

Nations of the World

Celena:

Overview: Celena is an old country, steeped in history and grandeur. Formed nearly eight hundred years ago from the unification (by conquest) of the numerous warring tribes in the region by the great King Leondun Celiea, the nation now is both rich and influential in the greater world. Plentiful ore and mineral wealth, along with a natural position as the trade-gate between the heartlands and distant Espiyon and the southern isles has helped it rise and hold onto great prominence for centuries.

The wealth of Celena has on occasion made it the target of avaricious intent by other nations and it has historically been at war with Tagaria, the allied aggression of Pruska and Oustany, and took part over a century ago in the famed 40 year war with Espiyon. (Though this was fought almost entirely at sea or far off in the lands of the southern isles).

Thankfully the natural barrier of the Clermont range coupled with the valiant hearts of the Celenan people and the mysterious powers of Sorcelli wielded by the noble families have been enough to keep the lands safe and unmolested. Most recently (around six years ago) unprovoked aggression by Oustany in attacking Celenan interests in the heartlands and the southern Isles have led to a declaration of war between the two nations and Celena currently has a portion of its armies fighting a successful (if slow) campaign in that countries northern regions.

Ostensibly a monarchy, Celena is currently ruled by the popular King Phillipe D'Onries. But in truth the authority of the king is far from absolute, instead the country is actually governed by the collective will of the ten great families, and within the court of Phillipe it is said that real power can change hands a dozen times within the space of a single heartbeat.



Along with ten great families (each of whom is responsible for one of the provinces) there are dozens of minor houses of varying wealth and influence. Most of these are closely tied to one of the great houses (often for centuries) but there are a few that have no firm allegiance (rarely by

choice but more often as punishment for some failing in allegiance to a great house) although there has been infrequent movement between the minor and great houses and historically it has been known for ennoblement of a family to occur there is to all intents a clear and intraversable line between noble families and the common folk.

For the common folk social class can be split into roughly three ranks.

Serf; those indentured to the land and effectively chattel to the landowner, they have almost no-rights within the law and are frequently the poorest and most abused of all Celena's people. Usually one is born to the rank of serf and it is baring extraordinary circumstances for life. Occasionally great debt might force a man or even an entire family into serfdom.

Commoner; Non-nobles who are free of (major) debt, they can own property (but not land) and run businesses (so long as they pay appropriate tax) the law protects their general freedoms and rights with the exception of where these would contravene the rights of the nobility. This group make up the majority of the free people of Celena.

Promu; Non-nobles who have been afforded special privilege and status by one of the great families or the king, They can own property and land, and have rights and the protection of law usually exceeding those of the Commoner. Higher ranking priests and decorated military officers are the most usual candidates for this rank though the richest of merchants can sometimes be afforded it as well. One notable point is that very rarely a Promu marries into a noble family and although he retains his rank his children will be noble.

People: The Celenan people are for the most part a outgoing and expressive folk. Where it can be afforded bright clothes are the preference and music and art (albeit of very different styles) enjoy great popularity with both commoner and nobleman alike.

When pushed to conflict however the Celenans show a different mettle — strong of character and conviction the Celenan army and navy are recognised the world over as a force to be reckoned with and its swordsmen and musketeers are second to none.

Religion: The Serayn faith is the official state religion of Celena (paying reverence to the father creator and his

consort). The faith was first brought to the country around 400 years ago by missionaries from Nathay and thanks to support from several noble families at the time quickly spread mostly ousting the indigenous Veileaux religion. The church enjoys reasonably popular support throughout Celena but its influence with the noble families and thus the politics of Celena diminished almost as quickly as it had arisen, as Duke Ciermone famously said *"We Celenans were here before God, so until he attends court in person I shall reserve the right to pay him any heed"*

The Veileaux religion (the worship of the spiritual entities said to dwell beyond the veil itself) still has some small popularity in the remote rural areas and enjoys slightly more widespread acknowledgement in the north-western mountain provinces of Auvern and Brokke, but even there it is not an organised religion and lack of any noble patronage of any sort means it is certain to stay so for the foreseeable future.

Sorcelli: As old as the mountains of Celena is its people's connection with the mysterious power of Sorcelli. From the very earliest days certain gifted individuals have had the power to see into the Veil and manipulate the strange energies that flow from beyond it into the normal world. Those so gifted are said to be able to use it to alter the very substance of the mundane, so that what is real becomes unreal and what should hold true in nature bows instead to the commands of man.

History suggests that once the gift was far more common than it is now and further that those gifted were drawn from commoner and noble alike. Certainly some of the more obvious incarnations of its power like the speaking-signposts that are found on many of the old roads, or the incredible floating docks of Navais, suggest its utility was much more commonplace in times past. Sadly that is not the case in modern times, now it seems that only the bloodlines of the ancient noble families produce gifted children and thus its secrets are jealously guarded and its public use rare indeed.

The one exception to this trend for infrequent and mostly unseen use in modern times is the noble dynasties creation and use of Familiere. Created by the most secret rites and guarded locations, familiere come in three types.

The least obvious and possibly most numerous are the Bet'nay, ordinary appearing animals infused with the essence of the Veil (some say possessed by spirits from beyond it) to become more potent and intelligent. Stories of cats that can control minds and disappear into vapour, hounds able to run a hundred miles in a day and bite through steel, and hawks capable of reading a and engaging in involved discourse are common in the stories of Celena.

More obvious and arguably most powerful are the Jai-nay, initially inanimate constructs of metal and wood, hinge and pulley given motive power and purpose by Sorcelli. Most often these take the form of war machines, great armoured carriages bristling with blade and gun set to purpose by the command of the family to which it belongs. But sometimes they can be more subtle, cunningly designed mannequins disguised as simple statues that act as indomitable guardians of a families most secret places.

