

Athasian Myths and Folk-Tales

In the absence of any real understanding of their history, the people of Athas have turned to folklore. The telling of ancient tales has become a way of passing wisdom down throughout the generations. The following tales are known by every Athasian child, and often referenced by adults as examples of wisdom best remembered.

In the Beginning — A Child's Tale

On the eve of the Age of Kings, Dragon destroyed the land, sea, and the sky. The sky was filled with stars, until Dragon swallowed most of them, leaving only the brightest. The sun was a brilliant yellow fire in the sky, until Dragon burnt it to a red ember. The sea was full of water, until Dragon sucked it dry and breathed dust into the place of the waters. The land was full of cities, trees, wells and grass, until Dragon began to gnaw, and it gnawed until almost none were left.

Gorged, Dragon lifted its head, and saw that a few cities, fields, and wells remained in distant pockets on the land. But as it reached out its claws to devour the last city, a great slumber came over the beast. Thanks to the power of the Seven Kings, it has slept for many ages, and will sleep for ages more, if you do not wake it with your crying about your hungry belly.

The Brothers — An Elven Tale

Two elven brothers returned from a hunt to find that their tribe had packed up and left them stranded in the desert. The water hole had only six days of water left, so the elder, stronger brother gathered the water into skins, and gave three days worth to his younger, weaker brother. With the water, they sprinted after the tracks of their tribe.

They travelled for four days, never catching up to their tribe. Each day, the younger, weaker brother drank his fill of water, while the older, stronger brother only drank half rations, looking with disapproval at his brother's gluttony. On the morning of the fourth day, as the younger brother drained the final drops from his water skins, the older brother finally spoke:

"It may be days more until we catch up to our tribe, brother. I have saved my water, though it cost me discipline and sacrifice. You have drunk your water and have no more. Now your gluttony will be your downfall."

"Not so, brother," replied the younger, drawing his dagger. "My water packs have been lighter the past three days, and my body is refreshed from its fill of water. You are tired from carrying your load, and weak from deprivation. Now I am the stronger..."

Throkat's Return — A Wizard's Tale

Some citizens of Balic tell an ancient legend about a foe of their sorcerer-king, Andropinis. A powerful wizard named Throkat spoke openly against the Dictator and his evils, yet managed to foil his templars at every turn. They never brought Throkat to justice before their master. The wizard continued this way for years, turning many to his side, inciting rebellion in the city and beyond its walls.

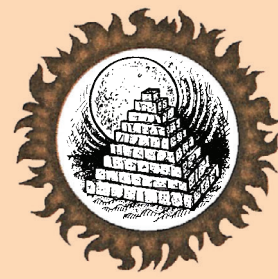
Then one day Throkat simply disappeared. Many who followed his teachings thought him dead. Others believed he may have reached a higher plane of existence - until exactly one year later he returned as suddenly as he had left. News of his return spread through the warrens like wildfire. His followers flocked to a bluff outside the city where he waited for them, shrouded.

But when all were assembled, he lifted the shroud away from his face. A panic swelled through the crowd. Throkat had changed - evil had taken over his body. No longer human, he had transformed into a horrid demon. At first the crowd recoiled; then they hurled the first stones. They destroyed the Throkat-monster and burned its remains in a pyre. Andropinis, it is said, looked on with great satisfaction.

Justified by this ancient myth, many Balicans today believe all magic outside the sorcerer-king's direction is fraught with evil. Those who practice it are doomed to bring tremendous evil down upon themselves and, consequently, on those nearby.

The Drunken Half-Giant — A Cautionary Tale

In a village south of Raam lived a half-giant named Junnai, a youth of great size whose sole love was ale. His fellows knew him as a drunkard. But the pleasant half-giant pulled his weight in a fight, so no one bothered him about his constant inebriation - no one but his brother, Trundai.



"Stop your drunken ways, brother," Trundai said.

But Junnai replied, "I drink two tankards of ale at the inn every evening, brother. And I shall do so until the inn runs dry!"

"Then at least cut down, dear brother, and drink but one this evening," Trundai suggested.

Out of love for his brother, Junnai agreed. That evening he drank just one tankard of his beloved ale before heading home. But when an elven runner found Junnai sitting, sobbing along the road back to his village, he stopped briefly to enquire.

