
Nations of Rage – the Player’s Section

Introduction

Nations of Rage is a “campaign in a box”, which makes it a little different from your ordinary module. For one thing, there’s an integrated storyline that weaves its way through all 30 levels. You will start out not knowing much about the world, but by the end, you’ll be serious movers and shakers.

You may be tempted to try and “outsmart the campaign,” but there’s nothing I can do about that. Writing out 30 levels of Dungeons and Dragons requires certain compromises, the foremost of which is that the plot is largely linear. I’m not invested in selling you a particular brand of fun. Use what you enjoy. Adapt or ignore the rest.

Theme and Mood

“You wanna get Capone? Here’s how you get him. He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital; you send one of his to the morgue! That’s the Chicago way, and that’s how you get Capone!”

The Untouchables (1987)

I’ve always liked that quote because the human response to being hurt is to lash back at our attacker. It’s a primal, automatic response. *Nations of Rage* is about what happens when this spirals out of control. In our world, we have atomic bombs, mustard gas and weaponized anthrax. Who knows what horrors can be birthed in a world of magic?

The PCs will learn what has gone before and what it means for the future. They will have an opportunity to change the direction of the world, for good or ill. Unlike other modules, *Nations of Rage* allows for “bad endings.”

Setting and Background

Nations of Rage begins in the Human kingdom of Ontanath in the year 828 of the New Kingdom (by Human reckoning), bounded by the Nazic Mountains on the north and the Askora Mountains to the east. King Jantham is generally liked by the people, as are his Dukes, but the nation suffers from a long conflict with the Empire (see Eladrin and Elves, below).

Some eighty years ago, a conflict between Human and Eladrin nobility ignited what has come to be known as the Midnight War. Rumors abound as to what that spark might have been, but none of them explain why passions run so hot on both sides.

Character Creation

Monster Races

The following monster races are not included as character options in this campaign:

Bullywug, Gnoll, Goblin, Hobgoblin, Kenku, Kobold.

Bladeling (Rare)

No one seems to know where the Bladelings originated, but none of the speculation is good. Most of the common folk believe they are some sort of demon. The laws of Ontanath (and most other nations) do not recognize them as a free people. Instead, they are perceived as attack dogs owned by “real” races.

Bugbear (Rare)

The Bugbears sided with the Orcs in the wars of the Old Kingdom and suffered even more greatly than they did. They are not known to have a place or culture of their own. Of the very few Bugbears remaining in Ontanath, most either are kept as slaves in rural Human communities (which is against the law) or work as menial labor on the Halfling riverboats.

Deva (Rare)

The Deva have dwindled in numbers since the start of the Midnight War, though there weren’t many to begin with. The common folk are somewhat fearful of the Deva, as they are believed to be lesser angels who precede tragedy. The only time they are met with joy is when they are present for a birth, because that is seen as the blessing of the gods.

Dragonborn (Common)

Known among themselves as the *Ishkriarii* (“children of the midday sun”), the Dragonborn hail from a tropical archipelago to the south of the main continent. While the Halflings ply the rivers and coastlines, the Dragonborn are the undisputed masters of the oceans, a relationship that has always been cordial. They believe that they were once an aquatic race, but rose up to bask in the heat and light. Dragonborn philosophy teaches that they should always be seeking and learning. It also teaches a sense of karma in the ripples one makes in the world.

The Dragonborn believe that it is possible to transform oneself into a perfected being. To this end, they use special inks and inscribing tools to carve their name, ancestry and a litany of their deeds, both honorable and shameful, on their scales. These glyphs are known as *turikti*. Each year the Dragonborn molts and the *turikti* must be renewed. Shedding the scales takes only a few hours, but the new ones must be allowed to harden over the next eight to ten days. During this time, the Dragonborn usually retreats into private meditation, involving only a select few close friends to assist in the inscription.

There are rituals that will cause the *turikti* to remain through the molt, but these are reserved to mark dangerous criminals. Otherwise, the Dragonborn chooses which *Turikti suits his sense of honor and self. He might, for example, change his name, leaving his old family behind and becoming an entirely new person. He might disown his children by omission. Similarly, he might leave off any sins for which he has atoned. Once the Turikti have hardened the Dragonborn accept them as a record of what happened and who that person is. The term kruham (“faceless”) is used when someone has to refer to the previous life of a Dragonborn that has remade himself.*

Most Dragonborn acknowledge Pelor as the creator of their race, but that does not mean that they worship him or follow his philosophies. Following a long religious and civil war, the Dragonborn split into two camps. The followers of Bahamut control the northern half of the archipelago, which is known as the Bright Isles. The southern half is known as the Warm Isles and this is where Tiamat holds sway. While there is some trade between the two halves of the archipelago, it is an uneasy peace.

