

The Place of the Silent Circle in Tuluki Society:

Posted on all Tuluki High Society boards (nobles and templarate) but posted here as well for posterity:

The various bards of Tuluk, collectively known as The Silent Circle, are in their limited numbers, very respected members of society. Long gone are the days of every last performer being inducted into the Silent Circle - it is now where the elite of the bards are located, as opposed to the common rabble of bards, of which there are a great many. They are seen as a source of wisdom, often of very sound advice, and they are one of the few groups in Tuluk who are **allowed as well as expected** to speak truth to power.

The bards, while patriotic, are often very neutral in their standings - with the exception of those which are under the direct auspices of patronage. This neutral stance and placement is advantageous to the Faithful and Chosen as well as the citizenry of His Ivory... the citizens feel comfortable speaking to members of the Silent Circle and confiding in them for advice, and the Faithful can be seen counting on them for opinions and advice as well, due to their boots-on-the-ground informed nature.

A mistake that is common to a few Faithful and Chosen out of every generation is to treat unaligned bards as defacto free aides or even slaves. These Faithful and Chosen have invariably either figured out the errors of their ways, or had sharp downturns in their reputations and ability to operate or pursue their own desires. With the bardic community being so small, and them being so tight knit, words of mistreatment spread like wildfire. The Driamusek slip rumors to the Chosen who's children they help raise, informing them of mistreatment, which causes contracts and assistance to dry up. Groot and Rusarla bards mention issues of mistreatment openly to the populace (as is their job to do so) which causes the citizenry to become much more cooperative with **other** Faithful or Chosen. Contacts and options dry up like an open black leather waterskin left out at mid day on top of the Shield Wall.

Some pertinent points to mention:

- If you want a bard to do something for you - it should be done as a request, not an order. These are respected members of the community, and very useful allies.
- If a bard does do something for you, payment should be rendered. This is true whether you are their patron or not.
- Seekers and full Bards especially should be treated well. These individuals have proven themselves already as skilled and useful. Apprentices can be expected to be hazed a bit, but it should always come with a reward at the end. If displeased, Seekers can make advancement and contacts difficult, and full Bards or Masterbards can absolutely wreck a career.
- The Silent Circle should actively be employed as diplomatic forces towards outsiders or distrusted insiders. They are a very effective force of informational control. If a Faithful

or a Chosen wants to find something out from an external faction, and they do not have an assistant or someone they patron, a bard is an excellent choice -- the importance of reputation to the bardic culture almost assures they'll do the best they can and take every possible route to success.

- Remember above all - Bards are not just singers and dancers and storytellers. They are influencers, they are rumor mills, they are movers and shakers that are well mannered and often have reach where even Faithful power can not go. They are potent allies, respected members of society, and often have criminal or external contacts that can filter in a lot of clutch information

Please treat them as such.

You're all doing a great job getting Tuluk off the ground as a xenophobic, hardass city state that can easily toe-to-toe with the Ancient Enemy Allanak. There are bound to be some growing pains with a reintroduction of a complex system (recently reworked) such as Tuluk is. It will be **very easy** to fall back into old patterns since we've all only had Allanak High Society for the last 6 RL years. Do your best to remember how different Tuluk is, and to reinforce it at every possible moment. The patronage system is **awesome** and very distinctly different from Allanaki aide system. If you're rusty, review it when you can, and help keep this culture moving forward by making the proper waves.

This message is being posted to all Tuluki High Society boards.

The Coming of Ruk's Wrath:

Tuluk closed her gates, and the exiling of the Known World began. Bards of all types took part, with every single one of them, by deed or by word, having blood on their hands for the removal of malcontents and non-citizens.

Eventually things calmed down. Every single living humanoid within His City had a star of some sort on its hand, or had been burnt or pushed down for use as fertilizer. Things went well for a while.

And then Ruk's Wrath came. The Uaptal theatre was packed with over a thousand bards, and an equal amount of commoners and chosen. Part way through a famous play about a gortok, the ground began to groan, and before anyone could think to escape, many were thrown to the ground. Stone benches broke off of their supports, trapping people below, others were slain by falling masonry or collapsing doorways. Some survivors, of which there were exceedingly few, said that in some cases the ground literally opened up and swallowed people whole.

The destruction levelled most of Poet's Circle, taking whole huts and buildings down into the ground, never to be seen again. It is said that for as long as a week or two after the Wrath that the screams of the dead and dying could still be heard from below the rubble and below the ground. Eventually there came silence... and The Silent Circle.

Devastated, the bards of Tuluk were nothing if not resilient, and refused to succumb to depression or madness at the loss of so many. With several circles banding together, housing was found for the displaced within the similarly shaken and partially destroyed Tuluki Warrens. Medical aid given to those who survived and needed it. They started to rebuild anew - but many lived on with trauma, and some never smiled again, even when playing their favorite tunes, or telling their favorite stories.

Grim and determined, the circles refused to let their lack of their old home get to them, and many turned their back on the old Poet's Circle entirely, saying that it was haunted or cursed by the loss of so many at one horrible moment. Many young bards take it as a form of counting coup to sneak in to the old Uaptal Theatre and sing a song which is never sung again - both to prove themselves strong and to give tribute to their fallen predecessors.

Every once in a while some bard or another decides they want to try to rebuild the old Uaptal Theatre, or clear out a portion of the The Silent Circle for themselves. Many have tried. Many have died. Some have simply disappeared. Others have gone completely mad. Every once in a while, one of them ends up being a permanent fixture of the ruins, shambling around as a Listless.

Perhaps someday the old Theatre will find enough luck that those will be able to re-polish it, but perhaps not.

History and Origins

Old Poets' Circle

Long ago, before the cataclysmic events which destroyed Old Tuluk, Poets' Circle thrived in a little area just near the Pak Curachek Arena, filled with balconies, stages, bards, songstresses, poets and many other varieties of inspired artists. In the climate of old Tuluk, bards had often been known to also pass as peacemakers, advisors and diplomats. Due in part to the high respect for the art of assassination and general roguery, it was often held that some of the more adept of this type also came from Old Poets' Circle. But whatever the individual tendencies were, the bards were united by their deep passion for their art: music, song, story, poetry, painting, dancing, prose and so on.

Bards have always played a very prominent position in Tuluki society, but little is known these days of how, in the previous ages, the Old Poets' Circle functioned. It is a topic surrounded by mystery and intrigue, and varied accounts and tall-tales abound about the accomplishments of the more famous master bards of the age. Dominating the discourse between bards reminiscing about these times of lore are near-mythological legends such as Holt Irofel, the master bard

who traveled the world embarking upon amazing and fearless adventures with his Troupe "The Sands of Irony", Reznor Elkinhym the jester who supposedly once posed as a Fale noble for nearly a year unnoticed, or Lashania Konviwedu, the reclusive master bard who was a cutting voice of dissent in her elder years during the occupation and a cunning master of disguise. Each circle has their favorites, and preciously ancient poems and songs still find their way about various circles from time to time, in the present day the coaxing of these stories from their dwindling sources has become an absolute requirement of study for many apprentices, though further embellishments, in good taste of course, are covertly encouraged.

Much of what once was is now lost, having fallen to 'shadows and dust' as the Konviwedu often say. Whatever the truth about the Old Poets' Circle, the stories of the close community's past are a favorite with all bards, and used to shape the ideals and ambitions of apprentices and master bards alike.

The Cataclysm and the Scattering of the Bards

Many a sad tale and song are still retold and sung of the destruction of old Tuluk. The ramifications of so many deaths (approximately 80-90% of all bards in the city at the time) and the loss of so much master-art and knowledge which had been passed through countless generations deeply impacted traditions and attitudes associated with death to this very day, a subject which is viewed most seriously amongst the circles.

In the dark years proceeding Tuluk's destruction, turmoil spread rife through the region, and the tightly knit community of bards was far from spared. Retreating into themselves, bards of the Poets' Circle Tradition began to wear charm-strings and specific caste tattoos in order to identify themselves quickly to one another. Becoming widely traveled, and feeling no particular allegiance to the city, some even ventured south, to establish what life they could in the city of Allanak.

However, the majority of the artisans of Poets' Circle remained in close contact with one another, and the traditions between Master and Apprentice(s) began to emerge even more prominently. Schooling with weapons and combat became highly important, especially amongst the now quasi-nomadic bardic troupes, and some circles, especially Groot and Irofel began to see rangers amidst their ranks.

The later part of this turbulent era is where many of the master bards forged their legacies, as they traveled and resettled, seeking to make sense of life and continue along their old traditions. It was with the inevitable expansion of the Obsidian Empire, however, that the remaining Bards of Poets' Circle faced their greatest danger, and risked extinction.

The Oppression of Allanaki Occupation

No period at any point in history has weighed so heavily on the current culture and traditions of modern bards than the era of Allanak's vast Empire, which swept across the Known World, crushing all resistance and conquering vast portions of new territory. Known for their cruel oppression, the bards were hardly spared and were in fact often the targets of it.

Having made cruel examples of all who were caught offering a dissenting voice amongst the populace, those true to the traditions of Old Poets' Circle were forced underground, and were severely restricted in both speech and action. Naturally repulsed by the starkly contrasting tastes of the Allanaki elite, and haunted by a pervasive atmosphere of fear and brutality, the Bards of Poets Circle quickly evolved toward perfecting the arts of secrecy and subtlety in much of their activity. Though a strong tendency for rebellion and freedom of expression remained at the core of their activities, they waited, patiently, concerned more with their own survival than risking to side with the more open and overt acts of opposition available.

