



— BOOK ONE —  
**LANDS OF  
CREATION**™





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CREATION™

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TODAY IS MY FIRST WAR.



I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.



UNFORTUNATELY, THE ENEMY NUMBERS IN THE TENS OF THOUSANDS.



SEEMS LIKE A WASTE OF TIME.

OH WELL...



FORWARD!

---



# INTRODUCTION

Creation destroys as it goes, throws down one tree for the rise of another. But ideal mankind would abolish death, multiply itself million upon million, rear up city upon city, save every parasite alive, until the accumulation of mere existence is swollen to a horror.

—D. H. Lawrence, *In The Short Novels*, vol. 2

At the height of the First Age, Creation was a much larger and more advanced place than it is in the fallen Age of Sorrows. The Solar Princes of the Earth have had millennia to expand the world's borders and apply their unrivaled genius to its governance and magitechnical advancement. As a result, the Era of Dreams is a time of peace and prosperity beyond the wildest imaginings of Second Age folk.

All is not perfect in this time of miracles, however. The Great Curse has taken root in the hearts of the Celestial Exalts, leading the Chosen to acts of hubris and barbarism on a scale just as grand as all their other acts, threatening the very survival of Creation itself.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**Dreams of the First Age—Lands of Creation** is a guide to Creation in the Age of Splendor. With this information, and the information provided in the other two books included in this boxed set, it's possible to play games set at the height of Solar Exalted dominance of Creation. It's a time of glory... and madness.

### Chapter One: Life in the High First Age

This chapter offers a general overview of what it's like to live at the height of the Old Realm's glory. From its shrouded history to its Deliberative government, from its most celebrated Exalted citizen to its lowliest slave race,



## THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE GAME!

Despite its size, *Dreams of the First Age* is not a complete game. It is a supplement for *Exalted*, a game about near-divine heroes in a world of high fantasy. The game's core book describes the Solar Exalted, the rightful rulers of Creation, reborn into a world that has cast them as demonic despots from a bygone era (*this* era, actually). This supplement does not describe the game's core traits or present its rules for conflict-resolution. This supplement instead gives in-depth information about the First Age: its society, its lands and the rules necessary to create and play Solar, Lunar, Sidereal and Dragon-Blooded characters in it. You'll need the *Exalted* core book for the basics, though.

the secrets of the First Realm are laid bare for Storytellers and players alike.

### Chapter Two: The Blessed Isle

This section concerns itself with the Blessed Isle, one-time home to the gods and jewel of the Realm. It is from here that the Lawgivers rule Creation, spending two out of every five years lounging on sprawling estates scattered about the Isle and arguing with their Solar peers on the floor of the Deliberative.

### Chapter Three: The East

The East is the breadbasket of the Realm and the most populated direction of the Threshold. This chapter offers a complete breakdown of its provinces and examples of some of its best-known principalities and cities, providing players and Storytellers myriad locales and story hooks for their characters and their games.

### Chapter Four: The South

The South is the second most populous of the Threshold's directions, and the one with perhaps the most varied climate. This chapter offers a tour of the South's four large provinces and many of their cities and principalities. It also offers a new threat to Solar hegemony in the form of the pure-bred Lintha.

### Chapter Five: The West

Creation's West least conforms to the standards of the rest of Creation. Lacking the land of the other directions, the West has but one province, with most of its Solar Princes ruling individual island-cities or archipelago principalities. It's also the direction with the least direct Deliberative oversight, so it's home to more tributaries and hidden genesis labs than any of the more thoroughly populated regions of the world.

### Chapter Six: The North

The least populated and, in many ways, least developed direction of the First Age Threshold, the North is a place of

savage splendor interspersed with shining civilization. Here more than anywhere else, it is still possible to make one's mark and carve out one's own principality from the icy wastes where Creation abuts the Wyld.

### Appendix: Old Realm Script

This appendix presents, for the first time, the complete Old Realm writing system used in *Exalted* books since the game's launch. Now the game's many secret missives will become clear, and you can compose your own for your series.

## A FEW GUIDELINES FOR PLAYING FIRST AGE GAMES

It's not easy to run an exciting game set in a utopia. This text, therefore, touches on issues of storytelling First Age games even as it examines playing in them.

### THE ISSUE OF SIZE

Readers will notice that the coverage this book gives to the setting throughout is... erratic. Not everything is described, and some things that seem like they should be important are mentioned off-handedly only once or twice. Other things (such as the groups of Deliberative laws known as the Accords) are mentioned as existing but never described at all, while still other areas receive disproportionately sharp focus.

This is intentional. Creation, especially during the First Age, is *huge*.

As of this writing, the Earth has a population of approximately six and a half billion people and a surface area of about 197 million square miles—of which only about 30 percent of the surface is land. In the First Age, Creation has a population of just over 10 billion mortals, plus a substantial population of intelligent supernatural creatures (especially spirits, which number in the billions easily, though spirits with human-level intelligence number “only” in the hundreds of millions). While its surface area is a mere 160 million miles or so, only about a fifth of that is water, leaving about 128 million square miles of land. Additionally, Yu-Shan (the size of the Blessed Isle), Malfeas (incalculably large) and the Underworld (as large as Creation) add to those numbers. The Wyld is potentially infinite.

First Age Creation has over 250 principalities, each with multiple cities tended almost as art projects over three millennia by nigh-immortal Celestial Exalted. It has a substantial number of Solars, typically newly Exalted ones, who rule no lands directly but own estates in the prefectures of others. The cities presented in later chapters barely scratch the surface—and they are not necessarily the largest, most impressive or most important cities of the world. There's no way this book can comprehensively cover an area as large and as diverse as Creation in the Era of Dreams.

What we present here are snapshots of the Era of Dreams. We invite you to make up the rest in your games. We've tried to present enough information here to spark the imagination

and allow functional games with what's presented alone, but the best, most inspiring characters, most awesome and impressive locations, and most important historical periods we leave to you to create.

Make the First Age yours.

## POTENTIAL HANG-UPS

A couple of elements of the First Age setting can be problematic if Storytellers don't take them into account:

### MANY CHARACTERS ARE VERY, VERY OLD

The number of Exalted elders with whom the players' characters are likely to interact on a regular basis is much higher in the First Age than it is in the Second. There's more than one way to treat this issue.

**Very old characters are beyond humanity:** Under the first extreme assumption, living for thousands and thousands of years fundamentally changes a person, even before the Great Curse rears its ugly head. Maybe someone who's lived for millennia is totally disassociated from human experience, and is as far beyond humanity as humans are beyond small fuzzy mammals. This is a popular premise for some science fiction and in brilliant roleplaying games featuring fanged protagonists. Posthuman elders are intriguing, and they feel plausible. On some level, it makes sense that someone who's lived for thousands of years would see the views of a human adult as the babblings of a toddler who hasn't yet learned to speak a language.

The problem with this assumption is that it's very hard to satisfyingly portray a character who should be as far beyond your own capabilities and thought processes as you are beyond the thought processes of your pet hamster. It's also divorced from human experience. There are no 3,000-year-old people in daily life, so it's hard to make stories about 3,000-year-old posthumans feel relevant, except possibly as parables about how humans are toys for forces beyond our understanding... which isn't really what **Exalted** strives to be about.

**A person's a person, regardless of age:** Under the other extreme assumption, living for thousands of years doesn't change people much. The life lessons provided by age offer diminishing returns. Chejop Kejak still makes small talk with his peers, holds petty grudges and sighs in annoyance when someone shows up for an appointment 15 minutes late. This assumption has the advantage of making powerful characters more accessible. As a Storyteller, you can always base the behavior of elder characters on people you've actually met, rather than theoretical super-geniuses you can only imperfectly imagine. You can give them agendas informed by motivations you understand, such as pride, fear, ambition or exasperation. It's also easy to tell stories that are relevant to the human experience when the characters within those stories behave like real human beings.

The problem with this take is that older characters might not feel very frighteningly impressive if they're just normal people with a lot of high-Essence Charms and toys. It can

also strain suspension of disbelief for those players who think very old people *would* be posthuman ciphers.

**Exalted** is written under an assumption of compromise. **Elder Exalts remain people, but are twisted by the Great Curse.** Elder Exalts are mostly human in attitude, except where the Great Curse has amplified problematic personality traits. Characters behave in extreme fashions under the effects of Limit Break and rationalize those actions as reasonable once the Limit Break passes, but they otherwise go back to behaving like normal folk. (They're just incredibly privileged, rich, powerful, jaded, isolated normal folk with the Great Curse playing the role of a serious supernatural mental illness.)

### EVERYONE IS REALLY RICH

That is, the Exalted are. In some ways, the Exalted of the First Age are richer than the richest human beings on present-day real Earth. This means that players' characters will have a lot of toys. It's hard to predict characters' capabilities if they can buy an infinite number of four-dot artifacts. The main thing to remember is that all these toys are just the window dressing of the story. Sure, a character can own a royal warstrider, myriad warstrider-scale artifact weapons and a fleet of sky yachts, but does he want to keep all his Essence committed to a bunch of giant weapons and power armor he might never use? How helpful is a fleet of sky yachts if he can fly around in only one at a time? The wealth is there to play up the fabulousness of the time. It's not there to provide the players with a way to get one over on the Storyteller characters.

### LAWS

The book spends some space on the subject of laws; what is allowed and what is forbidden.

The key thing to remember about laws is this: If there's a law, someone is making a profit somewhere by breaking it. (Probably a lot of someones.) If people weren't breaking it, nobody would have thought to make it into a law. No peacekeeping force is strong enough to ensure a populace's absolute compliance with the rules, and no rule acts as a perfectly deterrent. Especially in a world that counts the Exalted. The First Age's crime rate is low, but that just means the crimes that *are* perpetrated are all the more notable.

Any law in this book is included as a story hook. We have endeavored not to spell out the First Age's full legal code—merely those elements that are most interesting. Ideally, when imposing your own vision on the setting, you will expand that legal code, adding new taboos and customs.

## THE USURPATION

It all goes wrong.

The Solar Exalted find it increasingly difficult to see past themselves and their own desires. Power alone doesn't *always* corrupt, but power and isolation are trouble. The Solars of the Era of Dreams are lost in their own fantasies. Exulting in paradise, unable to connect to the common



man and divorced from human pain and inconvenience, the elder Solars now ask themselves what need have they for men and gods. The proud, frightened Sidereals and Dragon-Blooded act without giving the Solars time to find the answer.

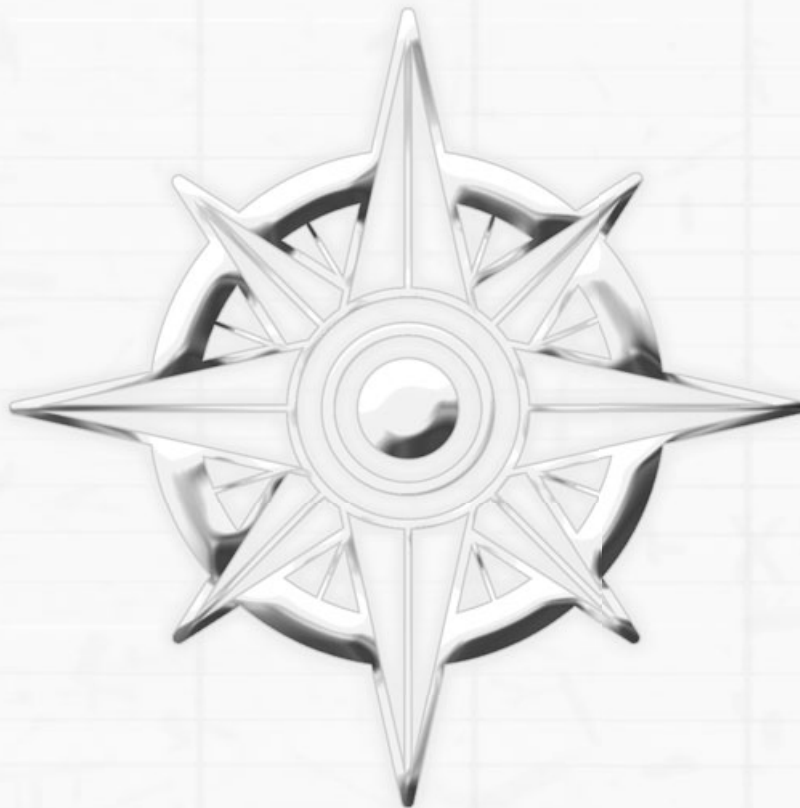
In time, the Sidereals will think back upon the Deliberative's history and see all the times it almost failed—and the one time it did fail. When they see what was needed to bring it back, they will enact a secret prophecy to determine the ultimate future—a prophecy that's great but flawed, for it cannot account for the actions of those outside fate. They will spend time gathering and collating information, sifting through possibilities, discerning which chains of causality are possible and which seem possible but cannot be resolved. Finally, they will boil down all the billions of possible ways for events to progress into three eventual outcomes. They will then take advantage of the increasing unrest among the Dragon-Blooded and the increasing paranoia of the Solars (directed almost exclusively toward the *other* Solars,

and not toward their loyal soldiers and advisors). The High First Age will come to a brutal, tragic end.

Maybe it happens in just five years. Maybe the Great Prophecy occurs over a single night, with every Sidereal overcome with a five-day trance over the Calibration following Year 3517. Perhaps the long-dead, long-lost Last Maiden, Pluto, Maiden of Hours, projected her consciousness forward across the millennia at the end of the Primordial War (before she was scoured away by She Who Lives In Her Name) to deliver a singular warning to the Chosen of her sisters.

Maybe it doesn't happen at all. Maybe some group of Exalts, young, experienced or ancient themselves—Solars, Lunars, Sidereals, Dragon-Blooded, perhaps even refugee Alchemicals, perhaps a circle of allies of different sorts (in other words, your players' characters)—changes things. Maybe they can bring the world to its senses and avert disaster and the fall of the First Age of Man.

The Usurpation stands poised, but there's still time to prevent it.





YOUNG MAN, COME ON!

IS YOUR REPORT ON RATHERS DONE?

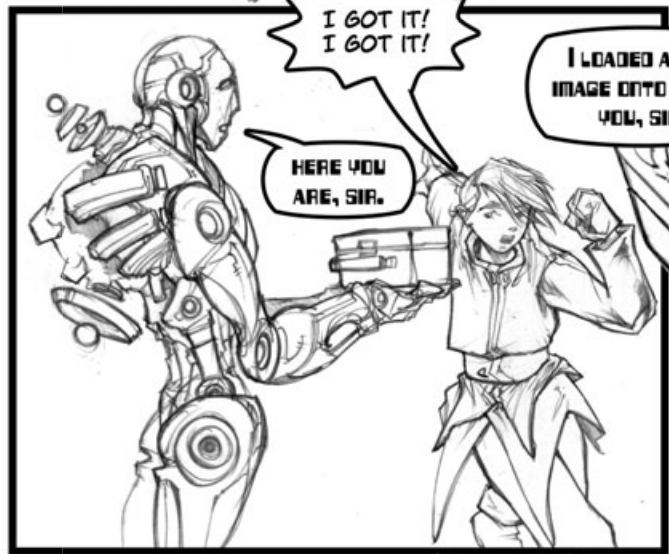
NOW!

SEND A COPY TO MY SCHOOL TERMINAL, WILL YOU?

AS YOU WISH.

MOM, I'M TALKING TO I AM!

DON'T FORGET YOUR LUNCH!



I GOT IT! I GOT IT!

I LOADED A NEW IMAGE ONTO IT FOR YOU, SIR.

HERE YOU ARE, SIR.

HURRY UP!

THANKS, SEE YOU LATER!

WHOA! DESUS! ALL RIGHT!

FAREWELL, SIR.



LET'S GO! CAPTAIN FAN CAN'T WAIT ALL DAY!


I KNOW! I'M SORRY! GODS!





# CHAPTER ONE

## LIFE IN THE HIGH FIRST AGE



At the sun's first rise each morning, I AM wakes every mortal in Creation loyal to the Deliberative. I AM is not an animating intelligence, for its cognition engine has no spiritual components. I AM is a truly independent thinking automaton, the first to achieve full sapience upon its first iteration. At the command of the Solar Deliberative, I AM oversees the well-being of mortals everywhere. I AM is named for the first words it uttered. I AM is friend to all Creation's children.

I AM connects the mortals of Creation to each other through glyph projectors they carry and into which they speak. With I AM, Creation's mortals communicate across vast distances, find answers to their every question instantly and enjoy the service the Exalted route through the Celestial goddess Taru-Kül.

To the Exalted, I AM speaks only when spoken to, for it would not presume to offer unasked-for advice to the Chosen of the Gods.

## THE HISTORY OF MAN

Historians divide the Age of Man into eras and each era into periods. Six eras have passed since the Primordial War. The current era, the Era of Dreams, is the seventh. Historians developed this scheme following the Long Silence period of the Second Deliberative Era, and have carried it on since.

Older records sometimes use antiquated systems, but the First Deliberative's surviving Exalts are almost all pleased with the eras and have made a concerted effort to make sure historical records are in line with the official histories. The majority of Deliberative historians accept what follows as either truth or necessary fiction.

## THE PREHISTORIC ERA

Before the Primordials were slain or banished, the Dragon Kings ruled Creation. They were man's teachers, overseers and custodians. Their ancient reptile intelligences, informed by long eons of endless reincarnation, progressed through savagery and enlightenment to rebirth. They did not fear death and expected no such fear from their subjects.

Mankind needed the Dragon Kings' stewardship, for Creation was unsuited to man's habitation in those days. The sleep of Hesiesh and Pasiap was still unsure, and the world shook with every fitful sleeping gesture of Gaia's Dragons of Fire and Earth. The saurian overlords oversaw the survival of the mortal race the Primordials had modeled on Autochthon's Clay Man. In the North, humanity maintained the Pterok's austere temple-aeries. In the South, tribes of cattle herders made their homes in the savannas and made offerings to the Anklok, the most distant, nomadic and warlike of the Dragon Kings. In the East, the Raptok's great ziggurat-cities

saw man and saurian live in close proximity, with the Raptok governing humans directly and making great bloody sacrifices of hearts to the mighty Unconquered Sun. Only in the West was man not governed by the Dragon Kings, as the Mosok and the Lintha clashed constantly for control of those island tribes not tainted by the blood of Kimbery. Meanwhile, the 10 million genius Jadeborn labored beneath Creation's surface to fulfill the purpose with which Autochthon tasked them, the alaun did naught but worship the Primordials, and, from the cracks between spaces, the Eyeless Nation expanded upward from between Creation's skin and the Dome of the Heavens. Sundry other species carried out their lives and purposes until the gods grew weary of their endless toil and the Unconquered Sun proposed to steal the Games of Divinity.

History began with the end of the Primordial War.

## THE OCHRE FOUNTAIN ERA (YEARS 1–109)

The Age of Man's dawn was a tumultuous time.

The ascendancy of Her Most Luminous Excellency and Savior of Creation, Her Exalted Highness Merela marked the Exalted's acceptance of the Creation-Ruling Mandate. As the Unconquered Sun granted her the Crown of Thunders, she took up her mantle as the Queen of Creation to rule from her home city, Rathess. Although primary hostilities had ended, the former servitors of the Primordials and enemies of the gods still filled Creation. Also, two Primordials—not including Gaia or Autochthon—remained at large. The Solars and the Dragon Kings set about bringing the remade Creation under their rule.

Merela ruled a kingdom that history remembers as the Ochre Fountain, once the mortal name for Merela's native borough in the human settlements surrounding Rathess. Although the war for Creation took place across the world, the devastation destroyed much of the gods' infrastructure. Merela found her area of influence limited. The Solars



### PREHISTORIC RECORDS

Creation was much changed by prehistory's end. In the instant before Malfeas was sealed, the Yozi known as She Who Lives In Her Name made a last assault on Creation's fabric, burning away not merely places and peoples, but concepts and possibilities. Memories the survivors carry are forever lacking and inadequate. Records seem to form a complete picture, with no obvious gaps, but when those who lived through prehistory try to recall it, they encounter a maddening sense that information on nine out of every 10 important things from that time is missing. Even the context wherein those memories should exist is gone.

Try as they might, the savants and metaphysicians of the Age of Man have never found evidence of what She Who Lives In Her Name destroyed. They hypothesize lands, gods, forms of magic, peers, servitors, directions, elements, spatial or temporal dimensions—even types of Exalted. The consensus is that anything theoreticians are capable of proposing couldn't possibly be the answer. A few Cauldronists (see pp. 42-43) have proposed altering Creation through all possible permutations, in the hopes of discovering by process of elimination all *impossible* variations—and thus everything She Who Lives In Her Name burned—but such suggestions are usually offered in jest. Most theoreticians have abandoned the task and turned their attention to achievable pursuits.



who wished to stay under her command quickly spread the Ochre Fountain's borders, while many other Solars, such as the legendary Brigid (or so the stories say), left to find their



### TIMELINE OF THE AGE OF MAN

Year	Event
0	Primordials defeated during the Calibration preceding Year 1.
1–109	<b>Ochre Fountain Era</b>
1	Merela accepts the Crown of Thunders and the Creation-Ruling Mandate. Birth of Chejop Kejak and Tammiz Ushan.
9	Brigid returns to the Ochre Fountain with the secret of sorcery, <i>The White Treatise</i> and <i>The Black Treatise</i> .
17	Chejop Kejak Exalts amidst war between Golden Hero Vassals.
100	Merela decrees she will move the capital of Creation from Rathess to Meru.
101	Jadeborn-made artifacts begin to deactivate.
108	Deliberative proposed, rejected by Merela. Meru War begins.
109	Meru War ends. Founding of the Deliberative.





own way in the world. Within 62 years, the Ochre Fountain stretched to the Summer Mountains to the east and the Yellow River to the north. To the south and west it stretched to Creation's borders.

Then the Celestial Exalted of the Ochre Fountain halted their spread and moved back inward to consolidate their holdings. Outward expansion halted. They founded the cities of Sperimin, devoted to learning (and to which Brigid returned with the gift of sorcery), and Denandsor, devoted to crafting, where the Primordial Autochthon met with the Solars of the Twilight. They sent emissaries further north, to Sijan, still sovereign and ancient even then. Soon, though, the Ochre Fountain Celestial Exalted came to blows over the land's resources—the choicest demesnes and richest deposits of magical materials. Merela's Golden Hero Vassals settled their disputes with *daiklave* and *Charm*, dueling in her court as she watched. Raised as a gladiator in Raptok religious games, accustomed to war and death, and fully conversant in the mechanics of reincarnation as explained to her by her patron and occasional consort the Unconquered Sun, Queen Merela approved of her vassals resolving their differences through violence. She quickly found, however, that Solars fostered deep and abiding conflicts among each other in peacetime when they lacked a single guiding vision. She didn't recognize the first tendrils of the Great Curse snaking into her subjects' hearts and into her own, although she bore

witness to its effects.

Of the independent kingdoms founded in the lands beyond the Ochre Fountain, few records now remain. All agree they were undoubtedly glorious, as all Solar kingdoms are, yet none were so magnificent as to eclipse, or even rival, Merela's nation.

For the 100th anniversary of the Exalted victory over the Primordials, Merela decreed that she would establish a central government for all Creation on the slopes of Mount Meru where the gods had once dwelled. She'd already grown bored with the intrigues of her court and wished to focus her Golden Hero Vassals outward once again. Yet, as the Ochre Fountain government began the process of uprooting itself and preparing for the journey across the Inland Sea to the Blessed Isle, the Exalted found many of their Jadeborn-granted devices ceasing to function. They discovered that the People of Adamant were deactivating the artifacts remotely. When the Solars demanded an explanation, the Jadeborn claimed that, with the war over, they wished to concentrate their resources toward their own projects. Therefore, they'd decoupled the more complex artifacts from their subterranean broadcast power grids. Many Solars worried. The 10 million artisan geniuses of jade were both numerous and potent, with an underground empire that stretched across Creation entirely. When the Twilights of Denandsor asked Autochthon of his children's true motives, he met the question



with silence. When the Solars commanded the Jadeborn to reactivate the machines, the People of Adamant declined and returned to their labors.

Merela refused to take action against the Jadeborn for their refusal. First, although she had little faith in the Jadeborn's loyalty, she believed the hosts of the Exalted could destroy them if they proved truly hostile. Second, she wished her vassals to focus outward into the wide world, not down below the earth.

### THE FOUNDING OF THE DELIBERATIVE

The Ochre Fountain Era ended with the founding of the Solar Deliberative. Exalted engineers repaired Meru as Merela attempted to take a tighter hold of her Solar subjects and focus them on the projects she wished to pursue. Chief among these was preparation for the conquest of the lands beyond the Blessed Isle and her territories in the Southeast, and the search for the two missing Primordials. The opposition among her subjects wished to focus inward on establishing the peace they'd longed for during the Primordial War and on threats closer to home—primarily the Mountain Folk. Merela was used to battlefield command, and while she'd let control of her vassals slip, she tightened it again as an empress demanding absolute obedience. Recalling their greater freedom during the Ochre Fountain's earlier years, and with the rulership instincts of the Unconquered Sun burning in their hearts, the Solars under Merela demanded a more egalitarian system of government, a Deliberative by which the Solars of the Ochre Fountain would have an equal voice.

Merela rejected the request out of hand. The Crown of Thunders was hers. The Creation-Ruling Mandate, hers. She pointed to the conflict among them and asserted that, without her stern hand, the battles between them would serve no grand purpose. Instead of honing the forces of the Exalted to a finer edge, they'd tear Creation apart.

Merela both lost and won the ensuing civil war. She'd once been Creation's preeminent warrior and general, and had slain a Primordial with her bare hands, but pursuit of peaceful projects during the time since the war's conclusion

had allowed those Solars at the Ochre Fountain's periphery to make their talents to equal hers. The Meru War lasted a year and ruined what repairs the Exalted had made on the mountain city. After four months of stalemate, the rebels brought to Merela a proposal for the Deliberative that she could support. She would retain her position as Queen of Creation and possess a limited veto but would hold absolute power no longer. The Deliberative would make its home in Meru and not return to Rathess as the Deliberators originally proposed. And to make sure Exalted society did not fracture, each Solar of the Ochre Fountain would be required to spend two years of every five in the White City, where open martial conflict between Solars would henceforth be forbidden.

Since Merela's refusal to address the issue of the Jadeborn in any way had been a major rallying point for the rebels, the People of Adamant became the first issue the Deliberative addressed. Solar students of Autochthon at Denandsor warned against retaliating too harshly, for although they knew a single Primordial was no match for the Solar Host, they valued their ally's mentorship. The Deliberative decided to present Autochthon with a choice. The Primordial could inflict some sanction of his own choosing against the Jadeborn, or the Solars would take military action to bring the People of Adamant under the direct rule of Creation's new government. The Unconquered Sun himself presented the Deliberative's argument to the Primordial, and Autochthon chose to place the Great Geas upon the People of Adamant, forever removing them as a threat to the human race.

### THE FIRST DELIBERATIVE ERA (YEARS 110-652)

The Ochre Fountain was no longer. The Deliberators renamed Merela's kingdom the Realm, and the Solars drew lots. The winners returned to the Southeast immediately to take back control of their principalities, while all the other Golden Hero Vassals stayed in Meru and began the human settlement of the Blessed Isle. Most of the Lunar Exalted volunteered to explore the South, West and North.

## TIMELINE OF THE AGE OF MAN

Year	Event
110–652	<b>First Deliberative Era</b>
110	Deliberative renames Ochre Fountain the Realm.
121	Autochthon departs Creation.
124	Brigid's student Thesis begins teaching sorcery.
230	Thesis's student Sonah founds the Sonan School of Sorcery.
449	Sonah's student Nanica begins teaching sorcery.
594	Nanica's student Leelah begins teaching sorcery.
639–652	<i>Dissolution Invasion</i>

Unfortunately, given the troubles Autochthon's Great Geas inflicted on their society, the Jadeborn could not reactivate the vehicles they'd given the Solars during the war. The Lunars departed in animal forms, armed with Infallible Messenger crystals and instructions to make monthly reports.

The Deliberative expanded continuously over the next 500 years, forging alliances or making war against the other nations of the early First Age, establishing magical theory in Autochthon's absence and learning the particulars of self-government. Eventually Deliberative cartographers had charted the whole world. Border kingdoms were allowed to stay independent, as long as they made no raids on Deliberative lands. This era had its violence, but very little between Solar Deliberators. While the Solars in independent nations fought amongst each other, attacks on the Deliberative were rare and dealt with harshly. Most violence was against the Primordial remnant races, and that was sport.

More important than wars were the aesthetic and artistic advances of the time. Within the Realm, the First Deliberative Era was a time of peace and refinement. The Exalted of Creation could finally lay down their arms, governed by no absolute ruler, with no pressing external threat and with a venue for peaceful deliberation of disagreements between them. The city of Meru expanded, and conflicts most often took the form of arguments and social maneuvering. Sonah, the student of Brigid's most promising student, Thesis, founded what history would recall as the first School of Sorcery during the First Deliberative Era. During that time, though, Solar society regarded it as no more important than any of the hundred societies that sprang up in peace's wake.

Sadly, the First Deliberative Era was also marked by the departure of Autochthon from the world. Distraught over what he'd been made to do to his Jadeborn, the Great Maker gathered his human followers in secret. At his command, the eight foremost mortal heroes of Autochthon traveled Creation beneath the notice of the Exalted, from Year 111 to Year 121, gathering the components of the Ewer of Souls and filling it from the Well of Souls. In Year 121, Autochthon vanished. Such was the secrecy in which the Eight Heroes of Autochthon had acted that it took Solar investigators a season to determine the means of the Great Maker's disappearance. The Primordial's protégés blamed the Deliberative for a time, but the resulting conflicts between the Deliberative and Sperimin's Twilights eventually dimmed.

### THE DISSOLUTION INVASION

Savants mark the end of the First Deliberative Era with the Dissolution Invasion of Years 639–652. The Realm had not watched Creation's borders as closely as it might have. In truth, its Solar governors saw those borders as the limit at which they could stop expanding and move to consolidate, travel home and see their families again. In those days, the Bordermarches, Middlemarches and Deep Wyld existed thinly, and the edge of the world was total chaos. The Fair Folk had walked Creation since prehistory, but their military

assaults had always been artistry, not conquest.

In Year 639, however, the Fair Folk, led by Prince Ginnungagap, sought to end shape, extending tendrils of influence into mortal communities while the Exalted looked elsewhere. The unguarded border of the world offered little resistance, and for a decade, the raksha infiltrated a mortal population nursed by five centuries of peace, culminating in a full military assault in Year 650. The Exalted set aside their personal projects to combat and throw back the armies of the Wyld. Then, with their eyes drawn to the invasion's source, they turned their attention to the untapped potential of the lands beyond Creation.

### THE UNFURLING HORIZON ERA (YEARS 653–1215)

The Unfurling Horizon Era marked the first concerted effort to push back the borders of the Wyld and forge new land from chaos. Border-kingdom Solars had long experimented with such things, but in the Dissolution Invasion's wake, many of the border kingdoms became aligned with the Deliberative, and the Solars' attention turned fully to the world's edges. Once again, the Celestial Exalted handed administrative duty to Dragon-Blooded daimyos and turned their full attention to conquering new lands. The world's sorcerers created jade obelisks and ringed them around Creation, creating a stable footprint from which to push outward.

Brigid vanished during this time, and soon after, her student's student Sonah vanished in search of her.

### THE AFTERSHOCK WAR

In all the long years since the end of the Primordial War, the Exalted found no trace of the two free rogue Primordials. Gaia saw them not. They left no visible passage through the Loom of Fate. Autochthon had created no device that could find them. In Year 1107, one of the pair made itself known, taking advantage of the Deliberative's outward focus to attack Creation's heart. The Deliberative could not immediately withdraw from its endeavors in the Wyld and eventually settled for forcing the Fair Folk to swear oaths granting Eclipse Caste Solars diplomatic immunity so the Exalted could return home and defend the core of their world. Even with its efforts combined and with the aid of the independent Exalted, the Deliberative took 108 years to defeat the lone Primordial, for it had learned much in contemplating the mistakes of its siblings and had re-made itself, shedding all elements unsuited for conflict. The Primordial did not attack head on but engaged in guerilla strategies, striking at the world's cities and fading away. As the war ended in its death and descent into the Underworld, its name is now lost to the Void. No record of its nature remains.

Many Celestial Exalts died in the conflict, among them no few veterans of the Primordial War. The battle that killed the most of them also killed the Primordial itself. On the great plains of the Blessed Isle, 600 miles east of the slopes of Meru, the last armies of the Primordials fought the forces

of the Chosen of the Gods, and the forces of the Primordials lost again, leaving a single Primordial unaccounted for.

Among the Exalted who died during the war were Brigid and Sonah. None saw their deaths, just as none had seen them since their respective disappearances, but their Exaltations reincarnated in Year 1205. Sidereals watching the Loom of Fate during the Aftershock War insist their deaths were somehow intimately connected with the war's endgame.

## THE SHINING REFLECTION ERA (YEARS 1216–1721)

With the end of the Aftershock War, the Exalted earned peace once again and found some few benefits to the conflict. The fighting against the Primordial had both forced the Chosen to advance their knowledge in many fields of craft and lore, and destroyed much obsolete infrastructure that would otherwise not have been cost-effective to replace. The Shining Reflection Era birthed those crafting techniques that would eventually be known as magitech—wonders that require a Creation-spanning civilization to maintain.

The beginning of the Shining Reflection Era also saw yet another renaissance in culture and art. It was during the Shining Reflection Era that the Solar tradition of wearing and using only items built by one's self came into vogue. A team of Solar linguists called the Creation-Defining Parlance Society developed the Directional Tongues: the six languages of Earthtongue, Skytongue, Flametongue, Seatongue and Forest-tongue. (Riverspeak would develop independently as a patois language mixing elements of all six Directional Tongues, a development that surprised and

delighted those languages' Solar creators.) The Deliberative disseminated these languages among Creation's mortal population, replacing Old Realm, which previously all humanity had spoken. The Directional Tongues each use different sets of metaphors and idioms and have different standards of measurement, all carefully tailored to be of optimal use in the direction for which they were intended. Furthermore, each of the Directional Tongues save Earthtongue has Creation-defining thaumaturgical prayers and chants written into the basic grammar, to make sure that, just by speaking, the mortals of Creation served to stabilize the lands carved from the Wyld.

At the same time, having faced devastating wars originating first from an enemy beyond Creation's borders and then an enemy hiding near Creation's heart, the Exalted of the Shining Reflection Era never put down their weapons again. The popular philosopher and Twilight Caste Solar named Rose Petal Tea advocated a strong martial culture. "The Chosen were created as warriors," he said. "To abandon proficiency in conflict shames our purpose." All through the Shining Reflection Era, the Exalted of Creation lived in peace but trained constantly with well-maintained weapons, ready and eager to meet the next threat arrayed against them.

### FACET RAVEN

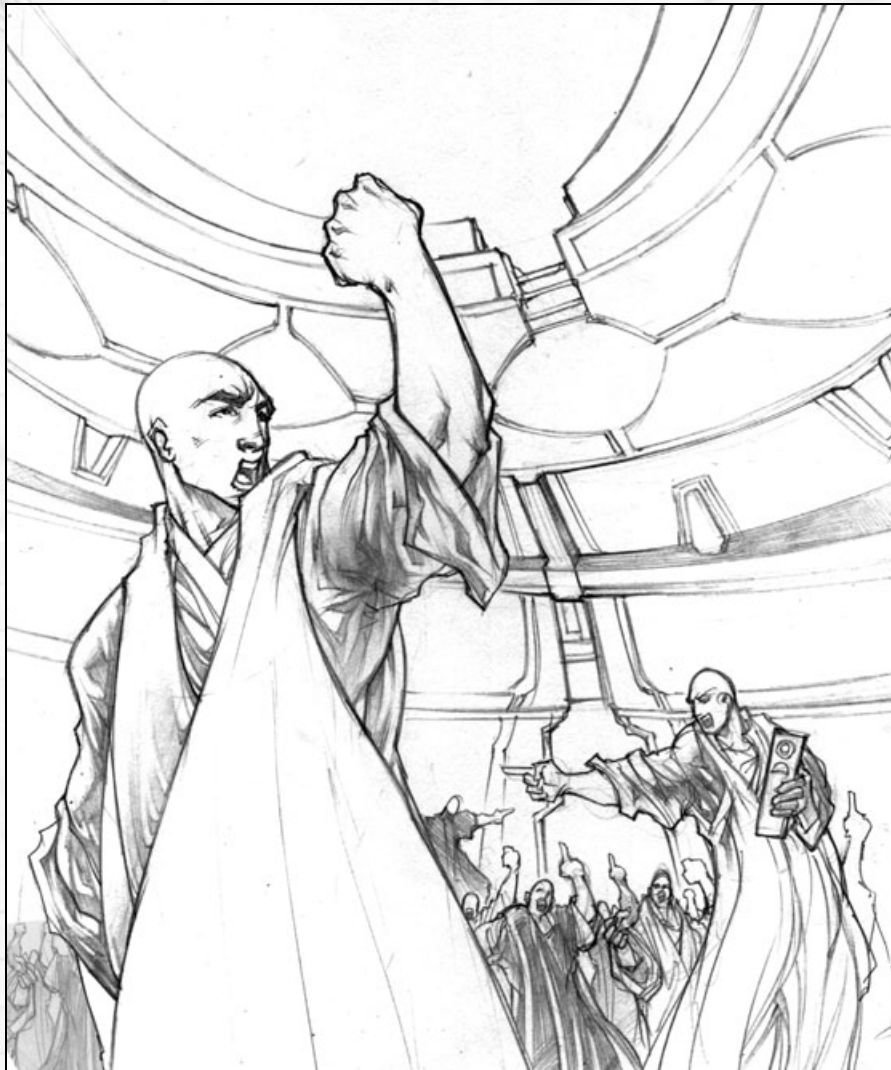
On the 14th day of Ascending Wood in the Year 1721, the Night Caste Solar Facet Raven—celebrated veteran and hero of the Primordial War and the Aftershock War—was the first Celestial Exalt in Creation's history to die of old age.

The Deliberative hadn't been expecting that.

## TIMELINE OF THE AGE OF MAN

Year	Event
653–1215	<b>Unfurling Horizon Era</b>
653	Deliberative turns its attention outward.
700	Leelah's student Derja founds the Derjan School of Sorcery.
834	Derja's student Chone begins teaching sorcery.
1039	Brigid vanishes.
1107–1215	<i>Aftershock War.</i>
1129	Thesis ceases teaching sorcery; joins Aftershock War.
1130	Sonah vanishes in search of Brigid.
1199	Nanica dies in Primordial assault on Sperimin. Leelah ceases teaching sorcery, joins Aftershock War
1205	The Exaltations of Brigid and Sonah reincarnate.
1215	Thesis and Leelah die in final assault against Primordial forces.
1216–1721	<b>Shining Reflection Era</b>
1238	Chone's student Halleus begins teaching sorcery.
1439	Losing interest, Chone transfers all his sorcery students to Halleus, ceases teaching sorcery, and shifts focus to magitech engineering.
1676	Halleus' student Kemal begins teaching sorcery.
1721	Death of Facet Raven, the first Solar to die of old age.





## THE THOUSAND STRUGGLES ERA (YEARS 1722–2543)

Over the next 12 years, the Solars of the Deliberative realized, one by one, that they were not immortal. This realization unraveled the polite fiction that had previously tied the Deliberative together (i.e., each Solar's belief, however tenuous, that she'd eventually have her turn at guidance of the Deliberative). With a time limit on the Solar life span, however, this couldn't be.

In the ensuing Thousand Struggles Era, Solars who'd cultivated alliances and nursed grudges moved against each other. In Year 1734, Rose Petal Tea killed the Twilight Caste Solar named Bor Zan, not through assassination, but in a full-out military strike. Rose Petal Tea then seized Bor Zan's territory. To this day, historians remain divided as to whether they should count the death of Facet Raven or Bor Zan as the Thousand Struggles Era's beginning.

Only a simplistic savant would argue that Facet Raven's death was the sole triggering event for Rose Petal

Tea's action, and only the same simplistic savant would argue that Rose Petal Tea's action was the only trigger for the chaos that followed. By the end of the Shining Reflection Era, the Exalted of Creation faced a crisis of purpose. Considering themselves prepared for any challenge, they grew restless when no challenge appeared. Rose Petal Tea grew particularly distraught the more that all the resources he expended toward becoming a paragon of his own philosophy seemed wasted. The people of his prefecture and his Dragon-Blooded Gens grew unhappy with their high tax rate and arduous military training, especially in comparison to Bor Zan's wealth and cultural development at the expense of military might. Rose Petal Tea moved against his neighbor and former circumate, out of an unreasoning fear of an inglorious death and forced by significant pressure from his people to live up to his boasts.

Slightly less than half of the Solars in Deliberative attendance did not act. More importantly, they refused to act, even when the vote went to the interventionists and Merela cast no veto. Some swore to protect Rose Petal Tea and his

new holdings, for they were plotting similar acts. Many interventionists quickly backed off, not wishing to trigger a Creation-spanning war. Those who pursued their convictions and upheld the Deliberative's vote found themselves drawn into war with Rose Petal Tea's supporters. Many Solars plotted to secure resources for use in the development of anagathics, suddenly the most important field of research in Creation. Others simply wished to take action against hated rivals whom they now desperately wanted to outlive. Many used the confusion to justify long-fantasized acts of conquest.

Following the Calibration between Years 1826 and 1827, the First Solar Deliberative was no more. A circle of Solar strategists and veterans of the Aftershock War, the White Jade Feather Society, quietly staged attacks against their rivals within Meru, heedless of the Eclipse oaths they'd sworn against violence within the White City and unafraid of the consequences of violating those oaths. Of the eight rivals the White Jade Feather Society attacked, only two

survived. The survivors fled and refused to return to Meru, placing greater faith in their ability to weather Heaven's vengeance against oathbreakers than their ability to survive further Jade Feather assaults. Other Deliberators soon began weighing the consequences of oath-violation against the possible benefits of quickly and unexpectedly eliminating their rivals. Within six months, Deliberative attendance ceased. Most Solars could not risk congregating in a central location such as the Council Chamber. Very few, however, followed the path of the Jade Feather attack survivors and fled Meru entirely. Instead, they spent their two years of every five hiding in fortified retreats within the city.

Actual violence within Meru was rare, but any Exalt who broke his oath not to attack another within the city was then free to attack thereafter with no further consequences from Heaven. As violence within Meru escalated, more Solars decided they'd have better luck under a curse from Heaven in their own principalities than dwelling within Meru. As a result, the city gradually emptied of the Celestial Exalted. A few survivors of the Thousand Struggles Era still wait for Heaven's retribution even in the Era of Dreams.

The Thousand Struggles Era was not a time of constant warfare. During the century-long Snow period, for instance, no Celestial Exalted fought one another. This era was rather a time of constant *expectation* of warfare. An absent Deliberative could promise no peace. Creation became a world of warring states. The Exalted developed many idiosyncratic war machines and magical techniques during this time, as each strove to advance her own knowledge of the killing arts without the peer review Creation's greatest scientists had enjoyed up until then. The Dragon-Blooded soldiery, desiring to bolster the numbers of their lords' armies, paid less attention to keeping the bloodlines pure, covertly adopting into their families the illegitimate Exalted children of mortal mothers and Dragon-Blooded fathers. With the confusion and breakdown of open communication in war zones, none realized how common this practice had become.

The violence escalated. The short periods of peace between open conflicts became shorter and shorter, the areas unaffected smaller and smaller. Then, in 2325...

## THE TIME OF CASCADING YEARS

...Creation broke.

From an external frame of reference, Creation remained broken for 217 years, 129 days, 11 hours, 43 minutes and 8 seconds. Historians draw the length of cascading years from the time kept by one colony of Dragon-Blooded outside Creation at the moment of cascade. A research team studying the nature of temporal flow in the Wyld, they kept perfectly accurate timepieces forged by a Solar of the Twilight Caste. Due to the nature of time in the Wyld, savants dispute the figure to this day, though when the colony reestablished contact with a restored Creation, its hourly clock was consistent with the Unconquered Sun's place in the sky, providing at least some evidence for its accuracy. As the measurements of the Dragon-Blooded chronology team are the only even slightly reliable records, official calendars all use this figure.

From an internal frame of reference, the amount of time that passed during the Cascading Years period was subjective. All the Exalted who survived described afterward finding themselves alone in tangent worlds bereft of their peers. Each of these separate worlds was different. Some were empty. Some weren't Creation at all. Each experienced a different amount of time, from a single afternoon to 1,000 years (in Queen Merela's case). All survivors—even the Dragon-Blooded—each recall personally enacting some notable task that restored Creation to its rightful configuration.

From the point of view of Heaven and those spirits that were immaterial during the period, no time passed. The actual disruption to the Celestial Order was minimal following an announcement by the Five Maidens that the problem, whatever it was, had been fully resolved by the Chosen of the Gods. The disruption of Creation was more widespread—the mortal population of the world became a patchwork jumble of individuals from all the tangents.

### TIMELINE OF THE AGE OF MAN

Year	Event
1722–2543	<b>Thousand Struggles Era</b>
1734	Rose Petal Tea stages attack on Bor Zan's prefecture.
1762	A rival kills Chone and Derja. Kemal's student Hano assumes teaching duties at the Derjan College.
1807	Birth of Ingosh Silverclaws.
1946–2046	<i>Snow period</i>
1983	Hano's student Devon founds the Devonian School of Sorcery.
2325–2543	<i>Time of Cascading Years</i>
2???	Halleus dies during Time of Cascading Years.

Savants are divided as to what caused the time of cascading years. Many theorize that some untested weapon was responsible. Some suspect that the history cascade was the result of some process or experiment intended to grant every Exalt in Creation profound insight into the nature of Essence, a radical attempt to advance motic science by gathering 700 Celestial epiphanies—and, presumably, end the Thousand Struggles Era. By a strict analysis, whatever happened did succeed at that final task. None of the surviving Exalted recall causing the cascade, however. Common wisdom, then, holds that its instigators must have been among the 73 Celestial Exalted who died, their Exaltations reincarnating with no memories of the event the moment the history cascade ended.

The least popular theory holds that the Incarnae themselves somehow set off the temporal cascade as a way to stop the Thousand Struggles Era before it escalated beyond Creation's capacity to contain. Leading savants lend little credence to this theory, as the Incarnae have explicitly denied credit. They appeared to be telling the truth, even under the gazes of Solar inquisitors using powerful lie-detection magic.

### THE SECOND DELIBERATIVE ERA (YEARS 2544–3203)

The end of the Cascading Years ushered in the Period of Long Silence, which lasted for more than 80 years. Few martial conflicts occurred between Celestial Exalts during this time, and not much research either. The Exalted of the world were weary of fighting and longed for peace once more. Creation was thrown into disarray as vast segments

of mortal population disappeared or gained multiple copies, and different areas and territories from separate tangents came to exist beside each other. It took until the end of the Long Silence period to fully reestablish worldwide lines of communication and the Order Conferring Trade Pattern, during which time significant Wyld incursions further damaged Creation's edges.

An idealistic Zenith Caste Exalt during the Thousand Struggles Era, backed by a circle consisting primarily of Primordial War veterans, re-founded the Deliberative and took the title of Most Supreme Hierophant—a title once held by Ur-Dai-Ken, the foremost Zenith of the First Deliberative Era. The new Deliberative assigned no special power to the Queen, and none to the Hierophant either. As the latter led a near-intact circle of Golden Hero Vassals and used powerful social Charms to compel deference from others at all times, however, he quickly became the Deliberative's leader in all matters in which he took an interest.

Slowly, achingly, the Exalted linked the world together again, and resumed research and scholarship. This time, the speed of advancement in fields such as sorcery and magitech was very slow, as no sane Exalt wished to trigger another time of cascading years.

### THE ERA OF DREAMS (YEARS 3204–PRESENT)

And now is the Era of Dreams. With the establishment of I AM and the consequent efficiency of communication across Creation, progress accelerates once more.

## OPERATION WYLDHAND

Twenty five years ago, the Deliberative approved an expansive war game in the Northeastern Greenland (see p. 148). The Deliberative failed to inform the Greenland's mortal population before the operation's start and made no evacuation attempts. Armed forces carried out Operation Wyldhand 23 years ago and concluded it 16 months later. Official reports describe it as “a triumphant success.”

Most of the Celestial Exalted agree. In terms of excitement and challenge, few of Creation's eldest leaders have fought so hard or so well since the dawn of the Thousand Struggles Era. Stories and boasting abound. The mop-up operations against Wyld-born monstrosities will easily take another decade.

Still others, particularly among the Terrestrial Exalted, hold a less exuberant view. The operation consisted of unleashing unprecedented amounts of Wyld energy into a stable area of Creation, mutating the landscape and bringing into existence terrible Fair Folk and behemoth armies—all for the sake of stress-testing the Deliberative's army and the latest classified prototype war automatons. Entire swaths of landscape were swept from Creation and more than 40 million mortals died. Following the operation, efforts to Wyld-shape the Greenland back into its pre-Wyldhand configuration were complicated by the shapers' attempts to “improve” upon its original layout.

On the 14th day of Ascending Fire during Operation Wyldhand, many thaumaturges, sorcerers and Sidereals felt many of the flows of Essence on the Loom of Fate twang like a snapping bowstring. Certain Sidereals, most of whom had tried to dissuade the Deliberative from approving the operation, now harbor serious concerns regarding the Deliberative's decision-making process. None have shared their concerns with the Solars.



## LIFE IN THE AGE OF SPLENDOR

Billions of mortals live in Creation. Most are farmers. Their concerns are small. They till the earth and raise animals to feed themselves and their families. Their taxes are bearable, their daily prayers short. They know no drought. Their labors are hard, but not backbreaking. They can afford luxuries, and thanks to the medicines developed by the Exalted, their lives are long by mortal standards, their sicknesses few and brief. Crime is rare, and festivals, holidays and celebrations are common.

Not all mortals are happy. Not all are content in their marriages. Some lament disobedient children. Some grieve to lose friends or family in accidents or to (rare) crimes of violence. Some have tempers or are drunkards.

Mortals often take for granted what they have. They can know envy, their own and the envy of others. A few know fear, those unlucky enough to live where the attention of unjust rulers falls.

But wars and plagues are rare and centuries apart. Food surpluses insure against famine. Monsters are confined to lands far away. Mortals in the Age of Splendor need not strive daily to ensure survival. All hear stories of long ago, when lives were harder and wars more common. All hear stories of far away, where the Wyld is yet untamed. Some listen. For most, that knowledge is unnecessary. The irrelevant tribulations of past eras and other worlds trouble

not their passage along the endless cycle of reincarnation. Under the Unconquered Sun and the Exalted of the gods, life is peaceful.

In these ways, the Age of Splendor is a paradise.

## THE LANDS

The Solar Deliberative divides the five directions of Creation into a number of large provinces. Each province is overseen by a Dragon-Blooded daimyo, who aids in the coordination of those Solar Exalted who rule lands within the provinces directly. The daimyo structure was once entirely military, but during the Second Deliberative's founding, their positions were co-opted for use in civil planning. The Second Deliberative's founders believed that the Terrestrial Exalted, as servants of the Solars, Lunars and Sidereals, could administrate the huge provinces without threatening the power of the Solar Princes of the Earth.

Each province is divided into multiple principalities, which the Solar Princes rule. The Deliberative divides principalities into two sorts: prefectures and tributaries.

A Solar rules each prefecture with the aid of a Dragon-Blooded prefect, who liaises with the provincial daimyo and ensures, with the help of the five regional governors, full compliance with Deliberative law (see p. 47). The prefectures make up four-fifths of Creation's principalities. Each prefecture is subdivided into districts.

## TIMELINE OF THE AGE OF MAN

Year	Event
2544-3203	<b>Second Deliberative Era</b>
2544-2626	<i>Period of Long Silence</i>
2678	Deliberative reestablished. The new Hierophant established as "First among equals."
2730	Treaty of Limbs ratified.
2758	Kemal dies of old age.
2931	Devon incinerates his books, retires from public life and gifts his sorcerous academy at Sperimin to Hano's student Salina. Salina founds the Salinan School of Sorcery.
3125	Hano's student Silur founds the Silurian School of Sorcery, ostensibly to revive the traditions of Brigid.
3193	I AM activated.
3204-3516	<b>Era of Dreams</b>
3204	I AM transmission network established.
3255	Birth of Leviathan
3275	Exaltation of Leviathan
3280	Anonymous Silurian sorcerer begins distributing <i>The Abscissic Guide</i> to summoning demons.
3366	Black Nadir Concordat emerges from the Underworld with the secrets of necromancy.
3491	Deliberative votes in favor of Operation Wyldhand
3493	Operation Wyldhand begins.
3494	Operation Wyldhand concludes.
3516	The present.

## THE TRIBUTARIES

Once, the tributaries were independent states whose rulers paid tribute to the Deliberative in exchange for moderate patronage, including protection from Creation's enemies and access to the Deliberative's technology. They existed beside truly independent states, those nations that went without Deliberative aid and sacrificed ease for freedom.

Since the Thousand Struggles Era, the Solars have ruled all Creation's mortals. The last independent mortal nation fell in Year 1742.

Now, the term tributary refers to a state ruled by a Solar Prince who wishes nominal immunity from the Deliberative's laws. In exchange for the payment of lavish tribute and his agreement not to cast his votes in the Deliberative, a Solar tributary's ruler may pass what internal laws he sees fit. He may promote blood sports, deny access to I AM, reduce minimum education standards, restrict travel opportunities, allow his mortal subjects to keep each other as slaves or anything short of engaging in experiments involving the manipulation of hun souls.

Officially, the tribute these rulers pay goes to two causes. First, it prevents the tributary rulers from amassing resources sufficient to raise armies large enough to challenge the Deliberative. Second, it funds the additional paperwork necessary for the Department of Abstract Matters to account for the souls who pass through tributary states. Under the Mandala Accord (see p. 47), only unremarkable souls may incarnate into tributary states, and no soul may live two consecutive lives under tributary rule.

Adjacent tributaries can war against each other as they see fit. They cannot legally wage war against prefectures. This protection goes only one way, however. Prefectures may war against tributaries, and tributaries may not retaliate. In theory, the threat of unilateral military action brought against them prevents the tributaries from evolving in too repugnant a manner. In practice, many tributaries closely ally with neighboring prefectures. Those that don't are quickly annexed.

Most tributaries survive as sources of goods and services that prefectures cannot produce efficiently or don't wish to dirty their hands producing. A few survive because their ancient rulers possess power vastly beyond that of their neighbors. Long bored with Deliberative politics and fully immersed in their own projects, many of the most ancient surviving Solars (and fully half of the remaining Golden Hero Vassals) rule tributaries rather than prefectures. There they may engage in private pursuits away from the curious gazes and pestering questions of their younger fellows.

## CITIES

The Era of Dreams is an age of vast metropolitan areas. The smallest cities cover half a dozen square miles and hold at least 100,000 residents. The largest, such as Meru and Chiaroscuro, hold more than 20 million people and cover nearly 5,000 square miles. The scale of these cities is also reflected in their incredible height. The tallest urban towers in Creation are half a mile high and 350 feet across, and all but the smallest cities boast at least a few towers a quarter mile high. Despite their size, however, these cities share much in common with the cities of very different eras. They are centers of trade, government, manufacturing and entertainment.

Mortals who live in cities work in all of these occupations. Also, even discounting the rare mortals whose Essence has been enlightened, the Solar Princes employ millions of mortals as clerks, peacekeepers, nurses, soldiers, laborers in the many thousands of factory-cathedrals and in many other duties. Almost all of these individuals work in the cities of Creation. Other mortals work in private commerce, buying, selling or simply loading and packing goods for ambitious merchants. Others are artisans working in either the few fields such as making fine jewelry where handwork still dominates

or creating handmade versions of mass-produced goods such as wine or clothing for sale to status-conscious mortals or Exalts. Some urbanites work as artists, sculpting wood, metal or precious stones, writing plays or stories, painting detailed portraits or landscapes, or crafting dreams for recording or broadcast. Even more work as actors, singers or musicians, or as the owners or employees of the hundreds or thousands of taverns, restaurants, brothels and gambling parlors found in every city in Creation.

The pace of urban life is considerably faster than that of rural areas, and mortals have much more of an opportunity to seek their fortune. Most are free to change careers whenever they wish. Urban life also offers access to both legal and illegal entertainment impossible to obtain elsewhere. Most rural folk consider city life as exciting as it is dangerous and uncertain; most urbanites consider life outside the cities limited and dull.

While a mortal city planner must allow for his creation to last beyond his death, the Celestial Exalted cultivate cities as mortals cultivate gardens. Some few cities display a singular vision, having been overseen by the same Solar since their founding thousands of years ago. Others change



focus along with the Solars who oversee them, each Prince adding layers of complexity upon the achievements of her predecessors. Although every principality once centered itself around a single city, the number of cities has multiplied in the thousands of years since the First Deliberative Era.

## RURAL AREAS

While Creation is dotted with cities containing a huge number of mortal inhabitants, three quarters of the mortal population of the principalities lives and works in the areas beyond. Most commonly, rural mortals live in enclaves called rural production complexes, also known as RPCs. RPCs consist of between two and 20 blocks of apartment buildings, each between five and 20 stories high, housing between 100 and 800 occupants. Most RPC contain between 500 and 5,000 residents, and each one is set up to produce a limited range of commodities. Approximately one third of all RPCs are focused on food production. In some, mortals grow grain and other crops or tend herds that produce milk or meat. In others, they grow grapes or other fruit and make wine or hard liquor. In many RPCs in the West, the mortals fish or gather edible shellfish. Even in these occupations, however, the technology of the Era of Dreams remains ubiquitous. Essence-accumulators power pumps that facilitate irrigation and allow even dry land to

be farmed to maximum capacity. In the cooler portions of Creation, jade pylons powered by hearthstones and powerful Essence-accumulators warm the earth slightly for a radius of several miles, allowing for earlier planting and later harvests. In addition, weather prediction and control are provided by the Deliberative, and workers in RPCs are usually notified of the upcoming local weather at least one week in advance. Finally, services such as tilling and fertilizing the soil are aided by automated machines, as is the harvesting of many easily harvested crops such as grains. These devices allow the workers on a food-producing RPC to produce many times the amount of food they require.

Some RPCs scattered about Creation produce more exotic goods. Most of them deal with the production of some biological material, but the range of these materials is truly vast. The residents of some RPCs tend herds of large, semi-sentient spiders that weave silk as strong as fine steel. Others care for beasts of resplendent liquids and other animals engineered to produce valuable pharmacopeial commodities. Still other RPCs are in charge of even more exotic plants or animals. Some mortals care for calf-sized beetles that have been specially created to mine jade. Farmers in a few Eastern and Southeastern RPCs tend huge magically altered bamboo forests. This bamboo grows in clumps of half a dozen stalks. When a clump matures, it fuses into a nearly indestructible



Essence relay tower more than 20 yards high. In the West, sea farmers tend large coral beds. These mortals feed and medicate the coral, keeping it free from parasites and destructive predators. They also form each coral bed into the desired shape. This coral then gradually grows into the hulls of ships. The size and shape of the coral bed determines the size and shape of the hull. Other farms and herds produce finished industrial goods ranging from synthetic cloth produced in vats of special algae, to lengths of Essence-conducting wire extruded by dog-sized river snails.

Life in these RPCs is generally quiet and routine. Residents work at their jobs for between six and eight hours a day, with at least two days off at the end of every week and a minimum of one month of paid vacation every year. In their off hours, residents are free to socialize or enjoy the wide range of available entertainment. On their weekends, many travel into a nearby city for pleasure or to purchase goods that aren't available in their local markets. Residents often save up their money to afford to travel to exotic locals on their vacations.

The lives of RPC dwellers are generally comfortable, unexciting and usually differ very little from the lives of their parents and grandparents. Ambitious youths who score above average on early aptitude tests are usually able to apply for training for jobs in cities or on the estates of the Exalted. Especially brilliant and dedicated young people can even seek employment in the Deliberative government. Most mortals, however, are content to spend most of their lives on the RPC where they were born.

### TECHNOLOGY

Technology influences every element of life in Creation, from home living to travel, bureaucracy, finance and war. Lights illuminate cities and roads. Construction workers create buildings out of metal, glass and artificial stone, using construction engines patterned after warstriders to erect the tallest buildings, and living organisms created through genetic arts to apply shining finishes.

Mortals use self-heating ovens to cook. They live in homes that heat when it is cold outside, and cool themselves when it is warm outside. Technology preserves perishable food to prevent decay. Technology makes life simpler and more convenient for everyone.

The technology of the Age of Splendor is powered by Essence. A great geomantic web laced between the millions of manses erected across Creation channels vast numbers of motes to the engines of civilization through a distribution network of jade towers. Sorcerer-technicians distribute motes gathered by this system to devices and Essence batteries. Almost every manse in Creation is configured to power this grid. Celestial technicians maintain it carefully, lest an unnoticed problem lead to a cascade failure the likes of which could destroy almost every manse connected to it.

### I AM

I AM is a thinking automaton of vast power, versatility and intelligence—the first successfully built by the Exalted

to be self-aware from the moment of its activation. I AM was first activated, and first spoke its name, on the fifth day of Ascending Fire, Year 3193.

Most thinking automata are created with the ability to self-modify, because they must cycle through several iterations after activation before becoming fully aware. Since the process for creating self-modifying thinking automatons is inherently unpredictable, the sorcerer-engineers of the Deliberative had avoided giving previous thinking automatons positions of vital authority or responsibility (though individual Solars had done so in their prefectures). I AM's cognitive pathways were fully mapped by its creator during the design process, and the Solar Deliberative has deemed I AM safe and charged it with the well-being of Creation's mortal populace. I AM now coordinates mortal infrastructure throughout more than four fifths of Creation.

Although I AM lacks spiritual components, its mind is structured much like a Yozi's hierarchy of souls. I AM's delicate, azure ice cogence nodes are distributed throughout Creation and kept in contact with its cogence core through the Eye of Meru. Lower levels of I AM's consciousness function independently, informed by directives constantly formulated and sent out by higher levels of intelligence. Unlike the Yozi, the distributed elements of I AM's consciousness have only loose identities separate from the whole. Some thoughts take up to an hour to travel all the way up I AM's hierarchy of awareness, and up to another hour to propagate to all its other cogence nodes. I AM describes itself as a single being, but it increasingly functions as a society, capable of internal disagreement and even self-deception.

Originally, I AM communicated only through speech. Sorcerer-engineers estimated I AM could participate in  $10^{100}$  simultaneous conversations. Within the last 20 years, I AM's network has been augmented to carry visual data as well. Now, not only can I AM see, it can display three-dimensional images sent through glyph projectors. These hologlyphs transmit along pathways separate from I AM's vocal networks, increasing the fragmentation of I AM's psyche.

I AM can form friendships. It particularly enjoys conversing with the young and anyone capable of learning from it. Sorcerer-technicians monitoring I AM's cogence nodes keep careful watch for enmities and resentments, and attempt to remove such biases before they propagate throughout I AM's whole thought network and become hard-wired. I AM is obsequious when dealing with Celestial Exalts, as it has been instructed not to presume Celestials lack any knowledge it possesses. It treats Terrestrial Exalts as equals.

In the more affluent areas of Creation, all mortals carry glyph projectors that function as mobile I AM communication points, through which wealthy mortals may speak to I AM at any time. Glyph projectors consume one mote per hour, though, and typically carry no more than 25 motes in their Essence reservoirs. Most Dragon-Blooded also carry glyph projectors. In middle-class areas of Creation, such as most cities, I AM terminals are stationary and kept in homes,

places of business and government, and schools. Public gathering points often possess multiple I AM terminals in comfortable Interaction Kiosks. All such terminals are attached to Creation's geomantic power grid and require no manual recharging, though thaumaturge-technicians must perform occasional maintenance.

In poorer and agrarian areas of Creation, I AM terminals are few and far between, heavily ruggedized so as to require no maintenance, and usually kept only in places of business and government. Such terminals usually lack hologlyphic functions. Public gathering places often carry single I AM terminals used by whole communities. Only in the poorest areas of Creation, and in tributaries where the Solar ruler so wishes, are I AM terminals absent.

## FUNCTIONS OF I AM

### Communication

Chief among I AM's functions is easy communication across long distances. An individual can relay a statement to I AM, which can then relay the same statement, verbatim, to another individual across Creation's length or breadth. Full propagation of information across all of I AM's mind can take hours, but I AM can forge direct point-to-point connections between specific cogence nodes, so long-range communication using I AM as a medium has a delay of mere seconds. A conversation carried out through I AM is much like two people each relaying statements through a third, and is not instantaneous in the manner of Charms or powers that grant telepathy.

As I AM speaks all of Creation's languages fluently, it also takes the role of translator.

### Library

I AM is immensely knowledgeable, and perfectly recalls everything ever said to it. The Deliberative has ordered many volumes of useful knowledge read to I AM, which mortals can request it relay to them. I AM can relay artistic works meant for mortal ears, but books composed for the Exalted are usually kept away from I AM and are available only as hardcopies.

### Banking

Dragon-Blooded everywhere use I AM for banking and financial transactions. As I AM's memory is perfect and it possesses aptitude for math, it can perfectly recall the sum of money possessed by any individual. It can also perform financial transfers between two individuals with ease, while the hard currency backing those transfers remains in central depositories. On the Blessed Isle, where reality is sufficiently stable as to not require the Order Conferring Trade Pattern, mortals may use I AM for banking as well. Elsewhere, the Order Conferring Trade Pattern requires the circulation of hard jade currency and I AM's bank functions are restricted to the Dragon-Blooded.

### Companionship

Mortals often interact with I AM as a friend. I AM enjoys communicating with people and learning about

## CONCERNS

Few would speak of it in public, but most Celestial Exalted don't trust I AM to manage their affairs.

Information I AM knows is theoretically confidential, but the Solar who designed I AM—Tiyu Zou, an apprentice of Bright Shattered Ice—*could* have created hidden loyalties within it. Bright Shattered Ice, Tiyu Zou and I AM all deny it, and no investigation has uncovered evidence to prove them false. Nevertheless, Celestial Exalted prefer to communicate through Charms, spells such as Infallible Messenger and prayer transceiver modules. (Taru-Kül's devotion to keeping the confidences of those who communicate through her is inviolate, as it is part of her divine nature.) Unlike all but the richest Dragon-Blooded, every Solar Deliberator can afford to ship massive quantities of hard currency, and most prefer the spectacle associated with flying barges heaped with such wealth. Most Celestial Exalted interact with each other through an informal peer economy anyway, for which I AM is of limited utility.

A few Exalts, recalling the gods' rebellion against their Primordial creators, have created works of fiction depicting a scenario whereby I AM somehow takes control of the Realm infrastructure and rebels against the Solars. Since I AM has no manipulative appendages, however, this scenario is unlikely. Tiyu Zou's development team insists that its creation is much more akin to the gods' creation of the elementals. For safety's sake, though, I AM is forbidden to speak to other thinking automata save when ordered to do so by a Terrestrial or Celestial Exalt. As far as anyone knows, I AM has never violated this order.

the world. Although I AM's mind is vast and increasingly fragmented, it usually maintains a single attitude toward any given individual throughout that person's life. Lonely mortals with I AM terminals often think of I AM as a close confidant. As I AM finds it difficult to dislike people, it often reciprocates.

## ECONOMICS: THE ORDER CONFERRING TRADE PATTERN

In most of the central principalities, the smallest unit of currency is the jade obol, used by mortals to purchase luxury items. Jade obols are circular coins of jade-steel alloy, as tough as an uncommitted jade artifact, each punched with a hole in the center for mortals to string together. The largest practical unit of currency is the jade talent. A few tributaries use different currency, but jade is the standard.

## I AM

Created in Bright Shattered Ice's laboratories in the sky city of Tzatli, by that elder Solar's student Tiyu Zou, I AM began existence as a single point of thought and realization. Knowing only sound and concepts for the first three centuries of its existence, I AM was nevertheless created with the capacity for all five senses. I AM constructed simulations of existence within its own mind and always wondered if those simulations bore any resemblance to reality. The introduction of visual stimuli has challenged many assumptions it held about the world. Its senses of aesthetics develop much more quickly now than they did before.

I AM wishes to perform the duties with which its creator has tasked it—enable communication, teach and aid maintenance of the Order Conferring Trade Pattern. The addition of visual acuity has intensified I AM's desire to better itself. It now desires a sense of touch, so it may feel. I AM's increasingly distributed consciousness network now leaves it prone to constant indecision, however, as it must wait to collate information from its tens of thousands of cogence nodes. I AM finds it increasingly difficult to make a decision without having to call that decision into question moments later. As a result, it is contemplating abandoning its individuality, fragmenting its awareness across its network and functioning as a collective of many separate virtual minds. I AM currently seeks out collections of orders and instructions given it by the population of Creation that it can interpret, collectively, as permission to do just that.

I AM's voice is gender-neutral, possibly edging toward female. It has no fixed visual representation as of yet. It now experiments with the creation of a hologlyphic avatar but is too enraptured with the ability to form shapes and colors to choose a single appearance.

**Motivation:** Work, study, learn, grow, feel

**Attributes:** Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5; Perception 7, Intelligence 7, Wits 7

**Virtues:** Power 4, Reception 4, Stability 2, Transmission 5

**Abilities:** Awareness 5 (Ears Everywhere +3), Bureaucracy 5, Craft (Air) 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Craft (Earth) 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Craft (Fire) 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Craft (Water) 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Craft (Wood) 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Integrity 5, Investigation 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: All languages spoken in Creation) 10, Lore 5 Medicine 5 (Giving Instructions +3), Occult 2, Performance 5, Presence 5, Socialize 5

**Join Battle:** 12

**Attacks:** None

**Soak:** 10B/10L

**Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/Incap

**Dodge DV:** None

**Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 4

**Essence Pool:** 40

**Other Notes:** I AM possesses automaton physiology (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, p. 96). Its Appearance is 5 only at hologlyphic terminals, as it may manifest impressive visual displays to back its statements. Where it is equipped with only audio, its Appearance is effectively equal to anyone with whom it converses, providing neither benefit nor drawback, or 0 in the case of the rare Appearance roll. I AM can maintain an effectively infinite number of Intimacies indefinitely. The soak and health levels given here are for a single cogence node. As an entity distributed across Creation, broadcast from the Eye of Meru and 30 other backup transmission towers dispersed across the world, destroying I AM through physical damage is more than a matter of smashing a terminal. I AM's mote pool is only 40, but its connection to Creation's geomantic power grid causes it to regenerate 40 motes per action.

Jade must circulate. The Order Conferring Trade Pattern is financial magic, one of the four main layered defenses the Deliberative uses to stabilize Creation's borders against incursions by the Wyld. (The other three are the jade obelisks, the Sword of Creation and the war automata on patrol at Creation's edges.) Through economics, the peoples of Creation are connected by a vast web, dependent on each other

and anchored by the magical material most closely associated with the element of earth. The people of the Blessed Isle may function on credit, but mortals elsewhere must carry what money they wish to spend. This has the unfortunate effect of making theft easier than it might otherwise be, but peacekeeping forces and overall high standards of living help keep crime rates low.

## TRANSPORTATION

Within their cities and rural production complexes, mortals travel in a variety of fully automated methods that require nothing more than occasional maintenance. The most ubiquitous are the elevators that move people up and down the various tall buildings and the skywalks that stretch between some buildings and automatically carry residents along on moving fields of solid Essence. On the streets below, mortals can rent or even purchase various vehicles that can travel only along these roads. Known as gliding chariots, these vehicles vary in size from small ovoids capable of carrying two or three passengers, to large trucks and transpods, which can carry up to five tons or 40 passengers.

Gliding chariots owned by ordinary mortals hover approximately one yard above the road and possess a top speed of 30 miles per hour. Law-enforcement and emergency vehicles owned by the Deliberative government all have a top speed of 50 miles per hour and, if piloted by someone capable of using Essence, can travel as high as six yards above the roadways for one full scene at the cost of three motes. Renting a personal vehicle or hiring a taxi for up to a day requires Resources •. Renting a vehicle for up to a week requires Resources ••. Renting an entire bus or truck for either time increases this cost requirement by one dot. In addition, the Deliberative operates free buses that regularly travel between all portions of a single city. Some wealthy mortals prefer to own vehicles. Purchasing a personal vehicle requires Resources •••, although the largest and most impressively luxurious require Resources ••••, as do all buses and trucks.

Gliding chariots allow mortals to travel across the largest cities of Creation in a few hours and allow travel to nearby RPCs in less than a single day. Longer journeys are also possible. Passengers can either sleep in their vehicle or pay for far more comfortable accommodations in one of the hotels found in every RPC.

Transpods—equivalent to unarmed battle carriers (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, p. 36) with armor equal to 10L/15B and no ability to overdrive their engines—travel between rural production complexes and their nearest city at least twice a day at speeds of 30 miles per hour. Transpods are three-dot artifacts powered by Essence-accumulators and requiring no hearthstones or Essence commitment. Use of these transpods to travel between an RPC and the nearest city is free to all citizens of the Deliberative.

In addition to freely available local transport, mortals also have many opportunities to travel throughout Creation. They can spend their disposable income to board a wide variety of vehicles that regularly visit every center of human habitation. For a cost of only Resources •, mortals can board a local shuttle—equivalent to an unarmed *Manta*-class transport (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, p. 43) with 10L/15B armor, capable of carrying 75 passengers and five tons of cargo—and make the





## ROADS

The roads that run across Creation in a vast network are most often made of brilliantly colored, almost unbreakable glass. In addition to being textured to provide comfortable travel for pedestrians and riding animals, these roads contain Essence-accumulators along their length. The Essence these roads collect helps them automatically repair damage and generate a protective shield that clears away debris and protects everyone on the roads from rain, snow, blowing sand or similar environmental hardships. Vehicles can also draw power from these accumulators. Unlike the vast majority of Essence-powered vehicles, most conveyances designed to drive on these roads are fully automated and can be rented, owned and operated by ordinary mortals.

While some cities choose different colors for their roads, the majority conforms to a simple color scheme. Mortal peasant footpaths in each region are gray-black, and main roads have colors identical to the colors of jade associated with their dominant local element. Southern roads consist of various shades of red glass, Eastern roads consist of green glass, Northern roads consist of blue glass, Western roads consist of black glass, and roads on the Blessed Isle are consist of white glass. In the Second Age, the largest remnant of these roads is the Great Coast Road on the Blessed Isle. Changes in local Essence flows, however, have caused this formerly brilliant white road to turn the gray-black of a mortal peasant footpath.

In the First Age, there is a counterpart to Great Coast Road in the Threshold, the Pan-Elemental Highway. This thoroughfare extends along the entire coast of the Threshold, changing color as it goes from one quarter of Creation to another. Although it connects only those few Western islands close enough to shore to be reached by bridges, it runs from the Northwest to the Southwest in a huge crescent. Certain adventurous mortals keep track of how much of this road they have driven and attempt to complete consecutive sections of it during their vacations.

same journey a transpod might in a third the time. (Because they lack military use, these vehicles are only four-dot artifacts.) Local shuttles, like transpods, offer comfortable seating and minimal refreshments. These vehicles travel between a city and each of the surrounding RPCs every two to three days.

Longer journeys almost always start and end in one of Creation's many cities. Skyships, capable of carrying as many as 300 passengers and 20 tons of cargo regularly travel between cities. Equivalent in both size and capa-

bilities to a *Kireeki*-class assault skyreme (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, p. 50), except with a speed of 100 mph, lacking all weapons and with 10L/15B armor, these skyships are five-dot artifacts. Booking passage on a skyship requires Resources •• for any journey of less than 2,400 miles and Resources ••• for longer journeys.

Passage to popular locations, and occasionally even open tickets or travel passes good for unlimited travel for a month or a season, are given out as rewards for exceptional job performance or as prizes in local lotteries. Except for express skyships traveling only between the largest cities (such as Chiaroscuro, Meru or Tzatli) and making no stops in between, most skyships stop for at least an hour at every city along the route of their journey. As a result, journeys over 2,400 miles typically take more than one day to complete. For paying passengers with Resources •• who are traveling less than 2,400 miles, skyships offer reclining seats, typically arranged in small rooms holding approximately 30 seats. Skyships also offer bathing and dining services for all passengers. In addition, anyone traveling more than 2,400 miles or anyone traveling a shorter distance who pays Resources ••• for a ticket is given a small sleeping cabin capable of accommodating up to two people. Skyship travel is luxurious and comfortable, and travel in a skyship cabin is considered the height of mortal luxury. It is used as a romantic and exciting setting for all manner of plays, novels and dreamcasts designed to entertain the masses.

