THE RUNED AGE

STORMFORGE PRODUCTIONS

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THE UNLUCKY CLIENT

"Never meet your client." It is the second rule if you want to work in this city for great length of time. The first rule is "do not be an idiot," which is why most of us never survive past the first week.

Never meet your client. It should be part of the first rule really, it is such an idiotic thing to do after all. Why would any client wish to keep someone like me alive once I have seen their face. Once I can tell the constabulary all about them, I am liability. And once they have seen mine, it is far too easy for them to track me down and before I know it I wake up with a dagger in my chest.

No. Never meet your client.

I met my client.

I should not have. I knew that, but orders came from on high. The Patriarch, old Petrus "the Third Duke" van Windburg, asked for me personally. He told me himself that this foreigner should be "given every courtesy." You do not argue with the Third Duke and you definitely never refuse him if you value your head. You say "Yes, sir. Right away, sir. Of course, sir," and then you just have to try to manage whatever creek you just found yourself in.

I can at least say that I was not stupid enough to go by myself. No matter what the Patriarch said, I would only trust this foreigner if he was dead or dying, and perhaps not even then. I brought two footmen who cared more for money than common sense and then off we went to see what foolish trouble I was getting us in.

We met this foreigner at an old abandoned warehouse near the docks. That should have said all about the kind of night to come, but I did not listen. I should have walked away, but I did not. I should have done a lot of things that I did not.

I sent Nora in first to see if any surprises were waiting for us. The young Ossenfresian girl complained half heartedly, but she knew she was the best choice to scamper along the rafters of the warehouse unseen. It was something she enjoyed doing in the dead of night along the poorer areas of town when she was playing vigilante. Tonight it also kept her away from me. I cared far more about that than her vigilantism. She had no love of the wealthy, even though her dream was to be one of them, and I was well off enough for her to count me as one of the hated upper class.

Michiel I sent to scout out the areas around the warehouse. As an ex-constable, he would

know what to look for if the foreigner was planning anything nefarious. I was half hoping someone would jump out and put Michiel out of his misery, or at least out of mine. A man as apathetic about the world as Michiel could never be trusted. His own life may not matter much to him, but mine does to me.

It was not the best team for the assignment by any definition, but it was the best I could do on short notice.

"Kobus," came the whisper in my left ear and I nearly shot my foot off in my haste to draw my pistol.

It was just Nora with a juvenile smile on her face. I had never even seen her approach. I was too busy thinking about everything that could go wrong that I was not paying attention to what was going on around me. It was another ill omen, but I couldn't argue that she is good at what she does.

"Only one. Not armed. Looks nervous," she said, ignoring my embarrassment. I did not press her on details. Nora was as miserly with her words as with her coin.

We waited for Michiel to finish his investigation of the perimeter and when he too found nothing untowards, we headed in. Michiel and I walked through the front door, weapons holstered to give the appearance of peaceful intent. Meanwhile, Nora once again went up into the rafters with her silenced musket to ensure the foreigner would not have a chance at, well, whatever he may have been planning.

A scrawny fellow he was, I saw as we got closer. Clean shaven, a large nose, weak chin, and sloped shoulders. All in all it gave the appearance of a man more suited to a life behind a pile of books than skulking around the docks in the middle of the night. I could see the sweat glimmering on his large forehead. He was more anxious about this meeting than I. He did not play this game often, if at all. An advantage for us. Even his clothing marked him as one who has never run in the shadows before. His black cloak, seemingly to conceal his expensive clothes, was too new, too dark and too well-made. He looked like an actor playing a role.

Michiel and I stopped at the edge of the client's lantern's light.

"Are you the men from the van Windburg family?" He stammered. His thick accent told me he came from the south. Vinean maybe? No, he enunciated too well for those louts. Bythikan, then, definitely.

I sighed inwardly.

"Clearly, or you are further up the creek than I am," I replied, perhaps too sarcastically.

"Oh, good," he said, looking slightly confused. "My name is Novak A-"

"My name is Smit, and I do not give a shit," I interrupted him. I did not want to know his name. I did not want to be connected in any way, shape or form to this schoolboy.

"What do you need us to do?" I said in a more soothing tone as he stood staring at me.

"Right. Of course, of course," he mumbled, seeming to get back on script. "A local businessman named Xander Johansson gave a presentation last week to the Senate Intelligence Committee titled "Farewell to the world of yesterday". A transcription of that presentation is being held at the Alfresian Intelligence Services building. However, I am not entirely sure where it is in the building. I would like… I... I need you to retrieve it for me."

Michiel gave me a knowing look. AIS was not a group of gentlemen you wanted to upset.

"Very well," I said after a pause, "When, how much, and where will we drop off this 'transcription'?"

"Umm, tonight, and, uh, meet me back here. Please," the client replied as he threw a coin pouch towards me. It landed with a thunk hefty enough to ease some of my worries.

"That is half. That is how it is done, yes? Half now, half upon completion?"

Michiel dearly wanted

to say something, to capitalise on the Bythikan's inexperience so he could have a few more coins in his pocket.

"Yes, thank you," I said hurriedly, before Michiel could get so much as a quip out.

"Good, good. Well, a pleasant night to you further," the client said before realising how silly it sounded given the context. He blushed and promptly turned tail and hurried out.

His cloak was barely out the door when Nora dropped down from above and gave a rueful shake of her head.

"So?" she enquired, apparently about the mission at hand. Although with her expressionless stare, she might as well have been asking about the weather.

"So what?" Michiel replied. "Breaking into the AIS headquarters is difficult. Following this little cretin to the other half of the money is easy. I do not know about you, but I take "easy" over "difficult" any day of the week. I say we take it, destroy his body, dump his clothes in the river, and call it a night."

Nora was quiet, even for her. This did not bode well. If these two agreed on this, I would not even have to worry about what the AIS might do to me. These two will do it instead.

"Stop being an idiot," I said in the most authoritative tone I could manage before the gears in Nora's mind finished turning. "The Patriarch wants this done, so unless you want to tell him why you did not do it, start walking."

"Was just an idea," Michiel mumbled sulkily. "What is your grand plan to break into AIS then?"

I fished around in my coat pockets, pulling out my pocket watch.

"It is only just past eight, which means we have the better part of eleven hours before the night is over. It will take us the better part of an hour to get across the city to the AIS headquarters, maybe a few hours to scout around and make a plan, and we can all get this over and done with and still be home in time for breakfast."

Michiel heaved a heavy sigh. "Very well then, what shall we take? The tram, a carriage?"

"Horses," Nora answered before marching out.

"Horses it is then," I replied sardonically, casting my eyes upwards, praying to the unborn Starchild that this night would just end well. The lack of a divine answer spoke volumes.

The hour passed in silence. Nora was her brooding self, Michiel was smoking something from across the eastern sea (I sorely hoped it was not something mind altering) and I sat thinking, ruminating and planning how to break into a building owned by the very men who specialised in preventing folks like me breaking in and stealing valuable documents.

Our first obstacle was getting into the Military District itself, wherein we would find the AIS. An entirely walled off district of the city is not the most convenient feature for men like me. However, we seemed to be in luck tonight. All the guards' attention was focussed on some sort of shipment that was currently leaving the district. Probably another military drill the Marshall is so fond of, I thought, I was not really paying attention. Getting into the AIS was far more important than some silly war games.

"An urgent message for the Marshall from Captain Smit," was all it took to get passed the distracted guards. It always works. No one wants to bother with saying no to an officer, so they always pass the buck up the chain of command. I do not know who Captain Smit is, but the poor bastard must have gotten hell over it for all the times I have used that excuse.

The short ride through the district was uneventful, and then suddenly there it was, the imposing headquarters of the Alfresian Intelligence Services. Five stories of black basalt looming over its surroundings like a dark spirit

from the past, which I guess it was at that. Old king Markus' Inquisition Headquarters leaves a lasting legacy.

We stabled our horses a block away and walked closer. The grounds surrounding the building was fortunately clear of people, but unfortunately clear of everything else. If anyone in the few lit offices were looking outside at the right moment, we would be seen approaching. There was nothing for it, we would have to hope for the best.

"How important do you think this transcription is?" Michiel interrupted my thoughts.

"I cannot say," I replied, "I only know Johansson from his work with airship arrays and even then only as an engineer. Perhaps the AIS is looking into airships? Why do you ask?"

"Where this transcription is stored all depends on how important it is. The more important something is, the higher off the ground it is, unless it is classified under the greatest secrecy. Then it is kept in their vaults below ground."

Nora gave a Michiel is questioning look.

"I have been in there before," Michiel said defensively. "I was a constable, remember? We worked with AIS when dealing with external threats."

"Fascinating," I said dryly. "Let us think about this logically. It will not be underground because the client-"

"Novak," Michiel interjected.

"The client," I said more strongly. "He knew about it. He is as far from being a spy as my mother is, so I doubt he would know about those documents. It most likely would not be on the first two levels, otherwise the Bythikan could have hired any old street rat to acquire it. He hired the Merchant League, so let us work from the top down.

"Michiel, you will come with me. You have the most experience inside there out of all of us."

"I have only been there twice," Michiel said quickly.

"Like I said, the most experience out of all of us," I replied. "Nora, find yourself a comfortable rooftop and keep an eye out. If anything goes wrong, we will need you and that musket to give us the time we need to get to the horses."

Nora nodded wordlessly and walked to the building nearest the AIS, nearly a hundred metres away. In the middle of the night at that range, Nora was the only one I could trust to be accurate. The look she gave me before she walked off made me instantly regret my decision. An expert marksman who dislikes me with a silenced musket in the darkness? I would be dead before I knew what happened should she so wish it. It was too late to worry about that by then. It would either happen or it would not.

Michiel and I turned towards the AIS.

A well-prepared Angel Wings array, a bit of Michiel's blood to activate it, Michiel's grumbling about this fact, and then we were on the roof. Michiel admired the night-time view of Middelburg and the Tenne river while I worked on the lock to get us inside. This is why the van Windburg Family hired me. My previous life as a locksmith has made me a valuable asset to the Family.

Forty seconds later and we were in.

I let Michiel take the lead. He might only have been in here twice, but he had been a constable for ten years. He knew better than I how investigators worked and, more importantly, where they would keep important documents.

Fortunately, the fifth floor was empty and every locked door I opened showed nothing but offices of men who made far more money and had more power than I could dream about. I had no worries about any persons below us hearing us skulking around, the arrays

on the soles of our shoes eliminated any sound we could have made. That did not stop any noise from below playing on my nerves like a harpsichord. It took almost half an hour to search the fifth floor, and there were two, perhaps four more to go.

Pistols were drawn as we inched down the stairway to the fourth floor.

The light from an office spilled down the hallway. The door was wide open, and we could hear the scratching of a pencil, the shuffling of papers and all those other small sounds a man makes when busy with paperwork echoing down the hallway.

Michiel made to walk into the hallway but my arm stopped him in his tracks. I would take the lead. This night had to go smoothly, bloodless. Michiel might well just shoot the man rather than go through the effort of trying to sneak past. There were only a few organisations with whom I did not dare want trouble, and the AIS was second on the list. I liked Middelburg, I was born here, I did not want to have to leave town over a little letter for some stupid client.

The look Michiel gave me told me he knew what I was doing and why. Perfect, just perfect. In front of me, he would have caused trouble. Behind me, he could kill me. I did not think this through, but I was committed. I could not show weakness in front of Michiel or I would have died that night.

I carried on.

Just past the lit doorway I heard a sound behind me. I did not need to look behind. I did not want to look behind me. I already knew what it was. I already knew what it meant. The Starchild does not answer prayers, they say.

I sighed, straightened up and looked around.

Michiel was in the office, looking through the dead man's pockets.

I saw then that he was just a lad. Could not have been long out of his teens. Probably found the job opportunity of his life and was working long into the night to impress his superiors. I knew that feeling. I was him in a previous life. Hell, he was what my son is now.

Michiel was careless, malicious and idiotic to have done that. But it was over now and you cannot cry over spilt milk, my mother always said. At least Michiel's pistol was silenced. So was mine. I could have shot him as he stood there, looming over the lad, reloading his pistol. But if anyone downstairs heard the thud of the lad hitting the ground, I would need an extra gunman to make good my escape.

So we drew a Terminator array and used the lad's own blood to power it to disintegrate any traces of the body. We threw his clothing and effects (barring his money that Michiel took) into a cupboard, searched the office for that damned letter and moved on.

I am not a murderer, well not in the philosophical sense. I had killed people before, but only when I had no other choice. I am a burglar, only a burglar.

We could not find the letter on the rest of the floor, but I luckily managed to stop Michiel shooting the other few unfortunates working so late into the night. I was getting more anxious about it by the minute, while Michiel was becoming more restless. The lazy pillock was doing far too much work than he thought was good for him.

We got lucky, well relatively speaking, on the third floor.

A frantic commotion made us stop on the stairway, as did the poor excuse for whispering. From the sound of them, they were another bunch of too-eager lads looking to impress, except this time they really had dug themselves into a hole. I could not hear everything they were saying as I was far too busy making sure Michiel did not just walk down and kill them all. However, the words "presentation" and "Johansson" definitely made me perk up. Even

Michiel calmed down.

The more I listened, the more excited I became. We had found it. Well, not quite. Almost. It seemed the ensemble we spotted, and promptly ignored, at the gates earlier was not a military drill at all. Rather, it was a shipment of documents from AIS to the senate building, for the senators to review at their leisure tomorrow. Unfortunately they forgot one document, our document, and these poor lads now had to go look for it, and hurry all the way to the senate to deliver it post-haste.

Good news, or so I thought, until I found out through the lads' little discussion that Johansson's letter was actually on the first floor, or so a seemingly knowledgeable Wikus told the group. Michiel gave me a look that said more than any number of curses ever could.

"Not a word," I whispered to him. "Not one single word."

His reply was cut short by a "Where is Daniel?" and a "He is upstairs," that came from the corridor below. I prayed Daniel was not the poor lad Michiel shot.

At this point even I had to consider whether we should kill them and find the document now, or hide while they searched for the late Daniel. We could wait who knows how long for them to finish and then potentially miss the document. My hand was forced when the lad called Wikus decided to go find the document while the rest of the lads decided to go find Daniel.

I pulled a resisting Michiel after me as I headed upstairs. Let the lad Wikus find the document for us. It will be far easier acquiring it from him on the road than in here. By easier, I meant that there was a better chance of the lad surviving out on the road.

Hopefully.

A bit of blood to activate the Angel Wings array five stories below and we were racing towards the building where Nora was.

Nora reacted to the change in plans with an irritable sigh. She had assumed we were successful and the night would be over. Michiel was also in an argumentative mood.

"You know we could have taken all those boys out and no one would have been the wiser!" He veritably hissed at me. Nora shifted to one side so that they were almost standing side by side. I had to think of something quickly, not only to get her back on my side of this argument, but also because the longer we argued, the more time Wikus had to find that letter and be gone before we had a hope in any of the hells to catch up to him.

"What I know is that you would have made an even bigger mess, and then AIS would have come looking for you, and you would have sang like a Nevincian whore and Nora and I would have had to look over our shoulders every day for the rest of our lives until they found us." It was a longer retort than I was aiming for, but I hoped that dropping Nora's name in there with mine would make up for the lack in brevity.

Nora shifted her weight to the other foot, to better look at Michiel. It was not much, but it was no longer two against one. Michiel opened his mouth to reply, but I cut him off. I could not risk this argument ending in drawn pistols.

"Unless you have anything else to add, lad," I emphasised the last word, "we have an ambush to plan and very little time in which to do it."

I could see Michiel wanted desperately to shoot me, but neither he nor I knew what Nora would have done then, and he did not risk it. Perhaps he was not as stupid as I imagined.

A worrying thought.

I had to be right about this.

I was wrong about where the letter was. I was wrong, in a cold and practical sense, about letting Wikus and his friends live. If I was wrong about this, I would never see the dawn.

I had to be right about this.

We knew that the shipment to the Senate House had forgotten Johansson's letter. The lads were in a rush to find it. It meant that Wikus would be in a rush to get it back to the senate house. Which, in turn, meant that Wikus would not be taking side roads or detours. He would take the quickest route to the Senate House so he can impress his superiors with his quick reaction to trouble. That meant taking the main road linking the Military and Political Districts. The road we had raced to. The road we were now watching, firearms drawn and ready, waiting.

I had to be right about this.

I was right about this. It surprised even me. Perhaps the Starchild does answer prayers.

The cabriolet came round the bend, its horse at a fast trot. Even from this distance, I could see there was only one person in the small carriage, a lad I presumed to be Wikus. I sent one last prayer to the Starchild for his sake and then readied my pistol.

The horse was barely ten metres from us when it collapsed, nearly tipping the cabriolet over. The whole affair skidded to stop in the middle of the street right between where Michiel and I waited. Say what you will about Nora, and a lot of men do, but she is a wonder with that musket. Not a sound nor a light flashed when she shot. I must ask her one day about the design of the arrays in her musket.

Michiel and I strode out into the street, pistols drawn with scarves around our faces, looking exactly like what we were: highwaymen.

I could not see into the cabriolet. Its hood was down and Wikus must have crept back under it, fearing what was to come.

We stopped a fair distance from the cabriolet, pistols raised squarely at it. I hoped Wikus saw us and our pistols, and did not try to be a hero tonight.

"Come out, lad," I called out. "Do not make us come get you."

"Alright! Alright!" Wikus' voice broke as he shouted. I winced. The lad was younger than I thought. "I will come out, please do not kill me."

Wikus slowly emerged from inside the cabriolet, doing his best not to look scared, climbed awkwardly down over the dead horse and stood up.

"You have something we want, lad," I said, doing my best to sound calm. "A document. A transcription. Hand it over and we can all go home for breakfast."

A range of emotions ran across his face, each quicker than the last. I could see his thoughts as if he were speaking them aloud. He wanted to bluster, to intimidate us. He wanted to lie, to say he had no idea of what we were speaking. He wanted to stall, to wait and hope someone would rescue him. He wanted to beg, to plead, to bargain. He wanted a lot of things he eventually decided he would not get.

With resignation writ large on his face, he sighed, nodded and put his hand inside his coat.

"Easy now," I warned. "Let us not make a mistake here."

He paused for a second, and took out a folded document.

I put away my pistol and approached him, hand outstretched, attempting to look far more genial than I must have.

I got within arm's reach of him when I saw a glint of metal from his empty hand. Too late I recognised it as a lever, which he promptly pressed and a hold-out pistol shot from inside his sleeve into his hand.

He did not even have time to raise his hand.

Michiel's round took the lad square in the cheekbone.

Less than a fraction of a second later, his entire head and part of his neck turned to stone. His face was eternally frozen in confusion, fear and pain.

His body collapsed to the ground.

His head, now with nothing holding it fast to his body, rolled away and came to a rest at my feet, his eyes staring straight at me, begging me, pleading with me. For what? I could not say.

We took the letter and left the body where it lay.

I am not a murderer.

I am just a burglar.

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Our meeting with the client was almost anticlimactic in its absurdity.

The fool looked like he had enjoyed a fine sleep since we last met and was, dare I say it, in exuberant spirits. Dressed again in his faux street garb, he veritably bounded through the door, looking like he was just crowned Emperor of Bythika. Our demeanour did not damper the poor fool's spirit one bit.

"Friends!" he exclaimed, clearly speaking of some other three people. "I assume you were successful in your quest?"

I ignored the incredulous look Nora gave me. It was the very least I could do to look professional, although I was quite sure it was wasted on the client.

"Yes, we were," I replied. "Do you ha-"

"Excellent!" he interrupted me. "I knew you could do it! From the first time I laid eyes on you, I knew you were not like the other Fresians. Not that there is anything wrong with being a Fresian mind you, but you know what I mean."

Nora was openly glaring at me now, as if this was all my fault. And the client kept on chattering as if we had suddenly become fast friends. His earlier apprehension of us seemingly vanished after a night's sleep.

"When I first came to this island, I thought you Fresians to be a cruel, petty and exceedingly lazy people-"

Looking at Michiel, I really could not quite fault the client for that sentiment.

"-but then I met you three and I can say you surely are above the common rabble-"

Looking at Nora, I could not imagine a worse insult at this very moment than for a wealthy foreigner to call her impoverished self 'common rabble'. I did not wait to discover what my insult was to be and interrupted the fool's impromptu speech.

"Yes. Quite. Indeed. Do you have the second half of our payment?" I took out Johansson's document.

"Oh?" he blinked, lost in his trail of insults against my countrymen. "Oh yes, of course."

We exchanged document for purse and before he could say anything more that would terminally shorten his life, I bade him farewell and waited pointedly until he walked away.

Nora turned towards me, expectantly, while Michiel still glared at the spot where the client stood, presumably thinking murderous thoughts.

We divvied up the money then and there, as equally as could be, despite Michiel protests, and walked away in separate directions, hands on pistols in case the other two had any sudden illuminating ideas.

And that, Marshall, is how you and your AIS friends found me: lost in thought, heavy at heart and clearly not paying enough attention to the world around me to spot the AIS agents that surely must have been tracking us since we left the Military District.

And that, Marshall, is my story and my confession, in the hope that I am not twelve inches shorter by noon.

And that, my dear Marshall, is why you never meet your client.

To my dearest family.

I hope this parcel finds you in good health. I know my disappearance seven months ago must have come as quite a shock. Rest assure, the Emperor himself tasked me with a mission of vital importance. I was to go abroad and search for the letters in this parcel. I am writing to you from Middelburg, that decadent metropolis on the island of Alfresia. I am not quite done with my quest, so I cannot say when I shall return home. If the Imperial Guards should ask, please tell them that it has been the greatest joy of my life to perform this service for the emperor. In truth, I am world-weary and have barely slept in the past few months. It has been a constant running about from one place to the next. I have been on the road for so long, I think that I may have become half mule, half ship. I do not even know why the emperor would want these letters, or even why he would not send his agents for them! This is plain drudgery and I cannot wait until it is over!

But while I have some time to pass before the ship that will take me north arrives, let me tell you about Middelburg. I have never seen a city like it so far on my travels and, to be honest, I do not think I want to again. It is a strange city and quite larger than I was led to believe. I do not even think our city of Bythika is as large as this. Unlike our fair city, Middelburg is a veritable rat's nest with all its alleys and cramped streets. Each time I venture from this inn I get the feeling that the alleyways and thoroughfares are about to swallow me up. It is far too easy to get lost in this city! The people here tell me their gods designed it, but if that is true then their gods must be crazy.

WESTDENE
GARDENIA
WILGEHOF
HEUWELSIG
BOKLAND
LANGEHOVEN
NOORDHOEK
BRANDSVELD
OOSTON
NIEUTON
MILITARY DISTRICT
OLDTOWN
UPPER HARBOUR
ROYAL WILLOW
RODEWAL
TEMPLE PARK
SUNVALE
ROSE HEIGHTS
POLITICAL DISTRICT
HILLSIDE
RUNEDAL
WEST LANDS
PELLISSIER
GREEN OAKS
BAYWATER
CROSSROADS
UNIVERSITAS
DOCKS
HOSPITAAL PARK
LEAGUE DISTRICT
NAVALSIG
PARK WEST
HOUTBAY
DOCKS
FLEURDAL
BRANDWAG
500 M
THE GRAND CITY OF
MIDDELBURG

LIFE IN MIDDELBURG

Districts of Middelburg

As with any other major city, Middelburg is divided into districts, but even in this the Alfresians think in circles. The entire city is built on a gigantic runic array which form the major streets of the city. This means that you can never get anywhere with any speed, you always have to travel in a circle wherever you want to go. That is, of course, unless you want to take the narrow side streets filled with vendors, hawkers, and cut-purses on the lookout for rich and stupid men. And if this was not bad enough, each of the circles inside the massive city runic array is a runic array in itself! It is my belief that the Alfresians want people to go mad by constantly having to travel in smaller and smaller circles until they are completely lost and confused!

At the centre of the city lies the Political District. Here the rich and powerful make decisions for the weak and the poor. You can also find the embassy enclaves here, where the rich and powerful from other nations come to curry favour and, more importantly, money from the Alfresians. Of course, there is also the Town Hall where the elite make a farcical show of letting the people have their say. Naturally, when the citizens have shouted themselves hoarse nothing has changed. Those corrupt men in their golden attires should count themselves blessed that the buildings in which they work are so beautiful. If the architecture should have matched their hearts, the peasants would long ago have realised with whom they were dealing.

In the heart of the Political District, and thus the exact centre of the city, sits the Senate House like a centrum of a runic array. Not only does the Political District house the government of the city, but the entire government of this island nation. The people here tell me that once, long ago, the Senate House was the lavish palace of the Archduke of Alfresia. This was clearly before Alfresia won its war of independence from the

City of Middelburg Constabulary

The local constabulary has an ancient and rich history. Though the constabulary is little more than three centuries old, the Alfresian Office of Constable hearkens back to the formation of the Heavenly Empire of Man, where the Constable was the head of the island's military. Later on the Marshal became the head of the military and the Office of Constable was regulated to overseeing the army of the fast growing Middelburg. Since then, the Middelburgundian soldiers were reclassified as deputies of the Constable until the citizens came to name them constables.

The constables today are not as close to the army as they once were. Still classed as a military force, the constables are trained for crowd dispersion, investigation and inner city fighting. Gone are the days of formations and battalions, constables now work in pairs during their duty. Their equipment is simple but efficient: bronze armour, weapons and shot is used as no array can target bronze. With the discovery of the Lightning rune, constables now use electrified billy clubs and shot, incapacitating suspects instead of killing them... most of the time.

Kingdom of Fresland and its mad king Markus VI. The palace is a marvellous structure, crafted with the most intricate of runes, ensuring it is never too hot, too cold, too humid, too dry, too light or too dark.

This sterility is a perfect metaphor for the Alfresian democracy. I am told that any man can become the national leader, now that they have done away with the old aristocracy, but you and I know this is not so. "Lies may walk, but money talks" is a favourite expression around here, saying all that needs to be said about that. It appears to me that the rich and powerful become the leaders here, rather than the leaders becoming rich and powerful.

And who is more powerful in this corrupt city (or any city on Jytoh's eastern coast) than the Merchant League?

Sequestered away in their own runic array in the south of the city, the Fresian Merchant League plays with the lives of people as if they are merely coins in a purse. The Merchant League are their own nation in every legal aspect, and all their property is considered land of this fictional republic. This has not stopped them from influencing nearly every facet of life in this city. Almost all major trade is done in the League District, under their careful eyes. The Great Bazaar, located at the heart of the district, is over two hundred metres in diameter. I once tried to see everything that was in that bizarre place but the day was gone before I even covered a quarter of it. The benefit to this is that you could find anything you could possibly want in the League District.

Each of the four titular families comprising the League has their own compound at the compass directions of the district. These sprawling mansions with all their towers and high arches are almost as impressive as the Senate's palace. Between you and I, I believe this is entirely the point. I have tried to have a closer look at these palatial compounds, but could get no closer than the walls. The personal guards of the families are as fierce as any privateer I have seen. They man the compound walls as if the families were expecting bloodshed to erupt at any moment. Having seen a fair bit of city, they may well be correct in that expectation.

The family compounds are almost as fortified as the Military District, located in the north of the city

in the third and final runic array. The Military District is the only permanently walled district, not surprising as it houses the headquarters of the Alfresian army and Intelligence Services, the headquarters of the Middelburg constabulary and the prestigious Rafäel Military Academy. The entire district is given over to military administration offices, barracks, training fields and living quarters for the men's families. Entry into the district is strictly controlled but I did not even need to get close to the walls to hear the gunfire and cannon shots. I pity the people who have to live with it every day.

> Middelburg is nothing more than the hole in the world that vermin inhabit, where morals are not worth a pig's spit, where the privileged few who sit at the top make mock of peasants below, and where beauty is turned into greed.
>
> ~ Ambassador Sonur Tenzi of Uttosia

But they may be more fortunate than those living in and around the University District. The University of Middelburg occupies most of the district, unsurprisingly, and most of the rest are given over to student housing and the many public houses that service the needs of the university's thousands of students. The people here are quite proud of the university and the many discoveries that have been made there. I, on the other hand, hold an entirely different opinion. In only the few short weeks that I have been in this city, I have seen at least a dozen alcohol fuelled celebrations of which I am quite sure even you must have heard judging by the noise of it all.

I find myself more drawn to Temple Park on the opposite end of town. It is an enormous park, complete with orchards and a small man made lake which abuts the grounds of the Progenitorist faith's High Cathedral of our Heavenly Mother and Father as well as the Prodigalist faith's Eternal Temple of Bür. Do not mention this to anyone outside the family, but I had ventured inside the High Cathedral and I must say it is gorgeous. I know what you must be thinking, "How can a proud Prodigalist think this?", but it was true. It is as large as our August Temple back home, and made of hard lines and graceful arches. The statues dotting its exterior seem so lifelike, you would think they are painted people!

Please, Mother, do not fret, I had done my duty and gone to the Temple as well, and it was even more breathtaking. Covered in runes, mostly decorative I would say, the immense dome of the Eternal Temple of Bür made me feel utterly minuscule when I was inside. It felt like I had stepped inside the world itself, peering at it from below. The priest told me that the part of the temple that we could see was only half of the building. It is an immense sphere, with the other half below our feet. He even said that the floor could be moved all around inside this sphere so that it could even be upside down! Why you would want this, I do not know, but I know better than to argue with a priest.

I had wondered where all the money came from to build and maintain such magnificent structures, but then I looked east. On a hillside overlooking the city proper lies the area the locals call Nieuton. It is an area developed only in the past few decades, and modernity covers it like a tapestry. Here, in their mansions and acres of land, the rich can look down upon the city without ever needing to travel there. The streets there are wide and straight, cutting through hillocks and brush. It gives the entire area an unnatural feel, and this is not helped by the gaudy mansions rising on either side of the streets, each owner trying to out do his neighbour.

On the other side of the river that bisects the city lies Oldtown, and there can be no better opposite to Nieuton than that decrepit place. As one of the oldest areas in the city, it is nothing but dark alleyways and crooked streets. I would not willingly go there at night and I only went down in daylight on the hunt for one of the Emperor's letters. The poorest of the poor in Middelburg live there, and crime is widespread. Even the constables only go into Oldtown when the trouble starts flowing over into the

neighbouring boroughs.

As the people here tell it, every new election brings forth promises to help the poor in Oldtown, to redevelop the area, and make things better. After every new election, Oldtown remains the same and so do its people. Even the priests have mostly stopped trying to clean it up, but every once in a while a new priests tries. That priest is then found either in a hospital or a cemetery, or usually never found at all. Oldtown swallows up everything it touches and migrants are no different. I have rarely found immigrants in the city except for the Docks, Political and scholarly districts and Oldtown. The government's talk of inclusivity apparently stretches only as far as the migrant's pocketbook.

And lastly, we come to the Docks and where I sit, and where money changes hands faster than I can see. The docks cover kilometres of coastline, even reaching high up the river into the middle of the city. Nearly every available bit of land near water in this city is given over to piers and warehouses. Of course, almost everything is controlled either by the government, its military or the Merchant League. The more I hear these Alfresians speak of liberty, the less I see it on the streets. Even so, I must say it does seems to work. Freight by the tons are delivered and shipped away every hour. Boats dance around each other, trying to get to their allotted piers without damaging one another. Rowdy sailors and even rowdier prostitutes swagger up and down the docks. The people here look happy, so who am I to complain?

Religion

The priests, on the other hand, well when are they not complaining? They appear to have a special love for the docks and haranguing the prostitutes and their clients, although from the priest I saw scampering upstairs here half an hour ago, it seems that is not the only thing they do to prostitutes. The more I think about it, the more I believe this laxity among the priests is due to the tolerance the Alfresians have to differing religions. Not the western religions mind you, but the more civilised ones.

Seven months ago I would have thought it strange to be sitting in a foreign city admiring another religion, but after so many months on the road, I have come to find that they are not the demons the priests back home tell us they are. Perhaps the priests are wrong, but for the love of Bür do not let anyone in Bythika know I said that! I know what you must be thinking, but please have an open mind. Back home we were never taught about the other religions, other than that their way is the path to damnation. So let me tell you quickly of the gods of Middelburg.

Like us, Prodigalism is the official religion in Alfresia, although it is not the only one. I am told that the Alfresian high priest sits on the presidential council and advises him in all matters concerning the spirit. Nevertheless, these northern Prodigalists are not like us. Yes, they believe that Bür was a god who took human form, and who delivered unto us the divine runes so we may rid ourselves of the inhuman threat. However, each Prodigalist I have met has a different way to worship Him and will tell you exactly why they are right and all the rest are wrong. These northern Prodigalists love to debate.

They have no centralised spiritual leader like we do. Even the Alfresian high priest is more an advisor than a ruler. Every Prodigalist nation is like a different religion altogether. There are more than a dozen Prodigalist temples here on the dock catering to the different cultures, but not one does it in the same way! I know that the schism between the northern and southern Prodigalists centuries ago would mean some differences, but not this much. Some Prodigalists believe there is only Bür and no Father nor Mother. Others believe the Father and Bür to be the same, and others yet still believe Bür to have been a woman! I cannot keep track.

At least the Progenitorists have some sense of orthodoxy,

but then theirs is a simple religion. We were taught back home that the Prodigalist faith emerged from the Progenitorists when we saw the light and that much have changed since then, but seeing them here, I doubt that. Yes, it is true they only worship the Father and the Mother, but they do still recognise a divine spark within Bür if only as a prophet. I must say, though, that seeing a woman priest ministering in the church of the Mother is quite disconcerting.

We recognise the Mother as having given birth to the world and honour her for that, but the Progenitorists say she still impacts the world today. It is to her they give thanks for every harvest and every newborn lamb. They say everything that is created is done under her guidance. If the Mother is creation, the Father is destruction. Unsurprisingly, he is worshipped most by soldiers and constables to give them strength, but he is also seen as the divine protector. They look to him for guidance in times of trouble, and seek shelter under his arms. Is it not strange how we have taken the Progenitorist teaching of the Mother and Father and blended them into one into Bür?

Middelburg is not only home to two major religions, but also to some strange cults. Whereas we would have eradicated these cultists for the heretics and heathens they are, the Alfresians allow them to stay and prosper. The Alfresians even offer them the same privileges as full fledged religions. What gall!

The greatest of these cults are the so called Runists. They have constructed their very own monastery in Middelburg, and have a long-standing contract with the local university to provide services and teaching with regard to the runes. The locals here say this is because the Runists know more about the runes than any other, hence their name. The Runists believe that the world is not real, that the only real things that exist are the runes. Thus, they research, and analyse, and dissect the runes so that they can glean some understanding of their "true" world.

The Alfresians tolerate the other great heathen religions, but only up to a point. The Mekadians are not well liked here, and I have come to suspect the feeling is quite mutual. The Neoists have only one temple on the docks to their single, wrathful god. The mayor long ago decreed them to be too quick to provocation to give them any more. So too do the Completists only retain one temple on the docks to their hermaphroditic god, far from any other religion. Their degenerate teachings are allowed only under the sufferance of the mayor, lest they spread their decadent ways further.

What seems most strange to my eyes are those who claim to have no religion whatsoever. Can you imagine it, to not believe in a god at all? It is my personal belief these poor wretches have seen far too many religions and heard to cries to too many priests. With a dozen men screaming about a dozen gods in your ear, however could you find the true path through all that noise? When I see these godless creatures, I do give thanks that in Bythika there is only one religion. There is no confusion there, and I often long for that blessed silence.

The People of Middelburg

As with any other society, the people in Middelburg can be divided into two groups, the rich and the poor. Although since breaking away from Fresland and opening up trade, a burgeoning middle class have developed. However, in a city so cosmopolitan there are actually three distinct groups: the rich, the poor natives, and the poor foreigners.

Foreigners like us can mostly be found near the docks, working around the shipping industry, trading and operating mercantile stores. Middelburg gains most of its profits through trade and encourages as many people to come spend their money here as they possibly can. Because of that, I have in my few short weeks here seen more people of different races than in

my entire journey. From the Tolians to the north to the Neoists to the West to even Uttosians across the eastern sea, the whole world passes through this city. The areas around the docks districts are like walking into the hub of the world.

And that is only the docks!

There is, strictly speaking, no law or regulation that prevents foreigners from leaving the docks districts, but I gained the sense from my forays into the city that the locals prefer keeping us near the sea if we are not Fresian. That is, unless you have money to spend. If that is the case, then the locals treat you are like a long-lost brother come home for the feast. Without such money, however, they expect you to make your business short before you start costing the locals their much valued time and money.

Perhaps for this reason I found most foreigners that have left the docks end up in Oldtown. It is quite the shame, as that is a dark and depressing place that swallows up even the light that touches it. It is strange that it is in such crime ridden areas where you can find the most equality. The people there do not care where you are from or who you are, only that you can be exploited or profited from. The gangs of Oldtown, made up of both locals and foreigners, have a fearsome reputation. They will extort you, exploit you and have been known to try to expand outside of Oldtown. The richest and poorest of us have a peculiar way of thinking alike. It seems there is no wealth limit on ambition and greed.

While the poor toil in Oldtown and the Docks, the rich among us foreigners can be found in the Political and League districts. There they spend their days in luxury, discussing business and politics with the local elite. In all my travels I have found that the wealthy are the same wherever I go. They are consumed with wealth and power and afraid of losing either. This has certainly not changed in Middelburg. The only difference between a wealthy Alfresian and a foreigner is the style of clothes on their backs. The foreigners care little for their own kind that dwell here, about as little as the local elite care about their own poor.

I fear I have made the Middelburgundians sound a petty and cruel people, but this could not be further from the truth. Yes, there is the odd one who may shout a bit, and now and then there is one with slight defects, one perhaps whose truthfulness you doubt a bit, but by and large they are a welcoming people. Their dependence on trade have exposed them to a variety of different ideas and philosophies. This has made them, in a general sense, accepting or at least tolerating of many sorts of people.

> It is easier than you would think to get lost in this city. A lot of money to be made from that.
> ~Johan van Strauss

As to why they may be wary of outsiders? Well, that is quite a long tale, so I shall try to put it as briefly as humanly possible.

In Bythika, we are told precious little of the world outside our empire, and we often forget the troubles that other lands have gone through. From the time Middelburg first existed during the Great War well over two thousand years ago, it has been the centre of any war focused on Alfresia. The city's runic array that protects the people inside is a magnet for any would-be conqueror. Like moths to a flame, they rush to Middelburg, because they know they must capture this city before moving onto the rest of the island.

Time and again over the past two thousand years this city has come under attack. The most recent of these came from Wesfresland, who by all accounts should have been Alfresia's staunchest ally. It was all caused by a petty duke who was angry that his claim on some Alfresian soil was not recognised by the republican government. Duke Lukas owned as much land as half of Alfresia and gave these locals a good run for their money in his petty war. When you can no longer trust those people of whom you were a part of not so long

ago, who can you trust? Is their mistrust so different from our mistrust of the Gitic pagan tribes that still litter our frontiers?

Their rulers may indeed think only of themselves, but it must be said that the conditions and the treatment of the Middelburgundians improve as the years slowly move on, to hear the locals tell of it. They despise their rich and powerful, but they are equally quick to defend their democracy. Even if none of them will ever have a chance to walk the hallowed halls of their senate, they will defend its existence to the very end. "As terrible as it may be, it is better than what we had before", is a saying I have heard more than once here. I cannot say if I agree with it, but I can at least say that their tramcars are always on time.

This does not mean that there are never any social or political problems, indeed quite the opposite. The Middelburgundians are quite fond of telling their rulers, especially their current president de Klerk, what they think of their reign. Whether this civil critique comes in the form of song, print, vandalism or a protest depends entirely on the disposition of the perpetrator. For this reason Middelburg employs a veritable army of constables to keep the peace and keep dissent to a minimum. The demeanour of a constable you meet will change depending on where you meet him. Around the wealthier districts like Nieuton, you will find only the best dressed and most well-mannered constables. They will be ready and eager to help with any cause, and you will leave them in the highest of spirits. In the poorer areas like Oldtown, however, you had best step lightly around a constable. The hospices and physicians around poor areas make most of their income from the actions of these types of constables.

If the constables do not gain much affection, it is because this is all lavished on the armed forces. Middelburg only keeps a small garrison and a modest naval yard, and most of the military you will meet will be cadets at the academy. Despite the lack of military build up, the people are proud of their armed forces. All civilian men of the nation are drafted in times of emergency and for this reason are required by law to keep a working pistol and sharpened sword in their homes at all times. I believe this is where the affection for the military comes from, as many of the older generations have themselves

Lukas Smit, Mayor of Middelburg

The Right Worshipful Grand Mayor and Lord Governor Lukas Smit of the Grand City and Canton of Middelburg. "My lord" would also do in a pinch. Smit governs more than a million souls in Middleburg, nearly a quarter of Alfresia's population, and is thus the second most important man in the nation. Some would argue the most important, but that debate has been raging for twentyseven years, ever since Smit came to power. Say what you will of the man, but he has been elected by majority every time, and his political acumen is second to none. Charismatic and ambitious, Smit is at his best in front of an audience. He plays the crowd like a composer, knowing exactly what to say and how best to say it. His speeches are merely wheels within wheels and discerning what is lie and what is truth can, and has, sent more than one man to the asylum. His arrogance has nearly been his downfall as multiple affairs and scandals has come out of City Hall. Strangely enough, witnesses and evidence always disappear, and none can ever find fault with Smit's excuses. He is a dangerous man in a powerful position, who is unafraid of abusing his near absolute power over his great metropolis.

served their time in uniform.

All in all if I were to characterise the average Alfresian that you might meet (if you dared to venture here) he would be a thoughtful, philosophical man, fond of poetry, arguing and his hats. At first these islanders may seem a detached and paranoid lot, but when you get to know them better you will find them warm and kind-hearted. Above all, they would be always willing to risk life and limb for their friends and family. And if you rather not care to know them quite that well, I can at least tell you that they phenomenal beers and have the rowdiest humour I have yet heard.

Technology and the Runes

It is no understatement to say that the discovery if the Lightning rune changed the entire world forever. Before it could change the world, the rune changed Middelburg through the hands of the Merchant League. After countless trials and errors, a Runist monk by the name of Jaco van Berg discovered the design nearly two years ago. The League paid him handsomely for his services and then managed to keep the design a secret for an unprecedented five months before it leaked out. In that time they made mountains of money from it, but it finally got out into the world and changed it, in my opinion, for the better.

Half a year's head start in the rest of the world meant that Alfresia was at the forefront of what could be achieved with this newfound "electricity". Afterwards, being the trading hub that it is, all new sorts of ideas and inventions flowed into the city. There could be no better time to live in Alfresia for an intrepid inventor. The government, the military, the League and countless private and noble benefactors stand ready to spend a small fortune on any new invention that could make them money and power. Both would, of course, be preferable if they can manage it.

As a trading hub, Middelburg has always been influential in matters of technology. With so many people passing through the city everyday this is unavoidable. However, with the advent of the Lightning rune, they have changed from merely taking in technological ideas to actively creating them. A large part of this was due to the influx of inventors, and their investors, who streamed into Middelburg. They came to uncover the mysteries of the Lightning rune soon after its inception, and to get rich doing so. These people wanted to be the first to bring such runic technology back to their home countries. Unsurprisingly, they were quite willing to pay whatever was needed to obtain it.

The other reason for this sudden explosion of technological innovation came about as a reaction to this influx of inventors. The Alfresian government had, for better or worse, signed a contract with the Merchant League. It has a long and boring name, but locals colloquially refer to it as the Lightning Contract. It stipulated that the government will pay, on a continuous basis, for any technology the League invents that would benefit the island republic. The League wasted no time in contracting (often by extortion, blackmail or kidnapping) the services of any inventor of note they could find. Say what you will about their practices, but much of the new technology that the locals here say enrich their lives came about directly because of it.

The greatest of these would have to the new electric airships. Over the past two millennia, there have always been men who were strange enough to try to create a ship that can fly. Unfortunately for them, the things were always more impractical than could be afforded and, worse still, could rarely sustain their own flight for more than a few minutes. The wonders of modern technology and the Lightning rune have given us ships that can fly from one city all the way to the next before needing to touch down. Something this magnificent could never be kept a secret, however, and as soon as the secret of the Lightning rune became known, airships

were built wherever there was space for them. The success were... varied shall we say.

It is not only in the sea and sky where you can feel the work of the Merchant League inventors. The electric tramcar system running through the major streets of Middelburg stand as a testament to that. The locals tell me that only a few years ago, heavy trains with dirty, foul smelling smoke ferried passengers around the city. Although I never saw these trains in action, the buildings lining the old railways are still blackened by the many years of smoke. The new tramcars expel no smoke and are far more practical, being able to stop and start again quicker and more smoothly than the old trains. They make a trip around the city almost a joy. I am told that some inventors are even trying to make a tramcar that does not need to be on a rail line, but they have not had any success thus far. Having been nearly trampled to death many times in this city by all its carriages, I sincerely hope they never succeed.

> I found Middelburg a city of walls.
> I left it a city of fire.
> ~ King Markus VI the Incendiary of Fresland

If you do not care to travel by air, sea or land, then let me tell you that the Midderburgundians are masters of runic transportation. In my travels across the continent I have had to transport by way of runic teleportation on a few occasions and my heart was in my throat every time. It is a finicky business that can kill as easily as it can work properly. The Middelburgundians have found ways, they tell me, with electricity and large clockwork machines to make it safe. These clockwork machines can input the correct runic address so that no other runic array is affected, and no harm comes to the traveller. I tried it once out of sheer curiosity. I travelled over three kilometres in a blink of an eye and I could not feel a thing. I have been told they also use this runic teleportation system to transport their electricity to areas not yet strung by copper wires.

One of the more common ways the Lightning rune has been used here is for weaponry. Unsurprising, I know, we use it quite well in that regard even back home. No rune exists that have not been applied for lethal purposes, but the Middelburgundians have done quite the opposite. They have utilised the Lightning rune in order to be less lethal. The Middelburg constabulary quickly picked up on the "stunning" effect that electricity can have on the human body. Therefore, they have equipped every constable with a "shock baton" to deal with criminals in a manner that, usually, does not result in death. Equally, the rounds for their powdered pistols are runed to create electricity when inside the body. They say that with this even a non-lethal wound can bring down a criminal in one shot.

With the discovery of the Lightning rune, technology has been married to the runes in ways never seen before. While we have always used runes ever since Bür gave them to us during the Great War with the Inhumans, but it has always been used to cheat physical labour. I have read historical accounts that speak of the pre-Great War humans mining for gold and silver and iron. Where in the past two millennia has anyone mined for metal or quarried for stone? The same energy needed to mine a ton of gold could be applied to a runic array to create ten tons worth of it.

Outside of weaponry and other methods of killing each other, this was the limited way in which runes and technology coexisted. They were separate but equal. Yet, now it is difficult to determine where the runes end and the technology begins. From lighting and heating our homes to the construction of buildings there appears to be no end to the technological marvels the Middelburgundians can create when runes and the human imagination is applied together.

Living with the Merchant League

I really must be going soon. The barkeep just informed me that my ship will soon dock, but before I go let me tell you of the mammoth in the room as it were. As I have mentioned several times thus far in this letter, the Fresian Merchant League are as in control of Middelburg as the government, perhaps even more so if I can be quite frank. Wealth is all that matters to the wealthy, and the Merchant League is as wealthy as any emperor. There are princes and kings who would look to the coffers and vaults of the Merchant League with sheer envy.

So for you, dear family, who are used to the government controlling everything, let me tell you how the League operates.

The League began its life out of the various trade agreements held between the four major trade families in Alfresia and its neighbours. These agreements and treaties solidified during the Alfresian War of Independence as the trade families saw the perfect opportunity to throw off the shackles of state intervention. When the newly formed rebel government needed a tremendous amount of money in short order, these families created the Fresian Merchant League to fund their rebellion. In return, the rebel government gave the League sovereign territory in Alfresia, what we now call the League District. With an untouchable home-base now secure, the Merchant League soon expanded beyond the island's borders. It now controls sovereign territory in Ossenzee, Wesfresland and even beyond the Fresian lands. With each year that passes, their wealth and power increases.

The most powerful of the League families is the Hugenberg family, the only one ironically not from Alfresia. It is a Wesfresland noble family which supported the rebels during the War of Independence, albeit under a different name to protect them from the wrath of their mad king. They continued this charade for over four decades before the king of the now-called Wesfresland discovered their complicity. By then the treasonous patriarch, and Burgrave of Wesfresland, was already deceased. There was little the new king could do without offending the other nobles, the whole League and the new nation of Alfresia. Not wishing another war, the young king relented. He instead made the best of a bad situation and formed contracts with the Hugenberg family that benefited his kingdom greatly.

The second most powerful, and the Hugenberg's greatest competition, is the van Windburg family. Operating out of the city of Windburg in the south of Alfresia, it has grown like a vine up the island and has even spread across to Hallei and the Gitic isles. The power of the van Windburg family not only comes from trade, but also from their very lucrative mercenary company which they hire out to the highest bidder. I have heard that the heir to the family must serve his time in the company before being able to lead the family. The 'Golden Talons' they call company, and I accompanied them partly on my journey to the east. If they fight as well as they drink then they must be worth every penny. It is unsurprising that the van Windburgs is the most militaristic of the League's families, and they say non can compare to the arms and armour of van Windburg.

The other Family not originating from Alfresia is the Heisenstein family. They originally come from Ossenzee and are still primarily located there. Ossenzee was Alfresia's ally in the War of Independence and the Heisenstein family naturally gravitated to the other trade families in the region. The Heisensteins may be the smallest of the trade families, but it has interests stretching far north past Nacitania. It is, or so the gossip goes, undergoing heavy internal strife. The previous patriarch passed away two years ago leaving behind a well groomed son and a second wife significantly younger than he was. Dowager-Matriarch Rita, as she styles herself, refused to hand over the reins to her stepson and

now rules the family, or at least part of it. There are talks of a schism about to occur, but nothing can be confirmed.

So we come to the last family, the van Rosedaal family. Hailing from the north of Alfresia, they specialise in the finer things in life like wines, flowers, perfumes, and runic research. However, their greatest source of income is, unsuspectingly, weapons. The van Rosedaal family styles itself as "Alfresian born and raised" trade family. This almost political campaign is the brainchild of the current patriarch from when he was still only the heir. The reason for this campaign is that the van Rosedaal family were loyalists during the War of Independence. Not loyal to Alfresia, but to the mad Fresian king. It was only later during the war that they joined the contract to create the League, but their early treason is still remembered in some parts. With the passing of the previous patriarch six months ago, the family has been reinvigorated with fresh blood, and started several philanthropic works to improve its reputation.

These are not the only trading families in the Merchant League, but they are the founders, often called the Governing Families as they are the only families who have an active say in the running of the League. The minor families are all under the reign of one of the four major trade families. As such, their influence in this almost feudal system is entirely dependent on their relationship with their liege family.

The League is an ever present force in Middelburg. No matter where you are, from the docks to the military district, from Oldtown to Nieuton, the mark of the League or one of its families is always in sight. Whether it is on a store front, on the back of a tramcar, or on the lapel of a dockworker, no one can escape the League. When I asked the barkeep about this, he told me the League had so many fingers in the pie that is Middelburg, that there is barely any pie left.

As such, most citizens here not in the government's employ are in the League's employ through some fashion. Even the barkeep sheepishly showed me his guild membership mark, a guild controlled by the van Rosedaal family. While the League clearly makes a large profit from these sorts of arrangements through fees and levies, it is not all a one sided arrangement. The League offers their contracted businesses protection from both criminals and the government. The barkeep says he can trade much more freely without these involved.

Of course, the greatest gift the Merchant League can offer is the League District, its own petty kingdom where it makes the rules. Alfresia's laws do not apply here, and anyone can do anything as long as the League approves. It should come as no surprise then that most of the seedy, shady and ethically-dubious business in Middelburg takes place here. As long as the League can take a cut, you can do any sort of business here.

Unfortunately there are those independent operators who do not wish to deal with the League. This protection and ease of trade is not available to them, but they say this is worth the cost of paying the League a share of their profits. Like a bloodhound, the League sniffs out money where it can be found. If these independents do not want to deal with the League, I am told the League uses methods both direct and underhanded to either force the independents to contract with them or to close down. There is little the constables can do when so many of them are in the League's pockets.

There is also a darker side to the League's involvement in Middelburg. There are some things that the League cannot be seen to be doing, whether by the government, the people (their valued customers), or their trading partners. Sometimes these may be illegal, immoral or just bad for business. For this reason they employ men and women of low moral standing who can do these tasks in the dead of night and in blind alleys. Men and women who the League can claim to have no knowledge of should they be caught or killed.

I have been told there is a thriving business all across Alfresia, though largely in Middelburg, for "footmen" to work for the League families. I

was at first confused as to why there are so many butlers in this city. The helpful barkeep helpfully informed me these thugs of the League are called footmen because they can easily be disguised as household servants. Only if the thugs so choose, however, because even as I sit here there is a group of men at the corner table loudly bragging of their exploits for the Heisenstein family and the money they got.

I cannot understand how such organised crime could happen in broad daylight, but I fear I will never truly understand these islanders. They are a people unto themselves, interesting to be sure, but I prefer the quiet life we have back home. This veritable rat race is not for me, but I must say I would dearly like to visit again. Only for a holiday, mind you.

But the time has come for me to board my ship, so I will say goodbye for now. I will leave this with the ship's captain and see that it finds its way to you. If it did not, you should be ashamed of yourself for reading this, whoever you are! I promise I shall write more in the future, but I cannot make any promises as of yet. I do hope that all is going well with the family, especially dear uncle's liver, and that conditions in the city has improved since last I was there.

Your faithful brother, your dutiful son.

Novak Amadej

P.S. Please do not forget to deliver the parcel with all the letters to the Imperial Steward, otherwise all my journeys have been for nothing.

P.P.S. Please, please for the love of the almighty Bür burn this letter after the family has read it! Do not let anyone else see it, for what I have said here may bring danger to the family.

BASIC RULES

Getting Started

The Runed Age will give you the rules and mechanics that you can weave your story around. After all, what is a game without rules? The main objective of the rules is to give you the ability to resolve conflicts in a fair and balanced way without intruding onto your story and immersion.

What is a Roleplaying Game?

A roleplaying game (RPG) is pretty much what it says in the name: it is a game where you play the role of a fictional character. Rather than playing as existing characters, you and your group will create your own original characters that will have adventures, intrigues, comedy and drama.

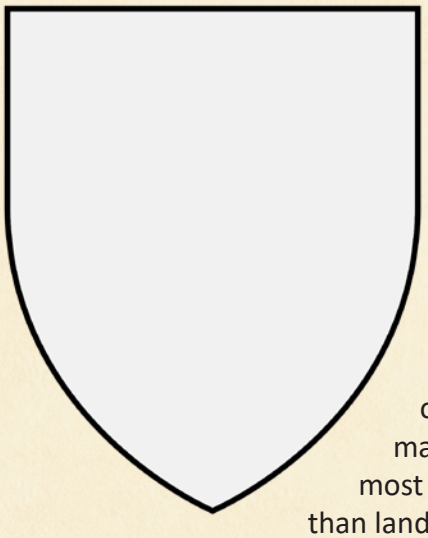
Playing a RPG is much like playing a video game: you take control of a character and direct them through their fantastical world, interacting with the world and its people. The difference is that you are in full control of your character. There are no buttons to press, no pre-generated stories or quests. You as a group will create your own stories and whatever your character does is completely up to you.

Basic Game Concepts

Game Dice

The Runed Age uses only one type of dice: ten sided dice. This abbreviates as **D10**. The d stands for dice, and the 10 for how many sides are on the dice, in this case ten. For the Skill Checks you will be rolling in game, you will need a **D100**: a hundred sided dice. While you can, if you look far and wide, find a dice with a hundred sides, it is easier to use two d10s. Designate one dice as the tens and the other as the ones dice, then when you roll them together you will get a number between 00 and 99. A 00 in this case is treated as 100.

For example: if you roll a 3 on your tens dice and a 5 on your ones dice, you have rolled a 35. In hobby stores and on hobby websites you will often find a special d10 which is already marked for tens (00, 10, 20, 30, etc. instead of 0, 1, 2, 3 etc.) that will make rolling a d100 far easier. Or, if you are feeling very 21st century today, there are plenty of websites and free mobile apps that can let you roll dice digitally.



The Power of Symbols

In the world of the Runed Age, the magical runes and runic arrays can provide every basic human need. Food, water, warmth, shelter; it can all be gained through the runes. As such, people view wealth and status in a far more different light. Simply being able to afford the necessities, living comfortably, or living past childhood is no longer seen as succeeding in life. What you need is something else.

In most places, land is the commodity of the wealthy. There is only so much surface area to the planet, and even the runes can't make more. Sure, some bold men have raised new islands, but for the most part, land is a finite resource. However, there is one thing greater than land that can bridge the gap between wealth and status: identity. You can't change who you are or where you came from, although many try, and being able to trace your lineage back to a famous ancestor, or becoming famous yourself, is the true mark of status in Alfresia and the whole world of the Runed Age. This is where heraldry comes in, and why is plays such a massive role in this book and in Alfresia. Fame, or infamy, can make your name known far and wide; and your name and your symbols is a currency greater than any other, one that will outlive you and continue to pay for your descendants.

Terminology

As with any instructional manual, this book will make use of jargon and abbreviations that may be unfamiliar to those who have not played a tabletop roleplaying game. To make your life easier, here are the jargon with their explanations so you can refer back to this list if you find anything later on that you don't immediately understand.

GM: The Game Master. This is the person that will be "running" the game. While the other players in the group will be playing as characters, the GM will be playing as the world. They will create the quests and obstacles and all other characters that you will encounter. They will also act as a referee should any dispute arise.

PC: The Player Character. This is you in the RPG, your avatar, embodiment, representation, what-have-you. Just as you would control a character in a video game, you will be controlling your PC.

NPC: The Non-Playable Character(s). The opposite of the PC, the NPCs are the characters you can't control. They are the barkeep, the merchant, the quest giver, the enemy minions you fight. They are all the characters your PC will interact with in the game. The GM controls the NPCs.

D10/D100: A ten and hundred sided dice, respectively. You will use a d100 throughout the course of the game and for the Character Creation.

D5: A five sided dice. A true d5 is quite hard to get a hold of, so the best thing to do is roll a d10 and divide the result by two, rounding up. So a 1-2 becomes 1; 3-4 becomes 2; 5-6 becomes 3 and so on. Don't worry overly much about the d5, you will only be using it in the Character Generation.

SKILL: The way your PC mechanically interacts with the world. This could be through using the Fight Skill to punch a bandit or the Diplomacy Skill to get a better price on that hat you have had your eye on.

SKILL CHECK: Whenever your PC does anything in the game that has some element of risk involved, your GM might call for you to make

a Skill Check. This is done with your chosen Skill and a d100.

EXP: Experience Points. Those lovely little numbers we all want so dearly. EXP is used to increase the potency of your Skills. They are how you get stronger, faster, and hopefully wiser. The more EXP you get, the more powerful your character will become.

ROLL: Rolling dice. In the course of the book, rather than constantly saying "roll a d100 and obtain a number under your Skill Level", it will usually just say "roll under your Skill Level" or "roll a Skill Check". It all means the same thing. So when you see "roll" it means the dice, not you.

ROLEPLAY: "Acting", as a wise man once said. You don't have to dress up in costume or put on an accent (although I won't stop you, who am I to judge, I'm a book) but roleplay is how you tell the story of your characters in the world. There is no Skill Check for walking down the street, having a pint at your local and discussing your upcoming plans for the heist. This is all done through you: talking about it, sharing about it, roleplaying it.

Playing the Game

Your Character

Throughout the course of this book you will generate a character to call your own. It will be your own unique character that you can stamp your name on. You give your character their hopes and dreams and ambitions, you make them a complete and fully rounded person. You can come up with everything about the character before you play, coming to the table with a character that you know everything about, or you can let the game teach you about the character, letting how you act in the game influence who your character is. Either option is perfectly acceptable and both makes a great character.

Whichever option you take, be prepared that once you start playing with that character it might all change. Just like how real life affects and changes you as a person, the game will change your character. And this is great, a lot of roleplay is all about character growth and development. That shy scholar you first made might have to start standing up for themselves and by the end of a long campaign become the greatest warrior in the world.

Once you get your character in the game, it is always important to keep asking yourself "what would my character do in this situation?". This is important as your character could be completely different to how you are as a person in the real world and thus your character could act differently in any given situation than you would.

Your GM will give you the scenario, they will fill the world with NPCs and events and it's up to you to decide how your character interacts with all of this. You will decide if your character is rude or nice, if he takes the left road or right road. You tell the group and the GM what you want to do and the GM will tell you how the world responds to your actions and the other players will tell you what their characters are doing.

Playing as a Group

No man is an island and while it is certainly possible to play an RPG by yourself, games like these are meant for a group. At the very least you will need two people because one person needs to be the GM, the referee, the judge, the one who plays as the whole world just as you will play as your character.

This is a group game so always remember the golden rule: be nice. It doesn't matter what your characters get up to, who they hate and love, what they do, how they feel about the other PCs; remember, the people playing with you are real people. They are also here to have fun just like you are. You would hate it if someone ruined your fun, so don't go around ruining their fun. Don't hog all the spotlight, don't try and do everything yourself, don't cut others out, and if

there is conflict between your characters, keep it in character, don't let it spill into real life. At the end of the day, it is just a game. There is no reason to lose friends over it.

Treat your gaming group like a relationship, and as your mum will tell you: the secret to a good relationship is communication. If something happens that you don't like, that makes you uncomfortable, speak up and say something. Make sure do it politely. Keeping those things bottled up will just make them brew and stew till you are no longer having fun coming to the game. There is nothing wrong with making house rules about what is acceptable and not. It's all about having fun, and if someone isn't having fun then it stops being a game.

Campaigns and Adventures

When it comes to role playing games, you can think of a campaign as a TV series and an adventure as a movie. A campaign is a long, sprawling story that can take months if not years to complete. In it, you could go through half a dozen characters as the plot moves along or you could have one character that ends up being completely different to what you started with. It will have plenty of twists and side stories, and you will be kept busy and by the end of it you will feel like you have finished a book series.

An adventure is more like the movie: short, compact and powerful. Adventures rarely last more than a few sessions. They usually have only one quest or story you can play and there will be a definite end to the mini-story. Some adventures will follow on one another so that you can get a campaign made up of adventures.

The Runed Age supports both campaigns and adventures; it's all up to how you want to play. Campaigns do involve more commitment as they will take a long time to finish and missing players may mean you have to postpone that session. On the other hand, campaigns have a bigger payoff as you will have a lot of stories your characters will go through.

Example of Play

Below you'll see an example of the Runed Age in action. This is by no means the only way to play, but it will give you an illustration of the core concepts. Don't worry too much about all the terminology used as it will be explained further on.

This scenario sees the would be adventurers in the Grand City of Middelburg, trying to break into a storehouse to steal a painting on behalf of one of the trade families of Middelburg. Karen is playing Cassandra, the "dreaded" pirate "captain", Harry is playing Selwyn the silver tongued Cael, and William is playing Gerrit, the local constable working his second job as a burglar.

GM: You approach the storehouse. The night is overcast and the only light bathing the area comes from the sporadic streetlights and the rare building window. The narrow street is clear of people, they have long since gone to bed. Except for one. There seems to be some sort of guard at the storehouse's front door.

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: If there's one guard, there is usually more. I want to see if I can spot anyone hiding.

GM: OK, roll a Perception Skill Check. Since it is dark, it will be quite difficult to see, but you've been out all night and your eyes have adjusted to the light, so a Challenging Modifier at +0.

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: ~rolls~ 36! Just under my 39 Perception. So, what do I see?

GM: Nothing. Well not nothing, you see a lot of things, just not people, other people than the guard I mean.

HARRY [SELWYN]: Now that that's taken care of, back to business. How should we take care of him?

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: Shoot him, that usually works.

KAREN [CASSANDRA]: Guys, wait. I got a plan that won't be too noisy. Let me distract him, and

one of you sneak up behind him and knock him out. No mess.

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: That works for me. Selwyn can do the sneaking, I'll keep a watch out in case anyone comes.

KAREN [CASSANDRA]: Good. So I mess up my hair, rub some dirt over me, and take off one boot to look banged up.

GM: Alright, you ready to go?

KAREN [CASSANDRA]: Ready as I'll ever be!

GM: Not at all. Well it's the middle of the night and this poor chap is all alone in a street bored out of his mind, and in comes a pretty young woman in distress who looks like she needs a knight in shining armour. So it won't take too much to distract him. But roll a Deceive Skill Check to keep him distracted. It will be an Easy Modifier +40.

KAREN [CASSANDRA]: Sweet, I only need to get under a 81. ~rolls~ 54. Easy peasy! Your turn, guys.

HARRY [SELWYN]: Gerrit, pass me your billy club. OK, I'll sneak around behind him, in the shadows, and beat him over the head with the electrified billy club.

GM: He is well and truly occupied, so a Routine +30 Stealth Skill Check.

HARRY [SELWYN]: ~rolls~ 67, phew, just one under. We were almost in trouble.

GM: Yeah, you are very lucky. The guard, whose name by the way is Jan you found out Cassandra, falls to the ground like a sack of potatoes. The way is clear.

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: I quietly check the door, is it open?

GM: It is.

WILLIAM [GERRIT]: Well then, what are we waiting for?

What happens on the other side of the door? Perhaps it's empty and their mission is as easy as going to the shops for milk. Maybe the owners have been tipped off and there is a whole battalion waiting. Anything could happen as soon as they walk through the door.

Skill Checks

Whenever a character attempts an action that has a risk of failing, the player makes a d100 roll to determine the outcome. This is known as a "Skill Check". All Skill Checks, as the name implies, will involve a Skill that a character has some, or none if unlucky, training in. Some Skill Checks will be quite straightforward such as rolling "Fight" to attack an opponent. Other Checks may be more elaborate such as rolling "Investigate" to know if the scorch marks you are looking at could have come from an explosion or an improvised flame-thrower.

Apart from roleplay, Skill Checks are how you will affect the world around you. You will use them in any situation, from trading with a nomad to fighting off bandits to finding that food you have been scavenging for, to surviving a week in the wilderness. They will be used a lot, so let's make sure we know how they work.

How to roll a Skill check:

- Decide which Skill is best suited for the task at hand.
- Make a note of the level of the Skill.
- The GM will apply situational modifiers to the roll, which can increase or decrease your Skill level for this roll only.
- Roll a d100.
- Compare the result of the roll to the modified level of your Skill.
- If the result from the roll is equal to or less than your modified Skill level then congratulations, you succeeded at this task.
- If it is higher than your modified Skill level, then unfortunately you failed the test and your character did not succeed at this task.

Example:

- Karen is playing Cassandra, the "dreaded" pirate "captain", who is currently running from the local police across the rooftops of a metropolis.
- Cassandra comes to an alleyway. She needs to jump. The police are right behind her. It's either jump or go to gaol.
- Karen's GM tells her this will be an Athletics Skill Check to make that jump.
- Cassandra's Athletics Skill is at Level 46.
- So far, she needs to roll under a 46 to make the jump.
- Karen's GM says it's pretty wide alleyway and the police are right behind her so this isn't going to be easy.
- He puts the Difficulty Modifier of Difficult on her Skill check. This is a -10.
- This means that her Modified Skill Level for this Skill check is 36.
- Karen rolls a d100.
- The result is 27. Success!
- Cassandra leaps over the alley and escapes the long arm of the law!

And that is all there is to it. All the Skill checks you will be rolling for in the game will follow this format. Just remember: Check your Skill Level, add Modifiers and roll under it. Also remember that the Modifiers go on the Skill Level, not the Roll Result.

Opposed Skill Checks

Most of the time your characters will be going up against the world, the environment and their own limitations, so you will be the only one rolling dice. Other times however, you characters will be going up against other flesh and blood creatures, be it animals, NPCs or even other PCs. For this we use Opposed Skill Checks. They work very similar to normal Skill Checks except that two people will be rolling dice here.

Figuring out who wins an Opposed Skill Check is simple. Whoever rolls highest but still underneath their Modified Skill Level wins. Think of it like blackjack. You want to get as high a number as possible while still saying at or under the target number. If there is a tie, then whoever has the highest Modified Skill Level wins.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra has gone into hiding, waiting for the police to give looking for her.
- She did not expect someone else was looking for her.
- Harry's character Selwyn is a mercenary, tracking Cassandra to get back the jewels she stole from the noble family.
- Their GM decides this will be a Stealth vs Investigate Skill Check.
- Cassandra's Stealth Skill is at Level 38.
- Selwyn's Investigate Skill is at Level 42.
- So far, Karen needs to roll under a 38 to stay hidden.
- Harry needs to roll under a 42 to find her.
- Their GM says Cassandra didn't pick the best spot to hide in, an empty barrel really is a cliche, but she fits so it's only a Challenging Modifier at +0.
- Their GM says because Cassandra didn't know until just a few moments earlier Selwyn was looking for her, he has a good idea of where she is. So it should only be an Ordinary task for him. This means a +10 Modifier.
- This means that Cassandra's Modified Skill Level for this Skill check stays at 38.
- Selwyn's Modified Skill Level for this Skill check goes up to 52.
- Karen and Harry both roll a d100.
- Karen's result is 28.
- Harry's result is 30.
- Since both players rolled underneath their Modified Skill Levels, it's just a case to see who rolled higher.
- Since Harry rolled higher, Harry wins!
- Cassandra's game of hide and seek was too little, too late. It

doesn't take Selwyn long to find her hiding in that old stinking rum barrel.

And that's all there is to it.

When both Fail an Opposed Test

It is easy to tell who is the winner when both players rolled under their Modified Skill Level or even if only one rolled under their Modified Skill Level. But what happens when both fail? Can one character fail at hiding, thus being found, but the other player fails at finding them at the same time? Is this some strange physics paradox?

There are two ways of dealing with this situation and it depends which of the characters is proactive and which is reactive, or if both are proactive.

In the Example of an Opposed Test, Cassandra is being proactive in trying to hide. Selwyn is reacting to Cassandra's attempt to hide and is looking for her. Determining who is proactive and reactive is much easier in combat: whoever is attacking is proactive, whoever is defending is reactive.

In an Opposed Test, the proactive character rolls first, and if they fail then the reactive character wins by default. If Cassandra failed miserably at hiding, then there is no need for Selwyn to investigate as he would clearly see her. If the thug shot at your PC and failed that Skill Check, it means he missed you, and you don't have to roll to dodge (you can, but you don't have to).

There are some uncommon cases where both players are proactive, usually in some form of contest: running a race, a tug of war, an arm wrestle. If both characters fail in an Opposed Test when both characters are proactive then it is up to the GM to decide if they both succeed at the task or not. For example, if two characters are racing to a target and roll an Athletics Skill Check then they both can't lose the race. The Skill Check was also for who was running the fastest, not to see who could run, so clearly both will reach the end. When this is the case, the characters may tie, the one with the highest Skill Level would win or they may both get run over by a car. It all depends on the GM's decision.

> Chaos is the law of man. Order is the law of the runes.
>
> ~Henry Fitztaron, Vissewalian scholar.

Critical Successes and Failures

Regardless of any Skill Level or Situational Modifiers, if you roll exactly on your Modified Skill Level that is a Critical Success. This means that whatever you tried to accomplish, you did so in magnificent style. If you succeeded on a Shoot Skill Check by rolling on your Modified Skill Level, you hit that bandit through the head even though he was behind the door.

However, if you roll a 100 that is a Critical Failure. If you failed on a Fight Skill Check with a roll of 100, not only did you miss but you tripped and your knife went straight through your leg. This is where GMs can get creative with how events happen.

In combat, Critical Successes and Failures take on a special role. If you are attacking and you roll on your Modified Skill Level and hit the opponent, the Wound you cause will automatically be increased in severity by one step. If you are defending and roll a 100 then any wound you incur will automatically be increased in severity by one step.

There are limits to Critical Successes and Failures, so don't abuse it. It doesn't matter how much you flap your arms, you won't fly to the moon. No amount of critical successes will help that. If a GM thinks a task is outside the realms of possibility then you will fail. GMs, this is a responsibility on your part to be both fair and just. You know what comes with great power.

Skill Check Modifiers

Difficulty

First and foremost, The Runed Age is a narrative-based RPG system. It is all about the story that you as a group tell about your characters and what they do in the world. It is for that reason that the rules presented here are as simple as possible while still providing quality game mechanics. A perfect example of this is any modifier put on to Skill Checks to modify their difficulty.

It is exceedingly easy to use the d100 system to give everything in existence a modifier, such as the difficulty of kicking down a plain wooden door (-14) to kicking down a solid steel door (-61) and become a simulationist game instead of a narrative game. This however brings in too many numbers that need to be kept track of while playing the game and, at the end of the day, turns the game from a narrative game into a game simulating the world in minute detail.

Therefore we are providing a blanket modifier that can be used in any circumstance and situation: the Difficulty Modifier. While there are more modifiers shown later in this book, they are optional and so you do not need to use them if you don't want to, or you can use them together with the Difficulty Modifier. The Difficulty Modifier is really all you need. Between it and the 20 Skills (plus specialisations) on offer, there is more than enough flexibility to do absolutely anything in the game that you can think of.

Test Difficulties	
Insignificant	+60
Simplistic	+50
Easy	+40
Routine	+30
STANDARD	**+20**
Ordinary	+10
Challenging	+0
Difficult	-10
Hard	-20
Very Hard	-30
Severe	-40
Harrowing	-50
Near Impossible	-60

And of course, if you do want to get more technical and precise in your games, there are plenty of other modifiers listed in this book to help you with exactly that.

When you attempt a Skill Check, your GM will decide how difficult that Skill Check should be. This should be based on the circumstances you are in and will include a lot of different aspects that will ultimately boil down to a single Difficulty Modifier. For example, your PC, equipped with a rifle, wants to shoot a target. The circumstances surround that simple action will include how far away the target is, if the target is moving, if the sun is in your PC's eyes, if it is raining, how many obstacles there are between your PC and the target, if your PC is in a hurry or if your PC can take time to do it right, and many many more. Your GM will condense all these circumstances into one modifier, for example a Difficult -10 modifier.

Combat Modifiers

Combat Modifiers are, unsurprisingly, only used in combat situations. It is up to the GM if they want to use these; they can always just use Difficulty Modifiers if they feel this slows the game down too much.

The Ranged Attack and Defence Modifier table assumes there is a clear attacker and defender. If both characters are attacking each other with ranged attacks, in a firefight or a standoff, then both characters can use the Ranged Attack Modifiers.

If the defending character in a Ranged Attack Opposing Skill Check elects to do nothing (perhaps they believe they are behind cover that they will not be hit) then it is

up to the GM to decide if the defending character deserves some form of defence roll.

Ranged Attack Modifiers		Ranged Defense Modifiers	
In melee	-40	In melee	-10
Moving quickly	-20	Moving quickly	+20
Off-Handed weapon	-20	Area of Effect Attack	-15
Firing blindly	-40	Dodge	+10
Aimed	Shoot Skill/2	Surprised by Attack	-40
Area of Effect Attack	+15	In cover	+20

If the character truly is doing nothing, then treat the Opposing Skill Check as if the attacking character is shooting an inanimate object. This means that only the attacking character rolls and all damage is calculated by just the attacking character's roll.

If the defending character does nothing, but there is something that can prevent the ranged attack hitting them (that has nothing to do with the attacking character) then simply do a flat Skill Check with base Skill Level of 30 with the Ranged Defense Modifiers added to represent all the external things that can aid that character.

Melee combat, on the other hand, is a dance made for two, but as in any dance there is someone who leads. For this we use the Melee Attack and Defense Modifiers. If you declare an attack on an opponent, then you use the Melee Attack Modifier and your opponent uses the Melee Defense Modifier. Once your attack is done, your opponent then has the chance to attack you, where you will use the Defense Modifier. Think of this as a sort of turn based combat. There is no strict turns and rounds, that will all be handled narratively, but for the purposes of opposing rolls there definitely is.

Three things to note with Melee Modifiers. Firstly, every flanking combatant gets the flanking bonus for every other flanking combatant. This means if there are three allies flanking an enemy, each ally will gain a +15 to their combat Skill Checks. Bottom line: don't get flanked or you'll get shanked.

Secondly, a Parry is not simply a block but a turning away of your opponent's weapon to set up a counterattack. For this reason it is a -20 Modifier, but if you successfully parry your opponent's attack then for your next Melee Attack against that character you will gain the Superior Position +40 Modifier.

Thirdly, it may seem counterintuitive that aiming would mean you have less of a chance to hit, but it is the difference between hitting someone anywhere you can and hitting them on one specific position. Aiming does give you a bonus to deciding where you will wound your opponent and it can also be used for non-lethal methods as well, such as disarming your opponent.

Melee Attack Modifiers		Melee Defence Modifiers	
Charging	+20	Parry	-20
In a superior position	+40	In a superior position	+40
Off-Handed weapon	-20	Off-Handed weapon	-20
Aimed	-10	Dodge	+10
Enemy is flanked	+5 for every ally flanking	Being flanked by enemies	-5 for every enemy flanking

The Superior Position

Innuendo aside, the Superior Position Modifier is perhaps the most important combat modifier. It is the modifier that encompasses a host of others. Instead of having a "prone" or "longer reach" or "have the high ground" or any such modifier, the Superior Position Modifier covers all of these and more.

The basic concept is this: whenever you are in a much better position in melee combat

than your opponent, for whatever reason, you can get this modifier. You could have tripped your opponent and now he is on the ground; you could be standing on top of the stairs letting your opponent come to you; you could be fighting with a long halberd while your opponent only had a short knife; or you could have just disarmed your opponent. In short, the Superior Position is whenever the situation has made it much, much easier for you than for your opponent.

It is a powerful modifier and reflects in how much better a position you have to be to get it. It is up to the GM's discretion, but it is something that should be situational an make you think "this is not a fair fight."

Flanking someone does not automatically give you the Superior Position Modifier; that is why the Flanking Modifier exists.

Skill Checks as Modifiers

No action, task or Skill Check happens in a vacuum. There is always the context of the situation to consider when dealing with Modifiers and how difficult, or easy, a Skill Check has to be.

There are times, though, when you can let the PCs own actions determine their future Modifiers. In simpler terms: the result of one Skill Check can become the Modifier for future Skill Checks.

Let's say for example that you are trying to win someone over to your point of view, whether it be haggling with a passing trader or trying to prevent a fight breaking out between to hostile characters. One way or the other what you say will affect how they feel about you, so you can't simply insult and denigrate them one second and then win them over with a lucky Skill Check.

In cases such as these, you can let the one Diplomacy Skill Check's result act as a Modifier for the next Diplomacy Skill Check. If the PC succeeds at the first Skill Check, take the amount by which they beat the Check and add it as a positive Modifier to their next Skill Check. Similarly, if they fail their first Skill Check, take the amount by which they failed and add it as a negative Modifier.

While this use of Checks as Modifiers works well for ongoing challenges, it can easily be used for quick events. If a PC is driving along and another car comes barreling at it, the result of the PC's first Perception Skill Check can act as a Modifier for their Drive Skill Check to avoid the oncoming car.

Be careful not to let these Modifiers stack up between Skill Checks as the Checks may become impossibly difficult or absurdly easy. These are best used once only, although the success or failure of the next Skill Check can determine the next-next Skill Check.

Multiple Modifiers

Always remember that you can add multiple modifiers to any Skill Check depending on the situation the characters are in. You can always add a Difficulty Modifier to everything because it is such a blanket statement, and if the characters are good at multitasking you can even combine a Social and Combat Modifier or a Melee and Ranged Combat Modifier.

Assisting

It won't always be the case where only one character is performing a task. Sometimes, multiple characters will be doing the same task. Two characters might be helping each other lifting and carrying a person out of a burning building, or three characters might all be scavenging through the same building, looking for supplies. When such a situation comes up, it is up the GM to decide how best to resolve it. There is no one size fits all cure.

If it's a task where all parties need to succeed or everyone fails, then it would be best to average the Skill Levels of all the characters

participating and then add Modifiers and let one player roll for the outcome. For example: if the characters need to carry a large container filled with food out of burning building, if any character drops the container then it is not going anywhere. One character can't lift it by himself. Either everyone carries the container out the building or it is not going anywhere.

If it's a task where one character is pulling most of the weight and the other characters merely helping a little bit then add a +10 Modifier for each assisting character to the main character's Skill Level and treat it like a normal Skill Check. For example, if the characters want to intimidate a rival faction's leader to staying off your territory, one character will be doing the most of the "negotiation" while the others occasionally throw in the odd insult or threat to help emphasise the lead character's points.

If it's a task where one character has a reasonable chance at success alone, but it is safer to use more than one character, then add the Skill Levels together of all the characters involved, and treat it like a normal Skill Check. For example, if a character needs to hold open a heavy sewer grate so that the other characters can quickly escape, that character might be able to do it alone but it would be safer for all involved if another character joined in. If the second character drops the grate, the first character will still have hold of it so it wouldn't be a failed test.

Degrees of Success

The dice rolls in The Runed Age inevitably come down to a binary outcome: you are either succeed or your fail. However, this doesn't mean everyone does equally well. The result of your Skill Check will also give you an idea of how well you succeeded or how badly you failed.

To see how well you succeeded in whatever task you were attempting to perform; simply look at the result of your roll and match it to the table below. The higher you rolled, the better you did. This means that the higher your Skill Levels, the better your chances will become at excelling at your tasks.

Degrees of Success	
1-10	Scarce
11-20	Mediocre
21-30	Average
31-40	OK
41-50	Good
51-60	Great
61-70	Excellent
71-80	Outstanding
81-90	Unreal
91-100	Superhuman

For example: if you rolled a 38, it means you had an OK success in whatever task you were performing, while if you rolled an 81 then you had an Unreal success in your task.

If you happen to fail your Skill Check, the process is a little bit different. You don't just compare your Check result, instead you see how far above your Modified Skill Level you rolled. After that, you can compare it to the table on the right to get an idea of just how badly you did.

For example: if you rolled a 62 and your Modified Skill Level is 43, it means you rolled 19 above your Modified Skill Level which means you had a Poor failure. If you had rolled a 94 instead, then you would have rolled 51 above your Modified Skill Level, which means you had a Horrid failure.

Just as with the successes, remember that the higher your Skill Levels, the less likely you are to fail horribly. If you can get your Skill Levels to above 50 then the worst you can fail is Miserably.

Remember that these Degrees are not absolutes, but are instead guidelines to give you and your GM a better sense of your successes and failures.

Degrees of Failure	
+1-10	Scant
+11-20	Poor
+21-30	Bad
+31-40	Awful
+41-50	Miserable
+51-60	Horrid
+61-70	Terrible
+71-80	Pathetic
+81-90	Catastrophic
+91-100	Subhuman

Recycling Over 100

If you're doing a Skill Check and through high Skill Levels, modifiers, Sigils, or other means you happen to get a Modified Skill Level of over 100, then you can add to your rolled result however much your Modified Level is over 100.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra is in a shoot out with the constables
- One of the constables runs towards her, down a narrow alleyway with no cover
- Karen makes a Shoot Skill Check, noting that Cassandra's Shoot Skill is Level 60
- The GM says because it will be an easy shot, she'll get a +40 modifier to her roll.
- Karen decides to spend a Sigil as well to get another +20 bonus
- This makes her modified Skill Level 120
- She rolls a d100 and gets a 43.
- She adds 20 to the result to get 63

Sigils

Sigils are tokens that you can spend to gain a +25 bonus to any Skill Check. Remember that this is not the final modifier to your roll, the Situational Modifiers can still affect the final Modifier you get. You can only spend 1 Sigil per Skill Check to gain a +25 bonus.

In the same vein, you can spend a Sigil to reroll a failed Skill Check. As with gaining a +25 bonus, you can only spend 1 Sigil per Skill Check to gain a reroll.

Sigils can be spent for any sort of Skill Check and for as many Skill Checks as you have Sigils. However, if you are using a Sigil to gain a bonus to your Skill Roll, you must declare the use of a Sigil before you roll the Skill Check. You cannot roll the Check and then decide you want to use a Sigil.

You can, however, roll the Skill Check and then declare that you are using a Sigil to reroll that Check.

You start each session with an amount of Sigils equal to your Sigil Threshold. Your Sigil Threshold is equal to the first digit of your Luck Skill Level. For example, if your Luck Skill Level is 38, then you have a Sigil Threshold of 3; if your Luck Skill Level is 54, then you have a Sigil Threshold of 5. While your Luck Skill may increase or decrease during gameplay due to penalties and positive Modifiers, your Sigil Threshold is always taken from your unmodified Luck Skill Level.

Use your Sigils as much as you can, because they do not carry over between sessions. Any unspent Sigils at the end of a session is lost. On the plus side, you start each session with your full complement of Sigils again. You can also always have many more Sigils than your threshold, if you can gain them during gameplay.

In drastic circumstances, you can burn a Sigil. This can be done even if you do not have any Sigils left. Burning a Sigil negates any Wounds you were given this turn, even if they should have incapacitated or killed you. This is best used if you are about to take your 3rd Grievous wound or about to lose a limb. It is fate itself and the hands of the gods that saved your life. If you burn a Sigil, work it out with your GM to decide how and why your life was just saved. If you burn a Sigil, your Sigil Threshold is permanently decreased by 1.

GM Intrusions

Sigils can be earned during gameplay through GM Intrusions. A GM Intrusion is when the GM makes your character's life difficult, sometimes for the good of the story, sometimes to add drama, sometimes for their own amusement. A GM can Intrude at any moment they feel appropriate to add some spice. They can declare that your pistol just misfired, your sword got stuck in its scabbard, your horse suddenly broke a leg, you slipped off the balcony you tried to jump off, etc.

When a GM wants to Intrude they will declare they are about to do so and explain exactly what is about to happen. Then they will offer you a choice. You can accept the intrusion and all the drama that comes along with it, and for your trouble be given a Sigil; or you can refuse the intrusion but then you will also miss out on the Sigil.

Just remember that not everything bad that happens in your character's life is worthy of an Intrusion and a Sigil. Sometimes bad things happen, and there is nothing you can do about it. On the other hand, if it feels that so many bad things are happening to your character that you are longer in control of events, then it's time to talk to your GM about it.

GMs: be fair and be reasonable.

COMBAT RESOLUTION

The actions you take in combat will be mechanically played out with Skill Checks and the Situational Modifiers as shown in the Skill Checks chapter. That, however, only covers the actions you take in combat, not their effects. Roleplay and the GM's narrative will play a big part in how the combat goes. It is the roleplay that will determine what you do and what happens, and then the mechanics which determine how it turns out.

Order of Combat

1. Declare an Attacker and a Defender.
2. Both parties pick an appropriate Skill.
3. GM places Difficulty and/or Combat Modifiers on the chosen Skills.
4. Both parties roll an Opposed Skill Check.
5. Determine which party has rolled highest below their Modified Skill Level.

   If the Defender won then the Combat Round ends here.

6. If the Attacker won: Determine by how far the attacker won the Opposed Skill Check and compare this number to the Wound Severity table.
7. Reduce the Wound Severity based upon the armour that the Defender is wearing.

   If the Armour reduces the Wound Severity to 0 or less then the Combat Round ends here.

8. Reverse the numbers on the Attacker's dice (i.e.: 69 becomes 96) and compare this to the Hit Locations table.
9. Resolve wounds.

Initiative

To determine a character's Initiative, or who goes when and in what order in combat, all you have to do is look at that character's Skill Level.

When combat begins, or is about to begin, the GM declares what Skill will be used for Initiative. What this Skill will be will depend entirely on the context of the situation, but it will mostly be either Athletics or Intuition.

Use Athletics when everyone already knows there is going to be a fight and it is simply a race to see who can reach their weapon first or who can move first.

Conversely, use Intuition when combat begins unexpectedly, or not everyone in the scene is aware that combat is about to begin. You can also use Intuition in the classic "stand off" scenario when each party needs to read the other in order to "draw" first.

Whichever one of these Skills the GM chooses (or any other skill they feel is appropriate to the current context of the scene), it must be the same Skill for everyone involved. You can't have one person with Athletics as their Initiative Skill for this combat and another person with Intuition. Everyone must use the same Skill for the same combat scene.

Once the Skill has been chosen, all you need to do is look at your Skill Level. The higher the Skill Level, the better, since the combat turns will start with the one with the highest Skill Level and work its way down from there until it hits the one with the lowest Skill Level. After that, the next round begins in the same order (assuming everyone remains alive).

Turn Slots

Once everyone has checked where in the turn order their character's Skill Level puts them, check and see which result was from a PC and which came from an NPC.

This is because you are not determining your own character's position in the combat turn order. Instead, you are determining where there will be a Player Slot and where there will be a GM Slot. Every result generated by a PC creates a Player Slot and every result determined by an NPC creates a GM Slot.

So after all this is done you (or most likely your GM) will have a piece of paper noting down where all the Turn Slots are (and in what order they are for each round).

If more than one character has the same Skill Level for determining Initiative AND they come from the same group (Player or GM), don't worry about it. Since you are determining slot order, if two results are equal, it just means two slots go one after the other.

If however, there is an NPC and a PC with the same Skill Level, the NPC always goes first unless the player spends a Sigil. This works on a per-NPC and per-PC basis. So if three NPCs and three PCs all have the same Skill Level, each player will need to spend three Sigils to get their Player Slot ahead of the NPCs.

> You can run as far in this life as you want, sooner or late god's scythe will find you.
> ~Bishop Giorgio Zeni

Turn Order

Now that you know in what order a PC or NPC goes in combat, it's time to figure out where your specific character's turn comes.

This part is easy: the players collectively decide who among them goes where in the Player Slots, and the GM decides who among the NPCs goes where in the GM Slots.

This isn't a permanent order for the entire combat scene. After everyone has had their turn and a new round begins, the players all again pick which PCs go in which Player Slot and the GM picks which NPCs go in which GM Slot. So you can have the PC that went last in Round 1 be the PC that goes first in Round 2, effectively having two turns after each other.

Turn Times

Combat within the Runed Age is designed to be as fluid and narrative as your group needs it to be. As such there is no definite and set for how long a turn must take or how many actions can be performed per turn. We can do, however, is tell you how long a turn should take, as that will inform how much you want to do once it gets to your turn.

A turn should take approximately 5 seconds.

Five seconds isn't very long, but you will be amazed at what you can fit into it, as the section below will give an indication. There is no set amount of actions or movements that you can do within a turn. As long as it doesn't take more than five seconds, and your GM allows it, then there shouldn't be an issue. So don't take the actions listed in the section below as exhaustive.

Five Second Actions

- You can walk (in meters) up to the 1st digit of your Athletics Skill
- You can run twice as far as you can walk and sprint thrice as far as you can walk.
- You can do one Fight or Shoot Skill Check.
- You can perform one of the Combat Actions below.
- You can aim your firearm for an Aiming bonus Modifier on your next turn.

Combat Actions

While it is the ostensible purpose of combat to do as much damage to your opponent(s) before they can do the same to you, there are more actions that can be performed in combat than simply Fighting, Shooting, Dodging and Moving. In fact, one can argue that simply doing damage is the exception and not the rule to what can be done in combat.

Remember that combat is as much about dominating the field of battle and your opponents as it is about damage, so there is a host of non-lethal moves you can do to make this happen.

Action	Skill
Grapple	Constitution/Fight
Throw (person)	Might
Disarm	Athletics/Fight
Choke	Might
Pin	Might
Leg Sweep	Fight
Feint	Deceive
Throw (weapon)	Fight/Shoot
Throw (object)	Might

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It is simply an example or two of what can be done in combat. As you can see, different actions are performed by different Skills, and some actions can even be performed by more than one Skill depending upon the context in which it is performed.

Action Descriptors

Grapple: Call it wrestling or brawling, grappling is when two (or more) opponents use their sheer strength and technique rather than their weapons in order to hold, throw, pin or choke one another. Depending on whether you are using technique or strength will mean the difference between using the Fight or Might Skills, respectively.

Throw (person): Exactly what it sounds like. It's taking a person that you already have a hold of and throwing them as hard or as far as you can. This can do damage depending on what you throw them into (or off of) and damage will depend on context. The distance you can throw another person is equal to the first digit of your Might Skill Level in meters. For smaller things (like children or small animals), you can double this distance.

DISARM: This can be done either during grappling (by using the Athletics Skill) or with your own weapon during a standard attack (with the Fight Skill). The purpose is quite clear: to get the opponent's weapon out of their hands.

CHOKE: Can be either non-lethal or extremely lethal. If non-lethal, the purpose is to render the opponent unconscious and so any Wound caused will simply reflect the length of time the opponent remains unconscious. If lethal, then the purpose to cut airflow to the opponent's brain until it expires. If so, resolves Wounds as normal.

PIN: To hold an opponent in such a way as to render them incapable of significant movement. This must be done after grappling an opponent and can be done standing up, pushing an opponent against an object or on the ground.

LEG SWEEP: It does what it says: to sweep the leg(s) out from under an opponent in order to make them fall on the ground.

FEINT: This is a fighting technique used in order to misdirect an opponent as to your true intentions. For example, making your opponent think you are going to swing on their right while actually swinging on their left. If successful, the amount by which you succeeded becomes a bonus to your next immediate Combat Skill Check against that opponent.

THROW (WEAPON): Sometimes throwing a pistol works just as well as shooting someone with it. Other times, you may have a flair for the dramatic and enjoy throwing knives. Whatever the case may be, you want to throw something to hurt someone and depending on what it is it may use your Fight or Shoot Skills.

THROW (OBJECT): Throwing something other than a weapon. This is meant more for things which aren't easily held in one hand (which can be covered by Throw (weapon)) such as crates and kegs and donkeys and chairs. This is why it uses your Might Skill because it is more about the physical feat of lifting it up and throwing it than about aiming.

Wounds

Wounds are the main mechanic that will deal with the stress and injury surrounding physical conflict. Wounds act in a narrative fashion in that it is up to the GM to detail what sort of wound a character receives based on the actions performed by the characters in combat.

Hit Locations	
Head	1 - 10
Torso	11 - 40
Left Arm	41 - 55
Right Arm	56 - 70
Left Leg	71 - 85
Right Leg	86 - 100

How and where the character's wounds will be located is determined by the Hit Locations mechanic. When you have rolled an attack Skill Check and it was a success, simply reverse the numbers on the dice and compare them to the Hit Locations table. The new number is the location on a character's body where you successfully struck the defender.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra and William's character Gerrit are in a shootout
- After the Situational Modifiers have been applied Cassandra needs to roll under a 54 to hit Gerrit and Gerrit under a 39 to dodge the bullet
- Karen rolls a 31
- William rolls a 74
- Karen wins the test.
- Karen reverses the numbers on the dice, making the 31 into a 13
- Karen consults the Hit Locations Table and sees that a 13 falls within the range of the Torso
- Gerrit gets hit in the torso, gaining a Wound.

If you have Aimed with an Attack, it stands to reason that you will be more accurate than a simple random dice roll. Because of this when you reverse the dice numbers to obtain your Hit

Van Rosedaal Family

Originating from a small vineyard near the city of Rosedaal in the north of Alfresia, the mighty van Rosedaal family began as a family of vintners. The van Rosedaal history is a testament to how perseverance will eventually lead to triumph. While the original van Rosedaal, old Willem, may never have seen his family expand beyond his small vineyard, his descendants eventually became the largest wine sellers in Alfresia and expanded into all sorts of foodstuffs, flowers and animals. It was with this so called farming mentality that the van Rosedaals entered into the Merchant League and was for a long time looked down upon for their pedestrian origins and work. The past few generations of Patriarchs have sought to change this by investing heavily in various gunsmiths along the eastern coast of the continent. Significant grants have also been gifted the University of Middelburg in return for novel runic designs to be used on van Rosedaal weapons. This new found emphasis on technological and military might have earned the family a great deal of respect among the Alfresians, both upper and lower classes, who see the family as looking after the security of the nation.

Location after you have Aimed, you can modify that number by adding or subtracting up to half of your unmodified Shoot or Fight Skill Level (depending on ranged or melee combat), giving you the possibility of hitting closer to where you intended.

For example, say you want to specifically shoot an enemy's head. You declare that you are Aiming, make your Shoot Skill Check and succeed on it with a roll of 43, which when reversed would be 34 and meant you hit the enemy's Torso. However, since you have a Shoot Skill Level of 60, you can move that Hit Location number by up to 30. So you can choose any number from 4 to 64 in order to hit the Location that you want. In this case, since you want to hit the enemy's head, you choose 1 which corresponds to the Head Hit Location.

Wound Slots

Each Hit Location has 3 Types of Wound Slots. These are, in order: A Minor Wound Slot, a Significant Wound Slot, and a Grievous Wound Slot. That means that a character can have, in total, a potential maximum 18 Wound Slots: 6 Minor, 6 Significant, and 6 Grievous (3 Wound Slots for each Hit Location). However, to get all these Wound Slots, you would need a Constitution Skill Level of 100.

Result	Severity
1 - 20	Minor
21 - 50	Significant
51 - 80	Grievous
>81	Location Destroyed

A character may have more than 3 Wound Slots per Hit Location, or may not have all 3 Wound Slots filled up. The amount of Wound Slots a character has is determined by their Constitution Skill Level. The first number of the character's Constitution Skill Level is the amount of Wound Slots that character has per Hit Location. For example, if your character has a Constitution Skill Level of 52 then they have 5 Wound Slots, at 48 they would have 4 Wound Slots, and if they managed to get their Constitution Skill Level to 100 they would have an amazing 10 Wound Slots.

Wound Slots come in groups of 3s, so if your character has more than 3 Wound Slots their 4th Wound Slot becomes a Minor Wound Slot again, their

5th a Significant, their 6th a Grievous and their 7th another Minor and so forth.

Resolving Wounds

When a character gets hit, the specific Hit Location gains a Wound. To determine the severity of a wound, simply look at the result of your roll. Whatever you rolled is the damage you inflicted. If your opponent did an Opposed Roll to yours, subtract the result of their roll from yours to see what the final damage is, (e.g.: if you rolled a 30 and the opponent rolled a 20, your damage is 10).

If the defender rolled over their Modified Skill Level, add the defender's result to the attacker.

Compare this number to the Wound Severity table on the previous page and see into which Wound Severity category it falls. That then is the Wound the defender suffered.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra and William's character Gerrit were in a shootout.
- Cassandra shot Gerrit and successfully hit him.
- Karen rolled a 23 which is under her Modified Skill Level.
- William rolled 35 above his Modified Skill Level .
- Since William rolled over his Skill Level, Karen adds together the results.
- 23+35=58.
- Karen compares this number to the Wound Severity Table and see that Cassandra inflicted a Grievous wound on Gerrit

It is clearly possible through luck to inflict the same severity of wound on the same hit location multiple times. That's just how the dice rolls. If this happens, one of three things will happen next. If the defender has more than one Wound Slot of the same Severity available (for example having two Significant Wound Slots) then just use that Wound Slot. If the defender does not have another Wound Slot of the same Severity available then use the next lowest available Wound Slot (for example moving to a Minor Wound Slot if all Significant Wounds have been filled). If all lowest available Wound Slots have been used up, then use the next available higher Wound Slot.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra shoots and successfully hits William's character Gerrit once again.
- Karen works out the Hit Location and the Wound Severity.
- Cassandra has once again hit Gerrit in the Torso for a Grievous Wound.
- Gerrit does not have another Grievous Wound Slot, but he still has an empty Minor and Significant Wound Slot.
- The Grievous Wound becomes a Significant Wound as the Significant Wound Slot is the next lowest available Wound Slot.

If all the Wound Slots on a specific Hit Location have had Wounds allocated to them, then the next Wound that Hit Location receives permanently destroys that Hit Location.

Wound Repercussions

For every Significant Wound a Hit Location (e.g.: Head, Left Arm) has, using that limb incurs a -10 Injury Modifier until that Wound is seen to. For every Grievous Wound a Hit Location has, using that limb incurs a -15 Injury Modifier until that Wound is seen to. For every Location Destroyed a Hit Location has, using that Limb incurs a -40 Injury Modifier. Minor Wounds incur no Injury Modifiers.

Any Injury Modifiers to the Head Hit Location will affect every task a character attempts. Also, if a character suffers a Location Destroyed on either the Head or Torso Hit Location, then that character automatically dies.

For every 1 Grievous Wound and/or 3 Significant Wounds that a character incurs, roll a Constitution Skill Check to see if that character goes into shock.

The first time a character rolls a Constitution Skill Check due to their wounds, it will be a +0 Constitution Skill Check. For every successive Wound that causes a Constitution Skill Check, those characters will incur a -10 penalty to the Skill Check. These penalties stack, meaning that by the fourth wound that causes a Constitution Skill Check, the difficulty will be -40.

If a character succeeds this Constitution Skill Check, then they do not have to roll another one until the next Significant or Grievous Wound that causes a Constitution Skill Check. If that character fails the Constitution Skill Check, then they go into shock. Every time that character wishes to attempt to do anything, they must retake the Constitution Skill Check to snap out of the shock.

If a character suffers a Hit Location Destroyed Wound then they must pass a -40 Constitution Check every time they attempt to do anything, until the remainder of that Hit Location has been seen to and it is not an immediate threat. Unlike the regular Constitution Skill Check to avoid going into shock, a success on this Skill Check does not mean they are OK. Even if they succeed, they must pass another Constitution Skill Check each time they want to perform a narrative action. If that character ever fails the Constitution Skill Check, then they go into shock.

Critical Successes and Failures

In combat, Critical Successes and Failures take on a special role. If you are attacking and you roll exactly on your Modified Skill Level and hit the opponent then the Wound you cause will automatically be increased in severity by one step. If you are defending and roll a 100 then any Wound you incur will automatically be increased in severity by one step.

Wound Descriptions and Healing

A Minor Wound is something small and insignificant: a scratch, a bruise, a bump, a cut that barely broke the skin. It is something that is no more than an irritation that will take care of itself within a matter of minutes. It won't heal that quickly, but it will stop being an issue. Because of this Minor Wound Slots refresh after each scenario or encounter.

A Significant Wound is exactly that: it is painful; it is distracting; it is weakening. It is a deep cut, a broken bone, a cracked rib, an arrow through the leg. Getting a Significant Wound will weaken you. Significant Wounds need to be seen to by someone with medical expertise. They need to be splinted, or stitched up, or bandaged or whatever it will take to start the healing process. Once you have done so, after that session of gaming has finished, the Significant Wound Slots will refresh so that when you have your next session you are good, relatively speaking, to go.

A Grievous Wound is something you may never recover from. It is truly something to grieve. It can be your hamstrings being cut completely through and you will never fully recover the use of your leg; it can be a hand cut clean off; a collapsed lung; a knife through your eye; a mace to the skull causing irreversible brain damage. It is not about healing a Grievous Wound, but learning to live with it. Even after you have received medical attention for your Grievous Wound, the Wound Slot will not refresh until your GM is satisfied your character has learned how to cope with life after receiving it. A good estimate for how long it will take is at least 5 sessions.

As the name implies Hit Location Destroyed is a permanent condition. This does not mean that the limb in question suddenly disintegrated (although that is a possibility); it merely means that you will never be able to use that

limb for absolutely anything useful ever again.

If this Hit Location is either the Torso or Head Hit Location, then that character automatically dies. If it is an arm or a leg that has been destroyed and that character gets hit in that location in the future use the closest Hit Location to the number on the dice as the true Hit Location.

Example:

- Harry's character Selwyn lost his left leg.
- In a fight, William's character Gerrit shot Selwyn and the Hit Location number was 83: the Left Leg Hit Location.
- Since Selwyn no longer has a left leg, Harry checks the closest Hit Location to 83 which is 86: the Right Leg Hit Location.
- Thus Selwyn was actually shot in his Right Leg.

Remember that once a Wound Slot has refreshed, the penalty associated with it is removed from the PC.

When a limb has suffered a Hit Location destroyed, it is clearly unusable and so you suffer a -40 modifier to any Skill Check using that limb. This -40 Modifier will remain forever as a Hit Location Wound lasts forever. However, after you have received medical attention, the modifier will only apply to directly using that limb. For any other task and Skill Check that is not directly dependant on that limb (but would benefit from having it), you will only suffer a -20 Modifier to that Skill Check.

Example:

- Harry's character Selwyn lost his left leg.
- In a fight, Selwyn is being shot at and wants to dodge out of the way.
- He doesn't need his left leg for it, but it would certainly help.
- Thus, Selwyn suffers a -20 Modifier to his Athletics Skill Check to dodge.
- Selwyn needs to roll under a 24 to dodge.
- Selwyn rolls a 34 and fails. He really did need that leg after all.

Narrative Combat Resolution

The Runed Age is first and foremost a narrative system. While there are lots of numbers to play around with, their job is only to further the story that your group is putting together. This is a Roleplaying Game, not a Numbercrunching Game. This applies to combat as well.

There will be plenty of situations where Combat Modifiers and Hit Locations and Wound Slots just don't make it feel "real". This might be something like the infamous coup de grâce (a lethal blow to an opponent unable to defend), or in fact it could be the opposite when you want to take down an opponent in a non-lethal manner, or even sneaking behind an unsuspecting opponent to take him out in one hit without anyone else knowing (dead men tell no tales after all).

When such a scenario takes place, talk it over with your GM to see what would be the most logical and reasonable way for it to happen. Most times it may involve you rolling another Skill Check such as a Stealth Skill Check to sneak up to backstab the guard.

Bear in mind that just because you want to do something, doesn't mean you can automatically succeed. A sword to the skull is lethal unless angels and trumpets are involved; there just isn't getting around that fact no matter how much you want it. On the other hand: GMs, be nice, it's about fun after all.

SOCIAL & MENTAL WOUNDS

Social Skill Modifiers

The opposite of combat, although no one would stop you from trying to talk in combat. Social Modifiers will mostly be used when dealing with NPCs. If you want to use a social skill against another PC it would be best done using an opposed test, if roleplay alone isn't enough to end the conflict, so that both players are involved in the interaction other than as a Modifier.

There are three different modifiers for social interactions depending on whether you want to use Diplomacy, Deceive or Intimidate; because an unfriendly character could also be a coward, and utterly naive so could still effortlessly be deceived or intimidated. Similarly, a helpful ally of yours could be a fearless cynic and so deception and intimidation would be much harder.

When someone is attacking you, it is hard to get a word in when swords and axes and pistols are flying around, so it doesn't matter whether you are trying to be diplomatic, deceptive or intimidating. In the same vein, when someone is a fanatic of yours they will believe and agree with almost anything you say so it will never be hard to manipulate them to do what you want.

Remember that social interaction is as dictated by the context of the situation as by what is being said. If you want to be intimidating, it is much better to be so in a dark alley than at a sunny beach, so don't be afraid to use Difficulty Modifiers to simulate this.

Diplomacy Modifiers		Deceive Modifiers		Intimidate Modifiers	
Attacking	-40	Attacking	-40	Attacking	-40
Hostile	-20	Distrustful	-20	Fearless	-20
Unfriendly	-10	Cynic	-10	Brave	-10
Indifferent	**+0**	**Indifferent**	**+0**	**Indifferent**	**+0**
Friendly	+10	Naive	+10	Anxious	+10
Helpful	+20	Trusting	+20	Coward	+20
Fanatic	+40	Fanatic	+40	Fanatic	+40

Social Combat

This isn't meaning using Social Skills in combat, but rather using Social Skills in such a way as to "harm" a character. Whether it be browbeating an opposing debater into accepting defeat or intimidating a suspect into confessing, you can use Social Skills in a similar way to Combat Skills to win a "fight".

Note that this is for extended encounters, not just quick and

simple conversations that require only one or two Social Skill Checks. Social Combat is for when two parties are locked in an argument or debate that will require the verbal or mental defeat of one party for the encounter to continue.

How, where and when a conversation or confrontation evolves into Social Combat is up to the GM. While a player can tell the GM that it is their intention to engage in Social Combat, a good rule of thumb to use to transition from conversation to social combat is when there appears to be a stalemate in roleplay.

As with all social encounters, player roleplay will be the driving force behind the debate, argument or interrogation that is happening, but there are some unique mechanics available for this type of drawn out social confrontation.

The first of this is deciding what can defend against what sort of verbal attack. Just as you can use Athletics or Fight to defend against a melee attack, the Social Skills can each be used against each other to both attack and defend.

Attack	Defend
Diplomacy	Diplomacy
Deceive	Intuition
Intimidate	Will
Investigate	Will/Deceive

The attacking and defending Skills are fairly straightforward. If you are debating you will be using Diplomacy and so will your opponent. If you are lying, you will be using Deceive vs. Intuition. To Intimidate or interrogate through Investigation will of course only be beaten by an iron Will. This, however, is the same as with any Social Skill Check. What makes Social Combat different is how it is resolved.

Social Wounds

This is using the term "wounds" as liberally as can be.

Wounds in Social Combat work similarly to wounds in Physical Combat in that there are three types of Wounds to be had and the more severe the wound, the worse you will fare in combat.

Determining the severity of a Social Wound works is exactly the same way as in Physical Combat. Work out how far the attacker won the Opposed Skill Check and compare that to the severity table above.

Here, though, is where things start to stray from the established physical realm. Rather than using your PC's Constitution Skill to ascertain how many Wound Slots your PC has on each limb, Social Wound Slots are determined by the Will Skill.

The first number of your PC's Will Skill Level dictates how many Social Wound Slots your PC has at each Wound level. This means that if your PC has a Will Skill Level of 30, then your PC has 3 Minor Social Wound Slots, 3 Significant Social Wound Slots, and 3 Grievous Social Wound Slots. There is only ever one Location Destroyed Social Wound Slot.

As with Physical Wounds, Social Wounds carry with them a penalty to future skill use. Minor Wounds have no penalty, Significant Wounds give the PC a -10 penalty to Social Skill Checks and Grievous Wounds give a -15 penalty to Social Skill Checks.

A distinct difference between Physical Wounds and Social Wounds is that penalties from Social Wounds do not stack with others of the same Wound Severity. This means that if you have 2 Grievous Social Wounds, you won't get a -30 penalty. Penalties from Social Wounds only stack with other of different severities.

The goal of Social Combat is to deliver the "attack" that will result in a Location Destroyed Wound. When this happens to one party in the social confrontation, then that party has been defeated.

There are two way to accomplish this. The first is by filling up all the Social Wound Slots until only the Location Destroyed Slot remains. This is how Social Combat can become an engaging and lengthy affair for both parties.

The second way is through luck of the dice. If the difference between the attacker's roll and defender's roll is ever above 80 then the defender is defeated immediately. This is where the Wound penalties come into play, the more penalties a character gains, the worse their rolls will be and thus the greater the difference between attacker and defender's rolls.

Wound Descriptors and Recovery

While Physical Wounds are easy to describe (after all, a cut is a cut, and a bash and scrape and missing hand are all fairly easy to imagine) Social Wounds are a different story.

What the Wounds will be is up the GM, but here the instructions are far more vague. The Wound Descriptors and their Recovery will depend entirely upon the context of the encounter and what was, or was not, said. Whether a secret was exposed or a hidden fear capitalised on, or it was a humiliation in public, a Social Wound can be nearly anything.

There is a key thing to remember when dealing with Social Combat and its Wounds. Unlike Physical or Mental Wounds, Social Wounds are not on/in the character. Social Wounds are in the minds of the spectators; they are the perceptions that other people have to the socially wounded character. So when describing the Wounds and their effects, keep in mind how other people will view the wounded character (even if this may not be factual, as perceptions rarely are the truth).

Their recovery also works slightly differently to Physical Wounds. Social Wounds still require the same length of time to recover as Physical Wounds (1 session for Significant Wounds, 5 for Grievous Wounds), but the penalties of these Wounds only affect social interactions with those characters that were part of, or observed, the Social Combat.

This is because the healing of Physical Wounds depend on your body, while Social Wounds depend on society. So if the Social Combat only happened between one PC and one NPC and there were no other characters nearby, then any Social Wounds suffered by the PCs would only penalise their Social Skill Checks with that specific NPC in the future.

This can become a bit tricky when Social Combat happened in a crowd and having to figure out every person in said crowd to whom the Wounds will apply, but this where narrative control by GM comes into play.

Always remember that all these mechanics serve only to support and enhance the narrative that you as a group are creating. These mechanics are not here to constrict or formalise your roleplay, but merely to keep a tally of what is going on. Roleplay must always come first in social encounters and the mechanics second.

> There is only one Golden Rule: The man with the gold makes the rules.
>
> ~Sultan Defne of Goxum

Mental Wounds

If your Social Combat is getting particularly nasty in that it could leave psychological scars, or if you are using some psychic supernatural elements in your setting, or if there is a particularly horrifying event taking place, or even if you just want to use good old Fear Checks, you can choose to use Mental Wounds.

The amount of Mental Wounds that a PC has is calculated exactly the same as Social Wounds, however Mental and Social Wounds do not share the same Wound track, meaning that any Wound caused on the Social Wound track does not affect the Mental Wound track and vice versa.

Like with Social Wounds, penalties from Mental Wounds don't stack with others of the same Wound Severity. This means that if you have 2 Grievous Mental Wounds, you won't get a -30 penalty. Penalties from Mental Wounds only stack with other of different severities.

Skills Affected by Mental Wounds
Deceive
Diplomacy
Intimidate
Intuition
Investigate
Logic
Perception

What differentiates Mental and Social Wounds is that the penalties from Mental Wounds target both the Social Skills as well as Logic, Intuition, Investigate and Perception.

This is to simulate that mental stress causes us to become more inwardly focused as we struggle with what is going on inside our heads. As such we become less adept at handling social situations, remembering and judging things as clearly, and our ability to perceive the outside world diminishes the worse our mental state becomes.

As with Physical Wounds, Minor Mental Wounds heal and refresh after the encounter and Significant Mental Wounds heal and refresh after the session in which they were recovered from. This is where the similarity between Physical and Mental Wounds ends, as Grievous Mental Wounds and Mental Location Destroyed are handled differently.

The penalties that Grievous Mental Wounds give you are based off the subject that caused those Wounds. This may be seeing a loved one die, killing an innocent, seeing an animal eating someone alive, etc. This subject (dead loved one, killed innocent, being eaten alive) becomes your Grievous Wound.

How you respond to this subject will depend on what type of Grievous Mental Wound you gained, and that in turn will depend on the context at the time and your GM's decision. There are four broad categories of mental stresses (Anxiety, Mood, Delusional and Hallucinogenic) and depending on which one you gained, will indicate how you respond in game to your Grievous Mental Wound.

To begin, your PC will have a -15 Penalty to the Skills affected by Mental Wounds but only for the session in which it happened, much like a Significant Mental Wound. After the first session, there are no penalties for a Grievous Mental Wound. Instead, being near the subject that caused this Wound can trigger a reaction from your PC.

Each time your PC encounters the subject of their wound, you must do a Will Skill Check. If you pass this Skill Check, then your PC is coping with the mental strain. However, if you fail the check, then the subject of the Wound triggered a reaction from your PC. When this happens, roll on the Reactions Table to the right to see what specific reaction your PC will do.

If you succeed on these Will Skill Checks 3 times in a row, then your PC has overcome their mental condition and the Grievous Wound Slot refreshes. However, if you fail a Will Skill Check before you get to 3 in a row, then the counter resets.

A Mental Location Destroyed takes this one step further. Unlike Physical Wounds, a Location Destroyed result does not mean death for Mental Wounds. It does, however, mean insanity.

When a character suffers a Mental Location Destroyed, that character is classed as going into Mental Shock; and just like shock caused by physical wounds, this comes with a -40 Will Skill Check. Should the PC fail this Will Skill Check, they will then go into shock and become non-responsive for the remainder of the encounter.

A Mental Location Destroyed means exactly that: the character's mind is broken; that character has gone insane. Every time a PC suffering from insanity wants to make a decision, the player has to pass a Will Skill Check. If the player succeeds, then the PC can do what they decided. If they failed then the PC's insanity has prevented them from doing whatever it may have been.

Just like with a Grievous Mental Wound, if

Reactions		
Roll	Anxiety	Mood
01-25	PC recklessly attacks the subject.	PC breaks down, sobbing uncontrollably.
26-50	PC runs away from the subject.	PC stars laughing hysterically.
51-75	PC freezes in terror.	PC tries to harm themselves with the subject.
76-100	PC tries to hide from subject.	PC becomes catatonic and non-responsive.
Roll	**Delusional**	**Hallucinogenic**
01-25	PC is convinced the subject is the cause of all their problems.	PC thinks subject is a monster from their nightmares.
26-50	PC believes the subject is telling it to harm other party members.	PC thinks subject is delicious and attempts to eat it.
51-75	PC believes subject has been following them.	PC thinks subject is their long lost love.
76-100	PC believes the subject has a divine message for them.	PC believes subject is imaginary.

the player fails the Will Skill Check, they roll on the Reactions Table to see how their PC reacts to the decision they had made. How this differs from a Grievous Mental Wound is that there is no distinct "subject" that triggers this reaction. Instead, every decision that the PC makes becomes the subject that triggers it.

Every decision has a "subject", in the sense of "I need to [subject]" or "I need to do something to [subject]". That is what the Reaction Table refers to for the insane.

There are of course times when the "subject" of a decision is far too awkward or nebulous a concept to attack or eat, etc. Should that be the case, the GM can simply choose another subject of the decision or an object in the decision. Should none of these apply, simply have the insane character become catatonic for the rest of the encounter.

The Road to Insanity

When a character becomes insane, it means that their mind is now broken. They have moved beyond the realms of mental illness into the realms of madness. That is why their reactions to things are on the primal level, because that is all that is left.

However, that is not say that you can't model a PC's road to insanity or other mental illnesses. In fact, the reverse is true. By using Mental Wounds, you can show the strains that have been placed on the PCs' minds and what maladies and illnesses they have received from this.

The Wounds System, whether Physical or Mental, are intentionally vague enough so that the GM can determine on what the wound is based using the context in which it was obtained. For Physical wounds this can be a broken rib, a bisected bicep or a crushed ankle, but the premise works equally well for Mental wounds.

The only thing to remember is that a Minor wound refreshes after the encounter, a Significant wound after the session in which it was seen to, and a Grievous wound after the PC has overcome their mental condition by succeeding a triggering Will Skill Check 3 times in a row.

With only this, the GM can decide that, upon seeing a loved one dying, the Grievous wound the PC got was severe depression; or that the Minor wound that the PC got from being in a haunted mansion was hearing voices.

This is a great opportunity for the GM and player to roleplay these sorts of mental stresses and

Severity	Minor	Significant	Grievous
Anxiety	Panic, Shock	Obsessive Compulsion, Irrational Worry	Phobia, Chronic Stress, PTSD
Mood	Hysteria, Anhedonia	Mania, Listlessness	Catatonia, Depression, Bliss
Delusional	Irrational Jealousy, Destined action	Being followed, Blessing of the gods	Paranoia, I-am-a-god!, Conspiracy theorist
Hallucino-genic	Hearing voices, Seeing ghosts	Imaginary friend, Something-inside-me	Nothing-is-real, Body-snatchers, Devil-on-the-shoulder

illnesses through the penalties these wounds give to Skill Checks.

The table shown here gives some brief examples on what sort of affliction each severity of wound could mean for different types of mental conditions.

Mental Recovery

For Significant and Grievous wounds to refresh and stop giving the player penalties to their Skill Checks, they need to be seen to. For Physical wounds, this is easy enough. A bandage here, a stitch there, a set bone here and that is enough medical attention to start the healing process.

A Mental wound can't be bandaged, stitched, or set. It needs care, love, and attention and that makes it a far more nebulous wound to heal. This is where roleplay and GM's decision making comes in.

What it takes to heal mental trauma is different for each person and so must be handled differently. For some, a night of drinking with friends can heal the scars of a lost one, while for others it needs a trip to a quiet place and some meditation.

However it is done, it does require roleplay and agreement between the player(s) and the GM as to whether this is sufficient to heal the Mental wound. This is also a case where a wound can be downgraded in severity (e.g.: Grievous to Significant) after some roleplayed healing if the player(s) and GM feel that some more work needs to be done.

