

# Table of Contents

<b>1 Varushka people.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Varushka culture and customs.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Family.....	3
2.2 Parting.....	3
2.3 Hospitality.....	4
2.4 Celebration.....	5
2.5 Funerals.....	5
<b>3 Varushka look and feel.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Overview.....	6
3.2 Feel.....	6
3.3 Breakdown.....	6
3.4 Varushkan costume.....	8
3.5 Low status costume.....	8
3.6 High status costume.....	9
3.7 Trousers.....	10
3.8 Varushkan armour.....	11
3.9 Varushkan helms.....	13
3.10 Boyars.....	15
3.11 Embroidery.....	17
3.12 Hats.....	20
3.13 Children.....	21
3.14 Images to avoid.....	22
<b>4 Varushka history.....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Joining the Empire.....	24
<b>5 Varushka leadership.....</b>	<b>25</b>
5.1 Leading a territory.....	25
<b>6 Varushka military concerns.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>7 Varushka economic interests.....</b>	<b>27</b>
7.1 Outposts.....	27
<b>8 Varushka religious beliefs.....</b>	<b>28</b>
8.1 The Virtuous Animals.....	28
8.2 Storytellers.....	28
<b>9 Varushka magical traditions.....</b>	<b>30</b>
9.1 Volhov.....	30
9.2 Cabalists.....	31
<b>10 Varushka hearth magic.....</b>	<b>32</b>
10.1 Rules.....	32
<b>11 Varushka lineage and species attitudes.....</b>	<b>33</b>
11.1 The Company of the White Stag.....	33
<b>12 Varushka territories.....</b>	<b>34</b>
12.1 Karov.....	34
12.2 Volodmartz.....	34
12.3 Miekarova.....	34
12.4 Karsk (Lost).....	34
<b>13 Varushka children.....</b>	<b>35</b>
13.1 Things every child should know.....	35
<b>14 Varushka music.....</b>	<b>36</b>
14.1 The Music of Varushka.....	36
<b>15 Varushka costumes.....</b>	<b>37</b>
15.1 Overview.....	37
15.2 Costumes.....	37
15.3 Clothing.....	37
15.4 ??Images to avoid - DO NOT USE THESE.....	38
15.5 Jewellery.....	39
15.6 Armour.....	39
15.7 Weapons.....	40
15.8 Shops.....	40

# 1 Varushka people



Varushka is a hard country. Life here is a struggle; the summers are short and the winters are long. The land is wild and resentful ? it resists taming and sends monsters to threaten those who would settle here. Varushkans are stoic and grim in the face of this adversity, only letting down their guard when they are able to secure their door against the dangers of the night.

To endure the predations of the land, the Varushkans have become guarded and wary. Most live in vales, wide valleys where the roads in and out can easily be watched. To survive here requires constant protection from the terrible dangers that infest the land. If those who provide that protection sometimes exact a grim toll in return, that too is the Varushkan way. Varushkans have little time for fairy stories where everything ends happily ever after ? they are a people well used to making hard choices.

Isolation is a fact of life here. Dangerous wilderness, where darker powers hold sway, lies between the vales. The Varushka have built roads to join their settlements and learned ways to ward those roads against the fell creatures that stalk the night, but no warding is perfect and some evils cannot be kept out by magic alone. The people know that if they grow weak or soft, if they forget the lessons of their past and the blood that was spilled to learn them, then those dark powers will reach out to claim them.

The malevolent entities that dwell in the dark woods of Varushka come in many different forms. The weaker ones, which the Varushkans call Wolves, can be driven off by strength of arms alone; but the most dangerous, called Sovereigns, require more subtle ways to deal with them. Varushkans have learned to prize wisdom dearly, for understanding is essential to dealing with the threats they face. Sometimes these threats can be defeated and destroyed but more often they must be endured. And sometimes they must be bargained with; for no matter how distasteful, it is a truism that it is better for one life to be lost than all.

The wealth of the land is what makes the dangers of Varushka worth facing. Veins of ore lie close to the surface, the trees provide valuable amber and timber, while the forests and rivers teem with beasts. Danger is never far away, but the land provides commensurate reward for those who are careful and wise enough to endure its predations.



The Varushkan people are often considered pessimistic by outsiders. They expect the worst, and they prepare accordingly. Yet they also possess an irrepressible spirit ? they endure hardship but they refuse to give in. They take fierce pride in their ability to prosper in a dangerous land. They carve out homes for their families from the darkest woods, and reap rich rewards for daring to live where lesser men and women would falter. No one can know the joy of small things like a Varushkan, for nothing is given them: they have fought for everything they have.

At one point, they were two peoples ? the Vard and the Ushka. The necessity of living in a harsh land first blurred and then removed those distinctions centuries ago, and they are absolutely one people. The only exception is those Varushkans who are born with a white birthmark somewhere on their bodies. According to legend, this mark shows the child as having a strong connection to the ancient Ushka, and the shape of the birthmark may give a hint as to who the child may have been in a past life. Children born with such birthmarks are often a little fey and unpredictable, feeling a strong instinctual connection to the dark forests and are said to possess a natural talent for bargains ? a ?*silver tongue flows from a silver mark.*?

## 2 Varushka culture and customs

### 2.1 Family



A respect for family is central to Varushkan culture. Varushkans commonly use familial titles to show respect and friendship. Friends may call each other Cousin, or even Brother or Sister if they are particularly close. Calling someone Uncle or Aunt indicates a significant degree of respect and acknowledges someone's seniority and authority while Grandfather or Grandmother is usually used for the oldest and most respected members of the community. Individuals honoured in this way are usually treated just like any other family member.

Old age commands respect in Varushka. Older relatives who pass their wisdom and experience down to the younger generations are treasured. To the Varushkans, long years both grant and demonstrate wisdom. Fools die young, and their strength does not save them. Varushkan folklore includes countless stories where the young hero gets into trouble after ignoring the advice of their elders.

Often this tradition of the older generation passing their wisdom to the younger is demonstrated in the form of an apprenticeship. Rarely formalised, it is especially common with magicians and priests. An older individual takes a younger one "under their wing" and imparts their wisdom while engaging in day-to-day activities. The younger individual, for their part, helps the older in any number of ways, often serving as an assistant or conversational foil, for example.

### 2.2 Parting



Varushkans have a tradition of gift giving before and after a significant journey. When a Varushkan leaves their family for the first time, there is usually a ceremony to mark the occasion, a celebration that culminates with one or more gifts. Travellers sometimes do not come back, or come back changed, so when family return from such travels, there is a second celebration where the returning traveller is expected to give gifts in their turn. Traditionally the gifts given to a departing family member are usually practical, while gifts given by the returning family member are usually decorative mementos of the traveller's journey.

The Varushkan people cannot afford to suffer the foolish or indulge the lazy for long. The slothful, the ignorant, the arrogant and the petty criminal ? anyone whose presence is no longer tolerable ? receives an unlooked for parting ceremony, receiving the traditional departure gifts of a travelling cloak, a sack, a meal of bread and cheese, and a stout staff before effectively being exiled. Such individuals either learn harsh lessons in self-sufficiency or die in the wilderness between vales. The luckiest fall in with a group of travelling **Navarr**, while others end up joining a new community, become bandits or leave Varushka forever. While some hold grudges against the vales that threw them out, those who learn from their experiences and become better people feature strongly in Varushkan folklore.

One particular parting tradition is performed on the eve or the morning of battle, or before an especially long or perilous mission. Most often a spouse or lover, but sometimes a close friend or parent, spends time braiding the hair of the loved-one who is leaving into an intricate weave, working charms of protection in as they go. The hair is not untied until they are together again. Those without long hair are often ceremonially presented with a hank of braided animal hair, or knotted yarn, which will be carried until the pair are reunited and untie it together. In much of Varushka this is also performed for the beloved dead as they set off on their last journey - some folk-tales refer to the shame of going from this life with loose hair and thus unloved.