Lastly there is the Fougue, the least apparent and possibly weakest of the Familiere, merely essence (or spirit) tethered to some place or thing and set to specific purpose such as providing illumination at command or lifting on unseen shoulders some great load. For the most part the Fougue are fairly innocuous in function but the requirements of the nobles have at times turned even these creations to other purpose, such as seemingly ordinary portraits whose subjects can recount in detail everything they are witness to when the correct command is given.

Pruska:

To the East of Celena, beyond the Clermont range sits the dark forested lands of Pruska, although briefly allied with Oustany in attempted conquest of Celena (around 140 years ago) it has been mostly a staunch ally of Celena against the predations of that expansionist and aggressive nation.

Most of the country is densely wooded and apart from on the undulating coastline their towns are nestled deep within its bosom, unsurprisingly timber and furs make up a large part of the country's exports.

The Pruskan people are generally tough and serious (and physically much bigger than the average Celenan), and although oft dour seeming, if they can be roused to merriment they throw themselves into it with unparalleled effort. They have a great love hunting and fishing and all things to do with the forest even their famed and most potent brew is a powerful spirit called Skanch made from fungus, treesap and sugar.

They are justly famous for their trackers and scouts and feared in battle for their skill with the crossbow and axe. In battle they often make up their numbers with fearsome Warhounds.

Pruskan irregulars can quite often be found serving alongside ordinary Celenan forces as scouts or crossbowmen and its hound-masters (and indeed hounds) are much sought after in the kennels of the Celenan nobles.

Tagaria:

To the North and North east of Celena is the windswept highlands of Tagaria. Almost a collection of independent city-states they nevertheless all pay tithes and lip-service at least to a powerful warlord-dynasty based in Tagar its snowy capital.

Celena has been at war with an expansionist Tagaria three times in the last two hundred years but in each case the conflict has only lasted at most handful of years before the Tagarian aggression was dissuaded and sent home.

Tagarian folk vary in attitude and outlook dramatically depending on which city they hail from but physically they are usually slightly shorter than an average Celenan with darker of skin and they almost all sport wiry black hair and thick bushy eyebrows that make them unmistakable even before they speak.

Whale oil and fish caught of their northern coast form a good portion of the country's export and their craftsmen's skill at working precious metals is unparalleled the world over.

In battle the Tagarian's are famed cavalrymen and many of them are employed as individually or as mercenary companies by other nations around the heartlands.

Espiyon:

The blessed empire of Espiyon is over a month's sail west-south-west of Celena. It too is an ancient and rich land and there has been distrust and envy between the two great nations since the day they first encountered each other.

Distance, experience and caution have for the most part been able to give temperance to the otherwise uneasy relationship. Although over a century ago tensions and dispute over colonial lands in the distant southern isles boiled over into the famed forty-year war, where the navies of the two countries battered each other mercilessly until wiser heads were finally able to call truce.

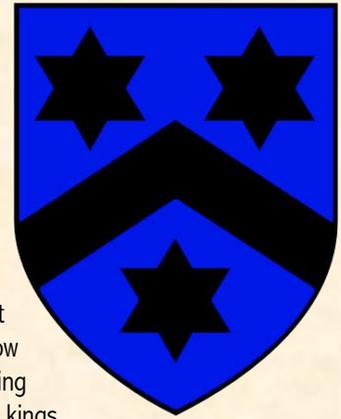
Espiyon is now on much better terms with Celena, and great wing-sailed Espiyon Galleys can regularly be seen landing in Celenan ports bringing silks, pepper and gunpowder in exchange for Celenan gold.

The Espish are a swarthy complexioned and dark-humoured people, they can sometimes seem uncaring and uncharitable and often noted for their unreliability in general dealings, but they are equally famed for their loyalty if it can be earned.

Passable swordsmen the Espish are noted sailors and navigators. They follow a strange religion (called Feh) of elemental spirits and otherworldly creatures and their priest-magi are said to be able to control the weather and call lightning.

Oustany:

Enemy of Celena, Oustany is a huge country to the south east of Pruska. For the most part vast rolling hills and dusty plains the nation is in reality the subsumed lands of several once independent principalities that have now fallen to the ever-expanding aggression of the Oustan kings.



Recently unprovoked attacks by Oustan forces on Celenan colonies and shipping have forced Celena to declare war on Oustany (again) and with the co-operation of Celena's Pruskan allies Celena has sent its armies on a campaign to free Oustany's northern principalities from Oustan servitude in the hope that this might give the other provinces the example needed to also throw off the yoke of the oppressive regime.

Tall, pale and cold eyed the Oustan folk are unmistakable, the years of living under the brutal dictatorship have forced all humour from its folk and even their speech is harsh and sharp on the ear.

The harshness of their land has however produced a battle-hardened folk and it is said that an Oustan soldier will stand and fight on no matter how severe his injuries.

Thankfully individuality and imagination are also discouraged so Oustan battle tactics are for the most part predictable. Thus although progression is measured the Celenan soldiers superior skill at arms and the verve and flair of its generals are slowly making the difference.

Other Nations:

There are many other nations of the world that have some small dealings with Celena, such as exotic *Vensar* and its islands far to the SW across L'Mer D'Auspell (where Celena has a few small colonial towns).

The mountainous country of *Girizlund* that sits to the NE of Tagaria, famed for its intricate mechanisms and instruments.

Or the ancient lands of *Nathay*, birthplace of the Serayn religion and exporter of salt and spice.

But for the most part these countries (and others) have little influence and impact on Celena, merely places which supply unusual and exotic goods for the delectation of the jaded nobility.