EQUIPMENT

The short of it is that there isn't money or equipment in the traditional sense. The Runed Age is first and foremost a narrative one. It's all about the story your group creates together, and keeping track of how many coppers and silvers you have in your coin purse to buy the Ultimate Sword +1, or whether the two handed sword or two handed axe does more damage completely breaks the immersion of the game.

In saying that, there are mechanics that you can use to add to the realism of your games without breaking the immersion of your players.

Money

While there isn't any coppers and silvers to keep track of, money still plays a role as it can be a source of drama when you can't buy what you need and have to work out alternative, perhaps not so legal, means of getting what you want.

To simulate this, the Runed Age uses the Wealth Skill. This represents your coin purse, your pocketbook or wherever you keep your "hard earned" money. It can be levelled up just as any other Skill and you can even Specialise in it, should you so wish. If you want to buy anything, your GM will decide the value of the object by using the Difficulty Modifier to determine how difficult it would be for the ordinary chap to buy the object given the circumstances you are in. If you pass, you've bought it, if you fail you couldn't afford it.

GMs, you don't have to make your players roll for every little thing they want to buy; remember it's all about what furthers the plot and adds drama. Getting a pint from a wandering trader probably doesn't need a Wealth Skill Check, but buying the last bottle of stout that the secretive, cloistered order of monks brewed centuries ago certainly does qualify for a Wealth Skill Check.

Losing and Gaining Money

Even though you have a Wealth Skill, you can spend all your money. Your Wealth Skill might never go down, but that does not mean your coin purse is infinite. If you ever succeed on a Wealth Skill Check but your roll is 10 or less, then you gain a -5 penalty to all Wealth Skill Checks for the remainder of the session. This penalty does stack with itself, meaning if you roll a successful Wealth Skill Check again and

once again roll within under 10 points then you will receive another -5 penalty, making your Wealth penalty -10 now. This simulates you slowly losing money by spending it all.

This penalty will stay in effect until the end of the session or until you get more money. How that happens is up to you. You could pickpocket a trader, rob a vault, kidnap someone rich and wealthy, or go scavenging for more loot. When you get money, your GM can remove some of the penalties you have acquired. How many of the penalties are removed is up to your GM and how much money you got. One pickpocketing might only remove a single penalty while cracking open a safe could get you back to your full Wealth Skill.

Of course you can always get more money even if your Wealth Skill has no penalties on it. Your ability to pick pockets does not magically disappear if your pocket book is full. If this happens, then you will gain bonuses to the next few purchases you make.

How large a bonus for how many purchases? Once again, that's up to your GM. One pocket picked might only give you a +5 bonus for the next purchase, while a vault burglary could give you +30 for the rest of the session.

Haggling

No one ever buys something at full price. You always haggle the price down to something a little more kind to your bank account. Some people will even spend an hour haggling just to take 1% off the price. If you do it right, you could get even more than that.

Haggling in the Runed Age will mostly be handled by roleplay. You will get to flex your acting muscles with the GM to see how much a discount you can get. However, there are some rolls involved that you can use if you want. These will all give you a bonus to your Wealth Skill Check that you will need to roll to purchase the item in question.

Be warned though: you can't just use everything in the Haggling Modifiers table to make sure you get the best deal. You can't use Diplomacy to make the seller like you to give you that bonus then turn around and use Intimidate to get another bonus. The work you just put in to get him to like you just vanished. You also can't use the Diplomacy more than once to get multiple bonuses, you only get one bonus per sale.

Since you are in competition with the seller to get a better price, Haggling is always an Opposed Skill Check: Diplomacy versus Diplomacy, Deceive versus Insight, and Intimidate versus Will.

Haggling Modifiers	
Successful Diplomacy Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill
Successful Deceive Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill
Successful Intimidate Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill

Gear

There isn't too much to worry about in the equipment department, mechanically speaking. At the end of the day a one inch knife can kill you as easily as a ten pound hammer, and a pistol can put a hole in you just as well as a blunderbuss, so they will wound as much as each other mechanically.

You should always make sure you know what weapons and armour and ammunition you have on you, as well as any other gear you need so you never caught with your pants around your ankles. You don't want to forget whether you have a two handed sword or a paring knife on you when the proverbial hits the fan.

In saying that, there are some modifiers that you can use to aid in your gameplay. This will mainly come down to armour and ranged weaponry.

Armour

While there are no hard and fixed descriptions of the protective value of each possible type of armour (and there are a lot of different types of armour in the world!), for the purposes of the Runed Age all armour fall under three broad classes:

Armour Classes	
Soft Armour	-15
Sturdy Armour	-25
Strong Armour	-35

Soft armour covers the various types of fabric-based armours that are available in the world such as gambesons, stiffened silks and leather. Note that this does not cover basic, everyday clothing. Basic clothing is not considered armour. Sturdy armour covers hardened and boiled leather, chainmail, lacquered armour or its equivalent. Strong armour is your plate mail, your bronze cuirasses, your full harness.

> Tread lightly. Tread carefully. But come well armed.
>
> ~Theo Bloemveld, Heisenstein handler.

Armour does not stack for gameplay purposes, so don't even think about wearing three suits of plate mail over each other. You can, however, have different types of armour, or no armour at all, covering different Hit Locations. For example you can have a bronze cuirass (Strong Armour) covering your torso; hardened leather (Sturdy Armour) covering your arms and legs; and a fashionable hat (No Armour) on your head.

When you determine the severity of a Wound by seeing how much the attacker and defender rolled and subtracting the defender's result from the attacker's, add in the modifier of the armour to this calculation. In effect, the armour will lower the Wound severity. If the Wound severity number hits 0 or below, then no wound is incurred.

Example:

- Karen's character Cassandra and William's character Gerrit were in a shootout.
- Cassandra shot Gerrit and hit.
- Karen rolled 23 under her Modified Skill Level.
- William rolled 35 above his Modified Skill Level .
- Since William rolled over his Skill Level, Karen adds together the results to calculate Wound Severity.
- 23+35=58.
- Gerrit is wearing plate armour over his torso, which counts as Strong Armour
- Strong armour has a rating of -45
- 58-45=13
- Karen compares this number to the Wound Severity Table and see that Cassandra inflicted a Minor wound on Gerrit instead of the Grievous Wound he would have suffered.

Armour is not the most comfortable attire to walk around in and it does hamper your movement, not to mention the extra weight that you are carrying around that will also take its toll on you. For this reason, any Skill Check that involves your character being quick or nimble will come with a penalty if you wear armour. This is a -5 penalty per armour type, so -5 for Soft, -10 for Sturdy and -15 for Strong Armour. If you are wearing different armour types on different parts of your PC's body, then take the appropriate armour penalty based upon which limb is used. If the whole body is being used in a Skill Check, then used the highest rated armour your PC is wearing.

Always remember in what sort of City Middelburg is when thinking about armour. It is always tempting to get the biggest and strongest armour available, but you can run into some trouble because of it. Think about seeing a man walk into your local pub or inn wearing full plate mail, you'll certainly treat him differently.

Weapons	Range
Pistols	Near
Shotguns	Medium
Cross Bows	Medium
Short Bows	Medium
Submachine	Medium
Long Bows	Far
Rifles	Far
Machine guns	Far

Ranged Weaponry

A key difference between ranged and melee combat is that in ranged combat it is not solely your skill with the weapon that determines whether you successfully hit your opponent.

The chief culprit in this is range. Between the force of gravity and the amount of powder in your rounds, you have the least say in how far your bullets travel.

In the Runed Age there are 5 range bands which affect how far you can shoot a ranged weapon. Each type of ranged weapon has an associated range which shows the maximum range it can accurately shoot. Beyond its given range in the table above, it is inaccurate to such a degree that hitting someone comes down more to luck than skill.

A ranged weapon can always be fired at targets in ranged bands closer than it's maximum range, just not farther.

The 5 ranged bands are as follows:

- **CLOSE:** melee range. If you can hit something with a stick then they are within Close range.
- **NEAR:** from a few meters away up to a couple of dozen meters. This is the range at which pistols and thrown objects will accurately hit their target. Anywhere in a room, decently sized house or equivalent is in Near range.
- **MEDIUM:** most of the way across a football field, Medium range requires a people to shout to be heard and good sized weapons to hit something.
- **FAR:** from the far end of a football field to easily twice that distance. This is the furthest a person can reliably hit someone or something without assistance from a scope.
- **DISTANT:** any distance further than the above. You need a telescope to see what's going on and a scope to accurately hit anything.

Ranged Damage

Class	Damage
Light	10
Medium	20
Heavy	30

The weapon you have will not only say how far it can shoot, but how much damage will deal. All weapons are divided into three broad classes: Light, Medium and Heavy.

The table above shows the damage each class does when you hit someone or something with a Shoot Skill Check. Damage from a weapon works similarly to Armour. After you have successfully hit someone/something, and you determine the severity of Wound to be inflicted, you add to that number the damage from your weapon class, making the damage you inflict worse and potentially increasing the severity of the Wound Inflicted.

The table below gives some examples of what the classes of ranged weapons can be, but the individual ranged weapons you use will be classed by your GM.

Weapons	Light	Medium	Heavy
Near	Hold out Pistol	Standard Pistol	Constable's Pistol
Medium	Shortbow	Crossbow	Blunderbuss
Far	Hunting Musket	Standard Musket	Small Cannon

Scopes

Scopes and other magnifying devices for ranged weaponry work by increasing the ranged band for firing a ranged weapon. A +1 Scope will turn a Rifle's range from Far to Distant, while a +2 Scope will turn a Pistol's range from Near to Far. A +3 Scope is the best Scope you will be able to find.

A scope is no good to anyone if you don't look through it to shoot. As such, you can only get the benefits from using a scope if you take the time (and a turn in combat) to Aim.

Scopes are a rare thing in Alfresia and beyond, and have only recently been invented. If you want to use one, you'll have to spend some considerable coin to get it.

Armour Piercing

Armour piercing for ranged weapons work exactly the same as the Armour Classes do. Just as armour is rated as either Soft, Sturdy, or Strong, armour piercing projectiles are rated against Soft, Sturdy, or Strong.

So if you have an armour piercing round that is rated against Strong Armour, then when determining the wound severity of a hit, ignore the modifier that Strong Armour provides. The same would be true for an armour piercing round rated against Soft or Sturdy Armour.

Melee Weaponry

For melee weapons, there clearly aren't any ranged bands to worry about, but there is the weight and shape of the weapon that can have an impact on how accurate you are with it. The more cumbersome a weapon, the harder it is to hit.

Melee weapons are classed into different weights in the same way that ranged weapons are (Light, Medium and Heavy) with the same damage done by each class. However, each class of melee weapons has an associated penalty to using it with a Fight Skill Check, as shown in the table above. The heavier a weapon is, the more difficult it is to use, but the more damage it deals when it does hit.

Class	Damage	Mod
Light	10	-5
Medium	20	-10
Heavy	30	-15

The table below has some examples of melee weapons from each class, but as with the ranged weapons, your GM will determine the weight class of the specific weapon you are using.

Weapons	Example
Light	Knives Daggers Batons Knuckle-dusters
Medium	Swords Maces Clubs Bats Hatchets Spears
Heavy	Axes Sledgehammers Pole-weapons Greatsword

SKILLS

Skill List

Below are the twenty skills in the Runed Age. Using any of these or a combination of them, you will be able to do anything humanly possible. The first group of Skills are labeled as physical skills, this is mainly important for the Aging part of Character Creation as your physical skills decline with age. They are also the skills most likely to be affected by Wound penalties.

Suggested Specialisations of all the Skills are shown in italics.

Physical Skills

- Athletics
  - *Dodge*
  - *Acrobatics*
  - *Running*
  - *Parkour*
- Burglary
  - *Pickpocket*
  - *Lockpicking*
- Constitution
  - *Survival*
  - *Masochist*
- Drive
  - *Horse riding*
  - *Boat sailing*
  - *Airship operations*
- Fight
  - *One handed weapons*
  - *Two handed weapons*
  - *Unarmed combat*
  - *Dual wielding*
- Perception
  - *Enhanced [Sense]*
- Might
  - *Lifting*
  - *Climbing*
  - *Swimming*
- Shoot
  - *Pistols*
  - *Muskets*
  - *Bows*
  - *Crossbows*
- Stealth
  - *Sneaking*
  - *Smuggling*
  - *Blending in*

Non-Physical Skills:

- Broad-Craft
  - *Craft [Profession]*
  - *Craft traps*
  - *Carpentry*
  - *Cooking*
- Deceive
  - *Disguise*
  - *Lying*
  - *Impersonate*
- Diplomacy
  - *Trading*
  - *Etiquette*
  - *Leadership*
  - *Rapport*
- Fine-Craft
  - *Craft [Profession]*
  - *First Aid*
  - *Tinkering*
- Intimidate
  - *Demoralise*
  - *Threaten*
  - *Command*
- Intuition
  - *Sense Motive*
  - *Danger Sense*
  - *Lie Detector*
  - *General Knowledge*
- Investigate
  - *Interrogation*
  - *Tracking*
- Logic
  - *Philosophy*
  - *History*
  - *Maths*
  - *Tactics*
- Luck
  - *Sigil Threshold*
  - *Looting*
  - *Gambling*
- Wealth
  - *Land*
  - *Slaves*
  - *Antiques*
  - *Jewellery*
- Will
  - *Meditation*
  - *Resist interrogation*
  - *Fearless*
  - *Resist Temptation*

> You will never learn to fly by keeping to the ground. Only by jumping, by falling over and trying again will you touch the heavens.
> ~Attributed to Lífti, the Vinean god of air and time.

Specialisations

Once you get a skill to Skill Level 50 you can gain a Specialisation in that Skill. After that, every 10 Skill Levels (i.e.: at Skill Level 60, 70, 80, etc) you can gain another Specialisation in that Skill. You can't get a Specialisation of another Specialisation, so leveling up your Specialisation will not get you another Specialisation. You have to level up the base Skill to get the Specialisations. Each Skill is tracked separately, so every Skill you get to Skill Level 50 can give you a Specialisation in that Skill.

The Specialisations shown in this section are merely examples of what you can do; they are not an exclusive list. You can specialise a Skill in any which way you choose as long as it fits within the context of the base Skill and does not perform the same function as another base Skill.

Specialisations are permanent. Once you have it, you can't lose it. You can trade one EXP between Skills and Specialisations between gaming sessions, and this means that it is possible to reduce a Skill with a Specialisation below Skill Level 50. If that happens, you don't lose the Specialisation.

Skill Descriptors

ATHLETICS: This skill covers most of what the human body can do. Whether it be running, jumping, climbing, throwing yourself out of the way of oncoming bullets or holding open a heavy gate. If you want to push your body to its limits then this is the skill to use.

Specialisations: *Dodge, Climbing, Running, Parkour.*

BROAD-CRAFT: The first of the two Craft Skills and the exact opposite to Fine-Craft. Broad-Craft deals with creating or fixing anything where you are looking at the bigger picture rather than the detail. It's about working in broad strokes, looking at it as a whole, and thinking about the space/time it will occupy once it's done.

Broad-Craft can be used at any scale, from building a house, to fixing a cupboard, to making a good meal.

Specialisations: *Craft [Profession], Craft Traps, Carpentry, Cooking.*

BURGLARY: Taking things that don't belong to you. Burglary covers the dirty deeds that thieves do, from picking locks to picking pockets to getting into places where you don't belong. Burglary allows you to perform certain acts without being noticed, but be careful, it's not Stealth.

Specialisations: *Pickpocket, Lockpicking.*

CONSTITUTION: The other part of your physical body. If Athletics is what your body can do, then Constitution is what your body can take. Resistance to the elements, surviving poison, holding your breath, shrugging off wounds, this is what Constitution is made for.

The first digit of your Constitution Skill Level is also the amount of Wound Slots you have per Hit Location.

Specialisations: *Survival, Masochist.*

DECEIVE: Convincing someone a lie to be the truth. Quite simple really. There are many and varied ways of achieving this, but at its core it's all about getting someone to believe a falsehood.

Specialisations: *Disguise, Lying, Impersonate.*

DIPLOMACY: The art of making people like you. Getting a better deal at the merchant's, making sure your contacts give you the best information possible or defusing a sticky situation, the Diplomacy Skill is all about forming and keeping positive connections.

Specialisations: *Trading, Etiquette, Leadership, Rapport.*

DRIVE: Operating heavy equipment, hopefully while not taking medication. The Drive Skill covers anything you can ride, drive or pilot. Carriages, boats, trains, airships, horses, donkeys, as long as you are controlling something else to move you around, Drive will most likely cover it.

Specialisations: *Horse Riding, Boat Sailing, Airship Operations.*

FIGHT: Some say this is what humans are best at. Some say we only achieved our current level of technology because of this. All we know is it's called the Fight Skill, and that if you want to get gritty and dirty in melee combat, you need to get your Fight Skill up as high as possible.

Specialisations: *One Handed Weapons, Two Handed Weapons, Unarmed Combat, Dual Wielding.*

FINE-CRAFT: The first of the two Craft Skills and the exact opposite to Broad-Craft. Fine-Craft is all about details and fine-motor skills. If what you are creating or fixing needs intricate work then it calls for Fine-Craft. Fine-Craft can be used at any scale, not just for little things. From trying to stitch a wound, to making a new firing pin for a gun, to drawing out a new runic array.

Specialisations: *Craft, First Aid, Tinkering.*

Van Windburg Family

Descendants of kings and the last of the old Alfresian nobility to hold real power. There are no humble origins for the van Windburg family, whose economic power was born from their noble, political and military power. It is easy to start a business when you have the economic backing of an entire duchy. The van Windburgs lost their noble titles when the last Archduke revoked all noble titles in order to govern his island alone. The van Windburgs had no qualms about entering the Alfresian Independence War on Alfresia's side, their resentment of the monarchy without equal.

Arms and armour are the van Windburgs' speciality. Before the van Rosedaal's entry into the weapons market, the van Windburg had a near monopoly on in weapons. They are still the biggest producer of weapons, but sell mostly to the various military outfits in Fresian lands. Armies, mercenaries, constabularies, navies, merchant navies, pirates and privateers, the van Windburgs produce ordnance of any size, able to refit entire ships in a matter of weeks. Their own private mercenary company, the 'Golden Talons', profit them near as much as their arms sales. Sold to the highest bidder, the Gold Talons are the self proclaimed best military unit in the known world, a reputation few can disagree with.

INTIMIDATION: If Deceive is about lying and Diplomacy is about convincing, then Intimidation is all about putting the fear of god into them. You could go the blunt way, using your raw strength and aura to frighten someone into backing down, or perhaps you like the subtle, quiet, decent way and threaten his family with intimate knowledge of his children's schedule. It's not nice and sometimes it's not clean, but someone's gotta do it.

Specialisations: *Demoralise, Threaten, Command.*

INTUITION: Gut feelings, instinct, life experience. Intuition is the knowledge you pick up through life just by living. There's no reason or theory involved, just knowing things. Whether that is picking up on someone lying, some general knowledge trivia, or how to fix a broken lantern, if your gut knows how to do it, you're set.

Specialisations: *Danger Sense, Sense Motive, Lie Detector, General Knowledge*

INVESTIGATION: Searching, tracking, querying, researching. Investigate is all about finding the truth, whether it is through the interrogation of a person of interest, looking at a room and knowing the butler did it, or tracking your quarry down ten days after they skipped town. Investigation is not just Perception, it is the entire process of searching and uncovering.

Specialisations: *Interrogation, Tracking.*

LOGIC: Traditionally defined as "reasoning", "deduction", "analysis". Logic in the Runed Age is as vague a skill as Intuition and covers all form of academic learning, problem solving, and technical knowledge. Logic is not gut instinct or trivia; you would have needed to study something at length and with difficulty in order to use Logic to for your Skill Check.

Specialisations: *Philosophy, History, Maths, Tactics*

LUCK: Open any dictionary and you will find in the definition of "luck" that it is uncontrollable. Luck is not something you can affect or influence; it merely happens. It is the random order to the universe. However, you will know exactly how lucky you are with the Luck Skill and you can even spend EXP to make yourself luckier. Other than for Sigil Thresholds, your GM can call for a Luck Skill Check whenever something happens over which you have no control and no Skill or action you take will matter, like seeing if a stray rock from an avalanche hits you or the guy next to you.

Specialisations: *Sigil Threshold, Looter, Infection Avoidance.*

MIGHT: Raw power and pure muscle. Might measures how physically strong you are and what you can do with all that strength, from throwing things (and people) around to lifting heavy objects and moving things out of your way. It also measures how powerful you can move yourself around, so if you want to be good at climbing or swimming, or dragging your self through a mile of mud, then Might is for you.

Specialisations: *Lifting, Climbing, Swimming.*

PERCEPTION: The five senses. Actually closer to fifteen if you believe some people. Perception is unsurprisingly about what you perceive about the world around you. It's not just about the signals your brain is getting, but about the processing of those signals. It is the difference between looking and seeing, between hearing and listening. You could see the lady in red, but your mind might be a million miles away and there goes the target without you ever truly noticing.

Specialisations: *Enhanced [Sense].*

SHOOT: If you can kill the opponent before they ever get to you, was it really a fight? Whatever the case may be, like Fight, Shoot is unsurprisingly about shooting things at, usually, people. Fight is for melee, Shoot is ranged. Pistols, muskets, cannons, bows, crossbows, slings or the good old throwing a rock. The higher your Shoot Skill, the more accurate you will be.

Specialisations: *Pistols, Muskets, Bows, Crossbows.*

STEALTH: Being undetected by others, usually with the purpose of doing something you aren't supposed to. Honourable men don't sneak, do they? Anything underhanded you wish to do without anyone being the wiser, you can rely on the Stealth Skill, be it sneaking about rooftops in the middle of the night, palming a key off a desk or blending in with the crowds.

Specialisations: *Sneaking, Smuggling, Blending In.*

WEALTH: Money, the love of which has been said to be root of all evil. Looking at the rich nobs, it's hard to argue with that sentiment. But we'd all rather be the rich nob than the poor pleb staring daggers at said rich nob, now wouldn't we? Money can't buy happiness, but I'd rather be crying in a palace than in a hovel if it's all the same to you.

Specialisations: *Land, Slaves, Antiques, Jewellery.*

WILL: The body can't achieve anything without the mind. A weak body with a powerful mind is infinitely more dangerous than a powerful body with a weak mind. The Will Skill is all about willpower. Resisting temptation, interrogation, intimidation, torture, hunger, thirst, fear, resisting the urges and weakness of the flesh to keep you alive.

Specialisations: *Meditate, Resist Interrogation, Resist Temptation, Fearless.*

CONTACTS

Everyone needs a friend. Nowhere is this more true than in the Runed Age. You and your group won't be able to do everything by yourselves, and so you will need people who can get you information, equipment, and help you in your journey.

Creating a Contact

After you have finished with Character Creation and you have tallied up all your Skill Levels, your Deceive, Diplomacy and Intimidate Skills will tell you how many Contact Points you have with which to create your Contacts.

For each of these three Skills, take the first digit of the Skill Level and then add those together. This is the number of Contact Points you have. For example: if you have these Skills at Levels 31, 43 and 38 respectively, you will add together 3+4+3 to get 10 Contact Points.

These Contact Points are then spent to build the effectiveness of your Contacts. Contacts only have two Skills, Influence and Aptitude, and you can use your Contact Points to increase these Skill's Levels at Character Creation. Like Character Skills, the Contact Skills start at 30, and each Contact Point you spend on a Contact's Skill raises it by 5 Levels.

For each individual Contact, you can also lower one of its Skills' Levels below 30 to increase the other Skill. Any number of Levels you take off one Skill can go onto the other one, however, you can't take Skill Levels off one Contact and give it to an entirely different Contact.

You can have as many Contacts as you like, as long as each Contact has at least 1 Contact Point spent on it. Once you run out of Contact Points, you can't make any more Contacts, and if, at the end of creating all your Contacts, any Contact Points you still have left over are permanently lost.

Contact Skills

Influence describes the relationship between your character and the Contact. At Skill Level 10 there barely is a relationship at all and your Contact is really only in it for the payment. At Level 40 you've become friendly with each other, and by Level 80 you're good friends.

The higher your Influence with the Contact, the less likely they are to betray you, or stab you in the back when the going gets tough. A Contact, after all, is fairly useless if you can't trust them.

Aptitude on the other hand, describes how good a Contact

Influence	
01 - 10	Just in it for the payment.
11 - 20	Repeat customer.
21 - 30	Good for business.
31 - 40	Reliable client.
41 - 50	Friendly acquaintances.
51 - 60	Trusted associates.
61 - 70	Trustworthy comrade.
71 - 80	Good, honest friends.
81 - 90	Best friends for life.
91 - 100	Blood brothers.

is at their job. The higher their Aptitude, the better they are at what they do and the greater chance they'll have of getting you what you want

You may think that this attribute is most important for your socially-inclined Contacts, those that you need to get Information, rare or illegal equipment or even future jobs, but you'd be surprised at how useful this attribute can be.

Aptitude	
01 - 10	Quite "Limited".
11 - 20	Mediocre.
21 - 30	Decidedly Average.
31 - 40	Competent.
41 - 50	Highly Skilled.
51 - 60	Exemplar.
61 - 70	Expert.
71 - 80	Master at the Crafts.
81 - 90	World Class.
91 - 100	Paragon.

Even if you just want a Contact to fix your equipment, if that Contact had a high Aptitude attribute then they'll be able to fix your gear quicker and with much better quality. Medical-type Contacts will also be able to heal you far better if their Aptitude attribute was higher.

If your Contact isn't good at their job, then they aren't a valuable Contact.

A Contact's Usefulness

If a Contact isn't useful, then they aren't really worth much as a Contact. You wouldn't put their number down in your little black book if they didn't have something to offer you.

When creating a Contact, you must specify the reason why you go to this Contact, called the Contact's Usefulness. The Contact may have a good few uses that you can wring out of them, but overall there will be one reason you would specifically go to that Contact and not another Contact. For example, you might have a Contact you go to when you need information, and another Contact you go to when you need your equipment repaired, etc.

You can make up any reason you want for visiting your Contact when you create them, and this will form the basis of your relationship and backstory with them. If you can't think of anything, or you'd like to randomly determine the Contact's Usefulness, you can use the table below.

Paying the Piper

Preferred Payment	
1 - 25	Money.
26 - 50	Goods.
51 - 75	Services.
76 - 100	Information.

Nothing in this life is free. Your Contact won't just do whatever you want for free either. No matter how good of a friend you two are, there will always be some form of payment that you will need to pay. Of course, the closer the relationship between you and your Contact, the cheaper things will be.

Broadly speaking, a Contact's payment will come in one of four forms: Money, Goods, Services, or Information. When you create your Contact, you will select one of these four payment methods for your Contact, or you can roll on the Preferred Payment table for a random result.

Money is straight forward. The Contact just wants to get paid in some fashion with actual

currency for the service they render to you.

Goods means that the Contact wants physical items that they can either use or sell on. Think of this like bartering.

Services means that your Contact will ask you to do a job for them in return for their service. This can be done before, during or after getting what you want from them.

Information means that the Contact wants you to tell them something they don't already know. Maybe the information is about you, your party, your mission or something in their line of work. The bigger a job you want from them, the more important the information will be that you give them.

Who your Contact is

Now that you have the mechanics for your Contact sorted, it is time to give them life. After all, your Contact won't just exist as two Skill Levels and a name on your Character Sheet. They will be an actual character found in your campaign, and now is your chance to turn them into a full rounded character.

Think of what connection there is between your character and the Contact. How did they meet? Why do they still keep in touch? Use the Contact's Influence and Aptitude Skill Levels to guide how you write the Contact's backstory, and work with your GM to weave the Contact into the campaign setting.

While your GM will have the final say on what the Contact is like (as it is the GM's campaign that the Contact will inhabit), make sure to craft your Contact in a way that fits with your character and you. You've spent valuable points in the Contact, so you will be using them time and time again in the campaign. The Contact needs to be a NPC you'll enjoy interacting with or it will just become an annoyance.

Contacts in Game

Always keep in mind that you can only create Contacts before you start the game. Once your character is actually in the game/campaign/adventure/session then you can't create Contacts any more.

During gameplay, your character will have to learn how to make friends if you want more Contacts. Through roleplay, you will have to find NPCs and either befriend, bribe or blackmail them into becoming a Contact.

How exactly a NPC transitions from "a person that I know" to full-blown Contact is between you and your GM, but very generally speaking if your character and the NPC knows each other and are not hostile to each other then they can be called a Contact with at least an Influence Level of 1.

Using Contacts

What good is a Contact if you never use them? During any game session, if you need a service from your Contact you will have to find them, talk with them and make a deal. Like everything else, this will involve a lot of roleplay between yourself and your GM, but there are a few modifiers you can use to make sure the deal goes in your favour.

Before you even start haggling over the price of the Contact's service, you first need to see if your Contact will help you in the first place. Perhaps the job isn't up their alley, or maybe they're busy, or the service might just be too large a task for them.

To find this out is very simple: just roll a Skill Check with your Contact's Influence Skill. If you succeed, your Contact has the time to do what you want. If you fail that Check, then bad luck, it's just not your day.

Of course, as with any other Skill Check in the Runed Age, there are Modifiers to be added to this Influence Skill Check. The first

is entirely optional and can be a risk for you. Before you roll the Influence Skill Check, you can roll a Social Skill Check for your own character and choose any of the three Social Skills to use. If you succeed on this Check, then the number that you rolled becomes a positive Modifier that you can add to the Influence Skill Check; but if you fail this Social Skill Check, the amount by which you failed becomes a negative modifier to your Influence Check.

This Social Skill Check will also serve to flavour the narrative and show how you approach your Contact to ask them to help you.

The next modifier to the Influence Check will depend on how difficult the task is that you want your Contact to perform. The more difficult it is, the less likely they are to do it. After you describe the task to your GM, he will choose one of the modifiers on the table here and apply it to the Influence Skill Check.

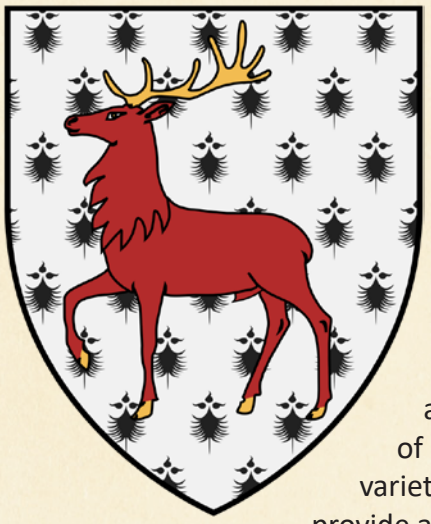
Task Severity	
-20	Considerable
-10	Major
0	Standard
10	Minor
20	Insignificant

And last, but certainly not least, is the Payment Modifier. Yes, one way or the other you will end up paying for asking your Contact to help you out. The more you are willing to pay, the more your Contact will be willing to assist you.

If your Contact takes money as payment, then this is very simple. You just give pick a number between 1 and your Wealth Skill Level and that becomes a bonus modifier to the Influence Check. Then, the number you picked becomes a penalty to all Wealth Skill Checks you roll until the end of whatever session your Contact completes their task.

Payment	
50	Considerable
40	Major
30	Standard
20	Minor
10	Insignificant

If your Contact takes goods, services or information as payment, it becomes a little more complex. Just as with the task severity, you can haggle and describe how much you are willing to do for your Contact, and your GM will decide where on the Payment Table above it falls and



Hugenberg Family

The vast power of the Hugenberg family comes not only through their economic power, but from their lands in Wesfresland. The Patriarch of the Hugenbergs has always held the title of Burgrave (equivalent to a viscount) and has ruled over the city of Lebenberg since 1337AGW. Everything in the city is under the Patriarch's control and in recent years most of Lebenberg have been given over to producing goods for the Hugenberg family. Walking through the city is like walking through a giant craftsman's workshop. Absolute control over the output of a city has allowed the Hugenberg family to produce the greatest variety of goods. The Hugenbergs pride themselves in being able to provide anything a customer could want.

For all their power, the Hugenberg family has shown the least innovation among the Merchant League families. New technologies and inventions are incorporated into their stores and manifests later than the other families, preventing their total domination of the League. The traditionalism and complacency of the aristocracy is to blame. The Hugenbergs see their position as comfortable and any potential threat to their lofty position are quickly eliminated, returning life to the status quo, something the Hugenbergs are supremely interested in keeping.

apply the appropriate modifier to the Influence Check.

Example:

- William's character Gerrit needs information on a mansion he intends to rob, and so he goes to his Contact James, hoping he can help.
- James' Influence Level is only at 30, so William knows it's a longshot, and rolls a Diplomacy Skill Check to help the odds.
- He succeeds with a roll of 16. It's something, but Gerrit's plea hasn't been too convincing
- William can't ask for much without giving himself a penalty, so Gerrit only asks how well guarded the mansion's exterior is.
- William's GM agrees this a Minor task, and gives him a bonus of 10.
- Since the intent of the heist is to make money, William doesn't want to spend too much, so goes to even out the modifiers by giving up 14 Levels of Wealth
- All told, he has a +40 modifier to his roll and needs to roll under a 70.
- Rolling a 43, James agrees to find out what Gerrit needs to know.

Keep in mind that just as with normal Skill Checks, you can spend a Sigil to gain a +25 bonus or a reroll on either the Influence of Aptitude Skill Checks.

> It is not the rules themselves which are sacred, but the principles behind them.
> ~President Dale van Rosedaal of Alfresia

Performance Evaluation

Once you've sorted out what your Contact will do and how much it will cost you, it's up to the Contact to actually do it.

This is where a Contact's Aptitude Skill comes into play. To see if your Contact can do what you want, roll your Contact's Aptitude Skill Check and apply the same Task Severity Modifier from the Influence Check. That's it, that's all there is to it. Whether your Contact succeeds or not is entirely up to him.

How long it takes your Contact to complete the task rests with your GM and what precisely you asked him to do. Giving you a loan could be an instant transaction, while "helping" with law problems could take a very long time. Generally speaking, though, the more severe the task was that you asked, the longer it will take.

How well the Contact did at the task you paid him for can be determined just like a normal Skill Check: by looking at the Degrees of Success table. Your GM will, of course, narrate how it all plays out, but you can look at the table to see that if you rolled a 35, then the Contact did an OK job, but if you rolled a 68 then they did Excellent work.

Degrees of Success	
1-10	Scarce
11-20	Mediocre
21-30	Average
31-40	OK
41-50	Good
51-60	Great
61-70	Excellent
71-80	Outstanding
81-90	Unreal
91-100	Superhuman

Example:

- It's been a while, but James gets in contact with Gerrit to tell him that he's done his investigation.
- James has a Aptitude level of 55, and with the severity modifier of 10, William needs to beat a 65 to get what he needs.
- He rolls a 52, and James tells Gerrit not just that the mansion is well guarded, but also exactly how many guards are stationed outside at night.

Levelling Your Contacts

A Contact is never static, they evolve just like any other character. At the end of each session in which you interacted with your Contact, your GM will make 1 of 3 decisions for both your Contact's Skills.

These decisions are:

- Something happened that could increase the Skill's Level.
- Something happened that could decrease the Skill's Level.
- Nothing out of the ordinary happened.

For the last one there is nothing to worry about. Nothing extraordinary happened in the session, so nothing happens to your Contact's Skill. For the other two, that is where the fun is. Remember that your GM doesn't have the make the same decision for both Skills. One could increase and the other could decrease, or one could decrease while nothing happens to the other one.

If there is a chance that a Contact's Skill could increase, then roll that Skill Check, but with a twist. If you roll underneath that Skill then nothing happens, but if you roll over the Skill then it increases by 1d10 Levels.

There are always things you can do to help get that increase roll for your Contact's Influence:

- Using Diplomacy to persuade your Contact and succeeding at those Checks.
- Paying promptly.
- Paying more than you should.
- Not asking too much from your Contact.
- Doing your Contact a favour.
- Seducing your Contact.

And for Aptitude:

- Getting a Critical Success on the roll
- Your Contact performing better than expected
- Helping out your Contact in their task

Of course, nothing ever goes according to plan, and things could happen that might make your Contact lose Skill Levels. The roll for this is exactly the same as for increasing the Skill. Roll the Check, and if you roll lower than the Skill, nothing happens, but if you roll higher than the Skill, decrease it by 1d10 Levels.

It can be tough, especially in lower Skilled Contacts, so be cautious when you doings like the following for their Influence Skill:

- If you used Intimidate to convince a Contact to work for you.
- Getting caught by your Contact using Deceive
- Failing miserably at using Diplomacy
- Not contacting the Contact for several Sessions.
- Not paying the Contact within agreed upon time-frame.
- Double-crossing the Contact.
- Attacking the Contact.

And for aptitude:

- Getting a Critical failure on the roll
- Your Contact performing particularly badly
- Your Contact's work being sabotaged

All of these lists are non-exhaustive, and your GM will look at the context of the session and decide what should happen to the Contact's Skills.

Loyalty

Every man has his price, and loyalty pays more than trust. If a Contact's Influence Level ever drops to 0 then you have lost that Contact. You can, however, prevent this happening by burning a Sigil to keep your Contact's Influence at Level 1d10.

DOWNTIME

Not every moment of your character's life will be spent sneaking around places they're not supposed to be, taking things that don't belong to them, killing people who get in the way of the first two, and in general being up to no good. They'll need time to rest, recuperate, get stuck into a project, or get back to their regular lives. That is Downtime: seeing what your characters do on their days between adventures and "off camera". Downtime will still keep them busy, they just won't be out adventuring.

Other than all the Activities you can perform during Downtime, it is a good means to skip ahead in time. Downtime is also a good way to "park" a character for a bit if you want to change out characters. One can be spending his time "off camera" while you take a new one out for a spin.

Downtime is split into three main parts: Work, Live, Play. The Work section is where your character can find a job and spend his Downtime working to earn a living. The Lifestyle section is where you determine how rich or poor your character will live during Downtime and how much it will cost. Then the Play section is where you choose what Activities your character will do, and see how well that goes.

There is a key thing that happens at the end of Downtime: paying the Bill. Nothing in life comes for free, and you'll need to pay for whatever you do on your Downtime.

Bonus and Penalty Rerolls

At the end of it, paying the Bill comes down to a Wealth Check with a Modifier based on your lifestyle, but that will be the only Modifier. Everything else that happens during Downtime that can affect your Wealth Check to pay the Bill will give you either a Bonus Reroll or a Penalty Reroll. A Bonus Reroll forces you to reroll the Wealth Check if you failed it; and a Penalty Reroll forces you to reroll if you succeeded on that Wealth Check. Bonuses and Penalties cancel each other out, so when it comes time to pay the Bill, you're either gonna be left with just Bonus Rerolls, none at all, or just Penalty Rerolls.

Time Frames

Downtime works on three broad timeframes: a Month, a Season, and a Year. The main difference between the three is the amount of Activities your character can perform during Downtime: two for a Month, four for a Season, and eight for a Year. Think of these timeframes as thresholds. If your Downtime lasts anywhere

up to a month, then use the Month timeframe; if it will last for up to a season; then use the Season; and same for the Year timeframe.

You can, of course, always do a bit of Downtime then go back to adventuring, then a bit more Downtime and so on. There's an ebb and flow to adventuring that won't always perfectly fit with the Downtime timeframes. If you have this sort of stop-and-start Downtime, just keep in mind the "Rule of Two". In Downtime, two Months make up a Season and two Seasons Make up a Year (even though in reality, we know that's not the case). This means that you can have two Months' worth of Downtime within a season's length of time before you lose any mechanical benefits from it; or four Months' worth of Downtime within a year before they stop giving your character any benefits. This means that you can spend all your time doing month by month Downtime to quickly increase your character's Skill Levels and other boons.

Work

Nothing in life is free, and the bills have to get paid. For most of us, the only way to make money is to work. During Downtime, your character can go looking for a job, or go back to their current one and work like the rest of us plebs.

To look for a job, you'll need to pass a Skill Check. Each job has a set of associated Skills, and if you succeed on one of those Skills' Checks, you can do that job for this particular Downtime. If you fail, however, you need to go look for another job. You can only attempt each job once per Downtime, and if you fail to get into a job, you'll get a -10 Modifier to the next job-hunting

Skills	Careers
Athletics	Chimney Sweep, Entertainer, Labourer, Messenger, Gardener
Broad-Craft	Artisan, Carpenter, Cobbler, Farrier, Mason, Smith, Wheelwright, Cobbler
Burglary	Footman, Locksmith, Tailor
Constitution	Brewer, Fishmonger, Labourer, Mason, Sailor, Tanner, Smith
Deceive	Artist, Butcher, Civil Official, Entertainer, Grocer, Office Clerk, Trader
Diplomacy	Barber, Barkeep, Coachman, Entertainer, Fishmonger, Grocer, Law Clerk, Printer, Trader, Retainer
Drive	Coachman, Farrier, Messenger, Sailor, Wheelwright
Fight	Barber, Bodyguard, Butcher, Constable
Fine-Craft	Apothecary, Artisan, Artist, Brewer, Cook, Jeweller, Locksmith, Runescribe, Tailor
Intuition	Barkeep, Clergy, Fisher, Scholar, Farrier, Cook, Retainer, Artist
Intimidate	Barkeep, Bodyguard, Civil Official
Investigate	Fisher, Gardener, Messenger, Runescribe, Scholar, Constable
Logic	Apothecary, Clergy, Law Clerk, Office Clerk, Printer, Runescribe, Scholar
Luck	Brewer, Chimney Sweep, Cook, Fisher
Might	Carpenter, Labourer, Mason, Sailor, Smith, Wheelwright
Perception	Artisan, Barber, Carpenter, Coachman, Jeweller, Locksmith, Tailor, Cobbler
Shoot	Bodyguard, Constable, Footman
Stealth	Chimney Sweep, Footman, Gardener, Tanner, Retainer
Wealth	Apothecary, Civil Official, Jeweller, Law Clerk, Office Clerk, Printer, Trader
Will	Clergy, Fishmonger, Grocer, Butcher, Tanner

Skill Check you do. This negative Modifier is cumulative, so if you fail to get into 5 jobs, you will get a -50 Modifier to your next job-hunting Skill Check for this Downtime. At the end of a Downtime period, these Modifiers reset.

If you already have a job from your background or a previous Downtime, you can just go straight back to it without having to do a Skill Check. And if you can't find a job, or don't want one, you can be a vagrant for the Downtime and get a Penalty Reroll to your Wealth Check at the end to pay the bills.

On the opposite page you can see the list of Skills and what jobs you can get if you pass their Checks.

When you're in a job, you can also choose to make another Skill Check for the Downtime to see how well you are performing at your work. Pass this second Check and you'll get a Bonus reroll to your Wealth Check at the end.

The more you work, the better you will become at doing that work. Therefore, if you work during your Downtime, you will gain Levels in any of the Skills associated with your job. Work for a Month, and you will get 1 Level; work for a Season, and you will get 2 Levels (split amongst any of the job's Skills); and work for a Year or more and you will get 5 Levels (again, split amongst any of the job's Skills).

If you don't have a job for the Downtime Period, you are considered a Vagrant. The positive to being a Vagrant is that you will get twice as many Activities in the Play section of Downtime later on. The negatives, unfortunately, are that you will get a Penalty Reroll at the end to pay the Bill, and you lose out on getting Skill Levels while Working.

Live

It's the quickest and easiest part of Downtime, and it says what sort of level of lifestyle you have. How rich or poor are you living? The answer to that will determine the Modifier you'll get to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime to pay the bill.

Your chosen lifestyle will also affect the flavour and aesthetic of the Activities you do in the Play section of Downtime, and thus may affect the Modifier your GM gives to the Skill Checks you roll and the rewards you get. For example, having an Opulent Lifestyle and going out Socialising will be a tremendously different night out on the town than doing so with a Poor Lifestyle. The places you go to and the people you meet will be of an entirely different calibre, so how you and your GM narrates that part of your Downtime will be quite different as well.

The same will go for almost all the Activities. If you want to Research, then the wealthier you are, the greater access you will have to academic material, so your GM may give you a positive Modifier to your Skill Check. If you want to Craft something great, but you are poor, well then the tools available to you might well be of poor quality too. Your GM could then decide to give you a negative Modifier to your roll.

Remember that if you are travelling and on the road, not all Lifestyles may be available wherever you stop and decide to spend your Downtime. Your GM may decide that Lifestyles above or below a certain mark simply cannot be chosen at a given destination. For example, if you leave Middelburg for a luxurious resort-town, your GM could declare that only Wealthy Lifestyles and greater are available; or if you travel through Oldtown, you can only choose Poor or lesser.

Lifestyle Modifiers and Rerolls

There are two things that can get you Rerolls to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime. If you have dependants living with you, you'll get a Penalty Reroll. "Dependants" here means anyone living with you that aren't helping to pay the bills. So children, other family members, guests, etc. For

Lifestyle	Cost
Homeless	80
Subsistence	60
Poor	40
Average	20
Comfortable	0
Wealthy	-20
Lavish	-40
Opulent	-60
Decadent	-80
Kingly	-100

every dependant of note, you will get a Penalty Reroll to your Wealth Check. What counts as "of note" is up to your GM, but a newborn baby clearly don't require as much resources, and your money, as a fully grown adult.

If, however, you have another breadwinner in the house then you will get a Bonus Reroll. For every person living with you that has a job, or other source of income, you will get a Bonus Reroll.

Each Downtime you can also choose to increase or decrease your standard of living. Increasing means a Penalty Reroll for that Downtime, while decreasing is a Bonus Reroll (on top of the change in Modifier).

If you don't have a place to live, you are Homeless. This is good for saving money, but not that good for your health. If you are Homeless, then you will need to succeed on a Constitution Skill Check to avoid getting sick. If you fail, you take a Physical Wound to your Torso Hit Location equal to the amount by which you failed.

Communal Living

If you choose to lodge with someone else, you can use the Homeless Modifier. You don't, however, have to roll a Constitution Skill Check since you will have a roof over your head. If you have a job for the Downtime, then the person you lodge with will get a Bonus Reroll, but if you are a Vagrant, they will get a Penalty Reroll.

If two or more players live together (and not one lodging at another's), then all players use the highest Wealth Skill Level among those players, and add a +20 Modifier for each additional player to the roll at the end of the Downtime to pay the bill.

Play

Activity	Description
Craft	Create an item or an object
Gamble	Wager on a game of chance
Relationship	Improve a relationship
Research	Learn about a specific topic
Rest	Recuperate and relax
Scout	Travel to an unexplored location
Shop	Buy or sell items or objects
Socialise	Spend time with others
Train	Improve a specific skill
Tutor	Teach another character a skill

The Play Section is the place where you will spend most of Downtime. This is where you decide what Activities your character will do (beyond working) while they are on Downtime. Bear in mind that you will only be able to perform a certain number of Activities depending on the length of your Downtime: two for a Month, four for a Season, and eight for a Year.

There are ten broad categories of Activities that you can partake in during Downtime, and each has its own quirks and special rules, and some will even give you Bonus Rerolls or Penalty Rerolls to your Wealth Check at the end to pay the Bill. Some will also give you other types of rewards or misfortunes that could carry over into the next gaming session and adventure.

There is also an extra non-Activity which your character can partake in: Overtime. This is where you decide to forego doing an Activity,

and instead work further at your job for extra money.

You can perform an Activity multiple times in a Downtime period (up to your maximum number of Activities for the Downtime). You aren't just limited to doing one of each. If you do the same Activity multiple times in a single Downtime period, you can also continue on with the same project or topic throughout them all. For example: if you want to research a specific topic and don't finish doing so one the first attempt, then you can continue your research by spending another Activity on it.

Players can also cooperate on many Activities. If more than one character wants to work on the same project or topic, they can each take that Activity and roll the appropriate Skill Checks separately, but then add their roll results together (if successful) to get a final result for the Check.

Craft

Creating can be a hobby, a side-job, a necessity for the next adventure, or even an act of worship. Whatever your motivations, you can spend your Downtime creating and crafting objects and items. This project of yours can be as large or small as you want, from a few pieces of ammunition, a single piece of jewellery to a vehicle, a house, or even bigger.

Difficulty	
2	Effortless
5	Simple
8	Easy
11	Average
14	Challenging
17	Difficult
20	Arduous

When you start a new crafting project, you describe to your GM what it is you're wanting to create and he'll give you a challenge target number that you will need to beat. This challenge target number is based on the complexity, intricacy and difficulty of your proposed project. An indication of the difficulty levels can be seen on this table on the left.

To start crafting, you roll a Broad-Craft or Fine-Craft Skill Check (GM's choice depending on the project). If your roll is successful, the first digit of your roll (e.g.: 5 for a roll of 56) is then counted towards the project's challenge target number. If you beat the challenge target number, the project is completed and your object or item is crafted. If you haven't beaten it yet, you can continue to work in subsequent Activities, and each time your succeed on your Skill Check you add the first digit of your roll to your previous one. Every following roll you make on the project, if successful, is counted towards the challenge and is added to your previous roll's number until the project is completed.

Your chosen lifestyle will dictate the quality of the tools and materials you have on hand to do your crafting, and how well kitted out your workshop is. Because crafting anything requires tools and materials, your GM will give your Broad-Craft or Fine-Craft Skill Check a modifier based on the tools and materials you have brought with you, and what you get from your lifestyle. The better equipped you are, the better the modifier you will get. Try to build a ship with a toothpick and pliers in a back alley, on the other hand, and you will get a severe negative modifier.

You can, however, elect to take a Penalty Reroll in order to get the materials and tools needed, but bear in mind that will only count for this one Skill Check. If you take another Crafting Activity later, you will either have to scrounge together the tools and materials, upgrade your lifestyle, or take another Penalty Reroll.

Gamble

Gambling is always a risk. You can win the jackpot or lose it all. Whether you are rolling dice, playing cards, or betting on the ponies, you can

do all of that with this Activity.

Gambling during Downtime is incredibly easy. First off you place your wager. This is any number of points up to your current Wealth Skill Level. Then you roll 2d100. The first d100 roll sets the target number, and to win the bet you must roll the second d100 at or below the result of the first. For example, if you rolled a 39 with the first d100, you must get a 39 or lower with your second roll.

If you succeed, then you get a positive modifier to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime equal to the number of points you bet. If you fail at the gamble roll, then you will get a negative modifier to that Wealth Check equal to the number of points you bet.

More than one player can join in the same gamble. They can both pool their points together for the bet, and then roll the 2d100 once. Two or more players can also gamble against each other. To do this, they each place their bets and then one rolls a d100 to establish the target number, and the other rolls the d100 to match or get less than the target number. Whomever wins, gets the positive modifier to the Wealth Skill Check at the end of Downtime, and the loser gets a negative modifier.

You can, of course, always bet on yourself. If there is a type of competition that you are particularly skilled at (horse riding, shooting, pit-fighting) then you can make a wager that you'd win that competition. The process is very similar: you bet a number of points up to your Wealth Skill Level, and then roll the relevant Skill Check for the competition. Your GM may then roll an opposing Check he chooses for the opposition, and then the one who had the best result wins.

Relationship

Relationships take a lot of work to maintain and improve them. If you do nothing with them, then nothing is all you're going to get.

In this Activity, you can work on any sort of relationship, from a romantic one, to a friendly platonic one, to getting a Contact's relationship better, to improving ties with a faction. To improve a relationship, you describe to your GM which relationship you want to work on and how you want to go about it. Your GM will then tell you which Social Skill to use for the Skill Check, and give you a positive or negative modifier to that Skill Check based on how well he thinks you've gone about improving the relationship.

Relationship Score	
1	Uncertain
2	Cool
3	Neutral
4	Amiable
5	Friendly
6	Warm
7	Affectionate
8	Close
9	Partners
10	Couldn't be closer

Of course, a gift always helps when trying to build up a relationship. You can choose to take a Penalty Reroll for your Wealth Skill Check at the end of Downtime in order to get a +20 modifier to your Social Skill Check here.

If your Skill Check succeeds then you've improve the relationship. What this means depends on the relationship you were trying to improve. For any of your official Contacts, this means that their Influence Skill increases by 1d10. For other relationships (romantic, platonic, faction or otherwise) that don't have concrete game mechanics, you can use the table above and advance the relationship one step for each full multiple of 30 that you rolled (so 1 for 30, 2 steps for 60, 3 for 90).

If, however, you failed your Social Skill Check and rolled 90 or higher, then things went terrible and the relationship is worse off than it started. For Contacts, reduce their Influence Skill by 1d10, and for other relationships, reduce where they sit on the table above by one step.

Research

Knowledge is power, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. With this in mind you can undertake this Activity to research a specific topic. Do you need to know how something works or what something means, where something comes from or who someone is? This is where you find out.

To research, you tell your GM what you are trying to find out and he'll tell you to roll either a Logic, Intuition or Investigate Skill Check depending on what it is your researching and how you're going about it. Your GM will also give you a positive or negative modifier to the Skill Check to show how easy or difficult the topic is to research. If your roll is successful, then you've found out information about your topic. The higher your roll, the more you've found out about the topic.

If you aren't happy with the amount of information you've discovered, you can always undertake another Research Activity, roll again and then add that result to this one, giving you an overall higher roll and thus more information about your chosen topic.

Your chosen lifestyle will dictate what you have available to you to do your research. The better your lifestyle, the more resources you have on hand to help, and your GM will take this into account when giving your Skill Check that modifier. The less resources you have to help you, and the more work you will need to do on your own will result in getting a worse negative modifier.

> All the world is a game, and we merely roll the dice.
>
> ~Willem Wikkelspies

You can, however, elect to take a Penalty Reroll in order to get the resources you need, but bear in mind that will only count for this one Skill Check. If you take another Research Activity later, you will either have to scrounge together the resources, upgrade your lifestyle, or take another Penalty Reroll.

Rest

Sometimes all you need to do is rest, relax and recuperate. Your body and mind is taxed, pulled apart, beaten up and pushed around in adventures and so you often need some time to sit down and take a breather. Resting is there to give you the chance to recover, so you can get back on the road as good as you were before.

There is no Skill Check or anything else you need to do for this Activity. All you do is choose one Physical Wound and one Mental Wound and reduce their severity by one step (e.g.: from Grievous to Significant). Hit Location Destroyed Wounds cannot be healed this way.

Scout

To boldly go where you haven't gone before. With this Activity you can spend your Downtime travelling to new locations to discover as much about them as possible. This can be a new area your party will visit soon in your adventures, a place you need to case for a heist, or perhaps even looking for a new home.

Scouting is an incredibly involved activity that requires a lot of planning. First off, the length of your Downtime will determine how far you will be able to travel (depending on the mode of transportation of course), so plan accordingly. Your GM may also declare that several jobs be unavailable if your intended scouting will not be compatible. After all, if you're stuck to a desk or a store, you can't go on a journey across the island. You will need to find a job that works well on the road, or you'll have to go without work while you travel.

Lastly, your Lifestyle will dictate how well you are provisioned while scouting. The better your Lifestyle, the better style you'll be traveling in. A journey can be perilous, and you want as much resources to make sure you survive it. Food, shelter, animals, vehicles, assistants; you'll get more of them at higher quality the better the Lifestyle you choose.

To Scout, describe to your GM where you want to go and how you intend to go about it. Your GM will then tell you to roll either an Investigate or Perception Skill Check and give you positive or negative modifiers depending on how difficult the journey will be. If your Skill Check is successful, then you've made it to your destination and found out what you needed to know. The higher you roll, the more you've discovered about your destination.

If you aren't happy with the amount of information you've discovered, you can always undertake another Scout Activity, roll again and then add that result to this one, giving you an overall higher roll and thus more information about your destination.

If you wanted to travel incognito, sneak about, be disguised during your journey, or in any way be unnoticed during your Scouting, you'll need a Stealth Check. However, you won't have to do another roll, instead the same Investigate or Perception roll you make will also count as your Stealth Check. This means that if you want to be stealthy, you will need to roll below both your Investigate/Perception as well as your Stealth Skill with that single roll.

If you roll over your Stealth Skill (regardless if you rolled under your Investigate/Perception Skill), then you've been caught out and discovered. What this means to your trip will be up to your GM, but it may involve some Checks to get you out of trouble.

Shop

In this Activity, you can buy and sell whatever you need to in between adventures. If you need to stock up on equipment, pawn off loot, get some new gear, then this is where you'd do it.

If you want to go buy items, describe to your GM exactly what you are looking for, and he'll tell you to roll a Wealth Skill Check with a positive or negative modifier depending on how expensive your final purchase will be. You can also dig into your savings to help buy what you need by taking a Penalty Reroll to your Check at the end of Downtime. This will give you a +20 modifier to the Wealth Check here to buy your items.

Selling things work in much the same way: you tell your GM what you are trying to get rid off, and if you need to, roll an Investigate Check to find a buyer. Your GM will then tell you what your goods are worth in the form of Wealth Skill points, and you can see below an indication of where your goods could fall.

Goods Worth	
10	Insignificant
20	Scant
30	Little
40	Average
50	Serviceable
60	Worthwhile
70	Desirable
80	Plenty
90	Invaluable
100	Priceless

Then it's all about the haggling to get you the right price, if you want to take that risk. You can roll a Social Skill Check of your choice, and if you are successful, then you can increase the worth of your goods by 10, but if you fail then you reduce the value of your items by 10.

The points value you end up with will then become a positive modifier to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime to pay the Bill.

Socialise

Having a quiet drink with a few friends, or going out and painting the town red, the Socialise Activity is all about having fun with others. It's a time to destress, enjoy yourself, but also to network and make new connections.

Socialise is the Activity where your Lifestyle will be most important. Your Lifestyle will dictate where you're going, who you'll be out with, and what you could get up to. Will you be going to a back-alley smokey bar with the local street rats,

or out to a 5-star restaurant with the bourgeois elite? This has a greater effect than just flavouring your Activity's narrative, as the Socialise Activity is where you can acquire new Contacts, but the Contact you get will come from those you go out socialising with. That means your Lifestyle with determine what sort of Contact you can get.

If you're looking for a new Contact, you can talk to your GM about what sort of Contact you are seeking, and he'll let you know if that fits within your Lifestyle. You will then roll a Social Skill Check to see if you can put your best foot forward and form that connection with your would-be-Contact. You can take a Penalty Reroll to your Wealth Skill Check at the end of Downtime to give you a +20 positive modifier to this roll. This shows your generosity in footing the bill for the evening of socialising, and is sure to butter up your Contact.

If your Social Skill Check is successful, then you've acquired a new Contact. While the GM will work out his Aptitude Level, be warned that your new Contact's Influence Level will start off at Level 1, which means he can be lost as easily as he was obtained.

Regardless if you are looking for a Contact or not, socialising will also help you destress. To that end, you can choose one Mental Wound (except Location Destroyed) and reduce its severity by one step. So if you had a Grievous Mental Wound, you can reduce it down to Significant.

Train

We all have things that we can get better at, and skills and talents we can improve. Practice makes perfect, and undertaking this Activity will give you that time to practice.

The Train Activity is incredibly straightforward: you choose a Skill or Specialisation that you want to Train up, and then you roll that Skill/Specialisation Check. If you succeed in that Check, you will gain 2 Levels if you chose a Skill, and 4 Levels if you chose a Specialisation.

It's incredibly simple, but that doesn't make training easy. Everyone needs help to show them how to do something right, and if you choose to take a Penalty Reroll at the end of Downtime then you can get a trainer to help you out, or get the equipment and resources you need to train effectively. This will translate into a +20 modifier to your Skill/Specialisation Check.

Tutor

We all have knowledge, skills, talents, and abilities that can be shared with others. By undertaking the Tutor Activity, you elect to share that knowledge and skills with another character, be they another player's character or an NPC. This is your opportunity to pass on what you know to someone else, and this is an especially important Activity if your character has an heir or family member that you'd like to play as one day. This is your chance to train that heir up to take the reins should something ever happen to your main character.

Training is fairly simple: you first choose which Skill or Specialisation you would like to tutor the other character in. Then both you and that character rolls the Skill/Specialisation Check. If both of you succeed, then that character gains 2 Levels if you chose a Skill, and 4 Levels if you chose a Specialisation. If only one of you succeeded, then the character gains 1 Level for a Skill and 2 for a Specialisation.

As enjoyable as tutoring may be, having the right tools and resources will make it easier, and you can get those by taking a Penalty Reroll to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime to pay the Bill. If you do, both you and the character you're training will get a +10 modifier to your Skill/Specialisation Check.

Overtime

Rather than spending your Activity on leisure, a hobby, or another pastime, you can instead spend your time working overtime at your job (assuming you're not a

Vagrant). The reward for your diligence is that you will get a Bonus Reroll to your Wealth Check at the end of Downtime to pay the Bill as well as being able to increase a Skill associated with your job by 1 Level.

Entanglements

Downtime isn't always predictable. Just because you aren't on an adventure, doesn't mean that surprises won't find you. Your GM may decide to throw something unexpected your way during Downtime and give you a chance to roleplay. These Entanglements could be anything that fits the narrative of your Downtime, but if in doubt your GM can always roll on the table opposite to see what luck brings you.

> Ask not who you are, nor where you go, nor what you do. Ask only why you are, and why you go, and what you do.
>
> ~Abbot Thibault Victore of Nacitania

The Bill

At the end of the Downtime period, you have to pay the Bill. This shows whether you could afford everything you did during Downtime. Paying the Bill is quite simple: you roll a Wealth Skill Check and apply the Modifier you received from your Lifestyle in the Live Section of Downtime.

After you've rolled, it's time to tally up how many Bonus Rerolls and Penalty Rerolls you gained from the Downtime period. The Bonuses and Penalties cancel each other out, so determine how many (if any) of one of them you have left. For example, if you have 7 Bonuses and 5 Penalties, they'll cancel each other out until you only have two Bonuses left.

Bonus Rerolls force you to reroll if you failed the Wealth Check, and Penalty Rerolls force you to reroll if you succeeded the Wealth Check. So if you have only Bonus Rerolls remaining, reroll until you've run out of them, or until you succeed the Wealth Check. Similarly, if you only have

Roll	Entanglement
1-4	A close friend betrays you.
5-8	A family member passes away.
9-12	A local crime lord pressures you to commit crimes.
13-16	A stray animal starts following you.
17-20	Burglars break into your home.
21-24	Scurrilous rumours are spread about you.
25-28	Someone in trouble asks you for sanctuary.
29-32	Someone is stalking you.
33-36	The authorities come to arrest you.
37-40	Too much drink makes you black out for a whole day.
41-44	You are accused of committing a heinous crime.
45-48	You are banned from a local establishment.
49-52	You are challenged to a duel to settle a matter of honour.
53-56	You are fired from your job.
57-60	You become involved in a serious fight.
61-64	You come across a grisly crime scene.
65-68	You discover there is a bounty on your head.
69-72	You get promoted at work.
73-76	You get severely sick (Gain a Grievous Wound to Torso)
77-80	You offend, and then lose, a Contact.
81-84	You receive an ominous and threatening letter.
85-88	You receive an unexpected marriage proposal.
89-92	You take part in a joyful local festival.
93-96	You unexpectedly make a new friend and gain a Contact.
97-100	You've made a powerful rival.

The Black Hart and Blue Rose

Contrary to popular belief, the Fresians aren't native to Alfresia, even if they have been here for over two millennia. Before they came here, there lived a different people here on the island called the Eilanni. They were a strange people who carved glyphs into great free standing stones and sang their histories to each other. They made necklaces by intertwining strings of carved wooden disks and worshipped dark gods.

The Black Hart and Blue Rose are not kind gods like Bür and the Heavenly Mother and Father. No, they are far more "human". The greatest of all gifts to the gods are, of course, human sacrifice. To kill someone of your own species for the gods, especially if it is a loved one, is the greatest gift a man can make. For the Blue Rose, the mother of the sea, this was at the Tenne River or in the ocean itself, but for the Black Hart, the antlered hunter, lord of land and tree, there was a special tree in a sacred grove to sacrifice.

The Eilanni faith is not completely gone. There are some who still cling to the old beliefs, claiming to be descendants of the true natives of Alfresia, and using the shadows and alleyways to build up their religion and culture again, hoping one day to throw off the yoke of the Fresians with blood, sacrifice, and the power of the old gods.

Penalty Rerolls remaining, reroll until you've run out of them, or until you fail the Wealth Check.

If you ultimately succeed in paying the Bill, it means you have some money left over from Downtime that you could use in your adventures. You can choose to take the result of your final roll as a positive Modifier to all Wealth Checks in your next few gaming session (until your GM decides you've spent all your savings), or you can choose to increase your Wealth Skill Level by the first digit of the result of your roll (so by 5 for a roll of 54).

If your final roll to pay the Bill was a failure, then you didn't have enough money to pay for everything during Downtime. This leaves you with a choice of how to handle your poor financial situation. You can either choose to have a negative modifier equal to the amount by which you failed for the next few gaming sessions (until your GM decides you've managed to scrape together enough money), or you can choose to decrease your Wealth Skill Level by the first digit of the amount by which you failed your roll (so if you rolled a 50 to try and beat a 20, you failed by 30 and reduce your Level by 3).

There is also a third choice if you failed your final Wealth Skill Check: go into debt. You won't lose any Wealth Skill Levels or suffer negative Modifiers, but someone has taken on your debt which means you now owe a lot to that certain someone, and then can come to collect any time.

Whatever choice you make, if you fail to pay the Bill your Lifestyle level for the next Downtime will be reduced.

ADVANCEMENT

Advancement of your characters works by spending EXP to increase your Skill Levels. Each Skill is levelled up individually and it takes 1 EXP to increase a Skill Level by 1 level. Each Skill's base level is 30, although by the time you finish Character Generation your Skill Levels will be greater than this.

Starting at Level 50 every 10 Skill Levels you will be given the option of a Specialisation in that Skill, so you can get one at Skill Level 50, 60, 70, etc. A Specialisation Level is increased by 2 for every EXP you spend in that Specialisation. Whatever you spend in a Specialisation or its parent Skill is not carried over between the two. For example: say you have Fight at Skill Level 51 and One Handed Weapons Specialisation at 62, if you spend an EXP to increase Fight to Level 52, One Handed will not increase to 63, and vice versa.

EXP and Levelling Up

EXP are gained via the following ways:

- Every person gains 1 EXP for turning up to the game.
- Each person who is instrumental to advancing the plot while remaining in character gains 1 EXP.
- The single person who rolled the highest under their Modified Skill Level gains 1 EXP.
- Whomever rolls exactly on their Modified Skill Level in a Skill Check gains 1 EXP to be used only in that Skill or Specialisation.
- Finishing an important quest line or a mission grants all those involved 1 EXP.
- Any amazing roleplay. This is up to the group and GM, but the roleplay needs to be a magnitude to be the stuff of legends. Then gain 1 EXP.
- The single person with the most ingenious and inventive use of a runic array in the session gains 1 EXP. This is decided by the GM with input from the group.

If you get all these EXP every session, it is possible to level up 1 Skill from the Base Level of 30 to Level 100 in only 10 sessions (assuming no Specialisations). It will take a long while to get all your Skills up to high levels, and this is meant for the longer campaigns you can play in.

Deciding which Skills to level up

Whichever Skill you want to level up with your newly acquired EXP is (almost) entirely up to you. You choose where you want to spend your EXP.

There is only one restriction: you can only choose a Skill to level up if you have rolled that Skill this last session. The Skills you have not rolled this session haven't been used by your character this session, and thus your character can't have gotten better at something they haven't been practicing. When it comes to Specialisations, you need to have rolled that specific Specialisation this session to be able to spend EXP in it, rolling its parent Skill doesn't count.

> History will not say which side is right, only which side remains.
>
> ~Arthur the Red of Ullacht

Levelling Time

EXP is only awarded after a session, so that is the only time when you can spend the EXP to level up your Skills. In between sessions you will have the time to decide which Skills to level up by taking into account which Skills you have rolled that session, which Skills you think you will need most next session, which Skills you think your character or the group needs most or even just what you think is the coolest Skill.

Because you can only choose a Skill to level up if you have rolled that Skill this last session, you cannot store EXP for a later date and time. Any EXP you gained from a sessions must be spent before the next session.

Trading EXP

In between sessions, as well as spending your EXP you can also trade 1 EXP between Skills. This is for those Skills that you have decided not to use as often but you don't want to waste the EXP you spent in them.

There are restrictions on this however. In between each session, you can only trade 1 EXP from 1 Skill to another. You also can't trade that 1 EXP from or to a Skill that you have just spent your fresh EXP on. If you want to trade EXP from or to a Specialisation, then you can still only trade 1 EXP. The doubling you get when levelling a Specialisation doesn't count when trading EXP.

Trading EXP is also restricted by which Skills you rolled in the latest session. You can only trade to a Skill that you have rolled in the latest session.

Skill Cap

By default all Skills are capped at Skill Level 100. This means that the maximum Skill Level a Skill can get to is Skill Level 100. Any EXP that is spent on a Skill after Skill Level 100 is wasted. This also includes Specialisations.

Depending on the difficulty and intensity of your campaign, you may wish to increase or decrease the Skill Cap for all Skills or only for some Skills. For example, if you are playing a grim and gritty series of adventures, you may decide that the Skill Cap should be reduced to 80, to keep anyone from becoming too amazing at any Skill.

If this is the case, simply make a note of the new Skill Caps and remember that they will act just as the default Skill Caps, meaning that any EXP spent in that Skill after it has reached the Skill Cap will be lost.

Perks & Quirks

Perks

When you get a Skill to Level 50 (and for every 10 Skill Levels above that), you can choose to get a Specialisation in that Skill. These Specialisations are tracked separately to the base Skills and, most importantly, they level up twice as quickly as their base Skills.

However, Specialisation aren't the only way you can customise your character and make them more powerful. You can always choose to get Perk.

Perks are permanent bonuses that your character gets that changes the way certain rules work, or adds extra rules to your character. For example: some Perks will let you use one Skill instead of another; some will change how you gain and use Sigils; and others can change the way you heal and inflict Wounds.

Whenever you have the option of gaining a Specialisation (Levels 50, 60, 70...) you can instead choose to gain a Perk. Most Perks will have a Skill as a prerequisite, and this means that you need to get that specific Skill up to a multiple of 10 in order to get that Perk.

Quirks

You aren't only limited to only getting either a Specialisation or a Perk when a Skill hits the right level. You can instead choose one of the following:

- Two Perks
- Two Specialisations
- One Perk and one Specialisations

If you choose one of these options, then you must also get a Quirk. A Quirk works much the same as a Perk, except that a Quirk is inherently harmful to your character.

On top of this, you also don't get to choose which Quirk you get. Your GM will either choose for your character, or he will roll randomly for it. You get more by having two Perks/Specialisations, but you will suffer for it.

Character Creation

You can start the game off with Perks and Quirks to get an edge on the game. To do this, simply roll on the table below to see how many Perks and Quirks you get.

When you start off the game with Perks and Quirks, you won't choose either the Perks or the Quirks. Instead, you can either roll for them, or have the GM choose them for you.

Also take note that you will start off with an equal number of Perks and Quirks. Nothing in life is free after all.

Starting Perks/Quirks	
01-30	No Perks/Quirks
31-55	1 Perk/Quirk
56-75	2 Perks/Quirks
76-90	3 Perks/Quirks
91-100	4 Perks/Quirks

List of Perks

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
1	Adonis	You can spend EXP to increase Physical Skill Levels even if you did not use that Skill this Session	Any Physical Skill
2	Aloof	Once per session, you can reduce the severity of any Social Wound you receive by one step (e.g.: from Grievous to Significant).	Will
3	Armoursmith	Armour you craft provides +10 armour than their toughness class normally does.	Broad-Craft, Fine-Craft
4	Back of Your Head	You do not suffer any negative modifiers from being flanked in melee combat.	Perception
5	Backstab	If a character is unaware of you, you can use your Stealth Skill instead of a Fight or Shoot Skill to attack them.	Stealth
6	Blessed by Bür	Spending a Sigil to grant a bonus to Skill Checks about runes and arrays gives a +50 bonus.	-
7	Bloodlust	During Combat, you can spend a Sigil to enter a state of bloodlust. In this state you must always attack the nearest enemy you see, but you gain a +25 to all attacks made and you don't suffer any penalties from Wounds. Your bloodlust ends when all enemies you can see are dead.	-
8	Body Linguist	You can use Investigate instead of Intuition when making Skill Checks to determine if someone is being deceptive.	Investigate
9	Brains	Increase each Non-Physical Skill Level by 1, but decrease each Physical Skill Level by 1 as well. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Any Physical Skill
10	Brawns	Increase each Physical Skill Level by 1, but decrease each Non-Physical Skill Level by 1 as well. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Any Non-Physical Skill
11	Budget	When you succeed on a Wealth Skill check, and roll within 10 points of your modified Skill Level, you can spend a Sigil instead of taking the -5 modifier to successive Wealth Skill Checks.	Wealth
12	Bullseye	When Aiming for a Shoot Skill Check, add your whole Shoot Skill Level as a bonus, instead of only half your Skill Level.	Shoot
13	Burn	If you successfully hit someone with a Social Skill Check in Social Combat, you can spend a Sigil to immediately roll another Social Skill Check against the same target (max 2 Social attacks per turn). Any modifiers from the first Check applies to this Check.	Diplomacy, Deceive, Intimidate
14	Catharsis	Each time you inflict a Physical Wound on another character, remove a Mental Wound if it is of equal severity, or reduce a Mental Wound's severity by one step if it is of a higher severity.	Will
15	Change Fate	You can spend a Sigil to add or remove 10 from the result of a Skill Check you rolled.	-
16	Chosen One	You can use Will instead of Luck when determining your Sigil Threshold.	Will
17	Concilliation	Remove a Quirk of your choice. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
18	Connected	Choose a single Merchant League Family. You gain a Contact (Influence and Aptitude both Level 50) within that family that can provide you with jobs and information (This Perk can be selected multiple times).	Diplomacy, Deceive, Intimidate

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
19	Counterattack	If you are hit in combat, you can spend a Sigil to immediately make a Combat Skill Check against that character.	Fight, Shoot
20	Critical Fortunes	Whenever you roll a Critical Success, you gain a Sigil.	-
21	Cunning Craftsman	You can use Fine-Craft instead of Burglary when making Skill Checks to pick locks.	Fine-Craft
22	Dark Side	Select a Quirk. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
23	Dead Drop	Once per session you can spend a Sigil and declare that you have a hidden dead drop nearby containing d10 items of your choice (GM's discretion if the item is reasonable).	Luck
24	Deluded Healing	You do not suffer the penalties from Physical Wounds if you have a Mental Wound of equal or greater severity. However, one Mental Wound can't negate more than one Physical Wound's penalty.	-
25	Dispensable	You can trade 2 EXP between sessions instead of just 1.	-
26	Doomed inspiration	Burn a Sigil to create the perfect array for the situation, and automatically and critically succeed on the subsequent Skill Check.	Luck
27	Double Criticals	Rolling a 1 also counts as a critical success for you.	-
28	Double Tap	If you successfully hit something with a Shoot Skill Check, you can spend a Sigil to immediately roll another Shoot Skill Check against the same target (max 2 attacks per turn). Any modifiers from the first Check applies to this Check.	Shoot, Perception
29	Dual Wielding	You do not suffer the negative modifier associated with using weapons in your Off Hand.	Fight
30	Due Diligence	You cannot get less than a +0 bonus Skill Checks determining the effectiveness of your runic arrays	Fine-Craft
31	Fateweaver	Spend a Sigil to add a minor detail to the current scene/encounter/GM's narration.	-
32	Fearsome Reputation	Choose either the Fight or Shoot Skill. You can use this Skill instead of Intimidate when threatening someone. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Fight, Shoot
33	Fencer	You no longer suffer the penalty associated with Aiming in melee combat.	Fight
34	Ferocity	If you successfully hit something with a Fight Skill Check, you can spend a Sigil to immediately roll another Fight Skill Check against the same target (max 2 attacks per turn). Any modifiers from the first Check applies to this Check.	Fight
35	First Strike	You can take a single turn out of Initiative order when combat begins, before anyone else has a turn.	Athletics
36	Flesh Wound	Once per session, you can reduce the severity of any Physical Wound you receive by one step (e.g.: from Grievous to Significant).	Constitution
37	Force of Will	You can choose to suffer a Significant Mental Wounds instead of spending a Sigil. If all your Significant Mental Wound Slots have been used up, you instead suffer a Grievous Mental Wound.	Will
38	Foresight	At the start of each session, roll 2 d100. Record the result of each roll. During that session, you can replace the result of any roll with one of these foreseen rolls. You can only use each foreseen roll once.	-

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
39	Gunfighter	You don't suffer negative modifiers to your Shoot Skill Checks for using ranged weapons in melee combat.	Shoot
40	Gunsmith	Ranged weapons you create deal +10 damage than their weight Class normally does.	Broad-Craft, Fine-Craft
41	Heavy Weapon Proficiency	The modifier for using Heavy Melee Weapons is only -10 for you, instead of -15.	Fight
42	In With a Grin	Choose a single Merchant League Family. Spending a Sigil in Social Skills Checks with NPCs related to this family does not reduce your number of Sigils. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Diplomacy, Deceive, Intimidate
43	Incredible Fortitude	You can spend a Sigil to automatically pass any Shock rolls.	Will
44	Innate Map	Spend a Sigil to automatically know the best route to the location you currently seek within the city of Middelburg.	-
45	Insanely Terrifying	Instead of taking penalties to Intimidate Skill Checks, Significant Mental Wounds give a +10 bonus, and Grievous Wounds a +15.	-
46	Intervention	Spend a Sigil instead of burning one to prevent losing a Contact through disloyalty.	-
47	Intuitive Understanding	You can use Intuition instead of Logic when making Skill Checks to understand the effects of a runic array.	Intuition
48	IOU	You can use Diplomacy instead of Wealth when making Skill Checks to purchase items, and (earnestly) promising to pay them back later.	Diplomacy
49	Iron Fists	Your unarmed attacks do +10 damage.	Fight
50	Iron Stomach	You do not get drunk, no matter how much you drink, and you can eat almost anything without ill effects.	Constitution
51	Jack of all Trades	Gain 5 EXP that you can spend on any Skill (but not Specialisation). (You can take this Perk muliple times)	-
52	Lecturer	Whenever you need to explain something to someone, you can use your Logic Skill instead of a Social Skill for the Skill Check.	Logic
53	Light Footed	You can use Athletics instead of Stealth when making Skill Checks to avoid having your movement being heard.	Athletics
54	Light Weapon Proficiency	Ignore the negative modifier associated with using Light Melee Weapons.	Fight
55	Looter	You can use Burglary instead of Investigation when making Skill Checks to loot or scavenge for items.	Burglary
56	Luck Reversal	After you have made a roll, you can spend a Sigil to reverse the numbers on the dice to create a new result for that Skill Check.	-
57	Lucky	When using a Sigil to reroll, you can choose to use either result.	-
58	Masochist	Each time you receive a Physical Wound, remove a Mental Wound if it is of equal severity, or reduce a Mental Wound's severity by one step if it is of a higher severity.	-

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
59	Master Debater	Increase the severity of all Social Wounds you inflict on other characters by one step.	Diplomacy, Deceive, Intimidate
60	Master Salesman	Sucessfull Social Skill Checks for Haggling results in a +40 bonus to the subsequent Wealth Skill Check.	Diplomacy, Deceive, Intimidate
61	Medium Weapon Proficiency	The modifier for using Medium Melee Weapons is only -5 for you, instead of -10.	Fight
62	Melee Weapon Master	Choose a Weight Class of Melee Weapons. You deal +10 extra damage when using that Weapon Class. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Fight
63	Mind Over Matter	Use your Will Skill Level instead of Constitution to determine the number of Wounds you have per Hit Location.	Will
64	Money Talks	You can use Wealth instead of Diplomacy when making Skill Checks to persuade a character.	Wealth
65	Navigator	You always know which way is north and your elevation above/below sea-level. You always know the time of day, and the date.	Investigate
66	Networking	You gain 10 Contact Points to create additional Contacts, following normal Contact Creation rules. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
67	Night Vision	You don't suffer negative modifiers for any Skill Checks made to see at night or in low light conditions. You still suffer negative modifiers in areas of deep darkness or pitch blackness.	Perception
68	No Limits	Select a Skill or Specialisation. The Level 100 Level Cap does not apply to that Skill or Specialisation. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
69	Only as Old as You Feel	Remove the penalties associated with your current age. If you age up to the next age bracket, you still gain those penalties. (You can take this Perk multiple times)	Age Over 40.
70	Packmule	You can use Constitution instead of Might when making Skill Checks to see how much weight you can carry and move around.	Constitution
71	Poker Face	You can use your Deceive Skill whenever the GM calls for you to roll a Diplomacy Skill Check.	Deceive
72	Prodigy	You can use Intuition instead of Logic when making Skill Checks to recall academic and scholastic knowledge and trivia.	Intuition
73	Psychopathy	For every Mental Wound you have, you gain a bonus to Combat Skill Checks. +5 for Minor, +10 for Significant, +15 for Grievous.	-
74	Ranged Weapon Master	Choose a Weight Class of Ranged Weapons. You deal +10 extra damage when using that Weapon Class. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	Shoot
75	Reckless Luck	You can burn a Sigil to automatically get a critical success on any Skill Check. You can activate this Perk even after you rolled the Skill Check.	-
76	Reincarnated	When rolling to see if you've discovered a new rune, add +5 to the roll. (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
77	Researcher	If you don't have knowledge of a topic, you can spend a Sigil to know where to find information about that topic.	Logic, Intuition

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
78	Runology	You can use Logic instead of Fine-Craft when making Skill Checks for the accuracy in the drawing of your runic arrays.	Logic
79	Sage	You can spend EXP to increase Non-Physical Skill Levels even if you did not use that Skill this Session	Any Non-Physical Skill
80	Second Chance	Burn this Perk instead of a Sigil to save yourself from dying. (You can take this Perk multiple times)	-
81	Sex Appeal	For Social Skill Checks made against characters of the opposite sex, you get one free reroll per Skill Check.	Diplomacy, Deceive
82	Sharpshooter	Extend the range band of any Ranged Weapon you are using by 1 band.	Shoot
83	Shepherd	If you've used a Contact this session, you can spend EXP to increase either the Contact's Influence or Aptitude.	Diplomacy, Intimidate, Deceive
84	Sigil Donor	Other players can use your Sigils (with your permission) to reroll, or gain a +25 modifier to their Skill Checks. They cannot burn your Sigils.	-
85	Soft Armour Proficiency	Ignore the negative modifier associated with wearing Soft Armour.	Might
86	Specialist	Permanently gain 5 Levels in your highest Skill (if you have more than one Skill tied for highest, you can choose which one is affected). (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-
87	Speed Burst	You can use Might instead of Athletics when making Skill Checks to sprint across short distances.	Might
88	Spite	Once per session, you can spend a Sigil to force any other character (PC or NPC) to reroll a Skill Check.	-
89	Stagger	Whenever you successfully hit a character with a melee attack, you can spend a Sigil to make them lose their next turn.	Fight
90	Stoicism	Once per session, you can reduce the severity of any Mental Wound you receive by one step (e.g.: from Grievous to Significant).	-
91	Strong Armour Proficiency	The modifier for wearing Sturdy Armour is only -10 for you, instead of -15.	Might
92	Sturdy Armour Proficiency	The modifier for wearing Sturdy Armour is only -5 for you, instead of -10.	Might
93	Supportive Sidekicks	You gain +10 to all Social Skill Checks for each supportive ally within Close Range.	-
94	Tactician	At the start of each combat round, you can spend a Sigil to decide which NPCs will fill the GM Turn Slots for that round.	Logic, Intuition
95	Taunt	Choose a number of characters within Near Range up to the first digit of your Intimidate Skill Level. Make an Opposed Skill Check between your Intimidate Skill and their Will Skill. If they fail, they must target you during their next turn.	Intimidate

#	Name	Effect	Prerequisite
96	Utility belt	Spend a sigil to declare you have a hitherto unknown "mundane" (in all senses of the word) item on your person that is no larger than what can be held in one hand.	-
97	Vengeful	Gain a +20 modifier to your Shoot or Fight Skill Checks any character that has given you a Physical Wound (severity of Significant or greater).	-
98	Wary	When determining Initiative, you can add a bonus 20 to whichever Skill's Level is being used for Initiative.	-
99	Weaponsmith	Melee weapons you create deal +10 damage than their weight Class normally does.	Broad-Craft, Fine-Craft
100	Well Rounded	Permanently gain 5 Levels in your lowest Skill (if you have more than one Skill tied for lowest, you can choose which one is affecfed). (This Perk can be selected multiple times)	-

List of Quirks

#	Name	Effect
1	Addiction	You must sate your addiction at least once per session (but can be more frequent depending on your GM) or you must succeed on a Will Skill Check. Failure means gaining a Mental Wound equal to the number by which you failed.
2	Antisocial	You have 0 Contacts. If you had any Contacts prior to getting this Quirk, you lose them. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
3	Atrophy	Decrease every Physical Skill Level by 1. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
4	Bane of Athletics	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Athletics Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
5	Bane of Broad-Craft	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Broad-Craft Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
6	Bane of Burglary	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Burglary Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
7	Bane of Constitution	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Constitution Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
8	Bane of Deceive	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Deceive Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
9	Bane of Diplomacy	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Diplomacy Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
10	Bane of Drive	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Drive Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
11	Bane of Fight	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Fight Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
12	Bane of Fine-Craft	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Fine-Craft Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
13	Bane of Intimidate	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Intimidate Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
14	Bane of Intuition	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Intuition Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
15	Bane of Investigate	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Investigate Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
16	Bane of Logic	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Logic Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)

#	Name	Effect
17	Bane of Luck	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Luck Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
18	Bane of Might	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Might Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
19	Bane of Perception	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Perception Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
20	Bane of Shoot	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Shoot Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
21	Bane of Stealth	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Stealth Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
22	Bane of Wealth	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Wealth Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
23	Bane of Will	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your Will Skill. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
24	Bigotry	Choose a culture. You cannot have Contacts of that Culture. You lose any Contacts you currently have that are of that culture. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
25	Blackmailed	Someone has information on you that you don't want released. Choose a Social Skill to be permanently attached to this blackmail. At the start of the session spend a Sigil or roll the Social Skill Check. If you fail, the blackmailer will find you in the session with a task in hand.
26	Butter Fingers	Increase the negative modifiers for the weight classes of melee weapons by 10.
27	Chains of Fate	Reduce the Level Cap of one Skill or Specialisation by 10 Levels. A Skill or Specialisation's Level Cap cannot be reduced below its current Skill Level. The GM selects the Skill or Specialisation. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
28	Charity	At the end of each session, permanently reduce your Wealth Skill Level by 1, and permanently increase the Wealth Skill Level of another party member by 1.
29	Chink in the Armour	Any armour you craft has 5 less armour than its normal weight class.
30	Conscience	Reduce the amount of EXP you receive at the end of each session by the number of Physical, Mental and Social Wounds you inflicted onto other characters in that session (down to a minimum of 0).
31	Country Folk	You cannot have Middelburgundian Contacts. You lose any Contacts you currently have that are Middelburgundian.
32	Cracked Crafting	Any weapon you craft does 5 damage less than its normal weight class.
33	Craven	You automatically fail Combat Skill Checks as well as Will Skill Checks to resist fear unless you spend a Sigil. If you spend a Sigil, you can roll the Skill Check as normal.
34	Crippled	You gain a permanent Grievous Physical Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
35	Death Wish	To save yourself from dying, you need to burn 2 Sigils instead of just 1.
36	Delicate	Increase the severity of all Physical Wounds you receive by one step.
37	Dependent	Gain a Minor Mental Wound for each encounter/scene that you do not spend in the company of another party member.
38	Disturbed	You gain a permanent Significant Mental Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
39	DNR	You cannot burn Sigils to save yourself from dying.
40	Doomed	You cannot use any Sigils for any reason whatsoever.

#	Name	Effect
41	Envy	If you don't have the most Perks and Specialisations amongst the party members, take a number of permanent Minor Mental Wounds for the difference in number between yours and the rest of the party's Perks and Specialisations.
42	Fade Away	Decrease every Non-Physical Skill Level by 1. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
43	Fatal Flaw	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your lowest Skill (if you have more than one Skill tied for lowest, you can choose which one is affecfed). (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
44	Fragile Ego	Increase the severity of all Mental Wounds you receive by one step.
45	Greed	If you rolled a Wealth Skill in a session, you must spend at least 1 EXP in Wealth at the end of that session. In addition, you cannot trade EXP from the Wealth Skill.
46	Hard luck	Spending a Sigil costs 2 Sigils each time instead of 1.
47	Hidden Treachery	Each time a party member gains a Physical Wound, you heal a Mental Wound of equal or lesser severity. If you have no Mental Wounds, you gain a Sigil instead.
48	Hypochondriac	You automatically fail any Shock rolls.
49	Impaired	You gain a permanent Significant Physical Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
50	Incitation	Remove a Perk of your GM's choice. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
51	Initiative Gamble	When determining Initiative, roll a d100 and use the result as your Initiative, instead of using a Skill's Level.
52	Insanity	You've snapped, suddenly and without warning. Gain a Mental Location Destroyed Wound.
53	Insecure	Increase the severity of all Social Wounds you receive by one step.
54	Introvert	You cannot spend Sigils to reroll or get bonuses to Social Skill Checks.
55	League's Spite	Through some nefarious methods, the Merchant League has managed to acquire all your money. Reduce your Wealth Skill to 1. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
56	Leftovers	You only gain Sigils in game when other players refuse GM interactions. The Sigils they don't get, come to you freely.
57	Local Menace	Your GM chooses a district of Middelburg. You've been declared a public menace here by the Alderman and will be arrested if discovered.
58	Locked In	You cannot trade EXP in between sessions.
59	Miserly	Halve any bonuses, and double all penalties, to your Wealth Skill Checks.
60	Nemesis	Somewhere in your past you have greatly wronged someone (justly or unjustly, on purpose or by accident), and they have sworn eternal vegeance against you. At the start of each session, spend a Sigil or roll your highest Social Skill Check. If you fail, your Nemesis will find you somewhere this session.
61	Oblivious	When determining Initiative, you get a -20 modifier to whichever Skill's Level is being used for Initiative.
62	Outcast	You gain a permanent Significant Social Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
63	Outsider	Your GM chooses a district of Middelburg. You've done something here that has made you persona non grata. You suffer -20 to all Social Skill Checks while in the district.
64	Over-Reaction	If you are hit and Wounded by an attack, forfeit your next turn.
65	Painfully Ugly	You automatically fail any Diplomacy Skill Checks made against characters that can see you, unless you spend a Sigil. If you spend a Sigil, you can roll the Skill Check as normal.

#	Name	Effect
66	Paranoia	Every Intuition Skill Check made to determine if someone is telling the truth results in you thinking that they are lying, unless you spend a Sigil. If you spend a Sigil, you can roll the Skill Check as normal.
67	Pariah	You gain a permanent Grievous Social Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
68	Permanent Bruises	Physical Wounds take twice as long to heal and refresh.
69	Pride	If your highest Skill or Specialisation's Level is not the highest amongst all the party members, you take a Mental Wound equal to the difference between it and the highest Skill or Specailisation in the party.
70	Psychopathy	You automatically fail Intuition Skill Checks to sense emotions, or in regards to other displays of empathy, unless you spend a Sigil. If you spend a Sigil, you can roll the Skill Check as normal.
71	Ravages of Time	Double the penalties associated with your current age. If you age up to the next age bracket, you gain the normal penalties assoicated with the bracket. If you are under 40, gain the penalties of a 40 year old. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
72	Respite	Select a Perk. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
73	Restraining Training	Reduce the amount of EXP you receive at the end of each session by the number of Sigils you spent/burnt in that session (down to a minimum of 0).
74	Rune Bane	For any Skill Check involving yourself and a runic array, if the result is doubles then the runic array explodes. Eeryone within Close Range takes damage equal to the roll, and everyone within Near Range takes damage equal to half the roll.
75	Runic Dependency	For each encounter or scene in which you are not creating, touching, or being in the effect of runic array, you gain a Significant Mental Wound.
76	Runic Illiteracy	You cannot spend Sigils for Skill Checks involving the effectiveness of your runic arrays.
77	Runic Luddite	Reduce the amount of EXP you gain at the end of the session by the number of runic arrays you used or created (down to a minimum of 0).
78	Runic Trauma	Creating, touching, or being in the effect of a runic array gives you a Significant Mental Wound.
79	Shame	Social Wounds take twice as long to heal and refresh.
80	Sheltered mind	Suffer a -10 Penalty to Logic and Intuition for each character within Near Range that is aware of you.
81	Short-sighted	On top of any other modifier, you gain a -10 modifier to any Perception Skill Check for every range band the target you are trying to perceive is away from you, if you aren't wearing correctional lenses or its equivalent.
82	Sigil Roulette	At the start of each session, roll a d100. On a result of 17 or less, you begin the session with 0 Sigils.
83	Sloth	You cannot spend Sigils to reroll or get bonuses to Physical Skill Checks.
84	Slow	You cannot spend Sigils to reroll or get bonuses to Mental Skill Checks.
85	Spent Effort	Spending a Sigil to gain a bonus on a Skill Check only gives a +15 instead of a +25.
86	Square Peg	Always round up your the result of your Skill Checks to the nearest multiple of 10.

#	Name	Effect
87	Squeamish	For every Physical Wound you inflict on another character, you gain a Mental Wound of equal severity.
88	Strictly Business	Your Contacts' Influence rating cannot be increased higher than Level 20. If you have any Contacts with Influence rating higher than Level 20, decrease them to Level 20.
89	Stubborn	Mental Wounds take twice as long to heal and refresh.
90	Tall Poppy	Permanently lose 5 Levels in your highest Skill (if you have more than one Skill tied for highest, you can choose which one is affected). (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
91	The Debt Collector	You owe someone a lot of money from a long time ago, and they've tracked you down. At the beginning of each session, spend a Sigil or roll a Wealth Skill Check. If you succeed, someone is coming to take some of your money, or make you pay it off with a job.
92	The Watchers	Someone is always watching you. Always. No matter where you go, what you do, or how well you hide, there is always someone there watching you. You can never escape them.
93	Tunnel Vision	After each session, choose one Skill/Specialisation that you rolled in that session. You can only spend EXP in that Skill/Specialisation.
94	Turnabout	Swap the Skill Levels of your Highest and Lowest Skills. If you have more than one Highest and/or Lowest, your GM chooses which Skill(s) to swap.
95	Uncomfortable	Increase the negative modifiers for the weight classes of armour by 5.
96	Unhinged	You gain a permanent Grievous Mental Wound. (This Quirk can be selected multiple times)
97	Unlucky	When spending a Sigil to reroll a Skill check, you must use the worst result of the two rolls.
98	Unwise Spending	When you roll within 10 points of your modified Skill Level on a Wealth Skill Check, double the penalties you receive.
99	Wanted	There's a bounty on your head. At the beginning of each session, spend a Sigil or roll a Stealth Skill Check. If you fail, someone is coming to collect on that bounty.
100	Wrath	When in combat, you must spend a Sigil each turn unless you are moving into Close Range with an opponent, or are attacking.

GM SECTION

GM Advice

The GM's role

Always remember the cardinal rule of roleplaying games: you are all here to have fun. It is just a game. It is your job as the GM to ensure this happens. If the group is not having fun, then you are all wasting your time. Sometimes it's an uphill battle and sometimes you just have to end the game early or cancel a game altogether, but as any experienced gamer will tell you: no game is better than a bad game.

Don't let this power and responsibility get to your head though, you aren't the king or tyrant. Think of yourself as a movie, or stage, director. You are there to guide the game and the players so that by the end of the day everyone, including you, walks away feeling like they did in fact just watch a fantastic movie.

Apart from the "fun" aspect and managing your players, it will also be your responsibility to manage the entire world and the adventure and campaign. This at first will sound like a monumental task, but it is at times even easier than just managing one character. All the NPCs you will control will only come into the players' lives for a moment, so at the end of the day all those NPCs' fifteen minutes of fame will add up to one full fledged character.

Know yourself and your players

Sun Tzu, in his Art of War, wrote: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." Now, you should never see your players as the enemy, but the principle remains. If you know your own capabilities, imagination and limitations, and you know your players' capabilities, imaginations and limitations then you shouldn't worry about how your game will go.

Know yourself

Before you go any further, ask yourself why you want to be the GM for this game. A lot of times the answer will be "because no one else in my group wants to" and that's par of the course. Every GM has been there. But you stepped up to the plate and it is an important question.

However, if your first answer is "because I want to tell a story" then I have some bad news for you, GMing might not be for you. A roleplaying game is a collaborative story telling experience. If you are telling your own story and using your players as props, then it isn't fair on them. A better way to put it would be to have an "idea" for a story, a premise rather than a novel. Let the players and their PCs create the story from the premise you have given them and the obstacles and twists you put in.

Once you've figured out why you want to be to run a game, then you have to ask what sort of game do you want to run, and what are you good at? We aren't all the best at everything, otherwise the Olympics would really be a boring affair, so you need to think about what you can and can't do. Are you better at describing the detail of a scene? Try a game of mystery and crime solving. Are you better at acting our different personalities? Try a game of social intrigue and politics. Are you better at fast paced, off the cuff storytelling? Try an action based, combat heavy game. Playing to your strengths will results in a better, stronger, more enjoyable game than trying to do something you aren't confident in handling.

Know your players

When you have figured out why you are here and what you can do, it's time to go talk to your players. The story in large part will be driven by the actions, and reactions, of the players. If they don't pick up on your clues and hints on where to go, the story stalls. If they don't want to chase after the villain, the story stalls. If they want to set up a lemonade stand instead of the skullduggery you had planned, the story becomes a stall.

What your players want to play is what you will have to provide them, so the first thing you should do is sit down and have a nice chat about what sort of story and game they want. This can easily be your first session as you go through the Character Generator and have a quick go over of the rules. This is even more important if there are new players to the group or the group have not played together before. Before any gameplay happens, find out what they are looking for. Do they want a social/political game, a combat heavy game, a slow paced mystery game or a fast paced, high octane game or any other sort of game?

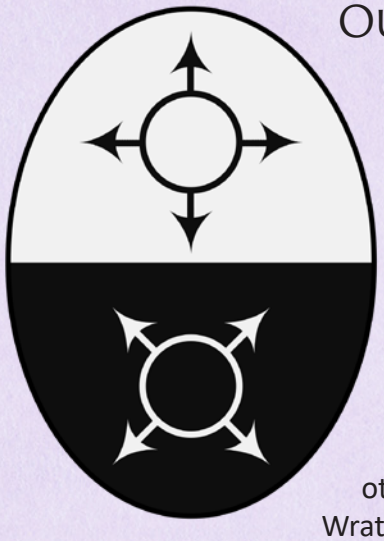
Sometimes the players themselves may not know what sort of game they want, especially if they are new to tabletop RPGs. If they aren't sure, ask them what sort of other media they enjoy. What sort of videogames they like to play, what genre of books and movies they like to watch. This will give you an idea of what sort of game to prepare for them. This will always involve some form of compromise. The players may not all agree on one type of game, or what the players want may not be what you want. So talk it through and come up with a game that everyone can enjoy.

This does not mean to always stick to exactly what the players want. Perhaps they have not experienced every sort of game and you can pleasantly surprise them. However, if you do go beyond what the players ask for, always have a plan to get back on track should you see the players not taking a liking to what you are offering.

> Morality defines humanity. It gave us tribalism, genocide, war, and the worst of the lot: politics. But it also gave us heroism, altruism, and the saints that watch over us.
>
> ~Jon Davidson, Worgian scholar

The last thing to remember about players is that each of them requires a unique approach. Even if they all agreed on a type of game to play, there will still be variations in what they like. Some will like interacting with the NPCs, some will like getting down and dirty with combat while others will like hunting for clues. So no matter what sort of game you end up playing, remember to throw each of your players a bone so they feel like they are playing an important role in the story.

Our Heavenly Origin



Progenitorism is the religion of the east. Just as Neoism is the heart of the west, Progenitorism is the heart of the eastern coast of Jytoh. As humanity migrated ever eastward all those thousands of years ago, they found that they weren't the first humans there and the migrants' cultures evolved as they assimilated the native cultures. Neoism too evolved, taking from the pagans what it could until its one god became two: the Heavenly Mother and Father.

The most important parts of Progenitorism are the eight Heavenly Virtues and eight Hellish Sins. Both Sins and Virtues are equally spread between the Mother and the Father; they are each other's opposites. As the clerics say; the Father is Obstinate, Avaricious, Wrathful, and Proud, but he is also Chaste, Temperate, Diligent, and Kind; and the Mother is Envious, Lustful, Gluttonous and Slothful, yet she is also Open Minded, Generous, Patient and Humble. These traits have become almost synonymous with masculinity and femininity, prompting Progenitorists of either sex to live up to their respective virtues and avoid their sins.

The other cornerstone of Progenitorism is forming relationships. The Heavenly Mother and Father each only represent four of the Hellish Sins and Virtues, because only by coming together to form a whole entity. So must it be for humans. It is the relationships we form that are important. Whether it be of family, or love or community, relationships are paramount. The Heavenly Virtues are those that help relationships, that help the community, while the Hellish Sins are those that harm relationships and the community. As progenitorists say: "I belong, therefore I am."

House Rules

Morality

So now you and your players have discussed everything you want in the game. Now it's time to discuss what you and the group don't want in the game.

The Runed Age, particularly the city of Middelburg, as indeed even the real world aren't always the nicest of places. Have a look at current world news, read up on those history books, folks, it isn't always sunshine and lollipops.

Racism, sexism, religious persecution, slavery, corruption, extortion, rampant crime, and of course gratuitous violence are present in Middelburg to varying degrees and it is best to come to terms with that before any game starts. Any and all of these may be too much for your players to handle. Before starting a game, ask any players if anything should be declared off-limits.

Remember to be reasonable about this sort of thing. What is offensive to one person may not be offensive to others. If one player declares something to be off-limits that other players find acceptable, or may even want (after all, who doesn't like a bit of blood and guts on occasion?) within the game's universe then it may be best if that player does not continue with this group. Remember it is about fun, if one person makes it not fun for the rest of the group then the whole experience is ruined. As the GM, you should make decisions like these on a case by case basis, be reasonable, and do so in the best interest of the whole group.

Table rules

Next on the list are tables rules, known a generation ago as manners and two generations ago as common

sense. This is just figuring out when is the best time to order or make food, coasters or no coasters, that sort of thing. Before your first game sort all of these niggling things out so they don't mar and slow down your games. Figure out how long to spend before starting the game chatting and hanging out so there aren't constant interruptions every five minutes so that one player can talk about the latest cat video they saw on the internet (This will become a dated reference fairly quickly). Also figure out how much out-of-character talk there should be at a table or if it should be scheduled and what to do when one player interrupts another.

This may all seem like a lot of rules and regulations for playing a simple game of pretend, but once you figure it all out it becomes those unwritten rules that make life easier. After all, you wouldn't appreciate it if you are watching a movie and someone starts listening to pop music at full blast next to you, or constantly talks and distracts you from the movie. This is much the same thing, when you are playing with the Runed Age you are watching that engrossing movie and you want to stay engrossed.

The Game

So you have figured out what sort of game you want to run, you have figured out what sort of game your players want and you've sorted out all the nitty-gritty things playing in a group requires. All that remains now is to prepare that game. Don't worry too much, with the Runed Age this won't be a hassle for you.

Preparations

Once everything have been discussed and talked over, your biggest role now will be to design the game. Whether you use the Adventure Generator at the end of the section or design your game from scratch, there are a few aspects which you will need to bear in mind. Whether you are designing a stand alone adventure or a campaign, these aspects will remain largely the same.

The Who:

You have to think about who the PCs will be working for, who they will be working against, and who the third party involved will be.

Will the PCs be working for someone else, even temporarily, or will they be doing their own thing? If they will be working for someone else, you will need to create a reason why this person, group, organisation or entity would employ the PCs. It does not always have to be the most complex and convoluted of reasons, but it needs to be a reason for the PCs to fall back on and to keep them in line. The PCs should know that there are consequences to their actions should they cause trouble for their employer but also know that their employer needs them and will protect them.

If the PCs are working alone, then there is less for you to worry about. However, they will need to know there is now no man upstairs to protect them should they find themselves hip deep in the proverbial.

The PCs will always be working against someone in some fashion. The opposition does not always have to be a villain but could be just the enemies, scoundrels, bandits they face. They will however need to be more than a cardboard cutout. The PCs' employers, or the players if the PCs work alone, will come up with the reasons why the PCs are working against the opposition, but you will also have to determine how the opposition responds to this.

No story is as exciting as when a third party is thrown into the mix to complicate the lives of the PCs. If you do want to use a third party, you will have to spend some time fleshing them out so they become rounded characters rather than one dimensional cartoon villains.

The What:

The meat of the game. This is the story as such, the bait, the hook to get the players moving. How much you plan will depend entirely on how much influence the players want in the

story. On one side there are groups who want to be in total control of what they do, and the GM then reacts to how they play, also known as the "sandbox" style. On the other hand are players who prefer the "quest" style of gaming: getting a quest/job/mission from an NPC, completing it and then going onto the next one (the Adventure Generator at the back of the section is geared towards this).

Whichever style your group chooses, you will have to at least plan what the world will throw at the characters, what obstacles the characters will need to overcome. If it is a quest the characters will be doing then you need plan all the important steps along the way that they may come across. They may not get to all of them, but it is better to be over prepared than under prepared. If it is a more sandbox style of game, you will need to prepare the eventualities. Since it is completely up to the players to decide what they do, you can't prepare everything, so you will need to be flexible and prepare a little bit here and a little bit there. For sandbox style games it is much better to prepare events that you can fit into any scenario in any place than fixed scenes in an adventure. The ring they can steal does not have to be in the tallest tower of the king's castle but could be in any chest they find along their travels. The merchant they need to meet does not have to be in any specific town but could always be in the next town they visit.

To help you with getting together the "what" of a specific quest or storyline, you can use the 4-Scene approach.

The 4-Scene Story:

At the most basic, a RPG storyline comes in four parts, or four scenes if you think of it like a movie. If you are planning a quest, a side-quest or just a random encounter for the players on their adventures, you can easily do so by using the four scenes.

The first scene is the Brief Scene. Here is where the players get the plot-hook, the job, the quest. It can take place in a bureaucrat's office with an official stamp or it could be as simple as a thief bumping into the character and they see him disappear around a corner. The important role of the Brief Scene is that the players get an objective, a goal, a mission that they can work towards or against. In many instances, this is the most important scene as this will give the players the motivation for the storyline.

Next up is the Legwork Scene. The characters now know what they have to do, now they just need to figure out how to do it. This is where buying needed equipment, scouting and investigating, and looking up their contacts to find out information happens. Everything that needs doing before they get onto the task at hand is done here. As such, this scene is most often a very informal event (if an "event" at all), there is no one person deciding it is time for legwork, it is something that is just done. Therefore, the Legwork Scene is mostly handled by the players themselves as they decide what they need to do to prepare for the next scene.

When the characters are ready, it's the Mission Scene. This is fairly straightforward, this where the action takes place. The characters now know what to do, they have prepared for it, and so they do it. Most of what you have planned will take place here. Whatever the mission or story may be, here is where it will happen. The Mission Scene will be the climax to the storyline. A lot of times, the characters may do a bit of the mission, do some legwork, do more of the mission, some more legwork, etc, so that the legwork and mission scenes start to blend together.

Lastly, of course, comes the Debrief Scene. Much like the first scene, this doesn't have to be an official declaration that the mission is over. It is just that time when the characters have finished for the day and can catch their breath, have a pint and sleep it off. The important aspect of the Debrief Scene is that the players know that this storyline or quest is now over. The overall story or campaign (if this storyline was merely one small part) may still be ongoing, but they know this stage is over.

If you want to put in some twists or complications, you can add them into any scene or even create a scene just for them. In most cases, the twist will happen after the climax just when the players start to get comfortable and believe the worst is behind them, so the easiest place to put the twist in is during just after the Mission scene.

Following this simple template, you should be able to create almost any story you can think of for your group to enjoy.

The Why:

This is perhaps the most important aspect you will need to plan. There needs to be a motivation for the game, doesn't matter whether it is sandbox or a quest. You will already have created the motivations for any potential employers and opposition, and the players will create their characters' motivations, so this is not what is meant here.

The entire game needs motivation. There needs to be a drive for the players to succeed, a sense of importance. Whether the characters are all great princes or the poorest thieves, the game needs to feel important so that there is all the more reason to succeed and all the more emotion should they fail. It is this drive and motivation which creates the gripping tension we all enjoy from watching and reading thrilling movies and books.

> The truest test of a man's character is how he handles power.
>
> ~Chancellor Athaulf Linn of Gaeland

To put it another way, you need to make your players care about the game. If they don't care about the outcome, they get bored, and boredom is the death of fun.

If you can provide this drive, you will engross your players into the game and they will become so immersed in the story that any small mistake you do make will be overlooked. In short: provide a great motivation and your game will be as safe as houses.

Running the Game

The group has been assembled. The characters have been made. House rules have been sorted out. The game has been prepared. All that is left to do now is kick back and enjoy the game... if you weren't the GM. While you can start relaxing now that the hard work is done, it's not all over yet.

When running the game, your main concern is to make sure it goes smoothly. The better your group plays together, the easier it will go for you. If they enjoy each other's company and work well as a team together with little bickering, half the job has already been done for you. Then you just have to worry about the game and not the players as well.

Clear communication

Like the old expression says: never assume. Unfortunately, no player seems to have ever heard this. It is unfortunately something that can't be helped with a medium such as a tabletop RPG.

Unless you explain everything to the smallest detail, your players' imaginations will fill in the rest. You mention a guard armed with a pistol and sword approaches, but what colour are his boots? Does he have facial hair? What colour are his eyes? Are his socks matching? All of these things are irrelevant to the scene at hand, but something the players' imagination will fill in. Most of the time, this is a very good thing as it means you don't actually have to take half an hour to describe every NPC your players meet.

Unfortunately, there are some times when this doesn't go according the plan. You mention that a man with a "gun" approaches the PCs from afar. The group may assume this to be a pistol, but you meant a rifle and now a PC is dead because they expected the NPC to have to come much closer before getting off a shot.

Communicating the important details is crucial. What the colour of his underwear is

doesn't matter. What he had for breakfast doesn't matter. What can impact the players, especially if it can be bad for them, needs to be clearly communicated. If you are ever unsure about what information to give the players ask yourself if the PCs could be seriously harmed if you didn't give them this information. This doesn't mean you need to spill all your secrets and twists for the game, just tell them the obvious things that their characters should know in any given situation.

Also, remember that the Perception and Investigation Skills do exist for a reason. If you are unsure how much you should tell the players, let them roll a Perception or Investigation Skill Check and then you can decide how many of the important details they noticed.

Information management

One quick way of losing momentum in a game is forgetting what comes next and having to go through all your notes to try and find that one specific piece of information. While a player only really needs to keep track of one character sheet, a GM needs to keep track of the entire world. While it may be a hassle, knowing where all of your information is will make the game easier for you in the long run. It is for this exact reason that there are Cheat Sheets at the back of this book that contains all the modifier tables so you can easily refer to them, or even print them out to make it even easier.

For all your other notes, it is best to categorise them (and remember what the categories are). For example, all the notes with the NPCs you may be using will be in a pile to your right, all the notes with the events that could happen in a pile to your left and of course this book close at hand in case you need to look up a detail or two. If you are using a laptop or tablet or the like, this will be even easier for you. You don't have to go overboard and bring a filing cabinet along with you, just be sure to know what is going on with your notes so it doesn't bring the game to a halt.

Combat and Damage

Narrative Damage

The Runed Age is a lethal system and every NPC the players meet could be quite dangerous. The PCs will suffer damage, a lot of it if they are unlucky, and some of them may even die. How that will happen is entirely up to you as the GM.

Damage will fall under two categories: Combat and Non-Combat Damage. Combat Damage is the easiest one to deal with as it will be the dice rolls that do most of the work. Non-Combat damage on the other hand will rest entirely on your shoulders.

Combat Damage

The Wound Severity and Hit Locations tables will, clearly, tell you where on the PCs body they were wounded and how severe the wound is. However, these tables will not tell you what sort of wound it was. Whether it was a scratch or a cut, a bullet wound or a broken rib, the description of any wounds the PCs receive is up to you. Take into account the context that the wound is received in, what the environment is like, what weapons are used, what armour (if any) is worn, and any other factors that could have an impact on the wound.

There are some vague guidelines such as swords cuts and maces bash, but with all the thousands of different weapon types in history and even more in fictional universes, it will be up to you to describe the type of wounds the PCs and NPCs receive.

Always keep in mind the severity of the wound: A Minor Wound is something small and insignificant that will take care of itself within a matter of minutes; a Significant Wound is exactly that. It is painful, distracting, and weakening, and it requires medical attention; and a Grievous Wound is something you may never recover from. It is truly something to grieve.

The varied and myriad effects from the runes and runic arrays will always be a wild card when it comes to wounds. Because the players will be able to create nearly any effect with their knowledge of the runes and arrays that you can imagine, the wounds that they create will similarly be as varied. The power of the runic arrays can do anything to a human from turning flesh to stone to disintegrating flesh all together, from pumping arsenic into the blood to turning the blood inside the body to fire. Very nasty stuff and at first it does look like it will all be lethal, but there are only three levels of Wounds that can be dealt and if the dice rolls say Minor Wound then Minor Wound it will be. You will have to work out why the full impact of the effects of a runic array did not kill the NPC or PC, perhaps by the weapon only grazing the body.

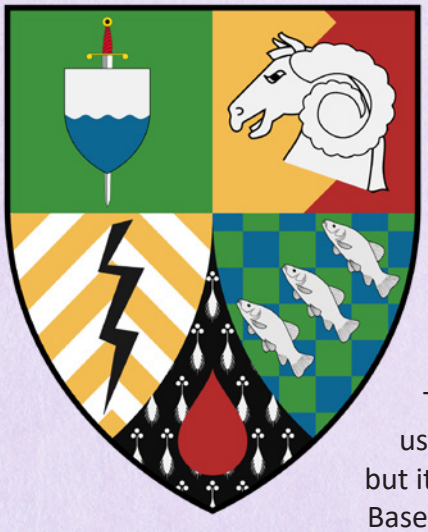
Non-Combat Damage

There are many more ways to get injured and die out of combat than there are in combat, and they aren't normally as quick and clean. Drowning, suffocating, poisoning, burning alive, falling off a tower, and so much more. The issue with all of these is that there are no easy Wound Severity and Hit Locations tables to tell you how bad the damage would be and where it will be.

Most of these can be handled through roleplay and your judgement. For example, falling off a ten story building with nothing below but pavement will kill you, no questions asked. So would a block of concrete around your feet and a lake. A lot of Non-Combat wounds will have to be dealt out to NPCs and PCs in a way that best fits the narrative. Use your judgement on this carefully as it may seem to the players to be arbitrary.

If you are ever in doubt about how severe a wound has to be or where it should be located. Simply roll on the Wound Severity and Hit Locations tables. You can roll on the Hit Locations table as if it was a normal d100 roll and then just use the location you rolled, however the Wound Severity is a little more tricky.

In nearly all circumstances there will be a Skill Check associated with whatever danger the



The Alfresian Guild of Gentlemanly Explorers

A club that began, as so many do, in a public house over a pint of local ale. While it may have began as a humorous affair, the Explorers Guild has become the foremost expert organisation when it comes to cartography and archeology. Their heraldry proudly shows all five continents to show how far they can and have explored. Governments and private organisations such as the Merchant League often hire the guild when they need new areas charted or ancient artifacts uncovered. The guild grants honorary membership to scholars in return for useful research. The honorary membership may not sound like much, but it comes with a tidy annual salary.

Based in the very public house where it was founded, the Guild operates in a very loose fashion. The true guild members are the administration staff and scholars who compile and research. The men and women who do the exploring can be anyone at all. Everything the guild needs done is posted on the large notice board next to the bar. These offers are taken and if completed, will net the taker a small fortune. This form of operating has allowed the guild to complete its tasks as quickly as could be imagined without any risk to the guild members. After all, who wouldn't want to be paid their weight in orichalcum just to bring back some old crockery.

PC is in such as an Athletics Skill Check to run out of a burning building or at the very least a Constitution Skill Check to see what is harder, flesh and bone or gravity and pavement. Allow the player to roll the Skill Check and roll a d100 yourself. Treat this like an Opposed Check and treat the Skill Level you have to beat as Level 100. By however much you win the Opposed Skill Check, that is the severity of the wound inflicted. By doing this, you allow the player to succeed without taking damage (difficult but possible) and you grant some randomness to the result.

Remember also that Non-Combat damage in most cases will involve situations that would realistically affect more than one body part. Falling off a building does not just injure your left arm, it will cost you a lot more than that. Don't be discouraged then from giving wounds to PCs on more than one Hit Location if you feel the narrative needs it. Similarly, certain Non-Combat damage wouldn't feel realistically correct being on certain Hit Locations. Thirst and starvation for instance does not really affect your legs (it does, but through a roundabout way of affecting your stamina and balance and your brains). For cases likes this and for things like poison or illness, it is best (generally speaking) to damage the torso or brain as any penalties gained from Wounds will then affect any movement the PC makes.

Mental Damage

They say that insanity is much like gravity, all it requires to tumble down that slippery slope is a little push.

Mental damage and insanity may be the most controversial and complicated aspect of the Runed Age that you may have to implement in your games. There are more mental conditions and disorders in the world than you can name in one day and the Runed Age compacts all of these into one easy-to-use mechanic to track. Such is the way of games.

However, just because there is a single mechanic for mental traumas and conditions does not mean that there will only be a single mental condition that your players will suffer from. In fact, because the mental wounds are set up like combat wounds, there can be thousands of different traumas and disorders that characters can suffer from throughout the course of an adventure or campaign.

And just like with physical combat wounds, it comes down to your descriptions and narrative

Severity	Minor	Significant	Grievous
Anxiety	Panic, Shock	Obsessive Compulsion, Irrational Worry	Phobia, Chronic Stress, PTSD
Mood	Hysteria, Anhedonia	Mania, Listlessness	Catatonia, Depression, Bliss
Delusional	Irrational Jealousy, Destined action	Being followed, Blessing of the gods	Paranoia, I-am-a-god!, Conspiracy theorist
Hallucino-genic	Hearing voices, Seeing ghosts	Imaginary friend, Something-inside-me	Nothing-is-real, Body-snatchers, Devil-on-the-shoulder

as to what the mental wounds will be that the characters suffer from.

As with physical wounds, keep in mind the severity of the wound when describing what it is: A Minor Wound is something small and insignificant that will take care of itself within a matter of minutes; a Significant Wound is exactly that. It is painful, it is distracting, it is weakening, and it requires medical (in this case perhaps psychiatric) attention; and a Grievous Wound is something you may never recover from. It is truly something to grieve.

Last but not least is the Location Destroyed Wound. In physical combat this is fairly straight forward: the limb or body part in question has become permanently non-functional. Perhaps it was obliterated or disintegrated, or maybe all the nerves were simply damaged beyond repair. Whatever the case may be, the character can no longer use it.

In Social Combat, Location Destroyed simply means that the combat is over and the character has lost. There is no real lasting damage other than what you, the GM, believes is appropriate.

For Mental Damage, Location Destroyed works differently. Here, Location Destroyed means insanity. As with physical combat, it is a permanent and horrific scenario but it does not mean loss of function. A Mental Location Destroyed sits somewhere between Social and Physical.

At the end of the day a Mental Location Destroyed does, in a philosophical sense, mean quite that: the character's mind has been broken and shattered, it has stared into the abyss and something stared back. They are no longer, and will never again be, the same person they were before.

While it is possible to go from no wounds to Location Destroyed through one unlucky Skill Check (just as in physical combat), most often you will be able to clearly show the players how their PCs have gone insane through all the mental wounds they have accumulated. This can be a way to show what type of insanity the character eventually suffers from and how it manifests.

