question. If there had been no arrests, no inquisition at all, then no doubt the several plots it foiled might have done some damage. However, perhaps a reduced degree of interventions might have resulted in fewer plots to begin with.



Spiderpolitik of course contradicts this: it argues a weaker Tyrana would naturally have engendered stronger opposition, and perhaps a successful coup. Yet most interesting, perhaps, is Constructivism's perspective, where the dominant interpretation has been to argue that the Inquisition's scope of operations was just right and that its effectiveness was good, though not perfect.

Clearly, the tradeoffs of more resistance one way or greater vulnerability the other seem to indicate that the Inquisition did as much as it could without going too far. As for its effectiveness, the amazing stability of Zinafae's regime over a long period of major changes in territory, governance, and social makeup cannot be overlooked. There was little to no resistance from the Red Mist all the way to the unrest of the 90s. Of course, other factors such as Zann'Elth's expansionist successes and Zinafae's various domestic concessions played a role, but doubtless the terror helped suppress discontent to no negligible degree.

Zinafae's measures against a coup

Zann'Elth's history was peppered with overthrows, and bloodless coups were an everyday facet of internal politics: officers occasionally replaced their superiors by forcing them out, and first daughters sometimes staged unfortunate accidents for their beloved matron mothers. Zinafae herself had taken power in a coup, and she was well aware of the vulnerability of her extremely centralised government.

Zinafae had little to fear from outside; there might be temporary troubles in the provinces, but she could always send out armies from the centre to deal with them. The real danger was in the capital, where all the power was gathered.

Initially, the risk was quite low: Zinafae was very popular and she had the direct loyalty of nearly all armed forces in and near the citadel. By drawing her authority from her personal charisma, she was relatively safe; however, as her authority became more institutionalised and her government more authoritarian, the risk increased.

Over the decades, she continuously made a military coup inside the citadel harder. Her primary method was to have many different armed forces under different commands, so a small group of plotters could not control a majority of them at once. By the time of Thynenvelve, these groups included:

- Protecting government buildings: the Crimson Guard at the Tyranaen Palace, military garrisons in army buildings, and elite guard units in the rest
- In each district: the civilian City Watch and the military District Guard, each of which had its own local commander (and District Guard commanders were outside the military chain of command)
- Various non-state paramilitary units: the Church Guard to defend holy property, the Academy's Spellwatch force, the many guards of the noble houses
- Large reserve units: the Crimson Company mercenary army garrisoned in caves below the citadel, and the Reserve Army nearby

In addition, Zinafae took every precaution she could to make sure no serious coup against her could be planned or even desired. The Imperial Inquisition, and the Velzyrae in the broader empire, investigated any rumours of plots and, if mere fear was not enough to prevent such attempts, arrested plotters before they could act on their plans. She also cultivated a good relationship with other centres of power, such as the Church and the major matrons. As long as she had their loyalty and information, no coup could succeed.

Numerous laws and customs worked in the Tyrana's favour. All citizens, and accordingly merchants, being members of houses meant registration and regulation was easier, and that houses - nominally loyal and easier to control than the myriad individual citizens



- could police themselves internally, uncovering any traitors. The Church of Vorash, which for a long time worked closely with the Tyrana, had very deep access to drow society and was an invaluable source of information and discipline. The rule that no armed units could enter the citadel without holy sanction also helped Zinafae make sure there were only loyal units inside the capital, and meant that putschists would not be able to quickly bring in large forces from outside.

Finally, in order to take power with any semblance of legitimacy, plotters would need to achieve two things: remove the current Tyrana, and put one of the two heiresses in her place. Thus Zinafae carefully defended her palace with guards and magical safeguards, and only left it under heavy protection. And she made sure to keep her heiresses in harmless positions, always busy with Tyranaen business: out in the empire, or in the capital under Velzyrae "protection".

In the event, these measures worked well enough at Thynenvelve: despite having military support, the plotters failed to capture the Tyrana, could not assert their legitimacy, and could not draw up reinforcements.

