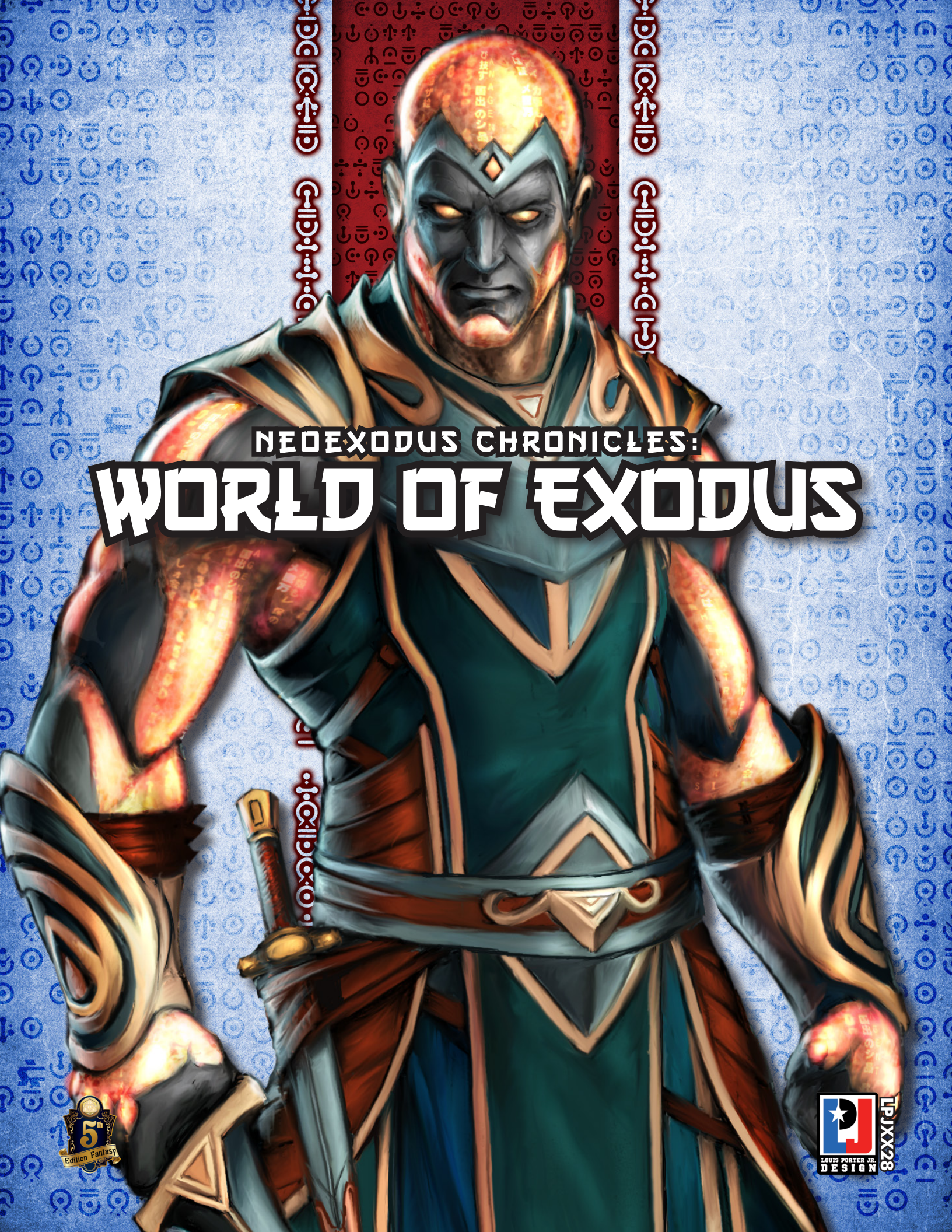




NEOEXODUS CHRONICLES:

WORLD OF EXODUS



ILPJXX28

HISTORY OF EXODUS

Exodus boasts a turbulent history—from the rise of the Kaga to the defeat of the First Ones and the events of the Twilight War; from the creation of the Imperial Alliance to the present crisis that threatens to tear that alliance apart.

Great heroes and terrible villains drove this march, though even in hindsight the two are not always easily separated. Theirs were the titanic passions, the burning obsessions and base treacheries in which modern Exodus was forged and tempered.

THE REIGN OF THE FIRST ONES

At the dawn of recorded history, the humanoid races toiled under the yoke of powerful beings known as the First Ones. More than two thousand years of shadowed antiquity lie between the reign of the First Ones and the modern age. Still the First Ones form the nightmares of the people of Exodus.

Because the First Ones lived and ruled so many centuries ago, historians have few concrete details about their reign. Modern sages do not know if the First Ones were one race or many, or even if they were humanoids whose immense power and wickedness rendered them like unto gods—or devils.

The ruins of the era show the First Ones were powerful magic users and warriors.

THE KAGA AND THE ERA OF HUMANITY

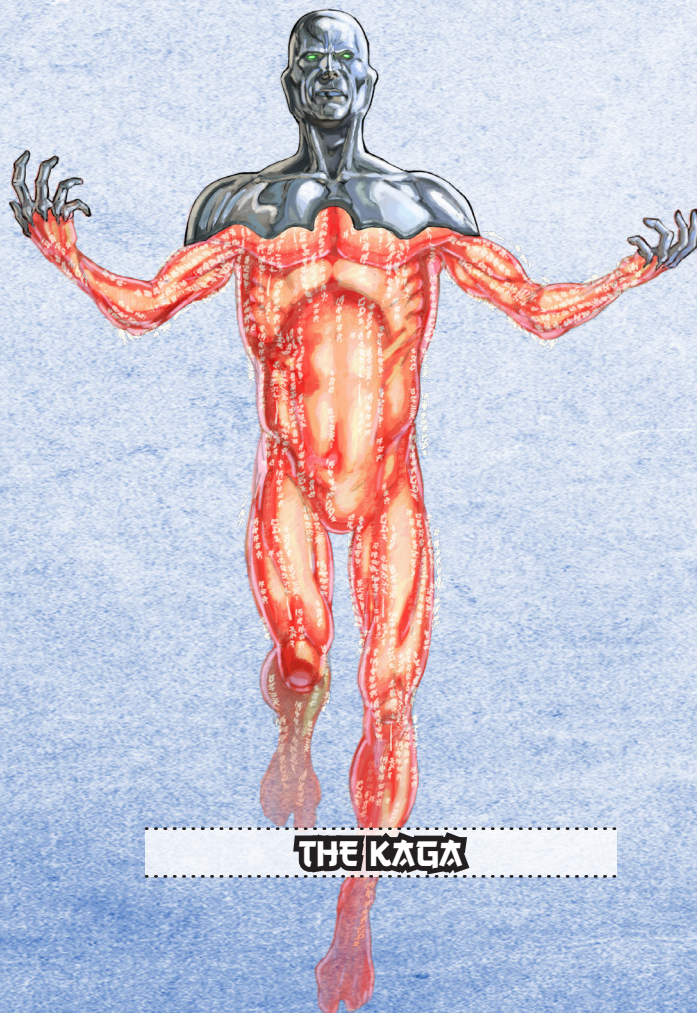
Two thousand years ago, the greatest sages, strategists, scientists, and sorcerers who labored in the cruel service of the First Ones concocted a plan to overthrow their masters. They did not know they would change Exodus forever. They created the Kaga, the collective sentence of the most brilliant minds of the age. The Kaga became a repository of all human knowledge—and the greatest weapon against the First Ones.

Soon after the Kaga's creation, the enslaved masses of humanity rose up against their overlords. With the Kaga to lead them, the slave races overthrew the First Ones in a series of apocalyptic battles. No record remains of those primeval struggles, nor is there any clue as to the eventual fate of the First Ones. Only the Kaga knows, and it is not talking.

Rather than rule as a god-king, the Kaga retreated into solitude and contemplation, its wisdom removed from humanity for centuries. Even now, with the Kaga once more accessible, sages cannot understand why it shut itself off.



THE EMISSARY



THE KAGA

After the Kaga's withdrawal, the surviving humans set about rebuilding in the ashes of the civilization that had enslaved them. Lacking the science and magical knowledge of the First Ones, these early people were primitive and barbaric. They dwelt amidst ruined spires and huddled beside latent sorceries, unaware of the powers within their grasp. In time, the ruins crumbled to dust, the magic faded from time-worn artifacts, and the humans moved from the decaying cities to the wilderness beyond.

THE AGE OF MIND AND MAGIC

While most of humanity descended into barbarism in the early years after the fall of the First Ones, a few learned to command the arcane sciences of their former masters. These arcanists became the first Sorcerer-Kings of Abaddon. There, they raised the first human civilization, binding hundreds of the savage tribes to their empowered wills. They repaired the cities of the First Ones and raised new ones in their own names.