"Normally I can find my way by taking the middle road of the three blurry roads I see," Junnai said. "But this evening I drank but one tankard of ale, so I see only two fuzzy roads before me."

"I see," said the elf. "I can help you see the third road, friend. Here, drink this." The elf handed Junnai a bottle of brew. The half-giant quickly and gratefully downed the elf's gift, squinted along his path, and continued home.

The next morning, Trundai searched for the missing Junnai. He found him face down on the road, poisoned, his possessions stolen, the tracks of an elf all around.

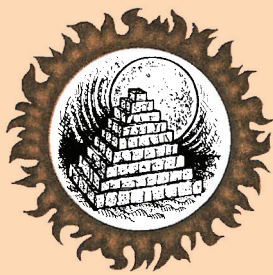
Drake and Maiden — A Tale of Wisdom

Outside Makla stands a temple ruin, burned during one of many elven attacks. All that remains is the charred statue of the small sect's founder. Worshippers abandoned the temple, all save one, an old man of great wisdom. When he died, his daughter continued to visit the temple daily out of respect. One day, as she visited, a great sand storm blew up. Hating to see the statue damaged further, she wrapped her own shawl around it while waiting out the storm.

A drake happened by, and (as this was back in the days when drakes were quite intelligent and polite) he stopped to observe. When the storm let up, he inquired of the daughter, "Damsel, why do you give your own robes to the image, an image of simple stone, that cannot feel the sting of air borne sands?"

The daughter was startled but composed herself before replying, "If it were but stone, mighty drake, then how could it answer my prayers and those of my father?"





Athasian Myths and Folk-Tales

Never had the drake heard such wisdom, not even from the spirits that counselled it. The drake returned often to visit the daughter on her daily trips, and in time came to love her. So taken was he that he sought out a wizard to alter his form. Then he went to visit the daughter as a human. The daughter shared his love, and the two founded a village of their own beyond the mountains. Their offspring, it is said, share the wisdom of their mother and the ferocious strength of their father. To this day, any child who displays both attributes is termed a “drake’s child”.

Arkhold’s Devastation — A Fool’s Tale

The dwarves of Balic say the ruins of Arkhold were once a farming village. Its troubles started in a Year of Priest’s Vengeance, when Thorlin, a ruler of uncommon power and cruelty, claimed to hear “the high voices from the moons.” He said the two moons, Ral and Guthay, commanded him to visit them and receive their wisdom.

Thorlin flew into the sky with a magical device of some kind - variously, a jozhal-drawn chariot, a net carried by air elementals, or (one of the most bizarre touches in Athasian mythology) a spoon.

He returned a year later with “a wild and burning eye.” Thorlin urged the villagers to burn their crops in great bonfires, then sacrifice all livestock. This, he said, would bring prosperity to the village. So it was done. After the devastating famine that followed, survivors left for all parts of Athas. Nothing remains of the village of Arkhold now, except ruins. So say the dwarves of Balic.

Uncle Tontor — A Wyrms’ Tale

Elf merchants around the Lost Oasis believe (or claim to believe) that no one has ever seen young or small silk wyrms. No one, they say, has ever seen them breed or reproduce, despite repeated (usually fatal) attempts. The mystery has prompted many tales. One concerns Old Uncle Tontor, a mythical old human known for nosiness about other people’s affairs. As the elves tell it, Tontor grew curious to learn how silk wyrms reproduce. None too bright, he tried to disguise himself as one, dyeing his skin green and wearing limp cloth wings.

Then he crept out to a fearsome, deep cavern where wyrms roosted. Uncle Tontor entered the cavern, trying as far as possible to look and sound like a wyrm. His bumbling attempts attracted the attention of King Snakewing (in village folklore, monarch of the wyrms). Ordinarily the wyrms would have killed the old man on the spot. But King Snakewing had recently fed well on a hundred humans and was feeling tolerant. He ordered his minions to carry the old man away into the sky.

Despite the human’s whining protests, ‘a hundred silken snakes’ lifted Uncle Tontor and carried him to the moon Guthay. There Uncle Tontor saw that the moon was really a colossal egg, from which all the silk wyrms hatched, fully-grown. Then the wyrms deposited Uncle Tontor unceremoniously on the underside of Athas. (Elven folklore once held that Athas is flat.) He had to swing hand-over-hand to the edge of the world, crawl up over the side and walk all the way home. His journey lasted a whole King’s Age, 77 years.

