



## TIN ISLES SKIRMISHER

*Your world has ended. You are all that is left.*

### HISTORY

For centuries immemorial, your people served the liches of Ultima Thule. Far away from the clashes and catastrophes of the Middle Sea, connected only by the thinnest thread of traders and travellers, you existed in the rain-swept heaths and thick forests of the Islands; and far to the north, the ice-locked plateaus of Olathue (sp.?) and Ultima Thule itself, the preserve of the Masters. You acted as servants to the Liches, mining ores and gathering herbs for their strange rituals, conducting their trade affairs and couriering messages; you were their link to the outside world. They existed in remote and frozen splendour, rarely venturing outside their magically protected sanctuaries. The physical presence of one of the Masters was a once-in-a-generation cause for frantic activity and great ritual celebration, and when they walked abroad on the Isles they were always accompanied by a fifty-strong bodyguard of your fiercest warriors. From time to time, the best and brightest of your tribe's youth were chosen at the High Holidays to make the perilous journey across the frozen waves to serve the Masters directly. Few returned; occasionally an ancient, withered elder, crippled with frostbite and white-haired, would limp back to your home, scant years after leaving as a young and vital champion. These were feasted and looked after for the scant few months until they inevitably perished, and buried with great honour.

One year ago, all that changed. The Liches had been unusually active for the year leading up to the Twelfth Annual; trade from the degenerate, hot southern climes had increased, and your negotiators and storytellers had scabbled furiously to fill the Masters' demands for strange substances, artefacts, and ancient texts of great power. You have no idea what the purpose was, but you know they were conducting a Great Work; the greatest work, some whispered, that the Liches had ever compassed.

It worked; or so your magicians tell you. Those brave enough to be outside on that terrible windswept night say that the northern skies, which for your whole life have flickered and glowed with the unearthly light of the Masters' Aurora, flashed bright enough to blind – pulsed in a thousand radiant colours – and went out. The warrens of the Northern Cataract were struck with earthquakes, shaking free once again the great waterfall that has not flowed since your grandmother's grandmother's time. On the island of Hibernia, cows gave birth to two-headed calves, and ravens tumbled from the sky, struck dead and blind in an instant.

And the Liches began to die.

It was a terrible, heretical rumour at first. Those who dared to whisper it in the Chieftains' hearing were immediately executed. Then the first of the youths began to return; shaken, most unable to even speak of what they had seen. Slowly, the horrible truth began to emerge. The Great Work had consumed the Liches' power – *all* their power. The dark magics which had kept them alive, frozen in an instant of flawless, crystallised time, since the world was young, had been burned up in one final conflagration of sorcery.

The Liches themselves did not seem wrathful or vengeful; some even whisper that they knew exactly the price they must pay for this terrible, final work. Their loyal Islanders, however, are now left lost,



alone, without direction or bearing. For generations your tribe has dedicated its entire existence to serving the Masters. Now the Masters are gone; where will you turn?

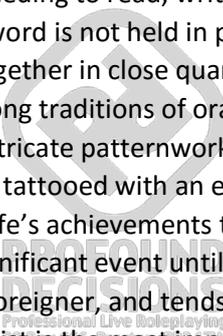
## CULTURE

Tin Islanders are primarily a cave-dwelling people. Your land is sufficiently inhospitable and the weather so treacherous that the vast majority of tribes make their home within the extensive caves and mines that riddle the hard places of the land. Centuries of use have made these caves comfortable and homely; warm, well-lit places, tunnelled through earth and rock for miles, with chambers to rival the greatest temple of the Middle Sea. Only the bravest and hardest tribes live on the surface, in the deep forests of Camulodunon or by the great lakes of Hibernia; these make great boasts of their capacity to survive the howling rains and terrible monsters. The rest sometimes make grazing-camps or temporary sheepfolds during the summer, but all retreat to the safety of their warrens during the long winter nights. Many Tin Islanders are mildly agoraphobic and become nervous in wide open spaces, preferring a solid rock ceiling – or at least a canvas roof – between their heads and the terrible sky.