Though not as monolithically wicked as their former masters, the Sorcerer-Kings soon acquired a reputation for heartless tyranny and cruel detachment. They sought to bind the whole of Exodus under their power.

Even as the Sorcerer-Kings rose in Abaddon, another power grew in the frigid hills of Nas. The cavians, a race of rat-like humanoids, took a distinct path to

power. Rejecting the arcane sciences that had once enslaved them, they instead honed the powers of their mind. Through their study and sheer determination, they became psychic warriors.

The cavians and the Sorcerer-Kings soon came to blows, blows that shook Exodus like nothing since the fall of the First Ones. Magical and psychic energies reshaped whole sections of the landscape.

When the dust had settled, the Sorcerer-Kings were a shadow of their former power. Of those that survived, only a half-dozen retained arcane power beyond the level of an apprentice. The cavians, once among the most populous and powerful races, vanished from the face of the planet.

THE SEEDS OF NATIONHOOD

The War of Mind and Magic—as the conflict between the cavians and Sorcerer-Kings came to be known—shattered both belligerents' dreams of conquest. The barbaric tribes of humanity, long held back by the supernatural might of civilization, surged into the power vacuum with fire and sword. At the same time, the long-silent Kaga, perhaps roused by the conflict, again lent its wisdom to mankind.

From the Kaga, barbarian chieftains learned the arts of statecraft and barbarian shamans learned the arts of magic. These young peoples washed across the face


THE LAWGIVER
THE PAINTED MAN

of Exodus like a tidal wave. In short order, the servile peoples who had labored for sorcerers and psions would bend the knee to warlords who ruled by force and steel.

Abaddon remained the seat of the surviving Sorcerer-Kings, who were threatened only by scattered uprisings and raids from their estranged kin in Cordel. Though their prestige was tarnished, the arcane scientists of Abaddon remained the mightiest living creatures on Exodus. For a time it seemed—even with the opposition of the Kaga—that they would regain their power.

In Cordel, the barbarian chieftains bred with the descendants of the Sorcerer-Kings. Within a few generations, both races had changed much. The tribes remained nomadic herders and raiders, but their ruling caste became one of natural magicians who blended sword, spell, and stealth.

In frigid Nas, the abandoned seat of cavian power, humanity replaced the rat-folk. The hardy people of Nas united under four clans: the Brauner, the von Breit, the Hanstrom, and the Olsson. Already more civilized than most of the suppressed humans of other lands, they accepted the wisdom of the Kaga and enacted a feudal system that endures today.

In the Wyldlands of Bal—where neither of the great powers of the last age had enjoyed success—humans fought beastly enuka and brutish calibans, matching savagery with savagery. Civilization rose in isolated city-states enslaved to bloodthirsty gods.

CREATION OF THE DOMINION

Even with the infusion of sorcerers' blood into their ruling caste, the nomadic tribes of Cordel found themselves at a disadvantage against the better-organized baronies of Nas and the spells and armies of Abaddon.

For centuries, they had been mercenaries for greater powers. Now, they found their own lands threatened. Individual khans found their forces—while more than adequate for striking at unsuspecting foes—too sparse and disorganized to stand against a determined assault. At best, they could fade into the desert and avoid battle. At worst, they were caught and killed or enslaved.

The nomads would have perished and disappeared from history were it not for the efforts of the first khagan of the Dominion, though the identity of this great chieftain has been lost to the sands of time—if it was ever known at all. The nomads of Cordel had no written tradition until much later. The only knowledge of the first khagan's life comes from the many and varied oral stories passed from generation to generation.

The khagan's customs did nothing to help confirm his identity. In the years leading up to his reign, he traveled amongst the tribes as a landless warrior. As unusual as his solitary lifestyle were his battle tactics—lightning strikes and short but intense magical assaults. While many khans of the Cordel tribes knew powerful magic, few had learned how to use it effectively. The first

khagan, though, blended matters magical and military to set up invincible ambushes, even when he and his allies were outnumbered ten-to-one. He would seem to appear from the very sands, then vanish in the night. For this, he was titled the Desert Shade.

The Desert Shade broke with the tradition of Cordel's humanoid tribes by dealing extensively with the region's large sasori enclave. This may explain the Dominion legends, which tell of him anticipating the plans of his enemies by his rare genius or, in some tales, by the gift of prophecy. Most modern scholars agree that his extraordinary foresight owed much to his intelligence network of sasori, who served him loyally in return for the first peace they'd had with humans since their mutual enslavement under the First Ones.

The barons of Nas and the Sorcerer-Kings of Abaddon loathed the Desert Shade. He displayed uncanny knowledge of their troop movements and most embarrassing secrets. To combat the rumors he spread to rally his people, they called him the King of Lies. Playing on age-old racial hatreds, they also called him "the human sasori." He embraced the name, saying he was a friend of the desert, not of any one of its peoples. The barons and Sorcerer-Kings threatened to wipe out any tribe that sheltered him, but the Desert Shade trained the tribes to fight back—and win.

After over a decade, he called for a council of the khans in Qijom, his secret city in the middle of the Cordel Desert. Before all the khans, he proclaimed himself khagan—khan among khans. The khans roared in acclamation, for he had led them to the only victories they had known in a generation. He named this collection of desert tribes and desert sorcerers, but not with the region's traditional name of Cordel. He named them the Dominion.

Johan Darre, a Nasian bard, was permitted to witness the council of khans and the khagan's coronation. Years later, he penned the only surviving record of the event. His tale, converted to the Imperial dating structure, places the event in 837 BU (Before Unification).

Concluding his dramatic chronicle, Darre wrote of the khagan: "He hides his face in desert robes at all times, but he is known to all by his voice, by his bearing, by his unmistakable presence. He is the first king of true men and his coming heralds a new age."

In the next five decades of the khagan's life, his people defeated more than a half-dozen armies from Abaddon and as many from Nas. Moreover, they pushed over the borders of both neighboring countries and seized two broad, fertile belts outside their desert homeland.

The khagan's military genius was matched only by his scholarship and statecraft. Taking the throne of a barbaric land, he gave his people the written language, a national identity, and a caste system that holds to this day. He organized the raiders into the Dammar, the shamans into the Khepri, and the casteless workers and merchants into the Rafik. He created the Sihr, the caste

of historians and scholars who implemented his written language.

THE COMING OF THE ARMANS

The rise of the Dominion further weakened the Sorcerer-Kings of Abaddon. Vulnerable, these last remnants of the ancient arcane empire were brought down by entirely new horde of barbarians. These barbarians were the Armans, seafaring raiders from the island of Ablis.

Though geographically remote from the fledgling barons of Nas, the Armans came from similar stock—much taller and bulkier than the other humans of Exodus; often fair-haired, always savage. Both Armans and Nasians, however, have denied this connection.

Living in isolated and forbidding climes, the Armans never labored under the First Ones' enslavement, and believe that they were the only free people among all humanoid. The Armans were uniquely ferocious—the inhabitants of the mainland's eastern coast spoke of the Armans as demons in human form: ruthless, cruel, fearless, and pitiless raiders. Even the Sorcerer-Kings paid off the Armans.

In 752 BU, the Armans did more than raid mainland Exodus. According to the sagas of the migrating Armans, their journey began with a prophecy. Grigori Vyskos, a shaman of the Kryszkas clan, had visions showing his people wiped from Ablis by “fires that walked like the sea,” but so too showing their descendants reigning gloriously on the mainland. The first prediction terrified the thralls and womenfolk, who remained behind while the raiding bands sought plunder in civilized lands. The latter vision fired the imagination of the thanes.

The clan's high thane, Vladimir Kryszkas, believed the shaman's warning and his promise. He rallied his raiders to invade and hold the mainland. By the first moon of 752 BU, he'd led his horde to Sametia and overcome the enclaves of plains tribesmen and the border outposts of the Sorcerer-Kings. Traveling swiftly, they sailed south from this colony, sacking northeastern Sorcerer-King cities and binding their arcane rulers with primitive, primal shamanic magic. After four moons, however, the Sorcerer-Kings rallied their legions and smashed the Arman invaders.

Vladimir fell back to Sametia; his people's prospects of empire looked bleak, and of survival little better. Grigori Vyskos, once hailed as a visionary, was labeled a fraud. He was executed on a midwinter's day of 752 BU, proclaiming to the last the truth of his visions.

Events bore out the shaman's prophecy. As the Kryszkas were hanging him, the island of Ablis erupted, its long-dormant volcanoes belching lava onto the mountain pastures of the Arman shepherds. Thousands died in the initial eruption. The rest abandoned Ablis in a mass migration.

