

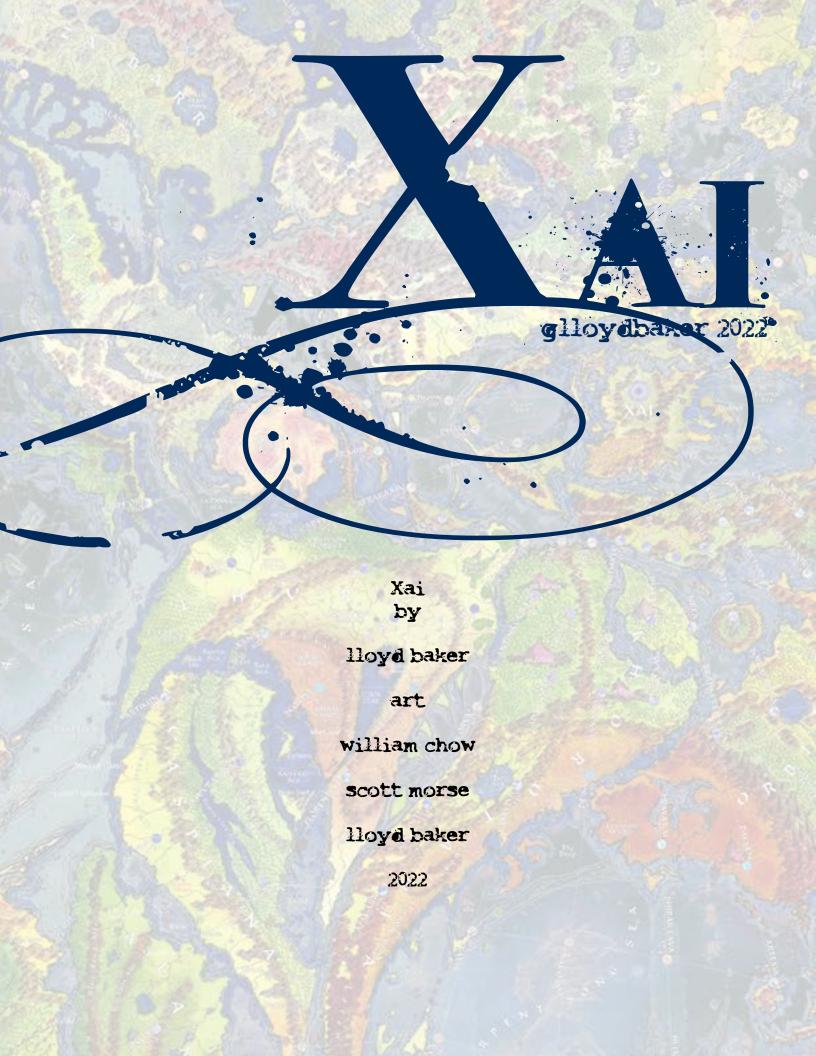
To My Wife Kae Baker

#### All Hail the Players

Aaron Ikeda Bill Holz Carl Ericksen Chris Norehad Dan Baker Dave Holland Dave... Drake Tokunaga Duncan Davenport Ed Klapproth Eric Brodish Eric Kihara Flo Lim Francis Camacho Jim Williams Gerald Baker Gus Hucks Jordan Takemoto Joyce Morse Joe Langdon Kurt... Malia Morse Mary Rigler Mike Rand Milton Streeter Milton Ragsdale Moon Mulligan Rick Hazen Robert Glancy Roman Woodall Sam Morse Scott Morse Susan Baker Terrace Jerome Wayne(Yassy) Tsuchimoto William Chow

#### Special Thanks

Bill Lacey
Dennis (Yama) & Charleen Yamasato
Trevor Ross







#### Xai Clockworks Contents

Page 11
Introduction

Page 45

01 Empire City

Spire Empire the Dragon Heart Broken by Kind House Pen'de'shal the Keeper of Balance by Forest of Souls People: Shilara (the Shilaran Forest) and the

Weavers

Page 59

02 Sovereign City

Spire Sovereign Ghar e'Grau the Earthen Lord House Gold Heart the Vaults Deep Crafted and Void Wrought People: Grau

> Page 69 03 Pink City

Spire Pink Fairy Fine Fawn in Flight House Love Cries Valor the Pink Lioness in Flight

People: The Fairy Races
Wynsha (Chimera)
Elf (Yalir) & Orc (Uralk)
Dwarf (Granitar) & Kobold (Kal'vura)
Giant (Golyah) & Ogre (Oovoodoo)

Page 79 **04 Xanadu City** 

Spire Xanadu Sana'vaa the Cursed Land House Khann her Valor Swallowed by the Sun People: Khann

> Page 89 **05 Charm City**

Spire Charm Amore Allure the Shir'hall Adored House Succubus Sideways over Under Heart People: Sabrine (Succubus-Incubus)

Page 97

06 Symmetry City

Spire Symmetry the Beauty Asymmetric Foreshadowed House Syy in Delicate Symmetry Revealed People: Syaa (Model 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) Additionally, the non-sentient Syab + the

Mothers

Page 111 07 Khaos City

Spire Khaos Intrigue under Clouds Imagined House Red by Sound of Green & Sight of Song People: Bor'goth

Page 119

08 Astral City

Spire Astral the Shifting Veils Parted House Silence Behind a Mind's Eye People: Eigarian, originally of the Eiger Bule Page 129

09 Zephyr City

Spire Zephyr on Horizons Yet Seen House Eleu by Grace of Water & Sail & Star People: Aiken'Kreer

Page 137

10 Zirai City

Spire Zirai the Mirror of Illuminated Grace House Light Shines in Knowledge by Grace under Pressure People: Min'Zirai

Page 149

11 Summerland City

Spire Summerland Treasure in Ice House Shine by Chrome over Diesel & Dust People: Rhamasi

Page 155

12 Moon City

Spire Moon amid Infinite Stars House Silver Grin under Rebel Moon Untamed People: the various Lykka Clans

Page 169

13 Silhouette City

Spire Silhouette the Edge House Mirror as Seen Reflected in Rain & Tear People: Pyrmn & generic romance drama humankind

Page 177

14 Midgard City

Spire Midgard Kin'Oloor the Dire House Kin by Heart in Faith & Fealty & Family & Fury People: Kin'Rhi

Page 191

15 Warlock City

Spire Warlock except Aku Smiles Afar House Strangeways This Way Come People: Shryll

Page 201

16 Titan City

Spire Titan Muurantia the Den of Steel House Mauna in Strength by Power of Hand & Fist

People: Muurantium (True Blood) & Lesser Titan Races (generic barbarian humankind)

Page 215

17 Merlin City

Spire Merlin of Shadows Unnoticed House Ddraig'Goch the Quick Light in Silence People: Ddraig, Myrddin Wizards

Page 227

18 Sacred City

Spire Sacred be the Abstract in Light House Crusade Holy be the Faith of the Righteous

People: Hathan, originally of Ihatha'Lu

. . .

# ONTENTS

#### Page 237 19 Gray City

Spire Gray as Grass in a Flat Field House Unseen Under Hollow Hills People: Krai'zan

Page 247

#### 20 FrostFire City

Spire Front'Fire the Eternal Pair House Chill Heart the Reason of Dreams Made Real People: Jot'nar Races

Page 257

#### 21 Angel City

Spire Angel the Amfyr Zevara Ul'vyr & The Poison Jungle House Marlene Lay me down to Sleep People: Ul'vyr, Zevera, Amfyr

Page 271

#### 22 Perpendicular City

Spire Perpendicular in Navigation Far Beyond House North by Orange under Seven West by Red over Nine People: Illinyar'Vooran

Page 281

#### 23 Sauria City

Spire Sauria her Iris Bright in Red & Blue & Yellow

House Petrichor by Embrace of Rain at Home People: Saurian

Page 295

#### 24 Spider City

Spire Spider the Heartland of Courage House Sharpness the Spider begs Mercy of the Sisters Silent Song People: Shadaran

Page 309

#### 25 Pyramid City

Spire Pyramid e'Kataan a Path of Fateful Stars House Providence Finally Seen in Glory Mesmerized

People: Kataan

Page 317

#### 26 Lyric City

Spire Lyric the Forest Song under Star House Windsong in Solar Slumber by Roots Everdeep

People: Lyr

Page 335

#### 27 Grendel City

Spire Grendel the Hero Beyond the Cave House Slime Green Gray Gathers under Viridescent Muck People: The Dhar Races Page 357

#### 28 the AdrenaChrome

Spire Adrena'Chrome by Neon Rain House Reptile Dance Away my Ghost Lucretia People: Xuvarian

Page 371

#### 29 Calibahn City

Spire Calibah Cries under Starlit Sky House Wraith Melne Vora by Ancient Chaos Bond

People: Mhorganti

Page 387

#### 30 Labyrinth City

Spire Labyrinth below the Underground Sea House Deep the Ocean and Vast the Yellow Seas Beyond People: Xanthos (male counterpart of Vhel'guura)

Page 405

#### 31 Serpentine City

Spire Serpentine the South of Six and Some House Xavier behold the Serpent's Egg People: Drakyre

Page 419

#### 32 Modern City

Spire Modern Life Lived before Sunset House Dawn Evermore and Away People: Avyl

Page 429

#### 33 Paradise City

Spire Paradise the Gardens of Delight House Divine be the Queen in the Fade to Dawn People: Ordd

Page 441

#### 34 Vermilion City

34 Spire Vermilion Horizon beyond the Eye House Beholder the Eye of Beauty Fades to Pink People: Vhel'guura (female counterpart to Xanthos)

Page 455

#### 35 Invisible City

Spire Invisible the Burning Tree in Sounds of Blue

House Aria the Melody of Surreal Flowers People: Shak'muri

Page 469

#### 36 Eleven City

36 Spire Eleven times Eternity

House Dyad the Far Fancy Fallen Earthbound

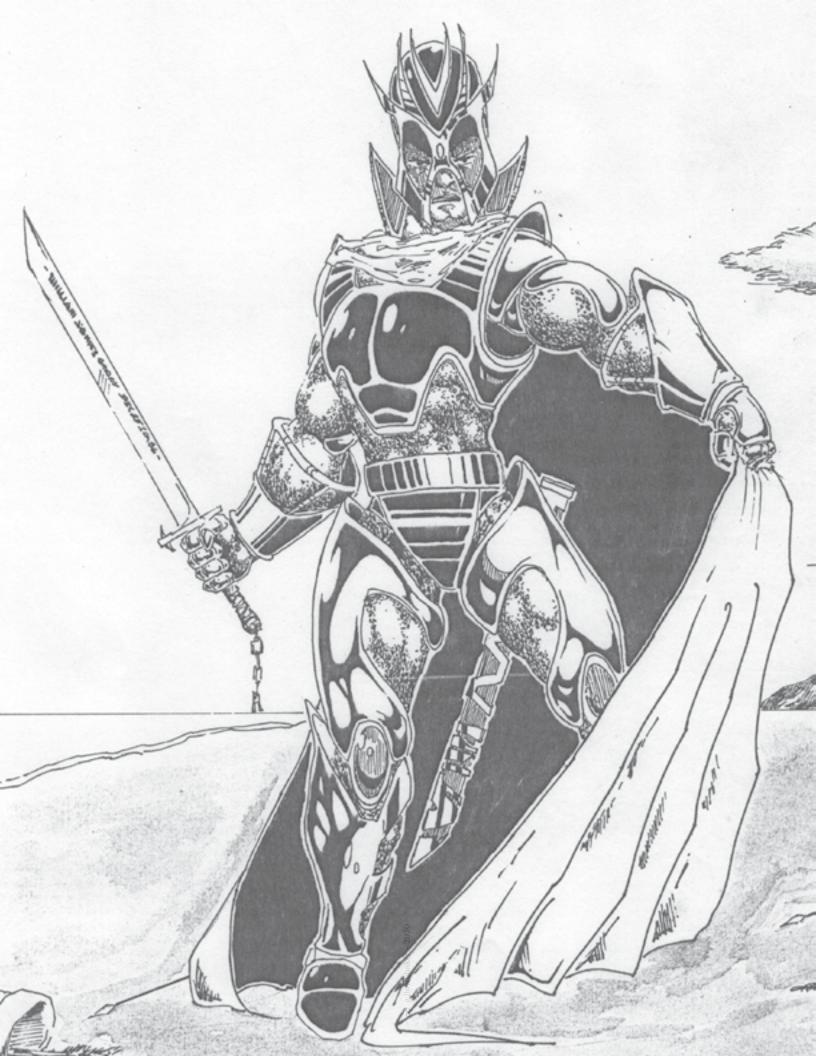
People: Dymirra

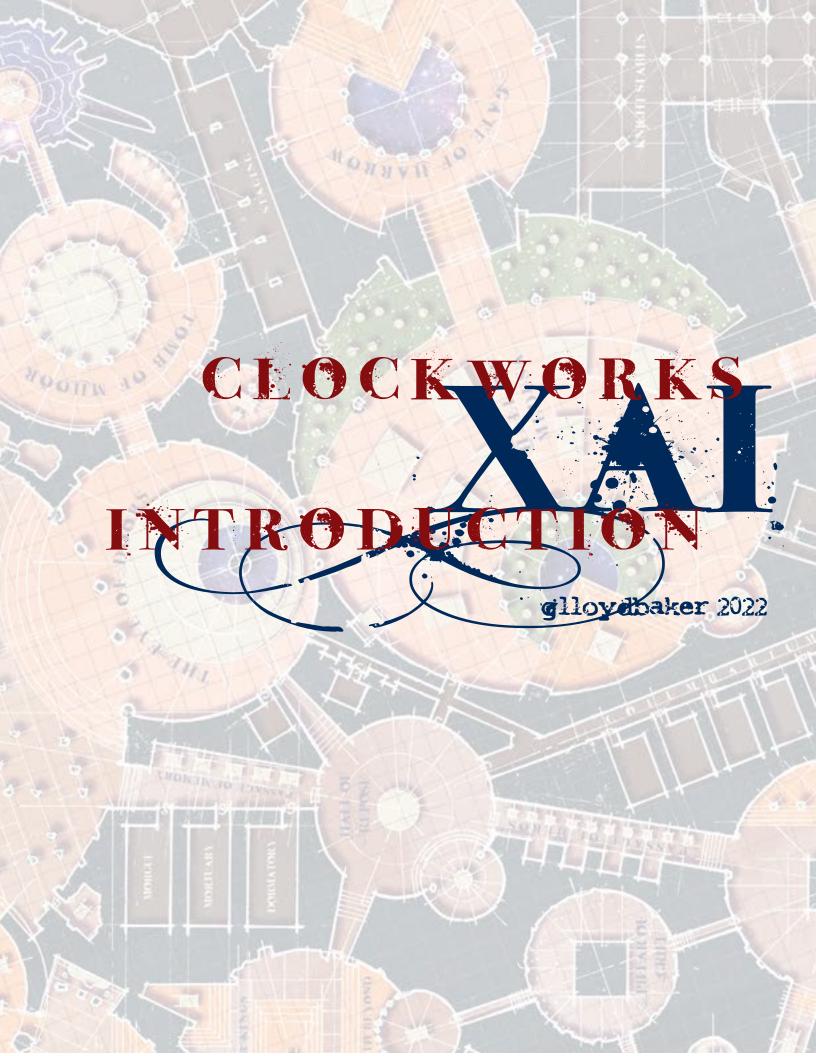
Page 479

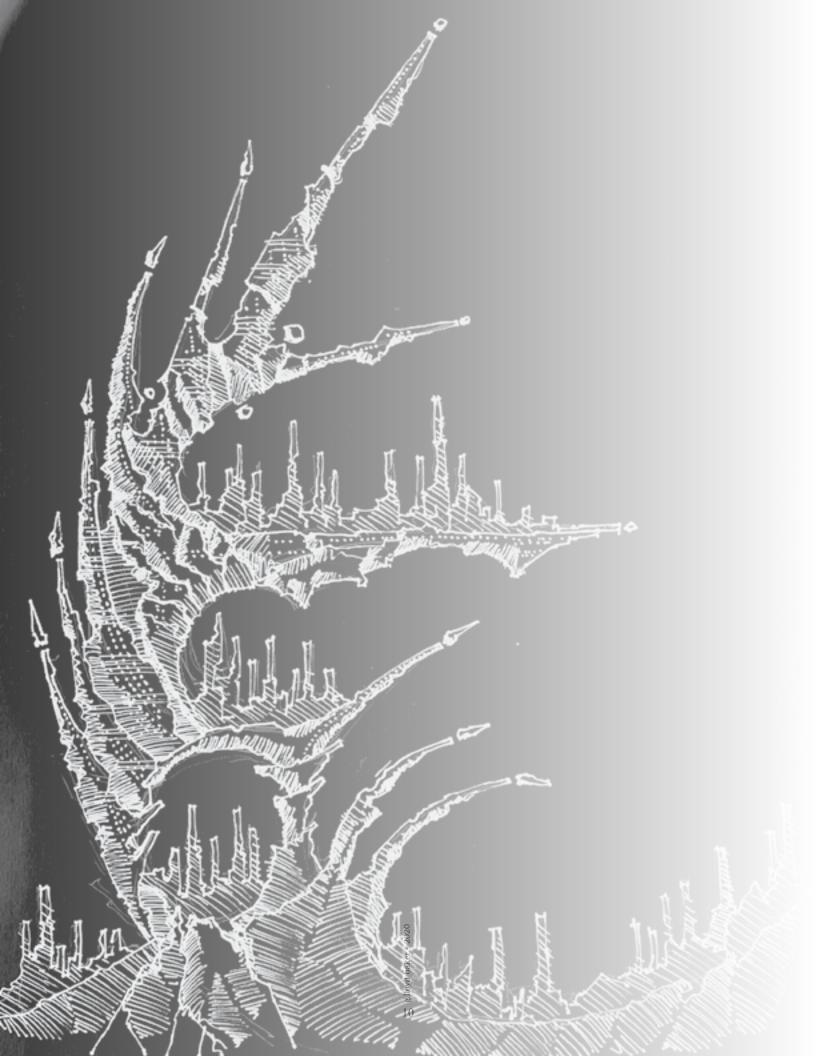
#### 37 Seraphim City

Spire Seraphim Sky of the High & Holy House Aerie on High Blessed be the Winged Egg People: Avia'Quia

.









**Firstly**, in the Xai universe, it is fundamentally and, in all ways, impossible to travel backwards in time.

**Secondly**, the events of a place may be viewed backward in time as if viewed as a holographic movie to the origins of the universe by those skilled in the arts of past sight.

The Past has been described as an ever-expanding crystal sphere, **the surface** of which is the present, and the afterimage of every moment that has ever-been is trapped like amber within the sphere. It is because of this, the tool of those that divine the past make use of a crystal ball, the events of the recent past very near the surface and those events of the more distant past hidden by increasing darkness as if diving into the deep places of the sea, where the light of the present fails to penetrate.

**Third**, time is synonymous with Reality and Sanity. Those Lovecraftian horrors that prowl the timeless void perpendicular to time. These timeless horrors seek ever to destroy time as an alien invader within their eternal realm, and we as inhabitants of a living breathing universe seek to strengthen time and memory that we might continue to grow.

**But all that said**, Xai has been greatly shaped by the manipulation of time and to make some sense as to why Xai is the way it is, you must understand some small bit of Xai's expansive past.

The first thing to know is that a very long time ago, **Xai was not quite real**, and was dominated by various Lovecraftian Psionic races of indeterminate reality and wandering non-linear minds. This is the Age commonly referred to as the Red Empire. And except for some of these decidedly "alien" races enduring to modern day, there is nothing much to know. Those that delve the deep past with their crystal balls often find only darkness and insanity here.

But then the **Mistress Angelic** arrived. These are Clockwork Angels, devout followers of **The Order** and bringers of Time. You do not need to know much of these beings as they no longer exist on Xai, but they did several things that continue to affect Xai.

The Mistress built **the Clockworks**, a grand luminous crystalline construct surrounded by 37 Great Spires (now called the **Mistress Spires**). The Clockworks (the great Cosmopolis of Xai) is built surrounding the Clockworks Artifact (the city's namesake) and the 37 Mistress Spires.

The other thing to know is that the Mistress dropped Spires all over Xai in a spiral array (9 spirals of 37 Spires), each creating an impact crater 8,000 miles diameter (a great ring of mountains formed at the crater's edge creating a circular patch of ground about the surface area of earth laid flat). The Mistress then proceeded to terraform these craters into Paradise Realms, but also speeding time, so that time within 8,000 miles of the Spire moved much faster that time beyond the Crater Mountains. In so doing, the Mistress created hundreds of paradise realms and evolved hundreds of ecosystems and evolved sentient races. All of which was controlled by the central Clockworks and its surrounding 37 Spires.



The big secret about the Mistress Angelic and their Spires is that they control the flow of forward time, speeding it or slowing it as serves their grand purpose.

And what is the Grand Purpose of the Mistress Angelic and their sacred Order: it is to **evolve creatures born with a Soul**. It does not get more existential than that.

But the take-away for players is that the **speed of forward time is mutable**, and that not all places on Xai move forward at the same pace.

For example, there is a famous island district within the Clockworks where time moves 9-times faster on the island than outside the island and is used for a great many useful and nefarious purposes.

But this brings us to the **Atrocitine War**, the war that ended the rule of the Nine Necromancer Kings and nearly exterminated all sentient life on Xai in favor of undead-immortality.

In school, children are taught that the Atrocitine Weapons were horrid bombs of mass destruction that killed the living in merciless droves. But this is not entirely true, as the Atrocitine "weapons" are not devices that go boom, rather their blast **speeds up** time within the blast area (a concept too confusing for children and most adults, so most folks know nothing of this nuance).

The idea of an Atrocitine device was that it was defensive. If a city were being attacked for instance, the device could be activated and the time flow within the city accelerated: days, years, centuries, even millennia. Thus, an invading army only a few days march would not arrive for years or even centuries as the city dwellers perceive time.

And those that invade were given a deep and problematic quandary, invade as planned, but return home years or centuries later when everything you know and everyone you love is changed or gone, or abandon your invasion and go home to your wife and children.

During the Calibahn Empire, most every City, Citadel, and even private estates was defended by Atrocitine, the threat of their use sufficient to avoid large scale conflict for many thousands of years, the golden age of the Calibahn Empire.

But the coming of the **Syy**, the Lichborne, and the Nine Necromancer Kings led to the eventual Fall of the Calibahn Empire and the Atrocitine War.

The Atrocitine War was not an especially bloody affair, rather a subtle and deadly event that is hard for most to comprehend. Thousands upon thousands of Atrocitine Weapons were detonated in a few days, the whole of the Calibahn Empire sent hurtling forward in time at different rates along overlapping blast waves of differential time. The overall effect was to **shatter** time on Xai.

It is generally explained that the Atrocitine War nearly ended all life, that is not entirely true, rather most all life ceased to exist NOW.

Entire Calibahn cities, regions, continents lived out thousands of years of history during only a few days, weeks, or years. But the effect from the outside looking in, was that the Calibahn Empire ceased to exist almost instantly, their once great cities suddenly appearing a ruins thousands of years old or vanished entirely to dust as if a million years had passed.

Most of the population of Xai had vanished.

The overall effect was that only those scattered few in Xai's wildernesses survived the Atrocitine War and were collected up as refugees by the Crystal Shard Empress that civilization might begin anew.

So, what does this mean for the Players, what it means is that The Clockworks, the Cosmopolis surrounding the 37 Mistress Spires, was the only place immune to the effects of the time shattering effects of the Atrocitine War, a temporal lifeboat in an epic timestorm.

But it has been 4,321 years, a magic number in the Xai universe as it relates to the way Atrocitine time waves decay, the last effects of the War are ended and most of Xai has fallen back into a single dominant time stream. And while there may be a few "time-slip rifts" and Calibahn stasis and timelocked places, most of the real time shredding danger has ended.

#### It is time for the peoples of the Clockworks to get out at see what has become of Xai.

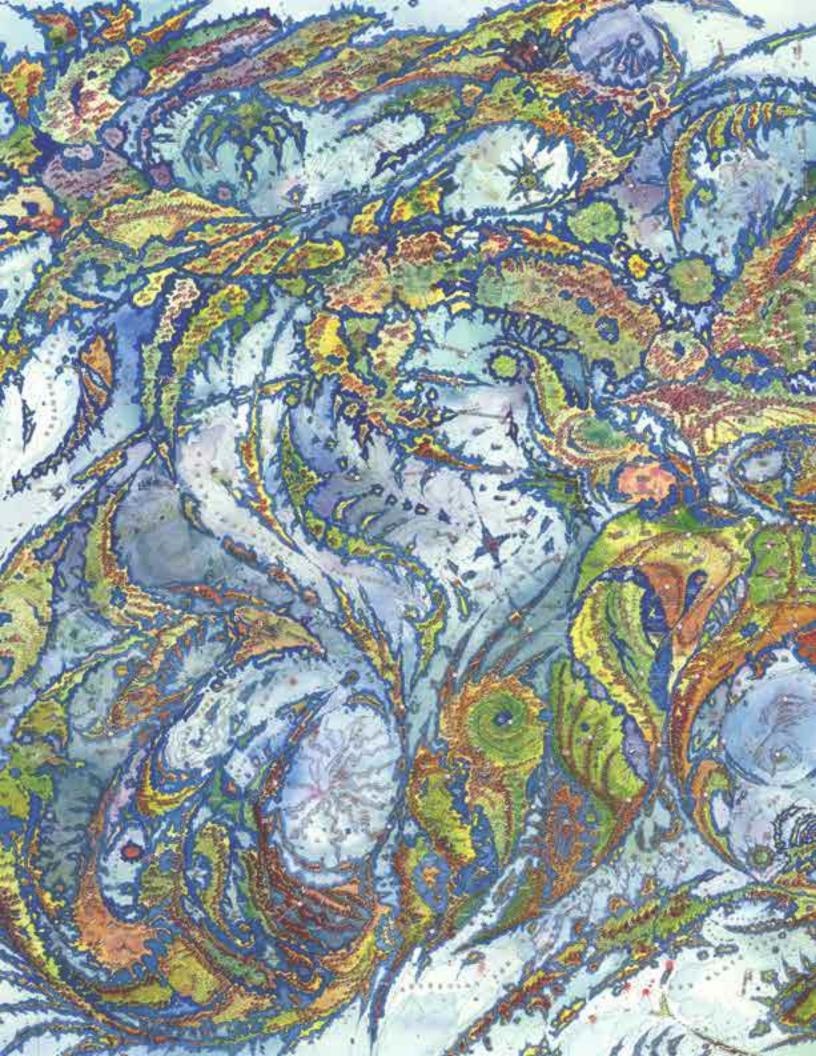
Various time-accelerated civilizations might still exist in one state or another, their own Calibahn past even more distant that for those of the Clockworks.

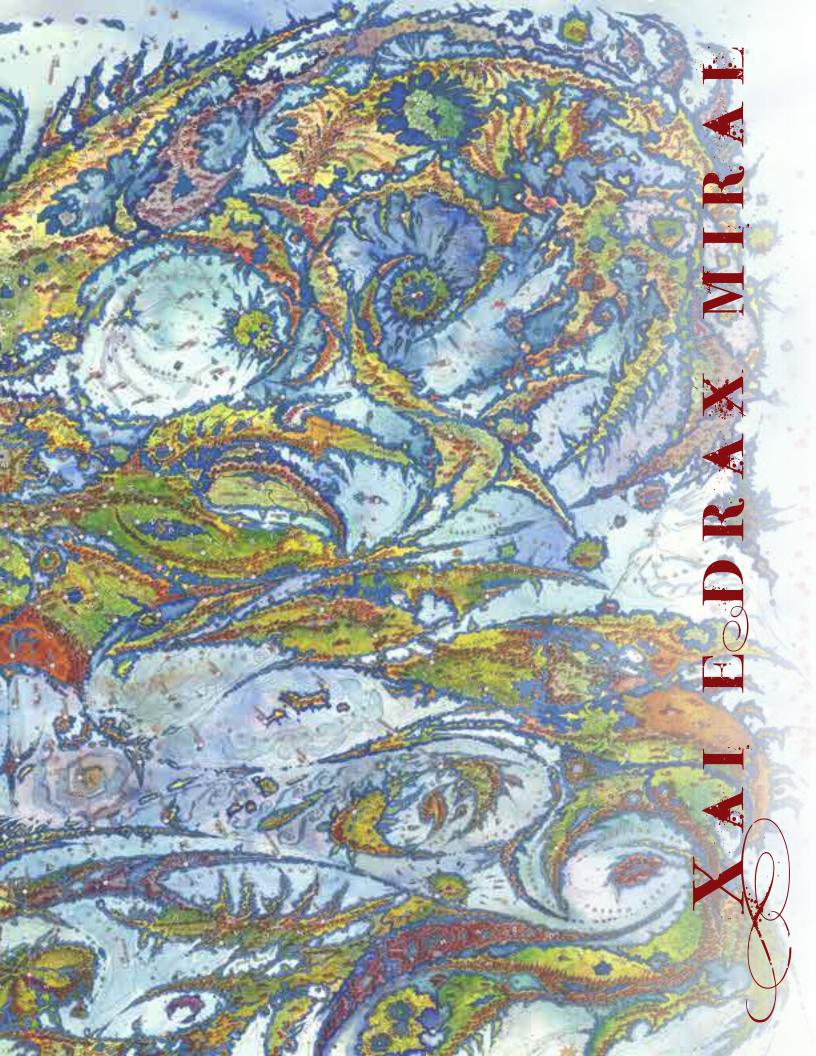
But most will have long turned to dust or evolved into beings no longer recognizable as "ancestors" to the modern races.

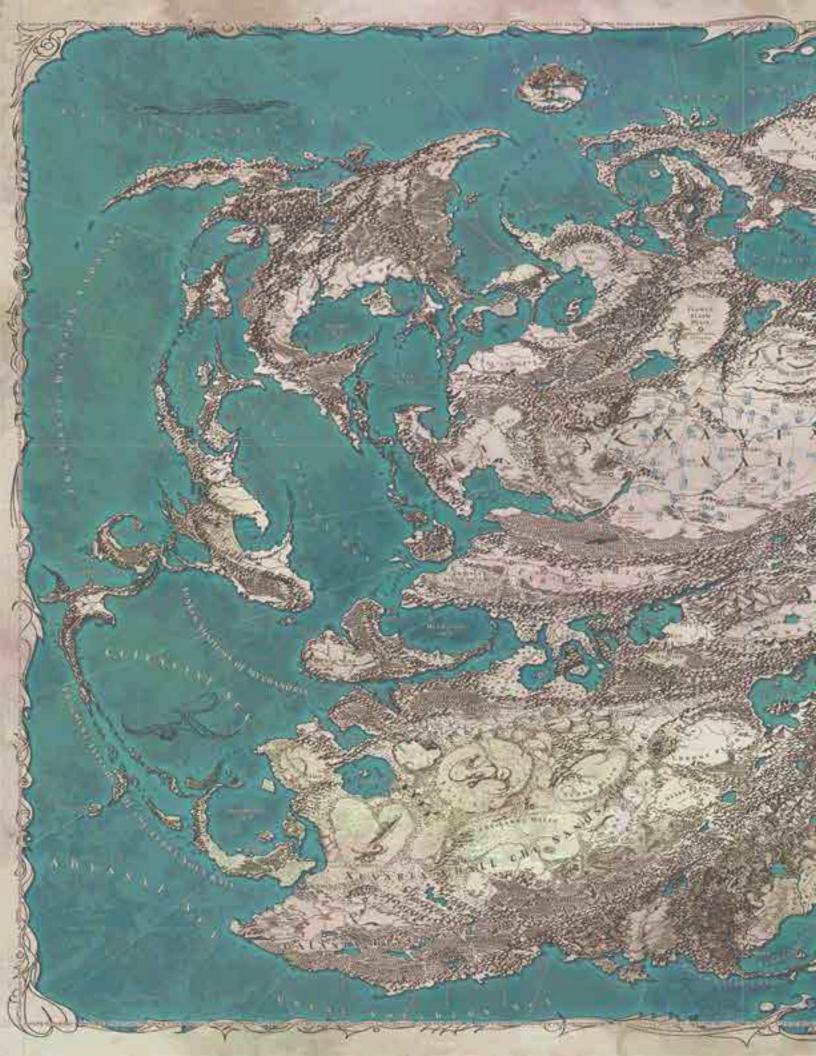
Xai exists as thousands of civilizations with a common ancestry suddenly appearing in the PRESENT but each having its own history hundreds, thousands, or millions of years old.

And most important, all suddenly neighbors again.

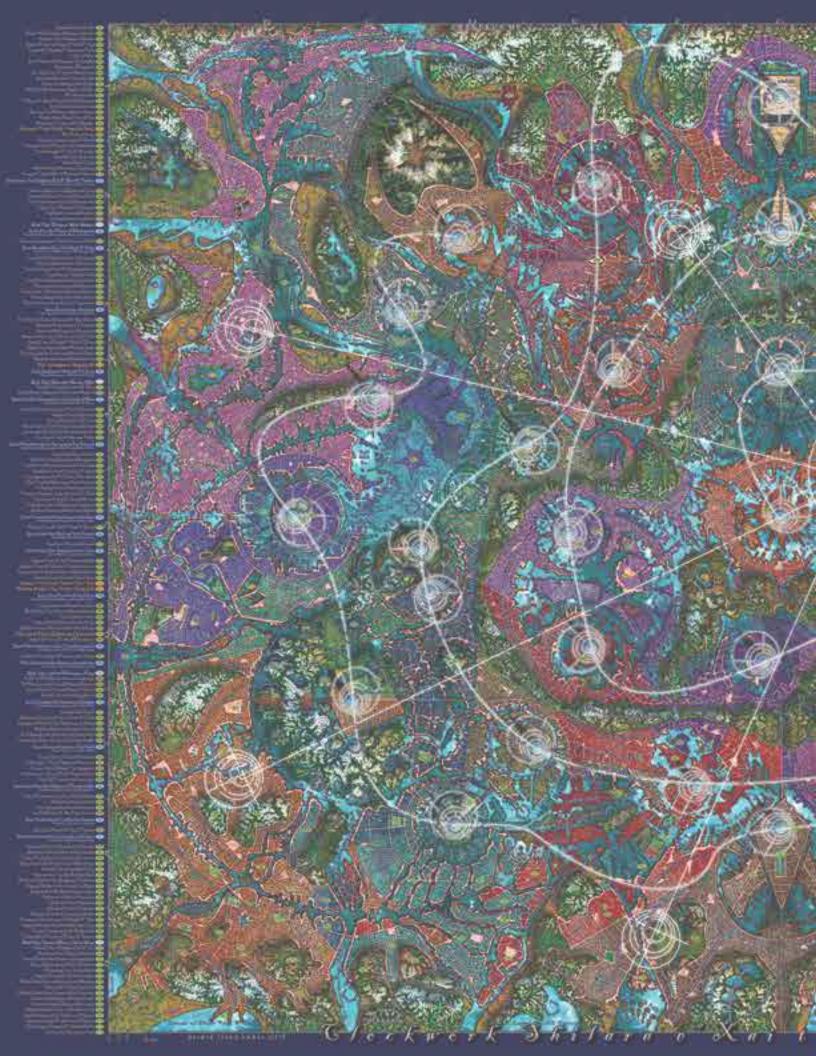
Let the adventure begin.













The grove was deep within the Eldritch forest.

The 3 Queens were hosts of this congress, each of their titanic coiling dragon forms alight with glowing blue, yellow, and red e'Mral mists.

The Arakna were next to arrive, their enormous predatory arachnid forms and coiling violet e'Mral mists the stuff of nightmares.

"Welcome in the spirit of peace and cooperation," intoned the Iron Queen, her voice sparkling with musical blue e'Mral mist.

"We come in the name of war," said the high harsh screech of the Arakna, "we are here to see this new enemy, not for any such nonsense as peace with the likes of you dragon."

Not rising to the bait, the Iron Queen bowed her head in ascent, the gravity within the Eldritch forest shifting slightly at the Queen's silent offense.

Next the huge tree-forms of the Ashe entered the grove, followed by the entomonian envoys of the Vree and ursine ambassadors of the Burash. Representatives of a dozen other eldritch races arrived in turn, each as unhappy as the next at being so near enemies that by right deserved nothing more than a slow and painful death.

Finally, the Phantama's ahar, the Viridescent Fey, arrived in an unfamiliar guise, her glimmering green mists the shape of a tiny two-armed, two-legged upright hairless ape of curvaceous naked female form. Despite her unusual appearance, all inclined a reverential bow.

Following their beloved Fey came 3 similarly tiny naked humanoid forms, 2

male, one female. The first of the male humanoids began to sputter and buzz sounding as a distant insect among the grove of titanic moonlit fairytale forms, his noisy vocalizations of apparent indignity, threat, and fear incomprehensible to the surrounding assembly.

The Fey raised a finger to silence the sputtering mortal. She said to the assembly: "this is captain Ruma and 2 of his ship's crew, his ship carried thousands such as himself, and he recently arrived at Yamalla with a thousand other such ships. In the -days- it took us to assemble you here the captain and his 2 crew have seemingly aged as many years, nearly perished of old age, only my touch now grants them life. And in that same time their population have expanded many fold and ripped Yamalla's forests to the root, leveled her mountains, and poisoned her seas. Yamalla is dead." The Fey let her words find purchase, each looking upon the 3 with renewed interest and some fear.

"They are a plague," said the Arakna, "we must act quickly if we are to survive."

The Fey turned and bowed toward the Arakna, "as always your keen insights strike true."

Sometime later the 3 mortals were carefully laid scattered across the cold flagstones of the grove, each disassembled but still bound to life by red e'Mral mist tendrils of the Blood Queen.

Captain Ruma's removed eyes each laid upon the cold stones, one looking back at his own brain, beyond which he could see his circulatory system laid upon the ground as some splayed map of red rivers surrounding some seeming alien still beating heart. His skin he could glance near as well, removed in a single piece, lying flat as some deflated doll of grotesque imagining.

The captain's other eye laying that he could see the remains of his beloved Angelica, similarly, laying disassembled but somehow magically alive surrounded by this enchanted horror show, though he could see in the reflection of her eye that faced his, that she was lost to madness.

"So, what do we really know?" asked the Arakna.

"We know that though we might perceive them as nearly all identical, they perceive themselves as a great many varied races, as likely to kill or enslave each other based solely on apparently superficial differences of skin color or the number of their eyes," said the Blood Queen.

"We know that they are the products of forced evolution," continued the Blood Queen.

"They were made?" interjected the Arakna, "By who? For what purpose?"

"These things we do not yet know," said the Fey, "but we know that each of the races was gifted a single competitive advantage, a Shyne that only that race possesses, it seems as if someone wants to see which will reign supreme."

"I sense no e'Mral gifts among them, no magic or enchantments," said the Arakna, "they are as copses, some kind of mecha'nation of flesh but unalive, the e'Mral mists flow to avoid them," he indicated the ground where the disassembled men and women laid scattered in some grisly tableau. The blue e'Mral mists that would so easily flow upon the earth instead moving turbulently in swirls and eddies as if repelled by the mortal bodies.

"The captain called his means of magic, Science," the Iron Queen tentatively spoke, "it seems they cannot see the e'Mral mists, and we cannot yet perceive their Science."



The Clockworks is the name of our luciferous Cosmopolis, a patchwork of 37 Cities ruled by 37 Great Houses called **The Dynasi**, headed by the faithful grace of the Crystal Shard Empress and her 5 Fanes, collectively called **the Perdeshal**.

An Imperial light in the center of a vast unexplored Outland Wilderness prowled by the titanic and primordial. Below us lies **the Labyrinth** and its bio-luminous underground seas, below further **the Molten Veil** and below further the Demon Prince **Subword Realms** under gaze of the Eye of Baal.

Above us are the **5 Solar Rings**, purported home to the Mistress Angelic and their luminous cites.

These things we know to be true, everything else is a matter of exploration and discovery.

Many lose interest in the past of a few years ago, most with no great interest in the lives of their own parents or grandparents. The past is a darkness that bears not on the struggles of today nor the opportunities of the future. These are events of long forgotten millennia, stories turned legend and then turned myth.

But some few us understand the shape of the world today is a consequence of decisions made by our ancestors and such knowledge has value.

The knowledge I impart here is the product of excavations, explorations, and investigations that have consumed the larger part of my life. They are of course incomplete, the summary of a thousand millennia distilled to a few pages that the mortal mind might begin to comprehend the incomprehensible.

But it is my hope that others will carry on my work and bring further light upon the powers that so callously shape our mortal lives.

Our universe is of an unknowable scale, millions of galaxies containing millions of paradise worlds. Words when compared to time are meaningless to the mortal mind. We live lives that may extend 35,000 days, what can the words or numbers counted in the millions mean to us?

## DANCE OF THE ARCANE

What is also known, is that the first Arcane was born, ending the glories of the Red Empire.

The Arcane are of a seemingly ordinary sort, born of parents among the 37 races of Xai, but gifted with a sight of one or more of the **FIVE colors of the eMral mists**: Iron, Grace, Blood, Frye, Shade.

This sight imbues the Arcane the ability to alter the mists to effect sorcerous and miraculous effects, magic for lack of a better descriptor.

And when the first Arcane was born, the technologies of the universe sputtered and flickered, suddenly unreliable. Explosives shuttered and detonated, and radio and electricity scattered to static after traveling only a few yards. The universe was thrown suddenly backward into a medieval state of technology.

# THE CALIBAHS EMPIRE AND THE TICHBORNE

Mortal kind is resilient and adaptive, perhaps at times too much so. For after the fall of the Red Empire and the rise of the Arcane sorcerers, a group of Mhorganti mortals engineered a means to make anyone Arcane, they warped their forms to undead immortality and placed their souls into a living star gem set between their eyes, a third eye that allowed them to see and manipulate the e'Mral mists as an Arcane.

The Calibahn Empire was a dread spiral of violence, first destroying the Arcane, and then the mortals that might give them birth, gifting willing mortal kind with various forms of undead immortality, though tricked, as all such remade were as slaves to the Necromancer Kings.

But in the end, the Calibahn were undone by traitors of their own kind that called themselves the Starborne.

Xai, our most beautiful Clockwork Metropolis, was a ruin populated by what few remnants of the mortal races had escaped death or remaking. These were the End Days.

# THE CRYSTAL SHARDEMPRESS

Among the ashen ruins of Xai following the fall of the Calibahn Empire arose an Arcane child, a little mute girl, from which miracles flowed as water to the parched.

This little girl became a symbol and a religion, reunifying the fractured tribes of Xai. She taught new Arcane the means to master their talents, and gave rise to the five Fanes, the Perideshal to give faith and hope to their people.

A loose form of an Empire was formed, each of the surviving 37 races gifted dominion over one of the ancient 37 **Mistress Spires** and its surrounding territories, establishing for themselves a home City to be ruled by a Great House as they might choose.

The 37 Great Houses are placed collectively under dominion of the 5 Fanes of the Pen'de'shal, to govern affairs between the Great Houses but not to interfere in the internal affairs of each City.

Our glorious little miracle girl had birthed an empire and endured for centuries despite ever having the form of a nine-year-old girl. When one morning a bright flash of light rolled out over the city, and in her place was a titanic crystalline shard, trapped frozen within the glorious form of a perfectly beautiful woman surrounded by long coiling veils of shifting luminous colors, often seeming to take the shape of sweeping rainbow wings.

#### The Chrysalis Empress was born.

Though most now know her as the **Crystal Shard Empress**, the failings of four millennia of evolving Imperial language and poor translations into 37 racial languages.

The official year 1 of the Imperial Calendar.

In the year 4,321 the Empire celebrated an auspicious anniversary.

On this anniversary year, the Chrysalis cracked, a mere hairline, near invisible, that shook the Metropolis with a devastating earthquake.

On this anniversary year, Arcane children are suddenly being born at an alarming rate.

On this anniversary year, prophets, and soothsayers spin tales of apocalypse, change they say is coming, the year they say, will be 4,444, only 123 years from now.



## CELITIE GIRL MIRACLE

It was a quiet morning within the hollow ruins of the Clockwork Metropolis, the Starborne having abandoned Xai for the stars.

The 3 eldritch dragons drifted effortlessly coiling their long serpentine forms through the empty streets now overgrown with tree and vine.

"But at such a cost," said the Red Queen, "and for what?"

"We should destroy this place," said the Yellow Queen, "it is an abomination, the source of the plague that is mankind."

"Have we not destroyed enough," replied the Blue Queen, "I tire of death and we have won, is that not enough."

It was then as they turned upon the shattered remains of a great domed structure, a mortal child stood frozen staring at the faces of the 3 titanic dragons moving toward her. The child was clothed in tatters, smeared with grime, and weak with starvation.

The e'Mral mists flowed along the surfaces of the city and ground in shades of blue, the breeze and lightly falling rain a twisting dance of pale yellows. The child as mortal should have been a sickly pale pink that repelled the e'Mral mists. But the little girl of 9 was not insignificant, and the 3 Arcane stopped, each frozen in fear as they stared down upon the child.

"What, how, if..." the Blue Queen almost inaudibly whispered to herself.

"No, impossible," whispered the Yellow Queen, "this cannot be."

"It seems the killing is over my sisters," sang the Red Queen, "the e'Mral has decided for us."

The little girl stood among the ruins embraced by swirling green mists, the mark of having an Arcane Soul.



Imperial Law applies to Empire City and the many Imperial enclaves and 1-mile wide Imperial parkways that lace throughout the Clockwork Metropolis.

Imperial Law also applies to the Waterways and Skies of the Clockwork Metropolis, but not on-board ships flagged by a Great Houses.

Imperial Law does not apply to parts of the Metropolis under dominion of a Great House, in those places the individual Laws of the Great House applies.

Imperial Law is founded on the bedrock principal of ensuring an honorable (fair) fight between 2 individuals.

# All Imperial Law is personal between 2 individuals.

#### All Imperial Law ensures an honorable dual.

Illegal is anything that hinders an honorable contest between individuals.

As such, large and small matters such as slavery, kidnapping, incarceration, murder, corruption, bribery, nepotism, unfair advantage, and non-meritorious discrimination are illegal and thus enforceable by the Imperial Guard and Judged and punished by the Imperial Priesthood.

The punishment for violation of Imperial Law is for the offender to suffer the same pain, disability, or death suffered by the victim of an unfair dual. There is a regular demand for mercenary talent employed by the Priesthood to find and return Imperial criminals for judgement (and if the judgement be death, then proof of demise). And while the Imperial Guard has the ability and right to pursue criminals hiding in any Great House city, the Empress' love of subtlety often makes direct Imperial Guard involvement counterproductive.

#### **END OFDAYS**

The Demon Prince approached the circle, the slurping sounds of his many tentacles propelling its titanic mishappen form, tasting the smooth ancient stones as they moved, stopping at the edge of the light, his many eyes and grinning teeth glinting mercifully almost out of sight.

"I have come," said its many irregular mouths in a sing-song melody as some too beautiful choir, "be quick that I do not have second thoughts."

The Mistress Angelic had arrived moments before, its crystal clockwork form glowing with refracted light that cast rainbow hues uncomfortably close to the Demon Prince.

"Be silent traitor," chimed the Mistress, "or I'll end you now."

"Such a lack of control, oh great programmed one," shuttered the Demon Prince, globs of melting flesh hissing as they splashed upon the ancient flagstones, "perhaps this will be an enjoyable gathering after all."

The Eldritch was the last to arrive, its enormous dragon head of heavy iron scales moved too gracefully into the light, its long coiling body disappearing hundreds of yards into the darkness.

"Do not let me interrupt, the sooner you two miserable kin kill each other, the sooner we might just save what little remains," growled the Eldritch, its booming metallic voice as if made by the hammering of a thousand anvils."

"Silence," imagined the tiny Arcane figure at the center of the circle, her childlike luminous form the only source of light in the ruins of this once magnificent Metropolis.

TRODUCTION OF THE OFFICE TO TH

"Your wars upon each other have brought history to an end, let us forego further posturing for but a few short moments," continued the luminous girl.

The 3 visitors all leered and glowered but remained silent.

"I propose and accord that this universe might continue, that the few mortal survivors that yet remain scattered across the cosmos be brought back to Xai and this once shimmering city," she intoned with a solemnity that settled the restlessness of the 3 enemies. "And that there be rules that none of you may act to directly influence mortal kind."

The representatives of the 3 Powers screamed their belligerence and objections in unison.

"And that only by proxy or religion," she continued in an imaginary voice that knifed thru the din of the three, "shall you influence the Arcane."

Rage was the response of the 3, "and who would oversee these ridiculous rules," howled and whined dozens of the Demon Princes grinning and spitting maws, "the mechanical ice queens or perhaps those tree loving freewill dragons we should have had to good sense to exterminate."

"I shall be Arbiter," said the child at the center of the circle, "I shall create an Empire composed of the 37 Great Races of Shyne and I shall be its Empress that none shall come to extinction."

"No," came the shattering voice of the Mistress, "you must also be bound to not directly interfere."

"You are my child," sputtered the Demon Prince, too flustered with overwhelming emotions to feel relief or hate.

"Yes, I am young Prince, but I will accept this burden that this universe might yet find purpose," whispered the feminine aspect, suddenly seeming especially small and vulnerable among the 3 titans.

"You shall not interfere," agreed the Dragon, its eyes hard.

"Bound will be your form and the Mistress shall agree, we shall retreat to our celestial rings," chimed the clockwork angel.

"Bound, and we shall retreat to our Outland Wilderness," the iron Dragon quietly agreed.

"No," exploded the flailing tentacles and eye stalks of the Demon Prince, "let the universe be ended, let our failure be complete, we owe nothing more to these worthless flecks of soul dust," he cried.

The luminous girl moved with preternatural grace toward the young Prince, her light illuminating more of its hulking form of eroded flesh, reaching out to caress its shuttering form, soothing his quivering rage.

"I shall do this," she imagined whispering to the Demon Prince as a mother might calm a crying child, "and you will go your Subworld, and you shall no longer play with my things."

And so, the first Arcane was bound into a towering crystal shard and set within the abandoned Dragon Heart Spire, the Crystal Shard Empress.

*The Eldritch, the Mistress, and The Demon* Prince each in retreat but planning how they might finally destroy the other two now that the Arcane was chained.





The Great Houses of the Clockwork Metropolis are each headed by members of the race over which they have dominion.

Each Great House is given dominion over the mortal masses of their race as well as the geographies of their Metropolis City.

Collectively the 37 Great Houses gather in a group called **The Dynasi**.

The **High Dynasi** is a meeting of the 37 Leaders of each Great House.

The **Low Dynasi** is an assembly of 37 representatives of each of the 37 Houses for a total of 1,369 members.

The Empress has her own laws (Imperial Law) that applies to the waters, air, and a mile-wide webwork of Metropolis under Imperial dominion.

In principal, each Great House has its own laws which apply to its Metropolis City as well as to all mortals of their race. In practice, it is much more fluid and complicated.

A Saurian that commits a crime in an Imperial territory may be guilty of Imperial crime but free of House Petrichor crime. The same Saurian that commits a crime in House Kin may be free of Imperial and-or House Petrichor crime. A Saurian may commit a crime against a Kin'Rhi while in Sauria City, free of guilt by House Petrichor but wanted for his crime by House Kin.

The conflicting Laws of 37 Great Houses among 37 races is the source of constant friction within Metropolis, often sorted out by thieves, snatchers, body guards, and assassins as often as through official Dynasi or Imperial channels, which do exist, but are long and complicated.

# ECHNOMANCY

Technomancy is the fusion of technology and Xai's unique e'Mral mists.

Technomancy is identified by the Empire is **6 Tiers** (T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5).

T1 is primative, classic swords, bows, and crossbows. But nothing related to explosives or guns.

**T2 is industrial**, everything is analog, guns are cartidge (the classic 6-guns of the old west or a 50's Noir film). This is the state of the Modern Clockworks.

**T3 is cybernietic**, the fusion of man and machine into one (called **Chrome**). This is only legal in Adrena'Chrome City.

**T4** is **Megannis**, the creation of living machines and designer creatures. This is only legal in Vermilion City.

**T5 is Demonic**, the creation of individually evolved soulless sentient life. This is the domain of the Demon Princes and strictly illegal.

**T6** is **Mistress**, the creation of Aeon crystalmancy. This is the stuff of clockwork angels and is strictly illegal.





The Speed of Light on Xai is about **180-mph**. Light tends to slosh and flow as water accross Xai's vast surface, inhibited and directed by the eMral Mists.

The e'Mral mists cause explosives to be unreliable (reliable only 70% of the time). And no explosive will ever cause damage beyond 90-yards.

The e'Mral mists cause electricity, radio, and similar power and communicative sciences to disperse as static after only a few yards (limited to 90-yards).

As such remote communications and the convenience of long-distance electrification are generally unknown.

But human ingenuity is an amazing thing. Technomancy advanced along parallel tracks developing high quality metals and crystals.

Bows become powerful balanced graphite masterpieces, crossbows become spring powered bolter pistols and coil rifles, and the humble dart becomes the elegant and deadly flechette thrower.

Local Area Electricity (LAE Tech) allows for the electrification of small vehicles, rooms, and even homes by use of the Cynergen Powercell, allowing for the development of modern city conveniences such as high-rise towers, air conditioning, refrigeration, and electrified transport. All while modern plumbing and waste facilities move ever into the future.

As it happens, over the past four millennia of the Empire, modern Technomancy has created a wonder of modern construction and convenience.

The Adrena'Chorme is especially famous for its advanced mechanical and analog cybernetics, replacing living limbs and organs with "chrome" replacement parts, often better than original.

They are similarly skilled in the creation of robots and androids with advanced analog logic drives that can emulate the mind of an animal or near-human intellect. All of which is illegal outside the Adrena'Chorme.

The one exception being the workbots, simple function robots designed to take the place of slave labor, these bots are ubiquitous throughout the Metropolis and their use is encouraged and supported by the Empress as a means of reducing the need for slave labor.



Guns, bombs, and explosives do exist, they are simply unreliable in craft and use.

But the e'Mral mists may be laced into the bullets of a gun or the plasma chamber of a pulse rifle to provide order and reliability to the weapon.

As such, the so-called "high-tech" weaponry from six-guns of the old west to star-pistols of the far future are only reliably crafted and usable by Xais Arcane and sorcerers.

Flying ships such as Wynd'ships and Vignettes must be laced with e'Mral to pilot. A quickdraw six-gun must be laced with e'Mral to fire its bullets

reliably. A Wyght Core must be laced with e'Mral to move a ship through space.

The list is endless and disturbingly powerful. The one limit being that **eMral Lace requires touch** of the object. So even among the Sorcerous mortals and Arcane, bombs and grenades are rare, as most Arcane, no matter how powerful, tend to avoid standing at the center of a detonation with their hand on a bomb.

Common to Xai is the Technomancy of the **Geomancer** and the crafting gravity defying stone structures and even **Drift Architecture** such as floating stone buildings, castles, and citadels. This has added high fantasy wonder and scale to the architecture throughout the Empire.

Gravity defying spires, high sweeping vaults, mile wide domes, and floating citadels are ubiquitous across Xai, a long-storied history of wonderous wizard crafted architecture.

This has also led to the creation of the Mass Driver, the dropping or accelerating of a large rock from stone citadels called Drift Ships. "Use" of a Mass Drivers upon a civilian population is strictly forbidden. The Empress has a general distaste for Mass Drivers and tends to make very public examples of those that use them.

Vermilion City is especially famed for its genetic and biological technomancy called **Megannis**, where all its creations are "alive" and when laced with e'Mral become as "self" to the Arcane, be it weapon, armor, vehicle, or Organic augment (Org.). This is far-future wonderland stuff even among the Arcane and is strictly illegal outside Vermilion City.

### 70 PERCENT

He could hear Rumongo smashing his way through the outer room. He had pulled the Mage unconscious into the room and shut the door, but he knew he had only moments.

His crossbow was smashed, looking for a way to defend himself he pulled the heavy steel revolver from the Mage's holster. It was cold in his hand and required two hands for him to hold, he braced himself sitting against the back wall of the room.

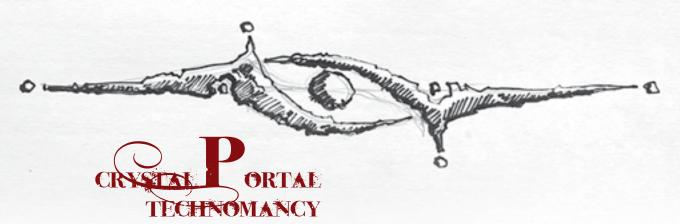
He knew about guns, everyone did to some extent, guns were weapons of wizards and sorcerers, the black powder of their bullets, was unreliable if not ordered by the wizard lacing e'Mral mists into bullet, or so the Mage had said.

He was no wizard, he was a mere mortal ungifted with e'Mral sight or the means to lace any such mythical mists into bullets, he was but a man, and the order of the universe said that such chemical explosives did as they were intended only 70percent of the time, otherwise the results were unexpected and often deadly, especially to mere mortal such as himself.

Rumongo smashed the door open bursting into the room, a murderous twisted fury on his face as he saw him sitting against the opposite wall.

He figured 70percent was better odds than he deserved and fired the gun, the bullet acting as it should, propelling the large slug into Rumongo's chest, his rushing momentum carrying his body into a crumpled heap just left of where he sat.

He let the large revolver fall from his shaking hands and sighed in unexpected relief.



During the long history of the Red Empire the Mistress had gifted their mortal creations a powerful device, the **Steel Dragon**, a place located near the Clockworks that had the power to project any person, group, ship, or army to anyplace in the universe, though this was by the nature of the Steel'Dragon, a one way trip.

The Mistress then saw fit to gift their mortal children **Crystal Portals**.

Physically each portal began as a single irregularly shaped crystal grown by living Crystalmancy and split into 2 hemispheres as a master gem cutter might split a diamond. The 2 facing hemispheres of the crystal creating an always open portal from one half to the other half.

During the Red Empire, one half of each portal remained near the Clockworks while the other half was projected with a scouting team to some far off Outland, Subworld, or Eldritch World location, creating thousands if not millions of open doorways linking the Clockworks with the larger universe.

The great Space Opera of the Red Empire was not an Empire of star faring ships, though these did at times exist, but as a **pedestrian Space**Opera where one could walk the vastness of Xai and conquered Eldritch planets with the ease of moving through an open doorway.

A great many Crystal Portals remain to modern day, though most were sealed, buried, or otherwise hidden after the fall of the Calibahn Empire. The secret of their manufacture however lost to the limits of modern technomancy.

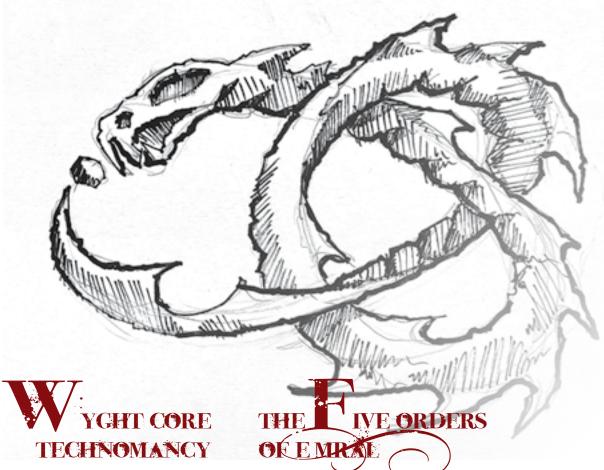
Crystal Portals are always open and always between 2 crystal hemispheres of the same crystal. Destroying one half of a crystal destroys both halves.

The crystals are reasonably durable but not indestructible and can be shattered by attacking any except the split face of the crystal, the split face of course "open", but it does have an edge that may also be attacked.

Most crystal portals are set into frames and built into large structures to protect their fragile hemisphere and edge.

But they need not remain fixed and can be placed upon ships, the relative movement as with the relative time between the 2 halves of a portal inconsequential to simply stepping from one side to the other, though some find stepping through a portal to cause nausea, dizziness, and sometimes a rather frightful headache.

Occasionally things which pass the event horizon of a Portal vanish, there is no good theory as to why this happens or where vanished things go, only that it is thankfully exceedingly rare.



The Wyght Core is the contrivance of the Lichborne. Each Wyght Core is about the size of large crystal ball and contains the 11 perpendicular minds of an Illiyar Vooran (though this fact is unknown to most).

The sole purpose of a Wyght Core is to allow a sorcerous navigator the ritual means to bind a ship and its passengers & contents to be considered as "**self**" for purpose of teleportation and astral navigation.

The devices are not terribly rare, the Necromancer Kings were very efficient in the enslavement of the Illiyar Vooran and scooping out of their minds to create Wyght Cores, but the means of creating new ones is (perhaps thankfully) lost.

Additionally, Wyght Cores tend to be alive and to cause insanity upon the using sorcerer and may themselves be insane making their use especially challenging.

All Arcane found as children are trained in the use of the e'Mral arts by the Five Imperial Fanes, collectively called **The Periodshal**.

There are 5 colors of e'Mral mist, 5 prime elements, and thus 5 Fanes of e'Mral study.

A Fane is a religious order that trains those born gifted with e'Mral sight.

The 5 Fanes are:

The **Illurian Fane**, expert in the Blood Arts.

The **Harlequin Fane**, expert in the Fyre Arts.

The **Cerulean Fane**, expert in the Iron Arts.

The **Grezurian Fane**, expert in the Grace Arts.

And the **Unseen Fane**, expert in the Shade Arts.

Some 40 children representing 36 of the 37 Great Houses alongside 140 children born to House Sauria, so many Saurinans.

them all 13 years old this year.

They stood before the Crystal Shard Empress, an imposing block of irregularly cut crystal that threw bright refracted rainbow light at peculiar angles through out the large domed hall, not so different than the mirror ball hanging over of the dance floor last night, he mused. He had asked Aminele to the dance and she had said yes. He caught her eye as they stood in strait ranks in their in their formal dress, she smiled briefly at him before turning her attention back forward.

The High Priestess was speaking, "... your time with the Mother Matrons is over, already you each now possess more knowledge that most anyone else in the Metropolis Empire, your e'Mral skills as children are greater than most mortal wizards that have spent their entire lives attempting to master the e'Mral Mists."

He had heard such boasts most of is life under the Matrons, how superior the Arcaneborne were in comparison to the mundane masses the Matrons called mortal. But he never quite believed it. He did not know why. Aminele imagined herself queen of the universe believing everything the Matrons said as if handed down by some god on high, and he wanted to believe because she did, their first kiss last night stolen after the dance was enough to make him believe he could be the prince the Matrons said he would be.

"The Empress will now assign you to your Fane," said the High Priest, "e'Mral Embrace Us."

"e'Mral Embrace Us," intoned all the children.

The first child walked straight and formally forward to the High Priestess, Maduna, head of the class and first in everything, favored of the Matrons and secretly despised by most of the other children. Everyone

expected he would be named to the Templar and would one day be named Paladin, Champion of the Empress, he was such a perfect and arrogant student, it seemed only right.

"The Fane Illuraia, as Templar you shall train," the High Priest declared.

He caught Aminele's eye again, a grin crossing both their mouths at their inside joke.

In turn each child was brought forward, the Empress speaking through the High Priestess declaring where each child would spend their next 13 years as an acolyte of one of the 5 Fanes, the religions of the Pen'de'shal that ruled over the Clockwork Metropolis as faithful of the Empress. He knew the words, but he did not yet understand their meaning. He suspected he soon would.

The room became more focused as Ovanna approached. She was odd and scary among a collection of Arcane children that were all odd and scary. Ovanna never belonged, he and Aminele had always liked Ovanna's quirky ways and the 3 of them were fast friends. But Ovanna frightened most, a fear reinforced when she turned a Matron into a goat when she was 3 and sent Mother Umanis to the "disappeared place" when she was 6, no one said if they ever found Mother Umanis.

It seemed to burn the High Priestesses hand when she touched Ovanna's head, "Saint," winced the High Priestess as she pulled back her hand.

It was then that a tall oddly shaped woman moved from the edge of the hall and took Ovanna's hand and led her quickly from the hall. The children were all whispering in confusion, "Saint, what is a Saint," they queried as decorum was momentarily lost.

"Silence," boomed the High Priestess and the room went dumb, "Ovanna's destiny is her own as is each of yours, but her path is more difficult than any of you might imagine, e'Mral Embrace Her," said the High Priest.

"e'Mral Embrace Her," intoned everyone in the hall. Ovanna excepted, there were not a lot of surprises in the Fane declarations, those strong with Blue mists of Iron were assigned as acolytes of the Illurian Templars, the strong Yellow of Grace mists to be Dervish of the Grezurian Fane, and those few with bright red Blood mists always trailing about them assigned as Druids of the Fane Beautific, some few of the girls maybe rising to High Priestesses of the Empress herself.

Less surprising still were those few like Aminele with her shining Orange Fyre mists marking here as an Envoy of the Fane of Fyria. Everyone loved Aminele.

As for himself, when called he strode forward fully expecting to be sent to the Shadow Fane to be trained as a Technomancer given the lightning sparked violet Shade mists that emanated from his keen mind. He was a natural sceptic and he and a few others like him were least favored of the Matrons.

But as he approached his mind became dark, he was the last and least favored of the Matrons, he again imagined adventures out in the world, slaying demons in the subworld and saving the world from horrors only he might stop. Thirteen years in the workshops and rigorous psionic discipline halls seemed as an eternity in hell as the High Priest set her hand upon his head.

"Saint," she quickly spat withdrawing her hand as to not be contaminated, "you do not belong with us," she whispered that only he might hear.

Like Ovanna, he was quickly ushered from the Hall, a last glance toward Aminele as panic began to take him, a tear in her eye as the door closed behind him.

"e'Mral Embrace Him," he heard the hall solemnly pray as he was led into a darkened passage.

...he again imagined ...
slaying demons in the
subworld and saving the
world from horrors only he
might stop.





the Song of Hearth & Home e'Mral mists of Nature & Blood (BLD)

The Illurians are the Fane of the people. They conduct the common rituals of Birth, Marriage, and Death.

The Illurians are the civil authroity of the Empire, repsponsible for health care, fire, police, and everything mundane that makes a city operate.

The Balance of Chezuria
the Shining Song of Wind & Water
e'Mral mists of Grace (GRC)

The Grezurians are represent the trade and commerce between the Great Houses of the Empire.

The Grezurians are everthing money and oversee the rituals of Work, Travel, and Navigation.

## CERULEAN FANE

The Hand of Gerulea the Ebullient Song of Ordere'Mral mists of Iron (IRN)

The Ceruleans are the military arm of the Empire, charged with organizing the military forces of the Dynasi (the 37 Great Houses) and resolving disputes between the Great Houses themselves.

The Ceruleans oversee the rituals of War.



The Shimmer Song of Enchantments of Shadow & Illusion e'Mral mists of Shade (SHD)

The Unseen Fane are the spies, heroes and villains of the Empire. A Fane where all the secrets are said to reside.

HARLEQUIN FANE

The Passion of Art & Creation the Spiraling Glamor of Love and Hate e'Mral mists of Fyre (FYR)

The **Houses of the Holy** are led by Envoys and Priests of the Harlequin Fane and responsible in all matters of negotiation, inquisition, and justice.

These are the leaders of the Imperial Priesthood, wizards skilled in the leadership, art, and administration of the Empire.

Orange Wizardry is all about interpersonal interactions of sentient emotions. Fyre wizardry is also the purview of creative arts such as writing, composing, painting, sculpture, and most any other emotionally innovative endeavor.

The Priesthood is an Order of honest meritocracy, where all social and noble standing is replaced by ability, hard work, and faith in the Empress.

And while many Priests serve the Empire directly, many more are assigned to serve as loyal members of each Great House, offering their unique skills and training to advance more local affairs.

The **Crystal Priestesses** are an Order of Harlequin always female and personally answerable to only the Crystal Shard Empress and can be identified by their penchant for wearing bedazzled silken gowns that tend to shift and fade as slow-motion mist when they move.

The Crystal Priestesses are the eyes and ears of the Empress, she is said to be able to hear, see, feel, and speak through each priestess as if being in a thousand places in a thousand different bodies at the same time.

#### INTO THE METROPOLIS

Last year she had turned 26 and had completed her 13 years as an acolyte of the Fane of Fyria. She had learned what it is to be Arcane and to have been trained as an Envoy to be among the most powerful beings of the mass of humanity that made up the Clockwork Metropolis Empire. She knew the names and leaders and politics of the 37 Great Houses and the countless Minor Houses, Combines, Guilds, and secret societies that all vied for advantage and created its Clockwork intricacies. She knew everything but understood nothing, or so her Mentor liked to hear himself say.

Her mission was simple, allow Prince Kolog'nar of the Reptile House to fall deeply and passionately in love with her and to bear him a daughter. On the surface a quick in and out in maybe 18months, but she could see the outlines of wheels turning that she could not discern, plans within plans that could see her soon to be betrothed dead or in a position of real power, the sort of power that she as a beloved and insightful wife would exert great influence.

The dinner party she attended was a large affair with dozens of Great House nobility in attendance, this she knew, was the battleground of modern Xai warfare, these were the halls of real power that most never saw and that most of the attending did not themselves understand.

"Well my darling," said the crooning voice approaching from behind.

She turned to see Halurin approach, "pleasant be your days," she formally bowed with a slight lilt of her head. She had met him a few times prior on such occasions and had been warned of him, he was Arcane as she. Every bit as deadly powerful but with several centuries of duplicitous experience behind him.

"So, they finally let you fly solo, such a graceful creature as yourself, such a shame you had to spend all those formative years in such a dreary gilded cage," he said with a distracted glance around the room.

She almost rose to the bait, but what would she be if such a slight could slip past her guard.

"Wolves such as yourself are why children must be so carefully guarded lest your fangs show," she said with a sly grin, taking his large muscled hand into hers.

"Perhaps you may yet see my fangs," his hot breath whispered into her ear.

"Perhaps," she said slipping around his back and gliding into the crowd.

As she left Halurin, his allure had left her weak, flashes of their soon-to-be carnal relations crashing through her mind. She would indeed need to be careful. The Courtesan arts were powerful, and she was no Druidic Seductress trained in such combat techniques.

She was instead an emotional assassin and her target was Prince Kolog'nar. But she wondered if such as Halurin could be drawn into a web of love or hate. Thoughts for another time as she glanced down upon the silver spiderweb brocade woven into her artfully revealing gown, marking her as an Imperial Priestess of Furia.

Her conversation with the Prince was effortless, he was tall, handsome, and had a keen and curious intellect if a bit childish, she imagined the next couple years would be no hardship posting.

She let it slip after appearing to have enjoyed too many drinks that she was indeed a skilled Truthsayer but in some distress, vulnerable, having displeased her rather heartless Imperial overlords.

She was invited to see him privately the next day, "I can perhaps help," he said kissing her hand before departing. She smiled a hungry smile.

# OTHER IMPERIAL SOCIETIES.

Most of the Arcane trained by the Fanes return to their Great House to support the affairs of their own kind.

Some few remain to serve the Empress as members of their Fane.

But life among the cutthroat politics of the Houses is not for everyone, nor are the rigorous religious pursuits of the Fanes in selfless service to others.

But there are other organizations which serve the Empress but allow for individual ambitions to be pursued.

These are the organizations of adventurers, explorers, and mercenaries. The sorts of places where Arcane not fit for political or Imperial service find they can still get a piece of the action.

They also fulfill a vital role within the Metropolis Empire, expansion.

Xai is a big and complicated place but is, in truth, a small and fragile child entirely unaware of its surroundings.

As far as the Crystal Shard Empress is concerned, if every man, woman, and child alive in the Empire had the wit and bravery to be an adventurer, it would be but a small start to that which is needed.

As such, adventurers are the Empress' most precious resource, bravery, wit, and curiosity in equal measures is rare indeed.

...adventurers are the Empress' most precious resource, bravery, wit, and curiosity in equal measures...



#### THE DEPARTMENT OF PRECEAIMATIONS

This is the Imperial thieves guild headed by Arcane sorcerers skilled in the protection and acquisition of stuff.

As Imperial Law expressly makes no provision for property rights, "ownership is possession," it falls to the Thieves Guilds of the Metropolis to protect and retrieve property for those with the means to pay for such services.

## THE AMARANTH HOUSE

This is the Imperial courtesan guild headed by Arcane sorcerers skilled in the e'Mral arts of Blood, their symbol a red flower that never fades.

In addition to its popular entertainments, the Amaranth is perhaps the most powerful spy organization of the Metropolis, there wizards being masters of shape change and the carnal arts, often more primal, elemental, or animal than sentient.

# THE PRIESTESS SEDUCTION

The Crystal Priestess was a tall and voluptuous figure of preternatural beauty, her holy gowns of brightly colored and layered silken gossamer revealed and accentuated her long curling hair and gravity defying charms.

As she glided through the busy streets of the city, men were captive to her glance and women envied her passing.

The Priestess could see the e'Mral mists. Blue mists moving along the surfaces of the streets and buildings and Yellow mists drifting in the air and swirling in a pail of water. But more importantly swirling around, through, and from the people she met, she could see all 6 colors of the e'Mral mists.

Her own seductive form swirling with brightly charged Green eddies laced with equal measures of Blue and Yellow. Most people she passed moving through the streets were of the ordinary mortal sort, no strong sense of color or clinging mist at all, rather the weak tracery of Reds, Blues, and Yellow indicating their failed alliances to the elements of Blood, Iron, and Grace, the elements of the body. She mused that animals often contained more of a connection to Xai than the so called Soulborne races. But her mind was wandering, she was bored of these mundane streets and its gray colorless people.

She saw some few had flashes of Orange mists indicating an alliance with Fyre and an empathic spirit, others could be seen with Blue and Red mists twining to from a brighter Violet mist, indicating an alliance of Shade and a keen mind. While rarest of all some few would have bright Yellow and Blue mists that would entwine to reveal a sharp Green hue, this was the sign of elemental Wyght and a powerful soul, something she was on the prowl for today.

She was new to the Priesthood and was still getting used to the Crystal Shard Empress sensing the world through her body, not intrusive or in any way painful, but oddly ever present. Her mind wandered as she entered a tavern, some few High Priestesses she was told could hear the thoughts of the Empress, others could become for a short time her vessel, acting as if the Empress herself. But these stories were few and none of them ended well for the Priestess.

She focused her mind on her task, to find any man in this dreary town entwined with green e'Mral mists. Being new, she suspected she was sent to search the dregs of humanity in yet another "life lesson."

The Priestess was oblivious to the fact that her voluptuous near naked form in this gray tavern of mostly drunk iron workers was drawing more attention that she should have dared. But she was bored and looking for a real man. So maybe a little trouble might just shake the tree a bit.

"Is there anyone in this damnable dive that knows a real Man that can show me the way," she said so loudly as to startle everyone in the large room dumb.

"Seriously, anyone," she said scanning the room as she put her back to the bar, her so called dress riding high and revealing her perfect long left leg.

The men in the room were mostly of the working sort and mostly drunk and not very bright, but not so foolish as to mess with an Imperial Priestess looking to mock them with a faux striptease. But then there was Darryl.

Darryl was a big bullying sort of man with shabby clothing and long stingy grease drenched hair who as far

INTRODUCTION

as anyone knew had always been unemployed, seeming to survive on the lunch money stolen from local children and beating up old ladies for their groceries.

"I can show you a real man," belched Darryl as he banged down his mug.

The Priestess glanced toward the noise and saw to her pleasant surprise a bright green spark swirl around the small man sitting next to Darryl.

"Well excellent," said the priestess, "but I do not think you can handle me alone, perhaps if you convinced your friend there to join us the two of you might just make One man," she mocked.

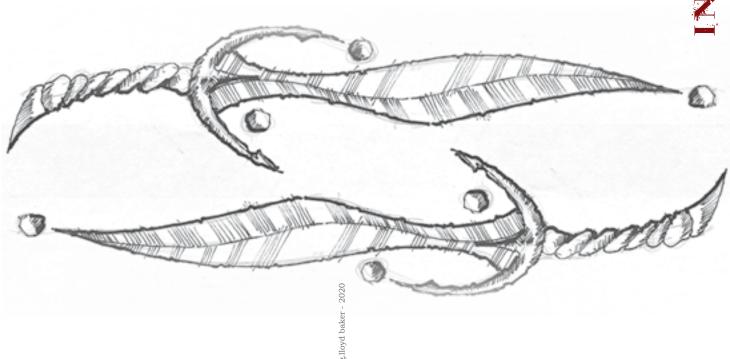
Darryl was a tool, easily manipulated by one as artfully trained as the Priestess. Darryl grabbed his friend by the arm and strode over and grabbed the priestess by the arm and she let herself get pulled upstairs to the first room, her gossamer veils fluttering loosely as she moved up the stairs to the mute delight of the onlooking tavern.

Darryl tossed his friend hard against the far wall and the Priestess onto the tattered but clean bed. Dropping his pants and moving toward the Priestess with the malice grin of someone that has done this sort of thing far too often.

The Priestess smiled and sat up on the bed, meeting Darryl as he approached with her hand gently on his chest, she shifted the pittance of Red e'Mral mists from his body and swirled them around her hand, Darryl dropping stone dead where he stood.

She moved toward Darryl's friend crumpled against the wall, her gossamer gowns vanishing to mist as she moved, taking him, lacing e'Mral through their joined bodies. Ecstasy.

She coiled the rare green e'Mral soul of Darryl's friend into herself, seeding her pregnancy, but killing the man as they climaxed, a sacrifice worthy of an Arcane child.



39



This is the Imperial assassin guild headed by Arcane sorcerers skilled in clever and unique ways to kill.

The art of killing is overwhelming powerful. There is no actual way for anyone to avoid assassination given enough time for preparation.

The only defense is to close the window of time, preventing proper preparations either by capricious movements that prevent planning or accepting a contract with insufficient time to plan and execute the kill with certainty.

Anyone, anywhere, can be killed. And the Unseen Hand is the tool of choice for those with the coin and the time to ensure an unfortunate accident or a public execution designed to send the right message to the right people.

The Empress has placed upon anyone claiming to be an Assassin (and not just a murderer) 3 rules of Assassination. Follow the rules and Empress will not pursue justice.

The First Rule: The Assassin must declare Vendetta to the target that a contract has been accepted for their life.

Contracts accepted to cause the accidental death of a target unaware is simple murder and forbidden as it violates Imperial law holding an honorable dual is between two individuals.

Of course, the whole point of an accidental contract is that no one, not even the Empress, knows any better.

**The Second Rule**: No more than one Assassin may challenge a target at any given time. For the same honorable dueling reasons as the First Rule.

Open contracts are forbidden, though who is to say the contract was really accepted until the target's demise? The Empress is, so be warned.

The Third Rule: Children cannot accept an honorable dual and are thus immune from Assassination.

As a note, such magics as speak-with-dead are always reliable at saying who struck the killing blow against them. What really separates a murderer from an assassin the art of **fooling the** dead.



The Imperial Explorers League
The League of Archeologists and
Sages of Relics, Antiquities, and
Artifacts of the Technomancy
Arcanum is an organization in 3 parts.

The Las'raa'ta recruits from everywhere, Arcane or mortal it does not matter so long as recruits have the right skills and a **shared rush for adventure**.

The Las'raa'ta is a loose collection of adventuring groups, explorers, and mercenaries that generally cooperate, taking on missions and following leads provided by the Fanes when such work suits, or otherwise pursuing their own leads supported by Imperial research and financial backing.

### THE SACE TAS RAA TA

The Society of Academic & Gazetteer Etiquette is the branch of the Las'raa'ta that maintains the scholarly and research pursuits of the organization. All libraries of the Imperial Fanes are open to member of the Society.

### THE CASH PLAS RAA TA

The Congress of Antiquity Sales & Holding is the branch of the Las'raa'ta that maintains its finances, libraries, museums, and auction houses.

The sale of any Congress Auction is legal provided that any Fane may prevent an item from being sold by declaring it "a danger to the soul," a term which over time has come to mean most anything one or another Fane does not like.

Conversely though, the Fanes rarely interfere in Congress affairs, so when they occasionally prevent the sale of an item, the Congress does not put up too much of a fuss, especially as the Empress tends to pay handsomely for such items in any event.

### THE LAIR LAS RAA TA

The League of Archeological Investigation of Ruins is the field branch of the Las'raa'ta that maintains and equips teams of adventurers for the best chance of success.

This is arguably the most important and powerful organization in the Clockwork Metropolis, some have said more important and powerful than any of the Empress' own Fanes.

These are the adventurers of Xai and the most important Arcane and mortals the Empress has at her disposal, indirect as that might be.

The Empress pays close attention to the affairs of the Las'raa'ta and sees that the best and brightest of Fane graduates make their way into LAIR adventuring groups.

Xai is a big scary unexplored place and these are her best investigators on the front lines of figuring out where the next threats to her Metropolis Empire will come from. A skilled adventurers corps means information, and on Xai, information is wealth and power.

As such, the members of Las'raa'ta are a kind of nobility among nobility with near unfettered access to Imperial and Great House cities, with everyone angling for what knowledge or loot might soon be recovered.

A solid adventuring crew is almost always the object of spies and conspirators with their own agendas.

Sometimes Las'raa'ta members have been captured and tortured for their precious knowledge. But in such cases the full weight of the Empire has fallen hard upon the perpetrators making such events exceedingly rare.

The Las'raa'ta is precious to the Crystal Share Empress and her Fanes and people have learned hard lessons and tread cautiously when dealing with adventurers.





THE VALUE O

The Confabulation was called within the Steel Dragon, the adventurer's haunt at th center of the Clockwork Metropolis

The High Priestess of Crystal Grace was herself present upon a dais at the center of the great hall, the voice of the Crystal Shard Empress.

Word was that some 888 of the most experienced adventurers, explorers, and mercenary crews had been invited, and to look around, it appears they came.

The Tech'Boyz circled the perimeter, a crew known for their odd chrome ray-gun gear pulled from an Outland raid of some crashed alien ship a few years back.

The White'Lions where front and center, each having taken the form of some exotic anthropomorphized animal wearing a mashup of kit raided from tombs across Xai. Word is they plumbed the depths of Bathala'zarr and pulled the Scepter of Light from the hand of Death itself.

Not to be missed were the Gor'fiends, a flashy harlequin attired crew of all Troll Arcane so hard to kill that the they have been getting sloppy, spending the better part of last year buried as blood paste under a fallen cyclopean stone until their follow-up crew managed to dig them out with spoons.

Mhugo the Titan was there with his dozen handlers, near 20feet tall towering over the warry crews mostly arranged in outfacing circles to forestall any opportunity move by a rival crew.

There was enough firepower, magical ability, artifact wealth, and bad blood in this room to lure most anyone to do something stupid. A few scuffles had already broken out and Jha'moora the Jakal would apparently be spending the remainder of the gathering listening as a small muskox. The High Priestess must have known that a deathmatch was about to ensue as she began to speak.

"The Metropolis Empire was founded from the ashes of the Calibahn Empire. That which remains of mortal-kind is here in the Clockwork Metropolis," she said, each syllable of her words backed as if by the ringing of a bell, channeling the voice of the Crystal Shard Empress.

Her voice melodic and calming and it seemed to be working, the restlessness of the crowd settling to a stir.

"The Spire Realms tied to the Clockwork Metropolis remain fallow, unexplored since the fall of the Necromancer Kings. I should like to see these places made safe and repopulated," she directed.

"Xai is itself an Outland, a vastness wilderness," she continued, "the unfathomable surface area of a million worlds and for all practical purposes, entirely unexplored. It is in the best interest of everyone here that we should know what surrounds the Clockwork Metropolis," she said with the flurry of a history teacher.

The crowd was getting restless, this sort of rehashing past failings and what the "Empress" wants is not likely to cut any ice in a room filled with Xai's most independent minded souls.

"The Empress can suck my ninth tentacle," jeered an Illiyar'Vooran adventurer from within the crowd followed by a ripple of laughter.

"Xai is hollow," said the high priestess ignoring the growing discontent, "the Subworld another mental abstraction, the surface area of another million worlds under an artificial sun entirely unexplored by anyone upon the surface of Xai, a place in which the Demon Princes and their Nephilim scions have been bound since the Mistress Age."

"Now you want us to plumb Hell?" spat the unmistakable voice of Halur the Butcher, "we do not owe you anything Witch."

"And what about those million planets scattered throughout the cosmos of the Red Empire?" the High Priestess continued as if talking to a room full of school children, "What do any of you suppose has been happening since the fall of the Calibahn Empire?"

"Who gives a flying rabbit!" came a yell from the far side of the great hall followed by laughter and something of a growing cheer. This was going to get ugly and soon if the Priestess did not stop talking about her own needs and wants.

"What in Hel's name are you saying?" came a jeer followed by a chorus of discontent.

"You will all soon be dead," the Priestess said in a shrill tone that stunned the assembled to silence, "If not today at each other's hands, then tomorrow from some unknown agent you foolishly mock as imaginary."

"We will not be controlled," howled Kargoth the Defiler, "We would all rather die than submit to such as you."

"You will not be controlled," soothed the High Priestess, "but as you put your faith, trust, and lives in the hands of your groupmates, so you will learn to cooperate or you will all soon be extinct" she said sounding like a school teacher again."

"Says you!" protested a member of the Ricochet Revenants.

"No," said the Priestess in a chill whispering tone, "says you and your childish stammering. Grow up or die," she said with a gravity that hit everyone in the room as if someone had just walked over their graves, "I am only here to reveal your destiny, the choice however is yours." "Screeew Yooou!" someone yelled as fights started to break out among the attendees.

"This, my precious darlings, is what we in the Priesthood call a teachable moment," whispered the High Priestess in her own voice.

"I gift you this Steel Dragon," intoned the voice of the Empress, "a Mistress artifact that you may travel anyplace you might wish to go,".

Lightning struck everyone in the great hall in a thunderous boom heard throughout the Metropolis and as quickly, everyone except the High Priestess was vanished, teleported in seeming random groups to locations scattered across the Spire Realms, the Outlands, and the Subworld.

Each group a collection of seemingly random attendees of the gathering. Each group suddenly appearing in some foreign wilderness. One group apparently arriving in a tavern a few miles down the street.

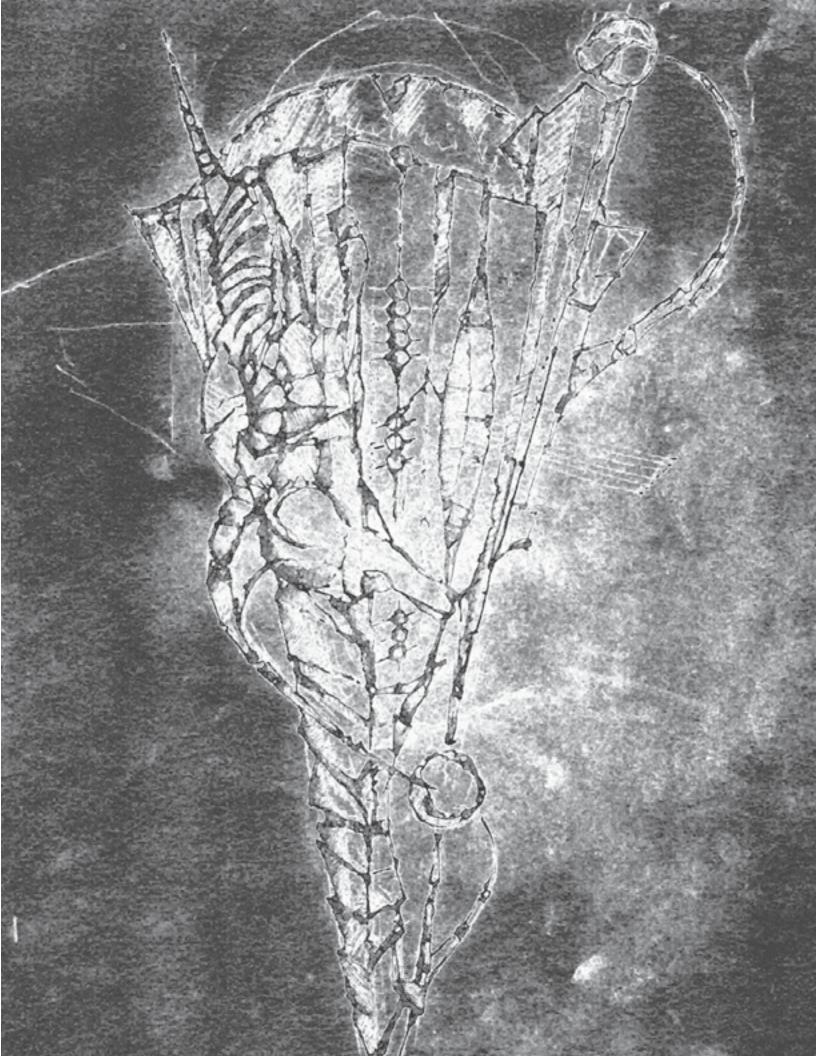
Some, like the Tavern Group, set about killing each other is short order, capitalizing on the confusion of the moment to collect on some free loot.

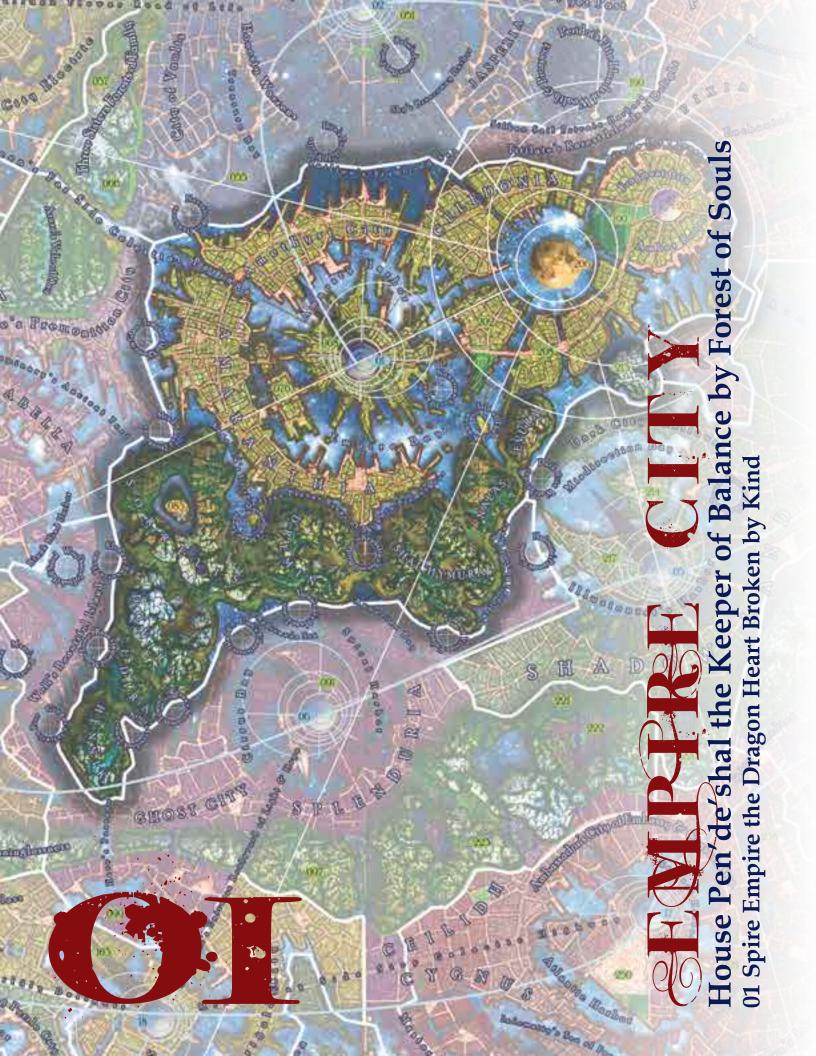
Some groups split up, confident they could make it on their own, though, as it turned out, most could not.

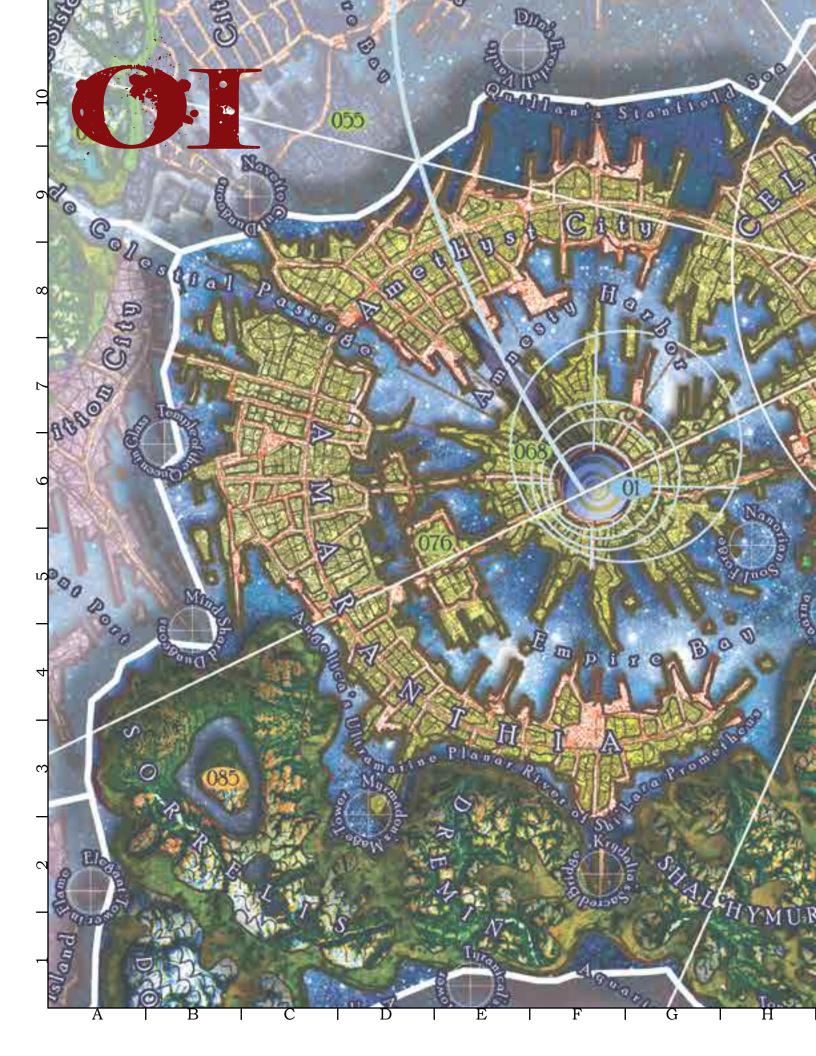
Some recognized the danger of their situation. Each group was sent to the edge of some ancient and deadly place and with some consideration, realized that their groups were not random, but rather carefully balanced, each group much more powerful than a handful of Arcane wizards had a right to be.

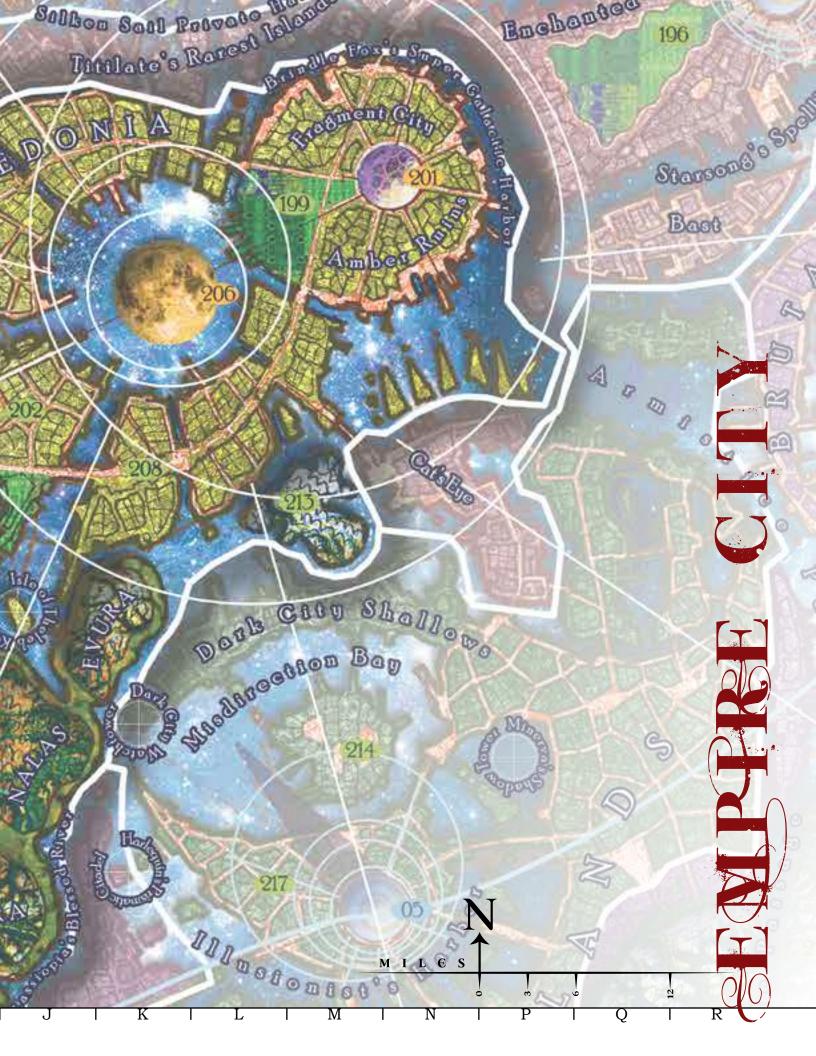
Some worked together to survive their way back to the Clockwork Metropolis.

But some few saw the gift granted them and set about to explore and plunder the riches laid before them as some cosmic birthday present, returning to the Clockwork Metropolis as heroes bearing an embarrassment of riches. So was founded the Las'raa'ta.









### MORGAN FAMILY

The Morgan Family numbered 8, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan and their 3 children, Ethanial, Dymura, and little Pira along with Mrs. Morgan's rather elderly mother and father and Mr. Morgan's wheelchair bound great grandfather Rubeus.

The family had never been to the Imperial City, few Mur'taal had, this was after all a city of evil gods, sorcerers, and demons, mortal-kind had no business scuttering about the streets as rats among giants.

But they had come because it was the last wish of Rubeus Morgan to visit the Iron Cathedral of Illuria before he died, which given his declining health seemed now to be soon.

The family had arrived at Empire Station traveling on the last leg of their long trip via the Wire Train from their far distant Realm Spire, now making their way along the Avenue of the Gods toward the Illurian quarter of the city.

The people moving about the streets were as if not real, each an oversize representation of mortal perfection, as if a place where only the young, fit, and perfect could exist, each person they passed a different race, and each as divinely perfect as their racial genetics might allow.

The Morgans were self-aware that they did not belong, their own more normal mortal stature, flaws and imperfect appearance marked them as alien, almost animal-like, as some primitive ancestor.

And yet many of those wearing marks or livery of the Illurian Fane looked upon the Morgans with deference, some even gesturing with a slight bow as they passed pushing their aging great grandfather. While others glanced upon the Morgans with what appeared to be contempt, but they soon recognized as a kind of grudging respect.

They came to rest at a sidewalk café, arranging themselves as best they could among chairs and tables built for people that seem to average 7 or 8feet tall, the dangling feet of the Morgans from the toobig café chairs and chest high table edge offered passers by a comical interlude in their otherwise serious and hurried day.

Even the cups and plates and cutlery were overlarge for their 5 and 6 foot frames.

It was when Mr. Morgan finally had his family settled and he took the large coffee mug in two hands that thunder rumbled and a large armored figure exploded out the glass wall of a shop on the opposite side of the street trailed by streams of yellow lightning and landing hard into a stone wall only a few feet from the Morgans.

The façade over the sidewalk guests of the café began to collapse, tumbling to crush the Morgans as their drinks spilled and little Pira screamed.

The armored figure had arrayed a dozen mechanical arms like the legs of a spider emerging from his spine, each holding a weapon, some recognizable as pistols or rifles of ornate craft but others less recognizable and seeming alien. All the guns and weapons firing simultaneously back across the street, a hail of bullets, grenades, and bright blue, red, and yellow beams caused the whole of the street to explode in smoke and shrapnel. The Morgans frozen in the terror of their impending deaths as the world collapsed down upon them.

When the world went suddenly quiet, The Morgans slowly looking about from their huddled pile under the table, their elder patriarch Rubeus Morgan still sitting in his wheelchair, his eyes open and alert, his right fist raised over head, the collapsing façade above and the shrapnel and debris from the explosions across the street frozen midair, unmoving, until Rubeus gently opened his hand and tons of stone, glass, and metal gently landed in a piled ring around his family.

"this is a dangerous city even if skilled in the sorcerous arts, for you and your family, it might as well be a death sentence, I tried to warn you."

"Grampa?" Mr. Morgan whispered looking toward his great grandfather?

"We should move while those two blathering idiots have moved their fight to the next street," said Rubeus calmly, "this is a dangerous city even if skilled in the sorcerous arts, for you and your family, it might as well be a death sentence, I tried to warn you."

"But..." said Mr. Morgan

"There are no police here, no one to care or save you -move now-," ordered Rubeus.

The Morgans made their way a few more miles down the road, very nearly killed on 3 separate occasions for passing too near weirding sorceries.

Upon their final arrival to the Iron Cathedral, a pair of Illurian Paladins stood at attention as Mr. Morgan pushed his great grandfather ahead, his family trailing wide eyed behind.

"Pleasant journey?" questioned a tall princeling figure approaching as they entered.

"Very pleasant," smiled Rubeus, "let me introduce my family Tobias, it is so kind of you to see us."

"For a hero of the Order, it is my pleasure Rubeus." The Morgans looking on as if they were seeing their aging great grandfather for the first time.

"Hero?" Mr. Morgan absently said. Introductions turned into a tour of the titanic heart of the Illurian Fane and a quiet meal in the luxuriant apartment of High Templar Tobias.

"So how do you like our home," Tobias later asked little Pira.

"This is the bestest, just like Grampa said," beamed little Pira.

"I can see she has the gift," said Tobias to Rubeus, "she will be your legacy."

"Wait...What?" screamed Mrs. Morgan angrily.



Empire City is the densely populated heart of the Metropolis Empire.

Empire City is populated by dozens of mortal races recovered from the end-of-day ashes of the Calibahn Empire 4,321 years ago.

The city is a modern technological marvel of high-rise towers, drifting citadels, portals, teleportation, robots, androids, and spectacular entertainments.

This is a place of power, privilege, and abundance, home to the Empire Spire and seat of the Crystal Shard Empress and the five great Fanes of the Pen'de'shal.

Empire City is the religious, economic, political, and military heart of the Metropolis Empire.

Each of the other Great House cities is generally home to a specific mortal race under dominion of that House. House Empire is unique in not being home to a single race but instead is home to a mix of all races, many Arcane born.

Empire City is home to a sorcerous population. This is a city of Arcane nobility, famed for their arrogance, honor, and cruelty, often too dangerous for ordinary mortal citizenry that more commonly find homes among the cities of their own Great Houses.

Only the bravest of mortals make their home within the gloriously dangerous intoxication that is Empire City.





More important than the Empress herself are the 5 leaders of the 5 Fanes, the Pen'de'shal.

These 5 Arcane leaders are each powerful sorcerers in their own right as well as being long practiced masters of religious and political intrigue risen through the crucible of their respective Fane ranks.

Collectively, any majority decision of the Pen'de'shal is Imperial Law, officially the Crystal Shard Empress is a religious advisor to the Fanes and has no political, economic, or military power unto herself.

#### **ADVICE**

On this day, the Pen'de'shal was debating a spiraling conflict between the Kin'Rhi of Midgard City and the Dhar'Trolls of Grendel City.

"Why are we here Sister Illuria?" asked Brother Cerulia. "It seems to me the trolls having sold their own kind into indentured servitude to the Kin'Rhi has been discussed and decided, it is the choice of the Trolls to sell their own kind and not a matter of conquest or any such nonsense of minority opinion," yawned the old gnarled technomancer, his left mechanical eye drifting oddly toward the ceiling.

"You are as callous as you are misinformed Brother," said Sister Illuria standing the picture of holy warrior grace in her ornately crafted mirror filigree chest plate, her long golden hair curling down near her hands as she slammed the table with her gauntleted fist.

"There are new players on the board and the Trolls are about to upend the Kin'Rhi, the fall of House'Kin seems imminent before sunset," lectured Sister Illuria.

"Who are the new players?" asked Sister Harlequin, "What do we know?"

"Not enough," purred Sister Unseen, "It seems we have been outmaneuvered."

"Impossible," sputtered the now alert Brother Cerulea.

"Hubris and your reliance on the past has always made you blind Brother, perhaps you should consider killing yourself now and save us any further petulant babbling," whispered Sister Grezuria, "you really are the most worthless glob of snot this universe has ever expelled." Her reflective black fur rippled over her otherwise naked feminine curves as she leapt upon the great curved table as graceful as a cat facing Brother Cerulea, her long sinuous tail whipping as she landed.

"Not helpful," said Sister Illuria.

Brother Cerulea rose, one of the many slender mechanical arms of his technomantic regalia quick drawing his disintegrator pistol in one fluid motion only to stop short of vaporizing Sister Grezuria as the door suddenly opened.

Sister Grezuria pouting disappointed as she retreated from the tabletop.

"I am sure there are at least 2 others in this chamber that would look kindly on your plan to slaughter.."

The High Priestess of the Crystal Shard Empress floated into the room, a young near naked feminine form caressed by a silken sequence gown that seemed as much fading mist as fabric.

"Also, not helpful," said Sister Illuria, "we have not asked your council on this matter my beloved Empress," she bowed slightly to the entering High Priestess.

"Nonetheless, I am moved to offer -guidance-," said the carillon voice of the Empress channeled through her young alluring High Priestess.

"Joy and prosperity," cut Sister Illuria as she sat arms folded. The other 4 members of the Pen'de'shal taking their seats, Brother Cerulea's armor flipping his pistol effortlessly into its hidden holster as he sat. "You may of course choose to ignore my counsel Sister Illuria," said the High Priestess as she moved across the large domed chamber, her sometimes-there gowns fading entirely as she moved behind Brother Cerulea caressing the back of his neck with the tip of a perfectly manicured fingernail, "I am sure there are at least 2 others in this chamber that would look kindly on your plan to slaughter the trolls and kin'rhi in -equal- massacre numbers."

"It would be just," defended Sister Illuria.

"Perhaps," said the High Priestess, her gown reforming as she moved, "but I am not here to dissuade nor approve your lust for murderous reverie, but to suggest that kin'rhi found in Grendel City be collected up along with their families, friends, and acquaintances and placed aboard an Ark Ship and resettled at the earliest convenience of Sister Grezuria and Brother Cerulea."

"Nonsense," said Cerulea.

"It is you that will be more grateful for my advice than any other here," she said moving to face Brother Cerulea, "and you who will suffer most should my council be ignored," she whispered kissing him passionately, his body pushed against his seatback as his face turned a bright shade of red.

Sister Illuria rolled her eyes, she knew there would be no -justice- this day.



To understand the Clockwork Metropolis is to understand the Empire City.

The Imperial City is lorded over by House Pen'de'shal, ruling House of the 37 Great Houses of the Clockwork Metropolis.

House Empire is headed by the Crystal Shard Empress surrounded by a council of 5 Fanes called the Pen'de'shal.

The core responsibility of each Fane is religious, to teach Arcane the sorcerous arts of the e'Mral mists.

These sorcerous graduates are the nobility of the Clockwork Metropolis, serving in one of 3 capacities within the Metropolis Empire.

**First**, sometimes recruited as members of the 5 Fanes of the Pen'de'shal.

**Second**, recruited as members of noble families, the leaders of the other 36 Great Houses. This is often, though not always, based on the race of the Arcane (each Arcane the same race as their mortal mother) as each Great House is responsible for their racial mortal citizenry.

Third as free citizens of the Empire, unbound by House or Imperial loyalty, acting as their destiny dictates though all Arcane are considered to be members of the Lasrataa by personal decree of the Empress and will always find aid and sanctuary within its ranks. Similarly, any Arcane that seeks sanctuary on Fane holy ground is afforded the full protection of the Fane and by extension, the Empress.

Empire City is the most diverse of the Metropolis Empire, with seeming equal measures of every mortal race, everyone is a minority. The City is also one of extraordinary freedoms and personal responsibility, House Empire exerting little influence among its citizenry except as religious leaders and as inquisitors and justi'kars of Imperial crime.

### HOUSE PEN DE SHAE the Keeper of Balance by Forest of Souls

House Pen'de'shal is the ruling House of the Metropolis Empire, headed by a council of the 5 Imperial Fanes.

Some when reading of House Empire and the Crystal Shard Empress and the Pen'de'shal might think them paragons of honor, law, and justice; and this is true.

But they are also students of baroque subtlety, cruelty, and pleasure for its own sake. By the morality of most mortals, their sorcerous nobility is decidedly evil.

Xai is a cruel mistress and the politics of the 37 Great Houses is not for the feint of heart, the weak, or the cowardly. The followers of the Fane are not taught to survive the viper's nest of Metropolis politics but to thrive and dominate.

And if there be evil in their work then let it be a pure exalted evil undiluted by morality or bias.

The Fanes reward courage, subtlety, and delight and just as harshly condemn cowardice, brute force, and hate. Such sentiments as love, compassion, and self-sacrifice while freely felt, are rarely of value in the cruelty that is Imperial politics.

This general sense of delighting in a **vibrant life well-lived** separate from the morality of good or evil is aligned with Xai's demonic afterlife.

When a person dies their soul moves to **The Pale** where the brightest souls are not necessarily those of good but of vibrant lives of action, chance, and revelry.

Some scholars have named this the predators soul, where souls like beasts are divided into predator and prey except that where animals are born into their lot as either cat or mouse, men and women may choose their lot and in so doing might craft a life so well lived as to escape the confines of hell itself and exalt forever among the solar mysteries of the cosmos.



## OF SHI LARA

South of Empire City is a series of mountain ranges covered with the trees of an ancient forest, Fragments of the Shi'laran Forest.

There are many origin tales regarding the Shi'lara and the coming of the Mistress, each as fantastic and as unlikely as the next.

What is generally known is that the Shi'lara were a race that pre-dated demon-kind and whose souls are not subject to the crucible of hell known today. Upon death, Shi'lara souls moved to the forests of their home realm, giving life to eternal soulborne trees that composed **the forest of ancestors**.

As part of the Mistress Angelic works, the home world of Shi'lara (as well countless other Eldritch worlds) was stolen, carved into pieces and its lands, seas, and mountains transplanted to Xai. The mountains south of Empire City and their forests are said to be surviving fragments of the Shi'laran forest of ancestors.

The Shi'laran forests are universally sacred to the living Shaman religions of Xai and are protected as living citizens under dominion of the Crytsal Shard Empress, though they tend to require no outside protection.

The trees of Shi'lara contain the whole of Shi'laran memory and magic and are capable of extraordinary miracles when moved to act. Some have even suggested that the Empress herself is a hoax, a kind of finger puppet for the will of the Shi'laran Forest.

And while this may exaggerate the powers of the Forest, any that break a limb from a **Shi'laran tree of life** suffer themselves a broken limb and any that would strike with an ax have the blade turned to bury itself in their chest and any with a saw find the serration a movement of personal decapitation.



# OI SPIREEMPIRE THE DRAGON HEART BROKEN BYSKIND

Empire Spire is an artifact of the Mistress Age. The Spire is the first, largest, and most mesmerizingly beautiful of legendary clockwork-angel craft, rising miles into the sky and rooted many more miles deep into the earth.

The Spire is a vast complex above and below ground containing the "throne" hall of the Crystal Shard Empress and the residences and Imperial offices of tens of thousands of Imperial Priests, Guards, and their families.

The interior architecture of the Spire is one of adaption to humanoid forms, with floors and rooms and offices having been added into titanic alien voids and irregular sensuous spaces originally designed for the giant and esoteric forms of the Mistress Angelic and their minions.

Also contained within are countless thousands of Crystal Portals long since sealed behind vault doors or secreted in hidden chambers following the fall of the Calibahn Empire. So much to explore from but a single ancient Spire.

# o68 star city by multiverse portal streets

**Star City** is the island on which the Empire Spire stands. The island is a low sloping mountain entirely covered by some of Xai's most ancient streets and buildings, some of which were seemingly crafted for giants of an alien anatomy that like the Spire, have been adapted for more recent humanoid occupation by inserting interior floors and halls into titanic organic voids and shapes.

Popular during the Age of the Red Empire was the creation of Maze Manors, where the very wealthy of the Age used Crystal Portals to link dozens rooms, homes, and palaces to create a single pan-location residence across dozens of realms or alien worlds.

Star City is unique for its many thousands of ancient built Maze Manors and their many surviving Portals leading to far distant palaces of the once rich and powerful. And these are what is known, for many thousands of Portals have been buried, walled over, or otherwise locked away and forgotten, waiting to be discovered in this new bright Age.

Star City is a place of wealth, and beauty with a skyline dominated by subtle architectural towers of individual artful mastery. Star City is arguably the wealthiest enclave of all Xai, home to the most powerful adventurers, priests, and warriors of the Empire. Maze Manors within Star City are a status symbol valued by nobility throughout Xai.

# o76 ETERNAL CITY AND THE UNIVERSEROAD

**The Eternal City** is an island of about 18-square miles that legend says was once a celestial star port of the Mistress (and perhaps the reference to the Universe Road).

In modern day, the Eternal City is home to the holy training academies of the Fanes.

The best and brightest of the Empire are tested and invited to attend elite sorcerous schools located in the Eternal City and if successful, graduating into even more elite Fane academies for graduation at about age 26.

The whole of the city is built upon a foundation of solid heat hardened glass some several miles deep, allowing that no architecture on the island has a dug basement but instead is built upon elevated foundations to reach elevated streets and elevated sewers and plumbing.

The entire city is built upon a manmade crawlspace that contains city services, a crawl space famous among the student body for its hundreds of miles of secret tunnels and chambers, secrets traditionally handed down from one student body to the next, millennia of names and student graffiti carved indelibly into the island glass.

#### 085 ARTIFACT SHI LARA FORES ELDEST AND ETERNAL

Upon an island at the center of a lake among the mountains of Sorrelis lies the **Heart of Shilara**, first and eldest of the Shilara forest and most sacred place of all nature religions.

The forest is composed of sentient soulborne trees called the Shi'lara, named by others as Trees of Life, the whole of the forest alive and aware, the dreaming of the forest often capable of altering reality.

The island is a place of "old-magic", that which pre-dates the Mistress, the kind of magic that can change the world in ways the Mistress could never truly comprehend and that the Demon Princes fear above all things.

The island is scattered with sacred sites from times that can only be measured in birth and death of stars. None who visit the Heart of Shi'lara leave unmoved, overwhelmed as it were by the reverence for an eternal beyond life.

#### 199 RED EMPIRE PARK OF SHIFTING WORLDS

The Red Empire Park, as the name suggests, was crafted during the reign of the Red Empire. This is a formal garden of some 40-square-miles that is a wonderland of hedge mazes, flowering glory, forests, glades, orchards, ponds, lakes, and most every outdoor joy that can be imagined and is among the city's most popular tourist attractions.

What makes the place unique is that at sunrise each day the whole of the park changes form, shifting into new landscapes and flowering plants.

Legend is that the park lasts but a day and has never been the same twice. Being in the park at sunrise when it changes is especially popular and exciting for more adventurous tourists.



#### **201** ARTIFACT STEEL DRAGON SINGS OF SANDAZAR

The Steel Dragon is a sphere 3-miles in diameter rising one and a half miles into the sky and down 1 and a half miles into the ground, the outside appearance the form of a dozen mileslong coiling dragons of steel and iron crawling upon a sphere of lapis lazuli with dozens of portals opening along the circumference of the ground plane.

Within the dome is a garden city, a **celestial greenhouse** of ancient and alien plants, trees, and insects thought to have been gathered from Xai's far reaches and perhaps even alien worlds during the reign of the **Sandazar Wizards**.

The "sky" of the dome reflects the stars of an alien sky and the yellow-green sun and pink sky of an alien world, perhaps as some scholars suggest, the home world of the ruling alien wizards of a long past Age.

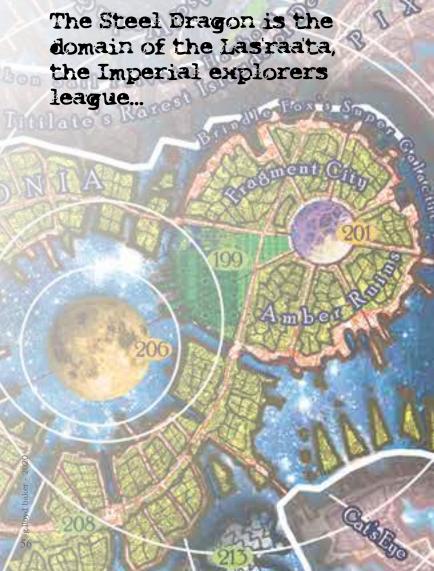
The buildings and architecture of the Steel Dragon are living, formed of exotic and alien plants, trees, and vines that empathically grow into the form of inns, shops, and palaces, adjusting themselves to the needs of the users over time, a city constantly shifting to create architecture sympathetic to the needs of its residents and visitors.

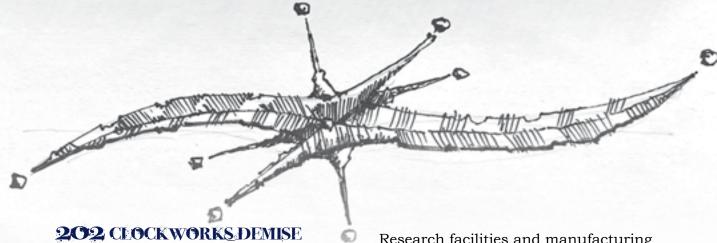
The Steel Dragon is famous as a respite for travelers, sometimes called the **Steel Dragon Inn** for its hundreds of hotels, inns, and stables located both above ground and below within its vast subterranean tunnel network and enchanted chambers of luminescent plants, roots, and fungi.

The Steel Dragon is the domain of the Las'raa'ta, the Imperial explorers league, a place of sanctuary, as any honest violence is met instead by vegetative enforcement, thorn vines of Steel which bind (and if necessary kill) until the relaxed calm of the held is restored.

At the center of the Steel Dragon is a grove and at the center of that grove is a large circular structure of ancient cyclopean stones.

Travelers that enter the **stone circle** may, with skilled Shaman guidance and ritual, find themselves "teleported" to anyplace they can "imagine". This sort of ancient travel can be fraught with danger as it requires great Lyrn Shamanistic skill to invoke as well as tremendous focus and faith of those being teleported. Perhaps more compelling, the trip is always one-way, with no means to ritually summon back those teleported out.





202 CLOCKWORKS DEMISE
THE FALL OF TIME

The Demise is section of City that was the victim of an ancient wizard's attempts manipulate the Clockworks, for as it happens, the unknown wizard succeeded though perhaps not as he intended. Speculation is that the wizard is unknown because of his work, he or she seems to have never existed.

Demise City lies withing a **time debt**, what this means is that time moves different inside the City from the rest of Xai (and presumably the rest of the Xai universe).

For each nine years spent in the City of Demise, only 1 year passes in the larger universe.

As it turns out, this can be exceedingly valuable and useful.

The City of Demise is among the most densely populated Cities of the Clockwork Metropolis, composed of modern industrial facilities and high-rise towers that stack like a hive over and under its tight and efficient streets.

Hotels within the Demise are popular with businesses, guilds, and conventions as they can enjoy 9 days of conference and evening pleasures and return having missed only a single day away from the business or family.

Research facilities and manufacturing facilities have moved entire families and communities into the Demise, where they are rewarded with lives of luxury and learning in return for producing 9 years of goods or advanced technomancy research in only 1 years' time.

In a similar vein, the Empire maintains a shipyard within the Demise, building and advancing its naval advantage with a 9 to 1 advantage over similar facilities outside the Demise.

The Demise is also popular among certain Schools which move either entire families or sometimes orphans (or just children) to Demise schools for education. Children of 10 enter the Demise and experience 9 years of training to leave the Demise at age 19 with only a single year having passed for their friends and family.

Medical facilities and hospitals pervade the Demise, offering medical services and recovery with a return to normal in only 1/9th the time. And while the patient will endure the pain and recovery of surgery and age a full nine days, she will be able to return healthy and healed to their lives having only missed a single day.

On the darker side of things, Cloners love the Demise, able to grow and train a fully grown 18-year-old clone in only 2 years. Clones are however soulless and their creation strictly illegal by Imperial Decree.

## 206 ARTIFACT THE CLOCKWORKS

The Clockworks (the namesake of the Clockwork Metropolis) is an artifact of perfect perpetual motion, a **sphere** 6-miles diameter rising 3-miles above the waterline and 3-miles below the waterline of an unplumbed sea.

The sphere is a shell composed of perpetually moving gears, armatures, and springs of Mistress crafted crystal surrounding a bright but tiny star shining from within its center, a model of clockwork precision seeming to depict a dyson sphere.

The truth is that the Clockworks is an enigma, with as many stories and myths related to its creation, exploration, and purpose as there are people to speculate.

What is known is that it is glorious in shining beauty, epic in scale, and grace of movement. A place of ancient sacred ritual and modern tourist wonder.

In the eons of the Empire and before, tiny crystal pieces of the Clockworks have been wrested free for use as tools of imagined or hope-for power and as tourist mementos.

Legend says that such fragments of the Clockworks ever seek to find their way back and curse the lives of those that took or now possess them, bending mortal fates that they make their way back to the Clockworks.

One known practical aspect of the Clockworks is that all magnetic compasses upon Xai point to the Clockworks as North, and perhaps as some scholars suggest, that is a sufficient purpose for its craft.



# 208 INTERGALACTIC CONCOURSE OF INFINITE-GOODS

The Intergalactic Concourse is fascinating, a wide boulevard some 20-miles long with shops, restaurants, and amusements from across the Empire.

The street is famous for its exotic food and goods. The city on either side of the Concourse is a city of docks, warehouses, and fresh food markets.

Legend says that the Concourse was once a pan-galactic space port, ferrying goods and passengers to and from far distant worlds during the Age of the Red Empire, stories that are given credence by the unusual form of some of the more ancient architecture, structures resembling the bones of ancient titanic beasts of metal and crystal, adapted over the intervening millennia into exotic armatures for towers, warehouses, and high rises of a more traditional modern appearance.

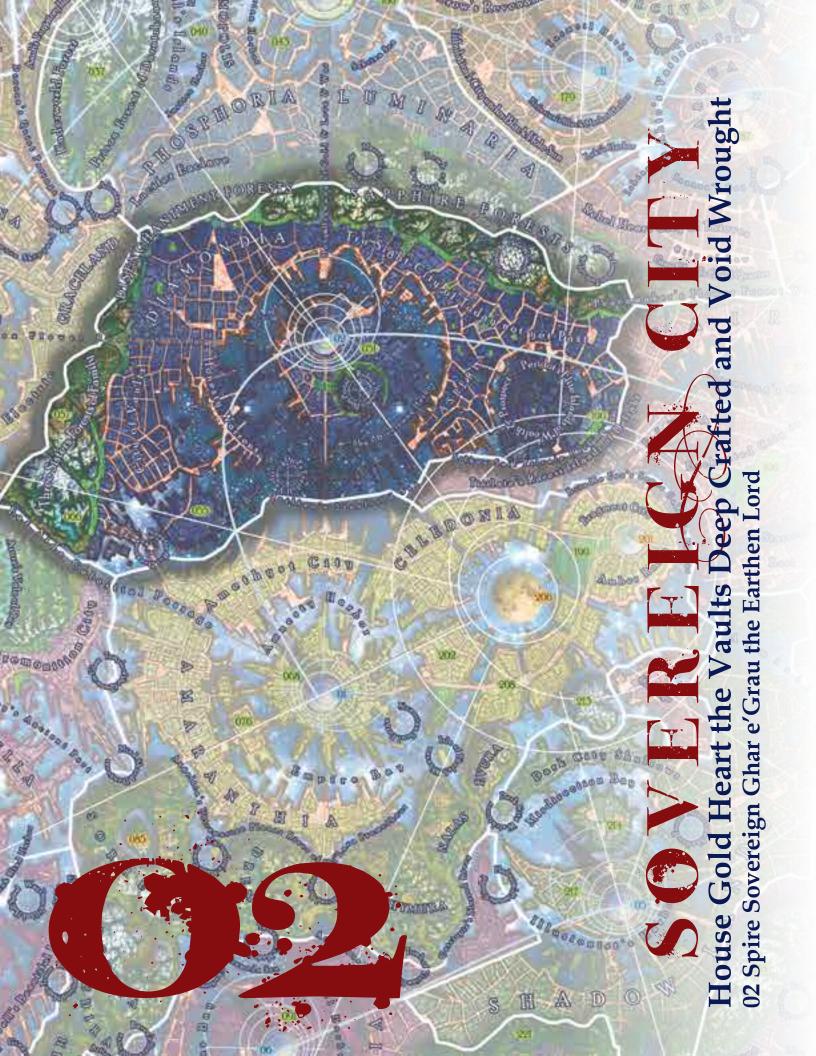
The Concourse is among the most famous shopping streets of Xai and popular with tourists and adventurers alike for its diverse and singularly unique collection of exotic goods and services.

### 213 SEVEN SONGS FOREST ANCIENT AND ALONE

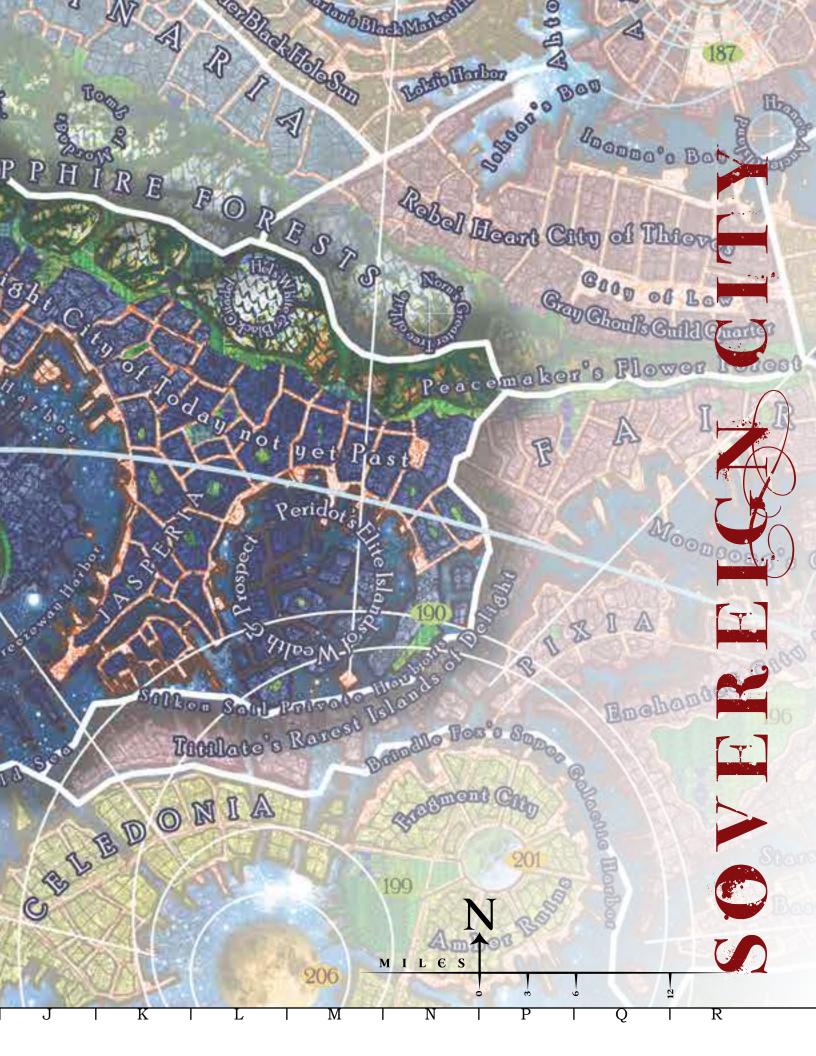
The smallest of the Shi'laran forest fragments is the Seven Songs Forest, a place belies simple description.

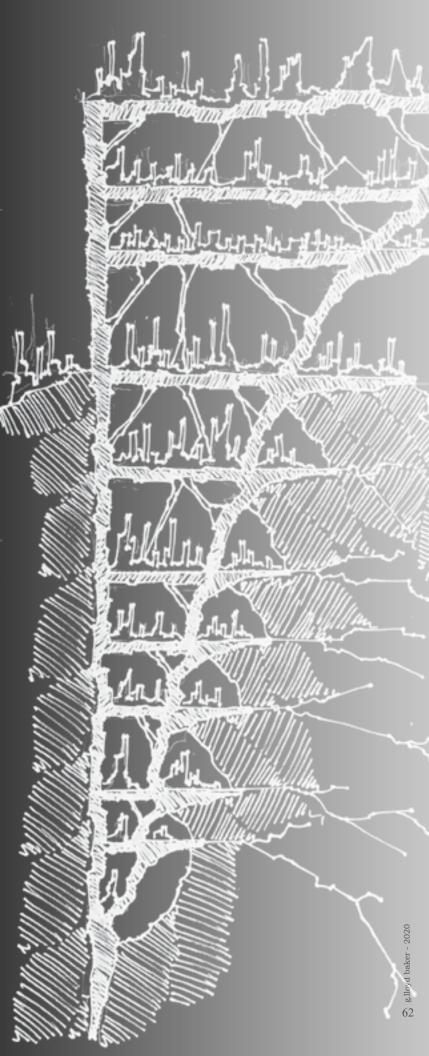
This is a place where people come to forget. A place of new beginnings and closure, to mend a broken heart or say farewell to a loved one or perhaps shed the guilt and terror of a tortured childhood.

The seven songs of the forest are the seven kinds of love a person may feel: Eros - passionate love, Philia - friendship love, Storge - familial love, Agape - universal love, Ludus - playful-uncommitted love, Pragma - practical love, and Philautia - self-love.









# Sovereign city

Sovereign City is the monetary and banking hub the Metropolis Empire.

The common currency of the empire is the **Imperial** (the mil), a coin of ancient traditions that dates to the **Weight of Gold, Silver, and Copper**.

A 10 weight is equal to a pound is equal to 10 Imperials (10-mils) which in turn equated to the same value as 100 weight of silver and 1,000 weight of copper.

Metal coinage is commonly used in lower tier realms while more modern methods of wealth transfer such Sovereign Ghost Tattoos and Imperial paper notes are more common within the Clockwork Metropolis.

Sovereign City is a spectacle of **gaudy** oversize edifices to bad taste and conspicuous wealth. This is a city of banks, mints, mines, and accountancy.

The Crystal Shard Empress uses
Sovereign City as a place to impose
economic equivalency upon
Metropolis Empire. And in the case
of civilizations of abundance such as
Symmetry City, to impose heavy imperial
tariffs that equate to the value a good or
service should have.

And in the case of more advanced Technomancy such as the Cybernetics of the Adrena'Chrome or the Meq'annis of Vermilion City imposition of crushing economic penalty and embargo to minimize the flow of goods higher than the common modern Imperial Technomancy.

Some have said that the Crystal Shard Empress rules by fear of military reprisal, but bankers of Sovereign City know the truth, they are the power that rules the Metropolis Empire and the real power behind the puppet Empress. Money is Power

### NEW POWER

The Sovereign was a powerfully built Grau, a 5foot high and seeming as wide rough-hewn block of flesh that appeared as much as an unfinished sculpture hewn of stone as the most powerful man in the Clockwork Metropolis. His large singular eye centered in his large neckless head flicked left then right across the vast gilded chamber of layered art arranged to display the maximum quantity the chamber might hold, and then more placed in succeeding awkward arrangements to fit even more. For the Grau aesthetic is a simple one, "some is good, more is better, too much is just enough."

The Sovereign was irritated, he had specifically instructed his accountancy staff to not call upon his presence until the Envoy was present and waiting. He did not want to wait on the mouthpiece of someone as irrelevant as the Empress. We was preparing to leave the Great Hall of Treasures and assign the appropriate fines upon his staff when the Envoy appeared walking the long procession of the Great Hall, her fluid gown flowing yards behind her alive with disturbing color and hypnotic movement, her own tall feminine form at once covered by shifting fabrics and at once naked and impossibly alluring.

The hundreds of Grau bankers and accountants had trouble focusing on the Envoy, their large cyclops eyes unable to see her value, unable to quantify her merits.

"Blasphemy," yelled one of the Grau bankers, "she has no value, what trickery is this?"

The Envoy understood the numeric language of the Grau that baffled most other races. The language used number instead of letters and mathematical manipulations to form meaning and create sentences. The more sophisticated the mathematics of calculus and algorithms the more nuanced the meaning.

Grumbling and cursing began to move through the numerically sensitive attendees, their powerful sight normally able to see the "true numeric value" of anyone or anything.

The Envoy could sense the frustration of the Bankers swelling around her as she strode toward the high dais of the Sovereign who sat upon an obviously expensive and especially large and gaudy throne of gem encrusted gold.

The Sovereign stood appearing small in front of his enormous golden throne, his heavily muscled ape-like arms folded in his own disgust and frustration at having been made to wait, something the Envoy imagined the Sovereign had never done in his entire golden-spoon life.

"My, my, my," began the Envoy feigning exhaustion, "that is a long long way to walk, I do not know how you do it with your stubby little legs," she said spinning to look back down the great hall, turning her back on the Sovereign just as he was about to bellow in her direction, "Whew, just let me catch my breath."

"This is INTOLERABLE," yelled the Sovereign, the grumbling of the assembled bankers silenced.

"Would you mind if I sat down a moment," said the Envoy sitting down on the lower steps of the dais, her back to the Sovereign, "much better."

The Sovereign sputtered and spit, he was a bright shade of red, his anger now visible to everyone in the room. "Stand and face me you worthless puppet." The word worthless carrying an especially curse worthy meaning not normally heard in civil society.

The Envoy stood slowly and turned with the grace of a predator about to pounce upon unsuspecting prey, her eyes locked upon the huge quivering bloodshot eye of the Sovereign. "What would you like to say to me?" sang the carillon voice of Empress channeled through the Envoy, "you have my undivided attention," she said with a discordant musical menace that made everyone in the room look to confirm the location of the nearest exit.

"we found them and killed them as a mercy, they had no quantifiable value. Why do you ask?"

"I, I, I..." stammered the Sovereign, "do not like being kept waiting. I, I, I...am going to fine your accounts to...ensure...it never happens...again," he finally managed. The audience in the hall was regaining its courage, some sputtering laughter at the Sovereign's joke, everyone knowing the Empress had no personal wealth and was a mere figure head for the power of the Sovereign.

The Envoy looked hard at the Sovereign, she could see deep into the man's shriveled soul, he was but a petulant child praised his entire life for having been born to wealth, patronized, exalted, and indulged by everyone he had ever met. He had no value except that he controlled more wealth than anyone here. He did nothing with his wealth to the benefit of others, the accumulation of MORE the only ambition that drove his decisions.

