



Volume 1

(May 5006)

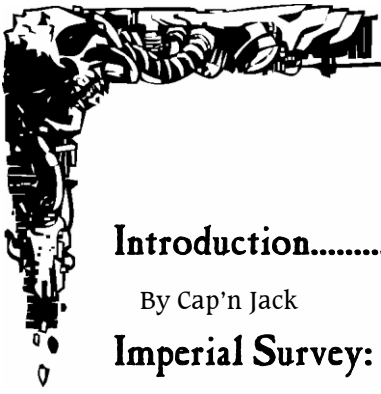


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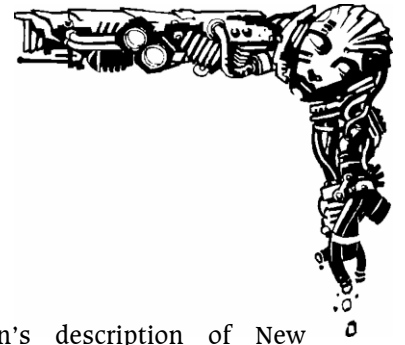
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Introduction

By Cap'n Jack

Ahoy there mateys,

Tis a rare pleasure for a lowly Lost Worlder such as I to address such a distinguished and well dressed audience as this. To you noble lords and ladies, to you worthies of the Church and the League, I offer my humble greetings.

So, what business does a lowly gentleman of fortune have troubling such a prestigious audience? Glad you asked. Some six months ago, a band of mad and desperate souls struck upon the idea of cataloging their collective knowledge of the Phoenix Empire and the myriad worlds beyond. From that idea was born the text you hold today. After half a year of debate, delays, writer's block and kraken attacks, the first volume in the Chronicles of the Fading Suns is being churned out on illegal printing presses from here to Cadavus to delight, inform and amaze.

What lies within depends entirely on the whims of the contributors. For this inaugural edition, we have sought the opinions of the greatest explorers, tale-tellers and lunatics of our age to describe some of the more unusual worlds to grace the Jumpweb. No less than four planetary surveys are contained within. From my own quill comes tales of misty, lawless Manitou, of the aerial fanatics of frozen Svarog, and of ancient, mysterious Leng. To this assembly has

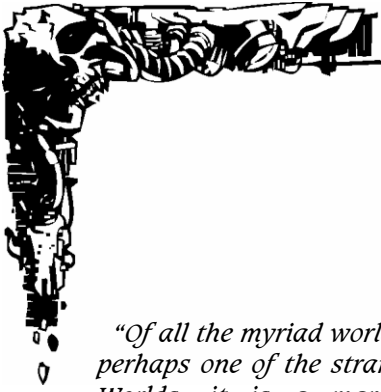
been added Chris Hogan's description of New Amhara. The gannok swears it to be the gospel truth but I urge caution. In addition to these cartographic treatises, the honourable Lionel Rudling and Casey Standridge provide philosophical musings on the nature of chance and failure. Not sure what they're on about myself, but no matter.

We hope that all readers will find something of use to them within these pages. You will no doubt be delighted to know that this is but the first volume of an ongoing journal. If Lady Luck smiles and we stay ahead of His Imperial Majesty's finest, expect to see Volume 2 before too long. Of course, we are always on the lookout for fresh talent, so if any among you would like to try your hand at writing for our noble enterprise then do not hesitate to get in touch. It is an exciting life among us. Travel, adventure and all the hull rats you can eat.

Well, dear reader, I must away 'ere the authorities are alerted to my whereabouts. May the Prophet watch you until next we meet.

Cap'n Jack

March 5006 (Location undisclosed).



Imperial Survey: Manitou

By Jack Oldham

"Of all the myriad worlds known to man, Manitou is perhaps one of the strangest. To most of the Known Worlds, it is a marginal planet, inhabited by uncivilised tribes and a thousand species of heretic and criminal. To the League, it is a rare boon, a planet rich in alien technology where the Guilds can operate with an impunity unknown elsewhere. To the Church, it is a cancer, a breeding ground for sin and devilry. To thousands of Republicans, psychics and heretics, it is an Eden, a last refuge from oppression. Manitou is feared and coveted, idealised and reviled. It is never understood.

To my readers on distant worlds, I offer my greetings. I am known as Gerard Montar, a freeman and citizen of Manitou. For my whole life, I have resided in the city of Noumea, but for my many forays across this world, both for my employers and to satisfy my not inconsiderable curse of wanderlust. I am the grandson of my world's single largest import, a political exile. I understand that Grandfather was the bastard son of some noble or other on the world of Ravenna, and the machinations of his betters led him to flee for his life. Here on Manitou he sought peace, but like all who come here, he longed for his old life. It was only with me that a Montar was born who saw this dark and fearful place as home. I have, in my three decades of life, been a scholar, a merchant, a political envoy to the Free Cities, a miner, a thief and a seeker of truth. By the ways of my world, it has been a dull sort of existence.

I write this introduction as a small indulgence, the only payment I expect to receive from my employers. In my current capacity, I work as an agent of the Manitou Trade Conglomerate, preparing an introduction of sorts to my world to those offworld traders and people of importance who wish to know more of this most unique of places. I have argued at length that such a task is by its very nature the epitome of futility, but to no avail. So be warned, gentle reader, this is in no way complete or particularly accurate. All I can say in my defence is that if you knew this fearsome jewel as I do, you would understand how little can truly be known.

Well, here it is. Manitou. Abandon your prejudices, dear reader. If there is one consistency here, it is all that we know, the rules of politics, society and faith

we hold dear, do not apply here. We are the aliens of Manitou, living only at the sufferance of this world and its guardians."

Gerard Montar - Freeman of Manitou.

Manitou Traits

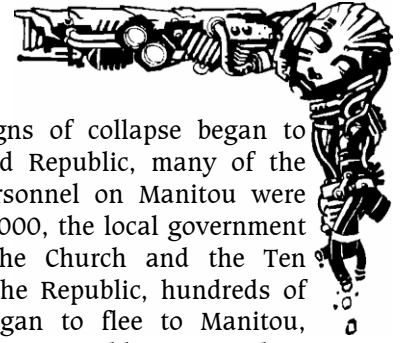
Ruler: Manitou Trade Conglomerate (MTC)
Cathedral: St. Maya Unchained, Noumea (Eskatonic)
Agora: Iocus Forum, Noumea (MTC/Scraver)
Garrison: 3
Capital: Noumea
Jumps: 4
Adjacent Worlds: Icon (dayside), Apshai (parallel), Vau (nightside)
Solar System: Geesis (sun), Ishkode (0.3 AU), Manitou (1.2 AU; Jiibay), The Asawajiw Belt (12-13.2 AU), Mukwa (24 AU; 13 moons), Mikwam (43 AU), Jumpgate (67 AU)
Tech: 3
Population: 200 million Coastlanders, c. 10 million tribesmen (2 million Ukari, 1.5 million others, Vau pop. unknown)
Resources: Zhrii-Ka'a Lotus, rice, pygmallium, mineral ores, seafood, timber
Exports: Pygmallium, foodstuffs, metals, timber, medicinal plants, lotus, contraband, Vau relics, illegal texts, psychics

History

Very little is known about the history of Manitou prior to arrival of the first human settlers. What little is known was pieced together by Republic archaeologists. It is clear from the vast number of ruins and abandoned installations scattered across the entire planet that Manitou once supported a considerable population of Vau. At some unknown point, the majority of the planet was abandoned. The Vau have never explained why this happened, and many theories abound. It is but one of Manitou's many mysteries.

Manitou was not discovered by humanity. Instead, its existence was revealed by the



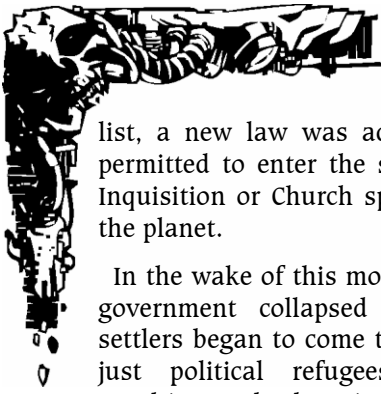


Vau during their negotiations with Benjamin Verden. Describing the world as of little importance to them, the Vau offered to allow human colonists to settle on the eastern coast of the great continent, on the condition that they recognised the Vau's authority over the world. Needless to say, in the fear that followed in the wake of the massacre on Apshei and the Prophet's mysterious death, few were eager to take these aliens at their word. Still, a small settlement in the southern hemisphere, called Byblos, was established where the various human polities conducted diplomacy with the Vau governors. Over time, small groups began to settle here, including many early followers of the Gjartin religion. These peoples included many from Urth's Indian, south-east Asian and Native American populations, from which most of the planet's place names descend. To this day, Manitou Urthish is heavily influenced by these sources, and can be nearly incomprehensible to offworlders. These early settlers saw Manitou as a world untrammelled by the heavy boot of man, and established small communities far from the spaceport at Byblos, trying to live in tune with their new world. The culture of these first settlers did much to instil the superstitious awe many later colonists would feel for the world.

Manitou remained sparsely populated until the establishment of the Republic. Hoping for greater ties with the Vau, and greater access to their technology, the Republican government sponsored heavy colonisation at the same time as Cadiz was being built into a suitable site for formal diplomacy. A series of small cities were built along the eastern coast, pushing the Gjartin communities further into the interior, where most began to abandon technology for a simpler tribal way of life. The Vau welcomed the human presence initially, although the western half of the continent was still barred from human settlement. Over time, however, relations appeared to sour. A number of diplomatic incidents broke out when some settlements began trying to terraform the world, and again when humans began harvesting the Zhrii-Ka'a lotus for its psychoactive properties. By the end of the 39th century, the Vau had cut off nearly all contact with the humans on Manitou. While meetings with the Vau governors had always been sporadic, they now almost ceased entirely. The Vau stayed in their enclave on Mhi'heresh'lathoom, only leaving to punish breaches of the poorly understood settlement conditions. Fearing an escalation of reprisals, the Republic authorities did their best to enforce the will of the Vau as they understood it.

In 3998, as the first signs of collapse began to spread through the Second Republic, many of the naval and intelligence personnel on Manitou were recalled. With the Fall in 4000, the local government began to fragment. As the Church and the Ten crushed the remnants of the Republic, hundreds of thousands of refugees began to flee to Manitou, hoping that fear of the Vau would prevent their enemies from pursuing them this far. In southern Seralong, the influx of new settlers, many of whom were destitute, armed and desperate, overwhelmed the government. The region south of the Mistswamp fragmented into a series of city-states, each under its own government. By the mid-41st century, two main powers had arisen. The northern coast, east of the Verdic Hills, came under the control of a loose alliance of Republican exiles called the Rhean Collective, named after the city that was the centre of the failed revolt on Byzantium Secundus in 4009. West of the hills, the city of Mohenjo came under the control of one of the few surviving nobles of House Von Ferdinand. These two polities warred with each other continually for much of the New Dark Ages, whilst the smaller states took and changed sides in a bewildering series of alliances and betrayals. It was not until the last of the Tyrants of Mohenjo died in 4703 that a peace was reached.

In the north, the Republican government clung on in the old capital of Noumea, but was quickly overwhelmed from within by local guilds and corporations, losing the last of its democratic trappings by the 43rd century. In addition, the starport at Noumea remained open, allowing representatives from the new powers in the Known Worlds to extend their influence. The Houses showed little interest in the planet, although some small Li Halan and Decados fiefs were established. It was the Church that had the most influence. Massive missionary efforts were mounted, trying to stamp out the Gjartins, Lotus-eaters and Vau worshippers who had made up much of the population during the Republic. Mass drownings of pagans and witches were conducted in the canals of Noumea, and priests began to stir up hatred against the Vau. Eventually, a fanatical faction of the local Church, who accused the Vau of the murder of the Prophet, led mobs in attacks on the seemingly abandoned Vau installations that dotted the landscape. Finally, in 4216, the Vau responded. Squads of Soldiers stormed Noumea, apparently immune to the attacks of the human defenders. All priests in the city were rounded up and executed. The Mandarin governor, for the first time in nearly 500 years, recited the conditions of settlement to the terrified survivors. To the



list, a new law was added. No Church vessel was permitted to enter the system, and no agent of the Inquisition or Church spy was permitted to walk on the planet.

In the wake of this momentous action, the northern government collapsed entirely. A new wave of settlers began to come to Manitou. Now, rather than just political refugees, thousands of heretics, occultists and other victims of ecclesiastic law began to flee to this new sanctuary. The famous Incarnate poet and preacher, Dafydd Twyd, is credited with the following pronouncement, *“and if it is only here, on this dark and alien world, that the Children of the Flame can stand free, in conscience, deed and thought, then here is our Eden, and a New Cradle of Man, untarnished and untainted.”*

It was a further two centuries before the north began to regroup. After the establishment of the Merchant League in 4352, more offworld traders began to travel to Noumea. As Manitou was seen by many as a pit of sin and depravity, thanks to the hurt feelings of the Church, these merchants were often less than reputable. Initially uncoordinated, these traders included many pirates and corsairs, some of whom established bases in the wilds. Of the League, it was the Scravvers that had the most interest in the world. As the Syndicates built up trade networks, and smuggling rings to move Vau and Republican relics, they began to campaign among the local merchants for a more centralised body with which they could work. This led to the establishment of the Manitou Trade Conglomerate (MTC) in 4428. Based in the spaceport at Noumea, this body began as a means to regulate trade with the Known Worlds, but rapidly grew to become a de facto government of much of the north. In 4438, the MTC was granted membership into the Merchant League, and in 4563 the Regency recognised it as the official world government of Manitou.

The MTC expanded to control most of the cities north of the Mistswamp, with only the Decados fiefs of the Mirojan Mountains remaining independent. Attempts were made to take over the Free Cities, but even with the help of the League they were unable to defeat the Collective and Mohenjo in a series of naval engagements, the greatest of which was the Battle of Mrij Island in 4589, where an uneasy alliance of the Free Cities sank the flagships of the MTC fleet. These wars ended abruptly in 4616, when the Green Death struck Manitou. The effect of this strange mutagenic plague on all the human states was devastating. Millions are thought to have died or mutated beyond recognition. Many of the settlements near

the Mistswamp emptied, as their citizens fled into the Hinterland to escape disease or famine, or sold themselves to Li Halan slavers to be taken offworld to Icon. Even today, there are hundreds of ghost towns dotting the forests and swamps.

The Green Death petered out in 4642, decades after it was overcome elsewhere. It has taken nearly 400 years for the planet to recover, and the ranks of the tribes have been greatly swelled by those who fled the coasts. The MTC re-established itself, strengthening its power by leading the effort to eradicate the plague. Equilibrium was reached, with the Free Cities remaining independent, but opening up to allow trade. In 4703, the last of the Tyrants of Mohenjo died. The city came under the control of a strange cult known as the Worldsingers, who stabilised the region and opened relations with the League through the port city of Macao.

Manitou played no part in the Emperor Wars, although the aftermath of the wars led to the arrival of new waves of refugees, particularly from the democratic government of Rampart. In 4998, the MTC formally gave its fealty to Emperor Alexius, confirming its membership within the resurgent Pheonix Empire. Conditions in the Guild Lands are stable for now, but the Free Cities are feeling the first waves from a bloody revolt in Mohenjo. In 5000, the ruling cult was usurped by a violent and expansionist power, which calls itself the Manitou Alliance. The Manitou Alliance is actively calling for the ousting of all offworlders from Manitou. For now, the threat seems remote, but the centuries of peace may be coming to an end.

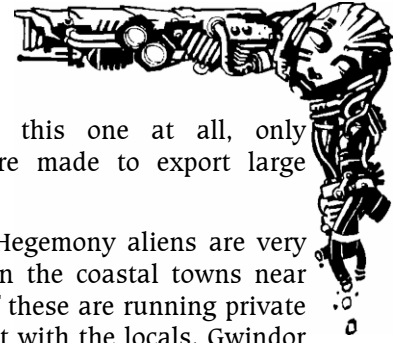
The Vau Governors

“This world's people, we apologise for allowing rash behaviour to foment among you. We granted your ancestors the freedom of this place, but unseemly disorder must be chastised. Now that good conduct is restored, we speak the words of the settlement once more. Listen, heed and meditate on these words.”

Yoma Tela Srad'neth Welthuur, after the Noumea Massacre

It is doubtful that more than one in ten thousand of Manitou's citizens has ever even seen a Vau. Generally, they keep entirely to themselves on their island. No formal diplomatic ties exist on Manitou. All of the Imperial factions maintain small embassies just in case, but they are hardly ever contacted, instead acting as sort of social clubs for visitors and the spy networks. Vau policy is never explained, just enforced. Over the centuries,





the humans have picked up on most of these 'laws', but occasionally the Vau mount apparently random assaults on small targets, thought to have somehow offended the alien overlords. The Vau are entirely ruthless in their response to human aggression, showing no qualms about killing transgressors. However, in reality this rarely happens, as all but the unrepentantly stupid know better. The constant threat of Vau disapproval fosters an ever-present feeling of paranoia, and all who live here cannot help but worry about a day when the Vau grow tired of the human presence.

Laws of Manitou

The 'laws' of Manitou are:

1. No violence is permitted in Manitou Space (although on the planet itself it is fine). Any ship that fires on another is summarily destroyed by a Vau Frigate that appears out of nowhere within a few hours of the incident.

2. No human may enter Vau territory. Any that try to sail to the island continent where the Vau live find themselves enveloped in a strange mist, and come to weeks later far out to sea. Any flitter or starship that approaches loses control within a few miles of shore and crashes. The same rule applies to the apparently abandoned bases on Manitou's moon, whose automated defence systems fire on any approaching ships. Technically, the western Hinterlands are also Vau territory, although they seem to be deserted and some nomadic tribes travel here with impunity.

3. The Inquisition is forbidden from landing on the planet. Priests are permitted, but any Church vessel that enters the system is given a curt warning before being fired upon. This law came into effect suddenly in 4216, and the Vau to this day refuse to debate or repeal it. Inquisitors and Syneculla agents who smuggle in on League vessels, and keep a low profile, are generally left alone.

4. Terraforming, even on a small scale, is entirely forbidden. In 3768, a Republic town attempted to set up small engine to break up the cloud cover above the settlement, in hopes of reducing the electromagnetic interference in the region. Within days, a strange invisible barrier appeared around the town. It remained in place for 2 months, by which time the inhabitants had starved to death. The experiment was never repeated.

5. Export of the Zhrii-Ka'a Lotus to other human worlds is forbidden, as is the cultivation or processing of this psi-stimulant. Use is never prosecuted, and unlike the other laws, the

Vau hardly ever enforce this one at all, only intervening if attempts are made to export large quantities openly.

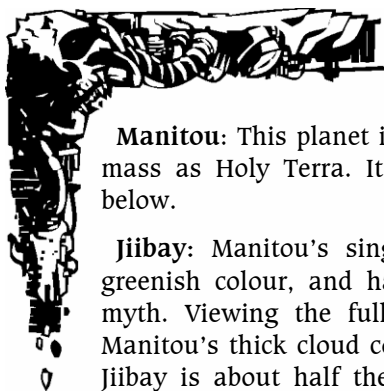
Vau workers and minor Hegemony aliens are very occasionally encountered in the coastal towns near the Vau homeland. Most of these are running private errands, and do not interact with the locals. Gwindor are never seen on Manitou. On very rare occasions, a worker has sold or given away a small piece of vautech. These incidents are incredibly uncommon, and those involved have a nasty tendency of showing up dead (whether by Vau or human hands, who can say). On even rarer occasions, a Mandarin visits human lands. Occasionally they meet with local dignitaries, or simply wander a town for half an hour observing the panicked or exultant humans before leaving. They are always heavily guarded and hardly ever directly converse with humans.

The main means by which the Vau are thought to interact with their human "subjects" (besides myths about mind-reading satellites and alien drugs in the water supply) is via the Shadowmen. Also called "The Watchers in the Woods", "The Endless", and "The Observers". These men and women are occasionally reported all over the planet. They speak in a strange, stilted dialect, and appear and disappear with impunity. Local legend holds that they are humans who have sold their souls to the Vau. In exchange, they receive the gifts of immortality, immunity to mind-reading occult powers and freedom to travel anywhere on the planet. Who these people really are, and how many of the legends surrounding them are true, is impossible to tell. They do not seem tied to the myriad Vau worshippers and Emulators who throng to the world, nor are they ever seen in the company of the Vau themselves. They are however present at nearly every major event that has occurred on the planet in the last two millennia, occasionally caught on camera. They were kept hidden by the Republic authorities, but are now widely known of. Occasionally, they trade information or strange devices with other humans, in exchange for odd or inexplicable services, the reason for which often only emerge months or years later when they can effect massive changes on the planet.

Solar System

Ishkode: A tiny molten rockball. Ishkode appears to be spiralling into the sun. Charioteer astronomers expect it to tear apart within the next few centuries.





Manitou: This planet is roughly similar in size and mass as Holy Terra. It is described in more detail below.

Jiibay: Manitou's single moon. Jiibay is an odd greenish colour, and has a fell reputation in local myth. Viewing the full moon (a rare event given Manitou's thick cloud cover) is seen as a dire omen. Jiibay is about half the size of Luna, and has not been explored in any depth. It has always been barred from humans by the Vau, and a number of giant, apparently abandoned installations are visible on its dark face.

The Asawajiw Belt: This asteroid belt is largely unremarkable. The only oddity is that ships negotiating the belt have occasionally claimed that the asteroids move in a manner suggesting they have some form of artificial propulsion. Some crews have even claimed that the rocks have formed massive floating shapes and alien glyphs as they passed them. This phenomenon has never been successfully recorded, and the meaning of these strange displays remains a mystery.

Mukwa: This dark purple gas giant is known to house a large Vau naval base on one of its moon. Small Vau vessels have occasionally been seen in the vicinity of the world. It is thought that the mysterious Vau ships that police the space lanes are based here, although how they can apparently materialize anywhere in the system in a matter of hours and then vanish without a trace is unknown.

Mikwam: This world is an iceball, which is only barely large enough to be categorized as a planet. It seems of little importance to man and Vau alike.

Landscape

The planet of Manitou is roughly similar in size and distance from its star to Holy Terra. It lies within the range of human tolerances, although the weaker gravity and high humidity makes it uncomfortable to many visitors. Unlike many other worlds, Manitou has never been subject to terraforming, at least by human hands. As a result, it has kept the feel of the alien that has been eradicated from many of the core worlds of the old Republic. Much of the planet is cloaked in a near permanent bank of thick, purplish clouds. Unique properties of the planet's atmosphere lead to these clouds holding a surprisingly strong static charge. Although most spaceships have sufficient electromagnetic shielding to combat this, the high levels of EM radiation can interfere with unshielded electronics and radio, making

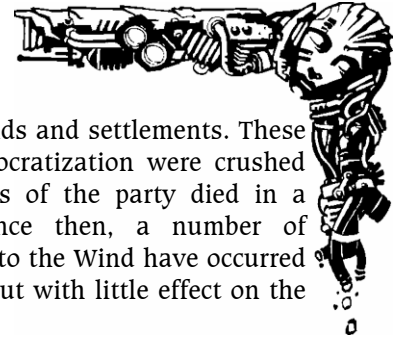
communication between settlements difficult without advanced transmitters. The radiation also fuels the breathtaking thunderstorms that can rage for weeks at a time, particularly at sea, where strange greenish lightening crackles across the waves.

The dense cloud cover forms as a permanent greenhouse effect, leading to a tropical or subtropical climate across much of the surface. Rain is rare, but humidity, particularly in the equatorial regions, is extremely high. Coastal regions in particular are subject to thick fogs and mists. The planet has a fully developed eco-system, with millions of native species of plants and animals. The rich, black soil of the main continent of Seralong feeds a riot of plant life. Most of the fertile land is covered by dense jungle composed of dark green and black leaved trees and creepers. Lowland regions are often home to great swamps, moors and mangrove forests.

Manitou is dominated by one continent, called Seralong by the Guilders. Seralong covers roughly a third of the planet. The main body of the continent stretches north-south, nearly reaching both poles. There is also a large peninsula in the northern hemisphere, built around the backbone of the great Mirojan Mountains, which stretches eastwards. The rest of the world is dominated by two vast, shallow oceans. These are only broken by the two small poles, a long archipelago known as the Eastern Reaches, and the giant island at Seralong's base, which houses the Vau governors of the world, and is permanently surrounded by thick mists.

Human habitation has always centred along the eastern coast of Seralong, on the shores of the Giraj Ocean. The Guild Lands cover most of the northern peninsula, centred at the capital of Noumea. South of the vast fenlands of the Mistswamp, the coast is home to a range of independent settlements, known as the Free Cities. The interior of Seralong is known to the coastlanders as the Hinterland. It is thickly forested, and home to many stone and iron age tribes descended from the original Diasporan settlers. The western half of Seralong, beyond the Duniya Mountains, is held by the Vau, although no evidence of actual settlement on the mainland has been found. This region is shunned by the coastal peoples, although some of the tribes travel here with impunity. The Vau seem to stay in their enclaves on the island of Mhi'heresh'lathoom.





People & Places

The Guild Lands

As far as the Empire is concerned, all the human lands of Manitou are ruled by the Manitou Trade Conglomerate. The MTC is a loose alliance of local guilds, centred in the north-east of Seralong. The MTC was founded in 4428, largely under the patronage of the Scravers Guild, who sought a single body to facilitate the growing smuggling trade in Vau relics and lotus. Initially based around the spaceport in the city of Noumea, the MTC grew to encompass much of the civilised regions in the northern hemisphere. Its success was largely due to the willingness of offworlders to use it as an intermediary with the myriad polities and city-states of Manitou. It was granted membership of the League in 4438, and later was recognised as the formal government of Manitou by the Regency in 4563.

The MTC is in truth a loose alliance of local guilds, and its political influence focuses almost exclusively on offworld trade and diplomacy. The MTC rules from Noumea, and is led by the Council of Worthies. The Council consists of appointees of the member guilds, who meet to debate matters of trade and defence. The Council also contains representatives of the Scravers and the Charioteers. These representatives ostensibly have no powers beyond their role as advisors to the Council. In reality, the Scraver advisors (one each from the Harrison and De Caprio Syndicates) have traditionally been the power behind the throne of the ruling faction in the MTC. Recently, in 4999, a Questing Knight, Lady Arathana Xanthippe, joined the Council as a third advisor. The Li Halan are actively campaigning to be given representation, which has provoked the local Decados to do the same. For now, the League is doing its best to try to keep the Houses out of government, fearing a takeover.

The active council members are divided into a number of factions and parties. The ruling party, The Bridge of Stars, favours a growth in offworld trade, and is well known to be in the pocket of the De Caprio Syndicate. The Bridge is opposed by the World Brothers, who began as an attempt to limit offworld control of the government, but have become thoroughly compromised over the years to the point where there is little to distinguish them from their opponents. There was an upset twenty years ago, when a new party called the Reforming Wind formed. The Reforming Wind argued with some success for extending elections to the Council

to many of the smaller guilds and settlements. These tentative attempts at democratization were crushed in 4983, when the leaders of the party died in a suspicious shipwreck. Since then, a number of terrorist attacks attributed to the Wind have occurred in Noumea and Meerapo, but with little effect on the government.

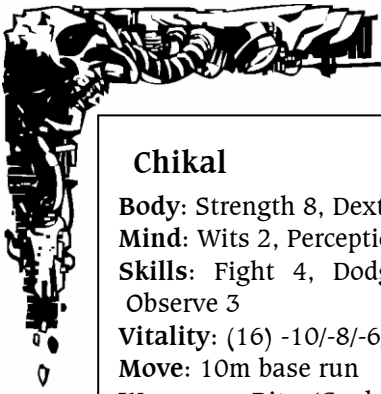
The MTC maintains a small military force to see off pirates, bandits and hostile Hinterland tribes. It has been centuries since the last wars with the Free Cities, however, and the MTC is reliant on offworld technical and manual support for any operations beyond basic peacekeeping. One unique strength that the MTC can call on is their small cadre of psychic operatives. Called the Whispers by the psychic covens they police, this group was founded shortly after the establishment of the MTC to combat the threats of hostile occult groups and Hinterland shamans. The Whispers are best known for their focus on telepathy, using it to read or control the minds of their targets. The organisation is very secretive, keeping to old traditions. They operate mainly as a plain-clothes police force, and informally as spies used against the offworlder factions. The Whispers have a high level of autonomy, and have been known to refuse orders of the Council they consider contrary to their interests. They help to add to the feelings of paranoia common to visitors to Noumea and the other large MTC settlements.

The City of Noumea

Noumea is the largest city on Manitou, housing a population of around 1.5 million. Noumea is an old town, built on the ruins of the old Republican capital. The city is built on a series of islands in the great lagoon of Jheel Bay. The islands are joined by a network of metal bridges. Constructed using the best in Republican engineering techniques, these bridges appear spindly and fragile, but can support great weights and have survived a millennia of use and tropical storms unscathed. The bridges are intricately carved, inlaid with copper, bronze and Shaprutian crystal, in designs reminiscent of Vau and Annunaki ruins. Some of the larger bridges have been built on, and now support whole neighbourhoods. Others have built their homes in the intricate supports, on platforms above the water where they fish and travel everywhere in tiny boats. These aerial settlements, linked by rope bridges, are the scene of much of the city's organised crime.

The city is a great naval port, and traders from as far off as the Eastern Reaches and the Free Cities come here to trade with League merchants.





Chikal

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Endurance 10
Mind: Wits 2, Perception 4, Tech 0
Skills: Fight 4, Dodge 4, Vigor 8, Survival 5, Observe 3
Vitality: (16) -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0
Move: 10m base run
Weapons: Bite (Goal 8, Init 5, DMG 6), Trample (Goal 8, Init 4, DMG 5, target knocked prone), Tail (Goal 8, Init 5, DMG 2)
Armour: Thick Scales (4d)
Special: Low Body (cannot be knocked prone)
Description: Chikal rival the horse as the preferred beast of burden on Manitou. These large, short-legged reptiles can support heavy loads and riders with little difficulty. Not known for their intelligence, Chikal are easy to domesticate. In the wild, they live in mated pairs, ranging over a wide area for the huge amounts of foliage they require.

At any time, the many quays are thronged with small boats and junks, packed together into near permanent settlements. Occasionally, the massive tankers used by the League can be seen towering above the boats of the native fishermen.

About two thirds of the population are of offworld extraction. Many of the merchants that come here have a local mistress or even family separate from any they have in the Known Worlds. These traders land in the spaceport, which lies on the dry land about five miles from the city limits. A maglev line has survived, although the power is dead, and the carriages are now towed by teams of chikal lizards. The League has by far the greatest influence here. It is the Scravvers that dominate, and many joke that they are the true rulers of the city. The Harrison and DeCaprio syndicates run the planetary agora. Called the Iocus Forum, the agora is a great market built on a platform spanning the gap between two islands. Boats can be seen passing beneath through the translucent paving slabs, as the stalls stand on a great mosaic of the eye-like flower of the Zhrii-Ka'a lotus. All of the other guild and noble factions have a presence in the capital. The noble houses and the Empire maintain small embassies.

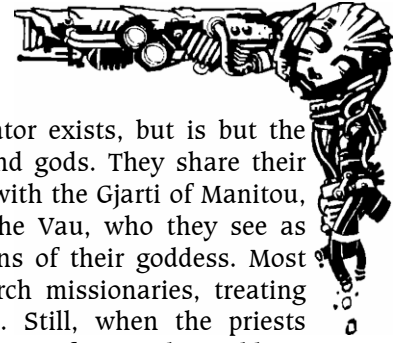
Noumea is riddled with agents from every spy group and conspiracy in the Known Worlds, who all know each other, occasionally socialize informally, and are subject to bizarre alliances. They are all there to spy on the Vau, but as there is hardly anything to report, many are deeply bored. Occasionally, they receive orders to do something, but most are rarely

monitored by their superiors. Some have gone into business for themselves, or amuse themselves by conducting petty feuds or secret dalliances with their opposite numbers in the other spy networks. As means of an example, there is a known Mutasih agent, called Sherifah bint Mehmed, who owns an exclusive coffee house, from which she conducts poetry readings and sells lotus.

What little presence the Church has on this world can also be found in Noumea. The Cathedral of St. Maya Unchained is a small but tasteful building near the seat of the MTC council. The only bishop on Manitou, Magister Solomon Konteskis, is an affable Eskatonic. He makes noises against the myriad small Incarnate, Preceptor and Gjartin churches that operate openly in the capital, but it is clear it is only for form's sake. There is a more militant faction within the cathedral, called the Heralds of Zebulon, who are a surviving remnant of the old Church government. Fearing a repeat of the Noumea Massacre, they stay in the shadows. They do help the underground Syneculla and Inquisitorial agents on Manitou, however, and have assassinated heretics they deem particularly dangerous. They maintain a paranoid theology of their own, that blames much of the troubles of humanity on a vast Vau conspiracy.

Finally, Noumea is famous for being the home of several psychic covens, most of which operate with a level of impunity undreamed of elsewhere in the Empire. A group known as the Favyana is an open secret here, operating from an orphanage in the suburbs. Another known haven is the Burning Eye, a tavern owned by a company of Dervish mercenaries. These groups are fractious and competitive, competing with each other and Guilder recruiters for the fresh psychics that arrive in the spaceport in large numbers every year, fleeing the threat of the Inquisition. Noumea is a hub for the informal 'underground railroad', which relocates psychics here and distributes them to safe havens across the planet. The MTC tolerates this situation, confident that the Whispers can deal with any overly disruptive occult crime. The League and the Decados have done their best to try to maintain the railroad, using it as a major area for recruitment of psychic agents. Worryingly, the uneasy balance between these groups is being upset by a series of odd deaths and murders that have occurred over the last 5 years. Already, the main Favyana haven has been decimated, so that they have nothing more than a token presence in the MTC lands now. Rumour has it that the Whispers have been unable to identify the perpetrators. Most speculate that a new coven is seeking to seize control of the





'railroad', and with it many scared and desperate psychics.

The MTC Lands

The MTC control approximately one third of the human lands on Seralong. The northern peninsula along the Mirojan mountain range is the centre of its power, which then peters out in the half-deserted lands north of the Mistswamp. The MTC's influence is concentrated in a string of small cities along the southern coast. Each is ruled by a local oligarchy of merchants and landowners, who send representatives to the MTC Council in Noumea. Each city has a high level of autonomy, with the MTC only regulating offworld trade and collective foreign policy. The greatest of these cities include Meerapo, which is home to much of the planet's heavy industry, mainly in the form of processing plants for the metals, gems and radioactives mined in the Mirojan range. Meerapo is the main seat of the World Brothers party, who favour greater autonomy for the MTC from offworld guilds. Offworlders are often treated with hostility. The city leaders fear Scraver reprisals enough to prevent this dislike from escalating into violence, but visitors should beware being the targets for swindles and petty harassment. Cells of the now outlawed Reforming Wind are known to be based in this city.

The interior of the peninsula becomes increasingly hilly, before soaring into the heights of the Mirojans. This region is less heavily forested than the rest of Seralong, largely due to centuries of agriculture (primarily rice paddies) and logging. Like everywhere on Manitou, the highlands are home to many small Vau ruins. Several of these have been successfully looted, but most remain protected by bizarre energy fields and other, more deadly, defences. These relics of the region's old inhabitants are great sources of interest. Some are treated with superstitious or religious awe by the farming communities that live near them, and the priests in Noumea often rail against the heathenish practices carried out at these sites by the rural peasantry on certain nights of the year. Others have been sealed off by the MTC, either for 'study' or due to matters of 'defence'. Most often, this is to allow Harrison looters to pick over the ruins for any missed treasures, but some sites do seem to hold dangerous secrets the authorities do their best to hide.

The people of the interior follow an odd syncretic religion. Most maintain some of the practices of Universalism, but do so in tandem with much older Gjartin and Emulator beliefs. They hold to

the belief that the Pancreator exists, but is but the greatest of many spirits and gods. They share their worship of the Pancreator with the Gjarti of Manitou, a world spirit, and with the Vau, who they see as divine agents and guardians of their goddess. Most will politely listen to Church missionaries, treating them as honoured guests. Still, when the priests leave they will resume their sacrifices to the Goddess, and the great pilgrimages to the lands of the Vau in the far south. Perhaps 70% of the MTC's citizens follow some version of this faith, with most others being orthodox Universalists or more traditional Gjartins.

Noble Lands

The northern slopes of the Mirojan Mountains are the home of most of the Decados fiefs on Manitou. Of all the noble houses, the Decados have the most presence on this world. The local branch of the Decados is rooted in those exiles that have fled here over the past thousand years. It is particularly popular amongst those who, while still favoured by the Prince, have angered the Church authorities so much as to have become a liability. This had led to the famous saying in the Mantis court, 'Anger the Emperor, seek Severus. Anger the Prince, seek New Tibet. Anger the Bishop, seek Manitou.'

The Manitou Decados are nominally led by Count Vladimir Decados, a distant cousin of Prince Hyram. Vladimir is an ageing man, but still striking thanks to the extensive cosmetic surgery and cybernetic alterations he has undergone throughout his long life. It is not entirely clear how old Vladimir is, but he receives massive shipments of anti-aging drugs every year. In the past decade, he has developed an intense interest in biochemistry and genetics, often inviting distinguished Engineer scientists to his mountainous lands to discuss his own research. Not all of these guests have returned. Still, Vladimir is the highest ranking Decados on the planet who can still appear in public without fear of reprisals, so has become a de facto voice for his house. The feudal structure in the fiefs is very loose, with most estates being isolated and secretive in the extreme. It is generally believed that some of these estates are used as remote bases and safe houses by the Jakovians, as well as for training camps for psychic agents. Rumours of Manja and Sathraist cults and worse circulate, but little can be proven.

The Decados have traditionally stayed out of the politics of the capital, preferring to remain neutral. Occasional conflicts arise with the Scravers,





The Green Death

Small outbreaks of this deadly disease are known in the interior of Seralong. Those that contract it must roll End+Vigor once a day for a week. If this roll is failed 3 days in a row, roll again. If this roll succeeds, the character survives but mutates, receiving a number of points equal to the VP rolled to spend on Changed powers. The PC receives Meta 1 (or +1 if already Changed) and the Mutation curse. On a critical success, the PC receives Meta 3 (or +3) and the Inhuman curse. The GM can assign mutations if they prefer. If the roll is failed, the character dies in extreme pain, as the body is riddled by malignant cancers. If a critical failure is rolled, the PC survives, but is changed into a bestial Grendel. A cure to the Green Death does exist, and if administered can stop the disease, although the victim will still be bedridden for two weeks and susceptible to secondary infections.

particularly in regard to competing interests in the black-market, but generally an amicable agreement of mutual non-interference is maintained. Recently, however, the arrival of Li Halan settlers in large numbers has led them to campaign for a greater role in the MTC government, particularly as the Li Halan are interfering with the lotus smuggling rings in the Mistswamp, which several Decados have a key role in.

The Free Port of Heschraad

This city on the eastern end of the peninsula was once a MTC port, but became ungovernable following the collapse caused by the Green Death. Heschraad closed itself off from all contact with the rest of Manitou for nearly two centuries, finally only opening up to outsiders in 4820. Unfortunately, the first 'traders' to come here were pirates and smugglers, and they quickly took over the surviving government, turning the city into the largest and most successful pirate base on Manitou. Heschraad is now largely lawless, order being kept by the heavies of the various smuggling gangs. The city has a crude but serviceable spaceport and a scavenged Republican fusion generator large enough to refuel mid-sized spacecraft. Pirates from half the Known Worlds come here to fence their stolen cargo. It is the Scravers that have the greatest role in buying captured cargo and then selling it on in the agora at Noumea. This arrangement has

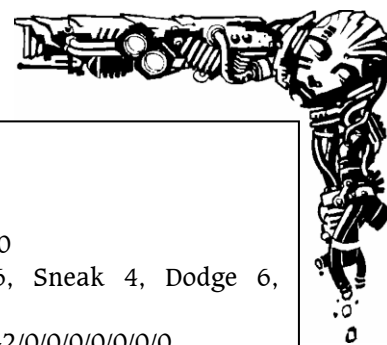
been an open secret for decades, but no one has the will to interfere, particularly as any attack on Heschraad would need to go through Decados land, disrupting the long-standing non-interference pact. The Charioteers in particular are angered, especially when one of them finds themselves buying their own cargo which was stolen months earlier above Icon or Cadiz. Thanks to the massive power of the Scravers, the MTC has always turned a blind eye to such complaints.

Besides the visiting pirate crews, here are two leading gangs in Heschraad. The first is a remnant of the old government that ruled the city before the arrival of the pirates. This group calls itself Purity Control and its enforcers still wear the gasmasks and thick coveralls once used to hold off the Green Death. Purity Control acts as a de facto peacekeeper. There are no laws as such, but these masked goons break up any major disturbances and guard the city in return for protection money. The second major group is the House of Vaysul. Vaysul is an escaped serf and pirate from Cadiz. He led a bloody takeover of the spaceport in 4986, and has held control of it ever since. He claims that engineers in his employ have rigged the fusion reactor to explode if his position is ever threatened. He collects a 'docking fee' from visiting ships, but besides that keeps no records and asks no questions. There are many rumours linking Vaysul to one or more of the Decados nobles of the north, and it is thought he acts as an agent, hiring pirate crews to mount fully deniable missions for the House. In recent years, several pirate ships that have targeted Decados worlds have suffered catastrophic accidents shortly after leaving Heschraad. As a result, some are choosing to use the smaller port at the Eyrie, as it is free of Guild and noble agents.

The Li Halan Expansion

The south-western region of the Guild Lands, between the city of Bikaang and the great moors of the Mistswamp, is the least populated region of the territories held by the MTC. Rather than a distinct border, the edge of the Guild Lands simply peters out as the land becomes more wild and uninhabitable. Once, before the Green Death, the Guild Lands stretched all the way to the Mangroves, home to many scattered farming and logging settlements. When the Green Death hit Manitou, this region became almost uninhabited. Many fled into the Hinterland, eventually assimilating into the Gjartin and Lotus Eater tribes. Many others accepted the 'aid' of Iconian Li Halan, who shipped thousands of impoverished refugees to work as slaves for their Apshainghoi vassals. This episode in





Manitou history was largely forgotten, except as a warning regarding the promises of offworld nobles. The region became empty, but for tiny fishing villages and the bases of lotus smugglers, who traded here with the tribes of the Mistswamp for Zhrii-Ka'a. It still has a dark reputation, shunned by most. These fenlands are rumoured to be home to weird villages of cannibals and mutants, and more grendel are seen here than in any other civilised region.

Grendel is the name given to a stable form of mutation resulting from the Green Death. They are humans who have lost all higher reasoning, becoming no more than violent apes. They are known for their emaciated appearance and greenish skin. They have narrow, skull-like features, and victims of their bite are said to become like them. Unlike Husks, grendel are alive and quick, strong and resilient to pain. They are a great danger, but luckily are only seen in small packs.

These cursed fenlands have recently become important for the first time in centuries. In 4995, shortly after the Emperor Wars finally ended, a lone Li Halan noble and his entourage settled in an abandoned town, renaming it Xin Hui-hen. This man was Count Darius Hsu Zheng Li Halan. Once a leading general in the Li Halan military, the Count dropped out of the Iconian court following the defeat of his troops during a key battle in the Malignatian Wars. Becoming a virtual hermit, Hsu Zheng dropped his Latinised court name and retreated to one of his rural estates as an act of extreme penance. Finally, when the wars ended he emerged to come to Manitou. He is an aging man in his late 60s, bald and generally dressed in homespun white robes, but still physically powerful. In the ten years since his arrival, more and more young Li Halan nobles, generally landless knights or younger offspring with no inheritance to speak of, have come to join the so-called White Monk. Claiming surrounding settlements in the fenlands, the Iconian Li Halan support these seizures by claiming them as the ancestral lands of the 'Manghoi', their Manitou subjects.

The Li Halan now control much of the border region, and are actively seeking to expand west and south into tribal lands and the Mistswamp. Until now, the Li Halan have been largely ignored by the MTC, assuming they would behave in much the same way as the secretive Decados, or the few pre-conversion Li Halan who live in the Free Cities. Unfortunately for the MTC and their League masters, the Li Halan are showing no intention of minding their own business. Already, the new fiefs

Grendel

Body: Str 6, Dex 7, End 6

Mind: Wits 3, Per 6, Tech 0

Skills: Fight 5, Vigor 6, Sneak 4, Dodge 6, Observe 5, Survival 6

Vitality: (12) -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

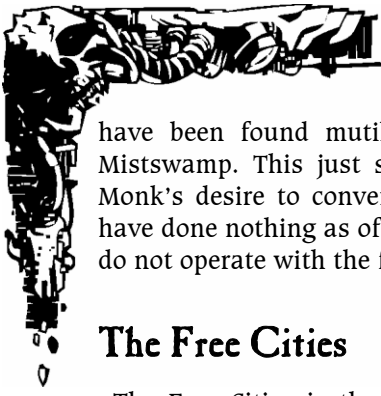
Move: 10m base run

Weapons: Bite (Goal 12, Init 6, DMG 3, victim must pass a End+Vigor roll or contract the Green Death), Nails (Goal 12, Init 5, DMG 4)

Description: Grendel hunt in small family groups of 5 to 10 members. They have no higher brain functions, but are still wily animals, capable of planning ambushes and group tactics. They mainly attack humans to drive them from their territory, or rarely for meat in times of famine. Some have been seen using crude clubs and rocks as weapons, but most use their toughened nails and teeth. Their bite has a chance of passing on the fearsome Green Death.

are growing rapidly, and the strict social system of the Garden Worlds is being enforced on the luckless inhabitants. Beginning in 5000, the Li Halan have consistently campaigned to join the MTC Council as advisors. Also, in 5002, a representative of the White Monk offered to police the lotus smugglers of the Mistswamp on behalf of the MTC and, by extension, the Vau. The embarrassed silence of the MTC was taken as consent, and Li Halan knights have begun breaking lotus rings and hanging captured smugglers 'in the name of the Emperor'. The Scravens and Decados nobles who have a hand in much of this business have so far been immune, as they mainly act as middle-men between the tribesmen and psychic cabals who harvest the lotus and the Known World markets, but they are enraged by this disruption of their trade. The MTC is plotting some kind of response, but do not want to anger such a close noble power.

It is unclear whether the White Monk is the real leader of the Li Halan colonists, or merely a figurehead for an expansion planned by the rulers of Icon, but he adds a level of religious zeal to the endeavour. Xin Hui-hen has a distinctly monastic feel to it, and the young nobles of the city dress in stark white to emulate their leader. The thought of these zealots riding out of the mists, shouting hymns and waving swords, haunts the dreams of the smugglers and holdout tribals alike. The White Monk sponsors missionary work into the Hinterland, and these spreaders of the Word travel in large, armed groups. Several have already vanished, or



have been found mutilated at the borders of the Mistswamp. This just seems to increase the White Monk's desire to convert the whole world. The Vau have done nothing as of yet, probably as the Li Halan do not operate with the formal help of the Church.

The Free Cities

The Free Cities is the term given to those coastal city states in the southern hemisphere which lie outside of the control of the MTC and their offworld masters. The south was the first region to be settled by humanity in the 28th century, and the settlements here are built on ancient ruins from the Diasporan and Republican eras. The Free Cities have been dominated since the Fall by two main powers. These are the radical Republic alliance of towns, known as the Rhean Collective, and the City-State of Mohenjo. Around a dozen other mid-sized cities exist, the most influential of which are described below. The Free Cities are an unsettled place, and offworlders should be cautious and discrete. Fears of offworld imperialism are rife, having been whipped up by recent Republican refugees and the violent new military government of Mohenjo. Only Byblos in the far south and the once great port of Macao hold significant foreign populations.

The MTC claims these cities in name, and the Empire recognises it as the only legitimate government on Manitou. However, since the general collapse caused by the Green Death during the 47th century, no open conflict has been fought between the north and south. This uneasy truce has been maintained for centuries, as all sides saw the benefits of co-existence. However, the rise of the Manitou Alliance and other events suggest that this peace may be coming to an end.

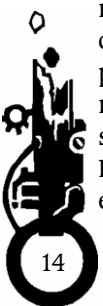
The Rhean Collective

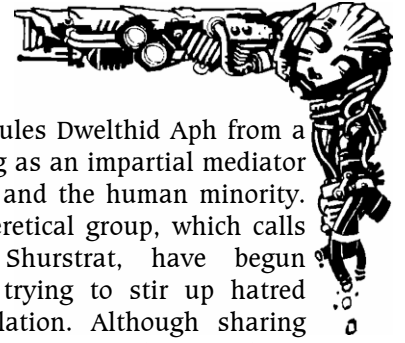
The Collective is one of the oldest and most successful of the free cities. The Collective rules from the city of New Avaneir (Recently renamed). Legend claims that the city was first founded by elements of the Republican Fleet fleeing the collapse of the great uprising on Byzantium Secundus in 4009. Since then, the original settlers have welcomed in waves of refugees. The history of the Collective is incredibly complex, with many civil wars and fluctuations in political system, but always keeping to its radical republican values. Currently, a century long period of stability has been upset by the arrival of the Rampartians. Initially welcomed as fellow comrades, elements of the RDA have stirred up

resentment against the Empire, calling for support for the insurrections on their homeworld and elsewhere. Most of the Collective agree with the impassioned calls for a Great Revolt, being ignorant of the true numbers of republicans elsewhere, and the RDA and their allies now dominate the Parliament. Others, especially the more pacifistic farming communes and the Byzantine Old Guard, resent the Offworlders. Some Rampartians only see the Collective as a means to wreck vengeance on their Li Halan enemies, and care little for the state that shelters them. Others want to abandon the lost fight and rebuild here, but they are a minority. More and more resources are being funnelled into weapon shipments, hiring fighters and bribing pirates to attack Li Halan shipping. There is a real risk that the RDA may call down the wrath of the Empire if they are traced here, as up until now the Collective survived only due to Manitou's unique position and its apparent harmlessness. The Collective is one of the biggest of the Free Cities, and the principle local rival to Mohenjo. Currently, the RDA offer concessions to the Alliance to concentrate on their offworld interests. The RDA faction that now runs the Collective is loosely allied to the rebels in the Apshei system, but sees itself as the true successor of the Rampart government, leading to some hostility between the two.

The Collective controls the coastal lands south of the Mistswamp, between the Verdic Hills to the west and Pentan bay in the south. New Avaneir is by far the largest settlement, with a population of over one million. Much of the rest of the population live in rural farming communes, where the land is held in common. The members draw lots to send representatives to the Parliament. The land here is flat and sparsely forested, making the region one of the best suited for agriculture on Manitou. The majority of rural Collectivists are Gjartins, although some follow an archaic form of Universalism or the Banjak heresy of the Dwelthites. Due to the Collective's republican politics, it has no formal trade with the MTC, relying instead on an internal economy. Some limited private trade exists, but the MTC has always refused to recognise the Collective government. Trade with Mohenjo was once extensive, but has dried up since the rise of the Manitou Alliance. The Collective's economy has held together for centuries, but with the RDA spending much of its resources on offworld conflicts, it is now closer to collapse than the Parliament is willing to admit.

The people of the Free City, as New Avaneir is often simply called, are a proud and haughty lot. The city is built around an old Republic





stronghold, the base for the Manitou Peace Force during the times of the Republican Regional Government. The city has swelled from refugees from a hundred revolts and massacres since the survivors of the Rhean Revolution first occupied the abandoned base in 4009. Each of these groups has maintained its identity, and neighbourhoods often have distinctive flavours unique to the homeworld of their inhabitants' ancestors. Central government is minimal, only exerting slightly more influence here than in the anarchist countryside. A large population of Ukari, and a smaller one of distinctly odd Obun, interact on equal terms to the human majority. The people of New Avancier have an odd, nearly religious, affection for the city, something the RDA have been slow to pick up on. Although the Byzantine Old Guard are bitter enemies of the Ustar Exiles and the Incarnate Brotherhood, they all unite behind their city. The rag-tag metropolis is instilled with a pseudo-divine essence. To its people, New Avancier is the One Free City, the archetypal perfect human society, which has manifested elsewhere when the people have strived for freedom. It has become traditional to rename the Free City after the centre of each wave of refugees' homeland. This self-confidence inevitably makes people of the City insufferably smug, but gives them a spiritual strength that has kept this tiny fragment of the Second Republic alive for a thousand years.

Dwelthid Aph

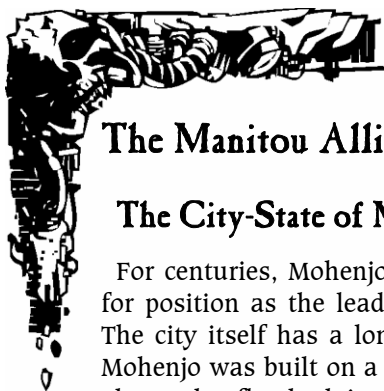
This is a city dominated by Ukari, which broke away from the Collective in 4798 after the then government tried to regulate psychics. The Ukari claim descent from a band of dissenters led by Dwelthan Gwetherid, a taudwan of Anikrunta who led a revolt against the then al-Malik rulers of Kordeth in the 4640s. He is still remembered as a violent terrorist and antinomist in the Known Worlds, said to have drunk the blood of his enemies to gain visions of the future. The people of Dwelthid Aph see things differently, of course. Gwetherid managed to flee to Manitou in 4648, going to ground in the Collective. He rose to become the de facto leader of the Ukari of much of the planet, preaching a heretical, highly mystical variant of Banjak before his death by agents of the AC in 4670. This reinvention was clearly influenced heavily by the Collectivist Ukari he met on Manitou, who were the descendants of Ukari in the Republican military. Strangely, the Dwelthites welcome humans as lay worshippers, holding that Anikrunta extends his harsh justice to all who suffer under oppression, and that the Church and Empire are both agents of the Tlintoi.

The sect he founded now rules Dwelthid Aph from a great obsidian tower, acting as an impartial mediator between the various clans and the human minority. Recently, another Ukari heretical group, which calls itself the Children of Shurstrat, have begun proselytising in the city, trying to stir up hatred against the human population. Although sharing some common theological positions, the Priesthood of the city are trying their best to ostracise these new arrivals. In addition, the Manitou Alliance is turning its eye to Dwelthid Aph, apparently wanting to recruit or destroy this concentration of psychics before pressing north. Several psychic saboteurs have been captured in the city, and have confessed that they are working for the 'true rulers' of Mohenjo. What this could mean remains a mystery. The Kadun (lit. "No Man", a ceremonial title held by the ruler of the city in a similar manner to the human term Exarch), is calling on the Rheans for support against this growing threat, but has received no aid as of yet.

The Verdic Hills

The Verdic Hills are a lightly forested range that marks the informal boundary between the areas of influence of the Collective and Mohenjo. The hills are named after the great diplomat, Benjamin Verden, although few remember the meaning of the great statue of the man in a Vau robe that stands on the old road through the hills. The hills were heavily populated during the Republic, with rich corporate leaders and nobles owning large estates and holiday homes, where they came to relax, take illicit drugs and retire. The Hills are now most famous for the clans of Changed that live here. They eke out a living through herding and selling Republic relics found in the ruins of the old villas and country homes. Most are the descendants of Republican citizens who underwent voluntary gene alterations. It is thought many fled to Manitou during the Fall, fearing Church attacks. Most of their mutations are minor and cosmetic, but can be startling. Men with plumes of feathers instead of hair are common, and may be descended from some obscure cult or other. Much of their history has been lost, only passed down in oral legends.