Between 752 and 744 BU, five other Arman clans joined the migration: the Babinovichs, the Ivanovenas, the

Chapaevonas, the Dyakonoviks, and the Krestyanovskis. Thus, the great Arman migration concluded. They soon lost contact with those who stayed behind.

In 743 BU, the Sorcerer-Kings—overrun by Arman invaders and losing legions and lords in terrifying numbers—abandoned their entire coastline. Retreat proved a fatal mistake. The Armans smelled weakness from the gilded halls to the south, and like the lions the Sametians likened them to, the Armans pounced. Cities fell to the invading barbarians, one after the other.

In 740 BU, the legion of the port city of Galeathan cast their monarch from the walls and opened the gates. Vladimir Kryszkas, wiser since his mistaken execution of a prophet, took the city bloodlessly and kept his horde from sacking it. He opened the city to Arman trade and established himself as the new king. Seeing the Armans' generosity, other cities welcomed them as liberators from the tyranny of the Sorcerer-Kings.

By 737 BU, the six Arman hordes encircled the Sorcerer-Kings' ancient capital of Mureath. The siege outlasted the year. When the garrison sought to surrender, Xalthotan, the Sorcerer-King of Abaddon, slew every last person with his magic and staffed the walls with their animated corpses. He and his colleagues waged titanic magical battles against the Arman shamans, pitting ancient knowledge against elemental power. Even with their empire lost, the Sorcerer-Kings might have wiped out the Armans on that battlefield, but the Kaga, long troubled by the legacy of the First Ones, lent its immeasurable wisdom to the Arman shamans.

In 736 BU, the Kaga's secrets and the shamans' vastly superior numbers bought the Arman warriors enough time to storm the walls, cut their way through an army of undead and fouler deviltry, and break the Sorcerer-Kings' power forever. At last, Arman barbarians raised the head of Xalthotan, the last Sorcerer-King, proclaiming their mastery of all Abaddon.

THE FOUNDING OF THE CANEUS EMPIRE

The people of Nas concerned themselves with advancing their civilization. Nowhere else on the continent did the influence of the Kaga spread further than in this purely humanoid civilization, unburdened by the legacy of the First Ones.

With the rise of civilization, however, came new dangers. Men whose ancestors were chieftains now dreamed themselves kings. Men whose ancestors fought at the heads of burgeoning warrior-aristocrat hosts now commanded armies of professional soldiers without ever leaving their capitals. Far from the increasingly gilded cities of Nas's powerful families, the ceaseless snows ran red with the blood of knights, mercenaries, and peasant levies. To the dukes and merchants who ruled in Nas, sending a local knight to die alone on a hundred mercenary swords became another play on a chessboard.

Not all of the minor nobles and commoners shared this sentiment, however.

In 657 BU, during a particularly brutal border contest between Houses Brauner and Olsson, one such minor noble, Gregory Eland, found his patience taxed beyond its limits. Gregory, Baron of Eland, came from a long line of warriors; he traced his ancestry to the Cavian Empire. In the previous century, his proud heritage had been repeatedly disgraced. Because the barony of Eland was on the border between Brauner and Olsson territories, it became a battleground whenever the two dukes went to war.

In the time of Gregory Eland's great grandfather, the barony was captured by Duke Olsson's men; the Baron Eland accepted his new allegiance judiciously, keeping a calm and rational mind, and raised his sons as loyal vassals of House Olsson. Fifty years later, in 680 BU, Duke Olsson foisted a greater disgrace upon Eland by selling the barony, along with several of its neighbors, back to Duke Brauner in exchange for a temporary alliance against raiders from the Dominion. Thus, young Gregory grew up in vassalage to the lord of his ancestors, raised by parents and grandparents who had spent their whole lives serving that lord's hereditary foe.

Because of this conflicted background, neither Brauner nor Olsson placed much trust in the young Baron Eland. When hostilities between the houses inevitably resumed, Duke Reinhardt Brauner declined to give Gregory. Instead, he placed the baron and his retinue under a mercenary commander, an Arman raider called Ivan Harskolff. Baron Eland and his knights, along with the retinues of other local lords, were repeatedly thrown into the heat of the fighting—against men of similar background or against peasant levies—while the Duke's professional soldiers claimed the glory for one against-the-odds victory after another.

To make things worse, at Duke Brauner's orders, mercenary soldiers quartered in the castles of the local lords. The mercenaries showed no gratitude toward their unwilling hosts. They roistered, depleted winter stores, chased serving wenches, and beat servants. General Harskolff, quartered at the castle of Ravenspont south of Eland, did worse. He took a fancy to Baron Ravenspont's daughter, Liesel—Gregory Eland's betrothed—and demanded she be given to him as a concubine. When Baron Ravenspont refused, Harskolff killed him on the spot and locked Liesel in his quarters, while Harskolff's men put to the sword the Ravenspont bannermen in



attendance. Of the Ravenspont family, none survived; Liesel took her own life rather than submitting to Harskolff's cruel affections.

Gregory's younger brother, Chauncey, was a squire at Ravenspont. He broke away in the confusion and spurred his horse to his brother's lands, not heeding a crossbow bolt lodged in his shoulder. By the time he reached Eland Castle, Chauncey was feverish and nearly incoherent, but he managed to gasp his story to his brother before he fell unconscious.

Gregory called his knights and sent messengers to the surrounding baronies. The army descended on Ravenspont and assailed the walls. They found the mercenaries drunk and slew them to a man. Gregory Eland personally threw Harskolff from the castle walls. Gregory Eland's wrath did not die with this single rapacious mercenary, however. He turned his host against the remaining mercenaries, wiping them out before they could reorganize. This action did more than avenge the offenses done to the local folk, from serf to baron; it branded them traitors to Duke Brauner's service, and so bound them to Gregory.

Recognizing the sudden and inescapable bond between him and his host, Gregory marched them northeast. With Brauner's professional armies ringing the duchy's borders, Gregory's host reached the gates of the duke's capital, Nyssa, nearly unopposed. In the waning moon of 657 BU, Eland's band of knights and men-at-arms stormed the city walls, overwhelmed the duke's retinue, and seized Nyssa. Eland spared Reinhardt Brauner—in exchange for an oath of fealty. For a baron to thus turn the tables on his lord was unheard of, but Brauner could not do otherwise. Once Gregory Eland had a duke for a vassal, he ceased to be a mere baron.

In 656 BU, Brauner offered to crown Gregory King of Nas. To the shock of his enemies and retainers alike, Gregory refused, saying he would not squabble over a crown like the dukes had. He would not rule by taking the power of his rivals; he would restore the feudal system of old. Gregory crowned himself emperor and he called his domain Caneus, the Old Nas word for Union.

The other dukes did not take kindly to this upstart emperor and his meteoric rise. In short order, though,



ASHUR



CHENDAGRYN

Gregory defeated the armies from Houses Olsson and Hanstrom and imposed vassalage upon them.

Again, he spared the dukes, taking from them their autocratic power and an oath of fealty. Their knights and barons were reluctant to fight a man they saw as a liberator and eagerly pledged themselves to the renewed feudal order and the young Caneus Empire.

Duke Ludwig von Breit, the last of the independent dukes, invaded the lands of the defeated houses and incorporated their mercenary armies into his own. In 653 BU, von Breit's army, swollen with every imaginable type of mercenary—from Sametian horse archers to skirmishers from Bal—met the heavy cavalry of Emperor Gregory to fight what historians would later call the Battle of Caneus.

Three times, Gregory's host charged the professional soldiers of von Breit, and each time they were pushed back. With his army nearly halved and night fast approaching, the emperor took up his war banner and led a last, suicidal charge against the center of von Breit's army. The knights finally broke through, splitting the ducal forces. More importantly, they reached the caravan of treasures looted from Olsson and Hanstrom, with which von Breit intended to pay his mercenaries. Seeing their pay lost, most of those soldiers withdrew

from the battlefield, leaving the stunned, exhausted knights of Caneus the victors.

In late 653 BU, Gregory Eland was crowned emperor a second time in Baron von Breit's palace in Hadenburg. The Dominion and the Arman clans recognized his coronation.

THE SANGUINE COVENANT

The Sanguine Church existed in isolated communities in Nas for centuries before it exploded onto the stage during the rise of the Caneus Empire. What prompted its rise was the emperor's brother, Chauncey Eland, who had been sick, unable to recover from his wounds from the siege of Ravenspont. Motivated by a dream from the Sanguine Lord, a country priest named Lucius Horst met with the ill brother, and using blood magic he cleansed and healed Chauncey Eland's wounds.