During this time, an extremely subtle language emerged between the serious Tuluki players. Based on allusions to song or poetry, encoded within rhythm or spoken prose which contained double, even triple meanings, Poets' Circle bards learned to turn apparently innocent seeming conversation into a deeply veiled ulterior method of communication. Music followed suit with the trend, drums often being favored for direct encoding, thus the aptly named 'talking' drum still used today. This form of communication, known as Bardic Cant, is a secret closely guarded by the Circle, and still in use to this day.

Call and response in song, music, dance, and 'dueling' appeared amongst Circle bards during this time as well, for the tendency of rebels to use phrases and counter-phrases to pass messages back and forth swept, if slowly, through the whole of true-blooded northern populations. It is rumored that the a few rebel bards had come up with this method of communication originally, but such things cannot truly be confirmed and are lost to the sands of time.

Many bards, like Kidjanja Groot, played their part in small and subtle ways, though none really stood out in a historical sense, preferring at the time, ironically enough, to stay in the background. The master bards used their subtlety and crafty positioning within the vast Obsidian Empire to act as informants, spies, assassins and secret conduits for widespread dissent and messages of hope for the future. Some Bards, however, chose to play a larger part in assisting and disguising themselves as the Chosen nobility of Tuluk, sacrificing their lives so that the Chosen might remain underground and hidden amongst the common populace.

Liberation and the Political Economy of New Poets' Circle

The eventual victory over entrenched Allanaki forces, and their consequent slaughter in Luir's Outpost did more than free the people of the northlands and drive back the Empire--it prompted an cultural explosion amongst the bards everywhere. Long having dreamed of the day where old traditions and culture might be celebrated rather than oppressed, Masterbards everywhere

migrated back to Tuluk, excited to fulfill their dreams and visions for a prosperous future, and a long discussed idea of a New Poets' Circle.

Every form of art and mode of expression previously frowned upon or even outlawed by Allanak sprung to life, providing a vibrant atmosphere for change and rebirth, the sound of liberation. Master Kidjanja Groot is noted for saying in her famous address to the other Masters and their apprentices, that "as the cries of battle fade across the lifting shadows of our lands, a New Poets' Circle will pulse again with life; the healthy, beating heart of a free North that shall haunt our oppressors for all eternity."

Obsidian poured into construction and labor, quickly sending Tenneshi and Winrothol into the prime spots politically. Meanwhile, the ambitious Masterbards began their appeals to the Lirathan order and the wealthy houses for aide on their own projects, using much of their own moneys as well to establish what was being called excitedly "the new core of art and culture in the known world."

The Silent Circle

The Silent Circle is the ruined, shattered gravesite of the former New Poet's Circle. After **The Age of Strife** (called by some bards **The Age of the Quiet Door**) began, the bards pulled together fully with several circles going so far as to offer cover, assistance, aide, and housing to bards which were either being chased by the Templarate or had other reasons to hide out. New Poet's Circle became the only place that bards were known to live for many years as the rest of the population of Tuluk became increasingly desperate for resources. At first, kindness and firm words were what was offered by the bards - interlopers driven off sometimes by giving them a loaf of bread for their effort after a stern warning. In time, the words were not enough, and beatings would be administered by the patrolling bands of bards who kept the borders of New Poet's secure. On more than one occasion, large groups or whole gangs would attempt to force their way in to the Circle only to be beaten back as the bards had had many years to work out solid defense plans through their arc of blades members.

This all came to a crashing halt during Ruk's Wrath. In a stroke of cruel fate, the Konviwedu had planned for a massive performance of a popular play that mocked the southern openness to change and magick. Half way through the play, the ground shook with such violence that many were sent flying off of whatever seating they were on to find themselves on the floor with broken bones. Those that could run began to do so, only to find the ground below ripping open like a hungry maw to swallow them up. In places around the Circle, the ground became as liquid, leading to whole people, whole statues, whole buildings slipping below forever. With a last scream, or no sound at all heard above the quake, they dropped down in to the churning soil, disappearing entirely.

The long renown Uaptal Theatre was reduced to an empty husk, and it is now considered cursed - a curse which seems permanently bound to the Konviwedu Circle. Within those hollow halls the performances are exceedingly rare, often very swift, and almost always grim in nature.

Apprentices and even Seekers will try to prove their bravery and focus by performing a Dance of Whispers - a musical piece, often only played or sung once and then never again, that honors the fallen dead below the Silent Circle. Once the piece is performed, it is considered as dead as the bodies of the fallen, and to repeat it is not only very bad form, but is said to summon horrible misfortune.

The only voice often lifted within this place is an unnamed Listless who seems permanently stationed within the stage area.

The Six Bardic Circles

Overview

The few and the luckiest of the bards of Tuluk belong to Bardic Circles, though well over fifty percent of Tuluki bards never find fellowship within the limited circles. Once almost completely destroyed by infighting during the year following the great earthquakes as the survivors struggled to gather what loot and knowledge they could from The Silent Circle. Some of the circles fared better than other. Driamusek had many skilled members that were hidden away behind the high House walls of the noble estates, and were able to pass along the traditions and knowledge to the apprentices below them. Rusalra circle had a great number within the Warrens, and their resilient and resourceful members were able to come together in short order.

Konviweddu unfortunately had the great misfortune of being at the direct epicenter of Ruk's Wrath during the earthquakes, as they were putting on a massive performance in a now sunken minor theatre. All of the ranking members were in attendance save for a handful, and the Circle continues to struggle and fade to this day.

The remaining members of Circle Groot have limped on, though many of their original ways and rituals have been passed by. Irofel is a shadow of its former self, in many more ways than one, and is rumored to be run by a shadowy figure from the underworld known only as The Grandmother.

Elkinhym is now a circle quite small in number, but undeniably important to the continuation of the city. Forcing a smile even in the darkest hours, Elkinhym soldiers on, bringing what hope and levity they can to a city that exists mostly in ruin.

The once powerful Circles exist in a shattered and fallen state from what they once were. Where once they almost rivaled some small merchant houses, they now limp on, a scattered handful to several dozen members at most, they continue to fight in any way they can to return Tuluk to the grandeur it once had.

Where once a circle could provide training, contacts, better prices on instruments, shelter and food, it now provides only what the senior members of the circles can directly provide for those apprentices they have under them. Many bards pride themselves on being highly self sufficient, and will seek to tithe whatever they can to those who have proven themselves worthy to claim a circle.

The use of Arcs is now far more of an anecdotal preference than the taught-and-ritualized school that it once was. Notable bards that do declare themselves a "master" of one arc or the other often face endless testing from fellow bards which may or may not be fatal in nature.

While small splinter Circles appear and disappear on a regular basis, the Circles which have survived since the second Fall of Tuluk are:

Irofel

Irofel Circle has traditionally focused on lore, gathering knowledge and new songs wherever it can. Its emissaries have traveled across the Known World, although the Circle shares the knowledge gathered in this process primarily with its own members, parceling knowledge out carefully, and perhaps stingily. Irofel have always been known as secretive, but now are seen almost as downright paranoid. Many keep their tattoo, if they have one, well hidden even from lovers and family.

Arc of primary focus: Lore

Arcs of secondary focus: Words, Song

Symbol: two horizontally interlocking red circles

Population: **Unknown.**

Favored Instruments: Mandolin, Flute, Talking Drum, Lyre, Violin, Harp

Masters: The Grandmother, The Watcher, and Silent Story

Groot

Groot Circle, it is said, produces the best examples of percussion instruments in the city. It deals in raw materials, frequently supplying the other Circles with wood, tortoiseshell, and precious stones. It is also known for being one of the more practical Circles, and has a reputation for its emphasis on the Arc of Blades. Many members of Groot are known to be prominent within the Wardens, Levy, or even the Sun Legions.

Arc of primary focus: Blades

Arcs of secondary focus: Music (crafting, materials), Lore

Symbol: three small yellow circles positioned in a triangle

Population: **Perhaps forty.**

Favored Instruments: Percussion, both as accompaniment and solo pieces, using talking drums for the latter situation.

Masters: Ralx, Ashraf

Konviweddu

This circle once oversaw the now ruined and shattered Uaptal Theatre, and those members who claim Konviweddu wish to see it restored. They are the fewest in number of all of the circle bards.

Arc of primary focus: Acting

Arcs of secondary focus: Words, Song

Symbol: a blue teardrop, superimposed over a white half moon

Population: **Perhaps a dozen in the whole city at any given time.**

Favored Instruments: Stringed instruments, they tend to stray from woodwinds as they limit speech.

Masters: None currently recognized.

Elkinhym

Bards who focus on humor and satire tend to gravitate to Elkinhym Circle, which produces the majority of jesters as well as bards specializing in political satire. Members delight in playing practical jokes on each other, and a particularly successful and spectacular prank often works to elevate a member's standing in the Circle significantly.

Arc of primary focus: None

Arcs of secondary focus: Words, Acting, Song

Symbol: three horizontally overlapping orange triangle

Population: **About fifty.**

Favored Instruments: A range of instruments from percussive to melodic, with a tendency towards instrumentation that leaves a voice free

Masters: Loni

Rusarla

Rusarla Circle holds most of the bards of non-human descent, and accordingly also specializes in music and instruments not of human origin.

Arc of primary focus: None

Arcs of secondary focus: Lore, Words, Music

Symbol: a green lemniscate

Population: **Just over a hundred**

Favored Instruments: None. Rusarla has the most diverse racial and tribal roots, lending itself to all sorts of instruments, and the most rare and exotic.

