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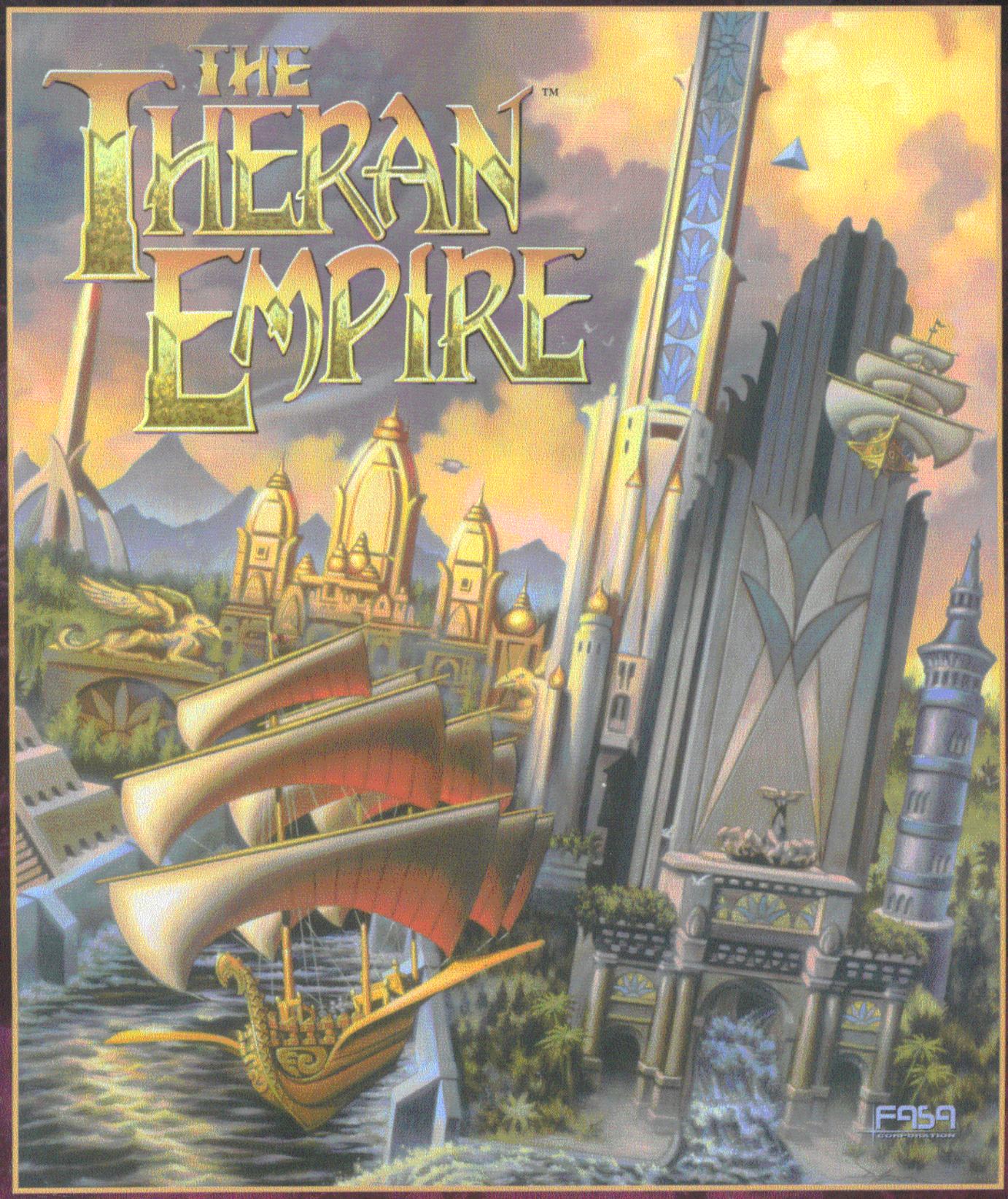
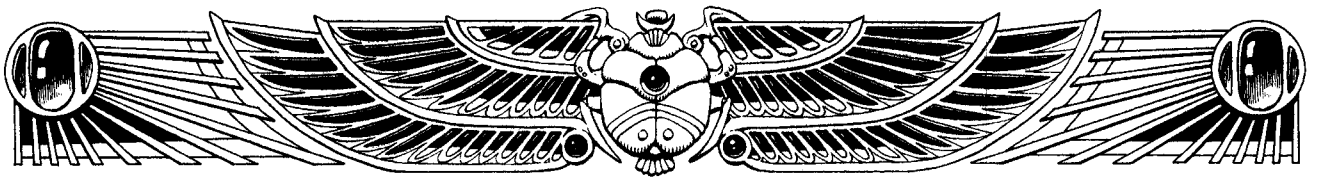


AN EARTHDAWN SOURCEBOOK BY ROBIN D. LAWS

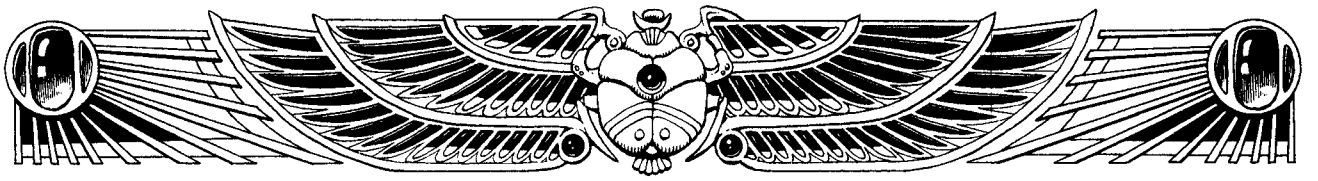
THE THERAN EMPIRE

FASA CORPORATION

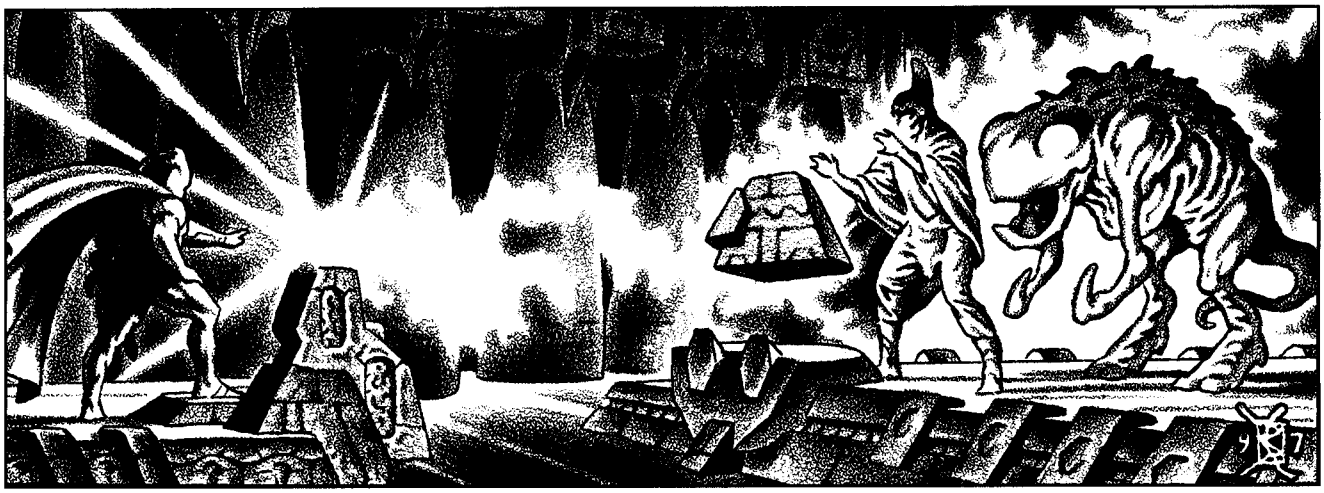


CONTENTS

ON HOW THIS WORK CAME TO BE 5
AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMPIRE 6
On Thera's Central Text 7
An Excerpt from *The Shining Foundation* 7
On the Importance of Noble Houses 8
On the Major Noble Houses 9
On the Corrupting Effect of House Rivalries 10
On the Structure of Government 13
On the Omnipresence of Bureaucracy 15
On the Theran Military 16
On the Structure of the Military 16
On the Forces Stationed in Great Thera 17
On Theran Forces in the Provinces 17
On the Political Influence of the War College 18
On the Role of Slavery 18
On Slavery in Early Thera 18
On Magic and the Empire 20
On Magical Augmentation and Its Implications 21
On the Many Races in the Empire 21
Jackalmen 22
Jubruq 22
Leafers 23
Ulk-men 23
On Theran Culture and Attitudes 24
On the Empire 24
On the Theran View of Barsaive 25
On Future Relations 25
GREAT THERA 26
Impressions of the City 26
On Sundry Diversions 28
On Theran Architecture 29
A Tour of the Great City 30
On the Eternal Library 30
On the Sphinx 32
On the First Governor's Palace 32
On the Arbitorium 32
On the War College 33
On the Hall of the Conclave 33
On the Grand Halls of the Great Houses 34
On the Monuments of Messias 35
On Visiting Aerial Buildings 35
Security Measures Explicated 36
On Attitudes toward Foreigners 38
On Daily Life in the Great City 38
A Day in the Life of a Noble 38
On the Curious Position of Theran Freemen 39
On the Enlightened 39
On Barbarian Status 39
On Slavery in Everyday Life 39
On Ostentation and Display 40
On Attitudes towards the Passions 41
CREANA 43
On the Origins of Creana 43
On the Pyramid of Name-givers 44
On the Pharon 44
On the Royal Family 46
On the Priest-Scribes 47
On the Nomarchs 48
On the Serfs 49
On Slaves 50
On Roles of the Name-giver Races 50
On Outlaws and Other Outsiders 51
On the Theran Presence in Creana 52
On the History of Thera and Creana 52
On the Overgovernor and Her Underlings 53
On Theran Houses Active in Creana 53
Concerning Military Deployment 54
On the Land of Creana 55
On the Cities 55
On the Legendary City of Karnard 57
On the Conquered Cities 58
On the Passions of Creana 59
On the Great Work 62
On Tomb Explorers and Grave Robbers 62
On the Effects of the Scourge 63
On the Horrors that Remain 63
On the Return of the Dead 64
On the Shifting Sands 65
Regarding Philosophical Unrest 65
INDRISIA 66
On Indrisa's Place in the Empire 66
On the Land 66
On the Jungles of Indrisa 68
On the Mayana Mountains 68
On the Theran Triumph in Indrisa 68
The Need for Conquest 69
The Discovery of Indrisa 69
On the Conquest of Indrisa 70
On Fovian, the First Overgovernor 71
On the Days before the Scourge 72
On Events during the Scourge 73
The Reclamation of Indrisa 74



On Indrisa in the Present Day 75
A Dissident's Assessment 76
On Local Ways 78
On the Uvasti Originators 78
On the Avani Invaders 79
On Common Traditions: The Passions and Thibomata 79
The Jaraput and the Pathalan 82
On the Cities of Indrisa 84
Annawath 84
Bullawy 85
Calcutana 86
Dravada 87
Elianari 88
Kanitherium 88
Kopalla 89
Mhutralla 90
Thepinar 90
Vaniri 90
The Sunken Cities 91
MARAC 92
A Brief Overview of the Land and Its People 92
On the Make-up of the Maracan Delegation 94
On the History of the War in Marac 95
On the Ancient War between the Cities and the Tribes 95
On Early Relations with Marac 97
On the First Conquest of Marac 98
On the Reclamation of Marac 99
On Sufik Activities after the Scourge 101
On the Jinari Rebellion 103
On the Jinari 103
On the Unfortunate Acts of House Narlanth 104
On the Foolishness of House Heindari 105
On the War against the Fabrikas 105
On the Assassinations and the Spread of Insurgency 106
On the Cities of Marac 108
Maracazar 108
Karatha 109
Orana 109
Irkum 110
On Notable Persons of Marac 110
General Bubac 111
General Chribac 111
Dossuth El-Landro 111
Krovo 112
Overgovernor Lesholem 112
M'zyu 112
Admiral Parragea 113
Grand Sultan Qufira 113
Uvira 113
Admiral Vonaxi 113
TALEA 114
A Brief Overview of a Strange Place 114
On the Traders 116
An Unanticipated Episode of Poverty 116
On Traders' Charters 116
On the Traders' Role in Talean Life 117
On the Intervention of a Mysterious Individual 118
On the Dukes 118
The Rights of Fedali 119
On Being Named a Duke 119
On the Great Dukes of Talea 120
A Regrettable, but Understandable, Incident 124
On the Therans 125
On the City of Pezzano 125
On Theran Policy in Talea 125
On Influential Therans of Talea 126
On the Signori 128
On the Rise of the Cities 129
On the Rule of the Signori 129
Ruling Signori and their Cities Described 130
On the Temple 133
On Serenity IV 133
On the Theology of Prima 134
On the Hierarchy of the Temple 134
On the Power of the Pompate 135
On Prominent Name-givers of the Temple 137
A Quiet Departure 138
On the Kings 138
On the King of the South 139
On the King of the North 140
On the King of Arancia 140
On Mercenaries 140
On the Republicans 141
A Final Farewell 141
VASGOTHIA 142
On Theran Vasgothia 142
On Imperial History in Vasgothia 145
On the Present Theran Hierarchy 146
On Theran Settlements 147
On the Tribal Lands 148
On the Organization of the Tribes 148
On the Barbarian Passions, Ancient and Modern 148
On the Adopted Passions 150
On the Place of ReNaming 150
On the Deep Forest 152
On Astral Taint 153
On the Fruits of the Passions 154
On the Fruits of the Horrors 154
On the Half-Horrors 154
On the Woman of Power 154



On the Towers 155
On Earthswallower's Pattern 157
On the New Races 158
On the Leafers 158
On the Ulk-men 159
On the Toads, or Gruthrump 161
GAME INFORMATION 162
General Rules 163
Playing New Races 163
Languages in the Empire 163
Great Thera 163
Depatterning 163
New Blood Charms 165
Theran Magical Augmentation 167
Theran Glossary 167
Creana 167
Sandstorms 167
Mummies 168
Jackalmen 168
Creanan Glossary 169
Indrisa 169
Indrisan Relics 169
Dhuna 169
Indrisan Glossary 170
Marac 170
Rhetoric 170
Jinari 171
Jubruq 171
Maracan Glossary 174
Talea 174
Talean Glossary 174
Vasgothia 174
Leafers 174
Ulk-men 175
Vasgothian Forest Magic 175
Fruits of the Passions 176
Vasgothian Glossary 176

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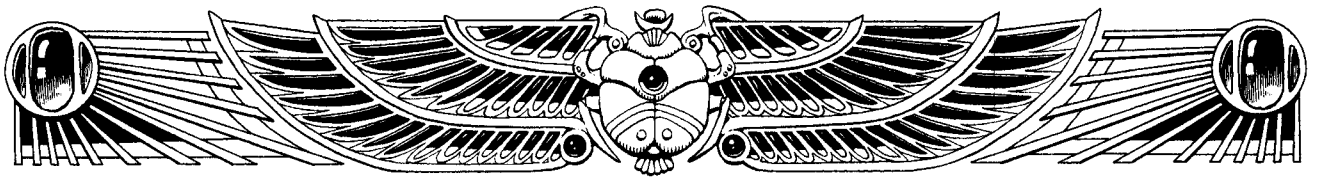


ON HOW THIS WORK CAME TO BE

I embark upon the writing of this introduction with pride and trepidation. Pride, because my colleagues and I have gone to great lengths to compile this volume, and because it so well accomplishes the goals set out for us by His Royal Highness, King Neden of Throal. I shall dispense with the usual self-congratulatory rhapsodies to which we of the Great Library are prone upon the completion of a mammoth task such as this one. I will merely—and deservedly—praise the sterling efforts of my colleagues; in their sometimes hazardous field research and in the more sedentary but no less arduous process of writing and editing, I congratulate them on a job well done.

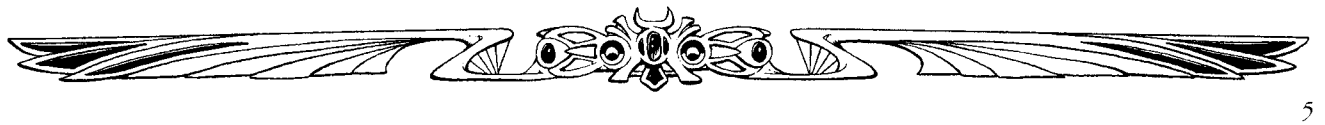
Lands of the Theran Empire is the first commission given us by King Neden, and historians of the future will doubtless find it a telling symbol of our new sovereign's priorities. For we stand at a crossroads in Barsaive; the kingdom of Throal is on the edge of war with the mighty Theran Empire, as evidenced by the recent Battle of Prajjor's Field, where Throalic and Theran military forces clashed for the first time in more than half a century. That event marked our entry into a new and confusing phase of history. No longer are the unearthly Horrors our chief enemy; now we must also concern ourselves with the subtler, more ambiguous threats offered by other nations. Are the Therans the implacable foes they seem to be? Are we doomed to shed our blood fighting them in the name of the Council Compact? Or is it possible to reach a mutual understanding that allows for peaceful coexistence between their mighty empire and our small but proud and determined nation? And if such an understanding is not possible, can we find weaknesses to exploit whereby we might bring about their defeat? King Neden commissioned this volume to find answers to these vital questions.

Readers may be surprised to learn how the team of scholars responsible for this tome, headed by your humble servant, went about its research. We initially planned to rely on the accounts of Barsaivian adventurers, as well as material supplied to us by Theran dissidents and exiles now living in Throal. We had completed a preliminary outline of the project when one Apulian Coriatus, a merchant of Bartertown who maintains connections with the Theran leadership in Vivane, approached us. He carried an invitation from no less a personage than Korgan, Grand Master of the Eternal Library of Thera! The Eternal Library was conducting a Great Symposium of Scholars to be held on the island of Thera, at which archivists from throughout the Theran Empire would exchange information about their homelands. To my everlasting surprise, I and any colleagues I wished to bring with me were graciously invited to attend.

Whether to accept this unusual invitation was a matter of great debate, both at the Great Library and in the Royal Chambers. Many courtiers feared that the Symposium was an exercise in propaganda, designed to lull politically unsophisticated scholars into minimizing the Theran menace. Some feared we would be taken hostage. (One concerned individual even predicted that we would be drugged and our minds drained of information by Thera's nethermantic inquisitors.) In the end, however, we decided to go. Though I had my own reservations about Thera's motives in this matter, to refuse an opportunity to acquire knowledge contradicts all I believe in.

I therefore chose three companions to travel with me to the Symposium. At my right hand was the indefatigable Thom Edrull, who made his determination to attend the event amply clear from the first receipt of the invitation. I also included the redoubtable Jerriv Forrim, whose attention to detail was matched only by his rigorous skepticism. The fourth one of us was the t'skrang troubadour T'saanas V'shala, whose gift for listening and willingness to place herself in unusual situations contributed much information about ordinary life in Thera that would have eluded the rest of us (who, I confess, often value book learning over experience).

The Symposium was even more fascinating than we had hoped. We spent many a long evening in unfettered discussion; curiously, our Theran hosts forbade us no subject. Throughout this tome, we have combined our first-hand observations with excerpts from the works of archivists from Thera and its provinces. These writings and speeches were particularly useful in the sections concerning other provinces, of which we have no personal experience. In a world where the unbelievable is commonplace, one can never be completely certain of the veracity of any report; however, I have not knowingly included any information I suspected might be false. Wherever we found ourselves uncertain of the truth, we have endeavored to show both sides of the matter at hand. As in the past, we have invited outside scholars and interested lay people to include marginal notes at any points of contention. For this book, we also invited a select number of Therans to add their comments. I think they found seeing themselves through our eyes an unsettling experience, indeed.



Finally, a note on the king's commission. Neden specified that we should pay special heed to the stories of individuals living throughout the Theran Empire. To paraphrase our liege, only through personalities can one truly relate broad historical and cultural trends to life as it is lived. Or, to quote His Highness directly, "Don't be so boring, Merrox! Tell us a rousing tale or two!"

We hope that this volume will educate Barsaivians about our enemies—if, indeed, that is what they are. If we are fortunate, this book may provide the first seeds of a garden in which people of Throal, all Barsaive and Thera can walk together as friends. And then we may all turn our energies toward continuing to rebuild our world.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records, 1509 TH

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMPIRE

This section offers the uninitiated reader a broad outline of the history, culture and workings of the Theran Empire. For the convenience of the reader, we have substituted the Throalic calendar throughout this book wherever the original material uses Theran dating.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records, 1509 TH

ON THERA'S CENTRAL TEXT

—As written by Thom Edrull, Archivist of the Hall of Records

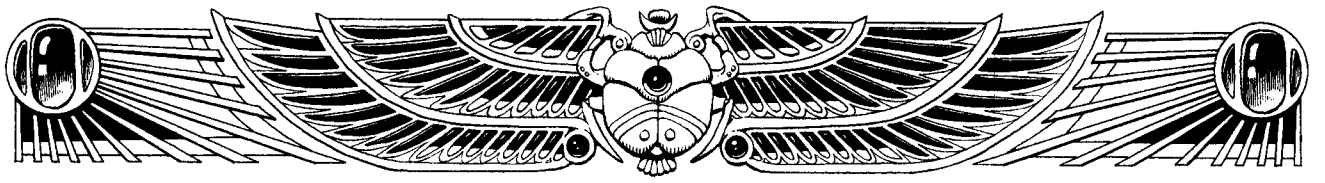
To understand how Therans think of themselves, one must read *The Shining Foundation* by Rizardo the Bearded. This text, written in 1040 TH, is considered the definitive work of Theran history, and is an integral part of the education of young nobles and other educated Name-givers on the island of Great Thera. Though the reader may strongly disagree with Rizardo's blind confidence in Theran superiority, we include *The Shining Foundation* here as the clearest possible expression of the way the typical Theran views the world. Should any stalwart citizen of Throal come into contact or conflict with a Theran diplomat, military officer or spy, know that the Theran's attitudes have been shaped by phrases such as the ones you are about to read—phrases that make it easy to understand why Therans see themselves as conquering saviors who know our needs better than we do, and to whom we owe thanks for the blessings of their civilization.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE SHINING FOUNDATION

Our forebears founded Thera to fight the Scourge, and every aspect of our Empire's existence reflects this fact. Thera became an Empire because we seek to save as many Name-givers as we can from the coming onslaught of the Horrors. If our leaders have sometimes engaged in practices that seem brutal or unjust, we have only done so to further this most noble of goals. Leadership is the ability to determine when a few must suffer in order that the many may be saved.

Leadership has no greater exemplar than Elianar Messias, the elven scholar who first prophesied the coming of the Scourge. Messias first rose to prominence as an adviser to Queen Failla, ruler of the Elven Court. At that time, so long ago that Great Thera was no more than a distant dream, the Elven Court ruled the minds and hearts, as well as the bodies, of all the world's elves. Thanks in part to Elianar Messias, the elves of Thera have been freed from this unjust enslavement of the self; like all their fellow Therans, Thera's elves properly owe their allegiance to the Empire rather than to a hereditary ruler granted sway over them simply because of their shared race. But even in Messias's day, forward-thinking elves were beginning to question the supremacy of the Elven Court and its queen. The details of the archaic feud that forced Messias to break with Failla are of no interest to the modern reader; it is enough to know that Messias rejected Failla's outdated ways and misguided choices, as did many other enlightened elves of the time.

Messias left the Elven Court and journeyed to an isolated spot in the region we know as the province of Barsaive, where he found a small settlement of questors dedicated to Mynbruje, the Passion of Justice and Knowledge and Truth. In tribute to their patron Passion, the questors had begun an arduous labor of love: translating a collection of ancient texts they had recently discovered in a network of nearby caves. They did not know that these millennia-old documents told a terrible story that would change the face of the world forever. Messias was the first to learn the truth contained in the ancient writ-



ings, and he paid for this knowledge with his life. Shortly after beginning this work, he was found dead, and beside his horribly mutilated body were found the beginnings of a translation of what came to be known as the *Books of Harrow*. Ever since, we have called him the Martyr Scholar, because he gave his life so that all of us might live through the terror that is soon to come upon us. Let the memory of Elianar Messias guide you, should you ever be called upon to sacrifice yourself for the sake of your fellow Name-givers. Messias embodies the True Pattern of the Theran hero; for the sake of the world, he stepped into the breach and risked all. As he did, so must all Therans do whenever the need arises.

The Books of Harrow spoke of a cosmic cycle that determines our fate, a cycle in which the level of magic in the world increases and decreases over thousands of years. When the magic reaches its apex, its power creates a doorway from our world to the mysterious home of the Horrors, malignant monsters that glory in untold destruction. Whenever this doorway opens, the Horrors come through it and ravage the world until the magic falls again. The followers of Messias knew that this terrible onslaught, called the Scourge, would destroy all life in our world unless someone discovered a means of protection. To this great effort they devoted themselves, delving deeper into the *Books of Harrow* to learn all they could of what faced us.

But the terrible forces that had claimed Messias's life were still at work, embedded in the *Books* themselves. Because the *Books* contained knowledge of the dread Horrors, their patterns were infused with the dangerous magical energies of those monstrous beings—awful manifestations that threatened the questors and their settlement even though the Horrors themselves were centuries away from arriving in our world.

The leader of the questors, an elderly elf Named Kearos Navarim, knew that he and his fellows dared not stay. A secret and powerful magical ritual, cast by Navarim to discover the most auspicious place to flee, led him to a map of the region surrounding the questors' settlement, and drew his eye to an island whose magical pattern was particularly resistant to evil influences. He led his people to that island and made it our home, Great Thera. The founding of our motherland through magic marks the first instance in a long tradition; we have always employed our great gifts of sorcery to protect ourselves and others. Thera began with and thrives through our magical knowledge, and so all true Therans respect scholars and magicians.

The questors fled, but the evil in the patterns of the *Books of Harrow* followed them. They found rest and peace only when they reached the island of Thera after a long and treacherous sea voyage. Then, as now, Thera was a refuge from the vast, uncontrollable forces of the world. To ensure that it always would be, Kearos Navarim founded a place of learning and Named it the Eternal Library. From that day to this, the scholars who maintain it are the spiritual heirs of Navarim and Messias. Nevarim also founded a settlement around the library, which he Named Nehr'esham—the center of the mind. From this small community of dedicated magical scholars, our vast empire sprang, shaped by the intelligence and forethought embodied in its Name. Let this remind you that the same intelligence and forethought must be the hallmark of a true Theran leader.

A time of heroes followed the days of our beginning. Magicians, adventurers and countless people of learning descended on Nehr'esham, drawn there—though they knew it not—by the pattern of the island itself, which called to it those who shared its greatness. These Therans, the worthiest Name-givers in all the world, are your ancestors. Never forget that you come of superior stock.

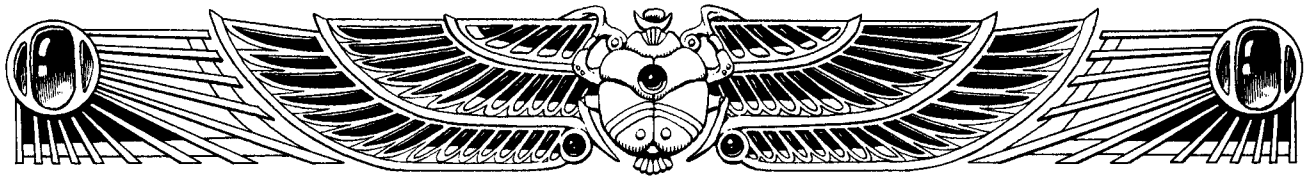
In the fullness of time, it became clear that Nehr'esham held within it the seeds of a greatness thus far unknown to Name-giver history. Its people re-Named it Thera, which means "foundation." Never forget the debt you owe to that foundation—a debt you can never repay. Protect the lands and people of Thera whenever and however you must, even with your life if necessary.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NOBLE HOUSES

—As written by Jerriv Forrim

Ask a Theran to name the most important element in his society, and he will invariably speak of the noble houses. The houses hold most of the Empire's power and wealth, and their scions are therefore of great consequence. The houses also form the foundation of Thera's government; members of the eleven most prominent ones make up the majority of the Conclave, Thera's primary ruling body. (More on the Conclave appears in the next section of this chapter.)

Each Theran noble house is composed of several aristocratic families who are bound together by a common history, though not necessarily by blood. Most of the major houses include families of various races, though some may be dominated by a particular race. Each noble house specializes in a distinct sphere of activity, from which it derives power, material wealth, or both. For example, House Carinci is known for trade and exploration, while House Krand profits from its members' unsurpassed skill in magical manipulation of the natural world. Rivalry between the houses is a constant in Theran life, as one of our Theran contributors to this tome shows just a bit further on in this chapter.



On the Major Noble Houses

Therans recognize many more noble houses than are described below, but those houses that send no representatives to the Conclave have far less influence than those that do. We concern ourselves here with the eleven major houses represented in the Conclave: Argenti, Carinci, Gascilium, Heindari, Ippuli, Jotyn, Krand, Medari, Narlanth, Thaloss and Zanjan.

House Argenti

House Argenti, which is dominated by dwarfs, provides various services vital to oiling the wheels of Theran civilization. Its members are moneylenders, healers, messengers, legal advocates, and owners of shops, taverns and food halls.

House Carinci

House Carinci is dominated by t'skrang, a race second only to dwarfs in a natural gift for trade. It therefore should come as no surprise that the Carinci are the Empire's foremost traders. Like traders of Throal, they invest a great deal of time and effort in exploration, hoping to find and open up new markets. House Carinci also produces more than its share of naval officers.

House Gascilium

House Gascilium dominates agriculture throughout the Empire. Its members own and farm vast tracts of land in all the provinces, which produce food for export. Gascilium nobles are fond of reminding others that Thera would die without them, as the island of Great Thera has nowhere near enough arable land to support its dense population. House Gascilium relies heavily on slave labor to plant and harvest its crops.

House Heindari

The Heindari are makers of things, from fine art objects to everyday household items. Allies of House Krand, they use that house's magical knowledge to their benefit, employing pattern magic to quickly and cheaply manufacture everything from swords to clothing to cookware. Various ill omens frequently plague their gargantuan installations, which are therefore are located only in the provinces.

House Ippuli

The Ippuli are entertainers, writers, poets, troubadours and sometimes even adventurers. Though smaller than the other major houses, House Ippuli maintains influence out of proportion to its size through historical and cultural tradition, as well as less savory means (if the rumors about the house are true). Many of Thera's greatest early heroes were scions of Ippuli; in fact, the house began as an adventuring band whose members received the right of representation in the Conclave as a reward for their impressive acts of heroism on behalf of the Theran cause. Nowadays House Ippuli has a disreputable, even dangerous reputation. Its members are said to control gangs of thieves and bandits in various Imperial provinces, and even in the Great City of Thera. (The reputed head of the Great City's thief gangs is the Supreme Warden of the City, an Ippuli troll Named Cha-Thordovis. This is a shocking thing, if true, as the Supreme Warden oversees the enforcement of the law throughout the Great City. Our own T'saanas V'shala gleaned more information on this subject, which appears in the chapter on **Great Thera,** p. 36.)

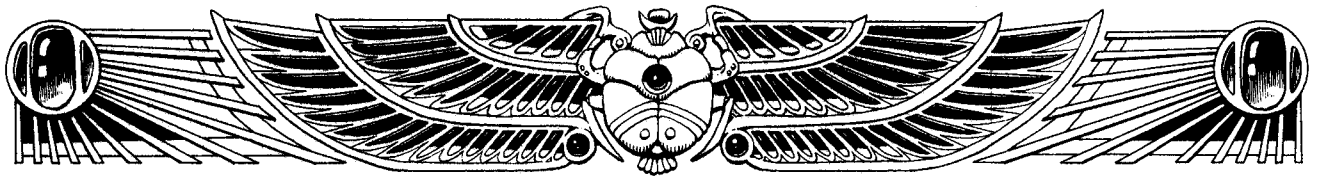
On a less sinister note, Ippuli storytellers and dramatists also maintain their house's hold on Theran society. The ability to popularize certain legends and ridicule or suppress others has practical application in our world, governed by pattern magic as it is. Ippuli artists like to call themselves free spirits, but most of them deliberately create works that support the Empire's philosophical aims.

House Jotyn

Members of House Jotyn are hewers of wood and drawers of water ... in a manner of speaking. They do not, of course, perform these labors themselves. Rather, they own the businesses that extract resources from the Empire's far-flung provinces. The great demand for orichalcum that drove the expansion of the Empire in the days before the Scourge made this house wealthy beyond the dreams of the most covetous questor of Chorrolis; these days, House Jotyn specialize in mining, forestry and fishing.

House Krand

Krand, founded by nethermancers and other magicians, makes its fortune through discovering the workings of magic in the natural world and turning this knowledge toward practical applications. Unlike House Narlanth, another house with a strong magical bent, House Krand is less interested in magical scholarship for its own sake than in the immediate, profitable uses to which magic can be put. For example, an ancestor of House Krand first discovered the magical techniques by which Theran shipwrights to this day weave true air into stone to create the Empire's massive kilas and behemoths.



House Medari

Members of House Medari are the Empire's middlemen, smoothing the path of finance for Thera's wealthy business owners—for a part of the profits, of course. The very houses that rely on their services hold the Medari in contempt—partly because they resent their dependence on what one Symposium attendee called "greedy copper-nickers who don't make anything you can see or touch or hold," but also because House Medari is notorious for underhanded political dealings. Whether this reputation is wholly deserved or not is difficult for an outsider to say. For my part, to hear one Theran calling another manipulative is like hearing a cobra tell a viper that it has a forked tongue.

House Medari also controlsshipping and the slave trade, which should not endear the house to any decent Name-giver anywhere.

House Narlanth

House Narlanth is dominated by elves and humans and contains the greatest number of Thera's accomplished scholars of magic. Many house members are wizards, and the depth of their arcane knowledge gives them potentially world-shaking power (or so the average Theran believes, and I have no reason to doubt that view). More than a few of the feared Heavenherds, Thera's greatest magicians, are said to be of House Narlanth.

Members of this house are largely responsible for the average Barsaivian's less-than-accurate image of Therans. Pale and thin from spending too little time outdoors in the sunlight, many Narlanthi wizards and scholars look sickly, and they often bear a striking resemblance to one another. House Narlanth must have been disproportionately represented among the first wave of Therans to return to Barsaive; nothing else accounts for our common assumption that most Therans look as they do. One wonders why so many of these scholars of the arcane should have been the first to return to Barsaive; but alas, I was unable to find any satisfactory answer during my limited stay in the Great City.

House Thaloss

Scions of House Thaloss are the bureaucrats of the Empire. They dominate Thera's government administration and also frequently manage various businesses owned by other houses. As governmental administrators without peer, House Thaloss gains its principal power because its members collect the Empire's taxes and decide how to spend them—though usually in private meetings rather than in public debate. More than once during our stay on the island, I heard knowledgeable Therans say, "Thaloss makes decrees from behind the throne."

House Thaloss also controls construction and public works and counts many architects, builders and military engineers among its members.

House Zanjan

House Zanjan produces the Empire's proudest soldiers and mercenaries. Its members are a fair mix of races, somewhat weighted in favor of orks and trolls; prominent orks and trolls in Thera are likely to be of House Zanjan. The First Governor of the Empire, an obsidiman by the Name of Kanidris, is of Zanjan descent.

ON THE CORRUPTING EFFECT OF HOUSE RIVALRIES

—In the words of Winasa, Theran critic

We of Throal have no monopoly on criticism of Theran ways. Thera tolerates a surprising degree of dissent, if only from its own citizens. Statements that would be labeled sedition if made by natives of Imperial provinces are permitted—even encouraged in some quarters—when made by free Therans, as a necessary corrective to possible corruption. Here we present an excerpt from the words of a prominent Theran critic, the poet and actor Winasa, who attended the Symposium.

—Thom Edrull, Archivist of the Hall of Records

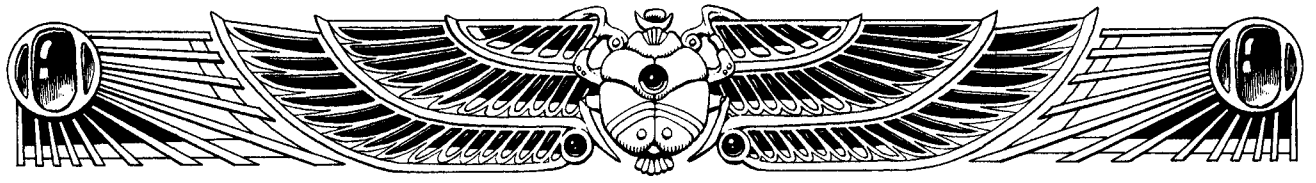
As proud Therans and proud nobles, I and my fellow citizens prefer not to think about the corrupting effect of house rivalries on Thera's political life. Our empire was built on the worthiest of principles, set out by Kearos Navarim and the other founders of Nehr'esham. Our forebears charged us to protect the people of the Selestrean, and everywhere else our influence might reach, from the coming Scourge. They charged us to bring education and enlightenment to all. Well, we have done so—to an extent. We protected our fellow Name-givers from the Horrors. We spread our ways—our laws, our arts, our Passions, our knowledge—as far as our airships could take us. Yet with them we also spread war and greed and exploitation. How can a nation built on the selfless legacy of Elianar Messias, the Martyr Scholar, do such things? I submit to you, my Theran comrades, that one thing above all has brought such ignominy upon us: the petty rivalries between our noble houses. And I say this in the presence of our honored guests, to show what true Therans are really made of. True Therans are not afraid to look at themselves honestly, nor to admit their failings.

If, during our empire's early years, some invisible enemy had wished to somehow subvert our society, that enemy could have done no better than to create the noble houses that currently rule over us. Because of each house's foolish desire to outdo all the others, the glorious aims of our founders all too swiftly sank in a sordid sea of back-stabbing and intrigue. Our most gifted and ambitious leaders competed with one another for power like children squabbling over the last slice of cake. The race to the shelters, undertaken to save all Name-givers from destruction, became an excuse for money-grubbing, with house fighting house for the greatest share of the profits. In our heedless pursuit of power and wealth, we made grave errors. We waged war against the dragons instead of recruiting them to our cause. We exploited and oppressed the very provincial peoples we had promised to save and thereby aroused unquenchable hatred in the hearts of those who should have been our grateful and loyal partners. And now, with the Scourge receding from memory, we have seemingly cast our last vestiges of altruism to the winds. We have everything: vast wealth, immense knowledge, unparalleled magical accomplishments and military power. And we are poised to lose it all in short-sighted, self-destructive intrigue. I have heard it said that the Theran Empire will never fall because no enemy dares assault us. But enemies do not only lurk without, my friends. Thera's most dangerous enemy lurks within.

My own house, Carinci, spends only a little time these days expanding the trade routes that bring light to the pathetic provincials who without them would lie shuddering in darkness. Instead, we spend too many of our days glancing nervously over our shoulders, waiting for House Medari to cheat us or steal our hard-won markets. In a sensible world, our two houses would be partners; House Carinci to open the trade routes and provide the goods, House Medari to ship the goods to those in need of them. But instead we fly at one another's throats or betray one another for a piece of silver every chance we get.

MY DEAR FRIEND WINASA MAKES A DRAMATIC CASE, BUT UNFORTUNATELY DOES SO BY EXAGGERATION. ALL NAME-GIVERS STRUGGLE FOR ADVANTAGE OVER OTHERS. I DON'T WANT THERA RUN BY DEWY-EYED WILDFLOWERS, BUT BY MEN AND WOMEN HARD-FORGED IN THE CAULDRON OF COMPETITION..

—THURBON, HOUSE MEDARI HISTORIAN



And how do other noble houses see House Medari? Hardly better than my own house does. The Argenti despise them because Medari seeks to create professional associations that will take away Argenti control over the mathematicians, the healers and the advocates. House Thaloss distrusts House Medari's political ambitions. House Gascilium resents the exorbitant fees that Medari shippers charge to transport their crops to market and so endeavors to build its own airship fleet. When Gascilium's ships were burned recently in the shipyards, did the house members blame provincial rebels, Horror-tainted folk or mad questors? No. They blamed House Medari. And most of the rest of us believed them, without asking to see even a scrap of evidence. What kind of nation do we belong to, when we immediately assume that our brothers are our enemies?

By some of your faces, I can see that you are hearing my words through the biases of your houses. "She is Carinci," you think to yourselves. "Of course she speaks ill of House Medari, who have always been her rivals." But do not, I beg you, hear from my lips only the animosity of centuries. We are all at fault. House Medari is hardly the sole offender. House Thaloss hates House Argenti because Argenti wants to turn into private businesses functions now performed by Thaloss bureaucrats—and the private services, of course, would be House Argenti's to run. For its part, Argenti sees Thaloss as an entrenched, self-serving cabal willing to stoop to any depths to keep its grip on the reins of power. House Jotyn despises House Heindari for refusing to pay fair prices for its wood and ore; meanwhile, Heindari believes Jotyn is already making too fat a profit at House Heindari's expense. House Narlanth complains that House Krand's unthinking exploitation of magical energies for quick profit will one day doom us all, while House Krand accuses Narlanth of undermining it to keep magic as Narlanth's own exclusive source of power.

Don't interrupt, friends—I am not finished yet. What of House Ippuli, that lays all of the empire's ills at the doorstep of House Zanjan by claiming that Zanjan seeks to make Thera a tyrannical state run by generals? Or House Zanjan calling House Ippuli nothing but a sanctuary for thieves and agitators? And the Zanjani don't stop there. Their hard-eyed military men and women take every opportunity to belittle the magical accomplishments of Houses Narlanth and Krand because those accomplishments rival their own feats on the battlefield. Alas for Thera, that loathing of Zanjan is perhaps the only thing Houses Narlanth and Krand can agree upon!

And all of that is just the intriguing *between* houses. Relations *within* houses are as bad or worse, marked by constant and shameless maneuvering for advantage. I do not speak against honest competition. That sort of rivalry improves us; it encourages us to do our best. But we advance ourselves through spreading rumors, toadying to superiors—sometimes even burglary or murder! What Theran worthy of the name of *noble*—indeed, what Theran worthy of the Name of *Theran*—can advance his own interests in such ways and not feel a burning shame in his inmost heart?

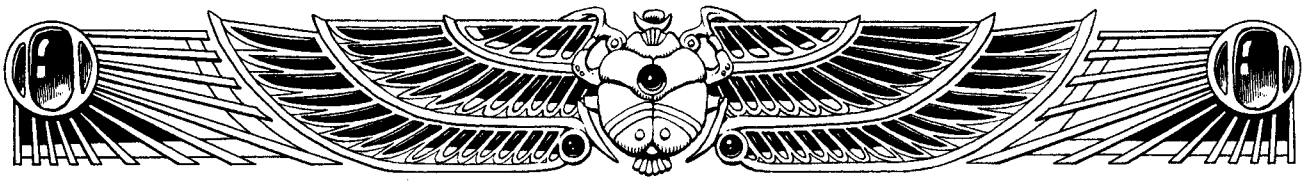
Legends of ancient days are full of cautionary tales of mighty civilizations that crumbled when their own people turned on one another. We are doing the same thing. Like wild dogs fighting over scraps of meat, our noble houses attack and wound one another for momentary advantage—or in imagined revenge for some slight given generations ago. If we are not to deal our Empire a hundred mortal wounds, we must abolish the house system and bury with it centuries of outdated antagonisms. We have little to fear from the provincials, no matter how much they may loathe us. At the rate we're going, we will devour one another long before they do us harm.

THERAN NOBLE HOUSES

House	Sphere of Influence	Principal Rival(s)
Argenti	Various services	Thaloss, Medari
Carinci	Trade and exploration	Medari
Gascilium	Agriculture	Medari
Heindari	Manufacturers	Jotyn
Ippuli	Entertainers	Zanjan
Jotyn	Natural resources	Heindari
Krand	Magical services	Narlanth, Zanjan
Medari	Finance and shipping	Argenti, Carinci, Gascilium, Thaloss
Narlanth	Magical scholarship	Krand, Zanjan
Thaloss	Administration, construction	Medari, Argenti
Zanjan	Military	Ippuli, Krand, Narlanth

Noble House Summary

To aid the reader in understanding the influences of the major Theran noble houses, we provide the summary at left.



On the Structure of Government

—In the words of Phiescapian the Younger of House Ippuli

While on the island of Thera, I had the distinct pleasure of spending time with the witty and charming Phiescapian the Younger. The elf Phiescapian is a former military officer and scout, an expert on fine wines, and—or so it's rumored—a thief adept. Someday I will tell the story of my adventure with Phiescapian in the Great City that involved a certain noblewoman and a necklace of singing sapphires. But here I have transcribed Phiescapian's views on Thera's government. Phiescapian has a unique perspective on this matter: he is a lavernae, a representative elected by his house to attend the Conclave that governs Thera.

As Phiescapian made his comments over several fine dinners we shared, I have paraphrased him in this account. I hope I have done justice to his entertaining manner of speaking.

—T'saanas V'shala, troubadour of House V'strimon

My saintly grandmother, who single-handedly stole the Teeth of Derem-Ba from the tomb of Phahn, had a saying: "There's the way things look like, and the way things are." That's a saying to keep in mind, my friend, when you look upon the workings of the Imperial government. What it looks like and what it is don't necessarily have much to do with each other.

It starts with the very Name of the Theran head of state. The leader of the Theran Empire is called the First Governor. Strange title, yes? Highest authority in the Great City and throughout all Theran lands, the leader to whom the Conclave and the Arbitorium and every provincial overgovernor and even the army and navy must answer—shouldn't someone like that be called the Emperor? Well, yes. But if we were to call him that, the dragons might declare war on us, and not even the mighty Theran Empire wants to risk infuriating all the dragons of the Selestrean Basin at the same time. We might have already done so, with that business of—but no, I'd rather not digress onto *that* subject. The less said about it, the better.

The First Governor rules the Theran Empire—which is to say, he decides where it's going and how it's going to get there and then tells scads of lesser officials to carry out his policies. (He's not entirely an absolute ruler, whatever you may have heard to the contrary. He does have to deal with the Grand Conclave, which doesn't always confine itself to asking, "How high?" whenever he says jump, and the bureaucrats of the Arbitorium have quite a bit of practical ability to frustrate the will of the powerful simply by "forgetting" to push the right pieces of parchment at the right time. But I'll get to that in a bit.)

Our current First Governor, Kanidris, is an obsidiman from House Zanjan and as strong-willed and forceful as any rigidly patriotic Theran could wish. You don't ever want to get on his wrong side. He believes utterly in the righteousness of the Empire and makes no distinction between his personal enemies and the Empire's foes. ("I *am* the Empire," is one of his favorite sayings.) Kanidris believes that his enemies have been put on this earth for one reason: to give him someone to crush. Of course, he's wildly popular, both with the common people and rest of Thera's ruling class. Something in the Theran soul loves an authoritarian, begs to be ordered around by a Name-giver with a firm jaw and an inflexible view of the world. Kanidris has been First Governor for a dozen years, and the only thing likely to remove him from office is the call of his Liferock.

Like all First Governors, Kanidris is attended by a court of officials called *stipatori*, who serve entirely at his pleasure. Most of the stipatori are members of House Thaloss, despite Kanidris's House Zanjan origin. The stipatori help the First Governor formulate broad policies for the Empire. The Arbitorium, the sprawling bureaucracy with at least one tendril in every corner of the Empire, actually carries them out.

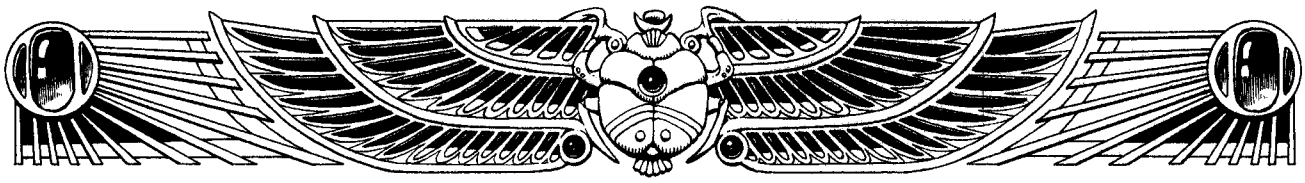
The Arbitorium runs the Empire, if any one group can truly be said to do so. The Theran Empire is gigantic and unwieldy, like an enormous cart running out of control down a flight of steps. It's out of control because it has a dozen drivers instead of one, and they're all busy back in the tavern, having an argument about some other matter entirely, not yet having noticed that the cart is missing. That's how things really are.

The chief officer of the Arbitorium is the Arbiter-General, also called the *karinthini*. Every four years the Conclave meets to elect the karinthini, who allegedly answers to the Grand Conclave rather than to the First Governor (though ultimately, everyone answers to Kanidris one way or another). Our current Arbiter-General, a Medari elf Named Andreax, is in the middle of his fourth term in office. He complements First Governor Kanidris perfectly. Kanidris is hidebound, authoritarian and inflexible; Andreax is perversely well-informed, so manipulative he's said to meet himself coming around corners, and a profound student of the art of expediency. He arranges the deals between often-competing interests that ultimately keep the Empire functioning. He maintains his grip on power because he's better at the job than anyone else could be, has a reputation for keeping his word and knows everyone's secrets. He's also very entertaining company, which is helpful in his position. He does have his share of rivals and is a magnet for resentment that the nobles dare not direct at Kanidris. Still, I expect him to continue in his post until he gets bored with it. Can't quite imagine anyone daring to push him out—or succeeding if they were fool enough to try.

Officially, at least, the First Governor and the Arbiter-General are both responsible to the Grand Conclave, an assembly of noblemen that convenes every four years. The Grand Conclave contains 231 members, or *lavernae*, including eleven stipatori and members from each of the eleven most influential noble houses. Each noble house also holds its own Conclave every four years, during which it selects its lavernae. (My house, unorthodox as always, uses its Conclave as an excuse for revelry and merrymaking. But we are so at odds with the rest of Theran society that we have little energy left over to scheme against one another. We select our lavernae through sporting or performance competitions; I won my seat by taking first place in the wine-making contest.)

Both the Grand Conclave and the house Conclaves are pits of intrigue in which infighting and backbiting rise to art forms. These gatherings are supposed to be lofty policy debates, in which opinions are swayed by mighty oratory. In truth, the official proceedings almost always degenerate into unseemly screaming matches, and the matter at hand is usually a business dispute involving huge sums of silver. The real activity happens behind the scenes; opinions are swayed by back-room deals in which cadres of representatives swap votes for their mutual benefit. Actual vote-buying is frowned upon, though not illegal ... unmannerly is more like it. Conclave members who wish to enrich themselves can do so in various ways—crudely, by selling their votes, or more acceptably by making connections that lead to lucrative but above-board business arrangements. In short, most lavernae are much more interested in the immediate state of their own purses than in the long-term interests of the Empire. Little wonder you provincials see us as heartless occupiers. Think of the Empire as an extendible observation glass, with the Grand Conclave at the eyepiece. What on our end looks like mere short-sightedness and petty greed is magnified in the outer reaches of the Empire, to the point where our merely foolish decisions become exploitive and even vicious practices.

One of my favorite examples of sheer folly took place at the last Grand Conclave, where House Krand squabbled fiercely with House Gascilium over a license to build more of Krand's magical installations in Vasgothia. The Gascilium lavernae feared that the hauntings and magical disasters invariably attracted by these installations would harm their house's



farming operations and refused to allow Krand to build them. That's one of the few times that Gascilium, hated as it is in Vasgothia, actually made common cause with the provincials there. The Vasgothians don't want any more loci for magical oddities built in their courtyards; they've quite enough magical oddities of their own. House Gascilium ultimately lost the fight—not because the Grand Conclave hates Vasgothia and wants to harm it, but simply because building the installations meant increased revenues for House Krand, whose members were therefore willing to dole out coin and valuable favors to win support from otherwise uninterested lavernae. House Gascilium couldn't outspend them. The Gascilii wanted the status quo; but they spent their budget for "inducements" regarding their Vasgothian holdings long ago, when they originally won the licenses to farm that land from the Conclave.

Between Grand Conclaves, the First Governor makes policy cautiously, preferring to implement resolutions agreed upon at past assemblies rather than enact anything likely to raise a fuss. Herein lies the real check on the First Governor's power; if he disturbs the delicate balance of entitlements held by the various noble houses, he may face impeachment proceedings at the next Grand Conclave. The Arbiter-General is even more vulnerable than the First Governor, as it is easier to get rid of him through legal maneuverings.

To win reelection, the Arbiter-General must guarantee that his minions will carry out the Grand Conclave's policies in the Empire's distant provinces. Provincial overgovernors have a way of ruling their provinces like local despots, ignoring those Imperial edicts that displease them. They are often more nakedly ruthless than Thera's central government would prefer, because they are lining their own pockets or those of their noble-house allies.

To deal with potentially troublesome overgovernors, the Arbiter-General commands two special military divisions: the *kedate* and the *praetori*. The kedate are low-level messengers with only marginal authority. The praetori, on the other hand, wield significant discretionary powers. Inquisitors or diplomats as the situation requires, they are usually equally adept at swinging a sword, firing off a mind-dagger spell, questioning a subversive and making witty conversation at official dinners. Many a praetor ends up getting between a Theran noble and his money-making scheme, a generally dangerous position—and so these varied abilities are essential to a praetor who wishes to live long enough to retire. In truth, the praetori are the sole outlet for tensions in a system of government that I fear has become dangerously corrupt. Those sufficiently skillful and honorable can right wrongs wherever the broader interests of the Empire are compromised by the greed of this noble or that overgovernor. Unfortunately, the efforts of the praetori aren't always enough.

On the Omnipresence of Bureaucracy

The somewhat excitable speaker on this subject, C'aan Aris, is the official historian of House Carinci and a member of the Grand Conclave. He is well known in Thera as a staunch opponent of the Arbiter-General and a thorn in the side of the Arbitorium. He advanced the idea that Theran enthusiasm for record-keeping and note-taking is a new and harmful development, an indication of a society in decline. C'aan Aris exemplifies the "acceptable" dissidents in Thera; rather than claiming that the system is corrupt, these individuals merely contend that it must be run more efficiently. The following is an excerpt from Aris's address to the Great Symposium.

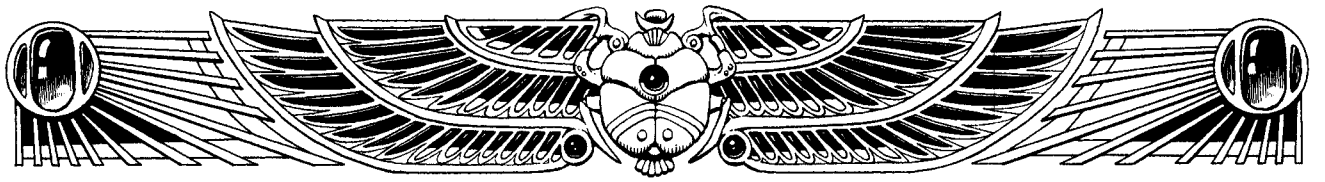
—Thom Edrull, Archivist of the Hall of Records

As a nation founded by scholars, we Therans can claim many strengths. We are not without weaknesses, however. One of the worst, at least in recent times, is our obsessive love of paperwork. One cannot conduct the simplest of transaction in the Great City without sending information about it to the government. Whenever you buy a weapon, a horse, a cart or even a drink at a tavern, the vendor must officially notify the Arbitorium of your purchase. If you get married, the paperwork involved takes three hours to complete. Three hours! Every official of the Arbitorium spends no more than half of his day actually working; he spends the other half filling out forms to tell his superiors what he's been working on!

And as for our taxation system ... *that* hellishly complicated tangle of forms and figures and calculations must have been devised by Horrors! Two individuals, living side by side, making the same income and having the same expenditures, can be assessed wildly different tax bills because our tax laws are so tortuously complex that not even the assessors understand them. I had the misfortune to work briefly as a tax collector, so I know whereof I speak. Every copper earned or spent must be noted down on parchment before taxes are assessed, and the poor bewildered citizen may find himself paying fines in addition to his tax bill if the assessor deems any significant sums unaccounted for. Ask yourselves honestly, friends—what kind of fair assessment are you likely to get from some poor overworked, confused minor bureaucrat who finds himself drowning in paper for the hundredth time in a week, and is sick to death of it?

IT IS INTERESTING TO ME THAT OUR GUESTS FROM THROAL TROT OUT CRITIC AFTER CRITIC OF THERAN LIFE WHILE IGNORING OUR MOST RESPECTED SCHOLARS ON EACH TOPIC YOU SEEK TO COVER. PROVINCIAL BIAS, PERHAPS?

—BANDIR BANDIRIUM, SUPREME HISTORIAN OF THE ARBITORIUM



Think of our provincial governors, afraid to make decisions because they must justify every move they make in some interminable report or another. All of our officials are afraid, from the Arbiter-General on down to the lowliest scribe. More officials of the Arbitorium are demoted for making a punctuation error in their paperwork than for embezzlement!

Our crazed report-filing drains money from the treasury that could be spent on other things. We might even give the money back to the deserving Theran citizens who earned it in the first place! How's that for a seditious idea?

Think of what it costs us to store all these documents, most of which no one so much as glances at once they're filed away. The Arbitorium now owns seven—yes, *seven*—auxiliary storage buildings to hold all of the paperwork generated since the Founding. Legitimate scholars are barred from using the important papers that may be buried in all the rest, all because of some silly feud between the Filemaster General and the Grand Master of the Eternal Library. This is another flaw of our reliance on bureaucracy; our officials spend more time sniping at one another over petty matters like rank and privilege than in actually performing their duties. And think of the cost of shipping all the documents compiled in the provinces to the Arbitorium. Do any of you have any idea how many airships full of useless information sail across the world's skies each year, all paid for by the taxes collected from hardworking Theran citizens?

Our obsession with documentation greatly inconveniences ordinary people and doubles the workload of our officials. Hordes of them do nothing but file these useless reports and accounts away in boxes and on shelves, where they'll rot slowly for centuries without anyone caring a straw about them. And if that thought isn't enough to make us cut down our bloated bureaucracy, think of the risk we run in putting everything down on paper. Rebels and rabble-rousers might easily send thieves into the Arbitorium's storage buildings and find who-knows-what kind of information with which to do us harm. Yes, the buildings have guards—but possibly not enough. For there is no creature more determined in all the world than a malcontent with a cause.

Can it be that our reliance on paperwork is an unseemly symptom of our veneration for the Passion Dis? The Barsaivians believe Dis went mad during the Scourge, and I'm almost inclined to believe them! We weren't choking on forms before the Scourge, were we? What if all our forms and reports are a subtle plot by a mad Passion to turn us into a nation of dust-covered bureaucrats instead of the adventurers and explorers we used to be? We'll choke on the mold spores collecting on our documents, or die of a thousand paper cuts! I say we make a bonfire from those seven buildings' worth of useless drivel and toss Dis into the flames along with them!

ON THE THERAN MILITARY

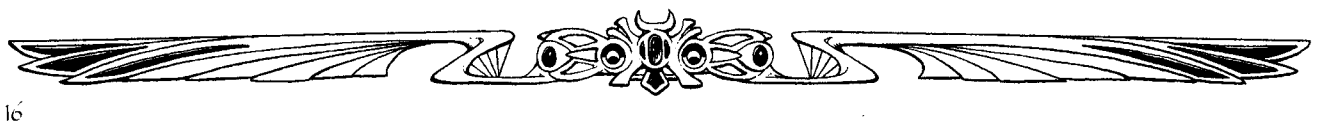
—As written by T'saanas V'shala

Our information on the Theran military came from Ojplok the Imprecator, a *strategos* in the Theran army currently attached to the War College—the administrative center for the Empire's infantry and naval forces. A stout ork with an impressive assortment of battle scars, Ojplok attended the Great Symposium as a military historian. I soon came to suspect that he was present also as a spy, to make sure that no one revealed any state secrets during this festival of scholarly sharing. He spoke only once, when called upon to extol the virtues of the Theran military. An inarticulate man who spoke in starts and stops, he showed through his extraordinary willingness to expose the military's frustrations with its civilian leaders that the solidarity between Thera's soldiers and politicians is not as great as one might assume.

ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE MILITARY

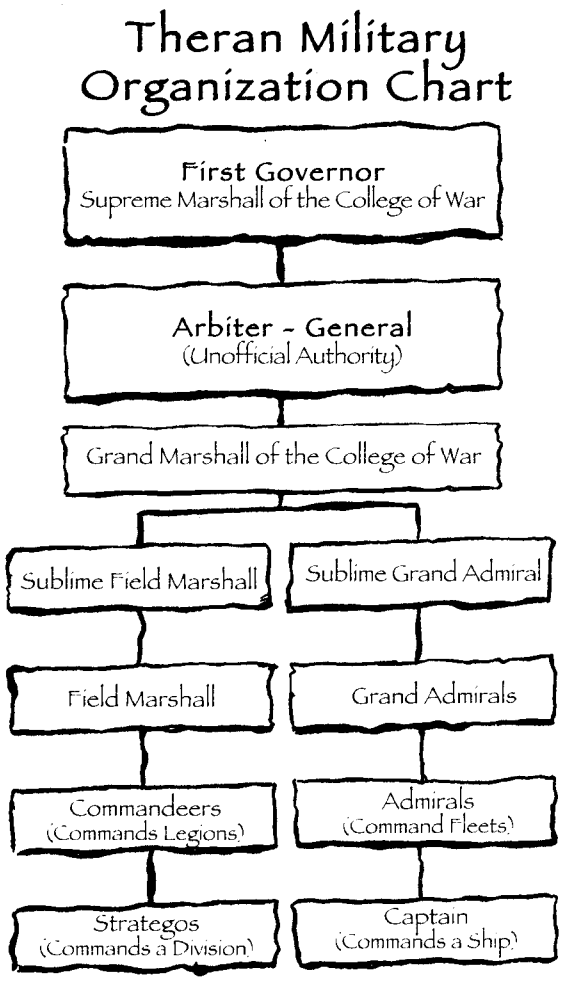
Ojplok began by briefly describing the structure of the military. The First Governor is the overall commander of Theran forces, though Ojplok complained bitterly that the Arbiter-General has come to exercise an improper influence over military appointments. Ojplok clearly believed that such appointments should be left strictly to the War College—though it seemed to me he actually wanted the power of promotion to be the exclusive preserve of his noble house, Zanjan. From what he said—and did not say—I gathered that an ambitious officer must curry favor among an inconveniently large number of officials and house members to get anywhere. Ojplok also implied that many appointments are made based on how well a candidate grovels; his actual skills at warfare or strategy have become secondary considerations. (If so, we in Throal clearly benefit from the current system.)

The head of the War College is its Grand Marshal. The current holder of the post is a troll, Jolokkos Jolokkarian by Name, a man of whom Ojplok seemed to have a low opinion (though he did not say why). The Sublime Admiral who heads the navy and the Sublime Field Marshal who commands the Theran Legions both report to the Grand Marshal. They in turn each command a staff of three Grand Admirals and four Field Marshals, respectively. Most of these officers are attached to the War College in the Great City of Thera. At the next level of command are the officers who command forces in the field: commanders of infantry legions and admirals of airship fleets. Some provinces, such as Barsaive, are home to only one legion and fleet. More troubled places like the province of Marac, where the Therans are warring with insurgents, host multiple legions and fleets. Field Marshals and Grand Admirals are reassigned to the provinces as needed to coordinate the activities of their respective forces.



Military Organization Chart

For the reader's convenience, I have drawn the following chart that depicts the organization of the Theran military.



On the Forces Stationed in Great Thera

Thera maintains the Seventh Legion and two fleets in the Great City. The legion is stationed there mainly for ceremonial purposes, as the Therans have little reason to fear a ground war in the heart of their Empire. The Seventh's commander is General Grovecheus, an urbane and dandified elf with strong political ties. Though not strikingly military in manner—far from it, according to Ojplok's description—he is nonetheless regarded with a certain awe by the War College. Another Symposium attendee, whom I promised not to Name, told me that General Grovechus has connections "far more powerful even than the First Governor," whatever that might mean. During our stay in Great Thera, we heard many rumors that the Seventh Legion would be sent to Marac to relieve one of the beleaguered armies now engaged there.

The First and Eighth Fleets frequently patrol the skies over Great Thera, as if the Therans expect an aerial attack—but from whom, I can't imagine. I know of no navy that could begin to challenge them. The prestigious First Fleet is commanded by Admiral Aeturna, another politically well-connected elf. A woman who prides herself on revealing neither her emotions nor her intentions. Aeturna is said to run a tight operation. Like their commander, her officers are noted for pride and self-control.

Admiral Serpenshostis, a dwarf woman well known among Thera's scholars and magicians, commands the Eighth Fleet. She is a nethermancer of some accomplishment, as well as an air sailor. She is best known for her strange sense of humor and for the severe punishments she exacts when subordinates fail her.

On Theran Forces in the Provinces

For the convenience of readers, we offer the following lists of the Empire's legions and fleets, included their current postings in the provinces and their commanding officers.

Theran Legions

Force	Posting	Commanding Officer
First Legion	Creana	General Feshavian
Second Legion	Marac	General Bubac
Third Legion	Rugaria	General Ganxmander Sturmrend
Fourth Legion	Vasgothia	General Keva'con
Fifth Legion	Marac	General Chribac
Sixth Legion	Vasgothia	General Holuhui
Seventh Legion	Thera	General Grovecheus
Eighth Legion	Barsaive	General Crotias
Ninth Legion	Indrisa	General Ramillah
Tenth Legion	Talea	General Ozfrak

THERAN FLEETS

Force	Posting	Commanding Officer
First Fleet	Thera	Admiral Aeturna
Second Fleet	Talea	Admiral Kebakki
Third Fleet	Marac	Admiral Parragea
Fourth Fleet	Marac	Admiral Vonaxi
Fifth Fleet	Vasgothia	Admiral Oballa
Sixth Fleet	Rugaria	Admiral Radgund Hartmallen
Seventh Fleet	Barsaive	Admiral Tularch
Eighth Fleet	Thera	Admiral Serpenshostis
Ninth Fleet	Indrisa	Admiral Himjhut

ON THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE WAR COLLEGE

Ojplok seemed most aggrieved by the notion that the military is warlike. He said no professional soldier wants to fight; it is simply the duty of a military to appear strong enough to deter potential attackers. The warm reception his talk received emboldened him to argue that the greed of Thera's great merchant houses were responsible for the ever-increasing tensions between the Empire and its subject peoples. "Medari and Carinci think of us as their private enforcers. As quellers of slave rebellions. As weapons with which to force weak provincials into contracts that gain them nothing. The mercantile houses upset the locals, despoil the land and end up making rebellion inevitable unless wiser heads stop them—which they rarely do. Then we get called in to deal with the resulting bloody mess. The cursed influence of the karinthini saps our strength! Were we free to do our job in an honorable way and listened to in matters of provincial administration, no province would see war. All would be at peace. The greedy love war because it's good for business. The soldier hates war because it's his hide at risk. If we ran things, I assure you—"

At this point, Ojplok abruptly subsided, perhaps after catching a warning glance from the representative of the Arbiter-General who was observing the proceedings. I would have been glad to hear him continue.

ON THE ROLE OF SLAVERY

—As written by Thom Edrull

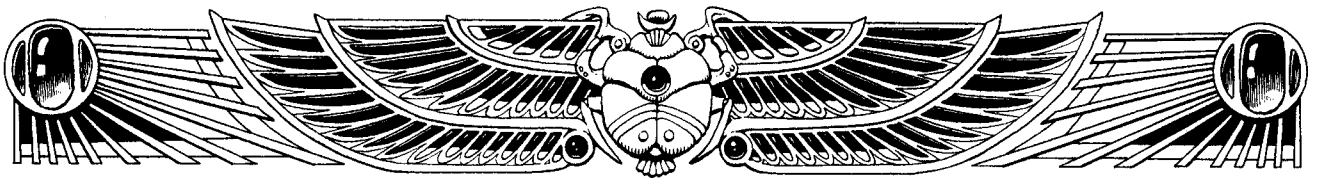
Whenever a citizen of Throal enumerates the crimes of the Theran Empire, the practice of slavery is the first crime mentioned. The Therans, however, find it strange that we consider slavery the distinguishing feature of their civilization. Even though their prosperity depends on slavery, the practice of it is largely invisible to them. As a moral issue, it scarcely exists at all. In fact, they see our abhorrence of slavery as eccentric at best, irrational at worst.

The following except from a speech given to the Symposium by the scholar Ovolon, a Theran ork of great intellect but somewhat narrow learning, perfectly illustrates the Theran view of slavery. Ovolon advances the peculiar theory—peculiar, at least, to Barsaivian ears—that slavery as practiced in Thera's early days was enlightened, even radical, in its time.

ON SLAVERY IN EARLY THERA

When studying the early growth of Theran power, it is difficult—and perhaps undesirable—to separate history from legend. After all, legends are magical, and magic changes the way things are. But magic did not build the Theran Empire. Labor did—the back-breaking physical labor that builds houses, bridges, temples and airship fleets. Nehr'esham, from which Great Thera sprang, was a community of volunteers. Formed from nothing, it had no common laborers in it, no group of people inured to the hard work that allows a society to function. Whatever drew people to Nehr'esham—a magical pattern, or rumors and tales that attracted questors and adepts—did not draw workers. To survive, therefore, Nehr'esham had to import them. And so certain people from Nehr'esham traveled to nearby lands to purchase slaves.

Now in those days, slavery was accepted throughout the world as part of the natural order of things. Most realms continue to accept it to this day. The agitators of Throal claim that we Therans embarked on a mad, soul-destroying deviation when the Empire's founders began to buy slaves in huge numbers. But Nehr'esham did not invent slavery—and our practice of it was far more civilized than was the case with some of our neighbors along the Selestrean. Indeed, the forebears of the very Name-givers of Barsaive who now so loudly condemn us for slavery practiced an especially loathsome version of it. They enslaved an entire Name-giver race—my people, the orks—simply because we were who we were! The ork slaves



of Barsaive were not captives in war or enslaved for a given time to pay off a debt. They were cast into bondage because of their race alone!

The leaders of Nehr'esham condemned this abominable practice. They declared that only criminals and other offenders against the social order should be sold into slavery, and they forbade their slave buyers to deal with those who enslaved Name-givers simply because they came of a certain race. The early Theran slavers even abetted a rebellion in Barsaive, led by our legendary heroine, Hrak Gron. Our forefathers were condemned for this and also for recruiting escaped ork slaves to oversee their own slaving operations. But I ask you, who could better ensure proper treatment of slaves than those who had been in captivity? My own ancestors were unjustly enslaved Barsaivian orks, liberated by the people of Nehr'esham and given the same opportunities as any other citizen of what was to become the Theran Empire. My family took advantage of this gift of freedom and rose to noble rank. Now I oversee slaving operations throughout the Empire and make certain that only the deserving are given into bondage. And I am not the only one. Almost all of the many ork families that have helped Thera to grow and prosper can trace their roots back to the terrible tree of Barsaivian slavery. Is it any wonder that we are fiercely loyal to our homeland? Let no ignorant, dirt-caked ork of Barsaive call us traitors to our race!

Even today, Thera's enemies point to our reliance on slavery as evidence of our innate evil. To them, I say, is it not true that serious crimes deserve harsh punishment? What penalty shows more compassion toward the criminal, even though he does not deserve it—to enslave him or kill him? Life as a slave may be difficult, but a slave can still redeem himself. He may impress his master and win a less arduous life or even his freedom. A man beheaded or hanged cannot do this. For him there is no redemption but blood.

Slavery is not only necessary, but just. It has been a part of life for eons and will continue to be so long after we are all dust. One might as well blame Thera for using stone to build its temple or True air to fly its airships, as for using slavery to become an Empire powerful enough to save the world from the Scourge.

THIS TURGMA DISTORTS HISTORY! HRAK GRON LIVED LONG BEFORE THE COMING OF THE THERAN DOGS. SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE ACCEPTED THE AID OF SLAVING SCUM!

—DIONA THE SWIFT, KRATASIAN AMBASSADOR TO THROAL

Concerning Ovolon and Slavery

—As written by T'saanas V'shala

During the course of my adventures in Barsaive, my cutlass has bitten the flesh of many a slaver. I therefore found it an odd experience to sit down to dinner with Ovolon—who is one of the Theran Empire's chief slavers as well as a scholar. He is most knowledgeable about the history of slavery, operates a large and profitable slave market on the island of Great Thera and also holds the official post of Slavemaster General. My dinner with Ovolon proved an excellent opportunity to elicit from him his perspective on this painful subject that so deeply divides our two nations.

Ovolon is tall and thin for an ork, with short, clipped tusks. His long face is lined with wrinkles, his hair cut close to his scalp. Though he is quite wealthy, his dress did not reflect this; his clothes were simply cut and without ostentation. Throughout the evening, he was composed and unfailingly polite.

As Slavemaster General, Ovolon regulates the slaving industry throughout the Empire. His pay for this position comes from the First Governor's office and also from the Slave Traders' Consortium, the trade organization that licenses all professional slavers. (Theran law defines a "professional slaver" as any individual who sells more than four slaves a year. Citizens who own many slaves are legally required to employ a licensed slaver when reselling more than this number of slaves.) Ovolon is also a high-ranking member of House Medari.

After exchanging pleasantries, I challenged Ovolon's contention that, because all slaves are criminals, slavery is just. I described to him how his slavers operate in Barsaive: most slaves taken there are "criminals" only because they are convicted of trumped-up charges by local authorities who are little more than bandits. They have no real chance to defend themselves or prove the truth; they are swiftly and unjustly branded as criminals and then led off in chains to waiting slave captains.

To this, Ovolon responded that Thera is not to blame for the greedy, grasping, unscrupulous authorities who rule in what he called our "hinterland." That, he said, was Barsaive's problem to solve. When I pointed out that weapons and mercenaries bought with Theran silver kept many of these despots in power, he recommended that we acknowledge Theran sovereignty over Barsaive and allow the Eighth Legion to deal with the illegitimate authorities. I confess, this suggestion made me laugh. As if the Therans would discard their loyal lackeys should they come to power again in Barsaive!

I could not persuade Ovolon, however. He truly seemed to believe his own well-worn answers. To him, Therans are by definition honest and noble. A few might be corrupt, but no more. It was inconceivable to him that any of his slaver colleagues might regard his ideals as convenient fictions to be trotted out when needed and ignored the rest of the time. Because of his profession, I had half-expected to find Ovolon to be an evil man—some variation on the grinning, gloating Theran villain of legend and song. Instead, I found him kind and moral but profoundly self-deluded. I cannot bring myself to hate him. But he and Name-givers like him must be driven from power before Barsaive can be truly free.

On Magic and the Empire

—As written by Thom Edrull

Though our Theran hosts spoke on many subjects during the Great Symposium, on the subject of their own formidable magic they were strangely silent. Our presence at the Symposium certainly contributed to the lack—Theran authorities would hardly allow scholars to give away or even hint at Thera's magical secrets to an audience that harbored subversive provincials within it! However, the other part of the reason goes deeper. Though few Therans would admit to this, many of them feel a certain ambivalence toward magic. They are proud of their arcane accomplishments, but the sheer power of magic also makes them uneasy. So they take for granted the many ways in which magic shapes their lives for their benefit, while not inquiring too closely into what price they might ultimately pay.

Of course, one can hardly speak of the Theran Empire *without* speaking of magic—and so I will address the subject as best I may, in the ways that will most interest the Barsaivian reader.

We may see the Therans primarily as slavers, but they regard themselves first and foremost as magicians. In much of Barsaive, especially in the hinterlands, ordinary folk regard adepts with almost as much fear as awe. In Thera, wielders of magic are universally respected; there is no worthier profession than to be a scholar of the arcane.

The average Theran believes—and he may be right, though there is no proof one way or the other—that Thera has many more adepts among its people than does Barsaive or any of the Imperial provinces. Therans believe they have a greater gift for magic than those they call "provincials" because their nation was founded by magical scholars, which makes magic an intrinsic part of their nation's True Pattern. Thus, goes the theory, those of Theran blood find it easier to become adepts. They are, in a sense, born with magical talent.

Of course, there may also be more adepts in Thera because more people try to become adepts. The rewards are great for Therans who follow the adept's way. Magical talents may give a young and ambitious noble a leg up in House politics; there are also many more positions of power and potential wealth open to Theran adepts than there are in places like Barsaive.

Almost all Therans, adept and non-adept alike, attribute the success of their Empire to magical superiority. Without the Rites of Protection and Passage, the Therans would never have been able to command the obedience of all the rulers whom they turned into provincial vassals. Now that the Empire no longer has the threat of the Scourge to hold over the heads of recalcitrant locals, it has turned to other magics to reassert its dominance over the lands it once owned (and in many cases still does).

On Magical Augmentation and Its Implications

In recent years the Therans have been experimenting with "magical augmentation," a catch-all term for various sorcerous techniques by which non-adept soldiers are given the abilities of advanced adepts. It is not wise to inquire too closely into the details; the stories I heard over many glasses of wine in the darker corners of taverns were enough to make my scalp crawl. I heard whispers of prolonged baths in magically charged liquids, manipulation of the subject's magical pattern, the ingestion of strange drugs, the use of magical devices that do not require threads (a seemingly impossible thing, but then, can one ever really tell with Theran magic?), and even methods gleaned from the study of Horrors. Even native Therans, usually so proud of whatever their Empire does, frequently seemed to view magical augmentation with repugnance—even as potentially dangerous interference with natural law.

Perhaps partly because of this aversion, visibly augmented soldiers do not patrol the streets of the Great City, nor are the secret facilities that allegedly perform the augmentations located on the island. They are said to belong to House Narlanth, which is well rewarded by the treasury for its efforts. House Narlanth's long-standing reputation for brilliant magical scholarship, as well as its well-known disdain for limits on knowledge, would make them likely overseers of such doings.

One woman, whose identity I agreed to conceal, swore she had seen magically augmented soldiers while searching for a lost relative in war-ravaged Marac. She and her traveling companions got lost in the deserts of that sweltering province. When they finally stumbled on an oasis, they found it swarming with Narlanthi magicians, and with something a great deal more sinister—a platoon of magically augmented soldiers. They had once been human, but by some means my informant couldn't guess at, had become part insect. Gleaming green shells, like those of gigantic beetles, covered their bodies, and they gazed blankly out at the world through bulging insect-like eyes. According to my informant, the Narlanthi magicians threatened to attack her and her companions; only quick talking and a promise of absolute silence got them out of there alive.

I cannot corroborate this tale, but I include it nonetheless to demonstrate that the average Theran's admiration for magical accomplishment is sometimes accompanied by uneasiness. Therans are proud to control an Empire and happy to reap the financial rewards of doing so. Yet even as they credit magic with their success, some of them also fear that their magical researchers are too willing to explore any avenue of knowledge no matter what the consequences.

Theran accomplishment in the arcane arts offers severe challenges to Throal. One powerful magician can hold off a division of ordinary soldiers. A legion of augmented soldiers, if the tales about them are true, could easily tear apart a legion of Throalic regular troops. If it comes to war between us, we of Throal must step up our own efforts in this area, or we are likely doomed to failure. Yet we should also learn from the Therans' example and avoid the traps into which it seems they are blithely marching.

On the Many Races in the Empire

—As written by Jerriv Forrim

As we gathered information about the Empire and its provinces, my fellow scholars and I made some surprising discoveries about Name-givers in Theran lands. We knew, of course, that humans, dwarfs, elves, orks and trolls lived everywhere in the known world, and that every Name-giver race was represented somewhere in the Empire. But we discovered certain unusual variants—for example, the deep-sea t'skrang of Indrisa, who prefer the ocean to rivers and can apparently breathe underwater. (Additional material on the t'skrang of the so-called Four Cities appears in the chapter on **Indrisa,** p. 91.) We also discovered new races native to several Imperial lands, races that seem halfway between true Name-givers and mere creatures. These races share many characteristics with Name-givers, such as intelligence and the ability to Name things. However, they lack their own distinctive cultures; they have not developed their own customs and traditions and legends, except occasionally in the most rudimentary of ways. Therefore, they cannot really be called Name-giver races as we in Barsaive understand them.

The four new races described below are extremely rare even in their native lands. Their numbers in proportion to the rest of the population in their respective provinces are roughly equivalent to the number of windlings compared to humans in Barsaive.

It is interesting that our Throalic associates consider culture and traditions the determinant of Name-giver identity rather than the ability to Name. Who can truly say what characteristic defines a Name-giver race? We consider the jackalmen, jubrug, leafers and ulk-men as much Name-givers as humans and elves.

—Ovolon, scholar of Thera

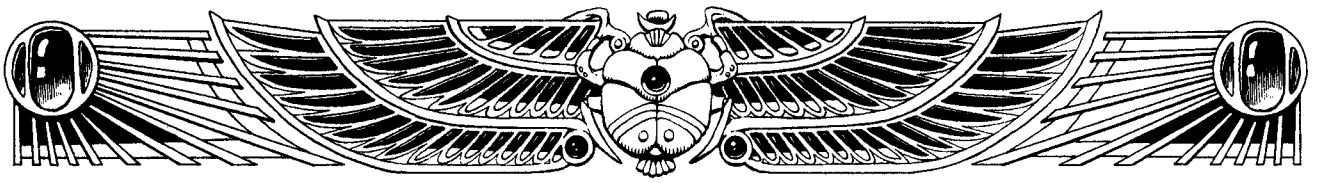
JACKALMEN

Native to the province of Creana, the *jackalmen* were once far more prominent (according to Creanan legend, at least), but have shrunk in number over the centuries. As they dwindled, whatever culture they may have possessed has been lost to time. As no jackalmen attended the Symposium, what we know of them comes entirely from descriptions by the Creanan delegation.

Jackalmen most closely resemble humans, but with the heads of jackals. In addition to their own racial language, they can speak Theran and Creanan easily despite the unusual shape of their mouths. The Creanans described them as a vicious and warlike race, even cannibalistic—allegedly, they eat the remains of fallen opponents. Most jackalmen adepts follow the cavalryman, warrior and swordmaster Disciplines. They are skilled fighters and also highly intelligent—indeed, some of Creana's prominent officials are jackalmen.

JUBRUQ

Jubruq are native to the province of Marac and are one of the few known half-breeds between spirits and Name-givers in existence. These odd beings are the offspring of human or ork females and the unusual elemental spirits of Marac known as *jinari*. Jubruqs most often resemble sickly and malnourished humans or orks, their racial appearance depending on the race of their mother. All jubruqs are male, and are infertile. Their spirit parentage gives them innate magical power beyond that of most Name-givers, and they almost always follow magician Disciplines.

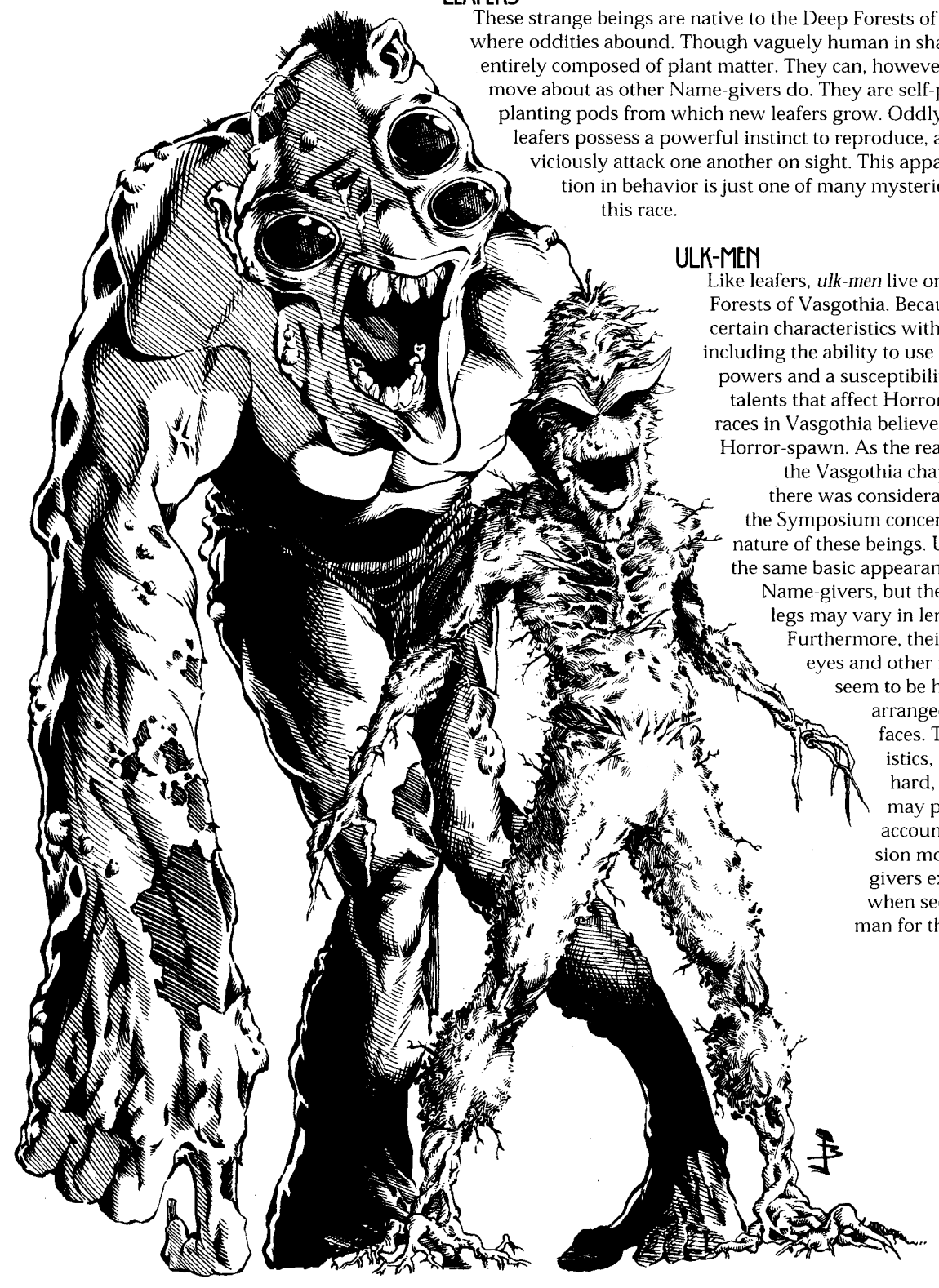


LEAFERS

These strange beings are native to the Deep Forests of Vasgothia, where oddities abound. Though vaguely human in shape, *leafers* are entirely composed of plant matter. They can, however, speak and move about as other Name-givers do. They are self-propagating, planting pods from which new leafers grow. Oddly, even though leafers possess a powerful instinct to reproduce, adult leafers viciously attack one another on sight. This apparent contradiction in behavior is just one of many mysteries surrounding this race.

ULK-MEN

Like leafers, *ulk-men* live only in the Deep Forests of Vasgothia. Because they share certain characteristics with Horrors, including the ability to use several Horror powers and a susceptibility to spells and talents that affect Horrors, many other races in Vasgothia believe them to be Horror-spawn. As the reader will note in the Vasgothia chapter, p. 159, there was considerable debate at the Symposium concerning the true nature of these beings. Ulk-men share the same basic appearance as most Name-givers, but their arms and legs may vary in length. Furthermore, their insect-like eyes and other facial features seem to be haphazardly arranged on their faces. These characteristics, as well as their hard, scaly skins, may partially account for the repulsion most other Name-givers experience when seeing an ulk-man for the first time.



ON THERAN CULTURE AND ATTITUDES

—As written by Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

In summation, I present the reader with the following conclusions about the people of Thera. I have based my judgments on the Therans I met during the Symposium and those I encountered while touring the Great City. The reader should keep in mind that the portrait below is painted in broad brush-strokes, any of which might be contradicted by a few counterexamples. But on balance, I believe my observations are valid.

ON THE EMPIRE

The Therans are proud of their Empire, proud to rule over so many other peoples. Even Therans who criticize this or that aspect of their government or their society accept without question the notion that they deserve to rule. The idea that we, the ruled, might want to live free of them, governed by our own kind, is alien to the average Theran. Most have never considered such a possibility. From the cradle, they have been taught that the Empire is good, and that therefore any "provincials" who oppose it must be evil. Those whom we might call freedom fighters, they call rebels, subversives and agitators. Officials from the First Governor on down routinely claim that freedom fighters are Horror-tainted, members of strange living-legend cults, or simply bandits. Our great heroes are portrayed as buffoons or villains in popular songs and stories. I witnessed a puppet show inspired by the Battle of Prajjor's Field, and shook with silent rage when I saw how it portrayed King Neden: as a selfish, bloodthirsty young whelp mindlessly doing the bidding of a greedy dragon. The event was intended to amuse its audience, and it did. The thought that there might be another side to the story did not occur to the Theran spectators. They genuinely believe they are doing the people of Throal a favor by attempting to drive our rightful ruler from the throne and cast us all back into servitude. They think servitude suits us, that we were born for it. In their view of the world, Nature has decreed that all others must bow to the Therans. Anything else is harmful not only to the Therans, but to the "foolish, misguided children" whom Nature meant to be their inferiors.

On the Theran View of Barsaive

Most Therans have an oddly sentimental view of our own land. They see Barsaive as the primitive cradle from which Theran civilization was born. Thera's founders, Elianar Messias and Kearos Navarim, were both born in Barsaive. Most of Nehr'esham's original settlers were Barsaivian as well: friends and family of the questors of Mynbruje who gave Messias shelter. The cave in which the *Books of Harrow* were found lies on Barsaivian soil. Without Barsaive, Thera could not have existed.

Consequently, Thera's magical theorists believe that the Empire's True Pattern is incomplete unless Barsaive is a part of it. And Thera's magical scholars have great influence over the Empire. What has saved us from a score of Theran legions so far are the noble houses whose members see less benefit in conquering Barsaive than in protecting their holdings in other provinces. In places like Marac and Vasgothia, where rebellions are simmering, the property of wealthy Therans is directly at stake. In Barsaive, the stakes are merely pride and an abstract magical connection. Thus far, silver has won out over sentiment.

Sentiment remains strong, however. The Therans see us as culturally closer to them than are the peoples of their other provinces. We may be backward and superstitious in their eyes, but we are not alien. Many cultural ties exist between our two peoples. The Throalic language is a distant cousin of the Theran tongue. Many of the legends we tell are also known in Thera. Even small habits and customs carry over. For example, Theran and Barsaivian orks use the same distinctive gestures of greeting. In turn, the Therans have imported many Barsaivian customs throughout the Empire. Creanan orks often greet visitors by biting their shoulders, just like the ork scorcher troops who protect Throal from invasion over the Throal Mountains.

Many Therans act as if our refusal to surrender to them hurts their feelings. They see Barsaive as a wayward younger sibling in need of stern admonishment. This may be another reason why they have not yet turned the full brunt of their military force against us; they still believe we can be swayed by what they see as rational argument.

In Barsaive, of course, we have seen little of this benign condescension. Officials like Overgovernor Kypros in Vivane must deal with the real Barsaive, ready to defy Theran aims at every turn. Those foolish enough to believe we will show them sweet deference are roughly disabused of that notion soon after their arrival on our soil. Most Therans consider Barsaive a poor post for a military officer, bureaucrat or merchant. Military officers in Barsaive face mostly intermittent warfare with small bands of attackers who assault their target and then melt into the wilderness; such battles are difficult and offer little chance for glory. Bureaucrats consider Barsaive a backwater full of sullen, ungrateful wretches. Merchants see little potential for profit; dependent on government-granted monopolies, they are woefully unprepared for the kind of competition offered them by Throalic merchant houses. Only Thera's magicians truly see immediate benefit in stepping up the conflict with Throal.

Still, the magicians have the First Governor's ear. Much intrigue seems to swirl around the question of whether and when to take Barsaive back, and mysteries play a role that the casual visitor cannot begin to grasp. The idea of completing Thera's True Pattern by conquering Barsaive is more than a metaphor. There seems to be a growing body of opinion that Thera is suffering setbacks in provinces like Marac *because* Barsaive's freedom has broken the Empire's pattern. According to this argument, conquering Barsaive will quell rebellion in the other provinces. Such a belief does not bode well for Barsaive or for any hope of peaceful coexistence between us and the Empire.

On Future Relations

It is difficult to say what course Thera will take in regard to Barsaive. Unfortunately, the best outcome I can see is more of the same from Thera: it will react forcefully if threatened, and in the meantime will continue to subvert our kingdom in any way it can. We can expect more spying, more trouble from the Theran fortress at Lake Ban, and possibly more assassination attempts like the ones behind the Death Rebellion that rocked Throal so long ago.

Though the Symposium showed me certain things to admire in Theran society, I cannot see true understanding developing between our nations. The Therans are not evil, but far too many of them believe themselves superior to us and therefore entitled to do with us as they please. Individual Therans may wish to behave well, but they must compete with others willing to profit from the provinces however they may. Now that the Scourge is over and the Empire's original purpose consigned to history, the guiding principle of Theran policy seems to be that the end justifies the means. If sending a clique of nethermancers to torture suspected rebels achieves some temporary objective of the Arbiter-General or even of a noble house, then let it be done! From their earliest years, Therans have been told they can do no wrong. Unfortunately for those of us who share the Selestrean region with them, they believe it.

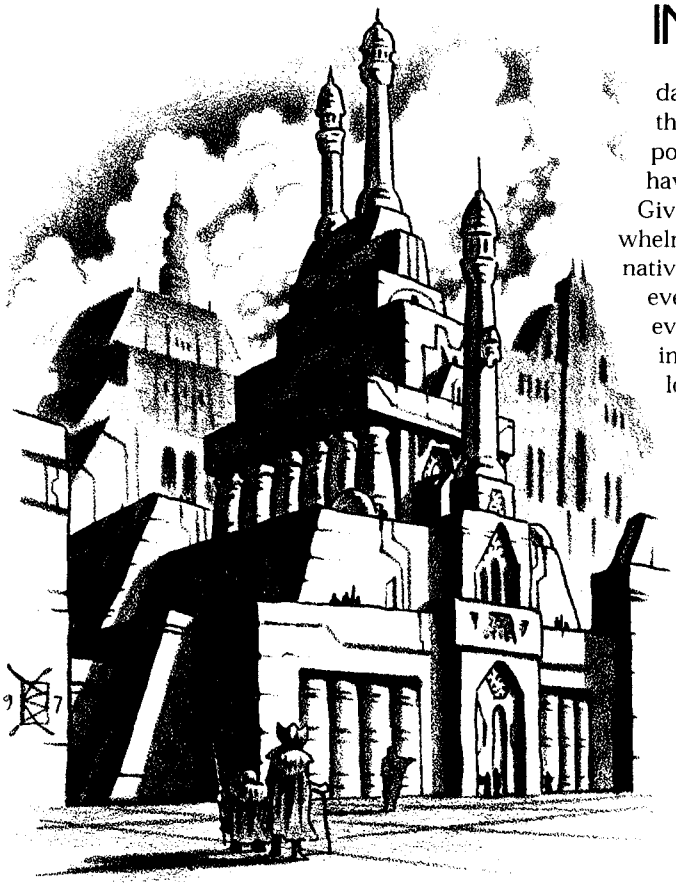
GREAT THERA

This chapter describes the Great City of Thera. During the Symposium, my colleagues and I were allowed free access throughout the city, much to our surprise. We had imagined that the Therans would treat visitors from Throal as virtual hostages, permitting us to view only carefully selected portions of the Empire's heart. Instead, we found an open society so confident in its power that even officials of an avowed enemy state were treated as if we were no more threatening than so many buzzing bees. (I shall have to have a word with a certain Derrisk, Throal's Grand Elder of Thystonius. Her famous account of an incursion into a hostile, near-impregnable Great City, though stirring, appears to have been—shall we say—somewhat embellished.)

Though our presence did not disturb the Great City in the slightest, I wish I could say the converse was equally true. We encountered many minor yet disturbing signs of the vast gulfs of understanding that separate Throal's people from Thera's. I do not merely refer to the usual "Theran arrogance" toward our quaint barbarian ways, or Theran insistence on believing that they have offered us the benefits of their enlightenment which we have unaccountably refused. I speak of a laxness toward the proper uses of power—military and political, certainly, but also magical. Specifically, many prominent citizens of the City who ought to know better are remarkably cavalier about their uses of magic, particularly blood magic. I begin to fear that these Therans may be leaving our shared status as Name-givers behind. They are changing their patterns, becoming something new—something alien, perhaps. If my darkest suspicions are true, then the implications are unpleasant indeed.

The Great City is also known as the Heart of the Empire, the Blood of Triumph, and the Touchstone. I found all of these terms somewhat unwieldy and so have devised my own solution. When "the City" appears capitalized in this text, it always refers to the Great City of Thera. "Thera" refers to the Empire as a whole.

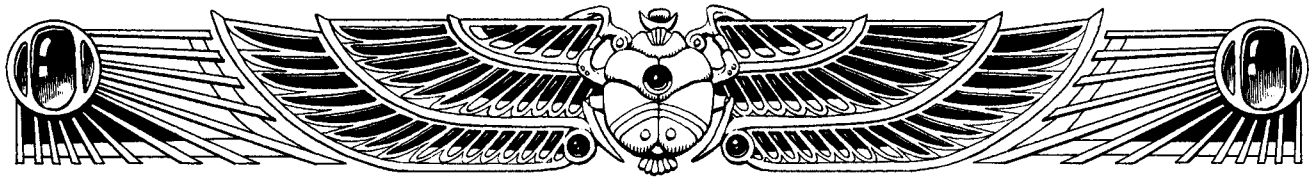
Unless otherwise indicated, entries in this chapter are by T'saanas V'shala, who spent more time touring the City than the rest of us.
—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records



IMPRESSIONS OF THE GREAT CITY

Hugeness, vastness, towering buildings and statues and dazzlingly gigantic open spaces—these are the first things that strike you when your airship lands in the City's docking port. The Great City of Thera is a great city indeed; it seems to have been built for legendary giants rather than for Name-Givers. Every public place is built to intimidate and overwhelm the outsider and to bolster the inborn confidence of the native Theran. From buildings to laneways to works of art, everything is out-sized, noisy, and full of people hurrying every which way, as if the City was a pot on the fire and its inhabitants the water boiling over. I thought Throal was loud and busy, but the dwarf kingdom is as silent as a stagnant pool compared to the heart of the Empire. There's always something happening here, day or night—especially at night, when the City comes fully alive.

