

shAKhàn

*Fantasy Role-Playing On the World of
Telostic*

Book "A":
Introduction / Game Setting



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1. What is Shakhàn?

This is the fifth widely published edition of *Shakhàn*, (shakk-HAHN), a fantasy role-playing game which is the culmination of over twenty years' intermittent to frenzied effort.

I was one of the first persons in British Columbia to become involved in the fantasy role-playing craze that had its height from approximately 1975 to the early 1980s. Along with certain others originally belonging to a games club at Simon Fraser University called "SPLUD", I began developing a role-playing game of my own shortly after I took up the hobby. This eventually became what is now called *The Telostician Campaign* or "*Shakhàn*".

For the last 24 years *Shakhàn* has been a part-time pastime; if you read the rules that follow carefully, you will discover of me, as I have of myself, some of my personal views, philosophy of life and (I hope) creativeness. Various incarnations of the game have been played by friends and acquaintances for its entire development period... indeed, a few of my friends (you know who you are) have had one particular adventure going on for ten "real" years' time, and I fully expect their "real" children to be old enough to join them by the time this mission is completed.

As for my wife Karen and I, well, we've joined the club with the birth of our baby daughter Virya Chéline on November 27, 1998. A new little soul now has two big worlds to explore: Earth and Telostic!

* Rocto-CathSinnian: "the world"

1.1. Shakhàn Version 4.1 (2000) Release Notes

Those who purchased the 1996 to 1998 editions of *Shakhàn* (up to Version 3.0) may be interested to know what has changed with the 2000* Version 4.1 release.

Generally, only a little has been added to the standard sections of this edition compared to the 1998 and mid-1999 ones – with one very significant exception. An overview of the changes and additions is given below:

-*Shakhàn* now includes a new book (Book "G") which details the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* or "Watchers". Inasmuch as the Watchers have always been an integral part of the *Shakhàn* fantasy environment – albeit, a poorly documented one – the 2000 edition of the game answers some of the questions submitted by many readers and players.
-This version – unlike all others up to this point – has been reformatted so as to be compatible with the Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (.PDF).

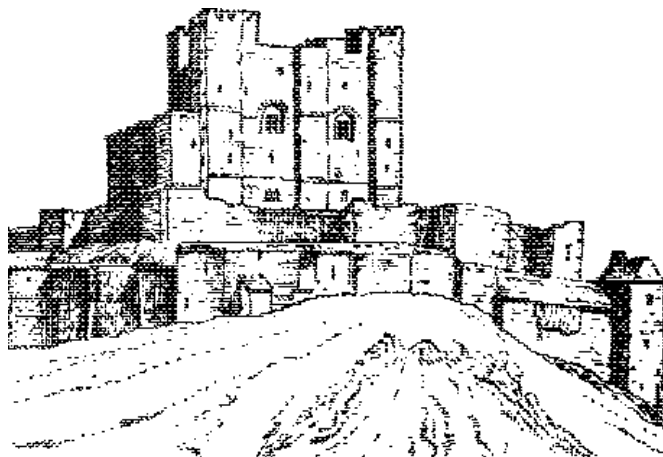
The .PDF format has become the *de facto* standard for exchange, display and printing of presentation-quality documents both over the Internet and from CD-ROM, primarily because a document in this format retains the exact look and feel of the original no matter what platform (PC, Mac, Unix, whatever) you use to run Adobe's free *Acrobat Reader* application and review a .PDF document with. (Note: The flavour of .PDF used for *Shakhàn* is version 4.0, so if your version of the *Acrobat Reader* is earlier than this you will have to go to www.adobe.com and get an update. Please **make sure to uninstall any older versions of Acrobat prior to doing this** – if you don't, you may disable *Acrobat* altogether! More details are available from Adobe, on this matter.)

-A few minor errors and omissions in the 1999 version's rules, charts and tables have been corrected.
-There are a few new spells.