Masters: Bricksy, Crusher Brigga

Driamusek

Many of the children of the nobility are tutored by bards of Driamusek Circle, which specializes in diplomacy, etiquette, and other social matters. Many Driamusek keep their ties to the circle hidden so as to not make them an overly tempting target for other aides and assassinations.

This is not universally true, and it is often believed that a full tenth of Driamusek 'bards' are only members by words alone and have lied their way into the position.

Arc of primary focus: Words

Arcs of secondary focus: Lore, Acting

Symbol: a purple cross
Population: **Under a hundred and fifty**
Arcs of secondary focus: Lore, Acting
Masters: Spak

The following posts are the documentation for each bardic Circle, from that Circle's perspective. Please be cognizant of this in your play and be careful when applying knowledge from another Circle to your PC.

Circle Irofel

Leader: Masterbard Gyrin Irofel
Symbol: two horizontally-interlocking red circles
Arc of primary focus: Lore
Arcs of secondary focus: Words, Song
Favored Instruments: Mandolin, Flute, Talking Drum, Lyre, Violin, Harp
Masters: Gyrin, Crosf, Prallia, Yione, Adarana, Arval, Sari

Irofel bards are often cryptic, accentuating purposefully the Circle's overall air of mystery and secrecy. Circle Irofel has cultivated knowledge since the Cataclysm and Occupation of Tuluk, remaining one of the only Circles (the other being Driamusek) that can trace its lineage back to before these dark times. They pride themselves on being the premier source of information, be it history of Tuluk, catalogues of stories, or lore on specific items. It is known amongst all in the Circle that Irofel entrench themselves in history, and are often stubborn about their world views and 'historically based' opinions.

Irofel are taught from birth or apprenticeship to observe the world around them with a discerning eye and glean as much as they can from it. A particularly observant, discreet and intelligent bard with a good memory will often be favored by the Masters of Circle Irofel over one who is more traditionally talented in instruments or dance. A select few Irofel are favored by the nobility as spies for their competence at gathering information. Worldliness and experience are also among the most highly valued traits in Circle Irofel, and it is not uncommon for an Irofel to join His Legions for a stint or to travel to the far corners of the Known World, returning with songs and poems about what they have seen and heard. More than any other Circle, Irofel Masters are known for their great feats of memory, which enable them to recite pieces several hours (or, in one instance, a day and a half) long.

Bards of this Circle are also prone to obsession, and only tidbits of the vast stores of lore possessed by Circle Irofel are released in the form of poetry and song to the general public. Nevertheless, they are not hoarders; it just so happens that not everything can be made into a suitable performance. Irofel has a close relationship with the House of Negean, often providing services for their Nobility in exchange for rare history and knowledge read from Negean scrolls

and tomes. The Circle traditionally has some ties with House Kassigarh because of their responsibility for conducting the foreign relations of the city. They also have a close (though undefined) relationship with the Lirathan Order.

Advancement

The Masters of the Irofel Circle are quick to promote those who show natural talent and skill, a practice that is looked upon disdainfully by the bards of Driamusek and some of the other Circles. The downside to this, however, is that a mediocre Irofel bard -- for example, one who cannot master the memorization of the classical lore of the Circle -- has almost no chance of advancing, no matter how long they stay in the Circle. Irofel places emphasis on memorization and exact recitation, as they rely on the oral tradition to pass down their personal history, and the history of the Circle at large.

Favored Instruments

The most common instrument for any Irofel bard is the voice, necessary for the stories and poetry they tend to favour. Irofel are known, in fact, for their feats of epic and rhapsodic poetry as a means of retelling and handing down history. Irofel pride themselves in knowing all forms of Song and Storytelling (listed in the Arc of Learning section). Stringed instruments are popular among Irofel bards, as are drums. Wind instruments tend to be the least popular, as it is difficult to play them and recite tales at the same time, though it is not unusual for an Irofel to have some skill at playing at least one type of them.

Relationships With Other Circles

Driamusek: Irofel have both an envy of and a disdain for bards of this Circle. Jealous of the ubiquity of Driamusek teachers and advisors in the estates of the Tuluki nobility, the Irofel nonetheless look down on the Driamusek, who they feel are ignorant of the world outside of the city and its rich history. Still, Irofel often at least try to be friendly with Driamusek, if only to try and learn lore of the city from them.

Konviweddu: The Irofel have a mutual respect with Konviweddu bards, who are known for their ability to create performances as another means of keeping bardic and Tuluki lore alive. The two Circles collaborate often and share a love of traditional storytelling. They are also extremely competitive when they are not cooperating.

Groot: The Irofel and Groot Circles enjoy a close relationship, and bards of both Circles are often well-travelled and have relationships with many of the major tribes of the Known World. It is not uncommon for an Irofel to seek out a guide from the Groot circle when making a trip outside of the city, and Irofel bards often use Groot bards to gather lore and knowledge of Gol Krathu.

Elkinhym: This Circle has a relatively neutral relationship with the Irofel circle. While Irofel bards often appreciate the insight and impact of Elkinhym satire in the politics of the city, they also feel that Elkinhym are often too engaged in frivolous pursuits to pay attention to serious and important subjects such as the history of His city.

Rusarla: Irofel bards generally have a mild disdain for the non-humans of the Rusarla circle, but have a better relationship with it than certain other Circles do. Being well travelled, Irofel bards often appreciate the exotic instruments and poetic forms used by the Rusarla, and adapt them. They also come to Rusarla to seek knowledge and lore of the elven tribes of His city.

Circle Groot

Leader: Masterbard Calimine Groot

Symbol: three small yellow circles positioned in a triangle

Arc of Primary Focus: Blades

Arcs of Secondary Focus: Music, Lore

Favored Instruments: Percussion, both as accompaniment and solo pieces, using talking drums for the latter situation.

Masters: Calimine, Lycel

Circle Groot's ranks are filled with a menagerie of hunters, crafters, and 'outdoorsy' folk, and has a keen focus on the Arc of Blades. Most who join Groot are active, worldly people, who are very pragmatic and not incredibly intellectual. Mind and word games are best left to Driamusek, according to Groot. Groot would rather focus on gathering the proper quota of Cunyati wood for the violin workshop than enter any sort of political back-and-forth. They usually find luck in employment with the Greater Merchant Houses as hunters, or with a Noble House like Dasari as a partisan, and follow a similar path to Driamusek as far as split trust between the Circle and outside Employment. As such, most Groot remain Apprentices or Seekers, and comparatively few rise past the rank of Seeker to Bard.

Groot specializes in martial combat, as their ranks must train and hone their bodies and weapons skills for hunting. They have also been tasked by the Circle at large to maintain the combat efficiency of the Circle's members, in the (hopefully unlikely) case of another war or uprising that requires the citizens to rise up and fight. Groots usually utilize the Partisan's Arena for such training, and their focus on such has led their Circle to focus primarily on the Arc of Blades. Groot maintains the largest community of human tribals, rivaling only Rusarla which leans more heavily on elven or dwarven tribes. They enjoy amiable relations with tribes such as the al'Seik and Arabet, and are commonly used as go-betweens by the Circle for any sort of relationship with the human tribes. Groot has some similarity to House Lyksae in that they treasure and cherish Tuluk's ancient tribal traditions, and are the predominant authority on such subjects.

Advancement

Apprentices of Groot usually focus on the Arc of Blades primarily, followed by the Arc of Lore. They learn how to hunt, climb, make campfires, and other outdoorsy abilities from Bards and Seekers that have come before them. It's not uncommon for small groups of Bards and Seekers

to rough it in the wild for a few weeks at a time, to better teach what they wish in the environment of their choice. Apprentices are expected to learn a percussion instrument, and begin learning how to sing. They are usually expected to make their own connections with the human tribes around the Gol Krathu.

Seekers of Groot make up the majority, and have often found employment with either House Salarr, Kadius, or Kurac by this point, and if not, with one of the Surif Houses. They are usually competent hunters and gatherers by now, and have also made extreme progress with the Arc of Blades. Their focus usually shifts at this point to the other Arcs of Learning, with a lean towards the Arc of Lore, though many also are bent towards the Arc of Music and Song. The Arc of Acting is usually the most alien to Groot, though they hesitantly pursue it if they wish to advance to the rank of Bard. Many, however, are content remaining Seekers, as it allows them the freedom to pursue a career with the Greater Merchant or Surif Houses.

Bards of Groot are uncommon, but those that commit to this role in the Circle are dedicated indeed. They are called Teacher by most in the Circle, and lead the small expeditions into the wild so that Apprentices and Seekers might learn more of the world around them. They are usually experts in hunting and tracking as well as herbs and lore. They have usually mastered the Arc of Blades by now, and teach often at the Partisan's Arena. Bards of Groot have garnered extremely good relations with human tribes by this point, and sometimes travel with them for shorter periods of time.

Masters of Groot are about as rare as Circle Rusalra, having only two Masters at the moment, with the recent death of Sunny Groot. Master Calimine, the leader of Circle Groot, has traveled the world over a dozen times, and is one of the most proficient drummers and hunters in the Poets' Circle at large. Master Lycel was recently promoted, due to Sunny Groot's death, and spends more time in the Grey Forest than in the Circle lately.

Favored Instruments

Percussion is Groot's instrument of choice. Though many other circles criticize Groot's simplicity, those of the Circle usually believe it is tribally rooted, and a very nature-based instrument classification that they enjoy the most of all.