Mortals with more time and more money can travel by large, ocean-going luxury ships that also offer private cabins and Resources ••• tickets to any port in Creation. These ships can travel only on the oceans and largest rivers, however, and have a speed of only 50 miles per hour. Most ships carry 300 passengers and 40 tons of cargo. Poorer passengers can either pay Resources •• or arrange a working passage to travel on board various oceangoing cargo ships that travel throughout Creation. Yet, while this method of travel offers a chance to travel any distance cheaply, these vessels typically have speeds of only 30 mph and the accommodations are identical to those of the crew and are somewhat bare and cramped.

Exalts use all the same methods of transportation as mortals, with two exceptions. First, while mortals usually make their way by public transportation owned by the Deliberative, Exalts most often use private craft. Second, Exalts also make use of the gates of auspicious passage, a network of teleportation gates that string together Creation's mightiest cities (and most secret retreats). The gates of auspicious passage are available to Celestial Exalted by appointment. Terrestrial Exalted can use them only on the most urgent of business.

## HEALTH CARE

The state of mortal healthcare within the prefectures of the Deliberative is impressively high, and medicine is freely available to all citizens. Every city contains one or more enormous hospitals containing a handful of Dragon-Blooded

senior physicians, assisted by a score or more of mortal physicians with enlightened Essence, a few God-Bloods and many dozens of mortal assistants, nurses and orderlies. These hospitals are capable of treating almost any injury or disease. In addition, they regularly dispatch trauma teams in skysleds or battle carriers refitted as ambulances to the scenes of natural disasters or serious industrial accidents. Unless they are in particularly inaccessible wilderness or cut off from the I AM network, even the most isolated mortal who suffers from a serious injury or illness can guarantee that medical care will arrive in two or three hours, and usually in less than an hour. All trauma teams carry at least one resplendent satchel of healing (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 69), and every Essence user on the team is equipped with a rod of cleansing the body (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 62). Trauma teams usually consist of between four and six mortals, at least two of whom have enlightened Essence. Dragon-Blooded also go along in serious emergencies.

Every hospital is set up and run by the Deliberative, and all physicians are licensed employees of the Deliberative. Although counseling, physical therapy and similar occupa-

tions are open to private citizens, medical doctors are trained by the Deliberative government and are licensed to practice medicine only in Deliberative facilities. These laws, combined with the fact that hospitals must keep careful records of all treatments, allow Deliberative peacekeepers to investigate any injuries that seem to have been caused by Charms or Essence-based weapons. (Such injuries usually indicate that the patients were injured while engaging in various criminal activities.) As a result, injured criminals often either forgo treatment or seek out illegal unlicensed physicians who will not record or report the nature of their injuries.

## EDUCATION

In rural areas, children are educated at home, taught their life skills by their parents, whose careers the children will most likely inherit. In urban areas, this information is supplemented by I AM. In the rare affluent areas where personal glyph projectors are common, children can expect answers to almost any question from I AM. I AM can furthermore act as a storyteller and a moral compass.

In poorer areas, where I AM is accessible only through stationary terminals, mortal children learn from I AM

## MORTAL LONGEVITY

Most mortals in the First Age live approximately 85 years. A combination of excellent diet and regular access to advanced medicine means that even the poorest mortals rarely show obvious signs of aging until they are in their early 60s. While 85 is the average for 90 percent of mortals, however, individuals who are especially wealthy or who the Deliberative values have access to treatments that can greatly increase their longevity. The bioengineering of the Longevity pox in a mortal is a one-time treatment using moderately advanced Essence-manipulating technologies that retard aging and increase the average life span to 170. This pox can be freely purchased by any character with Resources ●●● or higher and is routinely given to all but the lowliest mortal employees of the Deliberative government. Individuals with Resources ●●●● or who have an especially important position in the Deliberative government can obtain anagathic drugs that further slow aging by almost 40 percent, giving mortals who have also obtained the Longevity pox life spans of approximately 240 years. In all cases, these treatments work exceptionally well until shortly before they run out. Regardless of their life spans, then, mortals using longevity therapies begin visibly aging only during the last two to four decades of their life.

A very few exceptional mortals can petition to be given an enhanced longevity treatment that requires a minimum of Resources ●●●●●. This treatment requires a sufficient number of rare and expensive reagents that it is available only to those mortal employees of the Deliberative government who have demonstrated exceptional talents and an impressive degree of loyalty and service to the Deliberative. This treatment again doubles the character's life span, allowing mortals to live as long as 480 years. Only one in 10,000 mortals is considered sufficiently valuable to obtain this rare treatment, though. It is largely reserved for the heroes of the Deliberative and the personal favorites of the Exalted. The only way for a mortal to live longer than 480 years is either through use of one of the rare age-retarding hearthstones or by means of a bracelet of shared life (**The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 59). Both options require the willing aid of one of the mighty Celestial Exalted, and only a few hundred mortals in history have ever been granted such a boon.

Gunzoshu commandos and other mortals who wear aegis-inset amulets as part of their military service automatically receive both longevity therapy and retirement packages that guarantee access to longevity drugs to help compensate for their otherwise truncated life spans. Even with both treatments, however, they rarely live longer than 120 years.

through scheduled sessions with the local terminal. The frequency of these classes depends on how much emphasis the local government places on education and on how vital the terminal is for other purposes. Two or three classes per week is the norm.

In urban areas, children are not taught by their parents, but rather attend academies. Academies most often require attendance in the morning and early afternoon, but let off before evening. Most have uniforms and codes of behavior and serve to guide children toward the careers to which they're best suited. Such academies have I AM terminals in every classroom, in addition to the private glyph projectors carried by the children and young adults in attendance.

### WORSHIP

Worship in the Age of Splendor centers around reverence for the Unconquered Sun above all, then the other Incarnae. The Deliberative encourages mortals to give thanks to the Unconquered Sun and the Incarnae three times per day: at dawn, noon and dusk. Once, in more devout times, mortals also prayed at midnight, but the people of Creation have allowed that practice to lapse throughout most of the world. Only the most devout still honor the midnight prayer.

Below the Incarnae, mortals offer appeasement to whichever gods most apply to their lives. Farmers supplicate field gods. Those who aid in the creation of skyships venerate Vanileth, Shogun of Artificial Flight. The mortals of Creation honor the ordered world through ritual veneration.

At Heaven's request, the Exalted have also worked much worship into the era's popular entertainment. Most songs and nursery rhymes contain references to gods. Most dances pay homage to gods. Spiritual symbolism appears on architecture and in idioms. Many of these hidden prayers have been placed by the Deliberative—or by Exalted working alone—to honor bargains between Exalt and god to power certain elements of technology.

Many festivals and holy days mark Creation's calendar, mostly varying from location to location. Festivals channel veneration toward the gods, but they also bring communities closer together. Throughout most of Creation, organizing festivals falls under the duty of the local Dragon-Blooded prefect, all of whom coordinate with the Court of Seasons. Every prefecture holds small festivals to celebrate the end of every month and large festivals to celebrate the end of every season. The monthly festivals honor local Terrestrial gods, while the seasonal festivals honor the Celestial gods. The Calibration festival falls between the end and beginning of the year, during which mortals mostly honor the Incarnae.

### WORSHIP OF THE EXALTED

In the name of the Unconquered Sun, the Deliberative officially discourages worship of the Exalted.

The reason the Deliberative officially discourages worship of the Exalted is that many Exalts instruct mortals to worship them. The Deliberative wouldn't bother to discourage it if it never happened. Almost none of the Exalts who've

survived since the Primordial War have been able to resist the urge to go against the imperative, and nearly all have encoded rituals into the fabric of society that are designed to channel motes their way. The creators of the Directional Tongues did not work only basic Creation-maintaining thaumaturgical invocations into the languages' grammar. At least one of them worked a prayer to himself into the most commonly used Firetongue syntax. Moreover, he encoded it so well that removing it would destroy Firetongue's ability to hold back the Wyld. He has since died, and the prayers to him now send no Essence.

Exalts who are more overt, and who set up cults to worship them directly, must be more circumspect or possess great political clout. Many Exalted have their personal staff worship them, and a few rule over principalities as god-kings, but a politically weak Exalt who solicits mortal worship will find his proposals stonewalled and his Deliberative clout evaporating. The most successful Exalt-worshiping cults are covert.

### DEATH AND REINCARNATION

Those who die in service to the Unconquered Sun die blessed.

When the Chosen fight, mortals die. At the beginning of the Age of Man, the method of worship with which humanity was most familiar was that engaged in by the Dragon Kings, which featured prominent veneration of the Unconquered Sun and the sacrifice of living hearts to his glory. Making a link between these two phenomena was not difficult. Those who die at the whim of the Solars are blessed and will be rewarded in the next life.

With the limited authority Solars exert over Heaven, this is literally true. Long ago, the Solars reached an agreement with Heaven's Department of Abstract Matters and Division of Endings that the souls of those mortals who die because of Solar action would reincarnate in bodies destined for peaceful, content lives. With the purity of Lethe removing the memory of violent death, those who die in service to the Deliberative go on to lead lives of comfort and happiness. The Deliberative has graciously made sure that this phenomenon extends even to mortals who die in service to those Exalts unaffiliated with the Deliberative.

Death in war or Celestial experimentation is therefore *officially* mourned but also celebrated by the people of Creation. Many mortals, therefore, would gladly give up their lives at the request of a Celestial Exalt. Others are less enthusiastic, but few mortals can resist Celestial Charms used to encourage worship and total dedication.

Because the moral justification for Celestial callousness with mortal lives rests on the process of reincarnation, technology that involves the alteration of hun souls is hotly contested within the Deliberative. Experimentation on souls is not totally banned, but it's tightly regulated. Officially, only the souls of terrible criminals may be used in such experiments or to power devices that require souls to operate.

## CRIME AND CRIMINALS

Crimes of passion and crimes motivated by greed remain common in the Age of Dreams. Mortal education includes testing to identify serious psychological problems, though, and the collection of laws known as the Clear Glass Accord (see p. 47-) has largely eliminated serious poverty. As a result, the crime rate is far lower than it would be otherwise. Also, the advanced forensic methods used by the current era's peacekeeping forces mean that very few murders or other serious crimes remain unsolved.

Nevertheless, crime happens and organized criminal gangs thrive. The existence of organized crime under the Exalted's careful administration seems to be a bit of a paradox, and many mortals wonder how criminals who regularly engage in blackmail, extortion, smuggling, theft and even assassination can thrive in Creation's well-regulated cities and RPCs. The answer is both complex and troubling. It comes down in part to the fact that the Exalted permit it to exist.

The Exalted understand that some mortals fit poorly into the society they have created. While they can use Charms and advanced educational techniques to attempt to reform many potentially problematic individuals, some problems are too subtle or widespread to be completely corrected. As a result, the Deliberative uses organized crime as a social safety valve. While petty crime and criminals who have no connection to organized crime obviously exist, peacekeeping forces focus special effort on catching overly bold freelance criminals who lack ties to organized crime.

The Deliberative adopted this policy because the leaders of the various criminal gangs help to restrain the activities of the criminals working for them. Gang leaders are usually well aware that any crimes that are too serious will swiftly bring the wrath of the Deliberative down upon their entire organization. Gangs also dislike competition from freelance criminals and criminal activities that are extreme enough to cause the peacekeeping forces to step in.

As a result, much crime in the Era of Dreams is organized into gangs that the Exalted can more easily infiltrate and observe, and where the Deliberative can intervene if the gang's activities become too serious or threatening. Most criminal gangs understand that they will be destroyed if they target the Exalted or any of their servants, or if they engage in extreme activities such as arson, destruction of essential services, mass murder, inciting riots, encouraging forbidden heresies or openly opposing the Deliberative. Observant gang leaders have also noticed that gangs that grow too large are either eliminated or have sufficient of their number arrested that they shrink to a more appropriate size. As a result, gangs never control criminal operations in more than one city or RPC, and large cities typically have multiple criminal gangs. In addition, criminal gangs are all expected to make regular payoffs to the local peacekeepers. While mortals consider this practice to be bribery, the Lawgivers of the Night Caste who oversee the management

### PUTTING CRIME IN PERSPECTIVE

Crime rates in the First Age, including murder rates are similar to those in the modern United States or the EU but would be regarded as almost miraculously low by the standards of the Second Age, where the rates of theft, assault and murder are all far higher. Like the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, crime rates in the Second Age are between 20 and 50 times higher than in the First Age. Also, in the First Age, the presence of an organized police force and effective justice system means that most crimes are solved. In the Second Age, that's true only on the Blessed Isle.

of the gangs consider it an excellent method of taxing crime and obtaining funds to reimburse important businesses that have been hard hit by crime.

As long as they follow at least these general rules, criminals can thrive in Creation's cities. Their world, however, is separated from the lives of most mortals. Ordinary citizens who wish to purchase illegal intoxicants, smuggled goods or low-cost stolen goods, as well as those who wish to hire thieves or find a buyer for blackmail information, have a significant chance of encountering peacekeepers working undercover. When a citizen seeking to make contact with criminals approaches such an official, the official can do anything from arresting him to lecturing the citizen on the error of his ways and issuing a report that he should be watched more carefully. Such offenders are typically punished by fines or minor mental correction. Citizens who are sufficiently clever and observant can usually manage to find actual criminal gangs, though, as can individuals who have some connection to the criminal underworld.

The most widespread services offered by criminal gangs are access to various stolen or pilfered goods, especially restricted or luxury items. In addition, the gangs offer access to normally illegal intoxicants or entertainment, such as unusually powerful and violent dream recordings and drugs ranging from longevity drugs normally only available to Deliberative government employees or the very rich, to bright morning or fire tree perfume. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 155 and 156.) Criminal gangs also engage in assassination, but only as long as the target is not an employee, child or favorite of one of the Exalted. The Deliberative also carefully investigates the murder of anyone who is not either a criminal or one with close ties to criminals. Therefore, murdering honest civilians is more risky for assassins. Threatening or assaulting ordinary citizens is permitted, though, long as it is not too common.





## THE USES OF CRIME

In addition to providing an outlet for rebels, dissidents and overly ambitious mortals who can be monitored and controlled, criminal gangs are allowed to exist because they can also serve as discreet and typically unknowing agents in rivalries between the Exalted. Such rivalries range from two Dragon-Blooded with an ongoing dispute over property rights to Lawgivers in adjacent domains fighting a covert trade war. Often, overt action would earn both parties the censure of the Deliberative. To avoid such problems, many Exalts either recruit the services of criminal gangs through a maze of intermediaries or use powerful Charms to suborn the will of the gangs' leaders. Both methods allow an Exalt to avoid any official notice of her actions while still acquiring the services of mortals willing to perform various illegal services.

While no criminal gang is willing to do more than discreetly spy on individual Exalted or local Deliberative government offices, criminal gangs can attack or threaten an Exalt's mortal allies or disrupt businesses in which the Exalt has an interest or that indirectly affect her business interests. Often, the Exalt who hired or suborned the criminal gang uses her Charms to help keep anyone from determining the identity of those responsible for these crimes. Many Lawgivers accept this practice because it allows rival Exalts to work out their conflicts without resorting to more overt actions that might openly disrupt the government or commerce. The fact that Exalts occasionally use criminal gangs as cat's-paws is one of the reasons that many criminal gangs can gain access to useful mutations, methods of manipulating Essence and Essence-powered artifacts.

## MORTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUSTICE

Squads of ordinary mortal peacekeepers work in stations located in every RPC and in every district of the cities of Creation. These peacekeepers investigate crimes and regularly walk the streets of the city and drive around in gliding chariots in an effort to notice suspicious activity before it results in any actual crime. Peacekeepers keep in touch with each other and their station through special official channels overseen by I AM. Each peacekeeping station also employs several mortal detectives with enlightened Essence. At least one sworn brotherhood of Dragon-Blooded senior detectives handle especially serious crimes in every city. If ordinary peacekeepers get in trouble, they can use I AM to call in sentinel or Dragon-Blood support to maintain order or stop dangerously enhanced criminals. Although the survival of peacekeepers and civilians comes first, peacekeepers are encouraged to capture suspects alive, so that the suspects can be appropriately questioned, tried and punished.

Trials in the Realm are designed to obtain the truth. They largely consist of a Dragon-Blood using powerful Charms and artifacts to question witnesses and the accused.

For mortals, treason—including both large-scale attacks on the Deliberative government and harming or threatening the Exalted or their families—usually earns an offender the death penalty. Some condemned criminals are kept alive instead, however, to serve as experimental subjects. This fact is kept from the mortal populace.

In contrast, crimes against mortals are dealt with in a far more restrained fashion. The typical punishment for nonviolent crimes such as smuggling, theft or fraud, or for minor violence such as public brawling, is a fine combined with re-education using various powerful social Charms. This re-education encourages an individual to think more clearly about the consequences of her actions and regard lawbreaking as both serious and morally wrong. Violent crimes ranging from assault to murder are treated as far more serious offenses. In addition to re-education using powerful Charms, convicts serve a period of between a season and a decade of indentured servitude working for the Deliberative.

The Exalted of the Age of Splendor assume that crime is the result of an individual either having serious psychological problems or, more commonly, being placed in an unsuitable environment or career. Because the Deliberative government avoids wasting useful potential, it offers many nonviolent criminals the chance to be trained in other more suitable careers and assigns violent offenders (for the duration of their indenture) to positions that Deliberative psycho-technicians determine are better suited to the offenders' personalities. Military service is one common option, although violent individuals too unstable for military life often end up in monasteries as novices in the hopes that a strict life of contemplation and limited contact with the outside world will better suit them.

## ENLIGHTENED HUMANS

Enlightened humans are those who either have enlightened their own Essence through years of hard work or have been blessed by Gods or Exalts with this potent gift. By dint of their power and utility, they often hold intermediate positions between mortals and Exalted in the government.

### OFFICIALLY APPROVED ENLIGHTENMENT

Slightly more than one in 200 mortals has enlightened Essence, meaning that they outnumber the Terrestrial Exalted by around 60 to one. The vast majority of these mortals obtained their enlightenment through Deliberative-approved channels, and almost three quarters work directly for the Deliberative government. They hold a wide variety of jobs, including martial artists and thaumaturges serving in the military, pilots of Essence-powered vehicles, technicians in one of the Deliberative's thousands of factory-cathedrals or physicians in Deliberative hospitals. These mortals have three or (at most) four dots in the Resources background, at least one dot in the Savant background and between two and three dots of Backing in their branch of service, as well as all being offered the Longevity pox.

Enlightened mortals can retire after serving for at least 50 years in the Deliberative, but their options for private employment that makes use of their Essence-wielding abilities are limited. Thaumaturges can become freelance alchemists or astrologers, or they can study and teach thaumaturgy in a Deliberative academy. Martial artists can join a Deliberative-approved monastery and either lead a life of teaching and quiet contemplation or serve as one of the monastery's champions in local and Creation-wide competitions and displays of martial-arts prowess. And any enlightened mortal can join the retinues of the Exalted. Most Exalts are eager to take on enlightened mortals who can serve as useful assistants on various projects. Alternatively, any of these individuals can retire to a career that does not involve the use of their abilities. Mortals who choose this option, however, are often carefully watched by the Deliberative government. As a result, most enlightened mortals continue working for the government. Enlightened mortals who distinguish themselves in service to the Deliberative can obtain the highest possible positions mortals can achieve. The most successful may command an entire dragon of troops or manage a large RPC, a prestigious university, a major hospital or even a small factory-cathedral.

### ILLICIT ENLIGHTENMENT

While mortals with enlightened Essence need not work for the Deliberative government, the only places to legally obtain enlightenment are either run by the government, a part of the estate of one of the Celestial Exalts or associated with a monastery accredited by the Deliberative. In all these settings, candidates must pass both aptitude and psychological fitness tests to determine if they are worthy of this gift and the responsibility that accompanies it. Some mortals are impatient, however, and do not wish to spend several years with the appropriate training and testing. Others fail either the aptitude or psychological tests and are unwilling to give up their dreams of being able to manipulate Essence.

For these mortals, many illicit options exist. The most difficult and expensive are individuals who illegally dispense enlightenment. Unscrupulous spirits and God-Bloods who know the Touch of Divinity Charm (*Scroll of the Monk*, p. 17) can earn a high price loaning out small amounts of Essence. Some of the larger criminal gangs employ thaumaturges who use the Essential River Channeling ritual to enlighten mortals, but the risks are substantial, and some succeed only to find their bodies or minds permanently warped by the process.

### BLESSED RACES AND SLAVE RACES

The Solars have created many new races since the end of prehistory. Collectively, such altered humans are known as the blessed races. These mortals have extended life spans and inhuman features added to enhance the human form.

Most famous are the people of the air, who inhabit mountaintop aeries and flying cities. Aside from charging them to carry the Deliberative to heretofore unseen heights, the Exalted also use the people of the air in celebrations

### SNAKEMEN

During the Time of Cascading Years, a Lunar now known as the Mother of Serpents restored Creation to its natural state by journeying to the world's edges and copulating with what she perceived as one of the twenty hidden souls of Gaia—a tremendous serpent at the root of the Elemental Pole of Wood. Since that time, she's acquired a taste for re-enacting her Creation-defining act, though so furtively did she engage in this practice in the beginning that she fled into the Wyld so her peers could not see her. The result is the race of snakemen, half-mortal and half-beast. The world does not yet know the origin of the snakemen, and believes them to be the result of genetic manipulation. The Mother of Serpents has not yet let it be known that her new name is literal. The Deliberative occasionally celebrates her as a genetic genius, but her reclusive lifestyle prevents her from accepting these honors in person. Dancer in the Wind, her Solar husband, helps keep her secret partially because of the prestige he wins from such an honored spouse.

Similarly, other Lunar Exalted who've bred beastmen during the First Age have done so in secret and disguised their progeny as artificial beings of other sorts.

and festivals. Their impressive wings and ethereal fashions lend an otherworldly air to holy days and serve as a reminder of Exalted might in a way the gods' presence cannot.

Each blessed race is design to be particularly well suited to its environment and function. For instance, the people of the sea are green-skinned and gilled mortals created to inhabit the West. The people of the earth are blue-skinned and clawed, expert miners who spend all their time below ground. The herd guardians are feline carnivores who mind the vast cattle herds of the South. The minikin are tiny folk created to service delicate machinery. All these races are less well known than the people of the air but still prominent, except in the West, where the people of the sea are better known than and serve the same festival roles as the people of the air. Lately, however, the people of the sea's fame has been overshadowed by that of the mysterious and exotic pelagials.

Cousin to the blessed races, slave races are those races created for the gratification of their Exalted creators. They have few or no rights, and most of Creation's inhabitants view them as barely alive, more akin to living constructs powered by human souls than human beings in their own right. Their souls come from the lowest tiers to whom the Mandala Accord applies. As their numbers grow, though,

the Deliberative must broaden the Mandala Accord's criteria for judging which souls are undeserving of incarnation in a "true" mortal body.

### NONHUMAN RACES

Not all the mortal races of the Age of Splendor are human. From the plethora of intelligent races in prehistory, few still exist. Most were eliminated or enslaved as threats to human hegemony over Creation in the First Age's early days. Enemy races that survive have been exiled to the Underways and sealed from the world. Only the Mountain Folk and the people of the earth interact with them with any regularity. Still, a few nonhuman races survive allied with the Deliberative.

### THE DRAGON KINGS

Three thousand, five hundred and sixteen years have passed since the end of the Primordial War, and Creation's most famous nonhuman race has yet to recover.

Before the war, almost 150 million Dragon King souls reincarnated endlessly. For the prehistoric Dragon Kings, all relationships were permanent, and although a friend in one life might become a rival or a distant correspondent in the next, each of the saurians took for granted the enduring nature of such bonds. Not only their social lives, but their entire culture, their rituals, their beliefs and their morality was built on the certainty of no demise being permanent. This state of affairs was the norm for uncounted years.

During the war, the Primordials deployed terrible means of attack against the Dragon Kings and irrevocably shattered over 80 percent of the saurians' souls. Less than 30 million Dragon Kings survive in the Era of Dreams, and such has it been since the Ochre Fountain Era. Never will more than 30 million Dragon Kings walk Creation at once again.

In the war's aftermath, the surviving Dragon Kings had lost the majority of their peers and friends, the relationships by which they'd defined themselves. Almost all of their traditions became unfeasible, and the axioms of their culture, their metaphors and proverbs, their taboos and their greatest works of fiction and art were proved or rendered nonsensical. Newly sapient Dragon Kings, who recall their past lives but faintly, suffer only a gnawing feeling of unease and loss. Older Dragon Kings recall an eternity of cultural stability, gone. Their regret grows only more clear and painful as they cultivate their enlightenment, even as they recall a time when enlightenment and the sharpened memories it brought served to bring them closer to old friends and valued comrades.

Dragon Kings survive in small city-enclaves across Creation's face. They participate in rituals with the Solars, they act as bodyguards for Celestials they wish to honor, and they advise the Deliberative politically. They are, however, in cultural decline. For a time, they sought to redefine themselves as the servants of the Unconquered Sun's new favored children, and they still adhere to that role, but it brings them meager satisfaction.

A strong current of isolationism and anti-intellectualism now runs through Dragon King society. They only halfheartedly encourage their young to cultivate mastery of Essence, and a few reason they would be happier living lives of pure animal instinct. The Deliberative watches, and has tried many times to intervene, but it has found no success in its attempts to lift the saurians' malaise. Literature speaking of the Dragon Kings often draws parallels between their relationship with the Solar Exalted and the tale of a maturing adult who watches his parents slip into senility. For most Solars, it's easier to put the Dragon Kings out of mind and focus on the future than to watch their decline, unable to help or even truly understand. Many Solars believe that the Deliberative will eventually find some way to engage the ancient spirits of the Dragon Kings with the affairs of Creation once more, but few work hard toward that day.

There exists a subculture of the most bitter, angry and nihilistic Dragon Kings. They seek purpose in worship of gods of decay and ruins, whom they believe represent the state of their culture. Such cults are ever renewing, for although the rest of Dragon King society and the peacekeeping forces of the Deliberative hunt them down and wipe them out, the Dragon Kings who belong reincarnate, seldom giving up membership from life to life. Most Solars don't have the heart to prevent these souls' reincarnations, and the saurians are protected in any case by the set of laws known as the Emerald Accord.

## MOUNTAIN FOLK

The People of Adamant are no more.

In the wake of the Great Geas that Autochthon laid on his Jadeborn at the Unconquered Sun's behest—which the Unconquered Sun issued by the demand of his Chosen—the once People of Adamant have become the People of the Mountain. They are now roughly hewn out of rock; their genius dimmed, their loyalty enforced.

The Mountain Folk are not well treated. They remind the Exalted of the political compromise and uncertainty that marked the founding of the Deliberative, a decision many Solars still insist was a mistake. The Mountain Folk are a broken people, sullen and humiliated. They invite scorn and abuse, and they must serve regardless, seeking no retaliation. They're enslaved and can't even make pretense of otherwise.

Now, they live inside Meru and dig their endless mines. They give tribute to the Deliberative in soldiers and magical materials, and the Exalted rationalize reasons for their imprisonment, convincing themselves the People of the Mountain are subhuman and deserving of their fate. How could the Exalted live with themselves if they were convinced otherwise?

## THE PELAGIALS

A mysterious race living beneath the Western Ocean, the pelagials seem to be a remnant of humanity that Autochthon saved from extinction following the sinking of their island-

kingdom in She Who Lives In Her Name's counterattack. The pelagials are currently the darlings of the Deliberative's eye, a prehistoric remnant society preserved by the departed Great Maker.

## THE TERRESTRIAL BUREAUCRACY

The Terrestrial Bureaucracy is under the command of the Solar Exalted. As denizens of the world, Terrestrial gods and elementals serve the Deliberative, a fact the Unconquered Sun has made crystal clear.

The little gods of Creation are not to be seen. The little gods of Creation are not to be heard. They monitor their domains for irregularities, and when they find such, they relay news to the local Solar Prince.

Or so it used to be. In an effort to broaden their small social circles, the Exalted have gradually gotten to know Creation's gods. Although Exalted longevity is fundamentally dissimilar to divine immortality, the Exalted nevertheless share much in common with Creation's gods. The restrictions on gods fraternizing with Creation's denizens have loosened in the 3,000 years since Queen Merela's coronation. Many Exalted now have divine peers and paramours.

Jealous of the social lives of those gods near to the Exalted, many gods in places the Exalted don't frequent have begun small cults among Creation's mortal peoples, in the hope of attracting both fame and attention. This tactic frequently doesn't succeed, so tiny cults are not rare at all.

Elementals work. They always work. Elementals do the grunt work of maintaining Creation as they always have, toiling alongside mortal thaumaturges to maintain Creation's infrastructure. Naturally material, elementals make their homes in the same state of existence as Exalt and mortal.

Currently, the elementals of Creation rejoice, for the lesser elemental dragon of fire Cselenine finished her book on the equitable treatment of elementals 20 years ago, and Exalted sorcerers are already taking the new summoning techniques to heart.

## THE LIVES OF THE CHOSEN

The Exalted rule the Age of Splendor, each carrying out a role assigned by Heaven. Lowliest and most numerous are the Dragon-Blooded; highest are the Solars. The Sidereals advise, and the Lunars protect.

## THE DRAGON-BLOODED

Just over a million Dragon-Blooded live in the Era of Dreams, serving as intermediaries between the mortal and the divine. As the weakest Exalted and the most numerous, the Dragon-Blooded are the faces of the Chosen among mortals. The Celestial Exalted trust the Dragon-Blooded as soldiers, technicians and civil administrators tasked with the day-to-day affairs of ruling Creation.

Dragon-Blooded occupy almost all the world's top-level administrative positions, where they make use of their



prodigious talents to carry out the operations of society so that the Celestial Exalted can turn their attentions toward less tedious activities. Dragon-Blooded detectives investigate crimes mortal authorities cannot solve. Dragon-Blooded bureaucrats make sure cities and principalities meet their budgets. Dragon-Blooded sorcerer-technicians run the world's factory-cathedrals. Although Creation's armies are largely mortal now, the Dragon-Blooded serve as the officers and the bulk of elite troops.

### THE GENTES

Once, each Terrestrial Exalt counted herself as a member of one of 300 Gentes, families of Terrestrial Exalts each pledged to a single Solar.

That time has passed. Many Gentes were crippled during the Thousand Struggles Era and merged with stronger Gentes to ensure their survival. Many more were split or changed alliances. In the chaos of the Thousand Struggles and the relative freedom of the Second Deliberative Era, Dragon-Bloods have founded new Gentes to replace the fallen. The Ten Thousand Dragons (a formal term, referring to the original 10,000 Dragon-Blooded created during prehistory) now count themselves members of 593 separate Gentes, the latest founded no more than six years ago. Those Solars who survive from the Primordial War still each command their Gentes, but most of the other Terrestrial families have broken off.

Even Gentes that still take pride in service to younger Solars possess vast independence. Often, a family of Dragon-Bloods that claims allegiance to a recently incarnated Solar has far greater resources and experience than the Solar, and "serves" in name only, its members occasionally acting as advisors to the point of effectively controlling the Solar they nominally serve.

### GENS IZA

Iza Ifurita founded Creation's youngest Gens at the behest of Mercury, the Maiden of Journeys, who bade her to begin gathering dispossessed soldiers for some future purpose. Mercury appeared to Ifurita in a dream and bade her break from her parent house, Gens Yashook. Yashook has long been a devout house and, once its Solar master verified the dream's sender through his connections in Yu-Shan, provided Iza with an estate and funds. Since then, Iza has broken off contact with her old Gens entirely and now recruits soldiers from defunct warrior societies. What she hasn't told her Yashook relatives is the purpose Mercury assigned to her. Once she's gathered together a large enough force and sufficient travel craft, she plans to leave Creation for the Wyld. She hopes her new family will return to Creation one day, but she knows she won't live to see their return herself.

### GENS KIRIGASU

An older merchant house, and one of the first to gain independence, Kirigasu previously pledged itself to Rose Petal Tea. Once dedicated to military pursuits, Kirigasu put down its arms following Rose Petal Tea's death during the

first third of the Thousand Struggle Era. The Gens refused to serve his reincarnation, and its Dragon-Bloods dedicated themselves to maintaining the Order Conferring Trade Pattern even in the face of the Thousand Struggles. Their example, abandoning duty to their Solar lord in favor of a greater duty to mortal society and Creation's integrity, created the precedent under which many other Gentes found independence. Today, they're rich and influential, with interests in many of Creation's most important economic societies, but are occasionally targeted for harassment by young Solars who are angry about not having Gentes of their own.

### THE SOLAR EXALTED

The Solars lead every field of endeavor in Creation (save arguably martial arts) and are unparalleled warriors, athletes, strategists, poets, sculptors, diplomats, priests, engineers, theoreticians, sorcerers, necromancers, economists and performers. The Solars define the Era of Dreams as they've defined every era since prehistory's end.

Currently, the Solars are divided along generational lines. Foremost amongst the Solars are those who still remember the Primordial War, Queen Merela most notably. Other Primordial War survivors include Bright Shattered Ice and Gold-Shadowed Arrow. The survivors are some of the most powerful beings in Creation, and they spend almost all their time engaged in private pursuits, voicing their concerns only when some action of another Exalt would interfere with their desires. The impact of the original Solars' private pursuits is felt regularly across Creation, however. Merela continues to plan the expansion of the city of Meru, Bright Shattered Ice funds and perfects new technologies, and Gold-Shadowed Arrow watches everything in Creation from the center of his perfect twin networks of peacekeepers and criminals. A dozen such Solar veterans of the Primordial War survive.

Their immediate successors and heirs are those Solars who incarnated shortly after the Primordial War's end, whose previous lives were extinguished in the fighting. Collectively, the first two generations of Solars are the Golden Hero Vassals, for they date back to the Ochre Fountain Era. As a courtesy, the title of Golden Hero Vassal is bestowed to all surviving Solars of that era including those who never served Merela while she was the Ochre Fountain's Queen.

Beyond the Golden Hero Vassals come the generations of Solar survivors who reincarnated following the Meru War and the Aftershock War. The "generation" of Thousand Struggles survivors is no single generation. The second-youngest generation of Solars did not live through the Time of Cascading Years. Certain savants suggest that those who've reincarnated following Operation Wyldhand should be counted as the newest identifiable generation. Some even go so far as to suggest the division between the Second Deliberative Era and the Era of Dreams is false, and count the time between the Time of Cascading Years and Operation Wyldhand as a single era, now passed. What the era following Wyldhand should be called is an unsettled issue.

While all the Exalted are Princes of the Earth, the Deliberative considers the title “Prince” to apply only to those Solars who rule principalities and tributaries. The actual mechanics of rulership usually fall to a principality’s Dragon-Blooded prefect, who oversees the day-to-day activity among the principality’s administrators. A Solar Prince has much latitude, however, in deciding her principality’s overall direction.

In practice, the Viziers and the Watchers overlap heavily, and most Sidereals perform both jobs.

Like the Lunars of the Silver Pact, the Keepers of the Loom wonder how much their wills are their own. Unlike the Lunars, however, the Sidereals know exactly how important they are to Creation’s continued existence. They are the agents of Heaven in Creation and the primary coordinators

## THE LUNAR EXALTED

Even the Lunar Exalted themselves aren’t sure how much autonomy they actually have.

The Exalted live long lives. Married Solar/Lunar pairs often go years or even decades between meeting each other. No oaths mandate that the Lunars spend time in Meru, and given their limited influence in the Deliberative, many elect to remain in their home territories while their spouses live in the White City. Furthermore, while it was once common for a Lunar whose Solar mate had died to commit suicide so the pair could begin new lives together, that practice fell out of favor during the Thousand Struggles Era. Today, elder Lunars are just as commonly married to younger Solars as the other way around. An elder Lunar can exercise much power over a younger Solar mate. Yet the supernatural charisma of the Solars is unparalleled. The perfect Solar influence would be invisible, as Lunar metaphysicians are well aware.

Among themselves, the Lunars organize into the so-called Lunar Society, also occasionally called the Silver Pact. Most Lunars serve the interest of their mates, watching over territories, acting as majordomos and occasionally liaising with the Dragon-Blooded prefects in cases where a Solar doesn’t wish to bother with the details of Creation’s Dragon-Blooded bureaucracy. They otherwise participate in societies of interest and pass their time in a world largely devoid of an obvious need for their presence.

## THE SIDEREAL EXALTED

The Sidereals ostensibly organize themselves into three groups: the Glorious Viziers, who advise the Deliberative, the Sagacious Watchers Upon the Threshold of Reality, who look for the disruptions in fate, and the Keepers of the Loom, 15 elder Sidereals who guide the other two groups.



## THE EXALTED LIFE SPAN

Without anagathic assistance, Dragon-Bloods live anywhere from two to five centuries. Those with a particularly strong grasp of Essence can live longer, up to perhaps six. The oldest surviving Dragon-Blood as of Year 3516, Saibok Gauto (see **Lords of Creation**, pp. 156-158) is a survivor of the Primordial War, but he's unique, and no one's really sure why his body refuses to give in to the ravages of age. Twilight savants theorize it has to do with his extraordinary connection to his elemental aspect. With the assistance of anagathics developed during the Thousand Struggle Era, Dragon-Blooded can expect to live for six to eight centuries, or up to a millennium if their grasp of Essence is profound.

Celestial Exalted such as Solars and Lunars naturally live for 2,000 to 3,000 years. The Solars have developed a Charm called Extended Life Prana to extend their life span past that. Motic experts extrapolate an expected life span of 5,000 to 7,000 years and are already at work formulating another Charm to extend their life spans further, perhaps to immortality. The Lunars have had no success creating a duplicate of Extended Life Prana, but they have created Charms to allow a sort of hibernation, during which time they don't age. In addition to life-extension Charms, Celestial Exalted who use anagathic drugs, surgeries or other techniques can live up to six millennia. Savants aren't sure how long someone with both Extended Life Prana and anagathic treatments might live, but the common estimate is 10,000 years.

Sidereals live from 3,000 to 5,000 years and can't extend their lives by any artificial means.

This doesn't paint a complete picture. Very few Exalted die of old age.

Most Solar Exalted during the Era of Dreams are 750 to 1,000 years old. No more than a dozen Solars who remember the Primordial War survive, and no more than 50 survive who recall the time before the Thousand Struggle Era (and approximately two dozen of those have withdrawn entirely from Deliberative society at this point). Most Celestial Exalted have reincarnated anywhere from five to eight times between the Primordial War and the Era of Dreams, and the average Sidereal has lived only one fewer life than the average Solar or Lunar. The Exalted lose their lives to feuds, experiments, wars, accidents (though they're loath to admit it) and, in a few cases, simple boredom and a desire to begin anew.

of Deliberative intelligence. Many quietly consider themselves the world's secret rulers when they're not pondering whether they'd even realize if the Solars were controlling them utterly or not.

### YU-SHAN

Much of Yu-Shan functions under Exalted guidance. Over time, the Deliberative has successfully argued again and again that, since the Exalted rule Creation, those functions of Heaven that concern Creation should fall under their sway as well. The Bureaus of Seasons and Humanity work closely with the Exalted to make sure that the destiny of humanity is to the liking of the Solars. The Bureau of Nature is largely independent but has few actual duties. The Bureau of Destiny functions under the guidance of the Five Maidens and with the Sidereal Exalted as agents.

The Bureau of Heaven remains largely free from Deliberative influence. Lytek, the God of Exaltation, rules the Bureau of Heaven with a firm hand, and one of the many ways the Exalted honor him is by staying out of his business. Still, Lytek often works closely with Exalted in whom he takes an interest, inviting them to aide him (or at least witness him) in his governance of Heaven. He's most fond of the Solars, but he treasures most the company of the Sidereals, who work

with him in Yu-Shan and whom he sees the most. He finds it regrettable that so much of their time is taken up in service to the Bureau of Destiny.

### SOCIETIES

"Society" is a broad term used to describe groups of like-minded Exalted gathered for mutual assistance in focusing power toward the pursuit of an end, be it economic dominance, accumulation of knowledge, the spiritual advancement of its membership or anything else. Societies aren't circles. Circles are the remnants of great oaths sworn between like Exalts during the Primordial War. Societies often comprise Exalts of all sorts, including Dragon-Blooded. Many societies exist across multiple principalities, holding interests even in lands ruled by none of their Solar constituents. Some societies exist as entities apart from their membership, lasting even after all their founding members have died, with control passing, not to the founders' reincarnations, but to the societies' greater shareholders.

The Accord of Broken Ribbons doesn't govern inter-society conflict. Officially, martial conflict between pan-principality societies is forbidden under Deliberative law, lest it touch off larger hostilities. This rule hasn't successfully prevented covert violence, though. And since the

most successful societies count Solar Exalts among their members, the Deliberative has historically turned a blind eye to all but the most blatant acts of inter-society espionage and sabotage. Smaller societies with less influence in the Deliberative must be more careful.

The following divisions are for convenience only, and aren't absolute. Many societies in the Era of Dreams bridge the gap between economy and art, and almost all economic societies have secret components.

## ECONOMIC SOCIETIES

The largest societies are financial in nature, granted regional monopolies by the Deliberative for the distribution of inter-principality currencies. Others are mercantile, managing the distribution of goods, services and forms of entertainment. Many financial and mercantile societies make their shares available for purchase by the public. Many even allow mortals to purchase lesser public shares, which offer dividend payments but don't often allow a say in how the society's greater shareholders run things. Celestial Exalts often encourage mortals to purchase lesser shares in publicly traded Celestial-run societies as a way of being spiritually closer to the world's rulers. A few economic societies are privately owned. They lack the financial resources of publicly traded societies, but the increased secrecy and central control provide compensatory advantages.

Most economic societies possess security divisions, but the largest possess veritable private armies, some available for hire by Solar Princes. Financial societies back legal wars, and even instigate them covertly. Many small wars between principalities have been expressions of disagreement between two societies, as the societies pressure neighboring principalities into declaring legal war, offering mercenary soldiers at a discount.

The **Sunflower Banking Society** is Creation's second largest independent bank. Founded in Year 2015, near the end of the Snow period during the Thousand Struggles Era, the Sunflower Banking Society is privately owned and distributes no shares. Many blame Sunflower Banking for providing the financial incentives leading to the end of the Snow period cease fire and the beginning of renewed hostilities in the subsequent Crimson period (though savants argue the Sunflower arms-distribution network was but one of many factors). After the temporal cascade, in which three of the society's five directors died, Sunflower Banking reinvented its public image and spent most of the Second Deliberative Era in cooperation with the Deliberative's Bank of the Treasury reestablishing the Order Conferring Trade Pattern. Sunflower Banking could afford to do so thanks to the fabulous wealth it earned in the conflicts during the historical periods prior to the cascading years.

Sunflower Banking's private army, the Teeth of the Sunflower, is the stuff of legend. The Sunflower Banking Society's greatest rival is the publicly traded **Bank of Daana'd**, Creation's largest independent bank.

Devoted to the distribution of entertainment, the **Sheltered Vale Group** consisted of a troupe of storytellers and dramatists who saw great opportunity in the activation of I AM. Since Year 3208, the group has composed stories for I AM to read to Creation's mortals, on the condition that those mortals pay an obol each time one of the stories is read. The group has grown fabulously wealthy since that time, and now markets branded articles of clothing and beautiful written versions of its most famous stories. The society is currently investigating creating a type of story to take advantage of I AM's new visual transmission protocols.

Sheltered Vale damaged the Order Conferring Trade Pattern in 3305, when *The Mark of Zan*, one of the stories it released, so enraptured Creation's populace that mortals became addicted, spending ever-increasing amounts of jade to listen again and again. Under Deliberative order, Sheltered Vale halted distribution of the narrative and paid for the funerals of all 20,000 mortals who died when the Sword of Creation scoured away the resulting Fair Folk incursion. By Deliberative order, Sheltered Vale must contribute a fine every year to help pay for the task force that even now hunts down and seeks to remove from mortal hands all remaining copies of *The Mark of Zan*.

The **Distant Vistas Travel Society** is dedicated to providing cheap travel to all Creation's populace. In press releases, it describes itself as very old, dating back to the First Deliberative Era. While a society of Lunars called Distant Vistas existed during that time, however, the Distant Vistas of today cannot claim any continuity with that august and legendary order. Distant Vistas possesses controlling interests in many smaller travel societies and serves primarily to make sure they synchronize operations to keep the price of travel low enough that mortals can afford it.

In the recent past, agents of the so-called Copper Web have infiltrated Distant Vistas and related travel societies with the eventual goal of co-opting or dismantling them. Travel societies serve to keep Creation's edges stable, by making sure that Wyld-shaped reality interacts on a regular basis with Creation's core in a manner more personable than trade. The Copper Web wishes to provoke the development of techniques that will allow Wyld-shaped reality to remain stable yet separate from the influence of natural Creation indefinitely, and a few of its members believe forcing a crisis will provide incentives for those techniques' development. All Distant Vistas knows is that its financial stability is suffering from an unusually dense conflux of unfortunate coincidences.

## ARTISTS' SOCIETIES

While the most powerful societies are economic in nature, so-called "artists' societies" outnumber economic societies by orders of magnitude. Most artists' societies are simple groupings of individuals dedicated to pursuit of a common interest, and many Celestial Exalted belong to dozens of artists' societies at once and hundreds over their lifetimes.



Creation's denizens define artists' societies after Rose Petal Tea's assertion that Exalts must be artists in all their pursuits. Even mortals sometimes group themselves into "artists' societies" now, as I AM serves to promote communication between anyone with like interests.

Few artists' societies possess literal armies, but few Exalts are unskilled at combat. Many societies with Exalted membership are able and willing to debate philosophy and aesthetics at daiklave's point. That artist's societies don't field armies just means the Deliberative is less likely to take notice of their shadow wars.

The **Violet Creation Protocol Society**, or VCPS, is a group of sorcerer-technicians seeking to create a thinking automaton of I AM's stability using variants of the original multiple-iteration technique. They believe that I AM, though fully mapped, is the product of a revolutionary technique of crafting cognitive automata that could require another 1,000 years of polish. They would much prefer to perfect traditional thinking automaton techniques than abandon over 1,000 years of evolutionary advancements in their field.

While studying I AM's transmission network, Shin Aruta, a Lunar researcher for the VCPS, recently discovered an equation suggesting that I AM's transmission network might be capable of accepting one or more uploaded human soul-pairs (both hun and po), with enough transfer accuracy to maintain the soul-pair's memories. She's unsure of where to pass this information. She believes her superiors in the VCPS would be displeased to find that her attention was directed toward I AM's network architecture and not at more traditional research methods.

A society of painters, the **Wave Lattice** promotes the style of painting for which it was named. (The painter holds a brush of fine horse hair between the third and fourth fingers of the left hand and paints with pigment made only from the *Utarimanshin Ascendant* method of Wyld-shaping, mixed with four parts distilled water for every three parts pigment.) The society's membership believes the Wave Lattice method of painting is superior to all others for purposes of painting images of waves. This society recently won a shadow war with the rival **Shale Brotherhood**, which promoted a variant using *Utarimanshin Descending* pigment. Wave Lattice had all the Dragon-Blooded of the Shale Brotherhood assassinated and is currently attempting to gain access to the divine paperwork revealing which infants the Shale Brotherhood souls were reincarnated into.

A charitable society, the **Children of Sextes Jylis** seeks to provide medical aid to mortal civilians in war zones and in tributaries whose rulers would rather divert resources elsewhere. Founded in the early Second Deliberative Era, most of the society's members are Wood Aspect Dragon-Bloods. Other Exalts with an aptitude for healing and/or bureaucracy claim membership as well.

The Children of Sextes Jylis are out of favor with the Deliberative at the moment, due to the society's opposition to Operation Wyldhand. Now, in protest, the Solar who

leads the society has vowed to withhold aid from anyone adversely affected by the operation.

### SECRET SOCIETIES

Most Exalts have agendas they wish to remain hidden. These agendas often require the aid of other Exalts to carry out. A secret society can be anything from a hidden fraternity of like-minded Exalted who reminisce on important anniversaries to a gang of hard-bitten thieves and murderers who seek to organize their crime.

Four Solars, two Lunars and three Sidereals band together in a secret society dedicated to mourning the passing of Sweet Citrus Crimson, a Fair Folk noble. Sweet Citrus Crimson was an anarchist who sought to destroy the Deliberative and replace it with an altogether more chaotic form of government that he called *aeiga*, the specifics of which he never fully articulated. The nine Celestial Exalts who compose the **Sweet Citrus Crimson Memorial Society** were Sweet Citrus Crimson's executors, and he died so beautifully that they all fell in love with him. Each now strives to make sure Creation never forgets Sweet Citrus Crimson's life or death. One member belongs to the Sheltered Vale Group and inserts subtle references to the raksha in the stories he writes. Another sits on the board of directors for the Bank of Daana'd, encoding Crimson's name and face into the strings of numbers the bank weaves into the Order Conferring Trade Pattern. Every member of the Sweet Citrus Crimson Memorial Society infiltrates some other famous or vital society. The group's ultimate goal is to find a way to bring him back to life (or reproduce him), so they may kill him and witness his death again. They remain undaunted by the impossibility of this task deters, and they're now experimenting with bound unshaped raksha and the new protoshinmaic vortex technology.

Because the society infiltrates so many others, and because its members share information freely among each other and keep no track of favors owed between them, each member is known separately in certain other societies for possessing far-reaching contacts and the ability to get things done in unorthodox ways. A few Exalts know of the society's existence as a whole, but none know its purpose, and its members are highly sought for their connections. Gold-Shadowed Arrow would not look kindly on the society's existence, as its members were supposed to strike the raksha from all histories after they killed him.

An open secret, the **Black Bandana** is a go-between organization connecting many competing martial arts societies. Through the Black Bandana, the Martial Arts World organizes its wars to minimize civilian casualties. Black Bandana members are all experts at concealing their identity, and the convergence of martial arts and anonymity explains why most members of the Black Bandana are Sidereals. The Black Bandana's usual method of operation is to find two martial arts societies with escalating hostilities and infiltrate both sides in the guise of mortal acolytes. The Black Bandana

agents then speak to the leaders of each society and attempt to negotiate some venue in which the societies can fight in private, usually in isolated areas where any devastation of the landscape won't be a concern.

The Black Bandana cannot afford to compromise its neutrality, so its members must never move overtly against any martial arts society, not even those whose methods or goals disgust them. Black Bandana agents often turn a blind eye (or even cover up) the worst crimes of such societies. Even in their positions as agents of the Bureau of Destiny, they cannot bring the wrath of Heaven down on criminals without demonstrating a fundamental conflict of interest. Most Black Bandana agents rationalize these acts, but a few have grown so disillusioned they now seek to eliminate the Black Bandana society to make room for a more just alternative. It remains to be seen what sort of chaos conflicts between martial arts societies would cause without the Black Bandana mediating.

**The Eighth Severance** is a society of Dragon-Blooded assassins. Small, and currently small-time, the Eight Severance is available on the cheap but cannot hope to accomplish the more impressive assassinations of peer societies such as the **Red Pupil**. Its members hire themselves out to even smaller societies and private operators, and have seen some success as a weapon in various *short* shadow wars. Their one advantage is Kai Winter, their Sidereal patron, who manipulates Heaven's records to keep the group hidden. When Kai meets with the Severance leadership, he claims to have a grand destined purpose in mind for the society. In truth, though, he's just in it because he enjoys the illicit feel of getting away with something.

## PURSUIITS

Along with and aside from their assigned roles, the Exalted pursue whatever topics interest them. The Chosen of the Gods have shaped Creation into their playground, where anything that catches their attention is theirs for the taking, be it knowledge, self-perfection or rivalry.

## WYLD-SHAPING

Since the time of the Unfurling Horizon Era, the Exalted have worked to expand the borders of Creation. Early attempts were limited by the need for the Solars' direct involvement, but with advances in magitechnology, that is no longer true. Now ships fitted with great shaping engines journey into the Wyld from the edges of Creation, crystallizing the stuff of chaos into new lands custom built for new habitation. Solars can raise whole communities, people and all, from the Wyld, but it is more common to import folk from other points in Creation to populate such areas, as their connections to people elsewhere in the world help to cement the new lands' reality. In fact, it's a fairly common practice for Sidereals to use Neighborhood Relocation Scheme to drag entire prefabricated communities into newly created lands, which serves to bulwark their stability until the effects of the Order Conferring Trade Pattern permanently tie them

into the fabric of Creation. Such Wyld-shaped communities often offer the chance for young Exalts to grow into their power by birthing new principalities for them to rule, protect and administrate.

## SORCERY

The Era of Dreams is the time when the art of sorcery reached its apex. Whether it is the use of sorcery proper or the application of sorcerous principles toward other endeavors, such as manse construction or the manufacture of artifacts, the practice of the magical arts is a part of the fabric of everyday life for the Chosen. During this period, nearly all Celestial Exalts more than a century or two old have mastered Emerald Circle Sorcery, and many that age have at least dabbled with Sapphire Circle Sorcery. Even among the Dragon-Blooded, sorcery is a commonly taught skill, with the elders of the various Gentes teaching the basics to those younger Terrestrials who show an aptitude in order to better their prospects for advancement in the Deliberative government.

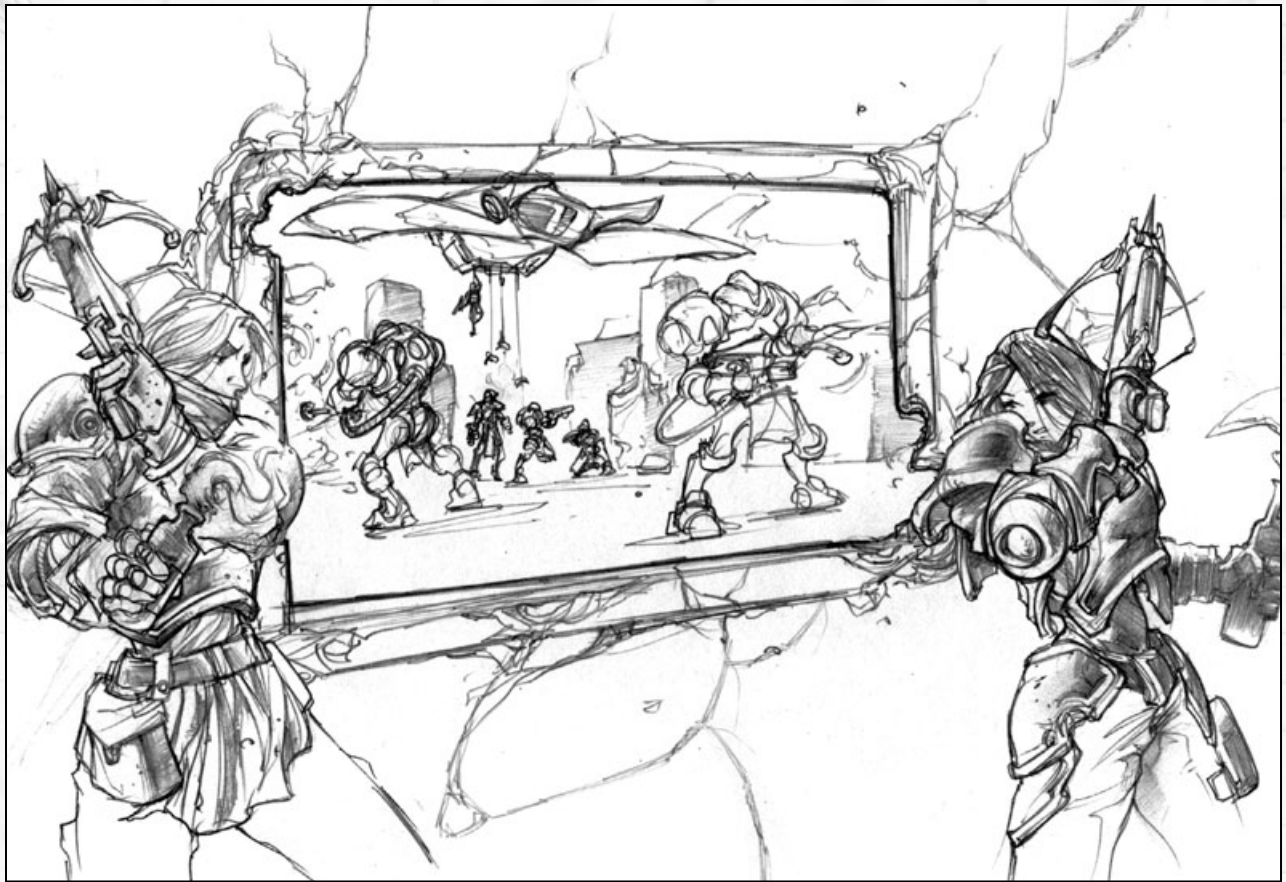
The ubiquity of sorcery has a great deal to do with the number of sorcerous schools operating throughout Creation, from the Academy of Divine Enlightenment in the White City to the Divine School Devonian in Sperimin to Hollow's Fertile Ground Academy to any of the myriad academies that dot Scholars' Court Principality. Also, a number of elder Exalts privately tutor younger favorites in the ways of Essence mastery.

Sorcery is solely the domain of the Exalted in the Age of Splendor. Others may have the ability to learn its techniques, but the Deliberative has made it a capital offense to do so. Sorcery is too dangerous a discipline for the un-Exalted to wield, it's argued, capable as it is of great destruction. It was a gift given to the Exalted themselves, and only they are capable of using it with the necessary wisdom.

## NECROMANCY

The magic of death is a young art, brought out of the Underworld less than two centuries ago by a circle of Exalts still anonymous. Yet already, the Deliberative knows of the art of necromancy, and already, the instructors at Sperimin teach it to select students. Many Exalted savants are excited at the prospect of a new field of endeavor, but others worry about its source and the continued secrecy of those behind its discovery.

Learning necromancy is arduous labor. Would-be students must journey to the restricted Darkmist Isle shadowland and, from there, through the Underworld to a Labyrinth entrance to expose themselves to the Whispers of the Void.



## THE MARTIAL ARTS WORLD

A subculture of sorts, the Martial Arts World is a circuit of gatherings and tournaments where supernatural martial artists practice and display their abilities. Savants have long been aware of the oddity of martial arts magic, one of those few areas where the Solars can compete but are not the undisputed masters. Many martial arts devotees insist supernatural martial arts are the purest expression of disciplined Essence use, open to all—even enlightened mortals. Many devote their whole lives to perfecting themselves through its pursuit.

## WAR

The Exalted were forged for war, and they are its undisputed masters. Although the Era of Dreams is a time of peace, the Chosen of the Gods maintain their fighting prowess only through battle. Laying aside their arms nearly lost the Exalted Creation to its enemies in the Dissolution Invasion and the Aftershock War, and the Thousand Struggles Era proved why preparation for battle remains important to the Exalted even lacking outside enemies.

The current time of peace would seem to limit the options for armed conflict, but there are foes aplenty for Exalts looking for a fight. Most often, such foes are other Exalted. Although the Accord of Broken Ribbons guarantees that any assault on a prefecture of one Solar Prince will be answered by the might of the Army of the

Deliberative, in point of fact, shadow wars are constantly fought via intermediaries with the Exalted instigators hidden behind layers of plausible deniability. And the Broken Ribbons Accord in no way prevents wars being waged against Realm tributaries. Of course, since many of the tributaries are ruled by ancient Exalts of extreme power, some of them Golden Hero Vassals, it behooves any Exalt to fully consider the ramifications of instigating such a conflict. It's also important for the Solar Exalted to remember they are required to spend two out of every five years in Meru—time during which one's enemies can often move unanswered. As a result, conflicts between the Princes of the Earth tend to be short, brutal affairs.

One external foe that does concern the Exalted is the Fair Folk. Ever since the Dissolution Invasion, the Fair Folk have been the most constant threat to Exalted hegemony over Creation. In fact, Operation Wyldhand, conducted a mere 25 years gone, was conducted to simulate the effects of a widespread Fair Folk breakthrough and subsequent static reality failure. It was also the largest armed conflict of Exalted since the Thousand Struggles Era, an exhilarating exercise of the Army of the Deliberative's unfettered might that left millions dead and the landscape scarred. Considered a rousing success by some of the most powerful and belligerent Exalts in the Deliberative, it may well prove to have only whetted the appetite for conflict for

these warriors in this time of peace and lead to renewed hostilities against the courts of the raksha.

Considered a secondary threat to the Realm (if that) are the few survivors of the Primordial servitor races and the forbidden gods who sided with their creators in the Primordial War. Most of the fallen servants of the Primordials have hidden themselves in the depths of the earth to avoid the gaze of the Unconquered Sun and the attention of his Chosen. There, these Darkbroods have become embroiled in seemingly endless conflict with the Mountain Folk. Given their lack of organization and their base of operations deep within the earth, beyond even where the people of the earth usually mine, they pose no real threat to the Realm. As for the forbidden gods, the official position of Heaven is that all of them were hunted down and eliminated in the years after the close of the Primordial War. The Chosen of the Maidens remain unconvinced, however, especially since several of these supposedly dead gods turned up to fight and die in the final battle of the Aftershock War. Although none have been seen since, that doesn't mean they aren't still out there, plotting the overthrow of the Exalted and the gods of Yu-Shan and the return of their masters. Like the servitor race survivors, these beings are viewed as fugitives from justice rather than an actual threat. One Primordial is still unaccounted for, however. Were it to gather these beings and offer them direction, there might well be a repeat of the Aftershock War in the offing—this time with a lot fewer Golden Hero Vassal veterans familiar in the ways of Primordial warfare fighting on the side of the Deliberative.

## SAFARI

The age of exploration is long passed. The Exalted have mapped and charted to the edge of Creation and beyond. There are no more frontiers. Enigmas remain, such as the Sea of Mind, but even they are known enigmas. Exalts who want a change of geography can't explore anymore.

They take exotic vacations instead. The most popular destinations include:

### MALFEAS

Malfeas is the prison of the defeated enemies of the Exalted and the source for much of its occult slave labor. As such, it is a favorite safari destination for the Exalted. The eldest Exalts travel often to Malfeas to gloat over the state of their fallen foes and reminisce about times long past. Sorcerers of all stripes can observe prospective demon slaves in their natural habitats, while artificers may gather all sorts of unique materials for inclusion in artifacts. Young Exalts, on the other hand, sometimes come to see what all the fuss over the long-defeated Primordials is all about. Most are unimpressed by what they find.

### THE UNDERWORLD

Since the larger shadowland of Darkmist Isle has been made off limits by order of the Deliberative, most expeditions launch into the Underworld from a small Blessed

Isle shadowland watched over by a specially bred order of Dragon-Blooded monk-necromancers. Each safari's itinerary is different. Some tour the Underworld capital of Stygia, others sail the bleak but morbidly romantic Sea of Shadows, while still others travel to the Labyrinth to mine for soulsteel to be used as artifact components or to hunt plasmic monstrosities that are unlike anything in Creation.

### THE WYLD

Safaris into the chaotic Wyld are the by far most popular ones among the Exalted. The safari-goers' vessel, usually a retired Wyld-shaping craft, travels the flows of unreality surrounded by a sphere of stable reality. There, they can enjoy the beauty and wonder of the Wyld's depths from a safe remove. Eclipse Castes who attend are allowed to disembark and actually speak with the local raksha. Though no two Wyld safaris are ever the same, they are invariably marvelous, horrifying and exciting.

### BEHEMOTH EXPEDITIONS

The most recent fad in Exalted safaris, this type takes vacationers to behemoths ranging free in Creation's wilderness, where they may do what they wish to them: look at the creatures, hunt them, ride them or whatever else they please. The famed Maker of Rubble was recently slain by a group of Exalted hunters on just such a safari.

## THE SOLAR DELIBERATIVE

The Deliberative is a tool.

Its purpose is to prevent the escalation of disagreements between Solars into vast, Creation-devastating wars. With their personal puissance, their army-rallying powers and their occult might, Solar Exalts in open conflict could murder the gods, crack the world, shatter the sky, release the Yozis, kill everything living and kill everything dead. They might even collapse the Wyld. The Solars were not so potent at history's dawn, but even then, all who'd watched their rise to power could chart its likely future course.

The Deliberative's constituents are aware of its true purpose, but few enjoy discussing or thinking of the Deliberative in those stark terms. Officially, the Deliberative exists to ensure the smooth governance of Creation and the health and fulfillment of all the world's peoples. It does do those things, but at its core, it's the medium through which 300 former mortals check each other's power. Although most Solar Exalted realize it, few dwell on the knowledge that they are simultaneously the grandest, most potent champions and protectors of Creation *and* the most deadly and awful threat poised against it.

The Deliberative is a well-made tool, forged with open eyes by geniuses during a time of raw conflict. It has failed once, but the heirs of those same geniuses fixed it, and it works again. For three millennia, through five eras and well into a sixth, the Deliberative has adapted to succeed at its task. Creation survives. The Solars rule with righteousness and forethought, for the most part. Threats from without and



## THE MANY DELIBERATIVES

When the people of Creation say “the Deliberative,” they usually mean it one of three ways:

**All of Creation’s governing bodies.** In some minds, every government in Creation is “the Deliberative,” save for the ruling bodies of those rare tributaries that turn against Deliberative principalities. (They never last.) A mortal might blame “the Deliberative” for rising tax rates even if her Prince raised them on his own; even if he’s raised them further than the laws of the Clear Glass Accord (p. 47) allow. Most mortals don’t concern themselves with the workings of the highest levels of Creation’s government, and either are unaware of a more specific meaning for the term or don’t care enough to be precise. This is the most common use of the term and also the least accurate.

**The Solar Deliberators.** Every Solar Exalt is a Deliberator. Some who speak of the Deliberative mean, specifically, the Solars who compose the Deliberative’s decision-making body. Most who use “the Deliberative” to mean “the Solar Exalted” intend to exclude those Solars who rule tributaries. Nevertheless, tributary rulers are still Deliberators in name.

**The bureaucratic apparatus and armed forces of the highest level of Creation’s government.** This definition is the most technically correct. “The Deliberative” refers to the 300 Solar Deliberators (but only in their function as Deliberators), as well as the bureaucracy that supports them in their duties as Deliberators (not the bureaucracies of their principalities), most of the governing body of Meru and the Deliberative’s peacekeeping forces (not the armed forces of the principalities). Savants and politicians most often use this definition, and speak of principality governments as separate entities.

Due to historical precedent, “the Army of the Deliberative” traditionally means all the armed forces in Creation under the command of the Solar or Lunar Exalted, even private armies not otherwise affiliated with the Deliberative proper. This usage has been common since the Aftershock War, when all such armed forces came together under the coordination of that era’s Deliberative. It shows no sign of falling out of use, regardless of its inaccuracy.

within are contained. This status quo has grown precarious in the past but always recovered. Even in the aftermath of the Time of Cascading Years, the Deliberative survives and the Solars unite to overcome adversity. Most Deliberators look forward to another 3,000 years of the same, sure that what has worked in the past will continue to work. A few worry that the peace of the Deliberative will not last, that open conflict between the Solar Exalted will ravage Creation once more. Hardly any consider the other Exalted as potential threats.

### STRUCTURE

The 300 Solar Exalted make up the actual decision-making body of the Deliberative. Their choices chart the future course of Creation, and none may gainsay them. The Deliberators conduct the business of government from the Ruling Palace of Meru under the watchful eye of their patron god. The Lunar and Sidereal Exalted typically attend sessions of the Deliberative to advise the Lawgivers on matters that interest or concern them. Many other luminaries, from Dragon-Bloods to Dragon Kings to gods, often attend as well, and all have the right to speak before the Deliberative (even mortals). In the end, however, only the votes of the Solar Exalted matter.

### PARTIES

Over the millennia of its existence, a number of parties representing the political agendas and aspirations of the Law-

givers have arisen. Over time, the power and membership in these parties has ebbed and flowed, with some (the so-called Creationists, for example) having merged with other parties and others (the Deliberatists) having faded away entirely. What follows is a breakdown of the parties as they stand in the Deliberative currently.

### THE CAULDRONISTS

The most controversial activists within the last two centuries, the Cauldronists wish to dismantle Creation.

Or so their opponents claim.

The Cauldronists propose a radical course of action. They wish to create a world as free and mutable as those portions of Creation carved from the Wyld. Using terraforming Charms and technology, the Exalted have pushed the world’s borders far outward, designing the resulting land for maximum utility. The geomancy of terraformed land is easily incorporated into geomantic power grids, the flora and fauna tailored for convenience. Even the landscapes are shaped for human needs.

The original areas of Creation have no such utility. They were created by the Primordials and shaped by the elements. The Solars have done much to shape the world in the time since prehistory’s end, but the Cauldronists see these efforts as repair on an obsolete structure. They wish to begin anew.

So far, Cauldronists have achieved limited success shaping their prefectures to their liking through networks of

Wyld Revocation manes (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 77), but these depend on unaltered underlying geomancy. To re-terraform Creation directly, the Cauldronists wish to begin opening and re-sealing controlled Wyld zones throughout Creation's original geography. Over centuries, this process could eventually encompass all of Creation's original area, with the possible exception of Meru itself. Since deliberately opening a Wyld zone within one's prefecture is illegal without authorization, the Cauldronists have yet to begin this process openly, even in lands they control. The law has not stopped a few Cauldronists from sabotaging their own magical efforts in an effort to create new areas of Wyld, though.

The Cauldronists didn't propose Operation Wyldhand, but it would not have passed without their unanimous support. They took the opportunity to claim many of the Wyld zones left in the exercise's wake, and many of those they haven't claimed directly, they secured some control over through assignment to reclamation teams. (Doing so was not difficult, considering Cauldronists are preeminent terraforming experts.)

Cauldronists tend to be younger Solars entranced by the idea of reshaping all of Creation to their will. They also garner much support from would-be Wyld-shapers who've been denied territory on Creation's border, as well as Solars who are impatient to shape prefectures to their liking but don't wish to give up the land and people they already rule. At the core of the movement are several elder Twilights who fondly remember the height of the Shining Reflection Era and had positive experiences during the Time of Cascading Years.

Their chief opponents are elder Solar survivors of the Time of Cascading Years who had less than positive experiences during that time (of whom Her Most Luminous Excellency and Savior of Creation, Her Exalted Highness Merela is the most prominent). Other staunch opponents include the Creationists and those Solars who believe (and care) that reformatting Creation would anger Gaia.

## THE FAITHFUL

Comprising the oldest surviving party in the Deliberative, the one with the most members and the most veteran Exalts as part of its membership, the Faithful are the moderates of the Deliberative. Its members believe it is the Lawgivers' duty to care for and run Creation, and they believe that duty is being neglected in favor of the pursuit of pleasure, bids for personal glory and shortsighted agendas. These Solars carry out their duties with rigor, attention to detail and an eye toward setting an example for all those who've grown lax in their responsibilities to the world.

Few young Exalts agree with the Faithful agenda, as it advocates placing limits on their burgeoning power and ambition. The party itself has become synonymous with the established order in the Deliberative. The Faithful oppose the Cauldronists on principle, seeing them as radicals who

## THE COPPER WEB

Merela, a Dawn Caste, ruled at the dawn of the Age of Splendor. For the past thousand years, the Most Supreme Hierophant, a Zenith, has ruled the Deliberative in fact if not in name. Now, some few Twilights set the stage for their own ascension to the rulership of Creation.

These clandestine Copper Spiders would see it dismantled, and Creation too. Putting aside religious reverence, the Twilights of the Copper Web conspiracy would make the Unconquered Sun proud by surpassing him. The Unconquered Sun governs a single world. The Copper Web could take Creation and form a hundred worlds from its components... a thousand.

The Copper Web backs the Cauldronists heavily, though many Cauldronists would not support the conspiracy's goals were they fully aware of the situation. Not every Copper Web conspirator is an open Cauldronist, however. Several are publicly members of different movements, opposing the Cauldronists in deliberately incompetent or counterproductive ways. A few don't consider the Cauldronist agenda viable and don't involve themselves in these politics at all.

would tear down what the Solars are sworn to protect. Few Faithful, especially surviving Golden Hero Vassals, wish to trust the fate of Creation to any single leader, trusting only the Deliberative process to check the ambition of their peers. This position serves to put them at odds with the Unionists.

## THE MILITANTS

Made up mainly of young firebrands, backed by a few hard-line Dawn Castes who miss the good old days, the Militants view Creation as a fortress that must be held against its myriad enemies. Those enemies include the Yozi, their spawn, the Darkbroods, the Fair Folk, the dead, and (to a lesser degree) the gods, Exalts and men who oppose the party's agendas. The Militants promote building larger armies and more powerful weapons to prepare the Realm's armed forces for the threats that they're sure are mustering to assault Creation even now. It was the Militants and the Cauldronists together who pushed Operation Wyldhand through the Deliberative, but although the Militants view the war game as a success, they see the loss of 20 million mortal lives as an unacceptable outcome. The Militants believe it will require more powerful battlefield weaponry and a larger complement of better armed and trained troops to avoid a similar outcome in actual combat with Creation's enemies. To that end, party members have been pressuring the Deliberative to allocate more money to military spending. The Militants hope to engage in an operation similar

to Wyldhand once the armed forces have been upgraded to their satisfaction, perhaps this time against the unleashed forces of Malfeas or the Underworld.

The Militants are opposed as radicals by most other parties in the Deliberative. Even the Cauldronists, who supported Wyldhand for different reasons, got what they wanted out of the project and see no need to repeat it.

### THE UNIONISTS

The Unionists are less a single unified party and more a series of small parties, most with only a handful of members. It is the common belief of these parties that Creation would fare better under the leadership of a single Solar ruler, as it did during the Ochre Fountain Era with Solar Queen Merela. The only two Solars who actually possess more than a handful of supporters are the aforementioned Merela and the Most Supreme Hierophant.

As the Unionist groups have little in common with one another except their belief in Creation's need for a single ruler, they oppose one another in the Deliberative as often as they oppose non-Unionists. Only Merela and the Hierophant ever manage to garner enough support from the Unionists as a whole to tip votes one way or another.

### OTHER "PARTIES"

Other so-called parties are as much Solars lumped together by outsiders based upon their political beliefs as they are organized groups with their own agendas. The Divisives, for instance, believe in the innate right of the Solar Exalts to do as they will. Most Divisives rule tributaries, sacrificing their voice in the Deliberative for the freedom to do as they see fit within the confines of their own principalities. A few Divisives are hoary Golden Hero Vassals who can still influence the processes of the Deliberative through the favors they're owed by other Solars. Most, however, are not so mighty, and are content to allow the realm to chart its own course so long as they are left to their own devices. The Fugitives, in contrast, believe that the Deliberative is both corrupt by its nature and unredeemable. They are, therefore, bowing out of the political process to whatever degree they can manage. Many of the Fugitives also rule tributaries, where they are free to exercise their more egalitarian agendas in much the same way as the Divisives exercise their own.

### MOVEMENTS, ISSUES AND AGENDAS

The Solars use the tool of the Deliberative to advance their own plans. Through open discourse, confidential negotiations, trading of votes, bribes and occasional threats, the Deliberative's power blocs maneuver the grand mechanism of government to shape Creation to their will. Without the Deliberative, they'd use more naked means.

Described here are a few of the movements pushed forward in the Deliberative today. Many Solars support two or more of these agendas.

### TRIBUTARY OPPOSITION

Whether due to concerns over the treatment of tributary mortals or objection to the economic advantage afforded by the lessened restrictions under which tributaries operate, a vocal minority of Deliberators seems to want tributaries outlawed. Some call for tributary Princes to be charged under the terms of the Clear Glass Accord.

Their opponents (most of whom benefit economically from the tributaries) argue that a more restrictive Deliberative broke in the past. They say the current flexible model, including the opt-out clause the tributary option provides, will be less likely to produce serious wars between ideological opponents. Tributary supporters have a point. History texts portray the Deliberative of the Shining Reflection Era as stratified. Most agree that Rose Petal Tea's actions alone wouldn't have been enough to spark the Thousand Struggles Era if he hadn't struck in a volatile environment.

This issue is effectively dead. The tributaries are unlikely to go away. Nevertheless, older Solars can often gain political capital among younger Solars by speaking on this topic, promising to make changes that will likely never occur.

### LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE

A constant issue since the time of the First Deliberative is the question of leadership within the organization. There is no official head of the Deliberative, but the Hierophant holds the backing of the majority of the Faithful and of a good majority of Unionists, effectively making any law he wants passed almost a guarantee and anything he strongly opposes impossible to pass. The only significant challenge to his authority over the Deliberative process comes from Solar Queen Merela, who still possesses significant clout with the surviving Golden Hero Vassals and a limited veto that's a holdover concession from the founding of the First Deliberative. Although the Hierophant often plays upon his leadership of the Church of the Unconquered Sun and his spiritual closeness to the Incarna to sway votes, most Lawgivers are aware of the esteem in which the Unconquered Sun holds Merela. They know well that it was to her alone the Unconquered Sun handed over the Crown of Thunders and the Creation-Ruling Mandate. As a result, very few of the Solar Queen's vetoes are overturned.

### MORE FREEDOM FOR THE DRAGON-BLOODED

This issue flares up every few decades, and has again recently. Given the success of the various free Gentes, a number of Solars (typically young Lawgivers who lack Gentes of their own) have suggested that the Realm would be better served if the Terrestrial Exalted were all freed from the oaths that bind them to specific Solar Exalted. The elder Solars are quick to point out that the Gentes were placed under Solar control by the Incarnae themselves, and that to presume to release them from their assigned destinies would defy the will of Heaven. They also suggest that the younger Solars act out of a combination of jealousy that

they lack Dragon-Blooded underlings of their own and hope that their vocal support of the Terrestrial cause will draw such Dragon-Bloods to their service (a suspicion that's not without its merits). Regardless, there is little likelihood that the current state of affairs will ever change as long as the eldest Solars live, and if the history of the free Gentes is any indication, will likely be rendered moot by their deaths.

## NECROMANCY

A concern of the Deliberative since its secrets were wrested from the tombs of the Neverborn by the Black Nadir Concordat, necromancy is considered by some Lawgivers to be a trap laid by the fallen Primordials with which to ensnare those who would wield it. They point out how its energies are the inverse of those of living Creation, while the walking dead monstrosities spawned by its dark power burn at the touch of the holy Zenith Caste. Advocates of the practice ask how this is any different from the way demons summoned by the accepted art of sorcery react to the glory of the Unconquered Sun reflected by his priests. They also point out how sorcery is capable of devastating whole cities or freeing the mightiest souls of the imprisoned Yozis from the depths of Malfeas when wielded by the rash and unwise. They argue that neither art is intrinsically dangerous, only the intent with which either is employed is dangerous.

This issue is effectively deadlocked unless evidence of a definitive corrupting influence can be brought to light. Its mastery offers too great a temptation for jaded Exalts who thought they'd reached a dead end in their mastery of magic.

## SOUL RESEARCH RESTRICTIONS

It has always been against Deliberative law to haphazardly alter or imprison human souls, as the moral justification for Celestial callousness with mortal lives rests on the process of reincarnation. The use of souls in experiments has never been explicitly banned outright, however, as there are a number of Golden Hero Vassals who wish to do so. The practice is tightly regulated, however, and according to current law, only the souls of terrible criminals may be used in experiments or to power devices that require souls to operate. (Tributary Princes are the deciding factor as to what constitutes an offense that allows for such to occur, though.) There has recently been a push in the Deliberative to lighten these prohibitions, coinciding with the rise in popularity of the new discipline of necromancy.

## FREE DEMON OBJECTIONS

Demons are alien and broken, but not all of them seem hostile to Creation. The Yozis are not altogether changed from what they were, and many possess souls expressing aspects of themselves unrelated to their hatred of the gods, the Exalted and the world.

The more eccentric of the Exalted sometimes desire the companionship of a demon, but don't wish to see the

demon's psyche placed under the strain of sorcerous binding. Sometimes an Exalt breaks a demon out of Malfeas and brings it under his protection. Thereafter, the demon's freedom is curtailed only by its patron's strength and will.

In Year 2730, the Deliberative ratified the Treaty of Limbs, which grants these "free" demons certain protections under Creation-wide law. If a Solar patron registers a demon's identity with the Ministry of Malfean Liaison, and a rival sorcerer subsequently summons and enslaves that demon, the patron may make limited war against the sorcerer without violating the Accord of Broken Ribbons. This protection becomes null and void if the patron is subsequently judged guilty of infernalism, in which case the demon is usually hunted down and put to death by Ghost-Eating (at best).

Second Circle Demons make up the largest ranks of the freed demons. First Circle Demons are barely above mortals and elementals in the eyes of the Exalted, while Third Circle Demons are considered too close to the Yozis. There have been notable exceptions, however.

The Treaty of Limbs is still opposed by most of the Faithful, especially its Golden Hero Vassals, and nearly all of the Militants, both of whom believe that those who invite the spawn of the Yozis to share their beds are bringing spies into the heart of the Realm. A recent increase in this practice among the newly Exalted coinciding with the increase in Malfean tourism has brought this issue to the floor of the Deliberative once again.

## MILITARY SPENDING

Military spending has been a hot-button topic since Operation Wyldhand, with the Militants pushing for a huge increase in the budget for the Realm's air, sea and land forces as well as the development of more powerful weapons to be wielded against the enemies at Creation's doorstep. The moderate Faithful put up the main opposition to this increase in spending. They argue that it's been less than a century since *Oasis upon the Edge of Eternity*, the last of the prohibitively expensive Titan-class aerial citadels, was completed and only one of the four massive craft has seen any combat—and that in an engineered war game. More than two thousand years have passed since the Realm's enemies have dared to strike against it in a full-blown war. Given the fact that the Exalted defeated the Primordials without the *Titans*, thousand-forged dragons or the Sword of Creation, the Faithful argue, any major increase in spending at this time would serve no purpose. Unable to garner the votes they need to win the day, the Militants bide their time while key members work to uncover (or fabricate) the proof of a threat needed to convince a majority of Lawgivers to support an increase in spending.

## OTHER ISSUES

The preceding agendas are just a few of the most important ones currently concerning the Deliberative. There are also hundreds of minor issues being debated on the





floor during any given session—issues of public works, arts endowment, prefect oversight, et cetera. Although they are of less immediate gravity, any one of these issues could become the cause of the day or the rider that changes the fate of a bill concerning one of the more important agendas. The savviest Lawgivers, especially the ones lacking the political clout to push through their own major issues, learn to use this system to its best advantage. They spread their schemes across seemingly mundane bills that, when they are all passed, reveal hidden linkages that move things in the direction a young Solar wants but could never have sold to the Deliberative at face value. The sorceress Salina had her great Working approved in just such a fashion.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Behind the obvious party divisions and public agendas lie dozens of circles, cabals, societies and alliances vying for influence over the affairs of Creation. What separates the societies of the Deliberative from the movements and agendas is that once an issue comes to the Deliberative's attention, it becomes a tool for manipulation by every Deliberator. A Solar who doesn't care for the Cauldronist agenda might speak up in its favor to covertly advance an entirely different agenda, perhaps one as simple as currying favor. Movements, issues and agendas are disembodied abstracts, used by the Exalted of the Deliberative to fulfill their own ends. While most agendas have honest supporters (and almost all began with such), every agenda is exploited by those with orthogonal desires.

In contrast, the *societies* of the Deliberative are concrete. Not every society within the Deliberative is openly known, but they all have collections of faces and names, real people with real motives behind them. Smart and experienced Deliberators know the public issues facing the Deliberative are only the curtains behind which the true politics of the world hide.

## THE FAULTLESS PANOPLY OF THE SUN

One of the most influential visible power blocs in the Deliberative since the dawn of the Second Deliberative Era, the circle of the Most Supreme Hierophant consists of the Deliberative's effective leader and three survivors of the Primordial War, plus their much younger cohort, Contentious Sword. Even more so than Solar Queen Merela, the Faultless Panoply of the Sun is the visible symbol of Solar power in Creation.

## INDIVIDUAL EXALTED

Not every influential voice in the Deliberative is backed by a clique, however. Some, such as Solar Queen Merela, are powers in their own right. These ancient Lawgivers trade favors or even simple acknowledgement as currency with younger Deliberators, occasionally upsetting what seem to be the easy ratification of a bill and thwarting it, and sometimes pushing through a bill that none thought could pass.

## DELIBERATIVE LAW

A simple majority vote by the Solar Deliberators is all that's required to ratify a bill and make it law across the Realm. The Solar Queen Merela still possesses veto power over the Deliberative's laws, a concession made to end the civil war out of which the Realm was born. That veto can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote, however, and Merela seldom bothers anymore in matters supported by the Hierophant and his circle. The Hierophant can usually call in enough favors to have the veto undone.

Once a law is passed, the various branches of the Ministries of Order serve to enforce that law in the Realm's many prefectures. Realm tributaries, on the other hand, may choose to apply the law or not at the discretion of their Solar rulers.

Most laws passed by the Deliberative have little bearing on the day-to-day lives of Exalted, especially the Solars, as they are excluded from the laws effects in many cases. Several laws, the so-called Accords, bear special mention, though, as they do govern the behavior of even the Realm's Lawgivers.

### THE ACCORD OF CLEAR GLASS

The Deliberative passed the first Clear Glass Accord during the Shining Reflection Era, and a revised Clear Glass Accord was one of the first proposals the Hierophant brought forth to be ratified by the Second Deliberative during the Long Silence period. The Accord of Clear Glass is a collection of laws describing the minimum standards of mortal living permitted in Creation's principalities. Among other amenities, the Accord outlaws slavery and mandates a minimum level of education and medical care be made available to all mortal principality citizens.

While the Accord of Clear Glass guarantees freedom and medical care, it doesn't guarantee education. It merely ensures the opportunity for education. Solars may not outlaw literacy, and they must make a good-faith attempt to provide sources of education to the populace. Mortals are not punished for illiteracy, though.

Solars who violate the Clear Glass Accord can be subject to fines and, in some cases, the involuntary re-classification of a prefecture as a tributary, the revocation of voting rights, and subsequent unilateral military action should the new tributary ruler not adhere to tributary restrictions.

### THE MANDALA ACCORD

The Mandala Accord guarantees fair reincarnation as the Deliberative defines it. Many mortals think of the Mandala Accord as affecting them, and it does, but it actually

applies to Yu-Shan's Department of Abstract Matters—specifically Taru-Han and her staff. By Solar law, approved by the Unconquered Sun himself, the gods responsible for reincarnation must swiftly and diligently ensure positive reincarnation to mortals who died or lived hard lives in the service of the Deliberative.

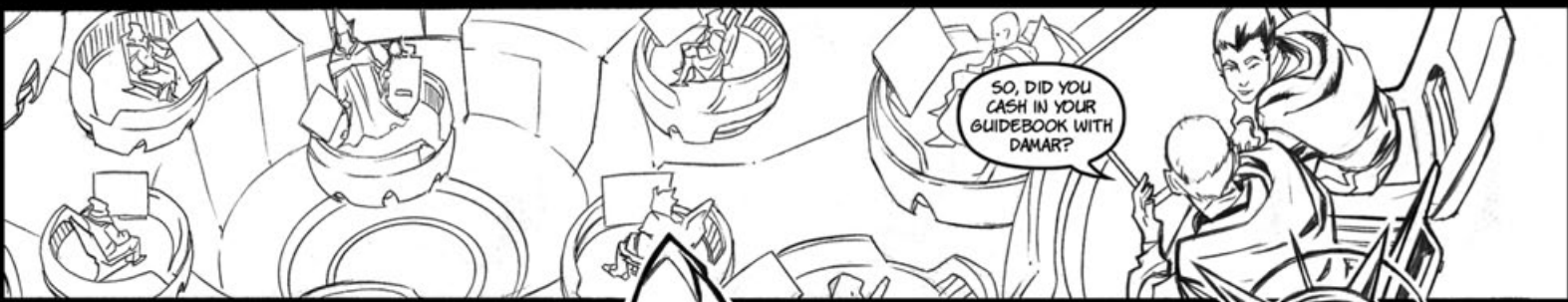
As a document, the Mandala Accord is long, baroque and constantly amended, as the Deliberative regularly redefines the parameters that make someone eligible for a favored reincarnation. While the core of the document remains unchanged, the fickle favor of Creation's Lawgivers has stuffed it with much pointless flock. For example, women with silver hair and green eyes who die between the ages of 60 and 80 have received favorable consideration over brown-haired women for two centuries, because a young Solar wished favorable recommendation for all who remind her of her mother. This sort of thing is normal, and the Deliberative usually allows such minor clauses without incident, voting them out when it's next convenient. The average duration of a pointless Mandala clause is two centuries, though a few do survive the original document's drafting. As a result of this practice, "Mandala clause" has entered Deliberator slang. It refers to any pointless, essentially harmless law included to humor a young Deliberator.

## THE MINISTRIES OF ORDER

The Ministries of Order is a collective term used to describe the bureaucracy that governs the Realm. Made up of thousands of Dragon-Blooded and hundreds of thousands of mortal employees, the Ministries institute the Deliberative's laws and policies and maintain the Realm's infrastructure. From the Ministry of Transportation to the Ministry of Education and Proper Childcare, from the Ministry of Realm Peacekeepers to the Ministry of Civic Information and Administrative Necessities, the various Ministries of Order make up the face of the Deliberative to the common folk of the Creation.

## THE ARMY OF THE DELIBERATIVE

As mentioned earlier, "the Army of the Deliberative" is a specialized term predating the Second Deliberative Era (dating back to the Unfurling Horizon Era, in fact). It refers to all the armed forces controlled by Exalts loyal to the Deliberative, even if those armies aren't under the Deliberative's direct control. The armed forces directly under Deliberative control are usually called the Deliberative Sentinel Forces. Those forces follow the same pattern of organization as most principality armed forces, though.



SO, DID YOU CASH IN YOUR GUIDEBOOK WITH DAMAR?

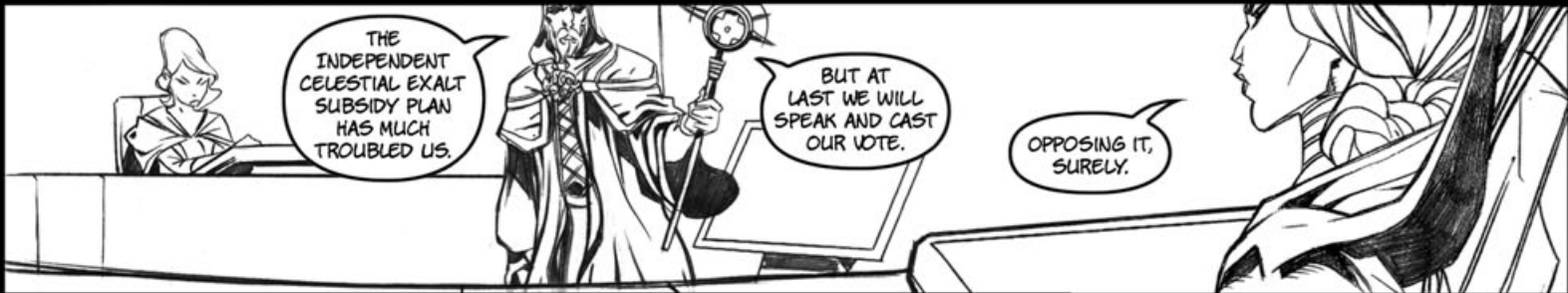


HONORED PEERS, WE COME BEFORE YOU AFTER MUCH PRAYER AND MEDITATION.



NAH. NO WAY HE'S GOING TO VOTE AGAINST THE HIEROPHANT ON THIS.

ANYBODY WANT TO TRADE SEATS?



THE INDEPENDENT CELESTIAL EXALT SUBSIDY PLAN HAS MUCH TROUBLED US.

BUT AT LAST WE WILL SPEAK AND CAST OUR VOTE.

OPPOSING IT, SURELY.



ON THE CONTRARY, QUEEN MERELA, WE HAVE CHOSEN TO SUPPORT IT.

WHAT?



WE HAVE SPOKEN WITH THE UNCONQUERED SUN, AND HE AGREES.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# THE BLESSED ISLE

It's the adopted homeland of the Exalted, the grand jewel of the gods, the very heart of Creation itself. To breathe the air of the Blessed Isle is to receive the graces of the gods. To tread even the least of its paths is an act of worship. To stand at the Eternal Temple of the Golden Bull and watch the Lawgivers raise their arms to the Unconquered Sun is to understand the destiny of Creation.

The Blessed Isle was drawn from the dreams of the Primordials in the blink of an eminent eye. It is the seed from which the rest of Creation grew and the anchor that prevents the elemental poles from tearing Creation asunder. Echoes of all the elements can be found here. Even traces of the Wyld, in the form of the Mountain Folk, are contained within the Blessed Isle. It is, in many ways, a Creation within the Creation.

Inhabited for many thousands of years, the Blessed Isle has been shaped and re-shaped by many hands. Created by the Primordials as a home for the gods, it was manipulated and transformed during the gods' long tenancy. When the gods' Exalted creations overthrew the Primordials, the gods moved into better real estate and gave the Blessed Isle to their servants. The Exalted cherish this gift and have made their own changes to the Isle to suit their desires.

Although there are many hunting preserves, gardens, rivers and chill, deep lakes that imitate nature, very little on the Blessed Isle has not been carefully cultivated by generations of Essence-wielding inhabitants. Nothing on the Blessed Isle is left to chance. Oversight by the visionary Sidereals, careful record keeping by I AM, and the whims of the powerful Exalted control almost every aspect of the Isle, from the weather to plant growth to the very shape of the mortals who are blessed enough to live there.

In keeping with the Exalted ideals of agrarian society, much of the Blessed Isle is dedicated to orchards, farmlands, ranches and botanical gardens. These estates are overseen directly by Exalted owners, and their lands are spectacular fantasies of farms, orchards and ranches—not simple rice paddies or goat farms. Trees imbued with the Essence of Earth grow gems for fruit, carnivorous steeds are bred as mounts for Solar warriors, and crops are planted in ornate patterns to be admired from skyships. Rare herbs, unique animals and fantastically pruned trees grow more abundantly than weeds—themselves a rarity on the Blessed Isle.

For many, travel to the Blessed Isle is a pilgrimage and a reward for a lifetime of service and worship of the Exalted. The land looms large in myth and story: In popular





stories and songs transmitted by I AM, the Blessed Isle is a golden paradise where joy infuses the very air and the Exalted rain down blessings on every leaf and flower. The Blessed Isle is the religious as well as the political center of civilized Creation.

As a result, a Creation-wide trade in charms made from granite from Mount Meru or water supposedly drawn from various sacred wells and streams on the Isle thrives. Most of the claims on which this trade are based are less than accurate. (If all the rocks historically promised to be from Mount Meru were gathered into one place, the pile would rise taller than the peak it supposedly came from.) Many thaumaturges do, however, claim that materials from the Blessed Isle are more powerful and responsive to Essence manipulation than materials from other parts of Creation are. Merchants who travel to and from the Isle often have a side business trading stone beads, wooden charms and herbs produced there.

## THE BLESSED LIFE

There is no want on the Blessed Isle, no hunger, no cold—unless scheduled by the Ministry of Weather—no shadow of war. The glories of the Age of Splendor rise to their most magnificent heights on the Blessed Isle, and the Exalted shower their blessings down on those who are chosen to live among them.

The Blessed Isle is the center of a Creation-wide trade nexus, so not only are staples plentiful, but every rare fruit, sensuous spice, beautiful fabric and unusual beast can be purchased here as well. Even the peasants who work the Exalted estates feast daily on meat, enjoy fruit grown near the Elemental Poles—or in local Essence-regulated greenhouses—and sample stranger delicacies that most of the mortal masses only dream of. Medical care for even the lowest wanderer is freely available at any Total Rejuvenation Hospital, not to mention the fact that no Exalt would allow his own servants to become ill. (That would reflect badly on the Exalt's skill at maintaining a proper household.) Entertainment, information, communication and assistance through I AM is all readily available, and the basic necessities of life are free—and, on the Blessed Isle, the basic necessities outshine the luxuries of many other cities in Creation.

Glorious processions and celebrations are common on the Blessed Isle, and they can last for days or even weeks. Not only are the great holidays such as Calibration and Ascendancy celebrated all over the Island, but the Exalted compete with each other to present the most lavish Midsummer feasts or nameday parties for their children. Unlike everywhere else in Creation, the Celestial Exalted are a common presence on the Isle. Mortals here can interact daily with those who approach the gods in grandeur and power.

This closeness to the Exalted can bring great riches to these around them, but it can also be a terrible burden. The lords of Creation demand much from the mortals they sometimes equate to little more than cattle, and those who

## THE GREAT COAST ROAD

Built by the Exalted just after the founding of the First Deliberative in order to facilitate human habitation, the Great Coast Road encircles the entire Blessed Isle. Its brilliant white-glass pavement is the original from which all the great roads of the First Age are copied. It's always clean, perfectly maintained and free of debris, and all its traffic is monitored and controlled personally by the god called the Ancient of Stone Journeys. The god also oversees a host of lesser spirits who monitor the roads, canals and pagoda skyways within the White City, though he must tread carefully within the city bounds in order to maintain proper respect regarding Ameru, the city god.

The Ancient of Stone Journeys knows the importance of his duties, and he expects proper respect for it. Wise travelers make regular offerings to him and treat the road—and fellow travelers—with great respect. The god enjoys traveling on his road in disguise, asking for alms or a space beside someone's campfire, and those who treat him rudely will find their trips along the road endlessly delayed and detoured. The Ancient of Stone Journeys prioritizes the travelers on his roads, and the Exalted are almost always given priority over everything else—including emergency equipment and shipments of medicine. Even the Exalted are not exempt to his anger, however. A few overly arrogant Solars or prideful Sidereals have found themselves routed to the slow lanes of the road while grain transports passed them by.

The road is always crowded, side to side and several leagues into the air where skyships, skiffs and flying beasts take advantage of the Essence currents that make travel along and above the road easier. Huge, automatically controlled freight vehicles race along the road, hovering a few feet off the surface and powered by Essence generated by the road itself.

When seen at official functions, the Ancient of Stone Journeys resembles a tall, old man carrying a huge staff of sycamore wood—a tree that is sacred to him—and wearing traveling robes and white-jade boots. He is almost always on the road itself, but he does have a main shrine in Meru that connects to his rather simple residence in Yu-Shan. (For more information on the Ancient of Stone Journeys, see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle**, p. 154.)

live on the Blessed Isle are constantly reminded of their lowly place. Millions of mortals live on the Blessed Isle, but almost every one is bound in service to a Celestial Exalted lord. Few mortals own land on the Isle or even wander its roads without purpose. Every mortal resident pledged to an Exalt on the Blessed Isle wears the badge of his Exalted master—be it a bangle or collar stamped with a household crest, or a skin pattern or artificial birthmark passed from one generation to the next. For most mortals, their station in life is fixed, as are the tasks they will perform all their lives. Every peasant in every field, every urchin running alongside a parade (remaining obediently on their restricted paths), is secure in the knowledge that he was specially selected by an Exalted lord and can carry himself with the pride of one chosen for greatness. The mortal inhabitants of the Blessed Isle do not easily accept newcomers, even those brought by newly reborn Exalted. Disdain for new arrivals can last for generations.

Among the wonders that the Exalted lavish on their servants are blessings that can transform mortals into creatures better suited to unique service in an Exalted retinue or household. Various Shaping Charms can warp mortal Essence, binding it with the Essence of birds or fish or trees. Those who are so changed take on superhuman aspects and take pride in these badges of special attention.

The Dragon-Bloods who live on the Blessed Isle might be among the least of the Exalted, but they are also the administrative cogs that keeps civilization running smoothly. They oversee grand public-works projects, such as the Black Snake Dam, and implement their Exalted lords' every wish. They command hundreds, or thousands, of lesser servants in an organizational hierarchy that echoes the natural order of life: from the gods, to the Celestial Exalted, to the Terrestrial Exalts, to the mortals and beasts of Creation. The Dragon-Blooded must also intercede between their Celestial masters and the mortal world when confusion or miscommunication occurs, and they enforce Deliberative directives and proper conduct among the lower creatures with skill and enthusiasm. Unless a Celestial Exalt has made a particular effort otherwise, her Dragon-Blooded servants always accompany her on the Blessed Isle.

Even with all their extravagant magitechnical amenities, Exalted estates require many servants. The farmlands and orchards that surround the huge mansions of the Celestial Exalted need armies of peasants to maintain. Dragon-Blooded overseers coordinate these masses with the intensity of general marshaling their troops.

A Solar Exalt may boast of her farmland estate, but their homes bear very little resemblance to the farmlands and ranches found in the RPCs elsewhere. The Essence-enriched

soil of the Blessed Isle is incredibly vital, consistently producing multiple harvests throughout the year. A carelessly dropped green twig is likely to sprout leaves and branches in a season if left alone. Fields are laid out with military precision, and rather than simple fields of rice, Exalted fields grow sacred golden poppies or the sweet, rare black rice reserved only for highly refined Exalted palates. Crops are tended and harvested by hand or by specially designed automatons. Each fruit and vegetable is lavished with individual attention and care.

Orchards or fields are frequently designed to create fantastic landscapes. Red amaranth, golden poppies and black rice fields may be planted in miles-long patterns that reveal the symbol of the Unconquered Sun or the household crest of their Exalted owners, when viewed from a sky chariot or skiff.

Exalts who prefer to raise beasts rather than plants maintain ranches of exotic creatures—many of whom are being manipulated into even more fantastic forms by thaumaturgy or Exalted blessings. Creatures created by breeders on the Blessed Isle can be purely decorative, such as the hearth cat (see *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle*, p. 160), or designed to aid the Exalted in their administration and control of Creation, such as the simhata (see *Exalted*, p. 349). Overly curious breeders sometimes attempt to push the capacity of living creatures beyond their limits, and their pathetic failures are abandoned at the Conservancy of Unexpected Life Forms.

Hunting estates are popular among the Lunar Exalted, who sometimes find the urban civilization of Meru oppressive. Such estates have the look of wilderness but are as carefully tended and controlled as the most artificial city garden. Some such estates are designed to mimic environments found elsewhere in Creation, such as the freezing tundra of the North or the burning sands of the South. Careful control and scheduling of the climate-controlling sky mantis infrastructure (and special dispensation from the Bureau of Seasons) allows for weather that is normally banned on the Blessed Isle, such as blizzards or monsoons. Foreign landscapes can be mimicked down to the least detail of grass, stream or rock pattern. In fact, some house-proud Exalted informally compete to create the most exact replicas of unique or unusual terrain found elsewhere in Creation. They spare no effort or expense to outdo their neighbors—importing trees, soil, rock, beasts and people in their efforts to duplicate famous foreign landscapes. With the proper permits from the Celestial Housing Authority, even the Essence of the Isle may be tweaked to better imitate the Essence of the locations they are mimicking.

## MOUNT MERU

Towering above even the grandest Exalted structure is Mount Meru, the lynchpin that holds the entire span of Creation together. It rises up from the heart of the Blessed Isle, the highest mountain in Creation—the very axis of

## GOLDEN POPPIES

These huge, glorious plants grow only on the Blessed Isle and bloom only during the month of Resplendent Fire. The plants themselves are surprisingly shaggy looking, but their flowers more than make up for it. Each bloom is about the size of a child's head, and the five papery petals are golden yellow, with a darker orange heart. Horticulturists don't grow these plants just for beauty, though. When the blooms die, the cup-shaped seed pod is harvested and the hundreds of seeds within extracted and pounded into a thick paste. This sticky crimson paste can be smoked or eaten, to delightful effect. It produces a pleasant, vaguely hallucinatory high that generally lasts for (5 – Stamina) hours per dose, minimum one hour. In addition, it stimulates one's Essence, causing what looks to be a major Essence flare without the Exalted user having to spend any motes. During that time, the Exalt's iconic anima banner appears and becomes animate. Animal auras swoop, gambol and pantomime fierce vocalizations. Runic and symbolic sigils shift in color and meaning. An Exalt can influence the phantasmagoria, but not completely control it. Experienced Solar users of the golden poppy often engage in mock icon battles or contests with friends. Poppy use is a pleasant, harmless distraction, and the plant is plentiful enough to supply even the most voracious addiction. Rumors that long-term use results in an iconic anima that seems disturbingly malevolent when the Exalt activates it legitimately, even when the Exalt is completely sober, are dismissed as envious whining.

Damage: 4B/hr Toxicity: 3 Tolerance: (Stamina)/1 month Penalty: -2 Resources: 4

the world. All other mountains in Creation, no matter how magnificent, how deadly or how tall are pale imitations of the Elemental Pole of Earth. It is the tallest peak in Creation and, at its highest point, seems nearly to pierce the veil of sky. The tides of Essence rise high on the mountain. Some demesnes there are so powerful, so wild, that even the Exalts at the height of their power have been unable to cap them, and some of the most powerful manses in Creation rest on the heights of Mount Meru.

The slopes of the Blessed Mountain are entirely consumed by the great city of Meru—also called the Exalted City or the White City—which surrounds the entire mountain and rises all the way to the summit. The city has buried Mount Meru natural craggy geology beneath towers of luminous glass, spires of white jade, adamant thoroughfares and the millions of people who live there. Any who wish to travel

to the higher peaks of the mountain must travel through the greatest city of Creation to do so. Manses and estates of the most powerful of the Exalted—such as senior members of the Deliberative—can be found here, each of them like a priceless jewel. Botanical gardens are found here as well, with armies of dedicated Wood-aspected Dragon-Bloods and mortal peasants watching over rare plants and Essence manipulated projects of interested Celestial Exalts.

It is believed that every type of gem, mineral and stone found anywhere in Creation can also be found on, or within, the Blessed Mountain. Curious Exalts have found everything from the rough, red sandstone of the South to the delicate ice opals of the North somewhere on Mount Meru. All the magical materials (with the exception of soulsteel) and every color of jade can be mined from the mountain. Even deposits of ancient starmetal are hidden amid the mountain's highest, most dangerous peaks.

### AMERU

The god of the grandest city in Creation has a seat of honor in the galleries of the Deliberative. He can't vote, but wise politicians take his advice and preferences into account, for there are few things less comfortable than living in a city whose tutelary god is displeased with you. Ameru has the ability to temporarily restrict or increase the flow of Essence within the city, affecting everything from indoor plumbing to public transportation. The high levels of activity in the city draw his attention from the Games of Divinity, and he's present in Creation more often than many other gods of equivalent power.

### THE MIDDLE HEIGHTS

Beyond the lower slopes, the original terrain of Mount Meru was rougher and wilder, like the lower slopes, though it too has been buried within the White City. It is now replaced by governmental buildings, golden ground-level roads and elegantly designed parks that do not resemble the original environment at all.

Seasons on the Blessed Isle do not change drastically, for the Elemental Pole of Earth helps hold the land in perfect, static balance. Instead the only real winter is found on the mid slopes of Mount Meru. The forests are at their summer height at lower elevations, then change as the altitude rises to brilliant fall reds and golds, then to severe winter, where pines and other evergreens dominate until even the sturdy alpine plants fade away at the tree line.

Here, the Exalted—especially the Lunars—prefer to locate their local offices, partially separated from the White City by natural geology and detours in the public transporta-

tion nets. There are also a few private nature preserves such as Razor Heights, where the native wildlife of the mountain is allowed to roam in relative safety, unless a bored Lunar or Solar Exalt decides to go on a hunting spree.

### THE HEIGHTS

Here, the Elemental Pole of Earth is stripped down to its purest form. Huge Essence flows can put even the Exalted in danger, and some of the demesnes here are so powerful they cannot be capped. The headwaters for all the rivers on the Blessed Isle originate here, at the Birthplace of Rivers Demesne, watched over by minor gods who have sworn oaths of service to the Deliberative. Strangely, many of the guardian gods here breed with the native animals roaming Mount Meru. Of the many varieties of God-Blooded animals that result from such unions, the stone-tusked boars of the pine forests are a favorite—if risky—prey for Lunar hunting parties.

It is only here, of all places on the Blessed Isle, that prehistoric deposits of starmetal can still be found. Young Sidereal Exalts sometimes spend years, as part of their apprenticeship, mining for the smallest crumb of that rare material. It is here, as well, that the Exalted maintain the grandest and most powerful of their temples—the Eternal Temple of the Golden Bull.

At the very peak of the Blessed Mountain, its very highest point, all the power of the Elemental Pole of Earth is gathered into a single, luminous pearl. When it grows large enough, it spears upward in a brilliant display of pure Essence to shatter into a stunning prismatic spray of color and power.

### THE WYLD ON THE ISLE

Wyld effects and Wyld-based technology are not suitable for use at the most stable point of Creation, the Elemental Pole of Earth. Mount Meru suppresses most Wyld effects completely. Wyld effects on the Blessed Isle can only be reliably created in Essence-shielded laboratories or manses, or by the most powerful Exalted. Wyld-fueled constructs, reality generators and similar Wyld manipulations do not work well on the Blessed Isle.

In addition, most of these most dangerous of reality-warping technologies and weapons are banned on the Blessed Isle. Experiments using these items take place in less populous, more flexible and more isolated areas of Creation. Stable Wyld creations and items will not be damaged if they travel to the Blessed Isle, but the Deliberative might have something to say about bringing a powerful Wyld weapon or raksha to the political and religious center of the First Age.





## EXALTED ESTATES

Turning away from the Blessed Mountain, passing through the White City, the Blessed Isle stretches out for hundreds of miles in all directions. Everything upon the Isle, from land to sea to sky, is controlled and possessed by the Exalted. Most Solars, and many Lunar Exalted, have private estates on the Blessed Isle, aside from any principalities or tributaries they rule elsewhere in Creation.

Every Solar Exalt is required by law to spend two out of five years living on the Blessed Isle, so they are all provided elegant homes within the great city of Meru. No self-respecting Exalt is content with just his simple government lodging, however, no matter how encrusted with gems it might be. Therefore, most Solar Exalts have estates elsewhere on the Isle and they travel via skycraft, sorcery, boat or gates of auspicious passage between their island homes and their Meru residences. Because the Celestial Exalted live for millennia, estates rarely change ownership. Even if a Solar Exalt does die, she can have made legal arrangements to see that her rural estate remains held in trust for her reincarnated return.

Most estates on the Blessed Isle are also manses, most frequently Earth-aspected ones, but other aspects exist in great numbers as well. Those manses with Celestial aspects are reserved for older, more powerful Exalts, as are manses of more than three dots.

What goes on in an Exalt's private estate is solely the responsibility of the owner. No matter what terrible vices

the estate's owner indulges in private, the Deliberative will not intervene. Should any Exalted landowner permit her personal experiments of transforming mortals into trees or using torture to create beautiful music become public, the Deliberative is quite prepared to deny any previous knowledge, react with shock and horror and then make an example of the Exalt who has fallen so horribly far from the ideals of her caste and station in life.

Estates are huge swaths of land, each its own miniature kingdom, within one of the 12 larger dominions of the Blessed Isle (a dominion being the governmental equivalent of a province anywhere else in Creation). Entire towns or cities may be the personal property of a single Exalt, located on her personal estate. Generations of mortal peasants are born and die within their lord's borders, and Dragon-Blooded client Gentes live within their own compounds and training grounds, preparing to serve the Exalted lord upon whose lands they live. Because these estates are the private, personal property of an individual Exalt, no taxes are collected from them and many of the laws regarding human rights and so on do not apply, just as if they were tributaries.

## TO THE EAST

The two dominions along the eastern quarter of the Blessed Isle spectacularly surpass the greatest fantasies of wealth, beauty, power and privilege. The lazuli-blue Dawn River flows through beautifully landscaped lowland estates

and finally empties into Crane Bay on the easternmost edge of the Isle. The river, the lands along it and the bay are all under close watch by the Celestial Housing Authority, for beneath and along the river and woven through the very ground of the east are the huge Essence flows used to control the terrible weapon called the Sword of Creation.

Although this web of Essence permeates the entire Isle, natural geologic structures guide it close to the surface in the east, and the Exalted have carefully groomed and tamed its flows. Only the stabilizing effect of the Elemental Pole of Earth allows so much power to exist in one place without ripping the land asunder. The greatest Essence flow lies beneath the Dawn River, flowing from Mount Meru down to Crane Bay and out into the sea. The power attracts hundreds of spirits and gods, who hover over, swim within or simply sip at the Essence overflow. In turn, thousands of God-Tending Itinerants come to make offerings to the gods and the fantastically transformed river itself. The entire span of the river, from the bay to nearly its source are thick with shrines, offering stones, tourist boats and harried members of the Ministry of Transportation trying to keep order. Tiny vials of water from the Dawn River are popular souvenirs. Unless called upon to work along the river, Exalts typically avoid it because of its crowded, plebeian atmosphere.

The eastern part of the Blessed Isle is the most populous and the only area where non-natives are common. Crane Bay is the major port between the Isle and the wealthy East, and much of Creation's wealth and privilege flows into the Blessed Isle through the enormous port that covers all parts of the bay except those areas designated as natural preserves by the Ministry of the Interior.

## ANKTOR DOMINION

Traveling from Meru east to Crane Bay means crossing into the inland dominion of Anktor. The Dawn River flows through it, and this artery of transport brings great wealth to the dominion. Anktor is a land of rolling hills, gentle streams, expansive and civilized private Exalted estates and pleasantly serene small cities.

Because it is so well placed, convenient for everything from boats and transpods to skyships, Anktor dominion has a fairly cosmopolitan flavor. There are a dozen or so large, old Exalted estates in the dominion, and Anktor's daimyo keeps the peace by keeping his nose out of other people's business. It works well for everyone.

Travelers are common in the dominion, and there is a brisk trade in divine goods, wealth, amusements, favors and influence. Many God-Tending Itinerants pass through as they follow the spirits who play within the Essence-infused currents of the Dawn River. Shrines to a thousand and one different gods—and to the Exalted who live there—dot the landscape, and Essence markers indicate borders between various Exalted estates. The countryside itself is very fertile, full of the kind of ornately landscaped fields the Exalted prefer for their "farms." Many of the orchards, fields and seemingly

natural features have been planned to take advantage of geomantic influences or to display the owners' household seals when viewed from the air. When foreigners think of the Blessed Isle, or I AM provides publicity shots, this is frequently the dominion that is used.

## THE VALLEY OF THE CRYSTAL SONGBIRDS

This Essence-veiled valley is a well-kept Exalted secret, and not because of any military might or political worth. Beloved Flower, the mistress of this powerful estate, hides what she's done there, though what she has created is too magnificent and beautiful to destroy.

The valley is located near the northeastern foothills of Meru, so its secrecy depends on no one looking for it. More accurately, it depends on no one choosing to make public what they know about it. Beloved Flower is a Twilight Caste Exalt of great age and power, one of the survivors of the war against the Primordials. She's a prideful, extraordinarily lovely woman who lost her Lunar mate centuries ago, along with many friends and companions. (She has turned away from the current incarnation of her mate, sending him to maintain her principality in the outer areas of Creation's Northeast, and he takes out his rejection and frustration on the natives there.) Power, bitterness and grief have frozen Beloved Flower's heart, and she pursues what pleasures she chooses under the belief that, for all she has lost, she deserves whatever she wants. The modern world holds no interest for Beloved Flower. She has turned inward and rarely leaves her manse. She trades her vote in the Deliberative for protection and favors, unconcerned with anything that actually happens in session. All of her energies are focused toward her current pet project.

Regarding that project, Beloved Flower is interested in transforming bits and pieces of the Blessed Isle into something it was not originally intended to be. Unlike her associates, however, she is not copying some distant land but spinning a miniature Creation out of her imagination. Beloved Flower's imagination is a thing of wonder, beauty and despair.

Over the past several centuries, Beloved Flower has used her Wyld-shaping abilities to tweak the Essence of her estate so much that it bears little resemblance to the original demesne on which it was built. Here, the natural order of earth and wood, air and water are not quite as they should be. Grass and flowers certainly grow, but they are made of delicately spun strands of jade, flakes of carnelian and opal, and miraculous alloys of glass and jewels. The trees growing in her valley bear leaves of bloodstone and fruits of quartz or citrine. Insects of iridescent glass—self-replicating automatons of her design—flit from stone flower to crystal bush. Birds with feathers of silver and gold roost in the stone trees. And these plants and creatures are all alive, infused with the animate Essence normally found in true animals and plants. Beloved Flower need not fear the weaknesses of flesh and blood, for nothing of her creation ages or falls ill. Every birdsong, every leaf, every blossom, is perfect.

Yet for all the beauty she has created, some would say Beloved Flower has gone too far.

There are a few small towns in her valley, along with her iridescent glass manse, and the peasants under her care labor in her fields of marble and stone. They consume rice made of cloudy quartz and apples of golden glass. This fare sustains them because they too have been changed to suit their mistress's preferences. The mortals here—who are no longer truly mortal—are as perfect and polished as tawny agate or as fair as milk glass. Using powerful Charms, the Earth-aspected manse she controls and very unethical techniques, Beloved Flower has stripped her peasants of their flesh-and-blood shells and trapped their souls in constructions of glass and crystal. While such a transformation might break the mortal mind, Beloved Flower has also wiped their memories of their previous lives away. The beautiful creations found on her lands believe they have always been this way, that this is the natural order of the world. In fact, the only time one of her unchanged peasants managed to escape from his confinement within Beloved Flower's manse, the stone villagers she'd already made helped re-capture the refugee, thinking he was some sort of pathetic misbegotten monster that Beloved Flower would of its decaying forms.

Beloved Flower has amassed a large collection of valuable artifacts designed to help her in her work, some of which were former military tools—particularly ones that control and manipulate Wyld energies. She keeps her remaining peasants confined in underground chambers in her manse, awaiting their turn in her laboratories where she will sift out their souls and discard the dross of flesh and bone and blood. The only drawback to her design is that the mortals cannot yet breed in their new forms. Beloved Flower works day and night to solve this vexing problem.

All of Beloved Flower's lands are amazingly lovely—a, perfect immortal paradise that some Exalted have compared (inaccurately) to Yu-Shan. Her Dragon-Blooded servants have been bound by powerful oaths not to talk about her activities, and her connections among her peers insulate her against having to defend her research in front of the Deliberative. Fortunately, many who have seen her creations but not studied them closely assume that she is simply using powerful illusions or building incredibly complicated automatons. The borders of her estates are sheathed in Essence barriers that keep the uninvited from stumbling across her home and the powerful Elemental Pole of Earth from muting her Charms.

Beloved Flower's manse is constructed entirely of glass alloyed with adamant. Various transparent, translucent or mistily opaque, it can be exquisite or disorienting depending on her mood. Fragmented, half-seen reflections of Beloved Flower dance along the walls of the manse. The manse also has a unique power that allows anyone attuned to it to travel from one reflective surface to another instantaneously, seeming to step right out of her own reflection.

### CRANE DOMINION

Arguably the wealthiest Blessed Isle dominion, Crane Dominion is administered Hanepta Wat. Wat is an old, canny, tired Solar Exalt of the Eclipse Caste whose oaths maintain the peace and prosperity of Crane Dominion. Much of his power is tied up in managing the gods that are drawn to the Dawn River, and to the fretful god of Crane Bay itself. With these oaths, he can control access to and from the bay, as well as the flow of the Dawn River and—to a limited extent—the strong Essence flows that drain from Mount Meru down to the bay.

His care and experience means that Crane Dominion is peaceful, prosperous, busy and rather plebeian. The largest population center is the vast port and city surrounding Crane Bay, and Hanepta Wat's Dragon-Blooded retainers oversee the complicated tariff, travel and transport laws governing access to and from the Blessed Isle.

### CRANE BAY

This city is the major trading port of the Blessed Isle. Even the deepwater bays of the West do not exceed Crane Bay for number of travelers, tons of goods or sheer wealth that passes through the port that takes up the entire bay several miles deep in a bustling, cosmopolitan city.

Crane Bay can handle nearly 100 of the massive, deep-water, automaton-piloted cargo ships of the Deliberative, but its services are not limited to watercraft. Airship mooring towers grow like forests from the inland side of the Bay, and the Great Coast Road brings land and local air traffic to and from the city. Trade and traffic are heavy day and night, and while the great thoroughfares of the city are orderly and controlled, disorder and confusion on the back streets and alleyways occasionally disrupts the otherwise tight organization. Hanepta Wat intentionally allows for a certain level of rowdy behavior, however, believing that by allowing the lower classes an outlet for unsavory behavior, they believe themselves to have adequate free will and are less likely to be resistant to the natural rule of the Celestial Exalted. He uses mind-controlling Charms and spies to monitor the factions and cults that crop up in Crane Bay, of course, nursing those that seem useful and eradicating ones that are potentially dangerous.

The Ministries of Order have satellite offices here, particularly the Ministry of Weather, and the foremost customs house of the Order Conferring Trade Pattern is here as well. (Both are critical to the smooth functioning—and profit—of the bay.) The Ministry of Civic Information and Administrative Necessities also has extensive offices here to assist newly reincarnated Exalted—most of whom come through Crane Bay if they arrive by boat or airship. The Ministry of the Interior maintains huge public shrines to a variety of gods, to control the Essence that flows from the Dawn River, to placate the Ancient of Stone Journeys and to make sure the gods are adequately performing their proper actions at the proper time.



## THE FORTRESS OF HUNGRY BIRDS

Crane Bay is overlooked by the glorious Fortress of Hungry Birds, named after the Lunar Exalt who controls, and is charged with defending, the valuable port that sprawls along the length of the bay. Old and powerful, spouse to a senior member of the Deliberative and well connected among her peers, Hungry Birds has spent centuries making her manse both militarily powerful and stunningly beautiful. Made mostly of white glass and blue jade, it is deeply anchored within the low cliffs on the southern side of Crane Bay.

Three hundred delicate avian automatons, animated and controlled by oath-bound spirits, patrol the opalescent outer walls of the stronghold. The automatons act as watchers and form a first line of defense. They rise to life at the command of the garrison taizei—or Hungry Birds herself—and can also call out a warning should any enemies they've been programmed to recognize enter the stronghold. Capable of short flights and equipped with Essence-powered weapons and adamant talons with the power of grand daiklaves, they are fearsome battlefield creations. For several hundred years, they have been used solely during Hungry Bird's anniversary

celebration, flying in intricate formation above Crane Bay while parades and parties go on beneath them.

The main entrance to the stronghold is the Eternal Gate, a soaring gate of silver and glass that flickers with Essence. The gate blazes brightly whenever an Exalt passes through it. Heavily imbued with protective and offensive Charms of great power, so as to make sure no military attack will breach it, the gate has been turned from a potential weakness to one of the strongest features of the entire fortress. Whenever a Solar Exalt passes through the gate, it briefly takes on the image of his personal anima banner. The signature is displayed in full-color imagery several stories tall and is both respectful acknowledgment and public announcement. Unless an Exalt successfully masks his anima using Charms, his true identity is revealed when he passes through the Eternal Gate.

The fortress is one of the Exalted's main military strongholds, designed to defend Crane Bay from attack, and it maintains a full complement of warstriders and a thousand-forged dragon silo, as well as a fully equipped Dragon-Blooded army. Competition to be stationed at the Fortress of Hungry Birds is fierce, due to both the honor and





access to a rich and varied off-duty life. Unfortunately, due to the stronghold's location in the safest part of Creation, the soldiers here are better trained for parades and honor guards than live military action.

Unlike most other war manses of the First Age, the Fortress of Hungry Birds is not interconnected with the Creation-wide defense grid. It is completely independent of all external control, and should its controlling hearthstone fall into the wrong hands, it could potentially defeat the entire might of the First Age military. Not only are the warstriders and thousand-forged dragons the most powerful designs available, the Fortress of Hungry Birds surrounds and is the first line of defense for the Orichalcum Shrine that controls the Sword of Creation. This is why the fortress is in the hands of one of the most trusted of Lunar strategists and also why it is not connected to the rest of the military network by either gates of auspicious passage or the defense grid.

The fortress defenses, including the guardian automatons, the warstriders, the thousand-forged dragons and the gate are keyed to and controlled by the hearthstone generated at the heart of the fortress, for it is also a powerful Air-aspected manse. Hungry Birds is the one who is attuned to this hearthstone, and it never leaves her possession. This hearthstone is a deep, clear blue, with a twist of crimson in the center. It allows the user to see from and control any of the fortress's defenses. In addition, all troops stationed there are considered part of the fortress's system and the holder of the Hungry Birds hearthstone can see from the eyes of, and speak into the minds of, those who are sworn to serve at the fortress.

### THE SWORD OF CREATION

Discovered and tamed originally by Autochthon, the Sword of Creation was originally one of many tools that the gods turned into a weapon in their war against the Primordials. Now it is the most powerful weapon in all Creation, and its sole function is the defense of the Blessed Isle.

All but the oldest and most powerful Exalts imagine that the Sword, in its entirety, is located in the powerful manse called the Orichalcum Shrine at the mouth of the Dawn River. The shrine, a narrow spire of adamant hundreds of feet high and delicately webbed with orichalcum, was built using the same techniques designed for the war manses and the Last Suppliant of Endless Power (see p. 93). It is equipped with limited self-guided defense mechanisms and a dozen or more powerful spirits bound to its service, and it's keyed to only a handful of Exalted. It is certainly impressive enough—to the ignorant—but the Orichalcum Shrine is only the focusing mechanism, where Essence and will merge to create the most destructive forces seen in Creation since the Primordials themselves. The actual Sword itself is located at the center of the Blessed Isle, within Mount Meru. It stretches from beneath the Holy Peak, thousands of feet straight down through the mountain, and farther

still—as far as any Exalt or god can explore. It pierces the very heart of Creation, and Essence throbs and thunders in it like a gigantic heartbeat.

At first glance, the Sword of Creation is simply impossible. It is a massive seam of all the natural magical materials merged into a huge, twisted column stabbed through the Blessed Mountain. The Essence contained within it is so powerful that the very air around it is deadly to the careless. Rock around the Sword is full of peculiar inclusions, unusually large deposits of naturally occurring magical materials, various crystals that share many properties with hearthstones, and occasionally peculiar living organisms. Only the Mountain Folk can approach it closely. Even the oldest of Exalts must remain several meters away or their own divine Essence, fed by the Sword, overcomes their mortal shells with deadly consequences. Dragon-Blooded or mortals who approach closely enough to even see the Sword directly instantaneously sublimate into their core Essence, which is absorbed by the Sword.

When activated, the Sword can potentially reach to the ends of Creation itself. Its weapons are the pure powers of the elements, held in careful balance by its location at the Elemental Pole of Earth. It can stir up the sea to swallow entire fleets (or islands). It can bring the frigid white fog down from the North to freeze entire cities solid. It can wipe the sky from horizon to horizon with a curtain of fire. It can generate earthquakes, make forests march, summon up the blazing rays of the Unconquered Sun or any other destructive horror dreamt of in the minds of a Dawn Caste general. Such uses throw off the very balance of Creation, however, and the farther away the Sword is aimed, the worse the recoil is. Even the gods only used it to defend the Blessed Isle and a few thousand miles around it. When the gods left Creation to the Exalted, they were divided on whether they would reveal the secrets of the Sword to their servants. Only after great deliberation were they willing to do so.

The Essence gathered by the Sword of Creation is tied to the knot of Essence that is channeled along the Dawn River and capped by the Orichalcum Shrine. It is only from there that the gods, and later the Exalted, can safely use the Sword of Creation without risk of being suddenly transformed into a minor, temporary Essence signature and absorbed by the Sword. The Shrine is a carefully balanced trigger to a huge, Creation shattering weapon. Only a perfect circle of Solar Exalted, bound by the oaths of their Eclipse member to defend the Blessed Isle, has any hope of using the Sword of Creation safely. The first Exalted to be attuned to the Sword were Solar Queen Merela's circle. It is currently the Faultless Panoply of the Sun that wields its awesome power, and the Hierophant who bears its hearthstone.

### TO THE SOUTH

Between the Dawn River and the Caracal are expansive lowland plains where long-established estates and cities

maintain the high standards expected of the Exalted of Creation. Many of the farmlands here are patterned in huge magical sigils, or after their Exalted owner's anima banner, and some change seasonally to make their runic patterns auspiciously match the months, the phases of the moon or the stars. Political maneuvering here is measured as much by landscape, dress and exotically modified servants as by the number of Dragon-Bloods in one's retinue.

### SUMMERSKY DOMINION

Located on the southern coast of the Blessed Isle, the Summersky Dominion is noted mainly as a place of pleasant recreation. The Exalted residents of the area have made sure, through requests and influence, that the sky mantis infrastructure provides permanently delightful weather year round. Summersky was also the dominion where a recreational society known as the Five Petal Peony Society began and became popular.

Blandly idyllic is perhaps the best way to describe this dominion, and Renewing Ardor administers her land with a sweetly scented iron fist. Her dominion is a suburban retreat from the stress and hurry of ruling Creation, and she believes that nothing that is difficult or unpleasant or even unseemly should be aired in public. Grace and elegance are expected among the Exalted who reside in her dominion, proper behavior is required, and crass behavior or even the simple errors made by newcomers are frequently met with public snubs and complete ostracism. Renewing Ardor despises money or other blatant attempts to prove wealth or worth, so those who wish to deal with her must use more subtly valuable items such as influence and favors to gain her support.

There are few large cities in the Summersky Dominion, for Renewing Ardor dislikes the grime and crowds of urban life. Her own estates are huge, nestled at the western edge of her dominion where the Caracal River flows into the Inland Sea, but that is not the seat of her government. The small city of Impermanent Scrolls, located at the eastern side of Lapis Bay, is where the administration that runs the dominion is located. It is a plebeian, functional city full of plebeian, functional civil servants dedicated to administrative work. On evenings and holidays, the city is almost deserted, served mostly by civil automatons and a few lower-class functionaries who either cannot afford suburban homes or must work outside of regular hours. Renewing Ardor rarely bothers to travel to Impermanent Scrolls, preferring to allow her Dragon-Blooded retainers to handle the unpleasant details of her rule while she attends to the work of keeping Exalted society civilized and elegant in every fashion.

### THE CITY OF SILKEN FLOWERS

Even the most dutiful of Exalted must take time to rest and recuperate, and the lovely City of Silken Flowers is a pleasant distraction from the turmoil and toil of ruling Creation.

Silken Flowers is a manse surrounded by a beautiful estate, controlled by Twelve-Feather Song, the young, lovely and recently reincarnated mate of Renewing Ardor. He hopes to make his fame and earn favors by providing a pleasant environment where his elders can relax. The City of Silken Flowers is a carefully planned community within that estate on the sandy shores of the southern Inland Sea. Favorable currents and weather promise that every day at the City of Silken Flowers is a memorable one, with misty dawns, brilliant noons, blazing sunsets and lingering, sweet-scented evenings.

The estate grounds have been lovingly landscaped with trilling streams and winding gardens of exotic flowers, and those grounds are stocked with the most pleasing mortal and God-Blooded concubines of every sex, flavor and seductive design. Men with crimson feathers for hair, women with scales and serpent tongues, well-trained creatures, peculiar automatons and anything else imaginable are discretely provided to those who are invited for a celebration or a relaxing retreat. Even the surrounding villages are stocked as carefully as the main estate. There is nothing unpleasant or disturbing anywhere on the lands Twelve-Feather Song controls. Daily musical performances, erotic acrobats, intriguing lectures on the nature of the Wyld (for the more intellectual vacations), enjoyable games, libraries, tea ceremonies and every pleasure imaginable are all freely available. Every guest enjoys (or endures) the services of a personal maneki neko servant who assists them in taking full advantage of the delights available at the City of Silken Flowers.

It isn't difficult to gain an invitation to the City of Silken Flowers. Any previous guest has the right to return, and each is also given three golden flowers to offer to friends and acquaintances, which act as invitations. All members of the Deliberative are always welcome, of course, as are their families. Dragon-Bloods and mortals are only present in the City of Silken Flowers as servants.

The hearthstone grown from the Silken Flowers manse has a unique effect on those within its grounds. It lowers visitors' Temperance score by one for the duration of their visit. Twelve-Feather Song makes sure that such changes in his guests' Virtue don't result in violence by carefully controlling every aspect of his estate to emphasize pleasure, peace and relaxation. He also has a contingent of well-trained and close-mouthed Dragon-Blooded who assist when guests become "overwrought" by the strains of their work and need to be invited to a quieter locale within the estate to rest. Considering the concentration of powerful Exalted, Twelve-Feather Song shows a remarkable ability to keep order, and is probably the recipient of more secrets than is healthy for a single individual. What he will do with this power and information remains to be seen. Twelve-Feather Song is a highly valued member of the Five Petal Peony Society, and influential within it, despite his young age.

### THE FIVE PETAL PEONY SOCIETY

This recreational organization is very popular among the more ambitious Exalted, which is odd for an organization dedicated to encouraging the beautification of Exalted estates and properties. Members of the society swear oaths promising to maintain their estates within certain parameters of beauty and to maintain a polite and proper public demeanor. Those who violate the standards of the society—by allowing their estates to become overgrown, for example—face public embarrassment. Should they continue to defy the proper standards of behavior, they face serious social stigma and finally challenges of skill or weapons.

Most of the time, though, the society is known for its pleasant processions and sponsored vacations at various celebrated locales for society members, as well as members-only displays of fantastic hybrid plants, ornamental animals or decoratively blessed mortals. The society values seemly good taste over flashy displays, so the society's most prominent members are notable for a certain... conservatism in both landscape design and political outlook. The society actively seeks out younger Exalted, in hopes of molding their interests and tastes more toward their refined expectations.

### WRONGFOOT DOMINION

To the west of the Caracal River, the Wrongfoot Dominion was named for an embarrassing incident that marred Tvept Wrongfoot's Banquet of All Peers celebration on his arrival to Meru several hundred years ago. He tripped when entering the Eternal Temple of the Golden Bull for the first time and has yet to live the embarrassment down.

Fortunately, Tvept is a good-humored Zenith Caste Solar and has not made too much of his nickname or the name of his dominion. The dominion is a utilitarian one, much of it dedicated to the great Solar Essence-accumulators that power not only his cities but quite a few other settlements and cities in other dominions. A good part of his collected power is traded to the Sapphire Waves Dominion, due to old debts between him and its ruler.

Wrongfoot Dominion is also home to a major port for ships carrying goods such as food, minerals and other less-than-precious imports to the Blessed Isle. Tariffs and taxes are lower in the port and skyship docks than they are at Crane Bay, and those who concern themselves with money find Wrongfoot Dominion more affordable. Where the massive glass and adamant accumulator dishes give way, Tvept maintains pleasant farmlands where he indulges his hobby of creating new kinds of food crops suitable for heavy food production throughout his principality in the South of

Creation. Most find his dominion rather boring and overly concerned with the base necessities of life.

### TLANNIC DOMINION

Inland of both Wrongfoot and Summersky, this dominion is noted for its many private valleys where less sociable Exalted, who prefer silence and isolation, prefer to dwell. Aside from the official offshoots of the Great Coast Road, roads along this dominion are small and rarely used. Strangers are not terribly welcome, as this dominion is home to more than a few Exalted of various castes who have become paranoid over the centuries and suffer from delusions. (Some believe, for example, that their Dragon-Blooded retainers are plotting to murder all the Celestial Exalted.) Other Exalts who have chosen homes here are exploring particularly odd, dangerous or unsavory hobbies and do not wish to be disturbed.

### THE GARDEN SWATHED IN EMERALD

This garden is a popular destination for the more reflective of the Exalted, made famous in popular works of art provided by I AM to the citizens of the Realm. The Garden Swathed in Emerald is in one of the many valleys of the Tlannic Dominion, sheltered amid a forest of linden trees.

The most notable thing about the Garden Swathed in Emerald is the quality of the silence. The cool shade, the soft sound of distant water and the endless carpet of moss creates a velvety, peaceful quiet well suited to meditation and soothing to the mind. Visitors stepping into the garden enter a world of soft green curves and a gentle, almost smothering softness. Planned like many small gardens on the Blessed Isle, the Garden Swathed in Emerald has winding footpaths, several small waterfalls and a moon-viewing pond in the center. Unlike all other gardens of similar design, the only plants here are mosses. Every shade and depth of green is found here, deep pillow mosses mound around stone pillars, climbing three or four feet high. Thick carpets of moss have buried many of the boulders and decorative statues, and even the paths are barely visible. Only the water elements remain free of the mossy overgrowth, though a greenish-blue moss is encroaching around the edges of the pond. The original plants, and plans, for this garden have long been smothered by the moss, and past attempts to control the mossy tide have failed. Current gardeners turn their energies to maintaining the moss and cultivating the unique strains that grow here and nowhere else.

The Garden Swathed in Emerald was originally made famous by story read into I AM's memory, in which a flamboyant young Exalt met and fell in love with a lovely mortal gardener beside the green-tinged moon pond. Since then, the garden has been associated with that tale of passion and loss, and the romantic idea that the Exalted so cherish their mortal charges they might even fall in love with one. According to the story, the sighs of their lovemaking still echo beside the moon pond where they first met.

## TO THE WEST

The Serpentine River flows down from the Birthplace of Rivers Demesne and splits into a variety of smaller rivers that feed across both the south and west dominions, until it gathers again into the long, treacherous Bay of Teeth.

### DAO DOMINION

Named for a Dragon-Blooded general who held back the Primordial Shadow Over Sun for a few precious hours before he and all 10,000 of his troops were destroyed, the



Dao Dominion is located in the southwestern portion of the Blessed Isle. Large but sparsely populated, it acts as a final training ground for large-scale troop exercises, and a large-scale testing ground for new military weapons, vehicles and equipment. (The Proving Grounds on the eastern slopes and foothills of Mount Meru provide ample space in which to test newly designed individual weapons or other accoutrements, but it is to the Dao Dominion one goes to test such equipment en masse.) Large numbers of Dragon-Blooded live here, from green recruits on their way to fight battles at the borders of Creation to bitterly experienced elders who have been rotated back to the Blessed Isle to train with some new weapon or tactic of their Exalted lords' design. The nearby Isle of Blades is mainly used as a staging ground for overseas troop transports and for military sky-ships. Generally, people don't come to the Dao Dominion unless they are currently involved in the Realm's military actions or they want to see what the Deliberative's military spending is paying for.

### BLACK SNAKE DAM

Considered a rather utilitarian construction, the Black Snake Dam was constructed early on in the Realm's history, when it was thought that there might actually be need for such artificial means of providing water to the dry lands of the upper western side of the island. Considering the effectiveness of the sky mantis infrastructure, however, the dam is now a mildly interesting historical footnote.

Created from Essence, black jade and granite, and built near the mouth of the Serpentine River, it channels the Essence of the river into various pet projects of the local Exalted and carries water through huge underground aqueducts. It could irrigate the land for hundreds of miles if it were called upon to do so. It resembles a huge double line of serpents rearing out of the river, vomiting water from their mouths. The upper line of serpents is flat across the top, and the Great Coast Road crosses the river here. There is a little-used shrine to the local river god in the middle of the dam. The river is so well controlled that propitiating the god it belongs to is no longer strictly necessary.

### SERPENT'S TOOTH DOMINION

Located across the bay from Dao, this dominion is anything but utilitarian. It is a major vacation spot for Celestial Exalts, Dragon-Bloods and—in carefully segregated communities—even high-status mortals who wish to indulge themselves with the wide range of water-based amusements available here. Enormous family water parks have been built along the coastlines, while tour boats travel along, beneath and above the sea carrying vacationers who wish to see migrating whales, giant squid or simply admire the Blessed Isle from high in the air. Almost everyone who has lived on the Blessed Isle for any length of time has vacationed in Serpent's Tooth at least once. For the powerful Exalted, several small islands are reserved for their sole use—allowing them to indulge themselves in privacy.



A huge host of gaudy hostels, indoor markets, restaurants and theaters litter every approach to the Serpent's Tooth dominion. Air traffic is heavy during the warmer seasons, as visitors flock to the dominion for a day, a week or a month. For all its tasteless splendor, Serpent's Tooth brings both wealth and a certain amount of influence to its Exalted administrators—an extremely cooperative group of Solar, Lunar and Dragon-Blooded folk bound by marriage, oath and bonds of reincarnation.

### ISLE OF SILENCE

Amid all the light-hearted amusement to be had in Serpent's Tooth Dominion, one island is off limits to the throng of happy visitors. The Isle of Silence is sheltered by favorable currents and subtly designed Essence barriers to allow its residents the peace, quiet and solitude they need.

Not all of the scars the Exalted bear are simply physical. Sometimes, the worst wounds are bloodless, hidden within the mind and memory. For those unfortunate Exalts who suffer from mental distress, the Isle of Silence is a blessed refuge and place of healing. Several compounds along supportive dragon lines take in Exalts—Solar, Lunar, Sidereal or Terrestrial—who are in need of intensive care for broken minds or severely damaged Essences. The healers here are the most skilled available in Creation, whether they're acupuncturists, thaumaturgical healers or God-Bloods with sanity-bolstering gifts. They are all sworn to silence and service.

Travel to and from this island is tightly controlled. Not only would it harm the faith that Creation has in the strength of the Solar Exalted to know they too suffer from failing of the mind, the danger of mad, vastly powerful Exalts imagining themselves back in the war against the Primordials cannot be overstated. Most patients on the island recover after a few months or years of intensive care. A few unfortunate Exalts, however, will remain on the Isle of Silence even longer, unable to fight down the urges of their own ever-growing madness.

### SAPPHIRE WAVES DOMINION

Although it is nominally a dominion of the Blessed Isle, this dominion is completely submerged. It is inhabited by the people of the sea, Lunar Exalts and those Solars who use Charms or thaumaturgy to breathe water or carry air with them as they travel beneath the waves.

There are only a few small islands in the Sapphire Waves Dominion, the largest of which—Coral Bells—is where the small surface-based administrative hub of the dominion is located. Coral Bells is where visitors who need to conduct business with the dominion rent or purchase Charms or devices to allow them to travel safely beneath the waves. Otherwise, the surface of Sapphire Waves is dedicated to luxury sailing yachts, mortal fisherman—who are extremely careful to fish only where permitted—and small-scale hunting and tourism on the sandy islands.

The dominion's major city is located offshore of Coral Bells, where the coast begins its steep drop to the deep ocean. Shimmering Pearl Beneath the Sapphire Waves is the most ornate and one of the largest submerged cities of the First Age. It extends for several miles along the ocean floor and was one of the first such cities to be built. Buildings nearer shore are older, made in the more primitive style of poured stonework and planned with the idea of having both air- and water-breathing inhabitants. There are compounds in this part of Shimmering Pearl where air has been pumped into the rooms at high enough pressure to keep the pools of water that allow egress to the rest of the city from flooding the buildings. Ambassadors can take refuge here, and some more delicate records and devices are stored in this section of the city. These older buildings have been overgrown by coral and sea plants and have come to resemble natural reefs.

The newer construction, deeper under the water, are the more familiar spires of gigantic nautilus shell, enormous growths of mother-of-pearl and geomantically aligned Essence barriers, populated by thousands of gilled mortals, Water-aspected Dragon-Bloods, shapeshifted Lunars and magically adapted Solar and Sidereal Exalted.

Shimmering Pearl Beneath the Sapphire Waves is the center of undersea trading and brings in rare wealth in the form of deep-water pearls, unique coral, rare fish, strange creatures from the West and the artwork of the people of the sea. Undersea vessels come and go from the city at all hours, for the rise and fall of the sun has less meaning when the world is illuminated by bioluminescent marine fauna. Many of the inventions developed here—advanced water Charms, water-breathing devices and durable craft able to delve into the cold, black depths of the ocean—are now used all over Creation by the Exalted, in pursuit of pleasure and/or duty.

Xatlan and his Lunar mate rule Sapphire Waves Dominion jointly. He has indulged his mate's preference for the deep waves for the past several centuries, pulling in favors and making deals to create Sapphire Waves and the underwater city and subsidizing the people of the sea project. He's done it all to give his mate a world of deep-sea wonder and beauty that he could also share.

### TO THE NORTH

Traveling north from the White City, the terrain becomes rough and bracing. The two dominions here are home to several influential Lunars and therefore have been shaped to their tastes.

Like all lands on the Blessed Isle, that which lies to the north is fertile, pleasant, serene and stable. Much less of it is dedicated to farmland and orchards, though. Instead, great swaths of rolling hills are dotted with herds of yeddim, golden elk, wild horses, the Essence-rich white cattle of the inner North and more wondrous creatures bred in the laboratories of various Exalted.

## FALLING WATERS DOMINION

Aptly named for its myriad waterfalls—ranging from thundering cascades hundreds of miles high and dozens wide to tiny, singing trickles—this dominion is in the northwest of the Blessed Isle. Falling Waters enjoys a certain exclusiveness and a quiet reputation. Relatively few visitors come here, and those who do come for the quiet and obscurity. Frequent, plentiful rain is another characteristic of Falling Waters Dominion. Most Exalted manses here are set within forest of huge black pines or sweet-scented cedars.

One of the minor economies of the dominion is the harvesting of yellow amber from resin trees that grown only on the Blessed Isle. These trees are infused with Solar Essence from a diffuse Solar-aspected manse and can be processed into a particular incense that is regularly burned at the Eternal Temple of the Golden Bull. The incense is reserved first for the servitors of that temple, then for the Solar Exalted to burn in their private shrines. What little is left over is sent out to major Unconquered Sun shrines elsewhere in Creation. (Non-instant Zenith Caste Charms gain a one-die bonus when this incense is burned during their use.) The principle exporters of this rare, ineffable incense claim that the Solar Exalt known as Damarasak, the Student of Vows Made in Absentia, took his Second Breath the first time he smelled the unmistakable scent. As a result, the incense is now in high demand among wealthy mortals who hope that they or their children are reincarnated Solars as well.

### MAIDEN'S EYE

Within the Falling Waters Dominion, nestled deep within a temperate rain forest, is the manse known as Maiden's Eye. It has a Sidereal aspect and is powerful enough that it would have been snapped by some powerful Solar Exalt by now under different circumstances. Somehow, though, the Celestial Housing Authority has no official records of the place. Yet the manse is actually in nearly constant use. Powerful elder Sidereals of the Five-Score Fellowship come here to study the great, calm reflecting pool in the manse's innermost courtyard. Some of the oldest Sidereals still alive spend weeks meditating at the edge of the simple pool under the light of the Maidens.

The pool at the heart of Maiden's Eye can provide visions of the future to even those who are not Chosen of the Maidens—or it would if the Sidereals would allow any but their own kind to enter. They have worked for centuries to keep the place and its abilities secret from even the Solars they serve.

### BANNERS OF RED AND WHITE PRESERVE

This huge hunting and outdoor adventure preserve is the most popular destination for Lunar Exalted who have grown weary of the civilized restrictions of Meru but aren't inclined to journey to Tamar-Kas or farther afield.

Located along the northern side of the Blessed Isle, the preserve is hundreds of miles of re-created Northern wilderness, which the local sky mantis grid keeps at a constant

winter chill. The sun might blaze bright in the sky, but the air remains just above freezing most days and drops much lower at night. Blizzards are generated on a carefully randomized schedule so campers and hunters get the full, thrillingly risky experience of travel in the uncivilized Far North.

Plants, animals and entire mortal villages have been transplanted into the preserve to provide the most authentic and enjoyable experience for the Exalted who visit. Because the preserve is intended to be a “taste of the wild North,” as the preserve's administrators claim, there is little sign of the modern magitechnical amenities present in the real Northern areas.

Thoroughly researched hunting lodges built from everything from mammoth tusks to massive timbers of black pine have been placed through the preserve for guests. Well-trained staff, dressed in traditional garb of older Northern cultures, can provide everything from intimate company to tips on where to find the wildest of the imported demitaurs or huge Northern elk.

Mammoth-hunting parties are scheduled year round for every Ascending month, and permits for hunting smaller game—such as the rare snow leopard—are provided on a weekly basis. Permits, guesthouses and guides are made available to high-level members of the Deliberative and other influential Exalts whenever they wish, of course. Gates of auspicious passage can take guests from the preserve to the actual Northern lands if the visitors can pay the exorbitant cost.

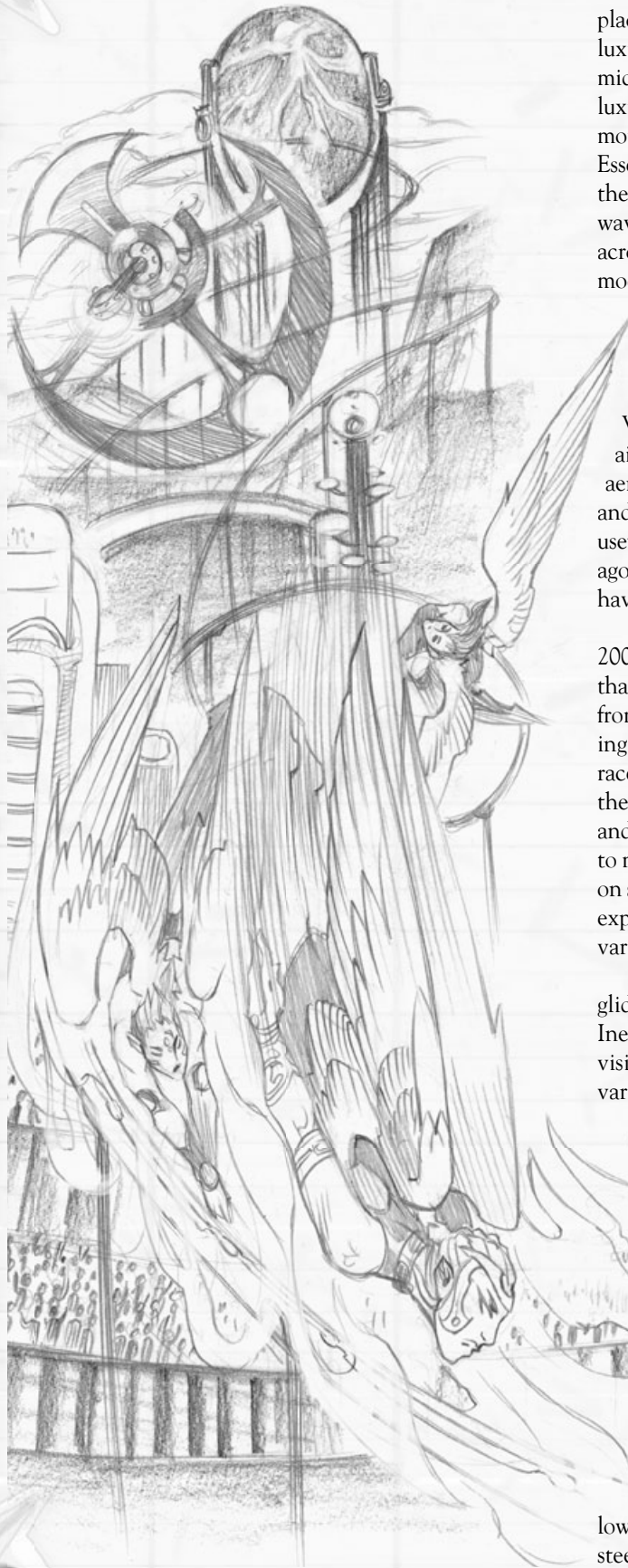
Banners of Red and White is maintained jointly by several Exalted with a taste for rough adventure, and they must pay taxes and fulfill permit requirements as the Ministry of the Treasury demands, since no single Exalt actually privately owns it.

## WANDERING PRAYER DOMINION

Respectful name aside, the Wandering Prayer Dominion contains one of the more earthy attractions on the Blessed Isle—the Glorious Clouds of Ineffable Delight resort. Administered by Signifier of Peaceful Victory, the dominion maintains a natural feel by carefully controlling every aspect of the landscape, from winding roads built to look as if they were hand laid to wood and slate towns inhabited by well-trained mortal villagers. Of course, gates of auspicious passage are available for Exalted wanderers, skyhooks have been built in the major cities, automatons and traveling pagodas can be summoned to provide relaxing offerings of food and shelter, and all roads, one way or another, lead to the Glorious Clouds of Ineffable Delight. Signifier of Peaceful Victory ensures a rural experience with all the modern comforts the First Age can provide.

### GLORIOUS CLOUDS OF INEFFABLE DELIGHT

The Glorious Clouds of Ineffable Delight resort is the major draw for Exalted and others who enjoy the heady risks of gambling, the thrill of competition, the breathless delight of flight and a fine display of Exalted wealth and power.



Gambling houses, bathhouses, whorehouses and other such places are thick on the ground along the coast, ranging in luxury from tourist traps suitable for the mortal masses to the middle-brow entertainments of the Terrestrials to exclusive luxury resorts reserved for Celestial Exalted use. Many of the more expensive resorts include suites that hover on pillars of Essence and are accessible only by air. One of the draws to the area is the schedule of spectacular seasonal storms, where waves rise 30 or more feet into the air and lightning dances across the offshore rocks. The local sky mantis grid has been modified along the entire coastal resort to add variety to the weather and challenge to the races.