Tin Islanders are tribal, with each tribe centred on a cave or stronghold and loosely controlling the land around it. Tribes can be large – several hundred or even thousand people – and their social structure is complex and stratified. Age is held in high regard, with grey hair or baldness seen as a sign of dignity, wisdom, and the rare physical hardiness to survive past middle age. There is almost no sense of national or cultural unity; a Tin Islander will identify themselves first by tribe and family name, second by the region of the Islands they spring from (or a prominent local landmark), and only if pressed mention the Islands. Consequently, Islanders feel no great sense of loyalty or kinship to other Islanders from different Tribes; any coherent sense of unified purpose or fellowship dissolved with the Liches. They feel no inherent obligation to take up a cause or master simply because other Islanders do so.

Within a Tribe, however, the bonds of family loyalty are sacrosanct and overriding. The history of the Liches' rulership is one of distant but callous and efficient tyranny; many of your childhood stories will refer to an offense committed by a single warrior which resulted in horrifying retribution upon the entire Tribe. As a result, the honour and reputation of the Tribe is paramount in every member's heart. Intermarriage between Tribes is an established tradition for any gender combination, and is treated with great solemnity; since one partner must leave their tribe in order to join the other, and since the Islanders have no concept of exile or ostracism from the Tribe, that spouse is seen as 'dying'. Most Tribes hold an elaborate funeral, complete with a feast and games for their 'dead' relative, to bid them farewell. Their spouse's tribe, meanwhile, compete to outdo them with a welcoming feast, modelled on the celebrations held for the birth of a new child.

Tin Islanders are usually literate, often needing to read, write and figure in order to carry out tasks for their masters. However, the written word is not held in particularly high regard by most tribes; practicality, long winter nights packed together in close quarters, and the paucity of light in their underground warrens has developed strong traditions of oral storytelling and singing. They also hold visual art in high regard, with detailed, intricate patternwork seen as the pinnacle of the artist's achievement. Every Islander is intricately tattooed with an elaborate pattern of blue swirls, spirals and interlocking knots – a story of their life's achievements that begin when they are initiated into the tribe as an adult, and marks every significant event until their death. Unmarked skin is the sign of one of the Masters or, more recently, a foreigner, and tends to invoke wariness in even the most well-travelled Islander. The Tribe's tattooist is the most important personality after the Chieftains,





and every Islander will be delighted to recite the tale of their own tattoos – often with great drama, flair and boastful exaggeration – upon demand.

Tribes are usually named after a major landmark or geographical feature that marks the border of their territory; the Plains of Searoburh, the Camulodunon Forest, the Northern Cataract and so on. Sometimes, however, the tribe will take its name from a historical event or great hero of the past, such as Caitt's Daughters, the Battle-Hardened, or the Hounds of Setanta. Pictish personal names tend to sound hard and sharp to a Middle Sea ear, full of odd consonant clusters.

Male name examples: Drest, Galan, Barteit, Taroc, Causatin, Aed, Tarain, Lutrin, Erdannon, Bran, Cathbarr.

Female name examples: Alvha, Aoife, Brigid, Colan, Eri, Finna, Hisolda, Mada, Muiriath, Rigan, Sinech, Una.

Genderless name examples: Garb, Arwyn, Cain, Delwyn, Einwys, Tirion

## GOALS

The Chieftains of the Tribes all have one thing in common; since their records began, they have never truly led their people – they have only acted as caretakers and intermediaries for the Masters. Without them, they are lost and mapless in the deep forest; and they are afraid. They have sent you, some of their hardest and bravest warriors, to journey to the fiery and heathen lands of the Ultimate South. Your people are proud but not unrealistic; they know their value – as servants and loyal followers, not as leaders. You understand that it is the heroes of the Middle Sea who will decide the rulers of the next Age, and not your own people.

Your goal is to find a cause – a leader – that will protect and care for your Tribe; in return, you offer them the loyalty, service and fighting power that a true Tin Islander warrior can bring to bear. So long as there remains in the world the power of sorcery and miraculous wonder – the power that made the Cataract stop in its tracks when Alva's wife willed it so, or defeated the Great Beast of Bufan Dune, whose feet were terrible chariot-wheels and whose mouth spat fire – there is yet hope that your home and tribe may find purpose again. Without a great hero to lead the way, your tribe will surely wither and perish. Even if that hero must be a foreigner, a strange Southerner with unmarked skin who pays homage to strange and distant Gods – well, if they prove their worth at contests of strength, wisdom and honour, what is not to say they could not be taught your ways?



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