* It should be noted that there was not, and now never will be, a "1997 edition" of *Shakhàn*, as we were not able to publish one due to family and other commitments in the fall of 1997.

One other comment is appropriate, regarding the publication schedule for *Shakhàn*. Although further refinements will be made to the game each year for the foreseeable future, in general these will be limited in scope... which, in the past, has caused the author to receive comments (mostly via e-mail) to the effect that, "you mean you had a *whole year* to add material to it, and *this* is all we get?"

Leaving aside the obvious point that *Shakhàn* is completely free, at least if you avail yourself of it by downloading it from the Internet, *Shakhàn* enthusiasts should keep in mind that the author has many, many other personal responsibilities (not least of which is doing his fair share of raising a baby daughter!) that must take priority over enhancing both the basic rules set as well as over creating *Shakhàn* scenarios and other playing aids. For the time being, minor rule fixes plus occasional enhancements and (perhaps) one new scenario a year, are all that can



Arlinga Castle

reasonably be expected. Hopefully this will be sufficient to keep the game interesting.

1.2. Game Setting and Rationale

Shakhàn is set in the cold northern regions of the imaginary world of Telostic, a world in which many of those things known to be fables in the "real" world such as magic, supernatural monsters, deities, enchanted swords and the like really **do** exist. The setting of the *Shakhàn* game environment is largely pre-industrial – that is, the level of most Telostician societies is equivalent to those on Earth just after the collapse of the Roman Empire – but (see Book "G") there are hints of earlier, greater civilisations with a much more highly developed level of technology.

Unlike many other fantasy role-playing games, the main "purpose" of the rules detailed below is to regulate adventures in cities or other populated regions, as opposed to "dungeons" or the Underworld as it is known on Telostic. Personally, I find the intrigues of city adventures more interesting and challenging than slaying endless hordes of monsters; there **are**, indeed, many dangerous and exciting Underworld regions on the planet, but hopefully they will not have to be the focus of the most diverting adventures. Telostic is also, relatively speaking, a "magic-limited" alternate reality, in the sense that supernatural powers, entities and events are quite few and far between. This is partly just to keep the game setting manageable for the Referee, but also because I feel that fantasy environments with overly easy access to magic usually become self-parodies: e.g., it must be rather difficult for the king to recruit tax collectors, if every tenth peasant farmer has learned how to use the "Lightning Bolt" spell!

Telostic is almost entirely the product of my own imagination, but I freely acknowledge my intellectual debt to many sources of popular fantasy and science fiction literature, in particular the *Empire of the Petal Throne*® series of games and books by M.A.R. Barker. EPT, in its day, was vastly superior to *Dungeons and Dragons*®, the most popular role-playing game, and it deserved a better fate than it received in the marketplace. Part of the original reason for *Shakhàn* is the fact that *D&D* has serious logical problems as a simulation, although it's admittedly fast and fun to play. Like many other enthusiasts I thought, and still think, I could do better. I say this knowing full well that *D&D* has a complete stranglehold on the FRP industry; parts of *Shakhàn* are compatible with *D&D*, others are not, but if you are looking for "another *D&D* scenario" I advise you to look elsewhere.

I have tried very hard to make everything within and about *Shakhàn* completely original, but given the nature of the subject, it is possible that one or more aspects of *Shakhàn* may have a superficial similarity to other FRP games. This is particularly true of titles and personal names; there are only so many ways to construct a fantasy name in a way that will be pronounceable to North American readers, and there is always the chance that one's own creations will overlap those of others in the field. Both the reader, and the author(s) of any such game or other type of intellectual property, should be aware that any such resemblance is not intentional and is purely coincidental.





1.3. Audience of the Game

Shakhàn is basically an adult game; that is, it is meant to be played and enjoyed by people of mature social skills and an open outlook on life. What this means, specifically, is that the game contains references to certain topics, for example demonology, violent combat, homosexuality, the rituals of the Temple of perverse *Væran/Virya* Kikiri or drug use, that some parents might find inappropriate for children. (There are also a few "anatomically correct" illustrations of various creatures and other possibly controversial items.)