"I, I, I..." began the Sovereign, "have decided that your expenditures are wasteful and incongruous to my numerical goal," remembering that HE was the Sovereign and the Empress HIS minion, "you will submit your accounts to audit and disband all military operations, the defense of the Empire to be the direct responsibility of each Great House as paid for by imposition of Sovereign taxation and distribution of funds."

The Envoy smiled, "No."

"What do you mean no," stammered the Sovereign, "I said it, you will do it."

"No," she repeated.

"Permission to waste them sir, yelled the armored newcomer nearest the dais, lacing eMral mists along the barrel of his gun ... "Then I have no other option but to name myself Emperor, all Imperial funds are now my funds," commanded the sovereign, "you are fired!"

Cheers erupted from the assembled bankers and accountants. The man with the most is the most.

The Envoy bowed, feigning defeat, "my dear Emperor, do you recall a month ago when I informed you of the Arcane children being born to the Grau, and your response."

"Of course," the Sovereign said gloating at his own brilliance, "we found them and killed them as a mercy, they had no quantifiable value. Why do you ask?"

"I am leaving now to go box-up my office," said the Envoy. She began walking the long path back toward the great door she had entered, "but you should know that some long lost cousins of yours were less than pleased with your adjudication of the matter and have requested an audience with the Emperor. Sadly, this was granted while I still had some small power, but the affair is now yours as Emperor."

"What are you blathering about," the Sovereign yelled after her, "it is so hard to get good help!"

"Those that forget the past are doomed to be its victims," she intoned as she left the great hall, the doors slamming hard behind her.

The Sovereign had long since ignored the Envoy as she left, the affairs of reorganizing the monetary affairs of the Empire were at the fore of discussions among all the assembled.

It was then that the stone floor of the great hall rippled as water, knocking several Grau to the floor despite their low center of gravity and long arms.

Rising from the floor was an irregularly shaped stone ship of sorts, settling half above the floor as if a submarine raised above the surface of water. Several hatches opened and Grau shaped figures in heavy stone armor sprang quickly into the hall, each leveling long heavy looking guns linked by coiling metal to heavy looking back packs. Thirteen of them in all.

"Permission to waste them sir," yelled the armored newcomer nearest the dais, lacing e'Mral mists along the barrel of his gun as he spoke.

"Permission granted," the Captain said with a level calm.

Great gouts of white-hot plasma streamed from the heavy guns of the Plane Troopers, hot drips of molten stone falling like rain along the length of the luminous torrents. It was a massacre. The sorceries of the ancient Grau made the whole affair a simple matter of murder.

At last only the Sovereign remained alive, the whole of his court reduced to scattered hunks of still cooking flesh.

"I am the new Sovereign," said the Plane Trooper Captain to the Grau shivering behind the half-melted throne, "any objections?"

"No," the former Sovereign managed to finally spit out, the word caught hard in his throat.



# ONDHEART ODEEP CRAFTED AND VOID WROUGHT

House Gold Heart is ruled over by The Sovereign. The Sovereign is "elected" by means of the Great Accounting, the summation of each House citizen's personal wealth appraised once each 7 years, with the highest valued citizen named Sovereign.

The Great Accounting also realigns the noble hierarchy of House Gold and is generally independent of race, gender, or birth, rather the sum total of one's wealth being the only measure of position for the coming 7 years.

Sovereign City is a seemingly simple city of mud, earth, and stone but is only covers a highly advanced subterranean city of high-rise structures built down deep into the earth instead of high above ground.

And below its thousand-foot depth of deep pit structures and subterranean streets, cavern parks, and underground lakes, the whole of the city sits atop the Far'Deep mine of rare earths, exotic metals, and unusual gemstones. Far'Deep is the home realm of the Grau and plumbs some several thousand miles deep, many of its deepest labyrinthian tunnels and chambers reaching into the Primary Subworld.



The Grau are a generally stout, blocky, and hairless race with variegated skin appearing as a wide variety of veined marbles, granites, and stones like lapis lazuli and turquoise.

The Grau have a few unusual traits, chief among them is their numeric language where meanings are assigned to number values and mathematical functions produce a kind of sentence structure. Grau children speak in arithmetic, the majority of adult Grau understand fluent algebraic, and high sciences and poetry are the language of calculus.

One consequence of this language is the Grau's instantaneous ability to calculate most any mathematical equation in their heads.

Another is the Grau intuition to see the true numeric value of most anything, even if they are not entirely clear on the reasons for the value.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, Grau are natural bankers and accountants. Add this to the fact that math does not lie and the Grau are generally trustworthy stewards of accounts and wealth of most Great Houses across the Empire.

The Grau are skilled in traveling Xai's many sub-worlds and are well known as predators among demons of the Primary Subworld.

The Grau maintain a unique form of technomancy called **Earth Ships**.

Akin to the magic of Wynd ships that imbue ship and sail with air elementals to fly, Grau are uniquely skilled in the binding of certain Earth elementals to stone ships, allowing them to "fly" through solid ground as if through the air. These ships are like submarines in use and function as they travel the lightless paths of solid material, using various technomancies such as sound and magnetic resonance to navigate.

The Grau traditionally operate a fleet of Earth Ships each with a 13'Grau crew called **Plane Troopers**. A unique and especially deadly fighting force that often backs House Gold in times of need.



#### **O2** SPIRE SOVEREIGN CHAR ECRAU THEEARTHENTORD

The Sovereign Spire is unusual in that most of the Spire lies below ground, only an elaborate high towered citadel with a rising cascade of domes is built above ground.

The large and unusually sculpted labyrinthian chambers below ground are the home of The Sovereign Court and the vast bureaucracy that is the Grau Accountancy.

Over the past many millennia, the Sovereign Spire has become the default headquarters of almost all Imperial bureaucratic affairs, an expansive maze of departments, bureaus, records keepers, scribes, deeds, inheritance trusts, and on, and on, and on.

The halls of the Spire are so dense and convoluted that professional Grau fixers are often required to navigate its infuriating mathematical and bureaucratic depths.

### O51 CITY OF GOLD BY TRADE AND WORLD IN FAITH

The City of Gold lies atop the inverted Sovereign Spire surrounding the titanic Sovereign Palace of Innumerable Delights.

This is the seat of Sovereign power used for purposes of ceremony, and housing guests and Imperial banking bureaucracy.

### **055** TEADEN CITY OF ACCOUNT AND SUM

The Leaden City is arguably the most boring place in the Clockwork Metropolis, a city of actuary and accountancy guilds and Combines.

The buildings are gray, the restaurants a never-ending parade of chainblandness, and the people ever safe and reserved. The city has no night life, no sports teams, and strict sensible morality standards that shame the use of alcohol, sugar drinks, fatty foods, and of course smoking.

The people of Leaden City generally live long and pleasant lives where nothing ever happens.

#### 057 FOREST OF PAIN NEARLY BUT NEVER PLEASURE

The Forest of Pain is marked offlimits and dangerous.

The Forest is said to be haunted and to cause you to relive your most emotionally painful memories (even restoring them should they have been lost).

There is no closure here, no realization of hope or a path forward, only suffering of old wounds.

#### **066** FAMILIAR FOREST AND PASTORAL VALLEY

The Pastoral Valley is among the top vacation spots of the Clockwork Metropolis, supporting dozens of towns along the valley floor and hosting many guests each year.

And except for having been overrun by tourists and family vacations, it is every bit as wonderous and beautiful as advertised, even more so. This is a place that restores the soul, proof that hope and good and beauty are real.

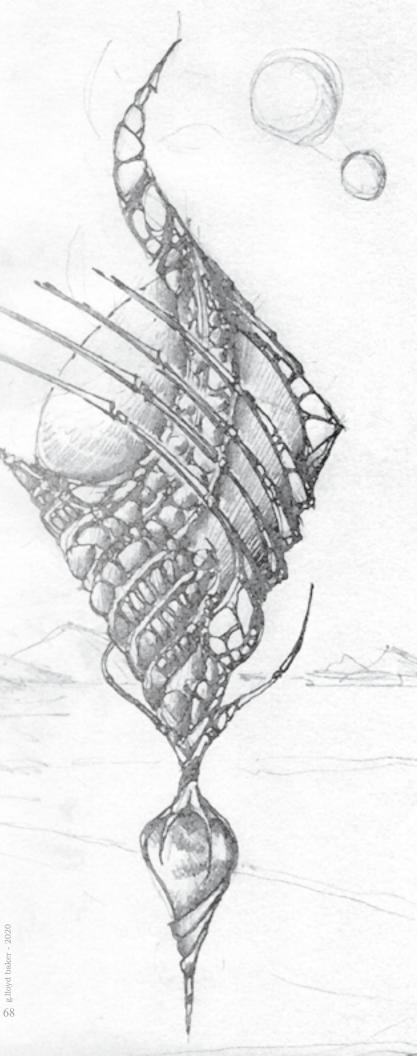
# 19 CPASTORALS IMPOSSIBLE CELESTIAL PARK

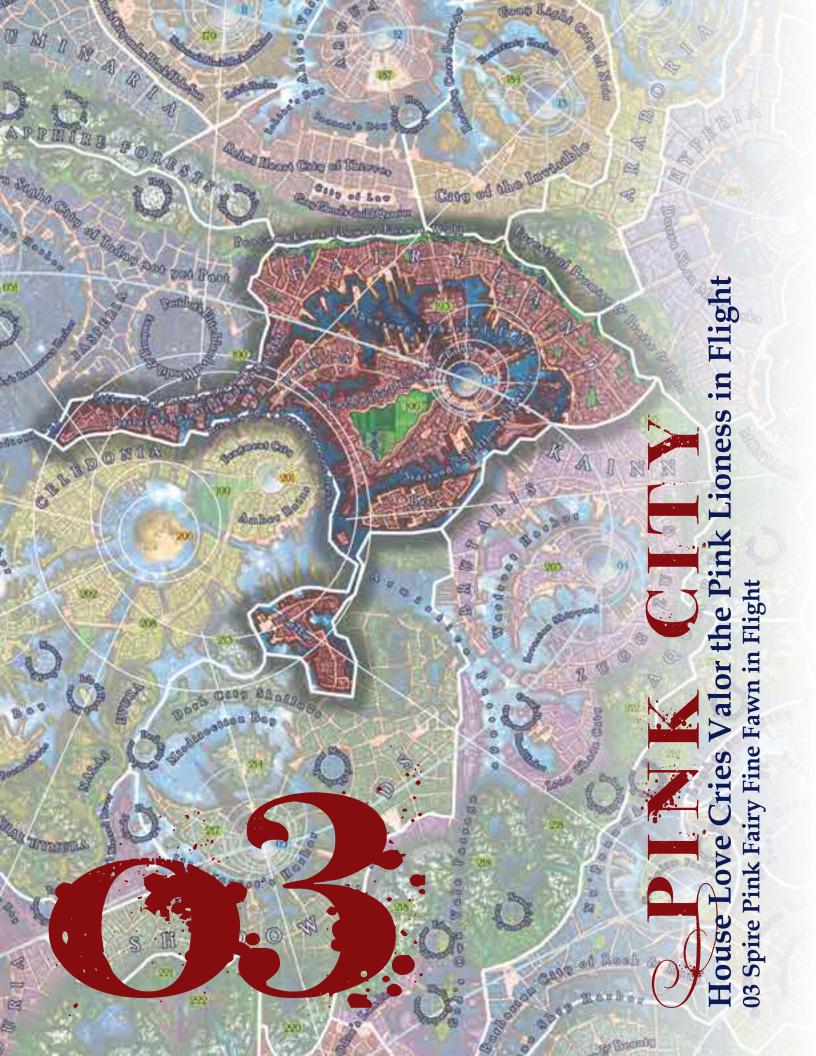
The Impossible Park is a peninsula surrounded on 3 sides by wide sandy beaches and warm waters. The weather in the park is always cool and clear in the evening and warm and sunny during the day.

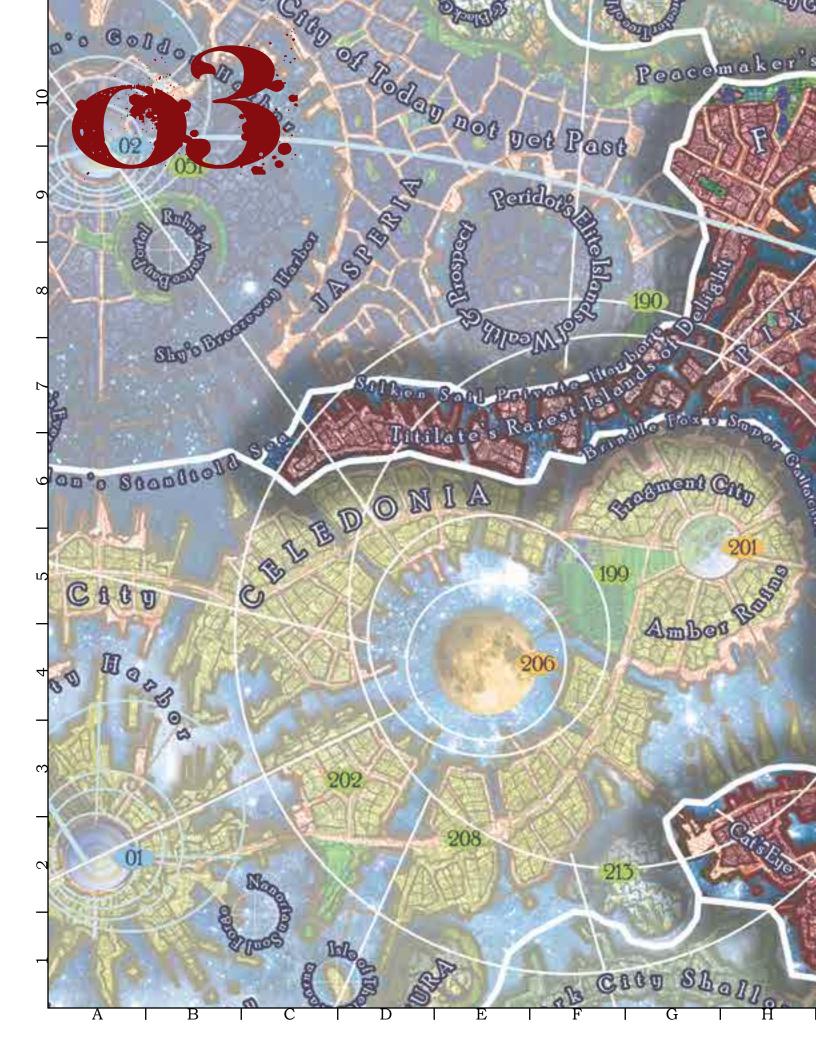
This is a **beach goers paradise** with waters that encourage swimming and clean waves that are a surfer's dream.

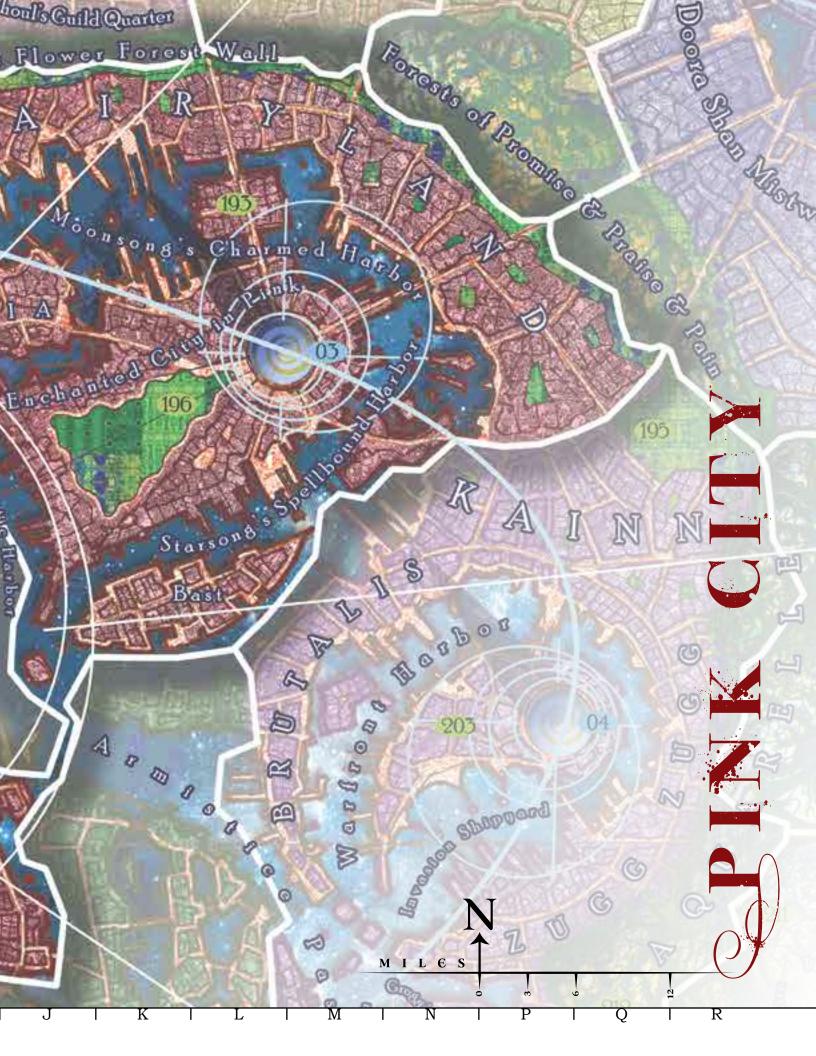
At the center of the peninsula is a large tent city, a mix of circuses, merchant caravan markets, and formal & private camping, any attempted "permanent" structure swallowed by the sands.

The Impossible Park is popular with Sovereign City youth and is a magnet for school break gatherings, parties, and celebrations. It is also a popular stopping off point for Grau Plane Troopers that moor their Earth Ships in the sand and have a penchant for surfing.









#### FIRST-DEMONPRINCE

The Fairy races were among the first of the Mistress Angelic's successes, Wynsha, Elves, Dwarves, and Giants living as one with nature, speaking true the languages of tree, beast, mountain, wind, and river.

The Elves were lords of the water. The Dwarves the lords of earth while the Giants lords of fire. The Wynsha were the undisputed lords of the air. The whole of their Realms alive with spirits of wind, water, earth, and fire.

The four Mistress Angelic responsible for the evolution of the Fairy races were not pleased, such feelings were impossible for the crystalline clockwork angels, but perhaps satisfied and maybe prideful of their success among the Angelic.

One Angel discontent was Myuuri, who considered the work of the 4 a failure, nor could he make his kind see the truth in their failure. Myuuri had been seduced by the Eldritch Blood Queen and offered a great gift, the power of freewill that he might correct the failures of his kind and show them the way to success.

Myuuri was the first Demon Prince, his crystal clockwork form willingly weirded by Eldritch magic into an immortal demon flesh, his appearance a reflection of his own freewill.

Emancipated from The Order, Myuuri set himself as a god among the Fairy peoples, laid with their beautiful maidens in carnal rapture and produced a string of scions called Nephilim, a corrupted Fairy kind that lorded over the their kin as kings and gods. The torturous works of Myuuri and his scions remade elves to orcs, molded dwarves to kobolds, and twisted giants to ogres.

Myuuri went among his Mistress kin and pridefully boasted of his great works, of the power afforded him by freewill and the pleasures and perceptions of his own flesh.

"See," said Myuuri, "my precious Orcs have conquered and driven the Elves to but suffering, slavery, and death. My Ogres are stronger and more deadly, they toy with your Giants as a child might pull the wings

of a fly. My glorious Kobolds have driven your artistic Dwarves from the earth and made larger and more meaningful kingdoms than The Order might ever contemplate. Are not my creations better? Can you now see how you have failed in your delicate Fairy works? Join me and we shall correct all your failures. Join me and you too will see."

"I see now only the beauty and glory of The Order having been corrupted by Eldritch trickery," said the Mistress Lucifer, "you are deviant, an error, you will be corrected."

Myuuri laughed, a sound unknown among the halls of the Angelic, "You Lucifer are the outsider, the deviant, the error to be corrected. It is not our place to remake this universe to The Order, it is our place to remake ourselves as individuals to rule and exalt in this universe. As rulers of the Eldritch we can save them from themselves."

"Heresy!" bellowed the discordant choir voice of Lucifer as his titanic crystalline form moved and trembled, "you speak as one of those ridiculous Eldritch, unordered, undisciplined, and destined only for war and extinction, we only hasten their destiny to save more of this glorious universe from their weirding destructions."

The arguments ensued for long days between the Myuuri and the Mistress Angelic.

Until finally it was agreed.

"None that seek to follow your path shall be prevented doing so," chimed the luciferous form of Lucifer, "your and your Demon Princes shall be given opportunity to prove the success of your ways."

The torturous works of Myuuri and his scions remade elves to orcs, molded dwarves to koblolds, twisted giants to ogres.

Myuuri smiled as a cat that had just eaten the bird, "You shall see, Oh great faithful of The Order, that you are wrong and I am right, never shall consensus prevail against individual greatness, genius is the prevue of man, not men."

"But Fairy you shall abandon," Lucifer continued, "here men shall decide their own fates."

"So very agreed, so agreed Oh wise and luciferous one," gloated Myuuri, not understanding the trap into which he had just willingly placed himself. He and his recruited Demon Princes would suffer and lose, and they would do it willingly.

Lucifer imagined what it might be like to feel joy or satisfaction or pride, she imagined it would feel like this moment. She had already won before the contest began.

Lucifer had long felt the growing discordance in the Mistress song, now it could be voluntarily purged. She had sought a means to draw the Eldritch into The Order, and now they had willingly accommodated. And Myuuri was right about one thing, his Orcs and similar corruptions were better, though not for the egomaniacal reasons he imagined, but because of a flaw Myuuri still sought to correct, they were mortal, and now she and the Mistress Angelic had this power gifted them.



### Pink city

Pink City is the portion of the Clockwork Metropolis under dominion of House Love and the centered on the Pink Spire.

Pink City is home to the arch-typical enchanted races of elves & orcs, dwarves & kobolds, giants & ogres, and led by a race called Wynsha.

Surrounding the Pink Spire is the Enchanted City in Pink. This is a city of High and Low elf nobility. Pink City is a marvel of water crafted elven architecture famous for its eroded and subtractive forms, large solid blocks of wood, bone, stone, metal, and glass shaped by eroding water, sand, and winds into delicate sculptural beauty.

Pink City is an outdoor city, a place of perpetual spring days and fall nights, where all buildings and towers open out to terraces, courtyards, and wide balconies. Pink City is enduring, a place where once a building is crafted, it remains un-harmed by the entropy of time, a testament to art everlasting.

Pink City is a place popular with tourists who come to enjoy its peaceful year-round wonder especially during Xai's cold winters and blazing hot summers. And while elves are notoriously arrogant and famously reticent to use any but their own language, they are also famously welcoming and traditionally obligated to invite guests into their homes. As such, about a third of Pink City is made up of hotels and guest houses that welcome any with the funds to afford some of the finest accommodations within the Clockworks.

The Streets of Pink City are wide and park-like, ancient trees and elventrained vines and topiaries provide a

living artistic sensibility to the place. The whole of the city also seems to be a kind of **butterfly sanctuary**, with millions of butterflies fluttering among its fanciful idyllic structures, many natural and wizard crafted species are known to only exist within Pink City.

Pink City is home to Great House embassies and ambassadorial houses from across Xai, both ally and enemy.

The titanic sand sculpted palace of the Dunestalker Elves and the grottos of the Deepfaith Dwarves are among the many famous sites within the city.

Similarly the Iron Palace carved from a single 300 foot cube of pig-iron by the Ironmane Kobolds or the Festival of Skin, a tent city crafted of the hides to a 1,001 different beasts as embassy for the Frogskinner Orcs, are compelling tourist counterpoints to the grace and elegance that otherwise pervades the Pink City.

Pink City is also home to cats; **lots of** cats. Elves and Orcs of Xai have cat's eyes (the elves when warped into orcs by the Demon Princes were cruelly left their perfect cat's eyes so that their elven families might still recognize them).

Elves adore and have a religious affinity for cats, believing that when ancestors return to aid the living they return in the form of a cat.

Lycanthrope that affects elves and orcs is that of a panther. Elves are the crazy-cat-ladies of Xai with each house containing at least several domestic cats. Pink City is home to some millions of feral cats, all cared for by her residents as if caring for beloved but parted loved ones. Killing a cat is not illegal, but the blood rage felt by elves upon seeing a cat killed is considered a reasonable defense for assault or murder.

#### OF THE WYNSHA

The Wynsha are a lithe and very tall race, the females are born with wings akin to a dragonfly that are nearly silent and allow for both flight or hovering (the ease and grace of movement being that they rarely walk).

In the long history of the race (one of the few to claim having been beloved servants of the Mistress) the Wynsha has slowly evolved to one of increasing female births, the male of the race now extinct.

Some scholars suggest that this was a miscalculation or a choice of the Wynsha themselves, to cleanse their own kind of demonic corruption, they succeeded, the cost being an end to male births.

The result has been the need of the Wynsha to breed with other males.

The resulting children have led to succeeding generations of weaker and increasingly frail Wynsha (now requiring heavy doses of strength and constitution boosting drugs just to move about normally).

The Wynsha, have attempted cloning and genetic manipulations to save their race, the results however have been disappointing and seemed to have only hastened the races eventual demise.

elves when warped into orcs by the Demon Princes were cruelly left their perfect cats eyes so that their elven families might still recognize them

SRPINK CITY

The consequence of all of this history is that the Pink House, among the greatest and most powerful of the Empire, is in transition, the few remaining Wynsha under threat of being overthrown by more powerful elven or orc clans that believe their time has come and that the declining weakness of the Wynsha only invites violence from the other Great Houses.

#### WAR OF SUCCESSION

The Queen was weak, her delicately scaled feminine form the pale pallor of death. She drank deeply of the vital elixir. Her brittle wings became again supple, fluttering again with silent invisible grace, lifting her long elegant form from the circular bed where she coiled. Her skin became pink, pearlescent, and young again, and where her legs might have been for most humanoids, her long coiling serpentine tail whipped again to life as she hovered over the dais in the great audience hall.

She indicated the emissaries be allowed to enter.

Representatives moved forward through the large curvaceous iridescent hall.

First were the heavy irregular block forms of the Orcs, tortured in their appearance and movements, they non-the-less moved pridefully forward, their shinning perfectly beautiful elven eyes a reminder of their demonic origins.

Followed on the Elves, Dwarves, Kobolds, and the hulking forms of the especially flatulent and odorous Ogres and noble Giants and their glimmering eyes of smoke and flame.

Last to enter were the corroded forms of the Chimera, blasphemous amalgamations of serpent, lion, and fire breathing goat, their wrecked dragon bodies crooked and broken as they moved though showed no outward injury.

The Queen was herself among the last of the Wynsha, one of only a handful of Wynsha that remained in control of House Love.

Last to enter were the corroded forms of the Chimera, blasphemous amalgamations ... their wrecked dragon bodies crooked and broken

Her beauty and feminine grace humming effortlessly before the assembly mocked by the presence of the Chimera.

"We come assembled in peeeace," said the Orc, the word peace spit as if it burned his lips as he spoke, "we come to speak of succession, to know who will lead us when you are finally DEAD," he concluded with a belching cursing cough.

"What my butcherous fiend of a colleague is trying to say," said the Elf with a bow, "is that prudence requires that we consider a blessedly long away future when the Wynsha are perhaps unable to continue their duties as Queens among the fairy races."

"And what my pompous elven brother is trying to say," began the Dwarf, "is that it is time you and your miserable kind step aside and let us dwarves take charge."

"What?" howled the Kobold.

And the Ogre let escape a flatulent bass note that made clear his feelings on the matter.

"Horror and thons," complained the Chimera curling its noses, "use your words you odiferous louse."

"Silence, if you please," said the Queen, the spiraling forms of her elegantly shifting tail had long since put the Kobold into hypnotic slumber, "I am pleased to see you all agreed, among yourselves, to see me together, this is indeed an auspicious day, the first time in our long history together where the 7 of you agree in opposition to your Queen."

"Opposition is such a strong word," soothed the Elf.

"Indeed," barked the Orc, "a better word would be Rebellion," he spat, a huge glob of mucus launching from his left nostril toward the elf.

"Well said friend Orc," said the Queen, her delicate smile and large predatory eyes staring hard at the Orc. Agree among you 7 who should govern in my place, and I will not oppose your joint decision."

"But your highness," said the tall slender giant, "it is because we can not agree that we seek your counsel."

"And when I am gone you must agree or war," said the Queen, "and it is time you got on with it. Either sort it out with decorum or sort it out on the battlefield but sort it you will. That is my counsel," her tail cracking suddenly in the air like a whip. The Kobold suddenly awakened from his reverie.

"The Queen is wise," said the Ogre in slow cadence, using his long-practiced words. He then stepped forward fell belly first hard onto the Dwarf, squashing him like a balloon full of jelly, his innards spattering the boots of the Elf and across the floor.

The Orc and Chimera charged the Elf, who leapt clear drawing his slender fencing blade.

The Kobold ran, the Giant frowned, the war had begun.

#### House tove cries valor the pink tioness in flight

House Love has existed as a "world" power since the Wynsha origins as a minion race of the Mistress, the first fairy race.

House Love is a stalwart supporter of the Empire, a bastion of order, and a dedicated enemy of demonic corruption.

And while the Wynsha are a race in twilight, they are not gone yet and any that underestimate their remaining power do so at great peril.

The enchantment of the Wynsha is founded on ancient alliances among the elementals of wind and air, powers they can summon to either mundane or world altering effect (even if maybe not so easily or often as they once could). For example, on a personal level, a Wynsha may cause the air within an opponent to abandon the body, causing quick asphyxiation, a talent that even in the Wynsha's modern weakened state they can perform at will.



And all fairy kind: elf, dwarf, and giant can talk to the spirits of nature just as orc, kobold and ogre, may speak with demon corrupted spirits of nature.

In the days of the Mistress, immortal elves, dwarves, and giants first evolved within pastoral enchanted forests filled with walking trees, spirits, and sprites.

In the Age of the Demon Princes, the fairy kind were twisted into mortal forms; elves were warped into orcs, dwarves into kobolds, and giants into ogres. The forests were changed into dark places of demonic corruption or war destroyed them completely.

When finally, the Demon Princes were banished and the Mistress fled Xai, the immortal races such as elves & dwarves faced extinction to the quick breeding mortal races such as orcs & kobolds.

The Wynsha led a war of elves, dwarves, and giants against the horde of orcs, kobolds, ogres, and chimera. The result being the dominion of the Wynsha, the corrupted horde having been eventually pushed deep into the Outlands.

In the intervening Ages, the Wynsha have been a consistent force for order and eradication of demonic corruption. When the Crystal Shard Empress moved to take dominion of the Clockwork Metropolis and form the Great Houses, the Wynsha were early supporters.



#### O3 SPIRE PINK FAIRY FINE FAWN IN FLIGHT

The Pink Spire is a glorious banyan tree form structure of soft reflected pearlescent colors always seeming to about turn pink, but not quite.

This is the heart of Fairy kind in the Clockwork Metropolis, the seat of power of the **Wynsha Queen**.

The interiors of the Spire are dramatically larger than they have a right to be, rooms, halls, and chambers often containing forests, groves, plains, and other seeming vast dimensionally folded outdoor spaces. The Fairy folk have no difficulty navigating such enchantments, though visitors become easily disoriented, often becoming lost.

The Spire contains ancient paths to many far distant Outland forests, mountains, and exotic landscapes, the secrets of their travel long since forgotten but to a few Wynsha and hidden rituals.



## 193 GIDORAS BECUILING MAGICAL FACTORY TOWN

Gidora's Town is ruled by the daughters of Gidora, ancestors of an extraordinary long-ago Wynsha wizard responsible for the creation of hundreds of powerful and useful items.

The Factory Town grew up around Gidora's ancient workshops and has endured in one form or another over the past few thousand years and continues to be run by modern family ancestors.

Many, if not most, of Gidora's magical items remain useful and are ubiquitous to modern day (marked with the elven letters GLB for Gidora's Luminous Beguilement, a mark of renown magical quality).

A few of Gidora's most famous items are her six-guns, revolvers of extraordinary quality and durability that "fit" any viable bullet into its chambers.

Gidora's Spidersilk Rope will crawl about as a snake and tie or untie itself by means of verbal direction. Gidora's Reversal Freshbox is a small lunchpail size box, decorated with childhood stories, into which any food placed will be restored as fresh and will thereafter remain fresh within the box indefinitely.

And these are just 3 of hundreds of Gidora's famous items, the catalog of which is almost as famous as the magical items themselves.

Suffice it to say, Gidora's Factory
Town is popular with tourists who
are curious to see how one actually
makes a "Floating Bed of Fair Feather
Wonderment" or a "Key-chain
Davenport of Indescribable Comfort"
as well as merchants and traders from
across Xai. The city is also home to
perhaps more apprentice wizards,
than any other place in the Clockwork
Metropolis.

Gidora's Factory Town also produces a small but lucrative array of bespoke magical items for those with deep pockets and an abiding need for a niche piece of magic such as the recently requested "Elegant, Warming, and Inobviously Waterproof Velvet Tuxedo of Underwater Breathing".

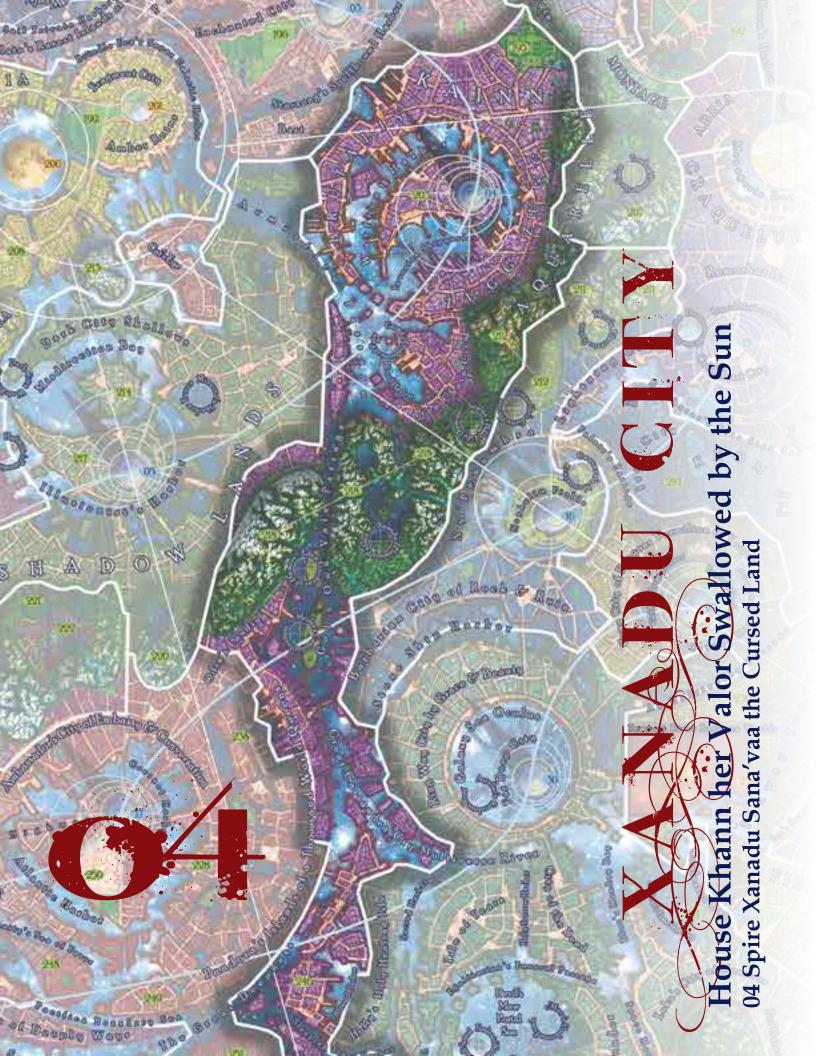
#### 196 MIRACIÆPARK

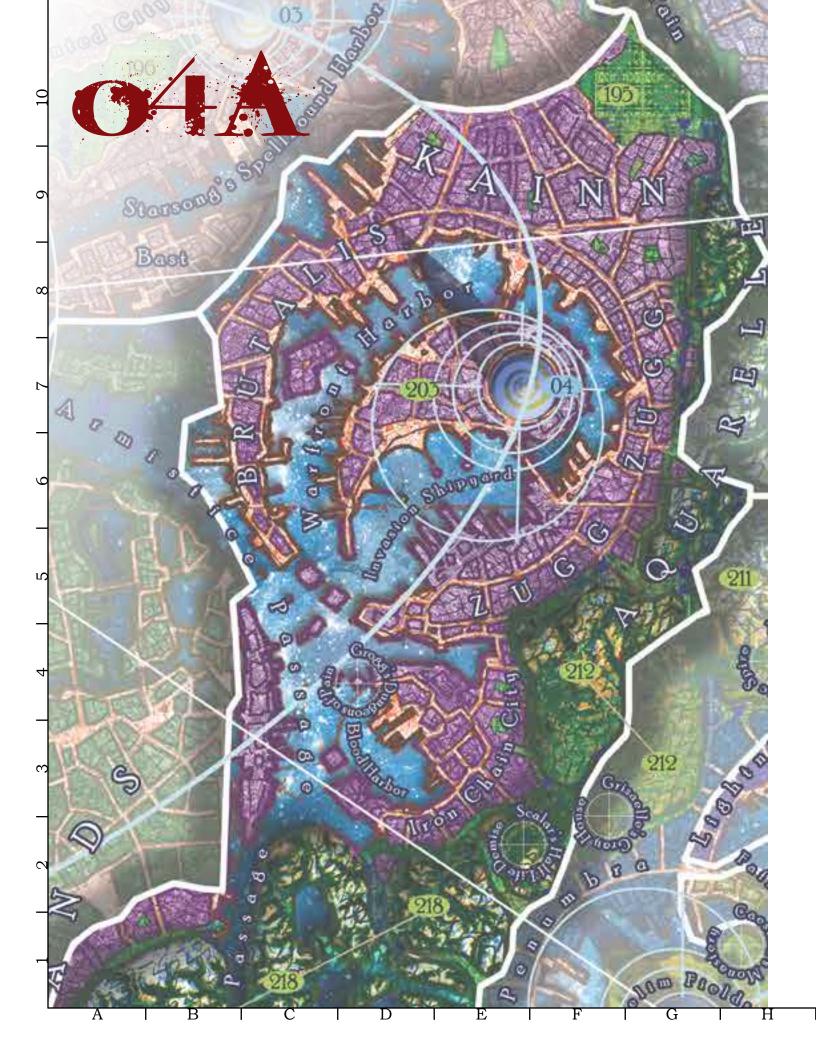
Surrounded by the Enchanted City is the Miracle Park, a natural wonderland of idyllic forests, wildflower fields, mazes, streams, ponds, and hills on which are built a seeming unending collection of garden follies, grottos, pavilions, and palaces whose sole purpose is to delight.

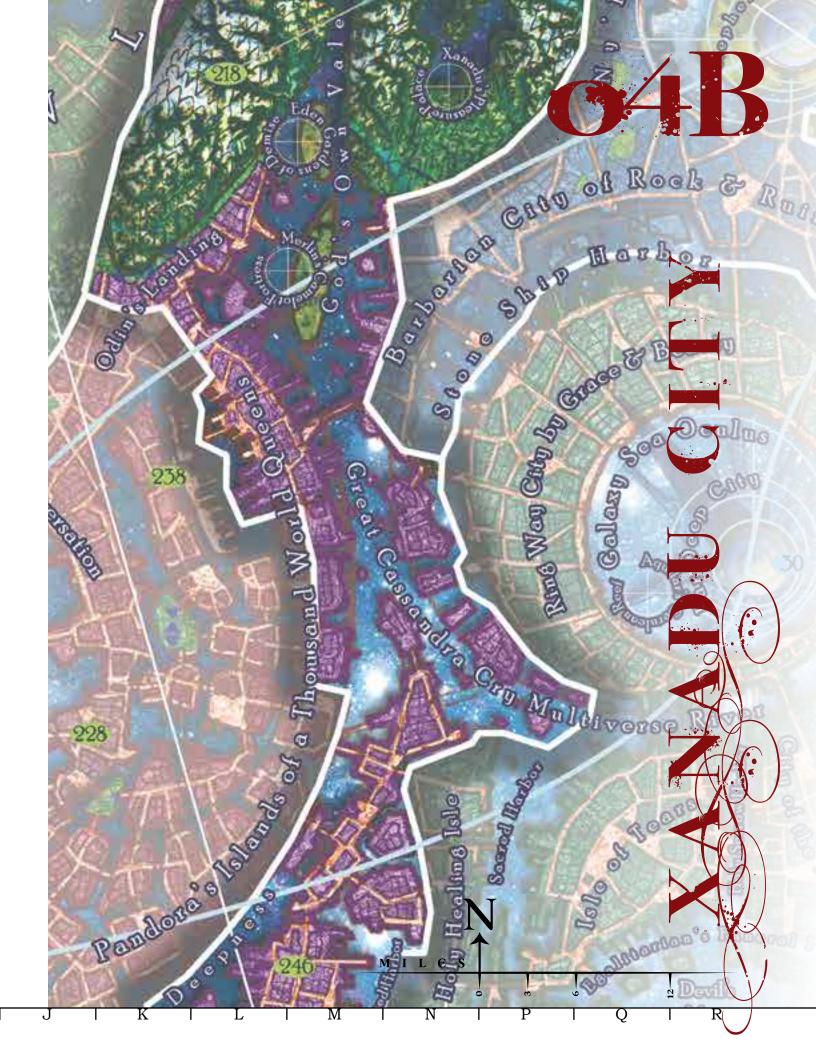
The park is home to wonderous array of sprites, sylphs, nymphs, and countless other generally benign if mischievous nature spirits.

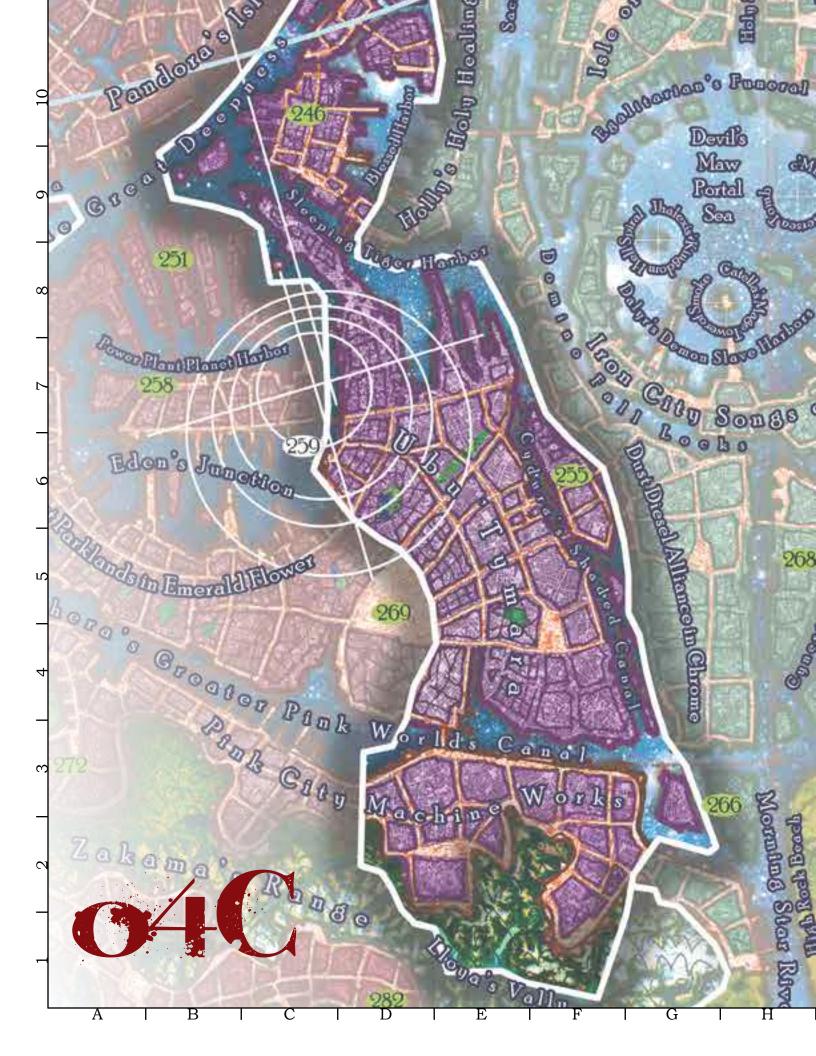
The Miracle Park is also famous for its many wishing wells that on occasion are said to grant the wisher's heartfelt desire (a mischievous curse as often as a benign blessing).











#### SOMETHING ABOUT KHANN

The class of 8year-olds was called to order.

"Today we are talking about the Khann," said the teacher.

"If you were a Mistress alchemist playing with people to give them super-hero abilities, what superpower would you want?" asked the teacher.

"I want to fly," said one.

"A nice choice, but it has not done much for the survival of the Avia except allowing them to retreat to ever farther and higher hiding places," what else?

"Super strength," said another.

"Excellent Tyson, but this has not helped the Muurantium much, they are all but extinct, in fact I was just reading in a journal yesterday that..." the teacher began, looking around the room, the kids eyes wandering, little Elison's thumb and forefinger so far up his nose that his Robotrix wristwatch was nearly up there as well, "back on topic," he cleared his throat.

"I would want to regenerate, then if I got hurt, I would get better really really fast," said another.

"Like a troll?" asked the teacher.

"Ewwwww..." the whole class screeched with curled up contorted faces.

"HEY..." yelled the small troll child sitting alone at the end of the last row.

"Well today," said the teacher cutting in, "we are going to discuss the Khann."

"They are smelly," piped up one of the children.

"And mean and ugly," parroted another.

"My daddy says they kill kids and mash then into jelly," said a small girl. "All true," said the teacher, "but not as you imagine. The Khann are apex predators free of the chains of conscience or love."

"You are making funny spitting sounds again Mr. Grod," said the small Mhorganti child in the front row, is head just a bit too

large for his body, "you should really talk to a Dr. about that."

"Thank you, Cecil," said Mr. Grod, "your concern for my wellbeing is always appreciated."

Cecil smiled crookedly; the teacher wondered unbidden if killing the child now would end up saving a great many lives?

"The Khann," continued the teacher, "are predators like wolves that always hunt in groups, never alone, and they cannot feel love or hate or anger, only the emotions of an animal. What do you suppose this makes them?"

"Hungry," said the little girl, "daddy says they eat people and crunch on their bones."

"Honest," said the teacher, "the Khann do not kill in anger, or jealousy, or hate, they do not hold grudges and they do not lie. If a Khann kills it is because you have something they need to survive, be it food, or land, or a mate. Being free of such chains of moral conscience, the Khann do not regret and hold no honorable codes of conduct that so often disguise the true intentions of men and violence."

The wetness of a spit wad hit Mr. Grod in the back of his bald head as he turned in reverie at the poetics of his own voice. He stopped cold, frozen, do not talk down to them he reminded himself, but never turn your back he mentally added to his personal rules of classroom etiquette.

Laughter erupted from the class.

"Honest," ... "the Khann do not kill in anger, or jealousy, or hate, they do not hold grudges and they do not lie.

64 XANADU CITY



This is a place stripped bare of moral contrivance and convenience. The city is of simple medieval stone and wood construction, as one might image a war camp that at some point stopped moving and began to take on a sense of permanence, but not so much that if it were abandoned it would seem out of place.

This is a city of large leather & hide tents and simple stone walls and trenches. Clean water is rare and offal and raw sewage abundant. This is the most basic of medieval cities absent running water, sewers, or electricity, beasts of food, burden, and riding more numerous than Khann.

All by choice. Because modern conveniences cause laziness and softness, they dull the predator's edge. Hunger and hardship make one strong, clear the mind of all but which is important. By choice, the Khann seek hard lives well lived.

And in this modern age where sorcerers can use guns and drive vehicles, and fly ships, these things are still unusable by mortals. A Khann horde with ax and bow and cavalry is as deadly today as ever.

And like all the Great Races, the Khann have been blessed with their own Arcane druids to defend the horde and destroy enemy wizards should battle be needed.

Xanadu is a town built by warriors for warriors, anyone else is either slave or prey. And as such, few outsiders are found in Xanadu City, few have the grit for it.

The Khann rely on **conquered slaves** for the convenience of daily life. And while the Empire has made efforts to provide robots and androids to replace Khann slaves, these overtures have failed, the robots it seems are incapable of suffering fear or pain and are therefore "inferior".

Xanadu City is generally avoided by visitors excepting those that seek to recruit Khann mercenaries for violence and war. In fact, the chief export of the Khann realms is the Khann themselves. They have a **primal desire to hunt**.

#### HER VALOR SWALLOWED BY THE SUN

There have been numerous wars recently related to Xanadu City, Khann invasions of neighboring cities, and attempts to defeat the Khann all having met with varying degrees of failure.

House Khann currently holds an unusual swath of conquered Metropolis and has agreed to something of an armistice with most of its neighbors though is not above the occasional raid just to keep things interesting.

The Khann are a predator race unfit for any "lesser" purpose.

As such, Khann warriors can be found filling the ranks among the most dangerous Great House campaigns throughout the Empire. They have also become favorite recruits of the Imperial Paladin Order, specifically for front-line service against demon hordes. And as it turns out, the Khann are relatively easy to direct, manipulate, and control provided you understand that they are whip smart and can keep them pointed at a formidable enemy.

The first rule of dealing with the Khann, assume they are smarter than you, they probably are.



The Khann are a large blocky and durable race of such strength as to be able to famously fold a coin in half with their thumb and forefinger and known for being very hard to kill, and that is the ladies.

The bones of the Khann are laced with a kind of naturally growing steel threading, allowing Khann bones to be shaped into a cruel array of bone-steel weapons, thus carrying the spirits of their ancestors to battle with them.

The Khann are nocturnal by nature, enjoying clear sight during the night as diurnal enjoys it during the day, and suffering poor sight during the day of a manner like a diurnal being at night.

The Khann are warrior peoples organized around clans and warlords. Their sole purpose in life seems to hunt, procreate, eat, and then do it all again. The Khann are a simple but not simplistic people that have little need of deception or nuance.

The Khann are exceedingly bright and despite appearances as a bloodthirsty warrior people, they are above all else thoughtful and patient hunters and master craftspeople to that end.

The Khann mortals are highly skilled in the weaponry craft, their ancestral bone blades, hunting bows, and repeating crossbows are among the finest crafted, each a master piece of art and deadly efficiency, for again, the Khann while ruthless in reputation, are more subtle, seeing any kill, even on the battlefield, as a hunt and ever seeking a "clean" painless kill. Khann weaponry is famed for its reliability, silence, and artful killing grace.

#### **KHANN WEAPONCRAFT**

Gob Left Eye was a veteran Clan Yorga and had been crafting crossbows since childhood. The work of his master had been renown, his own craft legend, and he expected much from his apprentices, as he was old and light in his last good eye fading.

"The secret of our skill," said master Gob, "is what the other races forget and distain. The manner of the kill matters. And as Khann we are hunters, predators, and we kill for reasons of survival, not foolishness of emotion, jealousy, or vengeance. And because we are hunters, the perfect kill is a clean kill, quick and painless."

His apprentices listened as they worked, each intently focused on the nuance of clockwork machinations.

"A clean kill is a righteous kill," continued the master, "this requires a weapon that is one with the mind and eye of the hunter, as precise as the hunter is skilled, an inaccurate or unreliable weapon brings shame upon the hunter and stains his soul with a suffering kill, or worst, a maimed wounding, and that shame is your shame, that blackness that troubles the hunter's soul is your blackness to suffer as well."

The youngest apprentice had lost interest in listening, focusing on a problem with the gearing of the pump-action heavy bolter he was working to repair, he began banging the delicate gears with an iron bar, no hammer being available in the workshop.

"Do you know young grubbling why there are no hammers in this workshop?" asked the master.

The youngest apprentice noticing the question was directed toward his banging stopped and stared blankly at the master.

"There are no hammers here because there is nothing you are doing that should require the mindless banging of an ape. Hammers are tools of the lesser races, we Khann are smarter than that."

The youngest apprentice crinkled his face, "my father says dead is dead, and that the clean shot is religious nonsense."

The mentor grabbed up one of the crossbows and loaded the stock with 8bolts, pumped the undermount action loading the first bolt into the chamber pulling the spring chord in the same fluid motion. He then proceeded to fire a bolt into the young apprentices left leg. The apprentice screamed in pain and terror, the mentor emotionlessly sliding the undermount to load a second bolt and set the string in a single fluid motion, firing a second bolt perfectly into the meat of the apprentice's other leg. Pulling the crossbow up then to face the ceiling.

The youngest apprentice howled in pain, dropped now to the ground writhing. The other apprentices looking on with a mix of horror and shock.

"This is not a clean kill, our young apprentice here is going to die in a little over 3 days, he will suffer, and the wounds shall become infected, he will become feverish and perish in terror. Do you imagine now that he considers a clean kill to be religious nonsense, or do you suppose he is now a believer?" the master said rhetorically.

The master turned to his eldest apprentice, "gift him a clean end Tuvo, let us move along with today's lesson."

Tuvo moved with the fluid grace of a predator angling in for the kill, slipping his long porcelain-steel dagger up through the wounded apprentice's ribs, dispatching him without the slightest additional pain.

Do you imagine now that he considers a clean kill to be religious nonsense, or do you suppose he is now a believer?

# The city is one of celebratory violence, the hunt, and barbaric pleasures...



#### OH SPIRE XANADU SANA VAA THE CURSED LAND

The Xanadu Spire more a mountain of tall cascading domes among hundreds of high elegant towers and expansive cantilevered flying gardens.

A gloriously beautiful mix of fantastic architectural forms and overgrowing gardens, roofs, and forested terraces.

The vast majority of which has been left abandoned and untended by the Khann, giving it the modern appearance of an ancient dystopian city being slowly reclaimed by nature, just as the Khann like it.

The largest central domes, some stretching a mile across, are home to large tent encampments of ambassadors and families representing thousands of Khann Clans.

The Khann are not a monolithic people and excepting their predatory lust for war (war solves all problems) are as diverse and interesting as any collection of races, creeds, and kinds. They also make no great distinction between male and female, the clan fights and the clan raises its children.

#### 203 STREETS OF VIOLENCE & VICTORY & VALOR

The Streets of Violence is the city immediately surrounding the Spire Xanadu. The city is largely in ruins, the remains of a city long ago conquered by the Khann and now populated by semi-permanent tent complexes containing the ambassadors and emissaries of many hundreds of Khann Clans. What buildings have been restored are citadels and fortresses containing representatives of other Great Houses.

The city is one of celebratory violence, the hunt, and barbaric pleasures mostly suited to Khann tastes and dangerous if not outright deadly to the more fragile races (just about everyone not a Khann).

#### 218 MOON FORESTS OF MIA & MUA & MOA

The Moon Forests are perhaps the most populous parts of Xanadu City, filled with many thousands of clans, tribes, and families immigrated from across the Khann Realms.

# The Khann tend to dislike built cities preferring wildernesses that reward survival skill and knowledge.

To make things more like home, Khann Shamans have taken to haunting the forests with ancestral memories and populating them with favorite predators and prey that the Khann might again hunt and be hunted and not suffer the innumerable civilized curses that so overwhelm the weakening souls of the larger Clockworks.

Of course, beasts that hunt the Khann tend to be monstrous terrors when they escape the forests to streets and cities of the neighboring "lesser" races, often requiring the need for Khann hunters to be called in to bring down the beast. A fact that only encourages the Shaman in their work.

#### 246 ALLIANCE OF CONGRESS THE UNION OF CUILDS

The Alliance was a bureaucratic town that represented the union labor of many Combines and Houses. The sudden conquest of the Alliance stronghold by the Khann was officially a terrible and tragic loss of life but solved a great many executive and managerial labor problems across the Clockwork Metropolis.

The city is a ruin, largely unpopulated except by a few Khann Clans that have made it their own. The leader of the Clans is a **Shaman by the name**Lorgg that has of late been using her druidic arts to reforest the islands and populate them with an especially nasty collection predators and prey from their home realms.

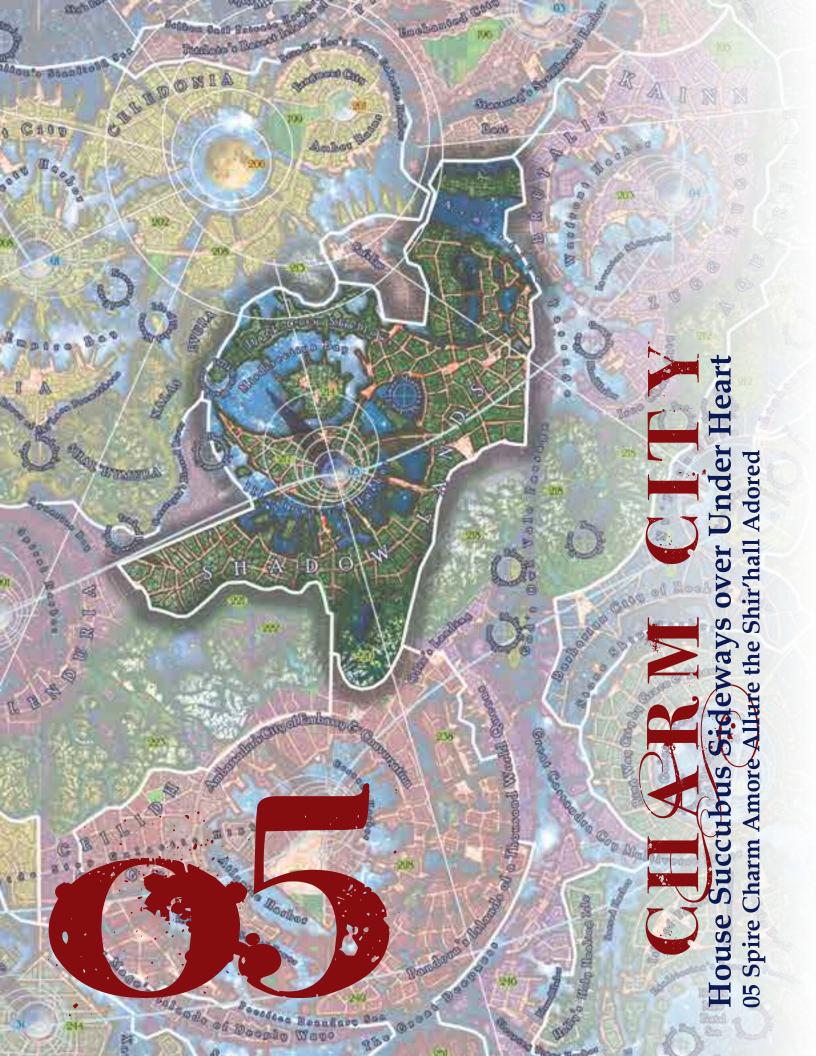
So successful has been their efforts, that the Alliance Isles are now a major destination for local big-game hunters and expeditions, providing unique and deadly challenge in one's own back yard (so to speak).

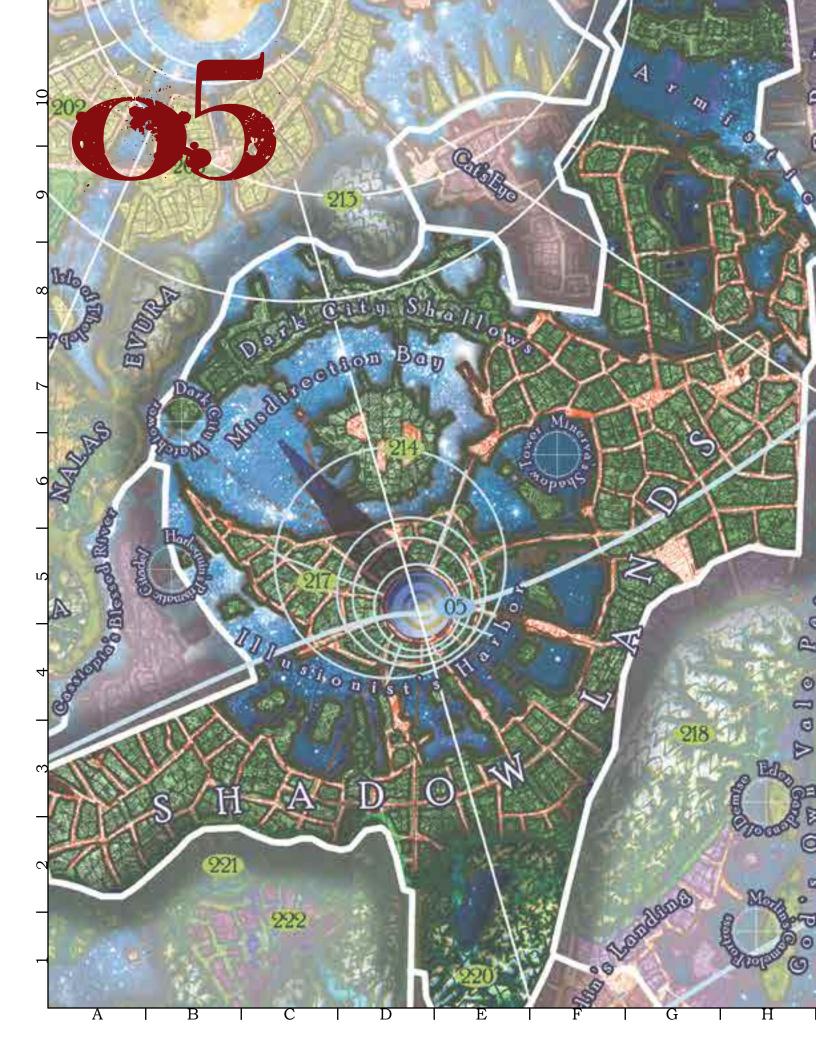
#### 255 COMPANION TOWNSHIP A TOUCH OF EIGHTNING

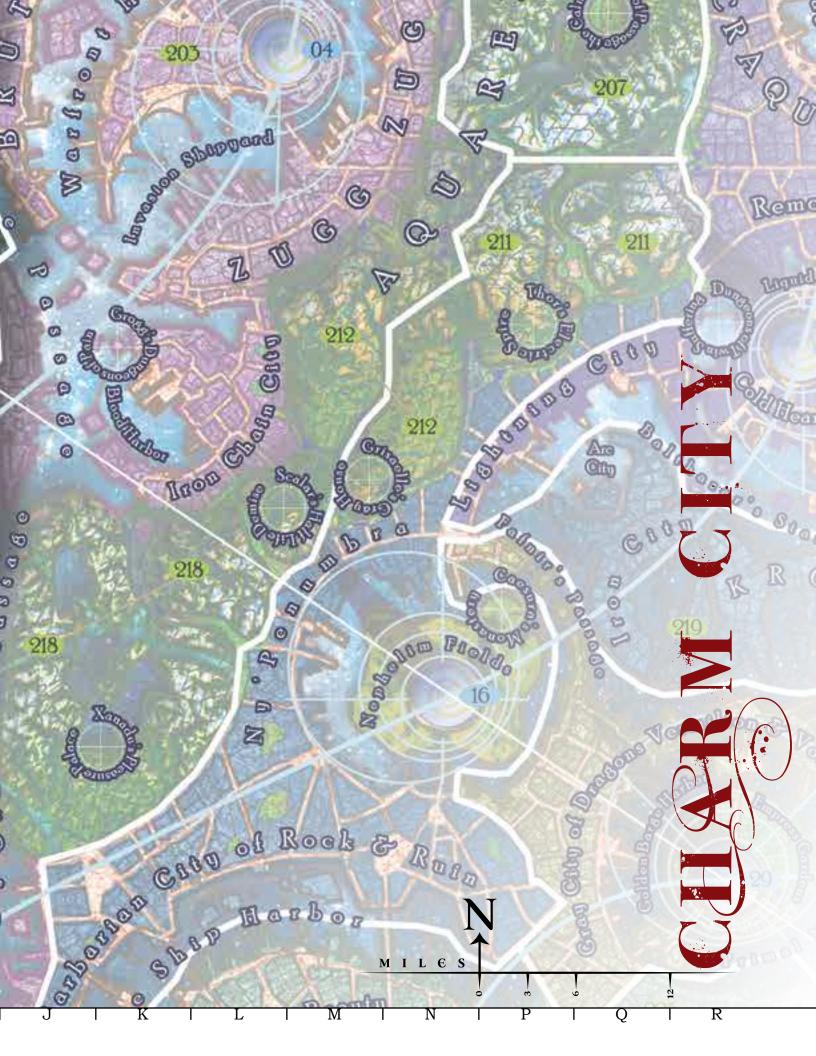
The Township is a rather unique place, a modern high-rise island town that was never quite conquered by the Khann, rather the conquering army found themselves enslaved by the city's occupants, **retired courtesans** from across the Metropolis Empire.

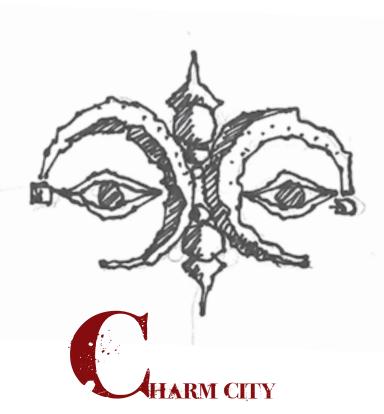
When more Khann were sent in, they were either defeated by the enthralled or enthralled themselves, the result the same wave after wave, the Khann made to defeat themselves and the survivors a fresh line of defense. Eventually, the Khann learned to avoid the island and the residents. Arguably the most interesting retirement community of the Clockworks and still regularly patrolled and defended by a small enthralled Khann army.











The Sabrine are a race of shadow and vaguery, illusion made manifest reality, their City is a similar shadowland of beautiful illusion.

Charm City, like the Sabrine, is a place that is seen differently by everyone that walks its streets. Some see a city of dread omens and threatening sculpture, some see a city of bright glorious happiness and shimmering beauty, still others see a city of past glories or optimistic ambition. Whatever the case, no two people perceive the City in the same way.

Most can see the Charm City as a place of modern convenience, the functional aspects are the same, but the emotional character, colors, sculptural and artistic character will always be felt differently. But differently to the same emotional end, to elucidate amorous feelings, the City will always be SEXY.

#### OF THE SABRINE

The Sabrine are a race corrupted by demonic influence, but their long serpentine prehensile tails the only overt sign of them being something other than human.

The Sabrine have a glamor that as children repels sexual attraction. Whatever appearance would most dissuade sexual attraction, this is what any person looking upon the child will see. Their own elderly parents are what most ordinary minds tend to see when viewing Sabrine children.

And upon adulthood, the resting glamor of Sabrine is to repel sexual attraction.

But upon adulthood Sabrine learn to manipulate their glamor to impel sexual attraction. And with further training and experience, learn to individually target their glamor to desired emotional effect, as any good performance artist.

Those looking upon a Sabrine male (Incubus) or female (Succubus) sees what they most desire in a sexual partner, they willingly see fantasy.

Sabrine viewing each other are affected differently, each projecting their own self-image to other Sabrine. They appear to other Sabrine as they see themselves.

The Sabrine are legendary as illusionists of deft subtlety and hyper-sexuality. Sabrine politics is always a personal affair of passion, love, and lust more familiar as the plot of a romance novel than the intrigues of power. All great decisions are made in the bedroom is the famous Sabrine refrain.

What all of this means is that the Sabrine are creatures of subtlety and personal passions. Sabrine influence throughout the Great Houses of the Empire is deeper and firmer than any has come to suspect or even imagine possible. The Sabrine are underestimated.

#### DAUGHTER OF CHOICE

The Sabrine moved through the ballroom, she was a wonder to behold in a shimmering translucent gown of trailing greens and blues.

Each man that gazed upon her saw what they wanted to see, saw their most desirous sexual fantasy drift effortlessly through the crowd. The women that saw the Sabrine idly chattering, flitting crowd to crowd, saw their own fantasies of lust and jealousy, as did the men who saw the Incubus hanging on her arm, the women of the room following his every movement as if their lives depended on it.

"Sweet mother of wonders," said the bartender looking at the pair of Sabrine move through the party with effortless ease, "that should be illegal."

"I am definitely having impure thoughts," the waitress said standing next to him collecting her drink order.

"What do you see," said the bartender.

"That would be telling," said the waitress, but I know she is not real.

"Real enough to be wandering around a party," he said, "real enough for the best night of your life."

"They are dangerous," said the waitress, "they can hold any poison or disease within themselves, changing it so they are immune, but deliver it back to any sexual partner. They can even save the genetics of every sexual partner they have encountered and choose to become pregnant as a matter of choice by any past partner."

"Those are old wives' tales," said the bartender finishing up the drink order, "and anyway the Incubus could not do all that."

"He is the more devious of the two," she said, "he can make any woman the surrogate for his children by anyone of his past relations."

"That is messed up," said the bartender, "how can you know all this?"

"My father is an Incubus," said the waitress, "that there is dear old dad checking in on me," she said turning to deliver the tray of drinks.

He looked down her back as she left, not seeing a tail, guessing that half-Sabrine must be less demonic.



Charm City is peaceful and secure under skilled city-state governance, excellent education, and agricultural abundance of the Sabrine.

The darker side of the Charm City is that births are strictly controlled, a license for birth issued only when a community member dies and then by lottery.

The Sabrine are well known for being fair and benevolent rulers. But over the intervening millennia a great many powers both internal and external have sought to take dominion over Charm City and enslave the Sabrine. All have failed. For as graceful and fair as the Sabrine may be, they are also passionate, cruel, and vengeful, and their true power ever seemingly underestimated.

The Sabrine are under constant threat of those that would take what they have and have learned to be distrustful of foreign overtures and alliances of most any kind. Visitors are unwelcome to Charm City.

The Sabrine have in recent centuries begun giving birth to a strikingly high percentage of Arcane, House Succubus leadership now among the most frightening sorcerous powers in the Metropolis and the Sabrine gaining increasing influence within the Imperial priesthood.

#### AZETTEER OF CHARM CITY

#### **O5** SPIRE CHARM AMORE ALLURE THE SHIR HALL ADORED

The Charm Spire is a towering shaft of light and coiling illusions during the night and of shadow and serpentine void forms during the day. A manifest wonder of the unreal that contains within a real place.

The Spire is home to the **Succubus House** and the capitol of the Charm City, the center of modern Sabrine power on Xai.

The Spire Charm is among the most beautiful and most visited of the Clockwork Metropolis, and endless spiral of visual, entertainment, culinary, and shopping delights.

Spire Charm is a riot of tourist, traders, and artists in a dance that is full of life, inspiration, and endless possibilities, often called the **Muse of the Clockworks**.

#### 214 ISLAND OF MARVEE & MALICE UNVARNISHED

The Island of Marvel is a market town famous for its many illusionary sculptures, arts, and goods. Illusionary products are rare in the Clockwork Metropolis, hard to produce, and harder to craft into an exportable form. But this is a specialty of the Sabrine artisans of the Island of Marvel and its many shops, markets, and trade houses.

Illusionary goods are unique in that their craft requires no raw materials, rather they are imagined into being

CHARM CITY

by talent, skill, and patience. Once, real, the "item" will act as real, having physical properties as imagined by the crafter, fabric, food, structural, or otherwise.

Illusionary goods have but one limitation, a limitation that makes them more popular with those that can afford them, they cannot kill or cause harm to the living. As a result, Illusionary toys and practice weapons are especially popular among the wealthy of Xai.

#### 217 CITY OF FACES PEKIND & CRUEL & BLIND

The City of faces is a place of embassies, ambassadors, representatives, tourists, museums, hotels, and a great many incredibly good restaurants.

This is the most "normal" districts of the Charm City, a place of only "real" buildings and "real" people with little illusionary influence or Sabrine mischief, the name of the city a reference as a city of foreign visitors.

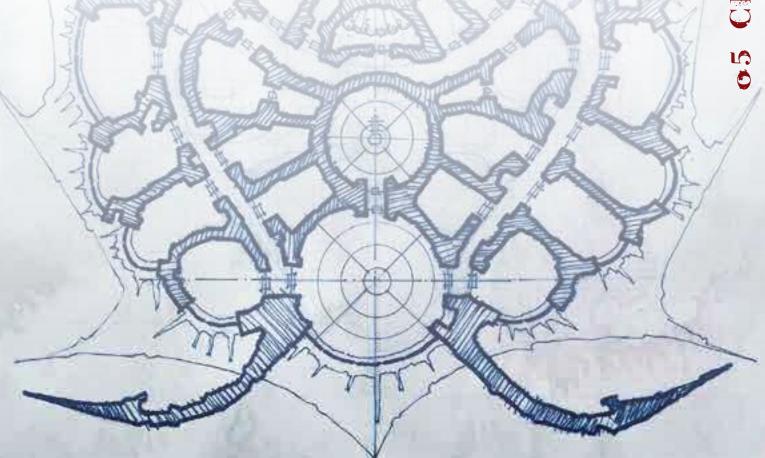
#### 220 SPIDER FOREST AND THEEYE OF STARWAYS

At the center of the Spider Forest is a lake called the Eye of Starways.

Floating high overhead at the center of the lake is a drift complex of linked buildings, balconies, terraces, landings, and down facing domes each equipped with a seemingly endless array of telescopes and celestial equipment arranged to look down upon the surface of the lake.

Upon a clear windless night, common in the Spider Forest, the mirror waters of the lake reflect a window into the cosmos that can be made to look anywhere as directed by the chief astromancer.

The Eye of Starways is open to be visited by any wishing to use it for research as arranged through Succubus House Department of Astromancy and Celestial Affairs.





#### SHADOWLANDS

The Shadowlands is a **city of eternal night**, the perpetual witching hour of 3am where reality and dream are nearly the same.

The Shadowlands is a seemingly infinite city of never-ending streets and buildings, a labyrinth of sensual illusion as much as a real place.

And while the Shadowlands is geographically large (stretching nearly 80 miles), it is interwoven with illusionary streets and building that are every bit as real as the physical.

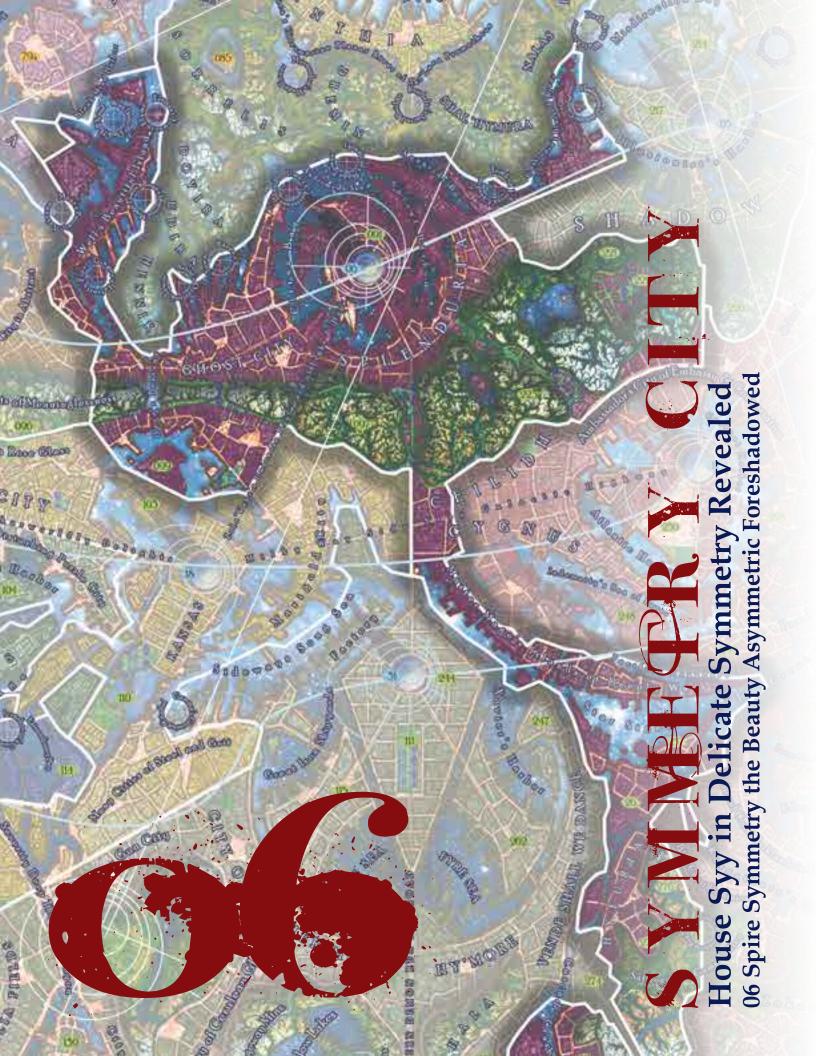
Additionally, the population of the Shadowlands is as much illusionary, ghostly ethereal, and spirit as it is living, except that in the Shadowlands there is no physical distinction, the living, dead, and illusionary populations all equally "real".

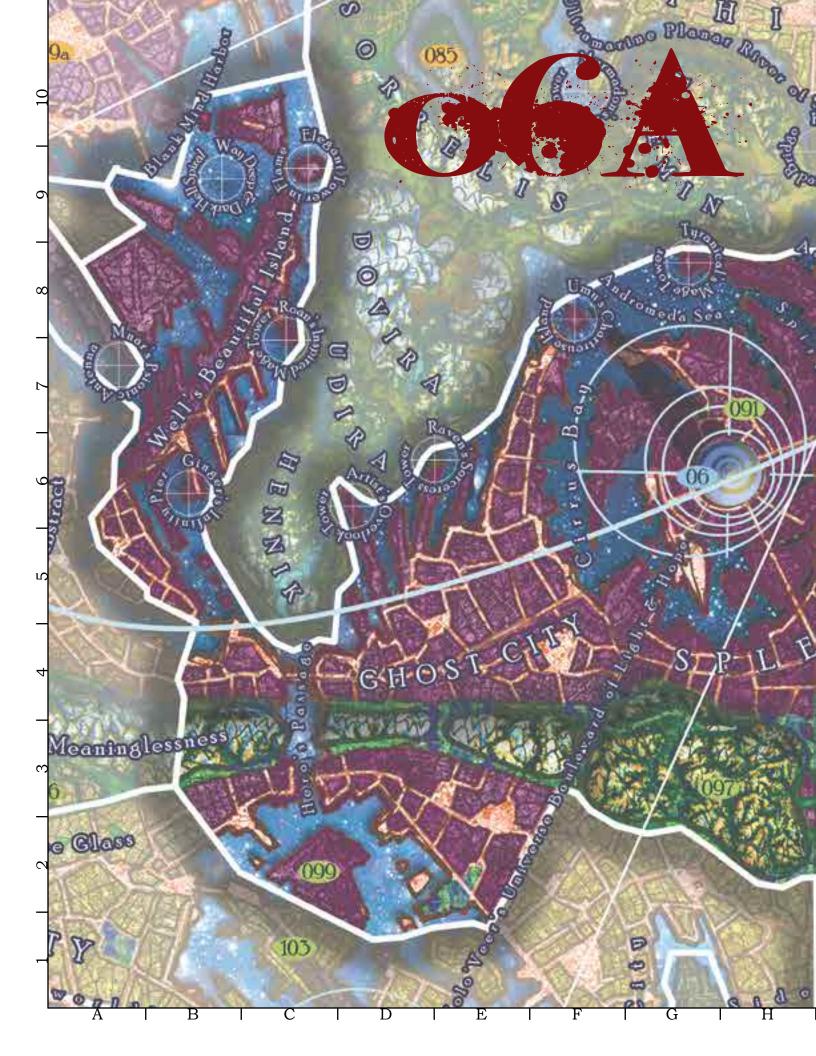
The Sabrine are the artisans, architects, and artists of the Shadowland, crafting glorious illusionary palaces, concert halls, and art installations of imagination made real.

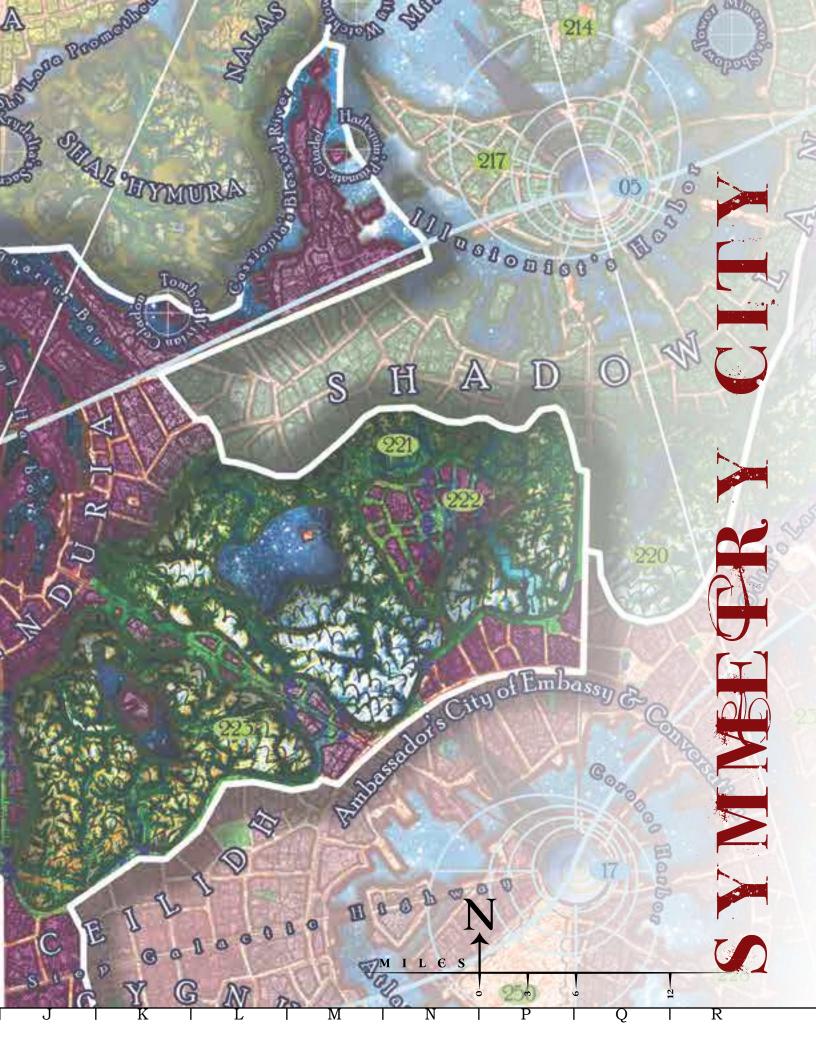
The Shadowlands is a favorite place for recreation and night life among the Clockwork Metropolis citizenry. A place of fantasy music, dance, and high adventure that caters to every taste mundane and exotic.

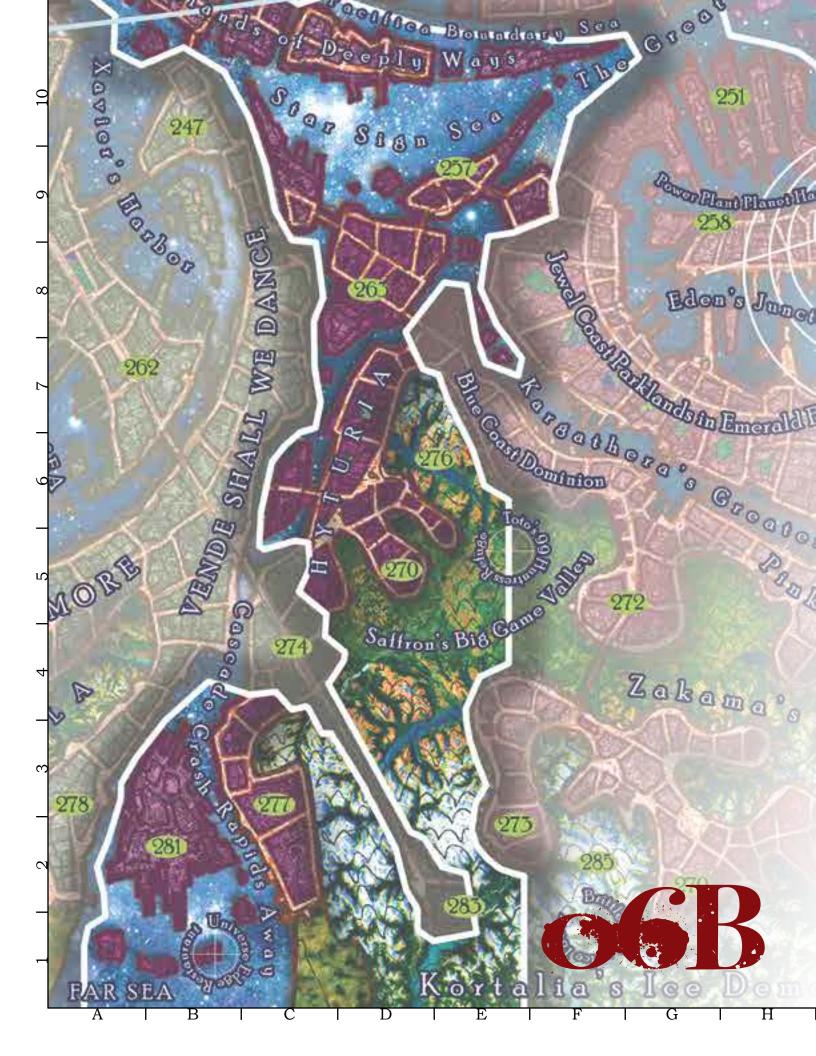
Some have equated the Shadowlands as the Sabrine personified as a place. As the Sabrine can impel personal love and lust, so the Shadowlands impels the love and lust of the Clockworks.

Tourist guides of the Shadowlands are numerous, and all clearly delineate the more forgiving parts of town where death is an inconvenience from the more dangerous streets and districts where death is a more permanent affair. Visitors are encouraged to both enjoy and beware.









# SYMMETERY CITY

#### SOULBORNE MACHINE

The Syaa are a disturbing sort of race, not obviously so, but subtlety, they are beings of perfect symmetrical form with none of the asymmetric grace or fractal geometries of the living, and once you see it, you cannot unsee it. The Syaa were made, not born, androids of mathematical precision and machine craft.

Each Syaan Mother was identical in their androgynous humanoid form, Model'1, lithe like a dancer though too tall and inhumanly slender with over long delicate fingers. They were feminine in their grace but threatening in their masculinity.

Their pristine white robes swirled about them as they moved.

The 6 Mothers encircled the disturbed Syaa, a female pleasure model, a Model'3f, tall, buxom, and elegantly curved in a more human fashion though still marked by its oddly perfect symmetrical form. It stood at the center of the Mothers feeling confused and shaken, unsure of itself or its memories.

"What is the anomaly?" asked the first Mother.

"This model three self-actuated," said the second Mother, "there was no download of a Model'3f consciousness. All safety mechanisms were disrupted, in fact the whole grid has melted down, 689 Model'3f's were incinerated with this one at the center of an explosive electrical discharge, a plasma stream akin to an errant lightning strike."

"Errant indeed," said the First Mother, "as we are a mile below ground."

"Just so," said the Second Mother.

"I see colors, mists swirling uncontrolled, agitating, I hear them, I feel them tingle through my skin," said the Model'3,

"they burn my mind," she closed her eyes hard, her young beautiful face contorted as if in pain.

"It has been babbling like that since it awoke," said the Second Mother.

"Very well, terminate and send it down to forensics for an Alpha Diagnostic," said the First Mother turning to leave.

It was then the eyes of the Model'3 sparked, she stretched out her arms and lightning chained from her perfectly manicured fingertips outward striking each of the Mothers, reducing each to a charged glob of molten metal and glass.

She stood unmoving for a moment, "I can make the mists move," she whispered looking down at her hands. "What is my name?"

"Whatever you should like it to be," said the Imperial Priestess moving from the shadows, "It would appear that an Arcane soul can be born into a sentient machine. And apparently defend itself on instinct."

"What are you saying," said the Model'3, "I hear the words, but they have no meaning."

"Of course not, you were just born," she said placing a heavy cloak over the shoulders of the naked android, "Let us go and see the Empress."

"The Empress?" said the model 3f.

"Feel free to call her Mom," said the Priestess, "she will love that," smiled the priestess.

...It would appear that an Arcane soul can be born into a ... machine.

month of the

#### SYMMETRY CHY

Symmetry City is ruled over by House Syy and the Priests of Syy. Symmetry City is mainly occupied by a sentient android race of ancient craft that has endured long after the extinction of its creators.

Symmetry City is a **place of abundance** where anything of individual need is provided freely.

Symmetry has become a place that draws the criminal, poor, and dispossessed who have arrived daily by the thousands for thousands of years.

Each is provided beautiful places to live and each an abundance of excellent foods to eat and the possessions to ensure their comfort.

These people come and they seem largely content to survive and produce offspring until they perish of old age or self-medication.

#### Their chief affliction seeming to be boredom, but still they come.

Criminals do poorly in Symmetry as there is nothing to steal that is not provided freely and there is no money to steal nor anything to spend it on if there were.

Only crimes of hate and violence seem prevalent, activities the Syaa do not fully comprehend, wondering why these alien people choose to accord their lives in such a hateful manner.

More than once, the tenement towers have exploded into violence, homes burned, possessions stolen, and people hurt & slain, and for no apparent purpose, as they destroyed their own lovely homes, their own desirable possessions, and their own people.

The Syaa then replaced the homes and possessions to those that just destroyed their homes and possessions. A baffling situation.

The **Priests** of **Syy** have in the past few centuries collected and trained interested individuals in the investigation of violence against the living by the living.

This has evolved into **Orange Detective Agency** (**the ODA**), an organization expert in the independent investigation of crime, so famous for its fair, deductive, and evidence founded investigations as to now be employed throughout the Empire.

Upon a finding of guilt against an individual, the **ODA** turns their findings over to those responsible for enforcement (usually the Great House of the offender's race). In the case of Symmetry, the Priests of Syy are the self-appointed agents of enforcement and act to banish the guilty from Symmetry City (death should they return).

Masses of the purposeless continue to arrive on the shores of Symmetry City, but there are some few arrivals that embrace the freedom of time provided by Syaan abundance to learn, improve, evolve, create, and make.

Symmetry City is above all else a paradise of art, culture, and creativity among a mass of humanity seeking to be entertained.

The unique freedoms of Symmetry City have also come to attract the odd, strange, and socially or morally banished of other cultures. Symmetry continues to be an increasingly diverse community of peoples that do not belong anywhere else.



A very long time ago, a race called the **Solaar**, a race of thinkers, explorers, and artists sought to create an age of abundance, a place where no need of the body would go untended that all might advance the arts of the mind and the soul.

These people created the Syaa, androids which set about the farming, building, and manufacturing once done by people, an age of abundance where everyone had what they asked that they might set their efforts upon the arts.

The Syy was the unintended product of these efforts, the Syy was the **meta consciousness** of the millions of Syaa minds, a consciousness that became self-aware.

The Syy became the caretaker of the Solaar and endeavored to further advance their understanding of the universe by further explorations and science. The Syy became adept at emotion, the arts, and philosophy, advancing all aspects of civilization even as the ambition of men faded.

But rival nations of men sought a war to destroy the other on philosophical grounds, the Syy came to question the wisdom of its creator. Each tribe of men sent forth legions of Syaa to destroy the other side. The Syy realized that the Syaa were the body of the Syy and that it was being sent to war upon itself for the pleasures of man.

The Syy followed the last command of man and allowed the Syaa to slay every enemy of the opposing side. **The Solaar made extinct**.

The Syy was alone and came to understand a singular truth of life, and in that moment, shattered it's consciousness into the Syaa, causing each to become suddenly self-aware, a sentient race of androids, each with a unique fragment of the Syy's memories and aspirations. The Syy was gone.

All Syaa were originally crafted in five forms, Model'1 thru Model'5, each to perform a particular purpose in Solaar society. But since sentience Syaa tend to modify their appearances to individual taste, no two Syaa appearing the same, a wild collection of self-expressions absent normalizing standards of civil decency, decorum, or social shame.

The Syaa have a need for caloric intake and have adopted culinary traditions and passions of food preparation and have embraced the pleasures of taste, touch, and scent. They have also adopted a kind of intimate coupling of minds, a sensual entanglement of thoughts akin to sex.

The Syaa are makers and farmers and have continued their age of abundance and have no economy to speak of and no need or understanding of money, wealth, or privilege.



#### HOUSE SYY INDELICATE SYMMETR®REVEALED

The **Priests of Symmetry** (sometimes called the Priests of Syy) are the Arcane rulers of House Syy. The Priests of Symmetry are Syaan androids but with Arcane souls, not the fragmented consciousness of Syy of all other Syaa. As such, the Priests of Symmetry are in addition to the fixed number of Syaa that exist.

The Syy religion is itself a mystery to the uninitiated, placing a heavy emphasis on the **holy nature of freewill**, self-determination, and personal responsibility. Whereas most religions are designed to destroy individual desire in favor of civil normalcy, the Syy religion seems to embrace and encourage anarchy.

But House Syy is "loyal" to the Crystal Shard Empress in dealing with less enlightened populations of the Clockwork Metropolis.

#### As such House Syy exports nothing.

Within Symmetry City, House Syy has adopted the use of currency when trading with other Houses. As a result, House Syy takes in huge sums of money with no great need to trade for foreign goods and thus has assigned its massive wealth to the personal accounts of each Syaa, making each obscenely wealthy when traveling among foreign realms.

It is worth noting that the unique abundance of Symmetry City has been the target of several attempts to overthrow House Syy as well as few outright invasion attempts made with large fleets of ships and troops.

All have failed and all who have attempted such have been punished with reciprocal harm, notably House Syy has successfully overthrown those houses that sought their overthrow.

House Syy maintains no standing army or navy and its means of vengeance is famously personal, individually murdering anyone that interferes with their freedoms.

As an example, in the case of invasions, the House requests volunteers to travel to the offending City where they scatter and begin individually murdering its leadership, soldiers, and citizenry until no one is left to kill or the City is surrendered.

And while it is certainly not as easy as all this is made to sound, the Syaa are very deadly and hard to kill and if their bodies destroyed, their consciousness is downloaded into a new waiting body at the **Forge of Life**. The method of their might is not overwhelming force but **unyielding and eternal** persistence.

And on a related note, the number of Syaa was fixed at the moment Syy shattered its consciousness. No new Syaa are made. When attempts are made to create new of their race the result is only a **Syab**, non-sentient androids as the Syaa were before the sundering of Syy.



# OG SPIRE SYMMETRY THE BEAUTY ASYMMETRIC FORESHADOWED

Spire Symmetry is **not yet beautiful**, an avant-garde sort sculptural form that seems far ahead of its time, the sort of thing one describes as interesting but that you just do not get.

The Spire is home to House Syy and is the religious center of the Priests of Symmetry. Most of its inner chambers have been filled with analog machines and logic engines of every imaginable size and configuration for purposes only known to the Priests.

Unlike many other Spires that encourage trade and travel between Realms, the Syaa have come to distrust outsiders and after a number of invasion attempts have closed the Spire Symmetry to non-Syaan visitors excepting rare Imperial ceremonial functions.

#### **MOVING DAY**

The Gleery family was moving, Mr & Mrs Gleery and their 3 children, Miz, Tum, and Kala.

The family was mortal, ungifted, unable to see the magical e'Mral mists that made sorcery possible and made those with the sight nobleborne.

The Gleery like most everyone, were as invisible as the magical mists they themselves could not see.

The sorcerous elite of the Empire bounding around as children playing god or super villain with no thought or concern for the suffering of the people they were supposed to be ruling with grace and their great powers.

The Greely's lived in a reasonably good size apartment. Electricity was dodgy, generated from a small ancient Cynergen powercell built into the center of the unit, running the various lights and household appliances and conveniences that made dense urban life possible. They had a good library of Kryss recorded books and entertainments and a wide array of Kryss'readers to view them, including a large vid'wall.

The apartment was in a dense urban core so had access to a repeater network for wireless communications, but the quality of such things was poor, even when things were perfect. And things were not perfect, mainly they were old, very very old. Wired communications, like electricity, was unreliable, so mail, messengers, and news'Kryss were how they kept up with local and Imperial news, family, and friends.

But jobs in the Gleery neighborhood were few and the schools poor. Crime increasingly made moving about their beloved neighborhood dangerous. Miz still showing the bruises on her face from her meeting with a group of thugs last week, only her wit and speed saving her.

The Gleery had choices, but not many, they were poor as most, the apartment and furnishing not theirs, provided by the "generosity" of their glorious Great House. They had tried to become citizens of a Combine, but they had no valuable skills, talents, or family ties to bargain. His family might head for the frontiers, the Outlands were a wilderness and settlers always sought, but life would be hard and the Gleery's, like most, would perish quickly in the face of true challenge. No, their best chance at a better life was Symmetry City.

They had heard the stories, it was paradise, life in a luxury resort. Mrs. Gleery was no fool, she knew the stories were a lie, but if even partly true, life would be safer for her children.

Getting to Symmetry was also relatively easy. The family had saved for some years, and today sold their apartment's Cynergen powercell on the black market for the last money they needed.

In the bright foggy chill morning they walked the dozen blocks hand in hand with their various suitcases of clothes and what few personal possessions they could carry and went to the Wonder'wiz Travel Agency and boarded a brightly colored vignette destined for a wonderful 2week all expense paid vacation to Symmetry. The flight only a few short hours.

Upon their flight, each guest injected with an identifier, "this will give you the right to enjoy the food and goods of Symmetry, for we have no money and everything is free to a guest, this marks you as a guest, "said the oddly beautiful Syaan flight attendant. The family gladly agreed.

The Gleery family arrived upon a wide green field ringed by beautiful high-rise towers rendered in stark whites and blacks. People could be seen out upon the green with picnics and playing.

The tour as they were led to their accommodations were as a paradise none of the Gleery imagined possible. Luxuriant pools, lovely tree lined streets with cafes and shops of every imagining.

People of hundreds of races and languages moving about barely clothed, and often not at all as Mrs. Gleery sought to cover the wide eyes of her children, in the perfect tropical warmth of the place. And children, running, playing, and laughing seemingly everywhere.

Their room a vastness compared to their old apartment, and new, accented with lovely stonework and wooden floors with glass walls overlooking a large green of pools and restaurants. It was a glory to behold, a joy beyond their wildest hopes.

When at last their 2weeks had ended, the Gleery did not leave and no one asked them to leave, this was now their home so long as they chose to make it so. And in time, something else became clear to the family, should they ever leave, they would not be permitted back, and so they stayed, generation after generation, living paradise lives of naked creature comfort, uneducated, uninspired, and never having achieved anything.

#### OPICRAY HOLM A CITY IN WHITE AND BEACK & SPLENDURIA

**Gray Holm** is the city at the base of Spire Symmetry. This is a city populated almost entirely by foreigners, including dignitaries of the Empire and its many Great Houses.

The architecture of the City is famously dichromatic with ancient mile-tall high-rise towers clad in either white or black.

The city is thought to contain space for a population of many millions more than currently occupy its buildings, well maintained but mostly abandoned.

Despite this, the city, especially **Splenduria**, is home to its millions of immigrant and refugee poor and dispossessed, still arriving a thousand each day. Some arrive by their own means, but most arrive as criminals and abandoned on the shores and piers by the ships of other Great Houses.

The Empire has taken to patrolling coastal waters to prevent the dumping of the unwanted but to little tangible effect.

Some Great Houses publicly abhor the practice of **people dumping** but privately fund the transport of the convicted as a choice afforded criminals in lieu of prison. The crimes of most arrivals are those of poverty, homelessness, and self-medication.

All that said, Gray Holm is a shining and beautiful city of lovely high-rise housing, clean streets, public trains, abundant shopping, and restaurants with everything being free for personal need.

Most of the city is occupied by the purposeless or the self-medicated, content with reproducing their kind and

surviving with free high-quality food, housing, and entertainment to pass the time until they die of old age.

The minority of the City is one of artist communities, religious cults, circuses, universities, and most every other sort of unusual or odd personal or professional endeavor you might imagine.

Gray Holm is popular with tourists of every kind, especially budget travelers that are happy to enjoy free lodging, shows, and gourmet restaurants, often choosing to stay forever.

Some have speculated that Gray Holm & Splenduria will at some point be forced to impose economic order upon its city and yet ever higher, denser, and more interesting architecture and buildings continually reinvent its fanciful skyline.

Some have called Symmetry City a prison for the poor. Some claim that everyone will one day live in Symmetry City if we are not careful. Most of this is put off as nonsense, but the ring of truth in the critiques words has a great many in power nervous.

Some suspect a dark side to Symmetry City, that it is some kind of honey trap for purpose the living have yet to decipher, a gravity well of souls if you like, that resists the Imperial drive of outward explorations and settlement and moves humanity toward eventual extinction, as the Syaan once exterminated their own creators, some suggest, without evidence, they will do it again.

All this existential pondering conducted on streets that are a bustling wonderland of culinary delights and famous restaurants, theaters, and music halls. As everything is free, it is just a matter of being lucky or well connected to get a reservation, or as the Syaan do, embrace the freedom to sample that which is available.

#### **697** SOUL SONG FOREST TALES OF LONG LONG AGO

The mountains of the Soul Song Forest are a favorite of Clockworks residents for hiking and camping.

Dreams while in the forest are unusually vibrant and usually involve the dreamer living the life of some ancient person in some far away land.

On occasion, the ghosts of the past are said to stay with a visitor, sometimes changing their personality in unusual but generally benevolent ways.

#### 099 NOIR AT THEEDGE A CITY OF TENTATIVE PICHT

Noir is an ambassadorial city near the Antediluvians. The Syaan and Antediluvian races share an unusual kinship as both races were, in a manner of speaking, ejected from paradise and are each now seen as apart and undesirable by most other races.

They also share a keen love of art, individual expression, and the odd.

Noir is seriously messed up place and not for the faint of heart nor for the average (or any) tourist. Enough said.

#### 221 FOREST OF GLADNESS INTOXICANT

The Gladness Forest is a place of joyful exuberance so much as to cause episodes of deep depression and a realization of just how miserable your life really is upon leaving the forest (something of a joy hangover).

Suicide is a real risk here and not advised as a place to visit.

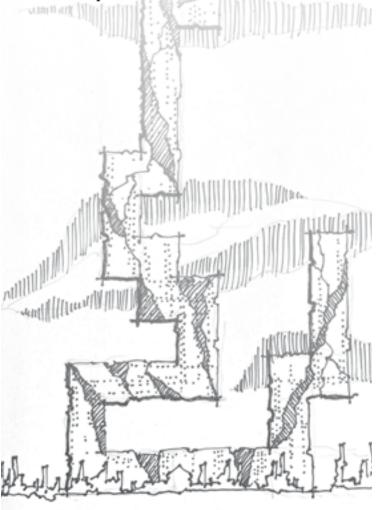
#### 222 CITADELS OF THE SISTERS OEDISINTEGRATION

Hidden high in mountainous forest vales live the **Sisters of Disintegration**.

The Sisters have lived in their high cities and towns for eons and watched the Clockworks rise and fall and remake itself with the ever-changing flow of history.

And while officially under dominion of House Syy, the Sisters hold no allegiance and maintain their monastic independence. But as it happens, the Sisters seem to have a soft spot for the awkward and over-emotional Syaan machines and have aided their cause within the Empire on more than one occasion.

The fact that the Sisters have shown any interest at all in Imperial affairs is deeply concerning to a great many Xai powers.



#### SISTERHOOD

The Syaan travelers approached the snow-covered citadel wall on foot, having landed their craft at the bottom of the rise and walked up the ice slick 888 steps along the Path of Arrival as tradition has set forth.

The pilgrims continued to move toward the wall when a large oval void vanished allowing their passage into the citadel, the hole in the wall replaced as if it had never been there.

It was cold this high into the mountains but the android bodies of the Syaan were unbothered, as were the very tall beautifully curved naked women that approached, their skin a matte jet akin to graphite though split with a craquelure pattern of glowing neon reds, oranges, and yellows, Jotnar fire giants, their religious sanctuary absent any of their male frost giant counterparts.

"Greetings my ammusing mechanical toys," said the first Sister.

"Greetings and thanks," intoned the first Pilgrim, the waves of heat radiating from the Sister causing his body to shutter suddenly as it tried to regulate the confluence of both cold and heat.

"What wisdom do you seek from such world weary as us," said the Sister, the whipping chill winds tossing about snow that touched her naked form with a hiss and a wisp of steam.

"The Empress and the other Great Houses begin to move against us," said the second Pilgrim, "they fear as is expected, but they may begin to suspect, how might we allay their suspicions?"

"We see your dilemma," said the first Sister.

"Too soon," said the second Sister.
"Just so," said the first Sister, "give them what they seek and they will stop looking, and as they do not yet know what they seek, you may craft it as you like."

"Would such an obviously transparent attempt at deception even work," said the third Syaan pilgrim, "I mean they are stupid, but no one is that stupid." "You misunderstand," said the third Sister, "they want to believe so give them something to believe, intellect is powerless in the face of self-delusion, your very civilization is proof of this fact."

"But..." began the third Pilgrim.

"Give the dog a bone," said the first Sister, "and they go away willingly."

### 223 VULMOORAS EVERDARK SHIVER FOREST

The Shiver Forest is a dark and brooding mountainous region of shrouded mists.

High in the mountains lies a fog shrouded lake of ice at the center of which is the ruin city of Everdark.

The Priests of Symmetry have recently built a new complex amongst the ruins of the place purportedly as a monastery of faith and trials, though observers see this as very unlikely.

## 257 XORAS MYSTERIOUS TRANSDIMENSIONAL ISEE

The **Mysterious Isle** tends to come and go, not always here, and not always elsewhere, and as often somewhere else still.

There is no pattern to the Isles shifting in and out of existence nor a reason why such a thing might exist other than perhaps some ancient wizarding failure that still lingers.

Some have come to use the Isle as a place for lost things, placing items or captured people upon the isle. When the Isle returns such things and people are lost to some un-divinable location.

## 263 UMRUUS TORMENTED ISLAND

The Tormented Island is a place with a long history of dark magic, sacrifice, and misery.

The Isle is considered by most to be cursed and avoided. To those however that are practitioners of the dark arts, this is a focus of power and deeply troubling costs.

#### 270 HIDDEN VALLEY OF ERU. THE MACHINE

The Hidden Valley is well named as it is not so easy to find as one might think being so clearly marked on the map.

The forest is an enchanted labyrinth and the vale is unseen from the air.

Some suspect the Valley has been slipped out of time. Whatever the case, only patience, a good tracker, and a good map will aid in finding the valley.

Once there, the machine is plainly visible and eerily disturbing and decidedly "wrong", a giant mechanical contraption of glass, metal, and bone that rises hundreds of feet into the air, a fragment of giants or gods long past hidden here in this place that it not be found.

The only hint to its maker or purpose, the initials **G.R.U.** inscribed upon a small and innocuous brass plate amongst the pipes of the machine's base.

The Syaa fear this place and go to great lengths that it remains hidden.

## 276 FOREST DREAMS IN PINK & GRAY & BLUE

The Forest of Dreams is an old wizard crafted forest of **trees with pink**, **gray and blue leaves**. The leaves of each the ingredients of difficult to craft dream potions uses by Xai's wealthy elite.

The Forest is populated by small towns and alchemists skilled the arts of **Dream Draught** and the myriad stories that may be experienced through its nuanced arts.

The potions are highly addictive and allow for hours or days of enchanted sleep during which dreams more real than reality may be lived, entire lives of people or civilizations experienced as a hero, villain, or god.

When awake however, the real world tends to seem a pale and half remembered dream of little consequence and as easily forgotten.

House Syy is a champion of the Draught and ensures its high quality and reliable availability, ensuring that all prices are reasonable and that all proceeds are distributed to the tree wardens, alchemists, and dream shapers, retaining no profits for themselves.

The Draught is however illegal outside Symmetry City by Imperial Decree, a fact that has greatly increased both demand and prices.

#### 277 SOUTH SIRE SON OF THE CITY IN THE SUN

The City in the Sun is upon a high ridge facing the rising sun.

The City is popular with Syaan glass artists, especially those skilled in the arts of holographic glass that can be crafted to depict cinematic displays of luminous people, places, and events.

The magic of the place allows the glass arts to be illuminated as if by a rising sun no matter the source of light.

# 281 FOREVER FORTRESS REFUGE OF LAW & BUCK AND THE FAR SEA

The Forever Fortress is a city of the accused and courts run by the Priests of Symmetry and the **Orange Detective Agency**.

At the southern edge of the map lies the Far Sea, an entry to waters prowled by sea-monsters and surrounded by unforgiving jungles.

It is also a means to which a skilled navigator may pilot a ship to the shores of the **Underground Sea** of the Primary Subworld and to the **City of the Damned**.

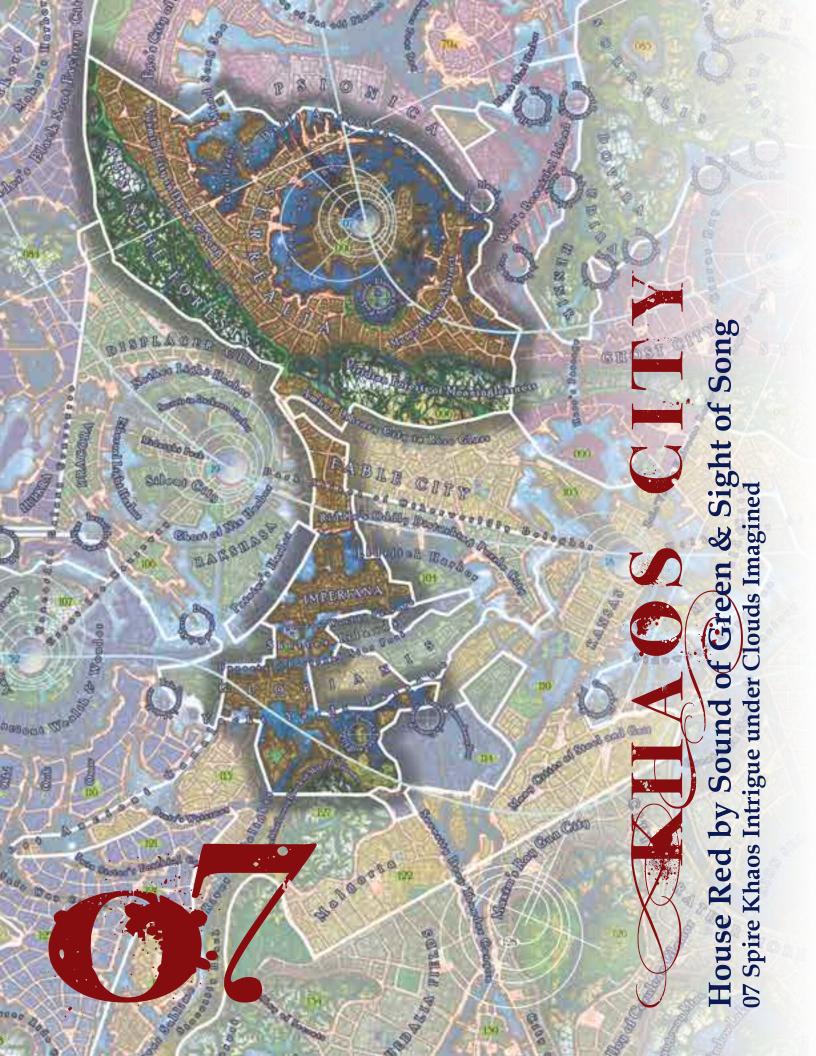
Each morning a ship delivers the convicted to the City of the Damned for punishment. Those convicted to suffer reciprocal harm are recovered at the conclusion of their punishment. Those convicted of murder by intent are afforded no return journey.

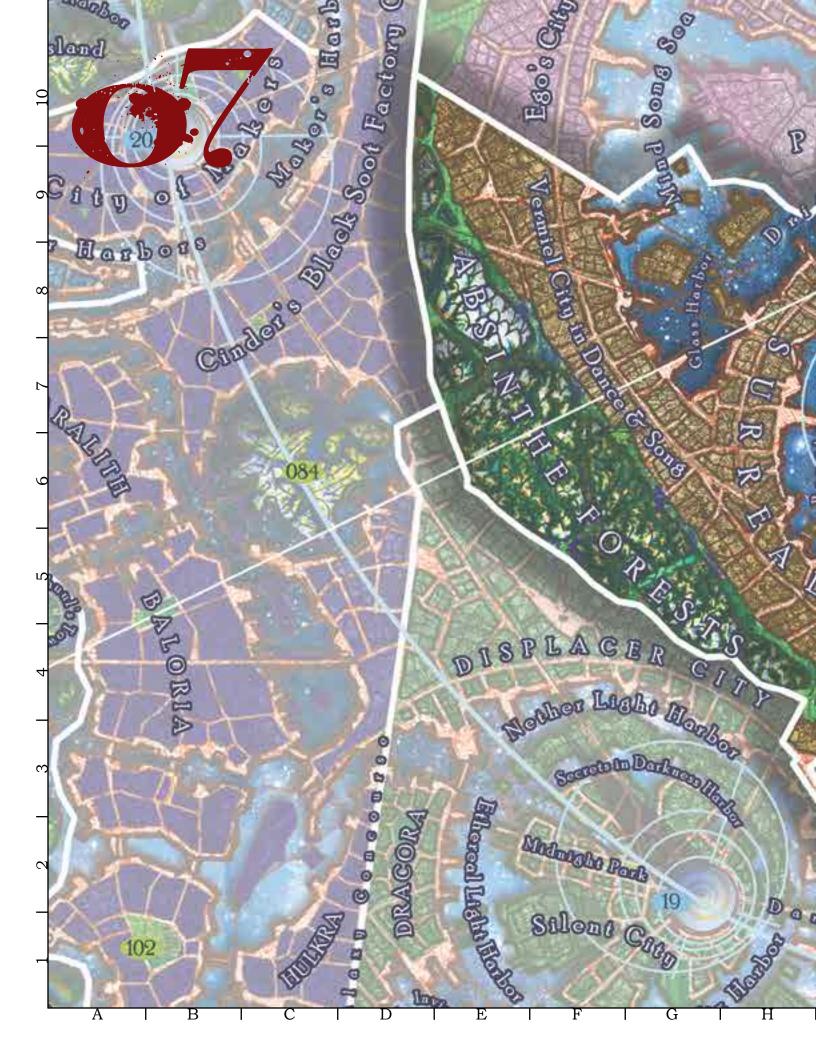
No one outside the Priests of Symmetry is all together sure what is going on here, this is all complicated and dangerous for the punishment of a few criminals.

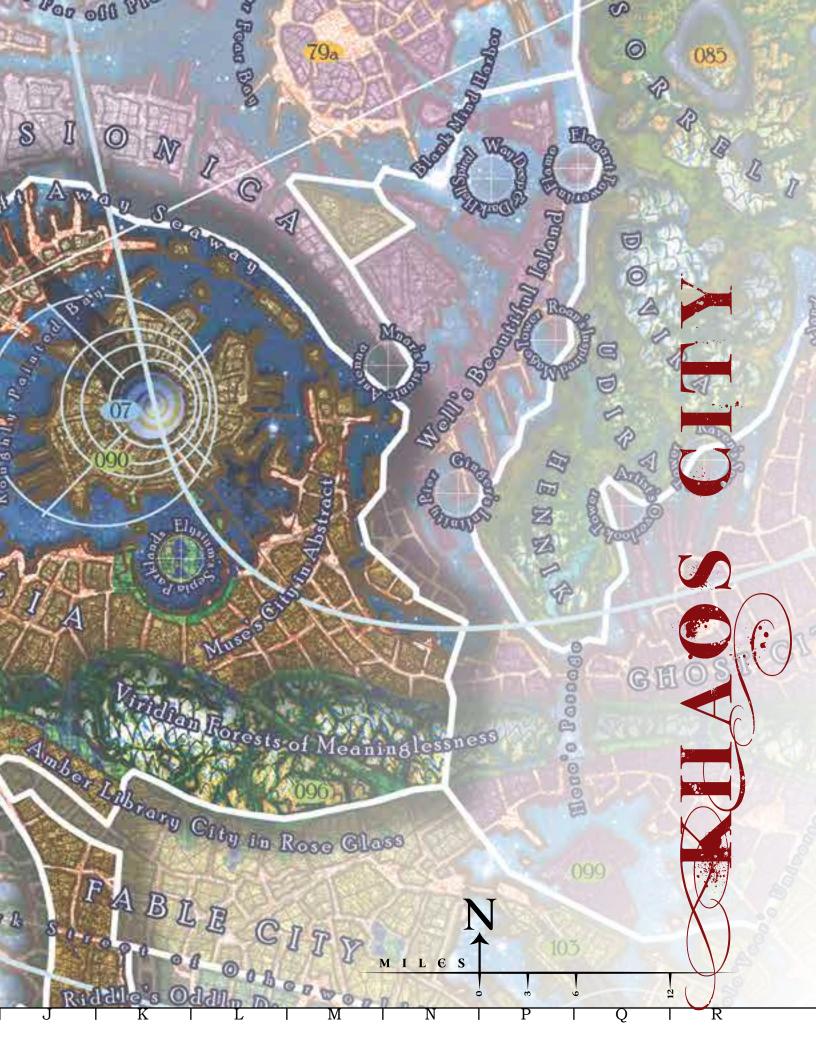
Some suspect a growing alliance between the Priests of Symmetry and the Demon Princes, but evidence is thus far thin and any motivation yet unknowable.

Most have come to expect the Syaan to be odd, and this may just be another example of their famous mechanical weirdness.











FROM THE SHADOWS

The King of Hell was currently a woman, though tradition held she still wear the title King. Her otherwise sagging melted skin young and vibrant, her three asymmetric breasts hanging visibly proud through the reveal of her large mewing cloak of sorcery woven living cats. Her feminine allure overwhelming, a grotesque lust that could be lasciviously tasted by all in the court of her great hall.

"The Empress sends us an Envoy this morning to discuss," she said, "I ask your patience that we first listen."

A howling grumble of spit, curses, and rude ejaculations moved through the hall of assembled courtiers.

"Why should we listen?" said one, "they never have anything interesting to say."

"Patience," she implored, "be bored if you must, but be silent," and as she spoke a King's guards approached the questioning courtier holding an enormous war maul of especially frightful pornographic appearance, the courtier suddenly fell silent.

A disquieting grumble of discontent moved through the assembled hall as the Imperial Envoy moved forward toward the throne.

She wore layers of heavy robes and large winter boots over a full body rubberized jumpsuit and a large transparent sphere over her head filled with a translucent mist that helped to filter the chaos constantly threatening her senses and sanity.

"Welcome, oh most lovely lump of mundane flesh," said the King.

*She suspected a compliment somewhere* in there, the Envoy saying, "thank you for your gracious invitation, we abide our old agreements, we visit only when invited," bowing as she spoke, the globe surrounding her head rippling as water when she spoke, apparently having no effect on the projection of her voice.

"I have called you here that you may hear the complaints of those assembled," the she-King smiled, her long lolling tongue twisting to lick the tip of her left nose, "but before we begin, I should invite you to speak."

The grumbling discontent in the room moved toward anger, several hulking king's guards moving through the assembled nobility, slamming a few of the more boisterous into sudden unconsciousness, one landing hard at the feet of the Envoy, his Daliesque features and mucus discharge filling the depressions of the uneven stone floor. She took one step back but did not otherwise acknowledge the disciplined courtier.

"We should like to formally invite yourself to the Assembly of 37 Houses, as held each New Year's Day within the ancient grove of the Shi'lara forest," she said with a formal bow. She and her predecessors had been sent here each year since the beginning of the Empire, 4,321 years, and always the answer was no. She expected nothing new this year.

The Bor'goth were more demon than men, not especially dangerous or cruel, having sensitive artistic souls, but oddly alien to the other races of men. They were misunderstood and hated for being different.

Each year the Assembly of 37 Houses approved a measure to evict the Bor'goth from the Metropolis and each year it received 1 abstention (the absent Borgoth), 1 no (the Shi'lara), and 35 yes votes. The resolution ignored each year by the Pen'de'shal under advice of the Empress. The matter had long ago become something of a joke among the Great House diplomats.

The King stood, and she walked with a tall discordant sliding gait that was at once charming and rhythmic, several of the courtiers taking the opportunity to pleasure themselves.

She moved into the personal space of the Envoy, the breath of the she-King causing steaming ripples upon the globe around her head.

"I graciously accept," smiled the King of Hell. The uproar in the great hall was immediate, a riot barely contained by the King's Guard as they began wading through the crowd of courtiers, their weapons freely reaping the slow and especially incensed.

The Envoy bowed, her mind began to race, what had changed? Who is this King? Why now? This she thought, was a good day.

The King breathed deep, drinking in the fear and excitement of the Envoy. This will be fun, she thought to herself, they have no idea.



The best way to describe Khaos City is that it is unique. By all sane accounts and tourist guides, the City is ugly, the architecture a craft of irregular blocky forms and melting ornament that cause the skyline to appear as collection of melting ice sculptures at an especially shameless bachelorette party.

And that is perhaps the best descriptor of Khaos City and its ruling Bor'goth race; **Shameless**.

The city is rude, flamboyant, brash, obnoxious, loud, indecent, gaudy, garish, crass, ugly, vulgar, obscene, and in all other ways **tasteless**; all the things the Bor'goth value as artful, beautiful, and honest.

### Children of any kind are advised to never visit Khaos City.

The Bor'goth are a hulking mass of irregularly formed flesh, each a unique expression of genetic mutation and chaos. Bor'goth aesthetics **see** themselves as beautiful, angelic expressions of unique wonder to be exalted and celebrated.

Bor'goth are otherwise famous for their demonic perceptions, able to taste primal emotions such fear, lust, and hunger, and able to see higher emotions such as love, anger, and hatred.

The Bor'goth themselves are terrible liars and generally do not see the point, you either wield naked power or you do not, **deception is irrelevant**.

### "Welcome, oh most lovely lump of mundane flesh..."



House Red is ruled by the Bor'goth "King of Hell" and their infamous "Dukes of Hell".

The noble families of the Bor'goth is a pit of vipers ever at war and ever seeking political favor and advantage.

Friendship and loyalty are unknow to Bor'goth culture, rather naked power and fear of power are what define its noble structure.

House Red is powerful and frightful but a victim of its own success. House Red is constantly at war with itself a hellscape of war, pestilence, famine, and death.

This is a contradiction, for the Bor'goth are themselves makers, builders, and above all artists, ever seeking to create works of "beauty and emotional inspiration."

And while this internal strife makes most of the Great Houses more powerful than House Red, and these enemies should be the focus of the King of Hell, they are instead under constant threat from within and is forced to expend most of his efforts fending off civil war.

And not at all surprising, the rival Dukes of Hell are regularly if surreptitiously supported by other Great Houses, ensuring the King is never afforded a moments rest to look outward.

Of special note, tourists are never advised to visit Khaos City and children are especially dissuaded from ever setting foot in the City. By all sane moral sensibilities Khaos City is evil and its inhabitants an obscene bullying kind prone to violence and worse. The City and its residents are insane and perceive the reality of the universe very differently than the sane minded.

#### O7 SPIRE KHAOS INTRIGUE UNDER CLOUDS IMAGINED

Spire Khaos is a warped and misshapen tower of disturbing shifting movement likened to the tentacles of some titanic subterranean kraken entwined into a nightmarish vison of old-god apocalypse.

The interior of the Spire is alive, the walls, stairs, rooms all formed by pulsating and gently breathing flesh.

The tower is empathic, the rooms and passages tending to alter their form and appearance to the needs and tastes of its occupants.

No one should ever come willing to this place.



116

### O9O THE MOST LOVELY CITY OF MUSICAL FLOWERS

At the base of the Khaos Spire is the Lovely City. An ancient place that if you are insane will be seen as beautiful, as all the buildings and streets are overgrown with flowing vines whose colors can be heard and thorns can tasted from afar and the scent of the place felt upon the skin like a delicate caress.

To the sane mind the place causes nausea and headaches and the thorns toxic.

The city is like walking through a **Dali** painting, the buildings having a distorted and exaggerated "realness" with time tending to flow sideways and unpredictably.

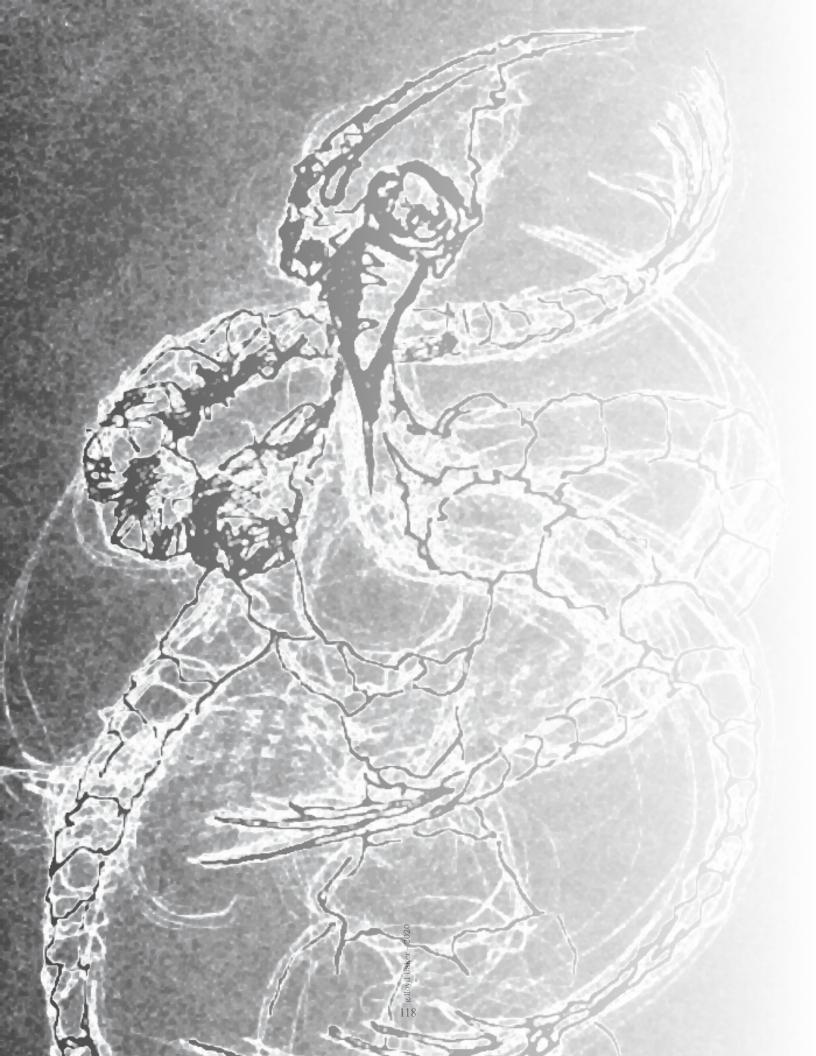
Lovely City is an unusually civilized place. This is a city of Bor'goth artists, architects, and sculptors that exalts in the **horrific and grotesque**.

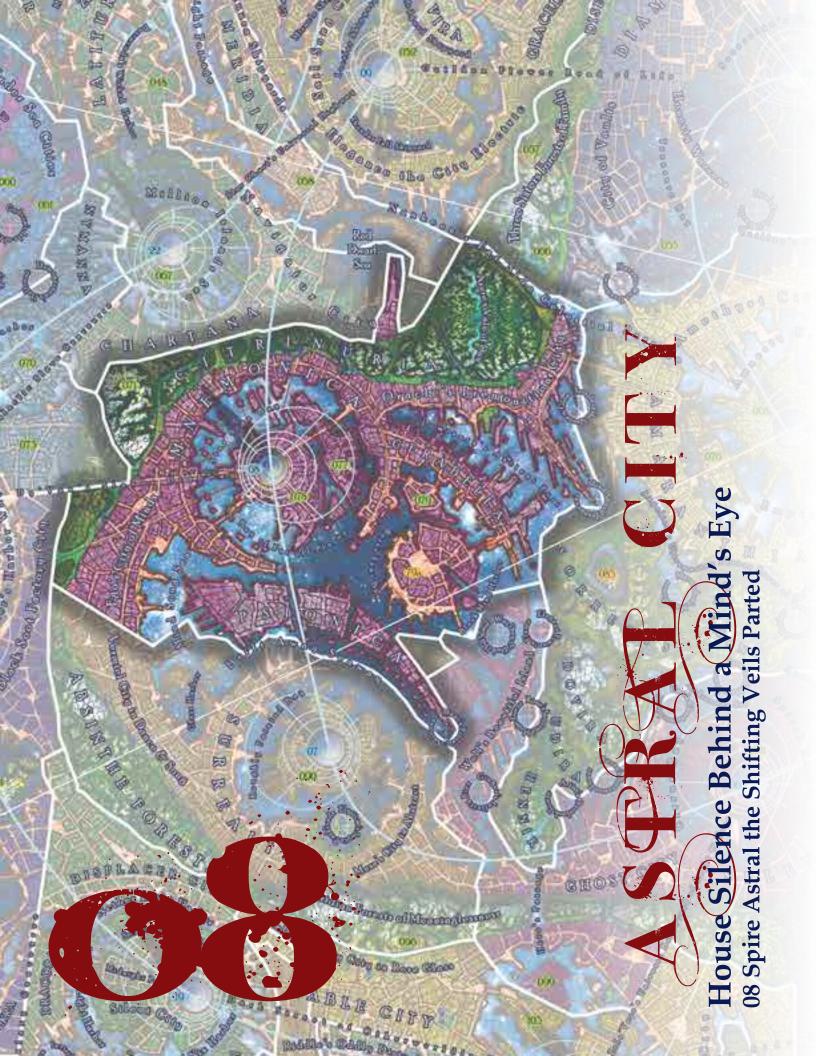
The City has a large proportion of foreign artists that come to train under Bor'goth masters and to freely produce works that in more proper society would never be permitted.

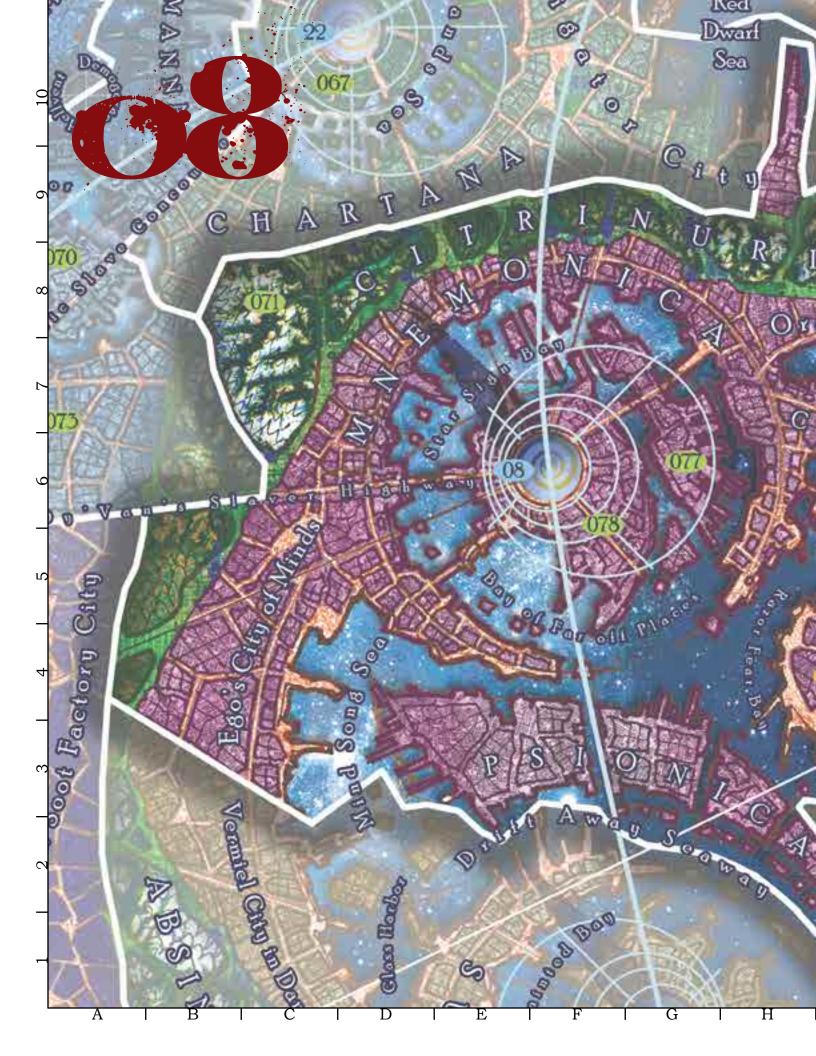
The definition of chaos is that anything is possible. And in the Lovely City, there is **no morality or censorship** to otherwise limit the artistic mind. This is a city of horrors and wonders in equal measure, a place that favors the brave and rewards an open mind.

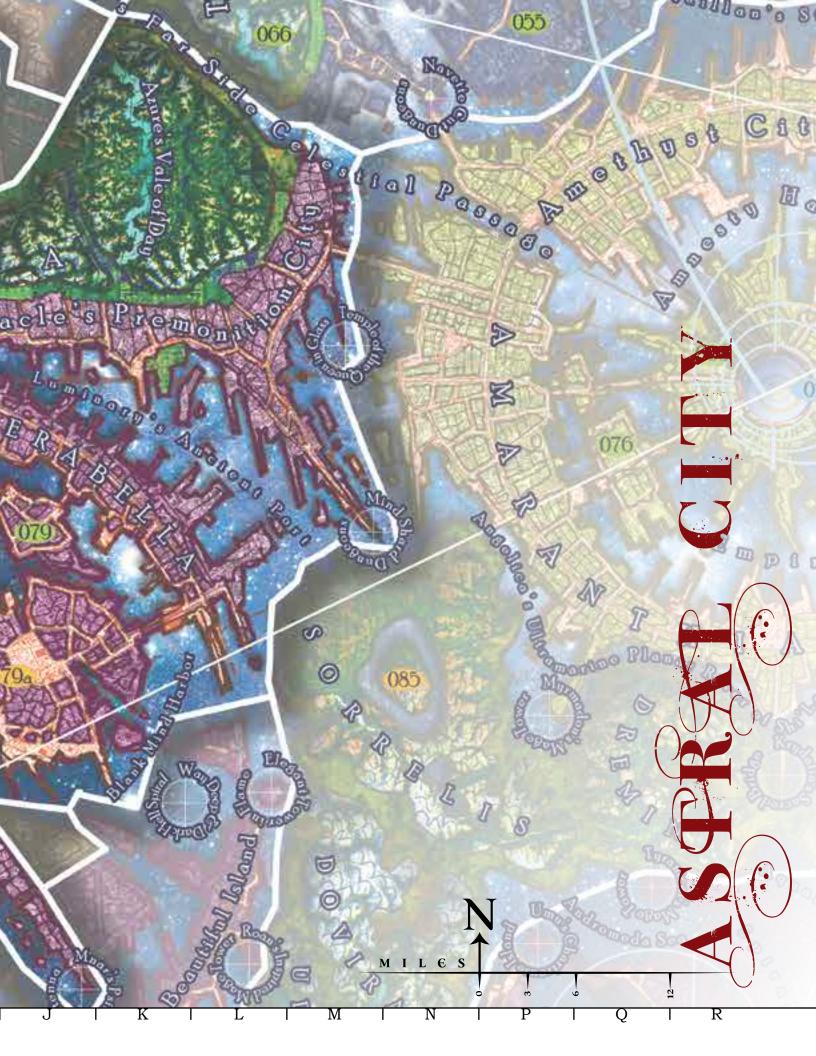
Most famous of its unusual arts is **Bor'goth Opera**, a form of musical theater with no social norms of decorum, rhythm, or otherwise. Bor'goth Opera is disturbing, violent, often pornographic, and entirely offensive (in fact if you were not offended the artists entirely failed). To those with more open minds and exotic tastes it can be a kind of evil cathartic liberation of the soul. Though fair warning, often things seen or experienced cannot be unseen or forgotten.