When Tontor arrived in the village, even older and more irascible than before, his descendants did not recognise him. Always nosy, Uncle Tontor asked them, “What happened to your renowned ancestor, the great Tontor?”

They replied, “What, that old coot? Our grandparents said he went mad and thought he’d turned into a snake. He slithered into the hills, and nobody ever saw him again.”

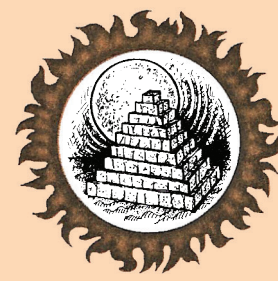
Brothers and Champions — A Hero’s Tale

Many decades past, a noble family of Urik presented twin sons to the sorcerer-king Hamanu.

“Use these children as you see fit, lord,” said their mother, “and may all your campaigns be glorious.”

Hamanu took the children and sent them to be trained for combat. Years passed, and the boys grew to men. But Hamanu wanted no rivalries in his ranks, so he ordered the pair to fight to the death. The stronger would lead his armies. And one clearly was the stronger, more learned in spear and lance than his twin. But the impending duel made his heart heavy, and he devised a plan.

The stronger brother sought out a wizard in the wilderness and paid handsomely for his services. The wizard performed two spells. First, he charmed the weaker



brother, erasing his memory. The stronger put his brother on a caravan bound for Raam, forever out of his life but away from harm. Second, the wizard cast an illusion on a simple gith. Hamanu witnessed the stronger brother killing his weaker brother and was satisfied, though in truth only a gith had lost its life.

The stronger brother became the leader of Hamanu's armies, and in time he all but forgot the brother he had saved. Years later in a war against Raam, the stronger brother led his triumphant host to the gates of that city. Around it massed an army of slaves and undead, but Hamanu called for combat by champions. The stronger brother rode out on his armoured crodlu, and to meet him rode a champion covered in the black chitin armour of his city.

When the other champion removed his helmet, the stronger brother looked in shock upon his twin's face.

He saw no recognition in his brother's eyes - the wizard's magic still held his memory. In his ear, the stronger brother heard Hamanu's voice saying:

"You have deceived me once, but I will let you live. Twice I shall not tolerate."

On the blast of the mekillot horn, battle was joined. The stronger brother ran his twin through, letting blood and his own tears nourish the desert sands.

Hamanu's Hunter — A Tale of Mercy

As the templars of Urik tell it, centuries ago, a templar of tremendous wisdom served King Hamanu. As a judge in the sorcerer-king's court, the templar Xamres, established a code of justice that still governs Urikite templars.

In one case, the first son of the noble family Kronn, a youth named Rotlees, had a fondness for hunting and a blatant disregard for authority. So headstrong was he that he often entered Hamanu's gardens to hunt game birds. Hamanu was furious, but wished no trouble with the house of Kronn, so he ordered Xamres to set things right.

Xamres pondered for a time, then sent guards to arrest Rotlees when he entered the gardens. When the guards brought Rotlees forward for sentencing, the wise templar said:

"Poaching in the king's gardens is prohibited, young Rotlees, even for you. The normal punishment is death!"

The boy quaked in his sandals.

"However," Xamres continued, "the prolific game birds of the gardens are getting out of hand, spoiling its beauty. Therefore, I sentence you, Rotlees, to continue your hunting in the gardens for the rest of your natural life."

All sides liked the solution, and Rotlees joyously carried out his sentence. In time, the duties passed to the second son of each generation in the Kronn family. Each became a hunter and a personal retainer of Hamanu himself.

The Three-Sun People — A Tale of Betrayal

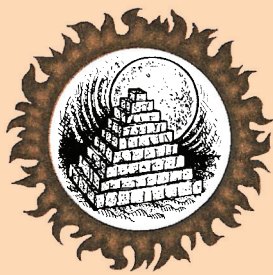
There was a time, the kreen believe, when Athas was not as it is today, when the world was green and blue and basked in the rays of three golden suns, known as the Three-Sun People. They were a trio of great warriors, noble rulers and wise weavers of sorceries to protect the green and blue world.