This in itself could be a story and the more that you can bring it into a game, the more that characters will grow and will realise that their minds are as fragile as their bodies and need to be taken care of. A character with three Mental Grievous Wounds should have as hard a time as a character with three Physical Grievous Wounds.

Most of the time in the Grand City of Middelburg, the mental wounds will come from what traumas we can experience in real life. Seeing someone die, seeing a gruesome murder scene, being tortured or interrogated, living through combat, or the constant mounting stresses of a hard life.

The runes, however, add in another dimension of Mental Wounds. There are so many ways that you can injure, corrupt or destroy the human body with the runes, that it honestly stops being funny after a while. It should come as no surprise that seeing your best friend turned to stone (or only part of him and then hearing his screams as he realises he is dying) will cause some mental anguish to someone.

There are some examples in this section that you can use, but always remember to tailor the mental wounds to the context they are gained in and what prior mental wounds the character has.

Sigils and NPCs

GM Intrusions

The Sigils are powerful things that can change the course of a scene, a battle or even the entire adventure/campaign. Your players will want to have as many of these as possible to make the best use of their Skill Checks. This will mean that you will need to Intrude quite often depending on how fast they go through their pool of Sigils.

GM Intrusions are a tricky thing. On one hand they are intended to complicate the lives of the PCs, yet on the other hand should not

be doing lasting damage to the PCs. It is a fine balance to walk, but before you get nervous, just remember that the players can refuse the GM Intrusion. They will lose the potential Sigil but if they believe the GM Intrusion is too powerful, they have the power to stop it.

A good idea to know exactly when to Intrude is to see how they are faring. Do they still have a lot of Sigils left, or even their entire pool left? Then there is no urgent need to intrude. Are they being utterly hammered by the world and each are sporting major wounds? Then perhaps their lives are already complicated enough. At the opposite side of the spectrum, if everything is going smoothly, maybe too smoothly, then it can be time to Intrude. After all, you don't get tension and gripping drama if everything is moonshine and roses.

These are only the most vague of guidelines possible. The cardinal rule of GM Intrusions is that they are meant to bring drama, and perhaps a few cheap laughs, to the scene. A gun jamming at the right (or rather wrong) time, a PC tripping over when they are trying to stay hidden, a pocketbook suddenly "missing", saying the wrong thing to the NPC the player is trying to flirt with, that is the sort of drama you can give with GM Intrusions.

Exalted and Accursed

The players are not the only people who can use Sigils to increase their chance of success at Skill Checks. You can too. If the players are having too good of a lucky streak and are overcoming everything you throw at them, you can have your NPCs use Sigils just like the players can to increase the difficulty of the game.

NPCs come in three different flavours and each use Sigils in different ways. These three types are called the Faceless, the Accursed and the Exalted.

The Faceless are your normal, run-of-the-mill NPCs. You could have made whole character sheets for them, just thought out one or two Skills, or they could even just be a face in the crowd. 99% of the NPCs you will have in your campaign will be Faceless.

There are two things to note about the Faceless. The first is that their Wounds work the same as the PCs' Wounds. They have 6 Hit Locations and the amount of Wound Slots per Hit Location is the first digit of their Constitution Skill Level.

The second thing to note is how they use Sigils. For each encounter and scene, you as GM will have a limited Pool of Sigils to use among the NPCs present in that scene. Once the Pool is drained of Sigils, no Faceless NPC can use Sigils anymore for the duration of that Scene.

The number of Sigils in this pool is equal to half the NPCs in the area that are contributing to the narrative, rounded up. Contributing to the narrative means they are involved in the story. For example if there is a shoot out between the PCs and some ruffians, the innocent bystanders hiding behind barrels and crates and in their stores are not contributing to the narrative, but the ruffians are.

Should any of the hiding bystanders try and intervene in this shootout, then they will become part of the narrative. When any reinforcements come into the scene or area, or some NPCs already in the area start contributing to the narrative, then they will also generate Sigils for the GM Sigil Pool. Calculate the amount of Sigils they bring into the pool separately from the NPCs that have already contributed.

Then there are the Accursed. Accursed NPCs are mostly used in combat and are intentionally weaker so that the PCs can more easily defeat them. These may be animals, or a horde of minions, or a character you just don't care about. Whatever the cause may be, they are Accursed for a reason.

The Accursed only have 1 Hit Location that represents their entire body. Once that reaches Hit Location Destroyed, they are dead. Penalties from Wounds affect all of the Accursed's actions and Skill Checks.

The Accursed also can't use any Sigils. They don't draw from the Pool of Sigils and they don't have any of their own.

Lastly there are the Exalted, the VIPs of NPCs. The Exalted are PCs in their own right. Just like the Faceless and normal PCs, they have all 6 Hit Locations and determine the number of Wounds normally. What makes them so special, however, is that they have their own Sigils just like a PC. They do contribute to the Pool of Sigils that the Faceless use, but the Exalted don't borrow from this Pool. Instead, like PCs, they have their own Sigils that they calculate by taking the first digit of their Will Skill Level.

This makes the Exalted very dangerous and quite durable, so use them for those NPCs which you don't want to see die too quickly.

The Long Game

So you want to turn your game into a campaign but are worried it may be too much work? It is actually far easier than you might think.

There are two main ways of running a long consecutive game: a series of standalone adventures or a single long running campaign. They can overlap quite frequently, but broadly speaking they are separate.

Stand alone adventures are just that: a series of adventures that have at best a tenuous link to each other can be played over as long a time as you want. This will give you and the players the opportunity to test out different styles and genres of games, playing different characters and enjoy different scenery. Adventures can also vary the tone of the game, easily switching between drama, comedy or horror between adventures. With stand alone adventures, there is no real "long game" you would have to prepare for, just taking each adventure as it comes. The best analogue to a campaign of stand alone adventures is the police shows on television. While the cast mainly stays the same, the episodes are all one offs that have a distinct beginning, middle and end that are separate from the rest of the show's episodes.

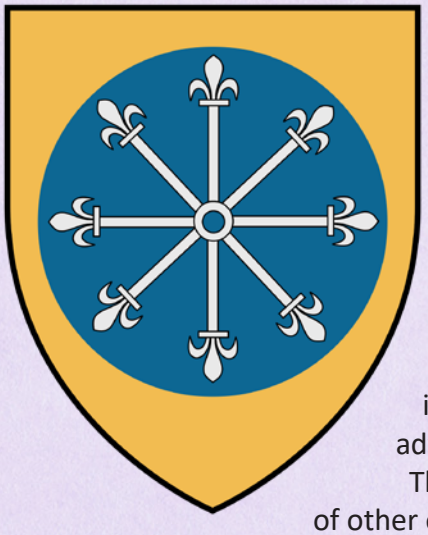
In between these adventures, the characters will go back to their normal lives and spend the time in Downtime, and through Downtime you can narrate how their lives has gone and what they have been up to.

A Campaign on the other hand is one (usually) long story that may take months if not years to complete. This at first does seem like a huge task to craft such a long story, but it is always better not to craft the whole thing. If you did, you could well find that the actions your players take may invalidate the whole story. You wished them to take the left path to the ruined castle, instead they took the right path to the swamp and kept going on right. What can you do? Two things really, one is to force them back (something called "railroading") but this might upset them because the choices they make no longer matter. Or you could replan the story.

It's much better to prevent this sort of thing than try and fix it. If you want a campaign, plan only the broadest, most vague story elements. Who's the villain, what does he want and how well he does it. That's it. Then just plan your gaming sessions as they go. Let the actions of your players dictate how the grand scheme of things unfold. By keeping the details vague, you can use each session to merely nudge the players in the right direction.

You can always combine the two. For stand alone adventures you can keep similar themes across each adventure. Perhaps the same employer. Perhaps you can put clues in each adventure to hint at a larger story such as one villain causing all the trouble the PCs have been seeing. Similarly, you could have adventures in a campaign. If you are familiar with video game RPGs, you will know of side quests, those adventures the PCs can do that are not connected to the main story line.

Whichever way you choose to do it, if you allow the players' choices to matter and influence the storyline, both you and the players will walk away happy.



Fraternal Holy Military Order of the Knights of the Northern Shield

Unlike their more aggressive southern neighbours, the Shield Knights have always been a defensive order. Their first, and continuing, mission was to hold the great Shield Wall as painted upon their heraldry. Their motto is also their oath: "Defend, protect, shelter, serve." While they had been forced to serve in several holy wars, the Shield Knights' oath is a type of pacifism. They are not allowed to harm any man unless it is in defence of another. Glory is for the Sword Knights and their adventures; the life of a Shield Knight is about service.

Throughout the centuries, the Shield Knights have spawned dozens of other orders but it still remains the largest of the northern orders and has chapters in every northern nation. It modern times the hostilities between the Progenitorist nations have subsided somewhat and the Shield Knights' greatest enemy is again their oldest: The Neoists. The borders between Progenitorist and Neoist lands are full of skirmishes, and the Shield Knights ensure no innocent is harmed in them. They have not yet seen need to visit the southern continent, leaving it to the jurisdiction of their southern Sword bearing brethren.

The Runes

The runes and the runic arrays are, quite unsurprisingly, the central concepts of the Runed Age, and as the GM it will pay for you to have an even better knowledge of how they work than your players do. This is because the arrays and runes are easy to exploit against someone is not familiar with the rules. A curved line when a straight line is needed can change the outcome of the whole array; some runes can only be used to modify other runes while other runes can only be used to command runes; some runes at first glance look very similar to other runes; in short it is possible to get confused if you don't know the runes and their rules well.

The other reason to make sure you as GM know everything this book can teach about the rules of the runes is because a player (and NPCs) can do practically anything with the runes. Only practically because there are some intentional restrictions built into the system. For example, while you can target Humans you can't target any specific human. Knowing what the restrictions and limitations of the runes and arrays are can help you spot any mistakes your players may make and also help you as GM make better arrays. It will also help you when your players create very strong arrays that you didn't prepare for, so your adventure and campaign isn't totally demolished by one array.

GM GENERATORS

Adventure Generator

The Adventure Generator is here to make your life as GM that much easier. Whether you want to create a sidequest, a one-session story, or a whole campaign, the Adventure Generator can do it all. You will find eight tables below, and for each one you can roll a d100 to see what result you get for each table. With all eight answers taken together, you will have the outline for your new story, its major characters and even a name to go with it.

You won't find any nitty-gritty details about a potential story here. The Adventure Generator will only give you the broad strokes for your randomly-determined Adventure, and it's up to you to fill in the blanks. Don't worry, though, the Generator will give you the mood, the feeling and the tone that you will need to bring it all together. It's also flexible enough to keep up with any genre and type of story you could want.

And so with all that said, start rolling those d100s.

The Motive

The first thing you need to know about your adventure is what its Motive is. This will set the tone for the entire story. here needs to be a reason why the players' character will go through the obstacles the plot will throw at them.

Whatever your plot for this Adventure will be, it will require a task to be carried out, and that is what the Motive is for: to give that drive to the PCs and to give the players a feeling to connect to and understand. Whether the Motive belongs to the Villain of the plot, the PC's Ally or perhaps even an involved Third Party... well that's up to you.

MOTIVE	
01-10	Ambition
11-20	Envy
21-30	Fear
31-40	Greed
41-50	Love
51-60	Politics
61-70	Secrecy
71-80	Vengeance
81-90	Wrath
91-100	***Roll Twice***

The Plot

The next thing on the list is to know what the adventure's Plot is. It is the meat of the adventure and is the task that the PCs will have to complete. Unless you happen to hit Roll Twice on the table, the Plot is only a single thing that the PCs must do and that point is crucial. The clearer the Plot and the task is, the easier it will be for the players to immerse themselves into the story.

So while the Plot answers on the table are fairly open-ended, try not to clutter up the Plot with unimportant side details. Leave those up to a nice, little sidequest that you can also create with this Generator.

EMPLOYER	
01-05	A group of rogues or privateers
06-10	A major Merchant League Family
11-15	A mercenary company
16-20	A minor faith or cult
21-25	A minor Merchant League Family
26-30	A mysterious foreigner
31-35	A Nieuton bourgeoisie
36-40	An independent merchant's guild
41-45	An Oldtown streetgang
46-50	Another footman
51-55	One of city's major faiths
56-60	The Alfresian Intelligence Service
61-65	The Alfresian military
66-70	The Constabulary
71-75	The Heisenstein Family
76-80	The Hugenberg Family
81-85	The Middelburg government
86-90	The Middelburg University
91-95	The van Rosedaal Family
96-100	The van Windburg Family

PLOT	
01-05	Assassinate someone
06-10	Destroy object or place
11-15	Escape from current threat
16-20	Escort someone
21-25	Explore new area or place
26-30	Kidnap someone
31-35	Locate person or object
36-40	Misdirection/Distraction
41-45	Negotiate a deal
46-50	Plant evidence
51-55	Protect object or place
56-60	Rescue person(s)
61-65	Sabotage object or place
66-70	Save person(s) from danger
71-75	Smuggle object or person(s)
76-80	Steal object
81-85	Stop the Villain's Plan
86-90	Survive the Villain
91-95	Uncover information
96-100	***Roll Twice***

The Employer

In the Runed Age, you will very rarely work for yourself. If you have that kind of money and security, you're better off (and smart enough) to hire other Footmen to do the job for you. So rather than figure out what hook to throw at your players and hope they'll bite, your adventure can come with an employer to lay it all out for them.

Who the PCs will be working for will change the flavour of the entire adventure. Working for the military or the League will give two completely different implications even if the job sounds exactly the same.

The Villain

Every story needs a Villain, an Antagonist, a Bad Guy in order to feel complete. Here is your chance to create that character.

Remember that the Villain for this adventure does not need to be the classic, Saturday-morning cartoon type of Villain. They don't have to be in direct opposition to the PCs and be cacklingly evil. All they need to do is get in the way of the PCs completing the plot.

The Villains on the table here are more roles than characters and are there to give you an idea of the Villain's personality. The Mad King doesn't actually have to be royalty, or the Undercover Spy doesn't need to be an Intelligence Agent. These are merely their personas and personalities that you can fit into any genre of game you need.

ALLY	
01-05	Affable Lunatic
06-10	Aged Sage
11-15	Airheaded Expert
16-20	Allied Villain
21-25	Curious Chronicler
26-30	Distressed Ingenue
31-35	Drunk Bard
36-40	Gibbering Madman
41-45	Glib Trickster
46-50	Grim Warrior
51-55	Grumpy Retiree
56-60	Hero Worshipper
61-65	Prideful Noble
66-70	Romantic Fop
71-75	Secretive Priest
76-80	Silent Oberserver
81-85	Sly Sycophant
86-90	Talkative Shopkeep
91-95	Tragic Hero
96-100	***Roll Twice***

VILLAIN	
01-05	Charismatic Rogue
06-10	Cold Bookworm
11-15	Corrupted Hero
16-20	Cursed Sufferer
21-25	Degenerate Priest
26-30	Dumb Brute
31-35	First Vanguard
36-40	Honourable Adversary
41-45	Lesser Evil
46-50	Mad King
51-55	Puppet Master
56-60	Religious Zealot
61-65	Sadistic Inquisitor
66-70	Scheming Patrician
71-75	Self-Righteous Avenger
76-80	Silent Assassin
81-85	Undercover Spy
86-90	Unknowable Evil
91-95	Wrathful Warlord
96-100	***Roll Twice***

The Ally

The PCs' friend during the Adventure. The Ally can be the NPC that gave the PCs their quest, or they could be the NPC the PCs need in order to complete the plot, or they could be someone involved in the plot that is willing to help the PCs. The possibilities are endless.

What is important is that they provide an extra layer to the story. Their mere presence will change the plot and they can be used to provide exposition and explanations to the players so that they know what's going.

As with the Villain, the Allies in the table here are more roles than characters that show you their personas and personalities so that you can fit them into any genre of game you need.

The Third Party

Things are never as simple as they seem. The Third Party is an NPC that is in the plot to add an extra complication to the PCs.

What they want and what is driving them is up to you, but the key thing about the Third Party is that they start off being independent. They aren't on the PCs' or the Villain's side, but that doesn't mean they can't be swayed to either side.

Maybe they are after the same thing the PCs are, or maybe they are after the Ally, the Villain or even the PCs themselves. Whatever the case may be, the Third Party adds an unpredictable element to the plot.

PLOT TWIST	
01-05	Ally always gives wrong advice.
06-10	It was all a secret test for the PCs.
11-15	It's all a trap laid by the Villain.
16-20	NPCs mistake the PCs for the Villain.
21-25	Item that PCs require to finish the plot is a fake.
26-30	PCs must choose between finishing plot and defeating Villain.
31-35	PCs must join forces with Villain to finish the plot.
36-40	The Ally backstabs the PCs.
41-45	The employer betrays the PCs after the plot is finished.
46-50	The employer is lying about who they truly are.
51-55	The PC's misunderstood the plot, their goal is the opposite.
56-60	The plot is a or red herring to another plot.
61-65	The Villain is actually the hero of the plot.
66-70	The Villain is the Ally in disguise.
71-75	The Villain wins if they are defeated.
76-80	The Villain, Ally and Third Party all mysteriously disappear.
81-85	There is a short time limit on completing the plot.
86-90	Villain is secretly related to the PCs.
91-95	Villain is trying to save the PCs from the secretly evil Ally.
96-100	***Roll Twice***

THIRD PARTY	
01-05	Amoral Pragmatist
06-10	Angry Beggar
11-15	Bounty Hunter
16-20	Crooked Cop
21-25	Cult Fanatic
26-30	Cunning Harlot
31-35	Demonised Monk
36-40	Disgruntled Servant
41-45	Dispossessed Bourgeois
46-50	Greedy Opportunist
51-55	Incompetent Lackey
56-60	Beleaguered Henchman
61-65	Paranoid Prisoner
66-70	Reformed Villain
71-75	Sardonic Professor
76-80	Sinister Jester
81-85	Tired Knight
86-90	Wandering Gunslinger
91-95	Wanted Fugitive
96-100	***Roll Twice***

The Plot Twist

Plot twists turn an ordinary story into an extraordinary one. With a twist in your story, your players will never be able to anticipate what happens next.

With twenty plots and twenty twists, it means you can craft four hundred different stories, and that's without even adding in all the different villains, allies and other NPCs.

City Encounters

The Grand City of Middelburg is a cramped, dirty, crowded and strange place at the best of times. No two days are the same, and you can meet anyone and anything in its cramped alleyways or grand avenues. This tool will help you come up with those sort of encounters to add some flavour, and perhaps some plot-hooks to your players' time in Middelburg.

There are a hundred options, so just roll a d100 and see what fate brings you.

1	A bard starts following the party, narrating their actions in song.	16	A cockfight in an alley, with the organisers taking bets.
2	A bedraggled prostitute propositions a PC while her pimp looks on.	17	A crowd tries to lynch a woman for whoring and adultery.
3	A beggar attacks a PC, but is too weak to do any real damage.	18	A cry for help rings out from an alley. Someone is being attacked.
4	A bird flying overhead defecates on one of the PCs.	19	A dirty man roasts rodents on a spit, and offers the party some.
5	A black cat crosses the party's path, hissing at them.	20	A dog runs up to the party, and attempts to lead them somewhere.
6	A blind beggar woman steps into the party's path and asks for alms.	21	A drunk stumbles down the street, not looking where he's going.
7	A blind man and his instrument draws a modest crowd.	22	A farmer's market sets up in the street, selling local fresh produce.
8	A bounty hunter asks around about his target.	23	A few criminals start burglarising a nearby house.
9	A bourgeois lady is lost and asks to be escorted home.	24	A few scions of the League argues heatedly with the constables.
10	A building nearby is on fire and there are people trapped inside.	25	A figures follows the party for several blocks before disappearing.
11	A carriage at speed tips over and crashes into a building.	26	A firebrigade coach speeds past, its runic sirens blaring.
12	A child asks the party for help, but leads them into a mugging.	27	A flash of light, and one random PC suddenly falls unconscious.
13	A children's puppet show on a corner mocks the Merchant League.	28	A foreign woman yells at her husband in their native tongue.
14	A coach stops; masked men jump out; a kidnapping in action.	29	A funeral procession fills the street with mournful prayers.
15	A coach with no apparent means of propulsion rides past the party.	30	A group of child thieves try to pickpocket one of the PCs.

31	A group of children mocks a lonely, cowering child.	50	A parade to a returning military hero blocks the street.
32	A group of drunk beggars accosts passersby for money.	51	A PC spots his doppelganger, who immediately flees into the crowd.
33	A group of soldiers on leave are drunk and getting rowdy.	52	A priest draws a crowd by giving out free food and drink.
34	A group of thugs harass a citizen.	53	A prominent businessman is missing, with a reward for his return.
35	A group of young bourgeois harasses the poor for sport.	54	A protest against the government threatens to turn ugly.
36	A gypsy woman at a rickety table offers to read the party's future.	55	A ramshackle stage is set up, performing the "Mad Burnt King".
37	A half-naked, jittery, ill man asks the party for illicit narcotics.	56	A scruffy merchant sells genuine divine healing potions on a corner.
38	A homeless boy cries for food as his mother sleeps behind him.	57	A set of burnt shackles lies smoking in an alleyway.
39	A homeless old woman tries to sell the PCs some floral crowns.	58	A street perfoemer keeps blocking the party's path, singing for coin.
40	A horse is spooked and bolts away, dragging a carriage behind it.	59	A street preacher standing on a crate preaches the end of the world.
41	A man yells at the party "We don't take kindly to your sort here!"	60	A well-dressed man dangles from makeshift gallows.
42	A masked youth paints graffiti onto a nearby wall.	61	A woman in the crowd cries out for help. She's in labour.
43	A merchant chases a youth down the road, yelling "Thief!"	62	A young lady asks the party to protect her from her lover.
44	A merchant's cart overturns, spilling his goods onto the street.	63	A young women trips and falls in front of an oncoming coach.
45	A monk tells the PCs to repent. He knows details of their sins.	64	An angry man walks up and punches one the PCs.
46	A naked man climbs out a window, while shouting is heard inside.	65	An anti-rune luddite starts attacking people that wear runic arrays.
47	A nearby building explodes, releasing noxious gas onto the street.	66	An armed robbery takes place at a nearby store.
48	A nervous man places down a sack and then quickly walks away.	67	An arrow strikes the wall near the party, a message stuck to it.
49	A pair of constables on patrol.	68	An elderly couple sits under an awning, begging for money.

69	An erratic man tries to convince others to join his cult.	85	Rich young university students are arguing with anyone in sight.
70	An impromptu horse-race takes place. Join the race, or place bets?	86	Sailors are press-ganging anyone they can find into the navy.
71	An old man collapses with a cry and starts convulsing.	87	Someone points a PC out to a constable, accusing him of a crime.
72	An old widow down on her luck tries to seduce a PC.	88	Someone unseen in the distance calls out a PC's name.
73	An old, overweight constable chases after a fleeing child.	89	Suddenly the crowded street is completely empty of other people.
74	An overwhelmed mother with a baby asks the party for help.	90	Suspicious constables question anyone bearing arms.
75	At a small market, a vendor accuses the party of stealing.	91	The party find a corpse in an alley, and the constables spot them.
76	Constables destroy a makeshift shrine built on a street corner.	92	The party is surreptitiously handed a note, saying "We know".
77	Constables evicts a woman, who tries to fight for her home.	93	The party sees a freshly severed head, festooned with jewellery.
78	Constables have blocked off part of a street, without saying why.	94	The party sees a wandering toddler with no parent in sight.
79	Constables hold up a wanted poster that looks like one of the PCs.	95	Three old men sit and make comments about people passing by.
80	Constables stop the party and wants to search all their belongings.	96	Two couriers have a heated exchange over a package.
81	Horsemen stop at a building and fire their pistols into it.	97	Two families argues over the actions of a pair of young lovers.
82	Men sit around a table, gambling with dice. There's a seat open.	98	Two merchants argue about who can set up his stall on the corner.
83	Mischievous children pull a prank on a store-owner.	99	Two rival street-gangs ready themselves for a battle.
84	Party hears a rumour about a new underground fightclub nearby.	100	Young, drunk Nieutonians are racing their horses through the street.

WHEN I LAY MY VENGEANCE UPON THEM

Runists! Bah, what a bunch of bastards!

Am I right, or am I right, gents? Jannie here thinks I am right, do you not think so Jannie? Oh... right... well, what does Jannie know?

Barkeep, another round and I will sing a song or three once I am done here! Anything is better than that poor sod up there now. Ah, there we are. Thank you! You are a good man, a credit to your race, a shining beacon of light in the darkness.

Now where was I? Oh, right the bastards them-holy-selves. You might be thinking to yourself "But, Theo, Runists are such lovely chaps," but you would be wrong. You would not believe how mean spirited they could even if I told you, but I will tell you anyway.

It all begins in a time long ago, in a faraway land.

Or rather, two weeks ago and around the corner.

There was I, singing a lovely melody for the Matriarch Rita Heisenstein herself and her closest female friends, and getting paid quite handsomely for it I might add gents, when all of a sudden some servant or another burst in to 'confer with her ladyship'. Ordinarily, I would not mind, servants come and go, that is how the gods made them, but I was at the climax of the song you see. It was right where the young maiden fair was about to be rescued from the clutches of the evil Inhuman emperor and… You are quite right, Jannie, we do not need to hear it again. At least not now.

In any event, the Matriarch and this servant chatted for a while. About what? How would I know? It is bloody difficult to sing and eavesdrop at the same time. When the servant left, oh, the Matriarch had that look on her face. Men die when she makes that face and as the only proud member of a 'member' in the room, I was not enjoying my chances, let me tell you that. The valiant Vallion had never saved his young maiden fair from the Inhuman emperor quite as quickly as when I sang it then. But it turned out that her look was good fortune for me, well, relatively speaking I should say.

Dismissing the room, the Matriarch called me over and I desperately started planning

the quickest way to Dalmaria. It turned out, however, she just had a job for me. Well pleased, was I, I must say. You see gents, I am not just a pretty face with an angelic voice. Oh no, my fairly hairy gents. Apparently, or so she said, the Runists monks at the local monastery was looking for, how shall we say, thugs for illegal skulduggery that they had planned. Shocked was I, as you can surely imagine. The Runists? Looking for morally questionable men? For skulduggery?

"No," said I. "Surely a miscommunication. Perhaps the servant was pulling your leg, ma'am." Poor bastard, I never saw that servant again.

But the Matriarch was in no mood for my quite witty banter, so with my purse a little heavier and my spirit a little lighter, off I went to the monastery as quick as can be.

Have any of you gents been in the Monastery of the Eternal Rune? I did not think so. Neither had I, to be honest, before that fateful day. I do not think I shall be ever setting foot there again, after that most fateful of days.

Enormous place it is, gargantuan even. Well before you even get close to the Eternal Hall, the compound itself stretches for hundreds of metres. I do not know what they do with all that space, but the bastards surely must be rich doing it all by now. The entire compound is one gigantic park, almost like Temple Park across the city, but where the Temple Park is a calm and natural place, there was this eerie sensation creeping down my back as I walked through it. A sensation of artificiality. It is a big word, I know Jannie.

Now, do not mistake me, gents. I love the city and everything in it: the towering buildings; the somewhat perfectly paved streets; the triumph of man over nature and all that carry on, but the grounds of the Runists' monastery was even more artificial than the rest of the city. And it looked completely natural! Yes, Jannie, that was my first thought as well. Everything was too perfect. The ponds were too round, the streams too perfect in its curvature, even the stands of trees were in perfect circles, and everywhere there were not-so-hidden runic arrays. Sit down on a bench, and beneath it would be an array, walk near a pond and on its bottom you would spy an array, walk through the trees and you will find yet another one!

And then fell into place in my mind like a virgin on her wedding night: the entire thing was created with runic arrays! It was well done, let me tell you that. I knew by the roundness of all the buildings that those were made with arrays, but that is commonplace enough. But it is not very commonplace for the very nature around them and everything beneath it to be rune made. Say what you will about those menacing bastards, but they do know their runes. Which, in hindsight, should really have been clear from their name.

What ever the case may or may not have been, I arrived at the Eternal Hall and asked about for their abbot. A nice old fellow led me through the various circular rooms and spiralling hallways, all bedecked with arrays and all manner of stones and metals, until I arrived at the top of the Hall by some manner I could not conceive of, for there were no stairs nor did I ever feel any elevations in the hallways.

Abbot Godfried de Brouwer is a peculiar little man. Little more than five feet tall, portly as an ale barrel, and with a thick beard and head of hair. He resembles a Cordyr more than he does a human. The brown robes he wore did not make the matter any better.

"Ha! You must be the Matriarch's boy," said the portly monk, achieving the quite singular feat of looking down at me from his lowly height.

"Indeed you are correct, my lord abbot," said I with my best smile. They were rich after all and a smile costs nothing.

"Ha! I was expecting someone a little more capable looking, but you will have to do, it seems."

"My lady told me you had an assignment for me?" I asked ever so politely, ignoring the little bastard's insult.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as I soon found out he was wont to do. "Of course! That is why you are here!

"There is a certain bourgeoisie businessman in town that has stolen something very precious from me! Ha! This is an insult that shall never be forgotten! Ha! He will rue the very day he was born when I am through with him! Ha! In return for avaricious sin, I want you to steal something very precious from him! Do you think you can do that, boy?!"

"Of course, my lord," I replied, what else could I say? The tiny monk behaved like this business man had stolen his firstborn son. "Just tell me the who, the where, the what and the when and your wish shall be my command."

And so he did tell me the who, the where, the what and the when, and with each "Ha!" my eyes grew wider at the fire and brimstone this tiny monk was spitting, nearly apoplectic in his vehemence.

I have done, and can do, many things my lovely gents, oh yes, but this was no ordinary assignment. Oh no, this was not a job for just one man. Well, technically speaking…

So I collected my team, my ladies of death and duty, my angels of mercy and mayhem, and plans we made. Oh yes, devious plans were they gents, intricate and complex, labyrinthine in their execution. The Heavenly Mother, glory to her name, no not even She would not have been able to foresee the twists and turns in my plan or how it would end: in riches, glory, fame, money and women, oh yes, lots of women. My team listened in awe as I laid out my plan, wondering at the marvel that is my mind. And when their minds could take no more, off we went in search of our prey.

Armed and prepared, we arrived at the extravagant mansion in Nieuton where this bourgeois Mister Johansson lived and worked. I, of course, was leading the team like a general in the Imperial Legions. They looked to me for command, to inspire them as we transgressed into this veritable fortress.

"Is this it?" Lara asked incredulously, clearly taken aback by the devious nature of a man devious enough to steal from the Runists that would reside in such open opulence.

Lara was the first one I turned to for my team. A scholar she was, and sometimes still is. The library she calls her head would undoubtedly be useful once we made it inside the mansion. I would not call myself an uneducated man, no, that is for other people to do, but I have many more better things to do than read books all day. That is where Lara came in. She is also fantastic company, the old girl, almost a second mother to the rest of the team and I. And-

Hey, come now gents, not that sort of mother. She is a saint, Lara is, and I shall not have one bad word said about her.

Yes, Jannie, that is a bad word said about her. You cretin.

Now where was I? Oh yes, Lara was the one who brought the other two team members into the fold. I was far too busy planning and scheming to be sullied with such paltry affairs. The first was Simona, and what a strange woman she was. Tolian, she was and that says all it needs to about her, does it not, gents? Yes, it does, it does. She was to be our getaway driver. This was not just some jewellery box we had to steal. Oh no, it was so large it required an entire carriage to fit it all!

Although, I must confess, I did not trust poor Simona when we first met. Always with her head in the clouds, she was, and a faraway look on her face. She gave us a dreamy wave as we hopped down onto the street and started making our way to the mansion. We were like thieves in the night. Wait, wait... no, we

were thieves in the night. We were like shadows in the darkness, moving unseen across the grounds of the mansion. I spotted the room where our booty lay, third floor corner room with a large balcony, and sent the last and, most assuredly, least of our small team up ahead while Lara and I waited in the tulips. And no, Jannie, that is not a euphemism.

Little Eva. Little annoying Eva. Little annoying, arrogant Eva. Little annoying, arrogant, gorgeous Eva. I begged Lara not to bring Eva. I pleaded with Lara. I implored her to save a drowning man! But like cold St. Katarina, Lara said no, and so I had to put up with little bloody Eva. I must confess it was not all bad though, gents. I found my own little revenge against the brat, which I promptly used when she reached the balcony.

"How is the view up there, Pigeon?" I softly called up to her.

"Eagle! Damn you!" she, not so softly, screamed down at me. She called herself the Imperial Eagle, the pretentious brat, citing some long forgotten descent to one of the emperors of her homeland. Oh how she hated to be called Pigeon, but if I had to put up with her boastful self, she had to put up with me.

Lara gave me a look that my own mother used to give me before bringing out the wooden spoon, but like the gentleman I am I did not take the bait and focussed on the mission at hand.

"Do you see a way in for us?" I called up to Eva.

"I told you I could easily just make one," she retorted.

With the patience of a saint and with the hand of the Heavenly Father on me, I serenely replied: "I am not telling you again, girl, no one must know we were here!"

She relented, thank the gods above, and started to find our passage in. She clambered over the walls like a spider, hopping from window sill to window sill, climbing over the roof and back, aided by runic arrays whose designs she still has not deigned to share with me. She may be an irritating braggart, but she is good at what she does. That is something I shall only ever say this once, and I will deny every word of it should you gents spread it around!

It was only a few minutes of anxious waiting (for Lara, not me, I was the very centre of calm) before we too scaled the walls with a runic array Lara had prepared in the intervening time.

And then, as the bishop said to the actress, we were in.

"Is this it?" once again Lara asked with such an incredulity in her voice that I was beginning to think she perhaps did not fully comprehend the masterfulness of my plan.

I looked at the chaotic office around me with papers strewn everywhere. Its paltry attempt at filing had ended before it even began, ink was splattered around the room like blood, even unto the ceiling. Clearly the work of a madman. If I had not known better, I would have said a burglar had already been in here before us.

"Yes, clearly," said I, and began collecting papers together into stacks.

"How exactly in all this mess am I meant to sort out what has to do with discovering new runes and what is just plain rubbish?" said Lara as she picked up a page with scribbles and gibberish written all over it.

Ah, the poor soul. I had overestimated her abilities, I saw that now. I tried to give her some encouragement.

"You are the scholar after all. You do not mean say those years with your nose in a book has all been a waste?" Surely it must have worked.

She gave me a look that said it surely did not.

It was up to me as the commander of this team to make up for the shortcomings of its individual members, to ensure the mission is

a success no matter the cost. So I changed my masterful plan, but I believed it became even more perfect in the end.

"Very well," said I, the very soul of conciliation. "Let us just take everything in here then. The carriage is big enough to hold it all." But she was having none of it.

"No, we take only what is needed," said Lara firmly, the very soul of stubbornness. "Then it will take them longer to figure out that anything is missing." Poor old girl, she just could not take being out of her element, she had to prove something to herself at least.

"Very well, take the time you need." I was grace personified. "Eva, get the array on the ground activated, we cannot afford to damage any of this on its way down."

"Not even a please!" replied Eva tartly. Girls these days, I wonder why the boys even bother. Yes, Jannie, thank you, I believe we are all aware that that is precisely why the boys still bother.

I gave Eva the most intimidating and commanding look I could give, one that could make even hardened soldiers quiver, but she had already turned away to the balcony, perhaps knowing what was coming her way.

As Eva clambered back down to ground level and Lara started sorting through the mess of an office, it was left to me to stand watch, the guard in the night. Opening the door a fraction, I began my watch. I felt each hour as they passed, and oh my giddy aunt they passed slowly. However, when I looked back at Lara's progress, she had scarce sorted through the papers on the desk alone. Poor girl must have been getting slow in her old age.

"Found anything yet?" I asked, hoping the small words of encouragement would aid her, but she merely gave me that look of frustrated disapproval that mothers are so adept at giving.

Rather than interrupt her work, I came upon yet another genius idea. If our crime were to be discovered, a rare chance I admit but still possible, then they would immediately know what we were after. If, however, I were to steal other things about the house, other more seemingly valuable items, then if our crime were ever to be discovered then the true motive would be hidden. Any money I would make from such an escapade would only be a bonus, nothing more. It was for the good of the mission.

Thus, I sneaked out through the door, being careful not to alert Lara to what I was doing so as to not distract her from her assignment.

Flitting from shadow to shadow like a ghost at twilight, I prowled throughout the house hunting for valuable artefacts. I was amazed at the sheer wealth of the mansion. 'Opulence' is an understatement of the highest degree. Tapestries fit for imperial palaces hung on its walls and rugs from rare creatures from across the globe lay on its floors. Oddities, relics, and all manner of curios were on every shelf, table and, well, anywhere there was room for them. Each time I put something in my pockets I would spy something even more valuable further ahead and would move on to that instead. Half an hour later and I still had not taken anything, so racked was I by indecision. What at first had seemed to be a thief's heaven had turned into a thief's hell.

My decision was made for me when a second later a man came shuffling down the hallway. Stark as the day he entered this world and pale as a ghost, this sleepwalker shambled down the hallway muttering and mumbling to himself. "This must be Johansson," I thought. Wherever his unconscious mind was taking him surely must have been important, unless it was to the pantry, so I decided to follow him.

Straight to Lara it seemed. This tottering, sleeping merchant had apparently decided that the best time to do work was in the middle of night. The time for action had come, gents. The moment I was born for.

Silent as a cat I crept behind him, imagining all the varied possibilities with which I could subdue him without him ever being the wiser. Would it be a Calabrian

Chokehold, or perhaps a Norian Neck Pinch? No, I decided upon the Ledowan Sleep Touch, taught to me by a wandering hermit. As I reached out in the ancient form handed down from master to student, the moon came out from behind the clouds and shon directly into my eyes through an upper window. I missed the businessman by a hair's breadth. Fate, it seemed, had conspired to keep the Ledowan Sleep Touch hidden once more. It was for the best, I suppose. I have been known to accidentally kill a man with the Ledowan Sleep Touch, and the tension of the situation was not well suited for the concentration that the Ledowan Sleep Touch required.

What seemed fortunate for the businessman was ill fortune for me, for as soon as I missed him with my attack he opened the door to the study and there he stood, staring at an alarmed Lara.

The moment seemed to stretch out into eternity and the entire cosmos shrank down to only the room. The businessman and Lara stared at each other across the desk and I myself stood behind the businessman, ready to strike should he attempt anything untoward.

Frozen like picturesque statues we were, until the moment was broken by Johansson swaying on his feet before shuffling towards his desk, apparently unaware of the Valtorian in front of him.

Lara quietly backed away from the desk, giving the businessman space to calmly pull out his chair, sit down and stare blankly at the desktop. Inching her way across the room to where I was standing at the door, we marvelled at the scene. Johansson was not finished with his surprises, however, and proceeded to search through the pages on the desk after a comically loud hiccough. We thought we were done for. We thought the game was up. Lara was already unholstering her pistol, knowing that the businessman would surely now realise that his desk was considerably more tidy than before.

But fate once again interfered, or as I would know later, it was the Heavenly Mother who stayed my hand in the hallway and kept Johansson from seeing us, all so we could now witness this. Johansson was himself now rearranging the pages on the desk sorting out certain pages he wanted and unceremoniously shoving the rest off the desk.

We cautiously moved closer the desk and what we discovered almost made us shout for joy. Johansson had done in just a few minutes what Lara could not in nearly an hour. He had collected all the pages on his desk related to discovering new runic designs. Exactly what we were meant to come steal! There seemed to be no end to our luck that night when Johansson found himself a quill and ink and began designing new runes right in front of us.

While Johansson was busy making me more money, I commanded Lara to sort through the rest of the detritus around the room and find more documents and papers relating to runic design while I kept an eye on our new best friend.

Another week's worth of time passed, and I was sure the sun must have been on the horizon when Johansson rose from the desk with another hiccough and shambled towards the hallway, still oblivious to the world around him. Motioning for Lara to collect everything he had written down, I followed Johansson to ensure he finally found his way to bed.

Returning to the room with my pockets a little heavier, I saw that Lara had at last completed her part of the assignment. Before her, on the desk, stood three towering stacks of papers. Even with the unconscious businessman's help, this was far too much for one, or even two men to carry. My masterful plan had taken this into account however, as usual. Why else would I have brought along a carriage?

With my plan coming together quite nicely, as expected, I walked over to the balcony to see it beginning to unravel.

Just as I was about to call down and get the little Pigeon to activate the runic array so that we could safely ferry our booty to the ground, a glint of light from the roadside caught my eye.

The light from the street lamps reflected off the blade a mere moment before it plunged into Simona's back. Before I had even time to call out to Eva and Lara, the poor girl on the carriage began to light up like one of them new lightning lanterns. Light poured out and through her skin so bright and harsh I thought she would become a star and float away into the night to join the other constellations. The fact that she never made a sound during the entire ordeal made the eeriness of the situation all the more worse.

The light brought Lara out on the balcony and even Eva climbed up to see what all the fuss was about. The ladies covered their mouths with their hands and watched as the light inside Simona grew brighter as she sat dying.

These new interlopers were almost as devious as I am, for as the light from Simona faded, the murderers were nowhere to be seen. I had fallen victim to one of the classic blunders, gents! I had become so distracted with an enchanting sight that I failed to keep my eyes on the danger at hand. Now, somewhere between the carriage and I were who knows how many men intent, I was sure, on claiming what by divine right was mine.

I pulled the women back inside and locked the door. Made of glass, it would not help much, but it would give us a warning should the thieves burst in.

Suddenly I was in my element, gents: hastily having to make plans while men were hell-bound on killing me.

Lara. She would be the most crucial part of my new plan. What she lacked at investigating an office she would make up in creating arrays that would serve as traps for anyone foolish enough to just barge in. While she started drawing the arrays and spilling blood to prime them, Eva and I started putting as much of the towering stacks of papers into the rucksack we all carried, focusing on the most recent work Johansson had done. We may not have had the luxury of carrying everything out, but at least we would take what was most important.

I had half expected the interlopers to have already come crashing through the glass balcony door while we were still preparing. It was what I would have done. A bold, quick strike while the enemy is unprepared! That they did not do precisely that told me many things, my fair gents. It told me they were cowards! Cowards who were far too... well... cowardly to face us directly! They took one look at me and knew that only through a sneak attack could they hope to prevail. When an enemy is already frightened before the battle has commenced, you know that you had already won.

Confident and calm, Eva and I stood there silently, her with her two stilettos in hand and I with my twin pistols that have served me so well over the years. Lara, meanwhile, drew defensive runic arrays over all our exposed skin with the helpful quill and ink that Johansson left us. Like the pagan Caelish warriors of old, bedecked in their colourful warpaint, we waited for battle to commence.

It soon became apparent that it would not. These cowardly bastards did not have the stones to face us in combat. It would be up to me to show them what it means to be a man! I have never been one to shy away from battle and I did not intend to start then!

No, Jannie, that time did not count, my mother was sick then. What did you expect me to do? Let my dear, old, poor mother die? No, I did not think so.

Lara reluctantly removed her runic array from the hallway door and us three and our rucksack full of booty crept down the hallway quiet as mice. I was not so idiotic as to attempt to barge through the balcony windowed doors. That way led to a sniper's bullet and an early grave.

I knew how these cowards thought. Not because I am one, let me make that clear, but because I have faced so many.

We made it to the front door without any problems, as I knew we would.

"They will be watching the front door!" Eva whispered to me. Oh my poor naive child.

"They would never expect us to go through the front door," I patiently explained to her. "Now off you go, before the ones they have surely already sent inside find us."

She sighed miserably, unable to grasp the genius of my plan, but she opened the door and stepped outside.

Only to be met with a sniper's bullet to the chest.

This was my chance. I knew there could not be more than one watching the front door, so out I ran while the sniper had to reload. I did not overly worry about the Pigeon, I knew she had defensive wards all over her clothes. It would feel like a mule's kick, but she would be better off for the experience.

I fell to the ground immediately as I set foot outside, my legs giving way underneath me by instinct. The gunman hiding beside the door missed my head by mere centimetres, his round passing through my hat. Right there in fact, gents, see? I nearly bloody-well died, that night.

My hands, of their own accord as if the Heavenly Father were guiding them, moved towards the gunman and I shot both pistols upwards into his chest. The coward had a look on his face that was equal parts disbelief and surprise, but to my disbelief and surprise he did not die. I had expected defensive arrays, but one of my rounds took him in the heart, the other in the stomach. I had hoped to see at least one get through.

What I saw instead was light. Pure, white, striking light shining down on me. Blinded, I rolled away and when I stood up I saw the twin lights shone from the coward's chest. His runic arrays.

I took off like a rabbit. Not out of fear, mind you, but because I knew in the darkness his lights would show all the other cowards where I was. See, a smart man am I.

My shadow ran ahead of me, as the coward painted me in stark light. I could feel the rounds from firearms whipping past me. I could hear nothing, though, as the cowards must have used silenced pistols.

The lights from behind me suddenly skewed upwards and I heard the cry of a man in pain. The girls must have taken the cowardly bastard down.

Halfway across the expansive front yard a shadow appeared in front of me. It would have taken my head clean off but for the glint of light on his blade as it careened towards my neck. The Heavenly Mother still looks out for her most favourite son.

I drew my cutlass and at last battle truly commenced!

I could see fear written across the coward's face, plain as day. He hesitated in his attack, attempting to circle around me like a scavenging animal waiting for carrion. I did not wait for his strike. Bold as a highland lion I charged at him, a war cry upon my lips and fire in my veins.

Like the coward he was, the bastard dodged my attack, spinning around behind me and slashing his blade across my back, below my rucksack. I was confident the runic arrays on my coat would protect me as they have done through so many battles, but the pain that flared across my back and the wetness I felt proved that confidence to be a lie. I turned to him with surprise on my face, wondering what sort of foul sorcery this was, when I saw that the ruddy colour on his sword was not only the reflection of the street lamps, but the true colour of the metal.

Bronze.

I should have known these bastards would be so dishonourable. The fault was mine for not foreseeing this, I had trusted too much in the goodness that is inside all men, and I paid for my

piety.

His sword had cut through me like I was a roasted boar and if he had the same arrays as the previous coward, then all my sword would be good for was to get myself an eye full of bright light. And if I were to fall, then the rucksack hanging at my side would fall into their hands. That was something I could not abide!

But what could I do if I could not harm this vermin? Surrender? Never!

A defensive battle it was to be then. I had to reach the carriage at all costs.

I feinted to his left, forcing him to meet my blade and when the sparks flew I kicked at his right foot. A crafty man this, he saw what I had planned and jumped back at the last moment, but this was all the time I needed to make my retreat. With blood streaming down my legs, I ran for the carriage.

Instinct, or perhaps the Heavenly Father, warned me I was in danger and I dove to the ground in front of the carriage. I looked up and saw a trio of bullet holes in the carriage above my head. I risked a glance backwards and saw two of the bastards run towards me, one with lights shining out from his shoulder.

My thoughts turned to the girls. In every battle there are a degree of acceptable losses, so I was not overly concerned about their lives, but they did have the other two rucksack. I could not leave without those. "Well I could," I thought. "It would be understandable," I presumed. The abbot did not need to know what occurred.

My train of thoughts were, quite rudely I must say, interrupted by a fourth bullet hole the carriage. I crawled underneath the carriage. It was not fear that drove me under the carriage and out the other side, but a cunning plan I had already formulated. By drawing the two cowards away from the mansion, I made it much easier for the girls to escape. My mother always did say I was a chivalrous boy, and how could I ever prove her wrong?

I dropped the rucksack at the puddle of blood pooling at my feet and prepared myself for the two seemingly invulnerable foes I was about to face. They came at me from either side, murderous victory in their eyes, but they would soon be disappointed, for I had already won.

Little did they know that on the rucksack was a prepared runic array Lara had made. A Wall-Exclude-Human array. They found out soon enough when they could not get within a metre of where I stood, no matter how hard they tried. Their moment of confusion was all I required. I levelled my pistols at them and shot at the only place I could not see a runic array on them. Between their eyes.

Their heads erupted into fire as the rounds found a new place to call home. For the brief moments they stood standing as their bodies had the appearance of candles at a midnight temple service. They collapsed to the ground a second before I did. I may be a god amongst men, gents, but even I have my limits. The last thing I remember was a distinct smell of bacon in the air. A curious thing, that.

What happened next was a blur of sights and sounds like you could only experience in dreams and divine visions. I was flying through the streets of Middelburg, except the city was upside down. The clouds were its bedrock and only empty, deathly, darkness its firmament. Hovering over me was angel of death. Pale and ghostly, she was clad in rags and covered in blood. Like a Walkur from Gitic legends, she was taking me to the life beyond this paltry existence.

The lights of the city extinguished themselves one by one as we flew past. The world become darker by the second until I could no longer see this mere mortal realm. Accepting my fate, I closed my eyes.

And woke up in heaven with an angel standing over me. Her skin like moonlight on virgin snow, her hair the colour of sunlight in springtime, her dress spun of silver and gold thread. Woven through her hair were strands of oaken beads and wisps of silk painted with runes and scripts I could not decipher.

I may, or may not, have said something inappropriate at that time, gents, but the slap across the face I received spoke volumes of my still mortal existence. Clearly, this was no angelic being welcoming me to the life hereafter. I soon discovered she was just a Runist nun. One who clearly beats her patients, at that. See what I said about Runists, gents? Bastards, the whole lot of them. What do you mean I deserved it, Jannie. Exactly whose side are you on?

I attempted to sit up to see exactly where I was, but my back ached like I spent a night in a Nacitanian brothel. However, the man that I am, I was not about to let pain stop me, so I stood up as if I had merely enjoyed an afternoon nap. The Runists in their madness must have built the floor to be uneven for I could not keep my footing. Crafty buggers, these monks.

The angel-turned-demon roughly escorted me back to bed with a huff of disapproval, and I was forced to lay and wait. After what seemed years, the portly dwarf of an abbot finally deigned to see me.

"Here is your share," he said in a tone I found entirely disagreeable and threw a coin purse directly on my ribcage. "I have already deducted the cost of your medical care."

Can you believe the gall of this little man? Not even a word of gratitude. Had I not been injured in glorious battle, I would have shown this imp a thing or two.

And then he left before I even had a chance to say a word, acting like I had the plague. I did not even have a chance to recover, as the demon-nun brought me my ruined clothes and told me it would be best if I left. Can you believe that?! Bah! Out on the street after nearly giving my life for them!

What happened? Oh yes, well after I recovered I tracked down Lara and asked her the very same question. Apparently, they drove straight to the Runists, dropped myself and the papers off, took their money and left. No honour amongst thieves, I tell you. I did all the hard work, and they got most of the money!

I tell you, that was the last time I shall ever work for the Runists. Believe me now, do you? Now, speaking of leaving, let us leave here quickly before I actually have to sing for this plebeian lot. Come here, help me stand Jannie, there's a good man. Come, come, quickly, gents!

To the most high and eternally gracious, Emperor Bythika LXXIX the divine and rightful ruler of the most blessed Second Empire of Bythika.

May this parcel find you in the perfect health that you so righteously deserve.

Please find attached the letters you eminence had ordered sent to you holy self. I have scrutinised their provenance and can assure your Majestic Holiness that these are the original documents. The difficulties I have had in obtaining these were a joyous sacrifice for your pleasure.

It is my most humblest of apologies that I could not obtain all the letters you tasked me with, yet. I am still on the road even as I write this and will not rest until I have procured them all for you, my august and forgiving liege.

As ever, I remain your most deeply devoted and humble servant, in this life and the next.

Novak Amadej

It is with great difficulty that I obtained this letter for your wondrous self, the personal letter to the northern heretical emperor was kept within his private study, in his palace surrounded by the Imperial Guard. Not that I would ever complain about a task given to me your illustriousness! It is my honour to serve at my liege's disposal.

I am still confused as to how your Imperial Majesty's spies even knew of this letter's existence, it was such a private matter. I am also confused as to why your Apostolic Majesty would request this, it is merely a historic account of the north, spouting the self same propaganda we hear often. Perhaps one day, your holiness will share your wisdom with me. Not that I would deem myself worthy of something such as that!

HOW WE CAME TO BE HERE

"To the Emperor on his blessed day of coronation"

The ancients were fond of saying "To secure peace, one must prepare for war". Never has that idiom rung more true than it does today. With the world seemingly teetering on the edge of another Great War, it is as though every empire and kingdom, every duchy and republic is trying to outdo one another with pompous shows of strength and power. With new pieces of technology coming to the fore every day, it seems to me that these displays of fragile egos will only become more spectacular.

It has only been two years since the discovery of the Lightning rune that kicked off the Electric Rush, as my contemporaries call it. To me, however, it feels as if a lifetime has gone by. I envy the children playing in the streets today. If I saw as a child the things I see today, I would never have gone back inside. Street tramcars run along railways inside cities almost as if by themselves, directed only by copper wires running over head and clever clockwork; teams of men raise large beams to string copper wires between houses and even cities; and there is no longer any need for candle or flame to light a house, just a copper wire in the roof. It seems to me, no one could be more happy for the discovery of the Lightning rune than the blasted copper miners! But, oh my, it seems we have nearly forgotten what life was like without that little rune, everyone is far too busy finding new ways to use it.

It was in such a contemplative mood that old-age so often brings that I decided to pen this letter to you, my sovereign. Perhaps between the two of us we could uncover what the world would say if it too could contemplate its own old age. Far from bringing melancholy to your happiest day, my young emperor, I think the world itself would sing of your empire's glory. And what a glorious history the empire has had.

Much like myself and that damned Lightning rune, it is often hard to think that the Heavenly Empire of Man did not always exist. With a history stretching back to the Great War itself, two thousand years ago, it is as if the Empire brought the world into its current age. All we know of the events before the Great War comes from myths and legends, poorly preserved scraps of paper, and carvings on rocks. Yet after the War, the only constant in this world has been the Empire and her Emperors.

But how did the world begin? Ask three priests and you would get four different stories. Ask a

single scholar and you would get a dozen different theories and hypotheses. None would dare admit they are wrong. None can.

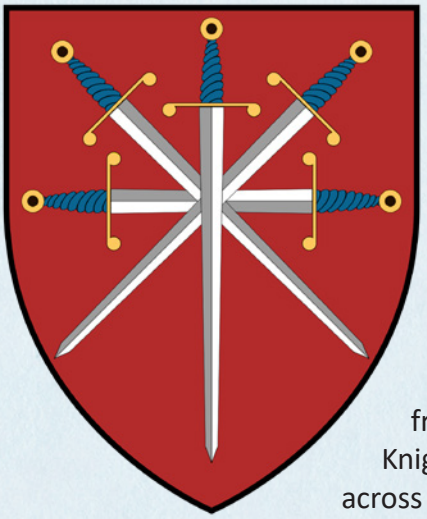
The Neoists would have us believe the world came about through song, that their single god sang the world into creation. They say there is a song and tune for every rock and tree, every grain of sand and animal, for every newborn baby, and if only you could discover this hidden melody you could control the universe itself. It is quaint idea, but it is no wonder those sand dwellers never seem to get much done, with all that singing and dancing nonsense.

The Progenitorists would have us believe it was a far more carnal, and more interesting if I may so, matter. They say the Divine Father and Mother fornicated the universe into existence, but see if you could get that story out of a nun without her blushing! The Mother birthed the world and, if that was not enough to send old ladies quivering into their handkerchiefs, the Father then spread his seed upon the world and everything grew from there. The northerners are a lovely bunch, are they not? But I must not speak too harshly of them, the Patriarch and Matriarch do sit on your Imperial council, after all.

The Prodigalist teachings which my mother, may the gods in their heavens bless her soul, tried to instil in me from a young age tells us a similar story to the Progenitorists. Tis no surprise, they do have a shared heritage, but the Progenitors say it was not the Father's seed which fell upon the world and started life. Rather, they say, it was his knowledge of the runes that cause life to spring up. It was the nascent Bür, creator of runes, in the Mother's womb that filled the Father with the vision of the world as it would one day be, and the runes He would need to make this vision a reality.

The Completists, that strange blend of Neoist and Progenitorist, with a dash of Prodigalist, takes even a step further. Their god, like their alleged prophet of old, is a hermaphrodite and so did not need a second party to perform its divine carnal act. Apparently it sang all the while as well. I have often been told precisely what I should do with myself, but rarely can one say the gods did that first.

If it is the old religions that tell of songs



Fraternal Holy Military Order of The Knights of the Southern Sword

The Sword Knights, as they are more commonly called, were created to protect the southern Progenitorist interests and convert the Vinean and Githic pagans. That mandate passed long ago when the Vinean/Githic lands converted to Prodigalism instead. With the Shield Knights protecting the north, the Sword Knights were nearly dissolved for no longer having a purpose. They were saved by the discovery of the southern continent. With fresh potential converts and new interests to protect, the Sword Knights have become a powerful naval force protecting Progenitorists across the globe.

The Sword Knights home was the fortress of Wollin in Boandia, but with the change in their mode of operation from land to sea they have since given this fortress over to an order of monks. Now the Sword Knights operate out of a gargantuan warship simply called Wrath. As large as their old fortress was, Wrath travels the seas bringing the rage of the Gods upon anyone who would dare to think twice about harming a Progenitorist son or daughter. On its sides are carved their motto: "*The wrath of the gods for the wickedness of man*".

and wombs and carnal acts, then it is the new religions which strive to incorporate natural philosophy into their teachings, although twisted as they have to make it to fit their dogma.

The Runists are perhaps the best example of this. That centuries old cult have survived every obstacle the world has thrown at it yet has never become much larger than its original size, owing, they say to its "high intellectual rigour". These mystical scholars say that the world, the sky, and indeed the entire cosmos, is merely an illusion. What we see and hear and smell and touch is nothing more than the effects of runes that we cannot see and hear and smell and touch. A Runist once told me it is like the magic lantern shows the carnivalists love to put up. The world is nothing more than the dancing pictures on the wall and the lantern is the runes behind the world. I admit, it is difficult for me to believe the world is not real, and I doubt many others can, which might more reasonably explain the Runists small numbers.

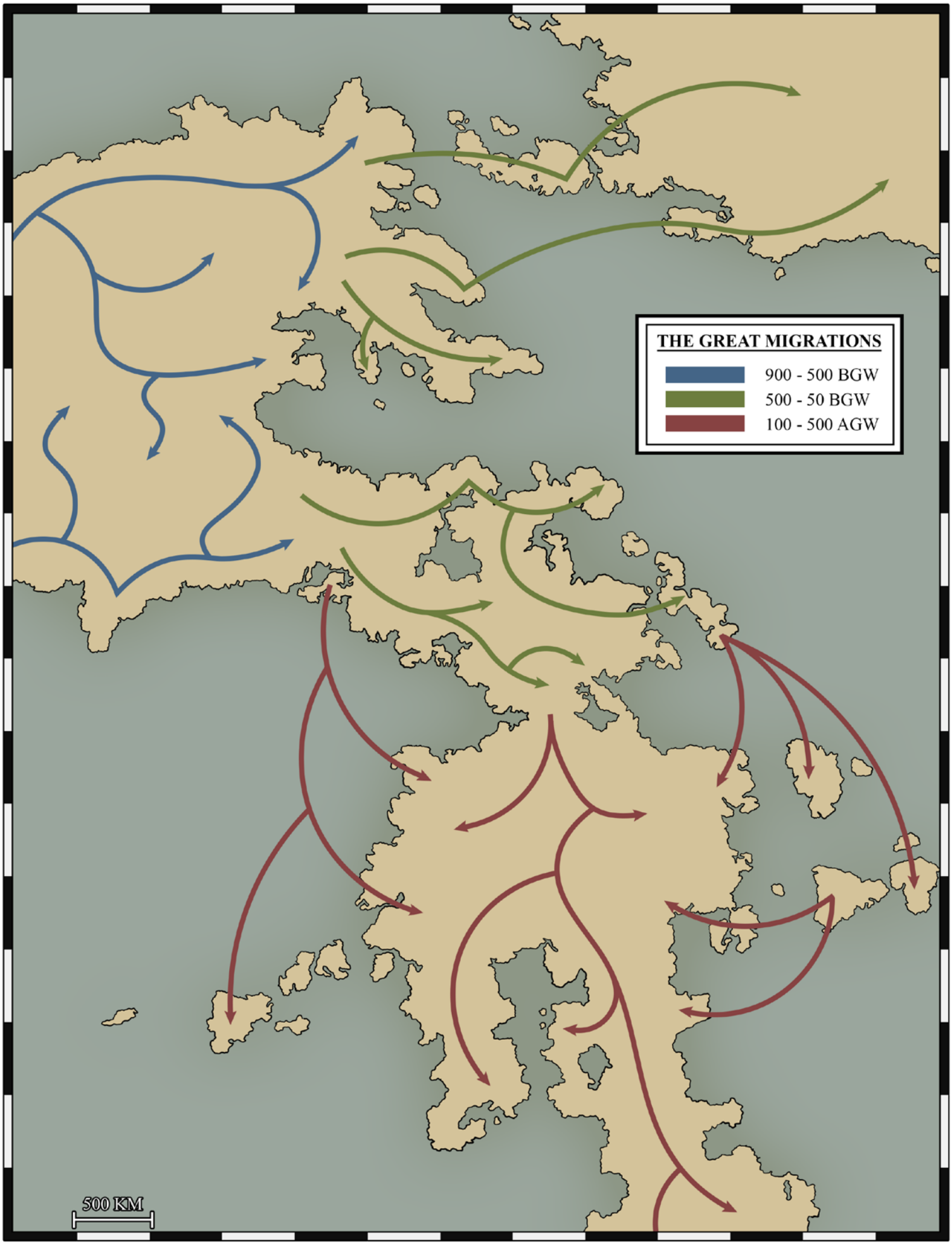
As the Prodigalist faith evolved from the Progenitors, so too the Runist cult spawn a smaller cult of their own. The Starchild cult and its members, which enigmatically call themselves the Seekers, agree with the Runists and their magic lantern show. However, the Seekers say that there must be a magician operating the lantern, a veritable god in the machine. They believe this unborn god, the Starchild, created the world for itself through the runes, and has been biding its time until mankind's knowledge of the runes was great enough. Clearly we were a slow bunch, and so the Starchild created an automaton to briefly inhabit, the legendary figure we call Bür.

From the theological to the mathematical. The scholars of natural philosophy tell me of quakes and tectonics and volcanoes, sand building up and planets crashing into each other. I must be honest and say these theories sail far over my head. It is far easier to smile and nod at these primly dressed men until something else catches their wandering minds, and they start chattering about magnets or whatever problem they must solve these days. These bespectacled men with their ink stained hands must surely be right with all the equations and measurements and philosophical arguments. However, the child in me will always enjoy imagining gods that sing and fornicate while operating magic lantern shows.

In whatever way the world may have been created, there she is in all her splendour, this globe we call Ārd, in the cosmos where she spins and dances while little men clamber over her asking about her past. Oh, how much she could tell us, if she was only willing! What would she tell us of those early days? We, ourselves, know precious little of our ancient past. The Great War saw to that. What we do know is that nearly a thousand years BGW (before the Great War) something apocalyptic happened in the western half of our continent Jytoh. It was something so great that it caused a massive exodus over the Ridgeback mountains into our corner of the world.

We do not know what chased them, but we do know it was Neoist priests that led them here. It were these same Neoist priests that established the first kingdoms (some of which still remain in one form or another) just to the east of the Ridgeback mountains, in those arid areas which must have reminded them of home. Whatever the great calamity may have been, we were here to stay, and over the next thousand years we spread out further to seek greener pastures. Over that time we formed unique cultures, and even met other humans which inhabited eastern Jytoh well before the Great Migrations. Perhaps we conquered them, and intermarried until our cultures blended so seamlessly, and they were forgotten. Perhaps we simply wiped them out root and stem. The entirety of our knowledge about these ancient natives are found painted in caves or carved upon great menhirs.

While the Neoists may hold the honour of having the first kingdoms, they were old, tired and decadent while we were young, fresh and ever exploring the world!


THE GREAT MIGRATIONS
900 - 500 BGW
500 - 50 BGW
100 - 500 AGW
500 KM

The Dayitic tribes which would one day form the Eastern Kingdoms arrived here in Empire lands near the end of the old era, a century or so before the War. We were one of the youngest kingdoms, although the Fresians are ever keen to disagree with us. No, they say, they had the youngest kingdoms, as if anyone else would want such a dubious honour.

> An average man am I. Just an ordinary man.
> ~Emperor Junius IV *the Magnificent* of the Heavenly Empire of Man.

It was not long after we found the eastern coast that only one way was left to us, south, and the impending horror that awaited there. If only we knew. In the harsh wastelands west of the Ridgeback mountains, there are surviving Neoist texts and stories that tell of strange creatures that walked and talked like men but were not men. Luckily for us, we were here in the east where nothing existed other than man and beast. That all changed once we started moving south.

Where the Vinean principalities now stand and even further south past the Bythikan Empire, there once existed creatures which were not men but, like the old Neoist texts said, walked and talked like men. What did they look like? All we have left of them are they taxidermied corpses the arrays can produce. We cannot trust the histories of the time, as the fragments of texts we have from the War differ so much in their description that we are no longer certain what was what. All we do now know is that we called them Sauddyr, and they had scales instead of skin, and their bulging eyes could move independently. What we can say for certain is that they took one look at us and deemed us inferior, and the feeling was quite mutual.

We did not start the century long conflagration we call the Great War. No, the flame had been kindled since the first Dayitic and Sauddyr laid eyes on one another. But it was the Sauddyr which lit the first torches. During the Great Purge which followed the War we ensured little to nothing remained of the Sauddyr cities and their libraries and wonders. There is but one item from them that still remains and is found in your Imperial library: the Sauddyr declaration of war. The Sauddyr sent messengers throughout all human lands bearing the simplest of messages: "Humans are nothing more than wild beasts rutting in the mud. It is time the Sauddyr culled them." With these two sentences, and the burning of a few human villages, the Great War began.

Before we even knew that our world was a globe, the entire world was at war. Before we even knew what continents were, the entire world was tearing itself apart. Before we even explored the world's corners and its depths, the entire world burned. Oh how the world would weep were she to tell us of this time, but as the priests are fond of telling us, even in the darkest of storms one can find the light to guide you home. We found our light in Bür, the myth, the man, the scholar, the prophet, the god depending on what your beliefs are. He gave us the runes we use so often today and taught us how to use them. He saved humanity and single-handedly changed the course of our world.

We were on the brink of extinction, but after our saviour gave us the runes we became masters of the world. There was nothing we could not do, no limit we could not break. Mountains crumbled by our wishes, and we turned valleys into inland seas with only our will. How the other five inhuman races trembled at us, how they suddenly cowered behind their walls. We gave no quarter and asked for none. For sixty-nine years we fought a losing war and in less than twenty we stood victorious. Out of the ashes of a burnt world there rose an empire.

He was the king of the Dayitic lands and the first ruler to meet with our saviour. Bür found him worthy, and along his journeys he sent humans to come to the king to organise our final offensive. And came they did, first by the dozens, then scores, then hundreds, until thousands came to kneel at his feet. Our king had his army, he had his weapons,

and south he strode. Nineteen years later our older, wiser, and bloodied king called an end to the war when the ruler of the Sauddyr fell at his feet. Holding the severed head aloft, the king proclaimed that no single kingdom could protect humanity from the remnants of the other races. Something more was needed, and so began the High Kingdom of the East.

Our king never spent a single year in it. No, this man was bred for war, born for battle. Ever south he strode, at the beginning of what we now call the Great Purge, to do exactly that. For a decade the High King, and any human willing to be at his side, strode ever further south, putting every Sauddyr village, town and city to the torch. They culled every Sauddyr they found to ensure the foul creatures could never harm us again. Ten years later and a thousand miles to the south, no Sauddyr structure taller than a child was left standing, and no Sauddyr could be found. Never again would they burn the world. At long last, peace was no longer a dream. It was real and it was ours.

This was not enough for our king. For the next nine years he sailed the coasts of the High Kingdom, making sure nothing but humans remained, clearing the path for the burgeoning settlers now streaming south into unoccupied lands. His deeds became legends even in his own time, his people heaping greater and greater honours on him until he became nearly as mythic as Bür himself. Finally, as an old man with no more wars to fight, the king came home to parades and fanfare. He walked through cities that had rebuilt themselves in his near two decades of absence. Far from enjoying the rest his old bones wanted, the people declared him Emperor Faustus I of the Empire of Man!

And so in bloodshed and fanfare began our illustrious history. A trend that would continue until our current day. The following three centuries of our Empire bear little for us to talk about. Oh, I am sure they were exciting times for those involved, but the time consisted of little more than migrating to new areas and exterminating any Inhumans they encountered. In my time I have found that we humans are quite adept at that, running and killing, and sometimes we can even do both at once. Of all the times and events of the Great Purge of the Inhumans, I take most interest in the very end of it.

In the 347th year after the Great War (AGW), the last of the Froskdyr was discovered on the eastern continent. Great fuss was made about it as none of the Inhuman amphibians had been seen in decades. It was such a fuss that our Emperor Leonard III heard about it and paid a king's ransom to have this Froskdyr brought to his menagerie in Faustad. There the poor creature stayed for the next twenty-four years until its death.

The Froskdyr called himself Beltiz and learned our tongue quickly enough. He soon proved himself not to be the beast we all thought him to be. He was said to be quite an articulated chap, able to spar words with the finest minds of the empire, and it was not long before he left the menagerie to become a personal guest of the Emperor. He was quite the sensation among the nobility. After all, none in the empire had seen an Inhuman in living memory, only hearing of them through children's stories and pirates' tall tales. Where they expected evil incarnate ready to again wipe humanity off the face of the globe, they found instead a man (arguably) who knew nothing in his life except the constant flight from humans who wished him dead. He could not clearly not remember the Great War, and the reasons behind were lost to him as it were to us.

For the first time we were confronted with the horror of the Great Purge, of exterminating entire races for the crimes of their forefathers. The Emperor wasted little time and instituted the Law of Inhuman Compassion. It decreed that no Inhuman may ever again be harmed in the empire, and any foreign nation doing so will feel the full force of the empire's might. For this, they gave Leonard III the posthumous title of The Softhearted. More cynical historians call him the Leonard the Late as his compassionate law came

Heavenly Imperial Legions of Man

They are oldest extant military force in the world, technically speaking. When the Empire of Man dissolved in 834AGW, the Legion dissolved alongside it. All but one battalion that is, belonging the Margraviate of Valonia. The Markgrave took them on as his personal guard and so they continued for the next two centuries. When the Heavenly Empire of Man was formed in 1034AGW, the Valonian Legionnaires became the bedrock of the new legions, bridging the gap between the two empires.

Since its inception, the Legions have been a professional military force. Although feudalism waxed and is slowly waning, the militia and levies raised by the Imperial States rarely match up in quality with the Legions. As the Imperial Throne is an elected position, the Legions also serve as the solely neutral body within the Empire. They are loyal to the Emperor only, whomever he may be. When the crown passes from one man to the next, the Legions follow, knowing it will only be for a short while. Their motto exemplifies why they truly are the only loyal sons of the Empire: "*Our blood is the Empire's coin to spend*."

far, far too late to have any effect whatsoever. The Great Purge, as with the Great Migration, had moved too far beyond the empire's borders, and were coming to a close as Inhumans were now as rare as snow in the desert.

For his remaining years, Beltiz lived a more privileged life than any noble. He was the best friend of the Emperor, and yet still he wasted away in despair, and died alone in 371AGW, the last known member of his race. His legacy is a melancholic one and his life was a tragedy. The epic poem "Dry Tears of Home" that he wrote in captivity serves as a stark reminder of what happens with slopes that are slippery, and when an entire world jumps off it. In his eulogy, Leonard the Softhearted called an end to the Great Purge now that the last known inhuman had finally died. In his farewell to his dearest friend, he hoped that what we managed to accomplish was worth all that we had lost.

While the Imperial Court grieved at the end of the Great Purge, many others around the world greeted it with a sense of relief. In many areas, entire generations had lived or died without seeing the Inhumans, but still their shadow had hung around, this spectre, this boogeyman who may one day return to burn the world. Now that it was all over, humanity breathed a great sigh, and then paused and wondered. What do we do now? Where do we go from here? As always when there is a vacuum, politics and religion are always eager to step up and fill the role.

A scant few generations later, and suddenly empires were everywhere. In the west, the great Neoist empire was on its last legs, gaining and losing both territory and monarchs faster than anyone could count. Here, our own empire could not have been doing better. It was at its greatest extent it had ever been or will ever be again. It controlled everything from the Maiden states in the west to the island of Alfresia in the east, from the Nacitanian duchies in the north all the way to the Vinean tribes in the south. It seemed as if nothing could put a dent in the empire, except for the growing threat far to the south: the soon-to-be Bythikan Empire and their Prodigalist notions.

The Prodigalist faith has been around since the time of Bür, and they worshipped him as god. It had never gained much traction

anywhere but in the south. The Empire of Man was the heart of Progenitorism; the Neoists brooked no heretic; and the northerners either had their own unique form of Neoism and Progenitorism, or had their own pagan gods to worship. Only the various petty kingdoms and city states of what would later be the Bythikan empire gave the Prodigalists a fair chance. They did, however, give the faith the derogatory name of Prodigals as a way to say they were wasting their time. Even though they were never a majority, the Prodigalists bided their time until King Bythika of the small kingdom of Bythika, in its capital city of Bythika (the Bythikans are nothing if not uncreative traditionalists) converted. It did not take long for this fanatical warlord to unite the various city states and petty kingdoms into a united force and on 446AGW the Eternal Prodigalist Empire was officially formed.

Their emperor took as hard a line concerning religion as the Neoists, and converted many of his populace by the sword. Not content with his corner of the world, he sent out missionaries to convert the other nations. Our empire was a favourite target of his. This shook the empire as nothing had for many generations. Before this, the only threats to the religious authority of the empire were the eternal screaming and chest thumping of Neoists far to the west, and the reclusive Vinean pagans in the south. These missionaries, on the other hand, were organised, patient and clever. The Vinean pagans in the south gave them the same retort they did the Imperial Progenitor priests, and so the missionaries decided their time was best spent elsewhere. They left the pagans alone and found a richer target: our imperial cities.

The masses came in droves to hear these eloquent missionaries speak, and it was not long before Prodigalism became accepted by the common people. Temples began springing up in every town and city that could afford them. Fearful that the Prodigalist peasants might turn against him, Emperor Gerhard I the Conciliator bade them to choose a high priest to stand next to the Progenitorist Patriarch and Matriarch at his throne. It was the legitimisation they had craved. No sooner did the high priest set foot in the Imperial Court when riots broke out across the empire. Mostly they were by Progenitorists who were furious at no longer having supreme divine power, but also by the Vinean pagans who had striven hard for centuries to be accepted.

The worst blow, however, was the western princes of the Maiden states who gave an ultimatum to the Emperor. “Choose the Prodigalists, or us”, it said, although more eloquently than I could. With rioting across the empire, the Emperor knew it would only become more bloody if he renounced the new faith, and thus with a heavy heart he granted the Maidens independence. And so began the slow decline of the Empire of Man.

There is not much to say about the next few centuries. The Maidens formed their historic Shield Alliance, and built their impressive thousand kilometre long Shield Wall to keep the howling Neoists at bay, and earned the moniker of Shield Maidens. The Vinean pagans martyred themselves one after the other in huge runic explosions across the empire until they too gained their independence. While the east was in turmoil, in the west the great Neoist Empire breathed its last and fell apart. Our empire slowly but surely lost ground, but it was the end of the eighth century which started putting nails in our coffin.

Near the end of the eighth century came two devastating events that we could not have foreseen. First was an immense quake across the Centrum sea to the north that we felt even here in the heart of the empire. This did not bother us as much as the seismic sea wave which followed. It killed tens of thousands, destroyed hundreds of towns and cities, and annihilated leagues of coasts and farmlands. It was as if the world herself could not forgive us our past sins. We could have overcome this calamity, we could have rebuilt what we lost had we only the time, but less than a decade later the Gitics invaded.

The Gitics were a hodgepodge of tribes following, loosely, the same pagan traditions that the Prodigalist Empire had finally got tired of, and so had chased them out. Unfortunately, they were aimed squarely at us. A horde the likes of which we had not seen since the Great War caused such damage as we had not seen since the Great Purge. The disorganised Vinean tribes never stood a chance and fell like wheat before the scythe. This did not sate the Gitic horde, and it soon started picking off our frontier lands. By the time the Imperial Legions could respond, the horde had taken a dozen duchies and more.

The Imperial Legions gave as good as they got, but in the end numbers always matter. It did not help the Legions that they constantly had to be called away. The Neoists decided our exposed flanks made the time ripe for a new slave trade, and our Legions were needed to drive them back. Having to fend off both the Neoists and Gitics, we were driven back to our last stand at the Seiver river, beyond which lies the heart of the empire. In a sense, we never truly won that war, we merely made it too costly for the Gitics to continue the fight. So they turned back and were content with ruling over the Vineans from the eastern islands, which to this day are still called the Hammer Isles.

The empire never recovered from this. Oh, we rebuilt what the Gitics had destroyed, but spiritually we were never the same. We became paranoid and xenophobic, cutting off contact with the outside world while spending all we had on our military. We grew distrustful of each other and made law after law to dictate how we should walk and talk and write and live. Some scholars say the empire died with the Gitic invasions, and I am of a mind to agree with them. The empire did not live after that, it merely existed. And so in 834AGW we saw the final nail hitting the coffin with the Summer of Ten Emperors.

When the previous, weak-willed Emperor Wilhelm III, died leaving no heirs, his "closest" and "most loving" relatives came out of the woodwork. Everyone, apparently, was the one that, surely of course, the Emperor would have named as his heir. When the Triarchy of religious leaders could not choose, these heirs took matters into their own hands. The ten most powerful each grabbed the closest priest at hand and had themselves crowned as the new rightful Emperor. The empire was barely large enough for one Emperor, it could not contain ten of them. So it was to be war. Ten small "empires" attacking each other and everyone else they could lay their hands on. Fifty four days and thousands of souls later, the Ten Emperors finally made peace. There would no longer be an empire, but there would be peace. It was more than we could hope for, and more than what we deserved.

> I am the Empire!
> ~Emperor Markus II of the Heavenly Empire of Man.

The Empire of Man was no more. The last thread connecting us to the Great War was finally cut. What was left in its place were dozens and dozens of duchies, city states, and kingdoms, each squabbling over what piece of land they could hold on to. For over two centuries this state of affairs lasted, and it was tantamount to chaos. Without an Emperor to reign them in, the rulers went mad with power. Everyone seemed to want to invade everyone else. The Langirdis decided to seek cooler climates and invaded the states of Rimie, Neatol and Valeron, and established the Kingdom of Langird. The Gitics decided another invasion was due and launched it from their Hammer Isles. The Nacitanians decided they had quite enough of the rest of them and conquered the Fresian peninsula. One of them by the name of Valk decided he did not quite want to be that far from the action and conquered the northern Dayitics to set up the early kingdom of Valkryk. Kings and kingdoms were lost as soon as they were raised during this troubled time. It would take a man none of these had ever heard of, from a land thousands of kilometres away to bring stability to the region.

In 1009AGW, the Emirate of Completism was established

by a bunch of rueful peasants with their Prophet at their head. This prophet, Eslin Qushtaq, was said to have both male and female genitalia, if such a thing could be believed, and they spoke of a god who was the same. This god, they said, was not the single god of Neoism, nor the Mother and Father of Progenitorism. Not, it was rather that all three were the same, single, hermaphroditic, divine being and we must all strive to be like this god. There would be neither male nor female, no lord or peasant, no miner or merchant, all would be the same in the new world. All would be equal.

Needless to say, this socially liberal philosophy caught on quite well with the lower classes. Peasants have always been jealous of their betters, and this philosophy told them they were the equal of any king. This philosophy caught on so well that they easily carved out for Qushtaq his own kingdom. But their western philosophy did not stay in the west, no it came here, muddied and muddled, but here it came, and it whipped the peasants up into a frenzy, again. The more learned and schooled of our kind saw this toxic philosophy for what it was. It was not some pretence of equality, but a destruction of individuality until everyone conformed to the same collective: the Completist collective. Already some easterners were rejecting who they were in favour of their faith.

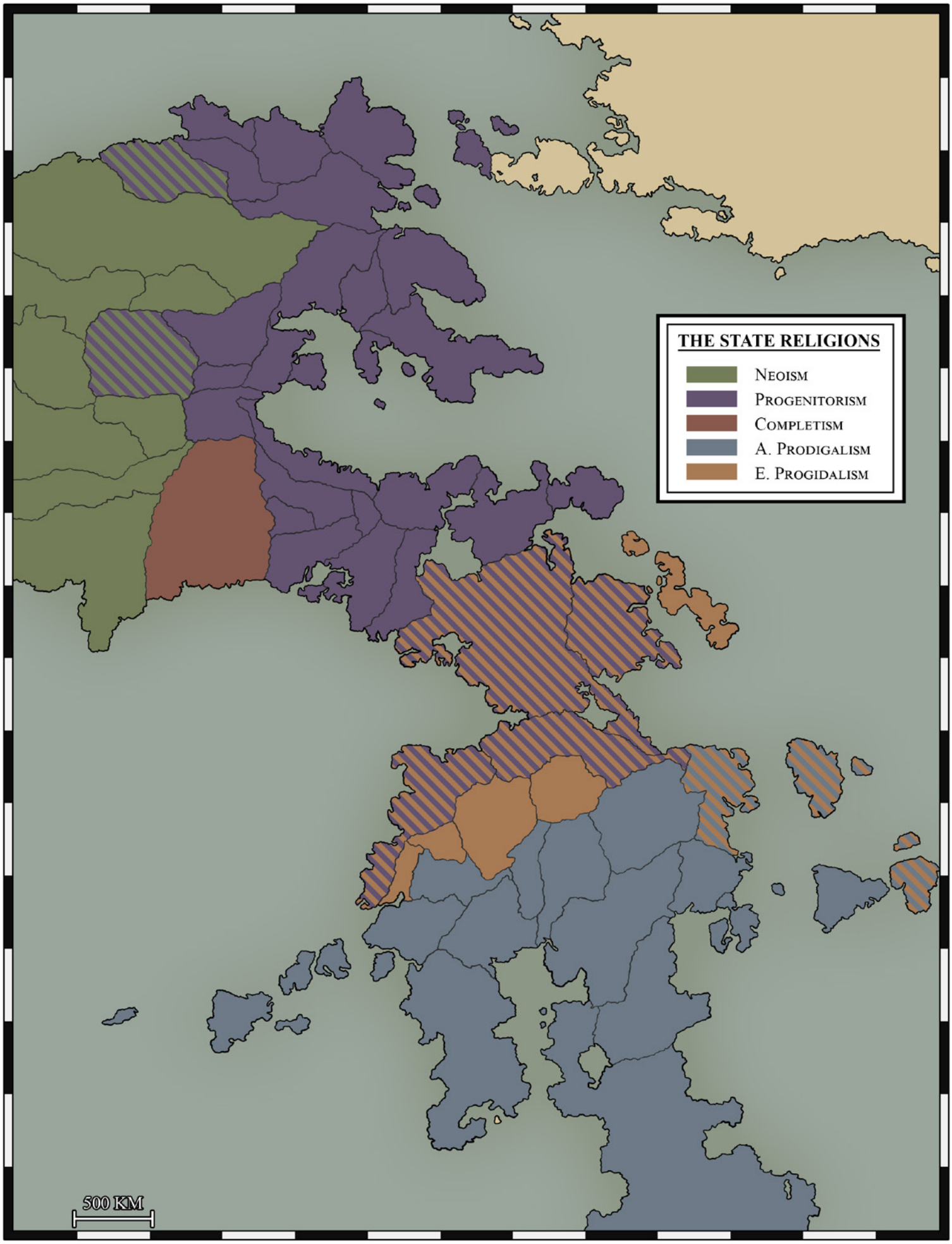
One man refused to let everything he knew become the same, grey, homogenous, mewling mass. One man vowed to take a stand. That man was King Oberon of East Dayitia, descended from the first Emperor, Faust I. Oberon organised his own Triarch of religious leaders like the Emperors of old. He was a faithful man, and obtained their blessing before launching his campaign.

Oberon was as skilled a diplomat as he was a warrior, and it was to his credit that there was to be only one great battle in his thirty year long strive to reclaim the Imperial throne. That was the battle of Bür's Bridge, aptly named for what was about to happen. Oberon's long time rival, and second cousin, King Guilhelm of Miroen and Western Dayitia. Guilhelm was the older of the two, and had spent his life battling one foe after the other to expand his grand kingdom. He would not let another now take his throne, and had come to kill his cousin and take Eastern Dayitia for himself.

When the two forces approached each other on either side of the immense bridge spanning the most powerful river in eastern Jytoh, a miracle happened. The priests, and the historians grudgingly, recount how the ground trembled and the water fumed as Oberon and Guilhelm glared at each other across the river. When the first boot struck the bridge there was a flash of light and the sound like a hundred thunderclaps. When the commotion died away, there stood Bür, crowned in all his glory and glowing from the light of his runes. Silent was he, as he beckoned the quarrelling cousins. Tens of thousands of men watched their kings cross the bridge where Bür spoke softly to them. What was said between men and god, none would ever say, but Guilhelm soon threw down his own crown and knelt at his cousin's feet.

With all eyes on Oberon, Bür as was his wont, slipped away quietly leaving Oberon to take care of matters. With the eyes of thousands then on him and the Triarch behind him, Oberon declared that Imperial law would resume, Imperial territory retaken, and Imperial tradition would continue with him at its head. This time, however, it would not simply be an empire of men, created by humans for humans and with all the failings and corruption of humans. This time, the Emperor would be nothing more than the conduit of true authority, and that authority is the gods. It was not the Empire of Man that he reinstated, but the Heavenly Empire of Man that he forged.

For the first time in over two centuries there was stability and peace in these lands. With a united empire, the barbarians beyond our borders now hesitated to attack us. With a new Emperor looking on our own kings and dukes were now more wary of internal war. Looking through the lens of hindsight and history, what


THE STATE RELIGIONS
Neoism
Progenitorism
Completism
A. Prodigalism
E. Progidalism
500 KM

to us may be a frankly boring period in imperial history must have been a gift from the gods to those people. The world outside our borders, however, raged on. The Tolians decided farming was not good enough for them, and started raiding the coasts of the continent. The descendants of the Prophet Qushtaq continued conquering and enlarging the Completist state, coming only so far as the Shield Wall. Even the Langird Kingdom dissolved and led to bitter infighting.

While the world raged to the north and to the west, the thirteenth century brought us the time of the Saint and Sinner Emperors. It involved an emperor of ours, and one from Bythika. Who the saint and who the sinner was depends entirely on whether you ask us or the Bythikans. The Bythikans had already reformed themselves a few times and was quite indecisive about whether to be secular or religious. Instead, they decided it was high time for another reformation. They now called themselves the Holy Bythikan Theocracy, envious of our title, and their new Theocrat decided tolerance was a quite quaint notion. Scarce had the crown touched his head when he began a reign of tyranny and enforced conversions that would make the Neoists look like childhood bullies.

It was a terrible time for the Bythikan people, but the regime worked and the Theocracy continued to expand for the next century. On our side of the border, we enjoyed a far more compassionate era with our Emperor St. Amadeus VI the Good. A pious man was he, a kind and gentle man, so unlike the Bythikan Theocrat. He exemplified the eight virtues of the Progenitorists. So pious was he that he never touched gold willingly and gave nearly all his money to the poor. He preferred to walk in the rags his poorest people wore than the robes of his kings. He looked so unlike an emperor that he could walk unrecognised through the streets, a benefit he took full advantage of to go to local public houses. It was not to buy himself a drink,

Our Father, Our Brother, Our Friend

It is no surprise that the religion of Bür, the Prodigalist faith, arose through the legends surrounding the mythical figure who gave humanity the knowledge of the runes. However, there is one key difference between Prodigalism and the other major religions: Prodigalism is the religion of humanity. Nearly every other religion believe that their gods are also the gods of the Inhuman races, of which only the Ogres remain. Only Prodigalists believe that their god is solely theirs.

Prodigalists comes in two flavours. The first is the northern Eternal Prodigalism, considered the more liberal of two. Eternal Prodigalism blends the divinity of Bür with the Heavenly Progenitors, creating a triumvirate of gods. They believe the Progenitors retreated from the world after creation and Bür was born to lead in their place. He is the perfect being, created to govern the universe that the Progenitors made.

The southern August Prodigalists, based in Bythika, is nearly as harsh a religion as Neoism. They also believe in the Progenitors but that these beings were imperfect grotesques, primeval gods that created an imperfect universe and went into slumber. Bür was born of this absence, perfection from chaos. He came to the world to save humanity and it is thus our purpose to repay this debt.

Prodigalism encourages personal, individual growth. Only by becoming perfect and virtuous can we help the world to become so as well.

but instead to buy the poor men a round of ale and listen to their troubles.

The people loved him for it and no other era brought as many liberal laws as Amadeus the Good's reign. To say the nobles did not care much for him would be a grave understatement. He gave away their riches, their mansions, their very clothes. They could do nothing about it, however, as the masses were on the Emperor's side. He even converted his Imperial Mansions into hospices for the sick, and orphanages and schools for the impoverished. He was too pure for this sinful existence, and a lightning strike ended his life, everyone agreed that the gods called him home. He was immediately canonised a saint and now watches over the empire, good kings and the poor.

The gods have kept a keen interest in the Empire since it gained its Heavenly prefix. On the fiftieth anniversary of St. Amadeus' canonisation, the Progenitorist church founded the first religious military orders. The Fraternal and Sororal Orders of the Heavenly Compass, they were called. The Holy Sororal Hospitaller Orders of the Eastern Dawn and Western Dusk were charged with caring for all Progenitorists across the lands. The Eastern Dawn established a hospital in Fresland and the Western Dusk in Neatol. The Fraternal Holy Military Order of the Knights of the Northern Shield was stationed at the great Shield Wall to protect Progenitorists lands from Completists and Neoists. The Fraternal Holy Military Order of the Knights of the Southern Sword was charged with bringing the words of the Divine Father and Mother to the southern heathens. Officially this was meant for the Vinean and Gitic pagans, but its true purpose was to keep the ever expanding Bythikan Theocracy in check.

The religious tension between the two empires continued to grow, thanks to the madness of the Bythikan Theocrats. The Theocrats could not fathom how the northern Prodigalists in our empire could allow the Progenitorists to do as they pleased. More so, they could not understand why our Prodigalists did not accept the Theocrat as their one, true religious leader. After all, the Bythikan Prodigalists did. This came to a head in 1439AGW when the Theocrat threatened war if the northern Prodigalists would not submit to him. Backed by the political clout of Emperor Hendrik III, The High Priest summarily refused. Enraged, the Theocrat sent his armies time and again north to be smashed by the Order of the Southern Sword and the Imperial legions.

> Our time on this world is irrelevant. What we do with that time is what matters.
>
> ~Emperor St. Amadeus VI *the Good* of the Heavenly Empire of Man.

By 1454AGW the Theocrat had had enough and declared all Prodigalists who would not submit to him to be heretics whose life was forfeit. In response, Emperor Hendrik III made the High Priest a prince and named him Most August Fürst of the Prodigals. Unsurprisingly, this caused a schism in the church, creating the Northern and Southern Prodigal churches. When the August Fürst created the Holy Order of the Knights of the Eternal Runes, or Runic Knights for short, to protect the Northern Prodigalists, and only them, from any outside harm, the schism was solidified.

It was not only the religious schisms that alienated men from their brothers, but also the political, for what would the nobility be if there was not always a dagger lurking in the dark. In 1522AGW Emperor Karl IV signed the First Fürst Accords, the basis of the legal system we still use today. I attempted to read it once but I fell asleep as if I held a bottle of whiskey in my hands rather than a book. It is a dreadfully boring text, but hidden in the flowery words and legal jargon there is a paragraph that nearly destroyed the empire yet again.

Before that time, the Emperor chose his heir from amongst his blood and his house. It was simple and effective. The new Emperor would always be of royal blood, and he would be

chosen on merit rather than the date of his birth. Whether by accident or design, the wording of the accords was so vague that it meant that any man, be he prince or pauper, foreigner or local could now be chosen to be Emperor. It seemed no longer would the Emperor choose his own heir. Any man holding a castle with the title of duke or higher would gain the title of Fürst, attached to his residence, that allowed him to vote on whom the new Emperor should be. The Triarch were each given this privilege as well, although they were barred from being selected to prevent another Theocrat.

In one stroke, the empire as we knew it changed. Every man suddenly became far more ambitious and suspiciously charitable, hoping to win a few votes. One not so charitable, but exceedingly ambitious, man was the Emperor's son, who had perhaps hoped to be Emperor after his father. Denied this right, he took matters into his own hands. Karl IV died of mysterious circumstances shortly thereafter. His son proclaimed himself Karl V without waiting for a vote and started the Fürst Civil war. It did not last long as the Progenitorist and Prodigalist holy military orders joined the war to oust him. It was the first and only time that both religions turned against the Emperor and warred with the state. All his war got Karl V was a severed head and the certainty that his royal house would not be elected to the Imperial Throne for the next two centuries.

If politics nearly destroyed our empire, religion nearly destroyed the north. The Neoists and Progenitorists never saw eye to eye, and for three centuries they decided to see whether and eye for an eye really did leave the world blind. Three centuries of holy wars. Three centuries of death and famine and pestilence left in the wake of countless armies. Tens of thousands of men warred in short-lived kingdoms that were destroyed nearly before they were created. The Delkan lands and Tolian tribes were the victims of this nigh eternal contest to see who could urinate the furthest. By the end of the Holy War Era the Progenitorists came out ahead, but only slightly. The same could not be said for the lands they had trampled.

With the end of the Holy War Era and start of the eighteenth century, we saw the great age of knights and chivalry. Every noble and man-at-arms was bedecked in shining armour and colourful arms. Women still swoon when thinking of this time, or so my daughter tells me. The greatest of these secular knightly order were perhaps the Fresian Lion Knights, or to give them their proper name: the Royal Guardly Order of Knights of the Golden Lions. They strutted around the eastern part of the empire in their dashing colours, saving maidens from towers and killing dragons. This is, of course, if you believe those types of stories.

But it was not all moonshine and roses. This time period also marked the decline of our empire, yet again. From this time our empire slowly shrank as it did over a thousand years previously. The worst of these occurred after the Heavenly Imperial Civil War, orchestrated by the king of Fresland. It saw the Empire lose more than a quarter of its lands, and some say we still have not recovered. Fresland would get its just desserts, however, when its own civil war a century later would see it lose a third of its own lands.

The Heavenly Empire might well have gone the route of the old Empire had it not been for the discovery of the great southern continent by a daring Neoist astronomer. Unspoiled by civilisation, its lands sparsely populated with barbarians, it was ripe for the taking. The Sultanate of Tanfakech tried to keep the news quiet, but it spread like wildfire. Soon every port in every nation was building ships to depart for unknown seas. The chaos of the first few decades gave way to a petulant truce between the nations. Skirmishes on the seas flared up every so often but the nations were content to work together against the southern natives, who, quite surprisingly had a vast knowledge of the runes and creative ways of applying these. Blood was paid by the barrel full for every centimetre of

land, but slowly footholds were acquired over the past two centuries.

The colonisation may have been yet another dull entry in a stupefying history book were it not for the world shattering news forty-seven years ago. Plunging into the jungle, mercenaries under the contract of the Fresian Merchant League heard reports from natives of strange creatures who walked like men and talked like men, but were not men. Nothing but savage superstition, they thought until they happened upon a peculiar looking skull. Study at the Middelburg university revealed it to be nothing less than a skull from a Kwendyr, an Inhuman from the Great War thought extinct after the Great Purge.

And with that ominous titbit, my liege, the tale is concluded. There lays the story of our world thus far. Two thousand and four years after the Great War and barely anything seems to have changed. Our lands are still embroiled in war. Pestilence still stalks the nights of winter. Men still steal from their neighbours and still lie to their wives. And perhaps the Inhumans still walk the globe. As we prepare for yet another seemingly inevitable war, have we learnt anything? Truly? You are the latest in the line of men we trust to guide and protect us. I most sincerely hope that as you enjoy your years on the throne, you will ensure that we, your people, enjoy ours in safety and peace.

Ever your most humble servant,

Klaus von Stadsheim.

This letter was a far easier prospect to obtain. The heathen Neoists speak much of their piety, but a little money in the right hands shows that piety for the falsehood it is. Truly, only in our most glorious Empire do men live who can stand steadfast behind their morals.

I must, however, say that in my most humblest of humblest opinions that I have read this letter and cannot find anything of great import within it. I would of course never dare to question your glorious and most holy divine person. If I, with my clear lowly intellect may hazard the wildest of guess, my august liege, would your interest perhaps pertain to the talks of sightings of Kwendyr in the southern continent? If I have, by wild luck, guessed correctly, shall I focus my efforts on more information pertaining to that matter? I would, of course, never shirk the noble duties you have given me.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD THAT WE FORGOT

My old kaín often used to say in his sermons that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes. It was quaint, old sentiment, but he always finished it off by saying that those who do learn from history are doomed to watch others repeat its mistakes. As I sit here, long in the tooth, overlooking a harbour where slaves carry weapons and munitions onto warships from dusk till dawn, the meaning of that idiom has finally dawned on me. It is not a warning that the mistakes of the past will always be repeated, but a statement of practicality and fact. It only takes one man's carelessness for the world to come to an end. With so many men in this life, how can we prevent all of them from being careless? One sparrow does not make summer, but one madman can destroy the world.

As our planet inches ever closer to the apocalypse the prophets foretold, have we learnt anything from our world's last apocalypse? God sang us into the world, one song for the world and seven songs for the seven races, but I fear He now weeps eight tears. A tear for what we have done to his world, a tear for every race we have destroyed, and His last tear for humanity that has strayed far from His guiding light. Once, we were one people, one nation, under one God, but now look at us! We divide ourselves into smaller and smaller political factions every year. We worship false gods or make heretical desecrations of the one true God. We have truly gone astray.

When God sang the world into creation, we were the last race of which He sang. Time after time, He attempted to raise the beasts to a higher level, but they were weak and unclean. So He crafted a song not of the land, or of the seas below, or of the cosmos above, but of Himself. We were the song that could sing. In those early days, as the prophets wrote, we could sing the hymns of creation just as we write the runes today, but these are a sad reflection of what we could do. We are ever grateful that God took pity on us and sent His most beloved prophet Bür to give us back a taste of the power we had squandered.

We would not have lost the gift of the song had it not been for the heathen barbarians clawing at the edges of our beautiful cities and temples. No sooner had God's song ended than they decried Him, blasphemed against Him

and sought to turn others against Him. We did what we had to, because could. First we were merciful, then compassionate, then tolerant, then we were firm, but nothing we did could convince them. For our failure God took away the divine melodies and no longer could we sing of creation. Our lands dried up and storms of sand and lightning enveloped our cities. We had to leave. A few brave souls elected to stay behind and God has rewarded their faith with strong and powerful nations today.

We crossed the Ridgebacks and settled in eastern Jytoh, founding new kingdoms. The lands we chose were harsh and unforgiving, but it was to be our penitence for our crimes. The weak willed barbarians could accept not even this, wishing easier lands for their lazy hands. They kept moving, kept running from God's light. This flight saw them rushing headlong into our destruction. We faithful have always had to pay the debt for the crimes of the heathens, but it is a cost we have been willing to bear. We knew the Sauddyr struck first, envious of our closeness with God, but sometimes I wonder what the Dayitic barbarians did to provoke them. Had we encountered them instead, the world would have been a much more different, much more beautiful place today.

As the day the prophets foretold draws ever closer, let us look at the madmen of the last apocalypse. Perhaps we can learn of their mistakes to find the madmen today and discover how best to contain their destruction. Of humans, more than enough has been written, and most of it is useless. Every race, creed, and culture, and city writes only what makes them seem superior. So let us look at the Inhuman races, those envious creatures who truly began the Great War.

As we destroyed them and their cities in the Great Purge, so we have destroyed their very names. What we name the Inhumans now are the proto-Dayitic names the eastern barbarians gave these races. The dyr found as the suffix to every inhuman race is just the proto-Dayitic word for beast, showing how little the easterners care about anyone but themselves. The Inhumans' original names have been lost to the ages, except for the astute historian who can dig through a library's worth of books and scrolls to find a scrap. Instead we call them by our own, derogatory names thanks to the eastern Dayitic empire's eternal dream to force its culture on others. So we use their crude words even here in the west, lest we scholars become disassociated from the world at large.

Riusdyr

We talk of the Great Purge as if all Inhumans fell under its wide scope, but that is not strictly true. Of the six Inhuman races, one race was spared this genocide. The Riusdyr, or Ogres in the vernacular, fought on the humans' side during the Great War from the very beginning until its bloody end. While they may have the intelligence of a four-year old human child and a limited vocabulary, an ogre's loyalty is always above question. It is precisely for their great loyalty we humans not once hesitated to grant them the same status as humans. They were our protective, larger brothers and we strove to protect them in kind.

Not that the ogres need much help with protecting themselves. With their hunched over frames standing over 3 metres tall, an ogre is truly an intimidating sight to behold. Whatever man brave or foolish enough to attack one anyway will face a hide tougher than any leather, and hair as course as hemp to protect it. With hands that can encircle a fully grown man the intruder will be pulped and smashed to fragments. Truly, ogres are living warmachines and we used them as just such during the Great War. We are fortunate that their small intellect prevents them from organising any sort of force and from learning the power of the runes. If they ever could, we would forever be helpless against such foes.

It is that same small intellect that has been the ogres downfall. As with many weak-minded

human simpletons, ogres are quick to trust and cannot recognise deception. This has been exploited by poachers over the past two millennia to satisfy the demands of black market profiteers and woods witches. Unscrupulous nobles and merchants would pay a small fortune for a natural ogre pelt, ogre meat, an ogre skull, or even the entire skeleton should they be so lucky. The pagan witches brewing their useless potions in forgotten woods and rundown ghettos prize every part of the ogre. They believe ogre parts to have healing properties. Their potions do not work, but that does not stop the uneducated poor buying it, continuing the demand for dead ogres.

The personhood-status of ogres means any harm a man does to them is punished just as it would be if the harm was done to another man. An ogre's death means death to his killer. The prospect of death, however, has not prevented the ogres' ever declining numbers. They are now an endangered species, much like the equatorial walrus. A mere few thousand exist today in the world, and most of these in special reservations under strict guard. Even protected, their numbers still dwindle. Soon the Great Purge will finally be over, and we will have lost a majestic race of creatures with a fascinating culture we could learn much from.

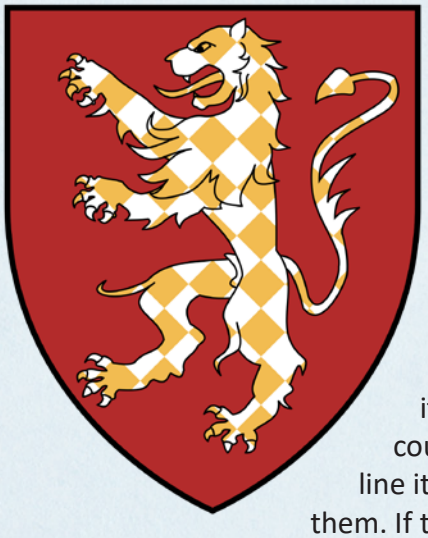
The ogre species has a tremendously interesting culture. It as varied as humans, with ogres in different regions having different cultures, yet at the same time the similarity in the minutiae between these ogre races are startling. As a rule, ogres do not wear clothing, owing to their thick fur, but all but the most wild of ogres adorn their fur with some form of decorations. Perhaps they have learnt it from the humans they have come into contact with. One can often identify from where an ogre hails by not only looking only at the colour of its skin and fur, but by these decorative adornments.

In the Tolian lands, ogres have taken to scrimshawing tusks and teeth of various animal, even their own fallen ogres'. They also trade for these from the local humans, and braid them into their thick fur. This is done as a rite of passage and for significant events. You can tell the age of a Tolian ogre by the amount of bone it is covered in. The Bythikan ogres, on the other hand, prefer threading cloth through their fur. The more colourful and rare the cloth, the higher the status of the ogre, and thus more mates it will have. The so called Ogre King of Bythika is so bedecked in silks, satins and cloths-of-gold that one can hardly make out his skin and fur beneath it all.

One startling similarity between all ogre cultures is the concept of "gift giving". This concept is virtually unchanged in all ogre societies, even those who have never met a human before. This concept entails that any gift that one receives must be kept until it is either broken or, as in most cases, eaten. A gift must never be thrown away or lost, as this is a deep shame that some ogres have been killed for. The end result of this is that many ogres, especially the older ones, are positively bedecked in all manner of things, from stones, bones, and branches, to objects given by human societies.

It is not uncommon to find an ogre with swords and pistols, hats and dresses, toys and boot tied all over him. These would have been gifts from humans, or more importantly, were seen as gifts. The limited intellect of an ogre may perceive a gift being given even when rubbish is thrown in its direction. This is born out of a desire to be seen as one who would be given a lot of gifts. This desperation to be seen as one who is loved and admired has led a Mollachian tribe of ogres to adopt a very liberal view of "gifts" and "giving". Some have gone so far as outright theft, robbery and murder to acquire their gifts. It is of no surprise then that Mollachian ogres' personal adornment lies not towards tusks or cloths but various miscellaneous objects which they display to show how "loved" they are.

As with most creatures, humans included, such ostentatious displays are nearly always done to project an aura of power to attract mates. As with other creatures, one would think these displays are limited to males. This, however,



Alfresian Museum of Natural History

Dusty halls, strange stuffed and mounted creatures, mountains of books and scrolls, and an air of sobriety and somberness. The Museum is at once a valuable piece of the fabric of Middelburg and yet a utter waste of space.

To the university, the Runist monks, scholars and other well read persons, the Museum is a sanctuary of knowledge in the bustling, overcrowded city. It has existed since the Archduchy of Alfresia was formed, and the Archdukes had always ensured it was well stocked with as much oddities, curios, and tomes they could lay their hands on. Artefacts from across Jythoh and beyond line its walls, with many an Inhuman tool, weapon or art-piece among them. If there is anything you want to know about history, there is no better place in the city to come looking for it.

That's not enough for some, however. The Museum is a large complex of buildings, covering a fair amount of land. That's lucrative real estate. Imagine what workshops and warehouses could be put there, what markets and store fronts could occupy that land. Imagine the profit. That's what the Merchant League and many bourgeois in the city think. Like pigs sniffing out truffle, they come sniffing out the money to be made here. They also have an ulterior motive: they want the treasures in the Museum for themselves. After all, who doesn't want a preserved Inhuman pelt on their walls, or a set of armour from the Great War itself? Pride and greed are good bedfellows, and they have caused a lot of friction between those who wish to preserve the history of the city and the nation, and those who wish to profit from it.

is not the case. In most cases, it is the females which are most adorned, especially by gifts given by males. Apart from males currying favour for mating, these gifts are also given as a sort of payment for protection. The reason for this is that female ogres never cease growing. Males reach maturity at around three to four metres in height, while females continue growing until their hearts can no longer support their size. The largest female ever recorded was in the Heavenly Empire of Man, at a shocking height of eight metres and eighty-nine years of age.

This unending growth is an artefact from earlier eras where ogres roamed across the land, free from reservations and the rifles of humans. Males, with their belligerent nature, would often die young in clashes with other ogres or other creatures. The responsibility of protecting the herd would then fall to the matriarch, the oldest and thus largest of the ogre herd. As times have passed and ogres have been given protected status and confined to reservations, males do not die as often as they had, leaving a quite different social order to these creatures.

Froskdyr

The ogres survived the Great Purge, but there is one inhuman race which ended it. The Froskdyr. Confined mostly to the eastern continent before the Great War, they were latecomers to both the War and the Purge. The Sauddyr and Cordyr fell before man reached Froskdyr lands, and one can only imagine the dread these creatures must have felt knowing that the tide of death sweeping across the lands would eventually reach them too. We have few human records of the Froskdyr Purge, as the nomads who took to the eastern continent had little use of literacy. We do know, however, that the Froskdyr were admirable

adversaries. They fought as if the Great War had not ended, which in part was true for them. They never saw an end to the fighting.

What records we do have, that are of any reasonable degree of accuracy, comes from a single source. The Froskdyr captive taken near the end of the Purge by the Emperor of the then Empire of Man is our only gateway in Froskdyr life. This poor creature, called Beltiz, was enslaved by the Emperor and trotted out for his court's amusement and mockery. Even in such barbaric conditions, he wrote down the oral history of his people as best he could remember it. The Froskdyr, amphibious as they were, had little use for writing when it could not survive their time under the water, so kept their histories as songs much as we Neoists have done.

Beltiz wrote down every song of his people, knowing that they would be the only remnant left after his people's genocide. What he wrote spoke of a people as complex as our own. It talked of kingdoms, and chiefdoms, and empires. It sang of mythology and religion, of folklore and philosophy. It revealed everything we know today of the Froskdyr biology, sociology, politics and religion.

Being amphibious creatures, the Froskdyr never ventured far from water. They kept their communities always on riverbanks, stream beds and on lake edges. When they did set out from their watery homes, which Beltiz tells us was not quite often, their towns and cities were in the wettest, most humid areas of the eastern continent's rainforests. For this reason, the eastern nomads used the power of the runes to either dry out the rainforests or burn them down entirely to root out the Froskdyr. Even the captive Beltiz's gilded cage had been runically enhanced to increase the humidity so that he could live there. Some have often speculated that the Emperor sabotaged these runes in order to surreptitiously kill Beltiz when he became too much of a political nuisance.

For an amphibious race, one would think the Froskdyr preferred wood and vine to create their structures but curiously enough, this was not the case. The earliest examples archaeologists have found of Froskdyr dwellings on land were, yes, comprised of wood and vine, but the Froskdyr quickly moved to stone, which would not degrade as easily as wood under water. Their sensibly, and in some cases intricately, carved towns and cities moved seamlessly from land into water. They were cities of three dimensions. Even those communities purely on land dug down deep into the soil, looking for moisture or underground streams and lakes.

Similarly, their societies were of three dimensions. Unlike human society, where social movement merely consists of moving up or down the various strata, Froskdyr could move in any social direction. There was no ladder where one's place is a well-defined rung upon which he stands. Rather to the Froskdyr, every career was measured by the careers around it. Carpenters were more important than blacksmith, but were less important than masons. Masons in turn were more important than courtiers but less than farmers. Farmers were more important than hunters, but less important than courtiers who in turn were less important than blacksmiths. Round and round it went. It was a highly confusing social dynamic which surely must have taken up a good deal of the Froskdyrs' time just to figure out where they stood.

This dynamic was also not limited to the sexes. While there is a similarity to the interplay between the human sexes, the Froskdyr approached it from a different angle. Froskdyr do not produce live young, instead laying a large brood of eggs, nor do they have external sexual characteristics. As such, the only dimorphism between the sexes is that males are slightly larger than females. Beltiz writes about differences in scents and sounds, but this was beyond human recognition. While females do care for the egg broods, they are less bound to the home and have instead taken on the roles of creators.

It were the female Froskdyr who were the masons and smiths and carpenters, opportunities that allowed them to be sedentary

so as to care for the collective egg broods. It were the males that travelled, almost constantly if Beltiz were to be believed, from one village and town to the next. Part of this was to spread their seed, but the greater part was the role they played in society, that of the merchants, the hunters, the scholars. They were the ones who ferried goods, food and information between the villages. In most cases they also acted as a nomadic military and police force, solving problems when and where they were.

In respects to the Froskdyr military during the Great War, it is unsurprisingly that their focus was in the water rather than on land. Our own records state that their navy was beyond compare. Even without ships there was nothing as dangerous as a Froskdyr in the water. The seas, rivers, lakes, and swamps were areas that we avoided later in the war, knowing that any amount of Froskdyr could be hiding beneath the surface and we would never have known. They never became adept at land warfare, however, and human cavalry would scatter them quite easily enough. Land was our one respite from their terror. Unfortunately for them, after we gained the power of the runes, not even the deepest depths spared them from our notice.

Cordyr

Unlike the Froskdyr, the diminutive Cordyr had an interesting relationship with humans. They also sometimes known as the Veradyr, which means 'traitorous beasts', already showing the nature of this relationship. As with the Froskdyr, we Neoists were fortunate to never have had dealings with the Cordyr. It were the early proto-Uttosian tribes who migrated to the eastern continent that were said to have cordial relations with the Cordyr. History tells us that they even lived among the Cordyr. They say it was not uncommon for the early kingdoms in the far east to be jointly ruled by both human and Cordyr.

These cordial relations would not survive the War. The Cordyr had never heard of the Sauddyr at the start of the Great War, but once the proto-Uttosian humans were drawn into the conflict, the Cordyr did not hesitate to brave the ocean to do war with the reptilian Sauddyr. While their diminutive stature did not lend itself to the melee of war, they were creative creatures and had already invented an early form of the crossbow. This allowed them to be deadly at range without the need of training or the strength the other races possessed. However, what truly set them apart was their sense of smell. Even today we still say a man has the nose of a Cordyr.

What the Cordyr could not foresee, nor could we for that matter, was that their entry into the war would cause the Sauddyr to seek out other allies. So the Akkedyr and Froskdyr entered the fray and the entire world was at war. The Akkedyr immediately began to assault our Mekadian lands, while the Froskdyr launched their main offensive against the Cordyr. With the main bulk of the Cordyr in Jytoh to battle the Sauddyr, what remained in the eastern continent were the females and the males too weak, young or old to go to war. It was a slaughter. The Cordyr were forced to return to their homelands, leaving only token forces in Jytoh. In the east, they did their best to fight the Froskdyr, but they became bogged down in siege after siege.

The Cordyr were forced to sign peace treaties with the Froskdyr to prevent all their holds from being eradicated. Under pressure from Froskdyr and Sauddyr they joined the war again only a few years later. Unfortunately, this time it was to wage war against the humans. They were once our allies and so knew our strategies and our tactics, the whereabouts of or strongholds and fortresses, and they knew how to cripple us. Legends tell us that the diminutive beasts would lay in wait in tall grasses and under brush. Any humans that came by would be peppered by hundreds of arrows and bolts, and the Cordyr would disappear as if they were never there.

It goes without saying that we humans took a perverse pleasure in exterminating the cowardly, treasonous beasts. While the Dayitics, united

under their new Empire of Man took to the Sauddyr, the Tolians and proto-Uttosians spent the next century finding every barrow and hole where the Cordyr were hiding to pay them in kind for their treason.

To understand the madness of the Cordyr's actions during the War, we must understand what makes the mind of a Cordyr. The Cordyr were diminutive, hairy mammals who occupied the northern half of the eastern continent. They were utterly indifferent to the cold of the far north where they first met us. Their fur would merely grow thicker among the northern populations and during winter. This adaptation to the environment suited them well in their semi-nomadic lifestyle, shepherding their herds across the vast lands, always in search of greener pastures.

When they did decide to settle, their villages and towns were half sunken things. It seemed that the Cordyr almost preferred the comfort of being surrounded by soil. In the human-Cordyr mixed cities this worked well, with the humans living above ground and the Cordyr below. Their dwellings were very rarely permanent as their herds, the only farming they were ever recorded to do, would eventually be moved on. The biggest of these rare permanent cities is now the Sunken Palace, the imperial seat of the Uttosian Khaganate, in the capital of Odoi Ger. This stronghold is set into the side of a dormant volcano. In ancient times it was the last redoubt of the Cordyr in their war against the Froskdyr, and was again so when we came for our vengeance. Most of the city is underground, now much expanded since then, and offered the female Cordyr safety and shelter while the males tended to their herds, or were off warring.

In respect to the social dynamics, the Cordyr of all the extinct Inhuman races were most like us. Perhaps this was because they too were mammals. The males were larger and more aggressive than the females, and the females were often pregnant and thus incapable of many tasks beyond rearing litters already born, and what litters were they! Historians tell us Cordyr litters could reach up to a dozen, keeping the females quite busy. The males in turn were responsible for most trades, including their precious herds.

The Cordyr's affinity with their herds, and most animals, are by now legendary. Much like how our hounds are adept at herding sheep and cattle, and seem to have a preternatural sense when hunting, so did the Cordyr. It said they were so close to animals that they could know precisely what their herds or even their prey was thinking. This ability must have certainly helped them in their hunts as their short stature and slow gait certainly could not have.

Akkedyr

True hunters were what we Neoists had to face in the war. Cold, calculating, they were the Scourge of the West and the bane of our civilisation. The Cordyr may have been affable, the Froskdyr fascinating, the Riusdyr loyal, the Kwendyr mysterious and the Sauddyr vain, but none exemplified cruelty as much as the Akkedyr. Long before the Great War, the Akkedyr had already been tormenting humans, enslaving us for their labour. Archaeologists have even discovered the remains of other Inhuman slaves in old Akkedyr structures. No base cruelty were beyond them.

While we Mekadians have always traded in slaves, this is nothing compared the Akkedyr slavery. Our scriptures and prophets have given us rules, guidance and restrictions on what can be done with slaves. The Akkedyr had no such thing. A slave was less than property to them, and mercy was rarer than orichalcum. This evil nature that was present within all Akkedyr made the union between the Akkedyr and Sauddyr even more puzzling. Surely the Sauddyr, even in the heights of their arrogance, must have known that they were nothing but meat fit for slavery and fodder to the Akkedyr.

For years philosophers have tried to understand why the Sauddyr called to the Akkedyr first for aid. The Froskdyr and Kwendyr

seemed like much better candidates for an alliance, but the Sauddyr went to these last. Clearly there were instances of similarity between the Sauddyr and Akkedyr. Both were cold-blooded and shared a vague reptilian origin, which may well account for the differences in thought and philosophy between them and us. However, unlike the Sauddyr, the Akkedyr preferred dry, arid regions and, more importantly, they could understand us humans as no other Inhuman could. It was not only us that they could understand on such a preternatural level, it were all Inhumans. The surviving texts speak of a dissociative state the Akkedyr could undergo. In this mystical trance they would truly believe themselves to be of the race they were mimicking.

Through this they could speak our tongue, read our alphabets and even debate with us. Some philosophers have called them the most intelligent of the Inhumans for their ability to see right into the hearts of men, even though their own true thoughts were so alien to us.

But they were not human, no, never. Their hairless, smooth, brownish-grey skin revealed that, and so did their four arms and ungainly head. Their wiry, lean frames belied the strength these four arms could yield in battle, and an enraged Akkedyr could fell even a Froskdyr, or so it was said. Such were rare occasions for the cold-blooded and cold-hearted Akkedyr. Like snakes, they waited and watched, intent on letting events unfold before striking one, merciless killing blow. This makes their entry into the war even more puzzling. Everything the philosophers have known about them say that they should have waited until the Sauddyr and us battled ourselves to exhaustion before finishing off both our races.

Perhaps the possibility of new slaves amongst the wounded in the battles may have tempted them forth. The Akkedyr were always a small and sparsely populated civilisation. They needed slaves for the overwhelming majority of their various trades and industries. From what the archaeologists tell us, this was because of the life cycle of the Akkedyr. Like the Froskdyr, they laid eggs rather than birthing live young, but they did not lay eggs in the dozens and scores as the Froskdyr did. Instead, each laying resulted in

The Fellowship of Runism

Among the latest in the line of religious evolution, Runism has become more a philosophy than a codified religion. Originating in Prodigalism which itself sprung from Progenitorism which came from Neoism, Runism has millennia of wisdom to draw upon but has surprisingly dismissed most of it. Runists believe that there is nothing inherently supernatural in the universe. No gods and goddesses to hear your prayers, no life after death. What the believe instead is that life is an illusion, an effect, like a shadow upon a wall, and candle that cast it is the runes.

