

## — CHAPTER V: THE ROAMERS, A NATION OF ROADS —

While their hearts turned to their homeland often and dreaded its ruin, the Roamers remained aloof, shaking their heads as one Faenari misfortune led to another. When the Sorcerer Kings came into power, the Roamers knew the hour of Faenaria's doom was nigh. That hour came toward the end of the Great Rebellion. Despite years of treachery and battle, the sorceress Feyna Drass, who had crowned herself empress of Faenaria, clung to her reign, even as one Sorcerer King after another fell. Her power was almost without equal. She had torn many of the secrets of Mount Oritaun from the minds of kidnapped vatazin, although she was never able to enter the mountain itself; the wards of the vatazin were impenetrable to her sorcery. Her madness was commensurate with her power, and both increased as she tried to recreate the images of the Oculon based on the psychic images she stole from the vatazin. Her efforts were in vain, and as the forces of the Great Rebellion crossed the northern border of her realm, she despaired. She sent wave upon wave of darkfiends, unliving, and shadowspawn, but to no avail. The rebels were mighty

and their cause just. Her mind snapped, and she devised a ruinous plan. Drawing upon the powers of all her shadowgates, she attempted to create a field of magic that would slay anyone who attempted to enter her domain.

Unfortunately for Faenaria, she did not fully understand the powers of the shadowgates, and instead of creating a deadly protective barrier, all of the shadowgates exploded simultaneously. Feyna was instantly annihilated in the purple and black explosion of Shadow, which mushroomed until it engulfed Austium, and then it continued. Villages and cities, for miles around, were destroyed when the Shadow hit, crumbling as if in an earthquake, burning as if on fire. No one escaped. The horror was compounded when, days later, the recently dead arose as the unliving and marched upon the more distant communities of Faenaria and the fleeing rebels. Many Faenari near the borders escaped, eventually joining up with their Roamer kin. In less than a month, Faenaria was no more, as Miriana foretold. What remains is a wreck of a land, still bearing the scars of that fateful day and still racked by storms of Shadow.

### LIFE AMONG THE CARAVANS

The core unit of Roamer society is the caravan. The Roamers' ancestors came from all over Faenaria, so the Roamers have many small kin groups but no large clans. Smaller caravans tend to comprise two to five extended families, and in some cases, an entire caravan is composed of a single large family. Larger caravans sometimes comprise as many as fifty families, but such groupings are usually temporary. The only caravan that is consistently that large is the one accompanying the High Seer.

A headman, who is usually the eldest person in the caravan, leads it. Sometimes this roll falls to a younger Roamer who is more road-wise. If the headman is not a seer, he or she relies on a seer's frequent counsel, and it is not uncommon for a caravan to have two leaders: a headman, wise in the ways of the road, and a seer, wise in the ways of the Royal Road.

### Culture

When the Roamers first left their homeland, they were primarily concerned with preserving their traditions, with carrying a bit of home with them wherever they went. They traveled far, but they were still Faenari. As the years passed and a generation of Roamers was born who knew the road more than Faenaria, a distinct Roamer culture began to emerge. Like their colorful caravans—each wagon carrying spices, trinkets, and tales from many lands—Roamer culture is a great farrago of cultural elements. In each land they have traveled, the Roamers have picked up some cultural trace: a story, a craft, a dance, or a clothing style. The mixture of these traces, combined with Faenarian sensuousness and artfulness, has led to the Roamers seeming exotic wherever they go; they give off a whiff of someplace else. Because of this, people who are uncomfortable with difference distrust the Roamers, while others welcome them, happy to catch a glimpse through them of the world's many facets.

With the rise of their third generation, the Roamers stopped traveling as one large band. It had become impractical to feed everyone, and smaller towns and villages were uncomfortable hosting a caravan with a larger population than their own. As the Roamers divided into smaller and smaller caravans, their culture became more and more diverse. The signature Roamer wagon arose in the initial period of dispersion and became a



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place of stability amid constant dramatic change. Now when one caravan meets another, they share lore, as well as objects from their wagons, further enriching Roamer culture as a whole.