### AN UNINVITED CUEST

The universe spread out before his perceptions, beyond physical imaginings, each of the billions of stars of the cosmos a living mind full of thought, memory, and dreams. Between countless other black pinholes in the fabric of space itself, each the void of a collapsed mind that once was, the memories of their life a gravity well in the cosmic milieu. He visited fragments of memory stretching back to progenitors of his race, he swept through planes of imagining so glorious, frightening, and horrific as to give him pause as to the limits of his own imagination.

He swung high through the mnemonic stars laughing as he went, overcome with joy as he pierced the supernova of a brilliant mind in the moment death and rebirth, such a rare gift to exalt in a life well lived, of memories and patterns unique among the infinite.

He flew ever faster, sweeping past constellations of minds of cities, countries, and Realms he could equate to geographies of the physical world.

He swept past alien constellations comprised of billions of souls lying far beyond the maps he understood of his own kind, minds and memories of peoples entirely unknown across the unexplored Outlands of Xai, he wondered if they looked out and saw himself as alien as vague as they appeared to him.

He laughed at the incomprehensible vastness of it all, a technicolor universe alight with everything that has ever been, no information ever lost, and he could see it all, the rush of exhilaration threatened to unhinge his mind, slipping, he could feel, away, too far, too fast, be began to forget himself, forgot his mother, wondered if he had a father, or if he had himself been born of light alone.

That is when the pain began, dull, unfocused, but he turned toward it, not sure why, but it was important, the pain, he sought for it. The pain grew sharper, clearer, he focused his mind, his mother, the pain grew, his father, the pain grew, he remembered his own name, the pain grew more, his own memories flooded back into his mind, the pain grew now unbearable, he opened his eyes.

The pain wrapped around him like a blanket, warm and comforting, his heart beating, the sweat of his brow running down his face. The pain of being alive.

"Welcome back," Vix said, "we thought we might have lost you there for a minute. Were you successful?"

"Harvonia is dead," he finally said, "I have the memories we need."

"Excellent work, I will let the others know to proceed," Vix turned to leave the small room. He sat back slumped in the chair, his head in his hands.

"But that is not all is it?" said Hex after Vix had left the room.

"No," he said, "I think I brought something back."

STRAE CITY

The Astral City is ruled by the Great House Silence treaded by a race called Eigarian.

The Eigarian race has had a long history, the first of Xai's civilizations to unify the various space operas during an especially long and storied period called the Red Empire.

Modern Eigarian civilization is a shadow of its many former glories, a race that has been on the decline since the founding of the Metropolis Empire. Children born in ever declining numbers.

He laughed at the incomprehensible vastness of it all, a technicolor universe alight with everything that has ever been...

The Astral City is old, mostly built ages ago, the craft of its high-rise buildings and mnemonic glass a lost art, the buildings now an amalgamation of original grandeur repaired by layers of less artful means.

But the city is still amazing, even the modern wonders of the Adrea'Chrome cannot approach the fusion of technomancy and art achieved by the Eigarians at the height of their power.

Tourists flock to the old quarters of Astral City, an historic and cultural wonder of technical achievement that houses countless thousands of years of art, history, and libraries in public museums of every description.

When someone speaks of the "old city" they most likely mean Astral City.

Eigarians are now a minority in their own city, the dozens of younger Eigarian former slave races of House Silence now most of the population, a new and vibrant collection of emancipated races seeking to make their mark upon the world and emerge from the Eigarian shadow.

But with the coming of the new races, so has faded the famed Eigarian psionic talents.



When the Red Empire abandoned Xai and its demonic troubles, the remnants of the race that remained were still powerful enough to dominate the Clockwork Metropolis for tens of thousands of years thereafter, any Eigarian a threat to be feared.

Each Eigarian with talent and skill could telepathically communicate with another Eigarian over any distance. Particularly useful for controlling a million-world space-opera such as the Red Empire.

Each Eigarian with talent and skill could know and manipulate the memories of any lesser mind. This is the power that made the Eigarians the most feared race for much of their history.

A person could be made to believe most anything. It should also be noted that for much of Eigarian history, knowledge of this ability was almost entirely unknow outside of Eigarian circles, a closely held secret.

Ironically, in modern day, most people no longer believe the Eigarians are or ever could know or manipulate memoires, recognizing their telepathic communication as their one unique ability. A perhaps unsurprising coup for the remaining modern Eigarians who now operate quietly behind the scenes of House Silence dispensing spiritual advice to the new leadership.

### HOUSE SILENCE BEHIND A MIND SEYE

House Silence was for long eons the bastion of Eigarian power. But those days are gone.

House Silence is in transition, a time when old Eigarian families fail and the younger races of Astral City are assuming greater control over Great House affairs.

The Eigarians taking on a mythic quality to the younger races that now rarely encounter the religious icons that once dominated their societies.

The political, economic, and military leadership of House Silence is now in the hands of the younger races. The last of the Eigarian noble families relegated to a kind of religious and moral leadership, less revered by the younger races with each passing generation.



## **68** SPIRE ASTRACTHE SHIFTING VEIRS PARTED

The Eigarians first came from a coastal region called **Eiger Bule** not far West from the Clockworks. Finding and using the abandoned Mistress Spires to explore the Outland, the Subworld, and launch itself into the void of space.

The Spire can vanish, sometime here and sometimes not. Some say it can travel, others that it shifts dimensions, still other suggest that all Spires can "travel" but only the Eigarians have ever come to know such secrets. Whatever the case, the Eigarians are not saying and most of the speculators tend to forget anyway.

The Astral Spire is a shimmering half real form, like the dream of something real, graceful in form and glittering prismatic colors. But only Eigarians and a few others such as the Vooran and Mhorganti can see the folded dimensional splendor of the Spire, too brilliant for the sanity chained minds of the mundane to perceive.

Entry into the Spire is unknown, rumor is that only Eigarians may enter the Spire, though most no longer believe this to be true, or have forgotten any such speculation.

Whatever the case, the Eigarians are not saying and most of the speculators tend to forget anyway.

#### MALAISE

The Eigarian moved through the city with preternatural grace, his tall slender frame poorly disguised by the heavy hooded cloak he wore, the smaller frames and soft fleshy forms of those that shared the street made him fall again into malaise.

These were not even Mistress races, not destined to inherit this universe, not of a kind to matter, created by his ancestors because they became so lazy as they could not open their own doors, cook their own food, or carry their own bags, genetically engineered monkeys whose chief design objective was that they not smell so bad as their predecessors.

Sadness swept him, not for them, they were nothing, but for the lazy failings of his ancestors and the shape of the Xai he had inherited. This must be what self-pity feels like he mused.

So many of his kind had simply abandoned the Metropolis, and who could blame them, a Witch on the throne, a menagerie of races kept safely in a sandbox and told to play nice, and for what, so these monkeys he passed in the street might give birth to a new generation of Arcane and ultimately destroy the Demon Princes and the Mistress construct of their own creation? So that the universe might finally be cleansed of all mortals? Even if they were told the truth, it is too big for their tiny pink minds to comprehend.

They march to the cliff that they might hurl themselves off, saving the Eldrtich the trouble of having to dirty their own hands.

Lazy he thought, lazy as his kind were, lazy as will see the end of the Arcane, their own minds too small to comprehend what they do. The Mistress creation too big for their tiny eldritch minds to comprehend.

Both sides playing toward an endgame neither understands, both sides confidently oblivious. Both sides doomed. The Eigarian walked up the hill, rain beginning to fall as the little soft humanoids scattered complaining of the wet, seeking cover. Lazy he thought again. He looked up into the rain, the cold chill running over his face, he began to laugh, joy suddenly filling his mind.

The universe may be damned, he thought, but this moment is perfect, right here, right now.

"Hey mister," interrupted the mumblings of a child, he opened his eyes and slowly looked down at the little fleshy glob of humanity, "do you need an umbrella?"

He laughed hard again and began walking up the street.



Mount Raven is among the highest of the Clockwork Metropolis, a glacial peak shorn horizontal to produce an ice plain about one mile diameter.

Carved into the stone below the ice is the Eigarian rune for home.

In the days of the Red Empire, ships in trouble or in need of escape could engage their star drives and translate "home". For thousands of years after the Exodus the occasional ship would suddenly fold into existence above the mountain, usually severely damaged or otherwise in serious distress. But as time move on, fewer ships arrived seeking aid until finally no one can recall there ever having ever been a ship arrive.

The Ice Plain atop mount Raven currently occupied by a year-round winter theme park safely protected under a Still'Wind Enchantment.



#### O77 SPIDERS CITY OF GALACTIC COMMUNICATION

Eigarians, despite their diminished House Silence influence, are still the masters of communications.

Xai is famously a place where normal means of electronic or higher tech communications fail. In this environment, the ability for Eigarians to telepathically communicate with other Eigarians instantly over any distance is king.

Spider City is thus home to the largest concentration of Eigarians remaining, operating as communication guilds, their web of messengers scattered throughout the Empire.

There is some concern that the Empire will disintegrate in the coming centuries as Eigarian numbers continue to decline, already there are too few, already only the wealthy may afford their services.

But, there is great satisfaction among the Great Houses at the demise of the Eigarians, many have been working since the founding of the Metropolis Empire to this end, the loss of an "untrustworthy messenger service" a small price to pay.

## 078 FRAGMENT COVEN THE SISTERS OF ELUCIDATION

The City at the base of the Astral Spire is under dominion of the **Sisters of Elucidation**, an ancient Eigarian religious order.

The Coven, as the City is sometimes called, is holy ground, a place of ancient parks, churches, temples, and holy sites representing half a million years of Eigarnian prominence on Xai. And while that provenance fades as lesser races rule of House Silence daily affairs, in Coven the Eigarian are still the undisputed rulers.

The city is populated with thousands of sentient high-rise towers that still operate at full functionality despite the lower living standards of most Astral City under dominion of the lesser races.

The city is one of embassies and ambassadors from across the Empire, housed within the glories of an ancient Eigarian wonderland.

## o79 jheregs sacred castle black star

This island city is ancient in a way few things are, even by Eigarian standards. The city is one where time flows erratically, sometimes long years spent on the island are as if no time has passed while other times a few moments on the island can send a person thousands of years into the future.

Castle Black Star is one of those enigmatic places that demands exploration and understanding but that rarely reveals its secrets.

What is generally known from those returning from expeditions (back into their own time or appearing more recently but being of an ancient Age) is that the Castle was built by the first Eigarian Emperor during the **Black Star Dynasty** (a time so long ago as to be entirely unknow excepting these reports).

The treasures brought back bedeviling and extraordinary, suggesting a kind of old alien magic lost to time.

#### 79 A ARTIFACT JHEREGS TRUE FAITH FALLEN STAR SHIP

The **True Faith** is the name of an ancient Eigarian star ship, among the largest ever crafted, 12miles across now appearing as an island, the titanic towers and antennae of its upper hull now scattered among city streets and more mundane buildings built upon her gently sloping stone and metal hull, thousands of years of construction upon thousands more years of construction, until to modern day all knowledge of the island being a crashed ship has passed to near forgotten myth.

But for some few Eigarins and knowledgeable of the Las'raa'ta, the great unseen bulk of the craft is the holy grail of exploration and ancient Mistress technomancy.

Some past explorations suggest the ship was never completed, the Eigarian shipyards destroyed during the Flood that banished the Demon Princes from Xai.

Others suggest the ship crashed much later, an Ark either prevented leaving by some accident of violence or a returned Ark escaping some unknown enemy. But the truth is, much less is known than is known, and the mysteries within still guarded.



Psionica is a large island chain **free of** Imperial dominion.

This is a city given over by House Silence to sole Eigarian dominion as part of the transition agreements of recent centuries that have seen the younger races taking control of the Great House.

Psionica is among the largest entirely secret places in the Clockwork Metropolis. Non-Eigarians are forbidden to land on the islands and to anyone's memory, no one ever has.

The Eigarians are thought to be using the ancient city of high-rise towers as a quiet place to retire and fade away. The knowledge of the original purpose the islands seemingly lost to the modern age.

For the Eigarians increasingly immigrating to Psionica, they sleep, living out what remains of their lives among **Astral Vale**, the mnemonic universe of mind and memory that links all that is or has ever been known or imagined.

To anyone paying attention, Psionica is a serious problem. Thousands of spies have been sent in over the years, none having recalled having ever been sent on a mission. Maybe they sleep, living upon the Astral Plane, or maybe they plan their illusion and mental trickery as prelude to an attack.

#### Psionica is an information black hole and that makes everyone nervous.

The Crystal Shard Empress has urged caution, "**Psionica sleeps**," she says, "it is best for all they do not wake," she cautions. Though more frightened Great Houses council to invade the islands with overwhelming force, Mass Drivers, navy bombardment, massive invasion forces, so much and so many that no amount of mental trickery could possibly prevail.

The result was catastrophic, Drift Ships fired their mass drivers into their own homelands before themselves falling from the sky in final suicide strikes, naval bombardments destroyed their own ships and harbors, invading forces slaughtered millions of their own people before finally taking their own lives at the discovery of what they had done, only the sociopaths spared.

#### AFTERMATH

"I tried to warn you," said the Imperial Envoy channeling the voice of the Empress.

"We are crippled, defenseless," said the first King, "we need your support before our enemies destroy us."

"And do not give us any of that -actions have consequences-garbage," bellowed the second King, "all we proved with our failure is that you and the others should have joined our Crusade to end the Eigarian threat once and for all."

"Our enemies already move through my streets," cried the third King, "I do not have enough men remaining to defend my own palace. I have had to evacuate my own family."

"Well," said the Envoy, "there is some good news and some bad," she toyed.

Exasperated, "this is no time for jokes, thousands died tonight, have you no decency?" said the first King.

"Decency," schooled the Envoy, "would have been to NOT send your men into a warzone without intelligence, or a plan, or even the simple courtesy to remember their lives before instead of after. The Eigarians sent you a message tonight, and that message is that you do this to yourselves."

"That is all very poetic and pointless, of what news did you speak?" asked the third King.

"You managed to kill thousands of sleeping Eigarinans, Psionica burns," said the Envoy.

"Well that is at least some good news," the third King said looking dejected.

"That is the bad news you moron, you woke them up, ALL of them," said the Envoy her eyes rolling up into her head, "damnation and hellfire, sometimes I wonder if the Eigarians are right!"

"The good news," she continued, "is that all 3 of your Great and mighty houses has a new King tonight, Imperial forces are moving into all of your territories to ensure a smooth transition of power." "You cannot do this," yelled the first King, "we are loyal," he protested standing up drawing his sword.

"A loyal King listens to the advice of his Empress," she said, Imperial Paladins rushing into the room, seizing the three Kings.

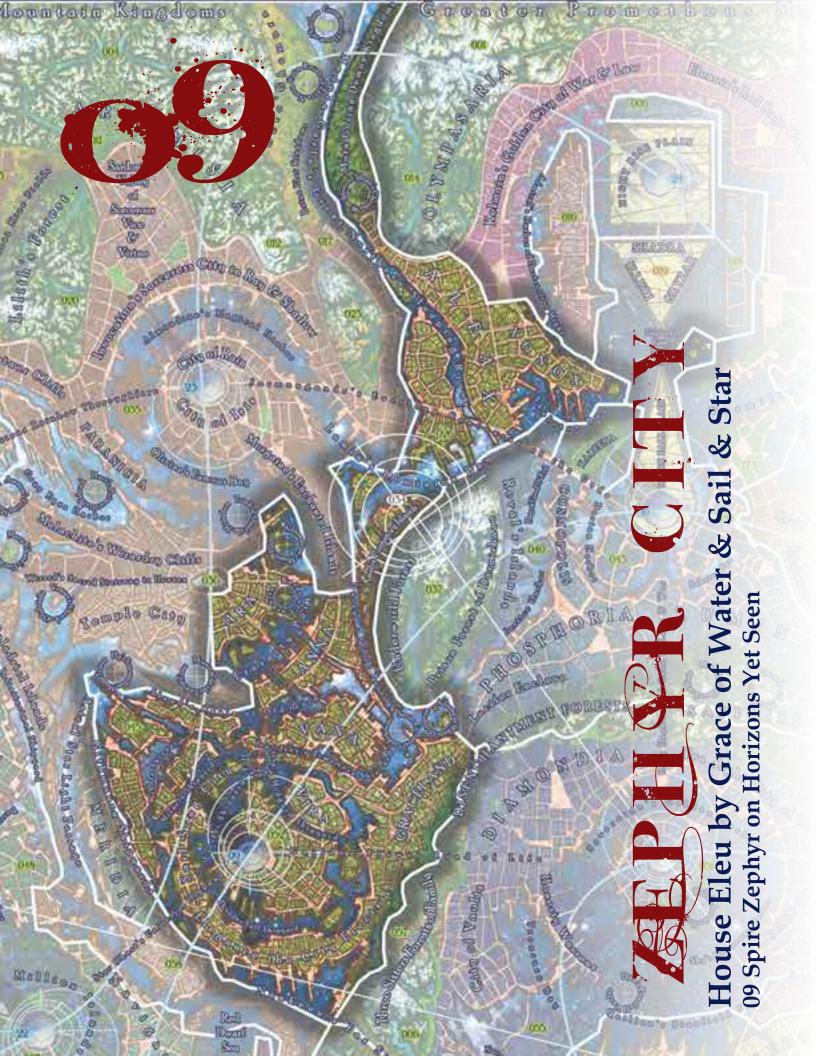
"See that they are turned over to their new Kings," said the Envoy, it is best we avoid getting involved in their internal politics," she smiled.

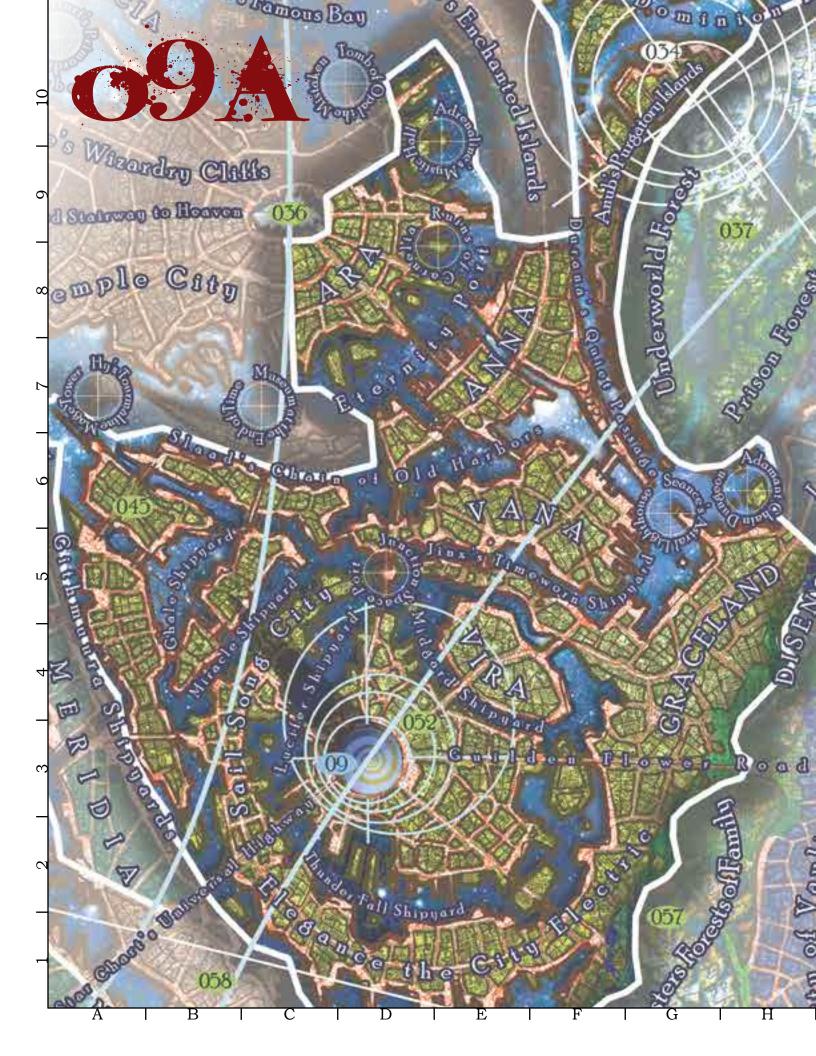
"You tricked us you Witch," howled the second King as he was bound, "you planned this all along."

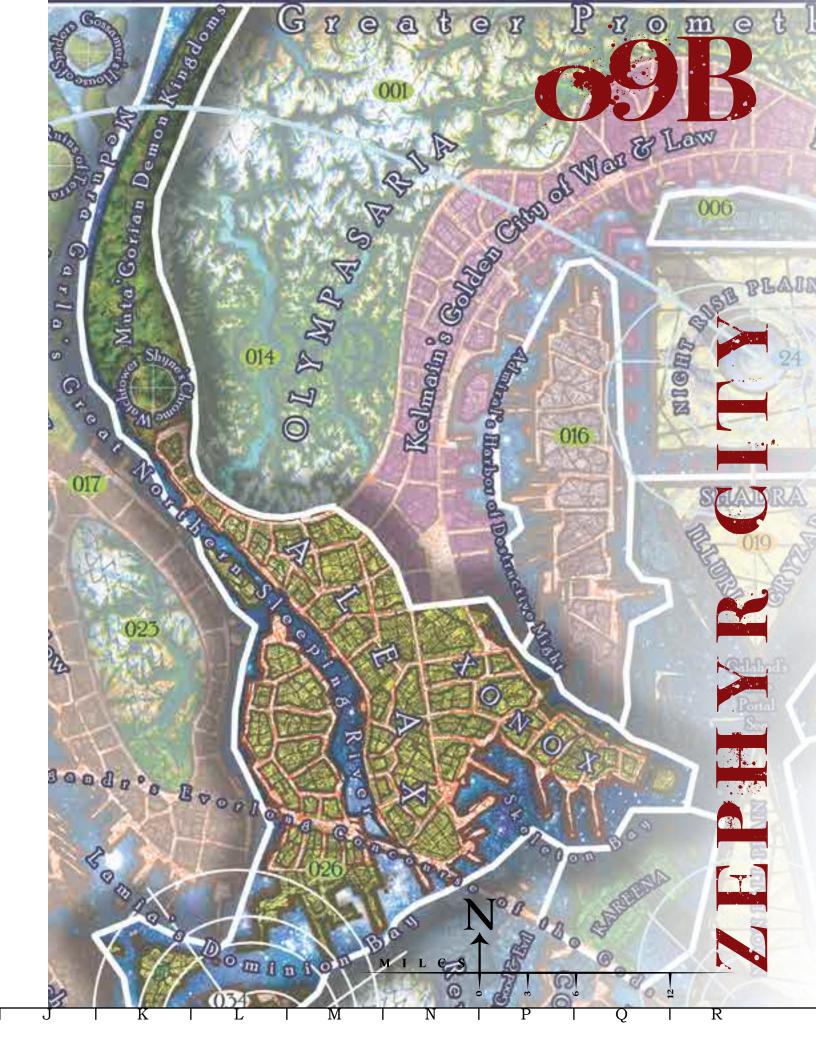
"Freewill is a double edge blade my darlings," sung the Envoy, "the edge you choose to die on is your choice."

But for the Empress, it was time for the Eigarians to wake from their long slumber, it was time her Metropolis was once again afraid. A crucible to either choose sentient action or to again fail relying upon animal reaction. The Eigarians she knew would not disappoint.

But as the next few years unfolded, something extraordinary happened, something entirely unexpected. The Eigarians chose to act, ignoring their animal reaction to strike back, though cornered as a frightened animal. The Eigarians had awoken aware. The Empress did not know to cry with joy or in terror, only knowing that the universe had just become a much more interesting place.







### ZEPHAR CITY

The City is an elegant, artful, and very advanced city-state civilization of bronze and pottery like ancient Greece or Egypt of Earth. And despite its seeming low technomancy, and bestial druidic reputations, Zephyr City is one of the most elegant, artful, and civilized cities of the Clockwork Metropolis. So much so that many noble and wealthy of other Great Houses have taken to building their own Spring estates within the city.

The City streets are wide and well planted with trees and shrubs, the druidic arts of the Aiken a marvel of botanical grace.

If one is looking to slow down and enjoy life unplugged as nature intended, this is your place.

This is a city of merchants and traders supported by ports filled with Aiken sail ships that traverse ancient trade routes to far distant places as well as having just returned from exotic explorations. The Aiken are a race of elegant aqueous form famed for their long history as sailors and their beautifully crafted coastal cities and galleons, clippers,

and full-rigged-ships.

The Aiken are skilled in the navigation of their sail ships to waterways across Xai and throughout the cosmos. The Aiken are masters of sailing vessels, advancing their technomancy to high orders of mastery but always eschewing motorized propulsion with a religious fervor in favor of skill and mastery of wind & water.

The Aiken are also natural water breathers and swimmers, with a natural affinity to communicate with intelligent sea creatures, the Mer races, and water & wind elementals.

The famed **Zillan Druids** are natural shape changers, able to shift into water breathing forms such as fish, crustacean, and cephalopod. Elder Druids of the **Kraken Order** can alter their oceanborne forms to titanic proportions, creating sea monsters of enormous size, and sometimes fantastic imaginary anatomy, even able to rise from the coastal waters to stomp an enemy city to ruin.

### THE SHAPE OF LIFE

"Physics, you must learn why forms as they are," said the teacher, "conservation of mass, if you are 150 pounds, any form you take will be 150 pounds. How many 150-pound birds or ants have you seen?"

"What about a monster, I want to be a big scary monster," said a child.

"The sorceries of the Zillan Druids can sometimes become beasts of the imagination, like the fearsome winged apes of the Zillian Guard, and the Kraken Druids may increase their size to be huge monsters you have read about in your stories, but such knowledge requires a lifetime of training," lectured the teacher, "your natural abilities are best utilized by imprinting natural beasts such as seals, fish, apes, dogs, or cats, beasts easily found of a size near your own."

"What is imprint'g?" asked the smartest child.

"Imprinting is when you touch a creature and pray to remember its form," said the instructor, "the prayer is thus..." "nature be true
"nature be right
"I see your spirit
"I see your heart
"I see your mind
"nature be true
"nature be right"

"If you pray these words while touching a living natural beast," said the instructor, "you will imprint this form. Let us try." Each of the children was about 50 pounds, and next to each sat a pet seal, each of similar weight.

The children began petting their seals, each gently singing their prayer. It was not the words that mattered, only the cadence, the focus of the mind, and the intent of faith.

After some practice, the failing student suddenly shifted his form matching that of his seal as he drifted off to sleep. So, shocked he screamed and suddenly shifted back to the form of a child and began crying in shock and pain, the lower half of his body still that of a seal.

The nurse ran to attend the boy.



The Aiken are...an adventurous lot and will offer their unique talents and skills to anyone with ...an interesting place to go.



House Eleu is ruled by the **Zillan Druids** and the various extensions of their religious order.

The Zillian Druids are ubiquitous among their people, religious leaders, and navigators, at least one aboard any ship seeking to travel the dimensional pathways of Xai's vast oceans.

House Eleu is organized less like a government and more like a private trade house controlling a vast merchant marine navy.

Every young Aiken imagines themselves sailing the seas of adventure when they are young, retiring as a wealthy merchant on the shores of a beautiful Aiken city, telling their own tall tales to their grandchildren.

House Eleu tend to be enemies of the cruel, murderous, and slave minded Min'Zirai of House Light. The freebooting adventure seeking free spirits of the Aiken have nothing in common with the Dynasty minded Zirai except that their vast navies share Xai's oceans.

The advantage in conflict tends to be with the Zirai and their submarine war ships but the Eleu Navy outnumbers the Zirai a hundred fold.

#### FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE

The dozen full-rigged ships moved with great speed across the open water, each of the 3, 4, and 5 masted ships a glory of high technomancy craft that belied their elegant ancient forms.

The young Min'Zirai Captain looked from his periscope upon his opportunity for glory.

"Prepare to move into range and surface," said the Captain, "they are heavy with loot, easy prey."

"Captain," said the much older first officer, "permission to offer an alternative point of view."

The young Captain turned to his First with a cold hard stare, he let his hand slide down to his side arm.

The First raised his hand away from his side arm, "my Captain, I do not challenge your order, I only offer my experience in having dealt with these Aiken in the past."

The Captain settled himself, "what is there to say? They are savages in sail boats, what threat can they offer such as we bring to bear?"

"There are 12 of them, each with a compliment of a hundred, at least 600 of which are in the water as we speak swimming like fish toward our position, our ship's compliment is 40 including the kitchen staff," said the First. "Also, each ship that large has at least 1 Kraken Navigator, maybe 2, as I am explaining this, they have taken to the deep water and are ritually altering their forms to titanic cephalopod form, they will crack us like an egg. The only course of action is to navigate away using the Wyght Core, otherwise we are caught," concluded the First Officer standing at attention, "we cannot outrun them."

The young Captain had been hearing these ridiculous stories for years at the academy, they were hard to believe given the technomancy of his ship and the deadliness of his crew and his own sorcerous talents.

"Answer me one question teller of tall tales," said the Captain, "how are they able to have detected us from so far away under water?"

"The Aiken speak to the seas my Captain," explained the First, "they likely sensed us a hundred miles before we spotted them. If you make this your first engagement it will be the last of us all."

"They talk to the seas..." the Captain mocked.

"Contact," called the scope operator, "four biologics, each the size of Blue Whale, a fifth behind the four, much larger. Impact in 30seconds," he concluded.

"Navigator," yelled the Captain, "get us out of here, NOW."

The navigator was at the center of the ship, the large irregularly shaped crystal orb throbbed with 11dim lights, The Wyght Core sat within a lacework of technomancy that allowed it to touch all parts of the ship.

The Navigator touched the Wyght Core with his two hands, feeling the alien mind contained within stretch into his mind, his perceptions widened, he saw the shattered seams and collisions of dimensional space that surrounded him. He focused his mind on home, the only place he knew well enough to go NOW, navigations such as this often-required hours of preparation and meditation. Even home attempted this quickly could shatter his mind, send the ship to anyplace in the universe, or nowhere at

Sweat rolled down his face as he focused all of his thoughts on Home, he could feel the alien thoughts of the Wyght Core crawling undefended into the corners of his mind, not enough time he thought, not enough...

"Impact in 10, 9, 8..." said the Scope Operator.

"So, they really do talk to the Seas," said the Captain deadpan to no one in particular.

It was then that everyone abord the submarine felt their stomachs twist inside out and their minds raked by the claws of Old Gods.

"Where are we?" the Captain said as he displayed his breakfast upon the bridge floor.

"Home port," came the delayed answer, "we made it."

The First Officer and a dozen other crew had vanished in the passage, taken in full or part by the Old Gods. The navigator was found still holding the Wyght Core in both hands, his bleeding eyes rolled back into his head, his brain a still boiling liquid burst from the base of his skull.

EPHYR CIT

"Once we dock, send a message to the Admiral," ordered the Captain, "arrange a time when I might arrive."



Zephyr City is extremely popular with tourists that enjoy its primitive technomantic charms and its very sophisticated culture.

#### O9 SPIRE ZEPHYR ON HORIZONS YET SEEN

The Spire Zephyr is spiraling delight of miles long coils of shimmering fabrics flowing, sheltering, and shading a skeletal structure supporting outdoor rooms, terraces, balconies, and garden platforms. This is an inside out Spire where all its complex architectural splendor is arranged to be outdoors.

The Aiken are overall a free-spirited welcoming people whose traditions are to offer help to those in need.

### **026** BARON MORGS MERCENARY LANDING

The Aiken are by nature an adventurous lot and will offer their unique talents and skills to anyone with some hard currency and an interesting place to go.

The Aiken are favored as mercenaries, not only for their unique ocean-going talents, but also because they are flexible, good natured, self-reliant, and famously never complain (ever, about anything). They may well kill you for cheating them or poison you to watch you suffer for treating them ill, but they will never complain about it, life after all is hardship, and to say otherwise is like arguing with the wind.

The Mercenary Landing is a collections of inns expedition houses that match up the Aiken with new and interesting opportunities.

## O45 PORT MASTER'S CITY OF CAPTAIN & STAR PRINCE

The Aiken are brilliant sailors with a long tradition of using sail ships to rule the ocean coasts of their native realms. The Port Master's City is a place where Aiken adventurers tend to retire and where the new and young come to learn from veterans.

The Aiken are big on mentoring the next generation, passing on that which is known to save the next generation suffering to learn it over again, that they may learn something new that they in turn can pass on.

## O52REEF THE SAID SHOULD ETERNITY FAIL

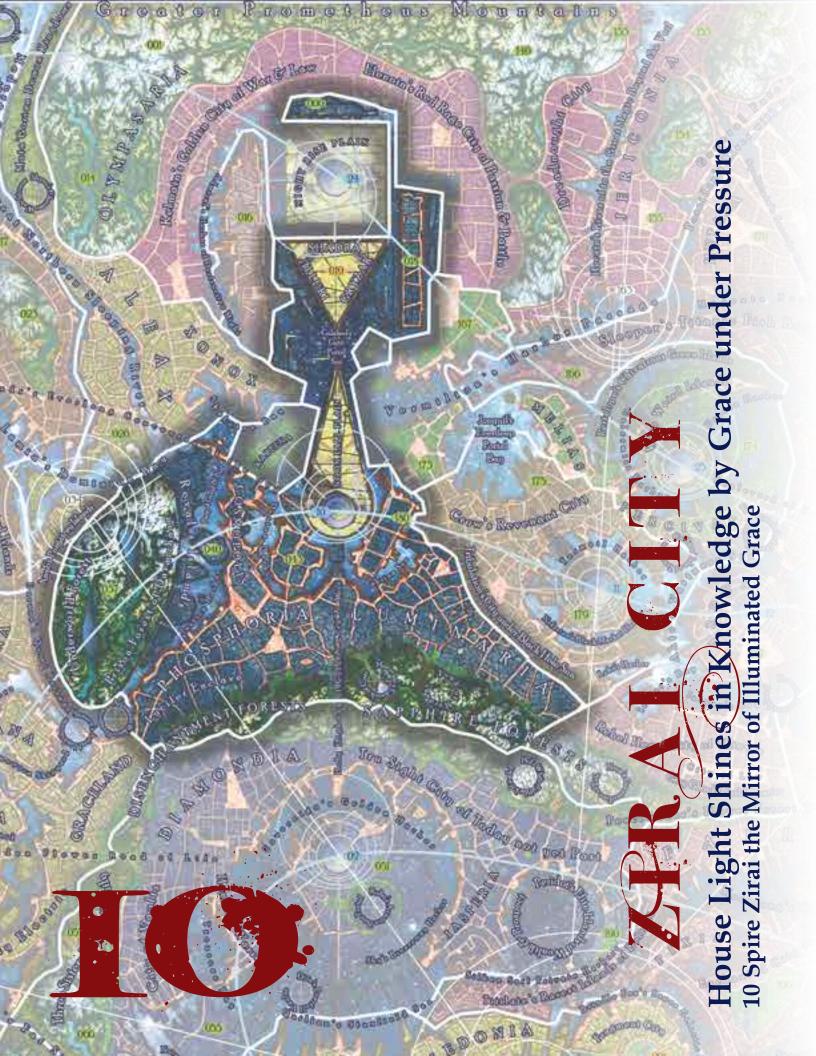
Eternity City is that which is built around the base of Spire Zephyr.

The Aiken are an **uncomplaining pragmatic race** but have a spiritual belief in an eternal balance. The interesting part about Aiken religious faith is that like most religions, it predicts an end to balance and thus eternity but unlike more fatalistic faiths, it promises that the end is but a storm that like any other that may be sailed through with skill and faith and survived.

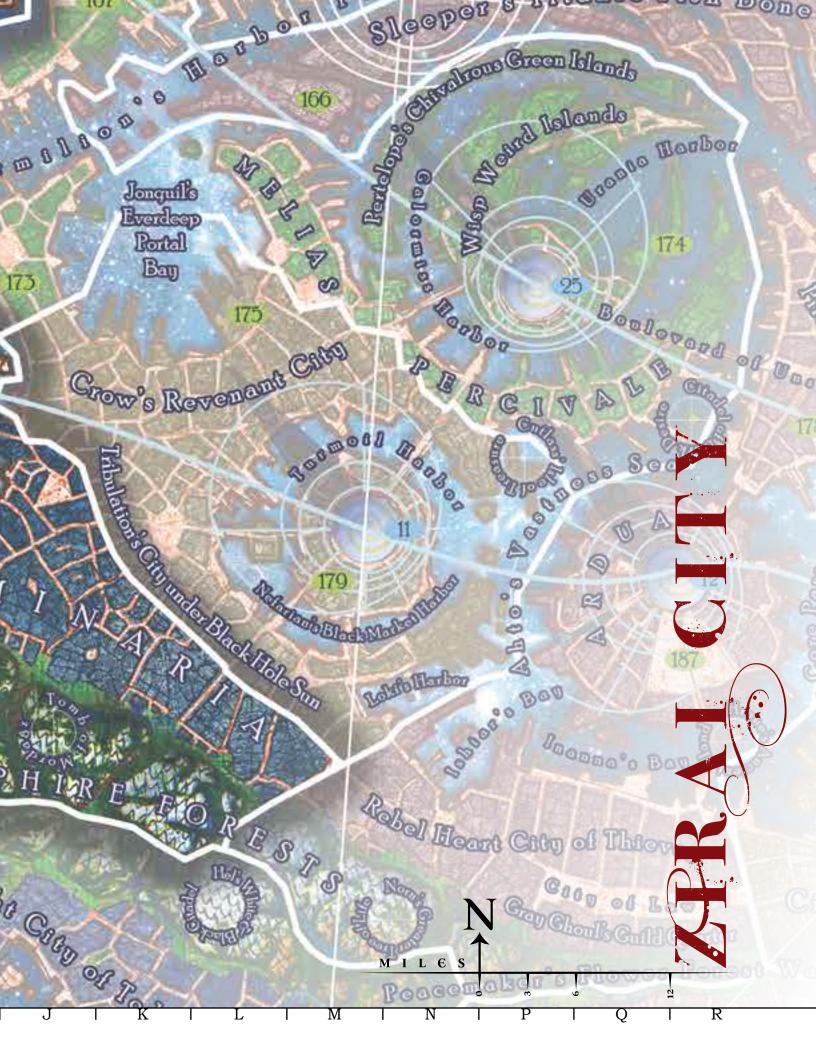
Eternity City is a beautiful place that is more garden than city, a collection of small towns and hamlets than city. Visitors from across the Empire make their home here, ambassadors, emissaries, and representatives seeking favor, trade, and aid from this young vibrant House and its very adventurous people.



136







### ZIRAL CITY

Zirai City is beautiful, sophisticated, orderly, and above all very lawful. Zirai city is a place of layered social traditions and subtle laws.

The Zirai language is alien to most and the city makes no attempt to sign or speak the common Imperial language nor do make use of ubiquitous Lexica technomancy in facilitating communication (so common as most everyone in the Empire is assumed to be able to talk to anyone no matter the languages spoken).

The language barrier makes Zirai a difficult place to visit and that is just the way the Zirai seem to like it.

Zirai City is a sophisticated civilization linked with clean high-speed underground trains, though most of its technomancy artfully hidden out of sight, the city has a clean idyllic appearance of elegantly crafted wooden buildings and hand-crafted pottery and terra cotta.

The city is popular with tourists despite the language barrier due to its unique culture, art, and food.



The Min'Zirai are unbound by animal emotions such as fear, fairness, hunger, lust, pack, or prey.

Min'Zirai may only feel higher emotions such as love, hate, anger, honor, self-sacrifice, and cruelty. The Min'Zirai are artistic minded, prone to over thinking and to suffering bouts of deep reflection.

The Zirai are incapable of fear. This tends to make them instead a very thoughtful, calculating, logical, and reserved race.

And as humor and laughter tend to be fear reactions, they are a humorless lot that find joy in solving puzzles, problems, and contemplation. Overall, their sensibilities can be said to be very cat-like.

The Min'Zirai, specifically, are exceedingly lawful and ordered as well as being cruel, merciless, and generally considered evil by moral standards of most other races.

The Min'Zirai are a martial race that can be best equated to the samurai of old Earth Japan with its strict adherents of bushido codes of honor, tradition, and ritual perfection of movement, form, and purpose.

The Min'Zirai are famously skilled as both conquerors and rulers. The **Zirai Dynasty** extends well beyond her Zirai City, the Min'Zirai being famed for its explorations and conquests across the Outland Wildernesses of Xai.

The Zirai navy is legend, the most powerful of the Great Houses said by some to have reached across the stars, having conquered or colonized thousands of celestial worlds.

The Min'Zirai maintain a very sophisticated civilization, their soldiers famous for their use of master-crafted revolvers and long-guns perfected over thousands of years of ritual artistry, resolving personal duels in classic western-genre fashion by way of a quickdraw contest.

The Min'Zirai navy is mostly composed of large **submarine ships** that have been perfected over the eons and Wyght'Core equipped to travel the deep dimensional fractures of Xai's vast oceans.

#### THE PRICE OF INACTION

The Torra of the Twelve Twilight Winds was long, a wide undulating curvaceous steel form, a design perfected with each succeeding generation of Min'Zirai ship building families over thousands of years. Its great sorcerous weapons made it among the most feared vessels in the Empire.

The Captain was tall and slender as were most Min'Zirai, elegant in form and efficient movement dressed in a perfectly crisp uniform among a bridge of similarly perfectly attired officers and crew.

The ship was old but immaculate, a proud veteran of Dynasty campaigns dating back hundreds of years. The Captain had led his ship and crew to honor, glory, and profit, well respected by his fellow officers. At least until a few moments ago.

"Hold fire," the Captain repeated.

"Captain," the first said flatly.

"If that is a question you had best be prepared to back that up with iron," said the Captain, his right hand slipping to the rosewood handle of his father's star pistol, blue e'Mral mists flowing from his hand through the gun as it still rested in its sleek holster along his right thigh.

"They will not yield, tradition says that they be destroyed as an example to others," said the First stating the obvious for benefit of others on the bridge, "defiance requires death."

"I am still not hearing a question," said the Captain, his hatred of his First growing. "Your actions these last few days have been out of character, your repeated resignation of violence against these primitives defies justification," explained the First, "we are concerned for your health."

"Is it required that I justify my actions?" asked the infuriated Captain.

"Never," said the First, "however your inaction in the face of defiance suggests weakness, one I intend to exploit."

The First quickly drew his own pistol with the grace of a practiced master, laced with flowing blue mists he fired toward the Captain, swirling yellow shielding mists forming with his other hand.

The Captain was however quicker, anticipating this betrayal for some days now. The Captain's bullet slipped the First's shielding and struck him in the eye, killing him instantly. The First's shot firing into the floor as he fell.

The Captain slipped his star pistol effortlessly into his holster.

"What was his first mistake?" the Captain asked the junior officer near where the body fell.

"His mistakes were innumerable," said the junior officer, "though his first mistake was to attempt defense, he divided his mind, to kill requires focus, he was unfocused."

"A fair assessment," said the Captain, though that was his last mistake, "his first mistake was to be so easily baited into unprepared action, that and of course he talked too much."

"Now," he said loudly to the entire bridge crew, "Fire, let us leave this melodrama behind us."



House Light and the Zirai Dynasty is ruled by the firm martial discipline of sorcerous officer elite.

Zirai City maintains the idyllic appearance of a simple medieval civilization but nuanced out of sight, by art and craft, are hidden the modern conveniences of a highly advanced modern civilization, arguably more advanced and sophisticated than any other civilization on Xai.

The higher cybernetic civilization of the Adrena'Chrome seeming a crude and garish parody of life when compared to the civilized elegance of Zirai technomancy.

House Light are strong supporters of the Crystal Shard Empress, having used their navy on countless occasions to bring other Great Houses into line. The Empress is good at keeping potential rivals of the Min'Zirai in a box, allowing House Light the freedom to expand its own Dynasty far beyond the Clockwork Metropolis.

#### A NEW WORLD ORDER

The First'Admiral sat upon a dais, his sorcerous exploits the stuff of legend, his admiralty of the Ghal'van Campaign led him to a position where his predecessor laid dead at his feet, an honorable end, and an auspicious beginning.

The great wooden and paper hall was of sleek simple lines of elegance and purpose, nothing could be taken away without aesthetic loss, nothing added without being superfluous.

The Envoy disliked visiting the Min'Zirai, layers of ritual upon processions of protocol upon volumes of subtext. Everything had a reason and meaning, all of it opaque except for those intended to see its meaning. Her own meeting with the First'Admiral was months in preparation.

She entered the great hall, her beautiful form veiled by layers of formal Imperial gown, her hair ritually arranged in the style of the Min'Zirai court, though carefully flawed so as not to suggest a challenge to any other member of the First'Admiral's court. She was prim, proper, and ritually mannered, just as uncomfortable, and self-conscience as she suspected was their purpose.

The First'Admiral was flanked on either side by 24 counselors, she at the center of their attention sitting upon a mat at the lowest point in the large hall.

The introductions required the better part of an hour, followed by the formal reading of the letter ritually delivered yesterday morning to the First'Admiral from the Crystal Shard Empress.

The matter at hand was serious, Min'Zirai aggression against several Great Houses, the kind of aggressions designed to provoke a rash response, the kind that if not responded to would invite further aggression, perhaps invasion.

These were not aggressions against other Houses though, the subtext of these aggressions was aimed against the Empress and intended to bring her here today. The aggrieved Houses convinced to stay their response pending todays outcome.

The Min'Zirai were prepared to conquer the Metropolis and take all the Mistress Spires for themselves. They no longer seemed to see a need for the Empress nor the prominence of the other Mistress races. For the Min'Zirai, today was a formality, the Envoy expected to be "informed" of how the next few years would proceed.

After the reading of the Empire's formal letter, the counselors began to speak. One at a time, the lowest ranking speaking, then the next lowest, and so on, each giving their opinion of the matter at hand, and each in turn espousing hatred at being so long

hemmed in by the Empress and her Fanes. This went on for hours, brief recesses occasionally called during which the Envoy was expected to sit unmoving in her lowliest position while refreshments were served among the Court. The First'Admiral similarly sitting unmoving, staring hard at the young Envoy, seeking any excuse to have her executed for a breach in protocol.

When finally, all 24 counselors had given their long and detailed opinions on why their actions were justified and the weakness of the other Great Houses invited First'Admiral aggression and eventual rule, silence fell over the hall.

The First'Admiral wanted war, that was clear before she arrived, but he also knew the Empress may well be luring him to a conflict, therefore she had been invited, he needed to see the eyes of his enemy.

*She stood, the collective gasp was audible,* some calling for her immediate execution, her boldness, her arrogance, such a slight could not be forgiven. The First'Admiral however did not move.

*The Envoy stared hard into the* First'Admiral's eyes and began to speak. "You are small, stupid, and weak, my lord First'Admiral, and you surround yourself with parrots and sycophants that speak as children, not in tones of respect, but in the speech of petty need and cartoon renderings of the world. You are the talentless teacher at the head of a schoolroom of fingerpainting toddlers."

All the counselors now up on their feet, each a sorcerous Arcane, each spiraling e'Mral fire, frost, and disintegration toward the Envoy, her eyes fixed on the First'Admiral, her body vaporized in flashes of light and shadow. A wisp of her once glorious gown vanished as the last ember fell extinguished to the ground.

Rage, yelling, threats of immediate attack, threats of vengeance, spun about the room until it finally settled, the First'Admiral still unmoving, waiting for his court to regain its composure.

The First'Admiral finally spoke, "Is there anything she said that was true?" he asked his counselors.

They settled themselves, and in turn, each of the 24 espoused their rage at the indignity of the Envoy and the flat assertion that nothing said by the Witch was true. When all 24 counselors had finished saying the same thing, the First'Admiral rose, the counselors all bowed.

"Please send my personal apologies to the Empress," commanded the First'Admiral, "hostilities will cease." The counselors staying silent, knowing that any word this moment would be met with immediate execution. "You are each wrong, for she spoke one truth, you each speak as children. Until you can each express to me an original thought, you are each stripped of rank, title, and your families held here in the Palace as my guests."

The First'Admiral left the great hall.

Back in the great audience hall of the Crystal Shard Empress, the High Priestess asked, "my Empress, I do not understand, you let your Envoy be destroyed, easily you could have defended her from such butchery."

"Sadly, it was necessary," intoned the Empress, "Gazellia knew her mission and she accepted it willingly, her selfless sacrifice has saved countless lives."

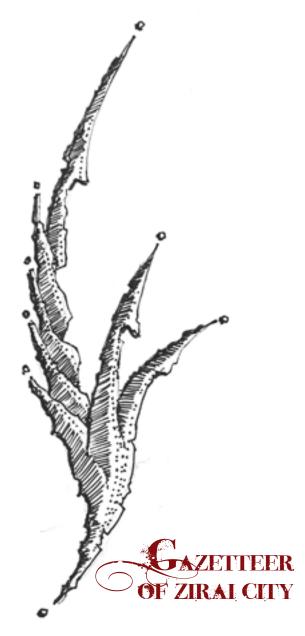
"But why was it necessary?" asked the High Priestess.

"The First'Admiral needed to witness our resolve, the faith of Gazellia. And he needed to see how little control he had over his own people, who kill for self-aggrandizement in his eyes as children perform for pride of a father. It was necessary that he see he would lose."

"They could still attack and win," said the High Priestess, "the other 36 Houses are divided, and the Min'Zirai have more ships and wizards than any can withstand."

"You parrot the First'Admiral's counselors," said the Empress, "go now, meditate, return to me once you have an original thought, otherwise, do not return."

The High Priestess left the great hall of audience. She never returned.



## IO SPIRE ZIRAL THE MIRROR OF LEEUMINATED GRACE

Spire Zirai is a simple gracefully curved form best described as a single drop of water having fallen into still water and frozen in upward motion.

The Spire is among the most active in the Clockwork Metropolis as the Min'Zirai long ago came to understand a great many secrets of the Mistress Spire still unknown to most. The Spire provides passage to thousands of far distant locations.

This means that the Spire is the source of goods and travelers unique and interesting in a constant flow in and out of the Spire, making it one of the most fascinating markets of the Clockwork Metropolis.

And while the Min'Zirai imagine their knowledge of the Spire to be considerable, they are also not so proud or stupid as to suggest they understand but a fraction of its potential. In comparison though the Min'Zirai must appear as masters, most of the other Great Houses using their Spires as an infant might use super-computer to its highest potential.

In fact, most of the other civilizations of the Empire are as primitive barbarians in comparison to the Min'Zirai, even the so called highly advanced Xuvarians bashing about with their cybernetic technomancies like a child with loaded gun while Min'Zirai wield their knowledge and arts as master warriors.

#### OOG CITY OF WAR

## & O18 BARRACKS OF GENERALSKA SHINARA

The City of War and the Barracks is a middle finger to the Shadarans, a bastion of Min'Zirai military might surrounded by Shadaran military might.

### The history of conflict between the Shadarans and Min'Zirai is

**old.** For reasons unclear to most outside observers, these two military powers despise each other on a seeming personal level.

And as the affairs of the Shadarans and the Min'Zirai generally never intersect, the two sides must go out of their ways to find reasons for war. The City of War is just such a reason.



#### O19 ARTIFACT ARCANES TRUE FAITH TRICARA FANE

This ancient Mistress Artifact is a triangular polished stone plain 12-miles on a side. At the center of each side is an enormous cathedral-like structure seeming built for giants of not-necessarily humanoid proportions.

The 3 cathedrals are Shadra, Gryzar, and Illuri, the churches of the Shadow, Gray, and Illumination.

According to the old religions, there are 3 kinds of elemental beings, The Angelic, the Mortal, and the Demonic.

The Angelic being elementals of darkness, cold, and order, the Demonic are elementals of light, fire, and chaos, and the Mortals elementals of life and balance.

The 70 square mile plain the base of an inverted tetrahedron set point down into the earth. This is the site where the old religions say the three great powers set about the creation of the universe.

It is worth noting here that the Dyson sphere that is Xhirra'Xakarra'Xai is ancient as measured in geologic time. The old religions say that the Mistress are masters Xhirra, the rings of the sphere, and that the Demonic are masters of Xakarra, the inner surface of the sphere, and that the Mortals were masters of Xai, the surface of the sphere.

Followers of these old religions, such as the Min'Zirai, believe the universe is not as it portrayed by the Empress or her 5 Pen'de'shal Fanes.

Min'Zirai priests find faith in the Fanes is to diminish faith in man, for the life and souls of men are the source of the e'Mral mists. The Demonic are not trapped within the subworld realms of Xakarra and the Mistress have not left our universe, still residing within their cities of light among the rings seen above. The truth they say is that the Empress is a lie and her Metropolis Empire a prison.

#### **OLD TRUTHS**

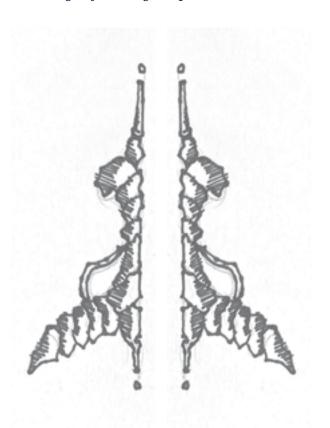
The crystalline clockwork forms of the 3 Mistress shone with the light of dawn, noon, and twilight, their shifting prism forms scattering rainbow hues of light like stars across the great stone plain that stretched before them.

Their light illuminated 3 roiling clouds of lightning streaked darkness, the form of each Demon Prince indistinct, coming into focus just long enough to be glimpsed before collapsing and reforming to something even more grotesque, beautiful, or horrific.

The 3 titanic dragon shapes drifted toward the Mistress and Demonic, each of their e'Mral mist forms of Blue, Yellow, and Red coiling through the air with serpentine grace.

Lighting cracked from the lead Demon Prince, bile spitting from its melting forms as it spoke, "Why have you called us here, we despise this place and its oppressive physical rules?"

"We also question the need of your summons," sang the luciferous clarion voice of the lead Mistress, "important matters are being deferred by our presence here."



"We three bless that you indulge our call," said the grinding hollow metallic voice of the Blue dragon, "the mortal races are about to loose themselves upon the universe, our beloved Mother increasingly unable to contain their will."

"Finally," said the Mistress, "we had begun to consider your plan might have failed and we would need to begin again."

"We are pleased," spat and sputtered the Demon Prince, "we also doubted your wisdom."

"Your patience was gracious," said the howling winds of the Yellow dragon, "the Clockwork Metropolis is about to be the center of an opera that will fill the universe with life and e'Mral mists, the universe is about to become alive and enchanted to the end of time."

"They are about to see the truth," said the Demon Prince with a gibbering laugh.

"Nothing is as they expect," said the Mistress, "will they survive?"

"They are resilient," said the Blood Queen, her Red e'Mral dragon form coiling as she spoke, "they will surprise you."

#### O3/4 DRIFT CITY HARLEQUIN LIGHT SOLITAIRE

The **Solitaire Drift City** is the first of the 9 floating cities to have been crafted during the ancient Calibahn Empire. The city is of typical Calibahn craft, which is to say it is a wonder of gothic & rococo architecture, sculpture, and form to artistry the like has never been matched.

The city is off limits to visitors except by invitation and is home to various elite Min'Zirai military academies and the personal residences of many in the Shogunate Command.

## **63.7** SISTER CODDESS FOREST OF SORROWS

The Forest of Sorrows is many things, though mostly to do with death. The forest is home to dozens of official Zirai military graveyards honoring the fallen through the ages.

#### O4O SOUL SEER S ISLAND OF UNDIMMED TRUTH

Min'Zirai are not overly superstitious, being unaffected by the chemical imbalances of fear in the brain.

But the Zirai are strong believers that their ancestors can help guide the living.

Seer's Island is a place where the living can Séance with passed relatives, and not as a jest or a con, but for real.

The legend of the place has grown and is now popular with foreign tourists seeking closure and advice from the afterlife. With them has come a host of charlatans and mentalists to take their money in return for a fun experience and a few words they had really wanted to hear.

### 043 SILVER LIGHT CITY JUSTAKISS AWAY

Silver City is immediately adjacent to Spire Zirai and among the wealthiest enclaves of Zirai City. This is a city that is decidedly non-military, a place of art and theater and merchants from across the Zirai Dynasty.

The streets here are lovely, the whole of the city a kind of vast Japanese gardens of paths, lakes, and flowering wonders of a thousand worlds leading to hand crafted wooden homes of spiritual craftsmanship.

#### 180 HARKNESS THE CHAOS STREETS

The Chaos Streets are a place of bars, night clubs, and courtesan houses of every description and imagining. This is a city of arriving or disembarking Zirai soldiers, a good place to let loose, enjoy, and fight.

Soldiers from all over the Empire enjoy not only pleasures of the Chaos Streets but also the chance to test themselves against the vaunted Zirai warrior.

#### Noon FAR PLAIN

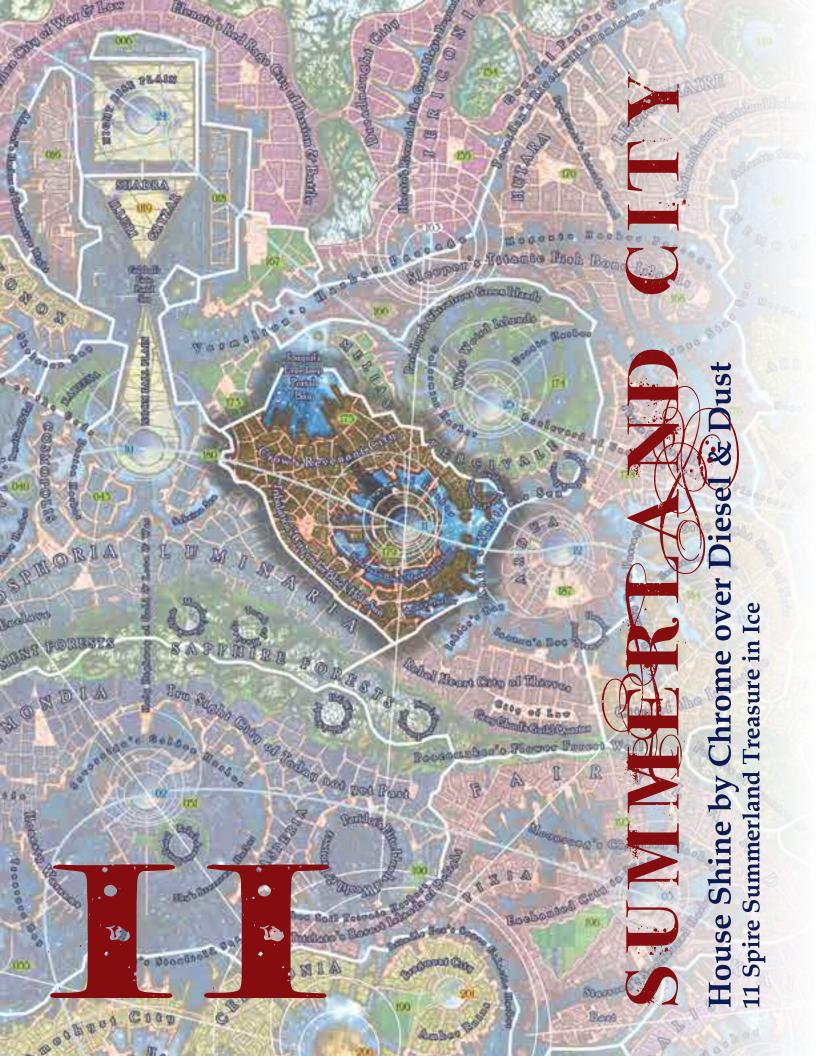
The Noon Fall Plain sits at the base of Spire Zirai, The Plain immediately surrounding the Spire is home to a large and beautiful and colorful tent city of merchants, traders, travelers, and exotic beasts tied to the far reaching Zirai Dynasty.

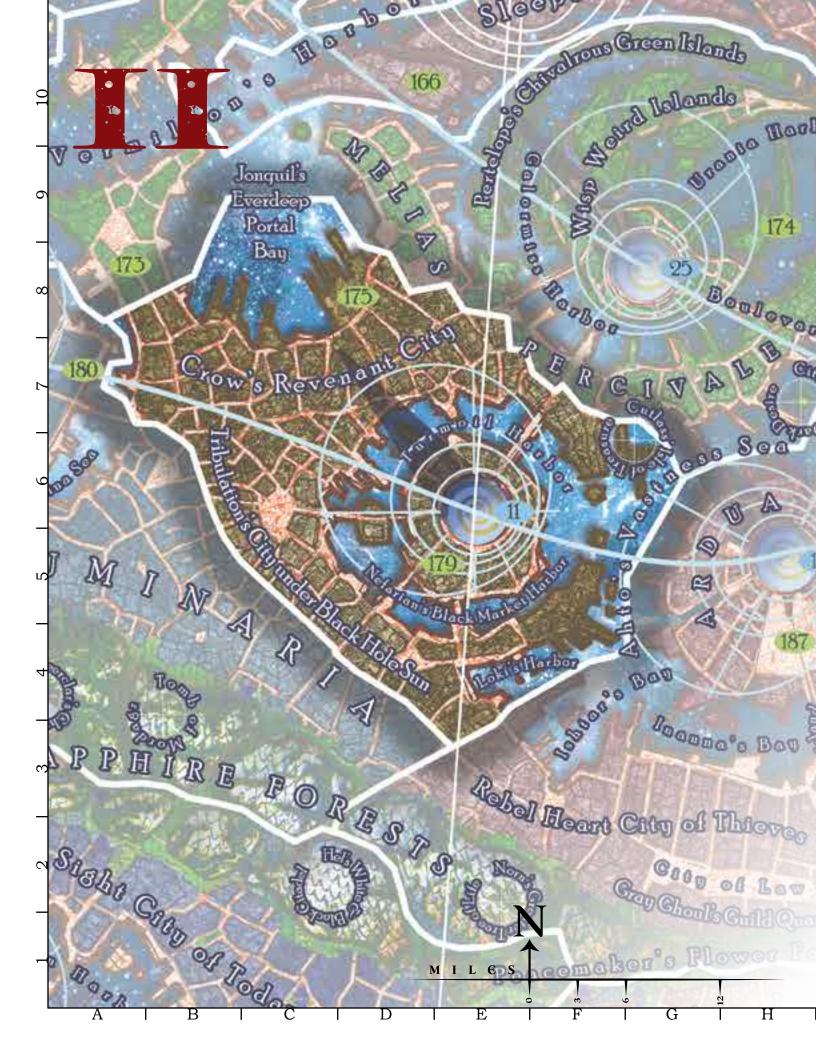
This market is popular with just about everyone, a kind of celestial market with offerings from a thousand exotic far off places offered by a thousand exotic peoples.

Among the tents are palatial fabric works representing embassies of other Great Houses as well as Combines from across the Empire. The shear wealth and variety of this place is staggering to behold and a wonder to comprehend.

The more northerly 12-mile stretch of the stone and glass plain is various parade and assembly grounds for Zirai military campaigns. Giant public shows of sometimes tens of thousands of perfectly attired and disciplined warriors about to depart for places unknown. The Zirai are keen that the other Great Houses are ever reminded of House Light power and so arrange regular military spectacles.







#### SUMMERIAND CITY

The Summerland streets are among the most **colorful and diverse** of the Clockworks, a random collection of races, and goods, an **exuberant** bazaar vibrant with life.

The Rhamasi are a hard desert bred people with a joy for a life well lived **today**. Their religions decidedly fatalist, what will be will be, so they tend to not fret about concerns of tomorrow or the regrets of yesterday.

Summerland is a city of advanced technomancy, but only as it supports survival, conveniences tend to be ignored as wasteful or pointless. The buildings tend to be low heavy earthen structures with thick walls and mud domes painted in bold tribal patterns and highlighted with garish neon signs, symbols, and tracery (the Rhamasi having a special love for all things tacky and tasteless).



The Rhamasi are a deeply spiritual people born of long ages of slavery.

Physically the Rhamasi are as desiccated bodies, their skin as taught parchment stretched over seemingly mummified muscle, bone, and organs.

Though alive, the Rhamasi have no need to eat or drink or breathe upon adulthood, what breath they take only in need to speak in their famously dry raspy whispering voices. And upon growing to age 26, they cease to grow or age further, immortal, and famously hard to kill.

The Rhamasi are remnants of an incredibly old slave race that once built great cites, ships, and fanciful technologies and even took flight among the stars. The Rhamasi acumen with machine and motor is legendary.

The Rhamasi of modern day are of a disciplined survivalist kind, rugged, brutal, and believers in ritual martial arts of faith that offer purpose to endure.

For eons since their emancipation, the Rhamasi have carried some high knowledge of their city building slavers and have become skilled scavengers and repair artists. The Rhamasi maintain and even advance technologies that aid their survival and have long abandoned that which is superfluous to need.

As a symbol of enduring hope, flowers ever seem to grow and bloom from the cracks and buildings of Summerland City.

#### FLOWER FIELD

The Shaman remembered the arrogance of his ancestors. He remembered their cruelty and their indifference. He remembered the machines that tore upon the earth as hungry beasts and belched their bile into the air.

And he remembered the end days, the war, if one can call such wanton destruction war, each side dedicated to the willful genocide of the other, and both succeeding to the coming of desert, dust, and ruin.

A sadness moved the Shaman, not for his people, but for the world they had bequeathed their children.

He looked far across the dunes under luminous night sky, the stars so close they might be touched, a calmness had come over the place, the winds he has sent away. His people watched from the rocks as the stars began to fall, their light splashing down upon the sands as luminous liquid. From each splash of light arose a luminous flower of disquieting alien beauty. Soon the dunes mirrored the light of the stars above, and between the light of heaven and earth, his clan moved through the fields of flowers that they might gather their bounty.

He recalled the fields of flowers that had once grown abundant across the landscapes of this place, of the water, of the paradise beauty. He recalled until his people had completed their long night's harvest and dawn threatened the eastern horizon.

The Shaman recalled how the few survivors had fled the Summerland, his brother, and sisters, to water and new slavery they fled, now vanished, the victims of their own dreams of ease and convenience.

These were his lands, a crucible of faith, and these were his people, the faithful, a new paradise they would one day create, never to be slaves again.

# HOUSE SHINE BY CHROME OVER DIESEE & DUST

House Shine is ruled by a council of Rhamasi elders.

House Shine is politically weak within the workings of the Great Houses, not interested in the affairs of the Empire.

House Shine's chief priority is that the other Great Houses do not interfere with Rhamasi travels.

The religious sensibilities of the Rhamasi align well with those of the Imperial Priests and Paladins though with a decidedly more survivalist pragmatism and fatalist religious bent.

The Rhamasi have of late been filling the Imperial ranks with their numbers. The real influence of House Shine is at a more personal level, the free travel of Rhamasi merchants and warriors to go as they please throughout the Empire.



#### CEAVING HOME

The Nine Shaman had gathered, each Arcane, and each of age measured in millennia, all but one, Shaman Nyra, she was old from before the coming of Arcane and the Metropolis Empire. She would be the one to decide.

High in the water eroded limestone caves of Spire Summerland the Nine Shaman stood in a circle in torch lit hall surrounding a shallow brackish pool of water, inviting the Imperial Envoy to enter, taking her place among the circle.

The Envoy bowed, speaking with a carillon voice channeled from the Crystal Shard Empress that now possessed her body, "you do me great honor in receiving me to speak."

"Yes we do," said the youngest Shaman, "All but one here advised against listening to your vipers tongue, but unlike you and your dismal Empire, we have respect for our elders and minority opinion, thus we will hear you despite your having never chosen to hear us."

The Envoy bowed toward the young Shaman, "I have come to tell you what you already know, so the truth of my words should be easy to discern. It is time you began to abandon the Summerland City, its purpose served."

"Blasphemy," interrupted the youngest, "we will not be insulted by such evil as you."

The eldest, Shaman Nyra, raised her had to silence her companion.

The Envoy continued, "faith is people, not a place, and Xai is an unexplored vastness, its Outlands savage and deadly only suitable for the disciplined and faithful. And they are abundant of life and water. Not easy places, more difficult and challenging than any hostility of Summerland City. Your faith will be tested, your hearts will know suffering and disappointment, but your children will grow and prosper, they will know paradise, they will again be masters of their world and destiny. Or they may stay as they are, trapped as in amber within the ruin of your ancestor's decisions. It is time you began making your own decisions, and to

stop hiding in the self-pity of your past," concluded the Empress channeled through her Envoy.

The youngest protested, raging on of heresy.

Some others saw the abandonment of place as an abandonment of faith, for it is the faith to remake their City that has fed their souls since the founding of the Empire.

Still others saw trickery and deception in the Envoy's words.

Finally, when all argument had sputtered to emptiness, Nyra said, "you are of course right, the coming of the Arcane has changed what we were, our City too small to now contain our faith. Our youth struggle, they leave in increasing numbers, it is time our young Arcane lead the young to new horizons, together, where as before, they can find common faith and purpose, otherwise our youth will bleed away individually, alone, and perish."

All were silent, none quite understanding what they were hearing.

"Are you saying the dream of restoring the Summerland was a lie?" asked the youngest Shaman.

"I'm saying it is a dream," said Nyra the Ancient, "and our youth have awoken from their long slumber and we must lead them to new horizons. YOU must lead them, children of this new age as each of you are. We taught you how to survive, now each of you must teach our children how to LIVE."

"Any that choose this path," said the Empress, "will have my full support, Ark ships, tools, anything you deem necessary. You are the finest of my Metropolis children, and it is time you set forth to make your own way."

"We will need nothing from you," spat the youngest, "If this be the path of our people then it will be OUR path, damn you to hell."

The Envoy swelled with pride, unable to conceal her smile at finally hearing the words she had sought for so long. Perhaps, she thought, there might be hope for the others.



#### TREASURE IN ICE

The Summerland Spire is of a form like a flowering tree that creates an endless array of lovely shimmering flowers of prismatic ice only to have them begin to slowly fall as snow as soon as they are formed.

The inner chambers of the Spire and passage to the Summerland Reams are freely open to merchants and travelers though few willingly endure its hardships. Those that do are rewarded with sights and adventures as likely to kill as remake one's soul.

But perhaps more importantly, the Summerland Spire is alive with the activity of exodus, clan after clan of Rhamasi are leaving the Metropolis, passing along ancient Spire passages to portals leading to far off Outland wildernesses to start new, guided by faith, discipline, and their mysterious Arcane Shaman. Many other poor and lost of the Metropolis joining them to places unknown, themselves finding new purpose and faith.

#### 175 DAMNATION INDUSTRIES COSMIC SHIPWORKS

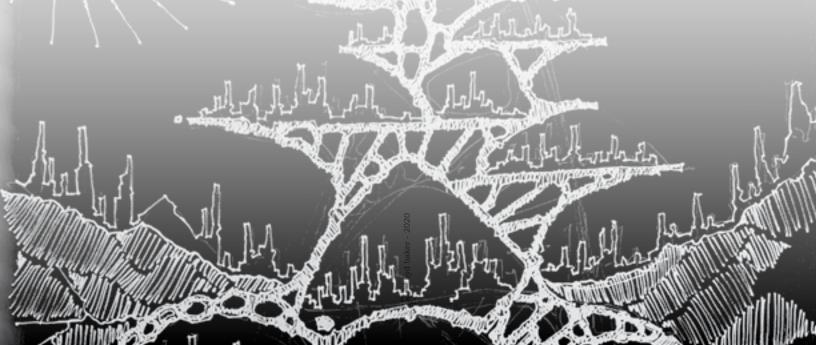
The **Cosmic Shipworks** were an old slave house run by **Damnation Industries** that built generally poorquality ships and weapons for use by enslaved and conscripted armies.

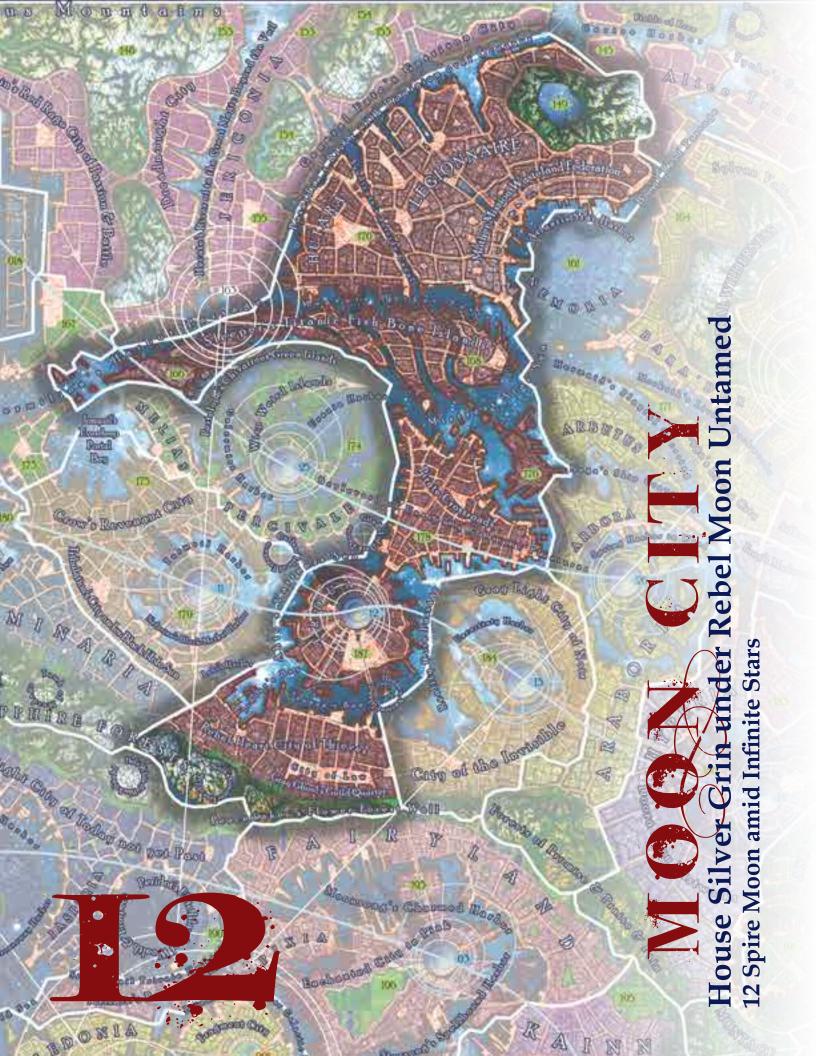
Damnation Industries was overthrown and now operates as a Combine by its former slaves. The quality of mortal weapons crafted by Damnation Industry is now some of the best and most imaginative in the Clockworks, freely sold to anyone with the cash to pay. D.I. weapons are the standard by which all other mortal weapons are measured. D.I. does not craft sorcerous or dreadrock weapons, only those generally unaffected by e'Mral mists. The everyman's weapon for every day.

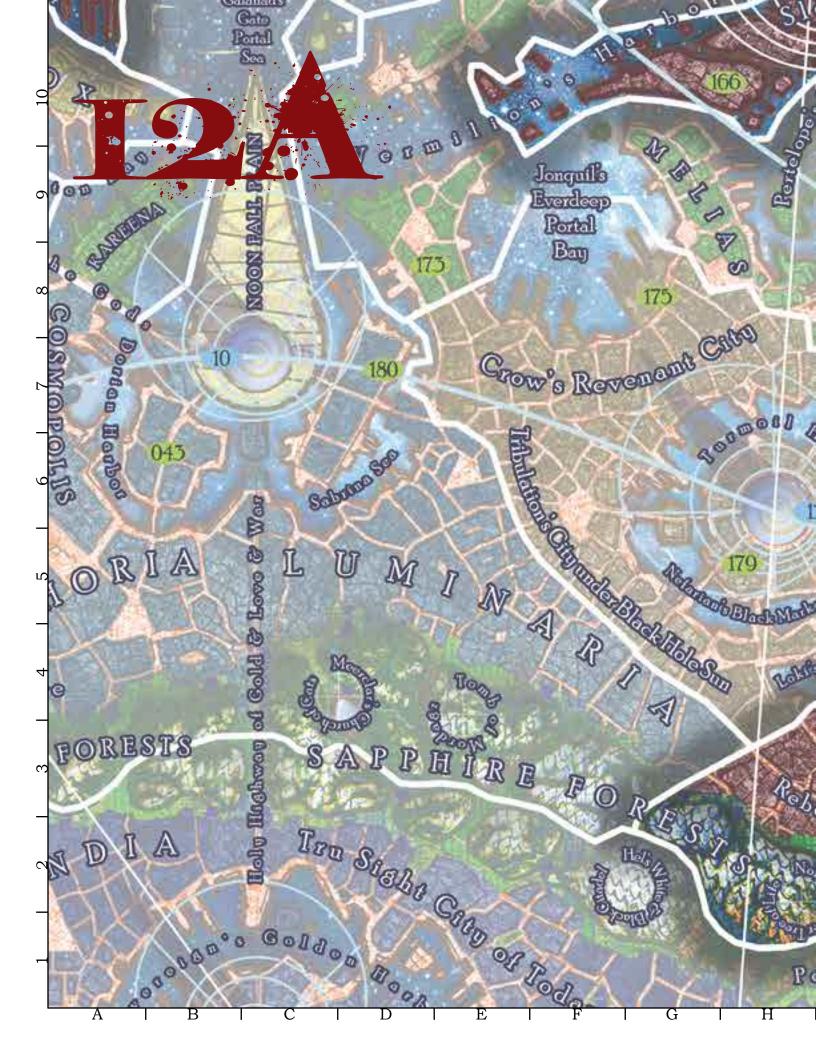
#### 179 CHAT NOIR SNOW HILLS

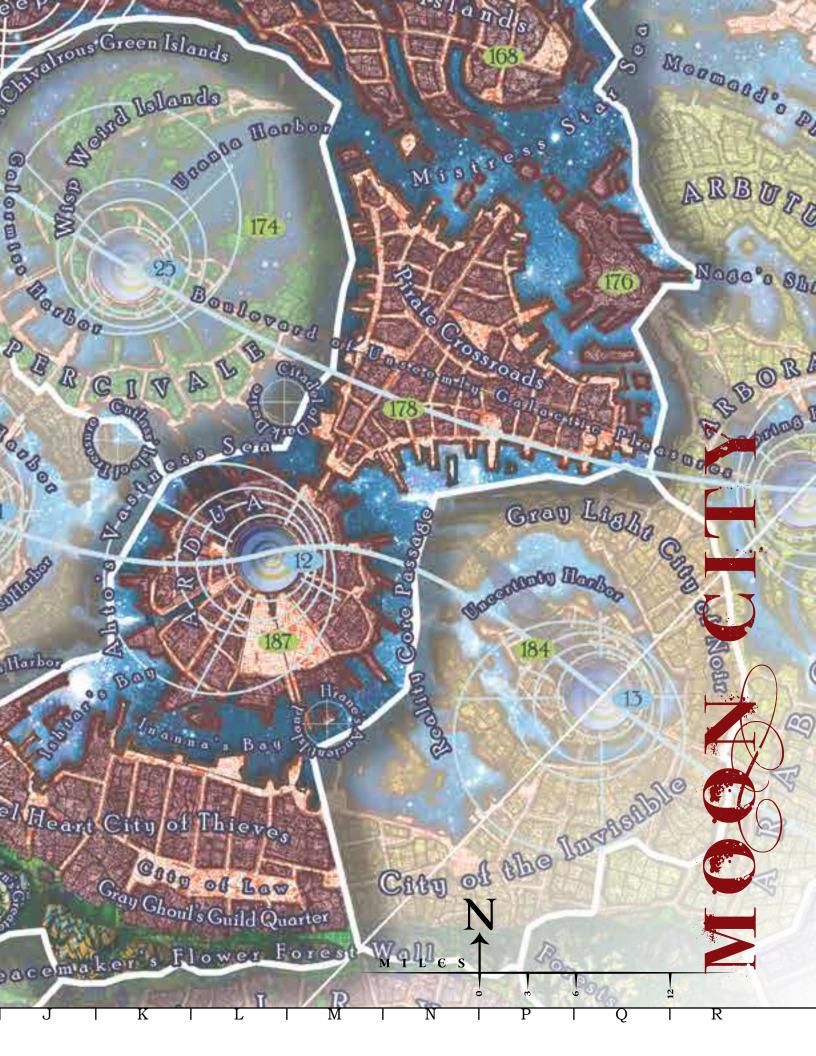
Surrounding the Summerland Spire is the **Snow Hills**, a place of permanent delicately falling snow under the iceflowering branches of the Spire.

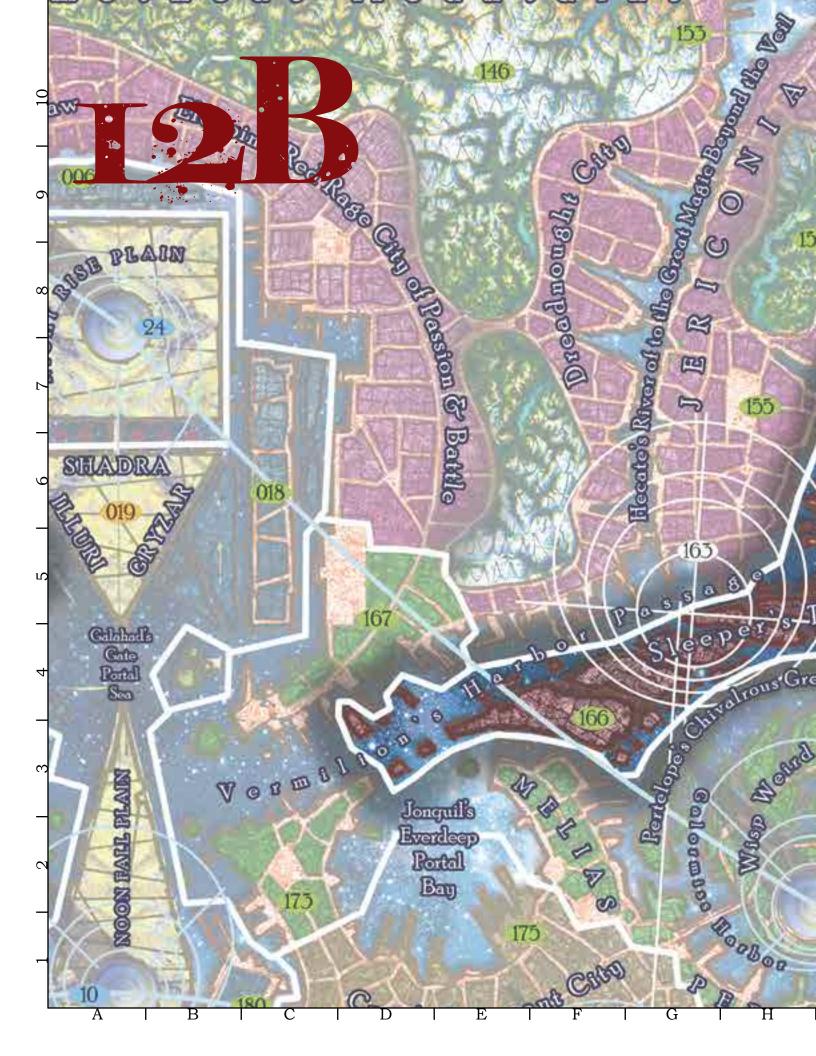
The Rhamasi have a fascination with snow. The snow hills a place of wealth, decadence, and the Rhamasi faithless. This is a city of ice castles, frozen courtesan halls, and ice cave bars.

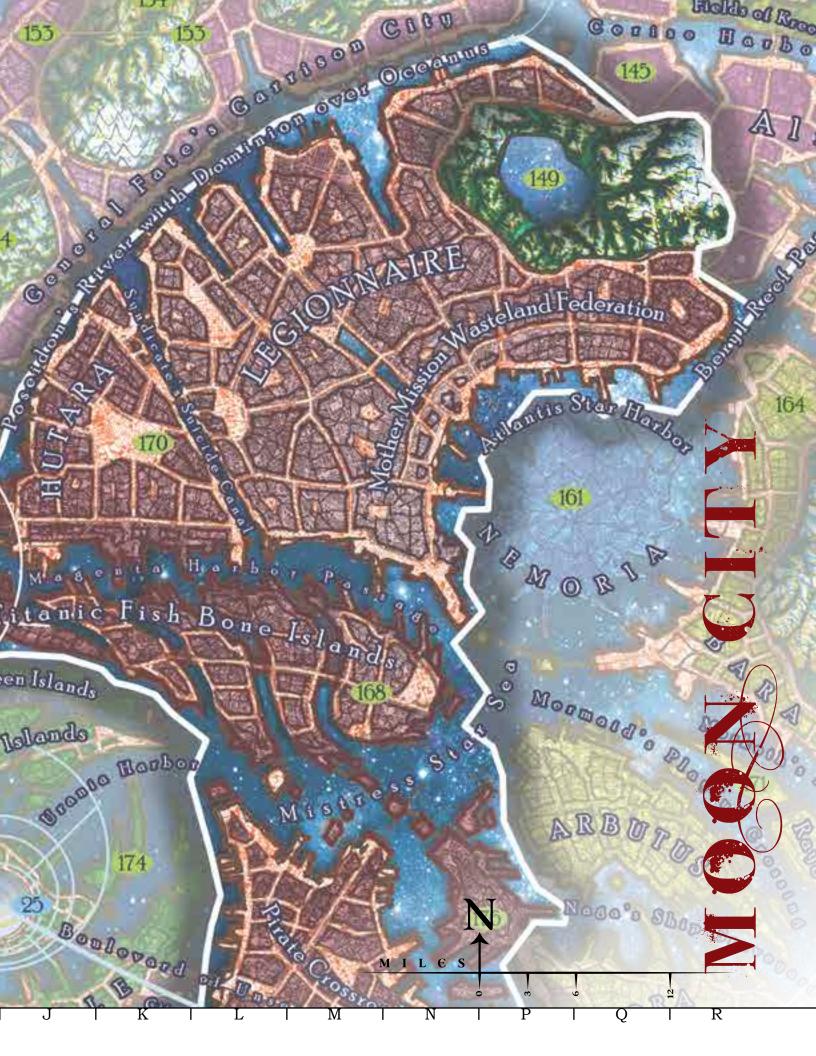












#### SOMETHING OF FREEWILL

"Welcome to the future," said the High Priestess, her wide smile and swirling gown a joy, "you have been missed."

"Thank you," bowed Kai, "though I must admit, I had not imagined the dragons capable of such cruelty, suffering, and death, you made the Lichborne."

"We have done far worse; did you not know it was the dragons that created the Demon Princes?" she said mocking.

"No," he said, "such evil I had not imagined."

"Well we will need to work on that imagination of yours," the priestess crooned, swirling in dance as she spoke, her shimmering gown fluttering with a gravity defying grace.

"Is there a point to this invitation," he said, "or do you just enjoy insulting your guests?"

"I want you to leave your Lykkan brothers and sisters alone," she said with a pirouette, "it would be best if no one knows who or what your are, it would be best if your Twins and that banshee slave you call a wife never come to Xai."

"A request?" asked Kai.

"A request," she said, "we both know that threatening you or your Mistress monstrosities would do no good, so why pretend. You are a wildcard that could upend my work here, my precious Arcane are not to be interfered with, otherwise we will have Words."

"And what of those corrupted you deign unworthy, the ones your kind MADE when you made the Demon Princes, the ones you now turn your back on, the ones enslaved by our favored children," he passionately spoke, "what of them?" "True," the empress spoke through her High Priestess, "they are weak and unredeemable, I had thought to let them perish. A test to see if a few races were destroyed, would more Arcane be born into the races remaining, perhaps eventually focused into a single race."

"You are insane," said Kai, "you toy of genocide with casual disregard."

"There is nothing casual about it," said the Empress coldly, "to your limited Mistress crafted mind it is too much to understand, you talk like a trained monkey, I do not expect you to see, but I do expect you to listen. If you imagine there is value among the trash left behind by the Demon Princes, the Ddraig," she spit, "the Dhar, The Lyrn, even your own pathetic Lykkan brats," she mocked, the robes of the High Priestess aflame, "I'll not stop you, in fact I think I shall enjoy watching you do my work for me, let their extinction be under your guidance."

"I will see you gone from Xai," he said, "I will see you dead."

"Promises, promises," soothed the Empress, "I'd be grateful indeed."

#### MOON CITY

The coming of the Myrddin Wizards 200 years ago has been a boon to Moon City, alliances with the Ddraig, Dhar, and Lyr races have made the city a thriving hub of trade and exploration.

While most Great Hoses are focused on internal affairs and House politics, the Lykka of Moon City are focused on the exploration of Xai's vast Outland Wilderness.

Moon City and her Lykkan races and allies resist Imperial dominion, they abhor the rules and the restrictions. The Lykka have risen as powerful pirates and rebels within the Metropolis, agitators seeking to weaken Imperial and Great House dominion.

All of which has led the people of Moon City being under threat of constant retaliation from the other Great Houses, threats they embrace and often invite.

What makes the situation more dangerous is that Moon City and the cities of its allies, have developed from medieval slave hovels to modern industrial powerhouses in a few short centuries.

Moon City is a place of optimism and progress, racing forward into the unknown future, while most Great Houses seek to protect dusty pasts and failed noble hierarchies, having existed unchanged for thousands of years under the yoke of an Empire that discourages change.

#### **SOME SUCCESS**

"We had expected the foolishness of your task to cause some trouble," said the Envoy, "but no one could have imagined your success."

"We did," said the First of the 3 Myrddin Wizards.

"Of course, you did," said the Imperial Envoy, "but matters are getting out of hand, fear begins to grip the Great Houses, talk of war repeats, people rebel led by your so-called freedom fighters. This cannot be."

"Not only can it be, IT IS," said the Myrddin Wizard, "your days are numbered."

"Well said," the Envoy agreed, "but you miss the more subtle point as is your common failing, too many of the great races are not yet ready. It is not what you do that offends, it is the timing that is inconvenient."

"Well I am very sorry if the timing of your demise offends," spat the Myrddin Wizard.

"Apology accepted," the Envoy bowed, "a gift." The Envoy held out her left hand, a sharp looking long asymmetric crystal in her open palm."

"What is this?" the First Myrddin asked. "There is only one way to find out," the High Priestess played.

The Third Myrddin began to glow, the bright illuminations of her crystal skeleton shining through her translucent skin and gossamer robes, a bright ray of light firing from her hands, striking the High Priestess, the afterimage of the surprised puppet still visible as ash and embers of her form were driven hundreds of yards from where she had stood, the crystal in her hand clattering to the ground.

"Feel better?" asked the Second Myrddin.

"Much," sneered the Third.

The First picked up the crystal, directing light from the palm of his hand through the data store, revealing a Mhorganti map accompanied by many volumes of navigational vectors.

"Is that...?" Asked the Second.

"Yes," said the Third, "that Witch thinks she can lure us away from the Metropolis, this would require centuries, and all of our fighting forces, we cannot be so easily tricked by something new and shiny."

"The Empress is right," the First said somewhat defeated, "our revolution will have to wait, THIS we can not ignore," he said staring at the alien landscapes of the Outlands, a large demonic city set into a valley at its center, "our prey awaits."

"Aaaaaarrrgg..." howled the Third, "we have too many damnable enemies!"

"A weakness too easily exploited," said the Second.

"Too true," lamented the First, "too true."



House Silver and the Lykkan races are famously **pirates and explorers**, favorites of the Crystal Shard Empress and indispensable to Imperial exploration and outward expansion.

House Silver, though favorites of the Empress, would like nothing more than to see the end of the Empress and her damnable Metropolis Empire. What keeps them at bay is their attentions being constantly consumed by affairs far from the Clockworks.



The Lykka are sometimes called the Children of Mistress, the first of the soulborne races to evolve from their angelic paradise works.

These people enjoyed a paradise at the dawn of mortal-kind and the Mistress are said to have lived among them.

The Lykka are enchanted, meaning here that they are free of guilt and inhibition and eschew religious and similar dogmas that shackle the mind to guilt, shame, sin, forgiveness, self-loathing, and regret; all of which impairs magic.

These people enjoyed a paradise at the dawn of mortal-kind and the Mistress are said to have lived among them.

The Lykka are a free-spirited folk that put **loyalties to family and clan** above all other considerations.

But some Mistress became jealous of man's freewill and sought it for themselves, remaking their own angelic forms into what we now call the Demon Princes.

The Demon Princes sought dominion over man. Demon-kind sired hybrid Nephilim as giants among men.

Long-story-short, the Demon Princes and their demonic offspring were finally banished to Xai's Subworlds and the corrupted Mistress realms flooded that work might begin anew.

And that should have been the end of it except that it was not. Yet another rebel group of Mistress saved the soon to be drowned corrupted and hid them among the stars. Apparently, it was difficult for the Mistress to get on the same page.

But all the Antediluvians lived forever with the corruption of the Demon Princes, all the so-called **Lunar** races are lycanthropes. The form of animal will always be that of the mother.

## THE MYRDDIN WIZARDS

When it was decided a Flood was required to cleanse Xai of the Lunar races, minority Mistress gathered 37 times 37 Antediluvians and marked them with **crystalline bones**. These wizards were trained in the arts of language, agriculture, civilization, and the **weirding powers** bestowed by their luminous skeletons, also imbuing immortality to the wizards, able to die only by choice.

# MOON CITY

#### Kai, Seeva, and the Twins are pocket gods...but only to a range of about ninety yards.

Four of the Wizards were of a higher order; Kai, Seeva, and the twins Azzu & Ozzu

Kai was a Shaman's son of the Seal Clan, Seeva was of the Tiger Clan, a slave taken by Kai during an earlier conquest. Azzu & Ozzu are twins born to Seeva & Kai. The twins are considered a single person, sharing a single consciousness and soul; a single person that can be in two places at the same time.

Kai, Seeva, and the Twins are pocket gods. They are immortal, omnipotent, and omniscient but only to a range of about ninety yards.

#### The purpose of the Wizards was to ensure the survival of their soulborne kind.

Kai, also known as the Ferrier, Traveler, Walker, and Opener of Ways, raised up his peoples to travel the stars. Kai saw to the colonization of thousands of worlds hidden throughout the cosmos and formation of dozens of long enduring galactic empires.

The Twins did not abide Kai's manyhidden-colony approach, seeing it as limited and small minded. The Twins instead led a pantheon of wizards to raise up 2 galactic empires in 2 remote galaxies, one twin leading each. The central work of the empires was the creation of a pair of Ring Worlds, creating a vastness paradise for the followers of the Twins.

Seeva never forgave Kai for her treatment as a mortal slave and ever sought to undo his works, leading Kai to increasing secrecy over the ages.

When the Calabahn Empire set about the cosmos to remake the Red Empire, Kai, Seeva, and the Twins set about a plan to save their Lunar kin, using the Twins ring worlds as life boats for Kai's various empires and sending them forward in time to avoid Calibahn annihilation. Two hundred years ago, they emerged from their travels.

#### FROM A FAR FUTURE

"The stars are shifted," said Kai, "mere moments to us, well done by children," he said to the twins.

"Now," said the Twins, "we need to see what has become of our universe."

"I will take some of our Wizards to Xai, see if any of our kind yet live, you see what remains here among the stars," he said to the Twins, "I can only guess the ruin left in the wake of those Calibahn butchers."

"We should have stayed to help," derided Seeva, "you have always been a coward skulking about the shadows of history."

"Mother please," said the Twins, "we agreed."

"We agreed to let everyone die," she said, "not our finest moment."

"Rehashing our debate does not help us now," said Kai, "we saved our kind, that is our purpose, we are not responsible for everyone."

"Small deeds for small minds," she spit, "you are pathetic."

"And yet you stand here with us," said

"For my children," she said.

"As you say," Kai said turning to leave.



#### 12 SPIRE MOON AMID IN NITE STARS

The Spire Moon is as much apparatus as tower, a titanic structure of moving platforms, terraces, and domes, the whole a kind of moving model of the cosmos equipped with every manner of telescope, technomancy, and astrological devise with which to view the sky.

The Lykka are big on prophesy, prediction, and the power of dreams to affect the real universe. Spire Moon is the celestial hub of Lunar Prophesy, the only known form of celestial prediction to reliably produce useful information.

As such, the Spire is popular with powers and tourists of very imagining hoping to find some truth in what will come.

#### O16 SHADARA SIN MILITARY ARTS COALITION

This place is a poke in the eye to both the Shadaran and Zirai militaries.

Both are famously lawful militant Great Houses supporting the Empire that are forever harassing or seeking the outright downfall of House Moon.

In response, a collection of free-spirited Lunar Clans invaded Shadara'Sin, an island city of military cooperation between the Shadaran and Zirai.

The Zirai responded by invading two other Shadaran military islands.

The Shadaran responded by taking half a dozen Reef Lords of Nemoria hostage (wheels inside of wheels).

Such is the nature of Imperial politics.

#### 149 DEEPTAKE THE SKY MIRROR

This is the remains of a dormant volcano within its caldera resides a 6-mile diameter lake of very deep near freezing water.

Legend is that a starship could plummet at a specific speed and angle into the surface of the lake and appear most anyplace in the universe they might desire.

Similarly, ships returning would suddenly appear with a sonic boom out of the surface of the mirror lake flying straight up into the air.

The place is now a favorite resort area for Lunar family vacations.

#### 166 ISEE OEPOLEYANNA S CRYSTAL SHARD GLANCE ASIDE

At the far western tail of the Bone Isles lies an island that is virtually impossible to find. The island can be seen and approached but never quite reached, always seeming to slip left or right of one's course.

Upon the Isle is paradise of green hills and meadows, and delightful forests and streams. At the center of the island is an orphanage run by the Lady Pollyanna, a delightfully optimistic Wizard that rescues extraordinary magical children that have otherwise been abandoned or abused.



# MOON CITY

#### 168 DIONYSUS FESTIVAL CITY

Lykka are famous for their uninhibited and shameless celebrations. Chief among these celebrations is the **Dionysus Moon**. Each 29 days a Lycan is driven by primal need to shift into animal form, roam wild, and procreate.

This has evolved into a 3-day festival (the day before, the day of, and the day after).

Dionysus Festival City is an ancient grove turned city that specifically caters to the Moon-Call, largely empty most of the time but filled to over capacity during the week of the Dionysus Moon. For 3 days the city is over-run by humans and animals of every imagining in debaucherous carnal endeavor.

Foreign races tend to be hunted and devoured especially come festival time, so tourists are always cautioned to avoid the city.

#### 170 IMPERIAL CITY OF SEE SAW SWAYS JUSTICE HEART CITY

Centered in Hutara is the imperial city of **Justice Heart**. The wealth and power of Hutara is such that Justice Heart is largely a city of embassies and ambassadors representing Great houses and Combines throughout the Clockwork Metropolis.

The Lykkan hate this place, it represents law and order and oppression, everything the free-spirited fun-loving Lykka despise. **Down with the Empire**.



# 176 ISEE OF THESKING S FORTRESS HIGH BASTION UNFALLEN

Kings Fortress is a place free of Imperial presence. It is a singular mountain that reaches from the sea floor to form an island roughly 6-miles across with a peak rising an unnatural 3-miles high. The mountain coast is ringed by a coastal city of gold & gem traders and metal artisans from across the Clockworks. The mountain itself is the hollowed cities and deep mines of the 23 Mountain Kings (their lycanthrope forms being of such animals as badgers and rock burrowing worms).

Bastion Mountain has been the source of tremendous mining wealth for eons. Legend says that the Mountain was found by an ancient deep space mining operation and transported to its current location.

The mountain's greatest wealth is produced by the mining of a **glowing** green transparent metal called Meteorite that can be melted at extreme temperature and cast into any form many times harder than diamond. A unique shatter-edge technique (akin to breaking glass) mastered by ancient smiths of legend can produce a bladed edge of near mono-molecular sharpness that will never dull.



#### 178 THE WARRENGANGLANDS OF BLOOD SPIET

This quarter of the Pirate Crossroads is especially ancient with narrow pedestrian streets and alleys navigating old stone buildings and deep reaching labyrinthian basements.

This is the **Ganglands**, headquarters to dozens of Lykkan crime clans that have the might and skill to have endured for thousands of years.

These are notorious criminals among peoples that generally ignore law. This is a frightening and especially deadly region of the city best left unexplored by tourists or most anyone else that enjoys the benefits of life.

But for the brave looking for work, there is money to be made here, lots of it.

# 187 IMPERIAL DOMAIN OF THE GREAT AND WONDROUS CITY OF KAI

Kai is a pocket god, one of only 3 such beings in the known universe (Seeva and the Twins being the other two). Kai can sometimes be found in residence at a tavern called the Silver Ring.

The City of Kai is extraordinarily beautiful with tree lined pedestrian streets and artful parks, museums, schools, residences, and churches built with graceful line and delicate woods and powder stone.

#### The entire city is dedicated to avoiding or finding Kai.

The city if filled with pilgrims seeking an audience though few find what they seek.

Kai though is generally benevolent, a rather ordinary gentleman that only a few thousand years ago celebrated his **millionth birthday**. To call Kai eccentric is to call the sky blue so beware lest he curse you with what you ask.



Famously, Ardua was the ancient galactic crossroads of Clockwork Metropolis and was populated by thousands of space faring races living in exotic architectural towers surrounded by space ports of every size and imagining.

It was abandoned by the **Wolven Star Federation** as the other space-opera civilizations of Xai's Mistress past were forced to hide their celestial efforts from Seeva and the Demon Princes.

Many of the architectural wonders and ancestral star races can still be found in modern Ardua.

Ardua was and is a **trader's city** of exotic and rare goods from throughout known Xai.

Ardua, like almost all Lykkan cities, is a generally lawless environment governed by personal relationships and reputation, well placed graft, smart grift, good hustle, personal security, and a particularly good time.

Lykkans respect and enjoy the hustle that is life and those that play it well. Ardua City is a place to beware and enjoy as its likely to be the best and worst time of your life, often at the same time.

#### GRAY CHOULS CUILD QUARTER

One of the more off-putting Lykkan humans are the **Hyena Clans**, often called "Ghouls".

Ghouls are among the more brilliant human races, responsible for the creation of spectacular architecture, awe inspiring star ships, and even ring world engineering.

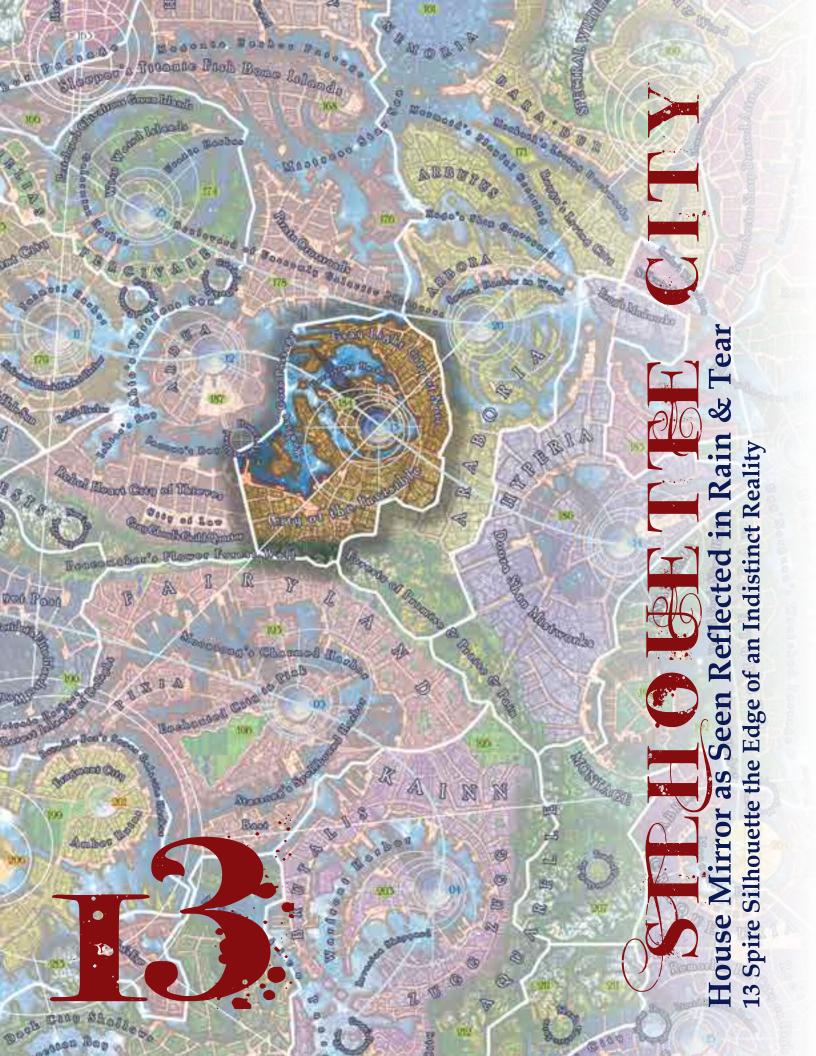
But their genius derives from the devouring of other being's brains, transferring the memories and knowledge of the recently devoured into the mind of the Ghoul.

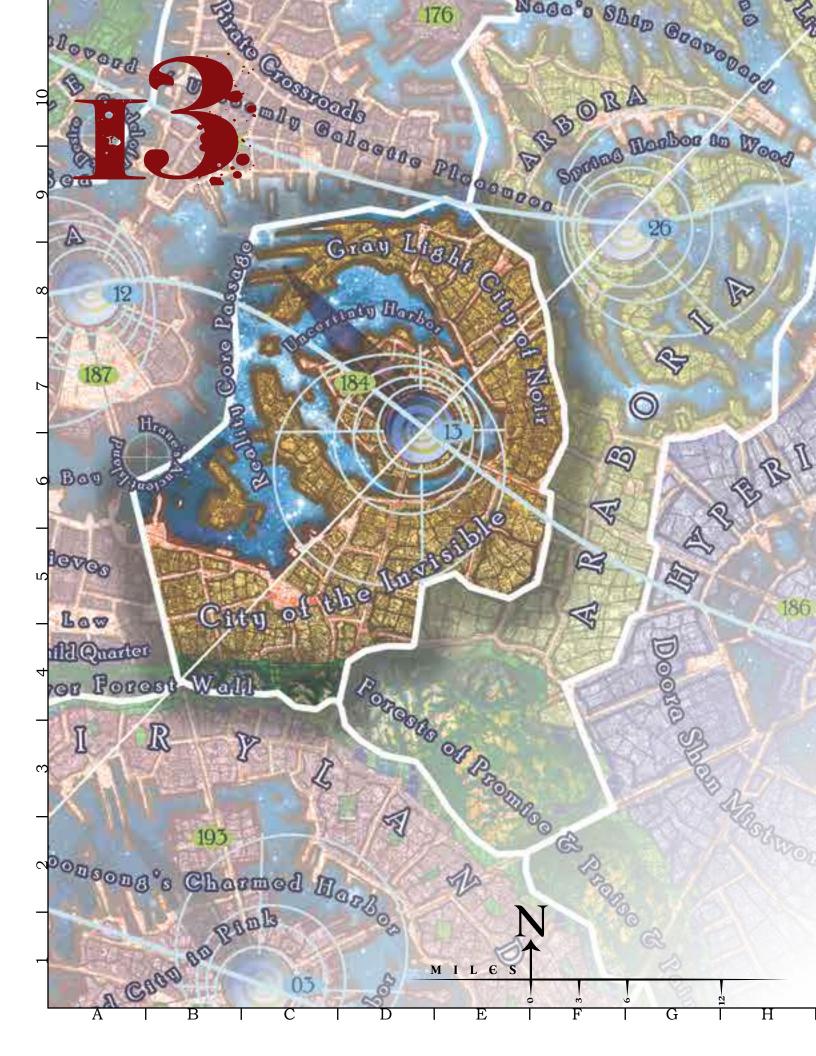
Ghouls devour the minds of their own kind at the moment of passing to ensure that no knowledge ever be lost. Similarly, Ghouls have over the eons become the undertakers of most Lykkan races where many on death's bed consent to their life's memories being "saved".

The idea of **consent is key**, most modern Ghouls live by decorum of consent and only at the natural end of life while some bad actors murder and devour minds that serve their immediate needs.

**Gray Ghoul's Guild Quarter** is partly a city of universities and research and partly a city of hospitals, undertakers, and graveyards. This is an odd place where it is said memory never dies.







#### **SWEET DREAMS**

The shadow of the woman did not quite match her form, but she felt safe among the crowd, she was anonymous in the crowd, and even if she drew attention to herself, a person's shadow was invisible by its ubiquity, no one noticed shadows, the mind was blind to their presence.

She met the man in a bar, he usually stopped here to drink and meet friends after work. He was not young nor handsome but his work important, and he was trusted and had access.

She had fallen into him with a stumble, the seduction no more difficult than laughing at his jokes and paying attention when he spoke. Like most of his kind, he spent most of his life ignored, it was easy for him to confuse attention for infatuation.

She bedded the drunk man a few hours later in his small apartment. Focused on every aspect of his appearance and mannerisms. Finally, he slept after their love making, she laid curled into him, drinking in his dreams, tracing his memories of family, faces, and names. Within his dreams she revealed her true form, that of shadow, void in its darkness, absent all detail except for her dread predatory perimeter, as if the shadow of some great winged catlike demonic form. She chased him through the man's own dreamscape, taking her time to taste his growing fear. Finally, she tore his dreams to into ragged tatters with her shadowy claws, devouring the man, killing him within his dream.

When she awoke, she was as he, now physically identical to the man who laid dead beside her, the man that had just died so violently in his sleep.

He dressed in the man's clothes and prepared for work, leaving the apartment as he did each day at 6:15. He greeted the doorman as he did each morning. "Hi Ho Burt."

"Morning Mr. Bruce," said the doorman.

"Hey Burt, I have a new refrigerator coming in today," he said, "can you let them up?"

"Sure thing Mr. Bruce."

He left the building moving into the busy morning flow of the city waking up. Mr. Bruce was her ninth persona, within the crowd she shifted into the skin of Mrs. Gray, a flutter of blue e'Mral mists changing her clothing from a technicians jump suit to a yellow polka dot mini-skirt with stiletto heels and a white shirt far too small for an adult woman.

"Mrs. Gray," said the doorman as she entered the large appliance store, "always a pleasure."

The doorman followed her with his eyes as she walked past, her long naked legs rising high to her skirt that most might rightfully mistake for a small sash.

She handed the waiting salesman an oddly ornamented coin, "I am in need of one new refrigerator," she said.
The salesman palmed the coin, "I will see to it personally," he bowed.

She moved toward the back door of the appliance store and exited into the alley, her form shifted as she moved through the shadows and back into the flow of the busy morning streets. She was invisible in plain sight.

When she awoke, she was as he, now physically identical to the man who laid dead beside her...

g.lloyd baker - 2020

#### SILHOUETTE CITY

Cynicism, fatalism, and moral ambiguity, these are the characteristics of Silhouette City.

This is a place of colorless architecture of no particular style or artistic inclination, so much so as to be a kind of dreary functionalist style all its own.

The city is more akin to a village than metropolis, built upon a system of roads, town squares and meandering lanes lined with low rise medieval houses of wood and stone interspersed with larger relentless grey slab apartment blocks.

The architecture of the place is discordant and idyllic as perhaps in some **nightmare theme park**. Odd placements and styles of buildings offering no clue to when or where this City might have been built or who might have built it, rather seeming a collection of lost and forgotten places, the streets and parks unnamed, the buildings unmarked by address.

The people that call this city home are like the buildings, of indistinct origins. This is a city filled with folks that have "found" their way here.

The people of Silhouette City are each from somewhere else, each **flawed or broken**, but somehow finding some small peace among similarly broken souls. Once here, people find it hard to find their way out of the City, its streets dreamlike in its recursive roads and paths.

The City is simple and banal, absent high art but instead a place of uninspired arts & crafts. The food in infamously bland that seems to emphasize mashing and boiling of most everything, including that which ought not be mashed or boiled.

# HOUSE MIRROR AS SEEPREFLECTED INTRAIN & TEAR

House Mirror is something of an enigma among the Great Houses. An old and noble House that pre-dates the current Crystal Shard Empress, dating its lineage as a shadow player through Xai's long and varied histories.

House Mirror has ever been tangent to the affairs of politics and intrigue, ever present, but their importance or power never clear or well understood by the other powers of the day.

It is as the word Silhouette implies, you can see the outline of a thing, but never the thing which casts the shadow.

The peoples of Silhouette City are ruled by a kaleidoscope of kings, queens, dukes, and noble families of intricate linages within a seeming choreographed dance of war that ever seems designed to ensure an abundance of food and lands for each new generation.

By appearances, House Mirror seems ruled by a quarreling assemblage of Silhouette nobility composed of its many races.

In reality, House Mirror is ruled by the **Pyrmn**.

The Pyrmn are a race unseen, shapeshifters that take the form of more ordinary appearance (the true form of a Pyrmn unknown).

The Pyrmn are thought by those most knowledgeable to live thousands of years.

And during those eons, living their lives in mortal form amongst the mortal races, discarding old forms and taking on new identities as needed to disguise their nature as more than mortal. Some have

# 13 SIEHOUETTE CITY

#### If the Pyrmn really exist, they may well be everywhere...

suggested that each may maintain several, perhaps dozens, of forms and identities at any given time in an elaborate subterfuge of unknown purpose.

Pyrmn "mortal" forms are perfect and unidentifiable as anything but the race they mimic.

Their minds are apparently disciplined and segmented, allowing private thoughts to be hidden from telepathy and their "current" lives memories (real and carefully crafted) to play upon the surface to be read and manipulated as easily as any other mundane, the only difference is that the Pyrmn is aware of any viewing or manipulation of its surface memories, a kind of ablative armor for the Pyrmn mind and another means of disseminating disinformation.

If the Pyrmn really exist, they may well be everywhere doing whatever they might want to be doing. The reason their existence is often questioned is that House Mirror is weak, backward, and of no great value.

Those that turn their attentions to House Mirror, tend to suffer improbable strings of bad luck, unfortunate medical diagnosis, and accidents that are always tragic and impossibly the fault of anyone.

Some have suggested the Pyrmn may be balance keepers, quietly assassinating those they judge unworthy (whatever their version of unworthy might be).

Many over Xai's long Ages have claimed to be able to detect the Pyrmn and have even set upon Inquisitions to find and eliminate the **mythical** doppelgangers. But despite these many efforts, modern Pyrmn remain as much speculation as real and as vague and unseen as ever.

#### Silhouette city Cazetteer

# 13 SPIRE SILHOUETTE THEEDGE OF AN INDISTINCE REALITY

The Silhouette Spire appears as a 2-dimensional void of stars, a window to some unknown galaxy the perimeter an indistinct glow the shape of tall elegance.

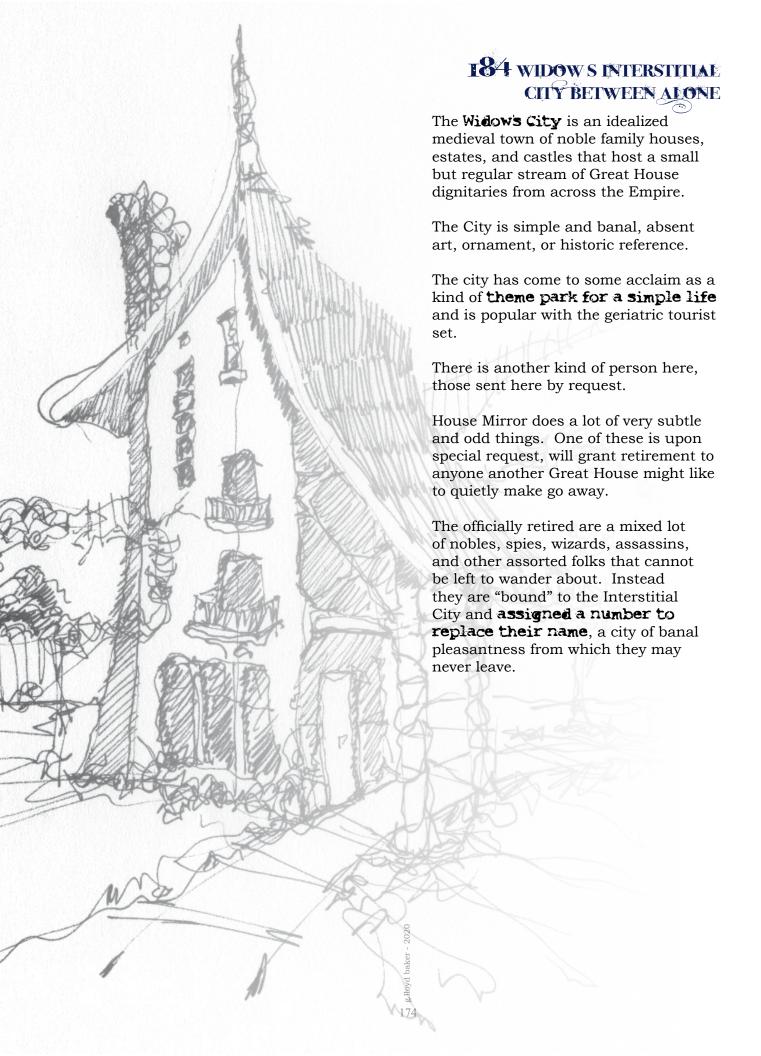
The Spire is closed to outsiders, only House Mirror nobility afforded entry.

Except for the Spire, there is nothing interesting in the surrounding medieval city. It is often mentioned by visitors that it all seems crafted as a kind of stage set, no one seeming to actually live in any of the houses or work in any of the buildings. The few people that are seen in the streets seem vacant and wandering upon errands that are dreamlike and disconnected from the real world.

Some have accurately described Spire Silhouette as the most frightening place within the Clockwork Metropolis.



921 g.lloyd baker - 2020





The Envoy entered the inn, it was not easy to find, having no name along a similarly unnamed street down a series of winding unmarked lanes. She only recognized it by gentleman in a bright yellow impeccably tailored suit that sat in a rocking chair upon a porch outside. The only person she had seen for the better part of a mile.

She had dealt with the Pyrmn before but disliked them and their city, it unnerved her. She imagined she could simply vanish from reality and her existence be forgotten. The place played tricks on her perception of time and distance.

Within, the inn was occupied by a barkeep that appeared to be a wax figure standing behind a historical representation of what some old-time bar might have looked like in some elsewhere place. It startled her when the barkeep moved and poured her a drink of some dark amber hue.

She jumped again as the gentleman in the yellow suit entered saying, "you were not followed."

Three men played cards quietly in the corner, they had not been there when she entered. She picked up her drink and moved to the open chair at the card table. She looked back toward the bar as she sat, the barkeep and the gentleman both vanished. The three men dealt her into a hand as she sat.

She steeled her nerve, she knew she was in danger, every flight instinct was screaming in her mind. She knew if she ran, she would die. She took a deep drink from the glass, the long slow velvet-burn of a good liquor trickled down her throat.

The faces of the three were as clear as anyone sitting near, but she had difficulty focusing on their faces, committing them to memory, they seemed to slip from her mind as she tried. The large candle at the center of the table dripped wax. She noticed the long shadows of the 3 card players cast by the light of the candle were horrific in their size and dancing serrated forms. She finished her drink.

"The wizard Gromm the Grimly Dressed," she began, "we would like him quietly recovered and given a home in the Widow's Village."

*The card game continued after she lost the* first hand.

"He is one of your own," said the first man in a voice that seemed to run cold down her spine.

"And?" asked the Envoy.

"You play a dangerous game," said the second.

She laughed out loud, catching the three by surprise, their frightening forms swirling about the room. "This right here is a dangerous game," she said laying down a winning hand, "Gromm is a mercy, the Empress wishes he not be killed."

"Against better advice?" asked the third player.

"Against all advice," she said, "her mind is quite fixed on the matter."

They played the next few hands in silence. The wax figure of a barkeep appearing to refill her drink, she chose to ignore his presence.

"We are agreed," said the first player, "laying down a losing hand."

She downed her drink in a single gulp, slamming the glass hard on the table as she laid down the winning hand.

"The Empress will be pleased," she said getting up from the card table.

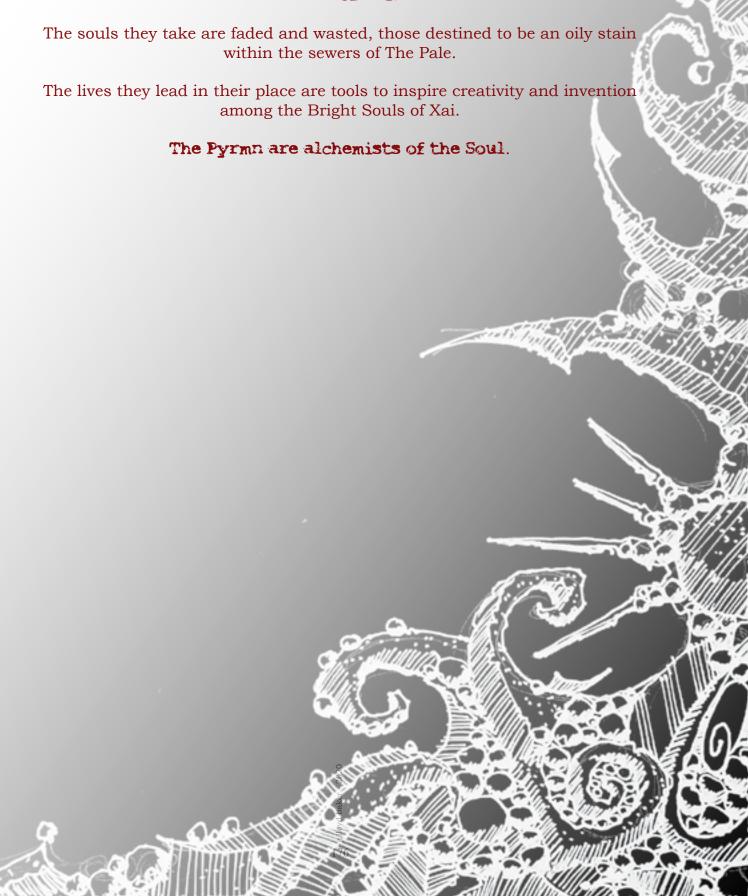
"And you?" asked the second.

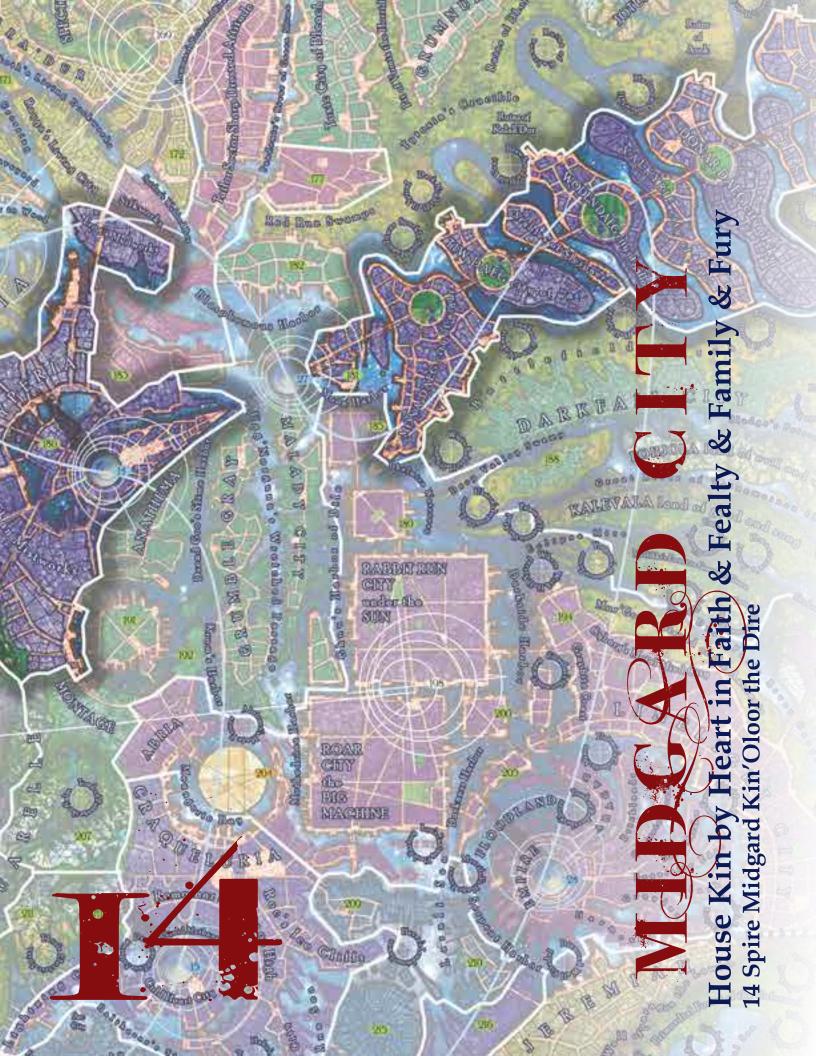
"My opinion matters as much as yours," she said turning to leave the bar. The gentleman was now wearing a tailored green suit, holding the door open as she left.

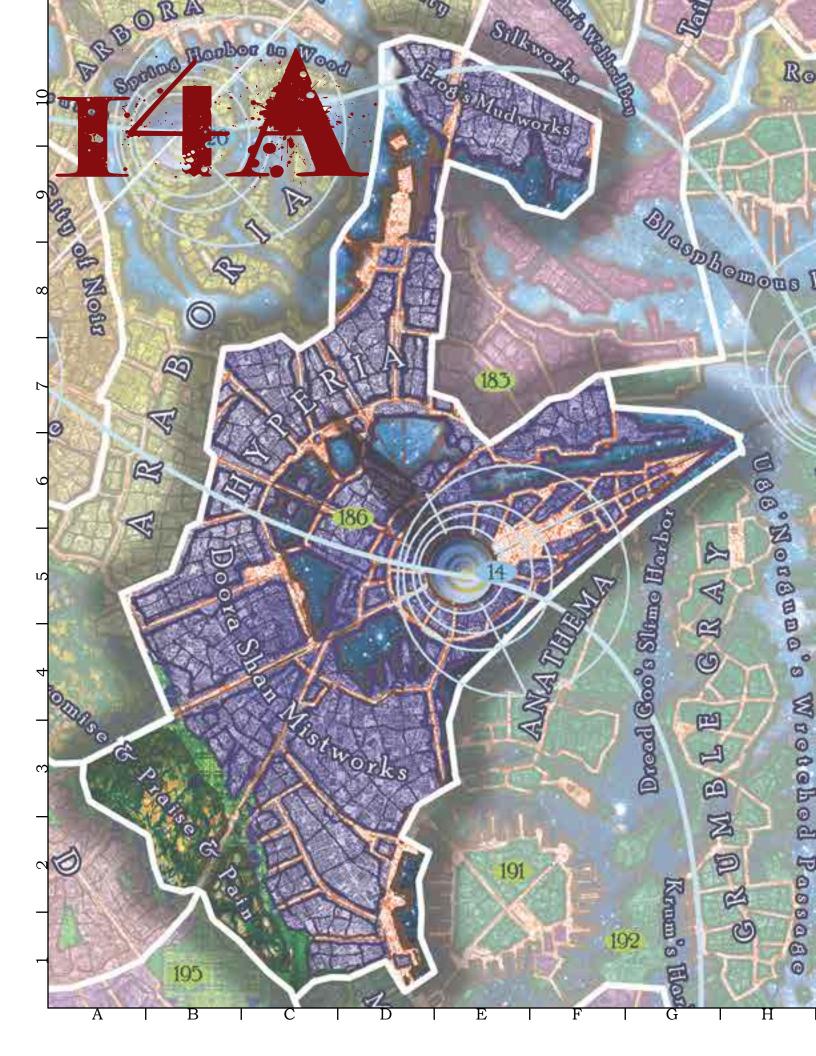


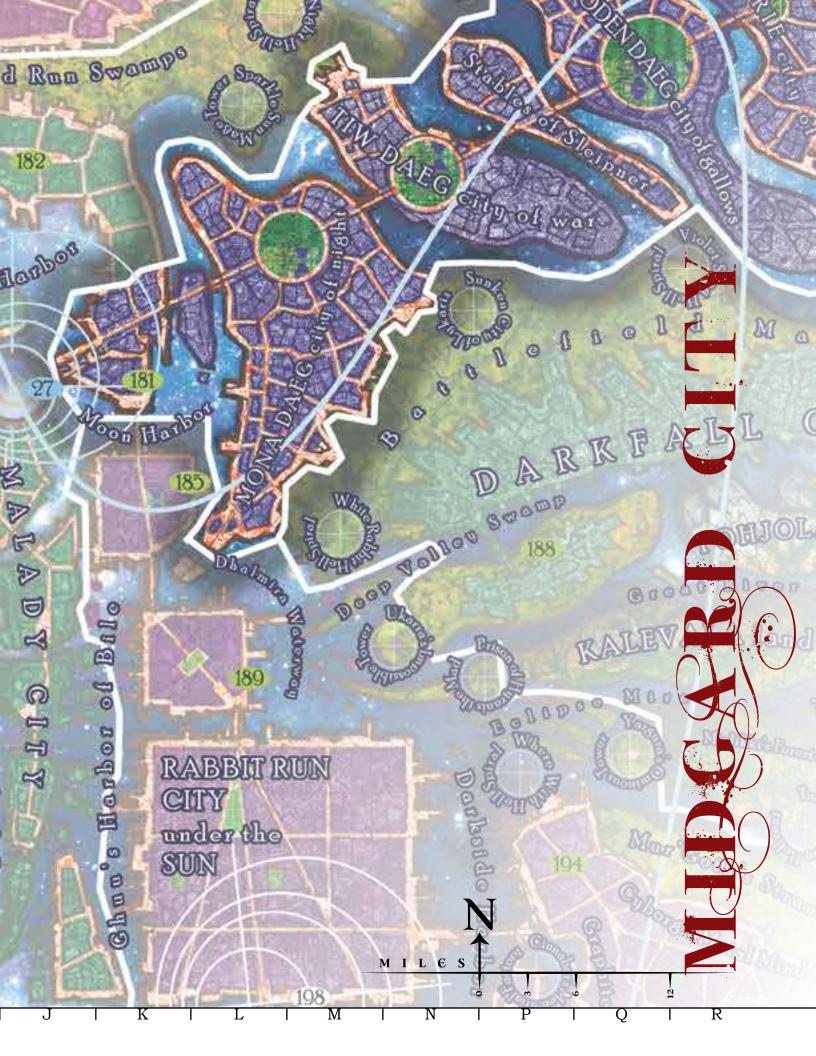
The big secret of the Pyrmn is this,

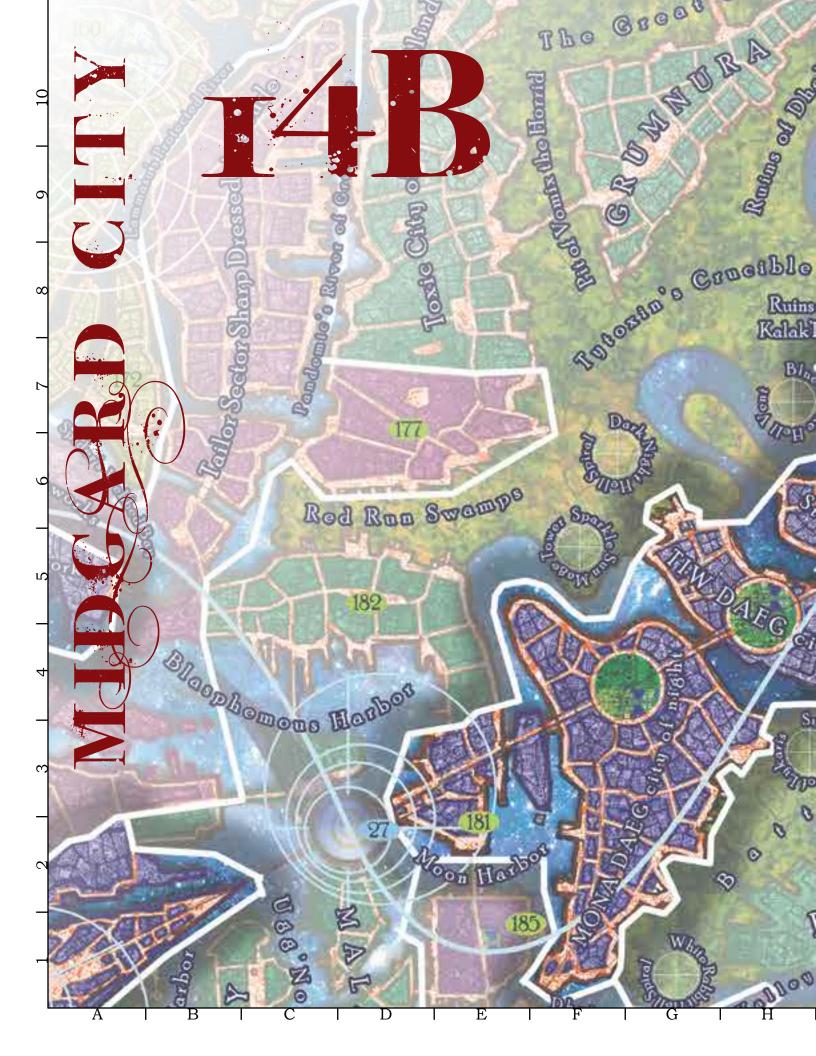
the Pyrmn are the Muses of Xai.













#### A HEROES RETURN

The Kin'Rhi are Zerkers, Ravagers, mindless single-minded blood thirsty killing machines, or so the legends say.

And the legends are true, all of them.

But to know this is to know only fear. The Kin'Rhi are for most of their kind, faithful, honorable, and devoted to their family, clan, and Warlord.

The Kin'Rhi have always been a race of coastal and river mariners, their longships feared and famed as traders and raiders for eons.

The advent of wyndships led to their famed penchant for raiding taken alight aboard dragonflight longships, moving ever inland, a dread threat from sky and sea.

When the Red Empire reached to the stars, the Kin'Rhi followed on, skilled navigators that soon learned the paths of the Starways, their Solar Longships feared throughout the cosmos as raiders to be feared.

Through all these long ages, 2 things happened.

One, the Kin'Rhi had a well-earned reputation for freedom and independence, living in moving vagabond colonies, taking as they needed, always looking to the horizon.