## 2.3 Hospitality



Anyone who lives in Varushka for long learns to be naturally suspicious of strangers. The land has many dangers and some can take a pleasing form if they choose to. Despite this they traditionally offer a warm welcome to any who stay after nightfall. Varushkans rarely let their guard down around strangers, but they know that treating them well is the best way to ensure prosperity and avert danger.

Treating a stranger well is the first step to turning them into an ally, and encourages them to respond in kind ? pitching in with the cleaning, the cooking and so on. More importantly, treating a disguised **monster** well traps them in the role of well-behaved guest. As long as they are not mistreated, they are bound by the **rules** of hospitality, and they cannot harm anyone. There are several cautionary tales of Varushkans who forget the importance of these customs and bring terrible suffering down on themselves and their families.

Bringing your own food and drink and sharing it with your hosts is a cultural expectation as well as common courtesy. Visitors who break the traditions of hospitality by being rude or taking their hosts for granted may be offered a drink or a meal ?for the road?. This phrase is a pointed warning that your behaviour is offending your hosts and the visitor who does not mend their ways faces immediate ejection. Depending on the circumstances a wise visitor might decline the offer and ask instead for a bed for the night. A foolish visitor who accepts the offer or carries on causing offence faces expulsion into the dark night.

## 2.4 Celebration

Day is the time for hard work. Celebrating before the sun touches the treetops implies indolence and invites the land to punish you accordingly. Few celebrations are ever held during daylight and as a result many Varushkans appear dour and parsimonious at first. In fact, they reserve their merrymaking for nightfall when feasts, drinking, dancing, **toasting**, storytelling and singing abound. Varushkans love dark bread and honey, and many meals start or end with it. Honey is also used to brew mead or create sweets, and bees are a powerful symbol of **Prosperity**, wealth and the family. **Stzena** are part- or full-time musicians employed by many towns and villages to play and compose music for local celebrations.

## 2.5 Funerals

A funeral is almost always a somber occasion in Varushka. The majority of funerals take place during the day, and are restrained affairs marked by eulogies spoken by the closest friends and families of the dead and a blessing from a priest. The body is then buried in a graveyard or corpse garden, wrapped in a shroud traditionally sewn together out of the sheets and blankets from the last bed they slept in before death. Graves are usually dug by the closest relatives of the deceased, rather than by any kind of professional.

After sunset, the tenor of the funeral changes. It is traditional to have a celebratory wake once the sun has set, during which an extra place is set for the dead. It is common for a Varushkan to put an amount of money aside with a trusted friend or a wise one to pay for the wake. The wake often lasts until sunrise, and includes the reading of the will and the distribution of the deceased's property wherever possible.

Varushkans remain buried for around five years, after which their bones are dug up and they are reinterred in an ossuary. The greatly reduced space taken up by an ossuary means that it is possible to store the remains of many more people in a single tomb which is much easier to protect than a sprawling cemetery. Ossuaries often have underground catacombs, and a comparatively small building can serve the needs of an entire vale.



## 3 Varushka look and feel

### 3.1 Overview



Varushkans like to display their wealth in their costume. Clothes are usually practical and well made but are made from cloth dyed in bright colours and then intricately embroidered with a dark thread. The use of fur is common, on cloaks, robes and mantles in a range of colours and styles.

Armour and weapons are always solid and well made. For most they are practical pieces made to serve, but the wealthiest Varushkans use ornate designs that serve to strike fear into their enemies. Talismans are widespread, used to help ward off evil.

Also see [Varushka costumes](#) and [Varushka icons and artistry](#).

### 3.2 Feel

Dour, stern, uncompromising, wise, cunning, prosperous, rich, powerful.

### 3.3 Breakdown

#### 3.3.1 Influences

Rus and Slavic costume.

#### 3.3.2 Materials

Fabrics are usually a single colour, suitable for embroidery or decoration. Poorer Varushkans use practical and hard wearing materials like wool, felt, heavy cotton, leather - but the fabric is less important than the decoration. Fur is common, but is usually reserved for trim.

#### 3.3.3 Colours

Bright vibrant colours predominate. A white shirt or dress is the most common under garment, with brightly decorated hems. Garments are made from cloth of a single colour, with contrasting colours being used for decoration and under garments.



### 3.3.4 Clothing

The base layer is usually a white shirt or dress, with embroidered hems. Poor Varushkans use wool to stay warm, but most prefer to wear multiple layers of lighter clothing, often in contrasting colours. Warm shawls in bright colours are handed down through families.

Trousers for men and women have baggy legs that fall just above or below the knee with stockings bound to the leg beneath them. Women's dresses have full, layered skirts and aprons.

Coats are more common than cloaks. The ideal coat has an asymmetric overlap across the chest, is nipped in at the waist but flares out below the waist to a full 'skirt'. The wealthiest wear coats in bright strong colours often with fur trim or embroidered hems.

### 3.3.5 Decoration

Fur is used extensively to trim garments of all kinds including armour. Garmets are not made from decorative cloth or covered entirely in decoration, rather it is put in bands usually around the upper arms and the hems. Complex and detailed embroidery is the favourite, most commonly in brilliant red for a white garment. Smocking is common.

### 3.3.6 Jewellery

Amber and silver are most commonly worn. Hunters carry amulets, talismans and fetishes designed to protect them from the monsters that might otherwise hunt them in turn.



### 3.3.7 Armour

The most common armour is scale or lamellar, either leather or metal. Splinted greaves and vambraces are common. Helms usually rise to a point, often with a plume.

A few Boyars wear plate that has a simple design but is intricately decorated. Plate can be tooled to emphasize the strength and power of the wearer and to make them appear darker and more intimidating.



### 3.3.8 Shields

Round shields are common and some Schlacta employ a pavisse.

### 3.3.9 Weapons

Schlacta, the Varushkan professional warriors, use heavy weapons of war such as broad swords, war axes and bardiches. The woodsman's axe is a common weapon for many other Varushkans.

## 3.4 Varushkan costume

The most common Varushkan costume is a white shirt, tunic or dress, often white or a light colour. This is intricately embroidered on the hems, the most commonly in red but any bright contrasting colour is fine. Garments may be made from wool, but most Varushkans prefer a lighter material like linen. These can be worn in layers for warmth, commonly with different garments in contrasting colours.



## 3.5 Low status costume

This couple are wearing some traditional Varushkan garments, a white dress and a white tunic with embroidered hems respectively. Sheepskin is a practical but cheap material which is worn by poor Varushkans, wealthier individuals would layer their garments and hem them with fur. Patterned fabrics, such as the woman's skirt, are used by the poor in place of the embroidered garments worn by most Varushkans.



### 3.6 High status costume

The ideal Varushkan jacket is fitted on the arms and chest but flares out from the waist with a full skirt of material. Dark coloured garments may be trimmed with fur rather than embroidered. ??



### 3.7 Trousers

Varushkan men and women wear plain coloured trousers. Ideally these should be baggy down to just past the knee. Anything worn below the knee should be strapped to the leg. Trousers may be plain or brightly dyed but are usually made from fabric of a single colour; the strapping is another opportunity for a bright contrasting colour, embroidery or both. ??





### 3.8 Varushkan armour

The traditional Varushkan armour worn by the Schlacta, the professional soldiers, is tightly woven scale or lammellar. Varushkan armour is as likely to be leather as metal. ???





### 3.9 Varushkan helms

The ideal Varushkan helm is pointed with a plume emerging from the point. ?????





???



### 3.10 Boyars

Boyars who are warriors often wear the traditional lammellar armour but with more complete coverage and supplemented with hardened leather or plate on the fore-arms and legs. ??



Boyars are not sadistic tyrants, but their rule may be authoritarian, callous or even cruel. Some adopt an intimidating demeanour, the better to project their power and authority over their dominion. Warrior boyars who choose to fight the monsters of the dark forests by appearing as dark as their foes may wear a suit of plate fashioned that reflects the dark gothic tone of the nation.