The Roamers' language has also been enriched by their travels. Originally the Aspaenari spoke Faenarian, but the language has evolved so much that it would be incomprehensible, save a word here and there, to the Faenari of old. Now simply called Roamer, the language has adopted many Aldin, Jarzoni, Rezean, and Kernish words and phrases, while maintaining complex Faenarian grammar. Non-Roamers describe the language as having a sing-song quality, and those who've tried to learn it have found the rapidly expanding lexicon and the intricate grammar bewildering. Roamers are proud and protective of their language and hold poets in high regard. Rather than teach the language to outsiders, they learn their host cultures' languages; almost every adult Roamer is multilingual. To protect their language from ambitious foreign scholars, Roamers do all they can to prevent their writings from falling into non-Roamer hands, and they commit information to memory, rather than parchment, whenever practical. These factors make it possible for the Roamers to communicate with others, while preserving a mode of communication that others do not understand. This fact exacerbates distrust of the Roamers, people often wondering what they are discussing in that "inscrutable" language of theirs.

Despite the rapid evolution of Roamer culture and language, some things have stayed the same for centuries. The Roamers love dance and song as much as their Faenari ancestors did and adroitly mix traditional and new styles. They continue to refine their skills as tinkers and artisans. The arts of flirtation, seduction, and love are practiced with gusto among the caravans and are often tested on non-Roamers. Many villages have a tale of a Roamer breaking a local lad or lass's heart or of a simple farmer leaving everything to chase after a Roamer lover. This is one stereotype the Roamers mischievously enjoy.

A stereotype they do not like is the one that paints them all as thieves, a prevalent stereotype in Jarzon and eastern Aldis. Despite the stereotype being far from accurate, there are indeed thieves among the caravans. Some are merely pickpockets, while others are master burglars or swindlers. One characteristic that distinguishes them from thieves in other lands is that they almost never steal from their own people or vata, and the few who do would not dare violate another Roamer's wagon. On some level, Roamers view one another as one family and view vata as distant cousins. Petty thieves, if caught stealing from Roamers or non-Roamers alike, are reprimanded and mocked within their caravan. Burglars and swindlers, if their crimes are great enough, are banished. Roamers never hand their criminals over to the authorities of their host cultures, believing they can administer their own justice. Sometimes this takes a menacing turn when a violent criminal simply disappears, the caravan leaders and adepts grimly refusing to explain to their kith what became of the criminal. Whatever a criminal's punishment, the Roamer appreciation for artfulness and flare is difficult to suppress, so even after railing at a

### ROAMER TERMS AND PHRASES

**Aspaenari.** The Roamer name for themselves, "the people of hope." *Aspaenar* is the singular form.

**Domnari.** Non-Roamers, "the people of houses." *Domnar* is the singular form. This term is never used for vata, who are simply called vata or the People of the Moon.

**Optari.** Non-Roamers who have become Roamers, "the adopted people." *Optar* is the singular form. This term connotes some affection. A Domnar becomes an Optar by traveling with a caravan and being accepted as a Roamer at a small ceremony led by a seer or headman.

**grettari.** Literally "the people of Gretta," but its idiomatic meaning is "very ugly." This is a common insult. It refers to Gretta of the White Face.

**stradvo.** Literally "road dust," but its idiomatic meaning is "well tested." Someone or something refined by experience is called *stradvo*.

**austiara.** Literally "regal," but its idiomatic meaning is "shortsighted." Someone who ignores the warnings of the wise is called *austiara*.

**He's lost on the Royal Road.** Said of someone lost in introspection or visions. This can also be said of someone who is idealistic but impractical.

**She's a few cards shy of a full deck.** Said of someone with bad luck. Someone with extraordinarily bad luck is said to be a few suits shy of a full deck.

**It's over the hill.** Said of something new and interesting. This phrase often confuses non-Roamers, who associate it with something past its prime.

**He has Miriana's eyes.** Said of someone who exhibits great foresight or mercy.

**She seeks the Dance and the Shadow.** Said of a person looking for something of utmost importance.

**He's like Valestian at Paelos.** Said of a person, of either gender, who is sexually alluring but hard to get. The phrase refers to the canto in *Riddles of the Far Road* when the seer Lilianus first meets the poet Valestian at the Faenari port city of Paelos. The poet is described as intoxicatingly beautiful but maddeningly difficult to seduce.

**This is a Tower day.** Said of a time likely to hold disappointment or disaster. The phrase refers to the Tower card in the Royal Road.

**They are chasing the Moon.** Said of people trying to solve a mystery. The phrase refers to the Moon card in the Royal Road, as well as to the myth that Selene hid all knowledge in the moon.

In addition to the preceding two phrases, there are many others associated with the Major Arcana of the Royal Road: "She has Exarch eyes," "All he cares about is the turn of the Wheel," and so on. (See page 71 in *Blue Rose* for a list of the Major Arcana and their primary connotations.)