

# ORATOAN ANNALS

Turn 22

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556–560

*The world's history is a divine poem of which the history of every nation is a canto and every man a word. Its strains have been pealing along down the centuries. And though it has been mingled with the discords of warring and dying men, a divine melody runs through the song speaking of hope and halcyon days to come.*

—Prince Ihúhah of Pouákaitoa

**D**ever underestimate the time required to disentangle two major wars. I think we've set word-count records for both the Oratoan and Sahûl newsletters this Turn, and it's all thanks to these all-consuming wars. I wouldn't have it any other way, though I continue to be concerned about the turn-around time. Automation is coming, or so they tell me, and that will help.

Enjoy this Turn, and take a good long time chewing it over. There's a lot here, and the one thing I can guarantee you is that whatever nefarious plan you set into motion, it didn't turn out exactly as you hoped.

Schooners are abbreviated SO, regardless of what it might say in the rules.

## CURRENT PUBLICATIONS:

*Atlas of the World* – With maps of Sahûl, Oratoa, and the rest of the Known World updated to Turn 20. Includes other supplementary material, including an index of all regions.

*Cruenti Dei Oratoa Campaign Guide* – This campaign guide provides a look at the warm and sunny continent of Oratoa, a land steeped in mystery and deep in the embrace of an Heroic Age.

*Cruenti Dei Rules Supplement 1: Errata and Additions* – This supplement contains the corrected Movement system, plus many new options for your Realm. Free download or in paperback.

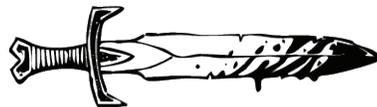
*Cruenti Dei Rules Supplement 2: Underlands* – This supplement details the Underlands, a series of vast caverns underneath eastern Sahûl. Free download or in paperback.

*Cruenti Dei Rules Supplement 3: Age of Discovery* – Expands the rules for NSR 10 and beyond. Paperback.

*The Chronicle, Volume I* – The compiled Sahûl Chronicle from Turns 0 through 10 inclusive, plus some other nifty bits. Available in both paperback and hardcover.

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*The Annals, Volume I* – The compiled Oratoan Annals up to Turn 20, plus some other bits. Available in both paperback and hardcover.



## SIGNS AND PORTENTS

A great comet appeared in the south in the winter months of 556. As it grew smaller in the very early spring of 557, as all comets eventually do, it suddenly and quite spectacularly silently exploded into fragments in the night sky. Men and Elves took this as another sign of the great war in the heavens, of which the wars on earth were merest shadows.

While the Midsummer Dragon meteor shower continued each year, several “shooting stars” even larger than the one of 548 lit up the skies. The first was in 557, just months after the death of the comet. A great fireball tore through Oratoa’s northern skies with a sound like a series of long thunderclaps before vanishing over the eastern horizon.

In the spring of 559, a similar, though perhaps smaller, fireball south of Oratoa tore eastward in a line from Chi’tixi, over Atuburrk, and out to the Azure Ocean, frightening cattle and causing wonderment in those who saw it. Several hours later, the great wave came ashore in New Ingazi, New Araxes, and southern Pakoa. The Church of the Red Death proclaimed it “the beginning of



divine retribution on those who have made war on the Gods.”

The third meteor was not seen in Oratoa, but crashed to earth in distant Sahûl, to the delight of the Red Death.

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## the utmost west

AND THE ENDING ISLES

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### TÁKIWAT OF WHUTOA (15 H/HM)

*Takríki Haki VIII, Rangatira Nuatam, Roríki of Kuatoa and Kúre, Maŕter of the Isles.*

**Trade:** DEM, Gúako, Rotkarru

**DP:** None.

Whutoa was beset with diplomats and envoys on all sides, from the Dread Empire urging unity and war, and from the other Tarotist Realms in the north, urging renunciation of the Dread Empire and its programme of eternal war. Takríki Haki VIII returned to Hedgecape in the autumn of 556 to find a scarlet envelope awaiting him.

He read the contents with horror, now finally convinced that his nobles had been correct all along in their distrust of the Dread Empire. He announced that the Emperor himself had broken the terms of the Secret Treaty, and as such Whutoa was no longer bound by ties of oath or fealty.

The venerable Admiral Toángen, however, who burned with hatred for the Southlanders, would not let this stand. In defiance of his master, he sailed the *Holy Tamkuára Armada* to war. Its home port of Moonsea and the surrounding hinterlands of Kungi joined the Dread Empire outright.

News of Whutoa’s withdrawal was slow to reach the Southlanders, who invaded the volcanic island of Kitwhu and conquered and converted the cannibals there.

Whutoa’s government expanded.

## KINGDOM OF GÚAKO (27 H/HM)

*His Serene Majesty, King Róngo VIII, the Fair, Rangatira Wangri, Takríki of Darkford, and Órieki of all Gúako. Takríki Ihaía of Woangnen.*

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

**Trade:** Rotkarru, Whutoa

**DP:** None.

úako's weak-willed King Róngo VII dithered while his increasingly acrimonious nobles hardened into noisy pro- and anti-Imperial factions. The overwhelming majority of the Gúakoan people remained firmly against the Dread Emperor and his Empire.

Matters came to a head with the simultaneous arrival of a delegation from the Takríki of Woangnen to the east and a scarlet envelope from the Dread Emperor. The Woangnen delegation, led by the Takríki's son Ihaía, had come with an offer to pledge fealty to the King in exchange for help in their war with Kéatoa. Apparently, Takríki Amíri had given up on receiving any Imperial help to fight the invading Urdans, and indeed had given up on the Dread Empire completely.

The scarlet envelope contained a summons from the Dread Emperor: the King's son and heir was to come to Ebonhill and pledge Gúako's undying fealty to the Dread Emperor and his successors. Once accomplished, the King himself was ordered to abdicate.

King Róngo, the very epitome of indecision, was now being forced to decide once and for all the fate of his Kingdom. After more than a year of increasingly shrill debate, the King succumbed to the pressure of the pro-Imperial nobles. He ordered his son Prince Róngo (called "the fair") to board a ship, while the Woangnen delegates were to be arrested for treason against the Matariki.

What happened next changed the trajectory of the Kingdom's history forever. Prince Róngo the Fair simply refused to go. He was himself firmly in the anti-Imperial camp, and his circle included powerful nobles, as well as the charismatic Ihaía,

leader of the Woangnen delegation. Though barely of age, the Prince staged a midnight coup and captured the throne, taking his father prisoner. He was supported by some of the most powerful nobles of the Realm, pivotally including Takríki Hataréi of Wihri.

Arrayed against the new Boy King were a handful of the oldest Gúakoan families, including the Takríki of Rehúa and Tuámmo, not to mention Kiriáre the Sinister, Grand Master of the Order of the Serpent's Blood, who remained loyal to the Dread Emperor.

Open fighting broke out in the capital of Darkford, as vast armies of the opposing sides prepared to engage the other. The Boy King asked for a parley with the powerful Grand Master and the rebel Takríki. They acquiesced, provided that the Old King would also attend the meeting.

They met at the jousting grounds just outside the city, each man with but one companion<sup>1</sup>. The Boy King proved himself extremely well-spoken. After the customary greetings, he turned to the Grand Master and simply said, "draw your sword, Lord Kiriáre, and look upon the pommel. Tell me who you serve. Is it the wraith in Ebonhill, or the King of Gúako?"

Grand Master Kiriáre did as he was bid, and he gazed upon the razor-sharp magic blade known as the *Sword of Gúako*.

Young King Róngo continued. "This sword, the sword which my father gave you to bear, has been in my house since the foundation of the Kingdom. It has been bourne by my ancestors from the first King Wewhin down to the reign of my father. He gave it away, much as he intended to give away his kingdom."

Kiriáre the Sinister looked up in surprise from the sword to young Róngo. "Do you wish for its return? The sword was a gift from the King."

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<sup>1</sup> For those keeping track, the Boy King Róngo the Fair had a single companion (Takríki Hataréi of Wihri), while those arrayed against him numbered seven, including his father, King Róngo the Weak.

“I am now the King, and the duty of the King is to his Kingdom and his people. I intend to defend them both to my death. This is the meaning of kingship, not subservience to a ghost, whispering lies. I ask only the loan of the sword, the sword carried into battle by generations of my ancestors. I challenge here and now any who would deliver my crown and Kingdom into the hands of the Dread Emperor.”

Kiriáre hesitated a moment, and then looked into the face of the old King. He saw fear in his eyes. He looked to the bold boy in front of him – a boy of scarcely seventeen summers – and he saw defiance, and something else. Assurance? Courage?

Kiriáre dropped to one knee and offered the hilt of the sword to the young king. The others gasped.

Róngo took the sword, and with his other arm he pulled Kiriáre to his feet. He said, “who’s first?”

The Takríki of Rehúa shook his head. “Nay, sire. We shall choose a champion. I will abide by the will of the Gods in this matter.”

“Very well. Are you all agreed?”

The supporters of the old King and the Red Death hesitated, then all nodded their heads.

“Very well. Who is your champion?”

The mighty General Ongi stepped forward. His shoulders were nearly as broad as Róngo was tall, and at his side hung a broadsword the size of a maul.

The young Róngo nodded once, and the loyal Takríki Hataréi immediately asked, “Majesty, may I have the honour of being your squire?”

The Boy King smiled at the grey-haired Hataréi. “You may, and your sons in turn until the end of the world.”

The opponents withdrew to don their mail and breastplates. When they returned to the field, General Ongi formally challenged Young King Róngo. He towered over the slight boy, his tattooed face worked into a grimace. He beat his mailed fist once against his breastplate and shouted, “I am Ongi, son of Ongi, Takríki of Tuámmo, Knight of the Red Death, and General of the Dread Emperor. I shall slay you, prince, and crows will pick your bones clean before the sunrise!”

Róngo took a step. It was his turn. He slapped the *Sword of Gúako* against his breastplate to a shower of blue sparks, and in a measured, almost quiet voice, said “I am Róngo son of Róngo son of Rúru, King of Gúako. I am the coming storm, the storm that rumbles, the storm that breaks and sweeps all before it. The Fates rocked my cradle, and I will end you.”

In one fluid motion, Ongi drew his blade and slashed towards Róngo, but the boy had already leapt straight up, and Ongi’s mighty sword cut only air. Róngo landed like a cat and dropped into a crouching position. With a grunt, the big man again swung at the boy, but he danced away. Again and again Ongi swung his heavy sword at the boy, and each time Róngo easily dodged the blow.

The big man mocked him, “run away, boy” he sneered. “Your family always has run away from the very beginning.”

Róngo laughed, easily and loud.

This reaction caught Ongi off-guard, and he hesitated.

It was enough; Róngo leapt lightly into the air and stabbed him in his face, the magic blade sinking in almost to the hilt. The mighty Ongi was dead before his body crashed into the ground.

True to their oath, the others dropped to their knees to offer the Boy King their homage. After only a moment’s hesitation, his father did likewise.

The King repudiated the Church of the Red Death and declared its members within Gúako to be outlaw. It was not all smooth sailing, however. Tuámmo rebelled, as did the Red Death dominated regions of Tekowha and Mekawhéni, both of which immediately joined the Dread Empire.

The people of Tiránu, by way of contrast, turned the Red Death priests out of the Priory of Tapaháutu and installed stout followers of the Hanged Man in their stead.

Only now could the King, secure upon his throne, deal with the delegation from Woangnen.



The King held court in the Great Hall of Darkford. It was, perhaps, a scene unprecedented in western Oratoa. Among the foreign dignitaries present were a Saurian from Zarkhandu, the Ice-Admiral Ardelbec of Hothrun-Dath. The city being, as it was, perhaps 700 miles from the equator, it made quite a nice change for the Admiral.

Prince Ihaía of Woangnen approached the throne of Gúako. He fell to one knee in homage and declared his fealty to the King of Gúako, “for only in unity can the peoples of Oratoa’s north resist the depredations of both the Southlanders and also the Red Death. Only in unity can we preserve our Oratoan liberties.”

The King accepted his homage and declared that he would send the Gúakoan fleet to the aid of “my loyal vassal of Woangnen.”

#### TÁKIWAT OF RANGKUA

**L**ike his brother monarchs of the Dread Empire, Takríki Ikaróto the Devout received a scarlet envelope from his master. Unlike the missive sent to some of the other realms, however, he was not told to abdicate.

In 556, Ikaróto took the blood oath, pledging for himself and his heirs undying fealty and obedience to the Dread Empire. The reaction in his realm was decidedly mixed. Tihéngti and Whemtoa immediately rebelled, and the Rakau of Wuátta wasted no time in repudiating his alliance.

The following year, the Takríki was crushed to learn of the death of his young son at Ebonhill. Ikaróto named as heir his only living male relative, his nephew Iháka.

#### TÁKIWAT OF ROTKARRU (13 H/RD)

*Takríki Matíu IV, Rangatira Mokteraka, Roríki of Rotkoa, Tongiki of the Island of Rotkarru.*

**Trade:** DEM, Gúako, Whutoa

**DP:** None.

**L**ike his brother monarchs of the Dread Empire, Takríki Matíu received a scarlet envelope. While some rulers

hastened to obey the summons, and some rulers angrily denounced them, Matíu simply pretended he’d never read it.

Instead, he sacrificed to the Hidden Lords and rebuilt Rotkarru’s capital of Jollyport to something approaching its glory days, including some shiny new walls. Many defensive works were built in the Elvish lands.

Young Prince Matíu, having gathered the continental holy troops, joined up with the rest of the army and marched south into battle against An-calimë. On the home island, however, things were not nearly so rosy. More than 25,000 Crusaders, itching for a fight, seized the fleet in Rotkoa.

Infantry quality improved and the government expanded.

#### DREAD EMPIRE OF THE MATARIKI (36 H/RD)

*Dread Amokapua, Emperor of the Great and Terrible Empire of the Matariki Tongiki, Bringer of Dark Chaos, Takríki of Hiktino, King of Holy Tongi, Sovereign Master of Oratóa.*

*Tawhiri IV, Atíri-Moámwhi of the Church of the Red Death, Speaker to the Gods.*

*Prince Vartherion the Proud, Master of the Stoneguard. Lord Admiral Toángen, Shark of Moonsea, Master of the Holy Tamkuára Armada.*

*Queen Réka of the Eašt, Regent of the Marque.*

**Trade:** Rotkarru, Whutoa

**DP:** Amlych (A), and see below.

**A**s it turned out, the Great Magic completed in the cavernous throne room at Ebonhill was but a portion of the Dread Emperor’s master plan. In the midst of the war, the Dread Emperor sent scarlet envelopes to the rulers of each of the seven nations of his empire. Within them were a summons and a command, and the true nature of the Dread Empire was perhaps at last revealed.

## HOLY KINGDOM OF TONGI

**R**ing Amokapua received a scarlet envelope from his master, the Dread Emperor Taasyntyä. In fear and obedience, he quickly dispatched his second son and heir Prince Amokapua to Ebonhill. Then he gathered his armies and marched to war against the Southlanders, reveling in what he called the “re-establishment of the Tongikan Empire”. He might be a King, but his son would be an Emperor.

Meanwhile, Prince Oángo returned to High-court. Prince Oángo is the King’s oldest son, passed over in the succession in favour of his younger brother Prince Amokapua. He attempted to rally the anti-Imperial nobles under his banner, to “restore the honour and independence of Tongi.”

For a few months in early 560, it seemed as though he might succeed. But unfortunately for him two Tongi lords charged with gathering the remaining scattered Crusaders arrived in the city in the summer. Even though the Prince had the loyalty of the rump army left in the city, against him stood 60,000 holy troops.

