

The Sahûl Chronicle

THE EMPRESS IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE EMPRESS!

Turn 20

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1546–1550 SA

The board is set, the pieces are moving. We come to it at last: the great battle of our time.

– Queen Tirrix Taxitiki of Chi'tixi, Marshal of the North.



SAHÛL'S ICE CONTINUES to expand. The southern rivers are largely frozen for most of the year, and so some map adjustments are in order. These *glacial rivers* are still rivers for the purposes of land movement crossing and air movement, but they should be considered Inimical Sea Zones for purposes of naval movement and CCR until further notice. The rivers affected are: Choloa River (B-3), Darriow River (C-3), River Yann (C-3, D-3, and D4), River Tondaris (D-3 and D-4), River Sunnaday (D-3), and Minrao River (D-4).

Likewise, Lake Sardath is icing up pretty good and should be considered an Inimical Sea Zone. Parts of Lake Sardath may be used by the daring for land movement (see the map below) during the next Turn *except for the Summers* (Phases 3, 8, 14, 18, and 23). All of these Regions are considered Inimical. Of course, if the weather continues to improve during the coming Turn, you may find the area unexpectedly liquid. Good luck.



A note on sea movement: please do not assume that Monsoon or Current arrows exist that are not on the maps. *All Sea Zones are on the maps.* Yes, that makes the Jannes Sea and the Sea of Tranquility both choke points.

Everybody, please. Re-read the rules on what you can and cannot do with Allied Units.

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

NEXT TURN DUE: FRIDAY 03 AUGUST 2012.

CURRENT PUBLICATIONS:

The Chronicle, Volume 1 – The compiled Sahûl Chronicle from Turns 0 through 10 inclusive, plus some other nifty bits. Available in both paperback (\$18.00) and hard cover (\$30.00).

Atlas of Sahûl, Second Edition – With maps updated to Turn 10 and some other supplementary material, including an index of all regions. Paperback (\$22.00).

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 (\$20.00).

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 (\$10.00).

Cruenti Dei Rules Supplement 2: Underlands – This supplement details the Underlands, a series of vast caverns underneath eastern Sahûl. Free download or in paperback (\$10.00).

Cruenti Dei Rules Supplement 3: Age of Discovery – Expands the rules for NSR 10 and beyond. Paperback (\$12.50)

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS:

The following will become available over the next weeks:

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.

The Chronicle, Volume 11—The compiled Sahûl Chronicle from Turns 11 through 20 inclusive, plus some other nifty bits. Available in both paperback and hardcover.

The Annals, Volume 1—The compiled Oratoan Annals up to Turn 20, plus some other bits. Available in both paperback and hardcover.

The Cruenti Dei Great Books Series—A series of relatively inexpensive paperbacks, already published as free PDFs. Titles include: *The Chivalry of the Common Man*, *An Explorer's Tale*, and *The Great Charter*.



Western Sahûl

THE KIT'IXI COAST

COUNTY OF TOKATL (141/TA)

Her Excellency, Tinikatua VIII the Implacable, Mistress of the Totek Hive, Countess of Tokatl, Chancellor of the Empire.

Trade: Averon, Chi'tixi, Kachar, Sakkar, Taneki, ThaceD

DP: None.

The implacable and deeply religious Countess Tinikatua VIII threw the majority of her Realm's income into new public works projects. There is a growing sense throughout Tokatl that perhaps she is a Gods-given inspiration to save Tarotism from itself and to lead it to a new day. The burden and (perhaps) the glory is very much on Tinikatua's broad shoulders. When she was asked to give her opinion on the holy war declared by the Church of the Red Death, she reportedly replied, "If the Red Death is a Tarotist, then I'm a Saurian."

Tokatl dispatched ships to aid the Imperial war effort in Oratoa.

ELECTORAL DUCHY OF TANEKI (271/YG)

Her Victorious Maješty, Toktoka I, Lady Talkeltik of Akeltl, Baroness Ketatl, Overlord of Pexiki, Electoral Duchess of Taneki.

Trade: Araxes, Atuburrk, Averon, Chi'tixi, Itaxik, Kachar, Kichitchat, Pexiki, ThaceD, ThaceE, Tokatl, Yarni-Za

DP: Failed!

The winter of 1546 was a repeat of 1545. Although the subsequent years were slightly more temperate, Taneki has yet to recover from the terrible cold and privation. Most of the passes through the Annaket mountains remain buried in snow and ice.

In the south, Duchess Toktoka ordered the road network extended from Koten into Sak'uich. An attempt to impress 5,000 Kuxa'ari Equerries into manual labour on the road nearly caused a revolt,

and the road was not completed. The outraged Baroness of Kuxa'ar vowed to bring this insult to her honour before the House of Magnates.

A similar attempt was made to settle the Saurian steppe footmen of the Sar of Histaun in the city of Utahpir in Malebolge Tzatz. The Sar reacted with fury, and instead marched his men northward to the capital. In 1549, the two aggrieved Saurian leaders¹ confronted their sovereign Duchess in the halls of Parliament.

With the Countess of Tzatz² on a diplomatic mission to Pexiki, little was done in the House of Magnates. In the lower House of Equerries, however, a *Bill Conveying the Sense of the House* was passed by a large margin. It graciously invited the Duchess to come to Parliament to take tea with the Speaker of the Equerries and the two aggrieved Saurian allies to discuss the situation. It was all very restrained and polite, in the proper Taneki fashion.

Sadly, the elderly Baroness Kuxa'ar died in 1550. Her grandson the new Baron, however, vowed to pursue the matter.

Wealthy and persuasive Taneki and Itaxik diplomats wined and dined the ruler of Co'atepec. She has not yet reached a decision.

ELECTORAL GRAND DUCHY OF AVERON (53 SI/IL)

Her Gracious Maješty, Jushana I, the Cold, Lady Drax, Baroness of Goorin, Countess of Darida, Electoral Grand Duchess of Averon, Protector of the Faith.

Tiketua VII of Tishrak, Margrave of the North.

Cleon II, the Devout, Grand Master and Knight-Commander of the Champions of the Renewal, Margrave of Yax'te.

Trade: Araxes, Carcë, Chi'tixi, CM, Itaxik, Kachar, Pehuatoka, Pexiki, Taneki, ThaceD, Tokatl, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

1 Although Sar Sorretan of Histaun arrived in 1547, the elderly Baroness Kozah of Kuxa'ar only arrived in the summer of 1549.

2 The Countess of Tzatz is the seniormost noble of the realm besides the Duchess. She is also the hereditary Convener (chair) of the Magnates, and little of an official nature can be accomplished in the House in her absence.

Grand Duchess Jera continued investing in vast new public works throughout Averon and Yax'te. Averon continued paying tithes to both the Church Militant and the Iluvarian Orthodox.

As Sakkari began their “inward exodus”, Sakkari General Ahana, who had received her training at Averese schools, surrendered herself in Kongros and asked to be placed under the protection of the Grand Duchess. In Auicalo, the long-standing Sakkari garrison surrendered to the government of Averon.

Even as Averon went to war in Oratoa, Crown Princess Jushana continued her work to root out the conspiracy that infested the Ruling House. She created the *Special Court of Justice* to investigate and try the members of the conspiracy. Duke Muldalan³ was brought to trial on charges of treason. The old man protested his innocence, but the *Special Court* found him guilty after deliberating for less than an hour. He was executed on the 5th of Primilis, 1546. On the platform in a light snow shower, the Duke tipped the headsman a goat and went wordlessly to his death. As the Duke's daughter-in-law and four of his grandchildren were brought to trial before the Special Court, the Grand Duchess called her daughter to account. What passed between the Princess Jushana and the Grand Duchess, none know, but they spoke deep into the night and the shouts of the Grand Duchess could be heard throughout the palace.

In the days after, the Palace staff noted that the Grand Duchess looked much older, as if the cares of the world were weighing on her shoulders.

Meanwhile, a manhunt was on for Duke Muldalan's only son, also named Muldalan. He led the agents of Jushana's *Special Court* on a merry chase as he fled from safe house to safe house. In order to apply pressure to him to surrender himself, his youngest child was arrested, meaning that his wife and all five of his children were in the custody of Jushana's *Special Court*. Finally, in the autumn of

1546, Prince Muldalan was killed while resisting arrest in an alley in Muladán.

At this point, the Grand Duchess (who had just celebrated her 66th birthday) called in her Chancellor and other legal advisors. The rumour was all over Kongros that she was planning on changing the order of succession. In any case, nothing came of it, for the elderly Grand Duchess Jera IV died in her bed in the summer of 1547. Princess Jushana ascended the throne as Grand Duchess Jushana the Cold. She immediately appointed her sickly son Gondulan as her heir.

The next year, Jushana's aunt Larreta, an officer in the army of the North, died from an accident involving a ladder and an axe. The new Grand Duchess's only other living relatives made themselves scarce. Her uncle Count Challik is an officer in the Oratoan expeditionary force, and his two children have gone missing in Yax'te.

The weather was so very bad in Yax'te, especially south of the Choloa and in the mountains, that in Ital'te and Potem'te the people gathered their belongings and fled their homes. Many crossed the treacherous glacier that the river had become. The people of the city of Firreltet stood firm thanks to the granary there, but they acknowledge that they must leave soon or starve as well. It was much the same in Onisba, where all the granaries in the world aren't going to stop the expansion of the growing ice sheet. Already the road is impassible, and the population has fled to Zanthia. Mamonts, gryphons, and leaping snow cats ventured farther north than they have ever been seen.

The snow in much of Yax'te finally melted in the summer of 1548⁴. A few months later, the snows began again, but at least the following years each had a bit of snowless summer. While the weather in Averon itself was nowhere near as bad, it was still a cold, hard few years.

Averon's Naval quality improved.

³ The Duke is the widower of Grand Duchess Derica I (reigned 1499-1523) and Princess Jushana's own uncle.

⁴ Though it appears that Ital'te, Potem'te, and Onisba are permanently lost.

IUVARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MILITANT (10 IL)
Her Holiness Sardula v, Iluvarian Matriarch of the West, Archemandrite of Tikata.

Trade: Averon

DP: None.

rchemandrite Sardula v continued to follow the lead of the Orthodox Pontiff. The liturgical meetings finally finished up, and the Holy Synod is confident that once the whole is edited and approved, new liturgical books will be published. Soon.

COUNTY OF PEXIKI (31 I/YG)

Her Excellency, Xitar III, the Vampyr, Mistress of the Coaĉtoka Hive, Countess of Pexiki, Lady Amoxcali, Lord Admiral of the Green.

Trade: Averon, Itaxik, Kachar, Taneki

DP: None.

he vampyric Xitar III decided that she didn't much care for an empty treasury, so she spent some time building it back up. The weather, meanwhile, continued to be terrible, especially in 1546, another year without a summer. Pexiki did get marginally warmer after that, at least to the extent that there were actual summers without snow. However the damage was done. The crop failures of 1544 through 1546 severely damaged the economy, and mass starvation continued throughout the Realm.

COUNTY OF KACHAR (17 I/UR)

Her Excellency, Kassa VIII, Mistress of Calpolli, Lady Tchantli, Countess of Kachar, Protector of the Fair Isles.

Trade: Averon, Itaxik, Pehuatoka, Pexiki, Taneki, Tokatl, Urdráhahn

DP: None.

ountess Kassa, herself a graduate of the renowned Tchantli Naval Academy, sent some ships out in 1546, and to most everyone's surprise they came back in 1549. Kachar expanded their government and built a Navigation College at the Academy.

The winter of 1546 was among the worst ever recorded, and widespread famine gripped Kachar. The people were miserable, and many starved. The weather improved markedly after about 1548.

QUEENDOM OF ITAXIK (30 I/UR)

Baroness Chatoaya III of Ueka, Regent of Itaxik.

Trade: Averon, Carcë, Kachar, Pexiki, Taneki, Urdráhahn

DP: Failed.

s the government of Empress Chath'ecutla spiraled out of control in early 1546, the Regent Chass'ika did her very best to hold Itaxik together. The terrible, icy weather certainly did not help. Despite her best efforts, which included drawing down on her Realm's own bank for relief, rebellion was rife.

Noyokka and Shiakalo both renounced tribute, and Lady Jarrok and her small army rebelled while taking over Yöllök⁵.

In Omei, the Baroness of Ohoka attempted to assert her independence, but the elderly Landgrave Asatdya of Nikka was also in Omei. The two had angry words, and at one point it seemed as though the Baroness was trying to persuade the Landgrave to seek independence herself. Asatdya's loyalty to Regent Chass'ika was absolute, however, and she herself killed the would-be rebel in a duel. The new Baroness back in Ohoka not only remained loyal to Itaxik, she swore fealty.

Lady Tekkulti, on the other hands, declared her independence.

In the icy spring of 1546, the Regent died. She was succeeded by the Princess currently serving as the Queen's principal heir, Princess Chass'ika⁶. Several months later, in the snowy summer, came the news that the Empress had died. As mourning consumed Itaxik, Regent Chass'ika herself ascend-

⁵ Lady Jarrok was something of anomaly; although her lands and family had renounced their alliance with Itaxik back in 1534, she and her small army had stubbornly remained loyal. No longer, it seems.

⁶ No relation to the Regent, also named Chass'ika. It's a popular name in Itaxik.

ed the throne as Queen Chass'ika I⁷. It was almost a year later that the Imperial Crown suddenly appeared on the Queen's head, heralding the news that Chass'ika had been elected Empress of Sahûl. She left immediately for Sardarthion, appointing the Baroness of Ueka as Regent.

In the summer of 1548, the snow cover finally melted over much of the Realm. The fact that it started snowing again just a few months later just made the Itaxik more determined. Slowly, the summers are growing longer.

Commodore Chac'tia, en route to the fighting in Oratoa, spent some time with the original manuscript of Yix's *The Art of War*. Those who know the Commodore best have remarked that her military acumen, always brilliant, seems to have actually improved after she read the tome.

In 1550, the venerable and storied Landgrave Asatdya of Nikka died at an extremely advanced age. She was succeeded as Landgrave by Asatdya II, who immediately swore undying loyalty to Empress Chass'ika and the Regency of Chatoaya of Ueka.

Wealthy and persuasive Taneki and Itaxik diplomats wined and dined the ruler of Co'atepec. She has not yet reached a decision.

COUNTY OF PEHUATOKA (41/UR)

Her Excellency, Cipaçtonatha v, Baroness Aueuetl, Countess of Pehuatoka, Guardian of Miçtia.

Trade: Averon, Carcë, Kachar, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Countess Cipaçtonatha was pleasantly surprised at the return of Narmona. The incredibly popular Lord Narmona has returned from Sardarthion and took full credit for the liberation of his homeland. The region, like the rest of Pehuatoka, was mostly covered in snow, but it looks as though the Sakkari had built some new public works there during the occupation.

⁷ Not counting the late Regent, she's actually the *fifth* Chass'ika to rule Itaxik. Previous Chass'ikas include Countess Chass'ika I (r. 1216–1228), Countess Chass'ika II (r. 1240–1262), Grand Duchess (later Princess) Chass'ika I (r. 1449–1478), Princess Chass'ika II (r. 1478–1497).

Cavalry quality improved and the tiny government expanded.

BARONY OF SAKKAR: THE INWARD EXODUS (18 IS/IL)
Baroness Neallatalah IV of Sakkar, Mistress of Nelhuayotl, Heir of the Prophet, Beloved of the Light of Iluvar.

Dame Tarik Tarkas, Grandmistress of the Military Order of the Sword of Iluvar, Warriors of the Ice.

Trade: Averon, Carcë, Duedhyn, ThaceE, Tokatl, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Baroness Nenepillah III of Sakkar resolved to remake her Realm. In the midst of the driving snows of the never-spring of 1546, she proclaimed a realignment of Sakkar's internal affairs. In her capacity as the Imperial Governor of Withidan, she called for the regional Prefects to hold a "vote of confidence" in Sakkar's rule of their Prefectures. She summoned the rulers of Sakkar's Urdan regions with similar instructions. She dispatched letters to the Empress, the First Matriarch of the Church Universal and Triumphant, and the Prince of Duedhyn. Orders went out to all of Sakkar's fleets and armies under the personal seal of the Baroness, including a thick packet for Dame Tarik Tiketua, Grandmistress of the Military Order of the Sword of Iluvar. Then, the Baroness left the country.

No one quite knew what to make of this.

The various prefects met in the Sakkari capital of Kuauinochitla. The Iluvarian prefects of Withidan Province treated the entire exercise as a bit of a lark, for in their minds the result was foreordained. Many of those from the more remote prefectures spent their time gawking around the big city and buying souvenirs. The Urdan rulers from Iutl, Pekka, and Tat'ia were much more circumspect.

They met in the Pavilion of the Iceflower in the vast Summer Gardens in the Itatlan greenhouse. The Baroness' deputy read the instructions:

Sakkar offers all regions with majority Urdan populations a choice in Imperial representation. Regional leaders are to make their choice of Imperial represen-

tation from among the members of the Imperial Diet, or ask for independent recognition into such Diet.

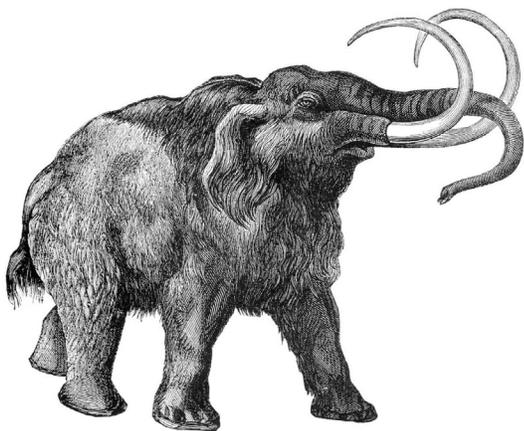
Further, Sakkar offers this to all regions within Sakkari control. Let there be no misunderstanding that at this time if any such region wants to claim another Imperial representative from the Imperial Diet, such will be supported by Sakkar. With the understanding that the Empress still retains the right to assign fiefs and hopefully will take the decisions of the regional leadership into consideration.

After a moment of stunned silence, pandemonium broke out. To a one, the Urdans walked out. Among the Iluvarians, when the actual vote was finally taken, they were unanimous in their confidence of the Baroness.

Meanwhile in Averese Auicalo, the long-standing Sakkari garrison surrendered to the government of Averon. In Wagga-Wagga, a Sakkari fleet surrendered to the Elector of Thace, and the venerable Admiral Virgifera there placed herself under house arrest. She very shortly thereafter died in Thacian custody, and the new fleet admiral decided on a different tack.

In Narmona, 14,000 Shadow Knights simply vanished into whiffs of steam on a cold spring morning.

Meanwhile, the Grandmistress of the Sword of Iluvar had received some rather unpalatable orders. Nevertheless, she gamely did her best to carry them out. The Iluvarians of Finnedor were told that both Finnedor and Sarthes were being returned to the Prince of Duedhyn. Dame Tiketua told the



shocked population that any who wished to leave would be resettled in Ersma. Not wanting to be left to the mercies of Duedhyn or (worse) the Ravens, virtually the entire Iluvarian population took up the offer to move. The Order pulled back their garrisons in the various Urdan Prefectures, including Narmona. The people there quickly threw down the Iluvarian shrines and restored the Urdan religion.

After visiting the Pope in Sistrameides, Baroness Nenepillah III of Sakkar died in Sardarthion in 1549, having never had her audience with the new Empress. When the news arrived in Sakkar, the elderly Dame Tarik Tiketua took sick and soon died as well, leaving leadership holes at the top of both the Barony and the Order.

The remaining Urdan tributary regions immediately declared their independence from Sakkar and in the same breath their loyalty to the Empress. They began casting around for an Urdan Realm to take them in. Chidrûl and Penkni sent representatives to both Pehuatoka and Electoral Thace, asking for protection. Iutl and Pekka both sent representatives to Pehuatoka and Itaxik, while Tat'ia only sent one to Pehuatoka.

A new generation took charge in Kuauinochitla with the rise of Baroness Neallatalah IV. She appointed many of her confidants to the positions of leadership in the Barony made vacant by assorted defections and surrenders, and she declared the dawning of a new day for Sakkar.

In Laimak, the Military Order of the Sword of Iluvar (a.k.a. the Warriors of the Ice) chose one their most promising officers and their new Grandmaster. She is more than a little dubious about the whole "giving Urdan lands to Urdan Realms" thing but nevertheless pledged her loyalty to the new Baroness.

Sakkar built a Peer trade depot in Yeyeçtin.

Finnedor's refugees settled in Ersma (2112)1. Bands of peasants settled in Kwenamikkan, Laimak, and Ololoa, though as yet none of those colonies are particularly thriving. Certainly the icy weather has much to do with the struggles of the colonists.

Thacia and Aret

THE HIGH PLAINS & NORTHERN COAST

ELECTORAL QUEENDOM OF THE GREAT HIVE OF CHI'TIXI TIRRIX KI (41 I/YG)

Her Most Puissant Maješty, Taxitiki II, the Illuſtrious, Mištreſs of Tirrix & the Great Hive, Black Claw Baroness of Tichiiir, Duchesse of Chax and Tix'itikata, Countess Itax, Elečtor & Lich-Queen of Chi'tixi, Imperial Warden of the North, &c., &c.

Her Excellency, Tannix VI, Lady Ch'tort, Countess of Cærrat, Vice-regent of Weſtern Chi'tixi.

Lady Tchatix Tixit, Grandmištreſs of the Military Order of Gidaxa.

Trade: Araxes, Averon, Hyrágec, ID, Ingazi, Kicitchat, Kumara, Lynnarvor, Taneki, ThaceD, ThaceE, Tokatl, Urdraháhn, Yarni-Za, Zarkhandu

DP: At war with a whole @#\$% continent

Chi'tixi's lich queen took her title of Warden of the North quite seriously. Indeed, Chi'tixi sent 760 ships and numberless marines to rendezvous with the rest of the gathering fleet and head north to Oratoa.

The Sahúlian Grand Armada gathered just off the Chittix Coast. Despite the orders of the Empress, not one Imperial Admiral appeared, and not one of the Imperial Fleets took part. Instead, the Grand Armada gathered under the overall command of the Deputy Warden of the North, Lady Tchazzix. Ships arrived from nine Imperial Realms⁸.

The War Council contained no less than seven admirals⁹. Together, the Armada counted some 2,385

⁸ Araxes, Averon, Chi'tixi, Hyrágec, Ingazi, Taneki, Thace (Electoral), Tokatl, and of course the *Imperial Withidan Fleet*.

