



---

# the utmost west

## AND THE ENDING ISLES

---

### TÁKIWAT OF WHUTOA (15 H/HM)

*Takriki Haki VIII, Rangatira Nuatam, Roriki of Kuatoa and Kúre, Master of the Isles.*

**Trade:** CRD, Gúako, Rangkua, Rotkarru, Woangnen

**DP:** Failed!



akríki Haki VIII triumphantly returned to Hedgecape in 541 at the head of his fleet. A week-long festival was proclaimed to celebrate the start of the new King's reign. This went a long way to assuage the discontent of the people. The great casks of wine opened for the occasion certainly helped, though the cry for justice remained loud, especially amongst those oppressed by unscrupulous lords and tax-farmers.

Prince Háu was dispatched to Whingno to wrest that island away from Woangnen. Despite large expenditures, not to mention the prince's own considerable charm, the Whingno nobles remain stubbornly loyal to the Takríki of Woangnen.

To the south, Whutoa's mighty navy met the fleets of the Empire of Sahûl in fierce battle.

Infantry quality improved.

### KINGDOM OF GÚAKO (19 H/HM)

*His Serene Maješty, King Rúru II, the Do-Something, Rangatira Wangri, Takriki of Darkford, and Órieki of all Gúako.*

*Kiriáre the Siništer, Grand Master of the Order of the Serpent's Blood.*

**Trade:** CRD, Rangkua, Rotkarru, Whutoa, Woangnen

**DP:** None.



úako conducted their usual sacrifices to the New Gods, and the New Gods rewarded them with a (very) small increase in their Mana. The Great War, meanwhile, continued to consume the attentions of the great.

The great hero Kiriáre the Sinister founded a military Order in Tengi, where he raised the mighty

castle of Rarwhoa. As a right of passage, the recruits reportedly journey into the thickest part of the jungle where to find a giant snake known as the *Ahuw*. After killing the snake, the recruit makes clothing from its skin to wear as a trophy. How many recruits survive this ritual is unknown.

A Gúakoan fleet of nearly 150 ships sailed into west, vanishing into the West Equatorial Current. They were never heard of again. Naval quality nonetheless improved, and the government expanded their efficiency and reach.

The Gúakoan people and government reacted with a mixture of confusion and alarm at the actions of the Atíri-Moámwhi of the Church of the Red Death in the ruins of Kavihaä. The people of Tewhóka generally just fled in terror.

### TÁKIWAT OF RANGKUA (8 H/HM)

*Takriki Iháka of Rangkua, the Old and Irascible.*

**Trade:** CRD, Gúako, Whutoa, Woangnen

**DP:** None.

Iháka celebrated his 70th birthday in 545, still hale and as irascible as ever. Prince Ikaróto's Princess died giving birth to their third child and only son in 543. The boy, named Iháka after his grandfather, is sickly and weak.

Rangkua's treasury grew fat.

### TÁKIWAT OF ROTKARRU (13 H/RD)

*Takriki Matú IV, Rangatira Moptoka, Roriki of Rotkoa, Tongiki of the Island of Rotkarru.*

**Trade:** CRD, Gúako, Rangkua, Roátru, Whutoa, Woangnen

**DP:** None.



he haddock failed again, and the people of Jollyport did not celebrate the Flopping Fish Festival. Great sacrifices made to the Hidden Lords seemed to fall on deaf ears, even when several hundred slaves were added to the pyres. Coincidentally, Rotkarru's government spontaneously improved. Perhaps the all-haddock diet had been hampering efficiency.

Crown Prince Matú returned home from the front, ostensibly to discuss war strategy with his fa-

ther, Takríki Matíu III. Many palace watchers believe, however, that he was returning to ensure he was not displaced by his half-brother Prince Haráka, some 27 years his junior. He found the boy<sup>1</sup> and the rest of his new siblings to be quite delightful, though his hatred of his young new step-mother Kataríki quickly became legendary.

Takríki Matíu III obligingly died of the fever during the wet autumn of 544. Princess Kataríki claimed she had a document signed by the late Takríki naming her son Prince Haráka as heir, and she and a mob of supporters occupied the palace throne room. They sent for a priest to perform the coronation rite.

Faced with a developing *coup d'état*, the popular Crown Prince Matíu moved quickly to solidify his claim. The army and the Black Knives Royal Guard rallied to him without hesitation. With the Black Knives surrounding him, Matíu forced his way into the throne room. At the very sight of the Prince and his armed retainers, Kataríki's support vanished and her palace coup collapsed. In the confusion, Princess Kataríki gathered her children and fled.

Takríki Matíu IV was crowned without further complication, and Princess Kataríki and her children took flight of the capital in the dark of the night for parts unknown.

Rotkarru's armies fought in the Great War with distinction.

#### CHURCH OF THE RED DEATH (17 H/RD)

*Whetíri II, Atíri-Moámwhi of the Church of the Red Death, Speaker to the Gods.*

*Háu, Holy Eunuch of the Temple, Scribe for the Librarians, Voice of the Holy Marque.*

**Trade:** Gúako, Rangkoa, Roátru, Rotkarru, Tongi, Whutoa, Woangnen

**DP:** None.



ven as the Great War raged, Rustwood grew unimaginably wealthy. The riches of Oratoa flowed into the city: ores from the north, gold and timber from the south and west, and even slaves from Woangnen in the east. Sacrifices

<sup>1</sup> He is only a year older than Prince Matíu's own son.

were offered to the Gods, but the Gods are capricious and their ways are mysterious even to the wise. The Church Demesne suffered what some are calling "an economic depression" as the native merchant and crafts interests struggled for ground against the various foreign interests. The primary effect seems to be a reduction in trade. Most expect this is a temporary condition, the Gods willing.

The Church undertook some construction in Ebonhill to strengthen the city's foundations and walls against any untoward events that might cause instability there.<sup>2</sup> Other, more unusual construction projects were also undertaken in the city. Wizards from Tongi and Whutoa were welcomed there by the ancient but still hale Mágua, and the company set to work on some sort of project involving imported obsidian, cinnabar, and gold. Soon after, Prince Erutíri of Roátru also arrived and met with the various representatives of Western Oratoa.

In southern Nóak, prospectors discovered a rich vein of iron ore. Miners worked day and night to extract the lode, but within five years it was played out.

The pale and ill Whetíri II became increasingly withdrawn from the day-to-day ceremonial and rule of the Church. Government functions were handled by the self-sufficient bureaucracy, and much of the coordination at the top was fielded by the Voice of the Holy Marque, Háu. By late 541, no one was allowed to see him, and the rumour spread that he was hovering at the edge of death. In Rustwood, the Partá Ngáku entered the final, deadliest phase of their training.

There was considerable surprise, then, when Whetíri II surfaced in the northern ruins of lost Kavihaä in 543. Just one year later, disaster struck at the Temple itself.

<sup>2</sup> The new rulers were concerned that, given the vastness of the Undercity ruins and caverns, a strong earthquake could very well cause the entire city to be swallowed up by the earth. They are now much more confident.

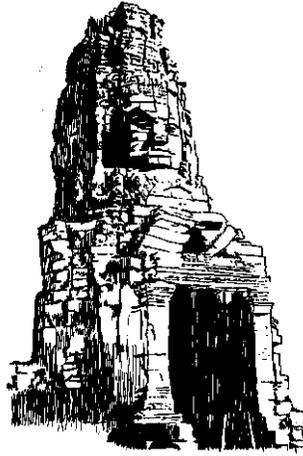
## THE REVELATION OF KAVIHAÄ

Kavihaä's forboding ruins had long held an evil reputation among the local tribesmen. No Tewhókan warrior could be induced to pass through the cyclopean gates, covered with strange sigils and sinuous relief carvings unsettling to the eye.

It was of olden days the beautiful capital of the Eldar Kingdom of Saartenvaahito. Its crystal palaces, delicate flying arches, and soaring ebon towers were the envy of many a King. Though Saartenvaahito remained the bitter enemy of Evil to the very end, in the ages since the coming of the Red Death, something unwholesome and malevolent had crept into the ruins. Now they were twisted and dark, a mockery of their former soaring beauty. The massive roots of looming tropical trees twine their way through falling temples and empty halls, slowly swallowing the city. It is said that only one man had ever survived more than a single day and night within its walls: the storied hero Kiriäre the Sinister, now Grand Master of the Order of the Serpent's Blood.

And yet, here it was that the Atíri-Moámwhi of the Church of the Red Death, Whetíri II, presented himself in 543. He was thin – almost gaunt – with his once sun-browned skin now pale as moonlight. He seemed almost sunken into his voluminous crimson robes, and his heavy iron crown pressed down on his brow, intensifying the illusion. Yet he did not seem frail; indeed, he strode to the ancient gates with purpose and resolve. To the shock of his entourage, he walked right through them and into the ruined city with only his young acolyte Irirángi accompanying him.