### 3.11 Embroidery

The most distinctive feature of Varushkan costume is the intricate embroidery that provides a stark contrast. Embroidery should stand out and show off the wearer's wealth. The entire garment should not be embroidered or decorated - the ideal placements are hems and in bands around the upper arm, but any garment will look more Varushkan with some embroidery. ?????







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### 3.12 Hats

Varushkan hats may be simple embroidered round caps trimmed with fur or else pointed caps that fold over the head.





### 3.13 Children

Costume for Varushkan children follows the traditional styles and emphasis on bright colours.



### 3.14 Images to avoid

A LRP setting is defined as much by what you leave out as by what you include. In defining the Varushkan look we have actively chosen to exclude some elements. Please do not use any of the images or looks seen in this section.

#### 3.14.1 Avoid: Hussars' jacket



Hussars are too modern for the game and the Hussars' jacket is not part of the Varushkan look. Varushkan wear full length coats not the short jackets favoured by cavalymen.

Please try to avoid frogging or tablet braiding across the chest that is so elaborate and intense that it evokes the Hussar image. Varushkan decoration is primarily embroidery and fur trim.

### 3.14.2 Avoid: Thor's hammer



Thor's Hammers have become as evocative and iconic as a crucifix. They are irrevocably associated with Thor, a deity which does not exist in the Empire game setting, so please avoid this specific piece of jewellery.

### 3.14.3 Avoid: Cossacks



The Varushkan look is inspired by Rus and Slavic costume and does not include Cossacks. We have excluded the Cossack look from the setting because like the Hussars it is evocative of a much later period than the game draws from. Please avoid elements that are reminiscent of cossacks; boots that rise to meet the trousers, small waistcoats, and cossack- style hats made entirely of fur.

Please also avoid cossack dancing. It is iconic - for Cossacks - but is not appropriate for Varushkans in Empire. ??



## 4 Varushka history

The Ushka were the first human inhabitants of this land; their legends claim that they were born, fully formed, from the soil and the shadows beneath the trees. Their villages clustered together in the wilderness, prey for wolves and worse, but they had an understanding of the cruel realities of life in the forest. They made bargains with stronger powers and thus survived, although they often paid a steep price for their survival.



The Vard were cousins to the Steirn, warlike and fierce; they came to Varushka meaning to claim the riches of the land for themselves. When the Ushka encountered the Vard, at first they tried to hide. When hiding failed they tried to make bargains with the Vard. When this too failed, they tried to fight the Vard. When the steel axes and steel shirts of the Vard meant they could not be defeated, they bowed their heads and were conquered. Rather than destroy them, the Vard offered the Ushka a place at their hearth and protection from the shadows beneath the trees. In return the Ushka shared their hard-won wisdom and helped them to survive the dangers that could not be defeated with steel alone.

With the wisdom of the Ushka and the prowess of the Vard, their ancestors defeated or bound many of the monstrous threats that lurked in the wilds. They spread slowly over the land, working together, until eventually the Vard and the Ushka were both gone, and in their place were the Varushkan people who partook of the strengths of both.

Not all the Ushka are gone, however. Early records say that many of the Ushka were assimilated but that the greatest of their sorcerers ? who called themselves the ?bargainers? ? refused to bow their heads. When it became clear the Ushka were outmatched, these bargainers made terrible compacts with the Eternals of the Wasteland, the place Imperial scholars call the Realm of **Winter**. In return for dreadful sacrifices ? and with the promise of more to come ? these **Volodny** hid their hearts outside their bodies, becoming to all intents and purposes immortal. Kept alive by their hatred, and possessed of terrible hungers, they vowed collective vengeance against the Vard and those Ushka they now saw as collaborators.

### 4.1 Joining the Empire

In the time of the first Empress, the Volodny created a terrible champion, **Alderei the Fair**, who sought to conquer Varushka with the aid of their sorceries. In desperation, the Wise Ones convinced those Boyars who opposed Alderei to turn to the nascent Empire for help. Faced with few choices, many Boyars agreed to become part of the Empire, in return for aid against Alderei. With the strength of the Imperial forces, they were finally able to defeat the Volodny pawn.

Even while the war still raged, the foundations for the Empire were being laid. The nations had agreed to a set of laws and seemed confident that they could be enforced but the cautious Varushkans thought otherwise. They argued that powerful men and women of the nations could not be trusted to collect the taxes and enforce the law with an even hand. They would find themselves constantly torn by their allegiances to their countryfolk.

This caused outrage, but the Varushkans were adamant, and insisted that the Empire needed dedicated civil servants and judges, whose loyalty was to the Empire only and whose probity was above reproach. In the end each nation agreed to put forward a dozen individuals of good standing. The **Imperial civil service** was created and powerful enchantments were woven to ensure that the Magistrates and other civil servants would be loyal to the Empire and no other cause.

## 5 Varushka leadership

The typical community in Varushka is a **vale**. These inhabited valleys are usually well fortified, and may be home to a single small town or several villages. Most vales have a leader called a boyar. Anyone can, in theory, become boyar ? while it is common for the boyar to be a warrior, there are plenty who are magicians, priests and especially merchants. A boyar generally oversees day-to-day life in the valley and serves as an arbiter to resolve disputes. Their authority stems from the protection from the dangers of the Varushkan wilderness they provide to the vale?s inhabitants.

The boyar is usually assisted in this task by a group of professional warriors called **schlacta**. Heavily armed and armoured, these soldiers protect their vale from the dangers of Varushka. Most boyars provide weapons, armour and food for their schlacta, in return for their loyalty. A boyar can claim as much land as their schlacta can protect ? **prosperous**, **ambitious** or **wise** boyars arrange regular patrols to keep quite large areas safe from **wolves** and other threats, acting decisively to destroy their lairs before they can threaten the boyar?s vale.



There is no single way that boyars are selected ? or, more truthfully, select themselves. In some areas it is common for a single family or group of families to lead a valley for several generations. In other villages there are fierce feuds between a small number of families over who claims the title of boyar. Some vales claim not to have a boyar at all ? they are often run by a small council of wise ones ? but in these cases it is usually easy for an outsider to point to the leader of that council, the head of the local militia forces, or some form of local sheriff, as being the de facto boyar.

Imperial law has done little to curb the real power of the boyars, which ultimately stems from their ability to withdraw their protection from the community, or from individuals in the community. While this is unlikely to result in immediate death, the next time the wolves gather in numbers those who cannot rely on the protection of the boyar and the schlacta are almost certainly doomed. Despite the cruelty of this practice, there is nothing illegal about it ? Imperial Law does not require the boyars to protect the people who live under their auspices.

While some boyars are fair and even-handed and enjoy the respect and love of their community, others rule with a rod of iron. Tyrannical boyars are not necessarily evil men and women. The dangers of Varushka are very real, and sometimes compromises need to be made between freedom and survival. A weak yet well-meaning boyar is often more of a threat to the people he supposedly protects than a strong yet authoritarian boyar whose schlacta maintain rigid order in the face of malignant supernatural evil. *?Hard as iron and fair as silver?* is meant as a compliment for a boyar who brooks no disagreement with their judgements.

While a boyar is often the effective leader of a valley, it is a foolish leader who neglects to hear the counsel of the wise ones. The wise ones maintain a loose network of communication between valleys, and help to tie the nation together. While their communication is most often used for the transmission of gossip or the spread of useful information, in times of trouble the wise ones are capable of working together to orchestrate effective responses. The relationship between the wise ones and the boyar in a settlement often sets the tone for the entire vale.

### 5.1 Leading a territory

Each territory in Varushka returns a Senator to the Imperial Senate. The process whereby these Senators are selected is a little convoluted, but is built around the Varushkan emphasis on wisdom. The candidates are isolated from the rest of their nation by civil servants and then brought one-at-a-time before the Egregore. The heart of the nation then asks each of them a series of riddling questions designed to show their wisdom and character. Each candidate is asked the same questions, but they change with each election. A civil servant records their answers.

