

An excerpt from:
Races of the World; a treatise on threats near and far,
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Chapter III – Threats from outside of the Crucible of the World

...Throughout of the mists of time, many great races have departed the stage of the World, their part finished and their star sadly faded from sight. Rare it is that mortal men of this age may treat with those that have shaped the very destiny of this World; yet in the mysterious Steelsworn, that opportunity may yet be possible.

Fate, the cruel mistress of us all, has never the less thrown an obstacle in our way: the Steelsworn have no wish to parley with us, or to teach us the intricacies of history and science that are their eminent domain. Our interactions with them are few and are invariably short. We are not permitted to enter their cities, or to even set foot on the land they consider to be religiously inviolate. All that remains us is terse conversation with a few morose individuals on the floating port of Tehrennos – a marvel of engineering that only teases at the great benefits we could learn from them – and the fragments of historical record that we still have available.

Dear readers, allow me now to piece together as complete a narrative as we possess, brief though it may be...

It is said in elder texts that the Steelsworn were the second race to be brought to life from the primordial clay. The All-Father, venerated above all other Gods by the Steelsworn, was displeased with his first creations: the Mudali.

The All-Father imparted the Mudali with too great a love of learning and of magical mastery, and this led them to question his wisdom and to even threaten his might. Therefore, the All-Father resolved to create a new race: one that would show the devotion that was his due, and would help to hold his errant firstborn progeny in check.

Where the Mudali were capricious, envious, and ambitious, the Steelsworn were stoic and true. They sought no wisdom other than that offered by their creator, and all their intricate works were to the aggrandisement of their one God. The All-Father denied to them the gift of magic, and so their energy and craft went into the manufacturing of things of beauty and utility. Even now, their work is considered to be of unparalleled quality, and Princes may go to war simply for ownership of a Steelsworn Blade.

The love of the elder 'children' for the younger was little, if at all. The Mudali were slighted by the fact that the All-Father created a new race, more in his own image and temperament. Though the Steelsworn were physically strong and hale – giants to mere mortals such as we are, they could not match the power held by the lithe and graceful Mudali. The Magic of the World and the many Realms beyond was theirs to command – continents would rise and fall if enough Mudali set their mind to it. With the balance of power firmly tipped in their favour, a meanness of spirit crept into the hearts of the Mudali, foreshadowing an act of treachery that would forever change the world.

Though they had supremacy over the Steelsworn, it rankled with them that there was at least one being who exceeded them in learning and potency: the All-Father. Long years passed as the father and his firstborn became ever more estranged. The gleaming cities of the Mudali were raised throughout the crucible of the World, places where the All-Father was questioned openly for the first time, and where plans were made in secret to overthrow his benign but stagnant rule.

The first God, he that stole from the Darkness to fashion the Physical realm, was without equal. There was none that could stand against him singularly and prevail, be they a lone Mudali champion or even the Great Wyrms of the Dark. But together, the Mudali had gained power sufficient to be a threat.

It was not enough for them to overthrow their father, to supplant him as rulers of the World entire. The Mudali knew that certain magic had been withheld from them, and their avarice for this forbidden knowledge underpinned all their grievances, both real and imagined. Not only did they wish to usurp him, but to take from the All-Father the last vestiges of power that they believed would make them into Gods in their own right.

They struck with purpose and with cunning; the forces of the Steelsworn were swept aside contemptuously. The All-Father was cast down in a devastating magical assault, and with his passing the World was broken in many places, allowing the evil of the Great Wyrms to gain a foothold in the physical realm for the first time.

The Mudali undertook a great mystic ritual; they sought to transfer the latent magic of their father to their race, but in doing so they shattered the eternal spirit of the one God, and instead formed many lesser ones in his place. This was an unexpected development, and in the confusion a team of Steelsworn stole back the body of the All-Father, from under the noses of their hated enemies.

The Steelsworn retreated to the fastness of their holdings in the Shieldlands, and there they have remained for many thousands of years. Their home was designed by the All-Father to be proof against the magic of the Mudali, and they may not step foot upon the sacred lands of the Steelsworn without inviting their own destruction.

A stalemate developed as neither of his children could eliminate the other, and so for aeons the Mudali ruled in the wider World, waging new wars against the many Gods they helped to create, and the followers of those Gods. The Steelsworn remained in their impregnable fortresses, nursing the inviolate corpse of their lost God, and vowing revenge, no matter how long it would take...

Though the Mudali have now faded from the World following their disastrous war against Ancient Hthemnos, the Steelsworn have yet to leave the Shieldlands in force. It is said that some Steelsworn now travel the World by the secret ways as scouts and rangers, looking for any signs of their hated foe.

In forgotten forest paths or the lesser travelled roads in the Badlands, one might cross their path. The Steelsworn resemble our own race very closely – and that is a story for another chapter – but they are broader and taller than we are. If you see a giant in a long cloak, seek not to waylay them or you shall, dear reader, be in for a most unpleasant surprise.

They have laboured for many long years in isolation, planning the downfall of a hated foe. What devices have they created and skills have they learned in those years of sojourn? If they now seek to finish their rivals, they must be powerful indeed – no doubt beyond our limited imagining! If only we could find a way to align ourselves with them and access their great knowledge, it could make the gains we have made based on the dusty remnants of the Hegemony look like a child's plaything.

My advice is thus, dear reader: treat any Steelsworn you meet with the utmost respect, and be on your way. Our civilization has a bright future ahead of us, and we should not jeopardise that by inviting the wrath of an elder race upon us...