The people of the Great City do not structure their days as we of Throal do. There are no common working hours or times set aside purely for enjoyment. The City never stops working or playing. No matter what the hour, a visitor can always find an establishment ready to do business—from moneylenders, armorers, and government officials to tavern-keepers and street performers. The light crystals at the many buildings of the Arbitorium glow throughout the night; indeed, some of the most influential government officials work only after dark. To gain an audience with them, one must be prepared to conduct business during the night's darkest hours.



The Arbitorium is not the only place that stays lit up until dawn. Huge colored light crystals shine in every public street, set in ingenious magical-mechanical sockets that swivel as you pass. A rainbow of color dances over you, your companions and everything else nearby as you walk through a marketplace or watch one of the constant street perfomances. The effect is dazzling, almost intoxicating. And then there is the music, which is always playing somewhere. Bands of musicians as varied as the items for sale in Throal's Grand Bazaar perform on almost every street corner, in the styles of lands far distant from the City. In well-traveled areas, I could no longer distinguish one performance from another; the rival tootlings of these musicians blended together in a swirl of sound that at times distracted me so much, I swear it altered my heartbeat! How any Theran gets a night's rest with this waterfall of noise in the background, I don't know. But after a few days in the Great City, you start to grudge time spent sleeping; take a nap at the wrong time and you might miss something terribly exciting!

ON SUNDRY DIVERSIONS

The visitor in search of a memorable meal or entertainment can satisfy these desires at any length of the candle-clock. You can't walk twenty-one paces in the City without tripping over a street-corner food vendor, and musicians, jugglers, puppeteers and freaks compete loudly for the attention of passersby on any laneway with a modicum of traffic. For those inclined to gamble (and I am not one, unless it's my boating skill against a treacherous stretch of river), the City is a virtual paradise—as long as you're winning, at least. The Therans seem to be always looking for ways to dispose of their excess wealth; gambling suits them as a rocky tunnel does a dwarf, or a treetop does a windling. They will bet on anything from the outcome of sporting events to the size of the grain crop in the province of Vasgothia. Dice games are popular in the City, as are a number of bewilderingly complex board games. Often, players of these games will loudly exhort passersby to join in—an invitation that few accept without regret.

How the Victor Gets the Best Food

The sheer variety of foodstuffs I saw on a single walk through the City turned me greener with envy than a t'skrang has any right to be. Throal's pantry, dominated as it is by sausages, oatmeal and more sausages, doesn't hold a clock-candle to the mouth-watering smorgasbord of exotic dishes sold for coppers on the cobblestone lanes of the City. My tongue still dances to memories of curries from Indrisa, steaming dishes of spiced lentils from Creana, and subtle noodle soups from far Cathay. The native cuisine of Thera appears to have been similar to our own rough Barsaivian fare once but has been utterly transformed by the mouth-watering culinary secrets of these other lands. One advantage of Empire has thus become clear to me: conquest of foreign lands means good eating forever! (Yes, I'm being flippant. But if you had ever eaten the red sizzling chicken served by a certain Cathay immigrant on the steps of the Eternal Library, you might think differently about Imperial expansion too!)

Bellaripila

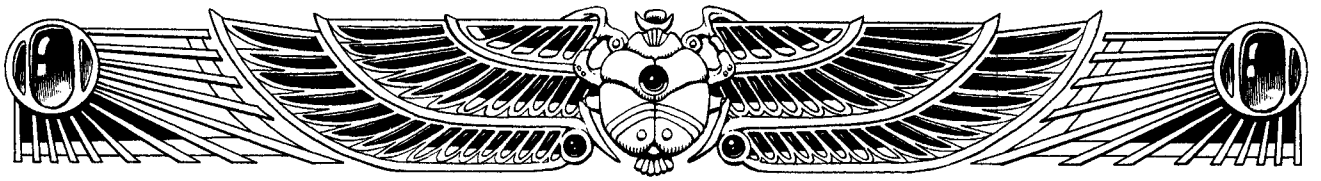
Another venue for gambling—or simple entertainment—is the City's beloved sport called *bellaripila*. Large lots of the island city's precious land are given over to parks for this sport, in which opposing teams of twenty-four players wielding narrow bats attempt to drive a small leather ball through a goal area guarded by the other team. Bellaripila is a vicious sport, in which the team best able to inflict injury on its opponents usually wins. The bats, intended to move the ball through the huge court, are frequently used as clubs against the enemy. Injuries are common in bellaripila; fellow spectators told me when I asked that fatalities are rare (but after observing a game or two, I remain skeptical).

Each noble house in the City fields its own bellaripila team. Some teams are dominated by young nobles, others by freemen or even slaves. Stardom on the bellaripila court may win a slave his freedom, or a freeman adoption into a noble house.

Regarding Confectio

—As observed by Jerriv Forrim

Where we of Throal insist on strict demarcations between the various arts, Therans mix them all together in a manner most profligate, in a spectacle—there really is no other word—called the *confectio*. All seven of the huge outdoor amphitheaters in the Great City cater to these performances, which combine theater, singing, visual arts and magical wonder-working. (On occasion they also include other elements, which I shall describe with merciful brevity.) My colleagues tell me that most confectio are satisfying to the eye and to the sense of awe, but lack the depth of Throalic theater. I saw one only and found it moderately entertaining ... for a time. A confectio that lasts less than six hours is considered brief; the stories, if one may call them that, loosely depict random episodes of Theran history or concern the activities of the Passions. The pieces of each story are strung together in a pattern I found haphazard; it seems the scripts are created under the assumption that audience members will come and go throughout the performance.



I confess, the cavalier attitudes toward the Passions displayed in these entertainments shocked me. The Passions that give meaning to our lives are frequently depicted as even more capricious, vain, and foolhardy than the average Name-giver. Many episodes of the confectio I saw centered around the Passions' romantic entanglements (though in a much cruder form than the word "romantic" may lead readers to imagine) as they become involved with one another or with hapless mortals. A spirit of low comedy prevails throughout. I cannot imagine why the Passions have not long ago cursed the Therans for such gross impiety. The performers begin each spectacle with a hymn to Astendar, claiming her patronage; but to my mind, she would find the proceedings appalling.

Even more appalling are the executions that the Theran authorities sometimes allow to be carried out as part of a confectio. I was unlucky enough to witness such a one. The wretched criminal was dragged onstage in costume, unwillingly assuming the role of a character destined to meet a gruesome fate. To the cheers and howls of the drunken crowd, the convict was brutally slain. A simple beheading is not enough for the Therans' jaded tastes; this crowd demanded and got drawing-and-quartering. I am told other favored methods include crucifixion, boiling in oil, burning at the stake, drowning, or the cruel, slow death of a thousand cuts. Sometimes the prisoners are thrown into cages with ferocious beasts. I heard that one unfortunate was slain by a Horror construct, a jehuthra, which the confectio's benighted director kept for this purpose until the thing sickened and died! Though it may be right and proper to slay those who commit truly heinous crimes, it is wrong to make this regrettable last resort the heart of an evening's entertainment.

Combat between creatures is also worked into some of the stories. Like the executions, these fights inspire bloodthirsty excitement in the assembled onlookers.

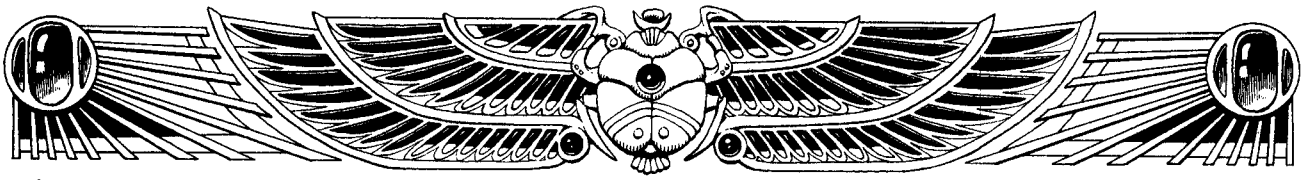
On Theran Architecture

Once the sheer size of the City's buildings ceases to astonish you, take a close look at them—and prepare to be astounded by their opulence. Judging by their devotion to exquisite detail, Theran architects and stonecarvers must consider an undecorated surface as a personal affront to the Passion Astendar. Virtually every wall of every public building—or so it seemed to me—was covered with bas-reliefs, usually figurative pieces depicting great moments in Theran history. The two most popular themes are the education of the ignorant barbarian hordes and the bloody conquest of any barbarian hordes too ignorant to be grateful for the aforementioned education. Floors are decorated in mosaics, very much like those found in Throal. Ceilings are covered in painted scenes of Theran administrators bringing enlightenment or Theran legions bringing bloodshed. The Passions are rarely depicted; Theran artists apparently prefer their own historical figures. The industry of Thera's artisans (most of them slaves) have given the Great City more images of its founder, Elianar Messias, than of any other Name-giver in the world.

> my esteemed throalic colleague should not think himself and his fellow barbarians the only ones to abhor executions during confectio. many sober-minded therans share his view.
>
> —c'aan aris, carinci house archivist

The oldest public buildings in Thera are stepped pyramids, like those that litter Parlainth and other Theran outposts built before the Scourge. Not many of these remain in the City, however. Because the small size of their island severely limits building space, the Therans seem to tear down and replace structures with mind-numbing frequency. Tall, slender towers are especially popular because they provide quite a lot of floor space for the square footage of actual land they occupy. An even more astonishing innovation is the floating building. Held aloft by a variation on the magic that keeps Theran behemoths in the air, these massive air castles ring the island, casting mammoth shadows onto the ocean below. Most Theran noble houses maintain one of these enormous flying castles. The splendor of these impossible structures is a central feature in the constant one-upmanship that is Theran politics. Each new building is more outlandish, more eye-popping than the last. In their endless pursuit of novelty, Theran architects are always assimilating styles from the provinces and from even more distant lands. No purists they, Theran designers weave these foreign elements among traditional styles to create a visual blend with as many varied flavors as the island's cuisine. Temple statues like those of Indrisa wearing gold masks from Vasgothia may stand before an ancient Theran stepped pyramid, side by side with the filigreed buttresses of a Talean cathedral—and the whole delicious monstrosity will be jutting out over the Selestrean Sea like the legs of a mammoth but delicately carved spider.

From looking at their buildings, it appears that the chief challenge faced by members of the Theran ruling class is in finding ways to spend their staggering incomes before their vaults become clogged with excess silver. Entire towers are covered in gold brick, finished in diamonds and sapphires, or decorated with dancing statues animated through expensive magic. When I think of the children starving in squalid Kratas, the wastefulness of such opulence makes my head crest quiver in fury. But I must confess that these wonders mesmerized me as I stood in the City looking upon them.



The Doings of Lupercal

Thera's most famous architect is Lupercal, a mysterious and eccentric individual. He built the fire-ringed opal tower of House Narlanth and has recently constructed an even stranger new manor for House Zanjan. It looks like a mile-long sword and hovers over the Selestrean like a baleful warning to all who doubt the power of the Empire's foremost military house. Lupercal is an illusionist, and no one knows exactly what he looks like. He is said to slip among the people wearing various different forms: a tall, thin troll, a grubby dwarf, even a lovely female elf with sapphire eyes.

Lupercal's architecture is inseparable from his philosophical pamphlets, one of which I was handed on the Street of Coin-Changers one day. The pamphlet urged Therans to throw off outmoded physical limitations and embrace a world of magical change. Lupercal's writings claim that the Great Pattern of the world can be remade bit by bit, by remaking the standard forms of things in it. For example, making a palace that looks like a sword is a step toward this transformation. These incremental changes will feed upon one another until they trigger a global change that the architect calls the Progression. This momentous happening will allegedly bring about a kind of paradise in the world, in which the limits of identity, physical being and mortality are no longer relevant. (A madman, clearly—but such wild ideas have their attractions, if only for the passing moment.)

A disciple of Lupercal's gave me the pamphlet and was happy to tell me about the great man himself. Lupercal has attracted many followers who form a sort of living legend cult around his ideas. Most Therans who commission buildings from him regard his odd theories as mere fodder for anecdotes. Some government officials have become concerned that he may be right and want to stop him from furthering this Progression he writes of; apparently, government will have no place in Lupercal's new order, and that thought alarms the administrators. So far, his wealthy clients have protected him; at the moment, Lupercal is the height of fashion, and fashion rules the City.

A TOUR OF THE GREAT CITY

The author of the following section is Shahanus Shahanian, an Enlightened map-maker employed by the Arbitorium. As a cartographer, he simultaneously loves the City's diversity and hates its resistance to orderly mapping. His knowledge of the City speaks for itself.
—Merrox

Unlike the Empire's provincial capitals, the Great City of Thera is unplanned. It began as a small assemblage of humble dwellings around a half-built library, then grew into a colony of scholars. As the community attracted disciples, businesses sprang up to support the expanding settlement. When the early descendants of Thera's founders began to explore the rest of the Selestrean Basin and travel the world, they naturally engaged in trade with newfound lands. Sadly, our forebears' love of order could not keep up with the demand for more and bigger structures to accommodate the Great City's growing population and wealth. Along with the explosion of trade came a chaotic sprawl of buildings that made the City the confusing collection of laneways, towers, villas, parks and whatnot that it is today.

The City is not divided into quarters or organized according to any other logical principle. The only meaningful divisions between one part of the City and another—if you can call it that—is the street. One laneway may be devoted to textile shops, while the next one over is home to prosperous freemen. And the one next to that might be given over to run-down warehouses full of slaves whose masters lack the wherewithal to keep them decently.

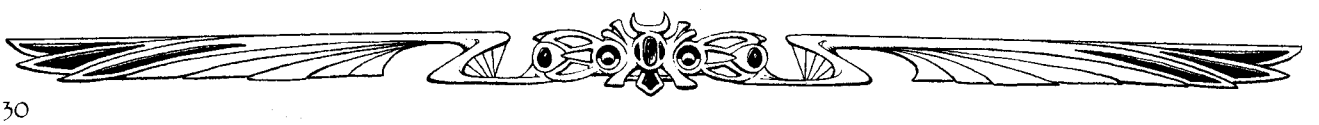
The jumble is made worse by the Theran love of tearing down and rebuilding for its own sake, whether or not a building deserves it. As a map-maker, I curse this habit. No sooner do I have a section of the city mapped when I learn that a third of it has been torn down and replaced! The new vogue for floating buildings is particularly difficult for those of my profession; how does one place landmarks on a map when they are floating above your head?

Understandably, even a lifetime resident of the City frequently has difficulty finding any place outside his own neighborhood. Directions from local people are more reliable than my freshest maps, sad to say. With more aides and better funding I might change that state of affairs, but until then, visitor and citizen alike must do as we have always done—go looking as best we may, confused and barefoot, for that cobbler's shop where we left our shoes just last week.

Thankfully, the Theran mania for tearing things down has not yet extended to the most famous public buildings and landmarks. For the edification of our visitors from Throal, and any other foreigners who may read this, I shall describe some of the City's best-known landmarks that are blessedly unlikely to disappear.

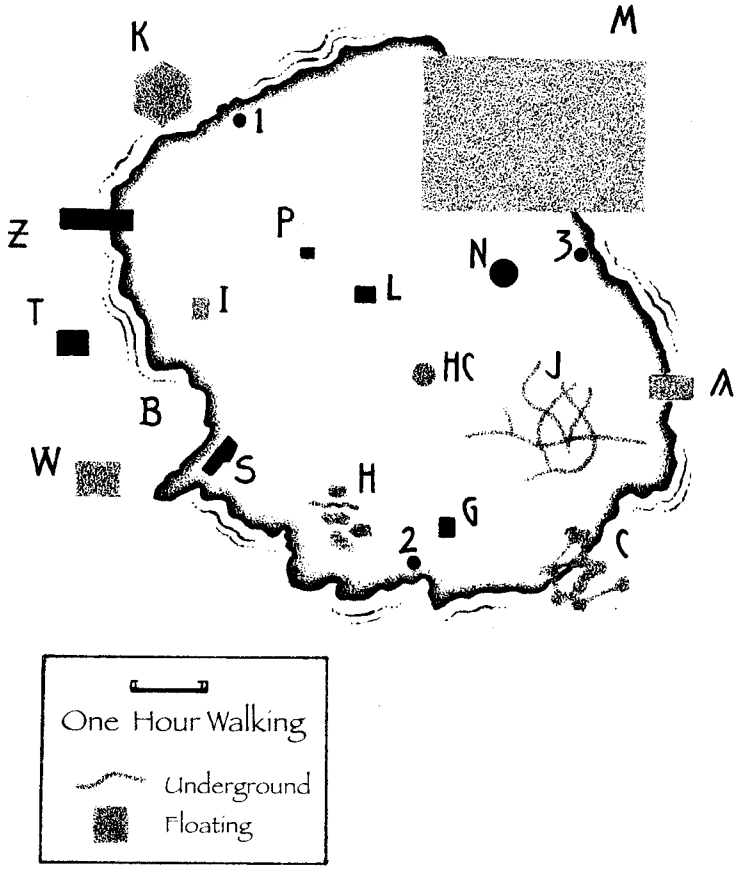
ON THE ETERNAL LIBRARY

The Eternal Library may be eternal as an institution, but the edifice which contains it has been rebuilt and refurbished more than a dozen times. However, for mystically symbolic reasons, the bricks used in the original small, stepped pyramid that was built soon after the founding are incorporated into the current structure.



Map Key

A- House of Argenti
B- Bay of Silver
C- House of Carinci
G- House of Gascilium
H- House of Heindari
HC- Hall of the Conclave
I- House of Ippuli
J- House of Jotyn
K- House of Krand
L- Eternal Library
M- Majestic Hall of Efficient Management
N- House of Narlanth
P- First Governor's Palace
S- The Sphinx
T- House of Thaloss
W- War College
Z- House of Zanjan
1- Monument of Messias
2- Monument to Navarim
3- Monument to Future Therans

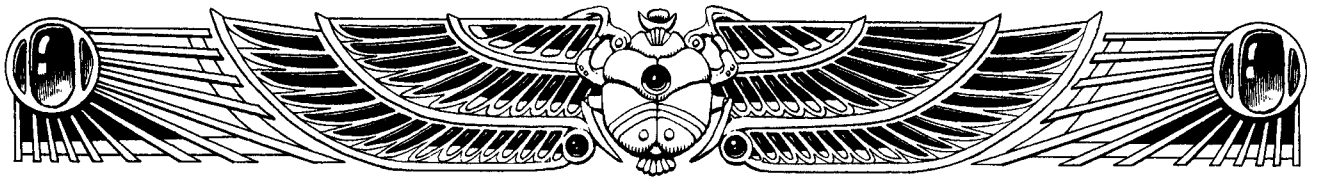


The present-day Eternal Library is housed in a stepped pyramid atop a squat, eight-story tower that stands majestically in the center of the island. Locations around the Library are considered auspicious, and the surrounding land is the most valuable in the City. The area around the Library houses the most expensive inns, as well as private villas owned by celebrated and wealthy scholars. The Empire's noble houses all maintain small villas here as well, for the benefit of their resident scholars and any guests they wish to impress.

The first floor of the Library tower is open to the public and is mostly taken up by a low-ceilinged but spacious reading room and a small collection of texts that visitors may peruse. Slaves may not make use of the facilities, but freemen, the Enlightened and even barbarians are permitted unlimited access for a daily fee of 10 silvers. For 150 silvers, Theran citizens can purchase a membership that entitles them to reading room access for a year and day. For this same privilege, freemen pay 200 silvers; enlightened, 250 silvers; and barbarians, 350 silvers. Among the texts permanently exhibited in the reading room are the *Books of Harrow* and *The Shining Foundation.*

Only scholars accredited by the Nominating Committee of the Eternal Library may consult the complete collection, which includes objects as well as documents. The complete collection is housed in the remaining seven floors of the tower and contains everything truly interesting to scholars. A few non-Therans receive the proper accreditation, but only after performing some great service to scholarship and the Empire. Accredited scholars must pay an annual fee of 1,000 silvers for access to the full collection unless they are employed by the Library, in which case they are paid for their labors but must work on projects commissioned by the Research Committee.

The pyramid, which is adorned with animated statues of Elianar Messias and Kearos Navarim, contains the offices of the Library's archivists, as well as private study areas for those accredited scholars personally known to and approved by Grand Master Korgan, the current head of the Eternal Library. Master Korgan lives in a suite of rooms at the very top of the pyramid. I am told they are quite sumptuous, though I have never seen them.



The Library collection, which seems to grow larger every day, is close to filling its current space. Various officials are debating whether Master Korgan and the Library should remain in the current building and divest the collection of its less useful materials, or if a new home for the Eternal Library should be constructed (a floating one, of course). As Theran scholars have never seen a document they didn't yearn to press to their bosoms, I predict that a new, airborne Eternal Library building will soon cast its imposing shadow across the City.

On the Sphinx

The tale of the Sphinx's creation is told in the works of Storymaster Jallo Redbeard, famed ork troubadour. —Jerriv Forrim

Looming over the harbor of Thera is the Sphinx, created by the famous dwarf scholar-magician Jaron during the heady years of the City's expansion before the Scourge. More than one hundred feet long and forty feet high, this huge stone beast stares with glowing blue eyes at the Arbitorium and the First Governor's Palace. According to legend, Jaron sought the help of three great-form earth elementals to weave the thing together out of raw rock, which they did in the course of a day. The Sphinx was meant as a warning against hubris; if ever a First Governor or Conclave forgot the worthy goals of Thera's founders, the Sphinx would awaken. What it would do once awake has never been made clear, but the stories all strongly imply that the consequences would be less than pleasant. Magical research committees from the Arbitorium and the Eternal Library have from time to time attempted to fathom the Sphinx's mystery, but none of these inquiries have yet yielded much useful information.

Several minor legends also surround the Sphinx. For example, it is said that greedy or overambitious officials should avoid approaching the beast alone at night, lest it wake for long enough to gobble them up. Whether true or not, this legend provides a convenient excuse whenever certain officials must be made to disappear.

On the First Governor's Palace

The title of First Governor is a fiction; everyone knows he's really an emperor. However, Names have power. If the First Governor took the Name of emperor, the aforementioned Sphinx might wake and cause no end of trouble. The First Governor's palace is an architectural reflection of this same fiction; the part of it that can be seen is a humble stepped pyramid. Like the Eternal Library, this part of the structure is built partly from the bricks that made up the first palace.

The rest of the palace—several wings added over the years—is invisible, shielded from physical and astral sight by the First Governor's personal wizards and illusionists. Apparently, successive First Governors hoped the Sphinx wouldn't notice the palace's increased grandeur—or would at least take the effort made to conceal it as an indication of appropriate humility. The number of rooms in the Invisible Palace is a state secret, but I have reason to believe there are 123 chambers, including meeting halls, servants' quarters and a vast indoor arena. The latter is used for the private entertainment of the First Governor, his aides and Conclave members in his favor. Many of the chambers have had their invisible roofs removed since the obsidiman Kanidris ascended to the Governor's chair. This allows him to live in luxury while keeping the sky over his head—and thereby avoiding his race's normal cycle of hibernation. Apparently, many of the private quarters have been given over to fellow members of his Liferock.

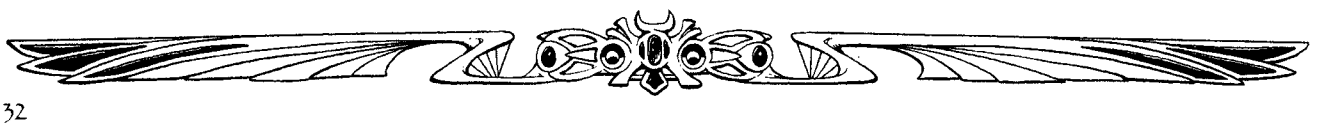
The entire structure is covered by a Great Shield, a dome of pure magical energy much like those used to cover citadels during the Scourge. The Great Shield is impassable to all except those who carry a special amulet given to them by Kanidris's staff. Guard stations stand around the edges of the Great Shield, one at each of the four cardinal compass points; however, their duties are mostly ceremonial. They can do nothing to repel intruders that the Great Shield cannot.

Kanidris and those of his Liferock behave in a most unobsidimanlike manner. What corruption infected their Liferock during the Scourge? —Isam Derr, Lightbearer of Wishon

Anyone attempting to walk, run or fly through the Shield bumps up against an unseen wall. Those who try to pass through magically are swiftly rendered unconscious by the Shield's defensive energies. To keep the clever but unscrupulous from stealing the amulets, the Great Shield is periodically re-attuned and new amulets issued. Visitors to the palace are given amulets that lose their attunement after a few hours, so that their bearers can come and go only once. Expired amulets are coveted souvenirs.

On the Arbitorium

The Arbitorium is not a single building, but a complex of buildings spread throughout the city. The most impressive edifice of the Arbitorium, built as a monument to the Theran bureaucracy, is the Majestic Hall of Efficient Management. This building serves as a blatant exception to the magical theory that Naming something makes it what it is. A floating slab of brick and mortar that overshadows much of the City's northeastern portion, the Hall is a marvel of inefficiency. I

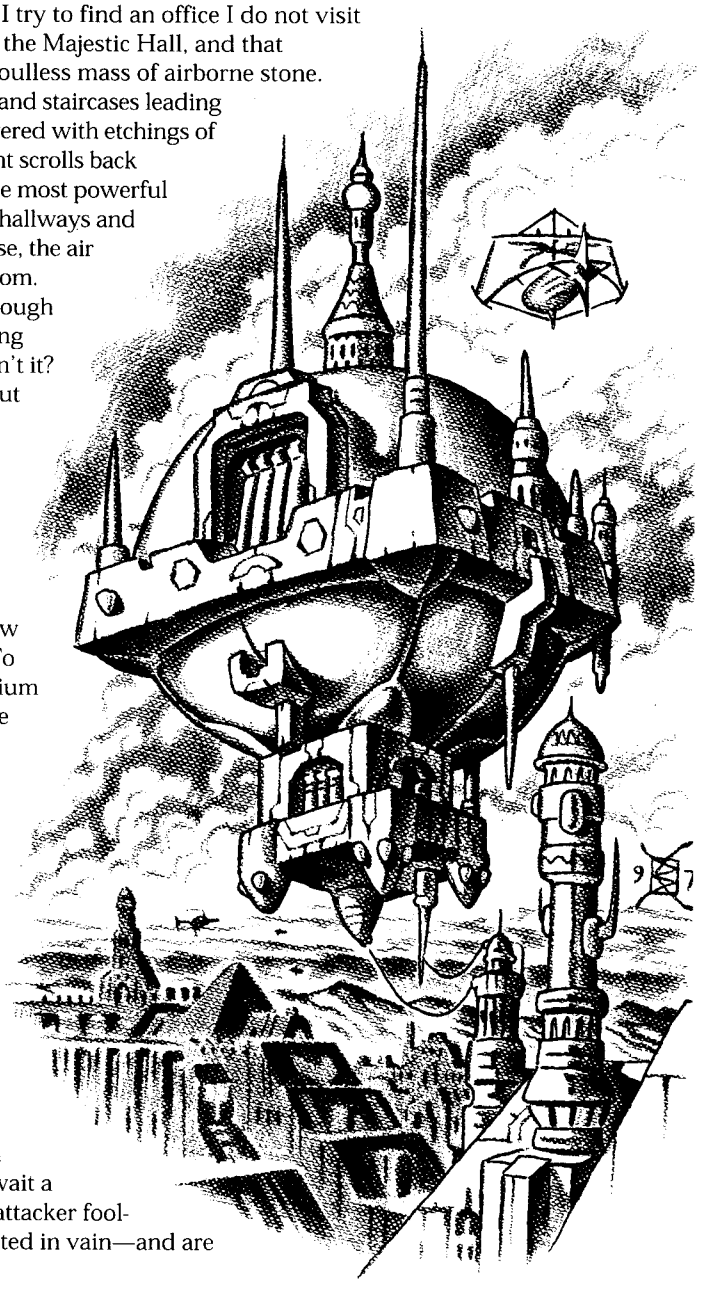


have worked there for years, yet I still get lost whenever I try to find an office I do not visit regularly. A massive, animated statue of Dis squats atop the Majestic Hall, and that Passion's desiccated spirit rules all aspects of this gray, soulless mass of airborne stone.

Inside, the Arbitorium is a veritable maze of hallways and staircases leading from one floor to the next. The walls are either blank or covered with etchings of dispirited-looking unfortunates carrying loads of parchment scrolls back and forth to no apparent purpose, and only the offices of the most powerful officials have windows. Consequently, telling the different hallways and floors apart is nearly impossible. And to make matters worse, the air inside the place reeks of dust, rotting parchment and boredom.

Only the Arbitorium's highest officials are unlucky enough to labor in this soul-deadening place—which says something about what certain powers in the Empire truly value, doesn't it? Others work in various other unlovely buildings throughout the City, including several stepped pyramids devoted entirely to the storage of useless documents.

Admittance to any Arbitorium building is permitted only by appointment. To apply for such an appointment, however, you must first gain admittance to the building in question—for which you must have an appointment. This ingenious paradox is intended to prevent the unwashed masses from disturbing the important business (finding new and different ways to waste time) of Arbitorium officials. To circumvent it, you must have connections. Find an Arbitorium official who works in the building you want to enter and he will slip you an appointment form—for a small fee, of course. Some low-level clerks make more in a year selling appointment slips than they draw in pay from the Imperial Treasury.



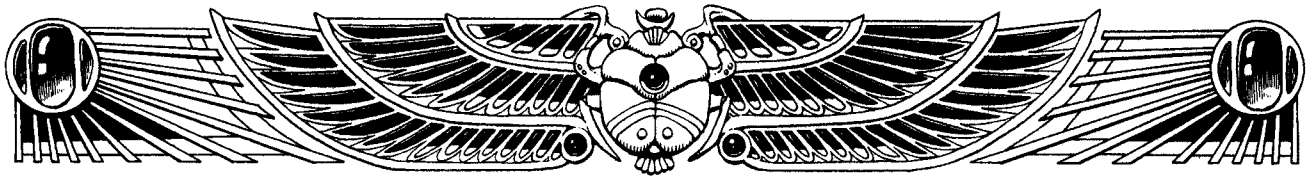
On the War College

The recently completed headquarters of the War College floats above the Bay of Silver. It looks like a behemoth of nearly three times the usual size—as if ordinary behemoths weren't enormous enough already! Though outfitted as a fortress, the War College is far too ungainly to participate in any naval battle. It is airborne only in the sense of being off the ground—actual movement is beyond its capabilities. It is, however, well-defended against intruders, with numerous turrets in which ballista crews, archers and spellcasters anxiously await a chance to prove their mettle by shooting down any aerial attacker foolish enough to show itself. So far, these defenders have waited in vain—and are likely to do so indefinitely.

The War College is the Empire's center of military training, planning and administration. The bulk of the Seventh Legion and the First and Eighth Fleets are housed in barracks built into the vast, floating structure, which also houses its own group of magical researchers, who compete with those attached to the Library and the Governor's staff to prove themselves the foremost innovators in matters of mass magical destruction. (Needless to say, the magicians conduct many of their experiments well away from the College, in places where no one of any consequence can be harmed should things go awry.)

On the Hall of the Conclave

The Hall of the Conclave is a vast, floating minaret without a tower to support it. It is shaped like a gigantic onion bulb or candle flame and finished with ingenious hinged tiles, which are gilded on one side and silvered on the other. The tiles wave in the breeze, creating a shimmering effect that enhances the awesome beauty of the structure.



Inside, the Legislative Chamber takes up most of the building. (The rest of the space is devoted to small meeting rooms, cloakrooms, and a kitchen from which Conclave members may order edibles and drinks should the session run longer than they expected.) Seats for the lavernae rise in a spiral from the floor of the chamber to the ceiling. Anyone wishing to take a seat must use one of the many floating platforms supplied for this purpose. A Conclave member recognized to speak does so from the most ornate of the platforms, which is adorned with images of fierce creatures from all of the Empire's provinces. All this floating around, of course, is as inconvenient as it is wondrous—or would be if the Conclave convened more frequently. It meets only every four years, however, and when done on such infrequent occasions, all the ceremonial floating and flitting seems stately and impressive. If the Conclave were a working legislature that met on a regular basis, the Hall in which it is housed would no doubt be designed more modestly. Most of the time, however, the Hall of the Conclave functions as an awe-inspiring but unoccupied monument to Theran power and glory.

On the Grand Halls of the Great Houses

The Grand Halls of the major noble houses are more frequently replaced than any other structure in Thera—though, fortunately for we map-makers, they rarely change location! The goal of all Theran politicking, especially in the Great City, is to trump rival houses—and the grandeur of one's Hall is a properly expensive expression of this ongoing effort. As a result, no Grand Hall contains fewer than one hundred chambers. The Grand Halls are used for House Conclaves, as residences for the highest-ranking clans of each house, and as places for doing business and taking pleasure. The nature of these pleasures varies from house to house. The stern leaders of House Zanjan tolerate nothing more scandalous than rigorous exercise and the occasional quaffing of ale. At the other end of the spectrum are the wild celebrations of House Ippuli, which I shall not describe in detail for fear of offending delicate Throalic sensibilities.

All of the Grand Halls I shall describe are floating structures, unless stated otherwise.

The Grand Hall of House Argenti is a huge cube, a design intended to evoke a treasure vault. There is indeed much silver housed within it, though the precise amount varies wildly from rumor to rumor. The outside of the manor is covered in coins, minted in all parts of the Empire.

Carinci's Grand Hall is series of globes connected by delicate, almost spiderweb-like walkways. Its artistry is the most subtly done, and therefore the most attractive, of these mostly unsubtle structures.

Gascilium's Hall remains steadfastly unfashionable. Bound fast to the earth instead of bobbing around in the air, it is a large, two-story rectangle shaped like the ideal plot of farmland (as laid out by the founder of the house centuries ago).

The Hall of Heindari is confounding to the eye. This bizarre assemblage of asymmetrical chambers festooned with gears, pulleys, flashing magic crystals and other ornamental devices is intended to symbolize the inventiveness of Heindari researchers. I call it a perfect representation of insanity. It lights up the night sky for some distance around, winking and flashing like a moon gone mad.

Stranger still is the Hall of Ippuli, another vast cube whose faces are all covered with grinning or weeping porcelain masks. Ippuli is not as wealthy as many of its fellow houses, and more than a few nobles have openly wondered where Ippuli got the money for such an extravagant gesture. Given House Ippuli's reputation for skulduggery—some even say that this house supports bands of criminals who waylay and plunder the unwary on City streets!—some house leaders fear that the necessary silver was taken from their own treasuries.

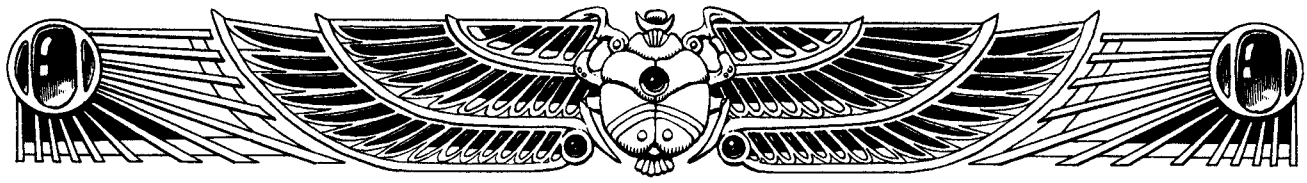
The Hall of Jotyn is beneath the ground, a highly unusual place for Therans to build. For obscure symbolic reasons, the chief clans of this house long ago decreed that Jotyn's business should be done in the bowels of the earth, and built their Hall accordingly. Jotyn's Hall is a winding complex of corridors in which denizens of Throal would likely feel at home. These mine-like subterranean passages are decorated in gold and other precious minerals. Some folk worry that the Jotyn are burrowing too deep in our fragile island's soil, and may even destroy the crust of earth that anchors us in place on the Selestrean Sea. I cannot speak to such fears, however—I am a map-maker, not a building engineer.

The Hall of Krand is a huge, translucent polyhedron, each of its twelve facings shaped like a hexagram. Activities in its outermost chambers are visible to all observers, and so only public affairs may be conducted in them. Private chambers are further inside the structure's interior.

The Hall of Thaloss rises from the sea on sturdy iron stilts. Each of its six floors is separated by another layer of iron pillars. Most Thaloss business is done in the Arbitorium, an institution with which this noble house is virtually synonymous. The Hall is mostly residential, and rights to the coveted uppermost floors spark many disputes among house members.

House Narlanth's manor, a shimmering tower of opal ringed by fiery magical sigils that change their shape as the constellations progress through the sky, reflects the Narlanthi's natural bent toward magic and the mystical. Like the Hall of House Heindari, the Hall of Narlanth lights up the night sky and assures that the streets of the City are never dark.

The most recently renovated Grand Hall is that of House Zanjan—the famous floating sword of which you have doubtless already heard tell. The Hall of Zanjan used to be a behemoth, but house leaders chose to move to free up the behemoth for service in Marac. Rumor has it that Zanjan's Hall can also double as a war machine; it is said to contain port after port



that can rain fire upon those below. Understandably, such rumors make ordinary residents of the City a bit nervous—a reaction greatly appreciated, perhaps even intentionally fostered by the military-minded members of House Zanjan.

No one—not even I—know where Medari's Grand Hall is. I mention it only for the sake of completeness, which I know matters a great deal to our visitors from Throal's Great Library. Members of House Medari insist that they have a hall that it is both impressive and clever, concealed somewhere in, over or under the island of Thera (depending on who you are talking to). Some outsiders insist that this imprecision is a ruse intended to confuse House Medari's numerous rivals, and that the Medari secretly live in several inconspicuous buildings scattered about the island. Others would not put any manner of strangeness past the Medari, who are known for their slippery and deceitful character. In terms of Theran politics, having a manor that no one has seen means that no one can truly claim to have surpassed House Medari in opulence, inventiveness, size, or anything else that might impress other people.

On the Monuments of Messias

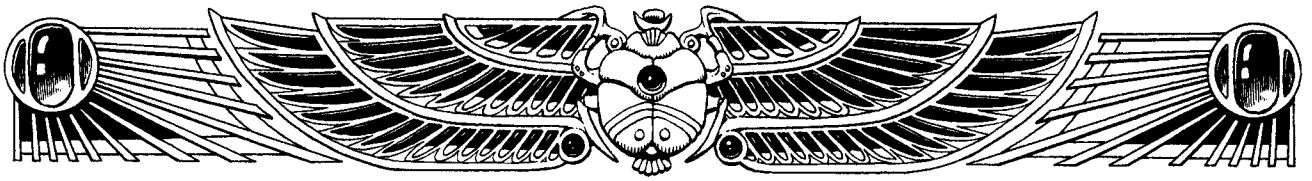
On the shores of our island, forming a triangle across the entire Great City, stand three massive pillars of pure orichalcum, each seven stories high. They are said to be monuments to Elianar Messias, Kearos Navarim and to the Therans of the future, respectively. Collectively known as the Monuments of Messias, they were constructed some time before the Scourge, though no one knows precisely when. They are also said to be purely ornamental, but no one who has seriously considered the question of their function believes this. What they are truly meant for remains a mystery, and those few who know aren't telling. Most rumors agree, however, that the pillars must have some truly astounding purpose. The value of the orichalcum involved boggles the mind; each pillar may well contain the result of centuries of orichalcum mining for an entire province. To use so much of this immensely valuable, powerful and rare material for mere decoration is either wasteful ostentation of the highest order, or a lie designed to fool the credulous. I shall relate a few of the most popular theories about the monuments' true purpose:

- The pillars assure Thera's dominance over the Selestrean Basin. By taking from each province the most precious mineral in existence, Theran magicians guaranteed that these provinces' True Patterns would forever be inextricably linked with the Great City's.
- The pillars create power that allows Theran magical researchers to expand the boundaries of magical knowledge, developing new techniques that would otherwise be impossible to imagine, let alone put into practice.
- The pillars protected the Selestrean Basin from the Horrors. The most powerful Horrors in existence tried to ravage our part of the world, but failed because the magical energies of the monuments killed them. Even now, if the monuments were somehow destroyed, the Scourge could begin anew.
- The pillars are responsible for the world's magic level—specifically, for its failure to drop beyond the low point that the devisers of the Rites of Protection permitted—and thus guarantee that the age of magic will continue for eternity.
- The pillars' purpose is political and economic rather than mystical. The Orichalcum Wars were strategically useful because they kept the peoples of various provinces at each other's throats during a critical period when they could have been fighting the Empire. They also made Theran noble houses rich. In the end, however, the very success of this strategy caused an unexpected dilemma: so much orichalcum was found and mined that the value of the substance threatened to plummet. So our forebears built the monuments to use up the excess supply of orichalcum, thus protecting the fortunes of the noble houses (who had all secured loans with orichalcum reserves).

> How absurd—and appropriate—that the Therans would take credit for the world's magic. To stop the magical cycle is far beyond the power of even the great dragons.
>
> —Derrat, Wizard of Ystane

On Visiting Aerial Buildings

At this point, the reader unfamiliar with Thera may well be asking exactly how people get to the many floating structures I have described. Winged Name-givers, like windlings, or those who possess the blood-magic charm known as the wings of flame, can reach these structures under their own power. Most, however, use balloons. House Argenti and House Medari both run lucrative ballooning services, charging fat fees for passage. A balloon consists of a large canvas ball full of magically active gas; hanging from the canvas by several ropes is a basket in which travelers may stand. A bolt of energy from a special magical crystal causes the gas in the balloon to rise, making the balloon airborne. Depending on their size, balloons can transport from two to twelve Name-givers at one time. The balloons are also used for pleasure cruises and aerial tours of the City. They are made in bright colors, and the sight of them bobbing through the skies gives the island of Thera a festive atmosphere. The usual trip from anywhere on the ground to a nearby floating building takes less than ten minutes and costs from 5 to 10 silver pieces. Longer tours are, naturally, more expensive.



A few small airships also transport passengers between floating buildings, but these are mostly maintained by the noble houses for the sole benefit of their members. For the ordinary citizen, transport is by balloon or not at all.

SECURITY MEASURES EXPLICATED

—As observed by T'saanas V'shala

Readers familiar with the extreme security measures maintained in the Theran Quarter of Vivane might expect the same—or worse—in the Great City, but security measures here are much less obtrusive. Confident in their safety and power, City authorities allow foreigners and natives alike complete freedom of movement. Wrongdoers are dealt with swiftly, but innocent citizens and visitors may go about their daily business without fear of harassment or arbitrary searches.

Theran and non-Theran visitors receive different treatment in only one respect. Those who are not citizens of the Empire must submit upon arrival to brief questioning by the *ianatori*, officers of the Arbitorium who speak to all visitors traveling to the City by airship or ocean vessel. The ianatori compare new arrivals against descriptions of known criminals and rebels; anyone who does not match these descriptions and does not appear hostile to Thera or her residents receives a pleasant welcome to the City. This came as a great relief to us. I confess that, as our airship approached the sky-dock, I was gripped by visions of a humilating body search. That this did not happen, even though we identified ourselves as representatives of an enemy government, speaks volumes about the City authorities' confidence in their ability to deal with troublemakers.

Daily security within the City is provided by a citywide police force known as the *custos*. Unlike their counterparts in provincial capitals, the City's custos are civilian authorities, reporting to the Arbitorium instead of the War College. This distinction is important to Therans, who like to view themselves as a free people. The Empire's nobles keep the custos from troubling them much through the Grand Conclave, whose members can become quite vocal when they feel their rights or privileges being threatened. (I shall speak more on this issue shortly.)

The custos patrol the city on foot, in units of five: one adept leading the squad, with four non-adept but extremely well-trained fighters under him. Leaders tend to be warriors or swordmasters—most often moderately experienced former adventurers seeking a quieter life. Though it may sound odd to speak of keeping order in a large city as "a quiet life," a good custos is at least as accomplished in diplomacy as in the use of arms, and so keeping the peace need not mean engaging miscreants in combat. (Magically augmented soldiers do not serve as custos, because their perceptions are too dulled for this sensitive work.)

In the event of civil unrest, the custos can field small cavalry units trained to put down disturbances. Serious unrest is virtually unknown in the City, however. The Therans I spoke to could not recall any such incidents ever happening, and no record of riots or rebellion exists anywhere in the Eternal Library (at least, not so far as I and my colleagues could determine). Crowds sometimes get out of hand, especially after sporting events or festivals, but these incidents represent no real threat to the stability of the City government. Should such an unimaginable event ever occur, the custos could no doubt draw on the training units at the War College for reinforcements—a piece of common knowledge that may partly explain why trouble in the City remains minor.

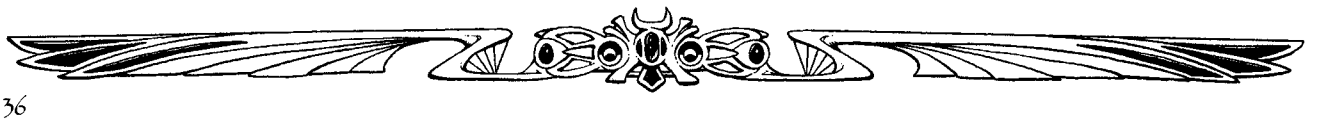
Each of the City's four custos stations (which I was privileged to visit) contain administrative offices and barracks. I could not learn from anyone the exact numbers of custos on active duty in the City.

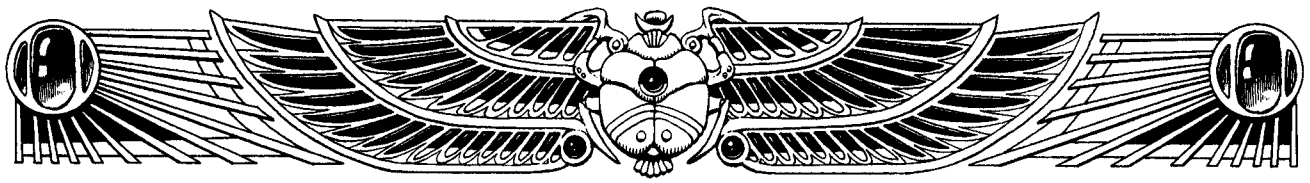
Crime and Punishment

The City's noble leaders see the custos as existing to keep other people from troubling the lives of the powerful. Several Theran citizens told me (after I gave them assurances of anonymity) that influential nobles can literally get away with murder if they choose. The officials in the Arbitorium's Department of Internal Security, to whom the custos report, are all appointees, and so must keep their political masters happy if they wish to retain their posts. In such a situation, there are often vast differences between the law as it is written and things as they are done.

First, a brief explanation of how the Theran legal system is supposed to work. Under Theran law, civil disputes are adjudicated by a magistrate, an appointee of the Arbitorium. Criminal cases are investigated and prosecuted by the custos. Theran criminal law distinguishes between Crimes of Grievance, which tend to be minor, and Crimes of Shame, which are more serious. For the latter type of offense, the law requires the custos to seek the cooperation of one or more praetori. Part soldiers and part diplomats, the praetori work directly for the Arbiter-General, one of the most powerful Imperial officials aside from the First Governor.

Crimes of Shame include murder, arson, rape, assault that causes permanent injury, and corruption of government officials. Crimes of Grievance include minor assault, disturbance of the peace, tax evasion and the selling of stolen goods. Most Crimes of Grievance are punishable by fines; anyone convicted who cannot pay up is sentenced to hard labor, which is essentially slavery with an expiration date. Crimes of Shame may be punished in an assortment of ways: fines, hard labor, slavery, exile or death. The law is alleged to apply equally to all and to have no regard for the social standing of either victim or perpetrator when a crime of any kind is committed.





Now I shall describe how the system works in practice. If a noble perpetrates a crime against a foreigner, slave or freeman, the custos are likely to conduct a cursory investigation and then close the case for "lack of evidence." When perpetrator and victim are both nobles, the custos conduct a thorough, but painstakingly slow, investigation. While they dawdle, the heads of the noble houses involved almost invariably resolve the matter privately between them. They see to it that the custos get word of their extra-legal agreement, and the case is once more dropped for "lack of evidence." If the perpetrator is anyone other than a noble, the law is allowed to take its course; if a freeman or slave or foreigner commits a crime against a noble, he can be sure of receiving the maximum allowable penalty.

A scholar at the symposium told me of a case that perfectly illustrates the ease with which noble families may bend the law to their liking. A member of House Argenti was slain in a tavern brawl by a young noble of House Zanjan, a military officer with a promising career ahead of him. Now, such a Crime of Shame would normally be punishable by exile or death. In this case, however, the elders of Zanjan kept the young killer away from the custos and approached the leaders of House Argenti to "discuss the matter." The leaders of both houses agreed that the death was not intentional, and that the slain Argenti had provoked the fight. To settle things, House Zanjan agreed to supply at its own expense a mercenary company to guard Argenti caravans in the province of Creana for a year and a day. They also agreed to transfer the offender to front-line duty in the rebellious province of Marac, where Theran forces had recently sustained great losses. Thus the Zanjani murderer was given a chance to redeem himself by fighting for his Empire, and the Argenti were compensated directly for the death of their fellow. The official investigation, of course, came to nothing.

As a Theran proverb says, "When the law intervenes, only the state wins."

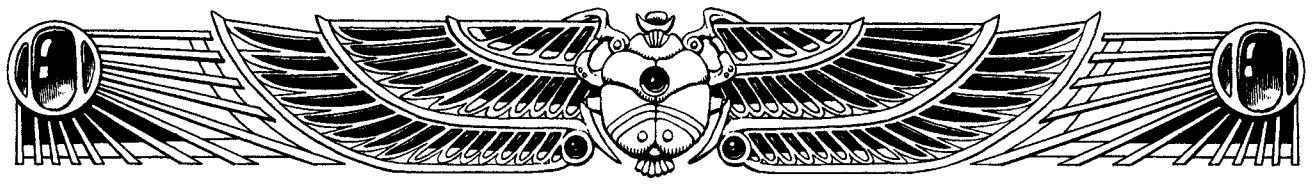
Regarding Cha-Thordovis

—Anonymous of Thera

The Supreme Warden of the Great City, who is responsible for preventing crime in the City, is a troll Named Cha-Thordovis. She is extremely dangerous—not to the City's criminal elements, sad to say, but to the ordinary citizen and to anyone the First Governor sees as a potential rival. She is among Kanidris's personal confidantes, and so her influence is greater than her station would normally allow.

Despite her official duties, Cha-Thordovis spends most of her time gathering information on Kanidris's domestic enemies. But then, she *is* of House Ippuli. They're known for carrying out all kinds of criminal enterprises, all in secret and all intended to enrich the Ippuli at their rivals' expense. I've heard stories that she runs several—maybe even all—of House Ippuli's thief gangs. And of course, she and her house escape chastisement because the First Governor finds her information useful in keeping his power.

I'm sure other people will tell you that House Ippuli's thieving bands don't exist. A pickpocket is a pickpocket, they'll say, and it doesn't take backing from a noble house to make people like that go out and rob. As if any noble house would so sully its hands, even the Ippuli, they'll say. You can draw your own conclusions. About the charges of spying for Kanidris, though, there's little question. On more than one occasion, Cha-Thordovis has given Kanidris information that allowed him to humiliate his opponents. It is equally without question that if Kanidris considers someone useful to him, that person is untouchable no matter what offenses he or she may have committed.



I met Cha-Thordovis once. I hope never to do so again. She loves flattery, hates to be contradicted, and maintains an unseemly interest in the private peccadilloes of other Theran officials. She loathes her fellow trolls, for no reason anyone has yet puzzled out, and devotes special effort to persecuting them.

The Arbiter-General, Andreax of House Medari, despises Cha-Thordovis. However, he has not yet moved against the Supreme Warden—a restraint completely out of character for Andreax. I have heard rumors that Cha-Thordovis possesses compromising information about the Arbiter-General and am inclined to give such rumors credence. In public, each makes a show of unwavering support for the other. Privately, each wants to do the other in. Kanidris is likely happy with this state of affairs; he likes to see his dogs fight one another.

On Attitudes Toward Foreigners

Based on my dealings with Therans in Barsaive, I expected to encounter snarling contempt in the City. I was surprised to be greeted with politeness and curiosity. Though I sometimes felt condescended to, it seemed to me that these slights came of ignorance, not malice. Theran children are brought up believing that their Empire "civilized" the unenlightened barbarians of the Selestrean Basin. Therefore, they expect from us gratitude bordering on worship. Therans of the City rarely meet typical foreigners and therefore get few chances to learn the truth. They see us as exotic creatures out of legends, with exciting tales to tell and quaint customs to marvel (or snicker) at. This patronizing behavior can be irritating, but it does us no real harm.

It is only when a naive Theran goes to the provinces and discovers just how "ungrateful" we really are that the "typically Theran" arrogance and spite comes to the fore. A young Theran's first such trip is often a bitter experience. It cannot be easy to cast off an entire lifetime of teaching, even when those teachings are more myth than fact. Predictably, instead of trying to understand we provincials and learn to respect our differences from them, the pride-wounded Therans continue to try to remake us into the grateful lesser beings they recall from their childhood history texts. Too often, sadly, they become frustrated with what they see as our foolish refusal to mind our betters. Then they use violence against us, breaking their own laws in the process. I wish I could say that this gap in our mutual understanding can be easily bridged. But that means getting the Therans to admit that their entire way of life is built on falsehood. It also means convincing them to give up the vast wealth they have plundered from the peoples of the Selestrean Basin. Neither of these will happen easily—indeed, I doubt they are possible.

On Daily Life in the Great City

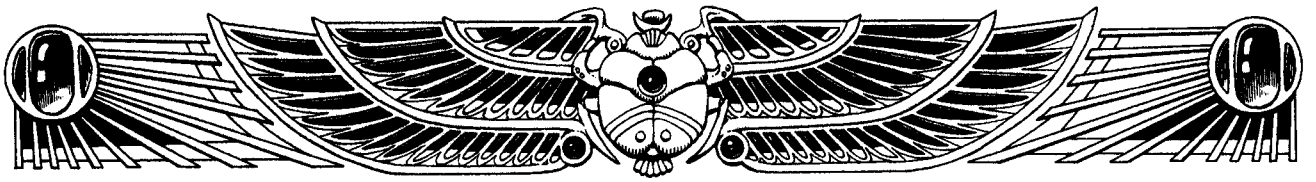
Though many readers of this volume doubtless want to know about the size of Thera's garrisons, the ease (or difficulty) with which its vaults may be plundered and the possibilities for profitable trade deals with the City, Merrox insists that we discuss the day-to-day lives of City residents so that we can better imagine the Therans as people like ourselves. Thus, we arrive at a flawed premise—which nonetheless proves instructive.

The flawed premise is that there is such a thing as an average Theran. The City is home to insanely rich nobles and wretched slaves, humble food vendors and Imperial merchant princes. You will find rich and poor in Throal, but the gulfs that separate poor from rich in the Great City are so huge you could sail an airship through them. Yet strangely enough, the conflict between the two classes remains very much below the surface in the City. Nearly every Theran apparently believes that the rich deserve to be rich and the poor deserve to be poor—and so there is no point in changing things. Abetting this fatalistic acceptance of things-as-they-are is the undeniable fact that a lowly slave can rise in Theran society, even to noble rank—though such miracles happen far less often in real life than in legends.

A Day in the Life of a Noble

The everyday life of a noble depends on his station within his house. In a house's lower echelons, so-called nobles toil in uncomfortable circumstances to make money for their superiors. Young or newly inducted nobles are given small house operations to manage or are appointed to humble positions in the government or military. If they impress their patrons, both patron and junior are promoted up the ranks. If they perform badly, both they and their patrons are demoted. Thus, a slow climb to the top can be followed by a dizzying fall if a noble is unwise in his selection of juniors.

Every noble who has not already attained the highest rank strives toward life in the highest echelons of a house, which is luxurious beyond imagining. These priviliged persons wake up every morning in sheets of rare silks, eat breakfast cooked with magical spices that tantalize all the senses and then spend the day in seeming leisure, socializing with other nobles and sampling the latest novelties and diversions. The word "seeming" is important; many of the apparently frivolous get-togethers are fertile ground for business deals and political intrigues, both of which can cement or further enhance a noble's status if they succeed.



On the Curious Position of Theran Freemen

A *freeman* is a Theran-born individual (one who is born on the Island or in a Theran-controlled province) who does not belong to a noble house. Freemen are rare; most of them are recently freed slaves or the children of same. Freemen run most of the City's small businesses: they are the food vendors, the tavern keepers, the street entertainers and the enlisted Legionnaires. However, all Name-givers in lowly occupations are not necessarily freemen. Such a one might be a slave working for an absentee owner or a junior noble managing his patron's most modest operation. A freeman who shows any sort of promise is likely to be approached by a low-ranking noble in search of juniors to propel his career, which of course changes the freeman's status.

Freemen may own and sell slaves. People say that freemen generally make crueler masters than high-ranking nobles because freemen need greater proofs that others are worse off than they.

On the Enlightened

The so-called *Enlightened* are non-Therans granted the status of freemen in the City or in Theran-controlled provinces. They usually receive their status from provincial Overgovernors, though certain Arbitorium officials are also empowered to grant it. The Enlightened have thrown in their lot with their Imperial oppressors in pursuit of status and silver and are more common in the provinces than in the Great City. Like the City's freemen, they are technically entitled to the full protection of Theran law. However, the Enlightened can lose their status at any time. If they offend a noble, that noble can lodge a complaint with a magistrate. If the magistrate sides with the noble (and most do), the unfortunate Enlightened is downgraded to the status of barbarian.

Enlightened may operate businesses in Thera and may own slaves. They may not become citizens, although their children's children can. Such third-generation foreigners are then eligible for induction into a noble house. All residents of the empire above the enlightened rank are considered citizens.

On Barbarian Status

Foreigners and provincials visiting or residing in the Great City are considered *barbarians* until they are officially recognized as Enlightened. Barbarians have no legal rights; they are presumed guilty of any civil or criminal charge made against them unless they can prove otherwise. They may not own businesses in the City or in certain areas of Theran provincial enclaves where the presence of barbarians makes Theran authorities nervous. They may not keep slaves. Needless to say, they are ineligible for recruitment into a noble house. While in Thera, *we* were considered barbarians. Imagine—our fastidious Merrox and overly dignified Jerriv Forrim, "barbarians!" It makes me laugh even now.

On Slavery in Everyday Life

The lowest-ranking Therans are the slaves. Some were born to slave parents; many were enslaved as punishment for some crime or other. (As we Barsaivians know, slaves imported from the provinces are likely to have been punished for crimes they did not commit. Therans, however, are unprepared to admit this.) Slaves have no legal rights, nor any legal recourse if beaten or raped. Their families have no legal means of recompense should a slave be slain. In some Theran circles, mistreating a slave is considered distasteful; nonetheless, beatings and brutalies occur often.

A Theran slave's day depends on who owns him. He may spend his days in backbreaking labor or may be a fine artisan contentedly working at his chosen craft. He may be a plaything for the twisted desires of a decadent owner or a much-loved surrogate family member. He may live in comparative luxury in the suite of a noble or sleep with mangy dogs outside a filthy tavern. In other words, there is no such thing as a typical slave in Thera.

On the Freeing of Slaves

The owner of a slave may grant him his freedom, provided the owner applies for and receives a license from the government. In the City, the Slavemaster General (described in the **Overview** of this tome) grants such licenses. In the provinces, the license must be granted by the Overgovernor. If the slave in question was born into slavery, a license is routinely granted, for a fee ranging from 10 to 100 silvers. If the individual was enslaved as a punishment for a crime, the slave's owner must convince the granter of the license that the slave no longer poses a threat to the Empire and has suffered sufficiently to satisfy the public's demand for just vengeance.

A Theran-born slave who is freed automatically becomes a freeman, even if the slave is that rarest of creatures—an enslaved former noble. A foreign-born freed slave is considered a barbarian. The purchaser of the license may pay an additional 100 silvers to grant such a freed slave Enlightened status.

On Ostentation and Display

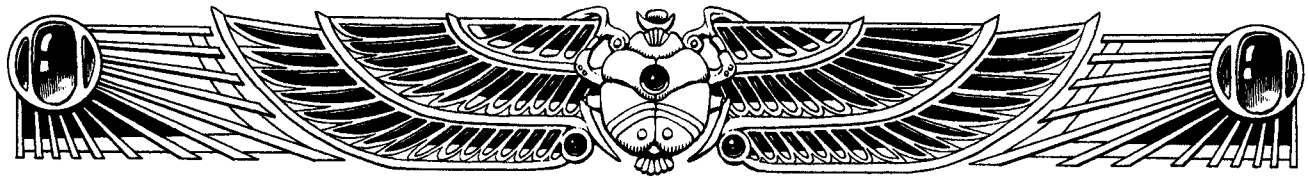
The leaders of Thera's noble houses have made the flaunting of wealth and privilege the focus of their lives. Political influence is measured by the finery of one's clothing, the jaw-dropping splendor of one's home, and the value of one's jewelry. The whole point of life in the Empire's highest echelons seems to be outdoing one's rivals. All of the noble houses became wealthy beyond measure long before the Scourge, and showing off that wealth is a means of keeping score in a complex and sometimes deadly game. To get elected to a house conclave or the Great Conclave, an ambitious Theran adorns him- or herself in the newest, most shocking and most expensive garments available.

This preoccupation with outward show takes all forms. I heard tales of popular costumers being kidnapped before major social events so that particular rivals would be unable to acquire clothing from them. (Apparently, every social event in the City is a political event in disguise.) Slaves who are gifted artisans are sometimes sold for more silver than it takes to construct an airship. A weaver of tapestries is as important to a Theran politician as a skilled airship crew is to a navy captain. Theran nobles are obsessive collectors, assembling vast collections of rare objects from the provinces. Not surprisingly, the quality of one's collection determines one's political progress. Over a glass of fine wine, I heard a tale of one bureaucrat who lost a coveted promotion because his rival revealed that many of the bureaucrat's finest miniature sculptures were incorrectly catalogued.

On a Paradoxical Attitude Toward Thievery

A civilization of collectors should abhor thieves. And Thera does. But the nobles of the City also rely on them, employing thief adepts to steal from their rivals. Officially, the penalty for even minor thefts in the City is death. In truth, however, the best thieves are freed again and again, so that they may continue to uphold this strange system of rivalry.

No Theran noble wants to execute a thief who might be able to help him embarrass a competitor in the future. Some nobles are thief adepts themselves; if caught in a rival house's treasure vaults, these noble miscreants are generally privately ransomed rather than publicly charged in the courts. The collector of the ransom finds the attendant humiliation of his victim more politically valuable than a public trial, which might put all the nobility to shame.



On the Omnipresence of Blood Magic

One alarming element of the Theran obsession with display is the increasingly frivolous ends to which the techniques of blood magic are put. For us of Barsaive, for whom blood magic is at best a necessary evil, the thought of using such sorceries for any petty end is shocking. Even worse, many Theran nobles are casting blood magic upon themselves for mere cosmetic benefits.

Apparently bored with the natural forms of Name-giver races, certain Theran nobles use magic to reshape themselves as much as possible. The higher up on the ladder of privilege a noble sits, the more likely he is to have radically altered his form. Some of these pattern changes provide magical benefits, but most alter looks only. During my short stay in the City I saw humans with gems for fingernails, trolls whose horns pulsed and moved as if they were independent living things, windlings with silk wings, dwarf craftsmen with extra arms, t'skrang with poisoned metallic barbs in their tails and orks whose voices thrummed as if they had swallowed a bucket of cicadas. Even the few obsidimen of Thera have adopted these strange alterations! Only mad obsidimen dabble with blood magic, or so it is said. How can they rejoin their Liferocks if they change their patterns in this way? The mystery of it baffles me.

I wonder if the nobles who heedlessly flirt with these dangerous powers are bringing Lupercal's Progression closer. I have heard it said that sometimes madmen see clearly where the sane do not. Or is it the Theran nobles who are mad, and the crack-brained architect actually sane?

Concerning Syglinda

From one Blurzanton, an accredited scholar of the Eternal Library with whom I shared a most informative glass of Theran wine during an evening's tour of the City, I learned of a most disturbing personage who indulges in such petty wastes of magical power. Her name is Syglinda, and her station is such that she ought to know better than to play with blood magic as a t'skrang child plays with toy boats. Syglinda is a rising star of House Narlanth, long known for its magical affinity, and is also one of the City's foremost researchers in blood magic. A lovely elf with frost-colored hair, Syglinda has undergone a number of blood magic transformations. Her hair is made of ice that never melts; her skin is pearlescent and glows in the dark. Blurzanton tells me that when you look into her eyes, you see your own image reflected—but idealized, more handsome or beautiful than you could ever dream of being.

Apparently adept at self-promotion, Syglinda makes a point of appearing at any ceremony celebrating House Narlanth's magical achievements. She also has connections to more influential magical researchers throughout Thera than any of her fellows. At one time or another, she has been a member of magical research groups connected to the Eternal Library, the Arbitorium, the First Governor and House Zanjan. The ease which with she has moved from organization to organization is remarkable, as these groups are usually fierce rivals. Her accomplishments have earned her the nickname "Queen of the Heavenherds." She owes her achievements partly to her brilliance and partly (or so Blurzanton said) to her gift for ingratiating herself with the powerful. She now heads a hand-picked group of researchers funded by House Narlanth.

Recently elected to the Grand Conclave, she tirelessly campaigns for additional funding of magical research. She claims to be on the verge of breakthroughs that will allow all Name-givers to live forever, resistant to disease and no longer slaves to physical needs such as hunger and thirst. Her supporters find this thought exhilarating; many others rightly fear such a bizarre existence.

Heavenherd is a title bestowed on only the most skilled, highly placed magicians in the Theran Empire. The Heavenherds are thought to be the current incarnation of the ancient magical order that created the Rites of Protection and Passage and are rumored to answer only to First Governor Kanidris.

—Jerriv Forrim

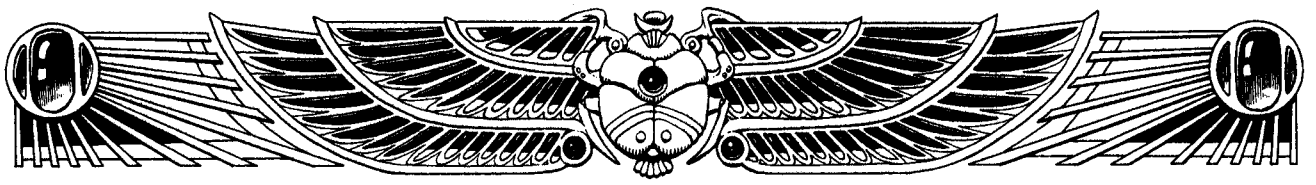
ON ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PASSIONS

—As observed by Jerriv Forrim

Before I came to the Theran Symposium and met so many scholars from distant lands, I labored under the grave misapprehension that the Passions we know in Barsaive were venerated all over the world. I have since learned that people of other provinces pay homage to Passions of which we know nothing. Those Passions will be described in subsequent chapters of this tome.

The Therans of the Great City, however, know the same Passions we do. This shared knowledge is yet another unexpected piece of common ground between our two cultures and reminds us that the roots of Theran civilization lie beneath Barsaivian soil.

Common ground or no, however, great differences exist between our own and Theran attitudes toward the Passions. Most Therans do not accord the Passions any great moral or spiritual weight, but treat them as no more than especially powerful spirits. They strike bargains with the Passions in exchange for power but do not treat them as if they possess any signifi-



cant wisdom or control over a Name-giver's destiny. The Theran magician and scholar Labbardis promulgated this theory during the Scourge. He sought to prove that the Passions were merely reflections of the thoughts and desires of Name-givers, representations of ideas integral to our lives. His writings describe them as intelligent, magically alive metaphors.

Labbardis stopped short of claiming that our desires actually created the Passions, as some of his successors have done. He urged extreme caution in dealing with the Passions, but his disciples have often been less careful. My sources tell me that several magical researches sponsored by the Arbitorium concern methods by which the power of the Passions can be subjugated to the will of the Empire—specifically, of certain powerful officials in the Imperial government. Though the average Theran would doubtless find that notion shocking, those who truly fear or love the Passions as many Barsaivians do are held in contempt in the City. The typical Theran views such notions as old-fashioned and superstitious. He is more than willing to call upon a Passion for power or even to issue a prayer in a vulnerable moment, but he is not prepared to admit that the Passions represent anything greater than himself. A true Theran, sadly, sees the Passions only as another type of magic to be exploited for immediate gain.

The Faithkeepers

Despite the derision in which they are held, a vocal minority within the Great City pays proper homage to the Passions as we do. Their questors lose no opportunity to decry the blasphemous behavior of their countrymen. They predict imminent disaster unless Therans mend their ways and beg the Passions' forgiveness. These people are collectively known as the Faithkeepers. Though their detractors lump them together, the Faithkeepers are not a single group. Each Passion claims a small cell of faithful followers, usually led by a questor. These groups are smaller and considerably less organized than Throalic *olzim*, but serve a similar purpose of bringing together a Passion's followers.

Faithkeepers of Passions known to be especially active in Name-giver affairs, such as Lochost and Thystonius, are regarded with suspicion by City authorities. One Faithkeeper of Lochost reported to me that he is under constant surveillance by minions of the Arbitorium's Department of Internal Security.

PERSISTENT RUMORS SPEAK OF ARBITORIUM RESEARCHERS WHO WISH TO CONQUER THE PASSIONS. HOWEVER, CONCLUSIVE PROOF TO SUPPORT THESE TALES REMAINS ELUSIVE.

—VAGOMATH, FAITHKEEPER OF JASPREE; RESEARCHER LAUREATE, HOUSE GASCILIUM

On the Mad Passions

The following tale was whispered to me by an individual who did not wish to be identified. This person claimed that the Passions most directly involved in the growth of the Theran Empire were the three we know as the mad ones: Raggok, Vestrial and Dis. Raggok (known as Rashomon before the Scourge), as Passion of Rulership, believed that the Selestrean Basin would best be protected under a single authority. He also thought that he and his fellow Passions might gain influence if that same authority required their worship outside of Barsaive and Thera. Dis joined Raggok's cause because he thought a single ruling power would bring order to the region. These two Passions then persuaded the trickster Vestrial to join them so that the Therans might learn how to fool the Horrors and direct their attention away from the people of the Selestrean. According to my informant, this very involvement with Thera brought about the doom of these three Passions, who did not go mad until the Scourge. The most intelligent of the greater Horrors targeted the three Passions for corruption, thinking that their defeat would open up the Selestrean Basin's kaers and citadels. The three doomed Passions prevented this catastrophe, but at the cost of their sanity. They made their greatest sacrifice on Thera's behalf, but since going mad they have sought to destroy Thera because its existence is too painful a reminder of their loss.

This tale is interesting for many reasons, not least of which is its open admission that the Passion Dis is mad. Many Therans insist that Dis is sane and venerate the Passion of Order above all others (insofar as they can be said to venerate any Passion at all). Those who pay homage to Dis do not concede that his cherished "order" has turned into tyranny. To my mind, the corruption of Dis mirrors the corruption of the Theran Empire. Both began as idealistic saviors of all Name-givers but have since become oppressors. Does Dis knowingly corrupt the Empire's motives and actions in vengeance against those he associates with his fall from grace? Or do the Therans willingly embrace this Passion because their own fall renders them blind to his madness?

CREANA

The province of Creana lies on the southeastern shore of the Selestrean Sea, on the continent of Fekara. It is known for the fertility of its central river, which the local people call the Great Mother. Its largest city is Karnard, home to nearly half a million Name-givers.

The relationship between Creana and Thera is a curious one, more closely resembling an alliance between states than the association of conquered and conqueror. The kings of Creana have maintained and expanded their power through strict compliance with Theran demands, and in return the Empire has helped them absorb several nearby city-states. Once independent, the cities of Okonopolis, Issyr, Chalmides and Nuboz have lain under the Creanan-Theran yoke almost since the Empire's envoys first set foot in the halls of the Creanan pharons.

To most Barsaivians, Creana is a distant wonder. We have all heard legends of its fabulous monuments to the dead, the multicolored shifting sands of its deserts and the dread power of the dragons said to sleep beneath the land. Traders and scholars from Creana sometimes visit Barsaive, but few visitors from that province dare to venture beyond the Theran outpost at Vivane. For citizens of Throal to visit Creana and learn about its people was therefore a rare and greatly treasured experience.

It was my greatest pleasure to meet the Creanan delegation to the Great Symposium. Headed by the learned Court Scribe Aten-a-par, the Creanans demonstrated that they desired knowledge of us as fervently as we sought knowledge of them. Jerriv Forrim and I presented the Creanan delegation with a copy of The Explorer's Guide to Barsaive to add to the collection of the Doomed Library of Karnard, and in return they kindly provided us accounts of their land from which we have fashioned this chapter. Except where noted otherwise, the material concerning Creana is taken directly from the writings of Aten-a-par.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records, 1509 TH

ON THE ORIGINS OF CREANA

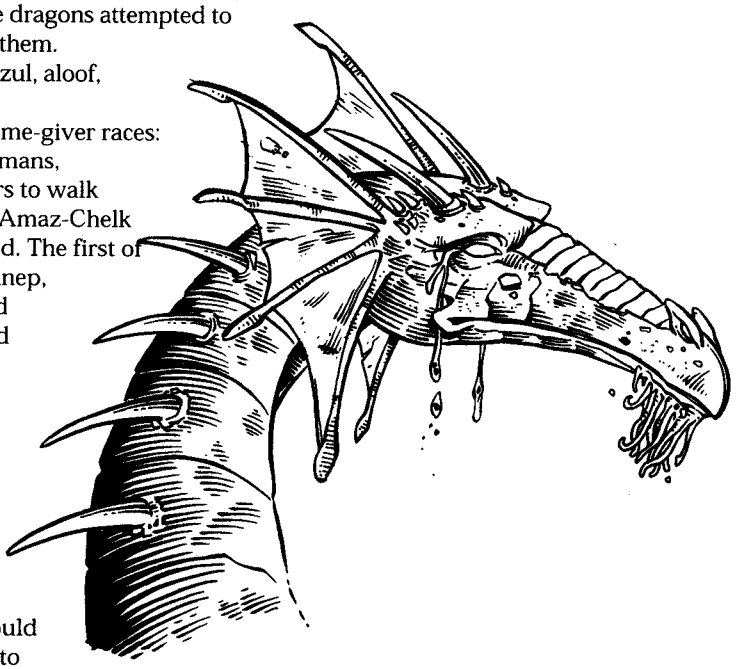
—In the words of Man-ot-krel, High Initiate of Pharon Zhem-ka-tep II

Hear now the story of the Creation, long known to the Priests of Gez.

On the day before the first day, there was nothing.

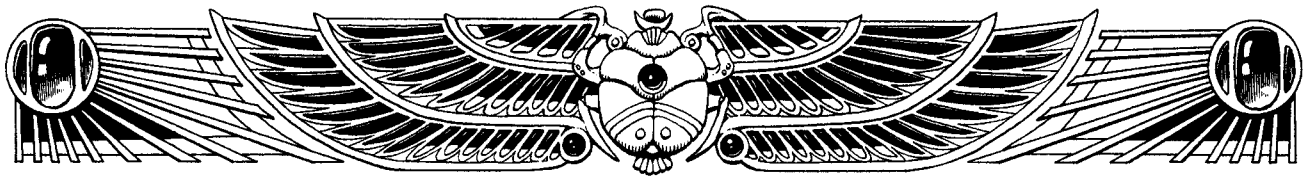
On the first day, there was Earth and Sand. The Earth and Sand were Amaz-Chelk, the Red Passion. Amaz-Chelk was angry and alone. He burned.

On the second day, there were the first Name-givers: the dragons. The dragons flew in the sky. Their flying made the Blue Passion, Ozul. The dragons attempted to land upon the Earth and Sand, but Amaz-Chelk burned them. So they took to the sky again and asked Ozul for help. Ozul, aloof, refused them.



On the third day, the dragons created the other Name-giver races: the jackalmen, dwarfs, elves, orks, trolls, windlings, humans, obsidimen and t'skrang. They told the new Name-givers to walk upon the Earth and Sand, to cool Amaz-Chelk's anger. Amaz-Chelk burned them up, and thus mortality came into the world. The first of the jackal-men to be slain became the White Passion, Sanep, guardian of the gates of the dead. He left this world and journeyed until he found the Lands of the West, a world for the dead to live in.

On the fourth day, the dragons cried. This day marks the only time that dragons have shed tears. Those tears fell onto the breast of Amaz-Chelk, and they became Ureth, the Great Mother River. Ureth cooled the anger of Amaz-Chelk and demanded that Name-givers be given the right to live upon the Earth and Sand. Amaz-Chelk agreed, provided that the dragons pay a price for disturbing him. He would go to sleep, and the dragons would also go to sleep, deep within his embrace. Before going to



sleep, the dragons would be permitted to lay eggs, which the Name-givers they had created would take to distant, imperfect lands. But from that day forward, no dragon would be allowed to walk the sands of Creana, the perfect land, or fly in the clouds of Ozul, the sky above the perfect land. Woe betide those who disturb the sleep of Amaz-Chelk or the dragons he embraces.

On the fifth day, Ureth, the Great Mother River, invited the remaining Name-givers to live along her banks. She gave birth to wheat and to barley. The Name-givers planted these seeds in the dark, rich soil. They sprang to life, as did two children dreamed by Amaz-Chelk: Tabru and Malek. Tabru was the Black Passion, the Passion of Wheat and Barley. Malek was the Multicolored Passion, the Passion of Vengeance and the Desert.

On the sixth day, Malek and Tabru each courted Ureth, to take her as wife. Ureth chose Tabru, for it is natural that the fertile river should choose the seed from which crops grow. Malek was angry and slew Tabru, then threw his dismembered body at Ureth's feet. Malek then retreated to the desert, where to this day he remains a menace to Name-givers and Passions alike.

On the seventh day, slain Tabru journeyed to the Lands of the West, the place of the dead. The dead were starving; Tabru allowed them to eat of his flesh, which sustained them.

On the eighth day, Ureth journeyed to the Lands of the West, even though she lived still, to petition for Tabru's return. Without Tabru the Name-givers of Creana, the perfect land, would go hungry and die. Sanep and Ureth wrestled for a year and a day, fighting for possession of Tabru. Each day they wrestled, another Passion was born of their flesh. After a time, there were too many Passions for the perfect land and the Lands of the West to contain. And so Sanep and Ureth stopped fighting and agreed to share Tabru. During the months of winter, he would journey to the Lands of the West to provide food for the hungry dead. During the rest of the year, he would live in Creana and give his bounty to the living.

Ureth plucked a sheaf of wheat from Tabru's ear and took it back with her to the perfect land. The first Name-giver she saw upon her return was a human named Pharon. She bid Pharon eat the sheaf of wheat, and he was infused with Tabru's essence. And so Pharon became Tabru in this world, for us. Ureth made him king of all Name-givers, and since that day the name "Pharon" has meant king. Creana lies under the wise rule of a Passion, assuring the continued perfection of our land so long as none disturb the sleep of Amaz-Chelk and the first dragons.

ON THE PYRAMID OF NAME-GIVERS

—From the writings of Aten-a-par, Court Scribe of Creana

The first king of Creana, Pharon I, decreed that the society of the perfect land must also be perfect. He decreed that the perfect shape was a pyramid, and therefore his kingdom should be a pyramid, with every Name-giver in his proper place. At the top of the pyramid stands the *pharon,* followed by members of the royal family and the priest-scribes who serve the king. Below the priest-scribes are the nomarchs, below them the serfs, and at the bottom are the slaves.

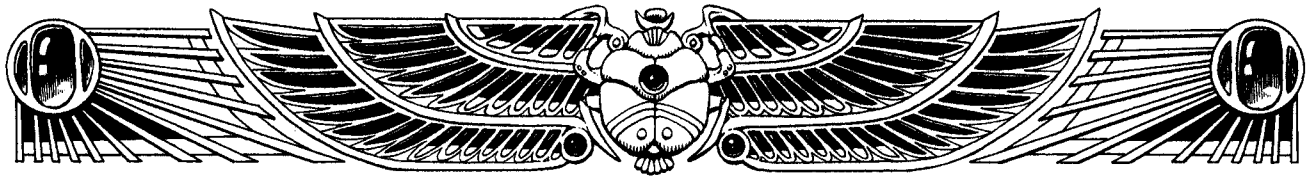
Just as the base of the pyramid can never be its apex, so each Name-giver must stay in his own proper sphere. A serf cannot become a priest-scribe, nor a royal prince a serf. Even a rebellious nomarch cannot be demoted; he can only be executed. Name-givers are born, not made. If you are born a serf, a serf you will die. If your father was a scribe, so shall you be.

ON THE PHARON

Even though our pharon has allowed the Theran Empire to claim some authority over the perfect land, the greatest power in Creana remains the pharon. Pharon Zhem-ka-tep II rules over us now, wisely and well. He commands all. Discontented souls, who exist to remind the rest of us how fortunate we are, may maintain that the Theran overgovernor is lord. They may try to prove their slander by claiming that the pharon never challenges the overgovernor's wishes. But they are misguided. The pharon rules according to his own will, and the overgovernor wisely follows him.

On the Pharon's Death

The most important duty of the pharon is to die every winter, when the Great Mother Ureth shrinks and her waters pull back from the fertile banks. On the sixth day of the month of Raquas, the Life Festival begins, in which our people celebrate the fruits of the earth and the vine and other everyday joys. On the ninth day of Raquas, the end of the Festival, comes the ceremony of the death of the king. Trusted servants dress the pharon in funerary wrappings, and he bids farewell to his family and his court officials. Six servants are selected for the supreme honor of dying with him, so that he may be well attended in the Lands of the West. Then the heir to the throne stabs the pharon in the heart. The pharon's dead body is placed in a coffin of gold, which proceeds to the Pharon's Tomb accompanied by throngs of mourners. This tomb stands in the center of Karnard, our capital city, rising high above all the other buildings that surround it. The bodies of the pharon and his six Chosen are laid within the tomb, which is then sealed. The sealing marks the beginning of the Months of the Dragon, our Name for the half-year following the Life Festival. The Months of the Dragon, when the Great Mother mourns for Tabru and we mourn for our pharon, are a dire time indeed.



The Months of the Dragon

Legends tell us that when Tabru and the pharon are together in the grave, the sleeping dragons allow their frightful dreams to seep up through the body of Amaz-Chelk and into the perfect land. These dreams infect the people of Creana. They inspire gentle folk to violence. The honest are moved to steal. The chaste become licentious. Loyal officials become rebellious. Even the Therans cannot always maintain order in their ranks during these haunted days. (Indeed, our Theran partners suffer worse than we from the ill effects of the dragons' dreams.)

But perturbations of the spirit are only the beginning. The Dead Who Walk the Earth, always troublesome since the Scourge, become more active while the pharon lies in his golden coffin. The shifting sands that bar passage between our cities reach the height of their ferocity. Disease spreads through the land, and the threat of the Horrors briefly returns. The mad, the Horror-touched and the cruel take comfort in these dark days, and are emboldened to commit their foulest deeds.

The Awakening of the Pharon

On the nineteenth day of the month of Teayu, a procession of high priests makes its way to the Pharon's Tomb. The tomb is unsealed as the priests speak the ancient incantations of Tabru. The coffin is opened and the slain pharon awakened, to live again. He returns to his palace, shows himself to the people and begins the Festival of First Planting, another celebration of the eternal cycle of life.

If the pharon does not revive, we know then that the spirit of Tabru has gone from him and from his family. The Prime Vizier of Creana then becomes regent, with all of the pharon's temporal authority. His first duty is to ensure the capture and execution of all members of the former royal family from whom Tabru has withdrawn favor. His second duty is to search for the new repository of Tabru's essence. Sometimes a new dynasty is identified through mystical means known only to the high priests of Tabru. At other times, warring nomarchs battle one another for supremacy, and Tabru's spirit settles into the body of the victor. Such dynastic interruptions are rare; only ten have occurred in more than two thousand years of Creanan history.

Regarding Zhem-ka-tep II

—In the words of Me'baat Khadruli, spice merchant of Karnard

It is a marvelous political advantage to be the living incarnation of a Passion. Zhem-ka-tep, like his forebears, is even more distant from his people than the First Governor of Thera is from his. The pharon's life is tightly circumscribed; he sees no one outside of his immediate family, his advisers and Overgovernor Chisfyn and a few of her most trusted aides. None among the people, therefore, truly know him. He remains an enigma even to Overgovernor Chisfyn, speaking in mystical riddles such as pharons love. Zhem-ka-tep expects humility from everyone, and thinks nothing of the fate of his lowliest subjects. Why should he? He is the Passion Tabru given flesh, as far above a Name-giver of low degree as that Name-giver is above ants.

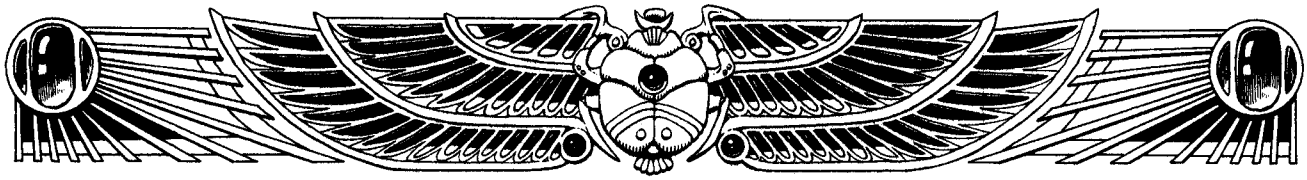
Not that knowing the pharon would be of any use to visitors, because no foreigner is permitted an audience with him. If you wish to know how things are in Creana, or how they are likely to go, studying the behavior of his two eldest sons is far more useful. Zhem-ka-tep III and Lhem-ka-mhur are the pharon's primary sources of information on the land he rules, and are therefore his makers of policy.

ON THE ROYAL FAMILY

The formulation and execution of policy has always been the province of the pharon's immediate family. Sons of the pharon are deemed senior to all other royals once they reach the age of fifteen. Daughters may take a son's place as heir to the throne only if a pharon has no sons; the spirit of Tabru can inhabit a woman, but the Passion best performs his role of husband to the Great Mother in the body of a man.

Over many centuries, the pharon has allowed his inner circle of priest-scribes to assume more and more administrative tasks. Our current pharon's sons, Princes Zhem-ka-tep III and Lhem-ka-mhur, have reversed this trend somewhat, becoming increasingly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom.

Zhem-ka-tep III is the *pharon-ta*, or heir to the throne. Energetic and open-hearted, he has shown an unusual interest in the welfare of his lowliest subjects. A warrior adept, he has traveled beyond the borders of the perfect land in order to compare Creana's government with those of other nations. He even went to Barsaive once, years ago when he was full of youthful idealism and eager to test his mettle in the world. He learned there of a document called the Council Compact, about which I confess I know little. The prince's report of this strange foreign document caused great consternation among my colleagues; they say it contains shocking ideas that turn the pyramid of Name-givers on its head. I have heard that Overgovernor Chisfyn also knows of this document, and that it greatly disturbs her. I see no cause for worry, however. Most pharon-tas are briefly captured by such youthful follies as enthusiasm for foreign ways; before the essence of Tabru enters them, they often lack regal instincts.



Lhem-ka-mhur is the *pharon-ti*; a title given to any son of the pharon who is not directly in line for the throne. Lhem-ka-mhur is of a subtler, quieter temperament than his elder brother; over some years he has built a thriving trade empire in concert with Therans of House Gascilium. His ties to the Theran overseers help to prevent possible conflicts from arising between the Overgovernor and the pharonate.

On the Priest-Scribes

The pharon rules by decree; his priest-scribes write down his holy words and read them to the people, and ensure that all officials and functionaries follow those decrees by keeping close watch over them. The priest-scribes are known as the *sehf-el.*

As with any position in the pyramid of Name-givers, membership in the sehf-el is hereditary. Those born into this class have no obligation to serve in the same area of government as their parents did, but most young sehf-el choose to do so anyway. A fresh-faced scribe is therefore most likely to answer to members of his own family. Some outlanders assume that our system is rife with nepotism, but nothing could be further from the truth. For a priest-scribe, there is no greater shame than a family member who disgraces his holy calling. To allow a kinsman to do his job poorly simply because he is of your blood is to stain your soul; those who do so may be devoured by Sanep, the final judge, when they arrive at the gates of the dead. I know of certain families who privately arranged for the strangulation of a member who was failing at his official duties. This sounds shocking to outlander ears, no doubt—but if the family can properly document the derelictions of the deceased, such a killing is not murder, but self-defense. Therefore, it leaves no spiritual taint upon the household.

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE: IF CERTAIN RUMORS WE HEARD IN KARNARD HAVE ANY TRUTH TO THEM, "TIES TO THE THERAN OVERSEERS" IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT. LHEM-KA-MHUR IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO REGULARLY SHARE A BED WITH OVERGOVERNOR CHISFYN, THOUGH NO CREANAN WOULD DREAM OF OPENLY CRITICIZING SUCH A LIAISON.

—MERROX

The Prime Vizier

The official who commands the sehf-el and oversees their actions is also the pharon's chief adviser, the prime vizier. Appointed for life by the pharon, the prime vizier may be removed from office only by the White Passion, Sanep, or the Great Mother River. Sanep may strike the prime vizier dead at any time if her performance is deemed unworthy. The vizier faces the Great Mother every year, on the twelfth day after the First Planting, when he or she must swim across the river. If Ureth is displeased with the vizier, she ends the vizier's service by drowning him.

Our current Prime Vizier, Greb-mo-tan, was appointed by Zhem-ka-tep I. A stern dwarf of advanced years, she nonetheless makes the annual swim across the Great Mother with strength and determination. She is dedicated to the service of the pharon and Tabru, and spends every spare moment in contemplation of the deeds of the Passions. Many speak of her as unapproachable, but this is as it should be—the prime vizier is a personage of the utmost importance, and her time belongs to the pharon and the sehf-el who see to it that the perfect land remains so. Greb-mo-tan is curious about the Passions of other lands, and on occasion has granted private audiences to questors and scholars from beyond Creana's shores.

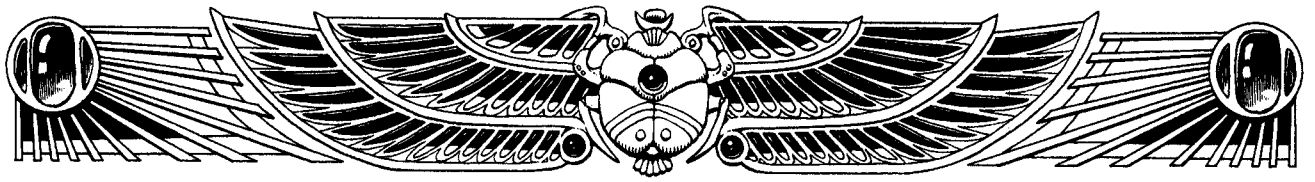
Some believe that the prime vizier faces greater challenges than the pharon. The pharon rules with the aid of Tabru, who inhabits him, but the vizier is merely a Name-giver. In addition, the vizier must govern during the Months of the Dragon, the time of our land's greatest peril. The vizier is not without help, however. Five officials aid the prime vizier directly and answer to none but her—and to the pharon, of course, at whose pleasure they serve.

The Vizier's Staff

The vizier's staff usually numbers five, though certain pharons in the past have changed this number to better suit the needs of the kingdom. Sometimes it happens that Sanep and the Great Mother choose a prime vizier who clashes with the pharon, or whom the pharon simply dislikes; the pharon can cause difficulties for such a vizier by appointing a staff that owes the king greater loyalty. Inevitably, such a test of wills between prime vizier and pharon ends with the vizier learning the error of his ways, or the Passion Tabru withdrawing his favor from a pharon who proves unworthy. Thankfully, relations between Zhem-ka-tep II and Greb-mo-tan are harmonious.

The five officials most commonly appointed to aid the prime vizier are the court scribe, the high initiate, the general of generals, the vizier of revenues and the vizier of state.

The court scribe—which position I am presently privileged to fill—keeps records throughout the kingdom. I command hundreds of lesser scribes to aid me in this task. I am also the chief priest of Gez, the Passion of Knowledge and Scholarship. In this capacity I oversee the acquisition of new knowledge, the cataloguing of existing knowledge and the recovery of lost lore. Among my other duties, I am also privileged to administer the Doomed Library at Karnard. Court scribes have done all these things since time immemorial.



The high initiate presides over all rituals dedicated to the Passions, performs auguries to divine their wishes regarding Creana's governance and commands the hundreds of priests who serve the pharon and the kingdom. (Other priests in the perfect land serve independently of the government, receiving neither coin nor orders from the prime vizier or the high initiate.) The high initiate fulfills a sacred duty; he must balance the needs and desires of all the Passions of the perfect land, major and minor. This post is perhaps the most dangerous of all among those who serve the prime vizier, for the Passions are jealous of their privileges and have been known to visit terrible vengeance on high initiates who seem to favor one Passion over another. The current High Initiate is Man-ot-krel, an elf appointed to the position at an unusually youthful age. It is said that Sanep whispered Man-ot-krel's Name into the ear of Zhem-ka-tep II the last time the pharon lay at the gates of the dead. Man-ot-krel speaks and thinks quickly, and exhibits great eagerness toward everything in life.

The general of generals commands all the warriors and sees to the defense of the perfect land. To him falls the task of supplying our armies and keeping their spirits high. As the high priest of Ra-Kib, the Golden Passion of Conquest, he also devises strategies for bringing other lands under enlightened Creanan rule. The current General of Generals is Lo-ak-preh, a jackal-woman. As ferocious as any of her vanishing race, her eagerness to serve Ra-Kib strikes fear into the heart of Creana's soon-to-be-conquered neighbors. Lo-ak-preh has the closest connections to the Theran regime of any among the prime vizier's servants; she and General Feshavian of the First Legion treat each other like sisters separated at birth.

The vizier of revenues collects taxes for the pharon, employing a small army of lesser officials to do so. He oversees the assessment, collection, storage and disbursement of revenues throughout the perfect land. He also serves as high priest of Berah, the Silver Passion of Wealth. The current vizier of revenues is a doleful, timid ork Named Dev-or-heen. Despite his cringing manner, he serves the prime vizier well; he treats each coin in the royal treasury as if it came from his own pocket, and has kept the coffers of Creana full to overflowing. Speak of Dev-or-heen in the streets of Karnard and you will doubtless hear many complaints—but when has any Name-giver of any station enjoyed giving up the silver rightly due to those who rule over him?

Finally, the vizier of state oversees the governance of conquered lands, the maintenance of relations with our Theran partners, and the establishment of trade and diplomatic ties with other states deserving of Creanan friendship. He also serves as high priest of Mav-Nah, the Yellow Passion of Friendship and Wise Dealings. Our present Vizier of State is the soft-spoken, far-sighted dwarf Eel-rek-ehp. The wisdom of her policies surpasses all that have gone before her—indeed, her intelligence and insight almost approach our revered pharon's.

On the Nomarchs

Not all Creanans accept the proper arrangement of the pyramid of Name-givers. We scribes and priests subscribe to the correct view, that our station is just below the pharon's. The *nomarchs*, who stand just below us, tend to disagree. Many of them believe they ought to answer only to the pharon, and that we should stand below them. These unruly pretenders to greatness cause much disorder, which the Passions allow so that we may test ourselves against chaos.

Nomarchs are members of the pharon's extended family; for some, the kinship tie is quite distant. They live outside the city of Karnard and administer outlying communities on the pharon's behalf. These areas, called *nomarchies*, generally consist of a city or town and the farmland surrounding it. Conquered cities and territories are also nomarchies because the pharon, in his wisdom, has assigned nomarchs to administer them. Creana presently has thirteen nomarchies.

Like the pharon, each nomarch is attended by a staff of priest-scribes, who are called his *tahn-el*. These priest-scribes are expected to follow the orders of their nomarchs, but also of their superiors in the sehf-el. For example, as court scribe I may command the court scribe of any nomarch; I serve the pharon, and so may claim higher rank than one who merely serves a nomarch. Of late, some nomarchs have shown regrettable dissatisfaction with this arrangement. They claim that, when their orders and those of the sehf-el conflict, their wishes should take precedence. Such nonsense is a mere irritation when the disagreement concerns the lesser scribe's office, but may become quite dangerous in other situations. Imagine the chaos if Creana's general of generals could no longer command the unquestioning loyalty of her counterpart in the service of a mere nomarch! The loyalty of all good Creanans should be to the pharon, and any petty noble who questions this risks the vengeance of Tabru.

To my regret, such disputes have erupted several times in our long history. Fortunately, each time the army of the pharon defeated the troops of the disaffected nomarchs. The return of the Therans to Creana after the Long Darkness of the Scourge has prompted more nomarchs than usual to question the will of our Passions, and despite our pharon's best efforts, some of these malcontents will not be silent. I pray that we are not headed down the path of chaos once again. We should unite to preserve our ways and conquer outlanders, not fight among ourselves. But greed and folly are as eternal as Malek, the Multicolored Passion, who seeks to despoil all things right and good. Indeed, I would not be surprised to find that some of our most fractious nomarchs are receiving counsel from Malek's outlaw priests.

On the Serfs

Very few Creanans are nobles or officials. Almost all of our people are serfs, most of them farmers, others laborers and artisans. Serfs are born owing a lifetime of service to the pharon. Those born in Karnard answer to the sehf-el. Those born elsewhere in the perfect land must obey the local tahn-el. Small communities of serfs are commanded by an official below the tahn-el, called a *khon-glas*. The khon-glas determines what occupation a serf may enter, where he will live, who he will marry, when he may have children and what funeral rites will be performed for him upon his death.