Relationships with Other Circles

Rusalra: Groot and Rusalra get along famously, due to their shared tribal nature. At times, there is racial tension between human and elf and dwarf and half-giant, but otherwise, they swap stories and tribal traditions. They will trade secrets of instrument crafting and origins freely with each other, as well as language studies. Rusalra also relies on Groot's hunter-gatherer skills in getting exotic woods and materials for their similarly exotic instruments.

Driamusek: Groot is often the butt of Driamusek jokes, but most Groot believe in mind over matter, and do not aim on getting entangled with the politics of the Circle. It is rare that a Groot will respond to Driamusek taunts. They avoid Driamusek if they can, but are often asked to

gather materials for instrument crafting, or for training of a Driamusek Seeker in the Arc of Blades. Groot poke fun at the Driamusek's serious nature behind their backs and closed doors.

Irofel: Groot and Irofel get along well. Irofel benefits from Groot's knowledge on human tribal traditions and culture, while Groot enjoy learning the vast historical lore of Tuluk from the Irofel. They typically travel together as Seekers, and there is little or no bad blood between these Circles.

Elkinhym: Groot and Elkinhym get along well. Groot usually accompany Elkinhym dancers on their performances, and over the years, this has lead to a closeness between the Circles. Groot will still poke fun at Elkinhym's satirical nature, preferring themselves to 'live' in the real world, rather than make fun of it.

Konviweddu: Groot and Konviweddu have a neutral relationship.

Circle Konwiweddu

Leader: Masterbard Honja Konwiweddu

Symbol: a blue teardrop, superimposed over a white half moon

Arc of Primary Focus: Acting

Arcs of Secondary Focus: Words, Song

Favored Instruments: Stringed instruments, they tend to stray from woodwinds as they limit speech.

Masters: Abri, Honja, Kyrios (Uaptal Theatre Caretaker)

Konwiweddu are some of the more isolated and self-ostracized bards of the Circle, usually seeking company among their own rather than fraternizing with other Circle Families. Not necessarily loners, they always seem to be cracking inside jokes with each other, acting out scenes or monologues just for themselves, or otherwise setting themselves apart. When they do seek to engage other bards, they usually do so through performance, and have made themselves renowned for their acting ability and exquisite palate with words and storytelling in particular. They believe for the most part that what is said in song is more important than the melody.

Konwiweddu has also maneuvered themselves into being caretakers for the Uaptal Theatre, a bid that has left some of the other Circles, such as Driamusek, a little miffed. They run performances almost weekly out of the Theatre, and other small theaters surrounding the Circle (virtual at this point), ranging in performances of monologues to full blown productions. Konwiweddu often puts a great emphasis on the power of the voice, whether it be through oration or song.

Konwiweddu are often used as diplomats within the Circle, as they are mostly impartial to Circle politics, and neutral insofar as relationships between Circles. They would prefer to keep bad blood between bards at a low roil, rather than some of the more dramatic spats between Irofel and Driamusek (which Konwiweddu would find droll and a waste of time). Many Konwiweddu advance to the rank of Seeker, as they take their work rather seriously, but the rank of Bard often eludes Konwiweddu, as they tend to focus almost entirely on acting and singing. Some find it difficult to branch out into Lore or Blades, though there are exceptions.

Relationships with Other Circles:

Irofel: Neutral. Konwiweddu will sometimes approach Irofel for information about historical pieces they wish to perform, and Irofel likewise will seek advice on the Arc of Acting.

Driamusek: Neutral to Negative. Driamusek bid for the Uaptal Theatre, hoping that their diligence with the Surif Houses would grant them some sway, but were denied. They hold this against Konwiweddu, but would never say anything in more than passing. Konwiweddu are usually very casual about this, and don't lord it over Driamusek in the slightest.

Rusarla: Neutral. They have a symbiotic relationship when it comes to exotic instruments, learning foreign languages, and in return, the Arc of Acting.

Groot: Neutral. They have a symbiotic relationship when it comes to the Arc of Blades and Lore, and in return, the Arc of Acting.

Elkinhym: Positive. Konviwedu spend most time with Elkinhym, outside of their own Circle, as they often share dance routines or acting positions with the satirical Elkinhym.

Circle Elkinhym

Leader: Masterbard Bandiweg Elkinhym

Symbol: three horizontally overlapping orange triangle

Arc of Primary Focus: None

Arcs of Secondary Focus: Words, Acting, Song

Favored Instruments: A range of instruments from percussive to melodic, with a tendency towards instrumentation that leaves a voice free

Masters: Janosh, more TBA

Elkinhym is one of the most notorious Circles within New Tuluk, and a relative new-comer to the scene. They can trace their beginning back before the Fall of Tuluk, but not as far as Irofel or Driamusek. When questioned of their lineage back to Old Tuluk, they usually refer to such lines of inquiry as 'dusty and musty and boring'. They're responsible, nine times out of ten, for all manners of mischief and mayhem throughout the Poet's Circle, often egging each other on to perform more dastardly and embarrassing pranks on the other students and even ranked Seekers and Bards, both for personal entertainment, and potential advancement within Elkinhym. They place a vast emphasis on the ephemeral nature of life, and the enjoyment one can achieve through learning to laugh at one's self. No subject is taboo to the Elkinhym. Though they tread cautiously around political satire involving the Chosen and Faithful of Tuluk, even members of His Faithful have been known to find amusement in a brilliant prank pulled by a Master of Elkinhym.

Elkinhym are usually mercurial and unpredictable, often oscillating wildly between light, airy conversation, and dark, subtle repartee. They typically restrain themselves enough in public to achieve an image desirable for employment by the Nobility. Oftentimes, it is apparent that Chosen Lords and Ladies have no idea what they are in for. Though bards of Elkinhym tend to keep their 'pranks' within the confines of the Circle, ambitious Seekers and Bards tend to search for greener pastures, and overflow their pranks and mischief into Tuluk at large. The most keen of wit and tongue tend to lean towards political satire, while those with a lean more towards slapstick comedy and pranks fill the major portion of Elkinhym's population. Much of Elkinhym

gets a bad rap for being 'lazy', as many Elkinhym are content remaining Seekers, which is the largest portion of Elkinhym's population.

Elkinhym is one of the forerunners in popular dance routines and technique, a talent that just happened to work out that way based on previous generation's interests and forced instruction of their children and children's children. Many of the dancers seen around the Circle and Tuluk at large belong to or are heavily influenced by Elkinhym, and are proud of their cultural inheritance. Elkinhym are reserved in their teachings of dance maneuvers, as they believe that telling a joke can be taught, but dancing is not something taken lightly or learned over night. Though most Elkinhym are breezy, some Elkinhym take dance seriously enough to attempt yearly dance performances at the Uaptal, and do not partake in the practical-joke side of Elkinhym. While other Circles have an obvious affinity with one of the Arcs of Learning (Irofel for Arc of Lore, Konviwedu for Arc of Acting) Elkinhym has a more varied approach, dabbling in the Arc of Acting, the Arc of Song, and the Arc of Music.

Elkinhym often make dangerous enemies, as their smiles can often be thin veneers to a much more sinister, dark artist beneath. Elkinhym have been known to pin pranks on unsuspecting victims that lead to dangerous consequences for all involved.

Advancement

Apprentices of Elkinhym are welcomed with open arms. They're usually hazed continuously and mercilessly for at least a year, often the butt of many Seeker and Bards' jokes within the Circle. They'll be sent on errands that are pointless, be instructed to do nearly impossible tasks, or asked to repeat something they just did. Of all the Circles, Elkinhym has the most turnover of would-be Apprentices that 'don't get' Elkinhym and run from the Circle's embrace, or attempt to audition for another Circle. Those that stay on, however, tend to find their niche after a year's time and begin to pull pranks of their own in between dance and instrument lessons.

Apprentices will usually make a name for themselves after this point, garnering attention from the Circle, and the Masters, Bards, and Seekers of Elkinhym most of all. Elkinhym expects the Apprentice to pull pranks within their own ranks to prove their worth and test their mettle.

Seekers of Elkinhym are the bread and butter of Elkinhym, and most are content maintaining this rank for many years. They tend to believe they receive all the attention they need through their mischief, and there is a great temptation to shirk most of the responsibilities associated with promotion to the rank of Bard. Seekers will typically travel abroad and spend their time gathering traditions of humor from other cultures, often collaborating with Irofel in this regard. They also are expected to learn an instrument at this time, as many skirt this by relying heavily on the Elkinhym tradition of dance.

Relationships with Other Circles:

Irofel: Elkinhym generally thinks of Irofel as a stuffy and snooty Circle, but they also get along with them nicely when necessary. They tend to work together on figuring out old dance routines, or for the Arc of Lore, where Irofel shines.

Driamusek: Irofel pales in comparison to Driamusek insofar as snootiness and lack of charm, according to Elkinhym. They will often play pranks on Driamusek, expanding on the Circle's serious nature and devotion to their work, making light of all the 'long hours' and 'dedication'. It's considered a rite of passage for an Apprentice Elkinhym to hoodwink a Driamusek.

Konviweddu: Elkinhym and Konviweddu get along well enough, relying on each other for performers depending on what's needed for productions at the Uaptal and smaller theatre houses in the Circle. They aren't usually at odds with each other, though they do consider each other friendly competition at times.

Groot: Elkinhym and Groot are usually allies, sharing a love for simple percussive instruments that accompany their dancers. They will often perform together, relying on each other's talents to further their careers. Elkinhym have been known to insult Groot behind their back for their 'simple nature'.