They stopped in a wide, weedy plaza, as yet unclaimed by the jungle. It fronted the wreckage of what might have been a temple, once, but was now a steep hill rising through the trees with only looming stone heads poking from the mass of root and



branch. The Atíri-Moámwhi broke the heavy silence.

“It is heavy, but it is no burden, Irirángi” he said as he stretched his crooked neck as far as it would go. Irirángi thought it made him look a little like a kura chick.

“What is that, my master?”

“The mantle and the crown. This birthing of a new age, a new empire. The days have never been more dangerous, but we must pray that the Starry Lords may find us worthy of them, these dangerous days. For who can follow us if we are not up to the task? Hmm? This looks a likely place, now.”

He often rambled like this now, in a distracted sort of way that Irirángi found unsettling. He had been so sure of himself, so strong, in years past. Some days he still showed flashes of his old brilliance, but mostly he looked and acted much older than his fifty years.

At his master's instruction, Irirángi set up the small shelter and started a cooking fire. While the acolyte prepared their dinner, his master meditated in silence. This would be their pattern for many days.

Occasionally, Irirángi would leave the city for more supplies, leaving his master unattended. When he returned, Whetíri had not moved. Sometimes, he asked Irirángi if he had procured the supplies, sometimes he would say nothing. They had no visitors, except for a few flights of birds.

Days passed. Then weeks. Irirángi explored some of the nearby ruins, taking care to stay near enough to daylight that he would not need a torch. Whetíri also claimed to explore the ruins, though he rarely moved from his spot. In truth, he walked the dark places of Kavihaä. He stepped over the skeletal remains of countless Gúakoan warriors, crumbling even now to dust. He found the bone pit where the noble Prince Rawíri had met his horrible end; he could just make out the impression made in the cold black mud by the *Sword of Gúako* as it lay unclaimed for years, mere inches from the catch

that would have released the trapped Prince. In his mind, he trod through places unseen since the days when the Red Death Himself strode the earth.

Late one afternoon, Irirángi came back from the village to find his master missing. Not sure of what else he should do, Irirángi prepared the fire and the evening meal as he always did. As the sun set in the west, Irirángi grew increasingly worried for his master.

Then, suddenly, the Atíri-Moámwhi Whetíri was sitting in his customary spot as if he'd never moved. Slowly, he stood. The startled Irirángi immediately thought there was something odd about his master's appearance. His skin was the colour of moonlit mist, and Irirángi almost imagined that he could see the looming trees through him.

But it wasn't his imagination. Whetíri held up his hand, wonderingly, in front of his face, and Irirángi could still see his master's face through the hand, and the shadowed background vegetation through them both.

"Master!" Irirángi gasped.

They weren't alone. Shadows stirred in the darkness beyond the firelight and pressed in close while Whetíri spoke in a whisper.

"The stars in their constellations speak the secrets of the Gods, but it is only in the darkness that they may be seen. The secrets of the Gods are found not only in the stars, Irirángi, but in the darkness *between* the stars."

Irirángi imagined that the circle of light around their little cooking fire shrunk back from the shadows. It was no longer the cheery fire of a few moments ago; it was a thin and feeble light against the eternal darkness closing in upon them.

"I have walked that darkness, Irirángi, the spaces *between* the world we know. There are powers there, and principalities. Even now, a shadowy army rises and gathers at my command."

### HOLY KINGDOM OF TONGI (10 H/RD)

*His Majesty King Amokapua I, Rangatira Rawhóri, Takriki and Tongiki of Tongi & Ebonhill, Órikei.*

*Ietóro the Bald, Grand Master of the Most Holy Order of the Companions of the Mace of Sundering, the Bonebreakers.*

**Trade:** CRD, Roátru

**DP:** Kauri (F), Kametua (A), Oáhi (F)



The Royal family continued to expand, with the Queen giving birth to three more children, bringing the total to seven royal princes and princesses. The birth of Prince Etera in 545 was particularly difficult on the 39 year-old Queen Airíni.

The great war hero and all-around bastard Ietóro the Bald retired from active service on the front lines to found a military Order in Ranga, where he raised the mighty castle of Mahmenti. Although the Order has a rather long official name<sup>3</sup>, they quickly became known as the "Bonebreakers" for Ietóro's preferred weapon.

Missionaries inundated both Núrel and Díssarad with little effect. Aurlith, on the other hand, spontaneously converted to the Church of the Red Death. The Tongi government expanded.

### TÁKIWAT OF ROÁTRU (9 H/RD)

*Takriki Erutíri, Rangatira Wukrung, Tongiki of Roátru.*

**Trade:** Atuburrk, Cappargarnia, CRD, Khurdán, Rotkarru, Tongi

**DP:** None.



Roátru continued to build up its military might to consolidate its gains in Ancalimë, despite rebellion and counter-attack. Takriki Típiene the Valiant died in battle, and all Roátru wailed and mourned for their great ruler. He was succeeded by his sister's son Erutíri, a very popular warrior. Erutíri's choleric young son Prince Arána was grudgingly accepted as heir.

Missionaries in Eladan and Othendar converted many Yagnarists. New public works were constructed, and the government expanded.

<sup>3</sup> Most Holy Order of the Companions of the Mace of Sundering.

---

# CENTRAL ORATOÁ

## BETWEEN DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

---

### THE GREAT WAR (531 – 545)

*Three Factions, Each Against the Other:*

#### THE ALLIANCE OF VALAS

Ancalimë, Orofer, Pouákaitoa

#### THE EMPIRE OF SAHÛL

Atuburrk, Khurdán (Kommolek), E. Thace, Warden of the North

#### THE WESTERN ALLIANCE (OR “SEVEN-NATION ARMY”)

CRD, Gúako, Roátru, Rotkarru, Tongi, Whutoa, Woangnen

*(Underlined Realms have declared Holy War against one or more of their enemies.)*

#### 541: The Winnowing of Whangwhúatéwua



he Whutoan fleet withdrew from the windswept isle of Whangwhúatéwua, leaving the Takríki of Whéwhi (a Tongi ally) and his 14,000 infantry and archers to deal with the natives and any remaining Thacians. He dealt with them without mercy, demanding that every inhabitant of the isle forsake “the southern witch” and submit to the Church of the Red Death, under threat of destruction.

As the Whéwhi army of occupation enforced the decree, the islanders rose up in rebellion under a militarily gifted former herder named Ropáta the Red. They were determined to drive the “infidel” from their land and to preserve their ancient Urdan faith and traditions. Even with Ropáta’s leadership, they scarcely stood a chance. The Tarotists lost some 3,000 men in their five-year campaign, but the Urdan dead were uncounted in heaps in every village and lane. Ropáta’s eviscerated corpse was hung from a pole by his own intestines, and the starving and beaten survivors professed the new faith.

The Yagnarist minority in isolated Morím in the Thornwood overthrew their Urdan rulers and rebelled from Ancalimë.

Word arrived in the halls of Oratoan power that the Empress of Sahûl had declared war against all those responsible for the attacks on Electoral Thace.

#### 542: *Thenimór!* (and more)



Whutoan Admiral Toángen patrolled the Dalig Ulv Stranden with a mighty armada of 425 ships, searching for any hostile forces. He was obliged when a Sahûlian fleet appeared, heading west and flying the imperial flag of the Warden of the North. The enemy fleet was just over half the size of the Whutoan, but it included caravels and galleons. Battlemagic crackled through the air as the two fleets met in battle. Despite Toángen’s considerable leadership skills, the enemy ships were simply too fast and too maneuverable for the Whutoan ships. The admiral lost a hundred ships, including all of his transports, while the enemy lost perhaps 45 vessels.

Despite their victory in the initial clash, the Southlander fleet disengaged and pressed on westwards, leaving the Whutoans in command of the shipping lanes. Admiral Toángen chose to declare the battle a Whutoan victory.



In the occupied Ancalimë homeland, the natives rose up in rebellion against the Roátruian garrison. The Roátruian garrison commander, Sir Puríki, gathered together some 17,000 men to put down the rebellion. The Turéhu partisans fielded an estimated 6,000, mostly peasant levies and archers. The Roátruans responded with firm and methodical attacks, but the partisan raiding tactics frustrated their efforts. The Turéhu would strike and then melt into the forests before a counter-attack could be mounted. Meanwhile, a series of would-be assassinations were foiled in the temporary Turéhu capital of Ringær. The real action, however, was on the plains of Thenimór to the southeast.