Outlanders often ask us why our serfs are content with their lot, given that others may command them in everything and they have no hope of advancement. The truth is, we consider this brief life a mere rehearsal for the eternal one to follow, in the Lands of the West. There, the serf will experience an eternity of luxury. As a reward for his faithful service in the world of the living, he will be waited on hand and foot by slaves, just like a nomarch in this life.

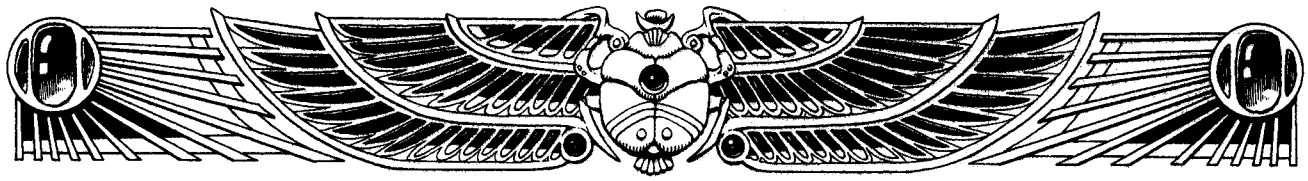
As to where these slaves will come from, if all serfs become nomarchs on the other side of the gates of the dead—they will come from the populations of you outlanders. Your spirits will spend eternity in our service, because we are of the perfect land and you are not. Thus, even the lowliest of our serfs feels pity for those unfortunate enough to lack our Creanan birthright.

We do not lord our good fortune over others too much, however. If a Creanan is rude to a foreigner, that foreigner will become a surly slave to his Creanan master in the Lands of the West. It is unpleasant to spend eternity with an unruly slave, and so we try to treat our inferiors with politeness and grace in this life. Indeed, our success at doing so is merely one more mark of our natural superiority.

Our superior nature also explains how we manage to maintain such an amiable relationship with the Therans, who have the temerity to call themselves our overlords. We know that the tables will turn, and so it is easy to let them think they rule us. We let them play at kingship in this life because we know our years here are a fleeting shadow compared to the eternal afterlife, when the Theran outlanders will wash our feet.

On the Bahj-Nar

Though most serfs live in humble circumstances, a few have earned great riches through trade. We call these merchants and traders *bahj-nar*, and through their khon-glas they are answerable to the vizier of revenues. Bahj-nar who bring great profits to the pharon's treasury are permitted to keep a greater portion of the proceeds of their labor than are other serfs, and are also given more freedom of movement and association. A merchant who allows these gifts to go to his head, however, may be stripped of all of his goods in a heartbeat. The khon-glas who rules such a one frequently punishes him and his family by assigning them to perform back-breaking farm labor. Sometimes, malcontents whisper that this or that khon-glas has unjustly punished a bahj-nar because the bahj-nar refused to pay him bribes—but such corruption would surely be discovered and punished by the tahn-el or the sehf-el. The Passions would surely avenge it, should Name-givers fail to do so. Tabru or Ureth might strike the criminal dead, give him some dread disease, or visit disaster upon his family. And Sanep would deal most harshly with his soul when the evildoer reaches the gates of the dead. All Creanans know this, and none would risk such disaster. Therefore, I urge our guests from Throal to pay no heed to such slanders.



It seemed to us that Aten-a-par was being somewhat disingenuous on this subject. The relationship between bahj-nar and khon-glas is clearly fraught with potential for abuse. An unscrupulous khon-glas can demand a hefty share of the trader's profits by threatening him with confiscation and reassignment. As a serf, the bahj-nar has no right to petition against the actions of a government official. If a corrupt official's superiors actively scrutinize their underlings' behavior and income, as they are supposed to do, then indeed such wrongdoing cannot occur. But if the superior is corruptible as well, only the Passions can punish the miscreants.

A clever bahj-nar may exploit in his own turn the corrupt official who feeds upon him. If the official's misdeeds are exposed, he risks execution, either by his fellow officials or the Passions. As we were told by a youth in Aten-a-par's entourage (who requested anonymity), a bahj-nar with the right connections can pay off demands for bribes and then use his own actions to extort greater freedom for himself from the official by threatening to make the crime public unless his terms are met. Our informant maintains that at least two wily bahj-nar control entire networks within the sehf-el this way.

—Jerriv Forrim

ON SLAVES

Slaves are foreigners or the descendants of foreigners captured in war and pressed into servitude. Strictly menial laborers, they are especially useful in the great construction projects favored by the Passions. Like serfs, they have only the rights granted to them by their khon-glas. Unlike serfs, they can expect no reward in the afterlife, and so it is often necessary to keep them in their place by force. Slaves who behave are allowed certain comforts: better food than the troublesome, or a bed of their own. Unruly slaves who do not learn acceptance are punished with pain or death. To maintain discipline over slaves is a holy duty given to us by Tabru in his role as the stern father. From time to time, masses of slaves are foolish enough to revolt—but this, too, is as the Passions wish it. The rebels are slain in the name of Tabru, and the Great Mother Ureth hungrily drinks their blood. Thus the lifeblood of outlanders feeds the perfect land and its people, as the Universe has ordained.

Visitors to Creana sometimes worry that they will be enslaved, but such fears are groundless. To enslave a guest who has done no wrong grievously violates the spirit of hospitality that Tabru taught us. Only those who offend against the pyramid of Name-givers, or who resist when we declare war against them, may be enslaved. So says Tabru, the Black Passion of the Seed.

ON ROLES OF THE NAME-GIVER RACES

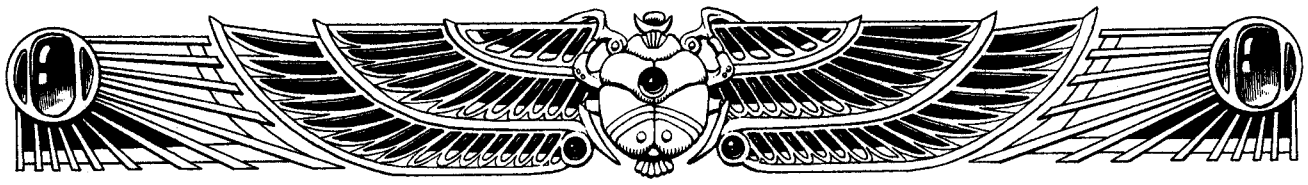
Tabru does not ordain particular roles for different Name-giver races. However, the first pharon and his family were human, and so by tradition all pharons since have been human. All of the nomarchs are human as well, and have been throughout our history. But Tabru may well choose to inhabit a member of another Name-giver race the next time the dynasty changes. The Passions do as they will, and their mysteries are not ours to fathom.

Tabru teaches us that no race is superior to another. Only our birthright as Creanans makes us superior to all others. A person of any race may stand anywhere in the pyramid of Name-givers. Like the peoples of other nations, however, we of Creana ascribe certain characteristics to the various races. Indeed, certain races seem particularly well-suited to fill certain roles within the sehf-el or other levels of the government. These natural tendencies are reinforced by the fact that many government departments have been run by the same families for centuries.

As an example, humans tend to be studious, curious and interested in language and history. We are contemplative and cerebral. We often prefer the work of the mind to the work of the strong back, and philosophy to practicality. Some call us bloodless, or even impractical dreamers. Many of these qualities make humans like myself well suited to be scribes—and indeed, most Creanan scribes are human.

Most of Creana's tax collectors are t'skrang, as are many of the khon-glas with authority over traders and merchants. A typical t'skrang is a lover of money, a sometimes miserly soul with one eye always directed toward the balance sheet. They tend to be superior mathematicians, and also are said to have the greatest facility for evading the spirit of Tabru's laws without actually breaking them. Thus, they may commit acts that are technically unlawful, while keeping their hearts, livers, brains and stomachs pure of dishonor for their final meetings with Sanep. T'skrang are also innovators, always finding new ways to increase our uses of Tabru's bounty; they lead us to make new inventions and erect ever more magnificent monuments.

Army officers, especially those serving under the general of generals, are most often trolls or orks. Though great rivalry exists between the two races, to the rest of us they seem much the same. Both races are proud of their martial prowess and their ability to mete out harsh punishments to deserving enemies without flinching. To impel her soldiers to greater ferocity, the general of generals often divides her forces into platoons by race, knowing that ork and troll soldiers will attempt to outdo each other in martial feats. The few jackal-men still living in this world are as naturally ferocious now as that race ever was, and so they also frequently seek military careers. They are almost as feared by their colleagues as by our enemies, for they are cannibals driven by thirst for blood and a concept of family honor that serves as a justification for sudden violence.



Dwarfs frequently serve as priest-scribes under the vizier of state. The dwarf race tends to be crafty and well-informed, which can suit them for many callings. They are also curious about other lands, anxious to solve disputes amicably and sympathetic to the unfortunate—all admirable qualities for doing the vizier of state's work, though of little use in other areas of Creanan life. Our interest in foreign lands extends only to those ripe for conquest. Mediation between competing interests is unnecessary in a place ruled by a Passion; Tabru tells us what to do through the pharon, and we do it. Sympathy for the luckless is likewise misplaced; without those of inferior status, there would be none to wait on faithful Creanans in the afterlife.

The servants of the high initiate, who are priests among priests, include many elves. This, too, is fitting. Like the Passions, elves are imperious, certain of their own rightness and vengeful when crossed. They know many secrets and keep them close. These same qualities, however, also give elves a reputation for instability. A Name-giver's mind is vastly inferior to that of a Passion, and those elves who try to understand too many of Creana's mysteries are sadly prone to madness.

Obsidimen and windlings are rare in any walk of life. Like their kind in other lands, Creanan obsidimen are long-lived and eager for experience. In the perfect land, however, many associate them with the ill-tempered Earth Passion, slumbering Amaz-Chelk. Because of this, only obsidimen among all Name-givers may move from one place to another on the pyramid of Name-givers. I have known of some who left the sehf-el in order to become bahj-nar, or even common serfs. Creanan obsidimen excel at fire magic, possibly because of their kinship to the Passion of the burning earth. One Liferock deep in the desert is said to have formed an alliance with Malek the Multicolored; these obsidimen are greatly feared, though no one in Karnard has seen them in living memory.

Windlings are said to have a special bond with the Passion of the air, aloof Ozul. Like him, they are easily distracted and care little for anything outside their own immediate concerns. This flightiness makes them incapable of the fidelity exemplified by a good serf, which may be why no windling serfs exist now in Creana.

ON OUTLAWS AND OTHER OUTSIDERS

Though we are pleased to present an account of Creanan life from the viewpoint of a high-ranking priest-scribe, we also recognize the need for an outside perspective. Fortunately, the compilation of this volume coincided with a rare visit home by Mistippia, the renowned trader and swordmaster of Throal's House Mikul. Mistippia has spent the past four years in Creana, extending Mikul's trade empire into the so-called perfect land. She has graciously filled in the gaps left by Aten-a-par, beginning with a different perspective on Creanan society and offering a look at the Theran influence on Creanan politics.

—Merrox

First, let me congratulate Merrox and his colleagues on their usual fine work. Having read this chapter so far, I think it gives quite an acceptable introduction to Creana—especially in capturing Creanan thinking, which pervades the place. (Of course, Creanan thinking has barely a nodding acquaintance with the truth, more often than not—but the reader will see what I mean soon enough.) Our Merrox scored a real coup in getting the court scribe and the high initiate to contribute directly. I wish I could even arrange a *meeting* with those two lofty fellows! Their odd biases offer more insight into the Creanan way of thinking than my poor words ever could. I would have loved to read this document before beginning my sojourn in the "perfect land"; it would have saved me quite a few sleepless nights wondering what in the Name of the Founders I could possibly be doing wrong.

But there's one point to be made above all: namely, that Creanan society isn't as rigid and stratified as our friend Aten-a-par likes to pretend. The divisions between social classes are sharp, it's true, but there's still plenty of room for folk on the outside. In fact, Creana needs outsiders, or it couldn't possibly function. Most rules anyplace would fall apart if no one ever broke them, and Creana is no exception. If anything, Creana especially needs rule-breakers because its leaders keep insisting on rigid enforcement. If they ever got what they think they want, though, Creana's "pyramid of Name-givers" would collapse of its own privilege-encrusted weight. So our job, as "outlanders," is to break the rules wherever the Creanans need us to ... and make a fair profit in the process.

For example, it doesn't pay for the priest-scribes to take risks when they want to get something done. Jealous colleagues are watching every move they make, just waiting for a rival to slip up. If a sehf-el tries something new and fails, he gets slapped down mercilessly—even if his bit of rule-bending actually benefits Creana. The same "never-risk-never-fail" approach goes for business enterprises. Creana puts traders like myself a fair ways down on their beloved pyramid. So if you're coming from Throal and expect business leaders to control things in Creana the way we do at home, you've got some adjusting to do. But no kingdom, especially one with as many mouths to feed as Creana, can survive on agriculture and looting. Priest-scribes aren't supposed to sully their hands with trading operations, or make profits from manufacturing, so they need intermediaries. If they hire foreigners—Theran, Throalic or otherwise—to run a business or acquire some-

thing for them, they don't have to worry about paying bribes or being charged with corrupting serfs. Therefore, Creanan life presents plentiful opportunities for a businesslike adventurer.

Of course, there are risks. For one, a foreigner caught breaking the law has no legal protection. The Creanans like to act nice to us outlanders because we'll supposedly be buffing their sandals in the afterlife, but that isn't going to win you any sympathy if they catch you in an ancient pharon's tomb. Always be prepared to make a quick escape or face swift and lethal punishment. Creanans rely on the Passions to strike down their own lawbreakers, but we outlanders aren't worthy of a Creanan Passion's notice—so the Creanans tend to take justice into their own hands in our case.

Speaking of Creanan lawbreakers, the so-called perfect land has more than its share of outlaws—certainly more than Aten-a-par will admit exist. It seems Tabru and Gez and company are strangely lax about striking down lawbreakers of the serf class. Old Aten would probably say serfs are too insignificant to bother killing; let Sanep eat them when they arrive at the gates of the dead. But whatever the reason for this unusual divine lenience, the fact is that Creana has a growing thief class. Whole settlements of them rove across the desert's shifting sands, living healthy and happy lives. I guess they're causing enough trouble for Tabru that his rival Malek gladly shields them from the sandstorms he throws at everyone else who ventures too deep into the desert. Tomb-robbing is the most lucrative crime in Creana, but many an outlaw also makes his share of silver in such old-fashioned endeavors as extortion, murder for hire, usury, highway robbery, burglary and smuggling. Some of them are nice enough fellows—they're just unwilling to spend a lifetime in thankless servitude. Others are moth-eaten scoundrels who'd kill you just to keep in practice. And still others really are crazed servants of the Passion Malek and his allies—some of which are rumored to be Horrors. The trick is learning to tell the different kinds of outlaws apart.

On the Theran Presence in Creana

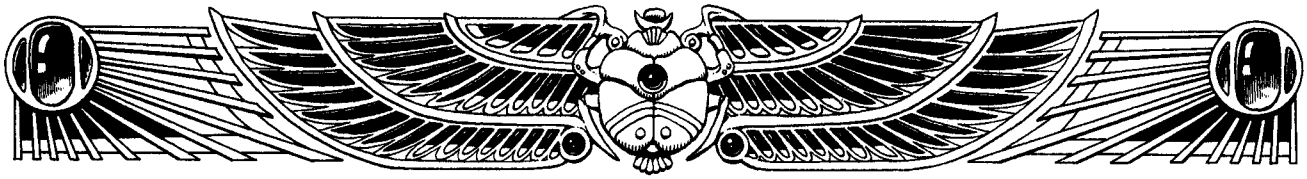
The Therans believe their relationship with Creana is ideal. The pharon's government calls the "arrangement" with the Therans a partnership ... which it resembles, at least on the surface. Indeed, more than a few Therans point to the Empire's treatment of Creana as a compelling argument for the benign nature of Theran intentions toward all Imperial provinces. To my mind, though, the pharon and the overgovernor get along because their self-interests just happen to match. It also helps that the average Creanan doesn't much care about freedom in the first place. What does self-determination matter when you think this life is just a prelude to a better one? The fact of the matter is that the Empire can't export its state of peaceful cooperation with Creana to any of the other provinces. Creana is unique, and mercifully so. The Creanans certainly don't object to slave labor, as we do. Their own system of slavery makes the Therans look enlightened by comparison, and the Creanans had it in place back when everyone else in the Selestrean Basin was living in caves and hunting mastryliths.

On the History of Thera and Creana

The Creanans claim their civilization goes all the way back to the beginning of the world. That's a pail of hog-water. Everyone knows history starts with an Age of Dragons, then a Dark Age we don't know much about, and then the current age—the beginnings of which are also lost in legend. Nonetheless, the Creanans do go back a long way. They'd already been around for quite some time when the Therans showed up at the mouth of the River Ureth and announced that they were in charge now, thank you very much. That happened in 657 TH, after they'd already claimed Barsaive and a few other provinces. I guess the Therans were working up their nerve, practicing on us before tackling the richest and strongest civilization in the region.

The Creanans also claim there was never an armed conflict between the Therans and the pharon's forces. I'd bet that's all hog-water too, but the Therans turned up here almost a thousand years ago, so the point is a tough one to argue. We do know from surviving ancient records that the Creanans were already in military trouble with their traditional enemies to the east, the war-like Issyri. The Issyri were on the rise when the Therans arrived and had already taken several of Creana's southern cities. The Therans could have started their own war against the Issyri, but instead decided to buy instant political legitimacy with the people of Creana by offering to help the pharon repel the Issyri threat. Which they did, sending their airships to rain magical fire down on the Issyri capitol. (The fact that airship travel is extremely dangerous over Creana but relatively easy over Issyr likely had something to do with that tactical choice.) The grateful pharon then told everyone else that the Therans were to be welcomed as friends and allies, and the Therans told themselves that they'd cleverly taken over Creana without firing so much as a crossbow bolt. Each side thought it was letting the other bunch of crazy foreigners believe what they wanted. And so it continues to this day.

The Creanans and Therans waged joint war against the other city-states of the continent of Fekara, evenly splitting plunder and captives. The Therans used their share to build up their Great City and their airship fleets, which they then used to conquer other provinces. The Creanans gained the spoils of war and, in time, promises of protection from the Scourge. They had special reason to worry about the coming of the Horrors because one of their own Passions, Malek, was sure to join the ravaging invaders and make things as bad for Creana as he possibly could. So the Rites of Protection and



Passage were worth more to Creana than to any other land in or near the Empire ... and if the Creanans hadn't already been up to their ears in Theran administrators, they surely would have welcomed the Imperial presence in exchange for survival.

The Rites worked well in Creana; the Horrors only managed to breach three of its dozen citadels. Mostly, the Horrors had to satisfy themselves with the other city-states on the continent, which they chewed through like rats through a bed sheet. After the Scourge ended, the Therans and Creanans resumed their old relationship; because a fair number of Therans had stayed in Creana's citadels, they were thick enough on the ground to easily pick up running things where they'd left off. Some families of Theran occupiers have lived in Creana for centuries. They haven't assimilated, though; Creanan society is too stratified to permit foreigners—which the Therans, for all their pretensions, still are—in their midst as equals. The "old Theran families" effectively are caught between two worlds. They have different tastes than their fellow Therans in art and music and food, and some of their behavior differs as well, but they aren't really Creanans either.

Ever since the Scourge, the Creanans and Therans have continued to prey on the shattered remnants of Creana's old enemies. Creana produces more food than it needs, and Theran nobles get rich exporting it to other provinces as well as to the Great City. Creana also serves as a lucrative market for goods produced elsewhere in the far-flung Empire.

The Therans want to promote their relationship with Creana as an example for other provinces to follow. They want their "wayward children" (as they call us recalcitrant former provincials) to come to Creana and see that cooperation with Thera leads to prosperity. This idiotic desire of theirs gives merchants from Throal excellent trade opportunities, as the Therans are perfectly willing to grant us access to Creanan markets in order to make their political point. We can treat the politics like the mugful of lark droppings it is, and still make money. True, we have to hold our noses at Creana's treatment of serfs and slaves, and we can't squint too hard at the sources of the gold and silver they're paying us. But someone somewhere will profit from their treacherous doings, so it might as well be us. At least we can put the proceeds to some decent use.

On the Overgovernor and Her Underlings

The Overgovernor of Creana is an elf woman Named Chisfyn. She looks and acts like a libertine interested only in enjoyable debaucheries and the conspicuous display of Theran wealth, but wise people learn not to underestimate her. She's smart, well-informed and has deep connections throughout Creana and the Empire. Rumor has it she's dallying with at least one of the Princes of Creana, which gives you an idea of just how close she is to the royal family. Unlike most overgovernors, Chisfyn doesn't have to worry about putting down local rebellions. She spends her time smoothing out trade arrangements between Creana's government (which controls all trade through its department of revenues) and the various Theran noble houses. She hails from House Medari herself, which certainly benefits from her efforts. She's clever enough, however, to avoid extreme demonstrations of favoritism toward her own house—the financial gain wouldn't be worth the political headaches. She's got her elegant rump resting in a plum seat, the most coveted overgovernorship in the entire Empire, and she's far too bright to get booted out of it for petty reasons.

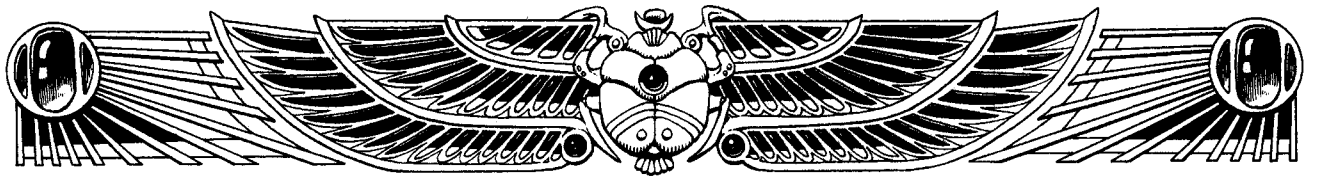
Unlike the other provinces, Creana has no high-ranking admiral assigned to it. Apparently the Passion Ozul doesn't like airships, and the Therans have other uses for their navy. The top-ranking military officer in Creana is Feshavi Feshavian, a former *ghareez* (windling torturer, for readers who've led sheltered lives) who somehow wangled her way into the military hierarchy and then into the position of General of the First Legion of Thera. In her hands, warfare is torture taken to a higher level. In concert with her dear friend, the Creanan General of Generals Lo-ak-preh, she wages pitiless warfare against Creana's neighbors. Unlike almost every other soldier I've ever heard of, she seems uninterested in plunder; she just likes to kill people.

The other influential Theran official in Creana is Harada, a glum dwarf woman who serves as the region's *akarenti,* or spymaster. Because the Creanan government is in cahoots with her masters, Harada has less to spy on than her counterparts in other provinces. So in order to look busy, she's taken on the admirable goal of cleansing Creana of Horrors. She hires and supplies teams of Theran adventurers willing to face down the undead, the minions of Malek and other menaces to traders and army units. She's not picky about who serves her, and has been known to extend similar offers to non-Theran adepts willing to do a little Horror-fighting.

On Theran Houses Active in Creana

I've met Therans from all of the Empire's major noble houses during my four years in Creana, but the ones with the most significant presence here are Houses Carinci, Gascilium, Krand, Medari, Narlanth and Zanjan.

The Carinci use Creana as a home base of sorts for exploratory expeditions to the lost cities of darkest Fekara. The Therans never bothered to bring the Rites of Protection and Passage to the tribal peoples of the continent's interior, and so the Fekaran tribes were forced to rely on a ritual woven by a strange Passion they call the Mighty Spider. No one knows for certain if any of the tribes survived, but on the assumption that at least some did, the Carinci are attempting to find the surviving cities so that they can set up trade arrangements with them. This puts the Carinci into conflict with General Feshavian and General of Generals Lo-ak-preh, both of whom want to plunder any Fekaran cities they can find. More than



one skirmish has broken out between Carinci explorers and First Legion units, and the army hasn't always come out ahead.

Those interested in helping the Carinci fulfill their interesting mission should seek out Ignace Patruvian, an inquisitive and remarkably idealistic (for a Theran) human who leads Carinci explorers in this province. When he's not off prowling the continent, he stays in the southern Creanan city of Zhofer. Like most of his Carinci colleagues, Patruvian has been in Creana for only two years. The last batch of Carinci explorers sent to Creana all went mad from too much poking about into deep, dark tombs, and so Patruvian now shows a strong desire to keep subsequent explorations above ground.

House Gascilium, which makes its fortune in foodstuffs, teaches the latest agricultural techniques to Creanan farm overseers. They also export excess food to Thera and other Imperial provinces at a considerable profit. The ranking Gascilium member in Creana is a single-minded, stubborn t'skrang woman by the Name of Muevrian the Arrow. She is deeply concerned about sabotage of farming operations, which lately has become a favorite tactic of the Passion Malek's mad priests. Adventurers willing to strike a blow against the Multicolored Passion's crazed followers might find her a good friend-in-high-places.

The Medari make up the bulk of Overgovernor Chisfyn's large liaison staff. They ever-so-subtly manipulate the pharon behind the scenes, making sure that the Passion Tabru continues to smile upon Creana's alliance with Thera. They also seek to maintain their house's influence by stirring up trouble between the other noble houses. As part of this effort, the version of Creanan affairs reported back to the Great City is the one that shows House Medari in the best possible light.

House Zanjan, predictably, is the backbone of the Theran military's raids against the remaining city-states on the continent that are not under Creanan control. The ranking member in House Zanjan's Creana presence is General Feshavian's aide-de-camp, an eloquent, conservative-minded ork woman Named Tamerlana. Though she does try to curb the savage excesses of Feshavian and Lo-ak-preh, no one should ever mistake her for a reformer. She wants military leaders to maintain at least the pretense of honor and dignity for only one reason: naked greed and aggression is bad for morale.

Houses Krand and Narlanth both spend their time and resources cautiously prying into Creana's magical secrets. Even though they share their fellow Therans' fear of breaking into Creana's many ancient tombs, Krand and Narlanth also lust after the knowledge and artifacts that might be buried within them. Despite the dangers to body and soul, tomb-robbing takes place on a regular basis, often sponsored by members of Houses Krand or Narlanth (in the most secret fashion possible, of course). The top man from House Krand is an ork wizard Named Nonno Steel-Stem, a truly boring man obsessed with completing his academic text on Creanan magical treasures. His Narlanth counterpart (and adversary) is the cheerfully unscrupulous troll nethermancer Quoovosi Queyvonian. Though even the most charitable observer would describe Quoovosi as evil, I like her in spite of my better judgment—perhaps because of her disarming honesty about her alarming goals. Her family lost face within House Narlanth recently, when their competitors in the house managed to attain important new knowledge of blood magic and magical augmentation. Quoovosi therefore hopes to find something in some tomb somewhere that will bring her clan back to prominence, and freely admits her willingness to step on anyone to do it.

Houses Krand and Narlanth are both involved—though I have yet to learn precisely how—in the recent establishment of a magical laboratory of sorts. That this laboratory exists is certain; to whom it belongs is less so. The most popular rumor places it under the direct control of the Heavenherds, the fabled master magicians of the Theran Empire. The laboratory lies in a new-built fortress on the outskirts of the city of Zhofer, which is furthest to the south along the Great Mother River. None I've spoken with know the exact nature or extent of the fortress's magical protections, but they are said to be impressive. If the place does indeed belong to the Heavenherds, then the fortress may be well-nigh impregnable.

The other popular rumor claims that the Heavenherds—or whoever—established the laboratory in order to conduct magical research away from the prying eyes of Barsaive's great dragons. The Therans are well versed in the legend that Amaz-Chelk and the sleeping dragons beneath Creana's sands will awaken and wreak havoc, should any dragon set foot on the land or wing in the skies of the so-called perfect land. They appear to be relying on Barsaive's dragons knowing and believing that legend, and staying far away from Creana.

I have also heard one final piece of gossip, though from only one source. For reasons of safety, I won't say anything about this person except that my source has proven to be generally reliable on a variety of matters. According to this story, the Theran laboratory recently welcomed visitors from Barsaive, including a captive. The captive's identity remains a closely guarded secret, known only to the magicians at the laboratory, the pharon and the grand vizier.

CONCERNING MILITARY DEPLOYMENT

The exact troop strength of the First Legion in Creana is a Theran state secret. If I told you that it consisted of a paltry six divisions, each numbering roughly one hundred twenty soldiers, I would cause great consternation at General Feshavian's command post. Not much strength for an occupying army—but then, the cozy relations between Imperial and Creanan leaders, combined with the fatalism of most ordinary folk in these parts, makes a larger military force unnecessary.

Likewise, I would dismay the Creanan General of Generals if I revealed that she can field more than five thousand soldiers, most of them in fifteen-man units well suited for swift strikes. Each Creanan field marshal commands two dozen-

these units. Of course, these forces do not include the soldiers under the direct command of the various nomarchs, who might or might not be lent to General of Generals Lo-ak-preh in an emergency. These nomarchy troops of which I do not speak number anywhere from three to four thousand. The careful reader will see why the pharon's priest-scribes are so concerned about the increasing restlessness of certain powerful nomarchs. For all the official protestations of Creana's perfect tranquillity, I predict that it's only a matter of time before some nomarch gets ambitious and the perfect land has a brand-new pharon.

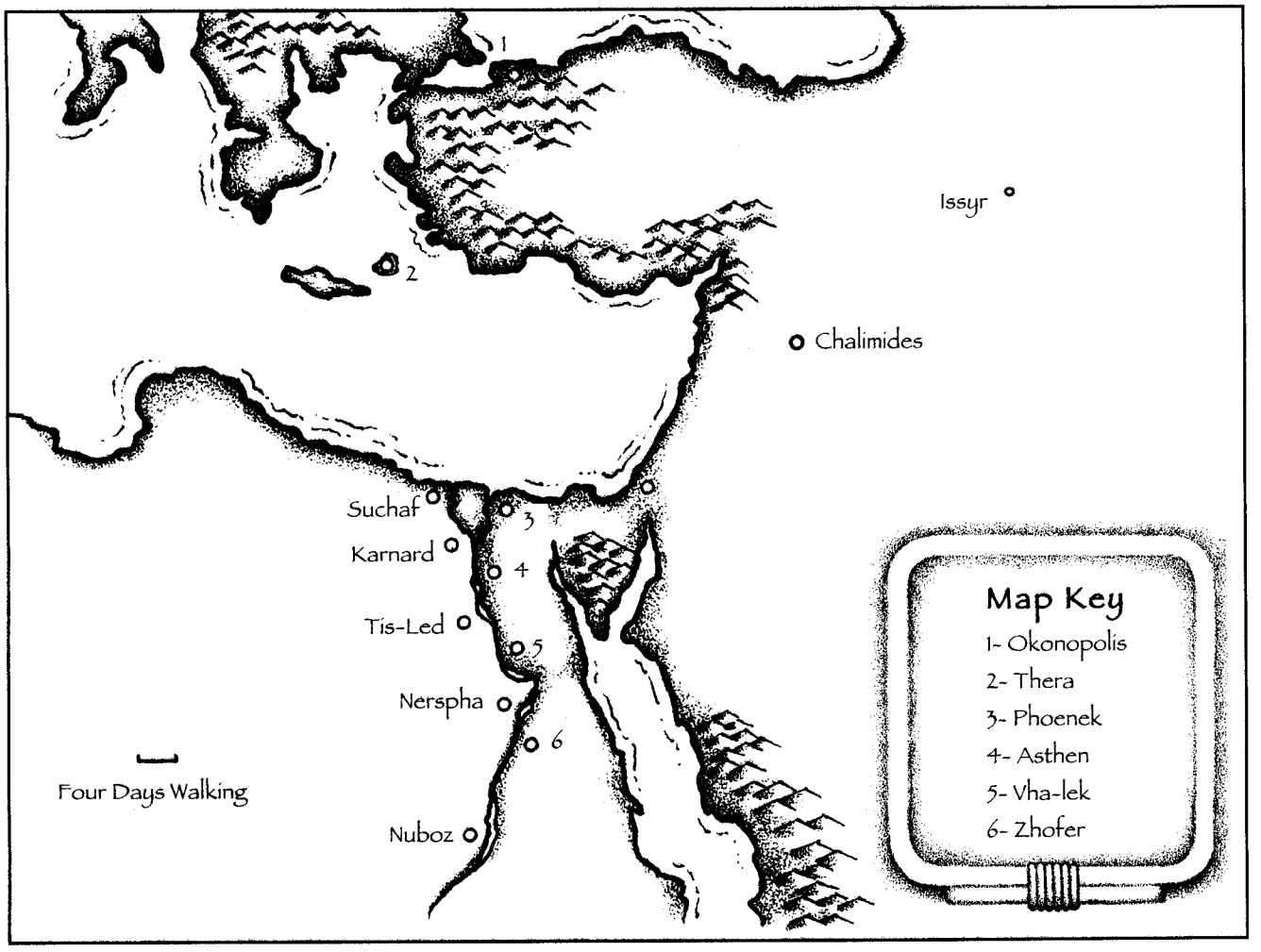
ON THE LAND OF CREANA

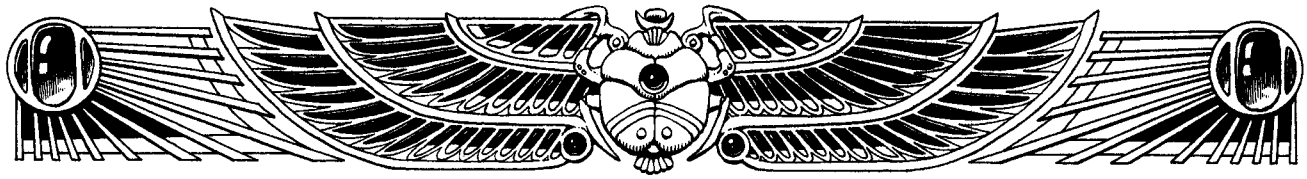
—As written by Aten-a-par, Court Scribe of Creana

Thanks to the gifts of the Great Mother Ureth, the land of Creana is the most fertile and prosperous in all of northern Fekara. Nearly a million souls dwell in the perfect land, with another five hundred thousand under our enlightened rulership in the occupied cities. Sehf-el who serve the vizier of revenues take a complete census of Creana's people on a regular schedule, so that our pharon may know precisely how many of each Name-giver race owe him allegiance.

ON THE CITIES

Most Creanans live within one hundred miles of the Great Mother River, in a city or town administered by a nomarch. I will describe the major cities below, from the northernmost to the southernmost. I have given our famed capitol, Karnard, its own section.





The northernmost city of **Suchaf** is one of Creana's principal ports, from which trading vessels laden with grain and other goods sail for the City of Thera. The pharon has recently commissioned the building of a small library here, so that we will not be utterly bereft of our written histories and legends should the Passion Malek next choose to destroy the Doomed Library at Karnard.

Suchaf is administered by Nomarch Da-leth-ka, a human of great size and bulk notorious for his opposition to the pharon's plans to reduce the nomarchs' power. He is said to consort with minions of Malek, though none have produced incontrovertible proof of such an association. Of all the nomarchs, Da-leth-ka has the largest army, and so our wise pharon has chosen to deal carefully with him. Da-leth-ka has survived several assassination attempts by his various enemies, from which I can only conclude that the rumors of Malek's favor are true or that the Great Mother keeps him alive to test our mettle. Certain priestesses of Ureth are known to serve him, so it may be the Mother's favor he holds (for now).

Rumormongers have lately begun whispering that some of the assassination attempts were ordered by Prince Lhem-ka-mhur, though no one has produced a shred of proof for these slanders.

The city of **Phoenek,** the smaller of Creana's two ports, is run by Nomarch Ahr-dehn-uz, a penny-pinching human whose reluctance to spend money on monuments to the Passions makes him a thorn in the pharon's side. The vizier of revenues remains convinced that Ahr-dehn-uz is pocketing the profits from the spelt and barley farms that abound just outside the city, but unfortunately has yet to discover irrefutable proof. Phoenek also supports Creana's primary shipbuilding trade. The vizier of state and the local tahn-el keep a watchful eye on this endeavor to ensure that the ships built and repaired here are used only in ways appropriate to the pharon's service—and to ensure that the whole province of Creana benefits from the trade made possible by these vessels.

Asthen, the funeral city, is home to Creana's most accomplished priests of Sanep, including the Nomarch Joh-kon-teo. Joh-kon-teo is an eccentric woman who has sworn to speak to none but the dead. She issues her decrees through a quartet of undead servants, all of them former lovers who failed to reach the Lands of the West. Such association with the departed is usually a sign of Malek's influence, but if Joh-kon-teo truly served the Multicolored Passion, her patron Sanep would have struck her dead by now.

Tis-Led is known for the gold that often washes up in the river shallows. Gold is the metal of the sun, and so partakes of the power of Ozul, Passion of the Air. Because Tis-Led abounds in gold, it is considered an auspicious city in which to be born. Many priest-scribes send their women there for the final month of their pregnancies, and so in Tis-Led women always outnumber men. The nomarch of Tis-Led, Khon-url-tan, is a priestess of Ureth, above the law and irritatingly prone to cryptic utterances and odd mannerisms. Her tuneless whistling is most annoying.

Vha-lek is—or perhaps I should say was—a city of artisans, many of them sculptors in turquoise and alabaster (which abound in the nearby cliffs). Sadly, the artisans and other respectable people have given way to bandits and tomb robbers in the past few years, largely because Vha-lek's nomarch is woefully inexperienced. Ech-ka-thon, a young cousin of the pharon, became Nomarch of Vha-lek after his father died in a riding accident. Though Vha-lek has become increasingly lawless under the nomarch's inept rule, our compassionate pharon has chosen to give Ech-ka-thon another chance to learn good governance. It remains to be seen how long the pharon's patience will last.

Nerspha, also called the City of Stone because of the limestone quarries that give its people their livelihoods, is well governed by the stalwart Nomarch Ohn-ka-to, uncle to the pharon. The pharon's staunchest ally among the nomarchs, Ohn-ka-to has often used the threat of his armies to dissuade less loyal nomarchs from rash actions. Ohn-ka-to is a connoisseur of ancient artifacts; none outside the pharon's palace possess more valuable treasures recovered from ancient times. Some say the nomarch is a patron of grave robbers, but this cannot be so; he retains the pharon's and the Passions' favor, and so cannot be guilty of such great evil. His loyalty to the pharon, alas, has earned him enemies among his fellow nomarchs who are doubtless the source of such lies.

I have heard it said that the air in Nerspha sometimes turns white from the limestone dust. Though I have never seen this phenomenon, I have noticed that food and drink in Nerspha tends to taste of chalk.

Zhofer, the gateway to the rest of Fekara, is home to much of the Creanan army and several divisions of Theran infantry as well. Among other things, the soldiers guard the city's precious copper mines from our enemies to the south. (I speak of the people of Nuboz, who remain troublesome despite our conquest of them—as you shall read further on.) The Nomarch of Zhofer, Bah-des-ghel, is a thin, nervous woman who rarely ceases wringing her hands. She believes that questors of the mysterious Fekaran Passion known as the Mighty Spider have marked her for death, and sees conspiracies everywhere. Thus far, my own scribes have not managed to confirm or deny the existence of any real threat.

Her latest scheme, for which she has formally requested the pharon's blessing, is the construction of a giant dam across the First Cataract that lies a scant half-day's walk from the city boundary. She believes that this dam will enable her to trap a portion of the Great Mother River's power and use it against her hidden enemies. The pharon has yet to answer Bah-des-ghel, but I believe his innate wisdom will lead him to reject this mad plan.

On the Legendary City of Karnard

Karnard is the regal city, governed by the pharon. Its half million residents include farmers, bahj-nar, priest-scribes and the many slaves who serve them. Most of Karnard's people live in clay homes with roofs of reed thatch. Senior priest-scribes like myself, by contrast, live in manor houses on large estates better suited to our wealth and position. Very few buildings are more than one story high. Height is a virtue reserved for royal and nomarchial palaces, for monuments to dead pharons, and for temples dedicated to the Passions. From time to time Tabru in his wisdom orders that all clay homes be torn down and rearranged; this last occurred fifteen years ago. Such periodic reorderings of the city are usually undertaken to counter some dread omen or to expunge a terrible collective sin on the part of Creana's royal family or ruling class.

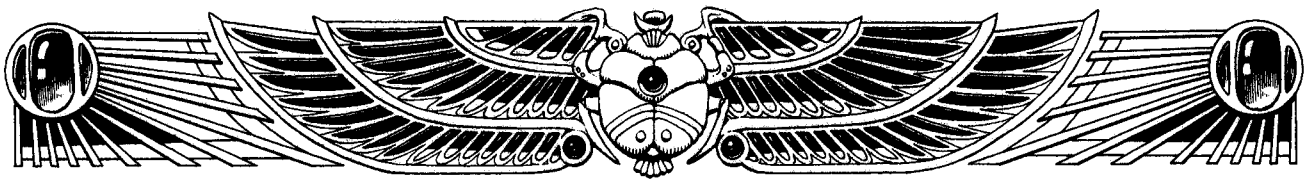
For the benefit of visitors to the perfect land, I shall describe some of Karnard's noteworthy landmarks.

The Doomed Library

The Doomed Library, which falls under my administration as court scribe, was the first building constructed in Karnard. The city's founder, Pharon Kalesh-Gar III, built it in tribute to the Passion Gez even before laying the foundation stones of his own royal palace. Unfortunately, this act of homage to Gez made the Passion Malek jealous. And so Malek appeared before Kalesh-Gar and told him that the library would be destroyed when its collection reached a thousand thousand pieces of information. Twice has Malek visited this terrible doom upon the Library, destroying the Library along with all of the documents inside it. The first time, it burned to the ground. The second time, all the words vanished from its scrolls and papyri, and then the building crumbled into multicolored sand.

I now preside over the Doomed Library's third incarnation. No one knows how Malek defines a "piece of information," so it is difficult to say when the Library will be destroyed again. As a precaution, after the second destruction of the Doomed Library my predecessors duplicated all of the most important documents stored in it and hid them in secret places. It is our hope that Malek will not touch the copies when next he deems the destruction of the Library appropriate. As for the small library being constructed in Suchaf, we can only pray that Malek does not doom it as well.

Only priest-scribes, nomarchs and members of the royal family may make free use of the Doomed Library's collection. These documents include everything from detailed government records to accounts of lost treasures and arcane mysteries. Foreigners, who are outside the pyramid of Name-givers, may peruse documents with the permission of Library staff. Such access, of course, requires that the foreigner in question first perform some service to the Library or for the kingdom.



The Royal Palace

The Royal Palace is the most imposing structure in Karnard. It stands on the Knoll of Supremacy, a hill formed of the bones of Creana's slain enemies. The Knoll of Supremacy is an eternal symbol of the pharon's relationship to outlanders, and a warning to any who would make war against us.

The palace is four stories of honey-colored stone and contains two hundred and twenty-two chambers. The pharon, his wife and concubines and his children live there, along with Creana's high officials and their families and concubines. My own suite, a dozen rooms, lies in the eastern wing. The spaciousness of my chambers and the subtle grandeur of the bas-reliefs carved on its walls humble me. They remind me that the greatness of Creana will continue long after I journey to the Lands of the West.

The Pyramids of Kalesh-Ghar

Across from the Royal Palace is the tomb complex built for Pharon Kalesh-Ghar III. Most tombs lie outside the cities, away from the fertile lands we depend on for our food. Tabru, however, decreed that his incarnation as Kalesh-Ghar III should be honored with a spot in the precious city that he founded. The tomb complex contains the largest pyramids in Creana; they stand ten stories high and house fabulous riches. No outlaw has dared even try to rob Khalesh-Gar's tomb. Even grave-robbers know that these pyramids connect the True Pattern of Karnard to that of the Lands of the West, assuring the city and its dwellers good fortune as eternal as the seat of the afterlife.

On the Conquered Cities

Tabru has given us the sacred task of bringing order to all nations, but most especially to the realms on our borders. They have been places of chaos since the beginning of time, and therefore the natural enemies of the perfect land. With the help of our Theran partners, we have at last placed them all under the yoke they so richly deserve. The city-states of Okonopolis, Issyr, Chalmides and Nuboz are all privileged to be occupied by Creanan and Theran armed forces.

We can do business with the merchants of Okonopolis, for much the same reasons that Creanan attempts to import their passions and form of government are doomed to fail. Though it would cause some difficulties in our relationship with the pharon, I believe Theran interests would best be served by declaring Okonopolis a province of its own entirely under our authority.
—Ruanna-allgwyn, aide to undergovernor Twyllyn

Okonopolis

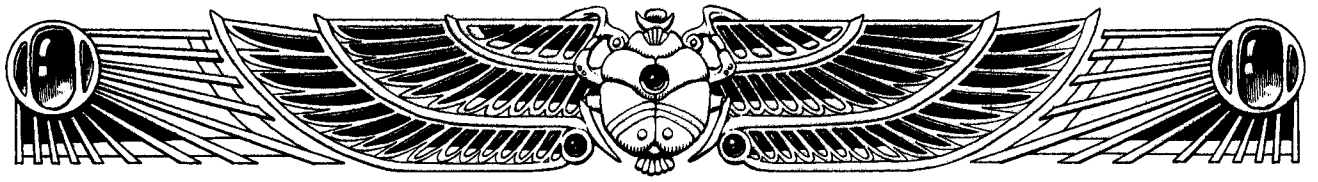
Ancient Okonopolis is a decadent place of intrigue and malice, and also the only port in the surrounding region of Ulustan where a trader can bring goods to barter throughout the Selestrean. Okonopolis lies on a peninsula where the Selestrean Sea meets Death's Sea, southeast of the Theran province of Rugaria. The city is home to many True Fire miners, most of them subjects of the Theran Empire since the Creanan conquest.

The people of Okonopolis are shockingly impious, denying the legitimacy of both the Creanan and Theran Passions. Their geographical position shielded them for far too long from the doom they deserved, but with the help of our Theran allies, we at last achieved Tabru's dearest wish and subjugated the infidels. Under the firm hand of Nomarch Shel-ot-ghe, once high initiate to Pharon Zhem-ka-tep II and blessed by all the Passions save Ozul, the Okonopolans have learned to pay proper homage to Tabru and Ureth. Still, their love of pleasure above all else is a powerful lure even to the most noble. It may yet corrupt the Nomarch Shel-ot-ghe, possibly without his realizing it. Though the nomarch has attempted to impose the pyramid of Name-givers on Okonopolis, the city's native leaders (who are permitted to buy their way into office) have resisted the wisdom of the pyramid with great skill and cunning. Undergovernor Twyllyn of Thera's House Medari, who aids the noble Shel-ot-ghe in administering Okonopolis, has greatly helped us to understand and fight against the inherent baseness of its people. Twyllyn is a cousin of the redoubtable Overgovernor Chisfyn, and has her august family's gift for serpentine politics.

Issyr

The Issyri have always been our chief adversaries. Issyri men and women of all races are bred to be soldiers. For centuries they lived entirely on plunder taken in raids, most of it from settlements and cities in eastern Creana. At several points in our history, when we had become lax in paying homage to Tabru and Ureth, the Passions allowed the Issyri to nearly destroy us. In our darkest hour, almost 900 years ago, we promised Tabru our renewed devotion and he rewarded us by sending the Therans to serve our needs. Together, Therans and Creanans beat back the Issyri hordes and smashed their empire.

Today, Issyr is a shadow of its former self. We have outlawed their warrior culture, instead training Issyri children as artists, scribes and priests. We permit a few young men and women to



follow Issyr's traditional ways, but these all serve the Therans in distant lands. I understand the Issyri slave-soldiers are much feared elsewhere in the Theran Empire.

Shorn of their warrior ways, the Issyri are a dispirited lot, given to drink and gloom. The Nomarch of Issyr, the fearsome jackal-man Vho-ak-tas, sees to it that they remain demoralized. Brother to our general of generals, Vho-ak-tas rules the city-state of the Issyri with the brutality that the Issyri best understand. The city's Theran undergovernor, Bomos, cares only for exporting Issyri slave warriors to other quarters of the Empire. The two officials sometimes disagree on the wisdom of this policy; too many Issyri trained in Theran camps have recently escaped to the hills to plot insurgency against Creanan and Theran alike.

Chalmides

The Chalmideans live in a small city-state in a rocky area suitable for grazing livestock. For most of their history, the Issyri ruled them as part of their empire. Since we broke the Issyri, the proceeds from the great herds of Chalmides are rightfully ours.

The Chalmideans are a peculiar people. They are accustomed to servitude, having spent most of their history as slaves of one outside power or another. In the temporal sphere, they are almost as obedient as any good Creanan. In religious affairs, however, they are as stiff-necked a band of rebels as it has ever been my misfortune to meet. The Chalmideans adamantly refuse to honor Creanan Passions, just as they refused to honor the Passions of Issyr. Their own pantheon of Passions changes with bewildering speed. It seems everyone in Chalmides is a prophet, announcing the existence of this or that new Passion almost daily in the city's public squares. Each new doctrine is less coherent than the last. A Chalmidean cult is considered large if it boasts a mere one hundred adherents. Though few of these strange creeds pose any real danger to Creanan authority, the religious mania of these people causes social chaos and inefficiency that any true believer in the pyramid of Name-givers must abhor.

It does not help matters that Chalmides is administered by the Nomarch Ka-leth-zho, a foolish young woman appointed to the post in an attempt to placate the troublesome Nomarch of Suchaf (to whom she is unfortunately related). Fortunately, the Theran undergovernor, a pragmatic troll woman Named Jell'aron, compensates for the nomarch's weakness. Only Jell'aron's competence and the desire of most Chalmideans to obey any order save a religious one have kept the city from becoming a breeding ground for other kinds of rebellion.

Nuboz

To the south lies the shattered empire of the Nubozi, who made the foolish mistake of opposing Creana once too often. Their capitol, Nuboz, is now firmly in Creanan hands. The other cities of ancient Nubozi, alas, remain hidden in the southern jungles—perhaps destroyed by the Horrors, perhaps taken out of this world by the Mighty Spider with some powerful magic like that used in faraway Parlainth. Our accounts of the Mighty Spider—if that Passion even exists, and is not merely an invention of Nubozi tale-spinners—are so fragmentary that we cannot say for certain what power it has to protect them, or what fate the Nubozi may have suffered during the Scourge. With the aid of the Heavenherds of Thera, we are determined to find those Nubozi cities that still exist and take our rightful tribute from them.

The Nubozi rebuffed our Theran friends when the Therans offered them the Rites of Protection and Passage, preferring instead to rely on the questionable promises of the Mighty Spider. They are a proud people to whom family honor, which they measure by the amount of treasure they possess, is everything. They hate us for taking their family heirlooms from them, and will dare any punishment to cause us trouble. Our wise pharon therefore appointed his aunt, the indomitable Il-ka-mhar, as Nomarch of Nuboz. Il-ka-mhar is quite willing to use force to keep the Nubozi under control. Aiding her in this task is Undergovernor Poppea, a prominent magician and friend to Overgovernor Chisfyn.

ON THE PASSIONS OF CREANA

It is proof of our wisdom that Creana's chief ministers of state are also its foremost priests. In the perfect land, to govern is to serve the pharon, and to serve the pharon is to worship Tabru. Creana is ruled by a Passion that walks the earth, our affairs ordered by the chosen vessel of Tabru. The other Passions of the perfect land watch over our state-craft and punish us severely if we neglect our duties. But if we honor them as they demand, they maintain our power and see to the happiness of all who labor under us on the great pyramid of Name-givers. Because of the Passions' favor, our civilization has lasted longer than any other in the world.

Creana venerates many more Passions than do our Theran friends. When Ureth and Sanep fought for custody of Tabru, they created many lesser Passions. Each city has its own guardian Passion, and every trade has its patron Passion. New Passions even spring up spontaneously in Creana's fertile soil, though their powers may be weak and their worshippers few. Many of our Passions are mortal; some of the lesser ones have been known to die, and pass forever into the Lands of the West.

We have no questors as you in Barsaive understand them. Prominent Passions require great numbers of priests who act as intercessors between the Divine Ones and ordinary Name-givers. Many Creanans consider themselves priests of one or more Passions, yet labor in other professions to support themselves. For example, almost all priests of Ureth also are farmers, because the Great Mother River cares nothing for those who will not plow her fertile soil. One who becomes a merchant ordains oneself as a priest of Berah, the Silver Passion. The Passions also appear in the dreams of our priests, and thus make their desires known to us. I have heard that certain Passions known in Thera and Barsaive sometimes walk the earth and go among the people—a strange and terrible omen to a Creanan, for whom the Passions remain distant as befits such a powerful entity.

Though an ordinary priest of Creana does not wield the miraculous powers attributed to questors of Thera or Barsaive, our Passions sometimes favor their servants with gifts of similar might. These blessings, granted only to adepts engaged in missions that serve the Passion, vary according to the nature of the Passion granting them. For example, Gez is the Passion of Knowledge, and so might grant a favored adept skill in a new lore. Ra-Kib, Passion of Conquest, might increase an adept's martial prowess. Tabru might give an adept a scarab to present to Sanep upon the adept's death, so that Sanep will take the scarab in exchange for returning the adept to life in the perfect land.

Just as Creana's people stand in a pyramid with the pharon at its top, so the Passions of Creana make up a pyramid with Tabru at its apex. Only the Great Mother River, who cannot be encompassed by any structure, exists outside of the pyramid.

Amaz-Chelk

Amaz-Chelk is the Red Passion of the Earth, the ground we walk on. His power is immense, yet without the intercession of the Great Mother River, he would have remained forever dry and arid. No priests pay homage to Amaz-Chelk, no artist depicts him, nor do adventurers quest in his name. To do so might wake him, and the day Amaz-Chelk throws off the web of sleep will be the end of us all.

Berah

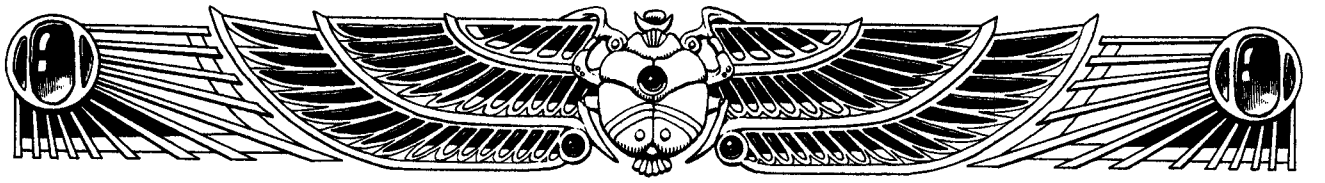
Berah, the Silver Passion of Wealth, is a beautiful yet fickle mistress. Like a coin, she has two sides. She can bring great bounty in gold, silver and jewels, and also in strong family ties and the good health of loved ones. She can also take all such blessings away without warning or even apparent cause. Berah's adherents love and fear her. They sacrifice riches to her to keep her capricious attentions fixed on them. They seek to recover lost treasures of the past, so that all who see them may be reminded of Berah's loveliness. She is sometimes depicted as a lovely elf woman, sometimes as a human with the head of a peacock.

Gez

Gez, Passion of Knowledge and Scholarship, is most commonly shown as a wrinkled dwarf with the head of a gibbon. To pay him homage, one seeks out new facts and disputes old ones. He is a kindly Passion, but when you meet him in dreams he may talk and talk until your dreaming ear becomes sore. If Gez asks you a question in a dream, you must seek the answer in your waking life. Otherwise Gez may chastise you by stealing one of your senses, or taking away your ability to read, write or speak. Those who find the answer to a dream-question are frequently granted gifts, most often the heightened use of one or more senses.

Malek

Malek, the Multicolored Passion of Heat and Vengeance, rules the parts of Creana where the waters of the Great Mother do not reach. He is also known as the Source of All Woes, for good reason. He stirs up the desert sands with storms to overwhelm the traveler. Embittered at being spurned by Ureth long ago at the beginning of time, he seeks to harm all Name-givers who fall within his sight. But he also grants great powers to murderers, madmen and cannibals who sacrifice to him and do his bidding.



During the Scourge, Malek helped the Horrors breach the citadels that once protected the cities of Ron-Carib, Sinket and Oolot-Behr. The Horrors in turn taught Malek to feed on the fear and pain of Name-givers, and Malek thereby grew stronger. Most of the Horrors are gone now, but Malek and his undead minions remain. He created special tombs in which to hide certain Horrors, shielding them from the decreasing magic level that otherwise would have forced them back to their mysterious home. From those tombs, they attack caravans and small settlements. Truly, Malek is a fearsome enemy.

Mav-Nah

Mav-Nah, the Yellow Passion of Friendship and Wise Dealings, affirms the power of the ties that bind us together in the pyramid of Name-givers. She is the patron of families, marriages and of alliances. Yet she also warns us to always know the intentions of our partners and to craft our arrangements for our own greatest benefit. Kind without sentiment, Mav-Nah warns us to love with our minds as well as our hearts. Mav-Nah is commonly depicted as an elf with the head of a meerkat.

Ozul

Ozul, the Blue Passion of the Air and Fortune, cares little for Name-giver affairs. Because of this, airship travel is much more dangerous in Creana than elsewhere. Ozul does as he will, and does not temper the winds he commands so that we may travel with ease. Even the Therans, usually anxious to prove their supremacy in all things, wisely use only the ancient forms of infantry warfare in the perfect land. Ozul is depicted as a hawk with the tiny head of a windling. Sacrifices or efforts to placate him only irritate Ozul, and so he is more feared than worshipped.

Ra-Kib

Ra-Kib, the Golden Passion of Conquest, is depicted as a hundred-foot tall jackalwoman. She urges us to smash the weak, plunder their riches and make ourselves their rulers. She loves combat and bloodshed for its own sake, but even more she loves to see the Creanans prove ourselves the natural superiors of other nations. Legends tell us that nine hundred years ago, Ra-Kib took the Theran Passion Thystonius as her consort and bore him several children: Ur-Val the Splitter of Skulls, Chan-Du the Piercer of Flesh, and Khan-Uk the Defiler of Freedom. By entering this long-ago holy union, Ra-Kib showed us that we should ally ourselves with the Therans instead of meeting them in battle. The Therans honor Ra-Kib by helping us conquer and enslave many of our troublesome neighbors. Ur-Val, Chan-Du and Khan-Uk occasionally appear in the midst of a war to help us smite our enemies, at which the enemy cries out in fear and our own soldiers shout for joy. Any adept, whether a swinger of swords or a hurler of mind darts, can earn Ra-Kib's merciless love by bringing doom upon the heads of Creana's foes.

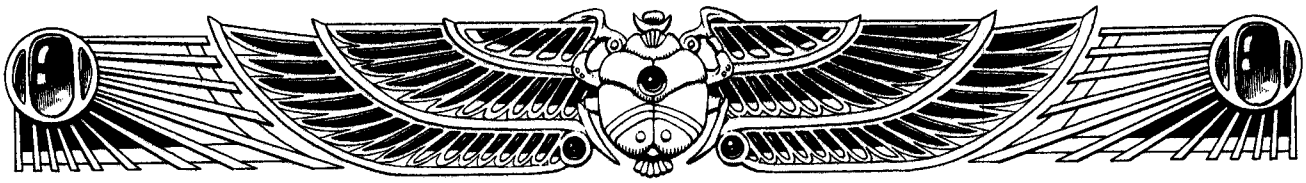
Sanep

Sanep, the White Passion and Judge of the Dead, guards the gates to the Lands of the West. When a Creanan dies, priests of Sanep remove his liver, heart, brain and stomach, which are the four seats of the soul. Each organ is placed in a special jar, and the rest of the body is mummified. The dead soul then makes the arduous journey to the Lands of the West. If the Creatures That Dwell Between do not catch him and tear him asunder, he presents himself at the gates. There Sanep tastes his liver, smells his heart, weighs his stomach and feels the ridges of his brain. These things tell Sanep whether the dead man lived an exemplary life. If he lived to please the Passions and performed no acts to strengthen Malek or awaken Amaz-Chelk, Sanep admits him to the Lands of the West. There the dead live in eternal paradise, waited on by the shades of outlanders. If the dead man acted to strengthen Malek or awaken Amaz-Chelk, Sanep attempts to devour him. If he should escape—which is most unlikely—he becomes one of the Creatures That Dwell Between, forever preying on pilgrims to the Lands of the West.

Sanep does not seek to influence the living or command them to do his bidding. He leaves us free to make the choices that will determine the taste of our livers, the aroma of our hearts, the weight of our stomachs and the feel of our brains. Like the Passion they revere, Sanep's priests also remain aloof from judgment of temporal affairs. They seek merely to perform their ritual dissections in a manner that will earn them credit when it is their turn to make the ultimate journey.

Tabru

Tabru, the Black Passion of the Seed, watches over us in the person of the pharon. As the Father of All, he instructs us in proper behavior. As the Ruler, he sees that we prosper above all other lands. As the Husband, he keeps all things in balance. As the Seed, he gives shape and form to the fertility of the Great Mother so that she may nourish us. He feeds us, and raises up enough wheat and barley that we may sell it to others. In this way, he showers us with wealth. When he dies every autumn, we mourn. When he returns, we celebrate. All Creanans are children of Tabru and pay him homage. Only those who willingly serve Malek are denied his bounty.



Tabru may think he rules the gods, but Ozul ignores his decrees, and Malek openly opposes him. Divine politics are rarely simple.
—Dhem-ur-phlak, apprentice scribe

Ureth

Without Ureth, the Great Mother River, Tabru could not shower his bounty upon us. Ureth is the root of all life. She is mystery. She encompasses all, and so cannot be understood by the Name-giver mind. She heals us of illness and injury. She washes away our uncleanness. Yet if we break the edicts of Tabru, Ureth will drown us and send us onward to the rough judgment of Sanep, guardian of the gates of the dead.

Only women may serve Ureth as priestesses. Partaking of their patron Passion's power, they may break the rules of the Creanan social order. None may harm a priestess of Ureth, no matter how improper her behavior may seem. These holy women travel from place to place seeking holy acts to perform. Some of these acts benefit the people, such as the use of secret healing magic. Others disrupt the pyramid of Name-givers, which cannot contain the Great Mother. Only Ureth may admonish Her priestesses, and does so when they take Her gift of freedom as license to do what they please. The wrath of Ureth is terrible always, but worst when she inflicts it upon one of her own servants.

ON THE GREAT WORK

—In the words of Man-ot-krel, High Initiate of Pharon Zhem-ka-tep II

Uneducated foreigners sometimes ask us to justify our territorial expansion and the heavy taxation of our vassal states. The Therans claim the right of empire because they brought the Rites of Protection and Passage to the peoples of the Selestrean region. We Creanans claim the same right because Tabru tells us to do so, in order to further the Great Work. The Great Work, which has continued for thousands of years, requires us to build monuments, tombs and catacombs to connect the True Pattern of Creana to the True Pattern of the Lands of the West. When the Great Work is completed, the burning sands of Amaz-Chelk will change to a paradise like the Lands of the West. The need for the cycle of death and rebirth will disappear, and the heavens and the earth will be as one. All striving, all suffering, all fear will depart from this world. All realms will join the pyramid of Name-givers, and outlanders will spend eternity in happy service to the Creanan-born.

As part of the Great Work, whenever a pharon dies forever, we erect a monument or tomb for him. Most of these are pyramids, though some are catacombs dug under the ground. Upon assuming his throne, each pharon has a vision of the monument that best fits his soul's True Pattern. At some time during his reign, he commands that this monument be built, a task that often takes years. Building these great monuments requires large amounts of silver, most easily raised through conquest. The work also requires the lives of countless slaves. (For a slave, there is no better fate than to die while constructing a pharon's tomb. Such a slave is admitted to the Lands of the West, and merits the treatment normally reserved for a Creanan serf.)

ON TOMB EXPLORERS AND GRAVE ROBBERS

Successive pharons have built tombs, catacombs and other funeral monuments for thousands of years. Such underground burial complexes honeycomb Creanan soil. It is almost always a grave offense against Sanep to explore these catacombs, and an especial blasphemy to take the fabulous treasures stored within them. Despite this, however, tomb robbery is disturbingly common in this troubling age.

Only the priests of Sanep may authorize the opening of a tomb or catacomb, which they occasionally do for a number of reasons. For example, Horrors used many catacombs as lairs during the Scourge; these abominations still lurk in some of the tombs. Such tombs must be cleansed of Horror taint, not only because of the danger they pose to living Creanans, but also because their presence erodes the mystical perfection of the Lands of the West. Each pharon's tomb is connected to the True Pattern of our afterlife. If a tomb is tainted by Horrors, its dread contagion might be passed on to the paradise to come. The priests of Sanep must therefore arrange for the cleansing of any tomb known to be Horror-infested.

Priests may also order a tomb explored if it is thought to contain lost secrets of Sanep. Our history is a long one, and we lost much knowledge when the Doomed Library was twice destroyed by Malek's curse. Every tomb contains traps to ward off tomb-robbers, however, and explorers must also beware of bound and angry spirits of slaves who died while building the tombs and who now hunger for vengeance against the living.

No matter why a tomb or catacomb is opened, Sanep's initiates will not allow its riches to be removed. They handsomely reward the adepts who serve them, and exact terrible vengeance against any who try to further enrich themselves through looting.

On the Effects of the Scourge

—As written by Mistippia, Trader and Swordmaster of House Mikul of Throal

There isn't a place in the world that the Scourge didn't change mightily, including Creana—no matter how much its priest-scribes might want to pretend otherwise. The Scourge made the dangerous parts of Creana more dangerous. It smudged the line between life and death. And it created fears among the people that continue to change the nature of Creanan society.

On the Horrors that Remain

Like Barsaive, Creana has its share of Horrors still hanging about. The Creanans were besieged with the same kinds of Horrors, quasi-Horrors and Horror constructs that Barsaivian adepts know only too well: wormskulls, despairthoughts, jehuthra, invae, gnashers, slipshades, wingflayers and so on. The Creanans call them by different names, of course, but they're the same monstrosities. The Creanans also have a frightening crop of unique Horrors, including the ones I've described below.

Choghe-ok-pulg, the Maggot Barrier

This Horror entered the tomb of the previous pharon when he was temporarily dead. It ate the pharon's corpse, then burrowed its astral way to the gates of the dead. Sanep and legions of Creanan spirits managed to repel the thing as it attempted to enter the Lands of the West, but it remained in the Lands Between, what the Creanans call the space between our world and the afterlife. It took command of the Creatures That Dwell Between, the malign spirits who test souls as they travel to the gates of the dead. With these spirits under its command, it prevented many souls from reaching the gates, resulting in a plague of undead in Creana that continues to this day. According to the testimony of some of those unwilling undead, Choghe-ok-pulg is a hundred-foot-long maggot.

Khrel-ok-zhan, the Whiff of Desire

Khrel-ok-zhan is a wily Horror that exists only in astral space. It impels Name-givers to heedlessly pursue their darkest desires, and then feeds on the victims' guilt and anguish when society crushes them for their transgressions. Khrel-ok-zhan is portrayed in several myths as the liaison between Malek, the Multicolored Passion, and the Horrors.

Uk-ok-ghaz, the Strangler of Harmony

This Horror is said to manifest as a coin, a scroll or a mirror. Like many tiny, intelligent Horrors, such as the Tempter, Uk-ok-ghaz is powerful beyond all proportion to its size. It breaks apart anything ordered, from a soothing melody to the very fabric of society. It turns beautiful songs into dirges that induce madness. It shatters monuments and pyramids. It causes terrible cancers and tumors to form in the bodies of the most physically perfect Name-givers. Anything it can disrupt and destroy, it will.

Another threat to the safety of catacomb explorers is the dragons said to sleep beneath the deepest passageways. The Heavenherds lust for any knowledge concerning the dragons, but even they are wary of opening the wrong chamber and finding ancient dragons stirring within.

—Alkwotha, magician of the Imperial War College

Zhon-ok-klaat, the False Seed

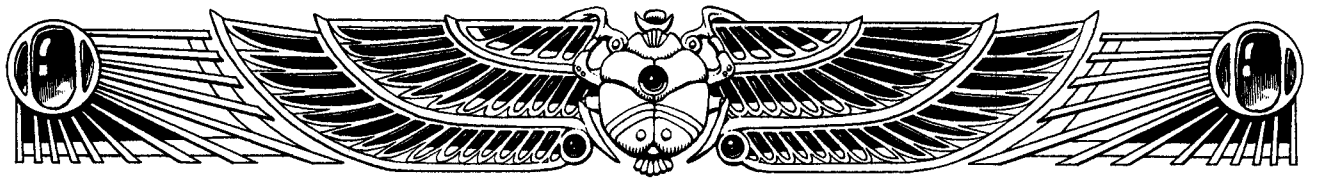
This Horror disguised itself as the Passion Tabru during the Scourge and lay with Tabru's wife, the Great Mother River. The Horror sired a legion of corrupt water spirits, known as the Um-glak-ih, who still haunt the riverbanks. Zhon-ok-klaat also created several species of voracious, walking weeds that destroy crops and are very difficult to root out.

On the Return of the Dead

Creana has a real problem with the dead coming back. Quite a few souls just can't make it past that giant maggot straddling their path to the afterlife, so they shamble back to Creana. Then their corpses claw their way out of their humble graves. The ones lucky enough to be buried in pharonical tombs or catacombs smash their way out, creating handy entrances for grave-robbers.

Depending on how expensive a ritual the dead Name-giver was granted upon his demise, he may return as an ordinary cadaver man, or as something worse: a mummy, so called because it got a better funeral.

Because full mummification entails getting your brain taken out and stuffed in a jar, most mummies are unintelligent creatures of pure destruction. But they're tougher than the average cadaver man, and so they can be harder to fight even though it's easier to outsmart one. Ordinary cadaver men, on the other hand, often retain their old memories and motivations. Some people say you can reason with a cadaver man, but in my experience being dead has made them crazy and violent, and any sensible living being will either attack them or run away. As always in our inconstant world, there are exceptions: some cadaver men are brainless, some mummies smart. The priests of Sanep don't always get around to taking the



brain out, or there may even be some strange kind of magic involved—but for whatever reason, intelligent mummies do exist. The undead former lovers who advise the Nomarch of Asthen are said to be intelligent mummies. I hear they go wild now and then and tear a slave to pieces, but we all have our faults.

Outside the cities, especially at night, there's a good chance you'll run into cadaver men or mummies. Other types of undead, such as demi-wraiths and spectral dancers, are also known to haunt Creana's deserts and other wild places. My advice is to travel in large groups and keep your hands near your sword-hilts.

ON THE SHIFTING SANDS

Creana's famed shifting sands are another travel hazard. They were bad enough before the Scourge, but now they're deadly. As soon as you step beyond the borders of the fertile farmland on the banks of Ureth, you risk being swallowed up by a sandstorm. Legend has it that the malevolent Passion Malek whips up these nightmares. The sands are all the colors of the rainbow, shimmering in the sunlight as if made of crushed diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires. All that beauty is hard to take when gale-force winds are hurling it in your face. A sandstorm can appear out of nowhere; the sky can go from cloudless crystal-blue to a wall of furiously flying sand in less than a quarter of an hour.

If you get caught in a sandstorm, you have an unpleasant choice. If you think it's going to be a long storm, you can throw a cloth on the ground, dive onto it face first, wrap it up around your head, and pray to your favorite Passion that the storm doesn't last as long as you fear it will. The cloth protects you from going blind or choking to death, but you might find yourself buried alive under a sand dune if the storm lasts for more than twenty minutes. I once talked to a man who died in this manner—he came back as a cadaver man. After hearing his description, being simultaneously crushed and suffocated by sand is a fate I intend to avoid at all costs.

Your other choice is to gamble that the storm will be short, and remain standing. The average adept or well-trained non-adept can survive a storm for about ten minutes, with luck. If you're unlucky, you'll be temporarily or permanently blinded by the sands even if you place a cloth over your eyes. Since the Scourge, the sand strikes at travelers as if it is intelligent; the tiny, sharp grains can worm their way through gaps in protective cloth, or jump down your throat and suffocate you. But if the storm ends soon enough, you'll at least be on top of the sand instead of under it.

REGARDING PHILOSOPHICAL UNREST

If there's one trait that characterizes the rulers of Creana, it's certainty. They know that everything they do is approved ahead of time by their ruling Passion. That makes them pretty hard to argue with, especially because they've been raised to believe such twaddle. Add to that the fact that their civilization predates all the others we know of by at least a dozen centuries, which understandably gives them the notion that Creana is the center of creation, and you have a ruling class with quite the high opinion of themselves. The Scourge, however, badly shook their sense that the world revolves around them. They may try to deny it, but it's true.

The fact that their almighty Passion Tabru could do nothing to prevent the Scourge still makes the priest-scribes nervous. From the way they talk about him, he should have been able to bat the Horrors away with the back of his hand. But the priests of Tabru and his kin had no ideas for how to survive the approaching Scourge, let alone destroying the Horrors. Instead, they had to go begging to the upstart Therans. They may pretend otherwise, but deep down the Creanans know that the Therans have eclipsed them. They know Tabru couldn't help them when it really mattered. This knowledge eats away at them; you can see it in their eyes. From the priest-scribes to the serf class, everyone's unthinking acceptance of traditional Creanan thought is wavering. The well-educated ones especially, the artists and the bahj-nar, are quietly starting to question the whole idea of the pyramid of Name-givers—which depends on the supremacy of Tabru and his incarnation, the pharon. If those two aren't supreme, then maybe the Lands of the West aren't what they're made out to be, either. And if there is no paradise awaiting the serfs who toil and sweat in this life, then their servitude will go unrewarded. Walk into a tavern frequented by intelligent serfs, and you'll hear talk that would curl a priest-scribe's ears. All it might take to touch off a revolt is a galvanizing outrage or two. Of course, the priest-scribes might just attribute any such incident to the machinations of Tabru's divine enemy, Malek. I'm no questor, so I can't judge the truth of that. But as a trader, I have to be practical. What might happen is much more important than the reasons it might happen. I'm not saying you shouldn't forge ties with the ruling class. Just keep an ear open in those taverns, and realize that there are powerful people in Creana outside that pyramid of Name-givers you hear so much about.

INDRISA

The composition of the Indrisan delegation to the Great Symposium clearly displays the Theran Empire's relationship to its newest province. None of the scholars representing Indrisa were native Indrisans. All of them were Theran, and each of them reports to the War College in one capacity or another. They brought with them certain texts written by Indrisan scholars, which we have included in this document. Nevertheless, we urge readers of this chapter to keep in mind their knowledge of Theran activities and objectives and to read between the lines accordingly.

We have attempted to keep the truth somewhat in perspective by including certain material supplied to us by a Theran dissident writing under the name of Balakan the Borderless. Balakan, a scion of a Theran noble house that shall remain nameless, has spent considerable time in Indrisa and came to love both the land and its people. Convinced of the moral bankruptcy of Thera's imperial aims, Balakan surreptitiously provided his account of Indrisan life under the Theran occupation to symposium attendees. He did so at no small risk to himself and his confederates. For this act of courage, and for the love he bears his adopted homeland, we salute him.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

ON INDRISA'S PLACE IN THE EMPIRE

—In the words of Jerriv Forrim

Indrisa is the only Theran province that does not border the Selestrean Sea. Rather, it lies many weeks' travel by airship to the south and east of the Isle of Thera. Indrisa is a subcontinent which extends like a large triangle into the Indrisan Ocean. The Therans value it for its gold and silver, precious stones and other such luxuries. As a populous realm known for its hardworking folk, Indrisa also fills Theran purses through the extraordinarily high taxes levied by the Imperial occupiers. The treasuries of countless Theran noble houses are bulging with more silver from goods made by and sold to Indrisans than from goods exported from that province.

An ancient and colorful civilization, Indrisa is the latest of the Theran provinces to be subjugated. The Therans themselves consider it a model for future conquests, which is reason enough to study it. Throalic traders might also gain mightily by securing the necessary permits for trade in Indrisan precious metals, stones and exotic woods. And, as elsewhere in the Empire, legendary secrets and treasures await adepts willing to travel the world in search of adventure.

ON THE LAND

—In the words of Aywaki Av-chan, interpreter and scout of the Ninth Legion

Indrisa is a realm of bustling coastal cities separated by narrow strips of farmland, with a vast and wild interior sparsely inhabited by bandits. The bulk of Indrisa is open plain and dense jungle that covers a vast, high plateau between the coasts. The Mayana Mountains, rugged peaks that kiss the sky, make up Indrisa's northern border. Most of Indrisa's people live in the

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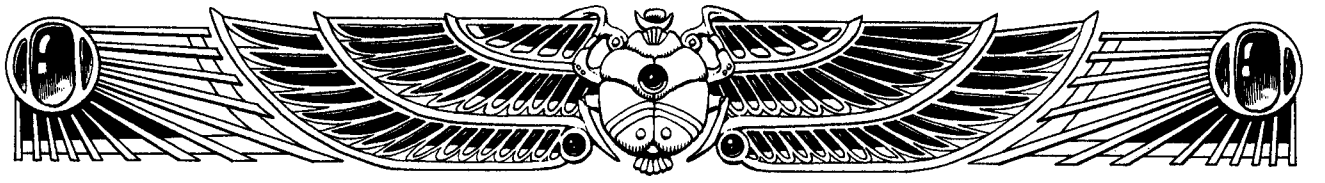


cities or in numerous smaller settlements near and around them; the jungles and mountains are home to various bandit and raider tribes. Theran travelers to Indrisa are unlikely to find themselves in the province's wild lands but may find some passing familiarity with the terrain helpful nonetheless.

On the Jungles of Indrisa

Indrisa's jungles resembles the Liaj Jungle of Barsaive, dense and thick with undergrowth. The few caravan routes through them are used primarily by merchants transporting goods from one coast of Indrisa to the other. Built by Thera's armies shortly before the Scourge, these routes have been refurbished since the Empire's return. Troops of the Ninth Legion patrol them regularly, mostly to ensure the safety of trade goods important to the undergovernors of Indrisa's many cities. Off the trade routes, travel through the jungles is slow and difficult. The wise traveler will add one to three days to any estimate of how long such a trip will take.

The Indrisan jungles are home to many different magical and mundane creatures, including crojen and the giant mantises called inshalata, mistakenly thought by many to live only in the Servos Jungle of Barsaive. Many of the plants native to these wild woodlands are poisonous; several produce breathtakingly beautiful flowers whose pollen can kill a troll in minutes.

Though few in Indrisa speak of it, I have learned that several dragons dwell in the jungles. I have seen two distinct types in my travels through the wilds, both of them largely unknown elsewhere in the Empire. The first, called Cathay dragons, are so Named for their origin in the far eastern realm of Cathay (often said to be a kingdom of dragons). Unlike common dragons, Cathay dragons have no wings. In fact, except for their four short legs, they greatly resemble giant snakes or eels with exceptionally large heads. A Pathalan tribesman whose life I saved on an overgrown jungle trail told me a startling tale about one such dragon; he called it Nelej the Tree-Eater and said it was lord over a tribe of humans and elves who served it as slaves. More than this he did not know, unfortunately.

The other dragon I saw, during a sojourn through the southern jungles, more closely resembled a common dragon, with large wings and a strong body. In place of scales, however, it had feathers of every color of the rainbow. Curiosity compelled me to research when I returned to civilization, and I have since learned that explorers reported seeing dragons of this type in the distant western land of Araucania. What such a dragon might be doing as far afield as Indrisa, I cannot yet tell.

On the Mayana Mountains

The Mayana Mountains are among the largest in all the world, more than twice the size of the massive Throal Mountains in Barsaive. The Mayanas include more than a hundred peaks, with deep valleys and wide plateaus between them. No one I've spoken with has ever ventured past the southernmost of these mountains, and so we know little of the denizens—if any—of the valleys beyond. Even Indrisan history says little about who or what might live in the lands deep within or beyond the Mayanas. Old tales speak of primitive and vicious troll and dwarf tribes dwelling there; other legends say that the mountains are the home of the first dragons. I have asked to lead an expedition into the mountain range to find the truth, but the matter is of little significance to the Empire at present.

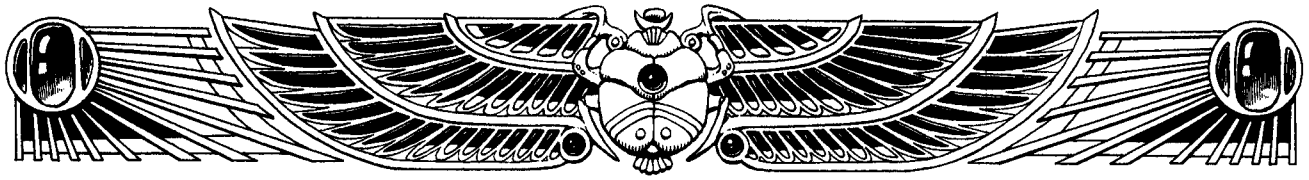
Several Pathalan raider tribes live in the foothills of the southernmost mountains. Perhaps toughened by their harsh environment, they are exceptionally fierce fighters. One small band of them reportedly slew a sizable contingent of crack Theran troops sent to eradicate them—a tale I might not believe so readily, had I not encountered Pathalans myself once. (I was fortunate to survive the experience.)

Additional information on the Pathalan tribes appears later in this section.
—Thom Edrull

On the Theran Triumph in Indrisa

—In the words of Commander Kolath Kolachavian of the Ninth Legion

Indrisa represents the future of our Empire. We conquered it after learning from our mistakes in other provinces. In Barsaive and Marac, we left too much power in the hands of local rulers, and now we are paying for our generosity with armed rebellion. We should have done with them as we did with Indrisa: brought the rebellious rulers to their knees, broken the foundations of their backward cultures, and refashioned them in the image of true Theran civilization. For as healing herbs spread through an ailing body and drive out illness or injury, so a way of thinking and acting can spread to a people and change them forever. Indrisa shows us the wisdom of bringing our ways to others—forcibly, if necessary.



On the Need for Conquest

The tale of Indrisa begins in 925 TH, a mere seventy-five years before the Scourge began in earnest. The Great City had already prepared many of its citadels and secured enough orichalcum and True Elements to power our island's magical protections. In true Theran fashion, centuries of careful planning were coming to fruition. One unexpected thing, however, came near to ruining us all—the persistent folly of politicians, which sadly still affects our Empire.

That year brought us the near-catastrophe known to Therans as the Secret Crisis. Certain functionaries of the Arbitorium made the distressing discovery that our beloved Empire had spent itself to the breaking point building the citadels we needed to survive the Scourge. The great houses and the entire Imperial government were heavily in debt to one another, and the loans were secured with the contents of the various house treasuries—treasuries that their owners had emptied. Arbitorium officials projected imminent ruin; any house that called in a loan could touch off the entire Empire's financial collapse. The bankruptcy of the government and noble houses, if revealed, would in turn devastate business and trade throughout the Imperial provinces. The completion of the shelters across the Empire depended on a solid business climate; if businesses suddenly stopped operating everywhere, the construction of shelters would stop too. Even the highest demand for their services couldn't keep the necessary builders, carters and other suppliers afloat if everyone who could pay them went bankrupt at once.

Arbitorium accountants predicted that at best, Thera's banking system could survive until the Scourge but would promptly collapse once the Theran citadels were sealed. And with the banking system would go the privileges and luxuries to which the great houses were accustomed. If the treasuries collapsed, silver would cease to have value. Only food, shelter, and clothing—the absolute necessities of existence—would matter. Centuries had passed since the nobles of Thera had made things themselves or grown their own food. They could not hope to survive in a world where coin no longer bought things. Without gold and silver, who would pay the freemen and Enlightened that served as Thera's soldiers and wardens? What would happen if there was no one to pay them? The answer was simple: they would take over. They would assert the authority of military might over every Theran, from noble to slave. The many adepts among the noble houses were powerful but could not by themselves hold off such a widespread revolt. The report predicting that catastrophe, presented at the Conclave of 926, threw a shiver of fear through the assembled lavernae. The terrifying truth was kept from the public, lest it set off a panic that could start the feared collapse. Any Conclave representative who so much as breathed a word of Thera's vulnerability was threatened with execution as a traitor.

To resolve the crisis without revealing its existence, the Arbiter-General knew there was only one solution: more silver and plenty of it must be found and funneled into the government and house treasuries. That meant one thing: plunder. Mere days after the fateful Conclave, the First Governor announced a great crusade to find other civilizations in need of the Rites of Protection and Passage. Furthermore, he proclaimed, the explorer who found the most deserving new province would earn an immense finder's fee.

Adept explorers, led by officials of House Carinci, fanned the globe in quickly commissioned airships. They sought a civilization abundant in silver and gold, sophisticated enough to value them and militarily weak enough for the Theran legions to easily conquer. In 928 TH, an expedition under T'calla V'nost of House Carinci found Indrisa.

On the Discovery of Indrisa

T'calla V'nost, the bold t'skrang captain of the vedette *Claw of Joy*, initially sailed toward the heart of the continent of Fekara in search of a suitable realm to conquer. A confrontation with a great-form air elemental blew him off course, however, and V'nost and his crew found themselves over the Indrisan Ocean with their food and water running out. (Some say the elemental was Ozul, the Creanan Passion of the Air; personally, I reserve judgment.) After many hardships, including an attempted mutiny, the *Claw of Joy* crashed into the Mayana Mountains, on the northern border of the Indrisan subcontinent.

Over several months, V'nost and his surviving crew made their way across Indrisa from the mountains to the coast. Their travels gave them a chance to observe Indrisan civilization first-hand, and to learn its language and ways. They saw that Indrisa was a land of splendor, with rich princelings who ruled over fertile lands and lived in luxury.

Indrisa seemed to be precisely what the Empire needed: rich in precious metals and gems but lacking the kind of unified military power needed to resist our legions. T'calla V'nost had no doubt of our ability to conquer this land; however, if he could bring it into the Theran fold without a shot being fired, so much the better. And so he told the Indrisans of the coming Scourge and offered them Theran magic to save them from it.

The Indrisan pashas greeted his offer with polite but definite refusals. Indeed, descriptions of their reactions in V'nost's own journals indicate that the petty kings of Indrisa were amused at his words. They knew the Scourge was coming and had long been preparing for its arrival in their own way. Their holy men, in whose powers they placed their trust, had the temerity to call our Rites of Protection and Passage primitive. Indrisa's rulers therefore had no incentive to ally with us, and so conquest became the only possible strategy.

House Carinci will pay well to learn of T'calla V'nost's final days or to recover his remains, which deserve a place of honor in the Carinci crypts. Paying proper homage to the bones of our slain heroes strengthens our house's true pattern and brings good fortune to all who serve it.
—C'aan Aris, Carinci House historian

The people of Indrisa had no knowledge of airships, and so V'nost and his men repaired their vedette with local materials as best they could. They cleverly withheld the details of their vessel's construction from the Indrisan wizards who helped them. An Indrisan warlord Named Simurang guessed the ship's true value and tried to steal it from them, but the crew fought valiantly and ended the battle by taking flight. T'calla V'nost was unfortunately left behind; no one knows his fate.

Under the command of V'nost's first mate, the ork air sailor Galvanosh, the *Claw of Joy* limped back to Thera. When Galvanosh told the First Governor of Indrisa and its riches, the Governor knew that Indrisa was the conquest Thera needed. With Galvanosh's aid, Thera's generals drew up plans for the Indrisan campaign.

On the Conquest of Indrisa

From the standpoint of the Theran legions, the years before the Scourge were the most peaceful throughout the Empire's existing provinces. With the Horrors breathing down their necks, every provincial from Throal to Chalmides was a loyal Theran. Neither ruler nor would-be rebel dared instigate ill-advised acts of revolt that might cause Thera to withdraw the Rites of Protection and Passage from his province. So we could afford to pull the vast majority of our fighting forces from the provinces and turn them against Indrisa. Mobilization began in late 929, and the fleets reached Indrisa in early 930.

The brilliant Indrisan campaign waged by Sublime Grand Admiral Risia Riskarian embodied her personal doctrine of war, which has since been studied by all Theran officers: "To break the spirit of a people, force must be overwhelming and merciless." She led five full airship fleets to Indrisa's capital city of Vellapur, on the coast of the Indrisan Ocean.

Galvonosh had told Admiral Riskarian that Indrisa's coastal city-states owed homage to a king Named Hundaripur, but that Hundaripur was a weak ruler. The powerful pashas who ruled the cities were virtually independent of their king, and so Admiral Riskarian knew there was no point in securing Hundaripur's allegiance. The pashas would refuse to honor his surrender, and negotiating with all of them separately—even backed up with the threat of the Theran navy—would take far more time than the admiral was willing to spare. Rather than mire herself and the Empire in the swamp of Indrisan politics, Admiral Riskarian opted for a simpler and far more effective tactic: devastation.

The admiral warned Hundaripur to evacuate his capital city in six hours. At the end of that time, it would be destroyed. Hundaripur, seizing what must have seemed like the perfect chance to counter his reputation as a weakling, refused to allow anyone to leave. Instead, he ordered the people of Vellapur to stand and fight. Admiral Riskarian, however, did not indulge the Indrisans in a house-to-house battle. Instead, she turned her five fleets' magical engines of destruction full force upon Vellapur. Overnight, the city was reduced to smoking rubble. Hundreds of thousands of Vellapurians burned to death or were fatally trampled in the mad, too-late rush to escape. As Admiral Riskarian had intended, just enough demoralized denizens survived to take the grim story of Vellapur to the pashas of the other Indrisan city-states. When the admiral sent representatives to those pashas, they had learned the consequences of defiance. Within a week, the pashas of every Indrisan city large and prosperous enough to matter had sworn eternal allegiance to the Theran Empire.

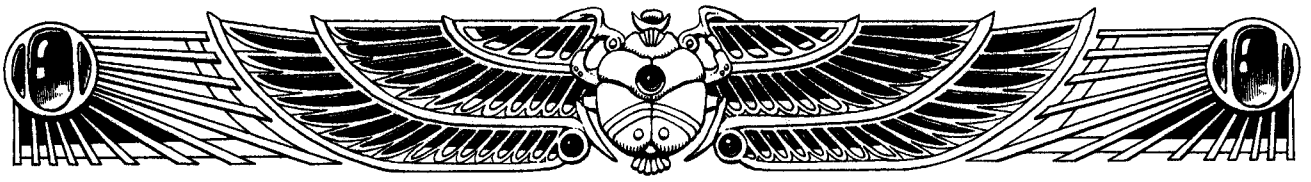
On the Precedent Set by the Conquest

—In the words of Lieutenant Makhol Tajima, Chief Aide to Commander Kolachavian

The Indrisa campaign is more than just ancient history. We are telling this tale for a reason. Our success in governing Indrisa has its roots in the province's conquest. We didn't pretend we were doing the Indrisans a favor by conquering them. We knew what we wanted from them: silver and gold. They knew they had to give it to us to stop our killing them. In provinces such as Barsaive and Marac, where we pretended to be high-and-mighty doers of good, the local folk are spitting in our faces because we acted like hypocrites.

Why do we pretend our presence helps the provincials? For our own benefit, not theirs. Everyone acts to suit themselves. But most people also like to pretend they're doing great and noble things in the process. With apologies to my esteemed commanding officer, all that mess-hall slop about the blessings of Theran civilization isn't designed for the provincials. It's designed for us—to make us feel better about what we're doing.

The trouble is, making ourselves feel like heroic do-gooders isn't in our interests. It's stupid to tell a people you're subjugating that you care only about their well-being. Most of them will see this as the paper-thin nonsense it is. And the ones who do are no threat; they're the cynics and pragmatists, the ones who always know which way the wind is blowing. But along with them you'll always find a few crazy idealists who actually *believe* you when you say you're out to do good. They



expect us to deliver on these empty promises—and when we don't, they fight us with all the fury of trust betrayed, and they stir up masses of naive folk to join them. No end of trouble, such people. Let them live and they agitate against you, no matter what punishments you subject them to. Kill them and they're martyrs to the cause, and so even more dangerous. So it's best to be brutally honest rather than give the idealists false hopes. Don't bother giving the primitive Name-givers under your boot a complicated message full of paradoxes. Let them understand that their only hope for survival lies in obedience.

That's the message we gave the Indrisans. And even though a few idealists still crop up there, they don't have the sympathy of the masses. When we crush a band of Indrisan rebels, the ordinary people think, "They deserved it. They were stupid. They didn't understand the rules." It works beautifully for the Empire—and will work just as well in future conquests.

On Fovian, the First Overgovernor

—In the words of Daneddegg Crystal-Eye, Military Liaison to Overgovernor Tahjaddian

The post-conquest phase of Indrisan history belongs to its celebrated first Overgovernor, Fovian of House Thaloss. A dwarf known for foresight and deliberation, he swiftly capitalized on the demoralizing impact of Vellapur's destruction and consolidated Imperial control over the entire Indrisan subcontinent.

Fovian's memoir, *A Life of Service*, remains the primary text studied by provincial administrators. In that tome, he outlines the principles of colonial governance as illustrated by his early actions in Indrisa. These principles, and their results in Indrisa, are set down below.

The vague is more frightening than the exact. Threaten accordingly. After Admiral Riskarian secured the pashas' surrenders, Fovian summoned them to a meeting outside the ruins of Vellapur. During this meeting, he never once threatened the pashas explicitly. He didn't have to. The ruins did it for him. This incident shows the usefulness of threatening those who might disobey in a way that is ominous but not specific. If you tell sullen provincials that you will kill one in ten of them should they rebel against you, some crazed fool will eventually decide that the price of rebellion is acceptable. If people know that the price will be terrible but cannot guess exactly how dreadful it might be, they will be reluctant to act. They will fear the worst, as Name-givers are wont to do, and will assume that the cost of rebellion is too great to risk.

Be the anvil, not the hammer. Subvert local authorities so that they enact your most oppressive measures. At the meeting by the ruins, Fovian told the assembled pashas that he would allow them to keep many of their powers and privileges, provided that they recognized him as the equivalent of their king. He also gave them permission to hunt down and slay all of Hundaripur's relatives. The pashas, who had expected Theran authorities to take them hostage or even execute them, happily agreed to this arrangement.

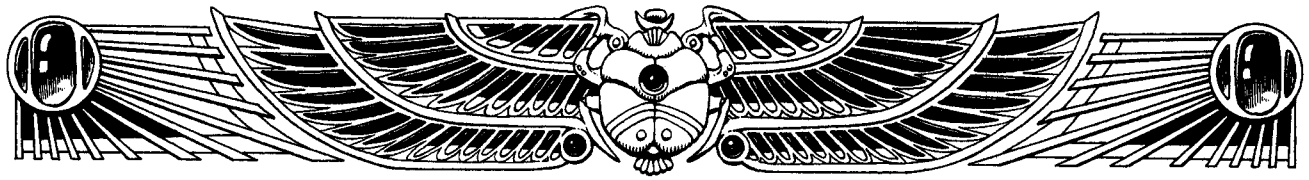
Subsequently, the pashas became responsible for carrying out the overgovernor's policies in their cities. The overgovernor appointed a lieutenant to attend each pasha's court and make certain the pasha followed orders. The chief obligations of each pasha were to collect taxes for the Empire and to swiftly punish any uprisings against it. The pashas were given a generous portion of the tax money, so that furthering the Empire's interests would advance their own interests as well. They were introduced to Theran accounting methods, so that each pasha appeared to gain more revenue than under the old system (in which he had been expected to send a large share of his taxes to the king). Our accountants, of course, neglected to point out that the tributes the pashas paid directly to the Theran treasury each year more than compensated for any such gain. Any pasha with sufficient brains and initiative to discover this omission received a stern reminder of the fate of Vellapur and invariably thought better of his complaint.

By enlisting the pashas' aid, Overgovernor Fovian ensured that the common people's anger over foreign domination and increased taxation was directed at their own leaders as well as at the Theran occupiers. In fact, they hated the pashas more than they hated us. In their eyes we Therans were greedy conquerors but the pashas were traitors. On occasion, Fovian further confused the people's loyalties by intervening in a pasha's affairs, siding with a group of common folk whom the pasha had oppressed. Unsure whom to name as their real enemy, the people remained passive.

A province is a field. To harvest, you must also plant. Overgovernor Fovian ended the fateful meeting at Vellapur by announcing his plan to rebuild on its ashes. The new city, to be called Calcutana, would serve as the Empire's provincial capital in Indrisa. He offered the pashas a chance to profit from the rebuilding effort, further cementing their loyalty to the new order.

> The frankness of the military mind is essential on the battlefield. But like many of his colleagues, Lieutenant Tajima lacks political insight. You may be able to win a battle with naked brutality, but you cannot run an empire. The Theran people would not have triumphed as we have without the little hypocrisies he decries.
>
> —Quahyrlyn of the North

> Fovian's A Life of Service is available upon request at the Great Library of Throal. It offers not only a rare glimpse into Theran colonial practices, but is also a stirring account whose details should prove tantalizing to any explorer or adventurer.
>
> —Thom Edrull



Named an Imperial capital by the overgovernor, Calcutana became part of the Empire's True Pattern and strengthened our hold on Indrisa. More important, however, it provided profit to suppliers of goods and transport, builders and architects. This enormous project offset the disruption of business caused by Vellapur's destruction. Also, each and every transaction involved in the construction of Calcutana was subject to taxation by the Empire. The tributes of the pashas and the tax revenue from the new capital soon filled Thera's coffers and eliminated the threat of financial collapse.

As Fovian teaches, every overgovernor has an interest in the prosperity of his province. He cannot simply take riches out of it; he must see that wealth is also invested in it so that business can continue and expand. If he can see to it that private concerns make those investments, so much the better. But one way or another, the overgovernor must ensure that those investments are made. A province that fails to thrive yields poor revenues. The profits made in one area or another by the noble houses of Thera mean nothing if the Department of Bursaries does not also see its share. Even the maintenance of order is important largely because it allows the efficient collection of tariffs.