One day discord came amongst them and the Three-Sun People fell to fighting. Two of them betrayed the third and tried to steal his power, leaving him alone and lost in the darkness. But their brother was far more cunning than they and he knew that, whatever the evil deeds of the heart, the elements of the living world see all, know all and judge all.

In his piety, the third of the Three-Sun People turned to the sacred elements for aid. They answered his call and rewarded his devotion to their principles. With their assistance, he was able to vanquish his two brothers and threw them at the feet of the elements for judgement.

The sentence of the elements was harsh. They stripped the two betrayers of their powers and bestowed them upon their brother. The two were banished to the darkness, becoming rulers of the night. To their brother was given the day and henceforth Athas would have but one sun, and two lesser orbs to illuminate the night sky.

But their judgement was not without irony. Unaccustomed to wielding so much power, the single sun was unable to control himself. Even now, he can only look on in horror as, day by day, he parches the world he so much loves, and night by night, his brothers bask in cool silence, revered for the hard-earned wisdom that they bring. Such is the judgment of the elements.



Athasian Myths and Folk-Tales



Gotho's Dealings — A Tale of Cunning

It is said that a templar's ambitions are every bit as large and hidden as Dragon's lair. A thief who penetrates that lair can gain great power. When the templar Junithu of Nibenay sought the services of the entertainer Gotho the Inestimable, the latter accepted graciously. He stayed at the templar's house for many days, performing for her family and guests.

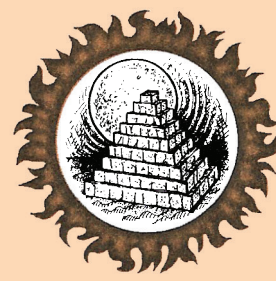
Then Junithu sent Gotho as a gift to the merchant house of Ryol. The Ryol house accepted Gotho into their compound. He carried his lute, his costumes, and his orders to steal the great Star Ruby, a gem of great price recently brought in by a caravan from the north. Master Ryol, though, was no fool, and he confronted Gotho about his mission. Gotho refused to talk — that is, until Ryol offered a price better than Junithu's, and then the truth flowed like precious water. Ryol made a counterproposal, that Gotho return to Junithu's house and assassinate her.

Upon presenting the body, Master Ryol promised a fortune in silver and jewels. Two days later, a large package arrived in the Ryol compound. Master Ryol opened it in private to find the corpse of the templar Junithu within. Later that night, he met with Gotho, presented the entertainer with his rewards and an escort to leave the city. But the next morning, a living Junithu, flanked by several guards, presented herself at Ryol's gates. Flabbergasted, Master Ryol fled to his chambers, only to find that the package contained the dead body of one of the Shadow King's concubines — the illusion placed on it had worn off.

Guards kept Ryol and Junithu from flying at each other's throats, but accusations flew. They brought suit against one another in Nibenay's royal court. The sorcerer-king, wanting to be certain he punished the guilty party, decided to execute them both. Gotho the Inestimable did not return to Nibenay for many years.

The Brown Elf

Ledopolitan elders maintain that several generations ago, a village woman bore a child whose intellect was vast beyond his years and whose mental powers were accordingly strong.



While still a babe, he spoke every language and gained a mischievous mastery of telekinesis. Of course, he did this all as an unwanted orphan - born to a human mother and a long-departed elven father, the half-elf boy appropriately found no love in the village, living on scraps of garbage and what he could steal.

One day, an intolerant shopkeeper, no doubt a recent victim of one of the boy's pranks, sought the strongest psionics in the village to control the adolescent. But the entire village went wide-eyed with panic when the boy dealt back more than he took, even from the greatest masters in Ledopolus.

Enraged, the boy turned his youthful anger full-force on the villagers, killing and maiming, lashing out with all the ferocity that fifteen years of scorn had burned into him. Those he didn't kill he enslaved, controlling their minds to do his wicked bidding.

But within the month, a stranger appeared at the edge of town, a shrouded elf whose brown wrappings indicated loyalty to no tribe. The elf made no sound, yet the half-breed boy sensed him and appeared. Their mental struggle took only an instant. Then the stranger left, leaving behind the shattered village, its newly awakened (and very confused) inhabitants, and the corpse of the evil half-elf boy.