In 654 BU, Emperor Gregory summoned Lucius to Nyssa. The emperor commanded Lucius to restore life to his dead betrothed, Liesel Ravenspont. Lucius agreed, and a short time later, Liesel returned from the beyond and became the first empress. Rewarded for his services, Lucius became Imperial Confessor and spent the next few years scribing rites that changed the Sanguine Church into the Sanguine Covenant.



DEMA-MA



FREJA ILYANOVKA

THE MAD EMPEROR

In 564 BU, Vincent Eland was crowned. His forty-year reign was marked by brutal purges, repression, and forced conversion of the populace to the Sanguine Covenant. His brutal reign ended in open rebellion and his death.

Archprelate Jung—realizing that without a trustworthy Eland emperor, the empire would descend into anarchy and feuding baronies once again—decided he would try to replicate the feat of the priest Lucius.

Jung realized he might fail. However, unlike Lucius, he had the mortal remains of the emperor's purged cousin, Prince Albrecht Eland. Jung's gambit paid off better than he could have imagined. He restored Albrecht to life, crowned him, and turned the people's fear of the Sanguine Covenant into faith.

Nonetheless, the Covenant was forever changed by the terrible reign of Vincent I and the reforms of Archprelate Jung. It remained an armed church, ever wary of heresy that might plunge it back into darkness. So too the Covenant kept armed against pagans and unbelievers,

and though it no longer persecuted them within the Caneus Empire, it did not look kindly on them in other lands.

THE ARMAN PROTECTORATE

By 500 BU, the Armans had completely settled into civilized life, their clan leaders now sedentary, autocratic princes. The strong mercenary culture that sent thousands of Armans to fight wars for foreign lords kept them busy and rich in their homeland principdoms.

The Armans had kept their splendor for years by raiding Abaddon; Abaddon had kept its splendor through mercenary gold earned in foreign wars—both of which were running thin. Any more, raids into Sametia and the Dominion hardly paid for themselves.

In 492 BU, the khagan invaded the lands of Prince Babinovich, imposing a steep ransom. The Armans took two years to retaliate. The khagan outmaneuvered them, waited for the Armans to split before falling on the host.

Convinced by a hermit worshipping the Sanguine Covenant, Prince Nicola Kryszkas and Princess Olga Babinovich fought the khagan to an impasse at the Battle of the Rain of Blood. After the battle, all three rulers made peace and accepted the word of the hermit.



GRAAL



KARISSA

Returning home, the two princes found that their former ally, Prince Josef Chapaevonas, had taken over their lands and granted them to his own retainers. In the civil war that followed, Prince Nicola defeated his opponents with the help of the khagan and the Sanguine Covenant. Victorious, Nicola was crowned Tsar of the Arman Protectorate.

THE CONFEDERATION OF THE WYLDLANDS

The Brotherhood of Khayne was a savage sect for a savage land. Atop step pyramids crimson with the blood of human sacrifices, its adherents offered up gruesome offerings to their god. For centuries, the worship of Khayne was limited to the cannibal tribes of the deep jungle and the city-state of Xehitoch in northeastern Bal; other sects, only slightly less bloodthirsty but far less ambitious, ruled other walled cities hidden in the jungle.

In 382 BU, Euhudi, high priestess of Khayne, saw favorable omens in the intestines of a sacrificial victim. She believed, perhaps rightly, that Khayne had chosen to spread his cult across all of Bal, and that the city of Xehitoch was destined to lead the way.

As Euhudi was both the spiritual leader of Xehitoch and the concubine of its war leader, Prince Xoltec, her words fired the city's imagination. Xoltec gathered an army of warriors and blood mages, made pacts with the

Khayne-worshipping cannibal tribes, and set off to win prisoners and glory.

Xoltec and Euhudi's army swept over several unsuspecting neighbors before anyone realized the danger. Finally, in 380 BU, the cities of Naphil and Baargon, alerted by their allies among the enuka beastmen, joined forces to bring the Brotherhood army to battle. Darai, war leader of Naphil, commanded the coalition host.

The armies met south of Baargon. Darai arrayed the core of his in the clearing, keeping the rest of his army hidden to disguise its size. Xoltec threw the brunt of his force against this line, expecting it to fold as others had, but the Baargon infantry and Arman mercenaries held the line. At the same time, Darai sent enuka scouts to fall upon the Xehitoch army's flanks. The Brotherhood fell back in disarray, thinking they were under attack by a larger force. During the retreat, Prince Xoltec was slain and Euhudi was captured.



KATLAN BREDJ HUELTA



LONGSHADOW

In accordance with Wyldlands custom, the captured men of Xehitoch were brought to the victors' cities as sacrifices. As a priestess, Euhudi would be ransomed back to Xehitoch, but she refused. Believing Xehitoch had failed Khayne, she chose to stay behind and join with the victorious Darai.

Euhudi became Darai's mistress, then his queen, ruling at his side in Naphil for the next decade. She integrated elements of Khaynite worship into the bloody practices of the Naphil priesthood, manipulating their rituals to reflect the cult of her native city.

In 371 BU, Darai died without a clear heir; Euhudi, his queen, had never given him any children. His lesser wives bickered amongst themselves to crown their own children, but Euhudi set herself up as regent and arbiter for the warring heirs. She played Naphil's society against itself.

In 369 BU, only one candidate remained: Darai's son Ordoa. Euhudi embraced Ordoa as the rightful heir and crowned him king of Naphil on a throne made from the bones of his rivals—in the name of Khayne.

Ordoa did not care what god ruled his soul as long as he ruled the country. Euhudi had so successfully instilled Brotherhood practices into the native cults of Naphil that it hardly changed for the common citizens. Again high

priestess and lover of a king, Euhudi turned her gaze to neighboring lands.

In 366 BU, Naphil invaded its former ally Baargon. For the second time, an army acting at Euhudi's behest approached Baargon. And for the second time it faced the shield wall of its temple guards and southern mercenaries.

As Euhudi built her powerbase in Naphil, an Arman mercenary named Lavrenty Roskoff claimed the crown of Baargon. Roskoff led the city's defense against his former allies. He was a canny and charismatic fighter, but highly conventional.

Euhudi remembered Darai's battle plan at the previous Battle of Baargon. She advised Ordoa to place his slave-soldiers in his center and to sweep his elite warriors around Roskoff's left flank. Ordoa followed her advice and executed the plan flawlessly. Only a handful of mercenaries and Baargon warriors escaped to the jungle. Its army destroyed, the city surrendered.

Ordoa and Euhudi did not stop at Baargon. Two more city-states, including the latter's native Xehitoch, fell to the pair's rapidly swelling host before the end of 365 BU. The high priestess dedicated each victory to Khayne with thousands of sacrifices. Most of the eastern Wyldlands fell to the Brotherhood. The feuding cities of the west looked askance at this growing empire.



MARKUS SMITH



MILKA BRONISŁAW

In 357 BU, in the city of Reis, the leaders of free Bal met with ambassadors from the southern empires. The free cities of Bal united under Prince Ataulpa Gazsi of Reis and planned a common defense against the Brotherhood.

Late in 357 BU, the armies met for the first time. Recognizing that his men did not have scouts as capable as their foes, Ataulpa Gazsi cleared a swathe of jungle a mile across and three miles wide. Rivers flanked his position and cliffs backed it. The outnumbered Reis army could not escape from this position—exactly as Ataulpa wanted. A veteran, he knew the fearsome reputation of the Brotherhood would send his men running long before he wanted to quit the field. By forcing the Brotherhood into the open to stand and fight, he made it a contest of wills and fighting skill rather than morale and stealth.

The armies met as Ataulpa intended. Brotherhood slave-soldiers charged across the river first, suffering ruinous casualties from the short bows and javelins of the Reis army. By the time they reached Ataulpa's lines, they were almost completely wiped out. Behind them came the shock troops of Euhudi's cult, the half-giants of Naphil, and the prince of Naphil's own bodyguard.

This block crashed against Ataulpa's center while cannibal savages harried his flanks. Had the Confederate army been able to flee, it surely would have broken, but trapped as they were, they had no choice but to fight and die with their prince.

Ataulpa's panther warriors did not fight like the Arman-taught heavy infantry of Baargon. They danced about the slower Naphil elites, leaping on their backs and slashing their tendons with sharp-edged war clubs.

Ordoa fell, covered with panther warriors. His two sons were slain, one cut down by Ataulpa himself. With the loss of their leader, the Brotherhood panicked. The Naphil stood their ground, dying to the last man over their ruler's body, but the cannibals and slave-soldiers broke for the river.

Euhudi realized that Khayne's temporal realm rested on her. Calling on the blood sorcery of Khayne, she formed crimson elementals that towered over the battlefield. The elementals crashed like a wave over her allies and surged toward the Reis army—and stopped.