The martial emergency

Despite all her precautions, Zinafae faced a dangerously close coup attempt in 98 OW. She realised that her previous measures, including the purges after the civil war and the martial law since then, were not enough. She decided to go even further: root out the traitors everywhere in the empire, deploy the military in all the cities to directly investigate any leads, and search all premises. Respecting house property and autonomy had allowed traitors to fester, so now the army would root them all out and let them reflect about their mistakes for a few decades.

This was a state of martial emergency, and it would last several years. Its purpose was made very clear: the traitors in the empire had to be trapped in and smoked out. The war with Manezheim had ended in peace and the Gezznyr front was relatively isolated and far away; so there were ample military resources available. Zinafae began by "locking down the borders"; this involved setting up checkpoints along all outgoing tunnels, but more importantly also involved locking down cities and positioning checkpoints on domestic axes of transportation.

After an initial burst of arrests, which targeted all individuals tied to the coup, the military emergency was restrained, focusing on various small-scale operations across the breadth of the empire against groupings judged disloyal. On the political battlefield, however, a bloody war was waged: the government was looking for more heads to chop, and different factions tried to use this to their own advantage.

The victorious group grew apparent in 99 OW: accusations and evidence incriminating the Old Clade and the major matrons cropped up, while the popular voices of Tuzzaei and the young matrons prevailed. Both the Church and the nobility were dominated by their respective younger, revolutionary factions. So the conservatives of the old elite were rounded up *en masse*, found guilty by Vorash, and were imprisoned. The Inquisition's dungeons became a sprawling underground complex, and new military-run facilities popped up all across the empire. After a year, the old elite's network of power was effectively dismantled, and the remaining nobles were fiercely loyal by necessity, helping to find evidence against their erstwhile allies.

As soon as the establishment was dealt with - a process which had sparked more small-scale insurgencies across the empire as individuals or small factions attempted to resist - Zinafae began taking steps against the young who had supported her. The youth



movements were too far-reaching, powerful, and rebellious for her to tolerate; Tuzzaei, a woman in a similar position to Zinafae's before the Red Mist, was the prime example of how dangerous they were.

She extended the martial emergency, making use of intrigue and Inquisition operations to keep the movements disunited and as apolitical as possible. She also utilised the immediate power she had to dismantle some of the popular images; for instance, she began a campaign against the Thylvunnyr myth and their very existence, limiting their military use in the aim of disbanding them within the decade. This was a purely political decision; the Thylvunnyr's military effectiveness or loyalty were not in doubt.

The martial emergency was a drastic campaign of violence and fear, for the first time extended to the entire empire rather than just the capital. Soldiers were rarely merciful or considerate when searching houses or arresting people, and the Inquisition and Velzyrae operated on high gear but still could not work down their target lists. The emergency was a brutal and merciless purge of any and all disloyal parts of the empire, in the sole aim of securing the Tyrana's absolute authority at any cost.

The extent of authoritarian control

Zinafae was never overthrown. After another few years of mostly stable rule, she chose to give up her title of Tyrana and become High Cardiness - though covert, this was a move for even more power, and not the result of any significant opposition to her government. Throughout her reign, domestic opposition was restrained and its timing was limited to temporary moments of popular discontent due to reforms or foreign wars.

Post-split clergy of Vorash

A decade after the split between Vorash's Coven and the Unity Church, Unity had grown considerably and incorporated the clergies of several provincial cities. With Tyranaen support, it formed the Drow Unity Church of Vorash and became the new monolithic church of Zann'Elth.

In this sense, "authoritarian control" can be seen to have been effective in limiting domestic opposition to the regime. While not all drow wholeheartedly embraced Zinafae's policies, the number of denunciations received by the Inquisition show a wide level of compliance with its aim of identifying enemies of the Tyranaen. Zannyr, among the most freedom-loving people of the Caverealm, submitted to the regime for a variety of motives, including:

- belief in the aims of Zinafae
- fear of the consequences of flagrant disobedience
- disillusionment with the previous political system and antipathy towards other, less appealing autocrats
- gratitude for the material benefits the Tyranaen gave its citizens, such as plentiful high-status jobs and economic advantages for the houses
- pride in Zannyr foreign policy, which had succeeded in restoring the citadel's power by constructing an empire

For the majority of drow - those not victimised because of their political status - there was little reason to risk persecution by a system that had brought power and wealth to Zann'Elth.