The lords were indecisive, but their minds were made up for them by the arrival of the Prince’s mother, Queen Airíni, who ordered them to attack “the traitorous Oángo, now no son of mine.”

The battle was brief, and Prince Oángo and his men were slaughtered. Queen Airíni did not mourn her eldest son, for her second son now ruled in Ebonhill, her ancestral home<sup>2</sup>. In fact, she ordered that Oángo’s head be preserved in wax and put on a pike at the city’s gate, “as a warning to traitors for a hundred generations”.

## TÁKIWAT OF ROÁTRU

**E**rutíri, long the Takríki of Roátru, prepared to launch his armies into “the rotting hulk of Ancalimë”. Instead, he received a scarlet envelope from the Dread Emper-

<sup>2</sup> Queen Airíni is the daughter of the last ruling Takríki of Hiktino, Maráma III. She very publicly revels in the fact that her second son Amokapua now rules from Hiktino’s old capital.

or summoning Crown Prince Arána to Ebonhill and demanding the full integration of Roátru into the Dread Empire.

These were words that Erutíri had long anticipated and which he had eagerly awaited. With no hesitation, he gave the orders. One of his vassals, however, did not agree; Ihípa II of Óama immediately renounced his allegiance<sup>3</sup>. This turned out to be an issue, because Ihípa and his army were stationed in Ancalimë.

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## CENTRAL ORAŌÓA

### BETWEEN DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

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#### THE GREAT WAR (531 – 560)

*Ancalimë vs. the Dread Empire & Rotkarru*

*The Dread Empire & Rotkarru vs. the Empire of Sabúl*

*The Empire of Sabúl vs. Pouákaitoa*

*556: Ancalimë: Rebellion and Reconquest*

**W**hile various rebellions convulsed the Dread Empire, the renunciation of Takríki Ihípa II of Weatherrill was perhaps the most immediately grave. He commanded 14,000 men of the garrison in Ancalimë, while another 21,000 men there were under the command of the Roátruan garrison commander, Sir Puríki, and the allied Takríki of Werri. More than a hundred stone golems stood immobile around the still impressive walls of Arthdthurin. Ihípa’s intention was to withdraw his forces and march overland, home to Óama. Sir Puríki, however, was a true believer, and he refused to allow them to leave. They would fulfill their duty and their oath, or he would lay them into the ground.

Battle was joined on a hot midsummer’s day.

<sup>3</sup> Technically, Ihípa’s title is “Takríki of Weatherrill”, but his dominion extends throughout Óama. The people of the region have a strong anti-clerical streak – Ihípa’s father famously said he’d “sooner swear fealty to a tui-bird than a priest.”

*Ancalimë: Battle of Midsummer's Day (556)*

**T**he Óamans under Takríki Ihípa II of Weatherrill numbered 12,000 men, mostly infantry, but with a number of cavalry and longbow. By contrast, Sir Puríki (along with the allied Takríki of Werri) commanded 11,000 infantry, as well as Roátru's impressive siege train of 10,000 engineers. More importantly, he had 120 stone warriors at his disposal, and these he used to screen his archers, defending them against the Óaman cavalry.

Despite Ihípa's genius, he could not overcome the sheer brutal strength of the stone golems. They smashed most of his men, though they fought fiercely, killing perhaps 5,000 Roátruans.

In the end, Ihípa managed to flee the field with perhaps a third of his men, melting into the forests in an attempt to reach his far-off homeland.

Sir Puríki's victory was, however, short lived. For in the autumn, the full weight of the Elvish army was upon him, led by King Calmalas and sworn to liberate their homeland.

*Ancalimë: the Return of Calmalas (556)*

**K**ing Calmalas was joined by his great captains: Lord Falassion and Lady Lessien, and above all the hero Whéru Rawringe astride his fire-drake Uánne. They led a magnificent, well-disciplined Elven host of 13,000 pike and 28,000 archers. Against this great host, Sir Puríki marshalled his forces: 9,000 engineers, 5,000 mixed infantry and archers, and 120 massive stone warriors.

The Turéhu began their attack with Lady Lessien, who let loose a bolt from the fabled *Lightning Bow* that instantly shattered fully fifty of the stone warriors and caused untold panic in the Human army. This, they followed by a volley of arrows that darkened the sky. Only then did the trumpeters call the charge. King Calmalas led them, resplendent with his magic shield and the *Sword of Valas*, flashing with a red light the colour of fresh blood. On his

left flank was the grey-haired Whéru Rawringe atop his screaming fire-drake, and on his right was Lady Lessien with the *Lightning Bow*.

Despite the best efforts of the storied Sir Puríki, the Roátru warriors broke in panic and fled the field. Sir Puríki, the remaining stone warriors, and a handful of archers made a valiant last stand near the banks of a small creek, but they were killed to the last.

The Turéhu spent a few weeks hunting down and killing the remaining Human warriors before turning their attention to Maúke Priory. This bastion of the Red Death was captured and burnt to the ground. There were no survivors.

King Calmalas led his victorious army to their ancient capital of Arthdhurin, which surrendered to him without a single arrow loosed.



More than 25,000 Red Death Crusaders, itching for a fight, seized the Rotkarru fleet in Rotkoa. The Rotkarru army, outnumbered and largely in sympathy with the aims of the Crusaders, could not or would not prevent them. The fleet sailed into the Túawhenua, where they met the Averese fleet on blockade duty.

Admiral Milski had graduated from the Delin Naval Academy with highest honours twenty years previous, and since then his reputation as a navy man has only grown. Amongst the Southlander Admirals, he was widely considered the best that Sahûl had to offer. He led 150 galleons, 45 warships, and 130 auxiliaries against the Crusader fleet of 200 outriggers. The outcome was never really in doubt. A short, sharp engagement sent more than 150 Crusader ships to the bottom, with a loss of only 25 Averese transports. The Crusaders attempted to flee into the gathering night, but Admiral Milski anticipated their movements, and dawn found the 45 Crusaders ships with perhaps double that number of Averese galleons bearing hard upon them.

The Crusader commander ordered his fleet to turn directly before the wind, essentially putting them at a ninety degree angle to the Averese. Had

it been executed well, the manoeuver might very well have caught the Southlanders by surprise long enough for the Crusader fleet to rake them and possibly get away in the confusion.

Alas! The incompetence of the Crusader commander was telling. The Crusader ships were too close together for such a precise manoeuver, and dozens of them quickly tangled up together. In seemingly no time at all, the Averese were upon them. The Crusaders fought like wild beasts, and in several cases they even managed a spectacular kura cavalry charge across the decks of the entangled ships. In the end, they could not stand up against the hard discipline of the Averese Navy and the skill of their Admiral. None of the Crusaders survived.



The Southlanders maintained their ineffective siege of the Dread Empire's capital, the Holy City of Ebonhill, though it seemed as though they were simply stalling for time. Fleets continued to land troops from Averon and Itaxik, adding to the gathering force. The defenders, meanwhile, eventually grew tired of throwing rotting vegetables and meat at their besiegers and went back to that good old standby: rocks.

Rumours spread through the Sahûlian lines of persons, perhaps a great many of them, entering the Undercity through hidden and secret passages. The Itaxian cavalry tasked with putting an end to this and finding these passages failed to make any real headway.

Within the city walls strange events were noted by the citizens. Swirls of red mist lazily unfolded throughout the city during the nights, as more and more of the Emperor's spectral soldiers patrolled the streets. A sudden (but brief) pillar of fire in the dead of a winter's night convinced many that Ahi Túpua<sup>4</sup> was returning. With the aid of sorcerers from Holy Tongi, Rangkua, and Roátru, stone

<sup>4</sup> Literally translated, the phrase means "fire demon", and seems to refer to a servitor of the Celestial Lords, probably an Efreet.

warriors grew from the Undercity, and rumours spread of things more shuddersome still.

The Dread Emperor himself, meanwhile, had faded to a spectral shadow of his former self, almost invisible in moonlight but still relatively solid during the day when required. On Midwinter's Day, he gathered his leadership corps and other notables from throughout the Empire together in the Chamber of the Crimson Throne and spoke to them. What he said, none reported, but when they left their faces were pale, and many of them were trembling. At least one of them, a visiting Rang-kuan noble, lay dead on the chamber floor.

Following the meeting, the Takríki of Mewhu, a visiting Whutoan ally, returned immediately to his fleet at harbour. He refused thereafter to leave his flagship, and he cancelled all shore leaves, strictly ordering that no communications take place with those on shore. He ordered his twenty ships into the middle of the sheltered bay while he tried to figure out some way of running the Southlander blockade.

The besieging Averese attempted to "soften up" the walls of Ebonhill by means of a pair of lightning bolts. The sorcerer, a battlemage named Moop, was unprepared for what happened next. The bolts reflected harmlessly off the walls and bounced right back to the Averese lines! Moop's command lost 7,000 soldiers and Moop himself lost his life.



In Orofer's Iägnarist occupied homeland of Ciúra, the Southlander siege of the Iluvarian capital of Mírchand finally got properly under way.

### *The Siege of Mírchand Begins (556)*

hi'tixi's Lady Tchazzix<sup>5</sup> led her 500 stone warriors and 36,000 Malebolge marines to the walls of Mírchand. The defense of the city was led by Corualadh Half-Elven himself, assisted by the Pouákaitoan shieldmaiden

<sup>5</sup> Deputy Warden of the North.

Hinwáhi Ngu<sup>6</sup> and the young Human Lord Garn. The defenders mustered 4,500 engineers and an additional 30,000 warriors<sup>7</sup>, mostly from Pouákaitoa.

The air crackled with battlemagic cast by both sides, and other sorcery as well: 150 of the stone golems collapsed into rubble. Still, the Iägnarists grimly advanced and laid siege to the mighty walls. In those first months, the Chi'tixi marines took horrendous casualties; scarcely 2,000 survived by spring's end.

A Taneki equerry known only as the Witch of Uetzi arrived with 200 warships in the summer to aid the Southlander siege. Sadly, no additional troops disembarked from the great fleet.

About the same time, however, an Orofer army arrived from the south to try to break the siege. These 9,000 warriors were led by Prince Aragroth, son of Corualadh Half-Elven. Two fire-bolts from the Southlander witch, however, quickly obliterated 7,000 of them.

As the siege continued into the autumn, the Southlander casualties mounted. The remaining marines lost their lives, and some hundred stone warriors fell to rubble. The defenders, too, were hard-pressed. Almost half of Orofer's engineers were dead, and their Pouákaitoan allies were down to 16,000 men.

The most terrible death, however was that of Corualadh Half-Elven, Takríki of Orofer and Warden of the Mark, at the age of 181. He fell defending the wall, smashed by the mighty hand of a stone warrior. A great wailing went up from the city at the news, and morale plummeted. Food supplies were already running low, and the common people openly discussed surrender.

Their captains, however, remained resolute.



On the conquered Tarotist isle of Pawhi, Prince Basodir of Thace issued a document in the form of

<sup>6</sup> Beautiful, smart, and deadly, even now into her sixties, Hinwáhi is the queen of monster-slaying. She wears armour fashioned from dragon-hide.

<sup>7</sup> To include both *the Prince's Own Bowmen* and *the Chosen*, Hinwáhi's personal guard.

a plea, which has come to be known as *the Liberties of Pawhi*. In it, the Prince laid out a governing philosophy in which Tarotists could become allies of Urdan Thace. Tarotism was not his enemy, he said, only fundamentalism.

The Takríki of Pawhi consulted with his kinsmen for advice on how to proceed.



The Thacian and Carcë forces in Nóak boarded their ships and left the region, which immediately rebelled and rejoined the Dread Empire.



Many Iluvarian peasant crusaders settled down in Avæth, constructing the town of Port Angel.

*557: Ebonhill, Ondír, and Mirchand*

An envoy from the besieged city of Ebonhill left the city under a flag of truce, ostensibly to discuss terms. The Dread Empire's envoy, Lord Kaihaútu, insisted that honour demanded that he would only speak with a Tarotist. Under careful guard, he was ushered in to parley with the leader of the Tokatl forces on the ground in Hiktino, the indomitable equerry Uchika.

Both sides carefully observed the niceties of parley, despite the fears of some in the Sahúlian camp. Lord Kaihaútu came with exquisite gifts of worked gold and gems, as well as a copy of Red Death holy writ, meticulously translated into both Byrrin and West Sardic – the only Southlander languages known on the Tongikan coast.

Rather than discuss the terms of Ebonhill's surrender, however, Lord Kaihaútu was much more interested in persuading Dame Uchika that it was her duty to join her fellow Tarotists in the Dread Empire and drive the infidel from Oratoa's shores. The conversation did not go well. Dame Uchika was, of course, an equerry and therefore utterly loyal to her Mistress of Tokatl. Even the religious argument failed to make any headway, as Dame

Uchika could see little resemblance between the formal (but whimsical) Tarotism of her youth and the stern, apocalyptic words of the Red Death. Eventually, with polite bows and measured words, Dame Uchika sent Lord Kaihaútu back to Ebonhill, his mission a failure.

After years of careful preparation, manoeuver, and feint in the long siege, in the summer of 557, the Southlander assault of the Dread Empire's capital of Ebonhill began at last.

### *The Assault of Ebonhill (557)*

outhlander infantry and, rather surprisingly, *cavalry* carefully moved into new positions. They weren't the only ones, for assassins moved amongst the Southlander leadership corps. The first to die was Averon's ally, the handsome young Lord Larrimar of Episma, who had command of 10,000 Episman knights and cavalry. He was brutally stabbed in his sleep. His assassin did not get cleanly away, however, as Aversese guards chased him through the camp and eventually ran him down and killed him.

By way of contrast, when her servants came to wake her, Dame Uchika of Tokatl was found laying in her bed, missing her head. Of the assassin there was no sign, unless the swirling glyph carved into her carapace was meant to be a signature.

The confusion in the Southlander ranks was understandable, but a strong leader quickly emerged in the person of Itaxik's Commodore Chac'tia. She had a keen mind for strategy and tactics, and was a student of Yix's *The Art of War*, of which she owned the original manuscript. She revised the assault plan and was soon acknowledged by the Aversese and Tokatl field commanders as the Commanding Officer, Imperial Forces (COIF)<sup>8</sup>.

The forces at her disposal were less than optimal for the assault of the city walls of Ebonhill. The Southlanders had 15,000 infantry, 15,000 pike,

<sup>8</sup> A title predictably proposed by the remaining Tokatl field commander, the rather infamous Lady Karzax. She nevertheless placed herself and her troops under the command of Averon's Admiral Lord Trameides of Tramades.

9,000 Tokatl marines, and 31,000 mixed cavalry<sup>9</sup>. There was not a single engineer or artillery battery in the entire army. Nevertheless, Chac'tia ordered the attack in the early morning hours of the 5th of Quadrilis on the Sahúlian calendar.

The stout stone walls of Ebonhill rose thirty feet above the Hiktino coast, and they were guarded by 7,500 shadowy swordsmen, and a hundred stone warriors. The defense had been entrusted to a triumvirate of the Dread Empire's best: the indomitable General Maráma, aided by Prince Amokapua of Holy Tongi and Prince Iháka of Rangkoa, not to mention a cadre of additional wizards and warriors from all over the Dread Empire.