Thankful, the villagers sent out their fastest riders to reward the solitary elf, but they never found nor heard from him again.

Proverbs of the Tablelands

"The beast snarls. The snake hisses. The stranger smiles. Take warning!"

"Birth is painful. Life is short. Death endures."

"You cannot quench the hunger of a fire, the thirst of a desert, or the greed of a templar."

"The cut worm forgives the plough."

"The locusts share no king, yet the desert trembles before their bands."

"The spider takes hold with her hands, and spins her webs in kings' palaces."

"As one who binds a stone into a sling, so is the one who gives honour to a weakling."

"Better to be clever than to be thought clever."

"Spit boldly in the slave's face, but spit quietly into the templar's footprints."

"Judge not a quarrel between your betters."

"The elements reclaim us all, but better you than me."

"An open wound invites hungry flies."

Local History of the Tablelands

Although each city-state and merchant house has its own calendar, the most commonly used is the Calendar of Kings, which divides the passage of the years into King's Ages of 77 years each. You don't know how many King's Ages there have been - you think at least fourteen and possibly as many as twenty.

Each year in each King's Age has its own name. The names of the years are determined by the cycles of Athas' moons. Each King's Age begins with the Year of Ral's Fury and ends with the Year of Guthay's Agitation. It is currently the Year of Priest's Defiance, the 26th year of the current King's Age.

The best historical records in the Tablelands belong to the merchant dynasties. The oldest of these - the *Shom Codex* - details the rise of the House of Shom from Nibenay over the course of a millennium. From the *Shom Codex* come a number of historical details about Athas.

14 King's Ages Ago

Year of Friend's Slumber (1,058 years before present)

House Shom is first noted in the records of Nibenay, where it is described as a small house with a few secure trade routes and little ambition. It is noted that the Shadow King is ruler of Nibenay during this time, meaning that he has been alive for over a thousand years.

11 King's Ages Ago

Year of Enemy's Defiance (819 years before present)

House Shom engages in an aggressive trade war with other merchant houses in the region, with aid from mercenary bands of thri-kreen and belgoi. Within a few months, it rises to a position of great prominence and power throughout the Tablelands.

Year of Silt's Defiance (798 years before present)

Tarandas of Raam, a powerful psion and teacher throughout the Tyr Region, disappears without a trace. Her students insist she has ventured beyond her mastery of the Way into realms unseen by lesser beings. Before her disappearance, Tarandas codified disparate methods of studying psionics into a single system that uses the five disciplines we know today. She is therefore one of the foremost architects of modern Athasian society.

7 King's Ages Ago

Year of Enemy's Vengeance (555 years before present)

The first Veiled Alliance is reported in the city-state of Tyr. Legend claims that it was founded by a wizard who studied psionics under King Kalak of Tyr.

Year of Ral's Defiance (553 years before present)

House Tsalaxa is founded in the city-state of Drax. The family claims that it was formed by a mage whose only aides were a cadre of loyal half-giants.

Year of Guthay's Fury (543 years before present)

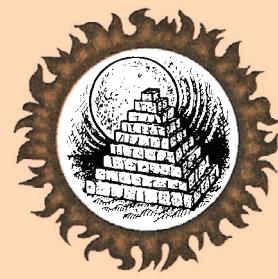
The *Shom Codex* notes that druids are seen once again in the Tablelands. It does not explain why this is noteworthy or where the druids might have been prior to this.

4 King's Ages Ago

Year of Enemy's Agitation (313 years before present)

House Stel is formed in Urik by a small group of gladiators and warriors, led by a soldier of fortune called Korvo Stel. The new merchant house enjoys the support of the Lion of Urik, allowing it to flourish in a relatively short space of time. Before long, House Stel is seen as little more than an extension of Hamanu's will.

Local History of the Tablelands



Year of Desert's Fury (298 years before present)

House Inika is formed in the city-state of Gulg when one of its agents breaks his oath, leaving House Riben and forming Inika on his own. By trading in small, fast cargoes and undercutting its older rivals, the new House Inika soon forges a place for itself amongst the other merchant families, winning a reputation for speed and mercantile prowess.

