

THE POLITICS OF BURDOETH, PART I

THOUGHTS ON THE DRENN SYSTEM

The most visible element of Burdoethian political and social life is the Tauther/Drenn system, if not instituted at least codified by the current Dharsage of Burdoeth, Khodre Dharen. The reasoning behind this is given away in Companion Jorune: Ardoth (p.30) when we are told that Khodre was "...the first post-holocaust human to read Plato [and] Aristotle". I will attempt to draw some comparisons between Burdoethian political theory and practice, and the models on which they are based. Go get a soft drink and some ice, this could get a little dry...

OVERVIEW OF THE DRENN SYSTEM

The Drenn system is a wonderful marriage of player incentive(s), and game-world interaction. For the uninitiated, a standard resident of Burdoeth is classed as a Toth, with no special privileges under the law. That is contrasted with Drenn, "citizens" of the Realm, who have a number of distinct political and social advantages. Those seeking to become Drenn are Tauther, and the process is referred to as Tothis. Most PCs will be Tauther, if only to get their hands on Earth-Tec (which is not allowed to your run of the mill Toth). Prospective Tauther, traveling to Ardoth's Hall of Drenn, register their Tothis by paying for a copy of the 'Tauther Guide' (otherwise known as the players' handbook), a first-person perspective on what it means to enter and progress through Tothis.

Drenn are the only members of society allowed to hold land, vote in civic elections, have full representation under the law, and the use of Earth-Tec (taken by most PCs to mean weaponry). Take out the last item and you are left with a class remarkably similar to the "citizen" found in classical Athens (circa 400 BC).

Unlike most Athenian citizens of Plato's era however, Drenn of Burdoeth must earn their right to become a member of the elite. In this sense the Drenn system is a meritocracy, the fittest and most intelligent rise to take a full part in the political life of the state. The Drenn system is there to separate the wheat from the chaff (the coditch from the husks?) - not all Tauther will achieve Drennship. Drennship also carries responsibilities; amongst other things, Drenn must serve on local Kims and as military leaders in times of war. Note that the Burdoethian state is on a near-war footing almost all the time.

The Drenn system exists to provide the state with its civic and military leaders. Positions within those spheres are allocated through election (by other Drenn) and by patronage (of the Dharsage and the Chell). These 'citizens' are fully enfranchised and have decision making powers, as did their ancient Greek counterparts. In their Kims and smaller Kimmits they run the affairs of the city.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE DRENN SYSTEM

How are the Drenn of Burdoeth maintained? This political class does not have the economic base that the Athenians had - slavery. The Burdoethian state opposes slavery, and operates under a kind of laissez faire economics where the free-market is loosely moderated by the Office of the Chell. Most estimates put the number of slaves in classical Greece at anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000, and the number of full citizens at 25,000 to 45,000. Ardoth has been quoted as having an upper limit of between 300,000 souls (2nd edition) and half a million (3rd edition), with a human population of

between 52% and 70% of the whole. The three wings of the Ardothian military contain perhaps 4,000 Drenn, and a quick estimate of 'at large' Drenn could be anywhere from 10,000 to 25,000.

For a leisured class to exist someone else must toil on their behalf. Tauther provide part of the answer of course, working on Ardoth's sea wall, being commandeered by Drenn to perform tasks for them (could be an adventure in it, could be a spot of baby-sitting), and taking care of city sanitation under the auspices of the Chell. While it is true that Kim and Kimmit service pays a per diem allowance of 5 and 3 gemules respectively, this is hardly enough to live on (beggars make about 3 yules a day as well). Drenn are expected to sponsor Tauther and uphold the Burdothian codes out of pure patriotism. Yet, if Drenn are not supported by an infrastructure based on slavery, how do they earn a living?

Serving on Kims must hold some reward beyond the joy of bringing justice to one's fellow man (and non-humans of course). It would be naive to think that Kims would not bend a rule here and there to financially favour one or more of its members. The Kim protects the rights of the neighbourhood after all, and it could do this by favouring one business over another, or one citizen over his contemporary from another part of town. Since a Kim is also a court of law, the potential for a conflict of interest - if not outright corruption - is substantial. A comparison with 20th century politicians is easy to make - maybe Drenn have 'sleeping directorships' as well.

Competing Kims could create organised chaos in law-making, and any special favours granted to entrepreneurial Drenn could arouse the ire of the Klades. There is a slight hint of this already, as both the 3rd edition and Companion:Ardoth state that the

Dharsage sees the more powerful Klades as a threat to his authority. Since the Dharsage has only nominal control of the internal running of the city, this may refer to Klade opposition to the Drenn system. Drenn are the only class allowed to hold land, this could mean that they own much of the valuable real estate in Burdoth and Ardoth. Maybe they collect rent from inclep owners and live on the proceeds. This creates servitude of a kind, perhaps 'slavery' by another name, just as in classical Greece it could be difficult to distinguish between an educated slave and a free Athenian artisan. There is more than one way to skin a cat.



Drenn are the beneficiaries of Dharsage and Chell patronage. The choicest jobs both home and abroad are available for the well connected. True heroes will get just rewards, but not every lucrative venture will be staffed with hard working and well intentioned Drenn. A few self-interested individuals will always be ready to exploit opportunities for loot, and more may find themselves corrupted by the privileges they worked so long to obtain.

DRENNSHIP AND NON-HUMANS

The Drenn system caters more to

pure-strain humans than any other race. Although the 3rd edition mentions this, it is not elaborated on in the Sholari Guide. For those without the 2nd edition, the minimum Drenn Points are 50 for a human, 60 for a boccord, and 70 for a muadra. No figures are given for the Iscin races, though I'd recommend 80 for woffen and bronth, and maybe as high as 100 for crugar. Muadra have been second-class citizens for some time, and it may not be wholly coincidental that the rise in dysha literacy parallels the rise in importance of the Drenn system. Both have come to prominence in the last 40 or 50 years. Just as boccord have an alternative to Drennship in the Ros Crendorian codes of Kree, so the Muadra may find greater social mobility in their own cultural system.