The issue here is that if a game like *Shakhàn* is to accurately represent "real life", it has to accurately depict things about the real world that some readers may find unpleasant. The larger point is, if this disturbs you, you have a problem with how the world really works; it's futile to "shoot the messenger" for describing the truth as he or she sees it.

I am strongly opposed to censorship of any type, so I have not limited the material I have included in the rules; nor have I made any hard and fast decisions on how old a person wishing to participate must be to be allowed to play, as I believe that maturity is a personal factor and cannot accurately be judged by chronological age. If you were to force me to make a quick decision on this, I would make the minimum age for participation 14 to 16, but this really has more to do with the likelihood of persons of this age understanding good manners than it does with having to "protect" them from the game's imaginary universe.

In this context, it is the responsibility of the **player** and/or his or her family to decide upon the suitability of *Shakhàn* for minors. I rely upon the judgment of the players, and other responsible parties, to use common sense in this area. I am not in the least interested in fielding complaints from religious fanatics about how "I caught my kid playing that perverted game of yours" – if that's the case, however much I might feel sorry for your child, it's up to you (not me) to regulate his or her reading material.

1.4. Rule Omissions (*Mea Culpa*)

As anyone who has ever had the pleasure (well, okay, the... experience) of getting to know me can attest, yours truly has a well-known habit of "biting off more than I can chew", and *Shakhàn* is certainly no exception. I have worked incredibly long hours trying to get this simulation in a playable form, and have only partially succeeded up to this point.

As matters stand currently, although *Shakhàn* is playable, some of the gaps in the rules as they now exist would require the Referee (me) to intervene and make arbitrary decisions rather more than I think appropriate. This being the case, I have decided upon a twofold approach to deal with the problem of a finite amount of time to write rules and a potentially infinite number of rules to write.

1.5. Rules "For Future Release" / Updates

As you read the rules given below, you will sometimes encounter a section heading with, where the rule description would ordinarily be, the phrase *For Future Release*. This means, for all intents and purposes, that the rule is not yet available: whatever it covers either (a) can't happen, (b) can't be attempted and/or (c) has no appreciable effect, if it does somehow occur. This system is, admittedly, a "kludge", but it has been necessary to allow the game to be published on time.

If you would like to keep "up to date" on rule updates and other information pertinent to *Shakhàn*, as of September 2000 you have three ways of getting in touch with these:

- There is now a World Wide Website devoted to *Shakhàn*. This is accessible via a link (just click the *Shakhàn* icon) on the Telostic Corporation "Portal"; the URL for this is:

telostic.virtualave.net

- You can also send us Internet email. There are two addresses for this; the one we would prefer you to use is:

inquiries@telostic.virtualave.net

However, for backward compatibility, we can still receive e-mail at our other e-mail addresses, which are:

marcusnkaren@globalserve.net

and

bc880@freenet.toronto.on.ca.

- You can write us via "snail mail" (e.g. Canada Post); our address is Telostic Corporation, 7 Homer Square, Brampton, Ontario, Canada, L6S 1X9. (The phone number is 905-791-6852 or 905-458-0879).

- Please note that until further notice, "The Planet Telostic" BBS, which was, in earlier days, the main conduit of information on *Shakhàn*, **has now been discontinued**. Basically, the BBS has been superseded by our Website, so if you're interested in the most recent information, try the Web.

- A good place to visit for announcements about *Shakhàn*, as well as many other similar games, is the Usenet newsgroup `rec.games.frp` and `rec.games.frp.announce`.

