

Culture Package: Gnomes

Geography:

Gnomes live in a place called The Undermines. The Undermines are vast networks of subterranean tunnels that span under the Deymourne Mountain range of Lowgarynn. They are located under the Dwarven mines far deeper than any of the Dwarves dare to go, thus their name.

Gnomes do not have a major capital city in the Undermines, or anything that even remotely resembles a city. They are too obsessed over protecting their inventions against gnomish contact to feel comfortable living in close quarters with one big group. Rather, gnomes live in small communities spread out over the Undermines. These communities are not necessarily separated by large distances – they're just far apart enough to cater to the gnomes' need to hide their inventions from others. These communities do keep contact and trade, however.

The Undermines are mapped, but not by traditional Kalidorian means. By the time the cartographer would be finished drawing the map, at least one new community will have sprung up, or moved, or a name of a community changed, or a new tunnel built. The geography of the Undermines is always changing, as gnomes will shift communities often in order to keep their inventions safe from prying eyes. Therefore, great amounts of money and effort go into producing gnomish maps – intricately designed and coded papers that are produced en-mass by tinkering machinery. They are constantly being updated, produced, and sold at extravagant prices by gnomes to those that do not know the tunnels well. The secrets of making these maps, like most products produced via tinkering, are closely guarded by their creators.

Resources and Trade:

Trade happens on multiple levels: community, inter-community, dwarves, surface and beyond. People wanting to trade for tinkering purposes, gnome or otherwise, are often treated with a fair amount of suspicion as gnomes are not only protective of their inventions, but very gossipy, which only reinforces the need for secrecy. Any trade involving tinkering technologies is only done in secret, rarely, and only between trusted gnomes. Trade involving staple resources such as food and fae dust is common, both between other gnomish communities and non-gnome outsiders. Gnomes have trade routes with the dwarves above them and some other surface races, and they often send caravans out to collect other resources from the surface that are unavailable underground.

Common resources are stone, metal, minerals, gems, fae dust and water. At the exceptional depth of the Undermines, gnomes have no issues accessing the water table. They have easy access to underground springs and creeks, both naturally occurring and gnome-made. The abundance of water, static climate, protection from the elements, relatively nutrient rich soil, and lighting systems put in place throughout the Undermines by the gnomes have made it possible for small low-light plants, mosses and fungi to grow in relative abundance. Gnomes have developed methods of farming this flora for food. However, large fauna for hunting remain relatively scarce. Attempts to cultivate large surface flora and fauna have been made using tinkering technologies, but anything on a large-scale has proven unsuccessful and impractical thus far.

Fae dust is harvested off of brownies that naturally dwell in the underground tunnels. Any occasional pixies brave or stupid enough to wander from their deep, dark homes away from gnomish civilization also inevitably get ground up into dust. Between Brownies, odd fae, and trading, a gnome can obtain a respectable amount of dust, but not nearly enough to sustain their inventions for an extended amount of time. How gnomes acquire the exuberant amounts of fae dust required to run their society is unknown.

Gnomes and Magic:

Magic is seen as the root of many problems in the Undermines and is considered a liability rather than an asset. Many gnomes will adopt the use of tinkering – creation of vast, wonderful, and terrifying machinations -- in lieu of using magic. The most powerful of tinkers can rival the strength of the strongest mages. Tinkering gnomes of the Undermines despise those of their own kind that practice magic, and as gnome mages are often hunted and made pariah by tinkering gnomes, mages are unlikely to be familiar with the art of tinkering. It is very rare to see a gnome that can do both, and those rare few are often shunned by both mages and tinkers.

The culture of magic-casting gnomes is mostly non-existent, as many spend their lives either in hiding or on the run from the tinkers; they are spread out among the surface in small roving bands. There are no known civilizations of gnomish magi.

Tinkering gnomes of the Undermines believe their society has no need for magic, as their society is one of advanced technology and intellect that is above the barbaric surface races that are too stupid to tinker and require crutches such as magic to help them survive. Since most races are considered too stupid to be able to ascend to the level of intellect gnomish society has obtained, gnomes are tolerant of mages of other friendly races, given that they do not practice dark magics such as necromancy or witchcraft. Psionic spells are considered to be mind-manipulating fae magic and therefore are frowned upon in a manner similar to necromancy and witchcraft (psionic casting for the sake of hunting demons is mildly tolerated, but evidence of charming someone, erasing their memories or anything of the like is sufficient for the mage to burn). A gnome mage, however, is immediately labelled as an outcast and an abomination to the gnomish race. A particular branch of the gnomish military called the GLS, or the “Gnomi Linna Suoja” (*Guhnohmee, Leen-nah Soo-oh-ya, roughly translates to “Gnome-Land Security” in Common*) exists to identify, apprehend and kill mages – young, old, gnome, fae, undiscovered or otherwise. The GLS is the cream of the crop of the gnomish military. They are essentially a powerful, underground secret police, the fear of all gnomish mages and those alike.