*Thenimór: the Battle of Hírnóst (542)*

The Orofer crusader army arrived in the summer in full battle array. Led by two heroes of renown, Hír Tengmango the Wraith-Slayer and the charming Hirin Aáta Mingwoa, the host numbered more than 32,000 cavalry and 24,000 levies. Tengmango's personal guard, the "Fierce" held the honour of the van, and Aáta rode her fire-drake Whinga high above the column, scouting for the enemy.

The enemy announced themselves rather abruptly when the great flying fortress *Cleansing Storm* hove into view. Airships flitted about it like bees around a hive; there were hundreds of them. As *Cleansing Storm* slowly approached the Orofer crusaders, the Iägnarist army itself marshalled under the personal banner of Iägnar Khurdán. Aided by his faithful servant, the lich Aeg-Annûn, Khurdán soon revealed the full weight of the task the Iluvarian heroes and crusaders had undertaken.

The 42,000 cavalry rode horses. Eight thousand were fearsome Saurian cataphraçti in their black enameled plate mail, and 18,000 were Wenemet cavaliers with their multi-coloured pageant of tournament garb and banners flying high. Most now wore enormous kura feathers in their hats or helmets, and they streamed behind them in the wind. The cavalry was supported by 34,000 infantry and 840 great stone golems.

As the armies maneuvered for position in the flat terrain, Khurdán's herald and Tengmango's kaitawa met near a village called Hírnóst. They exchanged pleasantries, each asking for the other's surrender, each refusing, before retiring to the local pub for several dozen pints. Much later that evening, each bid the other farewell, and they returned to their respective armies with the long-expected news: in the morning would be battle.

The two enormous armies squared off against each other in one of the great and storied slaughters of all time.

(With the initial twenty-eight couplets omitted for brevity since they essentially describe the above along with the detailed catalogue of each side's

martial abilities and accomplishments, we pick up our story, already in progress.)

*Tengmango spoke, and he lifted his shield  
And shook ash-spear, as the Fierce on the field  
Mounted their kura and armed for the fray.  
"Hear you, Iägnar, what the Orofer say?  
Spears will they give you; a tribute of ash-spears  
Is all you will gain from Orofer's peers!"  
In answer from Khurdán came raging flame—  
Five thousand fey folk in an instant slain  
By Iägnar's sorcery. Came the Fierce  
In answering charge with ash-spears to pierce  
The heartless chests of Khurdán's Wenemet.  
Came grim the Fierce, determined to beset  
Khurdán's Saurian and Turéhu host,  
Fifty thousand, five hundred Fierce foremost.  
Against them stood Iägnar and his might,  
Clamour raised. Ravens circled for the fight  
Eager for carrion. Men silent prayed,  
Spear flew, bow was busy, shield took sword blade,  
Bitter that battle rush! Warriors fell  
In blood repose, each the other's infidel.  
Tengmango Wraith-Slayer, fast against foes  
Slaughtered endless cataphraçti, but lo:  
The ravens scattered, screaming and aghast,  
Shadow fell across fallen and steadfast  
Both—for no cloud was this, that they saw fly,  
And no flock, but a mountain in the sky.*

*(three couplets omitted)*

*Upon a looming balcony she stood;  
The Baroness Drogdyr threw back her hood.  
She, who was nourished on the blood of blades  
And knew no other succor, cast her gaze  
Below. Her outstretched arm tore the air in a gash,  
And mighty Tengmango dissolved to ash.*

*(six couplets omitted)*

*Then Aáta Mingwoa, shrewd and unbowed,  
Spurred Whinga skyward to tear down the cloud,  
While far beneath them, ash spears shook shield walls,  
And Iägnar's stone golems commenced to maul  
The Mark's men, who could but bravely die.  
Despite Aáta's cunning in the sky,  
Dark Drogdyr swung blade shining of the Moon,*

*And quickly at fight, Aáta was hewn.  
 (ten couplets omitted)  
 Iágnar surveyed the field his arms had won.  
 No enemy remained; they'd slain each one.  
 And the God-Man roared a triumphant call,  
 His bellowing heard in the Half-Elf's hall  
 Where ancient rafter dust was shaken down,  
 To land in Corualadh's tarnished crown.*

*(selected excerpts from the Hírnostapura)*

543: *The Ancalimë Counter-Attack*



another Sahúlian fleet entered the Dalig Ulv Stranden in challenge to Admiral Toángen's Whutoan fleet. This fleet was about 235 ships. It was a curiously mismatched fleet; about 100 ships looked brand new, while the remainder looked fairly well beat up, as if they had been at sea for many a year. As before, they flew the flag of the Sahúlian Warden of the North.

Admiral Toángen, with 325 warships at his command, was feeling confident despite the clear technological advantages of the enemy. What he didn't count on, however, was the enemy commander's reluctance to fight. In fact, the enemy ships moved at a prodigious rate of speed, and they simply sped by the Whutoan fleet, frustrating any attempt by Toángen to engage them.

*Battle of the Thenigil Vale (543)*

Takríki Típené the Valiant of Roátru led 7,000 kura riders into the Vale of Thenigil, where they met an army of 24,000 infantry and archers led by King Calmalas of Ancalimë and the great hero Whéru Rawringe, riding the fire-drake Uánne.

Battle was joined with a sorcerous crash, as the great Típené let loose a bolt from the *Lightning Bow*, instantly slaying 4,000 Turéhu. The enraged Turéhu king ordered a charge and swore to kill the Roátruan ruler himself. And indeed, as the battle swirled through the forest, Calmalas found himself sword to sword with Típené. The sounds of battle

faded around them as the two warriors performed their steel-bladed dance.

While Whéru Rawringe led the Turéhu to an overwhelming victory on the field, the personal battle of the two sovereigns proved a much closer thing. Although the valiant Takríki Típené was clearly the better warrior, his age was showing against the energetic young King Calmalas. The Turéhu's superior weaponry and armour also saved him from many a cunning sword thrust. Even so, the King was suffering from numerous wounds, including an evil-looking cut above his left eye that bled freely and obscured his vision. Típené came more and more to rely upon his magic shield for his defence, visibly slowing as the struggle between the two dragged on. Finally, the Elf landed the killing blow on his opponent, and the valiant Takríki Típené joined the rest of his men in the halls of their ancestors.

King Calmalas took the magic shield and the *Lightning Bow* for himself, and he then ordered the bodies of the slain, both Human and Turéhu, to be buried with full honours. A great barrow was raised over the tomb of Típené the Valiant, and the Turéhu paid homage to the valour of their foe.



In the occupied Ancalimë homeland, partisan raids against the Roátruan garrison continued. Eventually, Sir Puríki was able to corner the largest Turéhu band in an open field near the River. The partisans were destroyed, but not before they inflicted nearly 7,000 casualties in the Roátruan occupying force.

The great Pouákaitoan crusader army arrived in Telemnar, 113,000 strong. It is said that the number of crusaders exceeded the entire population of the forest region. The crusaders were exhausted after their long march, but they were eager to fight the Iágnarists or their Tarotist allies in defense of Ancalimë and Oratoa.

A Gúako fleet landed more than 20,000 troops on the bleak isle of Mekawhéni. The native Urdans were pacified, and conversion by the sword com-

menced. The island's Roríki, who claims descent from Kátoro the Mariner, rallied the tribes to defend their way of life and religion. In a brief, fierce battle, he was killed and his small army defeated. Local partisans, mostly herdsmen, are continuing the fight.

In the southern seas, a most curious naval engagement took place. The Atuburrkian Armada sailed into the Moána a Waénga to enforce a trade blockade against Pouákaitoa and Orofer. The 350 ship Armada was now under the command of the Malebolge Commodore K'tax-ta. Ardent but untried, the Commodore was astonished when an Orofer flotilla of just 25 warships sallied from Edhelthent to give battle. Fearing some trick, Commodore K'tax-ta ignored the signal flags on the Orofer flagship asking for a parley. Instead, she ordered the attack. The Orofer ships immediately put about and sailed back for the safety of the port.



In the autumn, the Sahûlian fleet that had evaded the Whutoans earlier in the year began a trade blockade in the Western Mahuóro. Since most merchant traffic in the area actually travels the open waters of the Dalig Ulv Stranden, little trade was affected.

Part of the fleet<sup>4</sup>, however, broke off and made landfall in the Tongian forests of Téahiak. There they disgorged more than 20,000 infantry, intent on conquering the region for the Eleÿtor of Thace. The region was undefended, and it fell quickly.

In the Thornwood, the Atuburrk flying fortress known as Castle Black was slowly wending its way north, causing untold panic in Arluin.

In Rustwood, the administrative heart of the Church of the Red Death, a number of foreign agents were rooted out during the year.