On 28 Otaum 82, the focus of a speech that Zinafae delivered to the Imperial Representative Council was on the achievements of Zann'Elth under her rule. According to some historians, such achievements (constantly stressed by Tyranaen officials) were appealing not only to convinced followers of Zinafae, but also had a wider popular resonance in many parts of Zannyr society.



Those who did doubt the regime (Zinafae as Tyrana at first, then its domestic policy) seldom reacted, due to the terroristic nature of the state, and instead entered what has been described as a form of private protest - remaining silent and detached from any form of political discourse or overt resistance, and keeping any digressions behind closed walls. In this way lay safety. However, a failure to address such sentiments on the part of the Tyrana resulted in their continued spread, until they emerged in the form of popular movements with the potential power to overthrow her.

The flaws in the Tyrana's authoritarian control manifested in her need to make compromises and to tolerate private protest. In the end, her desperate attempt to suppress popular movements during the martial emergency reveal how her regime was strongly limited by social and political factors. Zinafae retained her central authority and her hold on the major houses, but could not remedy the unstable situation; private opposition such as youth gatherings continued to blemish her "perfect society" for a century to come.

Final words

The rise of Zinafae in the first century OW was a unique period for Zann'Elth, which saw many radical changes and the mobilisation of an entire population for the purpose of expansion at a grand scale. The formative agency Zinafae had on her empire was exceptional, especially for a medium as inert and unchanging as Khali elven society.

Zinafae Naflshein came to power as both a member of the establishment and a popular figure. She made use early on of political allies, personal charisma, and violence to assert her position. Her focus then shifted outward, towards the ambitious expansionist goals of the old regime, but with far more enthusiasm. She did this first with a massive internationalist effort and then a bloody campaign of military conquest, achieving impressive results and greatly expanding Zann'Elth's zone of control and influence. She furthermore remodelled imperial society to fit her authoritarian aims and be optimally geared for war.

Considering the vast gap between a small drow polity and a monumental multiracial empire, Zinafae was amazingly successful at consolidating her conquests and integrating new peoples into Zannyr society, especially while juggling the strict requirements of Khali customs.

An exceptional person can be observed in Zinafae: a single individual who, out of Vorash's shadow, achieved colossal power. From the historian's perspective, her ascension is fascinating in many areas of interest. These include, of course, state-building and warfare in the Caverealm, but also the valuable insight into Khali society and how it can, under the right circumstances, be changed. One might also investigate the relation between deities and the peoples they oversee, the complex political web of imperial Zann'Elth, or perhaps how social movements emerge and spread.

Placing Zinafae in the historical context

Though the difficulty of travel in the Caverealm does isolate states to a certain degree, the emergence of imperial Zann'Elth did not occur in a vacuum. Foreign events both underground and on the surface impacted Zinafae's policies, sometimes even dragging her into undesirable, costly wars; naturally, the influence of Zann'Elth on its many neighbours was also considerable. The historical context helps one understand events within Zann'Elth and the situation in the broader Caverealm to a much deeper degree. In anticipation of further reading, a brief summary is presented here.

All Tyranaen regimes were built on the precedent set by the ancient Sunnyr legend of Zeanel Dear'Clith. After seeking refuge from her Gezznyr family in Sunell, Zeanel allied with a few major houses to take power, then rapidly asserted her sole authority by means



of popularity and force. She created the first autocratic Khali regime, a "Tyranaen", whose political system, ruling methods, and general style would be adopted by the later Zannyr regime. The customary influence of the matron mothers and the partial but strict restrictions on the Tyrana's power were part of this inheritance. When Tyrana Zeanel attempted to override these customs, she was overthrown and bound to a stone, suffering *Yauntyrae*, "The Blank Stone's Plight" - a warning which all subsequent Tyranas heeded carefully.