Year of King's Slumber (260 years before present)

Kalak of Tyr sends a small army to loot the long-deserted ruins of Kalidnay. The expedition returns with much treasure and wealth, the majority of which Kalak squanders on his forthcoming ziggurat. It is notable, however, that some 160 years pass before Kalak begins construction on his ziggurat in Tyr. Some suspect that Kalak spent this time deciphering magical lore and ancient secrets taken from the ruins of Kalidnay.

3 King's Ages Ago

Year of Wind's Vengeance (219 years before present)

House Wavir is formed in Balic, founded by a former adventurer who uses wealth looted from ancient ruins to finance the house's growth. It soon becomes one of the premier trading houses of the city-state.

Year of Ral's Vengeance (212 years before present)

An elf named Rimmon discovers a powerful weapon in the ruins of Bodach - purportedly the sword of an ancient warlord responsible for the sack of that city. Rimmon uses its power to lead her bandit tribe against the city-state of Balic. She is easily defeated by Andropinis, however, and the weapon is again lost.

I King's Age Ago

Year of Priest's Slumber (99 years before present)

Kalak begins construction on his ziggurat, using loot plundered from the ruins of Kalidnay.

Year of King's Agitation (40 years before present)

Much of the city-state of Balic is devastated and many of its templars vanish. Survivors claim that the Dragon woke from his slumber and rampaged throughout the region, until sorcerer-king Andropinis was able to lay him to rest once more.

Current King's Age

Year of Friend's Vengeance (2 years before present)

An obsidian giant rampages through the streets of Urik, causing considerable devastation. Called the Obsidian Man by the shocked Urikites, it disappears into the desert, without any explanation for its origins or actions.

Year of Priest's Defiance

As Kalak's ziggurat nears completion, trade from Tyr dwindles - including iron. Tyr's economy collapses as countless slaves are diverted from their usual tasks to labour on the ziggurat. The other cities of the Tablelands are displeased, unable to obtain precious iron for themselves. Kalak ignores their protests. War cannot be far off.



Ancient History

The Green Age

What Came Before

Legend holds that Athas has many ages, stretching back even further than the Green Age. No history endures to tell of such eras, however – assuming that there is any truth to the legends. Whatever realms existed in those long-lost days have receded beyond the recollection of even our most ancient forebears.

The Golden Sun

Though few on Athas believe it to be so, the wisest of scholars know that the sun was a different colour in ancient times. It was a golden orb and shone from a sky of startling blue. Frescoes and inscriptions in rare tomes all depict this, and it is attested by accounts of the world in former days.

The Green World

Not only was the sun golden, but its heat was far less than the simmering inferno of the dark sun we know today. Under its kinder rays, Athas was a world of vast forests, sweeping grasslands, winding rivers, and oceans of glittering water so immense that even the most keen-eyed elf could not see the far side. In this verdant world, countless species of beast and bird flourished, and many races now lost to us made their home in harmony with one another.

The Great Cities Rise

Great cities were founded in those days. Chief among these were Tyr, Bodach, and Giustenal. Tyr, lying in the arms of the Ringing Mountains, was built on the confluence of two great rivers. A tribe of elves led families of humans to that place, and the rivers were named in honour of the elves' kindness. Bodach became a centre of great learning and wisdom, surrounded by shining lakes, and Giustenal, white-walled and beautiful, looked out over the waters of the Sunrise Sea.

The Lost Gods

From these days come to us tales of the ancient gods. They do not answer our prayers now, but many are the stories of their kindness, their wisdom, their love for their peoples. We do not know why the gods deserted us – or why we deserted them – but their temples stand empty now and their prayers are silent. Only the most ancient of the undead still know their names.

The Will and the Way

The Green Age is famous for the spread of psionics across the land. In this time arose the first great academies and all creatures grew to know some degree of psychic power. Psionics allowed civilisation to reach incredible heights of sophistication in those days – heights that have never been seen since.

The Great Kreen Migration

At the height of the Green Age, thri-kreen began to appear in the Tablelands, migrating from an unknown realm to the west. At first they were welcomed, particularly in Tyr. But over time, their welcome wore thin. Eventually, the ruler of Urik began to persecute them and ordered the death of all kreen within his city. Most thri-kreen abandoned the cities of the Tablelands and took to dwelling in the wilderness. The migration from the west ceased, leaving the kreen of the Tablelands isolated from whatever land they once called home.