Rusarla: Elkinhym and Rusarla are neutral allies, though Elkinhym holds the non-human Circle in less contempt in comparison to Driamusek or Irofel. Elkinhym performs with the tribal dancers and at off-Uaptal performances all the time, in hopes to expand their repertoire and routines.

Circle Rusarla

Leader: Masterbard Tintael Rusarla

Symbol: a green lemniscate

Arc of Primary Focus: None

Arcs of Secondary Focus: Lore, Words, Music

Favored Instruments: None. Rusarla has the most diverse racial and tribal roots, lending itself to all sorts of instruments, and the most rare and exotic.

Masters: Tintael, Reshawk

Circle Rusarla the most diverse family within the Poets' Circle, containing members from all walks of life, and more importantly, many different races. Elves, half-elves, dwarves, even half-giants (and even some humans that--to outsiders--might seem unlucky), are proud to call themselves Rusarla. A select few of these may make the rank of Bard and Masterbard. Humans interested in elven and dwarven tribes will gravitate towards Rusarla, especially if they have an interest in the more rare, exotic instruments usually only found within the ranks of Rusarla. Rusarla usually strive harder than most in the Circle to achieve any modicum of success, as they are met with real and imagined obstacles of racism around every turn and bend of their Arcs. Some of the Circle's most talented musicians and poets have come from Rusarla, though you would be hard pressed finding anyone outside of Rusarla admitting that point. They usually overcome this by learning, and dedicating themselves twice, three times as hard as the normal Apprentice or Seeker.

Rusarla prides itself on its diversity, welcoming people from any tribe or culture, in the hopes of assimilating their culture and stories and traditions into the Circle's own. They specialize in tribal traditions, storytelling, cultural phenomena, and rituals, though Groot has capitalized on creating a connection with the human tribes. While Irofel focuses on the world outside of Tuluk, and Driamusek the inner workings of the Ivory, Rusarla often attracts the most history and actual persona from the tribes of Gol Krathu. Members of several tribes have found a home in Rusarla at one time or another, and have shared their traditions in the hopes that their ways may survive the tests of time, or because they felt Rusarla was their new tribal "family." Regardless, Rusarla has become the lexicon of tribal beliefs and systems, working often in conjunction with Groot.

Rusarla are often traveling to and from Luir's Outpost in hopes to learn more from the tribal humans and elves that frequent the Kuraci Outpost. They have also been known to travel by Byn escort to Allanak and Red Storm for long periods of time, sometimes in conjunction with Circle Irofel. Though their pursuits are not as 'required' as most Irofel see it, Rusarla usually take advantage of the Arc of Lore to travel the world and see all the sights, and hear all of the wonders that can be shared.

Rusarla are also masters of language, as they have most of the known languages right in their courtyard. The dwarven native tongue as well as the elven native tongue are two of the most common, with Bendune a close third. It is not rare for Rusarla to speak in other languages they know present bards cannot understand, or to switch tongues mid-sentence to prove their mastery of foreign tongues. Those who do not have a natural aptitude for hearing languages do not make it far in the Rusarla ranks.

Advancement

Apprentices of Rusarla are the most numerous, as they are the only circle that accepts non-human bards. They are usually taken in kindly, and asked to speak of any tribal past they might have had, their family, and their traditions. They are then instructed in foreign languages, and those that do not have an ear for language or foreign words are sadly kept at the rank of Apprentice until they go mad with frustration or leave the Circle entirely. The apprentice must (of course) pick an instrument, and there are a plethora of teachers for all types in Rusarla, so the choices are more numerous than in the other Circles.

Seekers of Rusarla are fewer than the Apprentices. They usually devote themselves to other Arcs of Learning at this point, traveling with Irofel Seekers around the world, or mastering another instrument. Rusarla Seekers are afforded a bit more respect than the Seekers of other Circles. While the Masters are not overly hasty to promote, they are only second to Irofel in their quick praise of the hard work of Apprentices and Seekers, and are not prone to long-winded tasks or studies.

Bard of Rusarla are rare, as other Masters of the Circle are involved somehow in the choosing of new Bards. Rusarla are often passed over due to their race, and it takes an exceptionally talented Seeker of Rusarla to jump over this hurdle. Bards of Rusarla have often generated a

tidy sum of obsidian for the Circle at large, and won the proscribed amount of competitions, if not more. Bards of Rusalra are usually aware of the need to work twice as hard as others, and pride themselves on their talents and abilities (which are pronounced, if they have reached this rank). Bards of Rusalra are afforded great respect and opportunity within Rusalra and have plenty of leeway insofar as diverting resources and planning events. Rusalra relies on Bards to teach Apprentices and Seekers more than other organizations, as they only have a handful of Masters in comparison to the other Circles.

Favored Instruments

Tribal, exotic instruments, whether they be percussive or stringed or woodwind. Rusalra are often found playing the most outlandish instruments that are similar in ways to those commonly found in the Circle, but definitely not typical.

Relationships with Other Circles

Irofel: Rusalra and Irofel get along better than they do with most Circles, having a shared love for history (Albeit, Rusalra focuses almost exclusively on tribal histories). They often travel together to aid in the Arc of Lore, and oftentimes form troupes together as well.

Driamusek: Rusalra and Driamusek are rivals, through and through. Driamusek has stopped Rusalra at every step of the way, offering obstacles rather than back-pats, and denouncing any sort of 'victory' for Rusalra. They will often blame Circle troubles like theft and artless murder on Rusalra and its members, and goes through all sorts of trouble to point the finger.

Konviweddu: Rusalra and Konviweddu don't get along great, as the latter Circle is often egged on by Driamusek to give the cold shoulder to Rusalra. However, Konviweddu sometimes approaches Rusalra, asking after performance techniques of various tribes, and Rusalra will usually meet little friction in sending its students for study in the Arc of Acting.

Groot: Groot and Rusalra are allies, as percussion is a common theme amongst the tribals associated with Rusalra, and sometimes, Groot. They will trade secrets of instrument crafting and origins freely with each other, as well as language studies. Groot's focus on human tribal relations lends well to Rusalra, and they are often seen mingling with each other.

Elkinhym: Rusalra and Elkinhym are neutral allies, and share an interest in foreign dance routines. Rusalra will ask Elkinhym to help in studies of mimicry, to aid in study of language and word form, while Elkinhym usually reciprocates the desire to learn odd dance from other cultures.

Traditions and Quirks of Rusalra

-Rusalra is one of the only organizations in the Known World where non-humans can advance beyond the lowest of ranks, though it is not an easy path.

-Rusarla bards often debate, and don't argue. They will remain calm and collected, and are swiftly demoted if they cause ire in the Surif or Faithful, drawing more bad attention to the diverse Rusarla Circle.

-Rusarla bards pride themselves on their hard work, which is reinforced by Seekers, Bards, and Masters. Slackers need not apply to Rusarla, despite what everyone else says or thinks. The Masters won't shy away from booting out Apprentices that are hedonistic and lazy.

-There have only been three Masters in Rusarla, never more, for one reason or another. Some say it has something to do with inner-Circle politics and workings, though none speculate past that.

Circle Driamusek

Leader: Masterbard Zugara Driamusek

Symbol: a purple cross

Arc of primary focus: Words

Arcs of secondary focus: Lore, Acting

Masters: Olide, Lucrece, Anilae, Zugara.

Driamusek are the masters of subtlety and manipulation of words, making great orators and language masters. Many poets come from this circle as from Konviwedu, but where Konviwedu's words are meant to stir great passions, Driamusek's words are meant to persuade and sway a listener. The bards of Driamusek are generally a tight-knit group, all of its members sharing distinguished histories. Many of its members' families have rich pasts serving nobility pre-Occupation, and the family stories offer glimpses into history and lore even the Irofel do not have. It is the Driamusek who are most familiar with the duplicities of noble strife, and are the most comfortable in serving it, making Driamusek bards highly sought after by noble families as tutors and retainers, and making the Driamusek almost as proud and haughty as the nobles they serve.

They have the smallest membership of the Circle, since apprenticeship requires that the student have proof of partisanship to a Noble House for longer than a year. Unlike other Circles, Driamusek encourages its students to maintain a close relationship with the Nobility, even past the rank of Seeker. Most other Circles require Bards to lapse their employment as partisans into free agents, while Driamusek often requires Bards to serve a Noble House in conjunction with the Circle. This becomes a very tentative position for the Bard in question, as their loyalty ultimately lies with the Circle, and it becomes an often-times dangerous game they play between Surif and Circleborn.

Driamusek's emphasis on oration, etiquette, and the Arc of Words, has earned it the reputation of being one of the most stuffy and arrogant circles in the Poet's Circle. Driamusek requires its students to learn the techniques of verse and spoken prose, as well as the more 'refined' of

instruments, as well as being versed in etiquette and pleasantries. Driamusek favors subtlety in all things, making them excellent diplomats and speakers and glib liars when need be.

Driamusek are arrogant and proud (whether this is displayed openly or not) due to their talents and select membership, as well as the histories of their members. Those who enter the Circle without these qualities often develop them, as they spend many years without advancement while their 'companions' in the Circle are often easily promoted, as in Irofel. Subtlety is rewarded, and, almost at odds with their arrogant mentality, they are encouraged to always keep a pleasant face and smile at even their bitterest foes, seldom giving voice of their complaints within earshot of the one who's earned them. They are taught to love style and beauty in art and person, and many shelter expensive tastes in that regards. They are also taught grooming and as much personal hygiene as possible within Zalanthan standards, and it is rare to find a Driamusek bard who isn't presentable from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep.

