





PLATE 2 *The heroes of DragonMech include the traditional classes as well as those who build and pilot mechs.*





# CHARACTERS

GIVEN THE MASSIVE CHANGES ROCKING THEIR WORLD, THE PEOPLE OF HIGHPOINT SUFFER NO SHORTAGE OF ADVENTURERS. SOCIAL STRUCTURES HAVE COLLAPSED LEFT AND RIGHT, LEAVING MANY COMMONERS WITH NO RECOURSE BUT TO FIGHT FOR THEIR LIVES. MOREOVER, THE ADVENT OF MECHS HAS CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVENTURING. COLLECTING RESOURCES TO KEEP THEM GOING IS AN IN-DEMAND OCCUPATION THESE DAYS, AND THE MECHS HAVE RAISED THE IMPORTANCE OF A SKILL SET NOT FORMERLY VALUED: THE TALENTED PILOT. EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, NEW ADVENTURERS ARE WANDERING THE LAND.

## CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS

The world of **DragonMech** offers all the usual reasons to adventure and many more. Many clerics adventure to contest the lunar aberrations and their gods, while fighters are more concerned with claiming their exotic treasures. Mechcs introduce a whole new level of adventuring opportunities, whether they're used simply as transport or as the focus of a campaign.

Before you begin creating your character, stop for a moment to think about *why* your character has become an adventurer. How has he been affected by the forces shaping Highpoint? As you go through the character creation process, keep these questions about your character in mind:

- Where did his ancestors live before the lunar rain? What happened to their hereditary home?
- Where did they turn for shelter during the lunar rain? What enemies and allies did they make?
- What interaction has the character had with

the dragons and other lunar aberrations?

- How does he feel about steam technology? Does it offer salvation or is it an affront to the old ways? Does it threaten the supremacy of magic or challenge the power of the gods?
- After all the devastation wrought by the lunar rain, and the hardships your character has endured, does he still have faith in his gods?
- Does the Gearwrights Guild speak the truth about the first Age of Walkers, even though the ancient elven texts make no reference to such an era?
- What does your character think about mechcs? Are they vehicles, mere "wagons with legs," or a revolutionary new concept? Are those who pilot mechcs merely using them as a crutch, or are they powerful in a manner that is new for the world?
- Does your character see the world's current state of unrest as a clarion call for heroic defenders to fight the lunar aberrations and end the lunar rain, or a once-in-a-lifetime chance for profit and power?

Considering your character's motivations throughout the creation process will also help your gamemaster focus his campaign.

If your party is composed of traditionalist mages and clerics who see mechcs as a thinly veiled threat to the dominant role magic once played in the world, your DM will likely focus your campaign on fighting *against* mechcs. On the other hand, if your party is composed of coglayers, steamborgs, and mech jockeys who see mechcs as the best chance for defeating the lunar dragons, your adventures will be completely different.

With that in mind, here are some potential character motivations that have special places in **DragonMech**. Of course, a character is much deeper than a single motivating factor, so you can pick more than one, or adjust them as you see fit.

- Defeat the lunar aberrations
- Restore faith in the traditional gods
- Gain followers for a personal belief system from those who now have nothing left to believe in
- Oppose the plans of the lunar gods
- Explore (or loot) the ruins left by the lunar rain
- Restore the surface world (or your own hometown or nation) to its former glory
- Explore the depths of the underdeep, those exposed only since the surface-world refugees pushed ever deeper
- Locate the legendary Master Repository of the Gearwrights Guild
- Restore order and law throughout the world
- Fight against the oppressive policies of the Stenian Confederacy
- Acquire a personal mech
- Build your own mech
- Advance the art of mehcrafft through whatever means necessary
- Join the Irontooth Clans and become a mech devil
- Join the Gearwrights Guild
- Find a way to travel to the moon and destroy the lunar dragons at their source
- Forge an alliance between the splintered factions of the world, so the larger threats can be confronted in unison
- Pursue personal power through whatever means necessary, ensuring that you aren't affected by such disasters in the future
- Prove that steam-powered mechcs are superior to magically powered ones (or vice versa)



- Restrict knowledge of mechs to those who can use it wisely
- Rise to a senior pilot position in the mech jockey hierarchy of the city-mechs
- Discover what lives in the endless engine rooms that power the city-mechs
- Prove that life on the surface is possible without the city-mechs
- Unravel the mystery behind the Pretominin Heads and the Great Standing Dwarf
- Hunt monsters, find treasure, and become a hero in this shattered world



## RACES IN DRAGONMECH

The standard races are well represented in the land of Highpoint. Though they have been traumatized by the world's collapse around them, none has been completely exterminated.