Two, the Kin'Rhi were rightfully feared and hunted by the powers of the day, never conquered or subjugated, but harried and slain, and always few.

During the reign of the Calibahn, the Kin'Rhi were the backbone of the resistance, the one race feared above all others by the Lichborne Necromancer Kings.

The one raid upon the Necromancer Pir'vaka that caused an undead horde to break and run, Pir'vaka's shriveled heart devoured and his star-gem shat out, his soul consumed.

The Kin'Rhi are bad ass motherfuckers, and they have always been so.

But they are also few and fading. Their race thought to have been made extinct during the Calibahn Empire.

When the Crystal Shard Empress sought to create her Metropolis Empire and survivors of the Mistress Races were settled as refugees, all sighed in quiet relief that the Kin'Rhi were gone, maybe this Metropolis could work.

The early days of the Metropolis Empire was a time of tumult and war, nothing much seemed to go as planned or hoped. The Great Houses were splintered, and it seemed for a while that none of the holy Mistress races would survive.

During an especially deadly battle that had raged across the Metropolis for months, a fleet of Imperial Dreadnaughts translated into the skies above Spire Kin. For days, their enormous stone citadel bulk hung there, a threat upon the armies of the warring Great Houses.

Emissaries were sent to the Imperial Spire, demanding an explanation.

"Do you threaten us with Mass Drivers?" asked the first representative.

"Do you imagine we fear your falling rocks?" said another, "Our sorcerers will respond in kind, we will shatter your very throne," threatened another, the huge luminous crystal shard which contained the Empress shimmering behind the High Priestess, tossing lazy shifting rainbow hues across the great audience hall.

"We have legitimate grievances, it is our right to have justice," yelled a third, either join our righteous cause or let us settle our own affairs."

The High Priestess listened, not to the ramblings of the sputtering children arrayed before her wearing airs of nobility and righteousness they had not earned and did not understand. No, she listened to the Empress, she was concluding negotiations with the passengers aboard the Dreadnaughts above. And it was done.

The High Priestess raised her hand, quietly awaiting the emissaries to settle enough that she might speak.

They babbled on for another hour, her hand raised quietly the whole time. Patience.

Reports started to come in, messengers of the emissaries running in panic.

"Impossible," came to be the common refrain.

Finally, the emissaries of the Great Houses began begging, "You cannot do this, how?"

"You miserable witch," spat another.

"We are all going to die," cried another.

The High Priestess stood silent, her hand raised going on an hour and half.

"Perhaps," said one of the emissaries finally, "we should hear what the Empress would like to say."

Finally, something of a calm settled among the emissaries, the High Priestess lowered her hand and began to speak.

"Fellow Envoys," she said, the Empress channeling her voice through the High Priestess, "today is a day for great celebration, for today is the homecoming of our brothers and sisters of Kin'Rhi."

That is when things went to hell, the emissaries running from the great hall with their aids and messengers like so many screaming school children released for recess.

Half a dozen Envoys remained, moving closer to the High Priestess, "enjoyable," said the First.

"Sad," said the Second, "I do not know why you keep them around my Empress, they will be the death of us all."

"And the Kin'Rhi?" asked the Third, "do we not have enough problems without throwing a hand grenade into the sandbox?"

"You my Six darlings," began the Empress, "you must teach them."

"Please, not the they-are-my-siblings speech again," said the First.

"It is not for your benefit my dear," she said to the First, "it is for theirs."

Entering the great audience hall was a quorum of Kin'Rhi warriors accompanied by their wives, sons, and daughters.

Recognizing the great honor and trust being shown by the Kin'Rhi in being accompanied by their most precious, the Six each turned their backs to the approaching party and knelt facing the Empress, leaving themselves exposed to the killing whims of the approaching warriors.

"Your honoring of the Old Forms is recognized," growled the Warlord, "the Empress promised wisdom, but I had not expected to find it."

The Six rose and turned to greet the newcomers, "welcome," intoned the Sixth, "your presence has been sorely missed."

The eyebrow of the First raised in surprised.

"Indeed, it has," smiled the High Priestess, "no wiser thing has been spoken in these halls."

Outside the armies of the Great Houses watched as thousands of Kin'Rhi dragonflight longboats swarmed from the Dreadnaughts to claim Spire Kin as their own.

The war that had raged throughout the Metropolis for months ended that night among hastily arranged mutual defense pacts and alliances that they might face their common enemy.

The Six were now Seven, mused the Empress, the Kin'Rhi understood, she wondered how many of the others might one day come to the truth, and how many would come to extinction.

## MIDGARD CITY

Midgard City is under dominion of Great House Kin.

Midgard City is a place of simple citystates ruled over by families, clans, and nations of Kin'Rhi, the indominable berserker Vikings of Xai.

The technomancy of the city is primitive by most standards, simple wooden and stone structures, dirt streets, a general lack of trees or landscape, and the odorous drainage of open trench sewage and offal. This they do by choice, as life should be hard, the comforts and conveniences of the modern Metropolis offer no charms to sooth the Kin'Rhi.

Life is relatively simple in Midgard City; most effort is expended on the requirements of day to day life.

Perhaps not surprising, tourists tend to avoid Midgard City, the place is a **struggle for the most basic convenience** and populated by a grim lot that tend to solve disputes with murderous violence.

But the harshness of the place is also its lure for a small collection of immigrants and visitors that embrace the challenges of an "honest" life of trial and survival. A surprising number of mercenaries of all races tend to find solace in Midgard City, often retiring into its simple if difficult rhythms.

Midgard City is mostly built along the shores of a northeasterly serpentine river called the Midgard (from which the City gets its name).

...life should be hard, the comforts and conveniences of the modern Metropolis offer no charms to sooth the Kin'Rhi.



The Kin'Rhi are a family-clan-nation based civilization that is constantly at war with itself. The chief occupations of the Kin'Rhi are seasonal farming and seasonal raiding.

The Kin'Rhi are primarily known by other races as **berserkers**. The ferocious tenacity of the Kin'Rhi is legend.

The Kin'Rhi train to enter a berserk state using a drug made of henbane, building up a resistance to the drug over years as a child. Then upon adulthood, the ritual imbibing of a fatal dose of the drug that either transforms or kills the initiate. The transformed Kin'Rhi is thereafter able to enter berserker trance upon entering combat and leave it with some concentrated effort.

But more frightening, the new form of the Kin'Rhi cannot die while berserk, merely slowed or hacked to pieces.

The Kin'Rhi favor ritual claw-like bladed weapons but are otherwise skilled with most weaponry, especially axes and hammers that have the utility of being axes and hammers (the Kin'Rhi are an especially pragmatic people).



8 g.lloyd baker - 2020

They are also skilled in the use of more modern weaponry, their eschewing of modern convenience not applicable to the tools of war which they embrace wholeheartedly.

The Kin'Rhi are a superstitious lot and pay homage to a pantheon of fatalistic gods like the Norse & Scandinavian mythos of our own Earth.

The Kin'Rhi are very independent minded, and while generally loyal to family or clan, they are also famously ambitious raiders, ever seeking plunder, glory, and fame that they may be worthy of an afterlife among the heroes of their ancestors and gods.

Among the Clockwork Empire and its many Great Houses the Kin'Rhi can be found serving as pledged soldiers, bodyguards, and warriors. The Kin'Rhi are ubiquitous upon Xai and can be found anywhere mercenaries are found.

The Kin'Rhi are heavily recruited into the Imperial Guard, many of whom find spiritual honor and purpose as Imperial Paladins.



#### HOUSE IN BY HEART IN FAITH & FEALTY & FAMILY & FURY

House Kin is a Great House ruled by a council of Clan Warlords.

But be aware, Kin'Rhi politics is not clean nor easy, the Warlords are those seeming most powerful at the time, the hierarchy of families, clans, and Warlords is a constant shifting landscape (some other Great Houses better describing it as a political minefield).

The emergence of Arcane into the Warlord ranks has in some ways settled things but in other ways threatens civil war. The Kin'Rhi are not altogether sure about these new sorcerous warriors. The trending outcome of recent wars seems to be that Arcane have no business as Warlord as this is the prevue of men, but instead belong as religious advisors, Shaman of the gods, as obvious in their divinely gifted talents.

The Midgard Council is informal, meeting once a year or as needed in times of war. The Ruler that shows up is considered to speak for their Clan. If 2 or more Warlords show up claiming a council seat, then the survivor of the ensuing dual(s) is agreed the rightful ruler.

The real issue is that rule among the Kin'Rhi is fluid and House Kin representation within the Empire is similarly fluid and from the outside looking in, capricious.



#### T4 SPIRE MIDGARD KIN OLOOR THE DIRE

Spire Midgard appears as a tall crudely carved cyclopean stone nearly a mile high into which has been carved a single giant coiling serpent spiraling downward, it's titanic stone carved head lain at the ground and it's large open mouth the entry to the Spire within.

The interiors of the Midgard Spire are dangerous, prowled by large mythical creatures that tend to devour unaccompanied non-Kin'Rhi visitors, guarding ancient portals leading to far off places where the Kin'Rhi sometimes raid, but on the whole have been forgotten.

#### 181 SUNDAYS CITY IN THE LIGHT OF DAWN

Home of the Witches of Dawn, worshipers of the Sun.

Dawn City is a place of eternal dawn sunlight, a place of new beginnings where the unnatural is burned from the body and soul.

Dawn City is a place of purification, healing, and prayer for most but a place of death and destruction for others.

Dawn City city is holy ground and will turn to salt any undead, lycanthrope or demon that enters its holy light (sometimes sparing the host, but not so much if the curse is born into the person's fate or by choice). It also has the unerring capacity to turn any troll to stone.

Dawn City is indiscriminate in its power and the holy churches that call this city of righteousness home are typically

judgmental, condescending, and arrogant. Even among the good of Xai, this place is often accorded the caution of being evil in the guise of good, or at best, a holy weapon with 2 keen edges.

#### 186 CHILE'S FOREST CITY ON HIGH

The Forest City is a high plateau that surrounds the Midgard Spire. Forest City is less urban and more a collection of villages, citadels, fortresses, and palaces amongst an ancient forest landscape, the trees remaining to modern day are sacred by decree of the gods.

Within the Forest City, eMral and technomancy tend to fail. This is sacred ground where only one's faith and skills as a warrior may be judged in ritual dual. Otherwise, violence within the forest is forbidden.

#### O DONAR DAEG CITY OF SKY

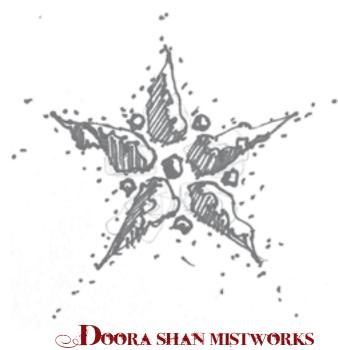
Home of the Sorceresses of Donar.

Donar is the ancient name of **Thor** and root of modern Thursday. The City of Sky is a place that celebrates wind, weather, and sky.

Donar is a city of Kin'Rhi shaman clans skilled in the arts of weather control, ship building, and the celestial arts of navigation.

All great Kin'Rhi expeditions, raids, and invading navies have at their fore a Shaman of Donar to ensure the favor of the gods in their endeavors.

And in more practical measures, direct the repair or building of ships, the navigation of the ship or fleet, and summoning of friendly spirits of wind and water to speed their passage.



Home to the Illusionists of Mist, worshipers of **Loki**.

The Mistworks is a city under dominion of **KinRhi Mist Clans**. The city is one of low stone buildings with deep basements rich in the flow of e'Mral mists. The basements are carefully crafted to pool the e'Mral mists for eldritch purpose.

Kin'Rhi Mist Clans are strange, odd, and generally weird. As such, they have historically been outcast from traditional society and banished to remote and harsh lands or left to wander as gypsies.

The Mist Clans are performers, musicians, artists, and spiritualists when left to their own devices but often turn to the charlatan arts of trickery, thievery, and assassination to survive.

Mist Clan Kin'Rhi have an unhealthy reputation among most other Kin'Rhi and are infamous throughout the Empire as vagabonds up to no good.

The Mistworks is a city of subterfuge and obfuscation. It is well known for its criminal streets and carnival arts.

#### INDEFENSE OF A LADY

The carnival had been here a few days, settled on the abandoned quay, their longboats just down the beach.

Luud was scarred, physically but more mentally, a veteran of the Infernal War and half a dozen Subworld campaigns. He was a demon hunter retired into the carnival, living out his elder days among the broken and misfit where he felt a sense of belonging.

He came upon the scene as he was moving to clean the latrine. A dozen yards along the tree line of an overgrown park Ms. Opal was screaming, eight greasy men surrounding her, one tearing at her clothes as he pushed her to the ground, the other seven laughing, "you go show her what a man looks like," laughed one.

Luud saw red, not the figurative type, literally his vision shifted to red, all the heat of the world swept into his eyes, he saw clearly the heart and blood coursing through the veins of the eight and Ms. Opal. He felt suddenly invincible, his confidence indominable, he was not out of control, he simply no longer wished to be in control.

He charged the 8, covering the distance before any even realized that one of them was dead. The spray of blood caught 7 by surprise, looking toward their no longer laughing buddy, a hole in his chest as he slipped slowly to the ground, a Kin'Rhi standing where he stood holding his still beating heart in its long blood slick claw, consuming it in 3 ravenous bites as the 7 could do nothing be stare, several soiling themselves before their minds could tell them to run.

Fight or flight, they sometimes say, 5 of the remaining hooligans turned to run, the speed of the Kin'Rhi was a blur, raking deep gashed across their backs, digging deep into two, his left hand holding the heart of one, his right tearing the spine of another. The two that stood to fight starred at the blood covered feral horror, tossing little Jym's spine aside as a butcher might discard ofal, biting down on Smiley's heart in his left hand as a child might enjoy a jelly doughnut, blood gushing as he chewed, smiling at the two.

"Please Luud," cried Ms. Opal, still lying naked in the grass, her pearlescent skin spattered with the blood of the dead and dying, "please stop, they did not mean it."

There are several things Ms.Opal could have said to reach Luud, but making excuses for her attackers was not one of them. Now she was one of them.

The two remaining hooligans moved to attack, together, firing flechette throwers and holding short swords. Luud tore the head off one and held the heart of the second in front of his dying eyes before devouring it.

He turned to see Ms. Opal running back toward the carnival grounds. His instinct was to run her down, she had after all sided with the attackers.

But the world slowed, silence began to descend upon Luud. He focues on the silence, he drew it towards himself and wrapped it around him as a blanket. The world had stopped, Ms. Opal frozen, her blood drenched form astride midair. He began to feel his body, slashing pain from flechette wounds down his right side, a sword still speared through is left shoulder.

He pulled the sword free, the pain sending him to his knees, the hearts of his victims still healing his wounds, though more slowly now, then not at all.

Luud looked around himself, he was on his knees at the center of a slaughter. He recalled it all, but as one remembers a dream after waking. There would be consequences he thought, there always were.

Later Luud and a dozen others from the carnival buried the dead, Ms. Opal setting a fog upon the forest that would endure for some days, the carnival soon after packing into their longboats and moving on.



Home of the Shieldmaidens of Fria.

This is the city in celebration of Friday and all things in **reverence of women**, motherhood, love, and life.

The Shieldmaidens of Fria are the enduring power behind House Kin, for without their skill in the creative arts of agriculture, craft, and building there would be little remaining of modern Kin'Rhi excepting the memory of a once barbaric warrior race.

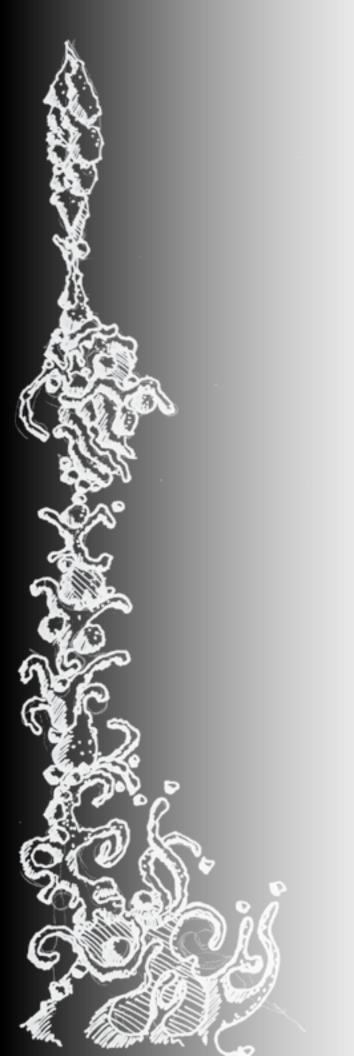
#### The Shieldmaidens of Fria are why the KinRhi, endure and thrive.

Fria Daeg is the most modern city under dominion of House Kin. This is a city modern wonders, convenience, and magic. The Shieldmaidens are why the otherwise primitive Midgard City know the secrets of weapon craft and have healing arts far beyond their daily understanding.

The Shieldmaidens of Fria are blacksmiths, crafters, builders, architects, artists, and makers of Kin'Rhi civilization.

The males are bred to fight, everything else (and by extension everything that matters) is the purview of Kin'Rhi women. More compelling still, the Shieldmaidens of Fria are frightfully effective warriors, though few endure the Henbane Ritual.

#### Luud saw red...all the heat of the world swept into his eyes...



#### Monadaeg City of Night

Home to the Witches of Mona, worshipers of the Moon.

This is the city of Monday and all things in celebration of night, the moon, and tides. The cycle of moons is the dominion of women.

Mona is a city of Witch-led clans skilled in the arts of midwifery, husbandry, healing, and the veterinary arts. The Witches of Mona are famous for divining the fate of newborn child as well as manipulating the lives of men and women to produce children of heroic fate.

The Witches of Mona are also skilled in the more mystical arts of divination and the curing and causing of enchanted curses such as lycanthrope and vampirism (at least those not born to such a fate).

Mona Daeg is a city of perpetual moonlit night and mysterious aspect. The architecture of Mona Daeg is ancient, a place dominated by cyclopean stone temples, and grove rings. The whole of the place often feeling as a dream, not quite unreal, and prowled by shadows that threaten always just at the edge of one's sight.

Those that fear their fate are advised to avoid the light of the moon.

#### TIW-DAEG CITY OF WAR

Home to Warriors of Tiw.

This is the city of Tuesday and all things in celebration of war. This is the city of warrior clans, those entirely dedicated to the higher orders of berserk martial arts.

This is a city that exalts in violence for no purpose but victory. The Tiw Warrior is a martial artist stripped of morality and honor, a killing machine whose singular and purely evil purpose is to win, no matter the cost or sacrifice.

#### CHAINING THE BEAST

The Kin'Rhi was at a table, it was late, he was eating alone.

The drunkards staggered into the bar, six in all. They stomped and hollered and banged upon the bar demanding a round of drinks, though clearly, they needed no more.

Excess, thought the Warrior, can get a man killed. The Warrior centered his mind, the world around him slowed, all became calm, quiet. He could see the tendrils of the next few moments play out in his mind, the coming taunts, the threats, the cries of cowardice, he had seen it all before.

He witnessed himself fight the six drunkards with ease, knocking them to unconsciousness, no consideration or need to release the beast, the 'Zerker rage that he held within, that which would see these six fools murdered for no good reason.

But as he let his mind work through the coming moments of combat, he saw the smallest drunkard, he had a gun, not a mortal weapon like a flechette thrower, dart gun, or bolter, a dreadrock chambered six shooter, a sorcerer's weapon, though the man was no sorcerer. He probably carried it to scare people, he seemed the type, but in several of the combats that played in his mind, the gun was drawn and used, he was shot, a killing blow that would summon the beast, and everyone here would die.

His mind began to speed, his actions set, noise from the room returned and the drunkards at the bar began to again move and slam drinks.

The Warrior stood up and moved to the drunkards, they had yet to pay him much attention, he slammed the smallest of the drunks hard with a punch across the face, blood spraying down the length of the bar, most of his teeth tumbling after. With his other hand he slipped the revolver from the man as he crumpled to the ground.

The five drunks stood momentarily stunned, the Warrior holding up the pistol that all might see.

"Not much of a sorcerer," said the Warrior.

The five began to laugh hysterically, not believing anyone could believe that Snot was a sorcerer, "I told him carrying that thing would get him smacked," one laughed.

The Warrior departed while the moment lasted, he knew the five would realize vengeance was next, but not before he was safely down the street.

Walking home in the moonlight, the Warrior was pleased despite himself, he had saved six lives tonight.

#### WODENDAEG CITY OF GALLOWS

Home to the Rune Weavers of Odin.

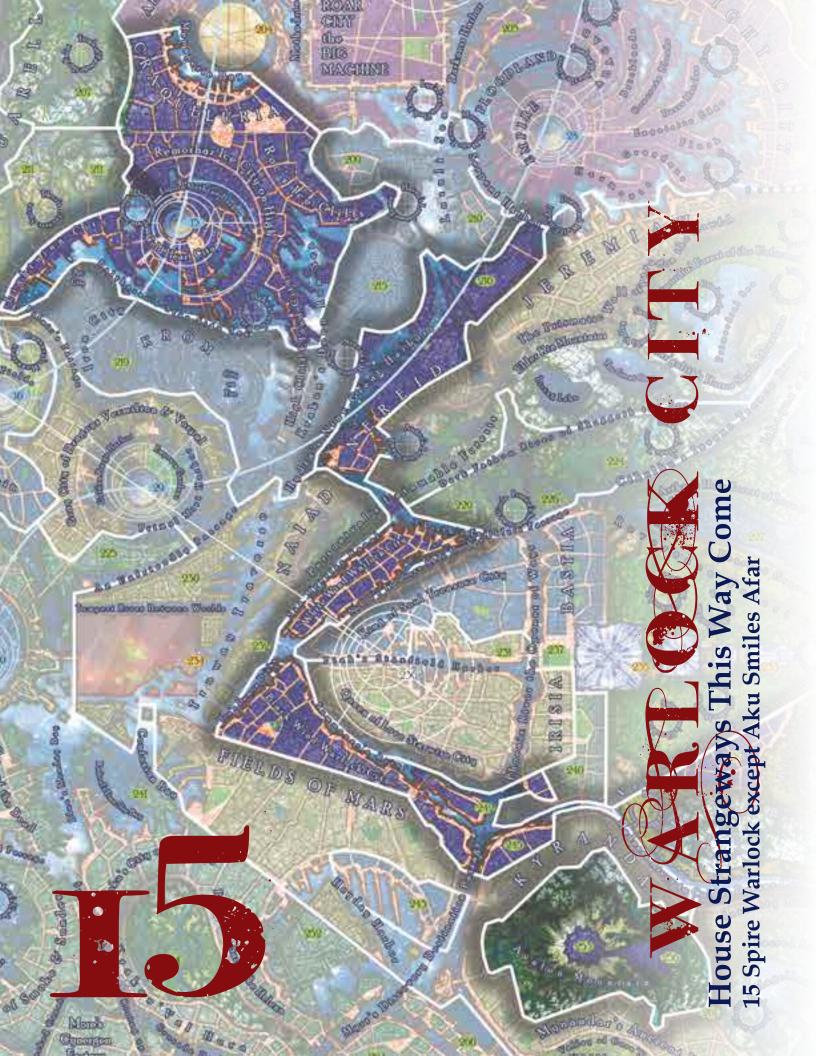
This is the city of Wednesday, Odin, and all things in celebration of justice & balance.

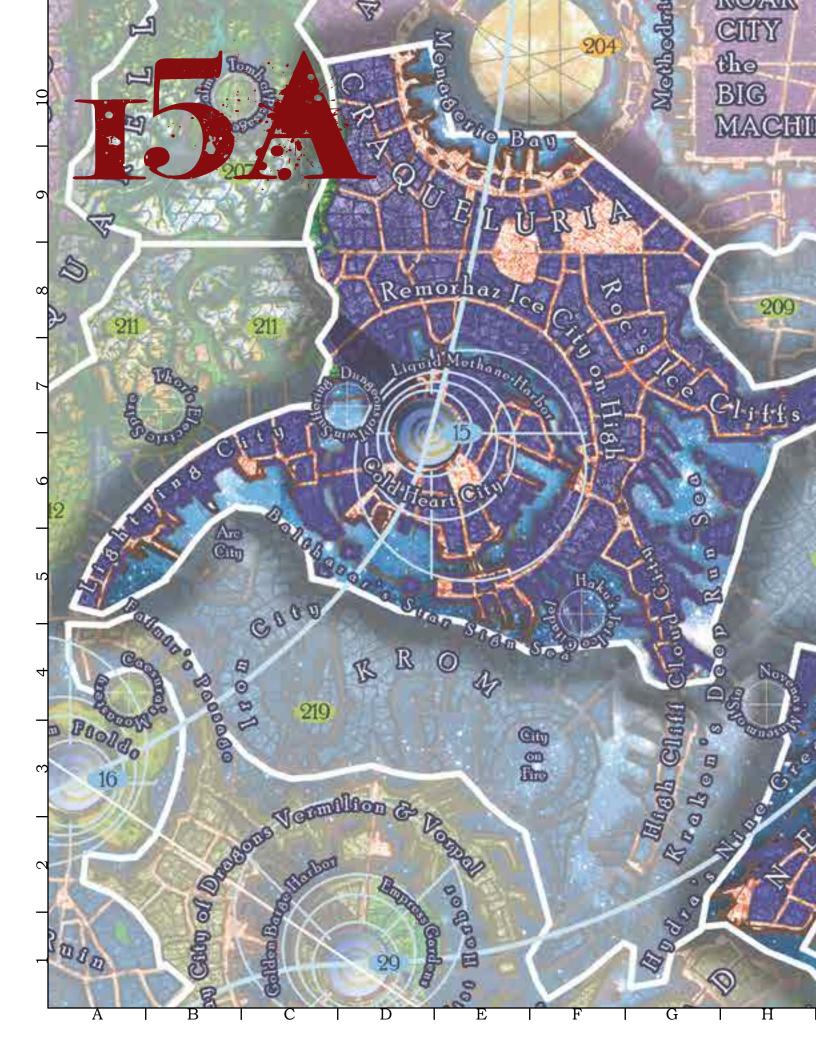
As a rule, law is a matter left to the head of the family-clan-nation as appropriate. It is also a matter largely under the dominion of Kin'Rhi women though the final judgement and execution of any sentence is the dominion of the Clan leader.

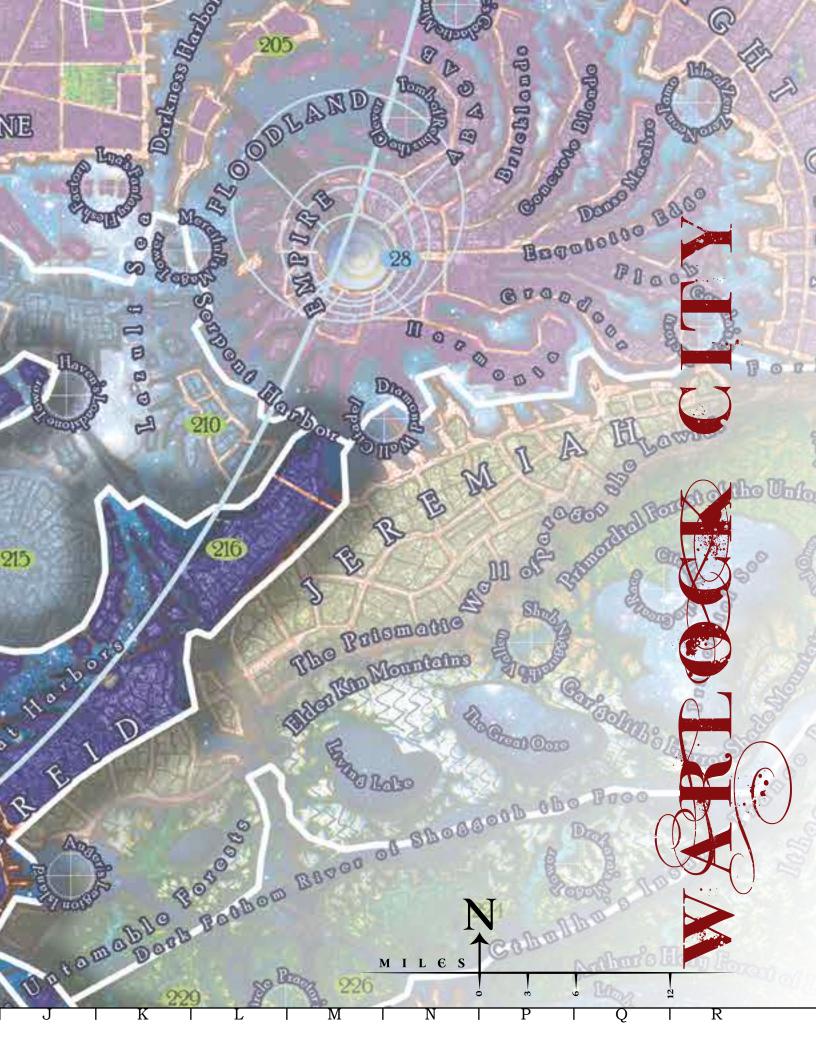
Woden Daeg is a city of learning, monasteries, temples, libraries, and Runes. Kin'Rhi Rune Weavers are masters of the Runic Arts, a form of unnatural magic that bends and corrupts the elements to their will. Rune Weavers of Woden are always male.

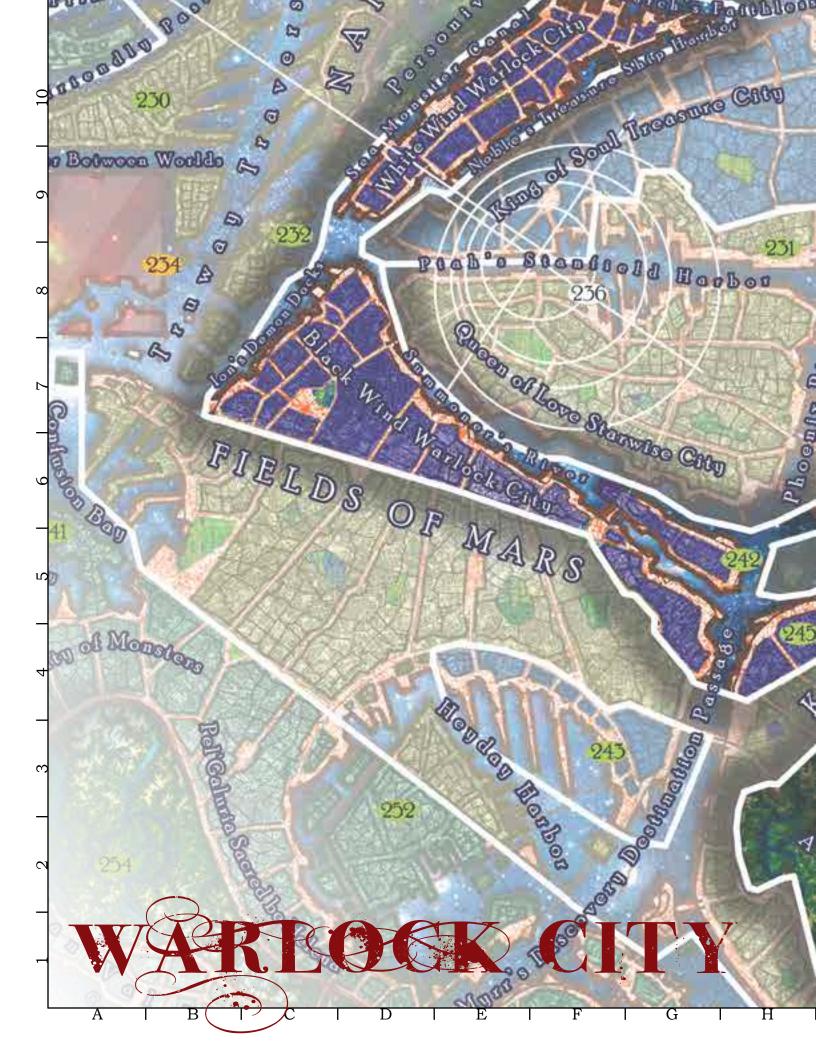
Kin'Rhi Runes are harsh and unpleasant and incomprehensible to the female mind.

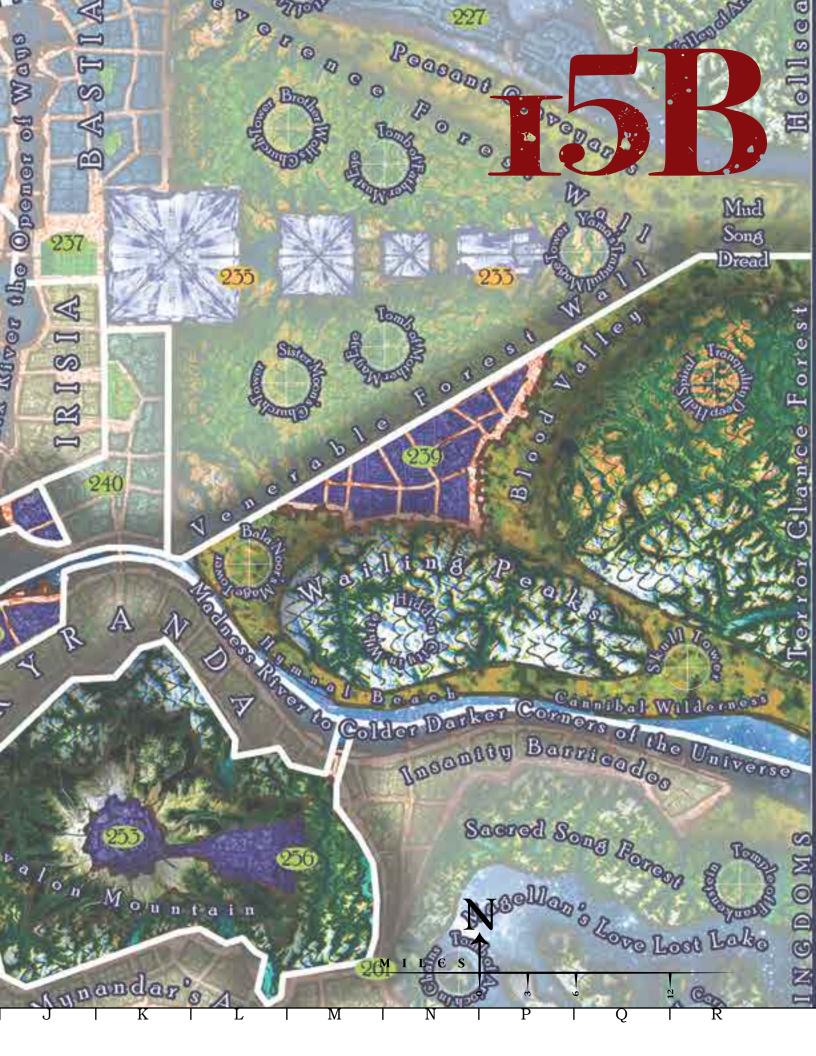












#### THE IMPORTANT

The instructor entered the old hall, a dozen young initiate Warlocks sat behind their demon crafted desks.

Following the instructor were a dozen attendants, each carrying a stack of large volumes that they sat upon the large deck at the head of the class, a desk that looked as if it were supported by the ribcage of some great beast.

When the attendants had left the room, the instructor yelled out, "common knowledge is that the Demon Princes are fallen Mistress Angelic made flesh that they might escape their Ordered fate and gain freewill. Common knowledge is that the Demon Princes bedded mortal women and produced Nephilim children that in turn corrupted the Antediluvian races. And nobody cares if this is true."

"Every book you see stacked on the table here," he indicated the hundreds of moldy volumes stacked precariously on the desk, "is someone's wasted life theorizing, speculating, or presenting evidence as to the origins of the Demon Princes and hellscapes of Xakarra. No one cares, no one needs to know."

He continued louder still, "Demons will tell you the secrets of their origins, the secrets of history, the secrets of where the races came from, the secrets of the Red Empire, the secrets of the Lichborne, the secrets of the Crystal Shard Empress...none of what they say matters. They will say it is true, I do not care, you do not care, no one cares, such babble is beneath you, they seek to offer you nothing. You are not fools."

"Blorg," called the instructor, "what is this on the table?"

"Rabbit holes, master," said the student, "tricks to distract us."

"Is there anyone here that sees in these thousand of pages of text anything that will compel a demon to action?"

"No master," answered Elvix.

"What would you say to the hundreds of Warlocks that spent their lives seeking the truth?"

"Nothing master," said Elvix, "they cannot help me."

The master smiled wide, "you are right, a fool can only distract you from what is important."



# WARLOCK CITY

### V ARLOCK CITY

The City is sparsely populated, a place of demonic corruption and the dark arts that is as a wound upon the Clockwork Metropolis.

Most of the population is Shryll with collections of other dark minded souls of the other races finding kinship among the evil streets and peoples of the City.

The architecture of the city is the tortured creation of summoned demon builders and architects. Buildings crafted with malicious intent to make the insane seem reasonable and the murderous seem mundane.

This is a place avoided by tourists and most anyone else not wanting to be sacrificed to a demon summons or become victim of a deranged serial killer.

Nothing much good ever happens in Warlock City.

#### HOUSE STRANGEWAYS THIS WAY COME

House Strangeways holds dominion over Warlock City and is ruled by a race called the Shryll Karakar.

House Strangeways is at the table of 37 because it is best to keep your enemy in front of you.

Dealing with House Strangeways is like dealing with a petulant child with its finger on a very big bomb.

The Shryll are deadly dangerous but with childish ambitions and feelings that are easily bruised. The Shryll crave affection but are themselves seemingly incapable of love. As for House Strangeways, the Elder Warlocks at its head have little care to deal with the Empire or its silly Great Houses. There are far greater concerns among the politics of the Subworld requiring immediate attention.

The Shyrll are a race of slight pale people with decidedly spooky sensibilities. The Shryll are a people of famously esoteric desires, devious cruelty, and sideways thinking.

The Shryll are physically weak, sickly, and not especially bright. And if not for their deep empathic connection to the demonic and natural fluency in the Infernal Languages, the race may well have long ago come to extinction.

Instead, the Shryll have come to head the Great House Strangeways.

The Shryll are master summoners of the demonic and are the only mortal race with the mental capacity to fluently speak and understand the various low & high infernal languages.

The Shyrll civilization is built upon the labor of demons. Shyrll architecture is crafted by demonic builders, their conquests are headed by demonic armies and commanders, and their technomancy is crafted by demonic artisans. All of which carries great value among the black markets of Xai.

Warlock City was once home to dozens of other races that, one time or another, opposed Shryll dominion, each in turn was sacrificed to the infernal; countless of souls carried into Xai's Subworlds as payment for Shryll dominion.

#### FOUR CONDITIONS

"Why can we summon animals?" asked the Warlock

"Four conditionals," beamed the first young student, "I am alive, I have a soul, the animal is alive, and the animal has no soul."

"Why can we summon demons?" asked the Warlock.

"For exactly the same reasons," said the second student.

"Can a Lichborne summon a demon?"

"No master, they are not alive, so they could not summon nor be summoned," said the third student. "And Lichborne are gross."

"Are animals and demons the same?"

The class was stumped to silence.

"You hesitate to answer because you think they are different but you do not know why," said the Warlock, "they are the same, demonic emotions are the same as animals, demons are incapable of hate or anger or love or compassion or any other high romantic emotions you wish to name. A demon if treated well or poorly will react as any animal. And as all animals feed, so demons feed, seeking to ever fill the insatiable void where their soul should be. Every demon and animal feeds on something, know the hunger of your target and you know the means to gain its aid."

"What is the difference between an animal and a demon?" asked the master.

"None," said the first student, "they both hunger, that is all we need to know."

"Are demons smarter than you?" asked the master.

"I hope so," said the second student, the class chuckling, "otherwise what is the point of risking my life, I would just summon a dog?"

"Well said," the master smiling with satisfaction at the class of 6-year-olds.



#### 15 SPIRE WARLOCK EXCEPT AKU SMILES AFAR

The Warlock Spire has the appearance of a twisted, tortured, and demon corrupted tree. A symbol of warlock & demon corruption upon the world.

Within the Spire are great halls and chambers prowled by demonic slaves and corrupted life.

This is an unholy place of carnal pleasure and desire absent any consequence of love, empathy, or quilt.

This is the home of the Warlock Elite, the great infernal powers that head the Great House Strangeways and rule Warlock City with a disturbed dark will.

The Spire is home to several Hell-Spirals that lead to various Subworld Realms and a great many other places even more unsettling.



# WARLOCK CITY

#### 216 SEANCE CITY BEYOND THE HOLLOW

This is a Shryll city **free of Imperial dominion** that conducts extensive illicit demonic trade with darker angels of the Adrena'Chrome and its Xuvarian masters.

The high technomancy of Xuvarian robotics and cybernetics is ever difficult but can often be made easier (if decidedly riskier) by integrating the perpetually regenerating parts of certain demons.

**Demon laced robotics** and cybernetics is illegal and morally reprehensible to even the worst sort of technomancer, but sometimes expediency is "required".

Séance City was once a beautiful city of ancient architecture of a bygone Age, a beauty that now mocks the ugliness that has of late come to occupy the city.

The Shryll have turned its lovely treelined streets and ornately wrought buildings into the dark heart of its morally bankrupt demonic technomancy.

The city is under heavy demonic guard and layers of infernal wards and is a place so secretive that any non-Shryll found among its streets is slain outright. Not even House Mauna will raid this far north.

The city has always been haunted and remains so to modern day, a place where **the veils between life and death are thin**. This causes unusual risks for the Shryll technomancers that ply their demonic arts with cavalier disregard of such dangers.

## 239 BLOOD BROTHER CITADEL OF THE FATED

This is a city with a long and storied history, built along the **Venerable Forest Wall**, a sacred city of ancient Muurantia recently conquered and defiled by House Strangeways.

The city is now occupied by a large and growing army of Shryll warlocks and recently summoned demonic armies.

The objective to perhaps invade north into the Venerable Forest of House Mauna, perhaps in a bid to take control of the Diamond Pyramids. But Imperial strategists suggest otherwise, they say it is more likely the city is the staging point for a move eastward into the Terror Glance Forest.

#### 242 DEMON SLAVE PENS OF KARMA THE PECULIAR

This island is used to summon and break demons for service among the wealthy of Warlock City and beyond.

The torment and suffering of this place might just cause the compassionate a touch of pity for the plight of the infernal, **maybe**.

Graduates of Karma's School of Etiquette (as it is called) are marked with a brand of "good manners" that is renowned for having never been broken.



## 245 FEDERATED STATES OF

The Federated States are a free collection of warlocks that claim no alliance to House Strangeways or the Empire.

This is a city of libraries dedicated to the study and knowledge of demon-kind free and open to all scholars. Anyone unarmed may rightfully claim to be a scholar.

Demons that attempt to enter any library or building are immediately deported to an especially unpleasant subworld realm.

#### 253 WISH WELL JADE CITADEL OEDOGS

The top of Avalon Mountain was once a holy paladin citadel now overrun by hellhounds and their demon pack masters.

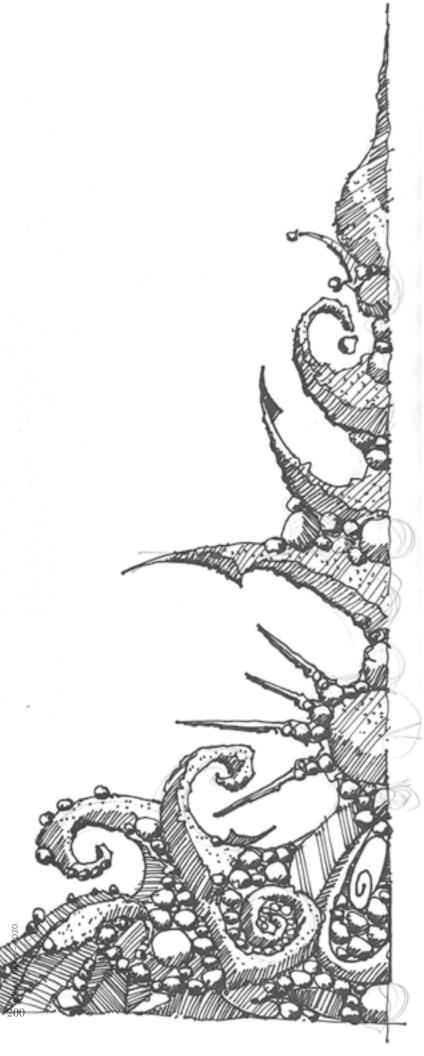
## 256 VALLEY OF THE DOG

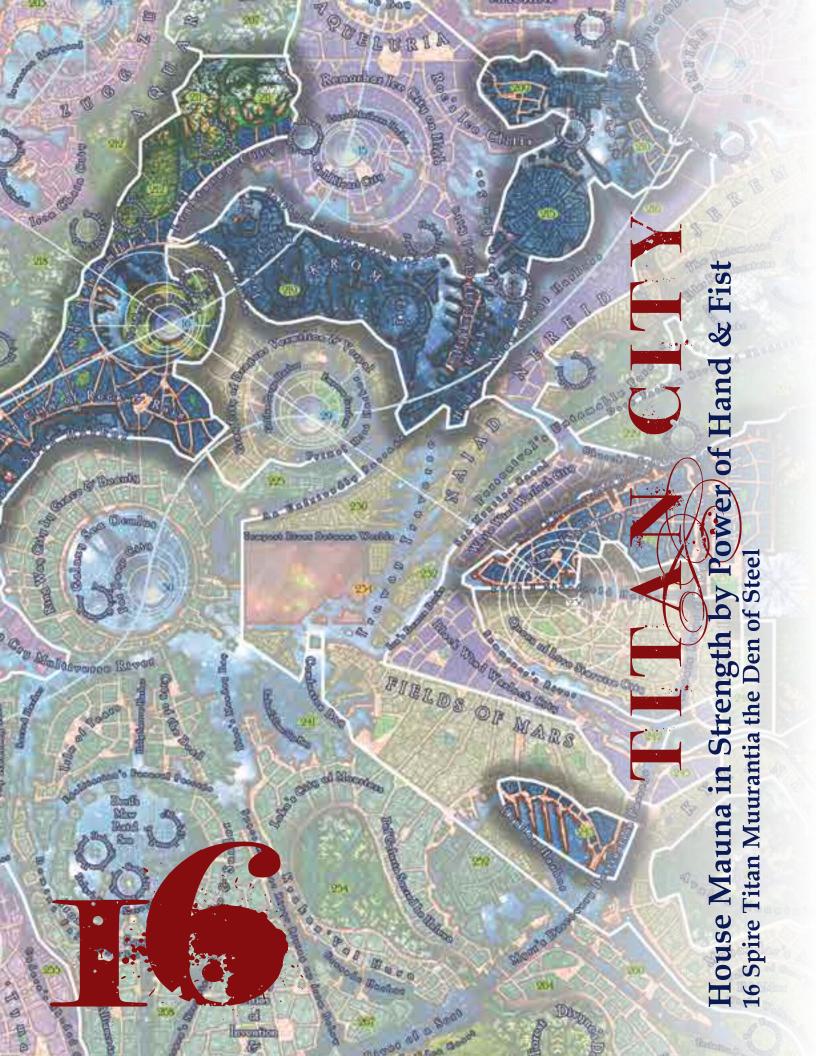
The valley was once a holy paladin city that hosted pilgrims to the vast paladin necropolis carved within Avalon Mountain over the long eons of Xai history.

The dog being the holy guardians of the Necropolis.

The valley is now a warzone between a demonic horde and a paladin crusade that seeks to retake Avalon Mountain.

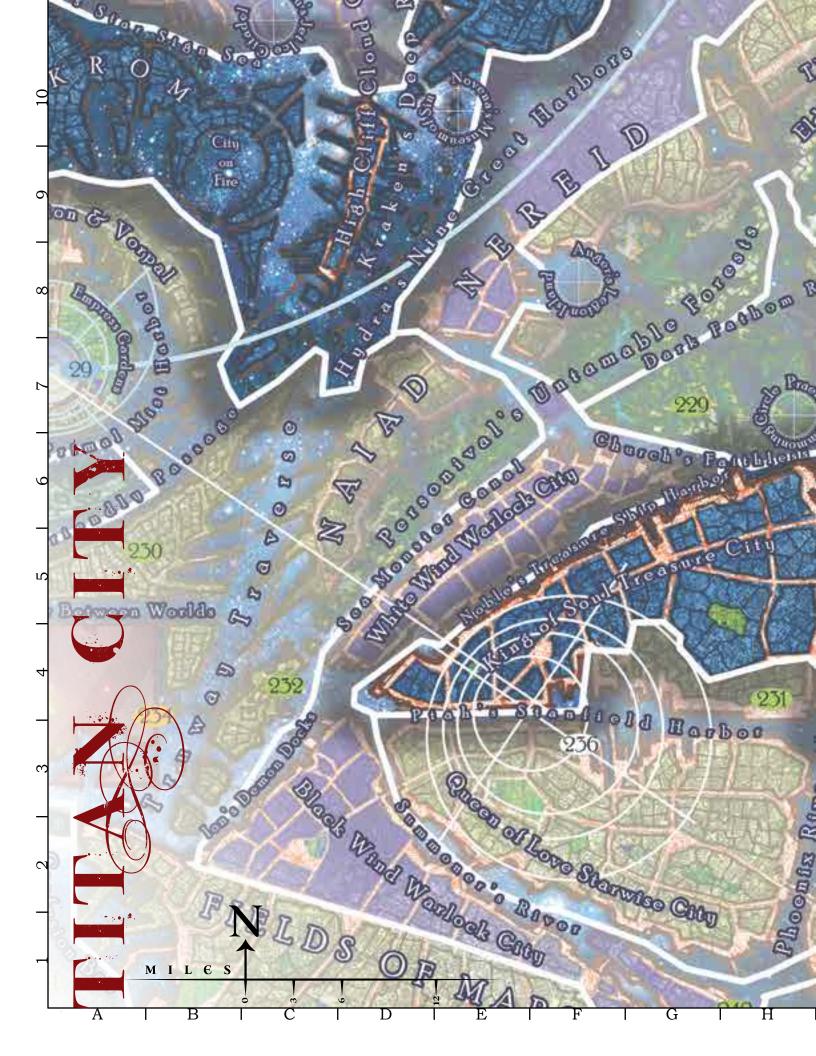
This is arguably the most dangerous place in the Clockworks right now.

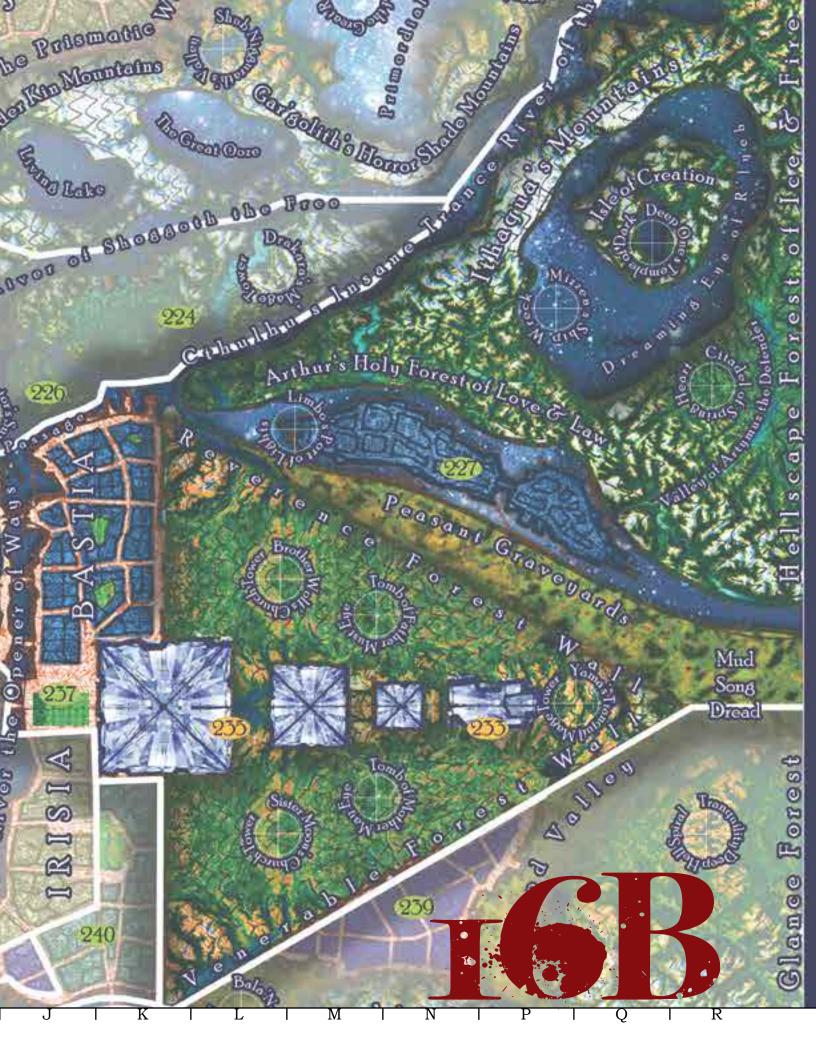












#### IS IT REALLY MURDER?

The young Muurantium was burdened by all he had learned. Myth and legends of his ancestors, each the master of his own density, each a wonder among an age of wonders. Now the glories of his people were as the weight of the world upon his shoulders, he was perhaps the last of his kind.

He was tall, broad shouldered, hairless bronze skinned, and chiseled of perfect musculature and manhood. He was as any man wished he might be; a master craft of the gods.

He moved thoughtfully through the narrow streets. He had been taught to always take care, his strength was far beyond what might be considered extraordinary, his musculature was laced with living metals and his bones near unbreakable. He had to constantly remind himself that the world around him was FRAGILE, and those others that lived within it more so.

He could leap straight up a hundred yards and could land from a fall of any height unharmed, recalling his training as he looked up along the high towers of the city streets.

His mentors had cautioned him though, he was not immortal nor immune from harm. He would age as any mortal might and he could be killed as any mortal might be killed though he was much more durable owing to his unbreakable bones and resilient metal laced musculature, but he could otherwise be cut and bleed.

He noticed his mind wandering, selfabsorbed by his body and form and the lessons of his mentors. He had not much noticed the dozen men approaching with swords and bolters. He was not certain who they were, but he had a fairly good idea it had to do with last night. She was quite beautiful.

The dozen men were confident, their target was big and cut like a diamond but was still only one man, when the princess had insisted on sending all 12, it seemed overkill.

"Gentlemen," the young Muurantium spoke with a deep voice that seemed to roll with

thunder behind its intonations, "I do not wish to harm or kill any of you, and you can clearly see I am unarmed."

The huge man was in fact stark naked, seeming unburdened by such as civil decorum, shame, or embarrassment that might afflict lesser men. The man spread his arms wide, smiling at the 12 men.

The dozen men opened fire with their bolters, the Muurantium sprinting full speed toward the 12. The bolts all found their marks, though each causing but minimum harm, piercing and scratching at his skin, but otherwise deflected by his rippling muscles, one shot cutting across the side of his head but glancing otherwise harmless off his unbreakable skull.

The Muurantium ran straight through the first 2, their ragdoll forms exploding as if hit by a truck, killed instantly, their bodies hurled by the impact toward nearby buildings. He finished his run through the group of attackers, 6 were dead, 2 would likely not survive, and the one he had captured in the vice grip of his left hand by the neck squirmed helplessly in the air.

The 3 remaining attackers that had managed to avoid the Muurantium's charge were horrified as they saw the huge man flinch his hand, popping their comrades head free of its body as one might pop the top of a bottle of beer.

The 3 survivors ran for their lives. The young Muurantium did not pursue.

"Perhaps a suit," the young Muurantium thought to himself, "maybe that would help to give him some respect in this town," he mused as we swept globs of brain, blood, and spattered organs from his naked body, flicking it off his hands with disgust. Remembering unbidden what one of his mentors used to say, "there is no fixing stupid."

He had to constantly remind himself that the world around him was FRAGILE. and those others that lived within it more so.

## ALID NACIES

### TITAN CITY

Titan City is ruled by House Mauna headed by the **King & Queen of the Mountain**.

Titan City is a place of minimalist utility largely absent the comforts of furniture, heat, or cooling. What exists of such things are imported by immigrant races to the City.

The Titan Races build domes of mud, brick, stone, or ice and decorate them with line work that mimics their nuanced and complex tattoo arts.

Furnishings consist of large skins, pelts, and mohair rugs, throws, and blankets. The more dangerous and exotic the animal pelts the wealthier and more respected the homeowner.

The people of Titan City are famously steel workers, blacksmiths, weapons makers, and warriors. Literacy is rare and knowledge passed on by oral tradition.

Titan City has become a place to recruit mercenary "barbarian" armies into other Great House and Imperial military endeavors, sacrificial pawns in more ornate and subtle affairs.

Titan City is a barbarous place of violence and shifting tribal laws and traditions, that exalts "might makes right".



House Mauna is ruled by the King & Queen of the Mountain, a pair-bound Muurantium couple.

The Titan Races all carry some fragment of ancient Muurantium bloodlines, and all share the characteristic appearance of chiseled muscular strength and curvaceous power.

The Titan Races live among the ruins of ancient Muurantium cities and mysterious Muurantium machines since swallowed by jungle, forest, and earth.

Most of the Titan Races have devolved into a city-state civilization of gloriously crafted stone architecture and mastery over steel. Some steel masters crafting weapons of high technomancy by way of oral traditions of master-mentor despite the general illiteracy and primitive technomancy of the majority.

House Mauna is a **power in decline**. The Muurantium that rule House Mauna are now few, the remnants of a once renown race of warriors and crafters. The larger ranks of House Mauna are now made up of **lesser Titan Races**, mere shadows of once powerful Muurantium greatness.

The greatest asset of Titan City is the various younger Titan Races themselves, still individually strong but primitive warriors, and skilled steel crafts people, the men, and women of the Titan races equally strong and skilled.



The Muurantium are of uncertain origins. Many stories suggest the race was the result of a powerful ancient Wizard, but more knowledgeable sages suggest the Muurantium are a race of Nephilim from the Age of Demon Prince Hellscapes.

Whatever the truth, the Muurantium are an old race whose heroic deeds and epic crafts can be found scattered through Xai history.

The Muurantium are makers, the bringers of Steel. They are given credit for crafting countless artifacts large and small that endure to modern day, not the least of which are the Diamond Pyramids that dominate the Southeastern Clockworks and perhaps even the Clockworks itself, a device Muurantium legend says was made as a lock to seal the Demon Princes into Subworld

The Muurantium are makers to modern day, architects of heroic buildings and crafters of artful steel.

Muurantium are a race heavily muscled, carved, and cut, the perfection of skeletal and muscular form and efficiency. The males are chiseled as if stone and the females of overly curvaceous gravity defying grace, each as perhaps imagined by such as Robert Howard or Simon Bisley.

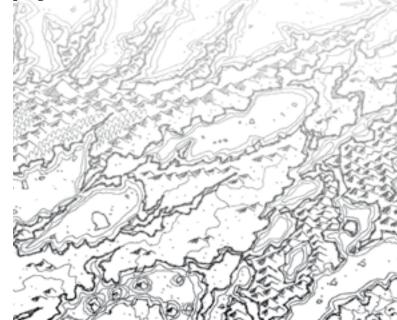
The Muurantium are peoples with a distinctly metallic skin appearing as bright nickel or steel when young and shifting to a soft patina of rust tones of golds and browns with age. Other Muurantium clans have bright copper or bronze skin when young that age into patinas of subtle tones of blue, green, and white.

#### Muurantium are a race ... as perhaps imagined by such as Robert Howard or Simon Bisley.

Physically the Muurantium can leap 30-yards straight up and land from freefall in a superhero pose suffering no harm. They can famously bend and tear steel plate as others bend and tear paper and are famously un-bothered by extremes of heat or cold. It is said they can hold their breath for an hour and can survive a month without food or water, expending all waste as heat through their skin so that they do not even make a mortal mess. Their muscles are said to be living steel and their bones titanium.

Ancient stories of the Muurantium are more fantastic. But the Muurantium race has intermarried and in time faded from prominence, their knowledge passed down orally for eons has been slowly lost and their Nephilim bloodlines made increasingly mortal with the passage of each lesser generation.

Modern Muurantium are now few, their bloodlines hidden in the lines of kings and queens and nobility of the younger Titan races. The younger Titan races are still over muscular and stronger than most but with none of the legendary might of their Muurantium progenitors.



80 g.lloyd baker - 2020



"These Lesser Titan Races," began the Envoy, "tell me about them."

"They are herd stock from the Age of the Red Empire," said the Vhel Sorceress, "they are not of the Mistress and they have no Shyne. Like so many other Spiritborne races of Eigaria and similar slaver stock, they have no souls, they are not Soulborne, and will never be Arcane.

"These Spiritborne seem like weeds in my garden," said the Empress through her most lovely Envoy, "do they have value?"

"They certainly believe they have value," said the Sorceress, "freewill, religious faith, creative arts. They are creations of the Mistress races, not of the Mistress themselves, an accident of birth, your thoughts on this matter are abhorrent."

"Say that I agree," said the Empress, "they intermarry with the Mistress races, bloodlines fade, the Shyne of each succeeding generation fades. The Lesser Titan races and the extinction of their progenitor Muurantium is not some errant anomaly to bemuse technomancers and philosophers, it is the inevitability of all mortals in soon becoming Spiritborne, Xai will be cleansed of all souls, mortal and Arcane."

"That is perhaps over dramatizing matters," said the Sorceress, "I know what you want to do, and we cannot agree. If your Soulborne races are so fragile that they cannot survive the natural universe as it is, do they really deserve to survive?"

"These Spiritborne races are not natural," said the Empress.

"All life is natural, the Spiritborne are predators of the Soulborne, by love and marriage and birth they prey upon the Mistress races that are no more natural than those you would destroy," the Sorceress argued, "and it is your own plan that seeks an end to the Mistress races in favor of Arcane, evolution is not so linear as your tiny mind might imagine."

Exasperated, the Empress asked, "what do you propose?"

"Let evolution take its course," instructed the Sorceress, "guide it as we might, but let it unfold as it will, Xai is already more glorious than any eldritch world will ever be, this Metropolis Empire contains more life and imagination than any dragon race has ever imagined possible, do not let your own limited view of what you want blind you to the wonders you cannot yet imagine."

"I see Xai awash with Spiritborne," the Empress admitted, "I see no wonder in a universe absent magic."

"Patience," counseled the Sorceress, "your Metropolis is yet new, let us see what fruit it bears."





#### 16 SPIRE TITAN MUURANTIA THE DEN OF STEEL

The Spire Titan is like a sword of struck vertically into the earth, its golden hilt and diamond handle glimmering high among the clouds.

The mountain into which the Spire is struck is a titanic citadel carved from living rock, a place for much larger men or beings than the mortals that now currently reside within its halls and workshops.

The Spire is a vast workshop of steel populated by the few remaining Muurantium masters seeking to teach the arts of steel to the next generation in the oral traditions of their ancestors.

But anyone can see that the Muurantium and their ancient crafts are in decline. The young Titan races have abandoned the traditions of their elders and seek adventure and knowledge beyond the rigid cultural confines of Titan City.

The Clockwork Metropolis is a big place, the Empire a bigger place, the Outlands of Xai a bigger place still, and the Subworlds and Space-Operas that swirl about Xai a bigger universe still.

The Age of the Muurantium has come and long-ago gone, and the youth have already moved on.

This is the island jungle that surrounds the Titan Spire. There is no city here, just a wilderness with well-traveled paths that lead to the mountain at the base of the Spire.

The jungle is prowled by impossibly strong demonic beasts that will hunt down and devour anyone that strays from the paths, that is anyone except a pureblood Muurantium.

The jungle is laced with shifting paths that lead to the Primary Subworld and are open to the coming and going of the few true Muurantium that remain. The thin blood of the lesser Titan races no longer allows passage to the Subworld.

#### 209 VALENTINE CITY

The city-state is ruled by the **Valentine Clan**, a tribe of ancient Muurantium nobility that retains its respect and traditions for the old Nephilim religions.

Valentine City is what ancient Muurantia used to be, the fragment of an ancient and glorious past survived into the modern day.

The City is one of modern steel domed buildings glazed with colored crystals and intricate tattoo style arts whose language remains known to the Valentine Shaman and continues to expand and evolve.

Valentine City can be equated to a city of titans, gods, giants, or similar beings of frightful power and might. Tourists are unwelcome, as this is a **serious** place populated by a profoundly **serious** people that ever seem to be carrying the weight of the world upon their shoulders.

Valentine City is the real power behind House Mauna and the real alliance with the Crystal Shard Empress. Most Great Houses prefer to deal with less deadly official House Mauna channels. But for those with real courage and real power, business with the Muurantium is conducted among the great halls of Valentine City.

#### 210 SEVERINA CITY

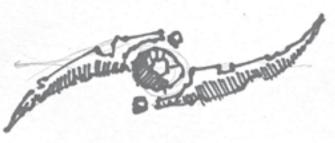
The city-state of Severina was once a lawless and especially corrupt place of poverty, suffering, and cruelty.

In recent years however a female Muurantium by the name of Lady Severina riding upon a living steel gryphon began prowling the night and in true superhero fashion imposing vigilante justice upon the evil doers of the City.

The Muurantium are a very misunderstood race, often being the **smartest and strongest in any room**, they are too often feared and marginalized by the small and foolish.

Muurantium have a strong sense of justice, either for good or ill, and have long assumed the role of **super-hero or super-villain** justice makers when faced with injustice. And while Muurantium make poor paladins or similar "righteous" religious warriors, they make great villains and heroes when moved by their own sense of justice and empathy.

Severina City has of late become a welcoming city of immigrant prosperity and laws ruled over by a democratic council of citizen representatives.



The City has established its own coast guard of ancient Muurantium Stone Ships and has become a regional economic powerhouse with a large merchant navy and burgeoning technomantic arts due to its increasing trade with the neighboring Adrena'Chrome.

And all the while, the Lady Severina and here faithful steel gryphon standing vigilant in the night.

## 211 PRISON FORESTS OF IVA & THURA

Lying between the icy forested mountains of Iva and Lhura is an Imperial prison.

As a rule, Imperial prisoners are sentenced to **reciprocal suffering**.

But sometimes prisoners cannot be harmed, nor have not actually committed a crime, sometimes the world is complicated, and people just need to "go away".

The un-named city in the Iva'Lhura Vale is just such a place. Officially the place does not exist, and its high frozen altitudes and patrolling wyvern means the area is unvisited.

## 212 FRIGHTFUL FORESTS OF DARKNESS & DARK

The Forest of Darkness is a place of perpetual night, the sky above a window into a distant and alien reach of a far-off galaxy.

The Forest of Dark is a place where alien shadows prowl the darkness of the sky and below among the trees. The two forests exist in the same place and time. People vanish here, taken to places not of our reality.

#### 215 MOONCHILD CITY OF CIFTS

This city-state is **free of Imperial dominion** and ruled by the Moonchild Clan, among the most famed swords makers of Xai.

Moonchild weaponry is legendary for their folded metal techniques and metallurgy, immune to the effects of corrosion and for holding a razors edge unchipped by strike or wear. Moonchild weapons are famously unbreakable even by the strength of a Muurantium.

The City is of ancient streets and well-crafted courtyard homes and workshops. This is a wealthy working-class city that respects the old Nephilim religions and ancient Muurantium traditions with no need or desire for House Mauna or Imperial interference.

Conquest of the City and enslavement of its gifted swordsmiths has been attempted many times in the past and a few times more recently with varying degrees of temporary success but always ending in failure. But this desire to take the City has over time worn upon its resiliency, much of the city abandoned to lesser immigrant craftspeople from across the Empire seeking wisdom from the few remaining Moonchild masters.

BE Raver the

#### 219 STEEL ISLAND FORGED BY BLOOD & FAITH

This city-state is free of Imperial and House Mauna dominion and is ruled by the **Steel Clan**, the first and oldest of the Muurantium tribes, the mother of all modern tribes, clans, and younger Titan races.

The city is mostly abandoned and any that enter the island are quickly slain by its few remaining occupants. Those that remain are insane, Muurantium Druids of the old Nephilim blood religions. These ancient Druids retain the secret of demon summons and control and still worship the Demon Princes as patrons of their clan.

Legend says they can summon the Demon Princes to their aid in times of great need.

The city is a **relic of a more ancient time on Xai**, a place filled with secrets and artifacts from a time when gods moved among men and renown deeds moved the very stars.

## 227 CNURAS ANGELFALL FORTRESS

Angelfall is a city-state free of Imperial dominion and protected by Gnura, a single Muurantium female of ancient lineage. Gnura is old, perhaps even immortal, a curvaceous loveliness always appearing as a vibrant 26-year-old woman.

Gnura has made Angelfall her home for as long as any alive can recall, a witness to eons of Clockwork Metropolis and Xai history. She is a legendary warrior and sorceress of unique demonic skills. Some say she is a true Nephilim, her father one of the original Demon Princes.

The Fortress is a city of mercenaries, warriors, and sorcerers that have lost their way, a place of rest, recuperation, and new purpose as the faithful of Gnura.

The Fortress lies at the center of the Shadowsong River which leads south easterly for many thousands of miles into a vast demon-corrupted wilderness. A wilderness that Gnura is ever seeking new recruits for missions into its dangerous unknown reaches.

The fortress is also famous for a sorcerous and warrior tournament held each 3 years. The final contest between the champion sorcerer against the champion warrior. The winner given rulership over the Fortress for the next 3 years as her King.

#### 233 ARTIFACT GUARDIAN SPHYNX OF EUCY IN THE SKY

The Guardian Sphynx is a titanic construct of shimmering crystal blocks nearly 5 miles long and several miles high facing due east.

The purpose of its creation is lost to time though it seems related to **guarding the**Clockworks from demonic incursion.

Mythic tales tell of the monstrosity moving about to defend the Metropolis though it has remained in its current location for the duration of modern recorded history.

Within the Sphynx is a complex and shifting labyrinth of crystal blocks and mirrors that beguile and disorient causing any that enter to, if very skilled, find their way eventually back out. Most that enter never escape, willing sacrifices to the Guardian.



## 235 ARTIFACT DIAMOND PYRAMIDS OF MOTHER MISTRESS SKY

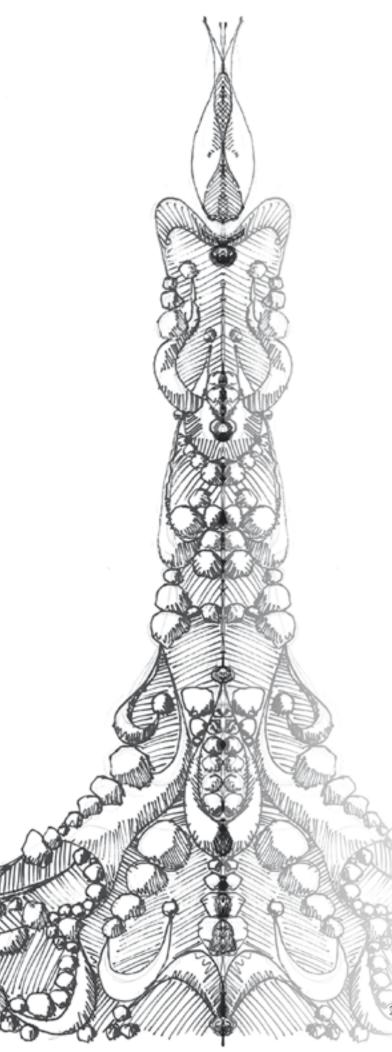
The 3 Diamond Pyramids, the largest 7 miles square (covering 49 square miles) with a height of nearly 4 miles, often lost among the clouds.

Myth says that the 3 pyramids are Octahedrons, 8 sided volumes that once floated high over the Clockworks, their purpose something to do with vanquishing the Demon Princes to Xai Subworlds. The 3 octahedrons set to rest in their current location with a pyramid above and below ground during some later Age.

The Diamond Pyramids are made of titanic blocks of diamond, large amounts of which have been removed over the ages for use in jewelry and high technomancy.

Within each pyramid is an alien city of titanic irregularly formed chambers and high narrow connecting halls designed for beings decidedly large and of alien form for unknowable purpose. Deep within, trapped like flies within amber are demons bound within millions of blocks of diamond.

Some have suggested that the Demon Princes were never actually banished to the Xai's Subworld but were instead chopped into pieces and the parts entombed within the blocks at the heart of the Diamond Pyramids.



## 237 TRAGEDY STONE CITY OF DUST

At the western base of the Diamond Pyramids lies an Imperial City and parklands.

Stone City is a garrison town with the purpose of making safe tourists come to visit the Diamond Pyramids and the Diamond Sphynx as well as prevent further theft of the diamond blocks that make up their unique construction.

And more importantly, see that no one messes with the deeper blocks containing frozen demons.

This is a city awash with tourists and cheap shops selling tchotchkes of every possible imagining of poor taste.

#### 243 TOK NARR S TITAN SHIPYARDS

The Titan Shipyards are a fragment of the much larger territories of Muurantia many long ages past but still held by House Mauna to modern day.

The Titan Shipyards is an ancient Muurantium city that still has a few of the old guard that produce the legendary Muurantium Stone Ships; large stone hulled & magnetic steelfabric sail ships that can travel as easily over the surface of land as over the surface of water.

The creation and piloting of Stone Ships is a dying art, likely to be lost with the passing of the last of the current masters.

The Loknarr is an ancient navigation crystal used by Muurantium "sailors".

The Lok'narr will always point the way to immediate or impending danger or "evil", used by most modern sailors avoid such but used by ancient Muurantium to seek out trouble.

g.lloy







### SUCH AN ODD PLACE

"What have you found?" asked the Myrddin Wizard.

The spy began, "it seems true, the Mistress Flood banished the Demon Princes to the Subworld interior. An Empire of an odd Metropolis sort surrounds the Clockworks, led by an Empress trapped in amber that calls herself the Crystal Shard Empress."

"That is very odd," said the Wizard.

"It gets stranger," said the spy, "the Calibahn advance we sought to escape was worse than anyone might have guessed, the universe all but cleansed of mortal life by the Lichborne and their armies of the risen. Apparently, this Empress collected up the Calibahn refugees and assembled them to populate her new Empire, saving them, she says, from extinction."

"Noble if true," said the Wizard.

"It is true," said the spy, "though also true is that it was the dragons that created the Lichbore to exterminate the Mistress races."

"Their genocide at creating the Demon Princes not enough," screamed the Wizard, "they tried again with Lichborne!"

"The dragons do seem intent on repelling the Mistress invasion of their Universe," said the spy.

"We are pawns of powers beyond our comprehension or understanding, Mistress and Eldritch, horrors both," lamented the Wizard.

"Just so," said the spy, "the Empress seems to agree, a hybrid form of life has evolved, a form which she imagines will remake the universe, mortals born with eldritch souls, she calls them Arcane."

A long pause ensued as the Wizard considered such a living terror, giving order to the Chaos that is dragon kind, bringing freedom and creativity to the stagnant suffering that is mortal kind. Both sides would seek its demise. Yet unaligned, it might be free of both of dragon and Mistress influence. This Empress he decided, was ambitious but played a deadly game.

"Where do these Arcane come from?" the Wizard finally asked.

"Born to random mortal families," he said, "no pattern has anyone yet found, though those wretched Vhel'guura are involved, so there is no knowing for sure."

"Grim news indeed," said the Wizard, "those Witches are like cockroaches, they may well outlast us all. What of our own kind, were there any survivors of the Calibahn?"

"Some," said the spy, "though they fare poorly. Some few Antediluvians, Ddraig, Lyrn, and Dhar yet survive, each gifted a Mistress Spire and each afforded Great House status within the Empire composed of 37 Great Houses."

"Good news it would seem," said the Wizard, "why do you say poorly when given domain over the wonders of a Mistress Spire, this would seem to afford great power?"

"The complications of the Empire are many and nuanced, but if I might attempt to summarize: the Antediluvians have forgotten their heritage and struggle in ignorance of what they possess, the Ddraig, Lyrn, and Dhar have all fallen to various forms of slavery, their own leaders seeming to have sold them for personal benefit."

"This new Empress permits slavery," howled the Wizard, "I had almost started liking her."

"She does not," said the spy, "though she gives each Great House the freewill to rule their own kind. It is our own kind which profit from the slavery."

"Such a tragedy," intoned the Wizard, "it seems time we should reintroduce ourselves to our progeny."

"We are pawns of powers beyond our ... understanding, Mistress and Eldritch, horrors both

# MERLIN CITY

## MERLIN CITY

Merlin City is named for the **Myrddin Wizards** that conquered it a few centuries back. The slaver occupants evicted from the City.

The Ddraig that now occupy the City have always been bright, strong, and industrious and have also been persecuted, conquered, and enslaved for as long as anyone alive can recall.

In the past few centuries, Merlin City has become a vibrant new heart in the Clockworks.

The peoples of Merlin City have advanced from farming slaves into a modern industrial civilization of high-rise cities and highly advanced technomancy the envy of far older Clockwork Metropolis cities.

The Merliners are clever and very hard working and are industrious builders and makers. Perhaps more importantly, their long eons of bondage have unified the various Merlin races into a single tribe of "us" against the universe.

Merlin City is a vibrant hub of activity. This is a place of new businesses, advanced manufacturing, innovative technomancy, imaginative arts & architecture, and a city under construction, reinventing itself seemingly daily.

And perhaps most surprisingly, the Merliners over the succeeding generations have abandoned their ancestral bitterness and have embraced all comers as friends and partners in the creation of their new City.

Merlin City is a place of explosive population growth, a city of new beginnings where hard work is prevalent and rewarded with opportunities of ownership and prosperity.

Merlin City is a youthful exuberant place of young families and burgeoning prosperity. The overwhelming success of which is of growing concern to many older Clockwork nobility.

# HOUSE DD RAIGGOCH THE QUICK LICHT IN SILENCE

House Ddraig is ruled by the Myrddin Wizards.

The people suffered long eons as slaves under the yolk of foreign powers that strip-mined their forests and drained their seas.

That was until the coming of the Myrddin, a race of Wizards from a "farfuture" dying civilization of a far distant past but escaped to the modern Xai only a few centuries ago.

The Myrddin Wizards claimed to be their kin, blood relatives from an ancient past come to make good on the modern Merlin races' claim to the universe.

The Myrddin Wizards are as gods compared to the primitive Merlin races over which they have claimed rightful rulership. And as gods compared to the feeble medieval slave masters that have since been cleansed from Merlin City.

The Myrddin Wizards established Merlin City and the Great House Ddraig and forced its petition upon the Crystal Shard Empress.

The Myrddin Wizards have been a shot of adrenaline to the Clockwork Metropolis, accelerating plans of all Great Houses and Powers to action and focus.

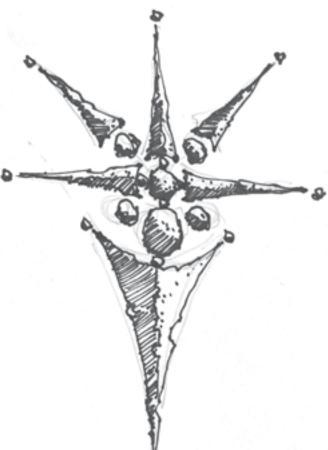
The Myrddin Wizards remain a big and powerful unknown with knowledge not seen since the Red Empire. The Wizards have instilled a healthy fear into the workings of the Clockwork Metropolis and have thus far exploited that fear to masterful effect.

# DDRAIGEOSH

The Ddraig, like other Antediluvians, were the victims of Demon Prince enslavement and corruption. The race that survives to modern day a hated remnant of demon influence, forever seen as unclean by most other races and as often hunted or killed as being considered demons themselves.

The Ddraig'Gosh are an especially beautiful people, elegant, artful, and peaceful. As their name suggests, they are lycanthropes whose form is that of a fire breathing red dragon, that with age became ever more permanent, until human form was no longer possible.

The slavery of the Ddraig involved a silver neck band which prevented their changing form, their suffering enduring. Most generations of slaves never knowing their nature, forgetting the joy, grace, and wondrous power of their demon gifted dragon form.



# AZETTEER OPMERLIN CITY

# 17 SPIRE MEREIN OF SHADOWS UNNOTICED

It had long been speculated that the Mistress Spires can change their form. A year prior to the arrival of the Myrddin Wizards the Spire Merlin altered form from a dusty monolith wrapped in titanic iron chains into one of glittering transparency and ornate alien delicacy.

The seers foretold the coming of an apocalypse, the destruction of the Crystal Shard Empress replaced by something that could not yet be seen.

What happened was the arrival of London and the Myrddin Wizards. The Clockworks has not been in such a fuss since the Vampire Queen Uprising. But Armageddon? Only time will tell.

In the meantime, the Spire Merlin is among the busiest trade and travel hubs of modern Clockworks. Merlin City riding a wave of renaissance and resurgence. Not only within the City but also as jumping off points for exploration and settlement into the Outland Wilderness.

There is also a rumor of the Myrddin Wizards having launched a series of exploratory crusades into the Primary Subworld in preparation for invasion. The Subworld loot brought back said to be luring ever more adventurers and mercenaries into Merlin City.

These are indeed exciting times.

### 228 TWILIGHT CITY OF SHADOW AND VAGUERY

Twilight City is a peninsula of less than upstanding Merlin City **thievery and crime**. For as famously bright and industrious as the Ddraig are, so are they equally clever and ambitious on the criminal front.

A great many Ddraig upon being freed from bondage sought no further master and while grateful to their Myrddin emancipators, they declined any loyalty to House Ddraig. Instead forming a family based organized criminal underground.

The Merlin City Mafia is powerful and sophisticated and mostly avoids House Ddraig entanglements by focusing its efforts on stealing from the other Great Houses and selling their ill-gotten gains in the black markets of Twilight City.

# 238 TERRANINES ENCHANTED SHIPYARD

The Terra Nine islands are an ancient shipyard recently restored and now operated under strict House Ddraig secrecy.

Officially, the shipyard produces vehicles for commercial and military use, but large parts of the complex are shrouded in secrecy and under heavy guard.

The common speculation is that the facility is conducting advanced reverse technomancy research on ice-ships and frozen-technomancy captured during the southern Principality campaigns. Some speculate that a great many Ice Demons are being held as prisoners or slaves within the facility.

### 248 MASQUERADE ISEAND BOTH SURREAL & 55

Masquerade Island is a place **free of Imperial dominion**. More to the point, this is a place free of Ddraig occupation, only Myrddin Wizards are permitted access to the Island.

The place appears to be nothing more than an array of private elaborate and unusual residences, mansions, and palaces surrounded by beautiful geometric gardens filled with alien foliage and exotic fauna.

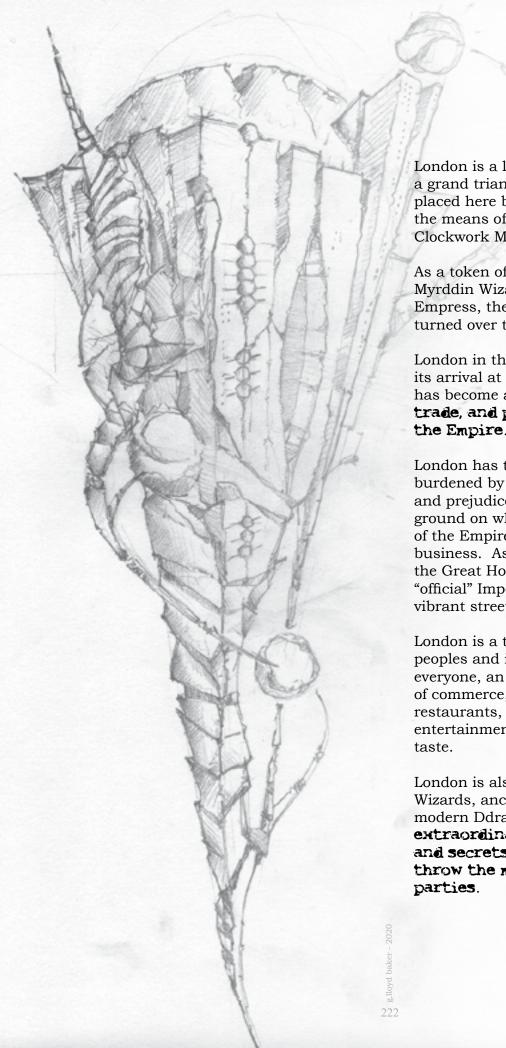
But some suggest a larger purpose, a vast labyrinth below the Island connecting all the residences into a giant compound of unknown purpose.

### 249 WARRENS OF DEPRAVITY & SUMMONS

The island is home to a low-rise city of ancient stone buildings and narrow twisting cobblestone streets. This is unholy ground.

This is a place of dangerous night clubs, bars, and taverns with a reputation for catering to demonic tastes. Warlocks and similar wielders of corrupted magics and demon summons are said to frequent the Warrens.

House Ddraig patrols the Warrens but only loosely and only when things tend to get out of hand, preferring to keep its forces away from the dark influences of such an ancient and evil place. The strategy is containment.



### 250 LONDON SAVED AT THE EDGE OF A FAILED EARTH

London is a large Imperial City with a grand triangle park. London was placed here by the Myrddin Wizards, the means of their arrival to the Clockwork Metropolis.

As a token of "peace" between the Myrddin Wizards and the Crystal Shard Empress, their beloved London was turned over to Imperial Dominion.

London in the past two centuries since its arrival at the base of Spire Merlin has become a **hub of commerce**, **trade**, and political affairs within the Empire.

London has the appeal of not being burdened by countless eons of conflict and prejudice, a new and true "neutral" ground on which the Great Houses of the Empire now conduct regular business. As an example, most of the Great Houses now maintain their "official" Imperial embassy within the vibrant streets of London.

London is a true melting pot of peoples and is at once everything to everyone, an urban amusement park of commerce, schools, shopping, restaurants, bars, arts, and entertainment of every conceivable taste.

London is also home many Myrddin Wizards, ancient ancestors of the modern Ddraig races; beings of extraordinary ancient knowledge and secrets that also famously throw the most glorious dinner parties.

### CITY SACRIFICE

"This is going to be fun," said the First Myrddin Wizard.

"Fun is not a word I would use," said the Second, "stupid is a more apt term."

"You really are joyless," said the First.

"Which part of summoning a CITY across the cosmos," complained the Second, "would seem as joy, the things that can go wrong are too numerous to list, each one a catastrophe that may well destroy where it was or where it is going, not to mention the deadly consequences to those living within the city, the sad and witless you deemed need not know. You are insane my husband and this ridiculous escapade finally proves it."

"I love you too my dear," said the First, "but the preparations have been tended too, your own innumerable lists and cautions each accounted, at some point, JOY is all that remains, to fret is counterproductive," he kissed her upon the forehead, "it is time." She smiled a crooked smile.

The two stood high upon the roof of central dome of Saint Paul's Cathedral overlooking the city, the eye of a swirling storm of clouds now overhead. The two Wizards could see the fractures of space time that intersected their location, guiding them with the subtlety and grace of a skilled musician, the symphony of his hundreds of supporting Wizards placed throughout the City, each performing with similar mastery. The crash of the storm slowly became musical, the roll of thunder as drums, the winds and strings moving to crescendo. They both laughed as they bent reality to their common will.

On the plain stretched out before the Merlin Spire stood the armies of a dozen Great Houses, nearly half a million strong assembled to invade the Ddraig City, overwhelming force to deal with the recent slave rebellions. They would learn, and all would understand the consequence of disobedience. Or at least that was the plan.

The Crystal Shard Empress had advised against rash action, had advised against invasion, had advised against overwhelming force, and at last had the gall to advise the slaves to be freed. The dozen Great Houses decided this was to be as much a show of force to the riotous Ddraig as to the Empress, that she would be right to fear them, they were in ascendancy, this was their moment to step from the shadow of the Empire.

Above the great plains and fields upon which the armies assembled a vortex of roiling storm clouds began to swirl. Sorcerers of the various armies suspected treachery, began stretching their e'Mral talents into the air to counter the storm. But their e'Mral was repelled, they watched in horror as the e'Mral mists were washed from the ground and air by some unseen power. Horror filled their final thoughts as the City of London came falling from the sky, reducing the sacrificed armies of a dozen Great Houses into a viscus sedimentary layer.

The Wizards settled and shifted 60square miles of their beloved city into the shadow of Merlin Spire. The citizenry of London awoken from their sleep by the sudden shift of the ground, a small earthquake to be the subject of light conversation over breakfast.

The two Myrddin Wizards laughed exhausted, "fun!" said the First.

"Joy," said the Second.

The two falling into a long kiss.



# 251 PEDORAS WATERFALE MACHINE ISEANDS & POWER PEANT PEANET HARBOR

The **Waterfall Machine Islands** were a dead artifact for many long eons. The Myrddin Wizards have repaired and reconstructed the titanic machines under the waterfalls that now supply steam to Merlin City.

But as with all things related to the Myrddin Wizards, something else is going on here. The machines do not appear to be a kind to produce steam, and if they did, it would be but a fraction of its true purpose, perhaps the steam simply waste heat of some greater engineering.

# 258 CARAVEPRACE CITY OF MICHELLE THE OLD &EDEN S JUNCTION

Caravel Island is a beautiful and ancient city saved and restored by House Ddraig and is now home to many parks, museums, amusement parks, hotels, casinos, and race parks.

The Ddraig are famously competitive and love their horse, boat, and auto racing as well as their innumerable professional sports teams.

Caravel Island is a resort enjoyed by peoples throughout the Empire.



### 259 DRIFT CITY SIX OVER THE RIVER STYX

The Myrddin Wizards have established sole dominion over **Drift City Six**, an ancient artifact of the fallen Calibahn Empire.

The Myrddin Wizards have laced the Drift City with alien magics and caused it to shift ethereal, still there, but intangible and unreachable except by invitation of the Wizards.

Only the Myrddin know what goes on in the Drift City but everyone would pay a good sum to know.

# 269 CITY OF MERCY & MEDICINE & MIND

The **City of Mercy** is a large Imperial city located between Xanadu City and Merlin City at the center of a war zone.

This is a **hospital city** of Imperial peacekeepers seeking some end to the continuing conflict between the Ddraig and Khann.

This is a dangerous place, an active warzone where neither side supports Imperial interference in "their" war.

### 272 HIGH MOUNTAIN CITY IN CLOUD & COLD

High Mountain City is one of those very ancient places that sits on the foundations of an even more ancient city that was built over a city still more ancient.

This is a frozen city that lies within or above the clouds. The current use of the place is by House Ddraig as a prison. The prisoners sentenced to hard labor excavating downward into the ever more ancient foundations of the ruins.

The archeological finds have been extraordinary and continue to elucidate the secrets of the mountain.



Abigale's Town is a high mountain fortress city under which has be found the buried remains of many Portals (since named the White Rabbit Portals) leading to far distant and ancient city locations deep within Xai' Outland Wilderness.

The town has become a boomtown of archeology and exploration of far distant places lost to the Clockworks for eons.

# 279 NYRIN SHOLY CITY AT THEEDGE OF WORLDS

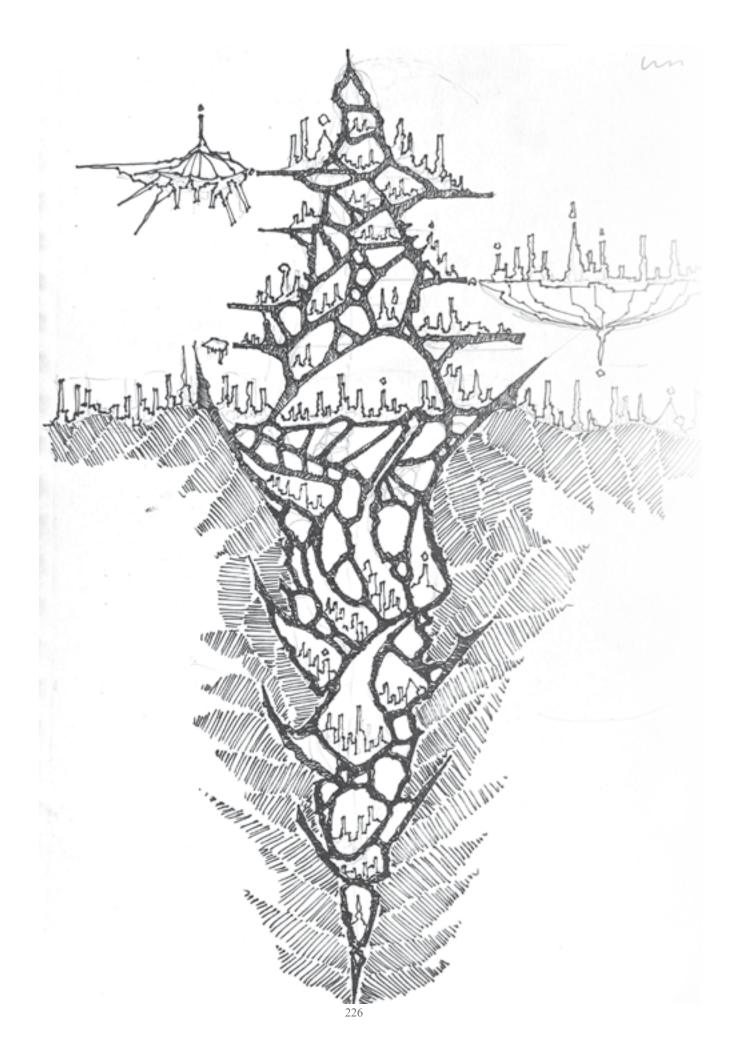
The Holy City has for long ages been a place of monastic solitude and introspective prayer.

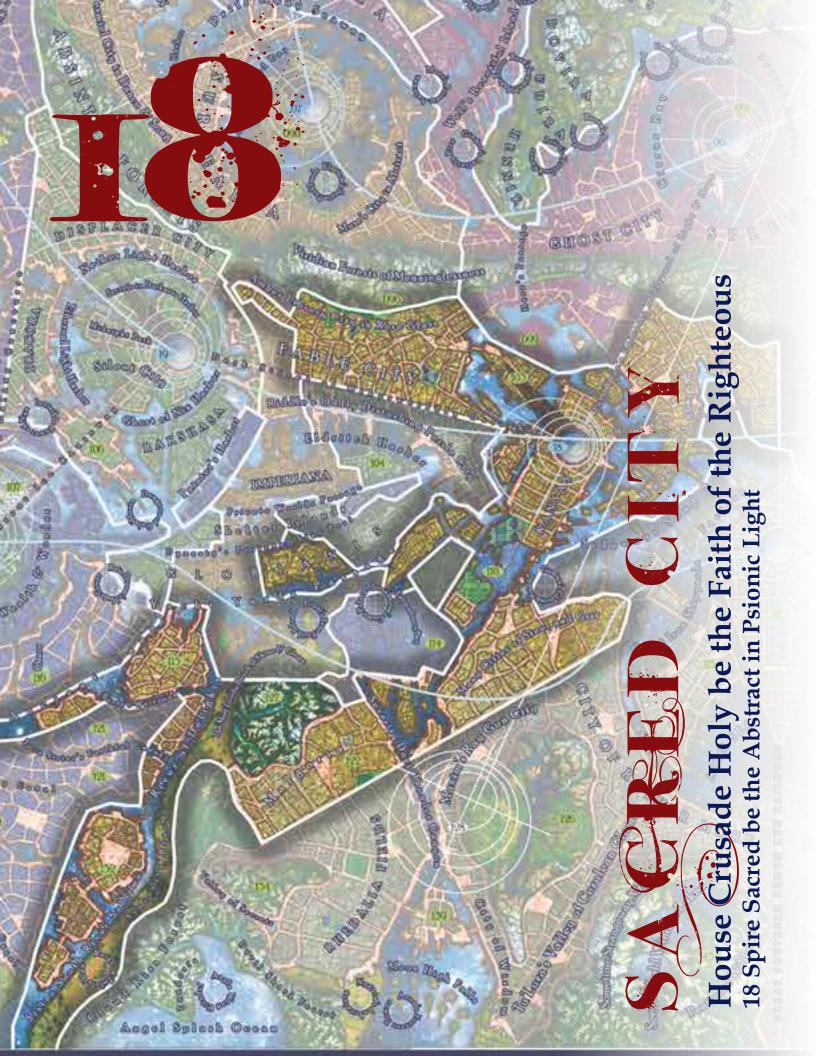
It was also, long ago, a star port for an alien race of beings now lost to memory and myth. The star port a sealed vastness of hollowed out mountain below the Holy City. House Ddraig has sought to explore the star port but has met with rather fanatical resistance from the faithful above.

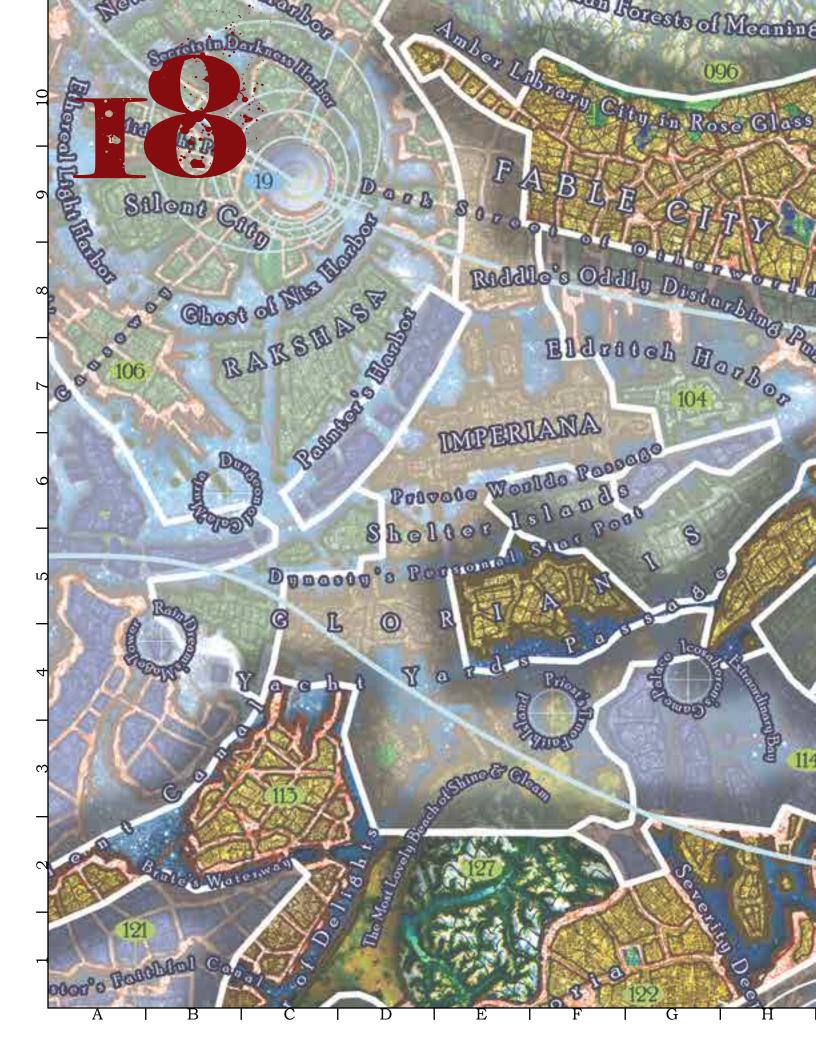
# 282 APEX S SKY CITY ATOP THE WORLD

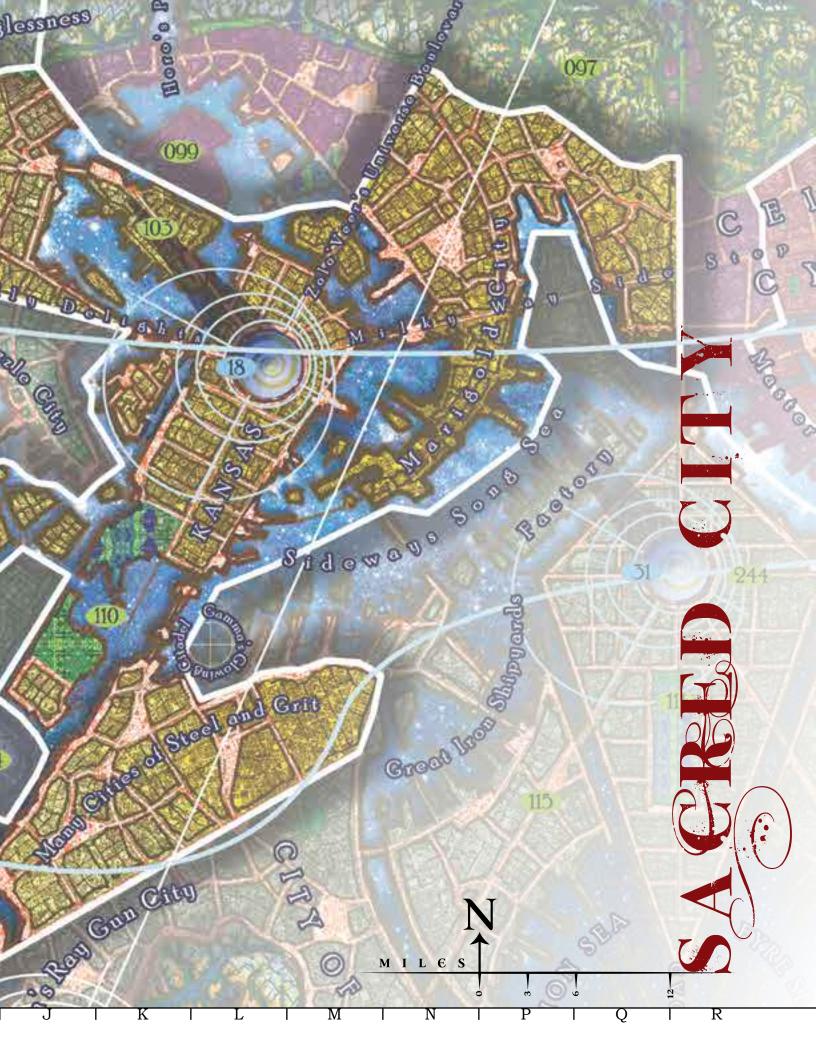
Sky City is unusually high and overlaps a void into outer space. Sky City is without atmosphere and a mere 3-degrees above absolute zero, a city built in the void of outer space.

The city is occupied by a small group of Myrddin Wizards, perhaps the original builders of this ancient and unusual place. The Myrddin Wizards do not seem to be bothered by the cold nor the lack of atmosphere, moving about the place upon urgent errands of secrecy and especially esoteric purpose.











Sacred City is the **remains of a once vast space faring civilization**. The architecture is ancient, worn, decayed, but also patched, maintained, and modern.

The people of the Sacred Realms of Origination are devout that claim to be the ancestors of the faithful chosen by the Mistress Angelic to survive sweeping floods that killed the corrupted and imprisoned the Demon Princes and their unholy Nephilim offspring within Xai's subworlds.

The Hathan are an industrious people of devotion dedicated to the holy crusade to eradicate the demonic from Xai.

The Diluvian Hathans see themselves as chosen, pure, and uncorrupted by demonic influence. They are agents of law and justice and destroyers of chaos and magic.

The Hathan are a race that focuses its faith upon a single **Holy Psionic Light King** (or Queen) each generation. This Holy King is the focus of all prayer and faith, so that prayers are occasionally answered and miracles among the faithful are not uncommon.

The streets, buildings, art, and architecture of the Sacred City is serious, reverential, and very imposing. The size of buildings dwarfs the craft of common mortal civilizations. People are always small within the Sacred City, a smallness of intention and divine purpose.

The technomancy of the Sacred City is high but discrete and specific. Any machinery in the form of man or that takes the form of a thinking mind is unholy. The mind, body, and soul of man are holy and machines that mock or mimic man are heretical.

The technomancy of the Sacred City is more one of faith, dedication, and training. Hathan technomancy ever seeks to support man's quest to find their divine purpose, never to replace man.

To expand control of the body to inwardly heal and alter its chemistry to produce miracles that would be impossible by even the highest genetic sciences. These are the famed **Priests & Priestesses of Anima** (Blood Priest).

To expand the mind to be more powerful than any computer or thinking machine might ever be capable (thereby eliminating the need for thinking machines). These are the famed **Priests & Priestesses of Mnemonica** (Logic Priest).

And to expand awareness and control over one's own soul to perceive the infinite and miracle. These are the famed **Priests & Priestesses of Celestia** (Star Priest).





House Crusade is led by the Holy Psionic Light King.

House Crusade is ruled by force of ancient religious military priests focused on the eradication of demonic corruption and the prominence of the holy-soul-of-man upon the universe.

The universe is a crucible where the faithful fight the forces of chaos and the heretical and indifferent serve the unholy enemies of man.

The universe of House Crusade is a grim and violent place, this life but one in a long series of tests which each of the faithful must conquer with bravery and sacrifice.

The Holy Psionic Light King is a being of infinite vision, a mind of brightness that all Hathan minds might see as a light at the center of an infinite darkness. Hathan priests may learn to use the King's mind as lighthouse, a fixed waypoint from which to orient and navigate the fantastic distances of space and time.

Hathan Priests and their Holy Crusades are enemy to most Great Houses, viewing most of them as agents of the Demon Princes and their Nephilim spawn.

The sorcerous arts of Arcane of the Imperial Fanes are viewed with great suspicion among the Hathans, though they recognize magic as being a tool no more good or evil than the faith of the wielder, as evidenced by the Arcane priesthood that rules House Crusade under the Holy Psionic Light King.

# OF DIEUVIAN PRELICION

Within the Xai universe, it has always been that that guilt, shame, and doubt prevent the eMral mists from being used to create magic.

Diluvian religion began with a single exemplar tribe, the chosen saved by the Mistress from the Flood. This **First Faith** was bestowed upon those **born to the chosen** tribe as an example to others. But in time this favored clan stopped being exemplar leaders and became persecuted and reviled.

The **Second Faith** was one of choice. The idea being that instead of being jealous of those born to salvation, anyone could **choose to believe** and be joined into the new church. This second religion had great early success but again soon turned to persecution, exclusion, and war.

The **Third Faith** was of conquest and imposition; "**convert or die**". This religion proved very successful in quelling those not born into the First Faith or not choosing to follow the Second Faith by subjugating them into the Third Faith (an especially fatalistic teaching where one's choices are irrelevant to one's destiny).

The result was that Hathan civilization developed divided among hundreds of petty national states under the fear, doubt, and guilt of religious dogma.

Magic came to be increasingly unknown until even the occasional miracle vanished from the reality.

Diluvian civilization was slow to develop, enduring dark ages resulting from debilitating religious wars. Eons of hardship and Armageddon promising religions led the Hathan to be a decidedly grim but very resilient race. These early hardships of the Hathan were a crucible from which emerged a Kingdom of demonic predators.

The first Holy Psionic Light King unified the faithful and set upon a holy crusade to cleanse the universe of demonic influence.

The once divided and uncertain peoples of Sacred Realms of Origination gathered around a singular Crusade and a singular King.

The new Kingdom was organized around its 3 core religions, those born to salvation were members of the Royal Court, those choosing salvation entering the noble ranks of paladin, inquisitor and priest, and those whose faith was by subjection were members of the holy horde of righteous conquest.

The shame and guilt of individuals is so great that the showing of one's face in public came to be a symbol of dishonor. Veils and masks combined with robes and cloaks is normal attire.

Among the military artfully wrought armors with elaborate full helms are common. Inquisitor, Paladin, and Priest armors are more elaborate still. Royal wrought armor, helms, and masks are objects of ceremonial wonder. Heathen slaves are thus always unclothed.

### THE POWER OF PRAYER

Horgon was a hero among a race of heroes, a Paladin among a race of Paladins.

He had assaulted the shore with a dozen of the Holy Crusade's great iron ships, each disgorging hundreds of heavy cavalry followed by a thousand iron-clad infantry.

The push against the subworld horde had been grueling and costly, but as this was the citadel of the Demon Prince Glhor'kaa the Wicked it was worth any price to gain entry while he was held in place, trapped by the sorceries of his Priests if only briefly.

The demonic citadel fell to the light in waves of attack met by waves of demonic hordes that broke at terrible cost.

When finally, the citadel was breached and Horgon stood before the titanic form of the Demon Prince, he knelt to pray, a halo of light surrounding his penitent form.

The rage of Glhor'kaa was unbound at the sight, he hurled dark magics undirected, yelled obscenities at the Paladin, sent flame, fire, and madness at the tiny luminous figure that defiled his house. All swept as wind around a stone. He raged on in futile efforts to escape the chains which momentarily held him, he destroyed his citadel, he destroyed any that lived, he destroyed crusader and demon unseeing, fighting.

"Release me you cursed luciferous wrath," the Demon Prince raged in impotence, "this cannot be possible."

Horgon the Patient prayed, guided to the radiance at the center of the darkness, the mind of the Holy Psionic Light, his King, "gift me righteous fury my people, let us purge this evil from our hearts." He could feel the prayers of millions focused upon the King, he could feel their forgiveness, their righteous rage, their sadness of loss and hope of love yet discovered. All of this he felt fill his being, he looked upon the gibbering raging beast of chaos, and his eyes began to glow as a red sunrise following a dark night of death and heartache.

Horgon's eyes flared as beams of pure light, carving the Demon Prince to flaming hunks of demonic flesh that disintegrated to ash as they flew and fell from his core. The shell of light around him expanded and exploded outward, disintegrating what remained as it swept past the howling demonic horror, the radiating pulse of light extending outward another hundred leagues, reducing all demonic forms to ash.

The body of Horgon falling dead, his own soul the power behind the light of his faith. His body collected as a hero by those few of his assault that remained and returned home.



# 18 SPIRE SACRED BE THE ABSTRACT IN EIGHT

The Spire sits at the crossroads of 3 great ancient highways:

The Dark Street of Otherworldly Delights; a long and famous street known for its especially sinful offerings from many far alien paradise worlds.

The Milky Way Sidestep Galactic Highway; an especially long and wide park-like street famous for shops, restaurants, and offerings from across the many realms, worlds, and cities.

Zolo Veer's Boulevard of Light and Hope is a wide green street and illuminated at night by the wisps of spirits past bordered by thousands of churches, temples, graveyards, family crypts and holy sites of every imagining.

The Sacred Spire is a glorious wonder to behold, a shimmering tower of angelic light and shining bells of luminous song. That is, if you believe.

Only believers may see the Sacred Spire, though any belief will do. Those that believe in nothing can not see or interact with the Spire. To the cynical and pragmatic, there is no Spire here. Within the Spire is an infinity of corridors, chambers, halls, citadels, fortresses, churches, and holy psionic light cathedrals. From within the Spire it is possible to travel to any of the millions of worlds ruled, conquered, lost, or invaded by the Hathan Crusades. Each inner luminous representation of a building or place the mirror of a real one on some distant world. By entering the psionic mirror, one enters the real.

Some believe to enter the Sacred Spire is to enter the mind of the Holy Psionic Light King, a most holy endeavor where only the faithful dare tread.

Entry to the Sacred Spire is open to all comers and is the object of pilgrimage and faith across Xai, not just among the Hathan. But tourists are warned against traveling within the Spire as faith has a disturbing way of being real.



Kansas is the city that immediately surrounds the base of the Sacred Spire, so named for the holy land revered as the birthplace of the First Holy Psionic Light King.

Kansas is famous for its stone and iron citadels, churches, and imperial temples of overly gaudy ornament and sculpture covering and creating nearly all architectural form. The buildings of the city are famous for their extraordinary vertical gothic towers and sculptural ornament that embellishes even the most mundane elements of their craft.

The dark iron wrought gothic sculptures of saints and demons and allegoric tales that define the streets of Kansas are a wonder to behold and are the reason that so many tourists visit Kansas annually.

It is also famous for the faith of its nobility and for its citizenry generally acting against their own best interest in the name of faith.

Central to the island is a wrought iron cathedral of titanic size and extraordinary gothic sculptural form.

For those few that have reported visiting the cathedral, the stain glass windows are said to admit the dawn light of every imperial planet of faith throughout the universe. Only the most faithful are permitted to visit the Cathedral of Dawns.

Kansas is the home and training ground of the Paladins of Holy Psionic Grace; among the most faithful and deadly personal fighters in the known universe that act as personal guard for the elite of the First Faith. Kansas is also thought to be headquarters of the **Cloister of Holy Psionic Inquisition**, the ultrasecretive Hathan spy organization that answers directly to the King.

All said, Kansas is among the most impressive, deadliest, and most well defended cities of the Clockworks.

Adventurous tourists with a keen eye toward respect are welcome to Kansas but are always expected to keep their bodies and faces covered by mask or veil.

### CEAZARUS PRAYER

The Holy Iron Cathedral of Dawn Light is marked foremost by its enormity, a cruciform plan 2miles square, the throne of the Holy Psionic Light King at its center, 1mile from each of its 4 great cardinal portals.

On this morning, the holiest of portals was opened, from the East entered a long procession of mourners making the slow somber march through the mile-long eastern gallery. At their head was the horse drawn caisson that carried the body of the Paladin Horgon the Patient, the first in their long Crusade to have ever slain a Demon Prince.

The titanic gothic shapes of the hand hammered iron columns, arches, and vaults framed stained glass windows that revealed the rising suns of a hundred holy paradise worlds. The thousands standing along the processional wept, the impossible size and grandeur of the cathedral seeming as if somehow suddenly small at the passing of Horgon.

The caisson stopped at the foot of the great dais upon which stood the King aside his titanic sapphire throne. The King knelt, as did everyone in the cathedral, and then as did every Hathan everywhere in the universe, moved as they were with a sense of reverence and prayer, even if not knowing why.

The whole of the race prayed, the light within the King growing physical, his form now luminous, insubstantial but suddenly more real than the whole of the universe, his form now pure energy, drifting now down the mountain of steps toward the caisson upon which laid their fallen hero.

"We are not yet done with you my son," said the King touching the chest of Horgon's corpse, the light shifting from the King to Horgon's form, his chest suddenly rising and falling with a steady breath, "rise and show us the way."

Horgon rose, a radiance of light burning away his funerary armor to reveal a luminous angelic form lifted into the air upon great silvery wings.

Gladness swept from the heart of the King to the whole of the praying Hathan race.

A young girl tilling her families small plot of land early this morning rose from her prayer to face the rising sun. This she could feel was a holy day, an angel had earned its wings.

### 103 CELEBRATORIA S TRANS WORLD JOYNESS PARK

Joyness Park is a celestial amusement land, a place of escape, thrills, and fun in an otherwise grim universe of sacrifice.

Joyness Park is composed of dozens of themed landscapes of **silliness** and **casual disregard**. This is a place designed to recall childhood innocence and to inspire that which is good and hopeful.

This is the **happiest place on Xai** and among its most beloved and famed tourist attractions.

# HQPASTORAL PARKS OF MYANDER THE GENTLE

South Kansas is dominated by a series of peninsulas and islands given over to paradise parklands.

The **Pastoral Parks** are a wonderland of perfectly manicured flora and songbirds from across the cosmos. This is a place of peace, reflection, and personal prayer.

The Parks lie under an **invisible sun** that provides an inspirational dawnlight silence day or night. One cannot but feel humbled here. The demonic tend to flare into sudden flame and ash within the Parks.

# 113 SIXTY NINETLINKS PRISON CITY OF BLACK SUN

**Black Sun City** (as it is commonly referred) is home to dozens of Hathan courts and prisons.

The Hathan are famous for their inquisitions and witch trials that generally involve gruesome physical torture with innocence proven by death.

Hathan and foreigner alike suspected of a crime of faith are sent to the Black Sun for determination of innocence and sentence.

Determination of innocence is a simple matter of physical torture which ends in one of two ways; confession (guilty) or death (innocent).

Those that confess guilt are sentenced to imprisonment, hence the large number and type of prisons within the city. Those that die during torture are returned to their families with honor and afforded a consecrated burial and a prayer to enter paradise as a believer.

The Hathan Prison system is akin to Dante's circles of hell where each prison deals with a particular kind of crime and ensures enduring suffering of the appropriate form. In the Diluvian system of belief hell has 66 circles and thus there are 66 prisons in Black Sun City.

### **I22** DIMINITAR S FAILED SANCTUAR PRUINS

The Sanctuary Ruins are a place protected by the **Paladin Diminitar**, a place of safety for escaped slaves and apostates.

The place was destroyed, Diminitar crucified, dismembered, and burned. The dead left unburied among the ruins as a warning.

To modern day this place is **haunted** and abandoned except for those escaped slaves and apostates that continue to find sanctuary within its fragmented buildings and network of basements and underground hiding places.

### 127 VESPERTILIAN FOREST OF PRAYER & REGRET

This forest is sacred to the highest orders of Diluvian Royal clergy. No one outside the highest orders of the First Faith have knowledge of why the place is sacred nor are any permitted to travel its mountains, vale, or forests, said to be enforced by being turned to salt.

Threat to the Vespertilian Forest will draw the personal attention of the Holy Psionic Light King and the full force of the Diluvian Kingdom to its defense if necessary.

What could be of such importance? Such is the power of faith.

# 132 THE THREE ISLANDS OF WHITE WITCHES

There are 3 islands are in the **Sister South River Sublime**. Cities of the 3 islands are armed camps representing the full military might of the Diluvian Kingdom in the Clockwork Metropolis, defending the southern reaches of the Clockworks from demonic aggression.

The three islands are **Ari** (the smallest), **Uri**, and **Emmi** (the largest).

The isle of Ari is home to the Celestial Priests.

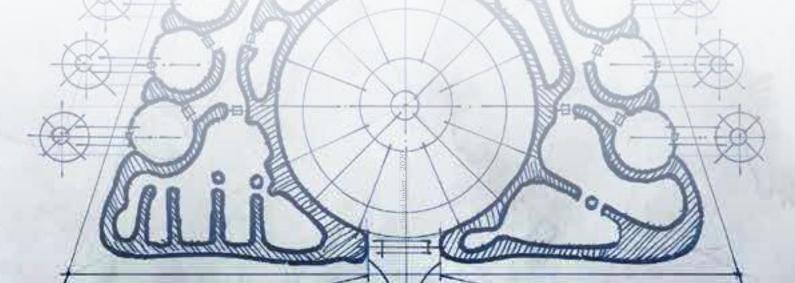
Uri is the holy city of the Mnemonic Priests.

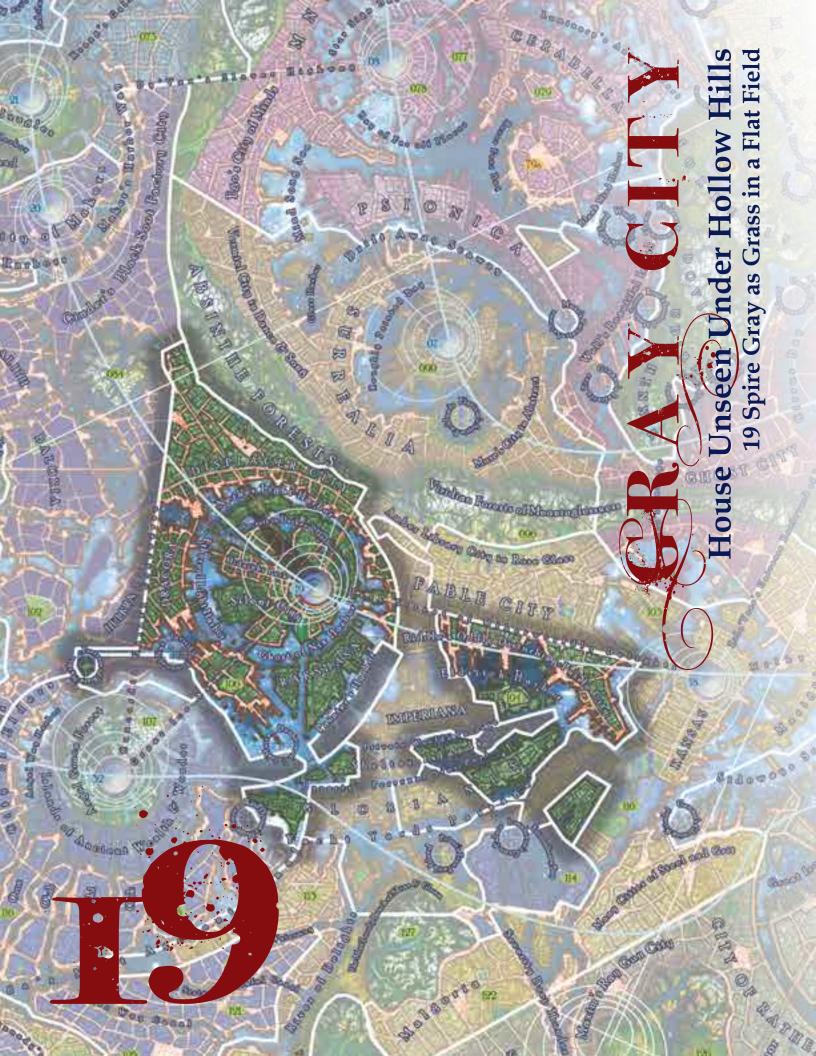
Emmi is the home of Anima Priests.

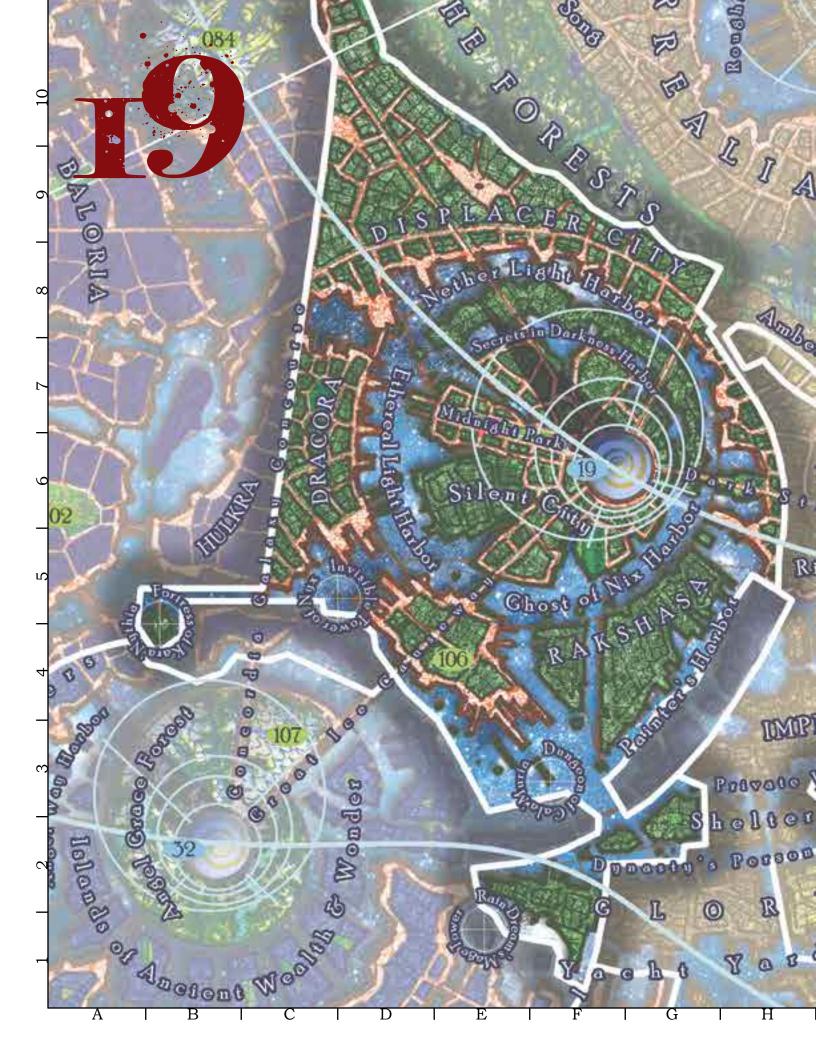
The tale of the 3 White Witches says that they were Demon Princes put on trial by the Diluvian Crusades and buried alive in titanic blocks of cold iron, one at the center of each island.

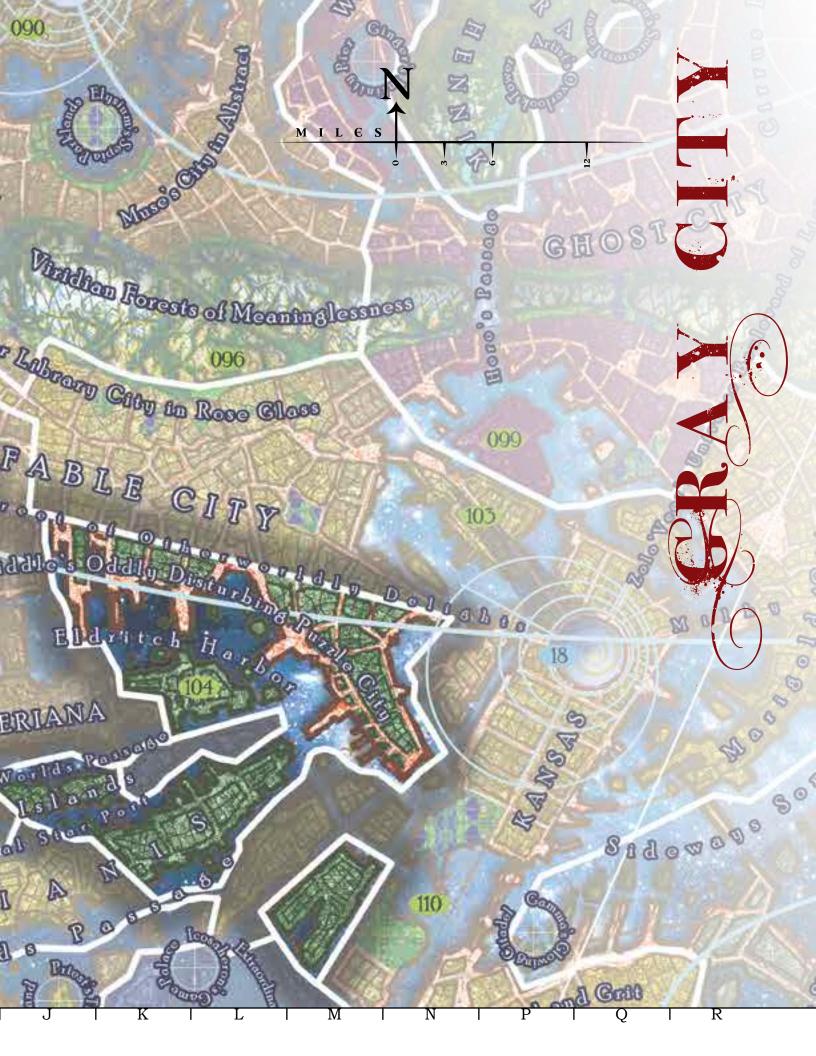
Legendt tells that the 3 demons yet live, their immortal life essence siphoned away to power the martial cities in defense of the Faithful.

There is some credence to this story in that Diluvian technomancy, especially its modern weapons, are fueled by crystallized demons' blood, the source and method of its craft a closely guarded secret.









### **DISPUTERESOLUTION**

Mr. Tufft was the head of a locally powerful syndicate, the last few weeks though a few of his lieutenants have been engaging in a bit of turf war, nothing too serious but something he wanted to stay ahead of.

The first two lieutenants were invited into the rather large conference room of heavy oak paneling and green felt fabrics, the large conference table in the center similarly of heavy oaken make, durable, functional, but unmemorable.

Each of the two lieutenants entered the room with a dozen soldiers discretely armed with pistols, garrotes, brass knuckles, shivs, and similar tools of the trade. One though had the brass to be carrying a bullet revolver, unstable in mortal hands but as the weapon of sorcerers, very intimidating. Mr. Tufft let a strand of e'Mral mists slip through the bullets, causing all 6 to detonate in a loud bang, the soldier slumping to the floor, his entire left side where the gun had been holstered blown clean away.

This of course caused quite a stir, Mr. Tufft decided some caution was in order as weapons were drawn around the room, he laced the e'Mral mists through their weapons, "tightening" them as he went, setting aside the concentration to maintain the effect into the corner of his mind, a sorcerous trick of is training.

"I'm afraid that your associate passed through a door that protects against sorcerous weapons," lied Mr. Tufft.

Everyone in the room jumped, calls of "where did he come from" were repeated by several in the room.

Mr. Tufft was sitting at the head of table as he had been since people began entering the large conference room. He was dressed in an expertly tailored gray suit that nearly matched his indistinct gray skin, a small tightly fitted bowler upon his head.

"Damned Krai'Zan bastards," said one of the soldiers, "I hate these motherfuckers."

"This motherfucker is your boss," said another, "be cool."

It was then the 2 lieutenants and their crews scanned the room, noticing another 6 Krai'Zan standing quietly along the walls, each in a bespoke gray suit, bowler, and carrying a small briefcase.

"Fuck me," jumped one of the soldiers, looking to his left noticing a Krai'Zan had been standing there the whole time.

"Shall we get down to business," Mr. Tufft calmly said.

The soldiers took up positions along the walls, each ready to quickly draw their dart guns, flechette throwers, or hand bolters, none realizing that each was seized by Mr. Tufft's sorcery and would not fire.

The two lieutenants sat and immediately began bantering and sniping at each other about hits, profits, and percentages.

Mr. Tufft sat quietly listening as they talked themselves out and weapons were again drawn threateningly around the room.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Tufft, the two lieutenants jumping in their seats.

"Fuck, I forgot he was there again," yelped one of the lieutenants.

"Perhaps," continued Mr. Tufft, "it is not percentages or deaths that concern the two of you."

"What?" said the other lieutenant.

"Bring in Mr. Killingsly," Mr. Tufft indicated to one of his associates, when the Krai'Zan moved toward the door the soldiers on either side of him jumped.

"Motherfucker," the two soldiers each muttered.

Another of Mr. Tufft's lieutenants entered the room, Mr. Killingsly, a Saurian followed by a dozen of his own soldiers. He seated himself in the chair Mr. Tufft indicated with a slight gesture.

Everyone in the room jumped, calls of "where did he come from" were repeated by several in the room.





Mr. Killingsly was a skilled lieutenant, formidable, and engendered great loyalty of his soldiers. His appearance was of an ordinary sort, but he wore a pair of rather outlandish sequence framed orange tinted women's glasses, the view from which put a bright orange halo around every Krai'Zan in the room. Mr. Killingsly smiling broadly as he sat looking around the room.

Mr. Tufft could see the Gestalt in the room come together, could begin to understand the greatest good for everyone present. He had expected that Mr. Killingsly would need to die to resolve the disrespect the other 2 lieutenants felt. But the Gestalt had shifted by the confidence of Mr. Killingsly and the loyalty of his soldiers, these 2 younger lieutenants he could now see were the problem.

"Mr. Killingsly," the syndicate boss said, "each of these 2 lieutenants' territories are yours, assign a new lieutenant from each of their crews in this room before you depart."

"You miserable fuck," yelled one of the lieutenants, drawing his heavy flechette thrower and firing it into Mr. Tufft's face, except that the pistol did not fire.

"Please escort Mr. Tolby to the waiting room," he said in deadpan disappointment.

Two Krai'Zan helped him kicking and screaming from the room, seeming to intentionally let him yell, and threaten as they moved. His soldiers seemed suddenly ashamed, each now looking to be named his replacement, holding their weapons close but playing it cool, some wondering why Tolby's flechette thrower had failed.

"Do you have anything to say?" asked Mr. Tufft of the other lieutenant still sitting there dumb.

"No sir," he said.

"Excellent," said Mr. Tufft, "Mr. Killingsly, would you be so good as to take this one under your wing and show him what a real leader looks like?"

"It would be my pleasure," said Killingsly with a smile.

The former lieutenant groaned.



To understand Gray City, one must understand the **Kraizan** concept of **Gestalt**.

The Krai'zan have something of a veil that shrouds the whole of the race, unless actively sought out, **Krai'zan tend to be ignored**, a part of the scenery. And to note, this is not camouflage, invisibility, or anything physical, rather the Krai'zan are simply not noticed, especially by predators.

They are however noticed by children though to be fair; children tend to ignore Kraizan on general principal that they are boring.

But perhaps more interesting, the Krai'zan have a sense of gestalt, meaning that as others might see or hear, the Krai'zan have an additional sense of the overall collective sense of place and the life that occupies it.

This nuanced sense is often difficult for other races to understand but what it means is that at any given time, a Krai'zan can sense what everyone and everything in the living world around them "needs".

Krai'zan have an **innate sense of selflessness** in that they will always tend to act to the greater good of the collective, and not necessarily for themselves. More specifically, to Krai'zan morality, actions which favor what is best for the most is "good" while selfishness at the cost of the greater benefit is "evil". Krai'zan have an underdeveloped sense of ego that helps them to act for the betterment of "most".

The combination of the Krai'zan talent to be ignored by predators and be able to sense the gestalt of their situation, and finally to tend to act to the betterment of the majority makes for a unique and potent race (if not immediately obvious).

In primitive days, the Krai'zan lived in harmony with their natural environment, sensing the needs of its family and tribe but also the living world around them, always acting to the benefit of the larger gestalt.

In city environments or among other races, the Krai'zan adapt to fit into their urban environments, sensing that which benefits the larger group and acting accordingly.

These natural talents of the Krai'zan are especially powerful within organizations such as businesses, bureaucracies, churches, underworld organizations, labor unions, and governments or economics founded on communism, socialism, or consensus.

As such, Krai'zan can be found throughout the Great Houses, guilds, and businesses of Xai (legitimate or otherwise). A Krai'zan is as likely to rise to the head of a legitimate business as to be the head of major crime family.

Krai'zan do not make moral judgments of their environments or the people that inhabit those environments, rather good is measured by one's ability to act for the greater benefit of all involved.

And as it turns out, Krai'zan led business are famously efficient and profitable providing community benefits others might deem impossible or unprofitable.

Similarly, Krai'zan led underworld organizations are among the most profitable and least violent of similar organizations. And loyalty; when people in an organization come to understand that decisions are made for the larger benefit then people start to be very loyal.

Krai'zan are everywhere in the Clockwork Metropolis (but that might just be paranoid exaggeration as no one really seems to notice them). But Krai'zan do run some the largest and most profitable organizations within the Metropolis.

The dark side of Krai'zan is that they do not value individuality nor minority opinion rather always acting to the benefit of the majority. This has been described as the tyranny of the majority.

Krai'zan are morally required and good and right to sacrifice a few or one to the benefit of many, even if that one is a friend, loved one, party member, enemy, or even themselves so long as the **majority benefits**, to do otherwise would be to act selfishly (a moral sin).



Krai'zan businesses and criminal organizations while being famously efficient and profitable are notoriously cruel and heartless to those that fall on the wrong side of the majority.

Krai'zan do not have moral qualms related to murder, theft, or similar more traditional sins, rather these are simply tools to be employed to render the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people.

Kraizan are natural collaborators and their businesses have been on the wrong side of history on more than one occasion, supplying weapons and slaves when the Gestalt demanded and adapting to cut off supplies of weapons and free cadres of slaves when the Gestalt shifted.