⁹ Admiral Lord Lorth of Episma, Admiral Milski (Averon); Admiral Elenthes (Hyrágec); Admiral Lady Sardira (Ingazi); Admiral Trebodir (Thace); Admiral Namtzar (Taneki); Admiral Tapatua (Tokatl); and Admiral Orrik of the IWF. The fleet also included Ingazi's Commodore Manandorin, one of the discoverers of Efan. A bluff old naval veteran, he was asked to attend the Admirals' dinners, both as a courtesy to his age and wisdom, and because he tells cracking good dinner stories. Deputy Warden Lady Tchazzix (Chi'tixi) and Count Tramandes of Kayew (Araxes) rounded out the Grand Armada's War Council.

ships, including almost 400 galleons. The dragon Karn flew overhead, as both a long-range scout and a mascot. The Grand Armada sailed north to war and adventure in 1548.

When she was told of the troubles in Cappargarnia, the Lich-Queen reportedly laughed so hard that a mandible fell off. It was later reattached.

The protests in Chi'tixi's eastern cities gradually petered out as it became clear that the Lich-Queen had thrown her power and might behind the Imperial war in Oratoa. In the western regions, things weren't so rosy. In Tantor, the Countess of Cærrat declared martial law in 1547 in the face of continuing anti-Chi'tixi protests and launched a brutal crackdown on the "rebels"¹⁰. As the Countess distributed largesse in the form of new public works and cushy jobs, the west slowly calmed down.

A new naval academy was built in Otch'kar, as well as an impressive new fortress for the Order of Gidaxa built at least partially with Tarotist slave labour. Naval quality improved, and the government expanded its reach.

DUCHY OF THACE (33 S/UR)

His Grace, Willor VI, the Unwell, Lord Goshtikka-Ourane, Baron of Brennadein, Duke of Thace.

Trade: Araxes, Averon, Cappargarnia, Carcë, Chi'tixi, Ingazi, Hyrágec, ID, Kicitchat, Taneki, ThaceE, Thünd(2), Tokatl, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Duke Brannis II died in the spring of 1548, and his middle-aged son Willor VI took the ancient ducal throne. Willor is not a healthy Saurian, and his first act was to appoint his similarly wheezy son Biard as heir. Lord Biard is the father to four small children, the youngest having been born in 1550, so one way or another the succession seems assured.

The winters continued to be long, particularly in the mountainous north, though by 1550 the weather had improved considerably.

¹⁰ One protest in the summer of 1548 was memorably broken up by troopers riding elephants.

ELECTORAL COUNTY-PALATINE OF THACE (33S/UR)
His Most Excellent Majesty, Brannis VI, the Gallant,
Lord Goshtikka-Snamarthis, Burgrave of Wagga-
Wagga, Overlord of Carcë, Electoral Count Palatine
in Thace.

Margrave Thosh the Wicked of the Severed Steppe,
Sar of Nemidor.

Trade: Araxes, Averno, Carcë, Chi'tixi, Hyrágec,
ID, Ingazi, Kicitchat, Sakkar, Taneki,
ThaceD, Thünd(2), Urdraháhn

DP: None.

hace's winters were long and cold, particularly in the mountainous north and in the southern steppe. After the especially nasty winter of 1546, the weather gradually improved, though it's still nowhere near warm.

In Wagga-Wagga in 1546, Admiral Virgifera of Sakkar surrendered her fleet of almost 200 ships and placed herself under house arrest, apparently on the orders of her Baroness. Several weeks later, some local Thacian officials went to investigate, and they discovered the Admiral dead in her chambers.

When news of this reached the fleet, Vice Admiral Orrik decided that she'd rather die in battle against the Oratoans than rot in some Thacian inn under "house arrest". The Sakkari captains rallied to her and elected her "Admiral of the Imperial Withidan Fleet". The IWF joined with the rest of the Imperial Armada gathering nearby. In this capacity, they happily took direction from the charismatic leader of the Thacian Expeditionary Armada, Admiral Lord Trebodir.

As the fleet was preparing to sail to join the Grand Armada, a cadre of ultra-Yagnarist dockworkers snuck aboard several galleons late one night and set them on fire. The harbour of Wagga-Wagga was thick with ships crowded in – ships from Thace, Hyrágec, the IWF – perhaps 400 or more, plus the normal merchant traffic. The fire spread madly from ship to ship, burning merrily in the night. Dozens burned to the waterline before the conflagration was under control. Soon enough, the docks caught fire,

which spread to the warehouse district and caused untold damage to the wares of many merchants.

In the cold light of the morning, observers could count only about 340 military ships in the harbour. The initial investigation laid the blame squarely on agents of the Church of the Red Death.

Much work was in evidence in the Goshtikka gardens, including an attempt to grow some desiccated, ancient seeds. A massive University of Ice campus was built at the University of Snamarthis.

More Thacian missionaries piled into Wagga-Wagga, cementing the hold of Urdanism there. The *cultus* of Urda the Indifferent is now the majority religion, although small Yagnarist and Tarotist "house churches" are still common. Thanks to being the jumping off point for the Oratoan invasion, the city has rapidly become one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Empire.

A Saurian saboteur was captured near the Cathedral of Saint Annír, just a few scant miles from the capital of Snamarthis. He was caught in the middle of some great magical effort by the Palatine Horse Guard. The saboteur committed suicide by poison while in custody. He had a considerable sum of money on his person and several spell crystals.

After visiting his daughter in Belorn, Count Palatine Brannis the Gallant re-entered Snamarthis at the head of a column of elephants. Shortly thereafter, he made an appearance at an elephant demonstration and race held in the Stadium of the Eternal Rider in 1548. The following year, he published a pamphlet titled "On Nobility" detailing his views on the rights and responsibilities of nobility and the rights and responsibilities of the common people¹¹.

The popularity of *The Azure Chronicles* endured, as several more volumes were published, bringing the total to 16. The series tells the continuing story of a team of brave Urdan teens fighting a secret world-wide conspiracy of villainy led by a mysterious tattooed Wenemet and his red-robed minions. With the coming of war in Oratoa, the tone of the

¹¹ Basically, hard work all around and not a lot of time for silly parties and frivolous chatter. The occasional elephant race is fine, however.

books has become somewhat darker, and in book 14 (*A Plenitude of Dragons*), the force behind the enemy is revealed to be “the Shadow King of the Red Death”. The author, Miss Keene Constance, has received requests for speaking engagements from Sardarthion to Akassa (which she cheerfully accepts), and proposals of marriage from as far away as Hyrágec (which she politely declines). Some of the children of Thacia and Araxes¹² who grew up on these tales have now reached adulthood, and it is clear that many of them regard Miss Keene as something of a prophet.

The books are so ubiquitous that parodies and thinly-veiled imitations proliferated throughout the Empire. One particularly clever forgery called *Tarot Tarot Tarot!* was very popular in the Byrrin valley¹³. Although the author was listed as “Keene Constance”, Miss Keene has denied writing it. Many believe it was actually ghost-written by the late Countess Tinikatua VII of Tokatl.

In northern Thace¹⁴, a strange hazy glow flashed briefly in the skies one afternoon in the autumn of 1550. What magical portent this may be, none quite know, but in subsequent years the area produced a bounty of natural resources, including lumber, linen, hemp, wool, and even fish.

The Air Academy in Eiden expanded.

¹² Not to mention the Imperial Demense. In the past few years, the books have been sold all through the West, the northern Byrrin, and into Hyrágec.

¹³ The novel tells the story of a team of plucky Imperial *Tarotist* teens fighting a secret world-wide conspiracy of villainy intent on controlling the world by corrupting the Tarot itself. The heroes discover a plot wherein a dashing and once stalwart Imperial Prince (the leader of a long tradition of true and right-thinking Tarotists) is brainwashed by an “old master of the Tarot” who uses black magics, and magics of religions other than the Tarot, to accomplish the Prince’s inner destruction and replace the True Tarot with his own corrupted deck. They race against time to save the good Tarotist Prince, who is now locked away and speaking only what his master, a mysterious tattooed human in a ragged robe, tells him to say. The heroes are led by a fierce, fur-collared Kithixi with a penchant for the dramatic. They hurry to uncover the plot, reveal the corruption, and rescue the Prince and all of the Deck.

¹⁴ Specifically in the prefectures of Daradu, Galeo, Galluch, Jannas, Mennendar, Ortuch, and Spenna.

THE LADY OF BELORN

1546

Count and Countess Brannis and Tressa had spent almost a year in Belorn supervising the work on the Arcane forge being built on the leeward slopes of Mount Gor. Though they had dinner with their granddaughter there nearly every day, there were still moments when they were distinctly aware of Mirra’s *otherness*. This was one of those times.

They were in the dining chamber of Sar Ortak’s great yurt, gathered around a small wooden table. The Count and Countess and their granddaughter were joined by the barrel-chested Sar Ortak, the dour old tutor, Master Nardir, the Reverend Mother Iona, and the elephant-sized head of the dragon Skögul, her neck snaking out through an enlarged doorway to the massive bulk of her body lying outside. As a young Saurian, Brannis had spent quite a lot of time with Skögul at the court of his mentor, the First Matriarch Camleda v. In those days, the great dragon had been a steed and a steadfast companion. To Mirra, she seemed more of a giant house cat.

Sar Ortak and one of his men heaved a whole roast pig into the maw of the dragon. She swallowed it in one go and smiled appreciatively.

“She always makes me nervous when she does that”, Ortak muttered as he took his seat. “Nothing more unsettling than a smiling dragon.”

Mirra munched contentedly on her bread and looked at her grandfather. Count Brannis at 56 was as impressive a Saurian as she had ever been, though if Mirra looked closely, she could see darker blotches on his once sandy-brown skin, and around his eyes his skin had begun losing its colour entirely, fading to grey. She thought it looked very distinguished. Grandmother looked more youthful, and not just because she was four years younger. The House of Dhanos had a well-deserved reputation for longevity. Mirra thought she should remember why that was, but it was right at the back of her

memory, like so many other things. She felt that she *should* remember, but she couldn't.

Her grandfather was speaking. He was leaving? Mirra tried to pay attention.

"...in the morning. I'm afraid we can't stay any longer. I've tried to teach you what I could, Mirra, but please mind your tutors."

Mirra nodded solemnly.

Count Brannis turned to Sar Ortak and said, "Noble son of Fior, you have done your duty well, and under what I now understand was the most trying of circumstances."

Ortak imitated a polite bow, an awkward move coming from the large, bluff steppe Saurian. Mirra suppressed a giggle, and Mother Iona gently kicked her under the table.

"My sar, at the leave-taking ceremony tomorrow morning, I shall name you 'Champion of Urda and Banneret of Snamarthis' in recognition of your past and future service to the Princess Mirra. You shall have the precedence and estates of a Landgrave, if not the title."

"My lord, you do me much honour."

"My sar, your service has been exemplary, and I do what little to thank you as I can."

Mirra enjoyed these little dances, so formal but (at least in this case) so genuine. She had observed her grandfather closely during the two years he had been in Belorn, and had tried to imitate his effortless transitions between the spontaneous and the rigidly formal.

Brannis turned suddenly to his granddaughter. "Mirra, you must promise me that you will allow Sar Ortak to continue protecting you. This is his duty, and you must allow him to do it."

Mirra nodded solemnly. "I promise, grandfather."

As the servants cleared the dinner dishes away, a new thought suddenly formed itself in Mirra's head. With no introduction, she blurted out "Skögul's leaving too."

The napping dragon, upon hearing her name, opened one eye the size of a dinner plate.

Grandmother Tressa replied, "oh? Is she coming with us to Snamarthis?"

Mirra puzzled out the thought in her head, frowning her brow. "No, I don't think so. No. She'll be going south, to the snows. She needs to see the snows."

Brannis and Tressa exchanged glances. Brannis said, "Mirra, dear, do you think that's wise, sending a dragon alone into the south? She's bound to cause some... *concern* in the other realms."

"Oh, she won't hurt anybody. There are plenty of wild animals for her to eat." It was true. Mirra could suddenly see Skögul swooping down and catching up a lone goat from a brown hillside in the south. Future or past? She never knew.

"I was thinking more of the people."

"Oh! No, she doesn't eat people!"

"Ah, no dear; I'm sure she doesn't. I meant that there are a lot of people who might tend to panic just a little bit if they were to see a dragon flying overhead. We should probably warn them."

Suddenly, Mirra saw Skögul's route, as if it were plotted on a map that she just remembered seeing. She remembered her eighth birthday. She remembered the faces of the proud ancient Princes of Duedhyn that she could never have met. She could almost remember why there was an empire at all.

The pieces were starting to reveal themselves to her, and she could almost see how the puzzle fit together. Firmly, she said, "Grandfather, you should send letters to the Elector of Araxes and to the Mothers of Logosenn. Skögul flies to Tythyen."

Skögul closed her one open eye. The rest of those in the room stared after Mirra as she left without another word and began walking towards her hill. It was her 11th birthday.

1547

A few days shy of her 12th birthday, Mirra lay upon her hill, watching the clouds skitter across the sky. In her bones she could feel the vibrations of countless hammers – she knew it to be the continuing work on the Arcane forge, leagues to the north. At least Mount Gor had fallen silent in recent years.

The loudest sound was the two guards at the base of the hill trying to be quiet as they played at cards.

Mirra closed her eyes and felt the song of the earth course through her. It had been lonely since Skögul and her grandparents left. Oh, there were still her tutors and good old Sar Ortak, but it wasn't really the same. Poor Master Nardir! He was always coughing now, always tired, and once-green skin was now blotchy and losing its colour. He was, she supposed, quite old by now.

In the distance, Mirra could now hear several Saurians approaching. They were some leagues away yet, and they were coming from Gorathis. She recognized the long, firm stride of Sar Ortak and the short, quick gait of Reverend Mother Iona. There were three guards walking their regulation steps in their regulation boots, leaving two strangers. One wore hard boots with a worn left heel. The other trod lightly, almost skipping.

Eventually a shadow fell across Mirra's face. She smiled in spite of herself. "Hello, Ortak."

Ortak's deep voice boomed out across the steppe, but he did not speak to Mirra. "Excellency, may I introduce your niece, the Princess Mirra?"

Mirra opened her eyes and found herself staring into the kindly face of her 28 year-old Uncle Merryn. She knew him at once, though she had not seen him since she was very young. He was enveloped in a shimmering cloud of Mana, which Mirra knew that only she could see.

He smiled and said, "Hello".



In the days following, Merryn and Mirra walked often through the prairie outside of town. They were accompanied by Reverend Mother Iona, who carefully listened to their discussion but spoke little, and by Merryn's aide Lady Sondara, a young noblewoman who seemed perpetually delighted and who practically skipped across the steppe. For all her apparent frivolity, Mirra observed that Sondara kept careful notes on everything they said in a thick notebook she always carried with her.

More and more, it became apparent that her uncle had come to learn from *her*, a girl less than half his age. He was most interested in the song of the earth, in the ebb and flow of Mana. She tried to tell him what she saw and what she felt, though she often had insufficient words to explain her experiences. She tried to show him the currents flowing beneath their feet and the glorious fountain of Mount Gor, to explain how each person was rooted like a plant in the earth, drawing the Mana upwards through their body and radiating it out into the sky. He could feel the roots of his feet pulling the energies into his body – what sorcerer couldn't? – but of the rest he could only smile and nod while his aide scribbled furiously.

One day, Mirra took them all back to the top of her hill. They sat and watched the clouds.

Mirra looked at her uncle, and the Lady Sondara sitting next to him, both happily staring upwards in the warm summer sun. She suddenly saw the myriad possibilities of her uncle's future life streaming away from his body and spilling off the hill into the plains beyond. While some ended in dark blood, some ended in a dazzling array of royal majesty. Beyond these, she saw a multitude of branches that she instinctively knew were all his possible children – Mirra's potential cousins. In an instant, Mirra was heedlessly falling down these lines of descent, seeing where they might lead. At the end of one of these cascading tendrils of possibility, one of Merryn's potential descendants looked up and stared into her. Mirra recognized her immediately.

With a start Mirra came out of her reverie. She must have made some sort of sound, for her uncle Merryn and his aide Lady Sondara were both staring at her. There was concern in both pairs of eyes.

"Oh, Uncle!" she gasped.

"Are you all right, Mirra?"

"You must marry Sondara right away. Now. Today." Mirra leapt to her feet. "There's not a moment to be lost!"

They stared at Mirra, mouths agape.

It was Mirra's 12th birthday.

Merryn and Sondara did marry each other just a few months later, having discovered to their very great surprise that a deep and abiding love had grown between them.

1548

On her 13th birthday, Mirra summoned – there was no other word for it – Mirra summoned Prince and Princess Merryn and Sondara and their new hatchling Brannis, Sar Ortak, and the Reverend Mother Iona to her birthday hill. Old Master Nardir had died during the previous long winter, breathing out his last words to Mirra. What he had whispered, she held close to her heart and told no one.

The four adults stood waiting at the top of the hill, Lord Merryn holding the hatchling in his arms. They each held the notes that Mirra had slipped under their doors sometime before dawn. “Come to the Hill at Noon” they said. It was now noon, and Sar Ortak grumbled.

“It’s no use complaining,” said the short Reverend Mother. “She’s up to something, and we’ll just have to wait on her to tell us what it is.”

“I see her!” Princess Sondara pointed to the horizon, where indeed the figure of Mirra in her yellow sun dress could be seen running towards them, three guards trailing behind in a ragged line.

Mirra was running, barefoot, carrying a pack in her arms. Her long yellow hat streamed behind her as she ran, and it was all the armoured guards could do to keep up with her. She ran over the plain and right up the hill, scarcely slowing her pace at all. When she arrived at the top, she was beaming. Down the side of the hill, somewhere near to the bottom, the guards huffed and puffed and did their very best to climb up after her.

Sar Ortak shouted down at them, “Weaklings! Outpaced by this slip of a girl! I’ll bust the two of you down to stable mucking if you aren’t up here by the time I count five. One!”

Mirra snorted, stifling a laugh. Ortak glanced sideways at her, but he refused to allow himself to be distracted.

“Two!” he roared.

The guards, smothering in their chain mail and full helms, heaved themselves up the hill. One of them fell down and started crawling.

“Three!”

Mirra could no longer hold her laughter, which now came out of her in loud, joyous whoops.

Ortak looked at her in confusion for a moment, before turning back to his men scrambling up the hill. Well, two of them were scrambling. One appeared to have given up and was lying on the grassy slope and heaving.

“Four!”

With a great, goofy grin, the gangly Mirra walked in front of the mighty Sar Ortak and gently poked him in the beak.

“F – ”

Sar Ortak fell haplessly silent.

“Now,” said Mirra, “do I have everybody’s attention? Good. Gather ‘round.”

The four puzzled adults gathered around the barefoot adolescent girl in her bright yellow sun dress and her bright yellow hat.

Mirra took a deep breath.

“I love you all very much, but the hour has come. My mission is clear to me now, and I must leave you. Uncle Merryn and Aunt Sondara, go home to Snamarthis and raise your family to be loyal and true. Hard times are coming, and only your strength of heart will see you through the struggle. I shall give your love to your brother and sister when I see them. Give mine to my parents, to my brother, and to my grandparents. I shall not see them again, I think, until we are all in the Summerlands at last.”

She turned to Reverend Mother Iona. “Take off your veil so that I can see you properly. That’s better. Reverend Mother, you are impatient and grumpy and wise. I think I will miss you most of all. You’ve taught me so very much, but now it’s my turn to instruct you.”

Mirra bent down and kissed the short Reverend Mother on her forehead. Iona's mouth gaped in wonder.

"And now, dear family, I have promises to fulfill in the centre of the world."

Sar Ortak found his voice. "You're not going anywhere without me, Princess."

Mirra grinned. "No, of course not. I promised Grandfather, and I never break my promises. That's the whole reason I'm here at all, you know." She took the old warrior's arm and reassuringly patted it. "Well, this is it. Goodbye."

And with that, Princess Mirra and Sar Ortak simply vanished. When the two guards finally arrived at the top of the hill, the much diminished party was already walking down the other side.

LORDSHIP OF CARCĚ (9 S/UR)

Sar Grotan Tahnik II, the Dragon, Third Lord CarcĚ, Master of the Horseclans, Scourge of Urda the Fierce, Defender of the Steppe.

Trade: Araxes, Averon, Itaxik, Pehuatoka, Sakkar, ThaceD, ThaceE, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Sar Tahnik II aged into his dotage while his son and heir spent his time in Snamarthis. The winter of 1546 was perhaps the worst on record, certainly the worst that anyone could remember. For one thing, it pretty much lasted until the spring of 1548. You can ride days across the steppe before finding a snowless spot of earth large enough to set up your yurt. Still, things did get a little warmer in 1549, and there were wide snowless stretches reported by the summer of 1550.

Sorcery quality improved, the government expanded, the Military Academy in Assarnes got a second building, and Naval quality doubled.

Doubled, do you hear! Doubled!

RANARÁDU ONCE MORE

Six unlikely pilgrims trudged through the drifting snow, from the village of Dhúl in the endless expanse of Harza towards

the shadow of the great red rock of Ranarádu. Four were Urdans. Two were not.

The Urdans included Sar Kortiss of Hurrimak (an older Saurian), the Wenemet Sir Nadith Jama-lan of Hyrágec, and two Kithixi: Lady Iteamik of Itaxik and Reverend Mother Fiyxit.

Both of the others were Saurians: the Iluvarian Baron Ennor II of Jorun, and a Yagnarist priest going by the name of Master Harroe. The Iluvarian spoke to everyone except Master Harroe. The Yagnarist only spoke to Reverend Mother Fiyxit. Mostly, however, they were all silent as they walked the last desolate miles to Ranarádu.

They passed by Harun Priory without stopping. Its buildings the colour of old terra-cotta looked almost charming with their thick coat of snow, piled high on the peaked slate roofs. The priory buildings were framed in gnarled old trees so draped in snow that they looked as though they were covered in blossoms. Even from a distance, the pilgrims could hear the droning chant of the sisters, who take shifts in maintaining a constant song of prayer to Urda for the emperor, and have done so for thousands of years.

It was approaching mid-day when they arrived at Ranarádu. The constant, driving wind had kept most of the Rock free of snow, but there were drifts in the hollows, and the pilgrims could see the bright flash of bare ice in many places. It would be a treacherous climb.

At the foot of the path was an ancient stone hermitage. Beside it stood a Saurian in a thick, hooded ash-hued cloak. Although most Urdan sisters wore the burkha, clearly some of the Harun sisters still preferred their ancient garb. She was relatively young, perhaps twenty-five or so, and blind. She leaned on a staff the colour of old driftwood.

As the six pilgrims approached her, she raised her head and said, "Indeed, the stars are right. Go and climb." She lowered her head and stood without moving.

By way of greeting, Reverend Mother Fiyxit chattered, "What is your name, sister?"

Without raising her head, she answered in a sing-song. "I am Sister Kurra, the 296th Keeper of Ranarádu from the first, who was appointed by the Emperor Belesar xxii of blessed memory. Go and climb."