Wise in the timeless secrets of the Kaga, Ataulpa's mystics battled the bloody priestess's will. The blood



elementals sank back into the river, dragging the screaming Brotherhood army to hell with them.

Ataulpa reconquered the east in a lightning campaign. He was also named the first imperator of the Reis Confederacy in 356 BU. Scholars speculate on Euhudi's fate, for the high priestess of Khayne vanished after the Battle of the River of the Dead. Her cult went underground, spread by madmen and cannibals throughout the Reis Confederacy and eventually to Unthara.

DAWN OF TOTAL WAR

By 350 BU, four great empires reigned in the Wyldlands of Bal, the ice fields of Nas, the desert of Cordel, and the hills of Abaddon. These empires looked to Sametia, home to scattered tribes of nomads and barbarians, as the logical place to expand. Sametia was more fertile than Cordel or Nas. The Arman Protectorate needed more land. The Reis Confederacy sought to expand its own empire. From 360 to 290 BU, skirmishes erupted between the empires and natives on the plains of Sametia every day. Each empire probed the will of its neighbor to keep or expand its holding in Sametia.

In 289 BU, the Dominion escalated the conflict by an astounding feat of magic. Magical theory advanced rapidly under the Dominion's caste system with the development of windsailing ships, elegant sloops

designed to cruise the skies like ordinary ships did the seas. Combining the powers of more than a hundred sorcerers and knowledge gleaned from study of the Kaga, a local khan raised an entire city into the sky, making it a floating, nigh-impregnable fortress and base of power. This new city was named Anidem.

Tsar Vasiliy Kryszkas demanded the Dominion surrender the secrets of this invention to its rivals. When Khagan Malik Ibn Hassan declined the request, Vasiliy declared war. Although it began in Sametia, the conflict spilled over to the entire Dominion-Protectorate border. Both sides fielded multiple armies, playing a tactical game on a grand scale. Old traditions of single combat, the tactic of the massed charge, the very nature of military force—all this changed rapidly.

When a Protectorate army reached Anidem in 288 BU, it unveiled its own innovation. Gigantic, crude ironforged war engines bombarded the floating city, while lighter-than-air balloons lifted troops through Dominion windsailing vessels. The attack was repulsed, but several districts of Anidem crashed to the ground.



NATASHA ILYANOVIK



OLEG ILYANOVIK

The Dominion retaliated by cursing the Protectorate countryside with endless night. Crops withered, animals shied, and peasants cowered. Tsar Vasiliy, unable to break the curse or draw the Caneus Empire into the fight, agreed to an uneasy peace. Victorious, the khagan lifted the curse.

From 287 to 263 BU, the empires restricted their jockeying for position to Sametia. The Reis Confederacy and the Caneus Empire came to blows after a group of Covenant missionaries were sacrificed in a Confederate city. The Canean knights launched the crusade that the Confederacy's first imperator had hoped for a century earlier.

It quickly became apparent that the Caneans' advantages—manpower, armor, and heavy cavalry—were useless in the sweltering jungles of Bal. Thousands of Canean knights died before engaging the armies of the Confederacy. Worse, they brought jungle diseases back with them, plunging the Sanguine Covenant's clergy into a constant battle against illness. Archprelate Karl Edegard proclaimed that these diseases were divine punishment for the empire's overreach and cautioned against further invasions.

Confederate armies retaliated in 251 BU and again in 235. These invasion forces proved as ill-equipped to fight in frigid Nas as their foes were in the Wyldlands.

The two empires declared Koryth a neutral zone, where neither would enforce their rule without the other's consent.

Though the wars of this century were relatively brief, the empires realized just how devastating they could be. More soldiers had died than had perished in any of the empires' wars of unification.

THE DOMINION - PROTECTORATE WARS

In 203 BU, Dimitri Dyakonoviks, the ambitious second son of the prince of the last independent Arman principedom, seduced Ilyana Kryszkas, the eldest daughter of the tsar. Rather than allowing her dishonor to become public, Tsar Pieter Kryszkas consented to the wedding. Almost immediately, Dimitri pressed his claim on his ancestral lands, urging the tsar to place him on the Dyakonoviks throne in place of his father and brother.

Prince Lavrenty Dyakonoviks, Dimitri's father, raged when he heard of his ungrateful child's demands. Rather than go to the tsar, who had no intention of getting involved, Lavrenty appealed to the Dominion for military protection.

Khagan Malik Ibn Hassan spent his early reign easing the tensions between the two countries; he had even



ORSIA WENTWORTH



ONISHI YUMI

stayed at the tsar's palace for an extended visit a few years before Dimitri pressed his claim. Unfortunately, Hassan was on his deathbed. His grandson and heir, Ahmed, was educated at Anidem and hated the Armans for damaging the floating city. A Dominion army under the crown prince marched to the help of Prince Lavrenty.

To Tsar Pieter, this was an invasion and a betrayal of the peace treaty. The tsar's army marched to the border. A second army, jointly led by Dimitri Dyakonoviks and Tsarevich Nicola, assembled on the border of the Dyakonoviks principedom.

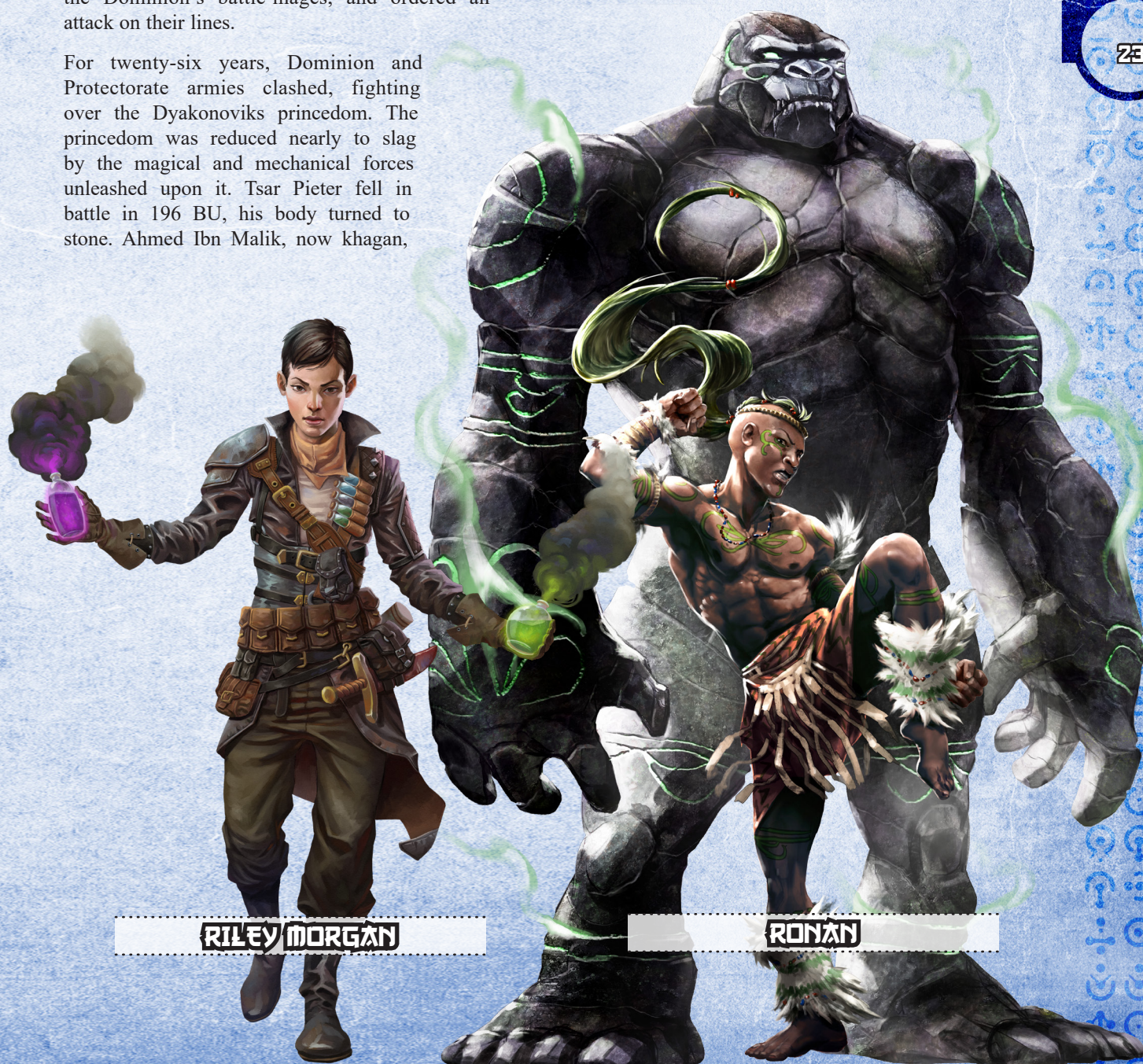
The conflict was later called the First, or Lesser, Dominion–Protectorate War. The first volley was fired in 202 BU, when a freak lightning storm paralyzed a company of the Protectorate's ironforged juggernauts at the Dyakonoviks border. Dimitri Dyakonoviks blamed the Dominion's battle-mages, and ordered an attack on their lines.