The Zannyr empire's establishment coincided with an era of modernisation and subsequent centralisation across the Caverealm. Modern mechanisation was being implemented in Zann'Elth and in Krukl, where the machines engendered greater production, industrialisation of the economy, and far greater availability of wealth. The technology of Connected gems - initially Zelina-style communicators and cable connections, and later cheap Holderhold apparatuses - made instant long-distance communication widely available. Using these technologies, guilds could coordinate their efforts in large industrial undertakings, the central government could communicate with its regional officials, and generals were able to coordinate large armies. And Zann'Elth's period of military success followed immediately after its lizard mount breeding industry boomed. To simplify an extremely complex and long process, the emergence of modern technology in the Caverealm gave states the wealth and the tools they needed to become large. The Caverealm of the second century OW looked nothing like the Caverealm of the first century before OW: it was dominated by large, wealthy, militaristic states.

Of course, Zann'Elth's rise underground was concurrent with the even more monumental events of the Orc Wars above. The Zannyr were significantly involved on the surface (more than any other Caverealm state previously): they gave the Boens some initial support, facilitating their conquest of Oshmondu; they then turned against the orcs, assisting their fall. The drow also began meddling extensively in surface governments. For a century, Ochebana was virtually a Zannyr puppet, Sarrasano to its south was also under strong influence, and the human states in the west treated Zann'Elth as a peer of comparable importance to their surface neighbours. Many political decisions on the surface were impacted to some extent by Zann'Elth's existence.

Looking foward, Zinafae's state-building naturally impacted subsequent Zannyr history. The Tyranaen state had become marked by ruthless autocracy and state terror, and this continued, though relative stability returned after the period of martial emergency. Modernism evolved out of Zinafae's policies and ideology, and Zannyr elites began projects such as "cleaning up" the messy, dense cities; building wide, wagon-usable roads through the Caverealm; and monumental construction projects such as a massive new Tyranaen Palace and, later, a new administrative capital. By drawing on the many resources and skills available to it, Zann'Elth managed to straddle the physical hurdles of the Caverealm and catch up to surface societies in size and economic power.

What was the role of ideology and personal charisma in Zinafae's empire?

The government of Ninza, which Zinafae replaced to broad acclaim, was built on ideology as a decisive political force. Zinafae, whose influence was based purely on personal charisma and popularity, stripped her government of all the ideology-based institutions. One might contrast the ideological Ninza regime with the personal Zinafae one. However, there remains the question of the extent of personal rule, and the role of ideology, in Zinafae's regime.

Zinafae was strictly materialistic in her early decades of rule, with virtually no reliance on ideas. She spoke of her foreign policy in terms of tangible benefits for Zann'Elth, and



likewise her initial domestic policy was driven purely by political needs (in the view of the Constrainists). It is also notable that Zinafae's pre-Red Mist radical, merciless, militarist ideas were dropped very quickly in favour of compromise and stability.

Starting in the 60s, Zinafae began relying on legal and practical justifications to strengthen her personal claim to rule. Other people came into the spotlight - Heiress Tuzzaei is notable for her great popularity which at times eclipsed Zinafae's - yet none replaced Zinafae. The Tyrana's policies were also by no means strictly materialist anymore; the Einandelvyr certainly included some ideas as to what proper drow society should look like. And the glue holding the youth protests together was mostly aesthetics and ideas. It is clear that even in a notoriously individualist, "ideology-free" society such as Zinafae's Zann'Elth, ideas still have an impact in moving groups of people.

Personal rather than institutional authority did run exceptionally deep in Zann'Elth. Even at her least popular, Tyrana Zinafae relied on her relationships with house and clergy elite to stay in power, and she protected herself against overthrow by maintaining several armed units loyal to her directly. She also invested vast resources in her Tyrana's Youth program to support her cult of personality. Likewise, most offices with any power were tied to a person, and individual vying for authority was at the core of the social ladder. House inheritance was more often decided by a daughter's influence than by her position in the order; military promotions could only be gained by replacing someone with other officers' support; and the clergy's hierarchy was determined by the favour of Vorash, as perceived by society. Zannyr social structure was built on personal influence and left very little room for shared ideas.

A perspective on violence and Khali social order

The Descent

In the aftermath of the Elvish Wars, the defeated dark elves had sought refuge in the Caverealm. A voice spoke to them from the darkness, and they chose to follow it. Thus Khali culture under Vorash's hegemony was born.