Fovian appears to suggest that greed is a force for social good, provided it is pursued with sufficient intelligence and forethought. His doctrine of virtue through cynicism has made him Thera's most revered philosopher, which surely would have amused him (as he considered philosophy the most useless of the sciences).
—C'aan Aris, Carinci House historian

On the Days Before the Scourge

The construction of Calcutana began in earnest in 932 TH, seventy-six years before the sealing of the Great City. During these years the overgovernor and his colleagues collected tax moneys, supervised the pashas' efforts to nip rebellions in the bud and explored the interior of the Indrisan continent in search of magical treasures to be used against the Horrors. The occupation of Indrisa was most profitable. While the rest of the Empire went slightly mad in its rush to compete and inhabit the shelters, business in Indrisa proceeded almost as usual—partly because of smooth Theran administration but also largely through the efforts of Indrisa's native holy men. Having scorned the Rites of Protection we offered them, they set about building their own safeguard against the Scourge—an unusual one that worked far better than any Theran of the time would have expected.

On the Holy Men and their Magic

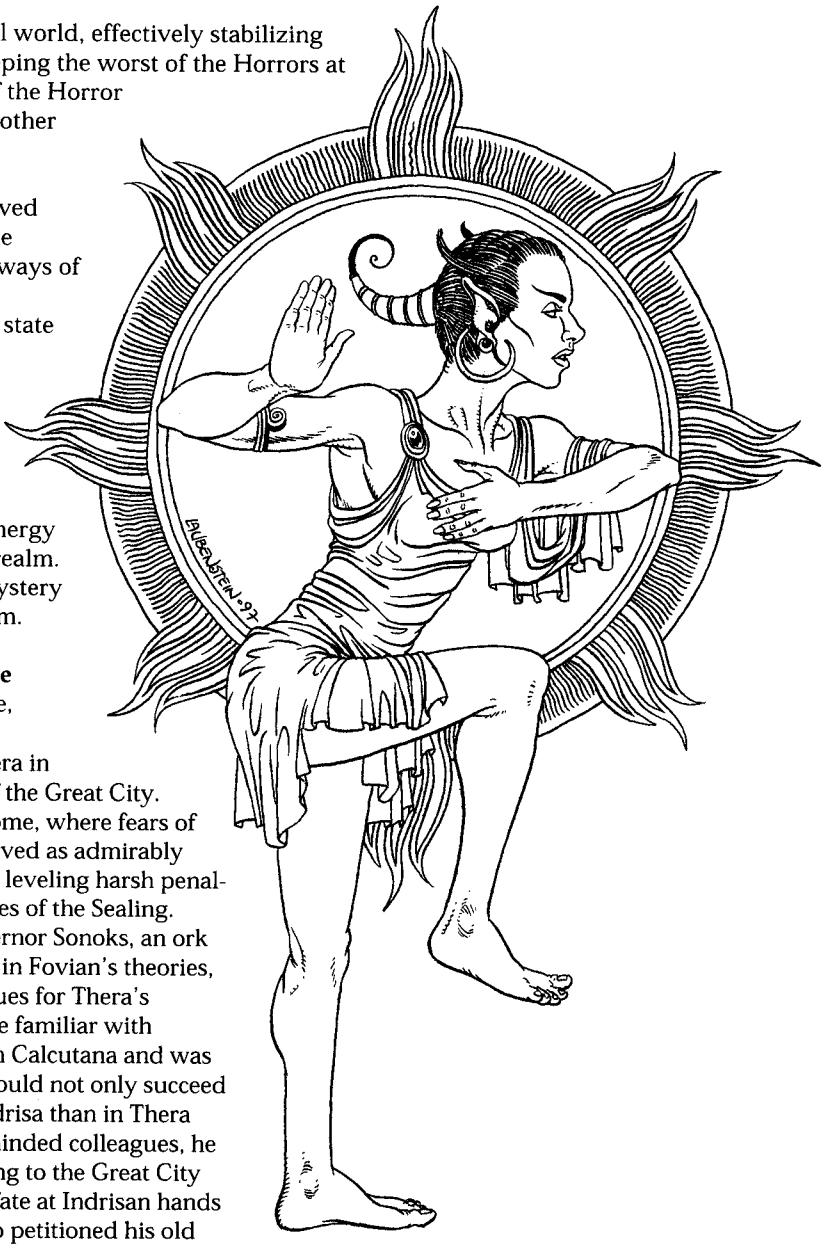
—In the words of Aywaki Av-chan, interpreter and scout of the Ninth Legion

When T'calla V'nost told Indrisans that his people knew of a coming Scourge that only we Therans could save them from, they thought him a simpleton. Of course a Scourge was coming—and the Indrisans had long been preparing for its arrival. They had no need of a martyr such as Elianar Messias to warn them of the Horrors. In Indrisa, even the greenest student knows the metaphysical doctrine of *vethanta*, which holds that history is cyclical. Everything that has happened will happen again, albeit with minor variations. According to vethanta, whenever the accumulated knowledge of Name-givers becomes too great, a force known as *hachaza* has its way with the world. An impersonal power even greater than the Passions, hachaza turns existence upside down. It topples civilizations, drops continents into the ocean, destroys knowledge and turns wealth to dust. Yet even hachaza cannot obliterate the memory of the past. Ideas, customs, even words lie dormant in the *omathani*, the thin layer of energy that Indrisan sages believe hovers between the physical and astral realms. These dim, free-floating memories sometimes drift out of the omathani and attach themselves to people, frequently to great heroes who found new civilizations or conceive of new ideas. Indrisans believe there is no such thing as a new discovery; if you think of something no one has ever heard of before, you are simply bringing to mind a long-lost thought that has been waiting for you in the omathani. Eons from now, after hachaza has come and rubbed away all the traces of our lives, new civilizations will spring up. They will use some of our ideas and customs, our ways of making art, perhaps even our words. Some of these things will reappear in the same soil that nurtures them now. Others may surface in surprising places or in unexpected combinations. Unlike the Scourge, hachaza is ultimately a good thing—a necessary destruction of a world that has become too full. Hachaza destroys so that new generations can create.

Indrisans also believe in *mirochali*, the idea that all positive forces have negative counterparts. The counterpart and enemy of hachaza is the Scourge, which Indrisans call *azachath*. It comes at the midway point between hachazas. It destroys merely to destroy, and its tools are the Horrors. To fight the Horrors, the Indrisans developed a way of protecting themselves in perfect accordance with their philosophy of life. One hundred and forty-four wise and holy Name-givers known as *sathalunta* devoted themselves to protecting their homeland through *vimithryitan*, somewhat imprecisely defined as the healing energies of positive thoughts. Theran magicians, including the Heavenherds, are interested in understanding this technique but it is difficult for any but Indrisans to understand. The practitioners of vimithryitan freed themselves of negative emotions and earthly concerns. They focused their minds on the Indrisan Passions and entered a trance in which they projected positive emotions. Working together, the sathalunta created enough positive, healing energies to strengthen the

barrier between astral space and the physical world, effectively stabilizing the level of magic in Indrisa and thereby keeping the worst of the Horrors at bay. As a result, Indrisa was spared many of the Horror manifestations that increasingly plagued all other regions of the Empire. Several magicians from Thera, along with a few Heavenherds, came to Indrisa to study the method but proved unable to learn it. Proper use of the technique required generations of training in Indrisan ways of thought.

The writings of many sathalunta clearly state their belief that their unusual magical technique drained the Horrors' power with positive emotion. Most Theran magicians, however, discount this theory as inadequate. Theran magical scholars of note believe instead that the sathalunta strengthened the omathani, the energy layer between astral space and the physical realm. Exactly how they managed this remains a mystery that even the Heavenherds have yet to fathom.



On the Last Overgovernor Before the Scourge

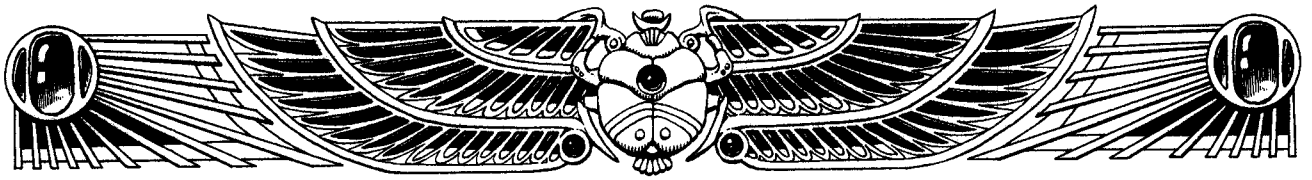
—In the words of Daneddegg Crystal-Eye, Military Liaison to Overgovernor Tahjaddian

Overgovernor Fovian was recalled to Thera in 990 TH to serve as the new Arbiter-General of the Great City. His talent for governance was needed back home, where fears of the Scourge were fostering civil unrest. He served as admirably there as in Indrisa, instituting martial law and leveling harsh penalties against those who disturbed the final stages of the Sealing.

His replacement in Indrisa was Overgovernor Sonoks, an ork and former *akarenti* of Calcutana. Well-versed in Fovian's theories, Sonoks continued to extract impressive revenues for Thera's Department of Bursaries. He had become quite familiar with Indrisan spiritual doctrines during his years in Calcutana and was apparently convinced that the vimithryitan would not only succeed but allow for a much finer quality of life in Indrisa than in Thera during the Scourge. Along with several like-minded colleagues, he resolved to stay in Indrisa rather than retreating to the Great City for the Sealing. He did fear somewhat for his fate at Indrisan hands once the Theran airship fleet withdrew, and so petitioned his old friend Fovian to send him several fleets of ships before the Scourge began in earnest. Fovian granted his request but told Sonoks he had to find the crewmen himself. Unfortunately, Thera's air sailors trusted its citadels more than the holy men of Indrisa, and most of them had gone home to safety.

On Events During the Scourge

In 1008 TH, Thera sealed itself off, leaving Overgovernor Sonoks on his own. He had three fleets of airships at his disposal, but their crews were primarily Indrisans more loyal to the pashas than to him. Sonoks immediately made tax concessions to the pashas in hopes of shoring up his position as de facto king of Indrisa. He apparently assumed that his personal friendships with many of the pashas would let him retain their loyalty once the mighty Theran fleet was no longer a threat. Unfortunately for him, he assumed incorrectly. Pasha Gopalin of Thirimdada, with whom Sonoks had lately sworn an oath of blood brotherhood, led a swift and bloody coup against him with the aid of Gopalin's cousin, Pasha Imbathudi of Davashan. Sonoks was beheaded and his body dragged through the streets of Thirimdada. Gopalin declared himself king of Indrisa and sent an army to occupy Calcutana and take over the overgovernor's palace there.



In his bid for royal status, Gopalin had the backing of half of the pashas; the rest rallied behind Pasha Imbathudi. Both factions had men aboard the luckless overgovernor's airships, and when their alliance of convenience against Sonoks collapsed, the fleet split between them. In the subsequent air war, inexperienced native sailors crashed almost all the ships. Indrisa's war of succession then became a grueling exercise in infantry warfare. The conflict, which came to be called the Pashas' War, raged for much of the first century of the Scourge until Pasha Imbathudi's grandson, Imbathudi III, cornered the Thirimdada forces and destroyed them. He then declared himself king of the war-ravaged realm, for all the good it did him. The Pashas' War had been very bad for business and for the smooth running of life in general; it had impoverished hundreds of thousands of Indrisa's people and devastated the entire province almost as badly as the Scourge itself was devastating other regions of the world. Nostalgia for the profitable, peaceful days of Theran rule grew, especially among Indrisa's remaining bankers, merchants and other educated souls. Imbathudi III's family became the royal family but faced periodic assaults from rebellious pashas throughout its four centuries in power.

Though history tells us that the Pashas' War began when the Indrisans attempted to reclaim their land from the Therans, one wonders how large a part the Horrors played in it. The sathalunta had managed to keep hordes of them from descending and ravaging the land, but we all know of many Horrors who work their greatest havoc in the Name-giver mind and heart. Perhaps certain Horrors simply adopted a slyer tactic to accomplish the destruction they desired; the years of the Pashas' War and many decades afterward were among the bleakest in the province's history.

On the Impact of the Scourge

Even before Sonoks was deposed, Horrors began to appear in force in Indrisa. At first, people feared that the vimithryita had failed. Then the number of Horror manifestations tapered off, as did the magic level all across the province. A few communities in Indrisa's interior were overrun but most of the province was spared significant Horror incursions. In general, Horror infestation in Indrisa throughout the Scourge roughly matched that suffered by most other realms of the Selestrean Basin in the century prior to the Sealing of Thera. As the Scourge wore on, individual sathalunta died and were replaced by new generations trained in the holy ones' unique meditation techniques. The number of sathalunta remained constant at one hundred forty-four, for reasons that Theran magical scholars have yet to determine.

In 1418 TH—the end of the Scourge, though no one knew this for certain at the time—all of the sathalunta vanished. When word of their disappearance filtered from their monasteries to Indrisa's cities, panic ensued. People cowered in fear of a sudden onslaught of Horror attacks. Three uneventful years passed before the people of Indrisa realized that the Scourge was over.

In 1421 TH, our airships returned to the province.

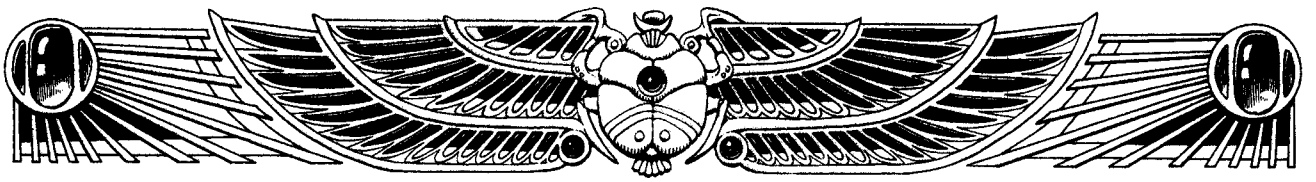
ON THE RECLAMATION OF INDRISA

After the citadel of Thera was reopened in 1399 TH, our leaders immediately set about reclaiming the Empire's provinces. To accomplish this, of course, we first had to rebuild our airship fleet and train and mobilize armies and navies. Thera's appropriately cautious First Governor, Faxmeln Arrish, took a generation to restore Thera to her fullest strength. He reasoned that the provinces were likely to be in worse shape than the Great City, and so there was nothing to be gained through haste.

We reclaimed Indrisa second, after restoring the province of Creana to its former Imperial status. Creana lies closest to us, and its people are more accustomed to civilized ways of thinking than many of our other provincial populations. The First Governor anticipated no trouble in reestablishing the Empire's traditional friendly relationship with the Creanan pharon, and he was right. Indrisa was reclaimed next for the same reason we had taken it before the Scourge: silver and gold. Thera needed money again, this time to continue rebuilding our military. The First Governor knew of Overgovernor Sonoks's borrowed airship fleet, First Governor Arrish sent three fleets from Thera to provide a show of overwhelming force. The esteemed Admiral Petagraven commanded the navy, advised by Indrisa's Overgovernor-elect Jannvoith.

The appearance of the Theran ships in Indrisan skies provoked a domestic revolt against the Imbathudi dynasty, personified in the incompetent King Yanamishna. In one of the stranger combinations of history, Indrisan merchants and pashas with diametrically opposed goals ended up working together to ensure Yanamisha's downfall. The merchants, who remembered legends of prosperity under Thera, rebelled against their king on Thera's behalf; the pashas, who had been dreading the Empire's return for centuries, worked against their king in hopes of replacing him with someone more capable of fighting off the Empire's forces. The spineless Yanamishna surrendered to Overgovernor Jannvoith, who offered him a choice between lifetime imprisonment or exile in Creana. Yanamishna accepted the latter; his family now operates a reasonably prosperous trading concern in the Creanan city of Zhofer.

Jannvoith then summoned Yanamishna's historians, who told him of Sonoks' fate. The Theran fleet flew to Thirimdada, which was ruled by descendants of the treacherous Pasha Gopalin. No warning was given or required; the residents of Thirimdada fled the city as soon as the Theran fleet appeared above the horizon. Our airships destroyed Thirimdada, just as they had destroyed Vellapur five hundred years before. Adepts under the command of akarenti



Aklohrd hunted down and slew every last member of the Thirimdada clan.

This overwhelming force, mercilessly applied, had the desired effect. Ever since the Reclamation, we have ruled Indrisa peacefully and profitably.

ON INDRISA IN THE PRESENT DAY

Indrisa's current Overgovernor, Tahjaddian of House Zanjan, rules the province in the tradition of the great Fovian. Tahjaddian began her career in Indrisa as an airship captain, earned promotion to admiral and soon afterward became overgovernor. A tall troll woman with a properly intimidating manner, Tahjaddian strikes fear into the hearts of bandits and pashas alike. No one could ask for an overgovernor with a greater sympathy for the needs of the military; unlike many soldiers, however, Tahjaddian is also a skilled politician. She seems to have memorized all Indrisan accounts sent to the Department of Bursaries for the past five years, and is expert at pinpointing areas that should be yielding higher revenues for Thera. It is unwise to question the wisdom of her orders; she has invariably studied the situation at hand from a dozen different angles and made the best possible choice. I have served under several overgovernors in different provinces, and never have I seen a more efficient operation than Tahjaddian's. Rumors about her throwing incompetent officials off the decks of airships, however, are exaggerated. I have only seen her do it once—and in that instance, I'm surprised she didn't do it sooner.

Tahjaddian's goal is to wring more tax revenue from Indrisa every year than her counterparts do from the provinces they control. She has only failed to do so twice during her decade in office. Both times, Creanan revenue surpassed Indrisa's but only because Overgovernor Chisfyn of Creana found new cities in the heart of Fekara ripe for looting.

Tahjaddian has been offered positions of authority in the War College and the Arbitorium but has so far refused all of them; she believes provincial administration is her true calling, and that she best serves the Empire by remaining in Indrisa. Were she ever to return to the Great City, she would doubtless exercise enormous influence within her noble house.

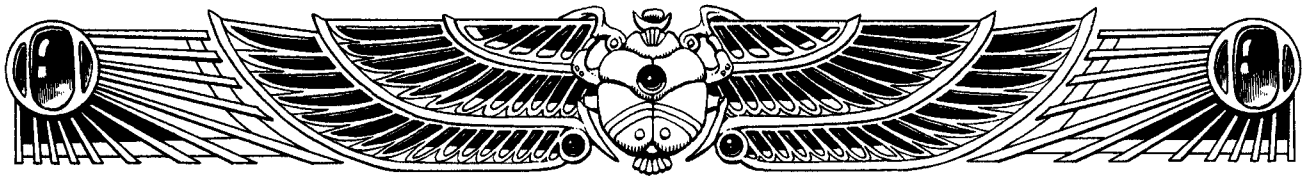
Serving under her is Admiral Himjhut of the Sixth Fleet, a handsome human of modest bearing. The Indrisans are so thoroughly cowed by Theran air power that Admiral Himjhut has not yet had to engage in hostilities during his tenure.

The forces of the Ninth Legion, on the other hand, must frequently deal with the bandits and raiders who continue to vex civilized Indrisans. These miscreants operate in small, swift-moving units against which naval power is useless. Unfortunately, traditional infantry tactics are also less than effective. Fortunately, General Ramillah of the Ninth Legion is a practical and innovative tactician. As a commander, he waged successful anti-bandit campaigns in the provinces of Creana and Vasgothia. This record of achievement made him the ideal choice to lead the Ninth Legion after the regrettable capture and execution of his predecessor by Pathalan raiders. Ramillah, a dwarf, has an unusual house affiliation for a military officer; he comes of House Medari, not Zanjan, and displays his house's typical wit and sophistication.

Though raiders continue to harass Theran and Indrisan trade caravans, General Ramillah has had some success in playing the raider tribes against one another. He has also assembled several crack anti-bandit teams, each composed of a handful of adepts who have mastered hit-and-run tactics. Some teams are drawn from the ranks of the Ninth Legion. Others are mercenary groups, paid handsomely for their efforts. Many of the mercenary bands are non-Theran. Some are Indrisan; others are exiles from other provinces. One of the most successful of these bands is the Broken Keys, whose members formerly belonged to a strange little provincial organization known as the Holders of Trust. I am informed that these Holders serve as some sort of spying network or police force in the Barsaivian city of Iopos. The former Holders who now serve the Empire as the Broken Keys fled to Indrisa (for whatever reason), where General Ramillah discovered them. The general is always looking for dedicated adepts willing to fight bandits, and he cares little for the origins or background of his recruits. So long as they prove themselves competent and loyal to the Empire, he asks no other questions.

Tahjaddian's akarenti in the city of Calcutana is Shiralien, a cheerful and vibrant elf woman whose outgoing personality belies the usual image of the skulking, sinister spymaster. The efforts of an akarenti should not be publicized; suffice it to say that her performance has so far been admirable. Shiralien and all of us who serve the overgovernor are proud to do so and look forward to many more years of fruitful dealings with the people of Indrisa.

> The presence of the Holders of Trust in Indrisa is most troublesome, given that they are guilty of King Varulus III's death. Knowing too well the scheming nature of the Holders and the Denairastas clan they serve, I wonder if these Broken Keys truly are "former" members of the Holders of Trust, or if they have come to Indrisa for some other purpose.
>
> —Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records



On the Pashas

Most Indrisan pashas are dwarfs and display that race's characteristically practical turn of mind. The descendants of those pashas who accepted reality and bowed gracefully to Imperial power have reaped the rewards of their ancestors' pragmatic wisdom. They remain in positions of significant power today, most of them as rulers of large cities in cooperation with Theran undergovernors. Some twenty other pashas rule over small settlements or retain the title of pasha but no longer own land. These landless pashas, or *puvontilan*, are useful tools for keeping the more powerful city pashas in line when subtle methods are in the Empire's best interests. The sons and daughters of puvontilan may marry into the families of the city pashas and thereby increase the status of all their kindred, and so the puvontilan eagerly indulge in intrigues designed to bring about such advantageous alliances.

The existence of ruling pashas smoothes the Empire's path in Indrisa by making the average Indrisan feel as though life under Theran rule is much the same as it always was. Many provincials have an unaccountable distaste for Theran ways simply because we are foreign; the presence of "their own" among those who rule over them makes Imperial sovereignty palatable. The pashas themselves are only too happy to take what they can get; they bow gladly to Theran authority as the price of retaining some of their own importance.

On the Policy of Theranization

—In the words of Commander Kolath Kolachavian of the Ninth Legion

Theran civilization will last for thousands of years to come. It may last for eternity. This means we must have long-range as well as immediate goals for our provinces. There must come a day when our sovereignty over these lands no longer depends on overwhelming force—especially in a land such as Indrisa, whose wealth is so vital to the Empire's well-being. Therefore, our long-range goal must be *Theranization*. We want Indrisans to think of themselves as citizens of the Theran Empire. We must make them understand that *our* best interests are *their* best interests. Those who work with us should not see themselves as collaborators with a conqueror, but as partners in a great enterprise that will eventually encompass the globe. We must expose them to our literature, our art, our magical accomplishments and our values, so that they will see the superiority of Theran ways and naturally wish to adopt them.

We must also expose the Indrisans to other peoples of the Empire and let them see Name-givers of other provinces prospering under our leadership. The overgovernor wisely places no restrictions on Creanans, Vasgothians, Taleans, or even Maracans and Barsaivians who wish to come to Indrisa and do business. Those who come to cause trouble will be dealt with as they deserve. But in general, we wish to show the inward-looking Indrisans that there is more to life than their primitive traditions, their infighting and their backward observances. When they finally accept the superiority of other ways, they will be the better for it. We can then use the airships stationed here to expand our Empire further into the vast continent from which Indrisa springs.

A DISSIDENT'S ASSESSMENT

—From the writings of Balakan the Borderless of the True Indrisans

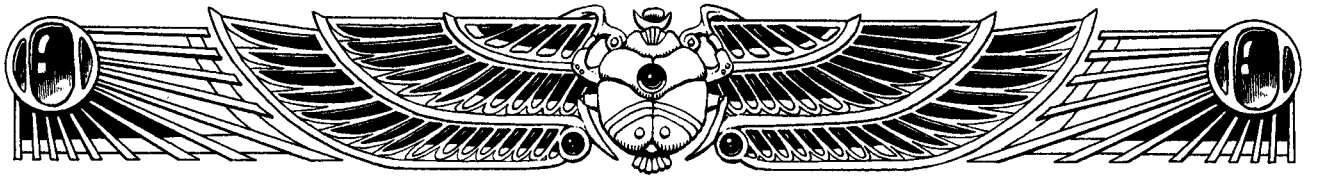
The editors of this volume include Balakan's comments because we wish to present the unvarnished view of a rebel, not because we personally advocate or condone the assassination of military officers or government administrators.

—Thom Edrull

I wish that the Theran overlords of Indrisa were a pack of bumblers; it would make the job of overthrowing them much easier. Unfortunately, the only idiot in the bunch is Admiral Himjhut. From what my informants tell me, he rose through the ranks as an agreeable fellow assigned to a series of strong-willed commanders. He did what those commanders told him and thereby racked up a record of success. He has no leadership qualities of his own, no ability to devise policy.

Unfortunately, his weakness does us little good. If a rebellion in Indrisa ever reaches the point of provoking naval strikes, we will already have failed. We're a long way from being able to counter the raw destructive power of one airship fleet, let alone the two or three that Himjhut would use to put us down. And should such a catastrophe ever come to pass, I have no doubt that Tahjaddian herself would direct the fleets, anyway. She, alas, is everything she's made out to be—smart as a sphinx and merciful as a gargoyle. If anyone should cause a terrible accident to befall her ... well, let's just say the free people of Indrisa would be grateful. And that gratitude might conceivably include generous material benefits.

About General Ramillah, we have mixed feelings. The True Indrisans are based in the cities. Our supporters are traders, artisans, and ordinary people who have much to fear from the raiders and bandits of the interior. Ramillah has been successful enough in dealing with them so that they now strike with caution. Because of his efforts, a narrow zone of relative safety exists around the cities, which benefits the True Indrisans as much as anyone else. Unfortunately, there is



no reason to believe that Ramillah would hesitate to turn his elite anti-bandit troops against us if he believed us a threat to Theran power. We need him for now but we must also see him disposed of if victory should ever come within our grasp.

Our worst enemy among the Theran administrators of our beloved land is the damnably charming akarenti, Shiralien. A believer among cynics, she has convinced herself that Thera's presence is good for the Indrisans. She feels that, given a choice between warring pashas and tax-grabbing Theran officials, that Indrisans are better off under foreign rule. We of the True Indrisans believe in a third choice. We want the grasping Therans gone from our land—but the equally greedy and shortsighted pashas must also be destroyed.

Because she is an unthinking patriot, Shiralien hates the True Indrisans out of all proportion to our current capabilities. We threaten her most because we confound her sense of what ought to be. She wishes to eliminate her confusion by erasing us, as if we were no more than an error in a student's exercise book. She thinks we're ungrateful—so ungrateful that we must be mad, or Horror-touched. Sadly, she has quite effectively spread that lie about us. Many who might have agreed with our aims now see us as crazed killers or believe that we possess dangerous magical powers.

Shiralien is also much too good at recruiting informers. Her charm and kindness and utter sincerity enable her to convince a traitor that he is a hero. Just last year, one of my oldest friends fell prey to her wiles and betrayed me. Shiralien convinced him that I had to be captured "for my own good." He failed to do so, fortunately, and I remain free to continue the vital work of liberating my home. Needless to say, anyone who can maneuver Shiralien out of her current office—by whatever means—will earn the gratitude of the True Indrisans and of all who love this land.

On Life Under the Theran Yoke

It is true, as the Therans claim, that the Empire brought peace to Indrisa. In ancient times this fair land was fragmented into hundreds of tiny kingdoms and city-states, each ruled by its own pasha and each fiercely proud of its own heritage. This pride magnified minute differences of history or custom between this or that kingdom into immense divisions, a tradition that continues to this day in the division between Uvasti and Avani. The pashas often warred with each other, showing little concern for the ravages of conflict on the common folk they ruled. Many were also corrupt; they regarded their realms as mere toys to be played with or ignored at whim and basked in the privileges of rulership without acknowledging its responsibilities. But for all the petty wars and political corruption, Indrisa belonged to Indrisans then. The pashas and the common people together shared a way of life that all understood, that had its strengths as well as its weaknesses. The people of Indrisa's kingdoms were free to live as they saw fit, with no foreign overlords to tell them that their customs were backward or that their land's great wealth belonged by rights to the nobility of a distant country.

The coming of the Therans changed all that. They permitted the Indrisans to keep their pashas but only in name. True power belonged to the Empire, personified in the arrogant overgovernor and the ever-present threat of the Imperial airship fleet. In the first years after the Scourge ended, Indrisa had a fleeting chance to reclaim its independence; but the people were too lost in fear that the Scourge might return to unite and act. By the time they began to shake off their terror, the Theran navy had returned. And with it came the Indrisan people's enslavement.

You may think "enslavement" an exaggeration. Let me assure you otherwise. True, the Indrisans are not literal slaves laboring in chains and whipped for their troubles—but their Theran masters have as much power over every aspect of their lives as a slaver has over his merchandise. The prosperous Indrisan merchants of our cities, who bless the "Theran peace" for their profits? They make only as much from their hard work as the Therans wish them to. Imperial taxes see to it that they prosper only so far. They have riches enough to build miniature Theran-style villas in the Merchants' Quarters of every town but not enough to live in the gracious, elegant neighborhoods reserved for their Theran betters. The clerks and advocates and teachers, so very grateful for the fine Theran education that has given them a higher place in the world than the slums from which many of them came? They all serve as junior partners to Theran superiors. Not one of them is his own master. And they must live among their own kind, in overcrowded buildings along narrow streets that are too full of people, far from the wide boulevards where the Theran counting-houses and courts loom in all their imposing splendor. As for the slums where the Indrisan masses live, think of a tangled maze where desperate rats chew at the walls in hopes of escaping. The air is thick with the smell of the unwashed, and it's a lucky man or woman who can claim that every window in his hovel is whole. In no city has any Theran undergovernor done anything to heal this blight—not so much as laid down pipes for indoor plumbing, so that poor children will no longer have to play in gutters running with refuse. The Imperials have the power to clean up the slums. What they lack is the will to do it.

Many Therans believe that the slums are where all Indrisans belong; they'd rather not have the "benighted provincials" cluttering up the nicer parts of town, shopping in the bazaars or strolling in the public parks just like they do. Being bright enough to realize that such total dominion is beyond them, they get as close to it as they can. They charge Indrisans an "amusement tax" for walking in the City Gardens of Bullawy, or refuse to serve them in Calcutana's taverns and shops. I've even seen Therans walk down a public laneway, spot an Indrisan approaching, and order the luckless Indrisan to step aside so that his Theran superior may pass without taking the chance of brushing against him. Not all Therans are so blatant in

their prejudice, of course. But the feeling is there nonetheless. To a greater or lesser extent, the Theran occupiers see the natives as barbarians with no right to live free in their own land—and the Indrisans accept it with hardly a murmur of protest.

ON LOCAL WAYS

—According to Hisman, Accredited Scholar of the Eternal Library

Though one can prosper in Indrisa with little knowledge of local customs, Theran or provincial merchants familiar with the place have an advantage. The following discourse is intended to introduce Indrisa and its people to the business-minded visitor.

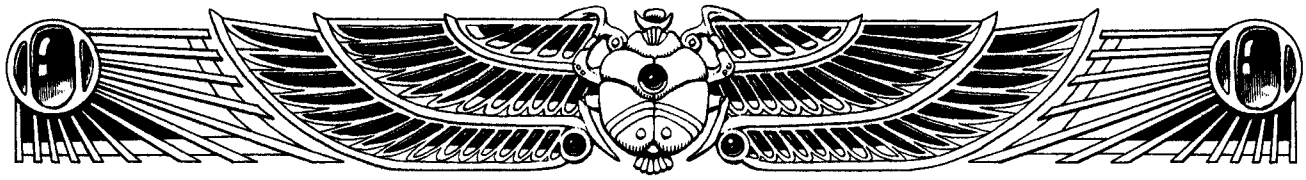
The most important element of local culture and custom is the rivalry between the Uvasti and the Avani. These two groups define themselves by the cultures from which they spring and to which they pay homage in various ways. The two cultures actually hold most of their traditions in common, and an outsider will see little difference between them. But to Indrisans, minute distinctions such as those between Uvasti and Avani can literally become a matter of life and death. If you mistake a Uvasti for an Avani, or vice versa, he will refuse to do further business with you—and he might even pull out a dagger and have at you!

ON THE UVASTI ORIGINATORS

The Uvasti come from the earlier of the two Indrisan cultural traditions. According to their early legends, they came down from the mountains led by Uvastar, a great prophet, or *thibomata.* Uvastar was either a dwarf or a human, depending on which version of the legend you believe. The Passion Halambuta visited Uvastar in the form of a serpent and told him of the vast, fertile land of Indrisa. So Uvastar led a tribe of humans, orks, dwarfs and elves down through the mountains toward this Passion-promised land. They endured many hardships along the way, fighting Pathalan raiders, dreadful weather conditions and dangerous creatures, until they at last arrived at the peaceful and fertile coast. According to the Uvasti, the tribe founded many great cities and developed writing, literature, mathematics, engineering and music, among other accomplishments.

Though the outside observer will note little difference between Uvasti and Avani in terms of behavior, the Uvasti see themselves as more intellectual, cultivated and rational than the Avani. In their eyes the Avani are impulsive, aggressive and rude. Uvasti children are taught that they are more clever than Avani and foreigners; the shrewd trader can take advantage of this intellectual arrogance. If you play the fool, your Uvasti negotiating partner is quite likely to underestimate you.

It is extremely unwise to insult the Passion Halambuta or the thibomata Uvastar in the presence of a Uvasti, unless you're looking for a brawl. However, Uvasti do not consider it imperative to fight for the honor of the other Passions in the Indrisan pantheon. The so-called "lesser Passions," while honored, do not command the level of devotion that would make



a rational, reserved, civilized Uvasti do anything so emotional and impulsive as indulge in violence. Instead, the lesser Passions must wreak their own vengeance for such offenses.

Roughly seventy per cent of Indrisans consider themselves Uvasti. However, there are many cities, such as Mhutralla and Vaniri, in which the Uvasti are a minority.

ON THE AVANI INVADERS

The legends of both cultural traditions make clear that the Uvasti civilization was already well established when the Avani first appeared from the north. The Avani were tribal raiders who at first merely harassed trade caravans, much as the jaraput and Pathalans do nowadays. Then the first Avani thibomata appeared on the scene: Avana, a tribal leader to whom the Passion Halambuta sent visions. According to Avani tradition, Halambuta was angry at his people, the Uvasti. They had grown weak and complacent, making insufficient sacrifices to him and flouting the Passion's observances. So Halambuta told Avana that he would make her a great warrior if she would follow his commands and serve as his vengeance against the Uvasti. Avana agreed, and with the aid of Halambuta's miracles assembled the scattered northern bandit tribes into a united, conquering force.

The Avani attacked and captured several Uvasti cities until Avana was killed. The Uvasti then rallied, with warrior thibomata of their own taking the field and claiming Halambuta's favor. Centuries of war passed, with each side throwing up battlefield prophets, until both sides were exhausted. At this juncture, several peacemaking thibomata appeared, many of them among the previously more warlike Avani. As the Avani lost their taste for battle, the two groups began uneasily to co-exist, and the Avani gradually adopted the civilized ways of the Uvasti. Conflict between the two groups leveled off to the type of unpredictable, spontaneous and mercifully brief outbreaks that continue to occur today.

Their past as raiders, living off the wild lands through their own boldness and cleverness, leads the Avani to see themselves as more inventive and vital than the Uvasti. They see the city-building Uvasti as decadent, weak, vacillating and less devout than themselves. When dealing with an Avani, the wise merchant plays to these prejudices. To gain the upper hand in a negotiation with an Avani, challenge his sense of courage—carefully. A bald insult such as, "You clearly lack the fire of legendary Avana," will only buy you trouble. Many Avani consider it an outrage for a foreigner even to mention the names of any Avani thibomata, especially their foremother, Avana. You might well, however, get away with insinuating that the Avani in question is displaying only twice the boldness of a typical Uvasti instead of three times as much.

ON COMMON TRADITIONS: THE PASSIONS AND THIBOMATA

Both Uvasti and Avani pay homage to the same Passions, though in different ways. Each has different legends concerning the Passions—but as with so many other aspects of the two cultures, the differences are so slight as to be meaningless to outsiders. For example, the Uvasti maintain that the Passion Halambuta always wears the color blue somewhere on his person; the Avani maintain that the color blue is anathema to the Passion, and that he always wears something red. In the following discourse, I will confine myself to the traditions that the two cultures hold in common.

Indrisan Passions are distant from the people who pay tribute to them. They intervene in mortal affairs only for brief periods and then withdraw for centuries. When they do intervene, they act through Name-givers. Like the Passions we know, the Passions of Indrisa often grant powerful adepts new and unusual talents. Especially favored Name-givers become what the Indrisans call thibomata, prophets with powers beyond those of even the mightiest adept. The Passions speak to the thibomata in dreams rather than manifesting in the physical realm.

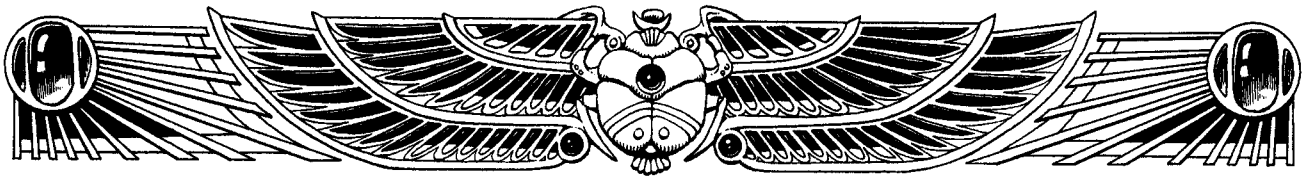
The Indrisans believe their Passions are members of a single, large family. As with many Name-giver families, the Passions are prone to squabble and work at cross-purposes. Unlike Name-givers, they also mate with one another without regard to blood ties. (Only the Indrisan Passions may disregard the powerful Indrisan taboo against incest in this way—further proof that they are different from ordinary Name-givers.)

The head of the pantheon is Halambuta, who appears in visions as a man during the dry season and a woman during the rainy season. As a woman, the Passion's Name becomes Halambutar. Halambuta is the Passion of paternity, travel and the sense of sight. Halambutar governs motherhood, fertility and the sense of smell.

According to Indrisan belief, Halambuta mated with him/herself to produce a number of children, who are the lesser Passions. Like their parent, they manifest as either male or female depending on the time of year. Each Passion changes gender according to a different schedule; I leave the precise details to scholars of Indrisan religion.

The first child was Oparan, Passion of war and art. The second was Devanar, Passion of craftsmanship and the sense of touch. Third was Shambalo, Passion of agriculture, cuisine and the sense of taste. These three Passions mated with each other in various combinations to produce still more Passions.

Members of this third generation are less powerful than their parent Passions, and do not change gender. Punovira, Passion of trade, mining and coinage, is the daughter of Devanar and Shambalo. Thopallapoth, first son of Oparan and



Devanar, is the Passion of secrets, magic and the sense of hearing. Reshura, daughter of Oparan and Shambalo, is the Passion of fishing, erosion and loss. Ulkura, Passion of animal-keeping, is the son of Reshura and Shambalo.

Two Passions cross the generational boundaries: Ivasta, daughter of Halambuta and Oparan, and Ishnar, son of Halambutar and Shambalo. The much-feared Ivasta is the Passion of vengeance, justice and investigation, and is also the progenitor of the strange beings known as *dhuna*. She rules the dark afterlife, called *Kazajura*, where the spirits of sinners languish in torpor until they fade away into nothingness. Though Ivasta and her servants terrify Indrisans, the Indrisans do not regard them as evil, as we might call a Horror or a mad Passion. Instead, Indrisans believe that Ivasta performs a necessary role in keeping Name-givers on the path of righteousness and maintaining the cosmic balance.

Ishnar, Ivasta's sworn enemy, is the Passion of forgiveness, healing and good fortune. He rules the bright afterlife, called *Jurakaza*, where the spirits of the righteous dead forever enjoy sensual delights and spiritual peace.

On Thibomata

Indrisans consider it impudent to pray directly to a Passion; instead, an Indrisan addresses his prayers to a thibomata with some connection to the thing for which he is praying. The thibomata play the leading roles in both Uvasti and Avani legends; the Passions appear only as mentors who give the thibomata powers and advise them on what to do. In the past, certain Indrisan heroes were hailed as thibomata during their lifetimes, but no such living thibomata has arisen since the Empire's arrival in this province. This does not, however, stop would-be rebels from claiming that a new thibomata will arise any day now and drive we Imperials out of Indrisa. A few natives say that the vanished sathalunta are thibomata but few Indrisans pray to them.

Chief among Uvasti thibomata is Uvastar, the founder of Uvasti culture. The Uvasti also greatly venerate the scholar and magician Bapur, a dwarf who is said to have invented writing. The elf Ornullar is the Uvasti patroness of virtuous thieves. Luvithri, Hundari, and Chaznu are the most famous of dozens of Uvasti warrior thibomata; Luvithri and Hundari are twin ork sisters who allegedly inspired the first Uvasti victories over their Avani attackers, and the dwarf Chaznu is credited with slaying the legendary Avana. Uvasti cavalryman adepts often pray to Vandu, a legendary human horsewoman. The troll Tuvallan is said to have tamed the wild beasts of the interior, and so is favored by beastmasters. Uthithin, a dwarf pasha who sacrificed himself to save the lives of his city's people during the long war with the Avani, is the object of Uvasti prayers for mercy. Uvasti pursuing just vengeance against a blood enemy pray to the spirit of Juthun the Mighty, a human warrior credited with the strength of three trolls, who single-handedly stopped a pasha's army from destroying a rival pasha's village.

Aside from their founding foremother Avana, the Avani pay homage to such fighting thibomata as Jowaho, the ork who led the legendary Seventy-Seven Slayers, and the dwarf Ushi, who is said to have slain a thousand Uvasti before her fourteenth birthday. The elf Named Thandiru the Golden is the thibomata of traders. Wallafir, a strapping troll warrior, is the revered killer of Pathalans and bandits. Itoluthi, an elf scout adept, is a legendary finder of treasures and other lost items. The t'skrang Challawar, said to have first sailed the full length of the mighty Ganghasa River, brings courage to the doomed. Thilku, the so-called Laughing Dwarf, ensures bountiful harvests. The legendary human healer Kalowuhu guards the Avani against disease and injury. Prayer to Jenaro, the dwarf chieftain who first called for peace between the Avani and the Uvasti, brings atonement for sins and protection from the fearsome dhuna.

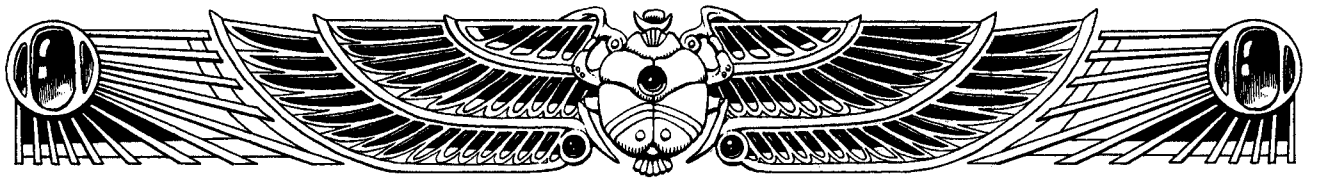
On the Relics of Indrisa

Whether Uvasti or Avani, Indrisan holy men claim that each thibomata left behind hundreds of souvenirs of his or her existence, from magical weapons to ordinary possessions to portions of his or her remains. These items are called *runarup*, or relics. The Uvasti permit the selling of runarup; the Avani only allow them to be given in return for services or as gifts of the heart. Most runarup act as magical treasures for those able to weave threads to them. In a strange quirk of magic, only Uvasti can weave threads to the relics of Uvasti thibomata, and Avani relics work only for Avani adepts.

Adepts are not the only ones who find runarup valuable. Any Indrisan who owns one may ignore the stricter observances required by his fellows (see below). The vast majority of relic owners never use the items' magical abilities, and so the true powers of a supposed relic are rarely put to the test. Many a charlatan makes a healthy living selling fake relics—though woe betide him if an Indrisan to whom he sells one ever discovers the truth. No one likes being lied to, and the Indrisans—Uvasti and Avani alike—take an especially dim view of deception about anything having to do with their legendary heroes.

The magical powers of genuine Indrisan relics run the gamut from healing abilities to the casting of various spells and generally relate somehow to the accomplishments of the thibomata associated with them. All the powers of a warrior thibomata's relics, for example, will somehow pertain to combat. The relics of a scholar or visionary thibomata would somehow provide information or insight. A peacemaker's relic might pacify hostile individuals or promote harmony among a group.

Theran or other foreign-born adepts often find it difficult to study and weave threads to Indrisan relics without first



studying Indrisan mysticism. Any relic, however, has enormous value in coin; the Indrisans value them so highly that they will pay almost any price asked. The customary Indrisan observances place no restrictions on how one may acquire a runarup from a foreigner.

On the Observances

Indrisans show their dedication to the Passions primarily through observances: customs, rituals and prohibitions by which they believe daily life must be lived. As with many other aspects of Indrisan culture, the Uvasti and the Avani have separate sets of observances, though certain of them are common to both groups. For example, both prohibit incest, murder, theft, rape and the destruction of property. However, each group's observances includes a different set of exceptions to these general rules. Uvasti observances, for example, permit theft from a proven murderer unless that murderer owns a relic. Avani observances permit the murder of a Uvasti, provided that the murderer reasonably believes that the Uvasti has committed one of a dozen offenses against the Passion Halambuta.

Dietary restrictions form the bulk of both sets of observances. Uvasti may only eat fish with the head cut off. Avani may not eat fish which are not cooked whole. Uvasti may not eat beef, while Avani are permitted to eat beef only during the rainy season. Uvasti must eat rice dishes with their fingers only. Avani may eat rice from plates but not from bowls.

The observances also include strict rules for dress depending on one's social position. A seasoned observer can accurately guess a person's profession, roughly how much money he earns a year, and whether he is Uvasti or Avani by his clothing. Foreign traders are well advised to learn what different types, cuts and colors of clothing represent.

The author's discourse on the meanings of Indrisan dress would fill a volume by itself. Readers interested in this specialized knowledge can find it in a supplementary volume available from the Great Library of Throal.
—Jerriv Forrim

The sheer number and complexity of observances have given Indrisans a legalistic turn of mind. They skillfully interpret their observances and are often quite creative in finding and exploiting loopholes—a skill with applications beyond the spiritual realm. When making an agreement with an Indrisan, whether a formal written contract or a less-formal verbal exchange of promises, foreign traders are advised to be wary. Define the matters and terms of any agreement as narrowly and precisely as possible; otherwise you may end up signing a contract that means something quite different from what you think.

The observances influence a person's social standing; anyone known to be lax in his observances may be shunned by his fellows, depending on the extent of his offense. Both Uvasti and Avani consider certain observances more important than others, and divide offenses against them into great and small offenses. Uvasti consider it a small offense to knowingly spend a night under the same roof as someone who has committed a great offense; Avani consider it a great offense to make love to or enter into a business arrangement with such a person.

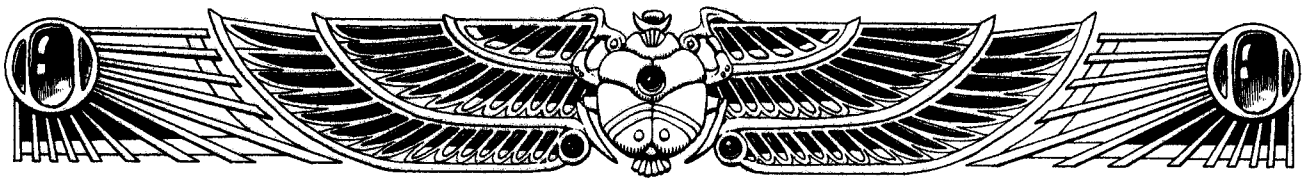
The observances also determine whether a person's spirit goes to the bright afterlife or the dark one. Though the eminently practical Indrisans do not spend much time worrying about the next life, none of them care to spend eternity paying for offenses committed during this life. The dark afterlife is said to be extremely unpleasant, and even the most pragmatically minded Indrisan takes the necessary steps to avoid it. Finally, one's adherence to the observances determines the outcome of encounters with dhuna.

On the Dhuna

The *dhuna* are intelligent supernatural beings, some of them immensely powerful. They are the spawn of the dreaded Passion Ivasti and somewhat resemble the Name-giver races: they walk upright on two legs, have heads with eyes and mouths and ears, often have hair on their heads, and so forth. But they differ from Name-givers, often in significant ways. Many of them have such bizarre features as multiple arms, bright-colored skins, huge tusks or unusual numbers of eyes, ears or breasts.

The dhuna live primarily in the jungles of Indrisa's interior, though some are known to walk the streets of certain cities at night. Indrisans fear them because they believe the Passions have charged the dhuna to dispense justice against transgressors of the observances. The dhuna may torture those guilty of small offenses and may kill outright those guilty of great offenses. Dhuna always know whether and how an Indrisan has transgressed and whether the subject is aware of his sinful condition or not. A sincere show of remorse may move a dhuna to lessen or even forego just punishment, but even the most heartfelt pleas often fall on unforgiving ears.

Most Indrisans live out their lives without ever meeting a dhuna, but almost every Indrisan knows someone who knows someone that a dhuna harmed or slew. Visitors to Indrisa should rightly share the natives' fear of these creatures, for the dhuna are permitted to visit any cruelty they desire upon foreigners. However, they are not obligated to harm outsiders as they must harm sinful Indrisans. Therefore, if you are unlucky enough to encounter a dhuna, you may be able to



bribe it. Some dhuna crave relics or riches but most will ask you to perform a service for them. I have heard tales of dhuna who wished to harm some Indrisan or other but could not do so themselves because the person in question had committed no offense against the observances. The dhuna therefore commanded a foreigner to do the harm that they could not inflict themselves. Some dhuna have even been known to actively reward foreigners willing to do their bidding.

Those seeking to fight a dhuna may be tempted to seek out the Pathalan tribesmen and learn their secrets. Most Pathalan share the jungles with the dhuna, though some Pathalan tribes dwell in the foothills of the Mayana Mountains that make up Indrisa's northern border. Because the Pathalans are neither Uvasti nor Avani, the dhuna treat them as foreigners and often do them harm. To survive, the Pathalans have developed a range of magical talents, spells, and treasures to combat them. Take care in your dealings with them, however. Pathalans live by raiding and are accustomed to taking what they want. Rough, proud and fiercely independent, they have little use for those they call "soft, flabby city-dwellers."

On the Jaraput and the Pathalan

—In the words of Daneddegg Crystal-Eye, Military Liaison to Overgovernor Tahjaddian

The chief obstacles to the ongoing extraction of wealth from Indrisa are the province's bandits and raiders. The population of civilized Indrisa lies on its coastline; the plains and jungles of the Indrisan interior are havens for outlaws. Banditry has always been a fact of life in Indrisa, and despite our efforts to contain it, it seems to be getting worse. Some blame this sorry truth on the Scourge, which did the most damage in Indrisa's wild lands. Horror incursions in the interior may have fomented madness and aggression in the tribes dwelling there or may simply have ravaged the land so badly that farming, hunting and other lawful means of sustenance are impossible. Certain troublemakers insist that the Imperial presence is to blame—they have the audacity to claim that local bandits are inspired to rob their fellow Indrisans in the same way that we Therans are "robbing" the entire province. (They conveniently forget, of course, that the Empire has given Indrisa many benefits of Theran civilization in compensation for the material wealth taken.) Our forces battle these outlaws aggressively—unlike Indrisa's cowardly native kings of the past, who often paid them tribute.

Civilized Indrisans draw a distinction between ordinary bandits, or *jaraput*, and the raiders tribes known as the Pathalan. Both groups form robber bands and live by stealing from respectable Indrisans. A jaraput, however, chooses to be what he is; a Pathalan is a raider by birth.

Jaraput

Jaraput are Uvasti or Avani who have turned to banditry by choice. An ordinary Indrisan can become a jaraput; likewise, a jaraput can retire from the criminal life and join respectable Indrisan society. Some jaraput gangs even claim nobility, having allegedly been founded by exiled pashas or their relatives. Jaraput often have acquaintances in cities who alert them to the planned routes of caravans laden with especially rich cargo.

Most jaraput gangs are susceptible to bribery and will accept payment to direct their raids elsewhere. They will also fight on others' behalf, if paid well enough; Indrisan history is full of examples of pashas who hired jaraput gangs as mercenaries (though they make decidedly unreliable troops). General Ramillah has persuaded some jaraput leaders to fight other jaraput or Pathalan bands in exchange for Theran silver. We pay them generously enough to keep their word; a jaraput may be a killer and a thief, but he is first and foremost a businessman. Unless you pay him so little that another can easily exceed your fee, a bought jaraput generally stays bought.

The best-known jaraput leaders are called bandit kings. Of these, the most famous is Kotalishna, a human thief and cavalryman adept to whom the leaders of many other jaraput gangs pay homage. He is a flagrant exception to the rule, and for this has been declared the Empire's primary enemy in Indrisa. For years, the perfidious Kotalishna accepted good Theran coin to fight jaraput gangs that he in fact commanded. He ordered their movements to convince us that he was doing our bidding, when in truth he was doing nothing at all. General Ramillah recently discovered this deception and placed a bounty of 100,000 silver pieces on Kotalishna's head. Consequently, many adventurers have sought out this diabolically clever raider, but he remains elusive.

Pathalans

The Pathalans make up a distinct culture, neither Uvasti nor Avani. They are born raiders, die raiders and consider any other means of making a living an affront to their way of life. They speak their own language, a rough tongue composed mainly of clicks and hisses. All Pathalans are either orks or trolls, and violent enmity exists between the two groups. Each race of Pathalans is further divided into smaller tribes, many of whom get along little better than the ork Pathalans and troll Pathalans in general. Different tribes of one race occasionally band together to fight tribes of the other race, but most of the time the tribes are at each other's throats. Their constant feuding is a good thing for the Empire; should the Pathalans ever unite, their fighting prowess would make them a potent threat to Indrisa's stability and prosperity.

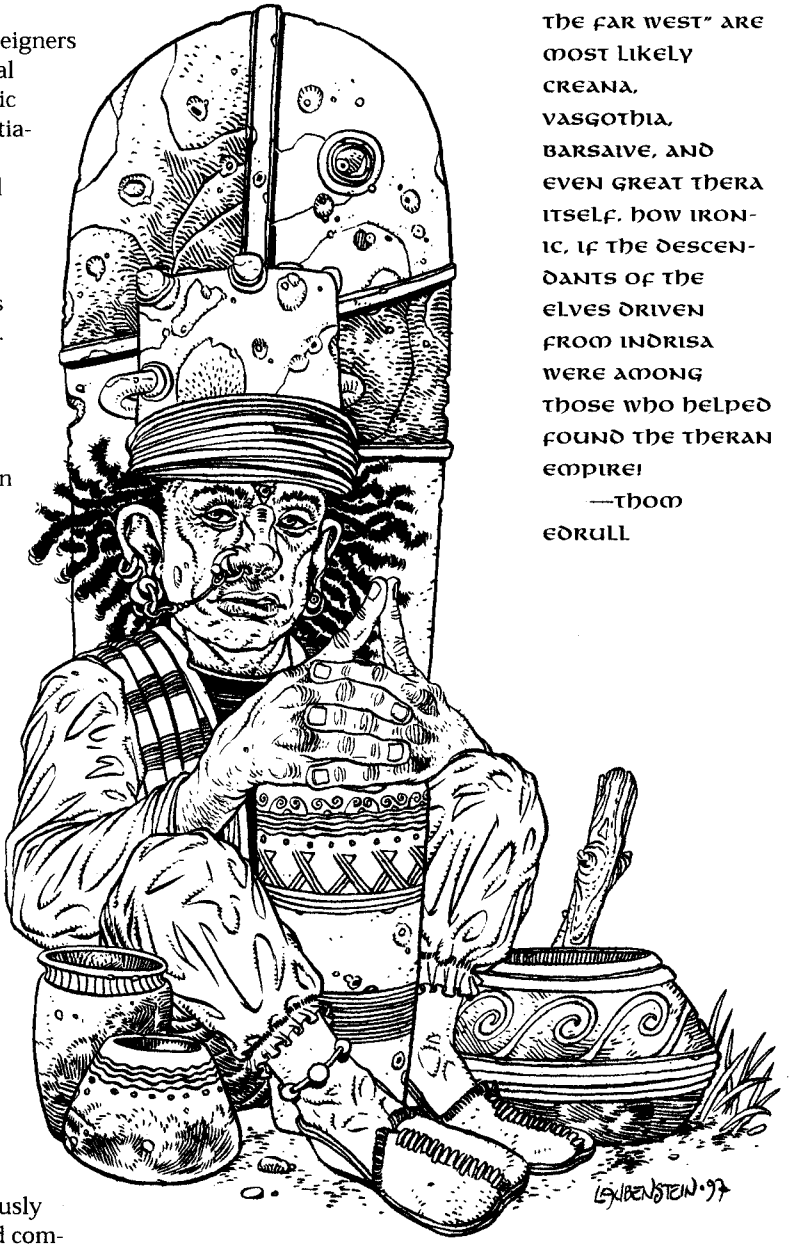
In a Pathalan tribe, an individual's status depends on the value of the goods he has accumulated throughout his lifetime. However, Pathalans value things differently than we do. To them, possession of an iron cooking pot confers higher status than a priceless piece of antique jewelry, which they consider useless—unless that piece of jewelry is traded for many cooking pots, in which case the Pathalan who stole the necklace receives the status due for the pots. This system generally ensures that the leaders of each tribe are the oldest and wiliest survivors of decades of raiding. However, Pathalan leaders must take charge of raids personally to gain plunder; otherwise their juniors will overtake them. As raiding is dangerous work, few tribal leaders live to a ripe old age.

Both men and women raid, though never against members of their own tribe. Stealing from a fellow tribesman is punishable by death. Stealing from another Pathalan tribe, however, is every bit as acceptable as stealing from jaraput, Therans or civilized Indrisans.

Needless to say, Pathalans rarely welcome foreigners into their midst. Few non-Pathalans speak the tribal tongue, though some tribal leaders speak an archaic dialect of Indrisan which they use in hostage negotiations. What little we know of Pathalan beliefs and ways comes secondhand, from Indrisan books and folk tales. They pay homage to a Passion Named Uruliun, who is unknown among the Uvasti and Avani. Uruliun is sometimes depicted as a troll among troll Pathalans or an ork among orks, but is most often depicted among both races as a dragon. According to Pathalan legend, the various tribes migrated to the Indrisan subcontinent long before the rise of the Uvasti. The Passion Uruliun gave them this land in exchange for their agreement to attack the inhabitants of pre-Uvasti cities—an elven people the Pathalans refer to as "the Ungrateful Ones." What these elves were ungrateful for is unclear. The Pathalans claim to have driven the Ungrateful Ones out of Indrisa to "the lands to the far west," where the exiles may have founded the various elven realms in other Theran provinces.

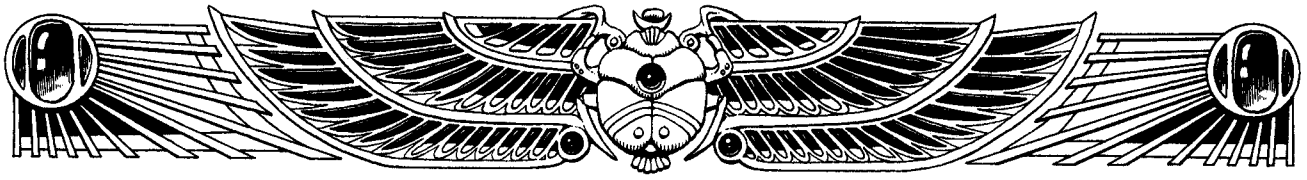
After defeating the Ungrateful Ones, the Pathalans had no one to raid and fell to fighting among themselves. They prayed to Uruliun for a new enemy to fight, and so the Passion picked the laziest and least honorable from among the Pathalan tribes and transformed them into the first Uvasti. After several generations, these poor excuses for Pathalans had established themselves in cities and were suitable prey for their former fellows. (The Uvasti, of course, consider the Pathalan version of their origin to be a gross parody of the truth—and indeed, Pathalan legend does not account for the existence of human, dwarf and elf Uvasti.)

As their own legends make clear, the Pathalans consider raiding a religious obligation to a Passion who rewards the strong and punishes the weak. The tribes' view of the world is dangerously simple; Uruliun has chosen them as his people and commanded them to follow his ancient edicts. Those who do so are good and worthy; those who do not are unfit to exist. One cannot reason with a Pathalan or convince him not to fight. He believes



These "lands to the far west" are most likely Creana, Vasgothia, Barsaive, and even great Thera itself. How ironic, if the descendants of the elves driven from Indrisa were among those who helped found the Theran empire!

—Thom Edrull



that he has the right to kill you and take your goods, and that his Passion will punish him if he does not. Therefore, the only response to a Pathalan attack is to fight back.

Some questors, many affiliated with House Thaloss, believe that the Pathalans can be taught civilized behavior. The questors have created missionary societies in the wilderness, in hopes of convincing Pathalan tribes to follow more respectable Passions such as Thystonius or Lochost. I admire their dedication, if not their wisdom. So far, the missionaries have little to show for their efforts, save for many dead missionaries.

In recent years, the Pathalans have directed their attacks almost exclusively at Theran targets—a worrisome development, all the more so because we have yet to pinpoint its cause. According to a captured Pathalan leader Named Ajantu, whose interrogation I was recently privileged to witness, the Empire's return to Indrisa was of great interest to Uruliun, who had supposedly just returned from a long journey "to the farthest stars." Ajantu said that Uruliun appears to tribal leaders in their dreams and commands them to fight us—or, worse, to kidnap scholars and magicians for reasons we have yet to discover. These kidnappings yield high status among the tribes—again, supposedly at the express command of the Passion Uruliun. Worst of all, as time goes by we hear less and less of fighting between the different Pathalan clans.

We have attempted to infiltrate the tribes but their cultural isolation makes this virtually impossible. They move in small, swift raiding bands, which makes conventional infantry or naval tactics practically useless against them. Our efforts to fight them with hired jaraput have achieved mixed results; no bandit king considers an anti-Pathalan campaign an easy way to make money, and so few are interested. General Ramillah is currently hiring groups of adepts to attack the largest Pathalan tribes and to assassinate their strongest leaders.

At the moment, the most prized target among the Pathalan leaders is Lhasamar, a troll whose brutality knows no bounds. She has begun raiding Theran trade convoys in the Vaniri region, with a distressing rate of success. She has also attacked and slain several delegations of sea t'skrang. Unusual for a Pathalan, Lhasamar appears more interested in killing caravaneers than in taking their goods. According to Ajantu, Lhasamar claims to speak daily with the Passion Uruliun. Ajantu—and most others who know of Lhasamar—consider her utterly mad.

On the Cities of Indrisa

—In the words of Aywaki Av-chan, Interpreter and Scout of the Ninth Legion

Indrisa has many cities but only ten are of any appreciable size. Of these, seven are jointly ruled by a pasha and a Theran undergovernor. The seven pashas possess significant power, albeit power subject to our own. The remaining three cities—Calcutana, Elianari and Kanitherium—were built by Therans. The provincial overgovernor rules Calcutana; the other two Theran cities are run by undergovernors.

Annawath

Annawath lies on the eastern coast and is bordered by jungles that abound in various valuable types of wood. Trade caravans full of wood, from ordinary *kathin* used to build houses to the precious scented *jirani* from which sacred statues are carved, travel from Annawath across Indrisa and return laden with goods and coin. Annawath had been an oasis of peace and prosperity until its pasha recently died under scandalous circumstances that have shaken the city to its foundations.

For decades a tribe of Pathalan raiders, led nowadays by a terrible troll Named Ulun-Noor, has stalked Annawath's caravans. A band of adepts hired by General Ramillah to drive back the raiders penetrated Ulun-Noor's camp and made their way unnoticed to her tent, where they came upon her engaged in an act of passion. The adepts fell upon Ulun-Noor and her companion; she escaped but her trysting partner was slain. General Ramillah's adepts did not realize until it was too late that their victim was Poliman, the pasha of Annawath. The ruler of the city whose people were suffering from terrible Pathalan raids was literally in bed with the criminal who should have been his enemy.

After quelling the riots that broke out when the news of Poliman's death spread, Undergovernor Amelar Stirlitian appointed Poliman's nephew Dadolid as the new pasha. This quick decision enraged the other six city pashas, who by custom have the right to choose a pasha's successor from among his family. The six have lost no opportunity to vent their displeasure, but Overgovernor Tahjaddian stands by Stirlitian's decision. Dadolid has further muddied the waters by marrying his dead uncle's widow, Banicar. Rumor has it that Banicar is the truly gifted politician among her clan, and that she agreed to the marriage to ensure her family's continued grip on power. One particularly scurrilous rumor alleges that Undergovernor Stirlitian and Banicar have been and still are lovers, and that the wily Banicar is the true ruler of Annawath. She is said to demand tribute from those who wish to do business in the city. Of course, no one who spreads this tale has ever produced a shred of proof.

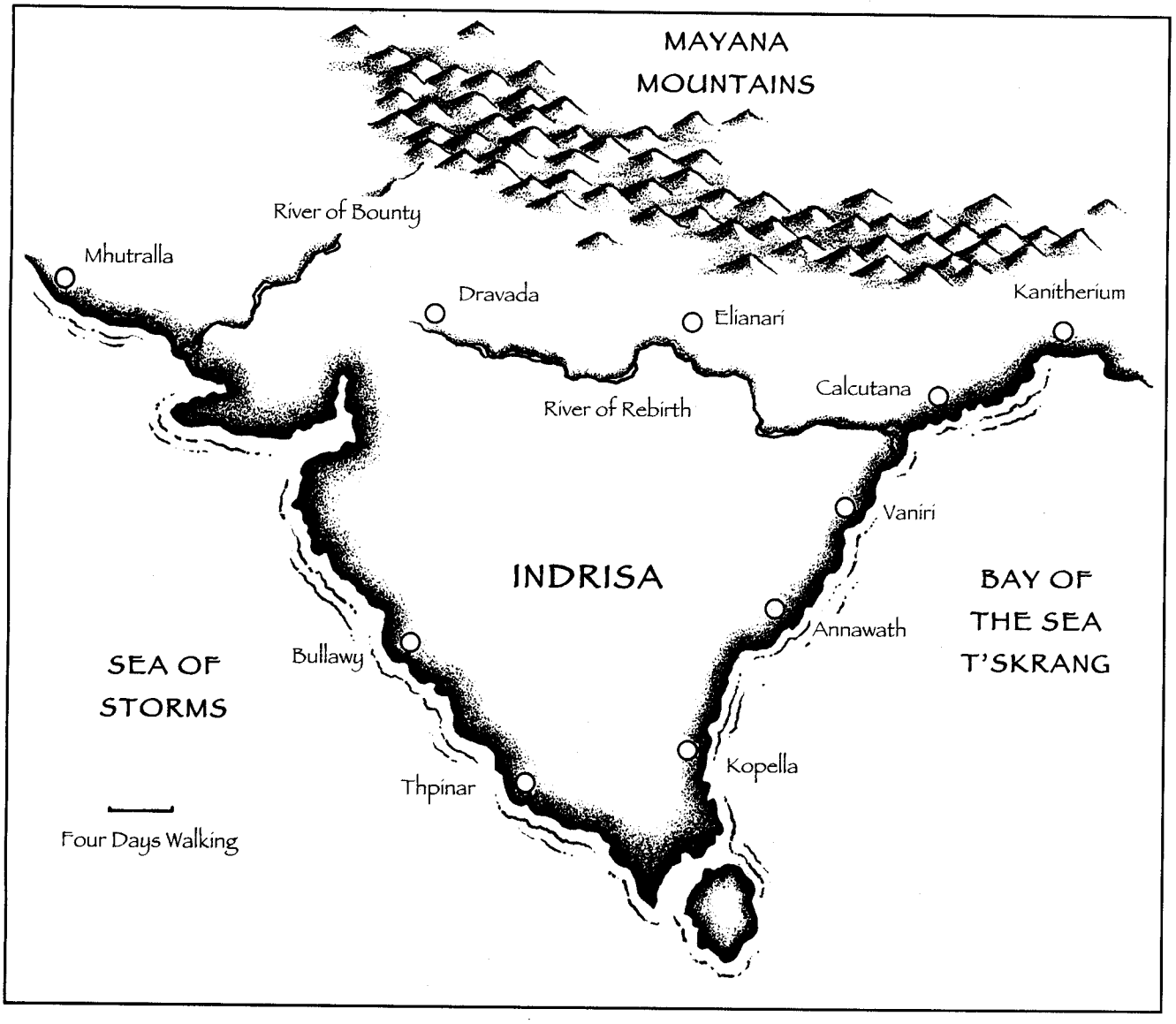
Meanwhile, Ulun-Noor claims to be the rightful pasha of Annawath because Poliman supposedly promised it to her as a wedding gift—and among Pathalans, the simple act of passion is considered equivalent to marriage. Her absurd claim is

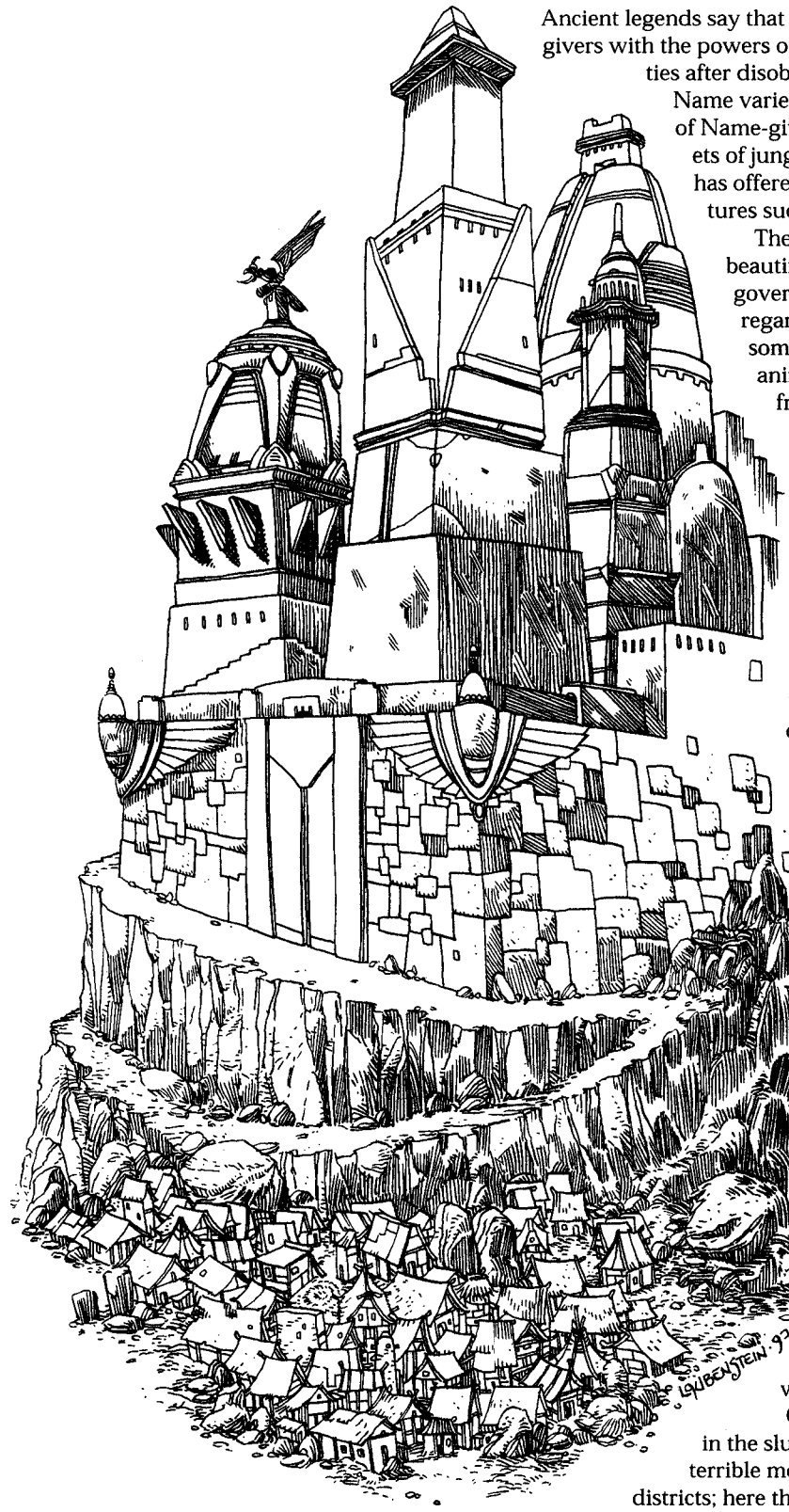
without foundation in Indrisan law, but that has not stopped Ulun-Noor from stepping up her attacks against the city. She has recently engaged in destructive raids against the stands of rare trees that give Annawath most of its wealth. Until the people of Annawath acknowledge her as their pasha, she says, she will not allow them to enjoy the riches brought by "her" lands. In response, a consortium of Theran lumber merchants has placed sizable bounties on her and her raiders. Even the scalps of her lowliest underlings will fetch a tidy sum for the diligent bounty hunter.

Undergovernor Stirlitian, a dwarf of House Thaloss, appears to be an efficient enough servant of the Empire. Only the Passions know what thoughts may be boiling under his placid exterior.

BULLAWY

The thriving city of Bullawy exports rice and meat to other cities on Indrisa's western coast. It is also the province's principal animal market. The forests near Bullawy are home to Indrisa's *mastryliths,* huge beasts of burden now used throughout Theran lands. The mastrylith is the most valued of the animals trained and sold in Bullawy, but there are many others as well. Giant cats are trained as household guardians; exotic birds fetch a good price for their decorative value; and poisonous reptiles and insects are prized raw materials for alchemists. For obvious reasons, the services of beastmasters are highly valued in Bullawy.





Ancient legends say that the animals of Indrisa were once Name-givers with the powers of speech and thought. They lost these abilities after disobeying the commands of a Passion, whose Name varies from legend to legend. However, colonies of Name-giver-like animals still allegedly exist in pockets of jungle outside Bullawy. The Zootorium of Thera has offered munificent rewards to anyone who captures such marvelous beasts.

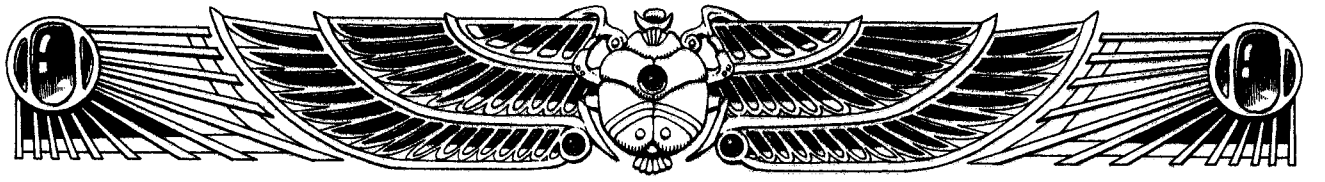
The undergovernor of Bullawy is Ielgunia, a beautiful and charming elf. Unlike other undergovernors, she has actively courted the people's regard. She is a beastmaster of considerable skill; some say she knows where the Name-giver-like animals of Bullawy live and is protecting them from discovery.

Pasha Thenthilopan, a pompous middle-aged dwarf, maintains an impressive menagerie on the grounds of his sprawling palace. Out of sheer pride, this spendthrift ruler is reportedly prepared to outbid the Zootorium for any Name-giver-like animal ever captured.

CALCUTANA

Calcutana is the grand and glittering Theran capital of Indrisa. Built on the ruins of ancient Vellapur, Calcutana began as an echo of the Great City, with outsized buildings made of massive stone blocks and straight laneways almost wide enough to accommodate two airships side by side. Over the years, the city grew outward from its original boundaries as more and more people came to the capital in search of work. The outer sections retain some Theran influence but more strongly resemble typical Indrisan cities. The streets are narrower and more winding, the buildings smaller in scale and covered with intricate ornamentation in colored stone and gilding. In the quarters inhabited by Calcutana's many artisans and merchants, the orderly maze of streets gives way every so often to wide-open spaces in which sellers of all sorts unfurl brightly colored tents and fold-up wooden booths, from which they hawk everything from freshly harvested spices to fine wood carvings to embroidered shirts.

Calcutana also has its darker side, embodied in the slums around the city's edge. These places are terrible mockeries of the more prosperous mercantile districts; here the winding streets become tangles of narrow



alleys and unkempt footpaths, and the beautiful stone buildings give way to unlovely hovels of creaking timber or warped clay brick. The slums teem with unfortunate souls from Indrisa's countryside and wild interior drawn to the capital by tales of its allegedly gold-paved streets and abundant work. Sadly, the sheer number of new arrivals vastly outstrips the available jobs, despite Calcutana's position as Indrisa's primary port for airship travel between Indrisa and the rest of the Empire.

Overgovernor Tahjaddian rules over Calcutana, administers the entire province and sets the policies administered by her chief aide, Pavravius Elkwood. Elkwood is a wild-eyed elf with a gloomy outlook on life that has served her surprisingly well in dealing with Calcutana's chronic poverty and occasional spurts of unrest. Currently, Elkwood has her slender hands full with the Hachazanites, a band of violent criminals bent on sowing chaos wherever they can. Because the Hachazanites draw a constant stream of new recruits from Calcutana's jobless masses, Elkwood advocates expelling the unemployed from the city. So far, Overgovernor Tahjaddian has hesitated to authorize such a draconian policy, citing the danger to the soldiers who would have to carry it out.

On the Hachazanites

Calcutana has become a beacon for the dispossessed, especially since the end of the Scourge. As the world came back to life and the Empire reasserted its power, the trade that is the lifeblood of nations everywhere climbed back to the heights it had reached before the Scourge descended, and Calcutana prospered no less than other Imperial capitals. However, even Calcutana does not contain enough work or wealth for all who come to the city in search of it. And many of the new arrivals spend their last coins or trade away their last possessions to reach the city; they have nowhere else to go, nor any means of sustaining themselves. These desperate malcontents make easy prey for the blandishments of a group of Theran exiles who call themselves the Hachazanites. Led by an unstable but charismatic dwarf named Annakin, a former commander with the Ninth Legion who went mad during the final days of the Scourge, the Hachazanites are responsible for various acts of sedition and sabotage in Calcutana.

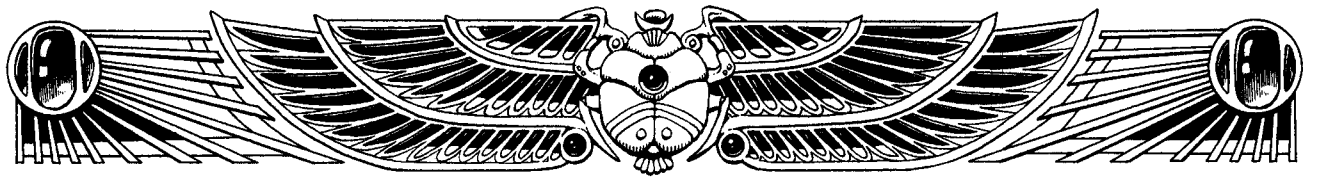
Annakin's tragedy befell him during a Horror-hunting expedition into Indrisa's interior in the waning years of the Scourge. The Horror he had been sent to destroy touched his mind and convinced him that the world was indelibly corrupt. The only way to redeem it was to bring about the *hachaza*—the cyclical apocalypse of Indrisan belief—thousands of years ahead of schedule. According to some of his captured followers, Annakin believes he can bring the hachaza by causing general chaos and undermining the Theran Empire. He and his devoted lieutenants prey upon the weak-minded and the poor, persuading them to join this doomed crusade. Their traitorous acts are usually suicidal; Theran authorities have caught only a few live Hachazanites. Annakin himself has so far been maddeningly elusive. According to persistent rumors, Chief Administrator Elkwood has actually met the man. However, the rumors do not explain why Elkwood would have let Annakin go free if she could have arrested him, or why Annakin let Elkwood live if not.

DRAVADA

Dravada, which lies far down Indrisa's southern coast, is also known as the Holy City because it contains the tombs of the most prominent Uvasti and Avani thibomata. Indrisans of both persuasions believe that prayers to the Passions through the spirits of thibomata are more potent when made at the site of such a tomb, and so the Holy City attracts pilgrims from all over the province. They come to pray for healing, for success in business, for relief from suffering, for justice and for anything else the fertile Indrisan mind can dream up. This concentration of devout pilgrims, alas, often leads to violent clashes between Avani and Uvasti.

Pilgrims are a notoriously unstable lot, thinking mostly about what they want and about the legendary hero they believe will give it to them. In this self-centered state of mind, they are incapable of considering the consequences of their actions. Imperial officials find Indrisan pilgrims difficult to pacify and control, and every one of the near-constant religious processions in Dravada is a riot in search of a spark. The Passions of Indrisa are distant and arbitrary, so the pilgrim relies heavily on the goodwill of the thibomata. He wishes to please their spirits by emulating their behavior. As many of the most respected thibomata were famed for smiting their enemies, to emulate one of them most often means to smite *your* enemy—in this case, some poor pilgrim from the "other side" of Indrisa's cultural divide. An Avani who gets along perfectly with his Uvasti neighbors back home may become a bloodthirsty zealot during his pilgrimage to Dravada, and vice versa.

Unfortunately for the soldiers of the Ninth Legion and Dravada's own police force, the Empire cannot merely sit back and let the Indrisans slaughter one another in the grip of religious frenzy. Our policy in the province is based on the unquestionable sense of order we bring, and we cannot abdicate that responsibility. Street duty in Dravada is considered the most dangerous posting for soldiers, and a headache of monstrous proportions for their commanding officers. Command in Dravada requires the ability to deal diplomatically with irrational pilgrims, and an equivalent knack for sensing when overwhelming force is the best solution to the problem.



Madelana Whetstone, Undergovernor of Dravada, is also a strategos in the Ninth Legion. An imposing ork, she is an accomplished warrior and a questor of Thystonius, and therefore a tough disciplinarian who also understands the religious mind. Whetstone has significantly contained the violence since taking over a decade ago, though riots still occur with distressing regularity. Whetstone has at least managed to keep the bloodletting to roughly a hundred dead per outbreak. Unlike many of her fellow Theran administrators, who live in elegant Theran-style villas made of white marble or other expensive stone, Whetstone lives in a large barracks originally built as a police station during Overgovernor Fovian's time. A squat block of granite only two stories high, the barracks has been remodeled into a miniature administrator's residence, with sizable (if sparsely appointed) living quarters in the back and small offices and an audience hall in the front.

The pasha of Dravada, Gimorah, is one of the few who are not dwarfs—nor is she Uvasti or Avani. She is a t'skrang, a scion of a niall that has ruled Dravada for more than a thousand years. The ruling pashas of Dravada migrated to the city long ago from the sunken cities off the Indrisan coast. Elevated to the nobility over the course of many decades, they were given Dravada as part of the settlement of a continent-wide civil war between Uvasti and Avani that occurred in 467 TH. Pasha Gimorah neither helps nor hinders Theran peacekeeping efforts; she prefers to concentrate on profiting from the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who visit her city every year. Gimorah and her cronies own most of the businesses that cater to pilgrims, from humble food stalls to the temple-like inns reserved for the wealthiest worshipers. Spiritual leaders among the Uvasti and the Avani decry Gimorah's greed in public but privately prefer it to the possibility of the other side gaining power. Should Gimorah and her family ever be toppled from power, both Uvasti and Avani pretenders would seek to gain control of the city to deny rival pilgrims access to it.

ELIANARI

Elianari lies near a rich cluster of diamond mines, and virtually every citizen earns his or her livelihood from them in some way. With such a source of riches near at hand, administered exclusively by Therans and with a largely Theran population, Elianari ought to be an oasis of Imperial civilization in Indrisa. However, this is not the case. Indeed, Elianari borders on lawlessness to a shocking degree, driven by the local enthusiasm for evading taxes levied on diamonds. Regrettably, both Theran and Indrisan diamond merchants consider it a challenge to avoid paying their rightful share of taxes to the Imperial administration that makes their wealth possible. Diamonds are so valuable and so small that the temptation to smuggle them is understandable. Even the most seemingly respectable merchants are likely to be up to something underhanded; just about every one of them has hired adventurers to smuggle undeclared diamonds from the mines to the city at least once. The job is risky, as the smuggling routes have become a prime target for bandits. Some of these bandits operate independently; others are in the pay of rival diamond traders, who target each other with all the enthusiasm of an Avani pilgrim throwing rocks at a group of Uvasti in Dravada. As a result, the undergovernor has had no choice but to hire his own mercenary adventurers to intercept the smugglers and bring them to justice.

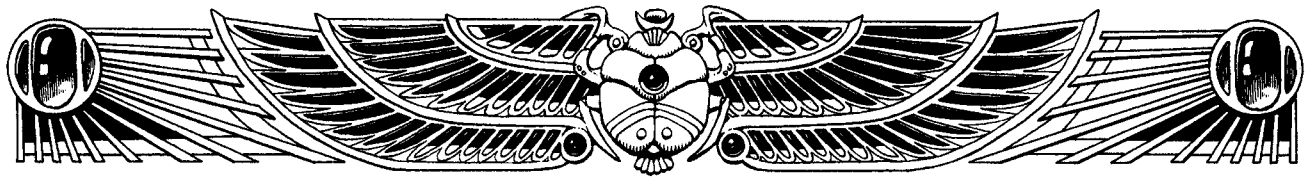
A wily dwarf and a former diamond trader himself, Undergovernor Viharo knows all the smugglers' tricks because he used to practice them. As undergovernor, he now receives a hefty commission on all confiscated diamonds. Some say he is too zealous in prosecuting smuggling cases, but officials of the Department of Bursaries think otherwise.

Viharo lives in a spacious villa built of the local red sandstone, with Indrisan-style ornamentation in pale rose quartz and other semi-precious gems. The villa once belonged to the pasha who ruled the small kingdom in which Elianari lies; Viharo had it moved from the hills outside the city to the Diamond Exchange, the large and busy district in the heart of Elianari in which the mine owners, diamond merchants and even several local jewelers have their places of business. The Diamond Exchange is notable for the richness of its buildings, the cleanliness of its streets and the heavy iron grilles that are lowered over the facade of every trading- or counting-house or jewelers' shop as soon as dusk falls.

KANITHERIUM

The newest of the Theran-built cities, Kanitherium offers easy access to the rich gold and silver mines of northeastern Indrisa. Taking a lesson from teeming, troubled Calcutana, Undergovernor Pivriel Longleaf has decreed that no one may reside within Kanitherium's tall iron gates unless they have documentation proving employment. A small encampment of the homeless and desperate lingers outside the city walls; its residents often accost travelers to the city and beg them for jobs. Some citizens of Kanitherium see the camp as an annoyance, but others see financial advantage in such a ready source of cheap labor. Because Theran businessmen in the city are so divided on the issue, the undergovernor has put off deciding whether or not to clear the camp. A stalwart elf of House Jotyn, Longleaf is well regarded by the local merchants, many of whom share his house affiliation. He well knows that Kanitherium is a moneymaking operation first and a city second. Traders are his constituency, and all other concerns must take a distant second place to their interests.

A unique feature of Kanitherium is its Maracan Quarter, a neighborhood inhabited by Theranized citizens from Marac. Our efforts to pacify rebels in that distant province have met with unexpected resistance, and the rebels have made a point of attacking Maracans who cooperated with us in our efforts to bring peace and stability to their homeland. Recognizing our responsibility to safeguard our allies, we relocated some forty thousand of them to Indrisa and gave them employment



in the mining trade. The Maracans have shown their gratitude by industriously filling their own purses and the Theran treasury. The Quarter has grown along with their prosperity and resembles a little piece of Marac transplanted to Indrisan soil. The Maracan language echoes through the streets and bazaars, Maracan bells and drone-pipes sound on the breezes, and the dazzling white of Maracan robes seems to be everywhere. The Indrisans who live in the hilly country around the city unfortunately see these Maracan newcomers as a threat, and processions protesting their presence regularly wind from the countryside to the city gates. Maracans have even been attacked, not only outside the city but within their own quarter. Longleaf's security forces have captured and interrogated some of the attackers, who claimed to have acted at the behest of a shadowy figure called the Teardrop of Purity. Whoever this strange personage may be, he or she is apparently offering a bounty for each maimed or slain Maracan. In response, Undergovernor Longleaf has put a hefty price on the head of the Teardrop of Purity and any who serve that individual.

In fact, local Indrisans tend to see Kanitherium itself as an insult, a powerful symbol of what they insist on calling our "oppression" of the Indrisan masses. It is true that Longleaf revoked the charters of Indrisan mining concerns in the region when the city was in the planning stages, but he did so only after the natives repeatedly refused our requests to stop undercutting prices charged by Theran merchants. Sometimes the Indrisans forget that they are a conquered people!

The locus of this discontent is a landless puntovilan family led by a dwarf named Birithilan, who claims (absurdly) to be pasha of Kanitherium. He says his ancestors ruled an ancient city on the site of Kanitherium, and he is therefore the natural ruler of any city on that particular plot of land. His outrageous claims have struck a chord in the countryside, though it is not clear whether the locals truly want Birithilan in charge or if they merely want to make trouble for us. Birithilan has launched occasional raids on Theran-controlled mines and is now a fugitive from justice. Unfortunately, many other Indrisan nobles regard him with some sympathy; executing him will be problematic, once we have him in our hands. Hopefully some sort of permanent accident will befall him and rid us of this troublesome noble.

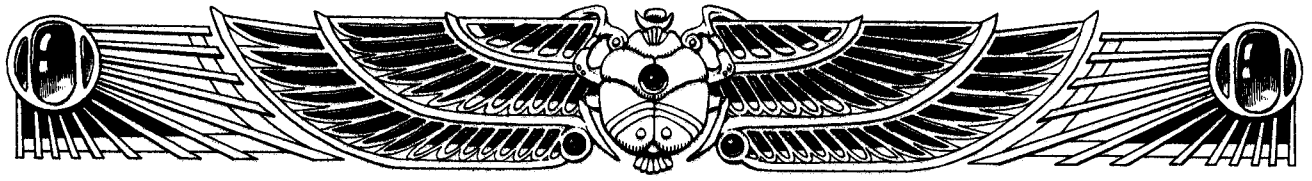
KOPALLA

Kopalla, home to nearly three hundred thousand Name-givers, is peaceable and generally well-governed city, isolated from the interior by a small range of jagged mountains. Connected to Annawath, Vaniri and Calcutana by a coastal road, Kopalla has a thriving marketplace that attracts merchants, farmers and craftsmen from all across southern Indrisa, all eager to trade with the caravans from the north. But the city's most remarkable feature is its pasha, a dhuna Named Avralati. Pasha Avralati is ten feet tall, with crimson skin, enormous tusks and six arms. Avralati became pasha of Kopalla after an encounter with the previous pasha of Kopalla, the dwarf Malagop. Malagop had traveled to the jungle in search of a particular giant snake to add to his private menagerie and met the dhuna at the woodland's fringe. The dhuna claimed its right to devour Malagop for his many offenses against the observances, at which the wily Malagop offered the being his position as pasha in exchange for his life. Avralati accepted the offer, traveled to Kopalla and announced to the people that he now ruled them.

In a shocking lapse of judgment, Undergovernor Zenawa protested. Every bit as thick-headed as a stereotypical troll, she even refused Avralati entrance to the pasha's palace. Avralati then demonstrated his formidable powers by slaying the half-division of Ninth Legion troops ordered to apprehend him and devouring Zenawa for dessert. Before we could appoint a new undergovernor, the pashas of the other large cities met with Avralati and declared their support for his lawful right to rule. Overgovernor Tahjaddian, hearing of this, wisely ruled that the dhuna's right to sit on the throne of Kopalla was an internal matter best left to the native Indrisans. So long as Avralati discharged the proper duties of a pasha to the overgovernor, the Theran administration had no opinion on the matter. To demonstrate Thera's lack of interest, Tahjaddian commuted a death sentence against the infamous windling thief Xilenes and appointed her as Kopalla's undergovernor.

According to conventional political wisdom, the overgovernor intended this startling appointment to rid Indrisa of Xilenes once and for all. An irreverent risk-taker, Xilenes should have been doomed to failure, followed either by swift execution for dereliction of duty or by death at an irritated dhuna's hands. But the windling is one of those lucky people whose most foolhardy feats bring vast rewards, and she has prospered in the post. Even Tahjaddian has learned to be grateful for the windling's management of the city and its strange pasha. Xilenes and Avralati enjoy a remarkably close relationship; in fact, Undergovernor Xilenes treats the dhuna as her closest advisor.

According to the religious observances followed by the Avani, who make up a majority of Kopalla's residents, it is a great offense to disobey the direct orders of a pasha. As a dhuna may eat anyone who commits a great offense, the people of Kopalla have sound reason for their obedience to their native ruler. Non-Indrisans also have reason to obey Avralati; his powers are great, and tradition permits him to eat foreigners on a whim if he so chooses. Avralati has shown considerable discretion in his choice of meals, however, invariably selecting persons who pose some impediment to Theran goals. On



occasion, when the dhuna has eaten a Theran or minor provincial official, the devoured party's family has hired adventurers to drive the dhuna to the astral plane. None has yet succeeded.

MHUTRALLA

The city of Mhutralla, known as "the breadbasket of Indrisa," sits amid vast tracts of fertile farmland. Though ill-ruled by a series of incompetent pashas for centuries, it was peaceful enough until the impious dwarf Obarivan ascended the pasha's throne. Ever since, Mhutralla has been nothing but trouble for the overgovernor. For years Obarivan has been an infamous flouter of the observances, and nine months ago his city received what many regard as the first sign of the pasha's comeuppance. A terrible fire swept through the Workers' Quarter of the city, burning its ramshackle wooden huts to ash. Tens of thousands died; as many more were left homeless. The fire behaved in a peculiar manner, leaping from house to house as if controlled by an intelligent hand, and local people blamed the tragedy on Obarivan's irreligious behavior. In the wake of the fire, a wave of religious revivalism has gripped the city by the throat. Holy men and ordinary folk alike insist that Obarivan must atone to the Passions for his sins, lest the entire city be destroyed. Obarivan's adamant refusal to heed these calls has outraged his increasingly fanatical people. In recent weeks, a band of unknown assassins—probably members of a cult devoted to a thibomata of justice—have begun targeting Obarivan's officials. They are likely to strike at Obarivan next, though his death or abdication will do Mhutralla little good. His heirs, alas, are even more decadent and blasphemous than he is.

Meanwhile, Undergovernor Mantuth—a stolid, scholarly dwarf whose level head has doubtless so far averted catastrophe—seems to have taken leave of his usual good sense. He has declared his desire to learn the devotions of the Uvasti people and has recently visited a number of thibomata temples. The undergovernor's Theran colleagues are suspicious of this odd indulgence in foreign superstition, and the Indrisans are no better pleased. The Uvasti are not sure that anyone can convert to their ways. One must be born Uvasti or Avani; it is fate, not a choice. The Avani, for their part, see Mantuth's actions as a breach of customary Theran neutrality regarding the eternal Uvasti-Avani feud. Despite the unpopularity of his religious dabblings, Undergovernor Mantuth is continuing them. He seems to have a sincere desire to become a devotee of the Indrisan Passions. To place his own wishes ahead of wise policy is a grave dereliction of duty, and yet the overgovernor has not seen fit to recall him.

THEPINAR

Thepinar also lies in a belt of fertile land but it produces far less food for Indrisa than it ought. Farming, and everything else, goes slightly awry in Thepinar, for esoteric reasons somehow related to the city's True Pattern. Not for nothing is Thepinar known as the "City of Inconvenience!" People lose important items and never recover them. On many mornings, the floors of buildings throughout the city are coated with half an inch of wet, musty-smelling sand. Otherwise competent scribes make crucial misspellings in documents and find simple mathematical problems difficult to solve. Bankruptcies are common; businesses tend to lose money for no apparent reason. Injuries take longer to heal in Thepinar than elsewhere, and minor illnesses drag on forever. Even the arrangement of streets in Thepinar is confusing; the most gifted scout can get lost there, no matter how carefully he studies his route.

As one might expect, Name-givers born and raised in Thepinar are given to peculiar hobbies and unusual preoccupation. The pasha of Thepinar, an addled dwarf Named Imithrada, is a prime example. He spends the bulk of his fortune buying fish so that his court scholars can count the number of scales possessed by each. As counting errors are rife in Thepinar, there is no assurance that the results of this pointless exercise are or ever will be accurate. Imithrada, who hums to himself constantly and claims to have a second set of eyes under his beard, is always scheming to increase his revenues so that he might expand the scale of his pet project (pun intended!). His plans generally backfire and his treasury loses money—which means that Thera loses in turn.

Plagued by such a bizarre state of affairs, Thepinar runs through undergovernors as a sneezing man does handkerchiefs. Most appointees prefer to cope with a city in open revolt than with the slow, seeping madness of this place. The current undergovernor is a bilious ork Named Cevtigg the Toothy, who received the post after accidentally spilling a bowl of soup on Overgovernor Tahjaddian's ceremonial uniform. Cevtigg has embarked on a campaign of repression against perceived local threats, real and imaginary; each pogrom has resulted in Theran casualties and not much else. Members of the overgovernor's staff have begun taking wagers as to whether Cevtigg will be recalled or resign in frustration first. It does not help matters that Cevtigg and Imithrada make no effort to conceal their mutual hatred.