Beginning in 5003, bands of Changed have begun to flood north into the Collective, some spreading as far north as the Li Halan estates. Those that are willing to talk to outsiders describe being driven for their lands by violent coastlander 'witches', who have begun massive digs in the ruins in the hills. What the Alliance could be looking for remains a mystery.



The Manitou Alliance

The City-State of Mohenjo

For centuries, Mohenjo has vied with the Collective for position as the leading power in the Free Cities. The city itself has a long history. Founded in 3613, Mohenjo was built on a rocky promontory rising high above the flood plains on the banks of the great Shavusha river. The city was ostensibly established by the Republic to act as a trade hub for the south. In actuality, the settlement was cover for a huge spying operation aimed at the Vau lands.

Much of the population was evacuated in 3998, and redeployed to hotspots throughout the crumbling Republic. The city was left as a ghost town, slowly accumulating a population of refugees and exiles during the Fall. Initially, the city was ruled by competing gangs, until it was reunited under a single authority in 4014 by Count Otto Von Ferdinand. The Count was one of the few leaders of the Rogue Houses to survive the retaking of Byzantium Secundus, as he was leading a fleet to intercept a Republican relief force above Liberty when the hammer fell. His fleet prowled the collapsing Republic for over a decade, descending rapidly into piracy. Eventually, many of his ships were destroyed in an engagement with the Alectos, and he fled to the lawless refugee camps on Manitou. Driven out of the main settled regions by remnants of the Republic Navy, he settled in Mohenjo, seizing the spaceport from petty corsairs and declaring himself Tyrant.

In 4061, Otto's heir, Franz, abandoned his old noble title to avoid reprisals from the Ten. The Tyrants of Mohenjo remained a potent force in Manitou politics, however, warring regularly with the Collective and even with the Guilds when the Scravers began to back the unification of the settlements near the capital in the 4400s. With the growth of a world government in the north, however, Mohenjo began to decline, as offworld traders chose the larger and better maintained spaceport at the Noumea. The line of Tyrants was finally ended in 4703, when Heinrich Darjo was poisoned by one of his mistresses.

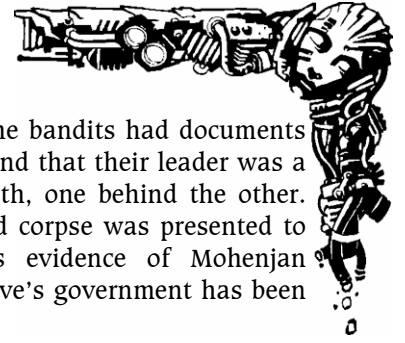
Mohenjo descended into anarchy in the wake of the collapse of the autocratic government. For five years, the city-state suffered from raids by O'orgva and the loss of territory to its rivals among the Free Cities. When peace came, it was from an unexpected source. The Worldsingers first appeared in the Free Cities in the 4680s. At first, they seemed to be just one of the many strange religions to form in the Hinterlands. They combined Gjartin and Lotus-Eater

beliefs with some practices reminiscent of the Amaltheans, and grew in popularity in the ruined city-state. Eventually, a priestess known as Hertajma, the Shaman-Queen, rose to power in Mohenjo. The Worldsingers never recovered most of the territory lost in the last years of the Tyrants, but trade was re-established through the sea port of Macao, and Mohenjo became the main economic power along the great Shavusha River. A peace treaty was finally signed with the Collective in 4719, and formal offworld trade was established with an exclusive contract with the Harrison Syndicate in Neo Edo in 4778.

Under the Worldsingers, the government was led by a high priestess appointed by the inner council of shamans. This changed in 4986, when an offworlder was raised to the title for the first time. Bianca Juandaastas was an exile from the Known Worlds, infamous as a libertine, heretic and suspected xenophile. The self-styled 'Poet Princess' became the spokesperson for the growing offworlder population of traders and recent refugees, demanding greater representation in Mohenjo's governance. Bianca herself was a highly charismatic figure, and through popular support was able to force the Worldsingers to accept her into the cult, and then as its leader. She championed greater ties to the Empire, inviting fellow nobles to join her in her exile.

Initially the people of Mohenjo were receptive to this, with the exception of some of the older Worldsingers, who held that an offworlder lacked the ties to the Planet needed in a ruler. However, things began to turn sour as the negative implications of greater ties to the Empire became apparent. In 4994, a band of Avestite Pilgrims infiltrated the city and assassinated several of the most respected Worldsinger shamans. Doubts over how such a group could have reached Manitou in the first place were quickly silenced in the outrage. Riots in Mohenjo were only narrowly defeated by the city's small defence force. The situation worsened until 5000, when Bianca was killed in an apparent flitter accident. This acted as a catalyst, and a full uprising overwhelmed the city. Initially leaderless, an alliance of rebel groups soon coalesced to form the Manitou Alliance. The Alliance drove out or slaughtered the offworlder merchants and nobles, before turning on those within the city they branded as 'collaborators'. The Worldsinger leadership itself was eventually driven from Mohenjo, re-grouping in Macao.





Present Situation

"...and should we be silent to the cries of the Mother? Should we allow the filth from the darkened void to pollute our homes? I say no! I say all Manitans, regardless of creed, faction or clan, must rise against the tyranny of the offworlders! We must act before the Mother's Guardians turn their disfavour on all mankind..."

Maximum Leader Rocek, at a political rally in Mohenjo, 5003

Mohenjo is now firmly in the control of the Manitou Alliance, under the leadership of Maximum Leader Rocek. Rocek is a powerfully built man. Formally a captain in Bianca's defence force, he switched sides with most of his men shortly after the Princess' death. He is the public face of the Alliance, appearing often to lead great rallies and military parades through the city's streets. After 5 years of consolidation, the city has been transformed into an armed camp, with an ever growing standing army. The wide boulevards now are hung with great banners, displaying the dawning sun emblem of the Alliance, and a great system of moats has been constructed to guard the stone outcrop the city stands on. The Alliance has begun an active campaign of expansion. Mohenjan diplomats are now spread throughout the Free Cities, and even have a presence in some of the Guilder cities. Already, the Black Mantis of Kiril and the smuggler towns around Sharktooth Bay have signed formal treaties with the Alliance. More alarmingly, the Garden City of Alor has been annexed in its entirety by Mohenjo, adding its vast agricultural lands to the Alliance.

With the expansion, foul rumours have begun to spread regarding the Alliance. It is known that a number of Hinterland tribes, including the feared cannibals of the MerSharadii, have joined the Alliance as mercenaries. Those that have stood against the Alliance so far have had a tendency to die or go mad in strange circumstances. The abbot of the heretical monastery of the Blood of the Prophet initially refused to pay tithes to Mohenjo, until he announced before his congregation that he was the Pancreator made flesh, and slit his own throat. Likewise, a strange plague of madness and suicide has struck the leaderships of several bordering cities, most particularly amongst the surviving Worldsingings. It is also known that the Alliance has many psychics in its ranks, although it does much to try and conceal this fact. Recently, the people of an anarchist farming commune, loosely allied to the Rheans, attacked and lynched a group of bandits that had been harassing them for

months. They claim that the bandits had documents linking them to Mohenjo, and that their leader was a witch with two sets of teeth, one behind the other. This man's badly mutilated corpse was presented to the Rhean parliament as evidence of Mohenjan aggression, but the Collective's government has been slow to act.

The Minor City-States

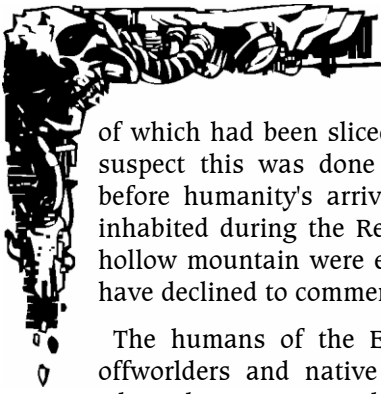
The following are some of the second tier of states within the Free Cities. These lack the power of the Collective and Mohenjo, but have traditionally remained independent of both.

Macao

Formerly a colony of Mohenjo, this major port city lies at the mouth of a great river that runs through the region of the Free Cities. It has acted as a hub for trade with the Guild lands for centuries, founded by the then Tyrant of Mohenjo in 4704. It acted as Mohenjo's principle port, with Mohenjo itself lying in the centre of the arable land further up-river. Always second to its founder, Macao has recently jumped in importance since the revolution. The surviving remnants of Princess Bianca's government have fled here. Originally a strange ecstatic cult from the Hinterlands, the ruling Worldsinger government is now in deep decline, with its shaman-leaders descending into confusion. Rates of suicide, madness and mysterious deaths among the Gjartin-inspired cult are staggering. The few effective administrators that remain are faced with the daily struggle of keeping the port open, as shipping is targeted by Alliance raiders. It is only a matter of time before the revolt boils down the river valley and swamps the city. Now, the offworlder merchants and settlers are desperate to flee, paying extortionate fees to local fishermen to ferry them to the safety of the capital. Those that remain are the most desperate and hopeless, and an aura of fear hangs over the half-deserted markets and quays.

The Eyrie

The Eyrie is one of the most famous of the so-called 'free ports'. Lying inland of the Free Cities in the heights of the Duniya Mountains, the Eyrie is a relatively recent settlement. It was discovered and settled in 4854 by a band of corsairs, whose ship lost control unexpectedly when approaching the planet. They crashed in the remains of an old city, constructed in a massive crater apparently manually carved out of a mountain, the top



of which had been sliced off and hollowed out. Most suspect this was done by the Vau or the Ur long before humanity's arrival, but the region had been inhabited during the Republic and no reports of the hollow mountain were ever made. As usual, the Vau have declined to comment.

The humans of the Eyrie are an odd mixture of offworlders and native Gjartin tribesmen, some of whom have come to live in the city. The human enclave takes up perhaps a quarter of the ruined city, with a population of around 7000. Much remains unexplored, especially in the tunnels beneath the city. Rubble has been cleared to grow food within the crater, and a serviceable spaceport has been built. The city is governed, if that term can be used, by a loose alliance of pirate captains. Any ship which gains the approval of a majority of the captains can berth here, and their captain can join the Council while they are there. In exchange, they must swear a blood oath to protect the city, and to not war within the walls of the crater. The Council is divided into 3 main blocs. These are led by 'Baron' Khartoum al-Asadhi, a disgraced al-Malik naval captain turned pirate, the Smiler, a hideously scarred mercenary from Midian who proudly bears the Black Mark for his Incarnate beliefs, and Captain Eliza Toa, the Stormwife, a feared Zuranist crime lord from Madoc. Baron al-Asadhi was the most powerful, but recently was forced to ground in Yintraï after his flagship was crippled over Criticorum. Now his faction is falling to the others. The Smiler recently allied with the Collective, agreeing to target Church vessels in the Rampart system. The Stormwife prefers to stay out of politics, and has the strongest ties to the Scrauers, selling her ships' cargoes to Scrauer middlemen to sell in Noumea and engaging in the Lotus trade.

Access to the city is generally only possible from the air. The friendly tribes of the surrounding forests know some precarious paths down the surrounding cliffs, but they would prove near impossible for an armed force to navigate. In 4998, the local Charioteers mounted an aerial assault on the Eyrie. Their heavy flitters were shot down by the defenders in an intense dogfight, and the surviving leaders of the assault were captured and treated to the Chauki Stride.

The Kingdom of Taltholobad

Lying inland of Mohenjo, this primitive kingdom lies on the borders of the Free Cities, just before the forests and swamps of the interior take over completely. Taltholobad itself lies within the flood plane of the great Shavusha river. The

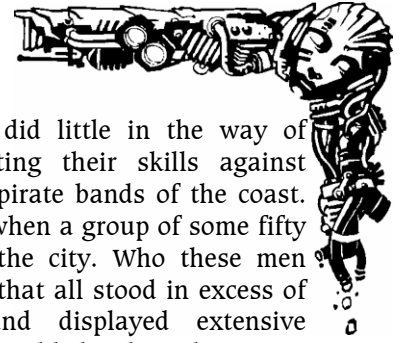
entire structure is built on a two-kilometre slab of terracrete, constructed by the Republic for a frontier settlement. The land around it is both highly fertile and underwater for half the year. The people of the city have an uncanny ability to retreat to the interior ahead of the annual floods, however, returning to reap the benefits of the rich paddy fields. They are an insular people, barely maintaining a Victorian tech-level from trade with the Free Cities. They are ruled by a King, appointed for life, who governs in tandem with the priesthood of the River God, Taltholemepolo, the Water Serpent. Foreigners are forbidden from entering the city, a full half of which is devoted to the temple of the Serpent. The religion is deeply secretive, and is rarely discussed with outsiders. The Taltholii maintain that their god resides with them in the city, but what this could mean is anyone's guess. There is one mad preacher in Noumea who claims to have entered the temple as a missionary, and to have seen an immense, coiling nightmare in the inner sanctum. Of course, this is Manitou, where you can probably find a mad preacher claiming that Hiram Decados is the Prophet reborn if you look hard enough. In recent months, the Alliance has begun demanding more and more food for their war effort. The Taltholii have grown resentful, and drove off the last 'traders' with their crude muskets. The Alliance intends to return in force.

O'orgva'heclsh'thenloen

(trans. 'City of the Glorious Lotus', allegedly)

One of the largest of the Emulator settlements, but by no means the only one, O'orgva has a dark reputation in the other city-states, who only occasionally trade with it. Founded on a second republic ruin in 4319 by a Li Halan eccentric, the city was intended as a utopia, built on its founder's idiosyncratic views of Vau culture. Initially mainly a drug den and nest of anti-Church Li Halan rebels, things took a turn for the worse in 4705, when Hidden Martyrs assassinated the last of the Li Halan rulers. A short but bloody coup propelled a highly charismatic madwoman, Herhemanowan, into power. It is thought that this woman may have been General Kamiko Li Halan, the Scarlet Dragon, who was exiled by the Regency for massacres of Zuranists and suspected heretics (read: political enemies) during the reign of the Theocrat. Killing off her enemies, she enforced a strict system modelled on what was known of the Vau caste system. The O'orgvans believe that only Mandarins are in line with prophecy, and that Soldiers and Workers are tainted souls who can only attain





perfection by loyal service and reincarnation into a higher caste. Every year, as the seasons change, the Mandarins ritually murder all criminals and foreign captives, and pray for the Vau to whisk them away for their piety. As of yet, nothing has happened. Conditions for the Workers are squalid, living in rickety buildings which vaguely resemble Vau towers and subject to insanely complex laws of auspice. The Soldiers are essentially bandits, attacking travellers and pilgrims with impunity. The Mandarin caste is small, and devotes much of its time to seeking 'prophecy' by ingesting astonishing quantities of lotus, and it is for this alone that they occasionally trade with outsiders. It remains neutral in regards to the politics of the world, except when it has been attacked by Mohenjo or the Collective in the past for raiding their lands. Currently, it seems in decline, with the Soldiers only attacking unarmed pilgrims on the road to the Vau enclave.

Once, on a rare visit by a Vau Mandarin to the capital, the Decados ambassador jokingly apologised for O'orgva, explaining that jealousy brings out the worst in humanity. The Mandarin looked puzzled for a moment, then politely claimed to have no idea to which city he was referring.

Kiril

Kiril is an old city, built on the coast of Sharktooth Bay by some long forgotten corporation. The vast rusting warehouses and industrial sectors suggest that Kiril was involved in extensive marine industries, possibly including underwater mining. Strangely, no detailed records of the city's history during the Republic remain. What is clear is that the population of the city were abandoned by their corporate masters in the chaos of the Fall. Since that time, Kiril has had a chequered history, rising and falling in influence but never reaching the levels of Mohenjo or the Collective.

Until recently, Kiril was ruled by an odd government. The Jade Dragon Brotherhood was a mercenary band, formed centuries ago during the wars between the northern Free Cities. The Jade Dragon's leadership grew rich by changing sides many times in the wars between the Tyrants and the Rheans. Since the peace orchestrated by the Worldsingers took hold in the north, the Brotherhood slowly lost much of its martial character, becoming a ruling caste in the city. Kiril was divided between soldiers and workers. The caste differences were strictly enforced, although worker youths were given a chance to compete for entry into the ruling caste during annual contests of skill. By the 50th

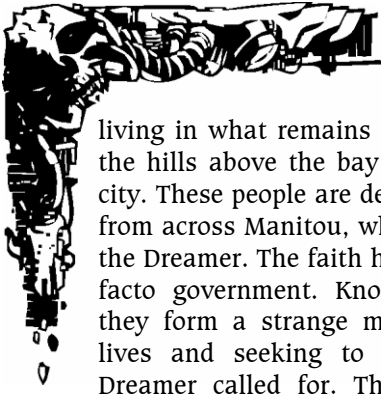
century, the Brotherhood did little in the way of actual warring, only testing their skills against O'orgvan bandits and the pirate bands of the coast. This all changed in 4987, when a group of some fifty offworld soldiers entered the city. Who these men were is unclear, but given that all stood in excess of eight feet in height and displayed extensive cybernetic alterations, it is likely that they were Grimson deserters from some noble war. In a matter of a year, their leader had ascended to the head of the Jade Dragon, slaying the previous High Command in ritual combat.

The new ruler of Kiril, who calls himself the Black Mantis, has spent the past decade shaping the Jade Dragon into an elite army once more. The small city's influence has been spreading. Tensions with Mohenjo grew as soon as the Alliance seized power, and the cities were on the brink of open war until the Black Mantis had a sudden change of heart last year. For unknown reasons, the Grimson King sold his services to the Alliance. A revolt among his own officers was brutally crushed, and now Jade Dragon soldiers march under the Sunburst Banner. Kiril remains an autonomous city, but for all intents and purposes is now a member of the Manitou Alliance. The capitulation of one of the only real military powers in the region has only increased the paranoia of the remaining Free Cities.

The City of the Open Eye

This mysterious settlement to the south of Dwelthid Aph is rarely visited by outsiders. The city, which was known as Podaruh during the Republic, survived as a large population centre until 4308, when over two thirds of the city was drowned in a massive tsunami. Only a tiny number of the survivors decided to stay, and since then much of the remaining ruins have been cloaked in dense jungle. The city perhaps would have been lost forever, if it had not been for the actions of one man. In 4629, a prophet of sorts appeared among the near tribal descendants of Podaruh's survivors. Known to history only as the Dreamer, this man claimed to have received visions from a mysterious group of Vau, who taught him many secrets of the world. He spread these revelations among his people, forming the core of a new faith. He preached a need for humanity to awake from the 'dream' reality they inhabited, and that the Vau had brought men to Manitou to achieve this 'awakening'. The monastery he founded still draws pilgrims to this day.

Over the years, the population has slowly grown once more, with perhaps ten thousand people



living in what remains of the old wealthy district in the hills above the bay that covers the heart of the city. These people are descended from Vau Emulators from across Manitou, who came to hear the words of the Dreamer. The faith he founded has become the de facto government. Known only as the Awakened, they form a strange monastic order, living ascetic lives and seeking to attain the 'awakening' the Dreamer called for. The Awakened are viewed as heretics by many Emulators, although some Manitan Vau worshippers are drawn to them.

The City of the Open Eye, as Podaruh is now known to all but a few historians, is a strange and haunted place. The surviving streets are choked with creepers and flowering vines. Most buildings are in disrepair, and some have collapsed entirely, with families now living in the hollows in the carpet of vines left behind by these collapses. Tales of whispering voices and alien shapes glimpsed at twilight and near dawn are common. Most outsiders find the city oppressive, while a few that come each year find it impossible to leave. The Collective and Macao send a few merchants to buy some of the rare plants that grow here, but by and large the city remains outside of the affairs of its neighbours. A few bands of scavengers have begun picking over the ruins lost in the bay, looking for treasure in sealed buildings. Only the desperate join these bands. While the Awakened ignore them, many go missing every year. Legend holds that the ghosts of Podaruh protect their homes to this day.

The Hinterland and the Tribes

The civilised lands of the coastal city-states cover less than half of the great continent of Seralong, clinging as they do to the edges of the Giraj oceans and the fertile river valleys of the Shavusha and other great waterways. In the half-forgotten settlement conditions, the Vau forbade humanity from settling on the land west of the great Duniya mountain range, which neatly bisects the continents from north to south. This region, which all satellite pictures and secret reconnaissance suggested was entirely deserted, is still formally uninhabited to this day, and remains cloaked in vast rainforests and unmapped stretches of swamp and mangrove. It is not, however, free of human life, nor has it been since the Republican settlers displaced the first Gjartin communities established during the Diaspora. These groups, who already sought a more primal relationship with their new planet, slowly abandoned modern technology, eventually reaching a sustainable level of culture as stone or iron

-age semi-nomadic tribes. During the Republic, these groups were looked down upon but tolerated by the Republican government, who only interacted with them for half-hearted census attempts. The tribes have swelled again since the Fall. Initially refugees who could not survive in the crumbling coastal cities came to join the tribes, and then again the Green Death displaced millions into the interior, where they were rapidly assimilated into the tribes.

There is a confusing multitude of tribes, sub-tribes, clans and cults among the Hinterland peoples, and no coastlander can claim more than a passing understanding of the complexity of their relations and ways of life. Indeed, the tribes seem to frequently change, collapsing and coalescing into new confederations and alliances. Likewise, culture is strangely mutable. Nearly all follow some variant of Gjartin practices, believing in a world-soul of Manitou, and a plethora of animistic spirits. However, specific religious practices seem to change often. In addition, social and linguistic drift happens more quickly among the tribes than most ethnolinguists believe should be possible. If a Hinterland clan were to be cut off from its parent tribe for only fifty years, its language and cultural ways would change almost beyond recognition.

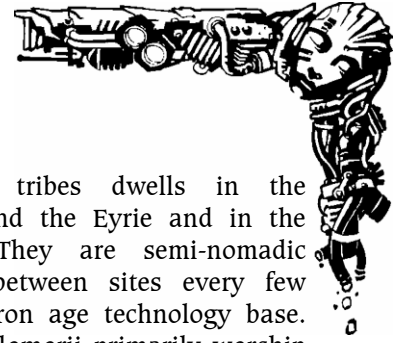
In addition to belief in Gjarti, there is one other near constant in Hinterland culture, and that is use of the Zhrii-Ka'a lotus. Nearly all tribes use this psychoactive plant in their religious ceremonies. As a result, most tribesmen see the world in a manner quite different from most Known Worlders, blurring the lines between the material world and a hallucinatory, dream-like existence. It has been theorized that some tribals, in particular the shaman caste, take such quantities of lotus tincture over their lifetimes that their bloodstreams become saturated with the drug, leading to permanent hallucinatory experiences and heightened senses. The unique properties of the lotus also lead to higher than average rates of psychic ability among the tribes. Every tribe will have psychics in its numbers, and all-psychic cabals and cults are fairly common.

Of the tribes that interact with the coastlanders, some of the largest follow.

The Messad Pakma

The Pakma are one of the most northern of the great tribes, and as a result have the greatest contact with the Guild Lands. Like most tribals, the Pakma are Gjartins, worshipping Manitou itself as a mother goddess. The tribe is divided into hundreds of small clans, each numbering around 60





to 100 members. They maintain a stone age culture, but are known to trade with the Guild towns for steel implements, textiles and hunting weapons. In exchange, they gather and trade medicinal herbs and the Zhrii-Ka'a lotus. They are the main tribe with which the Scraver and Decados lotus smugglers interact, on the borders of the Mistswamp where most of the Pakma live. Several of the psychic covens of the Known Worlds also have links with the Pakma. In particular, members of the Favyana occasionally spend time among the tribe to learn their psychic traditions and their understanding of the lotus. The Pakma are generally peaceful, but have responded with violence when coastlanders invade their holy places. In recent years, tensions caused by Li Halan missionaries have soured relations for many of the clans with the Guild towns, and many Pakma now shun contact with the coast.

Most of the Pakma clans live within the Mistswamp. This vast land of swamp and moor marks an impassable barrier between the MTC and the Free Cities of the south. Lying near to the equator, the Mistswamp is incredibly humid, and much of it is cloaked in a permanent pall of thick purplish mist. The odd electromagnetic phenomena of Manitou are much more pronounced here, and are capable of wrecking even shielded electronics. As a result, only primitive technology can be maintained here. The centre of the Mistswamp is dominated by hundreds of miles of dense mangrove swamps, with only small patches of dry land lying between the great trees. The tribes who live here make their homes in the mangrove branches, high above the water, which teams with serpents and biting insects. This land features the largest known lotus beds on Manitou. It is said that the groves where these semi-aquatic flowers grow are so abundant that the fumes from the lotus can drive a man mad. Only the Pakma know where these grottoes lie, and they guard them fiercely.

The Pakma are not the only humans to live in the Mistswamp. A psychic coven known as the Favyana has a presence here, trading with the Pakma for lotus. Recently, other smuggler groups have begun retreating further into the swamps to escape the White Monk's patrols. Already, some of these groups have vanished. There are also persistent rumours of tribes of horrific mutants living in the deep swamps. These creatures are said to have mighty occult powers, and to dwell beneath the surface, having developed gills and other amphibious characteristics. Even the Pakma fear the Children of the Waters, as these beasts are called.

The Pelomorii

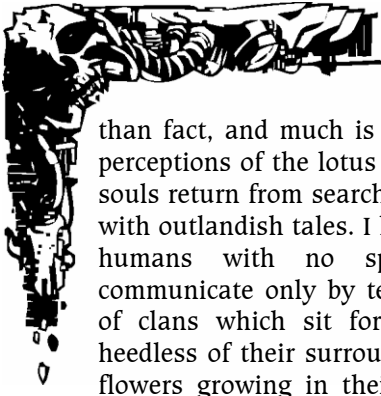
This confederation of tribes dwells in the mountainous region around the Eyrie and in the northern Verdic Hills. They are semi-nomadic agriculturalists, moving between sites every few years, and maintain an iron age technology base. Nominally Gjartins, the Pelomorii primarily worship personal animal totems, and try to emulate the behaviour of their chosen animal. The Pelomorii have domesticated several species of native animals. The most commonly encountered of these is the shidra, a long-necked, carnivorous dog-like reptile, used in hunting and herding the more docile chikal. The arts of Beastmastery are relatively common among the Pelomorii, and those that trade with the Verdic Changed or the pirates of the Eyrie are always accompanied by their animal companions.

The Mersharadii

This southern tribe has a dark reputation among those who border their homelands in the mountains west of the Shavusha River. The Mersharadii are violent bandits and raiders, preying on other tribes and on the settlements of the river valley. Mersharadii do not farm or hunt, instead relying on slaves captured from their enemies to work for them. They worship a debased form of Gjartinism, offering blood sacrifices to the Ravenous Mother. They are also infamous for the practice of cannibalism. During their lotus-fuelled ceremonies, Mersharadii shamans eat the brains of victims caught in slave raids. They claim that the lotus allows them to absorb the memories of those they consume, which are in turn passed on to the Ravenous Mother when the shamans enter her caves (thought to lie somewhere in the Duniyas) to die. In recent years, the Mersharadii have begun to expand, taking advantage of the chaos in the Free Cities to spread eastward. Already they are encroaching into the lands of the Taltholii. In addition, many thousands of Mersharadii warriors have become mercenaries for the Manitou Alliance, acting as scouts and terror troops.

There is little known about the more western tribes, living in the Vau lands beyond the Duniya Mountains. It is known that many tribes live here, through talks with the eastern tribes who have occasional contact with them. The Vau seem to take no interest in this breach of the conditions of settlement, although the rare coastlander groups that have tried to settle here have always vanished without a trace. What little is known about the deep Hinterland is more myth and legend





than fact, and much is filtered through the drugged perceptions of the lotus tribes. Still, occasional brave souls return from searches for vautech or rare metals with outlandish tales. I have heard stories of clans of humans with no spoken language, or who communicate only by telepathy. Other stories speak of clans which sit for days in silent meditation, heedless of their surroundings, or of men with lotus flowers growing in their hair, or of great herds of Grendel, thousands strong, which whoop and cry as they migrate through the deep jungles. The Gjartin tribes hold that these deep tribes are those who have reached true communion with Manitou, and as such have long since ceased to be truly human.

The Eastern Reaches

This great archipelago, which stretches from the north-eastern coast of Seralong down to the great island of the Vau, is only sparsely populated by humans. The islands are generally rocky and forested, and are buffeted by great seasonal storms. They are also home to several vicious amphibious species. These include the mersosh, a hunched bipedal frog-like creature that has no fear of man and hunts in packs, and the leshy, a strange plant-like creature that feeds on blood.

The only island with a large human population is that of Khuda-Maghz. The largest of the chain, Khuda-Maghz lies closest to Seralong in the north. It is home to the city of Neo Edo, a smallish naval port founded by the descendants of Republic settlers. The interior of the island is hilly and covered in thick jungle. It is also the site of extensive Vau ruins, many of which seem to lie beneath the surface. The natives of Neo Edo are thought to be the descendants of archaeological teams who came here during the Republic, and were stranded after the Fall. Eventually, the MTC established contact with the port, and a small amount of trade began. This has grown explosively since Scraver archaeologists discovered deposits of pygmallium in the island's interior. Now, Neo Edo is firmly in the grip of the Harrison Syndicate, who hold a monopoly on the extraction and trade of the rare mineral. The city and the mining operations are run by Dean Markos Arad, and access to the island is severely restricted, but for the shipments that take pygmallium to Noumea four times a year.

The pygmallium apparently lies in surprisingly pure deposits, and while not as extensive as the mines on Leminkainen, it is still a source of great wealth for the Guild. Rumours from miners suggest

Shidra

Body: Str 5, Dex 8, End 4

Mind: Wits 3, Per 5, Tech 0

Skills: Fight 4, Observe 6, Dodge 6, Vigor 4, Sneak 5, Tracking 6

Vitality: (8) -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0

Move: 20m base run

Weapons: Bite (Goal 12, Init 6, DMG 3)

Special: Sensitive Smell (+4 Tracking w/scents), Infra-Red Vision (+2 Observe to spot heat sources)

Description: Shidra are relatively common dog-analogues. They resemble Alsatian-sized lizards with straight legs and long, snake-like necks. In the wild, they hunt in packs like Urthish wolves, using similar tactics to tire out and outnumber larger prey. They are easily domesticated, and will follow commands with ease.

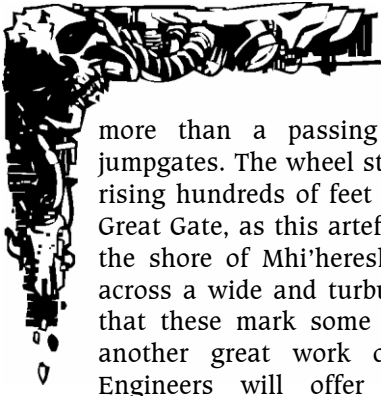
Wild Gift: Beastmasters can borrow the Bite, Sensitive Smell and Infra-Red Vision abilities of cohort shidra.

that the pygmallium has been found in strange, concentric circles running throughout the island. While most of the natives work quietly for the Scravers, there are a growing number who try to sabotage the mines. These rebels hold to some strange religious tradition, claiming that the mining is angering 'the King under the Hill', a god that dwells within the Vau ruins and will kill all humans if it grows angry. The rebels' numbers have swelled since the island was struck by a series of earthquakes last year.

The Vau Enclaves

As mentioned above, the original conditions of settlement agreed by the Diasporan settlers in 2855 marked over half of the land on Manitou as the exclusive domain of the Vau governors. Since that time, the Vau have never shown much indication of actually dwelling on Seralong, although enigmatic ruins and monuments suggest that they once dwelt across the globe, apparently centuries before humans ever came here. Now, the vast majority of the Vau dwell on the large island of Mhi'heresh'lathoom. There is a token presence on the southernmost tip of Seralong. Here, a rocky peninsula is claimed by the Vau, the edge of this enclave marked by the small city of Byblos. This is the oldest human settlement on Manitou, and has always existed solely as a meeting place for the races. Legends hold that the Vau used to visit Byblos every year, celebrating the Vau New Year festival with





more than a passing resemblance to the great jumpgates. The wheel stands atop a great white cliff, rising hundreds of feet above the crashing surf. The Great Gate, as this artefact is called, has a mirror on the shore of Mhi'heresh'lathoom, ten miles distant across a wide and turbulent channel. Some theorise that these mark some strange bridge of energy or another great work of Vau technology. Certain Engineers will offer vast sums for a single photograph of the Gate.

The Island of the Vau is and always has been an enigma. No human is known to have set foot on the isle and returned. The island is often obscured by thick mists, and its strange defences described above mean that no explorer has gotten within a few miles of it. The isle is girt by massive sandstone cliffs that in places display vast and alien murals. The isle appears forested, and low mountains arise in the south-west. There are two apparent settlements visible on the northern coast. These are the southern half of the Great Gate, and the even more enigmatic city of impossibly tall and thin towers and gossamer-like banners known only as the City of Mists. This

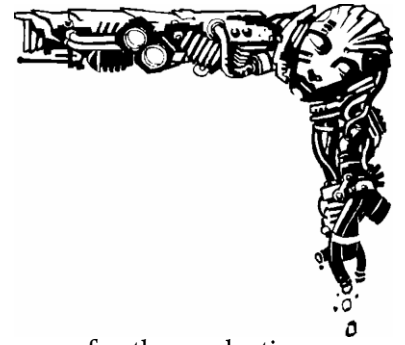
city is thought to be the capital of the Vau governor, and Vau spaceships have been seen descending towards it. Like all else with Manitou's enigmatic rulers, nothing more is known beyond rumour, paranoia and legend.

Game Rules

The Atmosphere

The Manitou atmosphere disrupts long-range radio communications. All radar and other sensors operate with a penalty of -2, which can rise as high as -10 during electrical storms. The Mistswamp can ruin any electronics, except perhaps some Republican hardened military tech, in a matter of hours. All sensor rolls automatically fail, and any equipment with electronic components (including lasers, blasters and energy shields) will become inoperable.





Lost World: Svarog

By Jack Oldham

History

The planet of Svarog was initially discovered by explorers from Cadiz in the employ of the young House Decados in 2830. Discovering a pleasant, Urth-like world suitable for human habitation, the Decados were quick to claim the planet as their own. Until the establishment of the Second Republic, Svarog was only sparsely inhabited, home to Decados pleasure palaces and a few million indentured farmers (most of whom were of Slavic origin, descended from TUV workers first used by the Gloucesters in the settlement of Cadiz). The Decados monopoly on the world was weakened with the discovery of a new jumproad from New Java in 3512, and a steady stream of colonists from the Republic Core set up independent and corporate-sponsored settlements throughout the early centuries of the Republic.

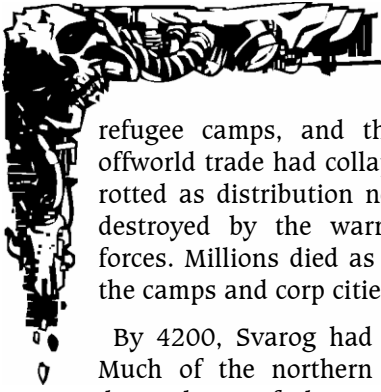
The second era in Svarog's history began with the decision of the Republic Senate to mount massive development projects to turn Cadiz into a paradise suitable for a centre of diplomacy with the Vau Hegemony. In 3850, the Republic used diplomatic pressure to force the Decados to sell their holdings on Svarog to the controversial terraforming consortium, the Eco Green Organization. EGO was granted significant government funds to develop Svarog into a breadbasket, intended to feed the massive urban population of Cadiz. The climate of the planet was optimised for the growth of massive harvests of staple crops such as scarlet wheat and millirice. Even after the Vau rejected Cadiz in favour of their own world of Vrill-Ya, Svarog remained one of the main exporters of crops in the region, supplying foodstuffs to heavily industrialised and marginal worlds as far away as Liberty and Istakhr. The underbelly of the world, with the poor treatment of farm labourers and growing problems with the terraforming engines, were criticised by the Republic's liberal politicians, but no concerted action was taken to challenge the control of a vast megacorporation such as EGO.

By the end of the 39th century, Svarog had become a centre for the Eco Green's vast corporate empire. In 3886, Dr Maria Soltsein, an EGO scientist, made a number of breakthroughs in the

harnessing of geothermal energy for the production of electrical power. Theoretically providing an unlimited supply of power in excess of even the fusion technology of the Republic, the first of these experimental geothermal plants was constructed on the northern coast of the equatorial island of Letovysche, within a pre-existing terraforming node. A resounding success, the geothermal plant was chosen to become the foundation of a great arcology, intended to house the corporate executives. This arcology, known as Pershi Vezha, was begun in 3902, and was completed in 3934. Standing over five kilometres in height, the great edifice housed over 2 million EGO employees. The Spire, as it was colloquially known by Svarog's inhabitants, was capped by a space elevator, which stretched thousands of miles up to a station in geosynchronous orbit.

As the Republic began to unravel in the last years of the 40th century, Svarog did not escape unscathed. Rocked by the scandals following the mysterious abandonment of Chernobog, and with it with several thousand EGO employees (most of whom came from Svarog), the political control of the planet by the corporation began to slip. In 3987, the Republic revoked EGO's ownership of the world as part of a raft of punishments against the terraforming industry designed to pacify the Church. A Republic senator was established, but it became clear quickly that this man was a Decados puppet. When the Senate on New Istanbul was massacred by the Ten, a Decados fleet mounted an unsurprising invasion of Svarog, claiming the Republic purchase had been nothing more than an illegal land grab.

The war for Svarog stretched on long after the Fall of much of the Republic. The EGO forces used their defensive position on the space station to fight off any large Decados invasion fleets, while on the surface the Jakovians stirred up worker revolts in the mega-farms of the north. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Core came flooding through the New Java jumpgate, escaping from the Church-sponsored purges tearing apart the Golcondan worlds. It is unknown who finally sealed the jumpgate in 4036, but in so doing sizable numbers of people from all these factions were stranded. Svarog had become clogged with



refugee camps, and the economy built solely on offworld trade had collapsed. Vast stockpiles of grain rotted as distribution networks broke down or were destroyed by the warring Decados and corporate forces. Millions died as disease and famine ravished the camps and corp cities alike.

By 4200, Svarog had settled into a squalid state. Much of the northern continent was held by the descendants of the Decados invasion force, which tried to enforce feudal control over rebellious farming communes. Around the Spire, the corporate government clung on to their arcology, although the space station had been demolished in the closing days of the War, barring them from space. A state of cold war developed, with both sides threatening nuclear annihilation. This situation finally began to change in the 4220s, when the corporate government began to be subverted from within by a strange cult among the ranks of the terraforming engineers who maintained the Spire. This shadowy group, that appears to have originated as a branch of the SoulCraft sect (destroyed in the Known Worlds during the Fall), threatened to disable the geothermal engines unless negotiations were opened with the northern states. The Church of the Bohoslov Mashyna, as this group called itself, began to send missionaries across the world, offering to use their technology to construct copies of the Spire, complete with geothermal power plants in all of the warring states. By the end of the century, all of Svarog's nations had conceded to the offers of the Enerhiyist Church, and around 30 spire arcologies were built across the world.

In the face of apparently limitless energy, the various warring states atrophied and eventually disbanded. The Church became the leaders of a world government, called the Svit Uryad, which was formally founded in 4319. This strange theocratic empire ruled unchallenged for nearly 500 years. The world's population congregated in the spires, each of which became a largely independent city-state. Technology was venerated as a holy sacrament, an embodiment of the Bohoslov Mashyna (Holy Machine), and was restored to a level on par with the early Republic. Much of the world's population enjoyed an excellent standard of living. Nearly all came to own the small, powerful airplanes which were to become ubiquitous on this world, serving as both personal transportation and as a religious artefact.

Unfortunately, this peaceful era was to prove short-lived. In the late 47th century, astronomers began to note strange fluctuations in the

Svarog Traits

Ruler: The Svit Uryad (The World State)

Cathedral: Malo Sontse (Church of the Bohoslov Mashyna)

Agora: Kosmofabryka (Independent Spire)

Garrison: 4

Capital: Osnova Odyn (The Svit Uryad)

Jumps: 5

Adjacent Worlds: Cadiz (dayside), Mataran (dayside)

Solar System: Sun, Perun (0.52 AU), Svarog (1.4 AU; Svarozhich, Dazhdbog, Khors), Ersvorsh (10.2 AU), Beilbog (14 AU; 6 moons), Myesyats (19 AU), Jumpgate (66 AU)

Tech: 6 (8 in the cores of the Spires)

Population: 50 million Lotchyk, 300 million Khodak (50,000 Hironem)

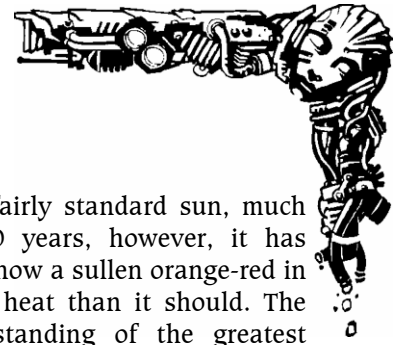
Resources: Mineral ores, high-tech devices, scientific knowledge

Exports: High-tech ceramics and metal alloys, aerial technology, forbidden scientific texts

electromagnetic radiation emitted by Svarog's sun. Within years, the star began to noticeably dim. With it, the temperature on Svarog plummeted. The near tropical climate maintained by the terraforming engines fell, and great icecaps began to expand across the poles. In 4732, the northernmost spire was abandoned as it became engulfed by the expanding glaciers. In the equatorial regions, always the centre of Svarogian civilisation, the falling temperature devastated the crops. No longer able to rely on robotic workers to sustain the farms needed to feed the spire-dwellers, the Svit Uryad began encouraging citizens to return to the deserted farming towns of their ancestors. This proved highly unpopular, and by 4750, the Church began sending criminals and social malcontents to work the farms. At their worst, these became armed camps, where petty criminals and the merely unlucky were worked to death to feed their fellows.

Over time, the children of these farm workers came to be viewed as lesser creatures by the spire-dwellers. By the beginning of the 49th century, Svarog had become split into two castes. The people of the spires came to be called Lotchyk (airmen), living the easy and decadent life of their culture at its height as if nothing had changed. The farm workers came to be called Khodak (walkers), and were viewed as sub-human chattel. Soon, the Khodak





came to outnumber the Lotchyk. Early revolts were countered with devastating air raids, with modified aircraft dropping bombs and napalm on rebel villages.

The Svit Uryad has struggled on to the present day, its citizens increasingly living isolated and delusional lives. In 4867, the remote spire of Kosmofabryka revolted, refusing to send delegates to the Outer Duma at Osnova Odyn. When no retaliation occurred, more of the eastern spires quietly broke away. Some continued much as they had before, but cut off from the world government. Others took to piracy and raiding their neighbours for food, technology and Khodak slaves. These so called *Nebo Zlodyi* became a growing threat, forcing the spires of the Svit Uryad to arm themselves and mount air patrols to scan their borders.

The 50th century has seen the Svit Uryad fragmenting further. In 4920, much of the southern island of Zemlja was swamped by a massive Khodak revolt, culminating in the destruction of the Perevani Drotyk spire by a vast peasant army. A decade later, in 4936, three spires broke away at once. The priesthood of these spires was usurped by a conclave of fighter pilots, who claimed descent from the old Decados kingdoms of the 41st and 42nd centuries. Since then, the Decados pretenders have been in a state of constant war with the Svit Uryad, with epic air battles being fought over the crashing waves of the Straits of Oskol.

Svarog finally rejoined the jumpweb in 4963. It is unclear exactly when the gate reopened, but it was first used by a corsair ship called the *Bloody Hawk*. This ship was a Republic relic, discovered by a pirate crew in the ruins of an abandoned city on Cadiz. The pirates made landfall at Kosmofabryka, as the spire was built on the ruins of the old EGO spaceport mentioned on the *Hawk's* think machine. Since then, this spire has conducted limited trade with the handful of pirates and smugglers who know of the world. This changed in 4989, when Decados agents attacked and boarded the *Hawk* above Cadavus. Under torture, the ship's captain surrendered the codes to Svarog. Since then, the Decados have sent small scouting teams to the world, but have not decided as of yet whether to mount a full invasion. Around a year ago, a pirate known as Jarak the Red was captured by the MTC on Manitou, and has sold his story of a trip to Svarog in 4997 to both the League and the Imperial Eye. Both parties are planning investigations of their own.

Solar System

Sun: Svarog's star is a fairly standard sun, much like Sol. In the past 300 years, however, it has dimmed dramatically. It is now a sullen orange-red in colour, and gives off less heat than it should. The change defies the understanding of the greatest Svarogan astronomers.

Perun: Perun is a hot, cloud-covered world, which is around the same size as Svarog. Attempts at terraforming were made during the Republic, but the engines were destroyed by Decados invaders during the Fall. There is no evidence that any humans survived in the toxic atmosphere.

Svarog: Svarog has three moons in various orbits. Svarozhich and Dazhdbog are unexceptional, being unevenly captured meteorites. Khors is a larger planetoid. It was inhabited during the Republic, and many deserted mining installations dot the airless surface.

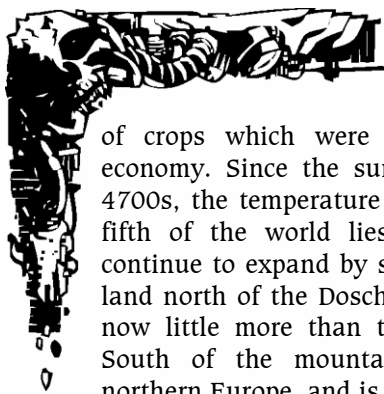
Ersvorsh: This is a large, ice-covered world. It was terraformed, and still has a breathable atmosphere. However, its large size and crushing gravity make it impossible for normal humans to survive for long. Tribes of Changed, designed by EGO to cope with the harsh conditions, dwell here. They are great shaggy creatures, only vaguely resembling standard humans, and have only a very primitive culture.

Beilbog and Myesyats: These are both large gas giants. Beilbog has a number of abandoned naval stations on its moons. Myesyats has no satellites other than a vast network of rings.

Landscape

The world of Svarog was well-suited for human habitation even before it was heavily terraformed during the Second Republic. The size, atmosphere and gravity of the world are well within human tolerances, with the only oddity being the 28 hour day resulting from a slightly slower rate of rotation. Svarog is roughly 70% water, although much of this is held up in the large polar glaciers. The northern hemisphere is dominated by the continent of Liskrayina, which almost rings the globe, only split by the Nova Baltic Sea in the east, and the hazardous, ice-filled Straits of Oskol. In the south, the only land is in the form of the two large islands of Letovysche in the west and Zemlja in the east.

The climate of Svarog was once subtropical, deliberately engineered to aid in the growth



of crops which were the centre of the planet's economy. Since the sun began to fade in the late 4700s, the temperature has plummeted. Now, a full fifth of the world lies beneath the poles, which continue to expand by several metres a year. All the land north of the Dosch Mountains on Liskrayina is now little more than tundra and frigid scrubland. South of the mountains, the climate resembles northern Europe, and is cloaked in the remains of the old mega-farms (now largely lost to the wilderness) and great tracts of pine forest. Only Letovysche on the equator remains largely unchanged, and as a result is still a centre for agriculture.

The three moons of Svarog exert a strong and complex gravitic force on the world. This has always made the oceans of the world dangerous to navigate, and is one of the principle reasons why the people of this world have relied so heavily on aircraft. Great storms in the world-spanning Buria Ocean can rage for weeks at a time, and become so fierce that they can blow aircraft hundreds of miles off course.

People & Places

The Church of the Bohoslov Mashyna

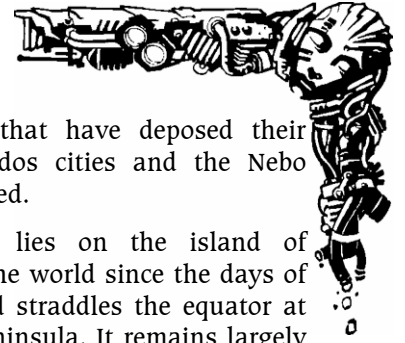
For all of its existence, the Svit Uryad has been under the control of the Church of the Bohoslov Mashyna, the strange amalgam of technosophy and Universalist religion that formed among EGO's terraforming engineers in the last days of the Second Republic. The priesthood of the Church, who are known by the title of *Inzhener*, serve three roles in the culture of the Lotchyk. Firstly, they still continue their original role as the operators and preservers of the great geothermal engines that lie at the core of each of the spire arcologies. In this role, they are also the maintainers of much of the other technology of the Lotchyk. Over the centuries, the knowledge of technology held by the average citizen has atrophied to the point where all but the simplest devices are viewed with religious awe. The functioning of technology is kept hidden by the priesthood, to maintain their vital roles as engineers, terraformers and aircraft mechanics.

The second and largest role of the Enerhiyist Church is that of the ruling government of the Svit Uryad. The Church, and by extension the whole World State, is governed by an Inner and Outer Duma. The Outer Duma, which contains representatives from the ranks of the Inzheners of all of the loyal spires, maintains a parliamentary system, based in the capital

spire of Osnova Odyn. This body holds 300 members, and carries out all its debates in public. Ostensibly, any citizen can petition the Outer Duma to listen to his suggestions or grievances. In reality, very few take advantage of this right, with most of the Lotchyk being largely ignorant or apathetic towards the mechanisms of their government. The Outer Duma is tasked with debating and passing laws with regards to the internal workings of the spires, and acts as the high court for secular law. The Inner Duma, which meets in private in the holy spire of Malo Sontse, is tasked with matters of foreign policy, defence and relations with the Khodak, in addition to policing religious law through an agency called the *Doslidnyk* (Investigators). The Inner Duma controls the Kapitans of the air force, issuing all orders beyond local defence against pirate raids. The Inner Duma has met behind closed doors since an assassination attempt on one of its members by a Khodak sympathizer in 4834, and likewise the identity of its members is a matter of utmost secrecy. In the old days, the two Dumas were on relatively equal footing in regards to power. The Outer Duma handled most affairs of the State, while the Inner Duma concentrated on the rare Khodak revolt or case of banditry. However, the rebellions of the past 150 years have led to the Inner Duma assuming a position of importance far in excess of its more public counterpart.

The third and most public role of the Church is as the spiritual advisors and shepherds of its flock. Clearly modelling itself on the Universal Church of the Republic, the Church is at the same time startlingly different from its parent in many ways. The faith, known as Enerhiyism, is basically a highly rationalised variant of Universalism. In its original form, the founders of the sect stripped away nearly all of the superstition and mythology that had accrued around the Universal creed since the days of the Prophet. Indeed, the role of the Prophet himself has been dropped from the faith. The Church worship a fundamental principle or force known as the *Bohoslov Mashyna* (the Holy Engine), or simply as the *Enerhiya* (the Energy). This is essentially the notion of the Pancreator stripped of all anthropomorphisms and supernatural beliefs. The Enerhiya is seen as the universal force that powers the entirety of the universe (called the *Matrytsia* by the Church). Everything from the vibration of atoms to the great nuclear forces of the stars is imbued and empowered by the Enerhiya. Likewise, life itself is the product of this primal energy. By extension, the geothermal power plants at the core of the spires are, in a way, great temples to the Enerhiya,





shaping and harnessing the stuff of the universe.

Old records suggest that the Enerhiyists initially rejected all notions of the supernatural, seeing the divine as a product of the physical universe. To be sure, human understanding was limited, but the Church held to the essentially scientific belief that with time all the mysteries of God could be revealed, and that the search was itself a kind of worship. Over the centuries, however, the standard irrational trappings of religion have re-emerged. In particular, the technology that harnesses the Enerhiya is now venerated. This is particularly common in the eyes of the citizens, who have an essentially magical view of life, seeing the technological marvels of their arcology homes and their aircraft as holy relics. In particular, the airplane has a central role in common religion. The swift motion and isolation felt in long flights is seen as communion with the divine. As a result, most fetishize their aircraft, painting them with religious insignia. The main public rites of the Church take the form of great aerial displays, with thousands of planes involved in carefully choreographed dances that can last for days. In recent years, these displays have taken on a darker and apocalyptic aspect. As the sun, the greatest of Holy Engines, fails, the Church hopes to reignite it with great displays of piety. As a result, each year sees greater and greater aerial dances, which can stretch on for weeks. Now, an observer will see planes spiralling out of control or colliding in mid-air as their pilots pass out from exhaustion. These sacrifices are seen as martyrs for the cause, and refusal to perform in the rites leads to immediate expulsion into the ranks of the Khodak.

The Svit Uryad

“Enerhiya grant Life. Life grant Motion. Motion grant Enerhiya.”

The Airman’s Hymn.

Despite the losses of the past two centuries, the Svit Uryad of the Bohoslov Mashyna remains the largest state on Svarog. Centred around the three great spires of Pershi Vezha, Malo Sontse and Osnova Odyn, the World State controls the island of Letovysche and around a third of the southern coast of the continent of Liskrayina. In total, twelve of Svarog’s thirty spires are still loyal to the Svit Uryad. The Svit Uryad still considers itself to be the only legitimate government on Svarog, viewing the other state’s as mere rebels. The eastern spires which refuse to obey orders but have maintained their own branches of the Enerhiyist Church

are tolerated, but those that have deposed their priests such as the Decados cities and the Nebo Zlodiy are ruthlessly opposed.

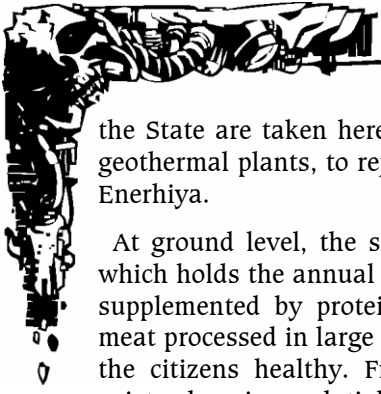
The core of the State lies on the island of Letovysche, the centre of the world since the days of the EGO. This rocky island straddles the equator at the base of the Dogoda peninsula. It remains largely untouched by the encroaching cold caused by the fading sun, and much of its surface is devoted to massive Khodak farms. Letovysche also hosts the first spire, Pershi Vezha, on its north-western coast. In addition to this oldest and largest of the arcologies, the island holds two others. These are Malo Sontse, the spiritual centre of the Enerhiyist Church, and the southern spire of Storozh. These three spires house over half of the Svit Uryad’s population between them, as they have been the least touched by the chaos of the past two centuries. The island is closely guarded, and no Sky Pirate would be foolish enough to raid here. In addition, the Khodak of Letovysche are remarkably docile. Holding the spires in religious awe, they deliver their annual harvests to their masters each year, where they receive blessings and gifts of medical aid and harmless technological trinkets from the priesthood. There has not been a revolt in centuries, as oral legends among the villagers speak of the fire the angels which will rain down on any who oppose them.

Pershi Vezha

Although Pershi Vezha is now neither the political nor religious centre of the Svit Uryad, the original spire remains an important symbol to the people of Svarog. Pershi Vezha was the first arcology, built by the corporate masters of Svarog centuries before the others, and the higher technical aptitude of the late Republic is evident in the size and magnificence of this great city. Standing in excess of five kilometres in height, Pershi Vezha is a larger template for the smaller spires built by the Enerhiyists. As a result, the following description can serve as a rough guide to the layout of all of Svarog’s spires.

The Spire begins nearly half a kilometre underground, where the terraforming node and the three great geothermal sinks that fuel the structure lie. This region is restricted to all but the Inzheners of the Church, and no citizen has ever been allowed beyond the great bulkheads at ground level. This area is viewed with religious awe, acting as an inner sanctum for the faith. Traditionally, high priests and those who give their lives in the defence of





the State are taken here to be interred within to the geothermal plants, to rejoin the swirling forces of the Enerhiya.