For twenty-six years, Dominion and Protectorate armies clashed, fighting over the Dyakonoviks principedom. The principedom was reduced nearly to slag by the magical and mechanical forces unleashed upon it. Tsar Pieter fell in battle in 196 BU, his body turned to stone. Ahmed Ibn Malik, now khagan,

had the statue of the old warrior placed in his palace as a trophy.

Tsar Nicola IV, hard-pressed by the Dominion and enraged by their treatment of his father, instituted one of the most controversial military programs in all Exodus by founding the Protectorate Peacekeepers. The Peacekeepers were an elite regiment formed from the finest Arman youth, both men and women, and their service was for life. Chosen as children, they were trained in a secret facility in the heart of the Protectorate, where grueling mental and physical tests honed them into living weapons. This was a force recruited to win all wars.

General Alexei Brushkov, the foremost warrior and field commander of the Protectorate, opposed the founding of the Peacekeepers. A highly successful and clever



RILEY MORGAN

RONAN

general, Brushkov had defeated the Dominion time and again. He became increasingly frustrated with the war, lamenting the gloryless, impersonal slaughter over which he presided so masterfully. Brushkov longed for bygone days when, he felt, honor and courage won battles, not numbers.

In 184 BU, Brushkov resigned his commission. The Protectorate was horrified to see the general leave, taking with him his most accomplished lieutenants. They vanished into the Sametian wilderness ahead of the inevitable demands for their return, dead or alive. The Protectorate sued for peace with the Dominion, conceding large tracts of rich farmland, including most of the contested territories on the west bank of the Abaddon River.

THE JANISSARIES

After resigning his commission, Brushkov and his retinue disappeared into the wilds of Koryth. There, in 182 BU, he founded the Janissaries: an order of warrior-ascetics dedicated to no king or country, serving only their code of honor and their consciences.

Brushkov hoped to attract the greatest military minds of all four empires, bring an end to imperial wars, and return Exodus to an age when knights and barons settled their disputes with honor rather than slaving for a distant master. He adapted much of the Janissary philosophy from the writings of Gregory Eland, a man he greatly respected. None of the empires recognized the new order.

They settled in the ruined fortress of Aremykh. For centuries, this ancient citadel had lain empty because the locals thought it haunted by the spirits of its former inhabitants. In the depths of Aremykh, the Janissaries found mental echoes from the Age of Mind and Magic and, through sheer force of will, mastered those energies. To their incredible martial disciplines the Janissaries added mental powers not seen on Exodus for a thousand years.

Psions or no, the wider world was not ready for the Janissaries' ideas, and their order remained obscure—a whispered threat to the great empires, a secret hope to many of their subjects. The Janissaries might have remained a footnote in Exodus history, a movement that rose and fell with its first grandmaster. But they didn't.

THE TWILIGHT WAR

Tsar Nicola IV died in 158 BU, passing imperial power to his sister Ilyana and her husband, Dimitri, whose



SHANI BENNU



SUSAN KINNON

ambitions had sparked the war between the Dominion and Protectorate. Immediately the war resumed.

Ilyana reigned until her death in 145 BU, after which her son took the throne as Tsar Georgy II. Georgy II modernized the Protectorate and reorganized the army. He laid the “gearlines”—vast arcane-mechanical constructions that propelled trams of men and material across the Protectorate—and sponsored the construction of a massive imperial university in Mureath. While these civil-works projects became marvels of Exodus, they showed the Dominion that the Protectorate was recovering from the war, becoming dangerous once again.

In 119 BU, the Dominion ambassador to the Reis Confederacy was murdered. Blame fell on a member of the Protectorate ambassador’s staff. The Protectorate refused to surrender an Arman citizen to the notably harsh justice of the Confederacy, promising instead to try the suspected assassin in an Arman court.

Neither Dominion nor Confederacy considered this an acceptable solution. On the eve of the suspect’s

extradition, Imperatrix Chanui of the Reis Confederacy gave the Dominion permission to extradite the man. Dominion and Confederate troops stormed the Arman embassy and dragged the suspected assassin from his countrymen.

The Protectorate protested and threatened war. Imperatrix Chanui complied, sending the captive back in five separate caravans. With the fifth, she attached a letter informing the tsar that he would make no demands of her country, and that crimes committed there would be dealt with by the Confederacy. Receiving the Imperatrix’s message, the Arman Protectorate declared war. Nineteen days after the declaration reached Reis, the Dominion launched an attack on the weakened Arman flank, preventing the Protectorate from marching into Sametia.

Because the Reis Confederacy was hundreds of miles from the Protectorate, Tsar Georgy focused on the Dominion. The Second, or Greater, Dominion–Protectorate War began. As with its predecessor, this conflict proved indecisive, a seemingly endless grapple of Arman warcraft and artifice against Dominion mobility and magic.

In 83 BU, the Reis Confederacy annexed the Sametian colonies of the Protectorate and occupied the Dominion’s colonies. Neither of the southern powers could afford to send significant forces to protect their holdings in



TANE

TWELFTH BLADE

the contested lands. The Caneus Empire engaged the Confederate army in Sametia.

In 80 BU, pressured by the need for aid against the Protectorate and their inability to hold their Sametian colonies, the Dominion also declared against the Caneans.

This marked the beginning of the conflict Exodus would know as the Twilight War. It would be the longest war since the War of Mind and Magic, and every day introduced new and more horrible ways to fight and die. At its peak around 50 BU, the Twilight War claimed more than ten thousand lives daily.

The Confederacy introduced war beasts of fearsome and unnatural aspect, twisted aberrations created by ritual magic. The Caneans countered by sending super-heavy knights that fought fearlessly. The Protectorate fielded bigger ironforged juggernauts that crushed whole divisions under their gear-like wheels. In response, the Dominion superheated the juggernauts with fire magic, cooking the crews and exploding them into fleshy shrapnel.

From the fires of the Twilight War emerged many dangers of modern Exodus, including magically engineered monsters, spells, and weapons. These dangers roam the wilderness to this day.

PATH TO UNIFICATION

In 15 BU, the Arman Protectorate and the Dominion signed a peace treaty, and their armies stood down.

Tsar Dimitri II and Khagan Rashid Ibn Fasan met in the oft-contested floating city of Anidem to sign the treaty. Both countries remained on a war footing, though, defending their northern borders against Canean and Confederate aggression.

The Caneus Empire and the Reis Confederacy came later to the war. Boasting larger populations than their rivals, they saw no reason to end the conflict. They pressed on where the Dominion and the Protectorate faltered.

In 5 BU, a massive Reis army crossed into the Koryth neutral zone, made of a hundred thousand soldiers and ten thousand monsters backed by ritual blood magic. The Confederacy was certain their army would reach Nyssa and force an end to the war.

The Caneus Empire's main army was in Sametia harrying the eastern front, so only forty thousand warriors—mostly knights of the local baronies—met the Confederate army.

The armies met in the shadow of the Aremykh fortress. From their looming citadel, the Janissaries emerged and arrayed for battle. The Caneans first took these men for reinforcements and welcomed them, but the Janissaries had not emerged from their citadel to take sides. One thousand Janissaries arrayed for battle against forty times their number on one side and a hundred times on the other.

When the dust cleared, hardly a Janissary had fallen, and both defender and invader were in full retreat. Magic—from the Covenant priests in the Caneus army, and from the blood mages of the Reis army—fizzled, stopped by the Janissaries' unrivaled mental powers.

Grandmaster Randal Yearby, Brushkov's chosen successor, delivered an ultimatum to both commanders: "Stop the Twilight War or the Janissaries will stop it for



you!” Having just watched the warrior-ascetics break two armies, the commanders were quite receptive. The armies withdrew from Koryth, taking a Janissary to present the peace proposal.

In Nyssa, Empress Constance Eland, acting as regent for her young son Desmond, wanted nothing of the enforced peace. The dukes, wiser in the ways of war and realizing how close they had come to disaster, advised her to play along with the Janissaries—at least as long as it served the empire’s purpose.

In Reis, Emperor Chaqua Gazsi proved more receptive. Their army’s defeat had shaken the Confederacy; many city-states were nearly depopulated, having lost generations of their young men, and others were on the verge of rebellion.