1.6. Nomenclature

In phrasing the rules found hereunder I have been as judicious as possible in the use of pronouns; due to the nature of the English language, however, in some cases the male pronoun has been used to refer to aspects of the game that are, in reality, "gender-neutral". In such situations, please consider that the phrase "his" may equally mean "hers" or "its". I have also tried as much as possible to make consistent variant spellings of Telostician words and rules of capitalization (e.g. "Referee" as opposed to "referee", "Energy Points" as opposed to "Energy points"), but it is possible that a few mistakes have still eluded me – for this, I beg the reader's indulgence.

1.6.1. Non-English Nomenclature

The preponderance of the text you will see below uses conventional English terminology, but to preserve the atmosphere of *Shakhàn* I have, where it has seemed appropriate, employed words and phrases as would actually be used on "real" Telostic (this is particularly true of honorific titles, proper names and other similar terms).

While a complete account of the exact meanings, etymologies and pronunciations of the intelligent species of *Ushù'l* would probably be a complete book in itself, I have listed a few of the more frequently-encountered non-English terms directly below so that the Referee has a basic understanding of what these words mean.

<i>Væran</i> (VAI-rahñ)	"Supernal Lord" or "Heavenly Lord" (A God, deity or other most powerful supernatural being; this term is also used for such beings whose gender is indeterminate).
<i>Virya</i> (VEER-ya)	"Supernal Lady" or "Heavenly Lady" (A Goddess; e.g. the feminine version of the former).
<i>Vòrin</i> (VOR-ihñ)	"Mighty Lord" (Essentially the same as <i>Væran</i> but denotes a being of somewhat less power; for example a Demon Lord)
<i>Vimein</i> (VEE-mayñ)	"Mighty Lady" (The feminine equivalent of <i>Vòrin</i> ; rarely used)
<i>Ushù'l</i> (oo-SHOO 'el)	One of the largest continents on Telostic and the one in which <i>Shakhàn</i> 's initial scenarios are set.
<i>Oblé</i> (AW-bláy)	A mountain range.
<i>Mùya</i> (emWEE-ah)	An ocean.
<i>Mira</i> (MEER-ah)	A sea or other smaller body of water.
<i>Khùl</i> (KOOL)	"Those Of..." (an honorific descriptor always used to denote belonging to a group, most frequently, one of the three groups of deities found in modern Roctien, but it is also used for certain other groups such as the <i>Khùl-Algrenàthi'i</i> or "Watchers").

Unless otherwise noted, all non-English words and phrases used in the game's reference materials are considered to be in the Rocto-CathSinnian language.

1.7. Editor's Notes

As you have undoubtedly realized after having read the above, developing and implementing *Shakhàn* has been a "labour of love" from my perspective; I could never expect to receive financial revenues sufficient to compensate me for the long hours I have put into it up to this time, to say nothing of what may be to come. This having been said, I have no regrets. Whether or not I ever publish this game commercially means little to me; about the only thing that I would be really disappointed in would be if nobody ever played it even once per year.

Ultimately, most adult simulation enthusiasts (e.g., "wargamers") realize that playing a game of this size and complexity is a sharing process, involving quite a significant expenditure of effort both on the part of the person who designed it (me) and those who are participating in it (you).





For my own part, it has been a pleasure to have been able to create something that, Fates willing, will allow my friends to compete with one another in a friendly setting and have something to talk about other than the weather, sports and politics (at least the non-Telostician kind). Hopefully, each one of you reading these rules will find your own equally valid reasons to participate in *Shakhàn* and enjoy yourself in doing so.

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2. Basic Game Concepts

Shakhàn is a "fantasy role-playing game". A role-playing game is unlike conventional board games in that, except on those infrequent occasions when combat must be resolved, it has no set playing surface or playing pieces. Instead, the players, up to five or six is usually the maximum, and the Referee sit themselves in any comfortable position and play the game by telling each other the actions their fantasy characters will attempt.