At ground level, the spire houses vast grain silos, which holds the annual tribute of the Khodak. This is supplemented by protein-rich fungi and vat grown meat processed in large hydroponic factories, keeping the citizens healthy. From here up, an entire city exists, housing palatial residences, theatres, music halls and public boulevards. Pershi Vezha houses around 1.5 million people, leaving around a quarter of the city deserted. Standards of living are not hugely variant, but those who work for the good of the State, as patrolmen, city managers and other civic workers, are granted the best housing. This lies on the outer surface of the spire. From around a kilometre above ground, the spire is covered in small bays, each housing a short runway attached to the garages holding the aircraft of the Lotchyk. Originally used to travel the world, these aircraft are now largely reserved for religious ceremonies and protecting the arcology. All who own an aircraft are obliged to enter the city militia. Most are part-time only, and their planes are only fitted with weapons systems when they are called to defend their homes. A smaller number form part of a standing air force, and are known as *Lytsar*. These pilots are led by *Kapitans* appointed by the Inner Duma, and are housed in the best apartments in the highest third of the spire. They are treated with considerable respect by the other citizens, something they take for granted. They do much to foster an image as glamorous heroes, protecting the Lotchyk from insane pirates and sub-human Khodak.

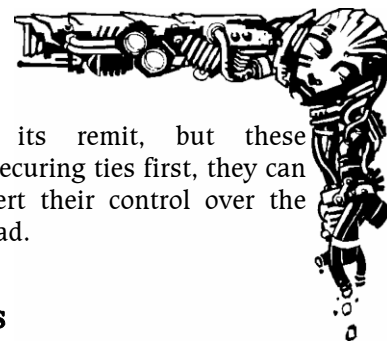
At the height of the spire, the tapering point is studded with antennae, great docking pylons for the large airships that travel between the spires, and thousands of brightly coloured prayer wheels, harnessing the raging winds to churn out offerings to the Enerhiya. In the case of Pershi Vezha, the spire ends with the thin but impossibly strong strand of the space elevator. This ribbon stretches up for thousands of kilometres, anchored to the burned out ruin of the old space station, abandoned since the Fall. In the early years of the Svit Uryad, the priesthood hoped to repair the station and renew journeys into space. However, the will to invest in this project never appeared, and is now largely forgotten. The station is remembered with religious awe, and a popular but technically heretical belief among the Lotchyk holds that the Enerhiya will restore the station when the planet is reunited.

Malo Sontse

Malo Sontse holds the honour of being the first spire to be constructed by the Enerhiyist Church. Work began on it in 4219, and it was completed fifty years later, despite considerable setbacks and many deaths among the construction crews. As a result, the spire was seen as a kind of miracle by the Church, and cemented in the minds of the Svarogians that the Church were true saviours after years of decline and war. Since its opening, Malo Sontse has been the centre of the Church. Fully one half of the 3 kilometre tower is devoted to a vast cathedral, with the Lotchyk restricted to the lower levels of the spire. All citizens who perform well in standardized tests in mathematics, physics and theology are invited to join the Church, and it is here that they come to begin their long years of training at facilities that bear a strong resemblance to a traditional university. Most leave after ten years, qualified to act as basic *Inzheners*, tasked with performing the common rites and maintaining airplanes and the spires' internal systems. A few stay on for another five years, and the best of these are inducted into the inner mysteries of the planetary engineers. After graduation, most priests return to their home spires, although some stay to enter the service of Duma members, as preparation for later political careers of their own. After years of servitude to the elders of the Church, a lucky few are appointed into the Outer Duma in *Osnova Odyn*. Only after a lifetime of service is there a slim chance of entering the Inner Duma. At this time, the priest's identity is wiped from the State system, and they cease to exist. The Inner Duma meets in the great plastisteel dome that caps the spire, within what once served as an astronomical station. Since the discovery of the fading sun, the Inner Duma has restricted public access to astronomical data, and any research that may still be conducted is carefully hidden.

In the past two centuries, the changing nature of the graduate system at Malo Sontse has seen a marked division appearing among those who leave to serve as engineers and priests, and those who remain within the walls of the cathedral to pursue a political career. This has begun to manifest as unrest among the *Inzheners* of some of the more remote spires, and was a contributing factor in the rebellion of the eastern spires in the 49th century. Some whisper that the leaders in the Inner Duma are abandoning their sacred task as engineers of the Svit Uryad, and are allowing the machinery of government to unravel. Although this is restricted to mutterings in the lower





ranks for now, the danger of a fundamental schism is growing.

Osnova Odyn

Lying across the strait from Pershi Vezha, Osnova Odyn stands on the southern tip of the of the Dogoda peninsula. Since its construction, Osnova Odyn has served as the de facto capital of the Svit Uryad. It is here that the Outer Duma, the public government of the State, meets, and it is here that the Council of Kapitans which leads the air force is based. Osnova Odyn itself stands over four kilometres, and even with a population of over two million, it is still partially deserted. Much of the population is involved in the apparatus of government, serving as aides, guards and assistants to the priests of the Outer Duma. Osnova Odyn sees itself as the centre of Lotchyk culture, not lost in the past like the spires of Letovysche and not descending into barbarism like the northern peoples of the mountains. As a result, the people here do much to try and prove their cultural worth. Even the lowest of citizens invests much in their appearance and in perfecting an air of cultivation. Huge crowds attend the great dances and plays held in the gigantic theatres that dot the spire (all of which are from a small handful of classics, none less than 300 years old). The holy days see the greatest aerial dances on the world, with upwards of thirty thousand aircraft weaving patterns above the southern cliffs.

The Outer Duma which rules Osnova Odyn was once on equal terms with the Inner Duma, but since the opening of hostilities with the Decados separatists seventy years ago, the priests of Malo Sontse, and the Kapitans they control, have slowly usurped many of the parliament's powers. Although the Outer Duma is still tasked with the internal apparatus of the Svit Uryad, they are purposely barred from influencing the air forces and their war in the north-west. This is becoming no small source of consternation, especially as foreign Kapitans are assuming more and more control over areas of the spire to house airship factories and docking pylons. In recent years, a faction of the Outer Duma has begun campaigning for the reconquest of the eastern spires, wanting an end to the wars with the Decados until some advantage over them can be found. This is probably as a result of the discovery by these Duma members of the presence of offworlders trading with Kosmofabryka. This faction, led by High Inzhener Tremsin Yanovich, is doing its best to hide the real reasons for its demands. Technically, the Inner Duma could claim that relations with

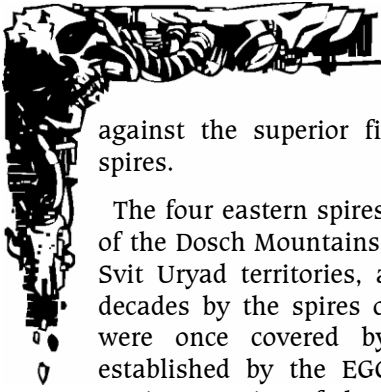
offworlders lies within its remit, but these conspirators hope that by securing ties first, they can use offworld aid to reassert their control over the government of the Svit Uryad.

The Northern Spires

Despite the fact that the political and religious centres of the Svit Uryad lie in the south, the forested mountains that form the centre of the Liskrayina continent have always held the majority of the spire arcologies. Now, only seven of the twenty spires lie under the clear control of the Svit Uryad. Of these, three lie on the eastern coast of the Straits of Oskol, and the other four lie along the coast to the east, in the shadow of the snow-covered Dosch Mountains. The three near the Straits are collectively known as the Sentinels. Initially built close together to exploit a well of geothermal energy formed by a tectonic fault in the region, the Sentinels have now taken on a new central role in the defence of the State. The three spires lie closest to the Decados rebels who hold three of the spires west of the Straits, and the last half-century has seen dozens of pitched aerial battles over the waters as both sides have mounted raids, offensives and full-blown invasion attempts. The Sentinels have come under the informal but very real control of the Kapitans, who have set about turning them into armed camps.

The central spire, called Viyskov Tabir, houses vast aerial docks, containing thousands of gunships and bombers. This spire also houses three great Povitria airships. These vast constructions consist of airborne aircraft carriers. They are massive gun platforms, with rows of aircraft bays along both sides. Each can carry over two hundred craft (mainly smaller militia planes, with a wing or so of larger gunships and bombers, and tiny stealthed scout planes which resemble microlites with a fusion engine). The planes are fired from the bays by powerful catapults, and freefall for a second before their engines engage. The Povitria are slow moving but devastating weapons. None has lost a direct engagement it has been involved in. They were designed to cross the Straits of Oskol and pummel Mayak into surrender. Only the expert flying of the Decados has stopped them. The Decados target the long supply lines of airships that keep the Povitria fuelled and armed. The Svit Uryad has yet to find an effective way to defend the supply lines once Decados break through, and have stopped attacks while they try to formulate a countermeasure. Despite these drawbacks, these mobile fortresses are the main reason the Svit Uryad has been able to hold its own





against the superior fighter pilots of the Decados spires.

The four eastern spires lie in the hilly forests south of the Dosch Mountains. These are the poorest of the Svit Uryad territories, and have been neglected for decades by the spires of the south. The lands here were once covered by the massive mega-farms established by the EGO corporate authorities. The rusting remains of the corporate towns, which lay among fields which could stretch over hundreds of kilometres, carefully tended by robotic harvesters, can still be seen jutting from the thick pine forests that have covered the region since the climate changed. The spires here are in a miserable state. None hold more than a million souls, despite being designed to hold more than twice that number. The main reason for this decline is lack of food supplies. With the fall in temperature, the crops that grew here, genetically designed for a Mediterranean climate, failed. Those strains that have proved viable in the new conditions are grown in squalid farms maintained by the region's Khodak. These wretches cling to small villages in the cleared land near the spires. The Lotchyk demand so much that the Khodak barely have enough to feed themselves. Unsurprisingly, rebellion is not uncommon. The Lotchyk care little for what the Khodak do, as long as the harvests arrive each autumn. Every year, more slip away into the forests, living in primitive clans beneath the trees that give some defence from the aerial reprisals of their masters. The Lotchyk are not above attacking the remaining villagers to encourage 'cooperation'.

The Lotchyk of the eastern spire seem to have sunk even further than their brethren elsewhere. A kind of millennialist depression has seized many, and apocalyptic variants of the Enerhiyist faith have become popular. Most citizens try to ignore the encroaching ice and the dwindling food by turning inward, or leave to join the air forces fighting the Decados or the Khodak rebels in the far south. Suicidal flights, where pilots fly out over the sea until their planes run out of fuel, are a growing practice, despite attempts by the Inzheners to outlaw the practice.

The Decados Kingdoms

"The problem with you lot is you're so predictable. If you would just stop taking commands from your damn mechanics you'd give us a fight worth boasting about."

Ambassador Iosif Decados at the Viyskov Tabir Peace Talks, 4998

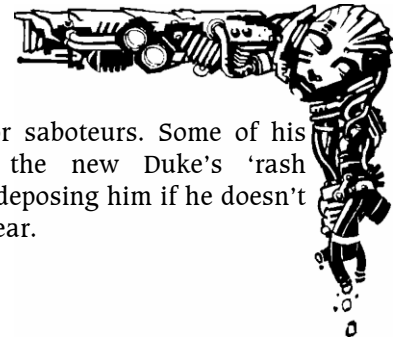
With the appearance of the Nebo Zlodiy sky pirates in last years of the 49th century, the Svit Uryad was forced for the first time to turn its attention to the matter of external defence. Until now, the only threats had been from the Khodak, who could be easily cowed by aerial raids. With the appearance of sky borne raiders, however, the Lotchyk found themselves threatened for the first time. Initially, these raiders concentrated on attacking remote Khodak villages, or grounded lone pilots flying between the spires. However, the massive attack on the spire of Sekvoyia in 4887, which led to the deaths of several thousand citizens, spurred the Dumas to found a permanent air force. This was placed under the control of the Inner Duma, who had previous experience of organising the policing of the Khodak. Each spire was assigned a number of Kapitans to form and lead an air force to police its airspace.

Initially, the Kapitans were under the careful control of the Enerhiyist Church, answering to the local Church leaders. However, as the pirate attacks escalated, and the remote spires began to break away, the air forces of the western spires began to doubt the capabilities of the Church to defend their lands. The lands west of the Straits of Oskol had once been the heart of the Decados kingdoms formed in the centuries after the Fall. Even when the Svit Uryad was formed, elements of Decados culture remained hidden in the ways of the people of this region. When this combined with the growing doubts of the fighter pilots and their Kapitans, it culminated in open rebellion. When a surprisingly organised horde of Khodak (who most Lotchyk had took to viewing as little more than animals) stormed the southern spire of Perevani Drotyk and overloaded its geothermal power stations, a cabal of Kapitans based in the spire of Mayak decided the Church had grown incapable of governing the World State. After 16 years of careful planning this cabal gained the support of most of the Lytsar pilots under their command, and overthrew the priesthoods of Mayak and two neighbouring spires.

The rebels succeeded in crushing the internal revolts that rocked the spires, and in a bid for legitimacy began claiming the long defunct titles of the old Decados rulers. The Kapitans adopted noble titles, and their leader, the newly declared Duke Baldak Decados, claimed Svarog in the name of his ancestors. The response of the Dumas was swift.

Shocked by the overthrow of the local





priests, an invasion was mounted in 4937. The Decados succeeded in fighting off this attack, and since then over twenty wars have been fought between these two states. Neither side has been able to gain a foothold in the other's territory, and a period of cold war has descended since the last war in 5003 ended in a stalemate.

The spires of the Decados Kingdom are undergoing considerable internal change. The Inzheners have been reduced to the level of servants to the military elite, forced to maintain their fighter craft and the power systems that make the wars possible. Much of the core religious beliefs remain the same, although heresy is more openly tolerated and the new rulers have refused to waste resources on the aerial rites (preferring instead equally elaborate military pageants). The Khodak are treated as harshly as elsewhere, although the supplies gained from raids supplement the food grown to an extent where the Khodak can keep enough for themselves to avoid starvation. The Lytsar have become much like Known World knights, although lesser noble titles are not hereditary, being granted in a manner similar to military rank. The culture of bravado and egoism seen in the Svit Uryad's fighter pilots has become practically a religion for the new Decados. Famed warriors are granted huge respect, and the lean pilots in their flowing black greatcoats festooned with religious icons and totems are an impressive sight.

The current Duke is one Luka Maksimovich-Decados, Baldak's great-nephew. Luka is a born killer, who has flown in battle since he was a child. Rumour holds that he is a *Vidma*, a witch and practitioner of the strange animist cult that has grown popular in the northern pirate spires. Certainly, he has formed a small cadre of psychics around him. He is said to be able to blind enemy pilots with a thought, sending them spiralling to their deaths. His elite fighters, called the *Koldun*, are probably the best pilots on this world of expert airmen, and their distinctive black and green planes can be seen engaging in play dogfights around the heights of Mayak every evening.

Duke Luka has cut back on the expansionist plans of his uncle, who died in the last war with the Sentinels. The young Duke still fully plans to take the world he sees as his birthright, but is canny enough to explore other avenues to this goal. He has sent emissaries to the pirate spires, hoping to form a greater alliance, but few of these have returned. He is considering trying to unite the Eastern rebels next, and has even thought of talking with the Khodak savages in the northern forests, to maybe

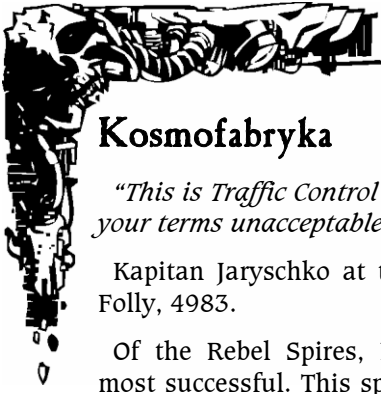
recruit them as infantry or saboteurs. Some of his uncle's advisors dislike the new Duke's 'rash notions', and some talk of deposing him if he doesn't renew the war within the year.

The Eastern Rebels

This is the term used by the leaders of the Svit Uryad to describe the six spires which lie in the eastern reaches of Liskrayina, along the Bosch Mountains to the west coast of the Nova Baltic. It is something of a misnomer, because of these spires, only one has voiced a formal desire to break all ties with the World State. This spire is Kosmofabryka, which stands in the heights of the Dosch Range, near the ruins of the old Republic spaceport. In 4867, tired by the lack of response to calls for aid in the growing famines, the Church of this spire simply announced that it would no longer send representatives to the Outer Duma, and would ignore future edicts of both the branches of government. Despite the fears of the spire's leaders, the Svit Uryad responded with silence, sending no retaliation force or even envoys to negotiate.

It became clear from this point that the core of the Svit Uryad had functionally abandoned the declining spires of the north, concentrating their relief efforts only on those closest to Osnova Odyn. The Dumas fully expected the more remote spires to fall like the four already engulfed by the encroaching ice, or to descend into barbarism like the Pirate Spires. One by one, the neighbouring spires of this region began abandoning their ties to the central government, until fully half of the continent lay outside the Svit Uryad's sphere of influence.

The Rebel Spires have not changed significantly in terms of culture since this separation. They are still led by their local priesthoods, and still practice the aerial rites. In addition, they still survive on the labour of their Khodak servants, although the level of oppression varies greatly between the spires. Like the other spires of the north, the Rebels have suffered greatly from the growing polar regions, and famine is a constant threat. The spires themselves are in poor repair, as young Inzheners can no longer travel to Malo Sontse for proper training. The spires are riddled with streaks of rust, and large sections lie abandoned and without power. None of the Rebel Spires have a population of over half a million, and several have initiated birth control restrictions to prevent food shortages.



Kosmofabryka

"This is Traffic Control to starship Ganesha. We find your terms unacceptable. Your Motion is exhausted."

Kapitan Jaryschko at the outbreak of the Mataran Folly, 4983.

Of the Rebel Spires, Kosmofabryka is by far the most successful. This spire lies in valley in the heart of the eastern Dosch Mountains, and as a result is in a uniquely defensible location from the attacks of the sky pirates. The Church of the spire is also in the unique position of being the only government on Svarog to have contact with offworld traders. Beginning in 4963, a small number of less than legitimate Known World merchants have come here, finding a market for contraband which would be too difficult to fence within the Empire. In addition, around the same time a number of trader princes from the Golcondan lost worlds began more large-scale trade. Kosmofabryka has done its best to accommodate these traders. They sell high-tech devices and sheets of ceramsteel and rare alloys scavenged from the two abandoned spires to the north in exchange for food and slaves from Penang and Kalimtan and luxury items and tech from the Known Worlds.

This relationship has proven enough to sustain the spire, which still hosts around 1.5 million inhabitants. The only upset in this trade came in 4983, when a Golcondan trader prince attempted to hold the spire to ransom, threatening to fire on it with his ship's lasers if his demands were not met. The spire responded with an attack by hundreds of its tiny fighter craft, which quickly overwhelmed the much larger starship's shields and sent it crashing into a nearby mountain. The wreckage can still be seen, and is calmly pointed out by the spire's negotiators when an offworld captain grows too belligerent.

Kosmofabryka has done its best to keep its contact with offworlders a secret, and gives dire warnings to visitors against exploring other spires, which they try to paint as being under the control of insane pirate lords. Sporadic attacks by sky pirates on Kosmofabryka itself have added weight to these stories, and the common traders and smugglers have not tried to push their luck by testing the spire's claims. On the other hand, the Decados agents that have begun arriving in the past decade have been slowly trying to get a better understanding of the planet's political situation, and are considering opening up secret relations with a faction of the Svit Uryad, or possibly the Decados

Kingdoms (who they view as simple pretenders, and have no intention of inviting back into the House unless doing so would present a clear advantage).

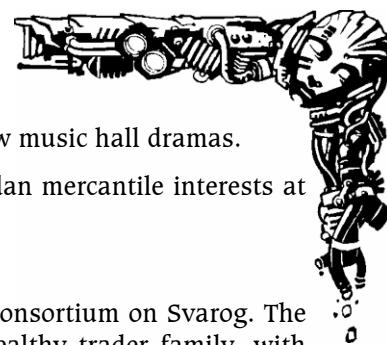
Offworld Relations

The Leaders of Kosmofabryka have set aside a fifteen level section near the top of their spire as a foreign quarter. Here, offworld traders are permitted to land and sell their goods. Contact with the citizens of the spire is kept to a bare minimum, and all negotiations have to go through a complex set of customs departments and trade officials. The level of bureaucracy is such that, unless one goes through one of the established negotiators such as Josef Kiyoda-Toa or the Jirair Consortium, all but the most basic trade is nearly impossible. Except for the large-scale Golcondan traders, visitors receive a polite but cold reception. Lytsar squads constantly patrol around the spire, and the customs officials make a point of showing the explosives rigged to the docking pylons and the wreckage of the Mataran Folly. Still, very few are turned away, except for those the Jirair want rid of and those who are known to have gone beyond the Dosch Mountains.

The foreigners quarter is very heavily influenced by the Golcondan culture of the majority of the traders. The sparse corridors and modernist rooms of the spire have been decorated with rich mosaics and statues of NeoHindu deities. The Svarogans tut at this, thinking all the decorations to be nothing more than frivolous firetraps. Still, elements of Golcondan fashion are becoming popular among the younger Lotchyk, particularly jewellery. A small number of hostels, brothels and NeoHindu and Zuranist shrines have been built to accommodate visitors. A small population of permanent residents run these businesses, and sell their services as translators and guides.

The Lotchyk remain largely separate, with most interaction being with the flashily dressed Lytsar officers or Inzheners in their stark black and white robes. Still, curious parties on both sides exist, with illicit meetings taking place. A black-market of sorts exists, where Lotchyk can buy such unknown luxuries as spices and fresh meat. Dalliances between young Lotchyk and the 'glamorous' offworlders are also becoming more common, despite official disapproval.





The Golcondan Merchants

The vast majority are free traders from Penang and Kalimtan. They sell food and slaves in return for high-tech alloys and machinery. While Svarog is common knowledge to the independent traders, keys are rare, and only a handful of competing interests come here. Svarog is widely known to Golcondans as a frozen hell of crazy people who are terrified of dirt (they're not really, but the sterile environment of the spire means that they tend to look down on the untidy) and die if they touch the ground.

These trader princes have very good relations with the spire's leaders. They do their best to stay at the top of the pecking order in regards to the offworlders. The fleets of these trader princes get preferential docking and refuelling privileges, and receive the best contracts. Beneath them are the various ambassadors from most of the Golcondan governments (who the spire is polite to but largely ignores), then the Known World traders (who are seen as unreliable but useful scum). The spire has been known to take care of 'problems' for its favoured trade partners. The Golcondan traders try to keep aloof of their Known World counterparts, viewing them (quite rightly) as untrustworthy pirates. There was a spate of attacks on Golcondan vessels leaving Svarog between 4997 and 5001, until a trader prince identified the attackers as the *Sable Vorox*, a pirate vessel out of Cadavus. The crew were captured and executed by the spire's authorities when they landed for fuel, although some escaped and are thought to be living with the Khodak savages in the mountains.

Most Golcondans accept the wild tales the leaders of Kosmofabryka tell them to discourage exploration of the planet. This is mainly to maintain the good relations with the spire, but also as the Svarogans are happy to bring goods to them. It tends to be the more adventurous (i.e. desperate) Known Worlders who go exploring.

The Matarani have access to Svarog, but since one of their captains tried without success to annex the spire they are very wary of it. Their leaders plot a second attack, but have too many other concerns to set aside the forces needed. The Mataran Folly, as the disastrous attack has come to be known, is still a blow to Matarani pride, and one they fully intend to rectify when the time is right. Since the destruction of the Matarani ship, the priests of Kosmofabryka refuse to trade with anyone with disfiguring injuries, and Matarani must now trade through independent middle men. Matarani have become figures of ridicule to the Svarogans, and appear as

pathetic villains in low brow music hall dramas.

The three leading Golcondan mercantile interests at Kosmofabryka are:

Vrij Jirair

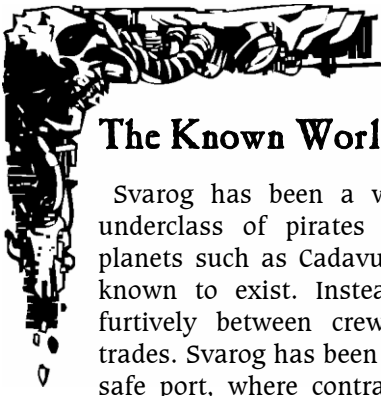
Vrij represents the Jirair Consortium on Svarog. The Jirair family is a vastly wealthy trader family, with holdings on both Kalimtan and Penang and exclusive trade contracts on Mataran. It was a ship in the employ of the Jirair that first successfully jumped to Svarog in 4968. Since then, the Jirair are responsible for most of the slave trade with Svarog. Vrij is an elderly man, who has lived on Svarog for over 30 years and has become acclimatised to the world's odd culture. He has excellent relations with High Inzhener Polina Yanova, who is tasked by the Holy Council with the governance of the Foreign Quarter. He even owns a specially built airplane with a Lytsar pilot on retainer. The Jirair do their best to hold a monopoly on Svarogian jumpkeys, only handing out the small quantity they own to trusted employees. There have been a few exceptions to the monopoly over the years, but the Consortium can be ruthless in preventing large competitors from muscling in on their cash cow.

Sir Kaliq Keddah-al-Malik

A young, disgraced noble from Penang. It is not entirely clear how he got access to Svarog, but his family are powerful enough that the other Golcondan merchants have not challenged his presence here. Kaliq runs a fleet of three traders, dealing mainly in luxury goods and foodstuffs. His egalitarian upbringing means he opposes the slave trade, and refuses to deal in human cargo despite Kosmofabryka's great appetite for labour. He is the most open of the Golcondan factions, and will happily negotiate with Known Worlders. He is particularly interested in buying information on the worlds and factions of the Phoenix Empire.

Hayati

Hayati is a trader prince from Kalimtan. She bought a key five years ago from the Jirair, and her ship has specialised in trading foodstuffs ever since. She is also pretty openly involved in smuggling, trading illicitly with the Lotchyk without the permission of the Enerhiyist Church. She has found ready markets for various drugs and other luxuries among the spire's citizens. It is theorised that she is blackmailing Vrij Jirair in some way, as she has generally gone unchallenged. Both the Jirair and the Inzheners are unhappy about her presence, but tolerate it for now as a minor nuisance.



The Known World Merchants

Svarog has been a whispered secret among the underclass of pirates and smugglers who haunt planets such as Cadavus and Manitou. No keys are known to exist. Instead, the jumpcode is passed furtively between crews as part of black-market trades. Svarog has been used for nearly 50 years as a safe port, where contraband can be sold for much needed repairs and supplies without alerting the noble and Imperial authorities. Especially since the chaos of the Emperor Wars has ended, and the powers that be have reclaimed control of their domains, Svarog is seen as one of a rapidly dwindling number of Free Ports.

The leading Known Worlders with a strong presence in Kosmofabryka are:

Captain Josef Kiyoda-Toa

A Zuranist pirate from Madoc, Captain Josef is a relative of the Storm Wife of Manitou, and has extensive links with the pirates of the Eyrie on that world. Having reached middle age without dying horribly, Josef is seeking to settle down, and has done so by becoming a sort of informal ambassador to the Enerhiyist authorities. He acts as a middle man, using his gift for languages and diplomacy to smooth out trade agreements between Known Worlder crews and the authorities. His ship, the Coyote's Eye, is now captained by his niece and her Lotchyk lover. Josef is in many ways the counterpart to Vrij Jirair, although the latter deeply resents the comparison. Josef is a good-natured giant of a man, who the Lotchyk respect for his considerable skill as a pilot. Most newcomers to Svarog will be approached by one of his family and offered his services as a mediator, for a small fee of course.

Lucita Draven

A smuggler from Cadiz, Lucita is in fact a Jakovian agent, leading the Decados exploration of Svarog. Lucita has been operating here for ten years, and has yet to be discovered. She hires the crews of pirate vessels on their first trip to Svarog to mount 'scouting missions'. These involve flying to a location on the planet and observing the situation there, and then kidnapping a few locals to be taken back to Cadiz for questioning. Already, such 'ambassadors' from Kryha Hora, the Svit Uryad and the Povstanets Alyans have been seized. The latter, a hardened guerrilla, managed to kill his guards and has fled somewhere into the slums of Cadiz. In the past year, two of these scouts have failed to return. A third, the *Maid of Sunval*, limped back to Kosmofabryka after being captured by the

pirates of Kryha Hora. The crew of this ship still hold a grudge against Lucita, and have threatened to spread word of the Decados' dealings here in revenge.

In recent years, Lucita has also been involved in selling Selchakah to the Lotchyk. The Svarogans are not aware of the devastatingly addictive nature of this drug, and have allowed its sale. Now several high-placed Inzheners and Kapitans are thoroughly addicted to the stuff. The Decados have been careful not to exploit this advantage yet, but may do so when rivals from the Empire begin appearing.

Captain Dreja Vordwed

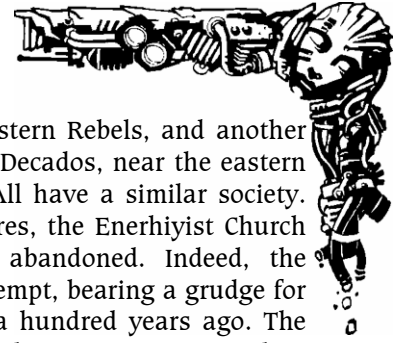
Dreja is an Aylon Ukari and captain of the *Maid of Sunval*. A hero of the Ukari Uprising, Dreja was on the losing side, and turned to piracy after the war. She still has an impressive price on her head from the al-Malik authorities of her homeworld. Now, she is involved in the black-market operated within the Ukari ghettos between Cadiz and Istakhr. Svarog is the end destination for those goods to hot for sale in the Empire, in particular restricted tech which the Inzheners are always interested in examining. Wanted Ukari criminals have a tendency of ending up among her personal servants in her quarters in Kosmofabryka.

The *Maid* is unique among the pirates of Svarog in having a very thorough understanding of the other polities of Svarog. Hired by Lucita Decados to scout the abandoned spires of the north, the ship was downed and captured by Kapitán Danil Romanavichi of Kryha Hora. Held for six months, the crew was forced to tell all they knew of the Empire to the pirate leader. In turn, they discovered much from captured Svit Uryad and Svarogan Decados slaves before they were inexplicably released. An attempt by Lucita to have them barred from Kosmofabryka failed when the ship managed to get Captain Josef and Sir Kaliq Keddah-al-Malik to speak in their favour to the spire's leaders in exchange for their information. The Inzheners were persuaded that the ship was captured by pirates, but learned nothing during its imprisonment. The ship's presence is still a source of tension, and Dreja could easily upset the complex network of alliances among the offworld traders if she revealed what she knows.

Sir Jarak the Red

Jarak the Red was Dreja's purser. This Aylonian human was looking to enter the Lotus trade on Manitou when he was captured by Li Halan vigilantes. He managed to ensure his survival by selling his story of Svarog to the MTC, and his report was copied down by his cellmate,





the Republican poet and agitator Gerard Montar. Both men were freed for their contribution to the Empire. Montar has returned to his native Manitou, refusing offers of a title in disgust, but 'Sir' Jarak has become something of a celebrity. Even the jaded courtesans of the Imperial Court find humour in the presence of a pirate at their social gatherings. Jarak has been helping arrange separate expeditions by both the Questing Knights and the Charioteers. More than one pirate captain has demanded his head for this act of 'betrayal' against his kind.

The Pirate Spires

When the Polar Regions began to expand in the 4700s, the first spires to be affected were those lying to the north of the Dosch Mountains. By the present day, four spires have been abandoned entirely, the vast ice-covered ruins now being home to only a few salvage teams from Kosmofabryka looking for scrap metals and electronics to sell to their offworld markets. When the encroaching ice first began to threaten, the leadership of the Svit Uryad organised massive relief operations, relocating the populations to the more southern spires. However, by the 49th century, problems of overcrowding and famine, combined with the growing apathy of the religious leaders on Letovysche, meant that no such measures were made available to the mountain spires who now found their farms replaced with tundra.

By the mid-49th century, several of these spires suffered bloody internal revolts, as panic over famine spread. Hunger and disease led to a rapidly falling population, and much of the Khodak fled into the deep mountains to avoid complete starvation (these groups are now said to live as violent cannibals, attacking any who brave the mountain passes by foot. As very few of the Lotchyk would ever deign to walk the surface, there is no hard evidence to say whether this is the case). As a means of survival, some of the airmen of the spire of Kryha Hora, which lies in the mountains north of the Straits of Oskol, began mounting raids on the Khodak farms of their neighbours, stealing crops and slaves. These raiders gained the title of *Nebo Zlodiy*, or sky pirates, and were the first serious military threat to face the Svit Uryad in its 500 year history.

Kryha Hora has remained the largest and most dangerous of the Sky Pirate spires, attacking both the Svit Uryad and the Decados Kingdoms whenever it perceives a weakness in either state's defences. Several other spires have resorted to the same tactics, three lying in the mountains between

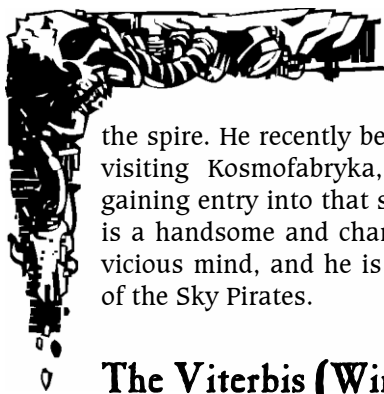
the Svit Uryad and the Eastern Rebels, and another two north and west of the Decados, near the eastern coast of the Nova Baltic. All have a similar society. Much like the Decados spires, the Enerhiyist Church has been overthrown or abandoned. Indeed, the pirates hold priests in contempt, bearing a grudge for their 'abandonment' over a hundred years ago. The pirate spires have tiny populations, never more than ten thousand or so, the rest having long since fled or starved. Each spire has several gangs of raiders, each of which holds a few hundred aircraft. Dwellers in the spires must gain the respect of a gang leader to fly with them, and doing so is the only way to ensure a steady supply of food and protection from the other gangs that roam the rusting corridors.

In recent decades, a replacement to the Eherhiyist faith has begun to appear among the pirates. Centred in Kryha Hora, this new, informal animistic religion worships a host of wind spirits and demons. Practitioners, called *Vidma*, offer sacrifices to these various little gods, and sell charms and totems to fellow pirates to decorate their planes and flight suits. This religion has begun to become popular with the younger Decados nobles, largely to try and gain favour with the Duke who is rumoured to be a Vidma himself. It is clear that the Vidma cult includes some psychics, a discipline long dismissed and unpractised by the Enerhiyists. This give the sky pirates an edge against the better trained and equipped planes of their targets.

The Vidma are particularly common in Kryha Hora, where the faith may have originated. One of the spire's three main gang leaders is Mama Deryaya, an aged crone who claims to be the daughter of the Great Ice Wind, the spirit of the northern glaciers. She rules from the top of the spire, and is said to dwell in a chamber open to the air, where she can miraculously survive the freezing winds and low oxygen. She still leads raids despite her age, and is rumoured to be in some kind of alliance with the young Decados duke.

The Mama is growing in power within the spire, but is still opposed by two rivals. King Oleg Vedmid is a huge brutal man who runs a small slave kingdom in the lower reaches of the spire. He has been targeting the aircraft of Inzheners, hoping to seize someone with the ability to restore the spire's geothermal engines. The mid-levels are ruled by Kapitan Danil Romanavichi. A surprisingly young man, the Kapitan seized control over three rival gangs in a series of brilliant and ruthless manoeuvres. The Kapitan focuses on negotiation far more than his rivals, acting as a mediating force in the politics of





the spire. He recently became aware of the spacecraft visiting Kosmofabryka, and is very interested in gaining entry into that source of wealth. The Kapitan is a handsome and charming man, but this covers a vicious mind, and he is perhaps the most dangerous of the Sky Pirates.

The Viterbis (Wind Devils)

In the freezing wastes of the north, numerous strange cults have begun to spring up among the Pirate Spires, as the survivors seek for meaning beyond the faith of the Inzheners who abandoned them. These sects are collectively known as Vidma (witches) by the civilised spires. Still, even in their ranks, there are some who are shunned and reviled by all.

No one knows where the Viterbis originated from, although common myth holds that they were citizens of one of the polar spires who refused to abandon their homes during the evacuation. They first began to prey on their neighbours in the early 49th century. Initially, Viterbis attacks were rare, and often confused with the slave raids of the Sky Pirates. However, the northern Svit Uryad spires have noticed a different mode of behaviour for these groups. They mount bloody raids against the Khodak, butchering villages and burning crops. Gory stories speak of the Viterbis raiders eating human flesh, making grisly fetishes from their victims and destroying loot that would seem valuable.

Even the Sky Pirates hate and fear the Viterbis. Those Vidma who will talk about them say they consort with 'the dark spirits of the White Wastes' and Mama DERNYAYA in particular makes a habit of killing any she encounters. How these raiders can keep their aircraft running is a mystery, as they are often barely functional. In recent years, the Viterbis seem to have swelled in numbers and grown bolder. Last year, a wing of black planes flew straight into one of the airship bays of the spire of Sekvoyia, killing over a hundred in the resulting explosions.

Captured Viterbis often die before they will talk. It is not entirely clear if many of them still understand human speech. Those that can converse boast of being children of *Nehatyv*, the entropic end of all Motion. They claim that the Enerhiya is unravelling, the Holy Engine grinding to a halt. They seek to speed up the process. Those Inzheners who have studied these nihilists are at a loss to comprehend where their suicidal beliefs could have come from, as

they have no clear basis in Eherhiyist religion.

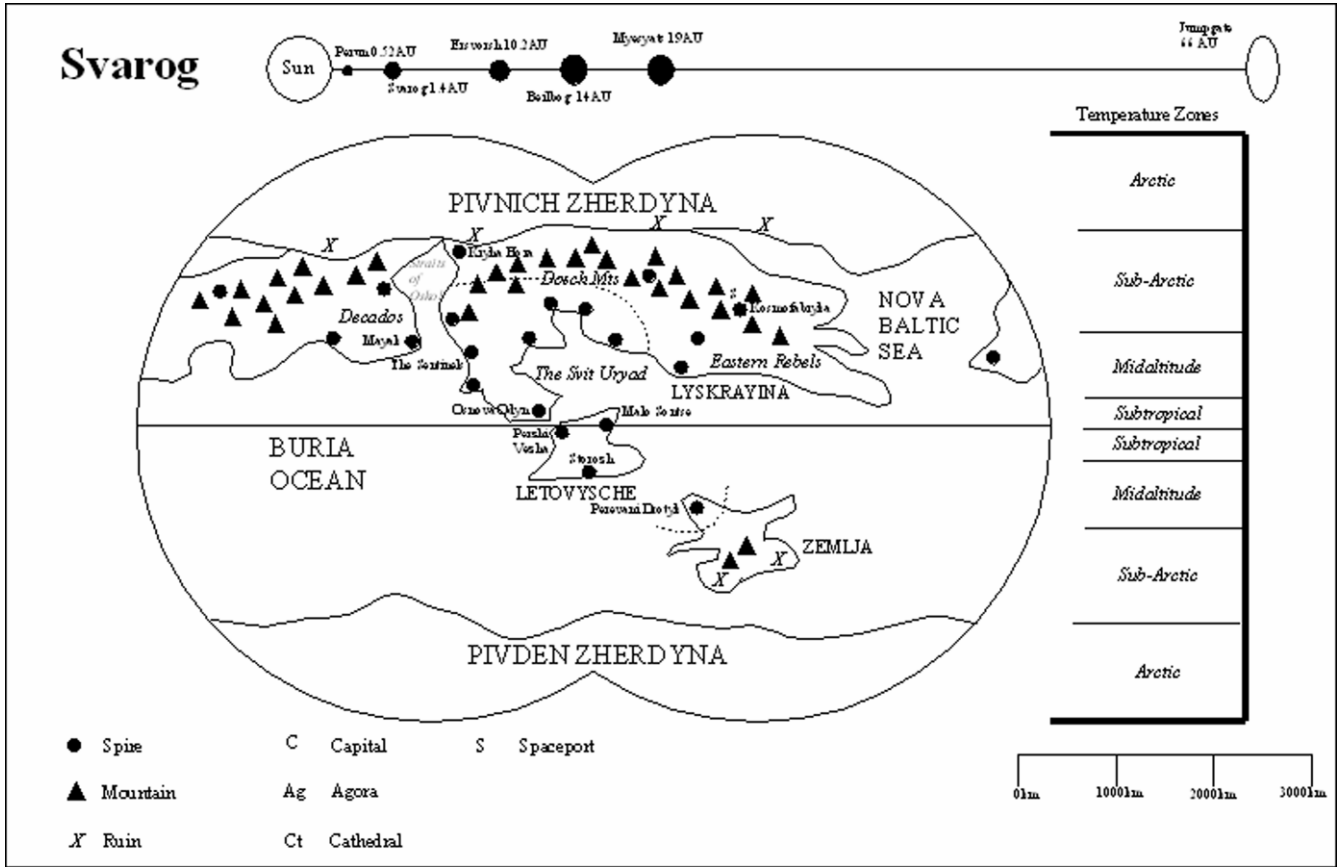
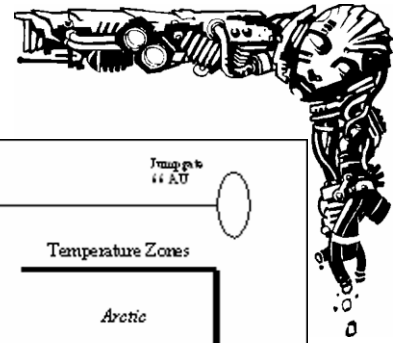
The Povstanets Al'yans

The southern island of Zemlja is unique in being in the hands of the hated Khodak. During the height of the Svit Uryad, Zemlja was considered too arid and rocky to be suitable for widespread habitation. As a result, only three spires were built here. As the glaciation began, the southern two spires were evacuated, leaving their Khodak serfs to their fate. For the next 200 years, the majority of the island was ignored, with the Svit Uryad only maintaining a token presence in the spire of Perevani Drotyk on the northern coast.

This period of indifference ended in 4914, when Lotchyk scouts spotted a number of mid-sized towns being built in the hills of the interior by the descendants of the Khodak. Realising that the Khodak had thrived since their abandonment, and hoping to harness them again as a source of labour, the Inner Duma ordered Perevani Drotyk to pacify the 'rebels', and to prepare them for shipment to the failing farms in the north. Unsurprisingly, the Khodak responded with violence, and the Svit Uryad began air raids, targeting the larger settlements. In 4920, the Khodak struck back. It is still a mystery how the peasant army managed to successfully storm Perevani Drotyk, but a team of saboteurs entered and destroyed the geothermal engines, gutting much of the spire in the explosion. Now, Perevani Drotyk still stands, but is a blackened ruin. The top third of the tower has broken away, and what remains, lists at an alarming angle. Tales of great technological treasures within the spire are popular, and bored Lotchyk occasionally mount expeditions to pick through the ruin.

After the destruction of Perevani Drotyk, the Svit Uryad responded with firebombing campaigns against the known Khodak towns. However, by the time the reprisals began, most large settlements had been abandoned. Now the Khodak, who are known as the Povstanets Al'yans by their enemies, live in a series of small temporary settlements and underground refuges. The war has dragged on for nearly a century, with the Svit Uryad leading offensives from one of the great *Povitria* airships permanently docked a few miles offshore. Fighting the Povstanets is considered to be a great honour by the Lytsar fighters, and many young pilots hope to gain renown here. The war would be one-sided, if not for the ability of the Khodak to blend into the countryside, and the use crude rocket





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launchers and clever ambushes to even the odds. The greatest weapons of the Povstanets are the *mechsoldat*. These appear to be converted farming golems, rebuilt for war. They are roughly humanoid, standing around 15' tall. They are studded with missiles and machine guns scavenged from crashed gunships, and are strong enough to take considerable damage in a firefight.

Very little is known about the Povstanets Al'yans, especially as the Inner Duma does its best to hide any real information from the citizens of the Svit Uryad (most of whom see the rebels as little more than dangerous animals). They are thought to live in small clans, which only unite in the face of large attacks. They seem to have built up a level of technology unseen elsewhere among the ground walkers. Some theorise that they are aided by a fifth column within the Svit Uryad, and several Khodak 'sympathizers' are uncovered and executed each year by the Inner Duma's Investigators. More likely is the possibility that the Khodak have gained their knowledge by exploring the abandoned spires to the south. The Povstanets also include in their number the small number of Hironem who have survived on Svarog. Descendants of workers

brought in by EGO, they lived in the hills of Zemlja, having refused to join the Svit Uryad when it formed. Legend holds that they dwell in an underground city, modelled on their ancestors' home of Turaz on Cadiz. It is now thought that this city is the centre of the Khodak resistance, although its location remains a mystery.

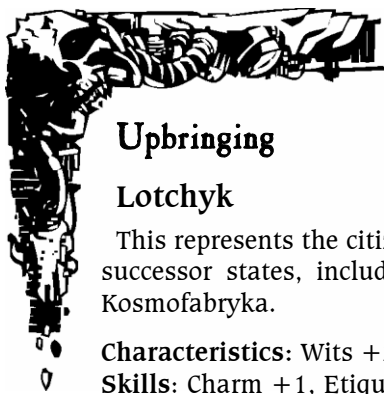
Game Rules

Those Who Soar: Svarogan Character Histories

The following character histories represent the unique cultures of the world of Svarog.

These rules are primarily designed for human characters. To create a Hironem PC, use the Illa Upbringing from *Orphaned Races: Ascorbites & Hironem*, and then follow the Khodak path below.





Upbringing

Lotchyk

This represents the citizens of the Svit Uryad and its successor states, including the Decados Spires and Kosmofabryka.

Characteristics: Wits +2, Tech +2, Faith +1

Skills: Charm +1, Etiquette 1, Read Svarogan (2pts), Lore (Home Spire) 1

Blessing: Loyal (+2 Passion when following leader)

Curse: Delusional (-2 Perception when confronted with the decaying state of their way of life)

Failing Spire

Not all of the Spires have survived the chaos of the past two centuries unscathed. The dwellers in the so-called 'pirate' spires must fight for survival in their decaying and lawless homes.

Characteristics: Wits +2, Perception +2, Ego OR Faith +1

Skills: Observe +1, Sneak +2, Knavery 1, Survival 1

Blessing: Suspicious (+2 Perception when rivals about)

Curse: Callous (-2 Passion when asked for aid)

Khodak

This upbringing represents both those wretches who live in constant fear of their aerial masters, and those few who have sought to flee from or attack their oppressors.

Characteristics: Strength +2, Endurance +2, Faith +1

Skills: Vigor +1, Beast Lore 1, Lore (Regional) 1, Survival 2

Blessing: Alert (+2 Perception when trying to remain undetected)

Curse: Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers)

Apprenticeship

The majority of Lotchyk will follow careers similar to Known World freemen, although formal guilds do not exist. 'Tame' Khodak use the *Those Who Toil: Peasants* character history tree by Colin Chapman (available from the *Fading Suns Renaissance* website).

Inzhener Priest

The brightest youths in the Svit Uryad are sent to be trained in the great university-cathedral of Malo Sontse. Even in the rebel spires, a few still train in the practices of the Enerhiyist tech priests.

Characteristics: Wits +2, Tech +1, Faith +2

Skills: Focus 2, Science (Engineering) 1, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Think Machine 1

Lytsar Fighter Pilot

Many young Lotchyk compete to join the ranks of the dashing, arrogant sky knights who protect their spires.

Characteristics: Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert +1

Skills: Observe +1, Shoot +2, Drive Aircraft 2, Etiquette 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2

Sky Pirate

A lucky few in the failing spires succeed in joining the powerful pirate gangs, raiding neighbouring spires for food, fuel and slaves.

Characteristics: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Perception +2

Skills: Impress +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Drive Aircraft 2, Science (Meteorology) 1, Survival 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2

Povstanets (Guerrilla)

Growing numbers of Khodak are unwilling to accept their lot, and in the south many thousands have joined the Povstanets Al'yans to strike back at their masters.

Characteristics: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Perception +1, Passion +1

Skills: Observe +2, Shoot +1, Sneak +2, Vigor +2, Lore (Zemlja Highlands) 1, Survival 2

Early Career

Inzhener Mechanic

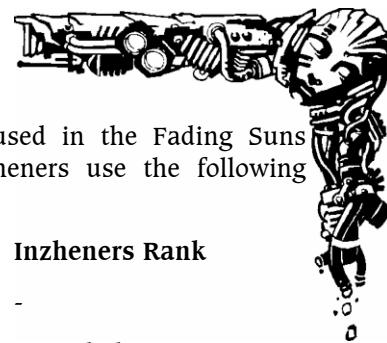
Upon graduation from the university at Malo Sontse, the majority of Inzheners return to their home spires to maintain the infrastructure and aircraft of their congregation.

Characteristics: Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Introvert OR Extrovert +1, Calm +1, Faith +2

Skills: Observe +1, Focus 2, Science (Engineering) 2, Science (Physics) 2, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Think Machine 2

Benefice: Rank (Novachok)





Inzhener Administrator

Each year, a smaller number of Inzhener graduates choose to pursue political careers, hoping in time to rise to a seat on the Dumas. This career represents those who choose this path, as well as the diplomats appointed by Kosmofabryka to interact with the offworlders.

Characteristics: Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +2, Extrovert +2, Passion OR Calm +2, Faith +1, Ego +1

Skills: Impress +1, Observe +2, Academia 2, Bureaucracy 2, Empathy 1, Etiquette 1, Lore (Law) 2, Lore (Home Spire) 2, Lore (Rival Spires) 2

Benefice: Rank (Novachok)

Lytsar Fighter Pilot

Characteristics: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion OR Calm +1, Extrovert +1, Faith OR Ego +1

Skills: Charm OR Impress +2, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Drive Aircraft 3, Lore (Home Spire) 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 3

Benefice: Rank (Lytsar)

Sky Pirate

Characteristics: Str +1, Dex +2, End +2, Tech +1, Passion OR Calm +1, Extrovert +2, Faith OR Ego +1

Skills: Impress +2, Fight OR Melee +2, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Drive Aircraft 3, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2

Benefice: Refuge (3pts)

Povstanets Guerrilla

Characteristics: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Passion +1, Extrovert OR Introvert +1, Faith OR Ego +1

Skills: Dodge +1, Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +2, Sneak +2, Vigor +1, Lore (Zemlja Highlands) 1, Remedy 2, Survival 1

Benefice: Refuge (3pts)

Extra Stages

Any Svarogan characters can take the **Tour of Duty Extra Stages**. It is highly recommended that all Lotchyk characters spend some of their skill points on Drive Aircraft. Lytsar and Sky Pirates must take their aircraft (usually a *Zbroya* gunship) in place of the **Worldly Benefits** from their first Tour of Duty, and other Lotchyk may do the same to receive a *Litak* civilian plane.

In place of the names used in the Fading Suns rulebook, Lytsar and Inzheners use the following ranks:

Pts	Lytsar Rank	Inzheners Rank
0	Kadet (cadet)	-
3	Lytsar (airman)	Novachok (apprentice)
5	Leytenant (flight lieutenant)	Mehkanik (deacon)
7	Komandyr (wing commander)	Inzhener (priest)
9	Kapitan (captain)	Planeta Inzhener (terraformer)
11	-	Verkhovnyy Inzhener (bishop)

Since the usurpation, the Svarogan Decados have begun to use old noble titles interchangeably with the above terms.

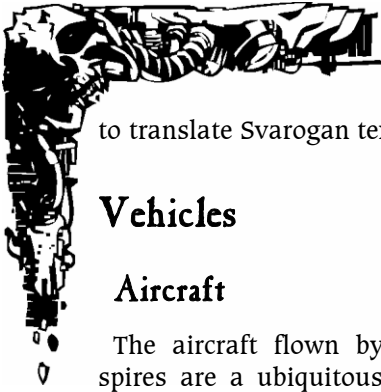
In the case of Khodak and Sky Pirate characters, rank should be used to represent the informal prestige the character holds amongst their people.

Only the Svit Uryad, the Decados and Kosmofabryka have maintained the technology to allow for the **Cybernetics Extra Stage**.

Although it is possible to create a psychic Lotchyk, the Enerhiyist Church has long denied the existence of such powers. As a result, only the Natal Psi Extra Stage is appropriate for Svit Uryad and Kosmofabryka characters. The growth of the Vidma pagans in the north has begun to overcome this cultural restriction, and Sky Pirates can take any **Psychic Extra Stage** or **Theurgy Extra Stage** to represent training as a shaman. Vidma rites are identical to those of the Contemplative Gjartins.

Svarogan Language

The language of the Svit Uryad on Svarog is an amalgam of various ancient Urth dialects, particularly from the Slavic and northern Baltic nations. In the time since the Fall, it has changed dramatically, losing all but a token similarity to Urthish. It is a very logical language, deliberately codified by Enerhiyist mathematicians. As a result, most Known Worlders cannot understand the Svarogan dialect. Natives of Severus and Cadiz may attempt to translate using a Wits+Observe roll, at a -6 penalty. Those who can read Urthtech can attempt



to translate Svarogian texts with a similar penalty.

Vehicles

Aircraft

The aircraft flown by many citizens of Svarog's spires are a ubiquitous image of this world. Many different models and designs exist within the Svit Uryad, and many more have been jury-rigged by the mechanics of the sky pirates. Most citizens fly in small, one or two-man fixed wing craft. These are relatively small, carrying only the pilot and a small amount of cargo. They tend to resemble incredibly sleek versions of early aircraft, covered in chrome and religious icons. Jet aircraft exist, but most tend to prefer slower models. Manoeuvrability is vastly preferred over speed. Standard propulsion is via a small fusion engine. Some common models follow.

Litak Airplane

Speed: 500km/hr

Armour: 6d

Fuel: Fusion

RNG: 1000km

Cargo: 1 ton

People: 1/0

Vitality: Ruin/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

Weapons: None

Tech Level: 6

Firebird Cost: None. Provided free to loyal citizens.

The Litak is a standard model for many civilian aircraft. By law, they cannot be armed except when activated to serve in the local militia. These craft are generally used for travel between spires and religious ceremonies.

A militia airplane has a Lt. Machinegun (DMG 7) and 2 Armour Piercing Missiles (DMG 15, halve target's armour) fitted.

Zbroya Gunship

Speed: 600km/hr

Armour: 8d

Fuel: Fusion

RNG: 700km

Cargo: 200kg

People: 1/0

Vitality: Ruin/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Weapons: See below

Tech Level: 6

Firebird Cost: None. Military vehicles only.

Notes: +2 to Drive Aircraft rolls.

The Zbroya is built on the same chassis as a basic civilian aircraft, but with a modified engine designed for manoeuvrability over range and a number of inbuilt weapons systems. This is the traditional aircraft of the Lytsar fighter pilots of both the Svit Uryad and the Decados Kingdoms. Zbroya can be rigged as either anti-aircraft or bomber planes.

Fighter Load

2 Hvy. Machineguns (DMG 10)

2 High Explosive Missiles (DMG 20, 20m area of effect)

OR

Armour Piercing Missiles (DMG 15, Halves target's armour)

Bomber Load

Lt. Machinegun (DMG 7)

4 High Explosive Bombs (DMG 20, 20m area of effect)

OR

Fire Bombs (DMG 10, see rules for Flamegun, 15m area of effect)

Notes

Larger military aircraft exist, but are rarely used except in the epic air wars periodically fought between the Decados and the Svit Uryad.