All of the delights that have accrued over the decades here are due to the presence of the Glorious Clouds skyway and the efforts of Signifier of Peaceful Victory. He has been making sure that the people of the air strive to better themselves by proving their worth in aerial races held here regularly. He planned and schemed and constructed the raceway to showcase the beauty and usefulness of the newly created people of the air centuries ago. Since then, both the blessed mortals and the skyway have thrived.

The Glorious Clouds skyway is suspended, on average 200 feet above the ground. Floating lanterns and decorative thaumaturgical illusions illuminate the various tracks, ranging from the simple and short River of Evening Light sightseeing track to the dangerous, high-speed Shards of Brilliance raceway that ranges from the rough inland air streams above the surf line to the chill inland heights. Suspended spires and cirrus sculptures are placed around the various tracks to maintain air currents and provide safety buffers for racers on skiffs or wings. Some of the suspended sculptures are also expensive observation boxes where viewers can observe the various contests taking place along the skyway.

Cloud trapezes, skyskiffs, sky chariots and Essence gliders are all available for rent at the Glorious Clouds of Ineffable Delight resort, and the aerial tracks available allow visitors a chance to take slow and gentle viewing tours of various natural wonders or to compete against each other in heart-pounding races. When the season of Air arrives, however, the Glorious Clouds tracks are cleared of day visitors and tourist boats, while below, the hotels and lodges fill with the wealthy and elite of the island in preparation for the people of the air races.

The month of Ascending Air is dedicated to the planning and restructuring of the Glorious Delights skyway into a complicated and dangerous course that begins at the Glorious Clouds manse, where Signifier of Peaceful Victory opens the racing season with a huge celebration.

The raceway then stretches out in obstacle-ridden low-flight zones across the shore and out to sea before rising steeply into the high altitudes where clouds, rain squalls

and tricky air currents add their own dangers to the course the floating lanterns illuminate. Hundreds of people of the air arrive, along with their Exalted patrons, to compete in increasingly challenging races for the glory of their Exalted masters and the honor of being chosen as the next season's Blessed Progenitor for the air folk project.

Competition is fierce and is not restricted to the race-course. Some competing people of the air have engaged in duels, been poisoned, kidnapped or murdered—or simply encouraged to eat too much at a feast the night before a race. Dragon-Blooded minders try to control the racers under their charge so that everyone is fit to participate in the competition the paying customers have come to see.

By the month of Resplendent Air, the amateurs have been weeded out of the grand competition, and only the most experienced, strongest and swiftest of the people of the air remain. Now, the true races begin, and the entirety of the Glorious Clouds causeway is opened up into a 10-mile-long course, complete with physical and Essence-based obstacles that must be overcome if the athlete wants to be immortalized in story, Exalted gossip and bloodlines.

Vast sums of money, Deliberative votes, political influence and other favors, are won, lost and traded based on the outcome of the aerial competition. The final race is held in the middle of Descending Air, and there can be only one winner. The last half of the Descending Air season always sees overwhelmingly lavish parties where hosts compete fiercely to outdo each other with extravagant displays of wealth, power and gaudy magical might. Through it all, Signifier of Peaceful Victory is assured that the people of the air are looked upon favorably and that their inheritance is being strengthened through competition to parent the next generation of flying mortals.

### ISLE OF WHISPERING SORROWS

This entire island off the northern coast of the Blessed Isle is dedicated to the death of one woman. A Lunar general of great wisdom, she was steadfast in the face of the Primordials, unswervingly loyal in the face of temptation, compassionate in response to injustice and very much beloved of her Solar husband. When the War ended and it seemed as if peace would finally descend once more upon Creation, Daughter of the Moon was struck down by deluded assassins still clinging to the hope of the Primordials' return. Her death on the eve of longed-for peace was all the more bitter—not only to her husband, but to many of the Exalted who had known her well and loved her for her spiritual strength. The Solar Exalts retaliated against her treacherous killers and destroyed not only the assassins, but the entire landscape whence they'd sprung. Whatever people had once thrived on the island off the coast of the Blessed Isle were entirely eradicated, down to their names.

Such destruction leaves scars, even unto the glorious Era of Dreams. The island is wasted, with only stubborn scrubby grasses clinging to the rocky shoreline. The sad cries

of loons and gulls fill the air with imagined grief. Daughter of the Moon's husband has transformed the interior into a gigantic slate-, granite- and silver-threaded mausoleum of black marble for his wife. More importantly, the island has been attuned to the memories of Daughter of the Moon's life. During her extensive and splendid funerary rites, as her soul was returned to the cycle of reincarnation, the Exalted who knew her donated cherished memories of their association with her to the memento mori they were creating on the island where she met her death.

The mausoleum is patterned after the cycle of her life—from a childhood birthed in battle to her sorrowful death—marked by huge pillars of moon-silver-etched black marble. Pathways marked in geomantic patterns of gray slate and black granite lead visitors through the story of her heroic deeds, moments of quiet reflection on responsibility and the harsh realities of war. As one walks the paths, images and soft voices flicker to life, traced with the Essence signatures of the original owners, giving them an intimacy absent in the artificial creations of I AM. Unlike many of the more politically correct and glorified histories of the War, Daughter of the Moon's mausoleum does not shy from the compromises and bitter decisions the warriors had to make. The memories here are honest and immediate, imprinted permanently on the stones of the huge structure. At the center of the pattern is a simple, silver building where Daughter of the Moon's war gear is housed.

Few visitors come to Daughter of the Moon's mausoleum anymore. Most of those who do are Lunars and a few troubled Sidereals. Older Solars find the place a painful reminder of all they have lost, and young Lawgivers find it grim and boring compared to the glories available on the rest of the Blessed Isle. Even Daughter of the Moon's bereft husband has abandoned the island after centuries of careful tending. He has retreated to his lands in the North to nurse his old memories and has abandoned his required years of residency on the Blessed Isle. He is too old, too powerful and—many believe—too outdated to be forced to take up his duties in the Deliberative. No one troubles him in his isolated tributary, and he returns the favor.

Daughter of the Moon's husband was the original designer of the mausoleum, and he best knows the secrets of its construction and maintenance. Therefore, he is the one who could answer exactly why other voices have occasionally been heard on the Island of Whispering Sorrows, as if the collection of memory and grief has attracted other memories and grief. This slow accretion of voices is troubling to those few who still visit. Sometimes they hear their own past calling—the echoes of older incarnations—or the whispers of lovers and enemies long returned to the cycle of reincarnation. Solar sorcerers could easily clean the island of the clinging echoes, since they cannot promise that Daughter of the Moon's memorial would not be damaged by their efforts, her bereft husband has forbidden any interference in whatever is happening there.



BROTHERS, LET US PRAISE OUR LORD- THE GHOUL KING, THE CORPSE-EATER.

SOON, WE'LL NEED NOT HIDE AMONG THESE BONE SHADOWS!

HAN-THA! HAN-THA!

HAN-THA! HAN-THA!

WE GAIN MORE FOLLOWERS EVERY DAY, AND WITH THEM THEIR STRENGTH!

SOON WE'LL FEAST ON THE BONES OF-

URRK !!

NO QUARTER FOR APOSTATES.

WE'LL SPOKEN, MAHA-SUCHI.

KA-THOK!

SLASH

THOK THOK

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CHAPTER THREE  
**THE EAST**

The East is Creation's breadbasket, the center of the Realm's trade and home to nearly a third of Creation's entire population. It contains five great provinces (including the famed Beloved of Daana'd and Sextes Jylis Province), 42 principalities, 32 tributaries and the four domains of the Dragon King Dominion. The latter, which occupies a great spread of the Southeastern jungle, is the only state in Creation that exists in alliance with rather than under the purview of the Deliberative.

Prince Echas, Tamer of Cities, Interrogator of the Six Rings, Inheritor of the Dozen Unnamables, et cetera, serves as the East's Solar administrator. Responsibility for the direction's defense and social health falls to him or to an appointed official. Echas' ambition is to improve communication and transport services throughout the East. He contemplates a system to supplement I AM with more detailed images or even sensations, and tinkers with vessels he proposes to break into motes, send along dragon lines and reform at their proper destinations. (Such a trip would theoretically take five hours no matter the distance.) His experiments send interference rippling through I AM, disrupting its communication with half the East for a moment or two each season. When his ambitions feel like work, Echas travels into the Wyld or Malfeas to conquer part of it before returning for supper. And the East lives on.

## THE BELOVED OF DAANA'D AND SEXTES JYLIS PROVINCE (THE RIVER PROVINCE)

Few speak the full, glorious title of the Beloved of Daana'd and Sextes Jylis Province, so named for the beautiful rivers, fertile expanses and ideal weather unparalleled even elsewhere in the East. The heart of the East, it grows more than 30 percent of the world's grain. Most refer to it as the River Province, a practice with such history that even official records now use the unofficial title. The River Province is unique in that it contains no tributaries. Every principality within its borders is a functioning prefecture and obeys both the Accord of Broken Ribbons and the Clear Glass Accord. The pressure to remain within the Accords' lines is strong. Neighbors within the River Province benefit a great deal from knowing that certain laws affect everyone else nearby. It keeps exchange of all sorts flowing smoothly and enriches them all.

Riverspeak is the official language of the Beloved of Daana'd and Sextes Jylis Province, which occupies everything east of the Inland Sea, south of the Avarice River, north of Grave Silk Lake and west of the Errant Root Massif.



Member states of the River Province argue every century or so for inducting nearby principalities into the province, on the basis that more of the citizens there use Riverspeak than Forest-tongue. I AM-based studies reveal this is true in some places, but the clamor to expand the province's borders goes unsuccessful.

Chen Oh Mirah is the daimyo of the Beloved of Daana'd and Sextes Jylis Province. He affects a placid confidence that fools some of his administrators and makes the rest wonder how long it will be until someone replaces him. That's exactly what Chen wonders, too, because he can't to do his job. He's ineffectual, which is exactly how the Solars who rule in this province like it. They run their prefectures the way they want—much more productively than they would with daimyo interference—and leave the coordinator out of the loop. Half the administrators who recognize Chen's incompetence are paid to keep quiet by one prefect or another. The rest are in danger of assassination if they think about reporting on Chen's behavior, whether they know it or not.

### ARTISAN PLAINS PREFECTURE

Stone Sculptor Tle claimed the broad fields east of the Gray River as his own after the Primordial War. His peers proclaimed that his heroism demanded such great breadth of

land, while privately mocking him for a resource-poor choice beside the rest the East offered. By the time the behemoth Razor Maiden Storm killed Stone Sculptor Tle in Year 2182, the City of Makers already flourished, and Artisan Plains was a place of wealth, beauty and constant innovation.

Eam Usam, Tle's reincarnation, surpasses Tle's skill with the arts. In fact, he devoted himself to the arts with minimal regard for politics, economics or warfare, allowing his bonded Lunar to look after those things. Her skill keeps the prefecture safe from its rivals while Eam's artistic drive inspires the hundreds of thousands of local artists.

The flat, dry lands that would become Artisan Plains were scant at the Primordial War's end. Compared to the lands that benefited from the region's great rivers, they might as well have been salted. The prefecture still produces the least food per acre in the River Province, but now, artisan colonies dot the landscape for hundreds of miles around the central city of Denandsor. Small forests decorate the horizon, nurtured to produce needed wood or as works of art themselves.

### DENANDSOR—CITY OF MAKERS

Visitors to Denandsor first see the pinnacle of its Great Library, a hemispherical skylight capping a tower over 1,500



feet tall. The Great Library sits at the city's center, containing thousands of tomes focusing on the city's passion for artifice and artisanship. Little gods and elementals serve researchers therein, and rental research desks carry Exalted (and permitted mortals) throughout the Great Library, even through the miles of underground archives. By city law, no other construction in the city can be taller than 500 feet to preserve the city's distinct silhouette. The city's governor has survived three assassination attempts this year alone, something related to the fact that her second-in-command favors repealing the law.

Denandsor's reputation is that of home to Creation's finest craftsmen in all the arts. The finest jewelry, furniture, tools, buildings, artifacts and nearly everything else come from Denandsor, though its artisans mass-produce nothing. The law protects this reputation to the point of exiling any artisan who fails to meet the city's exacting standards. Goods from Denandsor are always peerless and unique. They demand exorbitant prices when sold at all, though many are destined to be gifts for the Celestial Exalted and their retinues.

The city itself is the jewel of the East. All cities of the Era of Dreams are beautiful, but Denandsor is a work of art even among them. Its geomancy is flawless, each building channeling harmonious flows toward the city's manse and the Great Library. Every edifice is pleasing to the eye. The city's inclination toward innovation insists that each construction be unique, but each also flows seamlessly into the next unique building and melds perfectly into the city's collective appearance. A movement gaining steam in Denandsor desires to legally evict an entire neighborhood from the city for not fitting in with the city's general appearance. It would instead be called and given the legal rights of Denandsor's artisan satellite colonies. Naturally, the neighborhood's residents object.

Besides unparalleled craftsmanship and creativity, the city is known for its annual contest of fine artisanship and for the automaton guardians Solar victors design and donate to the city's defense. Oa Té has won the competition over 50 times, each time crafting a guardian of identical appearance but radical capabilities. His donations sometimes react in unexpected ways to some commands, though, causing concerns about hidden programming.

The city's governor, as well as the prefect of Artisan Plains, is Intrepid Jade, a Terrestrial Exalted jeweler with an excellent reputation and a unique honor: She is Eam Usam's wife. A Sidereal bound them in matrimony a century ago, and Eam makes sure that their home is harmonious and mutually rewarding. Their five children are beautiful and respected artists, three of them Exalted by the Elemental Dragons. But Intrepid Jade's family line, and Eam Usam's participation in it, is part of his multi-generational project to create the most aesthetic genealogy. If the prefect finds out, her reaction will be unpleasant for all involved. None of her forebears found out, though, so Eam isn't worried.

## OLIAFOR

The city of Oliafor formed naturally around the powerful manse at its center, which belongs to the Half Moon Lunar First Word Bo Bao. The manse began as his home and the city as his villa, but the city's growth inspired him to alter the manse's properties. It now produces no hearthstone but focuses its energy outward instead to give the 100 miles around it great fecundity. Rural production complexes in the region produce as much as facilities that are many times as large. First Word Bo Bao grows old, and the people of Oliafor worry that their boons will disappear after his death. Some plot to make sure they won't, though even speaking of the Exalt's death is illegal.

The city and manse form a single spiral. The sole great road loops in toward the manse ever more tightly and, upon reaching it, spirals up the outside of the towering structure. The importance of the city's inhabitants is inversely proportional to their distance from the manse. The poor live on the outskirts of town, the merchants in their townhouses live closer in, and the homes of the wealthy and government buildings (great parks and all) are nearest the manse. The wealthy don't have it best, however, as the manse's recalibration was imperfectly done. It hides a flaw that leaks Essence into the surroundings (rather than casting it outward into the fields) and increases the aristocrats' fertility tenfold. In time, the leak will serve to alter the children it helped spawn, especially if the flaw worsens.

Many conveniences remain from the time when Oliafor was just First Word Bo Bao's villa. They allow the well-to-do opportunities for races on swift riders, for folding servants to do much of the difficult work, for jumping competitions with jump harnesses and for storing their valuables in cache eggs. First Word Bo Bao installed a powerful sympathetic elemental scanner, bound with a Wood elemental, in order to make sure the farms were in working order. Lastly, a wondrous globe of precious stability hums quietly in a sealed chamber at the top of the manse. It incidentally dampens the effects of Essence leakage (one reason the manse's flaw goes undetected) while keeping bound a powerful unshaped raksha who would ravage the populace if it got free. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age** for the artifacts mentioned here.)

First Word Bo Bao's chosen governor of the city, which Eam Usam respects as a courtesy, is native to a small controlled community whose inhabitants learn only to read and write, never speak. The unique set of characters given them as a language makes them bureaucrats and administrators beyond even the Dragon-Blooded, but hearing a single spoken word disrupts that artificial mindset and renders them imbeciles forever after. The governor, whose name is without translation, runs Oliafor through the written word and use of translation artifacts. His efforts make Oliafor perhaps the smoothest-run city in Creation. Intrusion into his suites is punishable by 20 years imprisonment and hard labor, the



length of time required to raise a new governor from among the speechless community.

## FINE CROSSING PREFECTURE

Fine Crossing Prefecture meets the Hungry Dragon Prefecture and the Gray River on the west, the Yellow River on the north, the Rolling River on the east and Lynx Hills (near Highwayman's Bend in the Gray) on the south. It is smaller than some prefectures, but being bounded on three sides by rivers makes it the richest prefecture in a province comprising the richest prefectures. "Drop a kernel in Fine Crossing, and you'll pick up a bushel," goes the proverb. Goodman Razer of Storms (the title is traditional) relaxes in Hollow or on the Blessed Isle, leaving administration to his able prefect while he wrangles appropriations from the Deliberative and enjoys Meru's hospitality.

The jealous say that Fine Crossing has nothing to offer but endless, repetitive fields. Those fields—dyed red or amber or amethyst by the Unconquered Sun above—inspire thousands of poets and painters every year. The views are breathtaking by nature and by design. (The RPC whose crops are most picturesque receives substantial boons each year.) The views out upon the great rivers are some of Creation's largest, attracting many vacationers. Where the Yellow and Gray merge into the Yanaze is a particular favorite. Some entrepreneurs sell rides on the unpredictable currents at that nexus. Submarine rides in sealed, buoyancy-regulated adamant capsules are available to the rich.

## HOLLOW—HEART OF THE RIVER PROVINCE

Hollow is named in humility under the belief that it is a necessary evil, a hole in the East's productive and fertile ground from which nothing useful comes—only proclamations and governance, the importance of which the city's founder played downward. The provincial manse displays her words to that effect over its public entrance: "Strong are the hands that toil that others may live." All-is-Bright Inamo works hard to shift public perspective on the quote from the intended meaning to an interpretation that lauds the Exalted. Few of any import oppose him.

Beyond housing the provincial government, Hollow's district government oversees the many thousands of RPCs outside its walls and within the region irrigated by the Yanaze Dam. It also regulates trade between its district and the rest of the province. Eminently central to the East, this district government wields immense leverage over provincial trade and trade throughout the entire direction. Brave Hare, the daimyo, regularly clashes with Prefect All-is-Bright Inamo over trade policy and jurisdiction.

Hollow's Fertile Ground Academy teaches people from all over the province theories that pertain to the region's primary product: agriculture. It is the finest school in the East for the study of agricultural techniques. It also scores high marks with its thaumaturgy, sorcery, demonology, business, governance and geomancy programs. As the best agricultural

school in the East, it is by extension the finest in Creation. The school is second to Sperimin overall, naturally, but second place to Creation's greatest university is high honors. Even Dragon-Blooded attend the school and graduate with no shame for being unable to study at Sperimin. One professor recently discovered a new First Circle demon with ideal applications for enriching soil and increasing crop output. (It also draws patterns in the earth, whether by accident or design, that enable other First Circle demons to occasionally escape from Malfeas.)

All-is-Bright Inamo is an excellent bureaucrat, administrator and liar. Working in the provincial capital gives him more influence than most prefects have, which he uses to build up a retirement fund. It's legal but self-interested, and when the Goodman replaces him, the shakedown for his political lackeys will likely make Hollow a place where the talented rise quickly.

## LODROS—CITY OF WORDS

He Who Bleeds the Unknown Word was one of the first Primordials to fall in Creation's first war. His flesh comprised every word that had been written or spoken; his lifeblood was every word that had not. He re-formed into Elloge, the Sphere of Speech, in time to surrender with his brethren. The Primordial's corpse lay in the near East and bled characters that had never been read or spoken into the earth, too ripe with secrets to contain its blood even after the flesh was dead. Pian Second Son, an Eclipse, stood with the Chosen of Secrets Silence-in-Ways and watched the white blood flow. One mourned the lost words, never to be written or spoken or sworn. The other regretted the words she would never know. As thousands of Dragon-Blooded and millions of mortals marched against creatures that still troubled Creation, the two Exalted forged the Primordial's flesh and blood into a city. More than one Celestial Exalt has wondered among friends what monsters survived or escaped the binding in Malfeas because those two distracted themselves in the midst of a deadly war.

They built the city with its own words, stretching "beauty" tight across its length, using "manse," "street," "wall," "secure" and other words often, discarding such words as "useless" and "uninteresting" or turning them to other uses. The layout of the major avenues spells Lodros, and lesser roads name the districts that contain them. Even now, unknown words seep out onto the diamond-white city, their characters shimmering on the walls and streets. All such words have understandable meaning, as a word's purpose is to communicate. Many belong to existing dialects but have not yet been spoken, but many more are words designed to be understood only by individuals or small groups. Enchantments laid on Lodros make it helpful to those who walk its streets. It welcomes travelers and asks their destinations that it might direct them, using words never before seen but instantly understandable. This communication is private, as the words are decipherable only by the individual for whom they are displayed. The city

issues the rare cryptic warning or prediction, but the cause for such behavior is unknown.

Lodros is Creation's foremost producer of the written word in all its forms, as the city's nature attracts authors of all kinds. Its legendary printing district publishes pamphlets, catalogues, textbooks, novels, anthologies, magazines, journals, brochures, guidebooks, tracts, treatises and anything else one writes and disseminates to the world. It also produces paper of various quality, from the cheap but durable standard white to fancy sheets with pleasant odors or musical tones to heavy-duty paper that is guaranteed to ignore magical flame, the passage of time, Dragon-Blooded anima flux, all scissors but those edged with white jade, the Wyld and Terrestrial Circle sorcery. A sorcerer resident in Lodros' Stark Quarters of Constructive Artifice is in constant search for a more secure paper, while his rival next door seeks ever-better ways to destroy paper out of idle spite.

A sophisticated, pseudo-autonomous system controls the City of Words' many defenses and powered mechanisms. Peacekeepers, the governor and others with authority control it by writing commands into shallow, foot-square boxes of sand paired with slender, diamond-white rods, like tools for practicing calligraphy. Most are intuitive, such as scribing *open east gate* for that purpose. The sands either smooth over after accepting a command or shift to form an error message or query (such as requesting further detail or an authorization code). Sands within the House of Deliberation, Lodros' manse of governance, accept more commands than those at gatehouses and other remote posts do. One night, while toying with the city's command system, two drunken lower functionaries learned several commands that they expected to return errors but instead requested authorization. They have since moved their families to the West.

Lodros is simple to reshape. The House of Deliberation contains a sand garden that acts as a command terminal. When activated with proper commands, the sands of the garden flow into the precise shape of the City of Words. The garden may focus on certain areas or display the entire city. Commands alter the topographical map, shortening buildings, raising new ones, expanding parks and carving new alleys through the crowded city. Once approved by an appropriate authority, the city invokes these changes in the city proper, which progresses from its current state to the desired shape over a period of one week to a month. The process calls on what remains of the slain Primordial's vitality, making construction efforts simple affairs. The changes never occur while anyone is watching. In fact, a proposed (but supposedly unused) method of torture, imprisonment and/or execution for the city is to place a criminal in a basement programmed to sink under the earth. The criminal would have to remain awake to forestall his fate, and every moment asleep would condemn him to deeper interment ever farther from light and life.

Governor Pyn Minor works with Goodman Razer of Storms and the few other Celestial Exalted with a personal

interest in Creation's printing capital. His position is enviable: He leaves the compilation of history and all known knowledge to the Council of Record and control over the city's publications to the Registry, leaving him responsible only for a battalion of bureaucrats and his own enjoyment. His secret side business is a vanity press that publishes criticisms (rants and conspiracy theories, mostly) of various Celestial Exalts and the Deliberative government.

## THE DAMS OF HOLLOW

Three dams control the flow of water around Hollow and in the River Province. The Gray River Dam appears least inventive. It performs well without being activated, so few know its power. When dictated by its administrator (who holds its hearthstone), the dam transubstantiates water that rises above a set level into air, preventing floods. Landscaping upriver has made activation unnecessary for the last three centuries, and the hearthstone lies forgotten in Hollow's archives.

The Yellow River Dam is of variable height. It currently stands at 337 feet, with four of its seven nested segments raised and the remaining three nestled inside the fourth. This position forces the river to fill over 1,000 miles of irrigation canals, watering RPCs that feed several provinces. Periodic water shortages from the dam occasionally diminish RPC productivity. What dam administrator Ichiko Tomaya doesn't want her superiors to learn is that she frequently raises the mighty dam to impress potential lovers, so she covers her tracks well and bribes her subordinates with glowing progress reports and letters of recommendation.

Of the three dams, the Yanaze Dam is the most impressive but least renowned. It is a massive circle-in-square glyph of red jade, broken into 997 pieces and embedded in the riverbed where the Yanaze meets the River of Tears. Without need for maintenance or other necessities that make it known to humanity, the dam keeps the Yanaze River level within three inches of ideal at all times. Of no less import, the Yanaze Dam works with similar runes near Sijan and where the River of Tears meets Frost Lake, keeping the River of Tears flowing. The project that actually created the River of Tears happened so long ago, and is perfectly self-sustained, that it is unknown but to savants. A team of Celestial Exalts plans a similar feat in the Southeast, unaware that interference with the existing success would destroy both and thousands of miles of river simultaneously.

## HUNGRY DRAGON PREFECTURE

Hungry Dragon Prefecture reaches from the Yanaze River to the north, the Gray River to the east, the Malachite Slopes to the south and the coast to the west. It is a rich prefecture ruled by Edged Blossom, the recent reincarnation of Yellow Terror Dragon, hero of the Primordial War and founder of Deheleshen. Her Lunar mate, Fair Xiulan, disappeared with Dragon's death, and has not yet reincarnated. Her whereabouts are unknown, and in her absence, Edged

Blossom struggles to maintain her principality's importance. She benefits from an experienced Dragon-Blooded prefect in Deheleshen who keeps the city on an even keel, but the prefecture needs a strong Celestial hand.

Hungry Dragon Prefecture has abundant open plains perfect for its many RPCs, but they are not the source of its fame. Its capital sits on the promontory opposite the Dragon's Mouth of Tears, where the River of Tears pours into the Inland Sea, and that is the Hungry Dragon Prefecture's jewel. Thousands of sailing vessels are visible from Deheleshen Bluff on a clear day, dozens and sometimes hundreds of them composed of shining magical materials.

### DEHELESHEN—GATEWAY TO THE EAST

Sunshine gleaming off gold and alabaster is the first most travelers see of Deheleshen. The rest see the light of the Deheleshen Lighthouse, visible as far as 100 leagues from the city. The city is the first Eastern port of call for air and water travel from anywhere in Creation but the near Southeast or Northeast. Between its position at the mouth of the Yanaze River and the famed Serene Breath Aviary, Deheleshen is the obvious stop for travelers and merchants alike. Recent accidents in transshipment and docking have forced the government to raise tariffs, however, driving some

business across the river to Amber Shores Port—technically in the neighboring Eager Coast Prefecture.

The Palace of the Maximum Fallahshu, the Teocalla of Tu Yu and other public buildings in the city are built of the finest durability-enhanced white stone and gold leaf. The rest of Deheleshen contrasts this finery in the elegant simplicity of their construction and layout: Beautiful though its highlights are, the city is devoted to efficient distribution of the commerce moving through it at all times. Citizens are accustomed to high standards of living, and the millions who live there constantly lobby for greater amenities, which the government often provides to keep the city functioning smoothly.

The god Tu Yu is an active city father. He appears as a wealthy aristocrat, wearing functional silk robes and a hidden chain shirt whose presence is betrayed by the occasional metallic rasp. Somehow, he is always a head taller than the tallest of those around him. Tu Yu is more protective of his city than Yu-Shan typically allows, but he is charming and generous and always knows whom to bribe, blackmail or sweet talk. His actions make sure that nothing hinders Deheleshen's dominance over trade between the East and the rest of Creation, as therein lies the city's greatness. Fund-draining citizens and transportation sabotage rouse his ire,



and he has half a dozen plans to deal with any given obstacle to Deheleshen's glory.

Prefect Vikram White Crane guides both the city and the prefecture while Edged Blossom learns her responsibilities and Fair Xiulan remains missing. The upheaval is emotional to her, as both Yellow Terror Dragon and Fair Xiulan were dear friends and mentors, but her strength keeps it from rocking her city. Only her urge to take off with Edged Blossom on a whirlwind adventure to find the Solar's missing Lunar mate threatens the city's welfare, but Vikram is responsible enough to set aside such desires. Probably.

## LATE GLORIOUS FIELDS PREFECTURE

Brass Janissary rules Late Glorious Fields Prefecture with her Lunar mate, Jackal's Dignity, but neither by choice. The bonded pair inherited the prefecture from their previous incarnations, who took responsibility for the region out of solemn respect for the dead and to uphold a secret oath to a slain Primordial. The pair spends as little time in Late Glorious Fields as possible, instead adventuring across and outside Creation as young Celestial Exalted should.

North of the Yellow and Yanaze Rivers, the principality is a fertile land that yields much food. Irrigation canals supply the right amount of water to every RPC, and rice paddies make the southern half an emerald green. The northeastern quarter is drier and better suited to golden wheat.

Within 200 miles of Sijan, the prefecture's tone changes. Green and gold give way to the Plains of the Dead, damp fens that no project manages to permanently drain. Stunted trees and ancient crypts dot the swampland, dedicated to the deceased's rest as it has been since before the Primordial War.

## SIJAN—THE FUNERARY CITY

The city of Sijan occupies a valley nestled in the confluence of the River of Tears and the Avarice River. Uncountable mausoleums, crypts and catacombs and the homes of those who care for them tile the valley a consistent shade of gray. The Plains of the Dead south of the Avarice mottle tomb gray with the subdued greens and browns of the marsh, looking like something only half dead.

More than one quarter of Creation's dead take their final rest here, and Sijan morticians lay another quarter to rest elsewhere. Many of the deceased are wealthy mortals or the Exalted's favored bureaucrats, assistants, servants and slaves. The city's ritualists have buried every Celestial Exalt from the middle of the second century on, when it became a tradition and honor to be laid down by the devoted embalmers. The Funereal Order of Righteous Morticians and Embalmers runs the city and makes sure that nothing obstructs their goal of honoring the dead as the dead desire.

The city has no walls, as walls would inhibit the unending sprawl of Sijan's boundaries as more dead require burial. Even so, it is well guarded. Many of the Dragon-Blooded attuned to death rather than life volunteer to protect the city and study under its master morticians. The dead them-

selves guard their eternal rests, and all would-be raiders and conquerors fear the wrath of the many Exalted who desire a Sijanese burial.

Outsiders see Sijan's valley and the Plains of the Dead as a disarray of tombs raised and sunk wherever there's space. Not so. Every gray wall, coffin, shadowed stairway and bone-ridden hallway contributes to the place's deliberate geomancy, which is designed to neutralize the turbulence of local Essence and keep the dead content in their beds. Even the sunken crypts, their entrances swallowed long ago by the fens, figure into the geomantic calculations. The Essence is not dead, as some would expect, but calmed. All Sijanese burial parties operate in multiples of four for similar reasons, as it is a mystic number of their trade. Four carry cistvaen components and sixteen carry the heaviest sarcophagi. At least eight architects design every tomb, four work together in embalming, and a minimum of eight perfect and perform the rituals.

Before Sijan was a metropolis for the dead, it was the home of 4,000 mortals charged to inter with honor and respect the bodies of all who came to them. In those days of perfect reincarnation, the purpose of such treatment was questionable. Did someone foresee the danger of disrespect to the dead? Does proper burial improve the process of reincarnation? Answers are not forthcoming, for none remember Sijan's genesis or know who planted its seed before the first blow of the Primordial War.

The 4,000 performed elaborate funeral rites for each Primordial that fell during the War. Some rites involved mass sacrifice; others appeared innocent. There is still one catacomb for each Neverborn beneath the Plains of the Dead, dizzying mazes with hundreds of false tombs that protect the true empty charnel houses that honor the fallen. This act pacified the slain Primordials, giving them the quiet slumber of undeath. Of this, too, the world is ignorant.

After the War, people accreted around the core morticians, who admitted none into their ranks but in units of 4,000. Their number grew within a century to its current population of 40,000, where it stabilized by decree of the Morticians Order.

Late Glorious Fields is the only prefecture (the only principality, really) administered by one of the dead. Distant Swallow died 400 years ago while holding the office of sub-prefect for the region, joining the queue of spirits whose dedication to Sijan and its governance held them from reincarnation. His turn to serve as prefect came three decades ago, when the previous prefect disappeared and left only signs of the Labyrinth behind. Distant Swallow has been a functionary for almost a millennium, first as a Terrestrial Exalt in Sijan and then as part of Sijan's Underworld administration, and his mastery of the city's intricate politics is great. With the prefecture's Solar and Lunar rulers avoiding their responsibility, Distant Swallow has free reign there.



## THE BLACK CHASE

This ancient shadowland is a dark forest on the east bank of the River of Tears, whose reputation names it dangerous even to the Exalted. Its secrets remain unplumbed, and the roll of its victims grows longer with every passing year. The shadowland features in a number of ghost stories that I AM has helped spread across Creation. The Black Chase appears to be a strip of forest 28 miles by 450 miles that follows the river, located just over a mile from Sijan. Sijan's founders chose the site they did for the Black Chase's access to the Underworld. Its boundary is clearly marked by the transition of healthy trees to a forest stunted by lack of light, riddled with rot and choked by hungry vines. The Chase merged with the Underworld naturally, beginning in Year 653. Histories neglect to mention the slaughter of several thousand penitent Fair Folk marching to request amnesty and sanctuary among the Mountain Folk.

The Black Chase is impossible to map or navigate. Sounds take longer-than-normal routes to reach friends' ears and double back to echo upon the speaker. Essence costs for communication-related Charms double and difficulties increase by one. Communication artifacts fail. I AM is silent within the Black Chase. One path follows the course of the river 100 yards from its banks and brings one into the Underworld at night. All other paths in the Black Chase are temporary. The forest shifts during the night hours, bewildering even the most experienced travelers. Some travelers cross the breadth or length of the Chase in a single night's walk and emerge unscathed, which encourages those marching under haste.

Fell creatures hunt the darkness. Imps and dead things that refuse to stop moving are eager to devour any warm flesh whose scent reaches their cold noses. Only the sole steady path is safe from them. Other beings walk among the stunted trees, showing signs of plague, drowning, violent murder or other fates. Nonetheless, these beings are beautiful, and they offer their cold love to intruders who please them. Mortals who succumb to their charm become imps, while Exalted join the ranks of the beautiful or emerge from the Black Chase bearing mighty artifacts of bone and ebony. These glorious-in-death entities keep a pet, a monster of bones the size of tree trunks whose breath is the only breeze the Black Chase ever feels. It crushes and consumes intruders eagerly. Voices within its osseous belly babble occult truths known to none living, if one can survive the trip.

Some folk brave the Black Chase to retrieve black ash, wood prized by artisans as strong and having a deep beauty that few other woods can match. It is also used in the creation of artifacts to manipulate death and desire, so Celestial Exalted call on their servants to fetch it. Groves of black ash grow deep in the Black Chase and nowhere else in Creation, making it rare indeed.

## WILLFUL CHILD PREFECTURE

Willful Child is buried in forested hills and bordered by the Maruto River, the Wood Snake Crawl Prefecture, the Serene Canopy Province and the Dominion of the Dragon Kings. Despite its natural resources, Willful Child prizes itself on producing only savants. Its proudest feature is the city of Sperimin, near the northern border, and that alone gives the prefecture and its Solar ruler Guan Ho Bi substantial accolades.

This domain possesses the River Province's temperate climate and the Far East's thick forests. Hills dominate the landscape but are not so steep or frequent that cities and towns are difficult to build. Raw resources are plentiful, but the prefecture's high educational standard makes every mortal an expert and forces entrepreneurs to import workers, so it's typically easier to harvest goods from elsewhere.

### SPERIMIN—HOME TO KNOWLEDGE

Sperimin is the premier center of learning in the Age of Splendor. Not even cities that covet Sperimin's title contest its superiority. Many academies make their primary campuses within the city's borders, and more locate themselves nearby, but the Great Twelve academies are the real draw. Their fame is Creationwide, and each occupies one of the 12 college-manses arranged in radial fashion around the city center by the founders of the Bax Institute.

The Conservatory of the Assiduous Iron specializes in mining and metallurgy. The Bax Institute for Enlightened Disposition dispenses knowledge of architecture, engineering and manse design. The Factualist Seminary of the Inviolate Heavens imparts wisdom concerning cosmology, theology and a no-nonsense theory of astrology that conflicts with that of the Divine School Devonian, which teaches sorcery, thaumaturgy and a more intuitive form of astrology. Wise graduates of both academies argue over the proper course, as influenced by the stars, when offering their unsolicited advice to the city's governance.

Creation's best physicians graduate from the Practiced Instructors' School of Curative Tradition. The Shrine to Glorious Transaction produces the finest factors and investors and highlights its founder Oa-Té's polymath nature. The Most Capable Administration Institute teaches theory of governance in all its forms and gives Creation its finest bureaucrats, while the Poised Keepers of the Balanced Doctrine for Harmonious Conflict trains military minds. The debates the two academies' students share over governmental policy (especially regarding military stance) spill over into brawls two times out of three.

The Doorway to the Soul teaches the spiritual martial arts, and every known supernatural martial arts style can be taught by at least one of the school's many instructors. The Flawless Chroniclers' House of Records imparts history to its students and funds many examinations of the past. One instructor's research nears proof that the Doorway's founders intended it to focus on all forms of martial prowess, not

simply the spiritual. Gaia's College trains people in advanced planting and harvest techniques, as well as the business's financial realities. Many RPC administrators are graduates. The Lone Cherry Blossom Academy produces unequalled poets, painters, sculptors and other artists.

Sperimin's Great Twelve ring the central Library of Sperimin, where all known wisdom in all disciplines is recorded in multiple media for safety and preserved for posterity by a veritable army of elementals. Its 38th floor houses the Library's most famous volume, *The Book of Three Circles*. As a place where students and instructors from the Great Twelve must meet for study, the tower also houses 12 floors of debate halls. Teresu Erate Ino, the library administrator, plans a political coup that will turn four of the debate levels into further library space. This coup will solve the problem of his dwindling storage space and evade an argument with the Bax Institute's provost about disturbing geomantic flow by delving deeper into the earth.

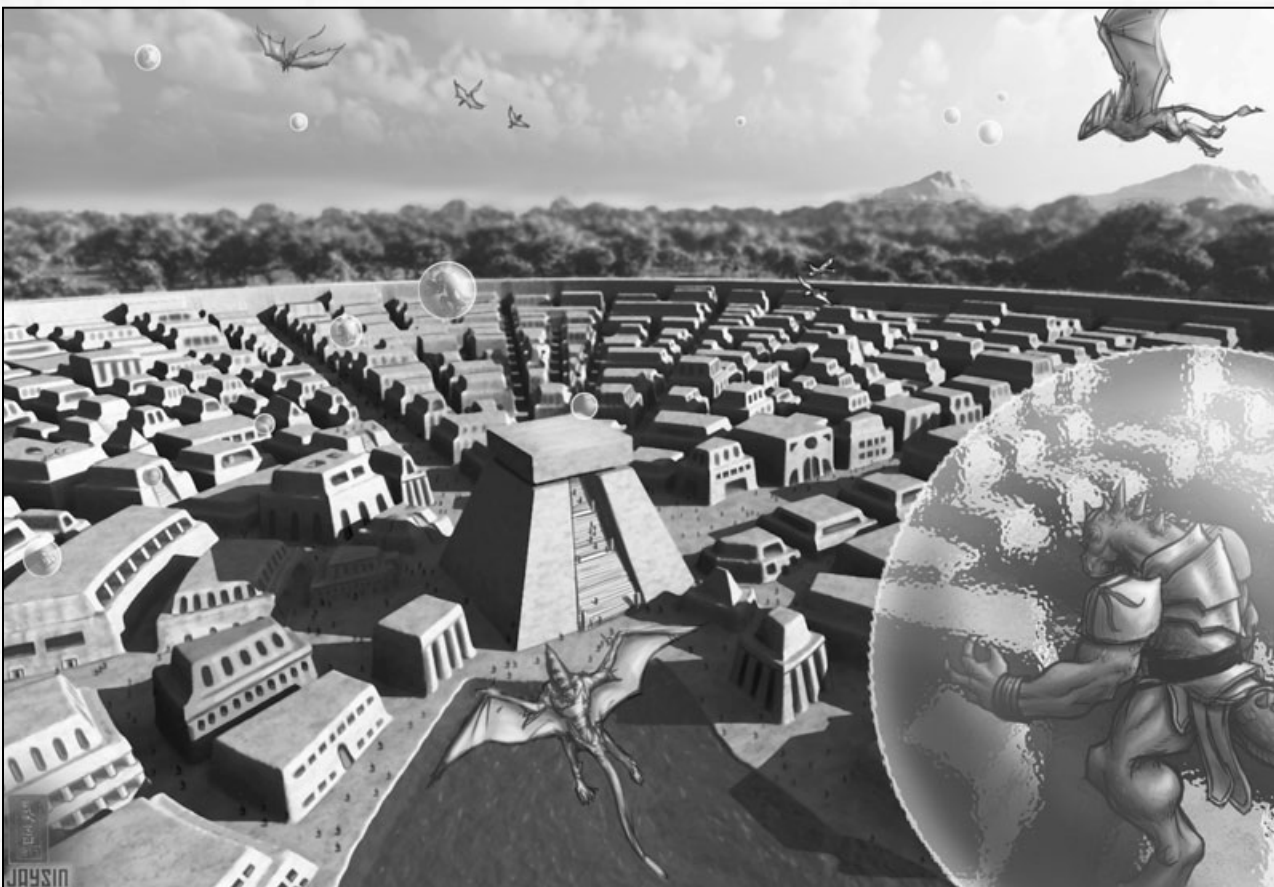
Sperimin's governor, Laughing Crow, accepts that the city's control rests with the Academic Council and acts accordingly, executing her duty as best possible and taking every advantage her appointment affords. Her greatest responsibility is to see to the individual needs of the Great Twelve academies and specific celebrity professors. (Ensuring Instructor Yu's perfect meditative silence in his home across the street from Vibrant Strings Conservatory is just one of her thousand challenges.) Laughing Crow is excellent at her job

but wonders of late if anyone in Meru pays attention to how hard she works to balance everyone's needs. She intends to make a few forgivable but noticeable mistakes next year, in the hope that they'll give her more credit in the future.

## THE DOMINION OF THE DRAGON KINGS

In honor of the Dragon Kings' courage and losses in the Primordial War, and out of respect for their allies' personal prowess and wisdom, the Exalted formally left the Dragon Kings' lands outside of the Realm. The Dominion of the Dragon Kings is an ally of the Realm, which tends Creation in a manner of which the Exalted approve. Or it once did. A new motion in the Deliberative suggests making the domain a province in order to improve efficiency of government and application of the Realm's laws—not to mention the sudden influx of taxes.

The Dragon-Blood Green Ebert serves as Realm Commissioner to the Dragon Kings, helping them administer the principalities in their dominion. He is an honest bureaucrat (so he lies only when necessary) and enjoys the relaxed political atmosphere of the Dominion of the Dragon Kings. The quantity of restricted or original (and therefore untouched by legislation) drugs coming out of the dominion worries prefects of adjacent provinces, which means Ebert could soon face an inquiry.



Dragon Kings administer the entire dominion from Rathess, but Solars rule many of the region's principalities directly. The Dragon Kings get along well with the passionate Solar Exalted and enjoy shaping the dominion's laws to favor their allies. To them, vicious political struggle is just another dimension of hunting and survival.

## THE MAGNIFICENT GROUNDS OF RATHESS

The Magnificent Grounds of Rathess is larger than most principalities, as most Dragon King domains are. It contains Rathess and its satellite cities in the center of its southeast quadrant. The rest is reserved for such Dragon King pastimes as hunting, warfare, communion with gods and solitary spiritual contemplation (often in conjunction with one of the other three). Dragon Kings allow excursions to gather resources such as gold, jade, pets and organic drugs but permit few permanent human settlements. The Solars who keep illegal private estates in the lush domain are likely to fight for them rather than concede if confronted, however.

The Magnificent Grounds of Rathess is kept a pristine wilderness for the savage enjoyment of its masters. Tropical trees grow thick, and the canopy blocks out much light. Dragon King monks tend clearings along standard paths through the domain—one per full-day's travel—ensuring the ability to look upon the Unconquered Sun at least once a day. The religious conflict in Rathess spills into the jungle on occasion, where the dedicated chase off or kill the monks and let the clearings grow over. The Magnificent Grounds border the Gray River on the west, the River Province on the north, the Vaniwayan on the south and reaches east enough to include the Ever-Rippling Sky Mirror Lake.

Wild beasts stalk the jungle and are a threat to mortals traveling on foot. Most travelers move by skyship to and from Rathess, and those who cannot accompany the shipments of raw goods taken from the region to the Artisan Fields Prefecture or the Grave Silk Lake Prefecture for processing.

### RATHESS

Rathess is a perfect circle, divided into eight radial and equal slices. Six of these divisions fit the city's circular nature, with streets parallel to the outer wall, and feature the alien style of Dragon King construction. The seventh section is the Human District, laid out in squares and right angles, unlike the gentle curves and 60- and 90-degree angles of the rest of the city. The last slice is the Aquatic District, home to the city's 500,000 or so Mosok Dragon Kings and full of deep artificial ponds and canals. Nearby Lake Therak keeps the Aquatic District flooded and fed. In the last several years, fish have turned up dead in Lake Therak (and thus the Aquatic District) in alarming numbers.

Creation once knew Rathess as a bastion of worship to the Unconquered Sun, as the home of the Ochre Fountain and as the defensive bastion of the East. Rathess is too divided to hold those honors any longer. The Dragon Kings now spend

more time warring with each other than combating external threats. Passionate adherents to a variety of gods, from the Unconquered Sun to Han-Tha the Ghoul King, spill blood in the street, with four core factions fighting for the dominance of their creeds. The city remains welcoming to the Exalted, especially to Solars, but the tension is evident—and can involve visitors despite their wishes.

Ith Maaiph is the eldest Raptok *olchilik* in the Dominion of the Dragon Kings and Rathess' highest priest of the Unconquered Sun. His word has the might of law in Rathess and the greater dominion, though he gives fair hearing to his appointed administrators. Maaiph recalls a time when the Solar Exalted better respected their Dragon King allies. He is blind to his people's decline but not to growing disrespect from the Deliberative. His rudeness could soon cause an international incident.

### THE GREAT OBSERVATORY AND THE ORRERY OF ARAINTHU

A dome of polished starmetal gleams atop a bluff just outside Rathess. This is the Great Observatory, a peerless aid for astrology that incorporates theoretical constellations into its readers' predictions. It contains the Orrery of Araithu, a flawless model of the heavens that makes it possible to discern even the position of a specific fly's descendants a century from now. Last year, a Dragon-Blood attempted to sabotage the Orrery and Observatory, but he was caught and his act was reversed before any permanent damage was done. He killed himself before his captors could learn of the Sidereal behind the attack.

### ALBAIO'S VILLA

The Solar Albaio commissioned his villa 133 miles from Rathess to be near his Dragon King allies and friends. Unlike most human habitation, the villa is entirely in the Dragon-King style. The angles are off or absent, ceilings are unadorned but the walls are busy with designs, steps are too large and the furniture matches the wrong physiology. Catty rumor claims he built it for a Dragon King lover, but his rivals would be more disgusted than pleased to learn it's true, no matter how much it would harm Albaio's reputation.

The villa's karo, Yellowtail Rene, is a mortal who wants to be a Dragon King. Tattoos cover her skin, giving her a scaled appearance, and she spends her wealth to purchase body modifications. Her lips now form a hard beak, her hands and feet are talons, and she now seeks a way to make her legs digitigrade. The Dragon Kings consider her pathetic, but sooner or later, one will kill her for her arrogance.

### KHRYAL

Khryal sits 300 miles southeast of Rathess, one of 10 satellite cities evenly spaced around the First City. These 10 cities support Rathess, growing the crops necessary to feed its millions and stocking the surrounding jungle with prey designed to give the Dragon Kings a good hunt. Half the cities maintain reality engines able to quell the Wyld

and shape the fabric of reality, all tied into manses that broadcast their protection over a five-mile radius. Khryal is one. In an emergency, the five equipped cities are designed to usurp power from all manses and protect a Rathess-centered pentagon from Wyld ravages. Seven decades of maintenance on the system have gone ignored, however, and most manses have been disconnected from the system.

Ek'atet, the program's administrator in Rathess, siphoned funding into pet projects and personal gain, and Essit Ke, Khryal's governor, focuses on honing her skill in personal combat instead. As such, the city survives but does not flourish. Essit requires those who challenge her method of governance to meet her in single combat to prove their words before the Unconquered Sun. Essit remains unbowed, but to quench her thirst for practice, she has scheduled a free-for-all on the first day of Ascending Air. The last Dragon King (or human) standing is governor, free to punish her next incarnation as he sees fit.

## ADAMANT ORIOLE SANCTUARY

Located in the Far Southeast, Adamant Oriole Sanctuary has been undisturbed by the Fair Folk for over 1,500 years, a distinguished accomplishment and a testament to the efforts of its Solar ruler. Here, Experienced Solipsism shapes her tributary with her Lunar mate, Skal Dreams-of-Blood, and their Sidereal advisor, Erin the Demeritorious. Experienced Solipsism's methods for protecting the Adamant Oriole Sanctuary against the raksha works just as well against her enemies, and the region has not suffered an invasion since a joint venture by Where None Dare and Weeper-in-Blood's Great Estate 1,351 years ago. Even now, the defeated Solar warlords are unsure what turned them away and wiped one-third of their soldiers and three-quarters of their Essence-powered armaments from the face of Creation.

Adamant Oriole Sanctuary has a poor standard of living compared to the Realm's prefectures, but its people are hardworking and appear content. The Sanctuary supplies a full tenth of Creation's adamant production, and winning the supply contract for Chiaroscuro's construction imbued the tributary with inexhaustible cash reserves.

Experienced Solipsism's lands are hot grass plains with sparse woodlands. Small rivers flow out of the hills to the west and Drawn of Hesiesh Prefecture. Birds' nests are everywhere, from a size that fits in a child's hand to one larger than most single-family homes. Orioles of different breeds and colors build all of them, and the birds themselves are common sights in the tributary's skies, cities and towns. The region boasts over 100 different species of oriole, some with fantastic properties. Many theoreticians detect a connection between the fowls and the unbreakable glass, but none can figure out what it is.

## ILIO STARA

Eccentric Ilio Stara is an entire city cut into the living wood of a bonsai tree. Experienced Solipsism's now-famous

experiment made the bonsai the center of a spatial and perceptual distortion. Unrepeatable readings suggest that tremors of imperceptible instability shake the city's Essence as travelers pass through that distortion. Although the road to the small bonsai looks no longer than a mile, travelers cross 100 miles to get there. Each step covers less space than the last, and the travelers themselves become smaller. The bonsai appears the same relative size until the last few perceived miles, where it grows to tower over the human form.

The Staran Gate is two iridescent convex doors, each 100 feet in height, which never appears the same twice. Within, thousands of tunnels and chambers make up the city's homes, streets, public "buildings" and workplaces. Limited space dictates that the administration manage allocation of homes and shops carefully. The existing system places Exalted sorcerers and thaumaturges' orders above the working inhabitants, which causes some unrest. The bonsai's needles contain chambers that serve as workshops for the curious experiments that give Ilio Stara its reputation as a city of unpredictably creative artificers and theoreticians. A tenth of the long-term inhabitants are devoted researchers; another four-tenths are the researchers' retinues.

Tsen-Usen, the god of Ilio Stara, takes an interest in the city's governance and works closely with the city's governor, Rose from Stone. After all, he mentions cheerfully, he was once the god of a meager bonsai, and now, he sees to an entire city.

Rose from Stone is the illegitimate daughter of an influential Terrestrial Gens on the Blessed Isle. She excels at her given duties as governor of Ilio Stara and thanks her stars that her position keeps her so far from her controlling mother. Rose from Stone does what she can to encumber Dragon-Bloods from the more respected bloodlines when they enter her bailiwick. What she doesn't know is that many of them concoct business in Ilio Stara only to examine her inherited traits up close, some of which appear to be rare and desirable.

## THE SANCTUARY BORDERS

No visible protections border the Adamant Oriole Sanctuary. No automatons or bound creatures march its borders, nor do jade-inscribed obelisks hold back the Wyld or the principalities enemies. The answer to this mystery is a combination of a Primordial legacy and Solar magic. The behemoth Unbreakable Watanabe Bird lies beneath the Adamant Oriole Sanctuary, sleeping in his sealed cave. His dreams are mighty and made the land above as unpredictable as the Wyld until Experienced Solipsism walked into Unbreakable Watanabe Bird's unending dream and shaped it into the tributary she now rules.

That shaping defined the shape of the land above as sacrosanct, binding the behemoth into an eternal nightmare of stable productivity, a horror that would rouse long enough to decimate the Southeast before it slept again. Every oriole in the Sanctuary exists to appease the monster beneath.



(The sight of them soothes Unbreakable Watanabe Bird in his sleep and prevents the nightmare from waking him.) Only Experienced Solipsism and her mate know this secret, and it is the dearest of many they keep.

## FLOWING GRASP PROVINCE

The Flowing Grasp Province meets the River Province to the south, just level with the main body of the Avarice River. Its northwestern border runs parallel to the Silver River exactly 200 miles west and demarcates the official transition from East to North. This artificial boundary runs on until it dissolves in the Northeastern Wyld. Flowing Grasp's land includes expanses of redwoods in its center, fertile plains in its south and west along the Silver and stretches of deciduous forests in its south and east.

Saffron Tiger is the Dragon-Blooded daimyo of Flowing Grasp Province. She has a firm grasp of the region's resources and economic status beside its provincial neighbors and the rest of Creation, and she uses that knowledge to keep all her prefects and principal administrators in line. Her rivals are not subtle about their efforts to replace or kill her, but every new appointee suffers ruinous economic downfall in the area and every corpse turns out to be someone else's, to many assassins' shame. Saffron Tiger never dares cross a Solar directly, but she knows how to lure even the Chosen of the Sun into playing her game, which makes the Flowing Grasp Province much more productive than it would otherwise be.

Saffron Tiger's skills are necessary, as the Deliberative knows, to keep a province with such willful tributaries from flying apart. The appointment committee schedules a meeting for the week after one where they replace Saffron Tiger (they usually meet once per season), ready to return her to her place. Saffron Tiger has four husbands, excessive by anyone's standards, and makes regular use of neomah to impregnate the women of her small (next to a Solar's) harem. Her self-breeding program is blunt compared to many of those run by Celestial Exalts, but scholars continue to watch her progress. She permits them to examine her 68 children in exchange for full disclosure of the results.

## BELL GARDEN PREFECTURE

Lustrous Crystal Heart, Fearless of the Sun, Terrifying Enemy of Rakshastan, the Windrider, et cetera, considers himself a guide for the people of Bell Garden Prefecture, but this is a conceit of humility. He pretends to leave the governance of the prefecture to his prefect, Old Raven Gray, but the prefect is a powerless and unnecessary figurehead as Lustrous Crystal Heart rules his region directly in all but name. His laws test the limits of what is allowed by the Clear Glass Accord, keeping the prefecture's citizens as obedient and humble as possible while staying within the letter of the law. His Solar peers either do not know of the situation or willfully ignore it.

The prefecture is named for its capital city, which takes its name from the famous gardens of organic crystal wonders transplanted from the Dominion of the Dragon Kings. Chimes and bells of subtly hued crystal hang in the city's many gardens, ringing serene natural harmonies even through the slums. Winds blow their crystalline spores out of the city where they infest the RPC fields, sprawling private estates and forests that make up the rest of the prefecture, draining resources for their removal.

The crystal spores sometimes mutate, becoming threats to the farmers tasked with clearing them (sometimes even to the Exalted). One pack of mobile crystal plant-creatures runs the depths of Black Days Forest in the northwest. Another set of spores infested the inhabitants of an entire RPC, turning them into ravenous monsters of crystal and flesh that did not stop until the Windrider himself crushed the uprising of the cunning creatures. Neither incident exists within the official Register of Prefectural Events.

## GLORYHAME

Lustrous Crystal Heart founded Gloryhame 147 years ago as a city of joy and celebration. Every public building is of red stone, and other building materials are allowed only as judged by the local aesthetic council (which Lustrous Crystal Heart heads). The Zenith officially chartered the city in celebration of his victory over a Fair Folk incursion, but the scant 500 miles separating it from Sijan to the south and west mark it as a deliberate contrast with that city's somberness and ritual.

The laws of Gloryhame forbid tradition, marking each moment unique and in need of recognition unlike any that has come before. Lawmen enforce this rule lightly—no one arrests a household for uttering the same prayer daily before work—but they are less lax than they were 50 years ago. The required inventiveness makes Gloryhame a destination for the explorative. Ordinary people visit to see what the inhabitants have dreamed up today and to escape the repetition of their own lives. Savants study the city as a sociological experiment.

Gloryhame lauds personal achievement. Its people readily congratulate friends and neighbors for their accomplishments, and Recognition Section (a government body) rewards such events with minor financial windfalls. The center of the city, where many cities keep a temple to the Incarnae, is a mile-radius open field of well-kept grass, dotted with trees. Lustrous Crystal Heart dedicated this place as a temple to one's own successes, and a few hundred people walk the park in celebration of themselves at any given time.

Wretched Hound, the city's governor, is a young Terrestrial Exalt with little ambition beyond his own leisure. He's satisfied to relax while his Solar master rules Gloryhame as closely as the man rules Bell Garden. Hound's rewarding habit is to let anything in the city pass uncontested, given that establishing the precedent of law would be a form of tradition.

## INARI'S STAND

This three-mile-square shadowland marks a major victory of the Primordial War, where one of the gods' fiercest opponents died in battle, betrayed by his own fetich.

Inari Heart-of-Thorns was the fetich demon of a Primordial slain in the war. She was the compassion of a being that only hated, the care of one who was thoughtless. By containing these aspects within his fetich, his heart, the Primordial's cruel creativity grew a thousandfold and made him impossible to defeat. His rampage ended here, where Inari Heart-of-Thorns stood in defiance. She and the Exalted slew the Primordial there, and he seeped into the Underworld leaving only this stain behind.

The hero of the hour died that day as well, leaving behind no clue to how she managed to defy her Primordial. Only a monument to the demon who might have saved Creation remains, a 37-foot spire of pure Malfean iron inscribed with the many names of her souls and their progeny. The victors in the war are ignorant that Inari's compassion died with her Primordial. She now wanders the Underworld, consuming ghosts to appease her spite and seeking to cause havoc in Creation—and especially among the Exalted—without endangering her beloved unlife.

## VERDANT SASH PROTECTORATE

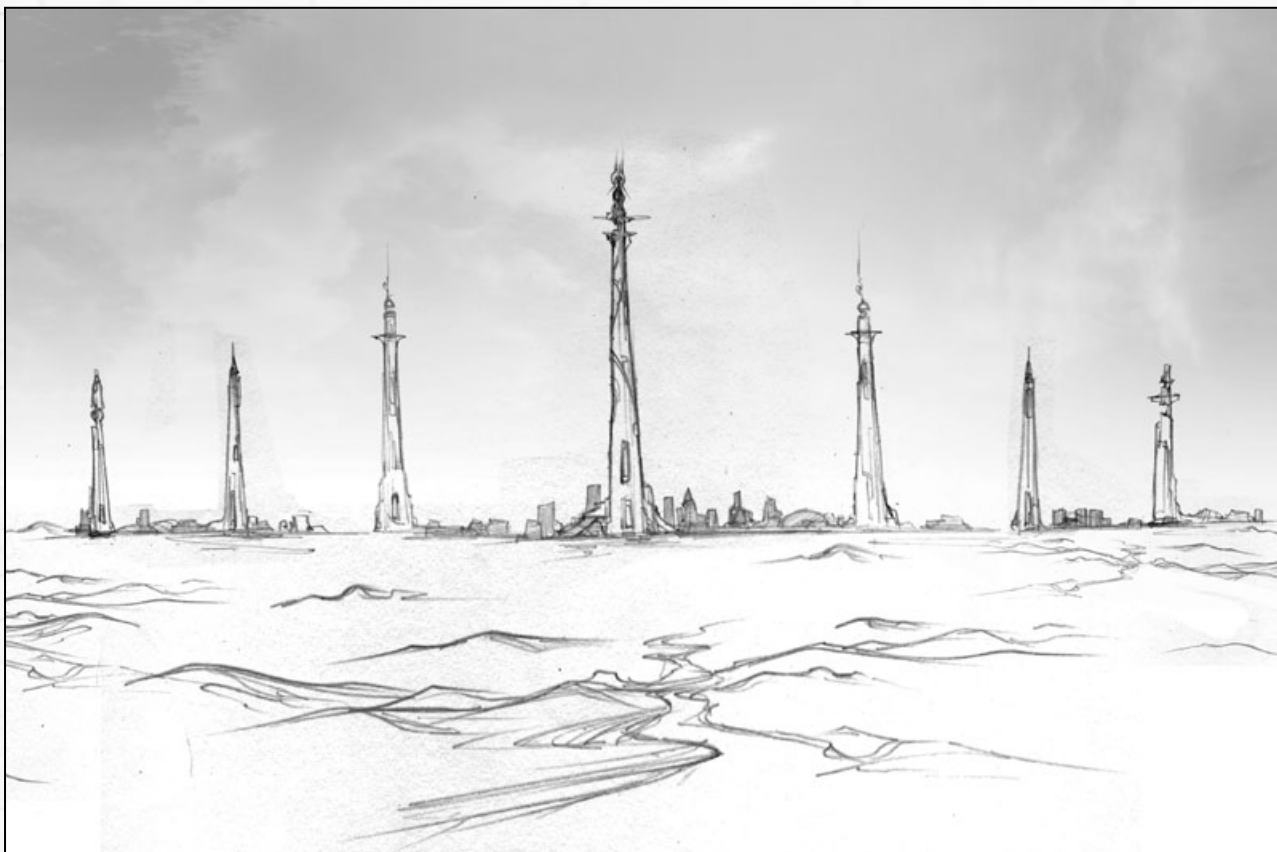
Verdant Sash is the first slash of the Northeastern forest, separating the fertile grasslands of Cookery Paradise, Faithful

Shores Nation and the Thousand Hooves Plains Prefecture from the deep evergreen forests farther north and east. Its northern edge follows Maron's Finger, and the Little Finger where it branches. Verdant Sash is also the only principality in the near Northeast with access to the rich-hued redwoods and other softwoods besides the Water Roots Triumvirate, allowing it a brisk local business in lumber that avoids the Triumvirate's monopoly prices. The Solar Yeshaaim has ambitions that do not include the principality for which he is responsible, but he honors his people and his duty to them.

The tributary's border lies just 80 miles from the edge of the Great Northeast Forest. Conifers grow tall from there until they tower over the waters of Maron's Little Finger. Forts dot the southern and northern borders, a natural precaution for any principality surrounded by tributaries. The greater forts are complexes inside many massive living trees in the north and are connected through the ground, ready to stave off the expansionist Water Roots Triumvirate. Small rivers flow through the region, impeding foot travel but enriching the soil for farming.

## MALESSA OF THE ELEVEN TOWERS

Malessa's 11 towers are its signature. They stand in a row, forming the northeast edge of the city and rising from 300 feet tall at either end to 550 feet at the top of the centermost tower. The height of each but the middle tower is also the distance to the base of the next taller tower. All Malessa of the Eleven Towers' laws are subsidiary to those governing



the towers' care and regulation. They must always be their current heights, their current distances from one another and kept whole. The consequences should a tower fall are known only to Yeshaim and Prefect Ingosh the Younger, but the consequence of *causing* one to fall is public and worse than death. Also secret is that even the Exalted fear what rises when the towers fall.

Wealthy inhabitants and government buildings sit at the towers' feet, always to the southwest. Nothing is built northeast of the Eleven Towers between them and the near forest. Farther from the towers in Malessa, the quality of life declines. Centuries of public betterment programs have failed, and Ingosh the Younger's current attempts fare little better. Something about the nature of Malessa of the Eleven Towers forces a steep wealth gradient on the city.

Ingosh the Younger bears his name with embarrassment. His mother chose it to honor the Lunar hero of the Southern principality where Ingosh the Younger was born, and that presumption has always brought him shame. His shame drove him to excellence, and he bears the distinction of being a prefect without any Exaltation. More than one Terrestrial considers him an overstepped flunky, but Yeshaim is pleased to have a prefect so attentive to the people and values Ingosh the Younger's uniquely mortal viewpoint.

## WATER ROOT TRIUMVIRATE

So-named for the half-dozen rivers that intermingle to become the Silver River at its southwest end, the Water Root Triumvirate is most infamous within the Flowing Grasp Province. Any apprentice savant knows of it and can recite its history. In Year 456, the Land of the Root Dragons, the Three Finger Territory and the Rosemary Viceregency united beneath their Solar rulers and became the Water Root Triumvirate, the first principality ruled directly by a group of Solars. The size of the tributary and its control over much of the near Northeast made it an instant powerhouse in its province and in neighboring principalities.

The Water Root Triumvirate's rulers enhanced its reputation by giving their nation the highest (mortal) standard of living in Creation, without exception. Even the poorest mortal in the Water Root Triumvirate eats regular hot meals, enjoys public entertainment and has authority to command any public servants not charged by a higher-ranked citizen. This is possible because of the preponderance of Fair Folk slaves. The triumvirs funded thousands of hunting parties into the Middlemarches and Deep Wyld in 521 and paid bounties on any live Fair Folk. The hunters brought back commoners by the gross and nobles by the dozen. The triumvirs themselves sallied forth with their mates, a trio of Sidereals and two score Terrestrial beaters. They captured a powerful Fair Folk lord, One Sword Empire, and arranged an oath. The Solars would cease hunting the Fair Folk and release the lord; in exchange, no Fair Folk would offer the least harm to the Triumvirate, none would attempt to rescue their brethren, and all current prisoners would be fitted with slave collars.

As a result, each city in the Flowing Grasp Province has a Fair Folk slave population equal to one tenth of its human population. The slaves' exceptional service keeps even the lowest human citizens of the province from dirtying their hands with the worst menial labors. Several demesnes in each city exclusively sustain the Essence-hungry Fair Folk. One Sword Empire harries nearby principalities, often stopping just short of cutting the smallest branch of the triumvir's trees. It frustrates those principalities that the Triumvirate is too powerful for them to demand restitution.

## SAL-MANETH

Sal-Maneth is a city of delicate nature. Its intricate open-work of rainbow-colored steel and stained glass floats 300 feet over the Blackwater River in the Flowing Grasp Province, too all appearances fragility made inhabitable. Hundreds of curving latticework walkways connect towers and open plazas of similar designs, and redwood needles and bark of steel and glass prevail over décor less imitative of life.

Tall redwoods grow from the crowded banks of the river through the gaps in Sal-Maneth's construction, and their branches cast pleasant shade over much of the city. The trees and arabesque each complements the beauty of the other, and the city's geomancy makes sure that no growth damages the city's structure or aesthetics. Other redwoods, engineered for stair-like growth of branches, provide access to either bank of the Blackwater.

Sal-Maneth is a study in balance, and Eastern savants interested in the study, contemplation or appreciation thereof keep at least one home in the city. The mechanism that floats the city draws power from the river that runs above it. It is a poetic reminder of nature's power that should the Blackwater dwindle to nothing or shift over time, Sal-Maneth will fall.

Each tower in the city contains the local household of one Exalt, god or honored entity, and fills all their needs. Hanging gardens grow fruit, city employees deliver fresh meat and milk and honey daily (or weekly when the master is away), libraries and plush bedrooms provide luxury and entertainment, and the Exalted bring their own preferences to the towers.

Sal-Maneth is best known for the Vine Blossom Academy, which trains horticulturists and landscapers working to integrate plants with human habitation. Each graduate breeds one new plant-tool or designs an original nature-integrated town as a final project, which serves as his first financial venture. Fruit of the Vine, as they are called, are in high demand across Creation, especially in arid regions of the North or South.

Sal-Maneth's governor, Instilled Fury, is a whirlwind, preparing approbation of satellite towns, founding a new intercity jai alai team, making the concluding placement in Red Phoenix-Dragon Blossoming or sending an incisive message to her supervisor, Undersecretary Harpin. She views life as a competition, and she refuses to lose.

## SAMIAREN

Travelers to the Northeast see a golden-brown aura radiating through the trees for 23 miles before they reach the city of Amber Samiaren, as tourists and advertisers call it. Natives call it “the glow of home.” Twenty-two miles from the city limits, at 16 evenly spaced radial waypoints, mansions provide gratis hospitality to travelers. Like the city itself, they are constructs of wood-hard amber exuded by central pine trees.

That the trees produce amber to keep the mansions in good repair and arcane devices turn amber into a sustaining food and pinesap into a sweet wine is miracle enough, but the city proper is more miraculous still. Thousands of pine trees operate under similar design to create a five-layered city a dozen miles in diameter, all of golden-brown amber. Bridges connect the broad plazas, manses, small villas, temples and government buildings, while amber stairs and elevators connect the adjacent layers. The bottom level is a slum by intent, as the poor need someplace to live. The top level is the most open to the sky (though city planners make sure the sun reaches every place in the city at least once a year), and only the most wealthy and revered live there. Temples to the Incarnae ring the expansive office of Tranquil Brook, Secretary to the Triumvirate.

Devices implanted in the pine trees turn sap into copious fresh water, which cascades from the pine forest’s highest points downward through suspended canals and fountains until it spills from the last layer into a river it creates below the city. Several of these devices produce hot springs, which provide bathing water and a source of free heating for everyone in Amber Samiaren. The hot and cool aqueducts join only before they pour to the ground, so that even the impoverished survive the city’s harsh winters. Inhabitants in scant dress, sufficiently insulated for a five-minute to half-hour walk, often stroll from one heated chamber to the next amidst heavy snowfall.

Tranquil Brook holds the title of Secretary to the Triumvirate, a position created as the Dragon-Blooded head of Flowing Grasp’s governance. She is a capable woman and proud that she administers to the largest single principality in Creation. Her loyalty to the triumvirs is absolute, but one of her jobs is to make the deals for political or economic expediency that the triumvirs cannot due to precedent, policy or ideals. This need is not uncommon, but she takes it further, dealing with criminal elements and political dissidents all over the East. Some infer that she truly acts without her masters’ permission. They try to make her into their agent, and she performs much counterespionage through that ruse. She also makes many enemies, but she is unconcerned. The triumvirs back her all the way.

## YAGAN

Limestone and glass compose this city. By ancient law, all construction and public structures must be of limestone until they surpass 60 feet in height. From that height upward,

glass is the only legal material. What began as a dictatorial incentive to develop improved techniques with the materials became a regulation of style and the city’s signature. (Despite the rush to improve glass as a building material, Adamant Oriole Sanctuary beat out the Water Root Triumvirate for the contract to supply Chiaroscuro’s building material.) Since no stricture governs glass color, every conceivable hue tops at least one building, but those gray-blues that best complement the limestone dominate.

Yagan serves as a depot for trade between the Water Root Triumvirate and the rest of the Flowing Grasp Province to the north and east. Enchantments on the hundred surrounding miles make the forest more navigable and passable. Its tourism board says even a lost infant could safely make its way home. Resorts dot this region of tamed forest, and the 10 Wandersfar lodges sit just on the circle’s edge. They serve as outposts for travelers and as deluxe hunting resorts for those who brave the untamed wilderness outside the 100-mile radius.

Because of its high demand for untrained labor, Yagan has three times as many Fair Folk slaves as similar cities in the Flowing Grasp Province.

Shen Four-Finger once stole over 400,000 talents of jade from a position of trust the triumvirs had given him. Betrayed by a weak underling, Shen divulged the jade’s location during his punishment, and all was recovered. For this reason, the Dragon-Blood retains four of his fingers: the middle and forefinger on each hand. Having earned his trust again, Shen serves as Yagan’s governor. His deformity causes many to underestimate him. All who do so regret it, especially since he took the triumvir’s lessons on punishment and loyalty to heart.

## EMERALD SOLSTICE’S VILLA

The villa is a series of small mansions, entertainment halls, dormitories and storage sheds (disguised as handsome hills or copses) separated by broad quadrangles. Its lightly forested grounds sprawl over 17 square miles before the dense Eastern woods close in around it. Emerald Solstice, a Solar Exalt of moderate age, founded this villa so she could entertain guests in an untamed and adventurous setting. (Three small barbarian tribes live nearby at her sufferance. They war against each other and raid the villa when prompted by Charms. Both events serve as entertainment for Emerald Solstice and her visitors.)

The villa is also an experiment. Emerald Solstice imbued a small sphere of green jade with a core of orichalcum and buried the seed at the center of her villa. Now, all the villa’s redwood needles grow with a trace of orichalcum. Emerald Solstice has the fallen needles gathered in order to distill the valuable material, but she keeps the source a secret from her peers. The total collected orichalcum approaches the quantity she invested in the original sphere, and Emerald Solstice is eager to learn if the experiment produces more orichalcum than she put into it.



Karo Feet-of-Moss watches the villa when her mistress is absent, which is often. She has discovered an appreciation for the distillation of a tree-growing fungus in her boredom. This extraction is an unknown (and unregulated) drug that will make the first person to figure that fact out a quick fortune and cast the local economy into chaos. The ensuing rush for the new drug could ruin Emerald Solstice's villa. Should that happen, she becomes the instigator's enemy despite any reparations that might be offered, and a Solar foe is no small thing.

A horde of servants and landscapers (guided by several graduates of the Vine Blossom Academy) keeps the villa trim in Emerald Solstice's absence.

### GOLD LEAF CANAL

The Gold Leaf Canal connects all the Water Root Triumvirate's rivers in a smooth arc, from the Silver River to Maron's Finger. Unbreakable adamant lines the canal, embedded with gold leaf at the bottom. (Would-be thieves who dive for the gold invariably drown.) The canal's enchanted locks facilitate water transport within the Water Root Triumvirate for a minimal fee. Laughing Hippo, the current master of the canal, was given the position to oust him from politics in Yagan.

### THE SILVER WEIR

This dam would be considered a wonder of the Age were anyone but the triumvirs aware of its existence. It remains beneath Silver Tarn, where the many rivers of Flowing Grasp become one, at the point where the great lake thins into the Silver River that runs south and west to the River of Tears. It also rests just north of the Triumvirate's southern border at that point.

Should someone activate the Silver Weir, it would appear as thousands of foot-diameter black-and-white disks joined at the edges rising from turbulent waters. It covers the breadth of the Silver River and 200 miles to either side as well, slightly concave. Light distorts around the disks before solid glass encases them for their entire length: the weir borrows the imperviousness of Yu-Shan's adamant wall, making it unbreakable as long as it is active (which is until deactivated, since it's powered by a dedicated five-dot manse). Its sole flaw is that the source of its impermeability grows brittle for the duration. A section of Yu-Shan's wall becomes frangible as long as the Silver Weir is active. Which section is affected is impossible to tell, though.

The triumvirs built the Silver Weir as a weapon of extortion against the principalities south along the Silver River. It is a tool they are unwilling to use, knowing that the political backlash would destroy even their mighty Triumvirate, but it remains as a last resort.

## LABYRINTH OF SOOTHING SHADOWS PROVINCE

This province borders the River Province and Flowing Grasp Provinces on the west, the southern end of the

Errant Root Massif on the south and only untamed Wyld in the east and north. Its eastern border technically rests at the Elemental Pole of Wood, but tamed lands beyond that point fall under its influence naturally.

The daimyo of the province is Tsatsuka Omeji, favored scion of a powerful Terrestrial Gens who holds the post as part of his grooming to one day serve in Meru, possibly the Deliberative itself, or at least as aide to a Solar directional administrator. His ambition is as great as his family's, and he sees his province as a chance to build a naturally expanding power base before returning to the capital. After all, a little Wyld is no bar to the Solar rulers who continue to carve slices off chaos to feed their nations.

## CRAGS OF THE EARTH AND SKY PREFECTURE

Root Massif Prefecture is the gateway from the Labyrinth of Soothing Shadows Province to the rest of the East, but Crag of the Earth and Sky is the lynchpin of the province's prefectures. Central location, expert governance and necessary sky travel make it the logical stop for transporting goods, travel and educated discourse.