They began their defense by launching three lightning bolts into the attacking Southlanders. Apparently, the augmented force now had some wards up, because they harmlessly fizzled out. It was then the attackers heard a rhythmic chanting from inside the city, a thousand voices chanting: "Ahi Túpua! Ahi Túpua! Ahi Túpua!"<sup>10</sup>

Suddenly, an enormous blazing creature appeared upon the walls and roared at the Southlanders. As the attackers understandably paused in terror, it flung a fire bolt at them. This, the wards did not stop. Its full force hit the attackers, immolating much of the front rank and instantly killing 3,500 Tokatl marines and pikemen.

And then, the Southlanders were at the walls, and their mighty battlemagics exploded among the defenders. Though the defenders had much less in the way of pyrotechnics, a scattering of artifacts pretty well evened the magical odds.

Tokatl's marines fought tirelessly, and through sheer ferocity and iron discipline in the charge did tremendous damage to the walls while taking heavy casualties. While most attempts to swarm up the siege ladders predictably failed, a small number did succeed. Soon, while most of the Sahúlian forces were providing cover or distraction, the Tokatl marines were atop the walls, fighting hand-to-hand against the Dread Emperor's own shadowy infan-

<sup>9</sup> Not including another 16,000 Itaxik cavalry held in reserve.

<sup>10</sup> Literally translated, the phrase means "fire demon".

try. While they slaughtered the shades, casualties among the marines were surprisingly light – until Ahi Túpua joined the fray. The marine captain immediately recognized it as an Efreet. Knowing now the odds, the marines nevertheless fought and died atop the wall until the trumpeters called retreat. Of the 7,000 marines that charged the walls that day, only 2,000 arrived at the redoubt that served as a rally point outside the city’s western gate.

Averon’s infantry also took heavy casualties, having been virtually wiped out by an encounter with the Dread Empire’s stone warriors. Cavalry casualties were predictably horrific.

The defenders lost their entire company of shades, as well as two of their leadership corps: the incomparable General Maráma and the erstwhile envoy Lord Kaihaútu were both among the dead atop the walls. Command of the city’s defenses were turned over to Prince Amokapua of Holy Tongi, though the Dread Emperor himself resolved to personally oversee the defense of the western sector and destroy those “blaspheming” Tokatl marines.

The next day at dawn, the second assault began. Again, the marines were able to gain the wall, this time reinforced by a contingent of Tokatl pikemen and Itaxian infantry. The fury of the Dread Emperor was terrible to behold, and the wraith led his stone warriors with intent to crush the attackers.

Crush them they did, inflicting grievous casualties and driving the retreating survivors back to their ladders in desperation. The Sahúlian supreme commander, Chac’tia, rallied the attackers. They reformed ranks and stood their ground. Slowly, it seemed that the tide would turn, when suddenly the Dread Emperor Taasyntyä *appeared* amongst the Sahúlians, directly behind Chac’tia. The Itaxik commander screamed as the Dread Emperor’s blade sunk deeply into her back. Suddenly, the Sahúlian battlemagic ceased, and a great cry went up among their host.

The anguish was short-lived, however, as Chac’tia was avenged by, of all people, the Lady Karzax of Tokatl. With a single slice of her blade, she cut cleanly through the ghostly form of the Dread Em-

peror. Her sword shattered sparkling into shards, and his crown fell to the flagstones with a clang. Pierced with a multitude of shards, Karzax fell forward upon her foe.

But the Dread Emperor’s cloak and hauberk were empty, and his angry cry went up into the shuddering air, and faded to a shrill wailing before it was lost on the wind<sup>11</sup>.

Confusion followed, as the bellowing stone warriors renewed their attack, and the leaderless Southlanders retreated before them in a desperate attempt to reach the ladders, or else run down the broken walls with their piles of rubble and so save themselves. Few succeeded; the surviving pikemen carried the wounded Lady Karzax back to camp. Atop the wall, Prince Amokapua of Holy Tongi took up the Dread Emperor’s crown.

#### *Interlude: the Logic of Empire*

With the death of the Dread Emperor Taasyntyä atop the walls of Ebonhill, his Empire so recently united stood in grave danger of flying apart. By now, news had spread that the rulers of Holy Tongi and Roátru had abdicated in favour of their heirs, both of whom were at Ebonhill. Also there were the Prince of Rangkua and the representatives of the Blood Dragons, who had assured all that the surviving members of their ruling house were on their way to Ebonhill to personally pledge their fealty.

The Council of Lords was held in the Chamber of the Crimson Throne. The newly proclaimed King Amokapua II of Holy Tongi, still clutching the dead Emperor’s crown, called the meeting to order from a wooden chair at the foot of the empty Crimson Throne.

“We have but little time, Lords of Empire. The enemy at our gates shall surely strike again at the dawn. We meet not only to mourn our countless dead, including our Dread Emperor who began the work of forging us into one, but also to choose who is to continue that work – or indeed if the

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<sup>11</sup> With all due apologies to the Professor.



*Amokapua*

work is to continue at all. Dread Taasyntyä of holy memory forged a throne to defend Oratoa against those who would forge for us only chains. Brothers, we cannot allow that throne to remain empty. We cannot scatter to the winds, for we cannot survive alone. A single arrow may be easily broken, brothers, but not so a bundle of arrows. Holy Tongi has spoken: we know not the minds of others, but ours is resolved for empire.”

The young Prince Iháka of Rangkua leapt to his feet and shouted, “Empire!”

He was quickly followed by the others in the Chamber. There was no dissent, no lack of enthusiasm. Their bonds had been forged in war, and they were unshakable. All were on their feet, shouting, “Empire! Empire!”

And then Matrú stood. Once an Urdan disciple of the Prophet Arári the Blind, he had become the primary Tarotist interpreter of the Prophet’s writings. He was, in a sense, the spiritual founder of the Marque of the Blood Dragon. He stood, but rather

than joining his brothers in their acclamation, he shouted, “Amokapua and empire!”

A momentary silence descended as his words echoed through the candle-lit Throne Chamber. Again he shouted “Amokapua and empire!”

This time, his shout was taken up by the others in the Chamber, first a few, and then thunderously by them all.

“Amokapua and empire! Amokapua and empire!”

With that, King Amokapua II of Holy Tongi walked up the dais steps and sat upon the Crimson Throne. Smiling amid the accolades, he placed Dread Taasyntyä’s ancient magical crown upon his own brow.

### *Ebonhill: the Final Assault*

In the cold light of day, the remaining senior commanders of the Sahúlian Expeditionary Force surveyed their battered forces. There remained but 2,500 Averese knights and another 6,000 Averese horsemen, 11,000 Tokatl pike, 8,500 Tokatl cavalry, and the reserve force of 16,000 Itaxik cavalry. The army was now led by Averon’s Admiral Lord Trameides of Tramades. The battlemagic was gone, though the wards held firm.

The walls of Ebonhill were mostly ruins, with just enough left standing to provide cover for the stone warriors holed up inside the city. The troops were restive and morale was low. The old Admiral, just past his 69th birthday, addressed the troops.

“The Dread Emperor is dead! We have suffered much, but the enemy has suffered far worse. Their Empire is a fragile thing. The death of their wraithking was the first crack, and a hammerblow will shatter them. Soldiers of Sahúl! Let us press this advantage, and give them such a hammerblow as the troubadours will sing a thousand years!”

And again, the armies of Sahúl came at the tumbled walls of Ebonhill. They scarcely needed ladders now, and the cavalry captains were confident – perhaps overconfident – that they would be charging through the city itself by lunchtime.

But the city was not undefended. As the Southlanders charged, they saw the banners of the Dread Emperor unfurl from points all around the city, many with a new cipher hastily stitched at the canton of the flag: the name *Amokapua*. As a military commander, the new Dread Emperor easily overmatched the Sahûlian admiral, and the addition of several other competent commanders made up for the superiority of Sahûlian weapons and discipline.

The stone warriors of Ebonhill and the fearsome Ahi Túpua laid waste to the attacking Southlanders. By mid-day, they had retreated in confusion. The old admiral was dead, as were another 10,000 Sahûlian soldiers.

With their forces in disarray and their senior leadership all dead or wounded, the Sahûlian captains withdrew their forces to their barracks. For now, the assault was over.

Within the city, however, there was little sense of victory. The walls were breached in numerous places, the army was in shambles, and the brilliant and beloved Prince Iháka of Rangkoa, little more than a boy, lay dead at the walls.



Gúako withdrew from the war. They also withdrew their garrison force from Mekawhéní, causing it to rebel from the Dread Empire. This was fine with the Gúakoans, as they had really had enough of this whole “Dread Emperor” business. Unfortunately, their fleet had very little in the way of options of where they might go, given the raging storms of the Mutúinga Kóre and the presence of large, potentially unfriendly fleets throughout the rest of Oratoa’s coastal waters. What the commander ultimately decided to do is anybody’s guess.



The Turéhu army in Ancalimë split up. A considerable force, augmented it is said by the very trees themselves, remained in Arthdhurin, while a much larger force marched back into the forest.

Across the river in Telemnar, meanwhile, young Prince Galathand led a successful insurrection against the Atuburrk oppressors<sup>12</sup>.

In Awahi, it was much the same story, with an insurrection instigated by Ancalimë’s wizard Grímas. The rebels ran into a spot of bother, as the region was positively *crawling* with the undead. They were no match for Turéhu archers, however, even when commanded by a tactical turnip such as Grímas.

The zombie corpses were consigned to a bonfire built on the site where once stood the Urdan priory of Dolphalan<sup>13</sup>.



Far to the south, the Turéhu chieftain of the Thórodegelu in Amlych yielded to the entreaties of Princess Vanya of Roátru and allied himself with the Dread Empire.



On the Thornwood’s “Crusader Coast”, meanwhile, the minions of lāgnar himself took shape.

*The Woe of Ondír Begins (557)*

**I**luvarian Ondír was beset by the same sorts of horrors that inflicted the *Woe of Oánwhi* exactly ten years previously. The very shadows congealed into vaguely man-like shapes, horrid spectres made of the stuff of nightmare and darkness. They flew from village to village, slaying the Iluvarians man, woman, and child.

No one was safe.

It quickly became apparent that this was not an ordinary attack; the Shadows meant to kill every Iluvarian inhabitant of Ondír. The Iluvarians called upon their crusading armies to defend them, and the farmers and craftsmen themselves took up arms, beginning a desperate holding action until they could be delivered.

<sup>12</sup> Technically, Atuburrk had only forced the locals to pay tribute, but in any case, the region slipped from Atuburrk’s orbit.

<sup>13</sup> Destroyed in 534 following the CRD/Atuburrk victory over Ancalimë at the Battle of the Fires of Awahi.

Among the ranks of the far-off Pouákaitoan Crusaders, there was a rising level of concern and division. Despite the Iluvarian advance into Annedír (still very much a work in progress), Captain Ioráma found that he could take no more provocation. The Iluvarian settlers of Ondír must be protected! Some 16,000 Crusaders shared his view, and they turned around and rode with him to the east.



The Southlander siege of Orofer's capital of Mírchand took a tragic turn for the Iluvarians.

*The Siege of Mírchand – Iägnarist Reinforcements (557)*

**I**n the summer of 557, a Kommolek army under Captain Sir Tewak Terthynn arrived from the north to reinforce the Chi'tixi besiegers<sup>14</sup>. The morale of the people of Mírchand, already low, sunk further as they caught sight of 35,000 fresh Iägnarist infantry.

Any thought of surrender vanished, however, when the enemy approached the wall, for it was clear that these were Iägnar's unholy warriors, their skull-topped banners bearing the Eye and their rousing rendition of "Onward Iägnar's Soldiers" admitted no other possibility.

As far as the Chi'tixi were concerned, of course, it was more cannon fodder to screen their golems. The unholy Kommolek brought something else with them – the Shadows. For some weeks, they instilled fresh terror into the already frightened citizens. As it turned out, they were relatively ineffective and were soon vanquished in the general slaughter.

And slaughter it was: more than 16,000 Iägnarists died upon the unyielding walls. It was as nothing, however, to the 28,000 dead Iluvarians within the walls.

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<sup>14</sup> They left no garrison behind in Marruar, which immediately rebelled.

By winter, the walls still held, but the Iluvarians prayed for deliverance knowing full well that they could not hold out another year.



Prince Basodir of Thace turned the administration of Pawhi, as well as the garrison, over to Captain Vox'll Kat'kax, former Military Governor of Retorok. She continued the Thacian programme of befriending the locals, and even had the Takríki of Pawhi around for drinks a couple of times.

Prince and dragon vanished one afternoon.



Meanwhile in Téahiak, Thacian Governor-General Wundoris barely survived an arrow that somehow got lodged in his chest while he was out hunting with some friends.

New Ingazi's Viceroy (and airfleet commander) Besar Trandes<sup>15</sup> was not nearly so lucky. He vanished from his cabin aboard *HEAS Magnificent* one evening, and his body was not found until the next day, mangled almost beyond recognition in the fields outside of the town of Retorok.

He had apparently been thrown from his cabin window at some point during the night, whereupon he plummeted to the ground and an untimely death. The airfleet was immediately put on lockdown for the investigation but, the culprit had already fled.

Amidst the sorrow and confusion, Prince Basodir and the Dragon Róta popped in just long enough to attend the Viceroy's funeral, and then they headed east into the Mahoúro.

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<sup>15</sup> He is fondly remembered in eastern Oratoa as the larger-than-life captain of Ingazi's team at the *Timpalak* games of 532. While they didn't win a single event, usually coming in dead last, the Ingazi team more than held their own in the after-hours drinking. He also commanded the winning combined Ingazi / Pakoan team for the Grand Méléé at the games' conclusion.

**U**nnatural storms wracked the Mutúinga Kóre, and Admiral Toángen's *Holy Tamkuára Armada* sailed straight into the heart of the maelstrom. As they passed, the raging waters calmed, and the storms ceased around them. The Armada, untroubled by the now quieted tempest, continued sailing eastward.



With Whutoa's withdrawal from the Dread Empire, the Tongi garrison of Whangwhúatéwua seized the island for the Matariki.

In nearby Mekawhéni, meanwhile, the Urdan hill-tribes rose in revolt and deposed their Tarotist overlords, re-establishing the authority of their beloved Roríki who claims descent from Kátoro the Mariner. He reminded them of their history and traditions as a very proud, and a very Urdan, people. A small number of Malebolge have been sighted amongst his warriors; they have apparently been living up in the hills for several generations, the descendants of long-ago castaways.



Ancalimë's region of Dolost was invaded by 56,000 Rotkarru warriors. Led by Crown Prince Matíu and the shieldmaiden Ngaíre Whani, the force was evenly split between regular forces and Red Death holy warriors. They fully intended to extend Rotkarru's triumphant march across the lands of the Urdan Turéhu. To their surprise, they ran into a substantial army prepared to defend their land. The armies met near the town of Dúresgal.

#### *Battle of Dúresgal (558)*

**A**ncalimë's defenders, led by Lady Lessien and the hero Whéru Rawringe, had participated in the liberation of their capital just a few years before. They were determined to hold their ground before the infidel Human onslaught.

Rotkarru had 7,500 crusading knights, 6,000 holy warriors, 10,000 knights, 22,000 infantry and archers, and 12,000 enthusiastic peasants with really sharp farming implements. Against this, the Turéhu of Ancalimë fielded 13,000 pike, 24,000 archers, and the fire-drake Uánne.

Under a cloud of Elvish bow fire, the Rotkarru cavalry charged. Lady Lessien let loose a bolt from the fabled *Lightning Bow*, incinerating 2,500 crusading knights and their kura. A moment later, the charging Rotkarru met ten thousand pikes, and the slaughter began. The enthusiastic but undisciplined Humans were making a go of it, but the Turéhu fired arrow after arrow into their lines at an unbelievable rate, while the fire-drake Uánne swept over them, terrifying even the bravest.