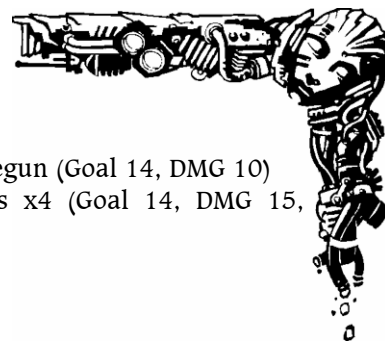
Pirate aircraft tend to be based on scavenged civilian craft, but without the strict protocols of the Enerhiyist mechanics. Designs and weapon systems can be radically different. As a general rule, pirates prefer light aircraft designed for anti-air combat.

The Lytsar of Kosmofabryka are the only ones to make regular use of laser weaponry. Svit Uryad military technology runs a few centuries behind its general tech base due to the long period of peace between 4200 and 4800. Kosmofabryka has begun buying ship-grade medium lasers (DMG 12) from illegal scavenger ships and fitting them to a small elite force of fighter planes. These replace the machineguns.

Mechsoldat

These golems are the best asset the Povstanets Al'yans has in its war for survival. These giant robots have no set appearance or weaponry, each being hand-made by a small number of Khodak who have recovered the technical knowledge of their ancestors. They are clumsy, clunking machines, but remarkably effective at the same time. Generally, mechsoldats are used in ambushes, targeting aircraft





that are lured into the narrow rocky gorges of Zemlja's interior hills. Most vary between 15' to 25' in height. A typical model is described here.

Tech Level: 5

Body: Strength 15 (+4 DMG bonus), Dexterity 6, Endurance 15

Mind: Wits 4, Perception 7, Tech 2

Natural Skills: Dodge 4, Fight 8, Impress 8, Shoot 8, Vigor 15

Learned Skills: Warfare (Gunnery) 8, Warfare (Tactics) 5

Armour: 10d (thick metal plating)

Vitality:

Wrecked/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Weapons:

Punch (Goal 14, DMG 8)

Arm Mounted Hvy. Machinegun (Goal 14, DMG 10)

Shoulder Mounted Missiles x4 (Goal 14, DMG 15, Half target's armour)

Author's Note

If any readers are wondering what all this talk of 'Golcondan Worlds' is, I have taken the liberty of drawing on Chris Hogan's excellent work on a non-canon cluster of Lost Worlds of that name. They can be found, along with a wealth of other setting ideas, on the *Empire of the Phoenix Throne* website.



Lost World: Leng

By Jack Oldham

History

The history of Leng is a long one, beginning with the first expansion into the Jumpweb made by the zaibatsu rulers of the First Republic. The system was discovered from Aragon by corporate explorers in 2431. The rocky, desolate world they found, with an atmosphere choked by hundreds of active volcanoes, was of little interest to the TDA, the agricorp giant that ruled the neighbouring worlds of Aragon and Vera Cruz. The world remained unclaimed until 2455, when it was purchased in whole by a Sino-Japanese mining consortium called Jinzi Kuangshan Ltd. Working in tandem with the industrialist oligarchy that controlled much of East Asia during the First Republic, JKL arranged for the transport of tens of thousands of indentured workers from various minority ethnic groups (primarily Tibetan, Mongolian and Nepalese) to construct their mining operations on the world they called Xizang.

Conditions on Xizang were harsh even by the standards of other industrial worlds of the time. Distracted by the wars between the TDA and Kanawha corporations on Aragon, the Republican authorities did nothing in response to the rumours of endemic deaths and injuries in the Jinzi Kuangshan work camps. The rulers of Xizang mined the rich seams of heavy metals, gemstones and radioactive minerals found in the planet's mountain chains. Use of explosives and vast earthwork operations destroyed entire mountains, and the scars of these first mining operations can still be seen to the present day. Cut off from Urth, the TUW workers were treated as chattel. Some attempts at primitive terraforming, using genetically designed plant life to increase the oxygen in the atmosphere, succeeded in making Xizang's atmosphere breathable, but toxins remained in the air. Sickness from noxious volcanic gases and native bacteria remained a constant threat.

The end of the Jinzi Kuangshan government came in the early years of the 26th century. When the First Republic began to unwind in the wake of the Sathra Revolts, the governors of Xizang found themselves cut off from their superiors on Earth. Sensing the weakness of their masters, revolts began to break out in the more remote mining

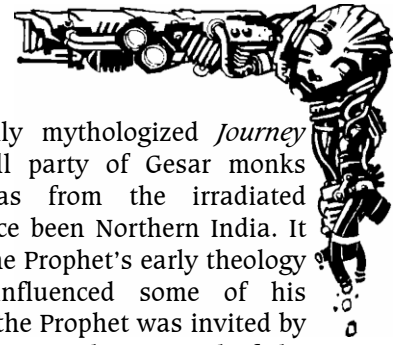
complexes. The insurrection spread rapidly, forcing the corporate authorities to retreat to their capital and the world's sole spaceport. Initially disorganised, the revolt began to coalesce around one man. The identity of this man remains a matter of speculation, although it seems likely he was one of thousands of political dissidents sent to work in concentration camps on Xizang in the 2490s. Drawing both on anti-corp and religious rhetoric, he succeeded in crushing the Jinzi Kuangshan government after 4 years of bloody warfare. In the ruins of the Corp stronghold (later the site of the capital city of Bya Lung Pa), he was hailed by his followers as the reincarnation of King Gesar, a folk hero of old Tibet. The iconography of the First Gesar that survives depicts a scarred man wearing a tattered red robe over combat armour, holding a broken frapstick in one hand and a budding lotus in the other.

In the chaos of the early Diaspora, the Gesar Rebels consolidated their control of Xizang, renaming the world Leng, and began to spread to neighbouring worlds. This early period saw a great cultural revival.

Leng Traits

Ruler: Consul Simon Solace (The Great Valley)
Cathedral: Mt. Gngas Monastery (Nyima Buddhist)
Agora: Bya Lung Pa (Muster)
Garrison: 2
Capitol: Bya Lung Pa (Muster)
Jumps: 3
Adjacent Worlds: Grail (dayside), Rimpoche (parallel), Zud (parallel), Chomolangma (nightside), New Amhara (nightside)
Solar System: Skarma (Sun), Me Bya (0.338AU), Leng (1.1AU), Bruk (23 moons, 15.6AU), Bstansig (56-58AU), Jumpgate (60AU)
Tech: 2 (4 in Nagara)
Human Population: 23 million
Alien Population: 5 million Etyri, 40,000 Obun
Resources: Slaves, metals, gemstones, radioactives, jade, religious texts and artwork, fire coral, herd animals
Exports: Slaves





The Gesar reintroduced those elements of Tibetan and Mongolian culture that could be remembered after the destruction of most historical records during the revolts. A form of theocratic monarchy developed. The Gesar Worlds were led by a succession of Kings, each believed to be the direct reincarnation of the previous ruler. Although the supporters of the First Gesar came to form a noble oligarchy much like those coming to power elsewhere in Human space, the Kings came from all walks of life, selected from among those born at the time of the last King's death.

This strange monarchic system was supported and legitimised by a new Buddhist movement. Known as the Shespaskarma (Star Wisdom) school, this outgrowth of the esoteric practices of Tibetan Buddhism sought to adapt the religion to the needs of humanity's new place in the jumpweb, as well as the political ambitions of their noble sponsors. While largely unchanged from the traditional practices of Mahayana Buddhists, the Shespaskarma were most notable for formalising the semi-divine role of the Gesar line. The Gesar King was considered a living bodhisattva, and the rest of the House were considered to be gifted by their station with a higher understanding of Enlightenment. Strangely, despite attempts to imbue the Gesar King with the status of the Living Buddha, this was rejected by the Gesar themselves. Legend holds that the First Gesar himself rejected this title, arguing that the bloody nature of his rise to power had barred him from Nirvana for 'a hundred lifetimes'. The later Gesar Kings (with the notable and infamous exception of King Wangdue the Rash, who was assassinated by his own family in 3219) continued this practice. A common but never formally accepted belief held that the hundredth Gesar would erase the sin of his line, and lead the way to a new age.

By the beginning of the 28th century, the Gesar controlled ten worlds, and Star Wisdom Buddhism was one of the most successful religions of the age. The Gesar vied with the other great states, such as the Irem Confluence and New Istanbul, for status as the leading power in Human Space. During this era, the Gesar's only real rival was the emergent House Li Halan. Descended in part from the Zaiatsu overthrown by the First Gesar, the Li Halan held a long-term feud with the Gesar as a result. This conflict was to rekindle repeatedly over the next two thousand years.

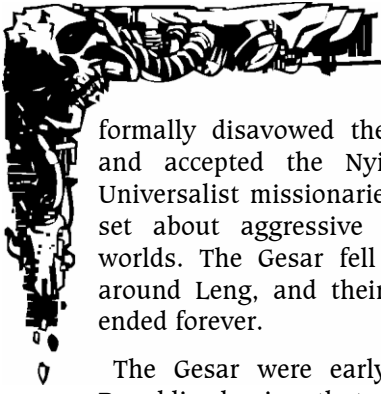
The early to mid Diaspora saw a great cultural outpouring from Leng. Only shreds of this literary and artistic age survives, the best example

probably being the heavily mythologized *Journey Homeward*, where a small party of Gesar monks recovered the true Vedas from the irradiated wasteland of what had once been Northern India. It is clear to any student of the Prophet's early theology that Gesar philosophy influenced some of his theories. In the year 2809, the Prophet was invited by King Chonden Gesar to debate with a council of the greatest Buddhist teachers of the age. After three days of intense debate, Chonden declared Lama Yeshe Tenzing the winner, but was so impressed by Zebulon's enlightened teachings that he granted him a place in his court, and gave him the right to preach his beliefs in Gesar lands. Only a small minority of Gesar converted to Universalism, but they were to have a great influence in the years to come.

On the Prophet's death, the Shespaskarma Buddhists granted him the title of bodhisattva. However, around the same time a more radical fringe began to merge the teachings of the Prophet with their own beliefs. When the Universal Church first formed under Palamedes Alecto, relations between the two faiths became strained. The Alecto that backed the new Church viewed the Gesar with envy, and the two religions became a battleground between the Houses. Around the year 3000, the underground of Zebulon worshippers on Leng began to emerge into the mainstream. They founded a new Buddhist school, called the Nyima, which proclaimed Zebulon as the Maitreya Buddha. This messianic figure had been central to Buddhist beliefs for millennia, and his birth was seen as the heralding of a new age. By bestowing this title on the Prophet, the Nyima were mounting an open attack on the Shespaskarma orthodoxy and their Gesar rulers, who had long held to the belief that the Last Gesar would fulfil the role. The conflict between the sects accelerated, with the earlier respect for Universalism being forgotten. First the Nyima, and then the small number of orthodox Universalists, were outlawed in Gesar space. In 3025, flush from the defeat of the Ukari clans, House Alecto and a loose alliance of minor states united behind the Church declared war on King Dorje, ostensibly to defend the rights of their oppressed co-religionists.

The Wars of Religion stretched on for nearly twenty years. Despite their strength, the Gesar were slowly forced back by the other noble houses, which united behind the Alecto to bring down their larger rival. In 3043 Dorje died during the naval bombardment of the world of Chomolangma. His successor was, thanks to the ways of the House, a mere infant. The regent council formed by the Gesar sued for peace on very unfavourable terms. The Gesar





formally disavowed the Shepaskarma monasteries, and accepted the Nyima as the state religion. Universalist missionaries were given free reign, and set about aggressive conversion on most Gesar worlds. The Gesar fell back to four worlds based around Leng, and their age as a great power was ended forever.

The Gesar were early supporters of the Second Republic, hoping that a central government would protect them from the aggression of the Alecto and Li Halan. During the Republic, their political role atrophied, although the Gesar King remained an important cultural and religious icon on Leng and some of its neighbouring worlds. The Republican period saw a continuation of the merging of Nyima Buddhism with Universalism, until by the time of the Fall the two faiths were nearly inseparable.

Leng itself saw a recovery of its fortunes in the early years of the Republic, as a Planetary Senate peacefully took over from the Gesar, who abdicated their temporal power to become the leaders of the Nyima religion. Although much of the world's mineral wealth had long been exhausted, Leng grew rich on tourism and a faddish popularity for the Nyima sect among the Republican elite in the 36th and 37th centuries. In the late Republic, more extensive terraforming was conducted. Tectonic stabilizers brought the constant threat of earthquakes and volcanic activity under control, and the primitive ecology established during the colonisation was strengthened by the importation of various engineered and compatible alien species. The Republican period also saw an influx in immigration to the 'majestic solitude' of the world. In particular, the large Etyri population dates from this time.

With the Fall, the Planetary Senate of Leng found itself undermined and replaced by the Gesar once more. Although the House had long ago abdicated its political role, it had remained an intrinsic part of Leng's social and religious identity, and in the crisis of the Fall millions flocked to the Swan Banner for the security it promised. A number of small pro-democratic revolts erupted. These were at their worst when a renegade Republican fleet, under the leadership of Admiral Mehmet Burns Keddah, attacked the poorly prepared defences of Leng in 4002 in a quixotic attempt to preserve the Republic on a single world. The Admiral met his end when his flagship received a direct hit from an orbital defence laser and crashed deep in the Seguder Mountains. The democrats never recovered from this defeat, and by the 4050s all of the rebels had

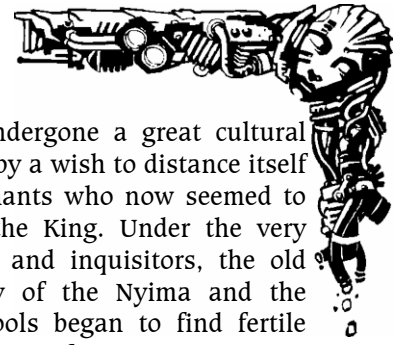
capitulated or fled into the lawless regions of the world, such as the Broken Lands of Phnom. The Gesar made the prudent move of throwing in their lot with the Ten, and Leng and its neighbouring worlds survived the chaos of the 41st century relatively unscathed. The first major threat to the world came from the Universal Church. The Nyima religion was one of many targeted by the fanatics that came to control the Church after the Fall.

When the Doctrine of the Cleansing Flame was initiated, the Gesar worlds were targeted by many fanatical Universalist crusaders. Finally, in 4096, King Yonten Gesar surrendered to the Patriarch. Prostrating himself before the father of the Church, the 63rd Gesar King denounced his claims to divinity and accepted the Orthodoxy as the one true faith. This move sparked chaos at home, with the world of Zud rebelling against Leng under a self-declared King and then vanishing from the jumpweb. The Gesar became a more traditional hereditary elite, and the Nyima, now almost indistinguishable from mainstream Universalism, were subsumed into the Church as a Heyschast order.

The New Dark Ages saw a great fluctuation in the fortunes of the House. Recovering from the threat of excommunication and extinction, the Gesar began to regain a measure of their old influence by the end of the 42nd century. During years of careful planning by King Palden IV Gesar, the Gesar took possession of hundreds of small estates on Byzantium Secundus. When the then ruling House Cameton fell into infighting over a dispute of succession, the Gesar were able to draw on their myriad holdings and alliances to seize effective control of the world in 4271. King Palden was the first of the Gesar to rule from this world, leaving Leng in the hands of a junior branch of the family. The Byzantium Gesar grew rich on trade with the nascent Merchant League, while their homeworlds slowly declined into agrarian backwaters. Over time, the two branches grew further apart, until the Gesar of Leng barely upheld their fealty to the King on Byzantium Secundus.

When the Barbarian Invasions began, the Gesar leadership was badly hit by devastating Vuldrok raids on Byzantium Secundus. When the young Vladimir Alecto began his campaign against the invaders, the Gesar became one of his earliest and strongest allies, despite the traditional antipathy between the houses. This alliance was strengthened when the houses united with the Justinian to defeat an invasion of Byzantium Secundus mounted by the young Grand Duke Tahir al-Malik in 4548. When Vladimir announced his intention to unite





the Known Worlds into a single empire, a Gesar stood by his side.

When Vladimir died on his coronation, the Gesar were again targeted by their old enemies. Within a year of the death of the first Phoenix Emperor, the Li Halan were stirring up resentment against the Gesar Worlds. In 4572, Patriarch Nadrim was convinced by an Inquisitorial Court to excommunicate the entire population of Leng, after evidence of continued heretical practices in the Nyima monasteries was exposed. The truth of these rumours is impossible to determine, although it is probable that heterodox beliefs such as that of reincarnation and the veneration of the Buddha as a pre-reflective prophet on a level with Zebulon were still being practiced in secret. The more outrageous claim that the Gesar intended to seize Vladimir's legacy and proclaim themselves as god-kings seems less likely.

The Li Halan and Hazat led the Church-sponsored attack on Leng. Under pressure from all sides, the Byzantine Gesar broke their ties with Leng. The Li Halan finally broke the Gesar lines in 4574. Conquest of Leng seemed a certainty, until the remnants of the Gesar fleet mounted a suicidal offensive against their enemies. The Li Halan and Hazat were driven back to Aragon, and by the time they had regrouped they found the Leng gate to be sealed.

The branch of the Gesar that ruled Byzantium Secundus survived this crisis, by severing all ties with their 'heretic' cousins on Leng. The Byzantine Gesar clung on to power until 4663, when an alliance of Houses Cameton, al-Malik and Decados drove them from power. King Dorje III was tried before a Regency Court, sentenced on spurious charges of treason against the Phoenix Throne, and executed. The remaining Gesar were systematically hunted down, and by the end of the 47th century the House was considered extinct. The House's voting sceptres were divided between their persecutors. Within the Empire, the long history of the Gesar Kings ended with fall of a headman's axe.

The Lengese View

And so ends the history of the Gesar as known to the historians of the Known Worlds. However, the records of the Nyima monks of Mt Gngas tell a different story of the last centuries of the ancient house. Beginning with the relocation of the house leadership from Leng to Byzantium Secundus in 4271, an increasing number of junior Gesar nobles and Nyima theologians began to resent the 'abandonment' of their leaders. By the early

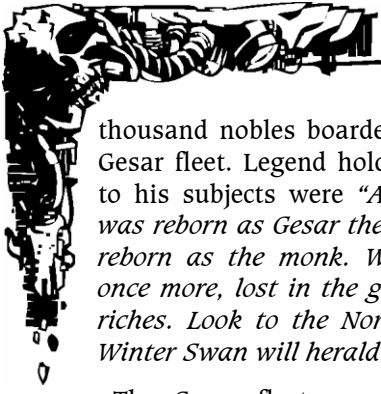
46th century, Leng had undergone a great cultural revival, spurred on mainly by a wish to distance itself from the materialist merchants who now seemed to dominate the council of the King. Under the very nose of Orthodox censors and inquisitors, the old Buddhist-inspired theology of the Nyima and the ancient Shepaskarma schools began to find fertile ground among the monasteries of Leng.

This movement came to a head in the secret crowning of an infant as the true reincarnation of Gesar, in defiance of the dynastic line of kings that had ruled since King Yonten's confession in 4096. Very little can clearly be said about the early life of the child who was to become King Chonden II Gesar, the Child of the Moon and the Winter Swan. Legend holds that he was found by a humble Lama on the banks of the Moon River, in a nest of reeds and swan feathers in the year 4551. Raised in secret at the oldest Nyima monastery on Mt. Gngas, many miracles are associated with the child, who spoke with the wisdom of 82 perfectly remembered previous lives. In 4570 he was brought before a secret council of Gesar nobles, who swore fealty to him and began to prepare for a war of independence. This conspiracy is remembered as the Silent Insurrection.

The rebels made their move in 4572, sending delegates to Byzantium Secundus informing King Wangdak IX that Leng was no longer his to control. Enraged, the old king washed his hands of Leng and of the Nyima sect, fully aware that the Church and House Li Halan would seize on the opportunity to invade. Sure enough, the world was excommunicated by Patriarchal decree and the invasion began within weeks. King Chonden himself blinded the last Orthodox bishop of Leng and threw him from the walls of the Red Palace in his capital. Although the Lengese had prepared for a war with the Byzantine Gesar, they were ill equipped for the attack of the Patriarchal fleet and two other noble houses. In 4574, Patriarch Nadrim reluctantly permitted the use of orbital bombardment to hasten the capitulation of the heretics.

The last actions of King Chonden recorded by history are perplexing to say the least. In the last months of the war he retreated once again to Mt. Gngas, where he entered silent meditation. Eventually he re-emerged with a startling proclamation. He ordered his entire house to leave their stations and congregate in the capital. There, he explained his decision to enter self-enforced exile, leaving Leng until the Gesar could rediscover the Enlightenment lost since the Fall. Those Gesar who refused were executed, and nearly ten





thousand nobles boarded the surviving ships of the Gesar fleet. Legend holds that Chonden's last words to his subjects were *"As Rimpoche the Enlightened was reborn as Gesar the King, now the ruler must be reborn as the monk. We go to seek enlightenment once more, lost in the glory of battle and the lure of riches. Look to the North for our return, when the Winter Swan will herald Gesar's rebirth"*.

The Gesar fleet swept the Li Halan and Hazat attackers from the system in a surprise assault, and then themselves vanished through the jumpgate, sealing it behind them. The survivors on Leng were left in confusion. By the end of the 46th century, any semblance of a world government had collapsed. The high passes that linked the settled valleys of Phnom became clogged with snow and bandits, and the Lengese splintered into many hundreds of clans, tribes and petty nations. The only thread that bound the world together was the actions of the Nyima monks, who travelled between valleys keeping alive the legend of the Last Gesar's promise of his return and a future paradise. They found a ready audience in most regions, although some peoples such as the inhabitants of the city of Nagara and the rebellious High Clans refuted this message. By around 4800, the Nyima had built up a solid legend of Chonden's return. Consisting of hundreds of stories and songs, the work is collectively known as the Swan King Legend, and has spread by word of mouth over most of the globe.

Despite the efforts of the priesthood, society on Leng continued to fragment. While larger polities did form in some regions, such as the Gnas Ri Alliance in the Great Valley and the Empire of Nagara on the coast of the Sea of Mists, most adopted a nomadic, pre-industrial way of life. Leng seemed destined for many more centuries of slow recovery, until everything changed in the spring of 4995. The people of Bya Lung Pa were shocked to see a spaceship descending through the flocks of winter swans flying overhead on their yearly migration south. The men that emerged were Muster slavers, keen to exploit a world they had secretly discovered from a dying slave of unknown origin. Led by Consul Simon Solace, the crew had the sense to accept the cheers and prayers of the crowds that surrounded them. Once Solace discovered that he was being proclaimed as some kind of sacred ruler, he was happy to assume the role. The Gnas Ri swore fealty to King Solace Gesar, Swan King and 84th reincarnation of the Liberator. Within the year, the first shipment of slaves, in the form of criminals and rebels who opposed the new king, was shipped for the markets of the Known Worlds. Since then, two great

insurrections (the Blood Water Revolt of 4996 and the ongoing High Revolt) have only swelled the coffers of the Swan King. The world, misnamed Swan's Way by lazy Muster translators, remains a secret known only to the members of Solace's conspiracy.

Solar System

Skarma (Sun): Leng's sun is much like Sol, except for the fact that it seems largely uninfluenced by the Fading. No reason for this is known.

Me Bya (Firebird): Me Bya is a large, blood-red planet which is easily visible on the low horizon on Leng. It is considered a symbol of good luck, and the Lengese believe that spirits cannot travel abroad on nights when the Firebird is in the sky.

Leng: This planet is roughly similar in size to and slightly denser than Holy Terra. It is described in more detail below.

Kailas: Leng's single moon is a large, chalk white planetoid. Kailas has always played a central role in the religion of Leng, with a popular folk belief holding that it is home to the Bodhisattvas and good spirits. This myth probably descends from the numerous abandoned Gesar estates which litter the airless surface. Kailas is still orbited by the wreckage of dozens of starships and spacestations, destroyed during the failed invasion four centuries ago.

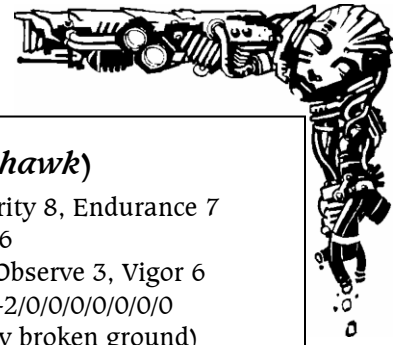
Bruk: Bruk is a large gas giant with many moons in complex orbits. An unusual rock, about 1.5km across, was found in high orbit during the Republic. Bizarrely, it turned out to be made entirely of the fire coral found in the Sea of Mists on Leng. At a total loss to explain this, astronomers blamed the Ur and moved on.

Bstansig (Trickster): This dark green gas giant gets its name both from its erratic orbit, which occasionally brings it close to the jumpgate, and the bursts of electromagnetic energy it sporadically gives off. These have been known to damage ships' systems.

Landscape

Leng is roughly Urth-like in diameter, but has a slightly increased mass, giving it a surface gravity of 1.2 G. This slight gravitational increase is well within the tolerance level of unchanged humans, but has led to a distinct stocky appearance among the planet's natives, and can be exhausting for





offworlders who have not become acclimatised to local conditions.

Old reports suggest that Leng originally had a toxic atmosphere, but crude terraforming begun by the corporate rulers during the First Republic created a standard oxygen-nitrogen mix. Since the Fall, and the failure of the terraforming engines in the 47th century, the balance of elements in the atmosphere has begun to become unstable. While still perfectly breathable, the level of oxygen has increased. This has the interesting side-effect of causing fires to burn hotter and faster than they do in a standard atmosphere. For this reason, natives of Leng are very cautious about the use of open flames, which has further stagnated the local technology level.

Geographically, Leng displays the complex tectonics and high mountains of a relatively young world. The landmasses of Leng cover about 55% of the planet, and are concentrated in two continents in the southern hemisphere, linked by a narrow land bridge. These are Phnom in the west, which stretches from the southern pole to the mid-point of the northern hemisphere, and the smaller crescent shaped continent of Bód in the east. Both continents are extremely mountainous, with peaks reaching heights of over 9,000 metres in places. Besides the plains and deserts at the coasts, most of the inhabitable land of Leng is at least 2,000 metres above sea level. The planet has always been subject to severe tectonic instability, and this has only increased since the Fall. Because of this, the Lengese have tended towards a rural way of life, rather than constructing large cities that would be vulnerable to damage from earthquakes. Although the nature of Leng's geography would suggest the presence of rich mineral deposits, very little of this remains. Much was aggressively mined during the First Republic (as evidenced by the ravaged land around the *Brug Skad Brgyab* Mountains, where millions of tons of rock was displaced by explosives), and what was left was exhausted by the end of the Second Republic. Although some deposits of rare minerals and radioactives still exist, they are in such remote locations that mining them would be prohibitively expensive.

The climate of Leng has always been chilly, and this has only increased since the terraforming began to unravel. Temperatures never exceed 20° C, even during the brief summers, and drop below freezing for months at a time in most areas of the planet. As a result life on Leng is strongly influenced by the seasons, with the summer being a time of intensive farming and trade between the scattered

Kyikra (trans. *Dog-hawk*)

Body: Strength 10, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 6

Skills: Dodge 4, Fight 4, Observe 3, Vigor 6

Vitality: (12)-10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

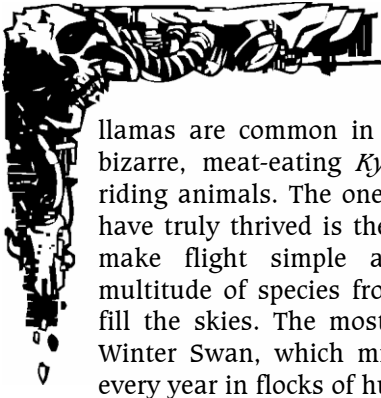
Move: 15m (not slowed by broken ground)

Weapons: Claws (Goal 12, Init 4, DMG 5), Bite (Goal 14, Init 6, DMG 3), Horns (bulls only; Goal 14, Init 6, DMG 6)

Description: Kyikra are a rare sight in the lowlands, but they are by far the most favoured steeds of the High Clans. The origin of these beasts is unclear. They are certainly not native to Leng, but their homeworld has long been forgotten. Kyikra are giant, shaggy creatures, vaguely resembling bull-sized goats. Their thick fur and stocky features make them appear ungainly, but they are surprisingly swift and agile. Their legs end in broad, bird-like feet, with sharp talons and a strong grip that allows them to move easily in the broken ground of the high passes. Their heads are large and slightly dog-like (thus their Lengese name), with a powerful bite suited to their omnivorous diet. Kyikra are pack animals, feeding on fish and small mammals in the summer months and lichens and hardy grasses in winter. They are belligerent creatures, and difficult to train. The High Clans tend to ride females or gelded males, although a few brave souls learn to harness the violent bulls for use in war. The latter are at least half again as large as females, and boast massive, curled horns that can cause grievous wounds.

clans, and the winter marking a time of long isolation.

When humans first settled Leng, the planet had nothing more than the most primitive of bacteria and other micro-organisms. Most of these native species, some of which were extremely harmful to humans, were made extinct by the haphazard terraforming of the 25th century. The ecosystem of Leng is now based around the *Shing Nags*, a hardy low-lying tree with distinctive black foliage. This plant was designed to boost the levels of free oxygen in the atmosphere, and now covers much of the world. It is unfortunately poisonous to humans. As a result, other species were introduced, and hardy variants of rice and wheat are stable agricultural products. Leng has only a small selection of animal species, most of which are the descendants of spaceship vermin or domesticated species. Brutes, goats and



llamas are common in the valleys. Horses and the bizarre, meat-eating *Kyikra* are the most common riding animals. The one environment where animals have truly thrived is the air. The high oxygen levels make flight simple at even great altitudes. A multitude of species from across the Known Worlds fill the skies. The most spectacular of these is the Winter Swan, which migrates from equator to pole every year in flocks of hundreds of thousands.

People & Places

The Holy Land of the Swan King: The Great Valley

"Hear, oh King. Hear the prayers of your people. Hear the silent cries of the river for her son. Hear the scream of the eagle and the lowing of the brute and the whispers of the dead. All the world calls with one voice, 'Return to us, oh Gesar King'."

The Swan King Legend, Stanza 1261

The Great Valley is one of the most densely populated areas on Leng. Lying in the vast *Brug Skad Brgyab* (Dragon's Voice) mountain range on the continent of Phnom, the Valley stretches for over 1650 miles in a roughly northwest to southeast direction, along the course of the Moon River. At the head of the Valley, which lies at a height of 5,000m above sea level, the half-deserted remains of Bya Lung Pa, Leng's only major city, lies near the source of the Moon River. The valley then slowly falls in height, and is settled by several hundred small farming towns and villages, about two thirds of which owe fealty to the rulers of Bya Lung Pa. For the past two centuries this has been the native Gnas Ri Clan, thought to descend from minor householders of the old Gesar rulers. With the arrival of the Muster, the Gnas Ri have submitted much of their sovereignty to the offworlders. They remain only as a puppet regime, responsible for those matters of administration that Solace does not wish to trouble himself with, such as ensuring the cooperation and food supplies owed to the city by the minor clans of the Valley, delivered each year at the end of summer in accordance with ancient treaties.

The people of the Valley, like those of much of Leng, are divided into many small semi-nomadic clans. In the north of the Valley, these clans have been largely unaffected by the arrival of the Swan King, and some still offer daily prayers in the direction of the capital. The clans mainly subsist via brute, cow and

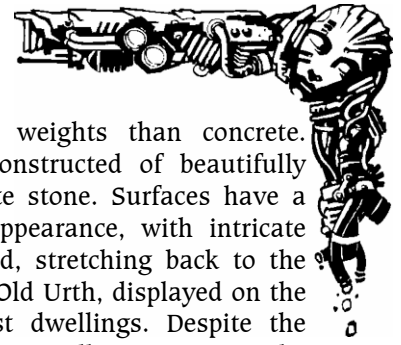
horse herding. The herds are wintered in small settlements along the banks of the Moon River and its larger tributaries, which are abandoned as the clans move their animals into the foothills to pasture during the short summer. Most clans live in this manner, although some have permanently settled in larger towns and live by growing maize, fishing the rivers and hunting for fowl and rabbits. Clans tend to be led by hereditary chieftains, who can be either male or female. Only the barbaric High Clans maintain any democratic traditions, although most chieftains will retire if the clan turns against them. Most of these chiefs claim descent from either the Gesar or some local god, such as River Woman or Fox. It is these spirits, often associated with the local landscape, that form the centre of most religious practices. Wandering lamas from the scattered monasteries are always welcome, as they offer blessings and religious instruction in the higher mysteries of the Gesar.

The Great Valley has always been the centre of Lengese civilisation, as evidenced by the numerous jade ruins that dot the land. Even after the collapse of the 46th century, the Valley has remained home to many diverse groups. The most influential peoples and places are listed below.

The City of Bya Lung Pa

The city of Bya Lung Pa has been the capital of Leng since the settlement by the Jinzi Kuangshan corporation over 2500 years ago. The oldest surviving area of the city lies about 2km outside of the modern city, in the vast expanses of the old shipyards. The shipyards lie on a smooth plain, created by the levelling of a mountain at a height of 5500m above sea level. As a result, it looms above the modern city, which lies around 500m below. The shipyards had been abandoned for nearly 300 years, and even with the arrival of the Muster, only a small section of this great expanse has been reclaimed. Much of the yards remain deserted, and local legend holds that the ghosts of the Zaibatsu's victims and those killed during the fall of the Gesar haunt the great warehouses and the frames that once were used to construct spacecraft. Other rumours hold that there are hoards of treasure and tech secreted away by the Gesar when they fled. Despite this, the Muster are reluctant to explore beyond the borders they have marked out. Those that do go wandering tend to vanish. The Chainer leaders maintain that this is due to accidents among the crumbling ruins, but the





deckhands are beginning to share the superstitions of the natives.

Massive cranes loom over the lip of the plateau, and access is generally via crude elevators set up by the Muster to transport their human cargoes. A single jade staircase runs down into the city proper, zigzagging back and forth along the cliff face, and is the only surviving unpowered route to the yards. The Muster discovered rotting explosives under the supports for this bridge, which the inhabitants had long since forgotten about. This route is guarded day and night by Muster sentries, and defences have been erected at the high end of the bridge, to which the offworlders can retreat if a revolt were to break out.

The modern city of Bya Lung Pa is a mere 1500 years old. When it was constructed in the early years of the Republic, it was considered one of the architectural wonders of the Known Worlds. To this day, despite the wear of the centuries and the lack of repairs in recent years, the city remains a breathtaking sight. The city itself is built in a tight ravine formed by the fast-flowing waters of the Moon River, which emerges from its source in the mountains 50 miles to the north. Myriad waterfalls run down the sides of the gully and between the streets of the city itself. The streets run at steep angles up the sides of the ravine, making travel on foot or by mules and brutes the only practical options. On the western cliffs, the old merchants district in the shadow of the shipyards has become the centre of the Muster government, and warehouses that once held riches from across the Known Worlds now house squalid slave pens. On the eastern cliffs, the palaces of the Gesar stand, now home to the Gnas Ri pretenders. The two walls of the ravine are close enough to each other that vaulted bridges stretch across the divide, soaring 100m above the churning water. As the city descends, the buildings become more squalid and abandoned. In the base of the cleft, along the banks of the Moon River, the Old City, with its tightly packed network of streets and bridges, is practically deserted. The only dwellers here are the workers in the great hydroelectric plants that harness the power of the Moon River and its myriad tributaries, and those desperate souls who refused the rule of the Swan King, and now cower in the shadows of the city's new rulers.

The architecture of the city, even in the slums, is astounding. Like most Gesar constructions, the primary building material is synthetic jade. Created by esoteric Republican nanotechnology, these slabs of unblemished stone are as strong as steel

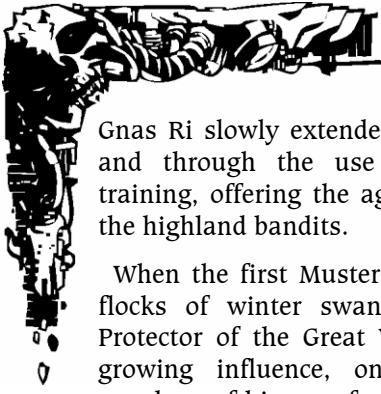
and can support greater weights than concrete. Nearly all surfaces are constructed of beautifully carved sea-green and white stone. Surfaces have a smooth, almost organic appearance, with intricate carvings from Gesar legend, stretching back to the dawn in the mountains of Old Urth, displayed on the walls of even the lowliest dwellings. Despite the beauty, the city is beginning to collapse in areas. The jade is impossible to repair with the technology of the natives, and when cracks start to appear, areas are abandoned or broken down for the stone. Much of the Old City is now treacherous, with collapses common. Whole streets have been known to crumble into the river, and one of the sky bridges gave way suddenly three years ago, sending over a hundred people to their deaths. The Gnas Ri make what repairs they can, but focus exclusively on their own estates. The Muster remain aloof of all such concerns.

Despite this degradation, the citizens of Bya Lung Pa enjoy a higher standard of living than most on Leng. While the fusion reactors that once powered much of the city have long since broken down, electricity is still generated from the rushing waters of the Moon River and the dozens of waterfalls that race through the city. In the summer months, this is sufficient to light the whole city, and allow citizens to use basic electrical appliances. In winter, however, all but the Moon River freeze, and while the frozen waterfalls are a beautiful sight, they provide no power to the generators. What power remains is directed to the wealthy districts, and the commoners must rely on brute dung fires for light and warmth. Each spring, some families are found frozen in their homes.

The Gnas Ri Clan

The Gnas Ri are the primary clan of the Great Valley, ruling the whole region, in name at least. The people of the Valley have united into many hundreds of clans, build around extended families and intermarriage. In turn, a crude form of feudal relations has developed. While no clan adopts pretensions of nobility (that right is restricted to the Gesar alone), several have grown strong enough to demand tribute from lesser clans. Of these, the Gnas Ri are the greatest. The power of this clan was secured just over a hundred years ago. They claim descent from the household guard of the Gesar, left with the task of acting as Lord Protectors of the city of Bya Lung Pa when their masters fled to save the world from bombardment. In the three centuries since the flight of the Gesar, the





Gnas Ri slowly extended their power through trade, and through the use of their better arms and training, offering the agrarian clans protection from the highland bandits.

When the first Muster ship descended through the flocks of winter swans ten years ago, the Lord Protector of the Great Valley sought to resist their growing influence, only to be assassinated by members of his own family who became swept up in the religious hysteria of the return of the Swan King. A bemused Simon Solace accepted the head of the 'traitor', and assured the remaining clan members that their position as rulers of the Great Valley was assured, as long as his primacy as King of Leng was recognised. Initially, the Muster did little to interfere in the affairs of their servants, assisting them in the subjugation of the revolt of the southern clans. Over time, however, the power of the Gnas Ri has been eroded. When the first Lord Protector under the new regime, Panden the Old, forbade his subordinates to sell non-criminals to the Muster in 4996, he died of agonising stomach cramps that very night. His successor, Panden the Younger, a famed warrior against the rebels, lasted only three months before falling from the walls of the Red Palace into the Moon River. Now, the Lady Protector is one Jangmu, a shrewd but paranoid woman in her late 50s. She has become increasingly conciliatory to the Muster, to the point where she accedes to their every demand. While she makes her contempt for the Muster fully known in private, the deaths of her grandfather and uncle have filled her with fear of offending the Swan King's uncouth servants.

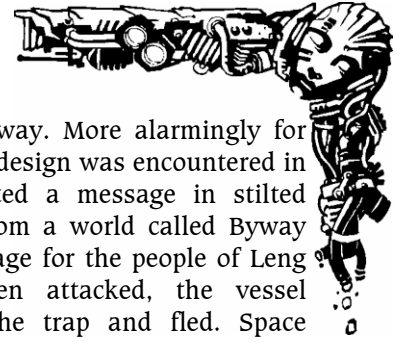
While the Gnas Ri are but one clan, they still number in the hundreds. Despite the united front they show to outsiders, they are divided into several distinct factions. The supporters of the Muster are the most powerful faction, even though the Lord Protectors have never been in their number. Initially wrapped up in the religious revival caused by the arrival of the Swan King, the leaders of this faction orchestrated a successful coup to ensure the ascension of Solace to the throne. In reward, the ringleaders were granted high positions in government, and have grown rich on the collection of revenues from the Valley, and directly from acting as middlemen in the slave trade. While some may now doubt the divinity of their King, the financial incentives have done enough to silence any concerns.

In opposition to this group, two loose factions have severe doubts regarding the presence of the offworlders. The larger of these resides in the military. While initially glad to accept the

aid of Muster mercenaries in the crushing of the revolt led by the Drisa monks, many Gnas Ri viewed the corrosion of their clan's influence and the sale of honourable enemies into slavery with growing distaste. There are persistent rumours that Panden the Younger was conspiring with several of the generals to overthrow the Swan King before his bizarre death. Since then, the malcontents have kept a low profile, but still plot against their rulers. The smaller anti-offworlder faction has only appeared in recent years, around the person of the Lady Protector herself. Realising that they have been marginalised by their own subordinates, they ineffectually scheme to reassert the position of the Lord Protector. While these two groups could benefit each other, they remain suspicious of one another. The generals see Jangmu as a spineless collaborator, and the Lady Protector worries that the military may act rashly and doom any coup before it can succeed. All three factions circle each other in the corridors of the Red Palace, and all have used blackmail, rumour and poison to support their cause.

The Gnas Ri rule from the Red Palace, a fantastic structure of burgundy coloured stone that projects out above the eastern cliffs of the city. The Palace has served as a centre of government, then as a Nyima monastery, and then again as a noble dwelling in its long history. It has thousands of rooms, many of which lie in artificial caves in the cliff face itself. The Gnas Ri occupy only a fraction of the palace, and much is sealed or simply abandoned, with dusty corridors full of treasure slowly rotting away. Life in the Red Palace is constrained by thousands of old laws and traditions. The Lady Protector holds court in the Hall of Memories, seated on a simple bench in front of a vast statue of Gesar in his incarnation as the Liberator, the Bloody-Handed One (the symbolism of this choice is lost on the Muster). From here, the Gnas Ri govern the city and police the Great Valley. Ancient laws hold that none other than the Gnas Ri can enter this chamber. Indeed, the only region of the Red Palace open to offworlders is the Hall of the King, where Solace holds court on those rare occasions he is forced to assume his role as the Swan King. Seated on the ancient throne of the Gesar Kings, he gives his proclamations to his servants, and bestows blessings to the pilgrims that still come to see the prophesised saviour (although the number of these has fallen sharply in recent years). In general, Solace only holds court four times a year, on the greatest holy days, and even then with a growing expression of boredom and exasperation.





The Gnas Ri officials and enforcers who govern outside of the Red Palace can easily be identified by the deep red gowns and yellow turbans that mark their station. Those seen beyond the city tend to be prefects sent to enforce the law and collect tribute from the farming clans, or the soldiers that accompany them. These latter are equipped with studded leather armour, primitive bolt-action rifles, and sabres.

The Muster Rulers

Although few Lengese outside of the capital have ever seen the offworlder slavers, these men have developed a stranglehold over the government of the Great Valley and are slowly expanding their influence across the face of the world. When Solace first landed in the Great Valley, he and his men chose to follow a cautious path. The natives were primitive but numerous, and Solace's strategy of co-opting the local elite to act as intermediaries with the Valley's inhabitants has been largely successful. The last ten years have proven to be extremely profitable for Simon Solace and his men, and he intends to milk 'Swan's Way' for all it is worth.

Solace and most of his followers reside in the old merchant's quarter on Bya Lung Pa's eastern cliffs, across the ravine from the Red Palace. There are perhaps two hundred Muster slavers, mercenaries and accountants here at any given time, with perhaps another fifty elsewhere in the Great Valley, either overseeing Gnas Ri slave raids or helping in the wars in the south and the Highlands. Solace has taken every available precaution to keep his work here a secret from the rest of the Empire, worried that his guild or the Emperor might try to seize 'his' world away. As a result, only guildsmen with direct loyalty to himself have been chosen for this operation. Only three non-Muster know of Leng. These are two Charioteer pilots, both of whom have been happy to hide the world from their fellow guildsmen for large bribes, and Captain Sir Yussuf Keddah, a spectacularly corrupt member of the Grail Defence Fleet who makes sure Solace's ships can slip through the Grail jumpgate unmolested. Promises of great wealth are enough to keep most of the Muster workers loyal, although a few have been brutally executed for 'disloyalty' as a warning to the others. A small fleet of five vessels are kept in orbit just in case someone from the Known Worlds were to enter the system. The crews have standing orders to pretend to be Charioteer scout vessels and visitors are invited to board, only to be shot at when they lower their shields. One Questing Knight has

already met his end this way. More alarmingly for Solace, a ship of unknown design was encountered in 5003. The ship broadcasted a message in stilted Urthish, claiming to be from a world called Byway and to be carrying a message for the people of Leng from their masters. When attacked, the vessel somehow broke out of the trap and fled. Space patrols have been doubled since the incident.

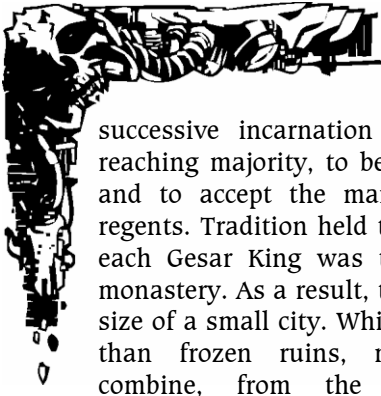
In general, the Muster remains secluded from the natives as much as possible, staying within the merchants' quarter or within the barracks in the shipyards. The soldiers are actively encouraged to view the Lengese as subhuman chattel. A common belief has developed that the natives are not human, but rather Changed from some ancient experiment. This is patently untrue, but the Muster leaders have allowed the rumour to spread, aware that it feeds into the soldiery's religious prejudices and does much to avert any sympathy for the slaves that are crowded into pens once used for brutes and horses.

The Muster is very careful to restrict the knowledge of the Lengese regarding their activities. No explanation has been given for why the Swan King wants slaves, and questions from Gnas Ri officials are met first with gifts, then threats, then assassination. In particular, Solace does everything he can to prevent the Gnas Ri from knowing about the Muster ships that have begun to explore Leng for other 'markets'. Already, they have made contact with the Justinian rulers of Byzantion, and their activities have sparked rumours of flying monsters in clans across the world. Only Bód has been left alone, as the Muster realise that Nagara has the capacity to fight back. Solace is particularly careful about who gets to go on these scouting expeditions since one scout captain decided to go native and vanished into the Broken Lands with half of his crew and a gunship. There is a significant price on this man's head which most of the remaining captains hope to collect.

Mt Gngas Monastery and the Nyima School

Lying at the end of a treacherous mountain pass high above the western edge of the Great Valley, the ancient monastery on Mt Gngas has long been a centre of learning and contemplation. According to legend, the foundations of the Mt Gngas monastery was placed by the First Gesar himself, standing on the blackened ruins of the penal mining colony in which he had slaved before he led the world into rebellion. In the millennia since, each





successive incarnation of Gesar came here upon reaching majority, to be blessed by the High Lamas and to accept the mantle of kingship from their regents. Tradition held that the first proclamation of each Gesar King was to order an addition to the monastery. As a result, the complex has grown to the size of a small city. While much of it is now no more than frozen ruins, myriad architectural styles combine, from the crude, blocky structures supposedly built by the hand of the First Gesar himself, to the grand synthetic jade halls, terraces and arches ordered by the Kings during the Republic, to the beautiful but modest structures added after the Fall with their veneer of Universalist imagery. In all, the monastery grounds cover an area as large as a small city, but houses no more than a thousand monks and their servants at any time.

Mt Gngas began as the centre of the Shepaskarma Buddhist sect, but was usurped by the Universalist-influenced Nyima school in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion in the 31st century. In turn, it became the seat of the Orthodox bishop during the New Dark Ages, only to return to the Old Ways after Chonden's Exile. Since then, Mt. Gngas has once again become the most respected of the Nyima monasteries, leading the new theology associated with the Swan King Legend.

The tenants of the form of Nyimaism worshipped at Mt. Gngas are both similar to and radically different to the practices of the ancient Buddhists of Urth. The lamas believe in a cycle of reincarnation, which can only be broken by attaining a state of supreme Enlightenment. This in turn is possible only over a succession of lives, the nature of each being determined by the deeds committed in the former. The position of the Swan King is a messianic belief, derived from the old worship of the First Gesar by the Shepaskarma School. The Nyima lamas hold that the return of the Swan King marks the end of an ancient curse the First Gesar placed on himself for the bloody war he waged to free Leng from the First Republic. With the erasure of the blood debt, the Swan King has reclaimed the Buddha nature that the First Gesar rejected. So marks the beginning of a new epoch.

Nyima theology is deeper than just the Swan King Legend. Lamas venerate all the previous incarnations of Gesar, each of whom is attributed to different virtues associated with his or her actions in life. In addition, a host of Bodhisattvas, enlightened souls like the First Gesar who refused Nirvana to help the living, are still venerated. Some of these come from Old Urth. Others, such as Zebulon, the Mother of Mercy (Amalthea) and the Bird of Heaven

(Mihanoom), were adopted from different religions in later times. Over the centuries Nyimaism has also adapted to and absorbed the animist beliefs of the surrounding clans. As a result, lamas fully accept the existence of numerous spirits and little gods. These are seen as good as long as they accept the teachings of the Swan King. Some wandering lamas work as exorcists to drive off evil spirits and the ghosts of the dead, who are seen as malicious blood-drinking horrors.

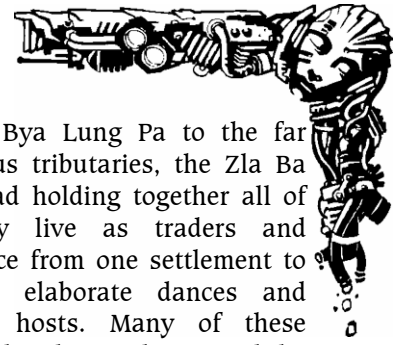
The Nyima have long embraced the existence of psychic and theurgic powers. The latter are thought to be possible via communing with higher orders of beings such as the Bodhisattvas, and a few mystics are said to know means of calling them down to earth. Psychic powers are more common, and are seen as a natural part of the growth of the human mind as it comes closer to Enlightenment. As a result, many lamas claim to be able to use such powers (fewer really can, but the numbers still seem to be higher than average), but strangely most refuse to. Indeed, the use of such powers is seen as rash and potentially dangerous, as by using his powers the monk ties himself closer to the earth and away from Nirvana. This in turn can lead to rashness and spiritual corruption. Those monks that do use their powers, such as those that fought in the Blood Water Revolt, are viewed with suspicion and pity.

The Nyima monks have become increasingly divided in recent years, particularly since the unexpected return of the Swan King. The official line taken by Mt. Gngas, and shared by most of the junior monasteries, is that Solace is the returned Gesar, and the commoners are encouraged to accept his temporal power. In truth, many of the High Lamas distrust him. Technically Solace is the leader of the entire religion, but he seems unaware of his theocratic position. Perhaps to keep things this way, many lamas have gone into seclusion in the last five years. Behind closed doors, debate rages over what is to be done. Few at Mt. Gngas wish to speak out against the messiah they have long preached about, but other monasteries have been less cautious. Most famously, the monks of Drisa Rock took up arms in 4995 and helped lead the Blood Water Revolt. Less extreme voices call for a careful watch to be maintained on Solace, lest his holy mask slips.

The Zla Ba, Children of the Moon

The one unifying feature of the Great Valley is the mighty Moon River. From its source in the mountains of the north, to the great waterfalls where it





descends rapidly to sea level at the south-eastern end of the Valley, the Moon River runs through the heart of the farms and towns of dozens of clans. Once the river leaves the highlands around Bya Lung Pa, it becomes broad and slow moving, making it easily navigable and only prone to freezing in the bitterest of winters. The Moon River is perhaps the only reason so many have survived in the Great Valley since the collapse of the world government. The river plays a central role in native religious practices, and is said to be home to a great water spirit. This spirit, depicted in statues as a great serpent-like dragon or a beautiful young woman, is known as Chu Skyesdman (River Woman). Each autumn, the herder clans make sacrifices of brute milk and wreaths of flowers to the River Woman when they return to their winter lodgings on the river's banks. The River Woman appears in many folk tales as a protective figure. In one of the most popular, the babe who was to become King Chonden II, the 83rd incarnation of Gesar, was found in a reed basket on the river, used by his supporters in the Silent Insurrection to prove his alleged divinity. Similarly, this story holds that King Palden, the Sleeping King, was nearly drowned in the river as a youth, and fled to Byzantium Secundus to escape the wrath of the River Woman.

The Moon River has always been an important waterway, as can be seen by the great system of locks built during the Republic to facilitate travel. Sited every fifty miles or so along the length of the valley, the lock stations have become the focal points for many of the Valley's largest settlements. In the years since the Fall, the river has also become home to a unique culture. Known as the Zla Ba, or Moon Children, this group is a closely knit alliance of clans, who live nomadic lives travelling the length of the river in fleets of houseboats. The Zla Ba are an ancient people, thought to be descended from Zuranist settlers who came to Leng during the migrations to New Amhara in the Diaspora and chose to stay. The Gesar always honoured the Zuranists as fellow survivors of the horrors of the Zaibatsu work camps. Over the centuries, these Zuranists slowly assimilated with the mainstream religion of Leng (in part to distance themselves from the atrocities being committed by their co-religionists on New Amhara). During the Fall they were amongst the first of Leng's people to return to a nomadic way of life, taking to the waters of the Moon River. In time, their true origin has become indistinct, but they still maintain many elements of their old culture.

The brightly coloured vessels of the Zla Ba, with intricately carved dragon-headed prows, are a welcome sight for most of the valley-

dwellers. Travelling from Bya Lung Pa to the far south, and along numerous tributaries, the Zla Ba are perhaps the only thread holding together all of the Valley's clans. They live as traders and entertainers, selling produce from one settlement to another, and performing elaborate dances and operatic plays for their hosts. Many of these performances have a strongly religious basis, and the Zla Ba are known to have close links to many of the oldest of the Nyima monasteries. Indeed, it was the Zla Ba who first spread the tale of the Swan King across the Valley and beyond.

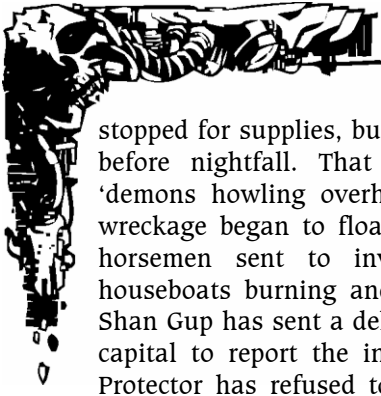
The Zla Ba have traditionally enjoyed a great deal of respect from nearly all the clans. Their ties to the Moon River, and their role as storytellers, has given them a certain mystical air in the eyes of many. Numerous young people dream of deserting the brute herds and corn fields to take to the river, although the insular nature of the Zla Ba means that they will only rarely permit outsiders to join them, and then only through marriage. The Zla Ba have a huge level of popular support, which easily eclipses that held by the Gnas Ri. While the Gnas Ri can demand respect due to their role as royal stewards, it is more often than not the Zla Ba who have relieved famines and saved villages by their timely arrival, travelling even in the dead of winter. The Zla Ba and the various monastic orders have long been held as the two groups above the rivalry between the clans, and attacks on either are unimaginable to most.

