

# Gnomes of Kyrell

*Lore Article · Culture*

## Summary

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A full cultural and historical reference for the gnomes of Kyrell -- the record-keepers, archivists, and research-minded companion race to the dwarves. Covers the dwarf-gnome symbiosis, society, record-halls, Quorath and the pursuit of new knowledge, relations with the Orders of Wizardry, naming conventions, and racial traits.

## Gnomes of Kyrell

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Gnomes arrived in Kyrell alongside the dwarves -- companion-race and counterweight from the beginning, present in the same creative act that brought the Thwarch up from the stone. The dwarves remember this. The gnomes remember it too, in considerably more detail and with better cross-referenced citations.

The relationship between gnomes and dwarves is the longest continuously functional interspecies partnership in Kyrell, predating the Empire of Venn and surviving everything that has happened since. It is not a relationship of equals in the social sense -- gnomes do not fight, do not hold Clan titles, do not sit on hold councils -- but it is a relationship without which dwarven civilization would have collapsed under the weight of its own record-keeping requirements somewhere around the third millennium of the Vennite period. The dwarves handle the stone and the steel and the defense of everything worth defending. The gnomes handle everything else. Both parties consider this arrangement satisfactory.

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## A History in the Margins

Gnome history is, characteristically, better documented than anyone else's. This is not because gnomes have had more interesting histories than other peoples -- by the standards of dramatic narrative, gnome history is comparatively quiet -- but because gnomes have been present at everyone else's history and have been writing it down.

The earliest gnome records predate the Vennite Council and include accounts of the dwarven-gnome partnership being established, revised, renegotiated, and eventually codified in a series of accords whose original documents are maintained in the deepest archive room of the oldest functioning gnome record-hall -- a room that has never flooded, never burned, and never been successfully raided, a fact gnomes mention with the particular satisfaction of people who planned for all three contingencies.

During the Empire of Venn, gnomes served primarily in administrative and scholarly roles. The imperial bureaucracy ran on gnome record-keeping. The Orders of Wizardry, when they began coalescing during the Time of Nightmares, drew heavily on gnome archivists to reconstruct what institutional knowledge had survived. This was not an accident. Gnomes had been preserving institutional knowledge in parallel archives specifically because they had assessed, correctly, that the main repositories were at risk.

The Weohstannuk Empire repeated the pattern. Gnome administrators kept the empire's records. When the Maygus brought the empire down, gnome archives were among the few intact sources of information about what the empire had been, how it had functioned, and what had gone wrong with it. The Orders and the successor states have been drawing on those archives ever since, typically in exchange for considerations that the gnomes negotiated in advance and the other parties agreed to because they needed the records more than they had anticipated.

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## Physical Description

Gnomes are stouter than dwarves and considerably shorter -- small even by gnome standards, the old joke goes, but never small in the ways that matter. Skin runs from ashen grey to a warm brown-grey that some outsiders describe as the color of old paper, which gnomes do not find insulting. Hair is grey or brown, occasionally white, almost never the brighter colors that turn up in some communities of other small peoples. Eyes are sharp -- unusually sharp, the kind that are clearly reading the room even when the gnome in question is not visibly paying attention.

Gnomes dress practically but not carelessly. There is a distinction, in gnome culture, between garments appropriate to the archive and garments appropriate to a council meeting, and the distinction is observed. A gnome arriving at an important meeting in working clothes is making a statement. A gnome arriving at an archive in council clothes is wasting them.

The reputation for dull personalities that gnomes carry in the Settled Lands is, by gnome account, a misreading of gnome social presentation. Gnomes do not perform warmth for strangers. They do not fill silences with pleasantries. They answer questions directly and ask clarifying questions when the answer depends on specifics the questioner has not provided. Outsiders experiencing this for the first time frequently describe it as coldness. Gnomes experiencing outsiders experiencing this frequently describe it, to other gnomes, as interesting data about how other peoples use language. Among people they know and trust, gnomes are dry, precise, occasionally devastating in their humor, and loyal in the particular way of someone who has assessed the situation thoroughly and decided where they stand.

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## Society

Gnome society has no rigid caste structure. Success is based on demonstrated competence, and the relevant competence is always defined by what needs doing. A gnome who is excellent at their work -- whatever that work is -- occupies a respected position in gnome society regardless of what the work is. A gnome who is poor at their work, or who stops pushing at the edges of what they know, loses standing not through formal process but through the accumulated weight of a community that has noticed.

The basic social organization is the record-hall -- a gnome institution that functions simultaneously as archive, community center, research institution, and governance body. Record-halls vary enormously in size and specialization. The largest, embedded in major dwarven holds, maintain comprehensive records of everything that has happened in and around that hold since the partnership began. Smaller ones, in surface communities or human cities, specialize according to local need and available expertise.

The record-hall is led by a Chief Archivist, a position determined by a combination of seniority and demonstrated excellence that the gnomes themselves describe as obvious when it is functioning correctly and contentious only when it is not. The Chief Archivist sets research priorities, manages relations with the hold or city the record-hall serves, and represents the gnome community in any formal interaction with outside governance structures.

