YARTHE: EUROPA AND THE WESTERN ISLES

Yarthe exists as an alternate Earth, though it does not have precisely the same history or geography. Some will be familiar, some will not - the disruption caused by the burgeoning Industrial Revolution across western Europa is complicated by the import of poorly understood magical artefacts from the technomancers of the Taiga; centres of learning in the Middle East include magical universities that have been there for centuries, studying the natural world and the magic inherent in it; legends of Atlantis refer to a real island city, built and peopled by elves, which sank into the sea in a monstrous cataclysm some few centuries ago.



Europa is the self-acknowledged centre of the civilised world (at least if one asks anyone living in Europa). Politically, the region consists of a collection of more or less independent city-states, each controlling the local area around a major city, sometimes including a few satellite villages as well as farmland and hunting estates. In between the city-states, the roads are maintained - more or less - for use by stage coach services, and there are a few stage coach stations and smallholdings along those arteries; a few fortified monasteries and temples also hold their own, independent of the governing city-states, and others consider themselves to be allied satellites of some of the city-states. There are periodic attempts by bandits and ne'er-do-wells to set up feudal lordships in these areas, although few of them last, but travel between the city-states is dangerous and difficult.

As a result of the increasing wealth of the various city-states, directly resulting from the burgeoning industrial revolution, there has been increased public spending on art, science, and literature in most major centres. Political types talk about the Enlightenment, a great Cultural Re-awakening, but much of it is less cultural than technological; those same politicians and noble houses are eagerly investing in the first railways and the new airship services enabled by trade with the technomancers, hoping to increase their own wealth as they do so.

Country folk still tell stories of the fae, of demons and dragons, although educated men no longer believe in such tales. They are not entirely correct to do so.

West of Europa lie the Western Isles, inhabited mainly by fierce Pictish tribes - and dragons. For the most part, the dragon clans make their lairs among the smaller islands further west, but some do lair in the more inaccessible places on the larger islands. Some even take the form of humans or elves, and use the old elvish villas - left over from the elvish presence in the Western Isles before the fall of Rome - or build themselves new mansions or castles as lairs.

There is one remaining Elvish community on the isles, in the south of the largest island, is called Caer Maugglyn. Legend has it that the town was founded by a man who was the child of a white dragon and a red dragon, though that may be simply legend. Whatever the truth, dragons do visit this community, taking on elvish form to do so, and the elves who study magic there know secrets that other magicians across Europa do not. They also make very fine wines and ciders, which are very occasionally traded east to the city-states of Europa.

Further west there is only open ocean, although sailors tell stories of mythical islands in the deep ocean where faeries and fish-people live. There are also always stories about the lost city of the Elves, the great Shining City which the Elves call Mu, but humans know as Atlantis.