In the past two years, however, this security has begun to erode. Treaties between the Gnas Ri and Zla Ba demand that all of the river clans must travel to Bya Lung Pa at least once a year to pay tariffs. Recently, the Lady Protector has been demanding greater tribute, ostensibly to pay for the ongoing campaign against the High Clans. In addition, the Gnas Ri have demanded that the nomads cease their travels into the rebel-held lands in the west and south. The Zla Ba have refused, holding to their traditional neutrality. Many now have begun to refuse their annual summons to the capital. In addition, the tone of many of their plays has begun to change. Now, more often than not, the plays portray Gnas Ri prefects as tyrants or fools, and the Swan King's servants as stinking, idiotic giants.

The growing tensions between the stewards and the nomads took a new and violent turn recently. The Shan Gup, a small herder clan with their winter base lying on a tributary around a weeks journey from the contested lands in the south, have reported the mysterious disappearance of an entire Zla Ba fleet.

They report that a fleet travelling north





stopped for supplies, but departed in some haste just before nightfall. That night, the villagers heard 'demons howling overhead'. At first light, charred wreckage began to float down from the north, and horsemen sent to investigate found the clan's houseboats burning and deserted. The Chief of the Shan Gup has sent a delegation led by his son to the capital to report the incident, but so far the Lady Protector has refused to see them. They have been kept waiting at the doors of the Red Palace for six months, with the Gnas Ri claiming that they must atone for a slip of the tongue during the ceremony of introduction when they first arrived in the city. Rumours of this and similar incidents are starting to spread, despite the efforts of the Gnas Ri, and are feeding the growing resentment in the Valley. Any open hostilities against the Zla Ba could be enough to drive much of the region into revolt.

The Contested South

The Gnas Ri stand at the apex of a complex pyramid of feudal relationships, and their power radiates from Bya Lung Pa southwards, covering roughly two thirds of the Great Valley. South of here, control becomes more fluid. While most of the remaining clans technically owe fealty, the means to force them into adhering to their feudal obligations has long been absent. This has changed with the arrival of the Muster slavers, who have been happy to encourage the Gnas Ri to restore their control over these 'rebels'. This in turn sparked the first large scale war in the Valley in over a century. Known as the Blood Water Revolt, the uprising was sparked by the massacre of a nomad clan who refused to pay tithes to a Gnas Ri tax collector. Among the slain were a lama and two apprentices from the monastery at Drisa Rock. The murder of a holy man, who have for millennia been considered above all clan feuding, led to massive unrest. In late 4995, several tax collectors were murdered and the Drisa monks denounced the divinity of the Swan King. The Gnas Ri army, bolstered by weapons and training from the Muster, crushed the revolt in less than a year. Thousands were slain and tens of thousands offered in payment to the Muster for their continued support. Drisa Rock, which acted as an impromptu bastion for the rebels, was sacked and the entire population enslaved. They were dragged through Bya Lung Pa in the dead of night, as Solace feared the sight of monks in chains would upset the natives.

As a consequence of this disastrous uprising, a region of some 200 miles in the south of the Valley has become dangerously under

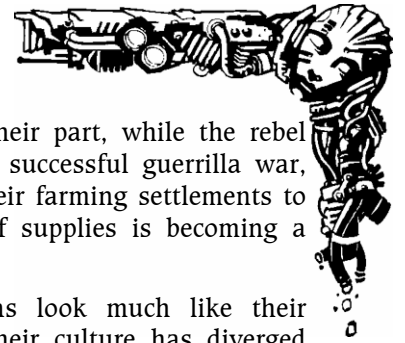
populated. The few free clans that remain face an annual struggle to amass the food to survive the harsh winters. While the Gnas Ri are reluctant to damage what they consider to be 'their' land, the Muster have no such qualms. Farms and forests have been set ablaze to drive the natives from the land. In the past two years, many have sold themselves or their children to the Muster to survive. Many more have taken to the highlands, where they survive as bandits and border reavers, preying on both the Gnas Ri and each other. The Gnas Ri have offered land to their loyal vassals to repopulate the region, but the continued instability means most refuse.

Despite the overwhelming firepower of the Gnas Ri, the revolt has never really ended, and pockets of resistance still remain. The largest of these dwell in the ruins of Drisa Rock, having diverted a nearby river to form a vast bog around their camp. A disorganised rabble, these bandits have still managed to be a persistent thorn in the Muster's side. They are led by Lu, a giant of a man who was once a monk and is now a killer. He has trained several of the bandits in the psychic arts he learnt before the wars and once swore never to use.

The High Clans

While the vast majority of Leng's population live in the grasslands of the world's great valleys, a few hardy clans cling to a life in on the slopes of the mountains and in the high passes that link the valleys together. In the Dragon's Voice range, many of these mountain dwellers have congregated in the foothills and passes on the western flank of the Great Valley. Thought to be descended from those citizens who sought to flee Gesar rule in the aftermath of the Fall, the so called High Clans have been a constant source of tension. Although they long ago submitted to the authority of the Gesar Kings, after King Wangchu defeated the Snow Tiger Alliance in 4253, they have always been quarrelsome and hard to control. To appease them, the High Clans were named as guardians of the mountain passes, and permitted by the Gesar to carry arms to protect travellers and collect tribute for the service. When the Gesar fled in 4574, many of the High Clans refused the claims of the Gnas Ri as their legal successors. Over time, the High Clans and the bandit gangs they fought against blended together, until by the end of the 46th century travel to the eastern valleys was all but impossible. The only groups that the High Clans would allow to go unmolested were the Nyima monks, as even these wild men respected the holy ones.





There was little contact between the High Clans and the Valley until the beginning of the 50th century. A series of extremely harsh winters forced many of the High Clans to migrate east into the Great Valley. Initially they warred with the Valley clans and their Gnas Ri masters, until a settlement was reached in 4912. The Gnas Ri ceded much of the Lha-mo foothills to the High Clans, on the condition that they recognised the Gnas Ri as their titular masters and provided a unit of soldiers to serve in Bya Lung Pa. Around two thirds of the High Clans accepted these terms, seeing the benefits of trade with the people of the Valley. The remainder returned to the mountain passes. Although these holdouts still mounted raids, especially after bad winters, the clans in the Lha-mo now acted as a buffer state, guarding the Valley from these bandits.

Despite this arrangement, the settled High Clans were still a people apart. They accepted the Gnas Ri as temporal rulers, but had no time for talk of a prophesised god king. When the Muster appeared, the clan chiefs sent tribute, but refused to abase themselves before the so-called 'Swan King'. This was the start of an ongoing feud. This insult (which mattered little to the Muster, but much to their new vassals) was initially ignored. When the southern clans revolted under the urgings of the Drisa monastery, the High Clans remained aloof of the 'disagreements of lowlanders'. Once this revolt was crushed in 4996, refugees from the rebels began to flee east into the mountains. The High Clans, who have never been politically united, took different attitudes to these newcomers. Some drove them off or passed them in chains to the Gnas Ri. Others accepted tribute or offers of vassalage, and allowed the refugees to settle in their lands. Demands for the surrender of these groups by the capital were rejected, and relations with the Gnas Ri began to rapidly sour.

In part to break the power of the largely autonomous High Clans, in part to provide more slaves to their masters, and in part to reopen the western passes, the Gnas Ri army began an invasion of the Lha-mo foothills in 4998. High Clans who agreed to help in the invasion were offered offworld treasures in exchange for their support, and perhaps a third of the clans sided with the Gnas Ri. The remainder resisted. The resulting war, known in the Valley as the High Revolt, has stretched on to the present day, with no sign of victory for either side looking likely. Gnas Ri troops, used to fighting poorly equipped farmers and holy men, are not well suited to suppressing a mounted, fast moving enemy who have an expert understanding of

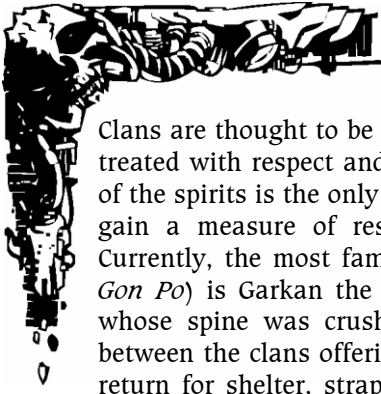
their native terrain. For their part, while the rebel High Clans are fighting a successful guerrilla war, they have lost many of their farming settlements to slave raids, and a lack of supplies is becoming a growing problem.

Although the High Clans look much like their Valley-dwelling cousins, their culture has diverged significantly since their ancestors took to the mountains during the Fall. The High Clans tend to dress in heavy wool and leather clothing, rejecting the bright silks of the lowlanders. Men usually grow full beards, and both men and women wear their hair in long braids, reaching past their waists. The clans speak a distinct dialect, and there are many subtle cultural differences with the lowlanders. The High Clans do not have a distinct feudal system, and the various clans tend to be far more autonomous. All adults are expected to be able to ride, hunt and defend the clan if needed. Sickly or deformed children are either handed over to the monasteries or abandoned, with the clans who live near Etyri lands leaving them as grizzly sacrifices to the Bird Demons. Nearly all of the High Clans live as hunters or herders, and a certain level of contempt is held for the agriculturalists of the Valley. This has carried over to the refugees, who are kept apart from the clans and have few rights.

Each High Clan elects its own leaders, a practice perhaps originating among the High Clans' democratic ancestors. Currently, there are three leading chiefs. Germi of the Srin Bia is the commander of those forces who have sided with the Gnas Ri. He is a giant by Lengese standards, standing over 6 feet in height, and is growing rich from his assistance to the slavers. The rebels have a score of heroes and commanders in their number, but two stand out as the leaders of the High Revolt. They are Nolog the Hunter and Sengemo the Lioness. Both have led great victories over the Gnas Ri, and attract scores of rebels to their banners. The Gnas Ri have placed huge bounties on their heads, and are trying to use the famous rivalry between the two to drive a wedge through the rebels' ranks, but with no success so far.

The High Clans follow a version of the Nyima faith, but in a less refined and more animistic form than that seen in the monasteries or the Valley. The High Clans believe in hundreds of local spirits and demons, and offer sacrifices to personal guardian spirits. The Etyri in the high mountains are viewed with superstitious dread, and those that stray into their lands are sure to leave a portion of their hunt as a blood offering. Psychics among the High





Clans are thought to be the chosen of the spirits, and treated with respect and fear. Displaying the favour of the spirits is the only way a cripple or outsider can gain a measure of respect in this harsh culture. Currently, the most famed of these shamans (called *Gon Po*) is Garkan the Dancer, a once great hunter whose spine was crushed in a fall. He now rides between the clans offering prophecies and healing in return for shelter, strapped to the back of his giant bull kyikra.

Beyond the Great Valley: the Free Nations of Phnom

Although the vast grasslands of the Great Valley have been the centre of Lengese civilisation for millennia, it remains home to only perhaps a third of the world's population. While the sudden collapse of world government 400 years ago doomed many of the more remote settlements to starvation in the harsh winters, the other valleys of the Dragon's Voice Mountains and the rocky coasts of the continent are still home to many hundreds of small clans and townships. Four centuries of isolation has led to great changes in local customs and cultures. The wanderings of the Nyima monks has kept alive the legends of the Gesar and the practices of the Faith over perhaps half of the continent, but in the far west and north new ways are beginning to form.

The growing complexity and isolation of Leng's cultures means that covering more than a fraction of them is far beyond the scope of a single tome, and regardless most clans and nations have no interaction with the offworlders who have visited their world in the past decade. Still, it is worth exploring the nations of southern Phnom, with whom offworlders may interact, particularly as the Musters' vassals push to reopen the High Passes and claim new slaves for their masters.

The Broken Lands

West of the Great Valley, beyond the contentious lands of the High Clans, the Dragon's Voice Mountains rise to heights of over 8000m above sea level. Even in summer, these lands are covered in snow, and humanity can only survive in the small valleys formed by mountain lakes and ancient mining operations. The region known as the Broken Lands covers a region nearly 1000 miles across, and is sparsely populated at best. Its name comes from the stark, barren stone and ice that covers much of the region, but also for the uniquely ravaged state of the land, torn asunder by

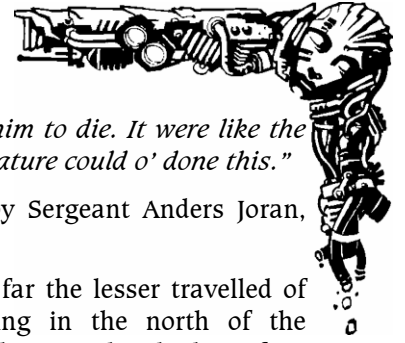
the great mining engines of Leng's Zaibatsu masters thousands of years ago.

When the Jinzi Kuangshan consortium claimed control of the barren world, they initially saw it as nothing more than a source of raw materials to be plundered. While the Great Valley was chosen to house the indentured mining population, and thus kept relatively pristine and even subjected to crude terraforming efforts, the mountain heights that contained vast seams of iron, uranium and precious metals were not so lucky. Huge demolition charges were used to destroy entire peaks, while in other places vast open mineshafts were dug to depths of several thousand metres. In only fifty years, the heart of the Dragon's Voice Mountains were stripped nearly bare and left entirely uninhabitable. When the First Gesar mounted his revolt, the miners in the region were brought back to the lowlands, and the Broken Lands were abandoned for centuries.

During the height of Gesar power in the Diaspora, roads of compacted rubble were constructed through the Broken Lands to the valleys to the west and north-west. These motorways became known as the High Passes. During the time of the world government, seasonal crews of workers were housed in settlements along the length of these roads, tasked with keeping them clear of snow and ice. When the Gesar returned to power after the Fall, democrats who refused to accept their authority were pushed out of the Great Valley and found shelter in these old road warden settlements, surviving on the robbery of travellers on the passes. The High Clans were founded by those bandit clans who agreed to police the High Passes on behalf of the Gesar. They still hold perhaps a third of the Broken Lands, but with the desertion of the Gesar, many have reneged on their old oaths. Now, a combination of neglect, encroaching ice and banditry has closed all but two of the High Passes. Even these are only navigable for a few months in the height of summer, and only caravans containing Nyima monks can be sure of passing unmolested. Only a few hardy clans of merchants, with old blood ties to the High Clans, make the arduous journey to the western valleys each year, and with the wars in the eastern foothills even this trickle of trade is dying away.

The two surviving High Passes are the *Rygyab Lam Khag* (the Spine Road), which wends roughly westwards from the Lha-mo foothills to the coastal valleys near the Gate to the West, and the *Goba Lam* (the Path of Eagles), which bends north and west, leading through the dark lands of the Bird Demons and the vast forests of the equator to the





coastal settlements of the Sea Peoples. Both take several weeks to traverse, and both carry great dangers to travellers.

The Spine Road is the more widely travelled of the two, and is in the best condition. Still, it is home to at least three large bandit clans, each of which has outposts in some of the blocky, fortified settlements once held by the King's road wardens, from which they mount raids on caravans. The Gyi Na clan of the Valley of Foxes are the first to be met. They are descended from a High Clan forced west during a civil war over a century ago, and can be bribed with food or silks. The *Tonte* (Ghost Men) hold the middle stretch of the pass, dwelling in a network of caves in the face of a vast open mine shaft. While they rarely venture aboveground, they cannot be bribed and will attack any caravan that does not display the silk banners denoting the presence of Nyima monks. To these, they can be friendly, and will come to trade fungus and lumps of unrefined ore for sermons and blessings for their children. They are a short, pale-skinned people, and most lowlanders consider them to be vile and filthy savages.

The final group to be encountered are the most dangerous. The Golden Wolves are not one clan, but a growing army of mountain peoples. They have recently united behind a single leader, known as the King of Wolves. No merchant from the Great Valley has ever met this man and returned to tell the tale. He is said to be the son of demons, stands over 7 feet, and has a wolf's head. His followers wear wolf pelts as cloaks, and fight with swords, spears and recurved bows of rare quality. It is whispered that even the ancient holy status of the Nyima is not respected by this warlord, and caravans that do not agree to pay harsh tolls are harried and eventually destroyed by raiding parties that dog them for miles through the Wolf King's lands. The colourful stories and superstitions make it hard to determine many hard facts about the Golden Wolves, but it seems likely from their well-forged weapons and numbers that they are being supported by one or more of the merchant kings of the western valleys. Why they would wish to harm traders on the Spine Road remains a mystery, although perhaps they are attempting to pre-empt any expansion by the Gnas Ri by seizing the Broken Lands for themselves.

The Bird Demons

"We found 'em a day's ride east of the trail. There weren't much left, just bodies all tore up and half ate. The captain, Prophet save him, was up in one o' them black trees. They'd rammed a branch

through his belly and left him to die. It were like the natives said, no earthly creature could o' done this."

Report to Major Solace by Sergeant Anders Joran, 5002.

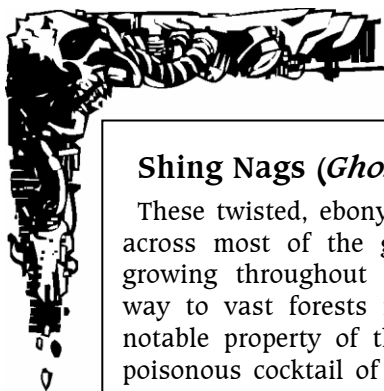
The Path of Eagles is by far the lesser travelled of the High Passes. Beginning in the north of the territory held by the high clans, in the shadow of Mt Gngas itself, the Path stretches northwest through the heart of the Broken Lands, before coming to an end on the coast of the Inner Sea. The Path of Eagles is a treacherous road, winding through mountains of broken rock and along the edge of dizzying cliffs. Unlike the Spine Road to the south, travellers of this pass need not fear human bandits once they stray beyond the lands of the High Clans. However, if legend is to be believed, far greater supernatural dangers haunt the region.

The Path of Eagles gets its name from the Etyri tribes that dwell in the high mountains it passes through. Little is known about these aliens prior to the Fall, although it is likely that they came from a sizeable population living in the Great Valley and the northern *Shing Nags* forests during the height of the Republic. When the Republic collapsed and House Gesar seized the world in a swift coup, many of the Etyri refused to accept the new government. Records in the archives of the Red Palace suggest that a guerrilla war raged between several Etyri settlements and the Gesar authorities in the north for the first half of the 41st century, although little mention of this is made in the official histories of the House's rise to power (suggesting that the handover of authority from the Planetary Senate was not as peaceful as most Nyima historians claim). In the aftermath of this feud, many Etyri fled to the Broken Lands, settling in the high mountain peaks where the terrain and the lack of oxygen made it impossible for humans to follow them. A small community of Etyri is known to have dwelt in Bya Lung Pa until the closure of the gate. The Swan King Legend contains the last reference to Etyri living among men in the following passage:

"And the Boy King, with tears in his eyes, begged the Clan of the Bird to stay with him, and guide him with the wisdom of the Mother of Mercy. But the One-Eyed Carrion Queen cried 'Nay! You seal the Eye of Heaven for naught. In the time before time I plucked out my eye for knowledge, but you tear yours out for pride. Take your family into exile, but know that you go to oblivion. As do I, to the dead home for my dead people."

Perhaps angered by the closure of the gate to their homeworld of Grail, the last Etyri





Shing Nags (*Ghost Trees*)

These twisted, ebony-coloured trees are present across most of the globe, with small thickets growing throughout the highlands and giving way to vast forests in the foothills. The most notable property of the Shing Nags tree is the poisonous cocktail of chemicals that fill its sap, drawn from the atmosphere as the trees give out the oxygen that has made Leng suitable for human life. If a PC drinks water contaminated by Shing Nags sap, they must roll End+Vigor. A success means the victim experiences violent vomiting, leading to a -6 to all rolls for the next span. If the roll is failed, the character will suffer from auditory and visual hallucinations and acute paranoia, leading to -4 to Wits, Perception and Calm for a span. On a fumble, the poisoning causes permanent brain damage, and the hallucinations may resurface in times of stress. Players should roll Calm+Vigor in these circumstances or suffer the above penalties again for 1d6 rounds.

The tribes of the Ghost Forest are known to use Shing Nags sap on blowgun darts. Anyone wounded by such a dart must roll as above.

joined their brethren in the Broken Lands. In the 400 years since the Exile, the humans of Leng have come to view the Etyri as fell supernatural beings. They are said to feast on human flesh, and bring plague and ice storms in their wake. Called Bird Demons, none other than the High Clans dare come near their lands. Even the hardy mountain folk fear them. A High Clan hunter who blunders into Etyri lands (which are usually bordered by Spirit Trees, old Shing Nags hung with bones and carcasses) will always leave a blood offering to appease the Bird Demons. Indeed, among the more remote clans, leaving sickly or deformed infants as sacrifices is a common practice.

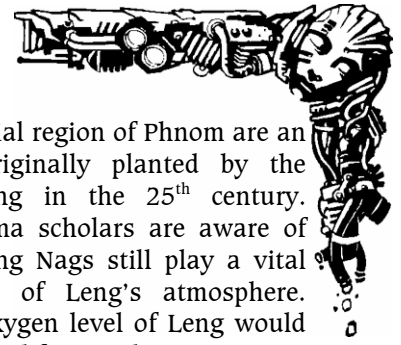
For their part, the Lengese Etyri do nothing to dispel the fears of their human neighbours. Their isolation makes it difficult to determine more than the most general aspects of their culture, but the manuscripts of Lama Srinpa, a Nyima monk who spent several years among the Etyri tribes at the beginning of the 50th century, gives some indications of the reality behind the myths. With the absence of reliable technology or trade, the Etyri have returned to an iron age, tribal way of life. Living in extended families of several dozen members, they dwell in remote cave networks and wooded valleys in the northern Broken Lands.

Even by the standards of their dour race, the Etyri of Leng are a fatalistic lot. The shaman caste which forms a loose form of de facto government between the tribes follows an odd derivation of the ancestral Etyri religion. The central tenant holds that Leng is itself a kind of netherworld, inhabited by the shades of sinners, both Etyri and human. They hold that the Etyri of Leng committed some great crime against 'the White Mother' (almost certainly a euphemism for St Amalthea. A similar deity is recognised among the Nyima as the Bodhisattva of Mercy and the mother of the First Gesar), and were thus banished to the barren lands of Leng upon death, rather than permitted into the paradise of the 'Sky Beyond the Sky'. They hold to the belief that they must atone for their great, un-named sins through a series of lives. If each is in turn virtuous, the soul rises through a series of forms. The Etyri hold that they are the closest to release from the netherworld, with non-sentient birds beneath them, then humans, then land-based animals, then formless 'hungry ghosts', then the unrepentant demons who dwell in the vast caverns formed by the ancient mines.

Needless to say, this belief permeates the culture of the Etyri with a vast melancholy. The mournful songs sung on holy days, lamenting their lost home of Grail and their lives in purgatory, are heart-breaking even to dull human ears. The Etyri have no love of humanity and little respect for sentient life. Still, they are not quite the murderous savages the people of the valleys imagine them to be. Tribes will attack travellers on the Path of Eagles in times of famine and winter, eating both the humans and their mounts. They have also been known to carry off corpses from the sky burials of the High Clans. In summer, however, they are more approachable. The shamans seem to have a small amount of respect for the Nyima, but will curse loudly at the name of the Gesar. They are also known to trade with the sickly, subterranean clans known to the valley-dwellers as the *Tonte*. They have a vast knowledge of the geography of Phnom, travelling over huge areas in search of game to return to their mountain nests, and will trade it in return for food or metal goods. They are aware of the rise of the Swan King, but have shunned all contact with him or his representatives.

One bizarre practice of the Etyri should be mentioned. Despite the beliefs of the High Clans, the Etyri do not consume the crippled infants left for them. Instead, they are taken and raised in their villages. Those that survive to adulthood are treated with respect, trained as shamans or tasked with exploring the vast tunnel networks that riddle the Broken Lands. What the Etyri





hope their human servants will discover is unknown, but Lama Srinpa described a number of strange artefacts, constructed from what appeared to be brightly coloured coral, which the Etyri claim their scouts found miles beneath the surface.

The Ghost Forest

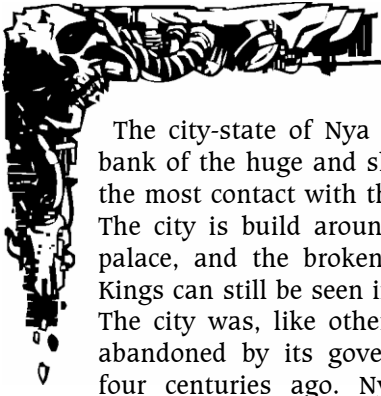
North of the Broken Lands, the Dragon's Voice Mountains slowly peter out towards the equator. Between the mountains and the coast, the foothills (which still average a height of over 1000m above sea level) are blanketed by a vast, undisturbed swathe of forest. Composed mainly of the black-leaved *Shing Nags* tree, created by the early terraformers of the First Republic, this forest has a fell reputation among the people of the mountains and the Inner Sea alike. The trees, while short and stunted, form an almost unbroken canopy, plunging vast areas in an almost constant twilight. The forests are eerily silent, home only to wild brute herds, kyikra and hordes of blood-drinking amenta. The rare traders who come here from the Path of Eagles hurry through on ancient trails. Old tales hold that hungry ghosts wait to seize travellers who stray from the path. The *Shing Nags* forests are not entirely devoid of human life. A few isolated forest clans eke out an existence as hunters and craftsmen. However, the *Shing Nags* are poisonous to humans and the thick canopy prevents all but strange fungi and ghostly corpse flowers from growing in the undergrowth. In addition, the sap of the trees sometimes pollutes standing water. Although only fatal in large doses, this tainted water causes sickness, vomiting and frightful hallucinations in any who drink it. These factors combine to explain why outsiders see the forests as a cursed and haunted land. The native clans survive thanks to their vast knowledge of their strange environment, and through the careful collection of rain water. Their lack of contact with the rest of the world has caused their way of life to stagnate to a stone age, hunter-gatherer level. They are often mistaken for blood-drinking ghosts by travellers, and violent encounters with terrified, hallucinating outsiders have persuaded the forest clans to keep to themselves. Despite their isolation, they have maintained a vibrant culture, producing exquisite carved artwork from the unique black wood of the trees. Many of Leng's surviving Obun population dwell in the forests, living intermingled with their human neighbours. Obun religion and culture has fused with that of the humans, and the unique blend is very different from the society of the mountain folk.

The forests of the equatorial region of Phnom are an artificial phenomenon, originally planted by the corporate masters of Leng in the 25th century. Although only a few Nyima scholars are aware of their significance, the *Shing Nags* still play a vital part in the maintenance of Leng's atmosphere. Without the forests, the oxygen level of Leng would fall dramatically, making life in the mountains impossible within a century. Luckily, since the Fall the forests have actually grown, covering a vast area both here and in the equatorial regions of the western continent. The trees have expanded over the abandoned ruins of more than one city, and tales of vast treasures guarded by the forest ghosts are told among the Sea Peoples of the coast.

In the past few years, a worrying rumour has begun to spread among the coastal towns. Groups of savages from the Ghost Forest have begun appearing in remote villages, begging for steel tools and oil. They claim that swathes of the forest have begun to mysteriously sicken and die, infected by a previously unknown fungus that rapidly kills even healthy trees. The forest dwellers claim that the fungus is being spread by 'the demons under the earth', and infected trees must be burned to prevent the contagion from spreading. Most of these attempts to gain aid have been met with suspicion and superstitious dread, with terrified villagers firing at the pale, fur-covered 'ghosts'. Still, some of the monastic rulers of the coast have taken an interest in the tales, and are considering investigating for themselves.

The Coastlands of the Inner Sea

As the land slowly falls towards the west coast of Phnom, high mountains and dense forests give way to a land of rolling hills and vast, slow-moving rivers. This region, which stretches from the great land-bridge to the western continent to the broken peninsula that marks the northern tip of the continent of Phnom, is home to many hundreds of small towns and settlements that run along the coast and the banks of the great waterways. The people of this region are known as the *Mi Gtsang Po* (the People of the Sea) by the mountain folk, who occasionally brave the dangers of the Broken Lands and the Ghost Forest to trade with some of the towns. There is no centralised government here; instead there is a chaotic tapestry of petty city-states and nomadic herders. It is hard to make any generalisations about the diffuse cultures that dwell here, but a few states stand out as the most influential.



The city-state of Nya Rgyal Sa, which lies on the bank of the huge and sluggish River of Dreams, has the most contact with the people of the Great Valley. The city is build around the ruins of an old Gesar palace, and the broken jade towers on the Hill of Kings can still be seen in the heart of the settlement. The city was, like others like it all over the world, abandoned by its governors during the Exile over four centuries ago. Nya Rgyal Sa went through almost two centuries of anarchy, beset by internal revolts and raids by the corsairs that once controlled the mouth of the river. Order was finally restored by the monks of Rmi Lam Island, an ancient monastery that lies on an island in the river, several miles east of the city. The monks gathered an army of farming peasants and river bandits in 4812 and ousted the dynasty of tyrants who then controlled the city. Since then, the High Lama of the monastery has also served as the governor of the city. It was the influence of the monks that led to the resumption of trade along the Path of Eagles, and they have grown to become one of the leading factions among the Sea Peoples.

The monks of Nya Rgyal Sa differ significantly from their more conservative cousins in the mountains. The tradition of isolation in remote monasteries has slowly eroded over the past two hundred years, and most now reside in the city. Many now marry and raise children, engage in trade, and even lead the city's small but well-maintained army. The ancient practices of seclusion and rejection of the mundane world are given little more than lip-service. The Rmi Lam School is growing in popularity along the eastern coast of the Inner Sea, and has far more influence in the coastlands than the conservatives of the Gngas-affiliated monasteries. Relations between the two schools have been cordial but distant for several decades, but the past ten years have seen a growth in tensions. High Lama Chogyal Wangdak, governor of Nya Rgyal Sa, did nothing to help matters when he had a party of Gnas Ri diplomats whipped and driven from the city in 5002. What provoked this violent reaction is unclear, but the High Lama has sent monks to Mt. Gngas making it clear that while he recognises the theological seniority of the most ancient of temples, he will permit none of the monastery's noble masters to enter his lands. Trade with the Great Valley is still being carried out, but that too could be cut off at any time.

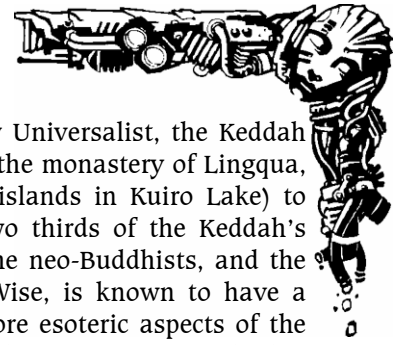
Beyond Nya Rgyal Sa, the coastal lands on the east coast of the Inner Sea are characterised by rolling hills and many rivers. The clans of this region have adopted a nomadic existence

as herders. Clans follow the vast reindeer and brute herds, only settling in winter in the coastal towns. They are led by local chiefs, called *noyans*, some of whom claim descent from the Gesar (a belief not shared by outsiders). The reindeer clans (who are known to their neighbours simply as *khampa*, or nomads) have adapted well to a nomadic life, travelling with their herds into the interior during the brief summer and to the coasts during the winter, where their brightly coloured tent villages form on the outskirts of the permanent fishing towns of the Inner Sea. The nomads are a superstitious lot, and consider spiritual purity to be of utmost importance. They live by hundreds of strictures and taboos. Breach of many of these, such as killing a horse without then eating it, or conversing with the ghosts of the Shing Nags forests, leads to expulsion from the clan. Such wretches are known as *Dmarpo Rkangpa* (lit. 'bloody feet'), after the practice of slicing open the soles of the exile's feet upon his expulsion from the clan. Many of these Bloody Feet have congregated in the coastal cities or in Nya Rgyal Sa, where they live as manual labourers or beggars. More than a few have also ended up among the pirates of the River of Dreams and the eastern coast of the Inner Sea. The infamous corsair Mal Galme is one such exile turned pirate king. He united many of the bandit clans of the River of Dreams into a coalition that attacked the walls of Nya Rgyal Sa itself in 4998, but was broken and driven out of the river. Now Galme has resurfaced in the north, having seized control of a string of fishing villages. Bloody Feet are flocking once more to his banner, and he is expected to try to settle old scores soon.

The Western Valleys

At the western end of the Spine Road, the high mountain pass descends into a rugged and chaotic land of small valleys and steep cliffs. The altitude of these mountains averages around 2000m above sea level. The lower altitude leads to a balmier climate and less harsh winters than is experienced in the heart of the Dragon's Voice Range. Tundra and bare rock gives way to flowering meadows and small forests of pine, *Shing Nags* and oak. The land here was once home to the rural estates of the minor nobility. These were largely Gesar barons and landed knights, but by old treaty Houses Keddah and Justinian also held land here. When the Gesar deserted the world and contact with the Great Valley slowed to a trickle, the remaining nobles of these other houses began to consolidate their control over the abandoned villages and manors. The 47th century was a time of war in this region, as Sheik





Kamila Keddah and Baron Horatio Justinian battled for control of the best farmland and mines. This conflict dragged on for decades, and did irreconcilable damage to the local infrastructure. In the end, both sides settled into a sullen peace that has remained to the present day.

The people of the Western Valleys are much like those of the high mountains, but elements of the culture of their noble masters have become engrained over the years. In the lands of the Justinian, who hold the north-western area of the region, the Nyima sect is still persecuted as if Chonden's insurrection had never occurred. The Justinian endeavour to maintain Orthodox Universalism, and it is one of the few regions on Leng where Nyima monks are not treated with respect. Indeed, only two years ago a wandering lama and his apprentice were hanged for attempting to spread 'heresy' among the peasantry. The rural serfs still keep to some neo-Buddhist beliefs in their folk rites, but the nobility harshly punish any found to possess statues or holy texts to Gesar or the little gods. Great bonfires of such wooden carvings are burnt on the anniversary of the Exile in the capital of Byzantion, to which all the town's citizens are forced to attend.

To the south and east, at the terminus of the Spine Road, the Keddah hold power. This minor house had maintained a history of good relations with the Gesar throughout the New Dark Ages. Over time, they came to hold a large number of small estates through diplomatic exchange or intermarriage. With the sealing of the gate and the desertion of the Gesar, the Keddah of Leng mounted a failed attempt to unite the world under their control, proclaiming themselves as royal 'cousins' to the absent house, and thus legitimate stewards of their subjects. These pretensions went nowhere, as the self-declared Sheik of Leng was unable to master her own estates, let alone the distant lands of the Great Valley or the Inner Sea. Now, Sheik Kamila's descendants still hold to their old claim, but have sensibly put it aside in favour of more pressing concerns. The Keddah rule from The Lion's Maw, a vast compound built to mark the western end of the Spine Road. This is the final destination of merchant caravans, who sell silks, barley and brute flesh from the Great Valley and ore bartered from the Ghost Men for timber, tea and rice (the staple crops of this region). The Keddah are wealthy, and have become more of a successful merchant house than a traditional noble family. Rank is determined in part by merit, and they are open to allowing commoners into the ranks of the House if they prove useful. In this way, they have become influenced by many native

ways. Although technically Universalist, the Keddah allow the Nyima (based in the monastery of Lingqua, which lies on a series of islands in KUIRO Lake) to operate openly. Around two thirds of the Keddah's subjects are followers of the neo-Buddhists, and the current Sheik, Amar the Wise, is known to have a personal interest in the more esoteric aspects of the faith. The Keddah have also maintained a higher than average tech base, by patronising and occasionally inter-marrying with traditional clans of craftsmen and engineers (called *Lag Shes Pa* by the native Lengese).

The feud between the Keddah and Justinian has been quiet for nearly a century, when a neutral region of independent valleys was established to act as buffer zone between the major powers of the region. Despite this, tensions have begun to grow again in recent years. Keddah astronomers have reported an unusual number of 'shooting stars' above the Justinian estates. The Justinian diplomats vociferously deny any contact with these unidentified aerial craft, but this combined with the rumours of offworlders coming from traders from the Great Valley has led to growing paranoia among the Keddah elite. The Keddah began funding the Golden Wolves bandits in the lands to the east to guard their borders from a possible attack from the Great Valley. Unfortunately, the bandits have grown out of control, and now demand tribute and weaponry to stop them attacking the Lion's Maw itself. The Keddah are trapped between an old foe and a new one of their own creation, and are desperate for assistance, regardless of the source.

The Far West: The Lands of Bód

The western continent of Bód, named after the ancient homeland of Leng's original settlers, has always been a sparsely populated land. Slightly larger than Phnom, Bód forms a great crescent, stretching around the massive bay known as the Sea of Mists.

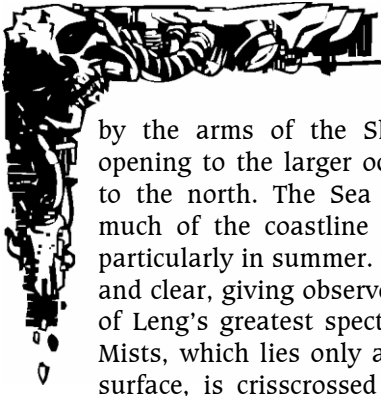
The Empire of Nagara and the Sea of Mists

"We bled for him, we died for him, and this is how we are repaid! Never again shall I bow to a king who rewards loyalty with betrayal and honour with cowardice. A curse on the line of Gesar, and death to all who would grovel before him."

Lord Commander Khadan of Nagara, 4574

The heart of the continent of Bód is dominated by a large, shallow sea, enclosed to east and west





by the arms of the Shadow Mountains and only opening to the larger ocean through a narrow strait to the north. The Sea of Mists is well named, as much of the coastline lies shrouded in thick fogs, particularly in summer. The water itself is eerily calm and clear, giving observers a magnificent view of one of Leng's greatest spectacles. The bed of the Sea of Mists, which lies only a few hundred feet below the surface, is crisscrossed by a breathtaking series of coral formations. In many places, these ridges of brilliant orange and scarlet coral break the surface, forming jagged spires and minarets that can stretch dozens of metres into the air. These reefs, formed by a number of coral-like micro-organisms native to Leng, are now deserted of life. The changes in the world's atmosphere after the settlement of the world poisoned the reefs' creators, which were declared extinct by the late Diaspora. Thought to be the most advanced of Leng's native species, the reefs remain as a silent monument to a vanished order of life.

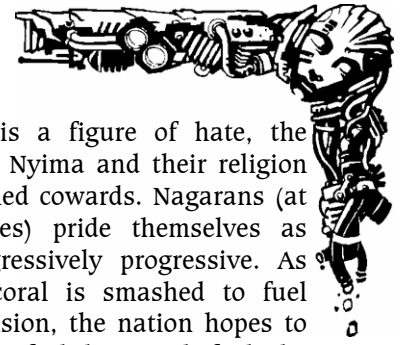
During the long reign of the Gesar, the reefs of the Sea of Mists made the region a popular destination for tourists and nobles seeking to retreat from the rigours of governance. The Gesar long ago forbade any interference in the reefs, despite the discovery of large hydrocarbon deposits (formed by aeons of dead polyyps) beneath the sea. This environmental restriction was honoured by the Planetary Senate during the Republican era, who invested heavily in the region to encourage interstellar tourism from the rich worlds in the Republic's core. At this time, the city of Nagara was founded on the southern coast as a discrete, tasteful and above all secure retreat for the Republic's political and economic elite. When the Fall came, Nagara was targeted by democratic militants, and only the carefully disguised defences and a small group of loyal soldiers prevented a massacre of noble residents. In honour of the defenders, the restored Gesar gifted them with titles and command of the city. The semi-autonomous city became the base for the Green Banner, House Gesar's elite military regiment and the planet of Leng's last line of defence.

In the chaos of the 46th century, Nagara tried to steer a neutral course between the House leadership on Byzantium Secundus and the fanatics that seized control of Phnom. The Green Banner generals had little love for 'King' Chonden, and the religious revival of the Nyima found little support in the region. Despite this tension, the hand of the Green Banner was forced when Nagara was targeted by the invading Li Halan fleet in 4574. Repeated attempts to mount a landing assault were repulsed with heavy casualties on both sides. In the

end, the Li Halan resorted to orbital bombardment, having received dispensation from the Patriarch to resort to such extreme measures in the face of global heresy. None of the asteroids dropped on Bód scored a direct hit on Nagara, but the surrounding countryside was devastated. The bombardment was cut short by a desperate counter-attack by the surviving system defence fleet, and the Li Halan were expelled from the system. In the chaos of the aftermath, the leadership of the Green Banner found themselves cut off from their Gesar masters. By the time communications were restored, they found both their attackers and superiors gone, left with only a cryptic message from King Chonden Gesar. Unimpressed by the holy king's humble abdication of power, the Lord Commander of Nagara repudiated his oath of fealty to House Gesar and began the process of establishing himself as dictator of the surviving communities around the Sea of Mists (Lord Commander Khadan's speech announcing his intentions was recorded and is played to crowds each year on Betrayal Day. It has lost none of its anger and vitriol over the centuries, and never fails to whip up the Nagarans into a patriotic fury).

The Green Banner's early plans of conquering the continent were foiled by the end of the 46th century, mainly due to the lack of infrastructure caused by the collapse of world government and the devastation of the local agricultural lands. Khadan himself died in 4618, assassinated by one of his own aides in a coup attempt. Much of the 47th century was dominated by feuds between the officer corp, which only served to further damage Nagara's infrastructure. It was not until 4665 that the collapse was halted. Angered by the in-fighting and poor governance of their officers, a popular movement began to grow among the Green Banner's common soldiery and the civilian population of Nagara. The movement, known to history as the Sword and Hammer Revolt, culminated in the expulsion of all military forces from the city of Nagara itself. A civilian government, known as the High Council, was established along nominal democratic lines, although in reality it consisted of an oligarchy formed from the city's upper classes. The military was violently purged of officers who were unwilling to release the reins of power, and restructured into fifteen 'banners', or regiments. Twelve of these were granted lands outside of Nagara to govern as semi-independent satrapies, on the condition that they swore loyalty to Nagara and remained outside of the borders of the city itself. The remaining banners, consisting of the Three Eye Banner (intelligence agents) and the Steel Gate Banner (the High Councils personal guard)





are the only legions permitted within the walls of the city.

Bizarrely, this system worked, mainly as the Banner Generals competed among themselves and ensured no single member of their ranks grew too powerful. Nagara itself went through a period of massive growth throughout the 49th and 50th centuries. A concerted effort was made to rebuild the technological infrastructure lost during the bombardment. The major breakthrough came from the exploitation of the untouched reserves of oil and natural gas beneath the coral beds of the Sea of Mists. By the 4850s, rail lines linked the scattered settlements of the coast, flying over the ravaged countryside between. While some peoples resisted, they were quickly crushed by the Banners, who seized the taken lands for themselves. By the end of the 50th century, the growing Empire of Nagara is poised to expand across Bód and beyond. Mighty airships are braving the heights of the Seguder Mountains that encircle the Nagaran plains, and a fleet of vast dreadnoughts is being prepared to set sail for the Inner Sea and beyond. If it was not for the unexpected attacks of the Seguder Cerig hillfolk of the mountains, Nagara would have already begun the exploration and eventual conquest of Phnom. This new threat is causing tensions between the Banner Generals and the High Council to resurface, and the politics of the Empire are a minefield at present.

The city of Nagara has grown from a small resort town to a bustling industrial city with a population of over five million. The skyline is scarred with rows of smokestacks and chimneys, and a permanent haze of smoke hangs over the city from the vast factories, which churn out munitions, vehicles and other goods 24 hours a day. The streets are bedecked in bright pennants and political posters, urging the workforce to strive for the Freedom of Leng. With the new war and the tensions with the military, the democratic practices of the city have begun to slip. Secret police from the Three Eye Banner are everywhere, and laws restricting freedom of speech and movement are rigorously enforced. The power of Nagaran nationalism is still strong, but growing voices in the slums and gin houses mutter against the Council which turns a blind eye to the deaths in the factories and suppresses any form of civil protest.

The Nagaran culture is one built on a violent rejection of Leng's past. Despite the failure of the Green Banner to secure control of the city they once guarded, the impotent rage that struck the soldiery after the desertion of their noble masters

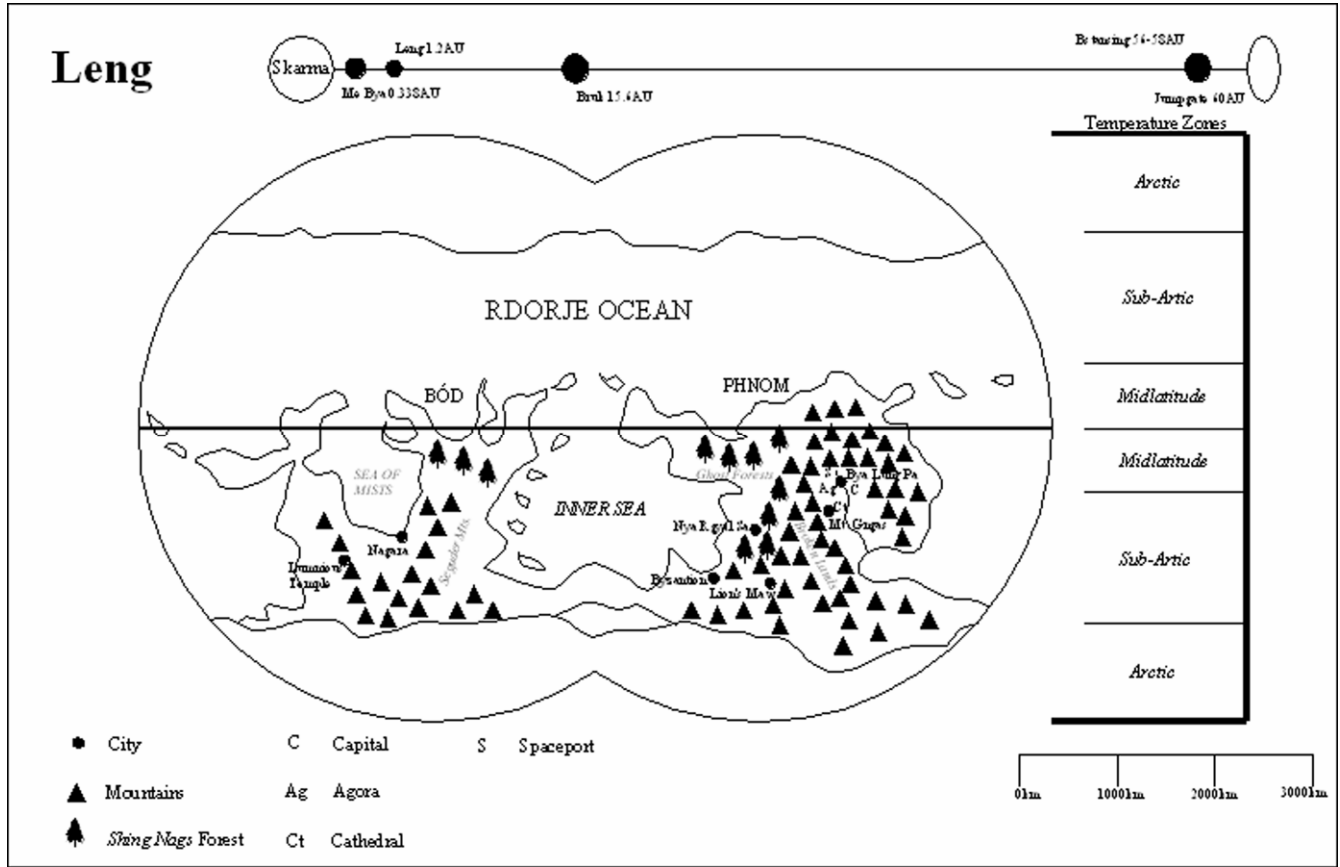
remains. Chonden Gesar is a figure of hate, the basest of traitors, and the Nyima and their religion are dismissed as weak-willed cowards. Nagarans (at least in the upper classes) pride themselves as forward-thinking and aggressively progressive. As the once venerated fire coral is smashed to fuel Nagara's engines of expansion, the nation hopes to smash the old ways they feel have calcified the people of Leng into numb inactivity.

The Seguder Cerig (Shadow Soldiers)

Even during the height of the Second Republic, the Seguder Mountains that dominate the southern half of Bód were sparsely populated. Unlike the Dragon's Voice range, the Seguders lacked a region like the Great Valley where settlements could be based. Instead, the population became congregated along the coasts of the Inner Sea and the Sea of Mists. The mountains, with their poor soil and lack of vegetation, were home to only a scattering of mining colonies and meteorological stations. When the Fall came, the new Gesar rulers evacuated those miners who could be traced, and abandoned the rest. From the 41st century onwards, the Seguder Mountains became essentially lawless.

A small number of people were either missed by the Gesar or refused their offers of resettlement, living out a miserable life as hunters and scavengers in the mountains. These hillfolk were hated by the people of the coasts, and the soldiers of Nagara were often tasked with driving them from the farmlands around the Sea of Mists. Ironically, many of these very farmers fled into the mountains when their lands were bombarded by the Li Halan in 4574. When Nagara fell into internal feuding after the desertion of the Gesar, most of these refugees chose to stay with the hillfolk, swelling their numbers greatly. Since then, an ongoing brush war has raged between the hillfolk, who regularly sneak into the surviving farmlands to steal food and livestock, and the Nagarans who seek to drive them further into the mountains to increase their borders.

This conflict would have been settled in Nagara's favour but for the actions of a mysterious group of monks. Around thirty years ago a number of the mountain clans were approached by strangers in white robes. The monks claimed to come from a lost kingdom high in the mountains, which they obliquely referred to as the Luminous Temple. They told the startled savages that they were the last survivors of an ancient civilisation, which fell hundreds of years ago. The monks were from a holy order which was tasked with keeping alive the knowledge of



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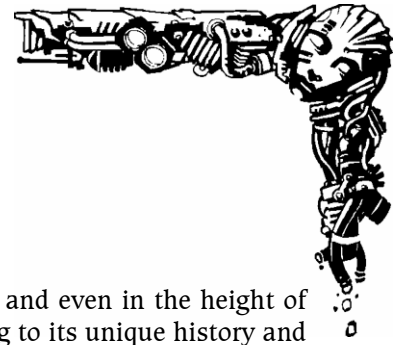
the past in secret, but that studies of the stars had informed them that the time was right to return to the world and prepare the way for a great change described in ancient prophecies.

Much of this talk went above the heads of the Seguder tribesmen, but the rifles that shot bolts of fire and food that could keep a man alive for a week with a single bite bought the support of many chieftains. By 4990, an alliance of several hundred clans began mounting organised raids against Nagaran military outposts and oil refineries. This new army is currently led by Noyan Jida Twice-Born, a fanatical follower of the Luminous Philosophy. He is the only known man to have travelled to the Luminous Temple, where he claims he was brought back to life by the magic of the monks after being slain in a failed raid against a Nagaran oil refinery. He described the Temple as a giant white egg, half buried by rocks at the end of a steep-sided valley deep in the mountains. Jida has become the core of a new religious sect, which worships the monks as angelic messengers (a practice the monks neither condone nor oppose) which is spreading rapidly through the ranks of the hill tribes.

The Nagaran army has quickly come to fear the so-called *Seguder Cerig* (Shadow Warriors), both for their uncanny knack for slipping through gaps in the Nagaran defences and for the strange armour they wear which distorts the air around them, making them hard to target. The High Council is also alarmed by the nature of the raids. In a matter of a few years the hillmen had gone from cattle rustling to stealing arms and raw materials. More than once a new prototype weapon has been stolen, and within weeks replicated and used against its inventors.

In the past five years, the Nagarans have been constructing an increasingly complex string of walls and watchtowers along the edge of their lands, to little appreciable effect. Seguder Cerig raids are growing bolder, although they have still been defeated in those rare occasions the Nagarans have managed to corner them into a pitched battle. Last year, one such victory was won at Five Crater Field. The Ivory Talon Banner defeated a numerically superior Seguder Cerig force and took nearly 3000 men as slaves back to Nagara. Among them was one of the mysterious monks that lead the Cerig, who has been subjected to interrogation, medical investigation and torture since his capture.



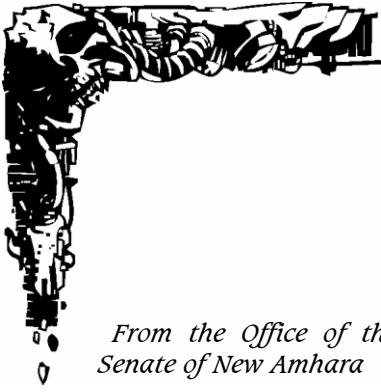


The military authorities have released some details to the public regarding their prisoner. They say he is hairless and devoid of any physical marks or blemishes, able to survive for weeks without food or sleep, and is in excellent physical condition. More bizarrely, he claims to be over 1000 years old, but maintains he cannot remember anything clearly before the 4950s. In regard to his mission, he merely maintains that he and his fellows are preparing for 'the Great Change'. Official government statements maintain that the monk is clearly some kind of Gesar agent, although he has never mentioned the House himself and seems to know nothing of the Swan King legend. Among the populace, the common and more pragmatic belief is that the man is a demon, and that he and his wicked allies seek to feed on the blood of loyal Nagaran citizens. Either way, the Nagarans are preparing to take the war to the Seguder Cerig, and are gearing up for a major offensive into the mountains in the coming summer.

Game Rules

Lengese Language

Leng is an ancient world, and even in the height of the Second Republic it clung to its unique history and culture. As a result, Urthish has never been the dominant language on Leng, only spoken by the minor nobility in places such as the Western Valleys. Lengese itself is derived from ancient Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian dialects and shares no more than a handful of loan words with the language of the Empire. As a result, Lengese should be treated as a separate language, taken by characters from Leng in place of Urthish.



Lost World: New Amhara

By Chris Hogan

From the Office of the Speaker of the Planetary Senate of New Amhara

On behalf of the people of New Amhara it is my pleasure to offer greetings and salutations to our brothers in liberty among the stars. Although long isolated from our fellow republics it is the avowed wish of our government, supported wholeheartedly by our electors, that the interrupted relations between our world and the greater commonwealth of sentient beings be renewed at the earliest opportunity.

It is with great pleasure that we invite to visit our world appointed representatives of all stellar alliances, planetary governments and private corporate entities who may wish to engage in a peaceful and mutually advantageous exchange of goods, services and cultural ideas.

May the blessing of the Creator be upon you.

Nesta Dinagde, Protector of the People and 134th Speaker of the Senate

History

New Amhara was discovered during the Diasporan period known to later historians as the Age of Miracles. In 2758 a team of entrepreneurial exploratory scientists known as Dawntreader Survey working on the Swan's Way system jumpgate deciphered an unknown jumpcode. Robotic survey probes revealed a solar system of seven planets with a human-habitable planet second from the sun. Due to its erratic and highly eccentric orbit Moische, the eighth planet of the system, was not discovered until almost a decade after initial survey.

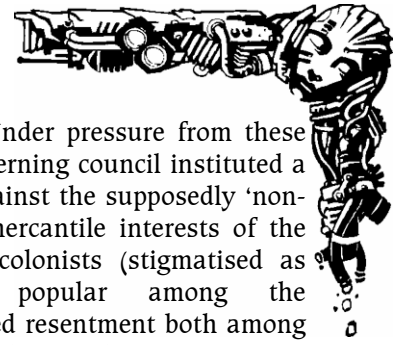
The scientists had intended to sell the system's jumpcode to the highest bidder but a member of their own research team thwarted their plans. This man, a Zuranist whose name has been lost in passage of centuries but still revered by New Amharans, leaked the information to his compatriots on Swan's Way, and via them, to Zuranist communities in the core worlds of humanspace. Dawntreader Survey's security teams rapidly exposed and executed the traitor in their ranks and did their best to bring to book those who they saw as profiting from data piracy. Although their harsh campaign

against "Zuranist pirates and data thieves" was applauded on Grail the *laissez faire* government of Swans Way, itself seeking to profit from the new world, refused to assist their efforts. A Dawntreader blockade of Zuranist refugee caravans arriving in the Swan's Way system rapidly fell apart when the local government passed legislation declaring any attack on the caravans to be a criminal act.