#### 544: *A Famous Victory, an Infamous Defeat*



Fire spread from occupied Ancalimë to occupied Dolost. The Roátruan garrison, having withdrawn, the uprising succeeded

<sup>4</sup> The shiny new part.

and the region returned to Ancalimëan control. The locals greeted the arrival of King Calmalas' army later that year with spirited celebration and many casks of the new summer wine.



More would-be assassinations were foiled in the temporary Turéhu capital of Ringær, and this time the perpetrators were very nearly caught. The presence of the hordes of Pouákaitoan crusaders was proving a bit of a strain. They were growing bored with waiting, and some had become quite rowdy. News reached the crusader captains, however, that the Atuburrk flying fortress known as Castle Black was slowly wending its way north, causing untold panic in Amdír. Clearly it was heading for the crusader encampment in Telemnar. Captains Ropáta and Ioráma laid plans for a reception, drilling their crusaders in the plan. Observers opined that this was more to keep them occupied than to mount any credible defense. Even so, several thousand desertions were reported.



#### *Culnámó: "A Famous Victory" (544)*

Although Ancalimë had prepared for an invasion of Culnámó, they were unprepared for the extent of the attack. Armies under the flags of Gúako and Rotkarru invaded, led into battle by Atuburrk's cadre of SuperZombies™. In all, the western allies mustered almost 50,000 live men and 5,500 dead ones against 17,000 Turéhu and a handful of border keeps.

Not wanting any surprises this time, the Allied commanders made sure their force was bristling with battlemagic. Although the entire allied force was under the nominal command of the elderly Captain Ruátwhi of Rotkarru, all tactical decisions were made by Gúakoan General Kétewhe, under advice from the hero Ngaíre Whani<sup>5</sup> and the

<sup>5</sup> Takríki Hanuman of Whengo, who actually commanded most of Rotkarru's forces, was consulted about the menu and very little else.

grizzled Atuburrki Wenemet zombie-master (and recently promoted “Marshall of the Northmark”) Kourbiedes.

Arrayed against them, Captain Mórarniel<sup>6</sup> was ably assisted by the wizard Grímas. Needless to say, a Turéhu fire-bolt tore through the advancing zombies, turning almost two-thirds of them into instant kindling. Still, the Allies advanced, Ngaíre Whani laughing merrily as she ran into battle *through* the forest of burning zombies.

The Turéhu border keeps fell quickly, and Captain Mórarniel ordered her forces to retreat behind the walls of Iëwar. The withdrawal began in orderly enough fashion, but in a skirmish with some advancing Rotkarru kura-lords, Captain Mórarniel was slain. Some of the surviving witnesses claim that her fatal wound was inflicted by a dagger from behind.

As the news spread of their Captain’s death, what had been an orderly withdrawal quickly degenerated into a running battle, and then a rout. Most of the Turéhu army never made it to the safety of Iëwar’s walls; they were slaughtered in the northern approaches to the city.

The Turéhu survivors barely got the gates lowered before the enemy arrived. The wizard Grímas attempted to put together a coherent defense in the city. Although he was a brilliant sorcerer, as a military leader he was more of a cabbage than a captain. One assault was all it took.

Though the remainder of the Atuburrk zombies were destroyed, the attackers suffered remarkably few casualties as they stormed the city walls<sup>7</sup>. Within just a few hours, a cadre of Gúakoan swordsmen had forced one of the city gates, and the army of the Western Alliance poured in. As the Ancalimë flag was hauled down from the great hall, General Kétewhe pronounced that “this day, the Gods have granted us a famous victory against their enemies.”



6 A Turéhu Princess, sister to King Dínenél (502–530) and aunt to Kings Gilnaur (530–538) and Calmalas (538–present).

7 Sadly, the nominal Rotkarru commander, Captain Ruátwhi, suffered a serious wound from which he did not recover. He was 59 years old at the time, grossly overweight, and troubled by gout. Dying in battle may have been his goal.

### *The Harrowing of the Temple (544)*

The dragon came screaming low over the sea, travelling at unearthly speed and making landfall near Rustwood in Wena. It gained altitude just before the treeline, and skimmed the treetops as it had skimmed the waves of the Túawhenua. On the ground, the intelligence wars culminated in an attempt on the life of Rustwood’s senior military official, Maáka, the Dread Crimson Lord of the Red Death. In the great hall, the Cappargarnian ambassador Talik Dern was in conversation with Dread Maáka. Suddenly, a fracas broke out in one of the balconies. The Wenemet Talik Dern absent-mindedly turned around and stepped forward, directly into the path of the three tightly-grouped arrows intended for Dread Maáka. Talik Dern was dead within moments. The Church’s own military struggled with the invisible, forceblade-wielding assassin for a moment before they lost him.

Just when it seemed as through the assassin had escaped, the Holy Eunuch Háu entered the hall carrying an armload of scrolls. Suddenly, the scrolls flew out of his arms, as if from a collision. Before any of them had even reached the floor, the astounding Háu had spun in place, smoothly drawing his curved blade from its sheath and *through* the invisible assassin. The scrolls hit the floor with a sound like a dozen finger-drums, followed an instant later by the heavy thump of the assassin’s body. Everyone stood frozen for a long moment until Háu cleaned the starkly visible crimson blood from his blade and slowly sheathed his sword. He walked to Dread Maáka and curtly bowed.

“My Lord, there is a dragon.”

Maáka, the Dread Crimson Lord of the Red Death quickly gathered his troops... and his airfleet. Ten airships, crewed by Oratoan airmen, took to the skies in pursuit of the dragon. Although the crews were somewhat green, the airships themselves clearly represented the very best of Imperial technology<sup>8</sup>. The dragon’s destination was not difficult to determine: the Temple of the Red Death itself.

8 And indeed, each ship had a clearly stenciled marking on their hull that read “Surplus” in the Byrrin language.

When Maáka arrived, the farmland near the Temple was already ablaze. The airships and the 10,000 soldiers on the ground did not hesitate to engage the dragon and its rider. The rider was in Sahúlian plate armour, but even so it was obvious that he was a Saurian. His shield and the trappings of his great saddle were blazoned with his noble arms, which none among the Oratoans could recognize.

The dragonrider launched two fire-bolts in quick succession at the structure of the Temple itself. Both exploded in a fury of light and heat against the building, but when the smoke cleared no damage was visible. The dragonrider spurred his great beast downward, to pull apart the Temple's stones one by one if necessary.

The defenders were courageous and ably led, but they stood no chance against the beast. The dragon rent the airships in twain as they flew, and their crews plummeted to their deaths amid a hail of burning flinders. The dragon lit on the Temple, smashing with its massive tail and tearing with its terrible claws. They fought and died trying, and failing, to defend the holy site. They seemed but a moment's distraction to the dragon, who soon got on with the business of destruction.

Maáka, the Dread Crimson Lord of the Red Death personally led the final, doomed charge against the dragon. It did them the honour of turning to face their charge. With one great bite, she swallowed Maáka whole, neatly biting in half the men at either side of him. After the dragon had dispatched the remainder of the warriors, it completed its task of destruction, tearing down the mighty Temple to its foundations.

Then, dragon and rider vanished in a flash of smoke, and nothing remained of them but the destruction they had visited upon the now-ruined Temple of the Red Death.



In the western Thornwood, Holy Tongi exacted tribute from the Turéhu of Síras.

A Sahúlian fleet in the Túawhenua put a blockade in place, designed to prevent all trade through this

vital sea. Terrible storms racked the Mutúinga Kóre, making travel and trade there impossible as well.

In the Dalig Ulv Stranden, meanwhile, reinforcements arrived for the Whutoan fleet, strengthening Admiral Toángen's Armada to 465 ships.

#### *545: The War on the High Seas*



Naval battles right across Oratoa pitted the Western Alliance against Sahúl's War-den of the North. In the Túawhenua, a Woangnen fleet of some 125 warships commanded by a slaver captain named Haknúamen sallied out of Ebonhill to break the Sahúlian blockade. They were joined by the Rotkarran navy of 450 ships, commanded by the hapless but popular Commodore Hataréi. He also was determined to break the Sahúlian blockade in battle. The Southron fleet obliged them, meeting them with 180 caravels, galleons, and warships near Cape Kiwhúm on the Hariwo coast.

#### *Battle of Cape Kiwhúm (545)*

The fleets battled the driving wind and shoals as much as each other. Nevertheless, the superior leadership and more sophisticated ships of the Sahúlians bested the larger numbers of Woangnen and Rotkarru. While the Southerners lost a handful of caravels and all 25 of their warships, Woangnen lost fifteen ships and Rotkarru an astonishing 125 ships. Commodore Hataréi was among the dead, and his captains in their panic attempted to withdraw the fleet, much to the anger of Haknúamen and his Woangnen sailors. The Sahúlian Admiral, however, counter-attacked before the Rotkarru ships could get away.