They climbed.

The climb was every bit as treacherous as it looked. Several times someone slipped on hidden ice or loose snow and gravel. A few times, blood or ichor was drawn.

Suddenly, Lady Iteamik snapped her head around, antennae quivering. "Did you hear that?" she asked nobody in particular.

Sar Kortiss grunted. "Nothing but the howling of the wind, shrieking. Put your mind to the terrain, lest you find yourself in a crevasse."

Sir Jamalan stopped as well, brows furrowed. "I heard something too. Shouts? They're pretty far away."

Suddenly, Lady Iteamik, Sir Jamalan, and the Reverend Mother Fiyxit all ducked down.

"Who screamed?" demanded Lady Iteamik.

As the others stopped to stare at them, the three slowly stood back up, looking around them in wonder, and perhaps fear.

Then, they all saw it. They were in the midst of a battle. Or, rather, the sacking of a town. The six found themselves surrounded by shadowy, insubstantial walls and gardens of elegant and delicate construction. Curving stone steps with graceful balustrades connected terraced plazas with gardens of potted trees and marble fountains.

Many of the buildings and walls, however, had gaping holes in them, while others had great tumbledown gaps. Loose stones and chunks of mortar and concrete littered the ground and the steps.

Some of the buildings were on fire, though the pilgrims felt no heat.

Throughout the ruins, shadowy Saurian figures in archaic clothing ran in various directions in undisguised panic. Some carried bundles of their belongings, or books, or valises, or children. They were insubstantial, like vapours, and one would

occasionally run through one of the pilgrims, as though they weren't there.

The air was full of screams, shouts, the crashing sound of stoneworks tumbling down, and the echoing crash of fire-bolts in the distance.

Father up the terraced hill of Ranarádu, they saw a burning tower stretching upwards to the sky.

For the first time, the Yagnarist Master Harroe addressed Sar Kortiss. "Up the hill or down?"

The old steppe warrior glanced up and down, considering both options. "Down. That tower is bound to collapse soon. Down. Now. Move!"

A fire-bolt smashed into the tower, about a third of the way up, and it exploded into fire and shattered stone. The six pilgrims began running down the stairs.

Except, they weren't really on stairs at all, but on a rough, icy slope. Most of the pilgrims immediately lost their footing; several disastrously so. No one escaped injury as they slid or tumbled down the rugged scarp. Lady Iteamik and Reverend Mother Fiyxit sustained injuries and were laying unconscious on the slope. Baron Ennor and Sir Jamalan had to carefully make their way back up the slope to carry them down.

The young Master Harroe had a spectacularly broken leg with at least one protruding bone, but he was setting the splint himself and seemed unconcerned. Sar Kortiss had smashed his head against a protruding stone and was a bloody mess. He was nevertheless scrabbling up the slope to aid the young Yagnarist when he blacked out, presumably from bloodloss.

Eventually, all of the pilgrims huddled in a little rock hollow near the unmoving body of Sar Kortiss. Yagnarist, Iluvarian, and Urdan together tended to the remaining wounded. The injuries of the two Kithiki proved serious but not life-threatening. Lady Iteamik had a narrow puncture to her abdominal carapace; it was deep but had missed her ventriculus by a good inch. Reverend Mother Fiyxit had a rather spectacular spiderwebbed crack on her anterior thoraxial carapace, which looked much worse than it was.

Sar Kortiss, however, was dead.

Baron Ennor started a fire while Sir Jarmalan dressed Lady Iteamik's wound and satisfied himself that Master Harroe's broken leg was properly set. Later, as darkness fell, they ate their warmed rations silently by firelight.

In the morning, they buried Sar Kortiss under a tumulus of loose rocks. The Reverend Mother offered a few words of prayer, including the traditional Urdan committal prayers. The Urdans echoed the responses, while Ennor and Harroe stood in respectful silence.

Afterwards, Sir Jarmalan returned to Hyrágec, and Baron Ennor went back to Kongros. After her convalescence, Reverend Mother Fiyxit returned to make her report to the First Matriarch in Iurdana.

The others tarried awhile to heal.

ELECTORAL GRAND DUCHY OF ARAXES (28 W/UR)

Grand Duchess Sardierre the Fair, Regent for... His Gallant Majesty, Kapalless IV, Baron Pinyerrel, Elector and Grand Duke of All Araxes.

Baron Kuakomanh Sardes, Lord Protector of Araxes.

Trade: AradécC, Atuburrk, Averno, Carcë, Chi'tixi, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Hyrágec, ID, Ingazi, IOC, Kicitchat, Kumara, Taneki, ThaceD, ThaceE, Thünd(2), Tokatl, Urdraháhn, Zarkhandu

DP: None.

The Regency threw itself into the Oratoan war. Several of the Thiuli-owned newspapers called it an attempt by the Regency to distract the population from their "illegal rule", but by and large the people supported the war. In a completely unrelated development, the editor of the Thiuli-owned *Pinyerrel Beacon* was arrested for sedition on the direct order of the Lord Protector.

The popular former heir, Count Tramandes of Kayew, took command of the Araxean contingent of the Grand Armada and sailed north to Oratoa. Once properly settled in New Araxes, he intends to send for his wife and children.

The old Thiuli Duke of Thunta died in 1529. He was succeeded by a charismatic (and loyal) grandson named Ursardes.

The prestigious Nigata Naval Academy expanded, and a new college dedicated to the study of the Ice was founded at the University of Pinyerrel. The fashion and publishing industries continued to expand with government patronage.

The dragon Skögul flew over parts of southern Araxes, causing equal amounts of fear and wonder as she passed overhead. She arrived in Tythyen in 1550, where she made herself a home in an otherwise disused drydock. Most people avoid the area, but several tour operators have made themselves extremely wealthy by showing off Tythyen's latest guest, if only from a safe distance.

The weather, particularly in the southern reach, continued to be snowy and cold until about 1548, at which point people started noticing that it was slightly less snowy and cold than it used to be.

COUNTY OF KICITCHAT (22 I/YG)

The Sorceress Atter'chi, Regent of the Kicitchat Hive and Associated Dominions.

T'ivik the Lich, Grandmistress of the Nameless.

Trade: Adndar, AradécC, Araxes, Atuburrk, Cappargarnia, Chi'tixi, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Golmath, Hyrágec, ID, Ingazi, Lynnarvor, Taneki, ThaceD, ThaceE, Urdraháhn, Yarni-Za, Zarkhandu

DP: Nolvonn (F, see below)

Countess Cir'ik VIII spent the vast sums on public works throughout her Realm in an effort to mitigate the worst effects of the chilly weather. It's difficult to say if it worked. Although the weather in 1546 and 1547 was as bad as any could remember, it warmed up after that. Her subjects also pitched in; private citizens took up a lottery for road creation, and the "Peoples' Road" now runs from the town Onin Zho in Atch'ikitik, through the great city of Xant'ki in Thichat, to the town of Taxitki in Karadeg.

The Countess endowed a College of Medicine at the University of Tchac'at. She was not at the dedication ceremony, however.

The Envoy

Sarnath stood perhaps a hundred feet away from the throne. It had become habit. The Countess was old. Her temper had become horrifying. Madness is setting in. Madness was finally catching up with the decay. Her body had become fragile and emaciated in the last month, but her mind was still razor-sharp. She was able to execute her duties like an old butcher with his knife, and like the butcher's hands, she was scarred and worn from use.

The vultures that surrounded her were wary. Countess Cir'ik VIII had ruled Kicitchat with an iron fist and deadly magic. Her body might be frail, but her magic was still persuasive. The ashy remains of clumsy servants were all the evidence that the vultures needed to know that they should keep their distance.

He was told the vultures were not like the others that came before. The others were Princesses who had proven themselves in the Testing Crèche. They were honed. But they were dead. The vultures who hovered around the edges of the cold, dark hall had killed them. They had stood in the way of the vultures' ambitions. Poison, dark sorcery, assassination, and accidents had thinned the potential aspirants to the throne of an old Countess. This was not the way of the Kicitchat he knew long ago. But now, this was the way of things, perhaps a remnant of the Atuburrkan Occupation.

Sarnath walked by Black Sith'tat to look down the long, stone hall to see if his messengers happened to be coming. He was restless. Court life had slowed. There was little to do.

He looked back at Black Sith'tat. The Kitix Princess was huge, perhaps six foot three and almost three hundred pounds, but there was no bloat or fat in her. She was actually quite attractive in a brutish sort-of-way, even to an undead Saurian. Her ebony

chitin glistened like the abyss as she moved about the hall.

Sith'tat was a fierce fighter if the stories he heard were true. The Countess had made her the Mistress-at-Arms after Sith'tat decided she was uninterested in joining the ranks of Countesses-Aspirant. She was also known for her unusual sexual appetites and was famously dull-witted in a caste known for its intelligence.

Sarnath spotted a small, beady-eyed Princess walking down the hall, past the Ittik Defenders; it was Princess Tikka. Sarnath did not like Princess Tikka. Celephais had warned Sarnath about her, saying she acts like a Kitix who knows she is being watched – the most dangerous kind of Kitix. Celephais says little, but when he does speak the wise know when to listen. The other undead Saurian in the Countess's service was her eyes-and-ears and at times – if rumors were true – her shadow-sword.

Sarnath knew enough about Celephais to know the truth of the rumors.

Princess Tikka approached Sarnath and smiled like a Kitix who had nothing to worry about. She whispered, "How is the Countess today?" Her beady eyes shifted to and fro.

"Wary."

"Ah, I see. Should I risk speaking to her?"

"I shall not stop you."

Princess Tikka looked Sarnath up and down before saying, "We all questioned bringing you back and into this position. Perhaps when the Countess has left us, that choice should be revisited."

"I serve at the whim of the Countess or whoever sits upon Kicitchat's throne."

"Do not forget that," said Princess Tikka. "I think I will speak to the Countess."

Tikka looked toward the throne and the old Kitix who sat upon it. She approached with more confidence than she should have had.

The Countess looked almost confused as Princess Tikka bent before her. The eyes... they border between madness and doubt. Is it time?

"My dear Countess, you are looking well."

The Countess only wheezed feebly and didn't seem to realize that Princess Tikka had pulled a cold iron dagger from her robe. She thrust it into the Countess's throat. Green and black ichor sprayed out. The Countess gasped, clutched at the dagger still in her throat, and collapsed to the ground in front of the throne. The Ittik Defenders did not move.

Tikka stood quickly scanning the room and looking for her rivals who would take the opportunity to strike. She smiled and her beady little eyes lit up as she noticed a figure at the dining table.

Sarnath waited.

The Priestess

Princess Bla'iat had been stuffing honey-fruit into her maws when Princess Tikka had stabbed the Countess. She wasn't eating now. Now her hand was on her blade. Bla'iat thought that should make Princess Tikka hesitate. She may be fat, but no one in living memory could handle a weapon like her.

Both Bla'iat and her sister Princess Haak'ita were favored Countesses-Aspirant. Their mother was herself killed in the Testing Crèche.

The Priestess' attention quickly moved elsewhere. As *One of Eight* she was above such court bedlam. Not that she was concerned for her safety, for Yagnar gave her more than enough power to deal with any blade that may stray in her direction. Sarnath found the dance amusing.

"Come, Princess Bla'iat – do you have something to say or should we wait until your mouth is no longer full?" taunted Princess Tikka.

Bla'iat moved to get up but then stopped and smiled at Tikka. Or at least that is what Princess Tikka thought until she realized that the Countess-Aspirant was smiling at something *behind* Tikka.

Princess Tikka wheeled around, quickly drawing a second dagger, but it was too late. A bolt of Mana ripped through her like a spear, spraying her innards and ichor throughout the cold hall.

The magic had come from the Countess who had emerged from behind a curtain.

She laughed maniacally as she screamed, "The old tricks are the best tricks my dear Tikka!"

Tikka was foolish. She should have known better. This was the same ruse that the Countess had herself played so many years ago to gain the throne. Princess Tikka should have been prepared.

But then it happened. The Countess' face went blank and her laughter was cut short. Where there was intelligence and cunning in her eyes, there now was only madness and death. Her body, only moments ago weak and frail, now seemed to gain supernatural strength.

The time was upon them.

A shimmering, almost completely translucent sphere formed around the mad Countess. She tried to force her way out, but to no avail. In her rage she scratched and clawed. When there was no effect, she turned her sharp talons onto herself drawing ten lines of green ichor down her face and chest.

Yagnar had touched Princess Haak'ita in ways that the Priestess had perceived only in *The Eight*. Not only was she beautiful – tall, thin, and graceful – she also was the most talented sorceress Kichitchat had seen in many years. She was aware of how Princess Haak'ita sent dark nightmares into Princess Harl'at's mind – killing the vibrant Princess-Aspirant before she could fight her in the pits the next day. There were countless other instances that *The Eight* divined of Princess Haak'ita's dark magic being used against other rivals. It was not her charge to inform the Countess of this – for her service was to Yagnar – but she suspected the Countess knew of it anyway and took great amusement from Princess Haak'ita's... naughtiness.

The Priestess suspected Princess Haak'ita was about to show that she was more informed of the Countess's tricks than the splatters of gore that were once Princess Tikka.

Princess Haak'ita appeared from the shadows and clicked her mandibles. "A shame my Countess, a shame to see one once so regal degenerated to such a state." She approached the magical sphere

like a cat on parade and looked down, shaking her head in false pity. "I certainly can't let you out, Countess. You could hurt someone else, so what to do?"

There was more certainty than question in those words. The Priestess watched the sorceress circle the sphere.

"I know! Let's give you a vacation. How about the sea? You will like the sea, Countess."

Princess Haak'ita whispered only a word or two, but the magic traced in the air was palpable even to those not so sensitive as *The Eight*. The Priestess quietly said a word of power of her own as Princess Haak'ita gently touched the sphere. It promptly disappeared. The Priestess' spell went off and she followed the magical strand left by Princess Haak'ita's spell. It provided her with a few moments of vision at the destination of the Countess's magical prison.

The sea spread out vast and unchecked for miles with only the struggling Countess floating above it. But a moment passed before the sphere disappeared and the mad Countess plunged to a watery death.

The Priestess' consciousness returned to the cold hall. Princess Haak'ita was running her hands seductively across the top of the throne, regarding at it lustfully. Without looking up she whispered serenely, "Dear Bla'iat, dear sister, I shall make this quick and painless for you."

The Priestess waited.

The Spy

Celephais stood casually in the damp and dark stone passage. Cobwebs encased the ceiling like a wedding veil for a dead bride. He was watching. He was almost always watching. That was his job.

There was a maze of secret passages throughout the castle that webbed its way by, over, or under every room. Few knew of these passages. Their builders had died long ago, encased in the walls of the secret ways they had created.

Celephais looked through the eyehole into the throne room of cold stone. He saw when Princess Tikka had drawn the cold iron dagger and thrust

it into the illusionary Countess. He watched as the invisible Countess splattered Princess Tikka throughout the throne room with one blast of magic. He watched his Countess finally go mad.

Princess Haak'ita's appearance was not a surprise, but the method she used in finally removing the Countess was certainly inventive. Celephais had to give her that. She was a dangerous one. Celephais had stayed well clear of her to ensure that she was not even aware of his existence. If she won the upcoming struggle for the throne, that would have to change. Celephais was not looking forward to introducing himself to her.

Sarnath was staying out of the way. Wise. The remaining servants of the dead Countess had scrambled out of the hall to avoid being caught in the crossfire. Many of them were wiping the remains of Princess Tikka out of their eyes.

Celephais could not see the dining table from his perspective, though he knew that Princess Bla'iat was there. Bla'iat was always at table.

Princess Bla'iat was on Celephais's list. He had first warned the Countess two weeks ago about the fat Princess after he spied Bla'iat skewering the Countess's favorite lover, Fal'mat'at, one night in the wine cellar. The fat Princess did not see Celephais as she was dumping the body into the swift river. Fal'mat'at was never seen again. The Countess listened to Celephais as he described what happened to her concubine. Celephais could see the anger bubbling up inside her.

"Celephais, I want you to kill her – but not yet," she had said. "She wishes me to die of despair. I shall die angry. I want to watch her gloat at what she thinks is her own cleverness. I want to look at her with a gaze that informs her that I know what you did, you fat pig, and your time is coming."

Celephais had nodded dispassionately at the command. It would be done and the nod was the only acknowledgement the Countess needed.

Looking through the eyehole at the carnage, it would seem that someone else had beaten him to it.

Princess Haak'ita had stopped running her hands languidly across the top of the throne as

her sister's head dropped into it. She looked up at the ceiling, startled at first but then a smile came quickly to her lips.

"It would seem you have saved me some trouble. I thank you and shall not forget it. Your new Countess will be very generous."

"I am afraid you are presuming too much," hissed a voice out of Celephais's eyesight. Celephais did not recognize it at first but then realized it was Black Sith'tat speaking. The voice was different somehow. She dropped down from the ceiling with nary a sound. A remarkable achievement for such a large Kitix. Sith'tat was now ten feet from Haak'ita, her body shining black and covered in Princess Bla'iat's blood.

"Now why do you say that, Sith'tat?" asked Princess Haak'ita. "I am the Countess of Kicitchat. Brand me with the Eye of our Master! Bring me the iron crown! Greet your new Countess!"

Celephais observed Black Sith'tat. The Princess was normally quite placid, almost stupid at times. Something had changed in Sith'tat. There was intelligence on her face now that Celephais had not seen from his secret places. No... no... it was an intelligence that Sith'tat had hidden up to now! Very clever, very clever indeed.

"I dispute your claim, Princess," hissed Sith'tat seductively.

"You? Why you are nothing but an ill-mannered prig – a fool! I would be surprised if you could read!" Even as Haak'ita taunted Sith'tat, the tone of her voice shifted as an awareness of the danger she was in dawned.

"That is your fatal error," dispassionately replied Sith'tat.

Princess Haak'ita let out a scream of rage and traced a pattern of magic in the air. A bolt of Mana discharged from her fingers to Sith'tat.

The gigantic Kitix sinuously danced to the side, and the bolt missed her. Sith'tat's bloody claws were now visible to Celephais. She had ripped Princess Bla'iat's head off with her bare hands... very impressive indeed.

She lunged at Princess Haak'ita, but the sorceress was also quick and moved behind the throne to avoid the deadly claws.

Another bolt flew from Princess Haak'ita's hand, and this time hit Sith'tat square in the thorax. She was knocked back three feet but still stood, her carapace smoking from the magic.

That spell would have killed a wild boar, thought Celephais. The spy was impressed for a second time today.

Princess Haak'ita let out a cry of anger and drew a cold iron dagger from her belt as Sith'tat closed the distance. She threw it with deadly precision at Sith'tat's eye, but the Princess deflected it with a casual flick of her claw.

That was all she needed. With one sharp claw, Black Sith'tat punctured Princess Haak'ita's chest. Claw still in the Princess' chest cavity, Black Sith'tat ripped Haak'ita's head off her body and then wrenched her nerve-cord out like a fisherman deboning a fish, holding it and the head up for all to see. Ichor sprayed out and pooled beneath the throne as what remained of the twitching corpse hit the ground.

Celephais observed the Ittik Defenders moving forward to brand and throne Sith'tat as Countess of the Hive. The remaining Heralds and courtiers took a knee. Sarnath did the same. Sith'tat bent her knee as she was branded and a crown placed upon her head. She then stood.

"All hail the Countess Sith'tat, of Kicitchat!"

Long live the Countess! was still being shouted as Celephais slipped away, considering how long he should wait to introduce himself to his new Countess.



No sooner had Sith'tat taken her crown, than the new Empress stopped by to appoint her Chancellor of the Empire. She appointed the elderly Lady Ri'rix her Regent and left with the Empress for Sardarthion.

Baron Dorrak of Nolvonn swore fealty to the new Countess, provided that he could serve her directly and retain his title for himself and his heirs. As the aged Lady Ri'rix¹⁵ had died leaving a sudden vacancy in the Kicitchat leadership corps, the new Regent accepted the Baron's proposal.

ELECTORAL GRAND DUCHY OF ATUBURRK (39 W/YG)
His Gracious Majesty, Adhanggar Rahnes II, the One-Armed, Count of Erran and Odol, Imperial Governor of Ardebon, Elector & Grand Duke of Atuburrk.

Trade: Adndar, Araxes, Cappargarnia, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Golmath, ID, Ingazi, Kicitchat, Kumara, Taneki, Tokatl, Urdrahahn, Yarni-Za

DP: None.

Grand Duke Rahnes invested heavily in his Realm's infrastructure. With a mighty breakthrough in sorcery, the Renaissance has definitively arrived in Atuburrk. A College of Medicine was established at the University of Enychil, and the Grand Duchy's elementary education system expanded. The prestigious Engadh Naval Academy proved a popular draw for the sons and daughters of the Great Houses.

The obnoxious young Count Caranthes left the Academy just after the start of his second year with no explanation. His sister, the Countess Drannea, was denied entrance to the Academy that same year despite having achieved the highest possible marks in the entrance exam. The Countess demanded an investigation, which was quietly quashed by her father the Grand Duke. Instead, she was forced to attend a kicky new arts academy in Inchadh. She graduated in 1550, reportedly on the strength of a manual on modern naval tactics that she wrote entirely in haiku.

The very serious people of the bleak, windswept Isle of Ibungiy named their port town Sto Talus.

Central Sahûl

THE HEART OF EMPIRE

THE ECLIPSE OF CAPPARGARNIA

Prélude: 1546 – 1547

Cappargarnia took out a loan from the Imperial Bank and sent crates and crates of gold north to their colonies. Many thought that Prince Caranthes was becoming a little obsessed with Oratoa, and yet he made no move to dispatch his forces as Lord Admiral of the Blue to join the Grand Armada massing off the Chitix Coast. In fact, the Republic scuttled some fifty ships of their own in Oratoa and settled the sailors into the fast-growing city of Abrahien.

Sacrifices were offered to Card VII: the Chariot, in an effort by Prince Caranthes to patch up differences with the Blood Swords. Worryingly, this did not go as well as in years past. In fact, a great pall of darkness covered the land, blotting out the sun over Cappargarnia City for several hours. The Blood Swords weren't initially all that impressed, either, especially as several Cappargarnian leaders repeatedly tried to nationalize the Order's forces in Erediar, Aretar, Gurvan, and Plormel. Nevertheless, the Order was given some newly constructed troops in Adndar, which confused the Grandmaster mightily. Luckily, he was in a forgiving mood and chalked the whole thing up to a bureaucratic foul-up.