2.1. Object of the Game

Role-playing games have another important difference from regular games: they are, essentially, "open-ended", with no ending point where everyone knows the game is over. With this in mind, there are two related objectives to the game, one for the player and one for his or her character:

-The objective for the *player* is to enjoy himself or herself in the company of other players and the Referee, to plot strategy, discover new things about the world of Telostic, and so on. The appeal of role-playing games lies in the fact that, subject to the rules and common sense, a player can vicariously engage in exciting and dangerous activities, slaying a dragon, for example, impossible in real life. The player only "loses", in this sense, when and if he or she becomes bored with role-playing.
-The objective of the *character being managed by the player* is more straightforward. Since in order to participate, a player must "live" through his or her character, it follows that the main objective of the game is to have that character remain alive. (As the reader shall see, in some parts of Telostic this can be easier said than done!) On a more broad scale, players will naturally want their characters to become powerful, rich and possibly famous in Telostic's societies.

2.2. Characters

A "**character**", in the sense meant in this book, is any imaginary person or sapient entity living in the imaginary world of Telostic. Those characters established and managed by the players are called "**player characters**". These are each real player's persona, through which he or she interacts with the other players' characters and, frequently, nonplayer characters encountered in the course of play.

Players are expected to keep legible records of the many statistics their characters will generate. A clipboard, a pencil and some graph paper, plus a calculator if available, will prove helpful to do this.

2.3. The Referee

The Referee is not a player but is none the less in close touch with what is going on in the game, since it is his or her responsibility to govern play, guided by these rules. The Referee has several responsibilities:

-The Referee must arbitrate the success or failure of actions attempted by the players. Rules for how to do this are given below. In the cause of good sportsmanship, **a Referee's decisions are final** with respect to whether an action succeeds or may be attempted at all.
-The Referee controls those game statistics that the players are not explicitly designated to keep, e.g. he is responsible for keeping track of game time, keeps records of where different monsters are in the Underworld, provides updates in local political and social trends for the players, and so on. In many of these areas, the Referee will create and use information that he or she should not share with the players. This is perfectly normal and is intended to provide an element of suspense to the game. Players who are allowed to know all the secrets of the game will lose much of its flavour, in much the same way that one loses interest in a novel whose last chapter is read before the rest of the book.
-The Referee plays the parts of nonplayer characters that the players meet in the course of their adventures. This may include everything from playing the part of a beggar in the street to acting that of a god or even an intelligent magic sword.
-The Referee is, to a degree, responsible for designing such background material, for example a new part of the Underworld, a new spell found on a long-lost scroll, etc., as the players may need from time to time to maintain interest in the game.

Supplementary material of this type will be forthcoming from the authors of *Shakhàn*, but will for the most part be limited to the broad sweep of history, e.g. wars, changes to map boundaries, explanations of the history and culture of Telostic, etc.. For this reason, Referees are advised to keep their own changes to such large-scale events to a minimum to preserve compatibility with other Referees participating in the game.

Although it might seem at first glance that the Referee's lot is "all work and no play", experience has shown that many people prefer being a Referee over being an player both for the variety the position holds and the sense of power one gets from being "the master of the world". Of course, there can only be one Referee, though there may be as many as five or six players participating in one adventuring session.

It is not a good idea to rotate the job of Referee amongst the players, as in such a case all secrets that would normally be kept by a full-time Referee are likely to become public knowledge.

2.4. Scenarios and Campaigns

While there are theoretically as many ways to play a game such as *Shakhàn* as there are players and Referees, two are recommended here.

-The first is called a "**scenario**": this is a setting designed for quick play, usually with the players assuming the roles of characters the Referee has especially designed for use in the setting. A scenario usually has a clear beginning and a clear end, i.e. running from the time play starts until the time it ends, either because everybody had to go home for the night, or the players' characters achieved their goal, whatever it was, or the players' characters were killed.
-The second is called a "**campaign**": this much longer and more involved undertaking is the preferred way of playing *Shakhàn*. In a campaign, each player usually establishes one character that becomes his or her own until the character dies in the game or the player is no longer interested in the game. The game itself, meanwhile, may have carried on completely without reference to any individual player, depending upon his or her importance to events of the world.