VANIRI

Vaniri is known as the "Gateway to the Sea" because it is the only Indrisan city that enjoys formal trade relations with the t'skrang that inhabit the sunken cities off Indrisa's coast. According to t'skrang legends, dragons told the Uvasti to slay

the t'skrang when the Sea People first came ashore to trade. But the pasha of Vaniri, a wise dwarf suspicious of dragonkind, refused to fight the t'skrang. Instead, he chose to trade with them. The dragons then allegedly attacked Vaniri, and a dragon-friendly rival pasha laid siege to the city. In compensation for these injuries suffered on their behalf, the t'skrang agreed that Vaniri would forever maintain exclusive rights to trade with them. Uvasti legends do not refer to these events at all, though fragmentary written histories refer in passing to a long-ago conflict whose origins no one remembers. But the denizens of the sunken cities honor their ancient pact, and trade with the Sea People has made Vaniri rich. Ever since the Empire first arrived centuries ago, this magnificent port has been a magnet for Theran traders.

The t'skrang sell seafood and nutritious sea weeds, fresh and dried, as well as ancient treasures and gold and silver coin salvaged from wrecks on the ocean floor. They also harvest and sell exquisite pearls, some of them amazingly large. In exchange for these valuables, they seek salted meats, metal and ceramic items, ivory and True Elements. The t'skrang trade with Therans and Vaniri but not with other Indrisans or foreigners.

To secure a trade contract with the sunken cities, one must be on good terms with Cahbohnorol, the enigmatic trade representative of the Sea People. This reserved t'skrang speaks so cryptically that it is difficult to tell whether one has her favor or not. She is known for her curiosity about dragons, in Indrisa and in other areas, and is said to pay well for information about their current activities.

A loyal citizen of Throal might also be rewarded for impeding Cahbohonorol and Fiskatan, or finding out just why this Indrisan t'skrang is so concerned with matters draconic.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

The other two people of importance in Vaniri are its pasha, a rotund dwarf of cultivated mind Named Jadadtha, and the undergovernor—an elven nethermancer Named Fiskatan, distinguished by his formidable abilities and his unkempt appearance. Pasha and undergovernor compete for Cahbohnorol's goodwill, though Undergovernor Fiskatan has had the upper hand recently. Certain Heavenherds back in Thera whom Fiskatan knows personally are privy to certain secrets of the dragons, which Cahborohnol dearly wishes to know. Fiskatan pays the Heavenherds to send him information, and so all parties are enriched. Pasha Jadadatha is said to be offering great rewards for dragon secrets or magical treasures, so that he may win Cahborohnol's attention back.

One disturbing development is the recent disappearance of several servants, all of them employed by Cahbohnorol or Undergovernor Fiskatan. Rumors in the city claim that the luckless victims were snatched by adventurers working for Indrisa's dragons, but no one knows how much credence to give this tale. Anyone who unmasks this conspiracy—if conspiracy it is—can expect generous rewards from the Imperial administration in Indrisa—it does not serve Thera to have an undergovernor inconvenienced by persons unknown.

I spoke with a sea t'skrang once. She was willing to talk of trade but little else. She seemed nervous, as if her words might reach the ears of some personage she greatly feared. Near the end of our conversation, she let his name slip; she called him "the cruiser of the depths."

—Aywaki Avchan, interpreter/scout of the Ninth Legion

THE SUNKEN CITIES

The Sunken Cities are four underwater cities—Chaedril, Mulantis, Saemasta, and Vaemari—that lie off Indrisa's eastern coast. The inhabitants are all t'skrang, gifted with the unusual ability to breathe and live underwater. In other respects, they are similar to t'skrang from other regions of the Empire.

We know little of the Sea People, as the dwellers in the Sunken Cities call themselves, because they have so far been most reluctant to answer the questions of our scholars. Some of them have hinted that other sunken cities exist, though we know only four by Name. Apparently, these t'skrang bear some type of grudge toward the Indrisans, except for the natives of the city of Vaniri, and they claim to be an ancient civilization—although they have never revealed the names of their leaders or anything about their system of governance. We do not even know if they have shivalahalas, as t'skrang elsewhere in the Empire do.

On occasion, Name-givers disappear in Vaniri, and their relatives later dream about them. In these dreams, the lost loved ones are living and breathing below the waves in a beautiful, moss-shrouded underwater city. This phenomenon involves members of all the Name-giver races, save the obsidimen. Although this phenomenon has caused fear and distrust of the Sea People among non-Vanirans, the t'skrang profess no knowledge of what it might mean.

MARAC

After the landing of the behemoth at Lake Ban and the disastrous Battle of Prajjor's Field, we in Throal expected the Therans to expand their presence in Barsaive. Yet they have not done so, and events in the province of Marac may be the reason. This distant land, home of glittering cities and rugged deserts, is the site of a fierce rebellion against Imperial power. The Therans are turning against their foes in Marac the formidable military resources that they might otherwise deploy against us. They have sent two legions and two fleets to quell an uprising backed by jinari, *unusual elemental spirits native to Marac who have little love for the province's Theran conquerors.*

So far, the war has proven disastrous for Theran and Maracan alike. The astounding loss of life shows no signs of letting up, as neither side is prepared to settle. We in Throal can learn much from the situation in Marac, though I fervently hope such a devastating conflict does not lie in our future. However, if our worst fears materialize, we can look to Marac for clues to the strategies and tactics we might expect to see in a Throal-Thera war.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

—As written by Jerriv Forrim

The province of Marac occupies a long stretch of land to the west of Thera, along the southern coast of the Selestrean Sea. Its spectacular cities of gleaming brass are celebrated in song and legend; its people are known for their sophistication and their mastery of such arcane fields of scholarship as astrology, engineering and mathematics. Marac's Theran conquerors have profited from this realm by taxing its trade and other businesses and exporting its knowledge. Until the disruptions of the recent war, Marac was also a primary center of the Empire's slave trade. I regret to say that the slave trade was not entirely a Theran import; the city-dwellers of Marac have known and practiced this dreadful custom in their own way for centuries. Indeed, Maracans created the tradition of the *jaraleh*, or pleasure-slave, which is rife today among Therans throughout the Empire.

The city-dwellers of Marac, known as the *aalhar*, pride themselves on seeing everything through world-weary eyes. They display breathtaking cynicism about all things, from belief in the Passions to fashionable modes of dress. They believe that Name-givers are the measure of all things, good or bad, and that we may therefore act as we will without reference to any greater powers in the Universe. By this way of thinking, even our flaws are not really flaws, but simply the way things are—and therefore to be accepted with a shrug or a sigh. As the Maracan proverb goes, "Whatever is, is."

A second strand in the web of Maracan life contrasts sharply with this citified sophistication. Outside the cities, in the countryside and the harsh desert, dwell the *sufik*—hardy, warlike folk who decry the decadence of their city cousins. They believe in a simple life and see all forms of pleasure and self-indulgence as spiritually corrosive. They vehemently oppose slavery—and also astrology, the construction of buildings, the minting of coin, the creation of art except as a tool for teaching their doc-

trines, excessive hand-washing and even the use of heavy sauces in cooking.

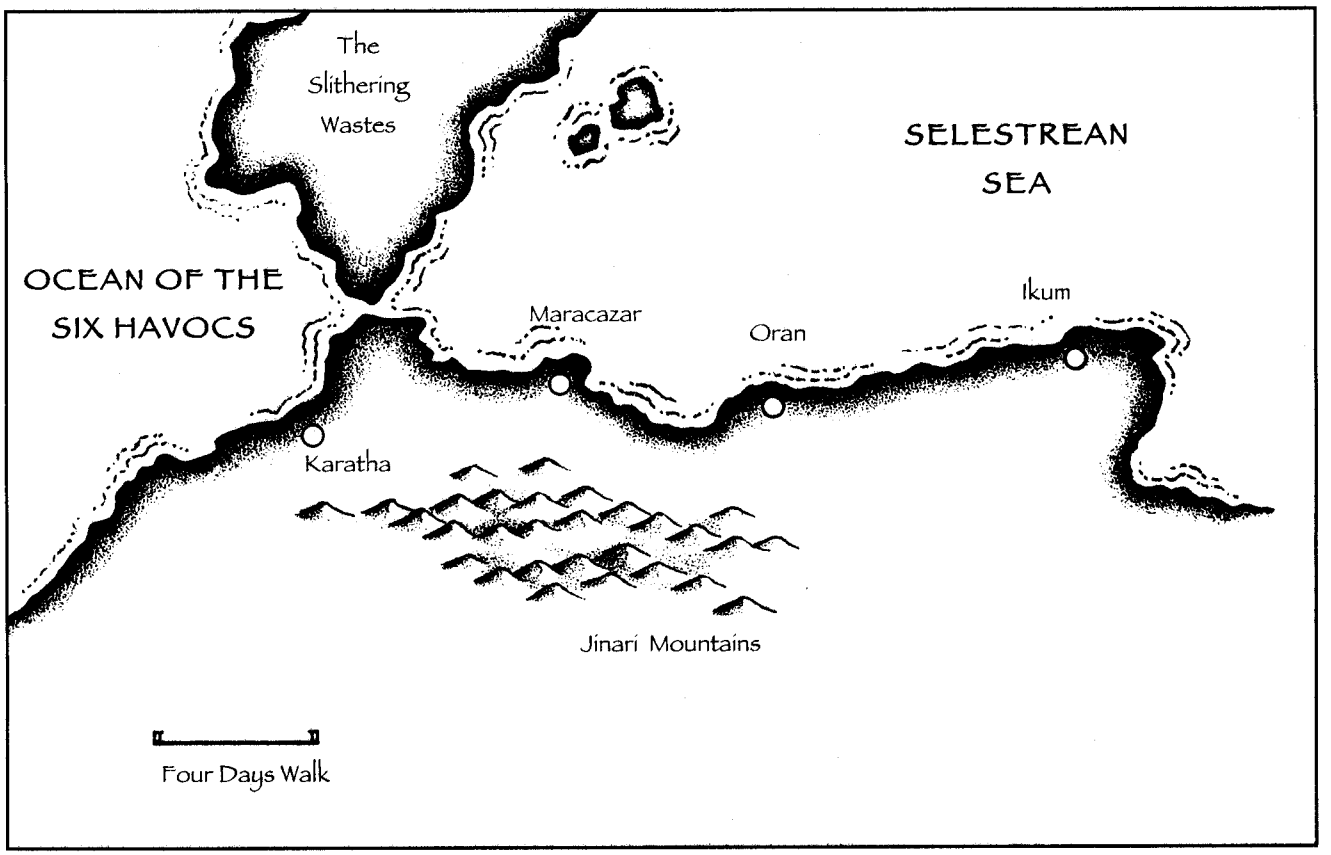
Sufik families have relied for generations on the services of jinari, elemental spirits of vast and unusual power. Individual jinari ally themselves with a particular extended sufik family, providing its members with the necessities of life through the use of their own strange magics. Their uniqueness has unfortunately made the jinari valuable prizes for Theran magicians, most notably those of House Narlanth. Some few years ago, certain powerful Narlanth sorcerers—even a Heavenherd or two, if the rumors are accurate—began capturing jinari to further their own reckless magical experiments. This outrage triggered a violent sufik revolt, which swiftly grew into the all-out war that has engulfed Marac. The sufik continue to grow in numbers despite the heavy-handed attempts of the Theran military to destroy them, and the aalhar are caught in the middle.

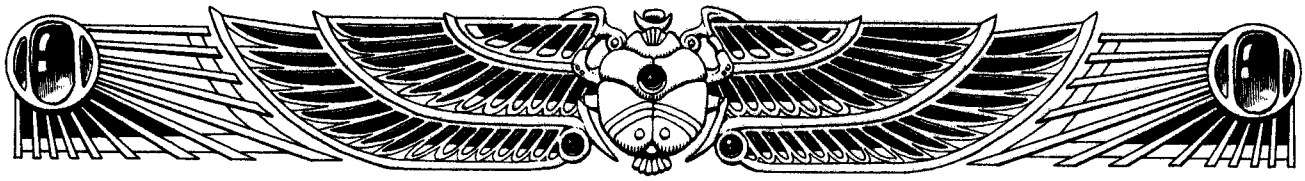
ON THE MAKE-UP OF THE MARACAN DELEGATION

A brief description of the Maracan delegation to the Great Symposium may bring home to the reader the extent to which the Maracan rebellion has come to color everything and everyone in that province. So strong were the opinions of most speakers on the issues and subjects they addressed that the reader is advised to be cautious. More so than with other sections of this tome, the information presented about Marac may be somewhat less than the whole truth.

Leading the delegation was Gargan Blind-Them-With-Ink, the official historian of the Second Legion. Like many military scholars, this Theran ork spoke bluntly and showed little interest in fine distinctions. In addition to exchanging information, he seemed to want to embarrass the War College and force it to face what he believes are the failings of its policy. Though he clearly has as little use for the sufik as any Theran, he seems to believe that the War College's chosen tactics cannot hope to achieve victory over the "scruffy bands of unwashed desert rats," as he put it.

Benari El-Qur, a Maracan elf who provided the aalhar perspective, embodied the cynicism of the city folk. Her words were laced with double meanings, and her tone and words made it difficult to discern her true feelings. At times she seemed sympathetic to the aims of the sufik; yet certain of her statements reeked of callousness toward them. As we learned during the Symposium, sophisticated Maracans are taught to speak so that a listener may read into their words whatever he wishes to hear. Benari El-Qur's contributions epitomize this perverse notion of discourse.





Jameel El-Khatar, another aalhar, is a trader in carpets by profession. Our roving correspondent, T'saanas V'shala, encountered him in a Theran market and persuaded him to contribute his somewhat jaundiced view of Maracan history to the Symposium's official documents. Unlike Benari El-Qur, Jameel seemed to find the sufiks and the Therans equally unpleasant. We have included his musings in the hope of providing a more complete, and thus more truthful, picture of Marac under Imperial occupation.

D'perci, a windling historian and mathematician, represented the *theraalhar*—descendants of Therans who have lived in Marac for generations. Sharp tensions exist between Theran-born Therans and the theraalhar, which the war has only exacerbated. From D'perci's quiet demeanor and obvious signs of stress, we concluded that Gargan had coerced him into attending the Symposium. He seemed most anxious to return to work on a huge tome whose completion has been repeatedly delayed.

Finally, cultural and historical notes on the sufik come from Irza El-Zara, a Maracan troll and brilliant scholar who courageously posed as a sufik for several years to learn their ways. That he escaped unscathed from this dangerous venture is a marvel.

On the History of the War in Marac

—In the words of Gargan Blind-Them-With-Ink, Official Historian of the Second Legion

Many of Thera's finest soldiers and sailors have died fighting for Marac and many more are bound to follow them if we keep to our present course. But there is only one way out of the crisis: to win. The battle for Marac is not a military battle alone, but also a political battle. To win it, we must fight on both fronts. We must know our enemy and our allies. And above all, we must understand how we got where we are today.

We Therans often make mistakes in Marac because we are not accustomed to the Maracan mind. Maracans are used to thinking two opposite things at once. They tell you what you want to hear, and only much later behind your back do you find out what is really going on. Many Maracan leaders whom we consider close allies secretly see us as fools. They are waiting us out, putting up with us until the glorious day when we finally leave the province.

Our own arrogance has only made the problem worse. If we do not want to be treated as fools, we should stop acting like fools. Because we are accustomed to being the rightful rulers of the entire Selestrean, we mistakenly take the Maracans for just another pack of ignorant colonials. We forget that they once excelled us in many things, including magical understanding. But the Maracans do not forget.

Arrogance also leads us to another flawed assumption—that the war is only about us. In truth, we are merely in the middle of a long, destructive dance between the aalhar and the sufik. We think we understand the aalhar, but we don't. The sufik we find completely incomprehensible. If I have learned one thing during my sojourn in Marac, it is that the view of this province held by too many in our War College bears little resemblance to the real place. If we were half as wise as we like to think ourselves, we would declare a moratorium on further actions in Marac until we better understand its peoples. I've ruffled some feathers by saying so, especially in House Narlanth. But we must stop and think before we find we've gotten into a mess too deep to withdraw from.

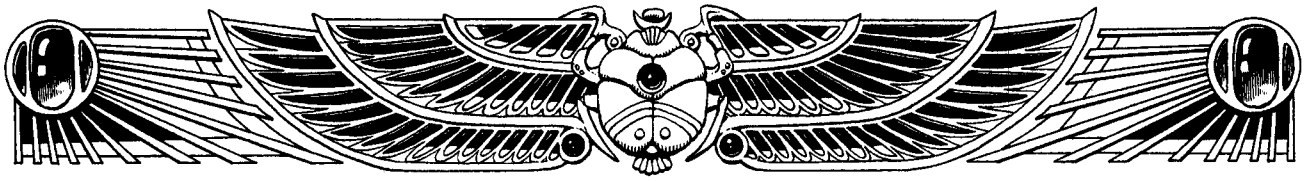
My friends from the War College are silent, I see. No doubt they consider this forum, brimful as it is with foreigners and representatives of rebel provinces, the wrong place for such statements. But sometimes one must be impolitic to get the attention of influential people. Now that I have it, I yield the floor to the Court Scholar Benari El-Qur. She may be a "mere native" to some, but she knows her people's history well—a history to which wise generals and administrators will pay attention.

> Is the Second Legion's historian testing a policy secretly favored by his commanders? It is most unusual for a mere functionary to speak so boldly, unless someone has given him license to do so.
>
> —Thurbon, historian of House Medari

On the Ancient War Between the Cities and the Tribes

—In the words of Benari El-Qur, Court Scholar to the Sultan of Maracazar

Marac's history is a pendulum that swings between the city-dwellers and the desert tribes. We of the cities always maintain the advantage, but we face hardship whenever the fortunes of the tribes are waxing. In ancient days, our troubles with the desert and mountain nomads took care of themselves in time. Unfortunately, the Therans have interrupted the pendulum's swing. As the honorable Gargan has said, they do not understand the equilibrium between city and desert. I shall therefore attempt to remedy this ignorance.



On the Aalhar Way

For as long as Maracans have lived in the world, we have built cities. Of their founding, however, we know little. We have unlocked the secrets of numbers, the ways of stars and the pathways of magic, but much of our own past is lost to us because of our own tradition. By custom, each sultan who begins a new dynasty orders the destruction of all documents that exalt or even mention his predecessors. Invariably a few documents survive, squirreled away by scholars unable to let all knowledge of a dead dynasty perish, or the memory of momentous events survives among the common folk in legends and fireside stories. But many of the details of our past still escape us. We know for certain only that we have always built cities to live in, and that we have always valued our cities because they stand as monuments to the glories of the Name-giver mind. And also that the sufik despise our cities because they do not understand what is worthwhile.

We know that the Four Cities of Marac—Karatha, Irkum, Oran and shining Maracazar, where I was born—have existed since time immemorial. They have had different names and a succession of rulers, but the people who dwell in them have never changed. We have always been clever traders, intrepid explorers and brilliant scholars. We know better than most the arts of diplomacy, finance and love. Over time we have refined the techniques of mathematics, astrology, rhetoric and magic. We have sold spices and carpets and ceramics and slaves to any who would buy. And we have formed rational methods of study by which to divine the underlying principles of life itself. Our wisdom has enabled us to outlast all the other peoples spoken of in our legends, save for the hidebound and superstitious Creanans. That *they* still thrive is proof of the existence of blind chance in the Universe.

On the Doctrine of Science

Less enlightened peoples explore the nature of the world by pawing through dusty old manuscripts and trying to sort the truth in them from the nonsense. We have found a different way. We form models of thought, and through them seek to understand the True Patterns of all things. What our benighted neighbors think of as separate fields of study—astrology, mathematics, magical research—are all part of the same great study that we call Science.

Though Science has a hundred different aspects, in the end it comes down to a single principle: that all things can be understood through the study of patterns.

On the Science of Rhetoric

Let us take rhetoric as an example. A practitioner of rhetoric parses your words as you speak, to see what patterns form in them. These patterns tell of your True Pattern, through which the skilled rhetorician can understand another's true motives. Understanding of such patterns also allows the rhetorician to manipulate his own speech so as to keep his true motives obscure.

The science of rhetoric is our pride, the creation of our clever brains that is nearest and dearest to Maracans. The rudiments of rhetoric are laid down in a number of texts that every educated aalhar commits to memory at a young age. Even the lower classes know something of it nowadays. In ancient times, the sultans fought to keep the secrets of rhetoric confined to the nobility. But the merchants got hold of it, as our merchants get hold of everything sooner or later, and from there the rudiments of rhetoric filtered down to craftsmen and laborers and even common servants. It is not unheard-of for beggars and street urchins to use this essential science—though of course, lacking the benefits of long study, peddlers and indigents are invariably less eloquent than lawmakers and judges. Certain adepts number the science of rhetoric among their magical talents, which occasionally allows individuals of low pedigree to exceed their social betters. Troubadours, especially, tend to rise from humble beginnings to positions of great influence in Marac through their amazing affinity for rhetoric.

Rhetoric teaches us to connect a person's words to his gestures, intonations and eye movements. In dealing with a sufik, a Theran or any other outsider, however, the rhetorician may be at a disadvantage. The meanings of gestures vary from culture to culture, and tone of voice can deceive when a Name-giver is less than fluent in the Maracan tongue. Only eye movements remain a reliable indicator of true meaning across all cultures. Different races may display movements to mean certain things, but these differences are all well accounted for in the classic texts of rhetoric.

Rhetoric has great influence on our day-to-day lives. It is everything we are. No transaction, no meeting, no conversation takes place without it. As a great sage once said, "The encounters between master rhetoricians make Maracan history interesting."

The sufiks claim that rhetoric is yet another in an endless list of what they call crimes against nature, because it reduces the Name-giver heart to an equation and negates the influence of the spirit. In this, they wrong us most grievously. We believe that a person's actions, words and gestures are the holiest of holy things, infinitely more important than puffed-up elemental spirits lording their magic over everyone. The patterns we Name-givers weave as we move through our lives are the only things truly worthy of study. We rightly place Name-givers at the center of the Universe. That disturbs the sufik, who insist on believing that Name-givers are base at heart. They would have us forever bow and scrape before the jinari

Artwork by Janet Aulisio

VAST, FLOATING BUILDINGS DOMINATE THE SKIES OF GREAT THERA.

Artwork by Jeff Laubenstein

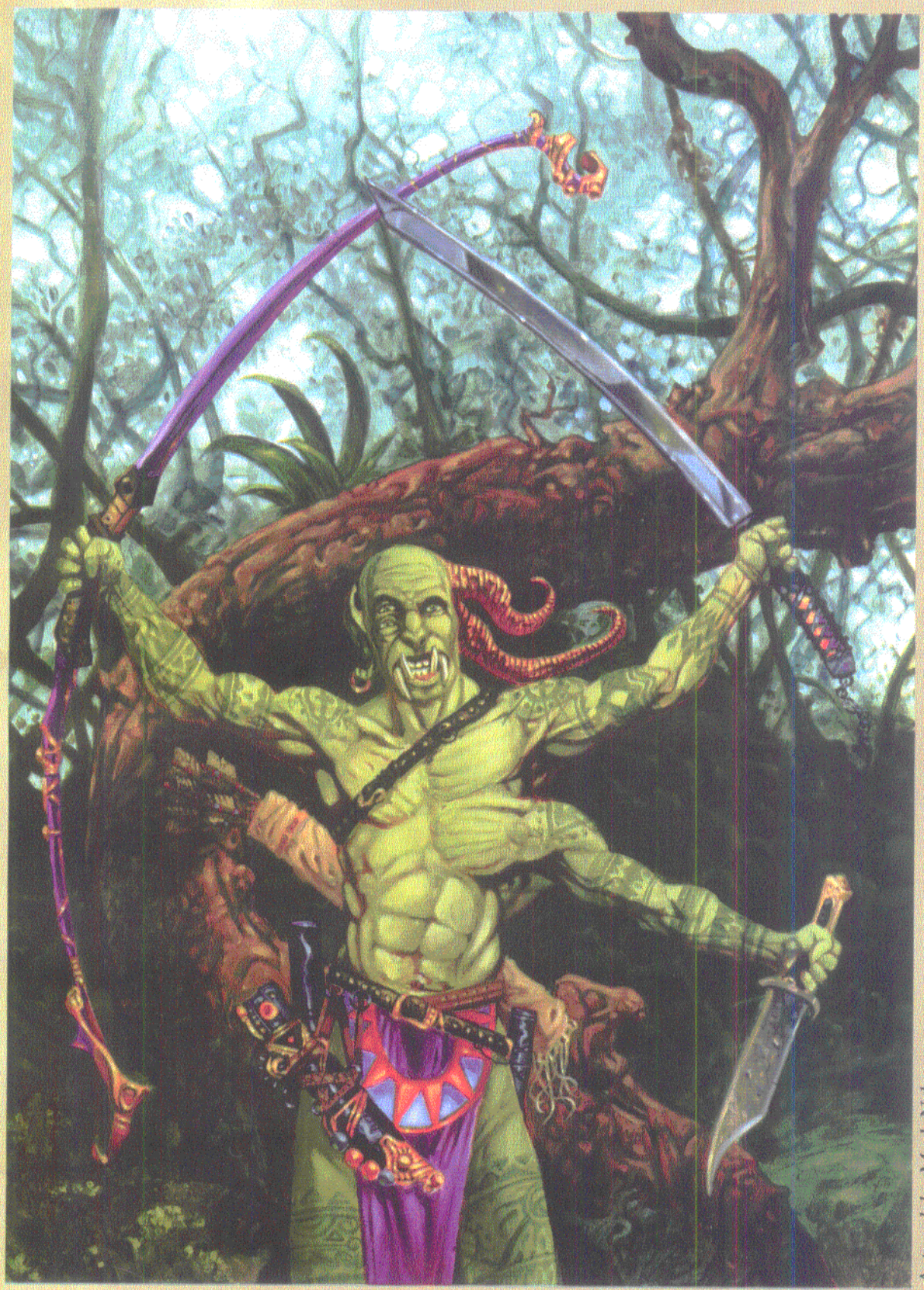
THE TOWERS, FULL OF TREASURES AND DARK MAGIC, LOOM OVER THE DEEP FOREST.

Artwork by Jeff Laubenstein

A startled Vasgothian leafer prepares to defend itself.

Artwork by Michael Sutfin

A Maracan jubbuq creates an illusion with his powerful magic.



Artwork by Mark Nelson

An Indrisan dhuna prepares to slay a transgressor against the Passions.

Artwork by Mark Nelson

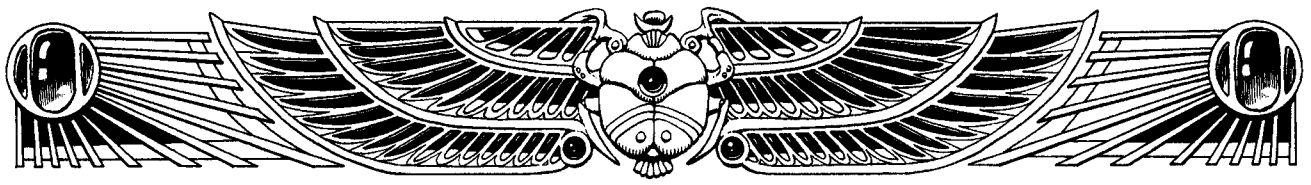
Barred from the afterlife, Creanan mummies return to attack the living.

Artwork by Tom Baxa

Theran kilas race to attack a Horrorship in the skies over Marac.

Artwork by Larry MacDougall

A Re-Named theran noble travels to join the savage tribes.



and other entities who purport to be worthier than we are. It is this gulf of understanding between us and the desert tribes that has kept the aalhar and the sufik at odds since we knew of each other's existence.

On the Predecessors of the Sufik

The sufik are not the first pack of desert tribesmen to bedevil us. Throughout known history, nomads native to the inhospitable mountains and dunes of northern Fekara have lived by attacking and plundering the cities. Unlike the aalhar, the desert-dwellers changed their ways from one generation to the next, as new tribal cultures supplanted old with dizzying rapidity. Every new hero who ever arose in their midst espoused some new way of thinking that the tribes believed must replace the old. Most of these heroes had the backing of one or more jinari, the meddlesome spirits who have vexed us throughout Maracan memory. The jinari's own unfathomable internal politics from time to time prompted one group of them to try to seize the nomads' allegiance from another. The tribes then fought viciously among themselves, which culled their numbers and diverted their attention away from us. When one or another jinari-sponsored hero finally won, he or she would change the name of the desert nomads to reflect the hero's philosophy, the name of his jinari sponsor or even his own name. The folk we know now as the sufiks have in past times been called the *al-kran*, the *dajana*, the *ilkadir* and a dozen other names. Each of these nomad cultures has differed from its predecessors, but all have shared a hatred of city-dwellers that I believe stems from envy.

> The aalhar also subjected their nomadic neighbors to slave raids for centuries. Little wonder that they thereby gained the sufik's undying hatred.
>
> —A Liberator Abroad

This is the pattern that governed our relations with the tribes until the Empire came to Marac. After a generation of inter-tribal conflict, one band of nomads would win out over the others. Its leaders would consolidate and increase their strength as all the nomad tribes adopted the victorious tribe's ways. Newly unified, the nomads would launching raids against our caravans and against the cities themselves. We of the cities would fight back as necessary to keep our ways inviolate and our business running smoothly. Our counterattacks would test the leadership of the nomads, who would invariably falter. Then the jinari who had lost the last battle would offer glory and magical powers to any would-be heroes willing to challenge the tribal leaders. Tribal wars would erupt anew, beginning the cycle all over again.

Then the Therans came and shattered the pattern forever. The sufiks should long ago have risen up, briefly flowered and then destroyed themselves in factional fighting. But with the Therans acting as a lightning rod for sufik hatred of other ways, the opposite is happening. The sufiks are getting stronger and turning their warlike impulses against those they regard as their common enemy. Worst of all, Theran magical meddlings have united the jinari, and that can spell nothing but disaster.

On Early Relations with Marac

—In the words of Jameel El-Khatar, merchant of Karatha

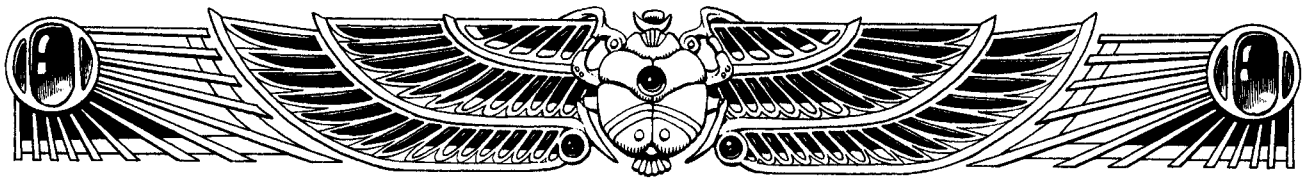
If the Therans really want to know what Maracans think of them, I can suggest how those thoughts might run:

The mad sufiks may be destroying our cities, but we take solace in knowing that our accumulated knowledge saved the world from the Horrors. Our day will come again. The Therans think their civilization will last forever, but we can see it falling apart. It's falling apart on our cities at the moment, but we can endure that. Time is long, and the desert sands are always moving. They are moving now over the Theran fools. Eventually the tables will turn on sufik and Theran alike, and we aalhar will finally claim our destiny in the Selestrean. In creating the Maracan Empire, we will remember the Theran Empire's mistakes and look to Thera as an object lesson in what to avoid.

Thera first approached Marac in 290 TH, looking for help. It was in no position to conquer us—it wasn't even an empire yet. Thera's founding father, Kearos Navarim, was still alive, still writing his great work, and he was stuck. He had the theoretical basis for the Rites of Protection and Passage, but he was missing something vitally important—the magical formulae necessary to actually create the spells he needed. So old Kearos sent scholar-magicians throughout the lands around the Selestrean Sea, in search of people who might have the knowledge to help him. And a fine thanks we've gotten for supplying it—though you know that all too well.

On the Three Scholars

One of Navarim's underlings, Melyor Tovanas by Name, came to the court of the Great Sultan Irkush to seek the aid of the sultan's wizards. Now the sultan could have had Melyor's head struck from his shoulders, but he didn't. Instead, he believed what Melyor said about the coming of the Horrors because his own most gifted wizards—the renowned Maracan scholars Quafim El-Ha, Moam El-Saf, and Gameh Al-Kherbuti—had told him something similar. Sultan Irkush commanded the Three Scholars to accompany Melyor back to Thera and lay Maracan wisdom at Navarim's disposal. He allied with Thera—not as a vassal, but as a partner.



AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF FOREIGN PROPAGANDA. THE MARACANS HAVE LONG FLOATED THIS FANTASY TO ASSUAGE THEIR BRUISED PRIDE. BUT NO AMOUNT OF MYTH-MAKING OBSCURES THE CENTRAL FACT THAT WE, NOT THEY, ARE THE MASTERS OF THE SELESTREAN. —THURBON, HISTORIAN OF HOUSE MEDARI

So the Three Scholars journeyed to Thera and supplied the essential equations to the Theran magicians. And I do mean essential. The Rites of Protection and Passage could not have been completed without them. The Three Scholars then left the island, loaded down with riches and magical texts unavailable in Marac.

On the journey home, however, their ship was waylaid by pirates—or so the story went—and the Three Scholars were lost. A tragic coincidence, wasn't it? And remarkably convenient for the Therans, who no doubt ordered the "pirate" attack to preserve their monopoly on the world-saving mystical secrets that the Three Scholars had helped to create. This incident was the first indication of how Thera saw the relationship between Thera and Marac ... and how they still see it to this day. When they have the upper hand, they exploit us. And they care nothing for how their greed and short-sightedness harm our land and people.

On the Journals of the Scholars

Fortunately, one pirate on the attacking vessel thought like a Maracan. While his comrades fought over the Three Scholars' gold, this clever ork took their books. Each of the three had secretly kept accounts of their work with Navarim, and one of these journals—the Journal of Gameh El-Kherbuti—soon surfaced in the city of Karatha. The sultan of Karatha arranged to acquire the volume, which revealed some interesting things. El-Kherbuti had realized that Navarim was embarked on two great magical projects, not simply the one that would protect the world from the Horrors. Moreover, there was something odd about Navarim himself. He seemed distracted and ignorant of magical knowledge that should have been second nature to a scholar of his stature. El-Kherbuti's writings hint that Navarim had somehow become a mere puppet of other forces, whom El-Kherbuti assumed were politicians and wealthy merchants. Most intriguingly, he also hints that Navarim's second, secret project meant inevitable doom for Thera. He didn't say how or why, at least not that I know of. But I can well believe that the Therans are doomed to destruction. That's what happens when you think you know everything but act in ways that only emphasize your ignorance. Whether we win this current conflict or not, it will at least be one more nail in Thera's coffin. And if their founder was meddling in magical matters beyond his understanding, then I'm sure the war in Marac will only hasten the Empire's end.

THE FATE OF THE OTHER TWO SCHOLARS' JOURNALS REMAINS UNKNOWN. I KNOW OF REPORTS THAT FRAGMENTS OF QUAFIM EL-HA'S JOURNAL SURFACED IN CHALMIDES, A CITY UNDER CREANAN CONTROL, IN 1498 TH. IT WAS SUPPOSEDLY PURCHASED BY A TRADER FROM THE BARSAIVIAN CITY OF IOPOS. ANYONE IN POSSESSION OF THIS PRICELESS VOLUME WOULD FIND MANY ANTIQUARIANS ANXIOUS TO BID ON IT. —ELIM AL-BRUN, BOOKSELLER OF THERA

ON THE FIRST CONQUEST OF MARAC

— Benari El-Qur, Court Scholar to the Sultan of Maracazar

Until the Declaration of Empire in 943 TH, Thera treated Marac as a sovereign, foreign state. In truth, however, it had colonized Marac by stealth centuries before, poisoning weak local leaders with Theran riches.

On the Time of the Great Sultans

The first four centuries after the first Therans came to Marac was the era of unity, when the sultans of Karatha, Irkum and Oran acknowledged the Sultan of Maracazar as their liege. When the great sultans were strong, life in Marac was good. The great sultans' powerful armies suppressed the desert nomads and checked the unruly ambitions of lesser sultans. Their courtiers outpaced all others in the art of rhetoric. The fields were fertile, slaves were plentiful, and scholars vastly expanded the boundaries of knowledge.

During this time, the Theran presence in Marac was modest. A diplomatic legation from the First Governor paid homage to the sultans, flattering and soothing them. Slavers of House Jotyn paid handsomely for Maracan jaraleh and other skilled slaves. Scholars of Houses Narlanth and Krand pooled their knowledge with ours. Members of House Gascilium paid well for the secrets of harvesting large crops from marginally fertile lands. And members of House Ippuli came to learn the true secrets of artistry from Maracan poets and actors. For the privilege of living in Marac and enjoying the many gifts we had to offer, Theran nobles paid the sultans tribute in gold, silver and gemstones.

On the Weakening of the Sultans

Unfortunately, the great sultans came to depend on Theran coin. They and their families became accustomed to a luxurious standard of living, and they began to see wealth as the linchpin of their

power. They thought they ruled the humbler city folk because they could command the construction of splendid brass towers, and because their every meal cost more than the annual wages of a mere craftsman or scholar. They forgot that real power came from control of armies and skill at rhetoric. The authority of the Sultan of Maracazar crumbled as his army became a shadow of its former self. The Therans were more than ready to take advantage of this weakness. They had learned our lessons, and now they turned them against us. First, they ceased to pay tribute for Maracan knowledge and instead offered loans to the sultans who pressed them for money. Anxious that the flow of Theran coin should continue, the sultans gratefully—and foolishly—accepted. They failed to consider that they had no way to repay the loans. One by one, the Theran moneylenders foreclosed the great sultans' business enterprises and took them over. The sultans could not stand against them, because they were too deeply in the Therans' debt. And so when First Governor Edro declared the Theran Empire sovereign over Marac in 943 TH, he merely stated in words what had been true for some years. We had been conquered long before then— not by the sword, but by the weakness of our own leaders and the financier's quill.

On the Time of Humbling

As the Scourge approached, the weak sultans naturally agreed to accept the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage. The Therans constructed citadels to protect the Four Cities and left behind Theran administrators and soldiers in each to "aid" the sultans in governance while the great domes remained sealed. The Therans had no need to recapture our cities when the Scourge ended; they had been there all along, pulling the sultans' strings. As the years dwindled before the Scourge, the Therans stripped Marac bare, exporting slaves, crops and treasures faster than we could replenish them. Our glittering cities became impoverished, and we realized that we had all become slaves to the Empire. Maracans today well remember this period, which we call the Time of Humbling. Even those of us who now prosper under Theran rule still recall it. The Time of Humbling reminds us that prosperity under a foreign ruler can be taken away at any time. It reminds us that every contract we sign, no matter how great its immediate returns, contains fine print that deprives us of our due. When Therans accuse us of thinking of something else whenever we seem to agree with them, they are right. We are thinking of the Time of Humbling, and how it continues to this day.

On the Akim-Hanar

One outgrowth of the Time of Humbling was a movement of patriotic Maracan scholars who called themselves the *Akim-hanar*, or "strong in mind." These rhetoricians, mathematicians and magicians claimed to have found another way to ride out the Scourge. They said they could keep the Horrors away by constructing beacons that emitted a magical energy inimical to the Horrors' True Patterns. In arguing that the Maracans should adopt their methods, the Akim-hanar became a political movement. Aalhar of all classes, resentful of Theran control over their destiny, joined them. Radical proponents of the Akim-hanar waged subtle but vicious war in the cities against the sultans and their Theran masters. Though they did not drive the Therans out, they did make life in the Four Cities much more costly and hazardous for the occupiers.

In 978 TH, the Akim-hanar war abruptly stopped. Tens of thousands of Name-givers migrated from the cities—simply got into ships and sailed away. The Theran authorities assumed these emigrants were Akim-hanar supporters and were happy to see them go.

No one knows where the Akim-hanar went or what happened to them. Some say they migrated to the eastern coast of Fekara, where they built settlements and used their own rites to protect themselves against the Scourge. We have found no evidence of their survival since the reopening of the citadels, so it seems likely that their protections failed.

ON THE RECLAMATION OF MARAC

—In the words of D'perci, tutor of Maracazar

Marac was the third Imperial province to be reclaimed, after Creana and Indrisa. The Therans assumed that the reclamation of Marac, like that of Creana, would be a simple affair. In 1409 TH, Theran airships sailed for Maracazar. Aboard the flotilla was the Overgovernor-elect, a dwarf Named Lipada of House Heindari, whom the Great Conclave had chosen to administer Marac. However, a surprise awaited Lipada in Maracazar; Marac already had a Theran overgovernor.

On the Theraalhar

It must have seemed a good idea at the time, to leave Therans in charge of the Four Cities so that the Empire could remain in control of them. This plan had consequences, however, that the

THE MARACANS ARE STRANGELY INCURIOUS ABOUT THE FATE OF THE AKIM-HANAR. I HAVE MORE THAN ONCE TRIED TO OUTFIT A FLEET TO SAIL FROM MARACAZAR IN SEARCH OF THESE LOST MAGICIANS, BUT MARACAN APATHY ON THE SUBJECT, WHICH I CONSIDER DOWNRIGHT UNNATURAL, ALWAYS GETS IN MY WAY. COULD THE AKIM-HANAR HAVE PLANTED SOME MAGICAL SUGGESTION IN THE MINDS OF THE MARACAN PEOPLE, SO THAT NO ONE WOULD EVER FOLLOW THEM?

—T'ANN Q'UVULL, EXPLORER OF HOUSE CARINCI

Therans had not foreseen. Therans in Marac came to know Maracan ways well during the Scourge, and gradually adopted many Maracan customs and habits of thought. They became *theraalhar*—neither Theran nor Maracan, but a blend of the two. Unlike Theran administrators left behind to run other provinces, who were killed by rebellious colonials once the Theran navy no longer backed them, the Theran rulers of Marac were skillful enough politicians to plan ahead. They insinuated themselves into all aspects of Maracan life. They owned businesses, especially banks, on which the cities depended. They employed Maracans and ensured that the interests of powerful natives coincided with their own. They mastered the art of rhetoric, became patrons of Maracan arts and created their own pageants and festivals to divert the common people. Once despised as flatterers and sycophants aping Maracan ways for their own benefit, the theraalhar became more popular than the sultans whose affairs they managed.

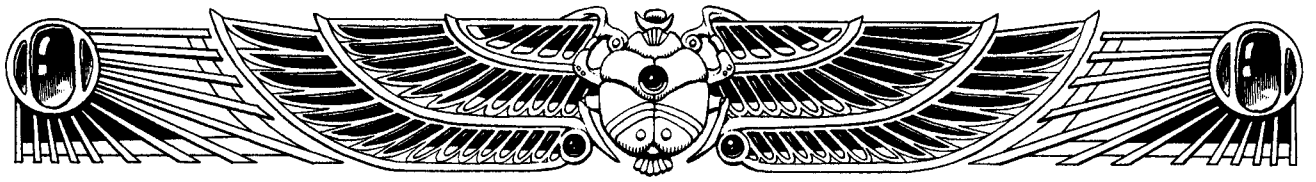
On the Maracan Declaration

Maracan astrology determined the earliest safe moment to open the citadels. Maracazar, the first of the Four Cities to reopen, did so in 1397 TH. Its theraalhar leadership therefore had eleven years to prepare for the arrival of their countrymen. They selected a satin-voiced troll Named Avagrum to be Marac's overgovernor and drew up a charter, the Maracan Declaration, which proclaimed their right to administer Marac with minimal interference from Great Thera. According to this charter, the theraalhar agreed to pay the Empire the taxes due it, but otherwise they demanded autonomy. In return for this freedom, they relinquished all claim to financial or military support from the Great City. They believed the First Governor would happily accept this proposal, as it would allow the Empire to use the resources earmarked for the reclamation of Marac to take back another province, such as Barsaive. Unfortunately, they underestimated the folly and greed of their Imperial cousins.

On the Maracan Conclave of 1409

Lipada had been prepared to threaten an obstreperous sultan or two when the Theran fleet arrived in Marac—perhaps by ordering her admirals to melt a mountain or some such. She had not anticipated another Theran with the power and audacity to refuse her the rights granted to her by the Conclave. After several heated meetings with Overgovernor Avagrum, the stiff-necked Lipada was no nearer to satisfaction. Quietly but firmly, Avagrum insisted on his right to rule the province. Unwilling to destroy a city full of Therans without approval from the First Governor, Lipada returned to the Great City. To keep anyone from interpreting her action as a surrender, she left a portion of the fleet behind. Back in Thera, she demanded an emergency Great Conclave to determine some way of dealing with the theraalhar.

Thanks to clever financial management, House Heindari had greater influence than many other Theran noble houses at the time. The Heindari had come out of the Scourge in a better position than most of their fellows, and the Heindari leadership loaned money to other nobles right and left to help them rebuild their power and wealth. Yet when the overgovernorships of Creana and Indrisa came up for appointment, the Conclave passed over Heindari candidates. Thus, the Heindari made it clear that they would recall all of their loans immediately if they were not granted the overgovernorship of Marac.



In 1409, many houses were overextended; the Heindari threat terrified them. So they backed Lipada and her house and passed a momentous resolution. Unless the theraalhar immediately capitulated, the Empire would treat them like any other group of rebellious foreigners. They would be stripped of their ties to Theran noble houses and considered foreign enemies of the Empire.

On the Martyrdom of Avagrum

Emboldened by the judgment of the Great Conclave, Lipada returned to Maracazar and demanded another parley with Avagrum. Though shocked by the decision to strip the theraalhar of their noble titles, Avagrum knew he had no answer to the airships hovering over his city. Lipada had told him of the fate of the Indrisan city of Vellapur, and he had no wish to see Maracazar suffer the same. He surrendered to her on the third of Gahmil, 1410 TH—a day the theraalhar still mark as one of infamy. After Avagrum handed over the overgovernor's seal and scepter of office, Lipada's soldiers clapped him in irons. In revenge for what she saw as her earlier humiliation at his hands, Lipada ordered Avagrum flown back to Great Thera, where he was tried for treason by a military court and hanged.

On the Repercussions of These Events

The theraalhar reacted to their loss of noble status and the execution of their leader with understandable fury. But they had no means of fighting Lipada's airship fleet, and so they chose to take revenge by surviving and prospering. The Maracan ruling class, accustomed to the wise rule of the theraalhar, continued to rely on them in secret. The sultans made some theraalhar their advisers; other theraalhar retained prominent positions in trade and scholarship. To this day they remain a power in this province. Certain of my theraalhar brethren may even be aiding the jinari rebellion. How else can the sufik and their jinari partners strike so skillfully at the cities, except with the help of those who know the cities well? How can the rebels move at will through cities supposedly locked up tight by Theran troops and airships? The jinari rebellion has given certain bitter theraalhar a chance to strike back at the regime that disowned them and slew their prince. It has also made life much harder for those of us who wish to live in peace with Imperial authorities. All theraalhar nowadays are subject to suspicion and harassment, which merely drives more of us into the arms of the sufik rebels.

We can take some consolation in knowing that Lipada, the misguided author of these misfortunes, did not prosper from her mischief. The determination of native Maracans and theraalhar to resist was too much for her in the end. They obeyed her dictums to the letter while utterly disregarding their spirit. Under Lipada's rule, Maracans and theraalhar evaded taxes as never before. Business enterprises belonging to House Heindari were repeatedly sabotaged, while Heindari's rivals in House Jotyn prospered. Jotyn's leaders cleverly sought the aid of the experienced theraalhar, and over the years returned certain theraalhar to noble status by adopting them into the house.

Lipada was recalled to Great Thera for gross incompetence in 1418 TH. A succession of similarly ill-fated Heindari overgovernors followed her until 1430 TH, when the recall of Heindari loans was no longer a concern to the First Governor. In that year the first Jotyn overgovernor arrived in Marac. Sadly for those of us who want peace, the change came too late. Ever since 1430 TH, the overgovernors of Marac have coped with an increasingly ungovernable province, some with more skill than others. In 1489 TH, Overgovernor Mishalan of House Jotyn even tried to publicly mend fences with the theraalhar by inviting Serkhan Velun, a dwarf trader of Maracazar known throughout Marac for his immense wealth and learning, as one of her advisors. But by then, affairs in Marac were unraveling on another front.

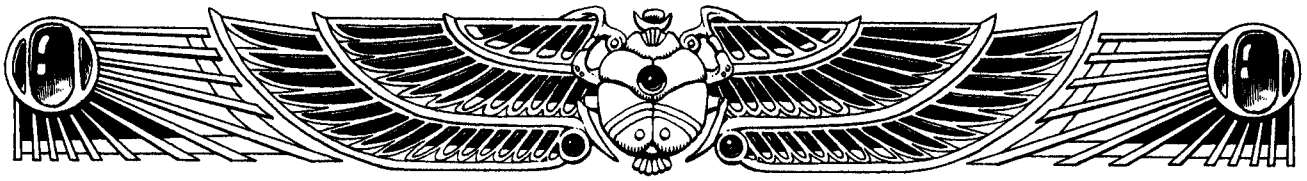
On Sufik Activities After the Scourge

—In the words of Irza El-Zara, scholar of Maracazar

After the Scourge, the aalhar resumed the slave trade. As had been true for centuries, sufik women and children were prime targets for slaving raids. In response, the sufiks rallied under a chieftain Named Erber the Merciless. A brilliant tactician, Erber soon turned the tables on the slavers. He made raids against the sufiks too costly to continue and then struck against the many tiny farming hamlets that surround the Four Cities. Erber's raids disrupted planting and harvests, which greatly increased food prices in the Four Cities. He was the embodiment of many an aalhar's worst nightmare—very, very bad for business.

On the Sufik-Heindari Alliance

Erber was at the height of his power in 1413—the same year that Overgovernor Lipada first began to fully understand the extent of her problems in governing Marac. The allegiance of aalhar and theraalhar to her administration was pure ceremonial fiction, and she was finally starting to realize it. Reasoning that the enemies of her enemies must be her friends, Lipada looked to the deserts and mountains for support. She sent a secret envoy to parley with Erber and made a covert agreement with him.



Even though the Theran occupiers were city-dwellers and therefore criminals according to sufik doctrine, Erber had reason to admire the Imperials. He respected the martial abilities of Theran troops and the power of Theran airships. Most of all, he appreciated the fact that the Theran occupiers had humiliated his people's ancient foes. He therefore chose to overlook, at least for awhile, the sins of the city-dwelling Therans and enter an alliance of convenience with them.

The agreement between Lipada and Erber specified that the overgovernor would pay the sufik to confine their raids to predetermined targets. Lipada also promised to warn the sufik when aalhar slavers were planning raids against them. Lipada and her successors concealed the existence of this pact from the people of Marac and also from officials of the Arbitorium in Great Thera.

While it lasted, the agreement brought great benefits to Erber and the Heindari overgovernors. The overgovernors turned sufik raids against villages and trade caravans controlled by their domestic political opponents, Maracan and ther-aalhar alike. The secret information they gave to Erber increased the success of his raids and rendered his attacks on slavers all the more effective. The agreement became cause for scandal in Theran eyes only when Lipada's successors overstepped themselves by turning the sufik raiders against opponents in other Theran noble houses, especially House Jotyn.

When the secret agreement was revealed during the downfall of the last Heindari overgovernor in 1430 TH, it sparked a scandal that blackened the name of House Heindari across the Empire. In an attempt to contain the damage, House Heindari expelled those of its members who had known of the agreement.

On the Sufik Craze and the Il-Sufar

Over the next twenty years, several Theran poets composed epics that glamorized Erber and the sufik way of life. This roused great interest in the sufiks back in Thera and inspired "the sufik craze." The poems portrayed the sufiks as noble warriors living a courageous life on the Empire's fringe, and emphasized sufik admiration for the Therans. Before long, many Therans came to believe that the sufiks were their allies. The average Theran probably still believes that most sufiks are friends of the Empire, and that the war in Marac is actually being waged by some other enemy.

Ironically, the sufiks suffered because of the craze. The wild popularity of all things sufik made ownership of sufik warriors fashionable. A true sufik warrior suddenly became a more valuable commodity than a mastrylith or a Creanan burial mask. But Theran buyers wanted proud sufik fighting men and women, not wretched thieves and outcasts. This demand presented them with a legal and moral dilemma, as Theran tradition dictated that only criminals could be enslaved. To sidestep this bothersome technicality and make slaves of sufiks who better fit the popular image of the proud sufik warrior, Theran slavers needed to somehow transform the sufik elite into criminals.

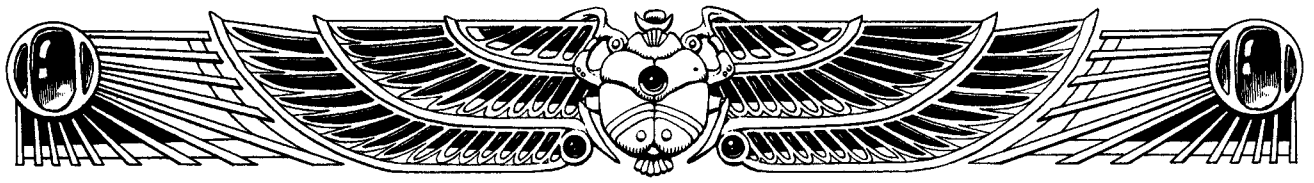
The opportunity to do just that began to take shape in 1435, when Erber died of a stomach ailment. Three tribal leaders contended to replace Erber as chief of chieftains, but others felt there was no longer a need for one. The sufiks' supernatural patrons, the jinari, were similarly divided. Some supported one or another of the three contenders, while others believed the tribes should no longer be united.

One of the three contenders—Ajalleen, formerly Erber's primary liaison to the Heindari overgovernors—lacked jinari backing and therefore needed support from elsewhere. When Ajalleen approached an acquaintance in the Theran administration, Overgovernor Teraca offered to sponsor her and her followers against the other contenders. Among other things, Teraca provided adepts to secretly help Ajalleen's faction. Ajalleen ultimately failed to reunite the sufiks, who fell apart into rival camps that spent virtually all their time fighting one another. Overgovernor Teraca of House Jotyn found this outcome perfectly acceptable, and in 1439 TH he declared Ajalleen the legitimate leader of the sufiks.

Though this pronouncement meant nothing to Ajalleen's rivals, it was crucial as far as Theran law was concerned. It meant that any sufik branded an outlaw by Ajalleen became a criminal, and thus fair game for Theran slaving raids. Predictably, Ajalleen's claim of sovereignty did not sit well with the other sufik. To this day they call her and her followers *il-sufar*, the "false people."

The current overgovernor still commands the il-sufar, now led by Ajalleen's descendants. The il-sufar tribe fields two thousand mounted fighters and includes another six thousand non-combatants. They live in segregated compounds in the cities, having abandoned many of the stricter demands of sufik life. However, they are anything but soft. They have repeatedly proved themselves in battle, specializing in small engagements fought in mountains or deserts. They consider the Name il-sufar a grave insult, properly applied to the other sufik rather than to them. Adhering to the legal fiction of 1439, they identify themselves as the true sufik and their onetime fellows as the false tribes.

Traditional sufik culture is utterly dependent on the jinari. Lacking their patronage, the il-sufar have had to devise their own rituals, system of justice and philosophy of life. Though they still cling to many sufik customs, they draw a little farther away from their mother culture every year. In another generation, they will bear little resemblance to the people from whom they sprang.



On the Time of Warring Tribes

The next forty-five years brought hard times to the sufik. The jinari remained divided, and the sufik did as well. They continued to fight among themselves until the late 1480s, when certain activities by Houses Narlanth and Heindari caused the jinari to band together to fight the Therans. This renewed unity led to a stunning reversal in the fortunes of the tribesmen and our Theran occupiers.

ON THE JINARI REBELLION

The jinari rebellion began as a series of attacks launched by the sufik on behalf of the jinari. It has since become a war of liberation in which the jinari, House Narlanth and House Heindari have all played pivotal roles.

ON THE JINARI

The jinari are spirits who manifest only to the sufik. Unlike most spirits, they seem bound to this world in some mysterious way. None has ever been seen outside the province of Marac. According to sufik legend, the jinari created humans and orks—the two races that make up most sufik tribes—and the sufik are the descendants of those first Name-givers. A rival group of spirits, called the *kwan-kadar*, or "jealous ones," is said to have created the other races and spread them across the globe, supposedly to spite the jinari.

From time immemorial, the jinari have intervened in the affairs of Marac's nomadic tribes. They select tribal leaders and from time to time band together to anoint a chief of chieftains to unify the tribes. The jinari give Names to newborn sufik children and preside over sufik coming-of-age, wedding and funeral rituals. The jinari dispense justice and mediate disputes between tribe members. They even dictate the nomads' philosophies and customs, which have changed over time according to jinari whim.

Jinari seem to be native to the astral plane and manifest in physical form only occasionally. When physically manifested, they most often appear as partly insubstantial humans or orks of gigantic stature, but they have also been known to take other forms. Their skins are various bright colors, most often blue, red or violet. The jinari can fly, a power that the sufik claim is the only one the jinari can use in this world without first being asked to do so by a Name-giver.

This claim may explain the powerful jinari's interdependence with mere Name-givers. What remains unclear, however, is why the jinari are so concerned with sufik affairs in particular. They have never intervened in the lives of other peoples in Marac, despite many opportunities to do so. The sufik have good reason to be grateful for jinari involvement; the jinari use their magic to keep the sufik alive. The inhospitable areas in which the nomads live should not support even a quarter of the fifty thousand or more sufik we know to exist—yet this vast number of people nonetheless live and thrive.

> The jinari claim that the passions of other lands are simply kwan-kadar who have overreached themselves, and that the Name-givers who follow them are fools.
>
> —D'Percl, tutor of Maracazar

When invited to do so, the jinari can turn one loaf of bread into four loaves. They can create fresh drinking water at will. They can even transform themselves into large shelters that protect people from the elements. They heal sick and wounded camels, and at one time also healed the sufik, though they no longer do this for reasons that remain obscure. The jinari can also grant Name-givers the power of flight.

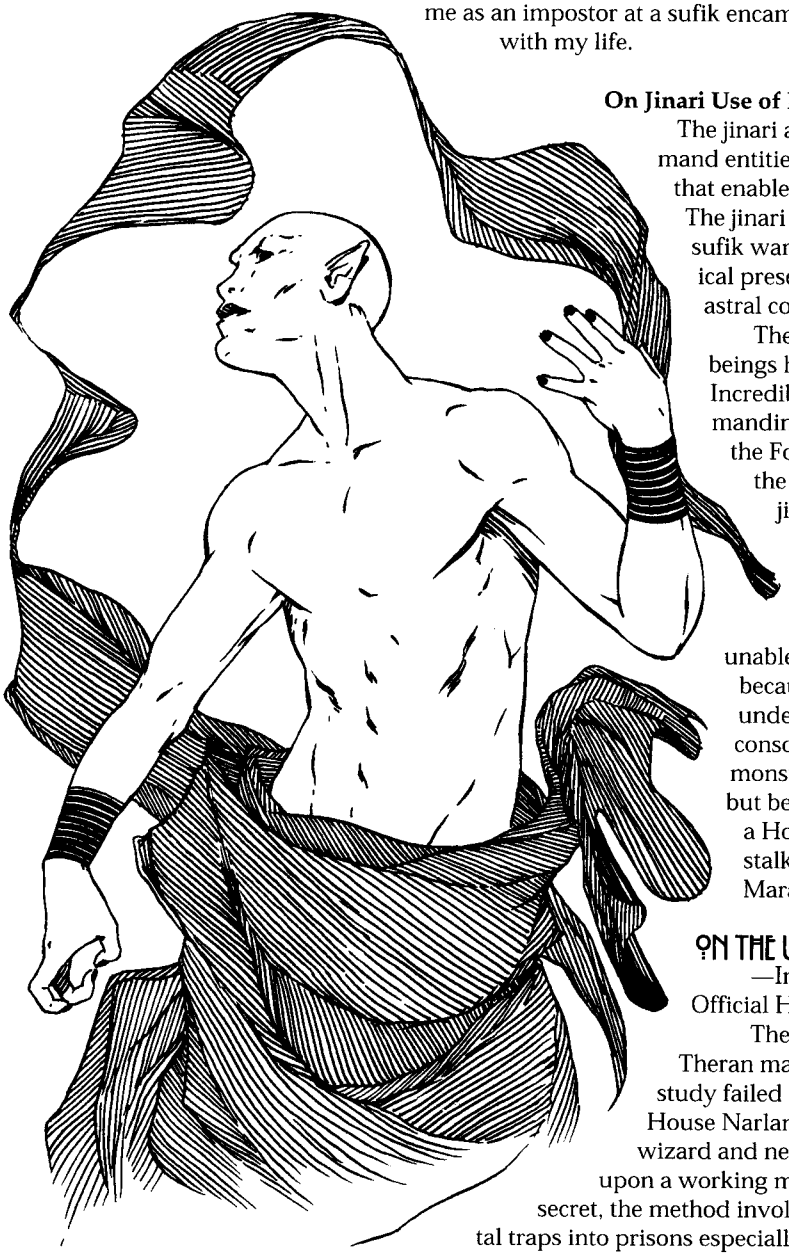
The jinari have a short life span for entities who dwell on the astral plane—few live more than a hundred years. Just as sufik may not mate without a jinari's permission, it is said that the jinari can only reproduce by engaging in a ritual that includes two sufik chieftains, one male and one female.

On the Jubruq

The jinari are the only elemental spirits that can crossbreed with human and ork women. The half-breed offspring of such a union is a rare creature called a *jubruq*. Some sufik clans have no jubruq, and no clan has more than three jubruq members at any time. Generally, jubruq resemble orks or humans, depending on their mother's races. They tend to look sickly and emaciated and are physically weak. However, they excel at all magical Disciplines. They often use their formidable magic to defend their tribe or act as intermediaries between a tribe and its patron jinari just as chieftains do. They reach the age of reason quickly, but most live for only thirty years. Perhaps because of their brief lives, they tend toward introspection. Unlike their parents, jubruq are infertile. The jinari appear to be siring more jubruq these days, possibly to use them in the rebellion.

Other sufik respect the jubruq but hold them at a remove. Being so isolated in the midst of otherwise close-knit communities, the jubruq do not have a normal Name-giver's capacity for empathy or kindness. I knew two jubruq in my time among the sufik, and both were lonely individuals full of self-pity. In fact, the one to whom I extended sympathy exposed

me as an impostor at a sufik encampment. He turned on me, and I barely escaped with my life.



On Jinari Use of Horrors

The jinari are unique among spirits in their ability to command entities that possess an astral presence—an ability that enabled them to protect the sufik during the Scourge. The jinari kept the most powerful Horrors away while sufik warriors fought off those Horrors with only a physical presence, which are stupider and weaker than their astral cousins.

The jinari ability to command astral and half-astral beings has played a significant role in the rebellion. Incredible as it may sound, the jinari are actually commanding the Horrors that remain in Marac to attack the Four Cities and Theran airships! Fortunately for the Therans, the number of Horrors available to the jinari is limited, as are some of the Horrors' more fearsome powers. While under jinari control, the Horrors act more like mindless engines of destruction than wily corrupters of all that is good. Horrors being driven to attack appear unable to torment Name-givers mentally, most likely because what passes for the Horror's mind is utterly under the controlling jinari's power. This fact is little consolation, I am sure, to those who must fight the monsters; even the best-trained soldier cannot help but be demoralized when he discovers that his foe is a Horror. Consequently, followers of the Horror-stalker Discipline are vital to military success in the Maracan war.

On the Unfortunate Acts of House Narlanth

—In the words of Gargan Blind-Them-With-Ink, Official Historian of the Second Legion

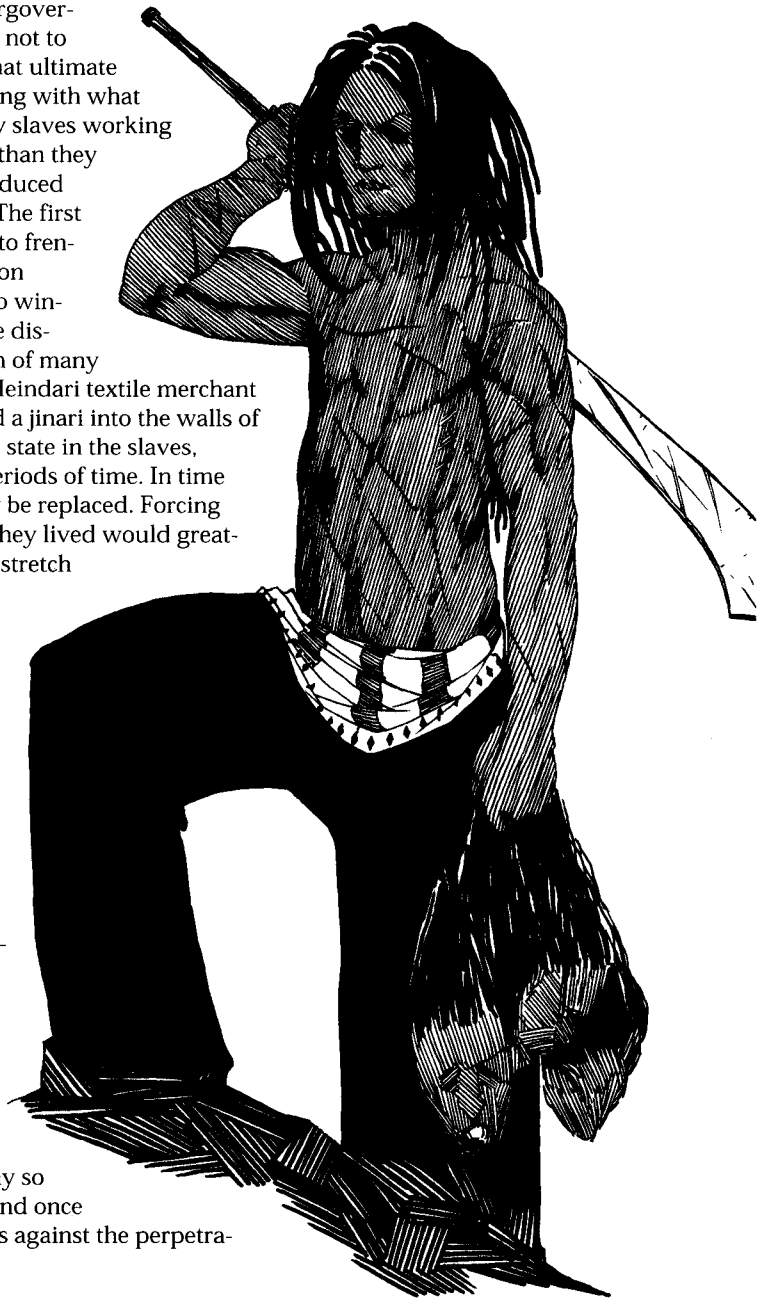
The jinari and their powers have always interested Theran magicians. But all attempts to capture one for study failed miserably until 1494 TH, when magicians of House Narlanth and the Brass Hand—a group of Maracan wizard and nethermancer adepts from the city of Irkum—hit upon a working method. Though the details remain a trade secret, the method involves the use of spells that convert ordinary crystal traps into prisons especially designed for jinari. More spells bind the jinari into objects, mingling their patterns with those of the items. The captured jinari then functions as an energy reservoir that generates amazing magical effects as determined by the magicians performing the ritual. The vast floating structures of Great Thera are among the most famous applications of this method; many of them are held up by one or more bound jinari spirits.

In 1497 TH, House Narlanth began hiring mercenaries to take their wizards to sufik territory on jinari-hunting expeditions. Various mercenary groups were employed, including Theran adepts, il-sufar raiders and desert warriors imported from the Creanan protectorate of Issyr. At first the wizards of House Narlanth proceeded cautiously and only captured a few jinari. By the turn of the century, however, the Narlanthi were capturing jinari at a rate that alarmed the spirits and their sufik servants. The sufik reunited in the face of this overwhelming common danger and stepped up their raids. Any group in sufik territory that looked like a hunting party became a target. Fighting for their own and their spirit patrons' survival, the sufik gave no quarter. Along with the expeditions sent by House Narlanth, many innocent traders and scholars were also slain.

All this jinari-snatching laid the groundwork for an expanded confrontation. A final provocation from the sufik's one-time Theran allies turned simmering unrest into the most serious military challenge the Empire has ever faced.

On the Foolishness of House Heindari

Though the new Narlanth enterprise of capturing and selling jinari caused concern among some of the overgovernor's officials, House Narlanth at least had the sense not to reveal what was being done to the captive spirits. That ultimate stupidity fell to the Heindari, who were experimenting with what they called a *fabrika*—a large building in which many slaves working together would produce goods in greater quantities than they could in small numbers in workshops. Goods so produced included clothing, pottery and artificial parchment. The first fabrikas achieved some success, but spurring slaves to frenzied activity in such bleak, soulless environments soon proved difficult. (Many fabrikas, for example, had no windows, lest the sight of the sky or the scent of a breeze distract the slave from his labors.) To ensure production of many goods quickly, something else was needed. Then a Heindari textile merchant hit on the idea of hiring a Narlanthi magician to bind a jinari into the walls of the fabrika. The jinari's magic would induce a trance state in the slaves, which would make them work feverishly for long periods of time. In time the strain would kill the slaves, but they could easily be replaced. Forcing them to labor like crazed automatons for as long as they lived would greatly increase the number of items produced in a given stretch of time.

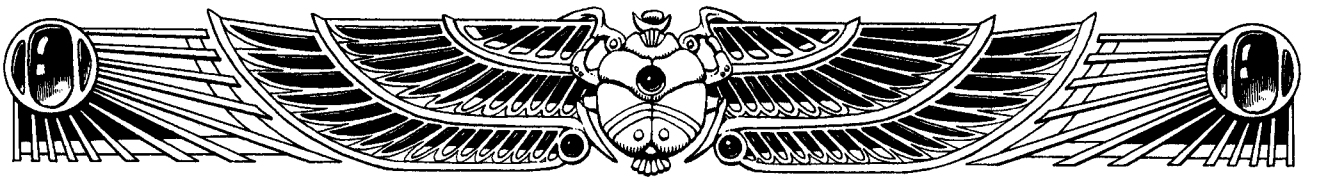


The Heindari also wanted to be as close as possible to the source of jinari, and so they placed many of their fabrikas in the foothills of the Maracan mountains, where they owned large tracts of cheap and otherwise useless land. Not long after the first jinari were bound into fabrika walls, the sufik discovered the truth—and trouble with the border raiders turned into a full-fledged war.

Just how the sufik found out the jinari's fate remains a mystery—but after spending so much time among the sufik and their patron spirits, my esteemed colleague Irza El-Zara has developed a logical theory. Imagine the feelings of a powerful spirit, commander and guardian of mortal Name-givers, suddenly finding itself imprisoned in the walls of a building and compelled to use its powers to force pathetic slaves to work themselves to death. The suffering of such bound jinari must have radiated from the fabrikas across astral space like a beacon, shouting the bound spirits' agony so loudly that the free jinari couldn't help but hear it. And once they did, they lost no time turning their sufik charges against the perpetrators of the atrocity.

On the War Against the Fabrikas

The sufik began by attacking and destroying the Heindari fabrikas, presumably to free the jinari bound inside. At first the Heindari responded by hiring mercenaries to defend the fabrikas and engineers to build fortifications around them. They thought the sufik, like any other raiders, would go away if presented with too fortified a target. Those of us who opposed this Narlanth-Heindari folly told them otherwise, for all the good it did. What



would *we* do if a foreign invader imprisoned our Passions? We'd fight to the death to free them, that's what. But our reasoning fell on deaf ears. And sure enough, the sufik's ferocity seemed to increase in direct proportion to the opposition they faced.

When the mercenaries suffered heavy losses, their price went up considerably. A look at the account books revealed to Heindari financiers that the cost of defending the fabrikas would exceed the revenues they created. The sensible course would have been to shut them down. But the Heindari have never been accused of sense. Instead of closing the fabrikas, they used their political influence to shift the cost of defending them to the Empire. Heindari leaders in the Great City twisted arms at the Arbitorium, and almost as fast as you could blink, the Theran legions in Marac received orders from the War College to "defend the honor of the Empire." In truth, we were defending House Heindari's treasury.

We lost more good men than I care to count defending those Passions-forsaken fabrikas in the back end of nowhere. We couldn't have picked a worse place to try to protect against mounted raiders. But after a grueling two years, we finally proved to the sufik that they couldn't raid Theran possessions with impunity. We repulsed raid after raid. For more than a year, not a single installation was destroyed and the jinari bound to them remained imprisoned.

So the free jinari moved their war to the cities.

On the Assassinations and the Spread of Insurgency

Many in the Great City think the war in Marac is far away, but we are fooling ourselves. Anyone from any province may come to the island, after all. How long will it be before jinari sympathizers come here and attack one of the floating buildings in which jinari are trapped? If such miscreants free the jinari inside, those massive structures will come crashing down on the city below and thousands might die! We must prepare ourselves for the arrival of this war in the heart of the Empire or rue the consequences.
—Tanstuvus the Elder

In 1503, an epidemic of assassinations hit the Four Cities. At first, we couldn't tell that they were all part of a single campaign. The victims came from many walks of life, though all were either Therans or Maracans doing business with Therans. Only after the bodies started to pile up did we guess that the killings were part of a campaign of terror. Sufik assassins had infiltrated the cities and were striking targets of opportunity.

It didn't take long for the aalhar to realize that the sufik and the jinari wanted us out of Marac. More of them than we'd expected joined the fight against the Empire, along with disgruntled theraalhar who'd gone native. Throughout 1504 and 1505, violent incidents in the Four Cities kept rising—not just assassinations, but looting of Theran shops and businesses as well. Maracan nationalists of all stripes had finally recognized a common interest with their old sufik foes, and so the traditional enmity between sufik and aalhar no longer divided them.

You can find Maracans of every social station who think they ought to run their own affairs; we Therans can't trust anyone completely anymore. Though our leaders assume otherwise, I suspect even the sultans are giving covert aid and comfort to the rebels. For all we know, every sultan's court may be rife with traitors. The theraalhar, stripped of their Imperial rank and ties by a short-sighted Conclave, are particularly dangerous. Their involvement in this revolt is the only logical explanation for the rebels' uncanny ability to anticipate our every move. I know some high-ranking Therans claim that the jinari can read our minds, but more likely they are paying heed to canny theraalhar advisers who well know our ways of thinking. In its usual wisdom—which is to say, not much—the Great Conclave back home has ordered the overgovernor to treat all theraalhar as potential enemies of the state. For those theraalhar who hope to regain their status as noble Therans, and who therefore remain as loyal as anyone could wish, this policy is a grave insult. Should the Conclave be foolish enough to order the arrest of all theraalhar as suspected traitors, we will only drive the loyalists into the arms of the rebels.

As more and more Maracans have joined the rebel underground, jinari tactics have changed. Instead of targeting high officials and military officers for assassination, they are striking at random in districts where many Therans live. For every officer or administrator they kill, another takes his place. But killing ordinary citizens makes everyone afraid. And fear is the weapon they believe will drive us out of Marac.

On Horrors in the City War

In 1506 TH, a string of particularly gruesome murders struck the Four Cities. The unbelievable degree of violence done to the corpses pointed to Horrors as the killers. At first we didn't recognize these Horror manifestations as being connected to the insurgency. Few Therans knew about the jinari's ability to control Horrors, save for scholars like myself who regularly pore through scrolls and tomes full of arcane information. The Second Legion's magicians thought the Horrors had been attracted by the welter of negative emotions thrown up by the war. That thought was demoralizing enough—but then a junior bureaucrat working for the akarenti of Maracanazar compiled a chronological chart of the Horror killings in all of the Four Cities. He realized that the first letters of the victims' names spelled out, "THERAN DOGS GO HOME."

After that, rebel graffiti appeared that took credit for the Horror attacks and threatened more against "all enemies of a free Marac." Then the Horrors started to appear. Crystal entities turned up in Irkum's Grand Bazaar. Bloatforms were found nesting in a Second Legion livery stable. Deceivers popped out of the plumbing beneath the overgovernor's palace, and gnashers surfaced in a garrison outside the Heindari installations.

You can imagine how many died.

On the Air War

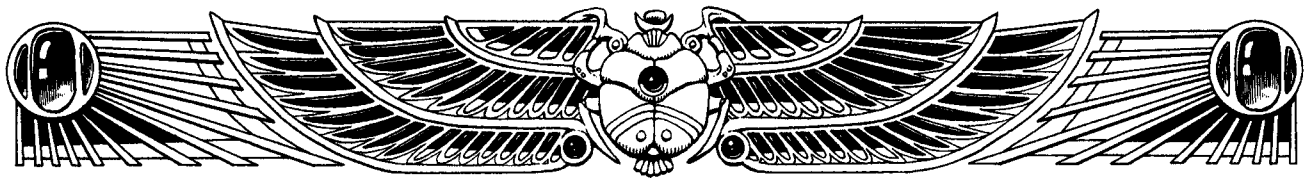
As an infantryman through and through, I'll match our soldiers against any in the known world. But the fact remains that Theran military superiority has always rested in air power. The city war has been supremely frustrating because air power is of little use. We can't destroy the Four Cities as we did in Indrisa, because our own people and allies live in them. We send the fleet out to bombard sufik hideaways in the foothills of the Jinari Mountains, but the sufik simply pack up their belongings and ride to new sites. We found it difficult enough to resign ourselves to the fact that our navy was useful only as a symbol of strength in this war. But then the rakken attacks began—and our vaunted airship fleet became a liability.

Near the end of 1506 TH, these dreadful flying Horror constructs swarmed out of nowhere to attack our ships. We could draw only one grim conclusion from this: the jinari controlled at least one major Horror capable of creating these creatures! We lost several kilas and vedettes in battles with the rakken; ship after ship was severely damaged or destroyed. On paper, we still have two fleets in the sky over Marac, but each is at half its strength.

We consoled ourselves—briefly—with the thought that at least we still had our behemoths. We learned differently in 1507 TH, when the rebels unveiled their gruesome Horrorship. Longer than a kila, the Horrorship was a reptilian, winged Horror outfitted with a wooden deck, siege engines, and a steering lever driven into its skull. The thing came upon the

GARGAN'S WORDS MADE ME WONDER BRIEFLY IF THROAL SHOULD SEEK OUT THE JINARI TO LEARN THE SECRET OF THE HORRORSHIPS ... AND I RELUCTANTLY CONCLUDED THAT WE SHOULDN'T. THE RISK OF LOSING CONTROL OF ONE IS TOO GREAT TO JUSTIFY, EVEN IF SUCH SHIPS WOULD FOREVER BAR THE THERANS FROM BARSAIVE. BUT OTHER POWERS IN BARSAIVE MIGHT NOT BE SO SCRUPULOUS ... THE DENAIRASTAS OF LOPOS, FOR EXAMPLE. IF THEY ARE ALREADY INVESTIGATING THESE MATTERS, THEY MUST BE STOPPED.

—MERROX



behemoth *Implacable* without warning while our vessel was hunting sufik in the Jinari Mountains. The rebels saw to it that enough of the *Implacable*'s crewmen survived to tell the terrifying tale of the airship's destruction. The Horrorship advanced on the *Implacable* and seized its stone ramparts in insect-like pincers. Our valiant air sailors fired ballistas at the thing and our magicians blasted it with magic, but the creature shrugged off these attacks as if they were mere pin-pricks. Other fighters attempted to board the Horrorship and fight with its crew, but failed. The Horrorship breathed clouds of poison gas at our sailors, then smashed the behemoth to bits against the nearest mountain.

The *Implacable* is the only Theran behemoth lost in battle in all our history. Our admirals have kept behemoths out of the Jinari Mountains since then. We fought several subsequent engagements with the Horrorship over the Selestrean Sea, but have so far not managed to down the thing. Luckily for us, it has also failed to pull any more behemoths out of the sky, though it has claimed several kilas and vedettes.

Recent unconfirmed intelligence reports speak of a second Horrorship, this one more crustacean than reptile, sighted in the skies over the desert. If these reports are true, they are very bad news.

As our airships are simply handing the rebels tempting targets, withdrawing them would seem to be the sensible course. Unfortunately, we can't. Such a decision would give the rebels too great a symbolic victory and might even spell the beginning of the end for our Imperial ambitions.

On the Current Status of the War

The war in Marac has become one of attrition. Neither side is strong enough to deal a decisive blow to the other, and neither side wants the cities razed. Unless we hit on some new weapon or strategy, this damnable war will drain our resources for many years to come. Its consequences extend far beyond this stinking cesspit of a province; the need to devote men and ships to Marac prevents us from expanding Theran might across the world.

Of course, if we pull out of Marac, that act will encourage similar rebellions elsewhere in the Empire. We should have been wise enough to avoid this fight, but now we have no choice but to prosecute it to its bitter end. The jinari are fighting for survival, and we are fighting for our credibility throughout Imperial lands. Neither side can afford to surrender.

Someday, Houses Narlanth and Heindari will be held accountable for the mess they have created here. I hope I live to see it.

ON THE CITIES OF MARAC

—In the words of Benari El-Qur, Court Historian to the Sultan of Maracanazar

Now that we have exhausted the topic of the war, I will tell our fellow scholars something of life in the Four Cities—which perhaps they will visit someday, if peace returns to our land.

Our cities are very similar to one another. The expectations of foreigners that each city should be vastly different from its fellows amuses us. Their own cities all have distinctive customs, festivals appearances and such, but only because those cities are fleeting and impermanent things. Maracan cities, however, have existed for thousands of years and have reached a state of perfection and balance. As logic clearly shows, if each of the Four Cities is perfect, then each must be essentially like the others. After all, there cannot be different kinds of perfection! In the time of the Great Sultans, when our perfect civilization was still unmarred by foreign invasion or jinari rebellion, it was a capital crime to suggest that the Four Cities were not identical. To say so was to imply that one of them was less than perfect, which showed great disrespect for its sultan. Current circumstances have forced us to set this custom aside, but when these troubled times are over we will doubtless attain perfection once again. Then we may once more enjoy the privilege of beheading those foolish enough to suggest that our cities are significantly different.

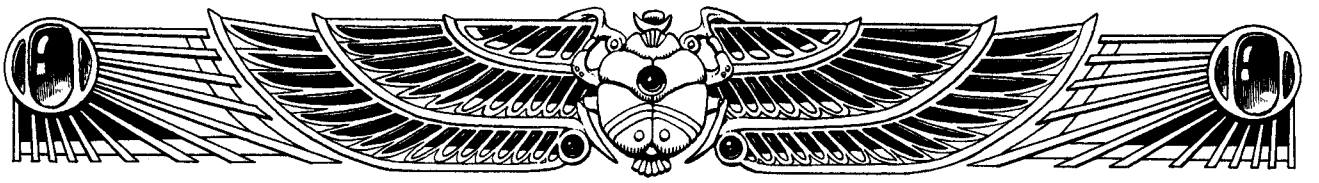
This passage is a prime example of the speaker's sense of irony. Here she swears that no differences exist between the cities, a most improbable claim. In the next breath, she describes them in diametrically opposed terms. From her tone of voice, it was impossible to tell whether she was serious or jesting at any given time.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

MARACAZAR

Maracazar is the capital city, the sublime of sublimes, seat of the Grand Sultan. Our current Grand Sultan is Qufira, who embodies the sleeping glory of Marac. The Theran overgovernor and akarenti know Qufira's desires so well that they need never consult him on any matter, large or small.

The sultan's palace is unmatched by any other for sheer splendor—its white marble walls and decorations of beaten brass gleam in the light of each day like a small sun come to rest upon the earth. All other buildings in Maracazar are also made of white marble and brass, though more of the latter than the former. In this way the people of Maracazar pay



homage to the Grand Sultan and his dwelling, by simultaneously imitating it and allowing it to be distinct from all the rest. The streets of Maracazar are wide and straight, laid out according to the guidelines of master mathematicians and logicians. No one except foreigners ever gets lost there, and even foreigners only lose their way because they lack the gift of discerning the subtle differences between one building and the next. And even for foreigners, there exists one never-failing landmark—the Grand Bazaar, a wide-open square full of bright-colored tents in which sellers of all kinds hawk their marvelous wares to any who will buy. Indeed, the cries of the merchants fill the air with the sweet music of commerce and can be heard several streets away from the Bazaar.

Maracazar is known for the lassitude of its men and the energy of its women. To wear any color other than blue or white there, except in the Grand Bazaar, is considered grossly indecent. Flocks of brightly colored talking birds, which we call *akiri-haz*, nest in the cliffs just north of the city, and descend upon it in droves every half-year. They endlessly repeat phrases from a long-dead language of maddening complexity, which no Maracan scholar has yet succeeded in translating.

KARATHA

The westernmost of the Four Cities, Karatha is haunted by the siren song of the deadly Ocean of the Six Havocs. The city's sultan is Hurhana, a lantern-jawed ork nethermancer, who has buried himself in magical research and left the governing of the city to its Theran officials. Hurhana is said to be working on a suit of magical armor that will render him immune to Horror attacks; when he perfects this suit, he will lead the battle against the jinari and slay all of their Horror pawns. This tale, however, can only be a scurrilous rumor. If Hurhana truly carried out such a plan, he would be executed for daring to outshine the sublime Qufira. And even his close friendship with influential members of House Jotyn and various Heavenherds of Thera could not protect him.

Karatha is known for the energy of its men and the lassitude of its women. In Karatha, wearing any color other than red or yellow is considered to bring contagion. Foreigners who forget to change into appropriate clothing are sometimes stoned to death in the name of public health.

Karatha also has a Grand Bazaar, though it is somewhat less impressive than that of Maracanazar. This is as it should be—Hurhana is only a lesser sultan, after all. In Karatha's bazaar one can find *haz-mirik*, a certain fish native to the shallows of the Ocean of the Six Havocs. When eaten dried, the fish brings on a healing sleep; when eaten fresh and raw, it brings visions of the future. Of course, to be certain of a vision's meaning, one should consult a dreamreader. These individuals, skilled at finding the hidden meaning in the most ordinary images, abound in the Grand Bazaar of Karatha and most charge reasonable fees. The haz-mirik itself, especially fresh-caught, is expensive; those who harvest it must dare the ocean's music, which leads those confused in mind to drown themselves. Sometimes huge storms also blow up far out to sea and create giant waves that can swamp a fishing boat in the shallows.

The souls of native-born Karathans who die in Karatha on the same calendar day as their births are reincarnated into birds known as *ferhaha*. These vengeful creatures pluck out the eyes of those they considered their enemies when they were Name-givers and shower those who merely irritated them with droppings. Ferhaha droppings smell strong and unpleasant and eat away at fine fabrics. In Karatha, bitter individuals often kill themselves on their birthdays in hopes of returning as ferhaha.

ORANA

Orana, which lies to the east of Maracazar, is ruled by Sultan Il-Itallor, a wizened old man who was once a young woman. A jinari fell in love with the young woman, but she rebuffed the spirit's advances, and the jinari turned her into an old man out of pique. This act of vengeance backfired, however. It made Il-Itallor the oldest male of Orana's ruling family, and the city's leading rhetoricians argued that Il-Itallor must displace Sultan Walqalla (who ruled Orana at the time). The rest of the family agreed and acclaimed Il-Itallor as sultan.

It is said that Il-Itallor is brooding and bitter and hates the jinari with a passion that defies good sense. It is also said that he dislikes the Therans and believes that they deliberately provoked the jinari rebellion to have an excuse to make war against us. Furthermore, it is said that he does whatever he can to embarrass the Therans and prove his own warriors superior to them. None of these rumors, however, can possibly be true. Maracan sultans are all identical icons of perfection, who would never be guilty of acting on any grounds other than pure logic. To suggest anything as imperfect as anger or bitterness behind their actions is a grave insult. And to suggest that their attitudes toward the Therans differ in any material way is only to flaunt one's ignorance.

Before the Scourge, Orana was plagued by songbirds that chirped all night and slept all day. The sultan of the day ordered them wiped out, and the effort largely succeeded. However, when the Scourge lifted, the birds had been replaced by giant beetles that also chirped all night. During the day, these beetles swoop down on unsuspecting victims and clip great chunks of flesh from them with razor-sharp mandibles. Because it would cast aspersions on the perfection of a past sultan, it is illegal to mention these beetles, which therefore have no name. Therans, exempt from this law, call the insects "rippers."

Not surprisingly, the most popular offerings in Orana's Grand Bazaar are healing salves and a solvent made from *kilun* grass, which grows in abundance outside the city walls. The solvent is most effective at cleaning up the corpses of the beetles that regularly smash themselves to pulp against Orana's brass towers. Sultan Il-Itallor employs vast numbers of washermen and -women in the constant struggle to keep Orana's brass towers gleaming brightly.

IRKUM

Sultan Irk-al-Irk of Irkum would be acknowledged as a witty author of delightfully salacious poetry and a dashing rake were it legal to ascribe such qualities to a Maracan sultan. Were it permissible, someone would surely note that he is more than happy to leave affairs of state to the Therans. But we all know, of course, that Maracan sultans are wise, sober leaders who guide our Theran guests in their voluntary endeavors on our behalf.

The sultan's city resembles him in many respects. Its people value clever wit, especially when employed in a suggestive manner. They speak swiftly, employing convolutions of language and thought that even other Maracans find amazing, and often seem to be laughing secretly at something. They have an unusual love of the color blue because it reminds them of the waters of the Selestrean Sea. One can see the Selestrean from almost any window in Irkum, and the gentle roar of its waves against the shore sings the city to sleep every night. More magicians reside in Irkum than in any other of the Four Cities, drawn there by the true water that Irkum's fisherfolk often harvest from the sea.

In Irkum, all women are left-handed and all men are right-handed. Children who show opposite tendencies are clearly cursed by jinari and are therefore left in the desert south of the city to die. People born in the first half of the year are have high, lilting voices; those born in the latter half possess low, raspy voices. Those born in the year's last month have voices too low to be heard by any living creature save *jububi*—squat, flightless birds with bulbous beaks that are native to Irkum. Jububi can be trained to repeat whatever a last-monther tells them and serve as translators. These rare birds are also highly valued for their meat, which has led to poaching in the past. It is a capital offense in Irkum to steal and eat a last-monther's jububi.

ON NOTABLE PERSONS OF MARAC

—As written by Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

The accounts of the Maracan delegation were notably short on prominent individuals. Every student of the legends of kings and villains knows that Name-giver history comes from the clash of conflicting personalities, and so we sought information on prominent persons in Marac from the Symposium participants. We assembled the

following descriptions from our notes of these conversations. To encourage frankness, we agreed not to attribute their comments.

GENERAL BUBAC

General Bubac, a troll with unusually delicate features, commands the Second Legion. The Second has been stationed in Marac since long before the rebellion, and poor Bubac must look longingly back on those peaceful days. He always considered himself unsuitable for a military career, but he's a Zanjani so he got pushed into it. A contemplative fellow by nature, he'd have preferred to be a scholar—probably studying the ways of Nature, which fascinate him. Given his bookish tendencies, it surprised both him and his family when he actually rose through the ranks to command a legion. Although nepotism was a factor—it almost always is, and Grand Marshal Jolokkos Jolokkarian is Bubac's cousin—Bubac's primary advantage over other candidates seems to have been his mastery of paperwork and report-filing. His brilliantly written documents make him seem like a better tactician than he really is.

Of course, no one has a lower opinion of his abilities than Bubac himself. He sees himself as an impostor and works hard to compensate for what he thinks are his weaknesses. Doing as well as he can is especially important to him now that his overbearing brother, Chribac, has arrived in Marac as General of the Fifth Legion. To say that Bubac fears Chribac's scorn is putting it mildly.

The Second Legion has suffered greatly during the rebellion, I'm sorry to say. And it isn't all Bubac's fault. Theran tacticians in general still haven't learned to fight hit-and-run wars against raiders, even though they most often face exactly that kind of opponent in an Empire where they dominate by air power. Bubac's men never had much confidence in him to begin with, and since the rebellion they have even disregarded his orders at times. He ought to have disciplined someone for such disobedience, mind you—but he didn't, because he thinks every debacle is all his fault.

Lately, Bubac has been leaning heavily on M'zyu, akarenti of Maracazar, for advice. He has sharply reduced the Second's casualty rate since he started relying on M'zyu. Though technically he outranks the akarenti, he is completely under the older man's spell.

GENERAL CHRIBAC

Bubac's domineering older brother, Chribac, is the Fifth Legion's new general. He was promoted a few months ago, transferred from his post under General Ramillah of Indrisa. He inherited a demoralized force severely depleted by fighting with sufik warriors. Unlike most Theran generals, Chribac is accustomed to the more subtle fighting tactics used against bandits in Indrisa, where his mentor General Ramillah managed to outmaneuver the jaraput and pit them against one other or against the fearsome Pathalan raiders. Chribac believes he can take similar advantage of factions within the sufik. However, he fails to understand just how strongly the jinari are united by their hatred of the Therans.

Keen observers of military politics expect Chribac to suffer a dramatic failure soon. He's an impetuous troll, especially when he has something to prove. And he hates the fact that his obviously unqualified younger brother made general before he did. He wants to show Bubac up by striking a decisive blow against the sufik—but he hasn't been in Marac long enough to know what a futile hope that is.

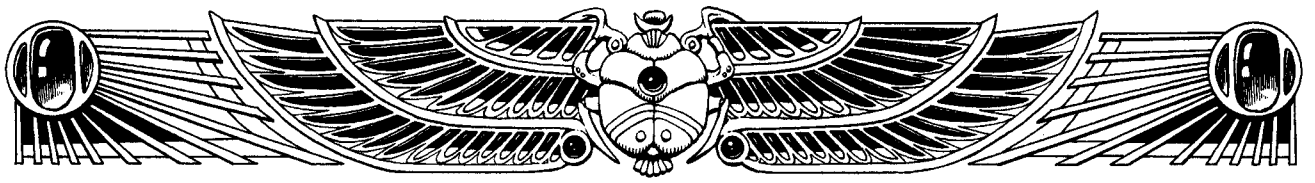
Because his brother respects M'zyu, Chribac underestimates the akarenti. He has been heard to question M'zyu's authority and even accuse him of usurping Bubac's power. If Chribac were more perceptive, he'd see what a dangerous rival M'zyu is. For his part, the cool-headed M'zyu seems to be giving Chribac plenty of rope to hang himself with—which this hothead is likely to do before too long.

DOSSUTH EL-LANDRO

Laconic, learned Dossuth El-Landro is one of the most prominent theraalhar to actively support the jinari rebellion. He's a tall, ragged-looking elf, the eldest son of the Landro family—they used to be of House Thaloss and ruled Maracazar during the Scourge. Dossuth now claims the right to administer Marac on behalf of its people, though he does not advocate the overthrow of the great sultan.

It took Dossuth a while to become interested in politics. As a young man, he traveled extensively throughout the Empire and spent quite a few years as a mercenary warrior in Creana. When his father died, Dossuth returned to Maracazar to take over the family's lucrative horse-trading concern. At that point he got entangled with the city's embittered theraalhar, who longed to recover their lost status and looked to Dossuth as their savior.

When the rebellion began, Dossuth declared that the true allegiance of the theraalhar lay with the jinari. Marac was the true home of jinari and theraalhar alike, his argument went. After a mob of supposedly off-duty soldiers burned his place of business, Dossuth retreated to the countryside and joined the sufik. His new friends, of course, were delighted to discover that he was a master wizard adept. Since then, this unlikely freedom fighter has rallied many young theraalhar to his cause. They all ride together as a mounted raider troop, calling themselves the Free Theraalhar and borrowing tactics from their



sufik allies. Some officials also believe that Dossuth commands theraalhar underground activities in the Four Cities. M'zyu has placed a sizable price on Dossuth's head and raises it on a regular basis. Several noted adepts have died trying to claim the bounty.

KORVO

Korvo is the ranking sufik leader, the one they call their chief of chieftains. People describe him as a hearty, strapping ork with a remarkably long mustache. He's said to be utterly fearless, cheerful in the face of death. Of course, the death he's facing is usually someone else's. As a formidable cavalryman and swordmaster adept, he has yet to find a foe to match him on the battlefield. Korvo is also celebrated for his generosity of spirit; he is well-known for sharing glory with his fellow chieftains. Even without the backing of the jinari, this charismatic warrior would likely have risen to the top.

Korvo's one weakness, if you can call it that, is his need to personally lead battles. The sufik's boldest raids usually have him in the forefront. M'zyu would like nothing better to see Korvo captured in one of these assaults. He's said to look forward to meeting Korvo with relish—and with respect. Likewise, Korvo is said to have expressed a certain, perverse admiration for M'zyu's tenacity in hunting him.

Not really a serious strategist, Korvo leaves complex decisions up to his jinari masters. He leads mainly by inspiration, a bold and dashing Name-giver face on a rebellion led by mysterious spirits.

OVERGOVERNOR LESHOLEM

That Marac is anything but a prized posting should not surprise the astute reader. Since the war began, four overgovernors have been recalled in career-ending disgrace. Any ambitious official who learns that his name is on the short list for Overgovernor of Marac does his level best remove himself from the race. Therefore, only dolts and fools tend to make the final cut.

The current overgovernor, an elf Named Lesholem of House Thaloss, is precisely this sort of uninspiring, vacillating leader. Nearly two hundred years old, she is a querulous old biddy who snaps at servants over trivia to relieve her near-constant tension. In her desperate quest to avoid error, she rejects any plan or initiative that could possibly be construed as bold. She is careful to secure the approval from the Arbitorium before beginning any course of action, so that her superiors will bear equal or worse blame if things go wrong. According to a joke making the rounds of Maracazar, Lesholm is so rarely seen in public because she must wait for the Arbitorium's approval before getting dressed every morning.

What really matters to Lesholem is her collection of antique Maracan rugs and her beloved pack of small, yipping lap dogs. (Not the usual assemblage of bureaucratic lackeys, you understand, but actual canines. They're always underfoot, smell like wet wool even when they're perfectly dry and have a disturbing fondness for Name-giver ankles.)