First landfall was made on the new world in 2763. The pilots' preference for landing on the barren (but conveniently equatorial) plains of New Darfur in preference to the rich (but orbitally awkward) prairies of coastal Amharia led to a deal of resentment among the first colonists. Many rapidly departed from the initial colonies, rebelling against what they saw as a Swans Way-dominated effort to turn them back into the kind of bondservants their TUW ancestors had once been. Despite the demands of their backers that the new world be called Cygnet a quick piece of sleight of hand by some Zuranist malcontents at the official planetary naming ceremony in 2765 resulted in the world being named "Home". The folktale of "How Saint Coyote gave the world its name" is still popular even among Orthodox Amharans.

Due to its late settlement and relatively isolated position two jumps nightside of Grail the inhabitants of Home remained largely unaffected by the spate of anti-Zuranist persecutions led by the early Patriarchs of the Universal Church. Home became known as something of a haven for Zuranists and other pre-reflective believers during the years of strife that followed the Age of Miracles. Although a few later colonists heeded the call to arms in the Consolidation Wars against the alien menaces of the Ukari and Vau star empires the vast majority of the population shrugged their collective shoulders and got on with the work of taming the planet. Would-be imperialists from Swan's Way occasionally raided Home during the early years of the Consolidation (3100-3500). These invaders were either bought off, or found occupation of an entire world of wilful individualists so difficult and expensive that they gave up the pretence of being rulers and either returned home or settled down to raise families themselves. Over the centuries the diverse peoples of Home developed a reputation as an insular and backward people among





Amhara Traits

Ruler: Holy Speaker (Prince) Nesta III Dinagde (Amharia), Zomma (Duke) Ishmael Zhenawi (Zalkhi)

Cathedral: Temple of the Golden Testament, Ghonda-I-Aga, Amharia (Amharan Orthodoxy)

Agora: Edul-I-Aga (New Amhara), Toadeni Oasis (Zalkhi)

Garrison: 4

Capital: Ghonda-I-Aga (New Amhara), Mokum (Zalkhi)

Jumps: 4

Adjacent Worlds: Swan's Way (dayside)

Solar System: Sun, Malhee (0.6AU), New Amhara (1.1AU; Selash), Manlek (2.3AU), Shao (3.9AU), Moishe (6.4AU), Iyasu (11AU; 12 moons, rings), Yohan (18.1AU; 4 moons), Yafeed (29.7AU), Jumpgate (48.4AU)

Tech: 3-4, up to 6 in Zalkhi and Amharia

Population: 700 million, 20 million aliens (12 million Obun, 7 million Ukari, 500,000 Gannok)

Resources:

Exotic woods, lacquer, natural dyes, perfumes, hydrocarbons

Metals (iron, chromium, gold, tin, nickel, copper, uranium, other exotics)

Minerals (fossil fuels, salts and alkalis)

Foods (vegetables, grain crops, fruit, fish, lamb, beef)

Natural produce (exotic woods, lacquer, natural dyes)

Finished woods (optical shields, furniture, weaponry)

Luxury goods (fine wines, jewellery, gika-silk, decorated/fancy goods, *Objects d'art*)

Archaeotech (starships especially)

Exports: None. Any of the above if contact with the Known Worlds or other stellar nation is re-established

the more politically advanced worlds at the core of humanspace.

By the 3500s an almost universal trend towards unification was spreading across humanspace. As so often however Home was an exception to the rule. Due to a policy of open immigration that the fractious and loosely organised planetary governing council instituted in the 3300s by 3500 the descendents of the original Zuranist inhabitants of Home (the self-styled Firstcomers) were an absolute minority on what they still

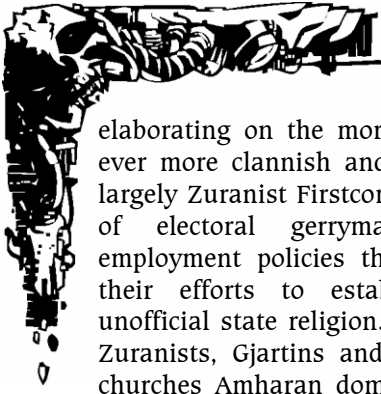
considered 'their' world. Under pressure from these influential citizens the governing council instituted a series of punitive taxes against the supposedly 'non-Zuranist' industrial and mercantile interests of the more recent Universalist colonists (stigmatised as Latecomers). Although popular among the Firstcomers these taxes bred resentment both among the Latecomer elements of the population, and, more importantly, within the rising power of the Second Republic.

During the early years of the 36th century a series of appeals for aid made by the leading families among the Latecomers, who through their controlling interests in the vineyards, gika-silk farms and rich mines of the New Amharan plateau controlled most of the liquid wealth of the world, were eventually heard by the slowly coalescing Second Republic. Sensing the opportunity to show their support for an unfairly disenfranchised majority population, and to make a fast buck out of an almost unspoiled world, the mercantile alliances at the heart of the Republic threw their support behind the Latecomers. A few years of preferential trade agreements, heavy propaganda broadcasts, and the covert introduction of off-world fabricated drugs among Zuranist youth saw the Zuranist governing council discredited among the populace. With their erstwhile persecutors dismissed as a corrupt feudal relic the Latecomer faction, with great fanfare, was acknowledged as the legitimate majority government of their world.

The Latecomers, who preferred to style themselves the Democratists during their campaign for admission to the Republic, proudly re-christened their planet after their own continent. With much fanfare, New Amhara became a member in good standing of the Second Republic in 3541. In commemoration of the landmark event New Amhara's Planetary Constitution and Charter of Membership in the Second Republic were engraved onto a tablet of gold mined from the rich veins of the Amharan Massif. This document, informally known as the Planetary Charter, became an integral part of the ceremonial inauguration of each successive Speaker of the Democratist-dominated Amharan Senate.

During the centuries of membership in the Republic the Democratist rulers of the world repaid their earlier persecutions tenfold. Although religious freedom was a founding tenet of the Republic a vigorous Universalist evangelical mission was established among the pre-reflective population. The public relations arm of this "mission to the benighted" made particular play of





elaborating on the more scandalous aspects of the ever more clannish and exclusive behaviour of the largely Zuranist Firstcomers. Through a combination of electoral gerrymandering and preferential employment policies the Amharan Senate pursued their efforts to establish Universalism as an unofficial state religion. Despite an outcry raised by Zuranists, Gjartins and several small pre-reflective churches Amharan domination of the media meant that this policy remained a dirty secret on New Amhara. It seemed that so long as taxes stayed low and exports remained steady the Republic remained well pleased with the *status quo*.

It was during the Republic that New Amhara gained its non-human population. Mining companies working both the vast Amharan Massif and New Darfur's Mountains of the Stars imported Ukari workers. Obun pilgrims and teachers settled the world, some seeking to study the extensive or evangelise the scattered non-Universalist population, others to study at the famous Ghonda University. Even the curious Gannok of Bannockburn found a home on New Amhara, serving aboard ocean-going vessels, in the fruit-farming and construction trades, and working in the extensive orbital colonies that were built around New Amhara and the gas giant Iyasu. The vast majority of Amharans saw the presence of aliens on their world as a mark of their new-found cosmopolitanism, especially after the Zion's Crown orbiting starport, a large repair and refitting facility for the Republican Navy, opened in 3761.

Despite the generally non-hostile atmosphere of the world some ugly incidents did occur. More than once aliens, a highly visible element among the immigrant population and thus easy targets for hatred, were lynched or burned in their homes by groups claiming to represent the Firstcomers. Rather than dying down as New Amhara increased in wealth and prosperity, these attacks increased in frequency and vehemence as economic disparities grew. It was in 3930 that the worst of these anti-alien killing sprees erupted. New Calabar, the island continent in New Amhara's eastern hemisphere, had long been a stronghold of Zuranism on the planet and, perhaps not coincidentally, a centre for Firstcomer activities. During the annual midsummer Landfall celebrations a drunken mob set upon and beat a group of Obun monks worshipping in the small Bintaru temple in the city of Loango. The pacifistic monks tried to plead for their lives, but to no avail. Seven Obun died in the attack, their bodies beaten with sticks and

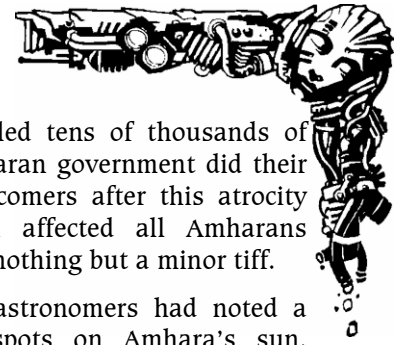
hacked apart by machetes before being immolated in the arson of their desecrated temple.

Widely and rapidly publicised, the Landfall Night Massacre in Loango acted as the signal for a month of anti-alien activity across New Amhara. Overstretched local gendarmes, despite their best efforts, were unable to protect a scattered non-human population. Some alien militants, resentful of the inability of the gendarmerie to protect them, took up arms in their own right, leading to gradually escalating urban unrest in the cities. Eventually the planetary senate was forced to send the planetary militia to the worst affected trouble spots in New Calabar and New Darfur. A harsh regime of local segregation, weapons seizures, curfews and even shoot-to-kill policing gradually stemmed the violence that had plagued the summer of 3930. But such a high visibility, high force response only kept a lid on a constantly roiling social pressure cooker of resentment and hatred. There was no denying the hostility that was slowly building against both the alien minority, and against the government in Ghonda.

The first serious presaging of the Fall to manifest itself on New Amhara, other than the race-hatred of the Firstcomers, was a catastrophic recession that hit the world in the late 3900s. Although advances in technology had made Amharan mining, farming, fishing and industry more efficient, the advent of cheap, programmable nanotechnology caused catastrophic upheavals in the existing economic structure. Primary industries, always a big employer on New Amhara, were hit first as the core worlds of the Republic; now able to extract and refine resources at almost zero cost, cut their orders for imported goods. New Amharan industries, even with local raw materials prices slashed, were unable to compete with the vast manufactories of Criticorum or Liberty. Although some local prestige and luxury goods remained in production neither this field nor the service and entertainment industries were able to absorb the vast excess labour pool created by the recession.

The government of New Amhara did its best to cope with the discontents of its people, but there was little they could do. The impersonal economic forces that had suddenly impoverished the world could not be legislated against. Although the Senate banned nanotechnological research on New Amhara their measures had no effect on other worlds. Inspired by the resurgent church a substantial 'back to the land' movement arose, leading to calls for the nationalisation of land and its distribution





to the unemployed. Taking a leaf from the book of the resurgent noble houses, which were gradually replacing Republican democracy and bureaucracy with a personal, charismatic style of leadership, the Speaker of the New Amharan Senate pronounced himself President for Life and Protector of the People in 3990. Although the next decade saw some progress in the fight against mounting unemployment and economic dislocation the Protector was able to do little to save his alien constituents from a resurgence of murderous Firstcomer aggression.

The Fall of the Republic in 4000AD exacerbated the pressures under which New Amhara was already labouring. With the chaos of the core worlds crippling both its tourist industry and export trades New Amhara sank deeper into depression. An attempt by the New Amharan government to nationalise the military-run Zion's Crown starport in 4002 was violently opposed by those elements of the Republican Space Navy still present in the system. The re-armed civilian craft of the Amharans were shot from orbit in a matter of minutes and, pausing only to set the space station's point defences to automatic, the navy withdrew from what Admiral Mehmet Burns Keddah now deemed "the hostile, insurrectionist territory of Amharan space". Although a number of attempts to occupy Zion's Crown were made by the Amharans during the early years of the post-Fall era all were unsuccessful.

Thrown unequivocally onto their own resources by events the Planetary Senate decided eventually to put their house in order. Freed from a system of interplanetary trade which had ultimately proved detrimental to the best interests of their people the Senate began the long, hard process of rebuilding the prosperity of New Amhara. Rejecting the apparent failure of the *laissez faire* Republic the Senate rapidly nationalised a number of key industries and slowly transformed New Amhara society into a command economy. The best efforts at reform were continually hampered both by a lack of offworld resources vital to an advanced technological economy, and by a resurgent Firstcomer movement, which sabotaged several high profile government projects in a sustained campaign of terrorism. Perhaps the most infamous of these attacks was the one on the Nakanda Gorge Dam in the summer of 4117. This Dam, which would have brought both electrical power and a controlled water supply to the isolated but fertile north-western parts of the Amharan Massif, was destroyed by a fusion-warhead missile only weeks after opening. The resulting floods, local famine and dust borne radiation

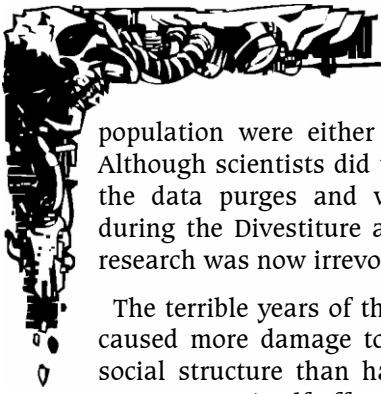
are estimated to have killed tens of thousands of people. Although the Amharan government did their best to root out the Firstcomers after this atrocity subsequent events which affected all Amharans would make this seem like nothing but a minor tiff.

Around 4115 Amharan astronomers had noted a marked increase in sunspots on Amhara's sun. Although it caused something of a stir in academic circles, it was not until the 4120s that the implications of this change in solar activity first became clear. Although the sun burned no less brightly, it had begun to pour out high levels of UV radiation, levels against which even New Amhara's thick atmosphere could not protect. During the first half of the 42nd century, spectacular auroral storms lit up the skies of New Amhara. In the wake of these marvellous displays instances of skin cancer in the population skyrocketed and, by the middle of the century, the event known as the Blinding was underway.

The Blinding was initially thought to be little more than a predictable side effect of increased UV radiation on the delicate tissues of people's eyes. Although the government began a programme of optical protection cases continued to increase in spite of all best efforts. It was not until people began to go blind *en masse* and the matter became *the* top research priority that the real cause of the horrific increase in blindness was discovered. A previously benign Amharan bacterium, present in all life forms on the world, had been mutated by increased ultraviolet radiation into a more malignant form. This mutant bound itself to the pore of the optic nerve's ion channel in those infected, effectively causing neural blindness in sufferers.

Amharans reacted to their gradual loss of sight with resignation and despair in the beginning. Sorrow quickly turned to outrage and xenophobia when it was discovered that the aliens of New Amhara were unaffected by the new affliction visited upon their human neighbours. The all-black eyes of the Obun and Ukar were immune to the aboriginal Amharan pathogen, while the prodigious immune system of the Gannok shrugged off its effects with an almost casual ease. Although many aliens volunteered their services or samples of tissue to the desperate scientists nonhumans once again became scapegoats for the suffering of humans. As the light dimmed in the eyes of Amhara's human majority another wave of pogroms wracked the cities. Within a few years of the initial outbreak of Blinding Sickness 90% of the human population of New Amhara population were blind, and the majority of the alien





population were either dead, enslaved or outcasts. Although scientists did their best to treat the disease the data purges and waves of anti-nano hysteria during the Divestiture and the Fall meant that vital research was now irrevocably lost

The terrible years of the Blinding Sickness probably caused more damage to the Amharan economy and social structure than had the Fall itself. Planetary government, itself affected by mass blindness, all but collapsed. Mass hysteria and rioting soon gave way to paralysis and the eventual collapse of advanced society. Entire communities starved in the midst of a plenty they were unable to find. Those few humans and aliens still able to see were either drafted as communal eyes, or set themselves up as petty despots. Packs of nomadic aliens took their chance to avenge the repeated indignities heaped upon them, preying on the blinded and all-but-helpless humans. For several decades New Amhara became a nightmarish proof of the old axiom that in the land of the blind, the one eyed man was king.

After a period of chaos in the late 42nd century Amharan society slowly began to stumble back to some semblance of order. Widespread mass education collapsed and, driven by harsh necessity, children were now taught about the absolute primacy of cautious collective action within trusted groups over individual initiative and free association. Only by working together and knowing one another's business, Amharan children heard, could people hope to survive in a dangerous world. Religious rhetoric among all the faiths of the world became much darker in tone. The Blinding was deemed a judgment upon sinful humanity. Any numbers of wild and outlandish reasons for this dire punishment were dreamt up. The presence of aliens on the world, the power of rogue psychics, an excessive love for visual beauty, or a lack of respect for the same were all cited as causes. This puritanical ethic was complemented by a rise in eremitic socio-religious movements, which sought to withdraw utterly from interaction with a dangerous, chaotic and unpredictable world.

The surviving humans of New Amhara slowly adapted to their new condition. As the desolated survivors gradually rebuilt their lives in a new form, a new aesthetic emerged. Under the harsh impetus of need, oral history and mnemonic practises underwent a renaissance. Choral and solo music, now a necessity for locating people over a distance outside familiar territories, became a rich and rapidly evolving tradition, particularly among the Zalkhite tribes of New Darfur. Architecture,

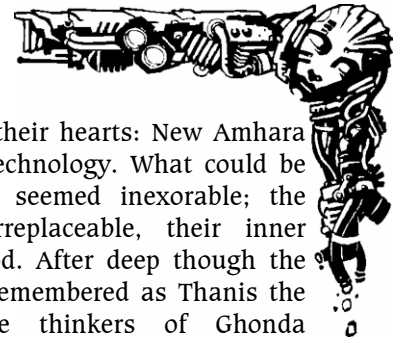
furnishing and domestic goods all developed padded or rounded surfaces, safer for sightless users than sharp, angular edges. Perfumery, long an Amharian speciality, gradually transformed into an elite art form. It is noteworthy but perhaps unsurprising that what little plastic art survives from the period of the Blinding is almost unique in Amharan history in its total disregard for colour, instead emphasizing texture as the primary medium of sensation.

Eventually, after years of painstaking research by the few scientists at Ghonda University able to continue their studies, a potential cure for the Blinding Sickness was discovered. Unfortunately this cure was ineffective against an advanced case of the disease and was proven to only be efficacious if administered *in utero* to an as-yet-unborn foetus. Despite the pain, danger and emotional strain involved in the inoculation process the vast majority of Ghondaris who were offered the serum accepted. Although Ghonda University originally distributed the serum on a *pro bonum* basis, the scientists' paymasters in the rump of the Planetary Senate realised the promise and threat inherent in control of the serum. This power over the sight of a rising generation could easily be parleyed into political influence over previously intransigent regional opposition. Although some few hold-outs refused what they saw as a poisoned chalice of the serum, over the next century the major part of the world of New Amhara accepted the Mephistophelian deal on offer; their children's sight in exchange for their own liberty.

Despite the protests of some scientists - and of a few high-minded politicians - the members of the Senate were rapidly corrupted by the newfound power they wielded. Although the head of the Senate still retained the historic titles of Lord Protector and Speaker, and regular elections were held for various offices of state, only a fool would believe that New Amhara was still ruled democratically. It might proclaim itself the "...restorer of civilisation and reviver of Republican glories..." but by the beginning of the 43rd century, the Senate was republican in name only. Looked at objectively the body was little more than an aristocratic oligarchy headed by a hereditary despot. Even the time-honoured tradition of swearing in a Speaker using the golden tablet of the Planetary Charter became little more than a triumphalist monarchic ritual.

The one body that might have stood against the rapid corruption of the Senate, the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun, instead chose to share in the exploitation of the so-called Elixir of Clear





Vision. The rising popular cult of the Holy Speaker, lauded as the Lion of Zebulon and Defender of the Republic, was led by the planetary archbishop of the Amharan Church, long known by the honorific of *Abou-Salama* ("Father of Peace"). In return for their unquestioning support of the status quo the priests of the Amharan Church were given not only the exclusive right to minister the Elixir of Clear Vision to expectant mothers, but also the right to preach the Omega Gospels to their captive audience. Before too long only those of provably Universalist religious convictions were deemed 'worthy' of this dreadfully necessary treatment. Backsliders and heathens were ruthlessly condemned by the church to dwell in the physical darkness to which their spiritual blindness had condemned them.

For nearly five centuries the Holy Speakers reigned over all the world worth ruling from the great and ancient city of Ghonda. The nomads of New Darfur, the city-states of Calabar, even the tribes of the Vogandi jungles all bent the knee to the Amharian *Ras* (dukes) appointed by the Holy Speaker, and to the Amharan Orthodox church. The power of this semi-theocratic empire was based on a rigid control of the vital Elixir of Clear Vision, bolstered by the technical achievements of Ghonda University, a paranoid and powerful secret police which attempted to exert a monopoly on psychic power, and by the raw military power needed to suppress local insurrections. At the height of the Speakers' power such was the wealth that flowed into his coffers from tributary areas that Holy Speaker Memelik XIII Dinagde declared that all those able to prove the Democratist and Universalist credentials of their ancestors during the 3500s would be free of any tax obligations in perpetuity. This elite of Amharan society, many of who had mortgaged all they owned to local landowners and forgers to secure true or 'reproduction' documents, became known as the 'Agas', or freemen. The Agas rapidly grew to form a body of privileged gentry under the *Ras* (dukes) and *Dejazmatches* (counts) of the Amharan Empire.

All the wealth of the Holy Speakers was unable to prevent a slow decay at the heart of Amharan society however. Forced into a rigid feudal structure and constrained by a code of risk-aversion bordering on taboo in its intensity, both social mobility and technical innovation languished during the empire. Advanced zero-maintenance machinery from the days of the Republic began to decay, while the complex and top-heavy command economy led to a gradual degeneration of industrial production. It was a professor of Ghonda University who in 4438 first dared to declare before the Holy Speaker

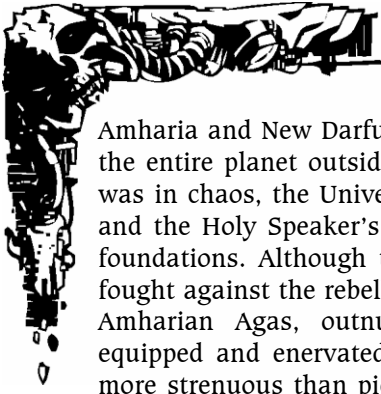
what all already knew in their hearts: New Amhara was gradually losing its technology. What could be done though? The decay seemed inexorable; the faulty machines were irreplaceable, their inner workings barely understood. After deep thought the Speaker of the day, long remembered as Thanis the Wise, declared that the thinkers of Ghonda University must discover ways that the lost technology could be replaced by manpower, ingenuity and skill. He decreed the establishment of a new Academy of Substitute Technologies, an institution devoted to maintaining the Amharan Empire's social and technical supremacy in the face of inexorable decay.

The Amharian Empire continued its course of slow political and cultural sclerosis until the late 48th century. It was during this time that a new phenomenon was reported in the jungles of New Calabar: sighted children were being born to the blind underclass of people who had rejected outright any compromise with the Amharan Orthodox Church and its' fabulous Elixir of Clear Vision. The Amharan hierarchy first suspected a mole within the tightly controlled and church-run Elixir production facility. It soon became apparent that there was a more profound and, at least to the ruling classes, threatening cause for these seemingly miraculous births. Over the centuries the optic nerves of the human inhabitants of New Amhara had begun to adapt to the bacterium that caused the Blinding Sickness. Although the eyes of the new generation of naturally sighted children were still more vulnerable to ultraviolet light than those of either the uninfected or those treated with the Elixir, these humans were the first in several generations of New Amharans able to see for themselves.

In a panic the Amharian Empire launched a killing spree in Loango and the other cities of New Calabar. Although hundreds of sighted children, and thousands still blind, were murdered by the spears of Amharian Agas word soon spread through the populace of New Calabar that the vaunted elixir with which they were blackmailed into obedience and religious servitude was nothing but a sham! Although not strictly true this rumour, along with the ever-heavier exactions of the empire and decades of accumulated resentment, caused the Calabaris to recant their enforced conversions and rebel against Ghonda's rule.

For a time it seemed that the Amharians, with their superior vision and higher technology, might hold New Calabar in subjugation but news of the revolt, and the reasons behind it, spread across





Amharia and New Darfur like wildfire. Within a year the entire planet outside of the Amharan Highlands was in chaos, the Universal Church deemed a fraud, and the Holy Speaker's rule was shaken to its very foundations. Although the Senate and their legions fought against the rebellions there was little that the Amharian Agas, outnumbered, outfought, under-equipped and enervated by decades of no missions more strenuous than picking off Obun nomads from the comfort of skimmers and aircraft, could ultimately do to restore their fortunes. By the early 49th century, the once world-spanning writ of the Holy Speaker was confined to the Amharan Highlands.

Within a generation of the Calabari revolt a seeming miracle had occurred. All over New Amhara an ever-greater proportion of children each year were being born sighted and free of foreign oppression. In a frenzy of celebration the Zuranist tribes living in the vast Zalkhi Plains of New Darfur declared themselves a free kingdom under the rule of their prophet-revolutionist leader Shkelgim Zhenawi. This man, an astronomer and mystic in the days before he had led his people in revolt, was acclaimed the first Zomma of All Zalkhi. The title of Zomma was an ancient one particular to the pre-diasporan ancestors of many Darfurans. Its' ancient connotations of holy kingship had long ago been banalised by the early Zuranist settlers of Home to indicate any leader of an autonomous Zuranist tribe, but by quirk of fate this time-hallowed honorific once again came to represent a sole and undisputed ruler in special communion with the divine. Amid rapturous celebrations Zomma Shkelgim declared his homeland the true repository of republican ideals on New Amhara. A messianic cult rapidly evolved from a syncretic mix of existing Zuranist and imported Amharian beliefs. This cult prophesied a time when the Hidden President, successor to the last unjustly overthrown true Speaker of pre-Republican Home, would reveal himself and lead his chosen people to the fabled land of Majid, a realm among the stars.

Fired with zeal the previously unremarked and despised Zalkhites swept out across New Darfur, conquering all in their path in the name of their Zuranist priest-king. Although in some disarray following the loss of their empire the Amharians looked on the rise of Zalkhi with alarm. An attempted invasion of New Darfur during a dynastic squabble within the Zhenawi clan managed to temporarily stall the Zalkhites' triumphant progress. Within a year however year the under-armed, badly led, and sometimes-starving legions of Amharia were forced to sue for peace by the

armies of Zomma Talpa. In celebration of the Amharian retreat from New Darfur the Zalkhites built a great stellar observatory at the order of their seemingly infallible king, victor over both heretic rebels and Amharian heathens.

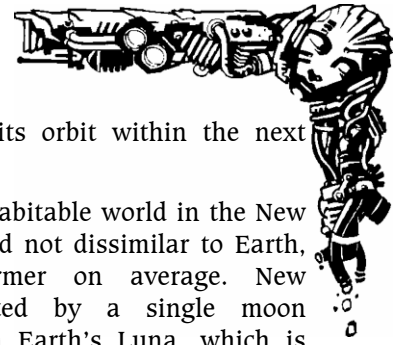
It was astronomers at the Mokum observatory who, in the year 4935, made a fateful discovery. It seemed that the strange star that had flown across New Amhara's night sky in patterns of its own since time out of mind was no natural celestial wanderer, but a construct, a thing made by men. This was news to the ears of the Zalkhite people, who considered the discovery yet more proof of the divine nature of their beloved Zomma's wisdom. Overnight Zalkhi was seemingly transformed. From the militaristic terror of the continent the nation suddenly changed into a society obsessed with flight. Strange experimental aircraft, cannons and rockets sprouted in the fields around Mokum. Airborne disasters rent the skies and exploding visitations from above became an occupational hazard for local farmers.

Within a decade Zomma Mihai, son and heir to Tapla the Victorious, was able to declare that Zalkhite science had produced the first voidsailer built on New Amhara for a thousand years. After delays and complications which somewhat took the lustre off the initial announcement the Zomma finally declared the voidsailer, named the Dawntreader after a great explorer and founder figure of Zalkhite legend, ready in 4947. On the anniversary of Landfall that year the people of Maydin turned out in celebration to wish their leader well on his glorious journey into the outer void.

From the beginnings the Zalkhite quest for the stars was fraught with troubles. The half-understood, barely controlled technologies of their voidsailer blasted the launch area clear of crowds and broke the bones of the hapless crew labouring under immense and unaccustomed strains of acceleration. Gasping and bleeding from their injuries the crew watched their home world fall behind them and gradually felt weight and solidity departing from their bodies. Certain they were dying many of the crew wept, prayed and vomited in fear and sickness. Within a few hours however the hysteria of those who survived their internal injuries had turned to wonder as their ship, guided by the mathematical engines built into it, swung into a close orbit around their goal: the vast, long-deserted Zion's Crown starport, a mighty fortress of the stars, ringed about with sleek void-going ships.

Impatient to enter what he was certain was the palace of the long-anticipated





Hidden President Zomma Mihai ordered an immediate docking with the station. Against the advice of his engineers the holy king of Zalkhi and his bodyguard floated down the Dawntreader's docking umbilicus and, after ineffective entreaties to the station, finally dynamited open the exterior airlock. Unfortunately for Mihai and his men their ignorance of explosive expansion in a low pressure, 0-gravity environment blew their docking tube to ribbons and themselves out into the void of space. The crew on the Dawntreader, after patching the holes blown in their own hull, decided that a more modest target than the starport itself befitted their abilities.

It was a chastened Zalkhite expedition that descended to the Zalkhi Plains on a blaze of meteoric fire five days later. Although they had brought with them a wonderful voidsailer of the ancients, both the Dawntreader and their beloved lord and master had been lost to the coldness of space: the former to cannibalisation for parts, the latter to explosive decompression. It was to his amazement and dismay that Senior Voidsailor Rajmono Zhenawi, a distant cousin of dead Mihai, found himself raised to the Zommate by popular acclaim. The new Zomma made a series of portentous speeches lauding their great discovery as the beginning of Zalkhi's inevitable ascent as the premier power on New Amhara. Despite this public bravado it was a more cautious Zalkhi that returned to the marvellous starcastle some years later...

Solar System

Sun: New Amhara's sun is a main sequence star, similar to Sol. In the early centuries of the New Dark Ages the sun began to fluctuate in output, causing coronal storms of terrific intensity. These sun storms, which produced amazing aurora displays on New Amhara, largely precluded human activity beyond the protective influence of New Amhara's strong magnetic field. In the last century the intensity of solar activity in the New Amharan system has abated somewhat, but any unshielded human venturing beyond the atmosphere has only a very limited safe exposure time.

Malhee: This small, tidally locked mercurian world close to the sun has developed an eccentricity in its orbit in the years of New Amhara's isolation. Astronomers of the Amharan Academy of Substitute Technologies have recently reached the disturbing conclusion that Malhee's ever more elliptical orbit will cause the world to either crash into the

sun, or be slung out of its orbit within the next century.

New Amhara: The only habitable world in the New Amharan system is a world not dissimilar to Earth, although somewhat warmer on average. New Amhara is closely orbited by a single moon substantially smaller than Earth's Luna, which is variously known to the inhabitants of New Amhara as Selash, Pan Vadhra, or simply "the moon". The influence of Selash (the name use by the Amharan Academy of Substitute Technologies) causes some minor tidal effects on the planet. Of greater interest to the inhabitants of New Amhara is the recent discovery of an extensive ring of deserted orbital facilities left over from the Republican era. These play host to a starship graveyard of apparently operable craft.

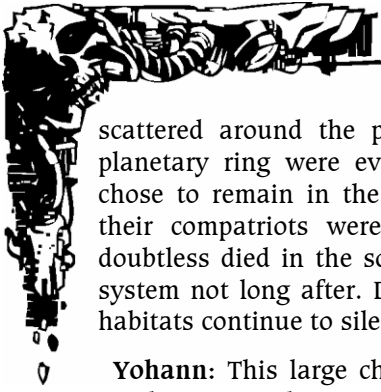
Manlek: A singularly uninspiring lump of cold rock pocked with the craters of asteroid impacts, Manlek provided little interest to the astronomers of New Amhara. Ancient, partially decayed records preserved in the Amharan Academy of Substitute Technologies talk about a remarkable pattern of regularity to the craters on the far side of Manlek. No one with access to these records has been able to visit the world to verify the startling conclusions reached by the long-dead crank authors.

Shoa: The small world of Shoa is a darkly glittering place (other than its flickering reflective patches the albedo of Shoa is almost 0) that seems to almost sparkle from orbit. The surface of the world is composed largely of electro-active salts, which interfered with the telemetry of several remote landings during the Second Republic. Despite the nine-day wonder caused by orbital satellite footage of apparent movement in the midst of the surface salts of this windless world the republic vetoed any manned landing on this dangerous planet.

Moishe: This strange little world orbits perpendicular to the other worlds of the New Amhara system, crossing the plane of the ecliptic only twice during its 23 year orbit. Remarkably the plane of Moische's own, highly eccentric orbit always seems to be parallel to the position of the slowly orbiting jumpgate at the edge of the solar system. Moische was noted during the initial Republican survey of the New Amhara system for its remarkably high albedo, around 95%.

Iyasu: The major gas giant of the solar system, muddy, dun Iyasu was a centre of orbital industry during the Republican era. During the Fall of the Republic the majority of the orbital facilities





scattered around the planet's 12 moons and thin planetary ring were evacuated. The die-hards who chose to remain in the Iyesu orbital stations when their compatriots were relocated to New Amhara doubtless died in the solar storms that wracked the system not long after. Deserted orbital factories and habitats continue to silently orbit the sullen planet.

Yohann: This large chlorine/ammonia gas giant is similar to Sol system's Neptune. During the Republican period Yohann was the outermost planet in the New Amhara system with a permanent human presence. The single research facility in orbit around Yohann was deserted and sealed even before the Fall of the Republic. To the present a recorded message in a now archaic form of Amharan Urthish warns spaceships not to approach the orbital.

Yafeed: Yafeed is a rocky world covered in a thick ammonia/methane ocean. As the New Amharans were able to obtain all the resources they needed nearer to their sun this outermost planet in the solar system was little explored even prior to the Fall.

Landscape

The world of New Amhara was found to be almost ideally suited to human habitation by its initial Diaspora-era surveyors. The two major and one minor continents and the extensive archipelagos of large islands gave the world substantial settlement room, while the deep oceans provided both a moderating effect on the climate and almost limitless reserves of both food and energy. The oxygen content of the atmosphere, slightly higher than that of Earth, ensured that even at the higher altitudes early colonists noted that they felt refreshingly energised. Despite this seemingly ideal environment native flora and fauna never evolved beyond the complexity of gymnosperms (ferns) or primitive pre-social insects. The native wildlife offered little opposition to either the planned release of tailored crops and genetically immunised animals by human colonists, or to the accidental introduction of migrant life forms during the Republican era.

Such was the natural bounty of New Amhara that, even at the height of the Republican fad for 'fixing' worlds with terraforming, the planetary senate limited alterations on their world to some minor weather control modifications. These were designed largely to ameliorate the annual hurricane season that plagued lands bordering the Tempestuous Sea between the two major continental landmasses. In the centuries since the Fall of the Republic these weather control systems have fallen

into total disrepair, a change due in no small part to the increased solar activity in the system after 4000AD.

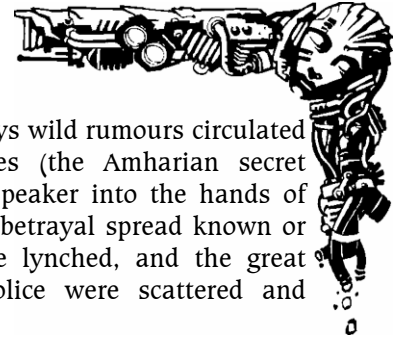
Human settlement on New Amhara was first established on the dry central plains of the New Darfur continent, a landmass sprawling across almost 110° of longitude in the substantial western hemisphere tropics of the planet. Several ranges of geologically active mountains less than 50 million years old isolate the central plains of New Darfur from the seasonal monsoon rains, which affect the more verdant eastern and western reaches of the continent. Settlement on New Darfur is concentrated along the northern and western coasts, although a number of human and Ukari communities live an autarchic life in the mountainous south.

Settlement rapidly expanded to the continent of Amharia (from whence – much the chagrin of Darfurans - the world later took its general name) east over the Tempestuous Sea. The continent of Amharia is a large landmass lying in the eastern hemisphere of the world and extending from South Pole to 20° N latitude. This continent is more ecologically diverse than its neighbour, with biomes ranging from ice cap and tundra in the extreme south, through sub-arctic and temperate uplands in the middle latitudes, through to areas of desert and rain forest coastward of the colossal Amharan Massif range which divides the continent into two unequal halves. To the east of the Amharan Massif lies the vast, gently sloping highland plateau that forms the heartlands of the Amharan state and the breadbasket of the entire planet.

The minor continent lying to the east of Amharia is relatively low-lying when compared to the cloud-piercing Mountains of the Stars on New Darfur, or to the Amharan Massif. The broad plains and thick rain forests of this island continent of New Calabar are home to the majority of the planet's Obun communities, many of who have sought to maintain the Bintaru religion of their ancestors.

Despite its high oxygen content and thick layer of atmospheric ozone New Amhara has, since the Fall, been subject to dangerously high levels of UV radiation and to regular aurora storms. Natives living in the equatorial regions do their best to shield their eyes from UV radiation and have evolved surprisingly sophisticated optical protection systems. Despite this achievement superstition about the sun is rife, and folk treatments such as veiling the eyes, herbal eye drops or shading facial make-up sometimes do the user more harm than good. The inhabitant of the southern reaches of the Amharia





continent, although apparently more protected from UV radiation by cloud cover, have a body of legend holding that the regular lights in the sky are the ghosts of ancestors that will curse those impious enough to look at them with blindness.

People & Places

Amharia, Federated States of

The heartland of the Amharan Empire has undergone substantial changes since the fall of that once planet wide domain. In the wake of the Calabari and Darfuran revolts in the 48th century the nobility of the Amharian *kollas*, the coastal lowlands to the east of the Amharan Highlands, broke away from what they saw as the ineffectual rule of Ghonda. Although the *dejazmatches* of this hot, dry and relatively infertile region acknowledged the dominion of the Holy Speaker, they insisted that the threat posed by vengeful Calabari privateers meant that they were unable to countenance or support the adventurist foreign policy of the chaotic 49th century. Apparent acceptance of this defection by the Holy Speaker resulted in a crisis of confidence in the Amharian *voina-dega* (midland), long the bastion of Ghonda's strength.

Protesting their loyalty to the person of the Holy Speaker, and their regret at the poor advice tendered by the Senate in the late summer of 4870 the *dejazmatches* of the prosperous *voina-dega* summoned their feudal levies and marched on the great city of Ghonda. Herds of llama, sheep, cattle and brutes were stampeded or slaughtered, members of the Ukari minority were beaten or killed, while rich crops of vines, olives and grain were looted or crushed underfoot by the tread of marching feet and the tracks of great siege engines. Despite broadcast assurances that the great magnates marched only to free the Holy Speaker from the influence of wicked advisors the fearful citizens of Ghonda rioted, burning part of the ancient University in their panic. As chaotic mobs swept the city the iron noose around the neck of Speaker Nesta I slowly and gradually tightened all through that hot, fateful summer.

As the rebel armies drew up before the walls of Ghonda and the Senatorial Guard readied themselves to fire on their own countrymen dreadful news came to the ears of the besieged loyalists. The Holy Speaker, Favoured of the Pancreator and fount of all legal and moral authority in Amharia, had been captured by the rebels while trying to flee his

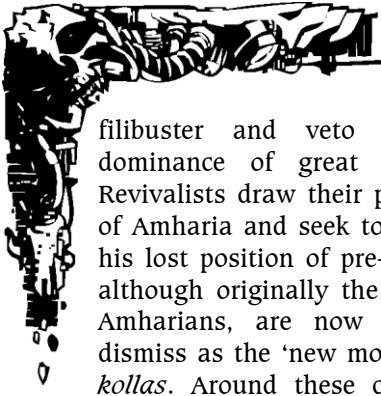
own capital. For several days wild rumours circulated that the Chamber of Eyes (the Amharian secret police) had betrayed the Speaker into the hands of the rebels. As word of the betrayal spread known or suspected informants were lynched, and the great archives of the secret police were scattered and burned

A week after the siege had begun, the Holy Speaker reappeared at the head of a rebel deputation. Closely escorted by the rebel *dejazmatches* and their substantial honour guard, this heir to centuries of imperial rule re-entered his city and was escorted to the Grand Palace of Tewedros the Glorious, a prisoner in all but name. Tabot of Destiny in hand, the Holy Speaker proclaimed the end of the great and glorious Amharian Empire. Instead of a unitary empire Amharia would be ruled as a federated kingdom, an alliance of states united in amity by their common Universalist heritage. With the assistance of his loyal and honoured *dejazmatches* the Holy Speaker promised to oversee personally the first open elections to the Senate for several centuries. The Speaker's words would not have rung so hollow had the spears of the rebel armies not been so clearly in evidence at both the audience and during the later electoral meetings.

Appeased by the recognition of their autonomy the *dejazmatches* of the *kollas* returned to the Amharian fold. Their renewed tribute of cottons, sweetmeats, feathered cloaks and crystal bowls were within a generation supplemented by the slaves, treasure and technology their great fleets of sea-raiders looted from the Calabari ports of Loango and Klova. It was partially this sudden influx of unearned wealth that paid for renewed Amharian adventurism against Zalkhi in the early 50th century. Despite its initial fury, and the use of ancient weapons stored unused in the vaults of Ghonda for centuries, the assault on New Darfur was ultimately an unsustainable effort. Despite the apparent pomp and grandeur of the enterprise it was no more than the last gasp of a dying imperial revival movement, headed by a Holy Speaker desperate to recover the standing and authority lost by his father.

The political compromise established in 4870 endures unto the present. The Holy Speaker is honoured as the Conquering Lion of Zebulon and Defender of the Republic, but his true power extends only so far as the great factions of the Planetary Senate permit. Three major factions endure in the constant political flux that reflects in microcosm the ever-shifting balance of power in Amharia. The Custodians are a faction of spoilers who use





filibuster and veto to ensure the continued dominance of great *voina-dega* magnates. The Revivalists draw their power from the minor gentry of Amharia and seek to restore the Holy Speaker to his lost position of pre-eminence. The Dispersalists, although originally the mouthpiece of the overseas Amharians, are now dominated by what many dismiss as the 'new money' of Edul and the eastern *kollas*. Around these cliques orbit a multitude of clients, mavericks and political bottom feeders who never manage to control their opportunism long enough to bring their numerical majority into play.

The customary fifth of all crops and minerals harvested in Amharia are still sent to Ghonda for the support of the Senate, the Church and the Academy of Substitute Technologies, but it is the Amharian nobility who assess their own harvests. It is the nobility who collate and count the ballots cast in the regular senatorial elections, ballots cast in the main by their own tenants and dependents. Combined with the established custom that no Aga of Amharian blood, although legally required to provide military service to the state at need, be required to pay taxes the *dejazmatches* have ensured that the Holy Speaker remains an honoured symbol of the nation, but one lacking the power to become a threat to their own prosperity.

Ghonda-I-Aga. Jewel of Amharia

For centuries the seat of the Planetary Senate and of the Holy Speaker the marble colonnades and golden roofs of Ghonda are fabled in song and story across New Amhara. Although situated in the tropics the high elevation (9,000ft above sea level) and mountainous environs of Ghonda give it a balmy, rather than a stifling, climate. The air, although thinner than the lowlands of the Amharian *kollas*, is rich with the scent of flowers and the song of both birds and humans.

The city of Ghonda is only home to about half of the six million people than its gleaming habitation spires were originally intended to house, yet there is still a daily flow of food into the city from the fertile Ghonda Valley, and rich tribute from the lands beyond its ringing mountain walls. Despite the great antiquity and craftsmanship of the architecture it rapidly becomes clear to the alert observer that Ghonda in 5000AD is not all that it once was. Many of the great buildings of state, erected from perdurable terracote and faced with exotic luminite and alien refractor crystal, have cracked and crumbling facades. The advanced urban

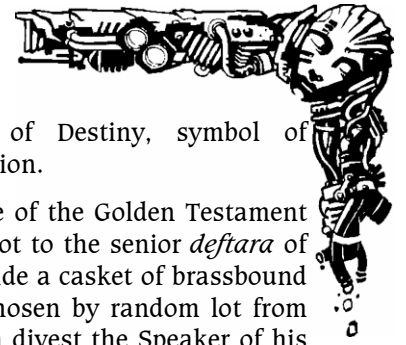
monorail system created during the great days of the Republic is now traversed by nothing more advanced than primitive steam engines. The airport has been closed for several years since the destruction of the main runways and traffic control systems by a mysterious meteor shower the long moribund orbital defence lasers were unable to defend against. Potholed roads and derelict, half-deserted buildings are found in the poorer parts of the city, and Ghonda's once model energy supply and sanitation system now operate sporadically at best.

Although the gradual decay of the city is apparent to outsiders the Agas of Ghonda remain inordinately proud, some might say arrogant, of their place at the heart of Amharian history. What outsiders see as decomposition, the Ghondari regard as a venerable patina of antiquity. Where ignorant foreigners might see improvised 'make-do-and-mend' adaptation, the silk-swathed inhabitants of Ghonda see evidence of their own unmatched adaptability. It is a common jibe throughout the Amharian *voina-dega* that a Ghondari will happily brag about his own cleverness and the deeds of his glorious ancestry right up until the point he is killed by a chunk of falling masonry.

Local pride aside, it is a sad and unavoidable truth that, despite the ingenious low-tech modifications pioneered at the Saint Kismiw campus of the famous Academy of Substitute Technologies, the people of Ghonda live in the faded ruins of their past. The ancient streetlights of Ghonda, their everlights long since commandeered for other purposes, now flare with gas fires or tar-soaked straw. The daily transcription of ancient and largely useless computer records recovered from provinces of an empire long since lost occupy the daily labour of hundreds of scribes and illuminators, and of thousands of tanners and paper-makers. Only a room away from the hunched and silent labour of the scribes' ancient hardcopy may be left to moulder away under leaking and unrepaired roofs.

More than anywhere else, it is in the Senatorial Palace that the Ghondari reverence for the ancient past finds expression. Every artefact of the pre-Blinding days preserved in the palace, even the most mundane of things, is treated with the reverence due a saint's relic. Proud nobles of Amharia plot and scheme for the honour of being allowed to carry the Holy Speaker's ancient and baroquely decorated duelling spear, or of carrying the synthsilk cushion on which is placed the golden orb representing his universal rule. The humble wooden pipe of Speaker Thanis the Wise is kept under glass and guarded around the clock. When used at all the





millennium-old ceramic drinking vessel once owned by Admiral Mehmet Keddah the Terrible, decorated with the fading Urthish epitaph of “World’s Best Dad”, is handled with silken gloves and solemn gravity. Even the ancient plastic beakers used by the Holy Speaker’s children are chased with silver and costly enamel.

Although he is at all times surrounded by stupendous wealth and an entourage of hundreds it is a tragic irony that the writ of the Holy Speaker runs no further than the reach of his Senatorial Guard. When not on duty in the palace or curbing the crimes of neighbourhood gangs, this picked body of men, clad in elaborately decorated heirloom armours passed down from the Republican past, spend their time in fruitless duels with the household troops of the great Amharian nobles. The Holy Speaker is never bothered by word of the brawling beyond his golden gates. Nothing unseemly must be allowed to disturb the tranquil deliberations of the Father of the People. With the Holy Speaker thus isolated the legal decisions of the wise *deftaras* (judges) of the Amharan Church are openly flouted by rich and poor alike.

Despite the inertia in its halls and the chaos in its streets all the inhabitants of Ghonda pride themselves on their unwavering loyalty to the Holy Speaker. Claiming a dynastic line unbroken for centuries, and revered as the deputy of the Pancreator in the world by millions of devout Amharan Orthodox, the Holy Speaker is honoured in an almost pharaonic manner. Although the religious hierarchy boast that Amharian Orthodoxy is unchanged in liturgy or ritual since the long-lost days of the Republic, the manner in which the person of the Holy Speaker is associated the Prophet Zebulon in public prayers tends to conflate the two in the minds of the laity. An Urthish Orthodox observer would deem the Amharian rite scrupulously Orthodox in manner of ritual practise, but obnoxiously heterodox, if not blasphemous, in intent.

The annual midsummer procession from the Senatorial Palace to the great Temple of the Golden Testament is considered one of the high points of the Ghondari social and liturgical calendar. It is on this one occasion that the Speaker, clad in raiment of gold, preceded by chanting priests and servants scattering golden *leu* (the coin of the realm), perfumed by half a hundred fuming censers and shaded by silken canopies, parades through the city in a self-powered levitating throne. The purpose of this procession is to display to the cheering, flower-throwing people both the Speaker himself

and the famous Tabot of Destiny, symbol of Amharia’s unbroken dominion.

On arriving at the Temple of the Golden Testament the Speaker hands the Tabot to the senior *deftara* of Amharia, who places it inside a casket of brassbound acacia wood. Two Agas, chosen by random lot from the people of Ghonda, then divest the Speaker of his golden robes. Wearing no more than a simple cotton under-robe, the Speaker kneels before the statue of the first Speaker of New Amhara in Victory Square. After silent prayer the Speaker, eyes covered by an opaque cloth, then knee-walks away from the statue, up the 95 steps of the Sacred Ascent and in through the decorated doors of the Temple, pausing a dozen times in his course to make additional prayers.

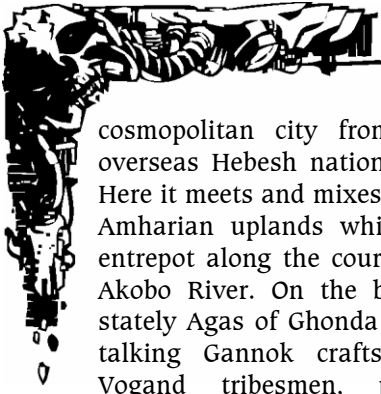
Once within the Temple, crowded since sunrise by the elite of Amharian society, the Speaker crawls the length of the nave to the high altar, where the waiting *Abou-Salama* holds aloft the Tabot of Destiny. The Speaker then recites his lineage, beginning with the first speaker of the Planetary Senate and proceeding without fail to his own father, before repeating and affirming the promises made during his own coronation. Still blindfolded the Speaker then receives the Tabot from the hands of the *Abou-Salama* while a favoured *dejazmatch* unties his blindfold. Amharian legend has it that this ritual has remained unchanged since the days of the Great Blinding and that a calamity, exceeding even the travails of that terrible time, will fall upon the people of Amharia should ever their master fail to renew his oath to people and Pancreator.

Although none will admit it in recent months a terrible rumour has swept the mansions and slums of Ghonda. Despite all the security in which it is held the Tabot of Destiny has disappeared from its canopied pedestal in the great audience hall of the Senatorial Palace. People whisper that such a threat to the timeless traditions of Amharia has not been heard of since the days of the Calabari Revolt. Many wonder what this ill omen might mean for the future stability of the Senate and the person of the Holy Speaker.

Edul-I-Aga

If Ghonda is emblematic of the lost glories of Amharia’s imperial past then the coastal city of Edul-I-Aga is the very archetype of the emerging *kolla* (lowland) states. Situated on the equatorial west coast of Amharia hot and humid Edul-I-Aga is the crossroads of the eastern Mare Tempustum. Seaborne trade flows into this vibrant and





cosmopolitan city from the Vogandi jungle, the overseas Hebeshe nations, and the Manshi Reaches. Here it meets and mixes with the wealth of the fertile Amharian uplands which flow down to the great entrepot along the course of the wide, slow-flowing Akobo River. On the bustling dock front tall and stately Agas of Ghonda jostle for position with fast-talking Gannok craftsmen from Jhanbar, sullen Vogand tribesmen, painted Khasaleite pirate chieftains, clear-eyed Zalkhite philosophers, silent Obun of the Manshi Reaches, and even a few rare masked pilgrims of mysterious Mokad-nar.

Unlike centuried Ghonda, or the various regional centres of the *voina-dega* that seek to emulate it, Edul is regarded by many Amharians as something of a half-breed and philistine city, a place where the *leu* is honoured above personal honour, kin-bonds, or the great achievements of the past. Although prejudiced, in many respects this assessment is accurate. Given their mercantile heritage, and the fact that their city has been sacked and burnt by raiders twice in the last century, the Edulians like to envisage themselves as the pragmatists of Amharia. Edulians dismiss *voina-dega* Amharians as nothing more than bitter and vicious old turtles that bite any who impinge on their nests and who are eventually destined to collapse under their weight of their own shells, while likening themselves to the migratory gulls that fly back and forth across the Tempestuous Sea, seeking food and mates wherever they will.

Of course, despite the mercantile prosperity the city's location and low taxes bring, all is not well in fair Edul-I-Aga. During the late summer months, after the weeklong rains of the sweltering high summer have finally abated, the bright banners on the roofs of the maxicrete-walled merchant houses may begin to wave fitfully back and forth. At this time the ever-present gulls, pelicans and mantabirds will desert the city, and the heavens will begin to lower. This is Edul's infamous storm season, when all wise men desert the city, returning to their homes only when the dreadful hurricanes of the Tempestuous Sea have abated. The storm season sees a remarkable change come over Edulians. The kin-bonds that they affect to despise during normal times come to the fore in a manner rarely seen since the days of the Blinding. People fleeing the city will find the homes of locals they have no prior call on thrown open to them as if they were old friends. Total strangers will share their last crusts of bread. For a month or more Edulians become one extended family, knowing the good they do another during the

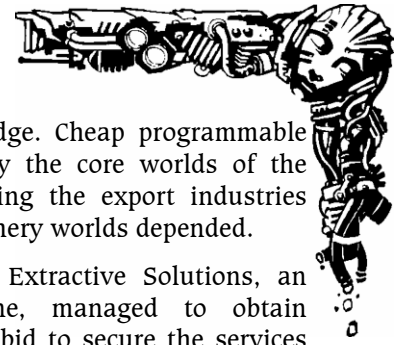
hardships this year will inevitably be repaid the next.

The traditional end of the hurricane season, the festival of Mortos Diablos, is a major festival in Edul. The last day of October (the Edulian church retains the archaic Republican calendar long since discarded by more purely Amharian organisations) often sees an influx of subdued and bedraggled natives returning to survey the damage nature has wreaked on their homes. With such a potent reminder of human fallibility and the transience of things the festival typically starts out as a sombre rite of mourning for the dead, a memorial for all that has been lost. The bells of the great Saint Marcius Neptuno Cathedral ring the tocsin over a silent city year after year. Inevitably however the irrepressible optimism and opportunism of the Edulians lowers the tone, and the solemn ritual of recovering the dead and disposing of the wreckage rapidly turns into a drunken, riotous revel as the Edulians loot the ruins of their own wrecked lives.

Summer and autumn in Edul hold the ever-present threat of piratical raids, summer pestilence or destruction by storm, so the winter and spring are the seasons at which the city is seen at its best. Although its equatorial location means that the daytime temperature is rarely less than 30°C even in the winter months, the otherwise lackadaisical Edulian church, the only corporate body to take responsibility for the city as a whole, lays on great religious festivities for the inhabitants and visitors during the summer. Even the haughtiest nobility of the Amharian Massif deign to visit Edul during the festivities of Cosmos Carnival. During this week of celebration choral and solo recitations in the oft-repaired Great Opera (a refurbished Republican sports arena towering over the squat, thick-walled houses of the New Town which have grown up around it) recount the great legends of the Universal Church, while storytellers in the cantinas of the waterfront Old Town hypnotise native and visitor alike with dark tales of the Great Blinding, the Calabari Wars, the Time of Pirates, and infamous storm seasons of the past.