In the ensuing engagement, the Rotkarru fleet was fairly well shattered. Captain Haknúamen salvaged what he could of both fleets and withdrew. Some 90 of his own ships and 180 of Rotkarru's limped back into the port at Ebonhill. The Sahúlians lost 25 caravels, and they did not pursue the fleeing Oratoans.

In the southern seas, it was a different story. The storied Whutoan Admiral Toángen and his 465 ships commanded the Dalig Ulv Stranden. In the autumn, another Sahúlian fleet arrived from the south. These Sahúlians had no interest in fleeing, despite their small number of vessels. They had but 180 ships, twenty of them galleons. Battle was joined just off the coast of Brégil, near a headland known as Gwéridol.

#### *Battle of Gwéridol (545)*

The genius of Admiral Toángen was nearly enough to overcome the differences in naval technology between the two combatants. The fact that Whutoa's navy is among Oratoa's best surely helped. In the first clash, the Whutoans lost only 30 ships<sup>9</sup>, while 130 Sahúlian vessels went to the bottom. Even so, the Admiral was wary, as none of the enemy galleons had even been damaged.

However, when it appeared that the Sahúlian galleons were attempting to regroup windward of Toángen's fleet, the Admiral wasted not a moment in pressing the attack. Casualties were heavy: the determined Whutoans lost 120 ships, but as the sun was setting in the west, the last of the enemy vessels were destroyed. The Whutoans celebrated a great victory as the remaining Sahúlian vessels burned merrily into the night.



The Atuburrk flying fortress known as Castle Black finally arrived in Telemnar in the late summer of 545. The great mass of Iluvarian crusaders were ready, or so they thought. When they marched out to meet Castle Black however, it turned out that it was flying a great deal higher than they had anticipated. Even their giant siege ladders were nowhere near tall enough.

Castle Black slowly, majestically floated over the forests of Telemnar, surrounded by a cloud of more than a hundred airships, until it finally came to rest over the provisional Ancalimë capital of Ringær.

<sup>9</sup> One of the Whutoan casualties was Prince Maáka, the uncle of Takríki Haki VIII.

At this point, Castle Black descended to shouting range. Then, from the flying fortress came a rain of rocks, garbage, and chamber pot contents. The rain continued, day after day, and Atuburrk officers on the walls shouted insults at the locals below them.

"Your mother was a kura, and your father smelt of gooseberries!"

One particularly witty Wenemet in a fake moustache opined loudly, "the guys down there may look like idiots and sound like idiots, but don't let that fool you. They really *are* idiots."

The crusaders began firing arrows at the walls of the fortress. This only elicited more insults.

"Nice try, but a little weak. Shall we come down lower?"

The infuriated crusaders started catapulting volunteers with grappling hooks up towards Castle Black with predictably grisly results.

"Oh, come on! My Granny can do better than that—and she's *dead!* Oh, wait. So's your ammunition."

"*That* one hurt!"

The increasingly frustrated crusaders loaded the contents of *their* chamber pots into the catapults. They succeeded only in increasing the rain of filth from the skies, much to the irritation of the Ancalimë inhabitants.



Gúako reported that fully half the population of Mekawhéni have embraced the cult of the Hanged Man. Reports have filtered out that among the Urda inhabitants are a tribe of native Malebolge goatherds, living deep in the island's wild hills.

The forests of Arluin were inundated by Iägnarist missionaries, followed closely by a Iägnarist army. The canny Elf-Lord of Halchúr invaded with 4,500 light kura and almost 20,000 archers. A peculiar purple fire-bolt took care of the garrison, and the Halchúrites effortlessly took control of the region.



Two Tongi Princes<sup>10</sup> took over the Army of the South, which had advanced into Úamalu. The native Turéhu more or less immediately attacked the small force, causing severe casualties. The Princes managed to pacify the region after killing the local Chieftain in battle.

All was not well with Tongi's other outlying holdings, however. Their Thornwood regions, as well as the western islands, were completely cut off from the rule of King Amokapua by blockade and storm. Some of the less scrupulous, or more independent-minded, officials took matters into their own hands. Although a rebellion in Metua was averted more by luck than anything else, in the Thornwood, the Turéhu Takríki of Caladawar and Lúthar took the opportunity to renounce their tribute and reassert their independence.



In Wena, the assassin's rotting body gradually became visible, revealing a female Saurian with but one wound—a single curving slash across one shoulder and through her neck. The head had nearly been taken clean off, and the vertebrae of her neck were deeply notched. She had no identifying marks but this: the brand of the Eye of Iägnar burned into each forearm.

Throughout the Church's lands, the cry has gone up from every village and city: holy war! The people are demanding holy war to avenge the destruction of the Temple. Unfortunately, none know for certain who was responsible. Many blame the Elektor of Thace. Others, perhaps more cautious, point out that many realms have Saurian leaders—and the Saurian assassin most certainly worshiped Iägnar. All await the word of the Atíri-Moámwhi, though some among the Church's senior leadership are extremely uneasy about the news from Kavihaä.

<sup>10</sup> Princes Ioráangi and Ipiha. This necessitated the retirement of the former commander, Prince Tamahára, at age 65 – a fact that did not please him at all. Of course, the largest part of the army belonged to the capable Roríki of Wenur, who had little patience for these sorts of dynastic games.

#### THACIAN OUTPOST OF RETOROK (1 SE/UR)

*Captain Vox'll Kat'kax, Military Governor of Retorok.*

**Trade:** None.

**DP:** None.



After thoroughly conquering Téahiak, the Thacians unloaded supplies from their ships and built the port town of Retorok on the Dalig Ulv Stranden, just west of the ruins of Vanhataikuutta. If anyone thought it odd that a Malebolge would command an army of Saurians in a Turéhu region, they said not a word.

#### NEW CAPPARGARNIA (85 WSE/TA)

*Lord Mikah Davin, Prefect of Talikhiem.*

**Trade:** CRD, Gúako, Kommolek, Orofer, Roátru, Rotkarru, Tongi, Whutoa, Woangnen

**DP:** None.



Cappargarnia once more sent their armies into the Thornwood. About 9,000 Cappargarnian infantry forced tribute from the Thongam Turéhu. The Sahúlians lost about 1,000 medium footmen to the Elvish bowmen.

#### THE NORTHMARK (38 WE/YG)

*Lord Kourbiedes, First Marshall of the Northmark. Mathorchir the Scythe, Master of the Kura Riders of Nenalph, Lord of Usk.*

**Trade:** Kommolek

**DP:** Nope.



tuburrk built up the economy of their little colony, and then they erected most of New Atuburrk into a March<sup>11</sup>. Lord Kourbiedes was appointed First Marshall, and the government seat was established at Wanthaji. The new Marshall, meanwhile, continued to lead his mighty, mighty zombies into battle far to the north of his new domain.

#### DOMINION OF KHURDÁN (4 WSE/YG)

*Khurdán, Son of Iägnar, Regent of Fell Kommolek, Master of the Iron Throne of Angildúath, Suzerain of the Thornwood Turéhu, Dark Lord of Oratoa.*

<sup>11</sup> Specifically the regions of Cúil, Nelthent, and Usk.

*His Fell Excellency, Goesek Derryk II, Count Palatine of Kommolek, First Speaker of the Nine.*

*Aeg-Annûn, Lich-Lord of Tasel, Steward of Angildúath, Second Speaker of the Nine, Marshal of the Fell Legions.*

**Trade:** Gúako, New Araxes, New Ingazi, Northmark, Pakoa

**DP:** Zarâni (F), Branluin (F), Amdír (F), Morim (T), Durgûl (T)

 Iägnar's bonfires of sacrifice continued through both day and night and in every season. The fires of the Thornwood sent great clouds of putrid smoke skyward. Vast sums were spent in new public works, particularly in the constructions of smithies. It only added to the smoke. The Thornwood, already a dingy greyish green at the best of times, became a world of black and grey.

Cavalry and naval quality improved, and the government (and the Realm) expanded to the glory of Iägnar's name.

Missionaries flooded the Thornwood, converting Ancalimëan Arluin and Branluin, as well as Amdír and Morim.

#### ANCALIMË (12 E/UR)

*King Calmalas of the Venerable House of Malvalas.*

**Trade:** Orofer, Pouákaitoa

**DP:** None.

 Faced with a demand from his enemies that he peaceably surrender all his lands north of the River, King Calmalas instead attacked! New armies were levied for the war effort, and dark and bloody sacrifices were made to Urda to ensure the Kingdom's sorcerous success.