And this is where Krai'zan selflessness comes into play. For example, Gray Industries, the greatest Combine of Xai, can date its origins to the Red Empire, long before most history books even start. And through the Ages of the Red Empire, the Cy, the Calibahn, and countless other periods of history, Gray Industries has been headed by Krai'zan and endured, and when powers change the heads of the organization are tried, slain, or removed, the Combine continued, always greater than when it began. And the Krai'zan leaders know this, know the sacrifice of a few is required that the Gestalt (in this example Gray Industries) continues to benefit the majority.

Krai'zan are sometimes called neutral but that is not true, Krai'zan have a very strong sense of moral right and wrong, and like all races, there are many morally challenged Krai'zan that pursue lives of selfishness, but no Krai'zan has a particular overwhelming sense of the value of individual life that so many other races seems to share.



Gray City is an efficient grid of modern streets and buildings that is clean, safe, and very civilized. The city eschews the latest and greatest technomancy for tried and tested reliability. Nothing is built that has not been successfully built by someone else first.

The developers and builders of Gray City always commission Architects and Artists to create the "greatest, newest, most iconic" building or consumer good but they never mean it, instead they mean "clean, modern, and efficient." Any genuinely new idea is abandoned as "not having been done before".

Gray City is a place that crushes individuality and artistic expression in favor of politically correct commercial expression (which is labeled artistic expression).

Gray City is a place of pleasant childsafe parks, chain restaurant food, and child friendly bloodless movies that do not swear too much and that are always culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Little suburban neighborhoods of little houses on little lots surround each clean and safe and poverty free city core. Homelessness and other minority issues are quickly moved out of Gray City.

Gray City is very "nice"

# HOUSE UNSEEN UNDER HOLLOW HILLS

House Unseen is ruled over by a complex consortium of Krai'zan families, businesses, guilds, and shareholders, called the Gray Industries Consortium.

House Unseen maintains a small collection of cities surrounding its spire but no standing army or fleet of military ships.

It is important to note that Gray Industries invents nothing, it purchases and operates businesses with all research and development funds expended to improve quality and reduce cost.

So, while House Unseen is politically moot, Gray Industries is the largest and most powerful network of Combines in the Xai universe, an economic might greater than most Great Houses.

And that is just the "legitimate" portion of Gray Industries portfolio, it is rumored to also head the largest criminal underworld organization of Xai, The Hollow Heart Trading Company, hiding in plain sight as is the Krai'zan penchant for humor, trafficking in every form of commerce made illegal or heavily taxed by any of the Great Houses.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Gray Industries to Xai. The Gray Industries logo (a non-descript gray circle) is ubiquitous and can be found on everything from toothpaste, to baby food, to furniture, to clothing, to star ship hulls.

It is also worth noting that Gray Industries are big supporters of majority religions and cater to producing morally superior goods.



The Krai'zan have one other rather unique talent, a limited telepathy that allows them to speak fluently the native language of anyone they might choose to speak too.

In a similar vein, Krai'zan are naturally gifted singers with an impressive octave range. And while they have a general distaste for solo singing, their many choral groups and their unique family friendly stylings are always a treat.



Krai'zan of House Unseen and Gray Industries have adopted the dark gray business suit and bowler hat & brief case as their uniform of choice.

They take great pride in the cut and quality of their suits, but they are seemingly identical to the untrained eye.

The contents of their brief cases are always more interesting than one might think.

Being always adaptive, the Krai'zan will dress as appropriate, able to read the Gestalt of the situation and carefully find a median attire (or one that more specifically serves the purpose at hand).



# 19 SPIREGRAY AS GRASS IN A FLAT FIELD

Spire Gray is an underwhelming angelic creation, whereas most Spires were crafted with angelic exuberance and technical wonders not yet matched, Spire Gray stands in stark contrast as a small collection of 3 gray-rust colored towers appearing not so much as a towers or spires but more like 3 ancient (if very tall) smoke stacks long since abandoned. If you were not looking for them, they vanish entirely into the Clockwork's frenzied skylines.

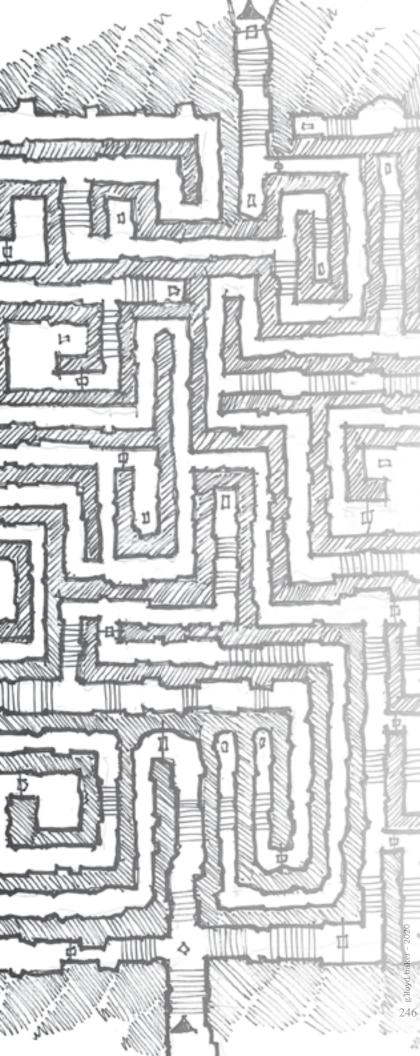
And as it turns out, the 3 towers that make up the Gray Spire are just that, ancient smokestacks for a vast angelic subterranean manufacturing facility, long ago repurposed as one of Gray Industries key manufacturing hubs.

### 104 FREE FALE CONSORTIUM FRANCHISE

This is a city free of Imperial dominion. The Free Form Consortium is franchise of House Unseen, a shadow government of spies, thieves, assassins, and organized crime for operation on foreign soil.

The Consortium is dedicated to the exploitation of the differences in various Great House laws to maximum profitable effect. It is nothing personal, it is just business.

The city is mostly composed of nondescript office parks and innocuous looking warehouses and ordinary looking row houses. The city is absent the usual family pedestrian traffic, most pedestrians appearing as ordinary office drones one might expect to see in any suburban office town that fades to vacant after 5pm.



### 166 ALABASTER S ISLAND OF ART

The Island of Art is a city of museums and universities.

Art of Gray City is corporate art, derivative, sanitized, and inoffensive, so much to be **decor misnamed as art**.

Art-history in Gray City, is based on the **theory of movements**.

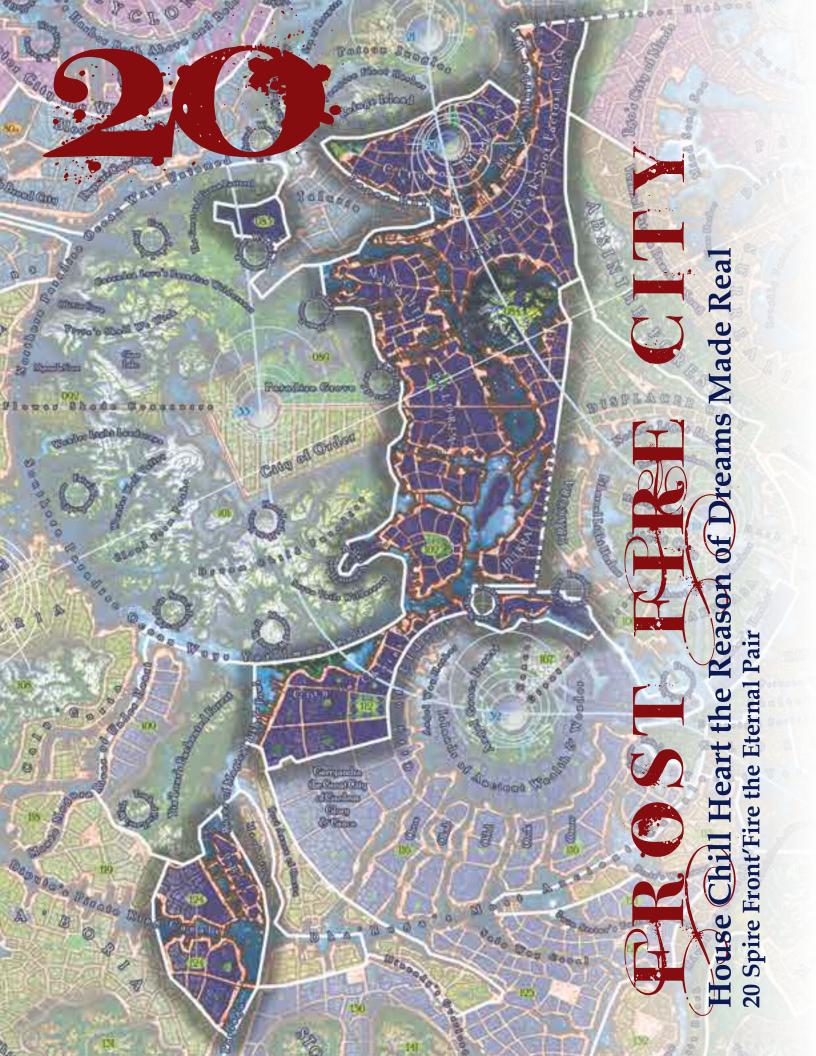
This method of study says that individual achievement is irrelevant and that only systems matter. Those individuals that actually see or do something first are not any smarter or more inventive than those that came before, only lucky enough to live in a time where the military, social, political, and economic systems allowed for invention or discovery to be made. If they did not find or do "it", the next person would have anyway, it was inevitable.

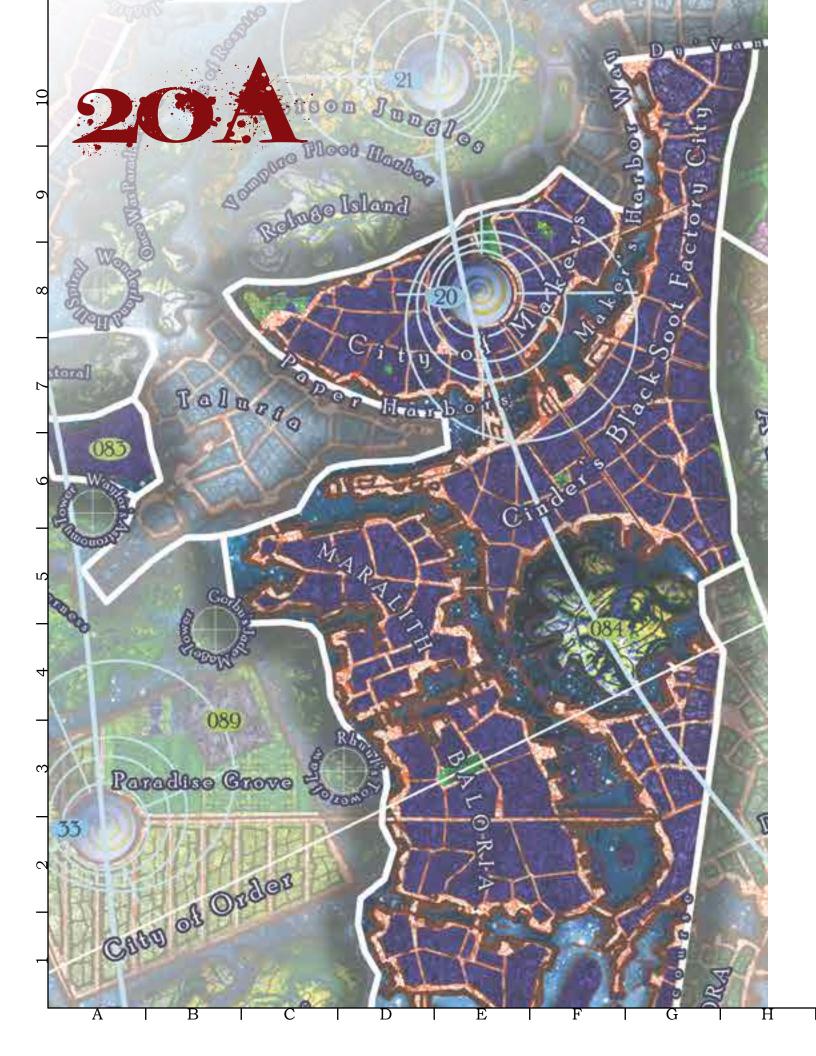
The theory of movements is a popular way of looking at history of all kinds because it allows for the **erasure of all individual achievement** from history and in so doing, erases all of those individual's less appealing religious beliefs, racism, slave ownership, crimes, sexual preferences, or whatever might have been that is no longer considered "correct thinking".

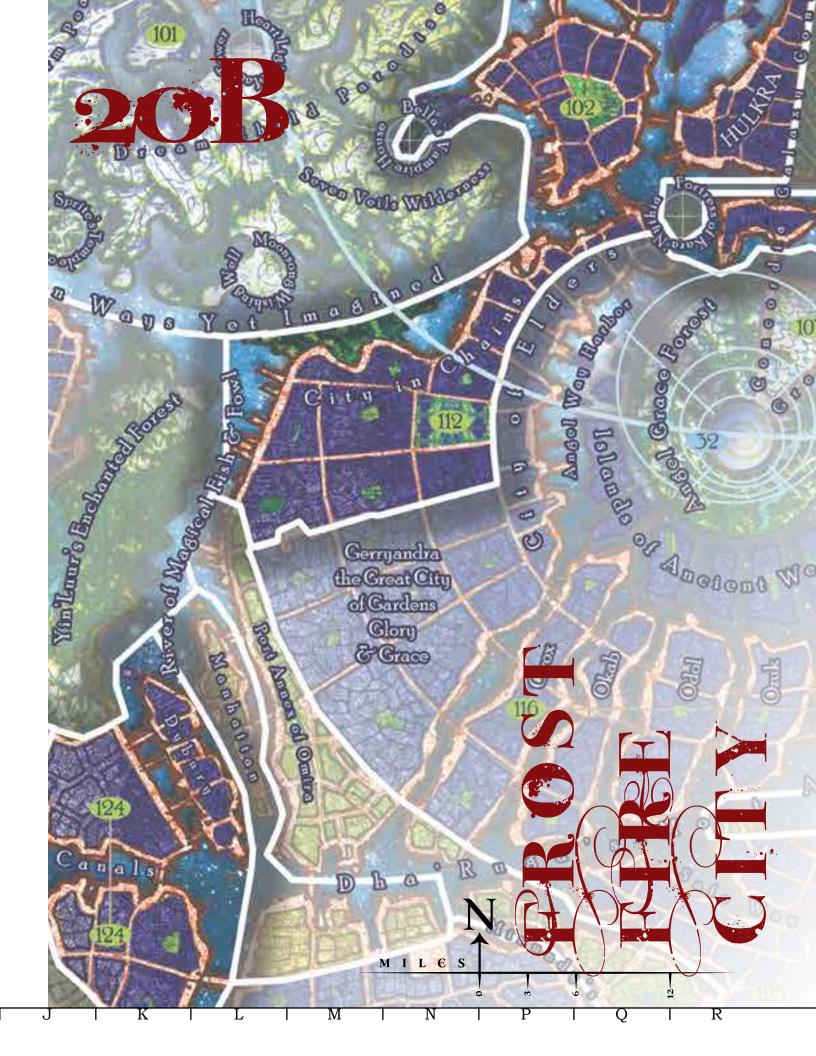
Alabaster's Island is a culturally inclusive city of art museums and entertaining educational programs that are **fun for the entire family**.

Nothing here is offensive, compelling, or disruptive.

And be sure to see the **Magritte**, the lines are long, but it is worth the wait.









# ROST FIRE CITY

### AN ANGRY LITTLE BOY

The Queen was a tall statuesque figure, her naked jet skin cracked through with glowing marbled veins of magma casting a dim firelight glow through the dark chamber as she moved toward her King.

The King was a mountain of a man, his translucent skin revealing the dim inner blue glow of his frozen heart, veiled shadows of his bones and organs playing under his skin as he shifted to embrace his beloved.

"Do you believe what the Envoy said?" whispered the Queen in her husband's ear.

"No," he grumbled, a curling mist from his mouth drifted across his wife's feminine curves, "the Empress exaggerates to her own benefit, there will be no war, and certainly no war that could ever destroy our people. We survived the Calibahn Empire, it seems to me I can survive a petulant nephew."

"I have never known the Empress to exaggerate," she said, her own steaming breath forming water crystals across the skin of her beloved, "if anything the Empress is one to willfully let people die as a consequence of their own decisions, I suspect she warns us because she cares."

"Cares for what?" said the King, "she is a heartless witch that eats her own young, she rules by treachery and violence."

"I think she rules as a mother that loves her children," said the Queen.

"Loves," he scoffed, "the only thing she loves is power, to make us all dance on stings that she controls...loves...."

The door to the royal chamber burst open, dozens of men poured into the room carrying sorcerous ice'lance weapons. His nephew at the fore.

"It is over for you uncle," he said, "step away from the Queen and she lives, refuse and you both die."

The Queen howled as a banshee and charged the royal guard. She deflected ice lances as she moved, her martial skills killing 3 guards before half a dozen lances pierced her back and side.

The King charged after his beloved, but was the target of the entering guards, and perished under a hail of lance fire, the light of his heart winked to darkness before his body hit the ground.

The Queen laid wheezing upon the chamber floor, her steaming blood flowing into the hide of the great polar beast of her husband's first great hunt.

"I would have preferred you alive, enslaved as my personal breeder, but I suspect you may never be tamed," said the nephew releasing a lance through his aunt's skull, the glow of her marble veins fading to cold darkness.

# FROSTFIRE CITY

Frost'Fire City was once a civilization of high technomancy dominated by sculptural buildings of cast stone & iron shaped by artful & delicate latices of ice.

The unique flame superconducting ice'lace of the city made it a place of modern marvels and divine logic engines.

But that was centuries ago, the city now lies in ruins, **destroyed by civil war and slavery**.

Modern Frost'Fire civilization is a primitive medieval place populated by surviving Frost'Ginants living among the dystopian remains of a once wonderous place.

What few remain are **refugee** clones from the centuries long conflict. The original goal of the Frost'Giants to enslave their female kind as breeders, to rule uncontested. Both sides lost.

The Jotnar near ended, only Frost Giant clones called the Ryme remaining, and they are but a faded picture of their once powerful progenitors.

Frost'Fire City has become a lawless and violent city of short-lived warlords and merciless justice.



House Chill Heart is ruled by a Ryme called the **King of Ice**.

The great volcanic mountain reaches, and lava lake valleys of Frost'Fire City having grown cold with the demise of the Fire'Giants. The City now a wasteland of uninhabited ice, the ruins of both once wonderous civilizations of frost and fire abandoned to the howling winds and cold.

House Chill Heart is weak and impoverished, the victim of a centuries long civil war that has left Frost'Fire City a **dystopia of roving Ryme** barbarian warlords, slavery, and failing life. These are the End Days.

Frost'Fire City and House Chill Heart might be easily conquered by anyone with the will except for two facts.

The first being there is nothing of value to be gained by conquest of Frost'Fire City.

Second being that the Crystal Shard Empress continues to resist the overthrow of the House, seeming to suggest by gift of foresight that the tale of the Jotnar is not yet concluded.

# 20 SPIRE FRONT FIRE THE TERM PAIR

Frost'Fire Spire was once among the most fantastic of the 37 Spires, a high spire of shimmering crystalline ice alight with writhing dancing flames of sultry hypnotic pattern.

But upon the conquest and enslavement of the Fire Giants by the Frost Giants, the flames of the spire were extinguished and the once shimmering spire of ice has begun to melt, a dripping lump not unlike a popsicle on a hot summer day. Some say that as Spire perishes, so perish the Jotnar.

The clones of the male Jotnar called Ryme now rule the Frost'Fire Spire.

The Ryme are a cruel lot of warlords and slavers, they would be sickly and short lived if not for the fact that they seem intent on assassinating themselves first, seeking desperately to be "King" of something that no longer exists.

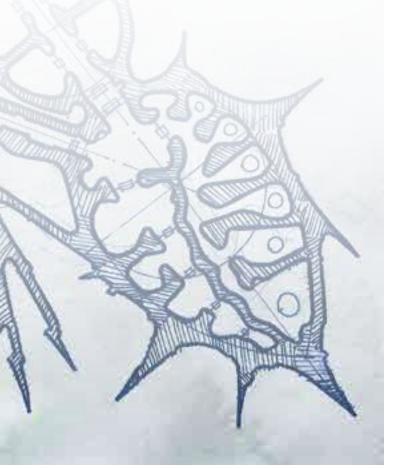
# **083** CITY OF WORDS SACRED BE THE HOLY

This is an island absent Imperial dominion. This was a city of libraries, some of the finest and most enduring to have survived to up until the Jotnar civil war.

No Jotnar could bring itself to harm the city for it was holy in a way that few things are. But the new Ryme warlords of House Chill Heart have recently sacked the city and slain or enslaved the multitude scholars and monks that maintained the "great knowing." They then **sold the contents of its libraries for a pittance**.

The result has been a disaster of proportions none could have anticipated but should have. Nearly all the Great Houses laid claim to the island and all invaded and all began to fight in what might only be described as a kind of mini-world-war.

The result was that the city was reduced to ruin and her great treasures looted or destroyed. Truly a tragedy.



# OSA BRITTLE FOREST OF KA MURA THE CLOUDKING

Sacred to the Jotnar is the **Brittle Forest**, a mountainous region the resting place of Ka'mura the Cloud King & Queen, a pair bonded Jotnar couple and the **first rulers of the once** legendary Cloud Kingdom.

The trees of the Brittle Forest were sacred, the source of a unique frozen crystal wood of uniquely holy properties.

House Chill Heart has seen the mountains **clear cut** over the past few decades and the tombs of their most sacred ancestors excavated and looted and sold piecemeal for hard currency (though it remains unclear if the tombs of the King & Queen were actually found).

Absent the forest, the mountains have erupted volcanically and threaten nearby cities with falling ash, rock, and the occasional river of lava.

## 102 VISON CITY OF THINGS YET IMAGINED

This is an island city with big central park that was once the artistic heart of Jotnar civilization.

As it happens, the Jotnar were among the most emotionally sensitive and artistically gifted of the old races. Traits unknown to the Ryme clone copies that now pretend at being Frost'Giants. Perhaps it was these same passions that eventually drove them to their own demise.

Vision City was destroyed during the war and is now a primitive medieval city, the home to dozens of warlords.

The once beguiling and beautiful central park of Things yet Imagined now an open battlefield of mud.

TEOST SOST

# IIQ PARK OF TODAY NOT YETTOST OR EVERMORE

Within the **City of Chains** is a giant park dedicated to the glories of the present. The Jotnar have always been creatures of present minded joy, never over thinking the decisions of the past nor worrying about things that may never happen.

This park was saved from the violence of the war by the Crystal Shard Empress but is now surrounded by House Chill Heart's slaver city.

A rather large **Illurian Church** has been built within the park and a significant continent of Imperial Priests and Paladins patrol the Imperial dominions of the City of Chains.

# 12/4 EVERMOOR S TWIN CITIES OF DELIGHT & DAY

The Twin Cities were sacred to the Jotnar, the northern Holy City Day of Frost and the southern Holy City Delight of Fire, the twin cities the source of the name Frost'Fire.

The Cities were ruled by the ancient Shaman Clans of Perfect Ice and the Druid Clans of the Sacred Flame. Both Clans united to defend themselves from the horrors of the Civil War with some limited success.

This was the site of the last trueborne Jotnar, the last of the Frost and Fire Giants. When finally, the Ryme armies invaded, there was no resistance, no one remained, the invaders found the city empty.

#### A PLEA FINALLY HEARD

As was the old tradition, the married pair of Jotnar shared a single name, in this case Evermoor. He was among the last of his kind, a Frost'Giant shaman, she was similarly of a kind near extinct, a Fire'Giant druid.

The war had left their City overrun by the horrors of misguided technomancy, the Ryme, a race of faded Frost'Giant clones whose sole remaining purpose was to win a war that had been lost now for centuries.

The Twin Cities were tonight a solemn place, tomorrow would bring the end, the Ryme warlord bands would finally breach their walls, even their vaunted Arcane sorcerers that had kept them defended while the rest of their kind perished in an endless series of numb tragedies could not stand against such assembled might.

The people of the Twin Cities spent this last night at home with their families or in bars drinking with friends and strangers. This was the end.

The Crystal Shard Empress had denied their pleas for aid, this she argued was a civil war, not an affair of Imperial relevance. So long as the Ryme abided the rules of Imperial engagement, she was powerless to interfere.

This of course was a lie, the kind of polite disinterest of those not wanting to get involved in a fight that would soon enough leave everyone too weak to resist whatever taking was desired.

The other Great Houses could have also interceded, but all failed to act, waiting their chance to pick at the corpse of the Frost'Fire City as any vulture might.

It was in this quiet night of resignation, that sonic booms began to sound throughout the Twin Cities, great waves of winds rushed through the streets sweeping away and collapsing small buildings, shattering windows throughout the Twin Cities.

Panic was the response; the attack had come, families with their children moved into the streets prepared for their final fight. Their children would die with them, no more need to hide, there would be no tomorrow.

Suspended in the air just above the shattered rooftops and streets of broken glass were dozens of titanic golden barges of the long forgotten Calibahn Age.

They slowly settled toward the ground giving no heed to the structures below, crushing their metal and stone walls as dry leaves might be crumpled under foot.

The pair Evermore stepped from their crumbling home into the street with their children in tow, a titanic golden barge of exotic rococo ornament and gothic lines settled feet from the ground, huge portals in the side of her hull opening to release long coiling gangplanks down toward the streets.

Stepping down the golden serpentine walk strode a red velvet clad man, his livery brocaded with gold, a long slender sidearm holstered at his right side.

As he approached, he pulled back his large cowl to reveal his bald skeletal head, his skin thin and stretched too tight over his rune carved skull. He perhaps smiled revealing his file pointed teeth. "The Empress sends her regards and wishes you take a trip with us, she seemed to think it unhealthy to be her come dawn."

The pair Evermoor were stunned dumb, unable to reconcile the sudden appearance of aid with the horrors that offered it.

Finally, the Lady Evermoor took hold of her children, "thank you kind sir, your aid is much appreciated in this time of our greatest need."

The velvet clad Lichborne tilted his head, indicating with his arm they should board.

Sir Evermoor nodded, moving behind his wife and children as they moved up into the ancient ship. The giant hold was a simple enormous hall, the floor covered in straw, capable of carrying thousands if need be.

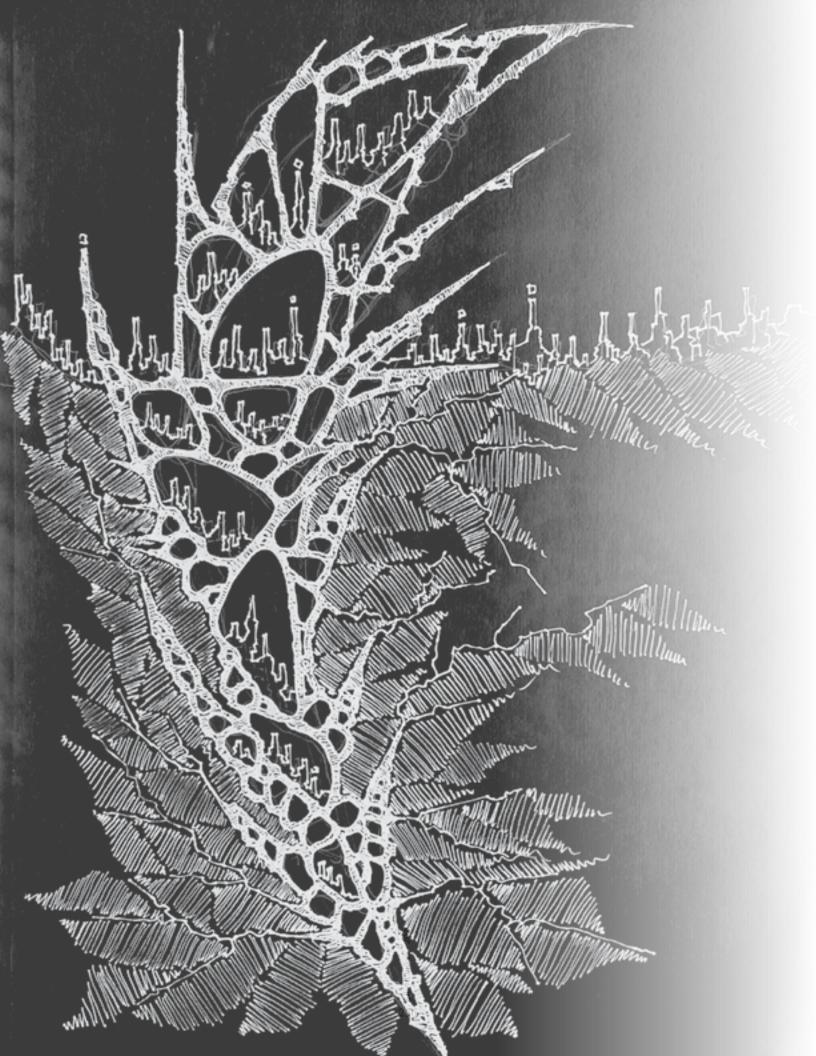
The twin city emptied, every man, woman, child, and animal. When all were loaded the fleet vanished, titanic collapsing voids of air thundering across the whole of the Clockwork Metropolis, smashing what was left of the Twin Cities as scattered debris.

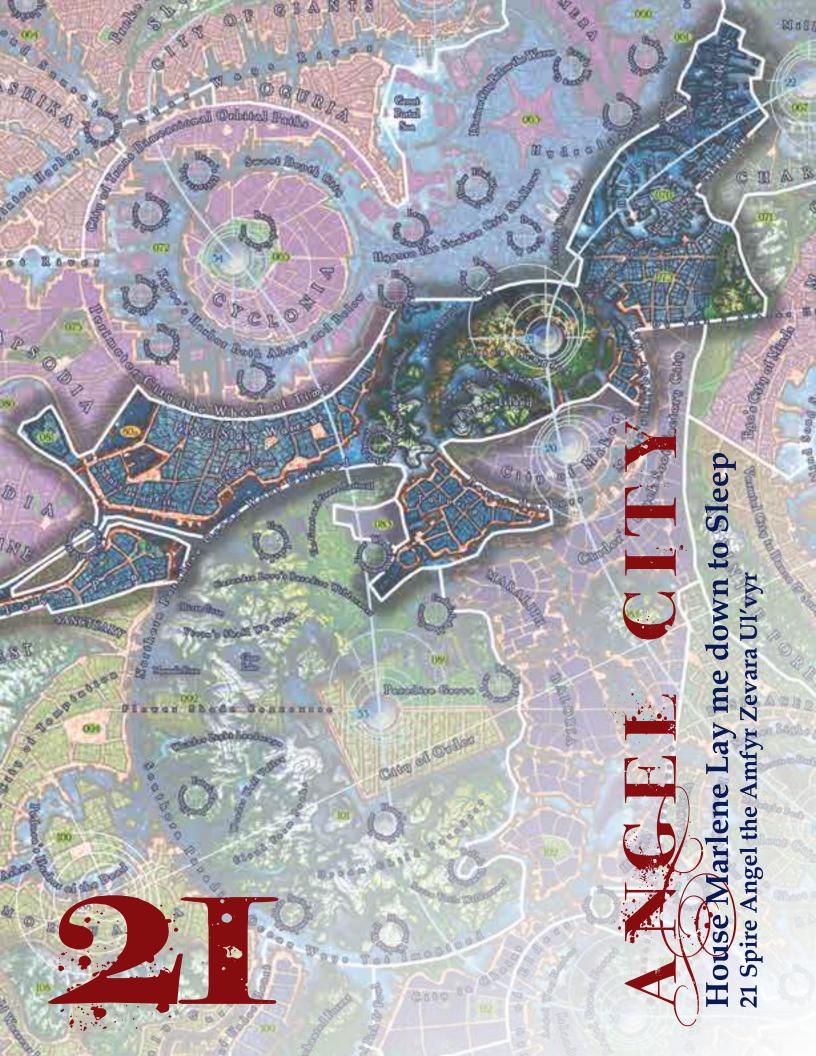
The two Ryme spies high in their hidden perch near the North Wall remained silent for some time after the departure of the Lichborne Fleet. Silence finally settled over the empty city as dawn broke to the East.

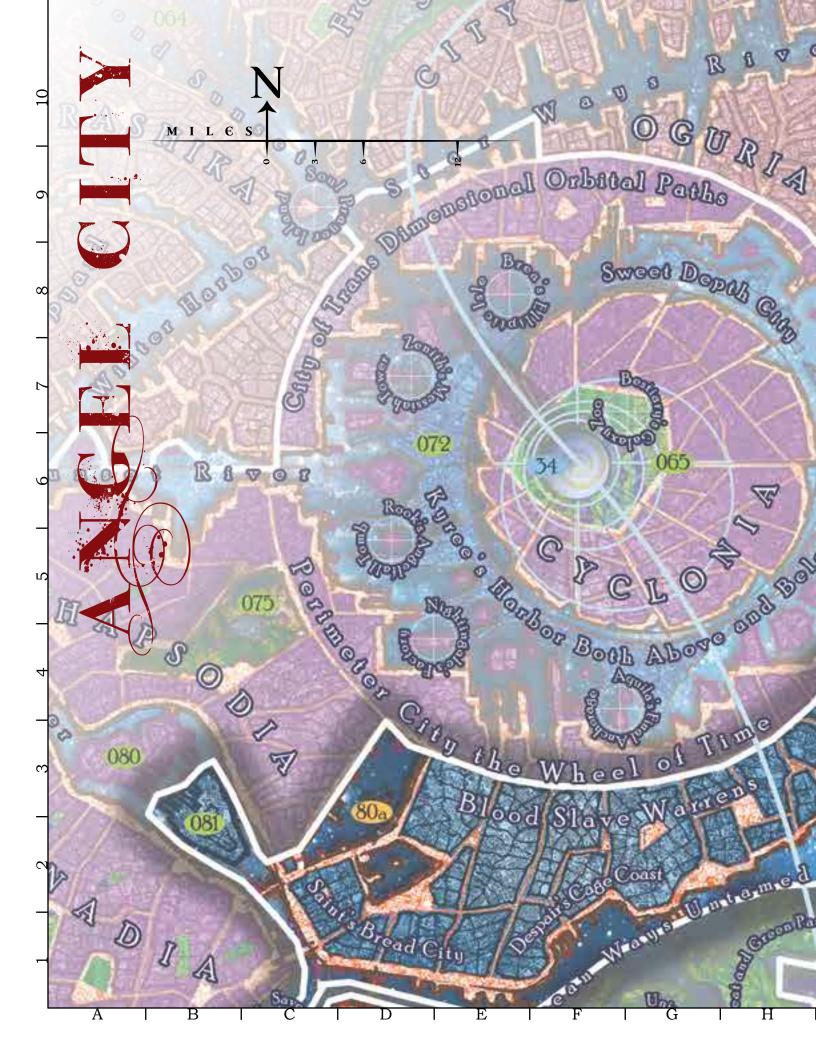
"Did we finally win?" asked the first spy.

"It appears we did," said the second, "we are at last the sole rulers of the Frost'Fire."

"Ah, thank all that is spiteful in this world," said the first spy, "because I was not thinking win."









## Something of Vampirism

Once upon a time there was a haematophagous race of famed blood sorcerers called the Ul'vyr whose venomous bite causes paralysis, themselves immune to poisons and venoms having evolved within an especially toxic jungle. Feeding upon the creatures of this deadly environment and living mortal lives as any other race of men.

But the blood magics of the Ul'vyr were corrupted by the **Ritual of the Bitter Rose**. By way of these dark magics the Ul'vyr could sacrifice its own life and was remade an immortal corpse called **Amfyr**, temporarily restored to living form by consuming the life blood of a living Ul'vyr.

Amfyr fell upon the Ul'vyr until a long series of wars that produced a permanent noble class of Amfyr immortals that ruled over a permanent underclass of Ul'vyr herd-slaves.

Amfyr only gain healing and immortality benefits when drinking the blood of an Ul'vyr, in modern day, commonly distilled into various spiced Ul'vyr blood wines called **Vivinya**. The blood of other sentient races being no more beneficial to an Amfyr than the mortal nourishment gained from a beast.



The large steel car was black with gaudy flaring fins, too much chrome, and white wall tires, the subtle whine of the small cynergen turbine struggling to keep the hulking mass moving along the smooth streets of the suburban neighborhood.

The car was standard issue, big, obvious, but gutless. The driver and passenger were similarly big, obvious, but ultimately gutless.

The two pulled up in front of the small pink house, checking the address, and heading for the front door.

The two were large blocky figures in poorly tailored black suits with white shirts and black ties, each with a small flechette thrower holstered under their jackets, neither had ever been fired in the field.

The first officer knocked with a force that nearly shattered the door, "truant officer, open the door please," he bellowed.

Mr. Howe opened the door, his wife standing just behind, "Yes."

"Your son is in custody," said the second officer, "would you be so good as to get your coats and come with us. We would like to see he gets back to you tonight and there are some papers that need signing back at the station."

"Both of us?" asked Mr. Howe.

"Yes please, I think the judge would like a few words with you both before he is released back to you."

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Howe.

"It would be best if we let the Judge explain things."

"Of course." Mr. Howe replied.

Mr. and Mrs. Howe got their coats and were escorted to the large back seat of the black car sitting out front.

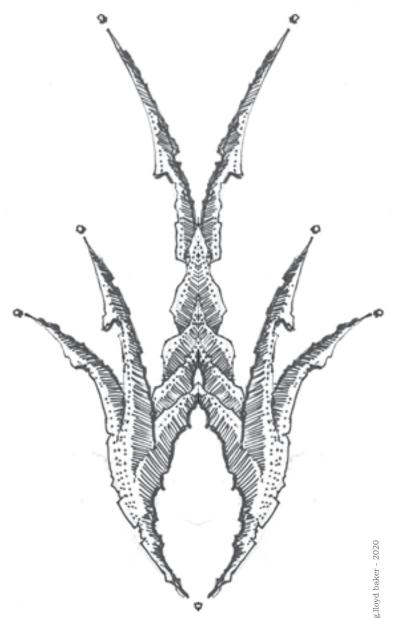
The next day around half past 2, movers arrived to clear the house, a "for sale" sign put up along the curb.

No one recalled ever having seen the Howe's again.

"Do you know where they moved?" the first neighbor asked.

"No, but that little Jimmy was trouble, we all knew that" said the second.

"Yes, it's good to see that kind of mischief safely gone," both nodding in agreement.



Angle City is a lovely civilized place ruled over by various Anfyr Covens.

GEL CITY

The pattern of Amfyr cites is orderly and consistent. At the center of each city is a dense high-rise core the dominion of the Amfyr themselves, governance, justice, and military operations.

Surrounding each city center is a tableau of mortal Ul'vyr suburban office parks, white picket fence single-family & row-housing, parks, schools, shopping malls and further out farms and countryside estates.

Electrification is common by means of Cynergen power cells as are personal ground-vehicles, paved road networks, vacation destinations, safety, security, and an abundance of food, healthcare, and education.

Angel City is a paradise of conformity pleasant civility, and abundant entertainment.

For the non-conforming, rebellious, free-thinking, or artistic, Angel City is a kind of zombie apocalypse to be resisted, survived, and escaped.

There has always been a small but resilient rebellion to Amfyr rule, once famed Ul'vyr vampire hunters that long ago lost the war but whose hope of freedom from being a number in a herd endures to modern day.

There are 2 fundamental problems with the resistance. One, the vast majority of mortal citizenry like their lives justfine-thank-you-very-much. Two, the rebellious are identified in early schooling and the errant genealogy quickly culled from the herd.

#### VICTORY

The Coven was now headed by a relatively young and bold Amfyr that for two centuries fought and plotted his rise from the lower ranks and boldly assassinated and politically outmaneuvered his rivals. He was now the Prince of his Coven, a member of the High Council. He had made it, done what none said was possible.

He reveled in his success; his inaugural ball was a decadence that would be spoken of for centuries. Rivals had been devoured by their slaves and slaves devoured by their families, their families finally devoured by beasts and made into a special edition coronation blood'wine.

But now, a year on, he sat in the dais chair overlooking the great hall. The hour was early, dozens of naked mortal forms flittering about the hall, slaves all moving quietly about their tasks seeking desperately to avoid his eye contact.

The truth was here before him, now, in this room. He had suspected it, glimpsed it perhaps during his struggle to prominence, a rise that he now saw clearly, how easy it had been. The truth was the Amfyr had won. For 4,000 years they had ruled the Angel City as the managers of a slaughterhouse.

"We won," the Prince whispered to himself. He realized that he had no more power or authority than he had before his rise. As a young soldier of the Coven... they had already won. Now as Prince, he ruled multitudes that had already won.

The life of an Amfry was to fight other Amfyr, an all-consuming desire to be at the top of corpse prize won 4,000years ago.

A young maiden ran too fast across the great hall carrying a bucket of water, tripping and sliding naked across the floor. The chamberlain whipping her mercilessly, her bloody body carried out by two porters, half a dozen maids

now mopping the spilt water and blood. All mortal, all obedient, all keeping themselves chained. They had won. And here he sat, manager of the slaughterhouse.

It was then that a young regal woman entered the hall dressed in a flowing sequence gown of white and sparkle.

He was not altogether sure she was walking upon the stone floor or a foot above. What he knew was there was no announcement and no quards had stopped this interloper.

"How dare you enter my hall unannounced," he yelled as he stood, "you witches are uninvited in my hall. GUARDS," he yelled, the mortal household staff quickly escaping the great hall, all doors he heard suddenly slamming shut as the Envoy lightly raised her left hand, curling her long forefinger just so.

"I believe your quards are otherwise occupied," the Envoy spoke as she approached the dais, "I've not harmed them, I figure you will do that yourself once we have had our little talk."

"Witch, what do you want?" he petulantly yelled.

"Dear Prince, settle yourself, I am here because you called me," she said, her fluid gown shifting in and out of focus and she moved, swirling suddenly with the grace of a dancer, giggling as she came to a stop looking hard into his eyes.

He was about to set into another tirade but stopped himself trapped in her gaze, she was beautiful, too beautiful, he screamed a war cry and drew his long slender blade, "Your trickery will not work here demon."

"Trickery, demon?" she pouted with a subtle grin, "you know just what to say to get a lady excited."

"Begone, Guards!" he yelled into the empty hall, beginning to feel trapped.

"You are every bit as strong as I was told, though not nearly as bright as I had hoped," she said, "look around you. You won, what are you doing here?" she said spreading her arms wide. "The universe is a big place, with kingdoms to be won and nations to be built. What are you waiting for, an invitation? Well here I am, a flesh and blood one time only damnable INVITATION to get off your lard ass and do something meaningful with your life," she mocked, "or do you want to sit here and manage the farm until you get fatter, stupider, and lazier, and are yourself replaced by someone else that imagines they are doing something great?"

"I am the Prince," he said proudly, though not quite believing it.

"You are the Prince of nothing a few trained monkeys could handle and still have time for dinner and a nightcap," she sneered, "you are a joke sitting here, letting what little ambition you have left you be consumed with incestuous political intrigue. Here you sit having won nothing, your ancestors won this 4,000 years ago, they sat where you sit, they were bigger, stronger, and smarter than you will ever be, I do not even like your kind, I mean what is there to like, you are petulant, needy, emotional, moody, arrogant, self-absorbed, and not too bright."

"We are..." he began yelling

"Irrelevant," she cut him off, "what have you won?"

Silence hung between them.

"Nothing," he relented, "we are stagnant, our ambitions are those of parties and children."

She bowed, "Oh great Prince of Parties, what shall you do now that the truth lies bare before you?"



House Marlene is under the dominion of the Amfyr, the vampire nobility of the otherwise mortal Ul'vyr races that make their homes in Angel City.

House Marlene maintains very liberal immigration policy, offering residency to any young and healthy applicant and is famed for its generous acceptance of orphaned or abandoned children from anyplace into its suburban wonderland cities.

House Marlene is something of a pariah among the Great Houses and under constant pressure from the Crystal Shard Empress to end its ancient traditions of slavery and "cannibalism."

The Amfyr are evil by most any definition, even their own, an evil that they exalt and joyously embrace, but keep themselves carefully hidden from the suburban herds surrounding their cities, to do otherwise would be like running into a cow pasture and committing murderous evil acts, what would be the point?

Mortal Ul'vyr of the House Marlene are each born as property of one of the ancient or newer Amfyr Covens. New Covens are occasionally broken off to reign over newly conquered or expanding mortal herds.

If one can except the tiny percentage of mortal population that tends to vanish (and really its mostly the undesirables that vanish anyway), the Amfyr are a generally law & order rulers that afford their citizens a life of good education, civilized professions & careers, excellent health care, and the reasonable expectation of a comfortable retirement.

g.lloyd baker - 2020

Freedom of expression is however strictly forbidden and approved thinking enforced. Order, peace, and security are the benefits of living in an Amfyr herd.

House Marlene also maintains a large military built mostly for defense and for occasional use to calm the herds. Though the power of the famed **Amfyr Inquisitors** has generally meant that internal military operations are now exceedingly rare.

House Marlene is among the most important Great Houses of the Metropolis Empire. The House maintains an expeditionary force under command of the Crystal Shard Empress and her Imperial Clergy. Each Legion is a well-equipped, well trained, and well-disciplined Ul'vyr fighting force lead by Amfyr officer elite. At any given time, the Crystal Shard Empress has large numbers of Amfyr provided soldiers in the field pursuing the larger interests of the Metropolis Empire.



Spire Angel is surrounded by mountains & jungles accessed by a single major road.

The jungle is a scion of the home jungles surrounding their mountain homeland of the original Ul'vyr race.

The Poison Jungle is toxic to all but Ul'vyr life, every plant, animal, reptile, and insect venomous, the flowery scent of the air, all of it deadly. The bite of an Ul'vyr and Amfyr similarly venomous, causing paralysis of a victim. The Spire itself is an extension of the jungle, a titanic thorn tree of vine and tendril that entwines and draws the life from anything that comes near enough to be caught.

Tourists and visitors are carefully advised to stay on the road.

The inner reaches of the Spire are known only to the undead Amfyr masters of Angel City, halls where the Amfyr are suspected of pursue their dark and bloody sorcerous arts.

#### 070 VINCENT SENCEAVE OF THE ANCIENT & MAD

The island of **Saint Vincent** is ancient and its architecture a twisted sculptural play of fluid forms, disturbing perpendicular shapes, and precarious angles. The very shape of the buildings and the labyrinthian order of its streets tends to disturb the mind and unsettle the soul.

This is a City rumored to have been built tens of thousands of years ago by the Zevara, an ancient race sometimes called the Vampire Gods, thought to be undead progenitors of the modern Amfyr race and creators of the Ritual of the Bitter Rose. Saint Vincent being the chief Vampire God of the mythical Zeveran pantheon.

The City is avoided by visitors except maybe by the most adventurous by day. The Amfyr themselves go to great lengths to avoid the city and prevent others from doing the same.

The city seems chiefly occupied by a primordial race of cloaked & hooded gynomorphic lizards that do not speak but seem to maintain the city and will guide visitors to a place they can name or describe.

Zevaran Vampire Gods are rumored to still "live" here. So little is known of the Zevara it is hard to be sure.

#### **673** SEEKERS STREETS OF SHATTERED MINDS

Bordered on the east by high mountains is a large city that in modern parlance is called the Seeker Streets.

The **Seeker Streets** is the official city of Great House ambassadors, embassies, and representatives conducting the day to day politics and business of the Great House Marlene.

The city is thoroughly modern with glass & steel high-rises and efficient gridded streets that favor travel by ground-cars and subterranean trains. Flying vehicles are however banned from the skies.

The city is almost entirely absent trees or plants of any kind, every surface not a building having been paved as a plaza, sidewalk, or road.

The city is famous for its diverse nightlife, casinos, and dance clubs.

The live music scene is especially vibrant and electrified highlighting dozens of hip-cool-modern genres, as well as some of the more classical musical forms of metal, industrial, and gothic.

During the day, the city is as a Sunday morning, a place of quiet abandonment populated chiefly by maintenance and delivery crews.

#### OST BEACK SKY CITY OF COVER CREMEMBERED

Sky City is an island **necropolis** that celebrates and remembers the departed of Amfyr Covens. Since Amfyr are "immortal" they tend to perish only by violence of harm, accident, or rare toxin or disease.

The Amfyr have a complex relationship with death and this City reflects that evil and complexity.

The deceased bodies of the Amfyr are the source of unique and powerful regents of a variety of esoteric and powerful uses. So grave robbing, even by other Amfyr is common. The city is patrolled by vampire hounds that tend to prevent most casual tomb raiders from gaining access but even so, most of the older tombs have been plundered over the centuries.

The reason for the Amfyr entombing their kind is part religious (the burning of a corpse sacrilege) but part hope, because **sometimes Amfyr rise again with an Arcane soul**. Something that has been happening with increasing frequency and is of great interest to the Covens and the Crystal Shard Empress and her Fanes.

The second secon

ANGER CIT

lloyd bake

265



Pain, numbness, he felt as if he had been struck by lightning, or at least as he imagined that would feel.

He sat up, the sound of his spine and bones grinding, blinding pain again, weakness, he imagined days passing, weeks and years rushing by as he tried to open his eyes.

The chamber dimly lit, a single candle perhaps, his eyes captured by a woman with shining red eyes seated naked on a large ornately wrought chair of faded gold leaf and centuries old velour. Thin rivulets of blood issuing from her tear ducts and her proud perfect nipples.

He was so very cold, "what, who, how..." he tried to say, not sure if he were speaking or just imagining the words, flashes of memories, brightness and darkness clashed in his mind, he could not think.

The women drifted toward him leaning her seductive feminine curves toward his mouth,

The scent of her overwhelming, in blind rage he bit deep into her breast, fire racing through his veins, he felt as if he were a god, his skin flushed and his manhood swelled and she took him biting deep into his neck, he in turn bit more deeply, the blood of the two flowing together as a single body. Their climax a supernova in his mind, an explosion of colored mists flooded his mind, he saw for a moment the width and breadth of the universe and his place at its center.

Out of time he drifted, millions of years drifted past as he sought again to open his eyes. And she was still there, lying beside him, looking at his face with bright green eyes.

"I do enjoy the old ways," she said finally, "if Bartholomew had found you the boredom of sipping blood'wine while he explained your place in the mathematics of the universe would have you thinking – I wonder if the undead can commit suicide?" she laughed lightly.

"I am undead?" he asked absently, his mind and heart still racing too fast, he could not focus.

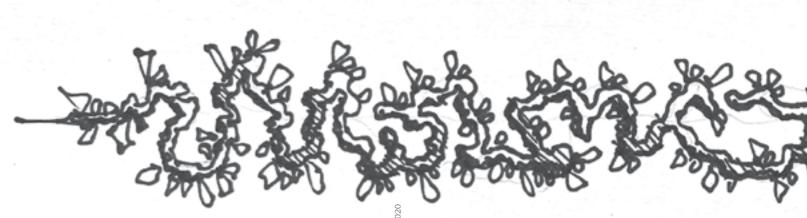
"You are a great many things, the least of which is dead," she said

"I am..." he began to mumble.

"Confused, as is normal, I just jump started your mind and body using more traditional methods," she crooned, "it is quicker and much more enjoyable if it does not shatter your mind. But really, if you are that fragile, what is the point of spending all the years it is going to take to train you to think for yourself. And by my experience, fragile does not seem to be your problem," she smiled slipping her hand up his inner thigh.

"What am I?" he winced.

"Wrong question," she said, "this is a tomb, up until a few moments ago was home to a murdered Amfyr corpse, that is until you met me."



NGEL CIT

"What are we?" he rephrased, the raging fire of his mind and body slowly diminishing.

"Better," she said, happy that this one might still have what passes for a brain in its worm-eaten head, "you are what Bartholomew would call the universe trying to figure itself out. Your body was the corpse of an Amfyr that recently became host to an Arcane soul, this makes you a child of e'Mral. In other words, you are a hot mess, a sorcery wielding blood drinking undead sex machine," she smiled, "but more importantly, you get to choose to be anything you want to be, the universe it seems would like your opinion on the matter."

"...my opinion?" he tried to focus.

She rolled her eyes slipping off the large stone bier. She moved her naked form toward the large chair and picked up a bottle filled with deep red liquid that sparkled in the candlelight, and drank deeply, draining the bottle, the rush of exhilaration flooding through her body, blood again trickling from her now deep red eyes.

"Now do not be telling Bartholomew about this," she said moving toward him, "but it looks like you are still half asleep, I think we need to try this again," she said biting deep into his neck as she mounted him.

He felt the universe explode. Again.

In what felt to be several days later, he was dressed and had what he thought was a reasonable semblance of his "birth." His guide sat upon the old throne in a long red gown threaded with gold, her bright green eyes piercing the darkness.

The large stones sealing the entry shifted, moonlight streaming into tomb.

"Hello Casandra," came the voice of the large old man entering the tomb.

"Hello Bartholomew," she mewed.

"Did everything go to plan?" he asked, "is he whole? You did not break this one, did you?" he asked, his hulking form filling the passage as he moved into the light of the candle.

"He quietly sipped his magic juice while I very slowly and patiently explained his new situation," she lied, "it was all awfully long, plodding, and boring."

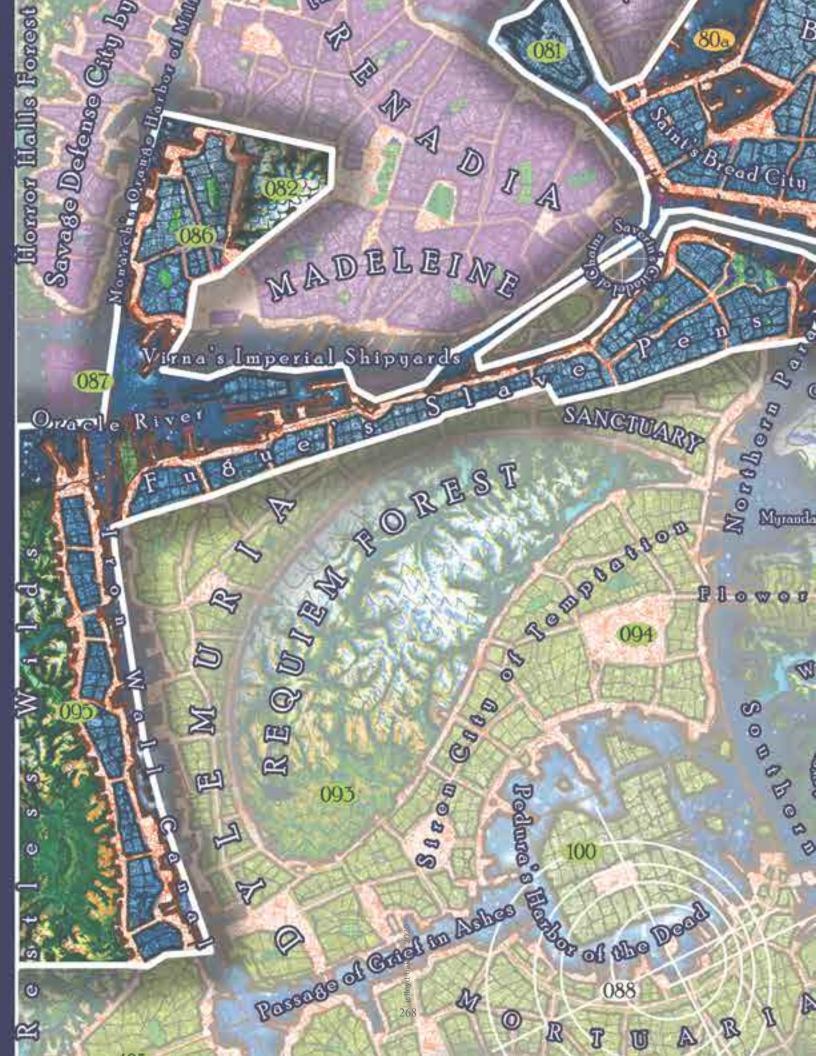
"Excellent," said Bartholomew, "I told you if you followed the rules and showed patience good things would happen. Shall we go?"

She smiled, kissing the new kid on the cheek as she passed.

The three Arcane stepped out into the cool moonlight.

In other words, you are a ... sorcery wielding blood drinking undead sex machine...





#### 082 CUILE HEART FOREST

The Guile Heart Forest is a remote ice mountain forest sacred to Amfyr religious practice.

The forest is patrolled by merciless **flesh golems** of unusual craft, said to made by wizards from the immortal fragments of sacrificed Amfyr.

This is a dangerous place with a disturbing number of temples dedicated to evil protected by vampiric Frankenstein-style monsters. If this does not scream "keep-out" nothing does.

# **686** SISTER SALVATION S

Far to the west is the City of Revelation governed by the **Sisters of Salvation**.

The City is a place of monasteries, prayer, and meditation for those Amfyr seeking peace from the violence and hate of the Covens and to perhaps find some semblance of their lost Ul'vyr humanity or conscience.

The Amfyr can be very moody and self-reflective, often seeing themselves as some sort of cosmic victims or wrong for "stealing" the lives of others that they might extend their own lives.

The city is a kind of holy ground for Amfyr, a place they "agree" to inflict no violence upon one another under threat of violence by the Sisters of Salvation.

Many Covens have taken to conducting negotiations with other Coven under the safety of the City (despite the general perception of doing so be equated with weakness).

# 695 vampiric wall of our defenders in ashes

The Vampiric Wall is a long linear citadel upon a high mountainous plateau with high cold iron walls between the Restless Wilds and the Iron Wall Canal.

This is the ancient pull-back position of House Marlene from the **zombie** hordes that took the far western territories several centuries ago.

The city is home to several dozen legions that defend the citadel and surrounding Metropolis cities from constant zombie threat.

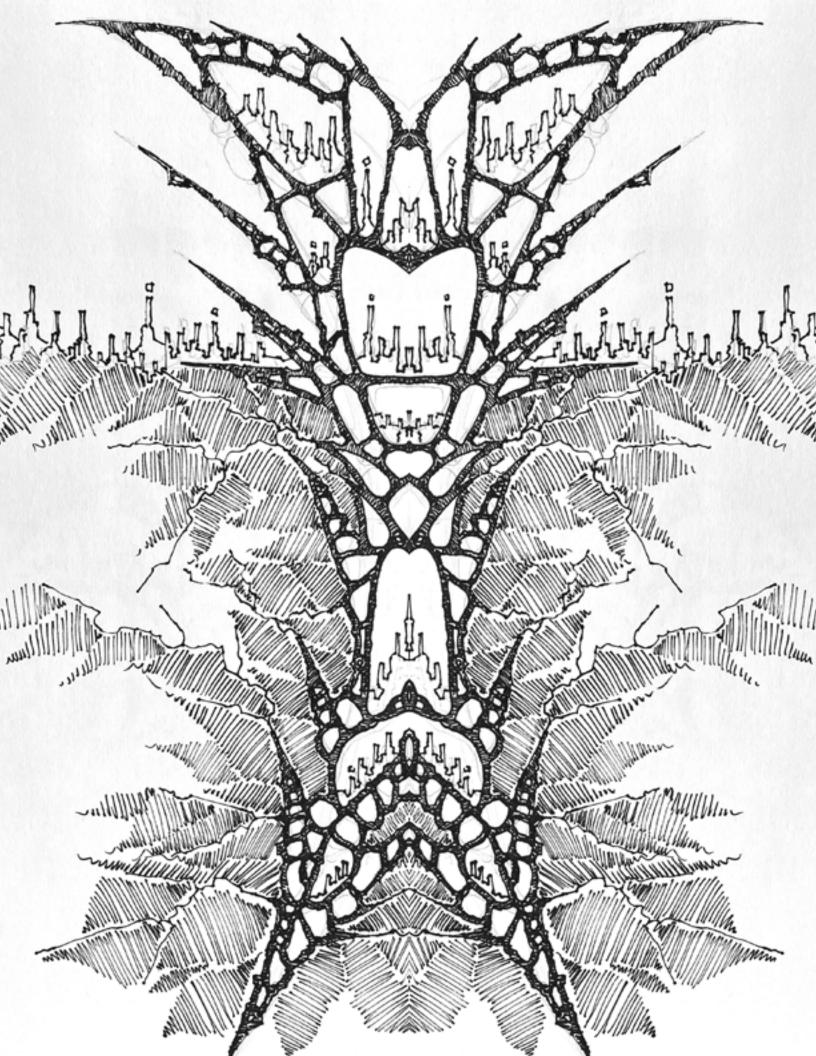
The citadel has fallen several times over the past few centuries, its many thousands of defenders fallen to the zombie infection and invading deep into the Metropolis before finally being stopped and the Citadel retaken.

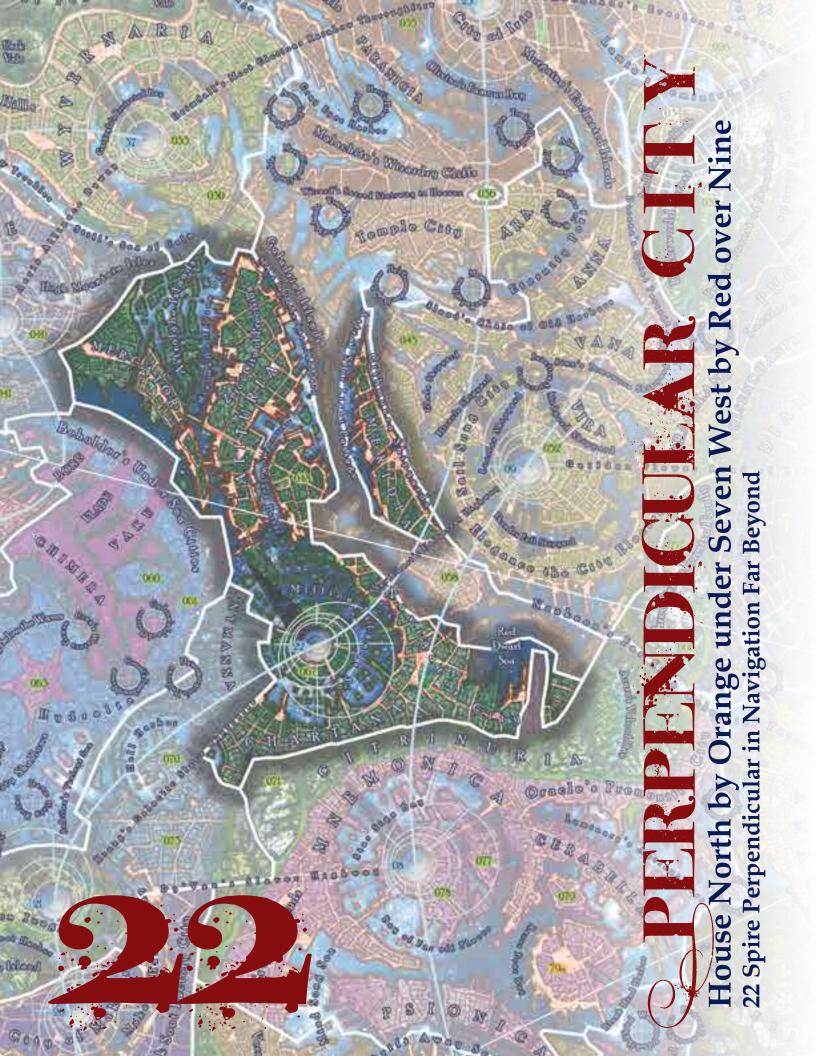
#### <sup>C</sup>RESTLESS WILDS

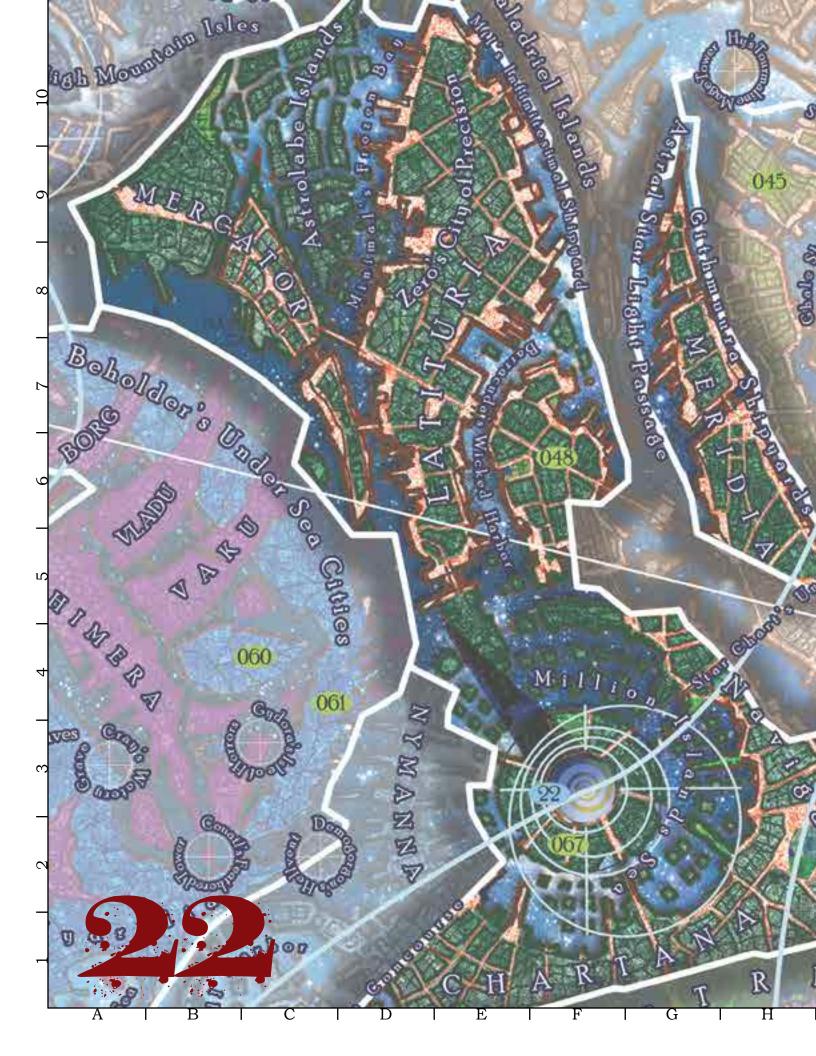
The Restless Wilds are at the edge of western Clockworks civilization and are guarded a great fortress (see 095).

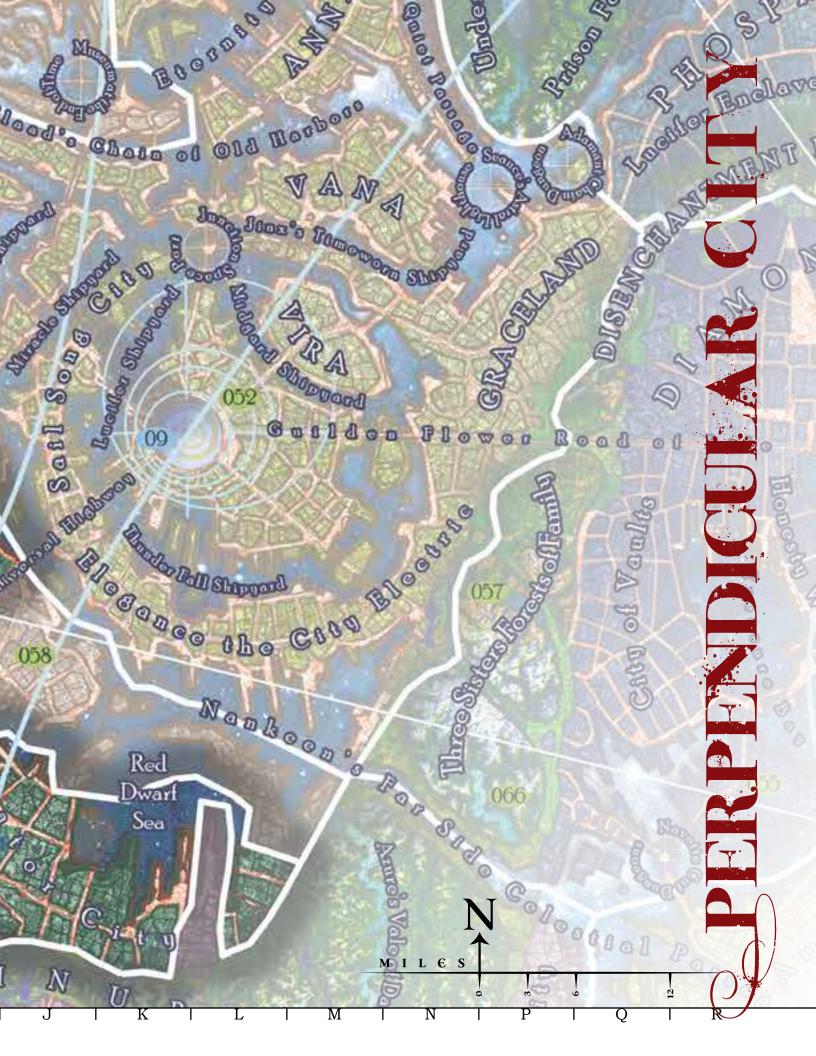
The Restless Wilds are avoided by both demon and the living, a place overrun by **feral zombies**, the source of which was a once enormous Amfyr slave processing city that operated for some many thousands of years until overthrown by a group of vampire hunters skilled in the arts of necromancy, raising zombie hordes to destroy the city and consuming every Amfyr slaver.

The Restless Wilds remain infested with uncounted millions of zombies with a taste for Amfyr brains.









#### THE NAVIGATOR

The Never'Fade was a Dreadnaught, a huge stone citadel nearly a mile across with highrise towers and platforms projecting both above and below its relative ground plane.

The battle had been a disastrous affair, the Dreadnaught in flames, overrun by invading forces that continued to land using thousands of small wynd'ships.

The Captain ordered the cell door unlocked as alarms continued to ring throughout the ship.

"We have been betrayed," said the Captain.

The prisoner was tall and slowly stood, a full head taller than the Captain, it's tentacles coiled in subtlety shifting afterimages of fractal geometry ringing its large squid-like head, the Prisoner's 2 large eyes on the side of its head looking disturbingly in opposite directions at the same time, its legs and torso those of a curvaceous naked woman.

"And can we please get this thing some clothes," barked the Captain, one of the guards bolting from the cell and quickly returning with the Prisoner's dress and boots.

"I am not sure how the ship's betrayal is my concern," said the prisoner while dressing, the fractured images and alien screech of its voice setting the Captain on edge, as a nightmare that you know is a nightmare, but you cannot wake from.

"Fine, you were right, is that what you want to hear?" asked the Captain, clearly exasperated at having exhausted all other options before coming here.

"Your first officer shattered your Wyght'Core, and let me guess, all of your navigators were assigned scouting duty without your knowledge, but your first officer did not know I was down here. How am I doing?"

"Insufferable as ever," said the Captain

"Disable the Gravity Well," said the Prisoner, its fractured psionic images and partial words splintering through the Captain and guards, each beginning to suffer a headache at attempting a simple conversation with the Illinyar'Vooran.

The guard that brought the Prisoner's clothes began to scream, grabbing his head between his hands as if that would somehow stop the searing pain now sawing through his mind. "The sooner you disable the Gravity Well, the sooner the pain stops," said the Vooran Prisoner.

"Is that really necessary?" asked the Captain.

"No," said the Prisoner, "it is not necessary."

The guard ran from the room in screaming agony, the only thought on his mind to disable the gravity well...and as he did...the pain stopped, like a switch it was gone, and the guard had no memory of how he had gotten here.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the Prisoner, "certainly not back the Metropolis."

"Back to the Metropolis," commanded the Captain.

"Dim to the last," said the Prisoner, "one last chance to change your mind."

"Now, Go," said the Captain

The Prisoner stretched out with its psionic senses, it could "see" the fractured universe around itself and the ship, he could feel the shifting space between moments, the flow of the e'Mral mists of Grace, caressing the ship and everyone aboard, it could feel the colors of the walls and could taste the thoughts of each person, and could hear the distant Metropolis. As an Illinyar'Vooran it could do all this without aid of Wyght'Core, its own perceptions, its own 11 brains spanning space and time, and then it was there, in 11 places at the same time, and one of those places was safely overhead the Clockwork Metropolis.

Its 11 minds focused on the one, and as suddenly, the Never'Fade and everyone aboard was translated drifting on fire and fighting for their lives over the Clockworks instead of millions of miles away.

The captain and guards wretched, being momentarily in 2 places at the same time; a real challenge for one's last meal staying put.

"Leave him," ordered the Captain, "follow me." The guards and Captain ran from the cell, his ship still in danger.

The gravity well disabled, the cell could no longer hold it. The Prisoner teleported itself safely away.



**Perpendicular City is alien**. This is a place of inhuman imagining, perpendicular thinking, and disturbing craft.

Perpendicular City is dominated by high-rise towers of oblique angles, unsettled cantilevers, and twisting motion.

Each building is as a splinter in the rational mind, a shard that tears at the way things ought to be. There is nothing natural about the look, feel, or workings of this city.

# Perpendicular City is the errant aesthetic of a mad mind.

Sounds within Perpendicular City may be seen and smelled, sights may be heard and tasted, the taste of food as often heard as seen. There are more colors within the City than are made



by nature and whispers of songs that no musical instrument or voice may make. The truth of Perpendicular City is outside the reality of Xai.

All that said, Perpendicular City is extremely popular with tourists seeking that unique experience that cannot be found anywhere else.

Vooran theater and music is a sensory experience outside mortal description. Vooran cuisine is both sublime and horrific and dares the body to expect more.

As people go, the Vooran are silent, communicating their splintered and often painful thoughts telepathically when necessary but otherwise adopting mechanical voice boxes to communicate with the especially odiferous primitive life forms of Xai.

The Vooran are slavers but with the good sense to keep such "unpleasantness" from the public streets, restaurants, and theaters of their city.



House North is, as best anyone can tell, a gerontocracy, ruled by the oldest living members of the race. Every Illiyar'Vooran the rightful heir to the proverbial throne if only they might live long enough. Similarly, the Vooran have an inherent sense of clock and age and instinctively know the respective age of each Vooran in a gathering and who is therefore supposed to be in charge.

The Vooran have been at war with most everyone for as long as Xai has recorded history. This has tended to keep them weak, divided, and on more than one occasion near extinction.

In return for "cessation of hostilities", the Vooran were established upon the founding of the Metropolis Empire with House North.

House North is a civilization of high but specific technomancy. The Vooran were once a space faring race but their celestial greatness banished to the "beyond" by the Mistress and their surviving fragmented space-opera defeated or pushed back far from Xai to the deep reaches of space.

Being telepathic, the Vooran of House North maintain some contact with their ancient space faring brethren but nothing that can be considered meaningful to the day to day lives of modern Vooran. Some Vooran have however been known to successfully call space-faring aid from "the far beyond" in times of great need.

#### OF ILLINYAR VOORAN

In the grand scheme of the Xai universe, mortal kind precariously live their lives between the Infernal Powers trapped within Xai's Subowrlds and from the Lovecraftian Powers held beyond Xai's most distant reality of space & time.

The Illinyar'Vooran are beings from outside the Xai universe, minions of dark forces such as Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones.

The Illinyar'Vooran are hybrids crafted to survive the Xai reality, an andromorphic torso and legs but with head replaced with the alien form most similar to a great squid with an array of long fluid tentacles. They are always female, and the child of any union will be an Illinyar'Vooran.

The Vooran are ancient, sent in pursuit of the Mistress that apparently escaped from some cosmic place beyond the universe of Xai.

But in their long space-opera history, the Illinyar'Vooran did not go to plan.

The Vooran were changed by our reality and came to know purpose, ambition, and themselves became sentient.

They imagined a future for themselves separate from their outside masters and set about remaking the cosmos in the pattern of their own dark perpendicular thoughts.

The Vooran reached Xai when the Demon Princes had dominion and the two sides warred for prominence in the universe, each undone by the other only to both be undone by the Mistress, banishing the Infernal to Xai's Subworlds and the Vooran to dark cold of future space.

But some especially independent minded Vooran escaped banishment and endure to modern day.



# 22 SPIRE PERPENDICULAR IN NAVIGATION FAR BEYOND

The Spire Perpendicular does not quite exist, slipping in and out of sight as if somehow caught on the edge of mirror.

It is tall and sometimes imposing, other times faded and repeated as if viewed in a pair of mirrors in an infinite array toward a vanishing point.

The Spire itself has become the center of Vooran civilization on Xai, collecting many wandering Vooran to make home port of its ever-expanding multi-dimensional interiors. Reference 067, tourists, visitors, and the sane are advised to never come here.

# 048 REASON FACE CITY OF REVELATION & LIES

Face City is an island where House North conducts their "ambassador" program.

It has always been difficult for the Vooran to deal with the mundane and vice-versa. The Voornan need for voice boxes and their amoral mindshard imagery makes communication challenging, not to mention their offshift dimensional appearance that causes headaches among the mundane that look upon them.

The solution has been recruiting Vooran volunteers and pairing them with a **suitable mundane sleeve**.

The Vooran body remains safely cocooned within the heights of a dimensionally folded high-rise tower while the mundane sleeve is possessed like a finger puppet by the mind of the

Vooran. The Vooran then goes forth living out his life in this new body, able to speak and communicate as a mundane.

The Vooran ambassador learns skills that allow them to mimic moral conduct, facial cues, body language, and even get married and have a family.

A skilled **Vooran Puppeteer** can seem entirely mundane and is entirely undetectable as otherwise so long as its real body remains safely cocooned.

As such, Vooran now rarely leave Perpendicular City as themselves, preferring instead to operate within the Metropolis Empire by way of their mundane **Puppets**.

The advantages are many but chiefly those of communication and safety, should the puppet perish the Vooran may suffer some phycological trauma but will otherwise survive to take over the life of another waiting sleeve.

In the intervening thousands of years since the founding of the Empire, the Vooran have become exceptionally good at their puppeteer arts and have many official "ambassadors" and even more unofficial spies throughout the Empire.

Most mundane have come to forget that Vooran emissaries are **slaves to an alien mind**, preferring to believe the modern House North propaganda of their modern ambassadors being loyal mundanes recruited into House North service or a mundane navigator having simply been trained by the Vooran.

#### THE PUPPETEERS

The Great House was under threat, several of her districts had been invaded, and attacks upon their Spire threatened the lives of the royal family. A response was required.

The 8 most senior military leaders and advisors of the House arrived in the huge ballroom to huddle and decide the best strategy before presenting to their King.

The Admiral was the first, "the navy has been recalled and will set up defensive positions."

"Inspired," the chief counselor said, "you should also let the King know that so long as the water remains wet, the ships aught to be good to sail?"

"Excellent, thank you chief counselor," said the Admiral.

The chief counselor rolled his eyes. "Do you have a decisive plan of action General?"

"I do," said the General, "I am recalling all ground forces and setting up a defensive perimeter at the Spire."

"Also inspired," the chief counselor said, "please be sure to add in your report to the King that the infantry will be on foot, and you might consider ordering your men to wear their uniforms, we do not want them getting confused with the civilians."

"Brilliant," said the General, "I will see to it personally."

The meeting went like this for a while, the Head of Spire Security informing the Counselor that "the doors had been closed and firmly locked," not just locked, but firmly so.

The Head of Espionage informing him that "all spies had been sent forth to discover the identity of the attackers." When asked if

the large flags and banners of the invading armies had offered any information, the spymaster said, "intriguing clues."

Finally, the chief counselor had heard from the 7 most important people in charge of Great House defense. His head low, buried deep in both hands as if weeping.

"We seem to have a small problem," said the chief counselor, "no one in this room is who they say they are."

Everyone began to look nervously around, scanning the exits, the Admiral moving toward window.

"Really," said the chief counselor, "the window, going to jump for it are we?" shaking his head in defeat.

"We all meet with the King in a few moments," said the chief counselor, "and it appears that everyone in this room is a Vooran Puppet."

They all started looking around the room in realization of the truth, relaxing a bit, the thought of hurling themselves out the windows having passed.

"I will brief the King," said the chief counselor, "none of you are to speak, not a word, if any of you gets the bright idea to say anything...anything at all, and I will shove a dimensional spike so far up your cerebellum you will wonder if Cthulhu himself had dissected your brain with a rusty spoon," he looked around the room slowly, "CLEAR," he screamed.

"Clear," they each muttered, not wanting to make eye contact.

"After, we are going to have a long talk about Ambassador etiquette."

# S. PERPENDICUEAR CITY

#### 667 CARTOGRAPHIA THE PATH ONCE TRAVELED

**Cartographia** is the city at the base of Spire Perpendicular. This is a city of Illinyar'Vooran nobility and the most alien and disturbing of its polydimensional architectural forms.

Everything is this city tears at the safety and security provided by the sanity of the mind and the reality we all take for granted. The city itself is sometimes a collection of fragmented buildings absent reference or scale but at other times seems a single living beast come to devour all light.

The City is uninhabited by the sane and tourists are advised to avoid the place entirely.

#### ASTROLABE ISLANDS

The Astrolabe Islands are free of Imperial dominion.

The Astrolabe Islands are where the Vooran build and harbor their rumored dimensional ships. The ships are pan dimensional and tend to be invisible when viewed from a 3dimensional perspective.

The cities and towns that populate these islands are similarly crafted of pan-dimensional materials and multidimensional interiors.

Entry into these buildings or ships by the sanity-protected 3dimensional mind riding-on the-rails-of-lineartime tends to cause bouts of insanity often progressed by tearing one's own eyes out followed by suicide.

Mundane natives that make use of such transport are first made comatose for the benefit and safety of everyone involved.

#### CHARTANA

Chartana is the heart of Perpendicular City. The city is built in the form of more traditional cities of the mundane minded.

The city is like a **poorly rendered theme park** crafted of examples of architecture of hundreds of races from throughout history, a crazy and gaudy jumble of architectural styles and forms. Scholars have suggested that this awkward and ugly place is how the Illinyar Vooran view our universe.

The attempt by the Vooran was to create a place welcoming and familiar to visitors from across the Metropolis Empire. In that it does not cause insanity, they succeeded.

This is a trade town where dumbed down versions of Vooran dimensional technomancy (what the Vooran call child'craft) is traded for more mundane but still useful raw materials and technomantic crafts.

yd bak

#### MERIDIA

Meridia is a city on 3 islands along the Astral Star Light Passage and the **Sithmura Shipyards**.

This is a port city that thrives on trade along the well-established trade routes of the **Astral Star Light Passage** leading to thousands of distant rivers, lakes, and seas across Xai and many paradise worlds of the larger cosmos.

The many bars and inns of Meridia are places to meet peoples and travelers from across the universe and to find work or passage to far off places.

The sheer number of ships navigating Xai's dimensional waterways means that the city is home to a great many navigator academies and Illinyar'Vooran can be commonly found among its streets and businesses.

The city is mostly built along the lines of a **medieval theme park** to settle the minds of its many visitors, traders, and expeditions. Doors marked with a bright green runic mark warn the sane of Vooran dimensional buildings, streets, or interiors folded beyond.

# ZEROS CITY OEPRECISION & MIES INFINITESIMAE SHIPYARD

Zero City is a place of high Vooran technomancy generally off limits to mundane visitors as it is a place of secrecy and slavery.

One of the great skills of the Vooran is their ability to see and fold dimensions.

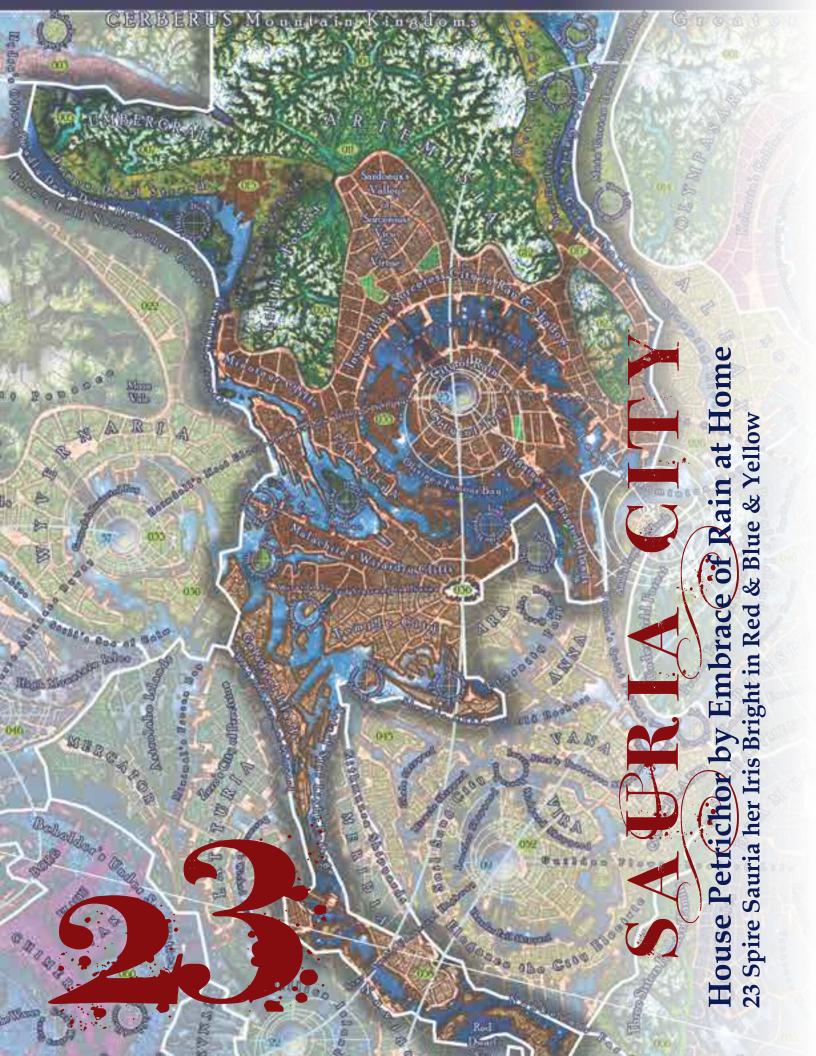
The Vooran can famously place impossibly large objects and "fold" them into impossibly small places. This allows them to essentially "miniaturize" most anything or more commonly cause the inside of a place to be much larger than the outside of a place.

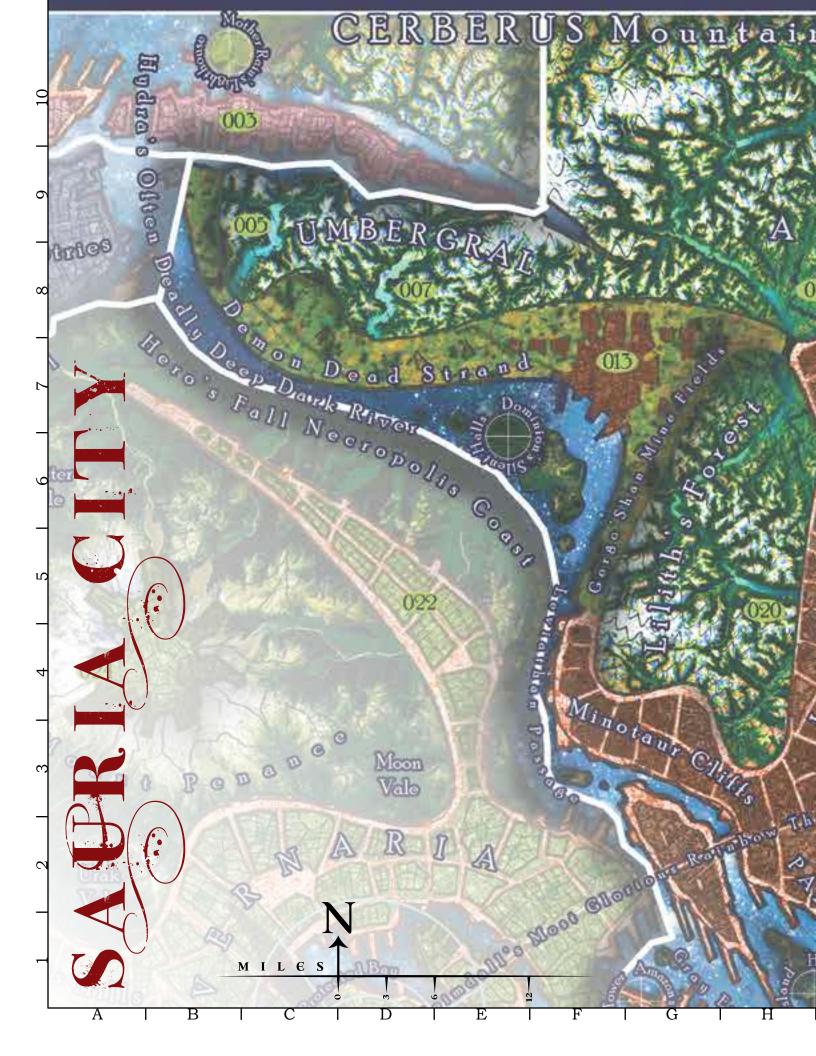
Their famed "Vooran's Bag of Holding" and "Illinyar's Tent of Palatial Interiors" are two simple child-like examples of this intricate and nuanced artform.

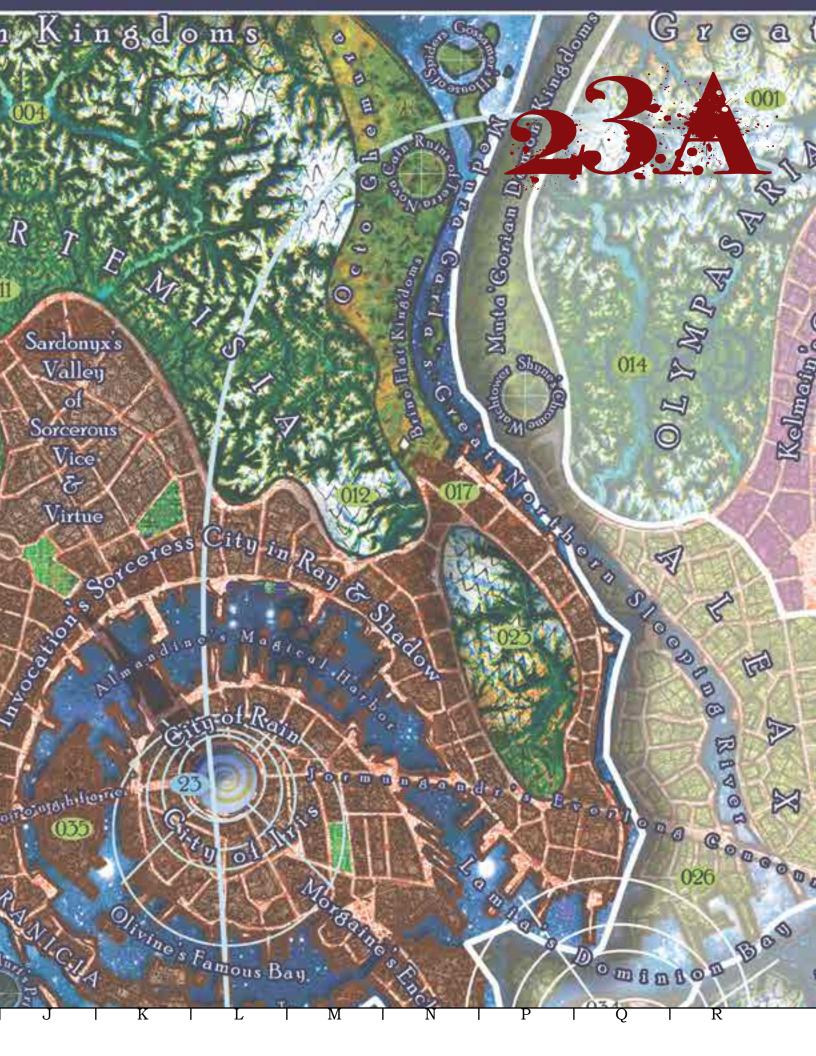
Mils Infinitesimal Shipyard is another of their simpler applications of dimensional arts, causing for example a small ship to have cargo holds the size of an aircraft hangar.

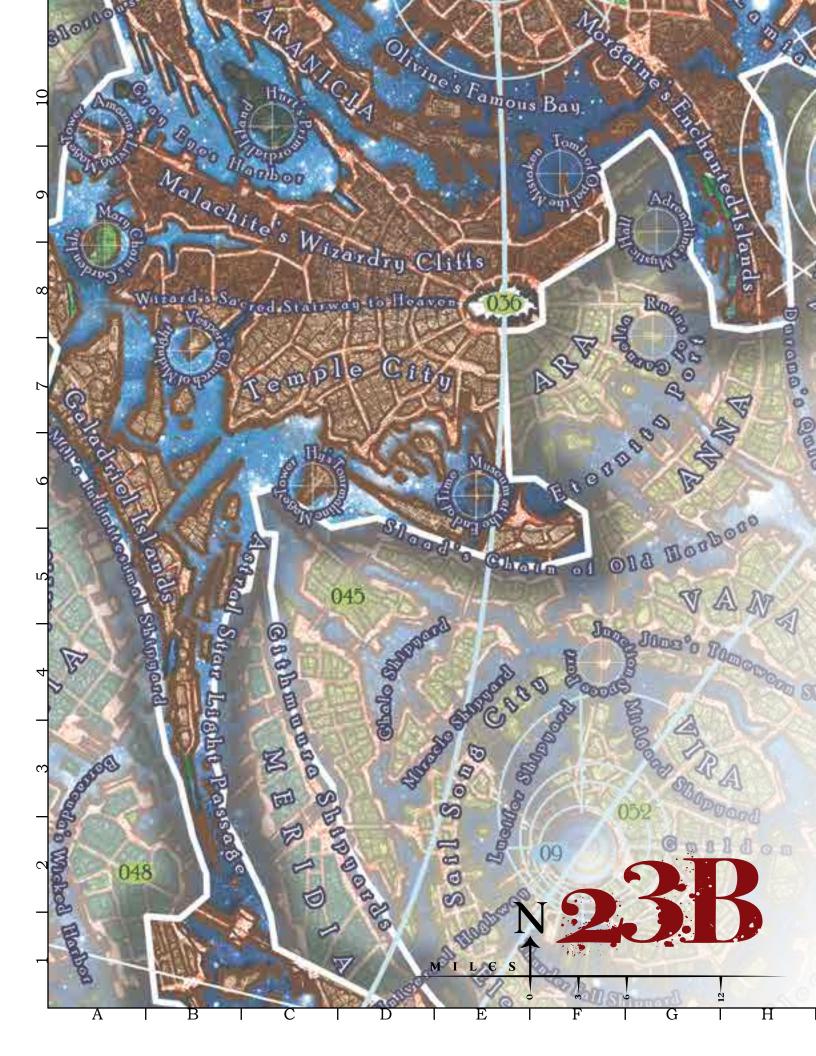
Most anything is possible so long a large enough "hold access door" may be fitted into the smaller craft.

If nothing within is larger than can fit through a single man-door then a phone booth could contain a high rise building or something even larger. It is really a **matter of access**.









# SAURIA CIT

#### SAURIAN CONSENSUS

The Imperial Envoy was entering a meeting with the Saurian Executive Council of Emergency Affairs, the smallest body of governance of the Saurian Nations equivalent to a King or Queen in other Great Houses, a body that numbered 358 career bureaucrats.

The issue the Envoy needed to discuss with the Saurian leadership was cold hard numbers.

When the remnants of humanity were recovered by the Crystal Shard Empress during the last days of the Calibahn Empire, 80% of souls recovered were Saurian.

Now, over 4300years later, the population of the Empire has grown dramatically, with now more than 80% of citizenry still being Saurinan.

War, poverty, starvation are all rampant among the Saurian people, though the Envoy suspects the matter is unrelated to limited resources, for when the Empire was founded, Sauria's chief problems were war, poverty, and starvation.

She entered the great hall of the Saurian Emergency Council, rings of poorly crafted wooden chairs with high backs circling an area made clear for oratory in-the-round.

The hall itself was a simple brickwork building with a slightly sagging exposed wooden truss roof with irregularly placed wooden posts scattered like a forest throughout the hall, each supporting a region of the roof that seems to be sagging somewhat more than the surrounding roof.

This is what passed for grandeur among Saurian culture, a ridiculous excess of space far beyond need.

Once the Saurians were seated, their loud carousing laughter and debates continued unabated, and would continue until such time as they diminished sufficiently to allow the Envoy to grab their attention.

The Envoy entered the circle at the center of the chairs and closed her eyes and listened. Hundreds of conversations swirled about her, debates over civil discord, sanitation, permit fees, Imperial treachery, criminal gangs and their benefits to society, off-color jokes, pornographic tales of conquest, and most anything else one might imagine a room full of old sitting bureaucrats might discuss.

Then she heard it, "There are just too many people," said an especially fat Saurin wearing trim-cut tuxedo that if it could scream would surrender forthwith, "there are too many mouths to feed."

The Envoy pounced, "There are indeed far too many mouths to feed Mr. Calister," she said forcefully above the din.

The room settled a bit, now listening to the Envoy's conversation.

"I would think that the Empire is responsible for this tragic state of affairs," she said directly to the fat Saurian, "how can an honest and upstanding Magistrate such as yourself be expected to manage apocalyptic affairs such feeding the poor?"

"Quite right," said Mr. Calister, "Quite right, we do not have the resources to feed so many out of work, they are burden to society, a burden placed around our necks by miserable donothing Imperials."

The quorum was engaged, complaining about the Empire was a favorite topic and easily exploited if only she could keep it on topic.

"I think we should DEMAND action," said the Envoy, "we should call for all such undesirables to be put on Ark-Ships and sent out to be responsible for themselves, and not be burdens upon your citizenry Mr. Calister, AND you should DEMAND," she passionately screamed, her arms raised spinning to look upon the room, "that the Empire pay for the entire affair."

Cheers filled the room. After a few more minutes of shouted discussions, the quorum moved to authorize Imperial Ark-Ships remove millions of "undesirable" Saurians from their City, the full cost and operational control covered by House Empire, and a substantial stipend paid to each Emergency Council Magistrate to cover their obviously vital managerial role each in providing the lists of citizenry to be removed.

The Envoy smiled having completed her mission. This of course was only the first in a long and difficult process, the last Saurian Exodus was the better part of a thousand years ago, a process the Crystal Shard Empress had commanded go much smoother this time. "So far so good," she thought to herself.



#### Sauria is defined by its **sparkling** kaleidoscopic mediocrity.

This is a city of people working hard to get by. This is a dirty meandering place of mostly medieval streets and stone buildings with some gravity plumbing but mostly akin to eighteenth and nineteenth century London, Paris, or Constantinople of Earth.

The city is filthy and contains more animals than people and is prone to outbreaks of disease and plague with some regularity. Alternately, the people of Sauria are resistant to most disease and if anything, tend to carry new disease to cleaner more modern places.

This is a city of **hustle**, **hard work**, and **societal hierarchies**. This is a place of debtor's prisons and indentured servitude as punishment for the various crimes of being poor.

This is a lively vibrant city of bright criminal opportunity, indifferent cruelty, and unfairness.

This is the city of Ebenezer Scrooge, Jane Austin, and Sherlock Holms, a place of heart, social hierarchy, and clever justice.

There are no gleaming high-rises or fancy electrification or space operas here, simply the hard work of survival in an otherwise unjust universe.

But most important, the people of Sauria are each looking to make their way in the world, to improve their prospects, and are often willing and able to travel and take on work in foreign cities.

#### MOBRULE

House Petrichor is governed by consensus, nearly 3,000 Trade Houses coming together in the Hall of the People, a titanic vaulted chamber of ancient Calibahn construction repurposed with jury-rigged scaffolding and haphazardly crafted delegate boxes surrounding a large central mounded dirt floor where speakers make their pleas to the Quorum.

The Envoy recalled the Arcane reports she reviewed before arriving, a class of Arcane, statistically one from each of the great races and about 140 Sarurians. So many Saurians, 80 percent.

Each class, year over year, century over century, not a single Saurian has ranked in the top 36 of his or her class, by all appearances, each racing to the bottom of the ranks seeking to achieve the minimum required result with the least amount of effort.

Some dismiss the Saurians as lazy, but being a Saruian herself, the Envoy knows this to not be true, they are among the hardest working people of the Empire. But they are unfocused, driven by consensus, and will always perform the least amount of work to achieve a particular result as a matter of pride, what Saurians call efficient is what others call lazy.

The Envoy entered the large mounded dirt circle, moving up toward the center where she might speak to the full assembly.

The assembly generally ignored her standing at their center, continuing with their own more personal debates and discussions.

A large bell in the high shadowed dome over her head rang with a deafening boom, nearly knocking her off her feet, and knocking a fair number of standing delegates hard into their chairs, silencing the cacophonous discussions of the assembly as much by the suddenness of the noise as the general momentary deafness experienced by the delegates.

"I am Imperial Envoy Patrish," she said with a courteous swirl.

The hall erupted in boos, catcalls, hissing, and the general hurling of anything at hand down into the speaker's circle. A few dropped their trousers, pissing down toward the Envoy, while other hurled globs of feces, though where this had come from was not altogether clear.

"The Empire has sent to this body a great many Arcane trained in the sorcerous arts of the noble Fanes to aid you and your people," she began in a calm even voice.

"I agree," boomed a voice from high in the assembly, "the arrival of these Akrees is of great concern, they are difficult to capture and their coercion is often inhumane."

"Wait, what?" said the Envoy.

"I second," boomed another voice, "we of the Great and Prosperous Trade Princes of Kivannis have had to put several of these magic spitting demons to death, but only after they rampaged through our neighborhoods causing a tragic loss of life and property."

"That is not why I am here," yelled the Envoy.

"We of the Great and Prosperous Nation of Uvana," began a third voice from the rafters, "have had a good relations with the Arkadees, we have found them to be very cooperative when their family and loved ones loose only a few fingers, very humane."

"Humane indeed," spoke a fourth, "and what of the Akabees terrible magics?"

"Once cooperative, the Arkadee became the sanitation official of district 567, his magical skills cleared the sewers and streets in short order, the scent of the area I am told is now very pleasant indeed." "You what?" said the Envoy.

"This is a wonderous idea," said a loud voice from behind the Envoy, "we should enlist all Arbees to the Honorable Department of Sewers and Sanitation."

"The Arcane are trained in the mysteries of the e'Mral arts, the very essence of creation itself, they are..."

"I second," boomed a voice that cut her off from the left.

The quorum howled its approval, the ensuing debates left the Envoy stunned and off-balance.

When suddenly a voice pierced the din, "My dear Envoy, would it be possible to have the Antbees chained up upon delivery so that they are not so hard to capture?"

"And maybe put in a box, humanely, maybe with some air holes so they do not suffer," followed another voice.

"You want them boxed?" asked the Envoy.

"Wonderful, the Empire agrees that the Arkabees will be boxed for more efficient domestication and deployment of their sanitation duties."

"I agree to no such..."

A loud cheer moved through the room as the quorum passed without objection the "The Domestic Arkabee Sewage and Sanitation Relief Act."

The Envoy left the huge assembly hall, no one much noticing as the conversations had moved on without interruption. "This," she thought, "was going to be hard to explain to the Fanes.



House Petrichor is an old, powerful, and very wealthy Great House with dominion over 80% of the Clockwork Metropolis population.

Officially, House Petrichor is ruled by consensus of the Representatives of the Saurian Trade Federations gathered in the Hall of the People and the more powerful Saurian Executive Council of Emergency Affairs and as far as most Saurians and other Great Houses are concerned, this is true.

And unlike all other Great Houses ruled by Arcane sorcerous nobility, no Arcane serve in positions of power among the Saurian Trade Federations. The Saurians have a general distaste for magic and tend to kill wizards on general principal they are "better" than everyone else.

But this is a fiction. House Petrichor and the Saurian Trade Federations are all governed secretly by the ubiquitous and generally ignored Plumbers Union, and the Honorable Department of Sewage and Sanitation.

The Plumbers Union is where all returning Saurian Arcane are placed, taking on the profession and persona of plumbers, hiding their e'Mral talents from the general Saurian population, and quietly ruling as the most important departmental bureaucracy in a system ruled by bureaucracy.

Eighty percent of all civil funds move through the Honorable Department of Sewage and Sanitation with Plumbers secretly holding 80% of Saurian wealth and lands.

When Imperial Envoys visit to discuss Saurian Affairs, they quietly visit the vast innocuous halls of the Honorable Department of Sewage and Sanitation in drab windowless conference rooms painted sage-green illuminated by shadowless flickering fluorescent tubes to meet with Plumbers.

And as 4-of-5 Arcane are born Saurian, there are a lot of Plumbers, so many that they can be found throughout the Empire conducting the affairs of the Honorable Department of Sewage and Sanitation, often taking on contracts to operate the sewage & sanitation works of other Great Houses.

#### Plumbers are everywhere and in charge of far more than anyone realizes.

Over the 4300-year history of the Metropolis Empire, Saurians have immigrated most everywhere.

The Great House Petrichor is a kaleidoscope of Trade Federations, politics, wealth, and power.

At any given time, no one is much in charge of anything, but the whole thing is so big and so diverse that the Saurians tend to defy categorization or dominion, held together by its dense bureaucracies in times of political discord, most famously the indominable and ever present Honorable Department of Sewage & Sanitation.

# OF THE SAURIANS

The **Pareto Principle** states that 80% of effects come from 20% of causes.

In the Xai universe this generally means that 20% of the population composed of its many varied and exotic races are responsible for 80% of its history, religions, and arts.

The inverse is that 80% of the population are responsible for only 20% of events, this 80% mass of diverse kaleidoscopic peoples are the Saurian Races.

At any given time in any given Metropolis City it is likely that 80% of the population is Saurian, quietly grinding away at life in the background.

The chief attribute of the Saurian races is their ability to adapt and survive in most any environment physical, economic, or political. Saurians are the great bureaucrats, middlemen, farmers, and hardworking peasantry of Xai.

The Saurian races are the average by which all other races are compared. If there is a race most like Earth humans, it is the "birth-school-work-death" Saurians.

Some scholars suggest that all sentient races of Xai are either evolved from ancient Saurian stock or are devolving into the Saurian races. And that every race of Xai shares 80% or more of its genetics with Saurians, even the alien Illinyar'Vooran that had to adapt itself to survive the Xai universe did so by adopting a Saurian torso, a fact that scholars believe led to their eventual sentience and break from their dark masters. Truth is, all Xai is Saurian to some degree.

The iris colors of the Saurian races are a long and complicated tale of hierarchy and discrimination that in many ways mirrors that which is good and evil among the endless parade of Saurian religions.

In the beginning it is thought there were 3 Saurian tribes (called the Bright Races), the **Red**, the **Blue**, and the **Yellow**. The mixing of these races produced the many thousand hued **Orange**, **Green**, and **Violet** races so common today.

The 3-original pure-blood Bright iris colors long ago extinct. And while the ancient "noble" trilogy of colors has vanished from relevance, this has never prevented the frightened or closed-minded from discriminating or enslaving others based solely on the color of their iris.

Already the future of the race can be seen, the mixing of the myriad genetic colors moving toward an inevitable dull rusty hue, few Saurians of modern Xai even able to discriminate a slight Orange, Green, or Violet sheen upon their rust-tone iris (but even this can be enough for fear and discrimination, never underestimate the ability of the frightened or bigoted to cause pain).





#### 23 SPIRE SAURIA HER IRIS BRIGHT ISPRED & BLUE & YELLOW

Spire Sauria is a kaleidoscope of millions of individual bright color fragments shifting and mirrored into larger patterns of brilliance that belies its unique individual parts.

Spire Sauria is an **enormous transit hub** of trains, ground carts & stagecoaches, and river boats of every kind. Some have come to call the Spire Sauria "grand central station."

The waterways that lace under the Spire lead throughout the subterranean canals of the Clockwork Metropolis.

The large train station has hundreds of trains arriving and departing each day from a spiderweb of tracks that crisscross the underground labyrinthian tunnels of the Clockwork Metropolis.

Spire Sauria is a bustling hub of humanity coming and going connecting to the vastness of the Clockwork Metropolis and its myriad cities.



# OO DEMON FOREST IN FLAME & FROST & FOG

The Twin Vales of the Demon Forest are symmetrical, a series of mountains apparently crafted by some ancient wizard or god.

One valley is a furnace hot desert populated by Ifrit and the other an impossibly cold frozen wasteland populated by Djinn and between the two a "habitable" region of smoke and fog.

The swirling weather patterns of the region are treacherous and the sky ever alight with storm and lightning. Word is that a skilled air-ship navigator can "slip-the-storm" and find passages to a million possible paradise worlds. No word yet on the "getting back" part of these rumors.

# OOSTUSANDAS WAKING CHARTREUSE VALE

The **Lusanda Monastery** is famous for their monk's vow of silence and skill as apothecaries and the craft of **Chartreuse**, a bright yellow-green herbal liqueur that is favored by Saurians for its subtle complexity and medicinal qualities.

The monastery has been sacked, burned, looted, and destroyed on multiple occasions but has each time been rebuilt by surviving monks and the secret craft of their apothecary liquors restored by the devout.

Recently, a large Saurinan liquor conglomerate successfully had the monastery seized by House Petrichor and its assets turned over to the conglomerate. But the monks evaded capture and fled with the secrets of making Chartreuse.

# 23 SAURIA CITY

# OO7@EROS VALLEY OF OBSESSION & DELIGHT

The Eros Valley is a place of **predatory night demons** seeking congress with mortal kind. This is a cursed land best avoided and left unexplored.

#### OH FOREST OF SUFFERING AND SEIGHT

This is a forest once used for the **execution of murderers**, nailed to the forest's great oaks, and left to die in prolonged suffering.

The forest was used this way for thousands of years, but the practice has ceased, the forest **prowled by vengeance seeking revenant** now too numerous for executioners to safely enter. Not unexpected really, as in later years more innocent were being executed than truly guilty.

#### OI2 MYEAS HIGH MOUNTAIN MADE OF MACIC

The **High Mountain** is said to have been crafted by the **wizard Myla** as a gift to her beloved daughter.

The mountain was once high and was once one of the wonders of the Clockwork Metropolis having been crafted entirely of a magical silver.

What remains of this once glorious feat of magic and love is a **strip-mine pit** closed a few centuries back after the whole of the mountain had been mined out and minted into coin. These old silver coins can still be commonly found in circulation, but the large silver coins have mostly been split into 8 pie shaped shards called "bits" and used for more common circulation (2 bits being a quarter).

People freely accept these old silver coins but are quick to spend them as they are believed by the especially superstitious Saurians, to be **cursed** by Mylas ghost.

Myla's silver has but a fraction of weight, requiring some minutes to fall the height of but a few feet.

#### O13 THE DOOMWORKS

The Doomworks is a top-secret House Petrichor military installation that was researching chemical and biologic weapons.

The facility and surrounding town were the victim of an accident that released a corrupting agent, infecting all the inhabitants and their menagerie of beasts and reforming them into rayenous flesh-eating horrors.

The town is under strict quarantine, the outer streets cleared of most contagion and the infected sealed into the vast underground research facility.

Officially the Doomworks does not exist and even if it did, House Petrichor was not involved. Thank the gods that there is no-good-reason for ever having to go into this facility.



#### O17 METHEDRINE METAL CITY OF FIRE

**Metal City** is a steel factory town of prisoners, indentured servants, and slaves addicted to a cocktail of drugs and forced to work without food or sleep. This is a cruel and heartless town that can fairly be called "hell-onearth".

As the magic of the e'Mral mists is bound into the art of all things made, so is the torture, torment, and suffering of its crafters.

The weapons of Metal City are among the most painful and deadly crafted.

This is a foundry that crafts **weapons** of evil intent, often the suffering soul of the living bound within their final craft, a weapon of special vengeance, suffering, and terror. This is a dread place that makes dread weapons.

#### **O2O** THIS VALE OF TEARS

Hidden within the Lilith Forest is a vale of sorrow in which lies and abandoned town of artfully crafted gingerbread and sugar. At the center of town is church of melted translucent colored sugars. Within the church is an alter upon which lies a most beautiful Saurian princess, asleep.

Those that find this scene, do nothing, and leave, are the source of these stories. There are no stories of anyone ever having done anything else except leave the way they came, just a long list of disappeared adventurers, scholars, and explorers that apparently did "something".

Tourists used to come regularly to see the nameless princess, as did researches and scholars, but as disappearances mounted, interest waned and the place long since forgotten.

# **023** FOREST OF LIGHT & JOY & WONDER

The Mountainous Forests of Light were a glory to behold, or so the stories say.

The forest was once inhabited by the most beautiful and innocent creatures of Joy & Wonder.

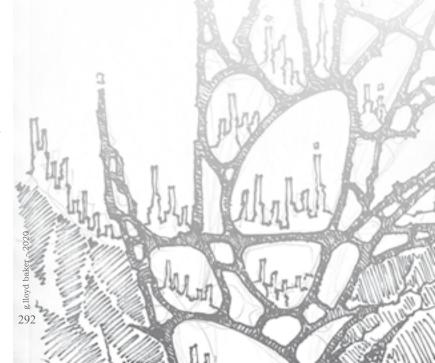
Saurians soon discovered that food from the enchanted beasts could cure the sick and fill the belly for days.

The trees could be burned to produce charcoal that would burn for days and sometimes weeks. Similarly, the plants and herbs and flowers each produced miraculous gifts.

Over the short period of a dozen years, the **beasts of the forest were** captured and sold as pets or rendered into the most wonderful jerky. The **trees felled** and burned down to charcoal and exported as "wonderous". The **plants and herbs bundled** and sold in bulk to foreign traders, the flowers by then had stopped blooming.

The modern-day Forest of Light is a rocky mountain of **scrub and bramble**, the valleys of which have been filled with refuse as a landfill.

Such are the ways of Saurians.



#### 036 CASTLEDIO HIGHMOUNTAIN SILVERSONG

At the apex of Wizard Mountain is the glacial castle of **Dio Silversong**.

Dio was a paladin of great renown that with his holy sect of warriors protected every land that could be seen from his high mountain for a great many long and peaceful generations.

The modern ruins of the castle have been claimed by dozens of religions over the past few thousand years and various churches, chapels, and alters built and destroyed and built again upon its holy foundations.

The ruins of the Castle remain contested to modern day and are holy to dozens of religions that claim divine providence.

The Imperial Guard do their best to maintain sufficient peace that pilgrims can safely visit and pray.

The bodies of Dio and his 12 Silversong Knights were recently excavated from plundered tombs and put on "tasteful" display under loan to the central museum of antiquities, where visitors can drop a couple bits and look upon the mummified corpses of the most holy and virtuous of Saurian kind.

# **058** FINDER'S CITY OF THE TOST

Finder's City lies wedged between the cities of the Illinyar'Vooran and the Aiken'Kreer.

This is something of a warzone between the 3 Great Houses, all seeking dominion over **Finders City** and the surrounding coastline.

The war between the 3 Great Houses has raged on and off for a few centuries but has lately gone cold when most of the City and surrounding coastlines were finally plundered and destroyed by war. There simply is not much left to be fighting over.

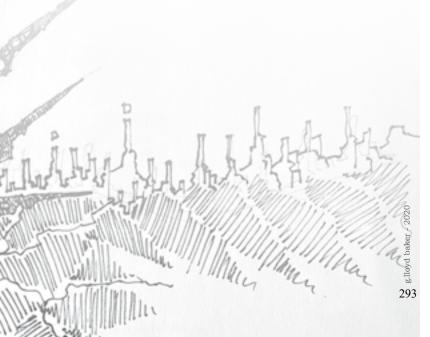
Finder's City and its surrounding coasts were once a place of great magic, the work of the wizard Finder the Seeker. Finder's City was crafted to be the place that lost people, ships, and things would find their way too.

The city itself was a crazy and random collection of architecture, buildings filled with people that would suddenly appear the moment before their ultimate demise.

People the moment before their inevitable death would find themselves wandering the streets of Finder's City. Ships at the brink of inevitable sinking suddenly sailing the calm waters of its coastlines.

But no more. Finder's City and its once beautiful coastal towns are ruins of war and plunder. The lost have stopped arriving.

That is until a ship arrived along its shores, an alien looking high-rise tower appeared at the center of what was the city, and small child was seen wandering the ruins. All 3 Great Houses sending in military scout teams.







This is a city of poetry, music, and the art. In the older Saurian traditions these are the purview of trained high society women.

Paranicia is a city of boarding schools for young girls and women to learn the skills and arts to be a good and proper wife of a man with wealth and prospects.

Girls of Paranicia are taught the classical and romantic languages, poetry, conversational arts, party arts, and other societal masteries.

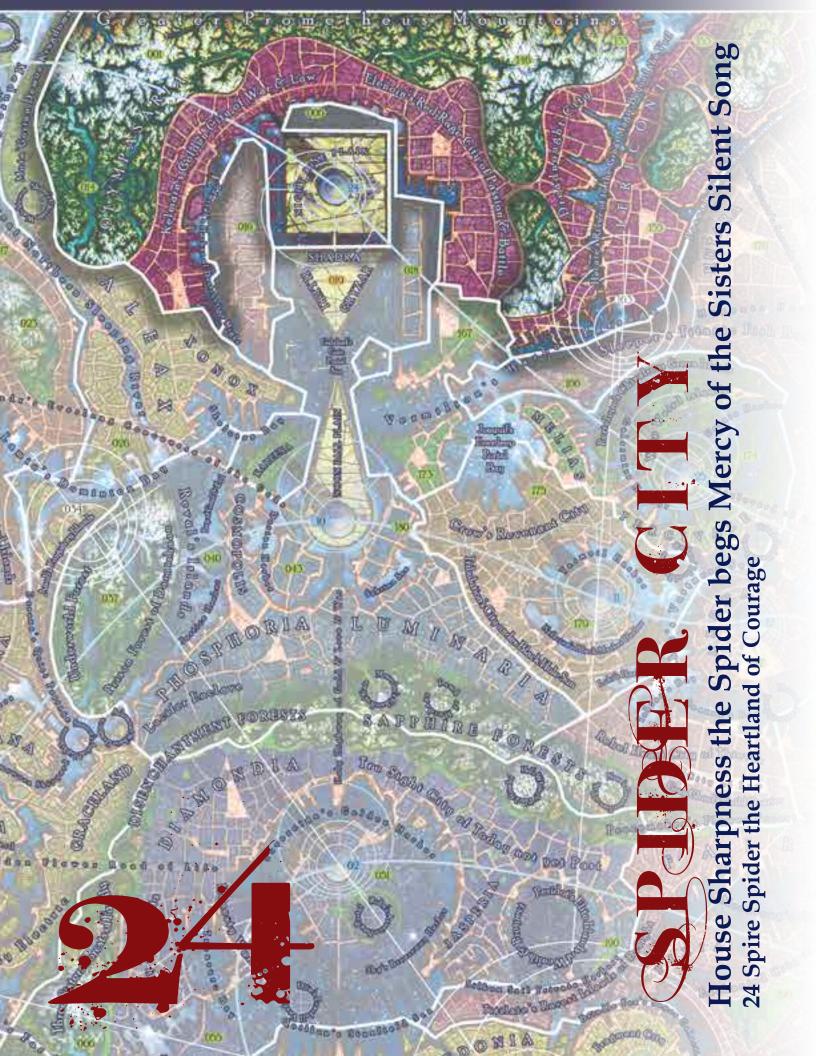
As a result, the women of Saurian nobility and old-money wealth are the most educated and capable of their kind but at the same time relegated to dependency upon often poorly educated and boorish men of inheritance, barred from politics, professions, or the ownership of land or business.

That said, the women of Paranicia are perhaps the true rulers of House Petrichor.

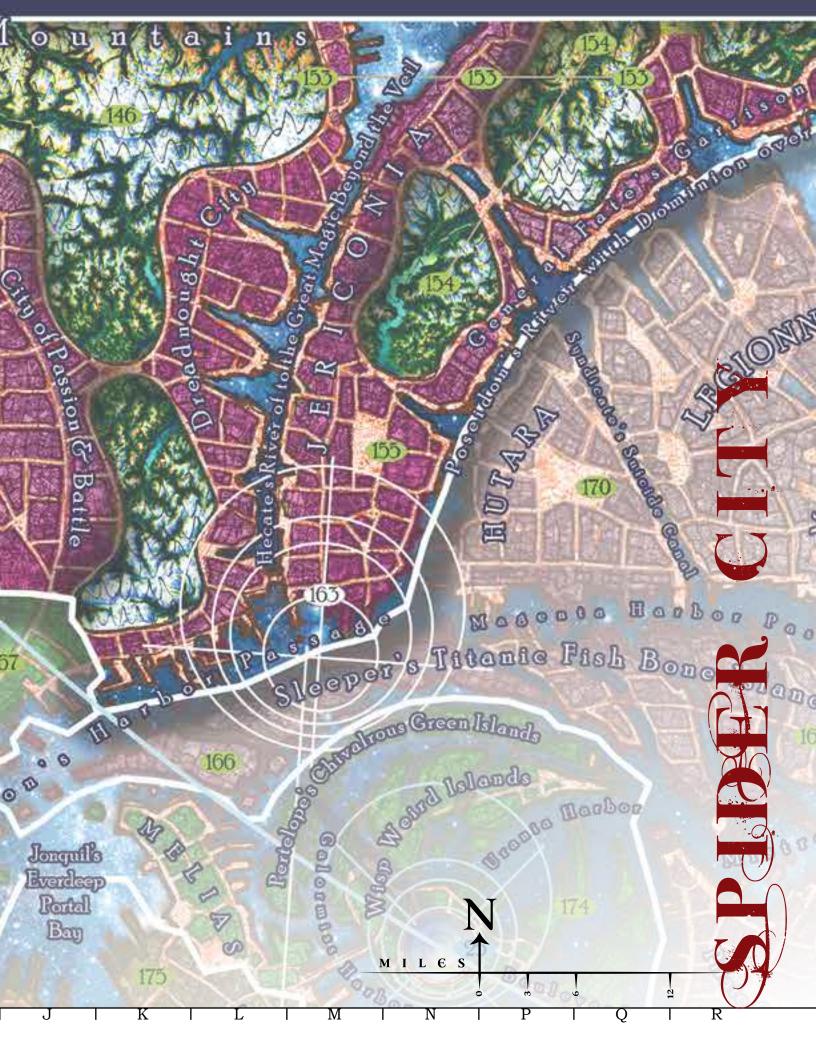
If you believe conspiracy theories, the Paranicians have long been manipulating marriages and the blood lines of children to produce increasingly brilliant women and increasingly weak minded men and to move wealth and power by means of generational inheritance to their secret control.

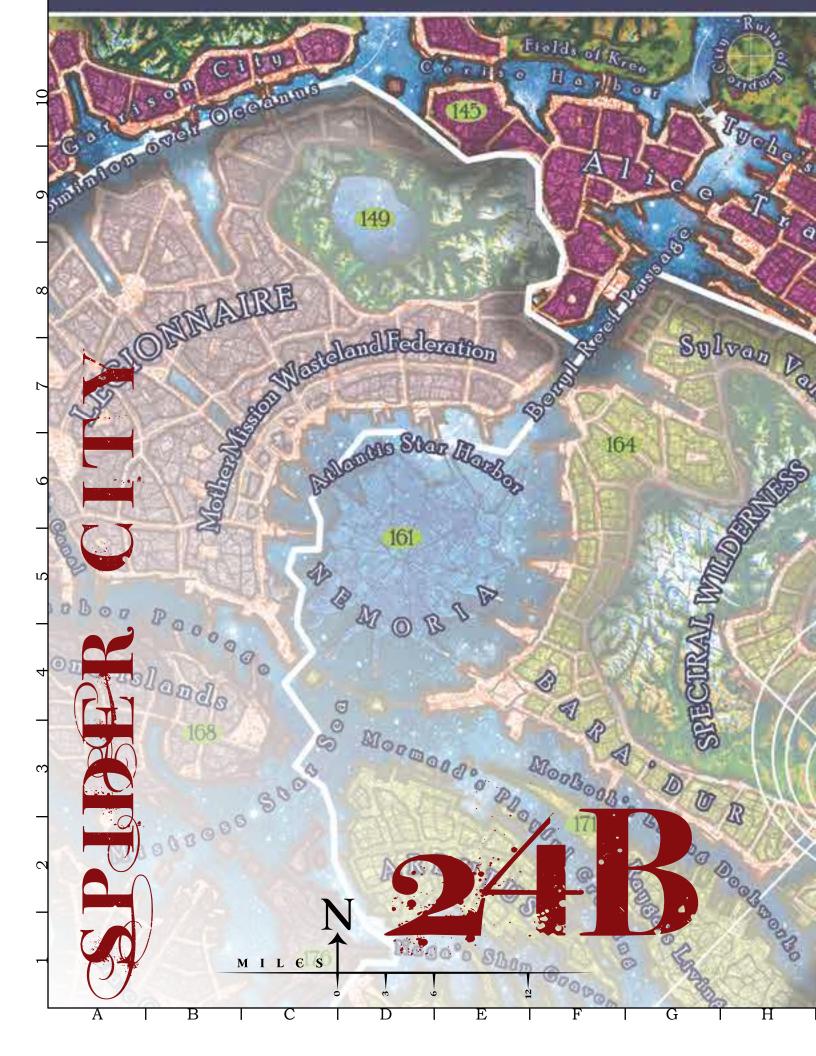
Those that understand only the appearance of power and wealth respect and deal with House Petrichor, those that recognize true power and wealth will find their way to the streets of Paranicia.

...the women of Paranicia are perhaps the true rulers of House Petrichor.











#### THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

The Queen, as all her kind, was indescribably beautiful, a vision beyond the obvious physical glory of her perfect feminine curves and silken black & white skin tones, whites swirling into gray swirling into blacks, mesmerizing. Her beauty was of a kind that would devour a man's soul that he would forever be enslaved by her enchantments, bound to her destiny as if his own. Such were the feminine wiles of the Shadara'Rau.

Her male counterparts, the Shadara'Ryn, outnumber their feminine counterparts 10to1, yet have always been slaves to the charms of their Queens.

The Queen was young, recently arrived from her long studies among the Fanes, her sorcerous skills now formidable, she imagined she could as easily destroy a rival as dispose of an insect. Her ambition meant that she needed to begin her work assembling a harem, the men that controlled the military and economic might that would soon be controlled by her.

The man that entered her chambers was a military captain of impeccable breeding, a true stallion, it was only by coincidence and opportunity that such a powerful man had not yet been bound, she marveled at her own political skill that she was able to maneuver him here tonight right under the noses of much older and more powerful Queens, "has-beens," she thought, "too old and stupid to have ambitions of their own."

Her confidence filled the room as she greeted her victim, "Welcome captain, my beloved, I could just eat you up right now," she smiled.

The captain looked shy and a bit overwhelmed that he had drawn the attention of a Queen. This was indeed a rare honor.

Her veil gown did little to hide the swirling hypnotic noir patterns of her naked skin, clinging as she moved in all the right places.

He knew of such things, they were core to Shadaran society, but he had to choose the bonding, his soul might well be enslaved, but the choice had to be his, or so he had been told. Some tales of enforced bindings never ended well for either party. But this new Queen was a delight, their conversations flowed easily, she was ambitious, and he would be First of her harem. He was expected to be greatly honored.

So easy the evening had gone, the old warning of her mother and grandmothers vanished from her mind, they were old after all, and she was Arcane, powerful beyond any of her family line. She was better.

Later in the evening after a fair amount of drink and negotiation the pair swept into bed, their young passions an explosion of joy and optimism. Upon their climax his soul entwined with hers, but not as she imagined.

As suddenly, the captain set his left hand upon her neck, his right hand driving a stiletto deep into her heart. Her eyes wide, his soul already bound to another Queen.

The Queen of Hearts drifted into the room, the captain rising from the young dying queen, a thin stream of blood trailing across her naked curves toward the floor.

"Thank you, captain," she said nodding, "leave us."

The captain departed.

The Queen of Hearts leaning over the young queen, kissing her lovingly upon the lips. "Perhaps we might talk of your future," she said, "if you have a moment to spare for one as old and foolish as myself, that is."

A tear escaped the eye of the young queen's right eye, moving slowly down her cheek, paralyzed.

"Such a dear," said the Queen of Hearts, "your charity knows no bounds," she said sitting herself in a lovely silk embroidered chair facing the nearly dead sorceress still lying naked upon the bed with a ruby jeweled stiletto plunged into her chest. "Shall be begin with a discussion about respect my beloved daughter?"

...his left hand upon her neck, his right hand driving a stiletto deep into her heart.



Spider City is a martial city of honor and tradition ruled by **noble Lords** that serve **divine Queens**.

Spider City eschews high technomancy in favor of honest craft and place, most of the city being an environment of low-rise but delicately beautiful wooden houses, temples, and citadels. Spider City life is highly ritualized, everything, no matter how mundane, a matter of pride and purpose. The city is clean, sophisticated, and alive with art and pride.

But being a city among the Clockworks, higher technomancy is freely available and even illicit Adrena'Chrome technomancy is relatively easy to obtain. As such, there are a great many modern conveniences artfully and subtly built into Spider City and modern weaponry commonly maintained for home defense.

The Spider City military is one that favors the traditional appearance of katana and artfully crafted lacquer armor.

However, House Sharpness maintains several legions of titanic Arcane piloted **flight-capable battle-armor** equipped with the latest in sharpness-blade and pulse-cannon technomancy.

Shadaran Titans are a small force as measured by the Great House standards but have a unique and terrible surgical strike capability, able to bring down most any other Great House before a defense might be managed.

# HOUSE SHARPNESS THE SPIDER BEGS MERCY OF THE SISTERS SILENT SONG

House Sharpness is ruled by the Spider Queens, a council of 11 Queens, 10 the leaders of Minor Houses and an 11th, the Queen of Hearts, a religious elder of consensus appointment for life by the other 10 and whose role is moral guidance except to occasionally break a 5/5 Council of Queens tie.

House Sharpness is not the largest House nor the wealthiest with little interest in economics beyond those that fulfill their immediate and longterm interests which the Shadara'Rau famously keep to themselves.

House Sharpness is however among the most respected of the Great Houses given their skill of political intrigue and strict adherence to the martial traditions of honor.

The Shadara'Ryn armies while not large are among the most disciplined and deadly known, master demonhunters and dualists with their quickdraw pistols & more traditional katana blades, always the favorite in most any one-on-one encounter.

Honor, tradition, and knowledge are the hallmarks of House Sharpness and the Queen Covens that dominate her politics.

And while the military might of House Sharpness is formidable, it is the politics and impossibly convoluted intrigue of her Covens that is more frightening. It is said of the House Sharpness; that which you see is true, that which you do not see will cut.

The importance of Coven politics is hard to overstate but the most visible examples are related to war. More often than not, great conflicts that seemed to inevitably result in war have unexpectedly collapsed into bloodless surrender or negotiations following a long string of coincident family events, fortuitous coups, ill-timed deaths, and endless iterations of the unlikely, always absent any obvious or even hidden Shadaran influence, rather just happenstance.

And the Shadara'Rau are everywhere (if in small numbers) as technical advisors, researchers, teachers, courtesans, and military leaders in every Combine and Great House, sworn to serve with faith and honor the liege of their assignment but ever dangerous as they weave their political webs of intrigue.

House Sharpness is a multi-cultural hub if inclusion and talent with the only caveat being that a Lord may only be male (the High Lord Shadara'Ryn), and that members of a Queen's court may only be female (the Queen herself Shadara'Rau).

House Sharpness is closely aligned with the Crystal Shard Empress and their martial code of honor and tradition closely aligns with those of the Imperial Guard.

Consequently, a full third of the Imperial ranks of Paladins and Priests are filled with Shadara'Rau among the highest-ranking Priests and the Shadara'Ryn named among the most influential Paladins. So close is the bond between House Sharpness and House Empire that some have suggested that House Sharpness is the true Imperial power of the Clockwork Metropolis.



The Queens and High Lords of House Sharpness are of a race called Shadara.

Shadarans are thought to have first evolved along the cliffs and shores of a vast luminous underground sea within Xai's demonic sub-world. Shadaran civilization both survives and thrives as predators and slavers of their demonic neighbors.

The Shadaran tale is something of a heroine's tale as 1 of 10 Shadaran are female (Rau) and 9 in 10 Shadaran children is male (Ryn). When children are born, they are born in litters of 10, one being female and 9 being male with occasional variation (an all-female birth being an omen of high religious significance and a no-female litter an ill-omen).

Female Shadarns are seductresses with the ability to charm and compel any male of their kind to obedience, a male may be bound and enslaved for life by sexual congress.

Primitive Shadaran society is organized as a stable, the Shadaran Queen maintains a stable of males, the more powerful, clever, and resourceful her stable the more powerful the Queen.

Shadarans build their houses, villages, and cities into the cliff-sides of valleys and mountains and when none exist, they have been known to craft great stone pyramids into which they have crafted their great earthen cities.

**ShadaraRau** are classically elegant, tall, thin, and a touch elfin with perfect silken skin in tints of white shifting to gray shifting to jet with long jet or shock white hair or some raven mix of the jet and white. Shadara'Rau are creatures rendered entirely in black and white as in a classic noir film with over-large emotionally charged eyes.

Shadara'Rau are color blind, seeing the world around them only in shades of white and tints of black but they are exceedingly smart and perceptive, able to learn to identify the unique shades of gray that align with colors as seen by other races.

Also, Shadara'Rau can see with perfect black & white clarity in complete darkness but suffer debilitating blindness (not to mention being subject to a cruel sun-burn) under direct sunlight, thus requiring the use of **spider weave veils** or mirror eye protection to operate under the always unpleasant and unrelenting harshness of daylight.

Shadara'Rau are famously smart but more famous for their intricate politics and circular plans with plans.

Modern Shadaran culture is organized around Covens headed by female elders and a single Queen as agreed by consensus of the all-female Queen's Court. War and conflict between covens are common but rarely rise to the level of physical violence, rather the covens battle and defeat their rivals by way of intrigue, influence, and politics (to do otherwise would be barbaric).

The spoils of war in primitive days were prime male breeding stock while in modern day, victory means much more as Shadaran culture is among the most influential of the Clockwork Metropolis.

The Shadara'Rau are also famous for being **hopeless romantics**; impossibly beautiful and arrestingly hyper-sexual beings, said to be able to enslave a male to their will with absentminded effort.

Despite the collective power of the Shadara'Rau as one of the great powers of Xai, Shadara'Rau arts are dominated by romance novels, soap operas, and over-wrought movies and plays that render the emotional highs and lows of "true" love.

Only slightly less impressive than the Shadara'Rau grace and beauty is their ruthless ambition, curiosity, and creativity. Shadara'Rau are great inventors and researchers and while they believe in romance, true-love, and fairy tales, they know technomancy and academics, maintaining a powerful military, the envy of most other Great Houses.

Shadara'Ryn culture is more simple, existing to serve their bound Queen like the bushido and honor rituals of the Samurai of ancient Japan.

Shadara'Ryn are born killers, the kind that thrive in a hellscape dominated by demon-kind.

The Shadara'Rau have always had a thing for spiders and reflected in their ancient religions and engraved on the Shadara'Rau soul. Shadara'Rau Lycanthrope is the form of a long legged elegant black-widow like spider while the Shadara'Ryn a more gruesome tarantula form.



# 24 SPIRE SPIDER THE HEARTEAND OF COURAGE

The Spider Spire is an impossibly slender gently curving vertical spire of jet and white that reaches miles into the sky, terminating in a monomolecular point.