**Surface gnomes** -- called Forest Gnomes, though they live as often in human cities as in forests -- organize somewhat more loosely, without the anchor of a dwarven hold structure. Their record-halls are smaller and more portable, and their relationships with surrounding communities more varied. A Forest Gnome archivist embedded in a human city functions as something between a notary, a historian, a reference librarian, and an intelligence asset, and is typically viewed by the city's governance as at least two of those things depending on the current political climate.

**Marriage and family** among gnomes follow individual preference rather than any institutional guidance. Gnomes marry whom they like, including members of other races, and the children of such unions are recognized fully within gnome communities. A half-gnome raised in a record-hall is a gnome for all community purposes, is expected to pull their weight in the archives, and will be held to the same standards of competence as everyone else.

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## **The Dwarf-Gnome Symbiosis**

The partnership between gnomes and dwarves is old enough and stable enough that discussing it as a partnership -- as something that requires active maintenance and mutual choice -- can feel slightly strange to members of both peoples. It simply is. The dwarves fight and build and mine; the gnomes record and organize and advise. The dwarves hold the Clan structure; the gnomes hold the institutional memory that makes the Clan structure function coherently across centuries.

In practice: a dwarven hold without its gnome archivists would still know how to fight. It would still know how to mine and forge. It would have serious difficulty tracking land claims, inheritance disputes, trade agreements, Clan records going back more than two or three generations, diplomatic correspondence with other holds, and the specific terms of every accord it had ever signed. Gnomes have, at various points in history, been asked to reconstruct records for holds that lost their archivists to disaster. They always can. The reconstruction always reveals that the hold has been operating on incorrect assumptions about its own history for however long the gap lasted. Rock Gnomes in the deep holds are fully integrated into hold life in the non-Clan sense -- they live in the hold, their children grow up alongside dwarf children, they participate in hold festivals and mourn hold losses. They are not Clan. The question of whether a gnome could be adopted into a Clan has been asked periodically and answered differently in different holds, with no consensus position. Most gnomes who have considered the question carefully have concluded they do not want to be Clan. The Clan structure is the dwarves' way of organizing the world. The gnomes have their own.

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## **Quorath and the Pursuit of New Knowledge**

**Quorath** is the patron god of gnomes -- the Keeper of the Celestial Record, whose ever-growing book contains all that exists and all that has been discovered. His portfolio is not merely knowledge but the creation of new knowledge: research, invention, the expansion of the boundaries of what is understood. A gnome who collects existing knowledge without pushing at its edges is, in Quorathian terms, a librarian. Respectable. Necessary. Not quite living up to the mandate.

The conduct expected of Quorath's followers is explicit: always push the boundaries of what is known and what can be done. Do not merely collect -- create. Gnome researchers who follow Quorath take this seriously. Gnome record-keepers who follow Quorath take it seriously in a different way -- the record must be accurate and complete, yes, but it must also be analyzed, and analysis generates new understanding, and new understanding is new knowledge, and that is the mandate being met.

Quorath's priests receive the Knowledge Domain automatically and gain two additional languages through the Blessings of Knowledge feature -- a reflection of the god's particular interest in the breadth of what can be accessed and understood. Gnome priests of Quorath are among the most polyglot individuals in Kyrell, by both inclination and divine encouragement.

Other gods are followed by individual gnomes according to personal interest. Arcanthos has a significant gnome following among those with arcane inclinations. Tethran -- god of time and its recording -- has a perhaps unsurprising following among archivists who find that Quorath's

mandate to create new knowledge sits in productive tension with Tethran's mandate to record what exists without editorial comment. The gnomes who follow both simultaneously tend to produce unusually thorough work.

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## **The Orders of Wizardry**

Gnomes interact with the Orders of Wizardry primarily as archivists and researchers rather than as practitioners -- gnome magical talent exists but is not disproportionately high, and gnome culture's emphasis on organized knowledge rather than individual power expression does not produce a high percentage of arcane specialists relative to population. That said, gnome archivists embedded in Order Towers are valuable enough that the Orders maintain standing agreements with gnome record-hall leadership in every city where a Tower operates. The gnomes find the Orders' regulatory frameworks interesting objects of study and occasionally point out, in writing, when those frameworks contain internal inconsistencies. The Orders receive these notes with varying degrees of appreciation.

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## **Names**

Gnome names are functional -- a personal name chosen by the family at birth, sometimes a second name indicating specialization or notable achievement, and a record-hall or hold affiliation used in formal contexts. Gnomes do not typically use their full formal name in casual interaction. *Wirna* is fine. *Wirna Crossref, of the Ironpeak Hall* is for council meetings and legal documents.

Gnome children given names in the dwarven tradition -- by hold-dwelling Rock Gnomes who have adopted some dwarven naming conventions -- occasionally end up with names that read as dwarvish to outsiders. This does not bother gnomes, who find naming conventions across cultures a genuinely interesting area of study and would not mind discussing it at length if you have the time.

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## **Racial Traits**

Forest Gnome or Rock Gnome as per PHB, corresponding to surface-dwelling and hold-dwelling communities respectively.

Gnomes speak Gnomish and Common. Gnomish has a full written form -- dense, heavily abbreviated, and cross-referenced in ways that make it difficult to read without familiarity but extremely efficient once learned. Gnome documents written for internal use are not encrypted; they are simply written in a way that presupposes a reader who knows what they are doing.