Once the questioning is complete, the civil servants take the answers to a council of wise ones, likewise kept in isolation from the Senate candidates. Wise ones who hold high office ? senators and generals, for example ? are customarily prevented from taking part in this council. The answers are often presented to the wise ones through the medium of a handful of children so that none know which candidate has given which answer. The children are used to provide the answers so that the wise ones can put a face to each set of answers, even though that face is not that of the actual candidate. Then the wise-ones deliberate and, based on those deliberations, select the Senator. Only when the decision is made is the identity of the successful candidate revealed.

The idea is that by using this blind test, the wise ones cannot be swayed by politics or personal opinion. Varushkans believe that this process returns some of the wisest and least-corruptible members of the Senate, and they are accordingly proud of this selection process.



## 6 Varushka military concerns



The schlacta are the most common group of professional soldiers in Varushka. They stand ready to defend the valleys that form Varushkan society. They are the defensive core that shields the people against its enemies, whether those enemies are ravening **wolves**, rapacious bandits, or rampaging orcs. The schlacta tend to be the best armed and best armoured of Varushkan warriors, but they also tend to see the most combat. As professional soldiers they tend to favour the heavy weapons of war such as broad swords, war axes and bardiches. This sets them apart from other Varushkans who tend to favour weapons that are also tools ? the hammer, bow or spear and most especially the woodsman's axe.

Not all schlacta work for a boyar; any organised group of men and women that fights for a living could be called schlacta. Several travelling merchants maintain schlacta to protect themselves and their caravans. There are even mercenary bands of schlacta who offer their protection to others in return for money.

Some particularly brave ? or reckless ? Varushkans follow the tradition of the wagon raider. These opportunists seek their fortunes by launching forays into barbarian lands to grab whatever riches can be found. They live in tight-knit communities of hard-bitten veteran soldiers, forming well-defended wagon trains. The wagon raiders are especially skilled in the use of the great pavisse shields, and these hardened gangs are adept at desperate fighting in close quarters. They are also treated with suspicion ? there are plenty of stories of wagon raiders who bring back more terrible things than riches when they return from the deep forests.

As well as schlacta, Varushka is home to the **warden** brotherhoods who combine martial might with the clever use of amulets, talismans and magical devices to oppose the threats of the Varushkan wilderness. Many wardens are champions of **Imperial Law**, and they are often seen as romantic, dashing and above all heroic figures by the people of the vales.

## 7 Varushka economic interests



Varushka may be dangerous, but it is also rich. Varushka does not export many finished goods. Varushkan craftsmen tend to craft for their family and community, not for the wider world. The true wealth of the nation lies in raw materials, and in that it has become a great provider for the Empire. It is famous for its high quality furs, which are sold all over the Empire, and the nation is home to many species of majestic hardwoods whose timber is in high demand. Not just timber is produced from the woods; amber is a common export, and many Varushkan men and women sport amber jewellery.

The bones of the land itself are valuable. There are rich deposits of iron and precious metals, and quarries that produce both fine quality stone and beautiful precious gemstones. Honey and mead are both common Varushkan exports. Varushkan honey is a delicacy, with different regions producing different types of honey. Connoisseurs talk about Varushkan honey in the same way one might discuss fine wine or cheese.

In Varushka, nothing is free. The supernatural threats of the nation often seem strongest where the wealth is greatest, and those seeking to make their fortunes must contend with the malign creatures that come in darkness. As a result, operating a Varushkan mine or lumberyard, or entering the forests to hunt and trap, is not an entirely mundane business. It is dangerous to harvest the bounty of an area that is claimed by a [sovereign](#) unless the creature is subject to a compact, agreement or binding. Only by following these [rules](#) may the resources be gathered safely. For example, a Varushkan lumberjack might mark trees in a certain area with a sigil the day before they plans to fell them; if the sigil is gone when they return the next morning, they know that the tree is claimed by a sovereign and cutting it down will have dire consequences.

While Varushka has towns that serve as trade hubs, it has no cities ? but this was not always the case. [Temeschwar](#), the greatest city in the north, was once part of Varushka. When the Empire was formed, Maria Ivanova, the boyar of Temeschwar, elected to join her city's fortunes with those of [the League](#) rather than remain part of Varushka. While some Varushkans were outraged by this apparent treachery, the majority simply shrugged. The defence of Temeschwar was now no longer their concern; the inhabitants had simply looked for protection elsewhere. Relations remain mostly good, and the city is still a central trade hub for many Varushkan traders. The symbiotic relationship between Varushka ? rich in raw materials ? and the League ? rich in worked goods ? has made the fortunes of merchants from both nations.

The [Navarr](#) are welcome if irregular visitors to the land. They ensure that every settlement receives news of the wider Empire and provide additional protection to those who want to travel long distances. For their part, visiting Navarr know to keep to the [roads](#) and to consult the wise ones and wardens whenever they can, to ensure they do not accidentally break some important taboo and bring disaster down on their own heads and the heads of the people they move amongst.

Many Varushkan villages employ [Stzena](#), local musicians who perform at local civic events and celebrations.

### 7.1 Outposts

Not all Varushkans dwell in the vales; there are countless isolated mines, quarries and similar across the nation where hard men and women work to make their living. Few of these outposts are joined to the network of warded roads that cross the nation and lacking the constant [vigilance](#) of a community they must be guarded solely by [schlacta](#). Those who work there are often regarded as foolhardy, desperately gambling their lives to make their fortune.

Most outposts are ruled by a merchant boyar. The best eventually grow to become a true vale, as people settle there to raise a family under the protection of the boyar and their [schlacta](#). The worst have a reputation for iron rule and cruel discipline, a refuge for exiles and anyone prepared to wield an axe and follow orders. Most outposts were worked by orc slaves in the past. That practice has long been abolished but many still retain a fetid air and often employ criminals working off a punishment. Varushkan magistrates keep a close eye on those they can travel to, but the more isolated outposts are difficult to reach.

## 8 Varushka religious beliefs



Priests in Varushka are considered to be (or seek to be) **wise**, and are generally either physically old or possessed of an *old spirit*. These wise ones are the repositories of wisdom in a community. While many consider themselves priests, and several are magicians, anyone can be a wise one simply by dint of offering good advice and keeping a close eye on moral concerns.

Elder wise ones are particularly respected, but there are wise ones of all ages. As a wise one grows older, they traditionally take on young apprentices who help them with their growing infirmity and in return are schooled in the ways of wisdom and virtue.

The most important role of the wise ones is to help people fend off the **monsters** of Varushka. Few wise ones fight the monsters directly; rather they teach people how to recognise them and protect themselves. They rally the whole vale when the monsters come, sharing with them the benefit of their experience and common sense. It is more important for a wise one to recognise and think their way around a problem than it is for them to memorize chunks of historical lore.

Wise ones recognise the danger of judging by appearances. There are plenty of stories where a wise child defeats a monster by refusing to trust the evidence of their eyes. Some wise ones emulate this by blinding themselves – not literally, but by blindfolding themselves when they are about official business. Forced to rely on other senses, they claim that they become adept at separating truth from lies – there is a common conceit that by blinding the eyes of the body, the eyes of the soul open wider allowing the wise one to see things as they truly are. A few wise ones never remove their blindfolds, living their entire lives in darkness and cultivating the *inner vision* that helps them hone their insight into the souls of others.

There is no official test to become a wise one – the title is an honorific either claimed or bestowed by one's peers. One becomes a wise one by being treated as a wise one and included in the counsels of the other wise ones.