Advancement

Driamusek advancement is slow and plodding. The Masters of the Driamusek Circle make this so in order to ensure that Driamusek's ranks (small though they are) are filled with competent and well-rounded individuals. As such, a long-time Driamusek Apprentice or Seeker may be regarded more highly than an equally-ranked and equally experienced bard from another Circle. It sometimes takes several years for Driamusek bards to rise from Apprentice to Seeker, or Seeker to Bard, depending on the Masters overseeing them and their particular tastes and requirements. Apprentices often focus on etiquette primarily, as it is one of the foundation stones of Driamusek, followed by the instrument of their choice and voice as well.

Seekers of Driamusek have achieved enough notice from the Masters of Driamusek for promotion, but that doesn't mean they are prepared for the challenges ahead. This can be a very trying time for the Seeker, as the bulk of their work, and lack-of-recognition, sometimes leads to burnouts at this stage. Oration, improvement of etiquette, learning multiple instruments, expectations to perform and win and deliver, all add up to quite a bit of work. Driamusek rarely awards promotion from Seeker to Bard, and when they do, it's often after long years of struggle, near-promotion, failure, and the near giving up of the party in question.

Bards of Driamusek carry over the disdain, jaded, arrogant nature of their forefathers, usually because of the years they've spent as Apprentice and Seeker. Most wish to inflict the same 'pain' they received during their tutelage, and as the primary teaching force of Driamusek, take out their past grievances on new Apprentices and Seekers. The vicious cycle continues to this day -- Bards of Driamusek focus primarily on instrument crafting and reputation, both of themselves and the Surif House they likely serve.

Driamusek is unique within the Circle in that Seekers (and especially Bards) are encouraged to maintain a partisanship or employment opportunity with a Surif House, aiding the Chosen rather than cutting off their political ties. Driamusek is responsible for the tutelage of Nobility, and therefore reap and sow relationships within the Surif through their members. This creates a fine

line for Bards to walk, as they must assure their loyalty to both the Circle and often their employer.

Favored Instruments/Styles

Driamusek prefer the more complicated, delicate, or sensitive instruments, often purposefully choosing or creating instruments that are overly complex and can only be played by them. They will choose the violin, for its sentimental, weeping vocal quality, and prefer pieces of music that are introspective and existentialist. Beyond the violin, they prefer the harp, lutes, kitharas, lyres, and guitar.

Relationships to other Circles

Irofel:

Driamusek is highly competitive with this major Circle, thinking the way that Irofel squirrels its knowledge while pumping the other circles to increase it, is hypocritical. They also two of the only Circles that can trace their lineage back to before the Cataclysm and Old Tuluk, based on their mutual focus on the Arc of Words and Tuluk's history. Irofel and Driamusek have always been rivals, as they are both focused on lore and history in a sense, though with different emphasis that either Circle believes is more important; Driamusek focuses on Tuluk and its history, while Irofel travel the world seeking lore from all corners. They also resent the fact that Irofel bards are usually well-known in most areas, since most Driamusek are not widely traveled, often fulfilling their requirements for travel by doing the bare minimum required. Driamusek bards try to ease the information of songs and stories from Irofel bards by plying their most effective and subtle persuasions to increase Driamusek's own store of songs and poetry.

Konviweddu:

Konviweddu and Driamusek share their love for poetry and song, often creating masterful works of oration and melody, the pleasantry of Driamusek's graces and diction fused with Konviweddu's passion for performance. It is not uncommon to see Konviweddu's Masters teaching Driamusek Apprentices song, instrument and verse, or Konviweddu apprentices taking lessons of etiquette and language from Driamusek's Seekers and Bards. However, the arrogant Driamusek do hold the Konviweddu in an inferior light (as they do with most Circles), secretly knowing their own abilities will steal the show. Beside this, Konviweddu and Driamusek are close Circles, their bards often collaborating together.

Groot:

Driamusek and Groot are cordial, and while not as close circles as to Konviweddu, Driamusek heavily relies on Groot to supply their needed materials and instruments. In general, Driamusek are encouraged to make contacts in Groot, if only to supply a discount. Driamusek often snidely speaks of Groot behind their back, thinking of them as simple-minded children only interested in banging drums and crafting simpleton instruments. They of course would never say this to their faces...

Elkinhym:

Elkinhym are considered coarse entertainers by Driamusek standards, many of their practical jokes considered vulgar, and their physical jests ridiculous. However, for the more refined Elkinym satirists, there are always Driamusek admirers, who are quick to recognize the use of irony and subtle humor to sting and underline a point. The Driamusek respect these Elkinhym, though they hold a reserved scorn at the majority of the Elkinhym jesters, thinking them crude, distracting, and oftentimes useless.

Rusarla:

The arrogant Driamusek look down their noses the most on Rusarla, who engage the non-human bards. While their contributions to the Circle are not doubted, it is Driamusek who often suggests that perhaps dwarves should stick to hunting and warfare, and elves to chicanery, rather than sully the name of bards everywhere. The egocentric Driamusek do, however, often try to impress the Rusarla, in order to gain the information and pieces that can only be heard and manufactured there (before the Irofel get them, is the common excuse) and to practice their arts of diplomacy, for it is said in Driamusek, that if one can be diplomatic with a thieving elf, stubborn dwarf or a stupid half-giant, one can be diplomatic in any situation.

The Ranks of Bards

Apprentice

Bards begin as apprentices. While some may begin with greater musical skills than others due to their background, apprentice bards are not expected to have more than a basic knowledge of one instrument or how to sing, and a vastly incomplete knowledge of lore and songs. Circle born Apprentices, on the other hand, are expected to have a pretty good understanding of one, or more, instruments and know a spattering of songs. Everyone has to start somewhere, and the Circle recognizes drive and some innate talent in Apprentices at auditions; no one is expecting tear-jerking performances or side-splitting comedy.

In order to achieve the rank of Seeker, apprentices are expected to:

- Master the basics of 2-3 instruments, with a focus on a primary instrument.
- Build their repertoire of songs, stories, and lore, by learning from each other as well as from classes taught by Bards.
- Learn the basics of how a bard of the Circle should comport themselves; basics in etiquette between common and high-born, composure, oration, and singing.
- Learn the basics of how to maintain and repair instruments; begin down the path of lutherie and instrument creation.
- Learn the history of Tuluk and the Gol Krathu region, along with basics of the Known World surrounding the Ivory.

- Win a Circle Sanctioned competition.

Seeker

These are bards who have passed the apprentice stage and have been promoted personally by a Master in their respective Circle, trusted enough to comport themselves fittingly and not disgrace the Circle. This is a process that can be hampered by a disgruntled or grudge-bearing Master, leading to talented (but usually indignant or stubborn) Apprentices that are not promoted for many years. Seekers actively pursue the Arcs of Learning in earnest at this phase, having passed their classes as an Apprentice. They often find themselves assisting Bards in classes, to enhance the knowledge they already have on the subjects, while pursuing their own goals. At this stage, Seekers will usually travel abroad, to widen their horizons and give perspective to their time in the Circle, as well as to come back with wild stories and various trinkets and keepsakes.

In order to achieve the rank of Bard, Seekers must:

- Produce a sufficiently well-crafted instrument, which usually (but not necessarily) becomes a bard's signature instrument of choice.
- Learn at least one new language.
- Be able to pass a verbal test on lore, demonstrating that they have mastered or nearly mastered that Arc.
- Be able to play three instruments (one wind, one percussion, and one stringed) with enough skill for public performances.
- Be able to compose impromptu songs on a theme of the Circle's choosing.
- Compose at least one group piece in the tradition of their Circle - A historical play for Irofel, a dance performance for Elkinhym, and so on.
- Win a Circle Sanctioned competition as a Seeker.
- Know the intricacies of Tuluki etiquette and be able to interact smoothly with Surif and Faithful.
- Have a major role in at least one formal performance.
- Demonstrate they are competent with a weapon.

Bard

To become a Bard, Seekers must master two Arcs of Learning completely, though they are not expected to complete all six. Bards are the lifeblood of the Circle, teaching most of the classes that further the Circle's traditions to the next generation, and are vested with complete trust from the Masters. A Bard doing something against Circle wishes, or betraying the Circle's trust, is

almost completely unheard of. At this point, those who joined the Circle without blood ties are 'joined' to the Circle (by means unknown to those below the rank of Bard) and their children usually take on the name of the Circle they belong to. Masters are careful to pair up mates in-between Circles, and those born outside of these pairings will often not take on the name of their father or mother's respective Circle.

Bardic Rank Progression vs. Relationships, Loyalties, and Influence

A bard's rank is one of the most obvious ways to determine how they are viewed by the rest of Tuluk. Those within the Circle would know each other's rank on first glance, based on particular tattoos available only to members of the Circle. It is rare that any member of the Circle would lie about their true rank, and those that do are punished with impunity by their betters. The tattoos are administered in the kitchen within the Bardic Compound, that is accessible only by Bards and Masters.

a colorful, dotted circle	Seeker
a colorful, arc-laden circle	Bard
a colorful, arc-laden circle inset with a blazing sun	Master Bard

Apprentices

- Most reliant on the generosity of a bardic patron or patrons.
- Often take a route of being part aide/artisan/assistant as well as bard to their patron because it offers a stable income and experience in politics.
- Other bards understand that Apprentices are largely more molded to the will of their respective patrons, regardless of any private opinions on the part of the bard. However, they are expected to refrain from anything that acts against the Circle in any way. Though not at the expense of the Sun King's law.
- Level of trust with the Circles is low.
- Level of influence among the Circles, other bards (of any rank), and among most people is low.
- It is possible to be lifesworn to an organization and be an Apprentice.