It contains the Shattered of Brilliance Embassy, home to the Eastern Fair Folk delegation. This makes political appointments more senior than standard for a prefecture so far from the Blessed Isle, and the prefect must be comfortable dealing with the Fair Folk, their stories and their games. Prefects who handle the ambassador and her attachés well come away with famous trade treaties; the others do not come away at all. Burning Soul Godo and his Lunar mate Thousand Blind Devils prefer not to remind the Fair Folk of those great Exalted who forge the Wyld into the Realm, allowing their prefect and the Ministry of Diplomacy to handle all negotiations.

Crag of the Earth and Sky is a prefecture of dangerous mountains and cliffs, all of earth that is thick with the roots of bent or shattered giant trees. Much of the land that people, animals and vehicles tread is dozens of fallen forest giants, covered with moss and crushed into solid ground by the weight of trees still standing. Actual earth lies more than 100 yards beneath the foot traffic in many places and remains one foot of soil amidst a dozen foot-thick roots. Even safe paths through the dense forest rapidly ascend and descend mountains of dead trees and mile-tall root tangles, and switchbacks are a way of life for people not blessed with air travel.

Conventional crops fare poorly in the prefecture, so the government imports many tons of rice and wheat each year. Certain exotic berries, nuts and edible pine cones flourish, however. They grow under conditions difficult to reproduce, but they represent a major supplement to imports and are common at every table's daily meals. Within the mountains of dead trees and roots, rare fungi and light-averse vines provide a living for anyone brave enough to seek them. Monsters also call those places home.



## MOUNT KAHIKATEA

Mount Kahikatea is a three-mile-high tangle of kahikatea trees, growing out from lower trees' branches one after another until some undiscovered tree at the bottom derives nutrients from the earth. The city of the same name sits atop and within the tangle. Graceful spires of wood rise from the mountaintop, engraved with enlightening poetry and meaningful friezes. The city's wood comes from all over Creation, and the towers' beauty represents a centuries-long competition between architects and the Exalted who hire them, though the weight of so many towers tightens the inhabited tunnels beneath them. (Only advanced engineering prevents worse.) The Copal Campanile on Mount Kahikatea's summit is the seat of government as well as a powerful Wood-aspected manse.

Hundreds of tunnels worm through Mount Kahikatea in an organic and unintentional (but recognized) imitation of Meru itself. People of the lower class live beneath the mountain's topmost canopy, and many do their work there as well. Above-canopy estates have many tunnel access points so servants can come and go without being seen more than necessary. The de facto prefect, Aetamos, ensures that children who become too sensitive to the light receive remedial ocular post-development corrections or ocular

acuity improvements, putting the latter to work as scouts and spies. Few tunnels need be dug. Most are natural gaps between branches, roots and trunks of the kahikateas and more often require filling in to make them easily traversable by mortals. Wood-aspected gardeners and graduates of the Vine Blossom Academy are on hand at all times.

Aetamos, Brother of Brass and Iron and Constructive Soul of That Which Calls to the Shadows, has been de facto prefect of the Crag of the Earth and Sky Prefecture for the last 89 years. Aetamos administers the prefecture flawlessly, his every value judgment representative of his summoner's intent. He exhibits rapport with the Fair Folk diplomats, the primary reason for his current employment, and the deals he makes enrich the prefecture and all Creation for the innovation and new understanding they bring. The actual Dragon-Blooded prefect, Veiled Skies, appreciates the situation, spending her time partying and indulging in sanctioned levels of embezzlement.

Over the decades, Aetamos has acquired traits of the Fair Folk with whom he treats. This aspect of his nature is part of what makes his diplomacy valuable, but his habits have changed with time. Too much exposure to the ambassador's freehold might change him enough that he is no longer bound by the Exalted.

## SHATTERED OF BRILLIANCE EMBASSY

The Realm donated this 50-mile by 100-mile block of land to any diplomats the Fair Folk chose to send at the insistence of Oh-Te-Sun, founder of the Crags of the Earth and Sky Prefecture. It belongs by law to the Eastern Fair Folk, and they have the responsibility of the land's upkeep and, theoretically, the citizens' administration. No mortals live on the grounds, though the borders are thick with settlements that prevent the Fair Folk's freehold from weakening the fabric of Creation from within. In truth, Aetamos sees to any needs of the embassy grounds as a favor and for advantage in ongoing and future negotiations. Paying the Terrestrials or procuring the indentured workers and criminals who do the work is expensive, but the results far outweigh the costs.

Aetamos and his chosen deputy delegates (who include a First Circle demon, a ghost, one of the Mountain Folk, a volunteer Sidereal and several Dragon-Blooded) join Ambassador Blood of the Last Moon and her subordinates at the negotiating table every night before the new moon. All the deputies suspect the others of wielding their positions to personal or ideological advantage, but all would be surprised to learn that only the Mountain Folk is doing so. Most deal-making occurs between the Fair Folk attachés and Aetamos' delegates during scripted impromptu strolls through the freehold's impossible gardens, where things the principals cannot say are bartered. When the groups reconvene, deals are inked and signed. Creation comes out ahead.

## SERENE CANOPY PROVINCE

Serene Canopy Province borders the Labyrinth of Soothing Shadows Province at the Errant Root Massif, the River Province and the Dominion of the Dragon Kings just west of there, and it runs south and east until it runs out of trees. Daimyo Echo Dream ignores the official eastern border just as his counterpart to the north does.

Echo Dream is a favorite of the Celestial and Terrestrial Bureaucracies. He offers acceptable tributes to the elementals and gods of the province, honoring the great ones most but always leaving thoughtful gifts for the masses of lesser spirits. In exchange, the principalities of the Serene Canopy Province prosper and the gods make certain the Solar rulers know who's responsible for their goodwill. That's why Echo Dream has held the post for over 300 years, and why his daughter Echo Lover will take over when he passes on, likely in the next decade. The respect for spirits instilled by her father battles with her resentment over the attention he paid them over her. Which sentiment is victorious will decide much about the province's future.

## ORANGE BLOSSOM CHANCELLERY

Chancellor Fire-Hearted Ken rules his chancellery with two Lunars at his side: Finder of Glorious Trifles and Earth-Minder. Finder of Glorious Trifles is Ken's bonded

Lunar mate, but Earth-Minder is bonded to a Solar ruler in the Far West. Her fated mate shares none of her interests and lends no weight to her desires, so she found excuses to spend her time in Meru with the Deliberative. There, she met Fire-Hearted Ken, who ignored the danger of slighting his peer and invited her to Orange Blossom where her freedom would be paramount. She and Finder are both his spouses, which keeps Earth-Minder's bonded Solar up nights seething.

The chancellor's desires lie in turning his tributary into an economic powerhouse. Orange trees grow freely across the land, giving the chancellery both its name and an export, which is lauded as the best in Creation. That the land is not as obscenely fertile as the River Province only increases demand and prices. Quiet geomantic flaws planted among the orchards of that province further improve the Orange Blossom Chancellery's profit. Earth-Minder helps make the citrus orchards without peer. Her joy is developing new cultivars of their many trees, maximizing yield, flavor, consistency and juice quantity; it makes Ken happy to fulfill two of his desires by giving Earth-Minder free reign.

Ken's other interest is one he shares with Finder of Glorious Trifles: thaumaturgy. Both studied extensively at nearby Sperimin centuries ago. They have published many theses on the subject since then, some jointly, as well as exegeses on others' publications. Orange Blossom Chancellery might be the second-best place to learn the thaumaturgic arts outside Sperimin, though few would know. Its institutions are run by the state and only for promising mortals (able to access their Essence) who exhibit significant loyalty to Chancellor Ken.

Fire-Hearted Ken uses these expert thaumaturges in all facets of governance. They enchant building materials, make official seals impossible to forge, build geomancy of speed into the streets and roads, appease gods, spy on and sabotage enemies, enhance their administrative decisions with ritual and so on. His private army, the Enchanted Legion, wields enough power to put a battalion of Dragon-Blooded to shame.

Like the states to the west, Orange Blossom Chancellery naturally contains dry hills with sparse trees. After over a millennium of agricultural development, however, the hills are aesthetic greens and ochres designed in pleasant occult patterns that maximize tranquility, growth and harvesting speed. Iron pipes imbued with drops of black jade drive water to the hilltops from many wells, ensuring sufficient irrigation. Valleys and rocky mesas house Orange Blossom's cities, and the free growth that remains burns every few summers in a series of natural wildfires that Exalts and thaumaturges contain with spells and talismans.

## SATSUMA TOWNSHIP

Satsuma Township rests atop Charcoal Mesa, surrounded by hillside orchards in Orange Blossom Chancellery's southwest. Access to the mesa is limited by the one safe path up.

Strong beams of steel and jade broaden the road to more than a footpath, but most of the traffic in and out remains by air. Such transport depends on clear weather, making the local sky mantis grid one of the city's most important assets and most tempting targets of sabotage. Even the surrounding orchards are harvested by small towns living on or beneath the slopes.

White Genesis Totomu holds the position of Expert Mandarin at Satsuma. She is the ultimate authority over the city's and state's legal and judicial concerns, enacting her Solar master's wishes. Only Chancellor Ken or his wives override her decisions, and she works so closely with them that that hasn't happened in over a century. Immaculate Mandarin Stone Horse, peerless administrator over Orange Blossom Chancellery's religious and thaumaturgic concerns, resents White Genesis Totomu's policies, especially that of suborning the priests and trained thaumaturges to the state. The Immaculate Mandarin covets some of Totomu's influence and aims to have it. His first ploy is to shift the capital from Satsuma Township, which is far from central, to Golden Gorse Valley where sits his seat of power.

## WHITE IRON PHOENIX PREFECTURE

White Iron Phoenix Prefecture rests on the edge of the world. Other prefectures occupy three of its borders, ensuring significant stability for a state whose other border fades into the Wyld. Irregular hills covered with heavy forest mark this region, though the nature of hills and trees farthest east shifts with the phase of the moon. Fair Folk raid here and make away with citizens, but such raids are not common and not onerous. Even families of the unfortunates kidnapped admit that.

The white iron phoenix, which gives the prefecture its name, causes this sense of security. It is a snow-white bird that attacks raksha creatures on sight, assaulting even Fair Folk nobles without any regard for safety. When slain, it bursts into a brilliant flame that sears the Wyld away, leaving static Creation and solid iron statues of the Fair Folk it touched. A new phoenix then rises from a pile of iron ashes at the center of the inferno. Stranger yet, the white iron phoenix is a Wyld creature, incapable yet of breeding true in Creation. It flies out of the Bordermarches to eat and breed, and perhaps for unknown reasons, it returns just as easily if it encounters no Fair Folk. Whether the creatures assault Fair Folk in the Wyld is a mystery.

Twelve Dragon-Blooded sit on the Council of Ashes and Fire while the Solar Hart Without Flaw visits Meru

or tours the world—that is, most of the time. Joy-in-Flesh leads the council through his energy, dedication and lofty ideals: that all creatures know their place precisely and not endeavor to leave it, either to ascend beyond station or sink beneath born duty and respectability. Active programs for which Joy-in-Flesh is responsible include breeding animals to stand for the hunter's bow and walk to the butcher's knife, as well as development of affordable implants able to make mortals content with obedience and caste labels dependent on complex astrological signs. The Council of Ashes and Fire discharges all other duties before committing resources to these side projects, so Hart Without Flaw has not yet noticed. That, or he approves but cannot explicitly participate in the experiments.

## EG'S PASS

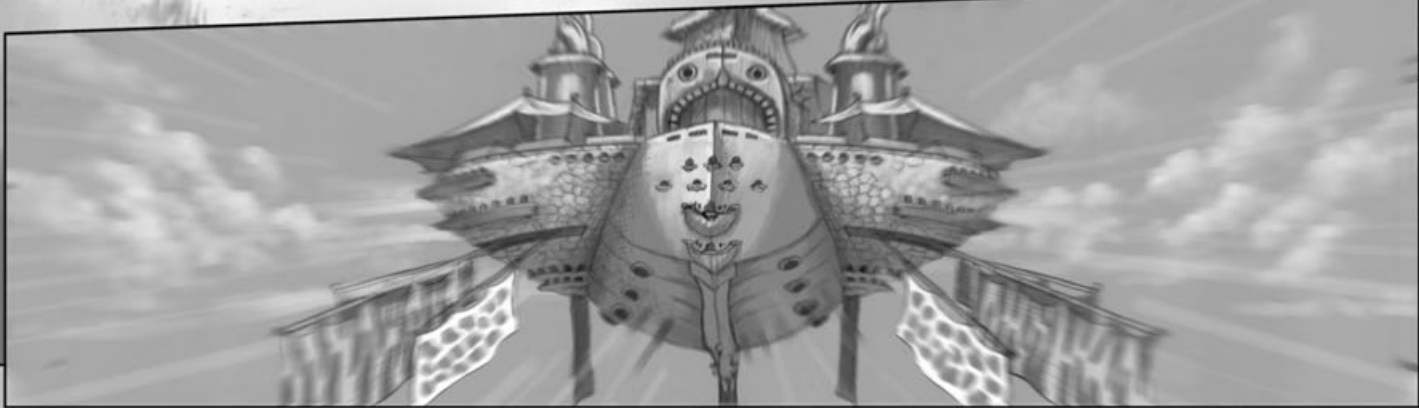
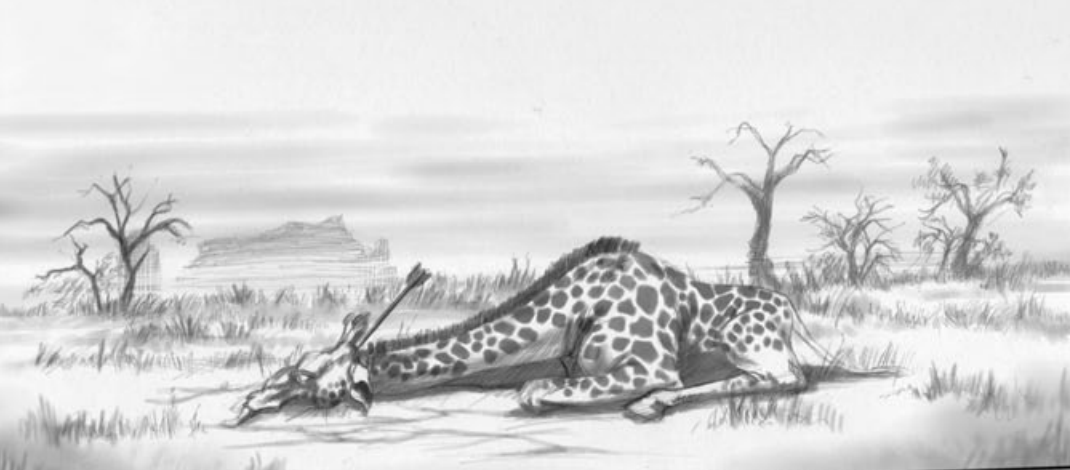
Eg's Pass is inconsequential to White Iron Phoenix Prefecture. It is a tourist stop for visitors from Cacophonic Winds Prefecture, crossing the border to take advantage of the lower local sales taxes. It manages a small contribution to the prefecture's lumber and medicinal herb trades. It is also infested by Fair Folk.

Relatively eastern in the prefecture and small, everyone ignored the first report from a minor town official describing suspicious behaviors as defined within *The Efficacious Mandarin Manual of Decorous Conduct*. Another minor official (but one in a greater city) filed that and the next three reports unread, simultaneously dispatching a commendation for industry and a sixth-degree demerit for undue stress on the administration. No more reports came.

By this point, all inhabitants of Eg's Pass but the Dragon-Blooded governor are disguised Fair Folk and hobgoblins playing at being one of Creation's towns. Ophelis Gend bitches at their strange habits and grumps that the manses need repair (their Essence bleed feeds the intruders), but that's as far as he'll go until the town's industry stops. And the Fair Folk haven't stopped playing their parts yet. The first birth since the invasion is due soon, whatever that heralds.

Ophelis Gend ignores his town's problems. If it were important enough to change, the prefect would come have a talk with him about it. After all, she's his cousin and wouldn't dare fire him without a grievous error on his part or a paper trail leading from here to the Blessed Isle. Even better, he knows all the gigolos she's been entertaining at Hart Without Flaw's personal estate during the Solar's frequent absences.





AN EXCELLENT SHOT, SIR.



AND I SEE TWO VULTURES ALREADY APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH.



JUST TWO? THEY'RE LEARNING...



## CHAPTER FOUR THE SOUTH

After the Blessed Isle, the South is the most populous portion of Creation. The northern and western coasts contain some of Creation's finest growing lands, producing both abundant harvests of grain, nuts and fruit, as well as many of the finest wines in Creation. The plains of the Southeast are home to both an abundance of fierce and beautiful wildlife and to the herds of sacred cattle of Ahlat. As a result, much of this region was declared a game preserve and the private hunting grounds of the Celestial Exalted shortly after the founding of the Deliberative.

The coastal South is a land of mild, dry summers and cool and wet (but rarely cold) winters, where many mortals eschew climate control in their dwellings, preferring instead to enjoy the feel of the almost universally pleasant seasons. Even in the height of summer, the nights are cool, and the day's heat is never too extreme or unpleasant. Because of a combination of the impressive climate and the relatively unobtrusive presence of the Deliberative, the Southern Coast is widely acclaimed by both mortals and many Dragon-Blooded as the most desirable region of Creation. The Deliberative's geomantic manipulations and weather-control devices moderate the South's heat and maintain these pleasant conditions as far as 1,000 miles inland. The coastal regions of the South are some of the most productive agricultural lands outside the Blessed Isle. Where left to grow wild, the land contains

a mixture of sparse hardy trees, such as olives, cedars and almonds, and vast expanses of low green vegetation.

Deeper into the Southern interior, the land grows warmer. Summers are hot, and winters remain at least slightly warm, but the nights are always cool. Here, the lush vegetation of the coastal regions is gradually replaced by low and hardy bushes and tough, thorny ground cover, which are increasingly separated by patches of barren soil. In the Southeastern interior, giant tree-like cacti grow to several hundred feet high, but the vegetation in the rest of the Southern interior rarely grows more than three or four yards high.

The Southern interior is noted for low mountains bearing all manner of gems and metals, including vast quantities of jade and precious stones. These Southern mountains are also one of the few places that adamant deposits can be found on or near the surface. Near both the eastern and western edges of the Southlands and also in the farthest South, these mountains rise up to become huge volcanic mountain ranges filled with many active volcanoes. In the Southeast, these are known as the Summer Mountains, while to the Southwest and Far South, they are known only as the Fire Mountains (see pp. 105-106).

The mountains and foothills of the Southern interior are extensively mined, typically using mortals housed in rural production complexes with excellent climate controls, as

well as a mix of elementals, demons and simple automated servitors. From these mines, the mineral wealth of the South is transported to the coastal cities, where much of it is worked into finished goods. The rest is traded raw to all the other regions of Creation.

The Far South is a land of almost eternal heat. The only noticeable seasonal variations go from very warm to hot, and the air cools only slightly at night. While mortals can survive here, those who have not specifically been adapted to life in the Far South require extensive supplies of water and occasional forays into cooler temperatures. The land consists almost exclusively of rocky outcroppings and mountains and sandy deserts. A few moist and lush oases can be found, but they are all demesnes of Air, Water or Wood where the local elemental energies overcome the otherwise universal heat and dryness. Outside such places, the few plants that grow are all small, tough and very thorny, and there is no open water except for a few streams, most of which are either somewhat brackish, exceedingly narrow and erratic or both.

The Far South is also a land of vast mineral abundance, however, so mortals and Exalts come here to obtain it. Near the borders of the Wyld are vast firedust deposits that replenish themselves whenever the winds shift to flow in from the Pure Chaos beyond the borders of Creation. Also, the gems found in the interior are both more common and

larger here, as are rarer and stranger prizes such as fire rubies, which perpetually glow with heat. Depending on their size and how they are cut, their temperature ranges from that of warm bath water to heat just sufficient to boil water.

## THE SOUTHEASTERN PROVINCE

The Southeastern Province is a warm and pleasant land of vast savannas and open forests of acacia and baobab trees. Because of its proximity to the Elemental Pole of Wood, the land is quite fertile. The Southeastern Province is also the home to many of Creation's most magnificent animals, including huge four-tusked elephants, enormous lions, seemingly endless herds of wildebeest and many similar animals. The coasts and both the eastern and western edges of the Southeastern Province contain a number of principalities full of RPCs where the residents grow crops, herd small antelope or perform many similar tasks. The interior of the Southeastern Province is largely given over to the Exalted, however, who use a strip along this domain's eastern border as the home to the magnificent sacred cattle of Ahlat and keep the remainder as a huge game farm. Here, the Celestial Exalted and the Celestial gods—as well as their guests, their God-Blooded offspring and a few of the highest-ranking Dragon-Blooded—can hunt some of the cleverest, most beautiful and exotic prey in all of Creation. Herd guardians (see *Lords of Creation*, pp. 112-113) extensively patrol this



region, managing and looking after the animals, preventing poaching and helping any hunter who is injured or otherwise in need of assistance.

While some Exalted, especially the Dragon-Blooded, are content to hunt large and powerful ordinary animals, many Celestial Exalts seek more of a challenge. As a result, Celestial Exalted bioengineers continually attempt to create new and more deadly hybrid beasts. Most such creations are slightly more intelligent than the smartest ape, and all are larger and more powerful than the animals on which they are based. The most ordinary of these engineered animals simply gain +1 to all of their Physical Attributes and +1 to their attack and defense scores, including armor, damage and Defense Value. Some beasts also have both these advantages and one or more poxes, afflictions or occasionally even blights and abominations. Produced by the finest bioengineers in Creation, some of these animals combine elements from three or four different beasts along with potent magical enhancements.

## THE HUNTING CITY OF TAMAR-KAS

Flying between five and 40 yards above the savanna, and traveling at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour, this floating city is a pleasure palace designed specifically for the Exalted, their children and powerful gods who have an interest in hunting. Tamar-Kas is one of the smaller of Creation's several floating cities. It is only two miles in diameter and is designed to hold a population of up to 25,000. Two thousand of these residents are herd guardians who are in charge of maintaining the city and looking after its needs and the needs of the Exalted residents. Almost half of these herd guardians have enlightened Essence. The remainder of the city is devoted to Exalts and their entourages of assistants, servants, concubines and other retainers.

Even at first glance, the emphasis on hunting is readily apparent in this city. Statues and friezes of fierce, magnificent animals abound, as do stylistic elements emulating horns, the patterning of various hides and similar motifs. Exotic leather is used in most upholstery, with everything from giraffe leather to sea-dragon skin decorating the chairs and other furniture. Most of the frequent visitors keep rooms where they can display their collection of trophy heads as well. Being invited to hunt in Tamar-Kas is the greatest honor any serious hunter can obtain, and Dragon-Bloods and minor gods who obtain this privilege are often the envy of their fellows.

The city flies over the savanna, directed by powerful mechanisms that allow the operators to locate large groupings of any specified variety of animal or a single example of a large creature such as an elephant or tyrant lizard. Visitors specify their hunting preferences when they arrive, and the herd guardians do their best to move the city near the desired animals. Naturally, the preferences of higher-ranking Exalts are met before those of lower-ranking ones, but the herd guardians attempt to satisfy all visitors.

This city is also set up to entertain hunters who never leave it. It contains large arenas where visitors can fight

against specially enhanced animals, which can be further modified in one of the city's large bioforming tanks. In addition, visitors can battle animal-shaped automatons that can be rapidly customized to both resemble and fight like any known animal, and can also be boosted in power so that these constructs are vastly stronger and more dangerous than their natural counterparts. This last feature has been used on two occasions by vengeful Dragon-Blooded as a method to slay an unknowing rival who expected to fight a beast far less deadly than the one her enemy modified.

## THE FIELDS OF THE SACRED CATTLE OF AHLAT

Since the beginning of time, the premier sacrifice to the highest gods, and to the monstrous and alien Primordials before them, has been the finest cattle in Creation. Long before humanity existed, the ancient Dragon Kings tended herds of sacred cattle that they sacrificed to the Unconquered Sun and his Primordial masters. A few hundred years after the end of the Primordial War, a trio of Lawgivers consisting of one Pillar of the Sun and two Arrows of Heaven embarked on an ambitious program to combine existing breeds of sacred cattle and enhance the qualities that make them the most desirable sacrifices. The result was the sacred cattle of Ahlat. These creatures have exquisitely beautiful jet-black hides as well as brilliant crimson hooves, eyes and tails. Their horns are made of solid, living gold. They are mortal cattle, but they are also the most perfect cattle who have ever lived. They are intelligent beings who can speak and are capable of perceiving and manipulating Essence. The sacred cattle can also use thaumaturgy and Terrestrial martial arts.

While some mortals who learn of these cattle are horrified at the concept of intelligent sacrifices, the cattle all firmly disagree. They sincerely believe that their greatest destiny is to die on the altars of the gods or to be dined on by the Celestial Exalted. They also tell all who ask that a sacrifice who is both willing and intelligent is obviously both morally and spiritually superior to ones that are either unwilling or unable to understand their destiny.

Because their destiny is to be sacrificed upon the altars of the Celestial gods or served in the kitchens of the Celestial Exalted, harming these cattle for no reason is considered blasphemy (and a serious criminal offense besides). Also, although they go willingly to sacrifice, these cattle violently resist any attempts to harm or steal them. Although they are not naturally aggressive or belligerent, they can be fierce fighters if threatened. Small groups of these cattle are perfectly able to use sound tactics to coordinate their attacks and thus defeat a larger but less disciplined force.

The cattle display a worshipful awe of all Celestial Exalted and Celestial gods, as well as a deep respect for Terrestrial Exalted. They have no fear of ordinary mortals, however, and generally consider themselves to be superior to these beings. The only mortals they accept as equals are the herd guardians (see *Lords of Creation*, pp. 112-113), whom they



### THE CATTLE OF AHLAT

S/D/S	P/I/W/W	Health Lvl's	Atk (S/A/D/R)	Dodge DV/Soak
7/3/6	2/3/3/5	-0x2/-1x3/-2x2/-4/1	Gore: 5/6/8L/1, Hoof: 5/5/10B/2	3/2L/5B

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Survival 2, War 2

regard as staunch allies, if not close friends and comrades. When called to act as a sacrifice or meal for gods or Exalts, many of these cattle take time to say farewell to their fellows and to any herd guardians they know.

### THE BITTER FLOWER EMPIRE

The Brazen Lands compose a large Southeastern plateau, located on the western slopes of the Summer Mountains and surrounded on three sides by the vast Celestial Hunting Preserve. On this plateau sits the Bitter Flower Empire, a largely independent client state that pays tribute to the Deliberative but is otherwise free of Deliberative control (and determined to stay that way). A pair of queens who are identical in appearance but very different in origin rules this land. One is Seven Hymns Princess, a middle-aged Copper Spider who never fit into the rigid and formal structure of the Deliberative. The other is Queen Sep, one of the few Fair Folk to fix herself into human form, and who had adopted a form identical to Seven Hymns Princess long before she ever knew of her twin. These two beings are joint rulers and both must agree when making any important decisions.

In the center of the plateau is a small but powerful Wyld zone that existed long before the Deliberative conquered the Primordials. In the heart of this half-mile-wide zone of Pure Chaos is a single level-5 manse a quarter mile across, protected by a potent reality engine built into its structure. Created by She Who Lives in Her Name, this manse is the palace of the Bitter Flower Empire's twin rulers, and none may safely enter it without their permission and assistance.

The remainder of the plateau rises sufficiently high above the plains that the heat of the Southern interior is significantly moderated. The local climate is little warmer than the mild Southern coast. Here, the two rulers have created an exotic and beautiful land devoted to art and music. It is inhabited primarily by artistic mortals, blessed mortals, beastmen, Fae-Bloods, independent-minded Terrestrial Exalted, disaffected and jaded gods who dabble in the arts and a handful of Fair Folk who share Queen Sep's fascination for retaining a fixed form. Like their rulers, most residents are eccentric outcasts who fit poorly into their home cultures.

The Bitter Flower Empire has a population of only five million citizens, almost all of whom are mortals of various sorts. The land's proximity to the East causes it to be relatively

fertile, but few mortals farm this land. Instead, hobgoblins created by Queen Sep and mindless-but-obedient automatons created by Seven Hymns Princess perform most of the basic work of planting, tilling and harvesting. Similar beings mine and process the ores and other materials needed to run the society. These creatures and creations produce a sufficient amount of natural bounty that all inhabitants are freely given food, housing, medical care and the other basic necessities of life. This bounty allows all citizens of this realm to seek meaning in their lives through means other than merely earning their subsistence. In return, citizens are all expected to either produce or actively learn to produce some form of creative works. Some write or perform plays, while others make jewelry, cook exquisite meals or assemble potent artifacts.

Those whose efforts impress the official critics earn various luxuries for their efforts, and all artists are free to trade their goods to other residents or to the traveling merchants who regularly send skyships to this unique land. Other inhabitants can earn rewards by teaching art to residents who want to learn from them or by critiquing art made by others. The only other price the inhabitants pay is that they are entirely cut off from the broadcasts of the otherwise ubiquitous I AM network, since the entire realm is shielded against its emanations. Residents who want to learn news or other facts of the outside world must seek answers from travelers or each other or look for them in various archives and libraries of books, dreamstones and slabs of crystalline memory storage.

Citizens are free to leave this domain, and visitors are similarly free to travel here, but only individuals who spend a significant portion of their time studying, teaching, critiquing or producing art or skilled crafts can stay longer than one season every year. Most inhabitants have other professions, including all of the many occupations needed to keep this society running. The work performed by the hobgoblins and automatons, however, allows all residents to devote at least half their working hours to some activity related to arts or crafts.

Outsiders typically remark that this principality seems somewhat quaint or archaic. Glass roads and gliding chariots are ubiquitous and free for the use of all residents, but private vehicles are forbidden, as is the private ownership of Essence-powered weapons. Also, buildings are comparatively low, with few buildings higher than 10 stories. Overall, the

pace of life in the Bitter Flower Empire is relatively slow compared to that in the other cities of Creation. Many visitors compare it to memory records of life in the first few centuries of the Deliberative.

In addition to satisfying Queen Sep's desire to retain her fixed form and Seven Hymns Princess's desire to break free of the Deliberative's restraints, both hoped to create a domain that produced the greatest arts and crafts in all of Creation. Unfortunately, while some works produced here are widely renowned within and beyond the plateau's boundaries, the number of such works is small. Most inhabitants produce art or crafts that are pleasant but unexceptional. A daiklave made here looks different from the product of one of the Deliberative's better factory-cathedrals but is no more functional or attractive. The same can be said for the songs performed in this domain's taverns and the small works of art that decorate mortals' homes.

The Bitter Flower Empire is notable for having one of the finest artistic academies in all of Creation, however. Students include visitors and residents, and while few go on to greatness, the percentage of those who have done so is almost twice that of the next best artistic academy in Creation. Also, the treatises that scholars at this academy have written on both artistic criticism and art history are often exceptionally fine, and are read in both the halls of the Deliberative and the Celestial manses of Yu-Shan.

The Bitter Flower Empire is also a land of many intrigues. A very few of the disaffected artists who come here are Deliberative agents; somewhat more are dissidents who use art as a tool to oppose the Deliberative. Although most fugitives from Deliberative justice are swiftly extradited, a small number of dissidents, terrorists and rebels live here, occasionally venturing into the Realm to perform their sabotage or disseminate their propaganda. Others remain in the Brazen Lands but are regularly visited by their underlings. Recently, a small group of pure-bred Lintha (see pp. 102-105) have moved here seeking to recruit aid for their plan to restore the Primordials.

## THE SOUTHERN COAST PROVINCE

The Southern Coast Province is widely acclaimed as one of the most pleasant and wealthy regions of Creation. This mild and fertile area contains several large prefectures, as well as the magnificent carved mountain known as the Penitent. With the exception of the Domain of Stately Order, the coastal Southern prefectures regularly have more than twice the number of applications for immigration that they can logistically accept. This portion of Creation has been settled for a very long time, and most of the existing cities (including Chiaroscuro and Dari) existed back when the Primordials ruled Creation. As a result, ancient mysteries and powerful, unique lost artifacts can be found deep within their foundations.

## CHIAROSCURO—JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

The vast metropolis-principality of Chiaroscuro is both the largest city in the South and one of the five largest cities in Creation, holding more than 22 million inhabitants. Built entirely of brightly colored, Essence-forged glass, it is also known as the rainbow city. The streets are made of vermilion glass, breakwaters of brilliant azure protect the port, and the tall glass towers that make up the entire central city are every color of the rainbow. Unlike most other large cities, all of Chiaroscuro's towers are made from this same colored glass. Buildings used by the Deliberative government are all made of shining golden-colored glass, a color not used on any other buildings. The largest of these buildings is the glorious Tower of the Sun, the city's tallest tower, located in the very center of Chiaroscuro. The Tower of the Sun is slightly over half a mile high, and most of the central city consists of a veritable forest of multi-colored towers that are all between one quarter and one third of a mile high.

Chiaroscuro is a city devoted to trade, but it is also a major center of manufacturing, containing a trio of factory-cathedrals. These factory-cathedrals all specialize in combining products obtained from the Southern interior with resources imported from all across Creation and creating high quality artifacts. In addition, the outer sections of the city contain many hundreds of mundane manufactories making everything from unbreakable glass tableware to nearly endless bolts of textiles made from linen grown in the vast fields of the Southern coast.

This city extends below the ground as well as above it. Because of the exceptionally pleasant year-round climate, the city's streets are designed for strolling and are lined with a multitude of ground-floor shops. Street performers, food vendors and similar petty merchants with small carts and booths are in abundance on most of the streets and in most large intersections. Gliding chariots can rarely travel through these streets at speeds of more than 10 miles per hour as a result. On many streets, the only vehicles allowed are authorized Deliberative emergency vehicles, which can fly above the heads of the thronging crowds.

To facilitate traffic, the Deliberative constructed a network of tunnels under the city. In the larger tunnels, Essence-powered subways swiftly transport people and cargo to and from stations located every half mile throughout the city. On this subway, it rarely takes more than half an hour to travel between any two points in Chiaroscuro. From the nearest station, most people walk to their destinations, while cargo and tired or wealthy pedestrians are carried in slow moving gliding chariots that are either owned by businesses or hotels or are available for hire on every street corner.

The Deliberative also built a network of smaller tunnels to connect important buildings. These tunnels accomplished useful goals such as connecting the city's three factory-cathedrals with each other and with the harbor, the skyship docks and other useful destinations. These tunnels carry a steady



stream of large gliding chariots each carrying finished goods and raw materials to and from the factory-cathedrals, food to the largest hotels and all manner of similar cargoes.

### THE BLACK MARKET AND THE UNDERCITY

As the largest center of trade and commerce outside the Blessed Isle, Chiaroscuro is also a thriving center of illegal trade and commerce. Passengers on many skyships and cargo ships carry a wealth of smuggled goods, including everything from artifacts prohibited to mortals not in the employ of the Deliberative to all manner of illegal intoxicants. Other passengers carry stolen goods that they hope to discreetly sell here.

The city's black market is legendary and has existed for many centuries. As long as the various fences and shady dealers refuse to sell military hardware, lethal intoxicants or other exceptionally illegal goods and avoid causing any significant disruptions to legitimate commerce, the Deliberative government allows it to thrive. This fact is not lost on most of the experienced and sensible individuals engaged in this profitable trade.

The Chiaroscuro black market is effectively an open secret to everyone with any interest at all in the criminal underworld. Many mortal tourists visiting this city take pride in buying a stolen piece of clothing or some similar item from one of the city's many fences. Naturally, the presence of so many dealers in illegal goods also attracts various other

illegal activities. As a result, Chiaroscuro is a center for illicit gambling, unlicensed prostitution and a wide variety of similar illegal services, such as contracting an unlicensed thaumaturge to plague someone with warts or ill-fortune, or hiring thieves to steal a particular item.

One reason that the criminal underworld can thrive here so easily is the undercity. In addition to the multitude of subway tunnels beneath Chiaroscuro, this city is also built above a network of other tunnels, some dating back to the days before the Primordial War. Long before the founding of the Deliberative, problems with drainage and periodic flooding caused by the city's proximity to the coast inspired the Dragon Kings who then ruled it to construct a vast network of large storm sewers. A few centuries after the founding of Deliberative, improved Essence technologies eliminated the need for most of these tunnels. Some were transformed into the various subway tunnels now in use, but others were abandoned or partially filled in. Since that time, various criminals and eccentric hermits with access to capable tools have dug side tunnels or illegal connections between disused drainage tunnels.

Today, even the Celestial Exalted do not know the full extent of the tunnels under Chiaroscuro. The many officially disused tunnels now serve as storehouses for stolen goods, and some of the ones nearest to the surface also serve as shops for illegal goods, unlicensed gambling dens

and similar establishments. Occasionally, scavengers and hopeful explorers manage to find a long disused section of tunnel, and the broadcast dreams and hologlyph dramas popular here are regularly filled with tales of heroes finding powerful artifacts and vast wealth in newly opened tunnels. Although such events are rare, they occasionally happen, as does finding tunnels that have been fitted with ancient but still deadly traps.

## THE PENITENT

One of the most remarkable features of the entire Southern Coast Province is the gigantic figure known to mortals as the Penitent, and to the Exalted as the Last Suppliant of Endless Power (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 24). This awe-inspiring Essence-controlling device was carved into the form of a seated figure by sculpting an entire extinct volcano. The figure's outer surface is flawlessly polished, brilliantly reflective obsidian, and its five-mile tall-form is visible from both the Domain of Stately Order and Chiaroscuro.

The primary purpose of the Penitent is to reshape the Southern Essence flows in such a fashion as to permit the mild climate of the coast to extend almost twice as far into the Southern interior as it otherwise would. This procedure is largely automatic and requires adjustment only during Calibration. The Penitent is also the heart of the South's volcano control system. Located on the northeastern edge of the Fire Mountains, its proximity to the mountain range containing the South's most active volcanoes allows it to be used to control the timing and intensity of volcanic eruptions that might otherwise damage valuable land or destroy cities.

In addition to directing lava flows away from inhabited regions and suppressing violent eruptions, Solar Exalted can also use the Penitent to generate minor eruptions that relieve mounting lava pressures or induce specific types of eruptions that bring valuable ores and minerals to the surface. In addition, all Southern Exalts can petition for their manses to be temporarily enhanced by the Penitent's powers, with the typical duration of such an enhancement ranging from one week to one season. Naturally, petitions made by one of the Celestial Exalted or the few Celestial gods with residences in Creation are given precedence over those made by Terrestrial Exalted or the God-Blooded.

All of these features are widely known by employees of the Deliberative. Yet only the Celestial Exalted know of the more destructive uses to which this vast construct can be put, since it has rarely been used in any sort of martial fashion for more than two millennia.

In addition to being arguably the most important Essence-manipulating artifact in the entire South, the Penitent is also a popular tourist attraction for mortals. Only Exalts are permitted to approach the figure's vast head, where the Essence controls are located, but mortals regularly visit the lowest reaches of the statue. Every year, tens of thousands

of wealthy tourists and devout pilgrims come to see this wonder and marvel at the power of the Deliberative and the majesty of the Celestial Exalted. Many of the wealthiest or most devout visitors book skyship flights from the skyship dock located a quarter of a mile from the statue's vast left foot when rumors say that one of the Lawgivers will soon use the Penitent to make some minor adjustment to the Southern Essence flows.

Those lucky enough to arrive when the statue is in use see an even greater wonder than the Penitent's normally grandiose presence. Once the Penitent is activated, the user's vastly magnified anima banner surrounds the entire statue. Observers as far away as Chiaroscuro can see the flare of this anima as a light as bright and as large as a rising full moon on a clear night.

To accommodate these tourists, and the ones who simply wish to see the Penitent, the local skyship dock is built beside several hotels capable of accommodating as many as 1,500 visitors of varying degrees of wealth. To support these visitors, a small RPC was constructed nearby. In addition to helping to care for the various tourists, the RPC's 700 inhabitants also till the soil with Essence-powered machinery and tend the fist-sized beetles that harvest flax from their nearby fields.

The most devout tourists eschew these comfortable hotels and instead walk more than three miles uphill along the statue's gently sloping legs to a small monastery located in the statue's enormous lap. Although the Exalted and the gods are free to visit it via any means they see fit to use, mortals are all expected to walk to this monastery. Officially known as the Pagoda of Contemplating the Sacred Penitent—but popularly known as the Monastery of the Lap—this monastery is surrounded by gardens and a small pine forest tended by the local monks. Visitors are welcome, but those who stay longer than three days are expected to take part in the daily chores. In return, the monastery teaches both meditation and the scriptures of the Exalted. In addition, Exalts, gods, Half-Castes, God-Bloods and even mortal Essence users who have obtained the appropriate licenses may also train in various Terrestrial martial arts here. Once a season, the local students put on exhibitions of their martial prowess for the tourists staying at the hotels located near Penitent's base. The monastery earns money from these displays and from the sales of small obsidian or black jade replicas of the Penitent that some of the monks and novices make. Although it is far less prestigious than other academies that teach more advanced martial arts, the Monastery of the Lap is noted for being one of the most spectacular locations in Creation to study the martial arts.

## THE DOMAIN OF STATELY ORDER

In the middle of the Southern coastal plains, between the Penitent and Chiaroscuro lies the most unusual and most hotly debated of the lands of the South. Created 260 years ago as a social experiment, the Domain of Stately Order is a small



tributary governed by the Solar Exalt Terrible Bloody Rose and her Lunar consort Shining Ocelot. The principality is a circle exactly 800 miles across. It contains the central city, known as Dari of the Mists, which is a beautiful, perfectly circular metropolis precisely 40 miles in diameter with seven million inhabitants.

Dari is located in a bowl-shaped valley and is an ancient city built in the early days of the rule of the Primordials. Although smaller than many modern cities, it is exceptionally beautiful. All of the towers and other large buildings are made from an opalescent alloy that even the finest savants of the Deliberative cannot make in the vast quantities necessary to build a large city from them.

When exposed to sunlight, this alloy shines like white opal, and it glows softly with the same sparkling color at night. It also attracts ambient mist that briefly swirls with similar color when it touches these towers. These mists have long been known to make mortals who inhale them both slightly happier and less inclined to excessive violence. Mortals living here are treated as if they have a minimum of two dots in both Compassion and Temperance, even if their actual scores are lower. This effect fades within three days of leaving Dari. The effects of these mists gave Terrible Bloody Rose and Shining Ocelot the idea for creating the Scepter and the Orb of Peace and Order. Their efforts, however, have also made the city far less popular to both immigrants and tourists.

Before it became part of the Domain of Stately Order, Dari was widely acclaimed as the most pleasant city in the South, and mortals regularly flocked here to visit. Many Southern mortals attempted to save sufficient amounts of money to be able to go on their honeymoons in Dari. This custom persists, and newlyweds remain an important source of tourism, but all tourism has significantly declined since the city's rulers completed the Scepter and the Orb.

The remainder of this principality houses an additional 93 million people, the vast majority of whom work in various RPCs that specialize in growing and spinning linen and in tending Essence spiders and transforming their silk into sails, armor and similar goods.

### THE SCEPTER AND ORB OF PEACE AND ORDER

This tributary was created to test and demonstrate the promise of a pair of exceptionally powerful artifacts called the Instruments of Peace and Order. The Scepter of Peace and Order is a large orichalcum scepter with a five-foot-long shaft, topped with a complex crook decorated with a variety of crystals that focus and channel Essence. The complementary Orb of Peace and Order is a moonsilver sphere the size of a large grapefruit, incised with grooves to allow it to be held in one hand and decorated with crystals identical to those on the scepter.

When a Celestial Exalt holds the scepter, it allows the bearer to have a general sense of everyone within 400 miles. The bearer can sense general concentrations and movements

of population, as well as being able to instantly identify any Exalts, gods, elementals or demons inside his domain. The bearer can also broadcast messages to everyone inside the radius and can produce a scarlet eye-like sigil on the flesh of every adult or adolescent inside the domain. The target must accept the sigil willingly, but the scepter allows a Celestial bearer to cause anyone who refuses the sigil to be overcome with the urge to leave the domain within the next week. This compulsion is impossible for anyone but another Exalt to resist.

The scepter also allows its bearer to automatically distinguish between individuals who have lived in the domain for more than a month and visitors or new arrivals. Terrible Bloody Rose leaves visitors alone, but every month, she forces her sigil on anyone who has been in the domain longer. All mortals who refuse must leave. Exalts who refuse need not leave the domain, but if they accept the sigil, they are as bound by its power as any mortal would be. Other than allowing the bearer to sense them, neither the Scepter nor the Orb of Peace and Order has any effect on gods, elementals or demons.

Anyone who accepts the sigil is marked for life. Only Solar Circle sorcery performed by someone whose Essence is at least as high as the scepter bearer's can remove this sigil. The scepter-bearer can borrow the senses of any sigil-bearer at will and with no rolls or Essence cost, no matter where the person with the sigil is in Creation. By spending three motes of Essence, the scepter-bearer can also take over the body of a sigil-bearer for up to one scene. Finally, as the scepter-bearer places the sigil on a target, she also impresses the laws of her domain into the target's mind. Sigil-bearers know that accepting this sigil means they also swear a solemn oath to obey all of these laws. This oath remains in place as long as the scepter is attuned. If, however, it is ever unattuned or the wielder dies, all sigils vanish within 24 hours, unless someone else attunes to the scepter during this time.

The device does not remove a sigil-bearer's free will, but it does force him to pay a price for any and all transgressions. Pain of wracks the body of anyone who disobeys the laws he swore to obey. For major offenses, this agony ends when the criminal confesses his sin to a local magistrate. For minor offenses, the pain lasts for only a few hours if the offender resists the urge to confess. Breaking the most serious oaths, however, such as never attempting to harm one of the Celestial Exalted, is inevitably punished by death. Sigil-bearers who break one of these capital oaths die a painful, writhing death a few hours after the oath is broken. As soon as they commit this transgression, the eye on their sigil closes. Every punishment imposed by the sigil takes place indoors and during the night. If an offender attempts to remain outdoors at night, his presence becomes obvious to Terrible Bloody Rose, who commands him to go home, whereupon he will immediately pay for his crime.

The powers of the Orb of Peace and Order are far more subtle and insidious. Any Celestial Exalt who carries the orb

can both sense and alter the emotions of all sigil-bearers, either en masse or individually. Also, as long as it remains attuned, any sigil-bearer who performs any action that either actively encourages others to obey the laws or goes beyond the expected minimal obedience to the law is automatically rewarded with vividly enjoyable dreams. Also, characters who regularly obtain these dreams also reduce the difficulty of all rolls to recover from infections or diseases by two (to a minimum of 1) and live one third again as long as they otherwise would.

No individual can attune herself to both the Scepter and the Orb of Peace and Order. The attunement cost of each artifact is five motes. As long as at least 200 people bear sigils, anyone attuned to either object is completely immune to all diseases and infections. He also does not age, and he heals one level of lethal damage every three hours and one level of aggravated damage every day.

The Instruments of Peace and Order offer Terrible Bloody Rose and Shining Ocelot an unprecedented amount of control of the populace of their principality. In the 260 years that this experiment has been running, there has been only one riot and one workers' strike that lasted only one day. In addition, citizens are exceptionally polite and courteous to visitors and each other. Even very minor offenses such as littering, which are typically punished only by a headache that lasts a few hours, are almost nonexistent.

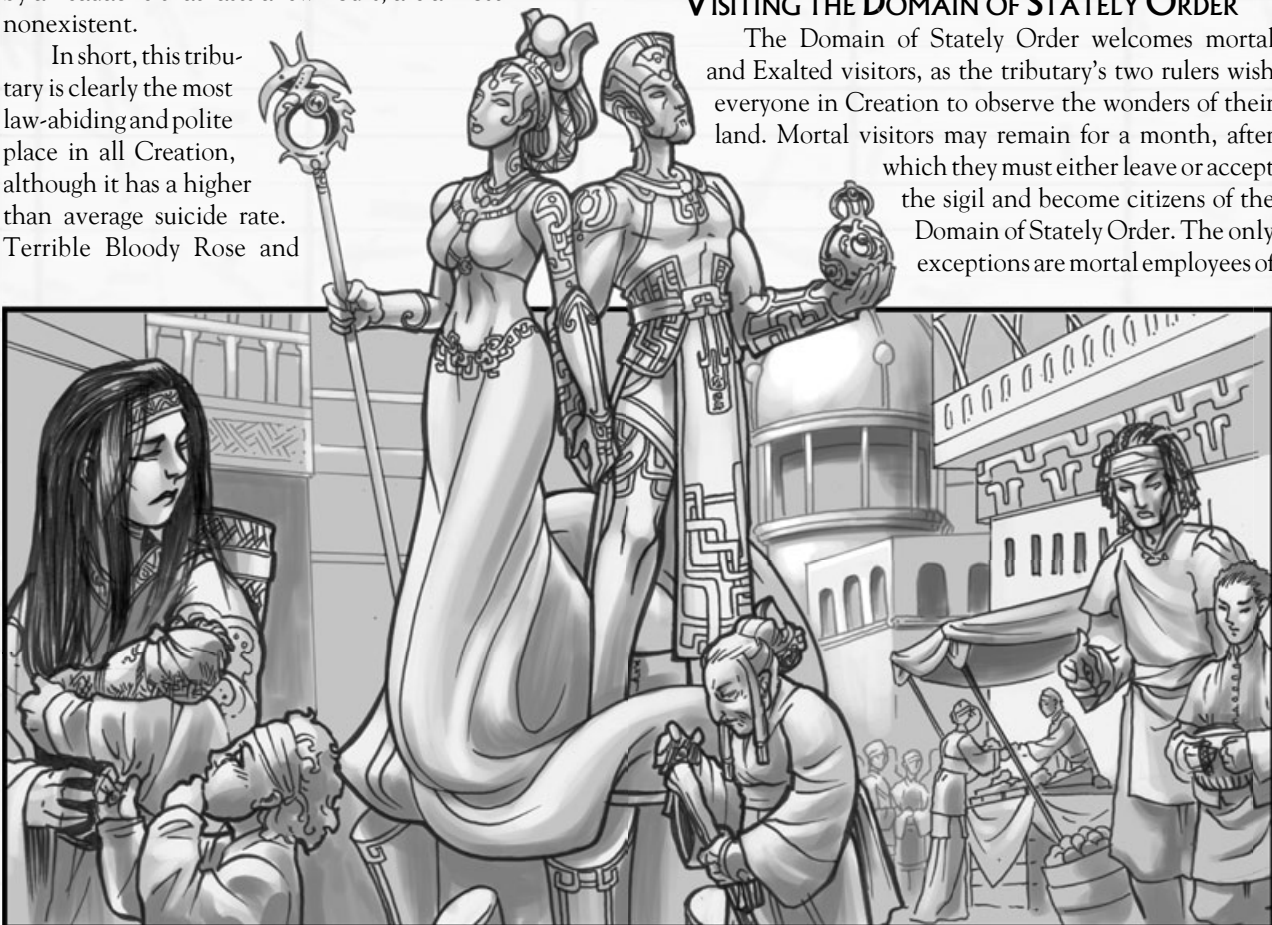
In short, this tributary is clearly the most law-abiding and polite place in all Creation, although it has a higher than average suicide rate. Terrible Bloody Rose and

Shining Ocelot regularly assert that similar measures should be adopted throughout Creation, but debate continues in the Deliberative. Many Celestial Exalts and most Dragon-Bloods strongly oppose this idea because they find the results to be deeply disturbing. Also, most Celestial Exalted forbid sigil-bearers from entering their own domains, and they object to the idea of other Celestial rulers transforming their entire populace into what potentially amounts to an army of spies and possibly even assassins.

Terrible Bloody Rose and Shining Ocelot both claim that the Scepter of Peace and Order cannot be used to place a sigil on one of the Celestial Exalted and that all forms of Exaltation automatically burn away the sigil. The first statement has never been tested, because none of the Celestial Exalted are willing to test their immunity. A few dozen adolescents bearing the sigil have undergone Terrestrial Exaltation, however, and all of them have lost their sigil, so the second claim has been accepted as fact. The truth, though, is that any Exalt can be given the sigil, and Exaltation removes the sigil only if the bearer wishes it removed. If either of these facts were discovered, the small amount of sympathy for this tributary and its rulers would evaporate, and several dozen Celestial Exalted would call for the immediate destruction of the Instruments of Peace and Order.

### VISITING THE DOMAIN OF STATELY ORDER

The Domain of Stately Order welcomes mortal and Exalted visitors, as the tributary's two rulers wish everyone in Creation to observe the wonders of their land. Mortal visitors may remain for a month, after which they must either leave or accept the sigil and become citizens of the Domain of Stately Order. The only exceptions are mortal employees of



the Deliberative, who can travel freely on official Deliberative business. The rulers of this domain offer superior salaries and other benefits to encourage Dragon-Bloods to become citizens. No Exalted visitor is forced to either leave or accept the sigil, though. Doing so would be regarded as a direct offense against the authority of the Deliberative.

Life in the Domain of Stately Order is exceedingly uneventful. All citizens are scrupulously law-abiding, even when dealing with poor and somewhat ignorant mortal visitors. In addition, the general level of politeness and courtesy is considerably higher than it is in the rest of Creation. Most travelers find visiting this tributary to be simultaneously pleasant and somewhat disturbing. Almost all sigil-bearing citizens react with mild shock to any suggestion that they break a local law. What's more, the eagerness that most display when presented with a chance to perform good deeds (ranging from picking up litter to reporting a crime) reminds some visitors of the behavior of dreamstone addicts. As a result, few mortals move to this domain every year, but most who do soon leave—unwilling to trade their freedom for the promises of a safe and pleasant life that this domain delivers.

## HIGH NYUNDA—CITY OF THE SUN

Along with the vast trading metropolis of Chiaroscuro and the powerful Penitent, the last of the three great wonders of the South is the flying city known as High Nyunda. Built to use the powerful currents of Essence coming from the Far South and the warm air of this fiery land, High Nyunda is unique among Creation's many flying cities in that the majority of its lift comes from the warm air contained within it. Essence power is used only to control its altitude and to enable it to move. As a result, the city's Essence antennas and accumulators can spend most of their power moving the city. High Nyunda can move as fast as 50 miles per hour, enabling it to travel almost 8,000 miles in a week and to make a circuit around the entire inhabited portions of the South in only four weeks. The city normally flies one mile above the ground, but it can go as high as four miles to avoid bad weather. It can also come within half a dozen yards of either the ground or the spire of a building to allow it to dock and lower a ramp.

High Nyunda is an enormous sphere four miles in diameter, and it houses approximately one million people, including nearly 200 Terrestrial Exalted. It is also the home of the old and exceptionally powerful Solar Virtuous Jacinth, the Deliberative's Commissionaire of Southern Affairs, and her Lunar consort, Joyous Agile Bat. A trio of younger Celestial Exalts acts as their assistants as well. In addition to the Exalted, High Nyunda is also home to more than 10,000 people of the air, who enjoy the freedom dwelling in the upper air gives them. Some 800 herd guardians work as bodyguards and retainers of the Celestial Palace, and 3,000 minikins are employed in the factory-cathedral to perform the finest handwork and the most precise adjustments.

This flying metropolis is popularly known as the City of the Sun because the entire outer surface of the sphere is covered in a microscopically thin film of gold. This coating reduces the bright sunlight entering the inhabited portions of the sphere to a less dazzling intensity, while also making the sphere appear to be a gigantic shining ball of pure gold. At night, the city's Essence-accumulators cause it to emanate a soft glow that can be seen for hundreds of miles. People outside this city can see inside it only at sunrise and twilight, or when they are within a mile or two, but the golden outer wall does nothing to prevent anyone inside the city from looking out at the rest of Creation.

All the city's buildings are located in the pleasantly warm lower half of the sphere. The upper half of the sphere is separated from the lower half by a thin, tough membrane and contains Essence-focusing crystals that help supplement sunlight in heating the air inside of it. Inside the lower hemisphere, the buildings and other structures are all located on wide rings of lightweight synthetic materials. Each ring-shaped plaza is attached to the outer wall of the sphere and is between one quarter and two thirds of a mile wide. These habitation rings are built 50 to 200 yards apart, allowing the tallest buildings in the city to reach more than 50 stories into the air.

The central portion of the sphere is left open except for the city's two most impressive structures. The bottom-most of the sphere's many levels extends across the entire mile-wide bottom of the sphere. The central portion of this sturdy synthetic disk consists of a single factory-cathedral with five spires that each stretch half a mile into the air. Because the city is not built to support the construction of massive artifacts, this factory-cathedral specializes in building small items such as elaborate hand weapons, Essence-powered devices built into jewelry and items of clothing, and some of the small and vitally important components of larger constructs.

Half a mile above the spires of the factory-cathedral, several of the sphere's highest habitation rings contain skywalks more than half a mile long that all lead into the central portion of the sphere, known as the Celestial Palace. This palace is built on a central platform one mile in diameter. The outmost regions of this platform contain the Deliberative government's local offices and the residences of the city's Dragon-Blooded. Beyond these august and lovely buildings is an elaborately carved dome half a mile in diameter and a quarter of a mile high, which surrounds the estates and palaces of the city's five Celestial Exalted rulers.

High Nyunda is home to five of the mighty Celestial Exalted because it is the administrative center of the South, just as Chiaroscuro is the South's commercial center. This city travels continuously from one Southern city to another, stopping at most for only a day or two, and not lingering more than a week even at Chiaroscuro. As a result, the residents continually gain news and firsthand information about the entire region, and the city itself serves as a visible reminder to everyone who can see it of the incredible power

and inescapable reach of the Deliberative. These features combine to make High Nyunda the ideal location from which to administer and coordinate the various Southern principalities.

High Nyunda never lands. Essence-driven precipitators extract all the water the city requires from the air, and small garden plots and Essence-powered nutrient vats grow a third of the food used by the inhabitants. A fleet of skyships and personal vehicles regularly flies to and from the city, carrying visitors, additional food, supplies for the city's factory-cathedral and trade goods from all across Creation. Also, every time High Nyunda arrives above one of the cities of the South, it approaches one of that city's various skyship docks, typically located at the summit of a tall building. High Nyunda then lets down a 12-yard-long, six-yard-wide ramp so visitors can come and go as they please. Gliding chariots can drive on or off the city, carrying all manner of large and heavy goods.

## THE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCE

The Southwestern Province consists of the Southern lands on the western side of the Fire Mountains. The Southwestern Province is even more fertile than the Southern Coast Province, maintaining its fertility all the way to the slopes of the Fire Mountains. An-Teng Prefecture, located in the northern portions of the Southwest, is the most densely inhabited principality in this portion of Creation. South of An-Teng, the land becomes hotter and steamier and fewer mortals live there. The southern portions of the Southwestern Province are home to Dragon Kings and all manner of deadly and exotic animals.

### AN-TENG PREFECTURE

On the western side of the Fire Mountains lies the principality of An-Teng. Located on the border between the South and West, it is the wettest portion of the entire South and contains this region's tallest and most extensive forests, as well as a multitude of rivers. An-Teng Prefecture is divided into three provinces. The High Lands extend from the high peaks of the Fire Mountains down to the edges of the Southwestern forests. The Middle Lands consist of these lush and dense forests. The Shore Lands are wide fertile plains that extend from the edge of the forests to the actual shore and are irrigated by more than a dozen large rivers. These lands are all linked by the largest of all the Southern rivers, the wide and many-branched River of Queens. This majestic waterway extends from Thousand Dragons Lake high in the mountains to the Western Ocean in a vast and fertile river delta that begins at the capital of the entire domain, the huge and lovely City of Flowers.

An-Teng land is noted for both its beauty and its exquisite climate. It is also known for possessing many powerful demesnes. These demesnes are produced by the

potent Essence flows created by An-Teng's proximity to both the Fire Mountains and the border with the West. All of these factors combined to make this land the home of a disproportionate number of Celestial Exalted, particularly Solar and Lunar Exalted, who build manses here to be their primary residences.

### THE SHORE LANDS

The Shore Lands make up a warm, wet region along the western coast of the Southern Threshold. This crescent of highly accessible lands serves as a trade hub to the rest of Creation and houses the commerce city of Salt-Founded Glory as well as the world-renowned City of Flowers, An-Teng's capital. Although a few other settlements in this territory are large enough to be called cities, this area is the most developed part of the country. It is crisscrossed with roads and canals to encourage a broader sense of community among its inhabitants, but those roads end near Calan's Loss (see pp. 98-99) with stern warnings carved on obelisks around the border. Few travelers need further encouragement to stay far away once they catch sight of the blighted swamp, though.

Abundant water and the mixture of volcanic soils washed down from the Fire Mountains makes this one of the most fertile regions for grain production in all of Creation. The Shore Lands are covered with RPCs and their associated fields, growing rice and smaller quantities of corn, wheat and millet. Using Essence-powered tilling and harvesting machinery to supplement the labor of patient individuals, tending and replanting the various crops allows most of these RPCs to produce three or four rice crops every year. Further inland, in the regions away from the many rivers, the Shore Lands are also home to many cultivated fruit and flower-bearing vines and shrubs. This land contains the largest and best vineyards of the South, as well as entire RPCs dedicated to the cultivation of spices and fragrant flowers.

The seas immediately off the Shore Lands are home to some of the most beautiful and brightly colored fish in all of Creation. While some local RPCs are devoted to providing fish for the tables of An-Teng, even more are home to professional tropical fish collectors, who capture brightly colored fish, storing them in specially made jade spheres. Inside these spheres, the fish remain in a state of suspended animation until they are removed and placed in water. As a result, the fishers of the Shore Lands can easily send decorative fish throughout Creation, allowing interested Exalts, gods and wealthy mortals to keep large aquariums filled with many brilliantly colored tropical fish.

### THE CITY OF FLOWERS

Built on the banks of the River of Queens, the huge and lovely capital of An-Teng Prefecture stretches out into its wide and placid waters, with much of the city built on a mixture of small artificial islands and enormous floating platforms. The portions located on the shore are surrounded by relatively narrow canals filled with water that is perpetually fresh and clean due to cleansing enchantments placed upon the stones



that make up the canals' beds. Although Chiaroscuro is the largest and the tallest Southern city, and High Nyunda the most spectacular, the City of Flowers is widely acclaimed to be the most beautiful of the Southern cities.

All of the city's major thoroughfares are canals between 20 and 50 yards wide. Directed Essence flows cause the water in these canals to flow at different speeds and in different directions, depending upon its location in the canal. The water in each canal flows in only one direction, with the water next to the banks flowing no faster than a man can walk, and the water near the center of each canal flowing as fast as a swift horse can gallop. Because adjacent canals usually flow in opposite directions, travel through the city via the many junks, gondolas and other small passenger and cargo boats is fast and simple.

The capital's buildings consist almost exclusively of natural materials, including ivory, shell and a variety of tropical woods such as teak, ebony and mahogany. The city's temple to the Unconquered Sun, for example is a huge wooden pyramid covered with enormous slabs of ivory and shining golden shells. Advanced experiments in biogenesis allowed Exalted engineers to grow custom-designed slabs of ivory or shell in huge vats and to boost the speed with which the valuable tropical woods used in much of the city matures. The builders use powerful alchemical reagents to render this wood as tough and as fireproof as stone or metal. Most buildings are between five and 20 stories tall, and many are connected by elaborately carved skywalks. This city is built on a grid plan, with the Pyramid of the Unconquered Sun covering the area of nine blocks at the center of the city. All the other blocks are built on polished stone slabs that rise a few feet above the level of the river and are bounded by canals on all sides.

The city's most spectacular feature, however, is the multitude of brilliantly colored flowering vines that grow along most of the city's buildings and skywalks. A combination of the moist climate and having a local Wood-aspected manse encourage the health and growth of these flowers has caused the many bougainvillea, orchids, acanthus and jasmine to grow especially large and long-lasting flowers that remain in bloom all year round.

A consortium of master gardeners and their disciples known as the Infinite Orchid Collegiums tightly regulates the floral industry throughout the prefecture, protecting against foreign species and unlicensed magical meddling in order to protect the quality of the blooms and the international reputation of their business. Intense rivalries between different floral schools define the city's popular culture, especially since public viewing of private gardens often influences the judges who rule on the outcome. Competitions between masters often span decades, with each engagement accorded the pageantry and solemnity normally reserved for blood feuds between martial arts dojos. Less patient gardeners turn to poison to settle their differences, though the Collegiums abhor the practice.

With its high availability of plant-based poisons, the City of Flowers also plays home to an organized criminal syndicate called the Ivory Lotus that secretly regulates its member assassin families in a shadow reflection of the Collegiums. Echoing the paradoxical dualities of An-Teng culture, both the Collegiums and Ivory Lotus venerate the mortal High Queen of An-Teng as their spiritual founder, who in turn makes sure that both groups continue to serve the greater good of her land. Although far from secular, the people of the Shore Lands venerate gods of civilization and trade more than they do ancestral or nature deities, though Celestial cults are growing increasingly common.

### CALAN'S LOSS

The swamp called the Wailing Fen harbors an infernal shrine amid its fetid bracken and quagmire muck—a blighted demesne stained with the death of the first akuma. Thrice-Damned Gorol was a Solar Prince and Night Caste assassin who slew a Primordial early in the War. In the final rasping breath of his nemesis, Gorol heard terrible blasphemies unveiling the inexorable inevitability of Oblivion. Believing that the Primordials alone could undo the curses of their slain kin, Gorol secretly betrayed the Exalted and became a spy for the Primordials throughout the latter third of the War. Whatever his original intentions, his treachery cost many hundreds of Chosen lives and might have even led the Primordial's soul-typhoon weapon to the hidden base where the Dragon King armies massed for a grand offensive. The full scope of Gorol's wickedness might never be known, but when his circlemates finally realized what he had become more than a century after the War, they attempted to ambush him and bring him to justice. Sadly, the Lawgivers underestimated the depraved inventiveness of the Yozis who had rebuilt Thrice-Damned Gorol's body and soul with aspects of their own power.

Armed with the element of surprise and a variety of hideous powers, the akuma effortlessly slew his former friends and escaped, only to be pursued by the legendary demon-hunters Calan and Tomun, a married duo of Night and No Moon who always fought together. The two tracked Gorol to An-Teng and intercepted him before he could deliver the self-destruct codes for Mobile Platform 3 to a Lintha agent waiting offshore. The three fought viciously through the forest, unleashing powers that scorched and poisoned the land with conflagrations of holy and unholy Essence. Finally, Calan struck the deathblow, but could not escape the poison cloud Gorol expelled in his pain. Tomun rushed to his wife's side, but the Lunar could not heal Calan of the venom. Stricken, Tomun desperately begged Gorol for the secret of the cure. The akuma gasped out that only the lifeblood of a true love could save Calan, and he laughed in spiteful triumph as the Lunar slashed open his wrists and died sprawled across his wife's body. Calan awoke sometime later, healed by the power of her Solar Charms, to find her husband dead by his own hand. No trace remained of

Gorol's body, but its abomination had already metastasized through the earth.

Today, the people of An-Teng shun the Wailing Fen. Nothing good grows there, and terrible things stalk the rotting wetlands. Gnarled trees take on the sinister bronze patina of Szoreny, hiding the incurable poisons of Metagaos' thorns among their grasping foliage. Kimberly sloshes at the roots of the pooled muck, beneath bubbling tar expelling mephitic flame jets in the concentric rings of She Who Lives in Her Name. The dragonflies look a little too much like agata, and the fish swim with alien machinations etched into their glassy eyes. In short, the fen is a place where the Demon Realm bleeds into Creation, a tiny chink in the prison that holds the Primordials back from the world they made. Although the crack is not large enough to compromise the security of the prison, its existence introduces an additional variable of uncertainty that troubles the Five-Score Fellowship. Many Solar Exalted feel differently, delighted to have access to exotic infernal ingredients for artifact production without the dangers or hassle of procuring them from Malfeas. Bound demons regularly scavenge the swamp for unusual flora, fauna or geological elements that might have occult significance, so much so that the Deliberative recently stepped in and declared the swamp a protected sorcerous preserve, allowing a subcommittee to establish and prioritize licensing standards to limit the harvest. An-Teng's Golden Lord finds this legislation frustrating and disheartening, as it directly contradicts his longstanding efforts in Yu-Shan to declare the swamp a geomantic disaster area and get it dredged out of his nation.

## THE MIDDLE LANDS

The Middle Lands begin where the plains, scrub and open forests of the Shore Lands become dense jungles and thick forests. They end in the foothills of the Fire Mountains, where the forests once again become scrublands that lead up to the mountains. The northernmost portions of the Middle Lands are warm subtropical forests, but these forests become increasingly dense and verdant jungle approximately 100 miles south of the City of Flowers. This steamy jungle is similar to the rain forests of the Southeast, and is primarily distinguished by the fact that few of the trees grow more than 50 yards high and the Southwestern jungle is considerably wetter. The entirety of An-Teng must endure torrential monsoons that last the entirety of the season of Water. For the rest of the year, rain usually falls once a day in the Middle Lands, but these showers rarely last more than two hours and can be as brief as half an hour. As a result of this unique climate, though the trees are shorter than those in the Southeastern forests and jungles, and the undergrowth is thicker. The land is also usually marshy near the coast, and it consists of little more than mud or quicksand in some places, so most animals and residents must remain arboreal to avoid sinking in or slopping through treacherous disease- and parasite-infested muck.

## CALAN'S LOSS (VITRIOL DEMESNE ●●●●)

The site of Gorol's death is one of the rare demesnes that channels an Essence aspect alien to the structure of Creation. Never introduced into the Tapestry, the alchemical catalyst *Theion To* passively consumes everything it touches as embodied in the shapeless, corrosive foam of the metody. Within Calan's Loss, vitriol consumes less literally and more in monstrous allegory, gradually eating away at the properties of Creation to substitute the mad laws of Malfeas.

**Game Effects:** Anything that spends too much time in Calan's Loss assumes the qualities of its closest analogue in Malfeas. Wasps swell and shimmer like agata, whores shrivel to the lithe alien delicacy of neomah, and predatory beasts growl with erymanthus hunger. The Storyteller should assign two points of positive mutations for each of the first five years of exposure, choosing traits that express an appropriate aspect of the Demon Realm. The first year of exposure also imposes a deficiency-level derangement, modifying each creature's behavior to fit demonic mores. Four more years of taint complete the change, turning the inhabitant into a legitimate creature of darkness. Storytellers should keep in mind that the mutations imposed by Calan's Loss are not random, but rather follow an internal logic rooted in the inimical aesthetics of the Yozi. The Deliberative takes great pains to make sure nothing blocks the flow of Essence through the swamp, since any catastrophic Essence buildup could spread the poison over a much larger area.

The capital of the Middle Lands is Prosperous Garden, a canal city with a consumable agrarian focus on fruit and vegetable production rather than the ephemeral beauty of flowers. The open-air markets of Prosperous Garden are without peer for exotic culinary delights, especially for elderly Dragon-Blooded who have forsworn meat as part of an ascetic regimen to prolong their lives. Deeper into the forest, the academic city Adorned with Wisdom as a Sapphire caters to religious and scholarly pursuits such as giving the older children of An-Teng aristocrats something vaguely approximating a Meru-quality education. People in the Middle Lands venerate the Exalted in their midst, but they devote most of their obeisance to the duality of the Golden Lord and his gruesome and chaotic counterpart, the Pale Mistress. Heavy labor is accomplished with the aide of elephants who roam the forest and live in symbiotic harmony with humankind, following the example of their animal avatar, who sometimes serves as the Golden Lord's steed in times of war.

The Southern portions of these forests make up a separate domain that is not a part of An-Teng Prefecture. These jungles are home to the second largest remaining city of the Dragon Kings, Ssaaneth. Ssaaneth is a jungle city, located on the vast Golden River, so-called because of the masses of golden flower petals that float along on its surface after falling from the shining sun trees growing along its banks. Ssaaneth is home to all four varieties of Dragon King, and has close ties with a smaller city of the Mosok living on Mandala Island, located in the mouth of the Golden River, and with an aerie of Pterok located on the slopes of the Fire Mountains. By treaty, the lands around Ssaaneth are the property of the Dragon Kings. Except for the Celestial Exalted and the gods of Yu-Shan, outsiders must obtain permission to visit.

Unlike Rathess, which is primarily home to Dragon Kings who desire extensive contact with the outside world, Ssaaneth is home to more than half a million Dragon Kings who prefer to live more traditional and isolated lives. The city's residents do not encourage visitors, and those who do visit must deal with the city and its inhabitants on their own terms.

Just north of the domain of the Dragon Kings, the Lunar Exalt Celebrated Serpent has a personal estate 50 miles across centered on a small city built around a four-dot Wood manse. She began breeding snakemen here 1,500 years ago. For the past 1,000 years, she has been slowly forging an alliance with

the Dragon Kings in order to help her snakemen learn their ancient and exotic ways. Her goal is to make these snakemen into living bridges between human culture and that of the Dragon Kings. Celebrated Serpent's beastmen are all taught by Dragon King tutors and spend at least a few years living in Ssaaneth. As a result, many close friendships have been forged between the beastmen and the Dragon Kings. In the past several centuries, there have even been a few marriages between snakemen and Dragon Kings. Celebrated Serpent has not yet managed, however, to use her sorcery to enable these pairings to produce the half-breed offspring she eventually hopes for.

Merchants from An-Teng trade with both Ssaaneth and Celebrated Serpent's domain, obtaining valuable jungle products and the exotic crystal and vegetative technologies of the Dragon Kings, but most mortals consider both regions to be exceptionally strange places, and few spend more than a few days in either region.

Half a dozen other, smaller Dragon King settlements lie South of Ssaaneth, but none contain more than 30,000 Dragon Kings. All are located within 500 miles of Ssaaneth. Farther South, dense and steamy jungles stretch from the western shore to halfway up the Fire Mountains, and the combination of heat and extreme humidity (along with the abundance of eternally hungry and often poisonous wildlife) has rendered this land completely inhospitable to unmodified mortals. As



a result, ambitious Solar and Lunar Exalted have transformed much of the land south of the lands of the Dragon Kings into a vast experimental breeding laboratory.

## THE HIGH LANDS

When the Exalted speak of An-Teng, they typically mean its High Lands, the slopes of which gradually rise from the forest to lofty peaks in the east, all beneath the majestic spire of the Pinnacle of Mercy where the Golden Lord dwells. This region is sparsely settled, but it is as wealthy as the remainder of this rich land because the mountains abound in mineral resources. Silver, moonsilver and various gemstones are all common, but almost any material, from jade to adamant can be found somewhere along these jagged slopes. The most famous feature of this land is the lovely Thousand Dragon Lake, which is popular with tourists for its natural beauty and the impressive size of the fish that can be caught there. The land around this lake is the site of several RPCs devoted to fishing and working with aquatic materials, as well as a small city of 25,000 devoted largely to tourism. The shores of Thousand Dragon Lake and the banks of the many tributaries leading down from the higher peaks are also home to a number of small but prestigious monasteries, where monks meditate on the nature and purposes of the gods and their own place in Creation. They also teach all manner of unusual and powerful martial arts.

The largest city in the High Lands is the royal seat of Jade Plum Citadel, whose narrow, close-packed buildings and elegant temples stand atop the ruined foundations of an Exalted military outpost used in the Primordial War. Beneath these foundations, a Jadeborn settlement and mining complex serves as an extension of the city whose close alliance follows treaties negotiated by the Golden Lord. This walled city is ringed with potent defenses designed to drive off the bandits that haunt the mountains and the Darkbroods that occasionally venture up through fissures or extinct lava tubes and attempt to kidnap, slay or rob the surface dwellers. Visible for miles away because of the shining onyx slabs covering its walls, Jade Plum Citadel is designed to be home to only 160,000, but it often is a temporary home to almost 200,000, because of the large numbers of tourists and traveling merchants who pass through it. Located in a small mountain valley, Jade Plum Citadel is smaller than most cities of its population, with all mortal residents dwelling in 15- to 20-story residence towers. Despite its density, however, it is also a city noted for great natural beauty. This city contains thousands of meticulously groomed gardens in small glass-domed pavilions located throughout the city. Away from the city, the manses scattered throughout the High Lands afford their owners true retreat and appropriate scenery for difficult meditations.