The Rise of Magic

The golden sun finally set on this age of verdant wonder when a new supernatural force appeared in the land. This was the ability to tap the energy of the living world itself – the ability to command magic. With its appearance, everything changed.

Ancient History

The Time of Magic

What Came Before

Before magic became commonplace on Athas, the world was dominated by psionics – the Will and the Way. Under its aegis, great civilisations flourished and many races now lost to us lived together in peace and prosperity. The discovery of magic changed all that.

The Cabals of the West

History does not record with any precision where magic came from, or who first brought it into the world. However, we do know that it first appeared in the western cities of the Tablelands, being wielded by cabals of men and women who came from the Hinterlands to the far west. Many of these cabals were hunted and slain out of fear of this new form of power. But, once released, the mystery could not be sealed away again.

The Doom of Celik

Celik was a great city of the south, one of the jewels of the Green Age. As word of magic spread to its rulers, it is said that they felt fear in their hearts and sought to enhance their psionic powers in order to withstand the coming changes in the world. Whatever the truth of it, their desires spelled disaster for their city. An eruption of psychic power devastated Celik, slaying all but a few of its inhabitants and leaving much of the city in ruins. For many, this signalled the end of the age of peace. All knew that dark days were on the horizon.

The Prophet of the Pale Tower

In the east of the Tablelands, a prophet emerged from the wilderness and began to preach the benefits of magic. He established a great school at a place known as the Pale Tower and here he began to teach the ways of wizardry to his adherents.

At first, the powers of magic seemed to be similar to psionics in many ways – abilities that produced esoteric results. But soon a darker side to sorcery made itself known. If not handled with care, magic could damage the world. This phenomenon became known as Defiling.

The Defilers

Wizards who tapped the land without due care drew more energy from it than they could return, causing an imbalance that slew plant life and turned good soil to ash. But many did not seem to care about the damage that their reckless use of sorcery dealt to Athas. These defilers longed only for the sudden rush of power, the ease with which magic answered their will. And, by slow degrees, Athas began to die.

The White Jihad

The people of Athas soon grew distrustful of all spellcasters – both those who were defilers and those who called themselves preservers and wove their spells with caution. People cared not for the distinction between preserver and defiler – all magic was seen as suspect. The masters of the Will and the Way preached that sorcery was an abomination upon the world, and most Athasians were only too glad to listen to them.

The preservers soon found that they had other concerns, as they began to be hunted and slain by defilers in great numbers. Attacks on the schools of magic that had sprung up across Athas became commonplace and preservers realised that a battle was being fought for control of magic itself – a battle that they could not hope to win. Their careful methods were no match for the wanton destruction of the defilers. And so the preservers of Athas fled into hiding... or were slain. Even psionics was no match for the fury of the defilers. For better or worse, Athas now belonged to them.



Ancient History

The Defiling

What Came Before

It is said, in the eras before the Defiling changed Athas forever, that the sun was a golden orb shining in blue heavens. The lands were bountiful, the oceans vast, the riches of the earth without measure. The Defiling changed that, however. The golden sun burned to a bloody cinder and the green world died.

The Crimson Sun

History does not speak of why the sun changed. Legends say that the Dragon was responsible, burning it to an ember in his ageless hunger. None know the truth. What is known, however, is that the changing of the sun was but the first of many cataclysms to befall Athas. And with these cataclysms came war.

The Great Wars

For over a thousand years, these wars raged. Great armies, each led by a powerful sorcerer, swept across the face of Athas, destroying the realms of the old races. Creatures the like of which have never been seen on Athas since were eradicated to the last, existing now only in fanciful carvings and half-remembered folklore. So mighty were the magics unleashed in these conflicts that Athas itself suffered. The world split, eruptions of magma spilling forth. Cities died. Kingdoms fell. The Sunrise Sea boiled away, becoming an ocean of silt.

The Great Cities Fall

The great cities of Ebe, Waverly, and Arala were swallowed by the expanding silt, though later it receded from Waverly. The nearby city of Bodach was spared, but became surrounded by silt in a series of vast lagoons. Bodach was sacked soon after by the warlord Irikos, becoming a haunt-infested ruin. All who did not escape the sack of the city joined its undead inhabitants, bound there in eternity.