Runists insist that life, the world, indeed the whole cosmos, is merely the effect of a masterful runic array, similar to creating fire or air that we can do. Any supernatural events are simply a fault in the array. The goal of all Runists is to find the correct runes that would allow us to see beyond the illusion, peer behind the veil to see the cosmic runic array at work. It is no surprise then that Runism is the choice of philosophy among scholars and in recent time it has even become fashionable for an eminent scholar to call himself a Runist to add to his prestige. The networking that can be done through the religion is undoubtedly another reason for scholars to “convert”.

only one egg, taking months to hatch. It would be nigh on a year later when the next egg could be laid. With the risks and dangers inherent in life, few Akkedyr ever reached maturity, leading to a culture where one valued his life above all else, letting others take the risk.

Even the accounts detailing the romance, if that is the appropriate word, between the Akkedyr show that it as well was a truly inhuman thing. Much like the other non-mammalian Inhuman races, the Akkedyr had no external sexual characteristics and thus distinguishing between the sexes would be difficult. The Akkedyr, however, took it a step further. There were absolutely no differences between males and female, because Akkedyr were both at once, a comparison to the degenerate goals of the Completists that the heathens would prefer everyone forgot. When not in heat, Akkedyr had no genders, no sex, they simply were. Only during heat would the environment dictate who would be male for that cycle and who would be female. We cannot know any more what these environmental clues were as the surviving historical chronicles offer little insight.

We must thank God everyday that the Akkedyr were not more amicable creatures, for the War would have been vastly different had this been so. The other Inhuman races seemed to trust them very little, perhaps knowing that any sign of weakness or compassion may mean they were the next to be enslaved. Thus, there was little interspecies organisation on our front of the war. Each race watched each other as much as they watched us. The Akkedyr slave armies, composed mostly of humans but with all races representing, did little to engender good will among the Inhumans. We do know that the Akkedyr were the last to surrender. They knew that without their soon-to-be freed slave armies, they were powerless to defend themselves.

As the Dayitic Empire took great pleasure in the destruction of the Sauddyr, so did we in breaking apart the Akkedyr civilisations. We knew their weaknesses and we exploited them masterfully. By destroying every egg we came across, we ensured no Akkedyr offspring would trouble us. By disrupting their environment, we made sure that they could not sexually differentiate and breed. By chilling the air across the continent, we made their cold-blooded bodies slow and weak. They were the scourge of our lands, but we showed them what the wrath of the true God looks like. It took more than two centuries to cull these long-lived devils, often finding them hiding in caves and canyons as far from human civilisation as possible, but now we sit in their old palaces, walking their streets. The last victory was ours.

Kwendyr

There were uncertain victories as well, though we did not know it at the time. Only recently, during the wars of colonisation on the southern continent, did we find out that perhaps our greatest achievement was marred by imperfection. Whether this was a cause for joy, shame, relief, or worry remains to be seen. All we know is that the enigmatic Kwendyr might still live.

The Akkedyr were the twisted, evil incarnations of ourselves that we saw when we looked in the mirror. The Kwendyr, on the other hand, were us at our most bestial, not yet uplifted by the Song of God. We shared some qualities with all the Inhumans: the malice of the Akkedyr, the ingenuity of the Cordyr, the loyalty of the Riusdyr, the tenacity of the Froskdyr, and the pride of the Sauddyr. With the Kwendyr it appeared as if we shared all our qualities, everything that is, except civilisation. The Kwendyr were not simply bestial in body, but also in mind.

Like miniscule ogres were they, unable to comprehend speech, script or runes, gutterly barking at each other in order to be understood. When we first encountered them late in the war, the philosopher of the time Nasir Nejem writes that we saw

much of ourselves in the Kwendyr. He sought to commune with them, to convince them that we were more similar than different, that together we could defeat the other Inhumans and live in peace. It fell on deaf ears. The Kwendyr could not understand us. Before Nejem's speech was finished, the Kwendyr had already began slaughtering the members of his party. It is still a mystery to us how the Sauddyr ever could enlist their help.

The Kwendyr were brought into the War midway through, after a brief peace treaty was signed between us Mekadians and the Akkedyr. It was a peace the vile creatures would soon break. History says that the Sauddyr had hoped a fresh influx of troops could end the war quickly, and so they had scoured the world looking for some. They found the Kwendyr on the southern continent, but how they ever convinced them to brave the great central ocean to find a land they did not know exist in order to fight a people they could not imagine we will never know. But come they did, and fight us they did, and they were marvellous at that.

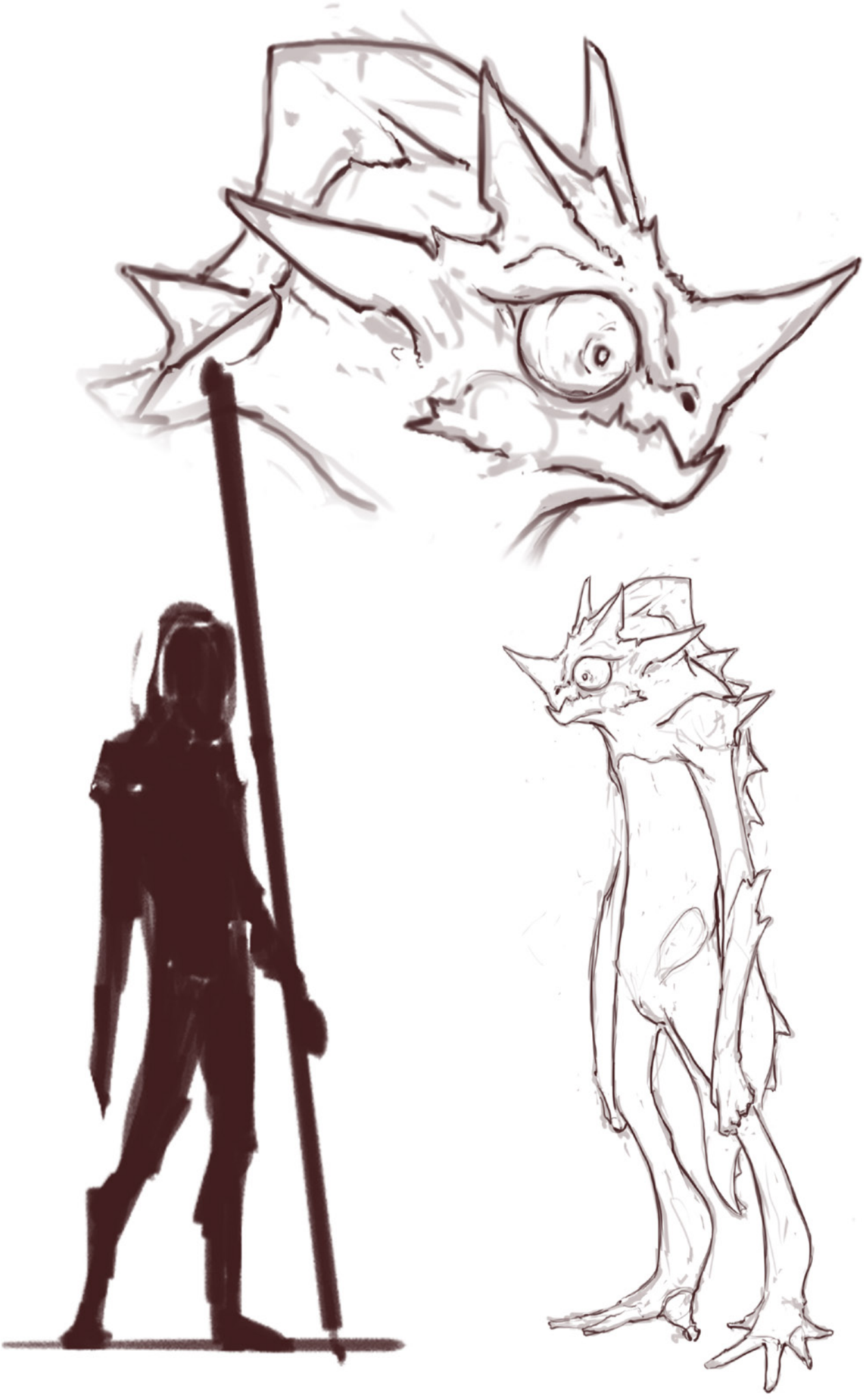
Just as it was difficult for us to think as a Sauddyr did to combat them, so it must have been for the Sauddyr to think as us. The Kwendyr did not have such complications. Fighting them was like fighting long-lost brothers. They knew how we thought, how we would strike, how we would camp. We were to them as a herd of cattle to the Cordyr. It was if they could speak the language of our baser instincts in a way not even we could. They did not fight us on the field with honour. Like the other Inhumans, they had no concept of this word, preferring the dark and the element of surprise to attack us. Where the Froskdyr would wait for us in the rivers and swamps, the Kwendyr would await us in the trees, waiting for a caravan to pass by before dropping down onto us.

Mercifully, not many Kwendyr made it to our shores. The Kwendyr were not renowned as seafarers, and the central ocean is fickle mistress even today with all our technology, it must have been doubly so in those times. Regrettably the ocean worked against us as well. The masses of ships we sent south at the start of the Great Purge to exterminate the Kwendyr were never heard from again, with many surely perishing along the way. We never set out so far south again in fear of what we may find, but that all changed a century ago.

We found the survivors of those exterminator-ships spread across the continent, in kingdoms and empires and chiefdoms. Primitive and savage though they are, their knowledge of the runes nearly equals ours and have stymied the colonisation attempts. This surprise was nothing compared to the stories we heard of Kwendyr still roaming the teeming forests and jungles. After a century we still have not found any, but the natural philosophers tell us what skeletal remains we found is not old enough to come from the Great War. So they remain a mystery to us still.

> God and nature may have created the runes, but humanity has mastered it, and in so doing have become gods themselves.
>
> ~Tytus Winograd, Boandian Runist monk.

Of all the Inhuman races, we know the least of the Kwendyr. We know that they never progressed past stone tools, being given metal weapons by the Sauddyr. We know that they lived by the absolute rule of "might makes right" as so many beasts do. The strongest among them (predominantly males) ruled over however many number of Kwendyr he could control and had the pick of any mates he so chose. Beyond this, there is little I can tell you. We have found no evidence of any religion or folklore, no instruments to speak of arts and culture, and only the bare minimum of decorative items that showed they at least were able to tell each other apart. But nothing more. The Kwendyr came and went like a vision from God, to show us what we might so easily have been without His almighty Song.



Sauddyr

And so I leave the most mad of the instigators of the previous apocalypse to last. Every child of every culture is brought up with stories of this Inhuman race and what would happen to that child if ever he misbehaved. The Sauddyr, for better or ill, have been marked down in history as the single most vile and evil people to have ever roamed the lands of the world. Throughout history, we find that any person of note that was discredited and defamed through the ages was done so by comparisons with the Sauddyr. Until God sings the hymn of the end times the Sauddyr will be the devil we once knew and pray to never see again.

The Sauddyr achieved this infamy by their now legendary message sent across the human lands. "Only the Sauddyr are fit to hear God's song. The false worship of the humans calls for your culling." Years it took for the messengers to race across human lands with this simple indictment of our lives, and on the messengers heels came an army bent on our destruction. The various Dayitic tribes were the first to feel their wrath, likely having provoked the Sauddyr with their pagan worship. To our arid lands, the messengers came last. Our great kings and wise elders attempted to persuade them on the common ground of our love of God, but to no avail. War it was to be.

War they wanted, and war they had. For sixty-nine years they revelled in their alliance's slaughter of us humans, lording over us as though they were God's chosen, not us. And then the great prophet came. Bür showed the proud creatures true power. In vain they attempted to use the runes as we did, and they had success to some extent, and in their successes they found the secret of the runes. The despair the truth sent through their people led to their destruction. Energy could power the runes, orichalcum could power the runes, but human blood was the greatest catalyst. Their blood had no effect, their runic arrays less powerful than ours. It was the simplest of messages: they were not God's chosen people.

The Dayitics harboured a great hatred of the Sauddyr. So great that their first emperor spent his life levelling their civilisation to the ground. We have lost much of what we could have known of the Sauddyr because of the eastern barbarians' rage, but their spite has served natural philosophy in another way. The easterners' love of icons to adore and worship meant they brought hundreds of Sauddyr skeletons and pelts back to their hovels. The greatest kings and princes of the east still hold these ancient taxidermied Sauddyr for their children to gawk at.

No two specimens still existing or draughted in old manuscripts look the same. The sheer variety among the Sauddyr are extraordinary. Oh, they share similar features: eyes that can move independently of each other, a lizards tough scaly hide, a propensity for horns and barbs and spikes; but that is where the similarity ends. Some have barbs and spines across their body, making them look akin to a hedgehog while. Others sport massive horns from their crowns in an assortment of numbers. Some are as green as a summer forest, while others could hide amongst the basalt of an active volcano.

With all the different shapes and colour and textures it is still impossible to tell which were male and female, which were old and young, which lived a hard life or was a prince among his peers. From the specimens and historical accounts we knew they were carnivores, hunting everything and anything they could. It seemed that this added to their vanity of being at the top of their food chain. We are told that not even cannibalism was beyond them, although whether this is historical fact or Dayitic propaganda at the time is lost to time.

While the Sauddyr were not overly fond of clothing, each surviving taxidermied specimen is riddled full of holes meant for piercing. Again it shows the vanity of these creatures who would bedeck themselves in so much precious metals in order to show

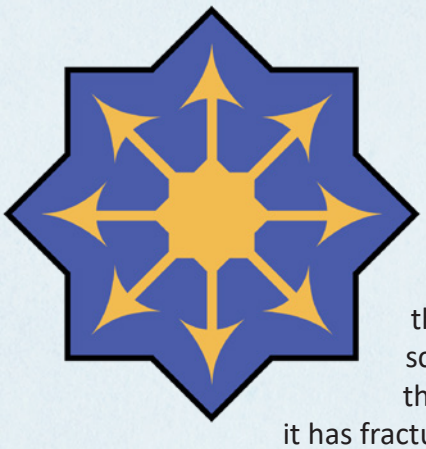
that they alone were the best. Amid all the historical records of the Sauddyr, this last thought is repeated again and again.

The Sauddyr were positively obsessed with showing off their splendour and power. Each one had to outdo his neighbour in order to show who was the best among them.

In this spirit, the Sauddyr preferred ziggurats and pyramids for their residences. The most powerful of the household or tribe or clan lived on the top tier, and each successively less important member occupied the tiers below him. The more powerful the Sauddyr, the larger the structure with more tiers. The greatest king among the Sauddyr, his name now scoured from history by the Dayitic emperor, had a stepped pyramid of fifty levels, clad in golds and silvers and marble. It was said to be visible from over twenty kilometres away. The number of servants and slaves that had to die to finish the construction does not bear contemplating.

The Sauddyr were as warlike a race as any other, perhaps more so, because what better way to show off one's power than to conquer one's neighbour. The infighting between the Sauddyr eclipsed our own by an order of magnitude, and they were not above skirmishing with the other inhuman races as well as us humans. Their last war, however, was to the War that ended them. Of all the Inhumans, they were the first race to be declared extinct. The divine fervour that gripped the Dayitics in the Great Purge and Great Migration were too much for the Sauddyr to defend against. The folly of their pride was to be their destruction, and with broken spirits their entire civilisation fell.

Can these forgotten children of God teach us what not to do to prevent the repeat of history that may see us becoming the last lost children of God? To our east and west, north and south now stands empires where once there stood only Inhumans, but has anything changed? Have we



The Religion of the One True God

The Mekadians call it Walephid, meaning "The Only True Path", but to the easterners it is simply called Neoism, because for thousands of years it was the only monotheistic religion in Jytoh. It is the oldest organised religion on the continent, having come with the humans across the Ridgeback Mountains during the great migration more than three thousand years ago. Many scholars believe that all the other organised religions in Jytoh have their origins in Neoism. However, while Neoism may be the oldest, it has fractured into dozens of denominations, some of which seem further from Neoism than the heathens.

While it seems that every Mekadian nation have different views on Neoism, they all share the same core beliefs. There is only god and he owes us nothing. Humanity was only one of the many songs he sung during creation, and we are no more special than the extinct Inhumans. Bür was merely a man who rediscovered the songs of creation, not a saviour from heaven. There is no divine love preached about in the other religions, there is only silent judgement. Heaven is never guaranteed, one must work hard every day to appease god.

For Neoists, it is important to understand that god does not love us, but he can come to respect us. The aphorism "god helps those who help themselves" is as true and real as the sand beneath the Mekadians' feet.

learnt anything from the Great War, Purge and Migration?

The Froskdyr could not adapt to the new world that was arising all around them. Today we see the same in those backwards nations who refuse the Lightning rune and the automated infrastructure it can bring. Will these envious luddites bring us ruin?

The Cordyr were too cowardly and inward focussed to stand by their allies, and so turned against them at the first provocation. In the political turmoil of today, alliances and treaties are torn up as quickly as they are written. Allies become enemies that become allies again, each nation too frightful to lose what they have accumulated. Will one of these allies tip a balance and send us tumbling down the fateful slope?

The Akkedyr's malice blinded them to the lives of others. They needed others to survive, but would not deign to show kindness to those they needed. The noble houses, merchant leagues and despotic priests of today require the lower peasant classes in order to have food, homes, armies and supplies. In spite of this, I have seen some free men in Jytoh treated worse than the meanest slave. Will this unjust malice spark a revolution that will sweep the world? Will blood call for blood?

The Kwendyr were too uneducated to accept a hand stretched out in friendship, and were manipulated by the vilest of peoples. Will our own uneducated peasants and lower classes be misused and manipulated by those wishing a quick and easy way to power? Will they be aimed and let loose against those who wish them nothing but the best? Will eternal civil war be our future?

The Sauddyr, too blinded by their own pride, too willing to subdue others, could not see how their reach exceeded their grasp. They built ziggurats and pyramids, we build mansions and palaces. They bedecked themselves in pierced gold and silver, we bedeck ourselves in silk and satin. They conquered others to show they were the most powerful, and can we in all honesty say we do not do the very same? Which nation's reach will exceed its grasp when it attacks a nation too powerful for it to battle alone, and thus drag its neighbours into the fray until the whole world again is burning.

My old kaín often used to say in his sermons that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes, and those who do learn from history are doomed to watch others repeat instead. As I sit here, long in the tooth, overlooking a harbour where slaves carry weapons and munitions onto warships from dusk till dawn, that one swallow who would make summer, the madman who would light to fuse to burn the world is still unclear to me. The one who lit the match two thousand years ago is now consigned to oblivion, his name or race never recorded. Perhaps that is the fate of us all. The only thing we can do now is to be vigilant, be watchful, and strive for peace.

His ever careful listener,

Kaín Assan Lirhad

This is the first of the Alfresian documents your magnificence have asked for. There were no "original" copies, as it were, of this lecture. The university of Middelburg keeps no transcriptions themselves, but I was able to obtain a student's transcription. I vow that this is as correct as can be, your gracious and illustrious highness. I would stake my own inferior life upon it, not that my life has not always belonged to you, oh Emperor of Emperors.

The professor is a Prodigalist, although of the heretical northern variety. I pledge that the thorough reading I have done of this lecture has not tainted me in any way shape or form. In fact it has strengthened my resolve in the Bythikan Prodigalist faith, the only true faith.

OUR PRODIGAL FATHER

A lecture by Professor Lubert Wessels for ***Introductory Prodigalist Philosophy****.*

No other religion has had such an impact on the world at large so quickly as the Prodigalist faith. The Neoists may sing of their age while the Progenitorists boast of their spread. The Completists gloat of their fervour and the Runists crow of their natural philosophy. Even the Starchildren vaunt their own mysticism. However, it is the Prodigalists who, in the span of only a few centuries, became not only a leading theological and philosophical power in the world, but also a political power. Our faith began with the new world. It began with the runes that gave us power we once thought beholden to the realms of fancy. It began with divinity.

Our faith began with Bür.

Divine Origins

Little is written about our saviour in the historical records. His life on this world was like that of a lightning strike: first here, then there, appearing where he wished to show others his light. Then, with the thunder of his knowledge spreading outwards he would disappear. All that the godless historians are willing to admit is that Bür came ashore on the eastern coast of Jytoh in the later stages of the Great War; travelled throughout the continent, giving the knowledge of the runes to the humans he encountered; met various kings and dignitaries; and then disappeared off into the western deserts. It is a short and mean telling of events, but it is in this grand understatement of that great journey that we see the mystery of Bür. We see how one person, in a quiet and humble manner, changed the course of fate without a single thought for himself and his legacy. Truly, an inspiration to us mere mortals.

The scholars and historians will not tell the true, complete story of Bür, because they refuse to admit his divinity. To this day their philosophies and logic cannot tell you how and why the runes work, or even from whence they came. None of their historical accounts show that Bür made any mention of how the runes were created. Despite this, they will tell you of theories and hypotheses so intricate and complex that you will not be able to do anything but smile and nod in agreement. They will browbeat you into accepting their secularism. Only later on you will discover these theories to be nothing more than a smokescreen for their ignorance. There is more to Bür and his runes than exist within

their philosophies, for those willing to listen that is.

The truth is that Bür was divinity incarnate, and the runes the divine instructions for creation that the gods themselves used to shape the world and the cosmos as we know it. There can be no other explanation for the working of the runes and the glorious being who gave them to us. The gods saw that mankind was on the brink of extinction during the Great War and interceded on our behalf. It was not only to save us from the vile Inhuman species, but to also give us the powers we would need to become the pure reflections of the gods themselves. Whether we have reached that noble goal is a topic for another class.

Late in the war, after the Cordyr had turned traitor and battled against us, it was just mankind with our ogre war machines against six Inhuman species of demons. We were being slaughtered. For every hundred we killed, a thousand would step in and take their place. The end was nigh, our spirits were broken, we could feel the cold hand of death creeping around our necks, when suddenly salvation came to us. It did not come as a light from the heavens, nor an army of divine creatures to fight on our side. No, it came in the form of a boat.

By now, the Boat of Bür motif is a commonplace symbol, finding itself in many different heraldries and trader's marks. Our local great merchant family, the Heisensteins of the Fresian Merchant League famously uses it. Every account, even the historical ones, agree that Bür and his boat was nearly inseparable. Bür first arrived on our world and into our lives in his boat, coming ashore on the eastern coast of Jytoh. From there, he used it to wind his way around the coasts and up rivers to spread his divine knowledge.

Every nation on the east coast claims Bür as arriving in their home first, even those southern nations where no human had even lived before the Great War. They are all wrong. Bür clearly came to our Fresian lands first, all the evidence points towards it. The name Bür is a homophone to the proto-Fresian word for farmer, likely an appellation then, given to Bür by the first humans he encountered. I can not think of a more fitting moniker, because as we farm with cattle or crops, so did Bür farm with the runes and the souls of men.

The second piece of evidence for Fresia being the landing point of Bür, is the first written account of Bür. It is by the King of Dayitia (an old kingdom overlapping modern Wesfresland and the Empire). It was at this gathering that Bür started the resurgence of mankind. The quickest way for Bür to have come to this fateful meeting was to cross Fresian territory. The claims of the northerners surely cannot be believed after this simple fact.

And of all the Fresian nations, our little island of Ossenzee has the strongest claim to be the landing place of Bür, where men first learnt of the runes. To get from the ocean to the old kingdom of Dayitia, the quickest way would be past our shores, else one would have to travel along the entire length of the island of Alfresia to our south. Ours would be the natural first step for a newly divine presence on Ārd.

> He who shuns the light and embraces darkness,
> He who renounces the wisdom of the ages,
> He who corrupts the good and holy,
> He who salts the fields and despoils the meadows,
> He who slays the innocent,
> A destroyer is he, and my enemy!
> ~Bür, Neoist *Book of Heavenly Ascent*

While other nations might quibble about where Bür came ashore, we can all agree it is his works that came after that truly matters: the runes have transformed our world. I cannot think of a single person who can imagine what life would be like today if they no longer existed. Each new fascinating piece of technology that human minds spring forth have runes incorporated in them. With these runes we can move mountains, create water from thin air, transport materials instantaneously across the world in a blink of the eye. We can even stop time itself.

Conflicting History

These are powers we once attributed to the various gods and angels and demons and spirits. Now we have become as powerful as they, and perhaps even more so. How can any man not see the power of divinity in this? It is at time like these that I am amazed how I can agree more with Neoists and Completists than with some of the philosophers in this very university! For all their tyranny and degeneracy, at least the westerners have admitted to the divine beauty of the runes and the one who gave them to us. That is not to say they are not wrong about several details! Quite the contrary, let me tell you.

The Neoists believe that Bür was merely a prophet, a man, blessed by the gods with the knowledge of the runes and the task to give them to mankind. Their other, later, prophets assert that he came to us easterners first, and not them, because we were much weaker, and thus in more need of the runes. Say them in their western desert, far from the wrath of the Inhuman coalition! What nerve! They only had to deal with the Akkedyr, and barely managed even that! However, their recognition of a divine spark in Bür must be recognised. In their scriptures they say that he now sits at the head of their angelic host, singing the praises of their solitary god.

Were this not a lecture, I would not have deigned to even mention the Completists, but alas I must. Their debased religion, copying and cribbing from the surrounding religions, have even corrupted the image of Bür himself. They claim him a prophet as well, but a Mekadian as they were, and hermaphroditic as their obscene god is. Their tale of him coincides with the Neoists, but it differs in that they believe their founding prophet, Eslin Qushtaq, is Bür's reincarnation come again to spread the "true" religion. There truly is nothing they would not corrupt, is there? Like a plague, they are.

Onto our eastern religions then! Our parent religion, the aptly named Progenitorism also claims Bür a prophet. Quite a pattern here, can you not tell, but rather than being any mere man, their priests claim that as the Father and Mother procreated once to give birth to the universe, so they did again to create Bür. This singular mark of divinity placed upon Bür to raise him above mankind is worthy of respect. In my expert opinion, however, that feature is due to the influence of the Prodigalists that have swayed the Progenitorists so. Their oldest scriptures suspiciously does not make mention of this second divine birth.

Before we talk about the Prodigalist view, as you surely all know it by now, let us contemplate the views of the rising cults. The Cult of Runism first, that queer blend of philosophy and theology. As they believe the world to be only an illusion cast by runes we cannot see, so they believe that Bür was also a manifestation of the runes. You may not find many of them saying it in public, but they believe the runes to be as sapient as we are. Well, perhaps not as sapient as a man, but more like that of an ogre. They see Bür's appearance as the runes taking a particular interest in mankind and willing to save us above all else. Why this may be so? I have never heard a satisfactory answer from a Runist. I doubt I ever will outside an institution.

As Progenitorism birthed Prodigalism, Runism birthed the Cult of the Starchild. Their so-called Seekers also believe in the illusion we call reality, but rather that the runes are sapient and did this all on their own, the Seekers believe there is a god behind the runes, commanding them. A god in the machine as the Tolians of old would say. A god commanding runes to create the cosmos is very near to our own faith, but for the Seekers, their god is a weak god who cannot "cross the barrier" as they say to enter our reality. That is until the correct rune is found to summon him in the form of the Starchild. Bür, they assert, was this Starchild's once and only appearance in the world. Why could he not break through before or since, and why worship a weak god? Do not bother asking the Seeker, they would never tell. Secrecy is their currency.

And so to our own faith. Try not to fall asleep, this is important for your exams. Prodigalism claims that there are three gods: the Father, the Mother and Bür, and that together they created the cosmos. The Father and Mother procreated and birthed it, while Bür used the power of the runes to shape and populate it. Bür always took kindly to us humans, and when he saw his most beautiful creation nearly destroyed, he came down to our world to share his divinity with us. He saw in us the spark he placed there at the dawn of time and judged us worthy.

But he did not do so alone. In all the major religions, and even the dwindling pagan beliefs, the stories tell of how Bür did not know the land he came to. Understandable of course, what colossal power it must have taken to assume human form, disorientation is to be expected. So bound in human form, he needed companions to guide and protect this new, fragile shell of his. His Companion saints are as legendary as he is. Going by the latest Empire census, their names, or variations of them, are among the most common names today.

Woudas

The most striking and controversial of them is Woudas the Burnt Angel, and so we shall cover him first. In the eastern religions, Woudas is depicted as an angel sent by the gods to Ārd as punishment for his disobedience in heaven. His penance was to be the guide Bür needed to give his runic knowledge to mankind. His crime against the gods was unjust wrath. Scriptures tell of how he was angered by the Sauddyr's arrogance and vanity, at their assumption they were better than the gods. Forbidden to enter into the mortal realm, Woudas decided to interfere in more subtle ways.

In dreams and in visions, Woudas entered the minds of the Sauddyr. In their slumbering minds, he taunted them with images of mankind overpowering them, outperforming them, outclassing them. Woudas had hoped the Sauddyr would start a war with mankind that they could not win. Woudas could think no ill of his beloved humans. Decades went by, and still Woudas tortured the Sauddyr, cutting at their weakest point. It is said the Sauddyr went mad, forgetting all else but their future conquest of mankind.

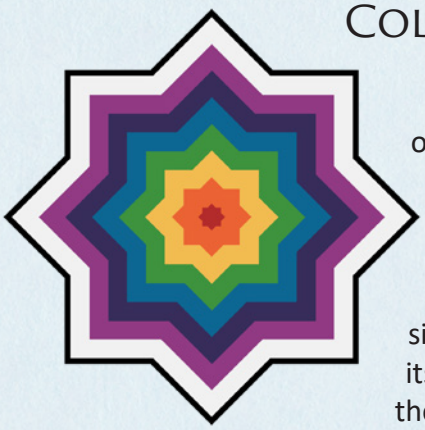
So it came to pass that the Sauddyr declared war on mankind, having been driven insane by the whisperings of an angel. We have all heard the end of that tale by now: mankind did not fare half as well as Woudas would have hoped. For setting the world to burn with the fires of war, the Father threw Woudas from heaven to Ārd. The force of this mighty throw burned Woudas as he fell through the sky, and the impact of his crash shook the world. Burnt and broken, Woudas the Cinder Angel was to spend his exile watching the world blacken with the ash of the innocents.

His salvation would be ours. Seeing mankind on the brink of extinction, Bür pleaded with his Mother so that he could intervene. At long last, both their cries swayed the Father's hard heart and he relented. Bür came to Ārd in his heavenly boat, a far more gentle trip than Woudas, but the view from the ground was far different from his heavenly position he normally enjoyed. He would need a guide, and the Father showed his foresight by revealing to Bür the location of Woudas.

Woudas would have a chance to redeem himself and once again enter into heaven, but first he must endure his penance. He would have to guide Bür through the ruined world he created and see firsthand what he did to his precious mankind. He would have to right the wrongs he did, but more than that he would have to endure the stares of the humans he had tried to save and their contempt of his grisly visage.

There was no moment where Woudas hesitated. Not only to be given his seat back in paradise, but to make amends to those he harmed. Woudas paved the way for Bür to save mankind, and to call it difficult is a gross understatement. In constant pain from his burns, and

Collectively Becoming One



Whether it is the culmination of all the wisdom in the world or a heretical concoction that is the path to ruin, Completism is a polarising religion. It veritably exploded into the world a millennium ago, and the power of the High Kingdom means it is here to stay. Completism has taken the best, or worse if you are feeling uncharitable, of all the other religions. It has taken the single deity from Neoism yet the duality of Progenitorism to create its hermaphroditic god. With the catechisms of Prodigalism and the eternal quest of the Seekers, Completism is definitely a mix of something.

Completists believe humans are by nature imperfect and wish to rectify this, but unlike the Prodigalists' focus on the individual, Completists believe it is individuality that causes this imperfection. "Because we are different, we are not whole" is a common saying. The individual must be subsumed within the collective to be complete. The old try and be young and the young try to be old, men and women try to become androgynous in the image of their god, and the whole of society dresses in a riot of colours so no one person can be picked from the crowd.

For all its quirks, Completism does look after the little man. With its focus on "sameness", Completists hate the thought of rank and class and many a revolution was started by a Completist. In saying that, the Completists are ruled by a High King, but one must remember that this is not hypocrisy, because "there are no immoral acts, only immoral persons".

a pariah wherever he went, he struggled on the path he was set. Where others may rage against the heavens for such a hell to live through, the Cinder Angel was the very soul of kindness. In his chapels across Progenitorist and Prodigalist lands, there are many depictions of Woudas saving young children from harm. His single burnt and blackened wing cradling the weak has become a symbol of redemption.

Through the short years Bür spent spreading his runes, Woudas ensured he found every king, every general, and every priest. Every influential person that could have helped spread the runes, Woudas found them. An angelic bloodhound he was, and for this he was rewarded by the Father with his place in heaven. Woudas refused to have his wounds healed, saying that his wounds would be his reminder to never again give in to wrath. So he watches over us, the angelic patron saint of meadows, burn victims, wayfarers and messengers.

At least, that is what the Progenitorists and Prodigalists believe. The Vinean and Gitic pagans believe in the Burnt Man, called Voltas in most of their dialects. Voltas' story follows closely with our Woudas, understandable with the close history between our peoples. Voltas was the son of the Sky-Father, exiled to Ārd for attempting to overthrow him. Bodily thrown into a volcano, Voltas emerged dripping in lava and ash, the embodiment of volcanic fury. The Sky-Father told his rebellious son to walk the lands of the world until he gained wisdom and until the lava on him cooled to stone. This he did for untold centuries, being the cause of every erupting volcano, a sign of his anger and turmoil. When the great hero Bür appeared, he guided him through the world, and when Bür's task was done, Voltas retreated below the ground instead of returning to sky, preferring the solitude of the dark soil. Now he stays there, erupting volcanoes and shaking the ground to test our fortitude, our strength and our resolve.

The Mekadians, morose as ever, see Woudas as an

evil demon. Yes, the Neoists have the complete opposite view as we do, to spite us I would say. Rather than guiding Bür through his journey, they believe him to be sent by the false gods of the Inhumans to delay and tempt him away from his path. He would go ahead of Bür and cause droughts, famines and fires spanning entire kingdoms. It was all done to prevent Bür from reaching the humans that desperately needed him. More than any other, the Neoist Woudas was Bür's greatest enemy, and they had clashed many a time in the western scriptures. Nowadays, they say Woudas spends his time creating famines and droughts for those whose faith is lacking.

As with all other matters, the Completists are obsessed with Woudas' appearance. There have been entire books from their prophets describing every minute detail of the burnt angel they call Morfir-Antar. Their depiction of the angel is identical to ours: an angel with skin blackened by fire, a single burnt and broken remaining, hair the colour of ash and utterly androgynous as all angels are. Unsurprisingly, the Completists focus only on this last description, making Morfir-Antar not only the guide of Bür, but also the messenger to the hermaphroditic prophet Eslin to tell him of his past life.

The Cael Brothers

From something angelic to something a little more human: the famous Cael brothers. While utterly human in most retellings, nearly every nation has claimed these as their own. In the south they are known as the Gitic brothers, across the sea to the east as the Horselords or the Seafarers, and in the west as the Silken travellers. The most widespread story, however, tells of a pair of brothers from the Cael lands that were the first humans Bür met in this world. Although, how they happened to have been in Ossenzee at the time I cannot say. For this class, we shall focus predominantly on this retelling as it is the most well-known, and is supported by our own scriptures.

Having come down from the heavens and met his guide Woudas, Bür began his search for humans to enlighten. The first of these was the legendary brothers. Twins were they, with the same name as well. Their father must have had a droll sense of humour. Little Riada as he was known, to differentiate him from Big Riada, was a small, wiry man with a fondness for adventure and loose women. A trouble maker he was, more ego than man. Big Riada could not have been more different. Where his brother was small and wiry, Big Riada was a tall, large built man with fists like hams. Stoic and contemplative, he would have made a fine scholar by all accounts.

In our eastern tradition, Bür found the brothers wandering hopelessly lost in a forest in their hunt for the mythical corundum boar. Tales of this mythical creature can be found in nearly every native Jytoh folklore. Despite this, no remains of one has ever been found, barring the colossal preserved corundum statue in Gallathian, claimed to be Big Riada's boar itself. Bür, with wry amusement I can imagine, offered to help these brothers in their hunt, and with the power of his runes made quick work of it. Unfortunately, the corundum boar was but a piglet, far too small for Big Riada's massive frame to ride on, and the big brother asked Bür to aid him once again. Bür complied on the condition they follow him, for he had need of courageous men on his journey. A deal was struck, the board was grown, and the rest is history.

The southern pagans believe the Gitic brothers, as they call them, to have been a pair of kings and conquerors, leading their men in the fight against the Inhumans. They claim it was to these kings Bür first travelled instead of the Dayitic king. When Bür met these kings, they were unimpressed by his so-called magic. They challenged him to a duel, to test his "sorcerous ways" against the strength of their arms. It was no contest for Bür, and after being defeated, the kings swore fealty to Bür and promised him their armies.

The Tolian old-pagan beliefs has a rather fairy-tale like quality to the story of the two brothers. In their beliefs, it was not two brothers but three, and not quite brothers at all. The story goes that Bür travelled the world alone for many years and, before he met any humans, he was attacked by evil spirits and only barely survived the encounter. He knew that he had to have some support for his journey, and to that end he gathered three creatures: a fox, a wolf, and a bear to him; and transformed these into humans. The fox to see, the wolf to hear and bear to fight. The fox would become Little Riada, the wolf Big Riada and the bear would be the Half-Man, which we will discuss shortly.

With all of that said, let us come back to the established belief. The Cael Brothers served a far more useful purpose than most scholars give them credit for. Most historians focus on their skill in battle, which is understandable as they were quite prodigious, but tend to forget their human element. Bür was a god that gave knowledge of powers mankind had never seen before and may well have been frightened of. He was also being led by an angel who, despite his best intentions, was a ghastly figure to behold. The Cael brothers gave the towns and villages they came across familiar figures to relate to, to assuage them that this was no malicious trick or deception.

That is not to say there were nothing special about these two. They were in fact, the first to receive the knowledge of the runes, and Bür himself granted them grand gifts which they used to great effectiveness. To Little Riada he gave an enormous bronze horn, adorned with all manner of runes. It was nearly as big as Little Riada himself. He used this to announce Bür's presence wherever he went, to draw the people to Bür so they could receive the runes. Tales tell that Bür so enchanted this horn that when Little Riada blew it, it could change the weather and even crumble mountains to dust.

To Big Riada he had already given a gift, the mythical and invulnerable corundum boar as his mount. To not let the gentle giant feel unloved, he too enchanted this great beast so that its hide was impenetrable by swords or arrows, and its metre long tusks so strong and sharp that it could pierce any shield, breastplate or wall. Big Riada was a fearsome opponent on any battlefield, a one man cavalry charge that could break spirits as easily as he did formations.

> Defend the weak.
> Protect the fatherless.
> Strengthen the oppressed.
> Rescue the captive.
> Feed the needy.
> Deliver the innocent from the hand of the wicked.
>
> ~St. Riada the Big, *Progenitorist Evangelion of the Saints*

When Bür departed and the War was over, the brothers returned to their Caellish homelands, resplendent in glory, honour and riches. These two would go on to found the first tribal kingdoms in the Cael lands whose successor states still stand today. Little Riada would establish the kingdom of Ullacht, and his horn still adorns the Ullacht flag and arms. Little Riada would become the patron saint of Ullacht, musicians, heralds, miners and guardsmen.

Big Riada would establish Ullacht's larger sister kingdom, Gallathia, and his boar still proudly stands on its coat of arms as well. Big Riada would go on to become the patron saint of Gallathia, horsemen, cavalry, boar hunters and guardsmen like his brother.

It is said the brothers enjoyed a quiet and peaceful retirement, their days of war left behind when their friend Bür departed, and instead they focussed on helping their people and their descendants. Every king of every Caellish kingdom since the Great War has claimed descent from one or both of the Cael Brothers. One can only hope that some of these men were sincere. It would be a great dishonour to the kind brothers' memories otherwise.

The Half-Man

Onto the fourth Companion Saint and third member of the Tolian pagan tale of the Fox, the Wolf, and the Bear. The Half-Man is nearly as peculiar a figure as Woudas. He is also the only companion of Bür that all religions and faiths seem to agree on the details of his life, well for the most part. From east to west, north to south, all agree that the Half-Man was a giant of a man, standing well over two and a half metres tall and nearly half that in width. This house of a man was also by all accounts as hirsute as a bear with a big, bushy beard that fell to his knees. There are even a series of Delkan fairy tales concerning the Half-Man's beard, what fairy tale world lived in there and how children used to sneak in and out of the beard while the Half-Man slept.

The most surprising aspect that all seem to agree on is the reason behind the appellation of "Half-Man". All mythologies and religions agree that this was because the Half-Man was not fully human. He had ogre blood in him. Here is the pedantic point of contention: how much exactly of the Half-Man was ogre? Across the different faiths and philosophies, you will find different percentages and ratios, each with a reason for being so. However, the conventionally accepted tale was that, yes, it was half as his name implies, but this rather begs an odd question. Was his mother or father the ogre? There are clear practical difficulties regarding either choice, but alas they must have found a way.

Bür encountered the Half-Man part way through his travels, during his journey north from the Dayitic tribes. It is for this reason that the Delkan lands alone have lain claim to him. The story of the Half-Man tells how he lived alone in an enormous log cabin in the wilds halfway up a mountain. He would only come down to the local villages to demand tribute in the form of barrels of ale. So great was his thirst that legends tell of entire breweries in towns dedicated to sate it. None would dare enter the forest surrounding his mountain for fear of evoking the Ale King's wrath. None that is, except for Bür.

After giving the runes to these villagers, Bür was intrigued by their tales of this giant man. Braving the wilds, despite the protests of the villagers, Bür made his way up the mountain. The Half-Man came down his mountain like a terrible storm, angered that another small man would disturb his peace, and doubly angered that he had not had a drink in days. Big Riada stepped forth to protect Bür, and he and the Half-Man nearly came to blows had Bür not intervened with a clever plan. Who would have won between Big Riada and the Half-Man is often speculated by theologians and played in many a theatre show.

Having heard of the Half-Man's insatiable thirst for ale, and now seeing what a formidable ally he could be, Bür offered a deal to the Half-Man. In return for the giant's service, Bür would supply him with all the ale he could ever want. Bür convinced the doubtful ogre by creating, with the power of the runes, a dozen barrels of ale from thin air. Consuming these as if it was merely a single glass of water, the Half-Man agreed and ventured forth with Bür, him and his axe the size of a man.

Bür had little need of another protector, his mastery of the runes and the Cael brothers had thus far served him admirably against all threats. What the Half-Man offered him went far beyond his ferocious skill in battle, or even his exceedingly intimidating appearance. The Half-Man knew the lands like no other, to him every leaf and blade of grass had a story. He could find water in a desert and track a man gone five years before. He was as much a part of nature as nature was a part of him.

More even than this, the Half-Man had way with animals that was supernatural. He could speak with them as if they were men, and there was always a coterie of animals trailing after the Companions. Some have jested that perhaps the Half-Man was not half human after all, but half Cordyr! Whatever the case may be, his intimacy with nature allowed Bür to go exactly where he needed to, when he needed to. With Woudas

knowing where the humans were, and the Half-Man knowing the best way to get there, Bür travelled the rest of the continent in less than a year.

After Bür finished his quest and the War ended, very little is known of what happened to the Half-Man. Most variations of the story say he went back to his log-cabin, now knowing the runes to eternal ale and lived out his life happily drunk. In many of these stories, he found love, although none could agree whether his love was human or ogre. In other stories, the Half-Man travelled the globe, in search of his kindred. He reckoned if he was half ogre, then surely there must have been others like him.

> I have kept His trust,
> I have traveled His world,
> I have fought His good fight,
> I have finished His race,
> I have upheld my promise,
> And so I return home.
> ~St. Half-Man, *Prodigalist Song of Bür*

In the Prodigalist and Progenitorist faiths, the Half-Man has been elevated along with the other Companions to Sainthood. In the heavens above, he now stands as the patron of the Delkans, woodsmen, ogres, lumberjacks, brewers, and public houses.

The Tolian tribes of the north has the most poetic story, however. Their pagan folklore tell of ice giants that in eras past ravaged their villages, carrying off maidens and devouring the men. So terrible were these creatures that they still impact the architecture of the modern Tolians. It is not hard to find a leering ice giant's face carved in the rafters of a Tolian house. They say when the War ended, the Half-Man travelled north, hearing of their plight. North, he marched, straight past the Tolian tribes to the mythical Ice Gate from whence all ice giants come. There he planted himself and a barrel of ale and waited. To this day no ice giant has assaulted a Tolian home, because thus far none have managed to make it past the Half-Man.

The Golden Pugilist

Another Companion known only by his title, the Golden Pugilist was the last Companion to join Bür. While just a man, his name has still been lost to time, but his appearance and abilities is of far more interest than his name. As his title suggests, he was a fist-fighter, one so acclaimed that none had ever defeated him. It is said he even fought armed and armoured opponents and beat every one of them bloody.

A traveller by nature, the Pugilist visited every town and village in every kingdom that he could. He was always looking to test his prowess against their best fighters. He had little interest in the War, only occasionally joining the effort in order to find the strongest Inhuman he could, so he might once more prove his superiority. The discipline and need for authority in war chafed at his desire for freedom, however, and he would be on the road before anyone was the wiser.

Unsurprisingly the Pugilist was an arrogant man. Understandable really, who would not be if they too were undefeatable in combat. It was this arrogance that led him to search for Bür and his Companions. If anyone were to be able to give the Pugilist a proper test of his skills, surely it must have been these mythical figures, he reckoned. Bür had finished in the north and was turning his sight to the west when the Pugilist found him.

Accustomed by now to the various challenges of his powers and knowledge, Bür calmly accepted the Pugilist's challenge, thinking it would be just one more embarrassed warrior. Bür's casual vanity nearly cost him the bout. The Pugilist presented a challenge like none other, and it was all Bür could do to keep his footing. After fighting themselves to exhaustion, Bür finally emerged victorious. In the few memoirs Bür kept that legends speak of, he postulated that perhaps the Father had sent the Pugilist to keep Bür's vanity in check.

Having suffered the first defeat of his life, the Pugilist was needless to say stunned. He could not conceive of any man being his better, divine or not. The Pugilist fell to his knees at Bür's feet and begged him for his secrets. When Bür spoke of his runes, the Pugilist was baffled. He had heard of this sorcery on his journey to find Bür, but what could sorcery have against the strength of a man's arm and the speed in his legs? The Pugilist felt cheated that all the work he had put into perfecting his body meant nothing next the power of the runes. He learned a valuable lesson that day: the limits of the human mind far exceed that of the body. Only by training the mind can one truly become powerful.

Having learnt this difficult lesson, the Pugilist asked for Bür's tutelage. If the Pugilist was to become the ultimate fighter, he had need of the runes. Bür offered him this and so much more. Bür runed the Pugilist's body much as he had with Big Riada's mount. Bür made his skin impenetrable to harm, and his fists and feet capable of punching through metal and rock. After Bür was finished, the Pugilist could leap a hundred feet into the air, walk on leaves, and run across water. For the Pugilist, he was already in paradise, for he had achieved the perfection he had always dreamed of.

As the Cael Brothers gave Bür's company a human personality when dealing with mankind, so the Golden Pugilist gave him a symbol. The Pugilist was a living embodiment of what the runes were capable of, which the Pugilist enjoyed greatly, beating every challenger to Bür's gift to show their power. Bür had created a living weapon, but this was not a weapon to be used against the Inhuman enemies, but a weapon against ignorance and disbelief. A lesson we could well learn from.

Beyond his ability to fight, the Pugilist's most striking characteristic was his skin, doubly so after being runed. As his moniker suggests, he had skin the colour of gold. Historians would have you believe this was mere symbolism for the skin colour of the Uttosians and the other races of the eastern continent. It is a story the Uttosians are always happy to propagate to lay a claim to the Pugilist, but it is my opinion that his skin truly was the colour of gold. There have been many records by men on this side of the ocean that makes note of the Uttosian tribes and never did they describe them as golden skinned.

The Neoists have a particularly interesting take on the Pugilist's story. In their tale, when Bür came to the Neoist empire of those days, the emperor welcomed this prophet they had all heard so much about. In honour of Bür's presence, the emperor had a life-size statue of gold made to celebrate the month long feast. The prophet Bür, however, was a plain man of plain tastes. He did care for such gaudiness that served no practical purpose, and told the emperor so quite frankly. To show the emperor the error of his ways, Bür used his runes to animate the golden statue to serve as his personal guard. This a story commonly told the children in the west who want too many toys and treats.

After Bür departed, the Pugilist joined the war effort in earnest. He led several armies and won several battles all in honour of his departed friend. However, this is where all accounts, historical and theological, of him stop. When the war ended, his story did too. No one can say with any certainty what happened to him. There are often tales though, cropping up every few decades, from far-flung villages where a golden skinned man covered in runes would challenge the biggest, strongest, most vain man to a fist fight. He always wins, this stranger. Perhaps that is the truth of it, who knows what runes were placed on the Pugilist. Perhaps he wanders the world to this very day, teaching men humility. Whatever his fate might be, he now stands among the Companion Saints as the patron of pugilists, men-at-arms, runecrafters and all those who struggle but refuse to give up.

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Thus, Bür and his companions travelled the length and breadth

of our fair continent, making sure to visit every settlement of note, giving the knowledge of the runes that we so take for granted today. On his travels though, he discovered that this was not his only purpose. True, the runes did give the humans the ability to create fresh water, food and shelter, raising the quality of their lives significantly, but this would often take time, time the humans in their generations-long war did not have. So Bür healed the sick, cleansed the rivers, and built homes for the people along his journey, his kind heart could allow him to do nothing less.

There was also a third, more militaristic, reason for Bür journey. He saw that mankind could not defeat the Inhumans if they stayed as a disparate group of individualistic tribes and kingdoms. We would have to stand as one if were to have a chance. For this reason, Bür is also called the Great Uniter, not because he gathered mankind to himself, but because he planted the seed. In his long journey, Bür saw the great kings and chiefs and emperors, the admirals and generals and commanders. He knew which leader would lead mankind to victory, and which would take us spiralling into ruin. So everywhere he went, he pointed the warriors he saw to these great generals and kings in order to create a united human army. The greatest of these would eventually become the Empire of Man.

Out of this great tale sprung the greatest religion today. From hearing this, how can any man doubt the divinity of Bür? How can any doubt the powers of his Companions? For centuries they called us 'Prodigalists' to insinuate we were wasting our time with frivolous fantasy. But like the Golden Pugilist, we struggled through adversity and came through one step closer to perfection. And it all started with Bür, our prodigal father.

Transcribed by Nienke Reinders

THE LAST EMBER

Bür teaches us that man cannot serve two masters, for betrayal and envy is within the heart of every man. It is our curse and our legacy. I serve two masters. I wonder when my day of betrayal will come.

It draws near. I can feel it.

Our family always could.

As I look out over this damnable city, this city that bested even you, I wonder which path I should take. What path would help my family, our family, the most? I wonder most which path you would have taken.

I received a letter from them again today. The continued use of letters troubles me. I have not met with them in months. I feel their support for me dwindling with each letter I receive. Is it their fear of me that is driving them away? Or do they fear something else, something greater? It is unsettling. The length of this newest letter is doubly so. It could, and does, only mean one thing.

Disaster.

They failed. Again. I am beginning to fear that this… "movement"... is itself doomed to fail at the hands of these incompetent idealists. But I need them. How else will I ever restore our family's honour? How else will I redeem your name? It is a gambler's path, this one, but it is the only one I can see that leads to vindication. I am no fool, I promise. I did attempt, quietly, to gain support from the bourgeoisie here, those of the old blood who would benefit from my cause, but they fear the fire. They remember.

Thus I have no choice.

Do I?

My only other alternative is the coward's option. The slow road that may, in a decade, a century, in a millennium even, lead to greatness. Like a tortoise it will eventually attain its goal but that is not glory, not honour, and it certainly is not vindication. I have not the patience for it. Mother always said I took after you. I doubt she ever meant it as a compliment. My brother is the tortoise, and he counsels me to be the same. He is a wise man. Perhaps he is right. Our family has risked much in the past and it has led us to this precarious position. Perhaps now is the time to secure our position, to "play it safe" as it were.

The Hugenberg Family can bring us this. Father was wise to establish a relationship with them, to marry the Patriarch's sister. I love mother dearly, but she is the daughter

of traitors. I hope you can forgive my tainted blood. If it were my choice, I would destroy the Patriarch's family, root and stem, but we need them. When the day comes that the De Brant family is strong again, they will pay for their treachery.

But tomorrow must come first, and have been summoned by Patriarch Nelson. I am… duty bound.. to tell him of this letter, of this fool's errand to find a rifle that is rumoured to be able to shoot through anything.

It was a pleasant day today. The weather was far more agreeable than I. I did not relish the upcoming appointment, I never do. The Patriarch knows exactly who I am, how could he not, and he lords that fact over me. He is a Burgrave, and I am merely the son and brother of a Baron, never mind the fact the last time his ancestors even came close to touching a royal throne was before Fresland's independence from the Empire.

"Ah, Markus! Good to see you, lad," he said, congeniality written across his face, acting as if the hour he made me wait was not intentional.

"Grandfather," I replied. I would not give him the satisfaction of complaining.

"What brings you here, today? Nothing grave I hope?" he enquired, and before I could reply he turned away with a "Brandy, dear boy?" and poured two glasses without awaiting my answer.

"Thank you," I said, taking the glass. "And yes, sir, it is grave." I handed him the note.

"Oh," he said, disdain dripping of that word. "Your little schoolboy gang." His acting evaporated like summer snow. When he had found out of my involvement with them, he had ordered me to keep him informed at every opportunity of their clandestine affairs. It was not out of some civic pride or do to what is best for the nation. No, information brings power, and he seeks out power like a pig does truffles. Of course I agreed to his terms, I had no choice, but our family is worth more than my wounded pride.

"What is it this time?" he asked. "You bloody well know I cannot read this insufferable code."

"They have heard news of a newly developed rifle that is purported to be able to shoot through anything. They want me to find it."

He raised his eyebrow.

"It does not work," he scoffed. "That is why it is currently locked up somewhere."

I could not believe it, but I should not have been surprised. Of course he knew. He damn well knew everything. He must have seen the look on my face, for his sly smile grew broader.

"Did you think I knew nothing of this?" he remarked. "I sometimes forget you are almost forty with the way you behave sometimes. It is your father's fault. I told him I'd school you, but no, too proud he was. Too proud, the whole lot of you. And look where that got you."

It was always like this. Even when I was younger, he would not let one chance go by when visiting to say how much better his family is than ours. I did what I have always done, what my brother and father always had to do: stand there and take it. How far we have fallen. You would have cut him down where he stood and burnt his house down. I cannot, but one day perhaps.

His rant carried on for a good while. I lost interest early on. I had heard all this before, time and time again. I had begun to plan how to best find this new rifle when I suddenly realised he had stopped talking at me and had started talking to me.

"Are you even listening to me, boy," he asked, tutting.

"Apologies, sir, my mind wandered," I replied, hoping my words sounded more sincere than my thoughts.

"Well your body can go follow it," he said tartly. "And if you can bear to remember this, when you find the rifle, bring it here. Is that

understood?"

My witty reply died in my throat as I saw the look in his eyes. I am not cowed by this man, but neither am I an idiot.

"Of course, grandfather," was all I said and, getting the letter back, left to go to the only place I could think of to begin this chase.

Nieuton, but it smelled like Oldtown.

It was nearly noon when I got there, and the bodies were still lying where they had fallen a day and a half earlier. Three of my so called comrades, two of them lying headless in the gutter of the street. The constables had not even done them the dignity of covering their bodies from the eager onlookers. More onlookers arrived every minute to gawk and stare at the horror that had occurred in their pristine paradise. The barely stayed a moment before leaving to spread word to their fellow bourgeoisie.

Pathetic. It was not at all what I expected of the Nieuton constabulary. The rich sheep who live here abhor any disturbance to their clean and delicate lives. The constables would ordinarily have cleared away the bodies before they had even become cold so as to not offend the Nieutonians' sensibilities. I did not have to wonder overly long about the reason for this as the answer was staring me in the face the moment I walked through the line of constables. Say what you will about grandfather, but the Hugenberg arms on my chest are as official as any constable's badge. They dared not stop me.

Hovering over the only intact dead body deep in the property was a thin, pale man dressed only in underclothes and a large straw hat. What he was doing to my erstwhile comrade (Lukas as I could now see) I could not fathom, but it apparently required the odd contraption he was holding. He turned dials, flipped switches, tweaked knobs, and stuck a slender rod into the late Lukas all the while utterly oblivious to my presence next to him. This could only have been the mad inventor I was looking for.

"Hmm," he sounded approvingly after this whole technological ritual was finished. If he had discovered something, or his mechanical device had told him anything, it was something only he and Bür knew.

As he went to put down this strange invention of his, he finally spotted. He let off a scream that sounded partway between a cow in labour and a small girl, all the while walking backwards on his hands and feet like a crab. Between the two of us, this sight cheered me right up after that dreadful meeting with grandfather. I stayed silent and unmoving, hoping for another performance from him, but alas my luck never holds, does it?

"Wh-wh-wh-who are you?!" he finally managed to stammer, his eyes large as saucers.

"The Hugenberg family sent me," I replied. It had the appropriate effect. His eyes widened even more and his mouth dropped open, giving the comic appearance of a surprised skeleton.

Do you see now? This is what this city has been reduced to. Unmanned beyond reason because of a few rich men. No longer does the power of kings and emperors frighten them, not even on the mainland any more where the bourgeois has taken over. The era of kings draws to an end, and with them goes the order they brought. Now coin has become the people's king, and chaos his instrument. This is why I continue to fight.

"Why are the bodies still here?" I asked. Before I start searching for the rifle, the dead must have their due.

It took a few seconds for him to determine that I had indeed spoken, and when he did, by the look on his face I might as well have spoken Nigaean.

"Because I still need them," he said so matter of factly.

"For what, exactly?" Now it was my turn to be confused.

"To find out who they are! They took it and I need to know why!" he exclaimed.

I furrowed my brows. They surely did not take it, otherwise I would not have been there. Never mind the fact that they clearly failed as Lukas' corpse could attest.

"'It'?" I asked.

"Yes! You know of it?!" he asked with a hope I have often heard from the dying in temples. "Well then, can you take me to it?!"

"Tell me what 'it' is," I said. I was quickly losing all cheerfulness with this man.

"What? Oh no! Do not play that game, sir!" he very nearly screamed at me, his sudden bravado unexpected. "Do not think for a moment I forgot Hugenberg's interest in it! I remember how much that old crotchety wanker wanted it! He warned me I would regret not giving it to him! And now this?! What are you here for, sir?! To cover this up?!"

He was nearly apoplectic by the end of it, spittle flying from his lips, arms waving about as if he was about to take flight. He was rescued from whatever I may have done to him by the approach of a rather striking young brunette.

A light touch on his shoulder was all it took to break him from his sudden rage.

"Oh Julia!" he cried like man dying of thirst seeing a river.

"Sir, I think I may have found a clue," this Julia said. "I left it for you in your office." She was blatantly lying, but he was in no state to see it.

"A clue? A clue! Right! Yes! Stay here, make sure they do not take anything! Anything!" And with that he stormed off, myself seemingly gone from his mind.

"Yes, sir," She said to his back.

"Miss," I said, nodding.

"What can we do for the Hugenberg family?" She asked politely. I was starting to realise who was really responsible for his success.

"What was stolen?" I tried again.

"Nothing of concern to your Patriarch," she said quietly. There was no fear here. It was refreshing. She reminded me of tales of your own wife.

"Three rotting corpses in Nieuton is very much the Patriarch's concern," I replied, nudging Lukas with my boot for added effect. He belched to add insult to his current state.

"Fine," she sighed. "It was all the work that had been done in discovering a new rune. That is why he is so upset. He was very close, his formula was almost correct."

I confess I never did pay much attention in class during runic design lessons, but from what I knew, discovering runes is a matter of luck. There is no rhyme nor reason to the runes' shapes. There can be no formula. But if there was, it would make whoever discovered it a god, pardon the blasphemy.

However, I suddenly discovered how I could easily find the rifle. If she didn't know it was stolen, perhaps she would have no reason to hide its existence.

"Fascinating," I said, perhaps too earnestly. "I would have thought he would be far too busy with all his other inventions?" I pointed at the apparatus at my feet.

"His mind takes him where it wills," she said, evidently having rehearse the line. I raised my eyebrow.

"We are awaiting the senate's approval for manufacture," she forlornly admitted. "They confiscated everything until they make their decision." The wind seemed to have blown right out of her, her earlier confidence evaporated like the act it was. I empathised with her, you would to, to have everything you love hang in the balance on another man's whims is no easy feeling.

But there it was, all the same: the clue I needed. She may not have said where it was, but I couldn't risk further questions. The fewer people who knew what I was after, the better.

"I will see if my contacts know where your missing formula has gone," I promised her, the words out of my mouth before I could stop them. Why would I promise her that? Out of some sense of chivalry? Or perhaps because of the latest argument with my wife two nights ago?

She looked at me with the suspicion such a promise deserved.

"You would only steal it."

"I am only a thief when paid to be one," I replied. "Have these men taken care of, if you would be so kind." I nudged Lukas again before turning away.

Today was not a complete waste after all. I found my next clue and I learned more about what my absent comrades are doing in the shadows.

"Knowledge is power," Bür teaches.

"Guard it well," you taught.

The senate building. What a miserable waste of time that was.

I had hoped the rifle would be there as Julia said. I had hoped my time in the Senate House would go unnoticed. I had hope today would be more fruitful than yesterday's trip to Nieuton. However, it seems I have the luck of a fatted calf.

I have been to the Senate House more than enough times to know which areas the senators use, which areas are merely for storage, and what areas are off limits to the general public. I had wished to make use of the latter two and ignore the former. It should have been a simple thing: slip in through the back with all the other underpaid workers, make my way to the storage areas and, if I could not find anything there, then to the private areas, then finally simply slip out the back and be done with it.

Simple, oh so simple.

It would have been, it should have been, if not for fat Karel Kitchener. That sad excuse of a senator from the south loves to remind everyone he meets how his great-grandfather Jacob Kitchener led the army of Middelburg in the great siege a hundred years back. This unwarranted pride alone should warrant distaste from any man with any shred of self-respect, but Kitchener went one step further. He had made it his goal in life to discover where your descendants had gone to, and so he found me. Oh, by Bür, how he loves to lord it over me, how his ancestor bested you in the siege. He is the reason I have never shown my face in high society in the past decade, because the hairy hound sniffs me out every time.

And there he was, that fat plebeian bastard, standing right at the loading door at the back of the senate house. I was caught in the throng of men walking in and could not turn back. I had barely got within five metres of him when, through some supernatural sense, he swung around from the worker he was speaking to and looked me straight in the face. So much for my attempt at secrecy. Oh, how his jowls jiggled as he chuckled, looking like a pig that found a truffle. Perhaps a more apt description than he'd like.

"Oh my!" he gasped in melodramatic fashion, causing everyone around me to stop and stare at this silk covered cow. "Watch out men! It is the Incendiary come again! Beware, or he will burn Middelburg to the ground!"

Confused stares greeted him. Why would the workers' reactions be any different? They did not know me. They did not know Kitchener's relationship to me. All they could see was a bourgeois politician making sport of a fellow worker. I knew, though, it would not stop there.

"So, Mister De Brant," he

said loudly, emphasising the name that was forced upon me. "What brings you here in such a… modest… fashion?" Heads began to turn towards me now. No secret was made when your son was given the name 'De Brant' after your death. Exile always came with humiliation. I heard men whisper to each other and within seconds the confused mob became an angry mob. These Alfresians still despise you. You have become the demon in the night, the monster of whom women tell their children so they would behave.

And now they had me, the closest thing to you. A compliment, I say.

Kitchener chuckled, knowing he had won. I could not turn back, and this mob would try to leave me beaten and bloody should Kitchener leave me with them. I had but one choice.

"I was looking for you, in fact, Master Kitchener," I said, attempting to sound as polite as humanly possible.

"Oh really?" Kitchener asked, his smile too broad, his voice too eager. The pig had its truffle now and all that was left to do was to devour it.

"I come from the Patriarch, to offer a lucrative trading deal for southern Alfresia," I said, hoping avarice would entice him. "Shall we speak in a more… private… setting? As you can see, I did not intend for all to hear of this arrangement."

"Oh, my, yes," he gloated. The man was veritably drooling.

We walked in silence and curiously avoided any frequently used corridors. I had expected Kitchener to show off his new prize to all who could see, but he was taking my jibe about southern Alfresian trading seriously. Had I inadvertently set foot in one of grandfather's schemes?

Closing the door to his office, Kitchener poured us a glass of sherry before confirming my suspicions.

"I had very much hoped Patriarch Hugenberg would accept my idea of a new shipping route out of the south. The van Windburgs are bleeding us dry, and you know there is no negotiating with the Third Duke."

"Indeed," I merely said. What else could I say?

"This calls for a toast!" Kitchener exclaimed, ironically saving me from further humiliation.

He did not wait for me but immediately tipped his whole glass down his throat. Thinking back now, what angered me most at that moment was not childish and petty attitude to me at the loading door. No, it was how he suddenly acted like we were the best of friends, as if the past could so easily be forgotten. I will not forget. With his head tilted back, enjoying his last drink took the opportunity to take the glove off my right hand and punch him squarely in the throat.

I had had quite enough of the pestilence that was Kitchener. The years of humiliation and mockery would end today. We would see which of us lived up to his ancestor's reputation. The fat politician, or the former soldier? Clearly there was no contest to be had here, and for a brief moment I felt ashamed at what I was doing, that this abuse of power was no different from what he had done to me.

But that brief moment of shame disappeared in the flash of fire that engulfed Kitchener's face when the ring on my hand touched his throat. It was your ring, the ring they found in the crater your death caused. Primed to release fire if someone touched the array on the ring, it worked as well as it always did. And as always, the sight of fire burnt away all my doubts.

For a second, Kitchener's head was engulfed in flames and then the mountain of fat collapsed against the wall, falling to the ground like a felled tree. All the hair on his head was burnt off, his skin a mess of blisters and his throat seemed well cooked. But he was breathing and, surprisingly enough, conscious if only a tad dazed and confused.

Quivering, moaning and sputtering, he sat

there on the ground staring at me in disbelief. I removed the glove off my left hand and showed him my other ring, the copy I made of yours. He quieted down immediately. He had forgotten why fire ought to be feared, but I had helped him remember.

"You will tell me everything I wish to know, or I will burn you alive," I told him quietly.

"Please, no! You cannot do this!" he began to sputter. "Oh dear gods, no! You know who I am! Please do not do this. I am an imp-"

I brought my ring closer to his face. He ceased his begging.

"Some time ago, a senate committee hosted an eccentric inventor who presented the designs of his new contraptions," I told him. "The senate committee then confiscated all said inventions. Where are they kept?"

"What?" he asked, staring at me in incomprehension. His fear of the fire had rendered his mind impotent.

"The rifle! Where is it?!" I yelled at him, my anger at myself getting the better of me.

"What?!" he yelped once more, his gaze utterly fixed upon my ring, a hair's breadth from his nose.

"Say 'what' one more time! I dare you! See what happens!" I yelled at him, putting my ring as close to his eye as I dared without activating the primed array. "Where?! Is?! The rifle?!"

Self preservation overcame his fear of fire, and a flicker of recognition in his eyes showed me he understood precisely what I was talking about.

"Rifle? I-it is not h-h-here!" he stammered. "The Intelligence S-s-s-service t-took it a few days ago!"

"Why?!"

"T-they s-s-said t-they could f-f-fix it! T-they found out why it did n-not work!"

I pressed the ring against his eye and forced his entire head back against the wall. The fire erupted from my ring and, with nowhere else to go, scorched its way through Kitchener's eye and into his skull. He did not even have time to react, to yell, to beg, to plead, or even ask whatever gods he believed in for salvation.

Karel Kitchener, the last descendent of the saviour of Middelburg, died snivelling on his backside, reeking of bacon.

Fitting.

Perhaps killing Kitchener was not the best course of action. Many people saw us together and heard my 'need' for a private conversation. My love of fire is not unknown either, nor is my hatred of Kitchener. I will have to disappear after today. My wife will not be happy, but she rarely is these days. At least she and the boys can live with go live with Willem. My brother will be happy to see them.

More than anything, I question if it was honourable. Kitchener did not deserve to live, that much is true, but I never gave him the opportunity to prove his worth against me. What would you have done? You killed men by the dozen who dared to disagree with you, but their lives were yours to take. Was Kitchener's life mine?

As I left the senate building en route to the Intelligence Service headquarters, I remember thinking of how coincidental all of this was. My 'friends' in the shadows happen to task me with finding this new rifle just as the Intelligence Service happens to discover how to fix the rifle. No, this was far too convenient, too clean. They knew about this, that is why they sent me. They could not tell me of it, however, in case the Intelligence Service intercepted the message. If only they had the courage to meet with me, this foolish quest of mine would have been much simpler.

I loathe this clandestine life. It is not noble, it is not just. I am no better than a footman of the Merchant League, skulking around in the

dead of night. You would not have sullied yourself by playing games at night. As Bür teaches us, what is done in the dark shadows of the night must be brought into the light of the day in order to be just and true. You lived by that principle, and if Alfresia is to once again have a monarch, then I shall too.

But first things first. I had to fulfil my duty and attain that rifle.

Twilight had given way to night by the time I arrived at the Intelligence Services headquarters, dressed in more suitable attire for a burglary. It is the descendant of your old Inquisition, but with a more palatable name and cheery demeanour. It has not changed one iota from your days, they just spy for other masters now.

My entry into the walled Military District was comparatively easy, the Hugenberg coat of arms once again opening doors which in truth should have been closed to one such as I. There was a tension in the air that I disliked, and more than once I was stopped and asked for identification. Each time the Hugenberg arms and the name of the Patriarch more than satisfied them. I was not concerned of the trail of witnesses I left behind me, I would disappear for a time after today, thus efficiency was my first priority.

When I arrived, I saw that my luck had only gotten worse as the day had gone on. The entire Intelligence Services compound was a hive of activity. An army of tents had been erected outside the main building where men were now urgently discussing some sort of plans. Boys were running to and fro, carrying messages from tent to tent and into the main building. On top of the building, I could see men with telescopes searching, apparently in vain from their reactions, for something... or perhaps someone.

In my heart I knew the reason for all this hustle and bustle, but I did not want to believe it. At the very least I had to make sure.

I approached the first tent I saw and, in my most authoritative voice, asked for the man in charge. I boy no older than twenty pointed me in the direction of a group of older gentleman standing off to one side. I thanked the boy and moved on.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," I said as I got close to the three men. "Which one of you is in command here."

"That all depends on who asks, sir," a jovial looking man with a drooping moustache said.

"Burgrave Patriarch Nelson Alexander Horatio Maximilian Valerius Hugenberg the Second," I said without the jovial man's humour. It had its intended effect. Smiles turned to frowns and eyes immediately became suspicious.

"We are busy enough without the Patriarch's worries becoming our own," a thin man with thinner lips and a Gaelish accent said. Impertinent, but confident. He was the man in charge, the man I needed to convince. What I said next would be my one and only chance of gaining any information, and perhaps the only chance I had at the rifle. I could not afford failure.

"The Patriarch has heard of what occurred here," I lied through my teeth, trying to sound as vague as possible. "He wishes to assist in whatever form he may."

"He heard, did he?" the Gael asked, not believing a word of my lie. Smart man.

"The Patriarch has as many ears as the Intelligence Service, sir, and he uses them well," I replied, beginning to feel the pressure mounting.

"And what 'occurred' here?" the third man, silent thus far, asked? He knew the game well. I had hoped they would not ask, but I was fool for hoping. You always said that hope is the road to disappointment, and you were right again, as always.

"The theft of the rifle," I said, sounding as confident as I could, gambling with my life.

For once my luck held, and I was as surprised as the three men seemed to be, their eyebrows raising in unison.

"The Patriarch's ears are well honed, indeed," the third man said. "The rifle was stolen not half an hour ago."

Half an hour? I was already in the Military District by then. I was so close.

"Do you happen to know who took it?" I asked in vain.

"Unfortunately, no," the jovial man said, sound understandably less jovial now. "All we know is that he wore a green mask and green cloak."

Oh no.

The bastard.

The bloody bastard!

How did he know of the rifle? How could he know? Why did seemingly everyone knew what was going on except for me? But I knew something he did not. I knew who he was. I knew how he operated. And best of all, he did not know I was after him.

I said my thanks, made quick promises to investigate and then left, going to the only place I could think of that he would run to.

There are only two routes between the Military and League Districts that allows one to travel and any decent speed, speed which a thief would need. There was the main arterial road, built on the gigantic runic array, that has arrays built into it to allow faster travel; and the Tenne river. Both of these pass through the Political District which were closed down today to anyone not on bona fide business thanks to Kitchener's murder. This meant the thief would have to swing around the west of it before the Northern Twin Bridges. A thief would not take the open road, not with such a large package as the rifle to conceal. The constabulary would check every carriage, but they will not check every boat.

If I were the thief, I would come ashore before the Northern Twins and head down the western arterial road. Then south past the university and into the League District as quickly as possible.

So at the intersection of the arterial and university roads I stood waiting, confident I had arrived before he did. I had only to show the Hugenberg arms to the Military District guards to let me pass and then I ran my horse nearly to death. These were luxuries the thief could not afford.

A horse came towards me at a brisk pace. Not too fast, not too slow, the perfect speed to avoid looking suspicious. I had my man. I unholstered my pistol and drew your gold and bronze sword and waited in the middle of the road. I was not overly concerned that he would run me over, I had drawn arrays across the road ten metres in front of me and primed them with my own blood. I merely had to wait.

The rider slowed as he approached me. We both knew what was about to happen.

"Who goes there?" he called out. I wore the clothes that Lukas and my headless comrades also wore, a uniform of a sort. Black coat, black hat, and a black scarf around the lower part of my face. Melodramatic, but it did serve its purpose, I was unidentifiable.

"You have something that belongs to me, van Strauss," I called back. "Tell van Rosedaal you failed. Tell him it was not there. Tell him anything you want, but give me the rifle and we part ways before you get hurt."

"Markus? It has been a long time since we ran together! What has it been? Five years?"

"Four, actually, and you are still not leaving with that rifle."

"Tell your grandfather you failed, and as you said: we can part ways before anything happens."

"You know I cannot do that, Johan," I said.

"Neither can I," replied van Strauss grimly and drew his blade and pistol.

He walked his horse forward, and its first step put it over the runic arrays I had prepared. A column of fire a metre across erupted from the ground, roasting the horse's head even as it reared back. Van Strauss was flung from the saddle but luckily rolled out of the way of the dead horse.

I wasted no time. I drew a bead on him and fired my pistol. A great gout of flame sprung from my pistol and leapt towards him. Quick as always, he jumped clear of the fire and the rest of his horse went up in flames.

Van Strauss returned the favour and reminded me in what poor shape I had let myself become. His round took me in the shoulder and, if not for the runic arrays across my coat, my shoulder would have been destroyed. Blinding white light issued forth from my shoulder, the symbol of our shadowy group. I wonder if my so-called allies appreciate the irony. Perhaps they thought it comical.

With my pistol spent, I charged towards van Strauss, robbing him of the chance to reload his own.

Our swords clashed and flames flared up from both blades at each strike, block and parry. I began to regret ever giving him that sword. I engraved its runes myself, copying from your own sword. I gave him your fire, but that was twenty years ago, far too late to cry over it now.

Van Strauss' sword work was exceptional, learned over a lifetime of fighting other criminals in this hellhole of city. He, however, did not have the training I had, the years spent soldiering, and his attempts at cheap shots won him little. Little by little I was pushing him back to his horse, my blade tasting his blood bit by bloody bit. His defensive arrays were useless against your gold and bronze sword. All the while his blade was shortening each time he struck my coat, my arrays transmuting the iron in his sword into light that blinded him. It gave me all the advantage I needed.

When his back foot hit the charred corpse of his horse I saw fear in his eyes, his mask could not hide that. He knew he was outclassed. He was far better at skulking and sneaking than standing and fighting. His weapon was useless while mine still burnt bright and hot, powered by his blood. He would lose tonight.

But he was my friend, a commodity of which I have precious little.

I chose to be merciful. I chose to spare his life. I will never make that mistake again.

I stepped back.

He sat down heavily on his dead horse, exhausted and bloodied.

"Leave the rifle," I said. "Go."

"No," he said and pulled the rifle from behind him on the horse and before I could reach him, he shot me.

I had not been pushing him back to his horse. He had been pulling me there. In my arrogance I had not given thought to the rifle being used. I had been proud and knew that between my arms and armour, and with my skills I would easily win.

Once again a Wesfresian had come to this city with fire and blood and been defeated with Alfresian ingenuity.

Fitting.

When I looked up from where I had collapsed, van Strauss was gone. And, of course, so was the rifle.

I looked down and saw the blood streaming from a small hole in my stomach, drenching my coat and setting off all its arrays, lighting me up like the sun at dawn. I do not know what ammunition that rifle shoots, but it went straight through my coat and the bronze brigandine I wore underneath.

The pain would come soon, I knew, but for

now I had to leave the road before the constables arrived. My stomach would not kill me yet.

One would think a surgeon operating solely on criminals would be hard to come by, but not in this city. The hole that the rifle's round punched straight through me was 'laughably small' the back alley surgeon said, although it still does not feel small a few hours later. At least it was only a few stitches.

And so I found myself here, as I do most nights. The Alfresians at least had the dignity to do this statue justice, even if it shows you holding a burning skull. But you look as regal as I always imagined you to be. I failed tonight, but as Bür teaches us, more can be learned through failing than succeeding. And I learned a valuable lesson.

I serve two masters, and it has gained me nothing but misery. No longer. I am my own master now, and my erstwhile compatriots will be my new troops even if they don't know it yet. My grandfather will just have to do without me. He still has my brother to toy with. I will no longer be bound by the chains others have set for me.

I will restore our family honour.

I will conquer this city.

I will conquer this island.

I will bring it all back into the fold.

The Alfresians will learn to fear the fire once more.

CHARACTER CREATION

In this chapter, you will build a character all the way from birth to the age when you choose to start the game. It is all randomly done with dice rolls (although if you already have a specific character idea in mind, you can always choose the options that are best suited to your idea, we won't judge).

The character creation is set up in a few sections which will take you through your character's look, their Culture, their Childhood, Teenage and then Adult years.

At the end of the Character Creator there is also a Random Name table if you can't think of a good name for your character or if you want fate to decide.

For each question, roll a d100 and record the result. In each cases, your result will get you two Skills. Each time you gain a Skill, roll a d5 (d10/2) and increase that Skill's Level by that amount. All Skills start a Level 30, so everything you get here is added onto that.

Skill Arrays

If you want to start a game quickly without going through the entire Character Generation process, then you can always use the Basic Skill Array method to create a character.

In this way you look at the table below and assign each Skill Level to a Skill. Next to each Skill Level on the table, you'll see how many Skills you can put at that Skill Level.

You have one Skill you can have at Level 50, three Skills at Level 45, five at Level 45, etc. It's that simple and quick to make your character.

Level	# Skills
50	1
45	3
40	5
35	5
30	6

Who are you

Your character's Age

While the Character Creation process is all done randomly, you can to a degree decide at what age you want your character to start the game. You can choose whether you want your character to be a Child, a Teenager or an Adult. Once that decision is made, you can use the tables below to roll for their exact age.

- If your character is between 21-40, then all their Skills start at Level 30.
- If your character is over 40 years old, then the ravages of age will start to set in.
- If your character is between 41-50 then they will have -2 Skill Levels to all their Physical Skills.
- If your character is between 51-60 then they will have -4 Skill Levels to all their Physical Skills.
- If your character is over 60 then they will have -6 Skill Levels to all their Skills.

Conversely, being a minor also means that your talents in life won't be as good as an adult's. Choosing to play as a minor will mean you also start with some reduced Skill Levels and it also means you won't be able to complete the Adulthood (or Teenage section if you're a child). Every benefit has cost, after all.

- If your character is between 11-20 then they will have -2 Skill Levels to all their Non-Physical Skills.
- If your character is under 10 then they will have -2 Skill Levels to all of their Skills.

Check the Skills Section to see which Skills are Physical or not.

Minor	
Range	Age
Child	5+1d5
Teenager	10+1d10

Adult		
Roll	Range	Age
01-35	Young Adult	20+1d10
36-70	Adult	30+1d10
71-85	Middle Aged	40+1d10
86-95	Mature	50+1d10
96-100	Elderly	60+1d10

Male Body Type		Female Body Type	
01-10	Scrawny	01-10	Petite
11-25	Lean	11-25	Slender
26-40	Athletic	26-40	Fit
41-60	Average	41-60	Average
61-75	Brawny	61-75	Muscular
76-90	Stocky	76-90	Buxom
90-100	Heavy	90-100	Plump

Gender	
01-50	Male
51-100	Female

Handedness	
01-89	Right Handed
90-99	Left Handed
100	Ambidextrous

Distinctive Trait					
01-02	Cheek piercings	35-36	Missing ear	69-70	Protruding brow and chin
03-04	Close-set eyes	37-38	Missing finger	71-72	Religious tattoos
05-06	Crooked nose	39-40	Missing teeth	73-74	Rune-inspired tattoos
07-08	Crooked teeth	41-42	Missing toe	75-76	Scarification patterns
09-10	Excessive body hair	43-44	Mythological tattoos	77-78	Scarring on arms
11-12	Exotropic eyes	45-46	Naval tattoos	79-80	Significant overbite
13-14	Extreme scarring on legs	47-48	Nervous facial tic	81-82	Stain-mark on arm
15-16	Faded burn marks	49-50	Noticeable underbite	83-84	Stain-mark on face
17-18	Gang tattoos	51-52	Old brand on face	85-86	Stain-mark on neck
19-20	Greasy hair and skin	53-54	Old brand on neck	87-88	Stain-mark on torso
21-22	Grinning facial scars	55-56	Old brands on arms	89-90	Terrible scarring on chest
23-24	Healed scarring on face	57-58	Old brands on legs	91-92	Unique ear piercings
25-26	Huge scarring on back	59-60	Old brands on torso	93-94	Unpleasant odour
27-28	Large mole on cheek	61-62	Persistent cough	95-96	Vitiligo
29-30	Large, long nose	63-64	Plant-themed tattoos	97-98	Wide-set eyes
31-32	Long fingers	65-66	Pockmarked skin	**99-00**	**Roll twice**
33-34	Military tattoos	67-68	Pox scars		

Heisenstein Family

The Fresians of Ossenzee have always occupied the lower class and social movement rarely occurs. To protect themselves and their interests, several Ossen-Fresian merchants came together to begin the first Ossenzeen Merchant's guild. Over the centuries, other guilds appeared, guilds merged and fell apart and others dwindled out of existence. This continued on until an exiled Imperial Prince named Stefanus Heisenstein came to the small isle and proved his prowess at politics and economics. In short order he created a governing body for all the guilds to consolidate their power so as to prove a match for the Nacitanian nobility. By the time the angels called him home the Heisenstein family controlled all the merchants in Ossenzee.

The Heisenstein family of today is a far cry from Stefanus' family. They have become the nobility, in all but name, that they so despised. Rich and arrogant, the Heisensteins flaunt their wealth by specialising in goods to serve other rich and arrogant folk. Jewellery, fine clothing, glassware, ceremonial weapons, ships and real estate are the Heisenstein's forte. If you have money and a lot of it the Heisenstein family will be happy to accommodate any desire you have, no matter how unsavoury it may be.

Culture

From what Culture are you?		
Roll	Culture	Complexion
01-27	Fresian	Fair
28-43	Dayitic	Golden
44-57	Valtorian	Rosy
58-69	Gitic	Olive
70-79	Caelish	Ruddy
80-87	Vinean	Tan
88-93	Delkan	Dark
94-97	Tolian	Pale
98-99	Mekadian	Dusky
100	Outlander	Exotic

Caelish	
1-30	Gaeland
31-55	Vissewal
56-75	Gallathian
76-90	Ullacht
91-100	Free Marches

Delkan	
1-30	Mollachia
31-55	Dalmaria
56-75	Esztervar
76-90	Dukshka
91-100	Turvana

Tolian	
1-30	Nigaean
31-55	Thracetolia
56-75	Kardigia
76-90	Edesaijan
91-100	Taurimea

Fresian	
1-40	Alfresia
41-70	Wesfresland
71-90	Ossenzee
91-100	Hallei

Dayitic	
1-50	HEM
51-65	Lodewaria
66-74	Tierool
75-82	Krunswikke
83-90	Moriakan
91-100	Kontryn

Gitic	
1-40	Heiemaark
41-70	Worge
71-90	Jotteland
91-100	Vyadland

Outlander	
1-30	Uttosia
31-55	Umdunia
56-75	Rehiyon
76-90	Dharati
91-100	Suyu Pacha

Valtorian	
1-20	Nacitania
21-37	Valkryk
38-48	Nevincia
49-58	Rimie
59-67	Neatol
68-75	Vortichaal
76-82	Arravan
83-88	Glaasia
89-93	Lieuwen
94-97	Valeron
98-100	Artoria

Vinean	
1-19	Boandia
20-35	Staandeland
36-50	Drussalia
51-64	Bythika
65-77	Litaundia
78-89	Cherimisia
90-100	Kolotsk

Mekadian	
1-14	Tanfakech
15-27	Allepioch
28-39	Cyrenibylia
40-50	Damienai
51-60	Goxum
61-70	Aktobia
71-79	Azovia
80-87	Hlynerm
88-94	Turkania
95-100	Gradabajoz

Childhood

What was your earliest memory?		
01-10	Getting hopelessly lost in the city streets.	Drive & Intimidate
11-20	Running for my life.	Athletics & Perception
21-30	Getting caught stealing by the constables.	Burglary & Will
31-40	A priest giving me the blessing of Bür.	Constitution & Wealth
41-50	A runic array exploding, and then silence.	Fine-Craft & Investigate
51-60	Being covered in someone else's blood.	Broad-Craft & Shoot
61-70	My parents telling me it will all be OK.	Deceive & Might
71-80	The joyful laughter of my family.	Diplomacy & Luck
81-90	A vicious street brawl. I don't know who won.	Fight & Logic
91-100	Playing hide and seek with my friends.	Intuition & Stealth

Where did you grow up?		
01-10	In the alleyways of Oldtown.	Stealth & Fight
11-20	On the open road, always travelling.	Drive & Diplomacy
21-30	At the docks, hard at work.	Broad-Craft & Athletics
31-40	Near a temple, helping the priests.	Investigate & Might
41-50	In Nieuton, waited upon hand and foot.	Intimidate & Burglary
51-60	Near a library that I always visited.	Logic & Fine-Craft
61-70	Anywhere on the streets that I could.	Shoot & Perception
71-80	In a busy shop, constantly underfoot.	Will & Wealth
81-90	In a comfortable urban environment.	Luck & Intuition
91-100	In the Political District, learning to lie.	Deceive & Constitution

What were the people you called family like?		
01-10	Merchants in the League, hunting for money.	Athletics & Wealth
11-20	Pious folks, always praying.	Will & Stealth
21-30	Constables chasing down criminals.	Shoot & Luck
31-40	Labourers tinkering and building all day.	Perception & Might
41-50	Scholars with their noses in books.	Logic & Diplomacy
51-60	Note takers and bookkeepers.	Investigate & Drive
61-70	Vagrants, forever wandering the streets.	Intimidate & Constitution
71-80	Artists, who created beautiful things.	Intuition & Fine-Craft
81-90	Mercenaries, always off to fight another war.	Fight & Broad-Craft
91-100	Thieves, rogues and footmen.	Burglary & Deceive

How strict was your upbringing?		
01-10	Draconian	Constitution & Shoot
11-20	Brutal	Broad-Craft & Intimidate
21-30	Heavy-handed	Athletics & Will
31-40	Strict	Perception & Fight
41-50	Tolerant	Logic & Might
51-60	Indifferent	Fine-Craft & Diplomacy
61-70	Easy-going	Drive & Intuition
71-80	Lenient	Burglary & Stealth
81-90	Pampered	Luck & Deceive
91-100	Spoilt	Investigate & Wealth

How did you respond to religion?		
01-10	The syncretic Completism.	Constitution & Fight
11-20	A mixture of two faiths.	Athletics & Shoot
21-30	The esoteric Runism.	Broad-Craft & Luck
31-40	Eastern Progenitorism.	Diplomacy & Will
41-50	The Starchild Cult.	Investigate & Perception
51-60	August Prodigalism.	Might & Intuition
61-70	Eternal Prodigalism.	Wealth & Stealth
71-80	I wasn't taught religion.	Logic & Drive
81-90	The ancient Neoism.	Deceive & Intimidate
91-100	My homeland's paganism.	Fine-Craft & Burglary

Who had the biggest influence on your childhood?		
01-10	The ever-present League.	Drive & Stealth
11-20	My sibling, my childhood's bedrock.	Athletics & Investigate
21-30	My best friend and partner in crime.	Burglary & Diplomacy
31-40	A priest from the local temple.	Constitution & Will
41-50	A hero from the epic poems.	Might & Luck
51-60	My teacher and mentor.	Broad-Craft & Logic
61-70	Myself.	Deceive & Intuition
71-80	A helpful and friendly constable.	Fight & Shoot
81-90	A kind old merchant that helped me.	Intimidate & Fine-Craft
91-100	My parents, who tried their best.	Perception & Wealth

Your childhood left you feeling..?		
01-10	Afraid	Athletics & Stealth
11-20	Peaceful	Burglary & Logic
21-30	Content	Fine-Craft & Broad-Craft
31-40	Cynical	Diplomacy & Investigate
41-50	Proud	Might & Drive
51-60	Sad	Constitution & Intuition
61-70	Ashamed	Deceive & Perception
71-80	Confused	Fight & Luck
81-90	Angry	Intimidate & Will
91-100	Indifferent	Shoot & Wealth

Teenage Years

Who was your best friend?		
01-10	An apprentice crafter, hard of spirit and always working.	Athletics & Luck
11-20	A League child with more money than sense.	Burglary & Drive
21-30	No one. Absolutely no one.	Constitution & Investigate
31-40	A scion from Nieuton with powerful connections.	Intuition & Broad-Craft
41-50	A bookworm who had an answer for everything.	Deceive & Logic
51-60	My dog, the best friend you could ask for.	Diplomacy & Wealth
61-70	A young mercenary, he knew every weapon there was.	Fight & Will
71-80	A street rat, one step ahead of the constables.	Might & Stealth
81-90	An apprentice monk/nun, silent but wise.	Shoot & Intimidate
91-100	An apprentice runewright, always drawing away.	Fine-Craft & Perception

How was your first love?		
01-10	I killed someone for them, it soured everything.	Athletics & Shoot
11-20	They were a petty criminal and ended up in gaol.	Burglary & Intuition
21-30	Adventurous! We did everything together.	Constitution & Drive
31-40	I caught them and their old lover together.	Broad-Craft & Fight
41-50	Expensive, by the hour, and I'm still paying for it.	Deceive & Stealth
51-60	Sweet, like Glaasian wine.	Diplomacy & Will
61-70	They loved me and so did their best friend.	Might & Wealth
71-80	Our families hated each other.	Intimidate & Luck
81-90	They always kept secrets from me.	Investigate & Perception
91-100	It was unrequited, through a window, from afar.	Logic & Fine-Craft

What did you learn from the adults around you?		
01-10	That they can't catch you if keep moving.	Drive & Might
11-20	To aim for the stars, and fake it till you get there.	Athletics & Deceive
21-30	That in this city, crime pays better than honest work.	Burglary & Stealth
31-40	That I need to be patient with my dreams.	Constitution & Broad-Craft
41-50	To see the beauty in the world, rather than the misery.	Fine-Craft & Diplomacy
51-60	That violence is a quick path to wealth in Middelburg.	Fight & Wealth
61-70	That everyone and everything has a price.	Intuition & Intimidate
71-80	To always do the right thing, no matter what.	Investigate & Shoot
81-90	That you need to keep your eyes open to survive.	Logic & Perception
91-100	To trust in Bür and stop worrying.	Luck & Will

What dreams did you have for the future?		
01-10	To track someone down. My future was with them.	Fight & Drive
11-20	I wanted to invent things, to create and build!	Investigate & Broad-Craft
21-30	Join the League and get rich. Simple as that.	Luck & Wealth
31-40	A future where I could finally disappear.	Shoot & Stealth
41-50	A future far away from this stinking city.	Athletics & Perception
51-60	Screw the future, I just wanted to survive the present.	Burglary & Will
61-70	To join the constables and fight the good fight.	Constitution & Might
71-80	To use the runes to reshape the world.	Fine-Craft & Deceive
81-90	I wanted to help make this city better for everyone.	Diplomacy & Intuition
91-100	To be strong, so that I don't need to be afraid anymore.	Intimidate & Logic

Who did fate take?	
01-20	My mother.
21-40	My father.
41-60	A sibling.
61-80	My friend.
81-100	My lover.

What happened to the one you lost?		
01-10	What always happens in Middelburg, murder.	Broad-Craft & Intimidate
11-20	The left this city and me behind to chase a dream.	Deceive & Drive
21-30	I sold them out to the League to curry favour.	Investigate & Wealth
31-40	They were a criminal and were sent to prison.	Athletics & Burglary
41-50	A terrible accident. It wasn't anyone's fault.	Constitution & Fine-Craft
51-60	They picked a fight with the League and lost.	Diplomacy & Fight
61-70	They gave up on this world and on us.	Intuition & Will
71-80	Ilness. Not even the priests could help them.	Logic & Might
81-90	They betrayed me. Vengeance was my right.	Perception & Shoot
91-100	Wrong place, wrong time, stray musket ball.	Luck & Stealth

How do you feel about your teenage years?		
01-10	Ashamed	Deceive & Broad-Craft
11-20	Afraid	Will & Drive
21-30	Confused	Diplomacy & Stealth
31-40	Proud	Perception & Wealth
41-50	Angry	Fight & Intimidate
51-60	Content	Athletics & Might
61-70	Indifferent	Burglary & Luck
71-80	Peaceful	Constitution & Logic
81-90	Sad	Shoot & Fine-Craft
91-100	Cynical	Intuition & Investigate

The turning point in your life was when I...		
01-10	Got an addiction. The withdrawals is as bad as the drug.	Burglary & Broad-Craft
11-20	Nearly died. I still bear the scars of the incident.	Constitution & Intuition
21-30	I found out that the runes don't solve everything.	Diplomacy & Perception
31-40	Found a secret treasure hidden in a dark alley.	Deceive & Wealth
41-50	And my family lost everything we had to the League.	Might & Intimidate
51-60	Saved someone from dying. I was the hero they needed.	Athletics & Fine-Craft
61-70	Found a starving, dying animal and nursed it back to health.	Drive & Investigate
71-80	Was given a precious family heirloom. I keep it on me always.	Logic & Luck
81-90	Had to kill someone. I still see them when I close my eyes.	Shoot & Will
91-100	Was blackmailed by footmen to do commit their crimes.	Fight & Stealth

Fresian Merchant League

All-knowing and all-powerful, at least that's how it seems in Middelburg. The Fresian Merchant League is technically and legally speaking a nation-state in its own right, although the only land it can call its own soil is one single district in Middelburg. Instead, the Merchant League is a country on paper made of paper.

The League consists of dozens of Merchant Families, ruled by the four founding Families, and between them all the League own hundreds of businesses, hectares upon hectares of land, fleets of ships, armies of mercenaries, and absolute mountains of money.

That last part is the important bit: the League exists only to make itself rich, by any means possible. All of its untold resources go towards making ever more money in any way it can. The wealthier a family is, the higher their perceived rank in the League; and thus the lust for money isn't just for its own sake, but for a Family's very survival.

The League only cares about the League, and pity anyone outside it that tries to intrude on League business. The very concept of "footmen", the paid-for-criminals in Middelburg, was developed by the Founding Families as a way to ensure that their business gets done.

Adulthood

What sort of life lead you here?		
01-10	A clerk's life, writing, publishing, and earning.	Will & Wealth
11-20	A footman's life, starving to make others rich.	Burglary & Luck
21-30	A labourer's one, breaking my back for others.	Constitution & Perception
31-40	An artisan's life, creating fine and detailed things.	Fine-Craft & Fight
41-50	A craftsman's life, doing a honest day's work.	Broad-Craft & Stealth
51-60	The League's life, trading goods, coins, and lives.	Deceive & Drive
61-70	The bohemian life of freedom and debauchery.	Diplomacy & Intimidate
71-80	The right side of life, bringing the law to the streets.	Intuition & Might
81-90	One lived on the move, never putting down roots.	Investigate & Athletics
91-100	One where my mind was my greatest weapon.	Logic & Shoot

What role do you play in a group?		
01-10	The Scout.	Athletics & Intuition
11-20	The Tinkerer.	Burglary & Broad-Craft
21-30	The Muscle.	Constitution & Fight
31-40	The Mentor.	Will & Logic
41-50	The Negotiator.	Deceive & Luck
51-60	The Lookout.	Diplomacy & Perception
61-70	The Warden.	Drive & Intimidate
71-80	The Vanguard.	Investigate & Might
81-90	The Striker.	Shoot & Fine-Craft
91-100	The Thief.	Stealth & Wealth

What's your opinion of people?		
01-10	They should do more to better themselves.	Athletics & Logic
11-20	We were made in Bür's image.	Will & Fine-Craft
21-30	Friends waiting to be made.	Burglary & Diplomacy
31-40	They're there to help me get rich.	Wealth & Deceive
41-50	They're just trying to survive, like me.	Constitution & Luck
51-60	They are too rigidly confined by rules.	Shoot & Drive
61-70	Eventually they all need someone like me.	Broad-Craft & Perception
71-80	Sheep in dire need of a shepherd.	Might & Intimidate
81-90	Too much talk, not nearly enough action.	Fight & Intuition
91-100	They're all a bunch of bastards.	Investigate & Stealth

Your motto in life?		
01-10	The end justifies the means.	Deceive & Intimidate
11-20	Knowledge is power.	Logic & Drive
21-30	There is no solitude in a city.	Might & Broad-Craft
31-40	Nothing ventured, nothing gained.	Fight & Investigation
41-50	Every man has his price.	Fine-Craft & Wealth
51-60	Each choice has a consequence.	Shoot & Diplomacy
61-70	Walls don't protect, they imprison.	Burglary & Perception
71-80	Calm seas make poor sailors.	Athletics & Will
81-90	Fortune favours the bold.	Luck & Intuition
91-100	Always darkest before the dawn.	Constitution & Stealth

What can't you stop yourself doing?		
01-10	Wanting to take what others have.	Fine-Craft & Investigate
11-20	Always wanting more and more.	Logic & Burglary
21-30	Being consumed by my hidden desires.	Luck & Diplomacy
31-40	Feeling better than others around me.	Shoot & Wealth
41-50	Getting the energy to do my fair share.	Stealth & Might
51-60	Forcing others to my point of view.	Constitution & Drive
61-70	Consuming more than what's good for me.	Broad-Craft & Intuition
71-80	Taking my anger out on anyone I see.	Athletics & Fight
81-90	Not caring much for anyone or anything.	Deceive & Will
91-100	Refusing to listen, even when I should.	Perception & Intimidate

What do you always try to be?		
01-10	Chaste in my passions.	Athletics & Intimidate
11-20	Empathic to others' needs.	Burglary & Fight
21-30	Humble in what I do.	Will & Perception
31-40	Patient with my plans.	Fine-Craft & Drive
41-50	Diligent in my work.	Investigate & Luck
51-60	Adaptable to what happens.	Logic & Intuition
61-70	Charitable to those in need.	Wealth & Broad-Craft
71-80	Kind to those around me.	Diplomacy & Might
81-90	Respectful to all I meet.	Constitution & Deceive
91-100	Temperate in my choices.	Stealth & Shoot

What is most important to you?		
01-10	This city, for all its quirks and oddities.	Athletics & Diplomacy
11-20	Power and the will to use it.	Burglary & Investigate
21-30	My friends, the family I chose.	Constitution & Might
31-40	My people, my culture, my nation.	Fine-Craft & Deceive
41-50	My beliefs and my faith.	Broad-Craft & Will
51-60	Technology, the runes, and the future.	Drive & Luck
61-70	Freedom and chaos, as nature intended.	Fight & Perception
71-80	My family, my blood.	Intuition & Shoot
81-90	Money, wealth, the promise of the League.	Intimidate & Wealth
91-100	Knowledge, and the study thereof.	Logic & Stealth

In your spare time, what do you enjoy doing?		
01-10	Getting away from Middelburg when I can.	Athletics & Drive
11-20	Taking advantage of the city's gullible fools.	Burglary & Shoot
21-30	Spending time with my fellow man.	Constitution & Diplomacy
31-40	Staying away from all the trouble in the city.	Fine-Craft & Stealth
41-50	Creating, tinkering, building.	Broad-Craft & Luck
51-60	Roaming the city's dark underbelly.	Deceive & Fight
61-70	Exploring the city. There's always something new.	Intuition & Perception
71-80	Watching the lives of people go by.	Intimidate & Investigate
81-90	Learning new things to keep me alive.	Logic & Wealth
91-100	Keeping my body and mind in shape.	Might & Will

Did you find your soul mate?	
01-40	No, I'm not that lucky.
41-70	Yes, for better or worse.
71-90	Yes, but only for a while.
91-100	Wait, just one?

And what about kids?	
01-30	One is more than enough.
31-50	A small handful.
51-60	A whole litter.
61-100	No. There's enough rats in the city.

Do you stand alone?	
01-20	Never. I need people.
21-40	No, there's always someone around
41-60	Only when I have to.
61-80	I might as well, few others care.
81-100	I do now, it's better this way.

What heirloom do you always carry with you?			
1-2	A badly made counterfeit coin	51-52	A notebook filled with incomprehensible writings
3-4	A bracelet made of silver charms	53-54	A palm sized geode carved like a skull
5-6	A braided necklace made of different metals	55-56	A pendant with your ancestor's coat of arms
7-8	A brass bell with a large crack running through it	57-58	A pictire of you and someone you don't know
9-10	A brass puzzle box you've never been able to open	59-60	A piece from an old war banner
11-12	A broken pendant showing only half a face	61-62	A plain heavy golden ring that fits perfectly
13-14	A brooch with a faded bone cameo	63-64	A pocket mirror that's cracked and blackened
15-16	A coin with its markings scratched off	65-66	A prehistoric insect trapped in amber
17-18	A comb carved from coral	67-68	A rusty dagger without a hilt
19-20	A compass, always pointing to the city's centre	69-70	A scrimshawed ivory pipe
21-22	A dead pirate's eyepatch	71-72	A shard of a mirror coated in dried blood
23-24	A deck of well-used playing cards	73-74	A signet ring with the seal nearly faded
25-26	A disk carved with a rune that doesn't work	75-76	A six sided dice with each side a different colour
27-28	A faceless doll made from bone	77-78	A statuette of an old soldier
29-30	A flag bearing unfamiliar heraldic devices	79-80	A tiny chest holding the ashes of an ancestor
31-32	A gigantic tooth from an unknown creature	81-82	A twelve sided dice inscibred with runes
33-34	A golden brooch in the shape of a constellation	83-84	A wooden chess piece blackened by fire
35-36	A hexagon pendant that hums like a tuning fork	85-86	A wooden fragment of a sunken ship
37-38	A journal written in a script you can't read	87-88	A worn book filled with poetry and children's tales
39-40	A key carved from bone that fits no lock	89-90	An ancient key with your name on it
41-42	A large coin bearing unfamiliar markings	91-92	An archaic bronze armband shaped like a serpent
43-44	A locket that's been melted shut	93-94	An exotic idol from across the ocean
45-46	A lucky charm	95-96	An ogre's tusk carved into a knife
47-48	A moonstone with cracks that look like lightning	97-98	An old constable's whistle
49-50	A necklace made of rune-engraved coins	99-100	An ornate pipe carved of pure black wood

Names

Fresian Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Aart	Carolien	De Klerk
11-20	Arend	Henriette	De Witt
21-30	Frederik	Hilda	Goossens
31-40	Gerrit	Isa	Hendriks
41-50	Jakob	Madelief	Jonker
51-60	Jan	Margareta	Mertens
61-70	Karel	Noortje	van der Berg
71-80	Michiel	Roos	van Dyk
81-90	Theo	Tineke	Vermeulen
91-100	Willem	Wilma	Wouters

Dayitic Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Adi	Adele	Brun
11-20	Alfons	Amelie	Fischer
21-30	Erich	Brunhilde	Hoffmann
31-40	Falk	Franziska	Lowe
41-50	Gerhard	Frieda	Meyer
51-60	Kurt	Gerda	Muller
61-70	Roland	Hedwig	Schmidt
71-80	Werner	Heide	Schneider
81-90	Wilhelm	Helga	Wagner
91-100	Wolfgang	Lilie	Webber

Valtorian Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Anton	Alba	Bruno
11-20	Florian	Amalia	Costa
21-30	Guillaume	Angelique	Fontaine
31-40	Hugo	Bianca	Le Roux
41-50	Julian	Carmen	Marino
51-60	Julien	Estelle	Mata
61-70	Quentin	Fleur	Rios
71-80	Reyes	Gloria	Romero
81-90	Vasco	Lea	Rossi
91-100	Vincent	Priscilla	Vega

Gitic Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Ari	Astrid	Aalto
11-20	Eino	Bjork	Adamsen
21-30	Flemming	Enni	Bager
31-40	Gunnar	Freja	Dahl
41-50	Hjortur	Helga	Ek
51-60	Ragnar	Laerke	Eriksson
61-70	Soren	Linnea	Jokela
71-80	Stellan	Ronja	Lindholm
81-90	Sven	Sigrun	Lund
91-100	Varg	Svea	Puera

Caelish Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Aidan	Aislin	Baines
11-20	Angus	Brigid	Boyle
21-30	Bran	Cerys	Campbell
31-40	Collin	Gladys	Jones
41-50	Douglass	Glenna	McDonald
51-60	Finn	Liadan	McKenzie
61-70	Kentigern	Maeve	McLeod
71-80	Lachlan	Moyna	O'Brien
81-90	Rhys	Nuala	Powell
91-100	Roderick	Rhona	Reilly

Vinean Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Aras	Dalia	Adamczyk
11-20	Borys	Danica	Astrauckas
21-30	Dusan	Iva	Bartosz
31-40	Lyov	Kalina	Beran
41-50	Milos	Mira	Cizek
51-60	Perun	Nadya	Fyodorov
61-70	Raduz	Rasa	Kijek
71-80	Vilen	Svetlana	Nemec
81-90	Vladimir	Wanda	Simonis
91-100	Yarik	Zlata	Utkin

Delkan Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Alin	Adina	Adamic
11-20	Cyprian	Camelia	Albescu
21-30	Dacian	Crina	Dimitrov
31-40	Doru	Dana	Dragic
41-50	Dragos	Danica	Kolar
51-60	Goran	Lilijana	Kovachev
61-70	Neven	Mirta	Lukic
71-80	Sanjin	Miruna	Lupei
81-90	Yasen	Nadia	Novak
91-100	Zlatan	Zora	Struna

Tolian Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Andreas	Alexandra	Colonomos
11-20	Aris	Avra	Giannopoulos
21-30	Emilios	Chara	Katsaros
31-40	Gavril	Dimitra	Metaxas
41-50	Ioannis	Eleni	Michel
51-60	Nikos	Katina	Pandev
61-70	Periklis	Melina	Papadopoulos
71-80	Spiridon	Olympia	Spiros
81-90	Stavros	Persefoni	Stephanidis
91-100	Vangelis	Xenia	Zabat

Mekadian Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Ahmed	Aaliyah	Abdullah
11-20	Altair	Darya	Abujjamal
21-30	Amir	Fatima	Attar
31-40	Harun	Leila	Darzi
41-50	Kamil	Lulu	El-Hashem
51-60	Kian	Mitra	Kartal
61-70	Malak	Parisa	Khoroushi
71-80	Mustafa	Salma	Nagi
81-90	Rashid	Simin	Sadik
91-100	Salim	Yasmeen	Uzun

Outlander Names			
Roll	Male	Female	Surname
1-10	Dal	Asha	Abe
11-20	Datu	Bali	Bai
21-30	Goro	Desta	Demir
31-40	Itri	Duc	Ito
41-50	Jin	Ju	Kim
51-60	Nergui	Lan	Li
61-70	Sefu	Nia	Mori
71-80	Uk	Sarnai	Ngo
81-90	Wan	Sirin	Ruk
91-100	Xolan	Van	Sun

Party Creator

Now that you and your entire group have made your characters, it's time to give your whole party some character and flavour. The tables below won't give you any extra Skill Levels, but they will give your party some context and backstory. They will show how your characters all initially met up, what the party's vague goal is, what keeps the party together and what can break it apart.

Keep in mind that your party is just like a character and it will evolve during gameplay just like your personal character would. Your party can change their goals and ambitions through roleplay, and what keeps you together and tears you apart will also change as you go about your adventures. Think of these tables as platforms to work off and start your journey with.

How did you all meet?	
01-10	Pure luck and happenstance.
11-20	Spent time in gaol together.
21-30	The same enemy targetted all of us.
31-40	We all got blackmailed together.
41-50	We all grew up in the same area.
51-60	We all worked for the same Family before.
61-70	We owe a debt to same person.
71-80	We used to be rivals and enemies.
81-90	We're pretty sure that we're distantly related.
91-100	We've done footmen jobs together in the past.

What ties you together?	
01-10	A promise of riches.
11-20	Good, honest friendship.
21-30	Mutual respect for each other's skills.
31-40	Only our current goal, nothing else.
41-50	Our boss ordered us together.
51-60	Past crimes we committed together.
61-70	We all have dirt on each other.
71-80	We have a common enemy.
81-90	We share the same motivations.
91-100	We swore an oath together.

What is your ambition?	
01-10	Claim our own piece of the city and control it.
11-20	Drag ourselves out of the muck of this city.
21-30	Fame, glory and reknown.
31-40	Someone's hunting us and we have to run.
41-50	There is someone we need to kill.
51-60	There's always another job to do.
61-70	To become richer than the League itself.
71-80	We have to save someone important.
81-90	We need to clear our names.
91-100	We owe a debt to the League, enough said.

What threatens to tear you apart?	
01-10	A complicated love triangle.
11-20	Broken promises and lies.
21-30	We all think we're in charge.
31-40	Conflicting ideologies.
41-50	Historic injustices between us.
51-60	One of us is a rat.
61-70	There's been an unequal share of loot.
71-80	We can never decide on anything.
81-90	Some of us aren't pulling their weight.
91-100	We simply don't trust each other.

Party Name

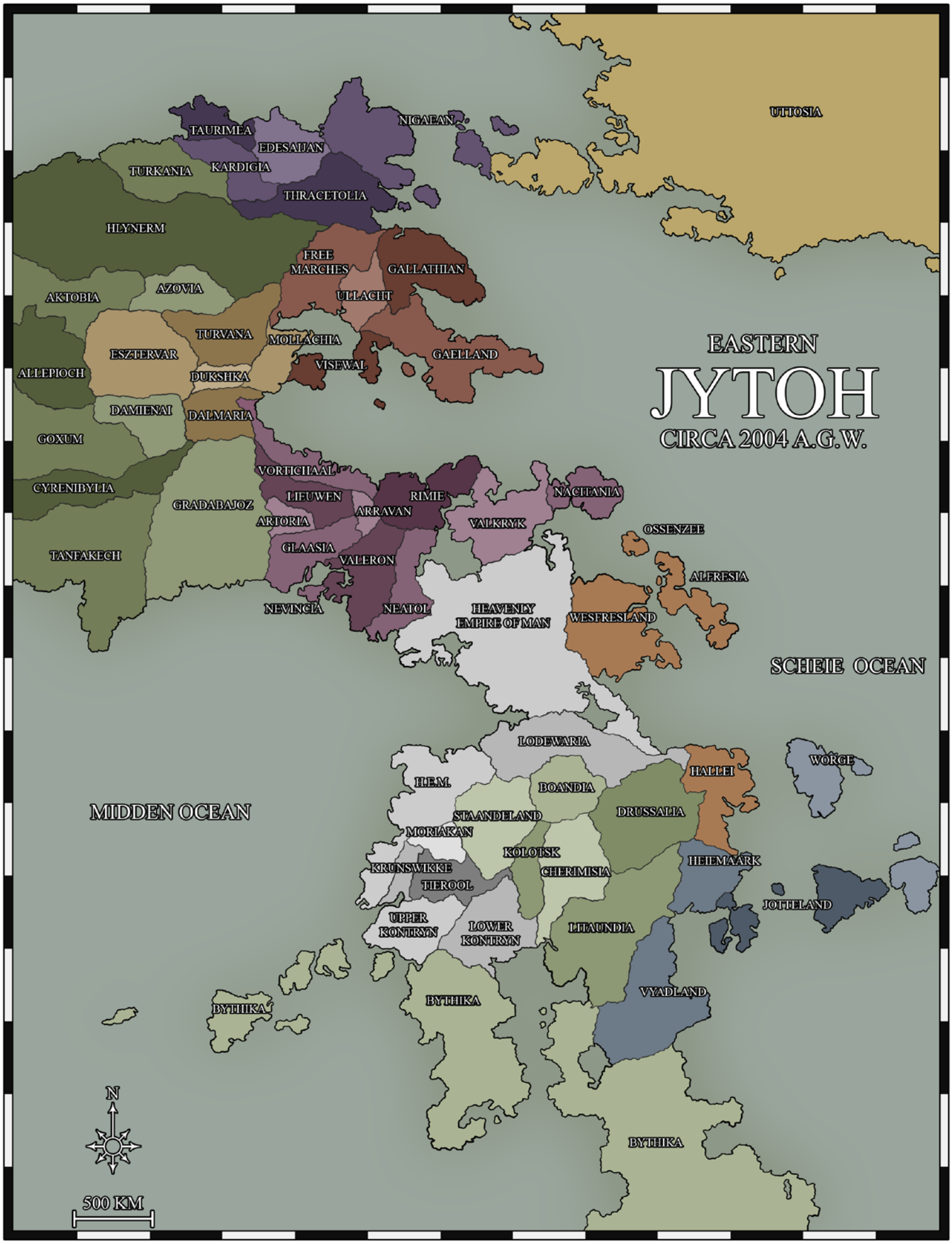
Your characters are done, your party is made, now all that is left to do is name your party. A name is everything. Every great band of adventures have had one, and now it's time for your to get yours.

There are two tables below, one for Adjectives and one for Noun. Simply roll once on each table and then you could be part of the Green Cloaks, the Broken Daggers, the Blind Rats or even the Old Sons.

Adjective			
1-2	Alfresian	51-52	Inhuman
3-4	Alleyway	53-54	League's
5-6	Ashen	55-56	Lone
7-8	Black	57-58	Lost
9-10	Blind	59-60	Lunar
11-12	Bloody	61-62	Middleburg
13-14	Blue	63-64	Nieuton
15-16	Broken	65-66	Old
17-18	Bronze	67-68	Oldtown
19-20	Bür's	69-70	Orichalcum
21-22	Burnt	71-72	Painted
23-24	Cold	73-74	Rotten
25-26	Crimson	75-76	Ruined
27-28	Cursed	77-78	Runic
29-30	Dark	79-80	Rusted
31-32	Doomed	81-82	Scarred
33-34	Dread	83-84	Soul
35-36	Drowned	85-86	Spoilt
37-38	Drunken	87-88	Stolen
39-40	Dusk	89-90	Stone
41-42	Fallen	91-92	Storm
43-44	Forgotten	93-94	Tarnished
45-46	Frozen	95-96	Twisted
47-48	Green	97-98	Umber
49-50	Hidden	99-100	Unholy

Noun			
1-2	Axes	51-52	Muskets
3-4	Bats	53-54	Ogres
5-6	Beasts	55-56	Paupers
7-8	Blades	57-58	Pigeons
9-10	Cloaks	59-60	Pirates
11-12	Constables	61-62	Pistols
13-14	Convicts	63-64	Prophets
15-16	Corsairs	65-66	Rats
17-18	Cudgels	67-68	Scorpions
19-20	Daggers	69-70	Serpents
21-22	Demons	71-72	Shrouds
23-24	Dogs	73-74	Sinners
25-26	Embers	75-76	Skulls
27-28	Fists	77-78	Sons
29-30	Footmen	79-80	Sparrows
31-32	Giants	81-82	Spiders
33-34	Guards	83-84	Stalkers
35-36	Gulls	85-86	Strangers
37-38	Gunners	87-88	Strays
39-40	Hawks	89-90	Swords
41-42	Hunters	91-92	Thieves
43-44	Jesters	93-94	Thorns
45-46	Killers	95-96	Vultures
47-48	Masks	97-98	Walls
49-50	Musketeers	99-100	Wolves

Breaking into the Alfresian Intelligence's central building was a feat of no small significance, all done in your everlasting name of course, but I must offer my most sincere and sorrowful apologies for the contents of this interview. I am afraid your divine majesty will find this interview as disappointing as did the Alfresian intelligence officers. It offers little in the terms of novel information as your highness' agents informed me, but rather a brief overview of each nation in eastern Jytoh. I did however chance upon a few lines which have led me to believe Alfresia could be in the midst of preparing for war.


EASTERN
JYTOH
CIRCA 2004 A.G.W.
UTTOSIA
NIGAEAN
TAURIMEA
EDESAIJAN
KARDIGIA
TURKANIA
THRACETOLIA
HLYNERM
FREE MARCHES
GALLATHIAN
AZOVIA
AKTOBIA
ULLACHT
TURVANA
MOLLACHIA
ESZTERVAR
GAELLAND
VISEWAL
ALLEPIOCH
DUKSHKA
DAMIENAI
DALMARIA
GOXUM
VORTICHAAL
CYRENIBYLIA
LIEUWEN
RIMIE
NACIEANIA
GRADABAJOZ
ARRAVAN
ARTORIA
VALKRYK
OSSENZEE
GLAASIA
TANFAKECH
VALERON
ALFRESIA
NEVINCIA
NEATOL
HEAVENLY EMPIRE OF MAN
WESFRESLAND
SCHEIE OCEAN
LODEWARIA
WORGE
HALLEI
H.E.M.
BOANDIA
MIDDEN OCEAN
DRUSSALIA
STAANDELAND
MORIAKAN
KOLOTSK
HEIEMAARK
KRUNSWIKKE
CHERIMISIA
TIEROOL
JOTTELAND
UPPER KONTRYN
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A BARD'S TALE

Transcripts:	536510 - 572830
Subject:	Theuns van Buuren
Classification:	Low level priority
Cross ref. to:	Geopolitical Background section 24439
Attention of:	Bastiaan Rademaker
Transcribed by:	Katrina van Leeukop

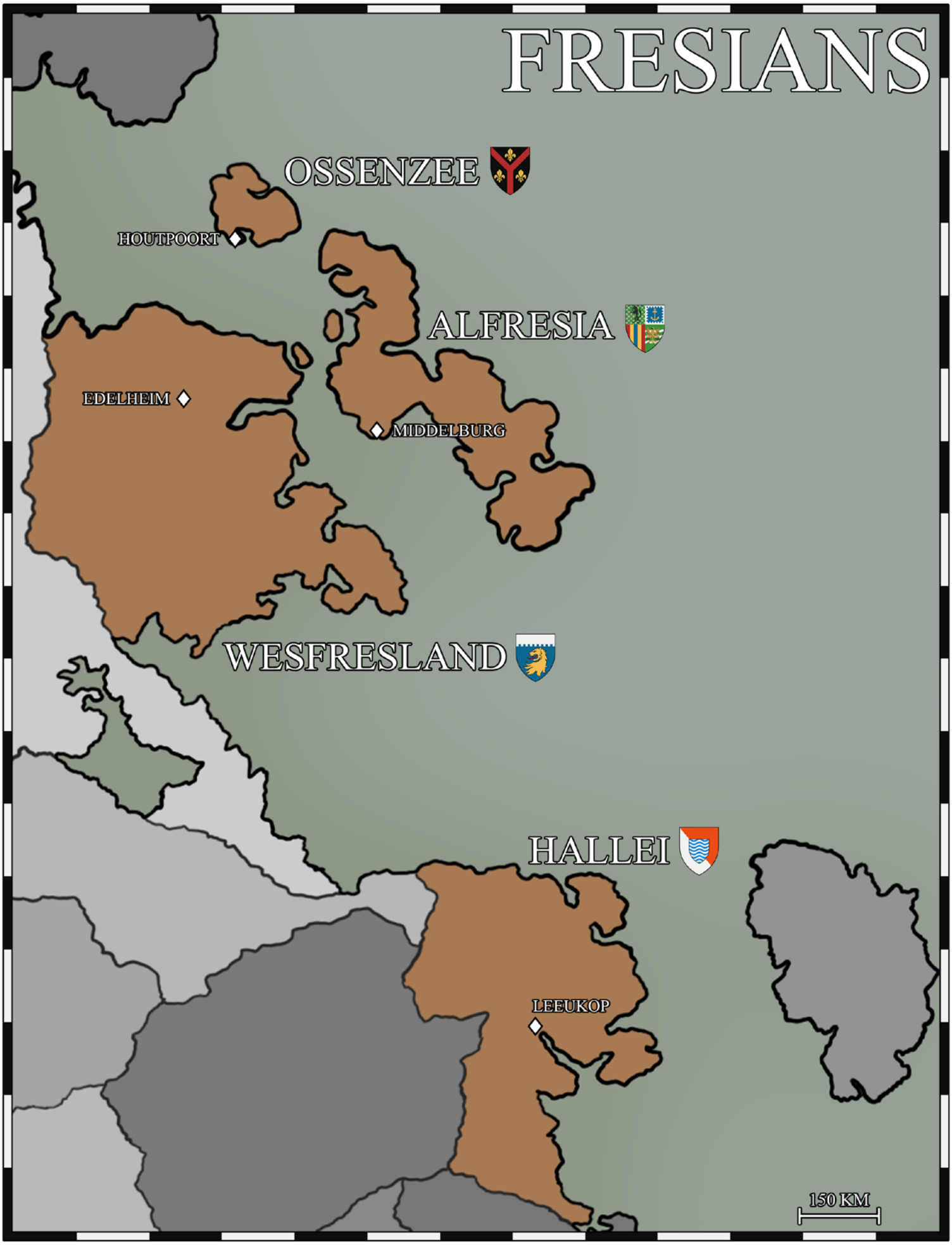
Oh, lad, what could I not tell you of the world? Although it does surprise me that, what did you call it, an "agent" of the Alfresian Intelligence Service would come to an old bard like me for knowledge of the world. One would highly suspect that the taxes I pay would mean you do this work yourself, but who am I to complain? You paid me and so I shall tell you my tale. I am nothing if my word cannot be trusted.