The subject of drow "depravity" is eminently popular among elven scholars. Different schools attribute the violence and individualism apparently endemic to Khali society to different sources: some argue Vorash is to blame; others believe the drow people brought this fate upon themselves during the Descent; and yet others think these unfortunate traits are merely a product of history and that the drow could be "redeemed" in the right circumstances.

One can consider the relation between violence and social order specifically in the context of Zinafae's rule. Often, one associates peace in the streets with order, however in Zann'Elth - and Khali society more broadly - this was not the case. In fact, violence was so necessary for a stable, competitive Khali society that the only successful drow state was the autocratic, terroristic Zannyr Tyranaen.

Obviously, the application of violence was an intrinsic part of public order. The only sanctions for transgressions consisted of applying direct physical pain, usually by the hand of a priestess of Vorash. The other tools for maintaining order, the Tyrana's Inquisition and Velzyrae, were likewise based on direct physical punishment: incarceration or assassination. Though it was not formally codified, houses also relied heavily on violence. It should be no surprise then that, in a city enjoying the Tyrana's peace and order, patrolling priestesses would routinely whip passers-by.

Without violence, there would be very little social mobility - and thus opportunities for progress or adaptation. House matrons could only be replaced on death or dishonour, so promising heiresses had to make use of complicated plots or straightforward assassination to assume their position before getting old themselves. The situation was similar in all other social institutions.



As a consequence, violence was an essential mechanic for "quality control" in Zannyr society. Popular nobles, often capable states-women, could replace their older peers, while priestesses with more ability and favour could reach higher offices, thus securing greater support from Vorash for the community. Society was built in such a way that without violence, it would stagnate and grow ineffective.



3.3. *A priestess of Vorash, 99 OW.*

It is necessary to note that, though violence worked, it was not necessarily a good thing for the Zannyr people (much like Zinafae's success was not necessarily a good thing for the millions who found themselves the victims of war or the subjects of merciless, exploitative drow). The constant infighting did not promote the best traits in the drow elite and individualism doubtlessly caused massive harm to many. The violence also considerably sapped drow resources, especially in time and in plain lives (the number of assassinations was not insignificant). The Tyrana had to make great efforts to suppress or reduce some of the violence: her pursuit of formal customs and strict rule contrasted starkly with the innate chaos and wanton back-stabbing of traditional Khali society. But most of her methods, ranging from martial law to state terror, were simply necessary to frame drow society and keep it going in the right direction.



Appendix

Thank you for reading this disquisition on Zannyr state centralisation, from the weakening of the Tyranaen under Ninza to the restructuring and imperial foundation under Zinafae.