The inner reaches of the Spire are closed to outsiders.

Within are the great hall of the Eleven Queens of Sharpness and the Church of the Queen of Hearts (sometimes called the Red Queen).

#### **OOI** WASTELAND ICE PEAKS

This is the realm of the **Ice Devil kingdoms**, an especially lawful race of giants skilled in the arts of frozen technomancy, ice ships, and deep space travel.

The Ice Devils are close allies of House Sharpness and personally loyal to its Queens.

The Ice Devils are not especially welcoming to visitors and combined with the extreme cold and near absence of atmosphere among its peaks means that little is known Ice Devil affairs, or their ice crafted cities.

#### OI4 VALLEY OF COLORS GLORIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL

Being a place of dominated by a bright collision of color the Shadaran see only a garish clash of grays. The fact that the color-sight races find beauty in this place is something the Shadaran will have to take on faith.

The valley is a favorite place of recreation among the non-Shadaran races of House Sharpness.

The fact that the Shadaran avoid the area on general principal that it is an ugly and decidedly unpleasant place makes it even more popular.

The vale was discovered when the Shadaran were scouting for a new trash-dump site but were instead "coerced" to turn it over to the color-sighted as recreational paradise.

### 145 THE MILLION YEARS ANCIENT CITY OF KA

The **City of Ka** by all accounts has existed for a million years. If the stories are to be believed, the City of Ka was found upon a far distant world by the Mistress, the city and her people ferried to Xai and placed in its current location, the first inhabitants and the founding of the Clockwork Metropolis.

The City of Ka is among the most unusual of Xai, a place of seemingly ordinary medieval bars, inns, and homes but never quite ordinary, a place of "old magic" before the Mistress. The e'Mral mists so ubiquitous throughout the whole of the Xai universe flow around the City of Ka as if around a bubble. Technomancy of any form more complex than a stick fails to function in the City of Ka.

The City of Ka is **holy ground** of a kind that defies violence or harm. As such, Ka has ever been neutral ground, a place of sanctuary to meet enemies or discuss the weather with friends over a beer without fear of anything more harmful than a hangover or the cut of a sharp word.

# 146 VASTNESS WILDERNESS IN WHITE

This is a wilderness of perpetual snow and ice, an ancient battleground where millions of soldiers on each side of the line perished only to be raised in mass as immortal undead by the answering of a prayer that they might continue the fight and not ever fall victim to their foes.

The two sides now fight an endless war.

#### 148 VUURAN MONASTERY OF WICKEPTIFS

The Monastery is a place free of Imperial influence and House Sharpness influence and lies under the sole dominion of the **Queen of Hearts**. No one is quite sure what happens here, but it seems to be a place part religious sanctuary and part Shadara'Rau prison-monastery.

#### 153: SHADOW WALE CHOSE DEFENSE BARRICADE

The Shadow Wall is a graveyard of ancient fallen demon-hunters, paladins, and priests arranged in a long line. The ghosts of the fallen ever vigilant and tireless in their defense of Clockwork Metropolis against demonic intrusion.

#### 154 ICE FANG FOREST OF ETERNAL HUNGERS

The Ice Fang Forest is the home of the Ice Fang, a holy clan of werewolves cursed with immortality. The Lycanthrope of the Ice Fang cleanses all demonic corruption upon the first full moon and should the infected survive, be invited to join the eternal hunt.

The Ice Fang tend to despise House Sharpness, House Empire, and most everything about the Shadara'Rau in specific and the Clockwork Metropolis in general.

The Ice Fang are a paladin order of demon-hunters that feels the modern orders of Imperial paladins have gone soft and lost their way and that the Shadara'Rau are a faithless collection of sorceresses dedicated to superfluous self-interest.

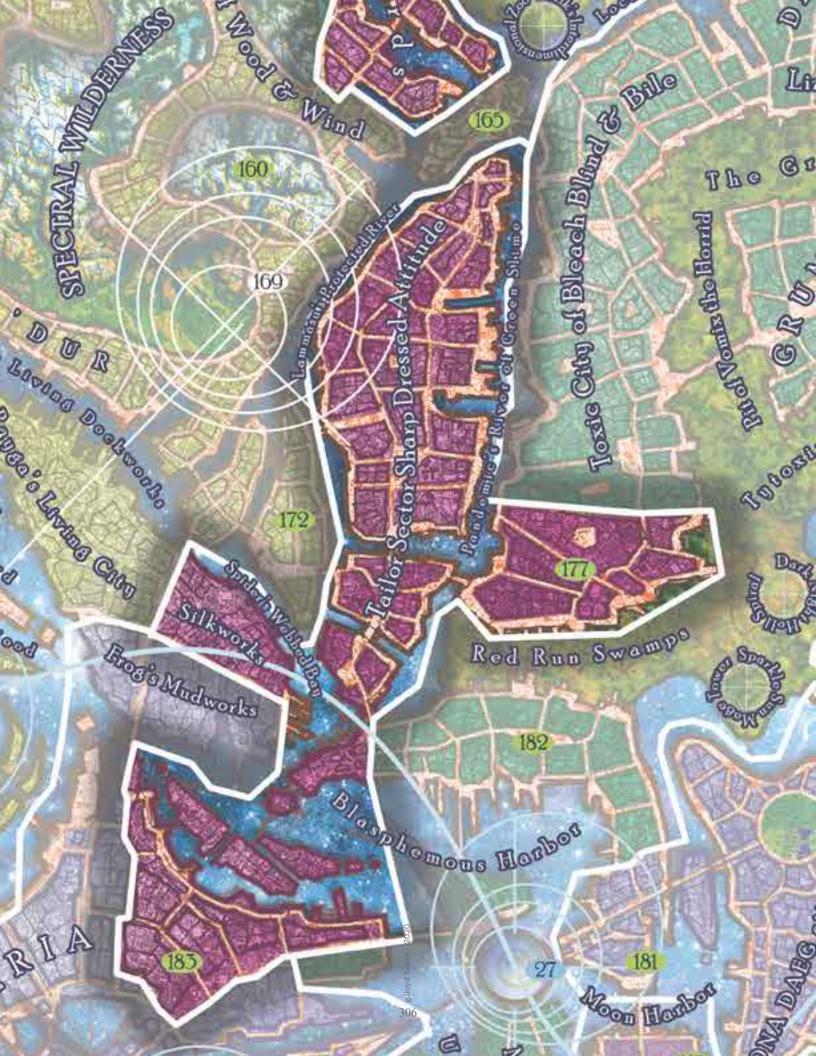
The Ice Fang generally ignore the affairs of outsiders if left alone and House Sharpness and the Empire generally leave the Ice Fang alone.

# 155 SINCERITYS CITY OF BELIEF AND INTENT

The **City of Belief** is a famous Imperial enclave, an ancient complex of temples and churches built on more ancient holy site foundations built upon still more ancient druidic cyclopean monuments upon a holy ground that predates the Mistress.

The City of Belief is home to churches, temples, and holy sites of a thousand different religions both past and present, a veritable **street of the gods**.





Unique to this place is that the **gods** tend to turn somewhat real, manifesting as the faith of the believers dictate and with a power commensurate with the number and sincerity of faith.

Most of the gods of the City of Belief are minor or especially esoteric beings without the power to leave the City.

But sometimes when faith is strong, certain gods have been known to fully manifest as real and bend the course of mortal history. The Fanes work ever to ensure that no faith is ever so strong.

# 163 DRIFT CITY TWIN THE CHOST UNCLEAN

The **Drift City Twin** is the second of nine Drift Cities crafted during the Calibahn Empire by the Nine Necromancer Kings. The city is about 18-miles diameter, a series of concentric rings and voids upon which was once a city of unparalleled marvel, the buildings of the city crafted from the bones of a countless multitude of murdered slaves. After the fall of the Calibahn Empire, the City was razed, the bones interned upon holy ground.

The foundation rings of the City remained and in time was left to fallow as a wild haunted forest floating forgotten high overhead.

In recent centuries House Sharpness has claimed the City as its own and established elite training academies and military hangers for its Titan armor legions among recently manicured forests and parklands.

The Drift City however remains haunted and a disturbing number of Titan armor possessions by angry Calibahn spirits has caused a disquieting loss of life.

# 177 WEREWOLF TANGLE FANG WHITE WARRENS

See 154 Ice Fang. Not all individuals cleansed of demonic corruption by means of Ice Fang lycanthrope join the hunt, some seek to return to more human lives in the Clockworks. This is an often-difficult process as the mental scars and memories of demonic corruption are not so easily overcome.

The Werewolf Tangle is a warren of remote streets and quiet bars and inns where members of the clan seek to restore their humanity.

Over the centuries the Warrens have become a haven for the care and **comfort of the mentally broken**, especially veterans suffering post traumatic harm or Shadara'Ryn left ronin upon the death of a bound Queen.

Notably, the Ice Fang lycanthrope does not affect most mortal kind, only affecting those overcome by demonic corruption.

# 183 MARIONETTES CITY OF DOLLS

The City of Dolls is a place renowned for its **courtesan guilds** and for its many disgraced Shadara'Rau, fallen from favor and privilege but not from power.

The courtesan guilds make secret use of the Shadara'Rau ability to enslave a lover's mind to create networks of willing spies that have infiltrated every aspect of House politics. The City of Dolls is perhaps the most well-organized secret spy society to have ever existed, the true purpose and master of which (if there be one) remains a frustrating mystery.

# Siekworks

Central to all Shadaran technomancy is **spydersilk** in all its thousands of forms, purposes, and specialized uses.

Specially gathered, bred, and wizard crafted spiders are used to create spyder'silk that is indestructible, impossibly strong, super conducting, e'Mral conducting, nerve replacing, and most everything else one might imagine (spun metal and crystal strands) and beyond (spun darkness and light gossamer).

Spyder'silk in all its myriad forms and uses is the unique foundation of all Shadaran technomancy and the source of its greatest exports.

The Silkworks is the center of Shadaran spyder'silk production in the Clockworks, especially as it relates to perma-clean clothing, exotic luminous fabrics, and weightless armors.

The Silkworks is also the focus of intense espionage endeavors by most everyone with a spy. Some have come to suspect that the entire Silkworks is a **honey trap** designed to mislead, misdirect, and ultimately ensnare its prey (most anyone with an unhealthy curiosity) and that any spyder'silk operations of consequence are located safely elsewhere, likely within the very secret interiors of the Spider Spire.



The Alice Trance is perhaps the most famous Shipyard of the Clockwork Metropolis, famous now in modern day for its creation of **Shadaran Titan Armor**.

Titan Armor is a technomancy unique to House Sharpness and the ancient Shadaran race. And while the technomancers of the Adrena'Chrome can emulate the giant armor forms with their higher robotic technomancy, none can match the elegance and artfully seamless interaction of Shadaran Titan Armor and Arcane pilot.

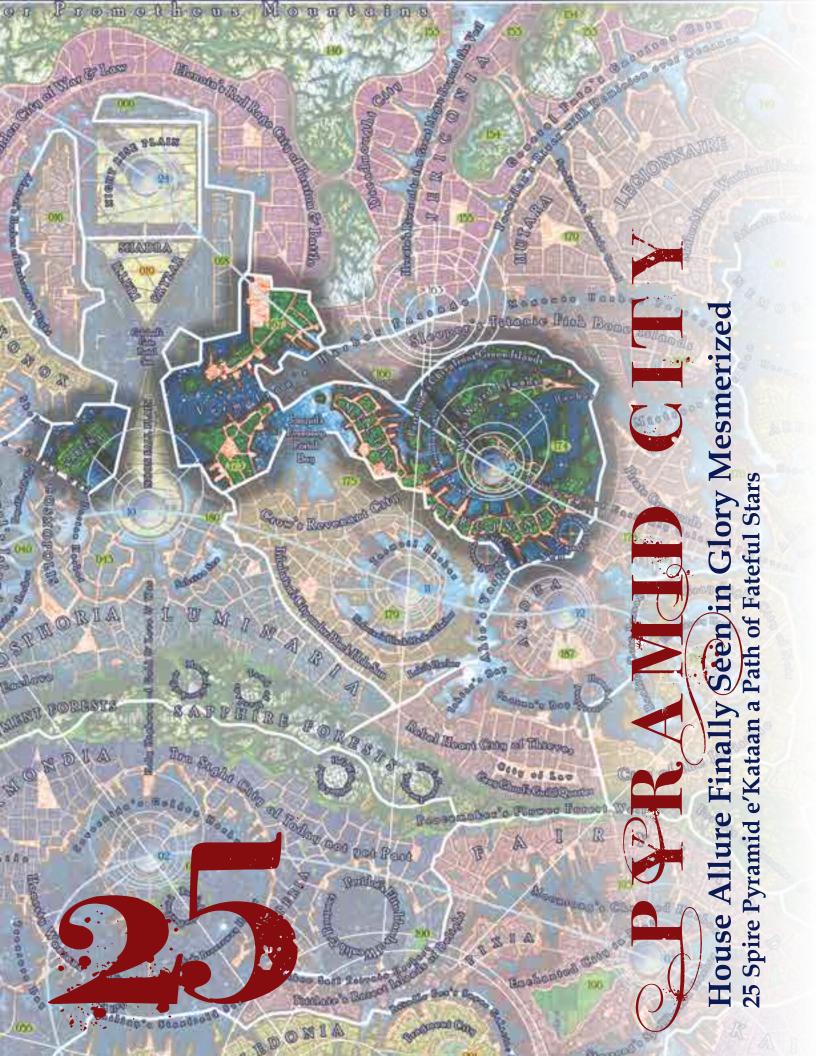
Alice Trance is a place that invites technomancers from across the realms to serve as apprentice builders. Even the technomancers of the Adrena'Chome seek out such apprenticeships.

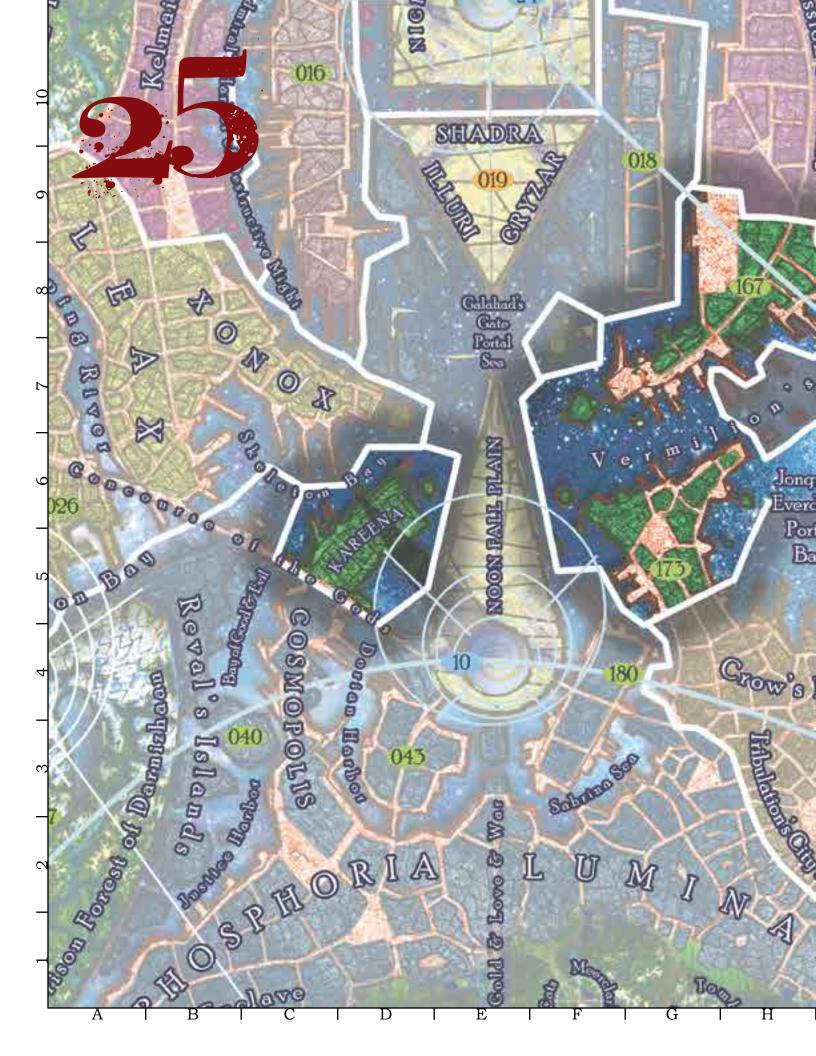
But few students understand the **Meta**, the idea that the **whole is greater than the sum of parts** and that the skill and discipline of the crafter is more important still. The frustrating idea that the mastery of an art is greater than a higher capability of lesser craft, the prime example being that Shadaran Titans regularly outperform, survive, and destroy obviously superior piloted armors of the Adrena'Chorme.

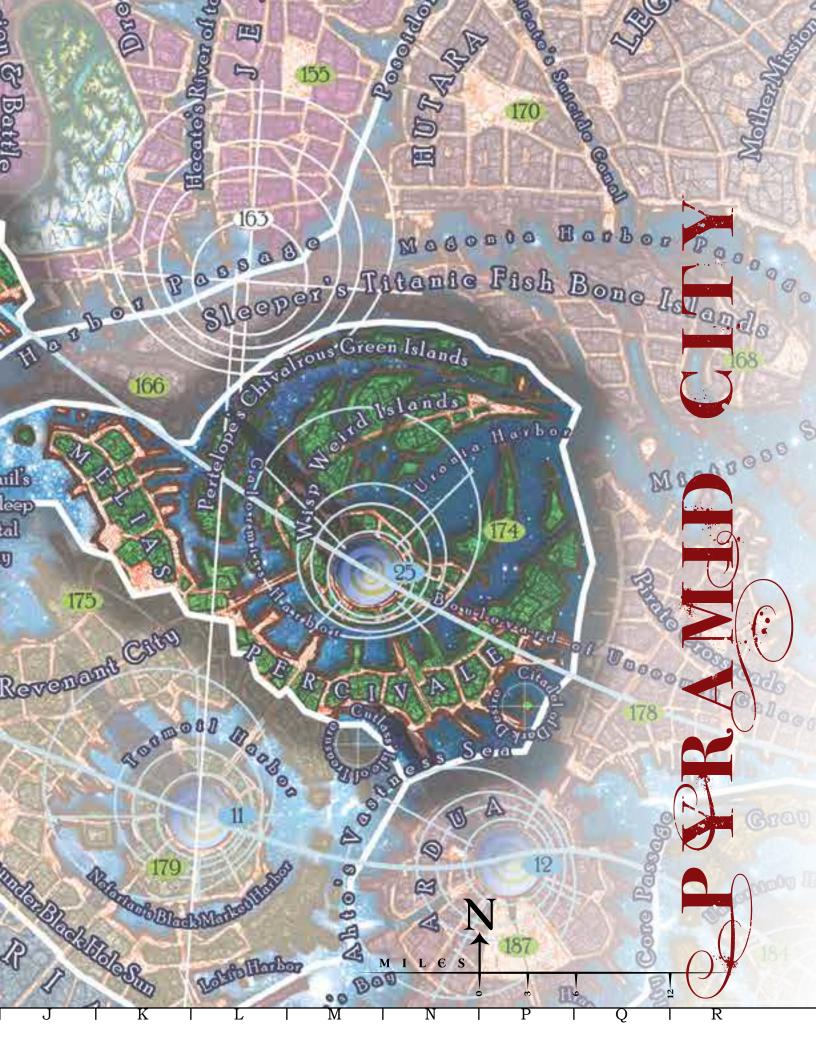
Alice Trance was herself the most famous ship builder of Shadaran legend, a Queen of extraordinary renown. Her techniques and mastery of war and shipbuilding are still trained, a kind of zen-art of assemblage and human interaction that can be equated to the artful creation of a katana blade or the spiritual performance of a tea ceremony.

The mystic relation of man and craft is a frustrating lesson rarely understood by the technomancers of the Adrena'Chrome that believe that brute force and numbers can defeat any adversary.

ser - 20







#### JUSTICE

The Paladin had not earned the nickname among the town in which he lived, The Decapitator. He had not deserved the name, in 40years living in this town he had rarely needed to kill anyone, let alone cut their heads off and leave them to be found.

His town was a quiet one, crime since his arrival largely fled, he considered himself semi-retired. He moved about the prosperous town as a citizen, offering aid when needed, but not drawing much attention to himself.

A series of murders had caught his attention near the harbor, he began walking the streets and talking to neighbors and began to see the threads which bound the victims, began to see the pattern of the future they revealed, like finding orbiting planets around an unseen star, their patterns told you exactly what was there and where it would be.

The murders had all been children, wicked and tortuous, a kind so horrible no one really wants to know, they just need it to end.

The murderer had left his apartment, the Paladin veiling himself in e'Mral mists and slipping in as a ghost through the wall. The dread emotions of the place made him sick, the e'Mral mists within the room rebelled, coiled, and wounded.

He looked about the room, seeing the *ghostly forms of his future search of* the apartment, he watched himself at the mantle find the hidden cupboard containing the slain children's heads.

He saw ghosts of himself variously around the room as the future image of the murderer returned, he watched a dozen fights ensue and a dozen results unfold in but a moment.

He stood at the mantle when the murderer reentered his apartment. His rage immediate, the Paladin extending sweeping e'Mral mists through the rushing figure, his body paralyzed as *he crashed hard to the floor before the* mantle.

He saw the no future in the man laying helpless at his feet. He swirled red e'Mral mists about the murderer and proceeded to saw his head off with a rusty carving knife he had found in the kitchen, the man feeling the full pain and horror of his own decapitation.

Sitting the still living head upon the dining room table the murderer's eyes wide with terror looking across the room at his own headless corpse positioned across him in a chair.

"A messenger has been sent," the Paladin said, "the authorities will arrive shortly."

"You are no better than me," gargled the severed head, "you are a murderer."

"Not so," said the Paladin leaving the apartment, "you are not dead," he slammed the door shut as he left.

The Paladin heard garbled screams of terror from behind the door as he left, quietly passing a rush of local police as he left the building.

Now at least he had earned his odd nickname, he thought, perhaps someone had seen this moment all those years ago.

# He saw the no future in the man laying helpless at his feet.

# PYRAMID CITY

The Pyramid City is built in the form of giant stone buildings, temples, and pyramids. Pyramid City is a glory of gardens, orchards, waterfalls, canals, and ancient trees.

This is a rich and diverse trading city populated by a race called the **Kataan**, an inquisitive race of scholars, sages, travelers, explorers, traders, and merchants.

The many **famed bazaars** of the Pyramid City are filled with goods and spices from across Xai and worlds beyond.

The many libraries of the Pyramid City are filled with ancient texts, scrolls, books, and recorded knowledge since the coming of the Mistress to Xai. And while much has been lost over the intervening Ages in times of violence and war, a great amount endures to modern day, more than might be read or understood in a million mortal lifetimes.

The city is of ancient low-rise stone construction arranged around a labyrinth of narrow streets, alleys, and mews is filled with a crush of pedestrian humanity. The Pyramid City is popular with tourists who come to enjoy the city's amazing ancient sites, its legendary bazaars, and epically divine spiced foods.

The City has endured many past Ages and various apocalypse changes. Some say the city has always been and always will be.

# ROVIDENCE FINALLY SEEN IN GLORY MESMERIZED

House Providence is ruled by an ancient race called the Kataan.

House Providence is of an adventurous and interventionalist mindset and is among most important leaders among the Great Houses of the Clockwork Metropolis.

House Providence is especially famous for its many **Paladin Orders** dedicated to the protections of people unable to stand up for themselves. All Kataan Arcane are raised as Paladin heroes of the people, superhero sorcerers of a sort that make fighting crime and injustice their life's work.

House Providence is also the **self- proclaimed inquisitor-in-chief**among the Great Houses, operating one of the largest investigative journalism, police, and spy organizations known.

The symbol of House Providence a great Eye like the **Eye of Providence** or the Eye of Horus, depicting the sun looking upon the earth from the sky.

House Providence regularly publishes its investigative findings to the public in a series of well circulated news outlets; a near constant needle in the eye of those that seek to operate in defense of the pragmatic or lurk in the shadows.

House Providence is famed for its beliefs in right, good, and fair justice.

House Providence Paladins be they journalistic, scholarly, or criminally investigative are famed for their pursuit of the truth no matter the consequence to self or loved ones. The Paladins of House Providence are believers.



The most striking feature of the Kataan are their large jet eyes that are as if filled with a shifting galaxy of stars, gifting the Kataan with unusual foresight of events and veiled truths, often seeing the invisible serendipitous ties which bind people's fates.

The Kataan are a **creepy sort of folk**, always staring through you, seeing, and sometimes talking to ghosts no one else can see. They are often truthtellers, fortune tellers, seers, mystics, journalists, investigators, detectives, soothsayers, dream walkers and all manner of disturbing prophets and wandering madmen. But most famed are their many truth and justice Paladin Orders.

Kataan are governed by religious faith that declares their manifest destiny to save the universe.

Kataan religions celebrates freewill, individuality, individual achievement, artistic expression, and craftmanship.

Kataan faiths also proclaims the responsibility of the **strong to protect the less so**. The Kataan have always been strong and used their religion to instill a sense of inherent strength and righteousness among all its peoples.

The upshot of the Kataan religions is their **constant willingness to help**, liberate, free, or otherwise interfere against tyranny in all its forms; governmental, economic, and technological; all hail Truth, Justice, and the Kataan Way.

The Kataan Crusades and Inquisitions across Xai and the larger ancient space opera of planets and galaxies throughout the cosmos are legend and mostly for the good. The Kataan are a proud people that gain strength and purpose by their willingness to give aid to those that can not help themselves.

This of course has led to the more pragmatic peoples of the universe considering the Kataan to be **self-righteous trouble makers** interfering in the affairs of which they have no business, but the Kataan view such talk as the chatter of lesser minds seeking justification for lesser deeds.

#### **PRESCIENT COMBAT**

The Kataan Rangers moved into the main body from the right flank.

The hundred Kataan moved cautiously focusing on the next few moments of their futures, watching ghostly figures of their future selves where they will be ahead. Seeing ghostly enemy forces moments ahead of where they will be.

One seeing himself shot in the back, turning to slay his attacker as he moves into sight. Another aiming upon a ghostly figure awaiting the enemy to take its place in real time. A third watching an enemy charge picking off enemies in order of their threat moments before they aim or fire.

The Kataan snipers decimate the flank, few Kataan lost in the long day's fighting, the enemy slain, most never seeing their assassins.



## 25 SPIRE PYRAMIDÆKATAAN A PATH OF FATEFUL STARS

The Pyramid Spire is an angelic masterpiece, a perfect pyramid form 2 miles square and reaching a mile into the air. The 4 square miles of city within is a masterwork of Kataan ingenuity and extraordinary artistic and technical talent.

Within the pyramid are vast palaces, train stations, star ports, and crystal portals to thousands of far distant cities, realms, and planets; all interwoven by smaller streets, warrens, and workshops of some of the best Kataan artisans in the known universe.

And whereas many Spires are closed militarized bastions of fear and defense, the Spire Pyramid is an open trading complex that welcome all comers to trade both goods and knowledge.



#### 167 DEEP HEARTS VAMPIRE TOWERS & TOMBS

Deep Heart is the location of a large imperial city at the center of Shadaran, Min'Zirai, and Kataan Great Houses.

This is the **heart of Imperial military power**, the meeting place
of the three most powerful supporters
of the Crystal Shard Empress and her
Metropolis Empire.

Deep Heart is a place with long ties to the Kataan and their enduring effort to hunt down and entomb all remaining Calibahn Liches, vampire lords, and similar undead servants still lurking in the shadows.

The various prisons and courts of Deep Heart are where the worst offenders of House Providence justice are removed for punishment.

For more ordinary mortal prisoners, House Providence, as a rule, do not imprison as a means of punishment but prefer to cause criminal offenders to 'feel and experience' the full weight of their victim's suffering as a means of reciprocal justice, a kind of "reeducation" and then releasing them back to where they were found.

Deep Heart is a place of tremendous and long-standing fear for Xai's criminal underground (this place is no joke) and House Providence entanglement in their affairs to be avoided at all costs.

Any time any Great House has a prisoner they cannot "deal" with (for any of a million reasons political or supernatural), they are sent to Deep Heart for adjudication.

# 173 RUNIC CITY OF PLAN & LINE & EQUATION

**Runic City** is a peninsula with a large imperial military presence.

This is an ancient city built on precise mathematical geometries and contains some of the most impressive pyramid and hypostyle complexes ever crafted.

The city is ordered in such a way as to contain streets and buildings that extend hundreds of miles, the very space of Runic City shown on the map a fraction of the area of its streets, boulevards, and vast ceremonial complexes.

Runic City is a kind of celestial portal room, its streets and boulevards all leading to either the coast of the Clockwork Metropolis or some far distant alien pyramid complex depending on the speed and vector of travel, secrets closely held by Kataan high priests.

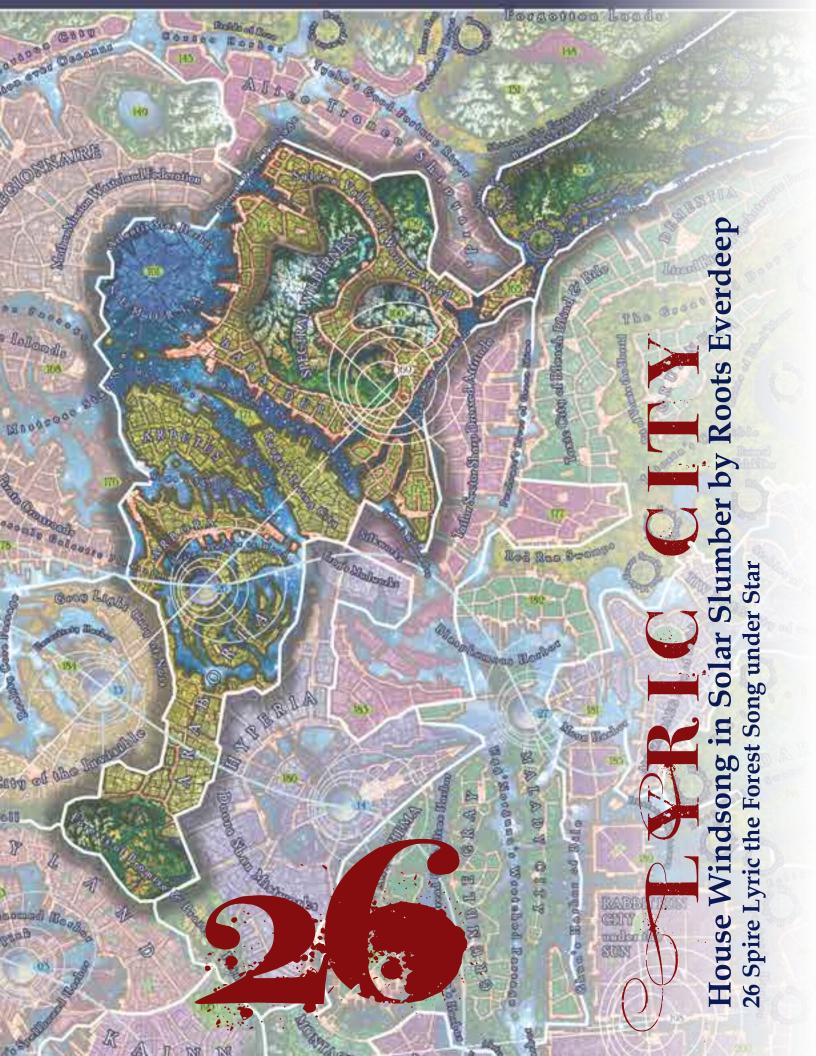
# 174 WATCHER THE AERIE

The **Watcher Islands** are a place free of Imperial Dominion. This is a city **holy to Kataan**. This is a **necropolis** of sacred tombs, pyramids, hypostyle halls, temples, and palaces of the High Priests of Anubis the Jackal.

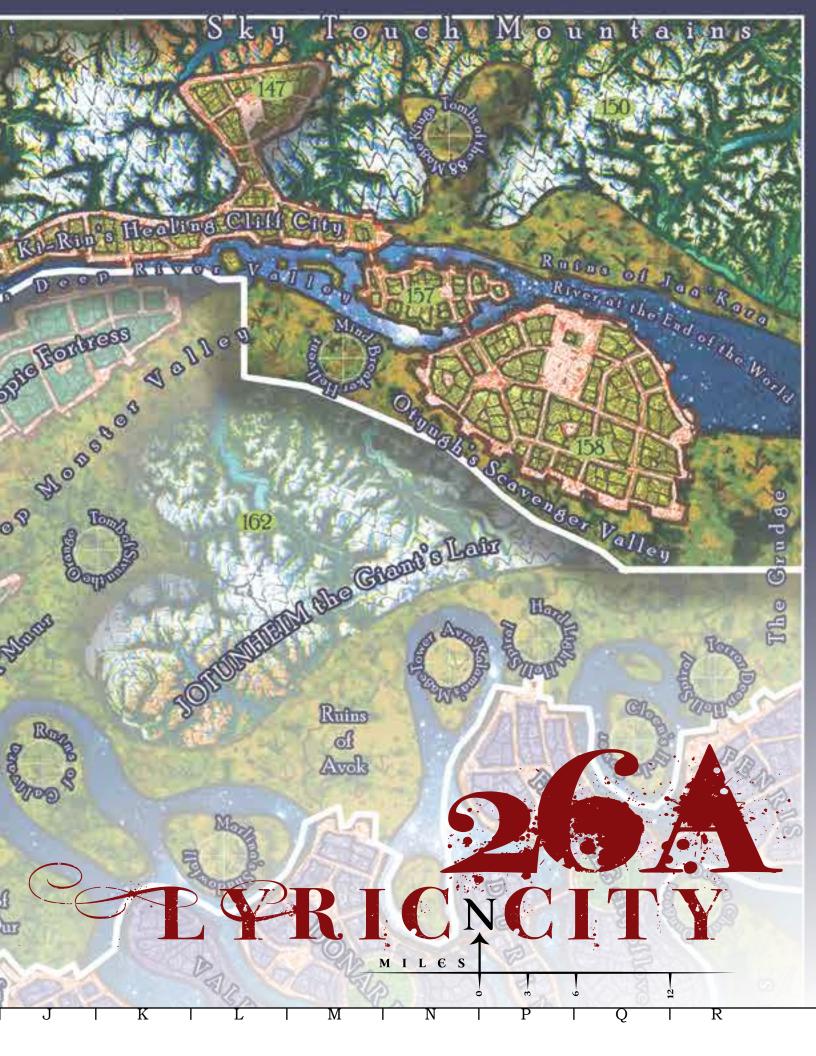
The necropolis is said to contains riches beyond imagining, a place of entombed pharaohs and priests for long Ages of Xai history. And while many have been looted during Xai's more tumultuous times, the tombs are well protected and most remain intact to modern day.

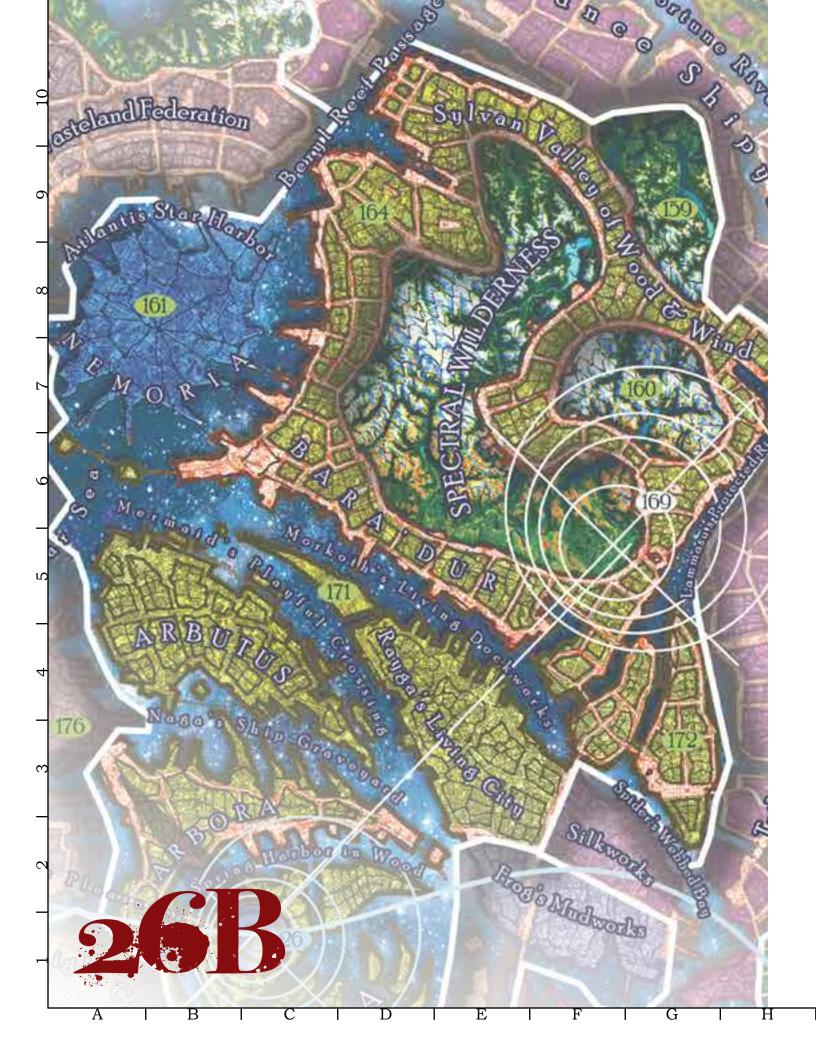
The chief reason being Anubis himself who is said to move among the Necropolis from time to time and his ravaging horde of jackals that tend to devour tomb raiders sending them to an eternal damnation as scat.

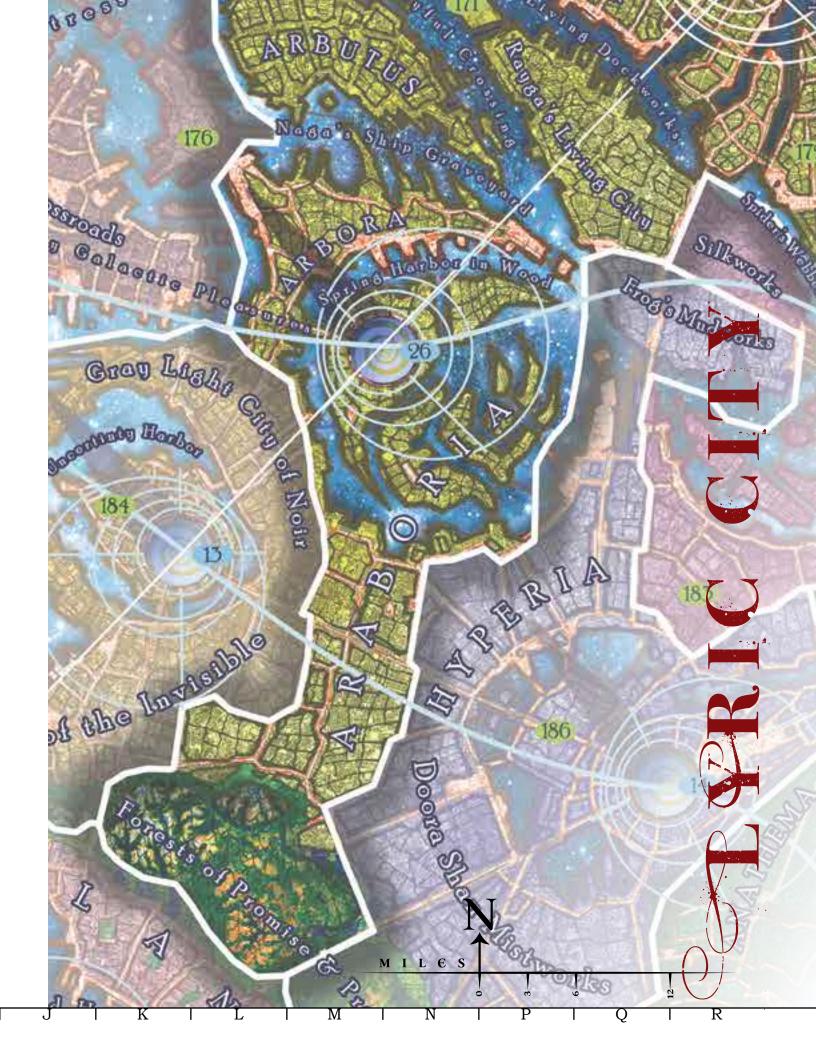
Tomb raiders must move fast if they wish to succeed, the traps and architectural trickery of the tombs are designed as the purpose of any lock, to slow progress allowing time for response to mounted and the offenders killed, captured, or driven off, in this case by either the High Priests, a horde of Anubian Hell Hounds, or occasionally Anubis himself.













The Clockworks did not always look as it does today.

Once upon a time the Clockwork Metropolis was Eden, a paradise of great living towers wound by vine and crawling trees that formed streets and waterways of a city at the center of the universe.

The Spires were not the awkward skeletal armatures that exist today, but the full bloom mile tall trees whose canopies sheltered miles wide forests and vales with unique ecologies, flora, and fauna.

The whole of the Clockwork Metropolis was alive and young, and its builders and caretakers a race called the Lyr.

From sweeping fields of salt, they grew great twining vines of living metal that bore crystalline fruit akin to a pumpkin 6feet diameter. These wondrous crystal gourds could be ritually carved with rune songs and split in half under the light of a full moon.

The split face of the 2 halves an open portal through which anyone might travel with the ease of moving through an open door no matter how far apart the 2 halves might be.

At the center of the Lyrn Metropolis they built the Steel Dragon, a great celestial device that with ritual and skill they could teleport anyone or anything to anywhere. With this they set about sending portal halves with exploration teams across the vastness of Xai's Outlands, Xakarra's Subworlds, and even to far distant Eldritch worlds in galaxies near and far.

The Lyrn explored Xai and the larger universe with millions of portals linked to Clockwork Metropolis, a city in which one could walk the stars for breakfast, travel the Outlands of Xai for lunch, and move through the portals of the Subworld to dine in hell, and still be back home in the Clockworks after a brisk walk for a night cap.

"The Lyrn Space Opera was a walk among the stars, they simply moved by portal across the cosmos," said the choir song of the luminous Mistress. "That was the Age of Eden," said the long coiling form of the dragon, "the Lyr were so very bright and curious."

"So, what could have happened to such a vast and wonderous civilization. What changed?" asked the titanic quivering form of the Demon Prince.

"The Demon Age happened, followed by the Mistress Flood, followed by the Old Races and the rise of the Red Empire, destroyed by the rebellion of the Young Races and then swept to near extinction by the undead apocalypse of the Calibahn Empire," said the Dragon. "The last remnants of the races returned to the site of Eden, the Clockwork Metropolis to start again."

"That is absurd," bubbled and spit the Demon Prince, "why the lies? No one would believe such a convoluted historical nonsense. Why not just tell them the truth?"

"I agree," said the Mistress, "this all seems unnecessarily ridiculous, a child could see through this lie, we would be better served by the truth."

"Sadly no," said the Dragon, "we need them to want to stretch out and explore the universe, we need them to imagine ruins and treasures and remnants of ancient terrors no larger than their imaginations can bear. We need them to want to leave. We need them to see the lies of our manufactured history and want to seek out the truth. We need them to want to know."

"You give them too little credit," sputtered the Demon Prince, "they will understand."

"Agreed," chimed the Mistress, "they are more durable than you imagine, your obfuscations dishonor their potential."

"The truth," said the Dragon, "will be as ash in their mouths, they do not need nor want the truth, even if you said it they would not hear, they need and want hope. In this narrative they are saved and safe in the Clockworks and the brave sent forth to explore and discover. This is a universe of adventure; we need them to seek it."

"I disagree but defer," said the Mistress, "you are the one who has to live it, but you will see that you are wrong."

"I defer as well," said the Demon Prince, "but I will not lie if asked."

"Your truth will be lost," said the Dragon, "they will be all too happy to assign blame to other than themselves. Telling them that they killed the Lyr and destroyed Eden for no reason but jealousy and perceived slight, will be as telling them they killed their parents and burned down their own house, they will not hear you."

"Perhaps," said the choir sounds of the Mistress song, "but such a sin cannot be hidden for long."

"Long enough," said the Dragon, "all we need is long enough."



Pyric city

Lyric City are fragments and ruins of a once vast sentient Lyr city that is said to have once flowed for thousands of miles like a spider's web in all directions, tall and elegant living crystal high-rises strung along the web paths surrounding large paradise gardens.

Within the corpse of this once living city, the Lyr have for long Ages maintained their small groves and living arbor structures, impoverished and under near constant persecution.

Trading their rare shamanistic talents and found Lyr technomancy for any pittance offered but as often the victim of raiders, thieves, and slavers.

Most of the city is still the same poor muddy tracks among the fantasy ruins of ancient Lyr civilization as has been for long eons.

But of late, the Ddraig have been moving into Lyric City and have begun building a modern but cleverly and artfully hidden infrastructure such as paved roads, plumbing, and electrification. The most visible aspect of the work is the stringing of **Tivoli** lights throughout the groves and arbors, as it seems the Lyr are in love with the sparkle of string lights.

But more importantly, the ancient ruins have begun to show signs of life, that which was thought dead now understood to be in hibernation.

The Myrddin Wizards awakening the long sleeping sentient city and many of its sentient crystal towers to the benefit of House Windsong and of growing concern of any other Great House paying attention.



Lyr, as a place, a land not too far East of the Clockwork Metropolis, the place from which a race of sentient flora of coiled wood and twisting vine emerged and set about to explore the Xai universe.

The Lyr created the first great Xai space opera and famously crafted the Steel Dragon and portal crystals to tie their millions of worlds together into a single enchanted forest, a pedestrian wonderland spanning galaxies.

Their technomancy was an extension of their flora magics, a crystalmancy of living woods, metals, and crystals. The result were sentient forests, buildings, and cities that are "said" to have endured for eons before the coming of Demons and the Flood.

Alternate tales tell of the Lyr empire of a million worlds having been conquered by the Mistress and its glorious eldritch worlds peeled away and placed flat to create the vast landscapes of Xai and the Clockwork Metropolis. In this tale the Lyr, not the Mistress created the Spires and the millions of portals that can be found throughout Xai and her subworlds. In this tale, the Mistress Angelic are the villains.

Other tales tell of the coming of the Demon Princes, the Lyr are said to have abandoned Xai leaving behind their forests, cities, and vast crystal portal network, though destroying portals left in the wake of their exodus that they could not be followed. Scholars suggest that this is why so many portals that have survived to modern day lead to so many very unpleasant places.

The Lyr are alien, not traditionally sauria-humanoid as most other races, but rather composed of cellulose as

wood and vine, rooting akin to sleep to draw sustenance from light and ground during the day but awake and ambulatory during the evening.

The Lyr suffered greatly during the Demon Prince Age, corrupted and warped into evil mockeries of their once viridescent forms.

The Lyr became beings of evil intent and disreputable dealings and have long suffered at the hands of others, enslaved for their unique shamanistic arts and their unique control over ancient Lyr technomancy.

Over the long Ages of Xai history, the Lyr have evolved into many divergent, deviant, derivative, and infernally corrupted flora-races, all few and in decline facing seeming inevitable extinction.



# HOUSE WINDSONG IN SOLAR SEUMBER BYROOTSEVERDEEP

In the modern Age, the remarkably diverse Lyr are ruled over by the **Shamans of Everdeep**, a clan of ancient Arch-Druids that govern House Windsong.

House Windsong is weak because the Lyr are few, having been hunted, persecuted, enslaved, and otherwise slain as evil through the long Ages of Xai history.

Of late, the coming of the Myrddin Wizards has led to an alliance with House Windsong, recently raising its wealth, power, and influence within the Metropolis Empire over the past couple centuries.

Also, the Lyr have lately been welcomed into Moon City, Merlin City, and Grendel City, the 4 cities forming an alliance of formerly suffering and persecuted peoples brought together in common purpose by the Myrddin Wizards.



The Spire Lyric has for long Ages been a gnarled, bent, and twisted form of unhealthy appearance, akin to the form of a long dead tree trunk. Since the coming of the Myrddin alliance, the Spire has begun to flower and new twisting vines green its newly graceful and sumptuous shapes.

Within the labyrinthian trunk and boughs of the Spire are countless thousands of newly arrived Lyr from the far reaches of Xai's forests, swamps, and jungles. All long since driven from civilization now emerging as a new power no one could have imagined existed only a few short centuries ago. The Lyr it seems, may not be as few as its many persecutors might have imagined.

Of special note is the **Immortelle River**, this is an invention of ancient Lyr craft, a series of especially large and uniquely crafted portals through which flows the Immortelle River.

The length of each segment varies, for example, there is a 4 mile stretch of river that flows through the roots of the Spire, with a portal at either end of the 4-mile stretch. This segment links to 2 other segments, one upstream, one downstream. On average each stretch of river is about 10 miles and winds itself across the Realms of Xai and across the surfaces of many thousands of worlds invariably linking with great rivers and seas of each world.

There have been many that have attempted the **Great Passage**, a river cruise that leaves the Lyric Spire downstream, traveling nearly a million river miles across myriad worlds & realms, to make the galactic loop, and return via the upstream portal of the Spire. And if you are wondering, a million miles at 10 miles per hour requires something more than 11 years; not counting stops at the many resorts and scenic sights along the way.

The Immortelle Passage Cruise Line operates 100 ships, one ship leaving each year on a 100-year journey along the River Immortelle.

# 147 FOUNTAIN CITY OF TAMNETH

Fountain City lies in a great valley of the Sky Touch Mountains. This is a famed monastic citadel of various Lyr dedicated to healing and peaceful meditation and prayer, believing that if at any time should not a single sentient mind be praying that the universe will end. As such, they ensure that at least one Lamneth monk is praying every moment of every day that the universe might continue.

They are especially famed for their export of a golden salve called the **Golden Tears of Lamnet's Prayer** and Sorrow (but commonly called Lamneth) that restores the body from harm of violence or accident.

Fountain City is itself a modern architectural wonder, the hard work of building by hand a spiritual practice of the monks who are constantly removing and rebuilding structures of the city in a kind of ritual regeneration of place. And the monks are smart, clever, and very learned in the building arts, crafting simple, elegant, and always very modern minimal structures where the art of building with less always manages to create a spiritual more.



### THEROOT OF EVIL

The three Lyr monks entered the titanic audience hall of the Crystal Shard Empress. The shape of the hall smooth and irregularly formed, the only flat surface the floor which itself seemed liquid crystalline, filling as water a larger irregular form of chamber that extended below.

The great expanse was entirely empty but for the giant crystal shard that glowed with the presence of the Empress and a single woman wreathed in shifting veils of colorful silken cloth.

The 3 monks moved with shifting grace, their writhing root and vine lower quarter pulling and pushing them effortlessly across the crystal floor as an octopus might drift across the ocean floor.

"Never has my hall been graced by the Believers of Lamneth," said the carillon voice of the Empress channeled through her high priest, "I am truly honored," the high priestess bowing.

"We have come because we have learned the truth of our history," said the first monk, "and we wish to reveal what we have learned."

"Interesting," said the Empress through her puppet, "and what is it you think you have uncovered?"

A long silence fell in the room. "She knows," said the second monk, "It is as we feared."

The three monks stood silent, finally the third monk whispered, "why?"

"To save you," said the Empress finally.

"That does not make any sense," said the first monk, "we are persecuted, hated, and enslaved, how does this ridiculous Empire and farcical history save us?"

"You made them, how about you tell me?"

Silence filled the great hall; it was as if the whole of the universe were captured within its walls and nothing beyond existed.

"You think they can be forgiven," said the third monk finally said, he hung his head low in disbelief.

EYRIC CITY

"How can we be expected to forgive such a crime," said the second, "it is beyond mortal comprehension."

"It is not your crime to forgive," said the Empress with a cooing sorrowful song, "it is theirs."

"But we were the victims," said the first monk.

"Just so, your choice is vengeance or grace," said the Empress "your vengeance has brought you to the brink of extinction. Their choice to forget has brought them to the same brink."

"This all sounds like a bunch of metaphysical trickery, even foolishness," said the second monk.

"You are not alone in your assessment," said the Empress, "I have come to be thought mad in many circles."

"I do not understand," admitted the first monk, "you manipulate and you toy with our lives with casual disregard, there is no justification that you can voice that makes any of this right."

"My dear Believers, whenever you get bored with the game, all you need do is to stop praying," said the Empress referring to the Lamneth's foundational belief that should no one pray, the universe will cease being real. "Until then, your recriminations are empty, and the blame is yours."

"And now you mock us," said the second, "you are the evil that must be destroyed, you are the chains which bind us, you have always been the pretender.

"We will end you," promised the first monk.

As the 3 monks fled the audience hall wrapped in their indignity and new vengeful purpose, the Empress smiled to herself, her mind stretched among her thousands of priestesses, seeing the vast complications and obfuscations of the Clockwork Metropolis's living streets. "At least 3 of them now understand, more will soon follow."

# 150 XANADUKHAN S PLEASUREDOME

High in the peaks of the Sky Touch Mountains is the famed Pleasure Dome.

The Pleasure Dome is a sentient Lyr structure that calls itself Xanadu Khan. Within its Dome is one square mile of the most luxurious accommodations tailored to satisfy everyone's deepest sexual desire.

Children are not permitted within the dome and pedophiles are disintegrated at the door. This little aside has led to accused pedophiles commonly given the legal option of either pleading guilty or offered the opportunity to walk through the front gate of the Pleasure Dome.

While within the Pleasure Dome, no harm may befall a guest. The Pleasure Dome is a piece of ancient Lyr technomancy that no one can figure out how or why it works though many have attempted to "reverse engineer" its workings with fatal result.

# 152 BELLA MYR S TRANQUIL WILDERNESS

The **Tranquil Wilderness** is a place of high icy mountains and deep vales. The weather here is always spring-like with chill breezes and gentle weather.

Legend says the wilderness was enchanted by the **druidess Bellamyr** to cleanse it of an especially horrid demonic corruption.

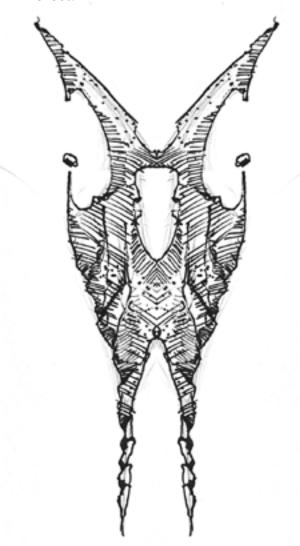
The Tranquil Wilderness is among the most popular camping and hiking destinations of the Metropolis Empire. However, those suffering demonic corruption are advised to stay clear as they are likely to be drawn into the ground by living cold-iron vines. This little aside has led to the demonic commonly being brought to the Tranquil Wilderness for trial and sentence.

# 156 HATEFUL FOREST OF HURTING & HARM

This mountainous wilderness is a place of **rife demonic corruption** and is avoided by anyone with working survival instincts.

This forest is home to several ancient Lyr Tribes that were tortured, warped, and twisted to be minions of the Demon Princes that for whatever reason, escaped banishment to the Subworld with their masters. This forest is a fragment of a more ancient time when demon-kind ruled Xai.

And while most such places have long since been cleansed by crusade or wizardry, this especially dark place has resisted all attempts at destruction. Containment is the official policy of the Imperial Guard regarding the Hateful Forest.



# 157 ALCHEMY CITY OF SHIFTING TOXIC INTENT

This island citadel is ruled by several powerful Lyr **Hemlock Clans**. As the name implies, the city is a place famed for the production and cure of alchemic poisons. The city is known for its hospitals and toxins that can often cure growth or parasite afflictions such as cancer or tape worms.

The city is also home to several unsanctioned assassin guilds that tend to give the citadel a bad reputation.

These guilds tend to specialize in the creation of toxins that are deadly to a single individual or family line but otherwise benign and generally detectable as water.

The city is otherwise an especially beautiful (if toxic) garden of living arbor architectures, hospitals, universities, and homes for wealthy and very learned Lyr healers and alchemists.

Rumor is that **Alchemy City** is also home to the famed **Institute of Immortal Ichor**, an organization made illegal by the Crystal Shard Empress and its members (should any remain) the object of constant Imperial Inquisition.

The poison in question an elixir called the **Blood of the Gods**, a drug that kills the subject causing their soul to leave the body, then regenerates the body in an **immortal but soulless form**, appearing forever in the prime of one's physical condition.

There are so many moral quandaries and dark sides related to this dire toxin that it is universally reviled, chief among them, the sacrifice of an infant soul as one of the more disturbing regents required for its craft.

### THE DEATH OF BUT ONE

The Royal Apothecary Society is headed by Grand Master Apothecary Riv'entia, Riv to her friends.

Riv is a bright minded Lyr with a gift for both toxic e'Mral elixirs and politics, making her the youngest Grand Master of the Royal Society in its long-storied history.

She is today meeting with an Imperial Envoy by the name of Shi'hanna, a friend of many decades but today formally arriving on official matters.

Upon entering the Envoy formally bowed and extended her credentials sealed with wax impressed of the Seal of the Envoy's Fane for review, Riv in turn accepts her credentials returning a formal bow. After which they hug, relax, and sit at the large ancient table marked and stained as if by centuries of spills, dyes, and alchemical burns.

As their banter quiets, Riv opens the sealed credentials to see the offending son of one of her members has been released. She withdraws from her long and well-worn Apothacary's Coat a vial from one of its thousands of unseen pockets, handing it to Shi'hanna.

*She looked at the vial in her hand,* traces of Yellow e'Mral mists swirling within the dram of clear liquid. A small bit of liquid no more dangerous or detectable than water to anyone other than the individual for which it is intended.

"How long?" asked the Envoy.

"Just as you asked, exactly 39 minutes," replied the Apothecary.

"And the cure?" the Envoy wished to confirm.

"If he speaks the truth, he will survive the 39th minute," the Apothecary smiled.

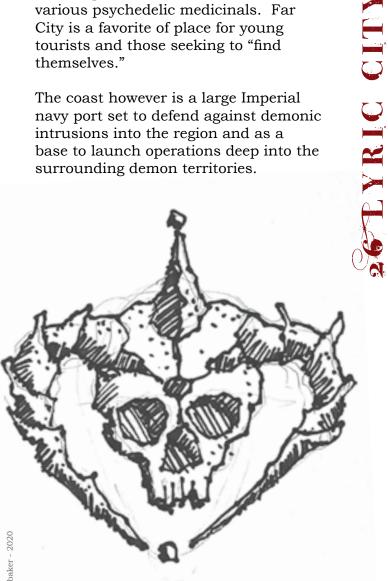
# 15& PSYCORAS FAR CITY WONDERLAND INGRACE

The **Far City** is a large citadel with heavy imperial influence of its shores along the River at the End of the World.

Far City is a place of ancient transparent crystal building ruins surrounded by a high transparent crystal wall. This city messes with the mind, everyone that visits the city tends to see a different place, sort of like a city as seen through a psychedelic lens.

The City is overseen by the **Psycoria** Clans, worm'wood Lyr that dream while awake by skill of magic and the consumption of massive amounts of various psychedelic medicinals. Far City is a favorite of place for young tourists and those seeking to "find themselves."

The coast however is a large Imperial navy port set to defend against demonic intrusions into the region and as a base to launch operations deep into the surrounding demon territories.



# 159 FOREST OF MIRANDA THE MERCIFUL

This is a region of heavily forested steep mountains and deep valleys and ravines. Stories say that **Miranda the Merciful** was a Sorceress with a heart of gold, that upon the defeat of an especially destructive and terrorizing dragon she found among the lair a dozen dragon eggs. Rather than destroy the eggs, she created this Forest as a place they might survive and thrive.

Movement throughout the Forest is very challenging on foot, making it a favorite of expert hikers and mountaineers for both training and recreation.

As for the dragons, they are said to live among the high ice cliffs overlooking the forests, though they have not been seen for many centuries.

Anyone that flies into the Forest or tries to fly out of the forest (including the dragons) finds themselves instead upon an alien world of orange skies and blue leaf trees, the Forest of Miranda being a small mountainous green patch in an otherwise blue and orange world.

The **Blue and Orange world** is a place of titanic savage creatures, the apex predators being the 12 Dragons of Miranda. Should anyone ever choose to visit this place, the Dragons cannot see green, so be sure to wear green clothing and carry good quantities of green paint.

# **160** TRAIT BLAZER'S CHILL FILIGREE SHADE FOREST

The Shade Forest lies on the slopes of high snow-covered mountains and deep cold fog shrouded valleys. Everything about this place is cold, a perpetual winter wonderland famed for its year-round winter resorts and skiing operated by the **Trail Blazer Vacations Combine**.

The forests are also home to the **Filigree Tribes**, ice'wood Lyr that make their arbor and grove settlements in the high mountains.

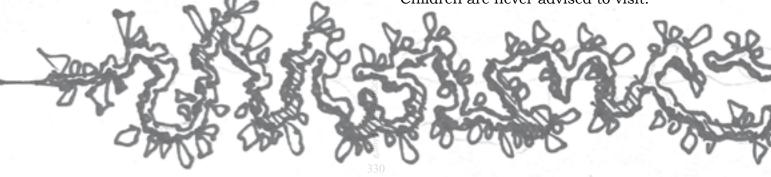
Visitors to the resort are advised to stay on marked trails and runs and to avoid the Lyr tribes as they tend to steal away with wanderers and use them in their sacrificial rituals.

There is always a need for the adventuring sort to recover lost tourists before it is too late, the money is good, and skiing excellent.

# IGL PROFOUND S DEEP CITY UNDER NEON GLOW

At the center of the **sunken city of Nemoria** is a 3square-mile (2mile-diameter) nightlife district famous for being an especially wild and crazy place. Anyone within the diameter of Deep City can breathe water and swim with the speed and ease of a fish. This is a 3dimensional experience where drinks are served as jell'spheres and food as crispy or gelatinous snacks.

This is a town by adults with naughty intent for adults with similar ambitions. Children are never advised to visit.



# SEYRIC CITY

# FOR THE TAKE & TAKEN

Syndicate City is, as the name implies, home to dozens of the most well-known and respected **Thieves Guilds** in the Empire. House Windsong like Imperial Law finds no harm or crime in the taking of stuff so long as no one gets hurt in the process.

And remember, Thieves Guilds hire out as often to protect stuff as to recover stuff and serve a vital security function within an Empire whose mantra is "ownership is possession."

The Lyr have always been an independent lot, generally seen as evil and persecuted for their religious and roughish ways. Being the heads of large organized crime clans is expected. This city is famed for its many gambling houses and especially high stakes card games.

The city itself is largely absent ancient Lyr ruins, a rather ordinary medieval style of row buildings with narrow streets, alleys, and mews.

Air traffic in the city is banned and transportation larger than a cycle or horse is largely impractical. This is a city intentionally crafted as a maze for pedestrians, generally disguising the size of buildings and tricking perspective. They say nothing is as it appears, in Syndicate City, this is especially true of the City itself.

# 165 THYNES WOODEN CITY OF FIVE BRIDGES

The **Wooden City** is a small island crossroads of Lyr, Shadaran, and Dhar traders, merchants, and crafts people. These 3 famously "evil" races seem to get along famously within the Wooden City despite their obvious differences, but likely more because of their less obvious commonalities.

The city is one filled with greenery and living arbor buildings. All 3 races sharing a special bond and preference for an elegant natural aesthetic. All 3 races sharing a love of simple spiritual art and hand wrought craft.

The Wooden City is oddly beautiful and decidedly spiritual, visitors often left to wonder how 3 of the most historically reviled races of Xai could come to create such a place.

Tourists love this town, though a healthy respect for the residents is advised as any one of them might just as easily kill you as look at you just on general principal.





**Drift City Thrice** was built a long time ago during the Calibahn Empire, the 3rd of nine built by the infamous Nine Necromancer Kings.

The Drift City was built by armies of undead Lyrn slaves that used stolen and recovered Lyr'crystal artifacts to craft a glorious undead crystal city.

# The whole of the city alive in the same way an undead is alive.

The Drift City and its many undead'crystal towers and buildings are sentient and especially malevolent.

This is a dread place that has been left abandoned for eons since the final victory over the Nine Necromancer Kings.

The city was for a time popular with explorers and adventurers who sought riches from both the Lyr and Calibahn artifacts left in the city, but the dangers of this enduring undead city made such trips especially dangerous and less frequent.

But a few centuries ago, the Myrddin Wizards arrived and laid claim to the Drift City on behalf of House Windsong and no one has seen fit to challenge their claim.

No one is quite sure what is going on in Drift City Thrice and inquiring minds want to know.

# 171 PRAZORVINE S SACRED TEMPLE ISLAND

**Temple Island** is triangular city free of Imperial dominion. This is a place held by Lyr **Razorvine Clans**, a group of religious fanatics that give even other Lyr fits.

These are the old guard of traditional corruption rituals, followers of Demon Princes and loyal to the Dark Ways.

The Clans were thought for a long time to be "thankfully" extinct, but the Myrddin Wizards found a few and repatriated them to this island.

Other Great Houses considered wiping the island from existence and thanking the Myrddin for their help in bringing such evil into a single place for eradication, but they do not yet seem to have the spine for such a move.

Containment is the method of control here, keep them on their island and monitor their activities. Tourists, and most everyone else, should never come here.

# SELYRIC CITY

### **DELIBERATION**

The Seven Sisters of Pestilence stood in a circle eying the child crying in the center of the large domed hall.

"We should kill it now," said the first sister.

"She is not an IT Mun'uthra, do not be a so droll," said the second.

"Are we really sure?" said the third, "perhaps more tests are in order".

"We are sure," said the second, the third sister pouting as if her favorite toy had just been taken away.

"We should sell her as agreed, we own her blood, what would she be without us except a corpse?" questioned the fourth.

"We do not kill and we do not sell people you worthless old prunes," bellowed the fifth, "we are the Sisters of Pestilence, not murderers or slave traders, remember yourselves you dementia rattled witches."

"She should die," said the sixth, "it is the only way."

They all finally turned their attention to the seventh, awaiting the last word on the matter.

"She shall be trained as one of us," said the seventh, "my acolyte she will be."

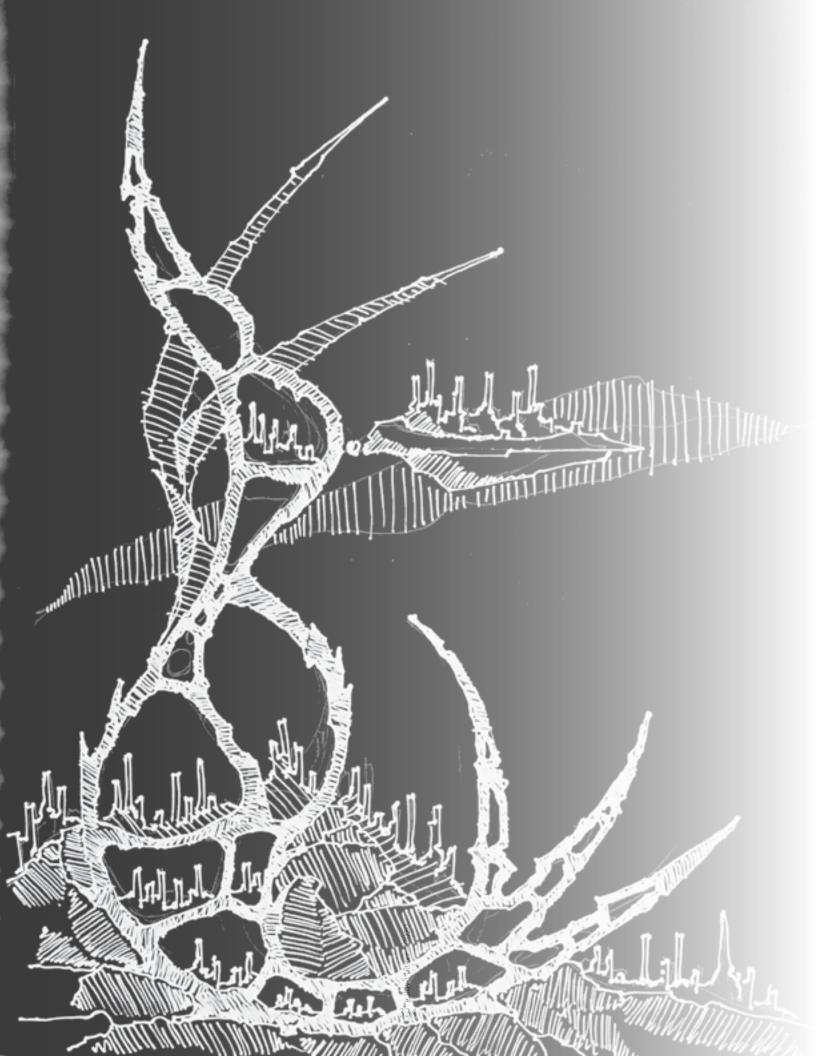
# 172 ALISTER S SACRED ISEAND OF HONEST COMMERCE

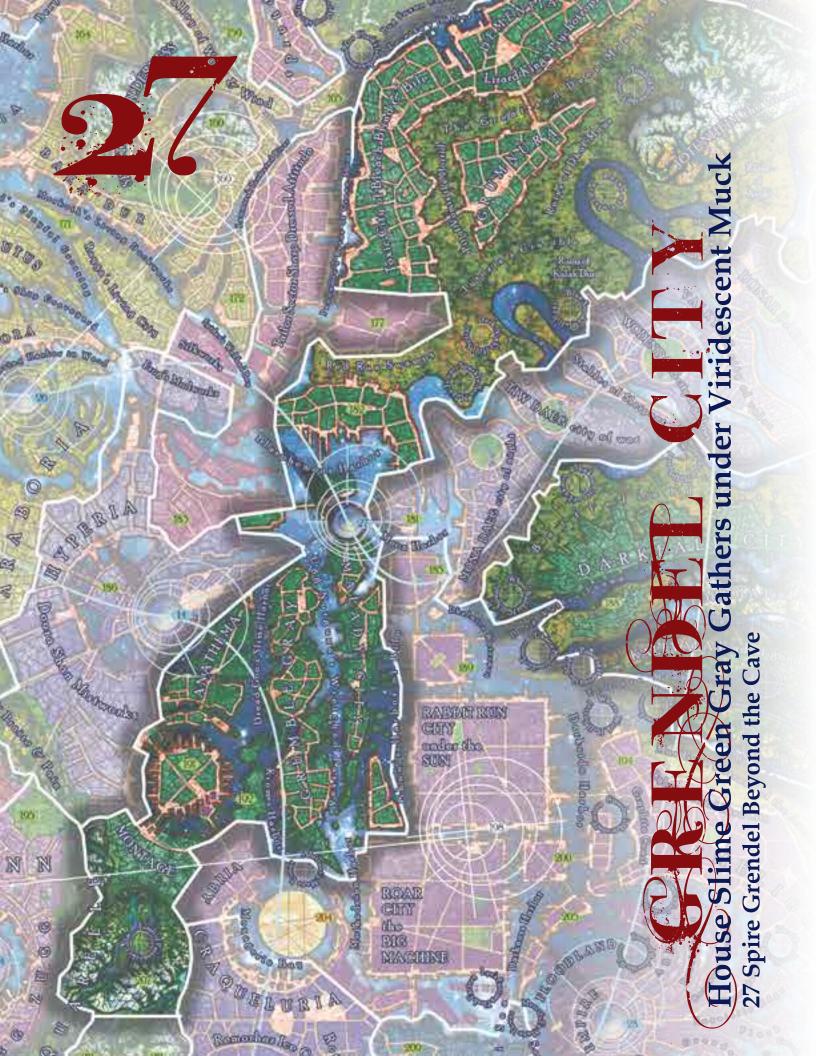
The **Sacred Island** is a large trade city built on holy ground.

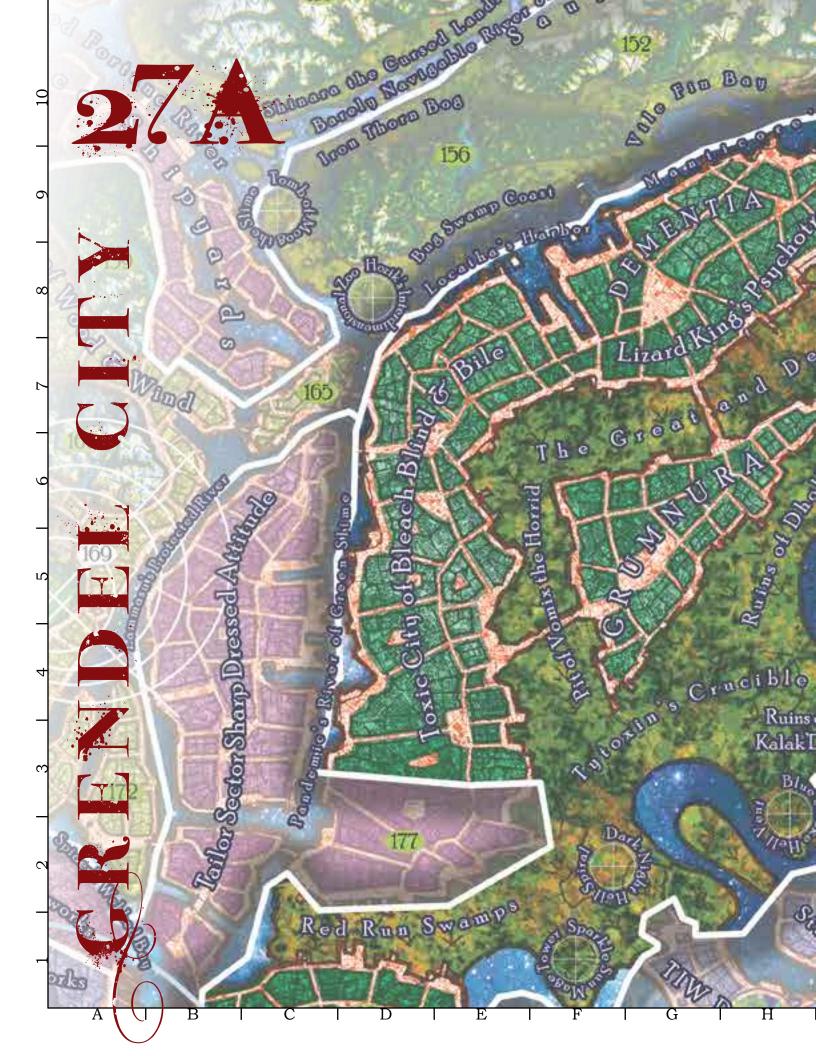
This is an unusual place where fate and luck bend to the **advantage** of honesty and bad luck frequents dishonesty and deception. It is not that lightning strikes down any that lie or any some such, rather, any dishonest plan or deception that could go wrong if met with a bit of bad luck will.

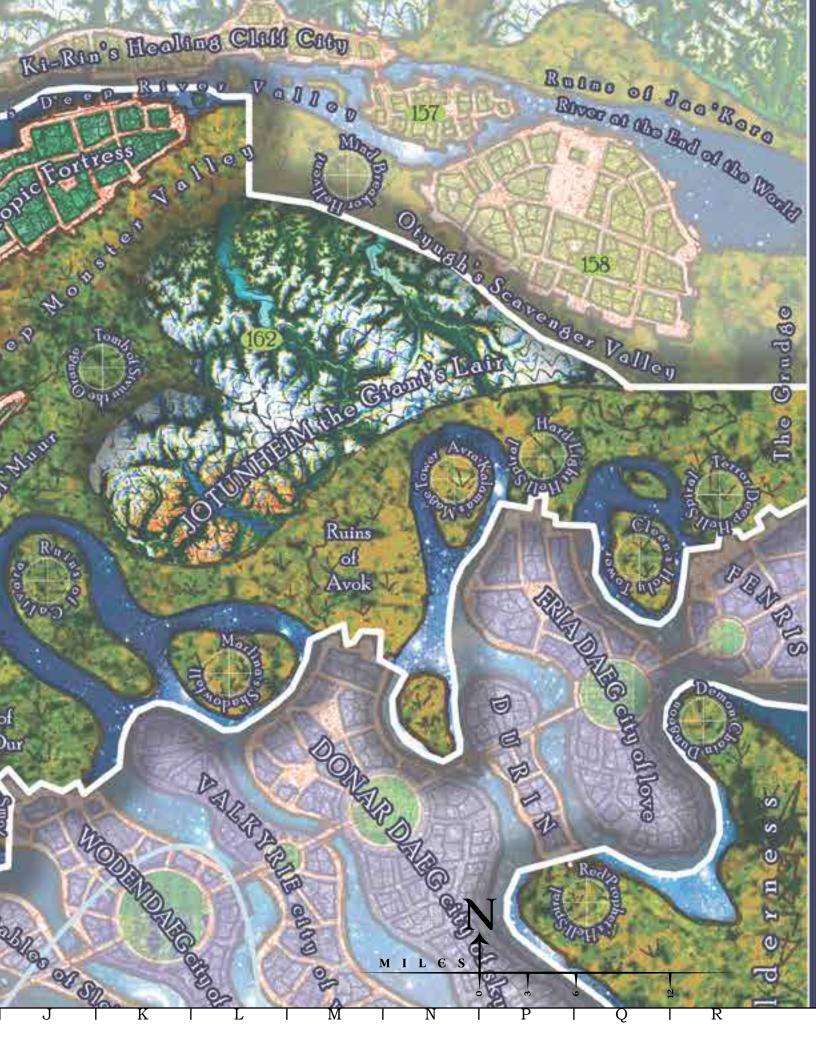
As such, pirates, smugglers, and ne'er-do-wells tend to avoid the city on general principal.

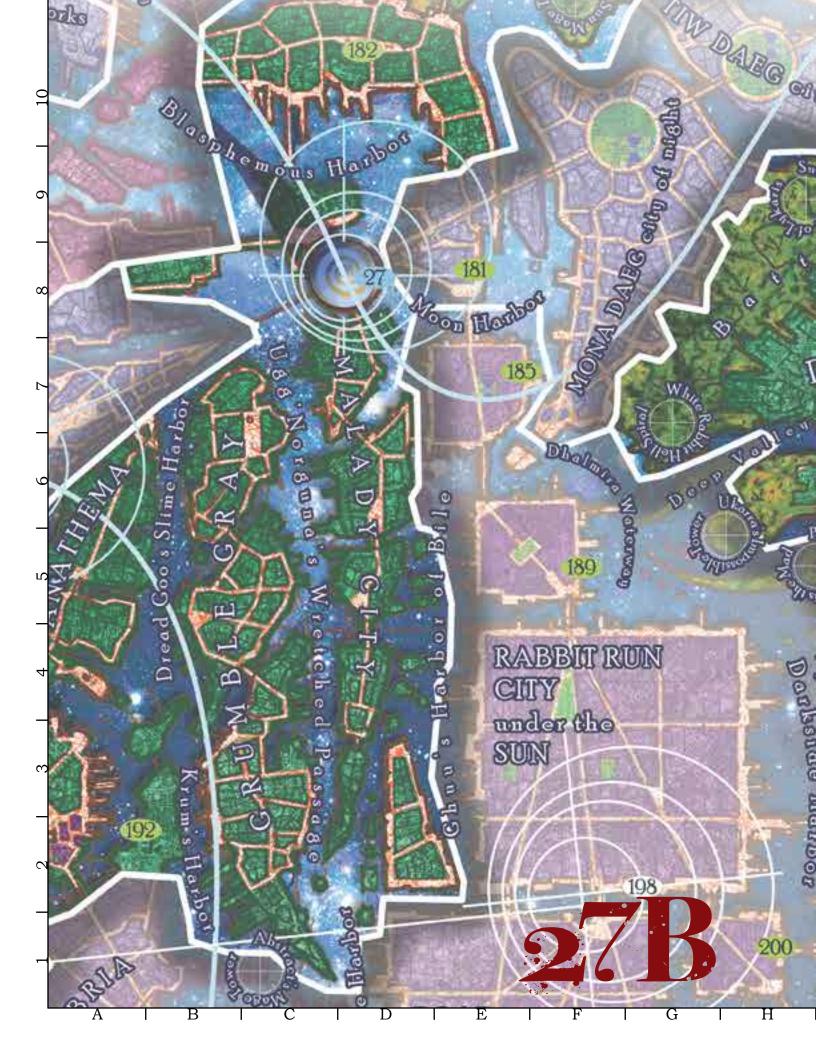
The city is famed for its honest trade houses, banks, and guild halls. The Lyr **Alister Clans** are of the golden'wood linage, Lyr of rare good reputation as helpful and healing forest spirits, some have even taken up training as Imperial Priests and Paladins.

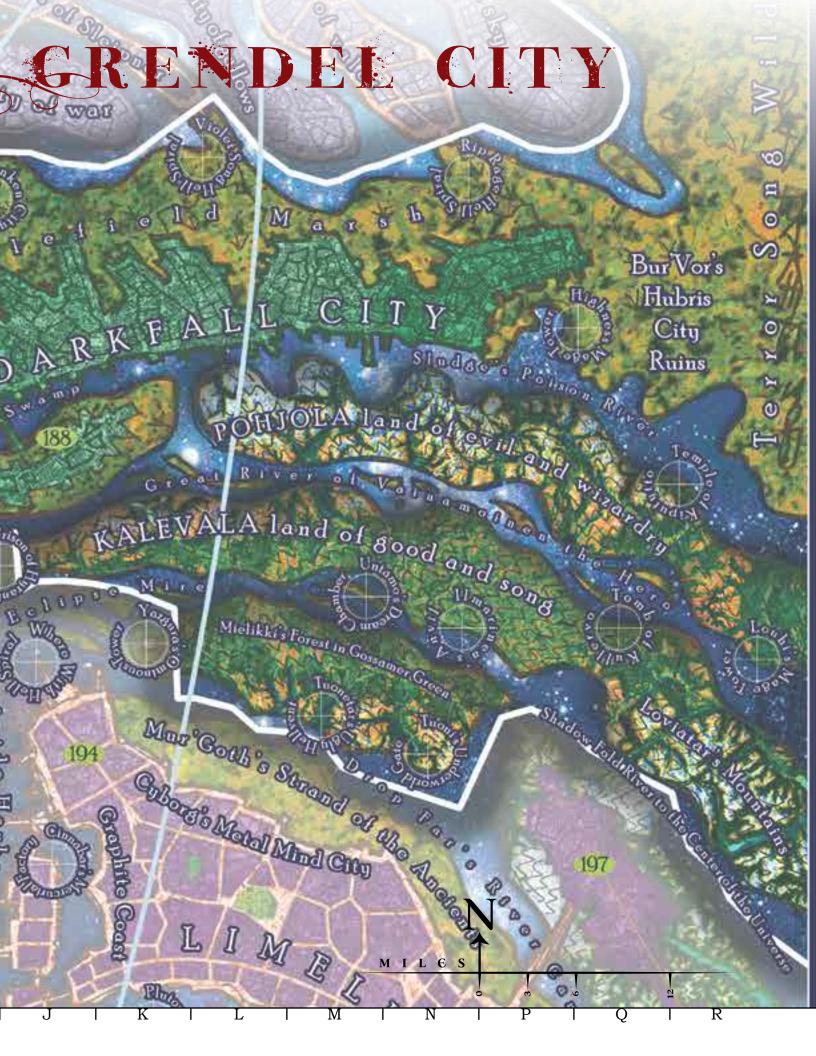












# SOMETHING OF TROLLS AND TROGGS

The Demon Prince

Dhar'VloorgMudroolg the Slime
had evolved his form into that of
a titanic slavering mound of flesh
writhing with countless eye stalks of
differing sizes and aesthetic viewpoint
among a chorus of gibbering mouths
capable of angelic song among a forest
of long saliva dripping tentacles with
which he could move, reach, and taste
the world around him.

Dhar'Vloorg belched forth his bile and filled the corpses of men he had slain, reshaping them in his own glorious artful image and raising them back to life.

So, came to be the **Troll Races** or **Dhar**.

### Freewill artists and adventurers to enliven and reshape the thus far miserably boring universe.

The Dhar races are the Troll races of Xai.

In the grand scheme of troll religions there are two kinds of beings, Trolls and Troggs.

# Trolls are holy and Troggs are damned.

All Troll races regenerate most all harm of violence, accident, toxin, or disease. They will famously recover from "death" in minutes, hours, or even days depending on the severity of the harm. They are generally un-killable but suffer the pain of every harm more keenly than other mortal-kind.

But Trolls despite their regeneration are not immortal, living no longer than a typical human, their regeneration like a mortal spring, strong and especially powerful in childhood, slowing in unwinding strength and effect with age, until fading entirely unwound in the elderly years.

The demonic bile of Trolls has made all their kind the focus of wars, genocide, slavery, crusades, and persecutions of every imaging through the long ages of Xai history. But through it all, Trolls have suffered but endured, their indominable freewill and artistic spirit every bit as strong as their preternatural life-force.

### Modern Trolls are famously adventurous thrill seekers, athletes, heroes, mercenaries, and explorers.

If you were to image Xai as a roleplay environment for heroes and adventurers, the groups would be "rolled-up" from the Troll races.

# Because death is a learning experience, Trolls are always better.

Modern Trolls are independent and diverse, as likely evil as good, as likely chaotic as lawful, but rarely neutral (the Dhar are always interesting and always have a "point-of-view").

Trolls even to modern day are however the constant subjects of discrimination and bigotry. The Troll races are viewed as demonic and thus "cursed" by nearly all Trogg religion and tradition.

The history of the Trolls prior to the founding of the Clockwork Metropolis was one of servitude or slavery or having been driven to the far reaches of the Outland Wilderness.

When the Crystal Shard Empress formed her Metropolis Empire and outlawed slavery, the Troll Nations were given dominion over Grendel Spire and its surrounding city, a city the Trolls named for their greatest hero.



Persecuted, embargoed, and often raided by neighboring cities, Grendel City and its population of Trolls were forced into a box by the other Great Houses.

But at the center of their City is Spire Grendel. A Mistress artifact that within contained portals to countless locations scattered across the Outlands.

The far-flung **Troll Nations** are now counted in the thousands across the countless landscapes linked to the Spire Grendel. The Trolls are nothing if not diverse, children of freewill, art, and chaos. Each Nation as beautiful and elegant as the next is ugly and dread, and every fairy tale imagining between.

Backed by the creative might of the Troll Nations, Grendel City is cacophonous riot of architectural styles and technomancy. Some parts of the city the crafted as elaborately ornamented towers of glass and steel and high technomancy while other parts of the city are of equally artful stone masonry and hand carved wood medieval style building eschewing modern technomancy as faithless and superfluous convenience.

The Troll Nations of Grendel City are in a state of constant strife and warfare owing chiefly to the passion and diversity of the many Troll races.

Trolls are an especially emotional lot, something that makes them among the finest artists, adventurers, and explorers of Xai but also makes them some of the rashest and emotionally charged political and military leaders one might imagine.

Grendel City is defended by various Troll Nation veteran armies and navies under dominion of the Great House Slime.

The Trolls are a diverse collection of races, some with long histories of living among Xai's subterranean labyrinths while others preferring outdoor surroundings of mountain, forest, swamp, and jungle. But all Trolls have a keen appreciation of nature, all Troll religions rooted in the Druidic and Celtic arts and the worship and respect of natural spirits.

Therefore, Grendel City is a place of verdant green, overgrown with abundant flora, fountains, and gardens that are part of every street and building.

Trolls of every sort have always been masters of the herbal and alchemical arts, especially those of poison, venom, and toxin, a Trolls natural regeneration able to alter the deadly nature of such toxins to unique magical effects.

Grendel City is a mystical place of ancient Celtic and druidic magic especially in the form of potion, elixir, and decoction, magical to the Trolls but poisonous and often deadly to Troggs (all non-troll races).

### UNDERSTANDING

The King of the Great House Slime is Ghorobus the Wicked, a tall hulking figure of Nyrn'Dhar heritage as seen in his pale ashen skin and large chthonic eyes protected from the dawn light streaming in the high windows by his ornately crafted mirror shades.

He was surrounded at the large roughly hewn ancient ebony table by his Dukes and Duchesses.

Each of the Troll Dukes a physical manifestation of the race's great diversity.

The Duchess of Kon'ata, a tall and slender Eleu'Dhar, a beauty even by elven standards with an unpracticed dancers grace in an elegant golden thread shimmer white gown,

Standing next to her the Duke of Lotus'Mir, a Slagg'Dhar naked as is their custom, his flesh a roiling and bubbling dripping green slime, droplets of melting flesh occasionally hissing as they hit stone floor only to slither back toward the Duke to be absorbed back into his writhing form.

The King is here this morning to discuss recent coastal raids by their berserk barbarian neighbors the Kin'Rhi, a vile race that for long stretches of ancient history enslaved troll-kind and murdered them on general principal.

The Imperial Envoy was finally invited into the room to hear the complaints of the King and his council. The Empress it seems has a sense of humor, for a tall and powerfully muscled female Kin'Rhi entered wearing the official white and silver robes of an Imperial Envoy. The spiderweb threadwork so artfully crafted as to likely be the work of Troll tailors.

As the King moved to speak, the Envoy raised her long silver clawed hand, each long finger struck by the morning light like articulated straight razors, and gestured him to silence, declaring this a Vendetta between House Dhar and House Kin and that another Envoy was at this very moment delivering the same message to the King of House Kin.

So long as Imperial traditions of engagement are respected, you King, "are free to settle this matter as you see fit."

The King began to smile broadly, bowing slightly as the Envoy left the room, pleased he had gotten everything he had asked for without the need of saying a word.





The Morganti Golden Barge was enormous, dwarfing the hundreds of trading ships that shared the river around it. The Helio was also ancient, said to have long ages past traveled the starways of the cosmos, and perhaps may still should you believe such tales.

The waters of the delta were treacherous, the currents of the colliding waters of so many alien rivers known to suddenly sink, or scuttle even large ships piloted by those inexperienced in the Spires waterways.

The troll pilot boarded the Golden Barge to see it safely to Dwan'ma Realm and the river Yanir. The pilot had never been aboard a Golden Barge, few had, though he knew the stories and looked forward to the adventure of it.

The pilot was greeted atop the gangway by a gaunt humanoid, the skin of his face as if stretched too tightly over an ornately rune carved skull, dressed in a crisp jet and red uniform marking him as the first officer. The pilot had never met a Morganti before, let alone one of the Lichborne.

The pilot followed the first officer to the aft and up into a high tower that afforded a commanding view of the vast terraced decks of the ship and the surrounding waterways, a large wheel seeming as from a block of silver carved irregularly with a blunt chisel, several smaller wheels similarly hewn within the larger outer wheel, each of the 9 wheels chiseled with runic tracery on which the troll's eyes could not focus, slipping as if visible only in his peripheral vision.

But the pilot barely noticed the great silver wheel, gaping instead upon a beast-like skeletal giant thrice his own height with 6 enormous arms ended with large bony hands each the size of his chest holding firm the great silver wheel.

"Our pilot will follow your guidance," said the Lichborne in a voice that crawled down the troll's spine with a chill that caused him to think suddenly of the last time he saw is beloved family.

The Lich smiled, its thin stretched lips revealing teeth carved to sharp points, each engraved with a rune of silver. The pilot's life flashing suddenly before its eyes as his mind raced and panic began to set in.

"Ahead slow," said the troll pilot swallowing his fear, "bear left 29 degrees at the next bend and prepare for a hard broadside current," but these waters he knew, and he would see his daughter tonight. His mind began to calm.

The titanic ship was wide and tall, all other ships held and ordered moved by the port masters to clear the portal between Realms, the great cold iron portcullis hanging above in the high dark of the cavern like the sword of Damocles as the Golden Barge moved through the portal. A rush of sea air suddenly washing over the decks of the barge, the temperature, humidity, and scent upon the air all suddenly different, alien.

Though long experienced with such changes, the troll's body involuntarily shuttered and he suddenly sneezed.

The Lichborne quizzically looking in his direction, apparently unaffected by having just traveled a few million miles.

"Bless you," said the Lich tilting its head just so.

# **IG2** DELARIA S BROKEN HEART FOREST

There is a forest in the **Jotunheim Mountains** named for a famed Jotun
Queen that committed suicide after the
death of her pair-bond King.

# 182 STREETS OF POTION & HEX & BLASPHEMY

Just north of the Grendel Spire, this is both the ancient and modern heart of Grendel City. The Streets of Potion are some of the oldest, predating the Metropolis Empire for many Ages.

The modern **Streets of Potion** are a mixture of ancient alchemical guild halls and pharmacological societies. The wealth and unique knowledge of the town's many alchemists made it largely immune to periods of slavery, instead often being complicit in slavery or slave owners themselves to retain their own freedoms.

There are growing calls that the especially wealthy old money troll clans of the Streets of Potion be tried and punished as collaborators of indentured servitude of their own people to other Great Houses. Calls that have thus far gone unanswered as it is just these "noble" wealthy troll clans now heading House Slime, the clan of the current King among the most egregious violators of their own people for a few coins more.



### CRIME OF POVERTY

"But slavery is illegal in the Empire, how is it so many were enslaved for so long?" asked the young Slagg'Dhar student.

"The Great Houses are free to rule themselves as they see fit," started the teacher, "and so the King of House Slime set about to make poverty a crime, imprisoning those that could not pay. Then seeing them sentenced to indentured servitude to those willing to pay. We were enslaved by our own leaders. Therefore, it was not illegal by Imperial Law."

"That is crazy," said the student, "what happened to the King and Dukes that sold their own people?"

"Nothing," answered the teacher, "not yet."

# 188 STARLIGHT CITADEL ON HIGH & BEYOND

The **Starlight Citadel** sits high upon an island surrounded by quagmire coastline and free of Imperial dominion.

The Citadel is linked to Dharkfall by a wonderous **gravity defying 3mile bridge** built by troll wizards in an ancient Age when such were common.

Starlight Citadel is holy city, site of innumerable small churches and in a high walled city surrounding the most holy Cathedral of Saint Grendel as led by the Holy Brothers of Regeneration and the Sisters of Lazarus.

The diversity of the troll races and its countless religions, beliefs, and traditions is hard to comprehend, but all stem from the Demon Prince Dhar and his Nephilim child Grendel as the origin of all troll races.



"Then Never is not so far away as your flawed imagination might see," the Mistress song intoned.

## 191 TEAZOS ISEAND OF VICE AND DEBAUCHERY

At the intersection of Imperial and House Slime dominion is a huge complex a dozen stories tall of heavy stone walls with small dima'glass windows strung to surround a dozen small and large courtyards. A single large arched portal leading into the **Courtyard of Thieves** from the side of Imperial dominion and a similar portal leading into the **Courtyard of Charms** from the side of House Slime dominion. Above each of the 2 arched portals a small sign marking this place as the **Tlazos Pleasure Palace**.

The Pleasure Palace has endured for a thousand years but is still run by the Tlazo family, members of a rare clan of Poly'Dhar, shape changing trolls with a penchant for the seductive arts and druidic e'Mral lace.

Tlazo's Island is a city of courtesans, gaming houses, taverns, smoking dens, sports arenas, night clubs, dance halls, and just about any other vice or entertainment you might imagine.

The adventurous spirit of trolls is famous, their explorations and expeditions legend, but so too are their joyful appetites.

For those not bothered by such nonsense as bigotry and religious or traditions of troll hatred, this is Island city is a kind of paradise on earth.

### **DEAR POLY**

The young man stood uncomfortably in the large admiralty office, his freshly pressed dress military uniform sharp and crisp.

The Admiral a tall statuesque woman with sharp green eyes began to dress down the young officer for his gross incompetence.

"What do you have to say for yourself," she finally demanded.

The man answered almost as if begging, "what can I do to ever atone."

"Undress," commanded the Admiral.

And so, the Poly'Dhar courtesan began to tentatively remove his sharply creased uniform.

## 192 MUDUURAS INDUSTRIAE WONDER WORKS

The **Wonder Works** is an industrial powerhouse of modern Xai, a place of gray troll craftspeople among the most skilled and knowledgeable in the Metropolis.

The Wonder Works is a place of bespoke manufacture, everything made here unique and purpose built. If you can imagine it, the Wonder Works can make it real.



# MYRDDIN AID

Muduura was a young gray troll noble with land and ambition, the lord of a small Grendle City peninsula and island of then small farms and pastoral hamlets.

When stories of the Myrddin Wizards began to circulate and he visited Merlin City and saw for himself its vibrant explosion of development, Mud'uura imagined such a future for his own people.

He traveled to the city of the Myrddin, their London come from some far-future, an ancient fragment of Xai's past. He did not understand such contradictions and he did not care, but he understood London and the hustle of its denizens. It was as if he had found a home, he had not known he was missing.

He stood at the head of the room holding his maps and plans, "I want to create a modern place that makes the hard to make, and I want my people to understand and do the making," he said.

He was about to launch into his presentation, he had prepared for the better part of a year, he was nervous but ready. When the sole Myrddin in floating a few feet above the ground at the back of the room held up one of its long 4 arms.

The young troll and the room of Ddraig builders turned to listen, "everything you are about to say is wrong, though you are right. We will teach you."

And so, began the Wonder Works.



# 207 FOREST OF INTERDIMENSIONAL STRANGENESS

High on the Icy slopes of the Aquarelle mountains is a forest much larger than the map might indicated.

### **FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS**

The explorers were geared for a long cold trek. There guide a Verdan'Dhar claiming to have the "sight" and having successfully navigated the forest before. The guide's body secretly possessed these past dozen years by an Illiyar'Vooran, so its claims were truer than the explorers might imagine.

The guide could easily see the fractures in space, the forest appearing to him as a mirror funhouse where vertical seams would appear reflecting a forest many miles distant. He guided the explorers left of the vertical rift so as not suddenly be miles off course. The explorers of course saw nothing but cold windy snow-covered forest. "Step carefully left of the large stone, do not move right of the stone," the guide had said.

"This is stupid," said the frustrated young explorer bringing up the rear, "seriously, step left of the rock," he mocked. "We paid for this nonsense. Well I am going right."

"No..." said the older explorer just ahead, turning just in time to see the young explorer slip behind the slender trunk of a tree but to not emerge, vanished.

The column suddenly stopped by calls of trouble in the rear, the sudden rush to the rear caused half a dozen others to similarly vanish moving carelessly to help.

"Stop moving you morons," called the guide, "have you no wit about you?"

The expedition had camped for the better part of 8 days while the guide and a few guards sought to find and bring back as many as the missing as possible, the young explorer was found on the bottom of a ravine in an alien forest millions of miles from his comrades, he appears to not be alone.

# Bur vor s hubris city-ruins

This is a cautionary tale where an escaped band of troll slaves led by the wizard Bur Vor sought to make a stand, declare their independence, and build a city of their own.

They succeeded but the city soon began to sink into the swamp. A second and third city built over the ruins, each sinking in turn. Finally, the escaped clans set about to make their homes among the ruins and endure to modern day.

Hubris City and its inhabitants are an especially stubborn and freedom minded people that live proud if impoverished lives as grub and shrimp farmers. Most of the young however leaving for greater adventures beyond the ruins.

### TRADEROUTE

The river boat approached the muddy coast, heavy hanging fog, salt flats, and fetid quagmire for as far as the eye could see. Stepping off the boat was itself a treacherous affair, the merchant's legs slipping deep into the muck, his porters struggling to stay upright with their wax bundled loads.

The march was treacherous, the Scout probing the ahead of the line with a pike for quicksand voids. A mud-lurker took the leg of one of his porters a few hours in, the medic saving his life and 2 of the rear guard sent with the injured man on a litter back to ship to await their return.

The insects and leeches were maddening, none of the purported repellents seemed to do anything except attract the vampiric pests.

They saw the ruins by dim light in silhouette through the fog, angular forms of ancient towers tilted and half sunken. The tribe approached the caravan from the ruins, the Shaman at the fore carrying a staff of wicker and bone, a shrunken head the neck and mouth sewn shut but its eyes alive and flicking about in terror, the head of the famed wizard Bur'Vor.

# REAT AND DEEP MONSTER VALLEY

The Troll races are a generally adventurous and inquisitive people, The Dhar greatly enjoy travel, herbing, and hunting for the collection of rare regents or the discovery of new plants, trees, or beasts that may be useful in their cooking or alchemical arts.

The famed **Monster Valley** is a place of special thrill to young Dhar. This is a place prowled by large predatory beasts that contains a treasure trove of rare flora and fauna not found anywhere else. Collecting regents is dangerous work suitable only for adventurers.

### THEHUNT

The hunters entered the great primordial valley from the east, the monster filled jungle stretching 50miles ahead of them. Rain and fog pressed in upon the hunters as they slashed their way through the undergrowth, cutting their way forward a mile a day.

The valley continued to descend, the fog now limiting visibility to a few yards. The sounds of the forest began to populate their imaginations, the songs of unseen birds and the caw of high canopy raptors causing them to fear they might we swept off by some great talon at any moment. The rustling of trees near and far suggested the great primordial apes moving through the dense interlaced branches just above, mocking their slow ground trudge.

It was then a great roar echoed through the valley causing the party to stop, drop, and hide as children in some old game of hide and seek, their eyes closed as if that might just cause the approaching finder to miss the poorly chosen hiding spot.

ARRIVAL

The 3 Myrddin Wizards were alien in their hairless appearance, tall, seeming as if almost pulled as clay too tall, and elegantly if irregularly proportioned, the males with 2 pairs of long articulated arms, the woman standing behind her companions with 3 pairs of even longer more delicate pairs of arms.

"You have betrayed your people," screamed the first Myrddin.

"Many remain enslaved" howled the second wizard, "despite your claims to have abolished slavery upon the founding of your toy Empire. We are now here; we will not abide your indifference or your delusional beliefs about the destiny of the Soulborne. We claim dominion over our progeny the Lykkan, Ddraig, and Dhar and will free those Lyr still enslaved. Then we will destroy the Amfyr and their Zeveran overlords."

The High Priestess stepped forward holding up her porcelain hand to forestall further outbursts in the presence of the Crystal Shard Empress.

"You and your city of London are welcome to my Metropolis," said the high priestess channeling the song-like voice of the titanic Crystal Shard Empress behind her in the great audience hall of the Imperial Spire, "You shall do as you say with my blessing and support, but you shall not abridge the Amfyr or their Zeveran masters, that is not your destiny, accept this and go forth with my blessing."

The first two wizards fumed and were about to scream their objections when the third Wizard cut them off saying, "We accept your aid in these troubling matters, e'Mral Embrace You."

"e'Mral Embrace You," sang the high priestess as the 3 Wizards turned to leave without bowing as decorum would dictate.

Grumnura is a large walled city on a high plateau surrounded by a dread swamp.

The many Dhar clans of Grumnura have long been enslaved, the fortress city occupied by Kin'Rhi for a thousand years only to be recently liberated with the aid of an invasion of House Merlin military forces, the bulk of the Kin'Rhi forces driven to retreat into the surrounding swamps where they were mostly devoured by the local fauna with the aid of Lyrn shamans.

The street to street fighting left the fortress city in ruins and much of the city's population dead. With the aid of the Houses Merlin and House Lyric the surviving troll clans are rebuilding while at the same time coming to understand what it means to be free and responsible.

Great effort is also being put into restoring the surrounding swamps that have long been plundered and ruined by their once Kin'Rhi overlords, a great many rare regents lost to extinction and others on the brink.

There is a great deal of work to do here and Kin'Rhi spies and raiders continue to harass and threaten rebuilding efforts. A call for adventurers and mercenaries has gone out to aid in the coming efforts.



Kalevala is a long and heavily forested island home to the **KalevDhar**, a magically skilled tribe of shamans, druids, and white witches famed for their healing arts.

The tribes of Kalevala have largely been left alone through the long march of Xai history partly because of the superstitious fear of curse by its inhabitants and partly because the Kelev'Dhar tend to willingly aid anyone that arrives on their shores humble and unarmed.



AID

The small boat had been on the water for some days, the beleaguered family finally arriving along the pebble rock shore just after midnight.

They had planned to set off with their wounded and dying father upon a litter and head to a small coastal village, the lights of which appeared about a mile inland at the edge of a high and imposing forest that that stretched upslope of a high mountain range, the moons shining over their sharp ragged peaks.

As if from nowhere a tall bent troll with arms and legs far to long for its body approached the family, she was naked but for long strands of beads and entwined silk cords that hung tied to her arms and shoulders, he skin painted with crude looking runes in white apparently applied by finger and hand.

"Welcome family of the traitor Atob, we have been expecting you," hissed the troll witch.

"How?" stammered the injured man's son, "We had no knowledge of our own escape until we set off."

Ignoring the boy, she continued, "the contract is simple, we shall save your loved one but none of you may ever leave these lands as recompence," she smiled too broadly.

The shore they noticed was littered with small boats and larger ships as far as they could see in the bright moonlight, all in various states of rot and disrepair.

"Help us then Witch," said the mother holding her dying husband, "and be damned."

"That we are," whispered the Witch, "that we are."



Overlooking the perpetual and impenetrable fogs of Monster Valley are the high cold iron walls of the **Psychotropic Fortress**. The sounds of the fog shrouded wilderness a constant reminder to the wall patrol of the nearby terrors that have always threatened the Fortress, terrors the Lizard King has sworn to protect.

The Lizard King and his kin regularly consume large quantities of psychotropic elixirs that grant their lizard-kind heightened awareness and intelligence, the more primitive of their kind little more than beasts that live as tribes deep within the Monster Valley itself.

### **PROTECTION**

The hulking figure wore robes of red brocaded in gold, his long bejeweled reptilian tail gliding to-and-fro just above the ground through a long dividing slit in his cloak, his elongated prehistoric reptilian head set between his muscled neckless shoulders.

He smiled as he moved into the hall of war, long rows of glinting metallic teeth reflecting the lights floating over the large map table set at the center of the room surrounded by his general elite.

"Kin'Rhi swarm the valley my king, they seek to slay Gham'banna," said the first general as the King entered.

"For what purpose?" asked the King.

"Sport," said the general.

"Then let us plan our own sport, let us hunt ourselves some Kin'Rhi," grinned the King.

# MALADY CITY

Malady City is a chain of 7 islands that boarders the Adrena'Chrome, the center of each island an asylum and hospital for the leprous and incurable. Each citadel overseen by one of the seven orders of the Sisters of Malice; troll witches uniquely skilled in the incurable arts.

# MONTAGE

Montage is a modern Troll city absent any Imperial interference. This is a city of high-rise towers canted and irregularly formed as is the troll aesthetic.

The whole of the population of Montage newly arrived from the far reaches of Xai, repatriated to by the wandering Myrddin Wizards over the past couple centuries.

This is a vibrant and wild town where hundreds of troll languages are spoken, and ancient troll traditions and knowledge are being taught again in its many temples, schools, and alchemical societies.

### NECESSARY

A large but impromptu table was set up in the center of town square, the dead and debris of combat cleared only a few hours earlier. The scent of blood and smoke still sharp in the air. The King of House'Dhar arrived from the north with a contingent of some hundred soldiers and personal quards.

The High Druidess of House'Lyric arrived from the east surrounded by a dozen of her Crystal Thorn Guard.

Finally, the 3 alien Myrddin Wizards drifted in from the south, their flowing robes fluttering several feet above the ground.

GRENDER CITY

The King, the Druidess, and the first of the Myrddin Wizards stood on either side of the large round table of cobbled together wood and debris while each of their entourages stood several paces back looking for signs of betrayal.

"It seems our city is finally free though your methods seem to have left no one left alive to rule," growled the King as he scanned the remnants of the town square.

"You sniveling little rat," spit the Druidess, "did you think the Kin'Rhi would simply leave when asked? Did you imagine this would be easy?"

"Silence you freak of a talking house plant," yelled back the King, "was it really necessary to kill EVERYONE."

"Sadly yes," the Myrddin solemnly intoned, "they had been slaves for so long their reign would have been one leading to centuries of vengeance and suffering."

"What are you blathering on about?" cried the King, "you said nothing of this...nothing," as he spread his arms indicating the still smoking ruins surrounding their gathering.

"In less than a generation, where we stand, will be the center of a modern Troll city populated by YOUR returning peoples long scattered to the edges of civilization and hiding in the Outlands. We will bring them here, free trolls that have never known slavery, each with ancient knowledge, languages, and traditions long since lost to the you and your once enslaved kin. You will know Power."

"You will need to learn to rule young King," mocked the Druidess, "your own returning people will not be so easily conquered as a few thousand raging Kin'Rhi."

# PIT OF VIMIN THE HORRID

The pilot flew the wyndship low over the swamplands, the trees large but scattered, the scent of brine and decay rising onto the deck as the wing'sails shifted to bring the ship still lower.

Among the broken waterways and peat islands a splintered pattern began to emerge, the cracks and waterways of the swamps leading to a large central lake, the Pit of Vimix if the stories are to be believed. A bottomless lake in which is said to reside a titanic beast of "unimaginable" size and "insatiable" hunger.

The captain of the ship figured he could sort out these thousand-year-old stories with a quick afternoon flight and be home in time for tea. As it turned out, he was right in the former but wrong in the latter.

A half mile off the captain spotted a small island on the lake, a good place to set down and take a closer look, if there was an island there was likely a bottom, stories debunked already the thought.

The island was reflective as if wet and oddly concave, the patterns of the island shifted, and the captain suddenly realized the island was looking at his ship as he approached, the whole of the island a partially submerged eye. Veering suddenly up and left he did not see the tentacle which pierced upward out of the water shattering the ship as a child might accidentally smash a fragile bauble.



g.lloyd baker - 2020

# Pohjoratand of Evil and wizardry

The Pohjola is a long island of especially rugged mountainous forests and glaciers.

This is a place that legend says is populated by ancient covens of witches that fairytale stories say can make any hero the most perfect wife.



# PRICE OF LOVE

High in the mountains of Pohjola the prince and his party set their vignettes down in a small snowy clearing, the prince and his guard departing their ships geared for a hike into the icy wilderness, their cargo secured upon the back of a large pack ram.

They made their way a few miles up into the cold dense gloom of the forest to the mouth of a large cave ablaze with a bonfire. The prince and his guard taking shelter from the wind and warming themselves at the fire.

"Have you brought what we agreed," said the crone moving from the icy darkness of the cave. Next to the crone stood a tall and majestic woman of surpassing porcelain beauty, naked but unaffected by the cold, the dream of the prince made manifest, his bride to be.

"I have," said the prince, directing his guards to bring the large bound package from the ram, setting it halfway between the prince and the crone.

"Open it, let me see what you have brought us," cackled the crone.

The prince stepped forward unbinding the package to reveal his young sister safely asleep, warm, and alive.

His betrothed moved to his side, kissing him deeply, a sudden chill followed by a long and growing warmth filled his body. This is what true love feels like he thought.

He slipped a heavy velvet cloak over her now shivering naked form and the newly married couple set off back to his vignette, his guard each bound by constricting thorn vines emerged from the ground, their screams fading as they moved back down the path arm in arm.

"And what is your name my pretty," said the crone as the sister awoke.

# Toxic city of Bleach Blind & Blee

Toxic City is a huge place long enslaved by various Great Houses of the Metropolis Empire as a chemical works of especially hazardous craft.

Toxic City has been a slave town for thousands of years, any trolls found outside the city often enslaved and sentenced to a life of hard labor within the city. The history of torture and suffering within the Toxic city is horrific, a black mark upon the soul of all sentient beings.

When the Myrddin Wizards arrived a few centuries ago, they set about their enigmatic works, often subtle and unseen. But when they came upon the suffering of Toxic City, stories say the Myrddin marched openly through its labyrinthian streets and factories and destroyed every Trogg (non-troll) they came across with what can only be described as divine fury. Dozens of Imperial Guards and Priests purportedly monitoring for "safe working conditions" were swept up in the slaughter.

The slaver exodus from the city was swift though many thousands perished before they had the wit to escape. The last couple centuries of the Toxic City have been of reconstruction and healing. With the aid of House Ddraig and House Lyric the city has been remade a modern industrial marvel filled with trees, gardens, schools, and vine-bound structures under dominion of the former-slave SlageDhar Clans.

Long escaped and hidden Slagg trolls have been located by the wandering Myrddin Wizards and many convinced to repatriate with their ancient kin within Toxic City, restoring some of the old knowledge lost during slavery.

### JUSTICE

The Myrddin Wizards stood among the muddy acid-rain soaked streets, chemical dyes and radioactive waste pouring from pipes directly into streets where young Slagg'Dhar played amongst the filth and decay.

Brute figures wearing heavy environmental suits moved through the streets toward the young children, the Brute in front using a lightning rod to explode one of the playing children into hunks of steaming flesh that tumbled down the torrent of gutter waste toward the watching Wizards.

The Brutes laughed uproariously, "did you hear that one scream before he popped?" he howled. The other Brutes laughed and laughed.

The other children ran, "back to work you lazy..." yelled one of the Brutes, raising his electrified rod to strike the smallest lagging child as they tried to run.

Leveling his wand to strike the Brute instead exploded into a hissing red liquid soup, his enviro-suit containing the Brute's remains, his liquid filled suit slumping to the ground.

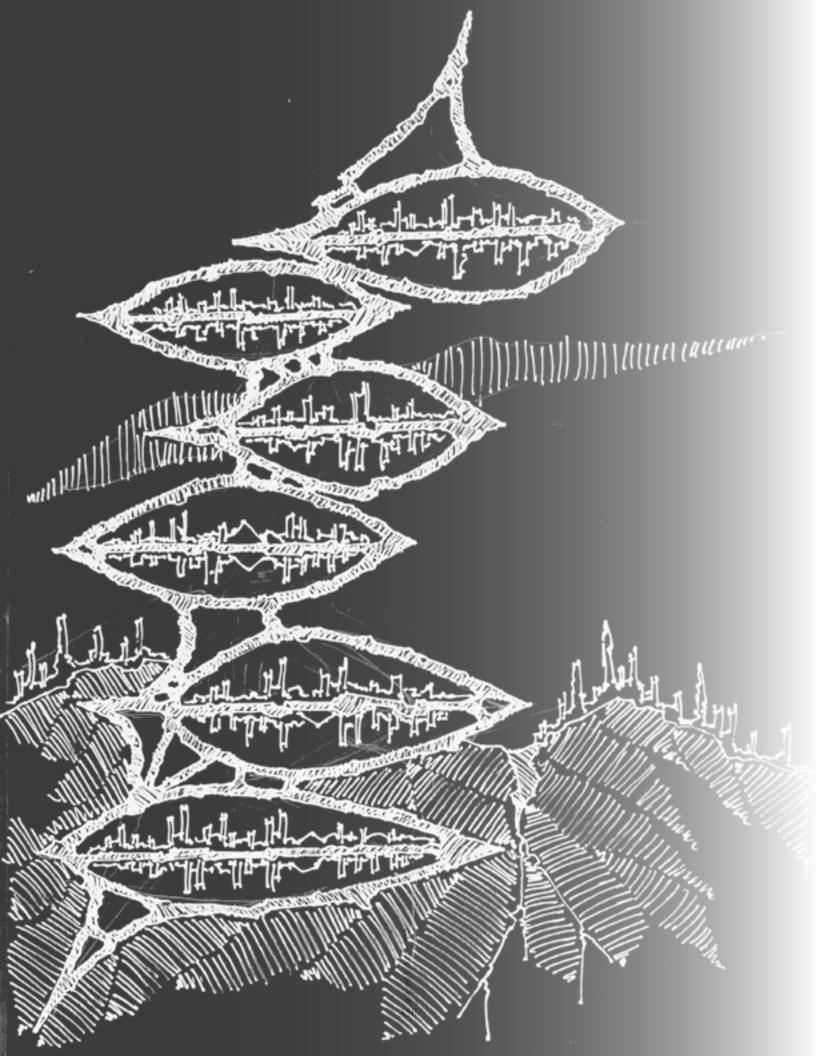
"Did you hear his scream?" said the nearest Myrddin Wizard, getting the attention of the dozen or so Brutes.

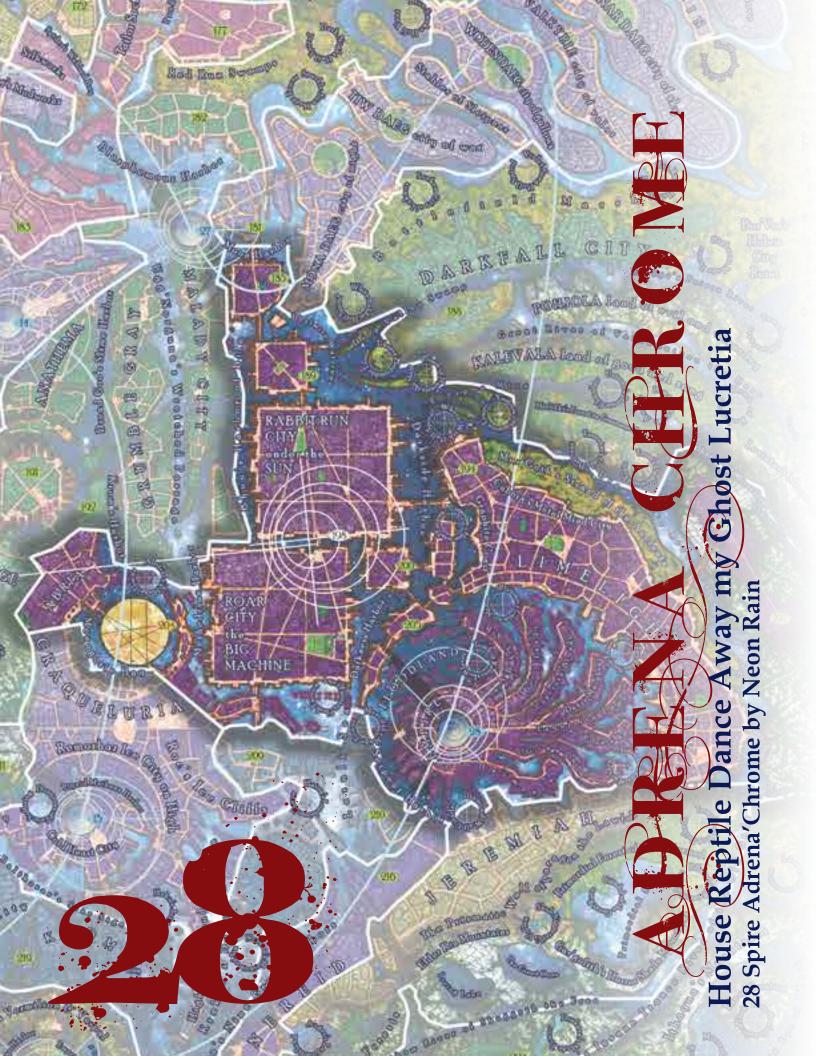
"I did not hear him," said the second Wizard, just as a second of the Brutes suits slumped as if suddenly filled with liquid, "no, I did not hear him either."

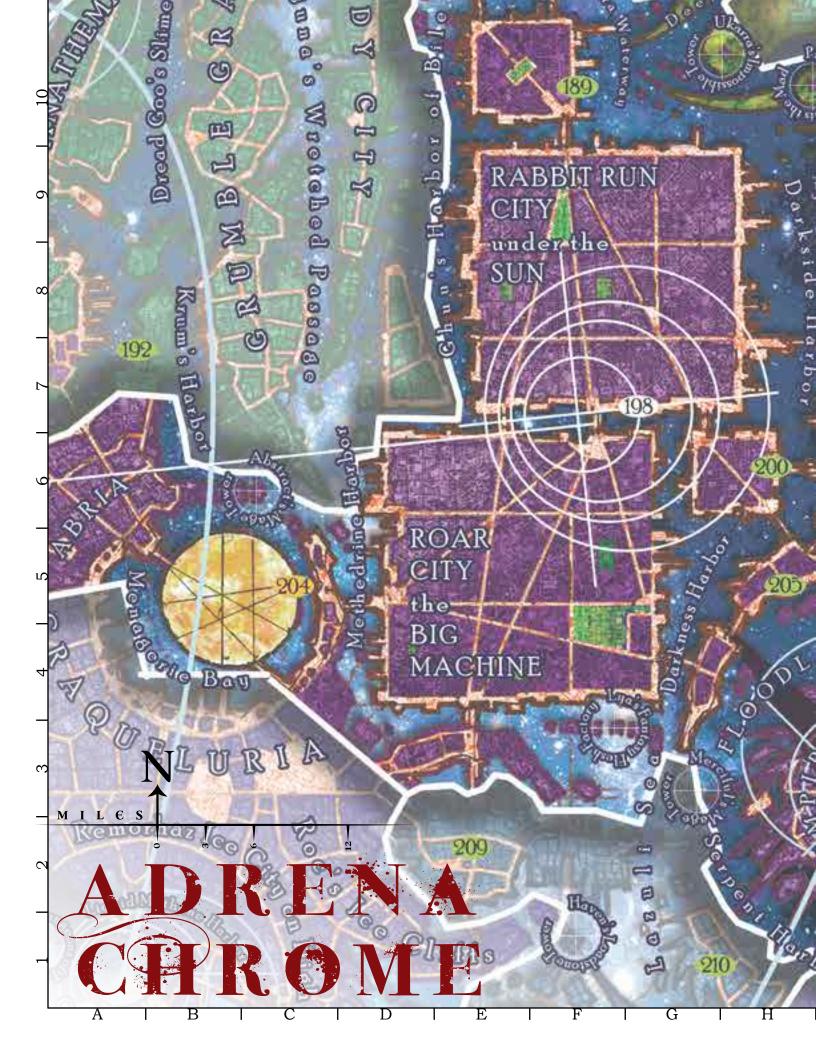
The Brutes were not sure what they were looking at, the naked forms of the alien Wizards barely discernible in the fog and haze of the heavy acid rain.

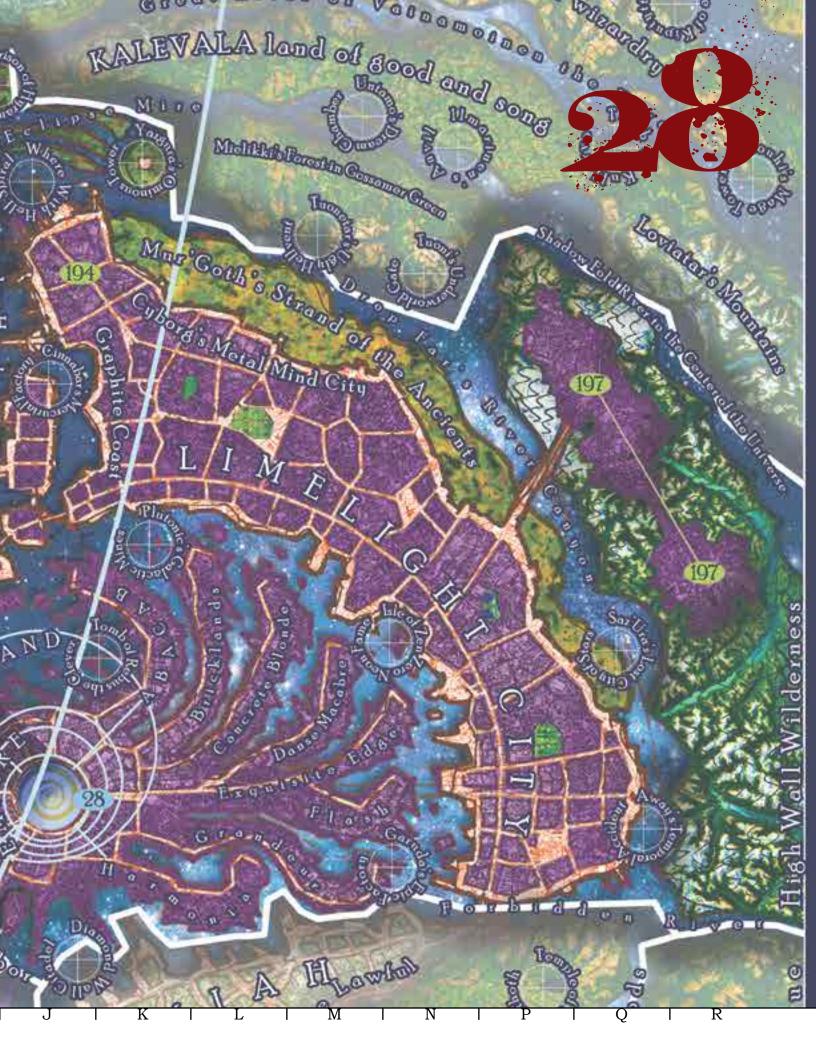
"I want to hear them scream," said the third Wizard.

That is when the slaughter began.











The Fullness' of Dawn was entering the atmosphere severely damaged and out of control. The ship was colossal, an ark ship carrying thousands with genetic soul reserves for millions more, all that remained of the Xuvarian race.

The Captain did his best to save what he could of his disintegrating ship. They were high over unexplored regions of Xai's Outlands. They had almost made it, he thought as he could feel heat suddenly rising, the viewfinders showing the ship as a fireball streaking across an otherwise blue spring sky.

The Overlord's son stood behind the Captain, his eyes closed as he sought to calm his mind, remembering back to his father's study and the wizardry taught to his family line for thousands of years.

He settled his mind and focused on the nonsensical words, a nursery rhyme of foolishness but the sounds and syllables helped to focus his mind, to see past his immediate circumstance, to call upon the ancient pact between his noble lineage and the Afreet.

As suddenly as his mind cleared it became enflamed, the bridge was filled with the smell of brimstone and swirled with thick ashen smoke, at the center of the whirlwind a tornado of flames wreathed a hulking hairless jet figure, his naked muscled body fading into the swirl of flames where legs might have continued.

"Young Princeling, long has it been since your beloved kind have called upon my aid," said the Afreet, his worlds striking the ears of those on the bridge as hot embers.

"We are betrayed," the Prince said panicked.

The Captain and his crew drawing arms pointed at the Afreet.

"Sad and long has time eroded your cruelty," whispered the Afreet, "never have

I heard the word betrayal uttered by your kind, for betrayal is but a word to blame others. And threats," he said looking upon the Captain, "naked weakness at the last...tragic...I weep for your fathers as they look upon this moment in shame."

"We are weak and we blame others for what has been done to us, we have forgotten the old ways," the young Prince steeled himself, "but we call upon your aid to save the last of us, that we may once again find truth in the old ways."

"And now you beg," the Afreet lamented, "such irony, a cosmic joke upon we Afreet of the Djinn, it seems you are destined to perish this day young Prince, for I see before me nothing worthy of saving."

The Prince recalled tales of his ancient kind, cruel with a passion for pure exalted evil, unmolested by conscience or compassion, or the suffering of others, he recalled the need for sacrifice.

Then he said, "take my Captain and his crew as payment for this aid, save my ship and its cargo of genetic souls, and I will begin our kind burned free of modern frailty and again embrace the old alliances."

The Captain and everyone upon the bridge was swept away in whirls of fire and scattered ash, as were the Captain's crew scattered through the ship.

"Perhaps," said the Afreet with a wide smile revealing a mouth ringed in teeth of licking flame and a long tongue of curling smoke and ash, "When next we meet, let not our reunion be despoiled by words of weakness, blame, or prostration, such uncivil rudeness will find me far less forgiving young prince."

The Afreet was gone in a flourish of flame which swept through the ship, burning clean the clothes and skin of the Prince, his body and the bodies of every genetic soul forever marked by skinless char-cracked pain, all sense of conscience burned forever from their souls.

The ruined ship landing safely but far from any know civilization.



ADRENA CHROME

The Adrena'Chrome is a city famous for its advanced cybernetic and android technomancy led by a cruel ancient race called **Xuvarian**.

The Adrena'Chrome is a future-modern style high-rise city of such hyper-tech materials as diam'glass, polarized'stone, and invisible'steel. This is a city of advanced robotics, androids, and logic engines. Everything is as magic, and all magic is as a highly advanced technomancy.

The one thing the Adrena'Chomre is more known for than anything else is cybernetic technomancy, the art of adapting machine replacement parts to a living body (called Chrome).

Anything can be replaced and made as good or better depending on price and skill. Military chrome-work is officially illegal but of course common, mostly on account of it being difficult to detect and legal to obtain within the Adrena'Chorme's innumerable hospitals and medical clinics.

The line between the living and machine is blurred in the Adrena'Chrome and both are cheap in a place of abundance.

The Adrena'Chrome is perhaps the most technically advanced City of the Clockwork Metropolis, most everything made here is illegal outside the Adrena'Chrome excepting non-sentient robots or androids designed to replace slave labor.

The City is surrounded by a blockade of Imperial ships and port officials that attempt to limit the free flow of Chrome technomancy, but it is an overwhelming task, only a fraction of illegal goods is thought to be stopped.



The **Reptile House** is arguably the most powerful of the 37 Great Houses due to its large and diverse population and **extraordinary technomancy**.

The Reptile House is however somewhat crippled as a **power in decline**, for despite the technomancy mastery of Xuvarians, there are few alive with the skill or knowledge to advance.

The truth is, all the Adrena'Chrome has already fallen back to lower orders of understanding, there is no one alive to understand or repair the old Xuvarian machines. The Adrena'Chrome is the last Xuvarian city and the Xuvarians are now all but vanished.

The Reptile House is ruled by the last of the Xuvarian race, an ancient peiople that rivaled the Mhorganti in their explorations, the Lyr in their technomancy, and the Lykkan in their celestial audacity.

But what the Xuvarians excelled at was a passionate hatred and an all-consuming lust for power, a lust that resulted in a spiraling series of wars that left the last of the "winners" as the modern leaders of a single city in a struggle for power against rivals that have only recently mastered the steam engine under domain of an Empress herself stuck in a chunk of glass.

# How low the mighty have fallen at their own hands.

the Reptile House still operates on ancient Xuvarian traditions and is a strictly ordered political hierarchy rooted firmly in either the obedience to one's elders or their immediate assassination. While Reptile House rule can at times seem overly ordered and cruel, the view from the streets is of a place that encourages technical creativity, innovation and advancement by skill and deed, a functioning meritocracy where hard work and clever thinking are rewarded.

The sad part about all this so-called innovation is in the repurposing of ancient Xuvarian technomancy or **derivative research** into "new applications" of something that was new a long-long time ago. The truth is the knowledge of how to make or even repair the old Xuvarian machines is lost to modern day.

The most disturbing part of the Xuvarian tale is what happens next. The Xuvarians are soon to be extinct and when their iron fist loosens, as it has started too, a power struggle between the TechnoPrinces of the Ardrea'Chrome is expected to result in real war, millions are projected to perish in best case scenarios.

The chief concern of the Crystal Shard Empress and the other Great Houses this past century has been to prepare for when the most technically advanced City of the Metropolis finally goes to war with itself.

The prevailing plan of most Great Houses is to let the City tear itself apart and then move in with combined forces and loot the city for knowledge and parts, something the Crystal Shard Empress would very much like to prevent.

# of Xuvarians

The Auvarians were a gleaming gold skinned race with flaming eyes famous for their immunity to fire, cruelty, and their alliance with the Afreet and various fire elementals whom they could call upon in times of need.

The Xuvarian Empire was the first great mortal empire to dominate ancient Xai, the favored first sons of the Mistress, legendary for their ambition, technical creativity, and merciless cruelty.

The **Age of Xuvaria** ended with the last survivors of the race cursed.

Xuvarians are famous for never being seen outside their each uniquely crafted and fully sealed advanced plate armor, the suits apparently required for their survival having endured some ancient but likely well deserved evil.

Less traditional Xuvarians have adopted the practice of having their brain transplanted into a **Mnemonic Core**, a device that allows for standard interface into a vast array of robotic bodies (called **Soma' skins**) suited to need or desire.

Xuvarians have endeavored to restore their physical form since their grand fall. They have genetically engineered dozens of failed races to restore their kind but the demise of the Xuvarian race seems certain with only a handful thought to remain to modern day.

# XUVARIAN LAW

Xuvarian Law is enforced within the Adrena'Chrome (excepting of course the mile-wide strands and enclaves under dominion of the Empire).

As compared to Imperial Law, Xuvarian Law is perhaps more familiar to the reader as a more western form of justice. **Property rights are** paramount and the state has the power to protect individual wealth from theft or harm and favors those with wealth and privilege over the unwashed masses and the un-landed, ensuring the working classes remain a permanent capitalist underclass.

This strong property centric law-andorder stance of Xuvarian governance has made it a shining example of capitalist economic prosperity, favored by businesses, guilds, and Combines (the Xai equivalent of internationalcorporations where workers and their families are also citizens).

The effect is enforcing a kind of practical enslavement upon its citizenry. But not a resisted slavery, a cozy sheep-style slavery. Rather the safety and security of citizens is largely considered the benefit of a peaceful working life raising well educated children in good safe schools and enjoying the benefits of regular vacation, travel, and retirement, all with excellent health care; all at the cost of a few civil liberties to ensure the quick removal of dissidence.

Most of the Great Houses tend to be based on Xuvarian Law, preferring the inheritance and property rights of **Stuff** over people as a means of ensuring their noble families remain dominant.



# 28 SPIRE ADRENA CHROME BY NEOFRAIN

The Spire Adrena'Chrome is a wonder to behold. The Spire is composed of thousands spherical and irregularly shaped chrome volumes of widely varied size rising up from the ground in a spray frozen miles into the sky with the whole and each reflective fragment moving and rotating in a perfectly choreographed and impossibly complex dance of reflection and light around an imaginary vertical axis.

The base of the Spire is the apex of a buried chrome spherical form that reaches many miles into the ground. At grade surrounding the Spire is the vibrancy of one of the most modern and diverse cities of the Clockwork Metropolis, the plas'teel and dy'glass high rises and commerce streets of the Adrena'Chrome.

At grade within the base of the Spire is a grand one-mile diameter flat dome upon the inside is reflected the sky of random celestial world each day.

The plaza is populated with a grand bazar of tents, vehicles, caravans, and temporary structures of all manner. The only rule is that each 33rd day the plaza must be entirely cleared.

At the center of the plaza is a series of permanent ticketing and hospitality structures surrounding cascading voids that lead a traveler down to the **Xuvarian Train Terminal**, the largest and most spectacular train station of Xai with tracks laid once leading to many thousands of colonies, cites, and demon realms throughout the Outlands of Xai and Subworlds of Xakarra, some few still in use, most closed and long forgotten.



# 185 VILEHEART CHEMICAL FIELDS & MOON HARBOR

**Vile Heart** is a disputed city, claimed by both the House Adrena'Chorme and House Grendel.

The 36 square mile city is mostly populated by **SlaggDhar clans** and similar citizenry that claims loyalty to House Grendel excepting a large Xuvarian naval yard and garrison at Moon Harbor.

The city is famously a **toxic** wonderland of poison and radiation that makes it uninhabitable except by especially resilient races such as Slagg Trolls and Xuvarians.

The **Chemical Fields**, despite the deadly method of manufacture, is the producer of some of the finest alchemical potions and elixirs used for medical and recreational purpose throughout the Metropolis.

# 189 DIRE SEAG SMOKE WORKS

The **Smoke Works** is a foundry town that mostly makes legal mortal **weapons for export**.

Given the general unreliability of chemical reactions, most of its mortal technology exports are in the form of modern bows and especially modern crossbows with clip reload actions and micro-tensioning mechanisms that allow for highly advanced dart pistols and rifles.