The Free City of Zadres was beset by Cappargarnian diplomats with honeyed words and large piles of cash in small, easy-to-carry bags. The fact that this particular Free City was under the direct administration of the Imperial Admiral of the Blue seems to have troubled the Cappargarnian diplomats not at all. The Guildmasters of Zadres assembled to meet the lead diplomat, who turned out to be none other than the venerable Pontiff Fenric v. He was accompanied by the rather taciturn Lord Sevas Pirein.

¹⁵ Briefly Regent of Kicitchat (1548 to 1549).

After permitting the Pontiff to make his case, the Guildmasters allowed as how it was extremely convincing. The Master of the Clockmakers' Guild spoke for Zadres. He said that he could think of no worse fate than to join the Republic. The confused Pontiff asked what he might mean. The Guildmaster produced a thick dossier.

"I think you will find, your holiness, that this file documents the various attempts by the Republic to infiltrate and subvert the government of the Imperial Free City of Zadres over the course of the last decade, attempts masterminded by none other than you, your holiness. Gentlemen, I believe our meeting is at an end. Good day."

And with that, the Guildmasters rose as one from the negotiating table, leaving the Pontiff and Lord Sevas alone in the chamber.

About this time, the young adult novel *Tarot Tarot Tarot!* (ascribed to the famous Miss Keene Constance) exploded through the Byrrin Valley. Book shops could not keep it on their shelves, even though Miss Keene denied having written it¹⁶.

The Plot Thickens: 1548 – 1549

Pontiff Fenric died in early 1548, having reigned since 1520. The twenty-two Hierarchs of the Church gathered at Golluz within the month and, after the customary vigil, were sealed into the Cathedral of Aphum to choose the new Pontiff.

By now, news had filtered back to the Republic of the Yagnarist uprisings in the Oratoan Thornwood, combined with the Cappargarnian attack on Kommolek's region of Tasæl. The Senate, never entirely comfortable with Prince Caranthes' Oratoan entanglements, called him to account. The Prince, meanwhile, had closeted himself with the rest of the Hydra Council to formulate a response to the deteriorating situation.

The Senate erupted in protest. The five members of the secretive Hydra Council had been deciding policy since they were established in 1521, but many Senators thought that this innovation was

¹⁶ See page 340.

sapping the life-blood out of the Republic¹⁷. The Senate was essentially starved of information, as the business of the Republic was increasingly carried out by shadowy figures bound to the Hydra Council. When rumours started leaking out that some Cappargarnian intelligence assets had defected, even the Senate Intelligence Committee (SIC) which was usually pretty good in the "cannot confirm or deny" department, simply threw up their hands in frustration.

Finally, the New Republic Guard quietly issued the Senators ornate, six-inch knives. The Senators were instructed to "swear an undying secret blood oath of loyalty to the Republic above all." The Senators were rightly confused, as the idea of a "blood oath" was utterly foreign to them. It was only then that they noticed that their staff members already all wore these knives. And not only their staff, but many of their retainers, and even the kitchen staff. Angry Senators demanded to know what this was about. It slowly dawned on them that most of the people around them in the palace district had already taken this "blood oath". Only then did the anger of the Senators turn to cold fear. Many suddenly retired to their country estates for the summer. Several went on foreign junkets. A very few took the blood oath.

On the Ides of Quintilis in 1548, a group of five young Senators, from some of the oldest Cappargarnian Houses¹⁸, pounded on the doors of the Hydra Chambers and demanded admittance. They were astonished when the door simply fell open. They were utterly unprepared for the scene that awaited them. In the centre of the room was a small round table with five chairs. An ornate Tarot Deck was spread on the table, and the cards were covered in dried blood. There was no one in the room.

A stern voice behind the five young Senators demanded their surrender "to the Republic". They

¹⁷ To be fair, many Senators didn't much care, so long as their customary graft showed up in the customary amounts at the customary times. The protestors, of course, thought this rather proved their point.

¹⁸ Abramian Lanharnes, Abramian Sardos, Anabrin Gorthes, Deirn Tarbot, and Steene Rand.

turned around to see a squad of the New Republican Guard, led by Prince Caranthes himself. All had loaded crossbows. Senator Deirn Tarbot¹⁹ stepped forward.

“We are kinsmen, my Prince, what need for arms and arrest? Let us discuss this like civilized men.”

The stern voice was apparently that of the sergeant who now replied, “Put your hands in the air where I can see ‘em *now*, or you’ll be doing your discussing with Card Thirteen.”

Senator Deirn Tarbot took one more step forward, and three crossbow bolts thudded into his chest, killing him more or less instantly. The other four Senators were arrested without incident.

Later that day, Prince Caranthes came to the Senate and addressed the remaining Senators, exhorting them to ultimate loyalty to the Republic. He placed a Tarot deck on the rostrum before him and pulled out his six-inch “loyalty blade”. The Prince drew the blade across his scarred left palm, and as his blood dripped on the deck before him, he shouted, “I renew my vow, my sacred oath. Undying loyalty to the Republic! For Tarot and the Republic!”

And the Senators in the hall drew their blades high above their heads and shouted back as one, “Tarot and the Republic!”



SOOTHSAYER:

Caranthes!²⁰

CARANTHES:

Ha! who calls?

CASCA: Bid every noise be still: peace yet again!

CAR.: Who is it in the press that calls on me?
I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music,
Cry ‘Caranthes!’ Speak; Caranthes is
turn’d to hear.

SOOTH.: Beware the Ides of Quintilis.

CAR.: What man is that?

¹⁹ All of 19 years old, he had only obtained his seat in the past year with the untimely death of his uncle Deirn Drandir.

²⁰ With all due apologies to William Shakespeare. Again.

SEVAS: A soothsayer bids you beware the Ides of Quintilis.

CAR.: Set him before me; let me see his face.

CASSIAS: Fellow, come from the throng; look upon Caranthes.

CAR.: What say’st thou to me now? Speak once again.

SOOTH.: Beware the Ides of Quintilis.

CAR.: He is a dreamer; let us leave him: pass.

...

CASSIAS: I kiss thy hand, but not in flattery,
Caranthes;
Desiring thee that Steene Rand may
Have an immediate freedom of repeal.

CAR.: What, Cassias!

CASSIAS: Pardon, Caranthes; Caranthes, pardon:
As low as to thy foot doth Cassias fall,
To beg enfranchisement for Steene Rand.

SEVAS: I could be well moved, if I were as you:
If I could pray to move, prayers would
move me:
But I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fix’d and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumber’d
sparks,
They are all fire and every one doth shine,
But there’s but one in all doth hold his
place:
So in the world; ‘tis furnish’d well with
kindred,
And kindred are flesh and blood, and
apprehensive;
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshaked of motion: and that I am he,
Let me a little show it, even in this;
That I was constant Rand should be
imprison’d,
And constant do remain to keep him so.

TIRIBISSI:

O Caranthes,—

CAR.: Hence! wilt thou lift up Mondana?

SEVAS: Great Caranthes,—

CAR.: Doth not Sevas bootless kneel?

CASCA: Speak, hands for me!

[Casca first, then the other Conspirators and Sevas stab Caranthes]

CAR.: Even you, Sevas? Then fall, Caranthes.

Dies

TIR.: Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!
Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the
streets.

CASSIAS: Some to the common pulpits, and cry out
'Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!'

SEVAS: People and senators, be not affrighted;
Fly not; stand stiff: ambition's debt is paid.



After the assassination, the Senate passed measure granting amnesty to the assassins. The bill was introduced by Caranthes' own kinsman, Deirn Drondathdenes, brother of the late Deirn Tarbot.

However, there was still a considerable faction of the Senate that remained loyal to Caranthes and his hard-line vision for Cappargarnia. They were given an unexpected boost when the elderly Tiribissi Lanharnes II, Chancellor of the Guilds Council of Adndar, announced that he would not be renewing his City's alliance with Cappargarnia in the wake of what he called "a government by malfeasance, madness, and murder".

Having never received his apology from the late Prince Caranthes, Baron Sandrim Haryt of Ebnadh announced that his family's alliance with the Republic was likewise at an end.

In the face of this newest crisis, the hard-liners (who have taken to calling themselves "Stalwarts") picked up support among some of the vacillating Senators. It was in this tense atmosphere that the Collegium was appointed and the various noble Houses made their bids for the Princely election.

The scattered Senators returned to the city post-haste from their estates and junkets.

For the first time, the political parties cut across House lines, with members of the various Houses supporting differing candidates. The Conspirators put forth their leader, Sevas Taric as a candidate.

Many of those who otherwise sympathized with the conspirators could not bring themselves to support a candidate tainted by assassination. They threw their support behind the young and popular Steene Rand. Senator Abramim Madasar, a former leader of the anti-Deirn faction, actively campaigned for him.

The Stalwarts, meanwhile, supported Prince Caranthes' charismatic nephew, Deirn Carberic.

A Cappargarnian election is always a dramatic affair, and this one was no different. Heraldic banners of the various candidates were hung (and often torn down) all over the city. Rallies and speeches filled the city's plazas, often ending in a riot or a confrontation between gangs of armed thugs. Scurrilous broadsheets circulated everywhere, and lurid newspaper headlines proclaimed a new scandal or accusation twice a day.

Meanwhile, the Republic continued its spiral of destruction. While Adndar had pulled out, the Blood Swords most emphatically did *not*, and when Grandmaster Steene Caranthes discovered that he and his very large army in Carlon were in Adndar territory, he thought that they should get back to their own lands immediately. In his mind, the best way to do this was to conquer the swath of land between where he was and where he needed to be.

Accordingly, he pacified Carlon and demanded the surrender of the city of Montoya. When they refused, he noted the height of the walls and decided he didn't like his chances in an assault. So instead, he left a small garrison and struck out west into Bæmûl.

The Blood Swords conquered Bæmûl and quickly overcame the town of Arturus. Behind them, Carlon was liberated by (of all things) about a thousand armed peasants.

As the violence of Cappargarnia's election reached a climax with an orgy of looting and burning of shops suspected of favouring one candidate or another, the Collegium emerged from their locked chambers to announce that Sevas Taric and Steene Rand had split the opposition vote, leaving the Stalwart Deirn Carberic with a plurality. He was duly sworn in as Prince Carberic I of Cappargarnia.

Just a few days later, the Convocation in Aphum also finally emerged to announce the election of an elderly theologian as Pontiff Fenric VI. He immediately renewed the Cappargarnian "arrangement".

Dénouement: 1550

The new Prince moved quickly to put the city back into order. He rescinded the Senate's amnesty for the conspirators who killed his uncle. They were all arrested, tried, and executed in short order. Their leader, Sevas Taric, did manage to elude the guards for some time. He was apparently killed in an altercation with some soldiers in Djarden, where he was attempting to raise an army to "take back the Republic for the people and the Senate".

Similarly, some of those who supported the candidacy of Steene Rand were arrested and charged with various crimes. Most were given heavy fines and forced to resign from the Senate. Senator Abram Madasar, however, was convicted of incitement to riot and jailed. As for Steene Rand himself, he fled the city and is now reported to be in hiding in Sardarthion or perhaps Einandhu.

The Blood Swords occupied Arzhadior and put Adndar's city of Faralas to siege.

ELECTORAL REPUBLIC OF CAPPARGARNIA (51M/TA)
His Sublime Majesty, Deirn Carberic, Burgrave of Punchega, Electoral Prince of Cappargarnia.
His Great Holiness, Fenric VI, Pontiff of the Hidden Lords at Golluz.

Sir Steene Caranthes, Grand Marshal of the Blood Swords, Consul-General of the Tempest March.

Trade: Atuburrk, Einandhu, Elphárec, Golmath, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Kumara, Lynnarvor, ThaceD, Tiryowglas, Zadres (3)

DP: Failed.

he Republic suffered, but it remains unbowed. The new Prince offers his people a continuation of the dreams of his uncle, Prince Caranthes. He demands only loyalty to the Republic and unwavering devotion to the Tarot.

Siege quality improved, as did sorcery.

IMPERIAL FREE CITY OF ADNDAR (29 M/TA)

His Excellency Tiribissi Lanbarnes II, Guildmaster of the Innkeepers, Hereditary Burgrave of Adndar, Chancellor of the Guilds Council of the Imperial Free City of Adndar.

Trade: Atuburrk, Einandhu, Elphárec, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Lynnarvor, Tiryowglas, Zadres (3)

DP: None.

dndar has reasserted its independence and is desperately looking for allies against what they suspect will be a long war with Cappargarnia. The Chancellor celebrated his 73rd birthday in 1550 in a free Adndar, the first since his sixteenth in 1493.

Many of the old names of Adndar's various fortresses and religious sites were restored. Char Y'Arz (of the Arzhadior Chars) came out of retirement to join the forces of Adndar.

A very battered flotilla of Atuburrk transports, numbering just under 300 ships, transited the Adndar Canal in 1550, heading north.

IMPERIAL FREE CITY OF EINANDHU (4 M/UR)

Sir Forngian Dareth, Tiger King of Arms.

Trade: Adndar, Araxes, Atuburrk, Duedhyn, Elphárec, Golmath, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Lynnarvor, Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Zarkhandu

DP: It's a living.

The Heralds registered a complicated set of arms for Zarkhandu that looks slightly less fussy after they removed the hammer and anvil: *Per pily gules and argent, a constellation Anapa or in fess chief, a comet of the second in middle chief.*

THE IMPERIAL DEMENSE (14 M/UR)

Her Augušt & Imperial Maješty, Chass'ika, Mistress of the Tischak, Countess of Takkikik, Queen of Itaxik, Golden Beetle of the Wešt, Sovereign of Sahúl, Lady of the Nine Hills of Sardarthion, Holder of the Emerald Throne, and Empress of All the World.

Her Mandibleness, Sith'tat IV, the Black, Lady Tchac'at, Countess of the Kicitchat Hive and Associated Dominions, Chancellor of the Empire.

Trade: Adndar, Araxes, Atuburrk, Cappargarnia, Chi'tixi, Einandhu, Elphárec, Golmath, Hyrárec, Ingazi, IOC, Kicitchat, Lynnarvor, ThaceD, ThaceE, Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Zadres (3), Zarkhandu

DP: None.

IIP: 29

For appointments, please see Gazette.

Empress Chath'ecutla, her influence and power waning quickly, nevertheless carried on with unflagging energy and purpose. She appointed the Count Palatine of Ingazi as her new Chancellor. She chided the Electors to take a proper vote on admitting Pakoa to the Empire. When the Electors finally voted in the affirmative, the Empress wasted no time in issuing patents of nobility for the King of Pakoa. The Peers admitted the Pakoan envoy into their halls the next day.

The House of Peers continued its lively discussions, and even passed a number of bills on to the College of Electors. Other than the Pakoan question, the Electors could not muster a quorum of five to pass anything.

The Imperial Chamber Court declined to hear a number of cases, based on lack of evidence or jurisdiction. They did, however, respond to the Empress

in the matter of the Aradéc Succession by noting that the succession itself was not in dispute.

The Empress' preoccupation with the Aradéc situation became an obsession. When the Imperial Chamber Court took up the case of *Yštar v. King of Aradéc*, she almost wept with relief. When the verdict came down²¹, she dutifully declared the Imperial Bann on the Electoral Kingdom of Aradéc, and all trade into and out of the Kingdom ground to a halt over the next few months.

All this frenetic activity on the part of the Empress Chath'ecutla came at a cost. She was ill most of the time. The snows of Sardarthion did not melt throughout the spring of 1546. Her own Realm of Itaxik was shaking itself apart. News reached the Empress that certain of her allies, the Electors who had stood by her, now might be shifting their votes to another. At first, she was enraged, but after a few days an eerie calm prevailed in the palace.



Empress Chath'ecutla sat in her private study reading the latest dispatches from throughout the Empire and Oratoa. As she read, the Empress jotted down notes to those that needed a response. Engrossed in her task, the Empress did not hear her aide I'stak enter the room.

"Empress, you are going to be late for your meeting with the Heralds," I'stak gently reminded her.

The Empress took a moment to realize that I'stak had spoken to her. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Your afternoon audience."

"Of course. Forgot the time. Just making sure I've covered everything. Things may be a bit hectic around here for a while."

As the Empress finished up the last signature, I'stak fussed over Chath'ecutla's gown, straightening the easily mussed Thacian collar. "Very regal for a routine speech, Majesty."

"Unfortunately, this is not a routine speech. Do you really think this Thacian dress looks regal?"

"Every inch the Empress."

²¹ See page 382.

“Thank you I’stak,” The Empress reacted with the merest flutter of her mandibles, the Kitixi equivalent of a slight blush. It was a habit she’d never quite managed to shake. I’stak continued to fuss over the dress. The Empress had known her aide for most of I’stak’s young life, and she knew when she was troubled. “What is it, I’stak?”

The aide hesitated before replying. “Majesty, there are rumors that the Yagnarists have betrayed you and your realm.”

“Politics ahead of Imperium. It breaks my heart, I’stak, but these are the times in which we live.”

Angry words tumbled out of I’stak’s mouth as if a storm had broken. “They betray you after all you have done for them! Aiding Kommolek, sending them money, naming Chi’tixi as Warden of the North, defending Atuburrk...”

The Empress sighed. “We must do what we must do, for the good of Empire. Now, please bring me some tea; it helps me with my voice.”

“At once Your Majesty,” I’stak bowed sharply and left the room. The Empress turned back to the last little bit of business. She signed the note to her successor and quickly sealed the envelope. Sydath had left a similar note for her, and she suspected that Sydath himself had found one on the desk when he first arrived.

I’stak returned with a cup of steaming raki tea. The Empress rose and took the cup, deeply inhaling its pungent odour. “I’stak, words cannot express how much I have appreciated your service over these many trying years.”

“Majesty, it has always been my very great pleasure to serve you.”

It was a short walk from her private study to the throne room. The Empress took a moment before entering the Blue Chamber to gather her thoughts. Once she was ready, the Empress downed the remaining tea in one quick gulp. She sat her cup on a ledge near the door and entered the throne room.

“Thank you for attending today. It is good to see all of you here. I will not bore you with long-winded speeches today, as my time is short. I have asked

you here today to discuss the ice and sacrifice. Long has Itaxik sacrificed much to combat the ice. As other realms built mighty fleets to leave Sahûl and to sail around the world, Itaxik researched greenhouses and freely gave this to all the Realms of the Empire. Itaxik was always willing to make these sacrifices for the Empire. As others have built flying cities and fortresses, Itaxik built an entire university dedicated to fighting the ice. We continued to pour resources into it, as this was a sacrifice Itaxik was willing to make for Sahûl.

“We do not admonish; we only wish to demonstrate that Itaxik has long sacrificed for the Empire and for the defeat of the ice. The ice is at the doorsteps of Sardarthion, and some might even say the ice has reached the heart of the Empire. With this we must disagree; the ice will only be at the heart of the Empire when hope is lost, when we feel that we have been defeated by the ice, when we stop sacrificing for the sake of turning back or surviving the ice. Then, and only then, will the ice be at the heart of the Empire.

“Even on the Imperial throne, Itaxik has continued to sacrifice. Much of this sacrifice was to the benefit those who state they betray me now. There has been much talk of my lack of remaining influence, I will point out much of that political capital was spent to the benefit of those who have verbally admitted their betrayal to me.

“No matter. We will not stoop to their level. We will continue to do what is best for the Empire, even at the most grievous cost to Itaxik and to ourself. We can only continue asking the Yagnarists to do what is best for Sahûl and pray that they may listen. As for Itaxik, there is no end to which we shall not go in sacrifice for the Empire. The Crown must be reassembled.”

The Empress paused here. The court was uncharacteristically silent as the various envoys and diplomats tried to work out where this was heading. Empress Chath’ecutla stood and laid one hand delicately on the old iron throne. She idly wondered, and not for the first time, why it was called the *Emerald* Throne.

“Let it be known that what is about to occur is under my own free and voluntary will, as this is my final sacrifice for the Empire. May Urda have mercy on the Empire and on Itaxik.”

Then, to the confusion of the Imperial court, the Empress simply walked out of the Imperial palace and into the snowy spring streets of Sardarthion.

She took a State carriage through Sondrim. At the iced-in port city of Sakkarah, she took leave of her driver and the officers and soldiers of the Emerald Watch. To a tearful I’stak, she entrusted a small piece of jewelry as a remembrance. Then the Empress Chath’ecutla set off alone on foot across the howling wilderness of icy Sondadh to face the ice and to reflect on the way of things. She offered in sacrifice for her beloved Empire the only thing remaining to her: her own body.

At precisely noon two days later, the Imperial crown appeared in its niche in the Mausoleum of Paharnes in Sardarthion. That same afternoon, the newly appointed Chancellor of the Empire, Count Palatine Razhim of Ingazi, arrived in the city.



The new Chancellor arrived to a city in the midst of wild and wailing mourning. Whatever sort of greeting the young Wenemet might have expected, this wasn’t it. He arrived wearing the ancient Sapphire Crown of Tepalis, the first person in more than 2,500 years to do so. Having never met the Empress he was chosen to serve, Razhim nevertheless made it quite clear to everyone that he was very much in charge until the Electors chose Chath’ecutla’s successor.

He immediately called for the appropriate Heralds and dispatched them to the Prince Electors with the summons to Imperial election. Given that the *Great Charter* indicates that the election must occur “within one year”, and that there was some considerable confusion in Cappargarnia and uncertainly over just who might show up to cast the Aradéc vote, Chancellor Razhim settled himself into the apartments formerly occupied by the late

Chancellor Tinikatua of Tokatl. The new Chancellor proved quite charming, and he soon integrated himself into the Sardarthion social scene.



After several necessary weeks of sorting out the piles of backed-up paperwork, the Chancellor made his way to the great Urdan shrine of Iurdana in pilgrimage, there to meet with First Matriarch Jerröe x. The two met for several hours, and then together undertook a tour of the shrine.

Under the great central dome, the ancient high altar is one of the oldest portions of the shrine. It is a rectangular block of marble, slightly worn at the edges from the millennia of rain and snow that fell upon it before the dome was restored. As Razhim and Jerröe approached, the altar began to vibrate. It was, at first, a barely noticeable hum. It grew louder the closer they approached, until the two candlesticks on the altar fell over and rolled onto the stone floor. The sound echoed off the walls of the immense domed chamber.

They stopped about ten feet away, and a brief spark arced between the top of the altar and the Sapphire Crown on Razhim’s brow.

“It’s heavy,” Razhim said to no one in particular.

After a moment’s hesitation, Razhim approached the altar and laid his hand upon it. He could feel the vibrations in his belly. Carefully, using both hands, he removed the crown and laid it delicately upon the altar.

Nothing happened. The vibrations stopped, and the echoing hum faded away.

“That was a bit anti-climatic,” harrumphed the First Matriarch.

“Perhaps we need more crowns?”

Jerröe looked thoughtfully at the crown on the altar. “Maybe we need *all* of the crowns.”