I was but a wee lad of six summers when my parents tragically perished in a fire they tried to put out. Heroic though their actions may have been, it left an orphan who had no one and nothing in the world to call his own. A jester took me as his own. Old Liam was his name. A good man, may the gods rest his weary soul. A saint in heart and word. He took me by the hand and showed my every square kilometre of the world we know. Over hills and through forests, and to lands where the sunlight never kisses the ground.

Many places have I been, many faces have I seen and still many more sorrows. The world is not kind to us, but may the gods be my witnesses, it is the kindness that lies in the hearts of men that has kept a smile on this old face. That kindness that remains once you scrape away the blackness the world put in us. Wherever my feet have led me, I have found a saint to fill my belly and an angel quench my thirst.

But you did not pay to hear an old man's melancholic reminiscing. You paid me to know what the other nations are like, so that you may turn friends into enemies, allies into foes, brothers into rivals and play your little games of chaos.

So be it, your money for their blood.


FRESIANS
OSSENZEE
HOUTPOORT
ALFRESIA
EDELHEIM
MIDDELBURG
WESFRESLAND
HALLEI
LEEUKOP
150 KM

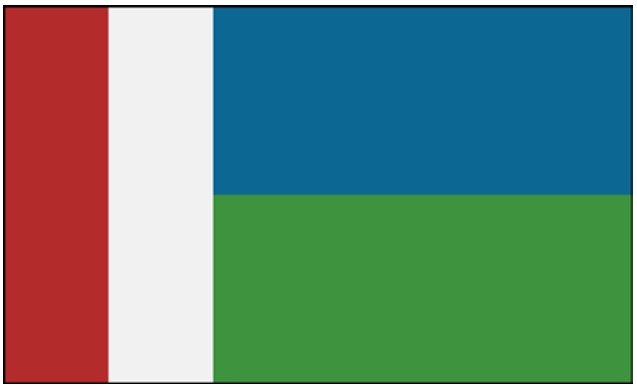
The Confederate Republic of Alfresia

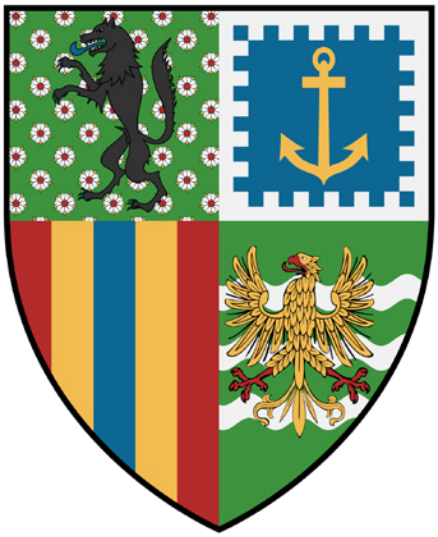
Alfresia? Truly? You wish me to tell you about our own nation? You do know there is a fine library just down the road from here? Look, you can even see it through the window, and you see that building just to the left of it? That is what we call a school. You might think of applying there one day. Yes, yes, alright. Calm down, son.

Our island was settled only by some of the various Fresian tribes that migrated to the eastern coast of Jytoh. After the Great War ended, the petty kingdoms we formed on these eastern islands and on the mainland were quickly swallowed by the Empire of Man. And there we stayed for nearly two millennia. Our only glimpses of freedom was when the Fresians as a whole became independent, but we were still under another's yoke. It was only a century ago, that for the first time since the Great War did the Alfresians stand alone.

As much as we are Fresian, we have our own unique culture. We have spent long enough on this island to even gain us our own language, Alfresian, which used to be called "broken" or "uncivilised" Fresian. While our patriots like to claim we are the true Fresians, from all that I have seen that particular claim still belongs to Wesfresland. We have moved upon a different track, and I believe we should be proud to call ourselves Alfresian rather than Fresian.

Our way is our own, and you can see it clearly in our art. It is strange, our art, in how it developed along a single track rather than many. Words seems to be our forte. Songs, poetry, drama, literature, these we have in abundance. Ask any Alfresian and he will be able to sing you a few dozen different songs without needing to go look at his hymn books. Perhaps due to our ever subjugation by foreign powers and their influence over our art and architecture that have we withdrawn into the theatre of the mind, that place where no man can enter and take what is yours.





But we have become too consumed with it, I believe. Look at our paintings, our sculptures, our buildings. You could find their like in any Fresian nation, and not even that, you could well find their like across the imperial lands. Perhaps given time, we will also gain our artistic independence.

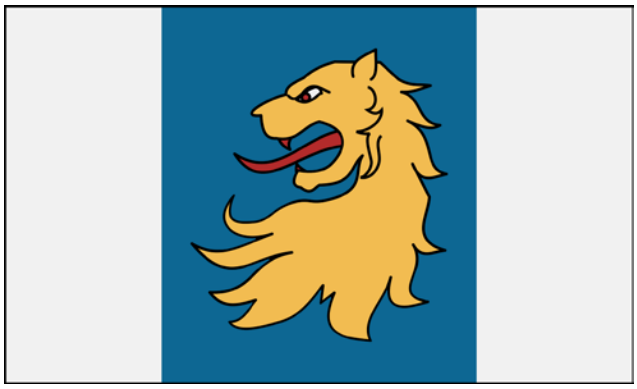
The Kingdom of Wesfresland

The Wesfresians. Have there ever been closer brothers to have called each other enemies? We owe so much of our existence to the protection they have offered us, yet were it up to them we would still been under their iron fist. Strangely, and ironically enough, now that our two nations have grown apart we are closer than ever; in trade, in relations, in culture and in defence. There is even talks of reunificaiton on both sides of this narrow sea that separates us.

Wesfresland is a nation as young as ours, born a century ago amid the War of Independence. Before that, the Kingdom of Fresland ruled the eastern shores, and it was merely five centuries old. For the birthplace of the Fresian peoples, the land itself has undergone more changes than a Nacitanian boudoir. First there were the chiefdoms and petty kingdoms before the Great War, then came the duchies and principalities of the Empire of Man. When the empire fell, the Five Kingdoms era came where the crowns passed back and forth between the nobles like an unwanted orphan before the unified Kingdom of Fresland emerged. For a nation so proud of its heritage, it has done all it can to muddy the history books.

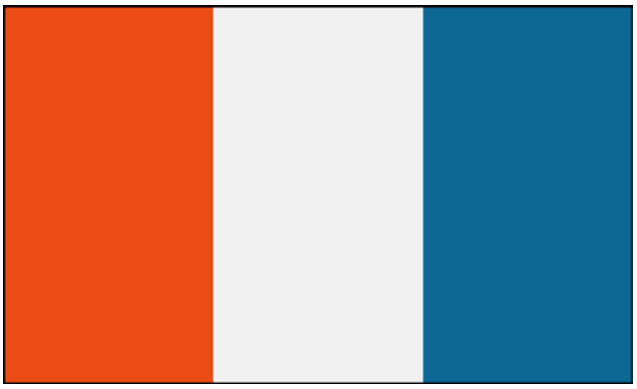
From my experience, the majority of the common folk could not care less about the glories of the past and the unified Wesfresian people. Wesfresland is large place, larger than we perhaps would like to admit, and it holds more distinct cultures than it perhaps would like to admit as well. Like in the Empire, the King and his council is a distant figure. The people prefer to look to their neighbours and communities for guidance and support, and beyond that to their local lords. Contrary to what our government would have us believe, the common Wesfresians are a kind folk, considerate and hospitable. Family and friends mean more to them than politics or wealth.

Because of this, their art tend to follow the people. Portraits hang everywhere, sculptures



are of common heroes of old rather than distant kings and emperors, songs are sung of villages and hamlets, and the cooks create enough food to feed an army. Their architecture, however, is what one would expect from a nation so long subsumed in the Empire. Our ancestors built to last, and grand monuments, vast palaces and imposing castles dot the cities and landscapes, brooding over the more genial people.

The Republic of Hallei



The southern Fresians, the Gitic-Fresians, or just the Gitics if you are not feeling particularly generous. They were among the first to colonise Inhuman lands and two millennia later they have kept that adventurous spirit. They are always on the forefront of technological inventions and explorations.

The history of Hallei began with the Great Purge, with colonists following on the heels of the armies that marched south into Sauddyr lands. The word Hallei is the old proto-Fresian word for greeting, that same greeting the Imperial Legions gave to the colonists as they arrived. Other Inhuman lands gave their new colonisers a foundation to build on, cities that were already built, but the Imperial Legion ensured no Sauddyr structure remained standing. The Halleians had to start from nothing but they did so at a remarkable speed. Having the ability to plan entire cities with the runes means they now have some of the oldest buildings still standing in the entire continent.

Much has changed since then. The Gitic invasions and subsequent dissolution of the Empire left Hallei defenceless, something the Gitics once again took advantage of, and the new Heavenly Empire had to reconquer Hallei from the southerners. Two centuries under the Gitics had left Hallei with a different language and culture. They incorporated the independent nature of the Gitics and would not stand for a new Emperor. Before they ever achieved independence they were already an autonomous republic inside the Empire. In recent times they have become a world power at sea, rivalling the empires and our island with naval power and their new colonies.

Their arduous history has had a tremendous effect on their art. The Halleian art is much like its people, understated at first glance but with a hidden depth that would surprise any man. The people can first appear plain, sombre even, but once you step into their homes you will find a joyous atmosphere you'd rarely want to leave. Their art is much the same. Their paintings, writings and songs at first appear quite simple and drab, but the more you look and listen the more you will experience. Their architecture, however is their point of vanity. Masters of wood and stone, the Halleians have crafted the most beautiful palaces and temples that would bring a grown man to tears. The grand buildings further seem to hide the inner nature of the people who pass by them, enhancing the mystery of Hallei.

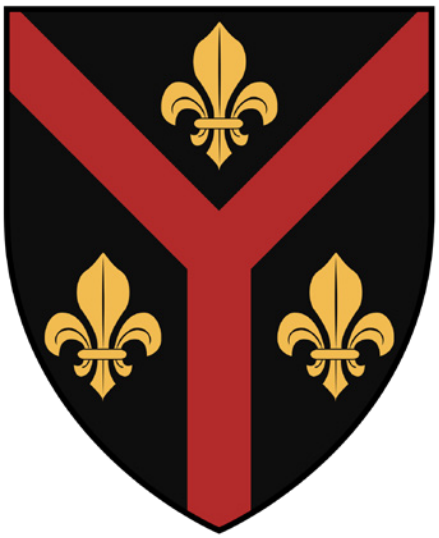
The Princedom of Ossenzee

Our small neighbour to the north, as persecuted and subjugated throughout its history as we have been. Even today, the small island is a nation divided between the Nacitanian nobility and Fresian underclass. In Hallei, the Gitic and Fresian cultures merged to form something new and exciting, but in Ossenzee there has, and is, a stark divide between their two cultures.

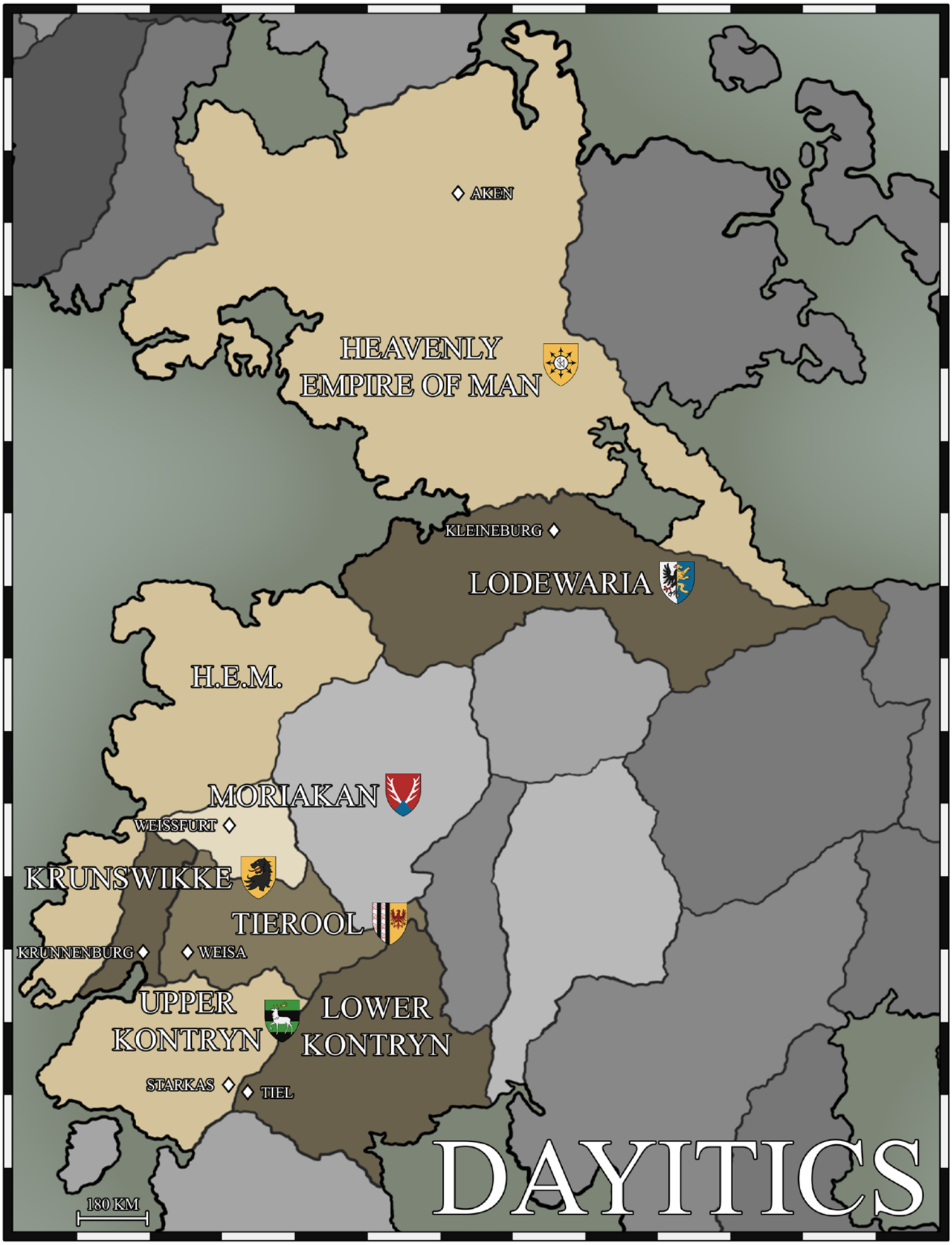
For most of its history, Ossenzee belonged to someone else. Its name comes from the ancient Dayitic word for eastern sea, signifying its status as merely an outermost province of the old Empire. It was a glorified military outpost, and the Empire treated the Ossenfresians as servants to their legionnaires. Later, it became one of the five Fresian kingdoms that stood united against any would-be enemy. However, once the old mighty kingdom of Fresland became independent, the Valian kingdom to the north took the opportunity to invade Ossenzee to expand its reach. From that time till only sixty two years ago, Ossenzee was part of Valkryk. When the old king passed away, Ossenzee and Nacitania became independent, having been given to his second and third born sons.

During those five centuries under Vallion rule, little truly changed for the people of Ossenzee. The Vallion nobles were unconcerned with their Fresian subjects, making no attempt to intermingle. They treated Ossenzee as nothing more than a retreat. The nobles refuse to speak Ossenfresian and their people refuse to speak Valian. The people have taken this noble apathy as a chance to express their own culture and creativity. They are warm to visitors and show as much of who they are as they can. Fiercely proud are these Ossenfresians of their people and culture and brook no insult to either. Yet they are hospitable to a fault to those who show even a passing interest.

Ossenzee has played an interesting role in the development of art and culture. Its close position to Alfresia means that all the ideas and



notions that cross Alfresia's shores crosses its too. Its close noble ties to the Valtorian nations have meant that these ideas it acquires are quickly spread across the Valtorian nations and vice versa. Ossenzee have been the focal point in a network of ideas that have spread new ideas about painting, architecture and sculpture right across the continent.


AKEN
HEAVENLY
EMPIRE OF MAN
KLEINEBURG
LODEWARIA
H.E.M.
MORIAKAN
WEISSFURT
KRUNSWIKKE
TIEROOL
KRUNNENBURG
WEISA
UPPER
KONTRYN
LOWER
KONTRYN
STARKAS
TIEL
180 KM
DAYITICS

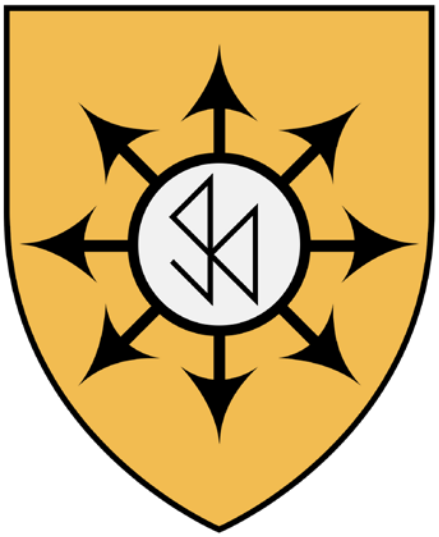
The Heavenly Empire of Man

The best of us and the worst of us. The empire that lies to our east has been our shelter, our protector, and our foe time and time again. It is a land of contradictions. A single state yet many different peoples. The strongest nation yet without actual power. Created to unite mankind yet cannot unite its own people. Dayitics, Fresians, Lothars, Langirds, Valians and more all vie for power and control, seeing themselves not as part of an Empire but as individuals.

The history of the Empire is known far and wide, it would do little here to go over it all again. Safe to say the Empire was born out of the ashes from the Great War only to fall eight centuries later. Reborn two centuries later still it is now merely clinging on to old glories. What the historians do not say is that the Empire used to be a nations of kings with the Emperor as their high king. Absolute power was held by a few. Now it is a nation of princes, dukes, and counts all trying to outdo each other. The Emperor's power means little, the princes hold it all and they never agree on anything. This is how a single kingdom, Wesfresland, was able to hold back the entire Empire a century ago.

There is no singular imperial people, although the current Emperor Lennard IX would see this done. In the north are the Valians and Miroenese, in the east the Fresians, in the South the Lothars, in the West the Langirds, and Rimiens and in the Centre the old Dayitics. The capital of Aken tries its best to foster a culture of imperialism, but outside of the few metropoli this does not exist. The people turn not to their Emperor for guidance but to their local counts and dukes and princes.

The city of Faustad and its grand old Imperial palace is sight to behold, but there is one greater still. It is the cathedral dedicated to St. Woudas in Leodium, in the old kingdom of Miroen. Larger than a city block, this Progenitorist cathedral contains over a dozen churches, scores of chapels, and both a monastery and nunnery. It is sometimes called the town of St. Woudas because of this.



Drama, tension, exuberance, grandeur and splendour. That is the only way to describe imperial art. Whether it is the grand architecture, with their tall columns and leering gargoyles to show the supposed power of the Empire, to the epic paintings with their bright hues and dashing colours showing battles among men, Inhumans or the hosts of heaven themselves. Even their music needs at least fifty men to play all the parts, but I must say their marches are quite lively.

The Duchy of Krunswikke

The Lion of the South. A small nation with a powerful roar. Krunswikke could easily be overlooked among its more powerful neighbours, but Krunswikke has made a name for itself in recent time by hiring out its military as mercenaries across the globe.

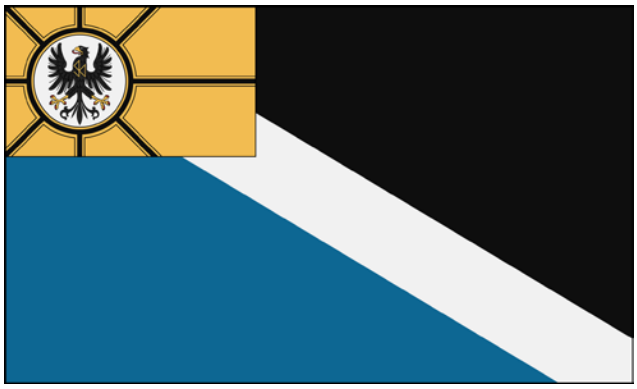
When Emperor Faustus I ordered his people south to colonise the vacant Sauddyr lands in the Great Purge, not all wished to stay under his rule. The Krunian tribes, a Dayitic people, hastened to leave the Imperial lands and settled far to the south, forming their own petty kingdoms where their pagan cultures could flourish. The Empire eventually caught up with the Krunian kingdoms, but the cost was steep. Many scholars believe that the costly Krunian invasions left the Empire vulnerable to the Gitic hordes.

Krunswikke was created during the short lived Krunian Empire that attempted to fill the power vacuum the dissolution the Empire of Man caused. It also worked to prevent the Bythikans encroaching onto their territory. While not the capital of the Krunian Empire, Krunswikke provided the naval support the empire needed to survive the Bythikans. When the Heavenly Empire of Man finally made its way so far south, it absorbed the Krunian Empire wholesale. The Empire broke it apart into its constituent duchies that have survived through their eventual independence.

The Krunswikkians hold themselves the be the inheritors of the ancient Krunian kings and conduct themselves as such. They are a noble, gracious and hospitable people who, despite the international insignificance of their small nation, seem like the larger than life heroes dotted through their folklore. Treaties with the other Dayitic nations have made their military redundant, and the common folk enjoy this turn of events as war no longer drives their futures and thus spend their time on the arts. The military they do have is entirely formed of mercenary companies that many young men

join to see the world and act out their children's stories of great heroes. And of course, to spread their love of beer, which they claim is never as good as is found in Krunswikke.

The Viceroyalty of Lodewaria



The Empire's sacrificial lamb. The southern marches of the Empire. No matter how far south the Empire has stretched in the past, Lodewaria has always been known as "the south". Lodewaria is technically still part of the Empire, but in all practicality has been an independent nation for near on a millennium.

When Emperor Oberon I formed the Heavenly Empire of Man, he learnt well the lessons the Gitic Hordes taught the old Empire of Man. Should an army ever again march on the Empire from the south, there would need to be a plan to prevent such an army from gaining a foothold in the Empire. This plan was Lodewaria, named after its first king Ludwig two centuries earlier. Lodewaria, "Ludwig's Marches", was from the very start of the Heavenly Empire to be a viceroyalty, independent of the rest of the Empire. It was there to bear the brunt of any southern attack and even be sacrificed if so needed to give the Empire time to fully mobilise its military.

It worked remarkably well. While no hordes to rival the Gitics ever attacked the Empire again, the various wars of independence turned southeastern Jytoh into a bloody battlefield. Lodewaria always suffered the most. Blocking the only land routes into the Empire proper, it was left alone to defend against all the traitorous enemies while the Empire organised a counter attack. Since the inception of the viceroyalty, no enemies have ever crossed the Seiver river, Lodewaria's northern border.

There is no love lost between Lodewarians and the Empire. While nominally independent, all their viceroys, marquesses and barons have been chosen by the Empire to keep control of the nation. Being ruled by foreigners for so long have made the people weary and distrusting of outsiders. Though, it has also reinforced the bonds that hold their communities together. Knowing that when the next war against the Empire happens they will be on the front lines has given Lodewarians a quiet stoicism and love of the small things in life rarely found elsewhere. Gain their trust and you will find them warm and fiercely loyal to their friends.

The Grand Duchy of Moriakan

A curious people, the Morians. Half their people still live in Imperial lands while the other half live free. Fortunately, this has not fostered resentment towards each other or against the Empire. Quite to the contrary, I have yet to meet as jovial a people as them.

They were the first of the Krunian kingdoms to fall to the Empire but the hardest won. When Moriakan was finally won, the Empire barely had enough strength to conquer the other Krunian kingdoms. One may think that the Morians would have harboured resentment against their conquerors, but the reverse was in fact true. It speaks to the temperament of the Morians. During the course of the Empire, the Morians became the staunchest supporters of the Empire, even driving away the Gitic Hordes that attempted to push into Krunian lands, all for the glory of their Emperor.

This scene played out again when Tierool founded the Krunian Empire and when the Heavenly Empire conquered south again. Morians fought and bled for their nation and then peacefully surrendered. Many have called into question the state of mind of the Morians because of this, but this method of warfare has saved Moriakan more often than not. No empire that has controlled it has had to overly concern themselves with rebellions and insurrections. In turn, the Morians have ensured their lands were well defended, sparing the Empire the cost of its defense.

Morians are a mercurial people, whose emotions can change a dozen times a minute at the slightest provocation. This culture is born out of the superstitions from the early Dayitic paganism that, in Moriakan at least, has successfully integrated itself into the predominant Prodigalist church. All their old gods and goddesses have become the angels of Bür, and two of these, the most important, are at the heart of mercurial Morian temperament.

Moriana, the old goddess of witchcraft and death, is said to keep a tally of each secret you hold, and will prolong your agony in the afterlife for a thousand years for each secret. Gor, the double headed god of mercy and cruelty, gathers every vendetta and grudge you bear only to grant those you hate good fortune in spite. These gods, now angels, has made the Morians an honest lot who is at peace with life and its hardships in order to avoid their wrath.

The Archduchy of Tierool

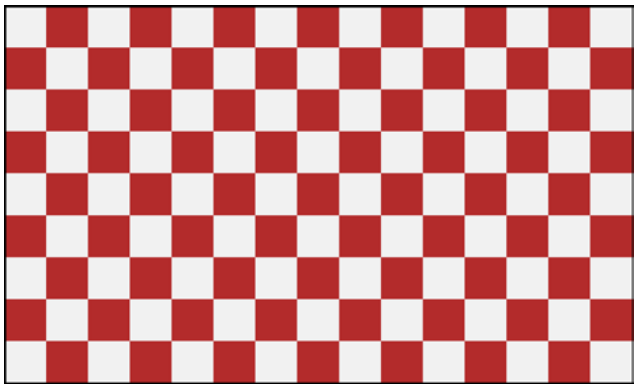
The little empire. Walking the streets of its capital Weisa, one could imagine oneself in the very heart of of the Imperial capital of Aken. The forests, meadows and mountains of Tierool were so beautiful that Emperor Faustus II fell in love with and called it the "Beautiful Land". That set the stage for its future.

Originally, the Dayitics of Tierool were an unimportant lot. The important cities were found in Moriakan and Krunswikke. Tierool was merely the hinterlands, the rural areas of little import. When Faustus II conquered the Krunian lands, he loved it more than his home in Aken. He named the land and began its noble history. Building a summer manor for himself, he also built the great Krunian road connecting Tierool to Aken. Since then, Imperial nobles had used Tierool as their favourite holiday spot.

This was to Tierool's advantage when the Empire collapsed. The attention the Empire had given it, had resulted in Tierool being the most advanced Krunian nation. Its infrastructure was second only to the kingdoms of northern Dayitia, its nobility descended from the Emperors themselves. It used this to great effect to conquer all the lands surrounding it to create the Krunian Empire. The Krunian Empire was the bright light in the south during those centuries the true Empire was absent. While all around them the nations were regressing into tribes and chiefdoms, the Krunian Empire held strong.

It saw itself as the true successor to the Empire of Man and resisted the Heavenly Empire greatly, but ultimately it too fell. The Heavenly Empire is not as strong as the old Empire of Man and Tierool had worked from the beginning towards independence. It was not long before the Tieroolians were again free. Now Tierool once again eyes its neighbours and thinks of imperial crowns.

Sophisticated and civilised, the Tieroolians enjoy a high standard of living, an appreciation for the arts, and a strong military. The Archduke



of Tierool influences the surrounding nations more that they would like to admit. His word holds the Krunian lands together against outside influence, and his people too are like this. Strong, proud, confident, like the heroes in the now legendary Song of the Dragon Slayer written in Tierool four centuries ago. Each Tieroolian sees himself a king and woe betide the man who corrects him.

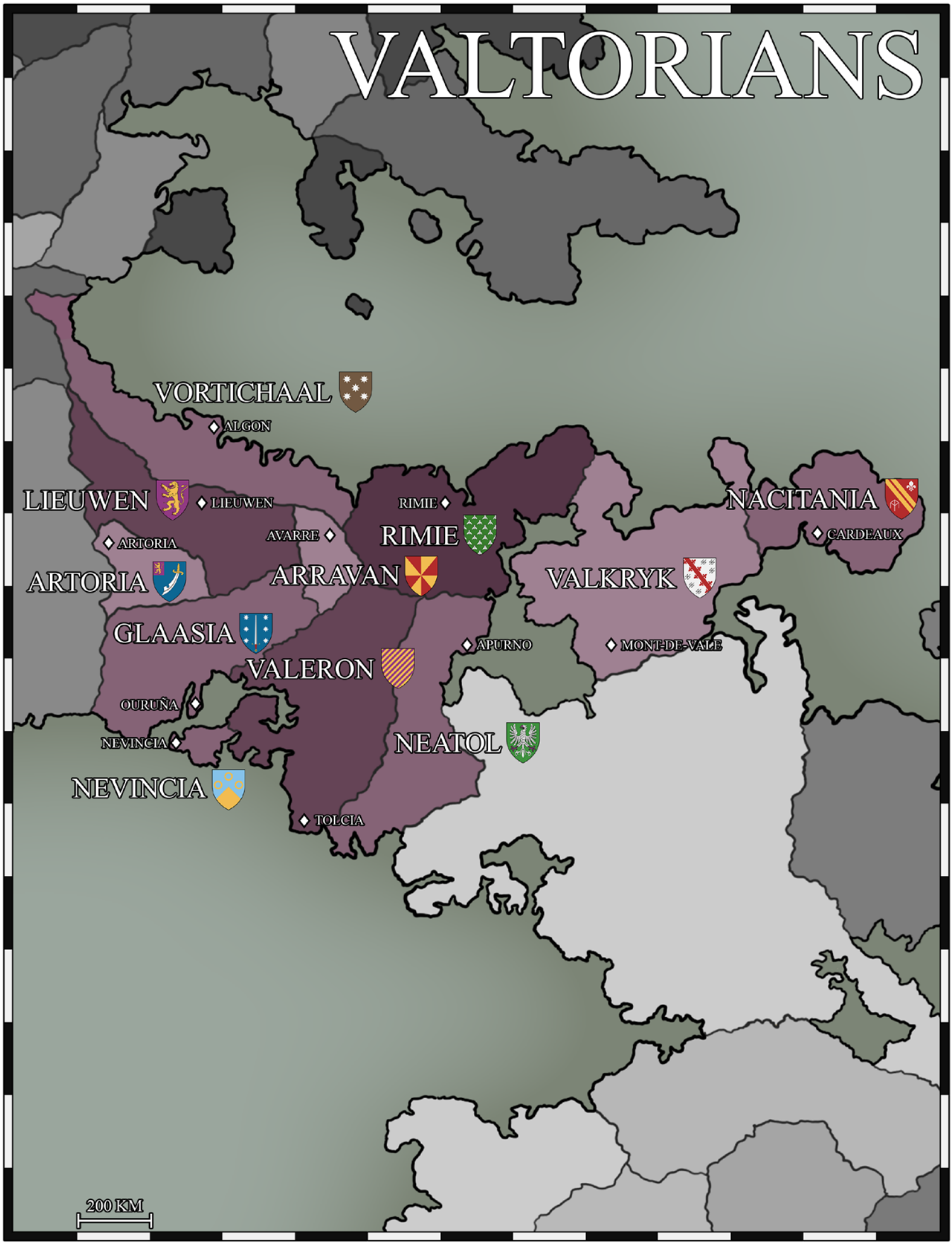
The United Kingdom of Upper and Lower Kontryn

The unloved, redheaded stepchild of the south, or north depending on which empire you are speaking of. Not quite Krunian, nor Dayitic, nor Vinean, nor Gitic, nor Bythikan. No one is quite sure where the Kontryens came from but they have had a comical history.

An aeon ago the Empire of Man moved south and the Eternal Prodigalist Empire of Bythika moved north to claim all the lands colonised by humans in the Great Purge. There came a point where the two met in a first awkward exchange of greetings backed by the ever present threat of war. This happened in the Kontryn lands, so named for their difficult terrain of mountains and valleys. Both empires laid claim to the land but had other threats to their rule that were more pressing. A a potential war over land which neither Emperor particularly wanted was put aside for the moment.

Thus the Kontryn marches were created, an eternal no man's land in which neither Empire were to go to. It was, and is, a buffer zone to ensure neither empire attacked the other. This arrangement lasted until the Gitic Horde stormed throughout the continent and ransacked the Kontryn lands. When the Empire of Man collapsed, the Krunian Empire quickly took the Kontryn lands before the Bythikans could respond. When the Heavenly Empire found its way south it, at the behest of Emperor St. Amadeus, the United Kingdom of Upper and Lower Kontryn was created to build a strong defence from the Bythikans. Thus the Kontryens have come into the modern age, much bemused by everyone's interest in them and quietly living their lives.

For as long as there have been borders around Kontryn, others have influenced its politics. The Bythikan Empire, the Heavenly and old Empire of Man, the Krunian Empire, the Gitics and now Tierool. Never once given the opportunity to expand, or allowed to trade with either great empire, the Kontryens had been forced to make due with what they had. For all this, the Kontryens have become a strong people who care as little for the world as it does for them. Family, community and country are what are important. Their odd motto says all you need to know: "We are to remain what we are."

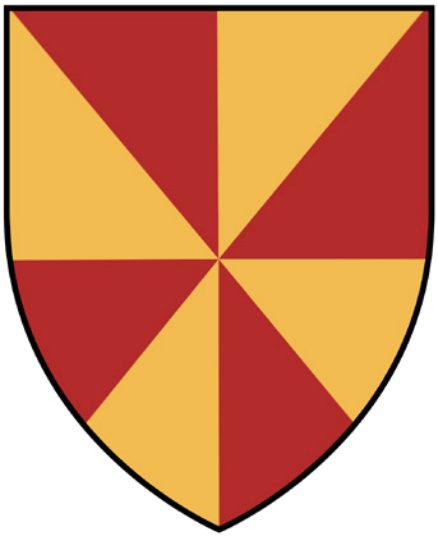

VALTORIANS
VORTICHAAL
ALGON
LIEUWEN
LIEUWEN
RIMIE
NACITANIA
ARTORIA
AVARRE
RIMIE
CARDEAUX
ARTORIA
ARRAVAN
VALKRYK
GLAASIA
APURNO
MONT-DE-VALE
VALERON
OURUÑA
NEVINCIA
NEATOL
NEVINCIA
TOLCIA
200 KM

The Duchy of Arravan

The shield of the east. The lands of the Shield Maidens have always been a tumultuous region, and none of the present nations are those that existed when the massive Shield Wall was raised. However, it is the Shield Alliance treaty which has held the Shield Maidens together. More important to them than scripture, the treaty speaks of brotherly love and the protection of home and kin.

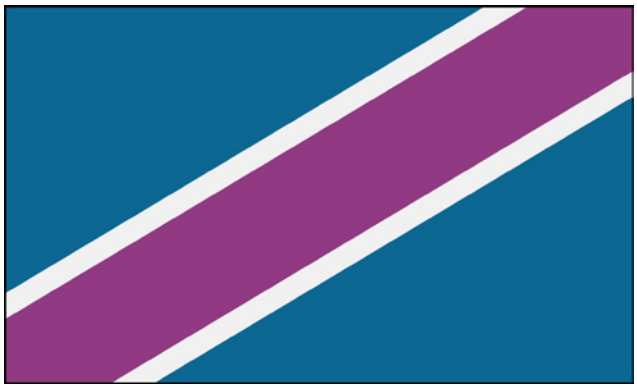
Arravan has its roots in the fall of the Empire of Man. Without the protection of the emperor, the cities and towns were left to fend for themselves. Held together by the Shield Alliance, the region of Arravan was not overly concerned, tucked away from any foreign foes by their shield brethren. All foreign foes that is but to the east. When the Langirds invaded Neatol, Rimie and Valeron, they dearly wanted the free Arravan cities and towns. The Langirds would have had them, had it not been for Duke Xábier, an ambitious Glaasian duke. Offering the Arravani protection in exchange for fealty, a deal gladly accepted, Duke Xábier held the line with as many men as he could muster and ensured the Langirds expanded no further east.

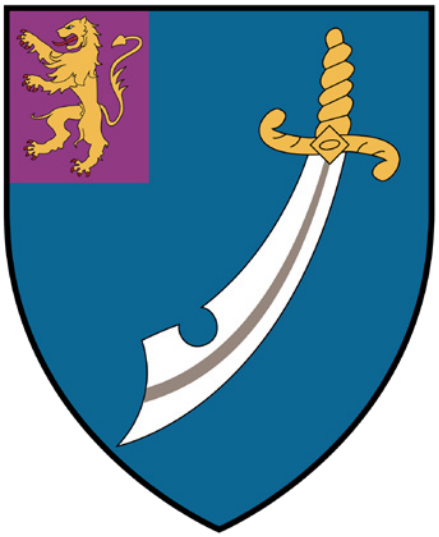
The duchy of Barbas as it was now called survived well into the Heavenly Empire of Man, gaining and losing territory to the whims of the nobles' inheritance. The other territories within the empire had to fight long, bloody, protracted wars for independence. Barbas' independence, on the other hand, was a clean and polite affair. Queen Anna-Maia I "the Lion Mother" of Lieuwen inherited Barbas, and rather than risk a war with Lieuwen when Gradabajoz was threatening the other side of the Shield Wall, Emperor Ekkehardt I chose to be generous. Since that time, the Duchy of Arravan has been passed between the nobility of the western Valtorians like an unwanted orphan, sometimes independent, other times not. It is currently independent, but Duke Josepe is old and in ill health. When he passes, the duchy will return to the kingdom of Lieuwen.



The common folk are entirely unconcerned with who may rule them. It seems every generation a new flag flies above the capital and the Arravani have grown tired of new oaths. They concern themselves more with cuisine and art, things the Arravani are famous for. Brilliant wines, delicious food and fascinating art. The Arravani adore nature. Each castle, every tower, each church is crafted and sculpted to emulate nature or reveal the best of what nature can bring. The cities of Arravan blend into the landscape from afar.

The Viceroyalty of Artoria





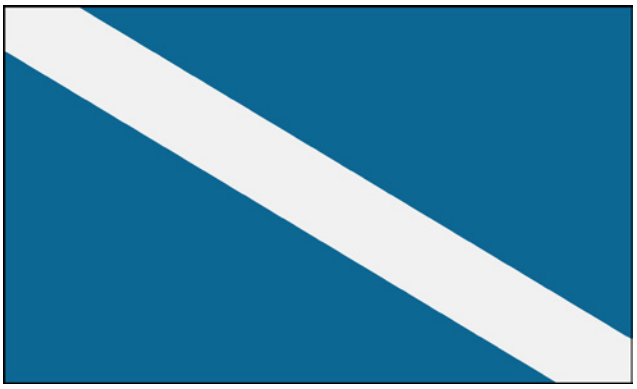
The blade at the heart. Artoria and its predecessors were always the smallest nation of the Shield Maidens but had had the most important task, to hold the centre. In any fight, battle and war, the centre will always face the most brutal onslaught, and Artoria has had the honour of defending the centre for nigh on two millennia.

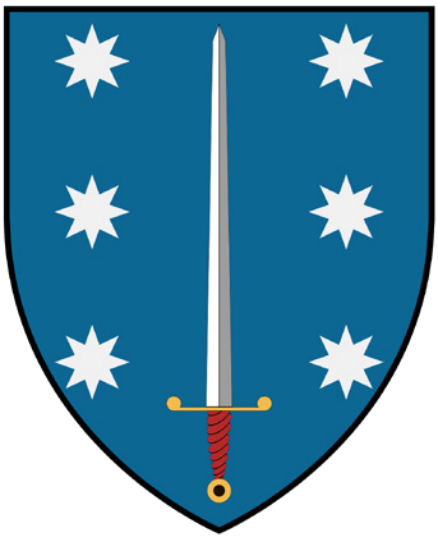
The laws of inheritance of the western Valtorians has existed unchanged since the time of the Great War. All property is to be equally distributed among all potential heirs. This has meant that the lands of the Shield Maidens, including Artoria, have been passed around the noble families, who frequently intermarry, more times than bears counting. In 1279AGW King Matías V of Lieuwen ordered Artoria to be removed from the inheritance cycle in order to bring stability to the most attacked region along the Shield Wall. Thus he made it a viceroyalty of Lieuwen. It was ostensibly under the Lieuwenese crown's authority but the kings of Lieuwen have long since paid little attention to the goings on of Artoria.

The Artorians care little as well for the crown of Lieuwen, going so far in recent times as to make the office of viceroy an elected title. This has made Artoria a republic in all but name. Closed in from the sea on both sides and the Wall and Gradabajoz on one side, the Artorians have always been isolated from the world. New innovations and technology reaches them slowly, filtered through the biases of the the surrounding Shield Maiden nations. Because of this, some have called them backwards and underdeveloped, but I enjoy their rustic, slow approach to life. If you wish a quiet time away from the hubbub of life, a trip to Artoria would not go amiss, if you stay away from the Shield Wall that is.

One area where Artoria have excelled beyond all would be competitors is the art of the siege. No fortification is as strong as an Artorian built one, and the other western Valtorians often call for Artorian engineers to help upkeep and redesign their sections of the Shield Wall. Even those outside the Shield Maidens call on the expertise of Artoria for their architectural experience. The breadth of Artorian architecture is a marvel to behold. While all their buildings have defensive functionalities, they are beautiful in their artifice. Angular, geometric shapes is the Artorian style and their cities can sometimes bring a man to headaches.

The Kingdom of Glaasia





The blade at the throat. Like its neighbour Valeron, Glaasia is a great naval power, but unlike Valeron, the history of the Glaasian navy is a bloody and battered one. Where Valeron can afford the luxuries of commerce and colonisation, Glaasia's navy is the first defence the east has against Completist and Neoist attack.

The Shield Wall has been a boon and a bane to Glaasia. Glaasia is the western Valtorians' oldest extant nation, its birth coinciding with the raising of the Shield Wall. Trusting in the strength of the shield wall to protect them, Glaasia focussed on its coastlines to construct its cities and shipyards in order to trade with the east. The Neoists of the time, and the Completists that followed, were not willing to give Glaasia that luxury. Unable to attack overland at the east, the Mekadians attacked at sea at the first land they saw: Glaasia.

The western coasts of Glaasia are a historical text on fortress construction. Dotting the land every few kilometres is a fort, castle or fortress built through the ages. From the old Imperial forts to the castles of the various kings who ruled Glaasia to the new fortresses of the Heavenly Empire. More fortifications have fallen than still stand as the Mekadians have launched various invasions across the centuries. The Glaasians' resolve have ensured that no invasion has thus far been successful.

In recent times Glaasia has become a poor nation. A decade ago a war with Gradabajoz on Glaasian shores have left the navy and dozens of fortresses in ruins, not to mention the thousands of men dead that could have worked the fields. Taxes had to be increased severely to pay for replacements. Adding to this, a trading fleet lost at sea with all the treasure acquired from the southern continent have led to a period of financial instability that some believe Glaasia may not recover from.

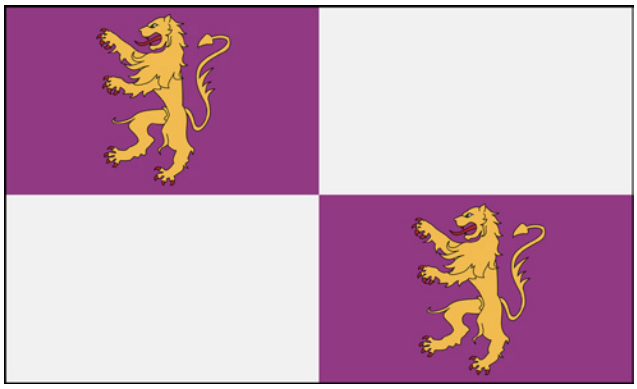
In times of hardship people turn either to, or from, religion. Since the war, many Glaasians have turned away from Progenitorism to re-embrace their ancient pagan gods. The old paganism of the Shield Maidens is the belief in spirits, but rather than believing that every tree and root has its own spirit, they believe there is one singular spirit for all trees and one for all rocks and so on. Glaasia has been criticised for becoming a backward nation, but its people are desperate for something to believe in.

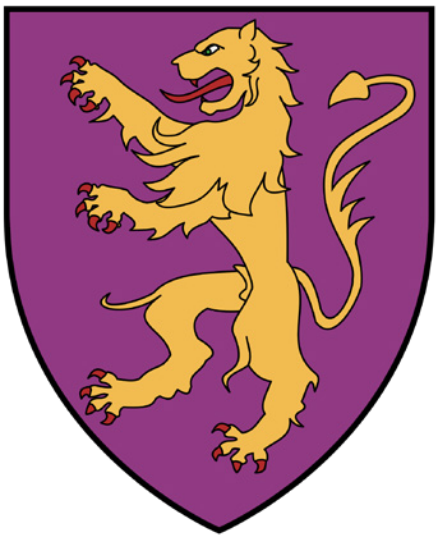
The Kingdom of Lieuwen

The lion at the gate. The beating heart of the Shield Maidens. While Valeron may have more militaristic and economical might, it is the politics of Lieuwen that shapes the western Valtorians. There are also rumours in the taverns and public houses that Lieuwen may be in the process of organising a united Shield Maiden nation.

Lieuwen is a product of the Heavenly Empire of Man. When Oberon reformed the Empire, he quickly saw that he would need a strong presence at the Shield Wall to protect the east, even before he made any attempt to reconquer it. So he sent his cousin and rival Guilhelm, the self professed "Lion of Dayitia", with an entire legion and all Guilhelm's troops to conquer the lands we now call Lieuwen. Naming his new kingdom in his own honour, Guilhelm settled quite happily and his line has ever since kept close ties with the Empire, intermarrying with the Imperial line frequently. This relationship has ensured that Lieuwen has had the backing of the Empire whenever petty wars has erupted across the Shield Maidens. It is also the reason why the other Shield Maidens do not cross the Lion Kings.

The Lieuwens are sometimes called decadent by their Valtorian neighbours and, perhaps, compared to them the Lieuwens are. The Shield Maidens are by virtue a militaristic area, always on the lookout for trouble brewing in the west. Lieuwen, by contrast, is much more fascinated with the arts, and has a strong artistic population. Most of its military action is done by its viceroyalty, Artoria, leaving Lieuwen to focus on other matters. Perhaps because of this Lieuwen has very little social mobility. Its class structure is entrenched, and the culture of its nobility is as unchanging as it is uncaring about its lower classes. The other western Valtorians call Lieuwens "lions in frocks". In turn, the nobility of Lieuwen look upon the other Shield Maidens as little better than peasants.





Lieuwen's art is nearly entirely controlled by its nobles and an artist's career is dependent on the whims of the nobles' commissions. Many stellar pieces, however, have been commissioned and most are romantic pieces about dead heroes that the nobles claim as ancestors. One area the nobles have not gained control of yet is their literature, of which the educated lower classes write in volumes. Understandably, most are satirical in nature about the idiocy of the nobles.

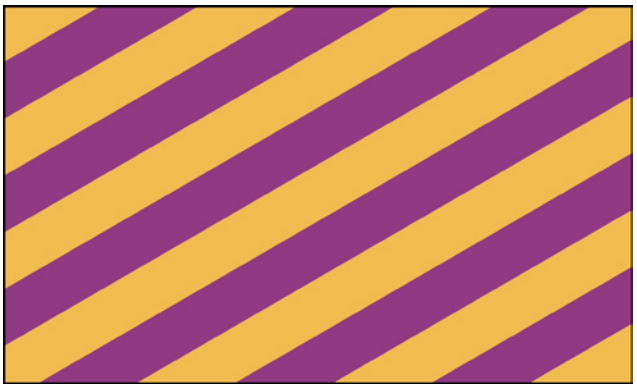
The Republic of Valeron

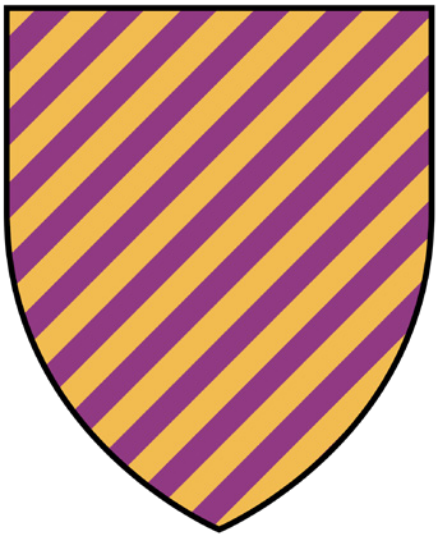
The shield of the sea. The backbone of the Shield Maidens and the most economically stable of these nations. It commands the greatest navy, and has used it to great effect to combat western fleets intent on harming the eastern lands. In recent years, it has also used its navy to form new colonies in the southern continent.

The nation is a product of the Heavenly Empire of Man much as Lieuwen is. Valeron came into existence when the Empire conquered the great Kingdom of Langird and broke up the kingdom into smaller, more manageable lands. The newly proclaimed Prince of Valeron immediately declared independence from the Empire and swore fealty to Lieuwen. Not wishing to burn political bridges, the Empire relented. The crafty Prince then signed onto the Shield Treaty and immediately again declared independence from Lieuwen. Without imperial backing, the Prince knew he could match Lieuwen in military might. Having signed onto the Shield Treaty, the Empire could also not attack Valeron without attacking the entire region. It was what the Prince was counting on.

Valeron has had a prosperous history since then, slowly and surely extending its borders and gathering more wealth as the ages crept by. The news of the southern continent had barely reached the president's ear before entire fleets were sent to colonise new land. The Mekadians arrived first, but Valeron was not far behind, and its colony is nearly ninety years old. It has not had a selfish history, however. Its navy is responsible for patrolling the entrance to the Imperial Sea, to prevent western slavers taking their pound of flesh.

A republic has its uses, and Valeron has made trading a far more lucrative career than nobility. The people are more worldly than their neighbouring nations, trading with as many nations as can fit in their ports. As with many other wealthy nations, people have started congregating more in cities than in rural areas.





This has led to a more homogenous culture of Valerish, rather than the smaller unique cultures of the rural lands. Adding to this trend of homogeneity are the spoils brought back from the southern continent. New foods, new instruments, new songs and dances, new artwork that the Valerish have already started incorporating in their culture.

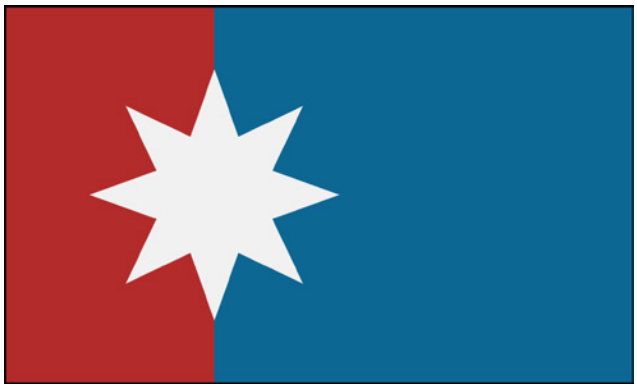
The Grand Duchy of Vortichaal

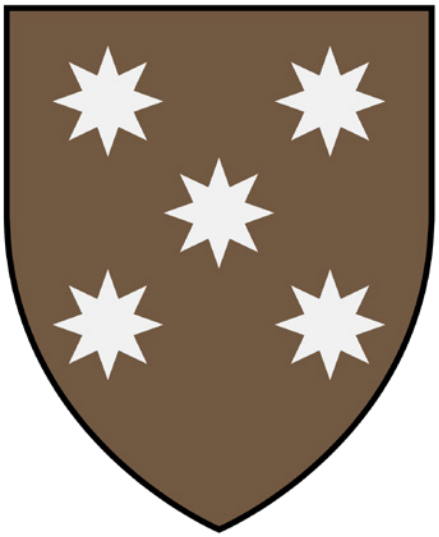
The watcher of the north. Only the barest strip of land connects Vortichaal to Gradabajoz, and as such Vortichaal has suffered the least in the wars and skirmishes surrounding the Shield Wall. Its unfortunate position facing north means it has had fairly little to do with the colonisation in the southern continent, leading some to call it the Forgotten Maiden.

Some speculate that the original inhabitants of Vortichaal had long ago died out. Vortichaal may have some of the oldest structures built east of the Shield Wall, but its people have been conquered and invaded so often that it is a small wonder there is a culture left. The Dayitics, the Valtorians, the Delkans, the Caels, the Tolians and some jest that a Gitic warship even landed there once. All have had their turn with Vortichaal and this has led a to a language that is unintelligible with the other Shield Maiden languages. The Vortichese culture is also closer to the Delkans, Dayitics and Caels then the rest of the Valtorians.

Before the unification of the Grand Duchy three centuries ago, Vortichaal were five separate kingdoms and duchies. All of them were quite tired of the constant invasions, and looked to each other for help. The Grand Duchy was formed under oversight from Gaeland in order to prevent bias in the constitution. It has worked, and Vortichaal has had a quiet and peaceful history since. Ill suited to colonise the southern continent, Vortichaal and the Caels have looked eastwards for their riches. They have gained a foothill in Uttosia that, while harder more costly to hold, may well be more stable in the coming years.

A single people, a single language, a single religion has been the creed of the Grand Duchy, and the Grand Duke and his parliament have done all they could to enforce this. If Valeron could be said to be starting on the road to homogeneity, then Vortichaal has already been there and back. It is quite refreshing, I must admit to be able to go anywhere in a nation and speak the same dialect, eat the same food and dance the same dances. Boring? Perhaps, but it does make one feel as if the whole nation is one large, extended family.





As homogenous as it may be, there is a diversity found in the culture of Vortichaal that is little seen elsewhere. With all the invasions over the years, Vortichaal has taken a little bit from each culture to develop a stew unique to itself. Food from Dayitia is paired with wine from the Cael Lands, a dance from the Delkans is danced to the tune of a romantic ballad from Rimie. It has taken everything it could from across Jytoh and made it their own.

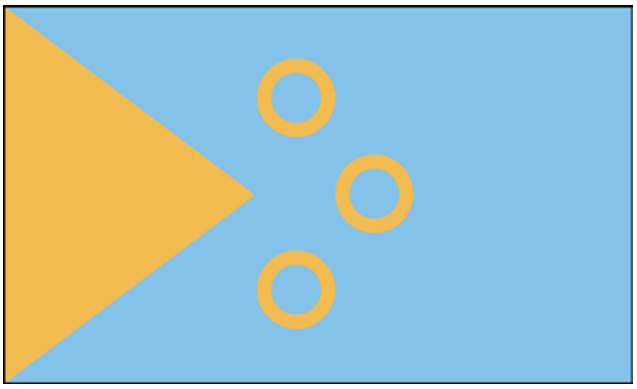
The Republic of Nevincia

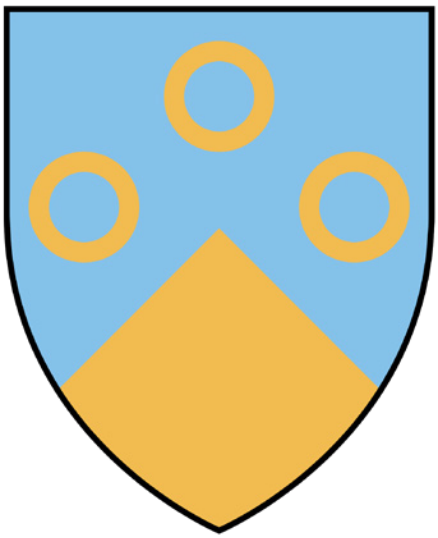
The first republic, or so they tell me. There is some truth to it, I must say, as most republics have been founded on the Nevincian model. However, the Nevincians have a propensity for tall tales and you would do well to take a pinch of salt with anything a Nevincian tells you.

The freedom the Nevincians enjoy was bought with blood and death, as so many things are. In 1203AGW, the less than pious nobles of Neatol fled the kingdom, fearing the might of the inquisition. Spending an emperor's ransom on mercenaries, the dispossessed nobles landed on the Nevincian peninsula and immediately set about conquering it. There was no warning to be had, and the Valerish were utterly unprepared for the slaughter that followed. By the time the Valerish military could respond, the Neatolians had captured the entire peninsula. The siege of Nevincia lasted eight years, but at the end the Neatolians triumphed and set about creating their own paradise.

Since then, Nevincia has had little interest in politics, preferring instead the arena of trade. Before Middelburg became the metropolis it is today, all shipping routes led to Nevincia and coin was the crops it farmed. The largest banks in the world today are still operated by Nevincians, and they ensure the supply of money into their peninsula never dries up. With nothing to export except loans and promises, this is a real fear for the bankers and merchants. Because of this, you can find enterprising Nevincian bankers and merchants in nearly every capital in the world. He will have a smile on his face and a contract ready to provide you with as much money as you want, as long as you can pay the exorbitant interest rates. If you cannot, there is a reason so many businesses across the continent are operated by Nevincians.

Nevincians are much like Alfresians, and if anyone are truly are brothers in spirit, it is the Nevincians. Money is the lifeblood of the small nation, and everyone attempts to hoard as much





of it as possible. Military life is seen as a life choice for the poor while the rich focus on the arts. Their own trade families rule much of the peninsula and the bankers rule the rest. There is a vibrant quality to Nevincia as, just like Alfresia, innovation drives profit. This differnce is that while we focus on technology, the Nevincians focus on the arts. This has turned their entire peninsula to resemble an art gallery.

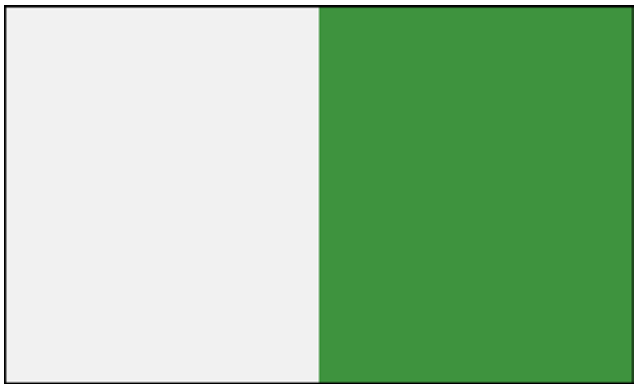
The Kingdom of Rimie

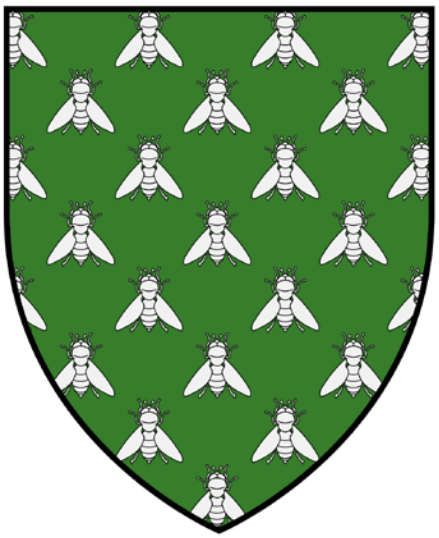
The forgotten empire. The empire that could have been. The empire that lost the race. Over the millennia, Rimie has gone from puppet master to puppet. It is an unfortunate turn of events but one that has luckily had little impact on the lives of its people.

Before the Great War there already was an empire in eastern Jytoh. A small one perhaps from what we have seen the Heavenly Empire can do, but it was significant. It allowed the spread of information and knowledge inside the empire from one corner to another, connecting its various peoples. Its most significant feat was the cities, roads and infrastructure that it built. They were magnificent, and some are still standing today. Then the Great War occurred and the Rimien Empire fell, only to be replaced by the Dayitic Empire of Man. By the time Rimie was in a position to rebuild its empire, the Empire of Man had already swallowed it.

When the Empire too collapsed there was a chance for Rimie to reform its empire, but the Langirds had other plans for it. After a few centuries under their rule the Heavenly Empire came to collect the old Empire's property. It has been little more than three centuries since Rimie gained its independence for the first time in millennia, once again at another's whim. While it has only been a puppet of large states for so long, Rimie has influenced the empires and kingdoms that controlled it, especially in the arts and architecture. Much of the Imperial art we see today is based off Rimien art, and the Imperial buildings based off the old Rimien Empire's grand monuments and palaces.

The Rimiens are a loud and passionate people. The years of subjugation certainly have not dulled them. Every greeting is a kiss and embrace, every conversation is led by the hands, not the mouth, and every meal a veritable feast. It is no surprise then that family and friends are most important to the Rimiens. They consider nearly everyone a family member, though, and





whole communities can often come together for one family's celebration. Their music is fast, and one cannot help but dance to it; and their art is bold, proud, and as passionate as they. The nobles may have adopted the more reserved demeanour of their Imperial counterparts, but to be among the people is truly a joy for the soul and stomach.

The Kingdom of Neatol

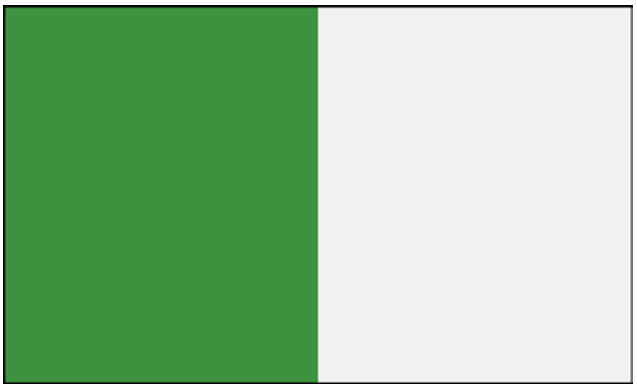
The most pious of nations so they say. Every king has been declared a saint immediately upon death by the Progenitorist Patriarch of Neatol. The church runs through the veins of every Neatolian, and this fanaticism has caused Neatol more than its fair share of grief.

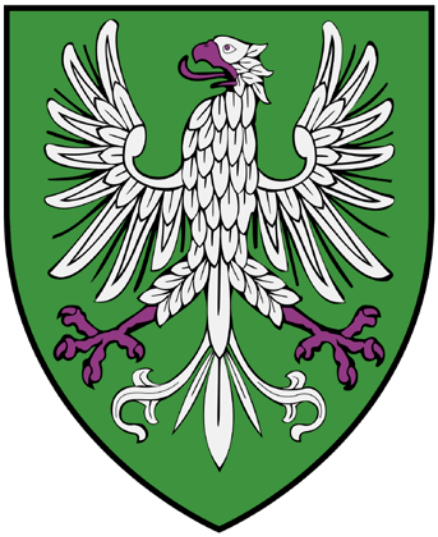
Today's Neatol was a gift from the gods. After the Heavenly Empire of Man won back the Kingdom of Langird, it broke it up into three kingdoms, one for each race it comprised. To the Neatolians the Empire gave Neatol, but it would not hold it for long. When the Shield Maidens were lost, the King Palmiro VI personally petitioned the Progenitorist Patriarch and Matriarch of the Emperor for their public blessing to declare independence, which they duly gave. Faced with the embodiment of the gods' will, the Emperor had no choice but to grant the king's request.

The new Progenitorist Kingdom of Neatol has been the hound that the east has needed to keep leashed since its inception. As fanatical as the Completists, Neatol has often declared holy wars on heathen nations to bring the word of the gods to them. Most times, the fleets were never heard from again, but Neatol has colonies on the eastern continent, western Jytoh, the far west continent and in the southern continent. Nothing will stop the saintly kings from completing their heavenly task. The world will eventually belong to the gods, they say, the "right" gods. The motto of the Neatolian army is "Diis velit", the gods will it.

The internal history of Neatol is one of the least memorable there is, as it has proved to be exceedingly stable. The Royal Inquisition, their not so secret police, keeps order by arresting every potential seditionist and traitor. Barbaric, perhaps, but effective.

It is unsurprising that the Neatolian people are very religious, but they are also superstitious in the extreme. The dogma of the Neatolian church has evolved to include many rituals and observances to be made for all their numerous saints. This has led to a culture of superstition that pervades the nation, but brings a quaint feel to the area. Apart from religion, it is family that the Neatolians hold most dear, and it is feast days that bring families together. As religious as they may be, no one quite feasts like a Neatolian.





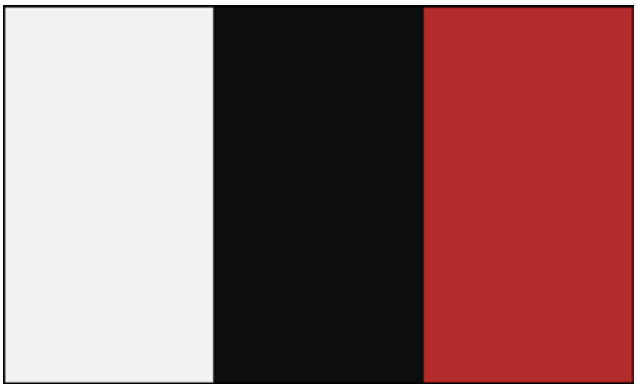
The Kingdom of Valkryk

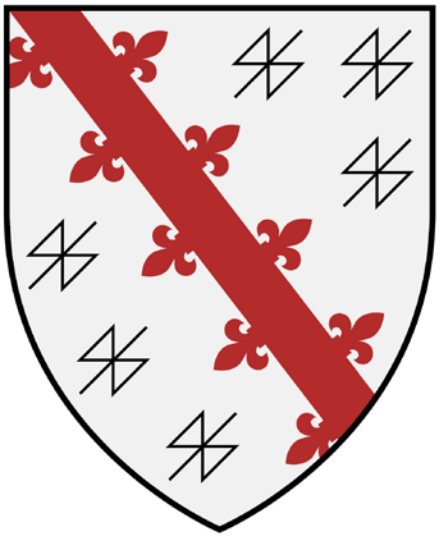
The gallant knights in their shining armour. Heirs to the old Vallion tribes and kingdoms, the Valkrykers are the true romantics. When we speak of knights rescuing damsels from Inhumans, it is of the Valkryk epics we speak.

While the time of knights may be almost over, the history of Valkryk is written by strong and hardy warriors. Before the Great War, the Vallion tribes were the competitors of both the Dayitics to their south and Rimien to their east. They did not bow nor give an inch to either. Vallion pride demands no less. When the Empire of Man was founded, the Dayitics met the Vallions as equals, granting them kingdoms and sovereignty over their own land. As the Empire fell, the Vallion nations kept going, strong as ever, conquering others and expanding their rule. The Heavenly Empire may have acquired them, but did not hold them for long. The might of the Vallions was a threat too powerful for the Empire to consider fighting.

As an independent kingdom again, Valkryk's power has fluctuated in rhythm with its relationship with Nacitania. The kingdom was nearly torn apart, however, in the Valkryk Holy Civil War when Progenitorist and Prodigalist stopped seeing eye to eye and preferred to rule the kingdom alone. Three decades the war raged, spilling over into Imperial and Rimien lands. It all ended with one knight, St. Henry 'the Silver', who brought it to an end through a gallant act of sacrifice. Since that near death experience, Valkryk has strived to only grow in strength, sometimes even starting wars so its people can have a common enemy to rally against. Its colonisation of the southern continent is unsurprisingly then the most hotly contested.

Like many other old kingdoms, Valkryk has a distinct class structure. You have nobles and you have peasants, and social mobility is a scarce thing. Trade has started to bring about a middle merchant class but the nobles ever strive to prevent the peasants from becoming their equals.





This strict social hierarchy has led to a host of social rituals that the Valkrykers follow. Their word for "manners" has become synonymous for "ceremony", which says as much as one needs to know. However, travel far from their nobles' castles and palaces and you will find a more relaxed, rural atmosphere where the people are friendly and hospitable.

The Kingdom of Nacitania

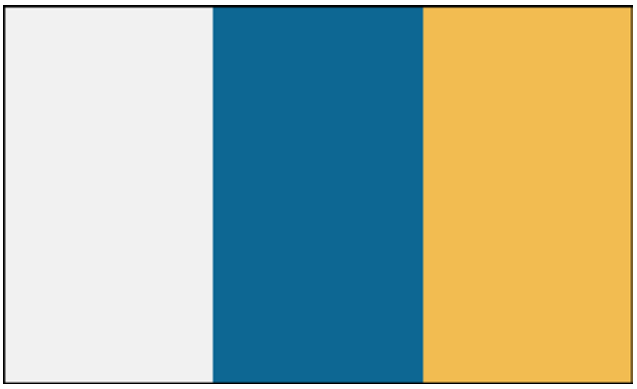
The isolated kingdom of water and lillies. The only route into the mainland from Nacitania is through Valkryk. While Nacitania does trade heavily by sea, this has left Nacitania somewhat isolated from the other Vallion and Dayitic peoples.

Nacitania has alway had a curious relationship with Valkryk. Both are the last independent Vallion nations and both stem from the same ancient king. This has often led one nation's king to inherit the other nation only for it to be disinherited by a second or third son later on. Many foreigners over the centuries have lost interest in whether Nacitania is separate from Valkryk this time or not and have given the combined nations the name of Valliland. It is a term still in use today to refer to any area populated by the Vallions.

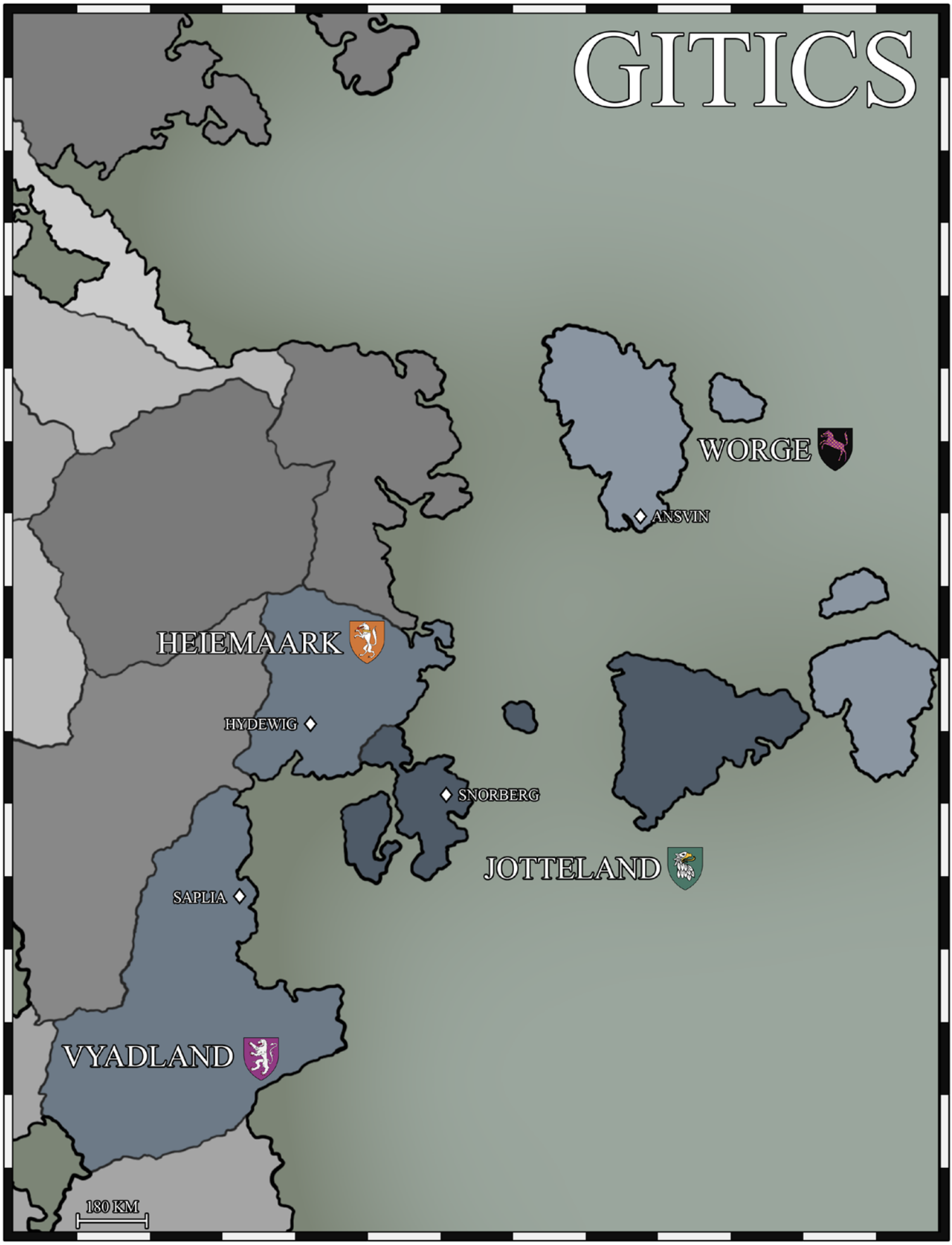
This confusion was only exacerbated five centuries ago when the Emperor Karl IV signed the First Fürst Accords, ensuring any man can become king via election. The king of the combined Valkryk/Nacitania at that time, still a vassal of the Emperor, emulated the Accords and signed his own version, making Valkryk/Nacitania also an elective monarchy. When the Vallions gained their independence, these accords still held and did so even when they separated from each other. The issue, however, is that any man from either nation can become king of either nation. This often leads the king of one to be elected king of the other, creating an interesting if utterly confusing political climate.

The people themselves, however, are far different from their western cousins. Barring those Nacitanians that live on the border of Valkryk, the people are reminiscent of the ancient Vallion tribes, owing to their pseudo-isolation from the mainland. Their ancient style has evolved to modernism by its own route, taking more after Fresian styles than Valkrykian.

What makes its people unique however is its organised pagan religion. In other nations,



pagans worship clandestinely in a borrowed house, empty warehouse or in the woods away from prying eyes of priests. The Mergamin of Nacitania are differnet, and have their own temples and churches next to Prodigalists and Progenitorists. While they are not accepted, they are tolerated. These Mergamin worship the four elements as gods, with the king of their elemental gods being the Ocean itself. Laws have even been signed that protect Mergamin from harm by the more zealous official religions, although words on paper can only do so much.


GITICS
WORGE
ANSVIN
HEIEMAARK
HYDEWIG
SNORBERG
JOTTELAND
SAPLIA
VYADLAND
180 KM

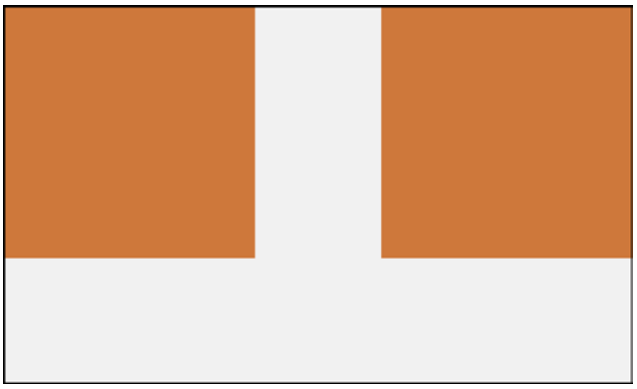
The Kingdom of Heiemaark

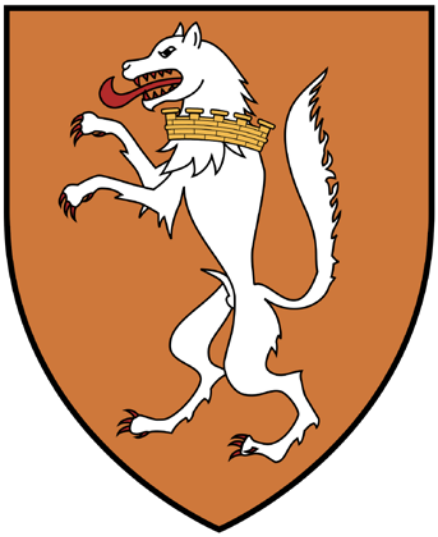
The wayward Gitics as they are known by their southern brethren or sometimes the turned-about conquerors. When the Gitic horde went north to throw themselves at Imperial walls, the Heiemarken tribes came east to Fresian lands, conquered what they could, stopped when they could not and settled peacefully, relatively speaking, ever since.

As much as the Halleians became Gitic so did the Heiemarken become Fresian, and for the better I might add. While they did try and destroy Alfresia during the Gitic Invasions, they have become an agreeable neighbour since then. As with the other Gitic nations, Heiemaark did not truly exist until around six centuries ago, before then it was a tumultuous time of petty kingdoms and chiefdoms, rising only to be destroyed the following year. Heiemaark climbed out of this catastrophe wishing to put the dark, war torn ages behind it.

This peaceful approach has not always been kind to Heiemaark as both Jotteland and Worge have tried to take land from it. War between the Gitics is not uncommon, they have been fighting each other as much as they fight others. Unfortunately for Heiemaark, it has been on the losing side once too often. Rather than try and compete with the other Gitics for what little land there is in Jytoh, Heiemaark has looked to the southern continent to expand, and with Jotteland withdrawing from there, the door has been left open for Heiemarken superiority in the south.

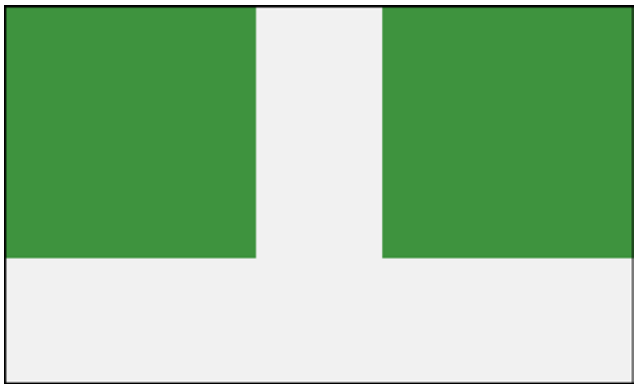
Heiemarken are often called the gentlemen Gitics and for good reason. Among the Gitics, they have the most universities and libraries and draw many foreigners to come study in these halls of knowledge. They are also a very polite and formal people. They have one word that means “please”, “thank you” and “my apologies” all at the same time and it seems they cannot stop saying it. Titles are of the utmost importance, but where in the Empire or Wesfresland this is due to pride, in Heiemaark it is because of politeness.





Even among friends you will rarely hear a man’s first name mentioned, it is always Master So-and-so and Doctor This-and-that. There is a long standing jest in Heiemaark that it takes seven years to learn another man’s name.

The Republic of Jotteland



The fair kings of the isles. It is hard to believe that the gentle Jotts of today were the warlords of the Gitic hordes. It is from the Jotts we have the word Gitic, and from their ancestral home of Gitland. The Jotts however have changed completely from their days as ravagers, now they are humanitarians of the world.

The defeat of the Gitic forces at the Seiver river spelled the end of Gitic superiority south of the Empire. The Gitics lost land gradually as local imperial citizens and Vineans rose up against their overlords. It took nearly two centuries for the great Gitic kingdom, that once occupied everything south of Lodewaria, to be pushed to a small outcrop on the eastern coast. The last Gitic king looked across the ocean where his priests told him the Jotts, guardians of the gates of the afterlife, must dwell. So they came upon their isle and settled there.

Their revolution three decades ago ended a strong line of kings that refused to give up on their past glories. It in its place is a government burdened with the guilt of the past, not only for the Gitic invasions but for the large scale colonisation the old King Ragnarr oversaw on the southern continent. The current leaders state that all crimes are eternal and must be paid for by each generation. Such fanaticism I cannot agree with, as it means each new generation must pay for crimes they never committed.

Where the old Jottish culture was one of excess, the new culture is one of restraint. Citizens are banned from owning weapons and even their constabulary carry nothing but a billy club. Their armies have been reduced to nearly nothing, the money spent on them instead gone to pay reparations to those afflicted by Jotteland's past crimes. Only what the politicians declare as "correct" forms of expression are allowed in order to shield the public from any potential offense.

It is a shame what has become of such a great nation, but travel from the cities and you will find the old Jotts, where men still drink, fight and sing bawdy songs. Where men are raucous but honourable and fine drinking companions. Where you can see the spark of the old Gitic kings in the eyes of the young. Where they are still allowed to tell tales of ancient heroes. Hopefully one day the politics will change and we will see the strong naval arise once again.

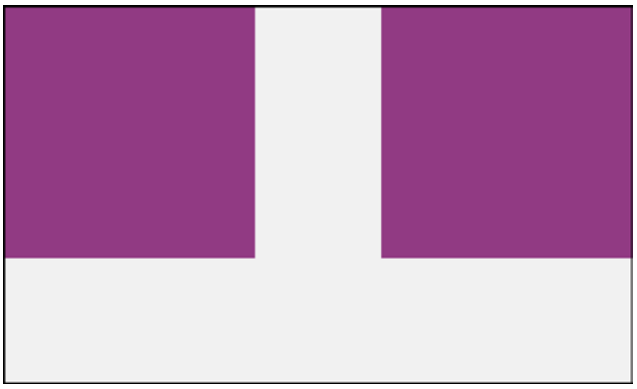
The King-Archbishopric of Vyadland

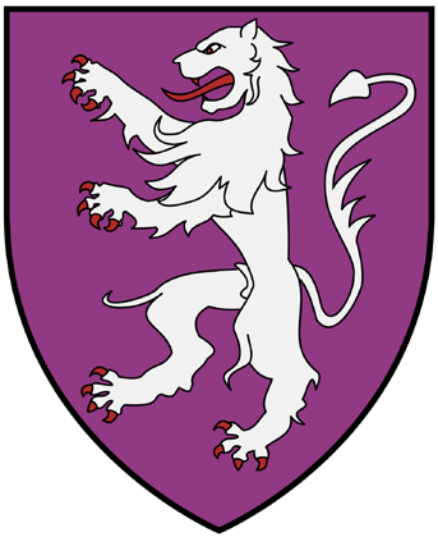
The conquered people. While we may bemoan and begrudge our centuries of servitude to other nations, our subjugation was a peaceful, kind and gentle one. Not so for the Vyads. Vyadland was formed eighty nine years ago and never even existed before then. It lies in the centre of the Gitics, the Vineans and the Bythikans and all three have waged near continuous wars over it since men first walked on Vyad soil.

First occupied by the Vineans, it was the first target of the Gitic horde who wiped out nearly the entire population as a message to the northerners. Since then it has been settled predominantly by Gitics even as the Litaundian tribes and kingdoms invaded at every opportunity and the Bythikan zealots conquered vast swathes to attempt to convert the heathens. Of course, then the Gitics, urged on by pleas of help, would reconquer the land. This game of to and fro would continue for over a millennium, uncaring of the people who actually lived there.

This ended eighty nine years ago when a treaty was agreed upon by the three warring peoples. Lead by the Bythikans, borders were agreed upon that no party was happy with and within it would be a sovereign people, in command of their own fate. The catch, however, was that it was to be a theocracy. It would be led by men not swayed by the ethnicity of their people but objective in their faith. I believe that particular amendment would not have been signed if not for the Bythikan armies standing ready at the border. And so the first eastern Theocracy in over three centuries was formed and the people finally had peace. After all, which nation would invade a religious institution?

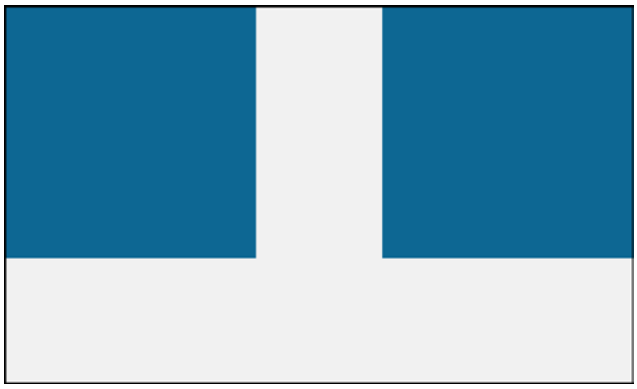
The Vyad culture, while still identifying as Gitic, has become a blend of Vinean, Bythikan and Gitic. Overall, there is an attitude of resilience, perseverance and grim determination. The Vyads have overcome much in their long history and there is much they can accomplish.

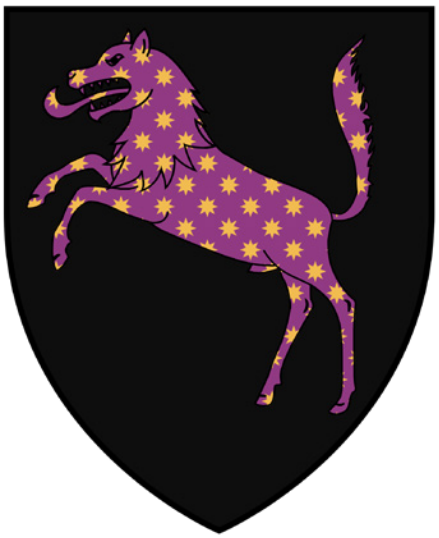




Their mixed culture also means they are far more open to outsiders and immigrants than other nations, back by their King-Archbishop who allows any Prodigalist to settle, their nation has become a thriving, cosmopolitan land.

The Republic of Worge





Savages, barbarians, heathens, heretics, beasts, warriors, conquerors, kings. All of these and more have been used to the describe the Worgens since they settled on their islands. The Worge islands were the final stop along the Gitics' travels and it shows in the culture of the Worgens. Where other Gitic tribes settled along the journey and integrated the local customs into theirs, the Worgens refused to compromise, searching for a land to call their own.

The Worgen tribes were the vanguard of the Gitic horde. They were the furthest from the Bythikan capital and its influence, culture and religion. Their resentment of the Bythikans made them perfect in the eyes of the Gitic warlords to act as a vanguard in search of their new home. They were the eyes, the ears, and the knife in the dark of the Gitic hordes. It was the Worgens who scouted which areas to move into, which tribes and villages were weak, which cities to avoid until strength was built up, and always were the first to meet the enemy.

In 789AGW, the Worgens had had that their fill of warlords. At the battle of Seiver River in Lodewaria, the back of the horde was broken by Imperial forces. The Worgens especially took heavy casualties as the warlords sent them in first against fresh Imperial Legions. The next night, all the Worgen tribes packed up and moved as far from the horde as they could. The ocean stopped them, but they did give it a good effort. The natives of Worge stood no chance against battle hardened Worgens and the Kingdom of Worge was founded. In the time since, the Worgens have become a civilised people, keeping up with modern developments and even instituting a public office of government.

Like us, the Worgens' secluded islands have given rise to a unique culture, even from the other Gitics. Unsurprisingly, Prodigalism never took as strong a hold on the Worgen islands as the other Gitics. Outside of the cities, the multitude of old gods like Rodinaz, Thun and Tio still hold sway. Even their style of Prodigalism is more a mix of church and paganism than strict dogma. This is a common practice is Worge, blending the old with the new, uncaring of what the world thinks of them.

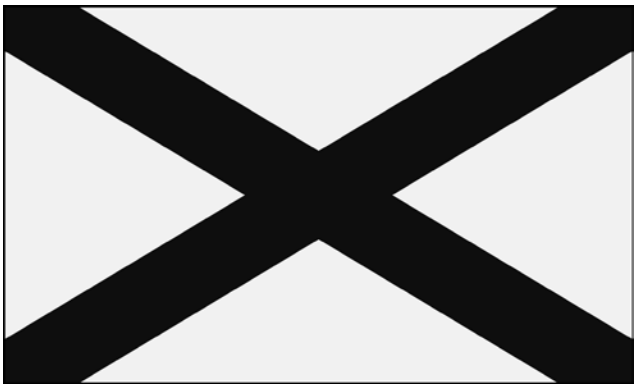
CAELS
FREE MARCHES
GALLATHIAN
GALSRUTH
DUNMARA
ULLACHT
DHUBAHAIN
GAELLAND
DYDDINAS
CAERLLYN
VISEWAL
140 KM

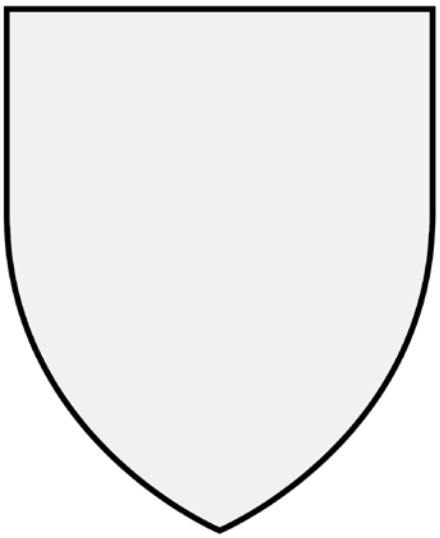
The Free Marches

If there was one word to describe the Free Marches it would be just that: free. We enjoy the principles and philosophies of liberty here, but the March Freemen well and truly live it. Freedom is at the bedrock of their nation, the heart of their laws, and the very foundation of who they are. They have no senate, no house of lords, no kings or queens. Every man and woman collectively vote on each law passed. This may make for a slow moving legal system, but the Freemen prefer it to handing control of their nation to a privileged few.

The Free Marches is another young nation, gaining their independence scarcely six decades before we did. The Marches have always been a tumultuous and contested land. It lies right in the centre between the Tolians, Caels, Delkans and Mekadians. Unsurprisingly, over the long millennia each of these groups have bitten off their piece of it or gone to war to take all of it. For the longest time the Neoist Hlynerm held power over the marches, attempting to impose their strict religious philosophy on the stubborn easterners. Dozens of revolutions occurred over the centuries and at long last, with the backing of their neighbours, the Freemen finally gained their freedom.

The people are as hodgepodge as the land they live on. Part Tolian, part Mekadian, part Delkan but the predominant culture is the Cealish one to the east. This natural multiculturalism has led to the Freemen being accepting of other nations and cultures, and their borders the most open of all eastern nations. They are, however, fierce in their determination to remain free. Any person seen as attempting to alter or change the Marches' legal system or social dynamic is quickly and severely dealt with. Each adult man and woman are by law required to keep and maintain a sword, pistol, musket and shot enough for both. As you can expect, undesirables are usually dealt with before most even know of the issue.





You would expect such a multicultural state to produce art of free expression with little boundaries. You would be wrong. While the Freemen do produce a wide variety of art related to the four cultures surrounding them and their own, their art tends to be on the conservative side. Ever fearful of having their identity once again subsumed into another, their art always falls back to espousing military and rebel heroes and the values of liberty.

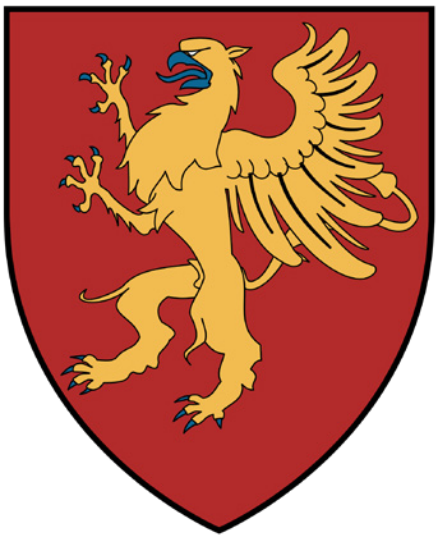
The Kingdom of Gaeland

A truer Cael you will never find, at least according to the Gaels. It was once even called the Kingdom of Caelland. Imagery and symbolism is a large part of the Gaelish identity. They were the first to codify the rules of heraldry on the continent some five centuries ago, and their regulations surrounding it is the most strict of any nation.

Gaeland began as Caelland, that unfortunate kingdom that lasted only for a year but encompassed all of the modern day Caelish lands. Gaeland was formed when the unlucky king's brothers imprisoned him and took huge swathes of land from him to create their own petty kingdoms. Gallathian and Ullacht was carved out of Caelland, and Gaeland was the left overs. Caelland, and then Gaeland, was the first time the Gaels were united as a people. Before then small kingdoms made up the peninsula, each warring with each other to gain power.

Since that union of Gaels, Gaeland has turned its eyes outwards and have become a powerful naval nation. Too far north to be of any significance in the new southern continent, Gaeland has turned its eyes eastward for conquest. It has since competed with the Valtorian nations to carve out parts of Uttosia and the other parts of the oriental continent. Inner conflict besets Gaeland, however, as the incestuous relationship between the nobles have always left more than the fair share of suitable heirs to the throne. Civil war is never far away in Gaeland.

Gaelish society is heavily stratified. On top is the king and his nobility, which own most of the land. Below them the gentry which own the remaining land; and upon these lands are the peasants who work them. The upper class are like those from elsewhere in the world, concerned with power, money and their image. The poor, however, are the sort you would want to call friend. Kind natured and good tempered whom you would never hear complain, who desires



nothing more than an ordinary chance to live their lives free of the strife that the rich always brings.

The upper class enjoy their plays and paintings and their sculptures, preferring all of these to centre around people. Portraits for their art, personal stories for their plays and busts for sculpting. The poor prefer their music and dance. Pipes, reeds, drums, lutes the Gaels are proficient in all of these. Their naval history has also brought about the famous Gaelish sea shanties that you will hear the world over.

The Kingdom of Gallathian

These are the proudest men you will ever meet with the strangest political system this side of the ocean. In Gallathian, family means everything. Blood is worth more than orichalcum. It is not what you know, what you can do or even who you know that is important, but who you are.

The tribal nature of the archaic Gallathian Caels took a strange turn early on. In other nations' history, tribes were mostly composed of a single bloodline, which then spread out, formed villages and eventually towns comprised of a whole variety of people. The Gallathians did not. Their tribes formed clans and to this day that is as far as they got. Each clan owns its own lot of land and stays there, sometimes birthing subclans upon its own land. At a practical level this functions much like a duke with his counts and their barons beneath him.

This system has survived everything the world has thrown at them. The clans were independent once, each his own king of his little castle until the Tolian raids picked off each clan one by one. Soon they banded together with each other and the Gaelish kings drove the raiders off. As Caeland consolidated land, they took Gallathian and Ullacht as well, through peaceful means. A year later, the brothers of the king betrayed him and the elder brother, a Gallathian on his mother's side, created the Kingdom of Gallathian. When he died of old age, the council of clan lords refused another king, saying that no one man will ever rule of them again. Instead they chose amongst them a Lord Paramount of the Realm. It is an institution still practiced today, ensuring Gallathian has been the most stable of the northern nations.

Proud and prickly are the only words you need to know about the Gallathians. Do not insult their nation, never insult their clan, and do not sing the praises of whichever clan is their rival. Follow these rules and you will have the best time of your mortal life. Gallathian has more feast days than any other nation and their clansmen make sure they never remember them.

Their art, like much of their lives, revolve around their clans. Their songs espouse their clan's virtues, their poems speak of coming back home when the poet had never left and their art is about their past clan heroes. Their unique instrument, that amalgamation of pipes and leather creates a polarising sound, but you can learn to enjoy it, I am sure.

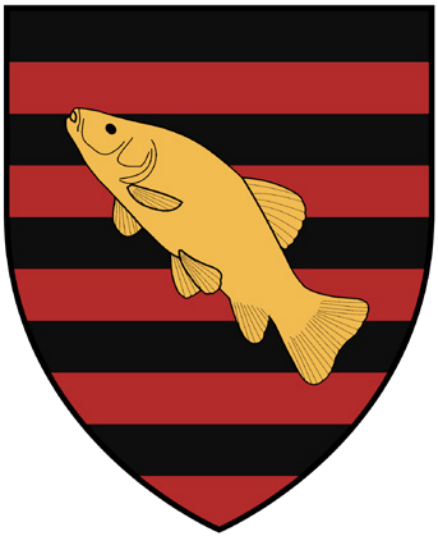
The Principality of Vissewal

The first of the Caels if the Vissians are to be believed. The word Cael in the Vissian dialect means human which does lend credence to their claim. This is unfortunately one of the few historical points of pride they have. The Vissians have been one of those unlucky nations to be constantly governed by another.

The names Vissewal and Vissian are not Vissian in origin, although they now call themselves these through the constant usage by foreigners. The name originates from the old Dayitic word for fisher. At its height, the Empire of Man conquered Vissewal in its futile endeavour to conquer the north. It could never conquer the other Caels, but held fast to Vissewal. When the Empire collapsed, the Vissians enjoyed a brief period of freedom, with its chiefs even conquering part of Mollachia. When Gaeland formed, however, they once again lost their freedom.

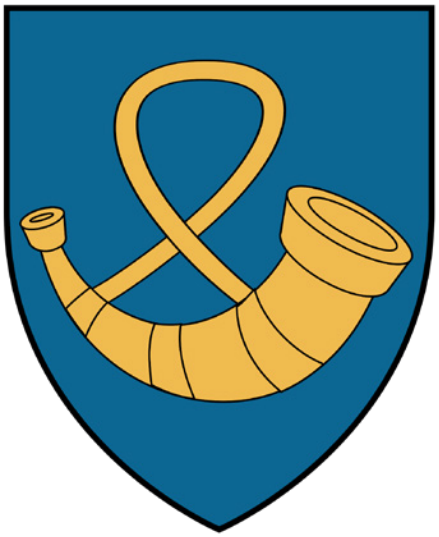
The Vissians took to this with the same stoic resolve they have always had. This, I believe, have saved them and their culture from being subsumed into Gaeland, and the Empire before that. The Gaelish used Vissewal as their border defences against any mainland attack. Castles and fortresses by the score were built in Vissewal and their keepers were named the Marcher Lords. Over time, Vissewal became the birthright of the heir of the Gaelish throne, starting with the first Prince Eddard. Later still Vissewal was granted its independence, in a manner of speaking. It was, and is still today, a protectorate of Gaeland, but is able to run its own affairs. The heir to the Gaelish throne is the sovereign of Vissewal until he assumes the Gaelish throne, and holds the unique title of Fisher Prince.

The Vissian people, their culture and their art all share the same features. They are all ancient and well preserved. The scholars tell me that the oldest Caelish art, songs, designs, and even their pagan religion, are all still found in the Vissian art today. Having been a subject people



for millennia, the Vissians have curiously held on to their identity. Mainly, I believe, by not caring much about their overseers. Their most notable form of art is the majestic choirs they can call together in a matter of moments. Some say a Vissian is born singing, and from what I've seen this is more than true. Start humming a tune while walking through a market and before you can blink the entire market has erupted into song with better voices you will find in any temple.

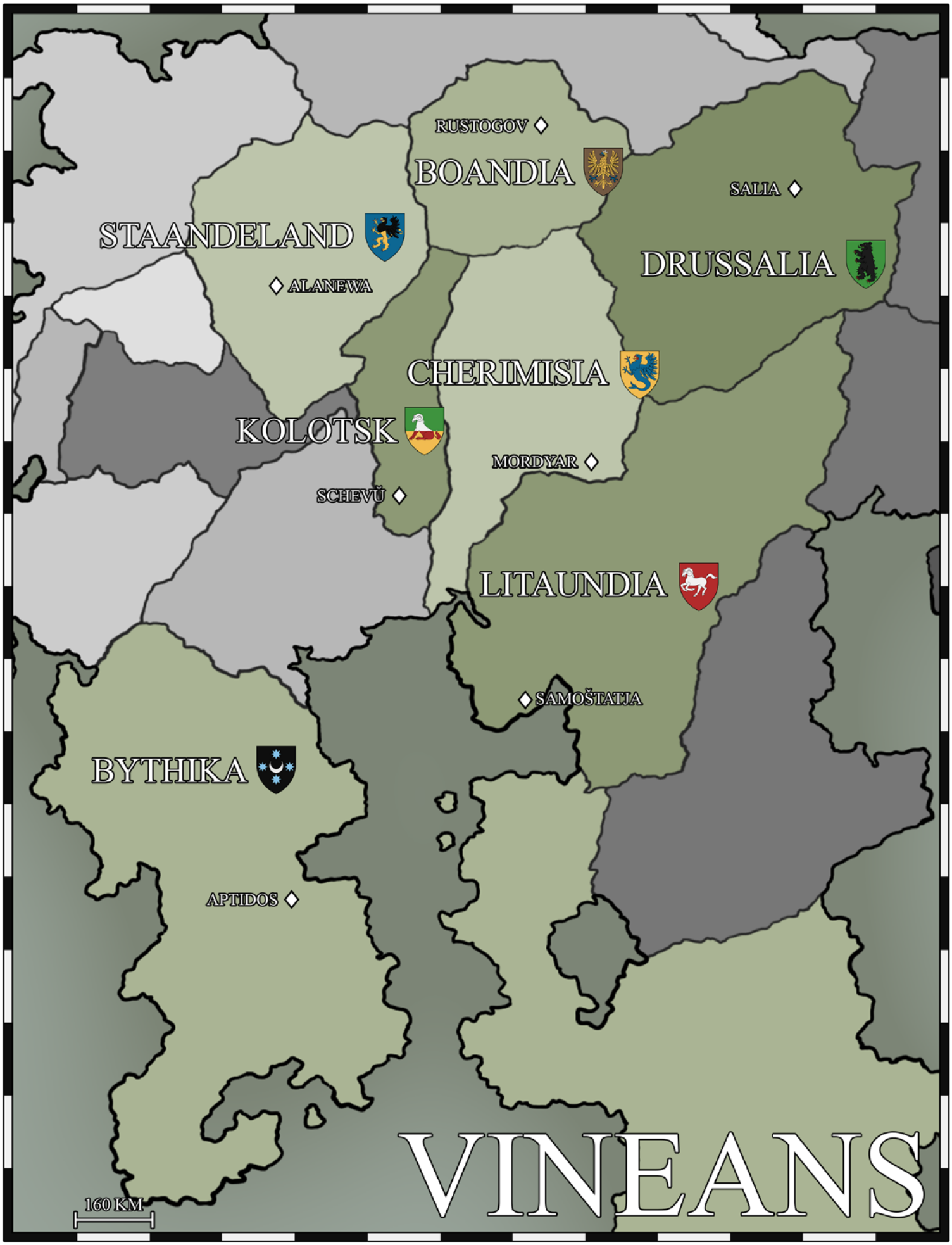
The Kingdom of Ullacht



Ah, the rolling hills of Ullacht. Never have I found a more calming experience in the world than strolling through the grassy knolls of Ullacht, with only myself, my lute and the gods to hear me. A small fish in a big pond, as the saying goes, Ullacht has suffered greatly at times by taking on those far stronger than itself, but then that is the Ullish way: bravery in the face of defeat.

Much like its brother kingdom Gallathian, Ullacht's history before its unification was rather dull in the grand scheme of things. Tribes battling other tribes, chiefs and petty kings vying for power. When it was unified as a kingdom, like Gallathian, it chose a different way of monarchical inheritance. A system the Ullish call tanistry means that every able bodied man can vote on who is next to be king, should he be of the same bloodline as the first king that is. This system has prevented many of the civil wars that its neighbour Gaeland has faced, by having the most popular heir ascend the throne. It has not, however, prevented the foolish wars Ullacht itself has started.

When Ullacht as formed, it was substantially larger than it is now, owning vast tracts of both Gallathian and Gaeland. Through greed and pride, or perhaps a longing to recreate the kingdom of Caelland, it wanted even more. So begun many a failed invasion of the two Caelish nations. Ullacht never succeeded in holding any conquered land for very long, and after a failed alliance with Valkryk, which resulted in Valkryk conquering Ullacht for a few generations, Gallathian and Gaeland decided the debt was to be repaid. Ullacht lost most of its land through these counter invasions.


RUSTOGOV
BOANDIA
SALIA
STAANDELAND
DRUSSALIA
ALANEWA
CHERIMISIA
KOLOTSK
MORDYAR
SCHEVŬ
LITAUNDIA
SAMOŠTATJA
BYTHIKA
APTIDOS
VINEANS
160 KM

The Second Empire of Bythika

Twin to the Heavenly Empire of Man, if perhaps a sterner, more strict twin. Then again, it has had more to deal with than the Heavenly Empire at times. If the Heavenly Empire is one of contradictions, then the Bythikan Empire is one of dissonance. One Empire with two capitals. One religion with many sects. The largest nation in Jytoh but nearly uninhabited.

The Bythikan Empires origins can be found in the migration of humanity southwards. The Empire of Man expanded far more quickly than it could control it, so the Emperor Bythika I set up a southern capital where his heir could govern the southern provinces. Little did he know that a scant few centuries later the southern provinces would declare independence only to be united in their own empire. Over a millennia later and the Empire has acquired its own southern capital of Natje and gone through several transformations but endures still. Moreover, it still claims it is the sole heir to the old Empire of Man.

The Bythikan Empire did what the Heavenly Empire could not do, create an Imperial culture. The lands of the Bythikans were once inhabited by a wide variety of peoples, mostly Vineans, but those who would not bend the knee to the Prodigalist Faith and Imperial Culture were exiled. The most notable of these the Gitic hordes. And now only the Imperial Prodigalist culture remains. Sure, there are regional variations on this theme, but the culture stands fast. The only great variation is between the northerners and southerners. So far removed from one another it is no surprise that these two groups became different peoples.

The Second Empire of Bythika is far larger than the Heavenly Empire of Man, more than five times so. In size it rivals the old Neoist empires. Unfortunately for the Bythikans, much of their lands consist either of desert, volcanic fields, mountains or jungles. The spine of southern Jytoh is rugged, with nigh impenetrable mountains dotted with volcanoes. It lines the

western coast of the great Bythikan peninsula, causing deserts across the entire eastern regions. The only truly habitable areas are the north of Bythika bordering on the Vinean and Gitic lands, and the far southern province of Natje with its jungles and rainforests. In between the two great provinces lies isolated towns and communities, oft forgotten. It should come as no surprise that Bythikan art tends to the religious. Their music favours the chants and, while beautiful, this in turn has given rise to some of the bawdiest tavern choruses I have yet heard. Their art is stoic and realistic, preferring muted and pastel colours to the Heavenly Empire's grand bold colours and strokes. Their buildings tend to follow the arrays far more than other nations, their veneration of Bür as the one true god means their buildings must venerate his runes.

The Kingdom of Staandeland

The Vineans the Empire could not civilise, or so the Imperials tell it. Neither the Empire of Man nor its Heavenly descendant could extend its borders past Staandeland and Boandia into Vinean territory. Better still, neither empire could ever impose its values on these Vineans that they had.

Laying between the Empire proper and the Krunian lands meant the Standish tribes were doomed to be conquered by the Empire at one point or another. The old Empire of Man cared little for the Vinean lands under its control, preferring the more prosperous southern lands. Luckily for them, the roads connecting the Krunian lands to the Empire brought great prosperity to the Standish tribes. Their chiefs and kings built their cities along these roads to better trade with the passing Imperials and, of course, also to better rob them. When the Empire collapsed, the Standish were sad to see it go, if only for the money it brought them, and the Standish suffered greatly after the collapse with no Imperial teat from which to suck.

When the Heavenly Empire expanded south, it did so with the intent of holding its lands more tightly than the old Empire did. Control was paramount. So it formed a kingdom for all the Standish to live in, to work in, to pay tax in and to die in. So Staandeland came to be. But to create a breadbasket in the south it had to "civilise the savages" as the saying goes. So Imperial merchants, politicians, nobles and priests descended upon Staandeland to bring it up to Imperial standard. This would only benefit the nation as it put Staandeland in the best position to rebel against the empire.

In the intervening years Staandeland has become a force to be reckoned with among the Vineans. It is a truly modern nation and its people reflect this. Universities and schools are in every city, and Staandeland boasts the most convents and monasteries in the Vinean lands. This has lead to an educated, religious people

who value morality and knowledge above nearly all else. Some see the Standish as too formal and reserved, but they have their legends, their little superstitions, and a fantastic range of folk music that is often played on pan-pipes or their signature single-reed bagpipe.

The Kingdom of Boandia

The gateway to the Vinean lands, and the gate that nearly closed on the Empire. Boandia has been the site of many a war and the nation and its people still bear the scars. A shame for a land as beautiful as Boandia.

Named "The Land of the Andians" by the old Imperial forces that promptly made it a province of the Empire, gave it a governor and promptly forgot about it, wishing to expand further southeast. The Empire never did expand further in Vinean lands as the scores of Vinean chiefdoms and kingdoms regularly united to push back the Empire. With Boandian rebels hampering their progress at every turn, the Empire finally accepted the futility of this endeavour. When the Gitic Hordes invaded, the Empire paid the Vineans back in kind by removing all its forces from Boandia. The land was sacrificed so that they could make their last stand in Lodewaria. In their rage at being defeated by the Empire, the Gitics burned everything in their path back south. Boandia was a fiery dust bowl for decades.

The Andians are no longer with us, the Gitics saw to that, but some Boandians still claim descent. Vineans, Dayitics and left-behind Gitics filled their vacuum and attempted to rebuild what was lost. The collapse of the Empire was ignored by the Boandians of the time, the people trying to rebuild entire cities from the ashes. The name Boandia was forgotten until the Heavenly Empire came to regain the old Empire's territory. The Boandians gladly accepted the Empire as they sorely needed protection from ongoing Vinean and Gitic raids and attacks. Their time under the Heavenly Empire was brief but productive. When Staandeland rebelled, so did Boandia under agreement that a union would be formed with Staandeland. It lasted barely a century before tensions drove them apart, but it gave Boandia the support it needed to be a whole, complete and healed nation.

The Boandians are a curious lot. Their nation was rebuilt from the ground up and so were they. Nominally Vinean, and drawing in large parts from that culture, they have founded a unique culture drawing from all the various people who rebuilt Boandia, creating a multiculture rarely seen outside the Empire.

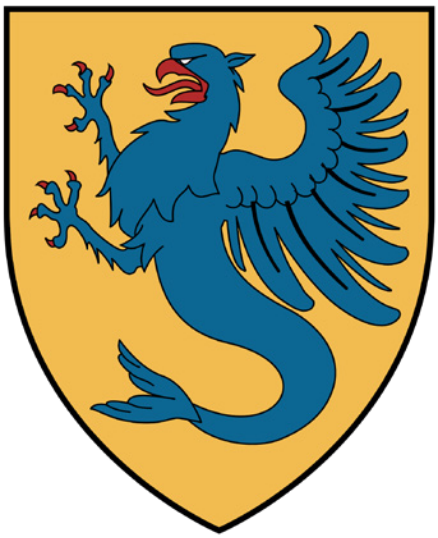
The Grand Principality of Cherimisia

The heartland princes. Strong and proud, the principalities that comprise Cherimisia are far older than the nation itself and the people reflect this. As varied as the flowers in the fields the various principalities come together to form a state stronger than the sum of its parts.

Information from the early tribes and chiefdoms on the Cherimisian lands is quite sparse. No authentic records survived the Gitic Hordes. The centuries of warfare and raiding between the Vineans and the Gitics were not kind to the historians either. We know that by the fourteenth century the principalities in Vinean lands were already established and prosperous, impacting politics as far away as Nacitania. Only Drussalia had emerged as a central power, the Litaundian and Cherimisian principalities preferring their independence. There were already the stirrings of nationhood by then, as a clear distinction between Litaundian and Cherimisian emerged.

It was outside forces which drove the unification of Cherimisia. With the formation of Drussalia under the legendary Grand Prince Rurik and the independence of the old Imperial states, the Vinean princes were nearly surrounded by larger powers eyeing their principalities hungrily. A council was formed, treaties were signed, compromises made and everyone left rather unhappily, but the Grand Principality was formed and ruled over by its council of princes. It was a difficult birth for the nation with many internal struggles and warfare, eventually leading to Kolotsk's independence, but eventually the nation settled and has become as stable as it can hope to be.

There is no singular Cherimisian culture nor people. Cherimisia is more a confederation than a single nation. Each prince has complete sovereignty over his own realm and laws can drastically change from one principality to the next. The culture and people change too, different fashion styles, different songs and dances, even the cuisine can change between principalities. The ruling council has recently endeavoured to create a unified culture, an attempt to modernise the somewhat rustic nation so that Cherimisia can compete on the world stage.



The Grand Principality of Drussalia

A wise man once said that it would be wiser to fight an ogre than a Drussalian, although there is not much of a difference between the two. There is some truth in this. Drussalians are an ornery lot and almost as large and hirsute as their vast ogre populations.

Drussalian legends say that, after the Great War, the Half-Man came to Drussalia with a whole horde of ogres to create a kingdom for himself and his inhuman kin on top of the bones of the Sauddyr civilisation he helped destroy. So he founded the city of Salia that is still today the capital, and origin of the name, of Drussalia. Meaning "sanctuary", Salia was to be a kingdom of peace and prosperity. To the Half-Man's credit, the city still stands today, a testament to its strength and to the people who live in it.

Except for legends, we know little of the early chiefdoms and kingdoms of Drussalia, the Gitic Hordes destroyed all before them. The Gitics did love the city of Salia, however, and through it controlled the Drussalian lands for many many years. It was the Drus tribe of Gitics that refused to give up Salia and many began to refer to their kingdom as Drus' Salia to differentiate these folk from the Vinean lands. Over time the Drus intermarried with the local Vineans and the Gitics died out, replaced by a people that were strong, proud and fierce.

Their kingdom shattered as well, forming independent principalities that would not be united until the near mythical Grand Prince Rurik "the Ogre" united them with an iron fist. Claimed to be descended from the Half-Man himself, Rurik's progeny still sit upon the Rius-throne, carved from a gargantuan ogre skull. Drussalia is today stronger than it ever was and it is no secret that its king Marijus has plans for a Vinean Drussalian Empire. A pagan, King Marijus is a man born too late. Believing himself to be a warlord in the old Gitic and Vinean styles, Marijus would sacrifice many an enemy to his pantheon of warrior gods.

It is this paganism which truly sets Drussalia apart. Predominantly a Prodigalist nation, its last few kings have been pagans, revitalising its old faith which speaks of cannibalistic ghost gods. Their gods are ephemeral beings that consume one's soul upon death to grow stronger. It is every Vinean pagan's dream to be devout enough so that they may become one with their god upon death. Or should they be so powerful in life, they may become a god themselves to feed on the souls of others.

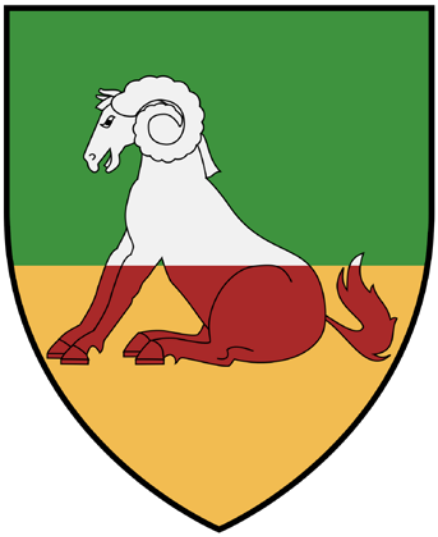
The Principality of Kolotsk

The prince's own. They say every man, woman and child in Kolotsk can trace their ancestry back to the small principality's founder, which renders the concept of nobility rather moot. A people's principality for the people, by the people.

Only legends of Kolotsk's founding remain since the Gitic invasions and these tell varying tales, but the most consistent of these speak of a father with twenty sons and no means of feeding them and thus sent them off to create their own futures. These twenty sons became the princes of the original Vinean principalities, and the youngest of these was pushed to the edges of Vinean territory to the least wanted land. He overcame this problem not by might or cunning, but through the family he brought with him and named his small village Kolotsk, "family".

What knowledge we do have of Kolotsk came from its split from Cherimisia. Unhappy with the treatment of the peasants by the apathetic nobles, Prince Kyiryv declared independence and promptly died for his defiance. The Kolotskans rose up as one and declared war. Nearly a decade later and the Cherimisian princes surrendered. The Kolotskans were merciful in their terms, demanding only their independence and a vow that Cherimisia would never again harm a Kolotskan. Free now, Kolotsk cast its eyes on the wider world and sought to become the equal of the most powerful and prosperous nations. To this day you will find a Kolotskan ambassador in every nation, dining and dealing with its leaders to further Kolotsk's future.

Kolotsk has become a model of the future. Its small population are nearly all educated, employed and housed. Poverty is a rare misfortune that is quickly remedied by the Prince, a now elected title. The socialist princely government does all it can to ensure that its people are in the best possible position to help grow and nurture Kolotsk. The people reflect this dream. Kind and compassionate, warm and



hospitable, knowledgeable and quietly devout, the Kolotskans show what is possible if a society comes together to help one another. Some argue that this is only possible due to Kolotsk's small size and population, but Kolotskans say that with the right will, their dream can become everyone's dream.

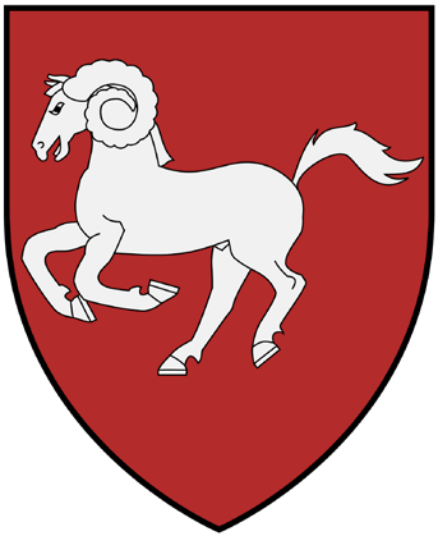
The Grand Principality of Litaundia

Ah, the romantics of the south. Never have I ever heard more songs sung about ancient heroes and their loves than in Litaundia. Their history is a proud, if tragic one and the heroes that have shaped their country have never lived long enough to see their accomplishments.

The only knowledge we have left of the Litaundian principalities before or during the Gitic Invasions is of the hero Velnas and his trusty pale steed Perkun who raced ahead of the Gitic Hordes to warn all the villages, towns and cities that hell followed in his wake. While his message came too late for the Vineans, his message gave the Empire the chance it needed to prepare its defences. Velnas himself rode in vanguard of the battle of the Seiver river and gave his life to defeat the barbarians that destroyed his home. The patron saint of Litaundia, Velnas' statue guards the steps to the Grand Prince's palace while his mount Perkun is upon Litaundia's coat of arms.