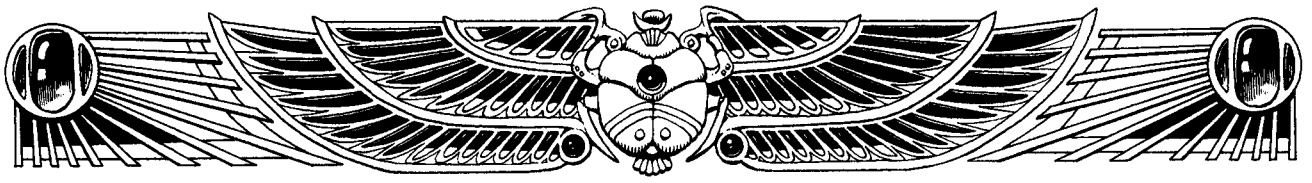
M'ZYU

The real power among Marac's Theran occupiers is M'zyu, akarenti of Maracazar. In any city-based civil war, the spymaster is the true general, and M'zyu fills that role to perfection. He is a slim elf of middle years, with perfectly symmetrical facial features that seldom reveal his true emotions. Once an admiral in the Theran Navy, M'zyu is a veteran of the destruction of Thirimdada during the re-conquest of Indrisa. He retired soon afterward and lobbied for appointment to the post of akarenti in Marac after hearing one too many infuriating anecdotes about the bungling of his predecessor. The post of spymaster in the Maracan capital is every bit as popular among War College careerists as the province's overgovernorship is among Arbitorium officials, so Grand Marshal Jolokkos Jolokkarian was more than happy to appoint the one man apparently fool enough to actually request the job.

M'zyu maintains no illusions about the nature of his task. If Thera wishes to retain Marac, M'zyu must make the cost of rebellion higher than the cost of submission to the rebels. His efficient, determined effort to destroy the underground networks in the Four Cities is only the beginning. He has also instituted what he calls "repayment with interest." If a jinari-controlled Horror destroys a home and kills a family in the Theran quarter, M'zyu destroys the homes and businesses of twenty suspected rebel sympathizers. If a Theran soldier dies at the hands of sufik tribesmen, M'zyu executes a dozen sufik prisoners in Maracazar's central square. M'zyu rejects the notion that the Therans must try to retain the sympathies of the aalhar and theraalhar. M'zyu doesn't care about sympathy. He wants obedience.

M'zyu may be turning the tide in Maracazar; fewer incidents of terror have occurred there since he took up his post. Violent incidents in the other cities have escalated, however, so it may be that the rebels have simply moved their fight to less hostile territory.

Other Theran officials in Marac, from the generals and admirals to the overgovernor, look to M'zyu for advice and guidance. As he proves himself in Maracazar, they are increasingly less likely to act without his consent.



ADMIRAL PARRAGEA

Another recent addition to the Theran military leadership in Marac, Admiral Parragea is a single-minded ork hungry for glory. She inherited the Third Fleet at half-strength with a body of sailors who were thoroughly demoralized by the suicide of their last admiral, who killed himself after a rakken attack on his flagship, the behemoth *Incinerator*. Parragea, a veteran of duty in the political quagmire otherwise known as the province of Talea, is happy to be stationed in the Empire's most difficult battlefield. Marac's war may be dangerous, but at least it's straightforward. She dreams of the jinari Horrorship, which she has yet to see, and reportedly salivates upon hearing reports of it. She wants to destroy that ship, no matter what the cost. In a number of engagements with jinari-controlled Horrors, she has demonstrated no concern for the safety of her crews or the integrity of her vessels. She wants her name to ring through Theran history as the admiral who defeated the Horrorship and kept Marac for the Empire. Nothing else matters.

Predictably, Parragea cares little for military politics. She is rude to the overgovernor and has little time for her peers. M'zyu reportedly thinks her an idiot, but a possibly useful one; if she does manage to destroy the Horrorship, that would greatly boost Theran morale.

GRAND SULTAN QUFIRA

The Grand Sultan of Marac is a puppet, a prattling fool who exists to lend an air of legitimacy to the Theran regime. A middle-aged human, Qufira seems to be a serious fellow until he opens his mouth. Everything he says is either a repetition of something that someone else just uttered or a pompous platitude. The only spark of cleverness he shows is in coaxing the overgovernor to pay for his luxurious style of living. He presides at Maracazar's many parades, and now and then issues a decree confirming his support for some Theran initiative or other on which he was not consulted. Beyond that, he spends his time raising doves and painting excruciatingly bad pictures of bold sufik maidens riding over the sands brandishing huge curved swords (which real sufik don't carry).

It's just possible that Qufira is smarter than he lets on; by being so obviously ineffectual, he's guaranteed that not even the most bloodthirsty rebel would bother to kill him. If the rebels win, Qufira might well remain Grand Sultan as figurehead, while the real authority—some jinari or theraalhar, like as not—does the real work of governing.

UVIRA

Uvira, a bold and intimidating human with hair the color of copper, is chieftain of the il-sufar. She lives like a Barsaivian ork—seizing life's pleasures and shaking them for all they're worth—and is said to possess half a dozen lovers, including a prominent merchant or two in Maracazar. Witty and sarcastic in manner, Uvira is known for mercilessly taunting any eligible male who does not live up to her exacting standards of masculinity. In the past, her outrageous behavior led Theran officers to hold her at arms' length. They used her in battle but did not seek her advice. When M'zyu took charge of Maracazar, things changed. A cool fish himself, the akarenti finds Uvira personally tiresome but is wise enough to realize that he couldn't possibly ask for a better expert on sufik tactics. He consults her often, which pleases her raging vanity no end.

Uvira has every reason to remain loyal to the Therans; other sufik regard her people as base traitors and will likely massacre the il-sufar should the anti-Theran rebellion succeed. Uvira boasts of her intent to turn the bold sufik leader, Korvo, into a jaraleh after defeating him in single combat. As a cavalryman and archer adept of legendary capabilities, she just might manage to accomplish this feat.

ADMIRAL VONAXI

Opinion on Vonaxi, Admiral of the Fourth Fleet, is sharply divided. Some say this homely dwarf is the sorriest commanding officer in the Theran military. She is the only admiral to ever lose a behemoth and has reportedly become listless and depressed since that defeat. She has ordered her captains to execute cautious patrols and to retreat whenever hard-pressed by aerial Horror attacks. She is said to spend most of her time—and even hold staff meetings—at a *ashi* parlor in the thieves' quarter of Orana.

Others, however, see more to Admiral Vonaxi's actions than meets the eye. Orana's thieves' quarter is said to be a haven for the underground movement, a rumor of which Vonaxi may well be aware. As many observers have pointed out, if Vonaxi really spent all her days there lolling around, drugged to the eyeballs among Thera's enemies, why wouldn't M'zyu have arranged her swift replacement by now? But he's done no such thing. In fact, she meets with M'zyu regularly. These anomalies have led some people to wonder if Vonaxi is laying a trap for the Maracan Resistance, offering herself as a possible double agent. If so, her apparent loss of will is merely artifice intended to speed the rebels' downfall.

TALEA

The presentation by the Talean delegation to the Symposium was an ordeal that the editors of this volume have chosen not to inflict on our readers. The delegation was made up entirely of acolytes of the strange and powerful Talean cult of The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be. Some of them were Theran-born converts employed in the provincial administration; many others were native Taleans. Whether Theran or Talean, however, they talked mostly of abstract theologies. Evidently they believed that their mission during the Symposium was to convert us to their odd beliefs rather than to tell us about their home. They did touch on Talean history, but only in terms of the spread of their cult. They provided no information on trade relations, as they pretend to regard moneymaking as somehow immoral. (From the richness of their garb and their liberal outlay of coins in the Great City's markets, they clearly do not regard the spending *of money as any sort of offense to their bizarre Passion-to-come.) Talea's politics they glossed over as a frenzy of disgraceful behavior unworthy of the attention of serious Name-givers. The arts of Talea did not merit even a mention.*

When assembling this volume back in Throal, we found ourselves at a loss over what to do with this chapter. We considered omitting Talea entirely, so weak was the available material. Then, as luck would have it, we received a manuscript penned by a troubadour now residing in Bartertown, one Stendariel by Name. Entitled My Sojourn In the Land of Poisoners, *it was an account of Stendariel's extensive travels through Talea. His remarkable adventures took him through many levels of Talean society and acquainted him with a number of influential Talean Name-givers. He has kindly given us permission to excerpt relevant portions of his writings here. The volume is also available in its entirety in the Great Library. The headings in this chapter were added by yours truly.*

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records

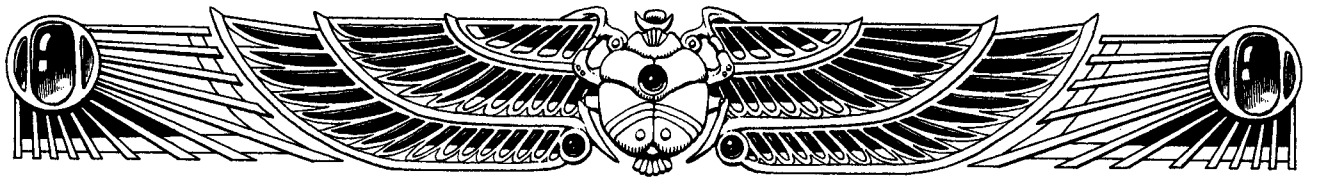
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF A STRANGE PLACE

—As written by Jerriv Forrim

Talea is the westernmost of the Theran provinces, positioned on the northern shore of the Selestrean. Lying to the south and west of the Caralkspur Mountains in Vivane Province, it juts far into the western Selestrean Sea. Its northern regions are temperate and fertile, its southern regions hot and well known for their vineyards. Northern or southern, Talea's people excel at trade—very possibly because they do not care how many corners they cut in making a profit, as Stendariel's account shows. Southern Talea is a place of hot emotions, rich food and underhanded political intriguing. The north prides itself on cool heads, subtly seasoned dishes and equally underhanded political intriguing.

Talea was the first of the provinces conquered by the Therans after their declaration of empire. Our legends of Talea have always depicted the conquest as easy because Talea was divided into squabbling city-states that could not unite long enough to kill a fly. Stendariel's account, however, points to a more complicated truth. In Talea, it appears that the conquered have corrupted their conquerors.

Talea is like a gigantic spiderweb, uneasily shared by five web spinners: traders, signori, dukes, kings and the odd but supremely powerful individual known as the pompate. Each of the spiders has its own role to play in Talean society, though all these roles overlap. Alliances of convenience—between this signori and that duke, this duke and that king, this king and these traders, or



anyone and the Pompate—shift and shatter and change and re-form at a dizzying pace, with no rhyme or reason easily discernable to the outsider. Indeed, from the account given us by Stendariel, it seems the Taleans play with power as children in Barsaive play with colored straws. Toss the straws on the floor and try to pick them up according to the right pattern—but if you choose the wrong straw by blind chance, you lose the game. Life in Talea, at least among persons of importance, appears to be much like that game. And, of course, wherever the powerful may change from month to month or week to week, the common folk cannot hope to be well or safely governed. Brigands and swindlers and opportunists of every stripe seem drawn to Talea like moths to flame, well aware that a lucky guess may bring them a patron who can make them rich beyond imagination's scope before the year has finished its turning. And over all this controlled chaos the Therans preside, taking whatever they find useful from Talea and ignoring the bubbling stew of intrigue. Or trying to, anyway. They don't always succeed, as the following story will show.

ON THE TRADERS

The beginning of Stendariel's tale, which follows immediately below, paints a clear portrait of one influential group in Talean society: the traders, known for their sharp wits and sharper knives.

AN UNANTICIPATED EPISODE OF POVERTY

—As written by Stendariel, troubadour of everywhere

When I met Robedoro in Bartertown, I had no way of knowing that he would bring me a host of misfortunes in the months ahead. He was a trader from Talea, and at the time I didn't realize that such a man is distinguished from a pirate only by his possession of a signor's charter.

I was performing in the Juggling Shadowmant tavern, favoring the clientele with a selection of my favorite airs and epics. Doubtless you have heard of me, and you may wonder why a troubadour of my accomplishments should be toiling in such a humble establishment. Here I must admit that I was rather at loose ends. A former partner of mine, the leader of a successful treasure-hunting expedition into the Mist Swamps, had unfortunately failed to pay me my due share of the proceeds in a timely manner. Certain other parties who owed me money were likewise delinquent. I had come to Bartertown to point out this laxity and demand immediate remedy, but had only partial success. While I was there, several people (who shall remain Nameless) dangled a number of interesting propositions in front of me, all of them fitting for a troubadour of my talents. Every attempt to confirm these tentative offers proved the sponsors to be most elusive, and so I was reduced to performing in the Shadowmant, an establishment run by my old friend and former adventuring colleague, Brainbiter the Troll.

I explain these humbling circumstances so that you will understand my actions, which in retrospect seem dreadfully gullible.

I Meet Robedoro, Trader of Talea

One night, after a stirring performance of the legend of Tonlaa and Enard, I was approached by a barrel-shaped dwarf with the deep brown skin of a southern Fekaran. He spoke Sperethiel to me, with a thick Talean accent. (I had met a number of Taleans in my travels, and so knew the sound of their speech.) He introduced himself as Robedoro, and proved himself a hearty fellow with a delightful appreciation for the troubadour's art. He praised my rendition of Tonlaa's tale, and then informed me with a touching show of regret that I had the details wrong. He said it was really the tale of Tassus and Enedetta, two legendary Talean signori.

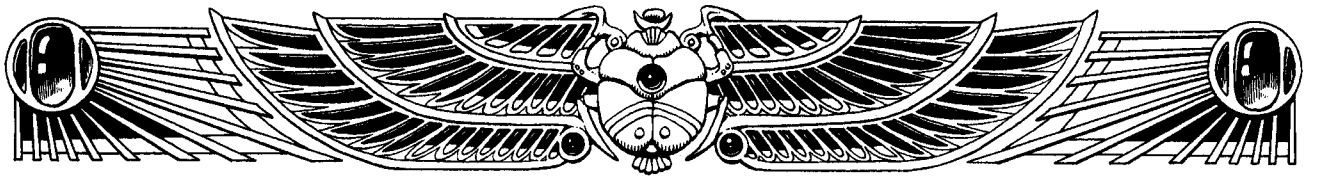
We continued talking, and soon he ventured a proposal. Talea's cities were starved for novel entertainment, he said, and would surely shower an exotic individual like myself with rubies and emeralds. In a month's time, his drakkar would be sailing from Urupa to the Talean city of Pallata. He knew that I was not in a position to pay for my passage in advance, but offered to accept payment once I had established myself in Pallata, where the local duke was a generous patron of the arts. Had I known more about Talea then, I would have smelled the scent of rodent on his breath; Talean dukes rule districts in the countryside, not cities. Cities such as Pallata are the domain of the signori. But I was ignorant of Talean affairs, and so foolishly thought his offer a generous one.

It soon became apparent that none of my Bartertown possibilities were likely to materialize, and so I made my way to Urupa. There I signed a contract confirming my agreement with Robedoro and boarded his drakkar, the *Skimmer*.

ON TRADER'S CHARTERS

Robedoro waited until the *Skimmer* was far out in the Selestrean before showing his true intentions toward me. In a shockingly rude manner, he made it clear that he expected me to act as his personal servant while on board! I informed him in no uncertain terms that I was an artist, not a swabber of decks. I expected that to be the end of the matter. I was wrong.

"You are whatever I tell you to be," he stated with a leer, revealing teeth whose rottenness I had not earlier noted. He



then pulled out the contract and explained to me the finer points of Talean jurisprudence. He told me that he possessed a trader's charter granted him by Giano Aldrichio, the signori of Pallata. The charter gave him the right to do business throughout Talea, to cite the Aldrichio name when guarantees of his conduct were demanded, and to interpret certain Sperethiel words in particular ways in the realm of contract law. This last charter right spelled my doom. A gloating Robedoro swiftly flipped through the pages of the contract, pointing out instances where the Sperethiel word for "retain" should be read as "forfeit," where "year" meant eternity, and "freeman" meant "slave." When I rejected his argument as patently absurd, he seemed genuinely aggrieved. He had paid good money for that charter, and it meant what he said it meant. We were in a Talean ship, so Talean law applied. He expected me to meekly bow my head when presented with these legal facts. I told him that if he expected a free Barsaivian to accept this Talean nonsense, he had been swindled by the good signor of Pallata.

Our argument then shifted footing. Robedoro pointed out that each of his men was an accomplished air sailor or sky raider adept, and that every troubadour's trick I possessed could not avail me against them all. I entertained the possibility that Robedoro might be bluffing, but decided that the cost of calling that bluff might be steeper than temporary subservience should I have guessed wrong. I therefore set about learning the finer points of deck swabbing.

In the next few days I was subjected to even more indignities that caused me to swear dire vengeance against the vile Robedoro. I also took the opportunity to master the Talean tongue.

ON THE TRADERS' ROLE IN TALEAN LIFE

It is truly wondrous to learn a language magically. At the beginning of the voyage, I knew nothing of Talean speech. By the end, I could easily understand the conspiratorial discussions between the traders. And I learned many useful things thereby.

First, I learned that Robedoro, though captain, was no tyrant of the air. His fellow crew members were forever disputing his decisions. The relationship between the inhabitants of the *Skimmer* reminded me greatly of most adventuring parties to which I have belonged. There was a nominal leader—Robedoro, in this case—whose authority derived entirely from the forcefulness of his personality. His fellows felt free to challenge him on any issue, and many shipboard hours were consumed by trivial, roundabout arguments. The repetitiveness of these disputes aided my Talean vocabulary immensely, especially in the realm of invective and vulgarity, though it often brought the participants close to blows. Force was clearly the final arbiter aboard the *Skimmer*. No crew member wished to be the first to strike at Robedoro, whose fighting prowess they seemed to fear. Of course, this did not stop them from complaining bitterly about his choice of allies.

I realized that chartered traders like Robedoro, unreliable as they were, served as intermediaries in a complex game of political alliances played by a large number of participants. The traders, who would be outlaws in any other land, were embraced by the elite in Talea. They could act in the margins of society (and legality) on behalf of powerful patrons who could disclaim all knowledge of them if a stratagem went awry. They were go-betweens, spies, kidnappers and assassins. Their legitimate trading activities were merely a pretense to justify their movement through Talean society.

Robedoro's fellow traders seemed displeased to find themselves working for the signor of Pallata. Though it is necessary to obtain a signor's favor in order to get a charter, no crew of traders works for the same patron for very long. In fact, the crew of the *Skimmer* had apparently taken action recently for another employer *against* Signor Aldrichio, and feared that his hiring them was a ruse meant to lure them into a trap. Robedoro hacked his way as best he could through their repetitious, tangled arguments, reminding them again and again that men as powerful as Signor Gian Aldrichio cannot be bothered to hold grudges against mere traders. Apparently, they are all too busy holding grudges against their rich and powerful peers.

By joining this band of pirates, I had inadvertently become a pawn in this strange game. The signor of Pallata wished to acquire certain lands from his local rival, the Duke of Sercicia. The duke wished to marry the daughter of the signor of Uomonza. This girl, headstrong and apparently quite silly, had demanded of the Duke of Sercicia a gift from each of the Theran Empire's provinces. Each was fiendishly difficult to obtain: a death-mask from a Creanan tomb, a bottle containing a Maracan jinari, and so on. Apparently this young woman had heard of the supreme achievements of Barsaivian troubadours—which was gratifying—and had demanded one as a slave, which was not.

So the Duke of Sercicia had hired another trader band, led by a jocular and flamboyant troll woman Named Memarva, to enslave a great Barsaivian troubadour. Aldrichio then hired his own trader band, the crew of the *Night's Edge*, to intercept Memarva's drakkar and capture the troubadour. Unfortunately, the troubadour was slain in the ensuing naval engagement. Aldrichio therefore turned to the *Skimmer* crew and ordered them to find and enslave a gullible wandering troubadour like myself. Robedoro intended to deliver me to Signor Aldrichio, who would then pass me on to the Duke of Sercicia in exchange for the lands the signor wanted.

So much I had managed to piece together over the course of our journey. Then, when we were very near the journey's end, a dragon-spawn flew out from behind the clouds—and I learned still more of the dazzling complexity of Talean politics.

On the Intervention of a Mysterious Individual

I had never seen a drake before. It looked like a troll-sized dragon. It was noticeably Talean; I doubt any drake of Barsaive wears flowing robes or breastplates inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The design on the drake's breastplate was the numeral one surrounded by a nimbus of light; I later learned that this symbol represented Prima, an unusual Passion that Taleans refer to as The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be. (This Passion is most odd; I will speak more of Prima futher on.)

The traders shouted, "Damned Enici!" and reached for their weapons. (The Enici are a warlike order of warriors devoted to Prima; my gracious hosts had assumed that the drake was one of them.)

Before any trader could fire at the swooping drake, it sent them writhing to the deck with a well-cast bone shatter spell. I cast about for cover, but to no avail. The drake grabbed me in its massive talons and soared toward the sun. A windling crew member gave chase for a while, but soon tired and dropped away.

After a long period of silent flight, I girded up my courage and asked the creature what it meant to do with me. Its only reply was to shift me into a chokehold, and I lost consciousness.

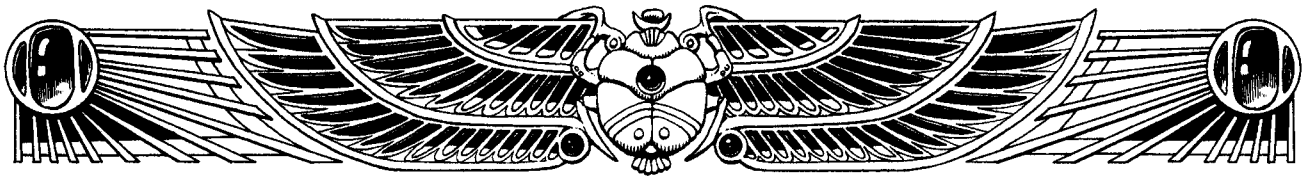
On the Dukes

I should have known better than to ask. The creature's civilized clothing clearly indicated that it was no mere carnivore. It turned out that the drake represented another force eager to place the Duke of Sercicia in his debt. So, when next I woke, I was in the duke's possession.

Water awakened me—a bucket of it, greasy and cold, flung roughly upon me. I gasped and sputtered, and when I finally collected my senses, found myself in a horse stable with two burly, dirt-smeared orks at my side. One of them had been so kind as to rouse me. Their postures told me they were ready to clout me if I misbehaved. Not for the first time, I resolved to learn the warrior Discipline so I could master unarmed combat. For the moment, though, I was at the orks' mercy.

A third ork appeared, this one clothed in long velvet robes. She had white hair and a patrician air. Unlike most elderly orks, she was aging gracefully. She introduced herself as Luisa de Voltura, chamberlain to the Duke of Sercicia, and explained that she had come to determine whether I was in fact a great troubadour of Barsaive, as Pader Vivanoce had claimed. I asked who Pader Vivanoce was, and the dirty orks gasped. They could not believe that someone did not know the dour, manipulative confidant to the pompate. When I told them I had never heard of the pompate either, they turned pale as new milk. My friend with the bucket dropped it on his own foot, but was too busy gaping at me to howl.

Luisa de Voltura then told me that I'd better start singing unless I wanted to be fed to the dogs. Though I have always disdained command performances, I proved my vocal brilliance to her satisfaction, and my treatment immediately changed for the better. I was taken to a salon in the ancient ducal palace, where I was able to wash up. I was fed and given sumptuous, if unfamiliar, clothing. Heodori, one of the duke's manservants, was ordered to see to my needs. He took pity on me and explained my new situation.



On Rights of Fedali

Heodori told me that I now belonged to the Duke of Sercicia. I disputed that claim briefly, as any good Barsaivian would, but then fell silent and allowed him to tell me about the man who laid claim to my body and soul. I also learned a great deal of the way things work among Talea's powerful, which I shall herewith relate.

Sercicia is one of Talea's seven powerful dukes and, like his fellows, holds what the Taleans call rights of *fedali* over a large portion of land in the province. The laws of fedali, well established centuries before the Theran conquest, proclaim that all landowners within a duchy must pay fees to the duke when they profit from the fruits of the land through farming, forestry, mining or the use of rivers to power mills. Those obligated to pay are known as *erfani*, and are considered to belong to their duke—not as slaves, exactly, but something akin to that in many respects. For example, erfani may not move from a duchy or change their way of making a living without their duke's permission. In exchange for the fees paid and obligations owed, a duke must protect his erfani from bandits and marauding armies. Each duke supports a small standing army, made up of professional mercenaries, to ward off bandits. When times are lean, he turns his soldiers into bandits and sends them into a neighboring duchy for a spate of looting.

Talea's dukes are forever squabbling with one another over the precise boundaries of their territories, and are therefore natural enemies. The Duchy of Sercicia is a large island off the southern tip of Talea, and so its borders are not really open to dispute, but most other duchies are patchwork affairs whose borders are not easy to determine.

The rights of fedali work in two directions, as you might expect. The dukes hold these rights over the erfani, but each duke also owes rights of fedali to one of Talea's three competing kings. As the erfani pay the duke, so the duke must pay to his king a portion of the proceeds from his land, or send soldiers to fight the king's wars. Unlike the erfani, however, a duke does not owe the rights of fedali for life. Instead, each duke renews his vows to a king every five years. As the deadline for renewal approaches, the duke gains bargaining power. He may wring concessions from his current king or seek a new one. A strong king may threaten to invade the lands of a duke whose continued loyalty he questions, using the troops granted him by other dukes. Fortunately for the kings, the no two ducal contracts ever come up for renewal at the same time.

When a king dies, a duke may succeed him—a feature of Talean law that gives the dukes who serve a particular king something to fight for among themselves. Taleans consider it bad form to openly campaign for the throne before the current king expires, and so such jockeying must be carried out with subtlety and secrecy.

In addition to the kings, Talean dukes must also deal with *signori* and *paders* on their lands. Paders, the Talean equivalent of questors, serve the Temple—the center of the powerful cult devoted to the worship of The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be. Every bit as active in political and business affairs as it is in spiritual pursuits, the Temple possesses rights of fedali over tracts of land within all the duchies. Naturally, the dukes want to displace the paders from their lands, while the Temple wants to expand its properties at the dukes' expense.

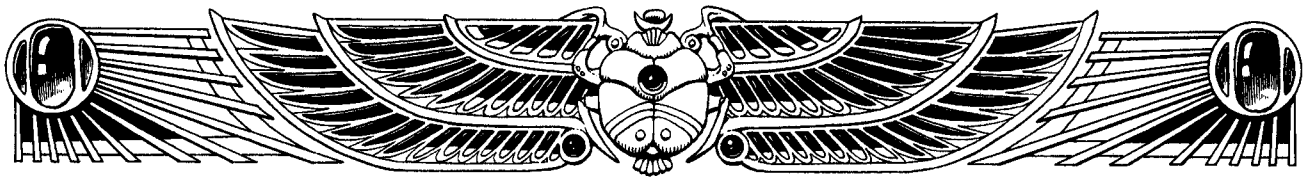
The signori, who rule Talea's cities, are another thorn in the ducal side. Talea's dukes have always claimed rights of fedali over the cities, which the signori have always rejected. A strong duke frequently sends his armies to besiege to a city until its signori pays up—which the signori invariably does, while loudly condemning the payments as unlawful extortions to avoid setting a legal precedent. The signori often respond by hiring mercenary armies to harass ducal forces; these armies cease their activities in return for so-called reparations. The legal advocates who work for the signori are skilled at finding past infractions for which these reparations are supposedly due. As the reader can plainly see, the balance of power between king, duke, signori and pader is an ever-shifting and precarious one.

On Being Named a Duke

Under normal circumstances—as far as anything but controlled chaos may be said to be normal in Talea—the eldest child of the reigning duke inherits the dukedom upon his father's or mother's death. If the family judges the eldest child incapable of rule or unsuitable for the position, the title passes to the next eldest, and so on. If there are no heirs of age, however, or if a king feels a duke is not fulfilling his obligations, the king may set a candidate of his own upon the ducal throne.

To designate a candidate to replace a duke or fill a vacant position, the king must seek the permission of the head of the Temple. This individual, known as the pompate, is Talea's chief judicial as well as spiritual authority. In theory, the pompate's decree, known as a severance, is usually enough to persuade a reigning duke to step down. In reality, however, the severed duke has nothing more to lose, and so the king must dislodge him by force. Unless the duke submits swiftly to defeat, another king may step in to defend him—and then the proverbial troll is truly among the windlings.

In practice, then, a king who wishes to replace a duke must select a candidate who can aid him in displacing the current duke by raising a strong army. Cash-poor candidates need not apply. Commoners are likewise disqualified: the candidate must be able to trace his lineage back to a noble family. In a crucial decision taken in 1434 TH, three years after the Theran reclamation of Talea, the then-pompate declared that Theran noble houses counted as "noble families" for the purposes of this ancient law.



From this, one might expect that the Therans have stepped in and taken over most Talean dukedoms—or that they could do so if they wished. They have not—at least, not yet. One peculiarity of Talean law has so far stayed the Empire's hand: namely, the power of the pompate. As part of issuing a severance, the pompate must approve the candidate appointed to replace the severed duke. But the pompate is exceedingly unlikely to approve any candidate who is not a devoted follower of the Talean Passion Prima. The possibility of becoming duke is so attractive that many Theran nobles doing business in Talea have converted to Primaism in order to qualify for the position. (I shall discuss the profound ramifications of this choice further on.)

The title of duke is attractive not only for the income the duchy provides, but also for the powers that ducal rank confers. As a symbol of his or her link to the land, a Name-giver installed as a duke undergoes a reNaming ceremony in which he adopts the Name of his duchy. As is usual with reNamings, the subject of the ritual loses any magical talents he previously possessed because the ritual changes his True Pattern. However, he also gains legendary powers associated with the dukedom. Further, any talents enhanced or gained by a duke while he holds the Name of his duchy are passed on to the next holder of the Name. The duchies all go back for centuries, so the Name of each duke has accumulated great power. Little wonder that Talean dukes by custom fight their battles personally—each is a terror on the field of honor, walking his or her Discipline path at impossibly high circles.

Of course, it may take a duke a while to learn to wield his newfound powers effectively. First and foremost, potential dukes require political connections, a radiant pedigree and buckets of silver. Few candidates are additionally gifted with the innate capacity to become adepts.

This renaming and bestowing of legendary powers is reminscent of the passing-on of ancestral memories between the shivalahalas of the t'skrang aropagoi.
—t'saanas v'shala

After his or her reNaming, the duke may take on some of the personality traits attributed to the legendary holders of the ducal title. From what Heodori told me, this effect is subtle; we are not speaking of anything so dramatic as spirit possession. Moreveover, each Name-giver interacts with the ducal title's pre-existing True Pattern in a slightly different way. One duke of Amalvetti might take on the boldness of his predecessors, while the next might acquire their well-known fondness for hunting. In general, dukes appear to gain the traits needed to hold their posts. Even candidates who seem poorly qualified are likely to grow into the ducal role after the reNaming ritual.

On Consorto and Consorta

The wife of a male duke, or the husband of a female one, is known as the duchess *consorta* or duke *consorto*, respectively, to indicate that the title is honorary and confers no official power. Unofficial power, however, frequently exists in plenty—not surprising when one considers the convoluted nature of Talean politics. Many a consort operates behind the throne, as it were, using personal force of will aided by whatever wealth and connections the consort brings to the marriage. It has lately become common for Talean dukes to seek Theran consorts in order to connect themselves to a Theran noble house.

Under the Talean code of honor, an unfaithful consort is a terrible disgrace. Consorts are therefore expected to lead lives of strict propriety. The murder of a faithless consort and his or her illicit lover is condoned, if not encouraged. Much blood is shed, especially in southern Talea, over notions of honor in general. And throughout Talea, slights to the honor of dukes, kings and other commanders of armies can lead to war.

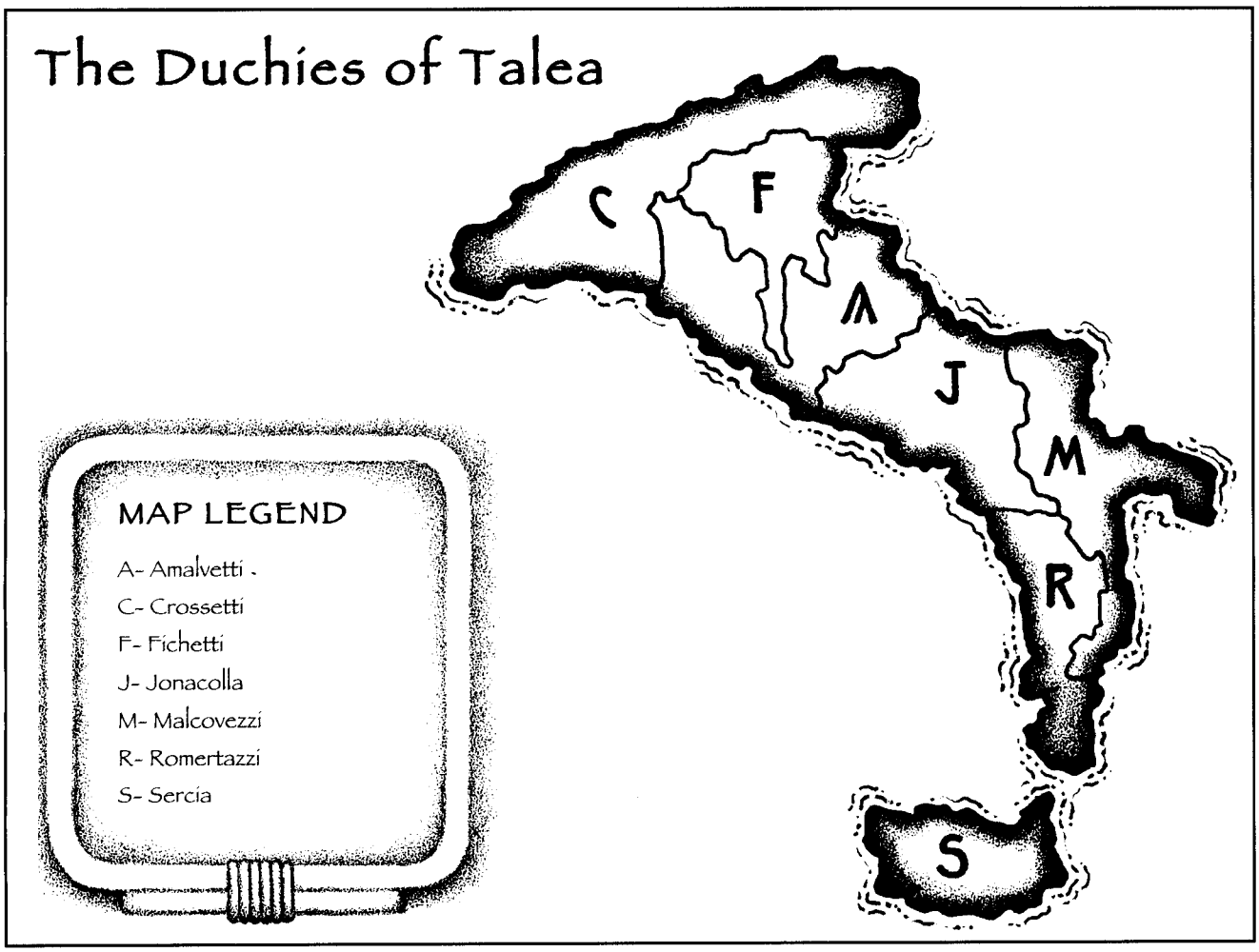
On the Great Dukes of Talea

Gossip about other important political figures was the order of the day at the court of Sercicia. From Heodri, and from my own meetings with the man, I learned rather more than I cared to know about the personality and activities of Sercicia himself. I was also able to glean a certain amount of information about the other six dukes of the strange and fascinating land in which I found myself held captive.

On the Duke of Sercicia

Over the months I spent as his tame troubadour, I came to respect Sercicia, though not to like him. (It is difficult to like someone who begins your acquaintance by acquiring you for his bride as though you were a pair of jeweled slippers.) The island of Sercicia has long been a haven for seafaring cutthroats—and so, following in the traditions of his forefathers, Sercicia is more of a pirate king than a civilized duke. Most of his servants were retired killers, except for a few wiser souls like Luisa de Voltura. The duke himself is a man who knows what he wants and gets it—in other words, a thoroughly vulgar swaggerer. His manners at the dinner table sickened me on more than one occasion.

Successive dukes of Sercicia have kept their power and position through strong alliances to the King of the South; Sercicia's pirates raid just about everyone else, from dukes to men of the Temple. The duke sees to it that none of his peers or rivals feel singled out. Greed, rather than political advancement, drives most of Sercicia's actions. As he told

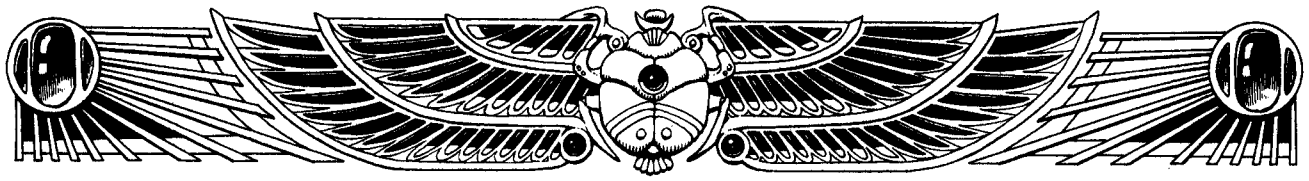


me with a shrug, "Piracy is my business," as if stealing on the high seas was an endeavor no less honorable than farming or fishing.

He also indulges in a Talean duke's traditional pastime: harrying the city-dwellers in his domain, in this case the inhabitants of Pallata. Signor Giano Aldrichio of Pallata, like his duke, is a pirate who holds political legitimacy. Sercicia and Aldrichio pretend to be friendly rivals, though their men often attack one another on sight. Dozens die in this feud every year.

Though he has Talean enemies, Sercicia reserves his greatest bile for the Therans. He imagines that Talea will be an independent state one day, free from foreign influence. Unlike most such dreamers, he doesn't envision himself as the leader of this state, or anything more than a behind-the-curtains figure in a rebellion. He prefers to leave that role to others—perhaps to the republicans of Eziano, whom he sees as an ideal weapon to use against the Therans. The republicans are an odd group—Talean to the core, but nonetheless acquainted with the greatest principle enshrined in the Council Compact, that every Name-giver is as worthy to choose the course of his own life as another. Incredibly (for a pack of Taleans, at any rate), they wish to govern their city according to this principle. Sercicia sees their odd notions, combined with their undeniable flair for declaiming inspiring public speeches, as the perfect vehicle for whipping up the fervor of the common man to throw off what he views as the Theran oppressors. To this end, he maintains a curious alliance with student leaders at the University of Malcovezzi, and with Lograno, Chancellor of the republican city of Eziano. The Duke of Malcovezzi and the Duchess of Frechetti find these alliances particularly disturbing.

(The student of political tangles may be interested to note that the Duchess of Frechetti is currently seeking Sercicia's help against the Duke of Amalvetti ... despite the fact that she is ready and willing to take any action that might inconvenience Sercicia's republican allies. This bizarre, convoluted relationship is a prime example of the labyrinthine nature of Talean affairs. Talean leaders always seem ready to deal with a lesser enemy in order to strike a blow against a greater one.)



Sercicia's marriage to the daughter of Signor Adanna of Uomonza appears to be an attempt to cultivate Adanna as a possible republican supporter. Sercicia's logic seems to go as follows: Signor Adanna opposes the pompate, and the pompate opposes the republicans, so Adanna is a likely republican sympathizer. Not long after his wedding, Sercicia began to curse his father-in-law, so I surmise that his overtures in this area were less than fruitful.

Sercicia is a troll, a high-circle swordmaster adept and—most unusually—a boatman adept as well! Normally, only t'skrang may follow this Discipline. However, because several ancient Sercician dukes were t'skrang, the talents of the boatman Discipline have become part of the True Pattern inherited by each Duke of Sercicia during the reNaming ritual.

On the Duke of Amalvetti

The Duke of Amalvetti, an elf with impeccable taste in dress, is an impudent newcomer to ducal politics. As a mere commoner named Marco Cloud-Dancer, he distinguished himself as the head of a trader company, perfoming deeds of underhanded derring-do for the pompate, the King of the North, and various dukes, duchesses and signori. There was, however, a drawback to working with him. Cloud-Dancer had a habit of discovering incriminating things about his patrons while fulfilling their wishes, and so always left behind him a cloud of resentment and obligation. Talean observers expected that someday someone would put Cloud-Dancer's head on the end of a pike. Instead, the pompate and the King of Arancia, the leader of the land to the west of Talea (whose rulers have always been far too involved in Talean affairs for Talean liking), made him a duke. The behind-the-scenes maneuvering behind that decision remains obscure, though Heodori believes that the pompate meant Cloud-Dancer's elevation to ducal rank as a rebuke to the Kings of the North and South. The pompate also embraced Amalvetti as his nephew, which lends credence to Heodori's theory. (Paders of Prima are supposed to remain celibate, but in Talean politics the "nephew" or "niece" of a powerful pader of the Temple is understood to be his illegitimate child.)

Amalvetti reportedly mourns the loss of his sky raider talents, even though the reNaming made him an accomplished cavalryman adept. Some say he plans to relearn the sky raider Discipline from scratch and regain his lost talents. His efforts would certainly benefit future aspirants to his duchy, of which there are many. Amalvetti has not yet sought a consort, but should do so soon in order to secure an heir and make his duchy less appealing to would-be successors. His melancholy over his lost Discipline is said to have impaired his romantic inclinations, which were once the stuff of legend. His fit of moroseness, however, has not prevented him from cementing his alliances with the Temple and the King of Arancia, and thereby tweaking the noses (so to speak) of the Duke of Crossetti and the Duchess of Frechetti. (One juicy bit of unconfirmed gossip identifies the duchess as Cloud-Dancer's onetime lover.)

On the Duke of Crossetti

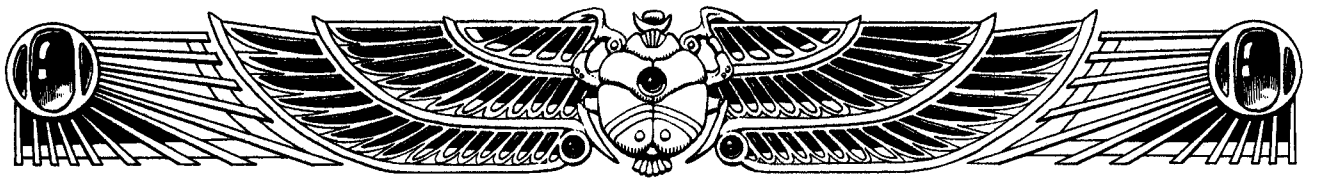
This seemingly imperturbable human has considerable surface charm that allegedly masks a cold, cruel temperament. He has seven sons by two wives, and all of his offspring regard him with varying degrees of contempt. They have allied themselves with his enemies, of which he has no shortage. Chief among them is the Temple. Crossetti makes a great show of personal piety, but is too proud to bow down before any of Prima's mortal representatives. Instead, he expects the abbots and priests in his duchy to bow to him. More than once, his soldiers have burned the temples and monasteries of those who refused. Three of Crossetti's sons have become paders of the Temple, where they use their position to do everything they can to actively oppose him.

Crossetti also launches frequent raids against the neighboring duchies of Amalvetti and Frechetti—whether simply to annoy his rivals or to conquer all of northern Talea, no one is quite certain. Now and then his forces breach Talea's border to attack duchies in Arancia, a kingdom that lies to the west of the province, across the Selestrean Sea. (Arancia plays its own role in Talea's interesting history, of which I shall speak further on.) Crossetti's staunchest ally at the moment is the King of the North, who regards Crossetti's military strength and fighting prowess as stabilizing forces in the region. (As Heodori put it, in the face of Crossetti's superior might, the other two northern duchies can't get up to much mischief. But Crossetti isn't quite strong enough to take over the entire north, and so the result is a rough balance of power.)

On the Duchess of Frechetti

I had occasion to perform for the Duchess of Frechetti when she came to call on Sercicia. She wanted the duke's pirate vessels to suppress trade along Amalvetti's southern shores, for reasons that seemed more personal than profitable. She was willing to pay Sercicia well for the services of his ocean-going erfani, and I believe they did indeed reach an agreement. The duchess, a lovely elf with a splendid head of shining black hair, was intelligent and charismatic, but extremely demanding. The servants found her overly fussy and prone to fits of pique, and went to great lengths to avoid attending her personally more than once during her visit.

The Duchy of Frechetti has belonged to the same family for many generations, and the current duchess appears to have an insatiable appetite for the fawning flattery of underlings. She brought a gallery of fops with her, who fell all over them-



selves thinking up ever more outrageous metaphors for her bright blue eyes, dark hair and pale complexion. (Some of these people ought never to be let near any civilized language. The verbal butchery in which they indulged was enough to make a grown man cry.) The duchess's advisors did *not* impress me, but Luisa de Voltura later informed me that Frechetti's political instincts are honed to a razor sharpness. She pinches silver pieces until they beg for mercy, and her erfani fear her more than love her. This duchess has a particular reputation for independence in Talean affairs, playing the three kings against one another and even managing to hold the Temple at arm's length. The only political force in Talea with which she has not been able to deal skillfully are the republicans who recently overthrew the signori of Eziano. Known for its marvelous canals, Eziano lies within the Duchy of Frechetti, and its deposed signori is the duchess's cousin. The duchess apparently regards the republicans' existence as a personal affront, and is working hard to undo their accomplishments.

The Duchess of Frechetti is a mighty beastmaster and swordmaster adept.

On the Duchess of Jonacolla

The human Duchess of Jonacolla is an aging beauty of Theran noble blood, and one of three Theran dukes. The Duchy of Jonacolla often lies at the heart of Talean political disputes because it contains the city of Uomonza, the pompate's seat of power. That alone made it a natural target for Theran ambitions. The current duchess, one Krizalla of House Gascilium, uses the nethermancer abilities that came with her title quite ably to hold onto power. How she came by that power makes quite a tale.

Since the founding of Prima's cult, dukes and duchesses of Jonacolla have fought to hold back the expansionist tendencies of Talea's pompates. In 1489 TH, Pompate Justice III declared war on the then-Duke of Jonacolla, who had repeatedly offended him by what is euphemistically termed "a lack of piety." (This charge can be and is used to describe almost any offense in Talea, from an excessive taste for assassinations to wearing the wrong color shoes on the last day of the week.) Justice III then sent a small force of Temple soldiers on what was meant to be a symbolic invasion, which would bring home to the duke, in a very pointed manner, the error of his ways. The duke was then supposed to repent, humbly beg to be reconciled with the Temple, grovel enough to soothe the pompate's wounded pride, and be formally welcomed back into Justice III's good graces. Except that the Duke of Jonacolla refused to play the game. Instead, the pompate's feint escalated into the fiercest war to sweep Talea since the Scourge. This struggle was dubbed the War of the Rakes, after an emblem worn by the pompate's forces. (They pledged to rake the impious Duke of Jonacolla from his high office as a gardener rakes dead leaves from a flowerbed. The *anguish* that such an overstretched metaphor inflicts on a Barsaivian troubadour's soul ... !)

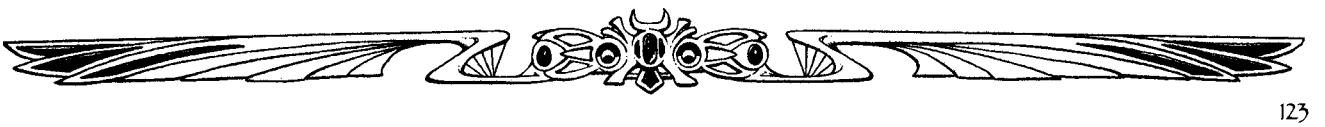
Seeking to curry the pompate's favor, the Kings of the North and South displayed rare unity and supported the removal of the duke. This move in turn unified Talea's other dukes, an almost unheard-of thing. But they so disliked the precedent set by this exercise of combined ecclesiastic and royal power that their own differences seemed petty by comparison. Even the Therans, who usually allow the Taleans to wage war on one another unmolested, were pulled into the fighting. The overgovernor supported the pompate, but intriguers from various Theran noble houses aided their favorite dukes and made astonishing profits selling arms and mercenaries to all sides.

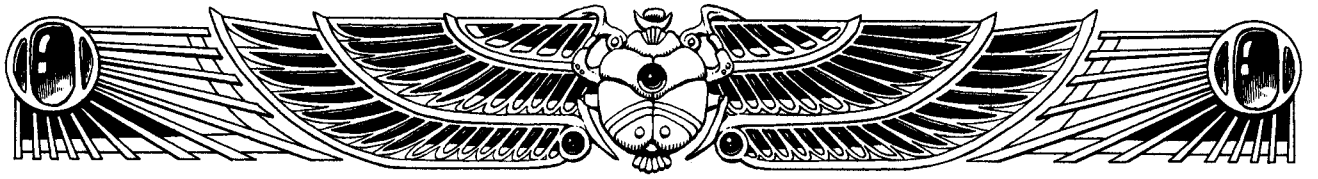
After much loss of life, the Duke of Jonacolla was slain on the battlefield along with the dukes of Malcovezzi and Romertazzi. (These two duchies lie immediately to the south of the Duchy of Jonacolla, and had thrown in their lot with their beseiged neighbor.) With three ducal openings, the Theran nobles who had backed the kings and the pompate demanded the right to submit ducal candidates. The overgovernor enthusiastically supported the nobles, hoping that Theran dukes would increase his control over this tempestuous province.

Justice III didn't care who occupied Jonacolla's ducal seat, as long as the candidate supported the Temple without reservation. He therefore selected the Theran candidate who seemed the most pliable: Krizalla of House Gascilium, a devout follower of Prima since early adulthood who appeared to care about little else.

It is hard to say whether Krizalla feigned her apparent purity of heart, or if the True Pattern of Jonacolla changed the new duke into an enemy of the Temple like her predecessors. But in very short order, the new duchess became a master manipulator and an unexpected thorn in the pompate's side. She holds the King of the North in one hand and the King of the South in the other, playing them off one another in ways that benefit her own duchy at the expense of those she opposes. The duchess seems to enjoy stirring things up for trouble's own sake, and her schemes are notable for the personal pain and damage they inflict on everyone caught up in them.

Though she is not above squeezing them when she has the upper hand, Jonacolla usually treats the overgovernor, her fellows in House Gascilium and the signor of Uomonza as allies. The alliance between a duchess and a mere signor is highly unusual, but in this case both seek to restrain the pompate's power in the duchy.





On the Duke of Malcovezzi

The current Duke of Malcovezzi is the son of a Theran elevated to this post in the wake of the War of the Rakes. This tall, thin ork with a high, balding forehead and uncannily penetrating eyes visited the Duke of Sercicia's court while I was there. Sercicia's sea pirates had captured several of Malcovezzi's most valued traders, and Malcovezzi came calling to negotiate down Sercicia's ransom demands.

Heodori told me that the Duke of Malcovezzi was once as deceitful and grasping as any of his peers, but underwent a startling transformation after seeing a vision of the Passion Prima. Malcovezzi made a solemn vow never to tell a lie, and swore to defend the honor of the Temple whenever necessary. He also became a great student of the legends of Prima, and has publicly expressed the desire to turn the entire Theran Empire into a bastion of Primaism. As part of this endeavor, the duke commissioned the building of a university—named after him, of course—in the city of Tavano. The university has become a crucial stepping stone for any young Name-giver seeking a career in the Temple. Ironically, it is also a breeding ground for republican thought, which Malcovezzi considers sinful. (His attempts to stamp out republicanism on university grounds have so far proved markedly unsuccessful—large numbers of educated people concentrated in one place do tend to insist on having ideas of their own, regardless of what the reigning authorities may think of it.)

Malcovezzi's attentions to the Temple have earned him the enmity of the Duchess of Jonacolla. The duke's own intense veneration for The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be leads him to carry out border skirmishes with Jonacolla's forces as if they are holy crusades. He gets on well enough with Overgovernor Berdew, though Berdew disapproves of the duke's missionary ambitions toward Great Thera. Because the Malcovezzi Name confers legendary ability as a weaponsmith adept, Malcovezzi forges weapons and armor for the Enici, the warrior brotherhood of the Temple. He treats Pader Vivanoce, head of the Enici, as a brother.

On the Duchess of Romertazzi

This young windling woman recently succeeded her father as ruler of the duchy, and the Duke of Sercicia described her quite bluntly as "a silly creature with gossamer wings for brains." The King of the South is the duchess's guardian, and she continues to support him as fervently as her father did before her. Otherwise, she has yet to assert herself in the wider world of Talean politics. She apparently makes great efforts to win the admiration of her erfani, yet she is also said to dispense swift and cruel punishment to vassals who show her disrespect. Whatever her intelligence, she has at least had the wit to choose a stalwart master-of-arms, a t'skrang Named Daporvio, who expertly fends off frequent sallies against her lands by the Duke of Sercicia's forces.

The Duchess of Romertazzi is of Theran descent, by way of House Ippuli. Her father was akarenti of Talea before converting to Primaism, and was elected duke in the aftermath of the Wars of the Rakes. The duchess retains strong connections to her noble house, and her duchy is a haven for Ippuli-affiliated entertainers, vagabonds and ne'er-do-wells. Other authorities in Talea dislike her habit of sheltering wanted criminals, and have sometimes sent small bands of adepts to Romertazzi to capture and retrieve fugitives from other duchies.

A REGRETTABLE, BUT UNDERSTANDABLE, INCIDENT

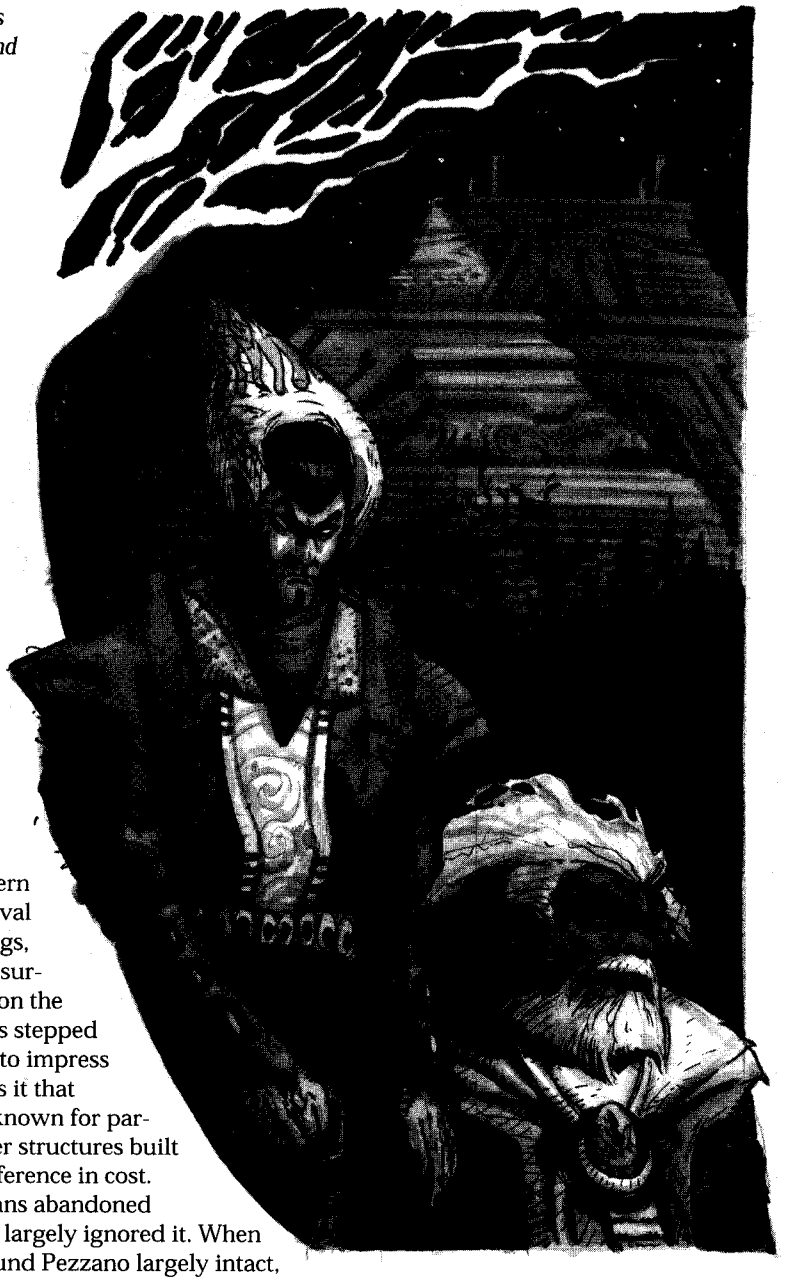
I owed my captivity to Ilessa, the lovely young bride of the formidable Sercicia. I had imagined a bubble-headed creature with painted fingernails, a taste for overdone clothing and no capacity whatsoever for serious thought or feeling. Instead, Ilessa turned out to be a charming girl full of romantic ideals drawn from the great legends of Talea. Her marriage to Sercicia was an arranged one, intended to mark a political alliance between the duke and her father, the Signor of Uomonza. From the difficulty of the tasks she assigned to Sercicia while he was still her suitor, I easily deduced that the duke fell somewhat short of Ilessa's ideal romantic lover. The duke is a brave and powerful warrior, like many heroes of legend, but he is also crude and disrespectful toward anyone not like himself—women in particular. And—if I may be blunt for a moment—a gigantic troll rarely makes an ideal husband for a delicate elven wife.

Enter myself upon the scene—a fellow elf, sophisticated, kindly and with a dashing manner (or so I have been told). Understandably, poor Ilessa soon developed a grand passion for me. Foolishly, I expected her to keep her desires strictly within the bounds of imagination.

So I confess I was surprised when she crept into my bedchamber and lifted the corner of my blankets. I was even more surprised when she stubbed her toe on a raised tile and let out a cry that awakened the entire household. Fortunately, Sercicia's chamber was on the other side of the villa from mine, and so I had just enough time to gather together my things and escape out the window. Fear of the duke's magically enhanced guard dogs had kept me from attempting an escape before then, but now a worse fate than death as a dog's dinner awaited me if I remained.

For reasons of space, we have omitted Stendariel's breathless account of his escape from Sercicia's dogs and men. He wanders about the island for awhile, until he comes upon several adepts hiding in a cave. They mistake him for one of Sercicia's pirates and beat him senseless, but upon realizing their error the adepts reveal themselves as Theran agents spying on Sercicia. Stendariel convinces them to take him off the island in their boat. Once on the Talean mainland he attempts to leave them, but they force him at sword-point to travel with them to the Theran stronghold of Pezzano.

—Thom Edrull



On the Therans

Even back home in Barsaive, I was never a political partisan. In the conflict between the powers of Barsaive and Thera, I take no position. I record history; I do not make it. And we all know that the winners pay the historians to write their chronicles. So I had no especial grudge against my Theran captors. I soon convinced them not only to free me, but to pay me for relating what intelligence I had gleaned from my days in Sercicia's court. In so doing, I learned various interesting facts about the Therans in Talea.

On the City of Pezzano

Pezzano is a Theran-built city on Talea's eastern coast, in the Duchy of Jonacolla. It consists of a naval outpost, an army barracks, administrative buildings, residences and a small market. My first view of it surprised me; the style of architecture is Theran, but on the modest scale of the pre-Imperial period. Pezzano's stepped pyramids are small, built for function rather than to impress lowly colonials with Theran grandeur. Legend has it that Pezzano was commissioned by an overgovernor known for parsimony; the way the story goes, he ordered smaller structures built than his budget allowed for, and pocketed the difference in cost.

In the years just before the Scourge, the Therans abandoned Pezzano. Because it was uninhabited, the Horrors largely ignored it. When the Therans returned to Talea in 1430 TH, they found Pezzano largely intact, save for several magical traps set by the last residents that had to be cleared.

Even seventy-eight years after the Empire's return, the city still feels unusually quiet and underpopulated. In a way, Pezzano symbolizes the Theran presence in Talea. Like their stronghold, they do not overwhelm; instead, they blend in. Though they see themselves as Talea's rulers, the Therans are really only one more ingredient in an increasingly complex stew.

On Theran Policy in Talea

When the Therans first appeared in Talea in 345 TH, Talea's forward-thinking rulers and pompates knew that an attempt at conquest was inevitable. So they softened up the Therans, drawing them into Talea's tangled web of back-stabbing and intrigue. Rival dukes sought the patronage of various Theran noble houses in their continuing wars. The Theran nobles began as simple profiteers, selling arms, magical knowledge, horses and the services of mercenaries to any and all

buyers. Little by little, however, the Therans became more and more involved in Talean affairs, which inevitably meant taking sides—and ultimately prevented a military invasion.

House rivalries were the key to this slide into the Talean mire. When House Thaloss supplied the pompate's army, their rivals in House Argenti supported the Duke of Jonacolla against the pompate just to embarrass Thaloss. House Medari, in love with conspiracy, inevitably sought a third force to back, so as to meddle with the affairs of two rival houses at once. And merrily on it went, and still goes today.

The sheer loveliness of this strange land was added incentive for Theran involvement in Talean affairs. Talea is an enchanting place; its sun-drenched cities, beautiful countryside and luxurious manner of living are all quite beguiling. Many Theran nobles took up permanent residence in Talean cities, and quickly became enmeshed in the politics of the local signori. A land of hot-blooded people who valued personal honor above all, Talea attracted quick-tempered young Theran nobles eager to make a name for themselves. Rival Theran houses supported various signori against one another—and because political struggles in Talea turn into military campaigns as quickly as a thunderstorm blows up on a summer night, the Therans soon found themselves facing one another on the field of battle. Before long, Theran citizens of the province had become Talean in many ways, though they maintained their own language and at least paid lip service to their traditional allegiances. Many prominent Therans in Talean history were born here, and have never set foot on the island of Thera. Roughly one in five Theran citizens in Talea even converted to the worship of Prima, which offered a more heartfelt outlet for veneration of the Passions than the perfunctory sort common in Great Thera.

In 443 TH, when Thera declared itself an Empire and Talea a possession rather than an ally state, life in Talea barely changed. The Theran leadership in the province considered its conquest little more than a formality, which it was indeed. Talea's kings and pompate made no objection to Theran rule; they contented themselves with persuading Thera's First Governor to appoint a Talean-born Theran as Talea's overgovernor. Ever since then, the dukes and kings have paid their taxes to the overgovernor, the overgovernor has passed them along to Great Thera, and everyone seems happy with the arragngement. Indeed, the Theran presence has invigorated the Talean system rather than undermining it. The noble houses run things in Talea, not the Arbitorium—and in Talea as in Great Thera, the houses often work at cross-purposes.

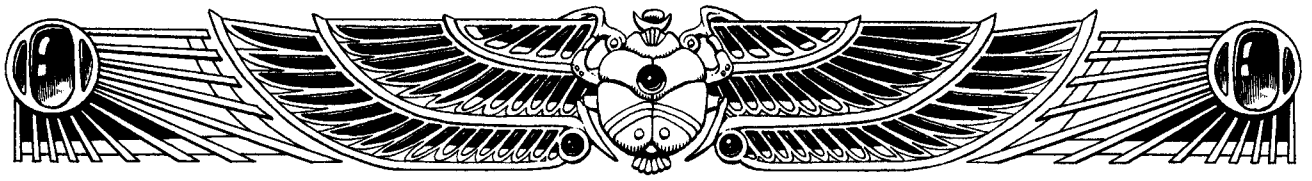
On Influential Therans of Talea

Upon our arrival in Pezzano, the Theran adepts—with whom I had forged something like a friendship—accompanied me to the house of the local akarenti, a t'skrang named J'onnoz R'azanaba. Overgovernor Berdew had sacked six spymasters during his tenure in Talea, and J'onnoz—a young woman whose ambitions unfortunately exceeded her abilities—was a recent appointee in over her head. So far over her head, in fact, that I—a Barsaivian lute-plucker with scarcely a silver to my Name—became her most reliable ally. In exchange for a small stipend—most welcome in my poverty-stricken state—I went into Pezzano and elsewhere, playing my lute in taverns and listening to gossip. I faithfully reported my gleanings to J'onnoz, and together we sifted through them for information she found useful. In the process, I learned a great deal about various influential Therans in Talea. (Should any readers feel inclined to criticize my working for a Theran, I invite them to try visiting a foreign land against their will, without money or friends to lean on and lacking any means of support, and see how long they stick to their high-minded principles. Fine words do not fill the belly, nor purchase a roof over one's head. It isn't as though I was in Barsaive, after all!)

Overgovernor Berdew

Overgovernor Berdew is a straight-backed, honest ork unusually well-liked by his underlings. They tend to worry about his health, fearing that he will one day work himself to death. Berdew believes sincerely in the glory and righteousness of the Empire, and immoral behavior by his countrymen greatly distresses him as unworthy of true Therans. Because of the underhanded way that things work in Talea, Berdew is often at odds with his own people. He believes most Therans doing business in Talea care only about their own petty fortunes and go out of their way to prevent him from asserting the proper level of control over the province.

At present, the overgovernor is most concerned about the growth of republicanism among Talea's educated middle classes. He has seen the impact of the Council Compact in Barsaive, and considers Talean republicanism—which has much in common with the Compact—an even greater threat to Imperial interests. To keep the leaders of Eziano from spreading what he regards as their pernicious doctrine, Berdew is willing to use any means necessary, and has even sounded out the commander of the Second Fleet about bombarding the republican stronghold. But Admiral Kebakki of the Second is a member of House Zanjan, and that house has extensive enterprises in Eziano. (The republican city is in fact a home of sorts to Zanjan-affilitaed mercenaries; they live in Eziano whenever they aren't out fighting some petty battle or other at their house's command.) Kebakki has refused to approve any attack on Eziano, and Berdew believes that the family mercenary business is the primary reason for that refusal. The overgovernor has protested to the Arbitorium, claiming that Kebakki is insubordinate. The War College, whose mostly Zanjani members indirectly profit from the house's holdings in Eziano, of



course backs Admiral Kebakki. Berdew is a member of House Krand, but refuses to play what he calls the "unseemly" game of House politics. He has cultivated no allies in Great Thera, so he lacks the influence to force his admiral to act.

Berdew's closest allies are the Duchess of Jonacolla and the Duke of Malcovezzi—both of whom seek to pull him in opposite directions. Jonacolla wants him to contain the power of the Temple, while Malcovezzi seeks to export Prima worship to Great Thera.

Betedar

This grim elven woman is a spice merchant with warehouses in the cities of Pallata, Uomonza, Eziano and Apazza. A high-ranking member of House Medari, she maintains a near-monopoly on foreign-grown spices in this cuisine-mad province. Would-be competitors tend to turn up in the city streets with fatal holes in their bodies. Betedar's friendship with Gian Aldrichio, the dangerous signor of Pallata, no doubt provides her with easy access to the skilled assassins who help her keep her position.

A fervent follower of the Passion Chorrolis, Betedar loathes and fears the followers of Prima. The Talean Passion-to-Come is openly hostile to wealth and pleasure, which automatically makes Prima worshipers an affront to any lover of the greed and luxury that Chorrolis embodies. Betedar feels especially threatened by those wishing to export the revelations of Prima to the Great City of Thera, and has therefore declared covert war on the pompate and on his evangelistic ally, the Duke of Malcovezzi. She has turned House Medari against the Temple and forged alliances with the Temple's traditional foes in order to pressure the pompate into ceasing his efforts to seek converts in Thera. Many paders of Prima fear to enter certain quarters of the cities in which Betedar operates, for fear her hired thugs will attack them. Pader Vivanoce, the drake who heads the Temple's warrior order known as the Enici, has pledged to use that organization to drive Betedar from Talea. In the coming years, I expect both sides to shed much blood on Talean cobblestones.

Admiral Kebakki

The commander of the Second Fleet is a wide-faced dwarf of few words. Oddly enough, Kebakki's command of a Theran fleet is incidental to his influence in Talea. Far more important is his position as head of House Zanjan's clearing-house for mercenary troops and adept bands in the republican city of Eziano. The admiral spends more time in Eziano than in Theran Pezzano, overseeing contracts with mercenary companies from all over the Empire. Talea's wars are small, lucrative and distinguished by a comparatively low casualty rate, and so mercenary captains are eager to bring their men here. Kebakki's mercenary forces include Issyri warriors, Creanan bandits, Indrisan jaraput and Barsaivian ork scorchers.

On another front, Admiral Kebakki is forging ahead with plans to make Eziano a center for airship construction, as most of the airships left in Talea after the Scourge were destroyed during the War of the Rakes. The prospect of buying airships to use against their enemies makes Talea's various rulers drool, and so House Zanjan is likely to make an amazing profit as airship-seller to the province at large. The thought of airships in Talean hands drives Overgovernor Berdew to apoplexy, despite Kebakki's assurances that mercenaries hired by his house will serve as crew for all such ships so that they will never be used against Imperial forces.

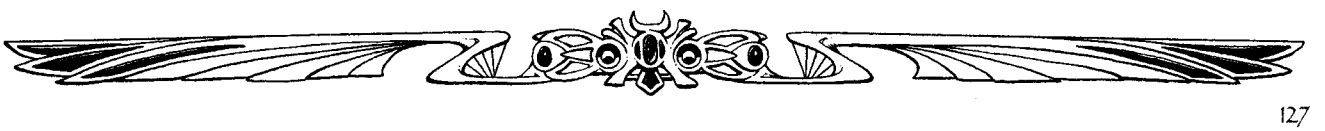
Supremely self-concerned and an accomplished schemer, Kebakki has one goal above all: profit. The dazzling riches he can bestow on officers under him and on his fellow Zanjan give him a much more secure base of power than the overgovernor can claim. Chancellor Lograno of Eziano is likewise the admiral's staunch ally, and none of the kings, dukes, signori or Templars wish to offend him because all of them want to bid on the first kilas to roll out of the Eziano shipyards.

General Ozfrak

General Ozfrak, a wizened ork woman, commands the Tenth Legion. Even though Theran troops have not fought a military engagement in Talea since the War of the Rakes, General Ozfrak nonetheless wishes to maintain the appearance of a battle-ready force. Ozfrak's officers therefore parade and drill the soldiers within an inch of their lives. Off-duty, however, the entire legion is dissolute and demoralized by sheer boredom. Most of the Tenth Legion's soldiers loathe the inactivity of their current posting—but few complain about it too loudly, lest they be shipped to Marac.

Ozfrak apparently has no idea how unpopular she is with the rank and file. The only subject that really interests her are the mysteries of Primaism, to which she is a recent convert. She has adopted a habit of speaking in riddles and an oblivious serenity that drives her subordinates to distraction. Apart from disgruntled infantrymen, however, Ozfrak has no real enemies; her otherworldly interests absorb so much of her time that she poses no threat to other powers in the province.

Seeking to gain influence within the Theran administration, the pompate has assigned Ozfrak a personal confessor—the arrogant Pader Juragna, who spends his off-hours in Pezzano buttering up officials connected with the Arbitorium. Most Theran officials regard Juragna as a jumped-up provincial with bizarre notions, to be humored only because General Ozfrak holds him in high esteem.



Yuglovian

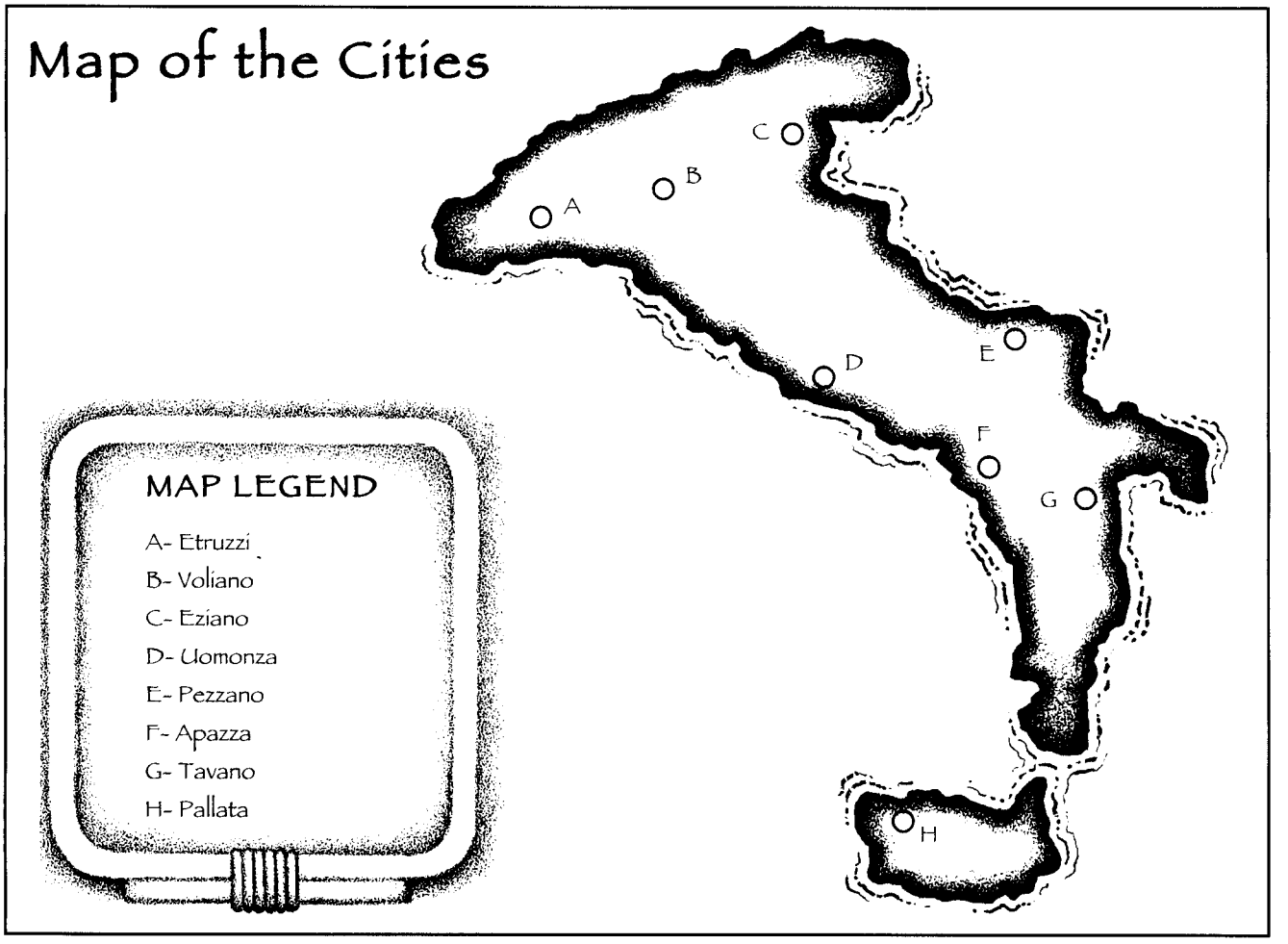
Yuglovian is an obsidiman, rumored to have emerged from the same Liferock as Thera's esteemed (and feared) First Governor Kanidris. He serves as akarenti to Overgovernor Berdew, having replaced my poor friend J'onnoz after the overgovernor found a windling rifling through his private papers. (Berdew dismissed J'onnoz and court-martialed her into the bargain. There was none to save my friend from her awful fate other than myself—so I did, and together we fled from Pezzano.)

According to what little I have heard, everyone in Pezzano is afraid of Yuglovian, partly because of his forbidding manner and partly because they believe he reports directly to Kanidris. Some say Yuglovian has set his sights on humbling Admiral Kebakki; I know for a fact that Kebakki is quietly offering a reward for information on Yuglovian's past or his current intentions.

ON THE SIGNORI

The need to save my friend J'onnoz came at a most unfortunate time for me. I had finally earned enough money to pay for airship passage back to Barsaive, but was forced to spend it bribing various erfani in the Duchy of Jonacolla as we made our way across the width of Talea to the city of Apazza. I knew that Apazza's signora, Gianna Volla, was less than sympathetic to the Empire, and hoped that our knowledge of Theran activities might buy us safe harbor in her city. I gambled that a single fugitive from Theran justice was not enough to justify Theran military action against Apazza, and I was right.

Once again, my handsome features and charm changed my fortunes for the better. Signora Volla, recently widowed, began to seek my company. My honor as a gentleman prevents me from discussing what passed between us—but I can freely relate what I learned from Signora Volla about Talea's many signori and the cities they rule.



On the Rise of the Cities

Before the coming of the Therans, Talea's cities were small settlements in which a few free artisans and others made adequate livings. The dukes kept their erfani on the farms, where they tended to the raising of crops and beasts that were the province's dominant enterprises. The liveliest spots in Talea were the ducal palaces, whose sites had been chosen for defense rather than the ease of transport required for the smooth conduct of trade.

When the first Theran nobles arrived, they set up shop in Talea's cities and cajoled the dukes into giving the common people greater freedom of movement. Influxes of erfani freed from the land, combined with Theran business acumen, made the small settlements into sizable places of great wealth. For a time, the dukes and kings on whose lands the cities stood taxed them as heavily as they could. But leading citizens soon realized it would cost them less of their hard-earned coin to build fortifications and hire mercenaries to defend them against ducal or royal troops than to continue paying onerous taxes to the nobility. And so they set themselves against the dukes and kings, and ever since that time the pendulum of power has swung back and forth between city folk and the dukes of the countryside.

Soon enough, the city folk began to deny the right of kings and dukes to rule over them at all. This caused a split between the cities and the Temple, many of whose priests came from aristocratic landowning families beholden to the dukes. Ducal and royal forces besieged the rebellious cities time and again between 600 and 800 TH. Some cities were overrun and plundered, but more often than not the cities won. The Therans pretended neutrality in the struggle, but secretly aided the city leaders, who had granted themselves the title of signori.

The Scourge brought the cities great misfortune. Dependent on trade, the city dwellers sank into miserable poverty within their citadels. When the Scourge ended and the citadels opened, the folk of the cities had not the strength to stand up to ducal military power. The dukes, on the other hand, controlled large numbers of self-sufficient kaers scattered across their lands. During the years underground, they had also trained as many adepts as they could so that they would have forces capable of taking the cities back when the Long Night ended. In the first years of freedom, these adepts went out from the kaers and cleared the countryside of the remaining Horrors. Thanks to this well-planned campaign, Talea is freer of Horrors than any other Imperial province. (In fairness, of course, the amount of land involved is also smaller than in any other province.) By 1420, just before the Theran reclamation of Talea, ducal farmland was already yielding bountiful crops and the erfani were safe and prosperous. The dukes added to their coffers by taxing the cities as heavily as they could without actually driving them under. Though only paltry revenues could be gotten from the poverty-stricken city folk, the dukes and kings demanded them nonetheless, simply to prove their right to tax. The cities, unable to afford repairs to their walls and forts or to hire mercenary troops, were in little position to resist.

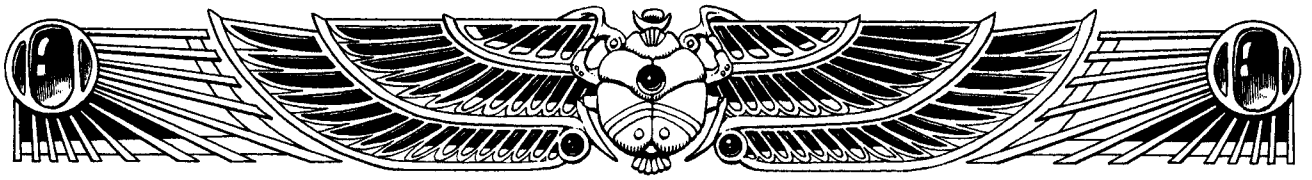
The return of the Therans helped the cities regain their former prominence. As trade began to flourish again, the cities recovered their wealth. And as the silver came back, so did their defiance of ducal and royal authority. Mercenary troops drove ducal forces back into the countryside as the signori reasserted their power over what they regard as their rightful domain.

On the Rule of the Signori

The signori are oligarchs, leaders whose right to govern stems from their wealth and status. With the exception of republican Eziano, a group of a dozen or so signori rules each city of Talea. Only the recognized head of this group may actually claim the title of Signor or Signora, however. Other members of the ruling council are addressed by no title. As an example, Gianna Volla is head of Apazza's ruling council and is therefore addressed as Signora Volla. Her brother Vido, who serves on the council and wields much influence as one of her most trusted advisers, is a signori by station, but is never called signor; instead, he is addressed simply by his Name. Signori may be dismissed by a unanimous vote of their peers, and new signori may be chosen by a two-thirds vote of the council.

Though signori need not all be blood kin, groups of signori tend to center around a particular extended family. Of Apazza's eleven signori, seven are kin to the Volla family by blood or marriage. Wise families bring other powerful business leaders into the fold through arranged marriages, or simply by voting them onto the council. Policy-making is usually informal, with decisions being reached at dinner or around the gaming table as often as through votes taken in formal meetings.

The families that make up the heart of the signori tend to be ousted from office only through rebellion or warfare. Most family councils rule for a century or two, but then become lax or complacent and are overthrown by a rival family. Unrest invariably begins when signorial taxes rise too high or other merchants begin to believe that the ruling signori are monopolizing business opportunities. Wise signori make a point of keeping their fellow merchants happy. Only the wealthy can afford to buy the favor of the city's workers or hire mercenaries to stage a coup, and so the signori's rule continues as long as the rich are happy.



Only three signoral families have been removed from office since the Therans' return to Talea. The most recent coup, in Eziano, has disturbed many Taleans because the signori were replaced not by new signori, but by officials elected by the citizens of the town. (I shall discuss this strange development in more detail further on.)

Proverbial wisdom tells us that the bitterest argument is a family argument, and the history of Talea's cities bears that out. A split between council members causes a violent struggle for succession far more often than outsiders successfully dislodge a ruling family of signori. Shifting alliances and betrayals are the daily bread of some ruling families, and assassinations of kin during such a power struggle are rife. The most common method of killing is poisoning, and so dining with signori can be a nerve-wracking experience. (So common is poisoning that one faction within a family all too often accuses another of murder after the sudden but natural death of one of their members.) Poisoning is so rampant in some cities that even the common workers, who have little genuine reason to worry, fear it.

RULING SIGNORI AND THEIR CITIES DESCRIBED

Even though they are competitors, the signori of Talea recognize also that they have broad common interests. They benefit when the dukes are weak and when the Therans desire to conduct business in their cities. And now they have a new common foe in the republicans of Eziano, whose odd ideas could spell the end of the signori should those concepts spread throughout Talea. These common interests keep the signori from warring among themselves, and also prompt them to deal honorably with each other more often than not.

The signori of each city send consuls to attend the courts of the other signori. Through these consuls, I came to know something of the individual signori who govern Talea's major cities.

On Signora Volla of Apazza

I profited greatly by my intimate acquaintance with the wise and lovely Signora Gianna Volla and her beautiful city of Apazza. A haven for artists and performers, Apazza reflects the tastes and temperament of its warm-hearted, charming mistress. Its musical theater, of which Signora Volla is a learned aficionado, is among the finest in the world. The signora keeps a careful eye on the conduct of business in her city, making certain that Apazza's people get the best possible part of any bargain. She is perhaps a shade too willing to deal in dubious Theran enterprises that she believes will benefit Apazza—but I have never been entrusted with the well-being of a city full of folk, and so am not truly qualified to judge.

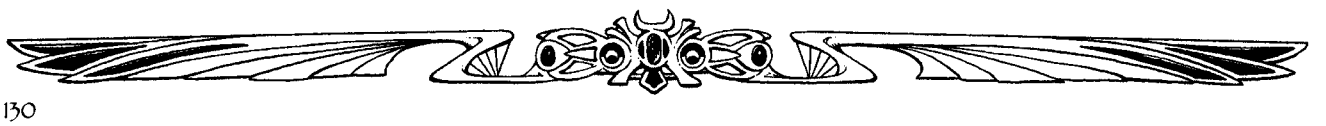
Of late, Apazza has been favored (if I may use that word) with the attentions of House Heindari, which has constructed a number of fabrika powered by captured Maracan jinari spirits. The fabrika laborers produce clothing, pottery and weapons at an astounding rate, though they wear themselves out just as quickly. Thanks to the Heindari, Apazza has become the hungriest market for slaves in the entire province. And herein lies one of the "dubious Theran enterprises" to which I earlier referred.

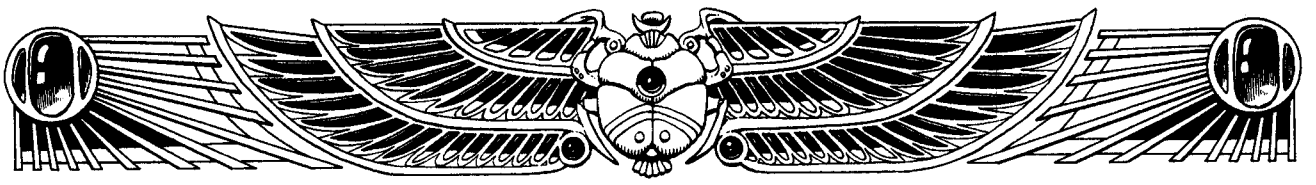
Talean law does not permit the enslavement of Name-givers, with one exception—those unfortunates formally severed from the Temple of Prima. I shall discourse somewhat more on the subjects of severance and the Temple further on—but at its heart, to be severed means to be cast out from the Temple, barred from its blessings and protections. House Heindari, needing slaves for its notorious fabrikas and wanting to obtain them cheaply and easily, desires the severance of as many people as possible. To this end, House Heindari has pursued what their representatives in Talea like to call a "special relationship" with the pompate—the head of the Temple, whose word determines who shall be severed. House Heindari donates copious monies to the pompate's endless building projects, and the pompate steps up his severances after every infusion of Theran coin into the Temple treasury. Signora Volla acts as liaison in this little game, enabling both sides to pretend that there is no tit-for-tat in it. The profit to Apazza, as Signora Volla explained to me when I challenged her about these dealings, lies in her capacity to moderate the extremes of both sides. She convinces the pompate to sever fewer Taleans, and the Heindari to build fewer fabrikas, less than either side might if allowed to operate without her influence as go-between. I confess that this explanation did not sit entirely comfortably, but I saw clearly that she believed it. And, as she put it with some justice, if she did not act, someone else would—very probably someone with fewer scruples.

House Heindari's senior representative in Apazza is Rureen, a dwarf with a self-mocking wit. His charm masks his violent temper, which flares whenever his sense of property and rights is at stake. When necessary, he works behind the scenes to keep the Volla clan in office. Signora Volla has few real opponents within Apazza, but foes of the pompate—especially the Duchess of Jonacolla and Betedar of House Medari, who has the ear of the Signor of Pallata—consider her an enemy because she profits from the Temple's corrupt practices.

On Signora Safilia of Etruzzi

Signora Ulicci Safilia, an elderly dwarf descended from the legendary warrior tribes of the Caralkspur Mountains, is said to be an insecure woman who attempts to gain the favor of all, but earns the respect of none. Her city of Etruzzi lies in northern Talea, in the Duchy of Crossetti, and benefits from the duchy's rich farmland. House Carinci has made Etruzzi a





primary shipping port, and has long been influential there. Signora Safilia tries—with some success—to balance the competing interests of House Carinci, local business leaders and the rapacious Duke of Crossetti. None of them are happy with her, however; each faction desires a greater share of the spoils, and blames the signora for its failure to get them. The only thing stopping them from moving against her is each side's fear that another will profit more than it does now from a new signori's rule. So either the signora is extremely lucky, or she is far more adroit at juggling the powerful rivals than other signori give her credit for.

Safilia's three daughters all seek to succeed her, and each has allied with one of the three rival factions. The quiet and well-mannered eldest daughter, Giovarda, backs House Carinci, and has a reportedly close relationship with its principal representative, a gluttonous t'skrang trader Named D'amas Carinci. Merviccia, known for sophisticated wit when she hasn't been drinking too deeply of local vintages, supports Carinci's local competition. Krizianna, the youngest of the three and renowned for her spiteful temper, is a surrogate for the Duke of Crossetti—according to the common wisdom, she is naive enough to believe that the duke will marry her someday out of gratitude. Signora Safilia has survived at least three attempts to poison her, thanks to her indomitable constitution.

On Signor Aldrichio of Pallata

I have already mentioned Signor Gian Aldrichio of Pallata, piratical rival to the Duke of Sercicia. In many ways, his city is very like him. Imagine what Kratas would be like if it had been a haven to thievery for centuries rather than mere decades, and if it was well-governed by a ruler strong enough to stamp out all opposition. That is Pallata. Though it looks as beautiful and sun-drenched and welcoming as any other Talean city, it prospers on theft, prostitution, assassination and smuggling. Signor Aldrichio, a troll with a weather-beaten face, speaks the rough language of his people and is very popular in Pallata. Of course, part of his popularity doubtless stems from the chilling fact that those who openly dislike him don't live very long.

Aldrichio despises the republicans of Eziano more than most of his fellow signori, who tend to regard them as irritating eccentrics rather than a genuine threat. Given the depth to which personal dislikes can extend among Talea's powerful, it is entirely possible that Aldrichio hates the republicans so much mostly because his enemy, Duke Sercicia, likes them. He seems to have a genuine friendship with the fiercely anti-clerical Theran merchant Betedar, whose spice business brings great profit into Pallata's coffers. He is known, albeit in whispers, for having several skilled assassins at his disposal; no one can say how many. Most of Talea's other powers fear and detest Aldrichio, but none are above calling on his services when the need for them arises.

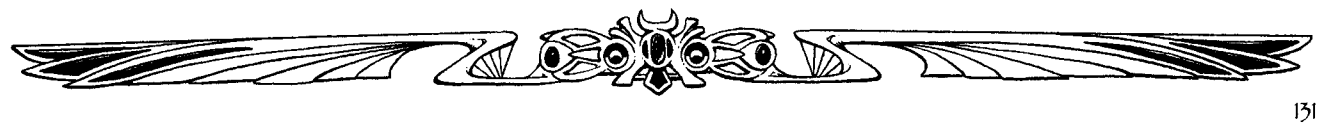
On Signora Cezicci of Tavano

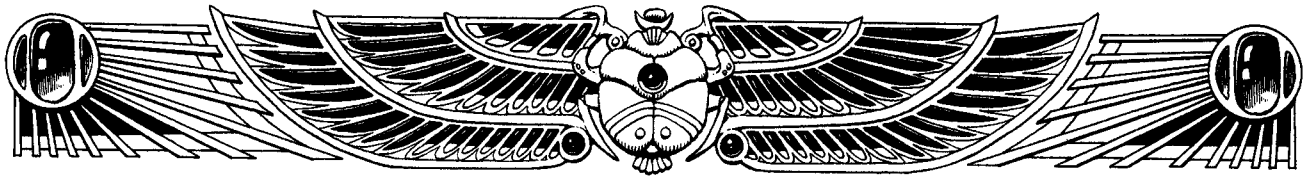
When the ruling council of Tavano chose Biri Cezicci, a relatively obscure young elf woman, as signora two years ago, the other signori reacted with surprise and several lewd jokes about the advantages of youth and beauty. Since then, Signora Cezicci has won the respect of her peers by foiling a republican coup spawned at Malcovezzi University, Tavano's best-known center of learning. Cezicci is herself a graduate of this influential institution, and her understanding of its workings may well have made her the ideal choice to rule Tavano.

The University attracts scholars from across the Empire, and its library is growing to rival Thera's Eternal Library and the Great Library of Throal. Its magical researchers have made great advances in the pursuit of cosmology, the exploration of realms beyond our own. In pursuit of this treasure-trove of magical knowledge, Theran nobles of Houses Krand and Narlanth vie with each other to win the signora's favor. Their treasuries pay for the troops that keep her in power, and both House representatives are said to be smitten with her. The Krand representative is a cool, cerebral, handsome wizard Named Jaspader. Narlanth's representative, equally handsome but more roguish in temperament, is the elementalist Tocruzian, whose smile reportedly causes maidens to faint at a hundred paces. For the moment, Biri Cezicci seems to content to enjoy the ardor of both men.

Of particular interest to the Therans are the researches of the wizard Zefilio, a famous magician of Talea and the signora's good friend. Zefilio claims he will soon be able to send high-Circle adepts to battle the Horrors in their native domain, beyond the astral plane—a boast that even the mysterious Heavenherds, Thera's most powerful magicians, have not dared make. Even more incredible, Zefilio claims he can forever close the gates that allow the Horrors access to our world. Only in Tavano, where all manner of eccentricity is encouraged, would Zefilio be praised for such risky studies. On the slight chance that there may be something real behind all this, Houses Krand and Narlanth are doing whatever they can to win the signora's confidence so that she might persuade Zefilio to share his secrets.

The pompate has not yet moved to suppress Tavano's intellectual freedoms, principally because Malcovezzi University was founded as a religious institution and still turns out many of the Temple's finest young members. Whenever the pompate periodically threatens to sever Zefilio or Signora Cezicci, the signora surrounds the university with troops and places the Temple paders there under effective house arrest until the pompate reconsiders.





The Duke of Malcovezzi, an ardent follower of Prima, would love to get rid of Signora Cezicci and expel the republicans and anti-Temple elements in the university he founded. From what I heard of how he was in the old days, his former self would have accomplished this goal by any means to hand; however, his vision of The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be and subsequent vows of virtue now prevent him from achieving his ends through underhanded actions.

On Signor Adanna of Uomonza

The pragmatic, unflappable Hezza Adanna of Uomonza is a rare signor indeed—one not at odds with his duke. Instead, Signor Adanna has made common cause with the Duchess of Jonacolla in an effort to contain the power of the Pompate, Serenity IV. The pompate's stronghold is in Uomonza, which the legends of Prima call "the city of tomorrow." And Uomonza owes much of its prosperity to the pompate's beloved building projects—so many monuments and temples are being constructed in the city, and there are so many paders to conduct Temple business, that traders, merchants, artisans and laborers flock to Uomonza in search of work and profits. The money made by all this is funneled through the treasury of the Adanna family, an arrangement that has acted as a check on the pompate since before the Scourge. Serenity IV is continually pressing for a greater share of the proceeds from taxes on Uomonza's business, but so far he has not succeeded.

The dance of power between Signor Adanna and the pompate is a delicate one, and almost seems more of a game than any serious endeavor to topple the Temple from its prominent place in Talean life. Adanna keeps a certain number of troops at the ready, occasionally supplemented by ducal levies (when he decides to accept them), to stop the pompate from expanding his influence too far. Whenever Serenity IV issues a decree or severance order that Adanna doesn't like, the signor's troops lay siege to the pompate's palace. Such a siege was in progress when I left Uomonza, and mercenary troops sent by the Dukes of Malcovezzi and Amalvetti were just arriving to break it. These sieges are not long-lived, nor do they do much real damage—Adanna apparently knows just how far he can go before others rally to the pompate's cause. He is also adept at engineering face-saving solutions to these frequent disputes that allow Serenity IV to declare victory while Signor Adanna (and sometimes the duchess as well) dictate the terms of that victory. The Duchess of Jonacolla, for her part, might be inclined to move more strongly against the pompate if she had her way—but such action would likely mean laying waste to large parts of Uomonza, and Signor Adanna will not permit it. For the time, the duchess seems to have decided that constant harassment from the Signor of Uomonza is causing the Temple enough trouble.

Adanna has another firm ally in House Thaloss, which maintains extensive construction interests in Uomonza. Many of the most majestic temples in the pompate's complex were designed and built by Therans. The pompate might prefer to bless his own cronies with these contracts, but Adanna has wrung concessions from him that force him to entertain Thaloss bids as well as those of Talean businesses. The contract to build a floating Grand Temple, in the manner of a noble house's headquarters in Thera, will direct a large portion of the Temple's building fund into Thaloss hands. The ranking Thaloss in Uomonza is Ekelan, a former Arbitorium official. A well-favored and libidinous elf, she is reputed to have led many young acolytes of Prima down the path of temptation. She also supposedly commissions secret passageways in every Thaloss-built temple in Uomonza, so that Adanna or those working for him can sneak inside the pompate's monuments.

On Signor Madeno of Voliano

The city of Voliano has been wracked by a bloody power struggle among its signori for the past several years. Recently emerged as the murderous victor is Miccio Madeno, a dark-eyed, frowning human with the sadistic instincts of a Horror. Impervious to the demands of other powers in the region, he waged a campaign of assassination against his fellow family members. When the people of Voliano rose up to support his opponents, he ordered levies of brutal Indrisan and Creanan bandit mercenaries to slaughter the "rebellious" citizens without mercy. Generally, war in Talea is a genteel affair in which the threat of violence works just as well as the act itself. When battles do occur, one party is often quick to withdraw, and the other gracious in victory. But Miccio Madeno changed those rules, ordering several massacres of surrendered rebel forces. He has so terrified the people of Voliano that none dare gainsay him.