Neither half has much of a centralized government. Instead, the governor of each island is known as a *syrnvor*, which is also the title afforded to someone that controls a fleet. These [name] come together in council

to resolve disputes and negotiate treaties. Custom dictates that a *syrnvor*’s word is law within their domain.

Another unusual tradition among the Dragonborn is the creation of *ishkitamar* (“maybe children”). Dragonborn couplings are often passionate and fleeting. Eggs produced by these unions are placed in stasis through a special ritual generally only known by Dragonborn (they would find it highly offensive if a non-Dragonborn performed the ritual) in which the names and deeds of the parents are painted onto the shells. *Ishkitamar* can last hundreds of years in this state. Some are kept as mementos of love or better days. Others are stored by the community. Undoing the spell is surprisingly simple – a few words and the touch of a blood relative of one of the parents. Destroying an *ishkitamar* is not considered murder, but is still considered a serious offense.

Drow (Not Applicable)

Players are strongly discouraged from choosing this race, as it will appear as an enemy later in the campaign with a non-standard origin. If need be, your GM can simply explain that your character is an offshoot of Elf that comes from an isolated place within the Shadowfell.

Duergar (Not Applicable)

The Duergar are enemies in this campaign.

Dwarf (Common)

Most Dwarves hail from Zhostmor, which takes up the western half of the Nazic Mountains and some of the forests north of there. Dwarven myth teaches that Moradin summoned a host of elementals and bound them to sacred stones from which the Dwarves could learn *The Way of the Many*. While it seems likely that Moradin intended his children to share this lore freely, the Agwar stones were split among the Dwarven families – known as Kith – and *The Way* became a scattered collection of alchemical traditions, many of which are no longer as effective as they once were.

As a result, the Dwarves are a highly spiritual people given to ritual and ceremony. Almost every Dwarf wears a good-luck charm of some sort and most carry a pouch full of trinkets and fetishes to placate the forces of the world. Dwarven oaths are similarly sacred, not out of a sense of honor, but because real magic can be found in them. Dwarves are expected to keep themselves clean, to take no more than their fair share and to treat the natural world with respect.

The Kith is the center of Dwarven society. Marriage outside one's Kith is never taken lightly, nor is adoption into a Kith (which is only done when a Kith is nearly wiped out). Romantic relationships with non-Dwarves are deemed "unclean" under The Way, though they have been known to exist. Crimes against a Kith – especially rape and murder – are always met with blood oaths.

The Genasi were accidentally created by the Dwarves. This history and information can be found in their section.

Eladrin (Not applicable)

*The Eladrin are one of the primary enemies in the campaign, more so than the Elves. Playing one is not suggested, at least not until the events of the early paragon tier. It is **not** suggested that your GM explain that your character is an offshoot of Elf from an isolated place within the Feywild.*

Not much is known of the Eladrin. They all seemed to disappear after the start of the Midnight War. Old maps show that they came from "The Empire of Summer," the hill country north of the Elven plains. It is common believed that the Elves serve the Eladrin, but the details are sketchy.

Elf (Rare/Not Applicable)

The Eladrin are one of the primary enemies in the campaign. Playing one is not suggested, at least not until the events of the early paragon tier. Player Character Elves will always be Vilhuril.

The Elves of Paria are a martial people with a highly structured society. The basic social unit among them is a *Dari*, which consists of fifteen to thirty Elves, all of whom are expected to fight in what is essentially a squad. The leader of a *Dari* is known as a *Kai* and his (or her) blood kin add *Phe'* to their *Dari* name (Lisha Muro would become Lisha Phe'Muro). Before the Empire, it was traditional for the *Dari* name to precede the "honor name." A few orthodox *Daris* maintain this practice. No Elf is permitted wealth beyond what they (and their slaves) can personally carry nor are they allowed to own land.

The *Kai* of an area come together and choose an *Ur'Kai* (roughly equivalent to a Human Count), who in turn select a *Ru'Kai* (Duke). *Ur'* or *Ru'* is used as the *Dari* honorific in these cases. None of the *Kai* is elected, however. They achieve their status through formalized duels, challenges and the occasional assassination.