Most players find campaigns the most interesting way to play role-playing games such as *Shakhàn*, since a campaign is essentially a direct reproduction of life; whatever, good or evil, smart or stupid, a player wants to do can be attempted. Whether or not it works, of course, is another matter!

2.5. Roles of Player Characters

It is an explicitly stated assumption of *Shakhàn* that those characters being controlled by the players are "special", in the same sense that the main characters in a novel or movie are different from the supporting characters: the players' characters, should they decide to use it, have the ability to change the course of history, become powerful and famous, and so on. E.g., there is something in their psychological makeup that allows them to take that extra chance that is often the difference between success and failure, that separates the leaders from the masses. This is why they are allowed to attempt the daring and unusual actions that, when done in the right circumstances, makes role-playing an enjoyable pastime.

It is for the same reason that in designing *Shakhàn*, we have used a degree of poetic license in deciding the outside limits of what actions may reasonably be undertaken by characters in general and player characters in particular.

For example, given enough time and training, and maybe a magic sword or two, a normal human warrior on Telostic should have little trouble single-handedly dispatching a large carnivore, for example a bear or a tiger. In the "real" world, such an undertaking would be almost suicidal for anyone no matter how well armed and armoured. Similarly, the chances given in the rules of a character rising in society, finding magical items, etc., have been vastly inflated over what they would have to be to maintain a stable society. We hope that both the players and Referee will understand this concept as long as it is used in moderation.

2.6. Playing in Character

It is very important for both the players and the Referee to realize that Telostician societies are not the same as Earth's ancient Rome, medieval Europe, or whatever: the players will not be able to get full enjoyment from the game until they try to think and act the way a "real" character on the world of Telostic would.





For example, upon occasion the opportunity to ransack the unguarded temple of an opposed religion may present itself to player characters. In theory, it might be perfectly possible to gain some loot by stealing chalices cups, scraping jewels off the altars, and so on. In practice, the deep respect every Telostician youth is taught for the sanctity of places of worship, even those of other religions, would make such an undertaking *extremely* unlikely, and suggesting it might make the person involving it something of a "black sheep".

Similarly, a well-armed fighter might be able to kill a drunken rival who is shouting insults at him in a tavern, but all "civilized" warriors would eschew mortal combat in favour of some rough but non-lethal fisticuffs. This is not just due to highly developed sensibilities, but also due to the fact that murder is usually severely punished in order that society avoid chaos in the streets and bars.

Suppose a player whose character is a serf begins formulating plans to travel far away and masquerade as a long-lost noble, or wants to start a revolution to establish a democracy. There is nothing in theory to prevent a player from attempting either of these actions, but the question is, could a peasant ignorant of political philosophy conceive of such rash behavior? Or, what if a player wants his blacksmith character to try his hand at inventing firearms?

Given the very long and stable nature of Telostic's societies and economies, there has to be a valid reason why someone has not already made such a technological discovery. E.g., the very fact that Telostician societies are agrarian and pre industrial in orientation presupposes that anyone out to reinvent the trappings of 20th century life on Earth is going to have a very tough row to hoe.

There is enough room in the game setting to allow for daring and "fantastic" actions, without allowing players to do things that their characters would never ordinarily think of attempting.

2.7. Actions Allowed to Characters

Provided that his fantasy character is not under the direct physical or mental control of another character in the game (for example if a "charm" or "mind control" magic spell was being used), a player is free to specify just about any kind of action he wants to the Referee, subject to common sense as follows.