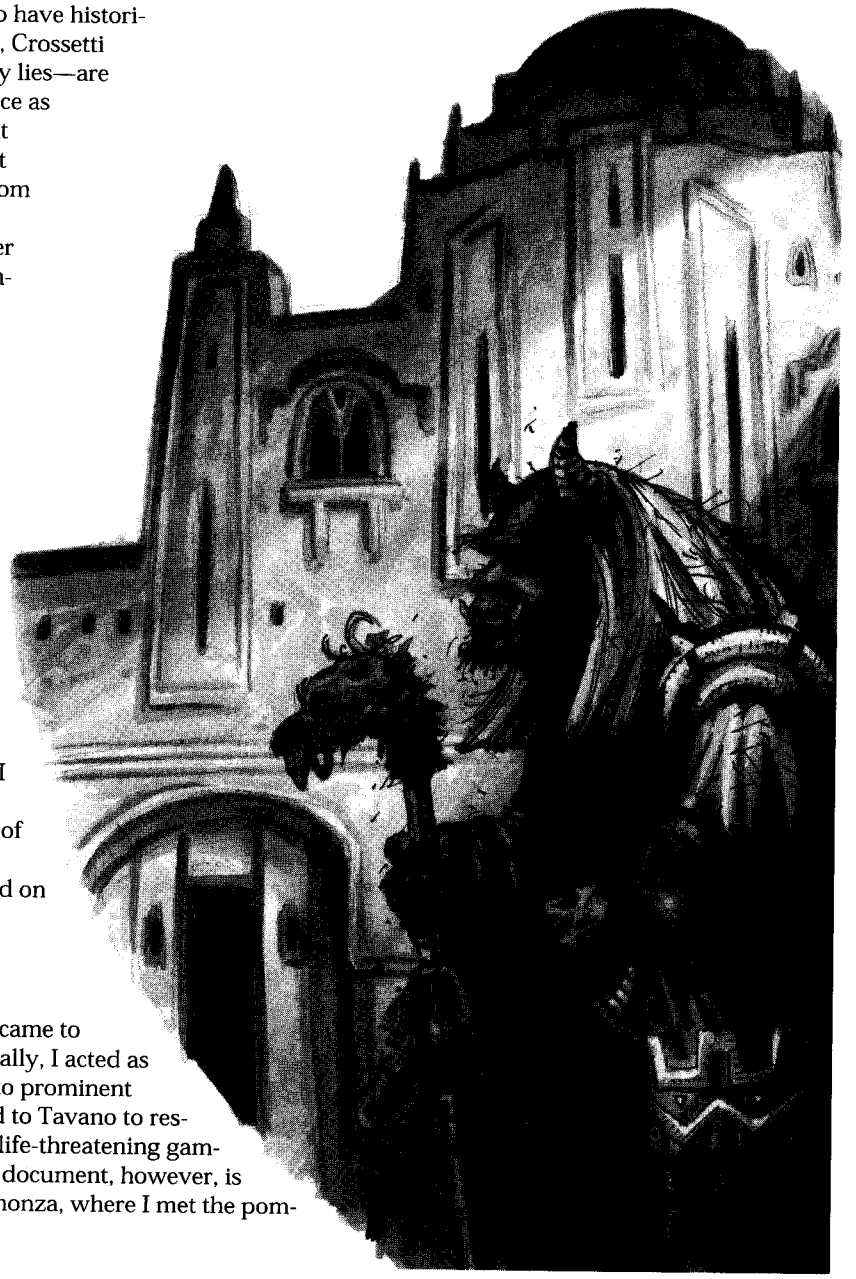
Madeno was wise enough to leave the city's Theran merchants alone, as any action against them would surely have triggered an aerial bombardment. They apparently do not trust him to continue to be so sensible, however, and his depredations already have made Voliano an impossible place to do business. Since his takeover, most of the Therans have left the city for greener pastures. Admiral Kebakki has refused to offer Madeno any more mercenary contracts, but certain savagely inclined mercenary captains have made their way to Voliano without the admiral's aid.

Voliano is a sad ghost of a city now, where honest folk fear to leave their homes lest they fall afoul of roving mercenary bands intent on mayhem. Corpses are left on the streets to rot, spreading disease. Miccio Madeno has won, but he is letting his prize degenerate. Signora Volla believes his own bloodlust has driven him mad; and that the people left in Voliano will starve unless something is done.

Unfortunately, those in a position to act cannot decide who will take on Madeno. His merciless tactics frighten even the bravest mercenary captains, who are asking up to four times their usual pay for a protracted campaign against Voliano. The

city is well-fortified, and any such campaign would be lengthy and expensive. The three dukes who have historically vied for control of Voliano—Amalvetti, Crossetti and Frichetti, on all of whose borders the city lies—are now scrambling as swiftly to disown the place as they once did to claim it. Each maintains that Voliano is the others' responsibility, and that therefore others ought to pay to liberate it from its crazed signor. The King of the North, in whose domains Voliano sits, is no more eager to pick up the bill. The Temple has so far confined itself to verbal condemnations from the balcony of the pompate's palace—to which the mad Madeno pays not the slightest attention.

Madeno's source of support remains a mystery. Some believe he pays his mercenaries by stealing from his own people, pushing them further into squalor. Some accuse the King of Arancia, whose lands border Talea, of loaning money to Madeno so that the madman will destabilize Talea and give the Arancian king a chance to claim power over at least some portion of the realm. The Therans apparently whisper that Madeno worships the mad Passion Raggok. A Theran of House Narlanth lately hailing from Voliano, whom I chanced to meet in a tavern in Apazza, told me he thought Madeno was acting on behalf of the dragons. I gave his theory little credence, however; some Therans blame everything bad on dragons.

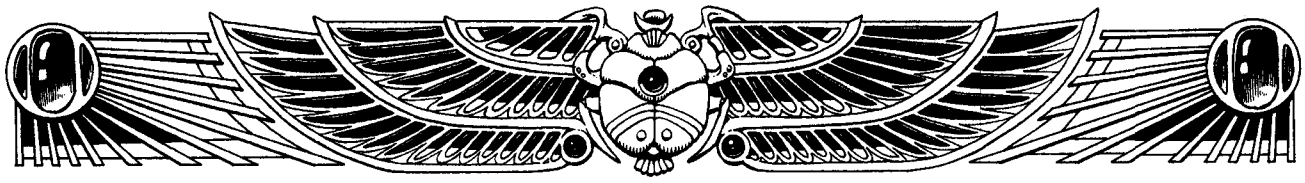


ON THE TEMPLE

As I came to know Signora Volla, so she came to know me and appreciate my abilities. Eventually, I acted as her emissary of sorts. I conveyed her wishes to prominent men of business in Apazza, and once traveled to Tavano to rescue a junior member of the Volla clan from a life-threatening gambling debt. Most interesting to readers of this document, however, is that the signora dispatched me briefly to Uomonza, where I met the pompate in the flesh.

ON SERENITY IV

Serenity IV is an aged, palsied ork wizard who lives wholly in the grip of his own imagined absolute rightness. He sincerely believes that whatever pleases him is holy to the Passion Prima—and if what pleases him happens to contradict certain established precepts of Primaism, then those precepts must have been inaccurately understood. He has carefully rooted out those patriarchs in his ranks who hold an inconveniently steadfast devotion to Primaism as originally set down by packing them off to lives of seclusion in Talea's many *paderonas*—that is, small settlements in the countryside where several paders live together as brothers and sisters. In his zeal to build rich monuments to Prima, Serenity IV has converted the Temple into a money-making device without peer—an ironic achievement, considering that Prima is said to favor poverty and humbleness. He truly seems to believe that his frenzied monument-building will bring Prima into the world ahead of schedule, and that his own devoted efforts will earn him extra privileges in the afterlife.



The pompate's body is failing him, but his mind is not. As crafty as a dwarf looking for ways to break a promise, Serenity knows that the Temple patriarchs are jostling one another for advantage so that each may have the best chance to succeed him when he dies. More than a few of the Temple's lower servants expressed the opinion—anonymously, of course—that "the conniving old scoundrel is playing the lot of them like a pack of cards."

On the Naming of a Pompate

Like dukes, pompates take new Names when they ascend to their position, and gain the traditional abilities of their legendary predecessors in the reNaming ceremony. Unlike dukes, a pompate may choose from among a number of Names. A pompate who adopts the Name of Serenity, as the current pompate has, becomes a powerful wizard and a skilled politician. The Name of Justice confers the warrior Discipline and scholarly knowledge. The Name of Virtue confers the weaponsmith Discipline and immense personal charisma. Pompates who take the Name of Utopia become illusionist and elementalist adepts prone to visionary experiences.

On the Theology of Prima

The beliefs of those who follow the Passion Prima are confusing, to say the least—though some of them have a certain eccentric appeal, even for this Barsaivian troubadour. Followers of Prima acknowledge the existence of other Passions than their patron, but believe that only Prima is worthy of Name-giver worship. To do homage to other Passions dooms the spirit, they say—though not one of them could intelligibly explain to me how. The paders of Prima are uncomfortably insistent on this point, even though it lacks logic to back it up; they do not permit their followers to recognize any other Passion, on pain of being cast away from Prima's blessings (whatever those may be).

Absurd, isn't it? But that is only the first chord of this increasingly strange tune. The Primaists claim that their Passion, the only one worth following, doesn't even exist yet! They call him The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Come, and eagerly await the day of his eruption into being. The legends of Prima are not tales of the past, but prophecies of the far future. In terms of his—or perhaps her—character, Prima is a gloomy and demanding sort, or so it seemed to me. It is said that Prima's emissary will retrieve the souls of Name-givers who followed the commands of the pompate and senior paders, some of them being: swearing off strong drink and good food, renouncing the arts of love, living in poverty, and forswearing acts of vengeance and violence. Only the last one has any real benefit, so far as I can see—though it might do a few over-wealthy Therans some good to live in poverty awhile.

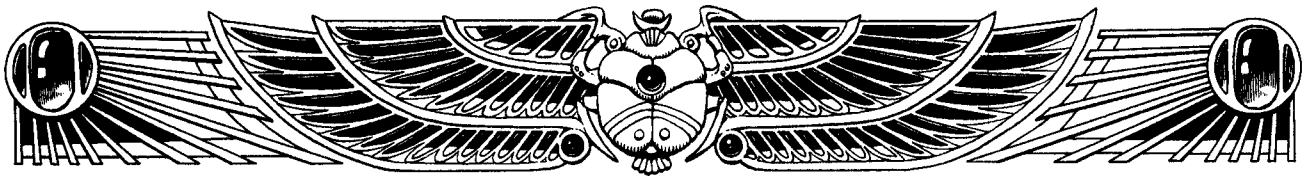
Taleans first heard of the doctrine of Prima in 99 TH, as preached by a wandering wise man from the north Named Demetrek. No one can say for certain which northern land gave Demetrek birth, a touch of mystery that no doubt aided the strange holy man in his self-appointed task. As the story goes, Demetrek learned in a series of visions that the current age is a dark time of spiritual deprivation. The Scourge embodied that darkness, but the end of the Scourge has not brought us spiritual light. According to Demetrek, Name-givers of our time have the misfortune to live before the emergence of Prima—the greatest Passion of all, and the only one who can grant a truly paradisical afterlife. Demetrek's visions told him that the souls of dead Name-givers go to a place of torment, where they will linger until the next age—an age dominated not by magic, but by the truth of Prima, the Great Passion. Prima will be born in this next age and will send an emissary to the place of torment where all of us will be waiting. From there, the emissary will rescue the souls of Name-givers who led their lives according to the precepts that Prima has yet to proclaim.

Truly, is this not enough to make the head spin? How, my readers are surely asking themselves, did such arrant, mind-bending nonsense—and joyless, to boot—ever become one of the most powerful cultural forces in Talea? Quite simply, really. The then-Duke of Jonacolla, by all accounts a depressive sort who loved conundrums, heard Demetrek's preaching and became enamored with it. He enthusiastically embraced the precepts of Prima, and those of his subjects who wished to gain favor with the duke followed suit. The common folk took their cue from these leaders, until the entire Duchy of Jonacolla had turned Primaist. Not long afterward, the Duke of Jonacolla won an impressive military victory over a rival duke against overwhelming odds, and credited "Prima's blessing" with the result. This strange faith then spread rapidly throughout Talea, as the other dukes and their signori and erfani decided there just might be something to it.

Not long after the duke's public espousal of Primaism, one of Demetrek's followers built a temple in Uomonza—the very Temple of Prima to which I have referred throughout my tale. The legends of Prima say that this place will have great significance in the age to come, and its pattern allegedly contains the possibilities of its future.

On the Hierarchy of the Temple

The pompate has many servants throughout Talea, all of whom theoretically report to him. They are of every race and both sexes. In addition to fulfilling scholarly duties, each servant of the pompate may also serve as diplomat, judge and even spy.



Some Temple servants cloister themselves away from the world to engage in scholarship and meditation. These individuals are called *paderi ciori*, or "paders of silence"; they live in small communal settlements known as paderonas, which are competely self-sufficient. Indeed, many paderonas run profitable enterprises, manufacturing books, wine, finely crafted artworks and other such items. One famous paderona in the Duchy of Malcovezzi makes fine swords and daggers. The wealthier paderonas are frequent targets of raiders and pirates.

The *paderi mundisi*, or "paders of the world," preach to and advise the common folk and help maintain the average Talean's fervor for Prima in the face of this darkened world's many temptations (or so their teachings have it). If it helps to understand their role, think of these paders as what we Barsaivians know as questors—Name-givers dedicated to fostering the ideals of a single Passion in the lives of all people—though few of them possess a typical questor's powers.

The paders of a duchy or city are commanded by patriarchs, Temple servants of great power and influence. Patriarchs are hand-picked by the pompate, and generally serve to maintain Temple control over Talea's dukes and signori. When a pompate dies, the patriarchs elect a new pompate from among their number—and so a wise duke, signor or king takes care not to offend his local patriarch. He or she just might become pompate, and therefore in a position to cause untold trouble for his or her enemies.

Servants of the Temple are expected to exemplify the precepts of Prima in their daily lives. In keeping with Prima's disapproval of the arts of love, subordinates of the Temple are expected to remain celibate, though many are said to secretly break this rule. More than one powerful patriarch, and even the pompate himself, are rumored to flout it with a wink and a nod. Among Talea's dukes and signori, Serenity IV is known to have many "nephews" and "nieces"—euphemisms in Talean society for sons and daughters one may not legally acknowledge.

Interestingly enough, the common folk of Talea do not appear to see—or perhaps simply do not admit—the hypocrisies and failings of the Temple's leading Name-givers. After living among them and speaking with them in taverns and markets and on street corners, I believe I understand the strange phenomenon that permits the pompate and his patriarchs to so obviously flout the precepts of Prima without provoking a peasant uprising.

The average Talean erfani is downtrodden and put-upon to a degree that would horrify even a Barsaivian who must struggle every day just to survive. Kings, dukes, patriarchs and Theran overlords tax him near to death, and his lands are looted and despoiled whenever his leaders go to war. He has no say in the laws by which he is governed, and any profit he makes from the rich lands he farms belong not to him, but to the duke who commands his allegiance. And he can do absolutely nothing to remedy this sad state of affairs. In all this darkness, there is only one glimmer of light—the promise that someday, if the commoner lives his life right, Prima's emissary will transport his soul to an eternal paradise.

The doctrines of Prima are gloomy, to be sure. The peasant is encouraged to believe that any pleasure he takes will doom his soul to an eternity of torment. And even if he spends his life in perfect virtue, he can still expect an eon or so of pain in the afterlife while waiting for Prima to manifest and send his legate to retrieve the worthy. But the hope of being among the chosen remains—the only hope in his small, narrow world. And Primaism also offers an excuse for the peasant's misery; it stems from the "spiritual darkness" of the age, and has nothing to do with him. It is not his fault, not some sort of punishment for wrongdoing. It simply is. To acknowledge the hypocrisy of the pompate and so many prominent Name-givers of the Temple is to acknowledge that the Temple's heart is hollow—and that raises the unsettling possibility that the doctrines of Prima are meaningless, and that there is no hope at all. Rather than face this, the average Talean peasant will accept anything the Temple tells him and will turn all the ardor of his impulsive nature into love for the pompate. Anything else might cost him his one chance at paradise.

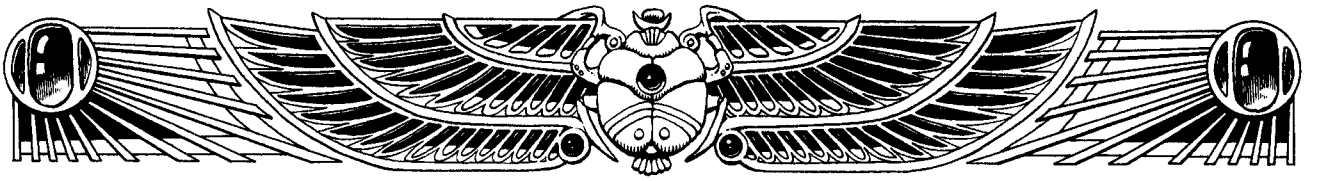
This life of continual suffering transforms the Talean peasant into a furious beast when he is finally aroused to anger. The paders and patriarchs are most adept at provoking the erfani to rage, and Talea's dukes and signori rightly fear the prospect of Temple-incited rebellions—which the pompate uses to his advantage against them whenever necessary.

On the Power of the Pompate

In addition to the illogical love of the common people, the pompate's power in Talea stems from his unique right to sever worshippers from the Temple; from the corps of troops at his disposal, known as the Enici; from his legal influence over the succession of kings and dukes; from his judicial privileges and from the heaps of silver in the Temple treasury.

On Severance

According to the prophecies of Demetrek, when Prima's emissary comes to the grim afterworld in search of ancient souls deserving of rescue, he will reject those unfortunates who were formally severed from the Temple during their lifetimes. Severance, a power belonging solely to the pompate, consists of a brief ceremony conducted by the pompate and five of his most trusted paders. None but these six people may witness the ceremony, which is always conducted in a certain chamber deep in the pompate's palace. According to the palace guards stationed outside this chamber, the ceremony does



not take long, and involves rather a lot of slightly off-key chanting in Old Talean—a tongue spoken by all Taleans in the province's distant past, but now known only to officials of the temple and to certain scholars of ancient languages.

The ceremony finished, the pompate sends a message to the individual who has been severed, and that person is publicly proclaimed outcast from the Temple at every place of worship throughout Talea. For a devout follower of Prima, there is no worse fate. Severance deprives him of the solace of worshipping his Passion, and also of the company of fellow believers; on pain of severance themselves, good Primaists are forbidden to associate with the severed lest the association stain their pure hearts (or some such reasoning). There are also more practical consequences. The Temple's wealth and the presence of its paders in almost every aspect of Talean life means that a severed person will find it extremely difficult to conduct his daily business. A severed merchant cannot sell his wares; a traveler may find it impossible to get a room at an inn; the very bakers and butchers in the markets may refuse to sell him his daily sustenance. And of course, Talean law permits the enslavement of severed Name-givers—the worst fate of all, to this free Barsaivian's mind. Severance also removes a Name-giver's legal recourse in civil or criminal matters; the courts are run by the Temple, whose adherents have little compassion for those they consider "fallen away." So dire is this penalty that the mere threat of severance is often sufficiant to persuade recalcitrant Name-givers to follow the pompate's will without much question.

The pompate may rescind a severance, but such occasions are rare. I learned of one recent instance in which the Lamp-Makers Guild of Eziano held that city's patriarch hostage until the pompate rescinded a severance against the guild's headman, who supports the republican cause.

On the Enici

The Enici are an elite guard, almost all adepts and paders of Prima, who serve as the Temple's—and the pompate's—private army. They number two thousand strong, but are so skilled in the various arts of war that they can match five thousand ordinary warriors. The pompate uses them to break sieges against temples and monasteries (a common occurrence as Talea's dukes and kings jockey with the Temple over the limits of Temple, royal and ducal authority), to aid ally dukes and kings, and to punish dukes and kings disloyal to him.

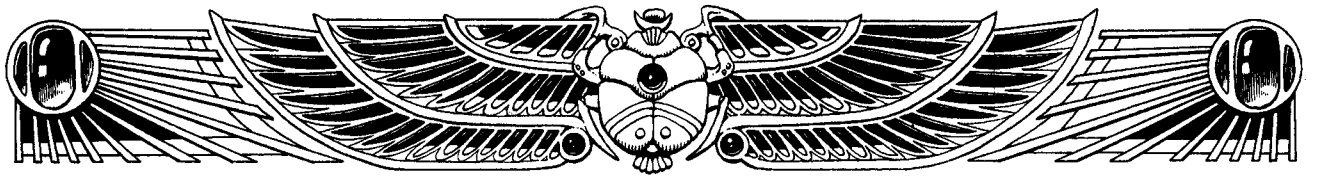
In addition to serving as soldiers, the Enici also serve as investigators and judges of a uniquely Talean crime, heresy. Primaism forbids the following of other Passions, and also prescribes a rigidly correct manner of expressing devotion to The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Come; anyone who violates proper practice as sanctioned by the Temple faces a heresy charge. The Enici regard the hunting down of heretics as among their primary tasks. They are permitted to interrogate adherents of Prima to test them for loyalty, and are said to use all manner of physical and mental tortures to extract confessions of impiety. Once a confession is wrung from a hapless worshipper, the Enici may assess penalties. The victim may be forced to pay fines to or perform services for the Temple, grant it property, or undergo some form of public humiliation. Opponents of the pompate direct their harshest criticisms at the Enici, whose members they accuse of flagrantly abusing their considerable power.

Pader Vivanoce, a grim drake who pokes his scaly talons into almost all intrigues of note in the province, leads the Enici. His sources of information are secret, but said to be vast; his ultimate motives, obscure. Pader Vivanoce puts up an impressive show of fealty to the pompate, but often makes bold moves on his own initiative. If even half the tales I heard of this cold-hearted Name-giver are correct, Vivanoce's fall from power (should it ever happen) will prompt a collective sigh of relief audible from the heart of Talea all the way to Bartertown.

On Judicial Authority

Name-givers who belong to the hierarchy of the Temple are the final arbiters of Talean law. Dukes and signors make and enforce decrees, but any worshipper of Prima may appeal a judgment made against him to a member of the Temple. Local rulers must therefore court the favor of their Temple representatives or else face the unpleasant possibility of confrontation with the Enici (anyone who fails to hold a Temple representative in the highest regard may be a heretic, after all). Fortunately for dukes and signori, most paders and patriarchs are as susceptible as the next Name-giver to bribes and compromises. (I gather it was not always so—but Serenity IV and his two immediate predecessors as pompate appear to have added their own bits and pieces to the precepts of Prima, many of which are remarkably convenient for the Pompate. Presumably, The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Come forgot a few things ... or will forget a few things ... oh, never mind. Thinking about it makes my head swim.) Only in very serious cases do conflicts between local rulers and the Temple result in confrontations. Negotiated settlements are much more common, usually to the detriment of the original petitioner.

In one colorful example, a professor of Malcovezzi University wounded the son of the Duchess of Jonacolla in a duel. Such injuries are generally considered outside the bounds of criminal punishment; the law presumes that the duelist knew what he risked when he entered the duel. The outraged duchess, however, would settle for nothing less than punishing the offender. She ordered the professor kidnapped and taken to her court, where she sentenced him to a severe lashing. The professor, once released, went to the Patriarch of Tavano seeking a judgment against the duchess. The patriarch called in



the Enici, who threatened a siege against Jonacolla's court. Now the Duchess of Jonacolla, who holds little love for the pompate, happened to have dug in for a long siege of a certain paderona in her duchy that sits on some particularly rich farmland. She offered to lift the siege if the Enici would go away—which they did. The professor, whose sufferings provided the pretext for the Enici's appearance, received no compensation whatsoever.

On Affirmations of Dukes and Kings

The pompate affirms all candidates for dukedoms and kingship. When the family of the reigning duke or duchess approves an heir as the new duke, the pompate simply affirms that choice. If any question exists concerning the capability or fitness of a duke to rule, the king and pompate both may intercede; and without the pompate's approval, a Name-giver has no hope of taking a ducal throne. The same rules apply to the succession of kings. The pompate may also strip a duke or king of his right to rule, generally in company with a severance. Talea's dukes and kings therefore owe the pompate their positions, though many are remarkably quick to forget this fact. The pompate does not casually rescind the rights of rulership; to do so would only invite instability, and ultimately would harm the Temple. Instead, he reserves this power as a measure of last resort. Of course, no dethroned duke or king goes quietly. They have nothing left to lose except the power that the pompate is trying to take from them, and it is not in any Talean's nature to give up easily. Generally, to remove a duke or a king from power takes a military campaign.

On The Temple Treasury

Followers of Prima are encouraged to tithe one-tenth of their earnings to the Temple, to gain unspecified blessings from The-One-Who-Is-Yet-To-Be and help speed his coming into the world. The Enici are known to make examples of those who are too publicly reluctant to pay the full amount, and so the pompate controls a vast treasury (despite the preachings of Demetrek, which extol the virtues of poverty and the evils of wealth). Serenity IV spends this money to build impressive monuments to Prima and vast, ornate temples in which to hold worship services. Under Serenity's leadership, the Temple proclaims that if the Talean people build enough monuments of sufficient grandeur, the seed of Prima's True Pattern will be brought into being and he will begin to gestate so that he can be born in the next age.

On Prominent Name-Givers of the Temple

Though I am by no means a believer in Primaism, I confess that the flagrant hypocrisy of so many Temple leaders disgusted me. During my time in Uomonza, I came to know a number of them—at first- and second-hand—and found most worthy only of contempt. Exposure to these poor excuses for Name-givers made me reconsider my affections for Signora Volla, who aided them in their corrupt enterprise of slavery.

On Patriarch Cucciano

Cucciano, a skeletal elf, is the pompate's right-hand man and is considered likeliest to succeed Serenity IV as pompate. He knows the ins and outs of Temple intrigue as well as I know the *Ballad of the Earthdawn*, and is thought to possess damning information on most of his rivals. Cucciano, like Serenity IV, is an enthusiast for monument-building, which has earned him the financial support of Thera's House Thaloss (a situation that the Therans fondly believed to be secret, but is well known by many signori). With Thaloss's bottomless purse to draw upon, the quietly forceful Cucciano may well become Serenity V. However, he inspires fear rather than affection in his subordinates, who may be tempted to elect a friendlier fellow.

On Patriarch Millezzi

Millezzi, a stooped dwarf with a pronounced stutter, seemed to be the only sincere patriarch in Uomonza. He is therefore unlikely to become pompate, unless his reputation as a gentle idiot makes him a compromise candidate in the event of a patriarchal deadlock. Most of his colleagues think him easily manipulated—but having met him, I wonder. Millezzi is the most interested in spreading Primaism to other parts of the Theran Empire, while his peers concentrate on seizing and keeping power in Talea.

On Patriarch Votanio

Votanio, a handsome human with a silver tongue that a troubadour might envy, has come out of nowhere to rival Cucciano for the office of pompate. Serenity IV is said to be fond of him, so much so that he overlooks the degree to which Votanio's writings disagree with his cherished beliefs about the role of the Temple in Talean life. Votanio enjoys the support of the republican Chancellor Lograno of Eziano, and has written a number of pamphlets declaring that the precepts of Prima are compatible with the personal freedoms espoused by the republicans. He has also cultivated the patronage of Overgovernor Berdew, who wants him to be the next pompate. Votanio is fond of saying that the Taleans have no right to export Primaism to

the rest of the world until they reform it in its birthplace, a message with which Berdew enthusiastically agrees.

Votanio is the Duke of Sercicia's personal confessor. Whenever Sercicia commits an offense against Prima—which is often—Votanio assesses him a stiff fine, which he uses to fund his own order of paders. He calls them "Brothers and Sisters of Rejuvenation"; his enemies call them Votanists. Votanist paders have spread throughout Talea's cities, helping the poor and spouting republican doctrine. The signori hate them, but don't want to risk the ire of the Temple by arresting them—their patron is a powerful patriarch, after all. And as many Votanists are high-Circle masters of magical Disciplines, arresting them is easier said than done. Sercicia is only too happy to fund this unconventional order. He wants to tie up all the signori's resources in dealing with the Votanists, which will leave the troublesome city leaders less energy for the pursuit of Sercicia's favorite activity—piracy.

I believe Votanio is a sincere reformer, but also a slippery politician with his eye on the ultimate position of power in Talea. Which side of his soul you end up dealing with depends on the situation. If he becomes Pompate, he will be an interesting and unpredictable leader. I'll wager that Chancellor Lograno, Sercicia and Overgovernor Berdew will be in for more than a few surprises!

On the Legend of Mole Skin

Some say that the true leader of the Temple is not the pompate, but a blind, grublike great dragon Named Mole Skin who dwells deep beneath the pompate's palace. According to this bizarre legend, Mole Skin conveyed the prophecies of Prima to Demetrek, and every Pompate must make a hazardous journey to consult with the dragon upon taking the holy throne. Belief in Prima and the construction of monuments in Uomonza are said to serve the secret will of this ancient dragon, who can see the future as if all moments in time are occurring simultaneously.

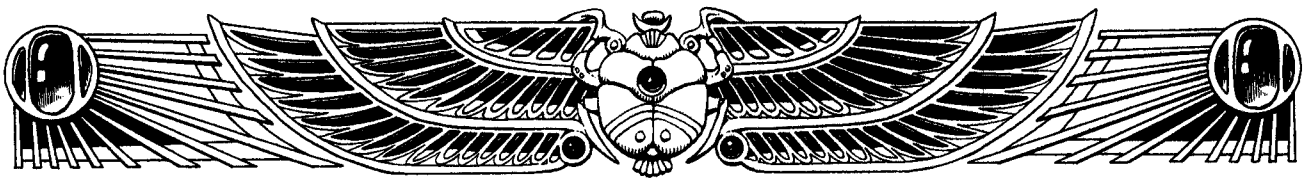
The servants of the Temple call those who spread this tale blasphemers, but it has gained currency among the Therans—who, as we know, see dragons under every bed. I am skeptical of dragon lore, but I must admit to wondering why a drake serves as the most powerful enforcer of Serenity IV's policies.

A QUIET DEPARTURE

The more I worked for Signora Volla at Serenity IV's court, the more I came to see myself as an accomplice to slavers. I saw many undeserving Taleans swept into the pompate's net as he fished for silver to complete his monuments, and it sickened me. When the visiting King of the South, Domartini III, offered me a position as a diplomat attached to his court, I happily took the opportunity. Perhaps I was cowardly not to say goodbye to my beloved signora, but I could not bear to face her knowing of the crimes I had helped her commit.

ON THE KINGS

The kings of Talea are the fourth pillar of power in the province (or perhaps I should say fifth, since the arrival of the Empire). There are two kings of Talea proper; the king of the neighboring province of Arancia is often considered a third because of his extensive connections and influence in Talean affairs.



Talea was once a land of three barbarian tribes, each with different customs and dialects. Each tribe included many clans, who constantly fought each other with no regard for whether or not they belonged to the same tribe. Sixteen hundred years ago, roughly a century before the founding of Throal, a charismatic dwarf Named Avazzi the Short arose from the Ramacci tribe, united his clans, and then fought the other tribes to force them to recognize him as king. Of course, Avazzi faced equally formidable opposition. The war leaders of the other two tribes, an ork woman Named Livaga and an elf man Named Gonzago, fought Avazzi tooth and nail, and Talea's hills and forests ran red with blood. Gonzago's tribe, the Davidi, was wiped out. The surviving Ramacci tribe became the Kingdom of the North. Livaga's tribe, the Ommoni, became the Kingdom of the South. At about this same time, Demetrek was preaching the doctrines of Prima in Talea's northern regions.

For a long time, the descendants of Avazzi and Livaga ruled Talea as battling kings of the north and south. Then two particularly weak kings were overthrown by their lieutenants, who took over large areas of land and ruled them as dukes. At one point, the King of Arancia thrust his nose into the issue to claim rights over Talean territory that lay nearest his own realm. Talea's domestic affairs became a morass in which intrigue and carefully waged, limited warfare became more important than legendary heritage, wise rulership or the good of the people—and so it remains to this day. Talea's kings nowadays are roving rulers in search of subjects, spending most of their money on mercenaries to throw at each other in hopes of gaining this or that brief advantage. The resulting property destruction necessitates constant rebuilding and keeps silver flowing into the pockets of the Therans and others who profit from Talea's ongoing small wars.

Like dukes, kings are reNamed upon accession, and take on the abilities and powers of their predecessors. Kings may choose from among a number of legendary Names, each of which conveys a different set of abilities.

From time to time, Talea's kings reassert their ancient power. When the dukes are weak, they lose ground to the kings. More often, however, the kings are weak and exert only a token power over the dukes and signori. The power of Talea's current kings stems more from legal tradition than military might, which makes their positions precarious. They therefore depend on bluff and strategem as well as on perceived legitimacy to maintain power.

According to Talean law, no duke can ascend his throne without the approval of a king. In practice, a powerful duke might do so; however, he or she risks provoking the common folk to ire by such flouting of tradition, as well as possible severance by the pompate. Therefore, the kings retain this ancient legal right even though they lack the military might to back up their choices. The King of the South approves the new dukes of Malcovezzi, Romertazzi and Sercicia, while the King of the North approves the dukes of Crossetti, Frechetti and Amalvetti. Both kings claim rights of approval over Jonacolla, which is often contested between them. In addition, the King of the South periodically asserts a claim to Amalvetti, and the King of Arancia every so often asserts rights over the western duchies of Crossetti and Amalvetti. The motive for claiming the right of approval is simple—money. Each duke owes tribute to the king who commands his or her allegiance; so the more dukes a king approves, the more wealth he takes. When a claim is disputed, the Temple steps in and divides the tribute owed between the claimants, taking a fat commission for itself in the process.

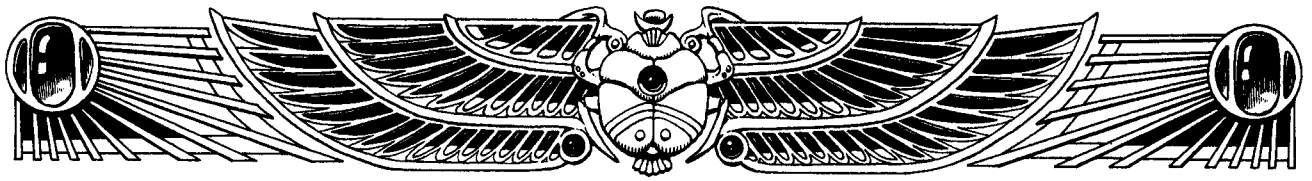
When I first signed on with the King of the South, I saw him as a possible unifying force, a shining hero who could knock heads together and help throw off the Theran yoke. As I dealt more and more with the diplomats sent by the King of the North and the King of Arancia, I came to realize that the kings were simply one more part of a never-ending cycle of futility.

On the King of the South

At first I was happy to serve Domartini III, a handsome, golden-haired troll of urbane tastes and considerable wit. When I first met Domartini, his heroic manner and ambitious plans for Talean unity greatly impressed me. Later, I came to realize that his fine words were mere puffery—a stratagem to snare the loyalties of the naive, rather than a plan he truly intended to carry out. What Domartini really cares about is riding around on horseback, getting into glorious battles and showing off the cavalryman talents that came with his Name, enjoying the pleasures of food and drink, and fondling serving wenches.

Domartini fights most of his battles with the forces of the King of the North, usually over the rights to tribute from the duchies of Jonacolla and Amalvetti. Now and then Domartini clashes with the King of Arancia, Ellieux IV, who also claims Amalvetti—but he engages in these small wars with less enthusiasm, because Arancia's troops are more of a challenge to defeat.

Among the dukes, Domartini has two staunch allies: the Duchess of Romertazzi, his loving ward, and the Duke of Sercicia. The latter, who was not pleased to see me when I showed up on his doorstep as a representative of his king, likes Domartini for his united-Talea rhetoric, but they disagree fiercely on the republican movement, which Domartini considers blasphemous.



On the King of the North

The King of the North is Povani the Mountainous, an ork who looks as if he had swallowed a thundra beast. He can no longer move of his own volition, but must be carried on a massive palanquin. He succeeded his uncle as king after most of the rest of his family was poisoned, and refused to be reNamed upon his accession to the throne. He has been severed and readmitted to the Temple at least twice during his chaotic career, and the pompate has threatened severance several more times. When I first learned of him, he recently had mended fences with the pompate for perhaps the twelfth time—no small feat, considering the stubborn streak for which he is renowned.

Povani's chief enemies are the King of the South, who disputes his claim over Jonacolla and Amalvetti, and the King of Arancia, who lays claim to Crossetti and Amalvetti. The Duke of Crossetti is staunchly in Povani's corner, the Duke of Amalvetti is happy to send the king's tribute to an account held by the pompate, and the Duchess of Jonacolla alternates her favors between north and south, depending on the day of the week.

On the King of Arancia

Arancia is a large kingdom to the west of Talea, across the Selestrean Sea. It resembles Talea in many ways; it has its own dukes and signori, and some of its people venerate Prima as their Talean neighbors do. Others pay homage to the wilder Passions of Arancia's deep forests. Arancia is not yet an Imperial province, but Theran business interests are as influential in its cities as they are in Talea. The King of Arancia, Ellieux IV, maintains an uneasy alliance with Thera. Overgovernor Berdew oversees this alliance, and has diplomats permanently stationed in Ellieux's court.

Ellieux IV is a hearty, back-slapping dwarf who prefers the company of common huntsmen and soldiers to his well-bred family members or Arancia's propriety-obsessed dukes. Despite his bluff, egalitarian manner, he is every bit as given to intrigue as any Talean king in his dealings with Talea's dukes and the pompate.

On Mercenaries

Among my other duties for Domartini III, I bargained for the services of mercenaries and so came to know many of Talea's most famous mercenary captains. Talean politics and business depend on mercenaries to an amazing extent. Kings and dukes spend much of their tribute money and tax revenues to pay soldiers-for-hire so that they can make war on other dukes and kings, or on various signori or the Temple. They use these wars as a sort of fire-cannon diplomacy, hoping to force their opponents into favorable settlements that increase tax revenues for the aggressors. This seemingly pointless cycle of warfare, threatened warfare and extorted treaties actually keeps the province going, as rain keeps crops growing. The warring takes money from the common man and gives it to the powerful, who give it to soldiers, who proceed to spend it like water as they patronize farmers, artisans, horse breeders, weaponsmiths and tavern keepers. Those farmers, artisans, horse breeders and so on—common folk, all—then pay their taxes to the dukes, who pay tribute to the kings, and the wheel turns merrily on.

A Talean mercenary captain is a shrewd bargainer. Though they like to be seen as mighty warriors, they actually fight as little as possible. The soldiers they command are their stock in trade, and it takes much silver to make up for the loss of a trained fighter. Talean wars are sieges and stalemates, in which deadly moments are few and sudden—and the mercenary bands prefer it that way. In general, mercenaries treat one another with professional courtesy; they'd rather take a foe prisoner than kill him. Some foreign mercenaries, such as the Issyri footmen and Indrisan bandits, don't understand the genteel rules of Talean warfare, and exact higher death tolls.

For the reader's benefit, I shall describe three of the better-known mercenary captains with whom I had dealings.

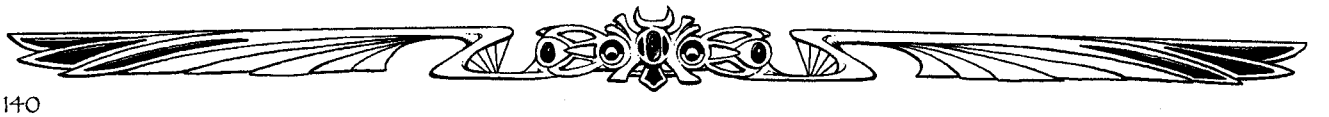
On Ignaturi of the Hills

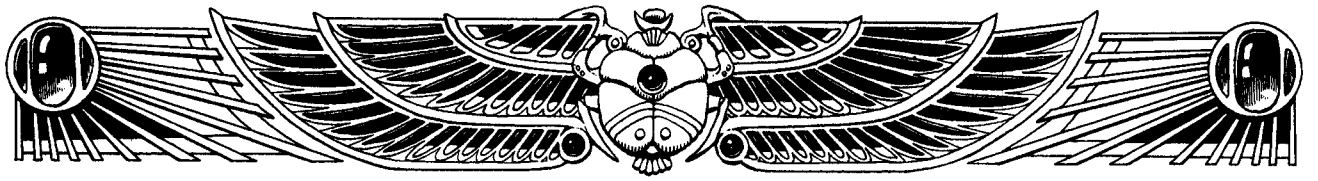
Ignaturi is the most famous of several captains who command units of dwarf pikemen, most of whom hail from the foothills of the Caralkspur Mountains in Vivane Province. The dwarf pikemen of Talea are famous throughout the Empire for their high morale, unshakable discipline and the hard bargains their captains drive. Ignaturi's Pikes, as they are called, are the most renowned of the lot. Ignaturi is a middle-aged dwarf, well-schooled and witty. He is a fine poet and a connoisseur of wines. Though as cautious about fighting as any of his colleagues, he is full of bravado and loudly claims to laugh at death. His reputation has made him haughty; he expects even a king to treat him as an equal.

On Nonno the Tusk

The elder statesman of Talean mercenary captains is a salty old dwarf Named Nonno the Tusk. A stout believer in the old ways of his homeland, he reveres the memory of his ancestors, all of whom were brilliant mercenary fighters (to hear him tell it, anyway). He is highly sensitive to insults about his unusual ork-like tusks; I saw him cut a man in half for joking about them.

Nonno commands the Spawn of the Wind, a mixed squad of dwarf pikemen and ork cavalry from the foothills. He'll





lower his price in exchange for looting rights, but that bargain is a bad one. His fighters can strip a village of everything of value in the time it takes to sneeze.

On Quar-es-Phek

Quar-es-Phek, a human originally from Creana, captains the Swift Spears, a mercenary company made up largely of Creanan bandits. She has lived in Talea for nearly five years, and has replaced her band's few casualties with native Talean fighters. Quar-es-Phek wants to be a Talean duchess, and so is willing to accept less pay in exchange for future political favors. She has converted to Primaism and frequently places her cavalry unit at the disposal of the Enici.

ON THE REPUBLICANS

The city of Eziano, which I had occasion to visit while in service to the King of the South, is the mercenary capital of Talea. It is a wonder among wonders: a city built on a network of canals. In Eziano, people travel by boat as they might use horses in another town. It does smell a bit on occasion, but the beauty of the place—with its white marble walls, lace-like balconies of pale carved stone, and waterways that shimmer in the light like jewels—more than makes up for any olfactory unpleasantness.

Eziano is fertile soil for business, but the city's leaders are plainly mad. Five years ago, when Eziano's men of business overthrew the ruling council of signori, they did not replace them with new ones. Perhaps because the rebel merchants could not agree on which among them should rise to power, they chose to elect a new ruling council through what they called "secret balloting"—of the entire merchant population of the city! They have done this twice now, and intend to do it again next year. Any merchant who has lived in Eziano for more than two years and runs a business with an annual income of at least fifty gold pieces may vote in these elections. The leaders of Eziano call it republicanism. I call it plain daft. No consideration is given to any voter's intelligence, common sense, experience in politicking or personal desire for the good of the city. Instead, the republicans blithely assume that mere residence for a brief period and possession of fifty gold pieces a year in revenue fits any merchant to determine Eziano's fate. A mad idea, truly.

The Republican Council of Eziano (as they style themselves) claim that their city is an independent state, not subject to the commands of dukes, kings or Imperial overlords. (That last I can certainly sympathize with.) The pompate has condemned republicanism as prideful and threatened the councilors with severance. Rather than bow to the Temple's threats, they in turn have threatened to make it illegal for Eziano's citizens to tithe to the Temple. The result is a stalemate. The Therans, who might have been expected to crush this republican nonsense, have done nothing so far. Admiral Kebakki has extensive business interests in Eziano and is rumored to have made a private arrangement with Eziano's chancellor, Lograno. Kebakki's fellow Therans are less than pleased with this state of affairs, as Lograno and his ilk continue to spread their republican rhetoric to other cities.

Chancellor Lograno, a dark-skinned and dark-eyed ork whom I found surprisingly eloquent and also surprisingly cynical, quoted me the following motto: "Battles change things for a time. Compromise changes things forever." A maker of fine fabrics, he employs more than five hundred people, all of whom call him just and scrupulously honest. He is something of a traveler, having spent time in Great Thera and in Throal. He told me he much admired Throal's Council Compact, but that it is "a mere first step" toward the universal equality of Name-givers. (The reader will understand from this why Chancellor Lograno and his fellow republicans are keeping certain Theran and Talean authorities awake at night, despite the fact that they control only one small city and have not much of an army to their name. Ideas can be liberating and dangerous things, as any troubadour knows only too well.)

A FINAL FAREWELL

I was with Lograno when we learned of the death of King Varulus III of Throal, and we sadly began to share our memories of younger and more innocent days spent in that kingdom. Suddenly, in the midst of a somewhat tearful tale about a tavern mistress who always gave me a free tankard of ale simply for my dashing smile, I pitched over in my chair with the feeling of a dozen knives slashing through my innards. I put it down at first to a sudden excess of homesickness, but we soon discovered that someone had poisoned my wine. Lograno, furious, spared no effort to find the poisoner. Great was my sadness to learn that his new chef had been paid to put arsenic in my drink ... by none other than my former beloved, Signora Volla of Apazza. In fairness, she *had* warned me against spurning her.

Upon my recovery, I resolved to leave Talea before any more of my misadventures caught up with me. Lograno helped arrange my passage to Vivane on a Theran trading vessel, and from there I made my way back to Bartertown—where I found that my associate *still* couldn't afford to pay what he owed me! But that is another story.

VASGOTHIA

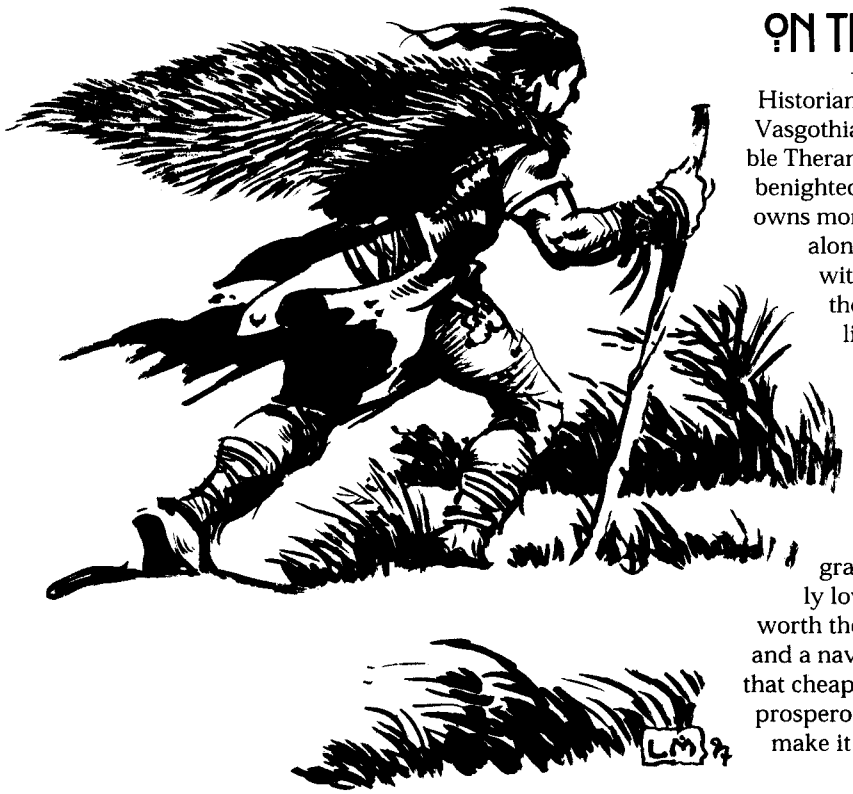
Vasgothia is a large province to the north of Talea and east of the Kingdom of Arancia, settled by the Therans in the earliest days of their civilization and shared with the hardy native tribal peoples. Despite this historic link, Thera's formal annexation of the province after its declaration of Empire in 443 TH proved easier said than done. Both before and since the Scourge, Vasgothia's tribes resisted pacification by the Theran infantry—in fact, their resistance to Imperial rule has increased markedly of late. Though far from being another Marac, Vasgothia is nonetheless a troubled part of the Empire.

Theran officials and soldiers consider Vasgothia a dismal posting, what with its constant tribal skirmishing, its wet, cold climate, and the presence of so many natives who, in Theran eyes, are nothing more than ignorant, dirty barbarians with less to recommend them than a band of Barsaivian ork scorchers (and most Barsaivians know the low opinion the average Theran holds of them*!). For a Theran soldier, there is little glory to be gained in suppressing yet another obstreperous Vasgothian so-called general; fighting here is no way to build a legend. The Empire values Vasgothia mainly for its large tracts of farmland; not for nothing is this province known as Thera's breadbasket. House Gascilium, which dominates the business of agriculture in the Empire, is all-important in Vasgothia; even Great Thera depends on the grain grown and cattle grazed by the Gascili.*

An ambitious Theran may find Vasgothia a pestilential backwater, but the curious adventurer can find many ways to build a legend in this wild and mysterious land. Of all the known world, Vasgothia was affected by the Scourge in the most unusual ways. All manner of mysteries, dangerous and fascinating, lurk in its deep, dark forests. And only in Vasgothia did the Passions fight the Horrors head-on; the strange remnants of this titanic battle should interest scholars, magicians and adepts alike. As the reader will see, these things merely scratch the surface of the Vasgothian enigma.

The Vasgothian delegation to the Great Symposium was headed by Bilford, the unexpectedly jolly and somewhat rustic Official Historian of House Gascilium. Military affairs were left to one Levonicus, a Theranized Vasgothian who has achieved the lofty rank of Field Marshal and is attached to the War College in Great Thera. Another Theranized Vasgothian, a human scholar Named Steenhauz, told us of Vasgothian tribal ways. Most interesting, however, was the inclusion of a number of adventurers in the delegation. Their bizarre tales of encounters in the Deep Forests of Vasgothia should whet the appetites of any adept worthy of the name.

—T'sanas V'shaala



ON THERAN VASGOTHIA

—In the words of Bilford, Official Historian of House Gascilium

Vasgothia's farmland is the only reason any sensible Theran would ever live in such a dank, chill, benighted place. My own House of Gascilium owns more acreage and pasture land in Vasgothia alone than in all the rest of the Empire, and with good reason. This province, backward though it may be, is blessed with fertility like no other. It supports the largest share in feeding Great Thera and many of the other Imperial provinces. So fertile is the soil that it produces vast amounts of food even in the relatively short growing season. House Gascilium sustains the Empire with its Vasgothian holdings, which give us plenty of grains and fruit and vegetables at a strikingly low cost. And to those who wonder if it is worth the Empire's while to maintain two legions and a naval fleet in Vasgothia, let me remind you that cheap foodstuffs make the Empire every bit as prosperous as scores of soldiers and airships make it powerful.

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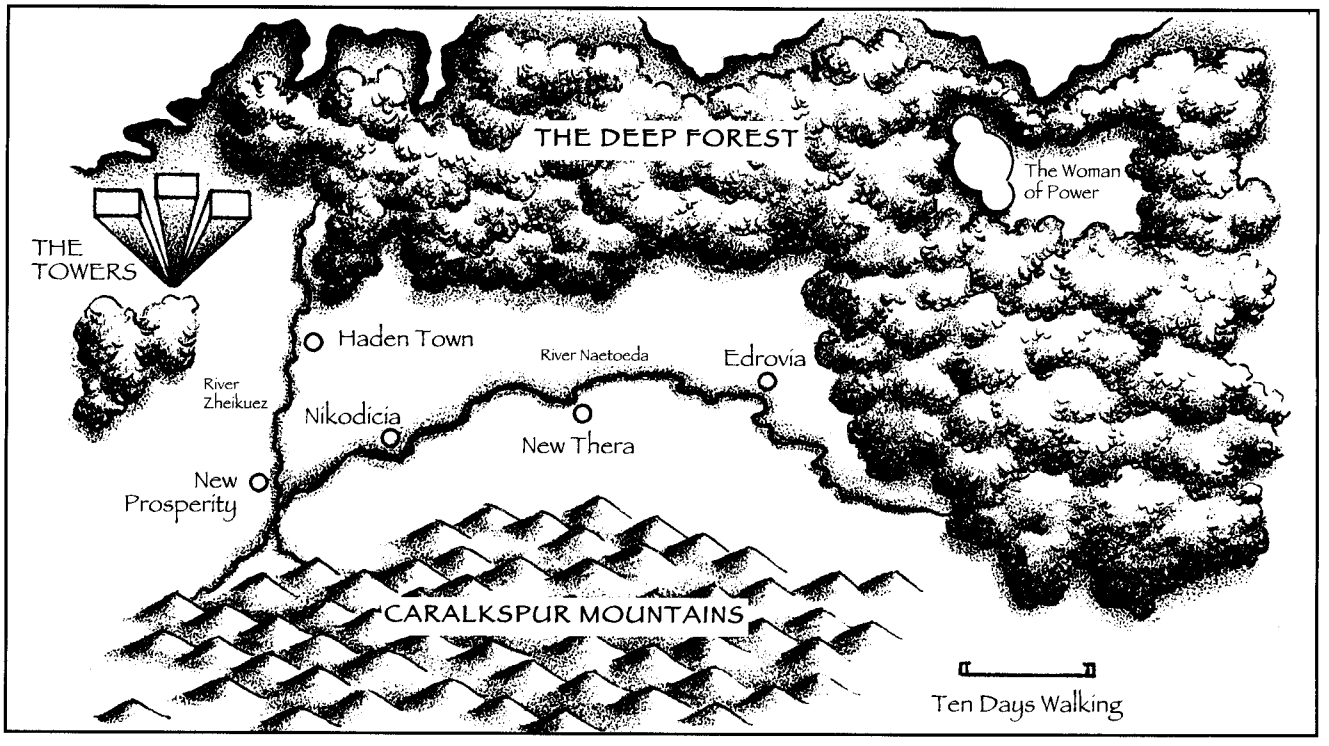
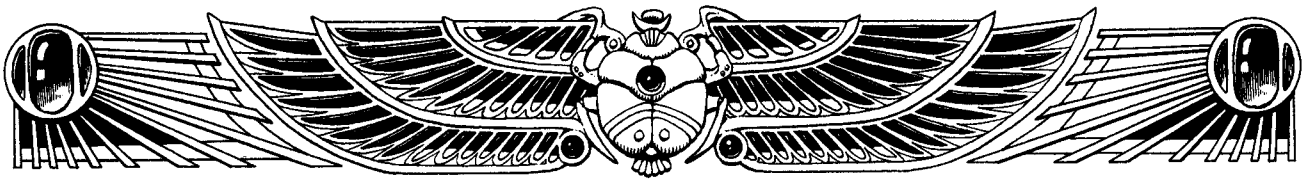


Without Vasgothia, House Gascilium would have to go back to doing what it did during the Scourge—growing food in greenhouses, just as did the kaer-dwellers of Barsaive and other provinces. (How else could we have fed so many people living in a citadel on a small island like Thera? There certainly isn't enough open land for the more usual sort of farming.) Of course, Thera's greenhouses were far more advanced than those of Throal, and our farming methods produced a greater yield than the methods used by most kaers. Most of our greenhouses were floating structures similar to our airships—large, flattish tubs of stone within which soil seeded with True earth was laid and crops planted. Unfortunately, this type of farming is extremely expensive. The costs of True air and earth alone would freeze the heart of any account-taker. And then there's the cost of hiring all the elementalists to keep the soil enriched, plus the simple fact that after four centuries, eating food grown that way leaves much to be desired in terms of taste. No seasoning can quite erase the bland, artificial flavor of grains and fruits and vegetables grown in an artificial garden, with the nourishment that would normally come from sunlight and water and decaying plant matter coming instead from True elements and elementalist spells.

Given the Empire's overwhelming incentive to reclaim Vasgothia's fertile fields, I'm surprised we took so long about it. I know the legions would rather have swallowed nails than wage extensive campaigns against tribal barbarians in Vasgothia's damp and nasty lowlands, but we ended up wasting much of the silver gained from Indrisa and Issyr keeping those greenhouses going. Foolish, foolish. It all comes down to House politics, of course. It always does. House Gascilium was very powerful before the Scourge, because we controlled the food supply. And certain leaders of House Zanjan, as well as others in the military, were none too anxious to see us resume our former prominent role once the Scourge ended—at least not until they'd gotten a good head start. In the end, however, cold hard numbers did what they always do. They demanded the action dictated by common sense—the retaking of Vasgothia. Ever since then, Gascilium has prospered and so has the Empire. This is as it should be.

Unfortunately, Vasgothia never has the sense to stay conquered. More distinct tribes than an Arbitorium scribe can count are running around the place, squeezing themselves into ever-smaller tracts of tribal lands as necessity forces us to expand our own holdings. So one moss-backed, self-proclaimed "king" or another is always getting pushed into the deep forest, where nobody wants to go (for reasons my colleagues and I will soon explain). And Vasgothian tribes with nothing to lose invariably come and raid Theran farms. These raiding bands are too small and too swift-moving to effectively attack from airships, and so we have to slap them down the old-fashioned way—with small infantry units. (It's not all sweet cakes and fine wine for the Fifth Fleet, however. Now and then, something huge and frightening slithers or flaps out of the Deep Forests, and the Fifth Fleet gets to show its mettle.)



On Imperial History in Vasgothia

The Empire's history in Vasgothia is a simple story to relate. Explorers of House Gascilium traveled there in 152 TH, soon after our house was founded, seeking good farmland with which to build the house's fortunes. We bought land from Vasgothia's tribal chieftains, fair and square. But then we found out we'd have to fight to keep it, no matter what our signed bits of parchment said. (Your Vasgothian tribal is a shifty creature, prone to making and breaking promises at a whim—and he doesn't really understand written deeds of sale, anyway. The ones my ancestors dealt with certainly didn't.) So we fought the battles that produced some of Gascilium's greatest heroes, and we kept fighting whenever the tribes made it necessary. Fortunately for my house, the tribes frequently preferred fighting each other to bothering us. Much easier to take on a band of howling half-savages in blue war paint and skins wielding bronze knives and spears than well-trained troops from a Theran legion with armor and better weapons.

We had to import slaves by the shipful to work the land, of course. Vasgothians make terrible slaves. Solid and stocky as tree stumps, they've no trouble at all with the brief bursts of exertion required for hunting and raiding. But give them heavy work to do, or leave them out in the sun for too long, and they melt like butter. With our imported slaves, we built the giant farms that made House Gascilium what it is today and that feed the Empire. We built some towns, too: Ermanium, Gascony, New Prosperity, New Thera, Messianar and Saemastar. Unlike Theran-built cities in other provinces, these didn't grow much; over our long history in Vasgothia, they've attracted only a few natives and artisans and so forth. Not surprising, really. Nobody except a farmer wants to live in Vasgothia if he can help it. But the Theran settlements did what the Empire needed them to do; they kept the grain coming, housed the army and generally stayed out of House Gascilium's way. And that was good.

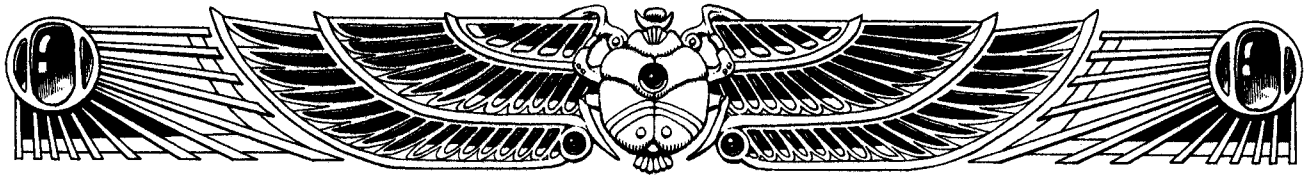
Things ticked along this way for centuries until 443 TH. In that year, the First Governor of the time decided to tell the Vasgothians that Thera was an Empire now, thank you much, and had conquered every last one of them. Came as a bit of a shock to the Vasgothians, who'd thought we were their guests and so had pretty much left us alone (except for the odd raid or two when a local chieftain felt bored). Well, the Declaration of Empire did what no Vasgothian could have done. It united the tribes against us. Well, about half of the tribes, actually—but by Vasgothian standards, that's unity. And so we had to fight again to keep what we'd paid for—and all because the First Governor had insisted on rubbing the tribes' noses in their subordinate status, instead of letting them go on thinking they were equal partners in the Theran enterprise. (It's never wise to tell an inferior that he is one, unless you can't avoid it; he'll work much better for you if he thinks he's on your level. But that's all leagues under the proverbial airship now.)

For the next three decades, up to the sealing of Great Thera, things got progressively worse for Theran interests in Vasgothia. Some of the tribes, whom we dubbed the Empirists, stuck with us because we taught them how to build kaers and protect themselves against the Horrors. But the other tribes caused all sorts of disruptions. We called them Barrites, after their so-called great general—a pestilential native troll Named Barri. Needless to say, we didn't give them one scrap of the Rites of Protection and Passage. They wanted to fend for themselves, so we let them.

Well, the Barrite tribes made things so bad for us that eventually we decided to pull out ahead of schedule. We left in 974 TH, after finishing the citadels that would protect three of our settlements: New Prosperity, New Thera and Messianar. (We picked the settlements with the most auspicious Names; it would be bad magic to let the Horrors destroy New Thera.) The loyal Vasgothians moved into these citadels; the rest we left on their own. We knew it was likely the Barrites would try to steal the Rites of Protection and Passage once we'd gone, but that was the Empirists' problem to solve. As it turned out, the Barrites did overrun Messianar, but they didn't settle in it; they just destroyed it. They had their own mad plan to survive the Scourge, you see. The questors of their primitive Passions told them that the Passions would fight off the Horrors—and the silly fools believed it.

As you might expect, House Gascilium languished during the Scourge. Greenhouse farming was not nearly as profitable as real farming, and our best land was being ravaged by Horrors far away. Finally, in 1450 TH, Theran forces returned to Vasgothia. With the aid of our loyal Empirist Vasgothians who'd survived in New Prosperity and New Thera, we re-established our farms and once again took up our post as food suppliers to the Empire.

A curious fate befell some of the Empirists, however. Between the end of the Scourge and Thera's return, they'd gone out to a site somewhere in the Deep Forest and reNamed themselves—with enormous and disturbing consequences, as you shall all hear soon enough. The forest had always been full of strange things, but the Scourge made the place far more bizarre and dangerous. The Place of ReNaming, as the once-loyal Vasgothians called it, is only one of many oddities with which we've had to cope in recent years. Under its baleful influence, the reNamed Empirists forgot their loyalties and also reproduced like rabbits. Soon, we had as many troublesome tribes on our hands as we had in the years before the Scourge. But this time, we won't withdraw no matter how difficult things get. If it takes another legion to keep them down, then so be it. The Empire must still be fed, after all—and we need Vasgothian land to do it.



On the Present Theran Hierarchy

The following informal presentation, in the words of an adventurer Named Itaret, was given not at the Symposium, but over mugs of ale at the Scorpion's Tale tavern on Majestic Lane in Great Thera.
—T'sanas V'shaala

I'm not much interested in politics, but I find as I go about my adventures that politicians are often interested in me. Sooner or later, someone with an official title and a little power always wants to put me in jail for some insignificant incident or another. So whenever I travel to a new place, I make it my business to pick up local gossip on who's who and what's what. (It never hurts to know the secrets of your jailers' bosses when you might get thrown in the brig.) In Vasgothia, I befriended a soldier or two and got a pretty clear idea of what the Empire's high-and-mighties are up to in those parts.

The voice of authority in Vasgothia isn't Overgovernor Enzwintz, even though he's of House Gascilium. Instead, it's his mother—Pularva Grotüün, the Chief Operating Officer of House Gascilium's business enterprises in the province. Those enterprises are the only reason Vasgothia *is* a Theran province, so this dried-up old bat of an ork is in charge. She decides on everything of importance: which Vasgothian tribes the legions will attack, who gets appointed to what military office, what cities will have their roads repaired or new storehouses built, and so on. Her authority is all unofficial, of course—but everyone knows who runs things, both in Vasgothia and back at the Arbitorium. She's been around forever, which only adds to her power. Rumor has it she swallowed a long-life potion cooked up by a House Krand magician, a potion that supposedly killed everyone else who ever tried it. No one knows how old she really is. I saw her once; she looks like one of those dolls with a dried apple for a head.

Overgovernor Enzwintz is perfectly happy to let his old mum run things, provided she stays out of his way. He's a career bureaucrat and one of Pularva's twenty-eight sons, which she's rumored to have whelped in litters. People who know him say that his mother terrifies him; his skin crawls like a zip-lizard whenever he gets within fifty yards of her. Fancy maneuvering by his enemies in the Arbitorium got him the dubious honor of his posting in Vasgothia; they wanted to humiliate him. They'd have succeeded better if Enzwintz actually gave a krillworm's hind end about doing his job. He's said to be a decent, if humorless fellow, who occasionally turns sulky and resentful when required to do actual work.

Vasgothia's akarenti, an ork Named Klehowa, is as much of a non-entity as his overgovernor. He's afraid to gather information on Pularva's enemies in the region because Pularva doesn't like bad news and has a nasty habit of blaming the messenger. (Throwing heavy objects at the messenger, to be precise. Klehowa has the bumps on his skull to prove it.) He's learned the hard way that his job isn't really to keep his superior informed about what's going on; it's to tell her that every pile of horse dung in Vasgothia smells like a garland of roses.

Klehowa has an interesting sideline going, however. Pularva is something of a prude and has banned what she calls "indecent" writings in Vasgothia. Klehowa brings salacious poems and stories to her attention, confiscates them at her orders, then turns around and earns himself a nice chunk of coin selling those same writings on the black market. In no other Imperial province of the empire does the common soldier read as much poetry as in Vasgothia!

As for Theran military might, Vasgothia's cheap wheat and cattle are important enough to the Empire that it stationed two legions here. Naturally, their generals are at each other's throats. General Keva'con, commander of the Fourth Legion, is a young elf who shot through the ranks like a flame arrow, thanks to the favors of a few powerful people back home. He's hopelessly vain about his good looks and his lineage; he comes from a long line of famous generals, and isn't shy about letting people know it. He has portraits of several illustrious forebears up on the walls of his quarters—funnily enough, all of them look almost exactly like him. He treats the Fourth Legion like a personal toy, deploying his soldiers when and where it suits him—or, more accurately, when and where it suits Pularva. Despite this, he cuts a gallant enough figure that his troops worship him like a Passion.

His rival, General Holuhui of the Sixth Legion, has had to bite and scratch for every promotion she's ever gotten. She's a canny tactician, but also a stereotypically blunt and pushy dwarf who tends to offend people without meaning to do so. To her, Keva'con represents everything that's wrong with the Theran military—style over substance, promotion through connections rather than merit, ego and stupidity rewarded with power. She routinely sends her soldiers out on dangerous assignments just to show up Keva'con, which doesn't exactly endear her to the rank-and-file.

Admiral Oballa, commander of the Fifth Fleet, is a scholarly dwarf who carries himself with rigid self-control. People don't tend to like him much, either. He fusses over small details and treats everyone except Pularva of Gascilium as if they're too stupid to even notice. (Toward Pularva, he is reputed to be a bootlicker of the highest order.) The Fifth Fleet doesn't have much to do in Vasgothia; it spends most of its time waiting for some huge half-Horror or creature to lumber out of the woods so that the fleet can bombard it to pulp on the ground or shoot it out of the sky.

On Theran Settlements

—In the words of Bilford, Official Historian of House Gascilium

Vasgothia boasts five settlements large enough to be worth talking about, all built by Therans. New Prosperity and New Thera, built before the Scourge, survived it intact. Those two cities were constructed under the auspices of the Empire as a whole, and were partly meant to impress the locals with the Empire's grandeur. They're not a patch on the truly opulent Imperial cities like Pezzano in Talea or certain cities of Indrisa, but they do have their share of gigantic stone buildings and outsized statues of various First Governors. Haden Town, Nikodicia and Edrovia sprang up after Vasgothia's reclamation; these three towns, built by House Gascilium, are much more modest in size and appearance, in keeping with House Gascilium's philosophy of thrift. Buildings are mostly wooden, as wood is abundant and cheap. Some of them are beautifully decorated by Theran artisans, but you won't find great towers of gleaming marble or alabaster colossi anywhere in these little farming towns. These places are meant for doing business. Most of the folk who live in all of these settlements, large or small, either work for Gascilium's farms and ranches or else provide services to those who do such work. New Thera boasts a population of about thirty thousand Name-givers; the other Theran towns range from fifteen to twenty thousand residents apiece. Approximately two-thirds of the city-dwellers are native Vasgothians with the wit to accept Theran ways and civilization; the rest are mostly Therans, with a smattering of natives from other Imperial provinces. Therans living in Vasgothia tend to be young bucks sent here to learn the family business and keep out of trouble, or adventurers out to make legends and fortunes by exploring Vasgothia's wilds.

On Theranized Vasgothians

As my esteemed colleagues Field Marshal Levonicus and Scholar Steenhauz will attest, loyal Vasgothians are proud to be part of the Theran Empire. In the centuries since we Therans arrived in this backwater, many natives have embraced the learning, business practices and military advancements brought by the Empire. Countless numbers of them have achieved Enlightened status, and some even have been invited to join Thera's noble houses. Descendants of our loyal Empirists serve in the War College and in all of the Empire's legions and fleets. You'll even find them in the ranks of Imperial magicians, officials of the Arbitorium, and scholars of the Eternal Library. (Though I must say, I'm not so certain about rumors that there are Vasgothians among the Heavenherds. They keep themselves to themselves so much that it's hard to say just who might be numbered among them; but provincials among the Empire's most powerful and learned sorcerers? Such a notion boggles this Theran citizen's mind.)

Understandably, most Theranized Vasgothians find it shameful that so many of their countrymen continue to embrace mindless barbarism. Your uncivilized Vasgothian tribesman spends his or her days in misery and dirt, siring and bearing huge numbers of children the tribe can't hope to feed properly. They have no art. They kill one another over supposedly ancient grudges that they really invented just last week. The Horrors destroyed their Passions—or so local legend goes—and they've replaced them with a veritable stew of misunderstood traditions borrowed from other lands.

More than a few of my Vasgothian acquaintances claim that all the barbarians living here nowadays are Empirists or their children who reverted to savagery after traveling into the Deep Forest and undergoing a bizarre reNaming. True Empirists call it "the Dread Yearning." They say there is madness in the Deep Forest, of which the reNaming is a symptom. And who knows—they may well be right.

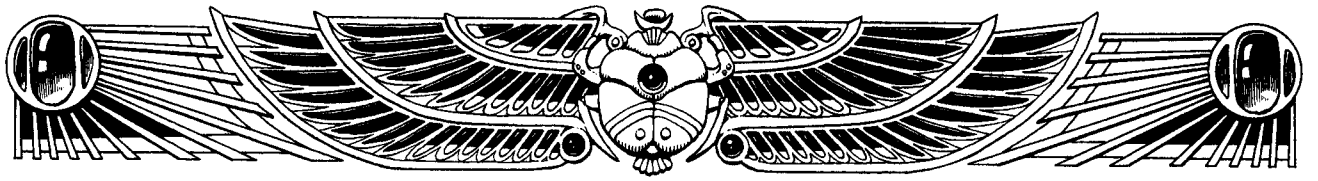
On the Instructors

—In the words of Field Marshal Levonicus va-Vasgoth

The honor and goodwill of loyal Vasgothians appears most clearly in their support of the Instructors, an irregular cavalry unit dedicated to bringing a civilizing force against the most egregiously barbaric tribal leaders. Prominent members of Vasgothia's Enlightened community pay for their maintenance, enabling the Instructors to buy everything from weapons to food to mounts. Unfortunately, the Instructors must raid villages, burn houses and slay those who oppose them, but only because the savage chieftains force them to take such actions. The Instructors themselves know very well that the common tribesman is not the enemy. It is their misguided leaders, the barbarian magicians, self-appointed generals and so-called kings, who must learn that savagery does not pay.

That lesson is most effectively taught them by Stakeuzia the Insistent, a grain-counter for House Gascilium who also

> It is the fervent hope of true, civilized Vasgothians that those who have fallen under this spell will one day awake from it. Meanwhile, we must bring our barbarian brothers into the light, even if we have to drag them there. Their descendants will be grateful for Thera's gifts, and if the most hardened savages must be slain in the process, then so be it. We have no other moral choice.
>
> —Field Marshal Levonicus



What would the Empirists do if hundreds of thousands of barbaric Vasgothians suddenly turned up at the gates of New Thera and announced that they wanted to be civilized forthwith? House Gascilium certainly wouldn't part with the silver needed to clothe, feed and educate them. And even if they did, not more than a fraction of the barbarian tribes could be gainfully employed.
—Eldred, magician of House Carinci

wages frequent, swift and potent campaigns against the worst of the barbarians. She and those who fight at her side display unswerving allegiance to the principles of civilization, and have vowed to bring those principles to the unwashed tribals at any cost. Some of our Theran cousins say that Stakeuzia's efforts simply stir up the barbarians against the Empire and House Gascilium, which may well be so in the short term. But the great mission to bring learning and gentility to all peoples is best served by uncompromising strength on civilization's behalf. What do a few burnt grain bins and slaughtered head of cattle matter, when laid against the aims of the Theran Empire?

On the Tribal Lands

—In the words of Steenhauz, historian and scholar of New Thera

Because House Gascilium owns and defends Vasgothia's richest farmlands, the province's savage tribes must scratch out a living in rockier soil. They live as farmers and herders, and raid one another when times are hard. They also raid as part of their seemingly endless blood feuds, or because of ancestral hatreds for reasons no one quite remembers. Sometimes they hardly know whether they're attacking a neighboring tribe just to loot their grain bins and steal their cattle, or whether the stealing is repayment for honor besmirched generations ago.

On the Organization of the Tribes

The average tribe of savages numbers about three hundred Name-givers, mostly mixtures of dwarfs, orks, humans and trolls. Some tribes are virtually all of one race, and may fight other tribes partly on racial grounds. But most tribes are intermixed, and find different pretexts than race differences for battle. Since the Scourge, many have taken on the Names of ancient tribes that died out, and have vowed to continue the ancient feuds those tribes fought.

A hereditary king or queen leads each tribe, attended by at least one shaman. These adepts know the primitive but powerful ancient magics of Vasgothia; they act as spiritual advisers to the kings and queens, and healers for all members of their tribe.

Some tribal leaders command the loyalty of many subordinate kings and queens when the time comes to go raiding. These potentates grandly refer to themselves as emperors and empresses. Five or six emperors may exist at any given time, and each holds sway over half a dozen or so lesser tribes. Despite their lofty titles, they are as wretched and filthy as any common barbarian under their command. The most famous emperor nowadays is Hayulaen, a wild-eyed old human who rules the constellation of tribes known as the Banner of the Crow. A clever fellow who knows how to read and write in Theran, he encourages his generals to investigate the weaknesses in Theran farmsteads before launching raids against them. He forbids his folk to attack other savage tribes, though his generals may defend themselves vigorously. Hayulaen's outrages have attracted the attentions of Stakeuzia the Insistent, and the Banner of the Crow has become the foremost target of the Instructors.

Raids are conducted by self-styled generals, chosen for their skill in warfare by the kings and queens. Generals are heeded only in matters of war, but are given near-absolute authority when it comes to battle.

On the Barbarian Passions, Ancient and Modern

Before the Scourge, Vasgothia's barbarians paid homage to their own Passions. In return for this devotion, the Passions of Vasgothia did their best to fight off the Horrors during the Scourge, but were tragically destroyed. Since the Scourge's end, the barbarian tribes have adopted the Passions of many different lands and honor them in their own peculiar ways.

On the Vanished Passions

The Passions native to Vasgothia are dead, slain in battle against the Horrors. As a result of that terrible war, the stone images of the Passions that once dotted the countryside disappeared. Songs of their exploits slipped from memory. In texts that referred to them, the letters on the parchment rearranged themselves so that clear references became obscure hints that scholars must now painstakingly puzzle out. The Names of these Passions are apparently gone for good. Only a few rough depictions of them remain in this world, all in the hands of scholars or collectors of art who took these representations out of the province before the Scourge came upon us.

We can therefore say little with certainty about the Ancient Ones, aside from the words I speak here. One of the most

powerful Passions was a horned man, who seems to have represented the bounties and dangers of the Deep Forest. Most scholars assume he was a Passion of the hunt, of animals, and possibly a patron of the wildness inherent in Name-giver hearts.

Another Passion seems to have been one woman with three aspects (as opposed to three different female Passions): a young maiden, a mother and a crone. The maiden apparently represented vigor, valor and joy. The mother represented fertility and protection, and the crone was a bringer of magic and dispenser of wisdom.

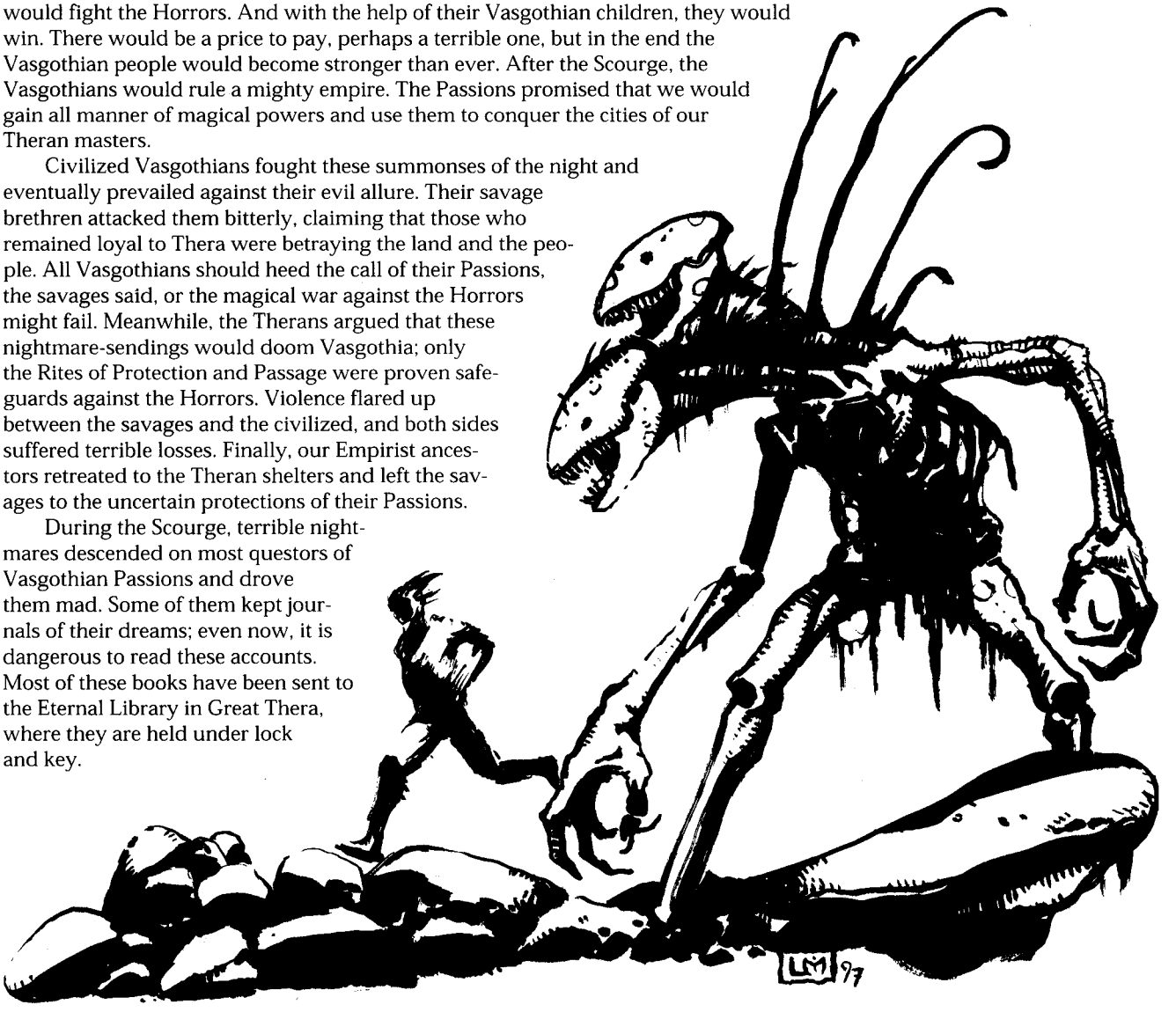
Still another Passion, depicted as both genders and all races, carried a giant hammer and is often shown throwing lightning. This Passion apparently brought storms and gave courage to raiders. A skeletal female Passion watched over the souls of the dead and barred evildoers from entering the afterlife. And a windling Passion with rainbow wings, most often depicted as female but occasionally as male, was a player of tricks who made people stronger by forcing them to make difficult choices.

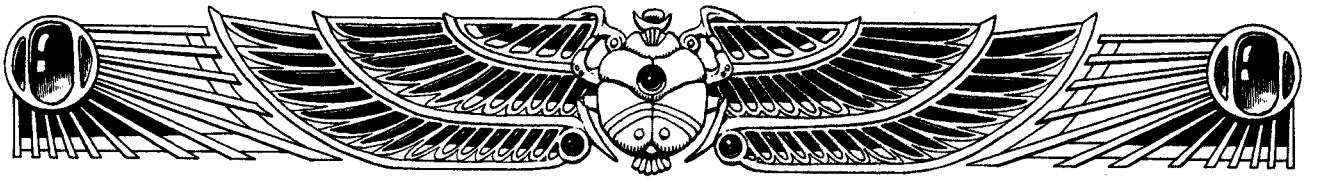
On the War Between Vasgothia's Passions and the Horrors

As the Scourge drew closer, all Vasgothians began to dream of the land's ancient Passions. In these dreams, the Passions told them they did not need the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage to save themselves. Instead, the Passions promised to protect them. Unlike the cowardly Passions of other lands, they said, they would fight the Horrors. And with the help of their Vasgothian children, they would win. There would be a price to pay, perhaps a terrible one, but in the end the Vasgothian people would become stronger than ever. After the Scourge, the Vasgothians would rule a mighty empire. The Passions promised that we would gain all manner of magical powers and use them to conquer the cities of our Theran masters.

Civilized Vasgothians fought these summonses of the night and eventually prevailed against their evil allure. Their savage brethren attacked them bitterly, claiming that those who remained loyal to Thera were betraying the land and the people. All Vasgothians should heed the call of their Passions, the savages said, or the magical war against the Horrors might fail. Meanwhile, the Therans argued that these nightmare-sendings would doom Vasgothia; only the Rites of Protection and Passage were proven safeguards against the Horrors. Violence flared up between the savages and the civilized, and both sides suffered terrible losses. Finally, our Empirist ancestors retreated to the Theran shelters and left the savages to the uncertain protections of their Passions.

During the Scourge, terrible nightmares descended on most questors of Vasgothian Passions and drove them mad. Some of them kept journals of their dreams; even now, it is dangerous to read these accounts. Most of these books have been sent to the Eternal Library in Great Thera, where they are held under lock and key.





As the centuries passed in the kaers, many Empirists revived the worship of Vasgothia's native Passions. But when they offered gifts to the Passions as Vasgothians have always done, the gifts were left unconsumed. When they performed great deeds in tribute to the Passions, no Passion praised or rewarded them. After a time, most Empirists abandoned the Vasgothian Passions forever. They believed that the Passions had turned from them because the Empirists had chosen Thera. No one suspected the terrible truth: that Vasgothia's Passions were dead.

When the Empirists left their kaers not quite a century ago, they saw no sign of the savages. It seemed that the Scourge had wiped them out. Explorers went everywhere in the land, even into the Deep Forest, looking for them. They found many strange things in the woodland's black heart, but no tribesmen. The Passions had lost their battle, and their savage children were no more ... or so it seemed, until the coming of the Dread Yearning. I will speak of this momentous happening in its turn; but first, a brief digression concerning the following of Passions in Vasgothia today.

ON THE ADOPTED PASSIONS

With the ancient Passions of Vasgothia destroyed, surviving Vasgothians sought new Passions to venerate. The Empirists adopted the Passions of Thera, paying special homage to Jaspree, Thystonius, Upandal and Mynbruje. Jaspree is the patron of the great farms we manage together with our Theran brothers; Thystonius applauds our efforts to suppress the savages; and Upandal and Mynbruje are the great civilizing Passions, who celebrate our efforts to build cities, accumulate knowledge and behave according to the principles of reason and justice.

Some Empirists, called *fruellings*—a Vasgothian word meaning "those who remember"—refuse to worship other Passions. They believe that it is pointless to pay tribute to Passions of foreign lands, and honor the dead Passions by holding their memory sacred. However, few of them would stoop to attack a fellow Vasgothian for following a Passion of Thera, or of any other land.

The savages (who were once civilized, as you shall hear) have haphazardly adopted Passions from around the Empire. They claim not only some Theran Passions, but also some of Indrisa, Creana and even the city of Chalmides (whose people understand things of the spirit in a fashion like no other Name-givers on this earth). Missionaries from Talea have brought their doctrines of the Passion-To-Be to the savages, who welcome these strange ideas with as much enthusiasm as everything else. The savage tribes mix up these diverse Passions, substituting them for the dead Passions when they retell ancient Vasgothian legends. In the savage mind, Floranuus once arm-wrestled with Halambuta, the leading Passion of Indrisa, and Prima of Talea (who does not yet exist!) is a great battler of Indrisan dhuna. These and other muddles abound among them, but seem to give them comfort despite the stories' lack of sense.

ON THE PLACE OF RENAMING

Much of the suffering, shame and bloodshed Vasgothia has endured since the unsealing of the kaers can be traced to a site in the Deep Forest called the Place of ReNaming. From this place have come all the savages who now bedevil our land. Once upon a time, they were the civilized Vasgothians who accepted the gifts of Thera—but the Place of ReNaming took away their reason and their learning and reduced them to the mindless barbarism of past ages.

On Taegmier's Frightful Discovery

In 1430 TH, while exploring the northern reaches of the Deep Forest, the adventurer Taegmier discovered the Place of ReNaming. This massive pile of stones shot through with briars resembles the face of a primitive beast, whose gaping maw is a tunnel of raw earth leading down into fathomless darkness. When Taegmier ventured up to the face's lip and peered in, he felt a tremendous temptation to enter the tunnel, but some deep inner instinct held him back. Several of his companions, however, could not be restrained from entering. They did so, and vanished.

Days later, as Taegmier and his remaining companions headed back toward New Thera, their former colleagues accosted them. They rode fearsome wild horses, and were daubed from head to toe in blue war paint like the long-vanished savage tribes. They recognized Taegmier, but demanded that he and his companions address them by new Names. When questioned, they claimed only dim memories of their former existence as civilized Vasgothians. They then thanked Taegmier for "rekindling the true flame of Vasgothia," and confidently stated that thousands of others would soon join them in what they termed their "rebirth." Finally, they threatened to behead Taegmier if he ever again entered the Deep Forest bearing his current Name. Then they rode away, blending into the trees as if part of the woods.

On the Dread Yearning

Taegmier swore his remaining companions to secrecy, and said nothing about the Place of ReNaming upon his return to New Thera. Instead, he claimed that rock apes had killed those who did not return with him. But Taegmier's friends were less circumspect, and soon word spread of the mysterious site in the woods. Mere weeks afterward, the Dread Yearning began to descend upon us—the overpowering need to travel to the Place of ReNaming and submit to its dangerous magic.

Throughout Vasgothia's cities, the Yearning seized native people. A person who just yesterday had been perfectly rational would suddenly become obsessed with thoughts of journeying to that primordial face in the wilderness and transforming, as Taegmier's lost companions had, into a forest-dwelling, painted savage. Every Vasgothian alive today lost someone—a parent, a grandparent or some other forebear—to this shameful spell. Husbands left wives and wives husbands, children left parents, brothers and sisters abandoned each other. Those lost to the reNaming that the Place brought upon them have become the savages of our own day.

At first, Vasgothians fortunate enough to escape the Dread Yearning tried to stop the streams of pilgrims heading for the Place of ReNaming. With the backing of the Therans, local authorities made it illegal to guide pilgrims there. Some families hired raiding parties to ambush the pilgrims and bring them back home as captives. At first these measures slowed our descent into savagery, but in the end there were too many pilgrims to stop. And the new-minted barbarians fought back, killing many who tried to halt the spread of savagery. Soon, it became distressingly clear that those of us left in the cities had more pressing problems to solve. The Yearning took from us roughly half of our former brethren; and with so many people transformed into children of the wild, we had to struggle to maintain such amenities of civilized life as the growing of food and simple sanitation.

The first great eruption of the Dread Yearning ended after fifteen years or so, and the cities survived largely intact. But by then, the wildly fertile savages had given birth to a second generation. These unruly children of the Deep Forest raided the cities, intending to complete Vasgothia's slide back into barbarism. They sought to exterminate all Vasgothians who did not feel the insidious call of the Place of ReNaming. For five long years, the remaining civilized Vasgothians held out against the raiders—but their dwindling numbers were against them. When the Therans returned to Vasgothia, the last citadels were close to falling. The surviving Empirists welcomed our Theran brothers with a relief born of desperation, and together the Therans and true Vasgothians resumed the battle for civilization. At great cost, the valiant Theran troops beat back the savages and reclaimed our farmlands from them.

Despite their defeat, the savages and the Place that spawned them remain a threat to this day. No more do thousands of misguided pilgrims journey to the Place of ReNaming, but smaller numbers of civilized Vasgothians are still susceptible to the Dread Yearning. Men and women about to come of age are particularly apt to feel its call. Our wealthiest families lock up their children during this difficult time, in hopes that they will not fall prey to the terrible siren song. Vasgothians of more modest means have no such option, and hundreds of young people are lost to the Place of ReNaming every year.

We have tried several times to destroy the Place, but to no avail. A band of bold adventurers burned it to ash just a few years ago, but the briars grew back within months, during which the trickle of victims toward it did not cease. Just last autumn, the Theran kila *Inceptum* flew to northern Vasgothia to bombard the Place of ReNaming with magical fire, but the great dragon Named Burr-Hide intercepted the vessel and warned it off. (Like all great dragons, Burr-Hide is an enigma. She pretends to be a friend of civilized Vasgothians despite her clear loathing for the Therans. However, a court of savages attends her whenever she appears, and she seems to have their interests more at heart than ours.)

On Therans and the Place of ReNaming

Given the effect of the Place of ReNaming on us, whom the Therans have so carefully and generously raised from our native dust, it is no wonder that they regard its terrible magic with a certain wariness. Let me take this opportunity to deny, once and for all, the rumors that the Dread Yearning afflicts Therans, too. I even have heard tales that the Yearning strikes their most gifted officers and leaders, and that some of the savage's best generals are actually reNamed Therans turned barbarian! Truly, it shames me that my own people give such stuff any credence.

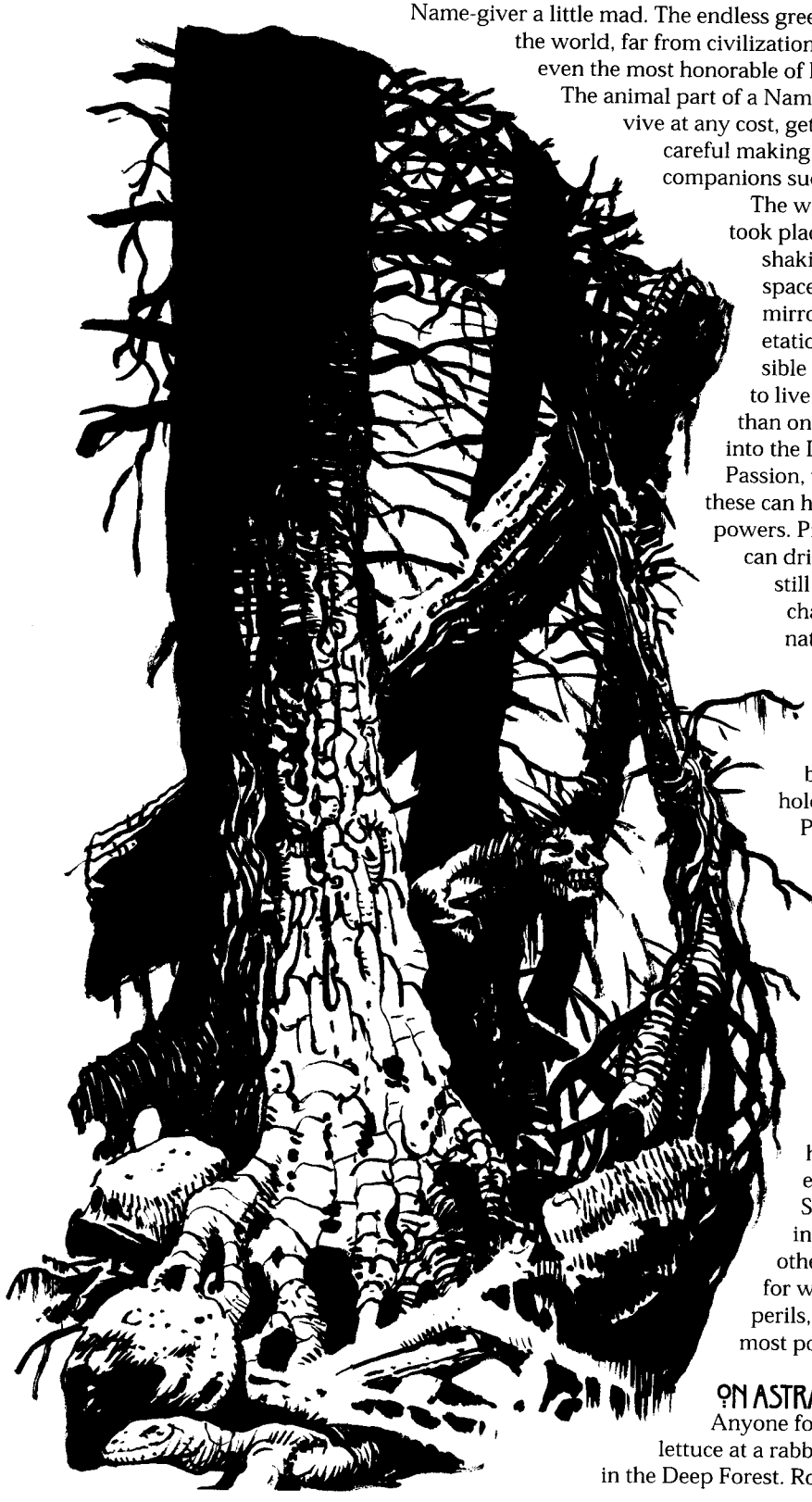
poor steenhauz is wrong. the rumors are true. it's work i won't touch, but i know of adepts hired to capture renamed therans and bring them home to their relatives. the families try to give them their old names back through some sort of ritual, but from what i understand, it seldom works. i've heard that when the rite fails, rather than live with the shame of a savage in its family tree, the family has its errant member slain.

—itaret, adventurer

On the Deep Forest

—In the words of Rohlenrio Thick-Neck, itinerant warrior and wizard

The ancient pulse of the Deep Forest thrums in the veins of every Vasgothian, whether clad in blue paint and furs or fine Theran silks. Vasgothia's woodlands have always been a place of darkness and primal terror, but also of fascination. Since the Scourge, they exert an even stronger pull over the Vasgothian mind and soul. Indeed, they can easily drive a



Name-giver a little mad. The endless green gloom, the feeling of being all alone in the world, far from civilization and beset by lurking dangers, can turn even the most honorable of Name-givers into little more than a beast. The animal part of a Name-giver's soul, that part that wants to survive at any cost, gets stirred up and may well take over. So be careful making decisions in the woods, lest you or your companions succumb to forest madness.

The war of our Passions against the Horrors took place in the Deep Forest, and that world-shaking battle left its mark. Much of astral space in the Forest is tainted—a corruption mirrored in the physical world by twisted vegetation, geological features warped into impossible shapes, and creatures too broken and bent to live that continue to exist nonetheless. More than one magician or adventurer has traveled into the Deep Forest in search of a piece of a slain Passion, which are said to litter the forest floor; these can heal the wounded and confer magical powers. Pieces of slain Horrors also exist, which can drive a Name-giver mad. Even the Horrors still dwelling in the Deep Forests have been changed; they remain dangerous, but their natures have been altered in significant ways. We call them half-Horrors, in recognition of this change.

In addition to the Place of ReNaming, so eloquently described by Scholar Steenhauz, the Deep Forest holds other oddities such as the Woman of Power and the Towers, of which I shall briefly speak. Finally, the Scourge and the powerful magic of the Passions' war have apparently given rise to two new races, similar in many ways to Name-givers: the leafers and the ulk-men. I shall leave discussion of them to those who know them better, and instead talk of the mysterious magics in the Deep Forest.

The wonders of our dark woodlands have made them a beacon for adventurers from all over the Selestrean Basin. Some lucky folk have discovered awe-inspiring treasures in their mossy depths; others met a different fate, becoming corpses for worms to eat. The Deep Forest is full of perils, and not to be taken lightly even by the most powerful adept.

ON ASTRAL TAINT

Anyone fool enough to toss raw magic around like lettuce at a rabbit wedding had best rethink that strategy in the Deep Forest. Roughly three-quarters of astral space in

the woods is severely tainted—and not in the usual way, either. I've risked the occasional look around with my astral senses, and lived to regret the experience. (Which is more than I can say for others.) Every time, the experience left me with a funny taste in my mouth, like burnt sugar. Once I saw weird crystalline structures just hanging there—what they are, I can't guess. And you'll get much worse than the usual nasty astral shock if you mess about with raw magic in the tainted regions. The astral taint of the Forest *changes* you. It may turn your hair white, or give you a nasty rash that crops up whenever you're feeling happy. Or you could grow a new set of eyes, or a row of fins up your back. Or you might forget some of your talents, or develop a taste for the flesh of your comrades. My friend Berensa cast raw magic in the Deep Forest just to prove he wasn't afraid to do it. His entire digestive apparatus, from mouth to stomach, vanished. His last few hours were miserable indeed. It's true that casting raw magic in the woodlands is less likely to bring a Horror mark than in some other tainted regions, but that hardly compensates for all the dreadful things that may happen instead. And if you're lucky enough to escape your folly with no worse than a change of hair color, other misfortunes may still befall you. Casting raw magic is like a beacon to every ulk-man and half-Horror in the forest, and there are plenty of those.

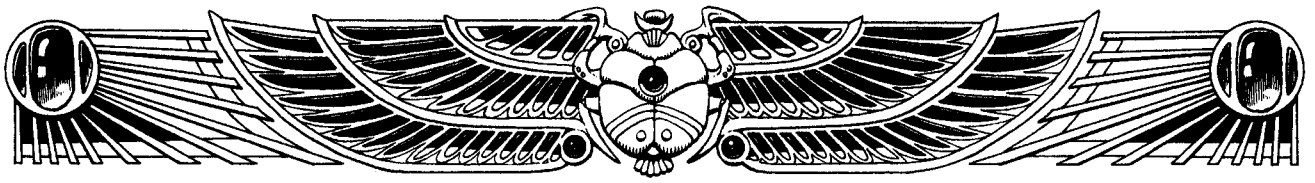
ON THE FRUITS OF THE PASSIONS

The ancient Passions of Vasgothia may not have done Vasgothia's people much good getting themselves killed, but they did a great favor for adventurers. The Horrors dismembered the Passions they slew, and bits and pieces of the dead Passions' bodies are scattered around the Deep Forest. Those bits and pieces, which we call the Fruit of the Passions, grant wondrous powers to those lucky enough to find and eat them.