The Dead Lands

To the south, a further catastrophe struck and from the elemental planes a vast wave of obsidian erupted into the world. It engulfed all of the southern realms, becoming an immense plain of black glass. All who were caught in its flow perished.

The Last War

The Carvings of Kothak, inscribed on the walls of the ruins of Kemalok record that, in the Year of Desert's Vengeance, a great war was fought between the dwarves and a warlord known only as the Butcher. This war came to its conclusion at Kemalok itself, then the capital of the last dwarf realm. There, the last dwarven king, Rkard, slew the Butcher in personal combat, but perished from his wounds, the Butcher's sword - the Scourge - embedded in his chest.

Rkard was buried with the Scourge, his crown, and his holy Belt of Rank. With his passing, Kemalok fell into ruin and the realms of the dwarves were broken. Legend says that all dwarves tore out their own hair in grief at his death, and have been hairless ever since. Rkard's sacrifice was not in vain, however. This great battle signalled the end of the Defiling.

With Athas broken, its kingdoms shattered, its peoples decimated, the surviving cities - and history numbered them twelve, though only seven now remain - fortified themselves and dared to hope for a chance to recover.

No such hope was answered. For in the wake of the Defiling, the Sorcerer-Monarchs arose.



Ancient History

The Age of Kings

What Came Before

An age of horror known as the Defiling had laid waste to Athas. War, cataclysm, and global devastation had turned the world into a desert, a cinder scorched by the rays of an unforgiving dark sun. Out of the aftermath of these wars, the surviving cities were besieged, occupied, or simply surrendered to the figures we know as the Sorcerer-Monarchs.

The Sorcerer-Monarchs

Some claimed to be deities incarnate on the world of Athas. Others insisted that they spoke for higher powers that still watched over Athas from afar. Others appeared simply to be men and women of immense power. Although they now number seven, the old tales tell us that twelve such figures emerged from the smoke and fury of the Defiling to lay claim to the twelve surviving cities of Athas, which they barricaded against the rampages of the Dragon.

The Dragon

It is from these years that the worst tales of the Dragon's depredation come. Like a mad beast, it roamed the Tablelands, devouring and destroying all in its path. Only the powers of the Sorcerer-Monarchs were able to keep it at bay. Only those in the great cities were safe from its hunger. By this transaction - safety for fealty - the Sorcerer-Monarchs cemented their rule.

When Gods Die

With the Dragon held at bay, the Sorcerer-Monarchs turned their eyes on each other. The city-state of Giustenal was the first to fall, and Yaramuke soon followed. Hamanu of Urik slew the sorcerer-queen of Yaramuke in personal combat and then led his armies to sack her city. Hamanu carried great riches out of Yaramuke, leaving the desert to claim it.

The Eradication

The druids of Athas began to preach against the Sorcerer-Monarchs, naming them defilers and saying that they were to blame for much of the ills that had befallen the world. In response, the Sorcerer-Monarchs declared all druids anathema and sent their templars to hunt them down. The great druid circles of the Tablelands were destroyed and the druids fled from the Tablelands, only returning a thousand years later.

The Teaching of Ka'Cha

Glimmers of hope remained in the Tablelands in these dark days and the most notable of these came from the thri-kreen Ka'Cha. This prophet spent his entire life travelling the Tablelands spreading teachings of peace and enlightenment to all the races of Athas. These teachings became the foundation of several monastic orders that endure to this day.

The Destruction of Kalidnay

Twelve hundred years ago, the last city-state to fall met its end. Kalidnay, home to the mighty Kalid-Ma, suffered a cataclysm that slew every single one of its inhabitants and left the streets filled with corpses. Only a shattered ziggurat, standing silent over the ruins, gave any hint as to what might have happened here.

Tarandas

Tarandas of Raam was the foremost psion of her age, a great teacher and innovator. Under her tutelage, the disparate psionic disciplines of the Tablelands were united under a single approach - the Tarandan method. This gave us the system of disciplines and powers still used across Athas. Although Tarandas vanished - ascending into higher planes, her followers said - her legacy shaped Athas as we know it today.