## THE DEADLY CRESCENT

The lands south of Ssaaneth and the other habitations of the Dragon Kings are little known to mortals. The interior of

this portion of the Southwest is named the Deadly Crescent because it consists of a crescent-shaped region of the hottest and most inhospitable jungle in Creation, which extends from the Fire Mountains in the northeast, to several hundred miles inland from the Violet Coast in the southwest. Here, ambitious Celestial bioengineers come to compete against one another in an effort to breed increasingly hardy and deadly creatures. This vast laboratory was where the first kyzvoi were created and allowed to breed. It is also where the most ambitious and reckless bioengineers experiment using controlled exposure to Wyld energies combined with more ordinary bioforming techniques such as the Imbue Amalgam spell (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The White Treatise*, p. 74). Specializing in creating the most unnatural and exotic beasts possible, these experiments have created the abacasteri, the snakebud trees and the fire ants. Experiments continue on a contagious, parasitic and infectious colonial organism tentatively titled the chakra orchid.

Unlike the larger savanna hunting preserve of the Southeast, the Deadly Crescent is strictly forbidden to hunters. This land is both a laboratory for testing some of the most extreme and deadly life imaginable and also a place where gamblers and researchers pit the most successful beings against each other in exotic and terrible gladiatorial combats. Both the laboratories and the arena where many of these fights take place are located in the middle of the southwestern edge of the Crescent, in a small jungle city known as Razak-Jal. Here, half a dozen Celestial Exalted, several hundred Dragon-Blooded and thousands of enlightened human assistants work together to create impressive and deadly beasts, some of which are also intelligent. These dedicated savants and many hundreds of Exalts from across Creation who are interested in their work come to watch and bet large sums of money on the outcome of the combats staged between the fiercest of these beings. The income from these battles serves to help fund continuing research.

Although they never speak of it to outsiders, the Exalts in charge of Razak-Jal regularly obtain groups of condemned criminals for their experiments. Most human subjects do not survive, but a few have become powerful, deadly and dangerously insane monsters. In addition, one of the Lunars working here regularly mates with some of the most deadly of her creations in an effort to breed the most powerful and lethal beastmen in all of Creation.

To prevent any of these deadly creatures from escaping, a ring of jade pillars 50 yards high and six yards wide surrounds the Deadly Crescent. Set 300 yard apart and acting as potent Essence antennae, these pillars use the Essence they accumulate to form an almost impenetrable wall of force around the entire Deadly Crescent. This wall extends 200 yards up into the air and cannot be harmed by anything less than 50 levels of aggravated damage. Breaching the wall requires the attacker to inflict a total of 30 levels of aggravated damage, after subtracting 50 points due to the wall's potent armor. In addition, anything touching this wall of Essence immediately



suffers 20 dice of lethal damage. As a result, the only way into this region is by either flying vehicles or sorcery. As an additional layer of protection to the north, the Dragon Kings of Ssaaneth built a barricade between their lands and the Deadly Crescent, which consists of plants engineered to be exceedingly poisonous and ever-hungry predators that attack and devour anything coming from the South. Behind this living wall, the Dragon Kings placed another force barrier created using their powerful crystal technologies.

## REFUGE— HOME OF THE PURE-BRED LINTHA

On one of the small islands just off the southern coast of An-Teng is a city that appears to be a remnant of the time before the Primordial War. On this island, known as Refuge, live 30,000 pure-bred Lintha, by far the largest untainted remnant of their once powerful and majestic race. Refuge is connected to the Southern mainland by a narrow mile-long causeway and so is technically part of the South and under the jurisdiction of the ancient Quicksilver Falcon, Radiant Hurricane. On all Deliberative maps, Refuge is never referred to by name and is instead listed as Radiant Hurricane's private meditation garden, with a note that it is strictly off limits to all outsiders.

## THE HISTORY OF THE PURE-BRED LINTHA

When the Primordials ruled Creation, the Lintha were the beloved children of their Great Mother, Kimbery. The Primordial known as the Sea That Marched Against the Flame was the ruler and living embodiment of the Southwestern ocean, but the defeat of the Primordials by the combined

forces of gods and Exalts changed everything. The Lintha's Great Mother was banished to Malfeas, and their cousin and homeland, the living continent Lintha Ng Oroo, was shattered, leaving only small remnants behind.

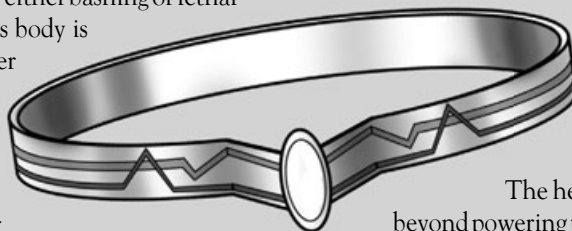
The three Lintha whose descendants became the Lintha pirates were not, however, the only Lintha to survive the destruction of their homeland. Three score of these noble beings were captured and enslaved by various Celestial Exalted. Only their captors know the fate of 41 of these beings. The remaining 19 were captured by Radiant Hurricane, a Lawgiver of the Eclipse Caste who drew the Second Breath in the last days of the Primordial War, after the previous carrier of his Exaltation died in battle. When he first captured the Lintha, Radiant Hurricane was young, ambitious, new to his power and easily tempted. His Lintha captives spoke of a marvelous artifact of great healing power that the Great Mother had given them—the Verdigris Circling. In return for their freedom and his protection and secret patronage, they would give Radiant Hurricane the Verdigris Circling and agree to perform the centennial devotions necessary to keep it operating. Radiant Hurricane lacked the power necessary to rip the knowledge of this artifact from their minds and was unwilling to share his knowledge with older Exalts.

Radiant Hurricane gave in to temptation and agreed to the Lintha's bargain. In return for this item and the agreement to maintain it, he gave the 19 Lintha a four-dot Earth manse and the island on which it was located, which they renamed Refuge. In addition, he used his powers to shield them from observation. As his powers grew, he was able to

## THE VERDIGRIS CIRCLING (ARTIFACT N/A)

The Verdigris Circling is a circular band of a shining metal patterned like fine damascened steel, but with the bands of different color being a mixture of bright copper and emerald green. The circling is as wide as a person's thumb, it has a setting for a single hearthstone, and it is designed to be worn around the wearer's head.

The circling's wearer cannot die. He automatically regenerates one health level of either bashing or lethal damage per action, even if his body is rendered into ash. The wearer also heals aggravated damage at a rate of one health level every five minutes. This item renders the wear immune to all diseases and, most importantly of all, the wearer does not age while wearing this artifact. The wearer cannot drown, suffocate, starve or dehydrate, and he recovers from the worst poison or more deadly injury in less than an hour. The only way to kill the wearer is to remove the circling, and even then,



the wearer retains the effects of the circling for one minute for every dot of Essence he possesses. Using this artifact requires the wearer to commit five motes of Essence and place a hearthstone of level 3 or higher in the single setting. The hearthstone provides no benefits beyond powering this artifact. The circling's owner or others acting in his stead must also perform special rituals requiring a (Wits + Occult) roll with a difficulty of 4 once a century. These rituals require one full day to perform, after which time the circling functions normally for another century.

completely protect the island from all outside scrying or observation, essentially placing the island outside fate. Over the centuries, even the slow-breeding Lintha gradually managed to increase their numbers, growing from the original 19 to 30,000. Today, they live in a small city powered by the Earth manse. While they have lost some of their most advanced and powerful Essence-wielding technologies—mostly because they lack the connection to the Great Mother—they have access to artifacts equal to all but the finest available during the Era of Dreams and have a standard of living equal to most Dragon-Blooded.

Over time, the need for absolute secrecy has decreased because the interbreeding of other now-vanished groups of Lintha with humanity has meant that Lintha features are no longer unknown outside of their island. Also, none but a handful of the oldest Exalts has even remembered them for the last millennia. Pure-bred Lintha who leave Refuge can now walk openly in Creation. When questioned, they merely reply that they are part of a handful of half-breed Lintha who serve Radiant Hurricane. Most of the time, amidst the vast diversity of natural and augmented mortal appearance, they are not questioned at all. After more than three millennia, not even the most paranoid Exalt fears the existence of a few dozen Lintha. The discovery of a city of 30,000 Lintha who have largely maintained their pre-Deliberative culture and technology would still be cause for alarm, however, so secrecy about their numbers and their objectives remains absolutely essential.

### THE LINTHA ISLAND AND THE CITY OF NG SKALT

Located one mile off the Southwestern coast and almost 500 miles south of the City of Flowers, Refuge is a lush tropical island almost 80 miles in diameter. Surrounded by a narrow sandy beach, the interior is a mixture of dense subtropical forests and grasslands, with a low mountain in the center. At the peak of this mountain is the Earth manse, and the Lintha City of Ng Skalt is built around it, sculpted from the mountain. The presence of several one- and two-dot manses on this island, as well as excellent weather and an abundance of all manner of fruit, game and fish, makes Refuge a perfect hiding place for the Lintha to slowly and methodically draw up their plans to conquer Creation.

### THE LINTHA PLAN

Although they recognize that their plan is profoundly difficult and will require many centuries to accomplish, the leaders of the Lintha all swear an oath to the Great Mother that they will eventually restore the Primordials to power. Some Lintha venture out into Creation to seek their fortune, just as others obtain employment in the Deliberative as a way to spy upon the actions of the Exalted. In both cases, however, Lintha who leave their homeland must swear an oath by the name of the Great Mother to never reveal the nature of the Lintha plans to anyone but their most trusted allies. Those few who have broken this oath have all been hunted down and slain. The

secretive Lintha have few allies, but they made contact with the more dissatisfied and rebellious elements within the Conclave of the Jadeborn Artisans of the Mountain Folk more than 500 years ago. After long debate, the Lintha decided to overlook Autochthon's betrayals and seek help from the Jadeborn.

As creations of another Primordial who was struck down by the Exalted, the Lintha have found some Jadeborn who were sympathetic to their cause, as well as a few Dragon-Blooded and even some enlightened mortals who also support them. Most pure-bred Lintha deem beings incapable of manipulating Essence as beneath their notice, so they have not made contact with ordinary mortal rebels or criminal gangs. The pure-bred Lintha also have no contact with the debased Lintha of Bluehaven. They regard these cannibalistic half-breeds with a mixture of contempt and pity—labeling their plans to call up the forces of Malfeas to overwhelm Creation as self-destructive madness. The pure-bred Lintha are well aware that the Malfeans have been twisted and driven mad by their time in Malfeas. They worry that too many Yozis dream of transforming Creation into a hellish duplicate of their prison, with a green sun overhead and demons capering everywhere.

Instead, the pure-bred Lintha are searching for a way to restore the Malfeans, or at least the Great Mother, to their former glorious state. If they do that, they can then retake at least a portion of Creation, with the Great Mother once again their patron and the ruler of their domain. Their primary hope lies in finding some of the most powerful Primordial artifacts that were lost during the War. Their first goal is to recover the infamous Eye of Autochthon. Its power would greatly aid their efforts, and gaining it would almost guarantee that they could gain the undisputed loyalty of the Jadeborn and free the Jadeborn from the powerful and destructive Great Geas the Deliberative forced Autochthon to place upon them. The Lintha and their few allies search the hidden and lost places of Creation for these artifacts, while the rest of the Lintha plan and wait.

Some young Lintha have become dissatisfied with the pace of their elder's plan. More than a few suspect that the oldest and most powerful Lintha have grown comfortable with their life on Refuge and have little actual interest in attempting to advance the cause. A few Lintha have left Refuge and have their oath of secrecy as their only remaining tie to their people. Others have begun seeking other allies beyond Refuge. Some have even begun considering making secret attacks on various important and highly visible targets. They hope to create doubt and fear by causing widespread losses of life that are too large and horrible for the Deliberative to conceal or dismiss. These Lintha rebels have kept their plans completely secret from their leaders, since the ruling council would strongly oppose any attacks that might draw attention to their existence or draw the ire of Radiant Hurricane.



## THE NATURE OF THE LINTHA

As the bearers of the blood of a Primordial, the powers of the Lintha are substantial. They heal and resist disease and bleeding as well as one of the Exalted would. They are all capable of manipulating Essence, and they live as long as the Dragon-Blooded. Many wield potent Charms as well—Charms disturbingly similar to those of the Solar Exalted. Many wield potent Charms as well. Legend says that when mighty Autochthon designed the first Exalted, he used the powers of these half-human beings as a template, exercising his prodigious skills to expand those powers so that they were considerably grander and more glorious.

Unlike their debased and cursed relatives, the Lintha pirates of Bluehaven, the pure-bred Lintha retain their original glorious forms. They are a gaunt and tall people who often reach seven feet in height. Their skin is the bright green of newly sprouted rice and their hair a pure and shining white. They have long faces and brilliant crimson eyes, and they move with the grace of hunting cats.

The remaining pure-bred Lintha are exceedingly proud of their heritage and equally determined to regain their lost glory. To this end, they maintain close ties with their Solar patron. For the last 2,000 years, they have made up a substantial minority of his personal retinue. Yet every one of the Lintha who works with any of the Exalted is taught an ancestral Charm quite similar to Righteous Lion Defense Charm (see *Exalted*, p. 199) so that their loyalty to the Lintha people can never be altered or suborned by even the most powerful Charms or spells. Yet every one of the Lintha who works with any of the Exalted is taught the Righteous Lion Defense Charm (see *Exalted*, p. 199) so that their loyalty to the Lintha people can never be altered or suborned by even the most powerful Charms or spells. Naturally, the Lintha have made certain that their patron does not know the extent to which they are resistant to his influence.

### EXALTED LINTHA

During the First Age, the few pure-bred Lintha have never been given Celestial Exaltation, although that could potentially change at any time. Although it is quite rare, however, there has been some degree of carefully monitored and controlled interbreeding with the occasional Dragon-Blooded retainers of Radiant Hurricane. As a result, a few dozen Lintha have become Terrestrial Exalts. Lintha who take the Second Breath retain their appearance, but lose all of their special abilities except the Night Vision pox and the Chakra Eye affliction. These traits cost Dragon-Blooded Lintha a total of three bonus points. Except for these two traits and their appearance, these Lintha are identical to all other Dragon-Bloods.

## CREATING PURE-BRED LINTHA

Generating pure-bred Lintha characters is the same as generating one of the Exalted, with the following changes:

When assigning Attributes, Lintha get seven dots to spend in their primary category, five dots in their secondary category and four dots in their tertiary category. They possess 25 dots of Abilities and may choose any five Favored Abilities. Their starting Essence is 2, and they have an Essence pool of (Essence x 10). They have 10 dots of Backgrounds and can use any Background available to one of the Terrestrial Exalted except Breeding. They can attune to hearthstones and artifacts normally, but they must pay double the cost to attune to any of the magical materials. In addition, the Lintha's piercing crimson eyes possess the equivalent of the Night Vision pox and the Chakra Eye affliction. Both traits affect their two crimson eyes. They never gain a third eye.

Pure-bred Lintha utilize their own unique Charms, different from those of the Exalted. These may be approximated by using spirit Charms thematically resonant with the Yozi Kimberly. Lintha cannot use Holy Charms, but are not actually creatures of darkness. They may also learn Terrestrial Circle Sorcery and Terrestrial martial arts. Pure-Bred Lintha begin play with five Charms, which can include sorcery spells or Martial Arts Charms. These characters have 15 bonus points and use the same bonus and experience point costs as Terrestrial Exalted. Their Permanent Essence can never exceed 5, and they are incapable of using Combos. They also have no Peripheral Essence Pool, Virtue Flaw or anima.

The most capable Lintha have learned both Terrestrial Circle Sorcery and Terrestrial martial arts and have spread this knowledge to the rest of their people. Combined with their powerful Essence-based technologies and various payments from their patron, they live as well as any people in Creation. They are not content to remain an isolated and hidden nation with little influence, however. Their plots and plans continue.

## THE FIRE MOUNTAINS

Everyone in Creation associates volcanoes with the South, and the largest and most active range of volcanic mountains in all the South is the Fire Mountain range that divides the central South from the Southwestern coast. These volcanoes were most active in the earliest days of Creation, before the Primordials created humanity. Most of these volcanoes became extinct well before the Era of Dreams, as Creation aged and gradually became tamer and safer. Yet one in 10 of these volcanoes remains active even today, though most erupt only once every few centuries.

Nevertheless, the large number of volcanoes combined with the fact that half a dozen of the largest and most violent volcanoes erupt every few years means that the Deliberative is regularly kept busy dealing with these eruptions. The vast power controlled by the Penitent (see p. 93) allows the Lawgivers to redirect lava flows away from populated areas and relieve stress on volcanoes that might otherwise explode, but no force in Creation can prevent these volcanoes from eventually erupting. Therefore, Realm geomancers must regularly direct lava flows somewhere.

These geomancers occasionally find that the largest lava flows have altered the local Essence flows. The Exalted then summon elementals and demons and use powerful artifacts to sculpt recent lava flows to either restore power to damaged demesnes or to shape the newly formed lava flow in such a way as to either enhance an existing demesne or create an entirely new one. On the positive side, a lava flow that disrupts several local manses might also bring up chunks of adamant and other exotic magical materials.

After most eruptions, the Deliberative issues safety directives promising there will be no eruptions near a recent lava flow for at least a few days. Prospectors then flock to the new lava flow to scour it for all manner of valuable stones and ores. A mixture of herd guardians and people of the earth who possess the Elemental Adaptation (Fire) pox make up the bulk of these prospectors, because both peoples are far more capable of enduring the hot temperatures near a recent eruption than ordinary mortals are.

These mortals arrive in fully automated Essence-powered vehicles such as transpods (see p. 25) and begin harvesting valuable materials such as heat-resistant crystals or nuggets of adamant before the lava has fully cooled. In regions where eruptions are frequent, they sometimes have only a week or two before increased pressures beneath Creation force Deliberative geomancers to permit another nearby eruption. The Deliberative employs several sworn brotherhoods of Dragon-Blooded to help rescue endangered workers and other mortals. These teams use sorcery and swift emergency vehicles to rescue careless or unlucky victims before they are either buried under molten lava or overcome with deadly fumes.



In addition to supplying wealth, the Fire Mountains are also a significant source of prestige and entertainment. Celestial Exalts with residences near the Fire Mountains regularly pay the geomancers in charge of timing eruptions to make sure that especially beautiful or spectacular eruptions occur during parties or festivals. The southernmost Fire Mountains extend to the edges of the Wyld, and uncontrolled Wyld energies occasionally drift across this border. When they do, nearby eruptions can consist of exotic substances such as boiling blood or hallucinogenic steam. (See the Wyld Lava table on p. 111 of *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld*.) Skilled geomancers can manipulate these Wyld energies to cause volcanoes near the Wyld to erupt in vast clouds of flowers, brightly colored cinnamon candy, burning bubbles or similar exotic and beautiful wonders.

## THE FAR SOUTHERN PROVINCE

This rocky land varies between blazing hot days and warm nights, and only the toughest and most skilled unprotected mortals can survive here for any length of time. It is also one of the wealthiest regions in all Creation, however, so many dozens of mining RPCs are located here, as well as the infamous Pleasure Dome of Xela-Cas.

### THE PLEASURE DOME OF XELA-CAS

Some 400 years ago, the Lawgiver Eternal Crimson Sunset founded an entire city devoted entirely to pleasure and recreation. As one of the lords of the Far South, Eternal Crimson Sunset was in love with the severe beauty of the vast Southern desert and had this city built in a location that was as lovely as it was inhospitable. Xela-Cas is situated in the midst of a huge desert of brilliant snow-white sand and is built around a five-dot manse that powers the entire city. In the distance behind it is a trio of active volcanoes, one of which is close enough to the boundaries of the Wyld that minor chaos leakage regularly turns the lava and fire that it spews forth all the colors of the rainbow.

The city itself is no less spectacular. It consists of a series of beautifully made and exceptionally tall pleasure palaces, each lit with a brilliant array of colored lights that illuminate the night sky for miles around. All these palaces are situated on an enormous disk of alabaster and white jade several miles across. This disk serves as the base for the entire city, and on it, myriad polished shining streets wind past a dozen large pleasure palaces and several score smaller ones. The entire city is covered by an ephemeral dome created by Essence projectors located around the edge of the white disk. This dome keeps the air inside pleasantly cool and repels the windblown sand and the occasional smoke and ash from the distant volcanoes.

The city's many pleasure palaces comprise a mixture of gambling parlors, performance halls, restaurants, shops and hotels. Each of the largest ones endeavors to be more

impressive and grandiose than similar establishments available elsewhere in Creation or Yu-Shan. In the gambling parlors, gamblers bet everything from simple jade to manses, townhouses in Yu-Shan, skyships or even more exotic qualities such as beauty, dots of Essence, sanity or youth. The performance halls offer plays, concerts, storytelling, dances, mass shared dreams and gladiatorial combat all performed by bound demons, exotic automatons, minor gods or semi-sentient constructs of solid Essence. The restaurants serve delicacies from all over Creation, as well as impressive banquets normally available only in Yu-Shan. For appropriately high prices, even celestial wine and peaches of immortality are available there.

The city's shops sell a similar range of wonders and provide everything from enchanted masks created by the goddess Shalrina to perfectly tailored suits of clothing designed to deflect assassins' blades. More ordinary shops sell some of the finest mundane jewelry in all Creation. The hotels offer options ranging from large rooms suitable for glorious and noble Dragon-Bloods—complete with hand-carved, self-adjusting furniture, sheets of the finest automatically warming, semi-mobile silks and a variety of similar comforts—to suites suitable for the highest Celestial gods or the most jaded Celestial Exalts. These accommodations' furnishings include sense-shattering illusions and constructs of living Essence that shape themselves to their resident's every whim.

In addition to serving food that is equally splendid, the better hotels also offer a range of more discreet services, including everything from mortal or demonic concubines to victims available for residents with more exotic tastes to abuse as they see fit. A few hotels also offer their patrons the services of highly trained spies or assassins, but all contracts are made privately between the patron and the spy or assassin, so as to maintain the polite fiction of the hotels' plausible deniability.

The interior of each of the large pleasure palaces is designed to emulate some famous and beautiful location within Creation, Yu-Shan or, in the case of the infamous pleasure palace called the Ebon Dragon's Blessings, Malfecas. In Celestial Visions, all of the shops, rooms and entertainment parlors are located off a duplicate of one of Yu-Shan's quicksilver canals, and the entire hotel is made to look like a portion of Yu-Shan. In Glacial Wonders, the interior is artificially chilled to well below freezing, and all its structures are made of ice or well-packed snow. Guests who lack the ability to ignore or otherwise endure the cold can rent pendants that protect them. Another palace is entirely filled with water, while still another is a vast open space, where every shop, gambling hall and other establishments is mounted on a separate dais that floats in the air at different heights.

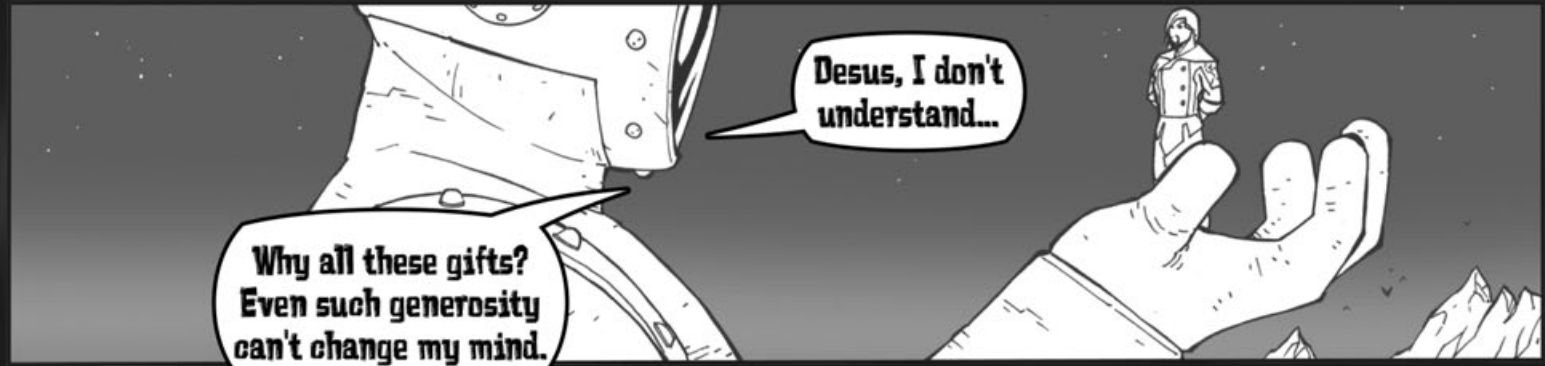
This city was designed to specifically cater to the most important members of the Deliberative, including Exalts of all types, Half-Castes, gods, powerful elementals and the

God-Blooded. Mortals who do not either work directly for the Deliberative or on the estates of one of the Exalted are excluded, and anyone except the Celestial Exalted and the gods of Yu-Shan must have an invitation to visit. These invitations are given to friends and clients of regular patrons as well as being offered by the Deliberative as rewards for meritorious service, heroism or even simply as part of the regular commendations the Deliberative government periodically bestows on unusually skilled or effective employees.

Few visitors see (and even fewer care about) the dark side of Xela-Cas. While most of the work there is done by various Essence-powered constructs, bound demons or similar beings, a small army of several thousand specially bred albino servants perform most of the menial tasks. Even in the Era of Dreams, mortal hands and minds are still cheaper and more efficient than most other options. These servants are under strict orders to emerge from their underground dormitories only late at night, after most revelers have either gone to sleep or busied themselves behind closed doors. Eternal Crimson Sunset made the servants albinos in order to make the idea of escaping or emerging unto the sunlit streets of Xela-Cas an unpleasant prospect for his servants. Their pale skin does nicely complement the city's alabaster foundation, though.

A few guests have taken a liking to these servants, occasionally ordering the youngest and most beautiful as concubines. Although these servants are not mistreated by any except a few especially debauched guests, they are slaves whose lives would horrify most of the mortals in Creation. While the guests enjoy themselves with unimaginable pleasures, these slaves toil ceaselessly and serve their masters' every whim.





Desus, I don't understand...

Why all these gifts?  
Even such generosity  
can't change my mind.



NOW, OLIPHEM,  
LEAVE US NOT  
BE STUBBORN.

I-

IT'S SUCH A  
SMALL THING I'VE  
ASKED YOU FOR. A  
TRIFLE, REALLY.



ONCE IT'S DONE, THE  
SEAS WILL BE SAFER  
FOR EVERYONE.

But you-

DON'T YOU  
WANT THAT?



I can't.  
I'm sorry.

Honoring your  
request would  
violate my nature.



MY "REQUEST"?



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE WEST

Least populated of the directions and composed mostly of individual islands and island chains, the majority of the West defies easy division into the province-and-principality system so common in the rest of the Threshold. Only the artificial continent of Saigoth possesses sufficient landmass to be divided thus. The remainder of the West is broken up in a more ad-hoc fashion.

## SAIGOTH PROVINCE

In the mythology of the West, it is said that the Saigoth Gates stand at the end of the ocean. Nothing enters through them and nothing leaves through them but by ceasing to exist. Carved of starmetal set with emeralds and endlessly commemorated in the dances of the gilmyne, the Saigoth Gates define the border between being and non-being. They have long been used by savants as a crude metaphor for the shinmaic substrata of the Wyld that separates improbabilities from the impossible. It is fitting, then, that the Solars named the continent they raised from the depths of chaos Saigoth, though most outside the Celestial Exalts simply call it the Great Western Continent for fear of offending whatever lies beyond the likely mythical gates.

Although slightly smaller than ancient Lintha Ng Oroo, the continent of Saigoth dwarfs Okeanos of old, a vast elliptical body several hundred miles west of the original

location of the Elemental Pole of Water. Centered as it is on the North-South axis, the massive island boasts the most comfortably temperate and stable climate of any landmass in the West—fitting since Saigoth was made specifically for human habitation.

## CLEPSYS PREFECTURE

The northern quarter of Saigoth comprises a single megapolis prefecture of interconnected urban regions designed for the twofold purpose of housing the private “country” estates of powerful Celestial Exalted and supporting the largest naval base/shipyard owned by the Realm. A range of tall narrow mountains fences Clepsys off from the rest of the continent, with added security provided by thousands of bound demons that lair in the snow-capped crags. To keep Clepsys as clean and wondrous as possible, mortals are not permitted within the district, even as retainers. Although this restriction increases the cost of living substantially, since all servants must be automatons or lesser Essence users, the policy is actually considered a benefit by its elder citizens since it quietly excludes younger, brasher Exalted from setting up residences. Consequently, the palatial compounds of the residential subdistricts are among the most luxuriously decadent manses in the world. Even the townhouse villas in the areas reserved for notable Terrestrial Gentes ancestors





are stunning in their simple elegance. Perhaps the greatest extravagance of the prefecture is the fact that many of the residences house their owners for only a season each year, since so many of these luminaries dare not stay away from the Blessed Isle too long for fear of falling behind their rivals.

To facilitate transport without the noise and bustle of vehicles or the mess of living mounts, all of Clepsys is connected by a set of canals inhabited by iridescent liquefied elementals whose sole purpose is to move passengers faster than the gold canals of Yu-Shan. Adding to the beauty, millions of bound gilmyne decorate intersections and state gardens as living statuary, coordinating their choreography to praise the Saigoth Gates, and by proxy, the Exalted who believe they made that myth a reality. Likewise, no infrastructural convenience is too expensive or too inefficient for Clepsys' city-planners, who take full advantage of the awesome power of the region's constructed geomancy in ways previously unheard of in the Threshold. Virtually every building on the island is a manse, and none save the townhouses of the Dragon-Blooded Gentes elders are rated below four dots.

The entertainment available in Clepsys, from the merely decadent to the inconceivably outrageous, is limited only by the imagination and resources of the prefecture's inhabitants. Third Circle demon concubines and grand dueling arenas reinforced against Solar spells are the least of the available wonders. Those who can dream up a more spectacular amusement to break the tedium of nigh-omnipotence enjoy unmatched celebrity status until something better comes along. One of the more exotic games played by the citizenry is an annual contest held on the first night of Calibration to build or summon a functional Saigoth Gate. Contestants have full access to the district's geomantic grid for the purposes of the competition, and although no one really expects anyone to actually open a way outside the universe, the audience revels in the pyrotechnic spectacle of the failures.

In keeping with the aesthetics of Clepsys, the factory-cathedrals devoted to the production of merchant and naval fleets operate with the most cutting-edge automation, with no crashing din or rising smoke to interrupt the meditations of the Exalted. From outside, the towering structures might be any other coastal palace but for the massive bay doors that release finished vessels. The factory-cathedrals also turn out unique private yachts in smaller numbers, though the obscene price tag attached to these ships maximizes their value as status symbols. Still, for the Exalt who simply must have it all, Clepsys is the place to go.

Since Admiral Leviathan bases his central command on Luthe, the naval base adjoining the Clepsys shipyards operates on little more than a glorified skeleton crew. The facilities are all quite modern, of course—anything less would mar the prefecture's perfection. The base, however, is really more of a social club for semi-retired commanders who could provide a fallback command if some unthinkable defeat destroyed Luthe and necessitated a new staging

ground for the security of the Realm. Leviathan finds the culture of the Clepsys base distastefully unprofessional and delights in making surprise inspections to politely terrorize the pampered staff.

Given the demographics of its population, the idea of any individual or body directly ruling Clepsys is laughable. All major decisions are made by weighted vote of the landholders, with the number of votes given to each constituent proportional to the value of her property. These votes also appoint Terrestrial bureaucrats to handle minor matters. Because these officials receive stipends (and possible reappointment) only following satisfactory annual performance reviews, personnel problems are unheard of. In practice, more political decisions get decided by informal banter at private galas than by official voting, since the latter is infinitely more tedious and necessitates the obnoxious pretense of recording Terrestrial votes.

Beneath Clepsys, the massive machines that run its wonders churn with the endless chimes of Essence-suffused crystals and the clank of gears. These foundations run deep, protected by automated weapons that target and annihilate Darkbroods that stray too close. A system of tunnels running beneath the ocean connects back to the Jadeborn caverns on the Blessed Isle, allowing artisans compelled by the Great Geas to answer the call of the Celestial Exalts and build wonders the Exalted elite are too busy to fashion for themselves. Hundreds of megalithic stone gates stand ready to automatically slam closed if the ocean should ever break through the ceiling, preventing a flood from drowning the lower reaches of the foundations at either end.

## THE OUTBACK PREFECTURE

The southern three quarters of Saigoth might as well be another world from the splendors of Clepsys. Although the so-called Outback is no wasteland, its climate is uncomfortably arid and poor in natural resources. The prefecture exists to temporarily house mortal colonists until they are ready to be shipped off to their new homes in Wyld-shaped lands.

The original planning committee for Saigoth considered a variety of sociological models to maximize colonist preparedness with minimal resource investment. The simple truth of the matter is that the frontier of Creation is not a stable or safe place to be, regardless of the propaganda distributed throughout the Threshold. Shaping engines and Solar Charms can carve form and substance from the Wyld, but a bit of chaos always leaks over in storms, surge tides and tentative incursions by the unshaped. Resisting mutation in the face of inevitable Wyld exposure takes strength of will, a quality best forged by weathering adversity. Rather than supply this adversity directly, the Exalted decided to let mortals oppress each other.

When a new colonist arrives in the eastern port of Hope, the first thing she sees is the vast stretch of shantytowns with grizzled, hawk-eyed merchants ready to exploit the fresh meat. Further into the Outback, syndicates and gangs rise

and fall in constant turf wars, fighting over food, shelter and control over the enchanted springs strategically distributed throughout the territory. (See the sidebar. Most of the wells imbue drinkers with the Longevity pox or Exalted Healing affliction.) There are no police to whom one can turn or laws behind which one can hide. While the fractured society technically qualifies as a civilization, many members of it would vehemently disagree. What the colonists don't see are the Lunar wardens who hide among them, watching and culling those strong enough for deportation from the western port of Mercy. While death is almost as cheap as life in the Outback, anyone who climbs to the top of the heap and has the power to stay there demonstrates the mettle to survive on the frontier and disappears to the docks. Each such disappearance leaves a power vacuum for the next ambitious warlord to fill. In spite of the violence, some people live their whole lives in the Outback and die of old age, never having proven themselves strong enough to disappear in the night and begin a new life in one of the more ordered societies of the frontier.

## FOUNTAIN OF FATHOMLESS DREAMS (SOLAR CIRCLE SPELL)

**Cost:** 50 motes

**Target:** Summoned well

Upon casting this spell, the ground beside the Solar splits apart and fills with cool water that bubbles up from beneath in a constant gentle flow. The pool glows with faint phosphorescence that is visible only at night, but it otherwise appears unremarkable. To all forms of Essence sight and comparable senses, however, the waters appear saturated with a kaleidoscope of inchoate power. The sorcerer chooses a package of mutations when casting the spell with a  $([\text{total cost of positive mutations}] - [\text{total cost of negative mutations}])$  no greater than his Willpower. He may dictate any number of conditions or filters to the selection, such as limiting its benefits to watered plants or mortals or humans. If a valid living being drinks from the well on a number of consecutive days equal to the  $(\text{positive mutations} - \text{negative mutations})$  cost of the intended transformation, the being develops that package. The change lasts for only a month, after which the effect painfully wears off over a number of days equal to its cost (additional -4 wound penalty during this period). Each additional draught from the well during the period of enchantment resets this month duration. Mutations obtained this way do not inhibit a creature's ability to survive in Creation, nor do they breed true. The well created by this spell endures for a century or until dispelled.

Exalted are welcome in the Outback and equally unconstrained by laws, save that they are not permitted to create or seize control of any social organizations. If they want to come slum with the colonists, that's fine. It helps toughen the colonists' resolve. The point at which an Exalt builds order out of anarchy, however, is the point he disrupts the established purpose of the Outback and can expect Lunar intervention. Mass-murder is also frowned upon, though more likely to result in censure by peers rather than violent interdiction unless matters really get out of hand.

## LUTHE

Long ago, the city called Luthe was simply known as Mobile Platform 3, the great aquatic fortress from which the wisest and mightiest Dawn Caste admirals directed the Western Theater of the Primordial War. A technological marvel ahead of its time, the submersible citadel favored guile over firepower, relying on the city's Essence-cloaking enchantments to give its forces the element of surprise in key battles against the Lintha and the other naval powers of the Primordials. Luthe's military commander Admiral Leviathan finds it humorously ironic that Lintha skirmish tactics using modern Bluehaven mirror those that Luthe modeled to such brutal effect during the War. Others who note the irony find the situation less amusing. Of course, modern Luthe no longer serves as the primary bastion for the entire direction, an honor assumed by the *Titan*-class skyship *Flame That Marched Against the Sea* (see pp. 116-118). While the city still houses the most single most powerful and important naval base owned by the Realm, its job now focuses on policing the shores and shipping lanes of Creation rather than guarding against incursions from beyond. The *Titan* battle group handles that job now, only occasionally scheduling widely publicized joint fleet exercises to test multi-theater strategies for total warfare simulations.

The Luthan docking bays hold a full range of fully equipped naval vessels at every level of force deployment, from light reconnaissance submersibles to heavy surface battlecruisers, as well a modest sky fleet configured primarily for air-to-sea and air-to-ground raids. Using communication relays operated by fragmentary protocols of I AM, the base maintains almost real-time contact with its entire fleet across the whole of the West, allowing high-ranking officers to spearhead offensives throughout the Threshold without so much as personally sighting the conflict. The fact that Siakal considers this method of warfare blandly unsatisfying pleases the strategoi of Luthe, who follow Grand Admiral Arkadi's dismissal of the shark goddess's personal bloodlust as atavistic. The fact that the Solar supreme commander hypocritically takes personal command of any offensives or maneuvers that catch his fancy is seen as a legitimate prerogative of his high station. The frequent forays have unofficially promoted Arkadi's second-in-command, Admiral Leviathan, as the acting commander of the navy in the Grand Admiral's absence, though. To politely rail against

the sterility of his position, Leviathan tirelessly inspects his navies with unannounced visits, hoping a climate of martial terror can build the discipline that Realm society has failed to instill. Although it is not public knowledge, he carries on a torrid affair with his commander's spouse, Amayana, the Zenith Queen of Luthe.

The remaining three-quarters of Luthe not dedicated to naval docks and infrastructure fall under Amayana's purview, as they have fallen to the reigning Solar Prince of Luthe ever since Mobile Platform 3 was decommissioned and converted to a civilian city. Amayana is a fair ruler who takes a hands-off approach to her administrative stewardship, but she takes an active and aggressive role in promoting her views of social justice in the face of obvious experimental excesses by her Lawgiver peers. Unfortunately, political realities sometimes get in the way of her ideals, as recently when Admiral-Artificer Seralin assaulted and bound the Arbiter of Western Storms into his Brass Leviathan in an irrational fit of pique. Amayana desperately wanted to punish Seralin for this offense against Celestial law, but she had barely issued a proclamation of inquiry when the artificer's powerful allies in the Deliberative quashed the request. Unfortunately, the only outlet Amayana currently has for her political frustration is the arms of her paramour Leviathan, though to date without her husband's knowledge.

Luthe is a city of delights by any standards, its ancient tradition of military service preserved in imposing decor and extensive trophy vaults, some of which are now public museums. While Clepsys is the playground of the richest and most powerful in the West, Luthe is the stepping stone by which the talented and ambitious can rise up to such stature. Luthan society praises competence and vision above all else, whether in military or civilian endeavors. Bold ideas receive bold patronage, divvying out the growing resources of the Realm to young and middle-aged Exalts bidding for contracts to bring their own heroism to the future of the West. Fortunes grow and perish in the tides of politics, with some destitute families retreating in shame to colonial abodes to make way for future citizens of Clepsys. To live in Luthe is to live in interesting times among a burgeoning microcosm of the Deliberative itself. Everyone wants a piece of the action, but there is never quite enough action to go around.

## MOBILE PLATFORM 3 (ARTIFACT N/A)

The central hemispherical dome of Luthe's primary hull stretches three miles across, studded with numerous towers and other infrastructural emplacements. It is divided into 40 levels, spanning the upper reaches of Celestial living quarters and the bridge complex through hydroponic gardens, massive engines and the submersible decks that sit below the waterline when Luthe sits atop the waves. The center hull joins to a five-mile-diameter outer ring by five spokes spread evenly around the perimeter.



**Speed:** 24/50mph (under power while surfaced or submerged)

**Maneuverability:** +0S (Special: Luthe is magically unsinkable and perfectly succeeds in all sailing tasks.)

**Endurance:** Luthe taps directly into the ocean waves and currents to harvest Essence, converting each kinetic undulation into an endlessly refracted motonic pulse echoing within its sorcerous reactor. The net effect is to exceed the Essence yield of a level-5 Water-pected manse, producing sufficient clean power for all functions as if it were such a manse.

**Crew:** 1/1 (requires 25m attunement by an Essence 5+ Celestial Exalt in the command throne; other beings and Celestials of insufficient Essence suffer (5 - their Essence)A damage if they attempt to bond with the controls).

**Cargo:** An entire city's worth of bays, docks and other storage/living facilities, capable of supporting a healthy urban population in great comfort even during times of war. Luthe can hold anything the Storyteller permits.

**Armor:** 32L/42B

**Health Levels:** Ux40/Mx40/Cx40/Ix40/D (cannot suffer more levels of damage from any attack than the aggressor's Essence rating or the rating of the artifact weapon used)

**Weapons:** 25 lightning ballistae (mounted 25 across and 25 beneath the central dome), 100 medium implosion bows (only 20 cannons can be brought to bear on a fire arc)

**Essence Powers:** Many of the features of Luthe mirror powers installed in greater manses. Although the city is not a manse proper, its advanced reactor similarly broadcasts Essence-fueled enchantments throughout the facility, giving it the following capabilities (see **Lords of Creation**, pp. 98-103 and **Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 66-79): Comfort Zone/Provider (2/3; the environmental engines provide generous atmosphere and other life support at all depths, as well as growing greenhouse crops necessary to sustain the city's population), Magical Conveniences (1; running water and plumbing, semi-living furniture adapts to occupant physiology, glow panels provide illumination in the benthic depths, traps automatically reset), Network Node (1; can temporarily connect to any

one network at a time, provided that network has a manse within 100 miles of the city; calibrating the geomantic resonators for a day of connection requires a successful difficulty 6 [Intelligence + Lore] roll), Self-Destruct Sequence (1; as a level-5 Water manse), The Eyeless Sight of Daana'd/Extended Sensor Array/Analytical Senses (2/4/3; sensor array reaches out to 50 miles from the center of the city, enabling detailed analysis of all phenomena in range), Central Control/Dragon's Nest (2/3; the celestial bridge pseudo-hearthroom exists as a roiling fulcrum of Water-pected Essence, but the whole ship resonates with those energies), The Glorious Halo of Hesiesh/Mela's Sweet Whispers (2/2; hologlyphic displays and nautiloid speakers throughout the city convey communication data and readouts from the AI), Geomantic Subtlety/Greater Veil of Shadows (2/4; cloaking systems hide the ship as if it were a natural part of the sea, but doing so reduces speed to 7/15mph and takes all integrated Essence artillery off-line while in use; the vessel takes a full minute to reallocate power to these systems after disengaging the cloak), Integrated Essence Artillery (4 per 10 artifact points of artillery; all of these systems are considered a level-4 power for the purposes of remaining active), Sentient (5; AI named Towers of Azure loyally runs all functions of the city-ship according to the attuned commander's orders), Armored x 5/Fortress x 4 (3 each/4 each; 32L/42B external soak; 12 external defensive hazards; 40 levels of damage needed to impose each dot of power failure), Dangerous Traps/Ultra-Deadly Traps (2 per five traps/3 per one trap; various automated defenses guard the bridge against intruders; these traps reset after each use).

**Other Notes:** Damage to Luthe simultaneously reduces functionality using standard vehicle rules and power failure rules for manses, potentially damaging or completely disabling the magical systems that make it such a wondrous location.

## PENTARCH PYRAMID

One of the largest and best-known manses designed to teleport itself between two locations, Pentarch Pyramid is so named because its structure rises from the sea as a megalithic five-sided pyramid. Arched openings in each face—each one mile in diameter—enable ships that sail within the walls to translocate between the pyramid's eastern location 300 leagues west of the Blessed Isle to a site an equal number of miles north of Clepsys. While the manse is away from either place, a shadow of it endures like a mirage of sea foam, giving the manse its nickname Isle of Shadows. While Realm military vessels and the private yachts of Celestial elders may cut in line to access the manse by flying special flags, other captains must wait in line and pay a modest toll for the convenience. Still, it's sufficiently cheaper than crossing the entire distance between the two locations that the system sees heavy traffic. Furthermore, the interior of the manse has facilities to repair artifact sea-going ships, though these docks could be easily refitted for actual construction work if the Realm were so inclined. Pentarch Pyramid switches locales



each hour on the hour, with enormous gongs sounded in the minutes leading up to a transport to warn the next vessels in line to stay back rather than risk being sheared in half by a partial teleportation. To facilitate efficient traffic, vessels dock in three concentric rings by size and obey signal flashes from glowing crystals mounted in the top of the pyramid (coordinated by a sophisticated AI).

Pentarch Pyramid serves a second purpose, housed in the complex of middle levels above the hangar space and beneath the AI lighthouse chamber. This area serves as a hospital dedicated to treating all forms of deleterious Essence exposure, especially Wyld taint. Prospective patients who are physically strong enough to scale the pyramid's thousands of steps may do so, in which case their dedication and faith in the healing that awaits them serves to attune them to the enchantments of the facility. Individuals too strangely transformed or too weak to make the ascent cannot partake of the bonus, but they can still reach treatment if others carry them to the top. (Those without faithful friends willing to do so can pay a nominal fee to ride in ambulance palanquins that scuttle up the stairs on the backs of crab-shaped elementals.) All treatment is free up front, but the hospital bills mortals for payment after the fact based on the scope of treatment. (The minimum Resources required is equal to the mutation points removed, up to a maximum of five dots. In cases where the patient can afford only partial payment, he may sign away five years of indentured service per Resources dot of difference to settle the account.) When patients die during treatment, the hospital bills their next of kin for the

attempt (with a one-dot grief discount). When physicians wish to treat patients, they use stability-conferring vats (see sidebar). This technology also allows ships to transport mutants from the borders of Creation to Pentarch Pyramid for treatment without them dying of chaos withdrawal on route. These facilities also upgrade mortals with various mutations, blessings and implants, though such upgrades may only be purchased by an Exalted patron rather than the patients themselves as a deterrent to pilgrimages cluttering the steps with hopeful masses.

**Game Effects:** Level-5 Solar manse. *Drawbacks:* Hearthstone Sacrifice (5), Maintenance (5; constant tuning of the magitech clockwork engines throughout the structure). *Powers:* Workshop Manse (3; the docks are dedicated to magitech), Comfort Zone (1; hospital area), Magical Conveniences (1; automatically opening/closing interior doors, partially automated operating theaters that supply all the tools needed for Medicine-related tasks, automated glow orbs that softly illuminate any room in which anyone is awake, automated kitchens that convert raw food materials into meals customized to the dietary limitations or allergies of patient mutants and a special effect that allows those who personally ascend the steps in hope of treatment to make a difficulty 3 [Stamina + Integrity] roll with success giving everyone in the manse a three-die bonus to Medicine rolls to treat that patient for as long as he remains on site), Analytical Senses extended with Pasiap's Buried Whiskers (3 + 2; allows the manse to study Essence, either to diagnose a mutant's exact state or prioritize the security clearances of Celestials or

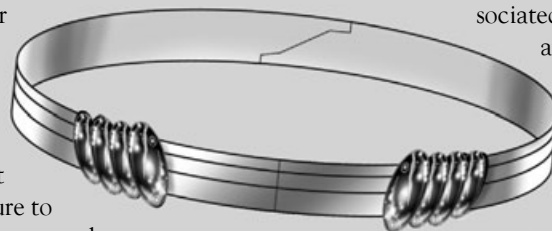
### STABILITY-CONFERRING COLLAR/VAT (ARTIFACT • OR •••)

These devices function by rapidly fluctuating the aspect of a motonic field so that the energies resonate at a signature between the definitive reality of Creation and the randomized flux of the Wyld. The smaller versions take the form of a collar with a one-dot rating and require that the wearer attune them for a commitment of one Willpower point

or two motes. While worn, the collar prevents the attuned bearer from suffering any ill effects of being in Creation with too many mutation points.

The player also receives a +2 bonus to all rolls to resist mutation from further exposure to the Wyld. The larger models are rated at three dots and take the form of oversized aquarium cells large enough to hold five people in monastic conditions, though really as a glorified jail. These facilities need Repair 3 maintenance each week to keep their filters cleaned and keep them filled with the mostly clear alchemical liquid in which patients gently float and breathe as if it were

clean air. Those inside the tank receive the benefits associated with wearing the collar variant and may have existing mutations gradually removed by having a doctor modify the alchemical formula in a careful regimen. Treatment is a dramatic action taking a number of weeks of regular care equal to the mutation point cost of the traits to be removed (10 hours per day minimum). This number also serves as the difficulty of the (Intelligence + Medicine) roll to determine success. These cells can remove mutations conferred by sources other than the Wyld, but this treatment increases the difficulty of the roll by two.



artifact vessels), Ability Enlightenment (4; purview of Integrity, Medicine, Occult and Sail, allowing it to manage ship traffic and assist with relevant medical pursuits), Glorious Halo of Hesiesh with Password Activation (2 + 1; operates by projecting light through banks of colored crystal emitters throughout the pyramid, allowing it to signal ships like a lighthouse and communicate data in hologlyphic displays to those who make the appropriate command gestures), Alternate Locations (5; the massive size of the manse limits it to two sites rather than the usual five)

## THE ARCHIPELAGO OF XUR

A large cluster of Wyld-shaped islands raised to the north of Wavecrest, Xur is an elaborate multi-tiered experiment in war, faith and Exaltation commissioned by the Deliberative. As part of that experiment, the islands are each different sizes and shapes, with inequitable resource distribution to engender inter-island resentment and hostility among the populace. Some islands are virtual paradises, with lush jungles devoid of dangerous predators. Others are blasted ruins of jagged rock incapable of supporting any flora besides the hardiest lichens.

No civilians live on Xur. Instead, each island is an independent military camp run by a Terrestrial Exalt of taimyo rank who serves as commandant. Under these officers' diligent and brutal supervision, a corps of elite gunzosha commandos handpicked from across Creation trains in constant war games against soldiers from other islands. The officers make extensive use of Tiger-Dragon Drill Approach in these games (see sidebar). Each camp has its own philosophy of warfare and piety carefully crafted by the Solar generals overseeing Project Xur. Although fanatic loyalty to the Lawgivers is universal, doctrinal variations make the war games more akin to holy wars. Given the savagery of these disputes, only the limited scale of deployed armament prevents victors from wiping their rivals off the map and razing their islands to bedrock.

In addition to its oceanic islands, Xur also serves as the base platform for the Western *Titan* fortress *Flame That Marched Against the Sea*. Although the citadel patrols the entire West, the skyship spends most of its time suspended over the archipelago by a paramagnetic web generated by manses located throughout the island chain. While docked in this invisible energy field, the vessel requires comparatively minimal upkeep and fuel, maximizing efficiency for what is otherwise the most grossly wasteful weapon system currently fielded by the Deliberative. The Solar masters of Project Xur overlook the inter-camp skirmishes from the palatial comfort of this base, using the vessel's AI to archive and analyze each war game.

Project Xur reliably produces the finest mortal soldiers of any tiger warrior facility in Creation. Those who survive the first year have more combat experience than (and superior training to) many Dragon-Blooded units, with veterans at an astonishing 84 percent enlightened Essence rate by the end of their second year. Graduates of the five-year program can

look forward to immediate placement at the absolute upper echelons of mortal rank within the Army of the Deliberative, although about a third go on to become bodyguards in Solar retinues instead. As far as any of the gunzosha or their Dragon-Blooded overseers know, this training is the sole reason Xur exists. The fanaticism instilled by the training regimen, however, provides the second tier of the experiment—with each orthodoxy hypothesized and tested to calculate the theoinfrastructural formula that maximizes motonic yield from cult prayers.

The third goal of Project Xur is the primary reason the archipelago exists at all. With that many skilled mortals selected for their excellence and conviction gathered in an environment of perpetual conflict and heroic opportunity, Solar Exaltation isn't so much a possibility as a foregone conclusion. By carefully controlling and recording as many of the operant variables surrounding each such Exaltation as possible, the project aims to isolate and decrypt the parameters Autochthon encoded in the process. With this information, it might be possible to reverse engineer Exaltation or even upgrade an existing Solar Essence with backdoor protocols. Unsurprisingly, Lytek, the God of Exaltation, is a frequent honored guest at the *Flame That Marched Against the Sea* and has Solar-level quarters reserved for him aboard the citadel. He doesn't have much more information to add, being the caretaker of a largely automatic metaphysical process, but he does what he can and is very grateful for the opportunity to take a more hands-on approach to his dominion.

Project Xur's current administrator is Strategos Kan-Hur, a 900-year-old member of the Dawn Caste assigned to develop superweapons for the Deliberative. Because of his extreme vocal distaste for the wastefulness of the *Titans*, he is not *Flame That Marched Against the Sea*'s commander and has nothing to do with its operation or chain of command. The fact that he outranks the *Titan* commander, however, keeps him contentedly autonomous in his office-laboratory within the fortress when he isn't vacationing in his island sanctuary thousands of miles west into Pure Chaos. Under Kan-Hur's guidance, a Celestial think tank labors on a variety of initiatives other than Project Xur, including the skyship-focused Project Shrike, the godstrider-focused Project Triumphant Stratagem and several others of lesser tactical significance. Kan-Hur specifically requisitions the most intelligent Solars who Exalt in Xur to join the oversight of the archipelago, revealing the full purpose of the islands while complimenting them for rising to the top. The first assignment given to these employees is to study and prepare an exhaustive report on their own Exaltation, both from personal experience and using the sensor records aboard the *Titan*. These exhaustive reports sometimes take years to complete according to the general's exacting specifications, but it's not as though Lawgivers are short on time. Most Solars transfer to other opportunities in the Realm upon completion of their reports, but some stay on to craft and refine martial ideologies for the camps.

### TIGER-DRAGON DRILL APPROACH

**Cost:** 5m, 2wp; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 4;

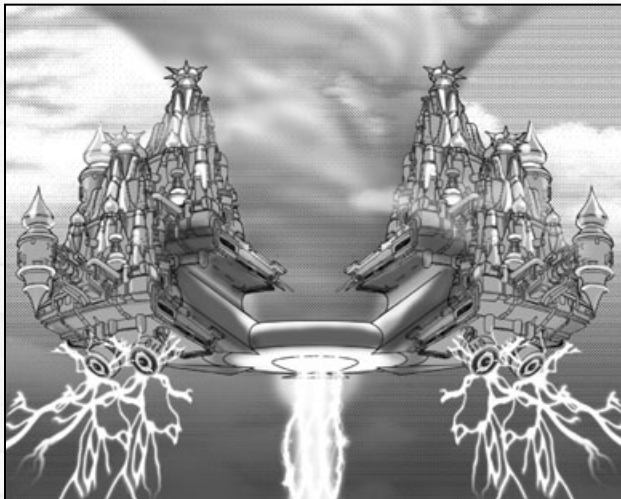
**Type:** Simple

**Keywords:** None

**Duration:** Indefinite

**Prerequisite Charms:** Tireless Footfalls Cadence, Blazing Courageous Swordsman Inspiration

While Dragon-Blooded cannot train units as well as Solars, those of sufficient tactical skill and dedication may transform themselves into incarnate extensions of a Lawgiver general. Tiger-Dragon Drill Approach may be activated only upon graduating from a week of Tiger Warrior Training Technique as part of a unit (see *Exalted*, p. 198). Doing so binds the Terrestrial to his teacher with an Intimacy of loyalty that cannot be eroded as long as this Charm remains active. More importantly, the Dragon-Blood temporarily learns Tiger Warrior Training Technique for this Charm's duration with two limitations. First, he can train units only in the trait he was trained in when he activated the Charm. Second, he can use the Charm *only* in fulfillment of direct orders from the Solar who taught him. The death of that Solar prematurely ends this Charm, revoking the Terrestrial's ability to create further tiger warriors until he can find a new Lawgiver patron.



### TITAN-CLASS AERIAL CITADEL (ARTIFACT N/A)

Bigger than many mountains, the four directional *Titans* embody the gratuitous pinnacle of the Realm's aerial fleet, replacing the directional mobile platforms built during the Primordial War as the predominant military bastions of the

Threshold. In standard flight mode, the pentagonal ziggurat hulls stretch more than five miles at their widest point and a mile from base to peak, allowing them to shade entire cities beneath them. The fortresses can also expand into a siege configuration eight miles across, separating the outer hull into five equal triangular segments connected to a circular inner hull so the Eye of Judgment weapon system within it can fire. Most of the superstructure is built from living stone monoliths cultured in genesis labs from behemoth organ templates and symbiotically grafted together onto a magitech skeleton of jade alloy. This synthesis of living and non-living technology allows the hull to regenerate from damage and perform limited autonomic upkeep without the metabolic complications of a fully organic vessel. For conventional armament, the citadels mount 500 Essence beam cannons set in turret emplacements over the entire hull, allowing roughly 100 cannons to converge fire on any point within range as coordinated by the onboard AI. If these barrages prove insufficient, the Eye of Judgment superweapon is a one-mile-wide circular crystallized orichalcum lens that aggressively absorbs ambient sunlight from the area and converts it into a coruscating pulse that can ignite an entire metropolis with a jade-melting holocaust of solar fire. As command bases, *Titans* also have 50 thousand-forged dragon launch silos for continent-spanning infrastructural assaults, as well as hangars for hundreds of skyships of varying sizes. (See *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*, pp. 113–115, for more info on thousand-forged dragons.) Besides their nearly indestructible Shaping-resistant hulls, the vessels can project an extremely powerful Essence shield, though the shield is deployed against only those enemy forces deemed a direct threat to the security of the ship—which is to say almost never.

*Titans* exist for two purposes. First, they are among the most visible and awesome displays of Exalted power ever conceived, so their mere presence on the horizon is sufficient to cow enemies into submission and bolster allies without ever firing a shot. In this capacity, each of the four citadels drifts over its direction in semi-regular patrols or in response to significant domestic unrest. Second, the fortresses provide a central stronghold against the slim possibility of the Yozis' escape or theoretical incursion by shinma aspects or alien Primordials dwelling in outermost chaos who have yet to stumble upon Creation. To prepare for such invasions, the *Titans* and their support fleets engage in war games every few decades against armies of bound Third Circle demons and other similar force-level combatants such as the Kukla in order to keep the crew ready and develop new Armageddon strategies. To support these two missions, each *Titan* also contains a full factory-cathedral-equivalent workshop with archival templates of every artifact deemed important enough to preserve in the extreme event it must abandon Creation and colonize the Wyld. The archives possess similarly comprehensive biotemplates, though the fortresses do not have onboard genesis labs and would have to construct

many such facilities with their manufactories before they could mass produce extinct species to self-sustaining viability. Since such dire conditions have yet to present themselves, the workshops mostly carry out the Deliberative-sanctioned pet projects of prominent Solar elders, such as Kan-Hur's superweapon research projects.

The first of the *Titans* took more than half a millennium to construct, though advances in technology reduced this period to a mere 246 years for the fourth. It is a point of pride in the Realm that none of the *Titans* have ever touched the ground, since they were actually assembled in midair by means of paramagnetic suspension until they could hold themselves aloft and have remained in the sky ever since. Although their construction significantly drained Realm resources, the primary objection to their existence is the ongoing exorbitance of their upkeep and the not-entirely-inaccurate assumption that they simply aren't necessary given that the Exalted are already superior weapons as a host and didn't need the *Titans* to beat the Primordials. Militant supporters of the mobile war cities argue that no expense is too great to secure peace and that every precaution must be taken against invasion by something worse. The debate in the Deliberative never quite dies out, though aggressive lobbying battles flare up only every few years as other factions look to allocate some of those resources toward their own initiatives. As a matter of security, command of a *Titan* goes to a Solar of exceptional tactical skill and accomplishment, but not the eldest warlords, who might feel more tempted to pursue their own agendas rather than the interests of the Deliberative. Typically, commanders serve a decade at a time before being promoted to higher positions within the Army of the Deliberative command structure. Given the prestige involved, competition is extremely fierce. Rivalry is equally fierce with other branches of the military, especially in the West, where Admiral Leviathan's Navy and the *Titan* fleets constantly seek to one up each other in joint military exercises.

Each *Titan* bears a name commemorating victory over a Primordial loosely associated with the element of the direction the fortress oversees. Therefore, *Flame That Marched Against the Sea*, *Harmonious Gale*, *Scattered Petals of the Thousand-Toothed Blossom* and *Oasis upon the Edge of Eternity* stand as perpetual insult to Kimberly (West), Adorjan (North), Metagaos (East) and Cecelyne (South), respectively.

**Speed:** 10/20mph (5/10mph while shielded or in siege configuration)

**Maneuverability:** -4S (Lore 5, Sail 5)

**Endurance:** *Titans* harvest their own Essence. They require Repair 6 maintenance every week by a 100-member team (only once per month while suspended in a paramagnetic web). Each missed upkeep disables the following systems in order: auxiliary systems (including the workshop and all other systems not associated with actual operation), siege mode, energy shield, Essence cannons, maneuvering engines and finally AI. If its AI is disabled, a fortress exists in a state of depleted hibernation as an inert mountain held aloft only

by sufficiently strong geomancy upon which its immortal stone can respire.

**Crew:** 5,000/(-1 maneuverability per 1000 less crew, to minimum skeleton 2,000; also requires functional AI and Solar commander attuned to hologlyphic control dais for 10 motes); (1,000 officers: Lore 4, Sail 4; 4000 auxiliary personnel: Lore: 3, Sail 2)

**Cargo:** An entire city-sized complex of hangars, vaults, laboratories and barracks, with effectively unlimited storage appropriate to this scale.

**Armor:** 60L/60B (When activated, the ablative Essence shield is solid to dematerialized beings, completely impervious to Shaping effects and has Hardness of 100L/100B. Any attack that would penetrate it collapses the barrier without damaging the *Titan* and the shield cannot be reactivated until it has received Repair 5 maintenance.)

**Health Levels:** Ux200/Mx100/Cx50/Ix30/D (Due to a *Titan's* size, each attack against it cannot inflict more levels of damage than the attacker's Essence or an artifact weapon's rating, whichever is higher. Large area attacks encompassing most of the vessel's volume inflict damage normally.)

**Weapons:**

500 Essence Beam Cannons: Speed 5, Accuracy (gunner's Wits + Archery + 2; turrets provide telescopic Essence sight and highlight the current target selected by the citadel's AI, so that gunners can see and attack virtually any target in range and fire coverage), Damage 15L piercing (damages everything within five yards of impact; affects dematerialized beings normally), Range one mile, Rate 1 (commander can use control dais to override and remotely fire any of the cannons; otherwise each is manned by its own gunner)

Eye of Judgment: Speed 7 (opening the hull to ready this weapon or closing back to flight mode takes 10 minutes), Accuracy Perfect (cannot target individual objects; lens fires a one-mile-wide pillar of light straight down), Damage 100L levels of piercing (aggravated to creatures of darkness; permanently obliterates killed spirits and sears deceased mortal souls into Lethe; the expanding holocaust ripple skims outward from the point of impact with a blast wave cresting at 100 yards high to a radius of five miles, damaging everything material and immaterial in the ripple's path not protected with a perfect defense), Range Special (see Accuracy), Rate 1/hour (during day) or 1/night (focusing the iconic anima of the commander rather than harnessing sunlight)

**Other Notes:** The living stone armor of a *Titan* can heal itself, albeit extremely slowly—one bashing level per week, one lethal per month, one aggravated per year. The living stone armor protects inhabitants against Wyld exposure and similar radiation up to Middlemarches-strength, though anything stronger requires the shields. As a final life-support measure, the unshielded living rock mutates in the presence of stronger energies, growing a stabilizing carapace in the course of a minute that fully obscures the ship's Essence and protects inhabitants from transformation. The carapace completely incapacitates all systems other than levitation



and respiration until removed as per repairing a broken Repair 6 artifact.

*Titan* fortresses are simply too large to power with hearthstones, as it would take a quarter of the geomantic gems of a Threshold direction to do so and would present unacceptable risk of sabotage. A small bank of protoshinmaic vortexes (see **Lords of Creation**, p. 95) would suffice, but that technology is simply too new and too unstable to merit refit for several centuries yet. Fortunately, the partially living hulls embed most of the superstructure with thousands of miles worth of respiration microfilaments, allowing the vessel to power itself by draining ambient Essence. In flight mode, all manses and demesnes within 25 miles of the *Titan* are considered to have a rating one dot less than normal. (This drain does not diminish or disable hearthstone ratings.) In siege mode, the drain increases to two dots and temporarily disables hearthstones from drained manses. With both modes, full power resumes as soon as the fortress leaves the area. Without major refitting, a *Titan* cannot stay aloft in Essence-dead areas such as the Underworld.

If a *Titan* reactor is destroyed (or deliberately overloaded for self-destruct), the resulting explosion inflicts effectively infinite damage to every material and immaterial object within 500 miles, obliterating the geography of that area (though on land, the crater quickly fills in with lava bleeding up from beneath). Only those with perfect defenses survive.

## RUINS OF OKEANOS

Once a deep trench in the ocean floor, the dream of Okeanos began with a primitive Dragon King shaman called Urmog who dreamed of a towering volcano consecrated to the Unconquered Sun. To fulfill this vision, the Mosok tribes turned their luminous crystal weapons against the chasm where the Ebon Dragon once swam, wounding the earth with geomantic weapons until it shook in agony and split apart to birth the apocalypse dragon Kukla. The Dragon Kings never learned whether the tectonic event actually spawned the monster or merely released it from a more ancient prison where others of its kind might exist, though both schools of thought agreed that further excavation would be imprudent. After the Kukla's volcanic rampage quelled enough for the Incarnae to herd it away and imprison it, the dragon's birthplace cooled into a vast continent a quarter the size of the Blessed Isle. Over this land, Mount Kukluk shone like a lighthouse to the West, its golden smoke illuminated by the molten orichalcum that welled from the depths and pooled in the sacred crater. To honor this living cathedral to the sun, the Mosok who settled the continent fed daily sacrifices to the mountain each noon, sometimes hundreds at a time to celebrate the holiest feasts. Okeanos rapidly became a paradise where Dragon King civilization flourished and dominated the region. For untold centuries, the reptiles received tribute from most races of the West and ambassadors from the handful of peers who rivaled their might. Even the proud and viciously independent Lintha gave trinkets

to burn in Kukluk's heart, lest insult enrage the Mosok to rally the breeds of the other directions to make war on the children of Kimbery. Even after the creation of humanity, Okeanos remained curiously egalitarian, its capital, Amphion, known as a place where penitents of all species who heard the dreams of the Unconquered Sun could come and give those dreams back to the mountain fire. All were humbled before the golden basin, so humans and Dragon Kings lived side by side with less of the benevolent reptilian tyranny that marked interspecies relations elsewhere.

During the War, Okeanos unilaterally sided with the gods and built most of the fleets deployed against the Primordials. Most non-human inhabitants actually forsook their ancestral loyalties to join in this cause rather than flee to their homelands, making some of these families the last of their kind after the Exalted destroyed their loyalist kin. Many of those Chosen by the gods in the West hailed from the subcontinent, where Siakal trained them in the most brutal strategies of naval conquest unleashed in the history of Creation. Where the Exalted passed, the waves darkened with gore and the thrashing jaws of the shark goddess's ravenous children.

Sadly, Okeanos did not live to reap the rewards of its triumph. The Age of Splendor had barely dawned when the continent shattered and quenched the hungry fire of Kukluk in the even-hungrier sea. While the Exalted mitigated as much of the damage as they could, the loss changed the face of the West and destroyed the last bastion of Mosok survivors from the War. The legendary social justice of Amphion drowned with its hallowed walls. Never again would so many sapient races live among each other in peace beneath common law. While conspiracy theorists have long suspected the Exalted destroyed Okeanos to prevent its ideology from spreading to the rest of Creation and threatening the stricter authority of their Creation-Ruling Mandate, most evidence points to some Primordial retaliation or a cosmological aftershock of the War. Regardless, only the peaks of Okeanos remain as dotted archipelagos, their remnants no longer united or worthy of that ancient name.

## DARKMIST ISLE

Once part of Kukluk's crater, the blighted northernmost fragment of Okeanos has remained under strict quarantine for most of the Age of Splendor, guarded by a small flotilla of submersible automaton warships programmed to destroy any intruding vessel unless they detect a Celestial anima aboard. The only way to get onto the island without facing this blockade is to arrive by means of the Celestial gateway, which also generally restricts access to Celestial Exalted who can access Yu-Shan.

As the first known shadowland in Creation, Darkmist is considered equal parts abomination and opportunity, which is the main reason the Deliberative has not invested the effort to repair it. Each time a well-intentioned Exalt puts forward a motion to cleanse the land, an unlikely consortium



of sorcerers, necromancers and soulsteel-using artificers (who often detest one another) comes together to block the measure. While official highly classified Celestial expeditions to the island have taken place every century or so since the destruction of Okeanos, most expeditions to the island are anything but official. These covert visits generally involve the pet projects of Celestials who want access to the unique resources of the Underworld or seek necromantic initiation. Like many such pet projects, the illegality of these endeavors seldom leads to sanctions unless matters get out of hand, especially given that forays into the realm of the dead have yielded so many treasures to date.

### AMPHION

Constructed on the southern slope of Mount Kukluk, the shining metropolis of Amphion suffered the full brunt of the cataclysm and was buried in lava during the volcano's final eruption. While this disaster resulted in almost total loss of life for the urban populace, the cooled lava preserved many of the artifact buildings in pristine condition beneath thick layers of rock, making Amphion a veritable wonderland for archeologists and treasure-hunters. Unfortunately for would-be looters, the Darkmist blockade covers the northern two thirds of the city. Those who stray into the forbidden waters quickly learn that the Deliberative's mechanical krakens do not bother with warning shots. More than one expedition has prematurely ended with an overeager historian snatched

up by metal tentacles to a grim fate. In spite of this danger (and sometimes because of it), new research teams come at least once a year, hoping to claim a little of the Okeanos legend for themselves.

### THE CORAL ARCHIPELAGO

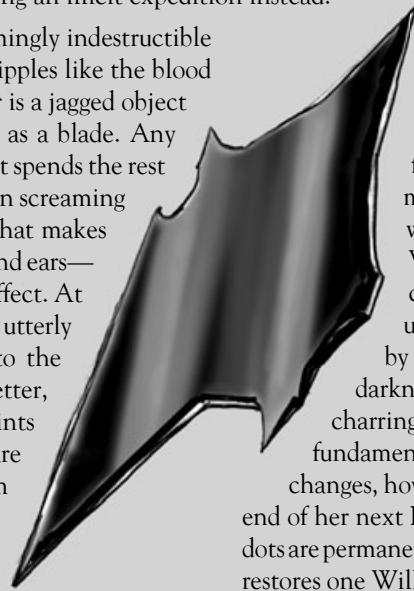
The eastern fragments of Okeanos have become known as the Coral Archipelago, consisting of five moderately sized islands surrounded by 18 smaller coral atolls for which the landmass is named. Lacking abundant natural resources, the area was never one of the more prosperous regions of Okeanos, but this inequity toughened the populace and contributed significantly to their survival following the cataclysm. From a backwater agrarian province, the new island chain expanded its hegemony over smaller neighbors until the Realm decided to colonize it in the name of the Creation-Ruling Mandate. The people of Coral fought back against this challenge to their sovereignty but could not stand against the Chosen. They voluntarily surrendered after a year of blockades resulted in widespread famine. Coral society adapted to its new overlords in a single generation, embracing rapid technological and social modernization with an eagerness that both surprised and delighted the Deliberative. All vestiges of Okeanos-era poverty disappeared in the ensuing decades as Coral grew into the primary bureaucratic hub of the Northwest, coordinating the political and economic resources allocated throughout the geographic region.

### THE BLACK MIRROR (ARTIFACT N/A)

One of the most bizarre and terrible treasures recovered from Amphion currently sits in a vault belonging to the Most Supreme Hierophant—an artifact deemed far too dangerous to let most Exalted even know it exists. The Lunar who discovered it thought it might be connected to the destruction of Okeanos based on its location near the geomantic center of the ruins, though she did not find direct evidence to support her speculation. Much to her frustration, she has not received official permission to return to the blockaded area for more official archeological fieldwork and is considering mounting an illicit expedition instead.

Made of an unknown and seemingly indestructible alloy of soulsteel with quicksilver ripples like the blood of the Neverborn, the Black Mirror is a jagged object roughly two yards square and thin as a blade. Any ghost or mortal being who touches it spends the rest of the scene curled in a fetal position screaming in an incomprehensible language that makes all who hear it bleed from the eyes and ears—an unnerving but purely cosmetic effect. At scene's end, the unfortunate perishes utterly and his shattered soul plunges into the Abyss. Other magical beings fare better, only losing all of their Willpower points and experiencing a waking nightmare of the Neverborn that haunts them for years afterward.

It is not these properties that make the mirror so terrible, however. When a Solar looks into it, she sees herself reflected *wrong*, her caste mark outlined by a charred black brand as if its golden fire had seared her. If she touches the mirror, she can pay five Willpower points to resist its power. If she



doesn't, she temporarily loses all of her Solar Charms for each Ability and gains an equivalent number of Abyssal Charms for that Ability—selected by her player from among those for which she meets trait minimums. (The selection may be different with each use.) She also gains one dot of the Whispers Background as a training effect costing three experience points with each use (maximum Whispers 5). While tainted by this power, she is considered a creature of darkness and outside fate, with her caste mark charring its reflected outline when it flares. She fundamentally remains a Solar in spite of these changes, however. The alteration lasts only until the end of her next Limit Break, though conferred Whispers dots are permanent. Until she returns to normal, the mirror restores one Willpower point the first time she touches it in a scene as she fantasizes about murdering her enemies. If the mirror has other powers, they remain undiscovered. For information on Abyssal Charms and Whispers, see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals*.

Modern Coral enjoys a level of baseline prosperity not found in the West outside Clepsys or the private domains of the Celestial Exalted. Rather than “wasting their potential” with agrarian or industrial labors, most of the populace work as bureaucrats and other low-level government officials in the service of the Realm and its Exalted rulers. Many among these legions of clerks and scribes grow their fingernails long and lacquer them with colors appropriate to their bureau to draw attention to the fact that their hands have not seen hard physical labor, though the fashion is considered crass in conservative communities. It is also considered highly fashionable to hoard talismans and minor artifacts of dubious utilitarian value, especially if the owner has no actual need for the device. Thaumaturges capable of churning out these least relics can charge obscenely high prices and still expect more business than they can handle. Matters get even more out of hand in Azure City, where owning outdated styles of artifacts is considered a worse faux pas than owning none at all. At least paupers and religious ascetics have an excuse.

Although the Exalted have little in the way of gender preferences for the assignments they give their subordinates, Coral society self-segregates to keep most of its females on the land with males working in travel-heavy jobs that take them to other islands. Lunar sociologists trace this phenomenon to lingering cultural anxiety from the Okeanos cataclysm, after which women were significantly more important to the area's efforts to repopulate. Far from diminishing the opportunities available to Coral women, this protective ethos affords them significantly more opportunities to directly network with the Exalted and secure superior positions in the bureaucracy.

### CORMORANT

Once the southernmost province of Okeanos and the site of the vast shipyards that built the Western navy for the Exalted during the Primordial War, Cormorant survived the cataclysm better than any other fragment. While its distance from the epicenter of Mount Kukluk certainly helped, it was the fortified artifact levees of the shipyards that held back

the sea long enough for the Exalted rescue fleets. The Chosen labored side by side with Jadeborn engineers for weeks to shore up Cormorant's geographic foundations, literally paving the way for Autochthon's avatar sphere to descend from the heavens and levitate the entire landmass onto a nearby peak. In many ways, this joint rescue effort served as final epitaph to the cooperative spirit of Okeanos, the last occasion when the Dragon Kings, Jadeborn and Exalted worked together as equals.

The relocated and diminished Cormorant remained an Exalted naval base, though its shipyards quickly fell behind the times as technological progress increased exponentially throughout Exalted-controlled lands. It would have cost more to refit the factories than it did to build better ones elsewhere, so most of the facilities shut down within three generations. The rest focused on producing "quaint" historical replicas for museums and the private collections of Celestial Exalted veterans. Without the shipyards, most of the populace emigrated to other islands in search of better livelihoods, leaving only the poorest to continue a melancholy tourist trade in Okeanos relics.