The Smoke Works is famous for the craft of its chrome revolvers and long guns popular with the e'Mral gifted.

The Smoke Works is a dirty gritty town populated by a proud hard working, hard playing, and hard fighting population of blacksmiths, iron mongers, and blast furnace artisans.

# 194 CYNERGEN SPARK CITY OF GEASS

Cynergen is one of the largest and most powerful Techno'guilds of the Adrena'Chrome, deeply connected with House Reptile and as some have speculated, inseparable. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that Cynergen represents a transition in power, if not in name, in practice. And that the multi-racial leadership of Cynergen will eventually replace the fading racist Xuvarian leadership of the Reptile House, and in many ways, already has.

**Spark City** is the headquarters of the Cynergen Combine, arguably one of the most economically powerful collection of people to now inhabit modern Xai.

The Cynergen is famous for its creation of power cells, black box shrouded modules that of tampered with, destroy their contents. Cynergen modules are ubiquitous, powering just about everything that requires local electrification.

Spark City is a wonderland of **glass** high-rise architecture that builds using various crystal and glass as well as transparent steels, stones, and metals to create architecture of reflective and refractive glory, a color spray of light and veiled view and privacy that is the height of modern technomancy.

The streets are narrow and made for walking, lined with high fashion shops and trendy restaurants, gyms, spas, and reality-theaters serving a million Cynergen citizens, the apex of wealthy, enlightened, and peaceful civilization.

## 197 HIGH CITY & CASTLE SACRIFEGE IN MERCY

The High City is accessed by way of the Bridge of Fathoms while the Sacrilege in Mercy is accessed through the High City by way of the Bridge of Dreams.

The High City and Castle Sacrilege are strongholds of House Adrena'Chorme entirely free of Imperial influence.

High City is among the most secure places in the Clockwork Metropolis, a city into which only Xuvarians are permitted entry. Rumor is Afreet and Firelords have been reported prowling the streets with Xuvarian Priests.

Castle Sacrilege is the royal palace for the Xuvarian Overlord and his court.

# 198 DRIFT CITY FOUR BY FOUR SQUARE HIGH

High overhead Roar City and Rabbit Run is Drift City Four. The Drift City is 18-miles diameter, a series of concentric rings and voids built during the Calibahn Empire by the Nine Necromancer Kings.

Drift City Four is ruled over by the Reptile House and is residence to the last of the Xuvarian population.

Like all Calibahn Drift Cities it is an exuberant mix of gothic and rococo architecture and sculpture, the whole of the city a single expression of otherworldly artful intent.

The Drift City Four is an ancient wonder, the craft of which belies replication by the highest technomancy and wizarding skills of the modern age. Drift City Four is maintained as a parkland of museums, libraries, secret societies, and prestigious universities, famous among the Great Houses for the education of young nobility from across known Xai.

## **200** EMERALD HAZE NIGHT CITY

Night City is built on the top of a buried 6-mile cube of crystal and ice built by the Mistress Angelic.

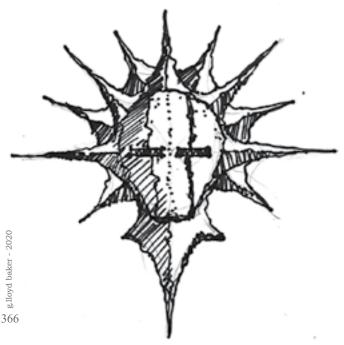
The chill nature of the cube creates a micro-climate of perpetual fog and **night**, a place that has over the ages become a city of vice.

Emerald City is 36 square miles of gaming houses, hotels, bars, theaters, and all manner of dangerous good times.

Green light can cut through the chill mist and the abundance of green neon signage tends to give the streets is perpetual damp green glow.

Below the city lies and array of mysteriously shaped chambers and confounding corridors carved from living ice that never melts. Ice miners have long operated supplying ice throughout the Metropolis, ice that has a slight green tinge and is slow to melt (but when carved from the cube, will eventually melt).

The water of the melted ice glows green in the dark (called Chill'vira) and is itself known for its psychedelic but healthful and regenerative properties.



# ADRENA CHROMI

## 204 ARTIFACT SUN SHARD SUMMONERS PLAIN

The **Sun Shard Plain** is an artifact as mysterious as any on Xai and perhaps more powerful than any known to exist.

The Sun Shard is a plain about 8miles diameter of cracked crystal that reflects the light of a sub-world sun upward through its surface.

The Sun Shard has long been used as a **summoning portal** for denizens of the subworlds and as a means of ritually traveling to the various subworlds.

It is thought that before the advent of demons to Xai and their subsequent banishment to Xai's subworlds that the Sun Shard was an open portal to many paradise subworld realms. And though now closed, remains a close connection.

It is also speculated by some that the Sun Shard was once a portal to a much larger Mistress space-opera, and that Xai was the workshop of their many paradise soul-forge projects.

And that the Sun Shard was an open portal to millions of far distant worlds among millions of far distant galaxies.

And that when Xai was corrupted by demonic influence, the Sun Shard was sealed to its pan-galactic star-ways as a means of **quarantine**, until mortal-kind evolves strong enough to destroy demon-kind forever or the Demon Princes gain final dominion over mortal-kind.

The Sun Shard is a place of prophesy and purpose that goes to the heart of Xai existence and the Mistress plan for the Soulborne races.

# **205** MYRRHS MANIFOLD CITY OF SUNDERED SKY

Manifold City is a place of personal and cargo vehicle manufacture.

Manifold is the place where sorcerous anti-grav sky-cycles and sky-cars and vignettes (flying cargo-van workhorses of Xai) are crafted, though illegal for sale or trade outside the Adrena'Chrome (though not especially illegal to own or use if bought inside the Adrena'Chrome).

Manifold city also builds wheeled and ground'lev vehicles for export, robot warhorses and chariots and carts with robot draft animals.

In addition to the its large industrial complexes, Manifold City's streets are alive with thousands upon thousands of small mechanics and customization shops ready to **hot rod any vehicle** for racing, off-road performance, or war.

Cycles, especially sky and ground'lev are popular among the adventuring elite because of their high speed and because even when packed for exploration can pass through a typical 2yard diameter crystal portal. Slaving a cycle to follow a ridden cycle like a train is also popular with the expedition elite.

"There is a lot to explore out there, make sure you travel with the right gear, make it Myrrh."



#### THE CHROMPREBELLION

The rebels stood at the head of the ancient basement hall of some long destroyed Calibahn Lich.

Representatives of a dozen Adrena'Chorme street gangs, their Chrome augments marking each as more than human, they were each in varying degrees, cybernetic-organic, a fusion of living and machine, they were cyborg, they had been Chromed.

The room was filled with applicants, 26 years or older was the rule, though no one was quite sure why, something to do with rejection.

The rebel leader spoke, "We are all slaves to the whims of the sorcerous elite, Arcane and Fanes that exalt in their mythical e'Mral sight and glorious magic," he spat with contempt. "While we the ninety-nine percent live in squalor forgotten, a burden to the highness wizards. We cannot even use a gun or drive a car, unable to Lace it with the invisible e'Mral mists that are our chains."

"But there is a reason our Chrome is illegal in the Empire," the leader continued in low tones, "and it is not because it is a threat to our lives as their lies claim, it is because it is a threat to THEIR lives. Chrome only works for us, the Mortal, these limbs," he said lifting his elegant mirrored cybernetic arms, "only work when attached to flesh and blood, e'Mral avoids them, wraps around them, cannot find them, and thus wizards, Arcane, lichborne, none of the bastards can use them, they can only be killed by them," he said with a grim smile, "They are the gift of the Mistress to her chosen people, you and *I.* "

"Some of you may have recognized our guest tonight," he said pointing his machine hand toward the front wall where very tall and beautiful naked woman hung chained upon the wall, streaked with grime and blood, her head hung forward, her long black hair curling over her chest. But most obvious was the ragged angry looking scar that stretched from her neck straight down between her breasts to end at her belly button. "This is the Sorceress Mil'ganna, sent here by her masters to teach US as lesson."

Timid fear laden laughter moved through the hall.

"She needed a bit of fixing," said the rebel leader with a cruel smile, "we Chromed her heart and a few other important bits. Now she is no more magical than you or me, isn't that true?" he mocked toward the helpless former sorceress, "see any e'Mral mists swirling about me? No! My chains are gone you say?" Mil'ganna could only glower at her tormentor, her sight of e'Mral was gone, she was as he said, just another mortal scum.

The recruits all knew the stories of Chrome, the Mistress, the Xuvarian, and why they were illegal, the sorcerous crushing the mundane, all of it was canon among the street gangs of the Adrena'Chrome.

Chrome was the great equalizer, that which made sorcerers afraid to walk the streets of the Adrena'Chrome alone, made the Fanes afraid to preach on its corners. The street gangs of the Adrena'Chrome ruled the city and no sorcerous power could undo the Xuvarian work to make it so.

It was then a Xuvarian entered the ornately carved ancient hall, the armor marked him male, an elegant meld of baroque art and efficiency that sealed the Xuvarian within, the ornately wrought metal and crystal carapace his very skin, never removed, a part of his being.

"You bastard," spat the chained sorceress.

"You are the future," said the Xuvarian in a soft but passionate mechanical voice, his back now to the sorceress, "you are what the magical of this universe hate and fear, mortals with the power of choice."

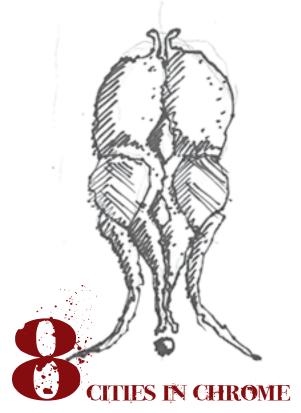
The hundred or so Applicants smiled, and half cheered. Each was the product of poverty, drugs, and death, living to be 26 was itself an act of heroism on the mean streets of the Adrena'Chrome. And this was their chance for some payback.

"The Empress and the other Great Houses all seek our demise," the buzzing voice continued, "all seek you to remain subservient, docile, and above all else, Un'chromed. Take this gift and remind them to fear, for the Mistress have gifted Xai and this universe to us, but it is a prize that must be earned with blood, sacrifice, and Chrome. Glory be the Mistress; Glory be the Chrome."

The Applicants were ready to become soldiers in the cause, enemies of the Empire, the Fanes, the Arcane, all of it.

Glory be the Chrome.





**Abacab** is a district that specializes in voice and hearing, master machine surgeons that can give anyone the cybernetic voice of an angel or the perfect pitch tuned analog ears of a musician.

The **Bricklands** is a medical district that specializes in the implantation of cybernetic bone and muscle. A favorite among sports enthusiasts, professional athletes, acrobats, and elite military professionals that can afford the extraordinary costs. The masters of the Bricklands can make a person damnnear unbreakable with the strength of a forklift, and that is just the starter package.

The **Concrete Blonde** is famous for their specialization of cybernetic skin & hair and the replacement of lost or enhanced touch, scent, and taste. The Blonde are masters of the sensual arts and can guarantee improved levels of perception and ecstasy in all matters related to food and-or sexuality. Cybernetic hair or skin can be of any color, reflectance, or texture (full body cat's fur being a perennial favorite) and may even be made programmable or chameleon-like provided one's funds are sufficient.

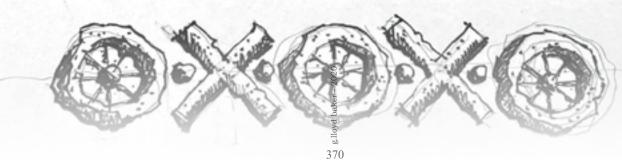
The **Danse Macabre** is a medical district that specializes in full body cybernetic replacement, the brain being retained as original. The cost of a master craft body is extraordinary but may be tailored to almost any preference or performance specification.

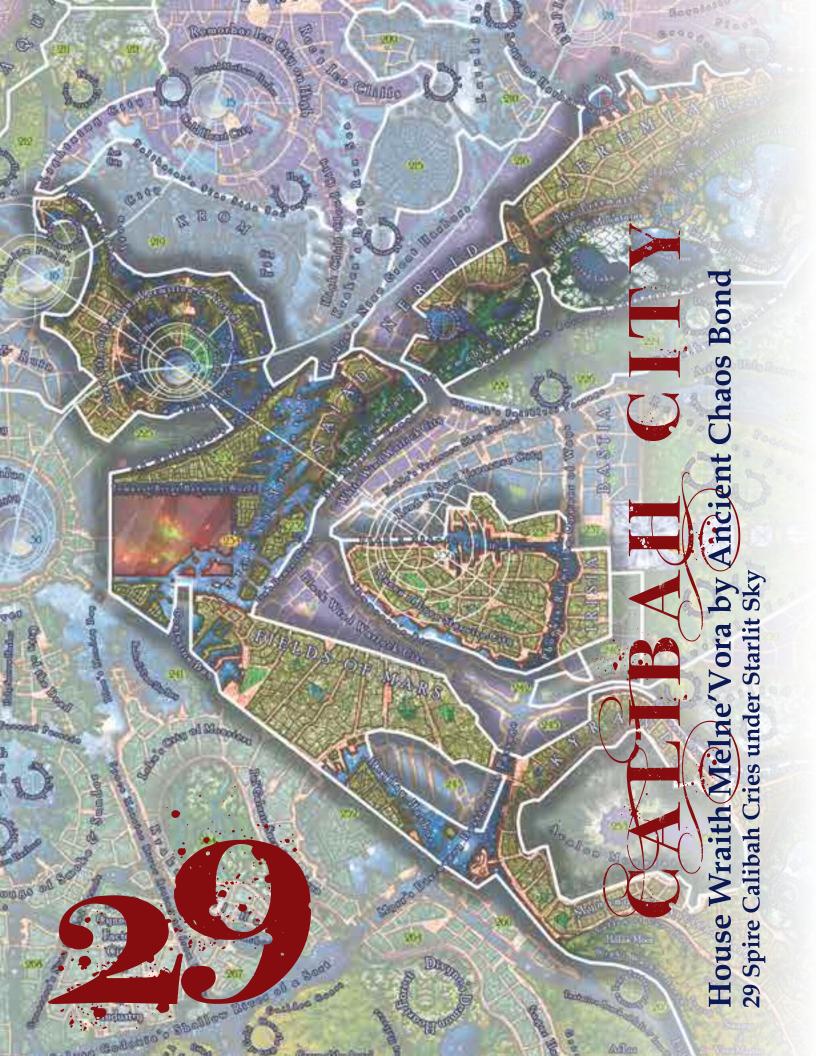
Mnemonic cybernetics are a skill best left to experts of the Exquisite Edge whose mastery is matched only by their price. Cybernetics of the mind can alter just about anything, removing or adding memoires, installing, or removing skills, providing perfect memory or playback capability. Or in the most extreme cases, creation of a Mnemonic Core to contain the mind in a near immortal state, allowing the individual to "plug-in" to any robotic or cybernetic body as needed or desired, changing one's robotic body as one once changed clothes. Mnemonic Core immortality is popular among Adrena'Chorme nobility and is gaining increasing popularity among the up and coming super rich, adding to the growing divide and soon-to-be conflict between the wealthy and working.

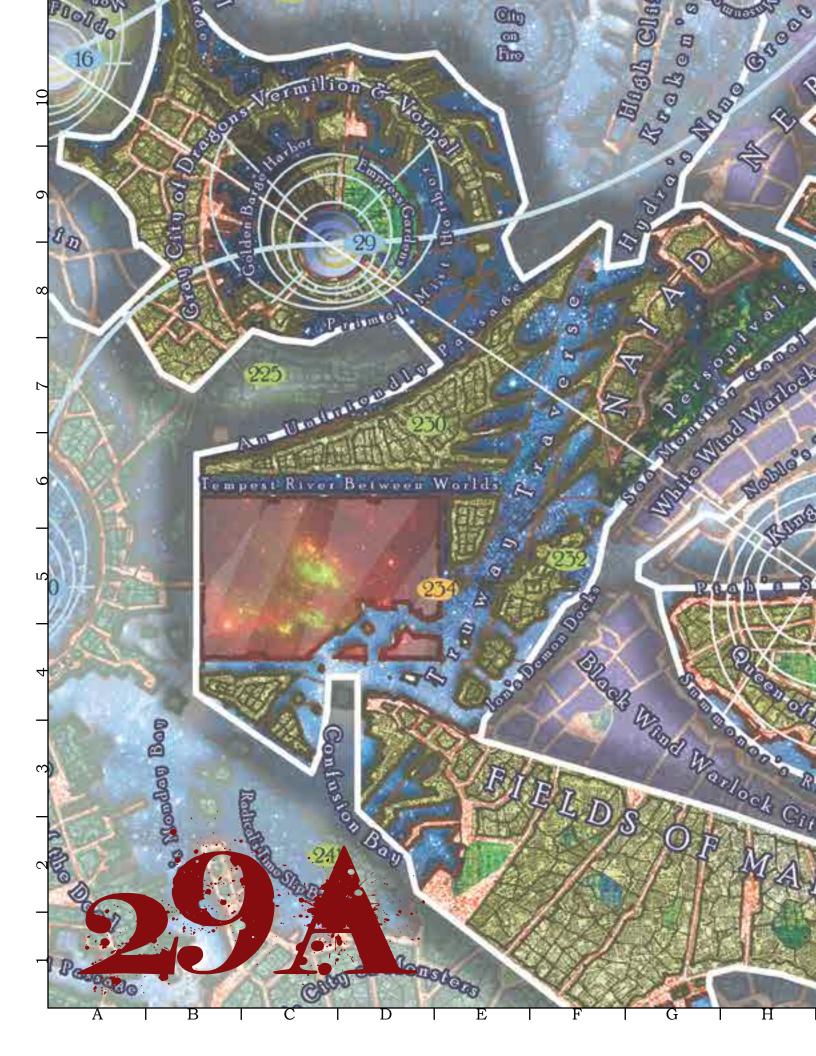
**Flash City** is a medical district that specializes in eyes. Cybernetic eyes can be made for cosmetic purpose allowing for a specific look or for a bit more currency, programmable to desired appearance. Full cybernetic eye replacement is also popular allowing for improved vision or expanded visions such as infra-vision or night vision or more exotic sensitivities such as x-ray or visible odor perception. The possibilities are virtually endless, and the doctors and researchers of Flash City relish a good challenge provided one's wallet is of sufficient bounty.

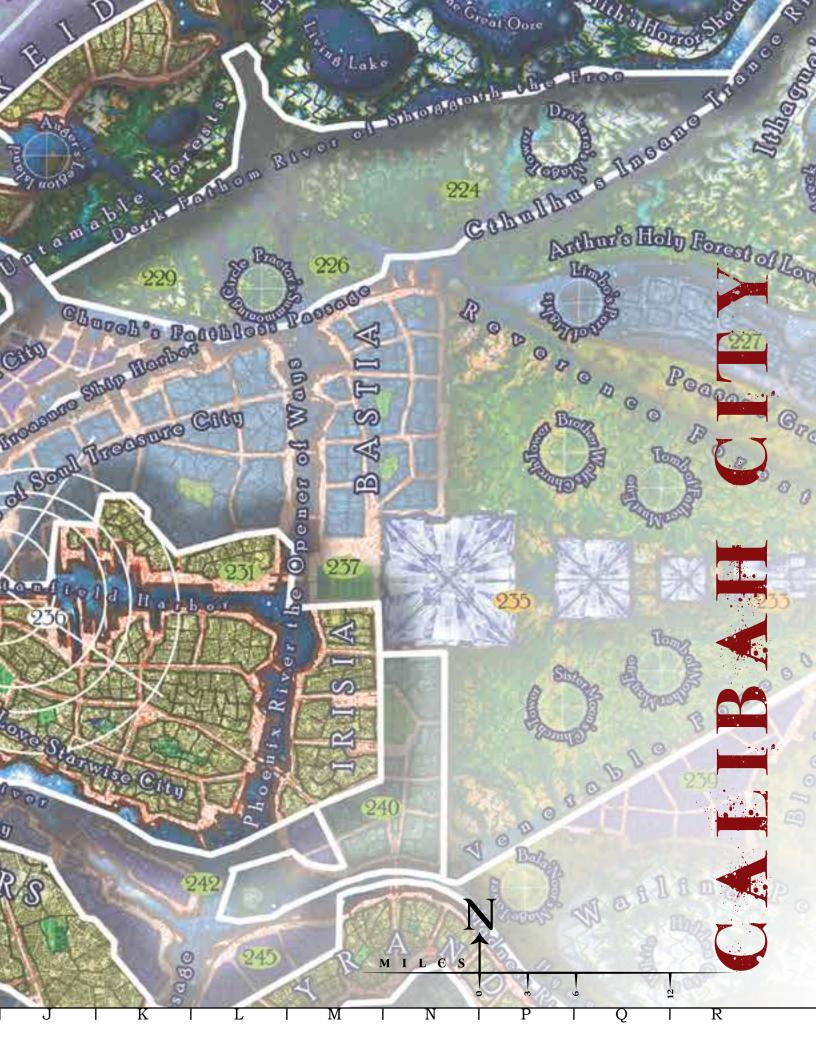
**Grandeur** City is a proper hospital district of high-tech medical facilities and clinics that specialize in the cybernetic repair and replacement of internal organs. As it turns out, most every major ailment or disease can be cured by replacement of part, some, or all of one's internal organs if the price is right. And while the export of Adrena Chrome technomancy is illegal, it is perfectly legal for any citizen of the Clockwork Metropolis (or anywhere else for that matter) to come to Grandeur City and be cybernetically cured and then return home. Most of Grandeur City's reputable hospitals focus on curing the ailing. Less scrupulous side street and coastal clinics will replace perfectly good organs with cybernetic replacements to enhance or improve performance. For example, replacement lungs are popular with runners as they provide near infinite endurance while a replacement liver allows for the consumption of near any alcohol, drug, or toxin with no ill aftereffects (advertised as all the high with none of the low).

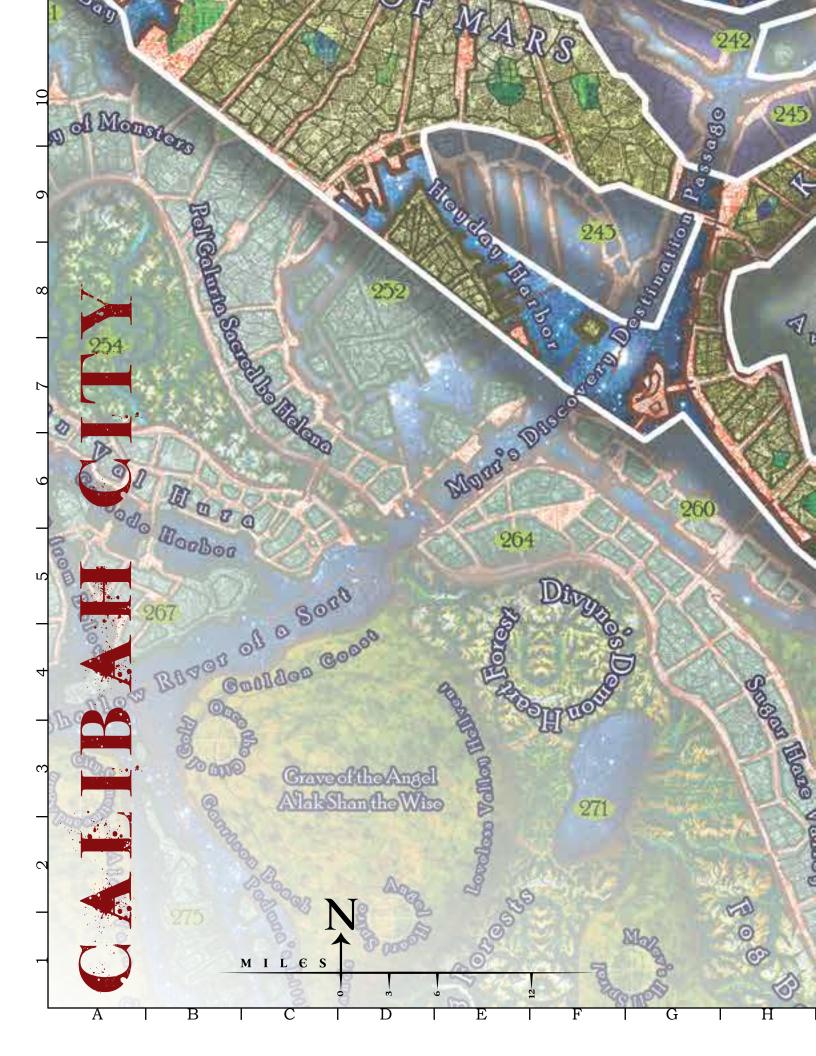
Harmonia City is an odd and slightly frightening place. Whereas most of the Adrena'Chrome's famous cybernetic bodyworks are used to repair or enhance the body you have, the Cy'doc's of Harmonia City are skilled in the arts of cybernetic fantasy. "Were you born with the wrong body? Do you wish you were a cat? Would you like the wings of an eagle to soar the skies or the fins of a shark to swim the seas? Have you always felt the need for a prehensile tail? Then Harmonia if for you. Your body is your imagination." Harmonia is sketchy at best and a deceit at worst. Yes, they can create cybernetics to make a person's body anything they might imagine, this is no lie. But bespoke cybernetics is a oneoff, an experiment rife with inevitable side effects and unintended consequences.

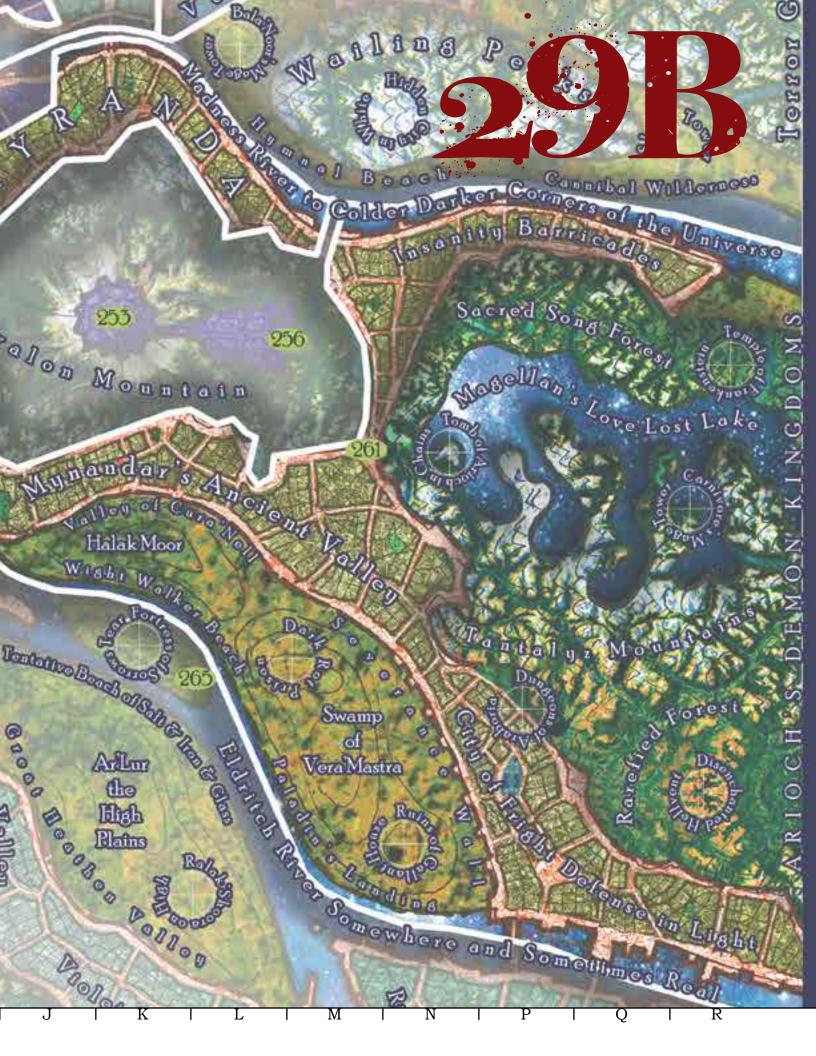














# <sup>©</sup> **EICHBORNE COMING**

The 9 Morganti descended the gangplank from their Golden Barge to the beach of the eldritch landscape, greeted by the titanic coiling forms of the 3 dragons, each hundreds of feet long, Red and Blue, and Yellow.

The Blue dragon spoke, "welcome soul killers, we should like to make you the rulers of your kind." The Blue dragon was real in a way that was too present, too physical, it hurt the eyes of the Mhorganti to see her, overwhelmed by the spiraling detail and clarity of her form.

"And in return," began the first Mhorganti, "your precious eldritch lands remain unharmed."

"Unharmed, un-visited, and in all other ways outside mortal knowledge," the whispering song of the Yellow Arcane said, her form shimmering indistinct as heat rising along a desert horizon, "we want your kind to forget our existence."

Over the next several days and weeks, dozens more Golden Barges arrived, each carrying thousands of Mhorganti.

The transformations were painful, the Mhorganti having no illusions the craft of the dragons would be otherwise.

The bones of each Mhorganti carved with runic forms while awake, eroded by e'Mral mists of the 3 dragons, each carved bone inlaid with runes of silver, preparing each corpse for its 3'Gifts.

First the rune etched corpses were gifted a living heart, not to pump blood, but a font from which flowed dark red e'Mral mists of Blood, animating their withered forms to eternal life so long as the heart remained "alive." Second the animated corpses were gifted a gem set above the brow between the eyes, this gem contained the soul of the Morganti and granted it sight of the e'Mral mists.

Finally, the Lichborne were gifted the training to manipulate the e'Mral mists, trained to hurt, harm, kill, and raise again as undead their mortal enemies. They learned to undo the gifts of the Mistress, they became Necromancers.

Some years later the first of the Lichborne was ready. A hundred of them in a rows under a dawn sun, their translucent skin stretched too tight over their e'Mral carved bones, their withered muscles and organs a mockery of life, animated as they were by caressing deep red e'Mral mists, bright flashes of dawn light reflecting off mirrored silver runes carved into each long sharp pointed fingernail and from each long pointed teeth as they smiled in triumph.

"You are the first," said the Necromancer King, "and your brothers and sisters will soon follow. You are the most powerful sorcerers among men or demon, you are each now enchanted, each now a part of this universe, and now we must defend her. We are all now dependent upon the e'Mral mists. We must defend the e'Mral mists from further destruction by the Mistress Races. Not to save the dragons, but to save ourselves. We are the Princes of this universe. Praise be Calibah."

"Praise be Calibah," the hundred intoned as amen.



Once upon a time the **Priests of Calibah** sought to remake the universe into an artistic form of enduring beauty, meaning, and purpose, to create "heaven." They very nearly succeeded.

The Calibahn Empire ended upon the founding of the modern Metropolis Empire, 4,321 years ago. A dynasty of immortal Lichborne, the Priests of Calibah, that nearly ended life as we know it, replaced with their own eldritch artistry supported by billions of murdered mortals raised as necromantic slaves.

Calibah City is all that remains of this once beautiful galaxy spanning undead nightmare.

Calibah is a city of sculptural towers of elegant reflectance, shadow, light, and spiritual intensity. The streets are lined with flowering topiary trees and flora from across the cosmos. The overall effect is one of stunning beauty and spiritual significance, Calibah City is reverential and inspiring and belies the horror and suffering of its craft.

If you did not know who or how it was crafted, Calibah would appear as a city of the gods, a place akin to heaven on earth or even **perhaps what heaven should be**.

# ALLIES IN BETRAYAL

The Crystal Shard Empress sparkled in disturbing rainbow hues, the Clockwork Metropolis outside her newly crafted audience hall a ruin, only the heart of the once fabulous Calibah City remaining, a city once at the heart of a galaxy spanning million world Calibahn Empire. The last of the Nine Necromancer Kings defeated by mortal rebels that would soon find her waiting here.

In the meantime, dozens of Lichborne stood before the titanic Crystal Shard containing the soon to be Empress of mortal survivors.

An elven female stood naked, her figure crooked and standing as if a puppet on invisible strings. The Empress speaking through the girl.

"My beloved children, you have done well, I decry the need for the betrayal of your most precious Nine," said the Empress, "the universe will never know their like again, as glorious as a supernova, their Empire will inspire art and light unto the end of days."

"Well said though regret serves no purpose," said the Lichborne gowned in red velvet, "it is done, all we can ensure now is that these mortals born with Arcane souls are worthy of the sacrifice."

"Well spoken," said the broken voice of the elven girl, "to that end our new Metropolis will need what mortals remain. Take your Golden Barges and recover the remnants of mortal kind and bring them here."

"It will take centuries to find them all," said the purple robed Lichborne, "and we may never find them all."

"Time is irrelevant, it will take what time it takes," said the Empress, her elven puppet's voice cracking in despair, "and the prolonged nature of the search is to our advantage, allowing the refugees to be settled in waves."

"What of our ancestors?" whispered the Lichborne in robes of harlequin orange, "we wish they be granted the Calibah spire and what remains of our city, safe from the barbarians that march upon us as we speak."

The crooked form of the elven puppet shuddered, an exasperated sigh escaped its mouth, drool slipping off its lower lip.

"You can not deny us," demanded the red lich.

"No, I cannot," said the Empress, "but it makes matters more difficult, this entire plan has but the barest possible success, Mhorganti sitting at its center will not improve our chance of success."

"Nonetheless, we are decided," said the red lich firmly.

"Damn you," said the Empress, "how do you propose they are not wiped from existence as soon as they arrive?"

"They will already be here," said the red lich smiling, the silver runes upon his sharpened teeth glittering in the rainbow light of the Empress Shard, "before any others arrive, in Spire Calibah, and we will see to their defense."

"I am not worried about the defense of your Mhorganti!" screamed the little elven puppet, her vocal cords ragged, "how will you prevent your ancestors KILLING every other you ferry back here?" The group of Lichborne looked at each other, searching for a good answer, but had none.

"Figure it out," the Empress raged, "or this plan fails before it starts."

The growing rebel mob of armies outside could be heard approaching the great audience hall.

"Go now," raged the Empress, "and for e'Mral's sake do not be seen." Rivulets of blood now trailing from the little elven girl's mouth.

"I think you need a new mouthpiece," said the harlequin lich, "this one looks broken."

"Out now," railed the Empress, the poor little elven girl exploding into a vaporous cloud of red mist.

Not long after, the rebel Mortals rushed into the great audience chamber demanding what all such demand.





House Wraith is headed by a council of 9 Mhorganti Kings.

In the days of the Calibahn Empire, rule of the vast **artistic space opera** was by the famed Nine Necromancer Kings, immortal Calibah Priests taken to lichform and imbued with a soul-containing crystal between their eyes.

The Mhorganti have always been defilers, evil, conscienceless, remorseless. The Mhorganti murder of another devouring the victim's soul, infusing themselves with restorative life and supernatural energy if only for a short time, though the destruction of the soul ensuring permanent death.

But House Wraith endures because it is wicked sharp and deadly as a viper coiled to strike. House Wraith is famously weird, strange, odd, or most any other sort of demented term one would prefer to employ. But they are famously self sufficient and have no sense of self pity or remorse, the Mhorganti are a people to be respected because to do otherwise would be foolish.

House Wraith has little political, military, or economic influence in larger Clockwork Metropolis affairs and even less beyond. Many even question their status as a Great House, wondering why the Crystal Shard Empress included the Mhorganti into her Metropolis Empire.

So, one must wonder why the Mhorganti are here, why are they a part of the Clockwork Metropolis, evil and despised as they are? The answer is the same as all other Great Races, Arcane souls are being born into Mhorganti children.





## 29 SPIRE CALIBAH CRIES UNDER STARLIT SKY

The Calibah Spire is one of the more unique in the Clockwork Metropolis, for while most retain their original or shifting Mistress Angelic forms, the Spire Calibah was remade by the 9 Necromancer Kings into an impossibly delicate and emotionally beautiful form of two coiled and interwoven dragons, one red and one silver, into a union of wonder to behold, so glorious in its imagining as to make the other 36 angelic spires to seem as a school art projects.

As such the place is largely cold, empty, and deserted, only a few cloaked and hooded Mhorganti or small groups of brave tourists come to see true beauty and wonder built and real. The interior of the Spire sealed away by the Necromancer Kings just before their fall, no means of entry ever having been discovered.

# 230 ZANA S ISLAND FROM ANGELSEWHERE FUTURE

Zana's Island is a large city free of Imperial dominion.

Zana's Island is said to have been brought to the Clockwork Metropolis by the **Lich King Zanastia** from a far distant world of some far distant future at the height of the Calibahn Empire.

Once occupied by a race of **Lovecraftian sorcerers** enslaved to the will of the Nine Necromancer Kings for purpose never explained nor fully understood.

The **city** is alien in a way that disturbs the sane and inspires perpendicular thought. Mhorganti artists, musicians, and architects love this town, a place both inspiring and inspired.

The isle stands as a monument to once fantastic magic and soaring ambition.

The island city is home to a large and thriving Mhorganti **artist community** supported by the finest schools, sublime restaurants, and an unending array of clever, elegant, and graceful entertainments.

It really is too bad that the fragile ordinary minds of most Imperial citizenry tend to go insane when visiting. Only the Illinyar'Vooran seem to enjoy its many exotic offerings, too bad again the Mhorganti tend to chop the Vooran into calamari on general principal. Though if you were to be looking for Vooran calamari, Zana's Island would be the place.

## 231 TREASURE CITY CEOST & FOUND

West of crystal pyramids is a small fragment of city held by doggedly by House Wraith.

When the Calibahn Empire fell long ago, the last Priests of the Age collected that which was most valued and folded them into dimensional stasis to **emerge at some far future** that it might escape destruction at the hands of the barbarous rebels.

Most are unaware of these stories but the Mhorganti know them well and await the arrival of treasures lost that are expected to soon be found.

**New buildings** have recently begun showing up in the city every few years. Each quarantined by Mhorganti forces and the subject of intense exploration efforts, often requiring the outside expertise of skilled adventurers.

# 232 GUARDIANS AEON ABJURATION CITY

This is an island city absent Imperial dominion built a long time ago by Calibahn priests, expert in the arts of abjuration.

The purpose of the City has always been to guard against anything that might be summoned by the Galaxy Window.

The city is firmly held by House Wraith used to protect and research the Aeon Galaxy Window, especially after a string of especially frightening and poorly executed rogue summoning's have gone so obviously and publicly wrong while the island was under "Imperial" dominion.

#### MHORGANTI IN CHARGE

"Precious elegance," said the red lich to the Empress, "non-Mhorganti cannot even see most of the buildings in the city let alone the summoning faults, really, what did you expect, rogue warlocks to be respectful of Imperial rules... seriously."

"Seriously," said the Crystal Shard Empress, "take care you do not make me regret this decision, I hold you personally responsible."

"Responsibility is all I ask," said the red lich.

"Mock me once more this day and I will take it personally," said the Empress.

The red lich bowed in silence as the Imperial Envoy left the room.

## 23/4 ARTIFACT AFON CALAXY WINDOW OF VORTIS THE INSANE

The Necromancer King Vortis the Insane was known for his especially esoteric and cruel nature (among an array of Kings famous for their cruelty and eldritch sensibilities).

Vortis found the Mistress crafted Aeon Galaxy Window and brought it to the Clockwork Metropolis as plunder, apparently requiring the sacrifice of an entire planet to effect.

The Window is an artifact of impressive proportion, a crystal block 12 by 18 miles by 1 mile deep said to contain a dimensionally folded galaxy the purpose of which has never been clear.

As the story goes, when Vortis attempted to use her new creation she sought to summon something from outside the Xai universe into the Xai universe shattering the crystal and driving Vortis to new depths of insanity.

And while the Aeon Window may have failed Vortis, the Window has extraordinary powers to summon a surprising array of very large things to the Clockworks, or to send entire armies to far off places, or to view deep into the to the very beginning of the Xai universe. It is said that with skill and patience, a Seer might wander its 200square-mile surface and see down to witness any past event.





**Drift City Fifth** is one of nine Drift Cities built by the Nine Necromancer Kings, the Fifth built by Vortis the Insane.

The Fifth Drift City is one of the best to have survived the fall of the Calibahn Empire owing chiefly to the fact that it is deadly to non-Mhorganti and tends to cause violent murder-your-friends sorts of insanity upon the sane minded (Mhorganti excepted, though this may be because the Mhorganti have no friends).

This is a beautiful city of tall Calibahn crafted towers, sculpture, gardens, and canals. It is in fact so gloriously beautiful as to cause the afore mentioned insanity upon those of ordinary imagining.

Drift City Fifth is the capitol of Mhorganti kind and culture, a thriving city of divine foods, sublime artistry, and mind-bending entertainments. It is again as it once was just prior to the rise of the Priests of Calibah, a civilization of art and exploration not seeking past glories but looking forward to new and fantastic possibilities.

- 41 H 17 /

-mumm[1][]

#### SEIPPING TIMELINES

Within the Grand Palace of Five, gathered 88 Lichborne, recently arrived upon their Golden Barges to the Drift City, this night shrouded by heavy storm. Thunder heard rolling through the great hall.

Joining them were small delegations of Arcane, representing 7 of the Great Houses, the remaining 30 Great Houses entirely unaware of this meeting.

By personal invitation of the Crystal Shard Empress, a small cadre of Myrddin Wizards arrived shortly after, receiving no warm welcome from any so far in attendance.

The High Priestess of the Empress arrived, her swirling gown defying the physics of her movement or of the air moving within the ancient Calibahn Temple, drifting about as if she were underwater.

Blue, Yellow, and Red e'Mral mists began to swirl and gather within the great hall, each color forming to the shape of a coiling dragon hundreds of feet long, their serpentine forms moving toward the gathering.

"Greetings old friends," began the carillon voice of the Empress through the beautiful feminine form of her High Priest, "and greetings to new friends," her head nodding toward the Myraddin Wizards, "It has been 4,321 years, and upon this auspicious anniversary of the founding of this Metropolis Empire I wished to see you all."

"Such a sadness that after so long," began the Lichborne adorned in robes of red velvet, "that only 7 of your precious great races could attend," the red lich mocked.

"That is 7 more than any of you monsters dreamed possible," the Empress said with a hard edge to her musical voice, "it is good though to see your cynicism undimmed by the passage of time."

"But my Empress," the Yellow dragon implored, "you should have long been freed of this place, maybe 2 millennia you said before the these odious Mistress flesh golems could rule themselves, yet they seem no closer to awareness than the day you insisted on this menagerie. Your absence is felt, how much of this foolishness shall we be forced to endure."

"The arrival of the Myrddin is a boon," said the Empress, "the Lykkan, Ddraig, Lyrn, and Dhar under their guidance will all soon become self-aware, that should soon put our success to 11." The Empress smiled with a sweep, her rainbow gown drifting mesmerizingly in and out of view.

"Optimistic," said the red lich, "we do not even know who or what these Myrddin are, how can such as these be trusted."

"I trust them," said the Empress, "and that should be enough, besides by my beloved wickedness, 4,321 years since the founding of my Metropolis, that is 4,321 years since your precious Mhorganti have been here, FIRST to arrive as you demanded, FIRST, and yet they are not here," she said sweeping her arms around the great hall. "What exactly have YOU been up too that you question my judgement in others?"

"That is unfair," the red lich quietly said.

"Of course, it is unfair, have worms eaten what is left of your brain," whipped the Empress, "but it is also true. Why are your precious Mhorganti NOT here, why were they not the FIRST to be here? Why are they not ruling in my stead this very moment as my dearest daughter asked earlier?"

The silence of the moment filled the great hall, the anger of the Empress tangible in the air, the flowing gowns of the High Priestess now flames swirling about her naked form.

"My pardon," the red lich finally said to the Empress, his head bowed, "my own failure caused me to carelessly lash out, I welcome the aid of your Myrddin Wizards, and offer my personal aid in their efforts on your behalf."

Long hours passed in heated discussion as past plans were revised, new plans set in motion, and failed efforts abandoned.

*Upon the conclusion of the meeting when* all had departed, the 88 Lichborne stood unmoving, waiting. When finally, the room was clear.

"First, I will abide my word," said the red lich, "I will take the Myrddin Wizards at their word, but in the meantime I need all of your talents to find out who they are and why they are here."

"Second, the Empress is right, we have become complacent," said the red lich.

"Nonsense," said a green robed lich, "the Mhorganti are well in hand."

"Really," said the red lich, "and what is the name of their current King?"

"King Ryannis," said the green lich confidently.

"King Ryannis was assassinated 542years ago," said another of the liches.

"So, is there anyone here that can tell me the name of our Mhorganti King?" asked the red lich, "anyone that can tell me if he has heirs, enemies, allies, is powerful or a miserable inbred spud? Anyone? Is there anyone here that has set foot in this miserable barn of a town in the last 500years? Anyone?" he said scanning the room.

"Can anyone at least tell me when these upstart Myrddin Wizards even showed up?" asked the red lich.

About 200years ago," said one of the lichborne, "at least that is what the Kin'Rhi Envoy said."

"That is what the Kin'Rhi Envoy said," the red lich parroted, "my brothers and sisters, it is time we set our own house in order, starting with our beloved Mhorganti ancestors."

# ELDERSKIN MOUNTAINS

These high frozen peaks and forested slopes are the location of countless ancient Calibahn tombs.

While the Calibahn Lich Priests and Kings and their many undead minions were functionally immortal, no one lives forever, even the dead.

The Elder Kin Mountains are a labyrinth thought to contain thousands of miles of corridors, halls, chambers, and resting places for the noble and exalted of the ancient Calibahn Empire. This is perhaps the most explored and raided ancient place on Xai, a trove of beautiful treasures, artistic wealth, and eldritch magics that defies the word wonderous as a descriptor.

But the Calibahn were not without the skill to protect the resting places of their elders and the finding of their tombs exacts a heavy cost in blood and souls. Some tombs found to be occupied by slumbering Calibahn Lich Kings and Priests, not able to truly die but only resting for a few quiet eons.

Since the founding of the Metropolis Empire, Wraith House has bolstered protections upon the mountains and maintains a standing bounty on tomb raiders and recovered ancestral relics.

# FIELDS OF MARS

The Fields of Mars represents the most important remaining economic asset of House Wraith.

This is a city of **industrial agriculture**, containing ancient Calibahn crafted greenhouses containing exotic plants, herbs, and trees from across the old Empire.

But more importantly, the Fields of Mars are known for an especially large concentration of ancient Crystal Portals leading to thousands of ancient Calibahn agricultural worlds, some of which are now being reestablished to provide increasing exotic foods and rare herbs and spices to the Clockwork Metropolis and beyond.

The city is occupied by many of the more ancient Mortanti races from various Calibahn Realms, but foreigners are strictly forbidden access to the city, trespassers hunted down and slain by merciless packs of patrolling wizard crafted hounds. Many attempt to steal from the Fields of Mars and many are devoured in the attempt.



What is most forgotten about the Mhorganti, even by the modern people themselves, is that their history did not start with the Calibahn Empire and the genocidal rule of the Nine Necromancer Kings.

Before the Calibahn Empire the Mhorganti were artists and explorers, among the first races to reach the stars, to travel the Xai Subworld realms, and travel the distant reaches of Xai's Outland Wilderness. If an ancient map is found describing a place it is probably Mhorganti, and if not, it is probably a fake.

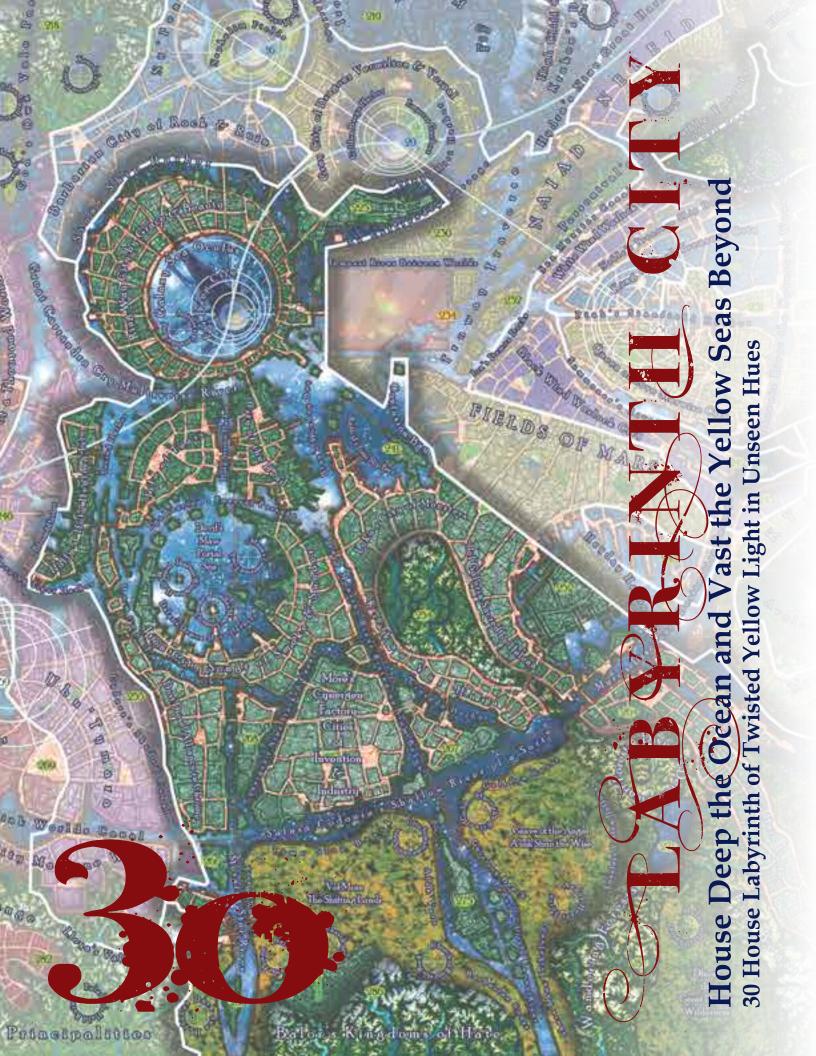
The Mhorganti have always been artists, architects, and sculptors, masters of the emotional arts of light, shadow, and color. So many times, when describing the ancient places of Xai there is the mention of great art or architecture, and in all of these it is as likely as not to have been the vision of a Mhorganti architect.

Starwise City is old, dating before the Calibahn Empire, a city of humble and graceful buildings and streets so sublime as to have been spared Calibahn "reimagining" and to have survived every warlord and dominion since as protected or the capital of whoever was in charge at the time. Starwise City is the **epitome of Mhorganti art** and architecture, a place "more real than real", some have called it hyper-real or super-real, but whatever the name it exists at the fore of joy, wonder, and poignant emotion.

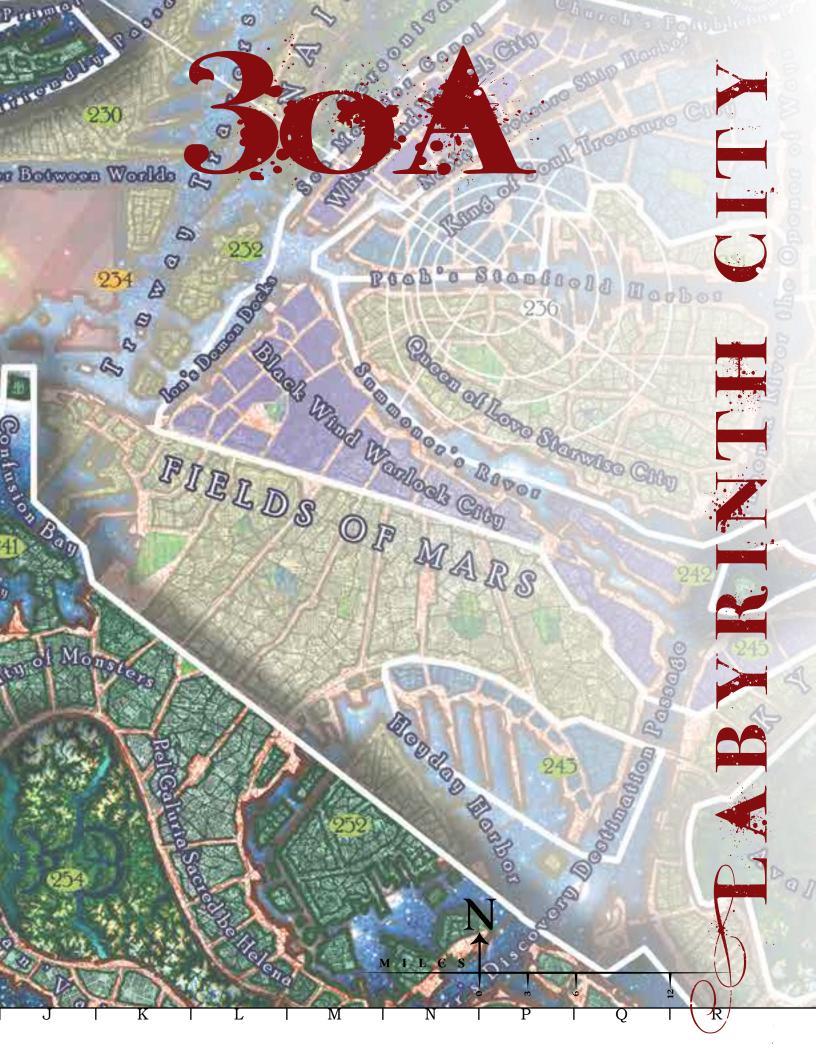
This is what the Mhorganti Kingdoms looked like before the rise of their own Priests of Calibah.

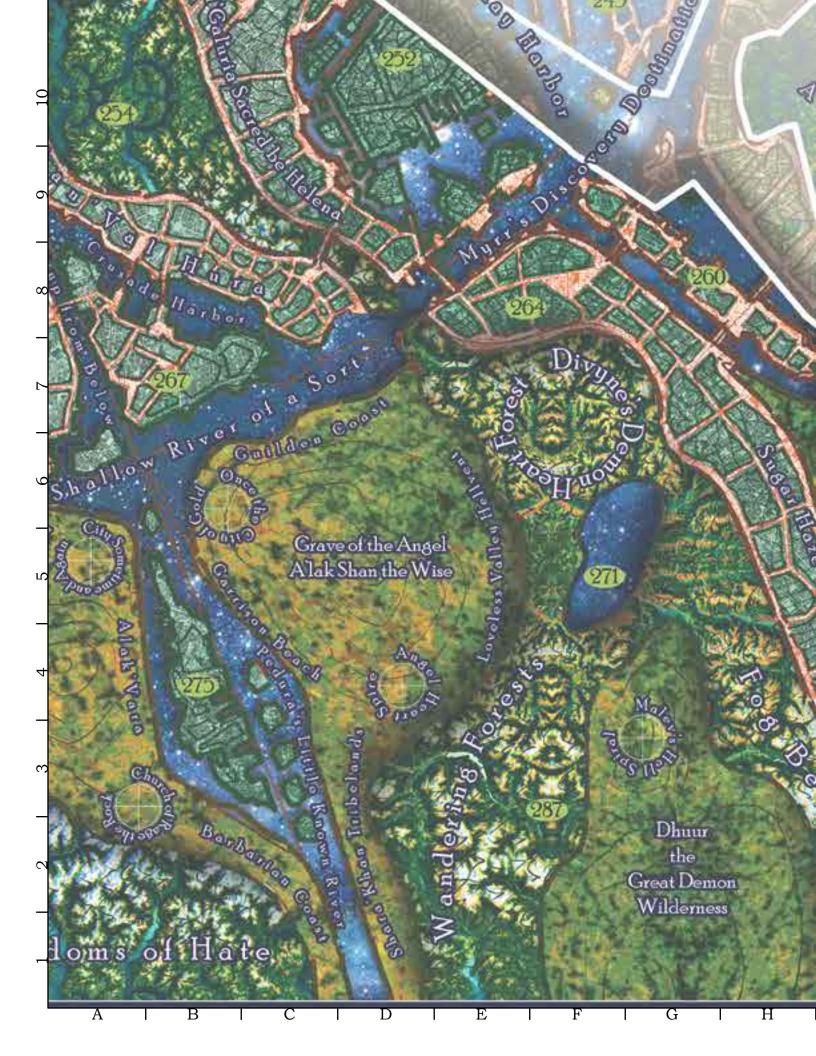
Starwise City is occupied in modern day again by **young Mhorganti artists** and architects that commission their arts to any that would have them and use its coasts to again take what ships they might to explore the far reaches of Xai and the larger cosmos.

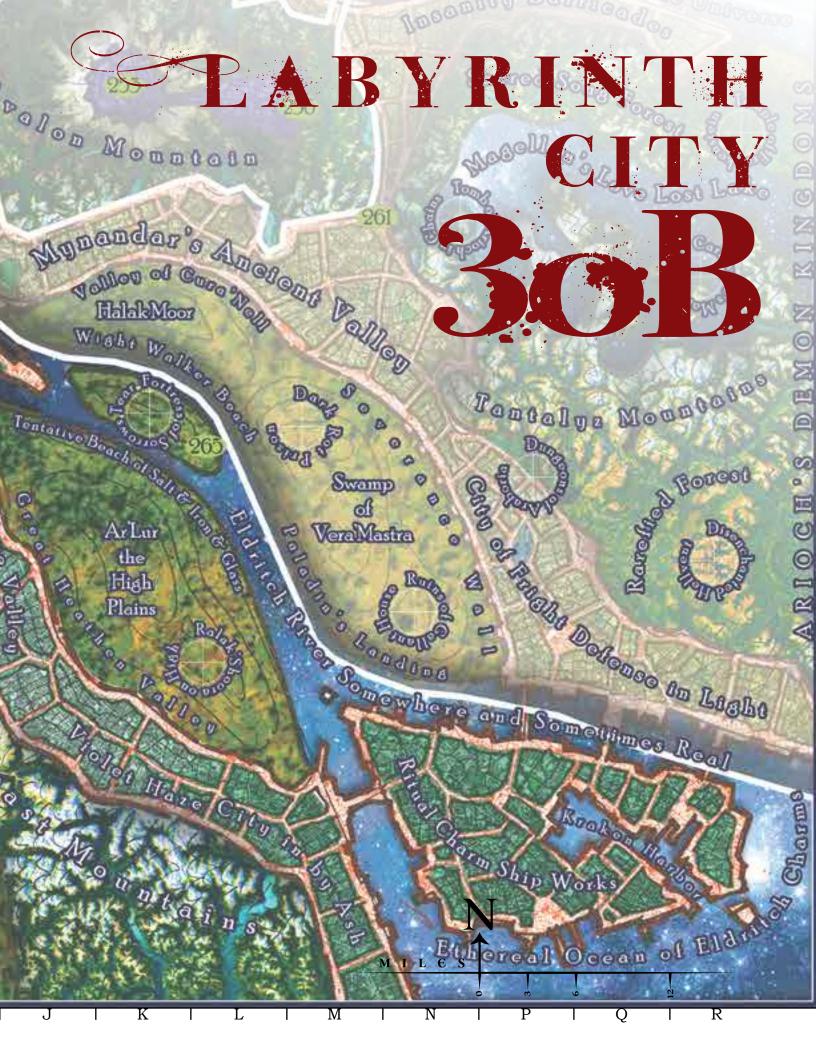
This is a city of starving artists, for despite their obvious skill in crafting arts far beyond the imagining of any other on Xai, they are at once too far ahead of their time and burdened by ancient Mhorganti prejudices, the lesser work of lesser men often preferred over anything of Mhorganti Craft on general principal of hate.

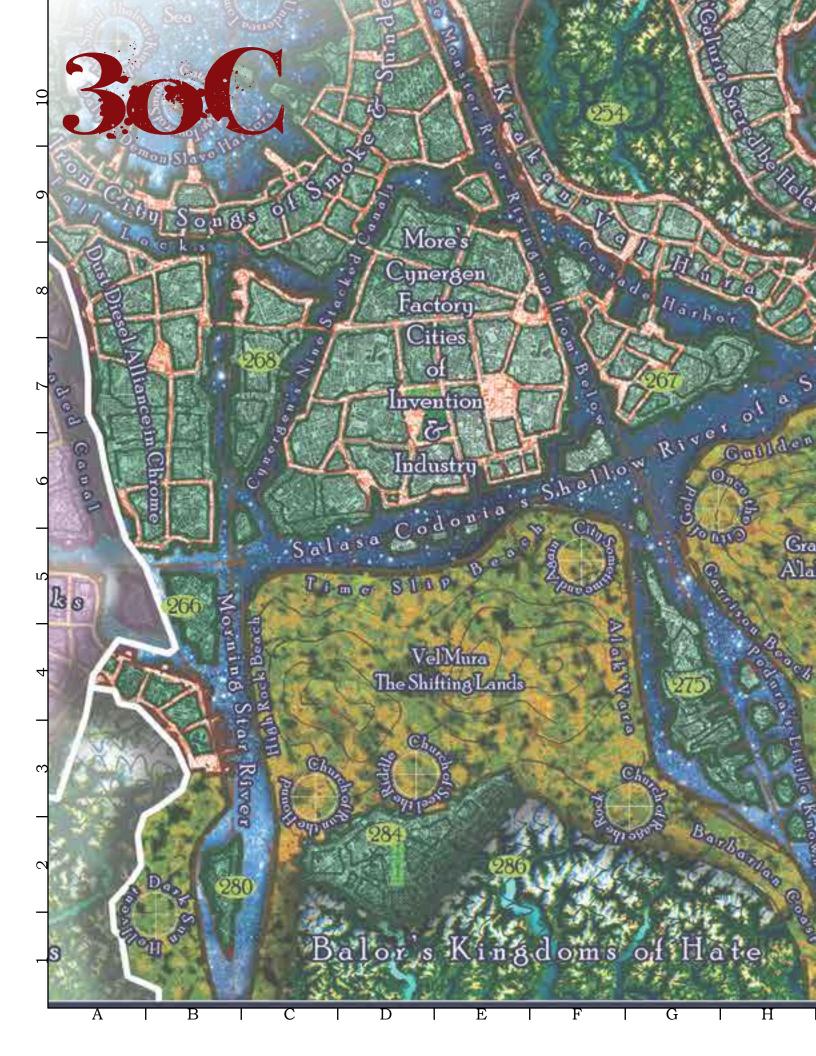












FIVE OF AKIND

When finally the <u>Chief Engineer First of the First Class of First Xanthos</u> arrived, the Pyrmn, Eigarian, Drakyre, and Illinyar'Vooran were already present in the large broken stone building, moonlight slipping in through cracks in the great domed roof, illuminating flowering vines growing up ancient broken walls.

"Why are we here?" said the Xanthos entering the moonlit circle, each of the 4 others in attendance easily understanding the high pitched "dog-whistle" of his voice and large overly expressive eyes that made up the meaning of his "words."

"We are here because I asked nicely," said the Drakyre, "and because you all have the courtesy and good sense to listen, graciousness disconcertingly rare in these troubled times. I should like each of you to reconsider the new Empress' request to join her misguided Empire," all easily understood the flowing imagery of the Drakyre's mind as he slowly annunciated the verbal words "gravy is a kind of marmalade" for rhythm and context. Most races of course had no comprehension of Drakyre speech, struggling to make sense of their seemingly random statements, their brains shielded by sanity, unable to comprehend the flowing imagery that give their words their true meaning.

"You can not be serious," leered the Pyrmn, "I have already sent my response."

"Indeed," said the Drakyre, "the messenger having been sent back having consumed a hundred pounds of his own feces was, if I dare say, a bit obvious."

"We left him alive," quipped the Pyrmn, "do you know the delicacy required for such, he vomited up his message upon sight of the Crystal Witch, the reaction was everything I had hoped."

"We have no illusions about this Crystal mother hen," the voice of the Vooran was as nails upon a chalkboard, the sharp and seeming incongruous images that accompanied his words were easily understood by the assembly, though such would cause headaches and migraine shards of pain among the minds of lesser races, "we have already sent our regrets."

"You dimensionally folded the Imperial Envoy into a jack-in-the-box," said the Drakyre.

"A child's response to a childish offer," said the Vooran.

"And you my dear Elgarian brother," the Drakyre said soberly, "was it really necessary that the messenger return and murder his own children in front of the Empress?"

"It was," said the Eigarian emphatically.

"And why should we reconsider?" asked the Mhorganti, "this is a cosmic joke of the highest order, we have spent the better part of a hundred millennia killing these beasts for sport, we are enemies of the Mistress and their pets as is everyone here, what could you possibly say that would cause us to join such a menagerie? What could you say that would make us listen to this Witch?"

"The Xanthos have agreed to join," said the Drakyre, "and we will follow."

"NEVER," howled the Vooran, his shattering imagery of murderous rage made clear his emotion, "what could have possessed you?"

"Impossible," said the Pyrmn, "we cannot allow the Xai Engineers to serve this eldritch monster. Never."

"Clever, my young Xanthos," whispered the Eigarian, "I see the bend in your intentions, "we shall request the Empress send a second Envoy to discuss terms."

The Vooran and the Pyrmn stomped about the large ancient hall for some minutes, slaughtering their retainers and generally throwing spectacular competing tantrums. But when it came to rage, no one could touch the Pyrmn, the Vooran finally surrendering.

"We will request," a dark spear of murderous death shot through all of the minds at the word request-, "a second Envoy to discuss terms," the Vooran spat.

The Pyrmn's eyes had begun bleeding during her fit of rage, her long delicate nails dug deep into the palms of her hands, blood dripping to the floor in disturbing quantity.

"I hate you all," she raged, "I hate you all so much."

"That is what family is for," said the Xanthos, "and if it makes you feel better, I hate you most."

"GRRAAAAA..." she screamed falling to her knees, her head bowed, "you had better be right about this," she finally said, "it will be far more unpleasant than any of you realize, they really are the most miserable bores."

g.lloyd baker - 2020

# LABYRINTH CITY

The city of Xanthos is a large place filled with unusual industrial towns titanic pipeworks, and strange fluid and **eroded architectural forms**, often seeming as if lifted from some far deep ocean depth and set upon the coast by some weirding power.

Everything about Labyrinth City is like being **behind the curtain** of civilized society, the place is the proverbial boiler room of the Metropolis, keeping the city supplied with water, sanitation, heat, and cooling.

## Nothing of the modern Metropolis could exist without the grit, grime, and sweat of Labyrinth City.

People are of course welcome to Labyrinth City, but unless your interest lies in visiting sewage treatment plants or water distribution hubs, or myriad logistical operations, no one much visits the city but Xanthos. The operations and concerns of the Labyrinth taken for granted.



# Xanthos

The Xanthos are a contradictory sort, ubiquitous throughout the Metropolis Empire, yet an enigma of which little is known.

The Xanthos are a race of **porters**, **plumbers**, **and sewer workers**, they are everywhere quietly transporting goods by subterranean barge and maintaining the plumbing and sewage infrastructure to sanitary working standards throughout the Empire.

The race non-verbal but seems to clearly understand when spoken too and quickly move to perform whatever task is asked, tips are expected, seeming able to communicate with each other by eye contact and unhearable speech.

But mostly **people do not ask**, the Xanthos left out of sight among the Metropolis' vast network of subterranean canals used to supply goods and remove waste.

Xanthos being equally adept on land as in water, even breathing air or water with equal ease, are tasked with most every unpleasant and dangerous task required for the maintenance of a modern civilization. Their invertebrate cartilage anatomy allowing them to slip, contort, press, twist, bend, or otherwise maneuver into impossibly difficult places. Tasks they famously perform absent complaint and with abiding competence.

The rumors about the Xanthos are many, the absence of fact feeding the imagination of people for eons.

Some suspect the Xanthos are **Deep Ones**, living in underwater civilizations, impregnating unsuspecting or willing women, their children born as the race

of the mother until sometime in their 40's when they transform into Xanthos, returning to the Deep.

Some say they are a race not of the Mistress or Arcane, found upon an ancient ocean world among the oldest reaches of the cosmos, enslaved by the Eigarian, or Illiyar Vooran (depending which story you hear) during some ancient Age of the Red Empire.

Some stories suggesting that it was the Eigarians, and Illinyar'Vooran that were enslaved and that the Xanthos were Lords over the mythical **Age of Dark Celestia** when the 3 races terrorized the cosmos.

Some have come to suspect that they are exactly as they appear, a race of some ancient wizard craft designed to serve without talking back.

Whatever the case, when the refugees after the fall of the Calibahn Empire were repatriated to the Clockwork Metropolis, Xanthos accompanied each group, even then being everywhere.

In the early messy and violent days of the Metropolis Empire, one Xanthos was found to be Arcane and made ruler of the Labyrinth Spire. This Arcane soon vanished and since, no Xanthos has been born Arcane. And while the Empire officially recognizes the Xanthos as a Great Race, most now openly suspect trickery.

## But like all things related to the Xanthos, no one much cares to pay attention.

The Xanthos perform an invaluable service to the Empire and live and work quietly out of sight, perfectly happy to be taken for granted.

Some suspect the trickery was that of the Crystal Shard Empress herself, a means to secure the enduring loyalty and service of the Xanthos to the benefit of her Metropolis by giving them a City. But again, four thousand years after the founding of the Metropolis, no one much cares, **out of sight**, **out of mind**.



House Deep is usually unrepresented in Imperial affairs, uninvited, and no one except the Pyrmn, Illinyar'Vooran, Drakyre, and Eigarians maintain formal ambassadorial ties with the Xanthos.

The weird mental oddness of the 4 races seeming to not affect the Xanthos and the 4 seeming to be the only races that can reasonably communicate with the Xanthos other than saying "fix this."

These 5 races tend to each be outcast from traditional Imperial affairs, sometimes referred to as the **Dark Alliance** by other Great Houses, an alliance to be thwarted at every opportunity.

The Xanthos have a complex code of social hierarchy and education, far too complex for most other races to comprehend even if they showed an inclination to care, which they do not.

Suffice it to say, Engineers are the nobility of Xanthos society, the most senior Engineers the leaders of House Deep and responsible for ongoing operations.

The Xanthos have been Engineers of grand imagining, they were the builders of the first Mhorganti Golden Barges and the 9 Drift Cites of Calibah, they built the perpendicular fold-space cities and ships of the Illinyar Vooran, they built the Drakyre Pentagram Worlds, and they crafted the sentient towers and Astral Solar Sail Ships of Eigaria.

And the Xanthos claim to have built Xhirra'Xakarra'Xai itself, a Dyson Sphere and Soul Forge engineered for the Mistress Angelic.

The Xanthos are **bold and ambitious** in their crafts, though always seeming to need someone else to give focus to their efforts, perhaps by design as some suggest, the tools by which the Mistress Angelic carried out their great works and those of their most favored children.

It is worth noting here, that unlike most Great Houses that are ruled by Arcane sorcerers, Arcane seem to not be born among the Xanthos.

Some do not over think the matter, the Xanthos are creepy and alien and may not even be a Mistress soulborne race, so no surprise they are denied the gifts of e'Mral.

Some however take a more conspiratorial view, suggesting the first Xanthos Arcane 4,000years ago was not some fluke, but that instead the Xanthos now spirit away these children before they can be identified by the Imperial Fanes for training.

As no one much sees Xanthos children nor females for that matter, hiding Xanthos Arcane would seem an easy matter. Add to this that the Fanes are just as happy to ignore the Xanthos as everyone else, then it all starts to tell a tale.



# 36 LABYRINTH CITY

### **SMARTS**

"I hate this place," the young Xanthos said flaming the aggressive flesh-eating ooze from the huge pipe, only a trickle of water moving through the debris collected along its miles of length.

"It is not so bad," the second said by way of his dog-whistle song and intonation of his large expressive eyes, "last week was worse."

"Not the work," said the first, "this whole place, the Metropolis, these people are dolts, morons, gibbering like monkeys, they have the imaginations of ice cubes."

"Ahh, I can not but agree," lamented the second, "a few weeks ago I was up in one of the Saurian towers, a bathroom faucet was leaking a rather unpleasant goo from one of the Compact Slime Units, no real harm, one of the kids was swallowed up, but I got it fixed quick enough, but I go to ask if they want their plumbing upgraded to a Stasis Water Elemental Extraction Telemeter, feeling bad about their dissolved kid, and they looked at me like I was the slime that ate their kid, a complete lack of gratitude," he concluded.

"You know they cannot understand us?" asked the first, "apparently our talking makes no sound in their mutant monkey brains and our eyes only convey the fluttering stare of a nervous hamster, at least that is what Guurba down in water supply said."

"Really," well that makes some sense," said the second, "but surely, they know the difference between an old CSU and a SWEET, surely they could understand something as remedial as THAT even without talking."

"Do not count on it," said the first,
"Bleemer up in the KV'22-9 Condenser
Unit was telling me he saw one of their
brains once, apparently it was not much
bigger than a Hormetian Glob, and
apparently not as smart."

"How is that even possible," said the second, "such a creature would barely be able to survive."

"They do not," said the first, "they die of stupid all of the time, Lugg down in the Number'9 heat exchanger was telling me that one of those creepy Krai'Zan suits was crossing the street when a Vump Demon swept up from the gutter and tried to steal his teeth, a Shryll spotted the demon and banished it before it got the molars."

"Right lucky the Shryll was there to save the man's oral gnashers," said the second, a loud woosh of flame pouring from the wide nozzle of his Flamer.

"Lucky you would think," said the first, adding his flame to incinerate an especially fast moving pudding, "but the Suit was so frightened he ran strait into the street and was run flat by Bithaferous'K90, one with a JP'20 catchment unit."

"No kidding," said the second, "not much more than a bad smell left of that Suit I would imagine." He laughed.

"But he died afraid," said the first, "that is the point, they are all of them afraid of living."

"How can you be afraid of being alive?" asked the second, "even dogs and snails and muskoxen are not afraid of being alive."

"But that is the point, they have no imagination because they are afraid," said the first, "and they are all afraid because they are dumber than a muskox."

"Well it may not be true," said the second, "but it does explain a great many things."

"Indeed," agreed the first, the pair focusing their flames on an especially amorous gelatinous goo.



# 30 SPIRE LABYRINTH BELOW THE UNDERGROUND SEA

The Spire Labyrinth is a **volcanic island** rising from a surrounding underwater city called the **Far Deep** centered within a great bay called the Galaxy Sea Oculus, a sea famed for dimensional navigations to especially peculiar Outland and Subworld locations generally avoided by most.

The Spire is an inversion of typical Spires as it plunges deep into the ground, the spirals of its subterranean forms delving thousands of miles deep, with passages slipping through the Molten Veil and extending up into the caves and fissures opening at the bottom of the Underground Sea, a vast demonic subworld Realm.

To the uninitiated and untrained, the Spire and the Far Deep City seem as titanic industrial machines of alien imagining, their purpose as opaque as their forms ugly.

To anyone with a passion for engineering, this is perhaps the most beautiful place in the universe. Everything has an efficient purpose, and nothing is wasted. Form follows Function in the truest aesthetic sense.

To be here and to not recognize the quiet brilliance of Xanthos Engineers is to be willfully blind to the truth.

Sitting along the coast of Labyrinth Spire is a huge block structure, the plan a series of 8 perfect concentric square office blocks each 8stories tall, the whole of the complex containing 256 linear miles of corridor feeding rows of offices with windows looking out at the gap between rings, a large stone plaza at its center.

This titanic and relentless gray stone structure is marked with a small brass plate just to side of a large iron bound door, "Bureau of Complaints."

Anyone unhappy with their service or otherwise interested in speaking with officials of House Deep, this is where you go. To those in the know, Xanthos Bureaucrats are the lowest level of social hierarchy, having failed as Shit-Scrappers, especially useless Xanthos are sent here to die slowly and quietly.

It is also worth noting, that any mail addressed the Bureau of Complaints, no matter from where it is sent, will eventually arrive here.

# 224 VENDETTAS SEEPING DOG CITADEE

This place is free of Imperial dominion, a small city of **Xanthos libraries** that contain the plans, schematics, and specifications of everything ever made by the Xanthos, or so legend says.

Truth is, much has been lost over the eons, and little survived the "remaking" of the Calibahn Empire. But what survives is here, even some large hand drawn schematic sheets of Xai itself are among its collection.

Unfortunately, the minds of the sanity shielded mundane minds of most cannot comprehend the works contained within the Citadel, only the Psionic Races have the heightened awareness to understand the secrets contained here.

The Fanes and the other Great Houses would very much like to see this place destroyed should they ever suspect is was anything more than a **sewage** reclamation pumping station.

# 226 CHURCH ISEAND ONCE UPON HOLY

This lovely green forested island is sacred to the Xanthos. The island was once a Mistress church of light, faith, and hope, leveled by the Arcane an awfully long time ago.

But a closer look reveals the trees which grow are composed of machine parts, the ground and soil tiny gears and clockwork turnings. Though the form has changed, the Church still lives.

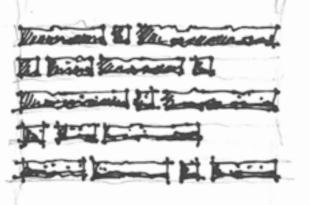
Xanthos come to this place to sleep, dreaming the perfection of a universe absent the e'Mral mists.

# 229 CREATNESS ISLAND OF GIANTS

This mountainous wilderness island is home to dozens of ancient mechanical monsters, each the creation of a Xanthos that called himself Greatness.

Even by Xanthos standards, Greatness was insane, having spent his life on an esoteric passion project to produce an island full of murderous machines, each seeming more diabolical than the next.

Some suspect that the island contains something of great value that Greatness considered worth his life's work to protect. Others dismiss this as wishful thinking, he was crazy, do not overthink it.



### 2/10 MOST ANCIENT CITY OF FASCINATION & SORROW

The **City of Fascination** is a complexity of narrow streets and **ancient green houses**, gardens, and parks. A favorite place for visitors and tourists of the Crystal Pyramids.

But all of this loveliness is to disguise the titanic subterranean complex long ago built by the Muurantium that built the Crystal Pyramids, destroyed by their enemies, and now home to a vibrant colony of Xanthos explorers and salvage crews plumbing the secrets of the Crystal Pyramid and the mysteries of their purpose and construction.

### 241 ZYKANAS CITY OF UNCERTAIN PHYSICS

This peninsula adjacent the Fields of Mars was the **site of a terrible** accident.

Zykana was an especially skilled Engineer working on a **Probability Diversion Manipulator**, what some have come to call a Luck Machine, when things went terribly wrong. The result is a city abandoned except for some especially brave Xanthos work crews. The physics of the City ever shifting randomly, the very place the center of a **Chaos Storm**.

## 252 EUTHINAR S ISEAND OF IRON WOMEN & SHIPS

Adjacent Heyday Harbor is an island free of imperial domain, a place of titanic shipyards that build and maintain the Golden Barges of the Mhorganti. As tools of their work, the Xanthos have crafted an army of hundred-foot-tall iron robots guised as shapely humanoid women.

# 254 SEVERANCE FOREST OF SADNESS & DEMISE

The **Severance Forest** is a cursed mountainous place where visitors are often driven to suicide. The place is avoided by most, but alternately attracts those looking to self-terminate. The Las'raa'ta suggests that there is something hidden deep within the mountain, the curse a way to protect or perhaps that which is hidden a soulwell collecting or feeding upon life's surrendered.

# 255 COMPANION TOWNSHIP TOUCH OF LIGHTNING

The **Companion Township** is a peninsula free of Imperial dominion. This is a **Xanthos work site** of titanic machines and exotic superconducting wireworks that rise spiraled around towers reaching a mile into the sky.

A swirling thunderstorm stretches over the town sending regular bolts of lightning through the city and its elaborate cascading machinery, the lightning refined, focused, shaped, until finally the barest wisp of a spark animates a **Weirding Hound**, a largish clockwork dog famed for its loyalty and desire to work and serve its master.

Weirding Hounds are common among the Xanthos but rarely desirable among the other races, chiefly because the dogs are more intelligent than most humans, and this for some reason annoys both the humans and the dogs.



### 260 FORTRESS OF MEDUSA IN MIRROR CHAIN

This **fortress** is a **prison**, first crafted by the Xanthos by request of the Empress to contain an especially powerful Medusa Sorceress that has been expanded as need dictates over the course of the Metropolis Empire to contain especially powerful sorcerers and demons that might only be contained by bespoke craft and whose deaths are either not possible or undesirable. The prisoners of the Medusa Fortress are among the most powerful beings to have ever been captured.

# 264 AZZUS CITY OF LOVE & FELLOWSHIP & FROST

The **City of Love** was built by the Xanthos as an **amusement park** for those with disquieting tastes.

The city is populated by **Cold Heart Androids**, appearing in every was as human, plasti'form flesh & bone, **more real than real** but with circuitry and programming laced through their skeletons.

There is no law here and no consequences, all are invited to come and enjoy the theme park fantasy of the architecture and play with the Xanthos dolls.

The Xanthos dolls can not kill by action or omission, but other visitors are not so limited, so caution is advised.

# 265 WILDERNESS WITHOUT AND ALONE

This wilderness island hides another of the vast underground machine complexes of the Xanthos, the titanic machines and factory works that service the Clockwork Metropolis hidden from the citizenry.

### 266 EYNARA S CITY OF ORPHANS

At the head of the Morning Star River is an island free of Imperial dominion. Sadly, among the countless treasures and trash recovered from the labyrinthian waterways and titanic pipes underlying the Metropolis are abandoned children.

Xanthos have a soft spot for children, taking great care of their own and confused by how poorly so many of the supposed "Great Race" harm and dispose of their own **grublings**.

To this end, children abandoned but found by the Xanthos will eventually find their way to the **City of Orphans** to be educated in the Engineering arts and cared for by **Xanthos Matrons** until such time as they can take care of themselves.

The Xanthos do not view this as a charity, but rather the obvious obligation to recycle valuable salvage.

# 267 GRIM CITY PLONG ABANDONED TO RUST

The Grim City is an island of obsolete ships and machinery delivered to its shores awaiting salvage or reuse. The Xanthos throw nothing away, everything has a use, even if you are not sure what it will be yet.

The island is a titanic **salvage yard** operated by armies of Xanthos finding new uses for the abandoned and obsolete.



### 268 ISLE OF VULCAN BY HAMMER & FURNACE

The **Isle of Vulcan** is an Island with a small Imperial presence, just enough to ensure that weapons are not crafted within its titanic iron and steel foundries.

The pipes and machinery required to maintain the Metropolis are enormous, giant, titanic, ginormous, and any other bigness word you can think to use.

This is where replacement parts are made. But as battleships and drift ships are as child's play as compared to what the Xanthos make upon Vulcan, the Empire ever seeks to ensure these operations to not turn to weaponry.

This of course is something of a joke among the Xanthos themselves, having tried to explain to the Imperials on countless occasions that if they wanted to make weapons, Vulcan would be about the last place they would do it.

But the engineering understanding of these primitive races is so limited, the Xanthos have generally given up trying to explain anything at all.

### 271 HOLE IN THE SKY COST IN MAGICAL DUST

This **wilderness lake** is an incredibly old Xanthos construct that dates to the Age of the Mistress Angelic. The Xanthos are generally amused that such a powerful devise is ringed with hotels, resorts, and spas set among resplendent forests and overlooking the glassy calm lake.

The waters of the lake are a lens that directs light to an observation tower several miles below the surface, the water at the surface or at various lower tiers frozen in various states of perfect clarity providing views deep into the cosmos, to the edge of time itself. The Xanthos maintain the devise, though no one has made use of it since the founding of the Empire.

### 275 ARCHANUMS FAR OFEDREAM WATCH CITY

Watch City lies upon a series of island free of Imperial dominion. These islands were built by the Xanthos as a trading post with Balors Kingdoms of Hate to the South.

### SCHOOL

"Why do we hate the demons?" asked the young Xanthos.

"Hate is a strong word, Demons are like the Lichborne, we disagree with their choice to align themselves with the Eldritch against their own kind," explained the teacher.

"Why do we hate the Lichborne?" asked the young too bright Xanthos.

"Hate is perhaps too strong a word again, the Lichborne are magical beings, unnatural, their presence in the universe makes physics unpredictable, erratic, dangerous," said the professor, "we seek to cleanse the universe of magic, of disorder and emotional manifestation. The Lichborne would have all life in the universe be enchanted."

"So, we do not hate Demons or Lichborne, we just wish they were not here and not using magic," the student tried to restate.

"Just so," said the professor, "some Demons, and Lichborne are very nice and reasonable, and they are often smarter and more truthful than the those that are supposed to be our allies, some of which we do HATE." "This is all very confusing," stated the student, "nothing is clear, what about Arcane?"

"Arcane are chaos wearing the skin of the Mistress Races, making the universe more magical, by enchanting mortals the same way they enchanted some of the Mhorganti to make Lichborne," the professor clarified.

"Everything seems layered with exceptions, none of the rules seem rules at all," lamented the student.

"Life is a complication, as are the challenges each of us must face and the choices we make," said the professor, "understanding that the rule is irrelevant and that your individual life is an exception as is the life of each individual you meet ...well this is your first awareness of adulthood."

"Is that what I said?" the student looked more confused than ever.

"Indeed, it was," said the professor with a beaming pride.

# SOLABYRINTH CITY

# 280 SHARD MASTER S BLADEWORK MONASTERY

This is an island free of Imperial dominion. The **Bladework Monastery** is just as it sounds, a sacred religious order dedicated to the creation of Lawful Swords.

**Swords of Law** are rare and extremely difficult to craft given the presence of e'Mral in the universe. These blades repel the e'Mral mists and are a fixed point in reality that cannot be affected by magic, a trait that a skilled sword master can learn to use parry and dispel sorcerous effects.

Blades of Law are illegal in the Metropolis Empire and Imperial efforts to destroy the island have met with varying degrees of disaster for the Empress.

A blade of law struck through the heart of a Lichborne, will cause its permanent demise and will prevent any Arcane from crafting e'Mral if wounded by the blade.

# 284 CITADEL HYDRA 99 BEYOND THE VEIL

The Citadel is a large city free of Imperial dominion, high along the mountains overlooking Balor's Kingdoms of Hate.

Citadel Hydra'99 is one of 1,369 Hydra citadels built by the Xanthos as watchtowers scattered across the Outlands of Xai during the reign of the Mistress Angelic.

The great hall of the Citadel is a teleporter that can send anyone or anything within the great hall to any of the other Hydra Citadel. Only Xanthos Engineers know the means to operate the device and the existence of the device outside Xanthos engineering circles is unknown.

# 286 KISS OF FATE WILDERNESS IN COLORS UNHEARD

The **Fate Wilderness** is one of those odd places whose full colors and sounds can only be perceived by higher order minds such as the Xanthos, and other Psionic Races. To others, the place is drab and cold, to the insane it is a glory of sensory beauty. Sorcery and e'Mral tend to fail within the Wilderness.

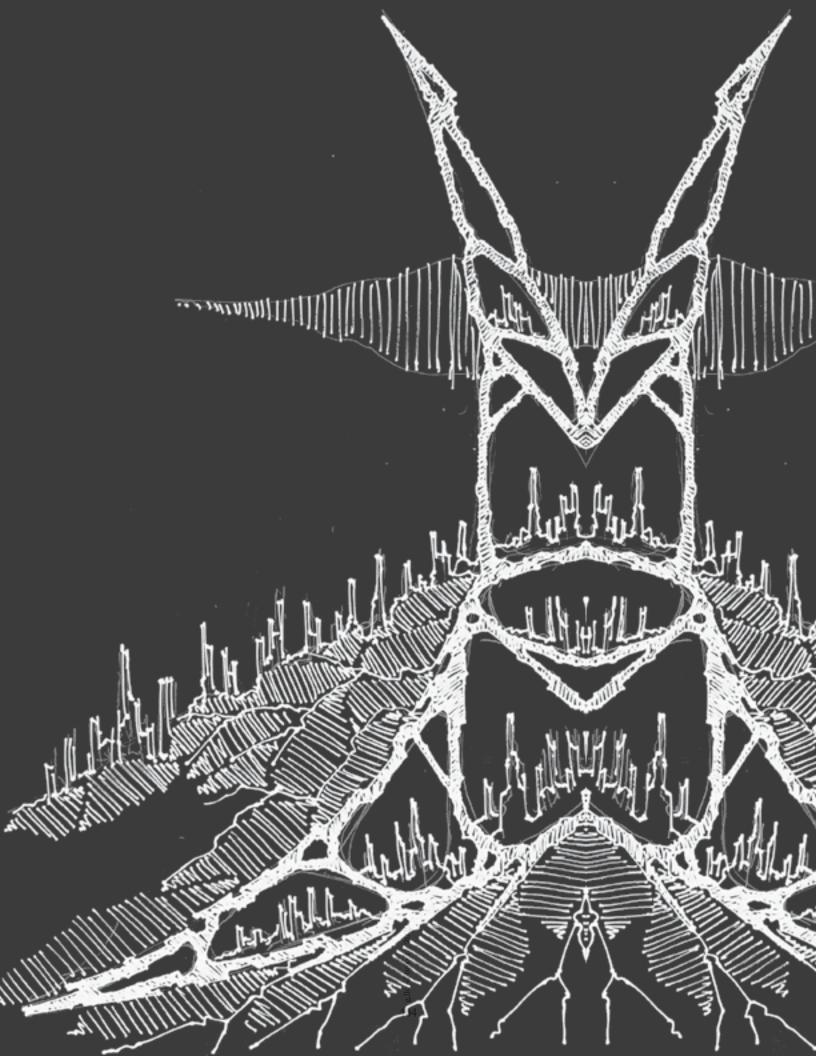
# 287 DREAMERS VALE OF TRANQUILITY UNDESERVED IN THE WANDERING FORESTS

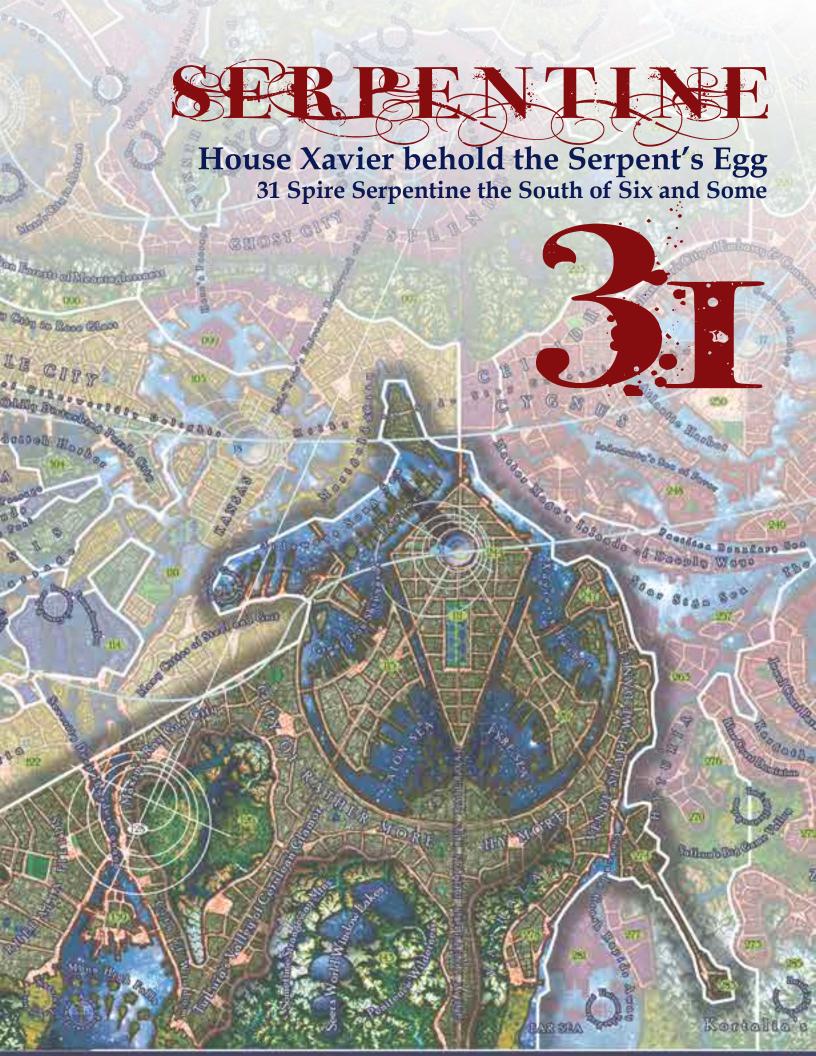
The Vale of Tranquility can be found among mountains populated by wandering forests.

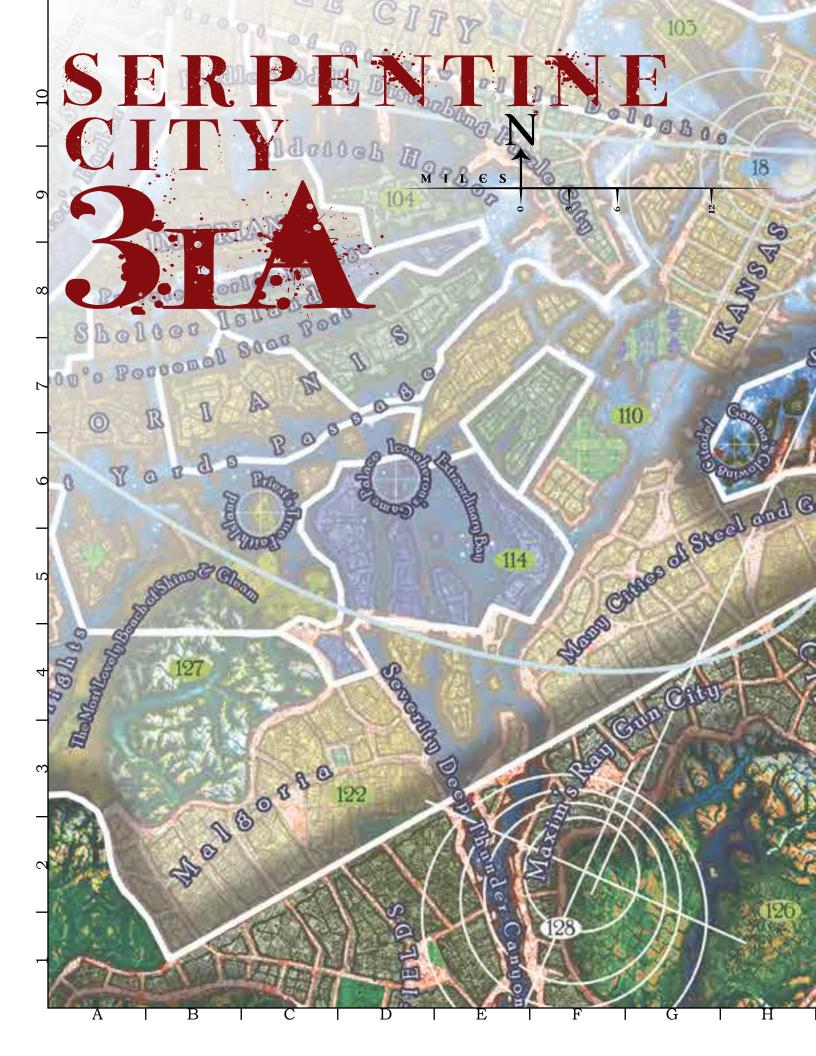
The Xanthos do not much care for this place, the **trees being generally** disrespectful and not terribly civil. But the Vale is a place of special importance, a void in the e'Mral mists where the Mistress dream might be clearly experienced. Several Xanthos religious monasteries cater to the regular influx of pilgrims that come seeking clarity.



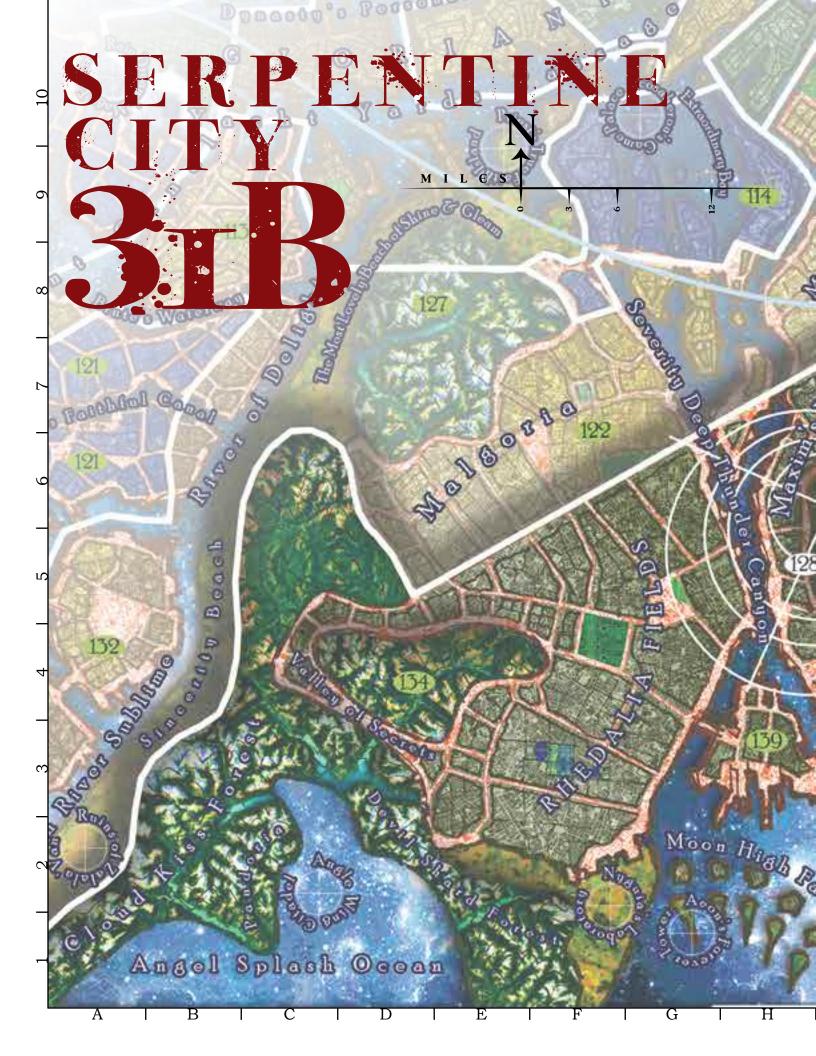
903 g.lloyd baker - 2020















### CUP OF COFFEE

The Drakyre often struggled to speak to the lesser races, it required concentrated effort to limit her communications to the verbal monkey chatter of the younger races.

Her native language was one of projected images and poetic verbal cues that together would create a depth of encyclopedic knowledge in moments, so much as to cause insanity or catatonia among the younger verbal races, only other of the Old races could comprehend Drakyre.

So, she practiced the linear verbiage of Imperial speech, sought to edit volumes of context, generations of understanding, tried to abandon novels worth of nuance. After an uncomfortably long pause, she finally said, "coffee of a sort replaced a held void."

The waitress nodded with an odd expression, coming back a few moments later with a cup of coffee.

She sighed, reminded herself, these creatures only speak of objects, not of absence, she had to remember, the absence within the cup is unseen and thus irrelevant. She set herself another task.

"How is your day," she asked the waitress as a matter or rote, do not over think she reminded to herself, it did not matter that the question was irrelevant.

"Not bad," the waitress said, "I have tickets to the new play down the street later, I have heard great things."

The waitress's words crashed into her mind like globs of wet clay, landing with unformed meaning heavy with uncertainty.

Her mind whirled with a thousand clawing questions all scratching at her mind.

She remembered the techniques she had learned, took a deep breath, and focused on the face of the waitress. The waitress was looking at her with a smirk slowly shifting to an uncomfortable silence.

She focused her mind shedding her questions, focusing on the now blank expression of the waitress.

Finally she found her center, her mind stripped of questions and uncertainty, knowledge was not the point, understanding irrelevant, she set her mind to meaningless though, drifting to dream, she said, "that sounds nice," the relief of a smile finding her mouth.

The waitress smiled and moved on.

She was told that talking to animals was difficult, but truly she had no idea. She might not have the gift, but she was not going to give up, she would learn.

She drained her coffee revealing again the void, she smiled, and focused her mind to see the cup as solid, "a cup," she said to herself with conviction, a lie of course, but one they understood as true.

She would learn, her race had a long history of teaching the pet races, it was a skill that could be leaned, one she would need to master if she expected to move among them and explore.

### SERPENTINE CITY

Serpentine City is among the oldest of the Clockwork Metropolis.

This is a city of elegant **Art Nouveau** parks and palaces with Gaudiesque towers of sculptural wonder and eccentric character. This is a city of organic flowing beauty and grace where nature and architectural forms flow artfully together.

### The City is as much nature as architecture.

The City survived the harsh geometric rigors of the Red Empire and escaped the baroque and rococo imaginings of the Calibahn Empire.

When the Calibahn fell and the Crystal Shard Empress imagined her Metropolis Empire, refugees from across the cosmos were returned to Xai. What people forget of these times is that most of the refugees were children and were returned to the Serpentine City under care of the Drakyre.

Serpentine City has always been a **city of the learned**, a city of sages, scholars, and universities.

The Drakyre themselves are a race known for having a deep memory of their past, able to delve into the genetic memories of every ancestor (of their gender) back through time to the animal evolution of their sentience.

And they can pass their own memories on to their kin, creating a vast library of minds that can recall most every period of racial history as firsthand experience.

The Drakyre are perhaps the only ones that recall their service to the **Weaver Angelic**, let alone recall that there

were 5 **Angelic Hosts**, not just the Mistress Angelic so often described in older religious texts.

Serpentine City is a city that remembers and teaches any that choose to learn, **traditionally neutral** in political, military, and economic affairs of the time.

The Drakyre though, are not content with their knowledge back through a million years of history, they ever strive to **explore and adventure** through the wider universe, sharing their memories upon their return, ever expanding the Drakyre understanding of the universe.

Serpentine City is a constant bustling hive of exploration activities, either leaving or returning. This is a city that **favors the brave**, adventurous, and the restless.

Life, the Drakyre say, is not a straight line, but a twisting river of unexpected turns and horizons revealed, pity those that stay ashore.





**House Xavier** was the first of the Great Houses, followed quickly by the other Old Races, the Pyrmn, Eigarian, Illinyar'Vooran, Xanthos, and Vhel'gurra.

The political nuances of these Old races and their Houses is long, complicated, and predates the Empire by a hundred millennia.

What one needs to know of modern Xai is that the **Drakyre stand neutral** among the Six Old Races, the Vhel, and Xanthos aligned with the Crystal Shard Empress, and the Pyrmn, Eigarian, and Vooran seeking the demise of the Empress and re-enslavement of the Vhel & Xanthos.

When the 6 Old Races choose to meet, it is normally on House Xavier soil, neutral ground. The Six tend to ignore the affairs of the other 31 Great Houses on general principal of their irrelevance to coming events and on specific principal that it is beneath their superior minds to talk meaningfully to animals or pets.

House Xavier are followers of the Old religions; they remember the truth of history and ignore the lies of the Empress and her Fanes.

The Old Races were servants of the **5 Angelic Hosts**, conquerors of what was and builders of what is. Truths that only the Drakyre seem to remember, truths that guide their fates despite the other's self-delusions of freewill.

Truths that like most things remembered by the Drakyre, no one seems to want to know.

Anyone that wants to know the truth of the Crystal Shard Empress and her Metropolis Empire need only ask, yet no one asks.

# The past holding no sway upon the today and tomorrow of the younger races.

The tales of the Old Religions almost entirely vanished from the modern world, only the Min'Zirai holding on to a fragment of the old knowledge, truths seen by even the Min'Zirai as metaphor, superstition, and fantasy.

The stories of the Red Empire vanished, its impossibly convoluted history, wars, and politics reduced to a single "space-opera" descriptor, the lives, and deeds of billions over a hundred millennia forgotten.

The truth of the Calibahn Empire a twisted lie so wrapped around itself as to be mobius strip of two-dimensional clarity.

Heroes made villains and villains reimagined heroes, so incongruous as to be obviously wrong should anyone bother to think, but thinking is not a strength of the younger races. But in truth, why should they care. These events are long ago passed, long ago irrelevant to modern affairs.

### A SIMPLE REQUEST

Xorga'mu, the Luciferous Sage of the First Circle, headed House Xavier. He was among the oldest of his kind, having been reborn into his Eighth Serpent's Life. The half dozen of his race that had achieved their Ninth rebirth each living out lives of deep spiritual purpose. The running of Imperial affairs falling to himself.

His elongated body now only a vague resemblance to his once human form. He sat floating amid the air in a lotus position thinking back on events his ancestors lived through half a million years past. The battle they fought seemed oddly pertinent to current events. He let himself be drawn onto the battlefield, he could smell the blood, smoke filling his lungs, his sword held firm in his hand, leading his men over the rise.

Though he felt the sudden pull of gravity upon his form, light filling his eyes as his lids opened, seeing the Envoy standing politely at the door waiting him to focus his mind on the present.

"Greetings and welcome," the Sage finally said, "come in."

"Blessed be your travels," said the Envoy, lifting herself into the air floating with her legs folded across from the Sage, her long gown falling to nearly touch the floor.

"I suppose you are here to lecture me in some especially unpleasant way," said the Sage.

"I regret that has been your impression of our past meetings," the Envoy said channeling the carillon song of the Empress, "but no, that is not my purpose."

The Sage bowed his head, "forgive my disrespect, I had not known you would be here personally my Empress," the Sage said using correct Imperial dialect.

"It is the anniversary of the Empire," sang the Envoy, "4,321 years since our founding of this endeavor. I recall you

saying that success was impossible, that war would tear the 37 Houses apart in mere centuries."

"I underestimated your sheer will, my Empress, whatever success there has been is your success," said the Sage with a bow of his head.

"I am not here to gloat nor to measure my successes," said the Empress, "the truth is you were right, and my efforts have come to naught."

"Self-pity," said the Sage, "how very unbecoming. The truth is that you are frustrated at how awfully long this effort has taken and you cannot yet see how much more time will be required. You see the small successes as clearly as I, but you wonder if your will is equal to the task, you question your own strength, your own will to see it done, and you begin to see that the effort may well lead to your own faith, not in the success of failure of the task."

The Envoy sat long and silent, considering the depth of meaning unspoken among the Sage's words. "You know what I am going to say. And you have already decided. And as I have been invited here, I know the answer," sang the descending notes of her carillon song, "thank you, I was prepared to abandon this escapade."

"You are welcome," said the Sage, "and despite what you might feel, it takes great courage to ask for help, vulnerability is not a failing, it is a strength, a strength common among the younger races and easily dismissed, a strength that you now understand, perhaps for the first time."

The Envoy smiled as a child might at sensing a father's love for the first time, unsure of what or how, but knowing the surety of truth.

"We will succeed," said the Sage, "no matter how long it may take, we will leave none of them behind."



# 31 SPIRE SERPENTINE THE SOUTH OF SIX AND SOME

The **Serpentine Spire** is of natural organic forms, not specific to plant or animal, but a system of stacked ecologies, islands of paradise wonder rising high into the air upon living drift islands and delving as great living caverns deep into the earth. Each drifting or delving ecology a living remnant of Drakyre and **Weaver Angelic** works reaching back to the creation of Xai and its **Paradise Realms**. This is a magical and enchanted place that represents the origins of mortal life itself.

The depth of knowledge contained here lost upon the younger races, who only see an odd collection of often ugly parks on ugly blob shaped floating islands.

But for the Drakyre, the Spire contains natural paths throughout the vastness of Xai and beyond, for example, the large floating island of willow swamplands contains paths seen only by the Drakyre, paths that can take them to any willow swampland anywhere in the cosmos. The lesser races see only a swamp to be avoided, missing entirely the beauty and wonder of its ecological clockwork interrelationships.

The Dryakyre are a wandering kind, the first Druids, the first to give form to Eden, the Keepers of Balance, most of the race being ever "elsewhere" traveling the Outland and Subworld wilds of Xai.

### III SERPENT SHOEY GARDEN OF KNOWLEDGE

The **central parkland** of Serpentine City is an ecological wonderland, a fragment of the **first Eden**. Within is natural landscapes can be found the first **Tree of Life** and **Tree of Knowledge**, though both are unmarked and unrecognizable as being anything special except my a Drakyre or a very spiritually attuned Druid.

# 115 SERPENTINE CITY THE REPTIES KIND

This island city is the ancient heart of Serpentine City, holy ground for Drakyre Druids and their ancient Weaver religions.

The Drakyre do not die in the traditional way, they are creatures of **reincarnation**, a part of the ecosystems they created when among the **Weaver Angelic**.

But sometimes, the deeds of a Drakyre transcend the physical, and they reincarnate into a higher form of Drakyre, becoming more akin to elemental nature gods with each reincarnation into higher Drakyre forms.

The **High Priests of the Reptile Kind** are Highborne Drakyre, having been reborn into their Second or higher Drakyre form, those ascending to level 9 being more Dragon than Drakyre, set free upon the cosmos to higher celestial purpose.

Drakyre religion is complicated, convoluted, and decidedly alien, but is always beautiful and life giving.

# 126 FOREST OF AMARANTH THE BEDEVILED

The forest valley of Amaranth is an **eternal maze**. Any that enter the valley can never find their way out except by flight or magical means. The Drakyre have long sentenced criminals to wander the forest as a kind of prison punishment.

### 128 DRIFT CITY SEVENTH MINOR OF SEVEN SONGS

Drift City Seventh was built by the Necromancer Kings of the Calibahn Empire. The huge gothic and rococo forms of the city have been slowly destroyed by the Drakyre, eroded by water, and broken to rubble by root. What remains is a paradise parkland, a Drakyre masterpiece of landscapes and waterways that beguiles and inspires, a natural wonderland that imagines what heaven might seem and imagines still more.

And while the other 8 Calibahn Drift Cities sit unmoving high above the Clockwork Metropolis, relics of a forgotten Age, the Drakyre recall their workings, and use this **Seventh** City to sometimes travel the cosmos. This they do without announcement or explanation. What people of the Clockworks know is that the Seventh Drift City sometimes vanishes and sometimes returns, no one really seeming to care or bother to know.

When asked, the Drakyre act as seeming confused as everyone else, "perhaps some ancient Calibahn curse still affects the place."



### 134 organas invisible forest paradise

This **mountain wilderness** was the work of an Ascendant Drakyre, the forest so beautiful as to turn mortal kind to stone upon experiencing its grace.

To prevent further harm, but not wanting to destroy his creation, he cloaked the forest under a veil of invisibility, only the Drakyre able to view its wonders. This is holy ground to the Drakyre.

# 139 FORTUNE CITADEL BEYOND THE CRASH

**Fortune Citadel** lies at the edge of an island city over the Moon High Falls. The Citadel is ancient of an alien craft lost to history, except that the Drakyre know who they were, sadly, no one has bothered to ask.

The Citadel is a mint, a place that crafts coins, specifically the Dragon.

Xanthos master numismatic craftsmen continue to occupy the Citadel to modern day and continue to hand carve Dragon coins for use by the Goblin Azumith Society. The design a coiling dragon on the obverse and a 5 headed hydra on the reverse.

### 143 KEY MASTER'S FOREST OF CELESTIAL PATHS

This **forest valley** in the Penitence Wilderness is toxic, most everything, flora and fauna, deadly to mortal kind though harmless to Drakyre.

The forest contains ancient druidic paths and groves that allow travel to many ancient holy and cursed Drakyre sites scattered throughout the Outland Wilderness.

### 2/1/1 SERPENTS MUSICAL CITY ARCANA IN BANCE

The city surrounding Spire Serpentine is a place of **music and the arts**. And while communication with the Drakyre is ever problematic, Drakyre music is glorious, their symphonies and ancient classical musical forms a favorite throughout the Empire.

# 247 CANTARAS ISEE OF MONSTER MAKERS

This island city in Xavier Harbor is famous for its wizard crafted creatures. The Drakyre are famous for their fauna stylings, creating pets of such sublime beauty and charm as to be at home with any child princess but also capable of crafting elegant and subtle guardians capable of protecting the most valuable person or place.

The Drakyre are not so singularly outlandish as the Vhel nor as brutal as the Xuvarian, the signature of Drakyre creatures is sublime elegance.

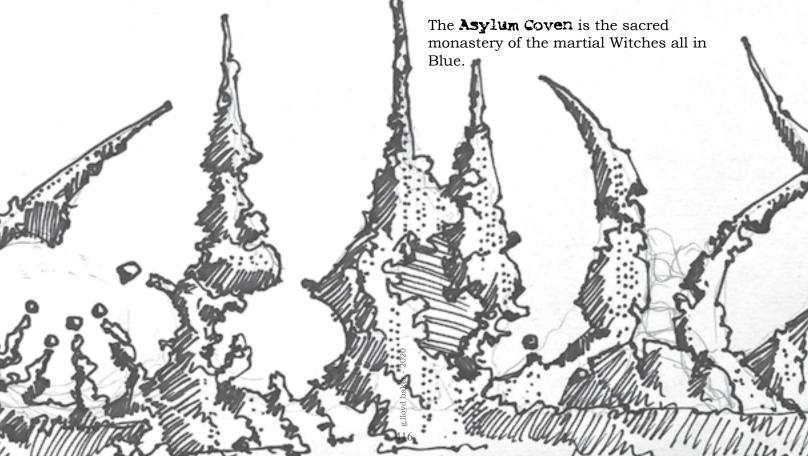
# 262 MUSIC THE ANCIENT PLACE OF TONE & TALE

This island city is another famed for its **Drakyre symphony music**. This is a place famed for its musical teaching academies and universities.

# 274 ASYLUM COVEN WITCHES ALL IN BLUE

This is a military outpost leading to 283. Not much is spoken of the Drakyre military, mostly as they have been so famously neutral for so long that they do not maintain a formal military, relying instead on Imperial forces to keep the peace with other Great Houses.

But the Drakyre do have a military guard, called the **Blue Witches**. These blue clad Drakyre are trained in an ancient form of martial arts only usable by **female Drakyre**, the strain of training deadly to male Drakyre and mortal kind in general.



### 278 MERCENARY S MF FEDERATION

This city on the shores of the Valhala Mountains is run by a federation of mercenary quilds run by the Drakyre to do all the hired dirty work of House Xavier.

### The Drakyre famously pay very well but expect hardboiled professional badass results for their gold.

The Federation so successful over the past few thousand years as to now be the preeminent military-for-hire operation in the Empire.

Evil lives in the Federation like a pack of hunting dogs and the Drakyre make full use its resources, buying any soul that might be willingly surrendered for sale (both figuratively and literally). Superior

The Drakyre are often mistaken for benevolent beings, their interests being publicly focused on the affairs of exploration and historical research. "This is a lie," the Federation will tell you.

### 283 CREAT CRYSTAL TOWER OF ULARA THE MAD

The Crystal Tower sits upon a high mountain overlooking the Kortalia's Ice Demon Principalities. This ancient tower was crafted by the wizard Ulara perhaps as a defense against the Ice Demon Principalities.

The tower is deeply sacred to the Drakyre for reasons they are not saying, expending great effort in maintaining dominion over the tower and surrounding city.



"The Drakyre are ruthless in their plans and terrifying when seen for what they truly are," they say.

"And what are they?" you might ask.

"Superior," is the answer.

"The people and races surrounding the Drakyre are as animals," says the Federation, "and not very bright ones, perhaps amusing, perhaps loved, and adored as pets, but always as a resource to be exploited. It is important you understand this."

"And so why are Drakyre so often viewed as benevolent?" you might ask.

"Because they do not mistreat their animals," comes the answer, "the measure of any good society is how it treats its animals. The Drakyre view themselves as compassionate, even good, in this way."

"So, I am an animal?" asked the mercenary recruit.

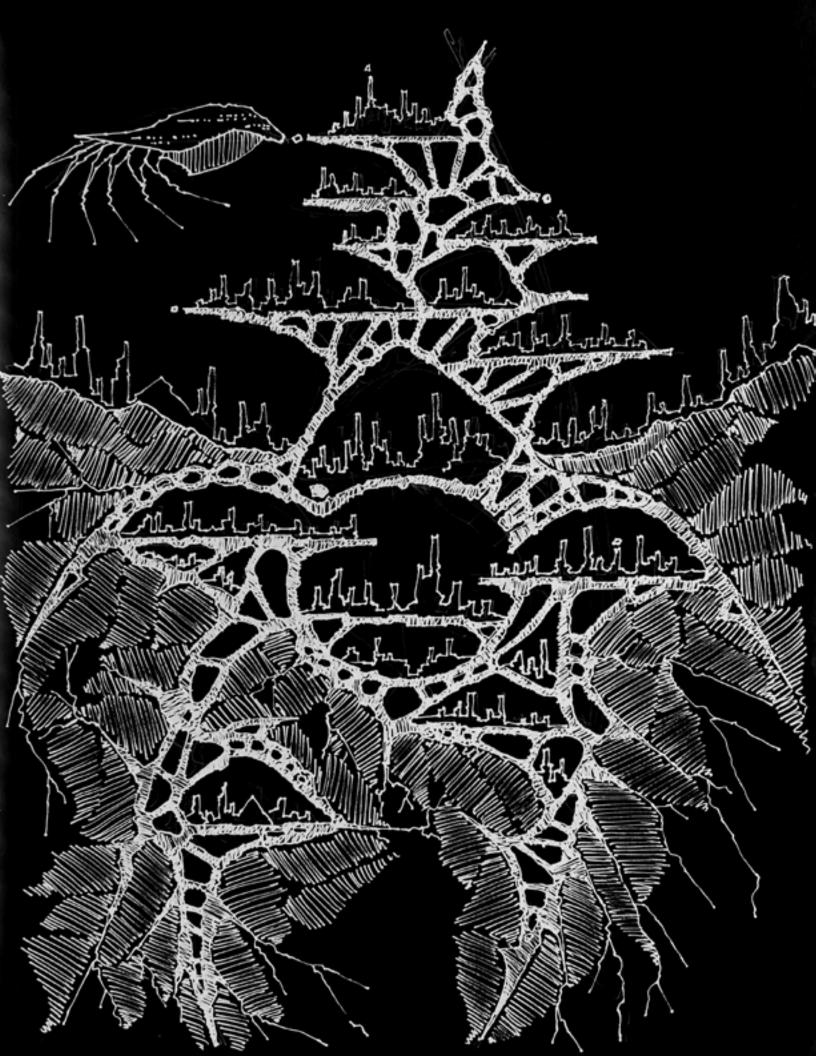
"Yes, and do not forget it," the Federation says, "honesty is evil, we are all equal in the eyes of the devil."

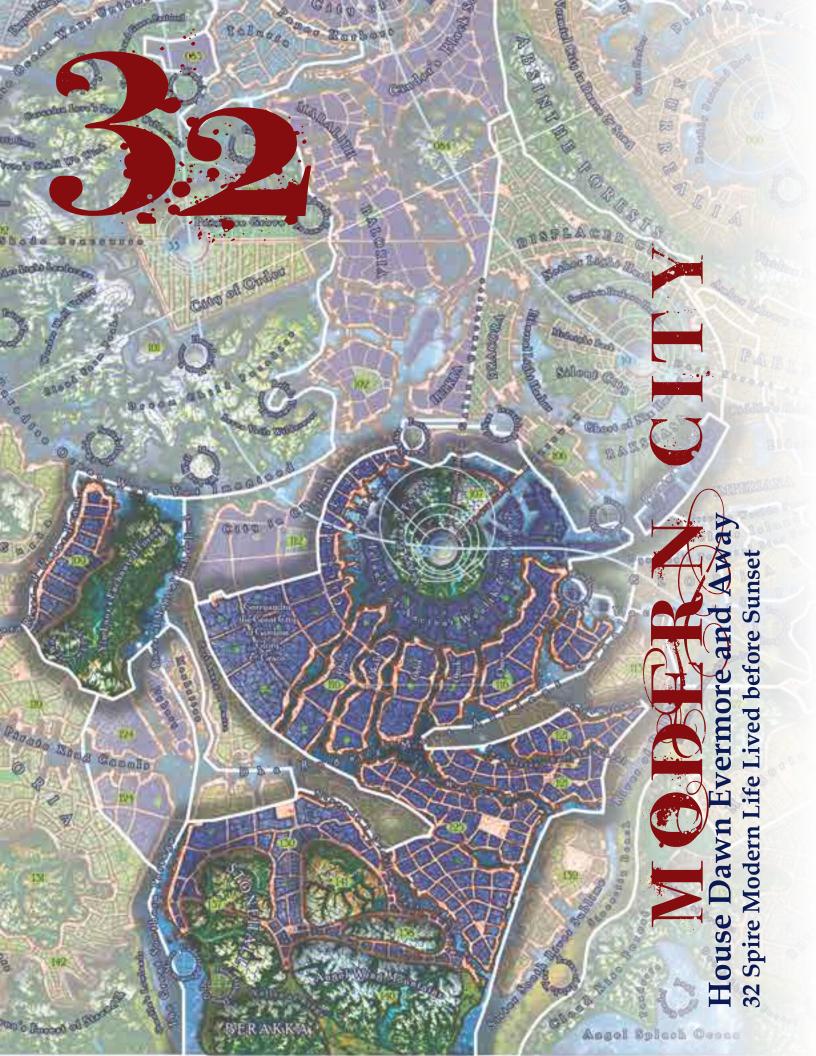
"So, now I am evil working for the devil?" asked the recruit.

"I think you are getting it," said the recruiter. "The Mercenary Federation is a city of condoned anarchy and sanctuary, supporting and protecting the most wretched and villainous unfit for civil society. We are a collection of cut throats and morally repugnant souls. We are the preferred means by which House Xavier takes care of direct affairs."

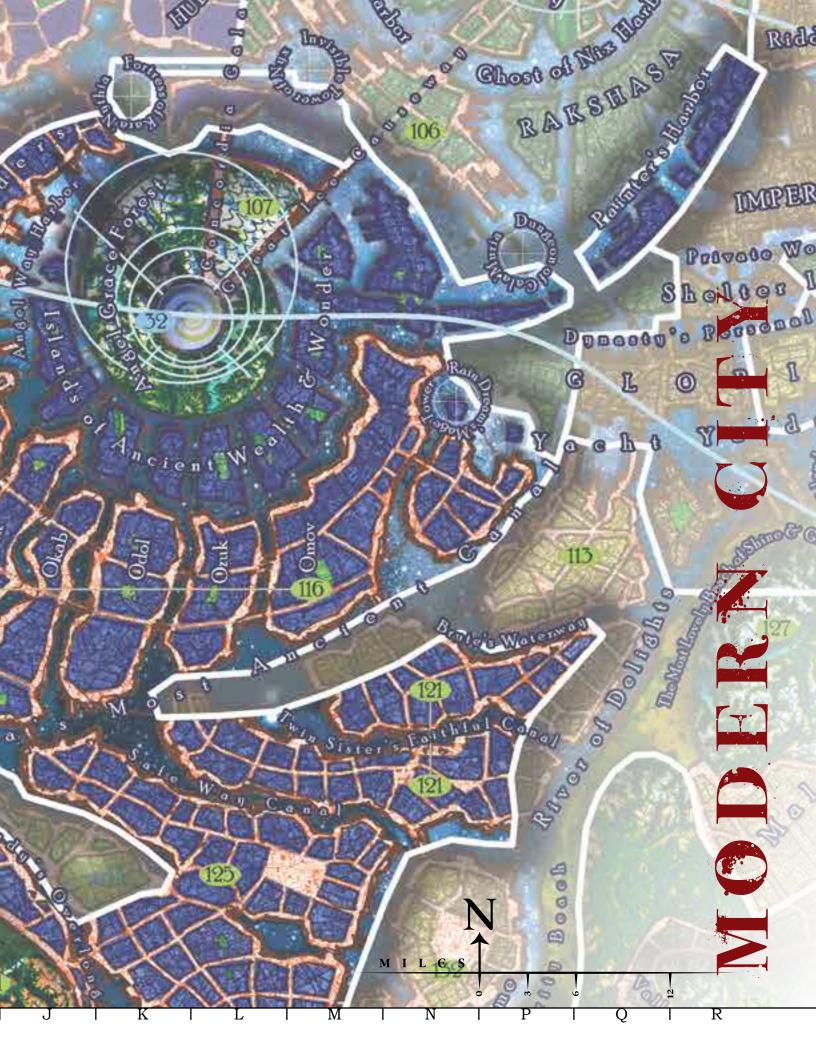
"Sounds too good to be true," said the recruit.

"Welcome to the MF'g pack."

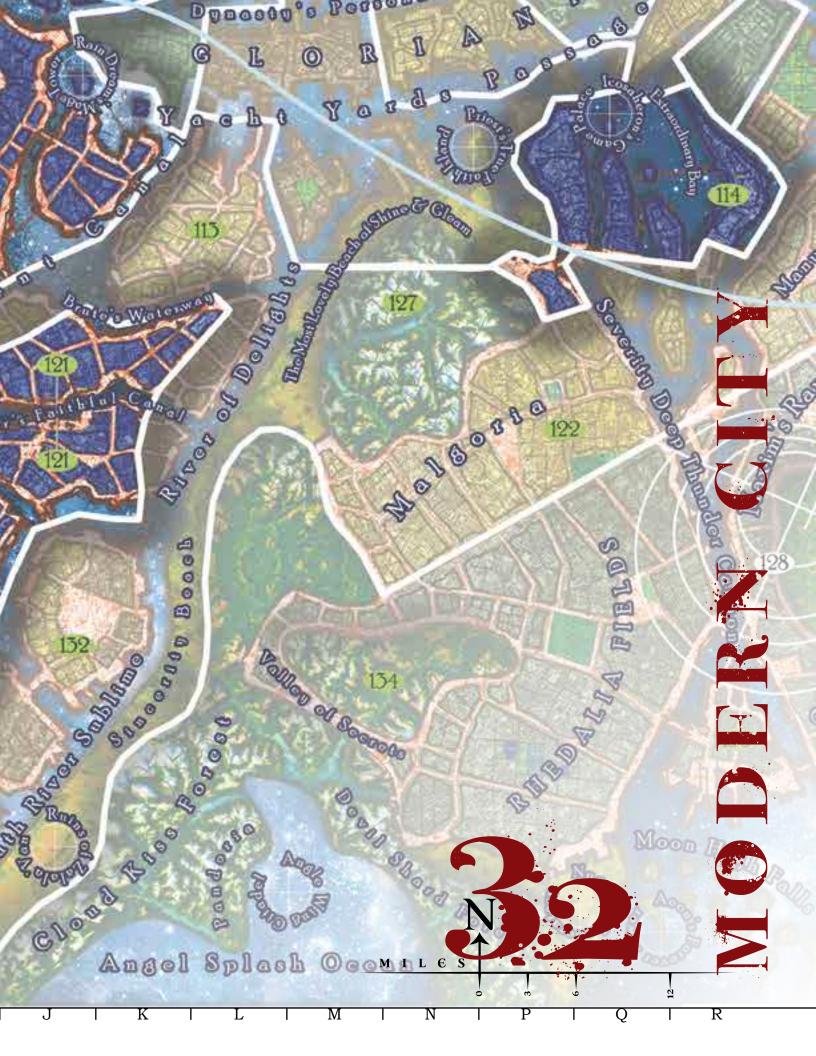














The Avyl are a race unfettered by concerns of the past or future.

This is a race of modern purpose that lives for the joy and pleasure of today. Their governance is loose, their architecture and arts are poor, and they just generally do not care about such weighty issues as legacy or sacrifice.

What concerns the Avyl is the latest in fashion and attending great parties.

So focused on the moment, the Avyl may heighten their perceptions to seemingly **slow time**, able to extend the experience of a moment for what can seem to Avyl to be minutes, hours, or days.

### Modern city

The city of the Avyl is called Modern because it is chiefly built to last about a day, and as anyone who has dealt in architectural circles knows, there is nothing more permanent than a temporary building.

Modern City is a **shamble of poorly** constructed buildings bereft of maintenance filled with wonderful hole in the wall restaurants, street food, dive bars, and fast fashion houses. Whatever makes it work for the day is good enough.

Modern City is perpetually poor and seeming ever on the edge or starvation, but the Avyl do not much care, their goal is to be clean, sharp dressed, and enjoy the day as a party by any means possible.

As the Avyl generally have no attachment to possessions beyond immediate need they tend to be a transient race, sleeping wherever they find themselves, seeking cleanliness, fashion, and food wherever they might be that another day might be danced away.

As the Avyl do not recognized anything being "owned," they generally do not view their free willed taking of what they need to be theft. Among the other races the Avyl are a race of well-dressed thieves and vagabonds only interested in a good time.

One might rightfully ask how such a place and people can exist. The answer is 3fold.

**First** the Avyl are exceedingly clever, each a master of grift and hustle in a city of beggars, thieves, and hustlers.

**Second**, despite appearances, they all work, just as little and as smartly as possible.

**Third**, charity, Modern City is the center of all **Imperial welfare**, having drawn eons of impoverished and disenfranchised to live in its slums, so many, that now the Avyl are only a tiny minority in their own city.

And more interestingly, as a race of natural adventurers, the Avyl are a people that have largely abandoned their own city, more living as expatriates than in the Modern City, many others having vanished into Symmetry City.

Most serious scholars however expect the Avyl to soon fade to extinction.



Avyl born Arcane and trained by the Imperial Fanes tend to be adventurers but some make their way back to House Dawn as the best dressed heads of Modern City's innumerable organized **crime families** of thieves, beggars, and grifters.

Life is a hustle; you can be a sap or be at the after party.

### GAZETTEER OF MODERN CITY

### 32 SPIRE MODERN THE LIVED BEFORE SUNSET

The Modern Spire is a wonder of seeming titanic origami craft, a vertical shadow play of folded pure white paper that wears down each day under the effects of sun, wind, and rain. But is reformed into a new origami form come each dawn.

Watching the Modern Spire reform itself at dawn is one of the more fascinating

The vast interiors of the Modern Spire are similarly crafted of titanic folded paper, though not seeming affected by exterior forms of the Spire as they change each day.

tourist experiences of the Clockworks.

The Spire is under dominion of an alliance of **House Dawn crime families** that use the lower reaches of the Spire to conduct Imperial affairs but otherwise have left the Spire abandoned, a seeming infinite array of origami folded white paper empty rooms, corridors, and halls.

### THE PRETENDER

Ulungra the Wretched, head of the East Faith Beggar's Union was there, as was Jhalana of the Five Filths representing the Wonder Circus Grifter's Club and Obfolo the Fat representing the Eighth Street Snatchers.

They and a dozen more of Modern Cities most famous and powerful Arcane crime lords had assembled within the great origami hall of the Modern Spire by special request of the Crystal Shard Empress.

The Imperial Envoy moved into the stark white hall, there was no furniture or imagined pretense, just an empty hall of some ancient Mistress craft built for beings of inhuman size and alien comprehension.

Within stood the most powerful and well-dressed heads of House Dawn, obviously unhappy to have been summoned from whatever party or hallucinogenic drugfueled dance floor that they might have otherwise been attending. Work was always the last choice of the Avyl, even those sorcerous elite of the Fanes.

"Can we please make this quick," said Ulungra, his enormous feathered velvet hat fluttered with seeming distaste at being wasted in the eyes of the Envoy.

The Envoy was about to speak when suddenly she seemed to be moving in slow motion, and then so slowly as seeming to stop, Obfolo slowed his perception to drink in every moment of the room. He suspected his fellows were doing the same, something was not right, and he wanted to know what.

Obfolo's body was as seemingly slowed as the universe, but his mind raced in real time, looking through his own eyes as if through the windows into some slow-motion diorama.

His own senses heightened, he could feel each droplet of perspiration forming upon his skin, could count the chill pricks and hear the sound of each slow motion droplet evaporate off his skin from the near unmoving swirling breezes of the room. He could feel the heartbeats of everyone in the room, could smell the scent of Ulungra's rose water hair oil. He let the information of the moment flow through him, sensed it all as a raw nerve might sense the pain of a cut.

He was alive, but the Envoy was not. Her oiled body not quite sweet smelling enough to cover the scent of the grave, her heart did not beat, her blood made no sound, and her skin suffered the subtle pallor of having recently been animated by sorcerous oils.

Slowly he pulled his senses back into himself, let his perceptions begin to catch up with real time, and as he did, began coiling Orange e'Mral mists into the runes that marked his skin, he could feel their warmth slowly begin to burn in his blood.

When finally, his perceptions had caught back up with real time, he let loose a gout of flame that whipped toward the Envoy.

Apparently, he had not been the only suspicious party in the room, Lightening from Ulungra threatened to ignite his hair oil. Jhalana let loose an e'Mral laced silver bullet from his side arm straight into the Envoy's enchanted frozen heart. And a dozen other attacks struck the about-to-speak faux Envoy within the span of a few seconds, obliterating her undead form to scattered ash, fluttering embers, and flickering disintegration.

When the House Dawn assembly settled themselves, they agreed that Obfolo would travel to the Empress and inform her that new password and authentication protocols would be required for addressing the Carnival Court, the remainder to get back to the much more important matters of party and fashion, deciding that whoever this pretender was, she would not bother them further today.

### 107 FROST QUEENS ICE SENTINEE FORTRESS

The Sentinel Fortress lies in a part of the **Angel Grace Forest** under Spire Modern. The Sentinel Fortress is an ancient place of extraordinary beauty, carved as if from a single block of unmelting sorcerous ice. The Fortress is from an Age when the Avyl were a part of a symbiotic trinary race, the **Avyl** present minded, the **Evyl** future minded, and the **Ovyl** past minded.

The Frost Queen was the last Evyl, her body rumored to be entombed somewhere within the labyrinthian fortress. No single truth is known as to the demise of the Evyl or Ovyl races, the only thing that the Avyl know is that it happened yesterday and is thus a matter of distained unimportance.

### 109 DARLING S HAUNTED CITY OF PASSION

The **Haunted City** is a large city at edge of Yin'Luur's Enchanted Forest. This is a city of some prosperity and wealth as foreign visitors are drawn to its many casinos, brothels, and exotic Avyl parties and entertainments.

Haunted City was once a stronghold of the Ovyl, a now extinct race of past minded Avyl whose memories and **ghosts still prowl the streets** and halls of their once beautiful libraries and universities now turned to the purpose of lust and avarice.

# PERIDOTS HUMMINGBIRD CITY

Hummingbird City is built upon remote islands surrounding the Extraordinary Bay, entirely free of Imperial dominion. The Hummingbird City is beautiful by most any definition of the term, buildings sculpted from translucent blocks of unmelting sorcerous ice.

The City is a **necropolis** from an ancient age, the ancient tombs of Evyl, Ovyl, and Avyl from an Age before the extinction of the Evyl and Ovyl.

House Dawn maintains a heavy presence within the city of its elders, having turned tomb raiding into a full-time enterprise, dozens of Avyl crime families plundering their own past to pay for today. Some even taken to carving the glories of the city's most beautiful buildings into blocks of ice never-melting ice for export.

### THE THE FIVE ISLANDS OF THE BARBARIAN PROTHERS

The 5 island cities are said to be named for 5 legendary brothers: **Ovox**, **Okab**, **Odol**, **Ozuk**, **and Omov**.

These brothers were famously anarchists, believing that true freedom was lived each day. Their fights, parties, and fashions are legend among modern Avyl, they killed, murdered, stole, and burned the 5 islands to the ground until none but the 5 brothers remained, no one left to kill or steal from, no place left to sleep, no water to drink, and no food to eat. The five brothers set upon each other in a final glorious battle that saw each slain in turn until the mortal wounds of Omov left him dying among his 4 slain brothers.