If a gnome is found to be adept at magic when they are of age, they are either immediately killed until final death, branded and exiled from the Undermines, or killed and their body branded, then exiled if they successfully resurrect. Even outside of the Undermines, mages are considered kill-on-sight to any other gnome that follows the ways of the Undermines. Gnomes within the society of the Undermines will often act as if the gnomish mage never even existed. Any mages of a race other than gnome that cast from the mind-manipulating psionic, necromancy, or witchcraft spheres -- or have proven problematic in any way -- are killed in the gruesome manner deemed appropriate and what little there is of their corpse left is branded.

If an underaged youth is found to be adept at casting magic, it is often considered either accidental or a result of innocent unknowing action and therefore not against the law. Though the gnome child is not immediately killed or exiled, steps are immediately taken to stamp out the magic from the child. The process is not a pretty one. The standard procedure is to call the GLS, who then take the child away for weeks, months, or even years. What happens to the child during this time is unknown to all but those who dwell in the darkest, most secretive parts of gnome society. The child returning in anything resembling a normal, sane state, if they return at all, is incredibly rare. In lieu of reporting to the proper authorities, parents of the youth will sometimes attempt to keep their child's magical abilities secret, if possible, and leave the area of their own free will. Instances of parents who are secretly mages themselves teaching their mage children to hide their talent have been documented, as have instances of parents abandoning or outright killing their children when they discover they have magical talent.

Why a gnome mage could once only cast from the psionic and illusion spheres is unknown; even more so is how gnomish mages could recently begin to cast from other spheres. No gnome worth their bulbous nose has seen the point in using resources to study gnome mages and figure out why this is, as studying it would require the practice of magic. As such, gnomes are quite content with believing the phenomenon to be a simple fact of life that requires no further explanation. Old gnomish legends say that gnome mages do not exist naturally: those who can cast magic can only cast from psionics and illusions because they have been tainted by, tricked by, or have been consorting with fae in some manner. Though this view is perceived as an old urban legend in most of modern gnome society, it hasn't been proven or disproven, nor do any gnomes care to explore the idea.

Politics and Social Interactions:

Tinkering gnome society is a technocracy. In gnomish culture, it's never a question of what a gnome is, but what they've done. Anyone can rise through the ranks, and anyone can fall through the ranks. Males and females are considered equals. The Undermines are a world of competition, and secrets. Gnomes are constantly trying to make the next best thing, and are extremely protective of their ideas and inventions. The pressure to invent is constant. Only those who make something truly revolutionary can expect to coast on it and be respected for the rest of their lives because of it.

Gnomes who have contributed in some way to better society are revered in proportion to the greatness of their inventions. Whenever a gnome accomplishes something of note, they are awarded with a "patent badge". The more badges they have, the more respected the gnome becomes. The greatest honours are given to those who contribute to scientific and technological progress – namely, the tinkerers. Given the technocratic nature of gnome society, there is a rather distinct power divide between tinkerers and those who work occupations that cater to the day-to-day running of society. However, accomplishments in other fields such as arts, blacksmithing, alchemy, farming, and the like are not necessarily unrecognized – just, not on the same level as the tinkerers, as their craft is not directly related to scientific progress. Generally, those who are considered accomplished in other fields are recognized because they are inventors or scientists on the side, and wound up establishing a means of getting a bigger crop yield, or a way to prevent metal from rusting, or inventing a new kind of paint. In the ultimate scheme of things, a gnome's place in the social hierarchy comes down to the inventive talent and level of intelligence the gnome has. Gnomes are expected to be intelligent and inventive by birth. Those who lack are inevitably doomed to scrounge on the lower rungs of the social ladder, making a living but severely lacking in political clout. Slavery is considered suppression of a gnomes' potential, therefore detrimental to society, so slavery does not exist in gnome society. (That doesn't mean they are unfamiliar with the concept of slavery, however.)