Seekers

- Still somewhat reliant on the generosity of a bardic patron or patrons. However, Seekers can command more in the way of commissions, making it a possibility for the more talented Seekers to expand their horizons in this regard.
- Slightly less likely to be involved in the overall interests of a bardic patron or patrons, but slightly more likely to be involved in the overall interests of the Circle(s). Other bards understand that Seekers are a bit less molded to the will of their respective patrons. Simultaneously, patrons historically tend towards using Seekers as directly (and as often) as possible as extensions of their agendas.
- Level of trust with the Circles is higher.
- Level of influence among the Circles, other bards (of any rank), and among most people is higher.
- It is possible to be lifesworn to an organization and be a Seeker.

Bards

- Not reliant upon the generosity of a bardic patron. Instead, bards are far more free to float between bardic patrons and tend towards partisanship arrangements that are very short-term. Bards can command more than Seekers in the way of commissions.
- Not likely to be involved in the overall interests of a bardic patron. Much more involved in the overall interests of the Circle(s). Bards make the transition from "instrument of a patron" to "instrument of the Circles," which can be a difficult process for both potential patrons and the former Seekers. Allegiance, however, is first and foremost (at this point) to the interests of the Circles.
- Level of trust with the Circles is high.
- Level of influence among the Circles, other bards (of any rank), and among most people is high.
- It is not possible to be lifesworn to an organization and be a Bard.

Masterbards

- Patrons? " Ha! You wish I'd call you a patron. Also, if you talk to me on any regular basis, I'm billing you for the time spent." (A masterbard would never say these things, but

they'd probably think them.) People need deep pockets to have you at an event or to use your talents for any purpose.

- Patron interests? "Ha! Petty squabbles." The interests of your Circle become your interests. No one can call you a partisan but the Circle to which you belong. You may perform at an event, but you would likely be the main attraction. Simultaneously, you've learned enough over the years not to be a complete show-stealer from the lower-ranked brethren in the Circles, and as such, you'd be far more likely to be performing at the more important events.
- Level of trust with the Circles is unquestioned.
- Level of influence among the Circles, other bards (of any rank), and among most people is the highest among bards of any rank, second only to more experienced masterbards and the Circle Leaders themselves.
- It is not possible to be lifesworn to an organization and be a Masterbard.

Bardic Culture, Traditions, Rituals, and Punishment

The Cultural Identity of Bards in Tuluk

The individual circles themselves are exceedingly scholastic in their own fashions, accommodating equally the education of their members as they do the creation of new knowledge and productions. There are known to be eight major arcs of learning: Music, Song, Words, Acting, Lore, Blades, Thread, Stone, Secrets and Tales. Each Arc has various minor arcs, aptly named and commonly referred to as "tangents." Tangents differ widely from circle to circle, and are at their roots, the specific requirements for academic advancement. See the documentation for each individual circle as to what their tangents might entail.

Though rivalry and competition amongst bards is common, a certain collective ideology and communal cooperation rests at the foundation of the Circle, and tends to promote a strong level of respect amongst most Circle bards, despite any differences. The Masters are quick to act on any feuds that get out of control and provide long lecturing and discipline where necessary. The competition, especially in times of difficulty for the Ivory City, is often kept to friendly levels. The pulling of a blade is not unknown, but can often result in censure for a bard who does so to another bard.

The idea of "intellectual property" is not given much consideration amongst bards, though it is considered very impolite (more so, say, in Driamusek than any other circle) to use a recent work that someone else has composed without giving them credit for it. Some items have no known author, and so in this case, credit will be skipped. There are many exceptions to this general protocol, but it serves as a general guide for most bards.

The circles pre-Silence were very driven to induct and indoctrinate any non-circle bard they came across. The same is not true these days. Many circles do not actively pursue every bard,

but only the ones which have apparent talent or interest that aligns with the circle itself. In fact, there are a large number of bards who never seek circle, and never get approached, but who will work with the circles on larger performances if requested. Non-circle bards who have proven they can do so are often referred to as Talents, and may even have that suffix tacked on to their name for distinction (so Amos the Bynner would become Talent Amos the Bynner.)

Culture of Master Bards

Shrouded in mystery and intrigue, master bards in the post Silence Tuluk have become slightly more reclusive. Master bards often will meet only directly with members of the Templarate or with nobles who can actually offer them something, leaving anything deemed beneath them to minors of the circle. This is usually not seen as an insult, as bards are so rare in number that even getting the direct attention of a mid-level bard can be seen as a feather in the cap of the interested party.

The culture of the Master Bards is culture itself. Having dedicated their lives to becoming successful and recognized with their art, having mastered all aspects of the word, these figures are living legends or shadowed myth. Entrance into their ranks has the same popular flavor of joining an elite, secret society. It can be gained only by being petitioned by one's circle for candidacy, then winning the popular vote from the masters of the larger community, which follows a thorough oral examination, interrogation and other rumored tests that are imaginatively speculated upon by potential candidates. The ceremonies themselves are taboo, and talk of them only whispered amongst enraptured apprentices, and fantasized and prepared for by Seekers who have such an inclination to advance further within the community. It is rumored that entrance into this 'society', or the True Circle as some call it, begins with promotion from Seeker to Bard, though none above the rank of Seeker will speak a word of what transpires before or after their promotion to Bard or Master.

Not much else is known about the doings of Masters with one another, as they are an exceptionally diverse lot. Their meetings are shrouded in secrecy, Bards, Seekers and Apprentices barred from attendance, and each attendee has long since mastered the art of silence: knowing when indeed, not to speak, nor seem to know anything, at all.

Other Customs and Traditions

Right For the Circle?

From time to time, an Apprentice (or even a Seeker) may find that they take poorly to the life of being a member of one of Tuluk's Bardic Circles. Should this occur, the Apprentice or Seeker simply makes it known to their Circle and moves on. In most cases, the Circles will not readmit the person should they change their mind for whatever reason. Exceptions are often made for prospective bards that get in over their heads with a Circle in a manner they weren't expecting (not cut out for one, but more suited for another).

Charmstrings

Emerging during the Scattering after old Tuluk's fall, charmstrings serve to quickly identify a bard to another savvy member of Poets' Circle. It is taboo to 'lie' on one's charmstring, and doing so would draw quick ostracization from one's peers, and potential disciplinary action from one's Circle or the Circle at large. Charmstrings are strung to the bard's instrument of choice, and should always be displayed during a performance where an instrument is utilized. Performances without instruments do not require the charm strings' visibility.

The Lucky Ghaati

The sacked out ruin that is the Lucky Ghaati is no longer a haven for high end clientele or tea, but a place of mild danger and sad memories. Ruined by Ruk's Wrath, the Ghaati still stands as a gathering point sometimes used by various bards, but no longer a focus for performances, negotiations, or pleasant evenings with a baked good.

Magick

The Bards of Poets' Circle attitude on magick, as can be expected, is one of fierce repulsion, and it is not tolerated at all by any bard raised in Poets' Circle traditions. Someone caught practicing magick will rarely make it to meet the Templarate if the opportunity to quickly and quietly dispose of them presents itself.

Repertoire

Though each circle has it's favorites, it is a tradition amongst the Arcs of Learning to memorize several ancient poems and songs, tales and monologues of Master Bards now long deceased. On top of this, it is customary and expected of students to learn the more popular tunes of the age.

Roguary

As is evidence by the long history of Poets Circle, there is a propensity toward the more subtle, darker arts, such as spying, professional theft and assassination, which have long been regarded as a civilized art form, even a mode of expression. This is not to say that every bard doubles as a rogue, nor to say that any will readily admit it openly. Simply, that it is traditionally something that an Apprentice has access to learning, with the proper master. After all, in the immortal words of Lashania Konviweddu, "the criminal mind is simply an artist too oppressed to express himself otherwise."

Death

The death of a bard is different from many other deaths, though also greatly different from the pre-Silence tradition of holding a several day (or longer) period of mourning. Death is common in the streets of Tuluk, whether it be from disappearance, a falling stone from a crumbling building, a scavenging beast or a knife in the dark. The bardic community often see themselves as one of the last bulwarks against the downfall of the city, so to depress the masses with extended mourning is antithetical. Upon the death of a renown bard, a revel is typically thrown, where many bards and even highborn or Templarate will gather and extol the tales of the deceased. The bards will throw these celebrations and contribute as much as they can, with the

primary contributors often being held in higher esteem for a month or so after for putting towards so much for the celebration of a fallen's reputation.

Birth

Birth is celebrated widely amongst the circle, and children fussed over by many. The tradition of naming has gradually become a very important and weighty matter, and a child born to one of the circles will spark much debate over the proper name for their future legacy. It is common to name the newborn with both a public name, and a hidden name - the hidden name being taken from one of those that was devoured by the shifting ground during Ruk's Wrath. Often the hidden name is of the opposite gender, which many bards believe will assist the child in learning how to portray themselves positively in either gender role.

Toasts

A bard will rarely pass up the opportunity to propose a toast, and has a wide variety of subjects ranging from general formal toasts, to more specific toasts oriented around praising the achievements of their colleagues, or honoring the fallen.