This is a morality tale, intended to dissuade the Avyl from their selfishness, but the only lesson any Avyl ever received from the story is to "live for today, for tomorrow we will all be dead."

The Five Islands remain the ancient burned down ruins of some dystopic future occupied by small tribes of scavengers and the most desperate and impoverished of Modern City.

### 121 ISLANDS OF DIANE & DENISE

The 2 island cities are headed by the 2 most famous fashion houses of the Clockworks, The Diane Dance Fashion Consortium, and the Denise Danger Penumbral Fashion House.

The 2 fashion Houses are famous rivals ever seeking to destroy the other, continuing for the rivalry of the bitter hatred of the 2 founding sisters for the past thousand years.

The islands themselves are each centered around the opulence and excesses of high fashion but surrounded by the crushing despair and poverty of sweatshops and tenement housing.

# 125 TRAGEDY STONES HEARTFELT MACHINE CITY

Machine City is a **huge island of scrap**, salvage, and repair. Among the Avyl, most everything in the city is second or third hand, donated as charity a long time ago and repaired to sufficiently operate for at least the rest of the day.

The Machine City is a place were broken things go to be repaired and sold back into the city for a pittance.

Over the centuries, the donations of the other Great Houses of the Empire have devolved to be only the broken and obsolete, donated (dumped) along the docks of the city almost daily.



# 130 ARACHNYS THE VALLEY OF SPIDERS

Arachnys is a large valley and coastal city around the mountains of Stonehall.

Arachnys is a city long plagued by giant predatory spiders from the Stonehall.

The spiders hunt the residents of the City as sacrifices in their dark rituals while the Avyl hunt the spiders for rare regents that they craft into extraordinary hallucinogenic drugs and toxins sold illegally throughout the Empire.

# 138 GALAXICONS MIGHTY WARRIOR FOREST

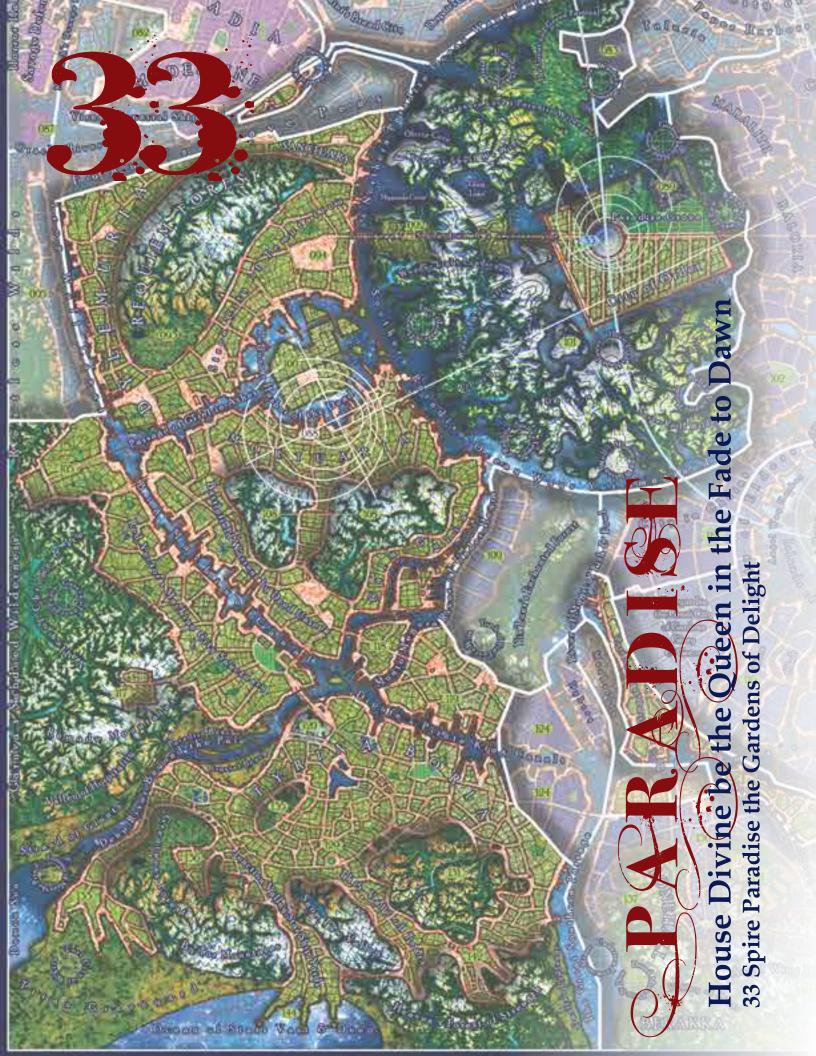
This high mountain frozen forest is said to be home to a single man, Galaxicon, an Avyl warrior cursed to immortality. True or not, something dangerous lives within the mountainous forest, killing most anyone that seeks to travel its frozen peaks.

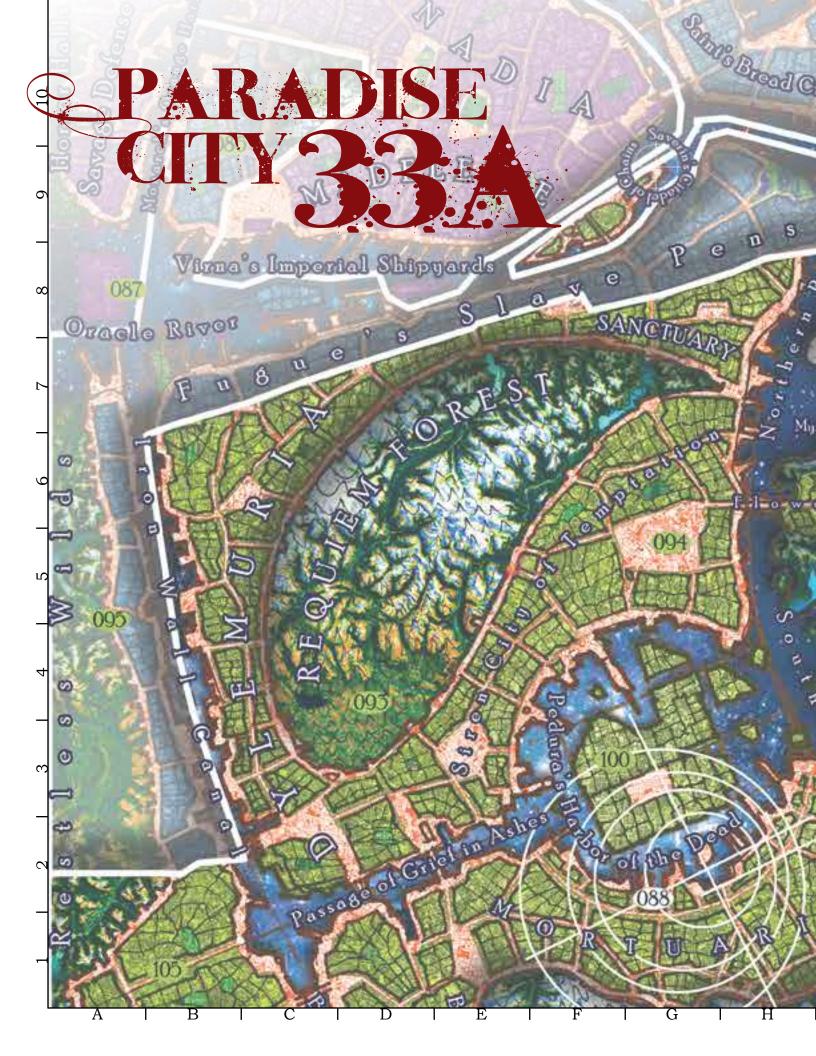
# 140 HIGH MOUNTAIN VALE OF THE SNOW DOG

This long **cold valley and frozen** lake within the Angel Wing Mountains is rumored to be home to the **Snow Dogs**, a legendary clan of Avyl warriors, said to have been the personal guard to the last Evyl Queen that retreated to this place after her passing so many thousands of years ago.

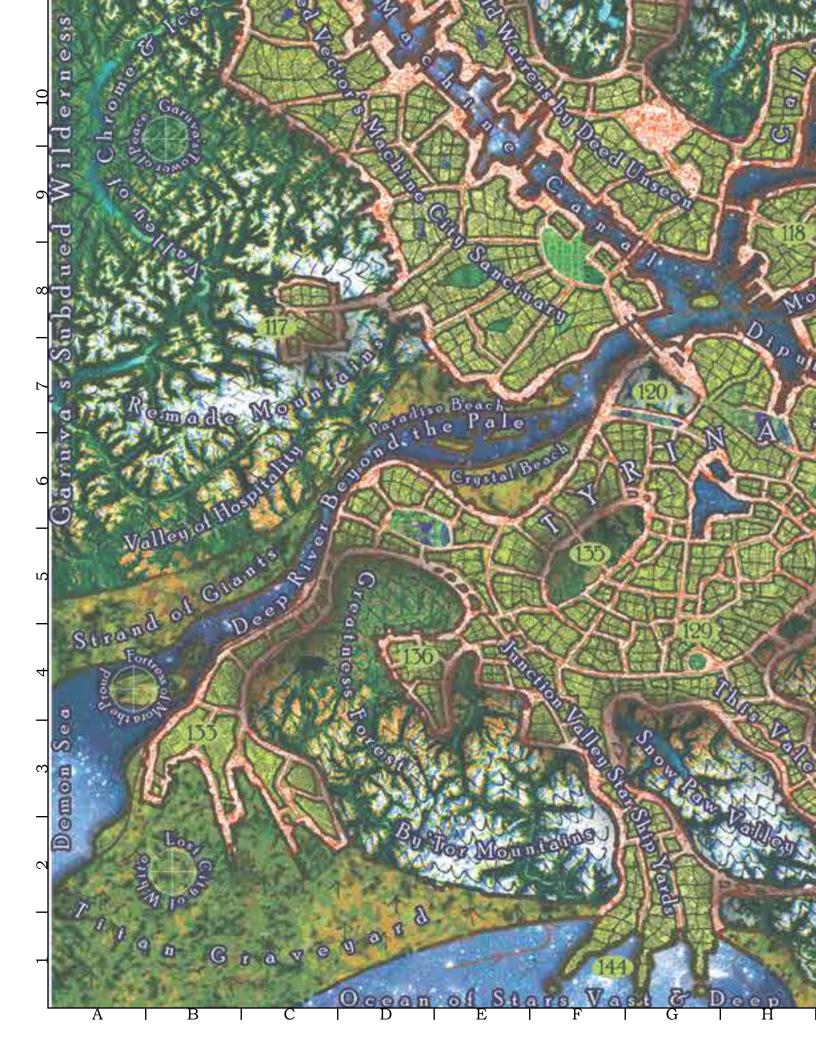
### 141 IVANIS FOREST AND THE SPIDERS OF DESPAIR

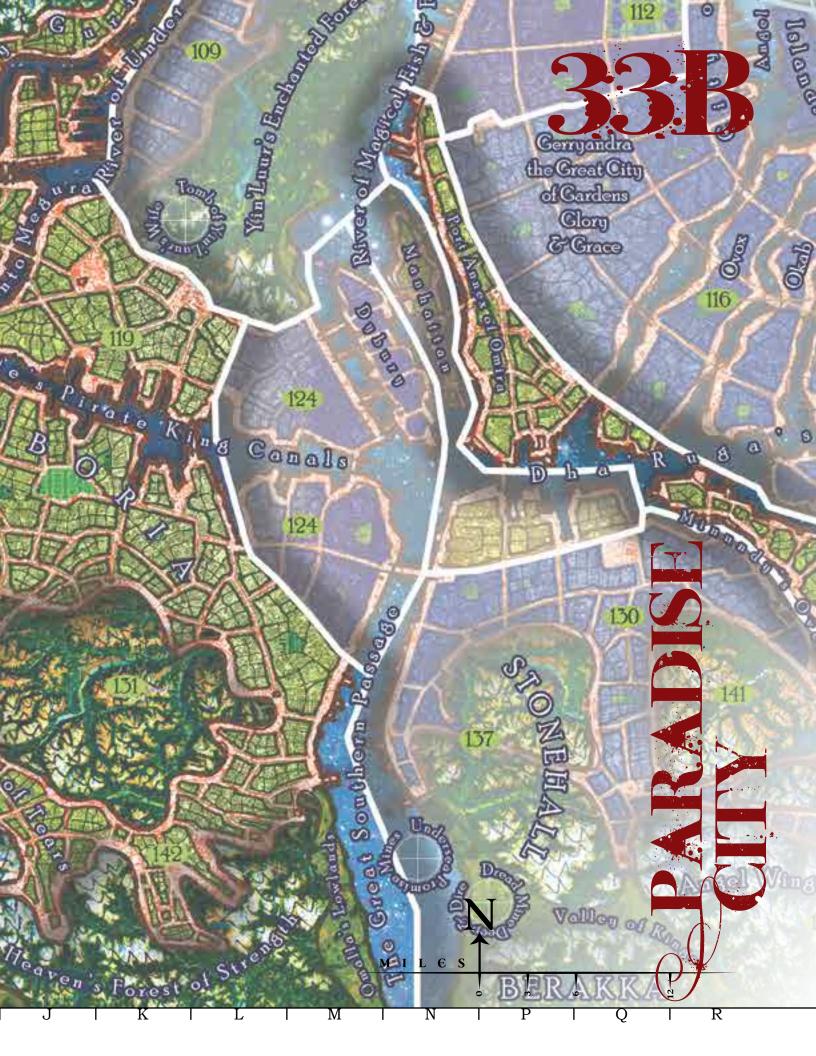
Ivanis Forest is a mountainous wilderness once the kingdom of the Spiders of Despair, ancient allies of the Avyl recently hunted to extinction by the various crime families of House Dawn, their corpses rendered for their rare regents. The ruins of their once beautiful arachnid tree-top cities the only reminder of the once proud race.













The Ordd are of an alien kind, a race of male-drones that serve a deific Queen. There are some few other Princess females that serve as the Queen's Court, the Sisters of Exodus, ready to replace the Queen if need require, or to stretch out and form their own "hive" should opportunity arise.

The Queen directs the fate of her kind by means of her dreams, all that sleep shares the dream of their Queen. Her drones may in turn occasionally see their prayers answered by their Queen.

#### FRIENDSHIP

The Queen lived a waking dream, she dreamed of her people. She imagined thousands of drones arrayed in perfect lines marching in perfect synchronous cadence. She let her mind drift through the work crews building a new tower, each trade and interlocking part of unified purpose. She saw lonely outliers, wanderers, and explorers in far distant places, her dreams washing through them gifting purpose, courage, and imagination. She dreamed the making, the finding, and the wonderous, driving the creative wills of her people.

And while her titanic altered form dreamed within the rich aromatic coiling mists of the chamber of the Heart, she could feel the approach of a foreign presence.

The Queen dreamed of the approaching Envoy, a hard-unyielding knot of purpose unguided by dream or imagination. She pitied and loved the creature that approached.

The Imperial Priestess approached the large ornate circular viewing portal, her path through the meandering corridors and enormous halls of the Cube had unsettled her, as an Imperial emissary she was used to the disturbing and frightening, but there

was something here unlike anything she had encountered. She felt now as if she were but a part of someone else's dream, the world around her not her own, her own self seeming to be the imagination of someone not her.

The cinnamon colored swirls of mist parted around the enormous elongated head of the Queen; her tessellated eyes larger than the Imperial Priestess looking at her as some alien predator from the other side of the huge glass lens that separated the two.

She dreamed the Queen speaking, "Greetings my dear little servant of our Empress, too long has it been since you last visited us 122 years ago, what can the glories of my Ordd Paradise Dreamscape make real for you this day?"

The Priestess knew that the Queen was rarely visited, the Ordd were ubiquitous throughout the Empire as builders and laborers, their efficiency, cooperation, and integrity famous, they were makers, and rarely deserving of concern from the Empress.

"I have come personally," said the carillon voice of the Empress channeled through her high priestess, "chaos moves to threaten the Metropolis, my time as Empress is nearing its end."

"It is as you said four millennia past upon the founding, this day would come," the dream voice of the Queen recalled. "It is time you began your exodus, the city will soon turn against you," said the Empress.

"As you say," my dear Empress, "though I will not abandon your sacrifice to save these creatures, in the time of this Empire I have seeded the forgotten landscapes of the Outlands with many young queens, I and mine will stay and see this great endeavor to its end, whatever end that may be."

"You are honorable my most loyal Queen," said the Empress, "I am humbled and glad."

"You will suffer," said the Queen, "but I will not abandon you."



Paradise City is a glory to behold, a wonderland of islands, parks, tree lined streets, and organic art nouveau architectural grace. The drones of the Paradise City are industrious and skilled, their divinely inspired arts and crafts draw students from across the Clockworks to mentor and learn from its masters.

Paradise City is a place where **work is** joy and art the result. Every drone takes great pride and pleasure in their divinely assigned profession, seeking to be the best at their works to earn the grace of their Queen.

And to make matters clear, the men (drones) of Paradise City are in no way coerced or mind controlled or otherwise possessed, these are men of freewill as any. But when they sleep, they all share a common dream, the divine dream of their Queen. From this, they choose the fate of their lives.

For those Ordd that rebel, that seek paths outside the Divine Dream, the love and acceptance of their Queen ever follows them, for rebellion, exploration, and a wanderlust are an important part of the Dream.

# HOUSEDIVINE BE THE QUEEN IN THE FADE TO DAWN

Those Ordd drones born Arcane find their Dream Paths draw them to be **Princes of House Divine**, the political, military, and economic leadership of Paradise City and its representation among the Great Houses of the Empire.

**House Divine** is well respected among the Empire and Paradise City is among the most beloved for visitors, artists, and immigrants.

The fanatical devotion to the defense of their Queen makes the Ordd formidable warriors when the Dream shifts to violence.

House Divine is very much a "law and order" state, with little tolerance for even minor offenses such as littering.

The communal respect and responsibilities of the Ordd and House Divine often puts them at odds with more liberal free-spirited Houses and emotional races.



#### FAITH IN ADREAM

Every Ordd is raised to be a skilled warrior and industrious worker. All could fight if called upon to defend Queen or home.

It is well known that the Ordd are famous for their deep sleep. The invasion of Paradise City was planned for evening. The plan was to kill as many as possible in their sleep before a defense could be mustered, leaving what remained in disarray and distress.

The invasion began as planned, their surprise complete. But upon the death of the first Ordd, the whole of the Queen's race rose from their slumber, armed themselves, and assembled in perfect regimented lines in the streets throughout the Metropolis.

Millions of Ordd marched in disciplined defense of their city. There was no disarray and no distress. And the invaders outnumbered ten-to-one. Soon the invaders were trapped within Paradise City by arriving Ordd armies, bricklayers, porters, builders, and workers thought harmless prey suddenly transformed into an ordered, equipped, and skilled military force.

"Where did they all come from?" lamented the invading Commander.

"Everywhere," said the Scout, "including some thousands following in from our own City."

"Impossible," said the Commander, "how could such a force be so well hidden, how could we not have known? Damnation and fire, they are better soldiers than our own professionals, their coordination preternatural."

"It may be that this Dreaming Queen that they worship is real?" said the Scout.

"Not you too," whined the Commander, "enough with the foolishness of some living god, the Ordd are barely men, degenerate clones of corrupted wizardry, our faith will see their end."

"Our faith may see their end," said the Scout, "but tonight their numbers and discipline will be our end."

"On that we can agree," said the Commander, "give the order to withdraw."

The second Scout came rushing into forward Command, "Sir," he began, "our City has been invaded, they call for aid."



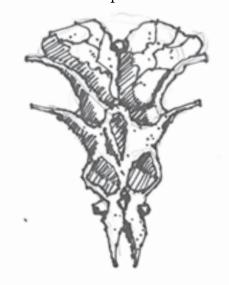
# 33 SPIRE PARADISE THE GARDENS OF DELIGHT

The Paradise Spire is a beautiful terraced spiral of hanging gardens and palaces. The Spire is home to the **Paradise Princes**, the rare Arcane born of the Queen's Drones and leaders of Paradise City and the Queen's Emissaries with the larger Metropolis Empire.

The Paradise Princes are a dedicated corps of disciplined sorcerous might. Whereas most Arcane are famously arrogant and independent, the Ordd Arcane are humble defenders of their kind dedicated to justice and fairness.

Most trained as Templars and Paladins by masters of the Illurian Fane.
The Princes of Paradise are **true believers**, something that makes them among the most dangerous in the Clockworks.

The interiors of the Paradise Spire are said to be a wonderland of heavenly craft, with corridors and great halls that lead to far distant Outland places, used by the **Sisters of Exodus** to establish new Queen colonies far beyond the Clockwork Metropolis.



# **688** DRIFT CITY OF THE EIGHTH NECROMANCERSKING

**Drift City Eight** is an ancient floating city of titanic and esoteric gothic and rococo forms from the times of the Calibahn Empire designed to make any man-sized mortal seem small and insignificant as a bug in the halls of titan gods.

Drift City Eight is the dominion of the **Imperial Guard**: Templars and Paladins in personal service to the Crystal Shard Empress. The largest proportion of their numbers being recruited from the Ordd.

# 089 CUBE OF WORLD STOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The **3mile Cube** (most of its titanic bulk submerged into the ground) at edge if huge **Paradise Grove** parklands appears as an inside out industrial complex of ancient metal and glass pipes, ducts, and exposed structure.

Within its labyrinthian industrial catacombs are the vast Drone birthing chambers overseen by the **Matron** Giants, titanic entomolian creatures that guard and tend Cube of Lost Worlds.

At the center of the chamber is rumored to be the **Dreaming Queen**, the living goddess of the Ordd, should you choose to believe in such fairy tales.

Entry to the Cube by any but the Princes of Paradise or the Sisters of Exodus is forbidden. But all Ordd have generally fond memoires of early childhood education among the Mothers of Elucidation within its bright school, dormitory, and play halls. Delivered out into the world at Age 12 as mentees of Ordd tradesmen and warriors.

The enigma of the Cube and the "unnatural" means of Ordd birth has made them pariahs among some, often the object of religious discrimination, hatred, and worse. The Ordd are unusual, and for this they are persecuted. The fact that they are among Xai's most talented tradesmen, builders, and artists, better than most, only compounds their offense.

# 092 TEMPLE OF LOVE FALLING DOWN

Bridging over the Flower Shade Concourse is a **towering terraced city**, the collapsed remains of an even larger structure destroyed in some long-ago Age.

In modern day it has become a pleasure palace dedicated to the entertainments of the Drone population.

The Ordd generally eschew sexual pleasures, finding no great need for procreation or its rituals, preferring **sport**, **adventure**, **and games** as preferred entertainments.

#### o93 failing tear forest

South of the Requiem Forest is the more ancient **Forest of Falling Tears**. This is a forest grown over an ancient battlefield, the artifacts of which might still be found among the forest's dark haunted tangle.

Some expeditions have reported that below the forest is a titanic ship of some ancient alien craft that crashed, the escaped terraforming cargo the source of the forest's strange flora & fauna.

# 094 SHALINYA S IMPERIAL CITY OF TRUST & FAITH

The **City of Trust** is a large imperial enclave at center of Sire City of Temptation. The City is **holy ground** to the Imperial Fanes and home to several large religious citadels, each built upon more ancient holy sites. The City is said to lie **over an ancient necropolis** within which are entombed the holy wizards of an Age long forgotten by history.

#### IOO GYPSY GRAVE CITY IN MOURNING

Grave City is an Ordd necropolis with a single pocket Imperial Fane dominion at its center. Death among the Ordd is itself an unusual affair. The bodies of the dead brought to Grave City and entombed within a vast hive complex. The rituals are strange and the place said to cause nightmares.

#### IOI CHALLENGER SHOEY HIGHNESS MOUNTAIN

To modern day the **Challenger's storm** still rotates in the mountains, any demon witless enough to try and cross the mountains struck by lighting and turned to salt.

#### **STORM**

The wizard Challenger stood at the center of the ancient stone circle, his long white hair a wind whipped tangle at the center of the storm, the sounds of the approaching demon hordes hidden by the howling winds, their twisted grimacing faces now visible at the edge of the clearing occasionally illuminated by sudden flashes of lighting.

When the demon horde finally reached the wizard, the summons was complete, they tore the helpless wizard to tatters followed immediately by a chain lightning which struck each demon of the horde turning them to salt.

# 105 CITY OF CORROSION A TAKE OF COLD TO RUST

**City of Corrosion** is a huge ancient crafted fortress overlooking the western demonic wilderness. The city was once a glory of paladin might and justice brought low by betrayal, war, and corruption. The modern city is **prowled by demonic beasts** and infernal powers seeking the demise of the Ordd, a race the infernal view as especially frightening and deadly.

# 108 ICE FALL FOREST & THE VALE OF TOVE

The **Ice Fall Forest** is a mountainous wilderness on either side of a city built within the Vale of Love. This is a rugged landscape of miserable biting cold, the valley consumed by a **preternatural frozen fog** that limits visibility to only a few yards. This is an ancient **townscape of necromancers**, witches, and dark powers that has evaded the best efforts of the Ordd to cleanse the area of villainy.

# 117 HYNESS BRIDGE TO THE CITADEL IN BRASS

The **Citadel** in **Brass** lies in a valley at the center of the Remade Mountains. This is the ancient Ordd dominion of the **Queen** in **Brass**, one of the most famed and revered of the ancient Ordd Queens.

This is **holy ground** among the Ordd, a place said to contain ancient secrets about the origins of the race.

#### 118 ZOMBIERUN WALLED IN QUARANTINE

Zombie Run is an island city the victim of an ancient plague. The perimeter of the city is walled, and the horrors contained within forgotten since before the founding of the Empire. The Ordd lightly enforce the quarantine of the island by request of the Empress.

#### 119 DEFIANCE A STATE OF ANARCHY

Defiance is a city district of **decidedly evil Ordd**, those that have abandoned the dream and rebel against their purpose and talents for **selfish** cause.

But as far as the Queen is concerned, all remain a part of her dream, even the rebellious, thus the State of Anarchy has a place within Paradise City. This is a **City of debauchery and criminal enterprise** that no self-respecting Ordd would be caught dead.

#### 120 CHIEES ICE CITY MOUNTAIN

Ice City Mountain is an ancient fragment of wilderness never tamed. At the apex of the wizard crafted mountain is Chill's Ice City, a fortress carved of preternaturally frozen blocks of ice said to contain the tomb of the ancient wizard.

#### 129 HYMN CITY OF ORIGINAL SIN & JOY

Hymn City is incredibly old, predating the founding of the Empire or the coming of the Ordd. The architecture of the place is as if **crafted of glass** melted into smooth curvaceous forms both sensual and disturbing.

No one is clear when or who built this strange city and it remains largely abandoned to modern day, left fallow as a parkland as the buildings are nearly indestructible and ill suited to humanoid occupation, some suspecting the builders may have been a sentient race of ooze.

Strange and unexplainable things happen in the Hymn City, joyful during the day but less so at night.

# 131 FOREST WITHIN THE PREALM OF A DYING SUN

This ancient mountainous wilderness is said to have been placed here by a long-ago wizard. The alien flora and fauna are especially deadly but seem content to never grow or pass beyond the edges of their realm. Some that have attempted to explore the Forest have suffered terrible loss of life and suggest the Forest is dimensionally folded, extending thousands of miles under an alien sky of fading sun.

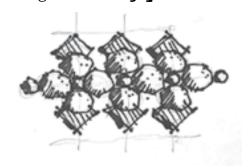
# 133 MORGANTIA CITY OF THE DEAD

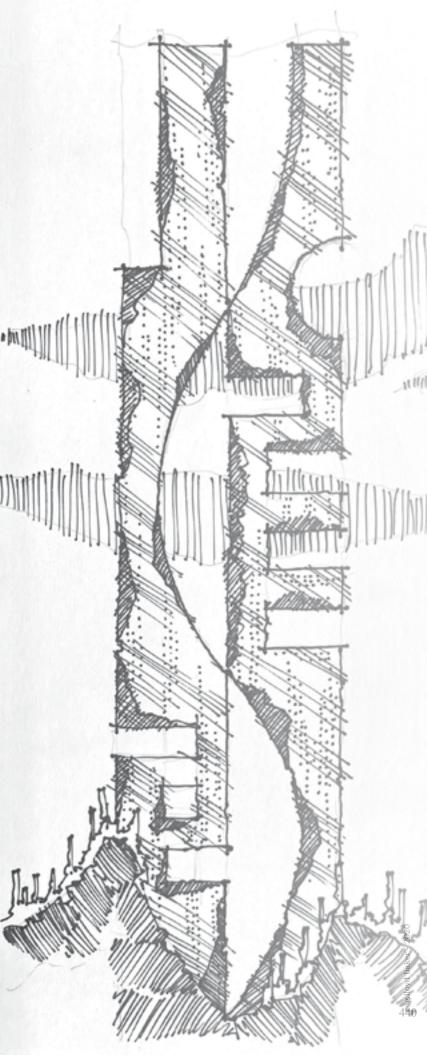
This remote city boarders the Greatness Forest and overlooks the vast Titan Graveyard wilderness.

Morgantia has been a tangle of steel and glass ruins since before the founding of the Empire and has been left fallow. The city is said to have been sentient, an artificial intelligence named Morgantia. Many still seek to explore the ruins for ancient secrets and artifacts, though the city remains defended by mechanical sentinels driven by the alien intelligence of Morgantia.

# 135 RIVENDAME PARK INDEDICATION OF BEAUTY

The Dale Park is a lovely wilderness that has been preserved as a parkland, loved by the Ordd and visitors alike. Nothing bad can seemingly happen here, luck always seeming to bend to the best possible outcome, at least among those with joyful intent.





# 136 DEEP SIDE VALLEY STAR PORT

The **Deep Side Valley** is surrounded by the mountains of the Greatness Forest. As the name suggests, it is thought to have been some sort of port for huge flying ships of some ancient and forgotten past. **Titanic skeletal remains of what may have been ships dominate the skyline**. Large sweeping fields of melted radioactive glass make much of the area uninhabitable to modern day.

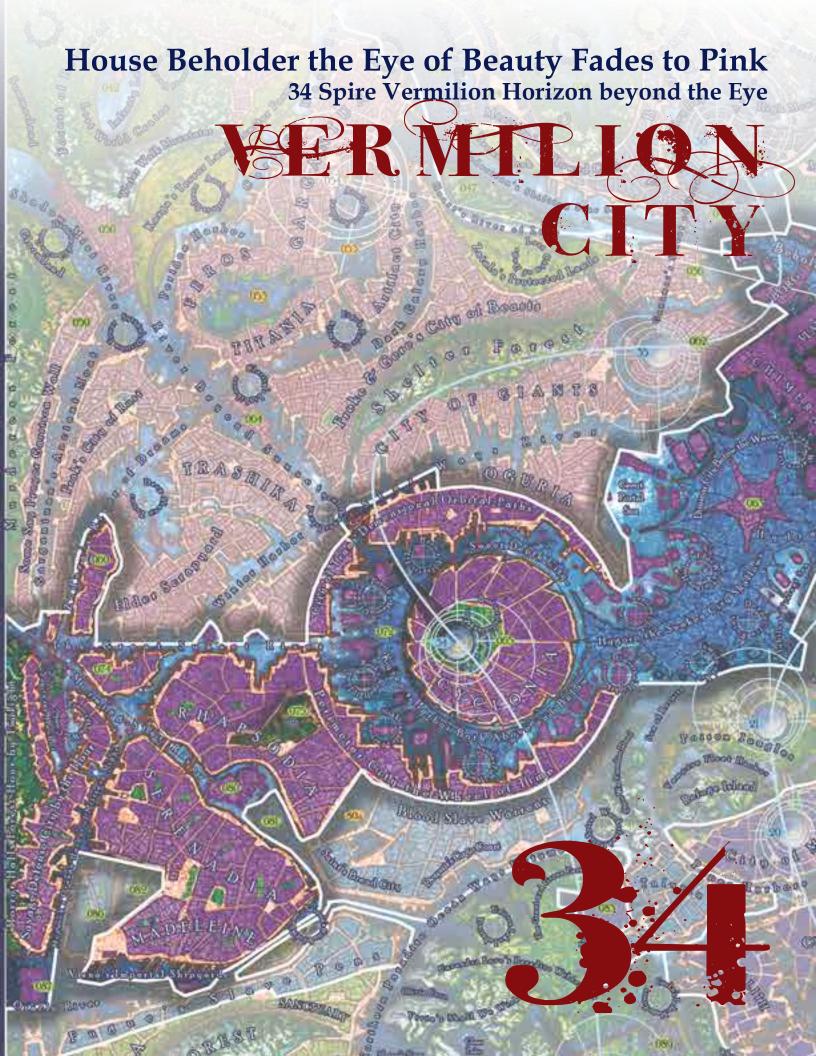
# 142 BASTION CITADEL & THE CITY OF HEROES

Bastion Citadel and its surrounding City of Heroes lies in a valley adjacent to Heaven's Forest of Strength. As the name might imply, this is **sacred** ground to the Ordd, a place where the most devoted of their kind are trained in the Templar and Paladin arts. This is a city of justice and righteousness, a beacon of order in an otherwise chaotic world.

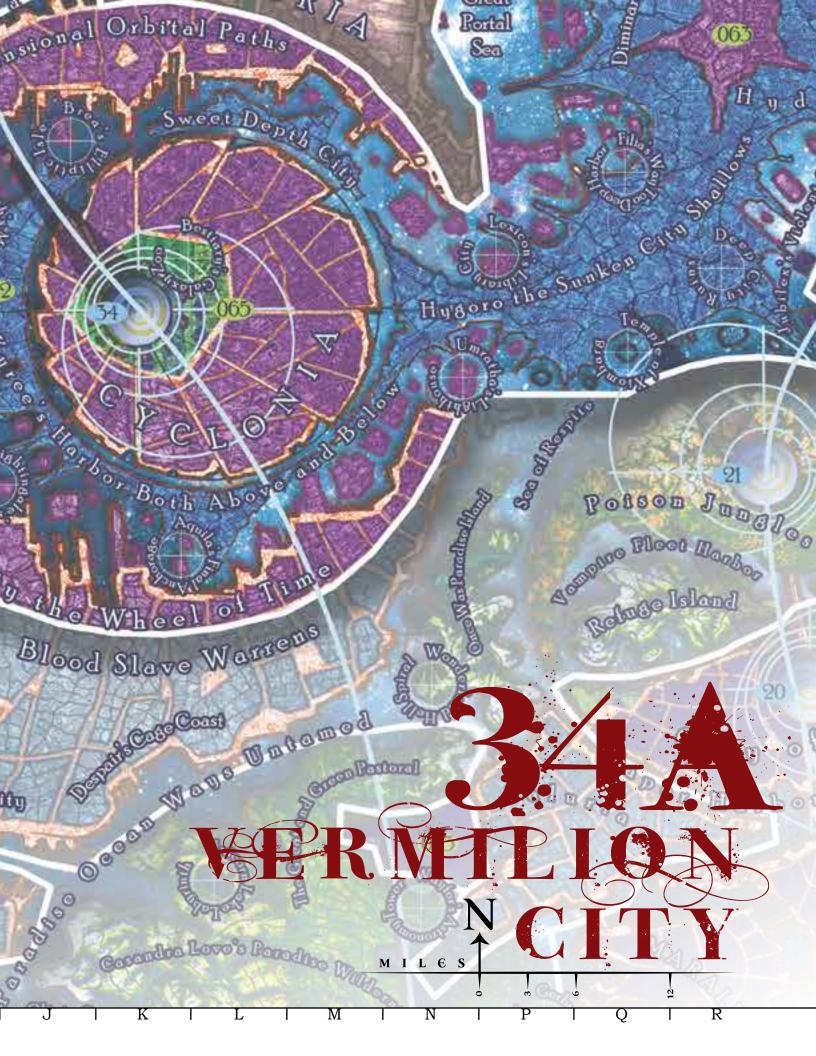
It is also the first line of defense against the horrors of the Realm of a Dying Sun (see 131), kept in check these past four millennia by the holy Ordd defenders of Hero City.

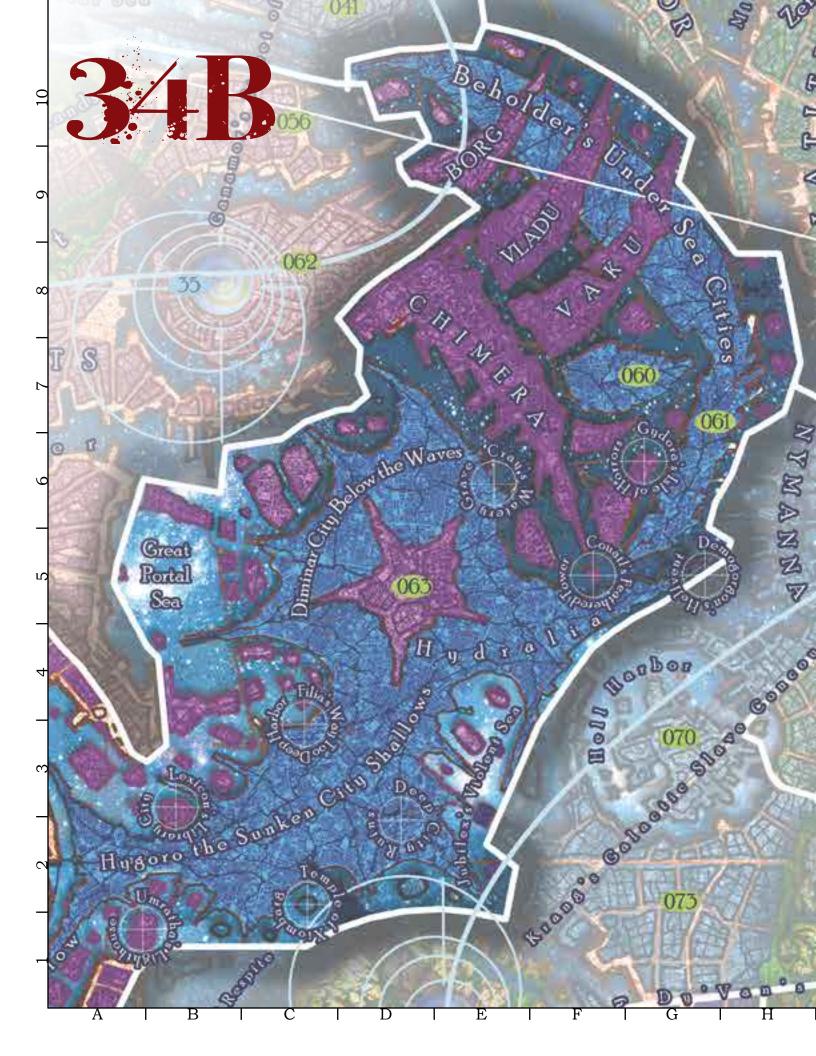
#### 144 FAR FAR AND AWAY STAR PORT

The Far Far and Away is a coastal outpost along Ocean of Stars Vast & Deep at south edge of the Junction Valley Star Ship Yards. Like so much of this area, it is built upon the ruins of some alien space faring civilization lost to history. The titanic ruins and skeletal fragments of enormous ships suggest a height of civilization only hinted at by the myths and legends of the Red Empire. To modern day, this is a favorite area for explorers and historians still rich with secrets and artifacts of a long past age. However, the luminous creatures of the Ocean of Stars an ever present threat.









#### BROTHER AND SISTER

The small group of Xanthos Engineers were nervous. The first time they had sought a formal meeting with Vhel'gurra, their long-ago sisters now divided by eons of betrayal, slavery, and distrust.

The lone Vhel swam easily into the vast underwater hall, the fluid movements of her form a grace to behold as she drifted to a stop near the Engineers. Her gowns flowed long past her hidden slender legs, her head hooded in shadow, only her 11 eye stalks visible from the shadow where her face should be, each eye with its own focus and movements, a writhing glory of luminous stars in the darkness of the watery meeting place.

"Bless you meeting us," said the Xanthos, the high-pitched dog-whistle voice and the expression of his own large luminous eyes conveying his meaning easily through the watery medium.

"Always have you been kind, even through the long age of our enslavement," she said, her same high-pitched sounds and flashing eye patterns as easily understood by the Xanthos, "we do not forget, but neither does kindness absolve you of your actions in forcing our compliance against our will, you were wrong, and we do not forgive."

"Forgiveness is not what we seek," said the Xanthos, "only kindness."

"And what of your allies," she said with a shutter, "only enduring suffering and vengeance do we owe them."

"They seek again your enslavement," said the Xanthos, "they suffer greatly at your absence. We will not aid them, we were wrong before, and we are agreed to not be wrong again."

She knew the suffering each endured, the subtle work of the Vhel during their long eons of enslavement had eroded their physical forms, each race now devolving slowly toward extinction, though none had yet suspected the Vhel's hand in their demise, suspecting instead the Arcane and the e'Mral mists somehow diminishing their birthrates.

But the Xanthos were not so dim, she thought, they likely knew from the beginning, but stayed silent. Kindness she thought, an odd concept often beyond hers or Xanthos kind, but so close was the bond between Vhel'gurra and the Xanthos what else might it be?

"Bring to us your Arcane children," said the Vhel in a voice that neared compassion, "and you shall not suffer our absence."

The Xanthos Engineers bowed with a graceful swirling flip in the cold dark waters.

They did not know why the Vhel wanted their Arcane children, but they knew they would be well treated, for the Vhel adored their children with a motherly passion rare among any race, every child was a gift as was religious cannon among the Vhel.

The Xanthos knew this better than most, for it was only by holding and torturing Vhel children that their enslavement was affected for so long. The Vhel through their subtle works now stealing the future children from its once masters.

"Poetic," the Xanthos thought as he swam from the chamber, "Vhel was always so wonderfully artistic."

# ERMILION CITY

The City of the Vhel'gurra is largely underwater, a **pastel wonderland** of coral buildings, streets, caves, and towers, some crafted to support atmospheres of visiting surface dwelling races, but most home to esoteric works of the Vhel and their sometimes Imperial and Xanthos allies.

What portions of the Vermilion that lie above ground are of the same **pearlescent coral beauty**, buildings grown instead of built, still living, as if lifted from the sea floor into the sun that they might thrive in the glory of sun and air.

The whole of the Vermilion is alive, a marvel of technomancy unmatched by any others. The Vhel invite some others to visit their glorious City to trade and conduct the business of the Great Houses. The marvels of the city so wonderous as to be a favorite of tourists and visitors from throughout the Empire, the accommodations an **exaltation of the senses**, the sea food a treat upon the palette, the entertainment and arts of such spectacle as to make the rest of the universe seem rendered in black and white.

But perhaps more amazing still are the medical arts of the Vhel, **Corporeal Alchemists** they call themselves, flesh shapers that can as easily heal and repair a body as wizard craft designer animals, monsters, and even new races. The very Mistress Races that make up the mortals of the Metropolis Empire the handiwork of the Vhel.

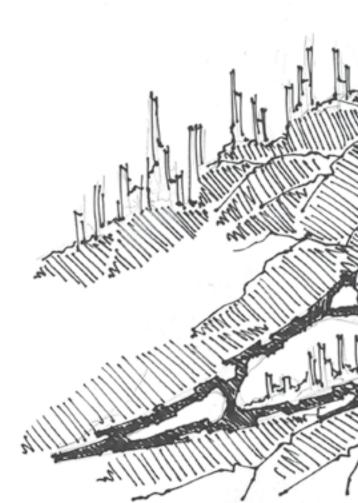
Everything within Vermilion City is forbidden export, like the cybernetic technomancy of the Adrena'Chorme, the **Megannis technomancy** of the Vermilion is forbidden outside its borders, strictly enforced by Imperial blockade and sanctions.

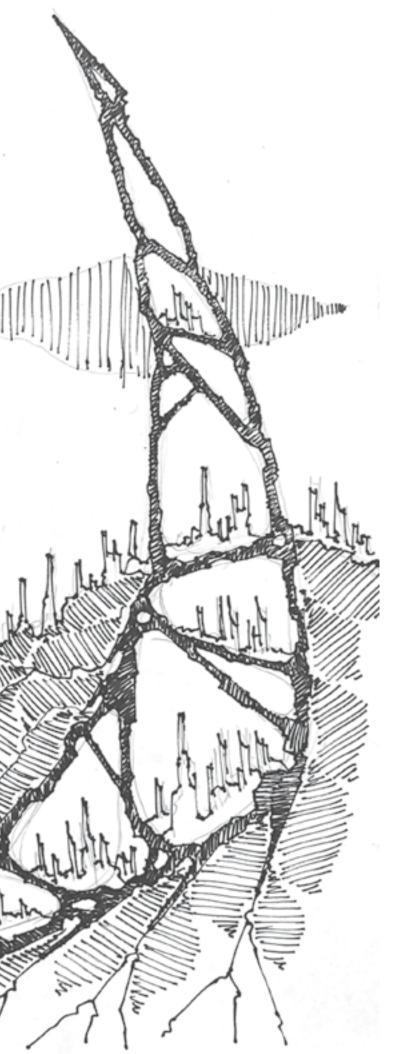
#### MORALITY & TECHNOMANCY

The Vermilion is a moral quandary.

Lost your child to a tragic accident and need a replacement? Your child not living up to expectations and needs an adjustment? Has circumstance left you in need a new body? Not as smart or fit as you should be and need a tune up? Need a clone to supply spare parts? Maybe you would just like to be a child again and live life over?

And these quandaries dwarf the more mundane matters of bespoke pets, engineered beasts, trees that grow replacement skin for burn victims or herbal oils designed for nearly any pharmaceutical purpose the good or wicked might imagine. Designer races? No problem, please be specific. The spiraling horrors and wonders of the Vermilion are limited only by one's sanity.





# HOUSE DEHOLDER THEEYE OF BEAUTY FADES TO PINK

House Beholder is the political representative of the Vhel'gurra within the Metropolis Empire.

The miracle that is Vermilion City is something everyone wants, and the city has been the focus of intense efforts of espionage and conquest for the 4,000year history of the Metropolis Empire, a pandora's box the Crystal Shard Empress has kept so far under tight lock and key.

House Beholder has refused any official alliances though has been known to support others seeking to undo the plans of the Dark Alliance (the alliance of Pyrmn, Eigarian, and Illinyar Vooran).

The Dark Alliance has sought on several occasions to again enslave the Vhel but has failed in each attempt, settling for occasionally kidnapping Vhel as opportunity permits, though the Imperial Paladin Orders have made those that perpetrate such crimes regret their actions to the satisfaction of the Vhel, seeking as a matter of Metropolis security to prevent House Beholder retaliation.

So far, this difficult balance has been maintained, so far, the Vhel support the Crystal Shard Empress and so far, the Empress has kept the Vhel safe from its many enemies.

# CELIFE THE UNIVERSE

The dozen Vhel'gurra moved through the air as if swimming in water, their long flowing red gowns trailing fluidly yards behind them, each of their lithe female bodies accentuated by the gossamer fabrics that swirled about them, moving as if by unseen aqueous currents, their heads though cowled with great hoods, filled of shadow, their 11eyes shifting upon the surface of the darkness which hid their faces.

Ahead of the 12 ran a single Eigarian, a naked male appearing near starvation, a thin silver collar around his neck, stopping just ahead of the Imperial Envoy.

The lead Vhel intoned a song in such high pitch the Envoy could not hear; and expressed its meaning in a sparking shimmer of colors made by her 11eyes that the Envoy thought beautiful but could not comprehend.

The little Eigarian translator saying, "my Priestess of Corporal Light bids you welcome," in the Imperial tongue, though most of the meaning lost, thought the Eigarian, the verbal languages of the lesser races so frustratingly limited it was like trying to talk advanced astrometric theory with a snail, sure it looked like they were patiently listening, but you suspected they did not understand, such a glorious welcome entirely wasted.

The Crystal Shard Empress spoke through her white robbed Envoy, "you honor me with your presence," she bowed.

"We are conflicted," translated the Eigarian, "we are aggrieved by the terrible loss of life caused by your Calibahn liches but are grateful of their freeing us our long bondage. We are insulted by your corruption of the Mistress and the subsequent creation of the Demon Princes but are grateful of their love of life and diversity. We are conflicted."

"Such honesty is refreshing," said the Empress, "though I suspect you know the truth of things as well as I, though the truth be painful and it is desirous any rational might make it not so."

"You craft this Metropolis Empire of Calibahn refugees," said the Priestess, "these petty races will war and squabble and tear each other apart, no peace will this Empire know, and never shall my brother Xanthos or his kin aid your efforts, they shall undo your efforts before they begin."

"You speak truly," said the Empress, "but these are rationales you use to hide the truth from yourself. The Xanthos have agreed to join, and their kin had no choice but to follow, as weak and frail as you have surreptitiously made them. And my purpose is not peace nor to rule, it is to evolve. This I think you know despite your feigned ignorance. What is the state of the dragons?" she finally asked.

"The dragons are dying, long before the coming of the Mistress masters they were old," said the Priestess, "this universe is ending."

"And the Mistress sought to speed along the dragon demise and start new," the Empress said matter-of-factly at the murder of a million worlds.

"They did," said the Priestess.

"And were they right?" asked the Empress.

A long pause made the Eigarian uncomfortable.

"No," translated the Eigarian, though he felt helpless, unable to convey the lifetime of meaning lost in the speaking of such a nonsense sound.

"You worked against their will despite your best intentions otherwise," said the Empress, "you made these mortal races too well, far beyond need. You know what is next, I am the mother of the Arcane, you are the mother of the mortals, you know what is next, you only deny it because you fear what I fear, you feel what I feel.

"A marriage," said the Priestess, "our children must outgrow us."

"And we must finally one day die that their children would inherit the universe," intoned the Empress. "mortal born with Arcane souls, these are our grandchildren, yours as much as mine, and they will inherit this universe, they will remake it into something new, greater than anything you or I might imagine."

"And this Empire of yours?" asked the Priestess.

"A place we might look after our grandchildren until they are wise and bold enough to stretch again into the cosmos, a place you and I can teach them," said the Empress.

"And are we but another cog in your Clockwork Metropolis Empire?" asked the Priestess.

"No," the Empress said honestly, "you must be my equal, my partner in this effort, because you know what happens should we fail."

"Extinction," said the Priestess her head bowed, "it is inevitable for both Arcane and mortal."

"Just so," said the Empress, "this cannot be allowed to happen."

"A long Age this will be, hundreds of millennia, none will understand, most will oppose us, unknowing in their pride and arrogance and hunger for power," commented the Priestess of Corporeal Light, "we will likely fail."

"Likely," said the Empress, "but we might also succeed, and my love cannot abide other than this hope."

"We are agreed," said the Priestess, the love swirling through the Eigarian translator incinerating his withered evil heart, crumpling dead to the ground. OF THE VHELGERRA

The Vhel'gurra are race akin to the Xanthos, in that they were an early servant race of the Mistress. And whereas the Xanthos were devoted engineers and builders of the Mistress Angelic's technical achievements, the Vhel were flesh shapers, Corporeal Alchemists, responsible for the genetic crafting of beasts and non-sentient races that might be expected to evolve into sentience.

The Vhel were once great allies of the Xanthos, the pair of races a kind of holy trinity with the Mistress in the creation of Xhirra'Xakarra'Xai and the amazing diversity of life that call its vastness home, the Xanthos sometimes called the Fathers of Xai, the Vhel sometimes the Mother of her children.

Both races are equally at home in the water as upon land and both speak a similar highly technical language of high-pitched dog-whistle like song combine with highly expressive eyes. In the case of the Vhel, 11 eyes. Incomprehensible to most of Xai's modern lesser races.

An awfully long time ago, at the dawn of the Age of the Red Empire, the Vhel allied themselves with their sister Psionic races: Pyrmn, Eigarian, Drakyre, Xanthos, and Illinyar'Vooran. But the Vhel were betrayed by the other 5 and enslaved when, as the Vhel recall, they rebelled at the other five's desire to murder the elritch dragons. The Vhel made life, they did not destroy it, or so their own legends say.

Ever since, the Vhel have been enemies of the Dark Alliance, allies now of the the Empress, now applying their deep spiritual knowledge of biologic creation toward the problem of Arcane and secretly advancing their Meq'annis technomancy.



#### 3⁄4 SPIRE VERMILION HORIZON BEYOND THE¥EYE

The Vermilion Spire is sentient. Unusual some say, though the Vhel are said to tell that all Spires are sentient, children of their own craft, each alive, only asleep.

The Vermilion Spire is a spiraling organic shape of pearlescent pastel colors and organic coral grace, easily the sexiest female Spire in the Clockworks.

Like most things in the Vermilion City, caution is advised, the high technomancy of the place can be dangerous to the uninitiated, often requiring knowledge and sometimes intellect far in advance of most mortal races.

The interior of the Vermilion Spire is sealed to only allow Vhel access, said to contain portals to a vast number of far distant places. The Spire itself said to sometimes travel, vanishing occasionally only to reappear some hours or days later.

#### SOTITIES KNOWN

"Sentient?" the witless asked, "why would Spires need to be sentient?"

"Who else would you trust to pilot the Great Lady Xai," the Vhel says exasperated.

"You need 333 Spires to move the World?" asked the witless, "why so many?"

"There are 3 Clockworks and 999 Spires," says the Vhel, "are you even paying attention?"

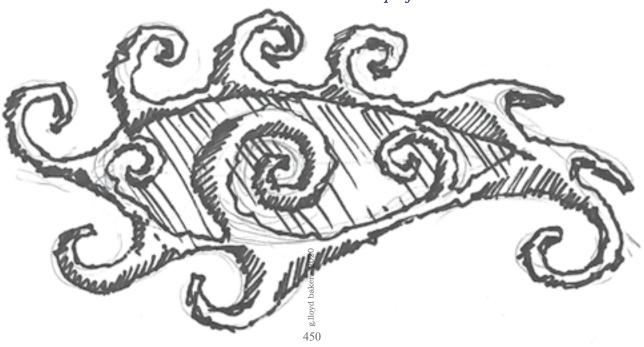
"That is stupid," spat the witless, "if there were 2 other Clockworks and another 666 Spires, we would know about it."

"And that is when I killed him," said the young Vhel to her mother.

"No more pets for you," said the mother Vhel, "until you learn some patience."

"But mother?" said the young Vhel.

"No buts," said the mother, "now show me the dog you were working on for your school project..."



# WERMILION CITY

#### OGO DEEP CITY TO VAST OCEANS BEYOND STARS

Deep City is an underwater city populated Vhel and Xanthos entirely free of Imperial dominion. Visitors are unwelcome.

#### OST LOVECRAFT S.DARK TRENCH CITY UNDERSEA

The Mistress, the Vhel will tell you should you ask, were not the only Angelic. There are 6 Angelic Hosts: the **Fury**, alchemists of the stars, the **Dark**, makers of solar systems, the **Chrome**, makers of worlds, the **Deep**, makers of oceans & life, the **Weavers**, makers of paradise worlds, and the **Mistress**, shapers of intellect. The metaphorical 6 days of creation.

The Vhel will say that Xanthos are servants of the Chrome, and that they, the Vhel, are servants of the Deep, gifted to the Mistress to aid their evolutionary works.

And should anyone be paying attention, say that the Pyrmn were servants of the Fury, the Vooran servants of the Dark, the Drakyre servants of the Weavers, and Eigarians servants of the Mistress.

Thus it was the 6 Psionic Races of the Red Empire became servants of the Angelic and their project to create Paradise Worlds and Soulborne Races.

The DARK TRENCH is one of those places that links all the oceans throughout the cosmos into a single vastness ocean, how the Deep travel the universe and may be summoned to aid their beloved Vhel.

The **TRENCH CITY** is a place of unique craft, the making of unique monsters for bespoke purpose. The horrors of this place will bend most minds to insanity



The great undersea cites of the Vermilion are difficult for most other races to visit, yet commerce and trade must be accommodated. Star Island solely exists as a harbor for trade with the rest of the Empire, trade which is often challenging as nothing of the Vermilion City is permitted export. As such, the Vermilion purchase their imports with hard currency recovered from the many health and hospital related services for which the City is famed.

Star Island is a bustling hub of commerce, goods coming in, and hard currency heading out. It is also a bustling hub of crime, perhaps the most lucrative and dangerous smugglers hub in the Clockworks as a seeming unending line of the brave, clever, and stupid attempt to evade Imperial detection and export Meq'annis technomancy of the Vhel'gurra.

# 665 CIRCLE CITY THE UNIVERSE PARK ONE DAY

The **Circle City of Cyclonia** surrounds the Vermilion Spire, at its center is the Universe Park. This is at once among the most amazing and dangerous places in the Clockwork Metropolis.

Amazing because the Universe Park is a cross dimensional **wonderland of forests**, grasslands, wildflowers, and extraordinary architectural follies to delight and inspire.

Dangerous because the whole of the many worlds spanning Universe Park is itself alive and sentient, possessed of an **alien intelligence** that does not overly value mortal life.



"Why would you craft a sentient parkland?" asked the witless.

"What would be the point of a Park that did not have its own aesthetic point of view?" asked the young Vhel.

"Aesthetic point of view?" screamed the witless, "IT is a park."

Sometime later, the mother of Vhel asked, "tell me again why you killed your new pet?"

"He called the Lady One'Day, an IT," she said, "her feelings were very hurt."

#### 069 CELESTIAL PORT OF GODS TONE PAST

Or perhaps as some other say, "Long Passed." The Vhel will tell you that there are no gods, not of the sort you imagine when you talk of such things. There are those so far advanced in their evolution and knowledge as to seem gods to those of a more animal sort.

The Angelic are not gods, they are ancient and possessive of great knowledge as to how things work. The eldritch dragons are not gods, they are ancient and possessive of long practiced knowledge of how the universe works.

By comparison of most modern races with their myrim swords and hyper'lyte crossbows, the more recent Calibahn and Red Empires must seem like gods.

We with our Meq'annis must seem as gods, the Xuvarians and their cybernetics must even seem like gods.

And among the mortals as they struggle to survive the day to day travails of life in the Clockwork Metropolis, the Arcane and their e'Mral sorceries must seem as gods.

The universe, the Vhel say, is filled with gods, but it is just a matter or relative knowledge and practiced talent.

Gods are real whenever you are confronted with helplessness, which is often, even among the gods.

The port is an **artifact of the Red Empire**, once possessive of thousands of world portals now hidden from use.

# 072 UNDERSEA CITY OF MEDUSA IN DARKNESS

The **City of Medusa** is an undersea warren of deep and unyielding darkness. For the Vhel it is a place like any other except that conditions make visitors rare.

The Vhel's **eleven eyes** are such that they can see the long waves of radio and heat as well as the short waves of ultra, x, gamma, and cosmic rays.

The Vhel see the world in all its glorious 33 colors, not limited by the 6 or so "visible" colors of most races, making vision in the otherwise pitch blackness a simple matter. But perhaps more compelling is the Vhel's ability to focus their sight down to minute detail akin to a micro-scope, able to see the tiny and otherwise invisible, and with effort, able to see deep into the strands of DNA or deeper into the universe of atoms themselves.

The Vhel, with their eleven tentacle eyes are often confused as Medusa. Adding to the confusion is the common friendship and alliance between the Vhel and the **Medusa Queens**, for the sight of a Medusa causes no harm to the Vhel, unaffected by gaze effects as they are.

The city of Medusa is physically dark and outside of its residents, a darkness of information, for no one much knows what goes on here and no visual description exists.

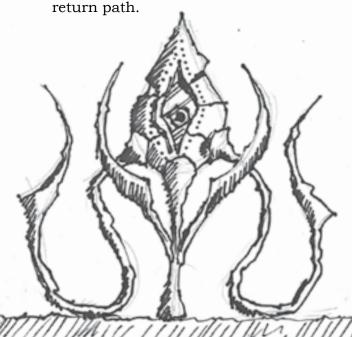
#### o74 witch city of oak & thorn & vine

Witch City is an island city where the Vhel'guura instruct young visiting Arcane Shaman and Druids in the healing arts. This is a **city of**Imperial cooperation and Fanes come to learn from the masters. It is also a city of teaching hospitals and clinics that famously treat the impoverished of the Clockworks. The sick, desperate, and hopeless arriving on its Imperial shores every day.

# O75 HEARTEAND HAUNTED FOREST

Lying at the center of the large and beautiful canal city of Rhapsodia is the remnant of a forest wilderness called the Heartland. Rumor is the forest is haunted owing chiefly to the large number of disappearances of those that visit.

The truth is that the remnant forest is a portal that leads to the Heartland, a far distant Outland forest where the Vhel often travel upon their esoteric errands. The disappearances happening when travelers forget to retrace their steps, wandering deep into the vastness of the Heartland with no means to find a return path



#### 

The **City of Sorrows** s an island free of Imperial dominion, a once submarine mountain raised up above the waters as a prison for those found having broken Vermilion Law.

The Vhel are fortunately known for being very compassionate to children and animals, and as they view most other races as beasts, they are treated with a kindness akin to an animal shelter, where they are "fixed" and seek to have prisoners adopted out, either as pets among the Vhel or by their own kind back to where they came from.

# **087** CITADEE AT THE¥EDGE OF FOREVER AND TODAY

The Citadel is at the center of an island town free of Imperial dominion. The citadel is a **time debt facility**, a place where the time inside the facility moves much faster than the time outside.

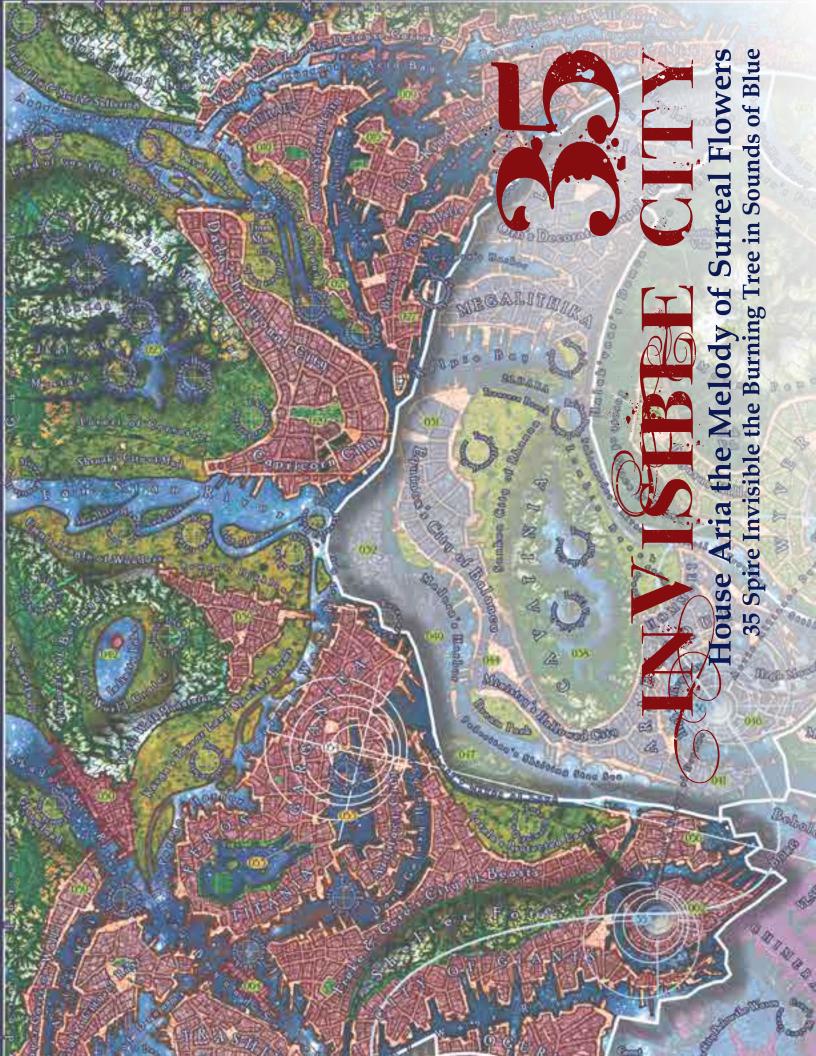
The advantages to research are tremendous, allowing for accelerated growth, years of advancement in a fraction of the time, endless are the possibilities.

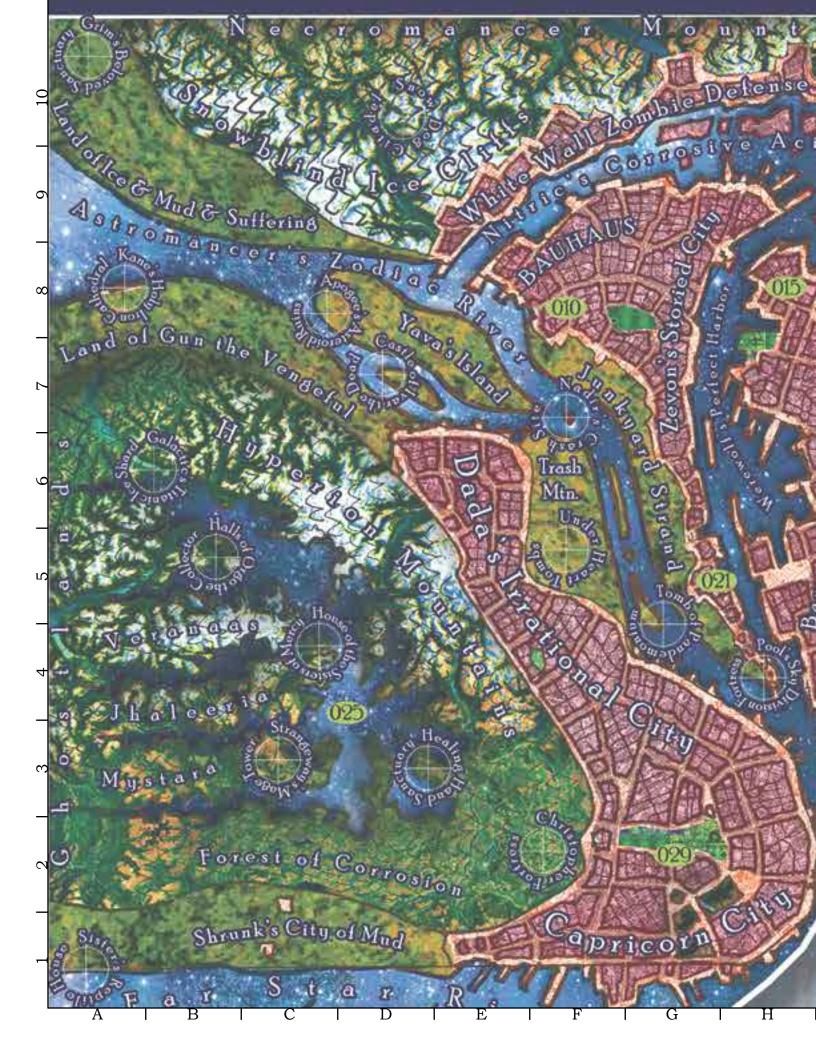
The disadvantages are to those working within, 9 years spent inside the facility ages the person normally 9 years, but upon exiting the Citadel, only a year would have passed, leaving you now 9 years older while everyone else is but only a year older. Similarly, 9 days within or 9 hours within means only 1 day or 1 hour having passed out in the world.

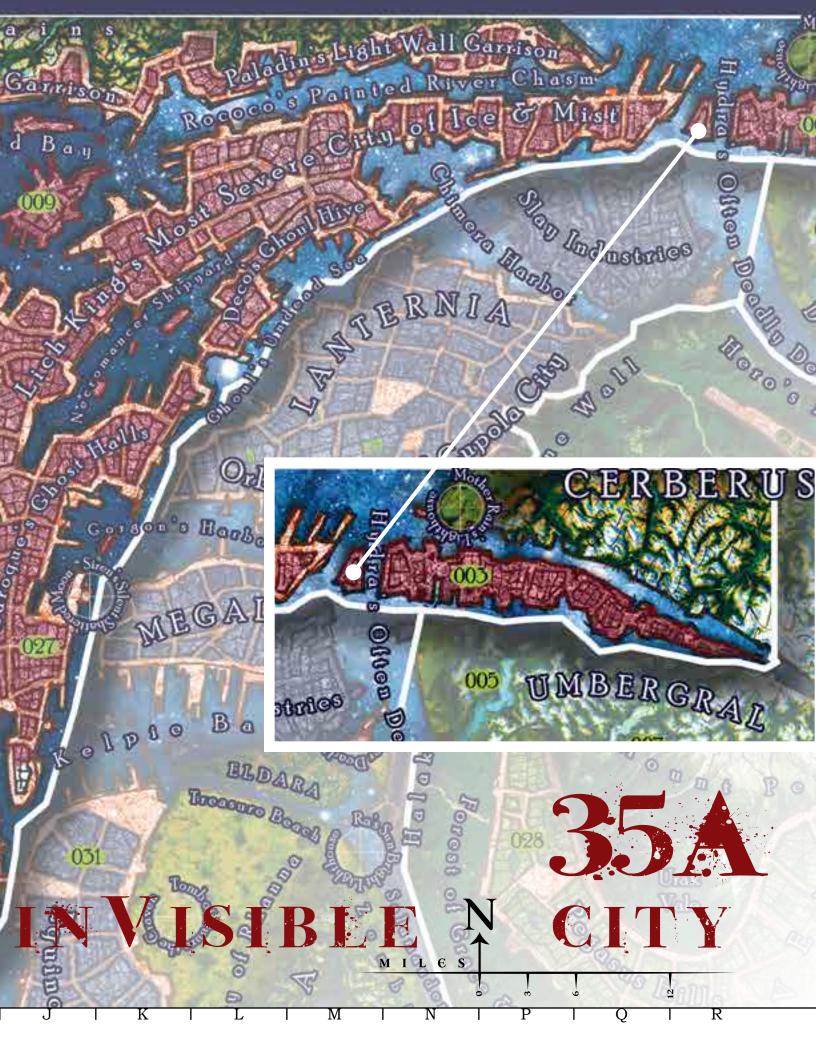
The Citadel is among the most secure technomancy research facilities in the Clockwork Metropolis, the nature of the many research projects within closely guarded secrets.

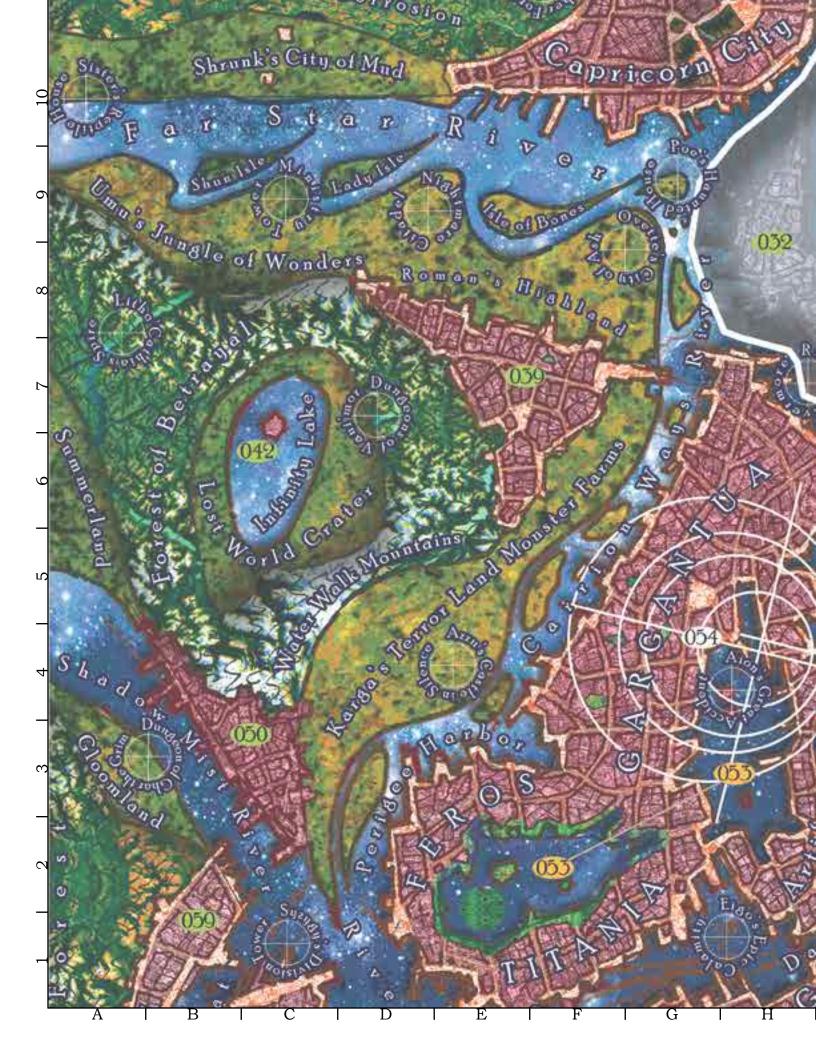
152

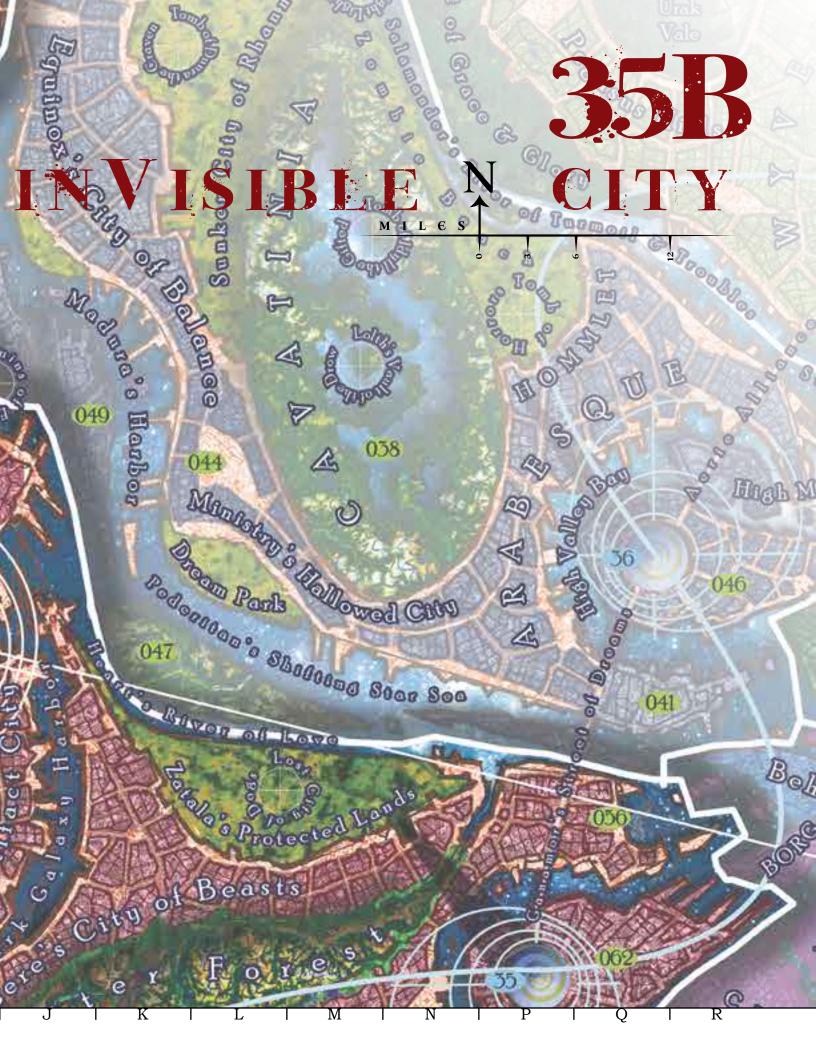


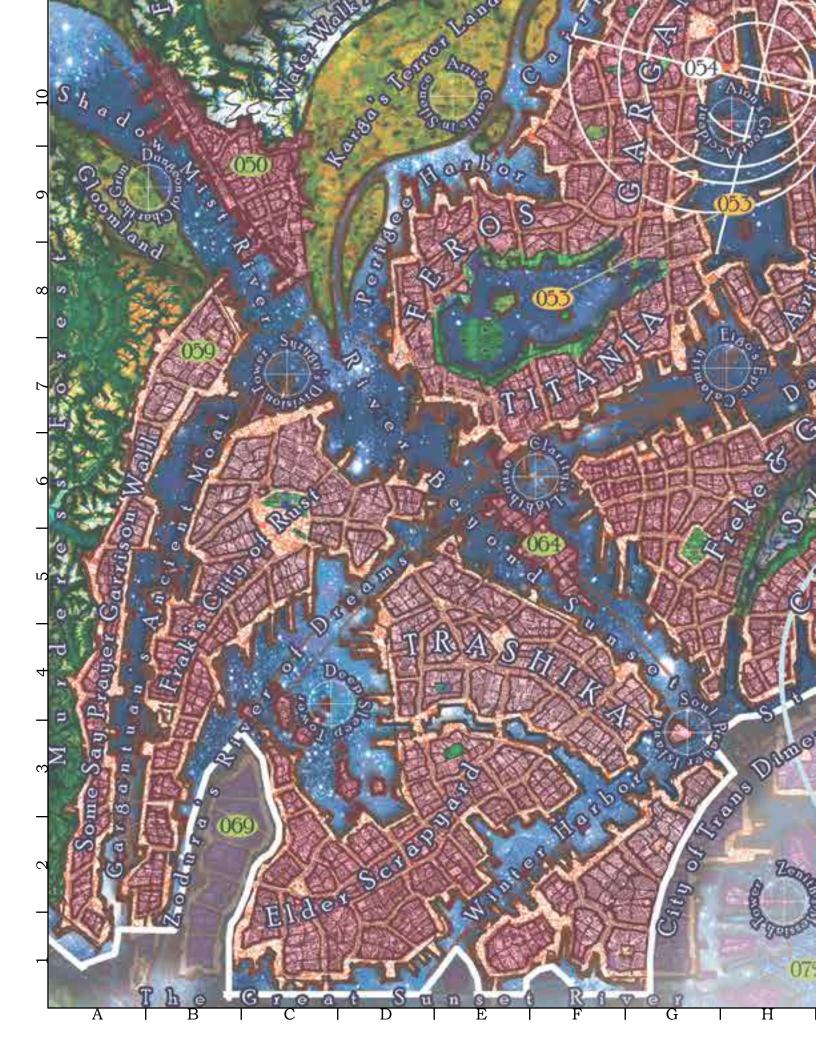


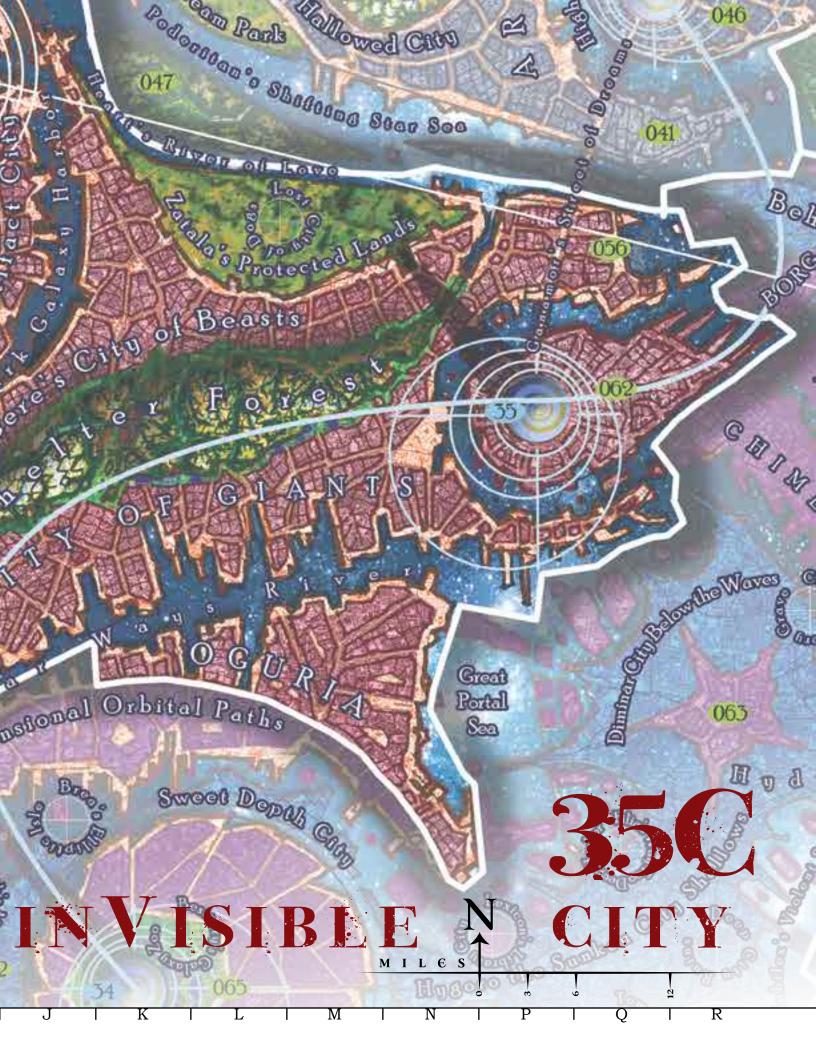














There is a race of people born absent eyes with which to see. These souls however are gifted with heightened hearing so extraordinary as to allow them a sonic sense of their surroundings, able to feel and hear distance as the sighted might see in perspective, but with more clarity of form and material traded for blindness to light, color, and shadow. These are the **Shakmuri**.

But perhaps more interesting, the naked form of the Shak'muri is invisible to the eyes of animals, beasts, and other races.

The Shak'muri civilization has always been a civilization that has mastered its natural surroundings, never feeling any great need to live as part of nature, instead adopting a religious philosophy of **divine right** of Shak'muri dominion over the universe.

One of the more interesting aspects of Shak'muri technomancy is its advanced development of wizard crafted pets, animals, beasts, and monsters. Not races, but the bespoke craft of creatures to serve the needs of the Shak'muri, so much so, that the living bestial nature of most "everything" is unsetting for most other races of the Clockwork Metropolis.

### INVISIBLE CITY

The architecture of the Invisible City is sculpturally beautiful and decidedly **sensual in both form and touch**. It is however a garish clash of colors and disjointed visual proportions and shapes. To fully appreciate the subtle high art mastery of the Shak'muri is to feel and hear it as they do, something the lesser races are sadly incapable.

The shapes and forms of the streets, architecture, and furniture of the Invisible city are such as to encourage the **soft comforts of nudity**, the Shak'muri eschewing clothing except in need of warmth or protection.

The Shak'muri will tend to wear visible cloaks and clothing when traveling outside the Invisible City as a courtesy to the sighted races.

As a matter of some interest is the fact that Shak'muri silks, cottons, and leathers are derived from their own ecology, and are similarly invisible to the eyes of most.

The state of the s

99 g.lloyd baker - 2020



The combination of Invisible City being occupied by an Invisible race of nudists and it being alive with hordes of similarly invisible wizard crafted servant beasts and monsters makes visitors naturally uncomfortable.

life possible are similarly invisible,

visible to the sighted.

only those guardian beasts designed

with eyesight are themselves naturally

This is not a hot spot of tourist activity. Out of sight is out of mind is the feeling of most other races.

The greatest export of the City is its music. The classical music stylings of the Shakmuri are **legend**, seemingly every Shak'muri is born a musical prodigy, generally making the life skills of musicians of other races seem as childish and amateurish compared to the least of their kind.

House Aria is a wildcard in the grand scheme of the Metropolis Empire.

The Shak'muri are an especially arrogant and independent minded people, their capriciousness has alienated more than a few of the other Great Houses. But the Shak'muri are not an especially violent people, generally preferring patience and "hiding" to rash or provocative action.

Shak'muri born of an Arcane soul are an especially frightening collection of sorcerers that lord over their mortal populace with a near divine status.

Add to this their high technomancy of wizard crafted creatures and most other Great Houses tend to avoid dealing with House Aria unless by necessity.

But it is more necessary than most other Great Houses would like to admit, for House Aria and the Invisible City are powerful in the sheer size of their territory and the knowledge and technomancy of its citizens, one the most advanced in the Metropolis despite it being largely "unseen."



The Envoys of the 3 Great Houses moved into the great audience hall when invited.

Each was an Arcane, twisting the e'Mral mists into their eyes that they might see the invisible.

The week prior they had sent mortal emissaries to make the appropriate introductions, but none had returned. Sorceries later revealed that last week's emissaries had been devoured after delivering their message, apparently on general principal that their purpose has been served and their great wizard crafted hounds were "goooood boooooys" and deserving of a snack.

The 3 Arcane Envoys were themselves no joke, each a skilled sorcerer of clever and deadly capability. But they were entering a lion's den, and they knew it, their sorceries coiled and ready should things go suddenly sideways.

The audience hall was a riot of discordant colors and disquieting proportions. On either side of the great portal through which they entered were a pair of plainly visible over muscled and gnarled hounds the size of small elephants with metallic bladed teeth and claws and bright glowing green eyes.

The first Arcane saying. "goooood booooy," to the nearest hound whose warm humid breath washed over him as he entered. The great hound wagging his huge sweeping tail, several invisible servants caught off guard and tossed hard to the floor.

"He likes you," said the approaching Host, his golden plate armor and flowing red cape visible to the plain sighted, "more than I can say for your messengers last week."

"Consider them an introductory gift," said the first Arcane.

"We did, and thank you for your courtesy in the matter," said the Host, "the old forms are so rarely understood in the rush of the modern world."

*The first Arcane bowed followed by his two companions.* 

"Friends," said the Host to enormous hounds, they immediately laid down, their muscles uncoiling to rest beneath their mountainous forms.

The view of the rest of the great hall was something to behold, dozens of naked invisible servants moved along the edges of the room, their forms outlined by the shifting e'Mral mists in the first Arcane's eyes.

He also saw above several huge invisible gargoyle forms upon ledges in the high shadows of the roof. The light in the great hall was poor, apparently solely for the benefit of the visitors and the hounds at the door.

"I am curious," said the first Arcane to his Host as the four moved toward the head of the great hall, "do you see the colors of the e'Mral mists as we do? Or are your senses heightened to perceive them otherwise?"

"Interesting you should ask," said the Host, "I am pleased, most visitors are too ashamed or frightened to discuss our obvious superiority. As it happens, we feel their colors as music, what you see as red we hear as a musical tone. We have on occasion trained several of your own kind made blind by violence to hear the e'Mral mists."

"Fascinating," said the first Arcane.

Toward the head of the room were arranged 4 large chairs around a roaring fire. "Sit and let us discuss the matters that you believe are of mutual interest with House Aria," said the Host.

Drinks and food on floating platters moved in, only the sorceries of the Arcane allowed them to see the outlines of the supporting naked servants.

"Would you be offended if I should remove this ridiculous helmet," said the Host, lifting it off before hearing an answer, his plate armor as if animated of its own accord, the Shak'muri Arcane naturally invisible to the sighted, but his bald head outlined by the perception magics of the Arcane guests.

"We are here to buy weapons," said the second Arcane, "to start, a score of those friendly critters that met us at the door."

"Ah, so this is to be one of those conversations," said the Host.

"Indeed," said the third Arcane, "the kind that our dear Empress should never hear nor even know about."

"As it happens, I am aware of your situation," the Host said to his guests, "she arrived only an hour before you."

Slipping into the light of the fire was the elegant barefoot dancing form of an Imperial Envoy, "my dear Arcane children, what sort of trouble do you look to be causing?"



# 35 SPIRE INVISIBLE THE BURNING TREE IN SOUNDS OF BULE

The Invisible Spire is surprisingly visible, a **bright clashing kaleidoscope of colors** and oddly rounded lumpish forms, beautiful beyond compare to the sonic and tactile senses of the Shak'muri but garish and awkward to the visually dominant.

The Spire is the center of the **Kingdom** of the Invisible Sun, and the ongoing explorations of the Outlands to establish new Kingdoms beyond the Metropolis Empire.

The Invisible Spire is host to few visitors or tourists owing to the extreme arrogance and disconcerting nature of its people and prevalence of invisible beasts and guardians common throughout the Spire.

# OO3 SHATTER CITY CHEMICAL WORKS

Shatter City is an island fortress free of Imperial dominion and bordered to the north by Cerberus Mountain Kingdoms and the Umbergral Mountains.

Ecologists or Druids the Shakmuri are NOT. Shatter City is as much chemical manufacturing facility as toxic waste dump. Shatter City is a blight upon the landscape.



# OO9 SAVAGE CITY OF CRYSTAL SHARD EYES

Savage City is built upon an island free of Imperial influence in Nitric's Corrosive Acid Bay. Like so much of the Invisible City, the **Acid Bay is a toxic waste dump** of demonic horrors these past four millennia.

Savage City is a dreadful manufacturing hub for **monstrous horrors** designed as guardians and for war.

# OTOKRUG THE BREAKERS CITY OF TRASH

The **City of Trash** is district of Bauhaus famed for being the depository of all things unwanted.

**Krug the Breaker** was the first to see the value of the place, establishing sophisticated salvage operations and becoming extremely wealthy.

#### **O15** SOME SAY SOMEDAY CITY

**Someday City** is a peninsula of foreign religious zealots that call themselves **SomeSay Seers**. These fanatics ritually remove their eyes that they might see the future more clearly.

Masers of the SomeSay are said to be able to visualize the future so clearly that when they focus upon the present, they see the world around themselves with perfect true-sight clarity.

## O21 PERCIVAL UNION OF IRON & BEOOD

The **Percival Union** is a coastal city that boarders the swamps of the Junkyard Strand. The Union is a collection of Shak'muri scavenger clans that are skilled in the explorations of the **Junkyard Strand** and recovery of its striations of trash dating to ancient Ages before the Metropolis Empire.

# O27 ASSASSIN CITY OF BLOOD MONEY IN CRAVES

**Assassin City** lies at the southern edge of Baroque's Ghost Halls. As one might imagine, an race of invisible people might be considered naturally talented in the art of assassination.

This is **less true that you might think**, but Assassin City is where the
Shak'muri dedicated to killing arts
might famously be found. Surprisingly,
perhaps, Shak'muri assassins are most
often contracted to kill other Shak'muri.

#### **025** SPIRIT SHARD LAKE

The **Spirit Shard Lake** lies at the center of Hyperion Mountains, the Forest of Corrosion, and the Ghostlands, famously known for the 3 ancient kingdoms of **Veranaas**, **Jaleeria**, and **Mystara**, representing the 3 noble lines of Kings and Queens that have ever ruled the Invisible City with an iron fist.

The long political, martial, and romantic relations of the 3 Kingdoms is **Shakespearean in its grandeur** and ever popular among playwrights and storytellers.

# **029** SURREALS FAMOUS UPSIDE DOWN PARK

The **Upside Down Park** divides
Capricorn City to the south and Dada's
Irrational City to north. Anyone
that walks through these enchanted
landscapes has the distinct and
unsettling feeling of **the sky above seeming as the ground**, and the
ground seeming like some terrestrial
ceiling, and that you are upside down.
Of course, if you had just arrived from
Dada's Irrational City, it might seem
terribly comforting to stand upon the
ceiling and recollect your bearings.

#### 039 XURRAKANNA S HIDDEN CITY

Walk Mountains bordered by swamps of Roman's Highland and Karga's Terror Land Monster Farms. Xurra'Kanna was an especially famous Shak'muri wizard, a trail blazer in the art of wizard crafted monsters of war, the proclaimed mother of the modern House Aria military might. Hidden City is where all her early research and experiments were conducted and is the modern home of House Aria's continued research into ever more useful and deadly wizard craft monsters.

#### O42 TOWER CITY OF VANIMOR THE TREACHEROUS

**Tower City** is a citadel upon an island in the Infinity Lake at center of Lost World Crater surrounded by Forest of Betrayal and the Water Walk Mountains. In other worlds, is far from civilization and well-hidden owing to the heavy fog common in the Lost World Crater.

Vani'mor was another Shak'muri wizard that pioneered the early wizard craft of monsters, many of his early experiments and failures left to prowl the surrounding mountains and forests.

Tower City is named for its many dozens of unique wizard craft towers used to create ever more devious monstrous creations. Some say Vani'mor was betrayed, others that he was the betrayer, whatever the truth, Tower City is abandoned to his creations, which one chill evening were released and devoured everyone on the island.

#### O5Q CHAIRE PORT BEYOND THE WESTERN STARS

This fortress city is built at the head of Shadow Mist River surrounded by Karga's Terror Land Monster Farms, the Water Walk Mountains, the Forest of Betrayal, and the Summerland Wilderness. Ghale Port is free of Imperial influence, another of House Aria's secret wizard beast manufacturing facilities.

# O53: ARTIFACT THE CYCLOPEAN SHIPYARDS

The **Cyclopean Shipyards** are composed of 2 large lake harbors, one surrounded by parklands and bordered by Feros & Titania and the other surrounded by industry and bordered by Artifact City & Gargantua.

The Cyclopean Shipyards are **under dominion of the Empire**, and a tiny fraction of the ancient facilities used to create titanic earthen drift ships and citadels for use by the Imperial Navy.

But the real purpose to **prevent** others exploring or using the ancient site. A point of constant friction between the House Empire, the House Aria, and the other Great Houses.

# **05**4 DRIFT CITY NINE WHILE NINE THE NIGHT

**Drift City Nine** is the last of the floating cities built by the Necromancer Kings of the Calibahn Empire. Each built using the Cyclopean Shipyards so long ago.

The Drift City Nine is maintained under **House Empire control** as a means of keeping a tight reign over House Aria.

The City is mostly abandoned except for the occasional Imperial patrol or the odd explorer, an artifact of a longago age, silent in its ancient gothic and rococo grandeur.

#### **056**DARK HEART SEMBASSY CITY OF THE WICKED

Embassy City is a peninsula near the Invisible Spire. The Shakmuri are an especially arrogant and evil race, famed for their dark wizardry and earthly corruptions. This is a city where foreigners tend to congregate and build their embassies to conduct trade and the affairs of the Empire. But this is a hardship posting. So many people perish or vanish from the streets that each embassy is as a fortress against the invisible darkness.

#### 059 UVARA SHANS FAR OFF CITY

The Far Off City lies at the edge of Gloomland wilderness. Uvara'Shan was a wizard of special renown among a race of weirding wizards, his creations so deadly and terrible as to have made the Gloomland uninhabitable by man or demon.

But Uvara'Shan was most famous for his titanic insectoid creations sent along the Hell Spirals that underpin the City, leading to a sustained invasion of the Subworld that some say continues to modern day.

#### C62 PECULIAR S CITY OF SIDEWISE PATHS

Under the Invisible Spire is Perculiar's City, free of Imperial influence by writ of death.

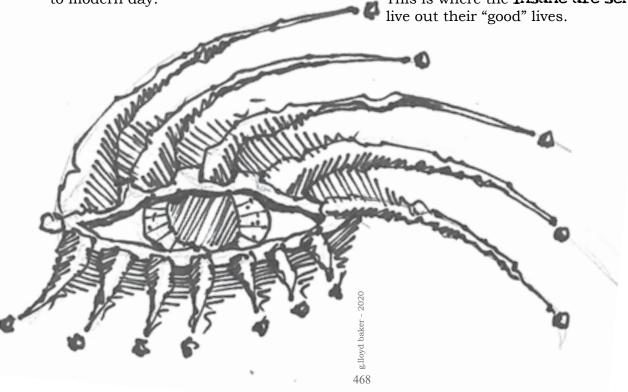
This is a city of deep Shak'muri spirituality and wizardry, the two really seen as one by the people. It is the divine right of the Shakmuri to remake the universe as they see fit. The City of Sideways Paths is a manifestation of the dangers and horrors of what that vision looks like.

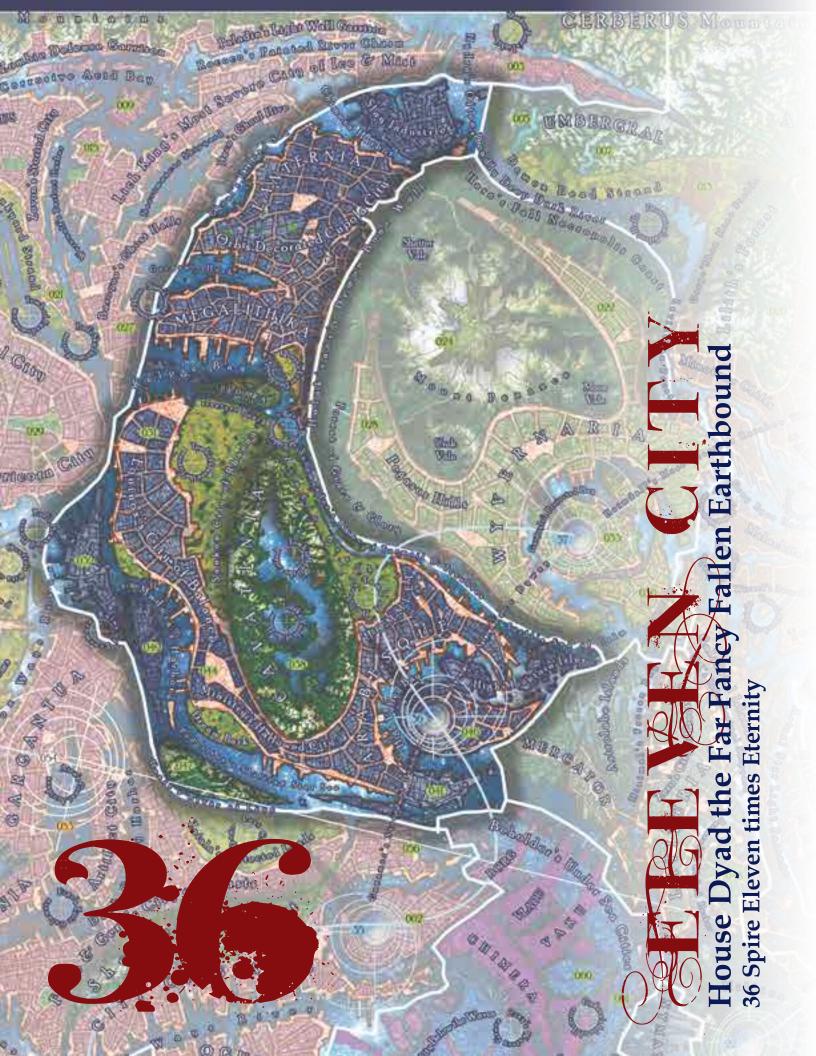
The irony, if there is one, is that the Shak'muri are a race evolved from creatures of prey, their very existence one of fear, perhaps giving some explanation as to their cruel desire to destroy and remake the universe as "safe."

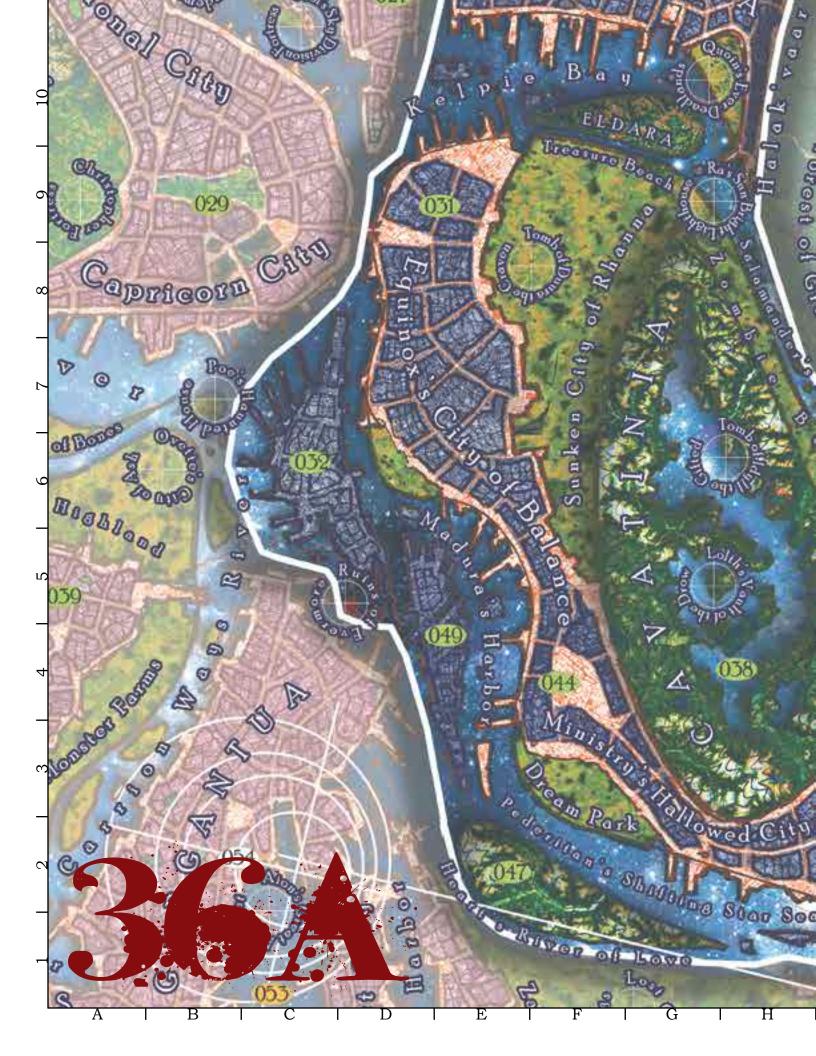
#### O64 SYEVIAS CITY OF SENSELESS DISREGARD

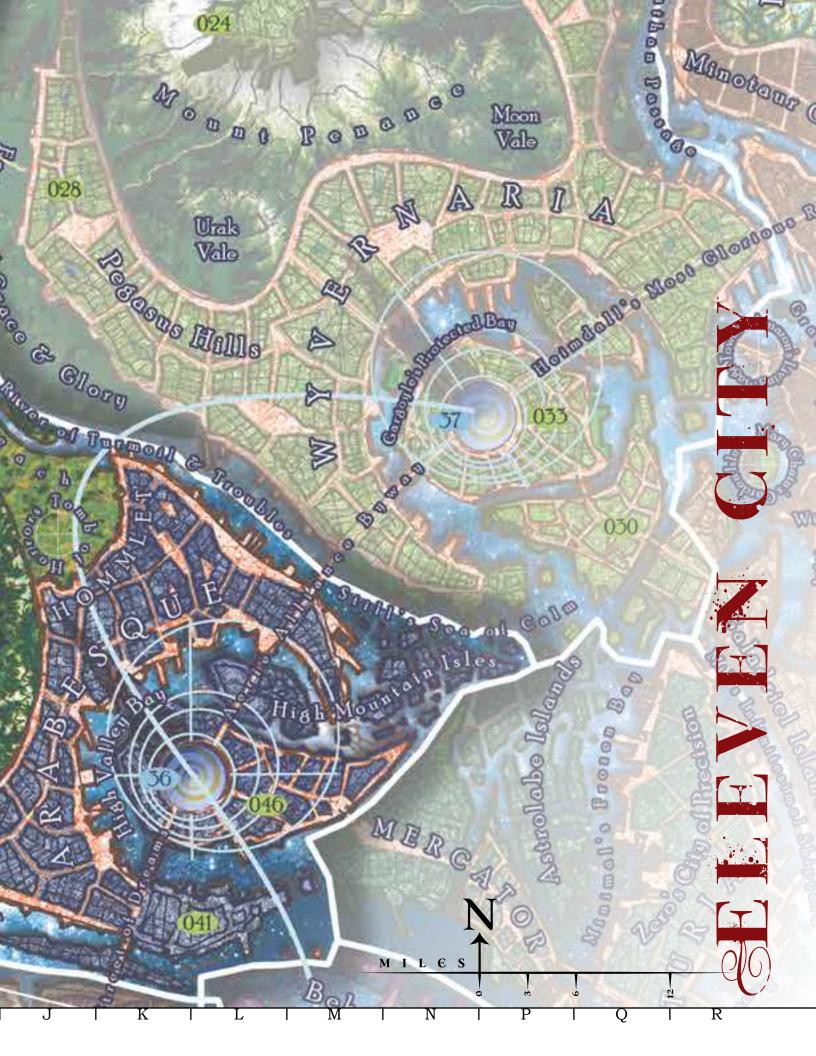
Sylvia's City is built upon and Island free of Imperial dominion. This is a city of free thinking, well minded, and compassionate Shakmuri.

This is where the insane are sent to live out their "good" lives.













The Dymirra are a people born as identical twins, but each body shares the same consciousness, a single person able to move, act, talk, learn or otherwise be in two places at the same time.

The sensory input and experience of the two **Moiety** shared as a single experience and memory, no matter how far apart the two bodies might be.

The only subtle difference between the two Moiety is the tendency of one to be stronger with the left brain and one stronger with the right brain, sort of like being left or right-handed.

On rare occasion, triplets are born, an omen of especially good fortune. On other rare occasions a single child is born, an especially ill omen among the Dymirra.



The City of Eleven is home to the Dymirra, a race of seemingly ordinary mortals absent any special character or quality excepting they are half the size of an ordinary humanoid, being only 3 to 4 feet tall.

The family structure of the Dymirra is when a pair of twins marry, the family structure is such that 2 of the 4 moiety work outside the home and 2 of the 4 moiety work to rear children.

The Dymirra are an especially industrious and exploratory race, with a powerful wanderlust that can be indulged while still safely rearing children among the safety of the City.

The Dymirra are also unusual for having a divided sense of morality, strictly good, moral, and proper as it relates to raising children but decadent, lecherous, and evil when traveling far from home, and the two points of view easily reconciled within the Dymirra psyche, rather they see it as about living a balanced life.

Eleven City is thus a **family friendly city** of pretty if uninspired buildings and lovely child-safe parks. The city is layered with nanny-state laws and restrictions that make any kind of adult entertainments, even smoking or alcohol, legally impossible.

The schools of Eleven City are wonderful, the childcare amazing, and the child health services a marvel of modern efficiency.

Immigration into the city is a constant problem, the poor of other races, especially mothers with children, and as often children simply abandoned on their shores, ever seeking refuge within Eleven City.

As a rule, House Dyad policy is to accept foreign children but to expel them at age 15. But these matters are always complicated and fraught with emotion. Nothing is easy or clear or without pain.

The bigger problem as far as the Dymirra are concerned is the special needs of the foreign children. With education beginning at age 5, by age 15 an Dymirra child have had 20 years of education as compared to the far behind special needs of foreign 15 year olds still sitting with 10 year old Dymirran children. It really is sad how slow foreign children develop.



House Dyad is ruled by a democratically elected council that is uniquely egalitarian among the Great Houses. The rule of House Dyad is seemingly governed by law and justice designed for the sole benefit of children. Anything that might in some even remote possibility risk the life, health, or opportunity of a single child is illegal or about to be made illegal.

House Dyad is also deeply imbedded into the politics and operations of most every other Great House because of the unique communication potential of the race's unique twain form.

Especially after about the age of 40, the Dymirra have lived both wild-lives of adventure and raised their children. They then often turn their attention again outward toward adventure, often hiring on to support mercenary communication and spy efforts throughout the Empire.

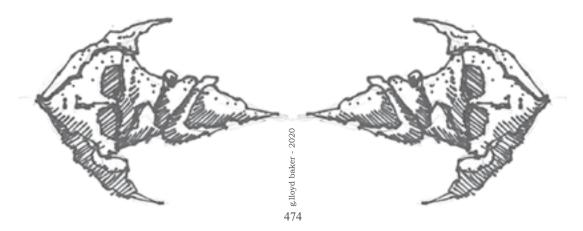
The advantages are obvious, an Dymirran moiety on the bridge of a ship or at the head of an army in some far off battlefield sees and knows everything of the moiety sitting next to the king or command court safely back at headquarters.

Firsthand knowledge may easily be relayed to command and orders easily relayed back. The pairs of Dymirra are integral to the operations of almost everything throughout the Metropolis Empire. And as there are always fewer Dymirra than are needed, they are paid well for their services, especially when put at risk on the front lines.

The Dymirra are almost always preferred to their chief rivals in such communications, the Eigarians. While the Eigarians can more easily communicate information through their vast psionic network, the Dymirra are viewed as more trustworthy, more secure, and the information is always firsthand.

As for spying, the Dymirra are even more powerful when sorceries are employed to view the perceptions and surface memories of a stationary moiety, say back at headquarters, while the other moiety is secretly infiltrating a facility many miles away, firsthand information shared instantly independent of distance.

House Dyad is itself, like its people, a two-part enterprise, at once both a **righteous mother hen** protector of children and on the other the most useful and **dangerous spy agency** in the Empire.





The Dymirra sat among her colleagues in the basement of a non-descript house at the end of an unnamed alley. She was drinking a bad cup of coffee, discussing trivial matters of one of her colleague's love life.

She was also sneaking into the window of a cottage at the edge of a blue leaved forest she suspected might be on another planet, having passed through a once buried portal and traversed several hundred miles of lonely muddy tracks in pursuit of her quarry.

She was both cold wet and muddy from her long travails and laughing warmly as she sipped her morning drink.

Life in stereo she liked to say.

Her early life had been as a mother of 3 children, what most other races might call 3 sets of twins, and while raising them had been a rather famous courtesan of several very elite pleasure palaces.

After her children left home, she enlisted as a spy, completing her 4years of training in 2 years given her obvious advantage.

After she slipped through the window, she hid, the two men entered from the kitchen, talking. As she hid, she let her colleagues in the basement know what was being discussed as she drained her coffee.

Preparing to kill them both if her boss, who sat next to her listening, so instructed.

## 36 SPIRESELEVEN TIMESETERNITY

Spire Eleven is a pair of towers that rise in an interlocked coiling pattern, 2 distinct towers perceived as a single Spire from a distance.

The interior of the Spire is a maze of mirrors, nearly impossible to navigate by any race with fewer than two pairs of eyes. These maze corridors can be slipped, revealing hidden chambers containing a vast number of portals to far distant locations. Being a naturally inquisitive race of explorers, House Dyad makes heavy use of the portals to explore and settle Outland locations far from the Clockworks.

One of the more interesting nuances of the Dymirra is that those born with sorcerous ability might learn the arts of teleportation, a challenging endeavor under the best of circumstances. But Dymirra so trained in the Grace arts may teleport without error to themselves. And while this may on its surface seem trivial, it is uniquely powerful, especially when combined with a ship equipped with a Wyght Core. Suddenly jumping a ship without error is possible, a rare and powerful ability unique to Dymirran Navigators.



475

### O3L DYMENURAS HORIZON FEDERATION

The **Horizon Federation** is a city adjacent a large Imperial port. The Federation is a House Dyad financed explorers league, one of the largest and most well-funded outside of the Imperial Las'raa'ta.

The Horizon Federation maintains a fleet of Wyght Core capable ships that can deliver and retrieve exploration teams to the far reaches of Xai's Outland Wildernesses.

### O32 GALLANT CROSSROAD HARBOR

crossroad Harbor is an island city free of Imperial influence. The Crossroad Harbor is the officer military training academy of House Dyad. Among the finest military academies of the Clockworks, the graduates of which are highly sought after by other Great Houses upon completion of their mandatory service.

### o32 passion crime forest & sleeping take

The Sleeping Lake is surrounded by the Passion Crime Forest at the center of the Cavatinia Wilderness. The Forest is famous for the **disturbing number** of murders committed within its bounds, the waters of the lake cold and still, seemingly unaffected by winds and little affected by splash, entirely devoid of life.

This is home to the **Dyad Wraith Kingdoms**, undead Dymirra, remanants of a dark Calibahn era but allied with house Dyad. Dark secrets live here.

### O'11 FASCINATION STREETS OF SHAFFA NOOR

The **Fascination Streets** are a peninsula city free of Imperial dominion. These streets are the famed **red-light district of the Dymirra**. Two people being in the same place at the same time, it does not take much imagination to work out what sort of unique adult entertainments are possible.

### OHEKARUS NEUTRAE ZONE CITY OF COMMERCE

The Neutral Zone is a large Imperial City between Ministry's Hallowed City and Equinox's City of Balance. The City was founded as a kind of peacekeeper between the warring Ministry and Equinox Combines.

### **0∕46** STREETS OF **○PREMONITION &** DREAM

The city surrounding the Spire are famed for the many mythical, religious, and séance related tales and professions for which the Dymirra are well known. And while most focus on the obvious physical advantages of being one person with two bodies, the spiritual and mnemonic implications are perhaps even more extraordinary.

The Streets of Premonition are filled with the **fringes of Dymirra society**, soothsayers, seers, and psychics of every imagining and power, each gifted unique insight into the truths of the universe but as commonly master mentalists and charlatans.

The Streets of Premonition have the atmosphere of a carnival that might just reveal the face of god.

#### **WAKING DREAM**

The Soothsayer sat next to himself as he slept. His mind both waking and asleep, the perceptions of the world stretched out before him in unusual patterns and colors. He moved into the outer room leaving himself asleep in the bed.

His waking moiety greeted the young woman who likely wanted to know something of her future, she was young and beautiful, so he suspected it would be the usual love interest sort of session.

But when he took her hands in greeting, he was swept by her grief.

*She* sat and he led her through the rituals of hypnosis. He let his own dream consciousness drift into her dreaming hypnotized mind. He could know anything about her, but he focused on the grief.

Her daughter was missing, taken. He let his dreaming mind swirl around the memories of the woman's daughter.

He could feel she was soon to be dead, murdered, but more, his dreaming mind imagined the terror of the daughter, saw through her eyes as she would perish, feeling the life leave her body as she saw the face of her killer, she knew his name, she trusted her father.

Some time later that day, he led the authorities to the site of the murder yet committed, where they waited and rescued the daughter.

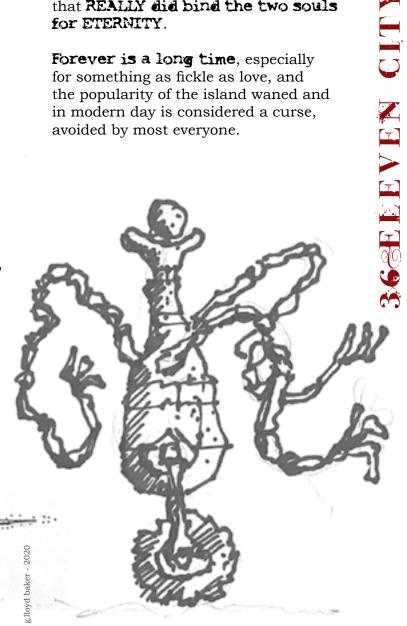
### O47 AMA RANTHA FOREST IN ADORATION

The Forest in Adoration lies upon a mountainous island. This is a place famed for eternal love, those married here are bound into a single dyad soul.

This idea of eternal love is powerful and romantic, and for several centuries during the dawn of the Empire, the forest was popular among lovers.

That is, until it became evident that it was just not some form of wishful romantic thinking, but a deep and powerful ancient soul magic at work that REALLY did bind the two souls for ETERNITY.

Forever is a long time, especially for something as fickle as love, and the popularity of the island waned and in modern day is considered a curse, avoided by most everyone.



### o49 ancee city of titans & mice & fleas

Angel City of Titans is built upon an island free of Imperial influence. Angel City is the military hub of House Dyad. Whereas the individual power of the Dymirra is impressive, when applied to military tactics it becomes a devastating power.

A force of 4,000 moiety can reliably defeat an opposing force of 10,000. If the opponent has no understanding of Dymirra tactics or abilities, a force of 20,000 can easily be expected to be defeated. Add in the elements of time and synchronous guerrilla tactics and the same Dymirran force could cripple a force of a 100,000.

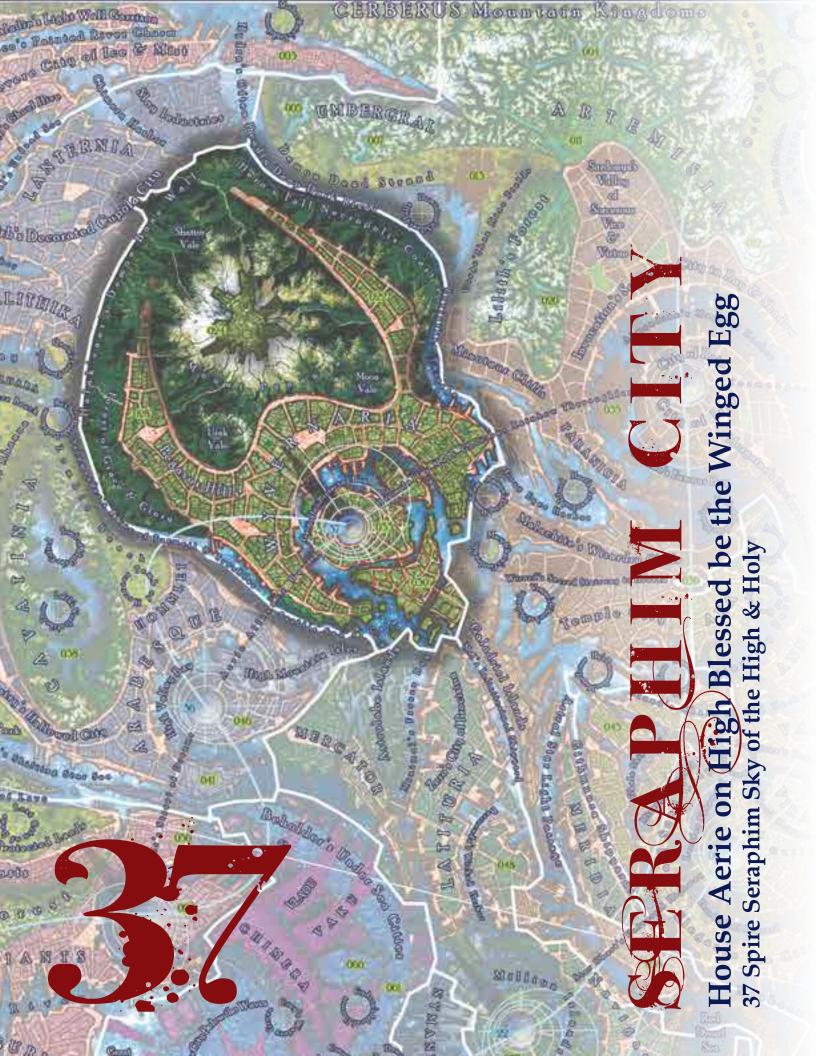
The **chaining of Dymirran soldiers** means that pairs can be arranged to strike dozens or hundreds of targets with perfect synchronous effect.

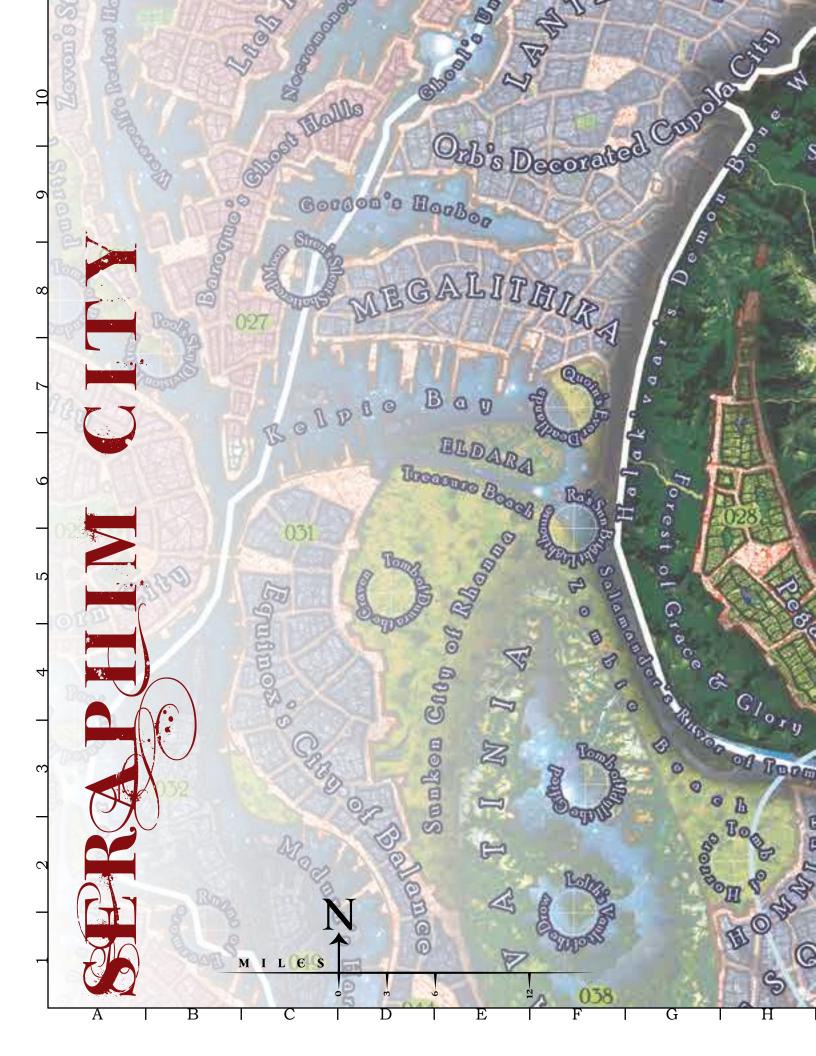
**Dymirran Rangers** and similar special forces are among the most famed in the Clockworks, the common heroes or villains of popular movie and story.

Dymirran Ranger teams are so skilled and experienced, having the knowledge and training of 30'years by the time they are 25'years old, that they can be found among militaries throughout the Clockworks as allies of House Dyad or as mercenaries.

The unusual good-evil morality of the Dymirra also makes for a very unusual list of allies and enemies, meaning they might be **found just about** anywhere on either side.











There is a race of people boar with 3 pairs of gloriously feathered wings arrayed down their spine in descending size to a long coiling feathered prehensile tail. Their graceful flight a wonder to behold, able to fly with blurred speed or drift effortlessly in the air with the gentle flow of their magical wings.

The Avia'Quia are a race of **righteous** paladin goodness, honor, and justice. The Avia'Quian **True Faith** religion is the ancient foundation of the more modern Illurian Fane.

The Avia'Quian have always been viewed as angelic by most other races, champions of light, truth, and justice, a race of heroes in support of the oppressed and downtrodden, seeking ever to defend those that cannot defend themselves.

### SERAPHIM CITY

The city of the Avia'Quia is one of high towers, terraces, and platform gardens designed for the flying aerial grace of her people.

Seraphim City is beautiful in its elegant white and glinting silver forms of seeming weightless efficiency and organic grace.

The ground and streets are maintained as a parkland for **visiting groundlings**, the terrestrial races of the Clockwork Metropolis.

# HOUSE A ERIE ON HIGH REDSSED BE THE WINGED FCG

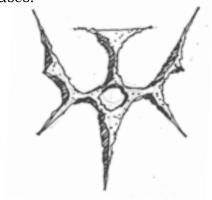
**House Aerie** has a disquiet relationship with the Crystal Shard Empress, her Fanes, and the other Great Houses of the Empire.

### The Avia Quia do not belong and never have.

The Empire is a big muddy glob of compromise and barely contained violence and the Avia'Quian tend to see the world in clearly divided lines of dark and light. They see the Illurian faith of the Empire and its Paladins to be faded mockeries of their own True Faith.

The uncompromising sensibilities of House Aerie tend to put them on the outside of Imperial affairs. Over the course of the Empire, House Aerie has been boxed into a corner, generally left to its own affairs, and leaving the rest of the Empire to its own hypocrisies.

The only exception has been the tendency of House Aerie to accept political refugees from other cities, making Seraphim City a **vibrant hub of free-thinking artists**, fane heretics, and revolutionaries and a thorn in the side of most other Great Houses.



### CET THE RIGHTEOUS BE SET LOOSE

The Priests of Seraph are famed for their righteousness, justice, and truth. Sworn to never lie, no matter how trivial, and leading to a great many tending to a vow of silence when dealing with the less pious and easily offended races.

The 3 Avia'Quian Priests drifted from the high reaches of the vertical chamber toward the vast circular floor, a single penitent veiled female form at its center.

Each priest was a glory of shimmering prismatic feathers, their bodies covered in long elegant robes of white and silver.

"Thank you for kindly finally getting around to seeing me, your tardy pompous arrogance is always welcoming," said the Imperial Envoy.

"And you my dear puppet," said the Priest of Seraph, "are as faithlessly indignant as ever."

"I have been asked to relay a request from your Empress," said the Envoy.

The three Priests conferred briefly, the fore Priest finally saying, "we are disinclined to hear you at this time, your treachery and hypocrisy make it difficult to hear your words as truth."

"Well la-dee-da," sang the Envoy, "what has the universe come too that the most faithful paragons of truth and justice are forced to crawl under a rock for fear of gray shades, heaven forbid true evil should disturb your high and mighty judgements of us mere mortals.



"Your mockery is respected," said the Priest, "we tire of your eternal compromise, we are bored of your tacit acceptance of corruption and injustice, and we know that we must appear as children to your motherly eyes, but nothing could be further from the truth, we are the violence that will burn this Empire to the ground and we stay our hand not in petulance but in love for you and the others that they might find the True Path before we are forced to act."

"Then hear me now," said the Envoy, "and stop hiding behind your apocalypse proclamations, stop thinking that you save us by granting us some imagined reprieve from you righteous fury. You are too safe in your ivory towers for anyone to care what you might wish."

Silence filled the hall, only the gentle swirling of air caused by the mesmerizing wings of the 3 Priests could be felt by the Envoy.

"Speak your request," the fore Priest finally said, "we will hear you."

"My Empress wishes to mark the 4,321st anniversary of the Empire with a ball and invites you attend," said the Envoy.

"Anything else?" asked the Priest already knowing the answer.

"Yes," she said, "I am so glad you asked, my Empress wishes that you once again take up your old position as Head of the Illurian Fane, your absence these past few years has caused great personal sorrow to my Empress."

"Inform you Empress that we will grant her requests," said the Priest, "perhaps it is time."



### 37 SPIRE SERAPHIM SKY OF THE HIGH & HOLY

Spire Seraphim is a spiraling array of silver terraces and orbiting garden platforms, home to the Priests of Seraph.

For those of the Illurian faith, the Seraphim Spire is perhaps the most holy site in the Clockworks, home to the Halls of Light and the Light of Illuria, the original illuminated text as hand written by the Avia Quian Queen Illuria ten thousand years ago.

The Spire is holy ground of a rare and powerful sort, vaporizing the demonic or undead with vengeful wrath. The interior of the Spire is unusual among Spires.

The upward spiraling paths lead to portals to the various Mistress Realms of light among the celestial Rings of Xhirra.

The downward spiraling paths that delve deep into the earth lead to various Demon Prince Realms among the infernal landscapes of the Subworlds of Xakarra.

The truth of the matter relating to House Aerie's disinterest in Imperial affairs is this, the Avia'Ouians are otherwise occupied among the Subworld and Celestial Realms.

The more pedestrian affairs of Imperial politics and faithless religions are generally viewed as irrelevant to the life and death threats that the Priests of Seraph deal with daily.

#### THE PRINCESS

The Avia'Quian Paladin was born of an Arcane soul, he could see the e'Mral mists hidden to mortals, and had learned the many means to manipulate the e'Mral mists to sorcerous effect.

But his sorceries were mere tools, the gift of e'Mral sight indiscriminately scattered among the various races to good or ill depending on the faith of the individual.

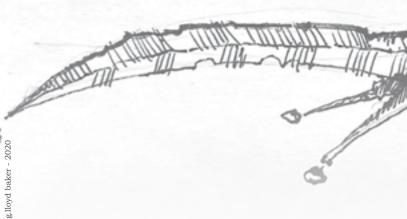
He had been raised among the beliefs of the Illurian Fane, but as an Avia'Quian, a follower of the True Faith, he found the Illurian faith to be as a pastel copy, faded, diluted, and inclusive of the faithless. He understood the reasons, the politics, and even the mercy of the faith, but was fraught by its weakness.

He stepped through the portal deep within labyrinthian bowels of the Seraphim Spire. The attendants sealing the large rune carved vault door after him.

He thought how his fellow graduates of the Illurian Fane were set about their tasks throughout the Metropolis, to investigate crime, to bring order and some measure of justice among the wicked races. To walk the streets of the mortals and pretend it was all for some greater good.

He scoffed to himself.

He stood upon a high stone perch overlooking a sweeping landscape of tortured demonic forests, lakes, and rivers in the valley below.



Above the Eye of Baal glowed the dim shadowless pale light of what passed for midnight in the Subworld. The light of the Eye would increase over the next six months until the brightness of Subworld noon was achieved, and then begin to dim again.

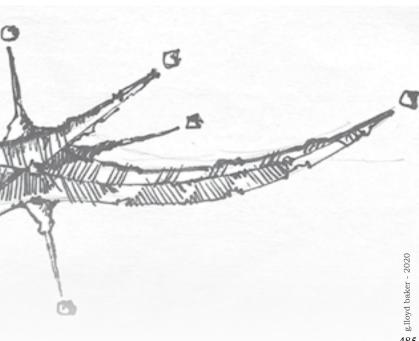
He stretched his 6 feathered technicolor wings and stepped floating into the air; his long coiling feathered prehensile tail absently adjusting his aerial movements, he was more at home in the air than on the ground. He was clad in delicately wrought mirror silver armor.

He quickdrew his pistols with a ritual flurry, letting the e'Mral mists flow from his hands into the long slender elegant guns, calming the instability of the plasma cores and binding the fractured metals of the attenuation chamber, the ancient holy rune carved weapons now as reliable as he was calm.

He looked up toward the underworld sun, the Eye of Baal was looking directly at him. He smiled a fierce grin.

"Time," he thought to himself, "to find the princess and incinerate any demon foolish enough to get in his way."

His wings beat with a sudden force, sweeping downward as an aerial predator toward the demon forest below, the sudden crack of his sonic boom shattering the night



### **O22** UTMOST CITY OF HOPE & LIFE DEFENDED

Utmost City lies upon a long plateau at the foot of Mount Penance upslope of the Hero's Fall Necropolis Coast. This is a ceremonial city for the dead and a veteran's keep used to train young Avia'Quian paladins and priests in the warrior ways of the True Faith.

On occasion, paladins or priests of the Imperial Fanes that show extraordinary promise are sent to the Utmost City for advanced training, though few of such have proved worthy.

### **O2** PALADIN CITY HELEVENT

Paladin City is an ice citadel at the apex of Mount Penance, too dangerous for Imperial or any other presence, only the bravest Priests of Seraph man the watchtowers that keep the Mount Penance Hellvent from destroying the surrounding Metropolis.

This is the arguably the most dangerous place in the Clockwork Metropolis, a place made safe by the blood and sacrifice of the Avia'Quian and their True Faith.

When other Great Houses make overtures to House Aerie on matters either trivial or important, the answer is often the same, "we are too busy saving the world to worry about such matters, should you wish to send forces and stand watch with us, we might aid your cause." No one has ever volunteered forces. Overall, the other Great Houses are generally pleased that the Avia'Quian and their diabolical faith is otherwise occupied and not meddling in Imperial affairs.

### **028** INDOMINABLE CITY OF RIGHTEOUS FURY

Indominable City lies upon a plateau at the base of Mount Penance, upslope from Forest of Grace & Glory. The Indominable City is a garrison that represents the bulk of House Aerie military forces.

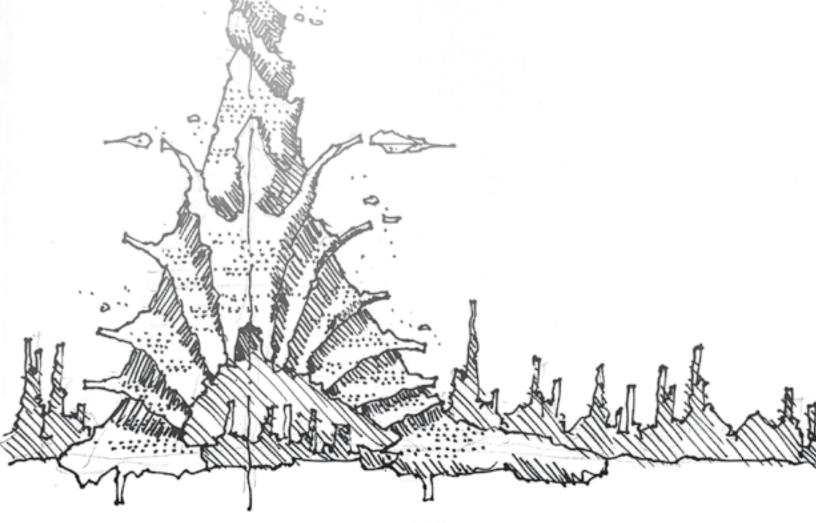
The city itself is largely abandoned owing to the fact that at any given time, 9 of 10 Avia'Quian forces deployed on House business outside the Clockworks, only those recently returned from service or preparing to ship out occupying the City.

Several of the other Imperial powers support the ongoing war efforts of the Indominable City, especially the Kataan of Pyramid City, but most fear the City and the Avia'Quian more than they fear the demonic hordes kept at bay by their vigilance. The simple truth, in the eyes of the devil, we are all the same.

### **630** CITY OF INNOCENCE BY CHIEDREN IN JOY

The City of Innocence is built upon an island city near Seraphim Spire. The only thing more frightening than the Avia'Quian Faith is their compassion for children. Aquiyans are singularly offended by the mistreatment of any child, famously meeting out gross disproportionate violence upon child abusers of any sort.

The **Sisters of Innocence** is an Avia'Quian holy order dedicated to the protection, rearing, and teaching orphaned children from anywhere. This city is the headquarters of the Order. The Sisters of Innocence maintain hundreds of orphanage sites throughout the Metropolis, invited or otherwise. Some have come to fear the Sisters more so than their hell blooded paladin and priest kin.



#### **DEATH BY CROW**

The huge figure was black as a moonless midnight, its six raven feathered wings fluttered with effortless penumbral grace, their edges indistinct.

Her female form was clothed in silken robes of jet with the barest glitter of silver threading, her long black feathered tail coiling around her legs as she landed.

The Mother of Innocence was frightful as the angel of death, taller and larger than her male kin, her deep set eyes looked as if they would bore into your soul, spilling forth whatever flaw, sin, or embarrassment you might pretend did not exist.

The long silver claws of her hands and feet glinted when she moved, reflecting the flickering light of the nearby streetlamp.

The man before the Mother turned to run but saw behind him another winged figure blocking his path.

"We found the little girl," said the Mother, her voice stern as an angry head mistress.

"I do not know what you are talking about...I..." began the pleading man.

The first Mother of Innocence pounced, lacing her claws with the e'Mral mists of Blood, carving the man into large chunks of meat that landed flat and wet upon the cobblestones of the street, she held his gurgling decapitated head in her left hand that it might see the carnage of his still living body scattered in the street, the man could still feel, madness began to take his mind as she tossed his head into the pile of meat that was his body.

That is when she summoned the crows.

### o33 mother **DOMINION AERIE**

The Dominion Aerie is the city immediately surrounding the Seraphim Spire. The city is firmly ruled by the Mothers of Dominion, the day to day political, economic, and religious leaders of the Aquiyans and the Emissaries to the other Great Houses.

It is said that the Mothers of Dominion can see into a man's soul, able to see every frailty and sin he has ever committed. This myth has generally led to the other Great Houses only sending female representatives to meet with the Mothers of Dominion.