### 8.1 The Virtuous Animals

Varushkans believe that most animals display one or more of the great Virtues. In particular they know that symbols or drawings of a creature can contain some of its power, so many Varushkans decorate their belongings with images of animals whose virtues they wish to emulate. The virtuous animals are also seen in Varushkan heraldry and art, as well as being worn as charms, belt buckles or embroidered patches.

**Wisdom** is usually symbolised by the spider or the squirrel. The goose and the spider (again) symbolise **Vigilance**. The bear and the boar symbolise **Courage**, and the virtue of **Loyalty** is associated with the hound. Deer and the eagle often symbolise the Imperial Virtue of **Pride**. Foxes and other animals seen as cunning symbolise **Ambition**, and often encourage the hero of the tale to improve their lot or that of their family. **Prosperity** is symbolised by bees, whose honey has a special place in Varushkan society.

### 8.2 Storytellers

Another common role for priests is as storytellers, following a tradition of telling instructional tales that show proper forms of behaviour and the repercussions of foolishness or vice. These stories balance optimism with harsh practicality; Varushkan religion instructs with a harder edge than some other national traditions. The custom of an older relative telling stories to the younger generation as the family gathers around the family is as old as humankind, but in Varushka it takes on additional significance.

Storytellers are often travellers, bringing spiritual support, entertainment and news of the outside world to isolated valleys, especially those without their own priests. The traditional garb of a storyteller is a brightly coloured coat of patchwork, marked with symbols and hung with trinkets, each one of which represents a story. Many storytellers use these trinkets and symbols as memory aids when telling their favourite stories. More so than other wise ones, a storyteller is likely to have a younger apprentice who learns the storytelling craft and the priestly ceremonies by travelling alongside the older priest.

...could not see the Wisdom in blindfolding oneself as some Varuskan wise ones do. So I tried it, and I will concede that I had to change the way I interacted with the world. The stories of the wise ones are steeped in virtue, and I feel they will come to accept the whole of The Way as readily as they do Wisdom. There is a matter I need to clarify, though. Is using animal symbols for the virtues a useful metaphor, or blasphemy against human virtue? I always believed it was the latter, but the practice is widespread and I cannot dissuade them against it.

Wayfarer Sarah in Epistles to the Winds of Virtue, 2 BE



## 9 Varushka magical traditions



Most Varushkans regard magic as a useful tool to protect people, but one that can also be dangerous. Supernatural evil is rife in Varushka, and magic is often the only counter to the workings of **sovereigns**, many of whom possess potent occult power themselves. Magic is rarely free however ? and Varushkans understand that magical power often involves some sort of sacrifice. Magic is neither good nor evil ? the same power that lets a magician bless crops and protect against monsters allows them to spread sickness or kill their enemies. As such magicians are treated with wary respect by sensible Varushkans.

A lot of Varushkan ritual magic revolves around sacrifice. This may involve a literal sacrifice when performing rituals that involve casting valuable items into a fire, or be more symbolic in nature involving shedding of a small amount of a ritualist's blood. There is a strong tradition of bargaining and payment in Varushkan magic that recognises that nothing comes without a price.

### 9.1 Volhov

Varushkan volhov are occult problem solvers who make a study of supernatural powers to better understand and defend against them. They work to unravel curses and defend their allies from monsters, but they also lay curses on those who they think deserve or will learn from them. They aspire to wield magic with an even hand, maintaining an internal balance between positive and harmful magic.

Volhov often specialise in two particular branches of magic. They are interested in magic that wards against and binds supernatural forces for obvious reasons, and volhov who master this particular type of spellcraft are often interested in the **Eternals**. These entities are dangerous, but several of them seem to have a particular interest in Varushka and they can be bargained with by clever volhov. Further, some volhov actually make contact with sovereigns, either arranging deals that protect their community or working magic to keep the sovereign quiescent.

They also make a study of divination ? especially if they are also wise ones. The ability to predict danger or uncover secrets serves them well as advisors, and is often key to uncovering the weakness of an enemy. Volhov know that uncovering a secret is not enough, that they need to find a practical way to use their knowledge to resolve their problems. The volhov embrace practicality and teach that not every problem can be solved with magic ? that it sometimes creates more problems than it resolves.

Some volhov are itinerants, travelling the **roads** between settlements in the company of a **warden** brotherhood or **Navarr** striding, or trusting their wisdom and magic to protect them when they journey by themselves. This willingness to travel alone adds to their mystique, and there are many stories of cunning volhov encountering and overcoming sovereigns, often staying as their guests for a short time while the sovereign tries to trap them into breaking a stricture and freeing the creature, or dooming themselves.

Volhov have a reputation for being meddlers that is not undeserved. They do not live apart from the other inhabitants of Varushka, and actively involve themselves in the lives of those around them, offering advice or interfering to improve any situation that catches their fancy. A volhov boyar is rare but not unknown; some use magic to empower their schlecta, or hire schlecta who possess practical magical talents of their own. Some volhov boyars have a bleak reputation for making deals with Eternals and sovereigns that protect their people but leave the people of other valleys prey to monstrous depredations.

Volhov are usually aided by a younger apprentice who learns when and how to wield magic. It is common for volhov to possess lineage, and they often prefer to take apprentices who have the touch of ?the other? about them, in the knowledge that it makes it easier for them to deal with some Eternals. Volhov tend to dress in dark coloured robes made of hard-wearing fabric and are rarely without their staves. They commonly cover their heads with hoods or hats, and volhov are often described in stories as ?*shadow faced*? as a reference both to their headgear and their mysterious nature. This simple uniform announces their profession to others, and warns them to be respectful.

## 9.2 Cabalists

Magic commonly forms a basis for cooperation in Varushka with skilled practitioners from different vales coming together to form a **cabal** to work powerful rituals. Cabals vary greatly in their unity and purpose and members may include wise ones, volhov and even **wardens**. The loosest cabals are little more than ritual teams where individuals whose primary concern is the vale in which they live come together for a time to further their own interests but more unified cabals often have an identity and a purpose of their own.

The most powerful cabals have existed for centuries and often have an agenda of their own. Those that are dominated by volhov tend to meddle in the politics of the vales and the nation, while those that favour wise ones tend to serve as a haven for wisdom and assistance when a hard winter brings difficult times. No two cabals are alike; some make their existence known while others prefer to operate unnoticed. Some occupy ancient fortifications and employ schlacta to protect them and keep unwanted intruders away, while members of others prefer the comforts and community of life in a vale. Some welcome any who would be a member, others invite only the most powerful to join them. The cabals of Varushka rarely challenge the power of the boyars, precious few have the time or the inclination to take on the defense of a vale and its populace, but they are influential and most boyars tread carefully around those who can wield magic.



## 10 Varushka hearth magic



### 10.1 Rules

Rules and laws are a powerful hearth magic throughout Varushka. There is a power in self-imposed rules, oaths and bindings. Many of the darkest powers are bound by geases and strictures that render them powerless, or expose their weaknesses. There is a belief that the stronger a creature is, the more profound its weaknesses become. Breaking an oath, rule or law always has profound consequences ? this is clearly seen in the rules Varushkans follow to prevent the **monsters** destroying them. Those who ignore or break this rule rarely live to regret it, and might rile up the supernatural force to the degree that it threatens their friends and family.

This idea of binding is very relevant when dealing with shapeshifters. Varushkan shapeshifters are bound to the form they assume, and while they are being treated as if they were what they appear to be, they cannot change their shape again and are compelled to continue in the role they have assumed. There are many Varushkan stories of **Mora** being bound to act as a polite guest and leave without hurting their hosts, or of the reckless few who take a Mora as a spouse and meet a terrible end when they mistreat them.

Curses are also important; while other Nations might frown on the use of curses, there is a strong sense of **lex talionis** (commonly summarized "*an eye for an eye*") in Varushka. The more fitting a punishment, the more apt for the crime, the more powerful the curse becomes.