Although Shar Thizdic has used racial tensions and hate-filled rhetoric as a ploy to grab power, interracial interaction has actually grown since the lunar rain. The chaotic nature of the world frequently throws together adventurers who never would have met before. The city-mechs are far too concerned about recruiting those with useful skills to worry about race (although tall humans certainly have difficulties on the low-ceilinged dwarf mechs), and independent mech operators are no different. Prospectors and treasure-seekers take whoever does the best job, and life on the surface is more about who can help you survive than who has pointed ears.

This section describes the major races in **DragonMech** and the ways they interact.

### HUMANS

Historically, the humans of Highpoint have been nomads, and rather uncivilized nomads at that. The center of human "civilization" was the endless plains. Relative-

ly few natural obstructions, combined with well defined boundaries preventing outside invaders, made this the perfect realm for nomads; the open plains were protected from invasion by the steppes to the west, the forests to the north, the sea to the east, and the swamps to the south. Between the nomad tribes, however, no shortage of conflict existed. Human civilization has always been wild and malleable to begin with, with entire kingdoms rising and falling within a few short generations, and the endless plains are no exception. The many tribes bickered constantly over territory, resources, and prestige. The orc hordes that also walked the plains made for still more conflict. The few nonnomadic cultures retreated to impregnable fortress-cities that the combative nomads couldn't invade.

Now, however, the endless plains are decaying. With little shelter from the lunar rain, they are eroding with every passing night. The human cities were easy targets for the lunar dragons, and many have been battered into the ground, their remains used by some dragons as lairs. At the same time, brave humans survive in the tunnels and small places under the ruins. The ruined cities are still home to hundreds or thousands of refugees, who hide where the dragons can't reach them.

The nomadic tribes were not as vulnerable as the cities. They fared well against the lunar dragons, being last on their list of targets. As wanderers with no fixed shelters, they were hit hard by the lunar rain. The luckiest found caves, mountains, or forests on the plains, which they were soon forced to defend against endless waves of refugees. The less

fortunate had to travel hundreds of miles to the western steppes or northern forests, where some were accepted by the elven villages. Most died en route.

Humans living in other regions, such as the flatland, were less affected by the catastrophe. They were closer to underdeep havens, or on good terms with nearby dwarves, and fared better than their nomadic brethren. Many took shelter in the dwarven strongholds. There they forged life-long alliances, standing side by side with their dwarven hosts to defend against later waves of refugees.

Older human characters are likely to be embittered, cynical refugees. Their personal history includes constant flight or fight for the past fifty-odd years. They've never known peace, stability, or true safety, nor have their fathers or grandfathers. To them, the mechs aren't hope; the mechs are merely the latest in a string of refugees. They adventure solely for survival.

Younger humans, however, were born into this world. Never knowing anything else, they take it for granted. To them, the mechs are simply there — some friends, others enemies, but all merely aspects of the environment, like mountains or houses. It is these new generations of humans that have the greatest potential for reshaping Highpoint, for they make the most of what is there rather than try to return to the old ways. They adventure out of a sense of hope and possibility, searching for the innovations that will restore the world (or at least their tribe) to greatness.

Human characters may hail from the specialized nomad tribes of the endless plains, some of which confer special abilities and limitations. The wild Stavians are excellent riders, while the Wisps are stealthy forest dwellers. See page 157 for information on these tribes.

### DWARVES

Of all the races, the dwarves are the least affected by the catastrophes. Their underground homes were never in any danger from the lunar rain. The lunar







dragons were only a small threat; no large creature can fit very far into a dwarven tunnel. But the dwarves suffered mercilessly from the secondary effects of the catastrophes: When the surface dwellers looked for shelter from the lunar rain and dragons, they headed to the mountains. The dwarves were forced to defend their underground caves against almost every living surface-dweller in the world.

The dwarven kingdoms have been in a constant state of war for nearly a century. The more recent years have seen less violence, since most of the invaders are dead by now, and the development of mechs gives refugees another option. But the first few decades were horrible. Most dwarves now refer to these as the Years of the Blood Rain, for the invasions caused by the lunar rain spilled more dwarf blood than any other war or catastrophic event within memory.

During the Years of the Blood Rain, almost every dwarf household lost at least two thirds of its numbers. Some were exterminated entirely. Some mountaintop dwarven cities are now occupied entirely by humans, elves, and orcs. Some still have dwarven residents, who are the slaves of the current owners. Other cities have been successively occupied by wave after wave of invaders, each of which wipes out the preceding one. These “sanctuaries” from the lunar rain are testaments to its disruptive power.

Dwarven characters are likely stoic, tired defenders. After decades of invasion, they are distrustful of anyone who is unfamiliar, particularly if they are approached in their strongholds. To them, the mechs are a mixed blessing. They relieve the pressure on the dwarven kingdoms. At the same time, for those dwarves who now live in mechs, they represent the abandonment of thousands of years of dwarf stone-dwelling tradition. They adventure to escape their confines, search for new solutions, beat back the attackers who have threatened their way of life for so long, or free the dwarven cities that are still occupied by invaders.