#### MARK OF OROFER (8 EH/IL)

*Corualadh Half-Elven, Takríki of Orofer and Warden of the Mark.*

**Trade:** Ancalimë, Pouákaitoa, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

 Orofer got their noses good and bloodied at the disaster of the fields of Hîrnost in Thenimór. Despite considerable investments, nothing improved.

#### KINGDOM OF POUÁKAITOA (19 H/IL)

*His Maješty King Róngo Fleetfoot, Son of Ihúhah Son of Eτέρα of the House of Ekara, Rangatira Kawhe of the Éiwi of the Eagle, Órikei, Beloved of Iluvar.*

**Trade:** Ancalimë, Orofer, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

 visibly aged King Róngo continued prosecuting the Great War against Iägnar and his human allies. The great crusading armies of Captains Ropáta and Ioráma arrived at the front lines. Although a number of the peasant levies melted away into the Thornwood, good discipline has been maintained in the kura cavalry for now. Pouákaitoa continued to pour vast amounts of gold into the development of their military forces, and cavalry quality improved.

The intended trade with the east was disrupted again, this time by the Sahûlian naval blockade in the Moána a Waénga.

---

## LANDS OF THE ÉIWI

EASTERN ORATOA FACING THE DAWN

---

#### TÁKIWAT OF WOANGNEN (12 H/ST)

*Takríki Amíri the Well Loved of Woangnen.*

**Trade:** Cappargarnia, CRD, Gúako, MBD, Rangkua, Rotkarru, Whutoa

**DP:** Ónguk (A)

 he beloved Takríki Amíri made peace with Kéatoa, a peace that involved the Urdans surrendering the region of Tawé to Woangnen. Crown Prince Ihaía triumphantly entered the region in 545 at the head of 15,000 kura cavalry. He arrived to find the region almost completely devoid of human life. The villages were empty, the fields fallow, the infrastructure crumbling<sup>12</sup>. Even the city of Whit had been virtually disassembled and everything of value taken, leaving only the pilings at its port.

Queen Hauóra returned from her foreign tour to raucous welcome home festivities in Flatmarsh and

<sup>12</sup> Even with the public works abandoned and crumbling, they were as impressive as anything in Woangnen.

a tender reunion with her husband the Takríki. In celebration, Woangnen built two new priories and sacrificed in thanksgiving to Strength, the God of Woangnen.

In 544, eighteen ravens landed on the roof of the Takríki's great hall in Flatmarsh and roosted there for a month before flying off.

Meanwhile, Woangnen's navy engaged with a Sahúlian fleet and survived. Mostly.

Woangnen enlarged their government.

### KINGDOM OF KÉATOÁ (19 H/UR)

*His Majesty King Haráre IV, Son of Harápo Son of Kíre of the House of Kekáta, Rangátira Tirwhekwi of the Éiwi of the Parrot, Óriki.*

*Holy Mother Panía I, Atíri-Moámwhi of Pukei, Matriarch of Urdan Oratóa.*

**Trade:** Kuroa, New Araxes, New Ingazi, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

King Haráre's consulted with his advisors and then made peace with Woangnen, ceding them the region of Tawé. Takríki Ámapo the Feeble of Tawé was so angry with his cousin the King, that he swore to kill him and seize the throne for himself. This did not go well. The delicate young man and his "army" of six followers were arrested in Kiruak and thrown into prison without ever having seen King Haráre.

The Tawé refugees are currently in camps throughout Nekan. Just to ensure that the Woangnen don't get uppity again, forts were built along the border.



The woman wore a patched cloak the colour of an old faded bruise. When she arrived at the royal court, she had already walked untold hundreds of miles, preaching to all who would listen, of the coming conflagration between the two serpents.

She is known only as the Prophet of the Wyrms, and she spoke the very words dictated by the late Arari the Blind, but in her mouth the words had a very different meaning from that preached in Kuroa by Arari's successor Matrú.

She said, "Hear, O Oratoa that the Mother of Wyrms is the daughter of Urda!"



One Serpent encircles the world. Her image is writ in the heavens, and She is rightly called the Mother of Wyrms. She is the fire in the heart of every man and the Sun, the fire which burns but does not consume. Her blood is the effusion of the earth, but it runs true in the veins of the Sacred Wyrms, the mighty Dragons, the Fire-Drakes, and the Kingly Houses of Katán and Kuroa.

She has died and been reborn in every Age of the World. She manifested Urda to the Eldar, and She was the black dragon slain by Urda to fertilize Sahúl. The Tent of the Heavens was made from her hide, and Her whisks bind the very Chasm of Harakh.

She is our only hope against the other Serpent, the One who sweeps the stars from the sky. Many times have they battled, and a new battle is fast upon us. The earth will burn.

### KINGDOM OF KUROA

*Act I: The Hollow of the Crown*

Kuroa's King Kiriáre the eloquent and pious invested in the future of his Kingdom. New public works were built throughout the lower reaches of the Great Tuan. The King summoned the disciples of Arari the Blind to his hall.

The *Timpalak* games were held in Renwhet in 542, and Crown Prince Ataíri himself participated in the martial events. He expressed his disappointment that there were so few foreign participants. Kéatoa and Pakoa entirely failed to send teams, although several individual athletes and fighters from each Kingdom participated. Ingazi sent a small team with both Humans and Wenemet, which did extremely well, though they continued to lag behind the Oratoans overall. Ingazi did manage to win the final event, however: a much-reduced Grand Mélé.

While the fighters at the event got along famously as always, there was some nasty anti-Ingazi grumbling among the spectators. Some incidents of violence in the pubs and inns of Renwhet were reported, apparently perpetrated by those against any southern influence in Oratoa. The Ingazi team left for home ahead of schedule.

After the games, Crown Prince Ataíri married the beautiful and virtuous young sister of the Takríki of Rengoa.

A Saurian herald from Sahùl arrived bearing a message for the people of Kuroa:

*We, the Apotheotic Kingdom of Fell Zarkhandu declare total war against the Kingdom of Kuroa, its nobility, peoples, lands, and all of its line and kind. They will be blood chattel from this day forth until they are extinguished.*

A puzzled King Kiriáre asked his advisors if they might tell him what the Zarkhandu complaint was about. None had any idea.

#### *Act II: The Parting of the Ways*

atríu and Kyuni stepped into the great hall. They had obeyed the summons of their King. Matrú was small in frame, but wiry, while Kyuni was tall and well-muscled. They looked quite the mismatched pair.

King Kiriáre shuffled in and sat in his throne. He looked old, certainly older than his years would indicate. The two men were shocked at his appearance. Nevertheless, when he spoke his voice was strong and firm.

“I trust you had a pleasant journey? Excellent. Let me come straight to the point. I intend found a new Chivalric Order in Timapoa, and you two would do me a great honour – would do your country a great honour – if you were to lead it.”

The two disciples looked to each other a moment before the wiry Matrú stepped forward to address his King. “Majesty, we have been entrusted a sacred

duty to protect the Princess Ahu. With all respect to your majesty, this is our first duty.”

The old King smiled. “You must know that the Princess herself has requested this. Surely she has been in contact with you?”

Kyuni now stepped forward. “No majesty, this is the first...”

Matrú interrupted him. “We are in contact with the Princess.”

Kyuni started. “We are?”

“We’ll talk later.”



Matrú and Kyuni had entered the King’s hall as the honoured disciples of Arari the Blind, keepers of the words of the Prophet and partners in their sacred duty. They left the hall as something else.

They returned to their inn rooms, and they argued. Their angry shouts could be heard in the commons room below. The words were indistinct through the thick, timbered walls, but they went on for hours, scarcely pausing or dropping in volume. They argued about a secret meeting between Matrú and someone else in Tikung, and about secret letters. Kyuni raged about “too many secrets” and “not trusting me” and “thinking I’m stupid” while Matrú pleaded with his friend. Finally, the door opened, and all the patrons and staff of the inn pretended they hadn’t been listening. Kyuni walked out, paused, and turned back to the room.

Witnesses said that tears streamed down his face as he clearly said to Matrú, “then we have failed. Ahu is already lost, and you with her.”

The door slammed. Kyuni walked quietly from the inn and into the town, head bent and sobbing.

#### *Act III: A Final Pilgrimage*

ing Kiriáre, now in his mid-sixties, gathered his family to himself and resolved to once more visit the graves of his ancestors before he joined them in the Summerlands. Accompanied by his sons, the Princes Ataíri and Ataráta, the King made pilgrimage to the Barrows of Woangoa

on foot. Though it was not a difficult trek, the King had fallen ill, and so the road was slow. They arrived in the autumn of 543. Sending most of his entourage away, Kiriáre sought out the barrows of the Kings with his sons.

