## Earthwardens

*We stood silent; a circle of shadowed figures swathed in simple brown robes. Above us the ceiling of the vast cave soared into flickering darkness among the stalactites. The only light came from the coruscating glow of the vast pool in the center of our circle. Crude steps carved from the living rock led down to the edge of the churning Jewel Well: it’s power radiated out in waves that buffeted us like blasts from a forge.*

*At the top of the steps stood a solitary figure similarly garbed in a plain brown. Jrek Okentu, leader of the remaining Earthwardens. Next to him was a wide pedestal of black stone, the flat top adorned with rows of jagged crystals, each pulsing, as if in answer to the scintillating Essence Well.*

*“Brother and Sisters. For countless years we have labored as healers and guardians of this scarred land. We have achieved much, left talismans to protect future generations, but it has been costly. We have lost many friends, and our time is ending. Most of our order has long departed this world, only us few remain. Were we to remain, we would continue to diminish, challenged by the remnants of our ancient brethren and the new powers that call Kulthea home. We gather here, our new birthplace, for our final act: a journey to become the immortal guardians of Kulthea, imbued with its very Essænce”.*

*After a weighted silence, Jrek carefully selected one of the crystals and beckoned to the nearest robed figure. Stepping forward the chosen man shrugged off his robe and stood naked before Jrek and accepted the crystal.*

*“With this acceptance you are born anew. I name you Ssamis T’zang, Winds Fury”*

*The naked figure eyed the Well in trepidation for just a moment and then, gathering his will about him like armor, he strode down into the bubbling pool, until his head finally disappeared below the surface.*

*We knew not what to expect, and an expectant humming of power washed over us all. Slowly, a shape rose out of the pool: higher, and higher it loomed over us. A long sinuous neck of iridescent scales glistened in the light, and a shadows spread out from the lithesome form. The creature’s wings unfurled, casting jagged shadows across us. A Dragon had been Born.*

*One by one each accepted a crystal and entered the Well to be reborn…emerging, growing, and spreading their wings….*

*Finally, when the last of the outer circle had passed, Jrek turned to look at us, the last remaining few. Gesturing to the podium and the few remaining crystals that lay there he addressed us:*

*“For you, my closest, most trusted companions, I offer you these last remaining jewels. Long have I labored over their investiture, for you that stand so high in abilities and my esteem. With our ascendancy we ensure our stewardship of Kulthea, immortal guardians of the Essence and one with the Flows.”*

*The first of us stepped forward, her robes slipping from her shoulders. She was a tall woman of black flowing hair and flawless alabaster skin bathed in the scintillating lights of the Jewel Well. She stood for a moment contemplating the crystals, and after a moment Jrek picked up long slender crystal black in color. Light flickered and peering deep into the shard she could discern a shadowy form of wing and claw.*

*Jrek dipped his head and handed her the crystal. “I name you Ulya Shek, Black Queen” he intoned, touching her forehead as he spoke. Then without even a backwards glance at us, she descended the steps into the coruscating pool.*

*One by one they stepped forward… each named in turn…*

**“***…Drul Churk: Green Seer”*

*“…Vorig Kye: Silver Eye”*

*“…Oran Jatar: Ice Lord”*

*“…Sulthon NiShaang: Red Flame”*

*Finally only I remained. I stepped forward, pondering the cerulean crystal, it’s center swirled with a cloudy blue haze. Picking up the crystal I felt the shock travel up my arm… though I was most pussiant, my knees almost buckled from the power. In wonder I beheld the power of the talism, but I knew my mind and had made my decision. Jrek raised his hand and began to speak.*

*“ I name you Riin Awduu “Sky Storm”*

*I shook my head.*

 *“I must refuse this gift my brother.” I paused,considering my next words. “ I fear this power will subsume us. We will be lost.”*

*Jrek beckoned me forth again.*

*Again I shook my head. “My path no longer lies with you.”*

*It was all I spoke, and I offered no further explanation. Jrek regarded me for some time, but he noted my resolve and his eyes saddened. He laid his hand upon my shoulder and spoke softly: “You know the path of ascendancy, and the caves of Ssoiayig Saer will lie open for you always. I wish you well.”*

 *Stepping back he raised his own crystal, a shard of soft golden light. “I name myself Kydak Dûm, Sun Sword”. With those final words he stepped into the Well. Suddenly I was beset with doubts and I turned quickly and left the caves alone, the blue crystal shard still held tightly in my hand.*

***The Ascendancy of the Earthwardens***

***Histories, as scribed by the The Storm Wizard.***

### History of the Earthwardens

This mysterious group was comprised of Ka’Ta’Viiri: Althans sensitive to the Essaence that were sent from Kulthea to find other Essaence emanations elsewhere in the galaxy. Eventually they had journeyed far beyond the Althan Empire and caught in the event horizon of a singularity. Though they were finally able to escape, the time dilation returned them to Kulthea thousands of years after the devastation of the Althan rebellion.

Surveying the destruction and ruin of their world, they were determined to rebuild Kulthea, but not as rulers as before. Instead they would encourage the younger races to rise up and flourish. But there was still much evil walking the earth: demons summoned from the Pales, and other shadowy forces arising from the ashes of the Empire.

These Ka’Ta’viiri learned to tap directly into the earth Essaence, to channel the very powers of Kulthea. They built enchanted places of guardianship to help protect the weaker races and came to them as teachers and counselors. They were named Earthwardens by the early Elven cultures and they inhabited the Shadow World for much of the Interregnum. Eventually, after a time, they felt they had done all they could, and most departed the planet. They left behind many works and artifacts: the Jewel Wells, the coral roads, protective stone circles, structures to mold and wield the Essance, and not the least, the enigmatic Golems-guardians for future generations.

The Earthwardens story does not end there however, for some of their number did not depart Kulthea.

A small group led by Jrek Okentu underwent a powerful ritual of Ascendancy in order to become creatures of raw Essænce. Fashioning crystals aspected to the elemental forces, they immersed themselves in a powerful Jewel Well Foci, emerging transformed into true avatars of Kulthea and the Essaence: Great Dragons. The most powerful of the Ascended Earthwardens, Jrek and his five companions, became Drakes of surpassing power: they are now known as the Dragonlords.

After the transformation they scattered, reveling in their new found powers, and became masters of the skies and Flows. Over time, most succumbed to their elemental nature, their previous lives and memories faded with the passing milennium. Some retreated from the world of mortals, others became cruel lords, fickle as nature itself. A few held on to remnants of their former Ka’Ta’viir nature.

Thule, one of Jrek’s original companions refused the ritual. Keeping his wrought crystal, (of Air) he continues his role as an Earthwarden. He is now known as the Storm Wizard.