#### 10.1.1 Warding

While magical wards are more reliable, there is also a powerful hearth magic in things that guard or keep watch for the approach of danger. Tent posts, lintels and fence stakes are often carved with faces that keep watch against the approach of evil creatures. Fires represent the light that keeps darkness at bay and warning bells have a power to send restless spirits fleeing back into the darkness.

#### 10.1.2 Walls

Walls are a form of hearth magic as well; they are often built with warding symbols carved into them, and many are reinforced with ritual magic. The presence of a wall defines an area as belonging to the people who dwell within it, and many monsters have strictures that prevent them clambering over walls to get at the inhabitants. Some wise ones say that this is the same kind of protection that extends to the **roads** ? that they are *?walls laid on their side?*.

## 11 Varushka lineage and species attitudes

Varushkans take a pragmatic approach to lineage ? they know well the dangers of judging someone by their appearance. Varushkan families are large, and many people can tell a story of a relative who has lineage. As long as a person with lineage abides by the rules of Varushka, their fellows largely do not care about the touch of magic in their blood.

This touch of the other also draws the attention of the volhov. Many volhov are lineaged or were taught their magic by a lineaged master. When people are troubled by Eternals or their heralds, the volhov know that people with lineage will have an advantage dealing with creatures who share their supernatural roots. If a vale is having trouble with a Summer Eternal, many volhov would rather have the assistance of a naive changeling cook than a schlacta without lineage.



Stories claim that the draughir lineage began in Varushka in a valley beset by terrible famine. A boyar made a deal with a powerful Winter Eternal to save her people but in the process they were transformed into monsters who feasted on rotten meat and the flesh of the dead. Traditionally the Varushkans have a great deal of respect for the pragmatic instincts of the draughir and for their ability to survive, while simultaneously keeping a close eye on them in case their monstrous appetites overwhelm them.

The briar lineage is accepted in Varushka, but its members are not entirely trusted. There is a common prejudice that the willful nature of the briar lineage makes it difficult to follow the rules, and that a briar left to their own devices in a dangerous situation will simply end up harming themselves and others. They are treated as if they are a little slow - and few briars can tolerate this attitude for long.

### 11.1 The Company of the White Stag

The Company of the White Stag is an unpopular changeling brotherhood of wardens who concentrate on fighting monsters. Their confidence drives them to take their lives in their hands and risk trying to destroy these creatures wherever they can, taking risks far beyond what their peers consider good sense. Many Varushkans consider these changelings to be a liability ? their recklessness and refusal to abide by the rules is a disaster waiting to happen and they are considered anathema and cast out by most other wardens.

#### 11.1.1 The Vodyanoi

The rivers of Varushka are often used to transport raw materials for trade. Some vales along the banks of the most commonly travelled rivers are dominated by clannish merrow boyars who are known for charging hefty tolls for all boats that pass through their territories. Called vodyanoi, the people of these merrow-dominated settlements are seen as grasping and miserly. The common vodyanoi claim is that without the hard work of their schlacta, the rivers would quickly become impassable. They are also accused of various underhand economic practices such as dumping rubble into rivers to prevent trade bypassing them. Calling a merrow a vodyanoi is often an insult.

## 12 Varushka territories

Varushka is a wild land, a mixture of difficult hills, dark forests, unpleasant marshes and fast rivers. The terrain has helped shape the nation, and has contributed to the relative isolation of its settlements.

### 12.1 Karov

The rich heartland of the nation, and the wealthiest territory in terms of timber and amber, this is where most outsiders think of when Varushka is mentioned. The vales here exist among rich forests, where they have not been cleared to make way for small farms. Karov has the largest towns in Varushka, and the majority of its boyars come from this relatively civilised territory. A great deal of trade happens in Karov, with wagon trains and river barges carrying raw materials south to **Temeschwar** and north to more isolated valleys who are in need. Despite its settled nature, it would be a mistake to think the land is entirely tamed and great tracts of wilderness still remain, often home to particularly malignant ? if quiescent ? **sovereigns**. Many towns and villages in Karov employ **Stzena**, local musicians who perform at local civic events and celebrations.

### 12.2 Volodmartz

A mountainous area, Volodmartz is rich in timber and deep mines. There are comparatively few vales here, and the boyars have a reputation for being particularly iron-fisted. Much more common are **outposts**, scattered across the brooding hills and growing rich from the mineral wealth they exploit. Both tend to be very well fortified, and not without reason. There are dark things in the Volodmartz mountains, and plenty of folk tales tell of malign horrors that burrow under them, emerging without warning to overwhelm the foolish. The **Volodny** had their old centre of power in Volodmartz, and it was here that **Alderei the tyrant-boyar** was defeated by the Imperial Army. The ruins of his stronghold still lie beneath the forest canopy.

### 12.3 Miekarova

Miekarova is more heavily forested than the rest of Varushka. It is known for its furs, for its hunting, and for its particularly harsh winters. Snow regularly falls here for up to six months in the year, and it is common for vales to be snowed-in during the darkest months. The **wolves** of Miekarova are especially savage, and every few years or so gather in great hordes that sweep down out of the north, threatening the unwary and causing widespread trouble until they are eventually dealt with.

Noted for beautiful painted caves beneath several of the larger ranges of hills, it was also the heart of Ushkan mysticism in the dim days long before the foundation of the Empire. It was in Miekarova that the **Imperial Faith** found its deepest roots in Varushka, and there are a number of **vales** here that surround churches and shrines to the Way. The priests here are especially vigilant against the dangers of the winter and the monsters that come with it, and many warden brotherhoods make a practice of spending their winters here to offer additional assistance.

With its mix of ancient mysticism, harsh winters and regular monstrous threats Miekarova makes a good setting for running plot-filled player events over winter.

### 12.4 Karsk (Lost)

This has always been a war-torn land. The scene of many vicious battles against the barbarians since before Varushka joined the Empire, it is scattered with fortresses, battlefields and ruins. It has an accursed reputation, and many stories refer to the "*bloated crows of Karsk, grown fat from human flesh and suffering.*" At one time this territory was home to numerous merchant boyars who became rich capturing and enslaving orcs to work in the mines of Volodmartz. When the Imperial orcs joined the Empire and it became illegal to keep orcish slaves, the senator for Karsk was brutally murdered during a meeting with a dozen now-ruined Karsk boyars.

Karsk has been overrun by the enemy. After a period of escalating raids, the barbarian orcs invaded in large numbers in 368AE. In a series of surprise attacks they overwhelmed the border fortresses and pushed deep into the heart of the territory. The ferocity and sheer numbers involved in the assault took the Varushkans by surprise, and before the Empire could organize an effective counter-attack, Karsk had fallen.

Disturbing stories have come from Karsk since the barbarian incursion. There are still a few vales holding out against the barbarians, backed up by some Imperial forces, a **cabal** or two and a few brotherhoods of **wardens**, and scattered reports reveal that the invasion seems to have stalled. Over the last two years it has become clear that the invading orcs are fighting among themselves, and with some of the few remaining indigenous orcish bandit tribes. This is Varushka, where unexplained events have a habit of turning into dreadful disasters, and many eyes are turned on this territory.

## 13 Varushka children

Varushkan children are treasured, but they are also a source of constant worry to their parents. They are often naive, and their innocence of the dangers and rules of Varushkan life can bring harm not only to themselves but to their families. In a land where harsh winters can sometimes mean shortages of food, another mouth to feed can be a blessing but also a burden.



There are many [sovereigns](#) and [Winter Eternals](#) who desire children for their own purposes, and stories tell of the bargains they strike with unscrupulous or desperate parents in return for their offspring. There are also monsters who feast on children, or who carry them off as servants and entertainment. Some of these children are twisted by their captors and returned to prey on their parents in turn.

Children are often dressed in bright clothing to make it easier to spot them against the dark wood of the Varushkan forests. Innocence is a powerful protection in Varushka. They are taught to stay close to adults who can protect them from the dangers of Varushkan life. They are expected from an early age to help with chores such as cooking and cleaning. It is impossible to keep them in sight at all times however, and it is assumed that a child who is not being watched is getting up to mischief.