In response to the Gitic Invasions and subsequent occupations, Litaundia was the first unified Grand Principality among the Vinean states. A powerful nation was needed to protect the people from the barbarians, and do have their own revenge upon the Gitics. When hostilities died down, Litaundia found itself with ten thousand heroes willing to lay down their lives with no war to fight, so the Grand Prince created the first Vinean professional military, an unknown thing outside the Imperial Legions. The Zvorune Warriors are the best known guerilla military, having been through their fiercest tests in the jungles of the southern continent.

The Litaundians are a people lost in time it seems. A modern nation by all accounts, but the styles, the fashions, the cuisine, the songs all speak of yesteryear, when the air was fresher, water was cooler and men were real men. Romantics equal to the Valkrykers, the Litaundians wish for the day to come again



when a problem could be faced with a sword in hand and a grin on your face. These days it is all politics and knives in the dark. Orders from a thousand kilometres away can kill a man through the barrel of a musket. The Litaundians favour a more honourable life and live each day as though that day will be etched into history.

DELKANS
TYRNORIA
TURVANA
ESZTERVAR
MOLLACHIA
DUKSHKA
NYITEMES
WALDISTE
RASHLJA
SYRNATIA
DALMARIA
125 KM

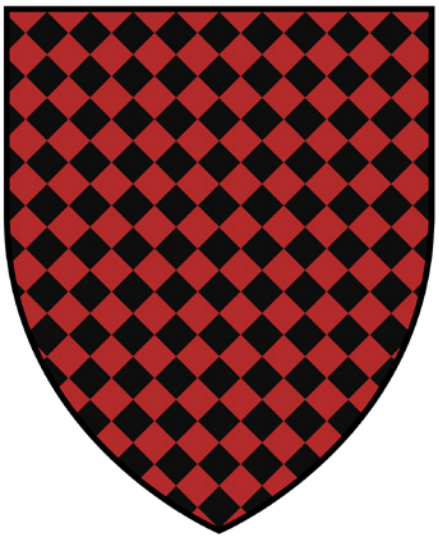
The Kingdom of Dalmaria

The Beautiful Homeland as the Dalmars call it. They are staunchly nationalistic and extremely proud of their culture and heritage. All the better I say, for whenever I have visited, they have always attempted to show how much better their hospitality is than other nations'.

Dalmaria, as with the other Delkan lands, have always been a divided nation. Originally a Neoist sultanate called Grebaz, Dalmaria always had a sizeable Progenitorist population. The Neoist ruling class had tried in vain over the centuries to suppress the heathen religion, but the Delkans frequently traded with the Caels and Shield Maidens. This frequent contact with both Progenitorists nations meant the faith would not die out. All this came to head when the ruling caste executed the Patriarch of Grebaz for refusing to pay the tax all heathens must pay to worship their false gods. The Dalmars, as the Progenitorists called themselves, revolted and quite rightly so. They threw Grabaz into a civil holy war that spread throughout the Delkans eight centuries before the famed Great Delkan Holy Wars.

The Dalmars did not get terribly far in their war, and for the next eight centuries were considered slaves in their own land. In 1495AGW, the Matriarch of the Dalmars snuck into Vortichaal to plead for aid only to be killed on the castle steps. The martyrdom of St. Morana sparked a fire in the hearts of the Shield Maidens and Caels. The century of the Great Delkan Holy Wars had begun. Grebaz was targeted first, and in a move that was reminiscent of the Great Purge, no Neoist structure taller than one metre was left standing. In 1499AGW, the Kingdom of Dalmaria was founded. The Great Delkan Holy Wars would rage for another century and the Dalmars would be sorely tested during these times, but the kingdom still remains.

There is no love lost between the Dalmars and Mekadians, and unfortunately I believe the scars will never heal. However, Dalmaria



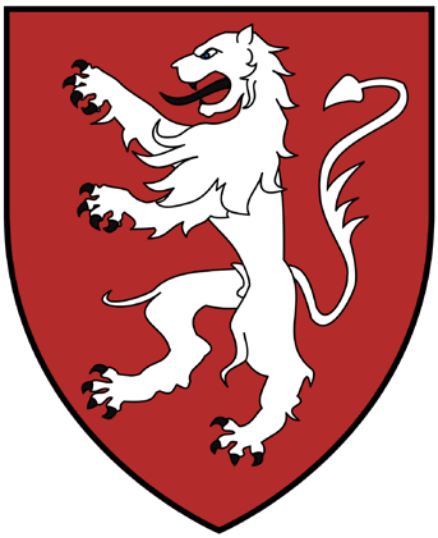
borders two Neoist nations and the Completist Gradabajoz, thus a good deal of its trading is done with its former enemies. I think it is this continued Neoist presence which has kept nationalism alive in Dalmaria, and in my opinion it has been for the best. The people are constantly seeking to outdo their neighbouring nations, and even neighbouring duchies and counties, in an effort to be seen as the best. This has led to many new innovations in Dalmaria that has spread even to our fair isle.

The Duchy of Dukshka

The heart of the Delkans, and in fact where the name Delkan come from. Surrounded on all sides by Delkan nations, one would think that Dukshka would also be the heart of Progenitorism. One would be wrong, as the opposite is actually true. Dukshka is home to the highest proportion of Delkan pagans and even its Progenitorism has been heavily influenced by pagan ideals.

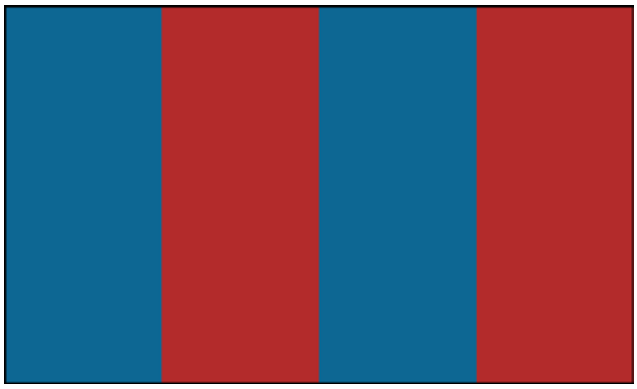
The Kingdom of Dukshka was short lived. Men who remembered the Sultanate of Dukshka was still alive to see the Duchy of Dukshka. Gaining its freedom from Neoists in 1515AGW Dukshka, much larger then than today, attempted to assert its independence and sovereignty by demonstrating its value in the ongoing Great Holy War. When the first Great Holy War ended eight years later, Dukshka's might was spent and it retreated to rebuild its nation. Estervar, however, fared far better during the war, surrendering nearly as soon as imperial forces crossed its borders. Now Progenitorist as well, Esztervar did not fear reproach from the allied forces if it would expand eastwards, and so it did. The war was short and bloody between the Delkan neighbours. In 1529AGW the Kingdom of Dukshka became a vassal of Esztervar as its easternmost duchy.

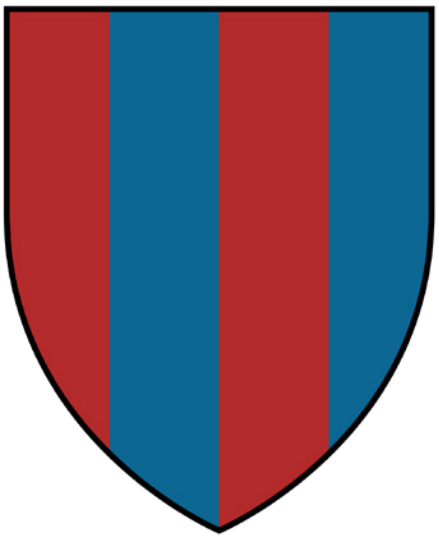
Dukshka's eventual independence from Esztervar was a peaceful, bloodless affair. The laws of inheritance among Esztervarian nobles is a strange, complex, and difficult political battleground. It is not enough to merely divide the possessions among the heirs, but each heir's rank in relation to each other is also stipulated. This does mean that a count can indeed be of a higher rank than a duke. When the king died in 1855AGW, the executor of his will discovered that his fourth born son, who inherited Dukshka was beholden to no one. This clerical oversight meant that, legally, Dukshka was independent. The new Duke Jadranko wasted no time in signing defence treaties with the other Delkan lands to prevent a reoccupation.



Very little differentiates the Dukshkans from the Esztervarians, mostly due to half the Dukshkans still living in Esztervar. What separates them is their paganism. A form of ancestor worship, the paganism has seeped into their Progenitorist church with the ritual of a "family saint". This declares that all people are descended from a saint. Why? Because we are all holy, so surely some ancestor must have been a saint. Thus every house has a shrine dedicated to their personal ancestral saint. You can see who is related to whom by seeing who prays to which saint.

The Kingdom of Esztervar





The westernmost of the easterners. Surrounded on all three sides by Mekadian states, Esztervar has been at the forefront of many Neoist aggressions. The Esztervarians have persevered through this by the shrewd political acumen of their rulers, who have often found ways to avoid war on Esztervarian soil.

Esztervar as we know it today arose through the first Great Delkan Holy War. Unlike its brother Delkan nations, no blood was shed to bring Esztervar into the fold. When the Heavenly Imperial Legions entered the war, it turned the tide dramatically to the Progenitorist side. Rather than facing a protracted war, King Gáspár instead entered into secret talks with the imperial commander. He agreed to publicly convert to Progenitorism if the Imperials would protect Esztervar. Weeks passed as imperial legions and Shield Knights were secretly brought to the western Esztervarian border. When King Gáspár converted, the Progenitorist troops were ready to protect the nation from Neoist backlash.

While Esztervar remained relatively safe during that war, the second Great Delkan Holy War was not so kind. It saw half of Esztervar's people slain by Neoists as the nation was the main target of the Holy War. The third Great Delkan Holy War was not any more merciful to Esztervar, but it would be the last. The then King Zsolt had to create a proclamation that Neoism was equal to Progenitorism in the state's eyes, and this seemed a tolerable result to all involved. Many have seen the Esztervarian kings as cowards who capitulate too easily, but they have saved more of their people through politics than through war.

The most cosmopolitan of the Delkans, Esztervar contains many different cultures as its borders has waxed and waned over the centuries. At its core are the Esztervarians, who comprise most of their nobility. Fair, kind and chivalrous to a fault. In the east are the Dukshkans, rustic and rowdy. To the south-west the Neoists have several near-autonomous emirates inside Esztervar and subscribe to the harsh, Allepiochian sect of Neoism. The northwest holds the plains of Esztervar where the famed Esztervarian horsemen still roam. They are noble and charismatic men who form the backbone of the Esztervarian military. The people have learnt to tolerate one another despite their differences, and so tolerate outsiders better than other nations in this conflict ridden area.

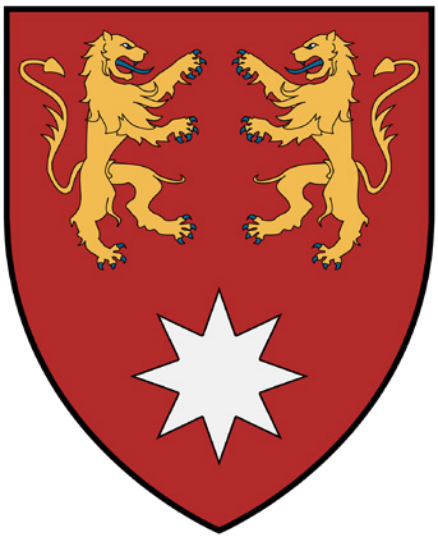
The Princedom of Mollachia

The half-Caels, or so the other Delkans call them. It is to be expected when the Cael lands are but a stone's throw away across the channel and Mollachia has even been invaded by the Caels. The Mollachians do not mind. They see their friendship with the Caels as a great advantage.

Mollachia has the honour of being the one Delkan nation to have never been part of any Neoist empire. By the time the Neoist empires reached the Mollachian tribes, they were already stretched so thin that the resistance of the Mollachian tribes proved too costly. Invasion from the east, however, proved more fruitful. When the Caels invaded Mollachia, they brought a codified Progenitorism that still lasts to this day. However, the Caels also started the turmoil in the Delkans. The Mollachians spread their Progenitorism to the other Delkans, which in turn led to the Neoists to finally take the Mollachian threat seriously.

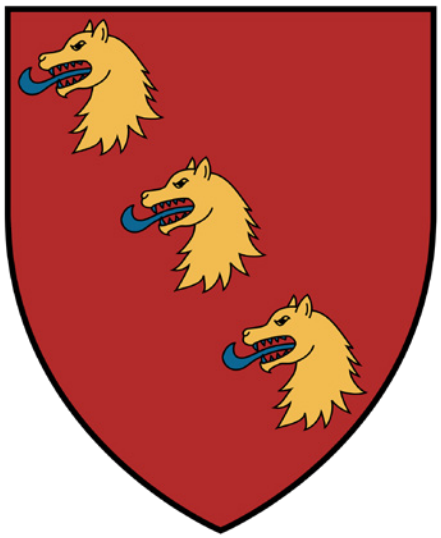
Life under Neoist rule was mercifully brief but at their peak, the Neoists took twenty thousand slaves per year from Mollachia and the surrounding Delkans. It was the Mollachians that petitioned the Caels to declare a holy war for the Delkans. When St. Morana was martyred in Vortichaal, the Caels could not resist the Mollachian pleas for aid any longer. Mollachia itself fared quite well during the first war as the might of the Caels waited at its door. The Mollachians, however, could not stand by and let their Delkan brothers fight alone. Much Mollachian blood was spent during the Great Holy Wars. By the end of it, however, the Mollachians were free from Neoist threat and have remained so until this very day.

The Mollachian culture has been heavily influenced by the Progenitorist church which emphasizes humility, love, and forgiveness in one's relationships. Mollachians are known for their hospitality and generosity. Guests are always fed, cups are never empty and every



house has a guest bed waiting and ready. The few Mollachian pagans who remain in their isolated communities, far from the cities, have a different reputation, however. They believe everything, alive or not, contains a spirit and thus no man can actually own anything. Everything they own are shared and can be taken and used at will. This has led to the reputation, deserved or not, that they are nothing but thieves.

The Kingdom of Turvana



The Sachral it was once called, "God's Rock". During the second Neoist Empire, Turvana was the rock against which the eastern and northern Progenitorists could break themselves on. This stubborn quality has become integral to the people, and has bled onto the very soil they walk on. You have a better chance of dissuading a charging bull than a Turvani.

The Sachral sultanate had the dubious honour of having never been a part of a Neoist Empire, yet having been the most important state in all the empires. During the second great Neoist Empire, the Shahanshah had a need of a powerful military presence in the northeast. He needed to keep the Delkans in line and, more importantly, keep out the Tolian and Caelish heathens. Thus the Sachral sultanate was formed, an independent viceroyalty under direct control of the Shahanshah. The rule of the Sachral fell to the military governor, who treated the sultanate as one giant military base. After the fall of the last Neoist empire, the Sachral continued, its governor becoming a king, but keeping sole command of the nation's military.

The Sachral was the last to fall during the first Great Delkan Holy War, a testament to its people's might. It was also the only nation recovered by the Neoists in the second Great Holy War. The Third War saw the Sachral do battle against nearly the entire east with little help from its Neoist allies. The war devastated much of the Delkans, but when the Sachral capitulated, it did so with honour. Now Progenitorist, the new Turvana has had little impact on the world at large, except for the brief Turvani Empire that gave the nation its current borders. Turvana still has a major influence over the Delkans as it is the most militaristically powerful nation.

The Turvani are a strong people. "Country, king and god" is an often heard motto showing what is most important to them, in order. Feudalism never gained traction in Turvana, the king always being the sole ruler of the Turvani, and this has made them highly nationalistic. They truly do believe that their nation and people are the best in the world. All men upon coming of age are summarily enlisted in the military, if only on paper, and although they do not need to serve continuously, they must be ready to fight for their country should they be called upon. This has led to a certain arrogance to outsiders as the Turvani men think themselves physically militarily superior to foreigners. They are the men, and the rest of us are mere boys.

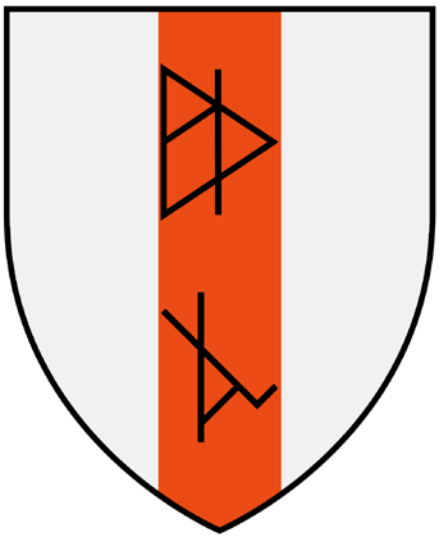
TOLIANS
TAURIMEA
NIGAEAN
KOTHICA
EDESAIJAN
KARDIGIA
ACHANIKE
ENI
CEPHIROS
THRACETOLIA
IKONICIA
130 KM

The Kingdom of Edesaijan

The oldest non-Neoist nation, Edesaijan is a land of firsts and oldests. The first Progenitorist church, the oldest city with a recorded founding date, and the oldest example of humans living on the entire continent, contrary to popular thought. The people too, are timeless. I suspect it is a life in the unchanging, frozen far north that lends everything a timeless quality.

Edesaijan's history begins in antiquity. Humans were already settled in the frozen forests and mountains long before the legendary first Great Migration. The name Edesaijan itself harks back to those prehistoric days. Its conversion to Progenitorism early on brought it into conflict with the Neoists that still rages to this day. Time and time again Edesaijan has had to fend off hordes of Neoists, and the occasional Uttosians. It won some, lost others, but it never stayed conquered for very long. The sparse populations of the Tolian lands have always banded together to defeat outsiders, most often led by the brave Edesaijani. This was cemented six centuries ago with the Frost Treaty that made the Tolian states a pseudo-confederation.

As much as the Edesaijani despise the Neoists, they are nearly as zealous as their monotheistic neighbours. Every citizen is required, by royal decree, to be Progenitorist and visit their local church regularly. Heathens and heretics are thrown into cages and strung from church towers for public humiliation. This strict social order is a common theme in Edesaijan. While we can all agree a woman's place is nowhere near any danger, the Edesaijani law states that certain work only men are allowed to do, while other work are only for women. Anything to do with money, for example is the women's domain: trading, banking, running the family home all fall to the women while the men do the hard labour. Surprisingly enough, when I was last there, the common folk did not seem to mind this awfully much. The winter's rage is more than enough of a worry for them.



The coldness of the north does not leave much for grand art, and the Edesaijani art consists mainly of folk music, colourful clothing and crafting. Reed wood music is the cultural favourite, with long slow melodies that can bring a tear to any man's eye. The variety of fabrics they produce will brighten up any woman's day. Their art epitomises the Edesaijani way of thinking: unconcerned with the rest of the world, as the community around them is far more important.

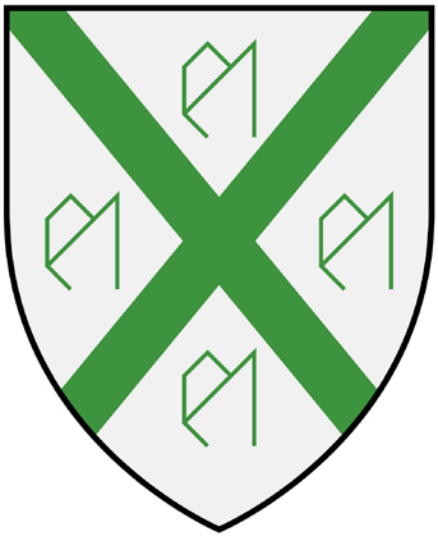
The Princedom of Kardigia

The hardened western Tolians. The arctic regions are a cruel place to live in at the best of times, but the Mekadians have only ever added to the Kardigians' hardships. For such a small, sparsely populated nation, Kardigia has had more of an impact on the world than most of its inhabitants knows.

During the first Great Migration, those that did not convert to Neoism were exiled and pushed ahead of the migration to fend for themselves. Thus the Kardigians came to the arctic with the other Tolians. Since that ancient time, the Kardigians have had to deal with wave after wave of Mekadian invasions. When the Neoists were not knocking on their door, the Kardigians were their own worst enemy. A stubborn people unwilling to submit to any ruler, the state of Kardigia had to be formed over and over again through the centuries as revolution after revolution would tear it down. At one time, the Kingdom of Kardigia encompassed modern day Taurimea and Turkania, while at other times the state of Kardigia did not exist at all, only the Kardigian Lands where the tribes ruled themselves. Only recently was the Princedom formed to attempt to modernise the nation.

Their greatest impact on the world came a millennium ago during the age of the Tolian Raids. While their eastern neighbours took to the sea, the Kardigians raided inland into the Neoist states. For a short while, it was the Tolians who invaded and conquered Mekadian territory. The Kardigian tribes left a trail of destruction behind them straight through Hlynerm to Allepioch. In their wake, petty kingdoms and chiefdoms were formed, spreading easterner and Tolian customs throughout the harsh lands. Today, the northern Neoists are more Tolian than they would ever dare admit to their southern cousins.

It must be said that the Kardigians are not xenophobic by any means. At worst they are apathetic about the warmer southern lands like their Tolian brothers. The Kardigians are merely



protective of what they have, being confronted with war every generation. Once past their social defences, they will treat you as a family member, sheltering you, protecting, feeding you as if they had always known you.

Kardigian art is a hodgepodge of Tolian and Neoist culture, expected from such a tribal people. Without a central authority for so long, each tribe's art evolved at its own pace and direction. A commonality between them all is the Kardigian vocal traditions. Their polyphonic choirs are a delight, with each tribe having its own unique melody. During the great feast days when the tribes gather, it seems as if the entire nation can sing at once, creating a melody and rhythm that makes me almost believe in the gods.

The Republic of Nigaean

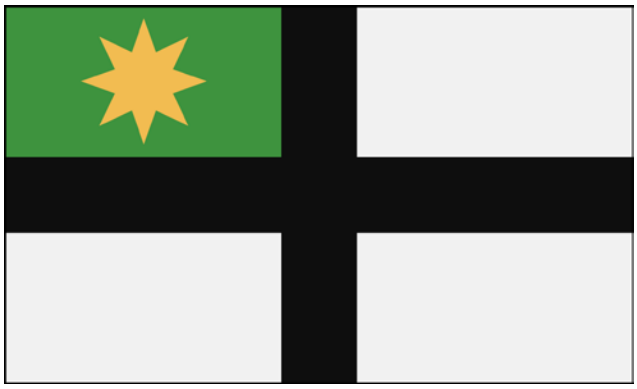
Warriors and thespians, raiders and philosophers, the Nigaeans are a marvellous bunch. From their place at the top of the world, the Nigaeans have a unique view of the world and an interesting take on life.

Nigaean truly began after the Great War, building its nation over the cities of the Cordyr, their ancient friends and neighbours. Before that, city states dotted the frozen land, and competition was rife. In the centuries after the War, the nation slowly solidified into a proud and strong force to be reckoned with. The Cordyr structures on their lands gave them a distinct advantage over their Tolian brethren. They had less to build, and what the Cordyr built, they built to last. With a strong, prebuilt infrastructure, Nigaean became a force to be reckoned with.

Nine centuries ago it was the Nigaeans who heralded the age of the Tolian Raids with its devastation of a monastery in Gaeland. The poor lands in the north meant that any wealth to be had was to be found in the warm southern lands. The culture the Nigaeans brought back home did more than the riches ever could. A new era of arts and culture began, but so did the downfall of Nigaean. In 1661AGW it lost Thracetolia to a revolution and in 1853AGW it lost most of the channel islands to Uttosia.

The people of Nigaean follow the strict social order of the Tolians. Men can be warriors, scholars, thespians, or take to the open ocean; while women are left to take care of the homes and cities. Women rule, while the men fight and perform. This division of work has allowed the Nigaeans' army to be nigh beyond compare while their theatre acts are played out across the continent. Their strict social order make for strange hospitality, with men and women each having their own tasks, but as the Nigaeans have told me, this strict order has taken much of the stress out their lives.

With the thespian life one of the few careers for men, Nigaean has a grand history in the theatre. Dramas, tragedies and comedies, Nigaean theatre is both passionate and philosophical, allowing an escape from the harsh cold of the north while allowing the writers to comment on current events and politics. All the greatest dramatists in history have been from Nigaean and they take pride in that small fact. The theatre of course is also used for song, and Nigaean opera, while not to everyone's taste, it is something to be experienced.



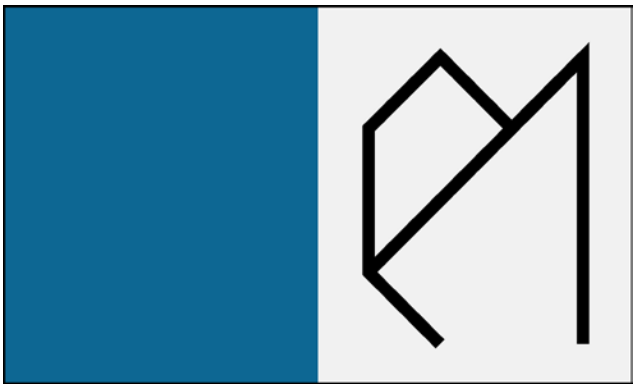
The Taurimean Federation

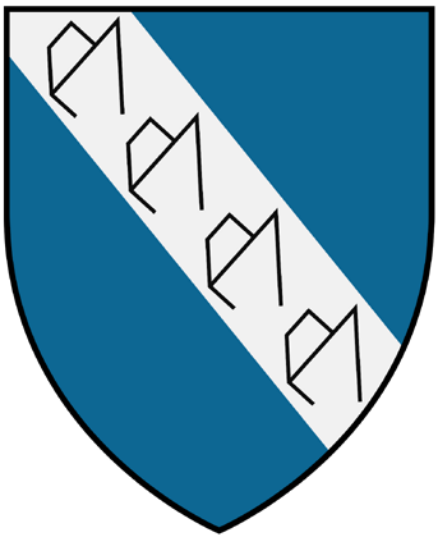
The Empty Federation it is sometimes called for a nation whose borders change every season. When winter arrives the arctic sea completely freezes over so that one can walk from Taurimea to the far end of Uttosia. The Taurimeans frequently do, moving entire houses on large caravans onto the open sea ice to live during the long winter, hunting seals and bears and whales. When summer rolls around and the ice retreats, they return to their homeland with their winter spoils.

The Taurimeans have always been tribal. In this day and age their tribes have formed a federation under the Tolian Frost Treaty, but over the centuries they have been the vassals of one king or another. Seven centuries ago it was the Kardigians who ruled over them peacefully and protected them from Mekadian assault. Five centuries ago it was the Uttosians who marched across the frozen arctic to create a foothold in Jytoh. Three centuries ago the Neoist Hlynerm took Taurimea as part of their Tolian conquest, bringing Tolian slaves back south. With no farming land and a small population, the conquering forces never spent much time nor interacted much with the Taurimeans, and for most of the tribes nothing truly changed.

The Taurimean tribes are nothing if not stoic. Their harsh lands demand nothing less. Apart from that? It is hard to nail down one description of a people so disparate. Like the Kardigians, each tribe's culture have evolved separately. The southerners are quite like Kardigians, the northerners Uttosian, the easterners Nigaean, the westerners Neoist.

If there would be one aspect central to all Taurimeans it would be trust. It is hard to imagine it from a people conquered so often but tis true. There are more people here in Middelburg than in the entire Taurimea. During the winter when the tribes move out to the open ice they are even more spread apart. Days, weeks, perhaps months can go by without ever laying





eyes on another human being. So when they finally do, it is with gladness and trust they greet each other. "Two together are stronger than two apart," the Taurimeans say. On the frozen ocean, it is in everyone's best interest to work together.

What art the Taurimeans craft is left on solid ground. They follow the other Tolians' traditions of song and theatre and music as their predominant form of art. On the ice there is no place for sculptures nor paintings nor grand architecture. They only bring along their songs and stories and epics and legends. However, their caravans are a thing to behold. It is not simply their mode of transport, but the way they express themselves to the world.

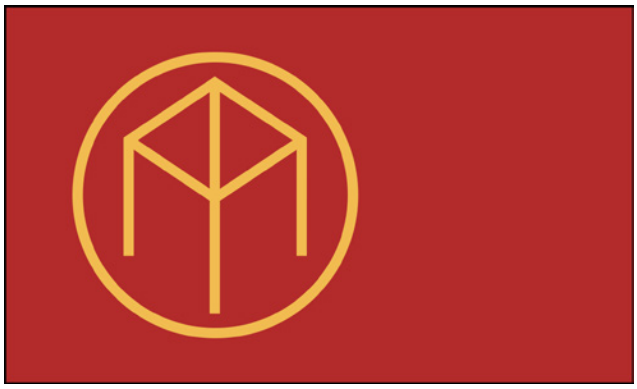
The Kingdom of Thracetolia

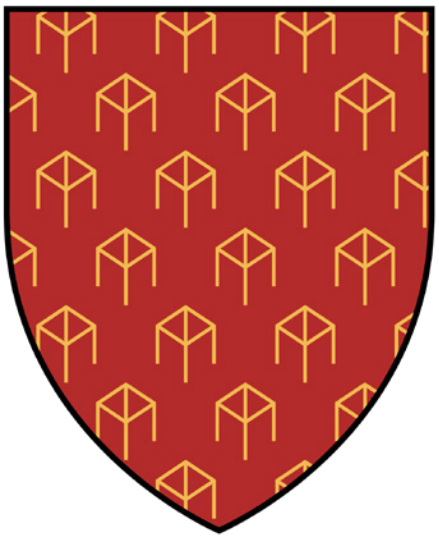
The Cordish Tolians they are often called and the Thracetolians take no umbrage at this. In fact they take a great deal of pride at being the nation with the most Cordyr structures outside Uttosia. As hardy as the other Tolians in their frigid north, the Thracetolians have withstood assaults by all of their neighbours and even had the temerity to pay them back in kind over the years.

The cold preserves the past well and it is easy to see how far back their history stretches. Their land was once owned by the Cordyr who gladly accepted their taller human cousins to live among them. Even more than the Nigaeans, the Thracetolians became subsumed into Cordish culture and art as some of their surviving monuments show. After the Great War, the Thracetolians, with their pre-made nation, was a powerhouse of the north, conquering southwards until they almost reached the Delkans. Their capital of Kertine became the centre of the northern peoples, creating trade routes to the western Neoists and eastern Uttosians.

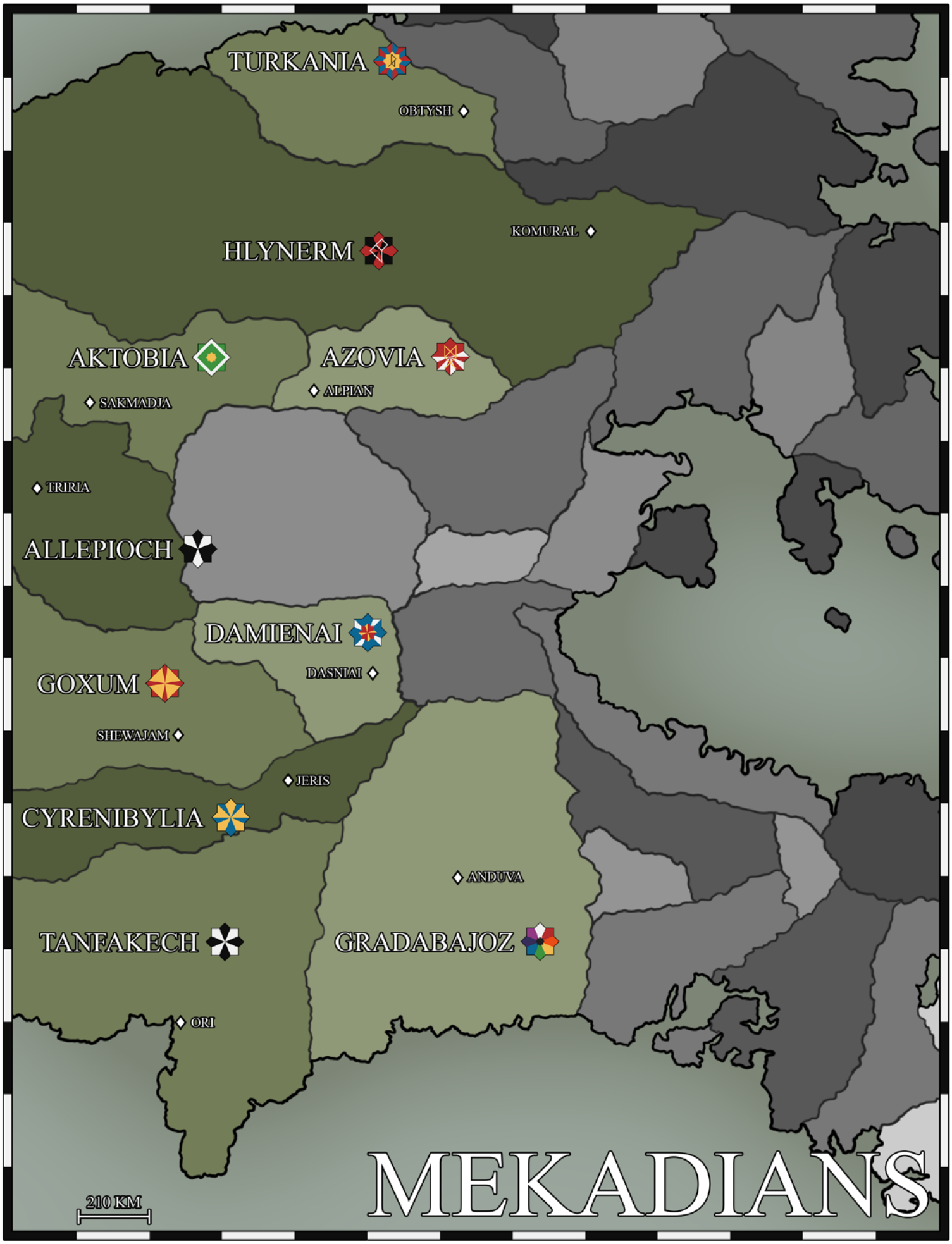
Their wealth would not last as they slowly lost territory to the Mekadians and Caels, until at last they were merely another poor Tolian nation. They joined their Tolian brothers in the raiding ages and returned home even hardier than they had left. A point of pride for them is that their homeland is still the only Tolian nation not to have been completely conquered by either Uttosian or Neoist.

Thracetolians are a more worldly people than their Tolian brethren. They border the Caelish lands and are the gateway to the north. Much like our small island, the trade that passes through Thracetolia brings with it new cultures and ideas that over time has changed the predominant Tolian culture into a more globally focussed one. Their men are unafraid and their women not shy. Their taverns and public houses take after the Caelish custom and you will always find a pint and a warm plate waiting.





Their art is a time-line of their history. Their oldest arts and architecture are Cordish. Their next artistic time period is early Neoist during the Great Migration period, succeeded by strong Tolian sculpture and recognisable architecture, only to be replaced by Caelish and Delkan from their raiding periods. After this time, the art blends to form a harmonic convergence of the varying cultures they have come into contact with.


TURKANIA
OBTYSH
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TRIRIA
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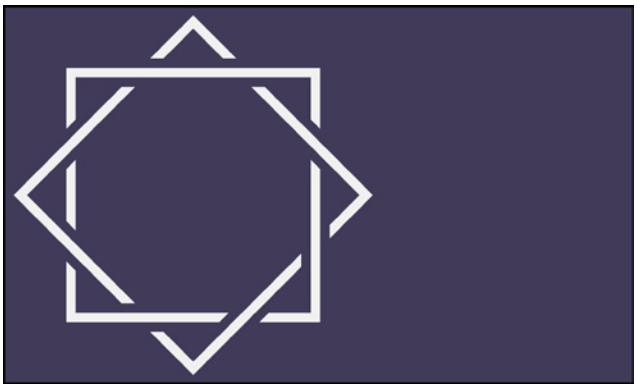
DASNIAI
GOXUM
SHEWAJAM
JERIS
CYRENIBYLIA
ANDUVA
TANFAKECH
GRADABAJOZ
ORI
210 KM
MEKADIANS

The High Kingdom of Gradabajoz

The dark reflection of the eastern empires. It took the best of east and west in the creation of its philosophies, yet it forgot to leave out the worst. It can be paradise or hell depending on what you do and say. They call it "socially liberal", but only if they enjoy what you have to say. A wrong step and you will find it as authoritarian as any Neoist state. If you travel there, avoid the cities, go to the towns and villages. There they are more humble, more accepting and will treat you with a kindness you will not soon forget.

Whatever you may think of the Completist faith and its philosophies, you cannot argue that Gradabajoz has had a huge impact on the world. It nearly broke the Shield Wall, it curbed the Neoist aggression, and set itself as a major land and naval power. And that was merely within its first century. It took the six Neoist and two Progenitorist kingdoms that were there and made them a single powerful nation. Today this success continues as its wealth increases. It is at the forefront of expansion into the new world. Its colony in the southern continent is easily the largest of all the Jytohan nations. This has cost Gradabajoz immensely as a plague that its ships brought back nearly devastated its peoples, its crops and farms. Nearly half a million have died in the past century while their physicians still seek after a cure.

Eight kingdoms, eight cultures, eight peoples brought together into one melting pot would ordinarily result in a maelstrom. Not in Gradabajoz. Their idiom of "all are accepted under the One" have meant that the various cultures live in reasonable harmony (the current plague predicament notwithstanding). Their social liberty allows all to live the way they please, as long as that way follows the scriptures of their prophets. Us easterners are fond to call them decadent and depraved with their liberal views on gender and sexuality, yet this freedom they enjoy has allowed them to thrive economically and politically.



Their art also follows this liberal view. Their architecture, cuisine, paintings, songs and sculptures push the boundaries of traditional thought into strange and often pleasing sights. Abstract and absurd has always been the fashion, although what is absurd by Gradabajoz standards, only they can say. Unfortunately, their philosophy has always been stymied by their scripture. Where our holy books in the east serve as a starting point for philosophy, theirs serve as an end point. Any philosophy or idea that does not follow the scriptures is heresy, punishable most harshly. Even the idea that someone may have contrary viewpoints can make them a pariah. This "thought crime" is a most curious thing to observe.

The Confederacy of Aktobian Emirates

Ah, the oft forgotten Neoists. Best to start with them first. No one else will, after all. Being surrounded on all sides by other Neoist states, the Aktobians have very little to do with us easterners. It is easy for us to overlook them in favour of their more powerful neighbours.

In the Aktobian language, Aktobia means "unwanted" and refers not to its people but to the land on which they live. The Ridgeback Mountains that divide Jytoh in two has a branch that stretches east and covers most of Aktobia. These rugged highlands were the unwanted lands that the Mekadians avoided during the First Great Migration. Until four centuries ago, the spine of mountains across Aktobia was merely the border between Allepioch and Hlynerm, with the nomads living in the unwanted highlands forgotten and uncared for.

In 1622 AGW the Neoist kaíns, the priests, of Allepioch decided that, once and for all, the pagan spirituality that has been allowed to thrive in the forgotten highlands must be exterminated. So with the approval of the Hlynermic priesthood they formed a new state in the highlands: The Aktobian Caliphate. The kaíns' arrogance would be their downfall as less than a century later, the ranking chiefs of the nomadic tribes nominally converted to Neoism, declaring the priests' mission over. The kaíns were overjoyed and left. The chiefs, now in command of their own nation admitted to their deception and told the Neoists exactly where they could stick their religion. The chiefs would not have their day, however, as a succession of holy wars began that only ended when the Aktobian chiefs allowed the priest caste to rule over them.

As can be expected, the Aktobians are an independent and stubborn people, preferring the outside world left them well enough alone. This has resulted in Aktobia being one of the least developed nations in Jytoh. However the people do not seem to mind. All they need in life is their family, their home and their nimble horses bred

for mountain life. Aktobia also houses the most pagans in any Neoist lands. The kaíns to this very day being unable to convert all the constantly moving tribes. Their paganism is a form of ancestor worship, not unlike our own veneration of the dead although the Aktobians believe their honoured dead can still affect the world.

A nomadic people never leave much time to create art and the Aktobians are much the same. They enjoy their songs and pass most of their history down through these melodies, and they enjoy a bit of a dance, but their art mostly comes in the forms of their fabrics. Cloaks, dresses, barding for their mounts, tapestries to hang on and in their caravans, the designs of the Aktobians truly are amazing. It is their main export and one can see Aktobians designs all throughout their neighbouring nations even stretching as far as the Delkans.

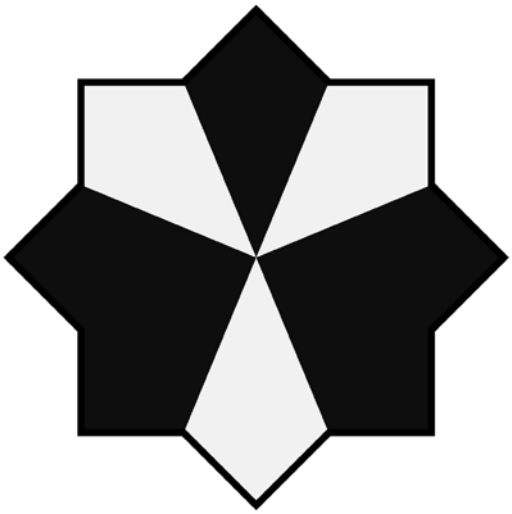
The Sultanate of Allepioch

A reserved people, the Allepiochians. Devoutly religious, considerably polite, and fiercely proud. Allepioch is one of only two nations east of the Ridgebacks that have existed, in some form, since the Great Migration crossed the mountains. Their long and secured history has not led to a united people, however.

Allepioch started as the first outpost of the first great Neoist empire when it consisted only of Tanfakech. The first Sultan gave to his brother the duty of defending and expanding the imperial border, and this brother based his ancient fortress at an iron mine. This iron mine is the root of the word Allepioch. As the empire expanded and aged, the capital frequently moved between Tanfakech and Allepioch, and its influence in art and architecture can be seen across Neoist lands.

When the various Neoist empires fell, Allepioch continued on stubbornly, refusing to allow time to dictate its fate. A warlike nation, it has frequently attempted to reform the empire and subject its neighbouring states to its whims. Its success has been, let us say, considerably varied. At times, its people have lived privileged lives due to its successes, at others they have suffered greatly. Yet Allepioch and its sultans, titled The Lion of the West, has never been one to sit out a fight. Wherever a war has raged, be it between Neoists, or in the great Delkan Holy Wars, Allepiochian soldiers have gone to fight to earn glory and riches for their nation.

Discipline, self reliance, respect for family and elders, and the glory of god. These are instilled into the Allepiochians from before they can walk along with a fighting spirit as fierce as the Gitic hordes of old. From their womb to their tomb, the men toil, fight and die for their god. The Allepiochian sect of Neoism is a particularly strict form that empathises suffering and sorrow as expressions of worship. The Sultans have always been supportive of this sect, as the people work ever harder for it.



Allepiochian Neoism forbids any depiction of any of god's creations, be it animals, plants, Inhumans or humans. As such, their art has consisted of geometric designs centering around the concept of the eight pointed star and the circle as a representation of the infinite nature of god. Their songs and dances too are dedicated to god as hymns and processions. Where secular art exists, it does so in their hand crafted jewellery and love of mosaics.

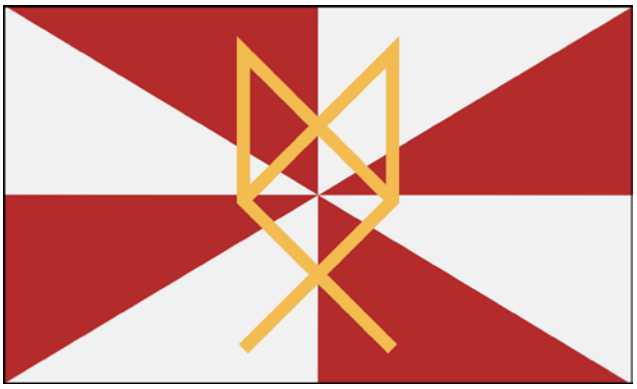
The Kingdom of Azovia

The so called newcomers to eastern Jytoh that caused such an upset in the Mekadian states that, centuries later, they still are not fully trusted by their so called friends. They are an interesting people with a different perspective that has survived centuries of Neoist attempts to curtail it.

A century before the Great Delkan Holy wars in the fifteenth century, a new wave of migrants had come over the Ridgebacks. While trade was done across it to the desert nations in the west, a migration of this size had not been seen in millennia. It would be have been the fourth Great Migration had Tanfakech not stopped its southern ingress, forcing the few that survived to cross north through Hlynerm. They then attempted to move south but were stopped by Neoists, and the eastern route was blocked by Progenitorists. So the Azovs settled between the whole lot and have acted as a buffer state between all the religions ever since.

With the hell that the Delkan Holy Wars brought, it was inevitable that the Azovs would be dragged into it. They were used by both sides against each other as fodder while promising riches that were never delivered. After all this, Azovia was nearly decimated. Near the end of the war, the Azovs agreed to the Neoist terms and surrendered completely, hoping to spare themselves the horror of further war. Unfortunately for them, the Delkans became Progenitorist, and once again they became the buffer to absorb any blow from the easterners.

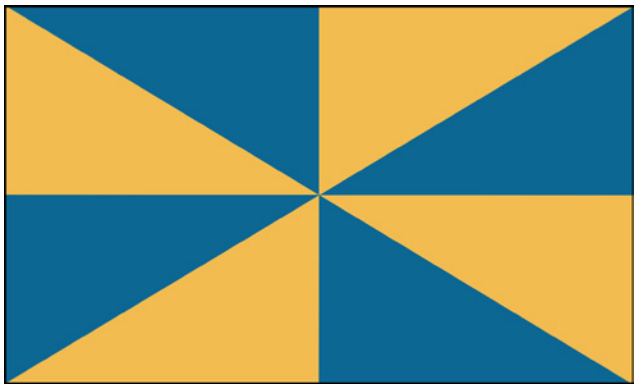
Azovia is a divided nation, standing on the brink of collapse. A third of its people, including its king, are staunch, nearly fanatical Neoists of the Allepiochian sect. They are more than eager to fight, kill or enslave their heathen brothers whenever they see fit. Another third are devout Progenitorists, seeing no sin in killing a Neoist. The other third are the pagans following the old ways, wishing to be left well enough alone. With its people pulling in three separate directions, civil war is never far away. It may not



be long before the different parts of Azovia are subsumed into its neighbours, Neoist to Neoists, Progenitorist to Progenitorists.

It will be a frightful shame once this happens. For all their time east of the Ridgebacks, the Azovs are a people apart, retaining parts of the culture that once crossed the Ridgebacks so long ago. From the clothing they wear, to the furniture they sit on, to the colours they bake into their crockery, you can see the great western desert in these people. What Neoism and Progenitorism have attempted to take away, the people still hold dear.

The Protected State of Cyrenibylia



Quite the mixed people, the Cyrenis. The four great states that border their thin strip of a nation have influenced the Cyrenis more than they themselves have. For a Cyreni, it is quicker to cross a bordering nation than to walk from one end of Cyrenibylia to the other. Being closer to your neighbours than your brothers makes it hard to talk about what a Cyreni could be.

The Cyrenis were the original inhabitants of Cyrenia, the now defunct kingdom that has become part of Gradabajoz. For all their talk of tolerance, the Completists effectively wiped out all who would not submit. The Cyrenis saw the approaching darkness and fled to the west, where they did indeed find shelter in the lands of Goxum, Damienai and Tanfakech. However, an entire kingdom's populace suddenly placed onto their doorstep made life difficult, to say the least, for the three host nations.

Poverty, lawlessness, paganism, all of these sprung up in the refugee areas, and the host nations responded in the only way they knew how. They pushed these poor people to the fringes of society in order to keep the peace. This continued until all the Cyrenis were corralled against the borders between the three nations. This resulted in a time of riots and revolutions. The Cyrenis had had enough of their lot in life. With the Completists still troubling their borders, the host nations gave in to the terrorists' demands and granted them their own nation. The Cyrenis were "gifted" the thin strip of land they now occupy, but they would not govern it alone. The tetrarchy was formed, one ruler from each of the host nations and a Cyreni ruler would lead the Cyrenis under the joint protection of the host nations.

Cyrenia is a distant memory. The Cyrenis left it with little more than the clothes they wore and the Completists destroyed what they left behind. The Cyreni culture had to be reborn in their new lands and thus took on the cultures of their hosts. Since the formation of the Protected State there has been some effort to unify the culture, but this has been a slow process with little success. The Cyrenis are now called by where they came from: Tanfa-Cyrenis, Gox-Cyrenis and Dami-Cyrenis. The culture and the art of the Cyrenis has also been split between these three groups. A unique feature of the Cyreni culture is their propensity for the written word. The libraries that have already been raised in Cyrenibylia has already surpassed those in its neighbours in both size and breadth of knowledge.

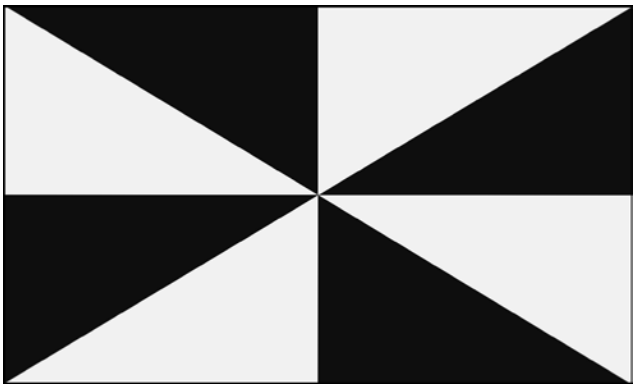
The Sultanate of Tanfakech

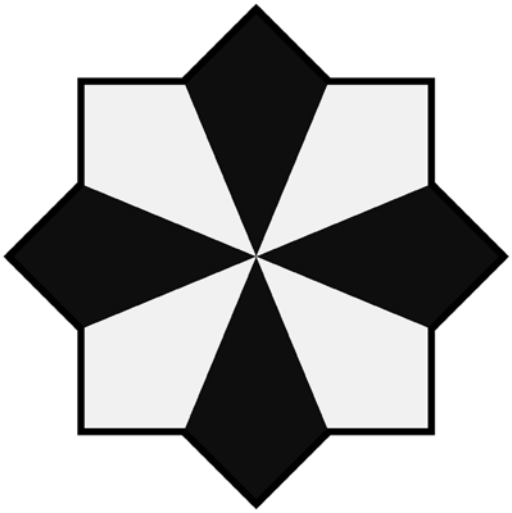
The great founder of empires. Tanfakech has been the centre of three great Neoist empires and alone have shaped more of the western lands than any other Mekadian state. The Tanfas are a proud people and not willing to let others forget the impact they had on the world. Even today, the policies in Tanfakech has lasting impacts across the globe.

Tanfakech grew around the city of Ori, the first city built east of the Ridgebacks according to Tanfa records. The city was built around a temple that worshipped god in his aspect as the Rain Giver. It was a curious appellation and one that will come back to haunt Tanfakech later. Tanfakech quickly grew into the first Neoist Empire, stretching from the modern day Shield Wall to the Ridgebacks and to the arctic. It was the largest empire to ever exist at the time, and for centuries this lasted until the Great War ripped it asunder.

Tanfakech rebuilt its Neoist Empire, but it did not last long. The Tanfa sect of Neoism was almost entirely pagan in its worship and rituals, and it drove a wedge through Tanfakech. Eventually the entire sultanate seceded from its own empire and started a second empire, the Tanfa Empire. The west was not big enough for two empires and, before the Completists ever arrived, both collapsed. Tanfakech still maintained its political hegemony however. It has had input in nearly every western political event. Its brand of Neoism has led it into conflict with other Neoists states, but the common enemy of the east has always proved a great uniter. Tanfakech holds a special place of hatred for the Prodigalists south of us on the western shore as Tanfa ships regularly target small villages to obtain slaves.

The Tanfas think of themselves as the perfect people. They are not at all like the white heathens to the east and the black barbarians from the southern continent. The Tanfas are the eldest and therefore the wisest of all the peoples of Jytoh and, of course, they know best. Condescending to the outside they may be, but to each other they are quite warm and kind.





The family is the central unit of Tanfa life and all work together for the betterment of the family. The Sultan has declared the entire nation his family to foster better relationships among his people. The Tanfa sect of Neoism, the predominant one in the nation, is more liberal than its northern variations. This is due to both its worship of god in several forms as well as its metropolitan coastal cities where merchants and slaves alike come and go. This makes the Tanfas a more worldly people than the other Mekadians, open to more ideas.

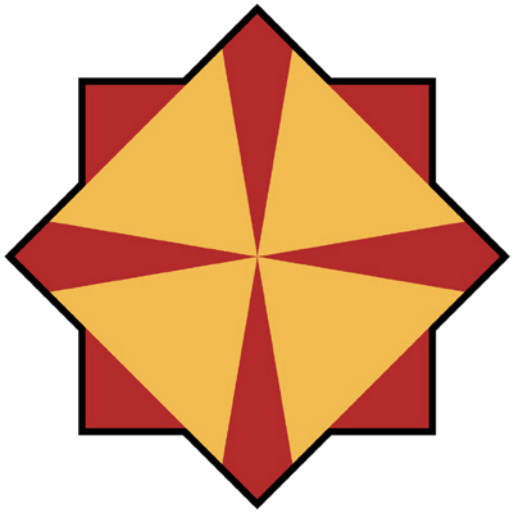
The Sultanate of Goxum

The stalwart Gox. The annals of history show them to have been the first Progenitorist nation, although the kaíns would have us forget that part of their history. An enduring and prosperous nation, Goxum has always been surrounded by other Neoist states and so have been protected from the horrors of holy wars. This compartive peace has led them to advance in ways their neighbours could not.

Historians speak of the Kingdom of G'xt, however that may be pronounced, the first Progenitorist kingdom, situated where eastern Goxum and Damienai are today. The religion they, perhaps, founded would be squashed almost immediately, but surviving priests would venture east and mingle their religion with the pagans they found. Again, later the Emirate of the Sun would arise, proclaiming the sun itself to be god, spreading Solism as far as it went; only to be destroyed. Goxum has a history of failed religions, visionaries are born there everyday it is said.

Goxum would later settle on Neoism, but like the other Neoist states, it would evolve into its own sect. The prophet Goxau was born, lived and died without anyone knowing of him, but after his death they found his journals which started a religion. Goxic Neoism has transformed Goxum, and also gave it its name. This was one religion the Neoists could not stamp out because it gave them something they needed, inventions. So they left Goxum alone, protecting it from heathen easterners in an unspoken agreement that it would pay off that debt.

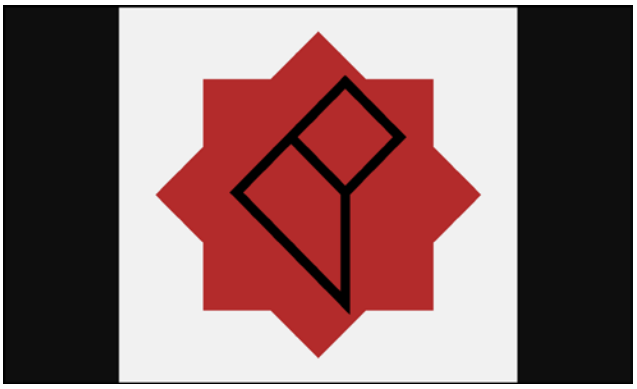
Goxic Neoism, or Goxism, views the world as an eternal battleground between creation and destruction, taking its entire philosophy from one sentence in the Neoist scriptures. The holy are those that create, the evil are those that destroy. As such, the culture of Goxum has taken a route towards inventions, discovery, arts, sculpture, anything a man can create. Its cities are beauties to behold, but utterly defenceless



due to the unspoken defence treaties, and also because pacifism is a tenet of Goxism. We frequently speak of the cruelty of Neoists, but that is because we have not seen the beauty of Goxism.

Goxism is different from both the conservative northern sect of Neoism and the liberal southern sect. Nothing is off limits to an artist, after all, creation knows no bounds. As such, you will find art of a variety and breadth to rival Prodigalist cathedral windows.

Great Hlynerm



The great thoroughfare of the north. To cross the Ridgeback mountains safely, one can travel along only two passes: the southern pass in Tanfakech and the northern in Hlynerm. Tanfakech has jealously guarded its gate over the millennia and even attempted, in futility, to expand eastward. Hlynerm has never contemplated sealing its pass and have allowed the far westerners into eastern Jytoh.

The name Hlynerm comes from the old northern Hlynermian dialect and means merchant. This speaks of the trade that was done between the northwestern Hlynermians and the wanderers from across the Ridgebacks. At the pass, a village called Yagonerm sprang up to facilitate the traders, which later became the city of Hlynerm, home to the old Kingdom of Hlynerm. Confined to the northwestern area of modern Great Hlynerm, it had little to do with the petty kingdoms, principalities and chiefdoms that changed with each generation.

The Great Delkan Holy Wars changed that. When the secluded Hlynerm sent forth its Neoist armies to do battle with the Progenitorists, it nearly bankrupted the kingdom. War is a costly business, and to make up for it the Hlynermian armies conquered their way back to Hlynerm. They ordered every village, city and kingdom to bend the knee and pay tax to the far away king. Thirty years of war it took to consolidate Great Hlynerm and the Great King, as he now called himself, moved his capital to the east, to better keep an eye on his new subjects. The only significant loss of land the powerful nation has had since then has been the independence of the Free Marches. The iron fist with which the Great King rules is an effective one.

For all the love lost between Great Hlynerm and the Free Marches, they share one important aspect: their people are more mixed than most mongrels. The people of Great Hlynerm have come from all across northern Jytoh. The Tolian raids eastward conquered vast swathes of Hlynerm as did Caelish migrations west. The constant influx through the Northern Ridgeback pass, like the great Azovian migration, constantly brings in new people, new ideas, new philosophies, and new cultures. There is no single Hlynermian culture, and unlike the southern empires, there is not even an imperial culture to form a backbone. Great Hlynerm is, for the most part, an empty place with towns and cities scattered far and wide. Travel from one city to another and you may well have learn a new language, dress differently, and eat strange food.

The only constant in Great Hlynerm is the Great King, and the veneration to their leader is the where the people find their common ground.

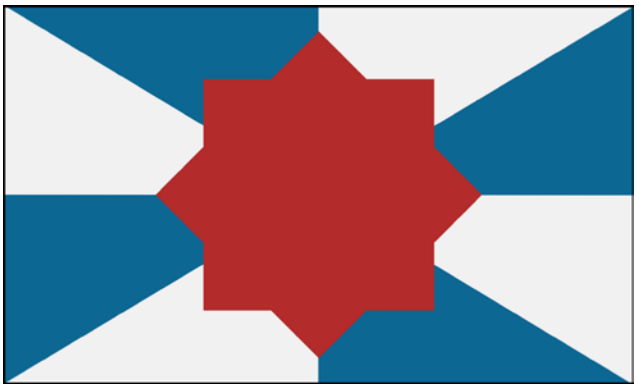
The Emirate of Damienai

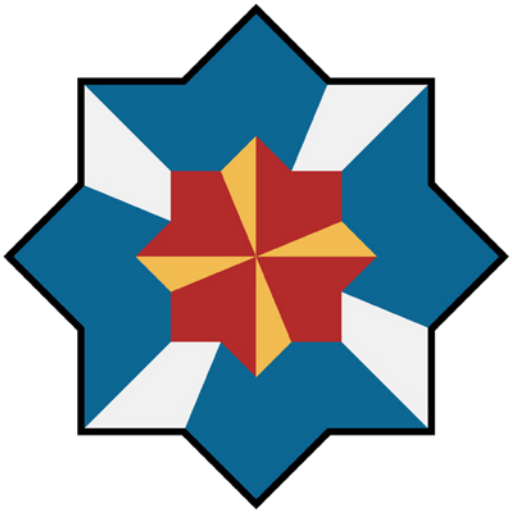
The eastern kings. The shield of god. The gateway to the west. The rock upon which many heathen forces has been smashed. Damienai has been called many things, but one of them is as timeless as it is true. It has always been a land of conflict and contrast. As the easternmost Mekadian nation, Damienai has both been a centre of trade where west and east met, and a centre of conflict where the two did battle.

Beginning its long life as Damietania, a simple province in the heartland of the great Neoist Empire, the people of Damienai were quite safe. They were surrounded on all sides by Neoist states, as at that time the Delkans were still staunchly Neoist. The Great Delkan Holy Wars were a rude awakening for Damienai. Suddenly, they now found themselves bordered by the great fortresses of the Progenitorist Shield Knights. Before this, any war that reached Damienai's borders were caused by the squabbles of Neoist kaíns, princes and emirs. They simply were not prepared for this.

Since the age of the Great Holy Wars, Damienai has in many ways become a more insular nation. When it was deep in the Neoist heartlands it could afford to philosophise about the world beyond its borders, and send out envoys and merchants. But now, with Progenitorists to its east and north, it is often on a war footing as every few decades battles and skirmishes erupt. This is not helped with the Shield Knight's fortresses and patrols along its borders. Even most of the trade Damienai does with non-Neoists is done through its northern and eastern border. It is as if Damienai has been consumed with the Delkan lands now. It is my belief this obsession has been urged on by the other western Nations who seeks to use it as a buffer.

The people of Damienai are, unsurprisingly, a practical and militaristic folk. Men are required to serve a term in the military when they come of age, and are always placed in reserve from





then. They must be ready to be called to war at a moment's notice. Each man must have a full complement of military gear and weapons in his home, should the enemy invade. This practicality extends even to their art, of which there are none that do not serve a function. All paintings are murals against walls, not a hanging portrait to be seen. Sculptures are only reliefs against facades, songs are marches, dances are martial arts. If it does not serve a function in Damienai then it is not wanted. This philosophy is, perhaps, not always of the best mind. The Damienai take a dim view of the disabled, the lame, the mentally deficient, the exceedingly elderly and the very sick. For obvious reasons, you will unfortunately never see many of those in Damienai.

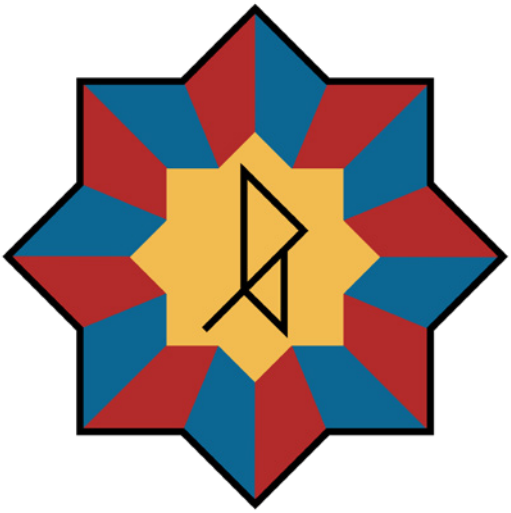
The Emirate of Tuskania

The Neoist Tolians. The proximity between the Tolians and Mekadians meant it was inevitable that the philosophies of the larger Neoist nations would bleed over unto Tolian soil. The invasions and conquests of Neoist lands made this an utter certainty.

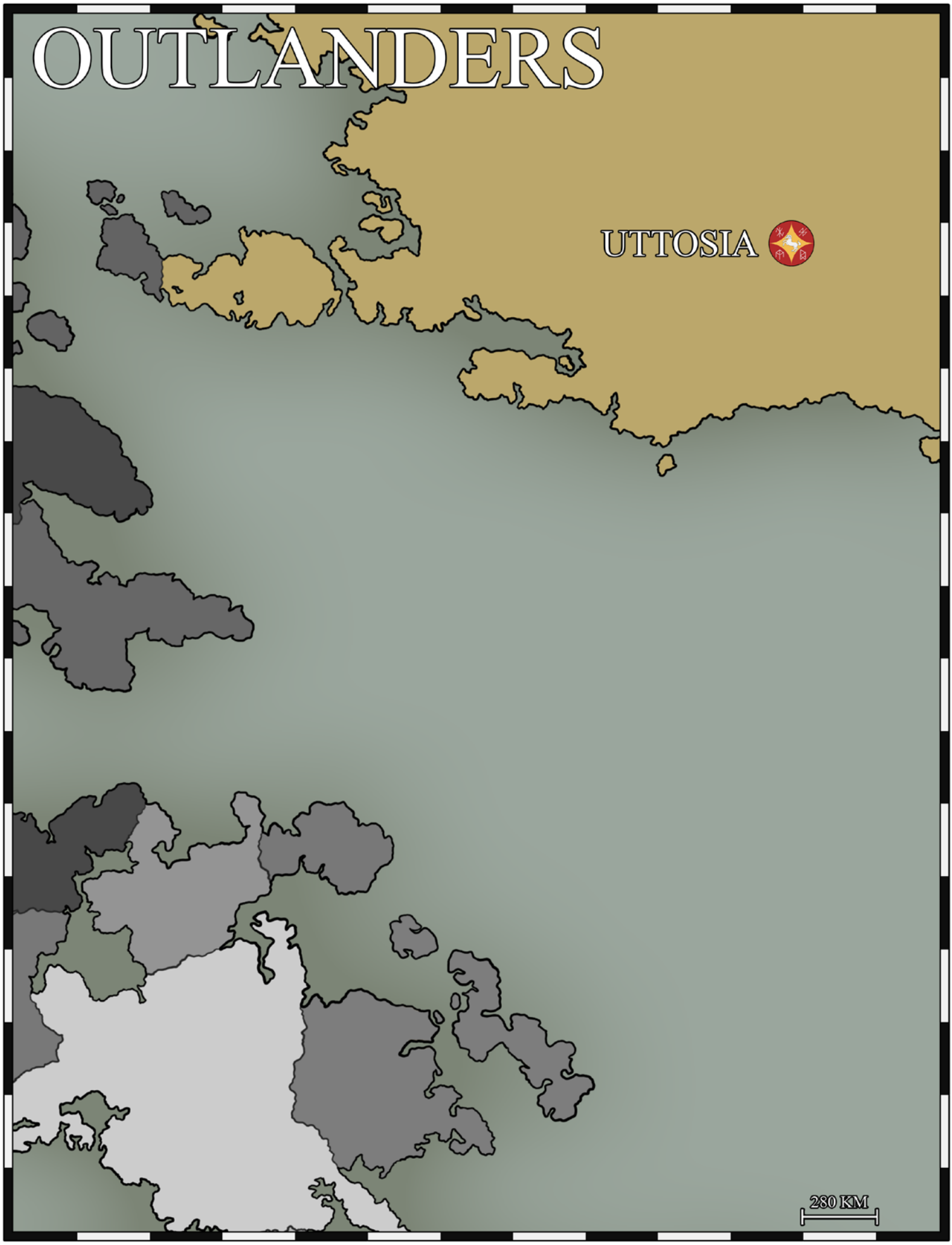
Tuskania was once known only as the Tolians' Roost, as the Tolians used this land as a staging ground for their invasions southwest. As their conquests and kingdoms moved further inland, the Tolians' Roost became the merchants' road through which all the stolen riches were funnelled back in Tolian lands. After the age of the Tolian raids finished, the Tolian kingdoms taken from the Neoists became isolated and insular. Eventually, the Roost dried up. With little riches trickling in from abroad, the Tuskans had to fend for themselves. A long period of instability ensued, with kings and kingdoms rising and falling nearly before history could take note of them.

This all ended along with the Great Delkan Holy Wars. As Hlynermian forces conquered all that stood in their way, so they also decided to take petty vengeance upon the Tolians that conquered them centuries earlier. The Tolians' Roost was nearly destroyed, only to be rebuilt as Tuskania. It became the northern outpost of the Hlynermian armies, to keep a weather eye on the eastern Tolians. Following on the heels of the armies came the missionaries, and the kaíns were very efficient in their work. Less than a generation later the entire populace prayed to the Neoist god, at least in public. As with everything else, the Tolians took to their new masters and religions with a stoicism that is the hallmark of their race. Centuries later their patience was rewarded with independence, although too long a time was spent under western and Neoist rule to ever truly be Tolian again.

The Tuskans combine the stoicism and philosophy of the north with the strictness and respect of the west to form a people with



which I could find little fault. Hospitable, polite, respectful, noble, the Tuskans treat each day as though they were at a king's court. To call them "nice" is as much of an understatement as to call the northern auroras "pretty". I have been told, however, that the Tuskans speak in layers that are hard for a foreigner to distinguish. A Tuskan could be insulting you for an hour and you would think he was singing your praises.


OUTLANDERS
UTTOSIA
280 KM

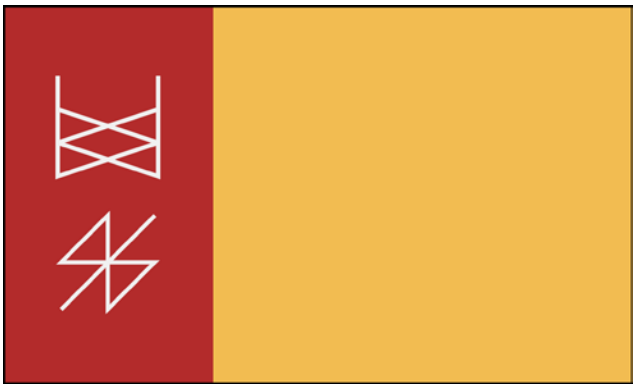
The Great Uttosian Khaganate

An empire of empires, or rather a khaganate of khanates, although even this is slowly changing. The eastern continent peoples are a strange bunch, even by our standards, but we are all human after all and one can easily see the similarities between their cultures and politics to ours.

The history of Uttosia is as convoluted as its politics. It is not one empire, but a conglomerate of empires. At its height there were six empires, but this has now fallen to three. It seems the world is becoming tired of empires. The word Uttosia is a strange word with many meanings, at once it is the name of the city which forms the nexus of all the empires, but it is also the word for their empire conglomerate, their continent and indeed the entire world. So when one talks of the history of Uttosia, context matters.

Their history started with an uprising by the northern horselords over the southern kingdoms which saw the entire northern steppes free of southern reign. The southerners thought little of this as the steppes are endless grasslands with no resources. Centuries later the first Khagan, Metu lead hundreds of thousands of cavalry into the south to stake his claim. Khagan Metu created an empire that spanned nearly the entire continent, which promptly dissolved upon his death as each of his six sons took a piece of it as his own empire.

Through the long centuries, the empires slowly crumbled until only three northern empires remained. The steppes still belong to the horselords. And at the heart of the three empires lies the city of Uttosia, a third of the city each belonging to each empire. At the heart of the city lies the Khagan's glory. Built by Metu's sons in his honour, this granite pillar has no end, its bottom hundreds of metres are carved and painted with images of horses and their rider. It is also the centre of the Spice Road, the thoroughfare that bisects the continent. A road leading from the arctic all the way to the southern tip of the continent.



The horsemen of Uttosia are at once a loving and warlike people. The steppes are an empty place, free from hills and trees, letting one see from horizon to horizon. This means that there are precious few permanent cities, leaving the Uttosians to follow their horses across the landscape. Constant travelling makes one far more kind to those he meets as he may very well meet them again, but it also means frequent contact with rival factions. Should you travel there, you will be welcome at the first hearth you meet, but perhaps not the second.

Unsurprisingly the Uttosians art favours music and the nomadic peoples still record their histories in song. Paintings and sculpture are predominantly about their horses and caravans with few human portraits, and their cuisine similarly consists mostly of horsemeat.

The Dark Heart of Umdunia

Umdunia was supposed to be the next great frontier of our voyage across the seas. When the continent was discovered at the other end of the Southern Ocean, every nation in southern Jytoh's eyes lit up. The Mekadians, the western Valtorians, the Bythikans, even us Fresians could only think of new lands to conquer, resources to exploit, and colonies to found. The Caels and Tolians could fight the Uttosians for the east, we would have the south.

That was until we found the Umdunians and waged a war still raging over a hundred years later.

There are more nations in Umdunia than our continent, and the name comes from a friendly nomadic tribe's word for the planet. Since everyone else there wants to kill us, we stuck to Umdunia.

It is hard to describe all the cultures of that dark land, but just as there is a pervasive feature amongst our many cultures (that of curiosity and exploitation) the feature of the Umdunians is that of inversion. When we brought the Invert rune from Umdunia, we did what we always do with runes: we exploited it for all its uses. The Umdunians, on the other hand, have embedded this idea of the rune into their various cultures to such a degree that many believe war was inevitable.

As they use the Invert rune in nearly all their arrays, their ideas of life and world are the inverse of ours. To them peace is a struggle and war the natural order of things; life is a dream, and death the great awakening; diplomacy is deception and our exploitation of the natural world is seen as a sin. It is no wonder that all negotiations broke down when the colonists arrived, and that the dark tales of the heart of Umdunia has such potency among the fireplace.

The Mekadians gloat that they have turned this inversion to profit, as they say this inverted view of life makes the Umdunians good slaves. The runaway slaves that make their way to our

city every so often tells a different story, but there is a kernel of truth in there. The Mekadians and Bythikans never to my knowledge have ever actually enslaved an Umdunian. Instead, they've been purchasing their slaves from the same Umdunians they are at war with.

No one knows why you would sell slaves to your enemies, but we do know the Umdunians treat time as currency, and thus a man's time can be bought or sold or used to purchase other goods. Even our runaway Umdunians would much rather buy goods with their labour and time than with guilders or pennies. We would much rather save our time and spend our money, or in my case, save both, but again it all speaks to a mindset that is as alien to us, as ours is to the Umdunians.

Whether we shall ever reach a compromise remains to be seen in the scramble for the dark continent.

The Thousand Islands of Rehiyon

A thousand isles, millions of souls, hundreds of nations, tens of thousands of tribes. The archipelago continent is called a thousand different names by its islanders, but our fair nation has only had contact with one tribe, the Igocano, and so Rehiyon is the only name we know. The seven Igocano who came here sixty years ago left us with many a fancy tale of their homeland, and in their absence it has been difficult to parse truth from myth, but that hasn't stopped many adventurous ships to set sail for the far side of the world.

As the Igocano tell it, the gods saw the beauty of Rehiyon and grew jealous of the paradise below them and of the glorious cities and states the people made. So they took the land, brought it up to the heavens and smashed it against the world below, breaking it apart like a plate fallen on the floor. One land became many, and the people who were once united were isolated on their own islands, left to become strangers rivals. The Igocano myths make no mention of the Great War or Inhumans, but scholars here suggest that the united empire with its glorious cities in their myths are in fact the half-submerged remnants of the Froskdyr cities. To see a culture unimpaired by the Inhuman legacy is at once both charming and envy-inducing.

The few isles the Igocano inhabit are the cornerstones on which their culture is built. They are little more than jungle covered mountains rising up from the sea, providing little in the way of arable land. The people are thus hunters and fishers, and this has made them a hardy and fierce people. But they are not the only predators on their islands, and the beasts of which they speak hunt them as much as the Igocano hunt the beasts. Stealth and cunning make for ferocious warriors, and their headhunters are feared across the thousand islands, or at least that is what they say.

Aside from war, the Igocano live a communal, tribal life. Their art is primitive by

our standards, and the loincloths and cloaks that they dress in speak both of the climate and their attitudes to nudity.

Their faith makes them truly unique, however. Never before, or since, have I seen such a superstitious people. Everything is an omen, anything can be a curse, and everywhere there are spirits, and woe betide the man who might accidentally anger one. This extends even to their use of the runes. Only their oracles and soothsayers are allowed to work on the runes, leading to a runic-illiterate population living a savage life, with a highly skilled upper-class of runewrights equal to any Runist monk.

The Igocano have not made another official visit to our isle, yet rumours persist of their people working as footmen in Middelburg for the League, putting their jungle tracking skills to more profitable use.

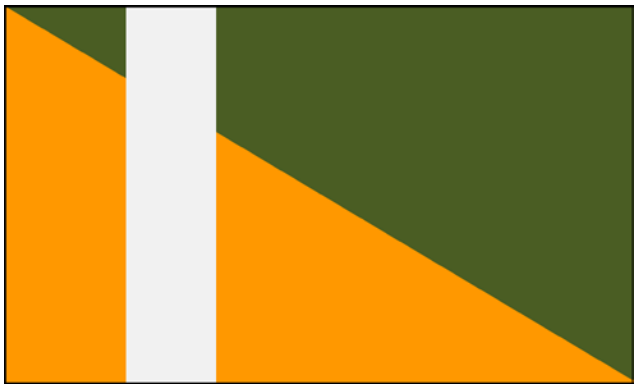
The Rajas of Dharati

The Uttosia of Mekadia would be the most concise way of putting it. We on the east coast deal fairly regularly with the Uttosian merchant fleets, yet the Mekadians see precious little of them. Instead, the westerners deal with the merchants of Dharati, the lands on the opposite side of the great Wastelands that cut our continent in half. The Mekadians, and then the Nevincians after them, made sure that the Dharati never made it further east, in order to hoard the profits of the western spice trade. Only in the last few years have the Dharati merchant fleets made it around the Bythikan peninsula to our shores, and that was only due to the League setting up an office in their far-flung lands.

What I know about Dharati wouldn't help you much, lad. Their half of the continent is as diverse as ours, with as many empires, kingdoms and princedoms as our own; and with many more wars fought between them. To judge them by the merchant vessels that come to our port would be the same as them seeing the League and judging all of Jytoh by those few souls.

What separates our two halves of the continent, other than the Wastelands, is religion. We have four (more if you include sects) fighting for dominance, but they have only one that covers nine tenths of their lands. I would call it "monolithic", but the irony is too much for me. Their religion has more gods than all our religions combined, orthodox and pagan alike.

Their gods are in every sprouting tree, every cloud and sea, every bird and bee. With a million and more gods, and everything able to be divine, the Dharati have a more intimate relationship with nature that you do not see in these lands, outside of the few pagans still allowed to exist. The Dharati architecture work with nature, rather than supplant it like ours; their styles of dress are bright and intricate, reflecting the beauty of nature, where ours sets us apart from the natural world; and their vast knowledge of life has allowed them to cultivate the most



fragrant of herbs and spices.

It is the latter two that we see when their merchant vessels dock, but while they make for a spectacle in their colourful dress, and we do love their spices, do not be deceived. The politics of the Dharati can put the League to shame.

Theirs is a stratified society baked into the roots of their culture and religion, more so than our feudal neighbours could dream of. Every man has a place in the world, ordained by the gods, and to climb the multitude of steps up that social ladder takes a keen mind and an amoral soul. The merchants we see are merely halfway up that ladder, high enough to not see the ground, but not high enough to reach the stars, and they would do everything to reach it.

Dharati plebs, like us, are salt of the world, but treat their princes like you would treat our Merchant League.

The Unending Hunger of Suyu Pacha

The monsters from the far corner of the world. We have only seen them once, and never again, but dark rumours say their agents stalk our streets. The Pachans are even a mystery to the Dharati, who only know they come from somewhere to their south west.

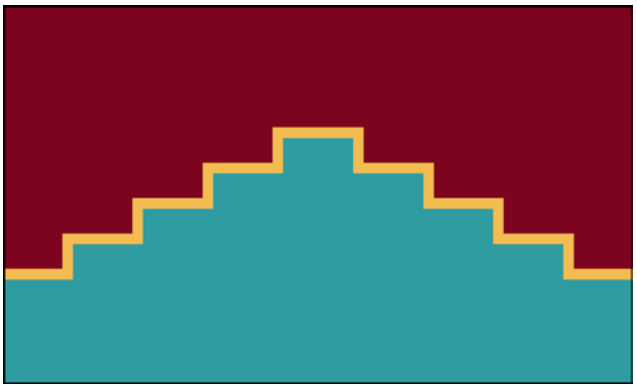
Eighty years ago a Suya Pacha barge sailed through Tanfakech's waters, and the news of their arrival preceded them to every port they visted after that. The news became distorted the further it travelled, and soon whole fleets were waiting for them, armed to the teeth.

And why? Because we thought the Sauddyr had returned.

Precious few relics of the Sauddyr remain, the Great Purge saw to that, but what we have and the writings that describe their clothes, weapons and ships near perfectly matched the Pachans sailing around Jytoh. The dress of scales, horns and feathers made sailors approaching them truly believe that they were Inhumans at first glance, and their symbols and heraldic devices seemed copied first-hand from Sauddyr ziggurats. What they proclaimed as they moved from port to port did nothing to alleviate those fears. They spoke of the city that became a state that became an empire, named Suyu Pacha, that will one day rule the world.

They did not come for diplomacy or even exploration, they came to see their new dominions. They saw us and our lands as already belonging to them and we could accept this fate now or when their military fleets came. This Pachan barge was simply a messenger, one of many sent to all the corners of the globe to inform them that they are tenants on Pachan soil.

Safe to say that no nation took kindly to this, but as the Pachans made no hostile overtures, uncertainty gripped each nation as the Pachan barge sailed onto the next. The barge never made it here. As it rounded the Bythikan peninsula and neared the northern Vinean nations, it began to drift of course.



When the Vinean navies went looking for it, they found a ship full of diseased corpses. To a man, the Pachans had died of pox, consumption, camp fever or a combination of all of them. No tears were shed for these Sauddyr imitators, and many believe it was the hand of Bür that saved us once again from the Inhumans, but the crucial questions remained unanswered: who are the Pachans, and why does Suyu Pacha bear such a resemblence to the Sauddyr?

Did some Sauddyr escape the Great Purge across the ocean and set up a empire enslaving humans as in olden times; did some humans during the Great Migration take the Sauddry trappings as their own for some strange reason; or perhaps is there something deeper to this, something that makes both man and Inhuman dress and act like this? Until we can find another Pachan, I doubt we will ever truly know.

The Hidden City of Bealmoa

Ah, so this is what it has all been about. This whole conversation, the entire tour of Jytoh and the world has simply been to find the hidden city of Bealmoa. Who told you that I visited the ancient city? It is not a song I have ever sung about, so your inquisitive little agents must have worked quite hard to find that nugget of information.

What you have heard is true, however, all of it. That I have been there, and all the legends you have heard of the city. Bealmoa is the greatest city on the face of this world, and has always been so. It is an oasis of perfection in the harsh wastelands west of the Ridgeback Mountains, and you will never find it. You can torture me all you want, lad, but Bealmoa's location is a secret I will gladly take to the grave.

I will tell you what it looks like, just to sate your greed and slake your envy. The city is easily thrice the size of Middelburg, with less than half the population. It is open and expansive where ours is claustrophobic and oppressive. Bealmoa's streets are lined with gold and orichalcum, and fruit trees line each avenue, kept fruiting by runic arrays, feeding the populace all year round. The city is built in three great concentric circles, with river-sized moats in between them, linked to each other with bridges that defy gravity and logic. The rivers are fed by a single awe inspiring fountain in the centre of the city, within the king's palace, and keeps the people watered and alive in the wastelands the city inhabits.

The buildings are made of the finest marble and granite, inlaid with all kinds of precious metals and gems, and the walls surrounding the city are made of pure jasper, standing ten times a man's height. The walls are runed to block any filth from the continual dust storms of the wastelands from entering the city, leaving it as pristine as when it was first created. Twelve gargantuan gates made of pearl line the walls, but it needs no such protection, as you will only ever be able to find the city if you are guided there by one of its inhabitants.

If the city already seems like paradise, then its inhabitants will sound like angels. There is no hunger or thirst as the city gives everything the people need without asking. Yes, the people here rarely starve, thanks to the runes, but veritable smorgasbord available to the Bealmoans would put the League to shame. More than this, however, is that there is no disease, and age barely has an effect on them. A century to us is a season to them, and this is all because they can do what none other than Bür could: sing the runes. Unlike us, scrabbling around with pencil and pen, they live and breathe the magic of the runes. Theirs is a paradise constantly renewed with every thought and word.

The greatest thing to have ever happened to me was the day the exile found me and led me to his city.

And now lad I believe it is time for me to bid you farewell. I hope you have enjoyed this old bard's tale of the world, and I hope you have learnt something. Oh no, not that which you had hoped to learn. Not about how to best inflict harm upon our enemies in the name of protecting this small isle. I hope you have learnt that no matter how far you travel in this world, how many mountains and oceans you cross, all you will find at the other side of the horizon is people.

Simple, is it not? You will not find monsters and Inhumans, you will not find trolls and winged serpents nor will you ever find dark sorcerers bending all their will to destroy this small island in the ocean. No. You will find people with the same hopes, dreams and sorrows as you will find in this very city. Husbands who worry from where his family's next dinner will come and mothers who worry for their sons out in the night. Wifes who worry about their husbands out to war and sons worried about the future.

You will find your villains should you seek far and deep enough, do not concern yourself there. Where there are men like me in the world, spreading laughter there will always be men like you, spreading sorrow. So go ahead, son, play your little game of spies and warships. You will only find other small men in other small, dark rooms plotting the same schemes as you have. When you have brought war and devastation to this city, when your brothers lay still and the sky fades, remember this old, weary bard. Many places have I been, many faces have I seen and many more sorrows. Do not make me sing of any more.

Now the road calls and I must away. Where the road shall take me, I cannot tell, but I shall walk the paths of fate, doing what little I can to make this world a little more cheery than when I first walked on it.

I bid you a very fond farewell.

Transcriber's note: Subject Theuns van Buuren disappeared nineteen hours after the time of transcription. Local constables can find no trace of the subject in the city nor is there sign of the subject leaving by rail, carriage or ship (air and sea). Investigations continue in surrounding towns and ports.

The corruption of the northerners' politicians allow me to appreciate the Bythikan system of government. Your divinely inspired right to solely govern our fair lands is the indisputably correct way. To their downfall, and your luminous majesty's windfall, this letter shows areas in Alfresia which we could exploit should these heathens and heretics overstep their grounds.

OVER MOUNTAINS AND IN VALLEYS

To the Minister of Foreign Relations of Mollachia.

An appeal for solidarity.

From the office of the Honourable Wikus Pascal

To my esteemed counterpart in Mollachia, I bid you fond greetings and hope the weather in the north is as fair as it is here on the Alfresian Isle.

I write this letter to you not out of official pressure from on high, but because as the days march on and the world becomes ever more hectic, I find that one can never do without friends to call on in times of hardship. And what better friends can there be than our two nations, whom have so much in common and have shared a history far more similar than any other. The closing of the Mollachian embassy here in Middelburg seven years ago has left a wound here in the political sphere that has never healed. In writing this, I hope to convince you to reopen the embassy so that the Princedom of Mollachia and the Confederate Republic of Alfresia can once again call each other friends.

Humanity has inhabited your Delkan lands far longer than our eastern isle, but I am sure we can both agree that the Great War was the great equaliser. Our nations were reformed, reborn and rebranded anew. Without question, those days were a different world to the one we know today. Even in this day and age, our university's archaeology department digs up fresh discoveries nearly every week it seems. From glyphic symbols on cave walls to odd and cryptic carved figurines, these discoveries speak of the human inhabitants that lived here before the old Fresian tribes came. But like so much, the Great war destroyed most their remains.

It appears that the ancient Fresians had barely settled in this part of the world, before the abominable creatures of the south took a dislike to us. Decades before the Sauddyr's declaration of war, those reptilian demons had been harassing us, seeking out humankind's weaknesses. Then the War itself arrived and, I suspect, the Fresians envied the Delkan tribes. We and the Dayitic tribes were the first to feel the wrath of the Sauddyr, while you northerners had time to prepare for what was to come. Unfortunately, even you would not be spared when the rest of the world turned against us.

THE CONFEDERATE REPUBLIC OF
ALFRESIA
SCHOTEN
NOORDHOEK
ROSEDAAL
BOGOMBAAI
OUDTSHOORN
MATJIESFONTEIN
LEEUKASTEEL
TWEELING
KOPTROPP
VREDEFORT
ODENDAALSRUS
JAGERSFONTEIN
WINTERSDAM
HEILBRON
STRANDFONTEIN
KROONSTAD
MIDDELBURG
WEPENER
LEEUKOP
LEBENDBERG
JAGOBSDAL
BRANDFORT
WINDBURG
SCHARZHAFEN
APFELSINEFLUSS
60 KM

We won the War, however, and far too many history books have been printed on it for me to talk about those myths and legends once again. We were free of the Inhuman threat, but not of each other for very long. It seemed as if no time at all had passed before we "belonged" once more to someone else. The great Neoist empire devoured Mollachia and the other Delkan lands almost before the announcement of peace reached your lands, and here we had to deal with the ever vainly named Empire of Man. In all fairness, one should not judge these empires too harshly. It was a time of conflict and uncertainty, when the people wished to feel safe and secure.

These empires, as is the nature of all empires, were quite reluctant to let us go. Both our nations have spent many a century under the lash of an emperor unwilling to hand us our freedom, or embroiled in someone else's war. In my humble opinion, this has done nothing but strengthened our two peoples. Where other, more weaker, peoples may have capitulated and been subsumed into their empire's leading culture, our peoples stood strong and still today we stand unique and proud.

Even here on our lone isle, we are not a single people, but a true confederate of people. From the highland men on their cattle farms with their fondness for savoury porridge, to the northern lowland port towns where a bottle of wine can always be found. From the wheat farms on the vast southern plains to the cosmopolitan metropolis of Middelburg, we are a disparate people, united by a common tongue and the love of our homeland and our fellow man.

United as we are, there have been many a time when both homeland and fellow man were in doubt, as I am sure you can attest from your own history. While you had your eternal struggle with the Neoists, we here faced a variety of threats, each more interesting and dangerous than the last. The greatest of these were the Gitic invasions. It was a horde like none had seen since the Great War, and that was far too reminiscent of the same for many people's tastes. Like the Inhumans before them, this horde came from the south the destroy and conquer. While the Empire likes to the take the credit, as they do in all things, for halting the invasion, if it were not for Alfresia, the entire north may have been at risk.

Oh yes, it is something the Imperial historians often leave as a mere footnote in their texts, if they even speak of it at all. The fierce naval battles in the Fresian Sea and how we repulsed every landing party they threw at our island was a grand time in our history that is oft forgotten. Why did the Gitics target us, I hear you ask. After the Great War, the Fresians had ventured south to colonise the empty lands and the Hammer Isles. When the Gitic had conquered these lands they heard of our island. What better point to launch their invasions in the north, they believed. With these rumours, history was written. With their main force marching overland into the heart of the empire, their high king ordered their navy to subdue us, thinking we would be easy prey.

> Always be loyal to your nation, but be loyal to your government only when they deserve it.
> ~Burnaby Tvende, Gaelish poet.

In the seven centuries since the Great War, us humans had become adept at using the runes. We were constantly pushing back the limits of what can be achieved with them. Worryingly, we were more dangerous than we were willing to admit. The Gitic invaders, however, were more than ready to use this to their advantage. They sent maelstroms at our shores and tornadoes at our land, all powered by the sacrifice of thousands of Fresians from the southern mainland. We took this on the chin and did not surrender. As the birthplace of the great Bür, we have always been masters of the runes and we used this to great effect. We rained fire upon their ships, crafted enormous walls of ice on the seas around our isle, and sent ocean currents to bash their ships upon the rocks. We held our ground, we persevered, and here we are today.

There is always a ray of light in the deepest

darkness, and the one benefit that the Gitic invasions brought us was the dissolution of the Empire of Man. Because of them, we tasted freedom for the first time in over eight hundred years. Your joy of being free of the Neoist empire a century earlier was mirrored by our own. The Fresian lands reformed into the Five Kingdoms, comprising almost all the extant Fresian lands. Our island was not free, but at least the Fresians were the masters of our own destinies for once. This did not come freely, however, and the War of the Ten Emperors cost us dearly. It seems to me that wars get more bloody as time strides on.

It was a difficult time then, even for your fledgling nation on the receiving end of the invading Caels, but for us the freedom we enjoyed was worth the suffering. Unfortunately, like all good things it was not meant to last. Barely a few hundred years later, a new empire arose to our west: the Heavenly Empire of Man. Once again we became the servants of another. It was our fortune that this reunification was not as bloody an affair as the dissolution of the previous empire. It appears the religious threat of the west had created a common cause that calmed the situation.

Oh, but have not both our nations had their fair share of difficulties with religion? For a century the Delkan lands had been the centre of holy war after holy war between the Neoists and Progenitorists. At times the Prodigalists even joined the wars to aid their neighbour Progenitorists against their western foe. As a fellow Progenitorist, may I join in your relief that us easterners prevailed in those wars, freeing you both from the political and religious control of the Neoists. The more tolerant Progenitorist faith has, I believed, allowed your nation to thrive more than it would have otherwise.

We have had our own fair share of religious difficulty, but then who has not? The Prodigalists and Progenitorists have always had rather cool relations. Some may even say cordial, but that is understandable as the Prodigalist faith arose from our own. However, do not be mistaken, there has never been love lost between the two groups. Tensions arise every so often, even here on our isle away from the heart of any conflict, and this has spilled out onto the streets whenever the wrong individual of note has been accused of heresy. This was not helped with the holy military orders on both the Prodigalist and Progenitorist sides. Now when violence erupts it is helped along with Runic knights squaring off against Sword Knights.

Nevertheless religion has always played second fiddle to politics, no matter how much the priests would rail against such a notion. One of the greatest political incidents to have happened to us was when the Fresians gained independence, for the final time, from the Empire. The Heavenly Imperial Civil War cost us dearly, but at the end the Fresians were free from imperial oversight and remain so to this day. Where there were once the Five Kingdoms of Fresia, there was now the single Kingdom of Fresland. This was not to last, as little more than a century later, Alfresia itself was free from Fresland. You may have experienced the joy of independence for centuries, but it took nearly nineteen centuries for us to experience that.

Surely you already know this part of history, but I beseech you to read it once more. I feel that this will show precisely why Alfresia would make such a steadfast ally to Mollachia. It began with the ruler King Markus VI of Fresland, known as "the Incendiary" for his penchant for starting fires. By all measures he was an odd fellow, short of temper and quick to flights of fancy. Imagining himself a new emperor, he wished to reunite all the lands the ancient Fresian tribes ever touched, under his rule of course.

For this brash plan he would need taxes, and oh how he did tax his people. The Archduchy of Alfresia as it was known then bore the brunt of these taxes. Markus VI saw the trading hub our island had become as a quick source of money and exploited it for all its worth. For more than two decades this farce continued, the poor had

to tighten their belts and even the nobles started to look a bit thin around the cheeks. Trade dried up as merchants started to seek cheaper harbours and as the coffers emptied, Markus VI taxed the people even more.

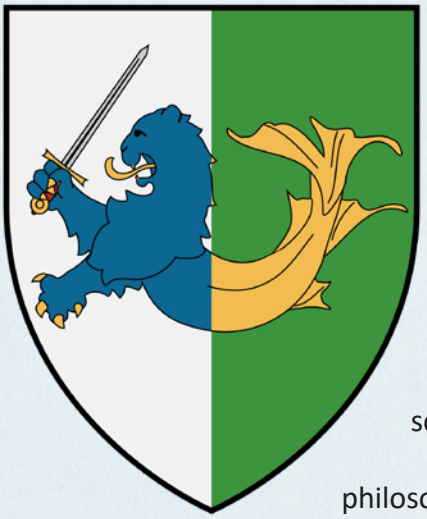
There are tales that Markus VI never ordered any taxes. These tales say that he was too focussed on the expansion of his military, and too obsessed with his dream of the imperial crown for such bureaucracy. They say that it was his greedy councillors and chancellors who ordered it in his stead. I fear, however, that this is merely whitewashing the history of a cruel and insane man.

This all came to a head when Archduke Leo X died at the fine old age of eighty seven. He was a good man and always a proponent of peace. So loved was he by the common folk that they never once took up arms against him. When he died, the governors of the cantons of Alfresia decided that no man could ever replace Leo X. They had finally had their fill of monarchs with absolute rule. Archduke Leo had started the process of a democratic senate and they would finish it. They voted on a president to see them through what was to come, and in the summer of 1899 the newly inaugurated President Paul Steyn declared Alfresia independent.

Whatever you might say about the king, Markus VI did not lack for courage. Either that or madness. When he heard of the rebellion he gathered his royal Lion Knights, summoned his armies and personally led the march to the coast. On the prow of his flagship he burnt everything in his path until he reached the Alfresian coast, and then continued to burn his way to the gates of Middelburg.

The war raged as hot Markus VI's fire. We were outnumbered fifty to one, although we had nominal support from Hallei and Ossenzee, our Fresian neighbours. Our numbers were also depleted by the loyalists in the far north of the island, traitors to our cause. Beset on all sides, it looked as if our democracy would not last long, but we had fought off the Inhumans, we had bested off the Gitics, and we defeated the Imperials. Surely, we could fight off the Freslanders and their mad king as well.

For three years the war raged across our small isle, and in the third year we found our



The Most Noble Order of the Knights of the Sea Lion

An offshoot of the Wesfresland Order of the Lion, the Sea Lion Knights gained their independence when Alfresia did. Expelled from their parent order for their apparent treason during the war, and left without royalty to guard, the Sea Lion Knights have become more of a gentlemanly order. While ostensibly a military order, there is little need for them in Alfresia, turning their focus of war to a focus on arts and scholarship.

Their numbers are made up of the most eminent scholars and philosophers in Alfresia, and it is seen as a great academic honour to be selected to join their ranks. So connected with the scholarly tradition are they that the act of asking philosophical and rhetorical questions can earn an unsuspecting man the moniker of "sealion", and the act of questioning called "sealioning". This jesting is not aided by their motto: "In the gods we trust, everything else must be proven." Their last and only remaining military duty is to guard the entrance to the senate house. Once the Archduke's palace, the Sea Lions still maintain guards at the great Gate if only as a ceremonial duty.

salvation in the Empire, irony of ironies. In his rage Markus VI had taken most of his troops to Alfresia, leaving his borders nearly undefended. Emperor Kibrian took advantage of this and invaded, seeking to claim back his own stolen lands. With his own lands in danger, Markus VI took all his men, forsook Alfresia and went to meet the emperor. When he was seen, Markus VI was only yards away from Emperor Kibrian and surrounded by his most favoured knights and the imperial guard. Then the whole battlefield exploded in an immense ball of fire. The paltry few imperial troops that survived withdrew from the field of battle, and the Kingdom of Wesfresland was safe.

No man saw Markus VI die, though surely he must have as he was the epicentre of the explosion, and many speculate that the mad old king is still alive. They say he is in hiding, plotting and scheming and burning until the day comes when he returns to claim his sought for empire. A tale to frighten young children.

And while kings and emperors burned, our president and war hero rebuilt our nation. Liberty was to be its foundation, and brotherhood its pillars. No man would ever again have to kneel at another's feet. A free and just confederation created for every man and woman.

We fought a war against an opponent that outnumbered us, out armoured us, and could out maneuver us, yet we never lost hope. When our nation was on fire and our walls crumbled, our spirits were still strong. When we knew death and defeat were imminent, we did not go gently. What better ally could Mollachia have than that? Who else would fight to the very last breath for what they believed in? With an ally in Alfresia, Mollachia would again never stand alone!

Oh how I wish you would return to the embassy enclave to see its beauty again at this time of year. The spring air is gusting, and if I recall correctly, your wife did ever so love the apple blossoms this time of year. I am told the enclave's head gardener has developed a runic array to keep the trees in bloom all year. I am sure we could arrange a trade of such information, the gardener is a most giving man. Is it not curious to think that not so long ago, there was no embassy here and no gardeners to tend to it. Even stranger to think that the inner circle of our great metropolis at one point used to be the entire city!

It is hard to imagine our sprawling Middelburg was at one point merely a small town, confined to the inner ring, the outer rings the farmlands to support it. I remember us walking the border walkway one day and how you commented that it was perfectly smooth and round. You did not believe me when I answered then, but I will tell you again! The runic array upon which our city is built was not crafted by mortal hands. Oh no, the five kilometre diameter array was constructed by none other than the great Bür himself to serve as a naval staging post during the War. Out of curiosity one day, I had a team of city planners measure it, and they found as you did that it is a perfect circle. The array is as perfect as in the text books. What other city can boast such a wonder!

> Better to die fighting as a free man than live kneeling as a slave.
>
> ~Anonymous soldier during Alfresian War of Independence.

This grand array has saved our lives and the city itself more times than I think even the priests are willing to admit. Its ability to instantaneously create a wall around the city (well most of the city these days!) made certain that no enemy force had ever crossed into the city uninvited. All but one, I must say. The mad king Markus VI achieved what even the Inhumans during the Great War could not. A private man, Markus VI never shared his runic arrays to anyone, so we cannot say how he managed to do it. All the but accounts of the time say is that one moment there was a fifty metre tall wall and the next there was nothing but fire.

The city array can do more than erect walls though, as

Markus VI discovered. It had dealt with fires dozens of times before and as the mad king started burning his way towards the old Archduke's palace President Steyn flooded the entire city. Ten feet of water arose across the entire city they say! Can you imagine the hilarity? A mad king and his pompous knights with hearts full of pride and zeal suddenly finding themselves swimming down the market streets! The story goes that the mad king had to swim to a brothel's second story window just to get out of the water!

The city rune has always protected us, like a mother her babes. It has created walls to ward off attack, it has quenched the various fires that has erupted over the years, and it has even stabilised the very ground itself during one of our, very rare, quakes. Bür, in his infinite wisdom, made the various loci and the centrum of the array their very own arrays, meaning that whatever is needed can be localised to these areas. In cases of emergency, walls are not only thrown up around the city's border, but around each district. The political district has its own array like this. You can tell your wife to rest easy knowing that whatever turmoil may befall the city, not even Markus VI the Incendiary managed to break through the political district's walls.

Alfresia is known far and wide for its city-runes. Each significant town and city on the island have incorporated such an array in honour of Middelburg. Of course, city-runes are not an uncommon sight, your own city of Cimuskei also having one, but these are not on the scale of Alfresia's own. Following Bür's example, we have made sure that all our towns and our cities will be forever protected. A law passed not four years ago have even made a city-rune a legal requirement for any newly developed town plan. It is with such forward thinking that we have become a world leader in innovation.

Alfresia is at the forefront of technological modernisation, with Middelburg the beating heart of this transformation. With our island's favourable location as the centre of the trading routes between the eastern and western continents, travellers from all walks of life and all places on the globe touch down on our shores. Thousands of new ideas and philosophies, and hundreds of new inventions and discoveries are found upon our streets, giving rise to an atmosphere where innovation in thought and deed is most prized.

As with the rest of the world, the Lightning rune revolutionised Alfresia, and our government did not hesitate to use it for the benefit of our people. Our cities are now like jewels in the night, lighting up the island as the sun sets. Our revolutionary tramcar system ferries our hard working citizens across our cities, and our trains have the remarkable record for not being late in the past two years since becoming electrified! With the efficiency provided by this new electricity, our ability to utilize the runes in combination with technology has been limited only by our imaginations.

Even in the scholastic arena, Alfresia is world leader in runology. We boast the most monasteries of the Runist faith, those strange monks who study the runes in such copious detail that their insights are legendary. Our universities work closely with these recluses in order to put their wild theories into practice for the greater good of society. Where other nations value either religion or natural philosophy and despise the other, here on our fair isle we do not hold to such dogmatic beliefs. When these two seemingly opposing ideas work together, we have found the greatest discoveries. After all, did the Lightning rune not come from this very city?

As much as we value peering into the future, I will not have it say that Alfresians have forgotten our past. As wordly a nation as we have become, we have not yet become lost in that world. The long centuries we have spent on this island have given us many traditions that we still value today, and that the guests to our fair isle find most interesting. From our unique cultural music with its fondness for the reed aerophone to our annual Festival of Light on Founder's Day, Alfresia offers a wealth of distinctive experiences for travellers.

OUDTSHOORN
MATJIESFONTEIN
RANDFONTEIN
DUIWELSKLOOF
KLEINZEE
TWEELING
KRUGERSDORP
VREDEFORT
ROODEPOORT
ODENDAALSRUS
BLOEMHOF
PUTSONDERWATER
BRAKPAN
GERMISTON
WINTERSDAM
BOKSBURG
RUSTENBURG
HEILBRON
VEREENIGING
HARTBEESPOORT
MIDDELBURG
OLIJVENHOUTSDRIFT
CENTRAL
ALFRESIA
23 KM

And even more than the technology or culture that Alfresia could share with Mollachia, we can also offer the land itself. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the burgeoning tourism industry that the Merchant League keeps hounding me with can perhaps be a boon to Mollachia's nobles. What baron or viscount would not prefer to spend a summer on a beach in the sun? If you will indulge a Minister's devotion to his work, let me tell of the Alfresia beyond Middelburg.

The southern plains are today the sustainer of our nation, with its kilometres and kilometres of farms where the men reap wheat in the autumn months. At one time, though, they were their own petty kingdom. It is strange to think such a small kingdom could exist, but the Kingdom of Valkenland brooked no insult. They were a coarse and hardy people, and that hardiness lives on in the southerners today. So does the memory of the old kingdom of Valkenland. The southerners, cut off from the rest of the island by the mountains across its spine often see themselves as a different people, with their own dialect and dress.

Not that Valkenland lasted very long. With the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms, our little isle and its people have gone through several transformations. The Kingdom of Valkenland became the Duchy of Valkenland, then the Margraviate of Windburg, the County of Windburg, the Landgraviate of Valkenland before finally settling on the Duchy of Windburg. Not long after this final transformation, the old Archduke and the War of Independence gave us the cantons of today. It is surprising that the southerners hold to a millennia old kingdom when so much has changed. But as the saying goes: as stubborn as a southern man.

The south is littered with farmlands. I once had a chance to board one of these new airships. From the air, the south seemed to me like the quilted blankets my mother used to make. While Alfresia imports much of its produce, it is no understatement to say we surely would starve without the southern crops. When droughts hit the south, it affects us all. Scattered in between the farms, you can always spot the farmhouses by their distinctive reed roofs and round shapes. The southerners have always been a practical people. They rarely build houses with their hands, preferring the quick practicality of using runic arrays.

This is not to say the south is all stark farmlands and rondavel houses. The south features many cities as modern as the rest of Alfresia, with the greatest of these being Windburg on the coast. Capital of the old kingdom and duchies and now of the canton of Windburg, the city is nearly as old as Middelburg itself. Its most notable feature, however, is that of the seat of the van Windburg trade family, part of our widely renowned Merchant League. As such, trade flows in and out the city, bringing an air of worldliness to the south. A "little Middelburg" it is sometimes called, because of this. So if you, or your noble friends, are wishing to come to Alfresia but want to shy away from all the hubbub of Middelburg, Windburg is a fine old town.

If you are looking for more than just a quiet day there, the Patriarch of the van Windburg family is an avid hunter. He has laid claim to the Roversbroek woods and built an impressive hunting lodge there. He imports many wild creatures from across the globe to let loose in his woods where he takes his well paying guests to hunt them. I myself have had the good fortune of an invitation to the lodge when I was younger. I can tell you the thrill of hunting an eastern froglion through the woods at twilight is something I will never forget. The Patriarch also keeps a whaling ship nearby if you prefer wetter, larger beasts as prey.

But if it is the wild that you are longing for, then go east! The rugged highlands of the east have created in turn a rugged people. However, there is no reason to fear, you will not find a more jolly people in all the lands than the easterners. It must because of what they farm over there. Meat, in all its forms! Whether it is sheep, goat or cattle, if you are feeling

WEPENER
TWEESPRUIT
LEEUKOP
EDENBURG
STEYNSRUS
BOSHOF
JACOBSDAL
DEWETSDORP
BRANDFORT
FOURIESBURG
WINDBURG
ROOIPOORT
REDDERSBURG
SOUTHERN
ALFRESIA
23 KM

carnivorous then the east has what you want. But these do not compare the hunting that is practiced in the east! The mountainous regions are covered in forests and positively teeming with deer. It is no surprise there is a thriving velvet industry in the east.

The eastern capital is the fountain of the coast, Strandfontein. A quiet port town on the east coast, one would think it would thrive on the trade coming from across the ocean, but surprisingly this is not the case. While Strandfontein does deal in trade, it mostly of the export variety of their meat, furs, skins and velvet. Rather than a trading hub, the most notable feature of this town is the headquarters of the Alfresian navy.

The gargantuan fortress called Dawnwatch sits out on a man made island overlooking the eastern ocean. It was raised from the seabed in the midst of the Great Purge as the easternmost outpost of the Imperial Army. Its purpose? To keep a weather eye on the horizon to ensure the Inhumans will never take mankind by surprise again. Later down the pages of history its purpose changed. The Inhumans were gone and so the fortress had to stay prepared for our human cousins across the ocean. Its favourable position gives it a view of the entire eastern horizon, and its sentry ships range far out onto the ocean to ensure nothing slips past the Dawnguard's gaze.

To aid in this vigilance, a network of lighthouses were constructed across Alfresia, linking Dawnwatch with Middelburg. It survives to this very day and, luckily, events have only made it necessary to use it once. Through the clever use of runic arrays, once a fire is lit in the great lighthouse, a cascade occurs that sets off lights down all the lighthouses immediately. Less than a minute after the beacon is lit in Dawnwatch, Middelburg is aware and ready to take action. The same can be done in reverse of course if Middelburg is in danger.

There are many things the east can provide, from its forested mountains teeming with wildlife, its many farms, its snow capped mountains, its quaint coastal villages and impressive sea fort. There is something more notable to the eastern highlands than all of these, and that is the ogre sanctuary. Up in the

The 9th Alfresian Naval Squadron of the 3rd Fleet.

More commonly known as The Dawnguard, the 9th Squadron operates out of the huge naval base of Dawnwatch. Dawnwatch was originally established as merely the network of signal towers to ensure the inhumans could never again attack an unsuspecting Alfresia. As this threat disappeared and the long centuries crept ever on, Dawnwatch was grown to become the eastern base for the Imperial Navy, and the military presence grew as well until a whole squadron of warships were stationed there.

The Dawnguard's mission has not changed since the days where the Watch was only a watchtower, to forewarn the island of an impending attack and delay the attackers long enough for Alfresia to mount a defence. The island has only been tested a handful of times since the Dawnguard's inception, and many think it an easy post, but every time a foreign navy has attacked Alfresia the entire Dawnguard has been wiped out, holding the enemy at bay to the last man. There is no surrender for the Dawnguard and every man who joins knows that the day may come where they will have to die for their country. It's motto is fitting: *"We watch for the dawn, for then we die."*

EASTERN
ALFRESIA
JAGERSFONTEIN
UITENHAGE
HATINGSPRUIT
KLOOF
KRANSKOP
PIETERSBURG
BURGERSDORP
STRANDFONTEIN
KROONSTAD
ROOIRIVIER
SWARTBERG
WEPENER
23 KM
LEEUKOP

mountains, in a deep valley where the climate is not so chilly, is the last ogre sanctuary in Alfresia. The aptly named Riusdyr Valley was officially opened seventy years ago as a sovereign territory inside Alfresia. It consolidated all the previous ogre sanctuaries, whose populations were becoming smaller by the year. It was the hope that a larger single population would be able to help sustain their numbers.

The sanctuary is officially overseen by the local governor, restricting access to all but the most needed personnel. Heavy penalties are inflicted upon any trespassers. Our newest president have even raised these penalties, campaigning that he would restore the ogre population to its previous levels. The success of this scheme thus far I leave for natural philosophers to decide. What I will say though is that is well within my purview to venture into the sanctuary, and this does extends to any guests I would bring along. I am told you have always had an interest in ogre sociology.

In contrast to the hardy southerners and rugged easterners, when people talk of the northerners they talk of gentle and sophisticated men. Rarely do they speak of treachery, and only because of the northerner's conduct in the War of Independence. The north has always had a close relationship with both the small isle of Ossenzee to our north as well as to the mainland. They have always been of the opinion that isolation is tantamount to stagnation. As such, the north has taken on a different culture to the rest of Alfresia, incorporating many Nacitanian and Dayitic traditions into their own. As with the southern cantons, the people of the north see themselves as a distinct people.

If meat and wheat is what the south and east produce, then the north is most famous for its grapes. Vineyards cover the landscape, with other orchards dotted in between these. The wines the north produce are exported across the eastern coast, being a favourite in the courts of both the Heavenly Empire of Man and the Second Bythikan Empire. The varieties of grapes and wine they can produce are staggering. Whatever variety you may have your heart set on, the north will have it.

When time, and my wife, allows it I always keep a bottle or two of their finest Rosés, but if grapes are not to your liking, never fret. The clever northerners have figured out how to make wine from nearly anything. Orange wines, apple wines, honey wines, pear wines, cherry wines, berry wines, and I swore I once saw a vintner make wine from an avocado! The vintner's festival each autumn draws thousands from across the Fresian region and beyond to celebrate the harvest, and learn a hard lesson in moderation the next day!

> Question whether the gods are real.
> Question whether life is true.
> Question whether the sun will rise.
> Never question my loyalty.
> Patriarch Karl van Rosedaal of the Fresian Merchant League.

This festival is hosted in the north's capital of Rosedaal, known as much for the thousands of rose trees lining its streets as it is for its wine. The City of Roses is credited, pseudo-historically if you ask me, as the point where the ancient Fresian tribes first made landfall on our fair isle. Thus, as the southerners sing of their old kingdom, the north sings of how they were the first Alfresians.

The city is as beautiful as its name implies and the canton's governor does everything it can to keep it this way. Every church and monastery are charged with keeping the vagrants and destitutes off the streets if they wish to retain their lands and privileges; heavy fees are enforced for anyone caught littering or strewing rubbish in public areas; and the canton of Rosedaal has the most sumptuary laws of any canton on the island. Clothing, food and drink are all restricted based upon race, sex, and station in life. The governor has stated that this is to keep the canton clean and orderly, and to increase sale of local goods. If you were to ask me, this is nothing more than

NORTHERN
ALFRESIA
NOORDHOEK
SUIDERSTRAND
TAMBOERSKLOOF
GANSBAAI
ROSEDAAL
ROZENDAL
KORINGBERG
ONRUSRIVIER
BOGGOMSBAAI
VISHOEK
NELSPOORT
DORINGBAAI
MATJIESFONTEIN
OUDTSHOORN
LEEUKASTEEL
BUFFELSBAAI
23 KM

old "loyalists" yearning for the age of the aristocracy.

Instead of the aristocracy, however, they now deal with merchants. The greatest of these in the north is the van Rosedaal family, one of the quartet of ruling families comprising the Merchant League. As with the other families, the van Rosedaals are the true power in the city. Not the mayor nor the governor can match their wealth or political power. As well as trading in wine and flowers, the van Rosedaals are most known for their weapons trading. It is my belief they hold this over the local officials, knowing they can deny them their finest arms and armour should they so choose.

My other notion of the friction between the family and the officials is the new Patriarch Karl van Rosedaal. He seems to be desperately trying to erase his family's complicity on the loyalists' side during the War of Independence. Karl has done all he can to whitewash history and make the van Rosedaal family appear to be the quintessential Alfresian family.

Nevertheless, if neither wine nor flowers nor politics is what you seek, perhaps a little danger? A small island off the coast of the north, aptly named The Rock, has for more than a century been a prison for our most dangerous. The worst murderers, rapists and traitors are sent to the Rock to serve out their time, should they escape the gallows, where they can do no harm to society. As fortified as the Dawnwatch, no one has ever managed to escape the Rock, although plenty have tried. Alfresia even offers to take prisoners from the other Fresian nations to hold at the Rock, for a price of course. Who would have thought prisons could make us money!

But if neither north or south or east meets

Alfresian 2nd Fleet

Sometimes called the Home Fleet or the Sitting Fleet, the Alfresian 2nd Fleet's main responsibility is to guard the waters around the Grand City of Middelburg. Led by Admiral Wendel Autenburg, the Home Fleet is seen as the hometown heroes to the citizens of Middelburg, due to their valiant defence of the city across the years.

Their most notable actions have been during the Independence War a century ago and during Duke Lukas' invasion thirty years ago. During both of these encounters they sacrificed their ships and souls in the brutal assaults, their wrecks serving as a dire reminder to the men on the wall of what will happen if the western Fresians broke through. After each siege the fleet was rebuilt better than before, but the names of the ships and seamen who came before have never been forgotten.

With the relative peace of the past thirty years, and the mandate to remain near Middelburg, the 2nd Fleet has become a "safe" option for the sons of bourgeois families in the Grand City who wants to pursue a military career. Many of the scions of Nieuton and the Merchant League have served out their tour of duty in the waters outside Middelburg to come home with a few more medals on their chests and pride in their hearts. While to many this may seem like a hollow achievement, and an insult to the brave men who came before them, it has come with some benefits. The Alfresian 2nd Fleet is one of the best equipped military units in Alfresia, with the donations from past sailors keeping its coffers, and its ships seaworthy. It may not do much now, but the next time Middelburg is attacked, the city will be well ready.

your fancy, you can always return to the west, to Middelburg and its surroundings, the centre of trade and our orichalcum mining industry. Home of the president, the senate, the military and the Merchant League. Whatever a man can want, he can find it here. If he cannot, I would resign immediately! We make it our duty to cater to our guests, to make them feel as if they too were a part of our large family.

If there was any more I could think of writing that could convince you I could. I would unashamedly say that Alfresia is the greatest nation in the world. We look to the future with our runic rifles and electric airships, and yet we hold on to the past with our own chapters of Runic Knights and Sea Lion Knights (and offshoot of the Fresland Lion Knights). We seek bonds with other nations without forgetting our own people. We are strong and resilient, without being imperialistic. What more can Alfresia offer to Mollachia?

Your humble and dearest friend.

Gerrit Pascal

Minister of Foreign Relations

P.S.: I hope the accompanying orichalcum-lace necklace for your wife arrived intact. I would dearly hate for it to have been damaged due to transit.

RULES OF RUNIC DESIGN

Tiers & Loci

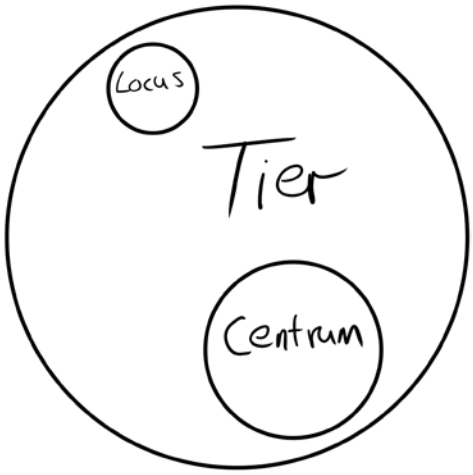
To extract the magic from the runes, you need to create a Runic Array. The type of runes placed inside the runic array and the links between them tell the array what sort of magical effect to create.

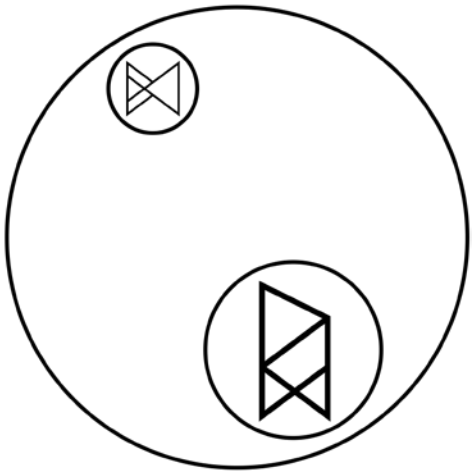
The most important rune is the Centrum, and will be the focus for the whole runic array. Everything else in the array will work towards manipulating the Centrum rune. A runic array can only have one Centrum, and so each array will only have one focus.

All other runes will be placed in their own small circles, called Loci, and from in there they will affect the Centrum in one way or another. The area that the Loci are placed in is called a Tier. The most basic runic arrays contain only two Tiers (the Centrum as its own Tier and one outer Tier filled with Loci), but you can have as many Tiers as you want. Each new Tier will be a larger concentric circle around the runic array that can be filled with its own Loci.

The most important rule to remember is that you "read" a runic array from the outside inwards. All Loci in each Tier will affect the Tier below it, eventually reaching the Centrum at the heart of the runic array.