Despite the friendly 'easy come, easy go' air that Edulians affect, visitors are warned to be constantly on their guard. As with any port city Edul attracts its share of confidence tricksters, cutpurses and press gangers, not to mention smugglers, fugitives and hired thugs. Although frowned upon severely by the church an active slave and mercenary market can be found operating on the extensive waterfront. The centre of these illicit trades are the built-over, rusting hulks of the ancient loading cranes that





hunch vulture-like over the silted-up Republican port at the mouth of the Akobo. Although the church may occasionally preach against the activities of Akoboport press gangers, or deputize some unlucky priest to ransom a captured brother from Zuranist or pagan slavers, any more forceful move against what the *deftara* have repeatedly denounced as "...that festering pockmark on the fair face of our city." is met with vigorous force.

In recent years long-time habitués of the city have begun to notice a change. Although too gradual for the residents themselves to notice, it seems to many visitors that the legendary, freewheeling hospitality of Edul has taken on a strained air in recent years. Some attribute this to nothing more than the rising political and mercantile tensions among the states of the Mare Temptestum. Others, more astute or more paranoid, wonder about the remarkable number of tall, spear-wielding 'personal bodyguards' hired by certain trading houses with known interests in the *voina-dega*...

Plains of Ravenous Dust

Far to the south of the Amharian *voina-dega*, in the altitude-chilled southwest of Amharia, lies an ill-reputed locale shunned by all but the greediest and most reckless. Stories tell of a great swathe of land below the 60th parallel where the ground itself, although honeycombed by ancient mine workings loaded with wealth beyond the dreams of a *dejzmatch*, devours the flesh of those who dare to unearth its treasures. Amharian folklore is rich in stories of men who journeyed to the south seeking wealth who, if they returned at all, regained their homelands sickly and withered before their time. The backwards and insular peoples of the southern highlands supposedly know the location of this dread land, and also the secrets of entering it and returning alive with wealth fit for the Speaker himself.

Stories of the fearsome Plains of Ravenous Dust are, by and large, true even in their most grotesque manifestations. The dark legends surrounding the Plains are told to this day in the secret lodges of the tribes still resident in the southern *dega* (highlands). Although hedged about with superstitious legends about arrogant ancestors conjuring uncontrollable devils these stories retain the essence of truth. The Plains of Ravenous Dust have their origin in the economic dislocations that darkened the last century of the Second Republic. By 3900 it was clear to even the dullest mind that, as efficient as they were, New Amhara's mining industries were slowly

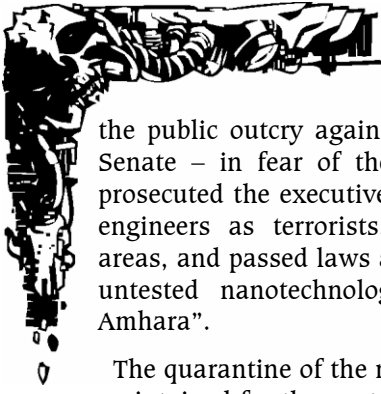
losing their competitive edge. Cheap programmable nanotechnology devised by the core worlds of the Republic was slowly ruining the export industries upon which scores of periphery worlds depended.

The owners of Makuria Extractive Solutions, an Amharan mining combine, managed to obtain government backing for a bid to secure the services of some nanotechnological engineers. Perhaps inevitably those engineers willing to make the trip away from the constant intellectual ferment of the great nanotech revolution of the core worlds were not of the highest calibre. Although keen and dedicated to their work the combination of limited experience, intellectual arrogance, and pressure to comply with deadlines led to hurried testing and poor internal communication in the staff of MES's "New Technology Mining Initiative". Limited field tests were a success and, feeling the pressure from both creditors and competitors, MES ordered that the NTMI was to go live on their holdings in southern Amharia immediately.

It was not until after the specialist miner nanosites had been manufactured, programmed and set running that those involved realised just how catastrophically they had erred. The miner nanosites functioned as planned, seeking out, extracting and collecting various minerals for collection and further reprocessing. Within a few weeks bizarre quasi-organic stalagmites of malachite, chromium ores and even gold dotted the surface around the mine workings. Unfortunately the support nanosites, designed to extract energy and raw materials for replacement nanosites for those that might be destroyed or run out of power during mining, worked entirely too well. An accumulation of minute errors and seemingly insignificant oversights in the coding of their materials recognition software meant that the support nanosites saw living things, including humans, as a perfect source of organic compounds, calcium and water.

Within days of the nanosites' release the first reports of nanosite infestation were coming in from local settlements. MES medical teams watched in horror as overenthusiastic nanosites rendered the infected down for raw materials in a slow horror of desiccation and decomposition. MES attempted to control news of the accident but reports began to come in of similar infestations over an ever-wider area. Within less than a month of the initial outbreak an area of several thousand square miles around the release site was devoid of all human life. All who had not fled had been transformed into raw material for the tiny, insatiable mining robots. In panic at





the public outcry against the disaster the Planetary Senate – in fear of their own careers and lives – prosecuted the executives of MES, arrested the NTMI engineers as terrorists, cordoned off the affected areas, and passed laws against “...any and all use of untested nanotechnology on the planet of New Amhara”.

The quarantine of the now unusable MES lands was maintained for the next two centuries. Even after the Fall of the Second Republic the Planetary Senate funded regular patrols and scientific testing of the affected area. During the Fall people fleeing urban unrest gravitated to the southern *degas*, attracted by rumours of a land where gold grew from the ground. They were either turned back by patrols, or, where too numerous or determined to cow, left to find their own doom. It was not until the almost total collapse of Amharan society during the Blinding early in the 42nd century that this deathwatch over an afflicted and barren land was discontinued.

During the following centuries the Plains of Ravenous Dust became the stuff of folklore in the Amharian Empire. The southern *degas* became a refuge of last resort for those Amharians too desperate, hunted or greedy to find satisfaction or sanctuary within the Empire. This shifting population eked out a marginal existence at the very edges of the dusty, wind-blown Plains, evolving an elaborate superstitious system of purgative hygiene and cleanliness taboos to ensure their survival and that of their cankered crops and livestock. Over time they learnt the complex seasonal patterns of the plains, those times at which it was safe to scavenge, and those terrible months when the very dust would attempt to devour fortune hunters. Periodically the Agas of Amharia would travel south, bringing goods, food and the all-important Elixir of Clear Vision in exchange for the bizarre, twisted mineral agglomerations the wretches of the devouring lands scrounged.

Even in the present the inhabitants of the Plains of Devouring Dust retain their own bizarre subculture. Although ostensibly a part of the Holy Speaker's realms, they owe fealty to no *dejazmatch*. Tales are still told of the strange curse that ate away the bones of the last lord of the *voina-dega* who attempted to force the people sneeringly named “dustlanders” into fealty. At present the natives of this land are tied to the mainstream of Amharian culture by little more than their lip service obedience of the Amharan Orthodox Church. Appointment to the position of Bishop of Dust is considered a sign that one has displeased the *Abou-Salama* greatly.

Manshi Reaches

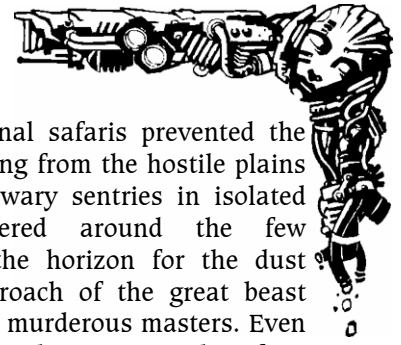
The Manshi Reaches are large coastal plains in the temperate and subtropical southwest of the Amharian continent. Much like the *kolla* lands of eastern Amharia in their climate the Reaches differ in their inhabitants. These isolated and largely overlooked lands have long the home of a culture of semi-nomadic Obun herdsmen and hunters who call themselves the Dhiya'Manshi (trans: “spouses/kin of Manshi” – an ancestor figure of their culture). In contrast to the Obun of the Phoenix Empire the Dhiya'Manshi are semi-nomadic pastoralists descended from a sect of Bintaru worshippers who emigrated to New Amhara early in the Republican days. These followers of the native Obun religion saw New Amhara as the perfect place to explore their philosophy of union with the universal *kelanti* (the Obun metaphysics of universal correspondences) through a ‘natural’ existence.

Isolated from the mainstream of Republican culture or New Amharan social upheaval by culture, philosophy and sheer physical distance, this quietist sect passed through the Fall, the solar storms of the 42nd century, and the subsequent events of the Blinding with little change to their lives. Although the Dhiya'Manshi did their best to help the few humans who lived among them the harsh necessities of nomadic life meant that most humans of the plains died during the dreadful days of the 42nd century. It was not until the Amharian Empire extended its reach across New Amhara that the Obun of the Manshi Reaches were forced to pay attention to something other than the eternal recurrence of nature's cycles.

The 44th century saw the Manshi Reaches become a fashionable exotic locale among Amharian nobles replete with unearned wealth and hungry for new experiences. Spurred by the tales of an idyllic ‘natural’ life on the plains spread by Edulian merchants and tale spinners, the more *avant garde* among the Amharian hierarchy took to the idea of extended holidays on the plains. Over the decades places like Port Venlosch, Three Gazelle Lick, and Flickersky Lodge on the banks of southerly Lake Kyoga became first fashionable, and later traditional, hunting resorts for the Amharian ruling class. Although the Obun at first welcomed these periodic visits, over time the arrogance and ecologically inharmonious lifestyles of the human interlopers led to friction between the two cultures.

In 4721 the resentment of the Dhiya'Manshi, which had festered for decades at the decimation





of their cattle and gazelle herds by Amharian safari hunters, finally exploded in violence. The catalytic event was the rumoured rape of yet another Obun servant girl by drunken Amharian nobles. An act so heinous was the last straw for a generation of embittered Obun hunters, who used their unmatched knowledge of the plains to harry the Amharian cuckoo in their nest. Unbeknownst to the Amharian nobles, a council of tribes planned a series of coordinated assaults on the palatial and woefully underprotected hunting lodges scattered across the plains. Guards were drugged, murdered or compelled to rebellion by Obun psychic powers, and in one night of blood and madness, decades of insult and outrage to the Dhiya'Manshi were repaid.

Amharian retribution for the Manshi Massacres was swift and merciless. Within weeks of the massacres squads of Amharian Agas swept across the plains in flitters and aeroskiffs, seeking out and butchering the widely scattered Obun. Although they fought a prolonged guerrilla war the Dhiya'Manshi sustained horrific losses, slowly being forced from the wide spaces of the plains. Driven by the goad of the Amharian legions the decimated Dhiya-Manshi retreated into the rugged foothills of the Amharan Massif and the inhospitable tundra of the sub-arctic south. Thousands died on these treks, harried as they were by Amharian Agas based out of the rebuilt and fortified hunting lodges of the plains. Thousands more died of hunger and exposure during the first harsh winters in their unwelcoming new homelands.

For over half a century the exiled Dhiya'Manshi raided into lands that were once theirs by right. Reluctant levies of Amharian soldiery chased after murderous shadows. No quarter was given or expected in this ongoing war of hate and revenge. What saved the scattered Obun from final extinction was ultimately not their own strength, but the unforeseen rebellion of the conquered peoples of New Amhara against their despotic overlords in the late 48th century. As the Planetary Senate withdrew ever more troops from the Manshi Plains the remaining garrisons first curtailed their punitive raids, then withdrew entirely into the defence of their supply lines. In the early 50th century a hardened and embittered minority of Dhiya'Manshi Obun returned to their ancestral lands, vowing never to be driven from them again.

Circumstances over the next century and more favoured the hard-pressed Obun of the plains. Amharia's aeroskiff fleets were largely destroyed in the fighting between the human nations, and only a bloody-minded insistence on the cultural

importance of the traditional safaris prevented the Amharians from withdrawing from the hostile plains entirely. Into the present wary sentries in isolated observation posts scattered around the few remaining lodges watch the horizon for the dust clouds foretelling the approach of the great beast herds and their black-eyed, murderous masters. Even the coastal city of Port Venlosch is not entirely safe.

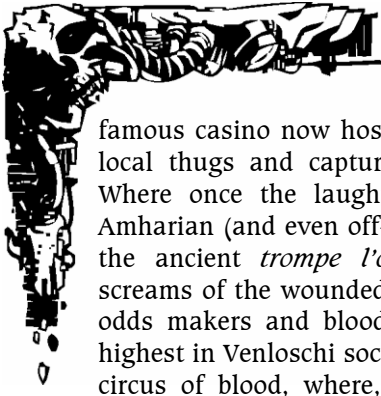
Port Venlosch

Still nominally ruled by a *dejazmatch* of noble ancestry once-wealthy Port Venlosch is little more than a shadow of its ancient self. Where once pillared arcades and elegant mansions lay scattered around Venlosch Bay little more than rubble and slums now remain. Decades of guerrilla fighting have driven away all but the most adventurous devotees of the safari and tourist trades, leaving the city as little more than a garrison clinging desperately to the end of a long sea-borne supply line. The casinos are bankrupt, the cantinas filthy, and the theatres and magic lantern palaces survive only by catering to the lowest common denominator. Even the formerly prosperous meat-processing industry, which once dominated the northern half of the Manshi Plains, has suffered greatly from prolonged Dhiya'Manshi raiding. Whereas Port Venlosch was once the middleman of the Manshi Plains traders from Edul and Jhanbar now trade with the Dhiya'Manshi directly in secluded coves far from the acquisitive customs officers of the city.

The people of Port Venlosch are, by and large, as poor and ugly as their city. Only a small percentage of the populace can claim the coveted status of Amharian Aga, and even the poorest Venloschi Aga will wear his elaborately embroidered crimson gika-silk Voter's Sash with as much pride as if he were the Holy Speaker himself. The remainder of the populace are heavily taxed and conscripted by an oligarchic government determined to wring as much from the impoverished city as possible. Almost invariably angry and violently bitter against their Obun neighbours, the typical Venloschan takes a malicious glee in the suffering of any captives brought back to their city by punitive raids into the interior.

The lot of captured Obun in Port Venlosch is not a happy one. Although some might be sold to Khasaleite or Edulian slave traders, most are fated to end their lives in a welter of blood and pain at the Grand Venlosch Casino. Reputedly founded during the long-lost days of the Second Republic, the formerly gloriously appointed and world-





famous casino now hosts squalid pit fights between local thugs and captured Dhiya'Manshi tribesmen. Where once the laughter and lamentation of the Amharian (and even off-world) elites at play lifted to the ancient *trompe l'oeil* ceilings now echo the screams of the wounded and the bawling of barkers, odds makers and bloodthirsty spectators. Even the highest in Venloschi society frequent this abominable circus of blood, where, at the end of each night's fighting, members of the audience who have bid for the privilege beat to death any Obun who have survived the rigged fights.

The Amharian Church is a willing participant in the worst atrocities perpetrated in the city. It is the Episcopal Urban Office of the bishop of Port Venlosch that is responsible for regulation of the local slave trade. Both captive Obun and human paupers are regularly sold into bonded servitude overseas by an institution which, although supposedly the "ethical and moral lodestone of the citizens", is also the major backer of the gladiatorial fights and the largest single landlord of slum property in the city. The *Abou-Salama* regularly writes to the Venloschi church decrying the harm done to "the moral fibre and spiritual well-being of the populace" by the bloody ritual fights held in the Grand Casino, but the jingling sacks of *leu* sent to Ghonda in tithe by the otherwise impoverished city serve to drown out these heartfelt admonitions.

The Zommate of Zalkhi

The Zommate (Holy Kingdom) of Zalkhi is a realm very different from its' former colonial master Amharia. Where as the heart of Amharian strength lays in their unassailable mountainous highlands, the strength of Zalkhi lays in the wide expanses of the plains of New Darfur. While the Amharians pride themselves on their allegiance to the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun the Zalkhites have long maintained their own pre-Reflective traditions. And, while the Holy Speaker of Amharia presides over the slow degeneration of the kingdom bequeathed by his ancestors, the Zomma of Zalkhi appears to lead his people from triumph to triumph. Of course, the truth of things in Zalkhi is more complex and nuanced than the twin national stereotypes of foaming Zuranist zealots and dreamy-eyed astrologers.

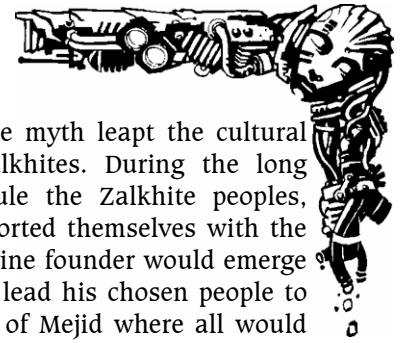
The independent Zommate is a relatively recent innovation. Although the Zalkhites (rightfully) claim to be the original inhabitants of New Amhara, which they still name Shiyagner (Home) among themselves, they have long been a persecuted race.

During the centuries of the Second Republic the Zuranist tribes formed an oppressed and second-class citizenry. The anti-immigrant measures passed by their pre-Republican governing council were repealed and a countervailing – and equally unjust – system of anti-Zuranist policies was instituted. Decades of legislation by the Universalist-dominated Planetary Senate gradually eroded the cultural traditions of New Darfur. Landholding laws, traditions of inheritance, inter-tribal trade agreements, the practise of Zuranist communal marriage, and even the use of the traditional Zalkhite language, were all called into question. In the name of 'progress' all these traditions were replaced with cultural and legal structures that favoured the Universalist social mores of the new Amharian ruling class. These laws were used time and again to evict longstanding Zalkhite *pamintean* (customary freeholders) from both the fertile coastal areas of New Darfur, and from the mineral-rich uplands of the continent-spanning Mountains of the Stars.

The departure of the Republican Fleet from Amharan space in 4002AD brought no relief to the Zalkhites. For another century and more they were forced to labour in the factories and fields of absentee *molocki* (a word which originally meant 'landlord', but later came to be an epithet for any foreigner). Even the chaos of the Great Blinding brought no relief to the largely Zuranist populace of New Darfur. Despite the exhortations of their *Angelos* (civic leaders) the Zalkhites fell prey to the universal panicked chaos of those dreadful days. Always family-oriented, the wider Zalkhite society fragmented almost entirely; anyone beyond the family group became a target for fearful, desperate theft. Hundreds of Zalkhite caravans were raided and burned by those tribes lucky enough to hire or capture sighted – usually non-human – guides. This time of fear lasted more than a generation and, along with the return of the *molocki*, forms the basis for a great cycle of Zalkhite *swatur* (legendary tales, often macabre in tone and cautionary in nature).

In the wake of the Great Blinding it was the Amharian monopoly on the all-important Elixir of Clear Vision, rather than any code of law, which lay at the heart of the subjugation of Zalkhi. The sedentary *gadji* (peasant) tribes of the coast were compelled to endure a lip-service conversion to Amharan Orthodoxy and a return to the bondage endured by their ancestors in return for the Elixir. The Zuranist traditions that had survived the Great Blinding were forced underground, and the traditional lunar calendar of the Zalkhite people was all but forgotten. The nomads of





the inland plains were able to retain their freedom of movement and of belief, but it was only humiliating annual rites of submission to the Ras of New Darfur – and crippling payments of tribute to his treasury at Nefur – that ensured their unborn children would receive the Elixir in the womb.

A few of the more isolated Zuranist tribes made the hard choice to forgo submission to the Amharians, preferring to suffer the effects of the Blinding Sickness than compromise their freedom and religious purity. This minority, who forewent all the advantages of a technological society and trained hunting dogs, hawks or monkeys to act as their eyes, became known as the *vujo* (“pure ones”). During the Amharian dominion it was the universally admired *vujo* who became the keepers of Zuranist lore in Zalkhi, their oral traditions acting as a cultural touchstone for the less rigorously isolationist *vurmapan* (nomadic) tribes. The *vujo* refusal to eat, drink, pray or perform any other intimate act in the presence of outsiders became a norm that all Zalkhites secretly admired and yearned to emulate.

As the decades and centuries of Amharian rule in New Darfur passed there grew up a cultural divide among the Zuranists. Although most retained the religion of their ancestors the faith of the *gadji* of the coasts began to be coloured by the Universalist rites of their occupiers. As they grew apart the nomads of the plains and their cousins in the alpine valleys of the Mountains of the Stars, began to refer to their coastal brethren as *marhime* (impure). Those named *marhime* were deemed to be beyond the bounds of Zuranist *pralipe* (brotherhood) and little better than the despised *molocki*. An elaborate code of permissible and taboo degrees of contact between the impure coastal Zalkhites and their *vurmapan* cousins, the famous *mageriphen* code, evolved as early as the 44th century. As their cultures diverged the very concept of money eventually became taboo among a select minority of the Zalkhite tribes. In part this was due to the largely barter-based economy of the plains, this simple necessity being reinforced by the desire to avoid the Amharan Orthodox Church’s tithes in cash and kind on expectant mothers.

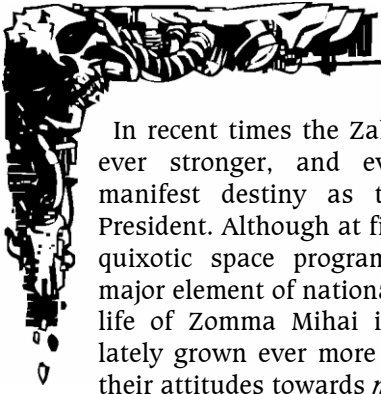
Much though the natural distaste of the nomad for the sedentary farmer might colour their perceptions of one another there was still some limited cultural intercourse between the *gadji* and the *vurmapan*. It was among the Amharian-influenced *gadji* that tales of a Zuranist messiah first emerged. The shadowy figure of the Hidden President was at first little more than a conflation of the legendary figure of Manuel Zuran. With the Holy Speaker of Amharia, he

gained in stature when the myth leapt the cultural gap to the *vurmapan* Zalkhites. During the long centuries of foreign misrule the Zalkhite peoples, nomadic and settled, comforted themselves with the promise that their semi-divine founder would emerge at the appointed time and lead his chosen people to glory in the blessed realm of Mejid where all would be equal and no man a slave.

It was during the last years of the 48th century by the Amharian calendar that it seemed that the time might be ripe for the coming of the Hidden President. For several years a group of Zuranist mystics announcing divine inspiration had traversed the Zalkhi Plains, preaching that soon all men would be free of the need to pay blood money to the *molocki*. Led by a *gadji* scholar by the name of Shkelgim Zhenawi, who had in his youth rejected the submissive prosperity of his sedentary forefathers and fled to live among the *vujo*, this sect was well placed to capitalise on the Calabari revolt. As word spread of the apparent miracle of recovered sight happening in the Calabari lands Zhenawi and his followers made their move. Proclaiming the imminent manifestation of the Hidden President they unleashed a vast horde of *vurmapan* zealots on the fat, long-idle Amharians of the coast. In a single headlong rush, which saw the butchery of those *gadji* who lacked the wit to convert to the plainsmen’s fanatic creed, the hated city of Nefur was occupied, razed and the ground sown with salt.

Exulting in victory, intoxicated by freedom, the Zalkhites could see only one possible explanation for their victory. Shkelgim Zhenawi, the inspirer of their great victory, must be the long-hoped-for Hidden President! Although he rejected any such identification to his dying day the peasant mystic accepted elevation to the position of Zomma (priest-king) of All Zalkhi in anticipation of the Hidden President’s appearance. Although the Zommate was first passed among the hierarchy of Zhenawi’s messianic cult, after the dynastic infighting that aided the Amharian invasion of the 4930s, the title became quasi-hereditary. It was already an established custom that only a personal friend, or blood descendent, of the first Zomma was familiar enough with his wisdom to lead the nation. As all Shklegim’s personal friends had been killed during the ascension of Zomma Tapla (soon surnamed the Victorious) it came to pass that the title was awarded – by a process of carefully stage-managed popular acclaim – to the closest surviving male relation of the previous Zomma.





In recent times the Zalkhites have grown militarily ever stronger, and evermore confident in their manifest destiny as the heralds of the Hidden President. Although at first content to labour on their quixotic space programme, which was deemed a major element of national identity after it claimed the life of Zomma Mihai in 4947, the Zalkhites have lately grown ever more arrogant and overbearing in their attitudes towards *molocki*. Once the Zomma and his astrologers preached the brotherhood of Zalkhites with any who stood against Amharian despotism. Lately they have taken a more hard-line approach: any who are not Zalkhite are no better than the Amharians themselves. The Hebesh nations of the Tempestuous Sea have begun to note the way in which those states that draw the ire of the Zomma seem to be afflicted soon after by mysterious meteor strikes. Although some ascribe this to a mere technological trick, other less advanced societies have come to regard the Zalkhites as the special favourites of the heavens.

Mokum, Holy City of the Stars

This sprawling city in the heart of a fertile plain is reputedly the oldest settlement on New Amhara. Although the scholars of Ghonda's Academy of Substitute Technologies scoff at the claim natives of Mokum proudly laud their city as the site of the famous First Landing. Indeed, the very name Mokum means simply "the place" in one of the ancient forerunner languages of the Zalkhite tongue. From humble beginnings as a mere agricultural produce store during the Amharian occupation Mokum has seen remarkable transformations during the reign of the Zommas. What was once a scruffy little garrison town had been transformed by the skill, dedication and wealth of a century of government-mandated beautification. Grain silos have made way for glittering palaces, while verdant parks of elegantly landscaped water features, exotic flowerbeds and shade trees now sprawl where once the herdbeasts exacted by *molocki* tithes were corralled.

Mokum is no mere show city, despite the lavish care and enormous expense that has gone into making it the fitting centre from a large and wealthy state. The same zeal to built and make orderly which has made the public areas of the city such a showcase has also been expended on the houses of the inhabitants. Although, in keeping with their nomadic or servile ancestries, the inhabitants of Mokum may own little enough in material goods, their houses are always colourfully decorated, the paint is always bright, the multi-coloured windows sparkle

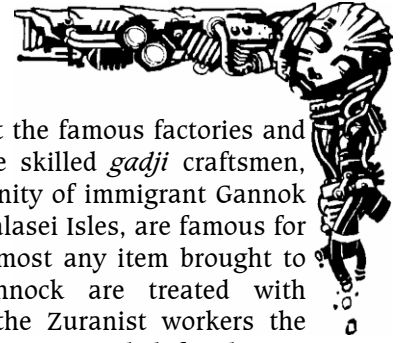
in the sun, and lavish carved woodwork and small statues of favoured Zuranist saints surround the doorways.

The city of Mokum is also the test-bed for radical experiments in urban planning and social engineering by the municipal government, who work with the full blessing of the Zomma. While *vurmapan* Zalkhites are rigorous in their separation of the public and private spheres of life many inhabitants of Mokum, rich and poor, live, eat and worship communally. This remarkable inversion of Zuranist *mageriphen* was the result of a realisation among the *Angelos* of Mokum that urban living tended to dissolve the bonds of family that many Zalkhites saw as their proudest inheritance. This realisation was nothing new to the *gadji* inhabitants of the rapidly expanding city – used as they were to Amharian control of their lives – but the *vurmapan* immigrants who formed the new social and political elite initially saw it as a potential destabilising influence on Zalkhi's newfound state of unity.

Soon after his elevation to the Zommate in the early 49th century the third Zomma of All Zalkhi, Shkelgim's foster son and acolyte Kolev publicly pronounced the need to extend the bounds of Zuranist *pralipe* (a concept variously translated as 'brotherhood', 'amity' or 'fellow feeling') beyond the traditional *vurmapan* tribal groups. The *Angelos* of the various nomadic septs resident in Mokum were summoned before their lord and ordered to cross foster their children with the *gadji*, to intermarry with them, and to share in one another's celebrations and sorrows. Although this profound social upheaval initially led to friction and unrest it was the personal example of the third Zomma that swayed public opinion. Of impeccable *vurmapan* credentials himself Kolev shocked and scandalised the Zuranist traditionalists by not only taking a *gadji* bride, but also by welcoming all and sundry to stay at his compound in the Blessed Hall of Divining Truth in the Heavens. When, much the chagrin of the naysayers, Kolev was miraculously not afflicted with the predicted ill fortune, impotence, hauntings, or slow and horrible death for his breach with tradition, his example became positively fashionable among the more prosperous and progressive of Mokum's inhabitants.

As visitors spread stories about the Zomma's spectacular reversal of Zuranist norms the previously rather anonymous Kolev grew into the status of a minor folk hero among the *gadji*. Zomma Kolev became famous in story and song for his gregarious nature and open-handed generosity to all.





The thousands of *lowe* (the Zalkhite version of Amharia's leu currency) that he gave away to what most traditionalist chiefs saw as no more than opportunistic leeches, beggars and hangers-on repaid themselves a thousand fold in the esteem in which Kolev was held by his people. During his long reign during the 49th century it was said that no man, Zuranist or Orthodox, spoke ill of him, and that even the fearsomely traditionalist *vujo* deemed him a worthy guest at their private meals. To the present the name of Zomma Kolev is a byword for "hail fellow, well met" sociability among the inhabitants of Mokum, among whom the judgement "He has the heart of another Kolev" is high praise indeed.

Almost since its' founding the heart and focus of Mokum has been the Blessed Hall of Divining Truth in the Heavens, which looms in the centre of the city like a triumphalist architect's fever dream made real. The entire vast complex of offices, suites, audience chambers, shrines, laboratories, mausoleums and gardens is deemed too holy for any non-Zuranist to enter. The forbidden always being more enticing the Blessed Hall remains a source of scurrilous speculation among the inhabitants of the Foreign Quarter of Mokum. Despite numerous attempts to gain entry (all unsuccessful to date) and constant rumours of strange alien discoveries, tunnels in the cellars leading to the core of the world, or bizarre and bloody rites practised within its walls there is little enough secret about the Blessed Hall to the Zalkhite visitor.

To those able to pass the hawk-eyed *vurmaman* guards, and who do not betray themselves as heathens by failing to perform the correct rites at the statue of the first Zomma that stands in the grand entrance hall, the truth about the nigh-legendary Blessed Hall is revealed. The complex is, in reality, the seat of government, scientific learning and religious faith for the Zalkhites, among whom the lines between government, science and faith are more blurred than in hidebound Amharia. Visitors are free to wander the courtyards, shrines, lecture halls and elaborately decorated colonnades practically at will, guests of the Zomma by virtue of their common faith and culture. In this vast palace, thousands of pilgrims and supplicants are daily served the same food as the Zomma eats, passing the time gainfully while their holy priest-king and his court preside over learned disputation, new astronomical findings, Mokum's constant backlog of legal cases, and performances of Zalkhite song, poetry and dance.

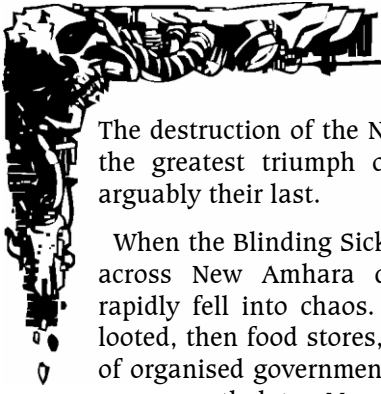
Removed some distance from the heart of the city, wisely sited downwind and screened by trees

and landscaped hills, squat the famous factories and workshops of Mokum. The skilled *gadji* craftsmen, along with a small community of immigrant Gannok craftsman who fled the Khalasei Isles, are famous for being able to reproduce almost any item brought to them. Although the Gannock are treated with superstitious distaste by the Zuranist workers the similarity of the little aliens' extended families to traditional Zuranist tribes means they do not garner the hostility and random violence that someone overheard speaking Amharian does. The metallurgists and technicians of Mokum find their ingenuity constantly challenged by the objects that the *vurmaman* gravediggers and scavengers discover in the old, half-buried Republican ruins scattered across the wide Zalkhi Plains. These mysterious artefacts are kept under lock and key at the Zomma Mahai airport, the unacknowledged home of Zalkhi's short endurance voidsailer ships.

Nefur Armayad (Nefur the Accursed)

If Mokum is the bright face of a hopeful new Zalkhi, the ruins of the old Amharian city of Nefur are the scars of a dark and violent past. For centuries the northeast coast of New Darfur was dominated by this dour maxicrete and steel city, originally built to house resettled Zalkhites during the Republican period. During the economic collapse of the 39th century the elaborate infrastructure of this essentially parasitical city built, as if by some perverse miracle, equally far from the rich forests of the east coast and the fertile north-central regions, began to decay. As New Amhara grew poorer replacement parts, materials, even labour became harder and harder to come by for a city that had for decades been little more than a dumping ground for the disenfranchised.

By the time Admiral Mehmet Burns Keddah retreated from New Amhara in 4002 Nefur (known at the time as Memphis) was little more than a slow-boiling cauldron of ethnic squabbling, where Orthodox arrogance clashed with longstanding Zuranist resentment. The Planetary Senate's attempts to rebuilt New Amhara's economy after the Fall were completely unavailing in the case of Memphis, and the city rapidly became a rich recruiting ground and refuge for the hatemongering Firstcomer movement. Each Firstcomer strike against the infrastructure projects of the Planetary Senate was hailed as a triumph of Zuranist resilience in the face of an ever-heavier and more onerous occupation.



The destruction of the Nakanda Gorge Dam was held the greatest triumph of the Firstcomers, but was arguably their last.

When the Blinding Sickness began to strike humans across New Amhara during the 4120s Memphis rapidly fell into chaos. Hospitals were mobbed and looted, then food stores, and within a week any form of organised government in the city had collapsed. A mere month later Memphis was little more than a necropolis. Those still alive had fled inland, hoping to find shelter and succour elsewhere. Most died lost and blind in the vastness of the Zalkhi Plains, while the few survivors were absorbed into *vurmapan* tribes with whom they had some customary ties. Although it became the temporary base for a number of desperate sea raiders during those terrible years, it was almost a century later before Memphis would see human inhabitants again.

It was not until the early 43rd century that the Amharian Empire arrived in Memphis. Due to its relative isolation and almost total desertion the city was deemed a secure storage area for the Elixir of Clear Vision on which Amharian dominion of the entirety of rich New Darfur was to rest. Five centuries of occupation as a military base and centre of tribute saw Nefur, as it soon became known, gain unprecedented wealth and some measure of its former population. Made wealthy by graft and idle by sloth the Ras of New Darfur and his strutting Agas soon became vilified as bloated leeches in a city that became a Zalkhite byword for parasitical greed. It was during the Amharian occupation that Nefur first gained in earnest its' heartfelt sobriquet of "the Accursed" among the Zalkhite natives.

The Zalkhite revolution led by Shkelgim Zhenawi was a catastrophe for Nefur. With its garrison already depleted quelling revolts among the islands of the Temptestuous Sea Nefur fell to the Zalkhites in a single night. With the rage of a quiet man provoked beyond all endurance by what he witnessed in the prisons and judicial torture chambers of the last Ras the future Zomma Shkelgim ordered that Nefur be destroyed utterly. What could not be smashed must be burnt, what could not be scattered to the winds would be thrown into the sea. The very ground upon which the accursed city stood must be rendered useless. The zealots of Zalkhi took their prophet at his word.

A century after its destruction Nefur remains a city accursed. The *vurmapan* of coastal Zalkhi consider the ruins of the city taboo, believing that great ill fortune will fall upon any who even glimpse them. Zuranist *swatur* (cautionary

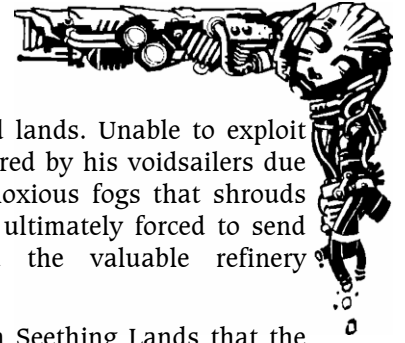
legends) hold that the vengeful ghosts of the Amharian *molocki* haunt the city still. These superstitions have picked up some credence among the sailors of the Hebesh nations, who ring spirit-placating gongs when they sail past the ruins, and spread far and wide the tales of its utter desolation. The unsuccessful punitive attacks of the Amharians during the 4930s spread cautionary tales of the desolated city to the Amharian Highlands and beyond. The tall tales of sailors do nothing to deter eager or desperate treasure hunters determined to find the legendary treasure of the Last Ras, even the pitiful number who return, starving and wild-eyed fuel the legend further.

Toadeni Oasis

If Mokum is the heart of the new, expansionist Zalkhi, then the great Toadeni Oasis in the heart of the wide plains is its traditionalist counterpart. Long a major nexus of trade for the *vurmapan* and *vujo* of the plains, in recent decades Zalkhi's crash course of technological development has increased the importance of this region further. Sited by some geological fluke at the confluence of several major aquifers the oasis has formed a great inland lake almost fifty miles across in the midst of semi-arid scrublands. The rich reedbeds at the perimeter of the lake have long held a place in Zuranist folklore. As well as being the reputed home of several important Zuranist demi-gods ("geista sanctas", as they are known among the *vurmapan*) these wetlands are famed as the one-time refuge of the future Zomma Shkelgim from *molocki* persecution.

The town of Toadeni, named for the oasis, derives a rich income from local agricultural produce (the pomegranate-like fruit of a native Amharian tree fern being a local speciality), the trade of the visiting *vurmapan* tribes in their huge smoke-belching *baroverdon* (great wagons), a nascent pilgrim trade dependent on visiting *gadji*, and also on the support requirements of the numerous astronomical and meteorological research stations that the last three Zomma have ordered built in the distant outliers of the Mountains of the Stars. Although welcomed by the Toadeni council of elders, and guided through the often-dangerous wetlands by local guides, *gadji* visitors – farmer, pilgrim and astronomer alike – frequently fall afoul of the traditionalist customs of the visiting *vurmapan*. Breaches of traditional *mageriphen*, particularly the all-important privacy taboos, which would be overlooked in relatively cosmopolitan coastal lands, have resulted in more than one fatal knife fight in recent





years. The *Angelos* of the council must treat a delicate line between offending the *vurmapan* backbone of the Zomma's armies, and the largely *gadji* scientists and technicians who ensure the continuing prosperity of their city.

Above and apart from all the internecine squabbling of the often rough-and-ready street life of Toadeni stand the rare *vujo* visitors to the city. Although the *vujo* regained their sight along with the other human cultures of New Amhara during the early 49th century they are still held in reverence by other Zalkhites for their unbroken and uncompromising adherence to Zuranist traditions and their own anti-technological taboos. Coming to Toadeni only to trade their intelligent and finely trained animals (horses, hawks, dogs and monkeys) even the most prideful *vurmapan* or sophisticated *gadji* of the cities stand aside when these exotic, dark-eyed relics of a former age walk in their midst.

Seething Lands

Far to the southwest of the Zalkhi Plains, in the lee of the great Mountains of the Stars, lie the exotic Seething Lands. In these distant valleys an exotic culture of *vurmapan* never fully absorbed into Zalkhite society make their home among geysers of superheated steam, boiling mudflats and eternally burning pillars of flame. Strange noxious-fleshed breeds of sheep and brutes graze on the sulphur-rich plants of these uplands, guarded always by a close-mouthed, xenophobic race of yellow-stained, dour-faced herders. By their own particular interpretation of the Zuranist *mageriphen* (code of rituals and taboos) the natives of these lands deem any who do not share in their rites to be less than true Zuranists, innately *marhime* in nature. The violent xenophobia of the *rasa magerdo* (stained people) of the Seething Lands would have remained little more than a local squabble, but for one thing: oil.

The combination of vigorous geothermal activity and easily accessible hydrocarbons serve to make this distant region intoxicatingly inviting to the energy-hungry *gadji* of Mokum. In the years since the Zalkhites first turned their attention toward the stars the Zalkhites have made remarkable advances in inorganic chemistry, advances which stand to improve their standard of living beyond measure, but which require vast amounts of oil and its derivatives. In the past decades numerous Zalkhite expeditions to this region, both exploratory and scientific in nature, were forcibly ejected or butchered by *rasa magerdo* tribes outraged at the desecrations

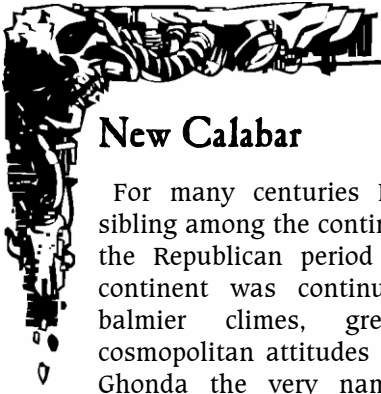
perpetrated on their sacred lands. Unable to exploit the orbital capabilities offered by his voidsailers due to the perpetual haze of noxious fogs that shrouds the land, the Zomma was ultimately forced to send armed forces to defend the valuable refinery established there.

It was in the little-known Seething Lands that the myth of Zalkhite invincibility was dealt its first blow. While unmatched by any other military force they had encountered the Zomma's vaunted *vurmapan* cavalry have been fought to a standstill in the boiling bogs and poisonous fogs of this obscure land. Their cavalry all but useless, constrained by primitive and largely ineffective gas masks, and cut off from the matchless intelligence and orbital artillery support usually supplied by their revered voidsailers, the elite of the Zalkhite army have been forced to fight a long, bloody and demoralising war against an enemy which has taken on almost supernatural stature. Among an invading force prone through religion and culture to myth making, the rarely seen but omnipresent *rasa magerdo* have gained a reputation as *trushalo odji* (hungry ghosts).

The superstitious fears common among the largely *vurmapan* Zalkhite troops stationed in the Seething Lands are further inflamed by the strange environmental effects prevalent there. Stinking noxious fogs that burn the eyes are bad enough to men raised in the clear air of the Zalkhi Plains, but the unstable mud flats which liquefy under the tramp of marching feet, slow-leaking subterranean pockets of methane and other hydrocarbon gases which ignite at the slightest spark, and the ever-present oil slicks which insinuate themselves into every watercourse, mean that the very land itself seems inimical to life and actively hostile to the invaders. In a manner almost unheard of in Zalkhite history *bashars* (officers) have recently have had to force their men onto patrols at gunpoint.

Rumours persist that, despite the hostile environment, the *rasa magerdo* hide secrets and wealth lost since the Republican days somewhere in the depths of their boiling bogs. Officers dismiss out of hand as garbage reports by soldiers who claim to have seen a series of strange monoliths in the depths of the mudflats. Although forced to keep their peace while stationed in the Seething Lands, drunken soldiers on furlough or at home tell stories of great carven spires that burn with a sickly corpsefire.





New Calabar

For many centuries New Calabar was the poor sibling among the continents of New Amhara. During the Republican period the hot and humid minor continent was continually overshadowed by the balmy climes, greater wealth and more cosmopolitan attitudes of neighbouring Amharia. In Ghonda the very name New Calabar was long synonymous with ignorance, racism and backwardness, while the exotic spices, flowers and fruits of the rich coastal plantations were advertised off world as being Amharan, rather than strictly Calabari, in origin.

New Calabar finally reached the notice of offworlders beyond a limited scientific community of biotechnicians in the early 40th century when the infamous Landfall Night Massacre of Obun monks in 3930 became the flashpoint for worldwide anti-alien rioting. Offworlders who had never before heard of the Firstcomers were repelled by the violence and hatefulness of the pogroms that followed violence that besmirched the reputation of the Zuranist minority across the Republic merely by association. The well-publicised policy of paramilitary policing, which ultimately contained the unrest, merely confirmed to the Amharan and interplanetary elites that New Calabar was a particularly benighted and backward locale. Of the inequities of the Democratist-dominated local governments, their forcing of the Zuranist populace into indentured service on the plantations and the despicable use of Obun psychic spies to maintain order in these concerns, the public knew nothing.

The retreat of Republican forces from Amharan space in 4002 brought no real change to the inhabitants of New Calabar. They were still caught between the rock of Firstcomer atrocities and the hard place of the Planetary Senate's ever-harsher curfews and quotas. It was only the universal chaos caused by the Blinding Sickness that eased the yoke on the back of New Calabar's people. For almost a century hunger, disorder and confusion was the order of the day as the Calabari's tried to survive in the face of an Obun minority determined to pay back a thousand fold the persecutions of the Landfall Night Massacre.

The return of Amharian rule in the form of the Amharian Empire and its Elixir of Clear Vision was little more than a continuation of the bad old days of the Republic for the people of New Calabar. In return for their sight the human Calabaris were returned to the plantations, or shipped to Amharia

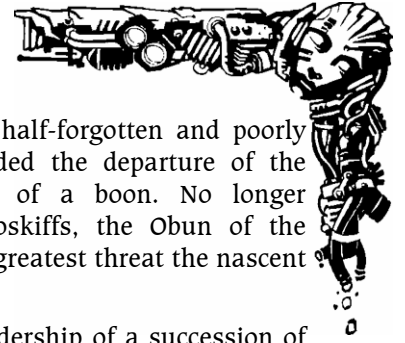
itself to labour in the dangerous mines of the Amharan Massif. A small minority who utterly rejected the vital serum were allowed by the Amharians to scratch out a living on the margins of Calabari society. This ever-present underclass of blind and pathetic untouchables served as a warning to the Calabari peons on the dangers of disobedience.

The Obun, sickened by human perfidy and wary of the returning Amharians, largely retreated from contact with the humans. The ultimate refuge of the alien minority was the hills and jungles of central Calabar, a region never fully mapped even in the days of the Republic, and too inaccessible for the Amharians to deem them any meaningful threat to their rule of the coasts. Irregular raids by the Obun and retaliatory strikes by Amharian Agas ensured that a slow-burning series of guerrilla wars persisted in the backwoods regions for centuries. Only a tiny percentage of Obun chose to serve the colonial masters, parleying their psychic powers and knowledge of Calabari flora and fauna into prosperity and relative security.

New Calabar remained a province of the Amharian Empire for centuries. Perhaps more than anywhere else on New Amhara this land became emblematic of the arrogance and injustice inherent in the imperial system. A microcosm of the divisive system of rulers and rules was inherent in the layout of the typical urban church of the colonial period, many of which remain in the towns of New Calabar. In a typical church the richly decorated balcony boxes of the Amharian Agas, accessible only from private entryways, overlooked both the hard wooden pews of the peons and the altar at which services were conducted. Standing room for those local Zuranist non-communicants rounded up and forced to endure the preaching of the Orthodoxy was situated just inside the public doors of the church. Behind elaborately carved roodscreens to the rear of the altar the painful and invasive procedure required to administer the Elixir of Clear Vision to expectant mothers were kept entirely out of the public gaze. The symbolism of such an arrangement was clear for all to see; only through submission to the church would children be born with sight.

Rumours of irregularities committed by priests during the administration of the Sacrament of Sight were the cause of more than one revolt by Calabari peons during the Empire. Such was the power that fear for their children's well being held over the majority that most of these situations fizzled out after a single paroxysm of violence, usually the murder of the Amharian inhabitants of an





isolated villa. These periodic and unpredictable outbursts bred an atmosphere of veritable paranoia among the ruling class, who soon saw threats everywhere they looked. Even at the height of the empire, the Agas of New Calabar were infamous for their sharp eyes for insubordination among their vassals and for their vicious exemplary punishments.

Not all the violence the Amharians could muster was able to suppress the revolt that arose among the Zuranist untouchables in the late 48th century however. Always free of close Amharian oversight into their doings the birth of sighted children to the Zuranists in the city of Loango long went unnoticed by any outside their communities. As soon as the news that mothers who had never undergone the Sacrament of Sight were giving birth to sighted children reached the peons on the plantations a large-scale rebellion broke out. Despite the best efforts of the outnumbered Amharians the revolt rolled unstoppable as a forest fire across New Calabar and within a year had spread to New Darfur. Despite massacres of the sighted newborn by the Amharian Chamber of Eyes, which the Calabaris repaid in kind wherever they could, it soon became clear that New Calabar could no longer be held. Within a decade the continent was free of Amharian dominion.

The newly liberated people of New Calabar turned against all things Amharian in a frenzy of destruction. Churches were burned to the ground or converted to profane uses, the great plantation villas were looted and the valuable crops burnt in the fields. Technology, long symbolic of Amharian dominance, was wrecked wherever it could be found. Electricity systems were ruined, vehicles burned and even the advanced sewage treatment systems of the cities were smashed beyond repair. It was only when a wave of pulmonary and enteric diseases swept the population that a necessary halt was called to the destruction and the Calabaris began the long, slow, often violent process of building themselves new lives.

Although the ringleaders of the revolt initially had grand plans for a communistic society where all worked for the benefit and betterment of one another human perfidy and greed rapidly saw the degeneration of New Calabar into a collection of mutually suspicious cantons. Democratic or autocratic in their internal government these primitive rural territories and scattered city-states, of which Loango and Klova were the greatest, spent most of their time fighting one another or the reclusive Obun of central Calabar. The latter, now being deemed ancestral enemies of the

Calabaris for a variety of half-forgotten and poorly articulated reasons, regarded the departure of the Amharians as something of a boon. No longer harried by Amharian aeroskiffs, the Obun of the forests rapidly became the greatest threat the nascent Calabari states faced.

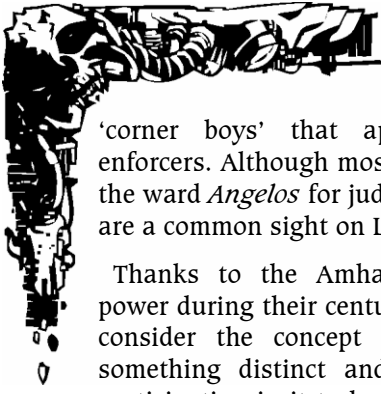
It was only under the leadership of a succession of charismatic warlords in the mid 49th century that the Calabari states were able secure their inland borders enough to begin retaliatory raids against the *kolla* territories of coastal Amharia. For several years the Calabar Sea was the scene of numerous tit-for-tat raids and running battles between the mutually hostile states of the coasts. A brief Amharian revanché in the 4870s saw Loango occupied and sacked by Agas now little better equipped than their former vassals. Since that time the Calabaris have contented themselves with petty raids against their former masters, preferring to sell the rich crops of their lands in trade with the Hebesh nations and Zalkhi.

Loango. City of Freedom

The first flashpoint of the Calabari revolt, the staunchly Zuranist port city of Loango was once the seat of the Amharian Ras of New Calabar. Loango was also the last city to fall to free Calabaris despite being the site of the worst massacre of Zuranist infants by Amharian soldiery and militias. In the two centuries it has been controlled by Calabaris (first by a democratic council, then a succession of dictators, and most recently by an oligarchy) the city has gradually decayed from a well maintained colonial centre into a veritable warren of houses, workshops, storage yards and houses of iniquity. Any surviving building more than two centuries old bears both the pseudo-Republican art deco hallmarks of the Amharian Imperial style and the scars wrought during the famous Calabari revolt, while more recent constructions seem to have little rhyme or reason to them.

The guiding principle of the Calabari revolt, that all were equals and no man was fit to govern the life of any other, has found physical expression in the anarchy of Loango. The million or more inhabitants (although no-one is sure of the exact number) build where they like, with little or no regard to existing architecture or the street plan beyond what other than local inhabitants are able to enforce. Neighbourhood militias enforce ever-changing local laws and a miscreant is almost entirely at the whim and mercy of any band of thugs, idlers or





'corner boys' that appoint themselves as law enforcers. Although most criminals are hauled before the ward *Angelos* for judgement violent 'street courts' are a common sight on Loango's crowded streets.

Thanks to the Amharian abuse of institutional power during their centuries of misrule the Loangans consider the concept of the corporate entity as something distinct and separate from the people participating in it to be a fraud. No institution, be it church, company or military force, has any rights in Loango. Unfortunately this means that the city has no civic government above the neighbourhood level. Although occasional "people's champions" are able to muster enthusiasm for faddish popular schemes neither the *Angelos* or the informal ruling oligarchy of the city are mandated to exact taxes from the populace on a regular basis. Despite the best efforts of the *Angelos* the civic infrastructure of Loango is as shambolic as everything else about the city. Damage to the electricity, water and sewage systems inflicted during the late 4700s has still not been made good in the year 5000. The streets of the city are full of potholes big enough to drown in, and the wood-and-stone walls erected by the popular dictators of the early 50th century are regularly cannibalised for building materials.

As a result of the sordid decay into which Loango has fallen the city is a veritable pesthole at the best of time, with high summer being the season most malodorous and injurious to health. During the three lunar months of high summer the majority of inhabitants either decamp to the countryside to work as farm labourers, or set out to sea in a motley array of vessels to fish, raid or trade as the winds take them. The lands around Loango, once the centre of the Amharians' great Calabari plantations, are now divided into a crazy quilt patchwork of small farm holdings, each of which is defended vigorously by Calabari farmers obnoxiously sure of their territorial rights. Any attempt to accumulate a landholding larger than one's family and dependents can work is vigorously policed by envious neighbours, who will sometimes use the threat of force to divide 'excessive' holdings.

Despite the apparent chaos and almost universal squalor that holds in Loango the city is actually remarkably prosperous. The riches of the sea and the fertility of the lands around the city provide the populace with ample food and basic goods, while a rough-and-ready capitalist system of water shippers, nightsoil carters and generator *wallahs* (an archaic dialect word meaning 'doer/provider of') haphazardly supply the structural needs of the city. The

rich hinterland of the Loangana (land of Loango) on the northwestern coast of New Calabar is an ever-changing tapestry of food and cash crops, the sheer variety of which boggles the mind. Loangan tea is one crop that even the proudest table on New Amhara does not reject. Farmers reduced to pauperdom if they fail to find a market for their produce are able to spend a few years working for their neighbours before the almost inevitable redistribution of land gives them a second chance at relative prosperity.

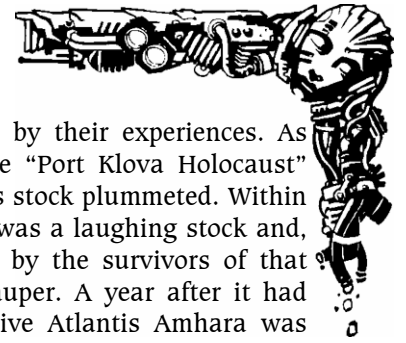
Contemptible as Loango may appear to outsiders, tainted as it is by squalor, disorder and a constant pall of wood smoke, the city maintains an enviable vigour. Neither the regular fires that sweep the crowded rookeries nor the irregular irruptions of the Amharians can prevent Loango from repeatedly being rebuilt. Insolent and badly organised as the inhabitants are in compared to the staid *voina-dega* Amharians or tolerant urban Zalkhites, the Loangans are, in many ways, a highly civilised people. Any man, other than an Amharian, is free to make a living among them, while any Zuranist is able to rise through merit to a position of respect among his peers. Despite their grubbiness the streets of Loango constantly ring with the songs and shouts of half a hundred dialects, all united in a dissonant susurrus that is a tacit hymn to freedom.

Klova

The coastal city of Klova, situated on the southeast coast of New Calabar is a city which has always failed to live up to its inherent promise. During the early days of the Republican era Klova was little more than a collection of fishing villages far removed from the bustling centres of industrial farming and bioresearch on New Calabar's west coast. The Zuranist natives raised their families in the privacy and liberty their ancestors had long sought. This idyll changed irrevocably when a group of investors from an interplanetary corporation named Atlantis Universal Leisure travelled to New Calabar in search of a suitable location for their latest luxury resort: "Atlantis Amhara". After several months of coastal surveys the investors settled a magnificent deep-water bay on the southeast coast of New Calabar as their preferred location.