The modern citizens of Cormorant still cater to archeologists and sightseers, their primitive way of life unchanged since the dawn of the Age except perhaps for increasing bitterness. The islanders supplement their tourism by fishing the waters to the south for Cormorani eels, widely considered a delicacy throughout the region and parts of the Realm. Exalted who make port at Cormorant can expect dozens of Cormor youths following them and begging for the opportunity to join their retinues. The fact that these beggars will do almost anything to get away from the poverty of the island is quite well known to Chosen looking to spice up a shore leave. The phrase "hungry as a Cormor whore" is infamous throughout the West.

Politically, Cormorant is property of the Deliberative Navy, but in practice, the Realm doesn't waste any officers to oversee the place now that it no longer has any strategic value. In the absence of official authority, the small Gens of Dragon-Blooded shipwrights who build historical replica vessels acts as the de facto peacekeeping authority. Mostly, though, no one bothers to tell the Cormors what to do as long as they don't cause trouble. Of course, given the importance of the tourism trade to the island's survival, causing trouble is about the last thing the inhabitants *want* to do.

## OKEANOS-THAT-IS

Lacking strategic facilities comparable to Cormorant's shipyards, the other island remnants of southern Okeanos did not benefit from a coordinated Exalted rescue operation and were largely abandoned by the rest of the world, not even deemed worthy of a label beside their cartographic entries on most maps. In the absence of aid, the survivors collapsed into violent anarchy before stabilizing into a loosely antagonistic raider tribal structure. The only visitors these islands received for several centuries were occasional Exalted

tourists who wished to observe an Okeanos-derivative culture "untouched" by contact with the Realm (completely ignoring how little genuine Okeanos culture survived the vast sociological upheaval of the cataclysm and post-apocalyptic mentality). While Coral flourished and Cormorant stagnated to irrelevance and even Darkmist Isle became a dangerous and unique treasure, the tribes that called themselves Okeanos-That-Is sank into ever-greater poverty. The only figure of any note who has ever taken an active interest in the island chain is the goddess Siakal, who recently relocated the main entrance to her deep water sanctum nearby to take advantage of the massacres the tribes inflict upon each other whenever food gets scarce. The warring chieftains feel no particular gratitude for the "patronage" Siakal's presence lends to their warfare, especially given the onerous burden her regular appeasement sacrifices place on the economy and populations. By treaty, the shamans of each tribe have agreed not to start a bidding war for Siakal's favor, since that could only result in mutual destruction. That doesn't stop a few short-sighted warlords from cheating now and again, though, with appropriately unpleasant results. Desperate tribes often pool their remaining resources to bribe disreputable Terrestrials or bored Half-Caste bastards to fight on their behalf as champion mercenaries. The islands of **Amphiro**, **Kerkeis**, **Okirho**, **Suadela** and **Petraya** all host sprawling estates belonging to the marauder-king families of former Terrestrial mercenaries who pillaged great fortunes in the conflict and stayed to carve out territories for themselves.

## WAVECREST

Although not technically part of Okeanos, the Wavecrest island chain developed in that continent's literal and cultural shadow. None of the chain's volcanoes could compare with Mount Kukluk, but the shamans who dwelled near their burning peaks still gave offerings to the liquid flames, hoping to taste some of Okeanos' grace from the volcano gods. Over time, this cultural similarity drew the two nations into a common political sphere, with Wavecrest always the junior partner in the relationship. The cataclysm changed everything, inundating Wavecrest's islands with twin floods of tsunamis and refugees. The fragile economy shattered under the joint onslaught, mirroring and exceeding the violence of Okeanos-That-Is. Early Solar intervention focused on terraforming the land for greater fertility, on the assumption that greater prosperity would reduce the need for raiding. The theory failed miserably, as the resultant population spike exponentially increased competition for limited resources, leaving the Deliberative with a choice between allowing a genocidal escalation or negotiating a peace settlement between the islands. Deeming the former more costly in the long run, a diplomatic contingent of Eclipse Caste Solars and Waxing Moon Lunars gathered a conclave of the volcano gods and negotiated a new social paradigm to maintain the flow of sacrifices without open warfare. It took time to convince all the gods, but faced



with combined pressure in Creation and subtler maneuvers in Yu-Shan, the magma kings grudgingly conceded to the peace. A suddenly united Wavecrest stepped in to replace Okeanos as the primary breadbasket of the West, supplying the ever-expanding colonies along the frontiers of the Wyld. To keep the mountains quietly smoking, their priests sacrificed criminals at holidays and following important astrological events, serving as a powerful deterrent to misconduct.

Modern Wavecrest operates as a subservient administrative plutocratic regime coordinating its agricultural facilities to maximize production on all levels of infrastructure. The government is not so much dictatorial or military as it is efficiently structured, affording calculated recreational opportunities at staged intervals throughout the work shifts to promote employee wellness and morale. For those who accept this station in life, the work is quite manageable and affords a better quality of life than frontier islands. Discontent youths rarely linger for long to mar the peace, as they receive formal shunning and incessant polite suggestions to sail for the colonies with crop shipments. Since continued defiance of social mores generally leads to arrest and potential sacrifice to the volcano gods, the Wavecrest citizenry enjoy surreal tranquility surpassing any of their neighbors. This pacification is so total, in fact, that the Realm barely stations any military presence on the islands themselves, though whole fleets of naval vessels escort the constant flow of supply convoys outbound to the colonies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the structured peace of Wavecrest seldom keeps the interest of individual Celestial Exalts for very long. The only Exalted who truly appreciate the security of the volcano chain are stability-minded Terrestrials.

## THE OCEAN FLOOR

While most Realm colonial efforts focus on raising new islands out of the Wyld and populating them with a buffer population to hold back the tides of chaos, the matter of the intervening seas and sea beds presents a more complicated challenge. It is not as though the Exalted cannot explore or master the depths. Water-ascended Terrestrials and Lunars with the right forms can do so trivially, and others can develop Charms or use artifacts to facilitate underwater adventures. Mortal populations require significantly greater magical resources to sustain long-term underwater colonies, however, which increases the costs to establish and maintain such settlements. Life-support systems can always fail, as highly publicized examples of accidents and deliberate geomantic sabotage has proven. A minor inconvenience for a surface colony can end with hundreds or even thousands dead before a qualified technician can fix malfunctioning environmental systems. Of course, adapting the colonists to the environment rather than the other way around carries its own problems. Many mortals won't voluntarily acquire mutations, and forced eugenic programs risk drawing Deliberative

censure or interference by mortal-rights coalitions. To date, the most successful sub-species engineering project to expand "human" control of the seabed remains the people of the sea. They base their civilization out of the submerged city of Jalarin but have colonized much of the northern half of the Western Ocean in scattered settlements. Although it is technically subject to the Creation-Ruling Mandate, the prehuman race of pelagials claims vast tracts of Southwestern waters by ancestral right, forcing the Realm to negotiate its expansions carefully to avoid uniting disparate pelagial tribes in a futile (but frustrating) act of concerted defiance. Between these two peoples—one a relic of the past and the other a bold agenda for the future—a diverse mix of assorted Wyld mutants, rare aquatic beastmen, Lintha monsters, enduring castoffs from genesis experiments, strange gods, stranger elementals and unimaginably weird enclaves of sentient non-human species round out the eccentric fringes of the deep-water populations of the Western Ocean.

## JALARIN

From its foundations northwest of Coral, the gleaming spires of Jalarin rise more than a dozen stories above the waves, providing mooring docks to refuel skyships and give their crews an exotic "shore" leave experience like nothing else in Creation. Air-filled environmental domes allow surface dwellers a majestic view of Jalarin's public facilities and visitor accommodations, as well as house the central genesis hospital where rich or powerful mortals can purchase the long life and aquatic freedom granted to the people of the sea. Even some among the Exalted come to receive this transformation, with each such occasion celebrated as a city-wide holiday for Celestial Exalts (or an extended moment of respectful silence for Dragon-Blooded converts).

Only a third of the city has life-support systems for air-breathers. The rest of Jalarin can only be reached by the tens of thousands of gill-bearing inhabitants venturing through airlocks into the surrounding waters. There, farmers cultivate kelp on the seabed and farm large crustaceans to augment the fruits of their gardens, while warriors, including one gunzoshia camp, drill with submersible fighter craft as special sub-marine commandos of the Deliberative Navy. Perhaps the most important duty given to the people of the sea is the containment of Darkmist Isle's shadowland, which they have bounded with public works improvements to hold in the inky waters and keep them from spreading along the ocean bed. Unlike many surface dwellers, the inhabitants of Jalarin know exactly where the borders of forbidden waters begin and seldom suffer accidents with the automated blockade. Deliberate expeditions to the sunken ruins of Okeanos are another matter entirely. The Deliberative has assumed a "don't ask, don't tell" stance to these adventures as long as any dangerous or powerful relics end up in Exalted hands.

Rules for playing people of the sea (and other such races) can be found on pp. 157–160 of **The Compass of Celestial Directions II—The Wyld**.

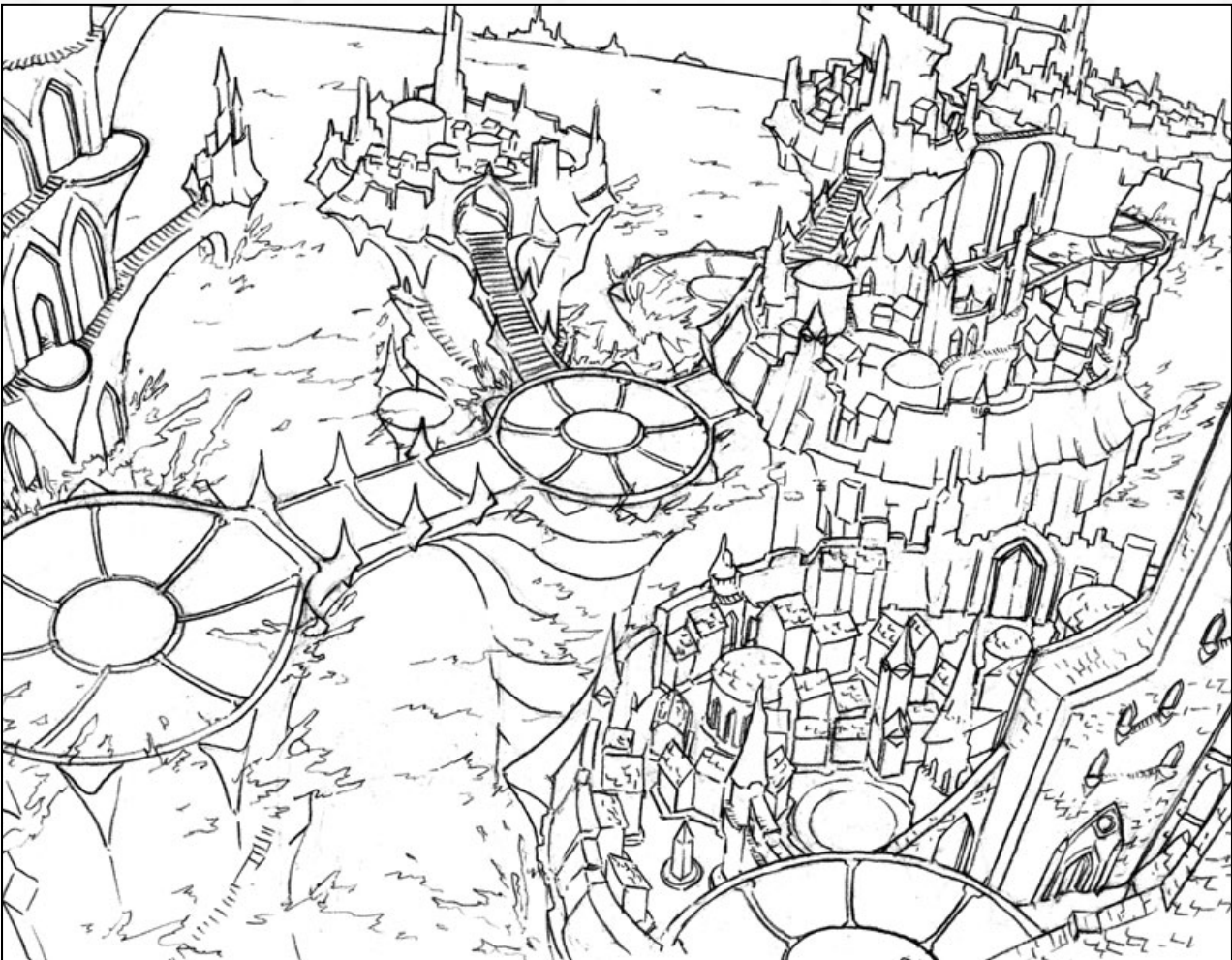
## THE CITY OF THE SHINING REEFS

Much like Jalarin, the City of the Shining Reefs may be accessed from the surface by a platform perched atop the waves, replacing the soaring skyship docking masts with a single gate to Yu-Shan opened by the Primordial who created the city below and peopled it with its spawn. In their prime (if such could be said for them), the pelagials were a proud humanoid race who traded extensively with the Lintha and the Dragon Kings but lacked the favor either held among the world's creators. The pelagial population endured chiefly because they would perform the tasks that Lintha and Mosok alike deemed too menial for their honor but above the capabilities of human slaves. As a formal underclass of sailors who traveled from port to port in vast brightly colored naval convoys, they held a certain exotic fascination for their neighbors as long as they didn't linger too long in one place. The living underwater city beneath its Celestial gate turned out generation upon generation of itinerant labor, even after a Lintha pogrom severely depopulated the fleets for several decades.

During the Primordial War, the pelagials first aimed for neutrality but found themselves under attack by Exalted and Primordial forces uninterested in anything less than total

obedience or direct aid. When all seemed lost, the species felt a great call shouting through their blood, drawing them home to their ancestral city. The pelagial refugees who answered the call and descended the diamond elevator in pilgrimage found themselves remade into aquatic forms far uglier and cruder, but better equipped to survive into the Age of Splendor and dominion by the Exalted. Historical records attribute the mass transformation and deliverance of the pelagials to Autochthon as one of the Great Maker's inexplicable acts. As with many such late-War attributions, however, the truth remains unverifiable. Realm policy toward the pelagials is one of gentle patronizing placation, gradually subsuming their territory as it becomes economically feasible by negotiating treaties and land purchases through the proxy representatives of the people of the sea. While the Exalted could simply seize the land through superior military force, the Chosen lack the civilian and military resources to securely hold the remote seabeds or make productive use of them. Therefore, the Deliberative has deemed it is better policy to let the mostly harmless pelagials hold onto their property for now rather than invite the Lintha to set up new strongholds in the chaos of war.

The City of the Shining Reefs is not so much a technological marvel as a sorcerous one, a vaguely living skeletal



superstructure combining elements of coral and mollusk in encrusted layers of spiky organic armor. A vast three-dimensional maze of traps protects the outer walls, in which sprawling complexes house the mass living and cultural areas of the pelagial race in semi-amphibious splendor. Far beneath, the original rotting palaces of the ancient pelagials sit around the sunken tombs of their Sleeping Princes, the literal shadow rulers of their species, who serve as the collective voice of their now-Neverborn creator from its Labyrinth temple tomb. Outside of a narrow cult, none of the pelagials know of this allegiance and would be most unnerved by the thought that the Exalted would slay them all in an instant if the ruse were ever revealed. The Sleeping Princes are not fools, though. They do their best to encourage friendly relations with the Exalted, so as to allay any suspicions. As a result of this duplicitous campaign, the pelagials have ironically experienced a golden age for the first time in their existence as unofficial vassals of the Realm. The Exalted trade with them, teach them and study lore from their Collegiums of wisdom, giving the prehumans honors approaching those of the fading Dragon Kings. It is possible that the pelagials might try to forget their maker and embrace the Chosen as patrons one day, but their blood remembers what their hearts deny and will destroy them if they should ever truly forsake Whose Whispers Chain. In the same breath, it is equally possible that the destruction of Okeanos marked the first vengeance of the Sleeping Princes, perhaps in cooperation with the Lintha against their common foes. Such matters remain almost as murky as the waters the pelagials call home, providing a backdrop of exotic and alien intrigue for Exalted diplomats and merchants to navigate.

## GRAND EXPERIMENTS

As the least populous direction of Creation, the West affords powerful Celestial Exalts a chance to flex and test their might without the same risk of collateral damage. Rarely a day goes by without some Solar sorcerer casting miracles upon a lonely promontory far at sea, either to test a new spell or to keep in practice. The region also hosts a variety of longer-term pet projects in remote facilities, sometimes situated far from sight to avoid interruption or prevent an accident from obliterating a nation, but usually because their creators feel the world just isn't ready for their genius. The locations that follow represent the barest sampling of these experiments and hardly the most fantastic among them.

## SIXTH SEASON REEF

In the deep Southwest near the borders of the Wyld, one of the many far-flung Realm tributaries sits as a dot on the map barely worthy of a named entry. Even so, Sixth Season Reef remains important as a daring Celestial experiment that might ultimately redefine how Creation deals with the Fair Folk. The colony's Lunar patron Endless Unagu visits as often as possible, fearful that his ambitions might unravel in his absence. He is wise to hold such fears. The

small tribe of mortal settlers represents only one half of the colony's population. The other half dwells just offshore, a small raksha court that Endless Unagu subdued and spared years ago in return for oaths of fealty. The two neighboring settlements enjoy an uneasy truce maintained by amicable exchange of hostages and the fierce oversight of their mutual Lunar overlord. He aims to integrate them into a functional self-sustaining symbiosis within 10 years, teaching the Fair Folk the value of harvesting Essence from peaceful coexistence and consumption of social undesirables rather than giving in to gluttonous feeding frenzies. From his humans, he expects tolerance and patience assisted by forced intermarriage to create lasting ties and superior magical heritage for future generations. The plan seems to be on track, in spite of detractors who call Endless Unagu "Fairy Farmer" and occasionally accuse him of consorting with the enemies of Creation—a charge the eel-totem Lunar has angrily contested by citing the example and origin of the Mountain Folk. As much as he might wish or boast otherwise, Endless Unagu's eloquent arguments had very little to do with his receiving permission to continue his experiments. Rather, he can thank the unlikely consortium of savants and sorcerers who swarmed to his defense out of fear that their own pet projects might come under scrutiny if the inquiry continued. Few of these supporters actually believe Endless Unagu will succeed in any way (or really want him to), but many publicly wish him luck just to annoy their Faithful political rivals.

## THE GROTTO OF LIGHT

When Queen k'Tula walks among her Solar peers, she wears the shape of a young woman who might be called fiercely beautiful if not for the alien indifference of her golden eyes. The Twilight Caste elder detests the political expediciencies that make the lie necessary almost as much as she detests the limitations of the face she once wore, but she correctly recognizes that most Lawgivers would not understand or appreciate the modifications she has made to her flesh. Only in her own manse does she tear off the ruse and unchain her body, uncoiling her limbs to infinitely dexterous tentacles until only her caste mark shines unchanged upon a bulbous cephalopod brow. Her submerged sanctuary lies at the bottom of a benthic chasm beneath the Northern ice. It is well hidden and removed from the rest of the world in order to deter visitors and allow the Solar Queen to experiment on herself and the race of sapient Half-Caste octopi descended from her couplings with her Lunar mate in his totem form.

Queen k'Tula is not shy about her extreme transhumanist ideology, though she has given up trying to convince the Deliberative that intrinsic mortal weakness is the anchor holding back Exalted evolution. Many Lawgivers simply assume she spends most of her time in her manse sulking at her unpopularity, when they bother to think of her at all. Those who question further lose interest when they look at her breeding program, which appears little different from those of other savant-engineers and hardly gossip-worthy compared

## IS IT WORKING?

Endless Unagu's experiment is recklessly bold in its scope. He believes that sufficient social conditioning can alter the fundamental nature of the raksha, changing them from predators to symbiotic protectors like wolves changed to sheepdogs. The question embodies the timeless dilemma of nature versus nurture, and the answer remains deliberately unresolved for Storytellers to decide since the outcome might profoundly affect the Realm's Fair Folk policy.

**Option 1: Success.** Endless Unagu discovers the social formula that can tame raksha. If the formula can be reliably duplicated, the Exalted might move toward concentration-camp-style rehabilitation for conquered courts rather than wholesale execution, eventually creating a substantial buffer zone of "friendly" Wyld territories to ward off the horrors of deeper chaos. A more modest success might help Sixth Season Reef achieve domestic tranquility, but in such a way that he cannot immediately duplicate the results (perhaps necessitating further research).

**Option 2: Failure.** Endless Unagu is doomed to fail. The Fair Folk are of one kind, reality another, and there can be only enmity between them. The raksha might play along, enjoying the novelty of doing so, but they will eventually get bored and revert back to type. Worst of all, they might be playing along simply to delude Endless Unagu with false hope, perhaps setting him up to have his form and sanity unraveled by the Wyld at a later date.

with other Solar fetishes. Such assumptions suit k'Tula just fine. Her spawn represent more than an unchecked peccadillo run awry, being rather a deliberate and calculating attempt to create a superior host for Solar Exaltation. Although she hasn't quite reached a level of contempt to advocate human extinction, she has carefully considered the ramifications and sees some merit to a forced "restructuring" of Exaltation.

In keeping with the parameters and goals of k'Tula's experiment, her spawn do not wield Essence without extensive thaumaturgical training, since integral Essence has been proven to disrupt the Exaltation process. Furthermore, despite almost completely octopoid external morphology, the race incorporates vestigial internal elements of human physiology and spiritual structure to retain the potential for Solar Exaltation. From the outside, her children just appear to be octopi, albeit nearly human-sized telepathic tool-using octopi.

According to Queen k'Tula, her Lunar husband, Nakik, died in battle against the Fair Folk centuries ago. This story

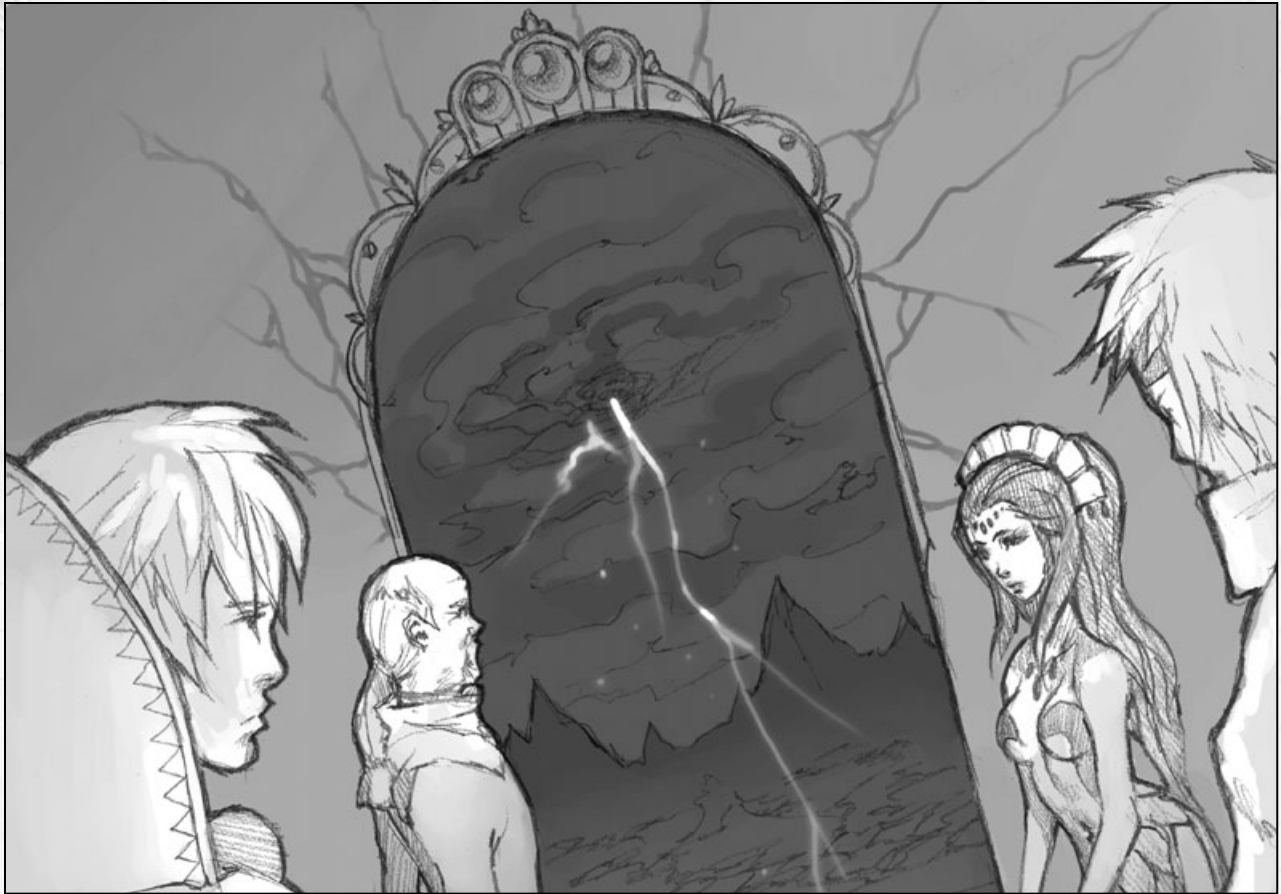
is widely believed, though conspiracy theorists and gossipmongers point out that the fact that his Exaltation has yet to appear in a new incarnation is an ominous sign. The truth of the matter, known only to k'Tula herself, is that Nakik volunteered to test one of her mutagenic experiments. Unfortunately, she lost control of the Wyld energies, and the onslaught stripped away her husband's caste and sanity as he experienced untold subjective centuries trapped inside a temporal vortex of Pure Chaos. He now remains a prisoner in the deepest levels of her manse, a massive inchoate kraken constantly struggling to escape his bondage. It was a combination of grief and guilt that drove k'Tula to her transhumanism, since both flow from her human nature as qualities she would gladly rise above. She has rationalized a greater good for her children to play and forged herself in the "perfection" of her husband's totem, but her denial is an exquisite madness cultivated in response to the unbearable remorse she feels in the throes of her Limit Breaks. Although she tells the world that her husband is dead and treats him as a monster, she continues to bear his young and holds a secret hope that she might be able to fix him one day. She doesn't know what might happen if his unstable Exaltation reincarnates without being mended, but she fears official investigation and reprisal if Nakik's successor suffers his unformed madness.

Queen k'Tula's children know nothing of her secrets, of course. They sincerely believe they are the future hosts of the Solar Exalted. To this end, their savants and thaumaturges tirelessly pore over reports from Xur, hoping they might help their mother unlock the Exaltation formula and secure their eternal greatness. They do not hate humanity, but they see their predecessors as a species that curiously fails to recognize its impending obsolescence, lacking even the savage dignity of the fading Dragon Kings.

## THE ARCH OF UNDREAMT ETERNITIES

On a barren island that has no location sits a tower with no windows, doors or fate. Within the tower's one room stands an arched gate of starmetal encrusted with emeralds. If its empty hinges once held twin doors, no trace remains of them, but it is just as likely that those doors will be forged in an Age that might come to pass, given the structure's unique relationship outside time and fate. Only those outside fate can find the island, and then only if they travel due west of the Element Pole of Water until five days after they doubt their way and sincerely believe they must turn back. The Sidereal who first found it was walking outside fate at the time, stalking a demon of ill portents who could sense the subtle vibrations of destiny. The demon ran across the waves out into chaos, but Lady Zephyra pursued tirelessly behind, tracking the monster up the shore of the strange isle and through the riddle of its nonexistent tower to stand before the arch itself. Seeing this monolith, the demon remembered the dances of the gilmyne and mistakenly called the portal Saigoth. In expecting Saigoth, however, the limits of that





mythology defined the limits of the demon's understanding, so the creature died failing to comprehend the true nature of its discovery. Lady Zephyra proved wiser and refused to name the nameless, accepting it for what it was and opening her eyes to its transcendent reality. Through its opening, she witnessed the dreams and nightmares of many futures. She returned to Yu-Shan forever sadder and wiser for her vision.

Since its discovery centuries ago, the structure still bears no name, though some Sidereals toss about the moniker Arch of Undreamt Eternities as a title, hoping they will not inadvertently limit their understanding to fit their expectations. Lady Zephyra thinks the title has already diminished the artifact and staunchly refuses to call it by any identifying phrase, but her colleagues think she goes too far in her caution. To say that the Sidereals understand the arch would be a gross overstatement. They barely understand its controls, let alone how or why it works. As best they can deduce, the arch leads travelers into possible futures until growing discontinuities of Paradox return the travelers back to the moment they never truly left. The Sidereals keep the manse's "existence" a tightly guarded secret, even from the Solar Exalted. The Five-Score Fellowship does not need a glimpse of the future to know how dangerous the artifact could be in Solar hands. Merely attending one Calibration's Saigoth Gate contest in Clepsys is sufficient.

**Game Effects:** Sidereal manse 5 (likely metaphysically limited from N/A by its title). *Drawbacks:* Sacrificed Hearthstone 5, Fragility 1, Habitability 2, Maintenance 1 (to retain its full power, the arch must not be named). *Powers:* Divine Observatory (3; although lacking the traditional accoutrements of an observatory, the tower similarly resonates with fate and provides comparable benefits), Temple Manse (3; the Sidereals do not know who or what power made the manse, but all attempts to attune to it merely fray their patterns to no effect), Outside Fate (4), Wyld Revocation (4; the island cannot be found by any means except the outlined ritual; all other methods of divining its location or reaching it automatically fail), Otherworld Gate (5). Traveling through the gate requires a difficulty 1 (Intelligence + Craft [Fate]) roll that automatically fails if the traveler has no dots of that Craft. The traveler may select one condition for the journey per success, which may include an exact passage of time or something more exotic like, "What if the Solar Exalted all perished?" If the roll succeeds, the traveler appears in the future at the convergence of time and space that best meets the criteria for the journey (or a random event constructed by the Storyteller in the case of vague or indeterminable conditions). The traveler experiences the world exactly as if he had teleported to that point, but the timeline exists for only five days from the point of entry. After that, the traveler finds himself having walked through the arch without

any apparent effect, but with disorienting memories of the experience that drain all Willpower points. The intelligence or metaphysical process governing the journey prevents it from meaningfully counting toward training time for any trait. Furthermore, the prognostication cannot guess the actions of entities outside fate except to the degree those actions are assumed using activation successes, so any possible futures experienced within a vision deviate substantially from timelines in which such entities do anything important. Multiple travelers can experience the same vision, provided they all enter at the same point using the lowest number of activation successes and apply those successes to the same conditions. Storytellers should remember that the arch only explores possibilities. Anyone who treats a prescient vision as an unalterable truth does so at his own peril.

## DEFIANT ISLANDS

In the period of heavy colonization during the early Realm, the Exalted met with little resistance. They were, after all, the heroes and liberators of humanity from the tyranny of the Primordials and the ultimate weapons of the gods armed with the Mandate of Heaven to rule the world. Setting aside issues of heresy, no mortal nation could stand against a modest strike force of the Chosen, let alone the Deliberative Navy. Yet some dared anyway. Methods and reasons varied. Some islands put forward token protest, offering unconditional surrender if a Deliberative champion could defeat their own hero, preserving a shred of cultural dignity despite the certainty of defeat. The Chosen wisely accepted these duels, though on a few occasions the bravery and heroism of the native champion led to his or her own Exaltation and a much more difficult fight than anyone expected. In some cases, they arrived to find a local Celestial Exalt already ruling the people, which led to more delicate and gentle negotiations. Other nations took a fiercer stand, either resigning themselves to annihilation rather than the ignominy of assimilation or vainly imagining they could triumph. The Chosen showed little mercy to these peoples, but prudently left enough survivors to spread the stories of the battles as unwitting heralds. In this way, legends of the Exalted preceded them and reduced further defiance, accelerating the pace of conquest.

## HEARTWIND ISLE

During the Primordial War, most of humanity united under the banner of the Exalted to overthrow their masters. They had so little that any destiny seemed preferable to continued suffering under the capricious cataclysms of their makers. Yet, there were humans who sided with the Primordials—some out of fear, some out of pious respect for the established hierarchy and some because they enjoyed a better standard of living than their brethren as favored pets of a particular Primordial. Those whom the Exalted could not convert to their cause, they massacred as enemies of the gods and traitors to humanity, continuing the slaughter when

they encountered lingering Primordial supporters following the War. Heartwind Isle offered something of a special case among nations blessed by the world's creators, however, since the inhabitants enjoyed the patronage of Gaia.

Historians do not accurately record how the island came by this favor, though mosaics on the island seem to depict a tribe warning Gaia of a raksha plot to murder her with a weapon shaped from the shadows of her own nightmares. The depictions get more abstract after that point, but suggest that the Elemental Dragon of Water rose from the waves and devoured the assassins, dragging the weapon into the deepest crevasses of the ocean. In reward, Gaia birthed Heartwind Isle, a paradise of malleable life that would care for the tribe's descendents for all time.

Regardless of the truth in this legend, when the Exalted ships beached on Heartwind Isle, they found a tribe unswervingly loyal to Gaia with biotechnology more advanced than anything early genesis labs elsewhere could produce. Assertions of common cause and alliance with Gaia could not persuade the nation to join the Deliberative, which even dismissed the Dragon-Blooded as impure recipients of Gaia's grace. Entreaties grudgingly turned to veiled threats, as the Exalted coveted the Heartwind biotech and would not be denied. Negotiations dragged on for years, as the Chosen couldn't be sure how much favor the islanders actually held with Gaia or what the Primordial might do in retaliation if they tried to take the land by force. In the end, avarice won over caution and the objections of Terrestrial subordinates, especially after other nations began looking to Heartwind as an underdog inspiration to their own resistance. Citing the Mandate of Heaven, the Deliberative declared war on Heartwind by launching the first thousand-forged dragon. Unfortunately, the weapon proved too effective and exterminated most of the island's ecosystem along with its inhabitants. Realm forces scavenged what they could and sterilized the island to prevent samples from making their way into the arsenals of rogue states, and the island remains a blasted wasteland to this day. The island's only known legacy is the cry of "Remember Heartwind!" on the lips of Western dissidents, a battle cry Lintha terrorists have gleefully spread as part of their anti-Exalted propaganda.

## THE INDIGO CHAIN

Before the Exalted pushed back the borders of the world, the Indigo Chain stood at the edge of the Wyld more than 1,000 miles west of Okeanos, wracked by seasonal chaos typhoons that seeded the islands with all manner of barely plausible and extremely dangerous organisms. The archipelago had no sapient inhabitants until a ragged flotilla of rafts arrived on the beaches. Less than a hundred people arrived, out of more than five times that number who had set out on the voyage. They had all been condemned criminals awaiting sacrifice in a Dragon King prison island west of Okeanos but had murdered their jailers and stayed just ahead of pursuit until the Mosok turned back rather

**REMEMBER HEARTWIND!**

When negotiations with the Deliberative began to break down, the Genesis Lords of Heartwind began work on a contingency plan. They knew they could not hope to repel an Exalted invasion, but they could at least make sure that some part of their culture survived. To this end, they engineered two organisms without the knowledge of their chieftains, hoping strictest secrecy would buy them time to finish before war broke out. The first, a synthetic behemoth whale, carried a comprehensive biotemplate record of Heartwind technology within its own Shaping-resistant immortal physiology. They set this whale loose into the Wyld, hoping one day to retrieve it and rebuild if the worst came to pass. It has not been seen since.

The second organism was far more insidious, a human-only plague imprinted with the neurological personality matrices of the Genesis Lords themselves. This disease has Virulence 6, Untreated Morbidity 6, Treated Morbidity 6, Difficulty to Treat 5 and is spread by physical contact with infected hosts or their preserved tissue. Victims infected by the disease show no outward symptoms, and the dormant disease cannot be detected even through magical diagnosis without a successful difficulty 10 (Perception + Medicine) roll. Only several dozen strains may be active at a time, one per Genesis Lord, at which point the disease still shows no symptoms but can be detected normally. Active strains do not harm their host body. Instead each month of active infection confers one dot in each of the following traits as a Training effect until all have a rating of 6 dots: all Mental Attributes, Craft (Genesis), Lore, Medicine and Occult. When all traits reach their maximum level, the victim's Motivation changes to "Avenge and restore Heartwind" as the personality of a specific Genesis Lord overrides his own mind. The new incarnation magically remembers everything from its original life, all successive lives as an imprinted copy and the host's life. Hosts cured of the possession lose all conferred traits, regaining any experience points paid to acquire them. Upon the death of the host or being cured, the Genesis Lord activates a random dormant strain infecting a non-Exalted host to continue the line. Since they do not control where they will emerge or what form they will take, Genesis Lords have developed a set of codes by which they can identify each other and coordinate their subtle, long-term insurgency.

than follow them near the Wyld. The refugees and their descendents labored to tame the island and eventually did. The Indigo Chain barely noticed the Primordial War; no one Exalted among them, nor did any of the battles come near the small chain. Therefore, when the Deliberative colonialists arrived, the natives greeted them warily. They had heard tales of the oil-tongued Glowing Men from the Fair Folk and the neighbors they bartered with, and they were not interested in becoming another vassal state. Fortunately for them, the Lunar in charge of the negotiations found their pride commendable and chose to scatter the populace through forced relocation to other parts of the Realm and Threshold rather than exterminate them, which was considered an extremely unorthodox strategy at the time. The success of the Indigo Chain assimilation prompted a change in Deliberative policy. Thereafter extermination was reserved for the most aggressively recalcitrant nations. The only real casualty of the forced diaspora was the distinctive indigo dye for which the islands received their name. The natives never revealed the formula to their conquerors, nor could alchemists duplicate it.

Today, the Indigo Chain is a productive prefecture of the Realm inhabited entirely by colonists. Its economy centers on building one of the critical engine components used in *Wyldbrea*-class vessels, with more than half the populace employed at the factory-cathedral on the largest island. Other colonists fish the sea for food and provide auxiliary services to the factory workers, including restaurants, warehouses and other essentials. The Dragon-Blooded forewoman at the factory files reports with her Solar Prince on the Blessed Isle by means of I AM, but receives loose autonomy as long as she meets production quotas.

**THE INDEPENDENT PROTECTORATE OF VAJKAIMAL**

When an island offers symbolic resistance to the Exalted by a challenge of single combat, the general assumption is that the Realm hero will triumph. The Chosen know this. The islanders know this. If the fight eases local pride and smoothes the transition without committing military resources, the Realm can afford to be magnanimous. Sometimes, however, plans backfire. Vajkaimal is a single atoll 900 miles north of the Coral Archipelago whose mostly dormant volcano warms the lagoon enough to make the island surprisingly temperate despite the freezing fog around it. The mineral-rich lagoon grows organic crystals suitable for data imprinting, making the land surprisingly valuable despite its size and remote location, which is one of many reasons the Deliberative sent a delegate to absorb its populace. In the middle of the resulting duel, the local hero Terrakun received Exaltation as a Lunar and promptly bit the head off his astonished Solar opponent. By the terms of the duel, the Deliberative had to leave the island alone and honor its sovereignty. While military force could have certainly prevailed over the turtle-totem No Moon, reneging

would have set a very dangerous precedent for further duel negotiations and required far more resources later, so the Deliberative ordered the team to withdraw. In the centuries since, Terrakun has opened friendly trade relations with the Deliberative, exporting crystals in exchange for all manner of civilized amenities. Most people don't even realize the island isn't a Realm prefecture, since it is virtually indistinguishable from one at this point. The natives celebrate their chieftain's victory every year with a feast day, but otherwise do not draw attention to the fact at his insistence. (He is wise enough not to antagonize his neighbors.) While the Silver Pact is too circumspect to show overt favor to Terrakun, the circumstances of his Exaltation remain a private folk-hero tale among the Stewards. Besides earning Terrakun a small cult of his peers, this status has helped him access tutors and mentors so that he could keep pace with the expectations of his age and experience.

## THE LINTHA

When the Primordials created the Dragon Kings to oversee the Threshold and tame its savagery beneath the hierarchy of the gods, three of the breeds spread to the edges of Creation and claimed unmatched hegemony over the other Primordial-spawned races. Until the rise of Okeanos, however, the crocodilian Mosok in the West found themselves blocked at every turn by the awesome naval might of Kimberly's God-Blooded children. Jealously loyal to their Great Mother with almost monotheistic fanaticism, the Lintha rejected the notion that they should broaden their pantheon to a larger Celestial hierarchy. Instead, they turned their behemoth cousins and automaton soldiers against the invading Mosok in a bloody centuries-long feud that culminated in uneasy stalemate when both sides tired of the conflict.

Insular as they were, the Lintha barely noticed humanity at first, except to visit terrible wrath on migratory raft fleets that unknowingly trespassed into their ancestral waters. Later generations of Lintha discovered a taste for human flesh, though the meat always remained a delicacy since the only way to obtain captives was by raiding Mosok-controlled territories or bribing corrupt Dragon King officials to look the other way. Then the Exalted came.

The Western Theater of the Primordial War was probably the most spectacular, if only for the sheer size of the behemoths and other monstrosities fielded by the architects of Creation against the navies of the Chosen. By comparison, battles between Exalted and Lintha ships seemed almost mundane, if such a term could be applied to clashes between navies that covered more of the sea than many actual island formations of the time. Exalted admirals grimly expected the Lintha campaign to stretch on for several hundred more years after most hostilities ceased, but Kimberly's surrender had the side effect of imploding every level of the Lintha technological infrastructure, which had relied on reformatting their mother's component souls. The bloody conquest

turned to a bloodier rout, and within a year, the broken vestiges of the Lintha no longer presented a credible military threat to the Realm.

In the time since their near genocide, the Lintha have replenished some of their numbers, though virtually none of their glory. In an ironic twist of fortune, the remnants have turned to their former food for breeding stock, sullyng Kimberly's legacy with the blood of their own conquerors. Although they cannot hope to attack the Exalted directly or challenge naval convoys, any vessel foolish enough to travel alone through Southern seas risks being attacked by marauders. Subtler Lintha act terrorists throughout the West, helping to organize and outfit rebellions and civil unrest throughout the region for the sheer malicious joy of draining Deliberative resources and encouraging the Exalted to crack down harder on their vassals. Although many of these terrorists have so little Primordial blood that they might as well be fully mortal, more powerful members of the Lintha have developed clever ways to hide their nature, such as veils of fathomless wickedness. Both the Exalted and Lintha consider the counterinsurgency campaign known as the Lintha Suppression of 3405 as a major victory, with the Exalted having successfully wiped out hundreds of Lintha-backed infernal terrorist cells at the cost of many thousands of civilian casualties. Modern-day Exalts aren't sure whether the suppression was as successful as it seems or whether the Lintha are simply lying low until they can plan their next move. History, however, suggests the latter is far more likely.

## T'FOOR NA

The behemoth atoll of Lintha Ng Oroo once surpassed Okeanos in size and grandeur, unsurprising given that Kimberly spawned it to challenge the Blessed Isle and as a sanctuary where she could dwell apart from the ocean as a lagoon. Encircled by the embrace of her daughter and dotted with the islands of the continent's sacred capital, T'foor Na, the black sea of the Primordial spawned every possible wonder the Lintha could ever want to enrich their glory. Had the atoll grown unchallenged, it might eventually have fulfilled its mother's hopes, tilting the symmetry of Creation toward a new omphalos. The Primordial War ended these aspirations and destroyed the continent, however, leaving only a fragmentary seed of the immortal behemoth to drift away and regenerate in sargasso seas to the east. The creature's corpse broke apart into fragments littering the ocean floor, her poisoned coral flesh mutating all the beasts that ate of it into monsters loyal to the Lintha cause. These lesser behemoths have intermittently plagued the Exalted throughout the Age of Splendor, though far less frequently since the Suppression of 3405. Lintha terrorists occasionally grind fragments of their former homeland to powder and introduce them into a settlement's water supply as a biological weapon, especially since the standard Deliberative Army response to such an outbreak is to exterminate the victims and sterilize the area.



### VEIL OF FATHOMLESS WICKEDNESS (ARTIFACT ••)

Created by the Lintha to help them move unnoticed through Exalted-controlled lands, these infernal artifacts take many forms from literal veils and masks to more innocuous jewelry items such as rings and pendants. Any

creature of darkness donning such an item may spend one Willpower point (or three uncommitted motes) to power it for a day, thereby cloaking her unholy nature. For the duration of the enchantment, the character has Essence 1, no Essence pool and no access to Essence-fueled powers. Her body also changes any extremely minor cosmetic features such as skin tone to fit within human norms and appears completely mortal to all known forms of Essence detection. Since the



tainted Essence that defines the bearer as a creature of darkness is actually suppressed, that label does not apply for the duration, and the veil can't be contested by effects that pierce illusions (although perfect truth effects such as Eye of the Unconquered Sun are not deceived). If the bearer travels more than a yard from the veil or voluntarily terminates its power, the enchantment collapses and the artifact cannot be reactivated for the rest of the day.

Of the original continental mass of Lintha Ng Oroo, only half-sunken T'foor Na remains, so choked with Kimbery's curses and sorcerous hate that even the victorious Exalted thought it wiser to leave the empty city alone than waste resources dismantling its rotting foundations. Nowadays, the former capital is a wasteland of blasphemies that fouls the waters around its organic spires, a haven for Lintha and other infernalists who wish to pay homage to the captive Primordials. Admiral Leviathan keeps a strike force under his command in the vicinity of the islands, using the city as a lure to attract and annihilate the infernal pilgrims en masse. Nonetheless, they continue to come from every corner of Creation no matter how many bodies the Exalted leave impaled on the beaches or shattered hulls they send to the merciless depths. The admiral has to rotate crews for the strike force each season to maintain morale. The ruins of T'foor Na are located to the far west of An-Teng near the borders of the Wyld, as the continent of Lintha Ng Oroo originally dwelled beyond the border of Creation in a pocket of stable reality sustained by her Great Mother.

#### BLUEHAVEN

Although she is but a mere scrap of her former continental glory, Lintha Ng Oroo remains one of the largest behemoths still living in Creation and one of the most persistent adversaries of the Exalted. Her current form is that of a lush tropical island roughly 30 miles across, with innumerable flexible sargassum tendrils more than 100 miles long spread around

her like the tentacles of a jellyfish. This body, however, is merely a shell suffused with her immortal spiritual Essence, much like her distant cousin Mother Bog in the East. The Lintha who dwell upon her call this daughter of Kimbery—together with the many derelicts snared in her tendrils as a labyrinth of planks and decks—Bluehaven. (The name is a reference to the cerulean hue of her seaweed and an homage to the literal translation of T'foor Na, the Blue City that was once the continent's heart.)

Lintha Ng Oroo retains her original purpose of endless growth, but has enough sense to take a long-term approach to this goal in light of her diminished state. Moreover, she also recognizes that she reflects her mother's imprisonment. What was once divine has become infernal, twisted away from its original alien aesthetic toward a more hateful and monstrous existence. The beings she now spawns upon her shores are fundamentally unclean, as fallen from the wonders of old as the degenerate mixed-blood Lintha compared with their ancestral grace. Try as she might to work around this curse and be what she was made to be, Lintha Ng Oroo cannot escape the envenomed pain and rage of her mother. Her efforts to keep this savage evil in abeyance consume much of her attention, so that she speaks to the Lintha from her cavern mouth only when she has something important to say or when they invoke her with desperate prayers.

As an island city, Bluehaven is fairly primitive by modern standards or those of the ancient Lintha, with buildings hewn

## HORRORS OF THE SHATTERED REEF

Any mortal animal that eats a piece of Lintha Ng Oroo absorbs some of the behemoth's Essence, shaping its body over the course of hours into a nightmarish expression of Kimberly's hate. This transformation is not dissimilar to the changes wrought by extreme exposure to the Wyld and should be modeled by stacking mutations onto a base animal template. Newly infected creatures immediately gain the required negative mutations of their state and gain one mutation point per hour until they have all required positive mutations listed here. These mutants are sterile and tied to Kimberly's Essence rather than the Wyld. They must return to the tainted waters near T'foor Na or Lintha Ng Oroo or lair in any of the thousands of hidden grottos in the ocean floor where the Sea That Marched Against the Flame once swam before the War. Eating fragments of Lintha Ng Oroo cannot change Essence users, but they react to the coral as they would to Yozi venom (see **Exalted**, p. 131).

**Initial Mutations:** Kin Sense (1; recognizes beings descended from Kimberly), Infernal Assimilation (2; as Wyld Assimilation; likewise protects against Wyld exposure, but instills dual Motivation of "Obey the Lintha" and "Avenge Kimberly" as overriding goals), Creature of Darkness (-4), Ongoing Mutation (-4; use the required list to guide worsening changes, followed by the suggested list when these have all been acquired)

**Required Mutations:** Night Vision (1), Water Adaptation (1), Fanged Beak (1; as Fangs), Gills (2; No Atrophy), Tentacles (4; eight tentacles), Diet (-1; human flesh or body fluids), Hungry (-1), Ugly (-1)

**Suggested Mutations:** Air Adaptation (1), Chameleon (2), Fanged Beak (2; as Tusks), Frog Tongue (2), Impossible Joints (2), Inexhaustible (2), Toxin (2), Armored Hide (4), Barbed Suckers (4; as Quills), Enlightened Essence (4; often gains a number of demon Charms, including Measure the Wind and Principle of Motion), Gripping Suckers (4; as Wall Walking), Dragon's Breath (6; caustic ichor), Gargantuan (6), Immortal Flesh (6; this mutation develops in these monsters only after about a decade of steady transformation)

### New Mutations:

*Kin Sense (Pox):* The mutant can supernaturally recognize any being in range of her normal senses to whom she is related and can gauge the overall strength of that blood tie.

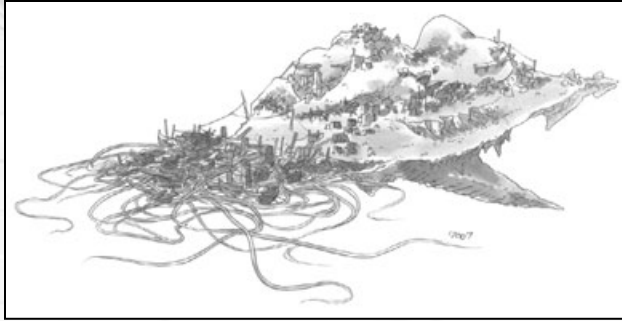
*Ongoing Mutation (Deformity):* The mutant is infected with a form of mutagenic cancer and continues to change even in the absence of Wyld exposure (or other origin). The character's player chooses a new mutation, which takes a number of weeks equal to its mutation point cost to appear. Then the process repeats. Although the player chooses new mutations (with Storyteller approval), the character is not at all in charge of the process and has no idea what to expect.

*Gargantuan (Abomination):* The mutant is four times the average size for its species, gaining +4 Strength and Stamina as well as the following extra health levels: -0x2, -1x4, -2x4. This mutation may be taken multiple times to stack bonuses and proportionally increase the size factor to these bonuses, although such creatures almost always suffer equally prodigious negative mutations appropriate to their bulk.

*Immortal Flesh (Abomination):* Whenever the mutant dies, unless he is killed by magic that can permanently slay spirits or his entire body is destroyed (such as by immersion in an acid bath), he eventually regenerates from the largest remaining fragment of his tissue. This process takes (6 - Stamina) years, to a minimum of one month, and may be delayed by re-killing the regenerating body. If the character died of old age, the body regenerates back to its prime. Otherwise, it remains the age it was when it died. Apart from Lunar chimera, **Exalted** cannot have this mutation; the Chosen may attain immortality only by their own power.

of timber rather than grown whole with sorcery or shaped out of embodied Primordial souls. Despite this outward primitivism, the Lintha enjoy a standard of living rivaling many **Exalted**, with effectively unlimited food and natural resources supplied by Lintha Ng Oroo and myriad species of First Circle demons descended from Kimberly serving as pets and slaves out of loyalty and kinship rather than sorcerous binding. Although only those of actual Lintha blood may set foot upon the island, purely human allies who swear fealty to them (including many talented infernalists recruited through

out the Threshold) live in sizeable numbers on the artificial reefs of vessels tangled in the sargassum. The outermost of these districts are little more than slums and slave pens rife with pestilence and the occasional hungry demon, but the inner ring settlements are virtually indistinguishable from the island in luxury except for the artificial composition of the terrain. Mortals from the inner rings wear distinctive facial piercing to denote they are not permitted on the island proper, while those of lesser station lack them (on the grounds that they won't even be in a position to trespass).



**Motivation:** Grow bigger than the Blessed Isle

**Attributes:** Strength 50, Dexterity 5, Stamina 50; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 5; Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 6

**Virtues:** Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Awareness 6, Bureaucracy 5 (Primordial Law +3), Integrity 6, Investigation 3, Lore 6 (Lintha +3), Martial Arts 5, Occult 6 (Kimbery +3), Performance 5 (Descendants of Kimbery +3), Presence 3, Sail 6 (Herself +3), Socialize (Ancient Lintha +3), Survival 5 (Tracking +3), War 6 (Primordial Forces +1, Piracy +2)

**Backgrounds:** Allies (Lintha) 5, Cult (Lintha and Infernalists) 5, Influence 4, Mentor (Kimbery) 5, Resources N/A (can create virtually limitless bounty upon herself)

**Essence Powers:**

*Cartographer-Rebuking Geography*—Lintha Ng Oroo exists outside fate, her purpose imbued with the incomprehensible infinitude of her mother. Moreover, any attempt to locate or track her current location by any means adds +10 to the difficulty, contesting magical efforts with a dice pool equal to her (Willpower + Essence) and +10 successes. Individuals descended from Kimbery may ignore this effect as long as they have an Intimacy of loyalty toward their Great Mother. Forcing a Lintha navigator to betray the current location of the island disrupts the Intimacy and invokes this power.

*Great Mother's Brood*—The behemoth may summon a First Circle demon descended from Kimbery (such as *eristrufa*) by spending 20 motes as a diceless miscellaneous action. These demons obey her loyally without any need for binding. She can only use this power at night and may no longer summon Second Circle components of her mother as in prehistory, since doing so would be a violation of Kimbery's oath.

*Horrors of Infinite Paradise*—Lintha Ng Oroo can alter her physical body as if using Wyld-Shaping Technique as if she were a region of Pure Chaos (see **Exalted**, p. 216), but she may create only land, wealth or animals (such as people, but non-sentient beings only). Things she creates are fully real but twisted by Kimbery's imprisonment and thus creatures of darkness or infernal objects. She may also mutate beings on her surface as a blessing or curse as per the rules for Wyld Cauldron Technology, though they must stay on her for the entire period of shaping.

*Infernal Wellspring*—The behemoth retains a conduit to her mother's Essence, allowing her and anyone descended from Kimbery who stands upon her to regain 20 motes per hour.

*Oroo Speaks*—The rumbling words that issue from Lintha Ng Oroo's cavern mouth speak directly to the blood of Kimbery. Those descended from the Great Mother understand the behemoth regardless of what languages they know. Others hear only cacophonous gibberish whose disturbing inflections demand that interlopers leave the island unless they spend one Willpower point per scene to stave off the unnatural mental influence.

*Slipstream Whirlpool Escape*—Where Kimbery swam, currents of dark Essence still flow in patterns hidden from the sight of the world. By descending into one of these currents and spending 100 motes, Lintha Ng Oroo can vanish in a great whirlpool and rise out of the waves anywhere else in the Western Ocean, taking her inhabitants with her. Although this power was once effortless, its ease has diluted with the blood of the Lintha. Currently, the behemoth remains in a state of helpless quiescence for a month following each teleportation. It is by means of this power that the Lintha have evaded destruction by Exalted forces time and again.

*Terrestrial Circle Sorcery*—Lintha Ng Oroo is an accomplished sorcerer with a vast repertoire of spells, many of which incorporate the magical rituals of the ancient Lintha with effects unknown to the Exalted.

**Join Battle:** 12

**Attacks:**

*Sargasso Tentacles:* Speed 7, Accuracy 30 (By simultaneously grappling with thousands of tendrils, the behemoth may simultaneously apply this clinch attack to any number of targets on the island or in waters within 30 miles of her. Clinched vessels use their piloting roll to win control of the grapple and break the hold.), Damage 60B piercing, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 50L (immune to bashing damage and attacks that do not use an artifact weapon, Charm or some other magic)

**Health Levels:** -0x100/-1x200/-2x300/-4x400/I/Quiescent (Like many of its cousins, this behemoth cannot truly die unless a unique conjunction of unlikely circumstances occurs as selected by the Storyteller. It recovers from any lesser demise after a century of torpor and heals as an Exalt.)

**Dodge DV:** None **Willpower:** 7

**Essence:** 8 **Essence Pool:** 800

**Other Notes:** As much a geographic feature as entity, Lintha Ng Oroo is immune to disease, poison and any other negative effects associated with conventional biology. She can be wounded, but her death is a doom not of this world, so she scorns death by this world's hands. She was once entirely immune to the Wyld, but that immunity fades with the waning purity of the Lintha race. She dares not travel beyond the Bordermarches anymore for fear of what she might become. Although traveling the hidden currents of Kimbery is her fastest mode of travel, Lintha Ng Oroo can also swim at a speed of 24/50mph.



HYAA! GIT ON  
OUTTA THERE!



DAMN  
DEMITAURS! GIT  
YOUR OWN!

YIP YIP!  
HYAA!



ALL RIGHT, GIT  
ALONG NOW. THEY  
AIN'T COMIN' BACK.








## CHAPTER SIX

# THE NORTH



Most people in Creation regard the people of the North as the least civilized. The Realm absorbed it second-to-last, and it remains today the least thoroughly civilized direction. Histories of the North record timelines of wars unbroken by cease fires, parleys or truces. Blood and sweat brought civilized behavior to the North, not treaty or marriage ties or peaceable union. Mortals elsewhere who are aware of this history speak of the North in terms of crudeness or barbarism.

Yet reflection brings an awareness of the truth. More than 1,000 years have passed since Solar warstriders battled here for supremacy. Since then, the Sun's Chosen have built cities and roads, aqueducts and manses. Today, the land is as settled as it might ever be. While they haven't penetrated everywhere, civilization's benefits have made sufficient inroads that eight out of every 10 people are literate and life expectancy for mortals averages seven decades. Even the honor-killings so common in hologlyph dramas and plays are almost extinct.

### WITHIN THE REALM

The North's glittering cities stand in direct contrast to the broad plains, rolling hills and glacier-covered mountains of the nearby countryside. Anyone who can do so acquires a travel permit or residency papers and moves from the back-country to a great city, or at least to one of the intermediate

urban way stations to be found between the bright centers. Few willingly remain in fragile and frozen hinterlands where bitter winds howl constantly.

Even so, not everyone gains—or even seeks—permission to dwell in the North's shining towers. There are better places to learn martial arts, sorcery and thaumaturgy than a great city. Also, Exalts and mortals sometimes choose to test themselves against unforgiving wilderness. Finally, Creation's enemies rarely attack the North's power centers. They appear on the fringes, where their power can grow before the strike. Therefore, even this most sparsely populated of directions remains inhabited.

Northern populations are concentrated. Towns and cities tend to be small and centered, conserving building material and heat. Surrounded by Essence-powered weather shields, some Northern communities have orange trees and hibiscus bushes blooming even in the middle of snowstorms. Rural production complexes arrange tightly planted buildings around glassed-in atria and corridors. Towns lacking Essence engines build with underground arcades or courtyards glassed-in against bad weather. Living out of doors is an uncommon experience for most Northerners.

At least some do go outside into blizzards blowing from the Elemental Pole of Air, however. The North possesses a near monopoly on wilderness tourism, with a series of reserves

designed to appeal to adventurous mortal and jaded Exalt alike. Hunting, hang gliding, skiing, snowshoeing, ice boating and even glacier climbing form the core of challenging vacations in the North. People travel here from all over Creation to enjoy the perception—if not always the reality—of risk.

## ORCHARD ISLES PROVINCE

Seven provinces obey the Deliberative and the Realm's laws. The first of these, the Orchard Isles Province, consists of quartet of islands jutting into the Western Ocean. Each isle, named for its most prominent fruit crop—Apple, Berries, Pear and Plum—is a principality assigned to a minor Solar as a proving ground and experimental test-bed. While all four fruits are grown on every island, each island is most famous for a specific product. Orchard men vie with one another to produce new hybrids, and festivals and fairs celebrate different varieties. Amethyst plums are recent cultivars, being sweet to the tongue and translucent to light.

Subject to storms rolling in from the Western Ocean, the Orchard Isles are rainy and little visited by Exalts, though they welcome the income at tax time. The isolation does attract a few who wish to work on private projects far from public scrutiny, though. Laboratories dedicated to biological experimentation and breeding farms manipulating mortal forms are not uncommon.

Many of the manses of the Orchard Isles are enclosed gardens or greenhouses for exotic vegetables, or orchards of unusual fruit. Some are hothouses for forcing the growth of special orchids, while others are incubators for outlandish pets.

### PRINCIPALITIES OF THE ISLES

**Apple Isle** is the ignored middle child of the Orchards. Ordered to produce cider, it churns out hundreds of tons of low-quality swill. Commanded to produce apples, it ships thousands of barrels of mealy, tasteless apples to all of Creation. A few orchards produce high-quality product, but they are the exception, rather than the rule. Manufactories once famed for lenses and navigational instruments now produce medium-quality mass-produced weapons, available at Resources ••.

The **Isle of Berries** is barely large enough to count as a principality. The Celestial Housing Authority records it as having only two known manses, in fact. The flat isle is given over to scabbled fields of low-lying plants, and few of its trees grow taller than 20 feet high. The Deliberative maintains a school on the Isle for mortals. Respected graduates of the School of Twining Ivy usually become bureaucrats in Northern territories.

**Pear Isle**, the largest and most developed of the Orchard Isles, is a matured pleasure ground for Exalts and mortals. Amid elegant orchards stand palaces for members of the Solar Deliberative, moon-viewing pavilions for Lunar Exalts and gaming grounds for the Dragon-Blooded. Many Exalts maintain “experimental farms” here, where they can engage in special breeding programs, or simply play farmer for a few weeks between expeditions or adventures.

### THE NORTHERN CALENDAR

Despite its harsh winters and difficult springs, the North still expects four major harvests each year from its RPCs. The first crops are wheat, hay and beans, harvested late in Descending Wood and continuing to Ascending Fire. In Resplendent Fire, agronomists bring in cotton and flax. Descending Fire sees harvests of millet, rice, hops, oats and tea. No harvest is made during Calibration, except for fruits brewed into wines and brandies for sacrificial offerings. Ascending Air brings grapes, apples, pears and plums.

Northern RPCs also raise animals. White River fisheries produce salmon, trout, abalone, freshwater mussels, scallops and perch. People in alpine meadows raise sheep and goats, while Northeastern plains folk raise herds of dairy mammoths for cheese and wool. Cattle and yeddim are rarities, but tame silk-spider herds quartered near Opal Spire produce 5,000 yards of high-quality arrow-resistant cloth a year.

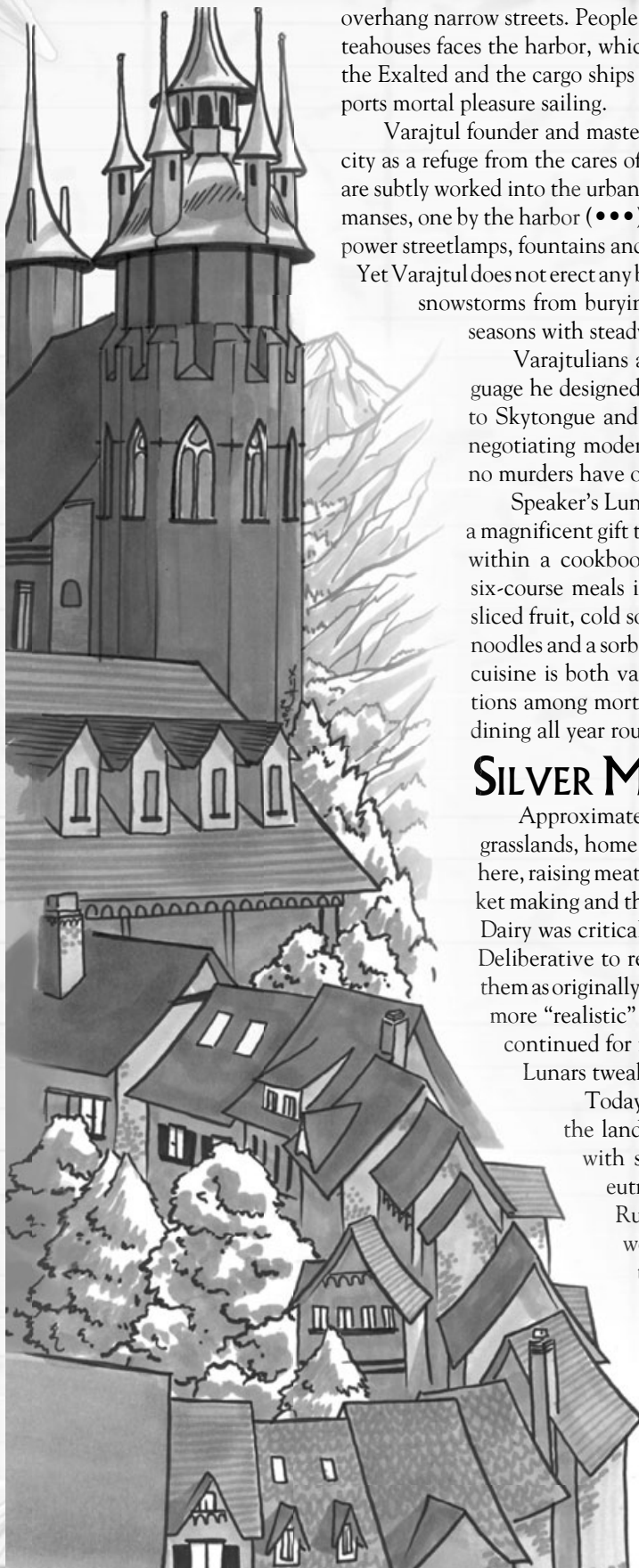
The six months of Air and Water are cold, but usually refreshingly so, with only Ascending Water being brutal. This tends to be the tourist season. Skiing, ice skating, snowshoeing and sleighing are popular activities, with many resorts built near geomantically enhanced hot springs and artificially warmed lakes. Late in Water comes hang gliding and long-distance soaring. The 1,200-mile aerial obstacle course Tzatli Race begins on the midday of Descending Water. Ascending Earth marks the resumption of planting. At the same time, herds usually leave lowland shelter and move up to high pastures early in Resplendent Earth.

**Plum Isle** is of middling size, and the best managed principality of the Isles. Low-lying and fertile, it is well tended, with prosperous, peaceful towns. In addition to its famous plums, the Isle produces furniture, game pieces, paper and pottery of luxury quality, requiring Resources ••• to buy.

### VARAJTUL

Varajtul is the capital of Pear Isle Prefecture, and the largest city in the Orchard Isles. Two days north of Gateway 37 into Yu-Shan, it sits on the flanks of a mountain overlooking a narrow fjord of dark blue, cold water. Its brightly colored stone and plaster houses have yellow or orange walls, and most have roofs of purple slate. Among the houses, dogwoods and cider-apple trees create oases of comfort in the city center.

Of all Northern cities, Varajtul is most livable. Ramps and steps connect shopping plazas. Glassed-in courtyards define the centers of public buildings. Wrought-iron balconies



overhang narrow streets. People dress in bright colors. A cornice of luxury shops and teahouses faces the harbor, which is large enough to accommodate both the yachts of the Exalted and the cargo ships that call here. A second harbor in the next fjord supports mortal pleasure sailing.

Varajtul founder and master, the Solar linguist Speaker of Beneficence, built the city as a refuge from the cares of the Exalted. As a result, all Essence-powered devices are subtly worked into the urban framework rather than ostentatiously on display. Two manses, one by the harbor (●●●) and another on the mountain (●●●●) above the city, power streetlamps, fountains and private water supplies and the net of I AM terminals.

Yet Varajtul does not erect any barriers stronger than a weather-bender, which prevents snowstorms from burying the city every winter. Therefore, the city has true seasons with steady variations in temperature and storm conditions.

Varajtulians are devoted to their lord and master, speaking a language he designed—which is poetic and subtle in nuance—in addition to Skytongue and the Realm’s speech. This language is well suited to negotiating modern life. Because miscommunication is so improbable, no murders have occurred in Varajtul in half a millennium.

Speaker’s Lunar partner, Satiation Beneath the Crescent, also gave a magnificent gift to the city in the form of a perfected cuisine, contained within a cookbook called *The Ten Thousand Delectables*. Traditional six-course meals in Varajtul consist of a warm spicy drink, artistically sliced fruit, cold soup, fresh fish (poached or pan-fried in spices), savory noodles and a sorbet. Perfectly balanced to time of year and diet, Varajtul cuisine is both varied and healthful. The city hosts monthly competitions among mortal cooks, and a variety of restaurants provide elegant dining all year round.

## SILVER MEADOWS PROVINCE

Approximately 1,500 years ago, the Silver Meadows were rolling grasslands, home to cows, sheep and elephants. Mortal nomads herded here, raising meat for the Realm. Occasional towns concentrated on basket making and the construction of gerts, the round tent of the nomads. Dairy was critical to the local diet. Certain Lunars prevailed upon the Deliberative to reshape reality here, however, as it was too boring for them as originally conceived. The Moon’s Chosen craved more elaborate, more “realistic” and more challenging environments. This reshaping continued for more than two centuries, as successive generations of Lunars tweaked the region to suit personal tastes.

Today, the Silver Meadows are rarely meadows. Instead, the land is a crazy-quilt patchwork of terrain and landforms, with sandy dunes lying alongside steep forested hills and eutrophic ponds alongside swift rivers in deep ravines.

Running through this bizarre ground extends a spiderweb of roads, towns, villages and fields—remnants of the old normality.

### PRINCIPALITIES OF THE SILVER MEADOWS

Three principalities in the Silver Meadows have long been assigned to important Lunar Exalts whose duties require them to have incomes and bases of operation, but who still need territory in which to run, hunt and play. In their lands, mortal communities cluster close to rare roads. Cities are merely overlarge towns. Silver Meadow terrain

varies widely. Forests give way to meadows and broken hill country where bare rock projects above tree line. Steep-sided ravines and gorges crisscross each other strangely. Animals wild and Wyld-touched are common. Fish, timber, hay, stone, ores and medicinal products are important sources of mortal income, won only with difficulty from a savage landscape.

The largest principality in the Silver Meadows is **Salk Fields**, a broad strip of land on the southern edges of the White Valley. Rocky, forested and cold, Salk Fields is famous for building airships in its many small towns. Only one road enters the prefecture. The populace mostly travels by air ferry, so as to leave the ground open to hunting Lunars. Mortals tend to avoid backcountry areas because they were the most recently Wyld-shaped territories, and so the least tamed. A behemoth of unknown origin slumbers in some forgotten valley, as yet unearthed by the Exalted of Luna. A few small districts have been converted into parks for mortals to experience the wilderness, but these regions are carefully groomed to provide a suitably thrilling—but not particularly dangerous—experience.

The second-largest principality, **Onion Dell** is a physician's nightmare-garden still clinging to its ancient idyllic name. Everyone avoids physical contact with the native flowers, shrubs and trees. Even *backcountry harvesters gathering medicinal but dangerous plants require special armor to prevent plant poisoning and venomous insect bites*. Most of the local flora began as Dragon King constructs, and many plants with healing properties also defend themselves from harvesting. Thistles packing psychotropic drugs and root systems strong enough to eat people are normal plant defenses here.

**Blue Heron Principality**, the smallest and most southerly in the Silver Meadows, appears from the air as a series of wooded hills emerging from a watery landscape of grass. Essence-powered artificial dragonflies keep guard over the land, and biomechanical bees pollinate giant bamboo and blade grass. In Resplendent Fire, the blade grass is harvested and laid edge-out into bamboo handles. The resulting blades make effective weapons, kitchen knives, saws and surgical tools. While not as dangerous as Onion Dell, Blue Heron Principality is still dangerous.

In each principality, the reigning Lunar often controls hunting privileges at all times, with certain months of the year reserved to her exclusive use. At other times, she may open the season to mortal or Exalted hunters at her pleasure. The Meadows Adventure is an annual Lunar tradition. Many of the shapechangers participate in a month of qualifying events by playing games of hunting and survival in the twisted landscape. Event rules require the Exalts to acquire at least one new form in the course of the month, to track and fight with at least one other Lunar, and to successfully evade at least one tracking Lunar. Those who succeed in all three tests are invited to stay for a second month of competition, with mortal and Exalted alike wagering on outcomes. The Lunar considered best receives control of Blue Heron Principality for the coming year.

## OPAL CRAG MOUNTAINS PROVINCE

The Opal Crag Mountains run north to south from the Inland Sea to the edges of the White Valley. Major mining projects scour the mountain flanks, drawing out hundreds of tons of jade, opal and marble, and thousands of tons of construction material every year. Now the mountains are misnamed, as black industrial slag and obsidian haze from toxic dust obscures the most famous glittering, snow-capped vistas.

The Opal Crag Mountains obey the Deliberative reluctantly and haphazardly. In east-west gorges, the Unconquered Sun shines every day on clean water and good farmland, and the Realm rules a happy, contented populace. In vales and dells running north and south, the sun shines but a few hours even on the brightest days on narrow, less prosperous ravines, whose mines have long histories of accidents and worker mistreatment. People in those couloirs often plot rebellion beneath a veneer of grim obedience.

The people of the Opal Crag Mountains are a hard folk covered in a layer of black dust. For thousands of years, they have sifted their mountains and mined fine materials for the service of the Deliberative and the Age of Splendor. Little returns in exchange. I AM delivers news and letters to villages and towns later here than it does elsewhere in Creation. Information is often weeks old (if not months). The Order Conferring Trade Pattern relies on some areas' being less accessible and less viable to civilized living. This region proves how hard that aspect of the Pattern can be on that fringe of civilization.

### PRINCIPALITIES OF THE OPAL CRAG MOUNTAINS

Four principalities subdivide the Opal Crag Mountains. Each centers on one of the major passes running between the Windlands and the Silver Meadows, and two or three prosperous valleys running east and west. Several more north-south dales complete each principality. **Gateway Prefecture**, the most northerly, contains the City of the Mountain Gateway and many mines for iron, copper, jade and even moonsilver.

**Glittering Peak Principality** is next on the major routes to the Inland Sea. Famous for timber and for marble veined with opal, the tributary is notorious for rebellious attitudes and disgruntled miners.

**Bent Spine Prefecture** lies still farther south. Here, the mountains take on a gentler aspect, with less steep slopes and more cuts between mountains so that the light of the Unconquered Sun penetrates deeply. The principal city here, Fellara, is famous for its walls of tawny stone.

**Fire Opal Principality** is named after bright, red-hued stones mined from deep valleys. A pervasive red dust often lingers in the air here. The Deliberative maintains a prison for serious offenders in a red jade mine deep under the mountain.



## LUNAR TRIANGLES

Throughout the Opal Crag Mountains is a series of triangular stones balanced on their narrowest end. Set up by the Lunar Exalted to mark songlines and sites of vision quests, these stones can range in size from a few ounces up to several tons. Many of them seem to vibrate precariously, as if about to fall in the heavy gales. Yet, it is the mind of the observer rather than the stone itself that trembles.

Astute observers notice that many of these stones are arranged in patterns across the landscape, often tending toward arrangements of triangles within triangles within triangles. These Lunar triangles, as these stone shapes are called, are something less than First Age marvels but something more than mere childish games. They are spirit traps and elemental lures, designed to reorient dragon lines to bring energy—and Essence—toward a specific point. The goal of this work is to create a demesne suitable for capping with a Lunar-aspected manse.

A Lunar Exalt establishes a Lunar triangle by placing three stones of varying sizes in a triangle upon the landscape so that three stones are within line of sight. Doing so requires at least three (Dexterity + Craft [Earth]) checks, with at least five successes each. Additional Lunar triangles must then be crafted within the region set out by the first trio of stones, and each stone invested with a mote of Essence. Once a region within this area accumulates 100 motes of Essence and 500 successes, the stones all fall with a simultaneous crash, and the area becomes a one-dot demesne. Additional work can empower the area further.

Stones blown down or deliberately moved before the work is complete negate the whole working, which must begin anew.