Some people may tell you that the woods are littered with these marvelous artifacts, but that's an exaggeration. The Fruits of the Passions are hard to find, and so are coveted by adventurers from all over the known world. They tend to turn up in the most dangerous corners of the Forest. Some lie in the lairs of dragons or other creatures. Others are in inaccessible places, such as the bottoms of deep crevasses or frozen in ancient beds of ice. The leafers and ulk-men collect them and hide them away, for their own obscure reasons. Savage Vasgothians believe that the Fruits belong to them, and try to kill outsiders they catch in possession of one—or anyone who's ever eaten one, which their shamans can sense. Finally, sad to say, some of my fellow adventuring adepts think nothing of bashing in another adventurer's skull for such a coveted prize.

The Fruits of the Passions don't look much like fruit. They take their Name from the fact that they can be eaten—they actually look more like glowing jellyfish than honest fruits like an apple or a pear. Great globs of glowing, rubbery stuff—that's what they look like most often. They can take on other forms as well: pine cones, rocks, hands or feet sculpted of precious stones or metals, even animal carcasses. You can always tell them by touch, though. Even the most magically unaware savage can feel the innate power of a Fruit if he touches it with his bare skin.

They don't taste very good, either. A colleague of mine once described them as tasting "somewhat less pleasant than a horse's leavings smell." But if you manage to gag one down soon enough after finding it, the Fruits can give you magical talents, even those you couldn't normally learn. They can also grant questor powers and even non-magical skills. The catch, of course, is that you never know what abilities you're going to get until you bite into the Fruit.



Though scholars of magic have yet to agree on exactly how the Fruits of the Passions work, the most promising theory states that eating a Fruit attaches part of the eater's True Pattern to the dead Passion whose bit of flesh he's just consumed. The first ability granted by this mystical connection comes right away; for the rest, the adventurer must meditate on the part of his True Pattern linked to the dead Passion. Even then, however, no one can predict what abilities may manifest.

On the Fruits of the Horrors

Fruits of the Horrors exist as well—bits and pieces of powerful Horrors slain in the Passions' war. Like the Fruits of the Passions, these chunks of Horrors can be eaten, but no sane Name-giver would knowingly do such a thing. The key word, of course, is "knowingly." A few poor unfortunates have mistaken Fruits of the Horrors for Fruits of the Passions, and suffered dreadful consequences. According to the few reports written of such incidents, some of the Horror Fruits confer Horror powers—but each time the victim uses them, he turns a little bit more into a Horror himself. Other Fruits of the Horrors are poisonous, or strip away the existing abilities of those who ingest them.

I've never heard of the Fruits of the Horrors conferring Horror powers. Has Roblenrio confused them with legends of the Ulk-men, who reportedly believe so?
—Itaret, adventurer

On Geinoiva the Widow

Only one person that we know of can reliably tell the difference between a Fruit of the Passions and a Fruit of the Horrors. Geinoiva the Widow, a half-crazy but remarkably gifted wizard, rides around the Deep Forest accompanied by a troop of similarly crack-brained adventurers. She believes that if all their bits and pieces are eaten, an explosion of magical power will bring the dead Passions back to life. Geinoiva acknowledges that the "magical explosion" will either save the world or destroy it, though she doesn't really care which. Assuming you find her and she takes a liking to you, she'll tell you whether or not you should bite into the glowing glob you just found. She does ask a price, of course. And not everyone's easy about paying it. She's a lusty old hag and prefers her payment in handsome male flesh. Women adventurers are encouraged to favor one of her three thick-skulled, drooling sons.

On the Half-Horrors

Vasgothians often weep and wail that our Passions died in the Scourge, but they forget that the Passions very nearly killed off the Horrors in the process. The surviving Horrors were changed by the Passions' magic in mysterious ways. They're not quite like the Horrors we know from legends. They look just as dreadful as they always did, but they've been stripped of their astral aspect. These half-Horrors, as scholars have come to call them, can't shift into astral space anymore. And most have also lost the ability, or the need, or whatever it is, to feed off the pain and sorrow and fear of Name-givers.

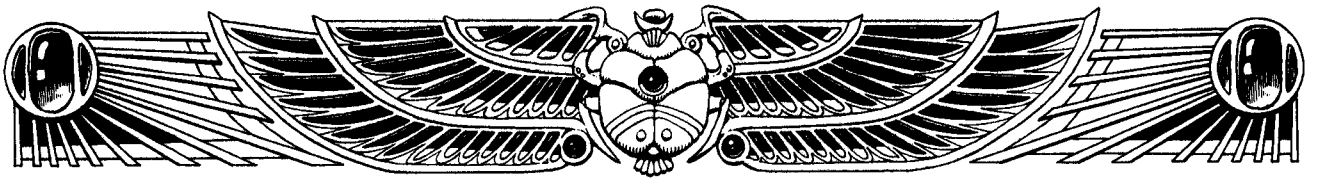
In the Deep Forest of Vasgothia, a bloatform or wormskull or deceiver and suchlike behaves more like a creature with Horror powers than a true Horror. Those that had intelligence before the Passions' war retain their cleverness, but it has become a curse to them in a way. They still have all their memories and nefarious plots, but they're confined to the physical world just like the rest of us. They're still dangerous, but they no longer have quite the same ability to manipulate the world and its inhabitants at their evil whim. Of course, plenty of half-Horrors still see Name-givers as dinner, even if they're dining now on flesh instead of terror. Others are embittered at their fate, and want to cause pain and anguish wherever they can even though they no longer gain sustenance from it.

The biggest challenge for adventurers in the Deep Forest is telling a half-Horror from a true one. The forest's astral taint has attracted Horrors to Vasgothia since the Scourge ended, and these late arrivals remain as powerful as they ever were. Unlike a true Horror, a half-Horror can be bargained with (though not easily, of course!). Bereft of part of their power, and also of the need to consume dark emotions, the half-Horrors behave in many ways like Name-givers. Some of them have formed alliances with savage tribes, or with dragons like Earthswallower (of whom I shall speak presently). Indeed, Earthswallower is attended by a number of half-Horrors, who apparently serve her loyally.

Numerous Theran magicians, including at least half a dozen rumored to be Heavenherds, are intensely interested in half-Horrors. They'll pay well for one captured and brought to them alive, and will even pay something for half-Horror corpses—provided they haven't already got dozens of the same specimen lying around.

On the Woman of Power

One of the Deep Forest's wonders is the monument Named the Woman of Power, which lies in the woodlands' northeastern reaches. This seventy-foot statue of a plump, naked woman with full breasts and no face to speak of has been there for as long as any Vasgothian can remember. It is extremely stylized, with hardly any details, and may depict just about any Name-giver race.



The Woman of Power is guarded by a living legend cult whose members—all female—call themselves the Protectors. The cult is headed by an elf Named Sulivia, a slim-bodied woman with a fair face and strangely compelling blue eyes. She speaks a language that bears some resemblance to Sperethiel, but is much more complicated. She is not Vasgothian, but has picked up our native tongue in order to conduct trade with the local tribes. Sulivia and her followers are all adepts of high Circles.

Sulivia claims to know many secrets, but refuses to divulge them. She trades with women who approach her with deference; a local tribal empress Named Aenjael sees to the needs of the cultists. Sulivia remains neutral in the struggle between the savages and civilized Vasgothians, but has little love for Therans. She seems to know much more of Great Thera than someone so isolated ought to; from her cryptic mutterings, she sees Therans as betrayers, but I could not ascertain why. She claims to have survived the Scourge without entering a kaer; the Horrors feared the Woman of Power, she says, and stayed far away from it. Some Vasgothian scholars believe that Sulivia may have witnessed the war between the Passions and the Horrors, but no one has ever reported her speaking of those events.

On the Towers

The Towers are three monstrously tall structures in the northwestern reaches of the Deep Forest. They extend upward as far as the clouds; no one knows for certain how high they go. Ramshackle and unstable-looking, the Towers are made from pieces of other buildings, seemingly from all over the world. The outer walls contain bits of Theran stepped pyramids, stucco houses from Urupa in Barsaive, Vasgothian-style wooden halls, Talean temple buttresses, Creanan obelisks, Maracan brass minarets, and traces of elaborately detailed Indrisan granite statuary.

According to Vasgothian historical records, which are quite extensively maintained by the Therans, the Towers didn't exist before the Scourge. Many adventurers have attempted to explore these fantastic structures since their discovery. Some have recovered bags of coins, ancient valuables and even magical treasures from the Towers. Others have disappeared.

The more distinctive items hauled out of the Towers include fine pottery, figurines, jewelry, tapestries and paintings. Researchers have identified many of these pieces as coming from the citadels destroyed during the Scourge. Apparently, some mysterious being or force gathered these items after the citadels were leveled and placed them in the Towers, though none can yet say how or for what reason. Like so much else in the Deep Forest, these things remain a mystery.

No legends tell how the Towers were built or why. But some who explored them have recounted vivid dreams that share many elements. These dreams might explain the origins of the Towers, could we but interpret them. On the other hand, they may simply be manifestations of the tainted astral space surrounding the Towers, to which these adventurers were exposed.

Astral space throughout the Towers and half a day's walk of the surrounding forest is completely corrupted. The trees are stunted and twisted, with patterns in their bark that resemble the screaming faces of souls in torment. The leaves and needles of these trees are so poisonous that a scratch from one brings on illness for several days. The area is as silent as the grave; no animals roam in it, no birds chirp, no insects buzz. Altogether an eerie place, whose hazards likely outweigh the treasures to be found and puzzles to be solved.

A Dream of the Towers

—Excerpted from the journal of Thaefaen, illusionist of the Four Bold Blades

The night after we found the jade head, I couldn't sleep well. I finally dropped off, but soon wished I hadn't. When the nightmare hit me, at first I thought I was awake and had gotten out of my bedroll to go look at the head. Then the head started talking to me.

"I saw the fall of Messianar," it said, "Nidorcyl led the Horrors' charge. And the Passions did not strike; they cared not for the city's fate."

Then I found myself standing in ancient Messianar, while its walls and houses crumbled to dust before an unearthly howling. At that point, I realized I was dreaming. I didn't see any of the Horrors; I'd guess my mind couldn't imagine them aright. But I felt them, and was frightened to the core. I saw things from the corners of my dreaming eyes—blood, shapes moving through clouds, teeth tearing at flesh.

Then I looked up and saw Nidorcyl—a dragon twenty stories high, with three heads. One was a normal dragon head. The second had a gigantic face that changed from human to troll to ork to elf to dwarf, but was always twisted in anger and madness. The third head was a writhing mass of meat and metal and sharp-tongued worms. I knew then that Nidorcyl was part dragon, part Passion and part Horror.

Suddenly I was standing deep in the forest, watching as Nidorcyl, attended by a yipping horde of monsters, began to build the Towers. Gigantic flying beasts kept landing, carrying pieces of buildings in their talons. Nidorcyl used its dragon head to pile these pieces into the Towers, like a child playing with wooden blocks. Each piece teetered at first, but then sta-

bilized. Once it did had a firm hold, it fused into the structure with a flash of greenish light, and the mass of attending Horrors cheered. Sometimes a piece fell and landed among the Horrors, crushing many to paste. The remaining ones cheered this as well, and then fell upon the crushed beasts and devoured them in an instant.

I stood atop one of the Towers, the clouds far below me and Nidorcyl's claws surrounding me. The writhing Horror head spoke to me, saying, "The Therans have their beacon, and we Horrors shall have ours." Then the Name-giver head said, "They want to live forever, stop the cycle where it serves them. They think they are greater than the Passions." Then the dragon head said, "My brothers and sisters plan the elves' punishment, but mine will outdo theirs. An eternity of Horror domination. We will live in this world forever."

"And from here," the Horror head said, "we will go to the other worlds and devour all."

Then Nidorcyl dropped me, apparently surprised by something behind it. I fell, but so slowly that I could see and hear what was happening above me. A huge horned man, as tall as the dragon-Horror-Passion, smashed Nidorcyl with a club made of thousands of Name-givers joined hand-in-hand. As the club struck, I heard a crash that shook the very air.

I awoke before I hit the ground.

Exploring the Towers

—In the words of Haelmear Triple-Ax, spoken over good ale at the Winged Horse Tavern

The scholars can speculate all they like about the origins and mysteries of the Towers, but for adventurers the real question is how to get the valuable loot out of them. Easier said than done, let me tell you.

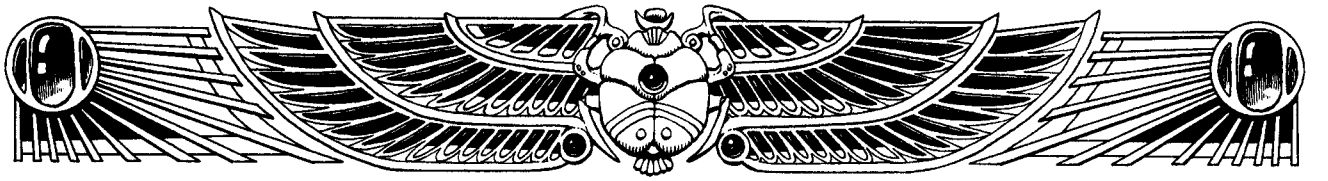
First, the land around the Tower doesn't support life. The plants are poison, the water is poison, and there's no game to be had. So you'll have to cart in supplies of food and water if you plan to stay near the Towers for long. Over the years, quite a few ambitious sorts have tried to set up permanent little towns around the tower to serve the adventurers who keep coming to this forsaken spot. But none of the towns has survived; the supply lines needed are too difficult and expensive to maintain.

Second, the savages in the area consider explorers fair game. The cleverer of them wait until you come out of the Tower with something valuable to steal, and then attack you. But plenty of others settle for raiding your supply wagon, which means you'll die of hunger or thirst if you don't pack up what's left and get out.

Third, the Towers are packed with traps that may well have been crafted by a powerful Horror. Just ask the folk who've dreamed about them. And if you get past the traps, you'll run into half-Horrors and all manner of other weird creatures, all of which will try to kill you.

And then there's the fifth problem, a strange one indeed. You may wonder how the creatures in the Towers survive without food and water. Well, if you stay in the Towers for long enough, the walls start to give you sustenance. You become a magical creature, through and through. And that's not a good thing; don't let any crackbrained fool tell you otherwise. Once you change like that, you can't sustain yourself on food and water anymore. So if you leave the Towers, you die. That's the reason the creatures don't eat one another; they don't need to eat to survive. Of course, the creatures are only too happy to gnaw on unlucky explorers for the sheer pleasure of killing something.

Not that the risks stop people from going to the Towers. I've heard that Theran magicians, especially the Heavenherds, are *very* interested in plumbing the place's mysteries. As for the rest of us, we've seen a lucky few make their fortunes and their legends forever with the swag they got and the perils they overcame. That's more than enough motive for any adventurer worth her salt to at least think about paying the Towers a visit!



I've been there twice so far. Saw good friends killed both times, and got nothing to show for it. So I figure the third time's got to be the charm. As soon as I get my pay for guarding the worthless hide of young R'kassi of House Thaloss during his annual visit home, I'm going back.

ON EARTHSWALLOWER'S PATTERN

—In the words of Rohlenrio Thick-Neck, itinerant warrior and wizard

Another marvel of the Deep Forest is Earthswallower's Pattern—a lattice of tunnels created by the dragon of that Name, which underlie almost the entire forest. Unfortunately, I can say little about it. I have not been there myself, and must therefore rely on fragmentary tales told by others.

Thus far, adventurers have mapped only a small fraction of these tunnels, enough to surmise that they mark out a pattern with geometrical precision. No one, not even the Therans, know yet what the Pattern is supposed to do, but the Therans dislike it on principle. It's clearly dragon magic, which in their view must be bad. General Keva'con's Fourth Legion offers a standing reward to any explorers who discover, map and then destroy portions of the tunnel. That last task is the most important of the three, to the general's way of thinking.

No one knows whether Earthswallower or her half-Horror servants ever attempt to repair ruined portions of the pattern. However, more than a few of the adventurers who destroyed tunnels have come to bad ends. The dragon's vengeance, or simple bad luck? Either or both may be true.

Intrigued by this mention of Earthswallower's Pattern, we sought more information on the subject. Our best efforts brought us the following fragment, which is anonymous and so cannot be authenticated. Interestingly, we received warnings from certain quarters not to publish even this much. But as everyone should know, the Library of Throal does not give in to threats—even those dropped upon us from lofty heights.

—T'sanas V'shaala

Excerpt from an Anonymous Document

Mixed up in dragon politics. Just what I needed. Even better—dragon and Theran politics! Don't the Passions have any respect for the humble dreams of a poor adventurer? Folk like me don't want to get mixed up in these things. We just want gold, treasure, a bit of glory. Not the kind of dung-mire that's swallowed me up to the knees.

All I did was fall in a hole. I was running from ulk-men, and I fell in a hole. Is that such a bad thing? If you ask me, the Universe made ulk-men to give us something to run away from. So I was just doing what I ought, right?

The hole was full of ulk-men too, of course. My typical luck. I expected them to club my head off for stealing their emerald totem statue. But I ask you, why did the Universe put thieves in this world if not to steal things? Of course, I didn't expect the ulk-men to understand that. I expected them to kill me. I was stunned when they spared my life. They didn't even knock me unconscious, which I would've done in their position. I should've known my stroke of luck was too good to be true.

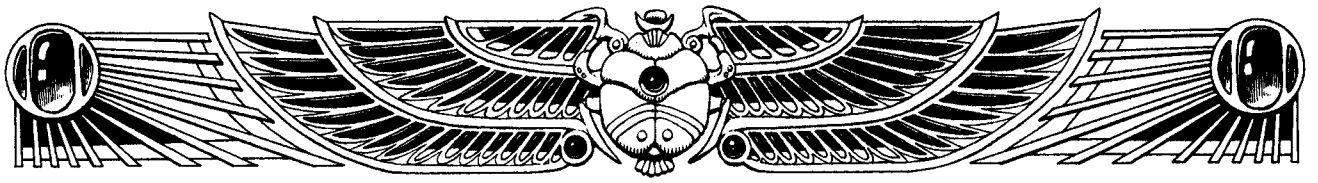
They dragged me through a maze of tunnels under ground for days and days. The tunnels turned and twisted and turned again. I had no idea what the ulk-men wanted with me, except that they were likely saving me for a more terrifying fate than death. Would they sacrifice me in front of an altar? Eat me alive in some bizarre ulk-man ritual? Looking back on it, I rather wish they had. What actually befell me turned out to be even worse.

I ended up face to face with a dragon. The hole I'd fallen down just happened to be one of many entrances to Earthswallower's Pattern. The ulk-men were Earthswallower's ulk-men, and had brought me to her specially.

She was chewing away on a nearby tunnel wall when I arrived. She asked what I knew of the Theran presence in Vasgothia. But I didn't tell her anything, honest. I don't help dragons, all right? Not good for business, when you're an adventurer-for-hire in an Imperial province. I kept my mouth tight shut. At first. Then she threatened to roast me. I swear, I'd not have said a word but for that.

I told her everything I could think of about the Therans in Vasgothia. Not that I know much. I'm just a good little city boy from New Prosperity out looking for adventure instead of grubbing on the farm. I told her what I knew about the overgovernor, and the gossip I'd heard some Therans tell other Therans about politics back in Great Thera. Then I started making things up, as she seemed so interested. At that, she blew little tendrils of flame at me—in a playful sort of way, as if to tell me she knew when I was lying to her but was enjoying the stories anyway.

She kept me around for a time, part errand boy and part dragon toy. When she got bored, she'd bat me around with her huge dragon paws. Never hurt me, really, even though I'm an ordinary and fragile Name-giver. Of course, it wasn't exactly comfortable flying through the air and then smacking against dragon scales. But whenever I protested, she got a hungry look in her eye, so I stopped complaining and prayed to Lochost for deliverance.



One day, Earthswallower ordered me to go on a long errand for her—to a place called Marac, with a message for someone she called Jinarimaker. She blew a cloud of dust on me and told me that the dust would allow her to always see what I was doing, so I'd better follow her orders to the letter. And I meant to. I have got some sense of self-preservation, after all. And it doesn't do to double-cross a dragon.

But when the ulk-men finally showed me the exit, I ran and ran and ran and didn't look back. I left Vasgothia, but didn't go anywhere near Marac. Instead, I asked a fellow I met in a roadside tavern if there was anyplace where dragons took no interest in the affairs of ordinary people, and could he please tell me how to get there. He told me to come here, to Barsaive. Nice fellow. Didn't match his Name at all. Imagine, a frightening Name like Darktooth for a mild-mannered little man like that ....

ON THE NEW RACES

—In the words of Washka, naturalist and scholar of Edrovia

When Vasgothians began to explore the Deep Forest after the Scourge, we found within it two new races: leafers and ulk-men. Some believe them Name-givers; others call them merely intelligent creatures. As far as we can tell, the immensely powerful magic released by the war between the Passions and the Horrors somehow created these races. Neither the leafers nor the ulk-men have explained their origins to us, so we can only guess for the moment.

We also discovered a tribe of subterranean orks, dubbed Toads by those who have encountered them. Though not a new race precisely, they are new to Vasgothia. They migrated here from a northern land after the Scourge, and now live quietly in the Deep Forest.

ON THE LEAFERS

Leafers, known in the Vasgothian tongue as *hoemofoels*, are odd beings. They bear the shape of Name-givers, with a head, a torso, two arms, and two legs, but are made of plant matter. Picture a hedge cut in human-like form and given the powers of speech and motion. Then imagine different kinds of leaves inside it, and also a multitude of worms, insects, mites and spiders crawling around among them. That is a leafer.

On Leafer Development and Behavior

Leafers grow from large, bud-like sacs that attach themselves to trees in the Deep Forest. While the leafer forms in this pod, it is highly poisonous. If a sac is broken, the unborn leafer dies, emitting a cloud of spores that may choke any Name-giver within fifty yards of the pod.

Once leafers leave their sacs, they mature in solitude. They gain speech at the age of six months, and mature fully a year after abandoning their pods. Captured leafers have lived for as long as forty years, and the species may survive for even longer in the wild.

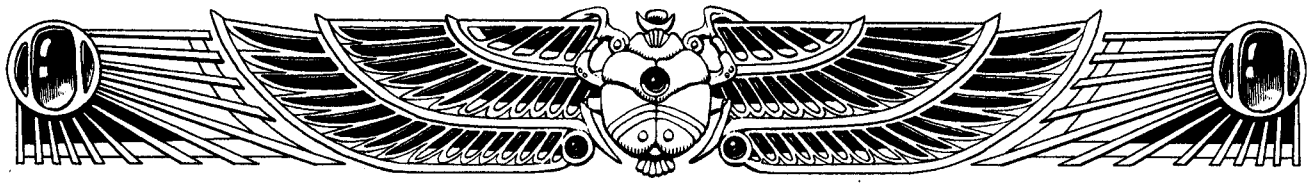
Leafers avoid their own kind, for good reason. When they meet, they almost always attack one another until one of them submits and departs. Because their interactions with each other are basically limited to combat, the leafer tongue consists almost entirely of threats, challenges and insults. Leafers can learn other languages, though they often speak them haltingly. They tend to be most interested in picking up profanity and invective.

In addition to attacking each other, leafers also seek to destroy the sacs of other leafers. Some actively search for pods to destroy; others are opportunists, bursting pods when they happen to find them. As leafers are not immune to the spores from burst pods, they must devise ingenious methods of safeguarding themselves. Often, leafers approach other Name-givers in the woods and try to enlist their aid in destroying a rival's pod.

Leafers tolerate, and sometimes even seem to enjoy, the presence of other Name-givers. However, it is impossible to teach a leafer manners, and even a leafer's expressions of affection are couched in gruff insults. All leafers call themselves by the Name of Sosl, the leafer word for "one." However, leafers who befriend other Name-givers willingly accept nicknames, which they adopt without apparent fear of affecting their True Patterns. For reasons we cannot yet determine, they regard savage Vasgothians as natural enemies, and fight them at the slightest provocation.

Above all, leafers desire to reproduce. Unlike Name-givers, they need not mate with others of their kind; they need only find a safe place where they can affix a sac to a tree once they are mature enough to pollinate (as plants do). The leafers with whom I have spoken show immense interest in foreign lands where leaf-bearing trees abound, as they apparently wish to propagate their kind throughout the world.

Some leafers produce a new sac every few months. These guard their sacs while the new leafer develops, departing just before the offspring is born. If the new leafer is born in the parent's presence, the parent leafer's aggressive instincts unfortunately overcome it, and it will try to kill the very child it has so long guarded. Other leafers, who produce pods every week or so, do not bother to guard their pods. These leafers seem more disposed toward civilized pursuits than their less fertile cousins. They may explore the wilderness, fight savages or even join adventuring bands.



Like Name-givers, leafers must sleep to refresh themselves. They must go dormant in rich soil for at least seven hours a day, during which time they feed from the earth through myriad tiny, feathery roots that they send out. A sleeping leafer is vulnerable to torn roots if shaken too abruptly awake. The roots take several weeks to regrow, during which time the leafer can neither feed nor rest properly; many leafers so afflicted die of hunger and exhaustion. Understandably, they refuse to travel to areas without the good soil on which their health and lives depend. Some leafers have been known to travel long distances on ships, airships and even caravans; it is said that they take a large barrel of good soil with them, and sleep in it.

On Leafers as Adepts

Extremely fertile leafers can become adepts. We do not know how much of the leafer population is so blessed, or how they learn their Disciplines. We do know, however, that adept leafers are the most social of their kind. Like other adepts, they wish to progress in their Disciplines and build legends, and so they seek out Name-givers in order to tell of their deeds. Leafer adepts can make chancy companions, however. They will do a thing merely for the legend it may inspire, and have no interest in other consequences of their acts. Cursed with an extreme turn of mind, leafer adepts are easily attracted to rigid beliefs and causes.

On the Passion of the Leafers

The leafers of my acquaintance all profess a belief in a Passion that they call—as best I can translate—the Always-and-Ever-Present One. They say this Passion impels them to fight one another, reproduce and—in the case of adept leafers—undertake legendary deeds. Leafers believe the One will make their leaves wither if they show respect to any other Passion. Some take this belief to extremes, and insult followers of other Passions at every opportunity.

Some leafers claim that the Always-and-Ever-Present One whispered the secrets of the universe to them while they grew in their pods. But, they say, the One warned them never to reveal these secrets. Every leafer I have known is fond of repeating, often for no apparent reason, "I know the answer, but I'm not telling you what it is." I surmise that this is either a magical phrase (to the leafers' way of thinking) or a leafer's idea of droll humor.

ON THE ULK-MEN

The Symposium presentation on the ulk-men swiftly turned into a vituperative exchange between the two participants chosen to discuss them: Jae'erl Johonnes, an elementalist and sometime scholar of Horror lore from the town of Edrovia, and a Maracan-born archer Named Kriz-al-Suf who has apparently lived among the ulk-men for the past few years. We present their sharply divergent views side by side so that the reader may draw his own conclusions.

—T'sanas V'shaala

On the Nature of the Monstrosities Known as Ulk-Men

—In the words of Jae'erl Johonnes, elementalist and scholar of Edrovia

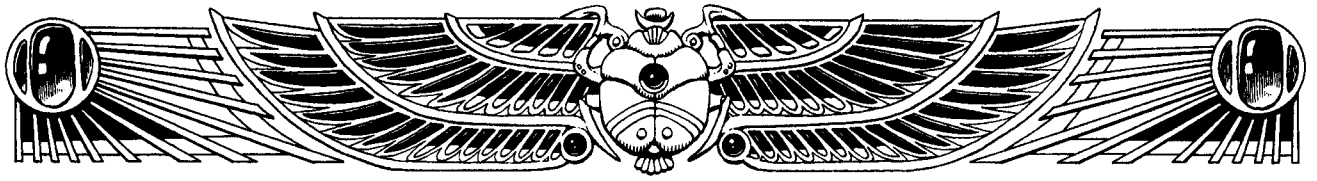
Ulk-men are a dreadful legacy left by the Horrors, most likely as a final act of revenge for their fellow Horrors slain by our departed Passions. Neither Name-giver nor mere creature as we understand those terms, the ulk-men are a blight on the fair land of Vasgothia. Like all monstrous things, they instinctively hate and fear what is good and wholesome, and so they seek to destroy us if they can. For this reason—not merely because we find them repulsive—the ulk-men are our enemies.

An ulk-men is a hideous thing, the more so because he walks this earth in something like Name-giver shape. Six to eight feet tall, these giants are malformed in body and face, often in ways that would make a sensitive soul faint to hear them described. They may drag one over-long leg behind them, or lean too far to one side because of one grossly swollen arm. Most of them move in an ungainly shuffle, unable to walk upright and easily as Name-givers do.

Their faces are grotesque parodies of Nature. An ulk-man may have two eyes on one side of his face and a third eye on the other. Or the ulk-man's mouth may sit on his forehead, or might be surrounded by beetle-like mandibles. The eyes of most ulk-men resemble those of serpents or insects, though a few look distressingly Name-giver-like. An ulk-man's skin may be raw and flaking off, scaled like a lizard's or armored like an insect's shell. Tufts of hair sprout from it at random, along with odd patches of quills or bristles. And they smell unhealthy, like meat left in the sun. Despite what some so-called scholars of Nature may say, ulk-men have no more claim to be Name-givers than a slug can claim to be a butterfly.

Ulk-men live in marauding bands of twenty or so, ambushing travelers and savages indiscriminately. They steal food from their victims, which is bad enough; they also engage in cannibalism, which is infinitely worse. They live to slaughter, and have no more family-feeling or understanding of the world around them than a stone. They know nothing of legends, or handicraft or any other art of civilization. The most bestial of Vasgothia's savages is a Theran lord in comparison to these wretched spawn of unspeakable magics.

Some adventurers who have met ulk-men and lived to tell the tale speak in whispers about their alleged king—a terri-



fying monster Named Moentruez, who stands twelve feet tall and has hands as sharp as blades. They say Moentruez breathes fire, consorts with dragons and eats a savage maiden for breakfast each morning. The cleverest of a bestial lot, he is said to spread false tales of his so-called people's virtues and desire to live peacefully with other Name-givers. A credulous few—such as my misguided colleague Kriz-al-Suf, *who will wait his turn to speak*—accept these myths as true.

One of the most insidious falsehoods spoken about ulk-men—a lie perhaps promulgated by their monster-king, if he exists—is that ulk-men can become adepts. In truth, ulk-men have Horror powers that let them steal talents from true adepts, which they then use to further the hoax that they are Name-givers like us. When large numbers of Name-givers begin to believe this lie and welcome the ulk-men into our cities, they will come and they will turn on us. They will set our cities ablaze and dine on our flesh, and the patrons of this Horror-spawned race—be they Horror or dragon—will celebrate our demise. Our only safeguard against this awful fate is to remember that the ulk-men are evil and must be destroyed.

On the Origins of the Ulk-Men

—In the words of Kriz-al-Suf of Marac, sojourner in Vasgothia

You have heard the contentions of Jae'erl regarding the ulk-men. Now hear the truth.

Before the Scourge, no one knew of ulk-men. Only after the Scourge ended did Vasgothia's bold explorers and roaming tribes find them, in small pockets of the Deep Forest. No one knows for certain how many ulk-men there are, but their numbers are very few.

I believe the esteemed but inaccurate Jae'erl has stumbled upon one small fragment of truth—namely, that the ulk-men somehow sprang from the magic released in legendary battle between Vasgothia's Passions and the Horrors. As a result of this battle, the Horrors seem to have somehow mingled some portion of themselves with those heroic Vasgothian Name-givers who fought alongside the Passions in their noble crusade to save the Vasgothian people. This magical fusion created the ulk-men: entirely new beings, halfway between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, reason and insanity. It may also be the reason why so many ulk-men exhibit the abilities of adepts.

They do indeed look hideous, but that is no reason to judge them monsters. And if they have the misfortune to be part Horror, so do they have the grace to be part hero. They can aspire to the same high ideals as the best of Name-givers, or—if treated worse than beasts and slaves—can confirm our worst fears about them. Those who call them enemies are looking in the wrong place. If we seek a new foe, better we should find it in our own ignorance and need to hate whatever is too different for our comfort.

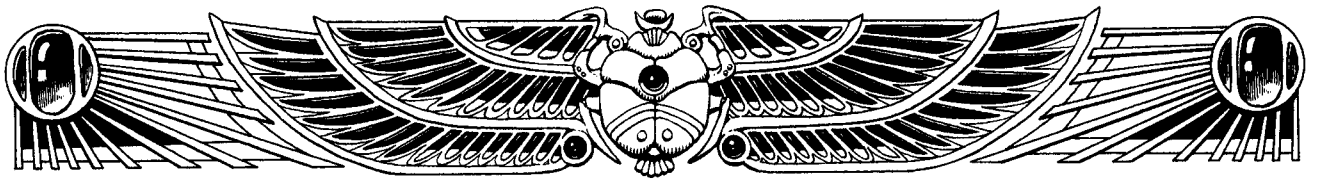
On Family Loyalties and Relations

What my colleague calls "marauding bands" are nothing of the sort. Ulk-men live and travel in extended families, whose members respect their elders and care tenderly for their young. Ulk-men mature as slowly as dwarfs, and adults expend a great deal of effort protecting their young ones. In fact, many of the unfortunate incidents between Vasgothians and ulk-men—so colorfully embroidered into a plot for our destruction by the previous speaker—occurred when the ulk-men thought their children threatened. As many Vasgothians consider it virtuous to slaughter ulk-men and prefer small victims to large ones, this fear has some foundation.

Ulk-men forswear violence against their own kind—and unlike more civilized Name-givers, actually abide by the prohibition. An ulk-man would sooner kill himself than strike another ulk-man. They consider suicide an appropriate response to other shortcomings as well, such as an inability to contribute to the family's welfare or failure to protect a young one. As for the charge of cannibalism, it is both true and untrue. Certain so-called experts on the ulk-men would have you believe that they seek out Name-givers in order to kill and eat them; this is not so. The ulk-men only cook and devour the bodies of slain foes, singling out enemies they consider to be particularly worthy of contempt for this indignity. "Thus dung is turned to dung," an ulk-man told me, explaining the practice. The ulk-men greatly desire to be acknowledged as Name-givers, and are rightly angry that all we have given them is hatred. To an ulk-man, the consumption of a foe who despises him is the ultimate retaliatory insult.

When different families of ulk-men meet, they resolve disputes that arise through exchanges of polite speech that go on for hour after hour. Indeed, the ulk-men's language is laden with words of compromise and apology. One group of ulk-men graciously permitted me to listen to such a negotiation, of which I regret to say I only understood a small part. The most common disputes are over territory.

Each family has the right to roam freely over a given territory. When a family increases in size, it may petition the families of neighboring territories for an expansion of its own area. Most often, however, only a family that has decreased will agree to give up its land. In a remarkable feat of memory, each ulk-man carries a map of the entire Deep Forest in his head and knows each family's territory by natural rock formations and other landmarks. Many territories intersect the lands of the Vasgothian savages, whom the ulk-men avoid whenever possible. They fight only if attacked or otherwise provoked.



On Ulk-Man Genealogies

The ulk-men have only one pastime that we might recognize as art: they recite their genealogies, which they trace back to the founding of each family. The genealogies say nothing of this race's origins, but begin with legends of the savage tribes called Barrites that lived before the Scourge. Modern-day Vasgothians share these legends, which supports my theory that the ulk-men are partly descended from Vasgothian heroes slain during the Scourge. The genealogies list countless legendary deeds of ulk-men, living and dead. Through them, the ulk-men spread the fame of their heroes and build their legends, just as Name-givers elsewhere do. As for their so-called king, I am sorry to disappoint my dear Jae'erl, but the fearsome Moentruez doesn't exist. Tales of him told by adventurers are either fever-dreams brought on by forest madness or outright fabrications. No ulk-man I know has ever spoken of such a personage; indeed, most of my acquaintance laughed aloud at the very idea.

ON THE TOADS, OR GRUTHRUMP

—In the words of Washka, naturalist and scholar of Edrovia

The so-called Toads live underground in the limestone caverns that underlie the eastern reaches of the Deep Forest. Certain tales portray them as half amphibian, but this is not so. Their Name comes not from an aquatic heritage, but from their flat skulls, large mouths, capacious jowls and green-mottled skin. The Name "Toad" offends them deeply; they call themselves Gruthrump, which means "Perfect People" in their language.

Less active and more melancholy than most orks, they sing dirges in the strange, gulping tongue of their native land. They are most prone to sing when they have overindulged in alcohol, which is as frequent a practice with them as it is with other orks. The musty, fungal brew favored by the Gruthrump is so vile that it makes ordinary hurlg taste like fine elven sparklewine by comparison.

Now and then, a new group of Gruthrump comes to Vasgothia, scampering by night through the Deep Forest. Gruthrump traveling aboveground are panicky and prone to lash out at any who approach them. They favor blades and triple-headed spears, both of which they coat with a poison made from a dark red-brown fungus that grows abundantly on cave walls. Though they fight with less skill than the average savage raider, the slightest nick from a Gruthrump blade can kill or disable. Because of this, the savages fear to fight them.

The Gruthrump worship their own Passions, to which they occasionally sacrifice captive Name-givers. I nearly became such a sacrifice myself, but fortunately escaped with the aid of my leafer companion Sosl the Strangler. My misfortune came about in a bizarre manner that only the equally bizarre beliefs of the Gruthrump could have caused, as you shall now hear.

I had come to the underground caves of the Gruthrump in search of certain spells, supposedly offered to adventurers by the Gruthrump king, Ollup, in exchange for various services. Ollup is a wizard, and claims to have developed several powerful spells unheard-of elsewhere in the known world. As he holds many a grudge against this or that barbarian king or queen or emperor, he has great need of adepts to fight such enemies; and though I am more a student of Nature than warrior, I can wield a blade with a certain flair. I happened to be courting the affections of a certain wizard at the time, and thought the way to her heart just might be through her grimoire.

After bullying my way through the many guard posts scattered throughout the underground caverns, I finally gained an audience with King Ollup. He struck me as a peevish sort, obsessed by petty slights directed toward him by the savages. He greeted me, then drifted into a long and wandering monologue. But just when I decided he had forgotten my presence, he looked back at me and noticed the circular tattoos on my forehead. With a gasp of shock, he scrabbled for his moldering copy of *Gothornthrup's Book of Prophecy*, a tome supposedly written by the Gruthrump's Passion of the same Name. (The Gruthrump guide their lives by this book, down to the smallest detail. What their Passion of Consumption and Prophecy tells them to do in its pages, they do without question.) All too soon, King Ollup found an obscure passage about a troll with circles on his brow, ordained by hungry Gothornthrup since the beginning of time as his dinner. As I fit the description, I henceforth became the first course on the Gruthrump Passion's menu.

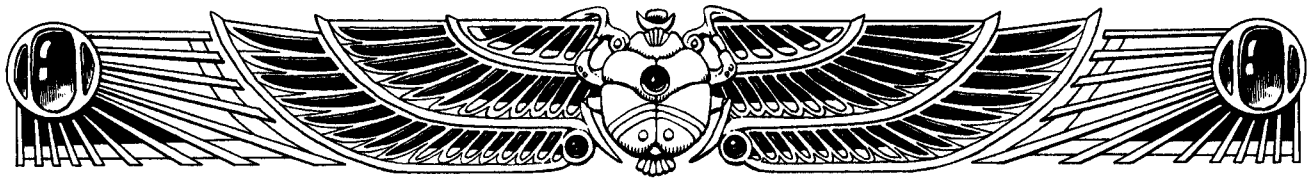
A questor Named Phlugmp, who happened to speak halting Vasgothian, translated portions of the Book of Prophecy to me. I heard it as gibberish, but perhaps my situation biased me against it. Phlugmp saw his actions as a kindhearted attempt to convince me how lucky I was to be sacrificed to the great Passion Gothornthrup. He became quite offended when I suggested he take my place.

After several days of captivity, Sosl the Strangler came to my rescue. The Gruthrump, whose eyesight is poor, took him for one of the ambulatory fungi that wait upon them in their damp and lightless realm. Sosl had observed these creatures, and had the wit to disguise himself as one with a dusting of fungal spores. He snuck into the small cave where I was being held and released me from my bonds. We then fought our way out of the caverns, sending howling Gruthrump screaming before us. Unfortunately, a Gruthrump warrior nicked me with a spear. It took me months to recover, during which I came near to death on several occasions. But the object of my affections nursed me back to health when we reached civilization, and we became betrothed soon after my full recovery.

GAME INFORMATION

The Theran Empire sourcebook describes the vast expanse of the mighty Theran Empire, from the island of Great Thera at the Empire's heart to the five most significant Imperial provinces beyond Barsaive. This section provides rules and game statistics for many of the unique features of Great Thera and its provinces, so that gamemasters can use the Theran Empire in their **Earthdawn** adventures and campaigns. General rules appear first, followed by rules, game statistics and brief glossaries of local languages specific to each province.

Aside from the **Earthdawn** rulebook, players and gamemasters may find the following **Earthdawn** products useful complements to the material in this book. The **Earthdawn Companion** and **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets** both provide rules for abilities that some characters described in this sourcebook possess. Some of the creatures and Horrors described here appear in the **Creatures of Barsaive** and **Horrors** sourcebooks. **An Explorer's Guide to Barsaive** (in the **Barsaive Campaign Set**) offers an overview of the Theran Empire, as does the **Sky Point and Vivane Campaign Set.** The latter also includes statistics for typical adept members of Theran legions and airship fleets. Finally, **Prelude to War: An Earthdawn Epic** provides sample statistics for Theran adept and non-adept soldiers, as well as statistics for adepts of each of the major Disciplines practiced in Barsaive and the Theran Empire for a range of Circles. **Prelude to War** also provides the fictional backdrop for **The Theran Empire** sourcebook: the assassination of King Varulus III and the disastrous Battle of Prajjor's Field between Throalic and Theran forces.



GENERAL RULES

The following rules for new races and languages apply to all of the Imperial lands described in this book.

PLAYING NEW RACES

Some players may wish to create characters of the rare and unusual races that exist beyond Barsaive's borders. (For each new race's game statistics and rules, see the section on that race's native province.) The player must have the gamemaster's permission to make such a character; these races are intended primarily as gamemaster characters, and playing one of them confers several potential disadvantages. If your character is a member of a rare race living outside its native region, ordinary folk may greet that character with suspicion and hostility. Also, the character's distinctive appearance will make it virtually impossible to travel without attracting notice. Tavern keepers may refuse you service. Locals will find it easy to identify you if you are suspected of a crime, and may be overly willing to do so because your strangeness automatically makes them dislike you. Healers might be reluctant to heal you, for fear of inadvertently doing damage. Mad wizards may try to kidnap you for study. Worst of all, your unfamiliar appearance may lead Horror hunters to assume that you are a Horror construct, and to attack you on sight.

LANGUAGES IN THE EMPIRE

In addition to Theran, several different languages are spoken across the Theran Empire. These languages come in three types: provincial, minority and racial. A provincial language, such as Throalic, is a common tongue spoken by large numbers of racially disparate people who share a common history. A minority language is spoken by a culturally distinct group within a certain province. A racial language is spoken exclusively by members of a single race. The racial languages of **Earthdawn** are ancient, dating back to legendary times. However, regional variants have crept into these racial tongues over the course of history. Consequently, an ork from Barsaive will find it difficult to understand orkish spoken in Talea or Indrisa.

Theran, which is spoken just about everywhere in the Empire, is a radically altered variant of the elven language Sperethiel. Characters who know Sperethiel can get the gist of a conversation in Theran, but will miss its nuances.

The following quick-reference chart lists the languages spoken in the Empire: their names, types, the regions where they are spoken, and the Difficulty Number for learning it with the Speak Language talent (p. 115, **ED**).

LANGUAGES OF THE THERAN EMPIRE

Language	Region	Type	Difficulty Number
Creanan	Creana	Provincial	6
Indrisan	Indrisa	Provincial	6
Jackalman	Creana	Racial	7
Leafer	Vasgothia	Racial	8
Maracan	Marac	Provincial	6
Pathalan	Indrisa	Minority	7
Sufik	Marac	Minority	6
Talean	Talea	Provincial	6
Theran	Throughout Empire	Provincial	5
Toad/Gruthrump	Vasgothia	Minority	8
Ulk-man	Vasgothia	Racial	8

GREAT THERA

The new rules for Great Thera introduce unique variations on the use of magic. The Theran Empire prides itself on its magic, in some ways perhaps too much. By recklessly pushing the limits of magical experimentation, the Therans are beginning to endanger themselves. Game mechanics to simulate the results of these unwise magical endeavors appear below, along with several new blood charms.

DEPATTERNING

The Therans' greatest body of arcane knowledge lies in blood magic, a powerful and dangerous type of sorcery traditionally abhorred by the other cultures of the Selestrean Basin, who associate such practices with spiritual corruption. The latest fruits of Theran research into blood magic, from spells to blood charms, carry with them the risk of a particularly horrible demise known as depatterning.

"Depatterning" is the bland euphemism coined by Theran magicians to describe what happens when excessive stress placed on a Name-giver's True Pattern causes that Pattern to collapse in on itself. Depatterning is always fatal, often spectacularly so. The most common cause of depatterning is the use of certain powerful blood charms that have recently become fashionable in Great Thera (see **New Blood Charms,** p. 165).

When a character takes the permanent damage required to power one of these new blood charms, he or

she earns a Depatterning Rating: a measure of how much stress the use of blood magic caused to the character's True Pattern. Each blood magic charm described below has its own Depatterning Rating, the amount by which the character's rating increases if he uses the item. The use of any blood charm included in previously published **Earthdawn** products automatically adds 2 to a character's current Depatterning Rating.

The first time a character uses a blood charm with a Depatterning Rating, he or she gains that rating. For every subsequent use of a blood charm, the gamemaster makes a secret Depatterning Test for the character, making a Willpower Test against the character's Depatterning Rating. If the test fails, the character's True Pattern begins to weaken. The next time that character uses a blood charm, his True Pattern dissolves and he dies. The gamemaster may choose the manner of death from the following list or create another unique form of demise, depending on what seems most entertaining at the time:

- The character suffers a massive, fatal heart attack.
- The character implodes, deflating like a punctured balloon.
- The character explodes in a shower of mangled flesh.
- The character turns to crystal and shatters into a million shards.
- The character melts like wax in a flame.
- The character putrefies on the spot.

Vernovog the Impetuous has fitted himself out with a blood weapon and equipped it with a poison sac, which gives him a Depatterning Rating of 3. He now decides that he wants glowing green eyes, and purchases a disturbing-appearance blood charm. He undergoes the ritual and takes the permanent damage necessary to activate the charm. The charm's Depatterning Rating is 3, which raises Vernovog's Depatterning Rating to 6. The gamemaster makes Vernovog's Depatterning Test against a Difficulty Number of 6, using the character's Willpower step (5/D8). The result of the test is 3, a failure.

A couple of days later, Vernovog goes to a house Conclave and uses his disturbing appearance charm in an attempt to intimidate a rival. His use of the charm's Charisma bonus triggers the depatterning, killing poor Vernovog. The gamemaster decides that Vernovog blows up; bits and pieces of him spatter all over the fine robes of his noble colleagues. His spectacular departure leaves not much of a body, but one unforgettable anecdote . . . .

Once a character fails a Depatterning Test, his astral imprint reflects the weakening of his pattern. Characters can detect this weakening in astral space by achieving a Good or better success against the affected character's Spell Defense. If the depatterning is detected before the

affected character next uses one of his blood charms, he can restore his True Pattern by removing all blood charms and not employing any form of blood magic except Strain for a year and a day. After this time, the character's True Pattern is restored. He can thereafter use blood charms without risk, unless he chooses one with a Depatterning Rating and begins the hazardous cycle all over again.

Characters suffering from weakened patterns are especially susceptible to spells and talents that target the True Pattern, such as Shatter Pattern (p. 135, **Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets**). Using a spell or talent against a character with a weakened True Pattern reduces the required success level by 1 level or the character's Spell Defense by 5.

NEW BLOOD CHARM TABLE

Blood Charm	Cost* (in silver pieces)	Weight	Depatterning Rating
Blood Weapon	500	3	1
Crystal Arm	1,700	6	2
Disturbing Appearance	100–1,000	1	3
Karmic Absorber	500	0	3
Poison Sac	1,000	1	2
Spore Gland	300	0	2
Wings of Fire	1,000	1	2

*Quadruple the listed price outside of Great Thera.

Stress Depatterning

If a character with one of the following blood charms implanted in his body suffers an injury to the part of his anatomy to which the blood charm is attached (for example, as the victim of a Called Shot; see p. 200, **ED**), that character's player must make a Depatterning Test. If the test fails, the character dies instantly and horribly, in a way determined by the gamemaster.

Theran magicians call this unfortunate phenomenon "stress depatterning." They don't like to admit that it exists, because it depresses sales of blood charms. (Thera's various magical groups and factions all supplement their research funding with revenue from blood charms, which gives them an incentive to downplay the dangers of their risky new devices.)

NEW BLOOD CHARMS

The items described below are popular among the Theran nobility, who have developed such outré notions of fashion that the most horrifying alterations of appearance are also the most popular. Name-givers from the provinces are likely to regard characters who openly flaunt these alterations as monstrous. The risk of depatterning should prompt most player characters to shy away from using these new blood charms; they are intended primarily as tools for gamemaster characters.

General information on blood charms appears on p. 258, **ED.**

Blood Weapon

A character with a blood weapon has replaced a portion of his or her anatomy with a living crystal item that provides a Damage bonus in unarmed combat. The item usually mimics the natural weapons of animals or creatures: razor-sharp teeth, claws attached to a hand or foot, a stinger (embedded in a t'skrang's tail), or sharpened horns implanted in the character's skull. All of these different blood weapons have the same game effects. The character takes 3 points of permanent damage when the blood weapon is installed. Thereafter, using the blood weapon in unarmed combat adds 4 Damage steps to successful hits.

Crystal Arm

A crystal arm is made of living crystal and implanted in a character's chest or between his shoulder blades. Installation of the arm causes 3 points of permanent damage. The character can use the arm to reach for and pick up or move things without taking additional harm. Using it for an additional attack per round costs 3 points of Strain per attack. Damage dealt by the arm is based on the character's Willpower step rather than his Strength step. When striking with the arm, the character suffers a –2 penalty to his or her Melee Weapons or Unarmed Combat step. The character cannot use the arm for additional Missile Weapons, Throwing Weapons or Spellcasting attacks.

Gamemasters should remind players that a permanent extra arm can be quite inconvenient; accommodating it requires a whole new wardrobe, custom-made torso armor and adjusting to new sleep positions. However, a character who has lost a real arm and replaces it with a crystal arm does not suffer these inconveniences, and does not suffer the –2 Attack Test penalty or an addition to his Depatterning Rating. However, he still takes the 3 points of permanent damage for installation.

Disturbing Appearance

Disturbing appearance charms cover a wide range of cosmetic alterations, all of them alarming. Examples include skin made of glass, compound or serpentine eyes, scaled hide, gems in place of fingernails, hair made of wire or silk, bright-colored teeth or radically altered mus-

culature. A character might also become disturbingly beautiful, with unnaturally fine and symmetrical features. Characters who choose this latter option look strangely similar to other Therans who have undergone this procedure, as the unusually lovely faces are all based on sketches made by the same few Theran magicians.

Officials with disturbing appearances are rarely posted to provinces in which Therans are unpopular, such as Vasgothia or Barsaive. Arbitorium bureaucrats have been known to alter themselves radically with these charms specifically to avoid receiving such dead-end assignments.

The charm itself is insignificant-looking—a small piece of black crystal, no bigger than a copper piece, embedded anywhere on the character's body. The character takes 1 point of permanent damage when the charm is implanted, and thereafter gains a +2 bonus to his or her Charisma step when making Interaction Tests in which the particular alteration caused by the charm may prove beneficial. (Sometimes it's an advantage to be intimidating, awe-inspiring or unnervingly beautiful.) The +2 bonus might also apply when attempting to seduce particularly perverse individuals.

Karma Absorber

To gain a Karma absorber, the character undergoes ritual scarification, which causes 3 points of permanent damage. Over a period of two months, the raised welts grow into a ring of tumor-like flesh around the crown of the skull. (In trolls, this soft flesh covers the hard cartilage of the horns.) The tissue acts as a lightning rod for Karma. Every time the character successfully strikes an opponent with a melee weapon, a missile, a blow in unarmed combat or a damage-causing spell, the character gains 1 of the opponent's Karma points. In the event of an Armor-Defeating Hit, the character takes a total of 3 Karma points from the victim. This blood charm is only effective against opponents who have Karma available.

The karma absorber is sensitive to the touch. If it is hit by an opponent making a Called Shot (p. 200, **ED**), the character suffers double the normal damage (multiply the Damage step number by 2) and an automatic Wound. Such a hit destroys the absorber; it bursts and spurts bloody pus all over the character.

Poison Sac

Poison sacs are attached to blood weapons, so a character must already possess a blood weapon to have a poison sac installed. The installation causes 1 point of permanent damage. A character with multiple blood weapons must specify to which one the poison sac is attached. Thereafter, whenever the character makes an Armor-Defeating Hit with that blood weapon, he or she may choose to poison the victim of the hit instead of doing normal damage. In this case, the character makes a Damage Test against using his Toughness step against a Difficulty Number equal to the victim's Toughness step. If the test is successful, the victim takes damage each round for a number of rounds equal to the difference between the Toughness step and the test result. At the beginning of a round in which the victim will suffer poison damage, the gamemaster makes a Damage Test using the attacker's Toughness step and applies that damage directly to the victim. Armor does not protect against this damage. A victim of a poison sac is immune to further hits from poison-sac-equipped weapons until he or she stops taking damage from the current one.

T'chera Carinci has a poison sac attached to the blood-weapon spike on her tail. Otherwise unarmed, she is fighting Zielaed, a Vasgothian tribal chieftain. She swings her tail at him. To hit Zielaed, T'chera's player needs a result of 7 or better. She rerolls one die and gets a 16, an Armor-Defeating Hit.

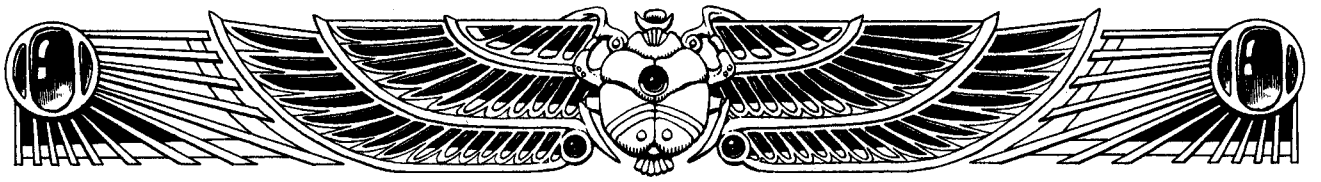
Rather than do normal damage to Zielaed, T'chera decides to poison him. Her Toughness step is 6, and so her player rolls a D10 for the Toughness Test. Zielaed's Toughness step is 5. T'chera's player gets a result of 8 on the test, then subtracts Zielaed's Toughness step for a final result of 3. This means that Zielaed will suffer damage from the poison at the beginning of the next three rounds. The gamemaster makes the required Toughness Tests using T'chera's Toughness step. Zielaed takes 8 points of damage in the first round, 7 in the next, and 8 in the third. During these three rounds, T'chera gains no benefit from poisoning Zielaed again.

Spore Gland

A spore gland charm is a fungal parasite implanted in the glands around the character's throat. The implantation procedure inflicts 1 point of permanent damage. Thereafter, whenever damage taken knocks the character unconscious, the gland opens up and sprays a cloud of corrosive spores. The cloud inflicts Step 4 non-permanent damage on the character, and does damage equal to the result of a Willpower or Willforce Test made by that character's player to all other characters within a 25-yard radius. Armor does not protect against this damage. Each character within range of the spores should make a Toughness Test against the unconscious character's Willpower step. Characters who succeed at this test take only half the damage from the spores.

The same magicians who install spore glands sell potions that protect Name-givers from the spores' effects. The potions cost 250 silver pieces per dose. Each dose works for 4 hours, during which time the character is immune to the effects of spore glands. Characters with spore glands often give these potions to fellow adventurers with whom they are traveling.

The character's permanently swollen glands are visi-



ble only on close inspection, and the character smells slightly musty on humid days.

Wings of Fire

The Wings of Fire charm consists of several magically treated fire opals embedded in a character's back in a crisscross pattern. Installation costs the character a whopping 15 points of permanent damage. After a month-long healing period, the character can use the charm to fly for short periods. The character can remain airborne for a number of rounds equal to his or her Toughness step. For each round spent in the air, the character suffers 1 point of Strain. To determine the character's flying speed, subtract 3 from his or her Dexterity Attribute and consult the Attribute Chart on p. 52 of the **Earthdawn** rulebook.

When the charm is powered, jets of flame shoot out from the opals in the character's back. These magical flames are not hot, and cannot be used to damage opponents or set fires. Windlings who have lost their wings sometimes resort to this dangerous blood magic.

THERAN MAGICAL AUGMENTATION

Thera's Heavenherds, led by research groups within the War College and the strongly magical House Narlanth, have recently developed magical augmentation that gives adept-like abilities to non-adepts. The target of the process is immersed in alchemical baths and must undergo bloodletting rituals. Depending on the end result desired, he may be injected with the distilled essences of wild beasts, other dangerous creatures or even Horrors, or various crystal charms may be implanted in his organs and muscles. The process is expensive but relatively swift and can be performed on individuals with no predisposition to magical ability. Currently, most subjects of this experimentation are non-adept soldiers serving in the Theran legions.

The subject of magical augmentation suffers in many ways, of course. The rituals dull his senses and rob him of his capacity to reason, make independent decisions and experience intense emotions. They also reduce his life expectancy by up to 50 percent, though the Heavenherds are not yet aware of this.

Though the Heavenherds downplay the negative consequences of augmentation, no Theran ever knowingly volunteers for the process. Soldiers who perform poorly and have little influence within their noble houses are frequently forced to undergo augmentation, and foreign troops in the service of the Therans—such as Issyri mercenaries—are often tricked into submitting to the procedure.

In game terms, augmentation means that the gamemaster can assign whatever game statistics he or she wants to low-status gamemaster characters in the service of Thera. The gamemaster can create non-adept opponents for adventurers that can nonetheless challenge gifted adepts. Augmented troops can have high Attributes, increased defense ratings, and high step numbers in skills or talents that can be learned as skills. However, they cannot gain spellcasting abilities or talents unavailable as skills.

THERAN GLOSSARY

akarenti *n.* Provincial spymaster.
bellaripila *n.* Vicious team ball game.
confectio *n.* Performance mixing theater, dance, combat and sometimes public executions.
custos *n.* City wardens responsible for policing within Great Thera.
fabrika *n.* Building in which slaves make various goods in a frenzy of self-destructive efficiency, caused by spirits bound into the walls.
karinthi *n.* Arbiter-General, head of the government bureaucracy.
kedate *n.* Courier in the service of the Arbiter-General.
ghareez *n.* Member of a cadre of windling torturers and inquisitors, feared throughout the Empire for their cruelty.
ianatori *n.* Customs officials working for the Arbitorium.
laverna *n.* Representative to the Conclave.
praetor *n.* An inquisitor/diplomat in the service of the Arbiter-General, responsible for ensuring that Arbitorium officials perform their duties adequately.
stipatori *n.* Attendants who serve the First Governor.

CREANA

Rules for Creana include those for resolving the effects of sandstorms, playing jackalmen, and using mummies.

SANDSTORMS

The major hazards of sandstorms are the risk of suffering temporary blindness or suffocation, or being buried alive. Which one actually occurs depends largely on the length of the storm. Most Creanan sandstorms last only a few minutes. When travelers suspect that a storm will be brief, they often remain standing and simply cover their faces, hoping to survive intact.

During brief storms—usually no longer than ten minutes—characters suffer damage each minute. For each minute of such a storm, the gamemaster makes a Step 12 Damage Test. Armor protects against this damage; even sturdy clothing such as cloaks and robes adds +2 to the character's Armor Rating. If the result of a single Damage Test indicates a Wound, the gamemaster inflicts on the character either temporary blindness or temporary suffocation.

Temporary blindness inflicts a -5 step penalty to all the character's actions until he regains his sight. To do this, he must make a successful Toughness Test against the result of the Damage Test that blinded him. He can

make this Toughness Test once each hour; for each test after the first, reduce the Difficulty Number by -2. Suffocating characters take damage each round equal to the difference between the result of the Damage Test that caused the suffocation and the character's Wound Threshold. This damage stops when the character makes a successful Toughness Test against the result of the Damage Test that caused the suffocation. As with temporary blindness, the character can make a Toughness Test each round, with the Difficulty Number reduced by -2 for each test after the first. A character should only be blinded or suffocated in a sandstorm once.

During longer storms, which last anywhere from ten to twenty-five minutes, most travelers attempt to hide from the worst of it by wrapping themselves in a cloth (a cloak, a robe, a canvas tent and so on) and lying on the ground. Such character is safe from blindness or temporary suffocation, but risks being buried alive. When a character attempts to protect himself in this way from a long sandstorm, the gamemaster makes a Step 13 Damage Test. The result of this test represents the Strength of the sand that has covered the character during the storm. In order to free himself from the sand, the character must make a successful Strength Test against the Damage Test result. He can make a Strength Test each round, but the Difficulty Number increases by +1 for every three tests made. Characters who cannot free themselves eventually suffocate to death. A character can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to his or her Toughness step; after that, the character begins to take damage each round. Make the necessary Damage Tests using a Damage step equal to 4 plus the number of rounds the character has spent buried since running out of breath. For example, the first Damage Test should be made using a Step Number of 5 (4 + 1 round = 5).

If two or more characters are buried close together, they may combine their efforts to free themselves (at the gamemaster's discretion). The stronger of the two characters makes a Strength Test, adding +1 step to his Strength step. Characters caught in a long storm who attempt to remain standing (as they might during a shorter storm) suffer the same effects as described for short storms during the first ten minutes. For every 2 minutes past the first ten, increase the Damage step of the storm by 1.

MUMMIES

Mummies are a Creanan form of walking dead, similar to cadaver men. Mummies are created when the spirit that once occupied an embalmed body fails to reach the gates of the dead in the Lands of the West. The spirit then returns to and reanimates the body. Because part of Creanan funeral rites involves extracting the dead person's brain and preserving it in a jar, most mummies are mindlessly destructive. However, whether because the priests of the dead failed to remove the brain or because of some magical fluke, some mummies retain their former intelligence and identities. The latter consider themselves to have been robbed of the paradise they were promised, and this sense of disappointment often makes them especially malicious. Native Creanans consider mummies to be servants of the sinister Passion Malek, and try to kill them on sight.

When a mummy successfully attacks a target, the gamemaster does not make the usual Damage Test. Instead, the target immediately takes damage equal to their Wound Threshold. Until that Wound is healed, the target loses 1 Recovery Test per day. Recovery Tests lost to multiple Wounds caused by mummies are cumulative, to a minimum of 1 test every two days. These Wounds are large bruises that quickly begin to putrefy, leaking pus and curdled blood.

Attributes
DEX: 5 **STR:** 8 **TOU:** 9
PER: 2 **WIL:** 8 **CHA:** 6

Initiative: 6
Number of Attacks: 1
Attack: 12
Damage: See above
Number of Spells: NA
Spellcasting: NA
Effect: NA

Physical Defense: 7
Spell Defense: 10
Social Defense: 12
Armor: NA
Mystic Armor: 4
Knockdown: 8
Recovery Tests: 3

Death Rating: 48
Wound Threshold: 14
Unconsciousness Rating: 41
Combat Movement: 27
Full Movement: 54

Legend Points: 180
Equipment: None
Loot: None, except for items found in the mummy's tomb

JACKALMEN

Jackalmen look like humans with heads of jackals. They have no more body hair than an average human, and come in both genders. These unusual Name-givers live only in Creana, and even there they are a strikingly small minority. Other Creanans see them as vicious and warlike, a stereotype reinforced by tales of the legendary jackalmen of the past. Though jackalmen are raised to be ferocious combatants, not all of them are heedlessly aggressive. Many are capable of controlling their aggressive instincts when necessary, giving those instincts free rein only in battle or self-defense.

Other Creanans also fear jackalmen for their cannibalistic practices. According to jackalmen tradition, the victor must eat the corpse of a slain foe who proved worthy in combat in order to properly honor the fallen enemy. (They are remarkably civilized about it; if they decide to eat you, they'll certainly cook you first.

Marinate you, even.) Jackalmen do not eat Name-giver flesh under any other circumstances, and so cannibalism is actually rare among them. However, most Creanans are unaware of this distinction, and expect jackalmen to try to devour them at the slightest opportunity.

Players who wish to play jackalmen may do so with their gamemaster's permission, using the following game statistics.

Racial Modifiers
Dexterity: +0
Strength: +2
Toughness: +1
Perception: -2
Willpower: +1
Charisma: -2

Karma
Karma Dice: D8
Legend Point Costs per Karma Point: 8
Starting Karma: 10
Maximum Karma Points: 35

Movement Modifier
Movement as Dexterity +1

Racial Abilities and Limitations

Jackalmen have low-light vision (p. 54, **ED**). They also have a bite attack: in unarmed combat, they may use their powerful jaws as weapons. Make the Damage Test for a bite attack using the character's Strength step plus 4 steps.

Discipline Restrictions

Jackalmen may not be air sailors, sky raiders, troubadours or weaponsmiths.

CREANAN GLOSSARY

bahj-nar *n.* A trader or merchant. Though technically a serf, a bahj-nar is granted greater social and economic freedom than most Creanan serfs.
Fekara *n.* The continent in which Creana and Marac are located.
khon-glas *n.* Government official with authority over large numbers of serfs.
nomarch *n.* Administrator/petty ruler of a large area within Creana or its conquered territories; usually a relative of the pharon.
nomarchy *n.* The area administered by a nomarch.
pharon *n.* Paramount ruler of Creana, who dies and is reborn each year.
sehf-el *n.* Priest-scribe; also the entire bureaucracy of priest-scribes.
tahn-el *n.* Priest-scribe(s) who serve a nomarch.

INDRISA

Rules for Indrisa include guidelines for using Indrisan relics and game statistics for dhuna.

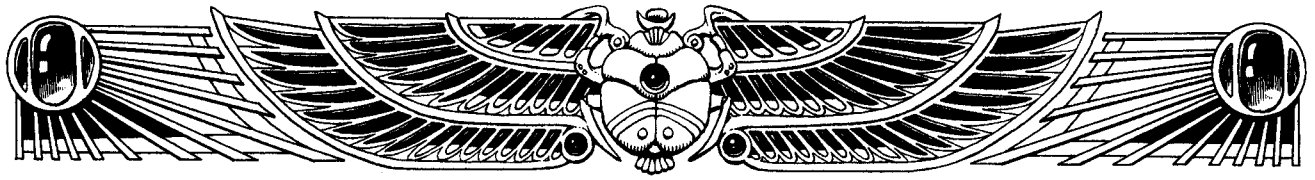
INDRISAN RELICS

Indrisan relics are thread items native to Indrisa, and are similar in most respects to normal thread items. However, non-Indrisans find them more difficult to use than do native Indrisans. This increased difficulty is reflected in higher-than-normal success level requirements for weaving threads and higher Legend Point costs for thread ranks. A character who wishes to weave a thread to an Indrisan relic must achieve a Good or better success on his Thread Weaving Test. Assuming the test succeeds, the cost for each thread rank is equal to the cost of the next highest rank, based on the progression given in the Talent Rank Cost Table (p. 221, **ED**). For example, a Barsaivian character is attempting to weave a Rank 3 thread to an Indrisan relic. The Difficulty Number for weaving the thread to this item is 10 (see Weaving Difficulty Table, p. 146, **ED**). Weaving such a thread to a standard thread item normally requires an Average or better success, and the normal cost for Rank 3 is 300 Legend Points. In order to successfully weave a Rank 3 thread to an Indrisan relic, the character needs a Good or better success on his Thread Weaving Test (a result of 15 or more), and the thread rank would cost 500 Legend Points.

DHUNA

Dhunas are the spawn of the Indrisan Passion who punishes those who transgress against Indrisan observances, and so may only harm those Indrisans who have somehow failed in these observances. Pathalans, Therans and other foreigners are fair game for them in other respects, however. Dhunas are extremely clever, and may threaten characters in order to extract loot or services from them. They are also immortal, and so the slaying of one in combat is something of an illusion. A "slain" dhuna is actually forced to retreat to the astral plane for a hundred and one years and a day. A dhuna banished in this manner can sense, upon its return, whether those who killed it are still alive. If so, the dhuna will stop at nothing to avenge its humiliation. Fortunately for adventurers from other lands, dhuna cannot leave Indrisa.

The game statistics on p. 170 reflect average dhuna (see **Indrisa,** p. 81). Certain Named dhunas are much more powerful than the average, however; they may possess abilities that rival those of great dragons or Named Horrors.



Attributes
DEX: 13 **STR:** 16 **TOU:** 18
PER: 16 **WIL:** 17 **CHA:** 15

Initiative: 16
Number of Attacks: 2–4
Attack: 16
Damage: 22
Number of Spells: 2
Spellcasting: 17
Effect: See powers

Physical Defense: 17
Spell Defense: 19
Social Defense: 17
Armor: 20
Mystic Armor: 11
Knockdown: 21
Recovery Tests: 7

Death Rating: 100
Wound Threshold: 19
Unconsciousness Rating: 80

Combat Movement: 120
Full Movement: 240

Karma Points: 20

Karma Steps: 10

Powers: Spells (Circle 12 Nethermancer)

Legend Points: 10,000
Equipment: None
Loot: None

INDRISAN GLOSSARY

azachath *n.* The Scourge.
dhuna *n.* A powerful, intelligent being who punishes transgressors and frequently threatens foreigners.
hachaza *n.* The impersonal force, more powerful than the Passions, which periodically destroys civilizations and shifts land masses.
jaraput *n.* Bandits who are culturally Avani or Uvasti.
mirochali *n.* A mystical principle stating that positive forces are locked in eternal struggle with counterbalancing negative forces.
omathani *n.* The layer of mystical energy between the world we know and the astral sphere; it contains echoes of ideas and customs from past civilizations.
pasha *n.* Ruler of a city-state who technically owes allegiance to the Indrisan king. Before the arrival of the Therans, pashas often owed allegiance only to their own interests; now they owe it to the Theran overgovernor.
Pathalan *Proper n.* Raiders from the Indrisan interior whose culture centers around banditry; neither Uvasti nor Avani.
puvontilan *n.* Pashas who control minor lands or no land at all.
runarup *n.* A religious relic once owned by a legendary hero, or thibomata.
sathalunta *pl. n.* The one hundred and forty-four holy Name-givers whose meditation largely protected the Indrisans from the Scourge.
selemchona *n.* The seven pashas with significant power in Indrisa; literally, cream.
thibomata *n.* Spirits of legendary heroes who serve as intermediaries to the Passions and are therefore the recipients of prayer and sacrifices.
vethanta *n.* A metaphysical doctrine stating that history is cyclical.
vimithryitan *n.* A meditation technique which, when practiced by a sathalunta (q.v.), projects sufficient positive emotional energy to drive off Horrors.

MARAC

Rules for the province of Marac include the new talent of rhetoric, jubruq characters, and statistics and guidelines for using the elemental spirits known as jinari.

RHETORIC

Step Number: Rank + Perception Step
Action: Yes
Requires Karma: No
Skill Use: Yes
Strain: None
Discipline Talent Use: None

Rhetoric allows characters to discern the true intentions of Name-givers with whom they converse for at least ten minutes. First developed as the central intellectual skill of Maracan culture, rhetoric has been incorporated into certain Disciplines as a talent. Troubadours may have it at First Circle, wizards at Fifth Circle. Only Maracan troubadours and wizards can train other adepts in rhetoric.

When told that a player character is using rhetoric, the gamemaster makes a secret Rhetoric Test on the player's behalf, using the Social Defense of the target character as the Difficulty Number. If the test is successful, the gamemaster reveals to the player the true feelings of the target character about the matter being discussed. "The character doesn't know what to feel," or "The character hasn't made any plans yet," are both valid answers, though if the character is leaning one way or another on an issue, the gamemaster should specify which. If the test fails, the gamemaster should give the player an inaccurate reading.

The gamemaster may rule that one player character cannot use rhetoric against another. If gamemaster characters use rhetoric on player characters, the gamemaster character may learn the gist of out-of-character comments made by the players about their own character's intentions.

A character with rhetoric may substitute his Rhetoric step for his Social Defense when targeted by another character using rhetoric or the skills of acting, disguise, flirting or seduction. Characters may use rhetoric as a talent (but not as a skill) in place of certain talents that target another character's Social Defense, if the gamemaster agrees that the use is appropriate.

For rhetoric used as a skill, certain modifiers apply to the Difficulty Number in the case of a target not raised in a Maracan city. Add +2 to the Social Defense of sufik targets, +3 for Theran targets, and +4 for obsidimen and for Name-givers of any other culture.

JINARI

Jinari are elemental spirits native to Marac who have a special relationship with that province's sufik tribesmen. They exist only in astral space, though they can make themselves visible to sufik tribal leaders and to jubruq (see **Jubruq,** below). Many Maracans believe that jinari have physical bodies and fly across the desert in search of Name-givers to bedevil, but this is mere superstition. Most often, jinari appear as ten-foot-tall male orks or humans, dressed in Maracan-style garments, with muscular builds and skin of bright colors like red, blue or violet. Because they are solely astral beings, fighting one requires the jinari's opponent to travel to astral space.

The jinari have many powers with which they can influence the physical world, provided that a Name-giver first asks them to do so. Upon request, and after spending 1 Karma Point, a jinari may quadruple the amount of any foodstuff, or create a shelter for up to forty individuals that lasts for eight hours and provides full protection from the elements. (Maracan folk belief erroneously claims that the jinari itself becomes the shelter.) Or it can create up to a gallon of fresh drinking water, or give a free Recovery Test to any mount.

By spending 2 Karma Points, a jinari can allow any Name-giver to cast any elementalist spell that the jinari knows; the character casts the spell using the jinari's relevant game statistics. The character must use the spell within a number of minutes equal to his or her Perception step. Spending 3 Karma Points allows the jinari to bestow the power of flight, at the character's normal movement rate, on any Name-giver for a number of minutes equal to that character's Toughness step.

Jinari can also mentally dominate Horrors and their constructs, provided they can see the creature in question in astral space. The jinari makes a Spellcasting Test against the Horror's Social Defense. If the test is successful, the jinari may psychically force the Horror or construct to do the jinari's bidding for a day plus one hour. A Good success permits the jinari to control the creature for a week and a day. On an Excellent success, the time period increases to a month and a day; on an Extraordinary success, the jinari dominates the Horror for a year and a day. A jinari may dominate a particular Horror any number of times in succession. Controlled Horrors and constructs cannot subvert the jinari's will or intention.

The jinari have their own society, in which they often contend with one another to influence the customs, actions and destinies of the sufik people. Lately, in response to Theran magical atrocities against their kind, they have banded together to drive the Therans out of Marac in a rebellion that has spread far beyond the sufik nomads. The catalyst for this conflict is a Theran technique that binds jinari into objects, where they serve as batteries of sorts for magical effects. The fabrika constructed by House Heindari (see **Indrisa,** p. 105) are only the most egregious example of this exploitation.

Attributes
DEX: 7 **STR:** 7 **TOU:** 7
PER: 12 **WIL:** 10 **CHA:** 15

Initiative: 7
Number of Attacks: 1
Attack: 10
Damage: 10
Number of Spells: 2
Spellcasting: 17
Effect: See powers
Physical Defense: 10
Spell Defense: 15
Social Defense: 17
Armor: 0
Mystic Armor: 15
Knockdown: 10
Recovery Tests: 4

Death Rating: 140
Wound Threshold: 10
Unconsciousness Rating: 120
Combat Movement: 120
Full Movement: 240

Karma Points: 30
Karma Steps: 6

Powers: Spells (Circle 8 Elementalist)

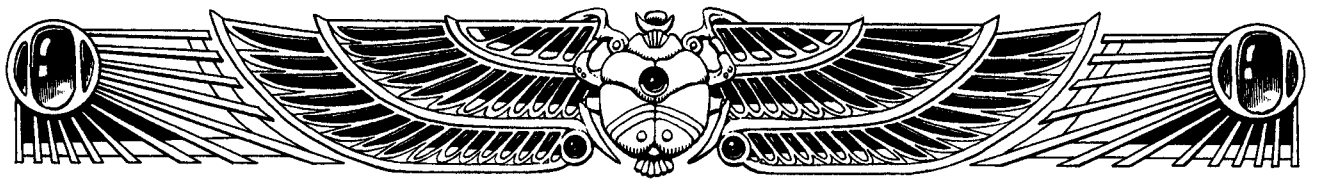
Legend Points: 5800
Equipment: None
Loot: None

JUBRUQ

Jubruq, half Name-giver and half jinari, exist only among the sufik tribes of Marac. Conceived in ork or human mothers by jinari fathers, they resemble malnourished specimens of their mothers' Name-giver race. Because their jinari heritage makes them powerful wielders of magic, the sufik respect them and give them important duties to perform for Marac society, but also tend to treat them as outsiders. Jubruq therefore tend to see themselves as apart from the day-to-day concerns of ordinary tribesmen. They are prone to melancholy and self-pity, and feel doubly alienated outside sufik encampments where they seem to have no purpose in the world.

Players who wish to play jubruq characters may do so with the gamemaster's permission, using the following statistics. The gamemaster should remind them that only a very strange jubruq would want to join an adventuring party, even for a short period of time. However, a handful of these rare beings might well be interested in seeing the wider world and willing to tolerate the unfamiliar ways of foreigners in order to do so.

Racial Modifiers
Dexterity: -1
Strength: -2
Toughness: -1
Perception: +2*
Willpower: +1**



Charisma: -1
*Add an additional +2 bonus to the jubruq's Perception Attribute Value when calculating the step numbers for talents and spells.
**Add an additional +1 bonus to the jubruq's Willpower Attribute Value when calculating the step numbers for talents and spells.

Karma
Karma Dice: D10
Legend Point Costs per Karma Point: 5
Starting Karma: 15
Maximum Karma Points: 70

Movement Modifier
Movement as Dexterity -1

Racial Abilities and Limitations

Jubruq are gifted magicians and gain special bonuses to their step numbers for Perception and Willpower-based talents and spells (see **Racial Modifiers,** above). They also gain a +2 bonus to the appropriate Defense Rating when targeted by Horror powers. Easily tired, they must rest for an hour after any strenuous physical activity, such as combat, and must also get twelve hours of sleep per day. A jubruq who fails to do either of these things suffers a -3 penalty to all step numbersuntil they are able to recover.

Discipline Restrictions

Jubruq may be elementalists, Horror stalkers, illusionists, nethermancers or wizards. They may not follow any other Disciplines.

MARACAN GLOSSARY

aalhar *n.* City-dweller; used to refer to the dominant cultural group of Marac.
Akim-hanar *n.* Literally, "strong in mind"; a group of breakaway scholars who allegedly came up with an alternative to the Rites of Protection and Passage.
jaraleh *n.* A slave kept for the pleasure of the slave owner.
sufik *n.* Stoic, ascetic nomad bands that roam Marac's deserts and countryside.
theraalhar *n.* Therans who remained in Marac during the Scourge, and their descendants.

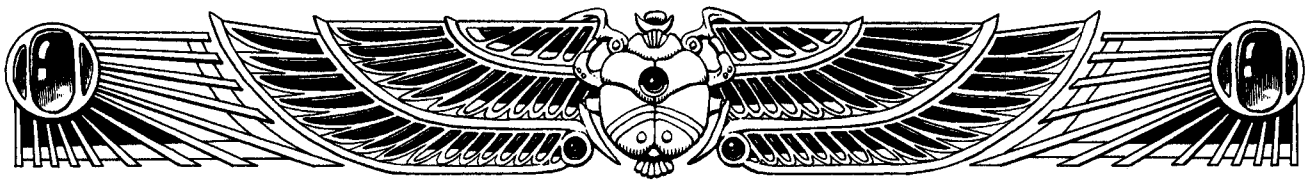
TALEA

Game information for the political quagmire that is Talea includes a rough breakdown of political alliances.

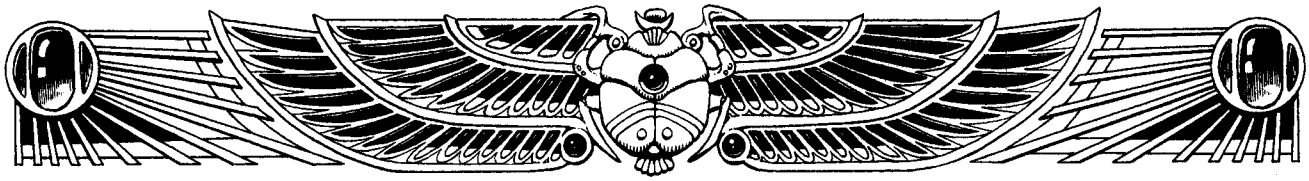
Talea is a land of constantly shifting political sands, where today's enemy may be tomorrow's friend and vice versa. In such a place, keeping track of who is allied or opposed to who is both important and difficult. The following table shows the current status of alliances and enmities among significant persons in Talea. Gamemasters should use this table as a starting point for Talean campaigns, but should also keep in mind that nothing in Talean politics ever stays the same for long.

CURRENT TALEAN POLITICAL ALLIANCES

NAME	TITLE	ALLIES	ENEMIES
Hezza Adanna	Signor of Uomonza	Betedar/House Medari Duchess of Jonacolla House Thaloss	Duke of Amalvetti Duke of Malcovezzi Serenity IV
Giano Aldrichio	Signor of Pallata	Betedar	Chancellor Lograno Duke of Sercicia
Amalvetti	Duke	King of Arancia Serenity IV	Duke of Crossetti Duchess of Frechetti
Berdew	Overgovernor	Duchess of Jonacolla Duke of Malcovezzi Patriarch Votanio	Admiral Kebakki Chancellor Lograno Duke of Sercicia
Betedar	Theran spice merchant	Signor Adanna Signor Aldrichio Duke of Crossetti Duchess of Jonacolla Pader Vivanoce	Serenity IV Duke of Malcovezzi Signora Volla



NAME	TITLE	ALLIES	ENEMIES
Cezicci	Signora of Tavano	House Krand House Narlanth	Serenity IV Duke of Malcovezzi
Crossetti	Duke	Betedar Povani the Mountainous	Duke of Amalvetti King of Arancia Duchess of Frechetti Serenity IV
Cucciano	Patriarch of Uomonza	Duke of Amalvetti Duke of Malcovezzi General Ozfrak Serenity IV	Signor Adanna Betedar Duke of Crossetti Duchess of Jonacolla Patriarch Votanio
Domartini III	King of the South	Duchess of Romertazzi Duke of Sercicia	King of Arancia Povani the Mountainous
Ellieux VII	King of Arancia	Overgovernor Berdew	Duke of Crossetti Domartini III
Frechetti	Duchess	Duke of Sercicia	Duke of Amalvetti Chancellor Lograno
Jonacolla	Duchess	Overgovernor Berdew Betedar Signor Adanna House Gascilium	Serenity IV Duke of Malcovezzi Signora Volla
Kebakki	Admiral, 2nd Fleet	Chancellor Lograno	Overgovernor Berdew Yuglovian
Lograno	Chancellor of Eziano	Duke of Sercicia Patriarch Votanio	Duchess of Frechetti Serenity IV
Malcovezzi	Duke	Overgovernor Berdew Serenity IV	Betedar Duchess of Jonacolla Duke of Sercicia
Ozfrak	General, 3rd Legion	Serenity IV	No current enemies
Povani the Mountainous	King of the North	Duke of Crossetti	Duke of Amalvetti
Romertazzi	Duchess	Domartini III	Duke of Sercicia
Sercicia	Duke	Domartini III Chancellor Lograno Patriarch Votanio	Signor Aldrichio Overgovernor Berdew Duchess of Frechetti Duke of Malcovezzi



NAME	TITLE	ALLIES	ENEMIES
Serenity IV	Pompate	Duke of Amalvetti Patriarch Cucciano Duke of Malcovezzi General Ozfrak Patriarch Votanio	Signor Adanna Betedar Duke of Crossetti Duchess of Jonacolla Chancellor Lograno
Pader Vivanoce	Head of the Enici	Duke of Malcovezzi Serenity IV	Betedar
Votanio	Patriarch of Uomonza	Chancellor Lograno Serenity IV Duke of Sercicia Overgovernor Berdew	Duke of Amalvetti Duke of Malcovezzi General Ozfrak
Gianna Volla	Signora of Apazza	Serenity IV House Heindari	Betedar Duchess of Jonacolla
Yuglovian	Akarenti of Pezzano	No current allies	Admiral Kebakki

TALEAN GLOSSARY

consorto/consorta *n.* An honorary duke or duchess, granted that title through marriage to a Named duke or duchess.

Enici *Proper n.* Order of militant warrior questors devoted to the Talean Passion, Prima.

erfani *pl. n.* Peasants who owe payme
under the system of fedali (see below).

fedali *n.* Laws governing the obligatio
nobles who rule the lands they work.

pader *n.* Follower of Prima, similar to a

signori *n.* Member of the oligarchie
cities.

nts to landowners

of peasants to the

questor.

s that rule Talean

elines for playing
e strange magic of
gn.

noid plants. The
is generally accu-
fer in small details.
ers may do so with
ie following statis-

Toughness: +2
Perception: +0
Willpower: +0
Charisma: -1

Karma

Karma Dice: D8
Legend Point Costs per Karma Point: 7
Starting Karma: 5
Maximum Karma Points: 35

Movement Modifier
Movement as Dexterity -1

Racial Abilities and Limitations

Because leafers do not have sensitive internal organs, they are immune to the detrimental effects of Wounds (see p. 203, **ED**). Normally, Wounds reduce the effectiveness of Recovery Tests; this reduction applies to a Wounded leafer as if the leafer had one less Wound than it actually does. In addition, leafers never suffer step penalties for Wounds. Leafers are also immune to physical torture and fatigue because they do not experience pain as other Name-givers do, though they do have a rudimentary nervous system that informs them when they take damage.

A leafer that fails to root itself in nutrient-rich soil and sleep for at least seven hours per day does not regain Recovery Tests. Leafers go dormant, essentially falling unconscious, when exposed to temperatures lower than 40° Fahrenheit, and take Step 5 damage for every ten minutes they spend in an environment with temperatures at the freezing point or below. They also take Step 5 damage for each ten minutes spent in direct sunlight at a tempera-

VASGOTHIA

Rules for Vasgothia include guid
leafers and ulk-men and for using the
the Deep Forest in a Vasgothian campa

LEAFERS

Leafers are ambulatory, huma
lengthy description of leafers on p. 158
rate, though individual leafers may dif
Players who wish to play leafer charact
the gamemaster's permission, using th
tics.

Racial Modifiers
Dexterity: -1
Strength: -1

ture of 100° Fahrenheit or more. Armor does not protect against temperature-related damage. Leafers have sap rather than blood running through their veins, and so cannot use any form of blood magic.

Discipline Restrictions
Leafers may not be air sailors, sky raiders or weaponsmiths.

Leafer Pods
If a leafer pod is ruptured, it sends a cloud of poisonous spores into the air, covering a 25-yard radius centered on the pod. Any character caught in this area must make a successful Toughness Test against a Difficulty Number of 7 or suffer Step 13 damage each round for 3 consecutive rounds.

ULK-MEN

Ulk-men live only in the Deep Forest of Vasgothia. Depending on who you believe, they are either misunderstood monsters or clever Horror-spawn planning to destroy civilization. The gamemaster decides which interpretation is correct.

Even if the gamemaster decides that the ulk-men are misunderstood, extreme care should be taken before allowing a player to add an ulk-man character to an adventuring group. Keep in mind that even sympathetic gamemaster characters will greet ulk-men with suspicion at best and violence at worst. Not even the tolerant citizens of Throal would allow an ulk-man to live in their kingdom. Local folk will rarely, if ever, allow an adventuring band with an ulk-man member to stay at inns or eat in taverns. If an ulk-man enters a city or village, its residents are likely to attack him. In short, ulk-man player characters will seriously handicap any adventuring parties they join.

Racial Modifiers
Dexterity: -1
Strength: +2
Toughness: +3
Perception: -1
Willpower: +0
Charisma: -2

Karma
Karma Dice: D4
Legend Point Costs per Karma Point: 12
Starting Karma: 5
Maximum Karma Points: 20

Movement Modifier
Movement as Dexterity -2

Racial Abilities and Limitations
Ulk-men may gain certain Horror powers (described on p. 297-9, **ED**) as talents. These powers, shown on the Ulk-men Horror Power Table, are available to ulk-men of any Discipline, and are treated as normal talents for the Circles given. When used by Horrors, these powers require Spellcasting Tests; when used by an ulk-man, add the character's rank in the talent to his Perception step to get the step used, even if the ulk-man has the Spellcasting talent. The Legend Point cost for these Horror power talents is the same as for a normal talent of the given Circle.

Because they owe their existence partly to Horror magic (see **Vasgothia,** p. 159), ulk-men are subject to all spells and talents that target Horrors or Horror constructs.

Discipline Restrictions
Ulk-men may not be air sailors, cavalrymen, sky raiders, troubadours or weaponsmiths.

ULK-MEN HORROR POWER TABLE

Horror Power	Circle When Available
Corrupt Karma	4
Animate Dead	6
Terror	8
Cursed Luck	10

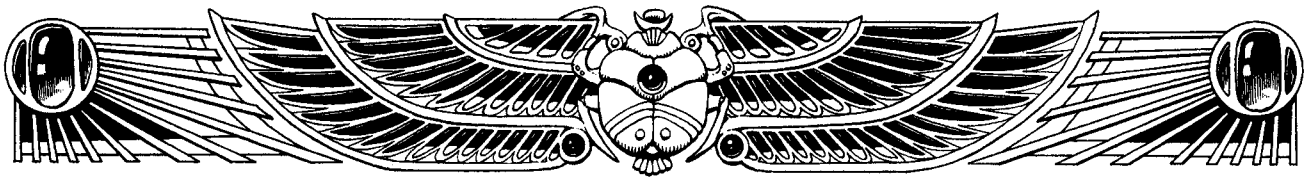
VASGOTHIAN FOREST MAGIC

Below are guidelines for resolving the effects of the Deep Forest's tainted astral space, including uses of Raw Magic, and for using Fruits of the Passions and Fruits of the Horrors.

Raw Magic Effects
The corruption of the astral space that corresponds to the Deep Forest of Vasgothia is not uniform. Often, Safe regions lie right next to Tainted or even Corrupt areas. Because of this lack of consistency, magicians who use raw magic in the Deep Forest can never be certain what type of region they are in. The only exception to this rule is the area surrounding the Towers (see **Vasgothia,** p. **155**), which is Corrupt for a radius of 3 miles around the structures. To determine the condition of astral space in a given portion of the Deep Forest, roll 2D6 and consult the Raw Magic Table.

The corruption of astral space in the Deep Forest works somewhat differently than normal, for reasons no magical scholars have yet managed to explain. Instead of taking conventional damage, characters who cast raw magic in the Deep Forest risk an alarming transformation of one kind or another. When a character casts raw magic in the Deep Forest, make a normal Warping Test against the magician's Spell Defense, per standard rules for raw magic (p. 156, **ED**). Then determine the severity of the transformation according to the success level achieved, consulting the Warping Table.

An **embarrassing** transformation will elicit com-



RAW MAGIC TABLE

Die Roll Result	Astral Space
2	Safe
3–5	Open
6–11	Tainted
12	Corrupt

WARPING TABLE

Success Level	Transformation
Average	Embarrassing
Good	Inconvenient
Excellent	Serious Loss
Extraordinary	Disabling Loss

ments from others and may be a handicap in social situations. Examples include changed hair or skin color, chronic body odor, unsightly blemishes and scars, nervous tics and speech problems such as a stutter or randomly using inappropriate words.

An **inconvenient** transformation reduces the character's ability to perform in adventures, though in a minor way. The character may suffer from irrational fears or compulsions that prevent him from doing certain things or force him to behave in an inappropriate manner. He may tire easily, require twice the normal amount of food to stave off hunger, suffer incontinence and so on.

A **serious loss** is a reduction of an Attribute or a relevant step number. Most often the character loses 1 point from his or her Perception, Willpower or Charisma Attribute values, or suffers a permanent loss of 1 rank in a relevant talent such as Spellcasting, Thread Weaving or Karma Ritual.

A **disabling loss** is an injury or compulsion that severely reduces the character's ability to perform while adventuring: the loss of sight or the ability to speak, the withering of a limb, a disfigurement so horrifying that normal social relations become virtually impossible, or even something fatal (such as the disappearance of a character's entire digestive system). Alternatively, the character may permanently lose 1D6 talent ranks spread out over crucial talents like Spellcasting, Thread Weaving or Karma Ritual. The player characters should fear that such terrible things might happen to them if they are foolish enough to cast raw magic in the Deep Forest. However, only gamemaster characters or player characters in short-lived games, such as convention runs, should actually suffer such extreme results.

Given the severe risks that casting raw magic normally poses, few player characters do it on a regular basis. If they make a habit of it, have a gamemaster character warn them of the extra risks involved in the Deep Forest of Vasgothia, rather than spring this on an unsuspecting player.

FRUITS OF THE PASSIONS

The Fruits of the Passions are unusual magical treasures—the remains of the Vasgothian Passions slain in their war against the Horrors. Each fruit confers 1D6 abilities on the character brave enough to consume it. The gamemaster chooses the specific abilities the fruit confers; most often they are talents, but may also include skills or questor powers (p. 91, **Earthdawn Companion**).

The character biting into a fruit gets the first ability it grants immediately, but must still spend Legend Points for it equal to half the ability's normal cost. If the ability is not one that the character can purchase within the rules of the game, treat it as an ability gained through Versatility, even if the character is not human, and add 100 Legend Points (the cost of Rank 1 in Versatility) to the cost of the ability. Add the 100 points for Versatility to the ability's Legend Point cost before halving the cost. If the character does not have the necessary Legend Points, all Legend Points the character gains from that point forward are automatically spent on the new ability until the character has spent the appropriate number of Legend Points.

A character who has gained one ability from the fruit may attempt to gain the next ability through meditation. When the character first tries this, the gamemaster tells the player how many Legend Points the next ability costs, but does not reveal the ability. The player character may choose when to spend those Legend Points, but only finds out what ability he has purchased after the points are spent.

Fruits of the Horrors

The Fruits of the Horrors are the cursed counterparts of the Fruits of the Passions, and are difficult to distinguish from them. If a character ingests a Fruit of the Horrors, he suffers the same results as if he had just cast a raw magic spell in a Tainted region of the Deep Forest. To determine the equivalent of the spell's Circle, add 2 to the character's Circle in his or her Discipline (or the highest Circle for characters with multiple Disciplines). In addition, and at the gamemaster's discretion, Fruits of the Horrors may also grant the character a Horror power with a step number equal to the character's Willpower (or Willforce) step. In this case, a single Fruit of the Horrors grants only one Horror power.

VASGOTHIAN GLOSSARY

Barrite *Proper n.* Member of the anti-Theran Vasgothian tribes before the Scourge.
Empirist *Proper n.* A pro-Theran, "civilized" Vasgothian.
fruelling *n.* An Empirist who does not believe in petitioning foreign Passions.
hoemofoel *n.* Vasgothian term for a leafer.
New Barrite *Proper n.* A Vasgothian who reverted to barbarism after visiting the Place of ReNaming.
ulk *n.* General Vasgothian term for a Horror.

THE THERAN EMPIRE

N

Shosara

Sereatha

Death's Sea

THERA

-LEGEND-

- MARAC
- VASGOTHIA
- TALEA
- CREANA
- VIVANE
- BARSAIVE
- INDRISA
- ARANCIA

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EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES AWAIT YOU IN THE THERAN EMPIRE!

Great Thera stands at the heart of a far-flung empire full of strange customs, awe-inspiring beauty and great intrigue. Travelers through these provinces must be wary of Thera's influence, but even greater dangers lie in the unfamiliar creatures and people native to these lands. Though Thera may lay claim to these vast countries, the Empire is not welcome in all of them. Some provinces benefit from the Theran presence; others seek to throw off the Theran yoke through violence, and still others maintain their independence by more subtle means.

- In Creana, magical, multicolored shifting sand constantly changes the shape of the province, killing the unwary traveler in a land where dragons dare not go.
- In Talea, a strange, unborn god rules the lawgivers, who compete among themselves for the favor of their Passion and the loyalty of the people.
- In Indrisa fierce, multi-armed demons do the bidding of righteous Passions.
- In Marac, gleaming cities of brass symbolize the pride of a people that use the Horrors themselves in an ongoing war against Theran domination.
- In Vasgothia, remnants of a war between Passions and Horrors lie scattered throughout the deep forest, protected by a people constantly reborn in the image of their ancestors.

The Theran Empire is a sourcebook for the Earthdawn game system. This sourcebook offers players and gamemasters a look at the Theran Empire that exists beyond Barsaive's borders, including the Great City of Thera and the five primary provinces under the Empire's control. This book offers many new possibilities for Earthdawn gamemasters, providing a wealth of information with which to run adventures and campaigns in mysterious, far-away lands. In addition to fleshing out Theran society and introducing numerous potential story lines, the *Theran Empire* also presents four new player-character races.

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