In 4 BU, the rulers of the major empires traveled to Aremyhk. At the Janissaries’ invitation, the leaders of dozens of independent principalities, tribes, duchies, and city-states joined them. After intense negotiation, all signed the Treaty of Aremyhk, ending the Twilight War and returning the borders to those present at the start of the war.

Grandmaster Yearby faced a momentous decision. The Janissaries had been founded to fight against monolithic governments and work to return to simpler, less centralized times. Yearby knew that the great lords would never accept such a proposal; he also knew the Janissaries could not dismantle the four empires by force. But Yearby saw a way to put an end to the age of total war: he would have to push for the opposite of his mentor’s vision. He decided to try.

Calling on the assembled dignitaries, Yearby proposed they go beyond a single treaty and instead form an alliance that could another Twilight War, reminding them that their countries could not survive another such conflict. And so for years, monarchs, statesmen, and soldiers argued, debated, threatened, insulted, spied, worried, and planned—from 4 BU to the inauguration of the Imperial Alliance in 1 AU (After Unification).

Eventually, the Imperial Alliance took on its familiar, modern form: an inner council consisting of the senior legates from the four imperial families; the Imperial Senate consisting of forty legates, one from each of the major noble houses; and a series of imperial assemblies that put the senate’s recommendations into law within each region, subject to the approval of the local monarch. The grandmaster of the Janissaries reported directly to the inner council and put his order at the Imperial Senate’s disposal, granting the Senate’s suggestions both force and respect.

At the insistence of the southern empires, the Sanguine Covenant was recognized as the official religion of the Imperial Alliance. All nations of the Alliance, from the strongest to the weakest, agreed to treat an attack on one of their number as an attack on all. All agreed to permit the Janissaries unrestricted passage through their

lands, to discontinue the use of forbidden magic, and to negotiate any serious grievances through the Imperial Senate, moderating the possibility of sparking war anew.

THE FIRST YEARS (1 - 40 AU)

In 1 AU, the Imperial Senate held its first session, blessed by the archprelate and prelates of Qijom and Mureath and watched over by the rulers of four empires. Exodus seemed poised to enter a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. But a threat waited.

For centuries, the Brotherhood of Khayne had lurked in the depths of the Wyldlands of Bal or Unthara. It now whispered its dark doctrines amongst the decadent, thrill-seeking children of the aristocracy. With the Imperial Alliance’s formal imposition of the Sanguine Covenant, the Brotherhood found many more adherents: enemies of the organized faith of Exodus who would turn to any cult—however bizarre or depraved—that would fight back against the Covenant.

In 12 AU, the Covenant churches were struck by a terrorist attack, the first of many to come. The Nyssa Massacre leveled the west wing of the Sanguine Cathedral in Nyssa, killing the archprelate and hundreds of worshippers. The attack was perpetrated with blood magic, so Covenant investigators traced it to the Brotherhood of Khayne. Prior to the attack, the Covenant had reluctantly tolerated the old pagan religions. Afterwards, the Covenant became increasingly militant, forming the Order of the Purifiers to hunt down and destroy enemies of the faith.

In 19 AU, an expedition sponsored by the Arman Protectorate traveled to Ablis. What they discovered is not known, but the Imperial Alliance blockaded the island. That blockade is still in effect today.

In 26 AU, the Caneus Empire and the Dominion came close to a major dynastic marriage when Erwin Eland, a senator and cousin of the emperor, married Nadja Ibn Al’alim, daughter of the khagan. This, however, was a match of two young nobles distant from the throne; before they and their children would have stood to inherit either throne, more than a dozen claimants would need to perish. Their son, Njal Eland, would instead become the chief legate of the Imperial Senate, leaving the politics of both of his homelands.

In 31 AU, another shock rocked Exodus. The cavians, the rat-like humanoids thought annihilated in the War of Mind and Magic, returned. Their return was subtle; for nearly a decade, their presence remained a whispered rumor, first in the Caneus Empire.

In 36 AU, the nomad clans of Sametia sought representation in the Imperial Alliance. This would be the first major addition to the Alliance. The senators, whose countries had a vested interest in keeping Sametia open for colonization, rejected the proposal out of hand, declaring the clan leadership insufficiently organized to maintain an imperial assembly.

In response, the angry clans launched raids against their neighbors. Janissaries were sent to pacify the situation. The presence of the psychic agents cowed the clan leadership, stopping their raids.

In 38 AU, the Janissary Kasim Dammar made contact with what he described as a “severed cavian,” an outcast from the race’s psionic hive mind. Kasim’s discovery paved the way for the reintegration of the cavian race into Exodus, and by 50 AU cavians moved about openly in major cities. Neither the severed cavians nor the members of their racial mind shed any light on where they had spent the last millennium or how their race had undergone their radical and disturbing transformation.

THE ALLIANCE IS TESTED (40 – 60 AU)

In 44 AU, tensions again flared along the Dominion–Protectorate border. On the Arman side, several prominent members of the Forgers’ Guild—the engineers of the country’s mighty arcane-mechanical devices—were assassinated; the same fate befell a group of magical scholars in the Dominion.

For the first time in half a century, troops massed at the border, close enough to eye each other across the invisible line between nations. The Imperial Alliance immediately sent Janissaries as mediators. They were

to meet with representatives of the Dominion and Protectorate governments in the floating city of Anidem, hoping to call to mind the last treaty signed there. Unfortunately, the pair died when their windsailing vessel crashed en route to Anidem. Further investigation revealed sabotage.

Tsar Ivan Kryszkas III immediately blamed the Dominion. The Janissaries died on a Dominion ship, traveling to a Dominion city, within Dominion borders. The tsar’s words might have swayed the Imperial Senate had he not chosen to back them with immediate force. The Arman Protectorate launched a punitive action against its neighbor.

The khagan, Yusef Ibn Al’alim, drew a large fleet of Protectorate flyers into the desert beyond Anidem. He let the city’s massive magical cannon pound them while his swifter windsailing ships cut off their retreat. The Fourth Battle of Anidem ended with a total Dominion victory, but the war continued. As the Protectorate air forces crumpled, their ground troops broke through the Dominion line and surged into the Cordel Desert, plundering the rich land on the west bank of the Abaddon River.

The war escalated too swiftly for the shocked Imperial Senate to stop it. Partisans of the Dominion and the Protectorate both insisted the Senate refrain from



FIRST ONES: ANEISHI



FIRST ONES: EXODITE

intervening. Rather than sending an army of Canean and Confederate troops under Janissary command, the Senate dispatched a single Janissary to investigate the matter. Jakatka Bisir was a new breed of Janissary, as much detective as warrior or peacekeeper. Rather than announcing his presence in the region, he moved in disguise through battlefields and ballrooms, unearthing secrets with his telepathic abilities.

In 47 AU, Jakatka returned to the Senate. After a closed session of the Senate's inner circle and a swift, decisive message to the tsar and the khagan, the Third Protectorate–Dominion War ended in another stalemate. Bisir was lauded for his craft and heroism, but neither he nor the Senate nor the belligerents revealed so much as a hint of the contents of his report. In light of his success, Jakatka Bisir became the template for the modern Janissary: secretive, observant, and efficient. He trained dozens of apprentice Janissaries in his methods.

In 59 AU, the Imperial Senate elevated Bisir to left master of Janissaries, a post second only to grandmaster. Immediately before his investiture, however, Bisir disappeared from Aremykh.

THE WORLD CHANGES (60–80 AU)

In 61 AU, a meteor crashed into the island of Unthara. Most of the Imperial Alliance considered it an unimportant astronomical event. In the Reis Confederacy, though, it was met with horror. Imperatrix Sepatha Gazsi's most

trusted advisor, the Bronze Sage, had predicted the meteor's fall—and that it would unleash a monstrous plague upon Exodus.

The Bronze Sage also prophesized that the newborn princess Lolani would bring the end of the Confederacy. With customary fatalism, the people of Reis accepted the albino child as their future ruler, even as they hated and feared her for what they saw as their inevitable destruction.

In 62 AU, to soothe the Confederate leadership, the Senate dispatched a Janissary to Unthara. They expected to lay the imperatrix's fears to rest but only confirmed them. The Janissary discovered that the people of Unthara were being infected by a quicksilver-like ooze, an alien parasite that used their bodies and controlled their minds. The infection proved incurable and inevitably fatal, turning the victim into a breeding ground for the organism. Worse, the entity or entities acted at the direction of some malevolent will.

Fearing an outbreak of these “quickslayers,” the Imperial Alliance quarantined Unthara, convinced that any release would destroy all humanoid life on mainland Exodus. The Senate worried that one or more quickslayers had already slipped through their net, but could find no proof.