Street Singing

Street singing is a common occurrence amongst the bards of Tuluk and certain prime spots for doing so, such as near the entrance of the Cormani's Carru, are ardently vied for by bards who have passed the Apprentice stage but are still studying to become Bards. The practice allows them to perfect performances that they may rely on for coin when favored by patrons: romantic or sentimental favorites, ballads involving specific noble house history, comic pieces, etc, or to practice newly acquired instruments. Bardic battles of verse where both contestants either try to celebrate a certain subject or denigrate each other are not uncommon.

Troupes

Members of the community may sometimes form a smaller troupe for the purpose of group performances. Troupes are more often found performing at larger and more significant public events rather than individual bards. Typical pay for a troupe varies. The coins are divided among members, although the usual tithe is paid to the Circle. Many troupes contain members from disparate circles as well as Talent as the pickings are slim.

There are no traditions regarding unions or hand-binding, and any references to them found on the boards should be discarded. These traditions have been retconned and will not be revamped or revitalized.

Discipline In the Circle

Discipline and punishment are not rare in the circles, though most punishments are designed to teach a lesson to the recipient, and are often made to fit the crime. The community places a heavy emphasis on secrecy, and does not abide those that kiss and tell. They are also prone to

not beat around the bush when it comes to tithes, and short-changing what is owed, or drawing unnecessary attention from dangerous quarters.

Minor Offenses: Brief suspension from the Circle entirely, suspension from competing in an upcoming event, forfeit of instruments or charm strings for a period of time. Punishments last anywhere from five weeks to a year, or have more immediate consequences.

More Serious Offenses: Disbarment from the Circle, confiscation of instruments or charms, covering tattoos from public view, demotion, temporary removal of rights to perform in any manner. Punishments typically last a year at the minimum, though they have been known to last longer.

Most Serious Offenses: Exile from the Circle, or Tuluk, destruction of instruments and charms (either by someone else, or the transgressor), removal of tattoos, fingers, toes, or even permanent removal from public performance on pain of death. These offenses are typically so serious that general time frames could not be given.

Censure: When a bard has committed an act considered so heinous as to be unforgivable, it may be requested of the Templarate that the bard be Censured. In simple terms, Censure means Exile, but it also means that the bard then becomes a target for any other bard who seeks to prove their worth in the Arc of Blades.

Charmstrings

Charmstrings are traditional to the Bardic Circles of Tuluk, and allow a bard to tell his or her entire history to a fellow bard with a single look. Made of braided, brightly colored cotton, they are attached to a bard's main instrument: the neck of a guitar, the mouthpiece of a flute, or tangled in a drum's cording. Bards collect charms for accomplishments: visiting a far away place, winning a yearly competition, houses that have acted as their patron, number of years as a bard, instruments they've mastered, etc. It should be noted that a bard is attached to his or her charmstrings, some of the more superstitious believing they contain some measure of the bard's soul. While a bard may give away charms from a string, they will never dispose of the string itself.

OOO NOTE: *Charmstrings are automatically a part of any instrument out there and are considered a virtual construct. At this time, we do not have a solid code solution for charmstring objects. We tried it once but they would not work properly when attached to an instrument. For now and for the foreseeable future, the charms themselves should be transferred from instrument to instrument. Should we figure out a coded solution here, we'll see about a light*

retcon of the charmstring docs to allow for different types of bards to wear them in different ways/places.

The following list details the significance of many of the bardic charms. It is a serious breach of protocol for a bard to wear charms to which they are not entitled. Some non-bards may wear charms as adornments; this is considered more than a little gauche.

Circle Charms

What are these charms? These represent the bard's relationship with their own Circle.

How does one get these charms? Be a part of the Circle.

- a white ceramic charm set with two garnet circles – red circles Irofel
- a white ceramic charm set with three citrine hoops – yellow circles Groot
- a blue teardrop shaped ceramic charm – blue teardrop Konviweddu
- a ceramic charm inset with amber triangles – orange triangles Elkinhym
- a white ceramic charm set with an agate – green lemniscate Ruserla
- a charm of white ceramic and amethyst – purple cross Driamusek

Charms for Instrument Mastery

What are these charms? These charms represent a bard's mastery of an instrument per the Arc of Music.

How does one get these charms? Achieve mastery of one of the instruments mentioned. This should be done realistically (i.e., not overnight). Please research and roleplay this appropriately.

- a cylini wood ukelein
- an agafari lyre
- a cylini wood mandolin
- a tortoiseshell tambourine
- a moonstone whistle
- a turquoise ocarina
- an amber drum
- an ivory flute
- a ceramic goblet-shaped drum
- a tortoiseshell horn
- an agafari harp
- a set of tortoiseshell castanets
- a wooden guitar
- a pymlithe lute
- a bone fiddle
- a set of jasper pipes

a wooden ocadarji
a clear blue kithara

Year Marker Charms

What are these charms? These charms represent (in a quick, easy-to-see way) how long a particular bard has been a part of the Circles.

How does one get these charms? Be alive and be a member of the Circles in good standing.

a white feather ring (1 year)
a blue feather ring (2 years)
a green feather ring (3 years)
a yellow feather ring (4 years)
a red feather ring (5 years)
a purple feather ring (10 years)
a red and silver feather ring (20 years)
a white and silver feather ring (30 years)
a purple and silver feather ring (40 years)
a black and silver feather ring (50 years)
a silver and grey feather ring (60 years)
a yellow and silver feather ring (70 years)
a gold and silver feather ring (100 years)

Charms for Arc of Words (language mastery)

What are these charms? These charms represent mastery (fluency) in a given language.

How does one get these charms? One must be tested by a ranked Bard fluent in the language in order to receive the appropriate charm. While not forbidden, other bards generally find it gauche (and endlessly amusing) for a bard to add a charm for their language of origin (sirihish for a human, for instance, or allundean for an elf).

a green and gold feather ring (sirihish)
a yellow and gold feather ring (allundean)
a red and gold feather ring (mirrukim)
a white and gold feather ring (cavilish)
a blue and gold feather ring (bendune)
a purple and gold feather ring (anyar)
a black and gold feather ring (heshrak)

Travel Charms

What are these charms? These charms represent a journey taken by a bard.

How does one get these charms? One must first request permission from their Circle for the journey. This is typically given approval. Masters generally seek proof of the journey, whether it be a physical keepsake or something more esoteric such as a song, a story, or a poem. The journey is expected to last for at least a few weeks and as much as a month in some cases.

- a tiny obsidian city (Allanak)
- a black outpost (Luir's)
- a grey silt-pearl (Sea of Silt)
- a tiny glass doll (Cenyr)
- a wooden halfling (Grey Forest)
- a black and red feather ring (Desert Elf Outpost)

House Charms

What are these charms? These charms represent a relationship that has been formed between the bard and the organization depicted by the charm.

How does one get these charms? Partisanship for a length of time (typically at least a year) with any of His Chosen or His Faithful usually leads towards the receipt of one of these charms. It is also possible to gain one for significant work done on behalf of one of these organizations (a great commissioned work, a series of commissions, performing a great service for said group). Unlike some of the other charms, these are doled out by the organizations themselves, and these organizations will frequently use that to their advantage.

- a tiny ivory alnon blossom (Dasari)
- a tiny red crescent moon (Jihaens)
- a tiny white crescent moon (Lirathans)
- a leather moneybelt (Kadius)
- a white ceramic scale charm (Kassigarh)
- a tiny spice-pipe (Kurac)
- a tiny, grey spiked mace (Lyksae)
- a tiny onyx quill charm (Negean)
- a tiny coffer (Nenyuk)
- a blue and silver feather ring (Reynolte)
- an obsidian sword (Salarr)
- a tiny hammer (Tenneshi)
- a wylrith plains-ox charm (Uaptal)
- a tiny kenku (Winrothol)

Competition Charms

What are these charms? These charms represent a bard's victory in a competition.

How does one get these charms? One must be declared the winner of a competition in order to receive the charm in question.

- a tiny drinking horn - drinking contest
 - a yellow glass pepper – Luir's annual tall tale contest
 - a tiny ceramic cup – Ghatti contest
 - a coppery pyramid – Lirathan contest
-

Tribal Charms

What are these charms? These charms represent an investment of time and effort in learning about the mentioned tribe in a first-hand sense.

How does one get these charms? One usually spends significant time with the tribe in question. The cultural experience and knowledge gained should be proven to one of the Masters in order to gain a charm.

- a black and grey feather ring (Al Seik)
 - a purple and yellow feather ring (Anyali)
 - a red and blue feather ring (Arabet)
 - a grey and blue feather ring (Jul Tavan)
 - a blue and white feather ring (Muark)
 - a red and yellow feather ring (Sun Runners)
 - a gold-dyed feather ring (Bejeweled Hands)
 - a black feather ring (Soh Lanah Kah)
-

Charms of Experience

What are these charms? These charms represent an experience that a bard has had in their life.

How does one get these charms? Experience is the only way to gain these. (The charms specific to the Arc of Blades imply competency in a style closely associated with that weapon.)

- a red and white feather ring (have played at Lucky Ghaati)
- a red and grey feather ring - fought gith
- a yellow and green feather ring - fought mantis
- a purple and green feather ring – fought kryl
- a laughing mask charm – Arc of Acting
- an agafari sword – Arc of Blades
- an agafari spear – Arc of Blades
- an agafari arrow – Arc of Blades
- an agafari shield – Arc of Blades

an agafari axe – Arc of Blades
an agafari club -- Arc of Blades
an agafari leaf– Arc of Lore
an agafari sun – Arc of Songs
an agafari feather – Arc of Words
an agafari root - Arc of Music