Varushkan children are taught a powerful warding that draws on its owner's innocence and fear. By presenting the talisman boldly in front of them a young child can turn dark creatures aside, keeping them safe. Unfortunately this protection extends only to the child itself; the parents and older siblings are fair game for the monsters of Varushka. The power of the talisman wanes as a child ages and most children find them useless long before they reach their majority.

### 13.1 Things every child should know

- **Don't trust strangers.** Danger can take pleasing forms in Varushka, do not trust people you do not know.
- **Listen to your elders.** They can teach you wisdom which will protect you from the dangers of the wilds.
- **Use your wits first and your talisman last.** It will only work so many times, so save it for when you really need it.
- **Stay alert.** Look for things that are out of place and warn the adults about them.
- **Don't cry wolf unless it is for real.** Those who pretend danger is coming will not be listened to when it comes for real, and then everyone suffers.



# 14 Varushka music

## 14.1 The Music of Varushka

### 14.1.1 Style summary

Varushkan music is rich and full-bodied, following a long tradition of being used to keep both the cold and the the horrors outside at bay. Choral singing, accordions, violins and hurdy-gurdies all find their place with the Varushkan love of discords resolving into rich harmony; the normally stoic people find an outlet for grief, love and joy in their music that they would find hard to express in any other way. A vein of melancholy runs through their music - minor keys are more common than major.

Varushka draws on the real world traditions of Eastern European and Balkan music, in particular Georgian, Bulgarian and Russian songs and Yiddish or klezmer instrumental music.

### 14.1.2 Commonly known songs

- **Marching song** This simple melody has echoed wherever the Varushkan army has fought - the night before battle, on the way to the battlefield and accompanying them home in victory or defeat. Often led by one singer with everyone joining in the chorus.
- **Raise up your glass to Varushka** The toasting tradition in Varushka is a huge part of their culture. Here is a famous musical toast.
- **The Beast of Volgadurn** A cautionary poem for monster hunters, often recited rhythmically and dynamically, and accompanied by stamping feet and clapping hands.
- **Hearth and Home** This beautiful and wistful traditional melody is often sung by Varushkans far from home, with unashamed sentimentality.

#### 14.1.2.1 A musical tradition

Toasting is very common in Varushkan culture. Pretty much every major event - weddings, funerals, births, victories, defeats, change of leadership, ceremonies of adulthood - will lead to both spoken and sung toasts. A typical Varushkan toasting song has very few words: the old-fashioned songs use "mravalzhamier" meaning 'good health' although others are sung to similar sentiments, or sometimes the name of the person being toasted or simply "Varushka!". Toasting Songs often start slowly and speed up and can be sung in full harmony or led by one singer. Some examples: **Mravalzhamiers** and **Raise up your glass to Varushka**, or use **Here's A Health to the Company** which is a drinking song known throughout the Empire.

Many Varushkan towns and villages employ a **Stzena**, a band of musicians who perform at civic functions, local events and public ceremonies. Historically, these were sentries who kept night vigils and raised the alarm in case of attack from monster, barbarians and raiders by blowing on trumpets and beating drums. As the **wardens** grew in strength and reach, the **Stzena** turned their skills to music and served their community in a different way, but some still take their secondary role as watchmen very seriously.

#### 14.1.2.2 One for the kids

- **The North wind doth blow**

### 14.1.3 Further examples

#### 14.1.3.1 Songs & Poems

- **Marching song** - medium difficulty
- **Raise up your glass to Varushka** - some toasting songs
- **Mravalzhamier** - some more toasting songs
- **The Beast of Volgadurn** - poem about a monster
- **Beneath the Skin**
- **The Walker of the Snow**
- **Footprints** - medium Varushkan funeral song about **Courage** and the **Labyrinth**.
- **Gusta Mi Magla** - TO DO
- **Hearth and Home** - nostalgic travelling song, easy

#### 14.1.3.2 Instrumentation and tunes

Violins, accordions, reeded woodwind, hammered dulcimer if you've got one! Music is drawn from Eastern European gypsy music, klezmer, or any fast tunes written in a klezmer scale. [More info on klezmer scales.](#)

#### 14.1.3.3 Other performance traditions

- Dancing, set dances like ceilidh circle dances but typically dancers will come out of the line to do their own thing before rejoining the set moves. Avoid Cossack dancing!

### 14.1.4 How to adapt your repertoire

- Avoid cliched Russian tunes like the Tetris theme music (good though it is!)
- Start very slow and speed up!

### 14.1.5 Our sources

Georgian, Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Moravian and Bulgarian folk as well as traditional Russian songs. Artists: Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir; Georgian Voices; Northern Harmony, Kitka, [[www.youtube.com/user/yaleslavicchorus](http://www.youtube.com/user/yaleslavicchorus) Yale Slavic Chorus]

Here is a [youtube playlist](#) of appropriate or inspiring music.

# 15 Varushka costumes

This is a placeholder page for content that PD are actively working on.

*Note: The tone and style of this page may need editing. All costume advice pages should be written in third person voice, using verbs that make clear that this page is advice, not direction.*

## 15.1 Overview

Varushkans' grim outlook on life is contrasted by their clothes, which are beautiful, bright and warm. Perhaps as a remedy to the cold and dark of their lands, they take great pride in intricately embroidered shirts, richly coloured trousers and warm fur trim on coats and hats.

### 15.1.1 Inspiration

Varushka is primarily influenced by Rus and Slavic costume and players can draw heavily from these sources for their costumes. The traditional Slavic white shirt or dress with red embroidery at the hem is a favourite for Varushkans, and the Rus trousers, hats and wrap over coats provide inspiration for the rest of the nation.

- <http://pinterest.com/medabeaks/empire-inspirations/>
- <http://pinterest.com/captinron/varushkan-inspiration/>
- <http://pinterest.com/thetriggerbug/slavic-nation-empire-lrp/>
- Tumblr
- Wolfhound (Russian, Spanish dubbed)
- Bulgarian costume
- Embroidered folk costumes

### 15.1.2 Similar nations

The ancient origins of Wintermark and Varushka can be seen in their similarities of costume. Both nations most commonly wrap their trousers to the knee although Varushkan baggy trousers are far more fashionable than the rather staid and narrow Wintermark trousers. Tunics of varying length and decoration are the staple of both nations. In the Wintermark these are normally pulled on over the head but Varushkan styles are commonly open at the front and asymmetrical or diagonal-cut. The bright colours, intricate decoration and fur trims will also help to pull similar clothes into a more Varushkan style.

## 15.2 Costumes

### 15.2.1 Materials

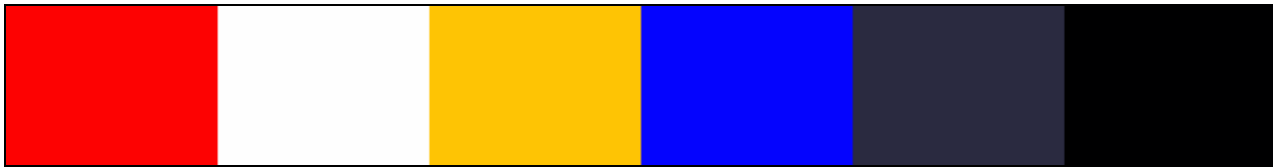
Varushkans tend to wear multiple layers of light fabrics like linen and cotton. Poorer Varushkans use practical and hard wearing materials like wool, felt, heavy cotton, leather - but the fabric is less important than the decoration. Fur is common, but is usually reserved for trim. Silks and velvets may be worn by the rich, but it is usual to keep the fabric simple and splash out time or money on the decoration and trims. Clothes can be embroidered directly, trimmed with bands of tablet or inkle woven wool or silk, or edged in fur. The wealthy may sport several of these features in combination, like silk edging embroidered and then trimmed with a fine fur.