The first to break were the Rotkarru levies, who were run down and slaughtered by the Elvish pike. Then the remaining kura riders fled the field, even as the Rotkarru Prince desperately tried to rally them.

The remaining Human infantry were on the defensive, anchored by the shieldmaiden Ngaíre Whani. Though these days she was more a crone than a maiden, she still laughed with a fierce joy as she fought. It completely unnerved her Elvish opponents. She was repeatedly wounded in the fight, but none seemed to slow her down.

As the tide of the battle shifted against her, she found herself face to face with a similarly aged hero, Whéru Rawringe, astride his mighty fire-drake. The two greying heros sized each other up for a moment, and then each fell upon the other in vicious attack. Both wielded swords, but in her off hand, Ngaíre Whani held a buckler while Whéru Rawringe clutched the feared *Wyrms Dagger*.

Their fierce clash of steel upon steel rang across the field as their weapons crashed against each other in a dance of swing and parry. The fighting around them stopped, as warriors from both sides watched their epic duel unfold.

As they tired, they each inflicted wound after wound on the other, both staggering under the weight of blood loss and fatigue. Finally, however,

Whéru Rawringe's *Wýrm Dagger* found its mark and slipped through his opponent's armour and between her ribs.

Ngaíre Whani looked down at the dagger protruding from her side. Then she looked up at Whéru Rawringe with savage fury in her eyes and laughed. "I die a true shieldmaiden, in mortal combat," she said as blood trickled from her lips, "but you shall die a sick old greybeard in his bed."

The shieldmaiden Ngaíre Whani fell to earth, and all around her, the Rotkarru warriors broke, fleeing the field. Salvaging what portion of his army he could, Prince Matú retreated with 8,000 or so men to Whóatar.



In the Thornwood, the armies of Holy Tongi invaded their former region of Núrel with an eye toward crushing the rebels and Iägnarist (un)holy troops there. The region had joined Khurdán in 556, however, and the new allied chieftain was no slouch.

The Iägnarists and the Tongi were evenly matched at 7,000 warriors, although the Núrel chieftain had some slightly better armed kura riders. Unfortunately for the Tongi, the Núrel defenders now had the benefit of Kommolek military advisors and so ran circles around the Tongi. While all 2,000 of the Núrel unholy troops died valiantly, they destroyed the entirety of the Tongi army, including their leader.



The bad news continued for Tongi, as their western isle of Oáhi came under attack from an amphibious invasion: 10,000 men led by Ingazi's renowned Admiral Harran<sup>16</sup>. The 4,000 defenders, bereft of leadership, never stood a chance. The Admiral then instituted Ingazi's new "convert or die" policy, losing several thousand men in scourging the island of all (open) Red Death worship.

<sup>16</sup> He sailed around the world, huzzah!



The Dread Empire's *Holy Tamkuára Armada* sailed into the Túawhenua, led by the indomitable Admiral Toángen<sup>17</sup>. They meant to challenge the Southlanders for control of the seas, and challenge them they did. By great luck, they caught the Averese fleet at anchor, resupplying on the Hiktino coast. Having the weather gauge and the drop on their Southlander enemy, the Armada attacked.

#### *Battle of the Anchorage (558)*

**I**n numbers, the fleets were evenly matched at 345 ships each. While the Armada contained only warships, the Averese fleet was a mixture of galleons, warships, and transports. Although the Averese absolutely had finer ships and crews, they were not so far ahead of the Armada as they might like. Averese Admiral Milski was among the finest in the world, but the Armada's Admiral Toángen was his match. Add two extremely able commodores in the Armada and the element of – not *surprise* exactly, but certainly startlement – and the advantage lay with the Dread Empire.

The Armada pounded the Averese ships at anchor while the Southlanders hastily cut hawsers and scrambled to ready themselves. Admiral Milski's flagship furiously sent up signal flag after signal flag to bring the fleet to order. Finally, under the withering attack, the Averese galleons started slipping away in ones and twos, leaving the warships to try and defend the supply ships as best they could.

The discipline of the Averon sailors paid off; as the sun set, the last of the remaining Averese ships slipped away from their attackers.

Admiral Toángen surveyed his losses. The Armada had lost about 125 ships, but he had sunk 170 Southlander warships and transports. His men cheered at the news: they had won a naval battle

<sup>17</sup> He was ably assisted by two skilled lieutenants, Atíri-Moámwhi Tawhiri iv and Master Kiáhik, hero of the Red Death and one-time apprentice of Mágua Mangod of War.

against the hated invaders, and the enemy was on the run.

Meanwhile, aboard the Averese flagship, Admiral Milski raged, “the bastard caught us with our pants down!” He had his crews affect what repairs they could while they continued to run northward out to sea.

In the morning light, Admiral Milski found that the Oratoan Armada had followed him. Milski faced the choice of abandoning his ten remaining warships and escaping with his 150 galleons, or turning on the enemy and engaging. He was outnumbered, but his fleet now consisted almost entirely of galleons.

He gave the order to tack to port, bringing the two fleets on a converging course.

#### *Battle of the Deeps (558)*

his time, the wind favoured neither fleet, though this didn't stop either side from attempting a series of complicated manoeuvres to gain what advantage they could. The net result was that when the fleets finally met, they were heading almost directly into each other. Whichever side ended up winning the initial pass, the other side could get cleanly away if they wished.

The Armada's casualties were horrendous, with ship after ship foundering under Averon's withering broadsides of ballista and cannon fire. In contrast, the Armada's ships couldn't seem to hurt the galleons. The Averese warships sunk or struck their colours quickly enough, but only a handful of the galleons did so.

The Armada finished the first pass with only 85 warships still sailing. Admiral Toángen ordered them to keep going and to put on all possible sail. By the time the Averese fleet had turned around, the Armada was over the horizon. The Southlander blockade of the Túawhenua remained intact.



The Southlanders, ever fond of amphibious assaults, came ashore in Wena, the heart Church of the Red Death's lands. Thacian Admiral Trebodir's fleet<sup>18</sup> landed 9,000 Thacian marines, followed by a mixed force of 22,000 Thacian and Carcëan troops and a dragon. Their goal was not the region, but the Church's holy city of Rustwood.

As the Thacians and Carcëans began their amphibious assault of Rustwood, a Dread Empire army arrived from the interior to help defend the city. What happened next was an epic battle inside and outside the harbour and city walls of the home of the Red Death.

#### *Battle of Rustwood (558)*

ustwood's mighty walls came under assault of dragonfire, while the Thacian marines landed from their boats directly upon the resulting rubble. They quickly gained a beachhead near the Harbour Quarter, and the Carcëan horsemen began coming ashore. Admiral Trebodir was in the front lines, gloriously leading the marines. The defense was conducted by General Iháka, who in addition to the stout city walls had 33,000 warriors under his command. In terms of military ability, none of the Southlanders were Iháka's equal<sup>19</sup>. The Southlander soldiers, on the other hand, were better trained, better armed, and better disciplined than the defending Oratoans.

The decisive factors, however, were the dragon and the fleet, which just kept disgorging new troops at an alarming rate.

Despite the General's prowess, he was very nearly killed by an invisible assassin with a very visible sword, seemingly made of light itself. It was only the merest luck that he escaped the well-timed blow. The would-be assassin escaped in the confusion of the attack, but attention was soon distracted to the first bit of good news for the defenders. For

<sup>18</sup> For the record, 70 galleons and 100 schooners. This will become important later.

<sup>19</sup> He also wielded a magic sword that cut through three enemy soldiers at nearly every swing. That certainly helped.

the *Holy Tamkuára Armada* was sighted on the horizon to the north, sailing for Rustwood harbour.

Admiral Toángen ordered his 85 ships to attack the numerically and technologically superior foe. Although Thace's galleons dwarfed the attacking outriggers, the Armada had the weather gauge and the Thacians reacted in confusion to the attack. From the shore, Admiral Trebodir watched helplessly as his leaderless fleet was battered and driven into the harbour by the *Holy Tamkuára Armada*. Oratoan boarding parties swarmed up the sides of the tall galleons<sup>20</sup> and captured several before the last of the ships made it safely to harbour under the protection of the seawall towers.

The battle on shore was going very well for the Southlanders, however. Despite the persistence of that darned Tarotist luck, the dragon was making mincemeat of all organized attempts to defend the city. Still, the Sahúlian casualties were as enormous as one might expect from an amphibious assault against massive city walls. Finally, as the dragon opened up the defenders' lines, the Carcëan cavalry tore through the city. And just as the Armada was triumphing at sea, a second assassination attempt on General Iháka succeeded. As he was leading his kura cavalry against the Carcë horsemen, there was a sudden sweeping flash of light, and the General's head fell neatly from his shoulders.

So enraged were the Carcëans that this apparently honourable foe had been cut down by perfidy in the midst of battle, that the nearby Sar of Roon and his honour guard wheeled away from the battle and pursued the assassin, whom he had spotted ducking into a nearby ruined building. Neither the Sar nor his men were ever seen again.

With the death of their General, the battle for the city was lost, and the remaining Dread Empire warriors fled the scene, hoping to regroup in the hinterlands of Wena. As the Sahúlian Imperial banner was raised over Rustwood, Admiral Toángen ordered the *Holy Tamkuára Armada* to

<sup>20</sup> After the battle, one of the Thacian captains facing a court martial for losing his ship said they "clambered up the sides like an army of damn monkeys".

withdraw to safe harbour in a cove several dozen leagues northeast of the city, near to the Temple of the Red Death.

The Southlanders counted 8,000 casualties, mostly marines, and the loss of 45 schooners and ten galleons. How many of the defenders survived is anybody's guess, but it wasn't many.



Holy Tongi made good on their promise to the people of Roúiri, returning there in force to oust the Southlanders. Their allied Takríki of Tengti led 30,000 men, both regulars and holy warriors, against the feeble garrison of perhaps a thousand Thacian archers. They succeeded without loss, and the liberated Roúiri happily joined the Dread Empire.



Orofer's Lord Koblakai led 11,000 warriors in the liberation of Dínenaur against a garrison that consisted mostly of zombies, with some Wenemet archers thrown in for good measure. While Orofer took some casualties, the Kommolek garrison was destroyed and the bodies burnt.

Lady Karzax of Tokatl, having never really recovered from the wounds she received at Ebonhill, died at an advanced age in Hiktino.



Meanwhile, on the so-called "Crusader Coast"...

*The Woe of Ondír, Year Two (558)*

**W**hile the Shadows' genocide of the Iluvarian people of Ondír continued without mercy, help was slow in coming. Iluvarian Captain Ioráma and his 16,000 Crusaders had backtracked as far as Asiéndar when disaster struck them as well.

A devastating earthquake convulsed Asiéndar.

Villages were flattened, trees uprooted, and much of the region's infrastructure was demolished. About 20% of the Crusading army was dead or

missing. After burning their dead, Captain Ioráma and his surviving men continued their push east.

But in Ondír, meanwhile, the true horror of the Shadows was only now beginning to emerge. Genocide it was, but as the ghostly horrors drained the life from the people, it soon transpired that they weren't exactly dead. Instead, the attack appeared to transform the victims into ghostly spectres as well, joining in the attack. Parents died defending their children, only to resurrect as dim shades, hungry for their children's souls.

The determined Iluvarians fought back, but every defeat only added to the enemy's number.



A Kommolek fleet attempted entry into the port town of Talikhiem of Amlych. They were denied entry by the garrison, which declared for the Dread Empire.



Meanwhile, in Orofer, the agonizing siege of the capital continued.

*The Siege of Mírchand – Iluvarian Reinforcements (558)*

**A**s the long siege of Mírchand ground on, casualties continued to be heavy on both sides. Though the walls still held firm, it was increasingly clear to both sides that unless there was a dramatic reversal, the city would fall.

Then, in the autumn of 558, an Iluvarian army arrived from the south to challenge the Chi'tixi and Kommolek besiegers. The people of Mírchand cheered as they caught sight of 40,000 warriors, both kura cavalry and infantry. The infantry and Turéhu archers marched under the banners of Orofer's Princess Orodriel. She had not yet assumed the titles of Takríki of Orofer and Warden of the Mark, to which she was entitled. She publicly proclaimed that she would accept her rightful crown only in her capital of Mírchand. The kura cavalry rode under the banner of Pouákaitoa's Human hero

Aátattíue Demon-slayer, his magic sling *Trollsbane* hanging from his belt.

Battle was joined on the plain before the city's main gate. The Iluvarian reinforcements brought with them additional magic, and the remaining forces within the city sallied, catching the Iägnarists between the hammer and the anvil. With the Kommolek and Pouákaitoa militaries matching each other in discipline and doctrine, and the leadership evenly matched in its genius, the fight quickly devolved into simple butchery.

Kommolek's unholy warriors died a brave death on the field, as did a hundred of Chi'tixi's remaining stone warriors. Despite their losses, they did damage enough: the Iluvarians took some 9,000 casualties and, for the first time, real damage was done to Mírchand's mighty walls. Of the captains, Orofer's long-suffering Lord Garn was killed, as was Taneki's notorious Witch of Uetzi.

The Iägnarists broke off the siege to regroup, while the Iluvarians rode triumphantly into the city. As winter closed in, Princess Orodriel took her father's crown as Takríki of Orofer and Warden of the Mark.

*559: A Failure to Communicate*

**U**ady Sardira of House Goshtikka-Snamarthis and a whopping huge dragon led a relatively small Thacian army of perhaps 4,000 infantry into Rotkarru's ally of Wangi. The Takríki of Wangi, no fool he, retreated with alacrity behind the walls of his port town of Farwave and settled in for the siege. It never came. Instead, the Thacian army satisfied itself with occupying the region and settling in for the long haul. After just a few months, the dragon left for points east.



On Whutoa's island of Kitwhu, an Ingazi fleet led by Commodore Manandorin landed some 9,000 New Ingazi marines and cavalry. They quickly defeated the small garrison and occupied

the island, renowned throughout the west for its cannibal inhabitants. The old Commodore did not long outlive his last victory. At the age of 87, he died on the beach of this tropical island, clutching a half-coconut shell with some sort of drink in it. He was buried at sea with full honours.



Iägnar's armies were again on the march in the Thornwood!

*The Woe of Ondír, Year Three (559)*

**P**ushing their way through the entangling forest, Baroness Drogdyr and the mighty Grishnákh, Elf-Lord of Halchúr, led a combined army of 100,000 Iägnarist warriors into Ondír. They proclaimed their intention to reinforce the Shadows and to “cleanse the perfumed stench of Iluvar” from the Thornwood.

Overhead, a 150 airships escorted the imposing and ponderous flying fortress, *Cleansing Storm*. Flights of gryphons wheeled among the towers, and their keen, piercing cries echoed through the warm air.

The scene they found in Ondír horrified even the hardest of the Iägnarist warriors. Desiccated, skeletal Human remains littered the burnt-out villages, while the spectral shadows of the dead roamed about the countryside, seeking whom they could devour.

A small remnant of the Iluvarian population stubbornly continued the fight. They were crowded into a narrow valley near the shore of the Mahóúro, where they had constructed barricades and other defenses to try to keep out the Shadows. In their long struggle, they had discovered that the Shadows could be dispersed, could be killed. They had done their best to kill as many as possible, but they were fighting a long defeat. With the arrival of the main Iägnarist army, all hope left them. Where before they had been fighting for their survival, now they simply resolved to take as many of the Iägnarists with them to their graves.