As they prayed before the tombs of their ancestors, the Dragon King of Kuroa and his two sons were ambushed. A red cloak colour of fresh blood swirled through the air like the cape of a penny-theatre villain. Clearly the assassin was well prepared, and he had been waiting for some time. Prince Ataráta's throat was cut before he even had time to shout. Nevertheless, King Kiriáre turned at the faint sound of blade on bone.

With a speed belying his age, the King's sword was out before he had taken more than a step, and in three steps it swung in an unimpeded elegant arc through the assassin's neck. As the assassin's head hit the ground, a second group of assassins struck with bowfire.

Arrows peppered the remaining handful of royal guards as Prince Atáiri shouted, "we are betrayed!"

The King and his remaining men charged the cowards' roost, located in a small copse of nearby trees. Prince Atáiri meanwhile unlimbered his bow and carefully knocked an arrow. Even the distraction of an assassin's arrow thudding into his chest armour failed to break his concentration. The Prince loosed an arrow, and it found the throat of one of the attackers.

And then, as the King and his men reached the treeline, a bad situation became catastrophically worse. For at a signal from the trees, the King's men suddenly turned upon their sovereign.

King Kiriáre III of Kuroa was cut down where he stood, suffering a dozen or more sword slices from the men sworn to protect him.

Seeing this atrocity perpetrated upon his father and his King, Prince Atáiri lost his temper. Where before stood a man with a bow, a Prince of Kuroa, now there roared the Dragon. In the merest moment the transformation was complete, and the Fire-Drake Prince leapt into the air. His father's

murderers never stood a chance against the fire of his fury.

#### *Act IV: The Desecration of the Dragon*



Meanwhile, an unremarkable merchant ship docked at Renwhet. The sailors tossed the mooring lines to the crew on the dock. Slaves began coming aboard loading the goods on their backs and scurrying off the boat at a rapid pace as the overseer stood watch.

Princess Ahu collected herself and preceded down the gangplank to the market. Dressed in an oversized robe to conceal her true form, she wandered through the open markets and trinket shops. It had been ten years since she'd last see her home, and not much had changed in her absence. The men of the fish market still made the fish fly through the air with an uncanny ability, swearing and singing the day away. The massive bells of Otuawh Abby still sang their beautiful song every morning... and her father still held the throne of Kuroa.

One thing had changed though, Kuroa herself had changed. No longer were the Éiwi the undisputed rulers of the land, for now they had to share it with a furrier sort. These "rodents" were now seen moving about freely through the markets of Kuroa. Ahu recoiled every time she saw one of these *In Ga Zia* from the south.

For several years, Ahu's father had groomed her brother Atairi as his heir, and for that he was sent south to learn the ways of a foreign land and forget his heritage. Ahu feared the obvious – that Kuroa was to become part of the southern empire.

Ahu found her bearings and navigated the maze of the market and headed to the royal house of Kuroa. Guards stood at the entry ways as they always had, clad in their shining armor, spear at the ready.

"You there, peasant, stop where you are and turn away, the King has gone away and is not seeing people," shouted one of the guards.

Ahu looked up from the ground into the guard's eyes as she removed the hood to her cloak. "Well

then, I guess it is a good thing I am neither a peasant nor a people.”

Taken aback, the guards stood mesmerized, but only for a moment, for as fast as they were to heckle a peasant, they were even faster to bow a knee.

“Princess Ahu... wait, what...?” stuttered the guard, unable to complete a sentence.

“Your questions will be answered soon enough, for now gather your fastest men. I will need them to summon all the guard and militia of Renwhet. I will also want a calling of the people. Work is to stop and all are to be summoned to the courtyard of this royal house of Kuroa. Now go, and make haste for we haven’t any time to lose.”

Ahu walked through the massive wooden doors of her forefathers, each one carved with the legacy of the Kuroan heritage. The house was empty save for a few slaves and clerks.

As Ahu entered her father’s study, she noticed a significant stack of letters on his desk, most with the mark of Pakoa.

While she read she could hear the masses beginning to form outside. She gathered the letters for later use and proceeded out to the main hall towards the balcony overlooking the courtyard, the metal of her boots making an audible clank against the stone floor. She stopped just before the opening, looking to the slaves that sat awaiting her orders. She handed each of them a satchel full of cloth, and whispered to each of them, “Hang these from all sides of the keep. Lower the colors of Kuroa, and raise these only once I’ve given the signal.” She then untied the knot that held the robes to her body and allowed the slaves to pull the cloth from her, and watched as they scurried up the stairs to the flagpoles.

She walked out on the balcony clad in brilliant scarlet armor, shining like the sun, and she looked upon the people of Kuroa spread out in the plaza below. What was to come next would shatter the very foundation of that ancient Kingdom.

“Too long has Kuroa been toyed with Southland heretics claiming to be of Urda, as they slaughter and enslave the Éiwi. This Urdan witch of the south

claims to be all powerful, and now she forces you to bow a knee before her, or go to war and be slaughtered like pigs. The King, or should I say Clerk, of Pakoa now claims to be unwilling to aid his Urdan brothers in a time of need, but only years ago offered a reason to go and fight. Always the ebb and flow of the Urdans, always looking for the balance in the world, always unable to grasp that balance. There has been unbalance for decades now in the lands of the Éiwi, a hostile peace, never knowing who your allies really are.

If Urda seeks balance, then there always must be a counter-balance. How can Urda preach about balance if She is the only one? There can be no balance if there is only one god, for the scales would always tip in one direction.”

The crowd began to mumble in words of approval and disapproval, even as more gathered in the back. Ahu waited as her words sank into the masses. Scattered shouts of “heresy!” and “death to the witch!” competed among the factions of the crowd.

“There are others in the sky we’ve never been able to see, other gods that balance the other sides of scales. I, Princess Ahu of Kuroa, Queen of the Blood Dragon, have come here today to claim what is mine by birth, the lands of Kuroa and her people. From this day forth, the lands of Timapoa and Woangoa will no longer be under Kuroan leadership nor will they lay claim to the heresy and blasphemy the Urdan religion has become.”

At Ahu’s signal, enormous black flags dropped from the walls surrounding the plaza, with only a blood red sigil of a tear drop with a dragon inside – the Marque of the Blood Dragon.

“So I say this to you people of Kuroa, do you sit idle and watch as the lands of the Éiwi are stripped and converted to the lands of the Urdan Witch, or follow me to the path of the dragon and reclaim our birthright?”

Ahu turned to her right and instructed the Captain of the guard to summon the captains of Kuroa’s army to the great hall immediately. As she turned from the crowd, she could hear laughter and joy, as well as scoffing and cursing from her people.

She knew not all would align with her. The army was vital.

The captains of the Kuroan army gathered in the great hall, and Ahu addressed them.

“You’ve heard my words; you all know what I seek. You men have sat idle for too long under my father’s watch that will change very soon. The path of the Dragon is ours to take, for it was given to all Kuroans at birth, we’ve just been blinded by Urda and unable to see it. I ask that all of you follow and defend the lands that are yours.”

Ahu’s eyes turned gold, and the pupils elongated from a circle to a horizontal oval as her skin began to transform from flesh to scale. It was now a Fire-Drake Princess who addressed the Captains.

“Any who wish to give up their birthright and be swallowed by the heretical witch of the south are welcome to leave. Know this, for as you walk out those doors, you and all the men you lead will be marked as heretics and blasphemers. If you are found in the lands of the dragon, you will be killed on sight. Do not seek refuge in the lands you’ve turned your back on. Any who seek shelter in those influenced by the southern Urdans will instead find shelter on the tip of a spear or the edge of a blade. This includes my father and that wretched brother of mine.”

Someone muttered “treason”. Several of the captains had already made for the door, though many, perhaps the majority, still remained.

“From this day forward the lands of Timapoa and Woangoa will be claimed by the Marque of the Blood Dragon. Any who seek shelter in the Southern Urdan forces or Imperial Urdan forces shall be deemed an enemy of the Dragon. Upon this day the Marque of the Blood Dragon is revealed as a holy religious military order that denounces the teachings of Urdanism and now seeks the Dragon. We recognize the holy Church of the Red Death and all the other hidden lords.”

### Act V: The New Order



As word filtered back to Renwhet that the King was dead, Princess Ahu’s *coup d’etat* was complete. With much of the Royal army now incorporated into the new Order, Ahu took the crown and appointed her like-minded aunt, the Princess Hauóra, as Grand Inquisitor to cleanse all “Southlander Urdans” and any who might be swayed by the “Sa Hulian Empire”. Many of those who felt their culture threatened by contact with the south joined in Queen Ahu’s new faith. It was particularly popular in Renwhet. Even so, many thousands of people followed the loyal Urdan nobles and clergy in fleeing from Ahu’s army.