The snows of Sardarthion finally melted during the late spring of 1547, during a sudden warm

snap. The grey waters of Lake Sardath remained dotted with icebergs, though some merchantmen did brave the waters. Many of the southern rivers, however, remained frozen glaciers, even through the summer.

The Election of 1547

Perhaps weary of the constant prompting of the Chancellor, in the Summer the last of the Electoral Envoys finally indicated that they were ready. They descended on the Imperial Palace at dawn on the Ides of Quadrilis. They were met on the palace steps by Count Palatine Razhim x of Ingazi, Chancellor of the Empire, wearing the Sapphire Crown and flanked by armed guards of the Emerald Watch. In the cool morning air, the Chancellor administered the oath to the envoys and then led them inside to the Blue Chamber.

Floored in the deep blue Kranthic marble that gave the room its name, it stood three stories tall. Although nine great lanterns hung in the chamber, only three of them actually cast any light into the gloom. Cracked and chipped blood red columns supported two balconies and a choir loft on their dizzying way to the vaulted ceiling. At one end of the great hall were massive doors, ornately carved from a single Aradécan cedar. At the other end of the hall, facing the ancient doors, was a simple iron chair flanked by golden lion statues. It was set upon a stone dais cut with three shallow steps, worn round and smooth by millennia of supplicants and stained black with the blood of fallen Emperors.

All other furniture had been cleared from the Chamber except for nine roughly-hewn chairs set around a circular table, carved with an intricate design depicting the Nine Sacred Animals. After each envoy had taken their seat, the Chancellor read the Great Charter to the envoys and then set his badge of office in the center of the table. He left the Chamber, and soldiers of the Emerald Watch sealed the great door behind him.

The discussion continued for two days. Then, without warning on the afternoon of the third day,

the great doors creaked open, and the envoy from Chi'tixi intoned the ancient formula: "long live the unanimously elected Sovereign of Sahûl, Lady of the Nine Hills of Sardarthion, Holder of the Emerald Throne, and Empress of All the World, Her August and Imperial Majesty, Chass'ika of Itaxik!"

At noon the next day, the Imperial crown vanished from its accustomed niche, only to appear just as suddenly on the head of the new Empress in Itaxik. She was 13 years old.



Empress Chass'ika arrived in Sardarthion in the spring of 1549, having stopped briefly in Moroko to visit the shrine there. She was accompanied by her new Chancellor, Countess Sith'tat of Kicitchat. Her formal coronation was held in the Shrine of Iurdana and well-attended. The First Matriarch herself placed the crown upon Chass'ika's head. Afterwards, the new Empress and Count Palatine Razhim of Ingazi both placed their crowns upon the high altar, with much the same effect as the previous experiment.

The outgoing and incoming Chancellors had a long meeting the next day. Count Palatine Razhim spent the next few months shadowing Chancellor Sith'tat in her duties, just to make sure that no vital bit of paperwork was misplaced or forgotten. They became fast friends, despite differences in Kindred and religion.

Just before mid-summer, a fleet of about 300 battered Atuburrk transports finally made it into the city with their cargo of Raven refugees and knights. The ships were in pretty bad shape, having bashed their way through the frozen Darriow River and the ice-choked Lake Sardath. Their travel season reduced primarily to the summer, it had taken them almost a year and a half to sail perhaps six hundred miles.

The refugees, knights, and sailors were all desperate for some shore leave²², a prospect that filled

²² Strains of that famous ditty "We've got cabin fever" could be heard coming from most of the ships.

the city officials with dread. During the next few days, the decision was punted clear up the chain of command, all the way to the new Empress herself. She summoned her Chancellor, the Colonel-in-Chief of the Emerald Watch, the Imperial Portmaster, the Atuburrk Commodore Garnock, and the Raven Grandmaster Dewethva of Pesk to discuss the situation. Ex-Chancellor Razhim was also present, as he was in his final week of “shadowing” his successor. He brought a nice cheese tray.

They all gathered around an elegant round table in a small private audience chamber in the Palace normally reserved for meetings of the Privy Council. No sooner had they situated themselves in their seats, when there was a sudden, blinding flash of light from the centre of the table.

When their sight returned, the Empress and her guests saw two Saurians standing in the middle of the table. One was a hulking figure dressed as a sar of the Western Steppelands, in desert robes with scimitar and longknife at his side. The other was a winsome young lady in a yellow sun dress.

The Malebolge Colonel-in-Chief of the Emerald Watch and the Saurian Raven Grandmaster had already drawn their blades and come to ready, but the sar on the table made no move for his weapons.

The young lady in the yellow sun dress lifted a finger and smiled, commanding the attention of all present. In a distinct Thaich accent, she cheerfully said, “Hello. Please don’t stand on my account.”

It suddenly seemed entirely reasonable to the Colonel and the Grandmaster that they should sit back down in their chairs, and so they did.

The sar stepped down from the table and took up a position by the door. He neither spoke nor drew his weapons.

The young Saurian girl sat down, cross-legged in the middle of the table, arranging her sun dress for the sake of modesty, and she began to instruct the mighty and the wise.

“It’s funny how it’s come to this, though I suppose none of you think it’s very funny, do you? You are all such serious people, after all.

“My name is Mirra. My grandparents are the Count and Countess of Thace. From my grandfather, I am descended from the House of Goshtikka-Snamarthis, more properly called Goshtikka-Coddet. Among my ancestors were the Imperial Dukes of Thace from Duke Biard the First, and before that the independent Dukes of Thace to before the Last Civil War, and before that the Imperial Dukes of Thacia since the title was bestowed by the Middle Master upon an honest stable groom who returned a Princess’s lost locket. From my grandmother, I am descended from the Dhanos Princes of Duedhyn, appointed stewards of that Realm by the Raven Avatar Tewedh.

“When I close my eyes, I can remember all of their faces, and if I listen carefully, I can hear their voices whispering to me.”

She fell silent, and everyone leaned forward, as if straining to hear the murmuring voices of her ancestors. When she continued speaking, it was little more than a whisper.

“And yet, even such illustrious descent has not prevented my uncle Ebalondrir from falling into despair and decadence. Many have forgotten the things that matter, and certainly my family is not immune.

“You, all of you, have forgotten why the Empire exists at all, if you ever knew it. You, Grandmaster of the Raven’s Order, you have forgotten the very mission that the Raven gave you exactly five hundred years ago today²³. All of you, for hundreds of years – thousands of years, really – have dithered and fought like children in a playground. Don’t look so surprised, I’ve told you all this before when I was Yvain the Artificer. I sent the prophet Naskeb to you with the same message. Only a handful in the most recent generations have begun to listen, and to walk in the old ways. The fact that some of them aren’t even Urda is kind of, well, groovy.

“We established the First Empire. The very blood of Urda ran in the veins of its ruling Dynasty. And why? Not for power, for how could Urda want

²³ The Order of the Raven was founded in 1049, the year after the Dhanos Princes took the throne of Duedhyn.

power? Not for glory, for the Great Wyrms sing to Our glory in unceasing chorus. Not for wealth, for We are the Source of the wealth of the world.

“No. The Empire was established to protect the Kindreds from the Demon Sun, from the fires of the Void. Everything that it did was established to aid that cause. Time and time again the people forgot. They thought that the Empire was for the accumulation of power, of glory, of wealth, and they fell to war. Time and time again, the wise reestablished the Imperial order. Even the fall of the First Empire could not extinguish the cause from the breast of the noble Hyrágec, and they weren’t even Saurian.”

She waved her hand dismissively. Just then she looked diminished, frail and fragile.

“I won’t bore you with the details. I’ve spoken much too long already, when there is too much to do. Empress of Sardarthion, you needn’t worry about the Order of the Raven. I shall take responsibility for them.”

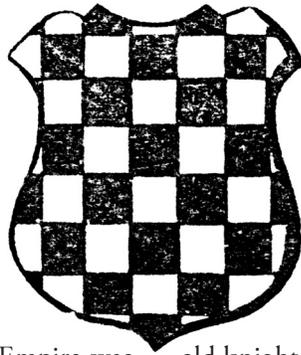
Once again, Grandmaster Dewethva jumped to his feet, angry and hand to sword. This time, he spoke.

“The Order will not be at the beck and call of *motherists*, and especially not a spoiled little Thacian princess who thinks she can get her way simply by showing up and recounting fables for her betters.”

Mirra stood up on the table and bent over to look into the eyes of the fierce, armoured Saurian. The two stared at each other for some moments, Dewethva’s eyes full of anger and Mirra’s full of sorrow. Suddenly Mirra smiled with a great goofy grin that seemed to light up the dim chamber, and then she gently touched her forefinger to the Grandmaster’s beak.

He sat back down, mouth agape.

“Surely even you, the proud and mighty warrior, loves his mother? Well, Dewey – I *can* call you Dewey, can’t I? Dewey, as of now, I *am* your mother. The old Order, humbled and defeated, has



been swept away, and together we shall found a new, victorious Order. And we must be victorious, my Grandmaster, for a defeat would mean the defeat of the whole world.”

Mirra chided him, wagging a finger as she towered over him. If any in the chamber saw the humour in a fourteen year-old girl dressing down a 44 year-old knight, no one gave a sign of it.

“You have a holy purpose, and I’ll write out a new Code for you so you don’t forget it in the future. Should we prove victorious, on my death you shall serve the Emperor of Sardarthion. Should we fail, we shall all be dead. Do you accept?”

Wordlessly, Grandmaster Dewethva fell off his chair and onto his knees.

Mirra jumped down from the table and laid her hands upon his bowed head.

“Rise, Dewethva of Pesk, Grandmaster of the Order of the Sacred Raven, beloved Champion of Urda.”

Mirra turned to face the Empress Chass’ika. “I hope this meets with your approval, your Imperial Majesty of Sardarthion?”

The Empress, still not quite sure what had just happened, said “Yes. Yes, I think that would be fine. Are you also taking responsibility for the refugees?”

“No. Those are the responsibility of the Commodore, here. Pray, Commodore, that those people find safe refuge, or I will hold you personally to account, and your family after you to the ninth generation.”

She paused a moment before continuing, “I will, however, inspect every ship of your fleet, Commodore. I want to see the people.”



After the meeting in the palace, Grandmaster Dewethva took Mirra and Sar Ortak to the Atuburrk ships where the refugees and knights were kept. She walked among them, and their hearts of ice melted at her words, at her touch. She gathered

her knights around her, some 14,000 all told, and debarked the fleet. They set up camp just outside the city.



Ambassador Abdas of Efan met with various Imperial representatives and envoys from several Realms of the Empire and the Church Universal and Triumphant. He briefly considered leaving after the Peers voted to shut him up into a gilded cage, but reconsidered after the Electors could not even muster a quorum to vote on the issue.

After much good-natured arguing, the Empress appointed an Ambassador to Efan from Averon. He will be dispatched eastward soon.



The traditional card game at the Regency lost another regular when the rather poncy (and increasingly paranoid) Duke Gilquibble Tarlan of Averon²⁴ got a bad fig and died rather suddenly. After that, the game slowly drifted apart, so that what had been a nightly game became a weekly game. By 1547, it was more of a monthly occurrence, before it trailed off completely. With nothing left to occupy his nights, the vacuous and dissipated Lord Ebalondrir of Thace commenced a concerted attempt to drink himself to death.

Mæstro Johannes' opera *Brave New World* had its Sardarthion première in 1546. Based on Sendare's *An Explorer's Tale*, it highlights the honour, courage, and wonder of exploring Oratoa. This popular opera shows the Mæstro returning to his old genius. It's rumoured that he has signed an exclusive publishing deal with Sardarthion House.

Meanwhile, the salón of Lady Tilda of Snamarthis continued to be the focus of much of the Sardarthion social scene. Each incredible party continues to top the previous ones, and the newspapers hang on every alleged dalliance and affair.

²⁴ Of the Polyimia Gilquibbles.

Her popularity continued to be a boon to several top-name Araxean dressmakers.

In the late summer of 1549, having disposed of the arrangements for her army, Mirra visited her aunt Tilda. They spoke behind closed doors for many an hour, and when she left, Mirra's face bore a sly little smile.



Baroness Nenepillah III of Sakkar arrived in Sardarthion in 1549, seeking audience with the new Empress. The day before their scheduled meeting, the Baroness suffered a massive hemorrhage of the subesophageal ganglion and died at age 36.

PRINCIPALITY OF DUEDHYN (9 S/UR)

His Highness, Prince Merryn III, the Great, of Duedhyn, Lord Goslowes, Baron Dhanos, Defender of the Faith.

Trade: Araxes, Atuburrk, Einandhu, Elphárec, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Lynnarvor, Sakkar, ThaceE, Urdráhahn, Zarkhandu

DP: None (but see below)



The Urdans continued to send food and medical supplies, blankets, tents, and nurses for the care and comfort of the Ravenist refugees huddled in Avalow and Tiogyon, as the freezing of the Darriow made the passage of Atuburrk's fleet impossible. The winters were horrid, and a general famine affected the Realm in 1546 and right into 1548. Leaping snow-cat attacks are a frequent occurrence in the southern mountain regions. Even attacks by wild gryphons are not unheard of, though these tailed off in 1549 as the weather improved.

Sakkar's Order of the Sword of Iluvar removed their garrisons from both Finnedor and Sarthes. The herders and lumberjacks of Sarthes followed the lead of the Raven Prior of Dohajydh in joining the Raven Ordinariate and pledging their loyalty to Duedhyn's Prince. In Finnedor, it was a different story, as the rabid Ravens of the (now) town of Samia declared that they would only follow a

Raven Prince. They did, however, pledge fealty to the Empress, an Urdan.

In the summer of 1547, there was a break in the ice of the Darriow, and the assorted Raven refugees and knights loaded up on the Atuburrk transports. As it turned out, there was not nearly enough room on the ships for all of them. Raven Prelate Artys gathered up the lighter troops and a core of the most rabidly fervent Ravenist refugees and struck out overland.

Researchers from all over the Empire continued cataloging the Library of Pareis. A compiled edition of the Annals of Vator neared publication.

THE RAVEN EXODUS

His Holiness Artys II, Prelate of the Raven Orthodox Church.

Raven Prelate Artys gathered up 9,000 lancers and 20,000 of the most rabidly fervent Ravenist refugees and struck out overland with the Raven treasury and what supplies they could gather. They braved the passes through the High Agnids into Koes, before passing into Tawesek.

LANDGRAVATE OF LYNNARVOR (11 MS/YG)

Landgrave Ebarrew Dolmathes II, the Prudent, Landgrave of Lynnarvor and Burgrave of Fair Belsûnd.

Trade: Adndar, Cappargarnia, Chi'tixi, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Elphárec, ID, Kicitchat, Tiryowglas, Zarkhandu

DP: Nope.

Landgrave Dolmathes the Prudent carefully saved up his pennies for a rainy day. His people, meanwhile, were subjected to a brutal winter that didn't really let up until the wan summer of 1549. Starvation was rampant, particularly in Colledhu and Penglos. People abandoned their homes in droves, becoming refugees fleeing north. In Colledhu, the great sheets of ice could be seen marching down the mountain week by week. The ancient city of Ueramos is half empty, and there is talk of moving the Military Academy north to Fair Belsûnd.

The Landgrave married a charming young lady of the court in 1548, and the next year they announced the birth of an heir, the Lady Ebrél, named after her late grandmother.

COUNTY OF TIRYOWGLAS (39 SW/IL)

His Excellency, Count Truedhek II, Baron Kwilkyn, Count of Tiryowglas, Defender of the Faith.

Trade: Adndar, Cappargarnia, Einandhu, Elphárec, Golmath, Hyrágec, Ingazi, ID, IOC, Lynnarvor, Murali, Sarsis (3), Urdraháhn, Zadres (3), Zarkhandu

DP: None.

Amid some of the worst (and longest) winters ever recorded – 1546 and 1547 were particularly bad – many of the towns of Tiryowglas grew into cities. Garavon in Annedor, Fordhavon in Antedon, Andraháhn in Búkleth, Emwysk in tributary Bylis, and Kerghen in Garwel all expanded. In addition, many new public works projects were put into place throughout the Realm.

Sorcery quality improved.

ILUVARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (29 IL)

His All Holiness, Pope Harmony VIII, the Great, Pontiff of Sištrameides, Archemandrite of Ilúhir.

Trade: Adndar, Araxes, Cappargarnia, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Elphárec, Hyrágec, ID, Ingazi, Murali, Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Zadres (3)

DP: None.

Pope Harmony the Great lost some of his former vigour as he aged into his late sixties. He was frequently ill, though he remained mentally sharp.

Baroness Nenepillah III of Sakkar arrived in Sištrameides in 1547, begging a Papal audience. She wore the garments of a penitent, and she stood outside in the snows for three days seeking admittance. When she was finally admitted into audience with the ailing, 68-year old Pope Harmony, she fell to her knees begging a blessing. She gave the startled Pope the gift of some Spell Crystals, and she vowed to transfer Sakkar's religious sites

to Church jurisdiction. Pope Harmony blessed the Baroness and returned to his sickbed.

Church-appointed lawyers defended the King of Aradéc in the Imperial Chamber Court, perhaps out of a sense of duty. This made Pope Harmony *extremely* unpopular with the other Primacies, for they saw it as a violation of spirit of the *Edict of the Sheathed Sword*, which they had together signed.

MOST SANGUINE DUCHY OF ELPHÁREC (34 W/IL)

His Grace, Kanda-Eparreb Morcrades I, Count of Angûron and Siddhan, Duke of Elphárec.

Kanda Morcrades Lord Ebléc, Chancellor of the Regency Council.

Trade: Adndar, Cappargarnia, Einandhu, Hyrágec, Ingazi, ID, IOC, Lynnarvor, Tiryowglas, Zadres (3)

DP: None.

Duke Morcrades returned the unspent *Ice Relief Trust Fund* to the Empress, who distributed it. Most of the treasury was spent in public works projects throughout the Duchy, perhaps preventing more peasant rebellions or even revolution. The weather continued to be dreary and cold. If anything, the ice storms and blizzards got far worse in 1546 and into 1547 before it started warming up again. One of the many winter deaths in 1546 was the Dowager Duchess Enebrel. She was mourned by the whole country.

Duke Morcrades and his twin brother and heir Count Caranthes both married ladies of the court in a spectacular and storied double-wedding in the wan summer of 1548. Each of the couples happily reported the birth of children in 1550, both fine healthy girls.

Elphárec built an ærodrome in Epadh and expanded the Duchy's already considerable air fleet. Endless shipments of raw materials were sent to Hyrágec to support the Oratoan war effort.

The Diplomatic Academy in Epadh got a long-needed spruce-up. Cavalry and naval quality both improved.

KINGDOM OF HYRÁGEC (31 W/UR)

His Valiant Majesty Irrjir Frenthes V, King of Hyrágec, Beloved of Urda.

Trade: AradécC, Chi'tixi, Elphárec, Golmath, Ingazi, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Kumara, Tiryowglas, ThaceD, ThaceE, Urdráhahn, Zarkhandu

DP: None.

Good King Frenthes continued to expand Hyrágec's navy with ships of the newest designs, many of which were dispatched to Oratoa. Crown Prince Rahn personally oversaw the construction and loading of the ships for the great endeavour.

With the sacrificial death of the Empress Chath'ecutla, Mæstro Johannes wrote a moving Urdan Requiem titled *Peace of Urda*. He conducted it during rites for the late Empress held at Our Lady of Chivalry Archabbey in 1547. He has personally vowed not to perform it again.

Sir Nadith Jamalan, late of the recent Ranarâdu expedition, was spotted in Endani Prefecture, walking around the ancient Shrine of Moroko and saying "wow" a lot.

With the successful establishment of a colony in Ráne, the King issued the *Edict of Dissent* in early 1550, followed almost immediately by the *Edict of Perpetual Protection and Friendship* later that year.

The King's government expanded.

A strange figure appeared at the gates of the palace in Pahasar in 1549. He was a Wenemet in his twenties, powerfully built. He had a scar under his left eye shaped like a check-mark, and his right ear was cleft. He wore simple clothes, with a cuir-bouilli breastplate and steel greaves. Most remarkably, he wore a ruff of iron, intricately fashioned and permanently bolted to his neck. He came, he said, to swear fealty to the King of Hyrágec. Here is the story he told.

THE TALE OF SPEKTHES

I am called Spekthes, though under what name I was born I cannot tell. My mother told me that my father's family was from Hyrágec, and so here I am. My father was a merchant on the Byrrin who married an Araxean girl. He lost everything during the Raven war and was sent to debtors' prison in Adndar when I was but an infant. My mother attempted to provide for me by becoming maid to the wife of a Saurian aristocrat, but she wasted away in the job. By the time I was five or so, she died. She left me nothing but her stories and her wedding band.

For a time, I was piss-boy and then stable hand in the manor. They called me Spekthes, so that became my name. When I was about twelve, they sold me to the Moonstar. I cared for the horses there. I've always been good with horses.

After four or five years of this, I made the mistake of falling in love with the daughter of Lord Tiribissi Jharek. If you don't know him, he owned one of the most prestigious stables in Adndar. His horses won races, and neither his four-horse nor two-horse chariot teams have failed to place in the last decade or more. Jharek was rich man and a proud one. The fact that his daughter Jara was flirting with a stable hand enraged him. He forbid her to see me, which of course guaranteed that she would.

If he could not control his daughter, he could certainly do something about me. He made a complaint to the manager of the arena that I had lamed one of his horses. A lie of course, but that was it for me. When Tiribissi Jharek wants you gone, you're gone. To make satisfaction for the horse, I was handed over to the Tiribissi trainers to become a gladiator in the blood pits. In this way, if I won, I could recoup the money that Tiribissi was out for the loss of his horse. If I lost... well, if I lost then problem solved.

I didn't lose.

I fought in the pits for almost fifteen years. At first, I was just another body in the *mêlées*, but my trainer, Dorran – a good man and an honest one –

he saw the promise in me. He trained me in single combat, with two swords and one, with spear and shield, on foot and on horse. He taught me to read, to sharpen my mind with the writings of the military masters. He taught me the *Code*, and he taught me the true meaning of the gladiator's oath: "I vow to endure: to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten, and to be killed by the sword".

Master Dorran was the only father I had.

I don't know how much you know about how the games work, but it's like this. Every contest a gladiator wins, he wins a prize. Seventy percent goes to his owner, twenty percent to his trainer or his school, and he gets ten percent. Your expenses come out of your winnings. You've got to pay your owner for your food and weapons and armour.

And some of those prizes are pretty paltry. Surviving a *mêlée* will net a gladiator a few pennies. Most of us die in debt to their owners, who have become rich by our blades.

Many gladiators drink their winnings. Some of us place wagers on ourselves with the bookmakers. It's a dangerous wager, though. If you win, you're fine, but if you lose you not only lose your money, but you're probably in even more debt to pay for the treatment of your injuries.