An Elf that disgraces himself is known as *Vilhuril* ("empty") and given a scar across each cheek to mark his shame. A small number of honorless Elves have scratched out a living in other nations, always on the lookout for vengeful kin.

The *Ru'Kai* serve the Eladrin in a way that is poorly understood. One belief is that the Eladrin are nothing more than advisors, providing guidance from their otherworldly citadels. A related theory is that the Eladrin are the "brains" to the Elves' "body." At the opposite end of the spectrum is the idea that the Eladrin are "ascended" Elves.

The Empire practices slavery, especially among the "lesser" races. The horrors of the labor camps are well known to the other nations of Paria.

Genasi (Rare)

Long ago, a magus of the Whitestone Kith was experimenting on corpses, infusing them with concentrated essences of the various elements, hoping to understand how living beings relate to The Way. Thus were the Genasi created. At first, they were a client race of the Dwarves, being not quite slaves, but not equal either. Having no history, culture or traditions, the Genasi accepted the Dwarves as their de facto parents. After three centuries of subservience, the Genasi started to clamor for increased freedom and rights, something that did not sit well with the Dwarves, many of whom saw the Genasi as a "gift" from Moradin intended to ease their burdens.

The Genasi rebellions started with them simply trying to migrate out of the Dwarven holdings. Despite their desire to leave peacefully, the Genasi fought back when they were accused of theft and "secession." As tensions mounted, they pled their case before Greatking Gundis, who could not see them as a free and independent people. In the wake of his refusal, the Genasi planned what came to be known as *utvalminar* ("the day of unshackling") where they killed everyone who tried to interfere with their exodus. Shocked at the violence, the Dwarves replied by hunting down the offending Genasi.

This cycle continued for eighteen years until the Genasi were nearly wiped out and Gundis demanded that the captured Genasi leaders surrender for their people. None of them would submit some even going so far as to commit suicide in front of the Greatking. Appalled, Gundis is said to have prayed for guidance, whereupon a host of archons appeared bearing Moradin's judgment.

The edicts that resulted from this visitation are referred to as *Diokledh* (“the shaming”). Not only were the Dwarves forbidden to bear arms against the Genasi, they were obligated to provide food, clothing and shelter whenever such was requested of them. At first even individual conflicts were forbidden, but later Greatkings determined that the strictures only prevented them from making war against the Genasi. Despite the centuries that have passed, the Dwarves still warn that every Kith to violate the *Diokledh* has ceased to exist within a generation.

Githyanki/Githzerai (Rare)

These races are not normally found on Paria. They would be more suitable as replacement characters in the paragon tier.

Gnome (Uncommon)

A great many Gnomes sided with the Elves and Eladrin and were killed as a result. Those that remain hail mostly from the tropical forests found in the extreme southwest of Ontanath. Outside of those forests, they are viewed with suspicion.

Gnome society centers on daring and risk. Each year, they gather to share stories of their accomplishments. Outsiders are almost never permitted to these gatherings. In places controlled by Gnomes, these moots determine who is in charge. Elsewhere, they merely establish bragging rights.

Goliaths (Common)

Goliaths occupy the foothills of the Nazi Mountains. They have an excellent relationship with the Dwarves and share humanity’s conflicts with the fey races. The Goliaths of Ontanath were partially assimilated when Duke Tovon of House Miedera presented them with an offer: recognize his right to “rule” their land (and pay him the same taxes Humans pay) in return for leaving them to their own devices. His noble support paved the way for them to be recognized as legal equals in the old kingdom, a determination that remains.

Goliath culture confuses many Humans, however. Goliath females own most of the property (It is considered distasteful for a male to live in his own home). Goliath females are only fertile once every three to five months. When a female senses the onset of estrus, she announces it to the community and suitors come to bid for her favor. This usually takes the form coins and

treasure, but can also include spoils of war and tokens of romance. Whomever the female chooses comes to live in her house. A female can “divorce” her mate simply by demanding that he leave. The male traditionally has no say in the matter and will likely be taken in by relatives unless the split was caused by something shameful. Members of both sexes generally have four to six matings over the course of their lifetime.

Halfling (Common)

Ancient lore speaks of the *Utephi* (“great liar”), one of the progenitors of the Halfling people. His ability to craft falsehoods was so great that Erathis appeared in person and made him an offer: forgo deception and she would shepherd his people. Utephi declined and they began to argue. After years of negotiation, a compromise was reached. Each Halfling would be permitted one great lie in their lifetime, a lie that would be believed no matter how ludicrous. In return, the Halflings would endeavor to be honest and forthright.