Just as despair threatened to completely overwhelm the remaining Iluvarians, Captain Ioráma's Pouákaitoan Crusader army arrived. Although he had but 12,000 men, and defeat was inevitable, the Iluvarians were cheered; at least they would make a proper fight of it.

*Battle of the Valley of Tangihia (559)*

**E**ven as the Iägnarist airships arrived over the valley, heralding the coming of the Cleansing Storm, the Crusaders attacked the force of Shadows at the valley's mouth. There were so many Shadows there, that the light of the sun seemed swallowed up by their presence.

While the Shadows may have been a terror to the peasants of Ondír, they dissolved like mist when struck by the weapons of the Crusaders. The Pouákaitoans cheered, for not a one of their men or kura were so much as wounded. A terrifying shriek pierced the air, interrupting their revelry.

Trees bent, and then snapped like twigs, as an enormous three-headed kura lumbered out of the forest. It was nearly as tall as the trees that it casually brushed aside, and it made a terrifying clanking as it walked. The Crusaders and their peasant auxiliaries alike froze in terror as all three heads stretched up to the sky and again shrieked out its deafening battle cry.

It could be nothing but the legendary *Hämäj-Goroth*, a demonic creature depicted in the ancient masks of the Thornwood shamans, come suddenly and terrifyingly to life.

As the Iluvarians stared, gape-mouthed in dread, the three massive heads turned towards them and breathed out a wall of fire.

It's impossible to say how many died in the flames, for the army immediately broke and fled the field in chaos. The captains tried in vain to rally their men, but there was no chance. A hundred



thousand Iägnarist soldiers marched down the valley and extinguished all kindred life. The few Crusaders who survived the slaughter at Tangihia were hunted down by the Iägnarist army in the following weeks.

No Iluvarian remained alive.



Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Thornwood, a Thacian dragon was slowly making its way towards Ancalimëse territory

### *The Fields of Harthad (559)*

he dragon appeared over the Eastern Mahoúro in the autumn. As she flew into Telemnar, the Ancalimë Turéhu could see the colourful banners of Electoral Thace and of Prince Basodir flying from her flanks. Messengers were dispatched to fetch young Prince Galathand from his chambers in Ringær.

Confusion and excitement ruled the Ancalimë garrison. A dragon! And in thrall to the Southlanders! If Prince Basodir had come to attack, there was nothing the Turéhu could do against a dragon. Nevertheless, they prepared their defences.

The dragon landed near the town of Ringær, and a portion of the garrison marched out to confront the dragon and her riders, stopping about fifty yards away. Young Prince Galathand ordered his archers to hold their fire, for the manner of the dragon's approach was nothing like unto an attack.

Indeed, as the splendidly armoured and emblazoned Thacian Prince slipped to the ground, he proffered the white flag of truce, and he haltingly formed his lips around the Turéhu words for "parley".

Several more Saurians and a pair of Turéhu followed the Prince from the dragon's back. One of the Turéhu, as it turned out, was his translator and herald. He walked to a point about halfway between the dragon and the Ancalimë warriors.

He announced, "My master, General Lord Basodir, Prince of the House of Goshtikka-

Snamarthis of the Electoral County Palatine of Thace, seeks audience with his highness, Galathand son of Dínenél, Crown Prince of Ancalimë!"

The Ancalimë Prince stepped forward from among his warriors and said, "I am Galathand. Among my people, it is not our custom to parley armed." He unsheathed his sword and thrust it into the turf at his feet and strode forward until he was standing beside the herald.

Prince Basodir removed his gauntlets and helmet (though not his coif) revealing an aged, grey Saurian face. He drew his sword. Its sorcerous glow shone even in the bright morning sun, though not as brightly as the massive sapphire in the pommel scintillated in the sunlight. He thrust the sword into the turf and strode forward to meet Prince Galathand. The dragon Róta, meanwhile, amused herself by catching a stray kura and swallowing it in one gulp.

About thirty minutes later, Prince Galathand returned to the Ancalimë lines. His men eagerly pressed around him. What did he want? What did he say?

The Prince held up a hand for silence and said, "he would meet with my uncle, the King."

For a month, the dragon and the small Thacian party encamped in the riverside fields west of the town of Ringær, at a place called Harthad. There were perhaps ten of them, Saurians and Elves, and they wandered through the countryside and sometimes even into the town. The Thacians were polite, but the Ancalimë were hardly in a position to refuse.

Finally, King Calmalas arrived. His men set up a small temporary throne at Harthad. The King, regal in bearing and noble in countenance, bade the Thacian Prince approach.

The old Saurian Prince bowed low before the Elvish King. Through his Turéhu herald, he addressed both the King and his court.

"Noble Elves of Ancalimë, descendents of the First Ones, I am your brother in Urda, and even though I may hail from the South, I am your friend. For many years I have hoped to speak with

you of Urda, of your culture, your people's hopes and dreams, and share with you the same from Thace. For too long I have respected your closed borders and your desire to remain ignorant, but the time has come for me to be heard."

At the word "ignorant" there arose a clatter and commotion from the Elvish court, but their King bade them to silence. Prince Basodir and his translator continued.

"The Saurians of Electoral Thace came to Oratóa hoping to remain indifferent to the power struggles here. We were naïve, and we have learned. With the Treaty of Valas you hoped to keep us Sahûlians from your shores, and I hope you now see the folly of those oaths. King Róngo of your Iluvarian ally has disavowed the Treaty when he wrote to my Empress 'You should also know that there is no binding oaths or alliances with the people of Ancalimë. We would not wish to hinder them in any way to pursue their own path.'"

The King, visibly shaken, asked "have you proof of these words? Of this betrayal?"

The herald brought forth documents and presented them to the King's clerk, who looked them over briefly and nodded to his master.

King Calmalas rubbed his eyes and motioned the herald to continue.

"Your majesty, the Ancalimë are truly a noble people to stand so steadfastly on your word, even when that word is leading you to your destruction.

"But I do not seek your destruction! My brother the Elector of Thace does not seek your destruction! The Empire of Sahûl does not seek your destruction!"

The shouts and cries from the Elvish court threatened to drown out the herald's words.

One elderly Elvish lord pleaded with his King, "Majesty, these words are lies! The Southern Empire stands with the Father of Lies, who seeks only the subjugation of the Turéhu!"

The herald raised his voice and the crowd fell silent.

"No lies, your majesty! But your noble lord speaks to a truth. From now on, Sahûl will always

be in Oratóa. The times have changed, the future did not hold what any of us thought it would. Now is time for new Oaths.

"I have forced myself upon you against your wishes, and for that I am sorry. But I hope to save you from the Holy Wars that rage through all your neighbors. Electoral Thace can save you, we can protect you. I have negotiated with the Empress of Sahûl, Khurdán of Kommolek, and the Warden of the North. Peace with Sahûl is possible for Ancalimë."

King Calmalas stood. "How? How is peace possible while the very Son of Iägnar walks in Oratóa?"

"Allow Electoral Thace, your Urdan brother, to accept your conditional surrender."

Shouts of indignation rippled through the crowd. The Prince and the herald, undeterred, pressed on with their case.

"This conditional surrender would allow us to extend the international laws of Sahûl to shield you under our rights. It would allow Electoral Thace to negotiate peace with the realms of Sahûl that currently war against you. Even Khurdán has been a strong proponent of Sahûlian law, and he respects and honors that law."

"Would we then become the slaves of Khurdán? Of Sahûl? This seems scarcely better than threatening our destruction. Is our choice then slavery or death?"

"This surrender is really vassalage to Electoral Thace. That would allow us to maintain Ancalimë as a semi-autonomous Thacian state, much like we have done with the fledgeling realm of Carcë back in Sahûl."

"A King vassal to a Count? A Turéhu pledged to a Saurian?"

"Yes, and this Saurian Count would guarantee your future, and that of your people. Your borders would remain; your culture would remain.

"The forests to your north echo with the cries of Tarotists frothing for Urdan blood. The forests to your south echo with the war drums of the Yagnarist faithful, momentarily distracted by the Iluvarian holy warriors. The seas are cluttered with Sahûlian

warships and troop transports. Ancalimë sits in the middle of the conflict, a target to some, an inconvenience to others. But a rare bloom to Electoral Thace who wishes nothing more than to save it.

“On this fine day, when the air is clear, and the sun shines upon all that Urda has given us, join us. Become our honored vassal. We bring gifts as a pledge of our faith.”

The dragon behind him shrugged, and chests spilled from one of the packs his back, bursting open as they crashed into the ground in a spray of gold and silver.

“Fine words and fine gifts. We welcome any who would ally with us, and we would listen to the terms of our...” Here the King paused a moment. “The *terms of our vassalage*. I will not say surrender.”

Prince Basodir handed the herald another paper, and the herald passed it to the King’s clerk, who read the terms aloud.

1. *Ancalimë surrenders to the vassalage of Electoral Thace and places their leadership under the leadership of Electoral Thace.*
2. *Ancalimë ceases all hostile actions against realms of Sahûl. Ancalimë will immediately cease trade with all enemies of the Empire of Sahûl, namely Orofer and Pouákaitoa.*
3. *Electoral Thace will protect Ancalimë and work tirelessly to secure Ancalimë’s borders from any and all incursions.*
4. *Ancalimë recognizes that to their south some negotiation over regions will occur with Kommolek...*

“Stop!” King Calmalas was on his feet. The clerk looked up, startled. The silence that enveloped the Field of Harthad was almost physical, like a cold mist. “Never,” continued the King. “Never shall we concede one acre, not one tree, not one leaf, of Elvish forest to the cancer of Iägnar. We account these lands sacred to Urda, and we cannot, we will not, we *must* not concede them to ‘negotiations’ with the Father of Lies. We know all too well what his word is worth.

“Noble Prince Basodir, you and your people are most welcome in our lands, and we shall account you as friends of the Turéhu. But not a blade of grass nor the smallest kura chick of Urda’s holy forests shall we willingly concede to Kommolek.

“We would ask that the noble Prince of Thace forgive us our vehemence, but understand our cause. If you can obtain for us the restoration of our southern border as it was in the year 515, we shall willingly join with you. On that day, I swear unto you in the name of the Owl of Elorchâl, we shall march with you against the Red Death until our armies stand together triumphant on the beaches of Whengo and Mong!”



Captain Vox’ll Kat’kax, Thacian Military Governor of Pawhi, tried her charming best with the Pawhi people and their Takríki. Feasts were held, including games of strength. Theological discussions and fora looked at the similarities between Orthodox Urdanism and the Way of the Hanged Man. Eventually, the Takríki of Pawhi made a counter-offer. He and his people could not be allies of Thace; sadly there was just too much difference. Maybe in a generation. Maybe two. However, if Thace was willing to invest a little in the island’s sadly inadequate infrastructure, Pawhi would happily pay tribute to Thace.



Count Palatine Derryk of Kommolek led his 40,000 crusaders into Denbigh. The region immediately joined with Kommolek, though oddly enough the town of Galek remained aloof.



To the east, the force of Iägnarist arms captured Orofer’s forest of Dagnîr. The invading 16,000 warriors made short work of the four castles in the region. The mighty fortress of Dolbain was an entirely different matter, however, and the invaders have gamely put it to siege. So far, it shows no sign of surrender. Or much damage, come to that.

In their frustration and anger, the invaders put Nenoll Priory to the torch.



Meanwhile, in Orofer, the agonizing siege of Mírchand continued.

*The Siege of Mírchand – Iägnarist Reinforcements (559)*

**T**he Chi'tixi stone warriors renewed their siege of the Orofer capital, which stretched from spring to summer with little result. Taneki Admiral Namtzar arrived in the autumn with reinforcements. Her 385 ships disgorged a disappointing 7,500 Kommolek pikemen before heading back to sea.

Once again the Iägnarists made a strong attempt at the city's gates. Once again they failed, but the Iluvarians took terrible casualties. More than 17,000 Elves and Humans lost their lives. Princess Orodriel mourned the death of her younger brother, the valiant Elvish captain Prince Aragroth, who died in the final Iägnarist assault on the walls. That final assault did significant damage to the walls as well, and the Iluvarians scrambled to repair breaches and shore up towers.

On the Iägnarist side, Chi'tixi's Lady Tchazzix took an arrow to her frontal carina. Only her personal magical aura prevented the shot from being fatal. As it was, she did suffer from a fashionable dent. Others in her forces were not so lucky. The Kommolek pike were almost entirely wiped out, and another handful of stone warriors shattered.

Still, with the continuing discrepancy in number of casualties, Lady Tchazzix was absolutely certain that the city would fall in the next year.

*560: The Knives are Drawn*

**T**he great army of Iluvarian Crusaders finally arrived in Annedír after an exhausting slog through the Thornwood. To the south, they could now see the great

peaks of the Black Mountains looming before them.

The 84,000 holy Iluvarians quickly defeated the 9,000 unholy defenders. Many of the peasants with the army settled down in the region – so many in fact that the region is now quite populous<sup>21</sup>.



Two Tongi armies converged in Téahiak, with the clear idea of removing the Thacian presence there. The former King of Tongi attacked from the north with 11,000 men, while their allied Takríki of Tengti led 30,000 men from the west. Fortunately for the Thacians, they had recently reinforced their 11,000 man garrison with Lady Sardira and a whopping huge dragon.

The New Ingazi airfleet, meanwhile, remained tethered over Retorok, and their small army continued their garrison duty in the town.

*Second Battle of Vanhataikuutta (560)*

**N**ear to the site of Thace's victory eight years earlier, once again the armies of Tongi and Thace danced. This time, the Tongi had a four to one advantage in numbers that more than offset the superiority of Thacian arms. King Amokapua of Tongi prayed that the *Greatspear of Emperor Ihu* and Tengti's *Golden Spear* would similarly offset the might of the Dragon Kirrik.

The Thacians were led by the old Banoss Wundoris, Military Governor of Retorok and by the Lady Sardira. Their infantry gave a good account of themselves, but in the end they were repeatedly overrun by Tongi's famed kura cavalry. The dragon positively laid waste to Tongi's holy warriors, which tended to run out in front of Amokapua's more disciplined regular troops.

By sunset, the Thacians were down to 3,500 archers and a wounded dragon. Wundoris was dead, and Lady Sardira was seriously considering a with-

<sup>21</sup> Annedír (3241)H. There remains a substantial Iägnarist minority loyal to the exiled Chieftain of the Annéd.

drawal to the town of Retorok. The Tongi, however, had taken some 15,000 casualties, including virtually all of the holy warriors. After weighing the odds, Sardira resolved to stand her ground.

The second day of the battle was a clear Tongi victory. The battlefield skills of the Tongi leadership was decisive, as the remainder of the Thacian archers were killed at a cost of only 7,000 Tongi. The dragon, though still alive, was beat bloody. Dragon and rider withdrew to Retorok.



In Ingazi-occupied Kitwhu, meanwhile, the new Viceroy of New Ingazi, Baron Gorres II of Saint Ilana, led his army to stamp out all traces of Tarotism or cannibalism, each of which the inhabitants embraced, and both of which the Viceroy was determined to eradicate. Although his army took tremendous casualties, his initial reports indicate some measure of success.



The Iägnarist Lady of Lasslain and her 14,000 warriors invaded Talathwas, a Dread Empire ally in the utmost west. The defenceless locals immediately surrendered. The priory of Wúawharit, however, oddly holds out for now.



The cantankerous Zirbeth, bereft of a garrison, rebelled from Kommolek. Similarly, Dínerol rebelled from Pouákaitoa.