Perhaps one of the main reasons why gnomes are so obsessive over keeping their inventions secret is the fact that gnomes, by nature, are very curious. When an invention is made public, word of the invention will spread from community to community rather quickly. Inventing something big in one community will get the gnome just as much recognition for it in the next one. Regardless of where a gnome of high stature goes in the Undermines, they're going to be recognized and respected. Respectable gnomes of high stature tend to congregate in communities separate from those who live on the lower parts of the social ladder, but moving between communities often or even starting up a new community to protect ones' inventions from the prying eyes of others is not uncommon for affluent gnomes.

Though all community leaders got that position by being revered inventors and scientists in their own right, becoming a respected member of society does not necessarily automatically involve the gnome in

politics or the direct running of society. However, since the communities are small and separate, most gnomes are quite vocal and engaged in the goings-on of their community – though participation in political decision-making is not allowed until a gnome is of adult age. Politics of trade and day-to-day running of the society are kept on the level of the small community. Only major decisions like going to war are made by affluent members representing all communities. Decisions in gnome society are almost never made by just one gnome put in a position of ultimate power. Rather, most issues and decisions in gnome society are discussed communally in meetings called “scrums”, and the final decision is voted upon (think something like the open, individual non-representative democracy of Ancient Greece). In order to participate in a scrum, a gnome must have a particular number of badges, dependent on the issues to be discussed in the scrum. The more important the decision is, the more badges they need to participate. A gnome might need only a single badge to help decide whether or not to change the lightbulb in lamppost #573, but a hundred badges to debate whether or not the gnomes should go to war. If a gnome has not contributed enough to gnome society and earned enough badges to actively participate in scrums, they ultimately have no political voice.

Titles in gnomish society are generally gifted to a gnome by their peers, though they are sometimes self-bestowed. There are names for the positions themselves, for the sake of having a name for the position, but there are no official corresponding titles to go with each position. Whereas all Barons in Kalidorian society are called “Your Lordship”, something equivalent to a Baron in gnomish society would be called by their name, followed whatever random title they've acquired. (eg. Razzie Fetchgrinder, Amathologist and Tinkerer Extraordinaire.) It's their own name that is expected to carry the clout and the social stature; the title is merely there to pretty it up, so it can be whatever they deem worthy to be seen beside their name. The name always comes before the title. If the gnome is called by their title alone, like the Grand Tinkerer, their title is considered to carry the same weight as their name does. If the Grand Tinkerer's name were “Grizwit”, simply calling him by his name “Grizwit” would not be considered an insult or a form of disrespect. Anyone at any level of gnome society can technically have a title, but they are generally found attached to high-ranking officials rather than lowly workers. At lower ranks of society, a title is seen as more of a casual nickname than anything else.

The highest ranking title a gnome can possess is “Grand Tinkerer”. The Grand Tinkerer is considered to be the gnome who has done the most to contribute to the advancement of gnome society. The Grand Tinkerer's word is the last word on any decision where gnomish society decides that the community is effectively split on the issue and a decision cannot be made otherwise. They can attend any scrum they please, they have the power to break ties at scrums, and they serve as an ambassador and representative of gnomish society when dealing with outside races. However, this is the extent of their power; the Grand Tinkerer's powers are far from unilateral like that of a human monarch. “Grand Tinkerer” functions both as a position name and a title, as the position is of such high clout that the title is considered to be equal to the name of the person who holds the title. Within a community, the gnome with either the highest amount of patent badges, or is considered by vote to be of the highest social rank, is the leader of that community. Any disagreements between gnomes are resolved by a gnome of higher stature and more badges than either of the fighting parties. In the case of a dispute between communities, the Grand Tinkerer's ruling is the only one who can resolve it.

The Grand Tinkerer is a position that can only be bestowed upon a gnome by their fellow affluent peers by means of a vote, but on a scale that involves all gnomish communities in the Undermines. Voting normally occurs when the current Grand Tinkerer has died or when the gnomish community feels that there is another gnome that is more deserving of the position. The Grand Tinkerer being removed from the position by committing a grave crime, attempting to overthrow society under their complete and total rule, or proving overall incompetent or corrupt has been known to happen from time to time.

Gnomes nominate fellows that they see as “the top” gnome for the position and votes are cast for the nominees. No gnome may vote for themselves. If a gnome wins the vote they must accept the position, regardless of their personal feelings on the matter. It's not likely for a gnome to not want the position, however.

A gnome directly challenging and promoting themselves for the position of Grand Tinkerer or any other position of power is considered very distasteful. Though a gnome with sufficient evidence of a transgression by the Grand Tinkerer can call to have the position revoked and a new Grand Tinkerer elected, they cannot nominate themselves to take over the position without heavy social repercussion.