The dwarven bonus to Craft checks related to metal applies to Craft (Mechcraft). Dwarves raised in mechs do not receive the stonecunning ability, but in its place receive a +2 bonus to Mech Pilot skill checks. The

dwarven bonuses in combat against giants, orcs, and goblinoids do not apply to combat with orc mechs. The bonus is due to generations of training in personal martial combat, not mech combat.

## ELVES

The elves were well protected by their dense forest realms, which shielded them from the lunar rain for some time. Although the forests were eventually worn down, they bought time for their residents.

Even so, the elves suffered hard. The elven lifespan is long, and their traditions are strongly cemented. While humans had short memories and several generations to adapt to a new world, and the dwarves at least retained the vestiges of their former realms, the elves have had every last woodland village utterly destroyed. Tens of thousands of years of advanced civilization have been reduced to a few portable libraries, the occasional rolled-up painting, and remembered songs. Humans give birth to children who never knew anything different, but barely half an elven generation has passed since the lunar rains began. Each and every living elf is painfully aware of all that has been lost. To make it all the worse, they are now forced to live in confined spaces, a condition which is anathema to the elven psyche. A deep sadness permeates elven society.

Nonetheless, elves welcome the mechs with open arms. From the perspective of those used to woodland groves and high forest homes, living in a tall, mobile mech is a monumental improvement over living underground. Although the mechs were invented by dwarves and developed by humans, the most advanced are the product of elven magic. They have taken the denuded ancestor trees that were once the centers of their villages and magically recrafted them into still-living mechs. These wooden mechs must root in the earth for one hour each day, but they are still far more powerful than any others, wielding barrages of fireballs and other spells at their fingertips. They carry with them the villages’ traditions.

Elven characters are sad and distant, but among all player character races they are the most hopeful. They have a seven-hundred-year lifespan — more than sufficient to use their mechs to eradicate the lunar dragons, use their magic to shield them from the lunar rain, and re-establish the culture they once had. They adventure with very long-term goals: to recover the artifacts and icons their villages lost, seek new sites to reroot their ancestor trees, establish alliances with others who would help them fight the lunar creatures, and find magical solutions to the world’s problems.

## GNOMES

The gnomes have suffered much as the dwarves have, with their underground burrows raided and used as shelters by other races. Unfortunately, the gnomes lack the extensive defenses of the dwarf kingdoms, and they have fared much worse. Despite their illusions, most gnomes were evicted from their burrows and forced to seek shelter elsewhere. Their burrows were then batted back and forth between successive invaders until the constant activity finally attracted the attention of the lunar dragons. Most gnome villages are now flattened wastes.

Although the dwarves invented the mechs and the humans developed them, gnomes actually constructed many of them. The few gnomes to survive their forcible displacement have been welcomed by mech crews, who deeply appreciate their technical prowess. They are less needed on the magically powered elf mechs, but most other mechs include a cadre of gnome technicians, and many gnome clans have traded their services for safety on a human or dwarven mech.

Gnomes are welcomed for another reason: They’re fun to be around. The gnomish sense of humor has sustained the race, and their jokes and pranks are welcome diversions in the bleak land of Highpoint. Of course, their jokes these days tend to be a little darker, but they still make people smile.

Gnomish adventurers are jovial tricksters, as they always have been, but at night, when



they're alone in their bedrolls, they silently weep for the clan members they have lost.

## HALF-ELVES

Half-elves on Highpoint have always had difficulty defining themselves. The radically different lifestyles of their two parents certainly never helped: The stable, ancient elves in their woodland towns lived a very different life from the whirling, wandering human nomads. Many half-elves split their time between their two cultures. Being from two races that respected one another, they were always accepted, even when they never belonged.

Each half-elf usually identified more strongly with one parent or the other and spent more time with that society, though he took pride in the accomplishments of both of his heritages. Now that the lunar rain has decimated the landscape, half-elves have, for the first time, had a chance to define their own identity as something other than a confused, misplaced mixture. Although it would be an enormous exaggeration to say that any half-elf actually appreciated the catastrophes, it is true that many have "found themselves" in the new world. As social structures which confused them have broken down, they have had less difficulty fitting into the newly reformed societies. They have flocked to the mechs, seeing the new culture as a place they can fit into from the start. Relative to their percentages in the overall population, half-elves are quite common in human and elven mech crews.

## HALF-ORCS

Orcs have always been despised by the other races of Highpoint, and half-orcs are unfortunately subject to similar disdain. They are accepted by no society, and most become wanderers or adventurers. The few who settle usually live with the tribes of their orc parents, where they are considered weaklings.

Half-orcs are found in mechs only as paying passengers (when their payment is high enough to overcome natural prejudices) or as slaves or laborers on an orc mech.