Of course, there's no downside to wagering on a death bout, so once I became proficient, I entered as many of them as I could, and I bet on myself to win. It was not for the fame – though when I fought, every seat in the arena was full. It was to buy my own freedom, so I could pursue the love of my life. My own freedom meant little, for I had never had freedom; it was for Jara I fought.

When her father died last year, she inherited all of his estates and holdings. I thought my chance had come at last. She came to see me, and my heart leapt with joy. I hadn't been in the same room with her since I became a gladiator.

She arrived with two guards... and her husband. The moment I saw her eyes, I knew that she had not forgotten me. No, I was an embarrassment from her impetuous childhood, nothing more. And I was an embarrassment that needed to go away.

She told me that I had my chance to win my freedom at one go – and to incidentally make her one of the wealthiest wenematrons in Adndar. She had entered me in a bout with a purse of ten thousand crowns. Even ten percent of that, plus my savings, would be enough to buy my freedom. I suspected that it would allow Master Dorran to purchase his as well.

It was an enormous prize, the biggest I'd ever heard tell. Even a gryphon bout rarely fetched more than a thousand, and I wasn't trained on gryphons anyway. So naturally I asked who I would be fighting. She smiled at me – curse her! – and said I would find out in the arena.

I trained that week with a broken heart, and Dorran made sure that I had some bruises on the outside to match. I remember I asked him why he was being so hard on me, and he said “question is, lad, why are you being so soft?”

“Master,” I said, “my heart is broken and there is nothing left to fight for.”

He walloped me a good one with the wooden practice sword. “Fight for? You fight because you're a fighter! Have I taught you nothing?”

After a few more blows to the head and some more of the Master's patented pep talk, he put the fight back into me. Then he gave me his most precious possession: the iron ruff you see me wearing now. Not only is it the most stylish gorget you're ever likely to find, it's got sorcery in it. Dorran had taken it off a dead opponent. I joked that it must not be very good magic if he was able to kill the man who wore it.

He whacked me in the head again. “It's not made for one-on-one. It's for fighting *mêlée*.”

“At a purse of ten thousand crowns, they're not going to be sending me into a *mêlée*.”

“Well,” he said, rubbing his jaw the way he did when he was thinking, “it's not technically a *mêlée* if you're the only one on your side.”

That was just about when I decided that this might be a serious fight. When he put the iron ruff on me, it magically bolted itself around my neck.

It's been there ever since. Might be a way to get it off, but if there is, I haven't found it.

The posters for the day said “See Spekthes, the world's greatest gladiator, take on an army”. This did not exactly fill me with confidence. When I walked out into the arena, I expected to see ten men facing me. There were fifty, and half a dozen were mounted. The Moonstar was packed with screaming fans. The Guildmasters' boxes were all full, and even the Chancellor, that fat old bastard Tiribissi Lanharnes, had come out to see. He was up in the Chancellor's box with his cousin Jara hanging on his arm. I hoped she'd bet against me.

Even though they were a bunch of no-names, it was a good fight. Not really a clean one, though, after they realized I was kicking their keisters. A couple of them were good. The guy who almost took off my ear would have made a fine gladiator, I think. But these kinds of fights are always to the death, so I opened him up.

You should have seen the party after it was done.

I didn't see Jara after that, and I don't want to. After they delivered my prize money, I stopped by Dorran's cell. We went up to the marshal's office together and bought ourselves out. He headed up to Sardarthion to retire. Probably smart for an old guy. I'm here because there was no where else to go. I've served my whole life. It's all I know. This once I'd like to pick who I serve.

The Gawan Peninsula

THE FEUDAL NORTHEAST

COUNTY PALATINE OF INGAZI (37 W/UR)

His Most Urdan Excellency, Gwariva Razhimx, Overlord of Gawan, Captain of the East Riding, Burgrave of Deriháhn, Count Palatine of Ingazi.

Trade: AradécC, Araxes, Atuburrk, Chi'tixi, Golmath, Hyrágec, Iáthedain, ID, IOC, Kicitchat, Kumara, Murali, ThaceE, Tiryowglas, Yaminon, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Count Razhim left for Sardarthion in 1546²⁵ to take up his appointment as Chancellor of the Empire. He returned in 1550. In between, he briefly ruled the Empire, trained his replacement, and met an Empress and an Avatar. In his absence, his very able consort the Countess Tremira served as Regent.

Honours were heaped upon Admiral Harran “the circumnavigator” and, to a lesser extent, his officers and crew. The Admiral was made a Knight Commander of the East Riding (wherever that is), and his captains all received knighthoods as well. He wrote his memoirs about the voyage around the world: a weighty tome with charts and minutely accurate descriptions of what little they had observed. This document, along with a similar memoir submitted by the voyage’s navigator, Lieutenant (now Captain Sir) Karshes, were forwarded to the palace “eyes only”.

A *highly* abridged version of the memoirs, emphasizing the adventury bits without paying very much attention to the boring navigational details, was published in Ingazi as *Around the World: the Extraordinary Circumnavigational Voyage of the Ingazi Exploration Fleet Commanded by Admiral Sir Harran Tremeres, KCER*.

Ingazi committed heavily to the Oratoan war, including vast shipments of gold to Kommolek which emptied the treasury. Count Razhim was heard to say that “us County Palatines need to stick together”.

On Wanangi, the Church built the Priory of Our Lady of Righteous Indignation near the port of Excelsior.

Despite continuing investments, little seemed to improve, though the Diplomatic Academy expanded again.

CHURCH UNIVERSAL & TRIUMPHANT (53.8 UR)
Her All-Holiness Jerröe x, the Leaping Horse, First Matriarch of Urda, Protector of Sahûl.

Trade: Araxes, AradécC, Atuburrk, Averno, Carcë, Chi’tixi, Duedhyn, Einandhu,

²⁵ Just after the conception, but sadly before the birth, of his son and heir Razhim Jr.

Golmath, Hyrágec, Iäthedain, ID, Ingazi, IOC, Itaxik, Kachar, Kicitchat, Murali, Pehuatoka, Sakkar, ThaceD, ThaceE, Tiryowglas, Zarkhandu

DP: None.

The First Matriarch administered the Church from Iurdana at Sardarthion, where she conducted research and proclaimed the late Empress Chath’ecutla²⁶ a saint.

Tithes came in; grants went out to Duedhyn, Iäthedain, Kachar, Electoral Thace, and Ingazi. Harlech Cathedral in Shuden was returned from Iäthedain’s jurisdiction to that of the Church.

Admiral Lord Whirripi Dranthes of Hyrágec arrived in Urdraháhn with 175 of the most modern ships. The fleet debarked 12,500 Hyrágecan cavaliers and knights to defend the city, “just in case”.

Pakoan Princess Iritána entered the Church’s leadership corps, taking the name Reverend Mother Mataáti²⁷.

The Church expanded its ancient University.

First Matriarch Jerröe spent some time one afternoon in 1550 meeting with the charming young Princess Mirra of Thace. They sat together in a small study, hands wrapped around hot cups of pungent raki tea, the elder Saurian with the younger. Sar Ortak, a Herald, and a handful of acolytes stood at the margins of the room, silent. Despite the constant conversational prompts from the First Matriarch to the contrary, Princess Mirra spoke of sunshine and rain and her happy childhood on the steppe.

Finally the frustrated Jerröe pleaded, “perhaps we can talk about something more important? There’s so much you can teach us, so much that we don’t understand.”

Mirra laughed. “Oh, Mother, we *were* talking about important things. Serious things, even! If there’s anything more important than warm sunshine on your face or more serious than laughter and rain, I don’t know what they are.”

²⁶ The rumour that she refers to her as “Saint Cha-Cha” has no basis in fact. None.

²⁷ In the Pakoan dialect of Tánagat, this means “first one”.

"I can feel a storm coming, and I'd like to get into the shelter before it hits."

"You wish instruction from me?" Mirra laughed.

"We all do. Where are the crowns? How do we repair the Tent of the Sky?" Jerröe leaned forward. "How much time do we have?"

Furrowing her brow, Mirra sipped her tea. "The Restoration is Our mission for this life, but as always it is the people of Sahûl who must do the work. There is too much to do for just one. First find the crowns, then we shall see what we shall see. The two crowns you have now sit on the heads of a Kithixi and a Wenemet. We must confess that this is something of a surprise. The Holy Crowns were made for Saurians. It's absolutely delightful that they have accepted the younger Kindreds. Even so, the Dynasty must be restored to at least one of the Crowns. Our hope was in Duedhyn, but it looks as though the Rose was hidden only too well, or perhaps it truly has died. And then there are the shanks. So much to do."

The First Matriarch stared at her, mouth open and eyes wide.

Mirra patted her knee. "You'll do fine."

Finally, Jerröe found her voice. "But, how?"

"We have confidence that Sahûl shall manage it. All of Sahûl. You don't have much of a choice if you wish to survive."

"We've attempted to coordinate with the Iluvarians and the Yagnarists. It hasn't gone very well."

"Keep working. They'll come around. They don't have to work together you know, they only have to work with you. You are all shadows, Mother, who can only live at the intersection of the light and the dark. This is the Way of the Balance."

A much diminished Mirra sank back into her chair with her tea. For a long time they sat like that, the two of them, in silence.

Finally, Mirra took her leave. At the door, she turned back to Jerröe with a mischievous smile. "Chath'ecutla might be a saint, but you probably shouldn't seek to venerate her until you have defeated the enemy who killed her." And she turned and left.

Mirra had been gone no more than a few moments when the Sibyl suddenly burst into the chamber, blood streaming from her eyes, nose, and ears, and dripping from her matted fur. She fell to her knees at Jerröe's chair and grabbed the First Matriarch by the lapels. "Bunnies!" she screamed. "Fluffy bunnies!" Then she collapsed to the ground, weeping, her tears mixing with her pooling blood on the ancient wooden floor.

First Matriarch Jerröe rubbed her eyes. Her head hurt.

PRINCIPALITY OF GOLMATH (50 W/TA)

His Gracious Maješty, Volpel-Walarri Sardirian, Baron Volpel, Count of Runazar, Electoral Prince of Golmath.

His Great Holiness, Mordican III, Hierarch of the Fellowship of Connate Tarotišts and Pontiff of the Hidden Lords at Serri.

Baroness Jejodh Dara of Nydoon, the Beautiful and Beguiling.

Trade: AradécC, Atuburrk, Hyrágec, Iäthedain, Ingazi, ID, Kicitchat, Kumara, Murali, Sarsis (3), Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Yaminon

DP: None.

rince Sardirian (the hard-drinking) put the Principality on something resembling an even keel. He and his late brother's massive infrastructure investments continued to pay off, with improvements in infantry, naval, and airship quality, as well as an expansion of the primary school system. The treasury grew, and a restless generation came of age.

Although the Prince's younger children, the Lords Drachtirian and Sardirian, are already eager to attend the Golmath Military Academy, the eldest (and heir) Count Kaidarian is less enthused.

Lord Minippygi Gussie, the Conqueror of Pama-Ati and onetime Regent of Golmath's Underlands, died at the age of 68. He was remembered with fondness in Tawatja and with honour in Golmath.

The weather, particularly in Runazar, got even colder in 1546. Kilt-wearing sheep became almost

commonplace. It did gradually warm up in 1549 and 1550. It's still darn cold, though.

REPUBLIC OF KUMARA (6W/KY/TA)

Baron Abmbur Kaſten II of Dambiyi, First Speaker of the Republic, Servitor of the King in Yellow.

Trade: Araxes, Atuburrk, Cappargarnia, Chi'tixi, Golmath, Hyrágec, Ingazi, Murali

DP: Mingka (A)

The Republic defended itself... in court. Attempts to buy off the various free companies under Aradéc contract within Kumara failed. Numerous Kumaran agents fanned out through the Aradéc-occupied prefectures to foment rebellion against their conquerors. In this, they were moderately successful; Ardanyi, Thirri, and Windra overthrew the Iluvarian oppression. A similar rebellion in Dalawathi was utterly crushed in 1550 by the Willeforn's Spears and the Hawkwood Company.

ARADÉC: PARLIAMENT VERSUS THE KING

1546: the Gathering of Hoſts

The accursed King Paharnes v gathered his armies and withdrew south from Ardanyi to reclaim his rebellious lands and restore his kingdom. The Kumarans in Ardanyi immediately revolted and restored their prefecture to the rule of the Republic.

Meanwhile, Aradéc's free companies marched through the Republic's lands, though curiously without attack orders. Willeforn's Spears transited through Yambai on their way to Thirri, and the Grey Company withdrew from Windra to Dimba.

As they marched south through Karrunyi, the King's army swelled to 200,000 men, two artillery batteries, and 75 airships. Despite his being in the midst of this great host, one of the largest armies recorded since ancient times, an attempt on the King's life came frighteningly close to success.

It happened one night at camp. The King was sitting down to a simple soup dinner on a camp chair, when a black-robed Wenemet leapt out of the

shadows, dagger in hand. Fortunately, members of the Sable Eagle Battalion wrestled the would-be assassin to the ground and the King escaped without injury. The guard questioned the assailant, but he began foaming at the mouth and convulsing. He was dead within moments.

In the morning, the King had the assassin's body drawn and quartered. The various pieces were impaled on pikes and left behind near the Crimmi River Bridge as a warning to others who might wish harm to the King.

As the Royal Army reclaimed Pagirri, Prince Manandir arrived to join his brother's retinue. Given the attempted assassination in Karrunyi the month before, the King thought it prudent to appoint the charismatic Manandir as Crown Prince.

In Darnuldeis, the Lord Protector mustered the Parliamentary armies for what he suspected would be a Royalist march to the capital. What he didn't account for, however, was Grand Abbot Murrores of Kityara. The Grand Abbot used his church contacts to effect a series of secret meetings, where he rallied the dispersed Clanmoot, as well as the underground Royalists and Whag "clubs" in the capital. He promised them a new king, a "loyal and sensible" king. He met with limited success, since even among the putative Royalists, there was little enthusiasm for King Paharnes. The feelings were perhaps best summed up by the irascible old Duke of Dambana, who said, "I love our ancient monarchy, but the past couple of Kings have been complete turnips".

Still, no one betrayed the Grand Abbot to the Parliamentarians. He counted that a victory.

Meanwhile, in eastern Aradéc, the Royalist Admiral Kalu recruited a force of 12,000 hussars in Darrayi Prefecture. Although surrounded by areas at least nominally loyal to Parliament, the Admiral was determined to restore the King's authority. Accordingly, he took command of the hussars and raced them through Bidigapa, Kuhlhara, Muruwa, and Palamingka. Although there was some initial trouble in Bidigapa, the Admiral succeeded in



breaking the back of Parliamentary control in the east in relatively short order.

In the west, the King's army continued down the Royal Road, moving into Dimba to rendezvous with the Grey Dragoons.

With the ruling of the Imperial Chamber Court in the case of *the Lich Yštar of Yarni-Za versus King Paharnes v of Aradéc*, the Empress solemnly pronounced the Imperial Bann against the Kingdom of Aradéc. All trade ceased. Even food shipments on the way from the Yaminon turned back before arriving at the border.

The winter of 1546 was harsh, at least by Aradéc's northern standards, and actual privation was reported in the mountains and the windswept eastern isles.

1547: the Return of the King

Dowager Queen Glóamora, hiding on the Isle of Milawalpayi²⁸, summoned what remained of the Sansollen Clan Mothers to Tyrryr on Makuwali, the *de facto* capital of the Isles. Once assembled, they confirmed the King's younger brother Prince Manandir as heir to the Kingdom. The Prince was a solid navy man, and the Clan Mothers felt that he might restore the Kingdom's honour. That he was his brother's choice probably influenced their decision as well.

News of the decision spread through Aradéc like wildfire. Hot behind the news was the growing rumour that the King was going to abdicate in favour of Prince Manandir.

Admiral Kalu and his hussars continued their ride through the peninsula into Kadra Prefecture, accepting the surrender of the local gentry.

The Kumaran-allied Baron of Windra finally ventured outside of Wendaháhn's impressive walls to reclaim his Barony.

Darnuldeis (1547)

The King's Army, some 200,000 strong, marched unimpeded through Dranyi Prefecture. As they marched through the countryside, peasants in every village along the Royal Road came out to watch the massive parade file past. With sullen faces, they by and large respectfully bowed to the King as he rode by, but they did not cheer his passing.

In many places, however, they *did* cheer the King's brother and heir, Prince Manandir. In some of the larger villages, revels were held in the Prince's honour. Maidens threw themselves at the most eligible bachelor in the Kingdom²⁹, and flowers were strewn in his path. Truth be told, he found it utterly embarrassing. His brother the King found it utterly infuriating.

The town of Quinn surrendered without a shot fired. The mighty fortress of Kurldra likewise surrendered, but the commander insisted that he be

²⁸ Where her brother is Laird of the Isle.

²⁹ Other than the King himself, of course.

allowed to personally surrender his sword to Prince Manandir, rather than to the King or one of his other officers.

On marched the King's great host, into Pranyi Prefecture and the historic heart of Aradéc. Here, for the first time, they encountered real resistance. Various small keeps and castles were held against them by Captain Doorn and force of dragoons. The host quickly smashed them and pressed on, arriving in the shadow of the massive megalithic walls of Darnuldeis in the late spring.

The fabled walls of Darnuldeis rose fifty feet over the surrounding countryside, and numerous parapets and towers rose another fifty feet or more above that. Built over the course the past century by half a dozen kings, the cyclopean walls are the most impressive fortifications to be found in the known world. And that was just the *outer* walls.

Any sane leader would have thought them unsailable. But the Grand Abbot had laid the groundwork well, and King Paharnes had a plan. He deployed his massive army around the city and began the siege of the city. Without ships, this might prove to be a problem, though the Royalist airfleet did its best to keep the port closed down.

The Parliamentary defenders were unimpressed. A siege? They were well provisioned, and the great Parliamentary Navy could be back to break the blockade before any serious privation would occur.

Then, on a moonless summer night, the Royalist airfleet of 75 airships and 7,500 rangers staged an assault of the Brinima Gate. Ships landed in the marshalling field behind the gate and disgorged thousands of rangers to the fields between the inner and outer walls. Similar assaults occurred simultaneously at many of the city's other gates. A well-timed insurrection within the city distracted the defenders, and fires broke out in widely scattered neighbourhoods of the sprawling city.

Parliamentary General Gorran commanded the city's defense from the Citadel of Manád. He had his hands full, trying to drive off the air attacks with artillery and arquebusers while also dispatch-

ing men to fight the fires. He had 45,000 soldiers at his disposal, and he made good use of them.

Nevertheless, when the sun rose, it was clear that the Royalists had captured three of the city's eight gates in the outer wall, and at the Brinima Gate, they had taken the inner gate as well. Gorran ordered his artillery to the spot, determined to make the King's entry into the city proper as costly as possible. Parts of the city still smouldered, and a thick pall of smoke hung over Darnuldeis, casting everything in shades of grey.

King Paharnes, accompanied by his brother Manandir, appeared on the parapets of the inner Brinima Gate. The King spoke to the city, in a magically-enhanced booming voice that carried to all corners.

"Citizens of Aradec, this is your king, Paharnes. I and my army are within the walls of fair Darnuldeis. We have no desire to bring any more pain to the innocent citizens of Aradéc, and we call upon the military forces currently taking orders from the Commonwealth government to surrender peacefully. They know full well the strength of Aradéc's Royal army, and what destruction will be wrought to stand without hope of victory to battle. There is no dishonor in this. They have served to the best of their loyalty to the people of Aradéc. I will not hold it against them, and there will be no retribution in any form to them."

The King's words echoed through the city, and for a moment after he finished, it appeared that peace and calm might prevail.

And then, a single arquebus shot rang out from the Parliamentary army and King Paharnes collapsed where he stood. In the space between breaths, as the startled officers and soldiers of both sides tried to understand what had just happened, a lone voice shouted out, "thus ever to tyrants!"

With a roar of fury, the King's Sable Eagle Battalion charged the Parliamentary artillery facing them across the plaza. The surprised gunners fired into them, and by the time the smoke had cleared, close combat had been joined. It would consume the city for three days.

Manandir, now King, led the Royalist army. He proved a cunning and popular leader. He could be seen throughout the city, the flashing *Sword of Huizacor* in his hand, issuing commands to his officers and rousing his men to battle. On several occasions, he found himself locked in personal combat as his army reclaimed Darnuldeis neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

Colonel Wilgi led the Grey Dragoons into the thickest of the fighting, where they took horrific casualties for the coin of the Royalist cause.

Commonwealth General Gorran commanded the defense, and he was no less energetic and dedicated to his cause than were his foes. He made good use of the great walls, stationing men upon them and firing into the Royalist forces fighting in the city. The overwhelming numbers of the King's army ground down the Commonwealth soldiers, as did several key defections.

The real turning point came on the morning of the third day, when King Manandir personally led the attack on the burning Halls of Parliament. The Lord Protector of the Commonwealth himself led the defense. As the King's forces fought for control of the Clanmoot Chamber, Lord Protector Pundra-ki Didrel found himself in furious swordplay with King Manandir. He was cut down by the *Sword of Huizacor*, wielded by the King's own hand. After that, resistance in the Parliament building all but ceased. The remaining Commonwealth soldiers there surrendered, except for one.

Corporal Bignippi stood in front of the doors to the Commons Chamber, standing guard. He had taken no part in the battle at all, except to guard that door. When a Royalist officer called upon him to surrender, he stated, "with all due respect, sir, I serve Aradéc. My orders are to uphold the Act of Parliament that prevents the King or any member of his household from entering the House of Commons. I have no interest in contesting the King's right to be King, sir. That's above my pay grade."

The officer in question sent word for the King.

To his surprise, King Manandir soon appeared. He spoke briefly with the Corporal and then sent

for a Herald. When the Herald had arrived, the King issued a decree assenting to the Act of Parliament in question, stating that henceforth, it would be unlawful for any King of Aradéc or any members of the King's household to enter the chamber of the Commons, even if invited.

Thus mollified, the young Corporal surrendered his sword to the King.

With the fall of the Parliament building to the Royalists and the death of the Lord Protector, the Commonwealth government collapsed. As the sun set on day three of the urban battle, almost a quarter of the city lay in ruins, and huge sections of its once mighty walls were rubble. Parts of the city still burned, and many escaped prisoners from the Commonwealth's prisons and dungeons roamed free. Some pillaging had been reported, though a death penalty for looting had been issued by the commanders of both armies.

That evening, the King received a Herald from the Citadel of Manád. It was an invitation from Commonwealth General Gorran to meet at dawn to discuss the terms of his surrender.