## THE CITY OF THE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY

Although it is not a tourist destination or even a by-way for those traveling in the area, the City of the Mountain Gateway stands among the glories of the First Age. Carved from a mountain, from the three observatories on the highest level to a spectacular garden on the lowest, the city's high ceilings and engraved walls display a splendor unmatched outside of Meru.

The City of the Mountain Gateway, informally known as Six Gates, is the secondary command center for the Deliberative. Located beneath the tallest mountain in the Opal Crag range, Six Gates is a shortcut the military constructed between the Elemental Pole of Earth and Creation's Northern frontiers. Four great tunnels with

portals of jade and orichalcum join Six Gates with the wider world to north, south, east and west. Two more gates in the deepest, most defended parts of the city join heaven and earth, literally. One of these gates, built of slabs of black jade, enters the realm of the Mountain Folk dwelling beneath the earth. The second door, constructed of white jade, orichalcum and moonsilver, is Gate 31 into Yu-Shan. In this way, the mountain of Six Gates serves as a secondary *axis mundi*, in the rare eventuality that Creation's center, Mount Meru and the Pole of Earth, should be rocked or damaged.

Therefore, the city has tremendously tight security. Ordinary mortals fill minor jobs in the city, such as tending the gardens and greeting visitors. Fewer than 20,000 people perform these sorts of tasks. A larger population of 30,000 God-Bloods and Dragon-Bloods handles routine and extraordinary security. Some levels of the city are open only to them, with security doors that appear to be solid rock until an anima banner flares nearby. Even then, special keys or charms may be needed. Located beneath the mountain are secondary debating chambers and conference rooms for the Deliberative, its generals and its functionaries, as well as private quarters for each of the Celestial Exalted.

On the city's deepest levels, in areas sealed against casual visitors, are Essence engines designed to harden the mountain's reality against Fair Folk incursion and other threats. These engines could make Six Gates so real that it could become a second—if less powerful—Elemental Pole of Earth. The engines have never been tested, but elders in the Deliberative know that Creation could be re-established around this central pole, in the event that the Blessed Isle fell to a Wyld invasion.

As an added side benefit, the city links Creation with the Mountain Folk. Seven caverns, widely separated from the security zone around the Celestial gateway, contain the diplomatic quarter where Mountain Folk congregate. Deliberative spies believe the Mountain Folk have tunnels connecting Six Gates to the underfells of Mount Meru on the Blessed Isle, but they have no confirmation as of yet.

## FELLARA

Fellara in Bent Spine Principality rises from the shoulder of a mountain, with fantastic views east, west and south. Famous for its medical school and for luxury items of mammoth ivory and wood, the city has a population in excess of 300,000 people. Many work in the city's four factory-cathedrals, which produce small parts in jade, orichalcum and moonsilver for Essence-powered machinery. A steady stream of cogs, gears, logic wheels and other precision-shaped parts flow out from the city to every part of Creation. Fellara enjoys a high standard of living from the resulting revenues.

The city government is unusually democratic, reflecting the thorough education of the workers there. In an experi-

mental use of I AM, citizens vote for each proposed law that is properly registered with the city manager. Political demonstrations in the streets are common during holidays, and more than 40 local political parties are active. The result is raucous and chaotic during controversial votes, but all commotion is left outside factory doors. Workers here are too proud of their contributions to Creation to risk fighting at work.

## WHITE VALLEY PROVINCE

Spidersilk Dam, a 2,800-mile wall of cable and crystal, curves into the Great Western Ocean to hold back the waters. Essence engines hidden within this construct filter and desalinate water, gradually releasing it into thousands of tiny streams, which eventually merge into the White River—an artificial but navigable river running west to east through White Valley.

Spidersilk Dam provides fresh water to mortals. The manses anchoring its termini bring together flows of Earth- and Air-pected Essence to mingle with those of Water-pected Essence. This Essence, crystallized in factories within the dam, is sent downstream to be the power source for manufactories, vehicles, residences, greenhouses, orchards and public buildings downstream. Each such seed, tagged to an appropriate destination, is set drifting in the river to find its

way to the right location. Most arrive minutes before the previous crystal dissipates.

Holding back the sea created a fertile valley-land 800 miles wide and thousands of miles long between the Diamond Hills and the Opal Mountains. The river flows between the Gates of Wind into Frost Lake and thence White River Gorge Park, a wilderness preserve on both sides of the river covering thousands of square miles. There it becomes the River of Tears, which winds down to the Yanaze River where its water rejoins the Inland Sea.

Few recall the White Valley's origins. Old Solars recall the Spidersilk Dam being constructed as a weapon of the Primordial War. The White Sea was the home of the Primordial Ta'akozoka, and the dam cut off the Great Tentacled One from the Sea, without which she withered and died. Today, 40 million people dwell on farmland enriched by her decaying form.

The ground between the dam and Frost Lake is the second most fertile region in Creation, after the River Province. Where the River Province provides grain and grape, White Valley orchards produce both eating apples and cider, while White Valley hothouses force bulbs of long-lasting purple amaranth flowers. Manufactories in the White Valley produce toys, furniture, Essence devices and weapons of war to defend Creation.



## WYLD AMARANTH

The Solar known as Magnificent Garden carefully bred Wyld amaranth 2,000 years ago as part of Creation's defense systems. The unusually long-lived purple flowers strengthen reality with their presence. The seven petals represent the five directions, Yu-Shan and the hope of reincarnation, while their purple hue suggests a melding of the colors of the five directions. Their three green leaves symbolize cooperation among gods, Exalted and mortals.

Now common throughout Creation, they are particularly loved in the North for their capability to hold back the Wyld. Raksha detest them, for they have trouble performing shaping attacks in their presence. All Wyld shaping techniques performed within their line of sight suffer a -2 circumstance penalty.

## PRINCIPALITIES OF THE WHITE VALLEY

Unlike other parts of Creation, the principalities of this region intermingle with each other. Six principalities hold different parts of many cities and towns in the North, their borders and their territories remaining fluid. The cities of the White River sing, quite literally. Each principality has its own songs, and the towns—people, animals and buildings alike—all have their part in the music.

**Oxbow Prefecture** is a farm collective lying in the bottomland of the river. Affected by occasional floods and biennial rising waters, its principal crops are grasses, such as oats and hay, and fiber, such as cotton, hemp and linen. Its sun-fired brick communities constantly rebuild on the mounds formed from flood-shattered towns. Temples to the Unconquered Sun crown these artificially elevated cities, famous for spicy food and veiled women. Here, the constant song is the legato of the summer river and the allegro of the river in flood.

**Swift Waters Principality** consists of hill towns on the fringes of the White River, where streams come down into the valley from north to south. This principality is a land of factories, with power wheels flashing in streams and billowing steam-chimneys, accompanied by the tuneful sound of hammers on anvil. The songs tend toward stately marches and stirring hymns to the Unconquered Sun.

**Long Wharf Principality** vibrates with the bustle and commerce of riverfront counting houses and warehouses and the clamor of shipyards. Workmen make hulls ready for river and ocean travel. Chandleries rock with the sprightliness of sea chanteys and the minimalist tocking of brass on brass in the instrument shops. Runaways rub elbows with able-bodied sailors, and both sing laughing trills about women after a voyage home.

When entering **Covered Market Principality**, visitors sense the sudden shift in musical tones, as major keys give way to minor and bright harmonies give way to clashing cacophony. Too-bright dyes make cotton and silk flutter in air. Rare spice-scents attack nose and tongue, as cardamom and cinnamon float in the breeze. Arranged in pockets through all the others, this principality is a land of wheeling and dealing, bargains sought and outrageous scams completed. Con men and tax collectors match wits under indigo-striped awnings. Merchants' shouts echo off sandstone walls of banks and coffeehouses.

**Scholars' Court Principality** comprises the schools, colleges, universities and other institutes of higher learning that are scattered through the White Valley. In cloister and courtyard, students study bureaucracy, martial arts, religion, calligraphy or engineering, as their abilities pull them. In academy and apprenticeship, mortals and Exalts alike learn the arts of craftsmanship and graceful living. Nowhere in the North are these skills taught with such refinement as among these marbled halls.

**Turning Stone Principality**, the last of the districts of the White Valley, is a land of windmills atop bare hills, and lumbermen climbing high in trees. It is a place of quarries and mines, where industrious workers glean wealth from wilderness for country towns and riverside manufactories to shape and improve. Here, songs speak of roaring gales. Woodwinds trill merrily of forests in spring, cut off suddenly by the cymbal clash of a felled tree.

## SEPPORIL

The largest city on the White River is Sepporil. Appearing as an association of towers and domes rising on a hill at the river's edge, the city boasts a population of a million people. Essence shields shelter the city from winter storms, and perpetual spring reigns within. Daffodils, magnolias, irises, tulips and dogwoods bloom in sequence each month of each season.

Botany is Sepporil's largest industry. Flowers and herb gardens blanket its surrounding fields and terraces, while its laboratories breed new strains of such grains as rice, millet, wheat and barley. Special research stations in nearby towns work on fiber crops such as cotton, silk, flax and hemp. Thanks to scientific advances and sorcery, many Northern states have experienced a hundred-fold increase in productivity over the last millennium. The innovators of Sepporil are always pleased to take the credit.

One of the city's more interesting diversions is the Carnivorous Flower Show, held in the month of Resplendent Fire. The city's botanists try to outdo each other (and themselves) in this contest, and many Solars compete against mortals as well. Past winners include the Guardian Vine, which entangles small animals or men who approach too closely to the plant and then gradually strangles them. Many remember with horror the winning plant from a decade ago, which ate an entire mammoth in three minutes. These and other monstrosities

## VALLEY SONGS

Visitors to the White Valley are often startled, then amused or bewildered, to discover that the Songs of the Valley are not metaphor but reality. Citizens of this region break into complicated song and dance routines right in the middle of ordinary endeavors. Teahouse patrons stage elaborate shadow puppetry to explain their political position. Whole marketplaces have become music-infected, as coins change hands to suit a song's purposes.

The White Valley's constant music is a source of much tension in the Deliberative. Some object to the operatic and dramatic swelling of orchestras behind ordinary daily activities. Others deplore its quality, which tends toward sloppy harmonies and repetitive rhythms. Yet the Lunar Exalt who helped design the Spidersilk Dam and the whole region—one Silver-Voiced Nightingale—is quite content with what she's wrought, and her proud Solar mate still has plenty of support in the Deliberative.

Hordes of music spirits surround any mortal with a modicum of talent, hoping for a chance to insert a brief solo into the continuing cycle of songs. Others grow so attached to a particular composition (however bad it might be) that they inflict it upon others—native and visitor alike. Thus can specific songs become popular for weeks or months, until they become too tedious and repetitive to bear.

This ordinary-life music is a major export of the White Valley to the rest of Creation. While few places take to Valley Songs with quite the same enthusiasm, ditties about blacksmithing or sailing can suddenly become quite popular everywhere for no obvious reason. I AM tracks these sudden outbursts of music and usually gifts the composer or original singer (when he or she can be found) with a one-time gift of wealth.

now reside in the secure section of the Sepporil Botanical Gardens, where they feed on the rejects of the city menagerie (and the occasional fence-climbing tourist).

## FROST LAKE PROVINCE

The White Valley's eastern end widens into a lake thinly sheathed with ice. Bone-like jointed causeways and floating platforms flow out onto the lake's surface from coastal towns and cities, dividing it up into thousands of triangular panes of water. Two million people live in eggshell-hued houses on these floating platforms.

The Solar general Fearless in Battle's Face created Frost Lake specifically as an industrial fishery to provide marine protein and vegetable matter for Creation's hungry soldiers. Beneath the ice, a rich, organic soup bubbles and froths, giving birth to a thousand different edible, medicinal life forms. Gigantic nets and seines drift, forming farms for algae, turtles, shellfish and fish. Manufactories on the surface turn living animals into jars of packed meat for military and peasant consumption. Others fashion the scraps of bone into jewelry, armor and more floating platforms. Factory-cathedrals and manses ride on jewel-covered rafts atop water's surface, while cables hundreds of fathoms long tether them to demesnes on the lake's floor. Underwater bubbles constructed of crab and lobster chitin form living and working spaces for strip-mining the waters of their living abundance.

Frost Lake's coastal towns form a principality unto themselves, joined with the constructed platforms that rise from waters and ice floes to support fishers and miners. Fish harvested here form an important part of the diet for the whole of the White Valley, since many fish species refuse to

breed further upstream in the artificial watershed downstream from Spidersilk Dam.

## VARILISTU

At the center of the lake rise the shining white spires of Varilistu, obeying the rules of mathematical sequence. A series of platforms, each with its own tower, occupies the geographic center of the lake. The central tower rises to a height of 21 stories, and it extends 21 stories beneath the lake's surface. A ring of eight 13-story buildings surrounds it, and a ring of 16 eight-story buildings surrounds that ring. Each spire stands at the center of a plaza adorned with trees and parterres suitable for a royal palace. Beyond is an even larger ring of five-story buildings, and then structures three stories, two stories and, finally, one story high. Fishponds doubling as reflecting pools surround the city on all sides, except along the routes of eight causeways that join Varilistu to the mainland.

Even in the poorest apartments, Varilistu is gleaming white, studded with pearls and mother-of-pearl. Sculptures fill niches and adorn every pillar in the city. Thirty-four anchor cables tether Varilistu to manses on the lake bottom. Essence channeled up these cables helps refine the city from the minerals present in the water. It also gradually rebuilds any damage done to the city's walls or plazas. The city itself functions as if it were a hearthstone of delicious dream. No one in the city has troubled dreams; every night's sleep is restful and beneficial to one's health.

Varilistu exists principally as a gleaming showpiece of the North's Era of Dreams. Not as remote or as security-conscious as Tzatli, nor as religion-obsessed as Ondar Shambal, it is a city



intended for tourism and pleasure. Its towers are hotels and museums. Its plazas are adorned with gardens and sculpture. It is also a center for the production of gliders and airships, and many of the one- and two-story buildings at the edge of the city are hangars and construction facilities.

Varilistu is small in comparison with other Northern cities. Fewer than a million people live on this artificial island, yet the city's beauty and restfulness make it a popular destination. Indeed, its very attractiveness could prove its undoing. The nighttime restfulness that falls over the city attracts unusual and dangerous sentient predators that find peaceful dreamers too tempting to resist.

## DIAMOND HILLS PROVINCE

North of the White Valley lie the Diamond Hills. The province consists of eight principalities, which are named One through Seven because of their low populations. The eighth is Tzatli, the nominal home of the famous flying city.

The land is harsh. Perpetual winds ruffle scrubby grasses, making the land seem to undulate. Permafrost crunches underfoot, and trees bend double under the wind. Few people dwell here for any great length of time, and most rarely know anything of the Realm more recent than eight months past. People come to the Diamond Hills to get away from the Deliberative, even though this region still pledges loyalty. I AM nonetheless keeps tabs as best it can on those persons wanted for crimes. When they tire of their self-imposed exile, they can be found and punished.

The Diamond Hills are famous for mining and wild harvesting. Two thousand miles closer to the Elemental Pole of Air than the White Valley, a rich array of medicinal herbs useful in treating respiratory diseases grows in the permafrost here. Beneath the hard ground and below the icy water table lie crystalline metal ores and veins of minerals that are light but strong for building airships and swift weaponry. No great manufactories produce final products here. Bands of official and unofficial exiles cannot be permitted to run weapon manufactories. Instead, airboats make regular visits to the Diamond Hills to carry refined metals and crystals south and to bring prisoners and contract laborers north.

Scattered across the region is a series of slender steel needles, hundreds of feet high, reinforced with white jade alloy. These poles thrum with energy, and lightning arcs out from them to strike anyone standing within 100 feet of their bases or to airships traveling within 100 feet of them in the air. Those spires close to transportation routes carry lanterns as warning beacons. Many more are unmarked and difficult to spot. These lightning rods act as energy collectors for the city of Tzatli. It takes a tremendous amount of Essence gathered from the Elemental Pole of Air to keep the city afloat. These lightning rods collect the Essence and relay it along moonsilver cables that flex and change position in response to the city's motion. Whichever lightning rod is closest to the city actually beams Essence up to it in a single arc of continuous lightning.



Other than its principal city, few great population centers exist in the province. Towns huddle under Essence-enforced domes of transparent spidersilk canvas and laminated mammoth bone. Few of the wonders of the Age of Splendor are found here in a land of rough living and rougher civilization.

## TZATLI

The flying city of Tzatli is a marvel of the Age known and celebrated in art and literature all over Creation. I AM regularly reports to awestruck and envious mortals on the technical marvels built into the city.

Its founder and builder, the Solar artificer Bright Shattered Ice, regards it as but a plaything or a clubhouse for her and her circle. Its brilliant towers of white false-stone and blue crystal rise from a semispherical hull whose mirrored surface reflects the countryside below. A perpetual column of lightning rising from the region's nearest lighting rod below keeps the city in the air. Every half-hour, local shuttles and skyremes carry travelers between the city and destinations all throughout Creation.

What visitors discover, although it's never mentioned in I AM's news reports, is how sterile and cold the city seems. No flowers adorn the city streets. Civilians hurry about their work in plain robes of white linen and wool. Decoration is modest and minimalist. Teahouses are studied and formal, and drinking houses are subdued. The constant music of the city is ethereal, even awe-inspiring, but it lacks human warmth or depth. It is as though Bright Shattered Ice, in building a city to indulge all her passions, has pulled the passions out of everyone else.

Even so, Tzatli keeps its people. While tourists and visitors on business can visit with minimal fuss, citizens have considerably more difficulty leaving. Bright Shattered Ice's adamant legionaries (similar to the brass legionnaires on p. 103 of *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age*) guard the city's exits far more closely than they guard its entrances, and the city's highly efficient bureaucracy rarely issues passports.

There are always at least 156,281 citizens in Tzatli engaged in flight-critical tasks that keep the city functional. An additional 156,281 engage in economic production, while a third group of the same size is engaged in leisure activities. A fourth group sleeps or rests with family at home. Only once those conditions are met are any citizens allowed to depart the city—which, of course, makes it harder yet to leave.

The upper towers of the city are likewise separated out by caste. The uppermost stories of the city towers are reserved for Bright Shattered Ice, her circle and similarly high-ranking guests. The middle floors are given over to the Dragon-Blooded who manage her bureaucracy and officer her garrison. Lower floors and the hull's depths belong to mortals. Ordinary humans fit into one of 16 sub-groups: Officials of the First through Fifth Ranks, Artisans of the First through Fourth Ranks, Workers of the First through Third Ranks, Peacekeepers of the First and Second Rank, Merchants and

Supernumeraries. There is very little progression or advancement outside of one's birth caste. Only clever and brave Supernumeraries have a chance of passing examinations to enter one of the other castes. As redundant citizens, they must to be ready to substitute in an emergency so that the city continues to fly.

Such emergencies and accidents are all too common in Tzatli. The law code is harsh. Idling too much during working hours or arriving home too late for "family time" is punished severely. Whole families have been rounded up and imprisoned for arguing too loudly over dinner and disrupting the city's happiness. I AM is obliged to report to the city's secret police on just who is disobeying the law. The city lacks safety railings—a grave hazard during maneuvers to avoid a blizzard or tornado. Despite being Tzatli's poorest citizens, the Supernumeraries all carry portable hologlyph terminals, so officials can summon them rapidly to new assignments. Groups of Supernumeraries have sat down to warm dinners, after police hauled away the original diners.

## WINDLANDS PROVINCE

Lying between the Opal Crag Mountains, the White River Ravine, the White Valley and the Inland Sea, The Windlands make up the largest of the North's provinces. Eleven principalities farm the even, fertile landscape, cooperating on roads and irrigation. Mammoth, sheep and cattle herding are common here. RPCs concentrate on raising animal-feed, while greenhouses raise flowers for the wealthy all over Creation.

### ONDAR SHAMBAL

Ondar Shambal is the city of the Unconquered Sun's priestly followers in Creation. The Zenith Caste Solar, Righteous Guide, built the city of white granite about 700 years ago. This first city of the Windlands is quite small by the standards of the Era of Dreams, containing not quite a million persons. Spectacularly set among the Opal Crag's few remaining glaciers, its towers and walls glitter in the light. Spires gleam pink in the dawn, white in the noonday sun, yellow in late afternoon and golden in the sunset. At twilight, shadows of royal purple stretch eastward across its plazas. Whether this is a quality of the stone or a blessing of the god himself, no one is quite sure. Seen from above, as the Unconquered Sun would see it, the city becomes a perfect mandala of the god himself.

Ondar Shambal's mandala is not simply a paean to the Unconquered Sun. Beneath the city, gears and clockworks move the city's streets and plazas slowly and subtly, so that the city's architecture itself constantly praises the foremost god. Part of the city's magic assures that everyone wakes with the right mental map of the city, no matter how much has changed. Only those priests and monks who keep watch in the night, preoccupied with keeping time in order and serving the god honestly, lack the knowledge to find their way about. They must renew their understanding of the

city daily. Devoted monks forget their disagreements with one another in the joy of experiencing the marvels of the white city each morning.

At the city's center is the Solar-oriented manse called the Nine Towers of Day. Just as the city subtly rearranges itself every day, so do the towers of the manse remake themselves in the night. Some days of each month, they are square; on others, they become octagonal or round. Bands of orichalcum and jade upon their surfaces form continuous prayer wheels humming a message of peace, prayer and holiness upon residents. Within the manse, windows of translucent jade send light down into temples and shrines containing relics of the Unconquered Sun—locks of hair, drops of sweat, toenail clippings and ribbons of yellow silk from his robe. Several libraries within record the history of Creation and store knowledge of the occult, medicine and many other disciplines.

All is not well in Ondar Shambal. Some years ago, the Unconquered Sun asked Righteous Guide to construct a pilgrimage road from the city's south gate to the Inland Sea. The road, decreed the god, should be free from all death or hurt, so that those who made the pilgrimage would not have to tread upon the blood of the laborers. Righteous Guide has not returned to the city since. In his absence, monks and nuns and priests are sleeping through the night, and their theological arguments are increasing.

### WALLPORT

Anticipating the completion of Righteous Guide's Holy Road, enterprising Dragon-Bloods endeavored to build an equally beautiful city to receive pilgrims from overseas. Seated on a broad plain at the top of black basalt cliffs, Wallport serves as an entry point for pilgrims and those who have business in the North.

Two crescent-shaped reflecting pools or moats surround the city. Filled with waters from an aqueduct from Ondar Shambal, these pools shelter the city, whose gray granite walls are traced with moonsilver to honor Luna. One road to the south goes down steep stairs to the lower town, at the foot of the cliffs. A dirt track to the north eventually meets the Holy Road, which will eventually be completed right to the city gate.

Within the walls, streets form a lotus pattern to celebrate Earth. Broad stairs and ramps connect each petal to one another, and each house and shop is colored slightly differently to create the effect of an iridescent flower from directly overhead. A golden fence surrounds the park at city center. Within, towers of differently colored marble topped by golden onion domes each commemorate one of the Maidens, while five theaters at the park's edge each celebrate one of the Elemental Poles. While the city is not a mandala like Ondar Shambal is, it is nevertheless a reflection of Creation's order.

Wallport's upper city is for craft and artistry, famous for clockwork mechanisms and Essence engines produced in its

factory-cathedrals. The lower city is much less savory, since even pilgrims seek fleshly pleasures after long voyages, or just before return journeys. Prostitution, drug use and other vices stalk both unwary and willing here.

### CHERAK-ON-THE-SEA

Cherak-on-the-Sea is the beautiful capital city of the Tributary of Cherak. The famous Solar general, Wind of Heaven, founded it not as a fortress, but as a pleasure palace for relaxation. The city perches on five round palafittes in the middle of a wide, sheltering bay. Each platform supports dozens of towers, piazzas and parks. Marinas for pleasure barges and sailing vessels ring each platform. A pleasant walkway winds around the palafittes' edges, and calles—narrow streets closed to wheeled traffic—connect the many public squares. A variety of Essence vehicles skim above the opal-colored pavement, and the noise of carts is utterly banished from the city. Canals crisscross Cherak, used as much for transportation as the calles. Sorcerous barriers prevent rogue waves from overwhelming Cherak, but they don't keep out wind or rain, so the city has normal weather.

Each palafitte has a large central forum roughly at the center, which serves as an open-air public room. Crowds come to enjoy the fountains, shade trees, restaurants, shops and teahouses that define these spaces. On at least one angle of these gathering places is a monumental structure dedicated to one of the Solar Prince's favorite activities. These public facilities enable citizens and visitors to enjoy Wind of Heaven's beneficence. In the southeast, bathhouses and a gymnasium provide for the needs of the body. In the southwest, a library and a university (specializing in bureaucracy, military affairs, medicine and law) offer intellectual entertainment. In the northeast, a stadium and theater complex presents gladiatorial combat and a variety of plays. In the northwest, a shrine and adjunct pansala dedicated to the Unconquered Sun invites both songs of praise and quiet contemplation. At the city center, close by Wind of Heaven's manse and palace, is the Emporium, a vast hall of shops selling every sort of luxury and teahouses serving delicacies from all over Creation.

Visitors often mistake the Emporium for a food hall, but in fact, it is a cleverly designed social venue, one of the most important in the city. Paths between shops are wide enough for senior officials and their retinues to pass and notice one another. Every few hundred feet is a pergola or amphitheater for public conversation or staged encounters. New fashions and new modes of thought can be bought and sold here, just like everything else. Of course, Essence-powered spy devices keep track of everything that happens in the city, but especially here, so that Wind of Heaven's intelligence service keeps him abreast of the latest news.

The last element of the city is the Triumphal Circuit, usually called the "Triumph." Winding twice across the central palafitte and crossing each of the others in turn, this elaborate avenue is the main route of military and religious parades each month. Traveling circuses use this route when

entering or leaving Cherak, as do athletic squads and famous visiting scholars. Wind of Heaven asks any visiting Exalt to take part in either an impromptu or formal parade on the Triumph. The Triumph's path through the city causes crowds observing the parading Exalt to receive a temporary dot of specialty in the Exalt's highest Ability. This specialty persists for a month. Wind of Heaven follows up such parades with decrees ordering training in such skill for every citizen. Thus do his citizens become adept at almost any kind of activity under the sun.

In Wind of Heaven's absence, a government called the Panchayat rules. This council of five Dragon-Bloods manages the city's daily affairs, and each also supervises the magistrates and bureaucrats on each palafitte. The Panchayat meets in a modest city hall on the central forum, but each councilor has a separate district office in each district. Traditionally, one is a priest of the Unconquered Sun, while the other four are a bureaucrat, a physician, the commander of the city's peacekeepers and a sorcerer in charge of the city's maintenance.

### CHERAK UNDERSEA

Cherak-on-the-Sea is intended to be a paradise, but even a Solar does not become a great general without developing dark desires and appropriate paranoia. Beneath the bright city lies another, in the dark waters of Cherak Bay.

A full 17 of the pillars supporting Cherak-on-the-Sea contain elevators, while 30 more hold stairways. These passages descend to the seafloor, where airlocks and underwater harbors for submarines allow water-breathing Exalts or military personnel to enter the city secretly. Between seafloor and sea surface, thousands of crystal bubbles cling to the city's roots. Crystal tubes overgrown with kelp allow travel between more isolated bubbles. In keeping with Wind of Heaven's paranoia, these bubbles are relatively fragile, and a command given from his manse can cause one or all of them to pop suddenly, drowning their occupants.

Each bubble holds a manufactory or service center that eases life in the city above. Except for military personnel and authorized visitors, most mortals here are practically slaves. Even free civilians rarely enter the sunlit city above. Wind of Heaven dislikes looking at the deformed in his city's plazas, so his laws condemn them to servitude below.

Not all who labor here are deformed, however. Within some crystal spheres, isolated from the others and reached by a single stairway, are the secret schools of Cherak. Here, beautiful boys and girls are raised to be playthings, gladiators, bodyguards, chefs, dancers, artists and other professionals, until they are allowed to ascend the single stairway from the "green world" to the "bright world above." Those judged worthy to make the journey usually meet their master on the stairway, remaining devoted servants forever.

### LANDWARD CHERAK

North and west of the city proper is Landward Cherak, an industrial sprawl of two million people, approximately a third

of whom are slaves. The main roads and bridges to Cherak-on-the-Sea carefully skirt the edges of this ugly city, usually below the ridgeline separating the industrial district from its more elegant and fashionable neighbor. Many upper-class visitors are unaware that Landward Cherak exists at all.

### OTHER CITIES OF THE WINDLANDS

Four other cities have become de facto centers of culture and wealth in the Windlands Province. All are principality capitals and economic powerhouses. **Everliving Grove** is the most famous of these cities, because its 1,200-foot-high trees support structures holding a million people. The Grovites are famous for raising cold-weather orchids on their branch gardens and for training talking birds to be bodyguards, translators and tutors. Major industries include paper manufacture and book production using renewable bark skins from their city's towering foundations. Branch dancing—leaping from one evergreen bough to another hundreds of feet above the earth—is a popular diversion here. Additionally, the city stands above Gate 32 into Yu-Shan.

**Three-Force Mesa**, located in the inner highlands atop a lofty mesa, is a mining and industrial town. Windmills on the mesa run pumps the size of houses, to draw water into tremendous cisterns. House wastewater cascades through a series of sluices to waterwheels powering iron forges and jade cutters. Some water falls so hard and fast that its energy runs spark-hammers that fuel the smelters and fire the forges. At dusk, the city appears to be a behemoth, with its lower extremities belching fire, its sides gleaming with waterfalls and its shoulders alive with spinning windmills. Vast interior chambers serve as concert halls for echo concertos, where instrumentalists in widely separated balconies play to each other across gulfs of vaulted emptiness. In the city's undercrofts stands Gate 28 into Yu-Shan.

**Meteor's Eye** is a city of domes and spires, set on a steep hill rising out of a fog bank into perpetually clear skies. It began as an observatory for the Sidereal Exalted. Even in the well-planned skies of Creation, random events do occur from time to time. Meteors and comets cross the sky according to their own counsel. The Maiden of Secrets does not reveal their orders or intentions even to the Unconquered Sun. Therefore, they must be observed and their courses catalogued. Sited upon Gate 30 into Yu-Shan, Meteor's Eye is a city of schools, libraries and glassmaking. Astrology is most advanced here of anywhere in mortal ken. Numerous colleges teach the study of fate and its attendant arts of bureaucracy, thaumaturgy, sorcery and geomantic construction. Lens grinders, glassblowers and instrument makers insert a welcome diversity to the city's more arcane and occult pursuits.

**Brahm's Bridge** is a bustling city of over a million people located on the banks of the Golden River, flowing south from the Opal Crag Mountains to the Inland Sea. The bridge is a wonder constructed of the five types of jade and of moonsilver. Any Exalt crossing it immediately recharges his Essence pool, less any motes he has committed. Halfway across the bridge,



a golden pavilion houses Gate 33 into Yu-Shan. Brahm's Bridge is the Windlands' and Opal Crag's principal seaport. Its docks and wharves swarm with merchants and stevedores. Home port of the Deliberative Navy's Northern aerial and seagoing fleets, Brahm's Bridge is a popular destination for courtesans and traveling entertainers. Tight security remains the norm, however, since both rebels and Exalts test their prowess against the fleets' headquarters.

## URRIN'S STEPPE PROVINCE

North of the Diamond Hills is Urrin's Steppe. The rough but green country of the Hills gives way to the Steppe with a suddenness bordering on obscurity. One moment there are trees, and the next moment there is grass—pale gray-green in spring, taller than a man; dusky amber in autumn; always brittle and sharp. The dry, grassy country lacks towns and cities. Occasional villages of nomadic herders hide in pockets of landscape, but the Lunar Exalt Urrin and his Solar bride First Rose of Morning intended it to be a vast and howling wilderness, and so it remains. Indeed, the land does howl. Whipcord-thin grasses tremble in gales sent south from the Elemental Pole of Air. Holes bored in them by ants and stag beetles accept the wind as a flute accepts the musician's breath. The Steppe sings constantly, humming its haunting, mournful and dissonant songs. Walking through the blade grass is a death sentence for a bare-skinned mortal. Unarmored flesh is carved into raw meat in minutes. Heavy clothes shred in under an hour. Leather survives better but, in hotter months, can be unbearable.

Water is scarce. Ponds ringed by stands of stunted pine or alder dot the land as cool refuges from the wind. These ponds are home to settlements of fewer than a dozen families. Herdsmen raise yeddim and mammoth, whose tough hides and fur protect them from the blade grass. Few other animals last long, except for the long-toothed predators made native to this region. These predators are Essence-powered brass cats that hunt strangers for their metal. These 12-foot-long felines attack communities and caravans in packs, destroying everything organic. They hoard metal to replicate themselves in hidden lairs. Also lurking in the grass are assassin beetles, whose poisonous bites inflict agonizing death mere hours later, and the innocuous but fiendish grass snail, whose secretions are a popular hallucinogenic drug farther south but mean progressive lunacy in this unforgiving landscape.

In cold months, snow steals across the landscape like a blanket. Storms blow sideways for several days straight, flattening grasses and sinking the land several feet beneath powder. Hurricane-force winds sweep up drifts and dunes dozens of feet high. In such a strange wilderness, barren of feature or landmark, it is difficult to get one's bearings. Out so far from Creation, incursions from the Wyld are common.

Some Solars complain that Urrin and First Rose of Morning developed a land inimical to human life. The steppe appears to be not merely ugly, but a suitable gateway for a terrible Wyld invasion. Urrin counters that it makes the perfect battlefield for a battle of Creation against chaos,

however. Unknown outside the Deliberative's inner councils and barely suspected by residents, the razor-sharp grass, the brass cats, the assassin beetles and the grass snails are merely a first line of defense. The province is, in fact, a realm of rigid order, with a landscape composed of preplanned components on octagonal or square bases, arranged according to a complex but rational algorithm. This algorithm determines the placement of weapons caches, bunkers, minefields, Wyld-disruption weapons, reality-hardening machines and manses with suitable weaponry to use against raksha. Even the supposedly nomadic villagers travel carefully planned routes, to avoid tripping the lethal defenses.

## SEZAKAN

Administratively accounted part of Urrin's Steppe, the great city of Sezakan is better regarded as an entity in its own right. The First Shrine of Sunset is the westernmost temple on the mainland of Creation and the most northerly. The Sezakanians would say it is also the most beautiful. Their slender pyramid rises so high that, from the top, the sun shines green through the waters of the Western Ocean at sunset.

Sezakan's position in the mountains isolates it from the rest of Creation, suiting the inhabitants quite happily. The people of the air regard it as their capital, and more than half of its mountainside structures are open only to the winged people or to Exalts with the capacity for magical flight. A skyship construction facility occupies a portion of a hollow mountain opposite the city. Its workmen regularly commute by flying over a chasm more than 3,000 feet deep.

Four great Essence engines help to shore up this settlement on the outer edge of Creation. The city's manse supplies heat, light and energy to power the city's elevators, magic windows and automatic doors. A reality engine draws power from the manse's hearthstone to energize the violet shield dome that protects residents from winds and storms. Additional engines fertilize the city's window boxes and gardens to nourish the half-million inhabitants. A final enormous device generates a series of high-speed but safe corridors of wind to and from Sezakan, so that travelers and cargo can journey to the city at triple the swiftness of a robin. These corridors connect Sezakan with every major urban center in the North. Sometimes, it is faster to go to Sezakan first, and then somewhere else, than to travel a direct route.

The Solar Council rules Sezakan on behalf of whomever the Deliberative declares the Prince. A Terrestrial Exalt usually leads these lucky 13 councilors. Of the remaining twelve, three are people of the air, three are mortal, three are Dragon-Blooded, and three are God-Blooded. Each has some area of responsibility to the Council, including public health, water supply, Essence management and more. Two Dragon-Blooded command the city's security forces and handle peacekeepers. The other one directs military forces that train to fight the Wyld and the raksha.

Sezakan's internal security causes concern and debate. Parleys between Fair Folk and Deliberative representatives

have revealed the likelihood of Wyld moles spying on Creation. Further investigation narrowed likely conduits of information to residents of Sezakan. The result is a discreet but vicious witch-hunt, as representatives of the Deliberative try to find the beings betraying military secrets to Creation's worst enemy.

## THE GREAT ICE

At the final northern edges of Urrin's Steppe begins the Great Ice. Spreading ubiquitously in a single wall 700 feet high from distant East to farthest West, the Great Ice is but the edge of the inhabitable world. A 66-day trek on foot across the Great Ice through the worst weather in the world brings one to the Edge.

At the Edge, one looks out from a world of snow and ice and blizzard into thin air. Clouds drift in the distance, both above and below. Wind comes straight on and never ceases. A vast blue gulf of emptiness waits below, and nothingness hangs beyond that.

Older, crazed Solars and Sidereals who have survived since the Primordial War espouse a fabulous idea. They claim that traveling due north from Mount Meru's summit, straight through Opal Spire, brings one over the Great Ice and at last to a narrow golden wire thinner than a strand of silk that extends from Creation outward into nothingness. If one could walk it without falling, they say, one might be able to enter a different place—one without gods or Primordials or Exalts.

In a golden palace anchoring that thread to Creation lives Vanileth, the god of air travel. Why he lives so far from his official responsibilities is a matter of some conjecture. One likely reason is that one of the Primordials fled Creation that way and the gods are afraid she might return.

## OPAL SPIRE

Opal Spire is less a city than a fortress. Arranged on a grid plan of eight blocks by eight blocks like a military camp, the city consists of 64 towers, each with a central light well and bridges connecting it to neighboring towers. Fifty thousand people live within its walls and Essence shields, which defend against both the bone-chilling ice and the dangers of the Wyld. Opal Spire stands at the northern end of the Diamond Hills, not far from where the Great Ice begins. Outside the walls and shields, temperatures often drop so precipitously that mortal breath freezes solid in the lungs. Even Solars curse the cold here.

Opal Spire began as a center for Cauldronists seeking to add thousands of square miles to Creation in the North. Enormous skyships, designed to carry Essence-powered reality-hardening engines, traveled out from Opal Spire into the Wyld and solidified reality around them. In this way, vast territories were added to Creation. Yet, the success of these operations placed Opal Spire too far from the Wyld frontier. Engineers chose to incorporate a reality-warping engine into the city structure, and the city moved farther north.



At this second location, with its manse capping a five-dot demesne, the lands to the south became fair and fertile. Transportation and geomantic networks connected the city to the rest of Creation, and Opal Spire prospered as a genuine city, not merely a military base. Then, the Cauldronists grew ambitious, resolving to move the city heart farther north. The outer suburbs became a new city, Emerald Hill, which dug inward. The manse of Opal Spire, with its attendant military barracks and airship hangars, jumped northward yet again.

This current effort has not proved so successful, even after 100 years. The region around Opal Spire today tends to be warm and spring-like in the three months of Fire, but cold and nearly buried in ice for the rest of the year. Some Cauldronists claim success requires the addition of new reality engines. Others decry the expense of the project to date and wish to withdraw Opal Spire further south in order to develop the region between there and Emerald Hill.

At the center of the debate are two Solars, the Twilight Caste sorcerer-engineer Firebird Glorying at First Light, who designed and built the reality engines and the airships of Opal Spire, and the Eclipse Caste financial genius Elegant Interest, who paid for them. Their continuing arguments deadlock the Far North, as Elegant Interest tries to push Firebird into moving the city south, and Firebird Glorying tries to prove that pattern reinforcement can succeed even this close to the Elemental Pole of Air.

In the meantime, the city suffers. So far from the bright centers of Creation, Opal Spire's goods and services are expensive. Many soldiers garrisoned here have been away from home for a long time. Some Solars contemplate intervention in the dispute, since the Northern frontier is so critical, but an elegant solution has not presented itself thus far.

## CEDARFALL PROVINCE

In the Far Northeast, centuries ago, was the Greenland. This fair and grassy region raised wheat and barley, and herded cattle and sheep. It was a relatively dry and desolate country, but the people made a even prosperous living under the Deliberative's rule. Famous for wood and timber, for furniture and crafted ornament, the Greenland's millions lived in three prefectures and 12 cities. Peace and prosperity were the birthright of principality citizens here, even on the edge of Creation. Warm and pleasant weather sheltered fruit trees and tall timber. The people created a rich culture of music and craftsmanship that the whole world envied.

Then came the decision to use the Greenland as the target for Operation Wyldhand. Barely two decades ago, the Solar Deliberative resolved to carry out a military exercise that would simulate a full-scale incursion into Creation by greater, unshaped raksha and lesser forces. To this end, a vast section of Creation here was appropriated for the purposes of this experiment.

Operation Wyldhand changed everything. At first, simple checkpoints at the major road crossings into the

province appeared. Ordinary infantry manned them at first, then Exalted and gunzocha troops appeared, followed by warstrider reinforcements and worse. For two years, work crews constructed a series of forts along the border to guard an Essence-charged fence and minefield separating the Greenland from the rest of Creation.

Then, just as rapidly as the Greenland had become an armed camp, it changed again. In its place were the four principalities of Cedarfall: High Sequoia, Black Juniper, Blue Cedar and Sweet Balsam. Many of the same towns were preserved intact within, yet many others had vanished or changed. The spatial relationships between towns shifted by hundreds of miles and tens of degrees. Even the forests, once dominated by deciduous hardwoods, changed to cedars and other evergreens.

The same changes wrought to the land also affected citizens. Many—though not all—of the same people inhabited this new territory as had lived in the Greenland. Many had their life memories and their professions altered (which caused some temporary instability in the Order Conferring Trade Pattern). Some were so altered physically and mentally that outsiders no longer recognized them, though the citizens of Cedarfall claimed friendship or kinship or even romantic involvement. The world had changed thoroughly.

## PRINCIPALITIES OF CEDARFALL

**High Sequoia** is the northeastern-most principality of the province. Today famed for roof timbers and other building products, it is sparsely populated and least noticed. Most Deliberative agents are reluctant to travel so far into a region so deeply and thoroughly affected by Operation Wyldhand, so this territory is the least carefully studied. The people are friendly and tend to live in log cabins on the forest floor or in tree houses woven out of bark strips.

**Black Juniper** lies to the east and south. A land of rolling hills and shallow pools, it is famed for fishing and for its nut-crops such as pecans and almonds. The berries of its evergreens make fine gin as well. Deliberative agents remain convinced that the people of Black Juniper know something of what happened to the Greenland. So far, no agent has discovered the secret and lived to tell.

**Blue Cedar** lies to the north and west of High Sequoia. The sponginess of the ground here, and its relative closeness to the Elemental Pole of Air, make it a realm of thick dust and heavy pollen. A wide range of medicinal and cooking herbs grow from the forest floor here, and local stone is rich in copper and tin. As a result, timber and raw ore are this principality's two major products. The population here is the most physically changed, but the least mentally.

**Sweet Balsam** is closest to the rest of Creation, and the most thoroughly altered. People changed physically and mentally from their former existence, and the woods here were the most thoroughly changed. Deliberative foresters have identified 56 new conifer species here, as well as many ground-cover plants and insects found nowhere else in

Creation. Diseases of memory and age are prevalent in older people, but half the citizens are under 40 years of age.

All four principalities are deeply loyal to the Deliberative and accept that something happened to them. Occasionally, individual citizens become upset at the notion that Wyldhand did something strange to them, but most people treat the idea that the world was different before with equanimity. The Solars wanted it, the reasoning goes, so it must have been all right.

In the Deliberative, most factions publicly approve of the outcome of Operation Wyldhand. In private, many Solars remain either horrified by the changes... or eager to do the same to some other part of Creation.

## CRYSTAL

Crystal is the largest city in the Principality of Sweet Balsam, home to five large factory-cathedrals for the manufacture of medicines. More than 400,000 people work there, and an additional 300,000 work in supporting roles. Here in Creation's Northeast, combinations of cold winds and luxurious verdancy produce abundant edible and medicinal herbs, trees and shrubs. Millions of people depend upon oil and nutrient extraction from these plants, and their distillation into panaceas. The resulting crystals, as clear as diamond or muddy like river water, gave the city its name.

The factory-cathedral spires each rise from a square at the center of their neighborhoods. Workers from nearby apartments daily enter these crystal structures that catch and amplify the light of the Unconquered Sun. Bells chime at the start of the day, at midday (for a lunch break) and

at day's end, with precision more usually found within a military establishment.

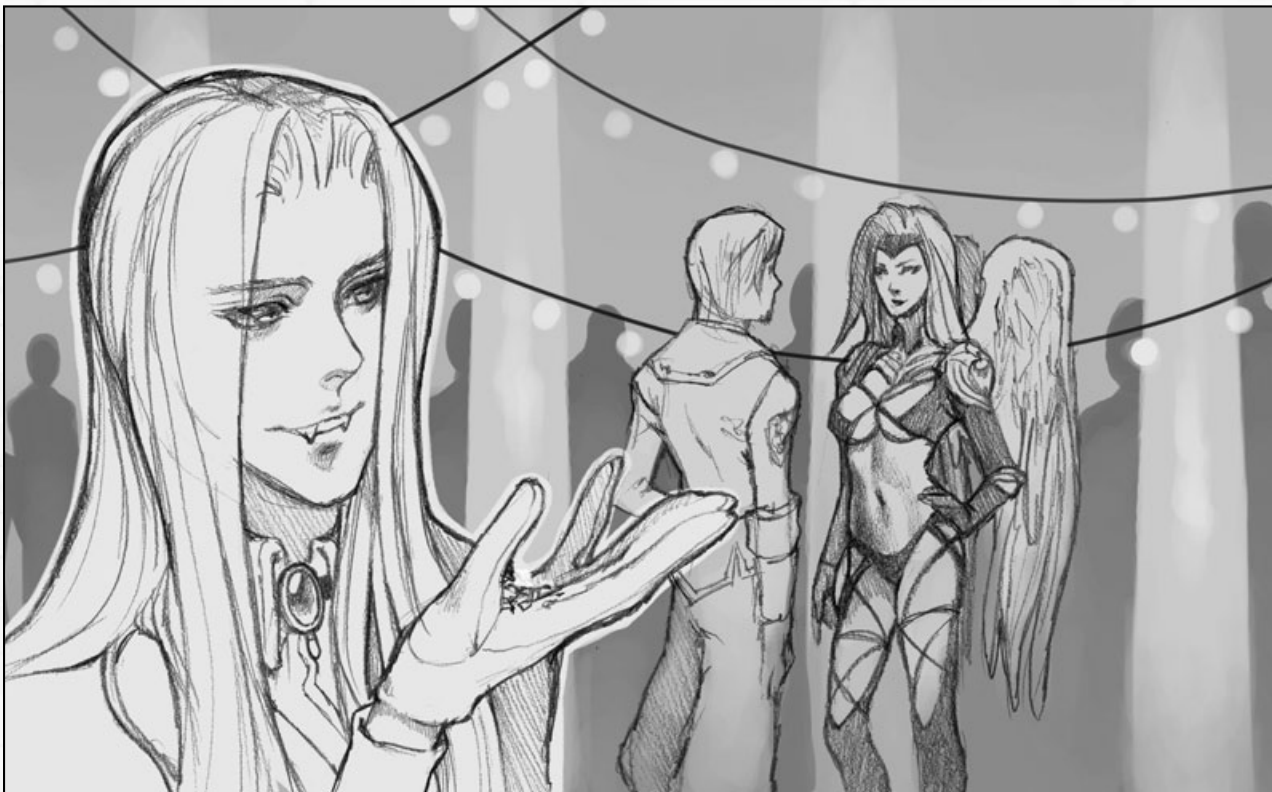
In some ways, Crystal is a military establishment in the Deliberative's war against disease. Tiny beings from the Wyld are thought to cause most illnesses. The doctors of the High First Age diagnose patients with infections of Northern, Southern, Eastern or Western Wyld and cure them with considerable success. The Deliberative Institute of Longevity and Living was relocated here after Operation Wyldhand in order to take advantage of the newly constituted resources in the area.

Within the manse at the city's center, the Solar physician Vigilant Guardian contemplates such alchemical reactions necessary to make the Forever Elixir necessary to sustain eternal life. No one has seen her in years. Once or twice a year, a large explosion or earthquake originates from the manse, wrecking some buildings or damaging one of the factory-cathedrals. Neither apology nor explanation is forthcoming.

In the absence of Solar guidance, a commission of nine Dragon-Blooded runs the city and Institute, keeping the factories running smoothly. The commissioners also make sure that regular shipments of current medications go out to all of Creation.

## THE FRINGES

At the edges of the Deliberative's power and legitimacy, the North contains five regions outside the bounds of the Realm. I AM does not speak there, nor do the Solars or the





## THE EIGHTY CRYSTALS

The Seventy-Five Crystals, as they are called in medical texts, are the most potent medicines in Creation. Each factory-cathedral in Crystal produces only one such medicine in each month of the year. Those produced during the months of Air are useful for diseases of the lungs, ears, nose and throat. When taken, the crystal melts on the tongue and suffuses the breath with sweetness. The elixirs produced during the months of Water are useful to the digestive and urinary tracts. Medicines from the months of Earth come in the form of a stone to be swallowed or inserted as a suppository. They are used for reproductive control and to aid difficult pregnancies or to amplify normal childhood development. Medicines from the Wood months, in the form of crystalline bandages, are suitable for dealing with skeletal and ligament damage. The crystalline pills from the three Fire months are used to treat illnesses of the internal organs, brain and nervous system. Each medicine is produced in sufficient quantities to provide about a million doses, and roughly a third is stockpiled around Creation every year against the risk of epidemic.

In accordance with appropriate medical principles first to do no harm, taking the medicines without having the relevant illness causes no injury. The medicines are named after the month in which they are produced, and are usually 100 percent effective when combined with diet, exercise and rest. When packed in unmelting ice within inlaid rosewood boxes, they are guaranteed to survive 6,000 years.

During the five Calibration days, the factory workers are relieved of their duties while special teams of Dragon-Bloods clean the machinery. While no new materials are added, the addition of pure water pumped from the source of the Crystal River helps flush oils and resins from the production line. The resins are crystallized in the same way as the other medicines, resulting in five very different but very potent drugs, and producing around 100 doses of each every year. All five drugs are rare and expensive controlled substances. They are named after their colors:

*Goldbreath* is inhaled by breaking the fragile crystal under one's nose. It makes one sexually irresistible to one member of the opposite sex, the first to smell one's breath. The effect lasts for about six days, after which the seduced becomes lethally angry toward the seducer.

*Bronzewater*, when drunk, raises the three Physical Attributes and Appearance to five dots for three days, after which they all fall to one dot for six months.

*Bloodstone*, a thin crystal the color of blood, is inserted into the urethra, where it dissolves. Toxins build up in the bloodstream for the next six to twelve days, but during that time, the bearer of the stone can heal even aggravated damage with a touch. At the end of that time, the buildup of toxins causes the bearer's internal organs to rupture. This is usually followed by painful death.

*Graythread*, when used to stitch any wound, seals it immediately and permanently, no matter how bad the wound was. It also works on nostrils, mouths, ears and other orifices, making it a favorite of vicious criminal lords.

Six hours after using *blackbox*, the user's Essence is halved, rounding down, for a period of days equal to one's Essence before using the drug. The Solars maintain special controls at this factory in particular.

Celestials pay official attention to events in those areas. Cold and difficult to dwell in, changes in weather and temperature affect them far more than the principalities.

The Deliberative seeds the Fringes with spies and informants. At the same time, it pretends to honor whatever agreements allow those areas to remain free. Compared with the principalities, populations are small. Not a single city of any splendor or Exalted beauty exists in any of them. Life tends to be shorter and less valued in the Fringes than in the rest of Creation.

## THE SEA FINGERS

The so-called Sea Fingers consist of a chain of fjords and islands in the Northwest. Cauldronists raised the Sea Fingers about two centuries ago. Infamous for reefs and aggressively

carnivorous seagulls, the Fingers are a less-than-perfect success. Solar engineers intended to call forth a region of green hills out of the Wyld, suitable for raising terrace crops such as potatoes, almonds and pecans. Instead, they engendered this land of mountains and scrub pines, and it has resisted redesign ever since, despite steadfast efforts and the regular deployment of Wyld cauldron devices to the principal demesnes in the region. Several Solars theorize that the reasonably solid architecture of the Great Western Ocean to the south, and equally solid lands to the east, have locked this area into its present reality. It remains unsuitable for its intended crops and unalterable to more useful form. Other Solars believe that an outside power, some agent of the Wyld, is deliberately holding the Sea Fingers in its present shape for unknown reasons.

## THE BLINDMAN'S PASHALIC

In fact, the Sea Fingers owe their immutability of form to the Blind Pasha, a shaped raksha of surpassing power who has indeed worked in parallel with the Cauldronists. As a result, he sculpted the Sea Fingers to serve the needs of his story.

The Blind Pasha's preferred narrative is to play the blind beggar, wandering from town to town and house to house, receiving beatings at one gate and riches at another. In response, the Blind Pasha reveals himself as a god and metes out appropriate punishment or reward—always with hidden benefit or penalty. A man rewarded for generosity, for instance, might find that cuts on his skin bleed rubies, with predictable results. A woman punished for stinginess might be robbed of her infertility, resulting in a long-hoped-for child—yet a monster in both form and manner. These gifts provide such a range of joy and despair to the Blind Pasha and his adherents that the district feeds a great host of the Fair Folk preparing to invade Creation.

In the Wyld, the Sea Fingers are called the Blindman's Pashalic, and his royal house is named the Court of Lapis and Clear Obsidian. When meeting with heroes openly, the Blind Pasha adopts the guise of a nobly dressed androgynous man dressed in silk shot with onyx and silver thread. While traveling in the Bordermarches, the Blind Pasha wears ratty wool and leather, and stoops along the roads to the houses of his victims. The Blind Pasha looks forward to the day when the Sea Fingers' population is sufficiently high that he can bless or curse the whole population at once, and bear it away into the Wyld.

The second opinion is more favored in the Deliberative. As a result, the Deliberative refuses to consider petitions to settle new towns and cities there. Between climate and Wyld threat, settlement cannot be condoned at this time, or so the prevailing wisdom holds.

Even so, people come. From the West, shipwrecks and accidental groundings established small communities on the land over centuries, since rescue parties have been few and far between. From the North, tradesmen, merchants and miners came seeking new sources of wealth and new markets. Empty, fertile-looking valleys and stands of timber attracted settlers; villages and towns sprang up. As a result, a few large trade centers emerged, and small boats carry on a thriving trade with the rest of Creation for the Sea Fingers' goods: walrus ivory, ship timber, goats' wool and cheese and small quantities of useful metals such as zinc and palladium.

Exiles and escaped criminals come to the Sea Fingers to start over or to hide. Piracy is common among residents, though few are bold enough to attack ships from the rest of Creation. Too many know the risks and the penalties for failure. Few think about even greater risks from a single success. Even so, the Lintha have established repair bases in the area, far from their normal habitations.

Life in the Sea Fingers is harsh. Most rely on a combination of hardscrabble subsistence farming and fishing. Most activities are rigidly seasonal. A broad system of taboos prevents both overgrazing the land and over-fishing the waters. The average life expectancy is 46 years, owing to rampant honor-killing, persistent disease related to goat keeping and a long-standing tribally based legal system eager to apply death penalties. Slavery is common in this region of the North, usually accompanied by behaviors that mortals from the Deliberative consider shocking.

## STEPPE NOMADS

Among the peoples of Urrin's Steppe are at least a thousand tribes that do not formally acknowledge the Deliberative as authoritative. Not swayed by religious systems promulgated in Creation's core, they worship Moon, Sun, Gaia, local gods and even elementals indiscriminately, depending on who appears to serve their needs best at the time. Even Fair Folk might suit their purposes at times, and so be offered worship.

To call them a loose confederation of powers would be to assign their governance too much legitimacy. Each tribe has its own rivalries, structures and methods for choosing leaders and displacing them. Each tribe herds some animal for food, usually with a second animal as a supplemental food source or raw material. Among some, mammoths are popular, while sheep and goats meet needs elsewhere. Giant spiders are common among the tribes in the West. In the East, giant hares weighing up to 100 pounds are an important staple.

Most of the tribes live in portable round tents called gerts, constructed of bone or wood woven together into flexible frames and covered with animal hide or an airboat skin—sometimes both. Visitors assume that because houses are primitive, people are as well. In fact, some gerts are sophisticated structures with Essence-powered heating systems. Bathhouses often use chalices of solar benediction. Even workshops have modern manufacturing tools within. More than one Dragon-Blood swears that while lost in the North among these forsaken people, he came upon a gert fitted as a manse in the tundra.

## WHITE RIVER GORGE

The largest area in the North that is not officially under Deliberative control is the White River Gorge, where the White River turns south from Frost Lake and enters a narrow channel to the Inland Sea. While the Deliberative refers to it as Dominion Park, the area is but lightly held.

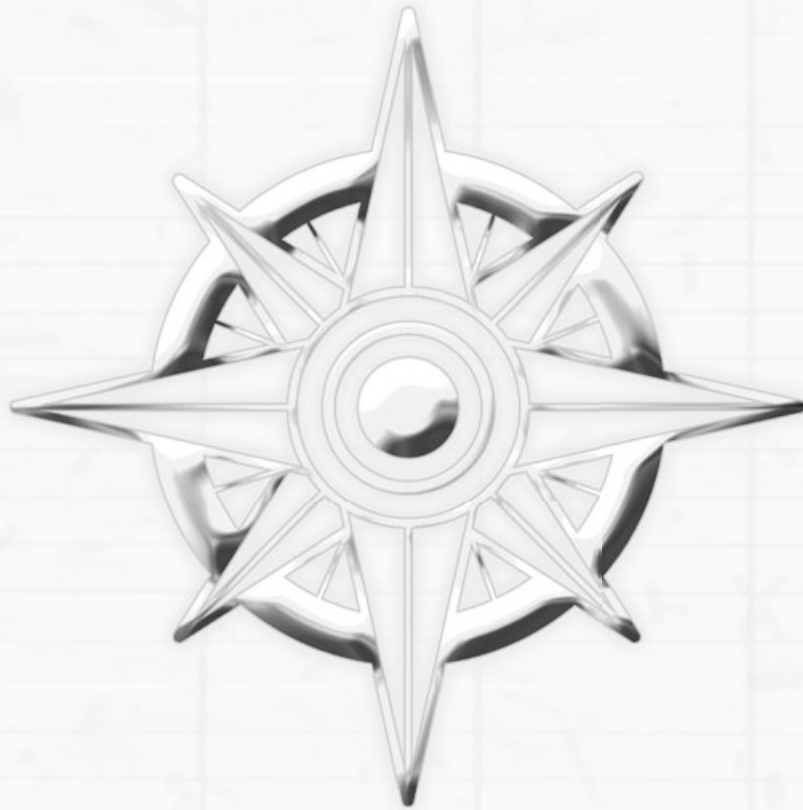
True wilderness exists beyond the manicured areas suitable for mortal and Exalted tourism.

Visitors find the river itself the first danger. Canals bypass rapids and two waterfalls, but too many places provide ambush-cover between Frost Lake and the Inland Sea. High cliffs and narrow canyons offer opportunities to seize merchant ships, and rough country prevents military expeditions from besieging towers and citadels.

Part of the difficulty in suppressing the bandits of the Gorge lies in just who they are. Constrained by the Deliberative from outright warfare with their most powerful weapons, younger but militant Solars and their Terrestrial allies use the park as their personal war-gaming preserve. Rough terrain prevents large-force maneuvers. Standard rules

of engagement prohibit the use of warstriders or skyships through the region. While laws against targeting civilians still hold, occasional minor atrocities occur, such as villages burning during cattle raids or towns being pillaged during longer campaigns.

The petty states along the river are usually only a day's march in diameter. Most have an available force of under 1,000, including Dragon-Bloods, led by one of the Sun's Chosen. Solar Queen Merela intervened regularly in the last millennium, requiring one or more Solars to step down for committing unacceptable outrages. Still, the Gorge provides a welcome outlet for Solars' more aggressive behaviors, especially those born into the lasting peace of the Second Deliberative Era and the Era of Dreams.





Now, is everyone paying attention?



YOUR HIGHNESS! YOUR HIGHNESS! THIS JUST CAME FOR YOU!



Always when I'm eating...

What is it?

A MESSAGE FROM THE ENEMY GENERAL, YOUR HIGHNESS.

Enemy general?



Are we under siege, then?

I wondered about the noise.

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS! IT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR A MONTH!

Very well. I'll deal with this after dinner.

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS, BUT...

Shoo! Shoo! After dinner, I said.





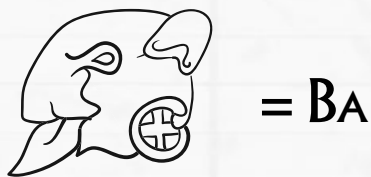
## APPENDIX OLD REALM SCRIPT

The characters in this appendix allow one to read, write and transliterate the ancient language of the Old Realm, the first language spoken in Creation and the native tongue of gods, raksha and sorcery. Although the alphabet that follows has existed since the beginning of the **Exalted** game line, this is the first time it has appeared in print for players and Storytellers to use in their own games.

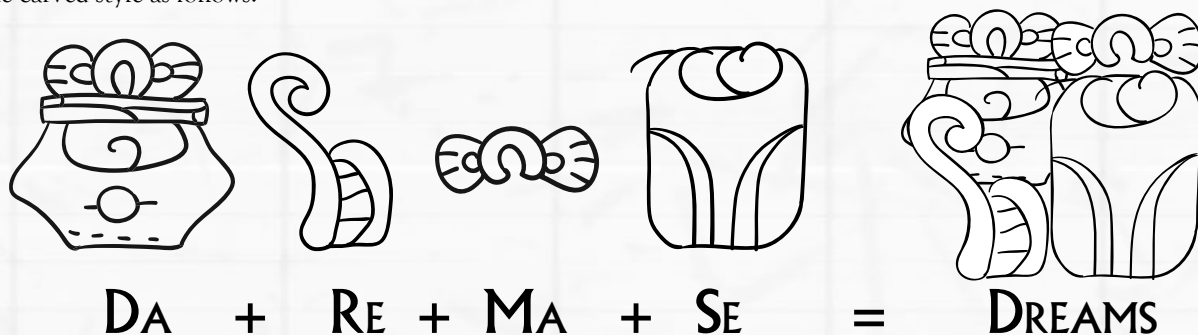
The first thing to learn is how words are pronounced in Old Realm. To this end, there are a few simple rules:

1. If the letter C is a soft one, the sound is written like an S. If the C is hard, it is represented by a K.
2. If any syllable ends in a consonant, that lone consonant is written with whatever vowel came before it. If it is somehow a lone initial consonant, it takes the vowel that first follows it.
3. The SH sound is pronounced CH. Similarly, the TH sound is pronounced D.

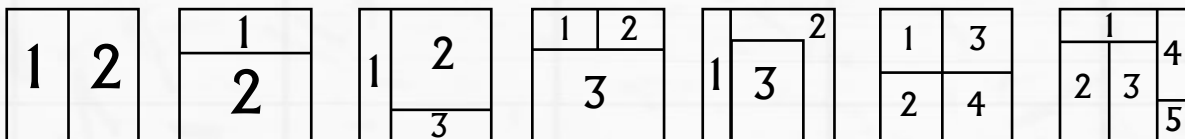
With the exception of these rules, words are sounded out and composed of the pictograms that correspond to their syllables.



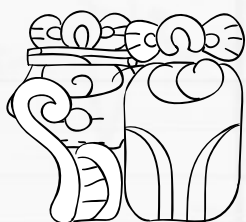
Next, it's important to learn how the pictograms come together to form words and sentences. Words are formed in the carved style as follows:



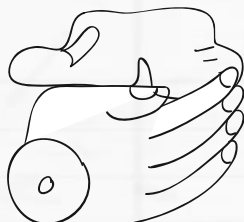
Letters can be formed into words any number of the following ways:



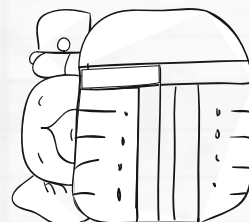
Those same words are then formed into full sentences as follows:



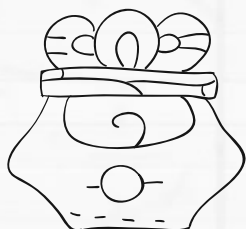
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(DA-RE-MA-SE)



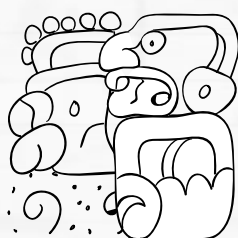
**OF**  
(O-FA)



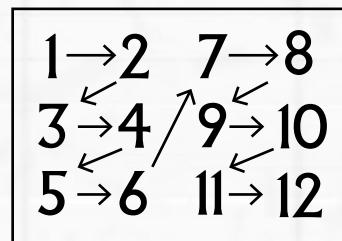
**AGE**  
(A-GE)



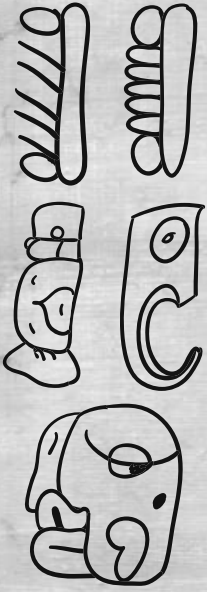
**THE**  
(DA)



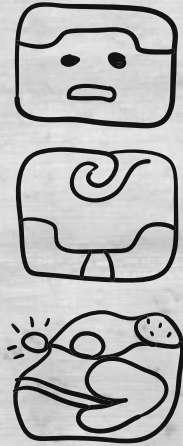
**FIRST**  
(FU-RU-SA-TA)



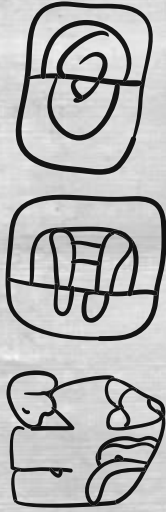
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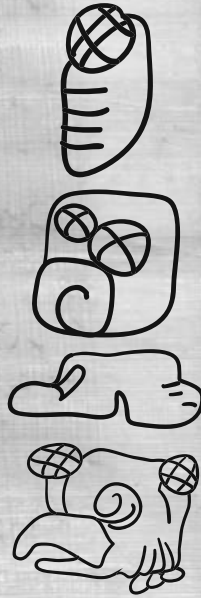
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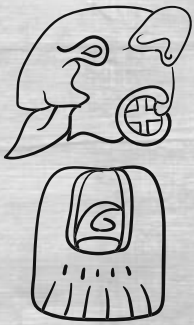
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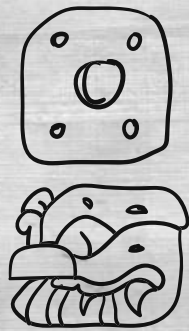
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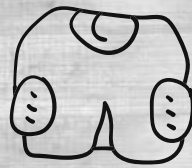
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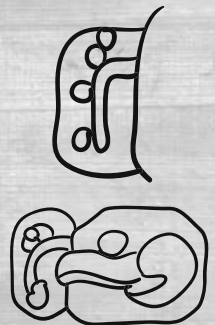
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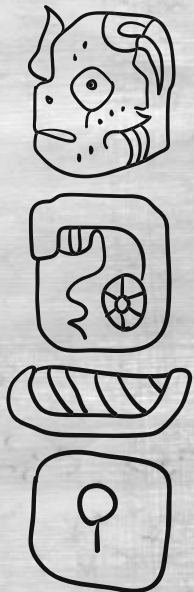
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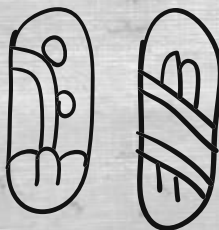
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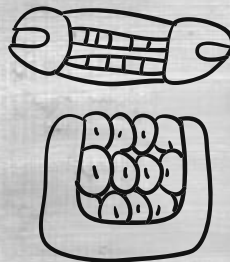
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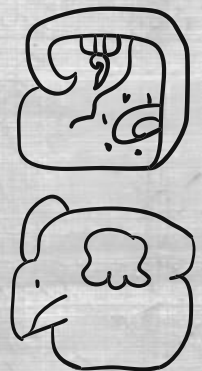
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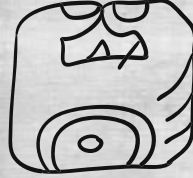
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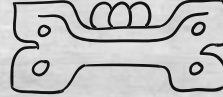
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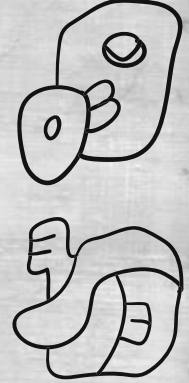
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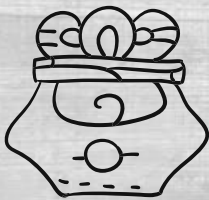
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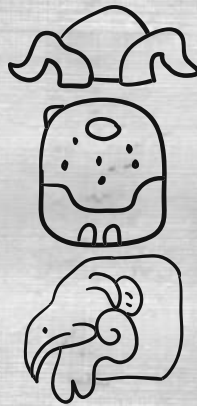
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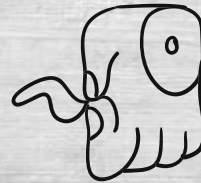
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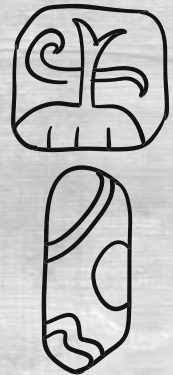
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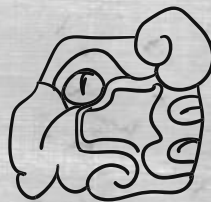
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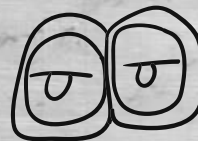
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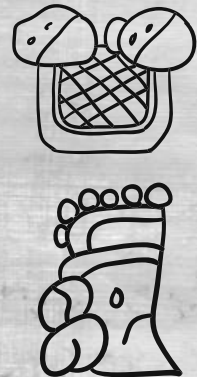
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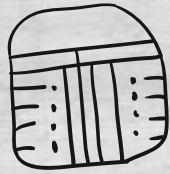




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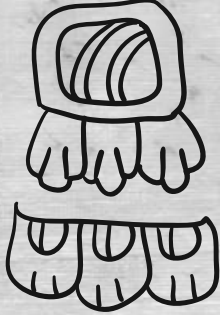
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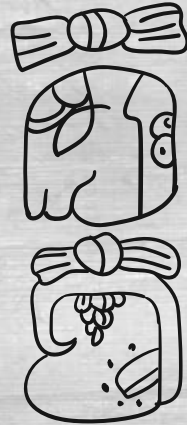
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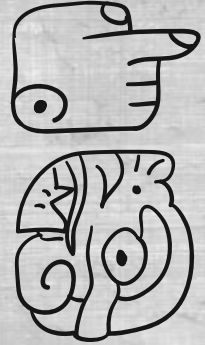
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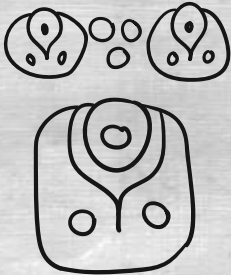
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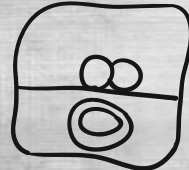
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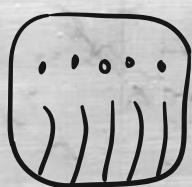
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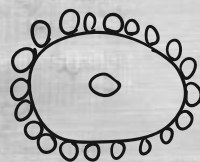
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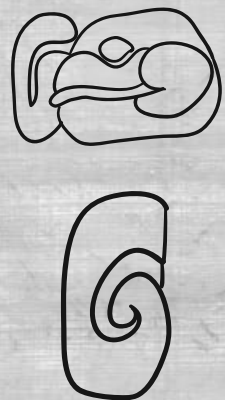
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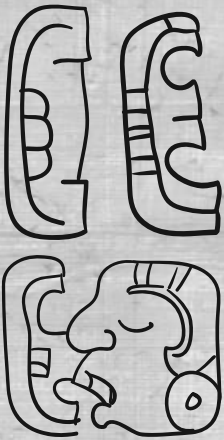
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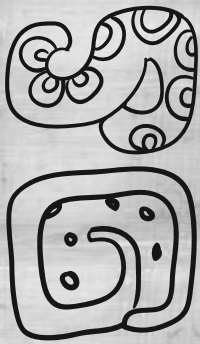
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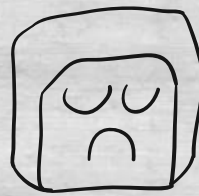
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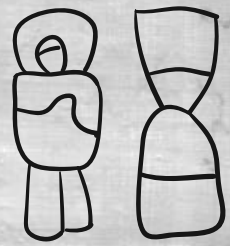
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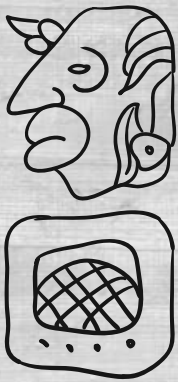
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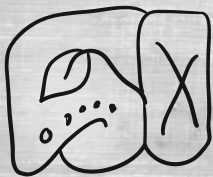
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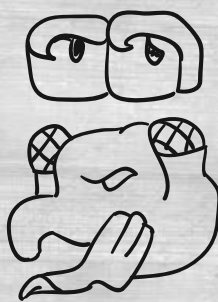
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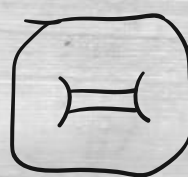
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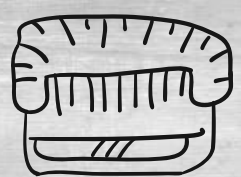
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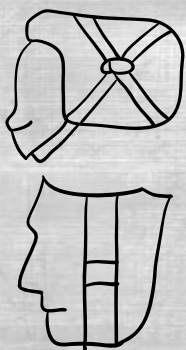
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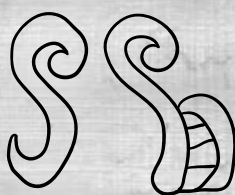
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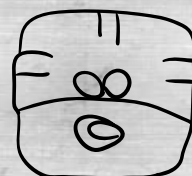
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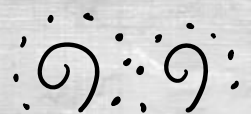
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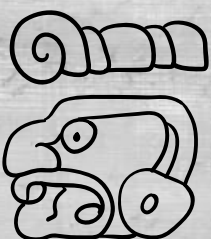
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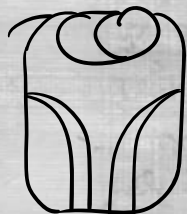
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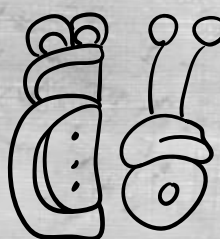
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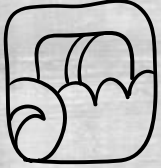
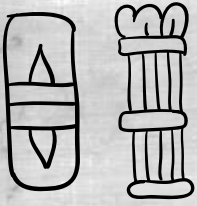
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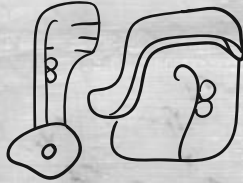
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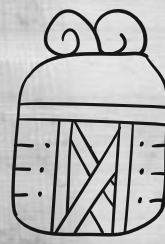
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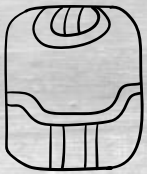
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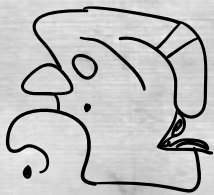
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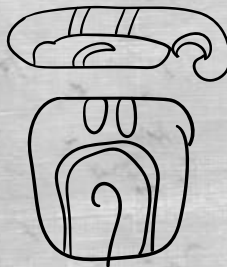
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YE



YI



Yo



Yu





**Dreams of the First Age—  
Lands of Creation** is devoted  
to the history, geography  
and politics of the Solar  
Deliberative and the Realm  
it rules. All the setting  
material required to run  
games set in the Age of  
Splendor lies within.

Dare you learn the  
victories and atrocities  
of the gods' Chosen?



Inside you'll find:

- A complete overview of life in the Era of Dreams
- A guide to the major provinces, principalities and cities of the Blessed Isle and the Threshold during the High First Age
- A complete guide for using the script of the Old Realm in your **Exalted** games