If you're adding fur trims, you can avoid pelts from animals kept in poor conditions in several ways;

- Faux furs can be an excellent substitute to real fur, but beware of cheap 'fun furs' which always look like nylon and matt together very quickly. [Fabrics Online](#) sell some excellent quality faux furs in various colours, lengths and patterns.
- Vintage furs are cheap and easily available online, from charity shops (you may have to ask for them) and from car boot sales. One coat can trim a range or garments and torn furs can be bought for a few pounds.
- Furs can also be bought after licensed culls of animals and you can be sure they have not been farmed.
- Finally, there are ethical furriers around. [House of De Clifford](#) are one who sell a huge range of products online.

### 15.2.2 Colours

Bright vibrant colours predominate, especially brilliant red, yellow and blue and are worn with white, black and grey. A white shirt or dress is the most common under garment, with brightly decorated hems. Garments are made from cloth of a single colour, with contrasting colours being used for decoration and under garments.



### 15.2.3 Decoration

The most distinctive feature of Varushkan costume is the decoration applied to their clothes. Garments are not made from decorative cloth or covered entirely in decoration, rather it is put in bands usually around the upper arms and the hems. Complex and detailed embroidery is the favourite, most commonly in brilliant red for a white garment. Smocking is also common and fur is used extensively to trim garments of all kinds including armour.

Intricate embroidery provides a stark contrast to the simple clothing of Varushka. Embroidery should stand out and show off the wearer's wealth. Red embroidery on white cotton is the most common, but blue on yellow and other strong, contrasting combinations are also found.

An alternative to embroidery is decorative trim in the form of woven braids, ribbon and tablet or inkle weaving.

## 15.3 Clothing

The most common base layer for Varushkan costume is a white shirt, tunic or dress, often white or a light colour. This is intricately embroidered on the hems, the most commonly in red but any bright contrasting colour is fine. Women's dresses have full, layered skirts and aprons. Most Varushkans prefer to wear multiple layers of lighter clothing, often in contrasting colours.

- [Smock for men, women and children](#)
- [Roumanian Blouse](#)
- [Afghan Nomad Dress](#)

- [How To - Make a T - Tunic](#)
- [T-tunic instructions](#)
- [Reconstructing History pattern RH018](#)

Varushkans men and women wear plain coloured trousers. Ideally these should be baggy down to just past the knee. Anything worn below the knee should be strapped to the leg. Trousers may be plain or brightly dyed but are usually made from fabric of a single colour, the strapping is another opportunity for a bright contrasting colour, embroidery or both.

Coats are more common than cloaks. The ideal coat has an asymmetric overlap across the chest, is nipped in at the waist but flares out below the waist to a full skirt. The wealthiest wear coats in bright strong colours often with fur trim or embroidered hems. Warm shawls in bright colours are handed down through families.

- [Turkish coat](#)
- [Tibetan coat](#)
- [Rus coat](#)

Varushkan hats may be simple embroidered round caps trimmed with fur or else pointed caps that fold over the head.

- [Rus style hat](#)
- [Skullcap pattern](#)
- [Skullcap pattern](#)
- [Skullcap pattern](#)

### 15.3.1 Children

Costume for Varushkan children follows the traditional styles and emphasis on bright colours. For toddlers and babies, traditional smocks, or simple t-tunics and drawstring trousers are simple and easy to pull-on garments, that can be made in linen or cotton for easy washing! These types of clothes also have plenty of flexibility in terms of size, meaning you'll get more than one year's use out of them. Traditional children's smocked dresses are easy to find in white and often have red or blue embroidery. These are an excellent simple costumes for babies and small children in Varushka.

When making costumes for smaller children, remember to avoid anything tight around the neck - strings, cloaks, hats on cords etc and in addition, all tabards should secure under the arms. Make sleeves and armholes wider than needed; they're the bits that get tight as they grow. Neck holes also need to be bigger than for adults or should fasten at the back.

- [Information on clothes and swaddling for babies](#)
- [Patterns for Medieval children's clothes](#)
- [Kittle](#)
- [Revival Clothing's Premade items for children](#)
- [Gambeson's Premade items for children](#)

## 15.4 ??Images to avoid - DO NOT USE THESE

An LRP setting is defined as much by what you leave out as by what you include. In defining the Varushkan look we have actively chosen to exclude some elements. Please do not use any of the images or looks seen in this section.

### 15.4.1 Hussars Jacket - DO NOT USE THESE



Hussars are too modern for the game and the Hussars jacket is not part of the Varushkan look. Varushkans wear full length coats, not the short jackets favoured by cavalymen.

Please try to avoid frogging or tablet braiding across the chest that is so elaborate and intense that it evokes the Hussar image. Varushkan decoration is primarily embroidery and fur trim.

### 15.4.2 ??Thor's Hammer - DO NOT USE THESE



Thor's Hammers have become as evocative and iconic as a crucifix. They are irrevocably associated with Thor, a deity who does not exist in the Empire game setting, so please avoid this specific piece of jewellery.

### 15.4.3 Cossacks - DO NOT USE THESE



The Varushkan look is inspired by Rus and Slavic costume

and does not include Cossacks. We have excluded the Cossack look from the setting because like the Hussars it is evocative of a much later period than the game draws from. Please avoid elements that are reminiscent of cossacks: boots that rise to meet the trousers, small waistcoats, and cossack-style hats made entirely of fur. Please also avoid cossack dancing. It is iconic - for Cossacks - but is not appropriate for Varushkans in Empire.

## 15.5 Jewellery

Amber and silver are most commonly worn. Hunters carry amulets, talismans and fetishes designed to protect them from the monsters that might otherwise hunt them in turn.

## 15.6 Armour

The most common armour is scale or lamellar, either leather or metal. Splinted greaves and vambraces are common. Helms usually rise to a point, often with a plume. A few Boyars wear plate that has a simple design but is intricately decorated. Plate can be tooled to emphasize the strength and power of the wearer and to make them appear darker and more intimidating.

The traditional Varushkan armour worn by the Schlacta, the professional soldiers, is tightly woven scale or lamellar. ??? Varushkan armour is as likely to be leather as metal.

Round shields are common and some Schlacta employ a pavisé.

### 15.6.1 Varushkan Helms

The ideal Varushkan helm is pointed with a plume emerging from the point. ?????

### 15.6.2 Boyars

Boyars who are warriors often wear the traditional lamellar armour but with more complete coverage and supplemented with hardened leather or plate on the fore-arms and legs. ?? Boyars are not sadistic tyrants, but their rule may be authoritarian, callous or even cruel. Some adopt an intimidating demeanour, the better to project their power and authority over their dominion. Warrior boyars who choose to fight the monsters of the dark forests by appearing as dark as their foes may wear a suit of plate fashioned that reflects the dark gothic tone of the nation.



## 15.7 Weapons

**Schlacta**, the Varushkan professional warriors, use heavy weapons of war such as broad swords, war axes and bardiches. The woodsman's axe is a common weapon for many other Varushkans.

## 15.8 Shops

- <http://armstreet.com/>
- <http://www.dein-larp-shop.de/index.php?language=en>
- <http://www.larp-fashion.de/>
- <http://www.planettrading.co.uk>
- <http://www.wulflund.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/115644428575951/> - Custom
- [http://www.etsy.com/shop/NeedlesAndChisels?section\\_id=11353342](http://www.etsy.com/shop/NeedlesAndChisels?section_id=11353342)
- <https://www.mytholon.com/index.php?language=en&osCsid=c3d32892e5cffd1811fba68f300c2ab5>
- The Midgard Seamstress Custom made UK LARP and Re-enactment costumes
- **Totally Leathered** **Totally Leathered** provides custom tooled leatherwork & bespoke armour.
- **Idiom Productions** Costume and Props Workshop creates custom hand-tooled leather armour, clothing and LRP weapons