*The Woe of Ondír: the Bitter End (560)*

With a final bolt of purple lightning, the pathetic remains of the Iluvarian people of Ondír were immolated. The forests and farmlands, now eerily quiet, were largely left uninhabited by the great Iägnarist

army, which remained holed up in the Valley of Tangihia in the shadow of the *Cleansing Storm*.



In Orofer, the Iluvarians and the Iägnarists found themselves on a more even footing.

*The Siege of Mírchand – Battle, Deliverance, and the Song of Ibháh and Orodriel (560)*

With the walls of Mírchand now showing considerable damage, Chi'tixi Lady Tchazzix<sup>22</sup> gathered her remaining 210 stone warriors for another go at ending the siege of the Orofer capital.

At first, it went extremely well. At a cost of 30 destroyed stone warriors<sup>23</sup>, the Chi'tixi positively slaughtered most of the defending Pouákaitoan cavalry. A particularly grievous blow was the death of the Pouákaitoan shieldmaiden Hinwáhi Ngu, who died with her Chosen defending a breach in the wall. In the end, not even her dragon-scale armour could protect her from the pummeling fists of Chi'tixi's stone warriors.

Even Orofer's heavy infantry took about a thousand casualties. The city walls were tottering, with huge gaps now being filled by ranks of swordsmen. One more assault, and the city would belong to the Iägnarists. Princess Orodriel, hoping for additional reinforcements, refused to surrender the city.

Then, in the autumn, a single fire-drake arrived from the north, bearing the banners of Pouákaitoan Lord Hokiánga. Lady Tchazzix and Sir Terthynn stared up in amazement. Surely this was not the expected Iluvarian reinforcements? One fire-drake?

Princess Orodriel's mind raced.

*I am Orodriel, daughter of Corualadh, Tarkriki of Orofer, Warden of the Mark, sister of Lothveren and Aragroth. They are dead. Orofer and my kin are dying. I am a shield princess. I am the last hope of Orofer.* The thoughts winked in and out of her

<sup>22</sup> Ably aided by the Wenemet Captain Sir Tewak Terthynn.

<sup>23</sup> And another near-death experience on the part of Lady Tchazzix, who collected another dent on her carapace, this one square in the thorax.

mind as she stood vigil at the cyclopean blocks of Mirchand's walls, staring into the distant sea. With a deliberate softness she spoke, "And they are coming." She had been repeating these phrases to herself as the battle raged. She could not, nor would she ever surrender.

"Please, my lady, come to your chambers," Orodriel's lady's maid found her there, drapery in hand staring into the night. She took her hand, pressing it to her cheek. "Please? You must rest." The siege was ongoing. Orodriel had barely slept. She let the tapestry drop from her hand and wearily allowed her servant to lead her away. They came to a room that had been cut into the rock by long dead Orofei craftsmen. Finally, with no further protest, the Princess lay her head down. When she closed her eyes, sleep came with swiftness to her weary body.

The dream that came began to unfold in waves of mist. As the Half-Elven princess moved through them, they slurred at her knees. Her dark eyes and hair faded in with the surrounding forest and were a bold contrast to the alabaster of her skin. Her feet were motionless and yet she moved. The trees and forest around her flashed by as she rose into the trees. The dizzying disorientation of moving scenery made her wonder which was moving. Orodriel felt her stomach lurch at the sudden upward tilt of landscape. All at once she stopped. She found herself now on the doorstep of an ancient treehouse.

The door opened noiselessly. Silence. Nobody was within that she could see as she now stepped with her own feet over the threshold. The sound of her pumping blood was all she was conscious of hearing. Then, the sound of her soft leather slippers sliding over the smooth wooden floors. The spotless room, hewn out of the trunk of the tree, was without even a speck of dirt. Its windows glowed white, illuminating the room. On her right was a mirror. The wood surrounding it was precisely carved into leaves that made Orodriel believe they were still part of the living tree. Her eyes surveyed further. A woven vine rug lay on the floor. The varying natural colors of the vines had been intertwined in fine detail, creating pictures of woodland creatures in

the branches of trees. As she moved left, their eyes seemed to follow her.

Orodriel heard her heart quicken, pounding in her ears. She took a ragged breath. Had her handmaidens drugged her? This was too vivid to be a simple dream, wasn't it? She closed her eyes and tried to wake. When she opened them again a wizened old man stood before her. His beard was tucked into his belt. Too shocked to even scream, Orodriel choked while the old man merely smiled serenely. "Orodriel," he began with a voice that made her feel like it was drowning in the depths, "Daughter of Iluvar, listen."

Some hours later, Orodriel stood again at the cyclopean blocks of the wall that safeguarded Mirchand. Her handmaidens had cause for concern for when she awoke she ordered her finest gown to be brought, to have her hair brushed out to its fullest extent, down past the small of her back. Thick, and shining, she had seen fit to keep it bundled in thick coils beneath her armor while she fought to defend the capital. Now it flowed in braided waves behind her as the ocean flowed in waves before her. While they worked, she fashioned a crown of leaves of her own design with the most serious of expressions on her face. "They're coming" was all she would say. Indeed, the Iägnarists were preparing for yet another final assault.

She stood there serenely watching her commanders run pell mell at her with the message that the fire-drake had brought. "I know..." she handed the message back to her second in command without even looking at what was written upon it. "They are coming." She pointed out to the sea. "They are coming." Smiling beneficently, Orodriel continued to regard the water.

And then, as many are wont to say in these things, Iluvar shined upon Orofer.

The Iägnarist commanders, unimpressed with the Iluvarian fire-drake "reinforcement" of day before, prepared (again) for the one last push to take the city. But Iägnarists and Iluvarians alike were unprepared for what happened next. Slowly, Iluvarian banners were rising from the sea.

Crown Prince Ihúhah of Pouákaitoa, brandishing the *Sword of Iluvar*, led a force of ten thousand kura riders out of the very sea itself. If that wasn't enough to get the attention of the Iägnarists, he followed it up with a lightning bolt that turned sixty stone warriors to powder.

The man, not the sword nor the banner, was the focus of Orodriel's keen gaze during the battle. Her eyes were for him alone. Unwavering, she stood and watched as her archers knocked arrow after arrow into the onslaught surrounding him. Neither did she flinch as he destroyed the enemy that sought to traverse the walls of the ancient citadel.

Spurred on by Ihúhah's display, and by the powerful aura of the holy sword, the Iluvarians went on the attack. The forces inside the city sallied, while Prince Ihúhah and Lord Hokiánga led their forces on a valiant charge against their foe.

The Iägnarists never stood a chance. The remaining stone warriors were obliterated, with some claiming that Prince Ihúhah sliced several in half on the initial charge. Sir Terthynn was slain on the field, while Lady Tchazzix reportedly fled back to her fleet, still anchored at the occupied port of Sea Haven. When the battle was over, and the enemy had retreated, the hero Ihúhah entered the gates of Mírchand.

As he entered the city, the world seemed to slow for Ihúhah. The cheers of victory that surrounded him became a wall of incomprehensible sound. Crowds and colors were a blurred montage. The sword in his hand lifted. Prince Ihúhah's eye followed it to the tip. That is when he finally saw her.

A corona surrounded Orodriel as she walked through the parted crowds towards him. It was not her lithe and curvaceous body which made him smile. Nor was it her raven hair, which parted on either side of each pointed ear before flowing down over her shoulders in endless tiny braids. It was her face and the determined look that was intoxicating. He caught himself holding his breathe before drawing in a great draught and whispering to himself. "The work of Iluvar."

It was not his physique that made her follow his tattooed face so intently, for many beautiful men had come and gone asking for her hand. The splendor of Iluvar radiated from him and from his sword. "He is the one," she whispered. For Orodriel, too, the world had stopped.

They moved towards each other. When they were a mere steps apart. They stopped. Ihúhah had not dropped his sword but continued to keep it steadily raised. His gaze centered at the apex of the sharp blade. A gasp went up in the crowd as Orodriel walked towards the sword until the tip was beneath her chin.

"My name is Orodriel, daughter of Corualadh, Tarkriki of Orofer, Warden of the Mark, sister of Lothveren and of Aragroth. They are dead. Orofer and my kin are dying. I am Orodriel and I am yours... I surrender." With that, the proud Elven princess knelt in fealty to the Prince Ihúhah. She looked up into his great grey eyes.

"Brave daughter of Iluvar, Orodriel, stand." As she did, his sword came to his side. With his free hand he drew her close. She placed a strong hand on his chest. "You cannot surrender to one who is already your prisoner."



In occupied Téahiak, the Tongi armies sacked the Urdan Northgrove Priory.



The Lich-Lord Aeg-Annûn led 24,000 horse cavalry from Hedhu into Orofer-occupied Lærarod, while 165 Kommolek airships sailed lazily above. The only defence came by way of a handful of kura scouts that slowed up the mighty invading force only long enough for the Iluvarians to shut fast the gates of their port town of Siluth. Some 840 giant stone warriors also eventually arrived in the region.



Atuburrk maintained their naval blockade of the Moána a Waénga, and Averon theirs of the Túawhenua. Unnatural storms continued

throughout the Hakapa Straits and Mutúinga Kóre, making travel and trade nearly impossible.

#### THACIAN ORATÓA (2 SE/UR)

*Lady Goshtikka-Snamarthis Sardira, Military Governor of Retorok and Governor General of Thacian Oratóa.*

**Trade:** Kommolek

**DP:** Failed.

**T**hace had mixed results in the war against the Red Death. Attempts to end the war with the Ancalimë Elves are ongoing. Lady Sardira, beset and besieged, found herself unexpectedly in charge of Thace's Oratoan properties.

#### FREE CITY OF ABRAHIEM (2 WS/TR)

*Lord Tiribissi Drarim, Burggrave of Abrahiem.*

**Trade:** None.

**DP:** None.

**T**he city fathers of Abrahiem remain fiercely loyal to the Empire of Sahúl. Their status within the Imperial system remains undetermined, though they're lobbying hard to become a chartered Imperial Free City. Nevertheless, they have for now rejected diplomatic overtures from Kommolek.

A minor scion of the House Tiribissi was chosen as their first Burggrave. He immediately offered the city to the Empress as a home for an Imperial Fleet.

#### THE NORTHMARK (42 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:** Failed! And how!

**A**tuburrk ceded their claims to Telemnar to Electoral Thace. This was largely a moot point, since the locals soon thereafter renounced their tribute.

Their immense flying city wended its way to the Thornwood's central plateau.

#### DOMINION OF KHURDÁN (7 WSE/YG)

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

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

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

**Trade:** Northmark, ThaceE, Yarni-Za

**DP:** Núrel (A), Denbigh (F)

**P**anicking over reports from the east, which many in Kommolek interpreted as an outbreak of the Red Death, the government ordered trade cut with New Araxes, New Ingazi, and Pakoa immediately.

Otherwise, it was pretty much business as usual.

*In the Halls of the Exchequer*

**C**ount Palatine Derryk surveyed his treasury and asked his Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Turéhu Satoras, "where are the monies promised to us by Zarkhandu?"

"Pardon, my master? What monies are these?"

"By the terms of the *Nowydh mora Tir*<sup>24</sup>, in compensation for the lands we deeded him, King Tirach Bæn was to pay us 400 talents of gold per five years for fifty years. That was in 1520. There should have been 2,400 talents of gold delivered so far."

"Certainly, my master, I do not recall receiving such a payment from Fell Zarkhandu, but I have only been your Chancellor for twenty summers. Permit me to check the records."

"I'll wait."

The very nervous Chancellor ordered his twenty assistants to pull the great ledgers, each the size of a small child, from their shelves. Those twenty assistants pored over the records as the Count Palatine

<sup>24</sup> Document promulgated by Baron Goesek Annavas II of Kommolek in 1520 to provide for this disposition of his Sahúlian territories.

and his sweating Chancellor awaited them. He had never heard of these payments, and such ignorance could easily be mistaken for incompetence. At his rank, incompetence in Kommolek was often considered a capital crime.

The chief clerk, bowing and scraping before the Count Palatine and his Chancellor, handed a small slip of paper to Chancellor Satoras.

After reading it for a few moment, the Turéhu furrowed his brow and then cleared his throat.

“Ah. Your Excellency. It appears that the last payment was received in, ah...”

“Yes?” Derryk demanded.

“Do you count half-payments?”

“Don’t be stupid, man. When was the last full payment?”

The Chancellor feebly replied, “in 1535”.

The anger of the Count Palatine was evident as his fur bristled. “How many payments have there been?”

“Two and a half, your Excellency. A total of a thousand talents paid, out of the 2,400 owed. And no payment has been received at all in this past quarter century.”

Fully expecting a reprimand (possibly to include the loss of some easily removed limbs) for his failure to send collection agents to Zarkhandu, the Chancellor instinctively flinched. He was both surprised and relieved when the Count Palatine merely grunted and left the room.



While the Count Palatine issued the *Abrogation of the Nowydh mora Tir Decree*, Khurdán himself pronounced that the Countenance of Coals in Zarkhandu was a schismatic sect and therefore a weakness in Iägnar’s church. He excommunicated both King Tirach Bæn and the “High Priest of the priory of Khurdún who calls himself Primate of the Dread Forge”.

Khurdán then spent several years touring about the northern Thornwood, terrifying and thrilling the locals. In Umlor, he preached to the Urdan

Turéhu. They flocked to him, casting off their old goddess for the god standing in front of them.



The Lady Ennedel’s sons, Terthynn and An-del, to all appearances perfectly normal young Wenemet, nevertheless have both proved to be prodigies. Under their mother’s careful tutoring, they are voracious students, excellent swordsmen, and the very epitome of chivalric courtesy.



Iägnar’s bonfires of sacrifice continued unabated.

#### **VEILED MASTERS OF YARNI-ZA (Ø YG)**

*His Unholy Magnificence, the Lich Ystar, Thirteenth Patriarch of the Priests of Ozahn, Master of Brégoru, Dread Hand of Yagnar, Voice of the Hidden Masters of Yarni-Za, Lord of the Fell.*

**Trade:** Kommolek

**DP:** \*burp\*



star the Unholy decided that two could play the “great work” game. He gathered unto himself sorcerers from two continents, from every major Iägnarist realm, and they began the weaving of a mighty spell.

In concert with Khurdán’s declaration that Zarkhandu’s Dread Forge Sect was in schism, the Thirteenth Patriarch of the Priests of Ozahn, Ystar the Terrible, solemnly proclaimed that His Dread Majesty, King Tirach Bæn of Zarkhandu was a manifest and unrepentant heretic.

Zarkhandu’s Baron of Onath, in Brégoru for the Great Work, immediately asked for asylum.

#### **KINGDOM OF ANCALIMË (14 E/UR)**

*King Calmalas of the Venerable House of Malvalas.*

**Trade:** Pouákaitoa

**DP:** None.



almalas the King, having spent the better part of a decade carefully marshaling his resources, went on the attack.

He was more successful than not, though he did have to deal with an unexpected dragon.

The Kingdom's government expanded.

### MARK OF OROFER

**W**ith the untimely death of Prince Corualadh Half-Elven, his crown fell to his steely-eyed daughter, the Princess Orodriel.

With the victory at Mírchand, great celebrations were held throughout Ciúra. Prince Ihúhah of Pouákaitoa entered the city a celebrated hero at the head of his army, and there he met the Elvish warrior-princess Orodriel. It was, as the old cliché goes, a match made in heaven. The two were wed in the waning days of 560, and their two realms were likewise joined.