The King and his squire arrived at the Plaza of the Citadel under a flag of truce as the sun rose. They were admitted inside the gates as a very nervous group of Royalist commanders watched. Less than an hour later, the Commonwealth's flag was hauled down from the tower. The King allowed General Gorran to keep his sword, and Royalist troops took possession of the citadel. The few pockets of resistance quieted within hours, as the King's personal banner flew from the top of the Citadel of Manád.

The capital had been retaken, but the cost was high. The Commonwealth army had been obliterated, and most of the leadership of both sides was dead, and the King's forces counted more than 42,000 casualties, including the entirety of the Grey Dragoons.

Naval Engagement at Dirnippi Point (1547)

Meanwhile, just off the Syrinais Coast within sight of the town of Dirnippi in Madrawan Prefecture, the naval forces of King and Parliament unexpectedly met.

Commodore Cassil and the main force of Aradéc's navy, flying the Commonwealth flag and unaware as yet of the doings in Darnuldeis, numbered some 900 ships, including several squadrons of caravels and galleons. They were relatively close to the shore, and the Royalist fleet came suddenly upon them from the sea. The Royalists consisted of a mere fifty sloops and schooners commanded the famous historian (and former Royalist Speaker of the Commons) Urlarra Perrim, who had read far more about naval life than he had ever lived.

Urlarra may have been an incompetent naval commander, but he was not so naïve as to think he had any chance of running past the Commonwealth fleet, even with his swift ships. He ordered an immediate retreat, a manoeuvre hampered by the prevailing wind.

The Commonwealth flagship signalled for the Royalists to surrender. Urlarra declined, and his squadron continued trying to escape by tacking into the wind. The swifter Royalist ships eventually pulled away, though they lost several vessels to long-range Parliamentary cannon fire.

1548: Commonwealth Retrenchment

With the rump Parliament captured or scattered and the capital firmly in the hands of the Aradéc's King, the Commonwealth cause collapsed. Noble after noble submitted to the King. Admiral Kalu and his hussars continued their ride through the peninsula into Rereyi Prefecture, accepting surrenders and protestations of loyalty from the locals wherever they went.

A handful of Radical Parliamentarians established a new capital in Omrundeis in Ingapyi Prefecture and attempted to raise a new army.

Meanwhile, the Kumarans of Thirri Prefecture overthrew their Iluvarian oppressors.

In Darnuldeis, the hunt was on for the members of House Sansollen captured or "detained" by the Commonwealth government. Unfortunately, a rather large number were apparently trapped in the Winip Old Gaol when it burned down during the battle of 1547. These included the historian Princess Mayia and her three young children, the sorceress Princess Trudora, and the well-respected judge, Prince Endrahan and his children and grandchild. Princess Maya, an alchemical instructor at the Royal University, was fortunately being held in the Citadel dungeons. She was found and released.

1549: The End of Parliamentary Rule

Admiral Kalu and his hussars advanced into the new Commonwealth stronghold of Ingapya. The hussars quickly took the local castles, and the Commonwealth commanders retreated their meagre forces behind the walls of their "provisional capital" of Omrundeis. One quick lightning bolt destroyed both the walls and the Commonwealth defenders. Admiral Kalu's hussars took possession of the city and he ordered the remains of the leadership imprisoned on charges of rebellion and treason.

Later that year, the hussars rooted out what little resistance remained in Napamirri and Kurrgeis Prefectures. With the Commonwealth Parliament under arrest or dead and only three prefectures remaining loyal to them in any case³⁰, the entire Commonwealth cause is in the hands of Commodore Cassil and the navy.

1550: A Lull in the Action

Dro-Kumaran revolts in Dalawathi Prefecture were crushed by the free companies in the pay of Aradéc's King.

³⁰ Dalâd, Madrawan, and Marrgalayi.

ELECTORAL KINGDOM OF ARADÉC (45 W/IL)
His Royal Maješty, Sansollen Manandir II, Baron of Wanumarra, Count of Abijar, Electoral King of Aradéc.

Trade: None – under Bann until at least 1566.

DP: None.

The reign of King Manandir II began in fire, but he has promised to heal Aradéc and to convene a new Parliament. He is immensely popular amongst his subjects. With the new king came a new generation of Aradéci leaders.

ELECTORAL COMMONWEALTH OF ARADÉC (4 W/IL)
Commodore Cassil Arnes, Lord Protector of Aradéc.

Trade: Araxes, Atuburrk, Golmath, Hyrágec, Ingazi, Kicitchat, Urdraháhn

DP: None.

Commodore Cassil retains control of the navy and a handful of prefectures. What he will do next is anyone's guess. He maintains an abiding hatred for the House of Sansollen. However, King Manandir, himself a navy man, is popular amongst the fleet's captains and officers, and the Commodore concedes that mutiny is a real possibility.

COUNTY OF MURALI (18 W/TA)
His Excellency, Kilyara Drathnes II, Baron of Karrka, Count of Murali.

Trade: Golmath, Ingazi, IOC, Kumara, Sarsis (3), Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Yaminon, Zarkhandu

DP: None.

The elderly Count Torthes II ordered Lord Miji to move the Thika refugees underground down the Patrulé Stair. This did not prove particularly popular with the people, who gave up their land of pleasant greenery for a dank and eerie darkness, lit only by the sickly green and yellow glow of various luminescent fungi. Roving gangs of thugs took advantage of the fear and uncertainty of the people, as well as the darkness, to impose a sort of criminal rule. After Lord Miji's murder in 1548, command of the refugees was as-

sumed by a particularly nasty specimen of Wenemet goon named Dringo. His henchmen used threats and lashes to continue driving the miserable Thikans down, down into the deep.

Meanwhile, on the bright and snowy surface, the old Count died in 1550 at age 72, keeping alive his Clan's reputation for longevity. He was succeeded by his middle-aged son.

DRACONIC BARONY OF IÄTHEDAIN (9 SW/UR)
Baron Darandain Zharharn III of Iäthedain, the Just, Lord Dragonwood.

Sir Darabur Sardein, Grandmaster of the Military Order of the Red Dragon.

Trade: Golmath, Ingazi, Sarsis (3), Urdraháhn, Yarni-Za, Zarkhandu

DP: Nope. But we're real friendly!

The snows were deep in Iäthedain, and throughout 1546 and 1547 they only got deeper. House Darandain did their best to aid and comfort their people, building many new public works.

By and large, the old Baron Zharharn II (the gruff but lovable) left the administration of his Realm to his clerks while he spent an inordinate amount of time hunting in the great Iathni Forest. He died on one such hunt in 1548, falling through thin ice during an unexpected summer thaw. Zharharn's son took the throne as Baron Zharharn III. His people have named him "the just", as he has a fine legal mind and has already proven himself a wise and popular ruler.

A new road was constructed between the towns of Anúrdar and Shannet, and the Barony's fledgling sorcery academy expanded. Harlech Cathedral was returned to the Church.

IÄTHEDEK: THE PROTECTORATE OF FRIEBÆLD

The great Wyrms Friebæld was little seen, though she could occasionally be heard. Some more trees are growing in Scagadon Prefecture.

VEILED MASTERS OF YARNI-ZA (34 YG)

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

Trade: Atuburrk, Chi'tixi, Iäthedain, Kicitchat, Taneki, Zarkhandu

DP: Nope.



star the Unholy was *probably* quite upset by the Zarkhandu primacy declaration, but he has gone into one of his moods where no one is allowed to see him or speak with him, so nobody really knows for sure. The reaction amongst his various minions ran the gamut from writing stern letters to the editor deploring “this sort of thing” all the way to repeatedly screaming “heresy!” whilst rolling their eyes and foaming at the mouth a bit.

It was, if anything, even colder in Ystar's dominions than in previous years. Starting in about the summer (ha!) of 1548, the temperature gradually increased from “frigid” to merely “bone-chilling”.

APOTHEOTIC KINGDOM OF FELL ZARKHANDU (61 S/DF)

His Dread Majesty, Tirach Bæn, Lord Sakkath, Count of Vúhlath & Mlideen, Duke of Hyáglion, King of Zarkhandu.

Sir Dukath Bir, Grandmaster of the Order of the Second Sons.

Trade: Araxes, Chi'tixi, Duedhyn, Einandhu, Hyrágec, Iäthedain, ID, Kicitchat, Lynnarvor, Murali, Sarsis (3), Tiryowglas, Urdraháhn, Yaminon, Yarni-Za

DP: Oy.



ing Tirach Bæn fought the Ice with every weapon at his disposal. If anything, 1546 and 1547 were worse than the previous years. Great glaciers in the mountains merged into ice sheets, driving the last inhabitants from the original homes of the Zîman people. The OSS fortresses of Garek-sûl and OGREK-sûl were destroyed and abandoned, as was Zisu Priory in Zîmandhu. The situation was possibly even worse in Sleghas, which was still populated. The people fled before

the slow, inexorable, grinding crush of the walls of ice. The town of Gargûl was abandoned, and the burghers joined the farmers and herders already streaming out of the region and into Darghas as refugees. Strangely, the walls of ice stopped just short of the priory of the Forge of Yagnar, and the clerics there maintained their religious life in the very shadow of the ice sheet.

Mamonts, gryphons, and leaping snow cats ventured farther north than they have ever been seen, prompting some enterprising refugees to take a hand at mamont herding. So far, it has not gone particularly well. Further south in Shakkos, however, the Gornya Rogami have done a little better. Learning from the nomads who hunt the great beasts, they have actually captured several of the enormous creatures and kept them alive in captivity for months at a time.

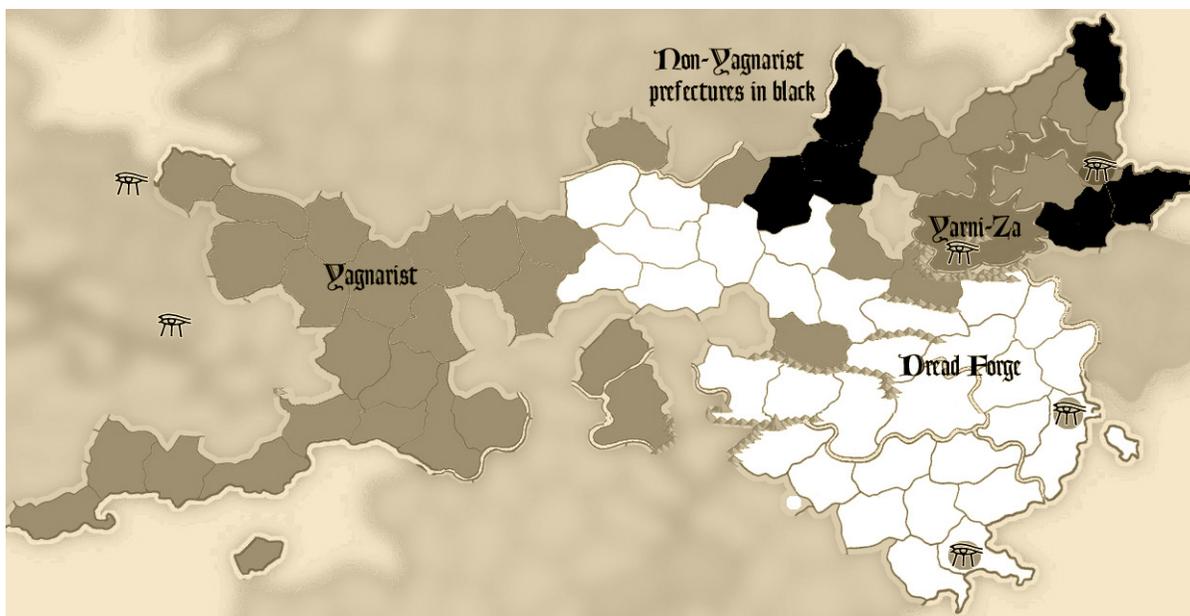
In Darghas, the King himself walked among the refugees, exhorting them to courage and resolution. He helped distribute the food and clothing aid, and with his own sword executed justice upon the whiny.

Saurian refugees from the independent regions of Drogdyr and Dubara fled north into Kommolek, where they encamped around the city of Treskaw and asked for the King's protection. In a similar way, the Saurian hillfolk of Kurfowlek retreated before the advancing ice sheets and fled into Tenuos.

Famine struck most of the Realm, but distributions of money and supplies from the Imperial Ice Relief funds helped enormously. The weather began to improve ever so slightly in 1548, to the great relief of the people and the government. By 1550, the threat of famine was a memory.

The rivers continue to be frozen for much of the year. Transport on the Minrao has all but ceased, though water still flows under the several-foot thick crust of ice. Even during the summer of 1550, when the ice actually broke up for a month or two, the river was full of chunks of ice that made any but the most determined (or foolish) boaters wary.

Some of the more enterprising young Saurians simply started running their smaller boats on top



of the ice. The young toughs raced their one- and two-man boats down the rough ice like madmen. This was only marginally successful, until the advent of Ardelbec the Insane.

In the far south on the Isle of Delin, the ancient Saurian Tower³¹ briefly flashed with an intense white light. Some of the local fishermen claim it shot a beam of light directly upward.



Deep in the depths of the Winter of 1546, the High Priest of the priory of Khurdûn in Chorken proclaimed himself Primate of the Dread Forge sect, subject (of course) to his Unholy Magnificence, the Lich Ystar. This primacy is known as the *Countenance of Coals*. Its priests wear coal-like masks with cantrips that make them seem to smoulder³².

This action soon precipitated a split in the Yagnarist hierarchy in Zarkhandu, as many ordinary

Yagnarists had no desire to be under the thumb of the Dread Forge. Whether or not this will escalate into a full-blown schism, or if this “division of labour” will be particularly well-received by the Veiled Masters remains to be seen. In Zarkhandu there are, for the moment, two entirely separate hierarchies sending tithes to two entirely different places.

ARDELBECC & THE ICERIGGERS OF HOTHRUN-DATH

It began with an attempt by a young Saurian man to impress a girl by winning an ice-boat race.

The son of a fisherman and a hedge-witch, young Ardelbec was fascinated by the Human culture of Oratoa, and he had voraciously consumed every book available on the subject. Young Ardelbec hit on the idea of using small Oratoan-style outriggers outfitted with skate blades. Unusual thinking ran strong in his family, and his mother conjured up some minor magics to help strengthen the runners on the ice-boats, which had an annoying tendency of snapping, bending, or just plain shearing off.

The day of the race came, and a curious crowd gathered around Ardelbec’s boat. It was unlike any-

31 On the Isle of Delin there’s an enormous, weathered statue that might have once been a Saurian. It’s half-buried in snow and ice, but about five stories tall.

32 In fact, you can tell the clerical rank by the mask, from the black coals of the novices right up to the glowing orange yellow mask of the Primate.

thing the other racers had ever seen, and Ardelbec was the victim of both good-natured mocking and derisive laughter. When the starter's flag dropped, however, and Ardelbec pulled up his sail, the boat took off like a shot. Two of his rivals caught up to him in the long straightaway before a sharp left bend in the ice river, their single, flat-hull boats sending up a spray of snow in their wake. Ardelbec took in his sail and slowed slightly, allowing his rivals to overtake him by a several boat-lengths.

As the three approached the bend, the pilots of the other two boats lowered sail and applied their grinding friction brakes. Ardelbec, however, did neither. In fact, as his boat headed into the bend, he actually gained speed and shot past his rivals. The rails on the outriggers squealed, and in the sharp of the bend his boat made the turn on its single starboard rail. After that, the only race was the one for second place.

In the following months, Ardelbec went into the ice-boat building business. He built larger and larger boats, moving on from one- and two-man craft to small ships he called "iceriggers". As his business expanded, he taught other craftsmen to design and build iceriggers. He came to the attention of the King, who soon discovered that Ardelbec was a positive genius in the areas of vessel design – both icerigger and ordinary naval ships. In 1550, the school of craftsmen and tacticians that gathered around him in his home city of Hothrun-Dath became an academy under Royal patronage.

The Underlands

DOWN UNDER

YAMINON ALLIANCE (22 Y/-)

Mani Jaripri, Second Lord Yani, Master of the Union Guilds of the Federated Towns of Yangina and Putini.

Trade: Golmath, Ingazi, Murali, Zarkhandu

DP: None.

s the elderly Mani Tunapri lay dying, the guildmasters of the Yani gathered at his bedside to hear his whispered, final words.

"Brothers, today is the last meeting I will call to order. First, acceptance by the Surfacers of our Massive Farms has been minimal at best. They should be restricted to the use of our allies. Second, I hereby propose the new policy: 'Yaminon First'. Our own Kindred should come first, above all else. If any wish our help, they must demonstrate how it shall aid us. Who among you shall support this policy?"

One of the older masters asked, "Guildmaster, before I cast my vote, I must ask. Why the sudden change of heart? Both you and your father have supported aiding the Surfacers in the past, yet now you say we should do so only if it benefits us."

At this, the Guild-master gave a dry chuckle.

"Ah, my friend Scovik! You have always been here to keep me honest by poking holes in my policies. This has been in the making since before I took office. My father knew that we had not the resources for another Sealing. Therefore, my father began by selling his soul to a Surfacer of Zarkhandu in exchange for protection. Once we had been integrated into the Empire, I separated us from Zarkhandu. The we tried to aid the Surfacers to better demonstrate our worth. I did so knowing full well that few would take us seriously.

"Now the time has come. The Surfacers wage their war against the North and each other, over their petty gods. I have seen the future, Brothers, and their actions shall bring about the devastation of each other. There will come a time, then the blood shed shall make even the heavens weep, then the tears shed shall wash away the hate. I have seen this and know it to be true."

Mani Tunapri dissolved in a fit of coughing. After a mug of water had been brought, he called for the vote. The masters unanimously accepted the proposal.

"Now as we must share this world with the Surfacers, I propose the construction of a Philosophy

College. They shall study the religious groupings so that we may better work with them.”

“Why would we wish to know more of religion? Do you suggest we convert?”

“Scovik, Scovik, Scovik! I suggest we learn from them for the same reason you would survey a mine expansion. You know full well that you can’t support the structure without knowing where it’s most unstable.” The vote was passed 6 – 1. This last exertion seemed almost too much for the old man, but in a whisper he continued.

“Finally, with the integration of the Putini and most of the Pamati lands, I propose the name of our great realm be changed to the *Yaminon Alliance*. We are all brothers, and ...” Once again, Mani Tunapri convulsed in a fit of coughing. This time, the water did not help. As the coughing grew more feeble, the two senior guildmasters ran to fetch Tunapri’s grandson and heir. By the time the three of them returned, the old Master was dead.



The Yaminon finished a road between Yani and Ringina, via Poatina and hundreds of miles of twisty tunnels and caverns.

Lord Temma’s great mass of Yaminon settlers and soldiers arrived at the top of the Patrule Stair. The settlers immediately set about settling into settlements in Thika (3241)*x*. A town was built over the entrance of the Patrule Stair, and to no one’s surprise they named it Patrule. A port was built on the Karra River to facilitate trade. Many of the Yaminon found the adjustment to life without a ceiling somewhat unsettling. It turns out that living most of your life underground can tend to make one a trifle agoraphobic. Fortunately, the forest canopy helped quite a bit, and in Patrule Town all the streets and sidewalks are covered.

The Yaminon surface-dwellers also set about the construction of a complex of buildings hard along

the river, with several oversized waterwheels. Visitors assume it’s a mill of some sort, though very little timber has been shipped there yet.

Despite their continuing isolation, Wuka Luyni, Lungtala, and Larapuna did not rebel.

Fabulous Efan

THE EASTERN CONTINENT

NEW ZARKHANDU (3 S/DF)

Her Majesty Queen Tannika, Governor of the Havens.

Trade: None

DP: Habissar (T)

Zarkhandu expended great effort in a diplomatic outreach to the people known as the Red Sarge. Mostly, it was ineffective. Finally, however, a Red Sarg herald approached Zarkhandu’s port town of Hadria in Danileen under the ancient flag of truce. Unfortunately, there appeared to be no one with authority to receive him. Finally, Prince Sharret Drehl appeared atop the barbican and bade the herald speak.

The Red Sarg herald delivered his message in a clear voice, easily heard by all those at the wall. He spoke in Old Imperial.

“My Lord Ombaird, Marshal of the Red Sargs, bids me speak to the master of the Black Sargs, the one who names himself Count Tirach Bæn of Sakkath, who is King in the South. My Lord bids me speak thusly: we have heard your words, King, and we make reply.

“You say you greet us in peace, but you landed in legions, conquering our lands and despoiling our monuments.

“In one breath you pledge to rebuild the Holy Empire, and in the next you demand tribute. You build your towns in the sacred remains of our ancient capital. In our holy city, you encamp armies.

“You claim we are kin, both descendents of the ancient Lineage of Chidor, and you even propose marriage between our Houses, but you have most foully murdered our last Holy King, attacking him

with wild animals and desecrating his body. The ancient and noble Lineage of Chidor is ended, and it is you who have ended it. It was hanging by a thread, and you cut it.

“No, your majesty, we think you an invader, a heretic, and a liar. There will be no peace – how can there be peace with those who commit such utter blasphemy? No, King of the South, our people are roused, for you have roused them from their long slumber. We pledge you no peace, no tribute, no daughter of Chidor, for we have none of these left to us. We pledge only this: war unending and eternal.”

The herald bowed smartly and walked away.

At that very moment, hundreds of miles away, a rain of flame fell upon the region of Norlein. It completely destroyed the terrified Zarkhandu garrison and caused untold damage to life and property throughout the land. It even killed a fair number of dinosaurs.

Zarkhandine diplomats found a much friendlier reception in Sinnithâr, which is apparently in the land of the Blue Sargs. They were welcomed with food (dinosaur: tastes of chicken) and wine (thin and vinegary). The local chieftain declined to pay tribute to Zarkhandu, but referred the matter by courier to the King of the Blue Sargs. They still await a reply.

Lord Mahbo, Zarkhandu’s most notable Human, led a corps of flying stone warriors into the Sarthas countryside, killing all the carnivorous dinosaurs they could find. While the expedition was a great deal of fun, they didn’t actually make much of a dent. They did learn quite a bit about dinosaurs and how they work, however.

A great Zarkhandine fleet arrived in Norlein to survey the horrific damage and to re-oppress the despondent natives.

The Crystal Citadel briefly flashed with an intense white light and shot a beam of light directly upward.



Imperial Gazette

Published by the Ancient and Undaunted Order of Heralds by Appointment to His Imperial Majesty



Her August & Imperial Majesty
Empress Chass'ika

Mistress of the Tis'chak, Countess of Takkikik, Queen of Itaxik, Golden Beetle of the West, Sovereign of Sahul, Lady of the Nine Hills of Sardarthion, Holder of the Emerald Throne, and Empress of All the World.

APPOINTMENTS

During the Reign of Empress Chath'cutla:

To Governor of Agador, Arador, Balashan, Drazhan, Kastier, Kembul, Kordier, Kumarand, Larloc, Orinos:
by examination.