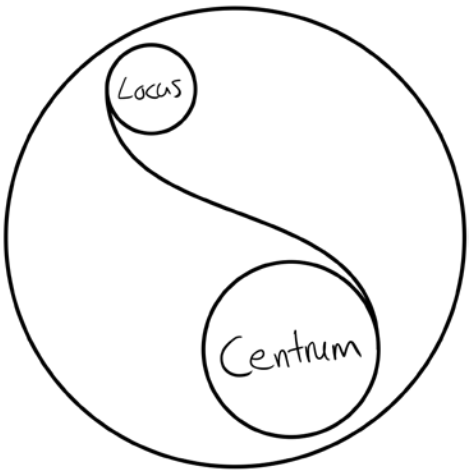
Our runic array starts its life with the rune for Fire as the Centrum, and the rune for Create as the Locus. It is obvious what this array will become, but at the moment it can't do anything, as no commands have been given to it. That will come next.





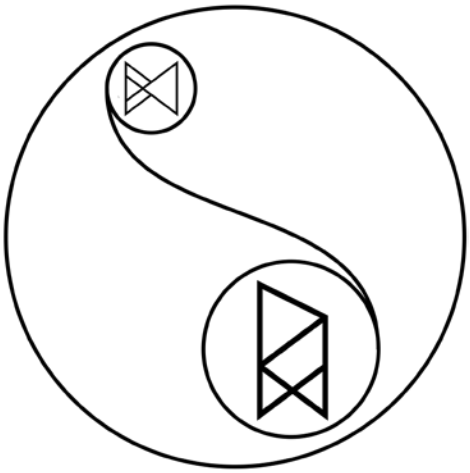
Commands

The runes in their Loci can only affect something else in the runic array if they are linked to it. The most common link is a curved line called a Command line. As its name implies, a Command line shows that one Locus is telling the Centrum or another Locus to do something. Linking an Action rune to a Target rune with a Command line tells the array to perform that Action on the Target.



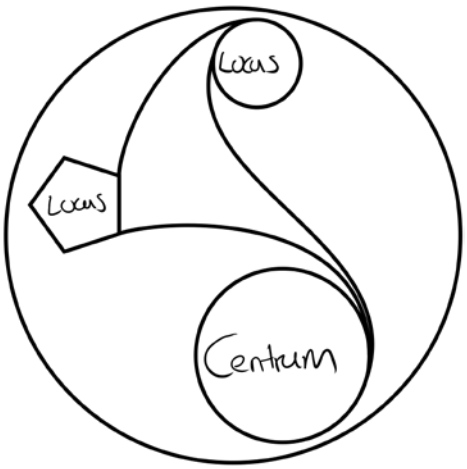
Not every rune can Command another. A Target rune like Gold cannot Command another Target rune, as there is no instructions found in the Gold rune for the array to execute. Only specific runes can Command others, and unsurprisingly we call them Command runes. These are limited to the Action runes (such as Contain and Float), the transportation runes, and the Transmute rune.

Our fire array now has a command which means it can do something. In this case linking Create to Fire tells the array to, unsurprisingly, create fire. While our array is very simple at the moment, but you can already use it just as it is. Adding a Command line is the very minimum you need to call your runic array complete, which means if you want to use this fire array right now, you can. Everything from here on out will help refine and modify how the array creates the fire.



Operations

If a Locus is Commanding other Loci within the same Tier, then you must show which Locus is Commanding which, since it is possible for a Locus to Command both multiple other Loci and a lower Tier or the Centrum at the same time. You can also have a series of Loci Commanding one another, linked to each other in a string of Command lines.

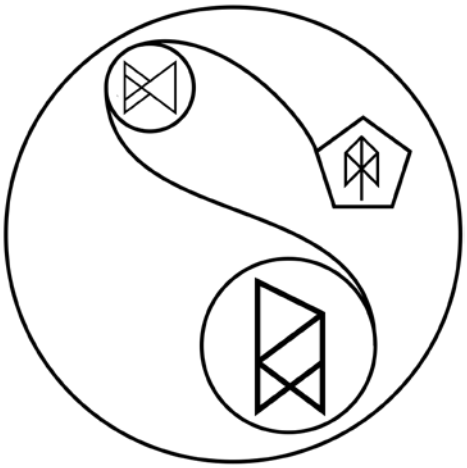


To show which Locus comes first in the order of operations, we use shapes other than circles for the Loci. More specifically, we use shapes with corners such as triangles, squares, pentagons, etc. The Locus with the most corners Commands the Locus with the least; so a pentagon Commands a square, a square Commands a Triangle, and so on with a true circle being last in line.

Remember that showing this operational order is only necessary when two or more Loci are Commanding

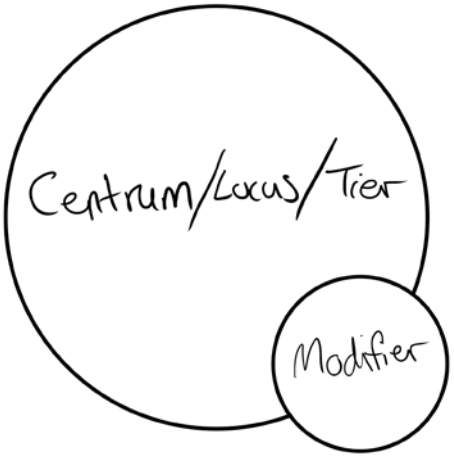
each other inside the same Tier. If a Locus is Commanding the Centrum or a lower Tier, you don't need to show the operational order.

The second locus here has the rune for Sustain. It is telling the runic array to continue creating fire. So rather than a burst of fire, the array will now keep the fire burning for as long as there is energy in the array.



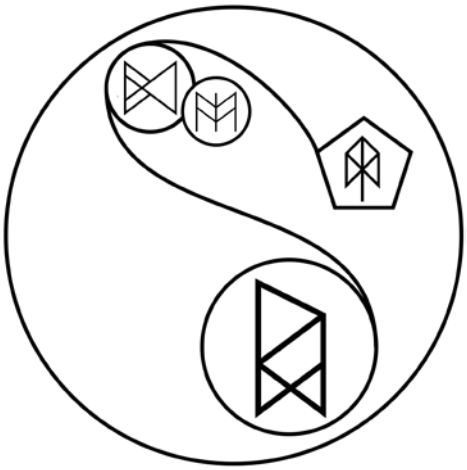
Modification

The second method to manipulate runes is through Modification. To modify a Locus, Centrum or Tier, overlap it with a smaller circle and put inside that smaller circle the rune that will do the Modification.



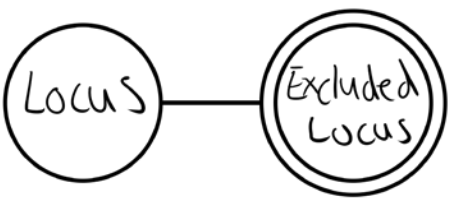
Modifying a Locus, Centrum or Tier with a rune tells the runic array to alter an aspect of the rune, or to specify something unique about the rune. Size and Shape runes are mostly used as modifiers to tell the runic array what shape or size the magical affect will be (thus altering the overall affect); and you can use certain Target runes to modify others, telling the array to only affect those particular Targets. For example: modifying a Blood rune with a Human rune will tell the array that you are only targeting human blood and not all types of blood.

We now add a Contain rune as a modification to the Create locus, which means that the creation part of the runic array is contained inside where the array drawn, meaning that no fire can be created outside the array. The runic array is now much safer to use. We could have made the Contain rune it's own locus that affects the Creation locus, but this way looks far neater and it does the same job.



Exclusion

A runic array can be told to exclude elements from the magical effect that it creates. To do this, a Locus, Centrum or Tier must be chosen to perform the exclusion. Then draw a line to the elements that will be excluded and draw a second line around the Locus that is being excluded.



If a Target rune is excluding an element, it tells the

The Eternal Quest

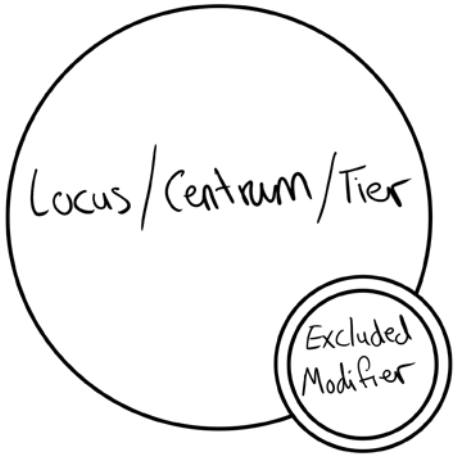
The Starchild Cult, despite its few centuries of existence, has never outgrown its cult status. This is because the Seekers, as the cult members call themselves, were always just a little too strange, too outlandish and too zealous for the mainstream religions. The cult's propensity for criminal acts and extremism has also not endeared itself to the public. The cult also does not actively seek to convert others, only accepting those who truly seek to walk down their path. This has created an "us vs. them" mentality, erecting a barrier between the Seekers and the world.

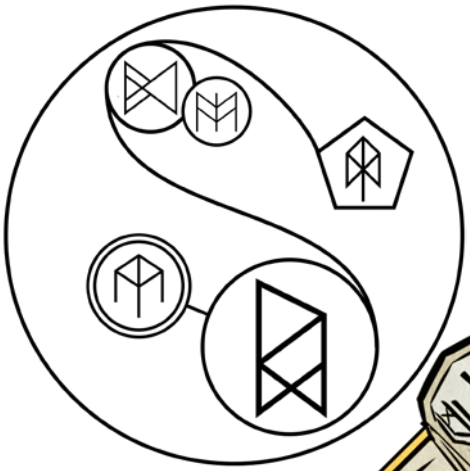
The Seekers have only one purpose in life and all their beliefs are centred around this: to find their unborn god. According to them, the Starchild rests on the far side of the Veil that separates the universe from the runes and arrays that power it. The Starchild once managed to reach across to our universe in the form of Bür, but he was ripped away before he could complete his journey. It is now up to the Seekers to find the path that will lead him back. The Seekers will do anything they can do accomplish this. They believe their best hope is to find and create the perfect array that will summon the Starchild; thus it is no surprise their cult contains a multitude of runic scholars. However, whatever they believe may help them is fair game in their eyes. Mortal laws are of no concern to the Starchild. "In the pursuit of faith, all is permitted."

runic array that the element cannot enter or exist within the same space as that Target (e.g.: a Containment field that excludes Humans means that people cannot exist or enter that containment field). If an Action rune is excluding an element, it tells the runic array not to apply that Action's effects to the element (e.g.: a Heat rune Commanding an Animal rune, but also excluding Humans means that all animals except humans will be heated).

Modifiers can also be excluded, and this will tell the array to specify all types of that rune except for the modifier that is being excluded. Excluding a modifier is shown by just having a second circle around the modifier that is overlapping the Locus. You can have both a regular modifier and an excluded modifier on the same Locus/Centrum/Tier if you want; it isn't just one or the other.

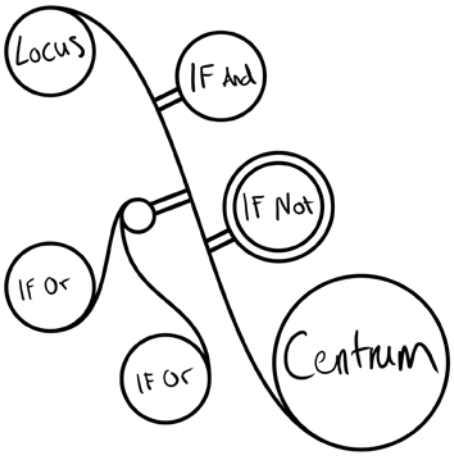
The rune being excluded here is the Water rune, and this means that water and fire cannot touch each other while there is still energy in the array. With this, we've effectively made waterproof fire.





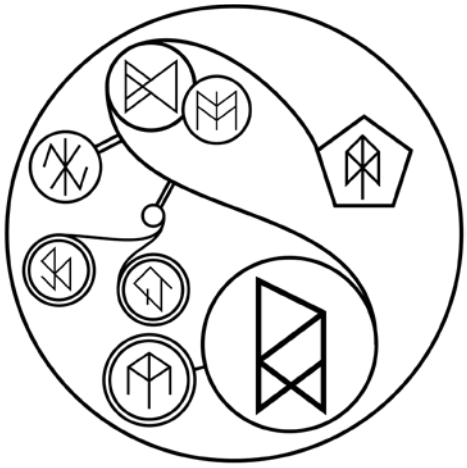
Conditionals

A Conditional acts like a trigger, telling the runic array only to do an Action if the specific Conditions are met. Conditionals are shown by a Locus intercepting a Command line with two parallel straight lines. This tells the array only to activate that Command if the elements in the Locus is present. If you put a second circle around that Conditional Locus, it tells the array only to activate that Command if the elements in the Locus is not present.



The third type of Conditional uses a blank Placeholder Locus with several Loci linked to it with their own Command lines. This tells the runic array to only activate the Command if any of the elements in those Loci are present. Only one of the elements in the Loci Commanding the Placeholder needs to be present for the Action to be activated. You can have as few or as many Conditionals of all three types on a single Command line. If you do this, then all the Conditions must be met before that Command line is activated.

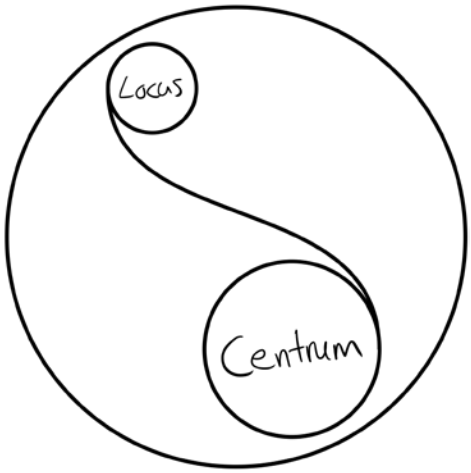
With our three Conditionals here, we've told the runic array to only create fire if there is Air *and* if there isn't Human *or* Wood present. We need the air of course for the fire to work, because the runic array will only provide the energy to fuel it, and of course we don't want to accidentally set a person on fire, so we can't have humans present in the array when it starts up. Similarly, we don't want the fire to get out of control by spreading somewhere else, so we don't want anything wooden in the array that could get set alight by our runic fire.



Complex Arrays

Just like how you can have multiple tiers in a runic array, you can have entire smaller runic arrays inside larger ones. A Complex Array simply means that there is a secondary, smaller runic array inside it that takes the place of a Locus.

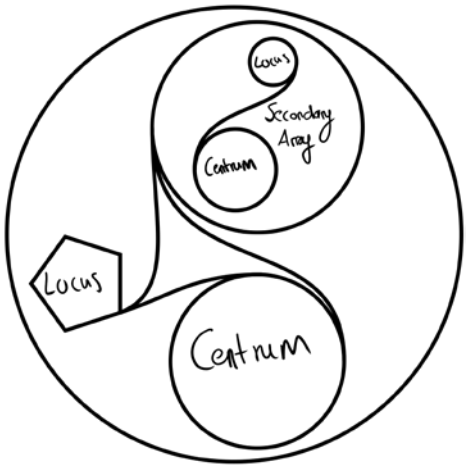
When a Secondary Array acts as a Locus, it is treated as if it was an Action rune and so it has to follow all the normal rules of Loci. This means that it has to show Operational order, it can be modified by other runes, and it have Conditionals placed on the Command line between it and whatever it may be Commanding. More importantly, if it Excludes anything, it tells the runic array not to apply that Secondary Array's effects to the element

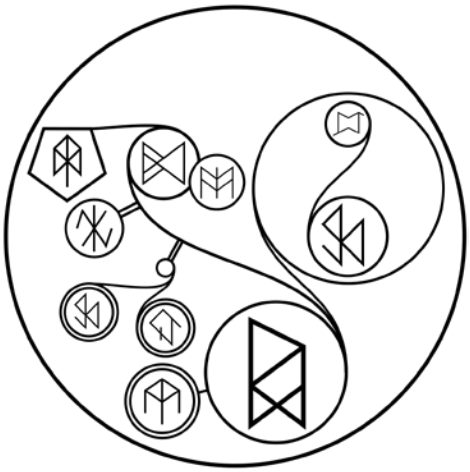


it is excluding. This is vital to understand: a Secondary Array Excluding another rune does not mean that each rune inside the Secondary Array Excludes the rune; it means only that the overall affect that the Secondary Array would ordinarily produce will not apply to what it is Excluding.

Complex Arrays are called "complex" for a reason. Because the Secondary Array acts as a single Action Locus, only the final effect that the Secondary Array creates has any influence on the larger Complex Array. You need to "read" the Secondary Array first to determine what it does, and then apply the result of that Secondary Array as a Locus by itself.

In the smaller, secondary array, you will recognise the rune for Humans as the centrum, and the rune in the locus is Push. This very simple array does exactly what it sounds like it: it pushes humans away. By affecting the Fire centrum with this array, every little bit of the fire will push humans away. Luckily, that won't actually happen because of the third law of motion which says every action has an opposite reaction. Since a human weighs more than fire, it's the fire that's going to be moving. What all of this means is that if a person gets too close to the fire, the fire will move away, and if the person moves over the runic array, the earlier Conditional we put in will cut off the fire.





USES OF KNOWN RUNES

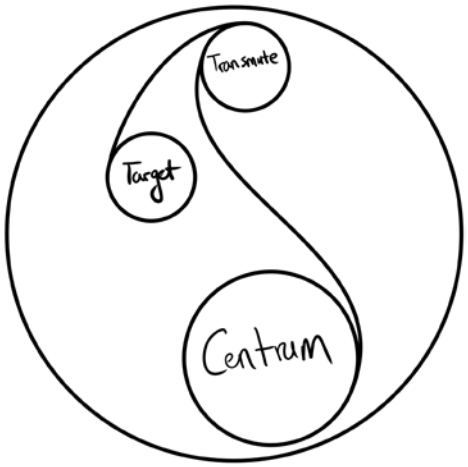
Command

Transmute

Transmute

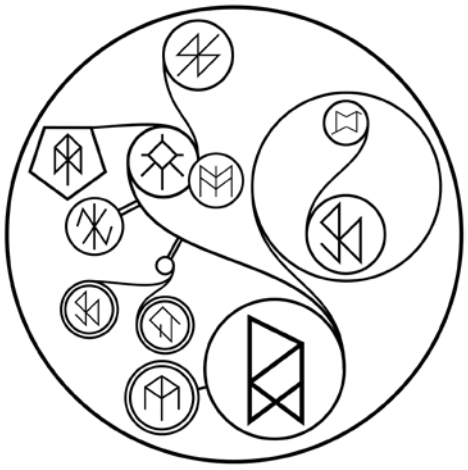
Transforms a Target rune(s) into another Target rune(s). Can only be used as a Command rune.

To Transmute means to change one thing into another. In a runic array, you can link two Loci with a Transmute rune to tell the runic array to turn one into the other. These Loci must either be Target Runes or Secondary Arrays. In other words, you can only Transmute tangible things. You can't Transmute an insubstantial Shape Rune or a non-existing Action rune.



Because Transmute links two Target Loci or Secondary Arrays, showing Operation order works a little differently. The Targets or Secondary Arrays that are being Transmuted do not have to show Operational order. Only other Command Loci need to show which comes first.

We've removed the Create rune and replaced it with the Transmute rune, and then linked it to the Stone rune. Now we're no longer making Fire out of nothing; instead we're turning earth into fire. This uses less energy, and there's dirt and rock everywhere, so we're not going to run out of fuel anytime soon.



Transportation

Receive

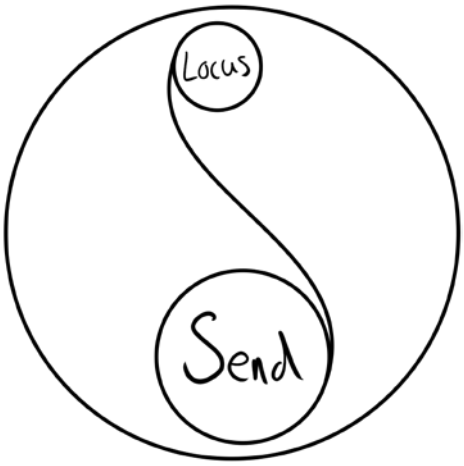
Receives transported effects of from an array with the Send rune.

Send

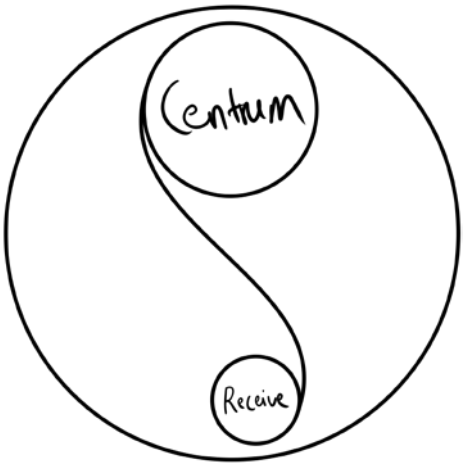
Transports all effects to an array with the Receive rune. Can only be used as a centrum.

Runic arrays can teleport targets and effects from one array to another through the Send and Receive runes. We call this Runic Transportation.

The Send rune will always be the Centrum of its array, and so everything in that array (whether individual target runes in Loci, or a whole construct magical effect) will be sent to the next array. The Receive rune in the next array can be either a Centrum (if you just want to do a straight Transport from one runic array to another) or a Locus (if you want to use the Transported material in the array you are designing).

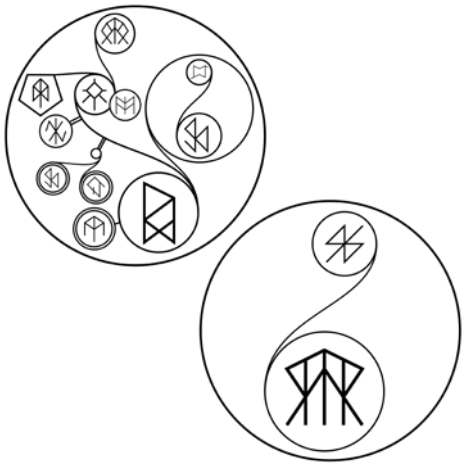


Modifying either, or both, the Send and Receive runes with Size runes will dictate over how great a distance they can Send or Receive material. A Send array will transport its array's effects to all Receive arrays within range, but it will only send an equal share of its effects to all Receive arrays within range; it will not duplicate its effects. The same applies to the Receive arrays.



To specify which Send and Receive array is Transporting the material, you can modify the Send and Receive runes with Air, Fire, Stone, and Water runes. Send and Receive runes will only Transport material and effects to each other if they have the same number of each elemental rune on them. To make them even more specific, you can modify the elemental runes on a Send or Receive rune with more elemental runes, creating a chain of modifications that both Send and Receive runes must match in order to Transport the material and effects.

In order to get the Transportation to work we need a second array. You can see that we've replaced the Stone rune with the Receive rune, and moved the Stone rune to the second array. The only thing the second array does is Transport the stone, which then goes to the Receive rune to be transmuted into fire. So we haven't really changed how the array works; all we've done is change how the stone gets to the array. You don't need to put it on the primary array anymore, which means the array can work even if there isn't any stone around.



Actions

Contain

Keeps the objects/effects of the rune(s) it Commands within the field of the array.

Cool

Reduces the temperature of the target rune(s) at a rate of 1°C per second.

Create

Spontaneously and near-instantaneously generates target rune(s). Can only be used as a Command rune.

Destroy

Spontaneously and near-instantaneously annihilates target rune(s). Can only be used as a Command rune.

Float

Cancels out the effect of gravity for the rune(s) it Commands. If used to modify a rune, it specifies a target that is no longer under the effects of gravity.

Heat

Increases the temperature of the target rune(s) at a rate of 1°C per second.

Invert

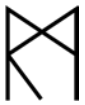
Inverts the intended purpose of the target rune (s). When Commanding or Modifying a Command rune, that rune does the opposite of what its description states. When Modifying a Target rune, it specifies the opposite of the Target's description.

Pull

Draws target rune(s) towards the centrum of the array at a speed of 1 metre per second, regardless of the target's mass. The effect is subject to the third law of motion. If used to modify a rune, it specifies a target that is already under the effect of a Pull rune.

Push

Propels target rune(s) away from the centrum of the array at a speed of 1 metre per second, regardless of the target's mass. The effect is subject to the third law of motion. If used to modify a rune, it specifies a target that is already under the effect of a Push rune.



Rotate

Moves target rune(s) clockwise around the centrum of the array at a speed of 1 metre per second, regardless of the target's mass or its distance from the centrum. The effect is subject to the third law of motion. If used to modify a rune, it specifies a target that is already under the effect of a Rotate rune.

Sustain

Maintain target rune(s) current state and effects, prevents decay or degradation.

Size

Tiny

Specifies that the target is to be 0.01 times (1%) the size of the array.

Small

Specifies that the target is to be 0.1 times (10%) the size of the array.

Medium

Specifies that the target is to be 1 times (100%) the size of the array.

Large

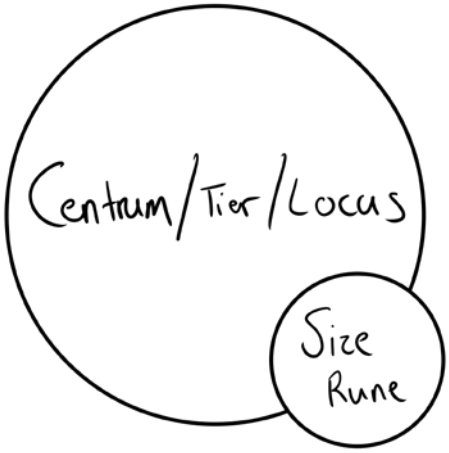
Specifies that the target is to be 10 times (1,000%) the size of the array.

Gargantuan

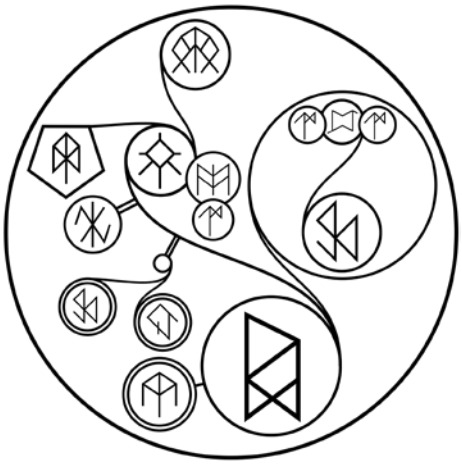
Specifies that the target is to be 100 times (10,000%) the size of the array.

Size runes are always used to Modify a Locus, Centrum or Tier and specify the size of that target or effect in relation to the area of the array. If more than one Size rune is Modifying the same Locus, Centrum or Tier then you add up all their sizes together. You can also Modify one Size rune with another one, which will multiply their sizes together. In this way you can get as specific a size as you require.

Always remember that it is the size of the array that ultimately determines the size of the magical effect, the Size runes just modifies and changes this.



There are three size runes added to our array, and all are the Medium rune. We have one modifying the Contain modifier, and this says that the fire will only made as large as the array, no larger, no smaller. It's a good way to control the size, so that the fire doesn't get out of control. The two runes on the Push locus says that the array will push humans (or rather the fire as we have learnt) up to a distance twice the size of the array. This puts a limit on how close a person can get to the fire before the 'pushing' begins.



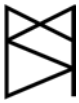
Shape

Ball

Specifies a spherical field across the diameter of the array, sitting flush against the array. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Clean

Explicitly specifies no shape or field.



Column

Specifies a columnar field across the area of the array, with a depth 10 times the array's diameter. Size runes increases the width and area of the shape, while putting a Contain rune (Modified by Size runes) will affect the depth of the shape. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Cone

Specifies a conical field across the area of the array, with a depth ten times that of the array's diameter and it's sharpest point against the array. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Contain

Specifies a field across the array to the circumference of the runic array. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Disk

Specifies a flat field across the surface of the array, with a depth 1/10th that of the array's diameter. Size runes increases the depth of the shape, while putting a Contain rune (modified by size runes) will affect the diameter and area of the shape. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Dome

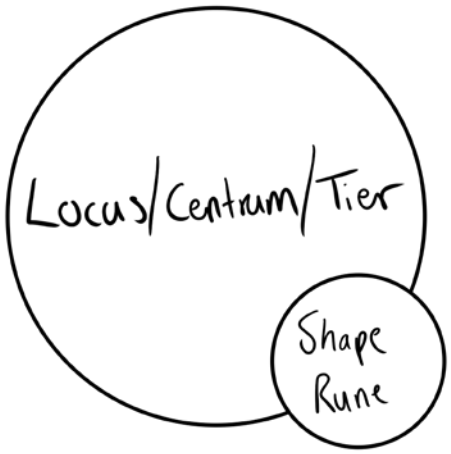
Specifies a half-spherical field across the diameter of the array, with its flat side against the array with the height of the dome equal to the radius of the array. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Wall

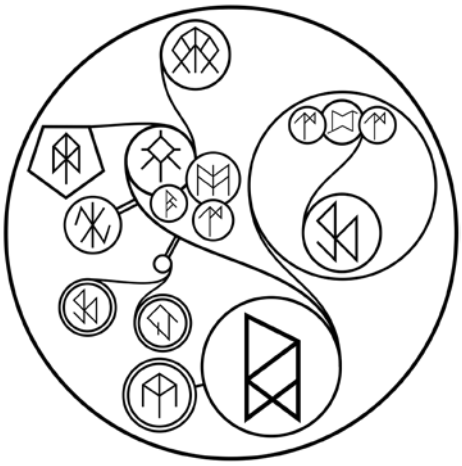
Specifies a field around the circumference of the array, with a thickness of 1/10th of the array's diameter. If Modifying a rune, the shape is filled with target rune's effects.

Like Size runes, Shape runes can only be used to Modify a Locus, Centrum or Tier. If one Shape rune is Modifying another Shape rune, the second Shape rune dictates the boundaries of the first.

For example: if you have a Column rune modifying a Ball rune, the shape of the Ball can't go beyond that of the Column. You can use this to mould the shapes to the specific idea that you have in mind. If you want an oblong shape, you can use Size runes to narrow the column, thereby squishing the ball lengthwise. Or if you wanted a flattened dome, you can modify the Dome rune with a Disk rune, to make a more shield-like shape.



We've modified the Transmute locus with a Ball rune, and this is purely ornamental and to give it a more 'magical' feeling. All it does it tell the array to create the fire in the shape of a ball. That's all, but it does make the appearance of it more elegant, seeing a ball of fire burning all by itself



Time

Spur

Accelerates target's time by a factor of 0.1 (10%).

Quicken

Accelerates target's time by a factor of 1 (100%).

Haste

Accelerates target's time by a factor of 10 (1,000%).

Stall

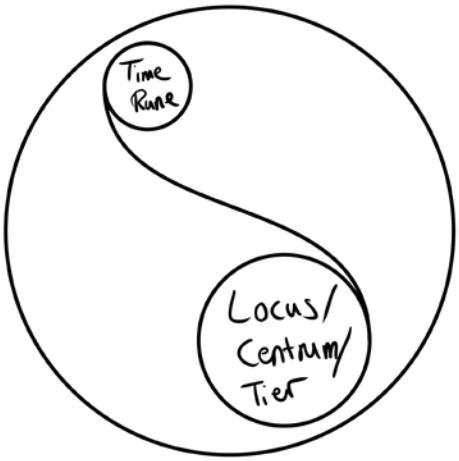
Decelerates target's time by a factor of 0.01 (1%).

Slow

Decelerates target's time by a factor of 0.1 (10%).

Stop

Ceases time for the target.

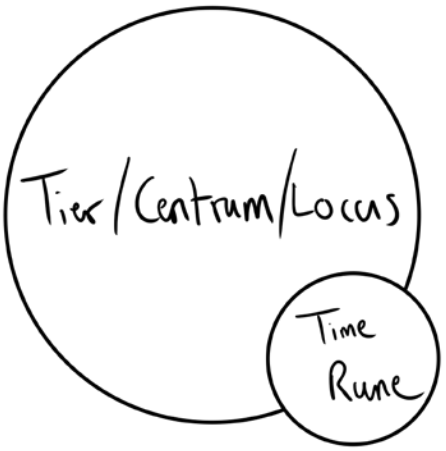


Time runes accelerate or decelerate the Locus, Centrum or Tier they are Commanding. Multiple Time runes can Command the same target, adding all their time adjustments together to find the final acceleration or deceleration of the target. Time runes can also modify other Time runes which multiplies their effects together (like Size runes).

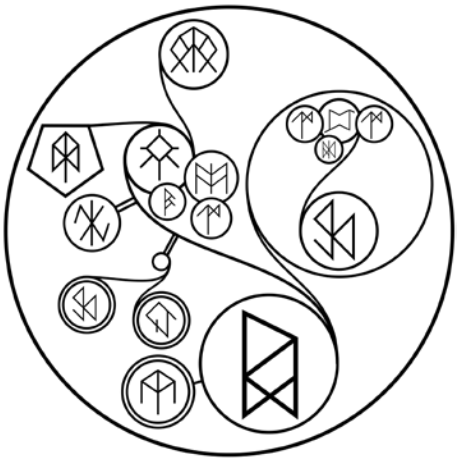
Some other Command runes already specify a speed at which they interact with a target (such as Push and Pull).

If a Time rune modifies such a Command rune, then it is treated as if it is modifying another Time rune in that the time adjustment effects are multiplied together to come to a final total result.

Time can be sped up as much as is needed, however it can only be decelerated down by a factor of 1 (100% deceleration) as time will then completely stop. TIf you choose to modify a standard target rune (such as Human) instead of Commanding it, the array will only affect that target if it is moving at that speed or further away from standard, unaffected time. So if you modify a Human rune with a Quicken rune, the array will only target Humans that are moving at twice normal time or quicker. Similarly, if you modify a Human rune with 5 Slow runes, the array will only affect Humans moving at half normal times or slower.



Here is another feature added to the runic array to make it safer. Modifying the Push locus with the Haste rune means that the fire will now be pushed away from a person at a speed of 10 m/s. If your runic array isn't ludicrously large, this will be close enough to instantaneous as makes no difference. The runic array should (fingers crossed) now be completely safe to have around people without anyone burning themselves.



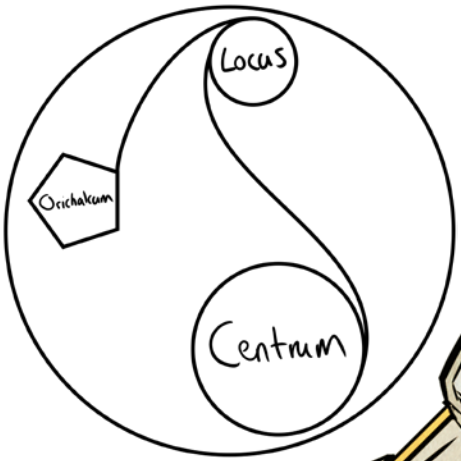
Target

Orichalcum

Orichalcum

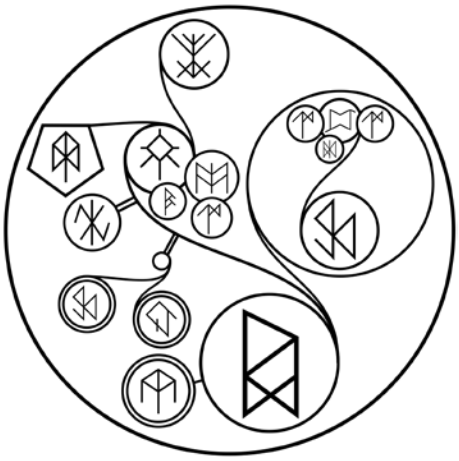
The rune that is required to be in the array as a Commanding Locus if orichalcum is to be used to power the array. Orichalcum cannot be Created or Transmuted.

There is only one thing that a runic array cannot create (or transmute other targets into): orichalcum. It is a mystical material that serves as the most powerful source of fuel for runic arrays.



A runic array must be set up to use Orichalcum. This is done by having Orichalcum Commanding another Locus, Centrum, or Tier. This tells the array that the Locus, Centrum or Tier that is being Commanded will not be activated unless there Orichalcum present within the runic array's field of effect. In this way, Orichalcum

is both a fuel and a trigger for the runic array. Orichalcum can also be used more generally as a Target rune to be manipulated by the runic array, or to be transmuted into other substances.

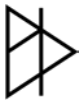


There's a few ways we can add Orichalcum into the mix for this runic array. To make things as simple as possible, we'll kill two birds with one stone by replacing the Receive rune above the Transmutation rune with the Orichalcum rune. This way it acts both as the trigger and fuel to start the runic array, and also as the material that gets transmuted into fire.

Materials

Air

The mixture of gases present in the planet's atmosphere. When Created /Transmuted, the array produces a mixture of gases based upon the average metric volume of atmospheric gases in the area closest to the centrum of the array.



Animal

Any organism classified under the biological kingdom of Animalia. When Created/ Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species closest to the centrum of the array.

Antimony

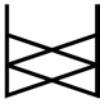
A lustrous gray metal that is crystalline and brittle. Chemical symbol is Sb.

Arsenic

A grey crystalline metal. Chemical symbol is as.

Bird

Any organism classified under the biological class of Aves. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of bird closest to the centrum of the array.



Blood

Red blood cells with hemoglobin suspended in plasma. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces blood containing no antigens of the species closest to the centrum of the array. Use various animal runes to modify the Blood rune to specify which animal blood is to be used. Runically created human blood cannot power a runic array.

Bone

Hard, whitish, calcified tissue making up the skeletons of vertebrates. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces bone of the species closest to the centrum of the array. Use various animal runes to modify the Bone rune to specify which animal bones is to be used.

Bovid

Any organism classified under the biological family of Bovidae. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the bovine breed or type closest to the centrum of the array.

Canid

Any organism classified under the biological family of Canidae. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the canine breed or type closest to the centrum of the array.

Carbon

Black, nonmetallic, tetravalent compound that is the basis for life as we understand it to be. Chemical symbol is C.

Cool

Specifies any heat at a temperature lower than that of the surface of the array.

Copper

A ductile, soft, malleable, reddish-orange metal with very high thermal and electrical conductivity. Chemical symbol is Cu.

Felid

Any organism classified under the biological family of Felidae. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the feline breed or type closest to the centrum of the array.

Fire

Flammable plasma discharge. If not given fuel and air, the fire will immediately go out once the energy in the array is depleted.

Fish

Any organism classified under the biological family of Pisces. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of fish closest to the centrum of the array.

Flesh

The soft substance consisting of muscle, tissue and fat that is found between the skin and bones of an animal. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces flesh of the species closest to the centrum of the array. Use various animal runes to modify the Flesh rune to specify which animal flesh is to be used.

Flowering plants

Any organism classified under the biological clade of angiosperms. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature organism of the species of flowering plant closest to the centrum of the array.

Gold

A bright yellow, dense, soft, malleable, and ductile metal. It is one of the least reactive chemical elements. Chemical symbol is au.

Heat

Specifies any heat at a temperature higher than that of the surface of the array.

Human

Homo Sapiens. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the ethnicity or race closest to the centrum of the array.

Iron

A hard, grey metal often used in fabrication. Used with carbon to create steel. Chemical symbol is Fe.

Lead

A soft, malleable, and heavy metal. Has a bluish-white colour but tarnishes to a dull grey when exposed to air. Chemical symbol is Pb.

Light

Electromagnetic radiation within a certain portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, most often used to refer to radiation within the visible spectrum. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces white light at an intensity of 1 lumen per 1cm2. If size or shape runes are used to modify the Light rune, the intensity would be 1 lumen per 1cm3. Intensity of the light can be changed by applying size runes to the Light rune itself, while applying size runes also to a Contain Rune which itself is modifying the Light rune.

Lightning

An electrostatic discharge. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an electrostatic discharge of alternate current (AC).

Lizard

Any organism classified under the biological suborder of Lacertilia. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of lizard closest to the centrum of the array..

Mammal

Any organism classified under the biological class of Mammalia. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of mammal closest to the centrum of the array.

Mercury

Also known as quicksilver. A silvery metal that is liquid at the freezing temperature of water. Chemical symbol is Hg.

Plant

Any organism classified under the biological kingdom of Plantae. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature organism of the species of plant closest to the centrum of the array.

Primate

Any organism classified under the biological order of Primates. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of primate closest to the centrum of the array.

Rodent

Any organism classified under the biological order of Rodentia. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the species of rodent closest to the centrum of the array.

Rose

Any organism classified under the biological genus of Rosa. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature organism of the species of rose closest to the centrum of the array.

Seed plants

Any organism classified under the biological clade of Gymnosperms. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature organism of the species of seed plant closest to the centrum of the array.

Silver

A soft, white metal that is both the most reflective metal known to man and the metal with the highest electrical conductivity. Chemical symbol is Ag.

Sound

An audible wave of vibration and pressure that propagates through a medium. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces sound at 1kHz at an intensity of 1 decibel per 1cm2. If size or shape runes are used to modify the Sound rune, the intensity would be 1 decibel per 1cm3. Intensity of the sound can be changed by applying size runes to the Sound rune itself, while applying size runes also to a Contain Rune which itself is modifying the Sound rune. Time runes will alter the frequency of the sound produced.

Stone

A solid aggregate of ground or soil. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces stone of the same variety as the closest stone, ground, or soil to the centrum of the array.

Sulphur

A yellow, foul smelling, non-metallic compound. Chemical symbol is S.

Time

The fourth dimension perceivable by humans which can be used to order events into “past”, “present” and “future”.

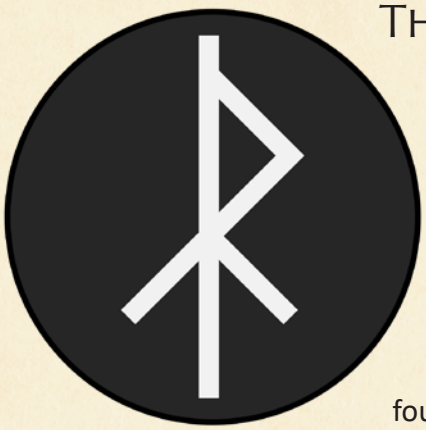
Tin

A malleable, ductile and highly crystalline silvery-white metal. Chemical symbol is Sn.

Ursid

Any organism classified under the biological family of Ursidae. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces an androgynous, sexually mature corpse of the ursine breed or type closest to the centrum of the array.

The Myth, the Legend, the Man



Bür is known across the world, from corner to corner, even if the name is called changes from town to town, country to country. There is one thing that all legends, myths and religions about him can agree on: he gave the world the runes and the knowledge of how to use them. The 'how' and the 'why' is where it all falls down.

Who was Bür? Take away all the scriptures, revelations and folk tales, and what is left of the man? Nothing. There is no body to be found and no historical record that is filled with the fantastical. For the great impact he had on the world, he left nothing beside the runes and the legends. And so all that is left to do is speculate about him, if you can do that beyond the ears of the religious of course.

Some say he is proof of life in other parts of the cosmos, and that he came to uplift us into a new great age. Others say he must be from our future, travelling back in time to ensure that the future happens as it should be. One theory, however, has kept archaeologists and adventurers busy: the legendary city of Bealmoa. Out in the wastelands east of the Ridgebacks, it is the city where supposedly humanity began, and where the runes were not written, but spoken and thought. Some say that Bür was an envoy of Bealmoa, and that if we can discover it, we will have reached the city of the gods.

Water

A transparent liquid found in rain, lakes, rivers and seas that is central to life. Chemical symbol is H20. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces pure water.

Wood

A porous and fibrous structural tissue found in the stems and roots of trees and tree-like plants. When Created/Transmuted, the array produces wood of the same variety as the closest wood to the centrum of the array.

RUNIC MECHANICS

The Runic Arrays

The central concepts of the Runed Age setting are the runes and the runic arrays. The previous two chapters went into detail about how the runes and runic arrays work and how to create them; and the next chapter will deal with the lore, background, and philosophy of the runes. This section, however, will talk about the game and mechanical aspects of the runes, and how to actually use them when playing the Runed Age.

As you've seen, the runes and their arrays are not like traditional magic. There are no wizards in towers, no mages' colleges, no incantations to cast fireballs. Everyone can (and does to some extent) learn the runes and how to craft an array, doing away with the use of elite, oligarchical mages. Most importantly: runes also can't be cast. They are drawn, etched, carved, painted, sculpted, etc. and then energy is put into them, and then they work. If you think of the more traditional games and media you have seen magic in, the runic arrays here are more like enchantments and magical traps.

But, unlike your more traditional media, you can do anything you want with the arrays. The system is there for you, the player, to do whatever you want to with it. From fireballs to blood draining swords to hoverboards, the only limitation to what you can do with the runes is your own imagination. By using the rules in the previous two chapters, you can (quite literally) create any magical effect that you can think of. Nearly everywhere in the world of the Runed Age you will find runes drawn on practically everything. It is interwoven with technology to a degree that the two are barely separate in the eyes of people in Middelburg and elsewhere. Every sword, every bullet, and every pistol has runes worked into them, The magic is everywhere. So don't be afraid to go completely insane with your runic arrays, they will fit right in.

Creating new Runes

The previous chapter shows all the runes that are currently known in Alfresia. There are 75 of them. This may not sound like many, but you would be surprised just how much you can do with just 75 concepts. We only needed 26 letters to create all the words in the English language after all.

There is a method, a rhyme, a rhythm, a recipe to creating the Runes, but the people of the Runed Age don't know what it could be.

Thousands of years of study has not revealed to them the underlying pattern behind the runes. To "discover" a new rune means just drawing something and hoping it works. It is a lot of trial and error that very rarely leads somewhere. As such, you as the player and GM will also not know how the runes are made.

But don't let that stop you from trying.

To try and create a new rune, first have a concept in mind that is significantly different to any of the runes in the book. For example: let's say you have a fondness for lilies. There is no Lily Rune currently. So say you have your heart set on creating a Lily Rune. Then draw it how you think it should look. Have a look at the runes in the book to make sure you have the same style as them so it all fits together aesthetically. Have a look at real world Germanic and other Indo-European runes if you want some historical inspiration.

Once you have your proposed rune set, you need to put it in an array, otherwise it is just a drawing. It is the runic array that makes runes work. The easiest to do is just link a Create rune to the one you just made. Once you've made your array, roll a d100. On a roll of 11-100, nothing happens, the rune is just a drawing, not a real rune. Throw it away, start again. On a roll of 02-09 something happens, but it's not good. The rune explodes with the force to destroy a building. If you are anywhere close, it will be a miracle to survive. So throw away that drawing, and start again. On a roll of 01, you did it. By divine inspiration, you uncovered a new rune. Well done!

If you are unfortunate enough to roll a 02-09 and the runic array explodes you may suffer a Wound depending how close to the array you are when it explodes. This will be up to your GM but expect it to hurt.

You can only roll for a drawing once, if it doesn't work you can never use that again. Any new drawing must look significantly different to the one you just did. You can't just move one line 1° and call it new. Your GM can disqualify a rune from being tested if it looks too close to a rune you already tried. Remember also that if someone else draws your rune it will look different because their handwriting is different to yours. Your new runes must take this into account.

Sigils and the Runes

Ordinarily in the Runed Age, you can spend a Sigil to get a +25 bonus to any Skill Check, and to reroll a failed Skill Check. They also have some runic specific uses, particularly in combat. Odds are pretty good that the weapons and armour your characters will be using will have runic arrays all over them, meaning that they can do things ordinary weapons and armour can't.

If you have runes that work as armour (i.e. runes which either prevent/redirect/transmute impacts and the like) then after you are hit by an attack and the Hit Location has been determined you can then spend a Sigil to declare your runic array absorbed the hit and you will suffer no Wound that turn. Remember, you can only spend a Sigil to negate wounds if the Hit Location where you have been hit has defensive runes that can narratively protect you. If you are only wearing a hat with no runes on it, then you cannot spend a Sigil to negate wounds to your Head Hit Location, even if you have runes covering other areas of your body.

If you are defending in combat and you roll a 100 you can't spend any Sigils to negate the potential wounds you receive.

On the offensive side of things, you can use Sigils to increase the severity of the Wounds you inflict. After you have successfully hit an opponent during combat, if your weapon or ammunition has offensive runic arrays on them, you can spend a Sigil to increase the severity of the Wound (e.g.: to increase a Minor wound to a Significant wound). If you choose to do so, you must declare you are spending a Sigil this way before the opponent can use a Sigil to

negate any Wound. Negating a Wound always beats out increasing a Wounds severity. You can spend more than 1 Sigil per Skill Check this way if you want to really make sure the opponent stays down.

Runes and Wounds

Runic arrays can be activated by three different means: through the direct application of energy (fire, a hot summer sun, a liberal application of a hammer); orichalcum (more rare and much more valuable than gold); and blood (but only human blood). The quickest and easiest way is, of course, blood. With blood, you don't need to mortgage the house for a piece of orichalcum or have to worry about the time it takes to start a fire.

This means that your character may have to spill some of their own blood in an adventure to get a runic array going. Slicing their palm, opening a vein, that sort of thing. Cutting yourself and spilling blood, however, does come at a price (except the multitude of scars of course). You can't just keep spilling pint after pint of blood and expect to still be standing after it all. For this reason, whenever you have to spill your own blood for a runic array you will get a Wound.

The severity of your wound will depend on the GM's assessment of how much energy the runic array will need. There are so many factors involved with this that there are no rigid rules set out for it, but a good rule of thumb is to work around whether the energy needed will be a little, a lot, or too much. This corresponds well to getting a Minor, Significant or Grievous Wound.

You can choose which Hit Location gets this Wound, but remember that self inflicted Wounds work just like regular wounds. If you already have a Wound on a Hit Location and you inflict another one, it will either go up or down in Severity depending on how many wounds you already have. For example, if you already have a Minor Wound, and you cut your palm to spill a little bit of blood on an array, it will count as a Significant Wound. Narratively you and your GM will work out why you accidentally stabbed yourself much harder than you anticipated.

Runic Skill Checks

Like everything else in the rules, if you want to use a runic array and there is a chance it could fail, or using it would case drama and tension, then you will have to roll a Skill Check.

Succeed on this Skill Check and you've drawn that runic array well enough to do what you want it to do. Fail it, and you've missed something somewhere in the runic array that means it didn't work, or it did and you aimed it at the wrong thing, put too little energy into it (or too much), or what you were trying to do was a bit more difficult than you thought. If you've drawn the runic array with the intent to hurt someone, then this Skill Check will double as a Combat Skill Check.

As with all Skill Checks, there are Modifiers that the GM can use to make life easier or more difficult for you. For creating runic arrays, there are two specific Modifiers to worry about: the Diligence and Suitability Modifiers.

Diligence Modifiers	
+30	Perfectionist
+15	Attention to detail
+-0	Neatly drawn
-15	Careless work
-30	Illegible

The Diligence Modifiers deal with how careful you have been in drawing your runic arrays. If you've taken the time to do it properly, then you'll get the higher Modifiers, but if you've rushed through it, expect to get the lower ones.

To get the Perfectionist Modifier, you will need to put some serious time and effort into drawing your array. How much time and effort? That is up to your GM based on the context of

the scenario and the choices you've made for your character, but to be a perfectionist, you have to be perfect.

The Suitability Modifiers on the other hand deal with how well you've thought out your runic arrays. There are a thousand ways to knock down a wall, if you are so inclined, but there a million more ways to do it wrong. When you design your runic array, your GM will decide how suitable it is for what you want to do and apply one of the following Modifiers to your Skill Check.

Suitability Modifiers	
+30	Perfectly suitable
+15	Fit for purpose
+-0	Adequate
-15	Inadequate
-30	Barely appropriate

Since the GM runs the fictional world of the Runed Age that you're playing in, he'll know how suitable your runic array is for the problem at hand. Remember, however, that your GM can simply say your runic array has no chance of working, and that's that. Not every runic array has a chance to work against every obstacle. If you want to knock down a wall and make a runic array to create a small puddle of water, then for obvious reasons that isn't going to work.

Weapon Enchantments

If you have runic arrays ready-to-go on your weapons (which you really should) then you don't have to roll an additional Skill Check on top of the Fight/Shoot Skill Check to attack your opponents. Instead, you can choose between two options.

If the arrays on your weapons will increase your chance to hit an opponent (such as with an area-of-effect attack), then you can use the refitted Suitability Modifiers above as an added positive Modifier to your Fight/Shoot Skill Check to hit an opponent.

Alternatively, if your Fight/Shoot Skill Check was successful and you hit your opponent, then you can use the Suitability Modifiers above to increase the damage done by the weapon.

Weapon/Armour Suitability	
+30	Perfectly suitable
+20	Fit for purpose
+10	Adequate
+-0	Inadequate

For example, if your Shoot Skill Roll was 10 points better than your opponent's Athletics Skill Roll, this would ordinarily mean only a Minor Wound. However, if the runic array on the bullet you shot was "Perfectly suitable" for harming a person, that 10 would become a 40 and take the Minor Wound up to a Significant Wound. Add to this the ability spend a Sigil to increase the severity of the Wound, and you can understand how deadly runic weapons can be.

Remember you can only choose one of these for a single Combat Skill Check, not both.

The same thing can be done with armour and the runic arrays you put on them. If you have runic arrays on your armour and clothing then you can either get a positive Modifier to your defensive roll if the runic arrays would help you avoid an incoming attack, or if you get hit by an opponent's attack, then you can use the Suitability Modifiers to reduce the damage you are about to take.

Skills to Use

There are two main Skills associated with the runic arrays: Fine-Craft and Logic. This doesn't mean they are the only ones you can use if the narrative calls for it, but they are the ones that have the closest logical connection to using the runes.

Fine-Craft for the runes is all about the practical application of creating runic arrays. Whenever you need to create a runic array, this it the Skill you turn to, and the Fine-

Craft Skill Check is also the one that the Diligence and Suitability modifiers will affect.

Fine-Craft is all about working with details and getting every little bit correct, and runic arrays need to be perfect. The better a runic array is drawn, the less efficient it becomes, until you've drawn it so terribly that it stops working; so practice that handwriting.

In short, Fine-Craft shows your character's aptitude and creating runic arrays.

Logic, on the other hand, is all about understanding the runes. The runes and arrays are a philosophy and a science in the Runed Age, and that means book-learning, which is right where the Logic Skill steps into the spotlight.

If you come across a rune or array that you as the player don't recognise or fully understand, you can roll a Logic Skill Check to see if you can get a few hints from the GM about what it is.

Alternatively, if you're trying to create a runic effect, but you're not too sure what runes to use, and how to put them into a runic array; then you can use the Logic Skill to get a few hints from the GM (or other players) about what to do to get your runic array finished. The Logic Skill won't design your arrays for you (it's good, but not that good), but it will go a long way to help you.

This most condescending of letters is from the purported most learned runologist in Alfresia. Our own scholars undoubtedly outshine this professor, whom I also hear is a Runist. Truly the northerners have no pride, allowing heathens within their most hallowed halls. Your everlasting illustriousness is wise though to investigate how these islanders think. I have often heard your hallowed words quoted in the blessed halls of the Imperial Palace: "To overcome one's enemies, one must first understand how they think". Truly, you are the wisest of sages.

ON INVOKING THE POWERS OF RUNIC ARRAYS, A BRIEF EXPLORATION

By Rikard van der Burg, RPhD, Professor of Runic Studies, Middelburg University.

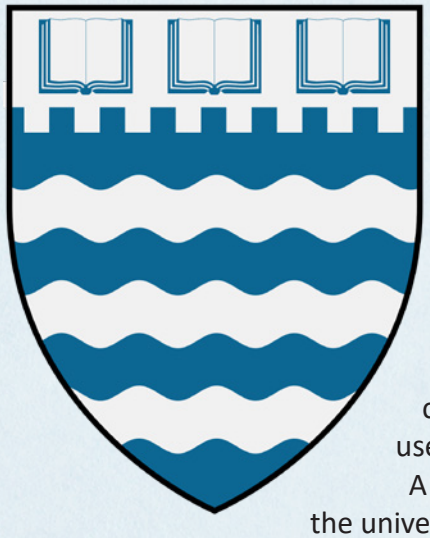
To my dearest readers,

It has come to my attention that our general populace here in Middelburg are woefully uneducated when it comes to the finer points of runic theory. Clearly, any man can draw a runic array and produce an effect, spectacular as it may seem. However, so few understand the powers with which they are dealing that their runic arrays are haphazard, inefficient and tragically inadequate. I have seen this time and time again with our new students this year, and also when the constabulary calls me to investigate yet another disastrous mishap due to poor runic array design.

So forgive a frustrated old professor this one article, which is not aimed at yourselves, you who have so consistently shown your aptitude at runic theory in all your many Letters to the Editor in this journal. No, this article is meant for those who are not avid readers and thus I dearly hope that you, my fair readers, propagate this letter to your friends, family and acquaintances so that the runic literacy in this city will increase. A runic array is only as strong as its weakest locus, they say, so let us help the less fortunate and make this city better!

On the Methods of Powering Runic Arrays

Runic arrays can be activated through three separate means. The first, and most common, is by the direct application of energy. This may be the least powerful method to activate a runic array, but it is the most ubiquitous. Any sort of energy can be used: kinetic, thermal, radiative, etcetera. Remember that the array does not absorb the energy, it translates it. 'Translation' in this sense means that the array creates a copy of the energy that is used to power the array. This is crucial to note as any



The University of Middelburg

Founded three years after the Alfresian Independence War, the University of Middelburg is a youngling compared to its continental counterparts, but it has already achieved more in its short time than some of the oldest schools in the known world. Originally known as the Merchant League Institute of Research, the university was created by the League for the sole purpose of inventing new ways for the League to make money. While it has ostensibly changed greatly since then, most of its funding still comes from the League with the intention that the university will use these funds to create lucrative inventions for the League.

A much more recent development has been the partnership between the university and the local Runist monastery. The university's runology department was never a popular attraction for students and scholars, but with the expertise of the Runists, the knowledge base of the department has increased dramatically, finally attracting the students and funding the department wanted. The runology department is now counted amongst the best in the world. The League has also taken an interest, wishing to merge the department with the trades department to create new runic technology for it to exploit.

application of energy, especially a high amount in a relatively brief amount of time, may damage the runic array. It is for this reason that arrays intended to proof against musket and pistol rounds incorporate a metallic destruction code, in order to destroy the round before its impact can do excessive damage to the array.

The second method by which a runic array can be activated is through the application of blood. This is far more efficient than using energy and will produce a much greater effect. However, using any blood will not activate the array. Only human blood can do this. This was first discovered during the Great War and since then no other creature's blood has been able to activate an array. It is for this reason that most contemporary religions, faiths and cults argue for the existence of a human soul, as no natural philosophical explanation have so far adequately explained why only human blood can activate an array. Of special note here is that the blood seems to be consumed by the array. Where the blood has gone has not yet been discovered, but it is the current thinking that the blood is transmuted into energy that is then used by the runic array.

Keep in mind that while it is indeed possible to construct a runic array which can create human blood, such artificial blood cannot activate runic arrays. This further fuels the unfounded yet popular religious claim of a human soul.

The last, and most powerful method to activate a runic array is by the application of Orichalcum. Per dry weight of human blood, orichalcum is 17 times more efficient than blood. As such, it is the most valuable substance in the known world. Orichalcum comes in two forms: raw and used. Raw orichalcum (sometimes called virgin orichalcum) is white pearlescent in colouration and as soft as gold. Compared with used orichalcum, raw orichalcum can activate runic arrays whereas used orichalcum cannot. Used orichalcum is also pearlescent but its colour changes depending on what runes were used in the array. Fire runes impart a ruddy hue, Water runes a blue hue, Plant runes impart a green hue and so on and so forth. As used orichalcum cannot activate runic arrays, it is predominantly used for ornamental purposes such as jewellery and as currency.

On the Matter of Energy Thresholds

When energy is applied, and translated, to a runic array, the outcome of the array is directly proportional to the energy invested. In the simplest of terms: the more energy put into the array, the larger the effect will be. Thus, a large amount of energy invested will create a large fire, for example. This however can be circumvented by the use of Size runes.

When a Size rune is applied within a runic array it creates an energy threshold. This threshold must be reached, and then surpassed for the runic array to produce an outcome. If one wishes to create a large fire, a tiny amount of energy invested will have no perceivable outcome. It will in fact be stored within the runic array until the energy threshold is reached. In such a way, a runic array can be primed with energy until it nearly reaches, but not meets, the energy threshold weeks if not months in advance. The final investment of energy can then be applied at the moment the outcome is desired for an instantaneous effect.

The energy that is required to reach the energy threshold is dependent on which size rune is used. Using the Medium rune as a base, the threshold for the Tiny rune is 0.01 times that of the Medium rune, for Small it is 0.1 times, for Large it is 10 times and for Gargantuan it is 100 times that of a Medium rune.

On the Effects Energy has on Runic Products

Without a Size rune, a runic array produces an effect whose width and height is equal to the diameter of the runic array. At least, that is the standard explanation that we teach to novices. In truth, the size of the effect is determined upon the amount of energy invested, as mentioned previously. Thus, the true size of an effect can be smaller or larger than the runic array's border. By careful examination of the energy invested into the runic array, it is possible to create a perfectly accurate result without the need of Size runes. Of course, even without Size runes, the diameter of the effect can still be constrained to the border of the array by the use of a Contain rune.

By controlling the energy invested into a runic array it is possible to "grow" an effect as the technical documents call it. This is done by investing a small amount of energy at the beginning and increasing the energy input until the desired size is achieved. This is most effective in achieving a high degree of accuracy when dealing with the various forms of energy outputs such as fire or electricity, or with liquid products.

Be careful when "growing" a runic effect, as creating a constant stream of any fluid product will require a consistent energy input. If you wish to create a constant fire, even a minuscule one, you will need to constantly invest energy to make that fire last. Only give a second's worth of energy, and you will receive only a second's worth of fire. That is, of course, without using the Sustain rune.

The issue with "growing" become substantially more complicated when this method is attempted on solid objects. When a product is "grown", a new product at a larger size is produced at the moment the energy increases. This means that there is an overlap between the large and small product. This overlap lasts for only the merest moment, but as you will see, it can have devastating consequences. In liquid, gaseous and energy products this overlap is of no concern, as the new product will push away the old product fairly easily.

With solid objects this is a far more, shall we say, messy affair. As the philosophers tell us, two objects cannot occupy the same space, and solid objects cannot easily push each other out of the way when one is inside the other. The results can vary either from fractures, splitting, deformation of the product to a violent explosion if the product proves to be too dense.

On the Paradox of Runic Feedback Loops

There is a curiosity about arrays that philosophers have yet to decipher. To be more frank, there are many curiosities surrounding runic arrays that the philosophers have yet to decipher, but we shall focus on but one here. It is not an apparent curiosity, mind you, but rather one that comes to mind late in the evening when you fill your pipe to relax. Once it enters your mind, you cannot think of anything else.

As we have established, energy that passes through a runic array is not used, but rather copied. The energy is still there and continues on. This is why you can still be shot clean through even if your silken tunic is runed, or why it is rather unwise to carve an array onto wood and activate it with fire. This we all know and have learnt when we draughted our first array, but it does bring up a rather peculiar paradox.

Say that one draughts an array to create fire onto a metal plate and then heated said plate. This heat would invest the array with energy, thus activating the array, creating fire. All well and good so far, and precisely what we wanted. However, the newly created fire would also create heat, as fire is wont to do, which would in turn heat up the metal plate upon which it rests. Logically, this would mean that there is now more energy being invested into the runic array, and should result in a larger fire which creates even more heat, investing yet more energy into the array and so on and so forth. By all logic, we should see a fire that grows ever larger until it consumes the entire globe is a fiery maelstrom of death and destruction.

Yet here we are, alive and refreshingly free of blazing cataclysms. Surely, someone somewhere must have created fire on a metal plate before this letter, so why does the world still turn? Do the runes not work as I have described? In short, no, and you can try it yourself.

There is something about a runic array that prevents a perpetually increasing energy investment caused by itself. The heat from that imaginary fire rune on the metal plate would not become invested in the runic array, neither would the ambient heat if you kept it in a box. Even if you Send the heat to another array only to immediately send it back, it would still not affect the array. There is something about the runes, something we have yet to uncover, that prevents an array's expended energy from affecting itself.

> Knowledge is power, use it wisely.
> ~Bür, Completist Chronicle of Morfir-Antar

While a runic array cannot invest itself with energy, it can invest a separate runic array. Thus, you can use one runic array to power another. Do not get ahead of yourself, however, as you cannot have two (or more) runic arrays power each other. Once energy has been created by a runic array, that energy can never power that self-same array ever again, regardless of how many arrays it has passed through. By all accounts it seems that the runes simply know what energy has been created by themselves, and what has come from elsewhere.

Perhaps one day we will crack this conundrum and be able to create an energy source that is self sustaining and never depletes.

On Creation versus Transmutation

There are only two documented ways thus far described in literature for how to produce materials by way of a runic array. The first is by use of the Create rune; the second by use of the Transmute rune. While the efficacies of both have been documented, discussed and argued about for many years, the simple fact remains that if one wishes to produce any material in one's array, it must be through either of these two runes.

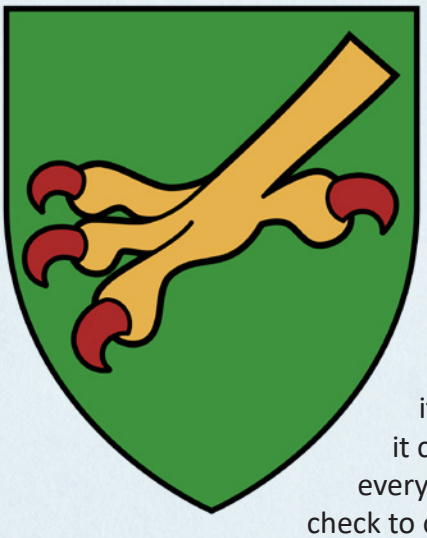
The Create rune is a simple

and straightforward rune. Whatever it affects, it creates. This can range from any material, from arsenic to air, from lead to fire, and so on. It can also create intangibles, such as Create-Contain to create a containment field; and Create-Circle to create a flat ephemeral boundary to be used in conjunction with other runes in the array.

Create was one of the runes that were granted to us by the great Bür nearly two thousand years ago. Since that moment, debate has raged over just exactly how it can create anything. Being one of the most often used runes, especially in war time when entire mountains worth of material is created, there has never been any record of all this excess material having any effect upon our world. Philosophers have deduced that with all of the material produced through arrays in the last two thousand years, our world must have gotten significantly larger. Yet it has not. The distance between Alfresia and Gaelland remains exactly the same as it was when first measured. There is the argument, of course, that runic arrays can also exclude and thus destroy materials, yet mathematical calculations have shown that any destruction is not on the scale of creation.

This in turn begets the question of where do the materials come from? We know that through the Send and Receive runes we can teleport materials across vast distances. Is this then too how runic creation works? Is it merely a transportation of materials from one area to the runic array? Perhaps, but if so, then the question again needs to be asked: where do the materials come from? Fifty-nine years ago Professor Hans von Kriek at the university of Velich in the H.E.M. pondered this very question and set out to resolve it. Through various colleagues in the known world, he sent out explorers and surveyors to find out just where the materials come from, if at all. When the good professor passed away seventeen years ago, he still did not have his answer. No one that was asked could ever remember any objects, or parts thereof, of their estates suddenly disappearing. No site was found where large amounts of raw materials could have been transported from. It remained a mystery.

Having heard of Professor von Kriek's experiment, a certain Jottelandish philosopher by the name of Lars Osson set out, through the financial backing of several wealthy bourgeois



The Golden Talons

The mercenary company owned by the van Windburg trade family and the unofficial military of the Fresian Merchant League. The Golden Talons are as good a mercenary force as you will find, or rather that you can afford. They don't come cheap, and that's for a very good reason: they are best armed and armoured military force in Jytoh, recruiting the best soldiers on the continent.

A luxury the Merchant League has is the literal tons of money it possesses, and it isn't afraid to throw that around, not when it comes to protecting its own interests. The Golden Talons have everything a military commander would want, and they have a blank check to order and material they need. Their most recent acquisition has been their very own airship that has already taken them to Uttosia to fight for the Gaels in their slow colonisation of the continent.

Other than making and spending the League's money, the Talons have another use: enforcers. If the League needs something done and it can't be trusted to footmen, then the Talons drop their insignia, cover their faces, and get their hands dirty in dark streets and cramped alleyways.

statesmen, to conduct a five year long "Runic Census". In this census he documented nearly every instance of an activated runic array in the Jotteland capital. His purpose was to discover the exact rate at which creation surpasses destruction. His results confirmed previous philosophical calculations that our world must be gaining mass by the day. Yet nothing untoward has happened, and to this day, no one can say why. No philosopher in all the known world has devised a sensible solution to where rune-created material comes from. I personally doubt that I will ever see the day when that discovery is made.

On the other side of creation stands Transmutation, a much more simpler process to understand. The Transmute rune takes one object and transforms it into another. Lead can be turned into gold, lightning turned into a fish, or sound turned into light. The Transmute rune was discovered much later than the Creation rune but from its inception has become far more used. This is for the simple reason that it requires less energy to transmute one material to another than it does to create a material wholecloth. Whilst this differs depending on which material and quantity thereof is used, on average creation is twice as costly as transmutation.

On the Use of Irregular Runes

Most of the contemporary known runes are self explanatory. Fire has to do with flames, mostly in its creation. Human deals with any humans, mostly to affect them in esoteric ways. We have been charmingly unimaginative when it comes to naming the runes. Thus the same goes for most runes, barring those that we call Irregular Runes.

And the ones that most confuses novice rune crafters are the Shape runes. Like Size runes, Shape runes cannot be used as the centrum of an array, but must be used to modify or affect an existing rune. Unlike Size runes, however, only one Shape rune is required to achieve the necessary effect.

The most commonly used Shape rune is the Circle rune. Used on its own to affect or modify a rune, Circle creates a flat disc spanning the entire area of the array. The area it covers can be changed by affecting the Circle rune with a Contain rune which itself is modified by a Size rune. This is the way it is mostly used and can be seen to great effect in the elevating platforms shuttling visitors between the stories of the Middleburg University library.

Size runes work differently on the Circle rune, as the Circle has no fixed edge other than what the array's border or a containment field sets for it. As such, a Size rune that modifies a Circle rune increases or decreases its thickness. With no Size runes modifying it, a Circle's thickness is always a tenth of its diameter. After that, Size runes affect it just as they affect other runes. So a Tiny rune would make the thickness of a Circle one percent its normal thickness.

One can immediately see how a Shape rune can offer the rune-crafter a greater degree of technical accuracy and freedom in crafting their runes. Nevertheless it comes at the cost of being quite more difficult to understand and manage.

The second Shape rune discovered thus far is the Dome rune. This rune creates a perfect half sphere on the array. Unlike the Circle rune, the Dome rune is affected by Size rune in the normal manner that other runes are, as there is no depth to trouble oneself about. However, like the Circle rune, it cannot be the centrum.

To complement the Dome rune, we have discovered the aptly named Cone rune. This rune is nearly the exact opposite of the Dome rune. Cone creates a sharpened cone, with its sharpened point resting in the centre of the array and its base twice as far away from the array as the array's circumference.

The last and most challenging is the Shell rune, otherwise known as the Wall rune. The reason for the

confusion because how radically different the rune acts when it is modifying a regular rune or a Shape rune. When modifying a regular rune such as Contain or Fire, Shell creates a wall of that rune's effect along the edge of the array, such a wall of fire should the Fire rune be used. If it affects a Shape rune (Circle and Dome) then it creates a wall at the borders of those shapes. To explain more plainly: should a Shell rune modify a Dome rune, then the effect would be a wall across the array in the shape of a dome, in contrast to the filled half sphere that Dome ordinarily creates. Similarly, with the Circle rune the Shell rune will create a wall along the edges of the disc that Circle creates, creating an enclosed container.

> Knowledge is power, and power is corrupting, and corruption is evil. Thus knowledge is evil. And that, good sir, is why I do not read books.
> ~Anonymous, overheard at the *Flying Beaver* public house.

The Fuel rune is another irregular rune that bears mentioning. It has only one purpose and function, namely to be the receptacle for orichalcum. Orichalcum is required to be in contact with an array bearing the Fuel rune in order to activate the runic array. With such a specific function, more so than any other rune, it is not unsurprising to know that this was not a rune discovered after the Great War. Rather it was one given to us by the enigmatic Bür when he gave humanity runic magic.

When orichalcum is placed on an array, the fuel rune will only activate whatever rune it is linked to. Therefore, if you have several loci on your array, and you wish them all to be activated with orichalcum, you had best be certain to link a Fuel rune to all of them. This has led to a perhaps unintended consequence: you could have certain loci linked to a Fuel rune and others not. This means that the same runic array will respond in a different manner depending on whether it is activated through orichalcum or other means.

On Sending and Receiving Through Runic Arrays

Whilst the Send and Receive runes are both quite irregular indeed, they deserve their own section because of the unique and strange way in which they function.

The concept of the Send and Receive runes are fairly straightforward: the Send rune transports matter and energy from its runic array to the Receive runic array without travelling through the intervening space and time. How this is accomplished has baffled philosophers for centuries.

The theories and questions surround the Send and Receive runes could fill several tomes by themselves, and I highly recommend finding and reading those. However we will only be asking, and answering, the most pertinent ones in the this small section.

The first question I have often been asked by enthusiastic young rune-crafters is how does the Receive rune knows which Send rune is transporting the matter, and vice versa. After all, if you have several runic arrays, each with a Receive rune, are they all receiving the same matter from the same Send rune? In a word? Yes, but the horrifying result of that will come later.

In order to specify which Send rune is transporting the matter, and which Receive accepts said matter, a key is required and both the arrays on either end of the transport chain requires the same key to operate successfully. The characters of the key are loci that modify the Send and Receive runes. It might come as a surprise to the uninitiated that the characters of this key are the runes of the natural elements: Air, Fire, Lightning, Stone, Water. They do not impart any of their elemental properties to the transportation, merely acting as a runic postal address. It is not important in which order these runes are placed, but each character can further be modified by other elemental runes in order to

increase the complexity of the key.

There is no limit to the number of elemental runes that can be used as this runic postal address. Therefore, a rune-scribe can make their transport arrays as unique and safe as he wishes.

Size runes modifying the transport runes are not part of this key. They merely specify over which distance the transportation occurs. As such, a Size rune is necessary, otherwise the transport would only occur within the array, defeating the entire purpose.

Of course, it is still possible for multiple Receive arrays to have the same key and thus we are back to the initial problem. It is for this reason that such transportation should carefully planned, using intricate keys. In all cases, transportation should never be used over any distance longer than what is strictly required.

As such, it is necessary to conclude this section with the dangers of using Send and Receive. Hypothetically speaking, if you were to construct two Receive arrays each with an identical key to a single Send array and then transport, let us say, a simple wooden chair, that chair would then appear in both Receive arrays. Unfortunately, the chair would not have been copied and you would not have two chairs. Half the chair would have gone to one array and the other half to the other array. You would not be able to tell at first glance as there would not be a cut across the chair. It would appear that both chairs are whole, until an instant later when they would crumble under their own weight and collapse into particles finer than Valerish sand. Now imagine for a moment the gruesome horror were this done to a living creature.

The reverse can be equally horrific. If there was one Receive array and two Send arrays all with an identical key and two objects were transported to the same array at the exact same time. This is a far more difficult task as the transportation is instantaneous, but say it were to happen? You would then be staring at a ghastly amalgamation of both objects, not being able to determine where one begins and the other ends. In nearly all cases where living creatures were involved, this has proved to be fatal. Inside the macabre creation, the organs would have fused with whatever was transported along.

One last item to note about the Send and Receive runes is their ability to act as storage. When one adds a Size rune to an array, one creates an energy threshold which can be used to store energy as mentioned previously. Similarly, Send and Receive runes can not only store energy but matter itself. The reason for this is that both the Send array and the Receive array must be powered in order to transport the matter from the former to the latter. If only the Send array is powered and not the Receive array then the matter will still be sent across time and space but will not reappear until the Receive array is powered. This effectively allows one to store matter inside the array, carry it somewhere else and then release it.

Many a thief have believed this to be the most secure of all vaults. You can store as much matter inside a Send array as you choose, turning untold kilograms of mass into something as small as plate. After all, if you cannot access a safe, how can you steal from it? There is logic to this fictional thief's train of thought, but only partly so. It is true, the contents of a Send array cannot be accessed until the Receive array is powered, this does not mean the contents are safe. Should the Receive array become damaged, the contents will be lost forever. Bear this in mind before you attempt to transport a living creature in your pocket.

On the Specificity of Runes

There are many things in life that we take for granted, and when it comes to runes this is no exception. Many of my students and even colleagues forget that runes are not merely symbols that produce a desired effect, but a series of specific instructions in and of

themselves. And when pressed, many are dumbfounded as to why a rune does, or does not, do what we have always accepted it does.

Confused? Let me elaborate and explain with an example.

The natural philosophers have deduced that we humans are comprised of only two parts flesh and bone and eight parts water. It is marvellous, and slightly macabre, to think that within me lies enough water to quench a family's thirst for days. However, if we are indeed comprised mostly of water, why then does a Water rune not affect us? Surely there is more water in my body than in this glass next to me, yet it is affected but not I.

The answer comes back to the assumptions we make when dealing with runes. The Water, and any other targeting rune for that matter, does not actually target water. Confusing perhaps, but true. What the Water does instead is target an object comprised of at least ninety one percent water. A distinct difference. This rule applies whether you are dealing with a target rune such as Air, Iron, Copper, Stone, etcetera.

> "The fool learns from his own experiences, the wise learn from the experiences of others."
> ~Isaac Gottschalk, Steward to Emperor Matthias VII of the Second Bythikan Empire.

This was first discovered by a brilliant young philosopher in the west called Kaín Selim Seylan nearly seven centuries ago. Young Selim was working with bronze when he became curious about the Copper rune. After all, bronze is nothing more than a mixture of copper and tin, but neither the Copper or Tin runes would recognise it. Kaín Selim proceeded to smelt a minuscule bit of tin into pure copper at a time and note down at what point the Copper rune would cease to recognise the mixture as copper.

Exactly ninety one and one quarter percent. He repeated the experiment on every rune he knew and this seemingly magical number would not change. Whether it be iron or stone, human or plant, if it is at least ninety one percent pure, it is recognised by the runes. If an object is only a fraction of a percent below the Selim number, the corresponding rune would cease to act upon it. Intriguingly enough, when transmuting or creating an object whole cloth from a runic array, it is always created at one hundred percent purity.

On the Origin of an Array's Effects

As I remarked earlier in this article, we often wonder from where does an array's effects come? From where does the fire and stone and water we create come? An utter and complete mystery. There is a similar but yet altogether different question to which we already know the answer, but which took humanity centuries to even ask.

Every so often, a student of mine approaches me with a look of consternation on their face and asks me this question; and every time I must demonstrate it for them to believe. They ask me: "From where does the effect an array create start? Or does the array create the effect in its entirety instantaneously?"

The answer, as they often do, can be found somewhere in the middle. The effect an array creates is not instantaneous, although it does appear to us mere mortals to be so. This is because the arrays create their effects at the speed of light and it does have a starting point: the centrum. Impossible, do I hear you say? No, not at all. Once you can wrap your head around the fact that light indeed has a speed, you can start to unravel this puzzle. This has been tested time and time again. The most famous of which is the Table Rabbit experiment, which also shows the limitations of an effect which had a starting point.

Imagine there is a table with a rabbit sitting quietly and peacefully on it. Beneath the table is an array which creates a containment field the

The 1st Alfresian Airfleet

For as long as the runes have existed, there has been airships, but until the discovery of the Lightning rune, none had been reliable or practical. Now the sky is the next frontier in transportation and warfare.

Always wanting to be on the cutting edge of runic technology, the Alfresian military immediately created the 1st Alfresian Airfleet, and then started looking for ways to fill that fleet with airships. With the success of the Celestin Airship Company's passenger airships, and with some backing by the Merchant League, the Airfleet found enough engineers to create a dozen airships to fill the skies above Alfresia. Their first, and thus far only, action in a war has been when Duke Lukas attacked Middelburg three decades ago, but they handled themselves with such grace and merit, that every military commander in Alfresia now wants an airship. The Dawnwatch reportedly has ordered a squadron of its own to watch over the eastern ocean.

Until another war breaks out, however, the 1st Fleet has been relegated to patrol duty around Alfresia, chasing down pirates both on the sea and in the skies.

shape of a cylinder large enough to encompass the rabbit on top of the table, but not so large as to be wider than the table itself. The containment field does only one thing and that is to Exclude Animals. One would perhaps think that the rabbit would be destroyed as it is inside the range of the containment field designed to exclude it.

One would be wrong. The containment field is first created at the array itself before the rest of it is created in a wave radiating outwards from the centrum. As such, the containment field will strike the table before it does the rabbit on top of the table. As luck, fate, or the gods, would have it, an array's effects cannot pass through solid matter. It will attempt to, of course, but it cannot until the solid matter is removed. In order to pass through solid matter, a runic array must first target it. If the containment field designed to destroy the rabbit also excluded wood, then both would have been destroyed as the part of the table blocking the array would also have been removed.

If the rabbit destroying containment field had been wider than the table, it would also have destroyed the rabbit. This is for the simple fact that there was space around the table's edges that the containment field could move around and crash back upon itself to fill up any untouched spaces. All at the speed of light, of course. As long as there is space for the array's effects to move through, it will do so and fill in any space that is within the area of effect the scribe of the array determined. It is best to think of an array as a jug of water being poured out. The effects of the array, invisible though they sometimes may seem, will flow out and crash in on itself, and fill any open container it can find.

On the Accuracy of Runic Draughting

To say that the runic arrays are a hundred percent efficient when copying the energy invested into them is not entirely the truth. In theory, yes they are, but this is highly dependent on how well they are draughted. If they are draughted exactly right, then they are indeed a hundred percent efficient. However, the more imprecise they are draughted, the less efficient they become. This is why

all students in runology are constantly drilled in their penmanship, and why so many of the uneducated people's arrays produce so little and cost so much.

There is also a danger involved when drawing runes poorly. This is due to how runes are discovered, which is nothing more than a trial and error affair. There is no philosophy or mathematics involved, contrary to what charlatans may tell you. There is no rhyme nor reason to how the runes are shaped, no pattern we are able to discern. So we guess, that is all there is to it. Never let any man tell you any differently. Before the Lightning rune was discovered, it was centuries earlier, four hundred and thirty eight years to be precise, when the previous rune, the Sulphur rune, was discovered. In that time, countless thousands have tried and failed to discover the shape of a new rune.

Nearly all the time, nothing happens when they try and activate a new rune, just as it would if you drew a picture of a heart instead. Sometimes, however, when the shape they drew comes very close to the true shape of the rune, something spectacular happens. Spectacularly disastrous to be precise. The array explodes violently, almost always injuring or killing those nearby. Why does this occur? Current speculation amongst philosophers is that it is caused by a highly inefficient flow of energy through the rune. Whatever the cause may be, this too could happen with known runes. Draught a rune too inaccurately and it will also violently explode. Take care, my friends, that this does not happen! None of us would like to be an arm or leg short, now would we?

I hope that this short article, penned in ever hopefulness, has provided some illumination to the more basic concepts of runic design that so many of our fellow countrymen seem to have such trouble with. It is up to us, my dear readers, you and I, to ensure that the uneducated do not remain so for long. You hold in your hands now the tool with which you will be able to teach others. So I charge you, avid reader, to go out and be that teacher that our city so desperately needs.

Should you prove successful in your quests of knowledge, do not be afraid to pen me a letter telling me, so that I may in turn pen another article so that our successes build upon one another until the runic literacy of our glorious city is the envy of the world.

Ever your faithful and diligent writer,

Rikard van der Burg

The more I travel the world, the more I miss your divine illumination, my everlasting Emperor. There is nothing out in the world other than sin and corruption. Your Splendid Magnificence was correct, as always, in ordering this letter be retrieved. In it you will see the abhorrent fraud found everywhere in the world. The gall of this Runist heathen to imply that base cult is responsible for the advances in runology! Of course, he cloaks in a discussion about the runes' history, but his deception is easily seen. There is not even a mention of our most holy August Prodigalism! We, I mean your omniscient and merciful Illustrious, should, though I would never dream of giving your Gloriousness advice, see this fraudster's claims debunked!

THROUGH THE SPYGLASS

"To Patriarch Karl van Rosedaal. A request for more funding."

~From the office of Abbot Godfried de Brouwer

To the most esteemed Patriarch Karl van Rosedaal of the van Rosedaal Trade Family and Prince of the Fresian Merchant League.

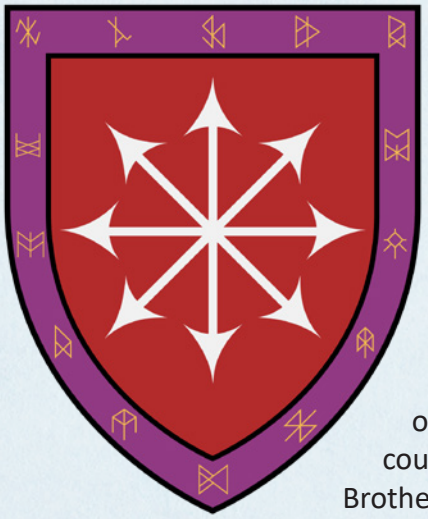
I hope this finds you in the best of health and I offer my deepest condolences to your father's recent passing. I know that the ascension to your new position cannot replace a father's love, but I hope that the mantle is a pleasant one. It is precisely because of your new position that I send this letter to you.

The Monastery of the Eternal Rune has always worked closely with the university of Middelburg to promote the study and research of the runes for the betterment of the city, the republic, and for civilisation as we know it. However, this continued cooperation has always been dependent on the funding given to both university and monastery in order to continue our research. Without this, the university's Department of Runic Studies may be forced to shut down, and our monastery will need to halt our own research in order to secure the financial future of our order.

I had brought up this sensitive issue with your late father last year, but before we could continue in earnest, he fell ill. I had hoped to meet with you in person to discuss this, but it appears that our schedules have not had the chance to coincide. Though you are quite new to the reins of your trade family, you have shown a willingness to the public to further the greater communal good. I hope in this spirit that I can convince you to fund the monastery and university's runic research.

I know that pleading alone will not help, so I have set out below the fundamental nature of runes in our society, how they impact our lives each and every day, and how necessary it is to continue to research them. I hope by the end of it I will have convinced you of the righteousness of our cause.

Runes and arrays infest every facet of life. There is no lie to that statement. The light by which I pen this letter was created by a runic



The Holy Military Order of the Knights of the Eternal Runes

The creation of the Prodigalist Runic Knights was an organic process. While their official formation was two centuries after that of the Shield and Sword Knights, their true start began less than a decade after the Progenitorist orders. It began through the camaraderie of a group of barons and knights in the south of the Heavenly Empire, united in their Prodigalist faith. With the Progenitorists growing in power, both through their number of adherents and military might, there was a fear that Prodigalism could be subsumed into its parent religion. Thus was formed the Brotherhood of Bür.

Two centuries later the Church rewarded them with an official sanction. By that time the Progenitorist orders had multiplied by the dozen, but for the next coming centuries the Runic Knights would stand united, an army to rival the Imperial Legions. A cold, passive war ensued between Progenitorist and Prodigalist. Since then, bridges had been mended and the Runic Knights' charter has expanded. No longer are they only to secure to safety of their brothers in faith, but it is their solemn task to discover any and all about the runes. Now, part archeologists, part explorers, and part soldiers, the Runic Knights traverse the globe in their everlasting quest with their motto: "*The runes are eternal, and so is our vigilance*."

array, the metal in my quill was transmuted by a runic array, and even the paper upon which I write now was created by way of a runic array. The streets upon which the postal officer will walk to deliver this letter were created, and are maintained by, runic arrays. Should he use any transportation such as the tramcar system, these too will be powered by runic arrays. The doorbell he will ring at the door of the van Rosedaal compound is a runic powered contraption and when you read this it will be under the light of a runic array powered by electricity generated by yet another runic array. In every step of this letter's existence, runes have played a role, and this is merely a letter. What further connection could not be achieved if one analyses the military, the government, or any other large industry?

If we take a look through the spyglass into the past, we can see how the world as we know it today has been shaped by our use of the runes. I do not mean so because the runes ensured our victory in the Great War, although that by its very nature has changed the world. Rather I mean the processes of life that we surrendered to the runes after the Great War.

The historical records tell us about the grandiose infrastructures the westerners used to build that ferried water from far away places to their cities. Aqueducts these were called. The only remaining aqueducts in the known world are those in Adria, the capital of Tanfakech. Where in Alfresia or on the mainland continent have you ever heard recently of a shortage of fresh water? History speaks of the dry, arid wastelands in which the Neoists built their cities, but today their cities are veritable gardens.

Our ancestors on the mainland, the Dayitic tribes, mined for their ore be it copper, tin, iron, silver and gold. They created bloomeries in order to smelt it, and staffed a vast army of smiths to beat out the slag. I ask you, sir, what sort of hell is that? All that work, all those manhours, all those lives destroyed by backbreaking work, inhaling toxic fumes from the mines and

bloomeries and the chemicals it requires. And for what? A product so inferior, the simplest man on the street today could craft a better blade than the greatest swordsmiths two thousand years ago. I do not mean to take away from our master swordsmiths of today, their talents border on the divine, but those of millennia past were little more than children playing with toys.

> If you look only to the past, you will be blind to what the future has to offer you. If you look only to the future, you will be blind to the lessons of the past.
> ~Zan Ling Kuang, Uttosian philosopher

Oh, and quarrying! Quarrying! The books I could write on quarrying! The sheer lunacy of the whole affair. It is no wonder most of the ancient cities have not survived to this day when most were made of wood. Can you even contemplate that stone could be expensive? The Heavenly Imperial libraries have accounts from the old Dayitic tribes that speak of scores of men having to mine large slabs of rock from a cliff side, transport them for kilometres across land and only then begin the process of carving and construction. And even then half the slabs would be of poor quality!

Yet today? Today we can build entire mountains of marble should we so choose. We could pave this entire island in blue quartz had we only the patience. A tower to the stars would require only a well drawn runic array and time. In fact, in the Uttosian Khaganate they have done exactly so, constructing the Khagan's Glory: an enormous column of granite of which you cannot see the top, it disappears into the sky. The Uttosians say this represents their first khagan's conquest of their continent, but between you and I, sir, it speaks of phallic insecurity.

It is not only khagans and kings which can use these runes, but even the simplest farmer. That is the true majesty of the legacy of Bür. Look at our island and the practical farmers of the south. Ever the stubborn pragmatists, the majority of their homes are round, owing to the runes. No carving, no mortar, no fitting, no leaks. The nomadic western tribes living on the fringes of Neoist society do the same. Constructing their temporary shelters as stone domes, these domed villages can be seen travelling throughout the western deserts. An impossible feat without the runes.

We cannot forget weaponry, oh no, we humans have become far too adept and destroying life, have we not? Whether it was because we received the runes during the time humans were almost extinct, or because we may be more savage-minded that we would like to admit, but the runes have always been, and I believe will always be, primarily used to kill others. Whether it is by crafting runes on rifle and cannon rounds, on blades to tear humans limb from limb, burn them from the inside, transmute their blood to mercury or turn their bodies to stone, we have all become adept at that side of the runes.

It is a shame, I think, that we have focussed so much of our collective energy to uncover novel and exotic means to end our lives. The runes can give us so much more. I have already written of how the runes have allowed us to spare ourselves the agony of building our homes and cities. Yet still, there is even more the runes can do for us.

Even the poorest in this city live better than the kings of the pre-runed age. The abundance of fresh water the runes give us mean none have to die of thirst anymore, and the ability of the runes to create meat mean none would need to go hungry again. Of course, a man cannot live on meat and water alone. Many hospices have patients who come from poorer backgrounds, admitted on the grounds they were ill-nourished. This is unfortunate but is it not better to be ill-nourished than to have died from hunger and thirst?

A society is only as advanced as its most weakest and vulnerable. This plentiful supply of food that the runes have provided have, in my humble opinion, given us the ability to focus on the possibilities of life. Free, for the most part, from having all of us spend our time gathering food to survive, from living hand to mouth, from the painstaking work of erecting shelter, we are given time to instead focus on the arts, on culture, and on technology. I do not believe that we would have been as technologically advanced as we are today were it not for the runes.

Water, food, shelter, what more could the poor ask for? Even in that unspoken question, the runes have provided an answer. The lower classes, and even some of the growing middle class, are illiterate. Disappointing of course, but understandable. One cannot expect too much from them. Nevertheless, the runes have given the illiterate poor their own form of literacy, which they use to great effectiveness I must say.

A poor man may not be able to read the word "fire" but he will undoubtedly know the rune for fire. While the alphabet still escapes the common man, he must learn the runes in order to survive, granting him the ability to recognise most runes. In nearly every culture, their own poor have developed their own methods of writing based upon the runes. In a pictographic manner, reminiscent of the writing styles that fell out of favour millennia ago, the poor can communicate to each other in print if necessary. In an ironic twist, this pictographic writing system transcends languages, meaning the poor may communicate with other nations far more effectively than we can.

If you should ever find yourself in the poorer districts of the city, on a philanthropic mission of course, you will find that the local shopkeeps have taken advantage of this. Capitalism is always eager to exploit any useful idea in order to profit of it. Thus, the signs hanging from the shop windows and door to not say in words what they sell but in runes. The restaurants' menus are not written out, but shown in runes so that even the most illiterate can understand them. On the docks, even the respectable businesses have done this, breaching the language barrier with the one true language of the universe.

It is not only the poor that have been affected by the runes, but the rich have also undergone changes driven by runic arrays. Before the runes and the Great War, the rich draped themselves in gold, and silver to a lesser extent, to show their wealth and power. Gold was valuable because it did not erode over the years and because of its rarity, enforced by the painstaking effort of retrieving it from the ground. Not so anymore. Gold is now as commonplace as iron and lead, the runes allowing us to make as much as we need. Gold became worthless overnight, and a symbol of the poor who could not afford orichalcum.

Orichalcum, that strange ivory coloured, pearlescent metal that is so intertwined with the runes. History tell us it was seen as gold's equal before the War, rare and without weathering. When we received the runes, orichalcum became the most valuable substance on the planet. Capable of powering the runes with great energy and unable to be produced by the runes, nothing could cost more, and it was desired by the military and nobility alike.

The runes also changed how orichalcum looked. The rune at the centrum of array will impart a colour onto the virgin orichalcum used to power it. A Fire rune will impart an irregular orange colour, a Water rune a cornflower blue, a Plant rune a dappled green, and any Animal based rune a deep blood red. This only enhanced the desire by the rich to obtain orichalcum. It was now the final word in jewelry. Where gold came in yellow, rose, green and white, orichalcum can come in a multitude of colours, limited only by the runes. It became so popular for jewelry that for nearly five centuries,

precious gems were not mined. Now however, the only mining we humans do is for orichalcum and gems and even that is mostly done with runes as well. No backs have been broken for the spoils of the land in millennia.

The concept of currency would also have been drastically different in a modern world without runes. On the walls of the ancient Neoist cities are reliefs depicting merchants exchanging gold and silver for products. But what value has something if everyone can have as many of it as they could want. Orichalcum took over the role once again. I often wonder what would happen if the rune for orichalcum is ever discovered. For the powering of runes, this would be the greatest thing to ever happen to us humans since the runes themselves, but for the economy? I shudder to think of the consequences.

But in today's world, blood still reigns supreme when it comes to powering runes, if only by volume. Orichalcum is more powerful, this is true, but there is far, far more human blood in the world than orichalcum. Blood has been our salvation and our bane. In the Great War, and in every conflict thereafter, it has been human blood, not orichalcum or energy that has been the deciding factor. When war comes, it is not only the opposition that is willing to draw the blood of the innocent. Their own rulers will often let them open a vein in support of their troops. When Markus the Incendiary came knocking on Middelburg's door, every citizen was required to "donate" a pint of blood to keep the city wall standing, for all the help that did.

War is not the only time blood is spilt in the name of the runes. Apart from the poor who spill it to survive, there are other more powerful men who spill the blood of the weak for the easy path to power.

In the west, the Neoists still continue their barbaric practice of slavery, or "indentured servitude" as they call it. Justified is another word they use, but the slave raids on the eastern nations' coast spell out a different story. Be that as it may, one of the tenants of their monotheistic religion states that slaves are beholden to give any blood to their masters should it be required,

Celestin Transcontinental Airship Company

The advent of the Lightning rune has finally made airships a viable means of transportation and many entrepreneurs have attempted to capitalise on this. None however have gone to the lengths of the Celestin company. Two years ago it was a passenger ship company, ferrying passengers across the sea to and from the mainland. When the Lightning rune was discovered the owner of Celestin, Daniël van der Vennen, dissolved the company, brought all his ships into dry docks and refitted them to fly. A gamble that could well have bankrupted van der Vennen has turned out to be a soaring success. Celestin Transcontinental was the first operating passenger airship service in Alfresia.

Celestin is based in Middelburg and ferries passengers to and from any capital in eastern Jytoh. It still predominantly operates in the Fresian nations but with enough money, Celestin will take you as far as the Tolian lands if you so choose. Celestin has become a point of pride for Alfresia and Middelburg, and many men attempt to find work in its workshops or on board their airships. They are seen as a symbol of the Alfresian innovative spirit, and of what can be done when brilliant minds take risks to achieve greatness. Van der Vennen plans on taking more risks by expanding his travelling routes to the eastern and southern continents.

and as long as it does not cost them their lives. Beyond religion and power, there is a practical reason for this barbarism.

Orichalcum is scarce in the west. In the arid regions on the east of the Ridgeback mountains and in the deserts to its west, orichalcum can hardly be found. One must travel to the western coasts of our continent before finding any trace of it again. But while it is scarce, blood is not. Humans are aplenty, and slaves even more so. So the slaves act as human-orichalcum for their Neoist masters. It is little wonder that the Neoists display their slaves like we do our jewelry. The more slaves a Neoist has, the more wealth he is seen to have, and the better condition the slaves are in, the better for their masters.

It is not only the Neoists who deal in blood and human lives. Many areas have over the years decreed that prisoners must pay for their crimes not only in their time spent in gaol, but also in blood. The Tolians are fond of this method, going so far as to omit goal time for petty offences, preferring an immediate payment of blood for the infraction caused. Capital punishment in the harsh northern lands consists of bloodletting until death. Some may call this cruel, but their greatest structures and monuments have been built with the blood of murderers and rapists.

Other cultures are more gentle than the Tolians, with some outright banning the use of blood powered runes. The Free Marches as a whole has done this, banning any use of blood, no matter who from, in the use of runic arrays. It is quite impossible to detect and enforce this, but it was done for political reasons but historical reasons. The Caels of the Free Marches one lived under the harsh rule of the Hlynermic Neoists and they well remember the blood trades and slavery. The ban of runic blood usage is not directed at the Caellish citizens of the Free Marches, but to the Neoist slavers that often cross the border. Bereft of their slaves' blood, they are bereft of power.

If only it was so easy to dissuade the other predators of men. Slavery may well be illegal on our prosperous isle, but there is still a thriving blood trade. Men are by nature lazy creatures, and this has not changed since the discovery of the runes. Blood is far easier to use for arrays then energy, if it can be obtained. For that purpose, many unsavoury characters have taken to abducting the innocent to use for their nefarious runic purposes. The only way possible to prevent this is to prevent all murders, as what difference is there between a murder done out of hate and one done out of runic intent.

Some communities have seen the destruction runic arrays are capable of doing to our society and have decided the benefits of runes cannot outweigh the cost to human lives. We have such a runeless community here in Alfresia. Ventersburg is a small town in the forested foothills of the mountain ranges to the north. Within its borders runic arrays, and the use of them, are strictly forbidden. It is understandably a very isolated community, and not only geographically speaking. Most avoid it and the strange folk who live there simply because there is no reason to travel to an area where runes are not allowed. The aggressively defensive attitude of its inhabitants does not do it many favours either.

> The past shows us what we could be, but it is our choices which determine what the future becomes.
> ~Prince Mihail Iliescu of Mollachia

It is not only those who believe runes are dangerous that forego the use of the runes. Religion, as is its wont, has impacted people's views on runes. The most conservative sects of the Neoism view Bür as the enemy of their god and the runes as his way to tempt humanity away from the one true path. They abhor the runes and see any human using it as

a blasphemer, to be shunned at best and killed at worst. This view is seen as extreme even by Neoist standards, and these runeless sects are left to wander the wastelands with the nomads, battling over what little resources there are.

It is not only the harsh westerners who gives rise to such extremism. While the Prodigalists, Completists, Runists and Seekers all use runes due to their origins with the mythical Bür, the Progenitorists and the various indigenous pagans beliefs do not have this strong connection to the runes. More often than they would care to admit, extremists rise within their ranks to claim the runes an affront to their gods. Never as harsh as the Neoists, they nevertheless take isolationist views and hide themselves from the world. These hermits prefer to break their backs in order to survive like our ancestors did millennia ago.

The final group who avoids the use of runes can teach us, in their insanity, about life should the unthinkable happen. There are small communities scattered across the continent that are perhaps even stranger than the fanatics who abhor the runes. These communities believe the runes will cause the end of the world and are preparing for what they see as inevitable. However, unlike the zealots who prefer to live in the past, those who prepare for the apocalypse seek to find innovative means to survive should the runes ever disappear.

It is a distressing topic to ponder, the runes ever disappearing. Most men never think on it, treating runes as eternal as the sun. Men like us, however, leaders in our fields, must always prepare for for the worst. While improbable, should the runes ever disappear then civilisation as we know it will change as quickly as it did when we received the runes. We simply do not have the infrastructure needed to support entire cities that we once had.

It is no accident I opened this letter by speaking of the hardships our ancestors endured to secure their meagre existence. Their lives may have been bleak and unforgiving, but they found innovative means to better their lives. The aqueducts of Tanfakech are a lasting reminder of this. Where once these sorts of structures were commonplace in the largest of cities, they are now gone, but what would we do if the runes should disappear? Of course, we can construct more, but this will take years to relearn the lost arts, and in that time millions will suffer.

We will not only have to relearn how to construct buildings without the aid of the runes, but we will need to relearn how to quarry to gain the stone for these structure, and mine the metal needed to create the tools. What will our poor feed themselves with while they quarry and mine and build money to pay for food and without the runes to create meat? It does not take a great leap of the imagination to predict that those who do not have will quickly turn upon those that do have. Revolutions are not uncommon in the times we live in, but even our War of Independence will look like a children's fight compared to what may come.

It is not an understatement to call the end of the runes the end of the world. This is reason alone to increase the amount of research that is being done in the field of runic studies. After all, the runes and their gifts to us may be of divine origin, and what is given can be taken away as easily. For millennia we did not have the runes. We did not begin our journey on this world with them. Who is to say that we will continue to have them? There has been precious little research done to investigate this. There simply is not funding for such a vague and obscure topic. I believe it is imperative to change that, and with your help we can!

But let us now speak of more pleasant matters. After all, our world is not always one of doom and gloom. There are always wonders to behold, both natural and artificial. We humans are a curious lot, are we not? With one hand we

seek only new means by which to destroy each other and the land we walk upon, but with the other hand we build vast monuments, grand parks and inventions that seem almost divine.

We have built whole cities with nothing but runes, created new islands upon which to live, and tunnelled through entire mountain ranges so our trains could run straight through. The trains themselves are marvels of runic engineering, combining the runes with the inventiveness of the human mind. And through such engineering we have been able to prevent volcanic eruptions from harming our towns and villages, stabilised the ground during quakes and create walls to protect us from seismic sea waves.

That was all decades and centuries ago. Two years ago, the future arrived and we have been nearly unable to keep up with the inventions being created everyday.

When the Lightning rune was discovered in this monastery two years ago, not even we could predict how it would change the world. We, as our Runist philosophy dictates, merely worked to discover new runes in the hope of breaching through the universal veil. Only when the Merchant League enquired about it did we have an inkling of how truly powerful it could be. It was the relationship between the League and our monastery which gave the world the Lightning rune. A potent reminder of what can be done, I would say.

Of all the myriad changes that the world has undergone recently, the one I find most fascinating is the changes to how we move throughout the world. Of course, for more than a century now we have had steam trains and steam assisted ships carrying people to all ends of the globe. The advent of electricity did not change that, but it did change how we went about it. Gone, for the most part, are the smoke belching, filthy steam engines that pushed the trains and ships along, replaced by electric runic machines that are not only cleaner, but far more efficient.

Our ships can now move faster under wind and rune, and some say it will now even be possible to circumnavigate the world in less than a year. I do not know about that, sir, but I bow to their sense of adventure. But a machine that even I am sure could cross the globe in a year is the airship. Capable of travelling by sea or by air, it is the greatest marvel of human engineering. This would not have been possible without the Lightning rune. I have even seen the first passenger airship in operation last week. How long will it be before we are all flitting across the skies?!

Our trains and tramcars are now quicker and smoother, no longer the bumpy mess of a ride it used to be. Luxury in travel seems to be within even a poor man's grasp now. Travelling from Alfresia to Windburg is no longer the arduous journey it used to be. Now one can travel to Windburg over the holy days and be back in Middelburg before work has even begun!

> The past is the tome you read. The future is the tome you write.
> ~Baron Vencel Herczeg of Karcag

Not only do we travel in opulence, but we now live in it. The Lightning rune has given us the ability to control the energy that we invest into runic arrays to a degree of accuracy we had only dreamt of. With this we can use arrays to control the temperature and humidity in our buildings. Winter, summer, rain, drought, these words have no meaning and no hold over us any longer. Even our hospices and hospitals have reported this regulation of climate have meant we become less sick and die less often than we had. Not only have we mastered the seas and the sky, but we have now mastered the very elements to do our bidding so we may enjoy the luxury of a comfortable home. It seems that we are near to becoming the gods that Bür intended us to be.

As wondrous and luxurious that may be, nothing can compare to flitting through time and space in the blink of an eye. The Teleportation runes were one of those given to us by Bür, but they never saw widespread

use until two years ago. The inability to efficiently control the input of energy meant that teleportation was fraught with risk if used over large distances. This has all changed with the world record for longest successful teleportation of a human been broken scarce two weeks ago. A daring young student at the Middelburg university volunteered for this undertaking and was sent to the Leonard University in Edelheim, a distance of nearly four hundred kilometres. To travel faster than the speed of light must have been an incredible sensation.

Of all the runes, the Send & Receive ones truly are the most mysterious. I have dedicated the past two decades to their study, with admittedly little success. In particular I have been trying to uncover where matter goes between being sent and received. Surely, there must be some interim space in which the matter must travel through before it arrives at its final destination. I have even once sent myself, doing it so ponderously slowly that the process took thirteen hours. I discovered two things. The process truly is instantaneous, as each part of me that disappeared from one runic array, appeared at the exact same time in the other array. The second was that I saw something. I cannot describe it to you, but it was as if I peered behind the veil of the world. With more funding, I am sure I can even reach out and touch that veil.

As fascinating as you surely have found what I have written so far, I know there is one thing you wish to know more than travel, more than luxury, more even than carpentry and building. You are a practical man, of course. I understand. My vow of pacifism does not blind me to the realities of the world and to the condition that is man. As I have written earlier, the first thing men did with runic arrays was the destruction of others, and I solemnly believe that will be the last thing men do with the arrays.

Drawing runes onto weapons and armour is simple enough to do, and was the first method of runic warfare. An array to create fire on a blade has been, and still is, the most common combative array. However, there has been as many different arrays etched on blades as there are grains of sands in the western deserts. Arrays to turn blood to arsenic, turn flesh to stone, pump mercury into the body or disintegrate flesh altogether are just some of the most common arrays for weapons.

Shields and armour have been the other focus for arrays in warfare. Arrays to exclude all metals in their containment field, arrays to transmute metals into fire that can be pushed back at the enemy, arrays to transmute metals and impact into blaring sound to stun an enemy, and I have even seen an array to send the rounds shot at the shields to another array pointed at the enemy to fire it back at the enemy.

The arms race between weapons and armour has been a pernicious struggle. The weapons have a clear advantage as energy invested into arrays is not lost, merely copied, which means the full energy can pass through the array. This means that a round fired at a shield will impact the shield at full force if the array there does not have a way of preventing this. Should the array do so, there will still be a small amount of energy that has indeed passed through. This means that sustained impacts can still break through the shield and harm the array until it no longer functions. It is my opinion that this is the reason why we have held onto our plate harnesses and great helms for so long, runed as they are. A plate of metal protects a man even when a runic array cannot.

Etching runes onto weapons and armour is but the most basic and crudest of ways runes can be incorporated into warfare. The true art comes from using runes to overcome obstacles we ourselves cannot. The iconic example of this must be firearms. Starting with the massive air cannons used during the Great War, we have always loved to propel objects at great speeds over large distances. It clearly does work

wonders, and when we discovered blackpowder a thousand years ago the runic arrays involved in cannons changed from forcing the cannonball out the barrel to only igniting the powder.

It was no difficult task to miniaturise cannons into pistols, although it took many centuries for it to get to the stage it is now. Since the invention of cartridges eighty nine years ago it seems firearms have become the final word in combat. That is, to say, if runes were never discovered. With the new Lightning rune revolutionising the world, we have new electrified weaponry, and I hear the university have developed a new pistol that is solely powered by electricity. The arms race between weapons and armour has kept up with the development of firearms, and runes are still as effective as they were when we shot air cannons at Inhumans.

There is so much more that can be done with runes and weaponry, loathe that I am to admit it. After all, we do not lack in experts in runology. What we lack is funding. Funding can secure us, and your eminent self, a safe, happy and profitable life. So what say you? Shall you fund my monastery and the university's runic department in order for us to continue our research that would benefit the greater societal good, and your pocketbook, or will you sit by as discoveries and inventions are made offshore, far from your inquisitive hands to grasp?

My door is always open to talk business.

Your, and the runes', humble servant,

Abbot Godfried de Brouwer

Your Eminent Excellency was, as always, correct in asking for this letter. The Alfresian Intelligence must under no circumstance be allowed to construct any of this madman's inventions. They have neither the wisdom nor the gall to use them correctly. Only under your esteemed and holy leadership can these be put to the best of uses. For your pleasure, my Lord, I have also acquired the design sketches to further improve our abilities to reconstruct these. The world shall tremble at your breathtaking power, my Lord and Saviour.

FAREWELL TO THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY

~Transcript of a presentation given to the Senate Intelligence Committee by Xander Johansson

Welcome my fair gentlemen, and lady, to what is going to be the first day of the rest of your lives! I am Xander Johansson and I am literally speaking to you from the future! Hmm? What's that? Oh. Julia tells me I am not in the future. Damn it did not work. Well, as I was saying.

The future starts today! Well, technically it started nine months ago, but like a newborn baby it is here now! After all, there is no time like the present! Except if it is the future, then who wants stinking old present? So say farewell to the world of yesterday and hug the brightness of the future tight against your voluptuous bosom, my lady.

Now some of you might be wondering "Why did we let this man in here today? Why does he have all that strange, yet hauntingly beautiful machine sketches with him? And why have we not had lunch?" Well let me answer those for you: because I am a genius, because these are future, and how should I know? Am I your cook? Julia, am I their cook?! No? Good. Thought this was one of those food dreams again. So how about we rustle up some food and then I can show you the future. Xander Johansson does not like to talk on an empty stomach. Julia! First slide.

I can see your confused looks. Do not worry, this is not the street layout for new city. That is silly and you should be ashamed of yourselves for thinking that. People elected you to office. But I want you to keep your eyes on this, because this is in fact the culmination of the entire presentation and my life's work. I call it… the Lightning-inator. The boys back at the laboratory wanted to call it the Electrically Powered, Runically Accelerated, Repeating Rifled Musket, but who pays the bills around here? Xander Johansson, that is who, and if I want to call it the Lightning-inator, then the Lightning-inator it shall be named.

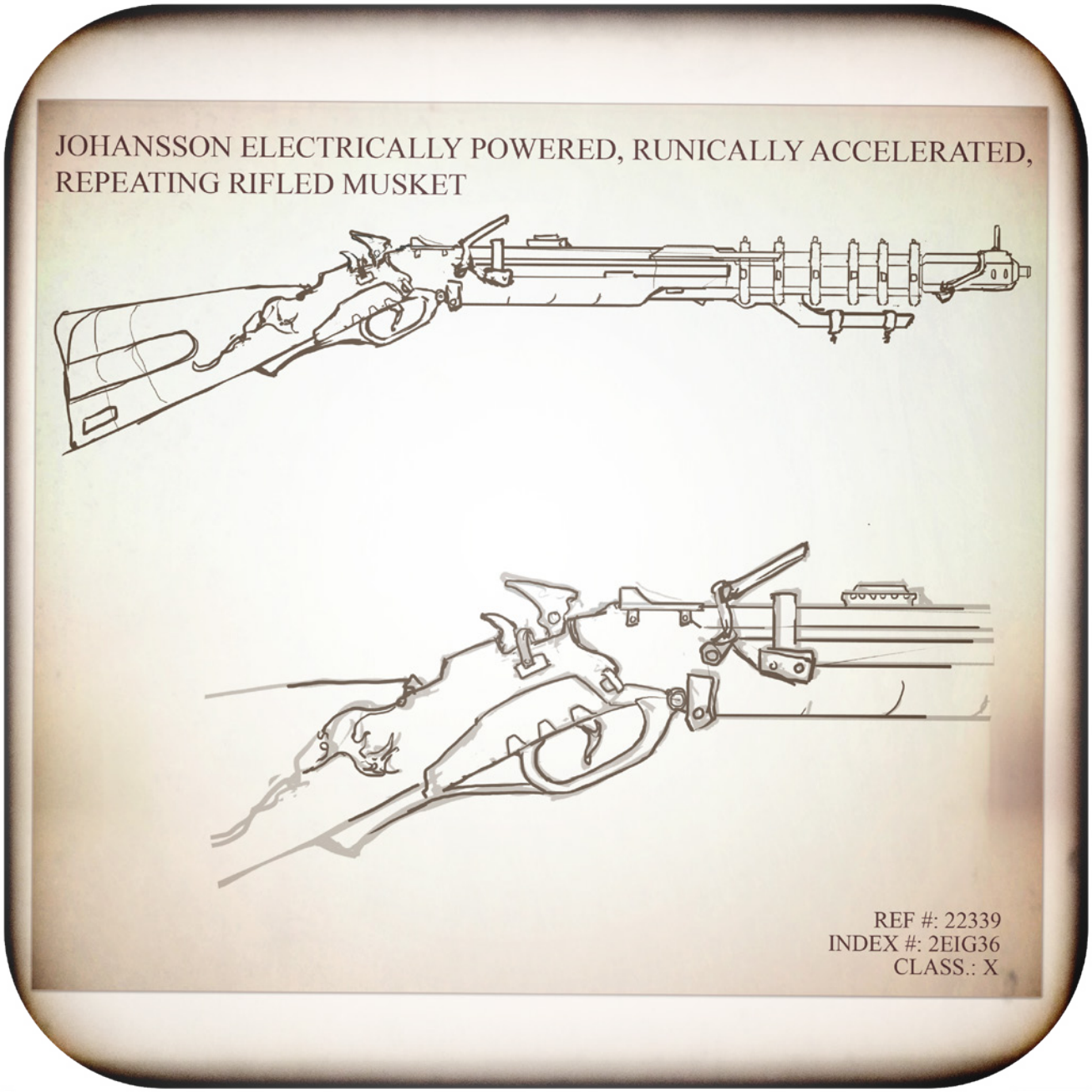
But I am getting ahead of myself. Julia! Second slide!

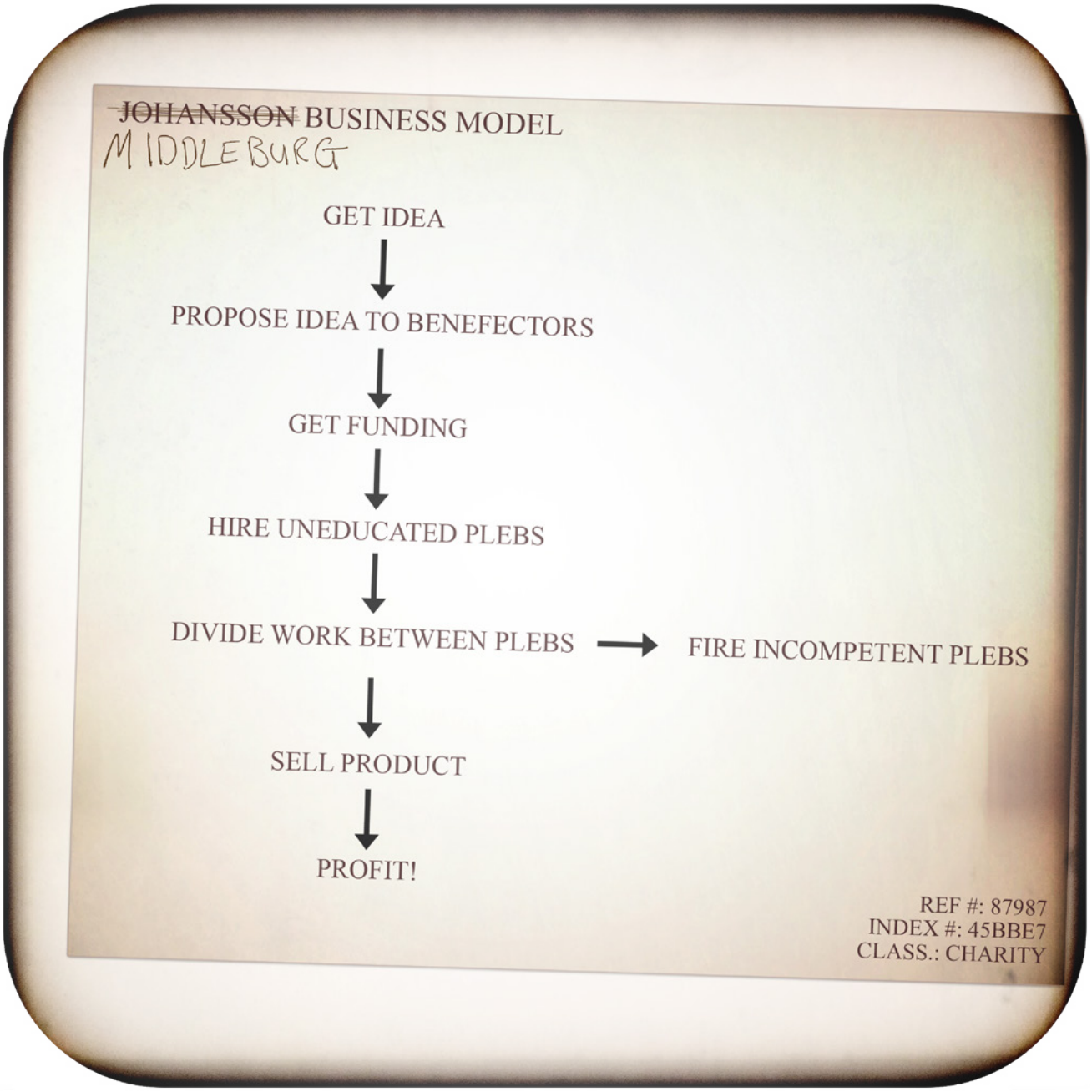
This is what I like to call the Xander Johansson Path of Success. It is how I got from a street urchin to owning dozens of businesses down the eastern continental coast! It

worked for me, it can work for this city. With some minor changes of course. We probably should take "Xander Johansson" off the top here like so [Mr. Johansson crosses out his name] and put Middelburg [Spelt incorrectly] in there. Not as flashy, not as catchy, but it will do.

The formerly-known-as-the-Xander-Johansson-Path-of-Success works by thinking of the little people. Thinking of how much profit they can make for you for the least amount of cost. The poor bastards are great for this, they will work for anything these days. After all, what else are they going to do with their time? Julia, what do poor people do with their time? Make tattered hats and broken shoes? What? Well in any case, what we are going to do is to get the poor people do the work for you. Who really wants to do work? I did not get where I am today by working, and I am fairly certain neither did any of you.