### KINGDOM OF POUÁKAITOA (24 H/IL)

*His Majesty King Kamwhai III, the Eloquent, Son of Róngo Son of Ihúhah of the House of Ekara, Rangatira Kawhe of the Éiwi of the Eagle, Órikei, Beloved of Iluvar.*

*Princess Orodriel, Takriki of Orofer and Warden of the Mark.*

**Trade:** Ancalimë

**DP:** !

**R**ing Kamwhai the Eloquent pressed the fight against Iägnar and his uncounted minions. He was infuriated at Kommolek's genocide in Ondír. The King was, however, delighted at the not entirely unexpected marriage of his son.

The government expanded, and the King must now establish a permanent capital.

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## LANDS OF THE ÉIWI

### EASTERN ORATO A FACING THE DAWN

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#### THE FIFTH<sup>25</sup> RAKITÓAN WAR (554 – 560)

*Kéatoa vs. Woangnen, Gúako*

*556: Missionaries*

**W**oangnen withdrew from the Dread Empire, and their war with the Southlanders ended. If they thought this would end their conflict with Kéatoa, however, they were mistaken. In the aftermath of the Battle of Nihang, Woangnen's military was wrecked, and in desperation they looked for help far afield.

Missionaries of the Lord of Strength filled every region, stirring up the already fervent population, indeed rousing them to war! They had to contend with thousands of Urdan missionaries, Human, Wenemet, and Saurian, who flooded the regions of Ónguk, Takwhi, Taranga, and even Woangnen's homeland of Wóang. Despite their numbers (and cartloads of printed pamphlets), they made very little headway anywhere but in Ónguk, where there was already an Urdan minority. Nevertheless, they set up field hospitals and refugee tents in anticipation of the coming war.

Woangnen warriors removed and detained the monks and clerics of the Red Death Priory of Kuanniwhe in Hingwúa. Devout followers of Strength were installed in their place.

Meanwhile, Prince Haráre of Kéatoa gathered his armies in Táwe and marched west.

*557: Arise!*

**A**s Kéatoa's armies crossed into Taranga, the Master of the Cult of Strength in Ónimi stirred from his meditations. "The Parrot wishes war with Strength. It is Strength that shall save us in this desperate hour. Arise."

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<sup>25</sup> More or less.

## THE END IS NIGH!

Listen to the words of the prophets who warn us. Another serpent comes that sweeps the stars from the sky, you need only look to see. URDA is manifest, her chosen creatures not only walk on the lands here in Oratoa, but she is full formed in the lands below.

URDA works tirelessly to bring about our protection, to awaken the World Serpent in Elāmānilo.

URDA is the only Card that is important now. She is all of the cards in one. There is no need for the many with the One who gave us all.

Join with your brothers, Éiwi! Join with your brothers in celebrating URDA. She is Fool, Magician, Matriarch and Patriarch, Empress and Emperor, Love, Prudence, Justice, Hermit, Chance, Death, STRENGTH, HANGED MAN, Temperance, Devil, Tower, Star, Moon, Sun, Judgement, and THE WORLD. She is all, and all is in URDA.

The pack tarot is nothing but shards of broken glass, each reflecting URDA.

The Red Death preaches falsehoods and has robbed the great people of Oratoa of our Mana, our dignity, and our STRENGTH. War without end is war without honour.

URDA IS THE ANSWER.

Those in the audience chamber looked at each other in puzzlement. Finally, the temple's sacristan asked, "Master, what are you saying? Arise?"

"Arise!" he shouted. Everyone jumped, and his voice echoed back and again in the vast chamber. "Arise! Arise!"

The Master stood. "Warriors of Strength, arise! This is your hour! Every man shall take up arms against the Parrot. It is holy war against Kéatoa. Arise!"

And arise they did. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of men took up arms and flocked to the

priorities, to Nonitot Abbey, to the great Cathedral of Ónimi itself, with but one thought: the destruction of their ancient enemy, Kéatoa.



In Taranga, Woangnen's fanaticism met Kéatoa's professionalism in open battle.

*Battle of Newhak (557)*

**P**rince Haráre and Marshal Makúru led 58,000 Kéatoan knights, warriors, and archers. They met a rag-tag band of Woangnen crusaders near Newhak Priory. There was but 3,000 men, about half were knights with kura chariots and the remainder peasants with farm implements. Outnumbered almost twenty to one, the Woangnen defeat at Newhak wouldn't even rate the name "battle" but for one detail.

Marshal Makúru of Kéatoa, that great military genius and veteran of two victorious campaigns, was killed when an arrow lodged in his right eye. Prince Haráre, enraged at what he called "a clear assassination", resolved to punish Woangnen for this atrocity. He began by burning Newhak Priory to the ground.

*558: Tragedy*

**P**ypassing the port town of Hale in Taranga, Prince Haráre of Kéatoa led his 53,000 men into Takwhi, where the rendezvoused with Hura the Crone, who had crossed the river with 20,000 warriors of her own. Here they met Takríki Ihaía II of Takwhi.

Ihaía's father had been the mightiest of Woangnen's warlords before his death at Ingazi's hands in 553. His family had commanded tens of thousands of men, and his own sister had married Takríki Amíri of Woangnen. His lands had once been rich and crowded with castles, until the coming of the horrors of 553.

None of that counted for much at the moment, for the armies were gone to the deep with his fa-

ther. He had but a single castle and 6,000 crusaders at his call. Still, Takríki Ihaía II of Takwhi bravely rode out to meet the enemy.

Long will the Kaitawa sing the *Song of the Last Ride of Ihaía the Younger!* He and his men rode fearlessly into the fray, confident in their strength and resolve, all the while knowing they would be dead by nightfall. The enemy wounded Ihaía again and again, but his fortitude never flagged. Three kura were killed beneath him; each time he found another and kept fighting. Finally, however, he and his men were overwhelmed; there were no survivors.

The Kéatoans buried them with full honours. Prince Haráre went on to destroy Tóawhim Priory and to occupy the defenseless city of Stone.

When he heard news of the death of his brother-in-law, Takríki Amíri the Well Loved despaired. Within weeks, he had wasted away and died. His son and heir Prince Ihaía<sup>26</sup> was acclaimed the new Takríki of Woangnen. Unfortunately, he was away in Gúako, so his younger brother the charismatic Prince Hukarére took up the reigns as regent in Flatmarsh<sup>27</sup>.

#### 559: *Gathering*

**W**oangnen soldiered on despite the setbacks. The new Prince-Regent Hukarére gathered all the forces in Wóang that he could muster. From the south, the Fire-walker<sup>28</sup> brought thousands of holy warriors for the fight. New troops were raised, and even Woangnen's slaves were freed and pressed into armed service.

And slowly, slowly, Kéatoa's Crown Prince Haráre and Hura the Crone led their mighty army towards the Woangnen capital.

<sup>26</sup> He was named after his late father-in-law.

<sup>27</sup> Prince Hukarére is also widely regarded as his brother's probable successor. While his brother the new Takríki is a life-long bachelor, Prince Hukarére and his wife have four children.

<sup>28</sup> Most formally, he is named Roríki Kamáka the Lame of Ónguk, but he is simply known as "the Fire-walker".

Meanwhile, a great Kéatoan fleet was spotted off of Woangnen's west coast, a force estimated as high as 350 ships.

#### 560: *Homeland*

**N**ever had such an invasion come to Woangnen's home region of Wóang! The Kéatoan army contained 24,000 knights on chariot, 12,000 additional kura riders, 17,000 infantry, 11,000 archers, and 5,000 engineers. Woangnen's defenders mustered 8,000 holy knights and an additional 24,000 men. Six castles in the region provided additional support. It was near one of these castles, an ancient stone structure known as Alalia, that battle was joined.

#### *Battle of Alalia (560)*

**A**s the great Kéatoan host crested the hill they saw before them a broad valley. The small Woangnen army was mustered in and around the castle of Alalia at the far end. Kamáka the Lame, Fire-walker of the Inner Earth, stood alone in the valley's center. He was dressed in a simple robe the colour of the sky, and he held a staff of nut wood and onyx woven together, at its top a crest carved of firestone bore the image of the mythical lion.

At the sight of a single man opposing them, the great Kéatoan army paused. Kéatoan Prince Haráre chided his men, "Fools! He is but a single man and we are seventy thousand! Forward, Kéatoans, forward to victory!"

The Prince drew his sword and spurred his kura. Rider and kura charged down the valley at long lope, followed a moment later by the rest of the army at a more measured pace.

When the Prince was perhaps fifty yards away, the Fire-walker raised his staff and thumped it onto the earth. With a mighty crash, a fire-bolt issued forth from the staff's top. While it was easily dispelled by Kéatoan wards, it certainly had the effect of getting their attention. Once more, the army

paused, and the voice of the Fire-walker echoed through the broad valley.

“Men of Kéatoa! Your ancestors were lions<sup>29</sup>, but you merely imitate their valour as the parrot imitates Human speech. Save yourselves! Turn back to your homelands where your wives are safely abed with your gardeners and your ploughmen. No one will think less of you than already they do!”

Prince Haráre drew up his reins. “You taunt me, sir. To what end? Surely you shall be dead before the setting of the sun?”

The Fire-walker laughed. “You are brave at twenty yards off, mounted on a war-kura, and with an army behind you. But have you courage enough to fight a lame man armed only with a staff in single combat?”

“There is no honour in killing a lame man, leaning on his staff.”

“So like your whole nation of Kéatoa, you are a coward.”

Prince Haráre of Kéatoa spurred his kura and trotted up to the Fire-walker. “No coward, but a prince, and a prince of Kéatoa. I will fight you.”

He slid off his kura and drew his sword.

Kamáka the Lame, Fire-walker of the Inner Earth, gave a curt nod signalling his acceptance. Prince Haráre of Kéatoa bellowed and charged the Fire-walker. He arrived with his sword a blur of motion, while the Fire-walker swung the heavy nut-wood and onyx staff.

With a loud crack! the Prince slumped to the wet earth, his helmet staved in.

Both armies were silent and unmoving as they tried to take in what had just happened with such suddenness and finality.

Then the Fire-walker again raised his staff and thumped it into the ground. With a great grinding noise, the earth around him erupted, forming

ten broad stone columns, as if a temple were growing around him from the very rock. When they were fully twenty feet high, the columns split at their base and grew arms. On each, a neck thinned forming a wide head at the top. Heavy stone lids blinked open, revealing glowing coals for eyes.

As one, they roared – a sound that tore through the air like thunder and echoed the entire length of the long, broad valley. One of the stone figures stooped to pick up the body of Prince Haráre and fling it several hundred yards through the air and into the Kéatoan army, as casually as a man might toss a fish back into the water.

At that moment, as time paused while a hundred thousand armed men stood in breathless silence, the fate of Kéatoa and Woangnen hung by a thread. Would the Kéatoan army break or charge?

The moment was shattered by the voice of Hura the Crone, who shouted “Vengeance! Vengeance!”

After a moment, the call was repeated by several of the Kéatoan captains up and down the line of battle. Then, from the left flank, a single trumpet forlornly sounded the charge. The call was taken up, first by one, then another, until all of the companies, up and down the line, were united in their call. And with a shout, the great host of Kéatoa surged forward.

Hopelessly outnumbered, the Woangnen nevertheless mounted a credible defense. They inflicted almost as many casualties as they took. Unfortunately, what they took was a ghastly number. Indeed, it was scarcely a handful of vanquished warriors who fell back behind the stout walls of Flatmarsh. The victorious Kéatoa counted 21,000 of their own dead on the field.



Meanwhile, on the western shore of Woangnen, in Kowhéne, another Kéatoan sought revenge. This was none other than Aáta of Táwe, Takríki of Nekan<sup>30</sup>, who had been recently named *Marshal of Northern Kéatoa*.

<sup>29</sup> The lion, perhaps a corrupted form or distant memory of the *Lion of Urda*, is the symbol of Woangnen, though no one in Oratoa has ever seen such a creature in the flesh. While it was formally adopted only in 518 by Takríki Hukarére, it has long been a motif of northeastern Oratoa. None now know the origin of the symbol, but scholars theorize that the Kéatoan Éiwi brought it from the Dawnlands.

<sup>30</sup> Who, truth be told, suffers from Aboynamedsue Syndrome.

The great Kéatoan fleet, commanded by King Kíre himself appeared off the coast and began landing tens of thousands of infantry under Aáta's command in an attempt to take the port town of Dragonfields by storm.

A single fire-bolt took care of the town walls, and without real resistance 27,000 Kéatoan poured into the town.

#### TÁKIWAT OF WOANGNEN

**W**oangnen's Takríki Amíri (the Well Loved) sent his son to the west on a mission of life or death for the Tákiwat. Sacrifices continued throughout the realm for the intervention of the Lord of Strength.

Woangnen repudiated both the Church of the Red Death and the Dread Empire. Takríki Amíri publicly burned the scarlet envelope he received from the Dread Emperor in 556. Peace accords were soon signed with representatives of the Empire of Sahúl, though not with Kéatoa; war with them continued unabated.

Takríki Amíri died in 558 and his son and heir Prince Ihaía took the throne, swearing fealty to the King of Gúako.

#### KINGDOM OF KÉATOÁ (24 H/UR)

*His Majesty King Kíre II the Young, Son of Harápo, Son of Haráre of the House of Kekáta, Rangatíra Tirwhekwa of the Éiwi of the Parrot, Órikei.*

**Trade:** Pakoa

**DP:** Nekan (F)

**R**ing Kíre, determined to unite the Rakitóan Peninsula under his rule, sent his warriors and ships deep into Woangnen territory. The King was gratified that his petition to join the Empire of Sahúl was accepted by their Empress and her Wírehúa.

Ingazi Urdan missionaries flooded Táwe, where they converted most of the local population. Most of the missionaries were Human, but a substantial number were Wenemet.

In Kiruak, the former King Harápo was visited by Reverend Mother Mataáti,<sup>31</sup> an envoy of the Church Universal & Triumphant. She brought with her a small keg as a gift, though what refreshing beverage it might contain, none would say. The two spent many days in conversation.

Military colonists in Kena are making progress in taming the land.

Naval quality improved.

#### THE TALE OF THE THREE COMPANIONS – PART THE SECOND

**F**rom Kiruak they departed with all the blessings of youth: Hemi, Háu, and Atawhi. With clear skies and a steady northern breeze, the former students made their way out to sea. Atawhi wanted to stop at Pukei before setting out in earnest, but Hemi would have none of it. Hemi's intensity had only grown as the days passed. Tasting the freedom of the sea after months of studying at the academy stirred in him a desire not only to complete his quest but to experience the exotic. Both Atawhi and Háu thought his attitude could prove problematic later, but for the moment they indulged him, and they did not make landfall at Pukei.

Hemi's impetuosity saved them from almost certain death.

They paused briefly in Whewhki and had been on the water for only a few days when they noticed storm clouds on the northern horizon. They knew immediately that this was no *natural* storm. It grew in size, spreading like fire on oil. The dark, angry clouds devoured the blue sky as they approached. The winds reached them before the clouds had covered half the sky. At first shocked, the desperate sailors row with all their might away from the storm. They took good advantage of the wind to increase their speed.

As the black clouds of the storm overtook them, large waves began to propel them forward even more quickly. The waves, breaking in the open

<sup>31</sup> Formerly the Pakoan Princess Iritána.

sea, lifted and tossed their small vessel. Háu was dislodged and tossed into the churning water. The hands of his companions reaching for him were all that kept him from being swept away by the violent sorcerous waves. All told they lost more than half their provisions, two of their oars, and several chunks of the boat itself.