Another threat came from the tribes of Sametia, which had grown since the end of the Twilight War, honing their fighting skills as mercenaries and partisans. Rebuffed from “civilized” Exodus, they embraced barbarism and united under a code of untrammelled might and savagery. Calling themselves the Janus Horde, they fought amongst themselves for position, but fought all others for vengeance, glory, and plunder.



FIRST ONES: KHAYNITE



FIRST ONES: KOBURA SOBEKA

In 69 AU, Thais—who traced her ancestry to calibans, giants, and stranger, stronger beasts—proved herself the most brutal and powerful leader in all the Horde. She defeated Jangai Zhar, the first war chief, and declared herself warrior queen of all Sametia. Under her banner and iron fist, the Janus Horde began coordinated raids on its neighbors, growing in force with every victory.

In 70 AU, Sametia saw the first appearance of the enigmatic man called the Lawgiver. He appeared as a simple beggar in the colonies of the great empires. Wherever he passed, the sick were cured, the lame healed, and the weak given strange and terrible powers. The Lawgiver bore the Lazarus Brand, a power hitherto unknown on Exodus—a power even the wisdom of the Kaga could not explain. When the Imperial Senate sought to question him, he vanished to beyond even Janissary investigators, only to reappear in the cities of the great empires as inexplicably as he had disappeared.

In 79 AU, a Janissary infiltrated Unthara, now the domain of the quickslavers, and came face-to-face with the alien plague's master: Xon. His reemergence decades after his demise, with a menace even greater

than his magical abilities at his command, worried the Confederacy.

PROSPERITY AND TENSIONS (80–90 AU)

Beginning in 80 AU, a royal match far closer to the apex of power appeared possible. Bial, Mercy, Cassandra, and Sienna—the four children of Desmond Eland, Emperor of the Caneus Empire—were all educated at the famed Sihr Academy in the Dominion capital, Qijom. During their stay, the four became extremely close to the young heir to the khaganate, Malik Ibn Al'alim.

Princes Bial and Malik, their ages and interests similar, hunted, wrestled, and sparred like brothers, becoming far closer than Malik was with his own brother, the cunning, scholarly Nasser. The Canean princesses Mercy and Cassandra took an even greater interest in the Dominion's heir.

In 82 AU, Princess Mercy Eland arrived in Qijom. Ranked among Exodus's greatest beauties, she quickly won Prince Malik's affections. The two were as



FIRST ONES: KROCA SOBEKA

inseparable as decorum allowed, spending almost all their spare moments together.

In 84 AU, Princess Cassandra joined her sister in Qijom, and the younger Eland princess also fell madly in love with Malik. A bright girl groomed to become the executor of the Caneus Empire's imperial assembly, Cassandra soon lost interest in her study of statecraft and became obsessed with winning the future khagan away from her sister. Her obsession was dismissed by all as a girlish fancy, harmless and passing.

The same year, Prince Bial returned to the Caneus Empire to begin the centuries-old trials that would prove him worthy of the throne of Gregory Eland. A traditionalist, Bial insisted on fulfilling the trials' in their original form: tests of cunning and martial skill that would prove his worth—or kill him. Bial decided to take his trials in the Wyldlands of Bal, for which the Reis Confederacy granted special permission.

In 85 AU, Prince Bial arrived in Reis to begin his preparations. But he soon found himself distracted by another heir, Princess Lolani. With a dire prophecy

hovering over her, Lolani was all but ignored by her own family and subjects, so she was shocked when the foreign prince addressed her. Bial became the first and only friend Lolani ever had. Though a loner and survivor by nature, she clung to the foreign prince like a lifeline, delighted with the attention. Because Bial was unfamiliar with the customs of the Confederacy, the accursed albino princess showed him how to navigate Confederate politics.

With all these joinings, only the Arman Protectorate would remain independent. The newly crowned Tsarina Anayanka harbored feelings for Nasser Ibn Al'alim, the khagan prince's younger brother. A union between two such cunning politicians could have ended the hostility between Dominion and Protectorate. The Protectorate faced its own difficulties with the increasingly powerful Janus Horde, and the Imperial Senate proved slow to render aid.

In 86 AU, Bial began his trials. His parents hoped to preside over two imperial weddings: Bial's to Lolani, and Mercy's to Malik. Had both gone forward, the Caneus Empire's imperial family would have ruled three-fifths of Exodus without shedding a single drop of blood. But Bial was injured during his trials, mauled by a great beast of the Wyldlands. Worse, he fell into a feverish state from which the clerics of the Sanguine Covenant could not rouse him. Suspicion fell on the Brotherhood of Khayne.

In 87 AU, Before the Caneus Empire could obtain a cure or vengeance for its heir, an assassin struck at Emperor Desmond and Empress Abigail. The attacker wielded a strange dark power, and even the Kaga could not explain what black art took the lives of the Canean ruler and his wife. With the emperor dead and Bial feverish, the nobles of the Caneus Empire declared Mercy the new empress. Mercy and Malik pushed back the announcement of their betrothal.

Immediately after Mercy was crowned, Bial's fever subsided. He awoke to find his parents dead, his throne occupied, and his beloved Lolani's country suspected of the devilry that had struck him down. Some might have risen in rebellion, but Bial was content with his lot and worked to ease the tensions between the Caneus Empire and the Reis Confederacy. Bial and Lolani were unable to meet again.



LOCARI

EXODUS

CENTER OF THE MULTIVERSE

Diameter: $\times 1$; **Mass:** $\times 1$; **Gravity:** $\times 1$

Atmosphere: Standard; **Orbit:** 1 year

Inhabitants: cavians, cyneans, dalreans, enuka, tieflings, humans, kalisian, prymidians, p'tan, sasori

Important Locations: Aremyhk, Cordel Desert, Nexus Point Zero, Nyssa, Unthara

Resources: Fertile lands and seas, widely varying life forms and environments

With its planetary and interdimensional conduit, the Nexus Gateway, the world of Exodus is known to many as the Gateway to the Multiverse. The long and conflicted history of Exodus has only added to the world's intrigue and importance. Many humanoid lifeforms, from cavian to human to prymidian, call this planet home, with its thousands of unique flora and fauna adding to its diversity. Unlike many other worlds, Exodus has become a great hub of commerce and trade as well as a center of knowledge due to the Kaga and important knowledge axes like the Infinite Library.



In 89 AU, the official period of mourning had hardly ended when Malik lost his father and was crowned khagan; Lolani also ascended to the leadership of the Reis Confederacy. All four empires passed to a new generation.

RECENT DAYS (90–91 AU)

In 90 AU, Empress Mercy was found dead in her chambers in the Gregorian Palace in Nyssa. The Canean imperial assembly immediately suspected foul play. Their investigation confirmed that she had died from poison. Suspicion fell on her brother, Bial, who had left Nyssa the night before Mercy was found dead. With Bial suspected of Mercy's murder and out of the capital, the imperial assembly chose Princess Cassandra to succeed her sister.

The new empress was crowned almost immediately, and her youngest sister, Princess Sienna, became the empire's executor. Empress Cassandra vowed to make her brother pay for his crime. However, a week later, all signs of Bial had disappeared, forcing the empress to call off the search. Even so, she ordered troops to the border of the Confederacy. Empress Cassandra blamed Bial for poisoning their sister and creating a diplomatic conflict with the Confederacy. She accused Imperatrix Lolani of sheltering her murderous brother and severing ties for his sake.

When news of Mercy's death reached Khagan Malik, he fell into a suicidal depression. He cursed himself for allowing statecraft to keep him from his beloved. Then he cursed himself for thinking of abandoning his duty and people. He could not help but wonder about Bial's guilt. He laid plans to travel to the Caneus Empire so he could personally investigate the matter. Leaving the Dominion in the hands of his brother, Nasser, Malik boarded his windsailing ship and winged his way north. In Nyssa, Malik was attacked by a band of assassins. Badly injured, he immediately returned home.

When Malik returned to the Dominion, he found his brother aware of his misfortune, which roused his suspicions. Malik put the cities and tribes on the Canean border on high alert and began marshaling his troops. At Nasser's urging, additional forces massed at the edge of Sametia, overlooking both the Janus Horde and the Arman Protectorate.

The Imperial Senate voted to impose martial law on all four member states, ordered the kingdoms and empires to withdraw to their borders, and sent Janissaries to restore order.

To the Senate's horror, all four empires refused to submit. To the horror of the four great monarchs, the Janissaries left Aremyhk and men-at-arms massed in Koryth to enforce the Senate's desperate bid to restore order.

It is now 91 AU. More than ever, the world of Exodus needs heroes...