The problem with work is that you spend years being an apprentice learning how to work, and when you finally get to working, you do all the work yourself! Who wants that? Not I, not you and not Julia. Well that is not true, Julia





loves to work, is that not right, Julia? I do not know what is wrong with her. Never mind that! The point is that is takes far too long to train an apprentice to do decent work, and then it is only one man working. What if, and bear with me gentlemen, what if you can get a dozen stupid, untrained, dirty, mangy... yes Julia I know... good, upstanding, resource deprived citizens to split up that work between them. Minimal training, maximum profit!

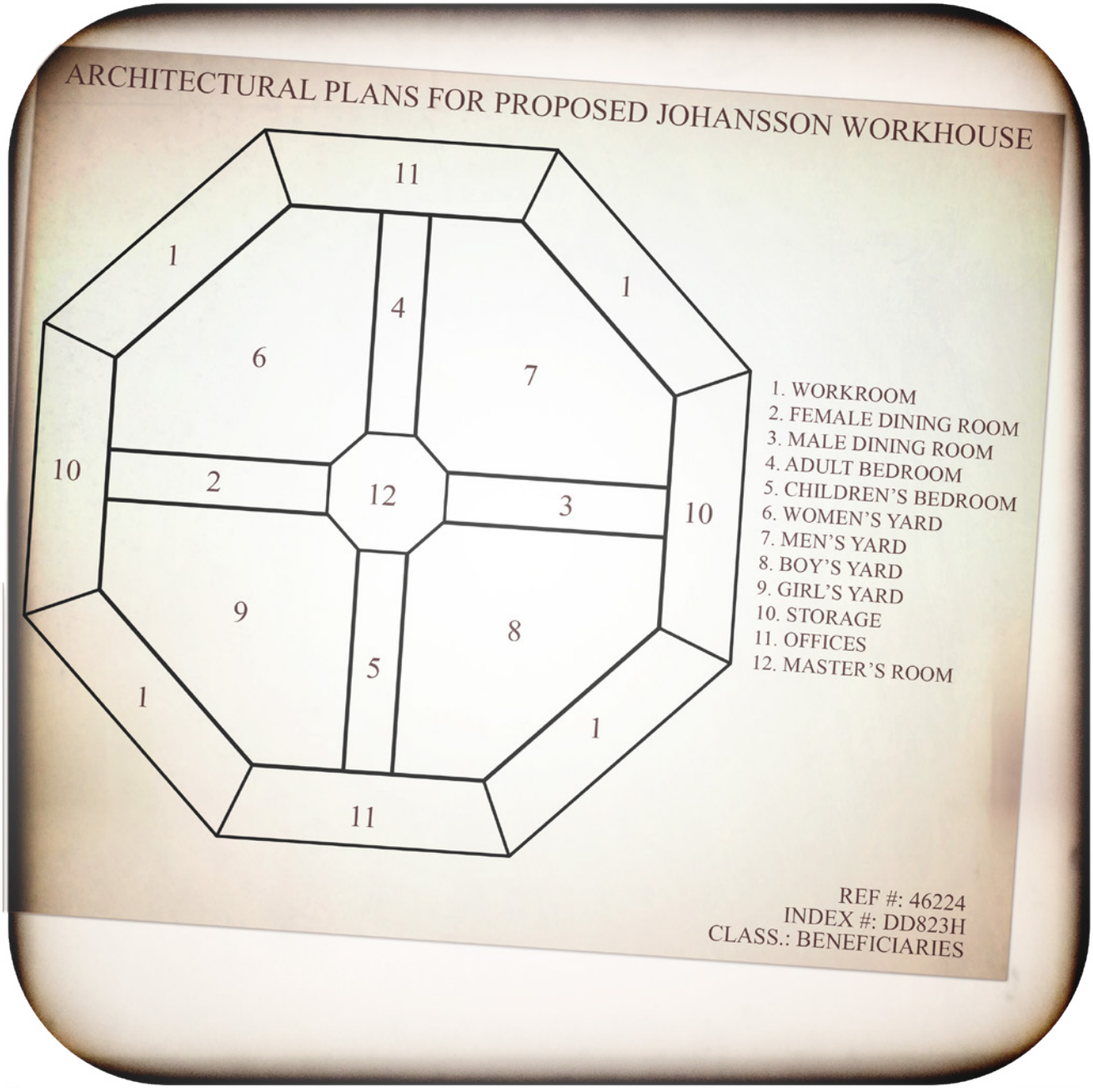
I like to call this "Maximising plebeian efficiency for patrician profit". Julia helped with the spelling. I am a businessman, not a linguist. Instead of paying one craftsman to make a chair, we pay twelve poor people a twelfth of his pay to make parts for twelve chairs! We get twelve chairs and they get paid. They do not know how much they are worth, they probably never even bathed in money before. They will love any money we give them. And at the end of the day we get twenty [Twelve] chairs and they go to bed feeling like they are rich. Everybody wins!

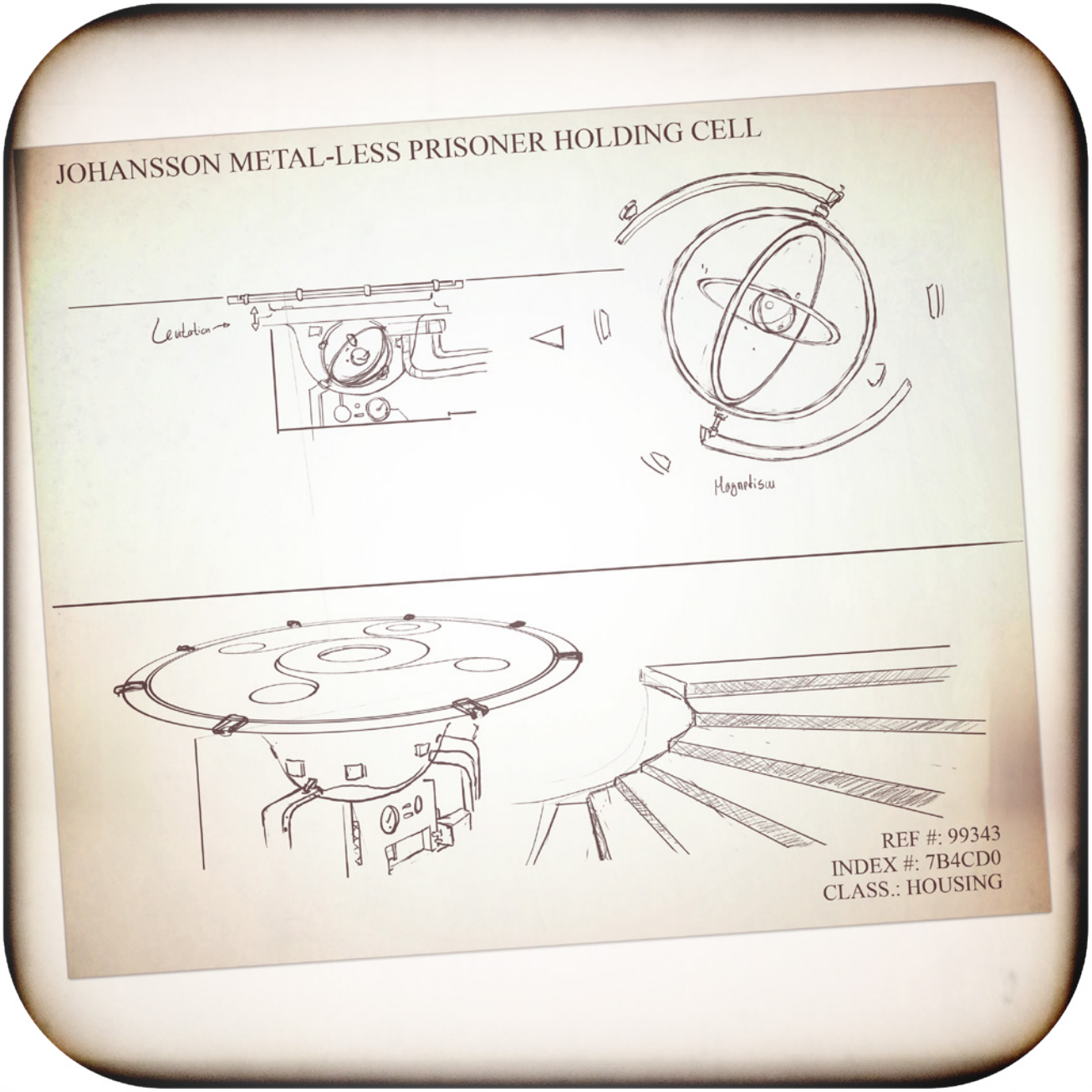
Julia! Next slide! [Slide of Architectural Plans for Proposed Johansson Workhouse shown to committee]. This is where

we plan to make the magic! Should you fine, wholesome gentleman grant me the contract, instead of those lazy Merchant League Patriarchs, then I will build workhouses in Oldtown. Demolish the ramshackle huts they call houses there and build shiny, new workhouses where they do not only work, but live there too! Why keep them away from it? Let them sleep there so we know they are never late for work. Less time lost, more productivity, more profit! We will feed them, house them, dock their pay for that of course, I am not a charity, and keep them off your streets! What do you say gentlemen? Have I got a deal?

[Committee members remain silent].

Well then, Julia! Next slide! [Slide of the Johansson Metal-less Prisoner Holding Cell shown to committee]. This is what can be achieved with using only poor people! Granted, I did not get poor people to make it thus far. Cannot trust them, now can we? But the boys back in the laboratory did it well enough, and if they can do it, anyone can. I call it the Person-Keeper-In! It is quite simple really, it works like any cell Julia tells me you would find in a





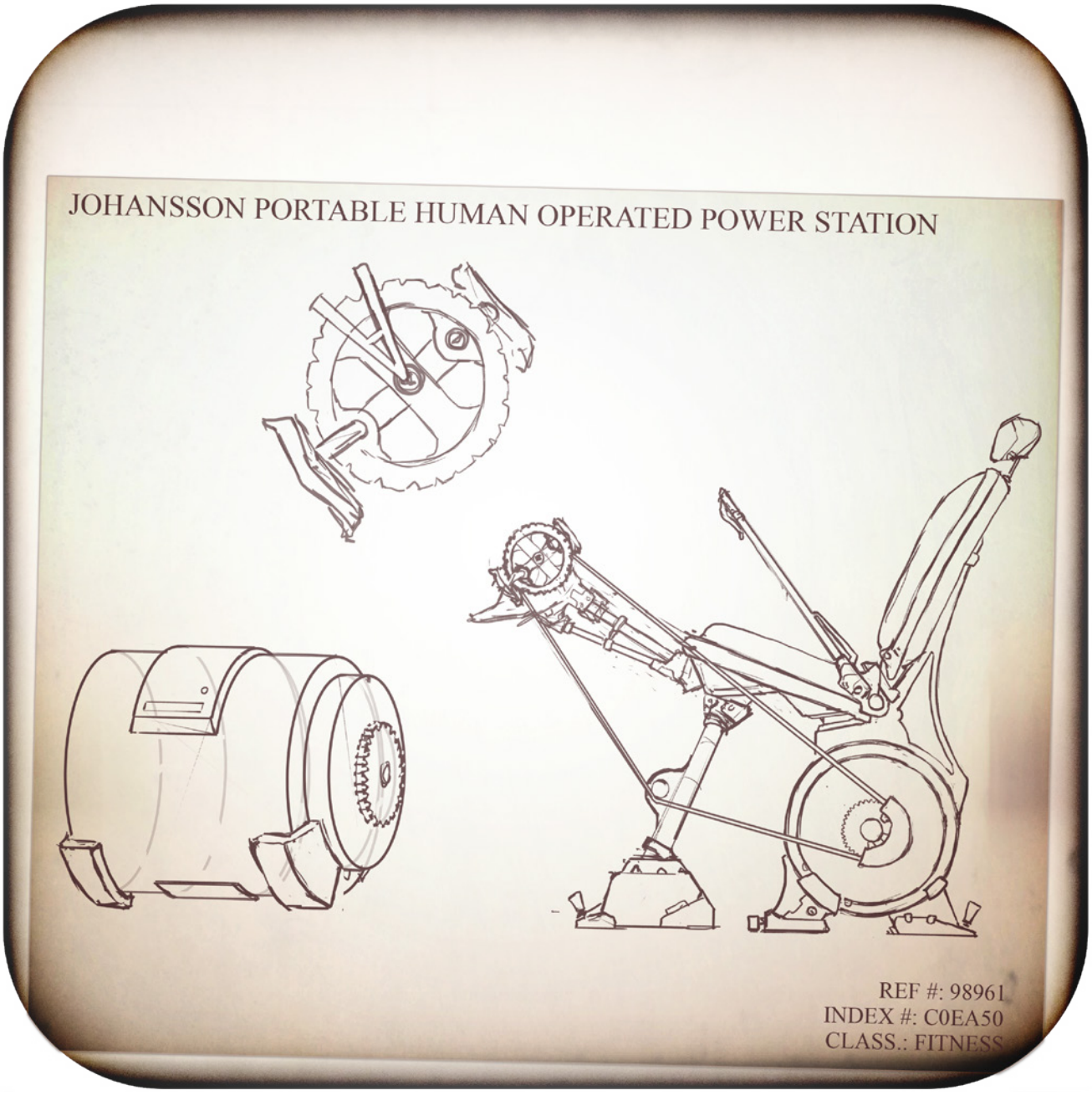
constable's gaol, except there is no metal! "Just a simple human excluding runic array" I hear you say [Committee members did not speak], but you are completely wrong. It is not just one array, but a whole set of them, controlled by a clever clockwork machine the laboratory boys cooked up. Testing so far showed loss of life and/or limb in only forty percent of cases. Now that is an error margin I am happy to put my name to. There is a slight problem, it works on electricity and if that goes, so do the invisible walls. But the power grid is your problem, not mine. Work that out amongst yourselves.

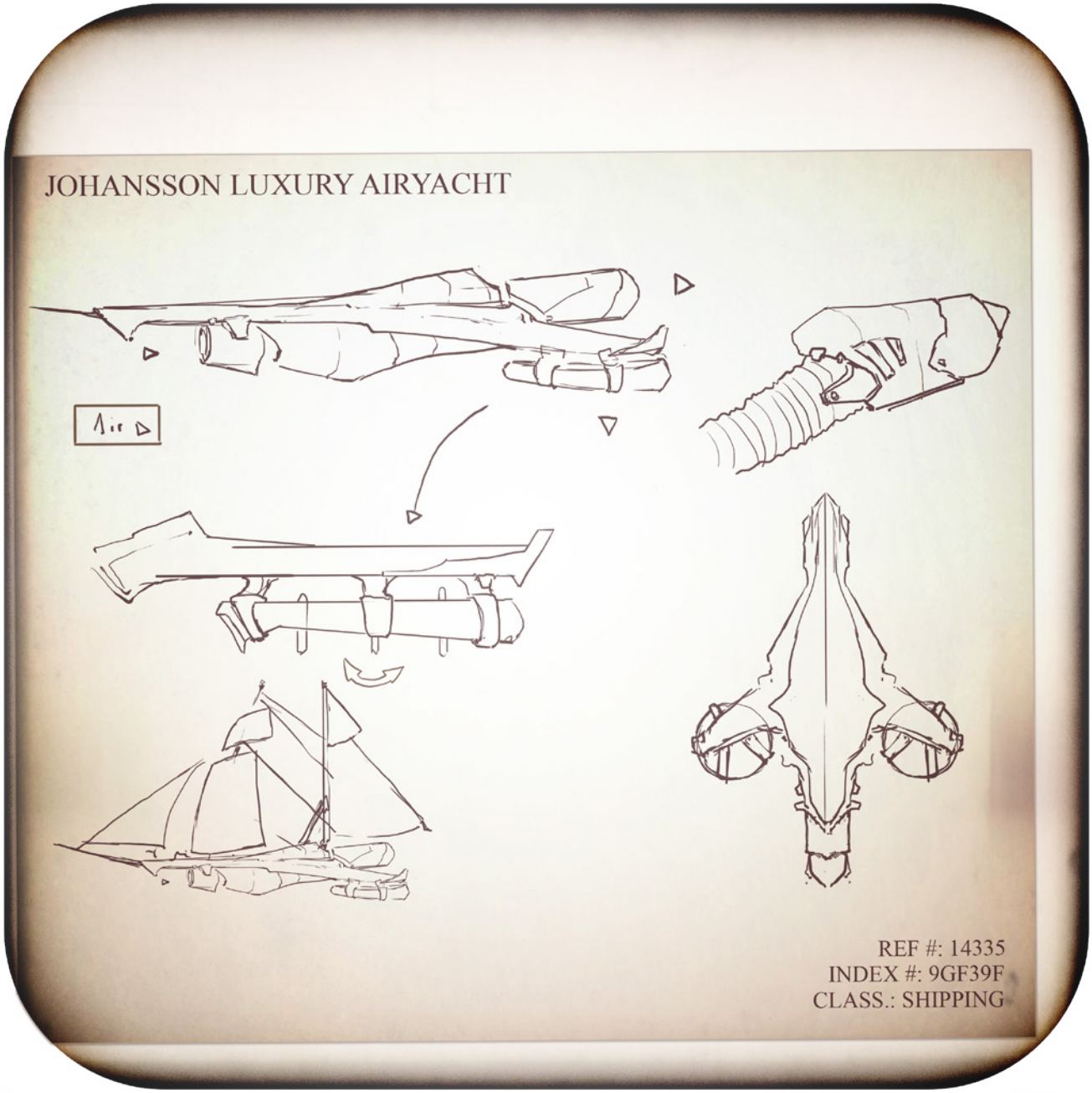
Julia! Next slide! [Slide of architectural plans for Johansson Portable Human Operated Power Station shown to committee]. Unless you want to make it my problem. In that case I already thought of the solution! Why only use the poor to make our products? Why not use them to make our electricity too? So I came up with the Man-Pedalectrical. It is small, very portable, you can take it anywhere and install it anywhere. Workers are always sitting and working, and I call that extravagant. So let them sit on the Man-Pedalectrical, strap their feet onto the foot

paddle contraptions [pedals] and pedal away. Connect these sons of guns up to the power grid and you will get electricity coming out your ears!

I see you are not convinced yet. Well I would not be either! Yet! I mean, so far this all just about the poor. Those selfish bastards, making everything about them. Time for us rich people to have our own way for once! Yes, you agree with me there, sir, I can see you smiling. [Senator Pienaar did not smile]. Well if you want fun, excitement and luxury then feast your eyes on this! Julia! Slide! [Slide of Johansson Luxury Air Yacht shown to committee]. Is she not a beauty? Almost as pretty as Julia here. I have seen the airships of today and they are nothing but brutish, hulking warmachines. Where is the style? The comfort? The little cherries in my drink? I'll tell you where! On the Flying-Mansion!

The Flying-Mansion provides everything you could want in a mansion. It flies too! There is no need for pesky sails and rudders on this girl. No, not you Julia. Powered by my own Air-Uplifters [Johansson Air Jet Engine], this girl will you keep you gliding along while you sip a fine northern





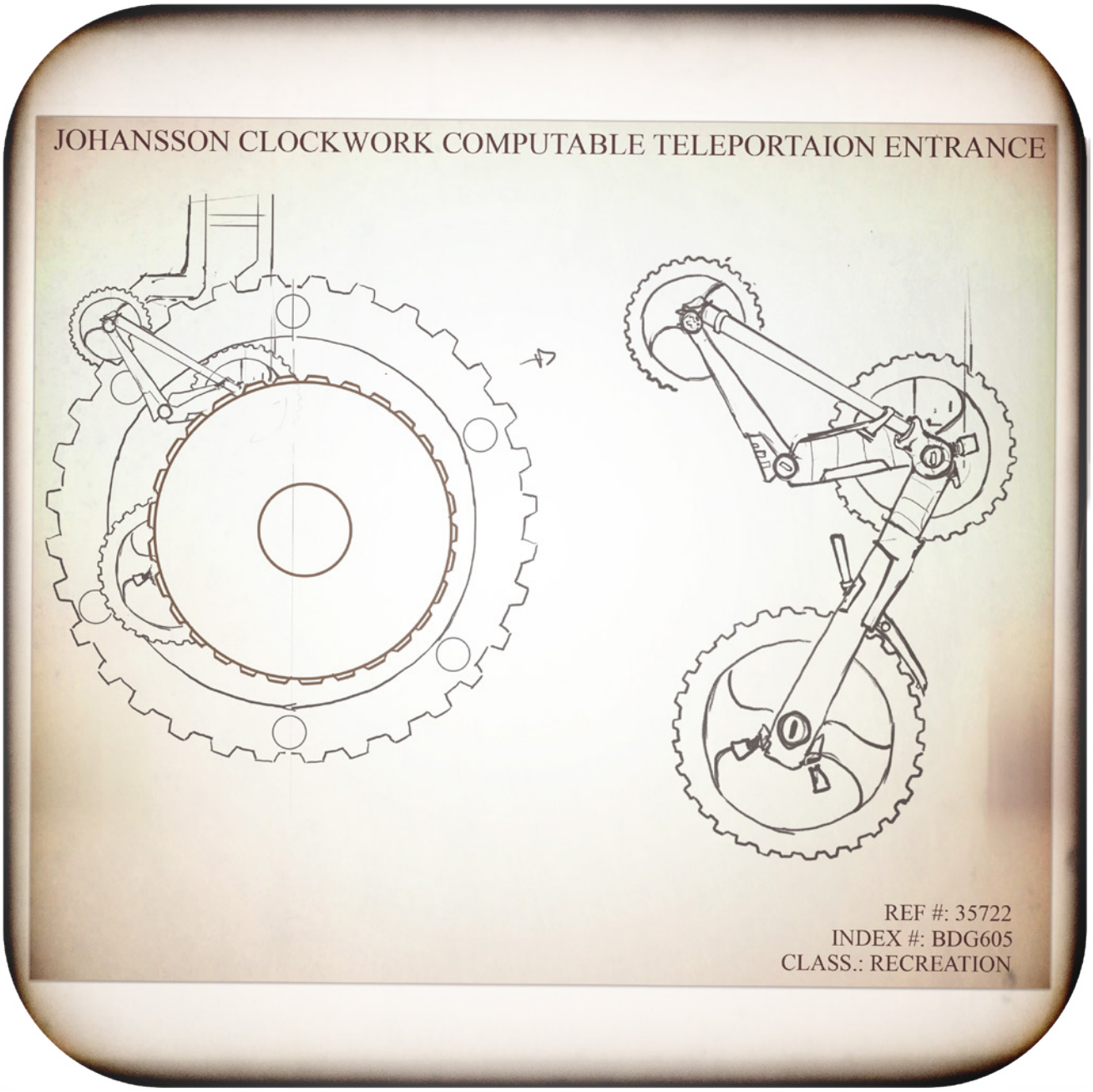
rosé next to your wife, mistress, daughter, mistresses, oh hell who am I to judge? Powered entirely by electricity, runic devices will take care of your every need. Need to visit the lavatory? Gone are the days from sticking your behind over the railing, interior lavatories are here to stay in our Flying-Mansion. Just make sure you keep it well supplied with electricity, we do not want it to fall out of the sky, repairs are extensive and these things do not grow on trees.

Still not biting, eh? Perhaps you are men who prefer their feet on terra firma. Well I got ground level luxury for you! Julia! Next... Oh thank you. [Slide of Johansson Sound Recording and Playback Device shown to committee]. I call it the Listen-and-Talk! Flick the switch! Talk into it. Flick the other switch! Listen to yourself from this magical box! Who does not like the sound of their voice? I cannot get enough of mine. I set a few of these back at the laboratory so I can tell the boys what to do and when to test without ever being there. Remote motivation! Remotivation!

Julia here tells me you can also record musicians on the Listen-and-Talk. I cannot stand bards in

person, and now you want them to annoy me when they are not even the same room? No, sir, I think not! Am I not the man who invented the No-Hearing-Earrings [Johansson Noise Muffling Earmuffs]? I am, got out two months before that cheap van Rosedaal knockoff [van Rosedaal Ear Defenders] came out and Karl van Rosedaal can kiss my pale a... Ah right, of course Julia. Well the women want it, and what gentleman would I be if I did not oblige? A poor one, no doubt. So if you do not want to use your Listen-and-Talk to record your voice for your friends, relatives and employees, then I guess you could give it to your wife so she can dance while she cleans.

We have extra work, extra power, mansions in the sky and machines that can talk. If this is not the signs of the future then my name is not Xander Johansson, and last time I was stopped at the border for smuggling, it was. But let us get serious here, gentlemen. There is a problem that have plagued us for centuries. A problem that many geniuses have attempted, and failed [No recorded attempts], to solve. And today, I can unveil the plans for the solution! Julia! [Slide of the Johansson Clockwork Computable



Teleportation Entrance]. The No-Hallway-Doorway. That is right, gentlemen, the plague that is the hallway will forever be vanquished after this baby is born. Walking is for peasants, and I will not be a peasant in my own house. So with some clever mechanical workings, we have an adjustable Send & Receive array all in one. Dial it to the bathroom, and walk through and have a bath. Dial it to the kitchen and stick your head through to yell at that damn chef who keeps putting lemon juice on everything! No longer will we have to put up with hallways... or lemon juice!

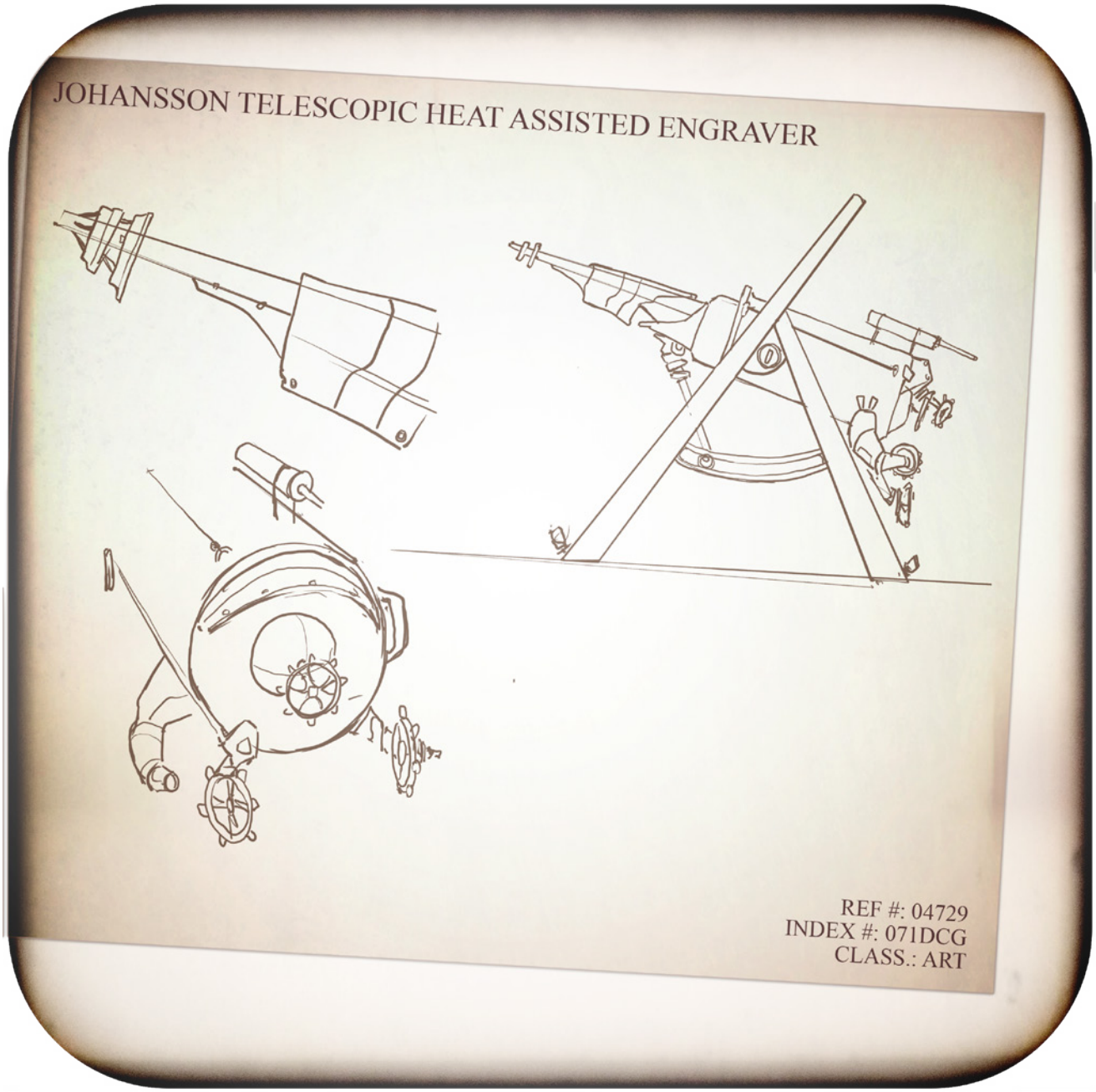
I will take my prize now, gentlemen. [Committee does not respond]. Well you can mail it, Julia knows my address.

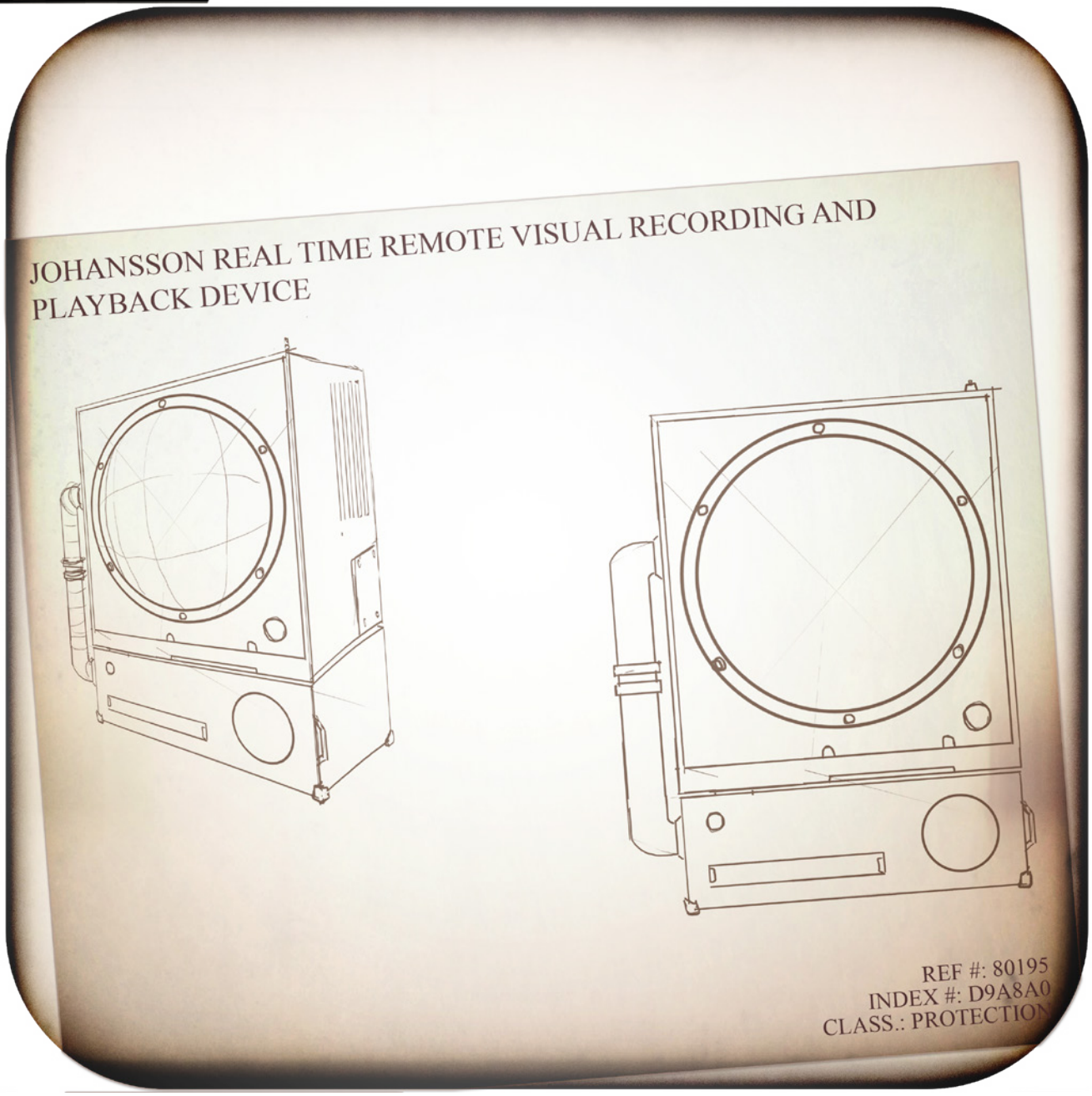
I can see you gentlemen are the sort that aims for the stars. I can give you something better. The moon! Think about it, everyone is out colonising the southern continent but no one is the moon. Why? Because they are short sighted. Who wants a slice of a continent when you can have a whole moon. Imagine it. In a hundred years we could be rulers of the moon, have entire nations set up there. Our children can be

skipping moon rocks on moon lakes before heading off to moon school.

"But how do we get to moon, oh wise philosopher?" I hear you ask [Committee members did not speak]. Easy, I say. I had the boys back the laboratory build us a Far-Burner [Slide showing Johansson Telescopic Heat Assisted Engraver]. Fantastic piece of engineering, burnt a man's arm clean off at thirteen kilometres. The laboratory boys tell me that the moon is a little bit further from the planet than thirteen kilometres but I am sure we can make this work.

And here is how: we point the Far-Burner up at the moon, burn a Receive runic array into it and start sending men up. The laboratory boys tell me there is no air on the moon, but do you know what I hear? Fear. Those lily livered womanly boys have never stepped out into the real world and experienced life's dangers. So I helped them out, fired the whole lot of them! Replaced them with war veterans. Real men. Hard men. Tough men who are willing to brave the dangers of the moon to set up the first mooner [lunar] colony. They will be heroes of Johanssonland! Name is still a work in progress.





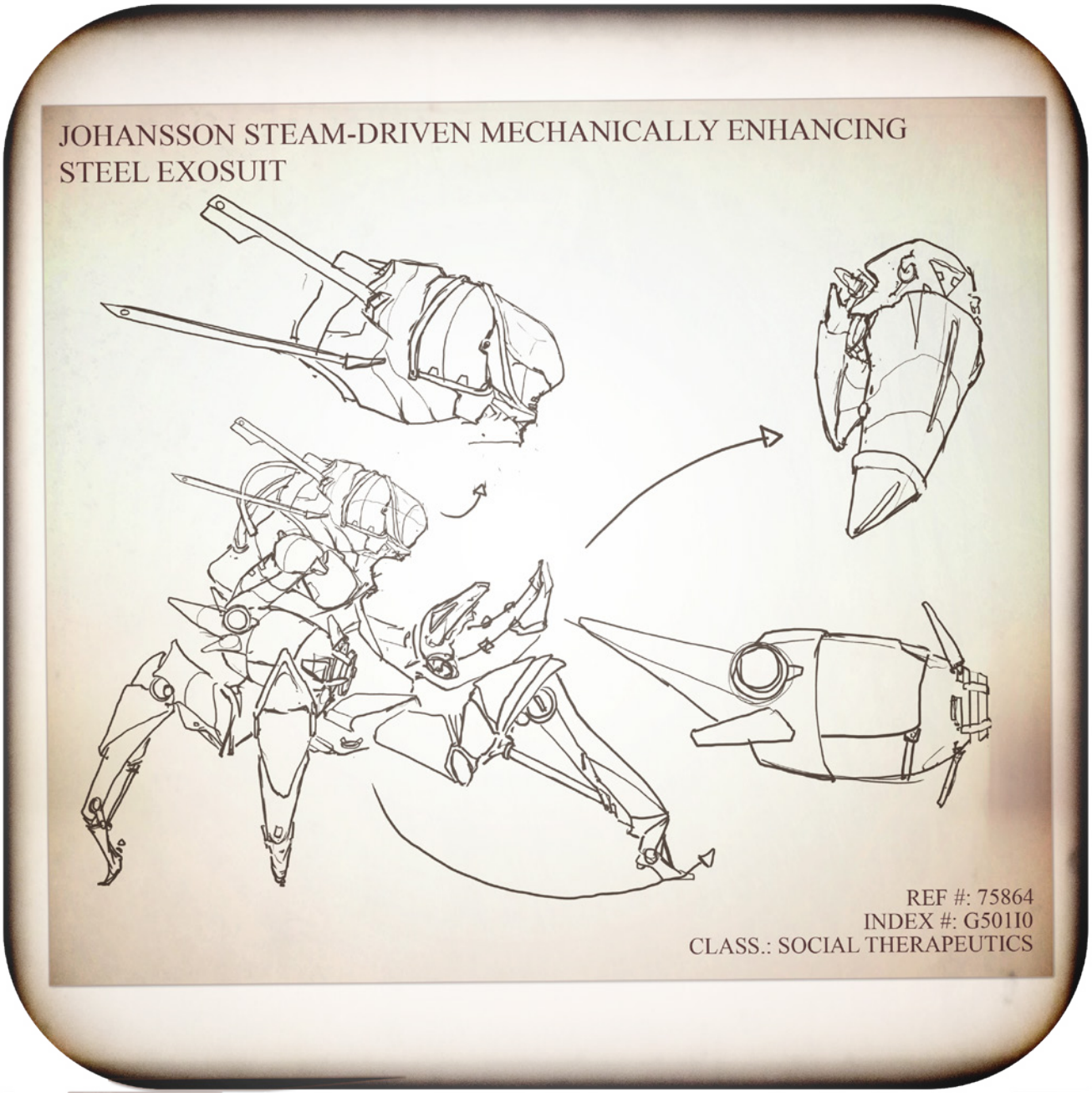
Moon-nation building is going to be expensive and the bean counters tell me that orichalcum does not grow on trees. I happen to think they are just not looking hard enough. But it did inspire me to start the Xander Johansson Prisoner Exchange Initiative. You pay me to take away your prisoners. To where? The moon of course! Safest place I know. Where are they going to escape to? The sun? That is silly, sun is far too hot. I will take your prisoners off your hands and put them to good work. What else are they doing around here? Getting free food and board, that is what! Damn welfare queens. Well no slacking around Xander Johansson. I will take those lazy ingrates and get them to build our moon-nation! You get your real estate back, and the world gets a colony. Seriously, I should be charging you for just listening to this idea.

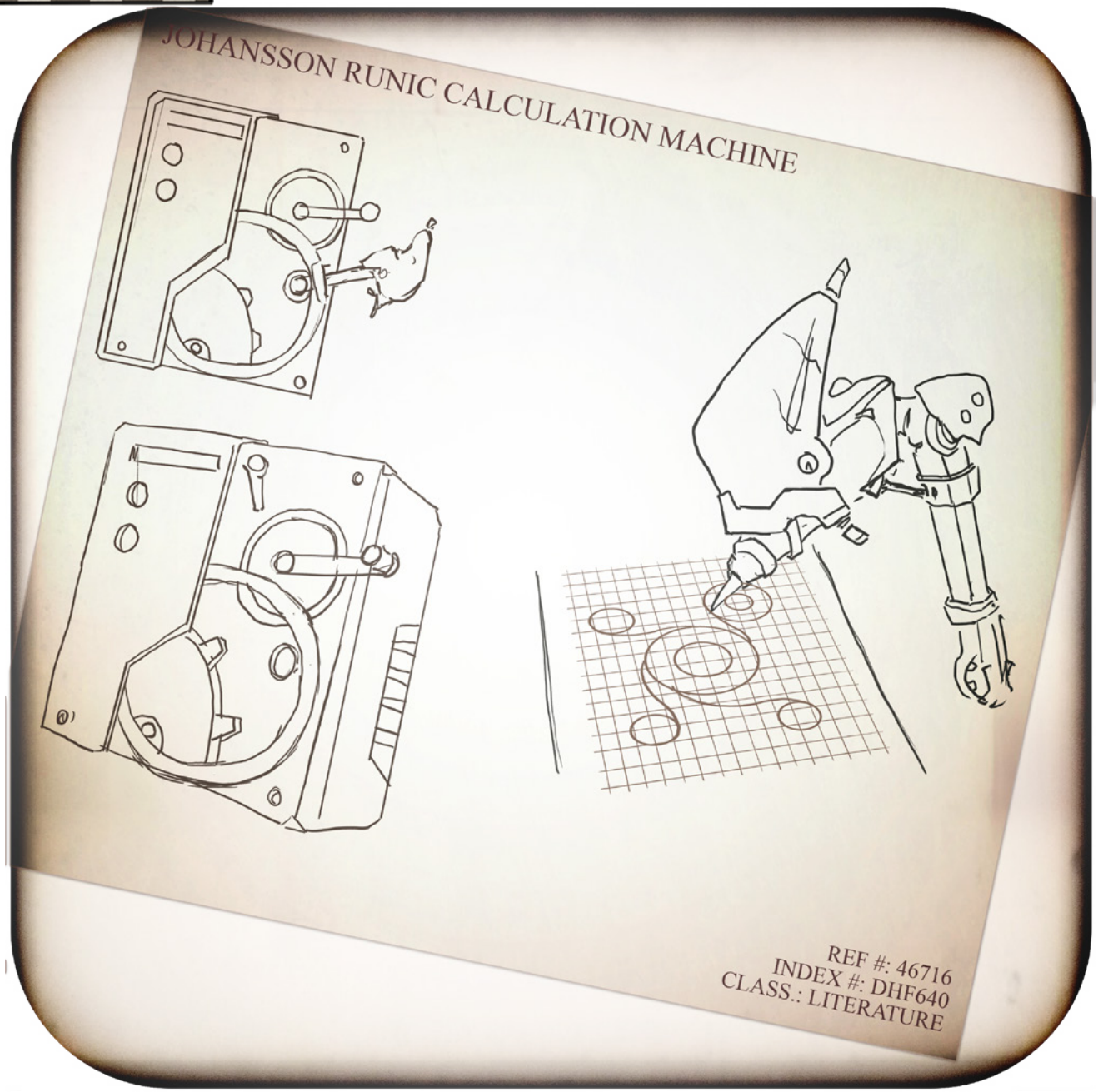
But enough about the moon! The moon is old news, it is yesterday's news and the boys at the laboratory say it will still be news in a million years. It can wait, but you know what cannot wait? People! They just cannot wait today! Too busy running around after this and that. It is hard to keep track of them all. But no longer! [Slide of Johansson Real Time Remote

Visual Recording and Playback Device shown to committee]. I call it the Discreet-People-Viewer! Show them, Julia! This device allows you to put this People-Watcher somewhere and then you can see what it sees through the People-Viewer! Completely wireless! You can see what someone is doing without ever being near them!

I got these all over my house, no one gets close without me knowing about it. And it is great! No longer would I have to actually send a servant down to see who is at the door. That is one degree of separation I am not comfortable with. In fact, I am not comfortable with all those people walking about and I have no idea what they are doing! I still cannot find my pocket watch and one of them must have it. So here is the plan: we put the People-Watchers on every street and every intersection and hire some men to watch through them with the People-Viewer! We will be able to see what everyone is doing. No more crime, no more littering, and I get the handsome devil who stole my pocket watch.

It is all about security here at Johansson Engineering. Just watching everyone in the city is not good enough for us. Watching does not





stop crime, action does! [Slide of Steam-Driven Mechanically Enhancing Steel Exosuit is shown to committee]. In that light we have theorised the best possible preventative measure for all your security needs! Julia! Next slide! I present to you the Protect-Me-Suit, the only name you will ever need to know in personal protection. Using clever application of runes, and some practical mechanical engineering, we have created a giant mechanical suit you can climb into that will protect you from everything! Not only that, it shoots, it swings, it stabs, it pulverises! It is fully customisable to your needs. I am getting teary eyed just looking at it. Is it not the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? Put your constables in this and there will not be a criminal brave enough to go criminalising!

You are probably thinking to yourself "Xander, we cannot just have amazing toys technology and wonders that will definitely make the world a better place. We also need some theoretical ways of protecting all of these." You could not be more right. Here at Johansson Engineering we keep the future close in mind. We think of the future like it was the present of the yesterday! [Slide of Johansson

Runic Calculation Machine shown to committee]. You want blue sky research? I give you blue sky research! Julia! Next… oh for the love of... wait till I say!

The Rune-Maker! You heard that right. This thing discovers new runes! Well, it will when we build it. I will be honest here gentlemen, we are just throwing engineering at the wall and seeing what sticks. No one knows how this things works, not even the boys at the laboratory. I came up with this while I was hanging upside down for over an hour. Do my best thinking that way, gentlemen, more blood the brain, more blood for thinking. Nearly delusional I was, but then it came to me like lightning from the gods! So how does it work? No one knows. Will it work? Of course it will! I invented it!

But I have kept you gentlemen, and lady, waiting long enough. None of my inventions shown thus far can hold a candle to the Lightning-inator [Electrically Powered, Runically Accelerated, Repeating Rifled Musket]. Once we finish testing it, every man will have one of these at his side! The final word in personal protection, I call it! "How does it work?" I hear? Well that is a trade secret, we do not want the Merchant League to find out, do we? Thieving bastards. But I can give you a hint or two, Xander Johansson is nothing if magnanimous. The Lightning-inator uses no black powder or any sort of explosion. It is powered entirely by electricity and the runes transmutes this electricity into a powerful charge of light that shoots out into a target. If this does not kill them, the bullet that follows at a speed greater than my gizmos have been able to measure will surely do it. Two in one deal, this is. Two shots for the price of one. It can shoot straight through a building and clear across the city!

So any offers thus far, gentlemen? But before you can start the bidding war, let me remind you that Johansson Engineering specialises in the future! Contracting us, instead of those blasted Merchant League types, will give you first access to anything you can imagine. My laboratories will be there for you to use and my testing facilities will be working day and night to bring only the newest and best to sell!

Thank you gentlemen, I am Xander Johansson, and this was the glimpse of the future you have waiting for. I am a busy man, so I will leave Julia here to start taking orders!

Transcribed by Julia de Jaager.

Assistant to Mr. Xander Johansson.

THE FIRST NEW DAWN

Oh, gods, yes. Thank you. I need a stiff drink at the moment. Ah, what a night it has been, my old friend. I may be battered, bloodied and bruised, but at least I am alive to fight another day! Chin-chin and bottoms up to that, I say! In truth, I should not really complain. My wife wanted to take me to the theatre tonight. Indeed, I know. She wanted to see… what it is again… that new show with the Tolian and the Gael? Ah yes, thank you, 'The Tolian and the Gael'. I do not know what I was expecting. It was a long night, so I am allowed some forgetfulness.

Speaking of forgetfulness, I never did as you. Who was it that tipped us off about the rifle? His own assistant? No, truly? I had a feeling it was him we were working for, after seeing that yacht, but I never did actually see the man. He was hiding in his room when I got on-board and refused to come out, yelling at me to put the rifle at the door and leave. Can you believe it? I would not have guessed you would keep such a secret from me, you old dog.

What is the time? Good, I still have time before my wife gets home from the theatre. Do you want to hear how it went? Fantastic. It started off well and went downhill from there.

It was right after I got the briefing from Karl… do not give me that look, I grew up with the man. He may be the Patriarch to everyone else, but he is Karl to me. It was right after I met with Karl that I knew this was not a job meant for one. I knew I could probably slip into the AIS and steal the rifle if I had a few weeks to plan it out, but I did not. I only had a few hours. Well more like a day to be honest, but even that was too short a time. After all, the AIS had been broken in only a few weeks ago, you remember? They still have not found all the bodies, I heard. The extra security on the building would have given me nightmares on the best of days. What I needed was an extraction team.

Not an extraction team for myself, oh no, I was more than confident I could get out of there. Yes, yes, I know. Arrogance, fall, destruction and all that carry on. The extraction team would all be focussed on the rifle. I was going to play it like the old confidence tricks we used to do back on the street. Can you still remember that far back? It had to be the best shuffle trick I had ever done. We were dealing with the AIS

after all, there would not be any second chances.

The first step was the build up and for that we needed a man with a silver tongue, and who better than Selwyn. No, the other one. Selwyn Jones. No, no, the peg leg. Yes, that one. He may not be good for running and leaping off buildings any more, but I have never seen any man lie half as well as he can. I was sure, and right at the end of the day, that he could make even the AIS believe everything I wanted them to believe. He was a bit recalcitrant, I must admit, in the beginning. I think the loss of his leg shook his confidence, but I managed to convince him the peg would only make the whole confidence trick better.

Next came the distraction, the one I desperately needed. Normally I would have used anyone I could find, some disposable patsy that would never even have an idea of the bigger picture and could not reveal anyone's names when he was eventually captured. Do not look at me like that, we all do it, even you. Yes, I know the stories. With the AIS, however, I needed someone I know would not be caught the moment they walked through the door. I needed a prolonged distraction.

For this, I needed Sameera. No, don't worry, you do not know her. She freelances by the docks, and not in that way. She has the most peculiar memory. She remembers everything, absolutely everything, and in the most perfect detail. All I had to do was show her the blueprints of the AIS that Karl was so kind to part with, talk her through the normal guard rotations that my contacts gave me, and she was ready. Amazing. I told her the plan once and I did not need to speak with her the rest of the day, that is how ready she was.

After Sameera distracted everyone and their dog within earshot, that was when it was my turn. With the information you provided, I knew roughly where the rifle was to be kept, so it should have been an in-and-out job. It was not, but you know what they say: no plan survives contact with the enemy.

Then all we needed was to get out and away. That is where we needed a boat, both to get us into the Military District undetected and then to get us, well me, away. You know Captain Alejandro Gaspar? No? Good. You should not. He is a pirate, although he claims to be an explorer and mapmaker. He does, however, know how to bluff his way through security checks, and he knows the Tenne river better than his homeland.

With the pieces set, it was time to play the game.

Most of the day went by in a hurry, it was only the last few hours that felt as if a lifetime had passed. We spent the day gathering what information we can. We would never have enough for a place like AIS, so we had to make the best we could. I spent the day talking with my contacts about getting guard and constable timetables and patrol routes; Selwyn spent his forging enough documents that even AIS would not be able to doubt he was who he was pretending to be; Sameera spent hers memorising everything we gave her and working out her own escape route; and Alejandro spent his acquiring a nondescript river barge and proceeded to make smuggling compartments large enough to fit all of us.

But like every plan, there must always be something that confounds it. With us it was the Political District that decided to stop everyone coming in or going out. What happened there? I never had the chance to find out. Did someone finally kill the mayor? Oh, him? Well I cannot say I am surprised nor aggrieved. He was an arrogant blow hard. At least now I know. It was a complication I was not pleased about, we had to change our entire escape plan because of that.

In any event, when the sun touched the horizon, we were ready to go.

As I lay tucked away in Alejandro's boat, slowly making its way upstream, I must say I felt

a nagging doubt at his trustworthiness. He is a pirate after all. I had kept a close eye on him all day, or as close as I could with everything I had to do, but he could always have found someone that would pay handsomely for me. What is that look for? I am important enough to kidnap! I mean, if you knew who I am, and what I do, which not many do admittedly. But if they did know, then I would make for a very valuable ransom.

Before I could fall asleep from the gentle rocking of the boat, Alejandro knocked on my compartment. We had arrived in the Military District. His bluffing had worked. We had stopped at a copse of trees at the side of the river away from most prying eyes. As soon as the team jumped out, Alejandro got back behind the boat's wheel and took off. He had to go north out of the Military District, wait a while and then head back to avoid arousing suspicion.

The rest of us split up. Sameera went south to wait until it was her time. I went north to wait for Sameera's distraction, and Selwyn limped straight ahead, looking like a man with a purpose.

Of what happened next I can only tell you what Selwyn had told me, and I only believe half of what he says at the best of times. To hear him tell it, he strode up to the front doors of the AIS as bold as brass and demanded to see their quartermaster. When asked repeatedly for identification, he evaded and sidestepped the issue like a Vortichese dancer. Instead, he says, he invoked ever higher powers until it seemed the President himself had sent "Inspector Koos van der Merwe" to the AIS.

The clerks and workers at the front entrance apparently had no idea what to do with this mystery inspector and his impromptu inspection. However, rather than risk feeling the ire of their superiors should they be wrong, they simply sent him up ahead to be dealt with by someone with more authority.

Onwards he strode, as he told it, like a vassal of the gods, blustering his way past low level workers until he arrived at the quartermaster himself. I did not think he would even make it that far, to be frank, and it is a credit to his skills that he did. The quartermaster is an old man and "wise of the world" Selwyn said, and he saw through Selwyn's ruse almost immediately. He had apparently worked as naval quartermaster operating out of Fort Dawnwatch before moving to the AIS, and knew when someone was trying to steal his inventory.

But we had come prepared! Or I should rather say I had prayed that Selwyn's forgery skills were as excellent as his lying. The papers he carried were more authentic than if they actually had come from the senate. It showed him to be Inspector Koos van der Merwe, there to catalogue the personal effects and items taken from the usual political rabble: traitors, seditionists, revolutionaries, unionists, you know the sort. Senator Henk de Arend's personal signature was on the orders and as was our very own mayor's. What sort of person would dare question these fine, upstanding and utterly corrupt pillocks?

The quartermaster seemed to be exactly that sort of person, and that is what I was counting on. There were some very rich men and women taken by the AIS in the past year, and their personal effects could make a man very wealthy in a very short period of time. That is why I chose it. Small, valuable things that can easily be concealed are always aching to be stolen and no man ever questions it. The quartermaster certainly did not.

So off our dear imaginary Koos was sent the office of an intelligent agent to sort all this out. All part of the plan. The capture was only the first step, now came the true test of Selwyn's abilities. I know, you know, and the intelligence agent that was staring at Selwyn certainly knew that any document can take hours to verify. They would have had to send a runner to the senate and city hall to find both men to confirm their signatures. Interrogation is far easier and much quicker. That is precisely what the agent did.

Selwyn never admitted

to anything, not even obliquely, or we would never have heard from him again. He did, though, let enough details slip to make the agent believe a confidence trick was being played on him. Selwyn talked of a whole team of investigators, sometimes two, sometimes four but being quite clear he was not alone. He pretended to bluster how talking to the agent was all part of his plan, how the agent was an important man he had to keep busy. Perhaps the truth, I would not know. He also talked of specific seditionists and their personal effects and how perhaps they were innocent.

By the end of it, the agent was utterly convinced that Selwyn was a confidence man, even though Selwyn technically never said anything that could be used against him. That did not stop the agent from locking Selwyn away in a holding cell, but we expected that. The AIS takes any threat seriously, as they should, and Selwyn locked away for the time being would keep him out of harm. The fact that he had lock breaking equipment hidden in his peg leg only helped matters along.

It was on his way to the cells, Selwyn said, that Sameera unleashed her unique form of distraction. Rather than attempting to break into the main AIS building as had been the plan I so carefully and in excruciating detail told her, she had elected to create an explosion on the wide open grounds that surrounds the building. She had, I later found out, found some blueprints of the sewer system running through the Military District. The explosion opened up one of these sewer pipes, giving the illusion that she had come up through the ground. Ingenious, I admit, but plans are plans, damn it! She may have been right, but I hate to be upstaged by people I employ.

It had an immediate effect, however, especially as she was carrying a comically large sack (holding nothing but crumpled paper) over her shoulder when she "exited" the hole she had made. She said she even posed in mock surprise at the AIS workers staring at her before dashing off. Half the agents seemed to run off after her while the rest went to the basement levels of the building to discover where she had managed to get into. The stage was set for me to do what I do best: steal other people's property.

Hmm? Me? Well, pass the bottle and I shall tell all.

When the rest of the team was busy playing their role in the night's opera, I was busy taking a well-deserved nap. I had had a long day and I knew I would have a long night ahead of me. So I took a nap, and you can look at me like that till the cows come home, it was worth it.

I would not have been able to do it had it not been for that new contraption the university gave us to test. The one that came in last week? You have not seen it yet? Well if Alejandro ever returns it, you must test it out, it is magnificent. Any light that hits the one array is teleported to the other array. Incredibly simple, yes, but if you put one behind you and the other in front of you, then from either direction it would seem as if you are not even there, the light seems to pass straight through you! So I simply put one in front of me and one behind me and off to the land of nod I went.

Oh, no, it is far from perfect. If the arrays are not lined up perfectly, then you can immediately tell something is amiss, but it was dark so I did not worry much. When Sameera's explosion woke me, I was ready for the night to come. I strapped the arrays to my chest and back and set off at a run to the building. Movement made the arrays nearly useless, but I would rather be a blur in the dark than an open target. Luckily for me, the AIS was far more concerned about Sameera than myself.

From what our client, the lovely young assistant I now know, said, the rifle was kept in the AIS' most secure vault. Now, most people think this would be the underground vaults and cells. More dramatic if that were true I suppose, but the most secure vault is actually located in

the exact centre of the building: on the third floor, equidistant from its outer walls. It looks like a regular office even. They are spies after all, not villains from romantic literature. Knowing where it was and how to get into it though are two wildly different things.

Hmm? Oh, I worked for AIS once. They had me bring someone in for them and managed to get a glimpse of the vault. It was over ten years ago, but you do not forget that sort of information.

I knew the door to the vault must have been an alloy of some sort. Some blend of metals that would ensure an array would not be able to target it. I also knew it must have had a wild array of... well... arrays to protect it from being simply melted down. The only way that I would be able to get into this vault was to pick the overly complex lock it must have had, and for that I would need time. That is what the entire plan was built around: giving me the time I needed to get into the vault.

I set up the two light changing arrays on other side of the door, facing down the corridors and lined them up as perfectly as I could manage. It was my hope that should anyone look down the corridor, they would not see anything amiss. Then I started working at the lock. I have picked many a lock in my life, far more than any constable would be pleased to hear, but I must be honest and say this was one of the easiest locks I had ever picked. No, I am not saying that merely to boast. To be even more honest, though, I did pick it by accident.

I had been working at the lock for a good ten, perhaps fifteen minutes if my pocket watch was accurate when I noticed something strange. Two things, in fact. The first was that it had been fifteen minutes and no one had yet come near this part of the building. The second was that, through the effort I had been putting into the lock, I had scratched off the paint around the lock. Yes, I know it was sloppy, but that lock had begun to irritate the ever living hell out of me. The interesting thing about it was that there was an array around the lock, partly uncovered now by my scratchings.

With little idea of how to continue on the lock, I instead scratched off the remainder of the paint covering the array. Yes, yes, but I had hoped the activity would prompt my mind to think of an idea of what to do with the lock. My mind did not have to, because the array told me everything I needed to know. The array excluded electricity at and around the lock. Exactly! You see it too. Why on Ārd would a lock need to exclude electricity, unless electricity was the way past it!

So I scratched out a Create-Lightning array on the tip of my lock pick, crudely and hastily I confess, put a drop of blood on it and pushed it into the lock. Once passed the lock array it activated and the door instantly unlocked. Beautiful is it not? The entire lock was a fake! It was only there to make someone like me waste his time picking an unlockable lock while the authorities came running. Yes, you are quite right, they really are not as bad as we make them out to be, but they are the government and we the criminals, we have to at least try to make them look bad!

The inside of the vault was smaller than I imagined. I barely had enough space to stand up straight and I would not have been able to lay down with any degree of comfort.

Hmm? Oh, yes, all sorts of oddities were on the shelves. Most of them seemed to be technological inventions whose functions I would never have been able to even hazard a guess. And in prime position… yes, of course, what else? The rifle, oh, and what a beauty it is. I will never hold a more beautiful thing in my arms again... and do not dare tell that to my wife.

So overjoyed at my success was I that I completely forgot to check for any traps. Luckily, there were none. I simply grabbed the rifle, wrapped it in the sheet I brought specifically for it, and walked out. I have never had a simpler job. I should have known then that something was very wrong. Getting the rifle was supposed to

be the most difficult part of the night, yet it had turned out to be the easiest and least bloody.

I had managed to get back to the boat unscathed and, I had thought, unspotted and saw that Selwyn had managed to get there before me. Sameera would not have returned as her exit plan took her east out of the city to Valfort so she would be as far away from us as possible. Selwyn removed his faux expensive ensemble, and he and Alejandro donned the green cloaks and green masks that Sameera and I were wearing.

Come now, that is a bit uncalled-for, do you not think so? I have been wearing them for over a score years and have never heard anyone complain. I think you are merely jealous. You want one, is that it? Do not lie, old friend, I can see it in your eyes. You must concede that they add a certain je ne sais quoi, a certain romantic mystery to the whole affair. A decade ago they even printed wanted posters offering my weight in orichalcum to capture the Green Cloak. I still have one in my house, I shall have you know. But ignoring my choice of fashion for the moment, let me continue.

Alejandro took us as downriver as far as the Twin Bridges, once again bluffing and bribing any guards that came near. I had wished to take the river all the way down to the docks, but there would be no possible way through the Political District. Not even Alejandro could bluff that well, and we did not bring enough money to pay those sorts of bribes. Leaving the boat at the side of the river, we split up, each going our own way. We had dressed similarly enough and each carried a "parcel" across our shoulders so that any constable seeing either Selwyn or Alejandro from a distance would think they were my honest good self.

Like Sameera, Selwyn would leave the city, leaving enough breadcrumbs behind him for even a blind man to follow. He would head north west to Heilbron before surreptitiously making his way back by boat. Alejandro would head directly for the docks and leave by boat, making sure every man and their hound saw him do so. He had business down south in the Gitic lands, so it suited both our purposes. I, however, would be quick and quiet in my escape, heading down past the university straight here, exchanging clothes and taking a cart to the docks to deliver the rifle.

Or so I thought.

What happened to Sameera, only the gods in their heavens can tell. I heard an almighty explosion from Oldtown so I pray Selwyn still lives and when I reached the docks I saw the ANS Kruger leaving the harbour in a hurry. Let us both pray Alejandro is as good behind the wheel as he says. As for myself, I ran into an old friend. You would never guess who.

Do go on, guess. Be a good sport.

Not even close.

No, still far off.

Who? Oh, him. No.

Alright, alright, calm down.

Markus de Brant.

Yes, indeed, the very fiery man himself. Who could ever forget that name. After what happened a few years back, I honestly not think I would ever see Markus again.

Of course he was there to burn me alive, what else does Markus ever do? Why do you think I am in this condition? Did you think I fell down some stairs? No, the lunatic nearly killed me.

Someone must have seen me leave and Markus somehow found out and knowing I like my mask and cloak, knew it was me. Yes, yes, fine, you have made your point. He knows how I operate, he knows who I work for, and he clearly knew about the fiasco at the Political District because he was there on the road near the university waiting for me. He had to have killed a horse or two to make it there that quickly. And then he quickly proceeded to try to kill me.

I had completely forgotten that he had the mad king's bronze and gold blade. Yes, that is the reason why I look like a carved turkey, thank you oh so much. No matter what I tried, he was… well... better. I had only one hope: the rifle. By all the heavens above yes, it does. It works perfectly and beautifully. The gods had looked down upon this poor sinner and granted him their power, because I destroyed a building with it then and there.

I kid not, Markus was lucky that he was standing right against the rifle when I shot. It only made a small hole in him, but when he was on ground with shock I had a look across the road behind him and lo and behold I had put a hole in a building the size of a man. I ran across to see, and the building behind it had a hole the size of a cart. I was on the ground when I shot, thus the angle had pointed up, so only the last building's entire third story was missing. I stagger to think how far the destruction would have gone on for had I shot directly head-on at a building.

I agree, that was my first thought as well. A weapon that could cause destruction on a such a mass scale should not exist, and it definitely must never fall into the hands of any government, nor even the Merchant League. Imagine a world where any man can destroy a city with only a rifle and a cleverly designed array? No, you cannot ban it, how would that work? You cannot stop everyone drawing an array. It would be chaos. I joked about the power of the gods, but it is quite true. There are some things that man should not know and some things man was never meant to control. I solemnly believe the power to destroy a city falls squarely under that sentiment.

Where was I? Ah, yes of course. I had wished, in vain, that after my little duel with Markus that finally my night would be over. As my wife knows, I clearly cannot stop being incorrect.

If anything, the League district had to have been a safe area for me. After all, who is moronic enough to attempt something with the four families looking on? It seemed some old sod from van Windburg was just desperate enough to try.

I had stolen a horse and rode along the edges of the League District, trying to stay far enough away from the other families' compounds while also trying to be as quick as possible. This unfortunately had to take me close to the van Windburg compound where, for the second time tonight mind you, I was thrown off my horse. At least that time, no one burned my horse.

The old sod had created an Exclude-Human array a few centimetres across on a building's wall at what would be chest level for a rider. My horse obviously went through it without thinking anything was amiss. I, however, was sitting hunched over, still in pain from Markus' beating, so the bloody thing took me in the throat! Do not laugh, it hurt!

There I was, on the ground choking, when this old sod calmly strode up and pointed a pistol at me. Of course I did. What else was I supposed to do? Say "No, sir, I will not give you this rifle, but thank you all the same"? Curiously though, he seemed more relieved than I that I agreed to give him the rifle. It was this mercy that had saved me that ultimately cost him. That and the explosion in Oldtown.

Backing away from me, this old footman from van Windburg turned sharply as the light and sound of the explosion reached us, presumably believing it was some accomplice of mine. That second of shock and surprise was all I needed to pull my own pistol from its holster and shoot the old sod in his right shoulder. I have recently been engraving my rounds with Stop-Human arrays, and the round froze his shoulder, stopping any connection between his brain and his hand.

Doubly surprised now and with his pistol slipping from unfeeling fingers, I calmly reloaded my pistol and again pointed it at him, this time

aiming squarely at his head. No, I did not. I should have, but I owed him my life so I would not take his. Yes, perhaps I am indeed getting "soft in my old age", but mercy is a rare thing in the streets and, I guess, we could do with more men like him. I could see he was no murderer and tonight I did not much feel like being one either.

I offered him the same terms he had offered me: the rifle for his life. His face had gone pale from the blood draining into the array. He did not have long to deliberate before finding a surgeon would be a futile task, but the pain that showed on his face spoke of more than the round. He truly needed this rifle. It was the pain of desperation and lost hope that I saw, and I admit I pitied the poor old sod. I do not know who it is that has such a hold over him, but I do not envy him.

I took the rifle and left him to deal with the array that was slowly killing him.

Markus knew of the theft and about me, but that was Markus. He is always a wild card in any situation. It was this footman from van Windburg, however, that presented a troubling thought. How did the news of the theft travel so far and so quickly that men could be ahead of me, lying in wait to trap me?

Could it have been simply the AIS? Were they ironically so proficient at hunting down criminals yet simultaneously so incompetent to have their most secure vault broken into? Was this perhaps their agenda from the very beginning, to have the rifle stolen so as to ascertain who might be interested in it? Might this whole affair be a ruse by our client in order to expose all the parties who would wish to steal the rifle? Could someone from our own family have leaked out the information for a quick profit? It has happened before, do not deny it. Or perhaps was there an elusive third party involved that we do not know of that set this all into motion?

From your silence, I take it you know as little of it as I do.

I did know one thing, however: I could not return here. Not yet. Not when there was the smallest chance someone here sold me out. It would be the perfect trap. I could not risk it, even though it made my night much harder. So off I went, far enough around the League District as I dared, keeping an eye open around me to ensure I was not followed. I made turns through the street at random, doubling back as often as I could to make the night as difficult for any potential pursuer as it had been for myself.

It took me well over an hour, but I had finally reached the Picarune Inn.

Of course it is not to your tastes, because people actually enjoy themselves there. I was also low on options for a safe house, especially this side of the city. I could not come here, nor associate with anyone from the family until I was sure, and I dared not put my own family in danger by returning home. That left only the Picarune Inn. I know the owners, and they have helped me out in the past. I hoped they would be so kind again tonight.

To my luck, they were. To my misfortune, I was once again one step behind my pursuers, ironically enough.

The Molderos, the owners, Cassandra and Geraldo, had let me borrow their back room so that I may pass the next few hours in relative anonymity while it seemed the entire city was hunting me. It seemed the only plan of mine that worked was the theft, because this plan too failed when I overheard, through the back window that overlooks the alleyway, a group of men discussing me and how they were told I would be at the Picarune Inn.

No, I dismissed that thought as soon as I had it. The Molderos would not sell me out. No, truly, they would not. Not only because we are on good

terms, but because they also have a healthy fear of me. They know what I am capable of. I also did not believe them to be quite so stupid as to specifically sell me out to these men.

As I continued listening to their whispered conversation I learned a few things. Firstly, these men were already quite intoxicated and from this very inn. Secondly, they said that word had come straight from the Matriarch that there was a man in a green mask and cloak of my height and build carrying a strange rifle. Yes, quite, now all the Families were involved in this affair.

I was not relishing another fight, especially not against four men. I did not think I would have survived it, to be frank. I was battered and bloodied from Markus, my throat throbbed with pain from the other old sod, and I was bone tired from all the running, climbing and jumping I had done tonight. As I listened I discovered that perhaps these men might not know in what condition I truly was. They did not speak of either my encounters with Markus or the old sod. Perhaps that is why there were four of them. Or perhaps I was overestimating my notoriety.

I could not stay at the inn, however. Sooner or later they would enter and find me. The best plan I had was to gamble and hope they were worse at cards than I was.

Walking straight through the inn passed a surprised Cassandra, I went out the front and sneaked around the back of the inn, behind my unsuspecting ambushers. So focussed were they on developing their own plan of action they did not hear me approach. With their heads bent in a huddle they also did not see me. They were quite aware of me, however, when I unslung the rifle and placed its muzzle against the head of the conspirator closest to me.

No, I would not have shot. Not out of any sympathy for those four idiots, but because I did not want to destroy any more of the city than I already had. The rifle was an intimidating beast and I was bargaining on that fact and on their intoxication.

I told my hostage to throw his weapons on the ground and kick them away, and he did so immediately, removing one of the threats. One of the others followed my hostage's example and when I mentioned I knew they were working for the Matriarch and I now knew their faces, yet another followed. The fourth man was defiant and seemed willing to brave the fearsome looking weapon when it was my hostage of all people who spoke up.

Yes, I thought so too, but self-preservation seemed like the last thing on his mind, rather the well-being of his two disarmed comrades. I would say he is a singer from the eloquence with which he spoke and his rich voice, and this had an immediate effect on his comrades. He should have gone into politics with such a charisma. With the threat of the rifle less real than the mythical corundum boar of the Big Riada, the fourth man dropped his weapons and all four men walked off.

My life should be made into a theatre melodrama, as tonight has seen old friends duelling to near death, mercy shown between two thugs, and a hostage pleading for his friends to surrender. Perhaps I could even get the hostage to play me in the drama, he certainly has the voice for it!

And speaking of the theatre, I should get to the end. My wife will soon be home. With that said, I stole the closest horse and raced it to the docks. If sneaking and skulking and hiding could not save me from the pursuers, perhaps speed could. The quicker I got rid of the rifle, the quicker they would all leave me alone.

Or so I thought.

I had made it to the docks without incident, and had begun to search for the pier with the yacht to which I was supposed to deliver the rifle. As I walked my horse along the piers I spotted something to my right that felt out of place. I stopped and looked out

over the sea and after a minute I saw a section of the water was not reflecting the moonlight. Too late I realised it was a black painted ship with black sails keeping pace with me when a glint of light from the ship heralded the end to the third horse I had tonight.

Exhausted, in pain, and spiritually tired I unashamedly confess that I did not hesitate to unsling the rifle, point it directly at the ship and fire. I may even have felt a small glimmer of satisfaction at doing so. After all, there were no buildings, no city to destroy here, only water.

When I said the rifle had the capability to bring the city to its knees, I was not exaggerating. One moment the ship was there and the next it was gone, along with all the water behind it for a good few kilometres I would say. The cone of destruction it left was enough to swallow city blocks. For a few seconds, I swore I could see the seabed.

The rifle itself is as quiet as a cat's whisper, but the sound of the water rushing in to reclaim what I had stolen was a deafening roar. I soon realised that I was perhaps hasty in my decision to fire the rifle. If anyone was still looking for me, they would now know exactly where I was.

I ran as fast as I could manage along the piers until I spotted the strange, sleek looking yacht. Seeing no one amidships, I cautiously went below deck, expecting another ambush. When I heard the inventor in one of the rooms, I was relieved. The relief did not last long when, as I said, the fool did not want to come out. Apparently he had seen what I had done with the rifle and was convinced I was here to kill him

You are quite right, I told him that word for word in fact. If I was there to kill him, why would I even go on board? I would merely stand a good ways back and shoot at the yacht. He was having none of it.

I nearly did shoot him, for all the frustration he was causing me to have. All the trouble I had been through tonight and he would not even greet me properly. Yes, I suppose you are right, he could not have known. But do not worry, I did not shoot him. I left the rifle in front of the door and left, slinking back here. The rifle is his problem now.

And so here we sit in the Patriarch's office sipping his liquor.

And there was my night, as enjoyable, frustrating, painful, vexing, and exhilarating though it was.

And now I must be off or my wife will be even more cross with me than is the norm. Come now, you know I jest. I am her husband, I am allowed to. I will send her your love.

A new dawn has risen, my friend, and from what I have seen tonight, it may well be a new dawn for life as we know it. You are right. Take care my, old friend, I believe we may all need it now.

SAMPLE ADVENTURE

The Case of the Missing Rifles

For this introductory adventure, the players are recruited by the van Rosedaal trade family to do a mission for them. Should they do well, then the van Rosedaal family may look into hiring them permanently. This would be windfall for anyone, it's like being recruited by the Italian Mafia. They would be set for life, or until they die working for the family.

Players, stop reading here. Otherwise you will just spoil the plot and all the fun.

GMs, the short version of the story is that some new prototype rifles the van Rosedaal family ordered accidentally got delivered to a warehouse belonging to the Hugenberg family. The players need to retrieve this quickly and quietly. Should the government find out, then everyone is in trouble, should the Hugenbergs find out then they will just take the rifles and the van Rosedaals lose out on all that profit. At the very least, they need to bring back those rifles.

Mission Briefing

Location:

- van Rosedaal Compound.
- Servant's quarters.
- Dining room.

How the players got to the van Rosedaal compound is up to you and the players. Perhaps one or all of them had previously worked with the family, perhaps they have been hand selected by van Strauss (the handler of all the dirty work for the family), perhaps they unwittingly got caught up in League business and now they are stuck, or perhaps they owe a debt to the family and this is how they will have to pay it off. Work up a backstory for the group, or let each player work up their own backstory and the characters can get to know each during gameplay. However they arrived, they are now in the heart of the League.

It is early in the morning. The players will have been taken into the compound through the back entrance. They will never have

entered the mansion, nor seen anyone except for a servant. Impress this upon the players. To the League, they are nothing but "the help". The Patriarch of the van Rosedaal family is like a King, and the players are merely peasants no matter how wealthy the players are or how noble their bloodline.

The servants they will pass by when entering the servants quarters beneath the mansion will be regular, nice people, honest and principled or as much as a normal person is. There is a huge distinction between the poor and the rich here. The servants won't interact with the players beyond a "hello" and a "how are you". They know what sort of people the players are, and they have been here long enough not to get involved with that side of the family business.

Johan van Strauss deals with all the footmen of the van Rosedaal family and so he will be the player's boss for this mission. He is as pleb as pleb can be. He himself started as a footmen and rose through the ranks. He is uncomfortable around money and luxury and prefers the common pleasures in life. He is a pleasant enough man but he will put his foot down should the players step out of line. After all, he is a consummate professional.

NPCs:

- Steward Hassan van der Wal
- Johan van Strauss
- Assorted servants

When the characters have introduced themselves to each other and to Johan van Strauss, their handler, and gotten the small talk out of the way, then the steward to the Patriarch, Hassan van der Wal will enter, say his good mornings, quiet them down, and bid them to take their seats.

Said by the Steward (*and you can read this to the players*):

"Good morning ladies/gentlemen.

"The task I have for you this day is a simple one. A crate of newly made runed rifles we ordered have accidentally been delivered to the Hugenberg's warehouse in the Dock's district. The crate is labelled "Woodcutting axes" to avoid the import tax that goes along with highly expensive, handmade, high quality runed rifles.

"If word gets out about the true contents in the crate, not only will we have to pay the import tax, but also a hefty fee to the government and a loss of face amongst both our suppliers and clients. It is imperative that this does not happen.

"For this reason, we cannot simply ask the Hugenburgs for our produce. At best, they will stay silent but keep the rifles. At worst, they will tell the authorities and this will result in the aforementioned loss of face and money.

"Your task is to retrieve our crate without anyone being the wiser. As far as our informants have told us, the Hugenburgs are still unaware of the crate and its true contents. We cannot say for how much longer this will continue. Sneak in there, get the crate and bring it here to our compound. Van Strauss here will answer all your questions, I however must get back to work.

"Good day, gentlemen/ladies."

After this, van der Wal will take his leave. He is a busy man after all. Johan van Strauss will not offer any information unless the players can't think of anything to ask. This is up the players to think what they might need to know before attempting the break in.

Information given by van Strauss:

- The crate is 2 metres by 1 metre by 1 metre and contains 40 rifles.
- It is labeled "Woodcutting Axes" and covered in fire retarding arrays.
- The crate is at a warehouse that doesn't handle dangerous or expensive goods. They handle low cost, mid quality goods. Axes, hammers, any sort of blacksmith tools, farm tools, leatherworking tools.
- A map of the city with the warehouse marked out is provided to the players.
- Information from last night suggests only 5 men on guard: 2 at the front door,

2 at side door and 1 inside.
- The watch changes every 6 hours: so 11am, 5pm, 11pm. 11pm is best time for obvious reasons.
- The ship that brought in the cargo was the Blue Canary. Still in dock although her captain can't be found. May go look at the Picarune Inn for him as it is a favourite watering hole for sailors. Note: The Captain would be a good contact for this mission as the crew members can provide some extra muscle for the mission and the ship could transport the crate closer to the van Rosedaal compound safer than going by street.
- The Captain will be able to give any information about why the delivery was incorrect and any information they may want surrounding the delivery.
- Needs to be done tonight.

After this, van Strauss will lead them out, saying he has another team of footmen to deal with. From here on out, it is up to the players to make sure the mission succeeds.

Legwork

This section is most free-form of the Adventure. This is the part where the players do all their investigation and preparations for the break in. It could take ten minutes if they are just going to go in guns blazing or it can take hours if they want to plan it like a casino vault heist. During this time is also when the players can procure the equipment they feel will be necessary for the break in.

The two obvious locations they could go to is the warehouse where the cargo is located and the Picarune Inn where the captain of the Blue Canary is drinking away his troubles. Apart from that, this is where you can explore a bit of the city, let them wander around getting any weapons, armour or other gear if they want. If they are unsure about where to go looking for equipment, their characters will know of the Great Bazaar in the centre of the League District where you can find anything you want.

If they are still stumped at what to do, a successful Contacts Skill Check should let a character find out the captain is at the Picarune inn, should they already have forgotten. At the very least, this will put them on the right track.

Below will just cover the warehouse and the inn and what potentially could happen.

Location:

-Hugenberg warehouse.

-Outside

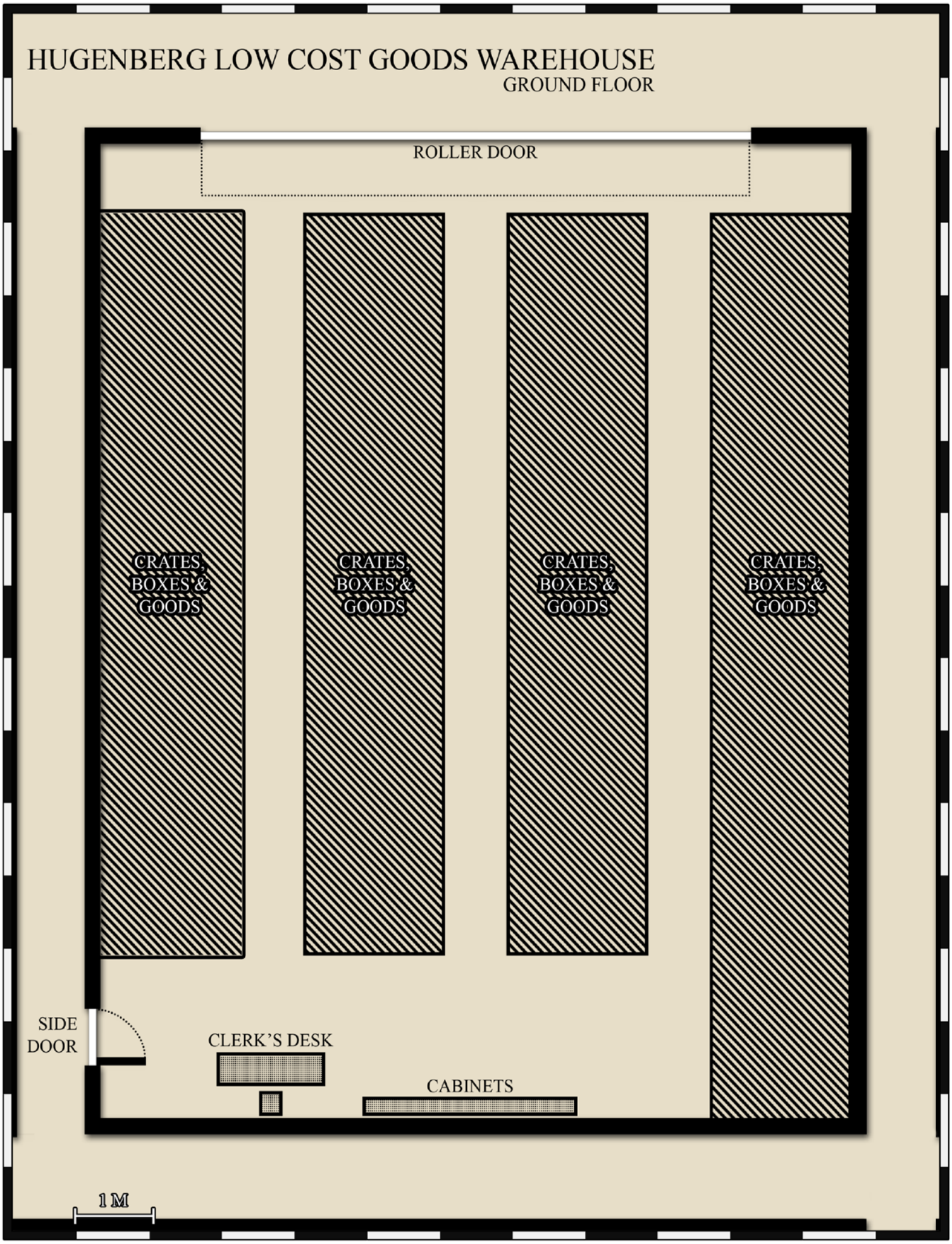
The Hugenberg warehouse is located in the docks district. Were you to get on its roof, you would see it's a stone's throw away from the sea. It is not the largest of warehouses, although it's not a chicken coop. The Hugenbergs don't store their most valuable goods here, so the warehouse is not the best kept building. Slightly rundown, faded paint, and only a few guards to keep watch. After all, who is going to steal pitchforks and shovels?

The area around the warehouse is as lively as on other day. Civilians wander the street, shop owners call out their prices, goods are constantly being trundled passed to and from ships. It is an everyday scene, and there are more than enough eyes looking around that the constables will quickly be called should the players decide to just bust in.

This stop at the warehouse is to give the players a look at what they are up against, see the area, scope out where and how they are going to break in. If the players manage to talk their way in, or climb through a window, use the information at **THE BREAK IN** for how it looks inside. If they manage to con the guards into letting them take the box of rifles out, all the power to them. Just remember, should the guards discover what is inside the box, the place will become a fortress. Double the amount of guards around the warehouse then as they call for reinforcements until someone

HUGENBERG LOW COST GOODS WAREHOUSE

GROUND FLOOR



from the Family can come and decide what to do with the box.

NPCs:

- Civilians wandering the streets
- 4x Hugenberg guards

Notes:

- Three story building. Inside is only one large open area.
- Shuttered windows along the top of the building on all sides, large enough for a man to get into (but just barely). There are a few open on each side to provide airflow.
- Drain pipes leading from the roof to the ground on each corner. 2 will hold a person's weight, the other 2 won't. It is up to decide which can and which can't. A -20 Perception Skill Check should show the rusty old pipes from the new ones.
- Narrow alleyways on all sides. Building on either sides are 2 story storehouses. Building behind is another 3 story warehouse.
- 2 guards at front door of the warehouse, 2 at the side door.
- Front door is a large roller door spanning nearly the entire width of the building, side door is a standard sized door.
- Guards are not suspicious, this is just a day job to them and nothing bad has happened in months. They are the friendly type, will say "hello" and "how are you" and inform players that it is only farming equipment stored inside.
- They do not allow anyone inside that they have not been informed of. It will take a lot of social skills to get in that way.

Location:

-Picarune Inn

-Inside Main Bar

The Picarune Inn is a ship on dry land, literally. It was the site of an old dry dock and when the dry dock moved, the ship stayed behind. The land developed around it without anyone wanting to go through the bother of paying to remove it until Cassandra "Peach" Moldero, an immigrant from the Shield Maidens, decided to purchase it and renovate it into an inn. She also registered it (i.e.: bribed an official) as a working ship, earning her the official, if dubious, title of Captain.

The Picarune Inn is a regular watering hole for sailors, dock workers and foreigners. It is as cosmopolitan as it is bustling. People from all walks of life stumble in and out of it, among these are Captain Manie Rousseau of the Blue Canary and some of his crew. The crew are in the bar, drinking away their sorrows while Captain Rousseau is in his own small cabin upstairs drinking away the whole world.

The somewhat unscrupulous nature of the patrons mean that there will be plenty of weapons, visible and hidden, in the inn. Players will not even need a Perception Skill Check to see that if they try and play silly buggers, it will not end well for them.

NPCs:

- Captain Peach
- Captain Manie Rousseau
- Patrons

Notes:

- Captain Rousseau is not in the main bar. He is upstairs in a room, sulking and getting drunk.
- Patrons may say that they have seen him or someone that matches his description if they are rewarded for it.
- 3 low ranked crew members of his are in the bar, drinking. Players will need to butter them up to get them to

say where Rousseau is.
- Captain Peach will say where Rousseau is if they mention Strauss, pass a -30 Diplomacy Skill Check or offer to owe her a favour.
- If all else fails and they can't find out where he is, when they leave Rousseau will stick his head out the window and vomit, showing them which room he is in and showering them with vomit if they aren't quick enough to get out of the way.

Location:

-Picarune Inn

-Rousseau's room

When the players make it to Rousseau's room, they will find it about as big as a shoebox. There is space for a bed, and a box for clothes and that's that. The players will be doing most of their talk from the hallway.

Rousseau is nearly blind drunk. He is at that weepy, sobbing, "I'm so sorry" stage so he will spill any secrets with barely a prod. He still has his ship docked which they can use should they want, he however is too drunk to think about it.

NPCs:

- Captain Manie Rousseau

Notes:

- Rousseau is drinking away his sorrows.
- Didn't get payment for his botched delivery and he's on van Rosedaal's shit list now.
- It was an honest accident, he hasn't been to Middelburg in 12 years. Offloaded the cargo at the wrong pier.
- Willing to help in any capacity as long as they convince him it will get him off the shitlist.
- He won't risk himself too much, however.
- Delivery was made around 2am last night meaning the guard that helped him will be there at the same shift tonight.
- Rousseau knows the harbourmaster at the pier he delivered the crate.

The Break In

Now is the time for the break in. Check with your players if they believe themselves to be ready, because once they start it will be exceedingly hard to have a mulligan.

If they go during the day, the scene outside is all the same as in **LEGWORK**.

Notes:

- The skills and equipment for the guards can be found at the end of the adventure.
- Should combat happen, the guards will retreat if they think they will die, farming equipment is not worth their lives.
- If a guard successfully retreats, they will call reinforcements.
- 10 guards are the reinforcements.
- Every five minutes after a guard has retreated, reinforcements arrive on a roll under 20.
- Only one set of reinforcements
- Reinforcements have the same stats, will also retreat and then call constabulary.
- If combat happens, after one round for every round of combat, on a roll under 10, constables will arrive as the civilians have called them.
- 5 constables only will arrive .
- The skills and equipment for the constables can be found at the end of the adventure.

But if they go during the night:

Location:

-Hugenberg warehouse.

-Outside

If they go during the night, the entire atmosphere will have changed. The shops have closed up, the people gone to their homes or the local inn or tavern, the dockmaster has left for the day. All in all, it is now an empty, deserted place. Shadows abound as the only lighting along the streets are the dusty lamp posts placed every dozen or so metres. Adding to that is the mist rising from the river and sea.

There would have been at least one guard change by now, so the guards will not be the same ones the players saw earlier that day. Since the people are off the streets, the players will be able to get away with more now. The constables will not be making an appearance unless the players blow something up or do something equally as stunning. The guard reinforcements, however, will still be there waiting.

NPCs:

- 4x Hugenberg guards

Notes:

- The guards and their reinforcements act the same as during the day.
- The constables will only be called should something exceptional happen.

Location:

-Hugenberg warehouse

-Inside

The warehouse's layout inside closely resembles the head of a fork. At the very back is a broad open space where the clerk's desk is and four lanes runes down the length of the warehouse to the roller doors at the front where the is only a narrow space between the lanes and door. At the rear right of the warehouse, facing the rear, next to the clerk's desk is the side door. In between the four lanes running down the length of the warehouse, and along the walls, sits all the boxes and crates of goods. The goods are well organised and rises up two of the three stories of the warehouse. There are ladders for the workers to use to get up so high and ropes and pulleys and all that carry on to help move the crates and boxes.

In the back left corner, directly opposite the side door sits the crate the players are after. To throw them off the scent, there are three other similar boxes in the warehouse, you can decide where they are placed. One box is of the same dimensions and also labeled "Woodcutting Axes" but has no array on it. The second box is also of the same dimensions and is labeled only with the same array as the player's crate but no "Woodcutting axes". The third box is a 1 metre square box (half the size it should be) and is labeled both "Woodcutting axes" and has the correct runic array.

If the players ask why the same runic array is seen so often, remind them that arrays are common and if an array works well it is picked up by other people who use it. It is, in fact, a meme in the technical sense.

NPCs:

- 2x Civilian servants (only during day)
- 1x Hugenberg guard

Notes:

- Day only: Servants sweeping and stacking and cleaning, will investigate news and call for help when they see a PC.
- Guard inside regularly patrols. Will investigate disturbance first and if a guard sees a PC, guards will shout for help to the guards outside if he sees two or more, but will attempt to subdue if they see one PC.
- Guards will retreat if they think they will die and get help from the guards outside.

The Complication

If the party is still standing after **THE BREAK IN**, then you can complicate their lives a bit further with the section below. However, if the party really screwed the pooch in **THE BREAK IN** and you think that they may not survive another encounter, you can skip this scene and move straight onto **THE DEBRIEF**. This section will purely be a combat scene, or a chase scene if the party can run away fast enough.

In this scene, the secret society calling themselves the Monarchists ambush the party and attempt to take the new rifles from them. They will constantly be going after the crate with the rifles in them, so if any PC leaves the crate unattended, the Monarchist will start prying it open and taking as much rifles as they can carry. If the crate is completely unattended and there are spare Monarchists that are not in combat, they will try and take the whole thing.

The Monarchists are not utterly without mercy, so they will not intentionally kill the PCs, only render them incapable or unconscious. They are also more fanatic that simple warehouse guards so will only flee once half of them have been killed or incapacitated.

If the PCs got the wrong crate, as soon as the Monarchists find out, they will retreat and go to the warehouse to get the right one.

Location:

- Varies

Where the Monarchists will ambush the PCs depend entirely on how the players decide to transport the crate. Over land the quickest route would be across the bridge spanning the estuary so that would be the ambush point.

If the PCs got Rousseau's ship to transport them and it, then just pick an alley or narrow street they have to enter on their way back the compound and ambush them there.

The ambush will start once they are halfway across the bridge/down the alley, when a horseless carriage on fire will be rolled across the end of it to block their path. The Monarchists will then come from behind to first ask politely for them to hand over the crate. If the PCs do not comply, then battle it is.

NPCs:

- Monarchists numbers = 1.5 x the number of players (rounded up)

Notes:

- Skills and equipment for the Monarchists can be found at the end of the adventure.
- They will not identify themselves and will have their faces covered.
- Will flee once half of them have been half of them remain.
- One Monarchists carries an iron coin with a crowned tower, the sign of the Alfresian Monarchists and the old Archduke of Alfresia.
- PCs can identify this with a -30 Lore Skill Check.

The Debrief

This section, like **THE BRIEF**, is just there to tie up all the ends of the story. The compound and servants quarters are the same as when the PCs left, although the servants would have changed shifts by this time. The steward will not be there to greet them, only van Strauss will be in the compound and a servant will summon him once you arrive.

The correct crate will mean a good pay day and a happy van Strauss, the wrong crate (or some rifles missing from the correct crate) will mean a very irate van Strauss and no payment. Van Strauss will also tell them he will see to it personally and their services are no longer required. A -30 Diplomacy Skill Check is required to get him to consider taking them along, should they wish to redeem themselves (this will be a new adventure for the players).

If the PCs are curious about the iron coin(s) they found and have not uncovered its meaning, van Strauss will tell them with a successful Diplomacy Skill Check (difficulty depending on whether they found the correct crate or not). He will take all the information gathered to the Patriarch and once the Patriarch has decided on what to do, he will contact the PCs again for their next job.

Should, for any reason, the PCs decide to get rowdy with van Strauss and try and take him on, he has a pistol and dagger strapped to the underside of the table in the dining room where he is sitting.

Location:

-Van Rosedaal Compound.

-Servant's quarters.

-Dining room.

NPCs:

- Johan van Strauss
- Assorted servants

Notes:

- van Strauss will check the crate to make sure it's the correct one.
- If not, they get a telling off and no cash.
- If right, the players will receive +1d5 to their Wealth Skill.
- van Strauss' stats are at the end of the adventure.

Congratulations, you have just finished your first mission, for better or ill, in the city of Middelburg. Now that you have the hang of things, you can make your own and/or use the Adventure Generator to help you along.

Middelburg is teeming with ne'er-do-wells, intrigue, and skullduggery. There will always be more work to be done and men and women of low moral standards to do them.

NPCs

Hassan van der Wal

EXALTED NPC

Skills:

Hassan van der Wal			
Athletics	30	Intuition	55
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	30
Burglary	30	Logic	35
Constitution	25	Luck	30
Deceive	50	Might	30
Diplomacy	55	Perception	40
Drive	30	Shoot	30
Fight	30	Stealth	25
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	45
Intimidate	40	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- None

Equipment:

- Well made clothing.
- Necklace with Neoist emblem.
- Signet ring.
- Pocket watch.
- Pocketbook.
- Folder with van Rosedaal schedules.

Johan van Strauss

EXALTED NPC

Skills:

Johan van Strauss			
Athletics	40	Intuition	45
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	30
Burglary	50	Logic	30
Constitution	30	Luck	30
Deceive	40	Might	40
Diplomacy	30	Perception	35
Drive	35	Shoot	55
Fight	45	Stealth	65
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	30
Intimidate	45	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- Middelburg Standard
- Markus' Gift
- Soft Fall Boots

Equipment:

- Leather jacket (clothing) with Middelburg Standard defensive array.
- Covers Arms, Torso and Legs Hit Locations.
- Pistol with bronze ammunition inscribed with Markus' Gift offensive array.
- Steel dagger inscribed with Markus' Gift offensive array.
- Boots with Soft Fall Boots utility arrays.
- Pocketbook.
- Pocketwatch.
- Pocket portrait of family.
- Compass.
- Rune scribe kit.

Civilians/Servants

Skills:

Civilians/Servants			
Athletics	35	Intuition	35
Broad-Craft	35	Investigate	35
Burglary	35	Logic	35
Constitution	35	Luck	35
Deceive	35	Might	35
Diplomacy	35	Perception	35
Drive	35	Shoot	35
Fight	35	Stealth	35
Fine-Craft	35	Wealth	35
Intimidate	35	Will	35

Runic Arrays:

- In their day to day business, not everyone will be wearing defensive and offensive arrays.
- For Defensive arrays: roll a d100, if below 50 then the person is wearing the Middelburg Standard on their Arms, Legs and Torso Hit Locations.
- For Offensive arrays: if they are carrying weapons, roll a d100, if below 50 choose any offensive array from this section for their weapons, excluding the Monarchists' arrays.

Equipment:

- Miscellaneous articles.
- For weapons: roll a d100, if below 25 then the person is armed with a sword and pistol

Hugenberg Guard

Skills:

Hugenberg Guard			
Athletics	50	Intuition	40
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	40
Burglary	30	Logic	30
Constitution	40	Luck	30
Deceive	30	Might	50
Diplomacy	35	Perception	40
Drive	30	Shoot	45
Fight	50	Stealth	30
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	30
Intimidate	40	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- Blood Drinker
- Manstopper
- Middelburg Standard

Equipment:

- Quilted leather jacked (soft armour) with Middelburg Standard defensive array
- Covers Torso, Legs and Arms Hit Locations
- Steel sword with Blood Drinker offensive array
- Musket and pistol with lead ammunition inscribed with Manstopper offensive array
- Pocketwatch
- Rotation schedule
- Pocketbook
- Runescribe kit

Middelburg Constable

Skills:

Middelburg Constable			
Athletics	40	Intuition	30
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	50
Burglary	40	Logic	30
Constitution	40	Luck	30
Deceive	30	Might	40
Diplomacy	30	Perception	30
Drive	50	Shoot	50
Fight	40	Stealth	30
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	30
Intimidate	30	Will	40

Runic Arrays:

- Constable's Friend
- Middelburg Standard

Equipment:

- Bronze cuirass and open faced helm (strong armour) inscribed with Middelburg Standard defensive array.
- Covering the Torso and Head Hit Locations.
- Quilted jacket (soft armour) with Middelburg Standard defensive array.
- Covers Torso, Arms and Legs Hit locations.
- Bronze billy club inscribed with Constable's Friend offensive array
- Pistol with lead ammunition inscribed with Constable's Friend
- Rune scribe kit

Cassandra "Peach" Moldero

EXALTED NPC

Skills:

Cassandra "Peach" Moldero			
Athletics	30	Intuition	40
Broad-Craft	45	Investigate	30
Burglary	30	Logic	30
Constitution	30	Luck	40
Deceive	45	Might	30
Diplomacy	50	Perception	50
Drive	30	Shoot	30
Fight	25	Stealth	25
Fine-Craft	45	Wealth	50
Intimidate	30	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- Manstopper
- Middelburg Standard

Equipment:

- Dress(clothing)
- Apron (clothing) with Middelburg Standard defensive array sewn on the inside
- Covers Torso and Legs Hit Locations
- Holdout double barrel pistol up right sleeve with lead ammunition inscribed with Manstopper offensive array
- Pocketbook
- Pocketwatch

Manie Rousseau

Skills:

Manie Rousseau			
Athletics	35	Intuition	30
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	30
Burglary	45	Logic	30
Constitution	30	Luck	30
Deceive	40	Might	35
Diplomacy	35	Perception	45
Drive	60	Shoot	40
Fight	40	Stealth	45
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	25
Intimidate	30	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- None, all his equipment with arrays are back on his ship

Equipment:

- Clothing
- Pocketbook
- Travel and identification papers for his ship and crew

Picarune Inn Patron

Skills:

Picarune Inn Patron			
Athletics	40	Intuition	30
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	30
Burglary	45	Logic	30
Constitution	35	Luck	30
Deceive	40	Might	40
Diplomacy	35	Perception	40
Drive	30	Shoot	40
Fight	40	Stealth	50
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	30
Intimidate	50	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

- Middelburg Standard
- Peace of Mind

Equipment:

- A variety of clothing and sorts of armour covering at least the Torso and Arms Hit Locations and with the Middelburg Standard defensive array.
- A variety of melee and ranged weapons. 50% of which are inscribed the Peace of Mind offensive array.
- Miscellaneous articles.

Monarchist

Skills:

Monarchist			
Athletics	45	Intuition	30
Broad-Craft	30	Investigate	30
Burglary	30	Logic	30
Constitution	40	Luck	40
Deceive	30	Might	45
Diplomacy	30	Perception	45
Drive	40	Shoot	50
Fight	50	Stealth	45
Fine-Craft	30	Wealth	30
Intimidate	35	Will	30

Runic Arrays:

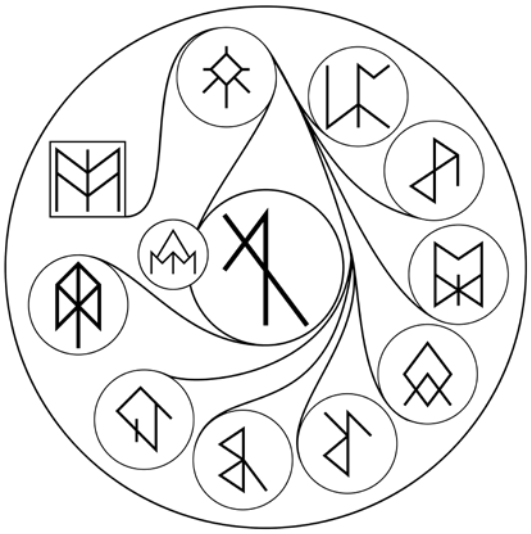
- Armour of Light
- Bloodhound

Equipment:

- Black leather coats (clothing) with Armour of Light defensive array.
- Covers Arms, Legs and Torso Hit Locations.
- Black scarves wrapped around the lower part of their faces with Armour of Light defensive array.
- Covers Head Hit Location.
- Bronze swords inscribed with Bloodhound offensive array.
- Pistols with lead ammunition inscribed with Bloodhound offensive array.
- Runescribe kit.
- One carries an iron coin with a Crowned Tower symbol.

Arrays Used

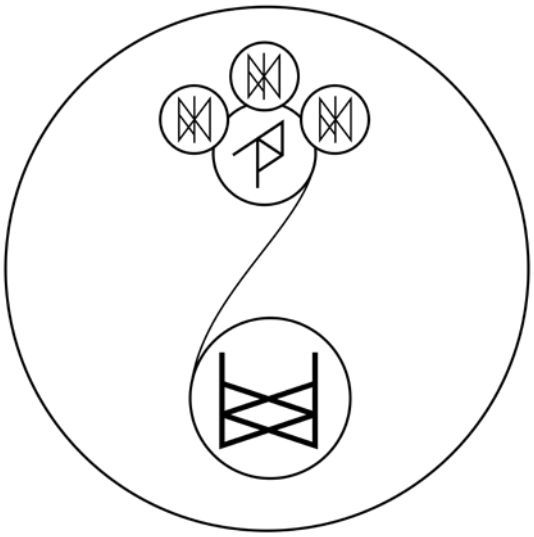
Armour of Light



NOTATION: Transmute Copper, Gold, Iron, Lead, Silver, Tin and Wood into a Gargantuan amount of Light and Contain the transmutation to the array. Sustain the Light.

DESCRIPTION: A defensive array that transmutes materials hitting it into beams of light to blind attackers.

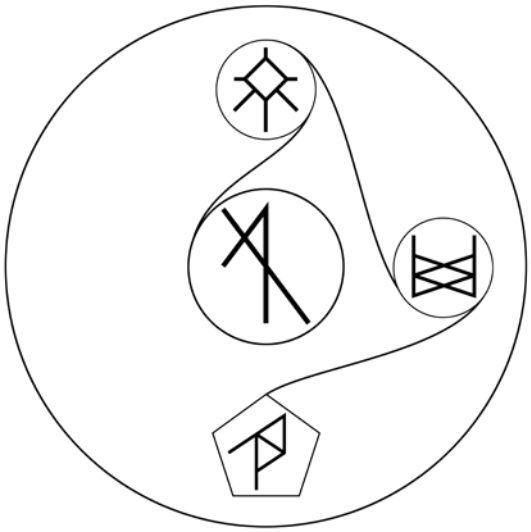
Blood Drinker



NOTATION: Pull Blood at a speed of 30m/s.

DESCRIPTION: Draws blood inside the body to the weapon/ammunition to bleed the victim to death.

Bloodhound



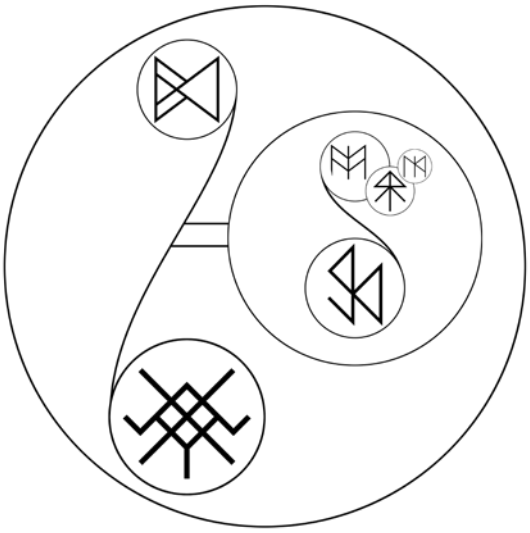
NOTATION: Pull Blood at a speed of 1m/s and Transmute that blood into Light.

DESCRIPTION: Makes the weapon/ammunition glow brightly to add dramatic flair to swords and to make victim glow from their wounds when shot.

Constable's Friend

NOTATION: Create Lightning only if a Human is within an area as wide across as the array and with a depth 1% of the array's diameter.

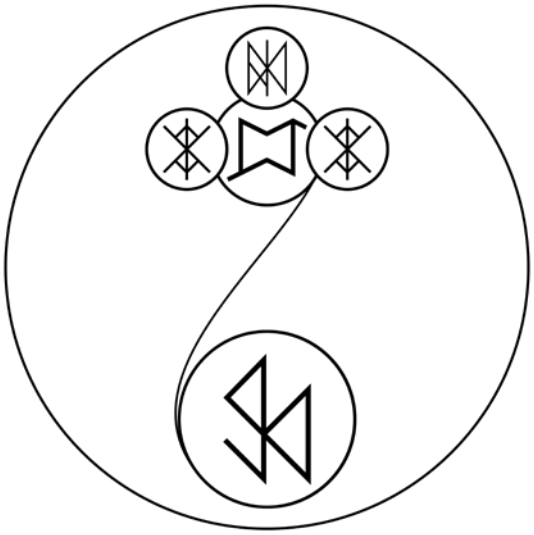
DESCRIPTION: Intended to shock and stun victims when the weapon/ammunition hits flesh.



Manstopper

NOTATION: Push Human at a speed of 10m/s 20 times the area of the array.

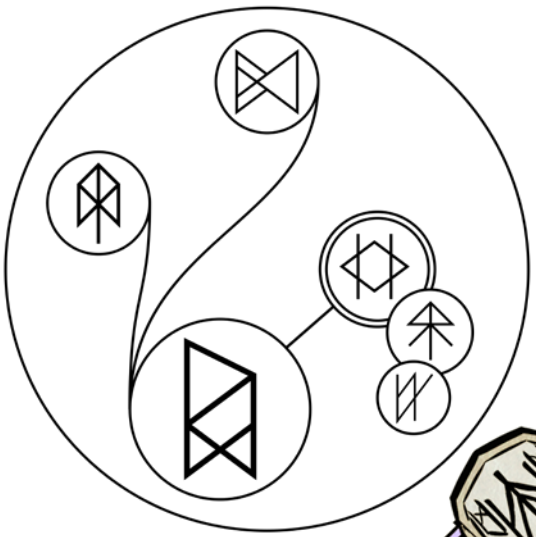
DESCRIPTION: Put on ammunition, creates a massive hole in the body, worsening any wound.



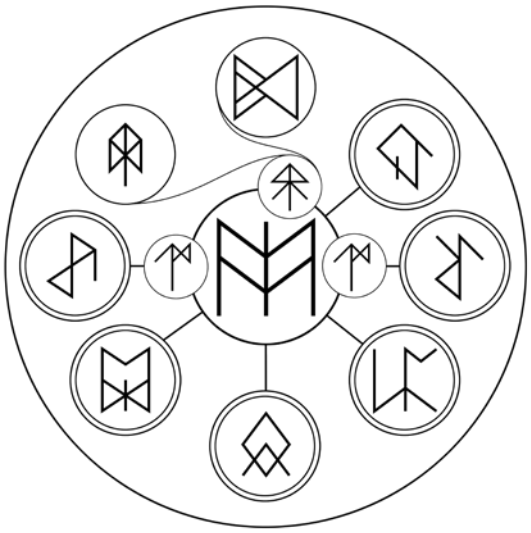
Markus' Gift

NOTATION: Create and Sustain a Fire that Excludes Heat from the lowest 0.1% of the array.

DESCRIPTION: Makes a weapon catch on fire for dramatic effect and added to potential to set enemies on fire.



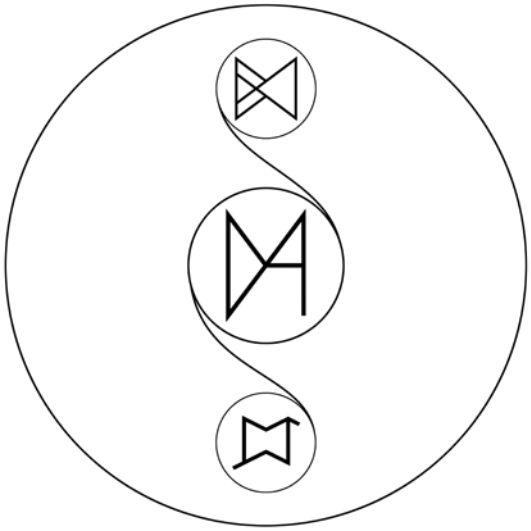
Middelburg Standard



NOTATION: Create and Sustain a Containment field that is twice as Large as the array's area size, and 1/10th as deep that Excludes Wood, Silver, Copper, Lead, Iron and Gold.

DESCRIPTION: Defensive array that creates a forcefield to stop incoming attacks.

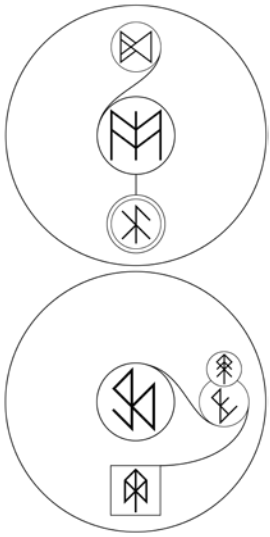
Peace of Mind



NOTATION: Create and Push Arsenic at a speed of 1 m/s.

DESCRIPTION: Poisons the victim with arsenic.

Softfall Boots



NOTATION: Top array: Create a Containment field that Excludes Sound.

Bottom array: Reduce the effect of gravity on a Human at the rate of 1 m/s and Sustain this.

DESCRIPTION: Reduces noise from footsteps, making sneaking easier.

SHEETS

On the next few pages, you'll find some handy sheets that will help you out during play.

First up is the Character Sheet which each player will be needing (and you can also use it for the important NPCs in your campaigns). There's two pages to it: the first has all the Wounds (Physical, Mental, and Social) as well as the character's Skills and Specialisations; and the second page is where you put all your Gear, Weapons, Armour, Contacts, and most important of all your Runic Arrays.

Don't worry about keeping it neat. Scribble all over it, as you'll level up Skills almost every session, meaning most sessions you'll be using a fresh copy.

After the Character Sheet is the Story Journal. Here you can record what happens in each session, from what NPCs you encountered, locations you visited, to the events that transpired. By the end of a mission or campaign you'll have a fully written journal of the story you just went through; something to sit back and read through to relive the great campaigns.

It's also very handy going from session to session to remember what happened so that everyone is on the same page at the start of the next session.

Last but not least are the Cheat Sheets. These pages contains most of the tables found throughout this book that you can use for quick reference. So print them out and keep them on hand if you need to refer to a specific table, whether it's for combat modifiers, wound hit locations, runic array difficulties and more.

THE RUNED AGE

CHARACTER NAME

SEX: ..... BUILD: .....

AGE: ..... CULTURE: .....

SIGILS

HEAD

HIT LOC: 01 - 10

ARMOUR:.....

TORSO

HIT LOC: 11- 40

ARMOUR:.....

LEFT ARM

HIT LOC: 41 - 55

ARMOUR:.....

RIGHT ARM

HIT LOC: 56 - 70

ARMOUR:.....

LEFT LEG

HIT LOC: 71 - 85

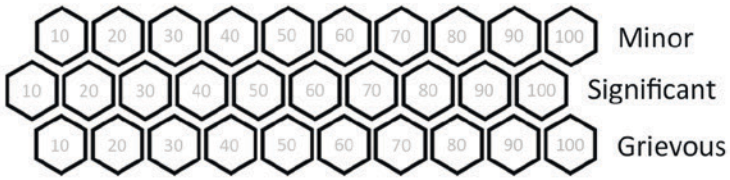
ARMOUR:.....

RIGHT LEG

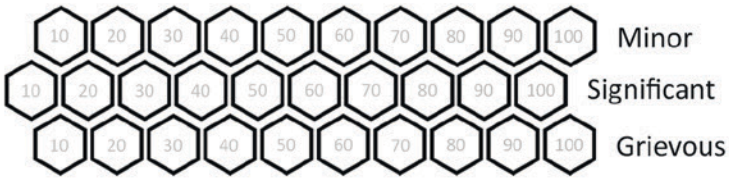
HIT LOC: 86 - 00

ARMOUR:.....

MENTAL WOUNDS



SOCIAL WOUNDS



SKILLS

Athletics	☐	Intuition	☐
Broad-Craft	☐	Investigate	☐
Burglary	☐	Logic	☐
Constitution	☐	Luck	☐
Deceive	☐	Might	☐
Diplomacy	☐	Perception	☐
Drive	☐	Shoot	☐
Fight	☐	Stealth	☐
Fine-Craft	☐	Wealth	☐
Intimidate	☐	Will	☐

SPECIALISATIONS

.....	☐	.....	☐
.....	☐	.....	☐
.....	☐	.....	☐
.....	☐	.....	☐
.....	☐	.....	☐
.....	☐	.....	☐
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.....	☐	.....	☐

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THE RUNED AGE

CHARACTER NAME

SEX: ..... BUILD: .....

AGE: ..... CULTURE: .....

CONTACTS

NAME INF APT

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RANGED WEAPONS

WEAPON RANGE DMG

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MELEE WEAPONS

WEAPON MOD DMG

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RUNIC ARRAYS

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GEAR

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THE RUNED AGE STORY JOURNAL

CAMPAIGN NAME

DATE AND GM

THE PLAYERS

SESSION SUMMARY — WRITE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE SESSION

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

PC NAME

GRIEVOUS WOUNDS

WHAT HAPPENED

NPCS — WHO DID YOU INTERACT WITH AND HOW DID IT GO?

LOCATIONS — WHERE DID YOU GO AND WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

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Cheat Sheets

Test Difficulties	
Insignificant	+60
Simplistic	+50
Easy	+40
Routine	+30
STANDARD	**+20**
Ordinary	+10
Challenging	+0
Difficult	-10
Hard	-20
Very Hard	-30
Severe	-40
Harrowing	-50
Near Impossible	-60

Melee Attack Modifiers		Melee Defence Modifiers	
Charging	+20	Parry	-20
In a superior position	+40	In a superior position	+40
Off-Handed weapon	-20	Off-Handed weapon	-20
Aimed	-10	Dodge	+10
Enemy is flanked	+5 for every ally flanking	Being flanked by enemies	-5 for every enemy flanking

Hit Locations	
Head	1 - 10
Torso	11 - 40
Left Arm	41 - 55
Right Arm	56 - 70
Left Leg	71 - 85
Right Leg	86 - 100

Ranged Attack Modifiers		Ranged Defense Modifiers	
In melee	-40	In melee	-10
Moving quickly	-20	Moving quickly	+20
Off-Handed weapon	-20	Area of Effect Attack	-15
Firing blindly	-40	Dodge	+10
Aimed	Shoot Skill/2	Surprised by Attack	-40
Area of Effect Attack	+15	In cover	+20

Result	Severity
1 - 20	Minor
21 - 50	Significant
51 - 80	Grievous
>81	Location Destroyed

Degrees of Success	
1-10	Scarce
11-20	Mediocre
21-30	Average
31-40	OK
41-50	Good
51-60	Great
61-70	Excellent
71-80	Outstanding
81-90	Unreal
91-100	Superhuman

Action	Skill
Grapple	Constitution/Fight
Throw (person)	Might
Disarm	Athletics/Fight
Choke	Might
Pin	Might
Leg Sweep	Fight
Feint	Deceive
Throw (weapon)	Fight/Shoot
Throw (object)	Might

Armour Classes	
Soft Armour	-15
Sturdy Armour	-25
Strong Armour	-35

Degrees of Failure	
+1-10	Scant
+11-20	Poor
+21-30	Bad
+31-40	Awful
+41-50	Miserable
+51-60	Horrid
+61-70	Terrible
+71-80	Pathetic
+81-90	Catastrophic
+91-100	Subhuman

Class	Damage	Mod
Light	10	-5
Medium	20	-10
Heavy	30	-15

Weapons	Light	Medium	Heavy
Near	Hold out Pistol	Standard Pistol	Constable's Pistol
Medium	Shortbow	Crossbow	Blunderbuss
Far	Hunting Musket	Standard Musket	Small Cannon

Diplomacy Modifiers		Deceive Modifiers		Intimidate Modifiers	
Attacking	-40	Attacking	-40	Attacking	-40
Hostile	-20	Distrustful	-20	Fearless	-20
Unfriendly	-10	Cynic	-10	Brave	-10
Indifferent	**+0**	**Indifferent**	**+0**	**Indifferent**	**+0**
Friendly	+10	Naive	+10	Anxious	+10
Helpful	+20	Trusting	+20	Coward	+20
Fanatic	+40	Fanatic	+40	Fanatic	+40

Haggling Modifiers	
Successful Diplomacy Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill
Successful Deceive Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill
Successful Intimidate Skill Check	+20 to Wealth Skill

Attack	Defend
Diplomacy	Diplomacy
Deceive	Intuition
Intimidate	Will
Investigate	Will/Deceive

Diligence Modifiers	
+30	Perfectionist
+15	Attention to detail
+-0	Neatly drawn
-15	Careless work
-30	Illegible

Skills Affected by Mental Wounds.
Deceive
Diplomacy
Intimidate
Intuition
Logic
Perception

Weapons	Range
Pistols	Near
Shotguns	Medium
Cross Bows	Medium
Short Bows	Medium
Submachine	Medium
Long Bows	Far
Rifles	Far
Machine guns	Far

Suitability Modifiers	
+30	Perfectly suitable
+15	Fit for purpose
+-0	Adequate
-15	Inadequate
-30	Barely appropriate

Weapon/Armour Suitability	
+30	Perfectly suitable
+20	Fit for purpose
+10	Adequate
+-0	Inadequate

REACTIONS		
Roll	**Anxiety**	**Mood**
01-25	PC recklessly attacks the subject.	PC breaks down, sobbing uncontrollably.
26-50	PC runs away from the subject.	PC stars laughing hysterically.
51-75	PC freezes in terror.	PC tries to harm themselves with the subject.
76-100	PC tries to hide from subject.	PC becomes catatonic and non-responsive.
Roll	**Delusional**	**Hallucinogenic**
01-25	PC is convinced the subject is the cause of all their problems.	PC thinks subject is a monster from their nightmares.
26-50	PC believes the subject is telling it to harm other party members.	PC thinks subject is delicious and attempts to eat it.
51-75	PC believes subject has been following them.	PC thinks subject is their long lost love.
76-100	PC believes the subject has a divine message for them.	PC believes subject is imaginary.

THE RUNED AGE

LEAD DEVELOPER: Izak Tait
CO-DEVELOPER Scott Andrews
ARTISTS: Fyodor Ananiev (http://ted-mx.deviantart.com/)
Joao Fuiza (https://inkognit.carbonmade.com/)
Leo Cheung (https://twitter.com/BlueTwoDays)

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