With makeshift oars, they limped their way west toward Kuroan lands. They were a sorry sight indeed as they made their way into the aptly named port city of Cape Wrath.

When they landed for provisions, they found the local dialect alien, but comprehensible. It was one thing to read that of all the Éiwi, the Kuroans and Kéatoans shared the most common history – it was quite another thing to hear and see it for themselves.

There were a number of Kéatoan merchant ships at port, stranded in a foreign land by the unnatural weather. The three companions took up lodgings in a seedy hostel a stone's throw from the docks.

It soon became apparent that the cost of repairing their ship would be prohibitive; it would almost certainly be cheaper to purchase a new one. At a loss for what to do next, they heeded Atawhi's wishes this time and sought Urda's blessing before proceeding. They went by land to worship at Runga Cathedral, where for the first time they encountered a pair of fuzzy Wenemet, pilgrims from the south.

From Runga the trio traveled south by foot, eventually making their way to Renwhet. Fortune smiled on them when they met an amicable merchant willing to take them as far as Sandlock.

In Sandlock, the three companions purchased a new outrigger, stocked with rations, and put to sea. Having spent a good deal of their money in Sandlock, they agreed that thrift would be their guiding virtue as from then on.

In the commercial ports of south-western Oratoa the three companions learned just how different the customs and material life of Sahûl was from that of Oratoa, and how much these differences were transforming life in southern Oratoa.

The first difference they noticed were the ships. As they approached Toang-Woang, the ships they encountered increasingly took on characteristics of Sahûlian vessels. Lager, stockier ships that bore little resemblance to traditional Tánagat outriggers and longships became the most common type of merchant ship. Even fishermen from outlying Pakoan provinces were adopting Sahûlian-style or weirdly hybrid boats.

The changes in nautical fashion were directly linked to the second obvious change: that of scale. While ports in Pakoa were changing, the difference in scale was most apparent when Hemi, Háu, and Atawhi stopped in New Ingazi's capital of Saint Ilana.

Here they encountered another world altogether. The predominant population was Wenemet. The language barrier, especially with their Kéatoan dialect, was insurmountable with the Sahûlian kindred. Their options for shopping were thus severely constricted. There was also a very real, if not universal class divide. The Humans who lived in and around the city were, by and large, former Dolphin cultists. Only one generation had come of age under Ingazi rule, and so most of the adults still remembered the old ways.

To compare the conditions of the Humans of Saint Ilana before and after the Ingazi occupation is easy to do on the surface. The industrious and technologically savvy Southlanders had in many ways improved the material lives of the city dwellers. There were new opportunities and new ideas spreading through the population. However, the conditions necessary to capitalize on educational and commercial opportunities were restricted by the impoverished conditions most locals had lived in before the coming of the Wenemet. Of course these commercial opportunities did not extend very far into the countryside yet, and so the farmlands nearest the city were taken over by large Wenemet estates.

Hemi was excited by the strangeness of Sahûlian life. The stark contrast between Kéatoan and even Kuroan material culture and that of the Wenemet

of New Ingazi was astonishing. As a man of passion and action, he was nearly as distressed at the habitation of Wenemet in Oratoa as he was delighted by the novelty of their language, customs, and goods. Atawhi saw so much potential for cooperative advancement between the southlanders and the Éiwi, but he was somewhat discouraged by the racial and social challenges that had developed in less than a generation of settlement. Háu simply saw the one possible pattern for the future of Oratoan-Sahúlian relations. The conquest and seemingly benevolent treatment of the indigenous people was a form of compassionate domination.

In Saint Ilana, they learned about the blockade of the Moána a Waénga by Imperial forces. As nationals from a non-Imperial Oratoan kingdom, they felt it would be in the interests of their nation, not to mention their self preservation, not to be caught attempting to skirt a blockade with a stash of gold.

In the event that anyone nosy decided to keep track of the three seemingly misplaced Kéatoans, they ditched their outrigger after landing in Noana.

By foot, they kept to the wilderness and avoided villages and farms as they traveled westward through Pakoan Ringinge, and then north through the Southlander colonies in Tamwoa and Ráne. Here, they crossed the border into the wild lands of Pouákaitoan Irik, and into southern Huátu.

When they arrived at last on the densely populated lands on the River Noárkah, they decided that they were beyond the reach of Imperial judgment and would secure a one of the small, flat-bottomed river boats so common here and complete the final leg of their journey up the mighty Noárkah.

In Pinebank, the three were detained by local police and questioned. Confused and offended, the Kéatoans did not know what to make of the situation; for their captors, the Pinebank Constabulary, considered them Imperial subjects and therefore enemies and (possibly) spies.

For while they had been skirting Imperial forces and dodging settlers in the wilds between Aihetoa

and Pouákaitoa, their homeland of Kéatoa had sworn fealty to the Empress of Sahúl.

The emotions the Hemi, Háu, and Atawhi felt flashed across their faces: varying degrees of anger, fear, loathing, hope, and even mild satisfaction warred in the hearts of the three young men. While they could not reach consensus on exactly how displeased they were with the news, they all agreed that being Imperial subjects was not something they wanted and not a title they could accept.

While they had spent nearly a decade away from their motherland, the three had sung and re-sung the Púra and the other songs of their childhood around their campfires and while they sailed and walked. All three men loved Kéatoa, and they were as committed as ever to reaching Katán and seeking the knowledge and guidance of the Turéangi.

All of this they expressed to their captors and in a private meeting with the Roríki of Huátu. Whether the Roríki had a soft spot for Kéatoans (or those on a hero quest), or whether it was the intensity of their dislike for the Empire swayed him, they were released.

They spent the last of their money on a small boat, local clothes, and all the supplies the boat could carry. The companions set off shortly after dawn the next day, to navigate up the mighty River Noarkah.

## MARQUE OF THE BLOOD DRAGON



Princess Réka took her rightful title of Queen and joined the Dread Empire. Her armies occupied a pair of mostly uninhabited regions<sup>32</sup>, cutting a swath between Pakoa and their dependent Kingdom of Kuroa. The Grand Inquisitor Hauóra died during the occupation of Pepoa in 558.

**UNITED KINGDOM OF PAKOA & AÍHETOA (45 H/UR)**  
*His Majesty King Kámiter the Great, Son of Hataréi and Réka; Lord Tuangua-Whári, Rangatira Whakamiharo of the Éiwi of the Orca and of the Dolphin, Órikei.*

<sup>32</sup> Pepoa and Natu.

*His Majesty King Kiriáre IV the Young, Son of Atáiri Son of Kiriáre of the House of Ngeru, Rangatira Kúanowhe of the Éiwi of the Kura, Órikei, Son of the Dragon.*

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

**DP:** None.

**R**ing Atáiri III of Kuroa fled from the barrows of Woangoa in 556, careful however not to come into direct contact with any of his men. Instead, he gave orders that all the guards who had entered the barrows, and all those who came in any kind of physical contact with them, were to be killed and their bodies burnt. He further instructed that all living materials surrounding the barrows were to be put to the torch, and that no man would be allowed to enter the grounds for at least seven years.

Then he drew his blade and plunged it deep into his own stomach. He died at age 51, having outlived all of his siblings, last of a cursed generation.

The Kuroan throne passed to his young son Kiriáre at the tender age of 11. Both he and his older sister Princess Hokiói, together with their mother Queen Réka, had long lived in exile at Saint Ilana in New Ingazi. The Kuroans anticipate that their new King will return to their country, though at the moment the family seems reluctant to move from their place of refuge and comfort.

Hikhéngri Abbey in Téiwa was expanded to a cathedral and donated to the Church Universal & Triumphant. The Church itself expanded Iwhroa Priory in Atíni to an Abbey.

After a reign of over thirty years, King Hataréi of Pakoa died in 558, aged 63. His son Kámiter, already King of Aihetoa in right of his late mother Queen Réka, ascended the Pakoan throne. In him, two of the great Éiwi kingdoms are united. He proclaimed the foundation of a new royal Clan and House, which he named Whakamíharo, meaning “admirable” or “wondrous”. The King appointed Prince Hataréi, the eldest of his three young sons, as Crown Prince and heir to the United Kingdom.

Following the fireball of 559, a tidal wave came ashore at Ku and Rurrong, killing thousands and causing untold damage<sup>33</sup>. The recently expanded city of Heartsbay suffered widespread devastation to its port area and has been reduced to a town.

#### NEW KERNEVEG COLONY (0 W/UR)

*Master Injiro, Royal Governor of New Kerneveg.*

**Trade:** None.

**DP:** None.

**C**he Hyrágecan colonists continued to work their land in peace. Some of them were rather hoping for more colonists, and maybe even some support from the home country.

#### VICEROYALTY OF NEW INGAZI (40 WH/UR)

*Besar Gorres II, Third Baron of Saint Ilana, Lord Trouserdale, Viceroy of New Ingazi.*

**Trade:** New Araxes, Pakoa

**DP:** None.

**N**ew Ingazi had a rather abrupt change of leadership with the assassination of Viceroy Besar Trandes in Retorok. His son, Admiral Sir Besar Gorres, became Baron of Saint Ilana while on campaign at the farthest limits of Oratoa, and he was shortly thereafter commissioned as Viceroy of New Ingazi.

While New Ingazi’s leadership was away, its urban centers grew: Jagofess into a port city, and Saint Ilana into an even larger one. The rest of the Viceroyalty’s economy was dedicated to the war.

Following the fireball of 559, a tidal wave came ashore at Trouserdale Island, Wattirri, and Motu Hungi, killing thousands and causing untold damage<sup>34</sup>.

Queen Réka of Kuroa and her children maintained their household in New Ilana, even though Prince Kiriáre of Kuroa became *King* Kiriáre of Kuroa in 556.

<sup>33</sup> These regions are considered *pillaged* this Turn.

<sup>34</sup> These regions are considered *pillaged* this Turn.

New Ingazi's government expanded. And it's about time, too.

**MARCH OF NEW ARAXES (1 WH/UR)**

*His Excellency, Count Thiuli Tramandes of Kayew, Margrave of New Araxes.*

**Trade:** New Ingazi, Pakoa

**DP:** Nope.

**C**ount Tramandes was determined that New Araxes would do its bit in the war against the enemies of Sahûl. Unfortunately, his maps weren't all that good, and he kept finding Hyrágecan colonists in his path.

Finally, he gave up and invaded Wérngo, which he managed to conquer without losing too many of his men to the native wildlife.

Following the fireball of 559, a tidal wave came ashore at Wiwh, killing thousands and causing untold damage<sup>34</sup>. The surviving Dolphinistas are beginning to question their faith in their sect.



## The Liberties of Pawhi (1556 SA / 556 OR)

**W**HEN ELECTORAL THACE first came to Oratóa, our interest was purely exploration. We had hoped to remain indifferent to the politics and power struggles of Oratóa. The Church of the Red Death, Tongi, and Whutoa refused our indifference. They had hoped to force us to retreat, but they attacked us before they had bothered to learn anything about the spirit of the Thacian people.

Urda teaches us balance, and within that balance there is room for Tarotists in Thacian lands. We rule peacefully over Yagnarist lands in the distant steppes, and are the guardians of an Iluvarian Holy site in Thacia. Malebolge hives live in Thacia, and our city of Wagga-Wagga, the stepping off point to Oratóa, is a Wenemet city. It is true that we now war with the Red Death, but we differentiate the Red Death from other types of Tarotists. They are Human, but their Kindred natures hold no import to us, as we also war with the Wenemet Church of the Red Death of Sahùl.

The Tarotists of Pawhi have nothing to fear from us or our culture. We are not predatory, we know how to rule over those that are different, who follow other gods. The only thing that we find unacceptable is the monomaniacal religious fervor that cause those like the Church of the Red Death to war against us simply for our religion. We have fought our own kind to rid Sahùl of the Urdan proselytizers like the Raven and the Tigers. We are engaged in Oratóa and in Sahùl against the forces of the Church of the Red Death. It is not religion that we oppose, not Tarotists, but the corrupting philosophy of fundamentalism, no matter which faith.

The Tarotists of Pawhi should become part of the grand Thacian future. Ally yourself with us, fight under our banner against those that are blinded by their fervor.

*General Lord Basodir,*  
of the House of Goshtikka-Snamarthis of  
the Electoral County Palatine of Thace.  
Isle of Pawhi.

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## Abrogation of the Nowydh mora Tir Decree

(1557 SA / 557 OR)

**A** GENERATION AGO, MY KINSMAN and predecessor Baron Annavas II committed our people of Kommolek to abandon their ancestral lands and journey to Oratoa, where they have found a new home and their true destiny. Not everyone could make the journey: many died on the way, and many never left Old Kommolek.

For the orderly disposition of these prefectures, the Baron issued the *Nowydh mora Tir* decree in 1520. This provided for the Baronial lands to be divided between his sisters, the Ladies Ebrel and Ennor. Lady Ennor's lands were joined to the Kingdom of Fell Zarkhandu, as she swore fealty to their King. Through her children, she became the matriarch of a new House.

In his *Testament*, Baron Annavas declared explicitly, *As in the south spreads the stalwart ice, in the east we bequeath to my brother Andel and my sister Ennor as well as her children Caja, Elowen, and Ando, suzerainty over these lands of our realm to expand further east in the name of our lord and together with our allies of Zarkhandu. Under their guidance and strength shall that house spread.*

These dowry lands had a just price. According to clause six of the decree: *the Kingdom of Zarkhandu permanently hastes and deeds over to Kommolek the flying fortress named Cleansing Storm and sends ten squadrons of Airships, ten Brigades of Saruian Cataphracti, ten flights of rangers, (one levy only) and 400 talents of gold per five years for fifty years.*

Since 1530, the King of Zarkhandu has failed to send the required gold, although they did send 200 in 1535. Since they are now in arrears by the sum of 1,400 talents of gold, we justly declare them to be in deliberate and persistent violation of the agreements of the *Nowydh mora Tir*.

Therefore, it is with a heavy heart that we, the lawful successor of Kommolek, declare that this agreement is, in all particulars related to the Kingdom of Zarkhandu, in abeyance and its provisions void. No region of the former Barony of Kommolek, nor any member of the cadet branches of House Goesek, should feel compelled to hold to the *Nowydh mora Tir* in regards to Zarkhandu.

*Count Goesek Derryk II,*  
Count Palatine of Kommolek.  
Denbigh.

# IMPERIAL STRENGTH INDEX

#	Realm	Player	Forum Name	E-mail	ISI
<i>The Great Powers</i>					
1	Dread Empire	Matt Sievers	Malleas	fantsigns@gmail.com	1,189.4
2	Pouákaitoa	Robert Kalcevic	Dawnwalker		1,127.7
3	<b>Iägnar (Kommolek)</b>	Cortlandt Winters	General Scum		1,107.0
<i>Major Powers</i>					
4	<b>Pakoa</b>	Michael Blythe	mikeb21	mblythe21@gmail.com	830.6
5	Gúako	James Kahelewai V	ExLibrisMortis	sciop@cox.net	812.0
6	<b>Kéatoa</b>	Robert Weatherby	urukexpress		638.4
<i>Minor Powers</i>					
7	Ancalimë	<i>This realm is open for a player</i>			455.7
8	Whutoa	Kipp Curran	MinapisMan		322.7
9	Rotkarru	Ed Allen	Touca Tuki	tgroove@att.net	315.4
10	<b>New Ingazi (V)</b>	Henry Jago	jago	jagoh@yahoo.com	219.3

Realms listed in **bold** are part of the Empire of Sahl.

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