Many scholars believe this to be nothing more than another fanciful story – something the Halflings remain renowned for. Despite this, most Halflings still participate in the *Rite of Trust* where they swear before Erathis that they have not lied in the previous year (the rich tradition of arguing over what exactly constitutes a “lie” continues to this day). Those that pass the ritual use a thumbprint of blue makeup on their forehead to show the community that they can be trusted. Many people will not frequent a Halfling merchant that does not bear this mark.

Halflings hold a special status in Ontanath, having secured agreements that make their riverboats neutral ground. Halflings are not technically citizens of the kingdom, but they are generally treated as such outside of criminal proceedings. Halflings charged with serious crimes are usually handed over to their elders for punishment. These sanctions are usually fairly harsh, as misbehavior hinders their ability to do business freely throughout the kingdom.

Half-Orc (Uncommon)

The list of Orcish atrocities committed during the war that ended the old kingdom is long and painful to read. As that conflict wound down, the Dukes sought a solution to the “Orc problem.” Eventually, almost all of them (including their Half-Orc get) were exiled to Drugash, a large island off the west coast of Paria. Those that remained were stripped of their rights, being forbidden to marry, own property or give testimony

before a court. Further, they were required to wear a *markagi*, a largish gold coin worn on a chain or leather thong, as insurance against any damages that might be levied against them. An Orc whose *markagi* was confiscated would have to work for the aggrieved party until restitution was made. Orcs lacking the coin were regularly whipped or hung, most often without trial.

In the early days of the Midnight War, King Iskel needed troops, so he abolished the *markagi* edicts. This was met with some resistance, but war changes many things. Iskel did not get as many volunteers as he would have liked, but it was enough to turn back the invasions of 751 and 753. A fair number of Orcs continue to wear the *markagi*, some as a gesture of defiance and pride, others out of a sense of caution.

Orcs remain second-class citizens, even in the major cities. Discrimination against them is tolerated and commonplace. As far as the law is concerned, anyone with Orc ancestors is an Orc. Orcs refer to those whose heritage is not readily visible as *gurut* (“those who hide” or “the hiding”).

Shifters (Uncommon)

At the very southeastern corner of Ontanath is a wide peninsula known as “The Green Reach,” stretching some 450 miles into the Bright Sea. It is moraine country, all wooded hills and clear water streams. This is where the Shifters come from.

Culturally, the Shifters hold themselves apart, lacking much in the way of centralized government or infrastructure. The king’s tax collectors come through twice a year, but they don’t get much. Every time the Dukes have tried to exploit the area for ore or timber, they have been met with bloody uprisings, so the unwritten policy is to leave the place alone.

Shifter lore teaches that the number eight is sacred and lucky, though the reasons why this is so vary between tribal groups.

Minotaurs (Uncommon)

The Minotaurs originally had a small nation on the far side of the Elven Empire, but that was destroyed 1500-years ago in a series of earthquakes and volcanoes. Since then, the Minotaurs have been known as the “People of the Cart,” traveling nomadically in small family groups using hand-drawn carts. They have a reputation for being excellent craftsmen. They are

accepted in most places, despite being perceived as slow and easily fooled.

When Minotaur caravans meet, they often swap children, who then “marry” into the new family group. Minotaurs ferociously pair bond, even to the point of suicide or berserker rage. This has even found its way into Ontonath’s legal precedence. In 114, the mate of a Minotaur named Lekahon was run down in the street by a drunken nobleman. When his mate heard of this, she went to the noble’s manor house and killed him, along with seventeen of his guards. When she was made to stand trial, she unrepentantly explained that the loss of her love demanded no less. She received a prison sentence instead of the gallows.

Warforged (Uncommon)

The Warforged are unique in that they are a created people. Dragonborn artificers built them thousands of years ago in the early days of their first empire. “Warforged” is a name given to them by outsiders who believed them to be mindless shock troopers enslaved by the Dragonborn. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Instead, the Warforged were created to lend permanence to Dragonborn culture despite the *turikti* rituals. The Warforged tend to Dragonborn children whose parents have remade themselves, keep records and generally keep things running. While Warforged tradition dictates that they serve, they enjoy the same rights and privileges as their “overlords.”

While most of the other nations are coming around to the idea that Warforged have free will, it’s a slow process. Warforged laborers have been instrumental in maintaining the kingdom’s fortifications during the long war. That, combined with the Ontanath’s solid relationship with the Bright Isles, has gone a long way towards gaining them equality in Human lands.