Some said the stream of refugees and Urdan military officers and units were led eastward by none other than Kyuni. Others say they were led by Crown Prince Ataíri’s wife, the Princess Réka of Rengoa. Whoever led them, they remained in good order all the way to Sandlock.

Further afield, many of Kuroa’s nobles, and virtually all of her clergy, rose up against the new order. Timapoa’s Urdan refugees found safe haven in Poháhu, whose people and leaders were having none of Ahu’s talk. The north proved extremely resilient to Queen Ahu, with Takríki Róngo II of Rengoa announcing that he would support the claim to the Kuroan throne of his infant niece Hokiói, the daughter and only child of the still-missing Crown Prince Ataíri, who was now reportedly safe in Sandlock. Rengoa, Tettoa, and Tengkoa all declared for Hokiói and the Rengoan Regency.

At the Cathedral of Runga, the Urdan Matriarch met with the wavering nobles of Wokrua. She persuaded them that their oaths of loyalty to the Crown were suspended while an infamous heretic held the throne. They cautiously declared for the Rengoan Regency. Nitao and Tamwoa simply rebelled, while Maláo and Tikung definitively declared for Queen Ahu, even though nobody in Maláo was buying this new religious idea in the slightest.

With many regions wavering between loyalty to the Queen and loyalty to Urda, between the nationalists and the internationalists, a wounded, exhausted Fire-Drake landed roughly<sup>13</sup> in the main plaza in Sandlock. A curious crowd gathered as the injured Fire-Drake slowly resumed its natural form, that of Crown Prince Ataíri.

The semi-conscious Prince was borne away to the infirmary at Túakowh Priory. He was nursed back to health by his wife<sup>14</sup>, and in 545 he was strong enough to declare himself King of Kuroa.

Several of the wavering regions, including Poháhu, declared for him, and his brother-in-law Takríki Róngo II of Rengoa publicly swore an oath of fealty to his new King at Kewha Priory near Honeysea. Hotkua, on the other hand, rebelled.

Queen Ahu immediately denounced King Ataíri as a “heretic, usurper, and traitor”. The feeling is mutual.

#### MARQUE OF THE BLOOD DRAGON (7 H/BD)

*Her Majesty Queen Ahu, Daughter of Kiriáre Son of Kaituéra of the House of Ngeru, Queen of the Dragons.*

**Trade:** Woangnen

**DP:** None.

 Queen Ahu boldly proclaimed a new order for Kuroa and for Oratoa. While many flocked to her, many more did not. Sorcery improved, and the Sorcery Academy expanded.

#### KINGDOM OF KUROA (13 H/UR)

*His Majesty King Ataíri III, the Erudite, Son of Kiriáre Son of Kaituéra of the House of Ngeru, Rangatira Kúanowhe of the Éiwi of the Kura, Órieki, Son of the Dragon.*

**Trade:** Kéatoa, New Araxes, New Ingazi, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

 With the assassination of King Kiriáre and the strange heresy of Princess Ahu, Kuroa was broken. Many place their hopes in the new King to save their country.

<sup>13</sup> i.e. crashed.

<sup>14</sup> She bore him a second child, a son named Kiriáre, in late 545.

The child was premature, but seems healthy enough.

#### KINGDOM OF PAKOA (23 H/UR)

*His Majesty King Hataréi, Son of Hiríni Son of Hóni of the House of Máki, Rangatira Tuangua of the Éiwi of the Orca, Órieki.*

*Her Majesty Queen Réka, Daughter of Kámiter Son of Kiatári of the House of Pápahu, Rangatiri Whári of the Éiwi of the Dolphin, Órieki.*

**Trade:** Kéatoa, Kommolek, Kuroa, New Araxes, New Ingazi.

**DP:** Ana (F)

 King Hataréi and Queen Réka returned to their capital of Toang-Woang and ruled what appeared to be the only Oratoan realm not at war or recovering from war. They invited learned clerics from the Urdan Church Universal & Triumphant into their lands. They built three priories and sent missionaries and teachers throughout the countryside. Pakoan diplomats continued their work. The port town of Eveshore was raised in Ana, and a massive royal road built from Toang-Woang to Widbeach.

Trade to the west was impacted by the Sahúlian blockade. Fortunately, this did not affect trade with Kommolek. King Hataréi sent word to the south that his Kingdom wished to join the Empire. Letters of support for this endeavour were received from Ingazi and Araxes.

Siege and naval quality improved.

#### VICEROYALTY OF NEW INGAZI (37 WH/UR)

*Besar Trandes, Second Baron of Saint Ilana, Lord Trouserdale, Viceroy of New Ingazi.*

**Trade:** Kéatoa, Kommolek, Kuroa, New Araxes, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

 Ingazi sent cash north while the Colonies sent raw materials south. New Ingazi spent on infrastructure and otherwise tried to mind their own business. New Ingazi's sorcery improved to the level of the home country.

## NEW ARAXES (1 WH/UR)

*Air-Captain Sir Weyew Drarim, Administrator of New Araxes.*

**Trade:** Kéatoa, Kommolek, Kuroa, New Ingazi, Pakoa

**DP:** Ketnim (T), Wiwh (T)

New Araxes sent envoys to the other Dolphin regions of their little island, convincing them to hand over their breadfruit, which was just sitting around rotting anyway. The typical response to the request for tribute was, “whatever you need, little furry dude.”

The great Countess Thiuli Ranierre died in 542 at the advanced age of 78. Administration of New Araxes fell to her deputy.



---

## PROCLAMATIONS

---

### Declaration of the Blood Line of the North East

*The Fourth Age, year 541 of the Oratoan Reckoning.*

Hear My Words, All Who have an Ear for the Voice of the Red Death.

There shall, from this Day forward, until the Blood Line at the River Welau is broken or a suitable Parlay is not possible that the Realm of Kéatoa and each its constituents shall enjoy freedom from the Blood Storm, wrought by the Church of the Red Death and the Crimson Brotherhood against all who might encroach unbidden into the Lands of Oratoa.

The Enemy of Our Enemy shall, henceforth, be known as Our Ally.

The Land of Táwe shall be gifted by King Haráre to Takriki Amíri, the Well Loved of Woangnen as a free-will token of this Understanding. Should either or both break this Vow deemed Sacred by the Church of the Red Death then both shall surely Die.

Woe and Doom to any who would interfere with the Justice of the Hidden Lords, or Question the Line established in the Blood of Oratoan Warriors.

Such is the Word of the Red Death.

Such is the Will of the Holy One.

Thus it shall Be until the Dark Skye falls.

*The Holy Marque of the Crimson Brotherhood.*

# imperial strength index

#	Realm	Player	Forum Name	E-mail	ISI
<i>The Great Powers</i>					
1	IÄGNAR	Cortlandt Winters	Cortrah	cwinters@notebookmargins.com	888.6
2	Pouákaitoa	Robert Kalcevic	Dawnwalker		885.7
<i>Major Powers</i>					
3	Kéatoa	Walter van Vliet	King Haráre IV		557.2
4	Pakoa	Michael Blythe	mikeb21	mblythe21@gmail.com	545.2
5	Gúako	Tyler Baumgartner	rawhidekid	tylerbaumgartner@gmail.com	465.6
6	Holy Tongi	Dominick Morales	Waiari Amokapua III	morales_dominick@yahoo.com	429.2
<i>Minor Powers</i>					
7	Ancalimë	Christopher Scherrey	JDScherrey		368.0
8	Rotkarru	Ed Allen	Touca Tuki	tgroove@att.net	332.1
9	Woangnen	James Kahaewai V	ExLibrisMortis	sciop@cox.net	319.1
10	Orofer	Ben Peters	Aileron		308.8
11	Whutoa	Mark Truman	Hailen	mark.truman@gmail.com	300.7
12	Roátru	Sam Jacobs	Mad_Prophet	madprophecies@gmail.com	266.8
13	CRD	Steve Speyer	Crimson Marque	crimsonmarque@gmail.com	252.8
14	Kuroa	<i>This realm is open for a player</i>			247.1
15	Rangkua	Michael Riggs	mriggs	m.riggs60@yahoo.com	198.8
16	Blood Dragon	Matt Sievers	Malleas	fantsigns@gmail.com	167.8
17	New Ingazi (V)	Henry Jago	jago	jagoh@yahoo.com	159.3

Note: A correction to an error in the calculation of the Oratoan ISIs was applied this Turn.

---

*The Oratoa Annals* copyright ©2011 Thom Ryng. All rights reserved.  
Cruenti Dei, Oratoa, Sahùl, and all related properties are trademarks of Sardarthon Press.

---