To Chancellor of the Empire: Count Palatine Gwariva Razhim of Ingazi.

During the Reign of Empress Chass'ika:

To Chancellor of the Empire: Countess Sith'tat of Kicitchat.

IMPERIAL OFFICES

Chancellor of the Empire:..... *Kicitchat*

Speaker of the House of Peers: *Hyragec*

Justices of the Imperial Chamber Court:

..... *Chancellor of the Empire*

..... *Speaker of the House of Peers*

..... *Chi'tixi* (through 1574)

..... *Averon* (through 1569)

..... *vacancy*

Lord Admiral of the Blue: *vacancy*

Lord Admiral of the Green: *Pexiki*

Lord Admiral of the Red:..... *vacancy*

Marshal of Thacia: *vacancy*

Warden of the North: *Chi'tixi*

FREE COMPANIES & ERRANTRY &C.

HAWKWOOD COMPANY—28mc 18pk 10mi

Captain: Lord Dwinbi Sardes (L974W) TR age 61

Location: *Dalawathi Prefecture, Kumarand Province*

Min. Bid: 130GP / TURN

WILLEFORN'S SPEARS—14mi 2li

Captain: "Spears" Willefor (LA53W) TR age 49

Location: *Dalawathi Prefecture, Kumarand Province*

Min. Bid: 50GP / TURN

PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS OF THE EMPIRE

Province	GPv	Ref.	Governor	Province	GPv	Ref.	Governor
Agador	55	–	bureaucrat	Kembul	50	–	bureaucrat
Anabreis	45	–	bureaucrat	Kiermon	65	–	bureaucrat
Aradaun	75	–	bureaucrat	Kinsidan	25	14	bureaucrat
Arador	55	–	bureaucrat	Kordier	60	14	bureaucrat
Ardebon	50	–	Atuburrk	Kumarand	55	7	vacant
Artier	60	8	vacant	Lambris	35	–	vacant
Balashan	60	–	bureaucrat	Larloc	55	14	bureaucrat
Belegaridor	55	–	bureaucrat	Mondahan	8	–	vacant
Biralis	65	14	vacant	Muralis	50	–	vacant
Chos	45	–	vacant	Narchoal	25	7	vacant
Dorthacia	25	–	bureaucrat	Nauatidran	5	8	bureaucrat
Dranchoal	45	8	vacant	Orinos	65	17	vacant
Dranmul	50	–	bureaucrat	Sachon	35	–	bureaucrat
Drazhan	10	–	bureaucrat	Sardior	100	17	bureaucrat
Endior	45	–	bureaucrat	Sistramidor	65	–	bureaucrat
Iantier	55	–	bureaucrat	Tepalis	50	7	bureaucrat
Iasedior	35	–	bureaucrat	ThaciaMaior	70	11	bureaucrat
Kaidu	35	17	bureaucrat	ThaciaMinor	60	11	vacant
Kanapad	10	8	bureaucrat	Thebia	45	–	bureaucrat
Kanmul	75	–	bureaucrat	Tramelis	65	17	bureaucrat
Kaparis	65	10	bureaucrat	Withidan	50	–	vacant
Kassaria	25	–	Zarkhandu	Yann	15	17	vacant
Kastier	40	8	bureaucrat				

For each Province of the Empire, the income (GPv) and Turn of the most recent reform (Ref.) is given, as is the holder of the Governor's office.

REPORT OF IMPERIAL REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES, 1541–1545

INCOME		Public Works	500.0
Regional and Provincial Income.....	264.9	Ice Relief Grants	900.0
Public Works Income.....	798.0	Ice Survivability research	100.0
City Income.....	9.1	Medical College.....	25.0
International Trade (Tariffs)	1660.2	Counter-Intelligence.....	500.0
From Exchequer.....	1100.9	TOTAL	3498.0
TOTAL	4433.1	To EXCHEQUER.....	935.1
EXPENDITURES		<i>Imperial Budget exclusive of returned Elphárec Ice funds disbursed to Zarkhandu.</i>	
Army Support	73.0		
Military, sorcery, spycraft investment ...	700.0		
Government investment	100.0		

RUGBY

All-Sahûl League play:

All Realms may enter up to two teams in the League, subject to the approval of the League Trustees.

Current ASL teams are:

Aradéc (suspended), Chi'tixi, Golmath, Ingazi, Murali, Runazar, and the Zarkhandu All-Blacks.

Tournament results!

Round 1 (1547)

Murali (bye, since Aradéc was suspended)
Chi'tixi 11 at All-Blacks 7
Runazar 6 at Ingazi 9
Golmath (bye)

Round 2 (1549)

Murali 5 at Chi'tixi 14
Ingazi 9 at Golmath 8

The Chi'tixi team was simply unbeatable, and the championship game seemed more of a coronation than a contest.

Championship (1550)

Chi'tixi 15 at Ingazi 8.

Next cycle's matchings are:

Round 1 (1552)

Golmath at Murali [yellow]
New Ingazi at Runazar [blue]
All-Blacks at Ingazi [red]

Round 2 (1554)

Yellow at Blue
Red at Chi'tixi

Championship match to be played in Chi'tixi in 1555.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

ALL BANK LOANS must be repaid within two Turns at 120% of the original amount of the loan. Those wishing to borrow from the Imperial Bank must contact the Board of Directors in advance.

IMPERIAL BANK OF SAHÛL

Locations: Einandhu, Sardarthion

Available to borrow: 4,880 GP

(No single borrower may borrow more than 1,000 GP)

INVESTORS MAY PURCHASE shares in the Imperial Free City of Einandhu for 200 GP each, any profits to be divided by shares. Rule 10.5.2 investment income accrues normally. The four chief shareholders, together with the Tiger King of Arms, form the board of directors (indicated * below).

Shares:

- Guilds Council of Adndar 9*
- Imperial Exchequer..... 7*
- House Gwariva of Ingazi 5*
- House Pangku of Araxes..... 4*
- Ancient and Undaunted Order of Heralds... 3*
- Printers Guild of Zadres 1

Loans: Yaminon Alliance / 420 GP / due Turn 21

BANK OF ITAXIK

Location: Itaxik

Available to borrow: 3256 GP

Ice Relief Fund..... 178 GP

Loans: Kommolek / 840 GP / due Turn 22

FIRST YAGNARIST BANK OF THE EYE

Location: Yarni-Za

Available to borrow: 0 GP

Loans: Kicitchat / 1200 GP / due Turn 21

Loans entirely at the discretion of the Veiled Masters.

NOTICES

Ruling of the Imperial Chamber Court (1546)

Response of the Court to the Request of the Empress in the matter of the Aradéc Succession

The Court finds that the succession of the crown of Aradéc is not in dispute.

- Her Honor, Chief Justice Ixik of Chi'tixi*
- His Honor, Justice Drak Grou of Averno*
- His Honor, Justice Razhim of Marriya, Ingazi*
- Her Honor, Justice Lik'Spit'l of Tokatl*

Imperial Chamber Court,
Sardarthion.

Ruling of the Imperial Chamber Court (1546)

Case 1545-01: The Lich Ystar of Yarni-Za v. King Paharnes v of Aradéc

THE EDICT OF THE SHEATHED SWORD (1542) provides that "From the time of this Edict forward, until it shall be rescinded by the Crown, any Imperial realm found guilty in Imperial Court of attacks covert or overt against a fellow Imperial realm, shall face the pronouncement of an Imperial Bann and Imperial Doom."

The *Great Charter of 1534* provides in Article 7 that the Republic of Kumara is a realm of the Empire.

Findings of Fact:

The armies of the Kingdom of Aradéc, led by King Deric II and Crown Prince Paharnes, invaded Kumara in 1541.

The Baron of Kumara demanded the withdrawal of all Aradéc forces from his lands in 1542.

King Deric died in late 1542 whereupon Crown Prince Paharnes acceded to the throne.

These facts are stipulated to by both parties and are therefore not in dispute.

The Court now finds that Aradéc's military operations continued in Kumara after the date of King Paharnes' accession, including: (1) "mopping up" in Ardanyi, a clear continuation of military action and not a retreat, (2) continued Aradéc military occupation of Ardanyi and Dalawathi, and (3) invasion of Windra by mercenaries in Aradéc employ in 1543.

Ruling:

While it is clear from the forgoing facts that the war was begun by King Deric II, it is equally clear that King Paharnes v continued the war after his father's death and is therefore culpable under the Edict of the Sheathed Sword.

It is therefore with a heavy heart that this Court finds the defendant, His Royal Majesty, Sansollen Paharnes V, Baron of Wanumarra, Count of Abijar, King of Aradéc, GUILTY of violating the *Edict of the Sheathed Sword*.

We further dismiss the charge of perjury as wholly without merit.

Judgement:

The Edict of the Sheathed Sword provides the possibilities of both Bann and Doom against the guilty, but the Court is mindful of the plea for mercy entered by the plaintiff. Therefore, in its mercy, the Court decrees:

1. All Aradéc military forces must withdraw from Kumara according to the borders of 1540.
2. Aradéc must repudiate all tribute from regions within the Kumaran borders of 1540.
3. An Imperial Bann is proclaimed, to last no less than 4 cycles (20 years). During this time, no Imperial Realm may trade with any lands ruled by the King of Aradéc.
4. The Kingdom of Aradéc must pay reparations to Kumara in the amount of 50AP and 250GP.
5. The King of Aradéc must disband all Royal Aradéc forces involved in the invasion of Kumara, to include releasing of Devas from his service (in effect disbanding them). Alternatively, given that the Empire finds itself in a state of war, the King of Aradéc may instead gift these forces to the Imperial war effort, either to the Warden of the North or to the Empress herself at the discretion of the King. These forces are to be directly transferred, and no Aradéc leader may command them.

Furthermore, if the King of Aradéc fails to uphold any of these five articles within the next five years (i.e., by 1550), the Court enjoins a Doom upon the King of Aradéc and his realm to last no less than 4 cycles (20 years).

The Court strongly urges Royal Aradéc to adhere strictly to this judgement.

May the Gods save the Empress.

Her Honor, Chief Justice Ixik of Chi'tixi
His Honor, Justice Drak Grou of Averno
His Honor, Justice Irrjir Lucian of Hyrágec
His Honor, Justice Razhim of Marriya, Ingazi
Her Honor, Justice Lik'Spit'l of Tokatl
 Imperial Chamber Court,
 Sardarthion.

House of Peers: Amendment to the *Great Charter* Article 14 (1546)

To the College of Electors,

LET IT BE KNOWN that upon this day, the House of Peers With a vote of 8 aye and 2 nay, the Peers have voted for passage of the following Amendment to the *Great Charter*, to append the following text to Article 14 ¶2:

Imperial Provincial Governorships may also be submitted *en masse* for review by the Peerage. Upon a simple majority

of the quorum voting in favor all the Governorships so submitted shall be issued on the same Imperial document

Irrjir Lucian,
 Speaker for the House of Peers.
 Sardarthion.

As of this publication, the College of Electors has failed to bring this amendment to a vote.

House of Peers: A Palace for Foreign Dignitaries in Sardarthion (1546)

To the College of Electors,

LET IT BE KNOWN that upon this day, the House of Peers With a vote of 8 aye and none nay, the Peers have voted to approved the proposal to create some small Manor in Sardarthion for the habitation of all Foreign ambassadors. This way there will be a venue for them to speak and be spoken to, but they will be cut off from reading or participating in any other venue at all including the use of Heraldic Messengers such that all business is to be conducted in the open.

Irrjir Lucian,
 Speaker for the House of Peers.
 Sardarthion.

As of this publication, the College of Electors has failed to bring this amendment to a vote.

The Code of the Knights and Soldiers of the Order of the Sacred Raven (1549)

IN THE NAME OF OUR MOST BLESSED LADY URDA, Gentle, Fierce, Indifferent, Mistress of the Beasts, Lady of the Balance, Protector of the Brave, the Reluctant Warrior;

Now, therefore, let it be said amongst all the lands of Sahûl that this Code is the Code of the Sacred Raven, and that all Knights and Soldiers of the Order of the Sacred Raven shall abide by it unto death.

I. Above all things, all Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Raven shall keep faith with Our Lady Urda, and Her Church; and let any Brother or Sister who fails to so keep faith be stripped of their shield and tabard; and let no excommunicate of Urda's Church hold office in or have dealings with this holy Order.

II. Let no-one enter this Order who has not achieved the age of seventeen years for a Saurian, nineteen years for a Wenemet or Human, or eleven years for a Kithixi; and though younger men and women may squire to Knights of the Order, they should not take the Order's vows until they are of this age. For service to Urda requires dedication and a mature spirit, and it is best that petitioners have a measure of years so that they do not later regret their choice of service.

III. The Order shall be open to men and women equally, and to gentle and common equally, so long as they are of the Urda faith and free of both debt and oath of loyalty. But those who wish to serve as Knight of the Order must already be a knight at the time of their petition and have sat vigil, and must bring to the order two lances, one sword, and armour suitable to a knight, or silver sufficient to purchase those things; and if a petitioner cannot provide those things, or is not a knight, then let them serve as man-at-arms to the glory of Urda, and let them be satisfied with that role, and not envy their knight-brothers and knight-sisters.

IV. All Knights are within the Order equal, save those granted the rank of Knight-Captain, Knight-Commander, Master, or Grandmaster, who shall have the benefit of those ranks; and a Knight of common birth shall have the same status as a Knight of gentle birth; but a Knight sworn for life to the Order shall have privileges beyond a Knight serving the Order for only a period of time. And only a Knight sworn for life may serve as a Knight-Commander, Master, or Grandmaster of the Order. And all man-at-arms are within the Order equal, save those that have the rank of Captain or Sergeant, as granted by the Knight-Captain of the Chapter, but any man-at-arms is subordinate to any Knight.

V. The Order shall be divided into Chapters, each of which being, wherever possible, twelve Knights, one for each month of the year; and thirty man-at-arms, one for each day of each month; to symbolize our Order's constant readiness. In instances where a Chapter is not warranted, let there be half-Chapters of six Knight and fifteen man-at-arms, wherever possible. And let one of the Knight of each Chapter or half-Chapter be Knight-Captain, as chosen unanimously from among and by the Knight of that chapter; but if the Knight of the Chapter are not able to speak with one voice, then let the Knight give the names of their choices for Knight-Captain to the Matriarch of their Cathedral or Abbot or Abbot of their Abbey, who will choose a Knight-Captain from among the names given. And further, let

one of the man-at-arms of each Chapter be Captain, as chosen by the Knight-Captain, and some of them Sergeants, as chosen by the Captain, and it is desirable that there be one Sergeant for every ten men-at-arms or portion thereof.

VI. And there shall be one Knight-Commander for each diocese in which the Order is established, who shall command in the field those Chapters within their diocese; and one Master for each diocese, who shall administer to the needs of the Order within their diocese; and finally, let there be chosen from amongst the Order a single Grandmaster, who has authority over all the Order, and who shall name the Knight-Commanders and Masters.

And the manner of choosing the Grandmaster shall be as follows: upon the death of the Grandmaster, let the Knight-Commanders and Masters gather to choose, by two-thirds vote on secret ballot, a new Grandmaster of the Order; but if the Knight-Commanders and Masters are unable to elect some one with the required two thirds of the votes, then let them continue voting, with one ballot in the morning and another in the evening, as required, until they are successful.

VII. It is the duty of each member of rank to maintain order amongst those in their charge, and to mete out justice amongst and for those in their charge as necessary, and to use their best conscience in dealing with the concerns facing themselves and those in their charge, with guidance from the dictates of the Church of Urda and by this Code. And it is the duty of each member of subordinate rank to obey their superior humbly and without hesitation or resentment.

VIII. And further, it is said, "the swordarms of the faithful are strong"; and so it is the duty of all members of this Holy Order to be fit to serve the Order in matters both martial and spiritual; and therefore, let each Knight and man-at-arms train diligently with weapons suitable to their station, that they may defend the Order and the faithful against all enemies; and let each Knight and man-at-arms also attend diligently to their prayer and vigils, and attend the rites and make confession without fail.

IX. Knights should bear a shield of black and white, checkered, as a symbol of their fealty to the Order; and both Knight and man-at-arms should wear a tabard of black and white, as a symbol of their fealty to the Church. And wherever possible, the shield should be polished and the tabard clean, to honour our Lady. And let no Knight or man-at-arms have other ornamentation

on their person or their garments or their belongings, save for a single symbol of Urda which may be of any material, even silver or gold.

X. Within the Order generally, let both man-at-arms and Knights hold firmly to the communal life, and uphold order within the Order, as Urda would wish; and take only what is needed to sustain themselves from the Order; and care for the sick and wounded and invalid among them, that they may in turn be cared for should misfortune strike them. And let all members of the Order, including those of rank, share equally in the labours necessary to sustain the Order and its Chapters.

XI. Knights and men-at-arms should not have wives or husbands save with the approval of a Master or the Grandmaster; and should a married man or woman petition for entry into the Order, then let the Master who hears the petition consider carefully whether to admit that petitioner; for family can distract from our Order's holy purpose, and give pause when faced with fierce odds, and marriage should be undertaken only with great caution. And it is desirable that Knights or men-at-arms not take lovers amongst themselves, for no preference should be given to a Brother or Sister solely for love, save the love of duty to our Lady.

XII. And those sworn to the Order should refrain from inciting anger from their brothers and sisters, and should endeavour to keep the peace within the Order; and if they find fault with another in the Order, they should not confront them in anger, but rather in a spirit of fraternity. But nor should brethren turn from fault, for to leave a fault uncorrected is foolhardy; and it is the duty of the Knight-Captain or other officer of the Order to ensure that correction is undertaken.

XIII. And further, let no member of the Order take up arms against any other member of the Order, nor strike them in anger whether with weapon or without, for unity is beloved of Urda and strife beloved of Her enemies.

XIV. And let all members of this holy Order, while giving faithful and humble service to our Lady, respect and defend the faithful of other faiths of good conscience.

XV. Let no member of the Order retreat from or yield in battle except when the Order's banner is withdrawn from the field, or by order of a member of greater rank within the Order; and should a Knight or man-at-arms be captured by an enemy, the Order shall not ransom them; for it is better that the Order's foes not be

encouraged to believe that they shall receive silver for captured Brothers or Sisters.

XVI. It is the sacred duty of the Order to defend the Empire of Sahûl against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to seek and protect the lost Lineages of the Sardavas. For this they were created, and to this they are rededicated this day.

Given by Her hand,
Mirra of Thace.

Edict of Dissent (1550)

FROM THIS DAY FORTH, let it be known throughout the Kingdom of Hyrágec that those seeking greater liberty and opportunity for themselves, that they may join with other like-minded people and seek the new colony of Hyrágec in Oratoa in the prefecture known as Ráne. The Kingdom itself will pay for transport and anyone wishing to join will be allowed.

King Frenthes v,
King of Hyrágec.
Pahasar, Kerneveg Prefecture.

Edict of Perpetual Protection and Friendship (1550)

FROM THIS DAY FORTH, let it be known throughout the Kingdom of Hyrágec that those seeking greater liberty in the Colony of Ráne will be afforded the affection and protection of the crown of Hyrágec. There will be no taxes levied or duties enforced on any trade, internal or external, that comes forth from Ráne. The Crown of Hyrágec stands ready to send troops, ships, and aid to her people so long as they maintain their loyalty to the Church Universal and Triumphant and the Empire.

Let it also be known that the people of Ráne are free to change their form of government peacefully with full support of the crown to whichever form they may choose.

King Frenthes v,
King of Hyrágec.
Pahasar, Kerneveg Prefecture.



Imperial Strength Index

#	Realm	Player	Forum Name	E-mail	ISI
<i>The Great Powers</i>					
1	Thace, Elector	Gareth Anderson	kolgrim	kolgrim@gmail.com	2,127.2
2	Aradéc (King)	Charles Hurst	Xanthi	charles.hurst@gmail.com	2,046.8
3	Itaxik / Empress	Michael Warner	Galen	me1451@comcast.net	2,021.2
4	Chi'tixi	Steven Cagg	Priest King	ragnarstation@hotmail.com	1,859.0
5	Church U&T	Anne Porter	Cupcake	crabbycupcakes@gmail.com	1,857.5
6	Averon	Kevin Lawrence	Averon Inc.	privatej67@yahoo.com	1,827.9
7	Zarkhandu	Theo Moriarty	Mandala of Blood	tmoriarty@gmail.com	1,818.0
<i>Major Powers</i>					
8	Ingazi (all)	Harry Jago	jago	jagoh@yahoo.com	1,799.5
9	Araxes	Christopher Hord	chordam7	chordam7@yahoo.com	1,785.2
10	Golmath	Mike Green			1,671.0
11	Taneki	Don Wynne	meriden	dpatrickwynne@gmail.com	1,587.3
12	Atuburrk	Adam Sherman	Gonnagle	mad.angus@yahoo.com	1,430.2
13	Cappargarnia	Kyle Kinghorn	Doppleganger	kyle.kinghorn@gmail.com	1,381.2
14	Thace, Duchy	Ken Ditto		quilldrake@gmail.com	1,232.4
15	Aradéc (Comm)	Frank Thein ?	Frank		1,153.9
16	Pexiki	Don Crysler	Plymouth Superbirds		1,039.6
<i>Regional Powers</i>					
17	Elphárec	<i>This Realm is open for a player!</i>			961.9
18	Veiled Masters	James Hazeltine	Von Malvalken	jhazeltine@pleiadesmm.com	949.9
19	Hyrágec	Paul Copenhagen	Wombatia	rossclannoble@yahoo.com	925.3
20	Tiryowglas	Michael Johnson	Minister of Defense	printermanmj@aol.com	908.9
21	IOC	Jason Pearl	redoubtable1	redoubtable1@comcast.net	845.2
22	Yaminon	Miles Luna	Ryushi	meryushi@yahoo.com	795.1
23	Murali	Sigvald Thorsen		sigvaldmartin@msn.com	767.2
24	Kitchat	David Harrington	Sarnath		733.6
25	Adndar	<i>This Realm is open for a player!</i>			542.6
<i>Minor Powers</i>					
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27	Kachar	Daniel Jones	Drunken Monkey		491.2
28	Carcë	Joe Cirillo	Conqueror Worm		484.0
29	Lynnarvor	Joseph Heiselt	Cadeous	jrheiselt@yahoo.com	473.3
30	Tokatl	Shelley Woodberry	Skipperway	desrik@comcast.net	471.1
31	Sakkar	Nelson Merritt	hemmy	hemmymeritt@yahoo.com	444.1
32	Kumara	<i>This Realm is open for a player!</i>			260.4
33	Pehuatoka	<i>This Realm is open for a player!</i>			227.4
34	läthedain	<i>This Realm is open for a player!</i>			223.9



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