Social stature is not inherited by blood. A child may socially benefit from their parents' work, as the child is assumed to have greater talent than their parents. However, if they prove otherwise when they come of age, any status they may have had by proxy to their parent is lost. The children of the Grand Tinkerer are by no means “next in line” for the position, but are often affluent tinkerers in their own right and are sometimes nominated for the position.

Law: Gnomish law is mostly an unspoken code. Laws are dictated by the Grand Tinkerer. Criminals are often dealt with as seen fit at the time, though physical copies of books listing laws and the process of law do exist and are consulted when deemed necessary. Investigations into crimes are done through gnomish court – which is essentially a chaotic scrum, only between the offended and defending parties. Punishments for crime vary, depending on the nature of the crime. Punishments can range anywhere from monetary compensation and public apology, to loss of status, exile, or even death. Torture and deliberate public execution are not considered appropriate methods of punishment, for gnomes or criminals of other races; such methods are only employed in matters regarding demon or dragon worshipers, and not often.

A gnome of the Undermines breaking of one the following laws listed below is considered to be a grave infraction, and is always met with instant death for the perpetrator if they are caught in the act. Gnomes who are found guilty of these crimes after an investigation are labelled as kill on sight. Any gnome of any stature can kill the guilty party.

- No gnome shall purposely attempt to learn or perform magic.
- No gnome shall do anything to deliberately conceal the presence of a gnomish mage, nor do anything to prevent apprehension of a gnomish mage.
- No gnome shall knowingly harbour a mage of a different race without alerting the proper authorities.
- No gnome shall destroy the technology of another gnome out of hatred, revenge, or any other strain of thought which is considered to be irrational.
- No gnome shall attempt to steal credit for, or reverse engineer with the intent of stealing, the inventions of a fellow gnome. (This one is actually fairly commonplace as it is difficult to prove such things have occurred, and false accusations are laid on occasion. Only those who avidly do it, do it stupidly, or otherwise get caught with solid, 100% evidence that they have done so are dealt with severely, but most gnomes aren't that stupid.)

For gnomes, trials, investigations, and proper evidence are required in order for criminals to be convicted and punished for crimes which are not listed above, regardless of how high or low a rank the offended or offending parties are. Rigging or otherwise tampering with trials is considered to be on a level almost as heinous as the crimes listed above.

Killing of a non-gnome criminal in the Undermines normally only happens when they are guilty of one of the crimes that warrant instant death for any Kalidorian race such as demon-worship or dragon-worship. Gnomes treat their dragon and demon worshipers in a manner similar to the way the people of Kalidor do, regardless of what race they might be. Resisting arrest when proxy to a magic-related crime, or deliberately assaulting/killing a gnome with magic, particularly psionic magic, are considered kill-on-sight crimes for a foreign visitor as well. Other infractions by a non-gnomish visitor are given trials and judged fairly, as they would a fellow gnome. (However, given that a non-gnomish visitor cannot participate in a scrum, their own trial is completely out of their hands and their fate lies with gnomes that they barely know.)

Dating and Marriage:

Conservative dating, casual relations of a wild sexual nature, and anything in-between are all acceptable dating practices. Some gnomes prefer more conservative methods and will wind up dating as such, whereas some like to sample a lot of pots. Both are considered socially acceptable, and completely subject to the personal preferences of the gnomes involved. Sex is seen as a need, and an enjoyable one to fulfill, so sleeping around is not necessarily frowned upon – some gnomes like to, while other gnomes do not. Contraceptives are available and often used, as raising children is considered an arduous endeavour and is considered taboo outside of a marriage arrangement.

Gnome children require a lot of good parenting in order to become useful members of society, to nurture their talents and intellect. Gnomish children are highly educated, both by their parents and the members of their community. Therefore, only gnomes who are married can have children. However, marriage works a lot differently than it does in human Kalidorian society: marriage in gnomish culture comes in the form of a contract. When two gnomes decide they wish to have children, they must present their case to their community and prove that they are genetically compatible and capable of raising good, intellectual gnomish children. The community then decides whether or not their case is valid; if yes, the gnomes are given a marriage contract. The marriage contract is essentially a license that declares two gnomes are genetically compatible and are capable of having a mutual relationship in which they can properly raise a child, therefore are allowed to procreate. Two gnomes with a marriage contract are not necessarily confined to the other's life and bed, however. Though they often live together as it is beneficial to the children, casual dating and sex between other gnomes can – and often does – continue to occur, depending on the nature of the relationship between the two gnomes. If a gnomish husband were to say, “Hey honey, I’m going next door in order to plow that hot gnome that just moved in,” chances are his wife would reply, “Alright, have fun! Oh, and tell that stud down the street to come over here – I want to rock his world tonight!” (Granted, this is an exaggerated, albeit possible, series of events.)