Further Reading

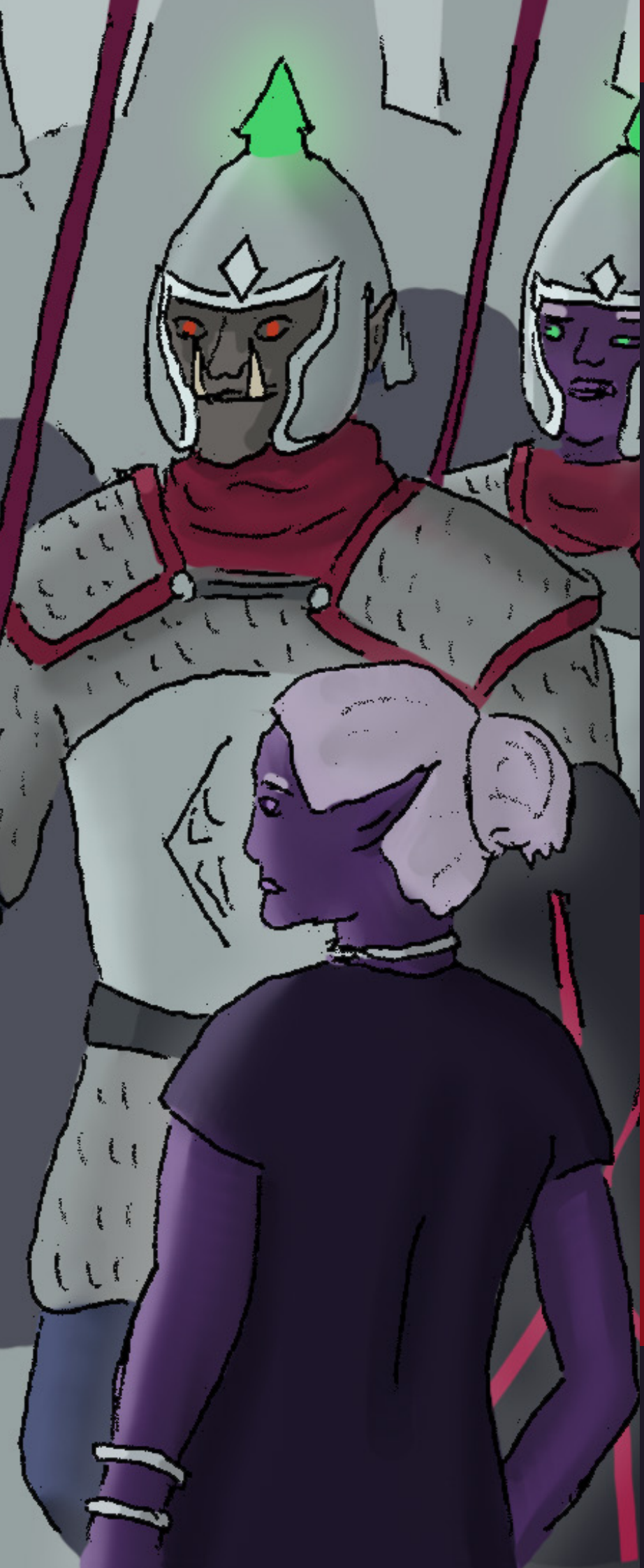
Khali society is a fascinating and exceptionally complex subject, which this tome has only been able to scratch the surface of. Khali states existed over tens of millennia, and evolved separately in a handful of isolated citadels; yet they were all united by a founding myth, a race, a language, and a goddess.

Find here a modest list of further reading opportunities on the Many Isles fandom wiki.

- **Khali Dark Elves.** An elaborate discussion of Khali drow race, culture, and society.
- **Black Spider / Sizza Maer'Duth.** Discover the origins of the Elvish Wars and drow enmity for "light elves", as Sizza Maer'Duth led her Spider Movement down dark paths towards Vorash.
- **Zeanel Dear'Clith.** This young noble from Gezneth had a unique life: a refugee fleeing her family, she assumed total power in Sunell and invented Tyranaen rule, only to be overthrown and bound to a stone for eternity.
- **The Phratry of Fulin'Delp.** A group of aliphids infiltrates Zannyr and Tsseh cities, attempting to establish an empire. After their exile from Zann'Elth, they became the progenitors of the aliphid empires in the southeast.
- **Citadel of Gezneth.** Read about the largest and (until Zinafae) most powerful drow citadel, whose culture can be praised as the most faithful to Vorash's vision.
- **The Massacre at Inaendlen Village.** An insight into the operation of one of Zinafae's most successful institutions: ritual raiding. Inaendlen was perhaps the most notorious drow raid.

Furthermore, drow make appearances in these texts:

- **Zinae'Vorash, the Church of Zann'Elth.** An essay exploring the church which evolved out of Unity, under the leadership of none other than Zinafae.
- **Understanding the Zannyr Army.** Read more about the strategic thinking and structure of the exceptionally successful army of Zann'Elth.
- **Captured by the Drow.** Following the massacre at Inaendlen, a Silurite light elven unit attempts to pursue the Zannyr raiding force into the Caverealm. But it goes badly and the two surviving soldiers are captured by the drow. This is a short story.
- **Rise of the White Flame.** In this as yet unpublished RPG campaign, players will encounter mercenaries and expeditionary forces at the outer edge of Gezneth's sphere of influence. If they go to deep, they might end up imprisoned in a Gezznyr outpost.



Zann'Elth was unique among the dark elven citadels: it was ruled by a single woman, the *Tyrana*.
Follow the career of the young noble Zinafae Naflshein as she slowly rises through the ranks of the military and the bureaucracy.
After her assumption of power, Zinafae proceeds to expand ruthlessly by diplomatic and military means, building up one of the first empires in the Caverealm.

kartecaedras.ch