Landing at the sight with an entourage of pompous Planetary Senate delegates the corporate officers of Atlantis Leisure made a spectacular presentation to the bemused Zuranist community leaders, many of who had never even left the bay in their





lives. Although the locals were unschooled in the ways of corporate and government compulsory purchase schemes they were not ignorant in the ways of human nature. One look at these overdressed, soft-fleshed city slickers, their faces aglisten with sweat and greed, told the hard-eyed old Zuranists all they needed to know about the future of their home. When millionaire developer Marcel d'Poseido, asked the leader of the local delegation what the name of their lucky, soon-to-be-bulldozed village was he was met with a glare, an obscene gesture and the dialect expletive "klova!"

Not realising the true import of the word, and hearing only the associations with the exotic spice trade of antiquity, d'Poseido deemed the name a fitting one for the centrepiece of his new resort. Within three years the hugely expensive resort was born. The centrepiece of this triumph of tasteless wealth was Port Klova, a sanitised reproduction of the very villages that had been destroyed to make way for the marinas, swimming pools, guesthouses, auditoriums, restaurants, VR suites, animal parks and airstrips of "Atlantis Amhara". Vatgrown offworld pearl oysters were introduced to the shallows of Klova Bay for the entertainment of those who fancied themselves as pearl divers. The Zuranist natives were employed as porters, kitchen staff, maids and 'local colour' in the wreckage of their former lives.

Unfortunately for the builders of Atlantis Amhara their surveys had neglected to take account of local environmental conditions, this was to cost their spectacular 'city of the waves' dear within the first year of opening. Atlantis Universal Leisure's hurry to turn natural splendour into vast profit had led them to overlook a notable feature of Klovan flora. Once every seven years, as the moon Selash waxed to full in the warmest days of summer, the beautiful Klovan Nightbloom, a native plant not dissimilar to the Terran orchid, released its pollen onto the night air. The tiny wind-blown seeds entered the ventilation and air-conditioning systems of Atlantis Amhara and, within hours, the horror began. Powerfully hallucinogenic when inhaled by humans the spores caused an outbreak of violent somnambulant incidents among the rich and pampered guests. Those awoken by the first screams of the dying or injured found themselves in an incomprehensible nightmare world from which it seemed only atavistic violence could protect them.

Rescue parties arriving from Loango the following morning found carnage among the guests. Almost all the visitors to the exotic paradise resort were

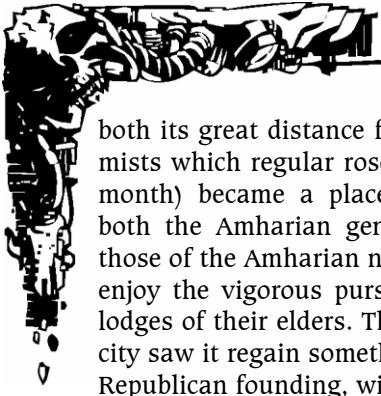
dead, injured or unhinged by their experiences. As news leaked out about the "Port Klova Holocaust" Atlantis Universal Leisure's stock plummeted. Within a month Marcel d'Poseido was a laughing stock and, after the class action suit by the survivors of that terrible night, a reviled pauper. A year after it had opened, the vastly expensive Atlantis Amhara was deserted.

The Zuranist locals, who had long used the hallucinogenic pollen of the Klovan Nightbloom in their religious rites, returned to the ruined holiday resort and attempted to rebuild their lives. In the stunning lodges where the elite of the Republic had slept under silken sheets the Klovan Zuranists built their family homes. Golf courses were planted with crops, while in their lagoons where the rich and famous had once snorkelled and sailed the Klovan fished and dove for pearls. As the centuries passed the Republic fell and stories of the Port Klova Nightmare became conflated with existing folktales. By the time the Klovan had struggled through the hard times of the Great Blinding stories of the arrogant Atlanteans who had come up from the sea to rule the land, before being repulsed in a single night by Saint Moonflower, were part of their cultural mythology. Even Marcel d'Poseido passed into myth as Saint Poseido, father of the oysters.

The arrival of the strutting Amharians in the 43rd century seemed a repeat of the Klovan's folk-tales in many ways. Once more a wealthy and arrogant foreign power had come to steal away the good things of life and make the Zuranists slaves. Even the offer of the Elixir of Clear Vision could not disguise the truth of what was, to the quick wits of the Klovan, just another type of slavery. The Amharians were made of sterner stuff than their Republican predecessors however. Although startled by what they first took as a Zuranist revolt the veteran Aga troops of the Holy Speaker were not repulsed by a midsummer night of hallucinations and maddened murders. The money to be made selling the products of rich pearl beds of Klova Bay to the decadent Imperial aristocracy was colossal, too vast a source of wealth to wait on bad dreams. When the cause of the seasonal mania was finally discovered the hallucinogenic effects of the Klovan Nightbloom were transformed from a sacramental tool of the Zuranists into a recreational drug for jaded rakes and pampered ladies of distant Ghonda.

During the centuries of Amharian rule Klova became a byword for hedonistic, indolent enjoyment among the elite of the empire. This formerly little-known city on the coast of the Obscure Sea (so called for





both its great distance from Ghonda, and for the sea mists which regular rose from it in the cooler winter month) became a place of perverse pilgrimage for both the Amharian gentry resident in Calabar and those of the Amharian nobility too idle or decadent to enjoy the vigorous pursuits followed in the Manshi lodges of their elders. The great influx of *leu* into the city saw it regain something of the lustre of its initial Republican founding, with Klova once more being the playground of the powerful and the favoured harbour of pleasure cruisers. Although the wide variety of spices grown in the hot, moist Klovan hinterlands were officially its major source of income, anyone who was anyone knew the truth of the city's prosperity. During the height of the empire the saying "voyaging to the land of spice" was an almost universal euphemism for narcotic intoxication.

The apparently miraculous recovery of natural human sight among Calabari newborns during the late 48th brought a brief-lived reign of terror to Klova, as to the other lands of Amharian Empire. Never a stronghold of the Universalist faith the Klovan Calabaris had long since succeeded in parleying their various services to the visiting nobility into a small contraband trade in the Elixir of Clear Vision. When the local Amharian authorities realised that the birth of sighted Zuranist newborns exceeded the numbers possible they reacted with the viciousness which has blackened the Amharians' name ever since. Curfews, roundups and executions went on for several weeks, before the long-suffering Klovan finally rose in mass revolt and threw their despised and bloated masters out.

In the last two centuries Klova has transformed itself from the sump into which all of Amharia's more degenerate lusts were poured into a wealthy centre of export trade. Klovan pearls, formerly the preserve of the Amharian nobility, are sought by the rich and emulous across Amharia for their fabulous lustre, while the pollen of the Klovan Nightbloom has become a popular recreational drug in many of the city-states of New Calabar and beyond. The Serene Council, which governs the various clans of Klova, has also led the way in moving the populace from a subsistence level of agriculture to exporting a wide variety of native Amharan spices. In recent years the fame of the city and its glamorous, well-maintained centre have spread far and wide, with visitors from distant lands sailing to Klova in search of the city's fabled splendour and riches.



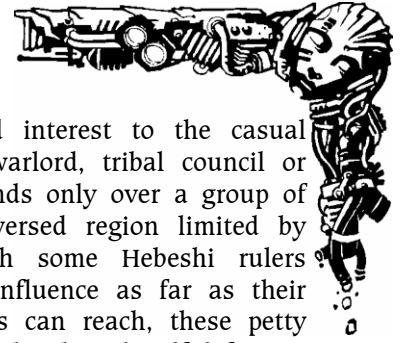
The Locus of Intermittent Being

The Bintaru-worshipping Obun tribes of New Calabar, long isolated from their human neighbours by both distance and historic enmity, know more of the mysteries of the tropical jungles than any other. Although they are the masters of their environment, surviving and flourishing where a human would soon die of starvation, poisoning or disease, there are some places that even these lords of the forests fear to tread. Although they are loathe to speak of such things to outsiders over the centuries scattered references in Obun fables and vague travellers tales have hinted that deep in the Calabari jungle is a place of ancient power where the very fabric of the world is weakened. Legend has it that a person who finds this place is able to take upon himself the powers of the ancient Obun gods, reshaping the world in accordance with his own will as easily as a child shapes clay.

Whether truth, exaggeration or outright fable, tales of the awesome Locus of Intermittent Being have lately drawn explorers to the city of Loango from across New Amhara. Every other week some foreign treasure hunter or local bored of his workaday life will gather up a cadre of ne'er-do-wells and head into the Calabari jungles in search of the reclusive Obun tribes. Even those explorers who manage to negotiate the services of an Obun guide, and who manage to avoid the savage Obun hunters known as the *Vhemthoro Oba*, more usually reap death than glory for their efforts. The few devastated human wrecks who stagger back to human lands with strange, pre-human artefacts clutched in their palsied hands are never the same again, refusing to ever speak of what they have experienced far from human eyes.

Those few who take the time to research what ancient records survived the days of the Great Blinding, the Amharian Empire and the excesses of the Calabari revolt occasionally happen upon Republican-era scientific reports regarding the interior of New Calabar. Obscure, barely understood references to "non-linear temporal/spatial psycho-reactive causal anomalies" are accompanied by page on page of esoteric equations, topographical maps and direful predictions. Of course, when combined with the folktales to which these antiquarian treasure-hunters give credence, the yellowed pages and flickering data-crystals of the Republican scientists act as a further spur to exploration.

The truth of the Locus of Intermittent Being is one that the treasure hunters of modern New Calabar have never yet fathomed. In truth it is not a



single location in the Calabari jungle, but rather an ever-shifting interface between the everyday world and a bizarre realm where the power of the mind is able to shape reality. The strength of the connection between New Calabar and the strange netherworld of the Locus varies in unfathomable patterns. For decades there might be no hint of it, or only bizarre mirages reflected from the lowering clouds, while at other times it may shimmer rapidly in and out of existence in far flung locations. The greatest mystics of the *Vhemthoro Obun* have gleaned some slight understanding of this place and, for reasons unknown to any but themselves, try to ensure that all intelligent beings avoid its manifestations.

The Locus has had two previous heights of activity since the Fall of the Republic, both corresponding to record high levels of solar activity in New Amhara's sun. It is no surprise to researchers able to decipher the bizarre dating system used by the *Vhemthoro Obun* that these dates correspond to the early 42nd and the late 48th century in the Orthodox calendar. During these periods, already infamous in Amharan history, the jungles of New Calabar were the site of numerous prodigies. Creatures utterly unknown on New Amhara were seen, while people thought lost in the jungle years before re-appeared with no recollection of their names or of their former lives, the skies darkened in daytime, distances became distorted and the landscape reshaped itself like a living thing. Unbeknown to any but the *Vhemthoro Obun* mystics it seems that the Locus of Intermittent Being is entering a new cycle of heightened activity.

The Hebesh Nations

The Hebesh nations are a collection of minor states that have arisen around the Tempestuous Sea in the years since the Amharian imperial collapse. "Hebesh" is an Amharian word meaning 'scraps' or 'sweepings', and was initially used as a pejorative by the disenfranchised Amharian nobility who remembered a time when their writ extended over the entire sea. Although most inhabitants of the Hebesh nations identify themselves primarily with their own locality the name has recently been adopted as a badge of honour among progressive politicians. To many living in the new states, the distinction of Hebeshi is slowly becoming a mark of their freedom, representative of their continued defiance of both the greatly disliked former rulers, and the rising power of Zalkhi.

Most of the scores of islands states and tribal homelands of the Hebesh are small in

population, influence and interest to the casual visitor. The reach of a warlord, tribal council or federal body usually extends only over a group of islands or an easily traversed region limited by natural borders. Although some Hebeshi rulers attempt to extend their influence as far as their warships and flying boats can reach, these petty empires are usually short-lived and self-defeating thanks largely to the damage they cause to their own people's prosperity. The only power to maintain a meaningful military presence in the Tempestuous Sea is the semi-piratical fleet of the self-styled Supreme Oba, but even this force often seems more intent on exacting 'safe passage tolls' or pursuing private vendettas than in outright conquest.

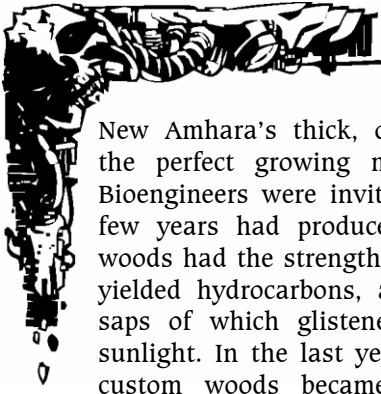
Although not as glorious as warfare, trade is a greater lever of long-term power and influence in the Hebesh nations. Except at the height of the autumn storm season the Tempestuous Sea is thick with ships sailing wherever the lure of profit leads. The nexus of this trade is, of course, the immensely rich port of Edul, although routes beyond the Tempestuous Sea to Mokum and Loango have recently become more popular.

Jhanbar

The city-state of Jhanbar is a prosperous domain situated on the forested eastern coast of New Darfur. An ally and client of Amharia since the early days of the Amharian Empire has long been a centre of Amharian Orthodox feeling in the largely Zuranist east of the Tempestuous Sea. Although Jhanbar is the nearest mainland area to the Khalasei Islands and is historically associated with them due to blood and cultural ties the divergent religions of the two nations has recently led to political tension between the two. If the piratical raids of the Supreme Oba of On Khalasei were the sum of Jhanbar's worries it's governing class would feel no great concern. In recent years however the Zomma of Zalkhi has expressed his interest in 'closer ties' with Jhanbar, particularly in regards to its famous timber reserves and the vast Jhanbar Bank oilfield.

Many visitors deem the verdant forests around Jhanbar the true glory of the city, one that outweighs its wide, clean streets and well-maintained Imperial-era buildings. The trees of the Jhanbar forest are unique in that they are the result of ancient genetic engineering during the days of the Second Republic. As New Amharan mining became less profitable during the latter years of the Republic, the city government of Jhanbar hit upon the idea that





New Amhara's thick, oxygen-rich atmosphere was the perfect growing medium for modified trees. Bioengineers were invited to the city and within a few years had produced varieties of trees whose woods had the strength of steel, others whose fruits yielded hydrocarbons, and others the never-drying saps of which glistened with shifting colours in sunlight. In the last years of the Republic Jhanbari custom woods became a major export of New Amhara, but not in themselves enough to prevent the economic collapse of the Fall.

After the Fall the people of Jhanbar, largely of Amharian or offworld descent and Orthodox in sentiment, maintained their love affair with their unique trees. Tree-farming and wood crafting remained honoured professions among Jhanbaris, who used their unmatched materials and skills to create beautiful ships. The Great Blinding, although it struck Jhanbar as hard as anywhere on New Amhara, was unable to destroy Jhanbari culture. The chaos of the early years, a nightmare of clan warfare, foreign raids and pirate attacks, was gradually replaced by a conservative oligarchy based on age, local area knowledge, and – as metal refining was beyond the capacity of a largely blind society – mastery of all-important woodcraft skills.

The Jhanbaris by and large welcomed the advent of the Amharian Empire across the Tempestuous Sea in the 43rd century. Submission to aeroskiff-riding lords of Ghonda was a small price to pay for the promise of the marvellous Elixir of Clear Vision and the guarantee of an end to the late uncertainties. By the time they submitted to Amharian governors the Jhanbari people had already established their own unique technocracy, in a very particular sense of the ancient word *techne* ("skill"). In a bizarre, but strangely intuitive leap of logic, the Jhanbaris of the post-Blinding days came to the realisation that the greatest assets needed in a leader were thoughtfulness, carefulness and dedication. By coincidence these were the same virtues displayed by the greatest woodcrafters of Jhanbar. When the Amharians arrived they were startled to find a state where fitness to rule was judged not by wealth, might or cunning, but by patience and obsessive care over ones' work.

Even after the Elixir of Clear Vision restored the sight of the Jhanbari populace they maintained their curious tradition of local rule. Election to high office in Jhanbar was, from that time forward, decided by the judging of wood crafted artworks made by the candidates by a panel of judges from outside the local area. The principle behind the annual

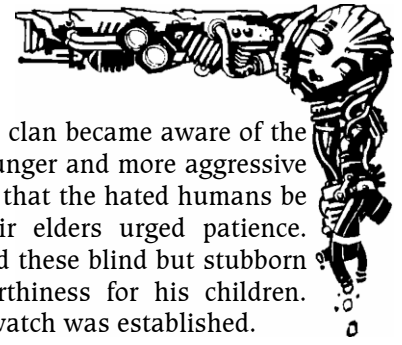
election was that anyone who took such obsessive care over their art would be both a fine thinker and craftsman, as well as being unlikely be interested in the opportunities for corruption and self-advancement presented by politics. It soon became a criminal offence to refuse an offer of office based on this selection by art.

Despite the high ideals of the Jhanbaris the "election by skill" system they instituted had one fatal flaw. Although the vast majority of governors elected by the system were indeed the sober and thoughtful men sought for, they were ultimately dependent on an Amharian-dominated civil service to translate their sensible decisions into policies. This civil service often deemed the decrees of distant Ghonda or the orders of the Amharian *dejazmatch* of Jhanbar of greater import than the needs of the Jhanbari people. During the centuries of Amharian misrule many unique varieties of Jhanbari tree became extinct through over logging. Passing fads among the nobility for ornaments of Jhanbari gossamerwood or furniture of oilbark cedar could, and did, cause irreparable damage to the Jhanbari forests. The devastation of their beloved trees was aggravated by the coastal pollution caused by reckless Amharian oil drilling on the Jhanbar Bank. More than one riot among the Jhanbari people arose over the way their once pristine coast was tainted by the greed of Amharians and their Jhanbari collaborators.

Much as they resented the overbearing arrogance of the Amharian Agas many Jhanbaris were shocked and dismayed at the collapse of the Empire in the 4700s. Centuries of wealth brought to Jhanbar by the hard work of its people were an irresistible target for the pirates that plagued the Tempestuous Sea in the wake of the collapse. The Jhanbaris found their delightful city transformed into an armed camp as the always-fractious people of the Khasalei Isles assailed their coasts and the Ukari of the Mountains of the Stars poured into their hinterland. The brief Amharian resurgence of the 4930s, although it stabilised the Jhanbari frontiers, made them a prime target for retaliation when the Amharians finally retreated from New Darfur in 4935. To this day Jhanbari traders sailing to Mokum, Edul, Port Venlosch or distant Loango arm themselves and their finely crafted clipper ships to the teeth.

Since the establishment of Zalkhi as the dominant power in their part of the world the Jhanbaris have moved warily. The 'requests' of the Zomma are not lightly dismissed by a small nation sandwiched between the zealous armies of Zalkhi and





the greedy raiders of the Khasalei archipelago. In recent years stories have reached Jhanbar from islands around the Tempestuous Sea that speak of dire celestial portents resulting from failure to accede to the demands of the Zomma. The news of the overnight destruction of the pirate nest of Melkabar by an unanticipated shooting star has caused a crisis of faith and confidence in the city. Despite their repeated requests for Amharian support it appears that the Universalists of Jhanbar may soon face the harsh choice of death at the hands of the Zalkhite legions, enslavement by a foreign hegemony, or exile from their ancestral groves. It is a choice none will make lightly.

Mokad-nar, the Hidden City

The upland valleys of the southeastern Mountains of the Stars have been the home of New Amhara's Ukari since days of the Second Republic. Originally imported from Kordeth and Aylon as indentured workers for the rich mines of New Amhara the Ukari, for all their skill as geologists and miners, were ultimately made redundant by technological progress. In one of their more 'enlightened' decisions in 3885AD the Planetary Senate presented the unsettled and seemingly worthless Tlinto Tana highlands of the eastern Mountains of the Stars to the resident Ukari as a homeland in perpetuity.

As anti-alien hostility became more marked during the last years of the Republic the Ukar of the Tlinto Tana (a name meaning "bridge to the stars" in their native Uryari tongue) gradually withdrew from contact with outsiders. The few urban settlements in the area were abandoned as the Ukar clans reverted to the primitive and largely subterranean mode of existence their ancestors had once known on Kordeth. Half-forgotten traditions were revived, abandoned mine workings were converted to warrens and the herds of sheep and chervin imported centuries before by an over-optimistic livestock company reverted to a wild, free-roaming mode of life. During the first eventful century of New Amhara's isolation from humanspace the Tlinto Tana became a region of ill repute among the humans of the coastlands. Any who entered those lands was unlikely to return alive.

The terrible advent of the Blinding Sickness by and large passed the Ukari of the highlands by. It was only when a small group of humans seeking a safe haven from the chaos of the coasts blundered upon the ruins of an abandoned mining settlement and began to establish a life for themselves that

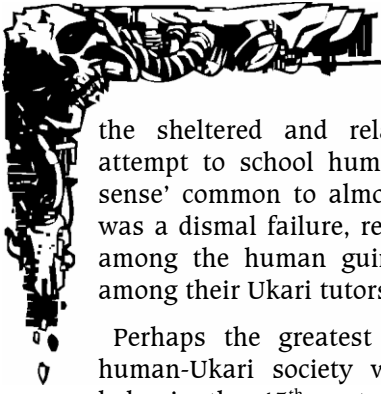
the Ukari of the Dwelthmid clan became aware of the situation. Although the younger and more aggressive members of the tribe voted that the hated humans be driven off and killed their elders urged patience. Perhaps Anikrunta intended these blind but stubborn humans as a trial of worthiness for his children. After strenuous debates a watch was established.

Over the months the Ukari watched many of the blind humans lost their lives climbing the treacherous slopes of the highlands, but the remainder gradually accustomed themselves to their new and dangerous home. It was deemed significant that the few sighted humans displayed a care for their blind kin that was almost Ukari in the level of its devotion. After the humans had been settled in their valley for a year and a season *taedwon* Vodurn of the Dwelthmid happened on a blind human who had become lost and separated from his kin. Rather than taking his blood for Anikrunta Vodurn chose to speak to the human in his halting Urthish, asking the man what his business was in the mountains. Unable to see that his interlocutor was one of the feared killers of the highlands the human introduced himself as Jacob van Dyr and invited the *taedwon* to share his food. Constrained by the rituals and customs of his culture the Ukar had no alternative but to accept this unconditional offer of hospitality and, as human and alien ate together, each began to learn the history of the other.

A week later the sighted humans of the settlement were amazed to see their neighbour, whom they had given up for dead, walking towards his home in the company of an honour guard of Ukari. For the past week van Dyr had lived among the subterranean Ukari, never realising that they were anything other than human. It seemed to *taedwon* Vodurn that the speed with which the blind human adapted to the lightless Ukari lifestyle was more a sign from his gods than mere adaptability; a sign that humans and Ukari could live and work together as they had long before. As Vodurn and van Dyr explained the tale of their meeting to the assembled humans and Ukar the foundations of one of the strangest cultures of New Amhara was laid.

Long years of exposure to one another's culture gradually changed the humans and Ukar of Mokad-Nar ("new settlement" in Ukari). As the humans slowly adapted to the lightless lifestyle of the aliens the Ukari slowly became less clannish and more accepting of their human neighbours. Universal schooling in the Baa'Mon writing of the Ukari allowed the blind humans to record their culture; this in turn broadened the intellectual horizons of





the sheltered and relatively ignorant Ukari. An attempt to school humans in the use of the 'near sense' common to almost all the psychic alien race was a dismal failure, resulting in years of psychosis among the human guinea pigs and rampant Urge among their Ukari tutors.

Perhaps the greatest invention of the combined human-Ukari society was invention of the sonar helm in the 45th century, the result of decades of slow, painful, and often-fatal research. Utilising the sonic technology found in the ancient mining equipment the growing communities shared, the vestiges of human medical knowledge that had survived the Blinding Sickness, Ukari psychic powers, and a rigorous system of research it eventually became possible to create masks that allowed the blind majority of humans to see their environment without recourse to their corrupted optic nerves. Although the first of these masks was little more than a proximity sensor the technology was slowly improved until the wearer could sense their environment in a manner that sighted humans could only imagine. By the time the masks were complete both human and Ukari culture had been profoundly changed by the project. The human and Ukari settlements had grown together into a single city, in which the philosophical questions the sonic masks raised on the nature of perception and being were the prime focus of intellectual life. Through the cross-fertilisation of Ukari metaphysics and human science Mokad-Nar had become the centre of a racially mixed society centred on the collection of knowledge for the purpose of greater perception of reality.

Centuries after the Blinding Sickness had first struck the fruits of the unique blend of human and Ukari culture made themselves known in the coastal lands of the western Tempestuous Sea. Men who spoke with strange accents and wore elaborately carved brazen masks began to make their appearance in the cities of the coasts. Paying their way with nuggets of precious metals, rare uncut gemstones and artefacts of a kind unseen since the days before the Blinding Sickness these masked pilgrims, who soon became known as the Resonant Lords, proceeded about their business surrounded by a mantle of mystery and fable that grew in the telling. It was said that the masked monks sought to gather all the knowledge of the world, that they never raised a hand in their own defence, that they could kill with a word, that they worshipped gods known to no other, and that they could see through walls or darkness.

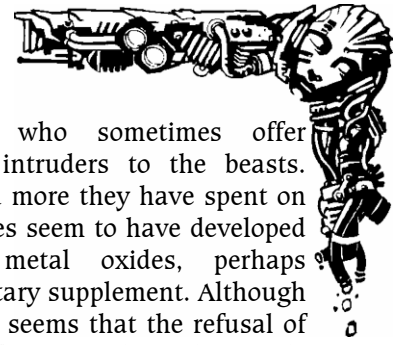
As the masked monks spread about the coasts of the Tempestuous Sea on their mysterious errands rumours of these Resonant Lords of Mokad-Nar preceded them. People came to see them as harbingers of good or ill luck, repositories of hidden histories, or the keepers of forbidden occult secrets. At the height of the Amharian Empire even the feared Chamber of Eyes were unable to fathom the secrets of these laconic visitors from afar. In the early 49th century some even went so far as to ascribe either the fall of the mighty Amharian Empire solely to their strange and subtle influence on human affairs. To all the questions that their presence raised the masked monks made no answer, merely continuing on their strange journeys and keeping their own counsel.

The Vogandi Preserves

The sweltering, pestilential jungles at the northern tip of the continent of Amharia have long been a mysterious and dangerous land. Inaccessible by virtue of latitude, terrain and prevailing sea currents even at the height of the Second Republic they were for centuries home to little more than scattered bioresearch stations and short-lived communities of refuseniks and survivalists from the core worlds. Vogandi's status as an embarrassing blank on the map was changed irrevocably when a wealthy Democratist businessman had the bright idea of turning the jungle into a nature preserve. This "Jungleland" would be the home of alien creatures from a hundred different worlds, the greatest nature park in the Republic and the biggest tourist attraction on New Amhara. Over the objections of traumatised ecologists the Planetary Senate approved the idea in 3619, and within a year, the first alien creatures and plants were being introduced into carefully demarcated and isolated stretches of cleared ground.

For several decades, tourists from both New Amharan natives and offworlders visited the air-conditioned hotels of Jungleland to see creatures from a spectacular variety of alien tropical environments. Bio-scientists and ecologists interested in the effect of environment on evolution joined the throng, working in a large, sprawling campus on the edge of the resort. Elaborate climate control systems modified oxygen content and air pressure, as well as mitigating or intensifying ultraviolet and visible solar radiation over the various preserves, mimicking the effects of a hundred alien biomes. For several years in the 39th century Jungleland enjoyed exclusive rights





to the recovered DNA of the Terran Bengal Tiger and trumpeted the unique status of these iconic animals. For a time the famous tiger 'Sher Kahn' became as popular an advertising motif for New Amhara as were portraits of dancing Zalkhites, grinning Khasaleite sailors or landscape shots of the Amharian Highlands.

As with so much else, the recession of the 40th century devastated Jungleland. As the core worlds found new fashionable resorts, and New Amhara's resources and money dried up, it proved untenable to maintain a high-technology resort thousands of miles from the nearest major city. By the last half-century of the Republic, Jungleland was a deserted and overgrown relic lost in a jungle rapidly reclaiming its once pristine structures. In 3970 a forest fire destroyed the faux-native coastal town of Olmanriya, originally built on the coast north of Edul to act as a support town for Jungleland. After the Fall the Vogandi Preserves gradually reverted from the tailored environments to the native Amharian flora. Thousands of penned creatures died as automated systems failed and their habitats became unsuitable for them. This silent catastrophe passed entirely unnoticed by a world with larger and more urgent concern of the Blinding Sickness.

It was during the chaotic times of the Blinding Sickness that Olmanriya gained a new lease of life. Originating as a shantytown of desperate refugees from the disorder of the Khasalei Isles the town of moored boats and stilt-cottages became the centre of a roaring trade in stolen, smuggled and 'found' goods after the establishment of the Amharian Empire. Although never a match for the great trading city of Edul-I-Aga Olmanriya survived by supplying the necessities of life – primarily medicines and the Elixir of Clear Vision – to those who saw the impenetrable swamplands and tropical forest as their last refuge from the heavy hand of empire. Treasure hunters who heard tell of a marvellous lost city named Jonchand supplemented the number of immigrants to Olmanriya.

Over the centuries the people of the Vogandi Preserves learned to cope with the multiplicity of wild beasts that now roamed their jungle home, killing those they could and fleeing from what did not fall to their often primitive weapons. Several fearsome species of mutated Aylonian biradials have emerged as the top predators in the jungles, with fast-moving Slekkers, mighty Torgons and even rare Reapers (known to the natives as "killing trees") wandering the vast forests. The biradials have taken on a totemic, almost godlike status among some

tribes of the interior, who sometimes offer propitiatory sacrifices of intruders to the beasts. During the millennium and more they have spent on New Amhara these creatures seem to have developed the ability to detect metal oxides, perhaps metabolising them as a dietary supplement. Although little known to outsiders it seems that the refusal of the inland tribes to use refined metals in their tools in preference to stone or wood may be based on more than mere superstition.

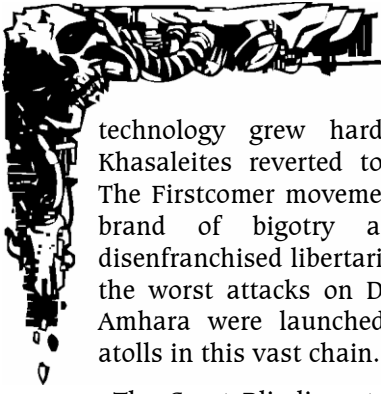
On Khasalei (The Khasalei Islands)

The Khasalei archipelago stretches like a curved claw forming the northern limits of the Tempestuous Sea. Comprised of thousands of islands ranging from sub-continental to miniscule in size the Khasalei Isles are a rich and diverse melting pot. Long the haven of exiles, fugitives and pirates the Isles has been a thorn in the side of any formal government that has sought to dominate New Amhara. As early as a century after the first landing on the planet, Zuranist tribes outraged by the demands of the offworld-run government centred in New Darfur, had fled to the Isles seeking freedom and peace. Freedom they may have found, but peace eluded them.

Over the centuries of the Consolidation and the early Republican era the Khasalei Isles, a largely unprepossessing part of an obscure world, became a refuge for anyone seeking to elude the long arm of Republican law. Although the Republic might storm and rage at the Amharan Planetary Senate about the range and volume of illicit goods, experimental drugs and unlicensed biotechnologies emerging from the Khasalei Isles there was little the government could do. Although the great Zion's Crown naval starbase at first seemed likely to stem the flow of vice emerging from the huge archipelago the problems of planetary versus fleet spheres of responsibility, as well as the right offers to the right people in planetary traffic control, ensured that unregistered smuggler ships met with a minimum of interference. As New Amhara's economy grew weaker in the later days of the Republic the untaxed wealth of the Khasalei had an ever-greater influence on government policy.

The isolation of New Amhara from the greater jumpweb after 4002 saw little essential change to the economy or society of the Khasalei archipelago. Although some concerns went to the wall as they lost necessary offworld supplies, most adapted to the new situation. Starships and microfactories were mothballed or cannibalised as high





technology grew harder to come by, and the Khasaleites reverted to a semi-agrarian existence. The Firstcomer movement found fertile soil for their brand of bigotry and madness among the disenfranchised libertarians of the Isles, and many of the worst attacks on Democratist interests on New Amhara were launched from obscure islands and atolls in this vast chain.

The Great Blinding struck the Khasalei Isles hard. The cutthroat traditions of the Isles rated cooperation and mutual trust low on the ladder of survival traits and, as the majority of the human population slowly went blind during the 4120s, society collapsed. Many aliens, irrationally blamed for the affliction of their human neighbours, met their ends at Firstcomer hands. Other aliens struck before the humans could, then fled to other isles in waterborne exoduses. Those few humans still able to see sought to escape from the thralldom to which many were condemned, forming piratical brotherhoods of the sighted and adding further bloody chaos to the situation. Although none know for certain it is possible that within a generation two-thirds of the pre-Blinding population died before their time.

When the Amharian Empire arrived in the maelstrom of 'devil take the hindmost' savagery then prevalent in the Isles it enforced only a semblance of order on the Khasalei peoples. The empire established a number of naval bases and depots at key chokepoints within the archipelago, usually along the shipping routes and straits through which the tribute shipments from New Darfur would pass. These mighty fortifications were governed by a number of mutually emulous rival *dejazmatches*, who soon became hereditary lords of their own petty domains. The scattered Amharian bases acted as the anchor points for a feudal relationship with the existing elites of the Isles, enforced by Amharian gunboats and aeroskiffs. In return for access to the Elixir of Clear Vision for themselves and their favoured supporters many pirate warlords threw their lot in with the Amharians, acting as local tax farmers, watchmen and bullyboys.

The collapse of the Amharian Empire and the restoration of natural human sight in the late 4700s saw the Khasalei Isles return to their immemorial 'business as usual' of piracy, smuggling and feuding. No longer dependent on the goodwill of a despised foreign cult the *sanctas* (shamans and mystics) of Khasaleite Zuranism became the focal point for countless petty revolts. For the next two centuries the archipelago was controlled by a dizzying

array of mutually rival minor states, few operating at above a local (one island) level. These microstates varied from pre-metallurgical to early industrial in their technology base, and ran the gamut of political organisation from true anarchy to totalitarian dictatorship. Try as they might the remaining *dejazmatches* were unable to enforce Amharian feudalism on the Khasalei Isles, and the most common form of polity to emerge was a loose, ever-shifting confederal system.

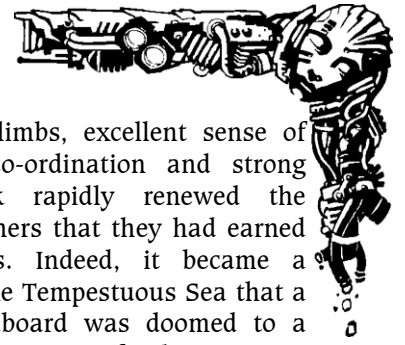
After two centuries of disunion and bloodshed the Khasalei Isles have in recent years experienced something of a unique phenomenon, a conqueror who is both successful and popular! A substantial area in the western half of the archipelago has in the past decade fallen under the dominion of the island of On Bekta, long famous for the creation of paper-thin, translucent ceramics that adorn the tables of the wealthy across New Amhara. This island of previously unremarkable craftsmen now answers to a sea king who styles himself the "Acclaimed Supreme Oba and Grand Admiral-General of All the Oceans". Islands free of outside rule since the 4800s have recently found themselves threatened by naval forces of unprecedented scale and brutality. Primitive aeroplanes launched from improvised aircraft carriers bomb both ports and inland cities which have not known such military inequality since the height of the Amharian Empire.

Quite how this "Supreme Oba" has managed to do what thousands before have failed to eludes observers, although many speculate at his discovery of an ancient Republican weapon cache, or at his having Zalkhite military backing. This last is not beyond the bounds of possibility given that some expansionist factions in the Zomma's court consider the Khasalei Isles a useful stepping-stone to the eventual conquest of the Amharian lands. This recent development, although a cause for concern among the merchants of Edul, has ruffled no feathers in distant Ghonda, where the noble advisers of Holy Speaker Nesta deem the Supreme Oba merely the inconsequential lord of a few pirate lairs.

The Free Simian State

It is said that any form of political entity can be found in the Khasalei Isles, and this includes a state ruled by the diminutive alien Gannok. Originally the creation of the chaos of xenophobic mayhem subsequent to the Great Blinding this minor enclave based on an island in the eastern reaches of the Khasalei archipelago has endured centuries





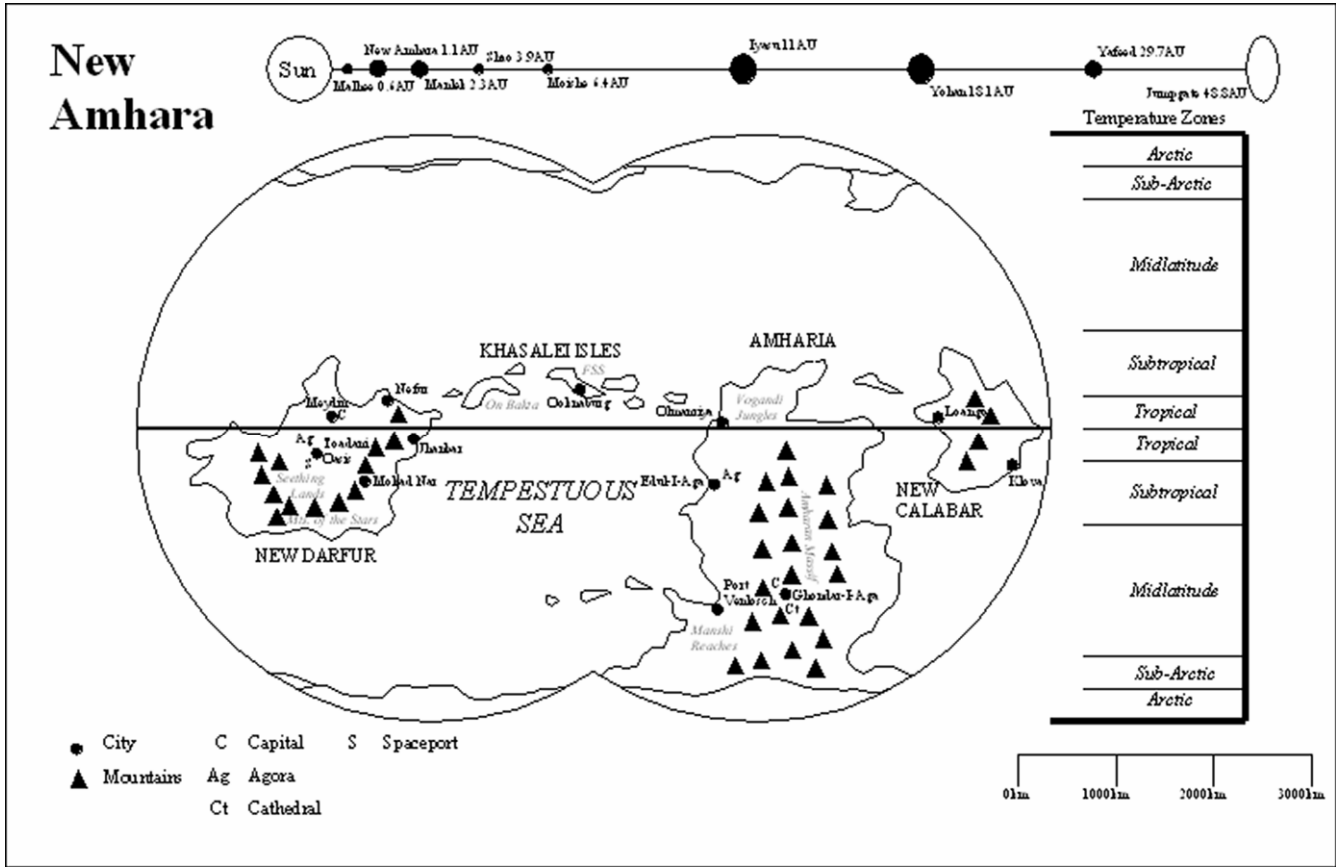
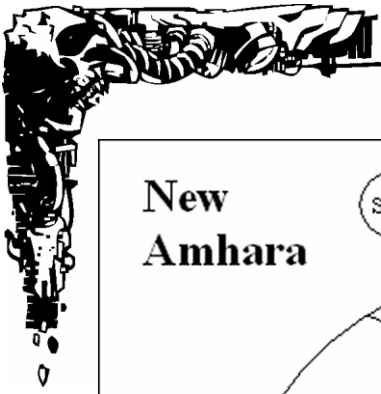
of mockery, contempt and bullying from its neighbours. The Gannok have endured all these things with the vigour and good humour that are their racial hallmarks, countering ridicule with smiles and insult with wickedly accurate mockery.

The Free Simian State had its genesis in the first days of the Amharian Empire's control of the Khasalei Isles. Hearing of the Amharian arrival in the Isles the Gannoks in the beleaguered and despised island enclave were among the first to send tribute to their local *dejazmatch*. Although their island was a source of both rare spices and a small amount of valuable thermocrystal the Gannok took advantage of the prejudices that humans held about them and presented their tribute entirely in the form of soft fruit. In return for their loyal submission the *dejazmatch*, a man not without a sense of the absurd, awarded the Free Simian State with a charter that guaranteed their autonomy within the empire in exchange for an annual peppercorn rent of fruit. The Gannok smiled, accepted the charter with a comical (to the humans) solemnity, and revelled in their tax-free status for centuries thereafter, rapidly becoming the centre of banking and money laundering in the Isles.

During the rule of the Amharian Empire the Gannok of the Free Simian State rapidly forged a reputation as both able seamen and masterful craftsmen. With

their multiple prehensile limbs, excellent sense of balance, fine hand-eye co-ordination and strong constitution the Gannok rapidly renewed the reputation as master mariners that they had earned in the pre-Blinding days. Indeed, it became a universal superstition in the Tempestuous Sea that a ship without a Gannok aboard was doomed to a sudden watery grave. Accusations of sabotage were often bandied around by sailors resentful of the higher pay awarded to Gannok seamen. Captains who often owed money to the Free Simian State were more politic.

With the fall of the Amharian Empire the special and protected status that the Free Simian State had long enjoyed went by the board. Although the charter of alliance remained safe in the town hall of Ooknaburg it was no protection from the greedy pirates who sought to plunder the rumoured riches of the Free Simian Bank. Some Gannok decided to stand and fight the renewed aggression under which they laboured, and often become fearsome corsair captains in their own right, while a sizable minority fled to join the Gannok expatriate communities overseas. By the year 5000 it was possible to find small communities of these famously clannish and adaptable little aliens in any city on New Amhara from Mokum to fabled Klova.



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Game Rules

Amharan Spear Duelling

In marked contrast to the pre-eminent place the sword hold in the armouries of the Known Worlds the Agas of Amharia deem the war spear the noblest of weapons. Similar in size and shape to medieval European glaive pole-arms, although numerous historic and regional variations in size, shape and weight exist, the aristocracy of the Amharian Empire evolved a rich fighting tradition with these weapons. Amharian Aga (freeborn) characters may buy fencing combat actions for use with their war spears, which use the same stats as the spear in the Fading Suns Rulebook. Fencing actions purchased for use with the war spear may not be used with Known Worlds sword fencing.

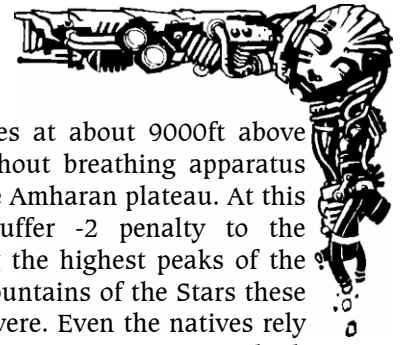
Mokad-narin Sonic Masks

The sonic masks of the mysterious monks of Mokad-Nar are a substantial part of their mystique. Linked to the nervous system of their user by a system of invasive neural interface threads these masks use an antler-like phased sonar array to grant the wearer cybernetic senses equivalent to the Sixth Sense psychic powers of Sensitivity, Darksense and Shared Sense (the latter only within another masked monk within line of sight). The sight conferred by a For each day of exposure, or part thereof lasting more than an hour, to New Amhara's strong UV a player is required to make an End+Observe check for their character. These tests must be made more frequently during the fabled lightstorms that accompany elevated sunspot activity on New Amhara's sun.

A failed test results in Observe being effectively halved by dazzle.

On a fumbled End+Observe roll the character permanently loses a point of Observe as UV damages their eyes. This penalty can be removed by





cybernetic replacement of the eyes, or through TL7-8 medical technology. If Observe is permanently reduced to 0 through fumbled tests the character is permanently blinded.

The wearing of Amharian-made optishields (essentially sunglasses) is sufficient to protect the eyes in the majority of circumstances, and in the centuries since human vision was restored the possession of these items has become a status symbol among most New Amharan social elites.

sonic mask functions regardless of light conditions, and reduces Perception or combat penalties for fog by half. A trained wearer may also use cybernetic equivalents of the Bedlam psychic path powers of Confusion, Resonate and Nerve Burn at the normal Wyrd costs and use the Psyche power of Brainblast at the normal Wyrd cost + 1 point of Vitality. A sonic mask also gives a +2 bonus to Impress among New Amharans.

Due to the unique manner in which sonic masks are tailored for the wearer it is only possible to use them after a hazardous TL5 cybernetic surgery procedure and several years of training by the Resonant Lords of Mokad-Nar. An untrained user who attempts to don a stolen sonic mask without a thorough understanding of the proper procedures will likely have their hearing damaged by the overwhelming cacophony of noise the pick-ups transmit.

Price: not for sale!

Ultraviolet Radiation

New Amhara's primary is a very active star. This not only makes New Amharan days brighter than those of Earth, but can also have detrimental effects on the unprotected eyes of visitors over the long-term.

Amharan Altitude Sickness

Although the atmosphere of New Amhara is richer in oxygen than that of Earth the central plateau of

the Amharian continent lies at about 9000ft above sea level. Non-natives without breathing apparatus suffer a -2 to Vigour on the Amharan plateau. At this altitude UV tests also suffer -2 penalty to the End+Observe goal. Among the highest peaks of the Amharian Massif or the Mountains of the Stars these penalties are even more severe. Even the natives rely upon bottled oxygen when attempting to climb monstrous peaks like the 32,000ft Ras Dashen.

The Science of the Blinding

This particularly nasty disease was inspired partially by an article on "light-activated" ion channels in optical nerves by Richard R. Kramer a copy of which can be found here:

<http://mcb.berkeley.edu/faculty/NEU/kramer.rr.html>

Dedication

This shabby little effort is dedicated to a few people without whose assistance I would have just given up.

So thanks to:

Jack Oldham – for showing me how an Imperial Survey write-up *should* be done, and for nagging me to meet the deadlines.

Angelus Michaels – for helping turn my poorly thought-out ideas into a (semi-)coherent world.

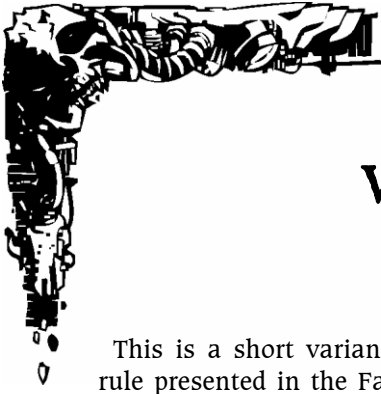
Lisa McCarthy – for letting me pick her brains and putting up with my 4am typing sprees.

Kathy Schadt – for her inspirational artwork.

Johann Eriksson – for insights into layout and pdf conversion help.

The FSGames and FSChronicles YahooGroups – for their feedback.

Holistic Design – for creating the Fading Suns universe.



Variant Critical Failure and Success Rule

By Casey Standridge

This is a short variant for the (un)popular critical rule presented in the *Fading Suns Rulebook* by HDI. The set is wonderfully simple and runs off of the suggestion that Arioch had back when this was being discussed on the HDI Forums.

The simple premise is when a CRITICAL failure is rolled (the Dreaded 20) the player should make another roll based on half his goal. As an example, a Drive (Landcraft) goal of 13 (Dex 5 + Drive (Landcraft) 8) will be used. The variant is that even with this low margin of success, a critical failure (natural 20) only exist if the player rolls a SECOND 20 (unmodified by accenting and penalty conditions). Only in this case, do the sad and catastrophic events of the dread 20 commence. If the player merely rolls an 8 (using his Drive (Landcraft) skill of 8 as the goal), it is merely a failure and thus on indicates an inability to collect the points in that roll. Conversely, if the player manages to roll under this small number, the Pancreator has smiled that near fatal mistake has not only been avoided, but he manages to garner some success from his mistake. If the player had rolled a 5 under the above variant, he would garner the Victory Points gained (though the GM could rule that the points are halved along with the goal, but this up the GM).

Example

Irem the Scrapper is making a quick getaway from the local constables in the Imperial City on Byzantium Secundus. The skimmer craft he's driving is barreling along the cluttered streets of the city at 130km/h and he is taking fire from the gun ports of the constables' skimmer. He spots an alley that links

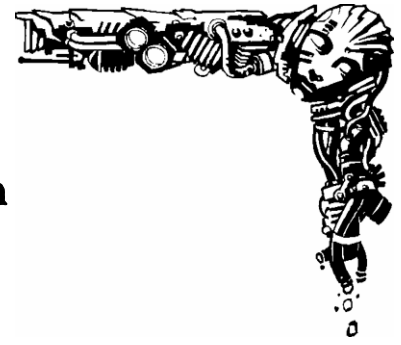
to a grav-train network on the north side which seems a great escape route to lose the law, but the turn is tight and fast approaching

The Gm rules that a total of 8-victory point needs to be garnered so that Irem can navigate the turn safely. He's allowing to three rolls to gather the points. Irem's player rolls the dice three times against his Drive (Landcraft) goal (we'll use the above as reference). She rolls 10, 6 and 20. Under the variant rule, Irem's player now rolls that d20 again to "change" fate and with her new goal, the players rolls a 6, the exact number (GM's can allow the character a critical success, but otherwise as per this variant is just a success). This allows Irem the two victory points he needs to make the turn safely, but it's none too perfect.

Irem jerks the wheel at the last possible second, causing his skimmer to swing a little too wide. He corrects at the last possible second and instead of blowing through the building itself (or just blowing himself up), he makes the turn and only ends up scrapping against the wall of the building next to him hard, causing sparks, pieces of skimmer body and none too few sweat drops to fly from the skimmer.

He speeds to safety, hearing a loud crash as the constable tried the same move, but didn't turn soon enough. Irem smiles as skims the grav-tracks and pulls onto the intercontinental speed way out of the Imperial City and out into the urban countryside of Byzantium Secundus.





Victory Point /Defeat Point System

By Lionel Rudling

The Victory Chart is at the core of Fading Suns' resolution system. It translates Successes into Victory Points and Damage Dice. This allows a test result to have a direct effect on the game world in the form of goal modifiers, additional damage, and measuring the duration of extended actions.

The system for failure is not as graduated. There is no differentiation as we find for the success system. A character either fails or critically fails with no indication of the severity as we find with successes. I have extended the philosophy of the successes to failures so that the entire Victory Point System is

evenly graded.

The Expanded Rules

Failures have varying degrees just like Successes. They translate into Defeat Points (DP) as Successes translate into Victory Points (VP). Defeat Points are the opposite of Victory Points, and the simplest way to work with them is to add a column to the Victory Chart for Defeat Points. The DP column repeats the VP column except for being inverted (starts at the bottom and increases up). The

modified Victory Chart below illustrates this clearly. *Example: A roll of 6 is either 2VP or 4DP (depending on whether you got above or below the goal number).* The modification is also extended to the Accenting Chart.

Just as Critical Successes result when you roll exactly the goal number, so Critical

Failures result when one misses the goal number by one. Critical Failures double the resulting Defeat Points just like Critical Success double the resulting Victory Points. A natural 20 is no longer a Critical Failure.

Just as a natural one is an Automatic Success, a natural 20 is an Automatic Failure. A 19 has no special meaning anymore.

VP/DP Victory Chart

Victory Points / Victory Dice	Result	Defeat Points / Defeat Dice	Accomplishments	Failings
1/+0	2	-6/-6	Barely satisfactory	Disastrous
1/+1	3-5	-5/-5	Mediocre	Pitiable
2/+2	6-8	-4/-4	Pretty good	Laughable
3/+3	9-11	-3/-3	Good job	Poor
4/+4	12-14	-2/-2	Excellent	Feeble
5/+5	15-17	-1/-1	Brilliant	Deficient
6/+6	18-19	-1/-0	Virtuoso performance	Inadequate

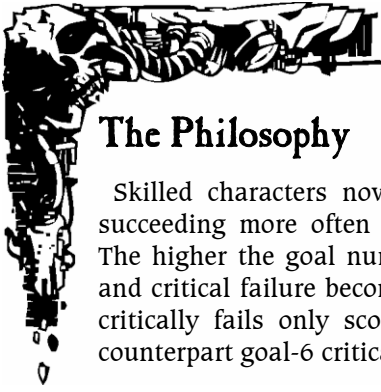
VP/DP Accenting Chart

Victory Points / Victory Dice	Positive Accenting	Defeat Points / Defeat Dice
1/+0	2	-9/-9
1/+1	3-4	-8/-8
2/+2	5-6	-7/-7
3/+3	7-8	-6/-6
4/+4	9-10	-5/-5
5/+5	11-12	-4/-4
6/+6	13-14	-3/-3
7/+7	15-16	-2/-2
8/+8	17-18	-1/-1
9/+9	19	-1/-0

Victory Points / Victory Dice	Negative Accenting	Defeat Points / Defeat Dice
1/+0	2-4	-4/-4
1/+1	5-8	-3/-3
2/+2	9-12	-2/-2
3/+3	13-16	-1/-1
4/+4	17-19	-1/-0

An **Automatic Success** occurs on a natural roll of one (1).
 An **Automatic Failure** occurs on a natural roll of twenty (20)
 A **Critical Success** occurs on a roll equal to the Goal, doubling the VPs.
 A **Critical Failure** occurs on a roll exceeding the Goal by one, doubling the DPs.





The Philosophy

Skilled characters now have an edge other than succeeding more often – they now fail less badly. The higher the goal number, the less severe failure and critical failure become. A goal-16 character who critically fails only scores 2DP, whereas his inept counterpart goal-6 critically fails with 8DP.

Advantages

This system has several advantages. Failures now have a defined meaning. The DP may be used as a goal modifier for the next action, instead of having a character fail outright. It may even translate into damage dice for a partial success, or as self inflicted damage.

Critical Failure has a defined meaning on a scale equivalent to Critical Success, and no longer needs to be guessed at. Higher skilled characters fail less badly and critically fail less severely. Critical Failure is no longer a disproportionate disastrous outcome

as compared to the rewards of a Critical Success. You now know the likely consequences of the failure. Two Defeat Points may just be a gun-jam or missed action, but 12DP is something potentially fatal.

Positive Accenting now carries more risk with the increased reward, and Negative Accenting less risk with the decreased reward. This prevents Positive Accenting from abuse without having to resort to special rules. It may even encourage Negative Accenting because of the decreased risk.

The system is extendable to Cumulative Actions, with failures subtracting from accumulated totals, representing the ebb-and-flow for a complex task. Tasks will take longer if this system is used, but it may be appropriate for suitably stressed situations as players occasionally bungle to get something done. Note that, with sufficient bad luck, low-skilled characters can potentially never complete a task.