When gnomes do have children, the typical amount of children is three. Anywhere between two and five is considered an average amount. The gestation time of a gnome child is approximately 18 months.

Advancements of political and social rank are not gained through marriage, so genetic unions for purely political reasons do not occur. Marriages between polar opposites on the social ladder are frowned upon, as those on the lower rungs of the social ladder are often seen as genetically inferior, but never has there been a historically documented public case of this happening as it would only result in a loss of respect for the gnome on the upper rungs. Marriage celebrations and rituals are more of a formality than legally binding.

Religion:

Religion is seen as a by-product of the old world, which cultures of surface races still cling to as their main method of politics since they're “too dumb to know any better”. There is a great separation of church and state. Worship of gods is kept on a strictly personal basis and never mentioned when

expressing political or otherwise public opinions. A gnome often doesn't know the religion of another gnome until they spy the altar to a god in the back corner of their closet, and discussing religion in even a private context is often perceived as nosy and offensive. Mentioning the will of a god in any kind of serious context will get a gnome laughed at considerably, but not before the gasping of offended gnomes. Gnomes believe that the only true way to know the will of a god is for the god to tell people what they want themselves in person. Any other method of determining the will of the gods is up to interpretation and therefore invalid.

Most gnomes are godless and do not worship, though there are a few gods that some gnomes do worship. Gods that encourage necromancy, demon worship, or use of magic are reviled. Before gnomes became adept tinkers, the spiritual views of society were focused on reverence of the earth that they live in. Therefore, a lot of gnomish holidays, traditions and practices of marriage and death rites stem back to the old ways of worshiping the earth. Though very few gnomes actually observe the religious practices themselves anymore (at least, in public), there is still a fair amount of respect and veneration for the earth below their feet that is evident in the traditions of gnome culture.

Military:

There's not much of a "formal" army in gnome society. The dwarves that live above the gnomes have a very strong army and do a very good job of keeping any surface threats out of the Undermines, and threats deeper underground are sparse. During times of war, gnomes who are able to fire a blaster are called to the cause – the training is often a quick crash course on how to fire the blaster before the gnomes are unceremoniously chucked onto the battlefield. What little organized army there is does recruit and train squads of specialized soldiers during times of peace, however. These squads often serve a dual-function in gnome society, such as guardsman, fae hunters, tinkers specialized in weapons' research, or the infamous mage hunters of the GLS. Positions in the army often prove a viable career for gnomes who find themselves enjoying using tinkering gadgets over making them.

Gnomes aren't known for their strength or stealth in battle, but what they lack in physical combat is more than made up for by their technological aptitude and sheer intellect. A single properly equipped gnome can easily take down ten of the strongest flynd warriors and not get a single scratch.

Relationships with other races:

Mountain Dwarves – Gnomes and mountain dwarves have been allies for ages. Cultural contact and trade between them is strong and frequent, though political matters are often separate between the two races.

Fae – Different species of fae are perceived in a similar way a human might see different species of animals: some are docile, while some will tear people to pieces given the chance. Some species of fae are seen as tricksters that torment the living, and will charm, manipulate, or wipe the memory of a gnome with their foul psionic magic the first chance they get, while others are seen as a relatively docile creature that happen to be useful, particularly for making dust. Gnomes understand that some races have close relations with fae – which is just seen as a mark of the races' stupidity. Often, gnomes will ignore the other races, inferring that the other races must be under the fae's charms and kill the fae, unless given very good reason not to.

Illithids – Gnomes are not on good terms with these creatures. They are on the same level as dangerous trickster fae: wicked, horrible creatures that manipulate the mind and torment the living. Occasional attacks do occur from these beasts from the depths of the Undermines. Attacks from Illithids will usually wind up with heavy casualties on the Illithid side, but they are sometimes stealthy enough that they can eat the brains of or enslave a few gnomes before they are spotted and slaughtered. They are known for picking off lone, lost gnomes in the Undermines as food and slaves.

Life Expectancy: 450-500 years.

Child: 1-44

Teenager: 45-69

Young adult: 70-119

Mature adult: 120 – 249

Middle-age: 250 – 374

Old: 375+