Is this pure prejudice or good political sense? A bit of both in all probability; keeping non-humans in Tothis longer ensures that they will be available as cheap labour, and it may be that more non-humans give up on Tothis as they see the humans outstrip them in wealth and prestige. Also bear in mind that a major benefit of Drennship is the access to Earth-Tec - this is not especially useful to non-humans, who will be unable to use any Earth-Tec that requires a scan of the palm print. This includes most weapons and a few other gadgets, so the primary reason for becoming Tauther will be different for non-humans than for descendants of the original colonies.

This would do the Burdothian state no harm. The innate racism of the system is built in and possibly premeditated. Disaffected non-humans may stay in the Realm, contributing to the economy and paying their clutch like regular Toth. Some non-humans - Thivin readily spring to mind - have no interest in the Drenn system, and are attracted to Burdoth for the opportunity to make money in private business. This too is impor-

tant, as these races serve the same function as the "metics" or "resident aliens" did in ancient Greece - they will never be citizens, but they enrich the state with their trade and expertise. Up to 20,000 residents of Ardoth could be of this type.

THE ROLE OF TAXATION AND CIVIC LEVIES

The Drenn system may be partly supported by Tauther servitude, by revenue generated as absentee landlords, by patronage, and (indirectly) by the industry of Burdoth's "resident aliens". The non-humans serve the state for a much longer period of Tothis, and even if they make it to Drenn they will not be a drain on the Earth-Tec resources of the Dharsage.

Still, to support Burdoth's military machine (of which the Drenn are a large part) the clutch currently collected seems inadequate. A Toth family pays 25 gemules every four years; it should perhaps be double that, and annually. Certainly it isn't a lot to pay in comparison to modern income tax. The extensive use of licences and permits in Ardoth could also be a good source of revenue, and one would expect the "resident aliens" to pay generously for the protection and services of the city. As the Drenn system attracts more Tauther, so the costs will begin to rise.

HAS THE DHARSAGE SUCCEEDED IN CREATING THE "SUPER-CITIZEN"?

Does Drennship attract the right kind of candidate? There is no hereditary claim to the title, which along with the very nature of the system rules out the incompetent, but it does not preclude the unscrupulous from becoming Drenn. Tauther are endorsed by existing Drenn, and a certain amount of nepotism must occur. The Dharsage would have no need of concern if all these were archetypal ultra-patriots, but that won't always be the case. There

are severe sanctions placed upon disgraced Drenn, so the Dharsage must be aware that a few bad apples will find their way into the barrel.

Numerous hints in Jorune material suggest that the Burdothian state tends toward imperialism and its citizens are prone to jingoism; the "blaster toting Drenn with a bad reputation abroad" is perhaps the natural product of the Drenn system, and closer to many PCs than any other type. It's also easier to be a Drenn out on the frontier, in contrast to the internal politics of Ardoth where the Offices of the Dharsage and Chell, the Ardothian Council, the Kims, the Klades, the Shen, and the other elements of Ardothian society have to be navigated in order to get anything done. Stalemate is probably the distinguishing feature of Ardothian politics, especially since the Klein-Khodre Accord.

The easiest path to Drennship is through the military, the militias, and other martial occupations. Adventuring Tauther will not often be from the ranks of entris, learsis, and Iscin. In fact Iscin are apolitical, and rarely seek Drennship. This is noteworthy as it shows that the Drenn system is - at least in part - a political tool. The cerebral occupations are necessary for the governance and maintenance of the Realm, and it is these Drenn that will have a better time of it in projects controlled by the Chell. Perhaps the Chell will increase the number of Drennit (honourary Drenn), so countering the Dharsage's monopoly of the more gung-ho element.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The Drenn system favours humans, and especially those from the military. The patriotic, even bigoted, 'Defender of the Realm' is a reality. Much of the Ardothian Guard is staffed with such individuals, and they have been known to lack re-

straint. Integrating non-humans into the system is more problematic, though the Caji infantry shows that it can be done. Some non-humans benefit from being Drenn, but the 'Realm of Man' is just that.

There is a philosophical dead-end looming as well, in that trigger-happy Drenn will not make the best leaders in times of peace or negotiation. If Khodre Dhardrenn is hoping that the best will rise to Kesht and Keshtia, and thence to the kind of Philosopher-King envisaged in Plato's "Republic", emphasising combat prowess may not be the best way to go about it. The only Philosopher-King in Burdoth is Khodre himself.

There are tensions between civic Drennship and field Drennship, though the two may meet most amicably in law enforcement. Yords and daijic may be a happy medium. A third type of Drenn might be those merchants, shasts, and men of knowledge whose primary interest in Drennship is to line their pockets. There is some confusion regarding the foundations of the whole package, specifically the fiscal burden and responsibilities of the Drenn system. As a political philosophy it is only partly successful, and we need elaboration on the progression from Drenn to Kesht to Lystra to Sage (a whole new article).

I hope this article (despite the rambling!) was of some interest. Parts II and III of the Politics of Burdoth will deal with the relationship between the Dharsage and the Chell, and the role of Klades in Burdothian society. I would be very grateful for feedback on the relevance/interest (if any) of this. Most players are perhaps only interested in the superficialities of Drennship, and the Tauther/Drenn system certainly works as a means of character advancement, but do Sholaris find this kind of in-depth discussion useful?