Half-orc characters are coarse, crude mercenaries, as they have always been. The lunar rain is a catastrophe for others, not them; since half-orcs were never fully accepted by either parent, they don't feel a deep sense of loss for what has been destroyed. Of all the races, the half-orcs are perhaps the best adjusted, for they took the least pride in what they were to begin with.

## HALFLINGS

The halflings of Highpoint never had a specific city or region to call their own, nor a civilization quite as advanced as that the elves lost. They settled everywhere and moved often; halfling neighborhoods existed in most human cities, throughout elven territory, in the halls of Duerok, and along the banks of the Endless River.

For many reasons, the halflings have adapted well to the catastrophes. First, their small size let them escape the lunar dragons easily. Many halfling communities were able to survive in the nooks and crannies beneath the rubble of cities destroyed by the dragons. Others became worm farmers. Unlike the larger races, they were not forced to battle for the underground homes of the dwarves and gnomes. Second, halflings are always quick to adapt to new opportunities, and they did so en masse after the catastrophes. Many became traders, scouts, guides, prospectors, and technicians.

Thus were born the "coglings": halfling laborers and technicians who tend to mechs. The huge, complex steam engines of the dwarven mechs require extensive maintenance, ranging from simple janitorial duties (cleaning off oil residues, monitoring wear and tear, etc.) to complex technical assignments (calibrating gears, checking pressure valves, etc.). Halflings can fit into smaller crevices than even the gnomes, and they were quick to recognize the utility of their size in the complicated regions of a dwarven

mech. Many halfling communities have now relocated to mechs, where they provide most of the unskilled and semiskilled labor required to keep the steam engines running. In many cases, these coglings are illicit stowaways unknown to the mech's leaders. In the most extreme cases, they have become feral gear-dwelling creatures, forgetting their heritage and living as perpetual stowaways in the harsh engines. (For more information on coglings, see page 183.)

Halfling adventurers are cynical, as are all the races, but not quite as jaded as others. After all, halflings see change as opportunity. Many halflings are now protected by the same mechs that protect the dwarves, gnomes, and humans, despite the halflings' absence in the innovation of such mechs. As usual, they have adapted rapidly and found places to support themselves.

## ADAPTING CLASSES TO DRAGONMECH

Most traditional classes can be easily integrated into **DragonMech**, although a few require adaptation.

### Barbarians

Barbarians have always been common, especially among the nomadic human tribes. Now, as new generations come of age in the rain-scalded world of Highpoint, they are even more common. Any character raised on the surface (in the rubble of old cities, in shallow cave complexes, or any other such area) is far more likely to be a barbarian than a fighter. Barbarians adventure to locate kin who were lost in the disasters, to acquire whatever vestiges of steam technology they can for their tribes, or because they have lost their tribes and have nothing left to go back to.

### Bards

In a world with little to hope for, bards are in high demand. They are welcome wherever they go for the diversions they provide. While



most survivors of the lunar rain are naturally suspicious of anyone or anything they encounter, the one exception to their suspicion is the bard. They'll wait to ask questions until *after* the bard performs, and if he performs well, they might never ask any questions. Bards adventure to piece together what bits of knowledge they can, hoping to uncover the ultimate secrets behind the lunar rain. Even while joking and singing, they pursue the big questions: Why did it happen? What is life like on the moon? How can this be stopped?

### Clerics

Few clerics have survived the catastrophes unscathed. The damage has been not to their

bodies (although many were killed) but to their faith. What sort of god would allow such disaster to befall his followers? Either the gods allowed such inexplicable disaster, which would make any follower question his own piety, or the gods did not allow the disaster, in which case they are ineffectual and lack the strength to stop whatever power *did* cause the disaster. Either way, a cleric's faith will be shaken, and many attribute their declining powers to these causes.

In reality, the old gods are being overrun by the lunar gods, particularly those of the lunar dragons. The physical interaction between

the moon and surface has given these gods a strong foothold in the affairs of the surface world. On other planes, they battle the old gods and are slowly overwhelming them.

Clerics in Highpoint must contend with the battles between their deities and the lunar gods. They receive spells only when their deities have the strength and divine focus to spare. Each day, after the cleric completes her hour of supplication, check to see if she receives spells. This is resolved with a Wisdom check against a base DC of 6. A roll of 1 always fails.

The base DC is modified as follows.

- For each day that the cleric did not receive spells, the DC on the following day is increased by 2.
- If on the previous day the cleric succeeded in a major defeat of the lunar gods or their allies and agents, in any way, the DC is decreased by 2.
- If on the previous day the cleric otherwise aided his deity in some significant way, such as completing a temple, founding a new sect, defeating an enemy cleric, or significantly enlarging an existing sect, the DC is decreased by 1.