- A player can only specify actions that his character could conceivably undertake. Thus, he might say, "my character will now go up to the bar and order a drink", but he could **not** say, "my character will blink his eyes and magically create a pot of gold" unless his character had previously somehow gained the magical ability to effect the latter action.
- A player may **not** indicate his character will attempt actions for which the character has no conceivable cultural or mental motivation. This means, for example, that a player could not specify that his character will launch a totally unprovoked attack on a stranger in a bar, unless there is something in the player character's background (mental illness, an evil religion pledged to violence, etc.) that would make him or her prone to such actions.

For this same reason, it is suggested that the Referee adopt a conservative attitude towards the question of player characters giving items to each other without an equal trade; e.g., it is important to remember that from their points of view, player characters usually have no special reason to be forthcoming with each other even though the players running them may have.

2.8. Using Dice to Resolve Actions

In many cases, there will be a chance that a character might be able to perform an action, but at the same time the chance will be less than 100 per cent. If this occurs, it is up to the Referee to determine whether or not the attempt succeeded, by performing a roll of the dice.

Most commonly, the Referee will use what are known as "percentage" dice, hereafter referred to as "pc" dice. These are special multifaceted dice available at game and novelty stores; two are rolled together, the result on the first showing the tens digit and the result on the second showing the ones result. Thus, if the first die rolled a "5" and the second rolled a "9", the end result would be interpreted by the Referee as a "59".

Other types of polyhedral dice are used upon occasion to resolve variable chances of success. The convention has arisen that these are referred to by the "D" naming system, in which a number indicating how many dice are to be rolled is followed by the letter "D", followed by the number of sides the die has, followed by any modifications the rules might call for to be made to the result of the dice roll.

For example:

- **2D4** means "two four-sided dice" (possible outcomes of 2 to 8);
- **1D6** means "one six-sided die" (possible outcomes of 1 to 6);
- **3D10** means "three ten-sided dice" (possible outcomes of 3 to 30);
- **1D6+1D8** means "one six-sided die, added to one eight-sided die" (possible outcomes of 2 to 14);
- **3D6+3** means "one six-sided die, with three added to the result of its roll" (possible outcomes 6 to 21).

Roll results of less than one (01) or more than one hundred (00) on percentage dice are normally treated as "01" or "100" respectively, unless there are outcomes on the chart or table in question that can only be reached by such unusual scores. For example, it is necessary to roll above "100" to have a chance to happen upon certain rare magical items, while it is necessary to roll below "01" to happen upon certain deadly Underworld traps.

2.8.1. "Roll It Now, Check Modifiers Later"

Referees and players new to *Shakhàn* will notice that because the game system stresses accuracy, a considerable amount of dice rolling occurs for the simulation of certain actions, particularly Melee Combat. To lessen the impact of this on playability, the following general rule should be followed:

When a dice check must be made for a game action (for example a percentage dice roll "to hit" on the Missile Fire Resolution Table), roll the dice first without worrying about modifiers; calculate in modifying factors only if the "raw" dice result is close enough to possibly have an effect. In other words, do not waste time calculating factors that may have little or no effect on the ultimate outcome of whatever is at issue.

For example, suppose that the basic number a character needs "to hit" is "30", but that there are several modifiers that may raise or lower this number by minor amounts. Have the player or Referee roll the dice first; if the result is "60" or greater, there is little point in looking up all the modifiers, as they are unlikely to affect the outcome by enough to make a difference. If the result is reasonably close to "30", then there is a reason to check, since it might affect the outcome.

This system has been used successfully both in *Shakhàn* and in several other role-playing games; its use on a consistent basis will significantly increase the speed and enjoyability of play.

2.9. How To Perform Actions

The rules found immediately hereunder govern virtually *all* the game mechanics of *Shakhàn*; they should be read, and understood, by both the players and the Referee prior to the start of play.

In many cases, when a player indicates his or her character in *Shakhàn* will attempt to perform an action that the character cannot reasonably be expected to be successful in automatically, the chance the character will actually have of performing the action will usually be based on one or more of the character's requisite scores plus other factors, as described below.

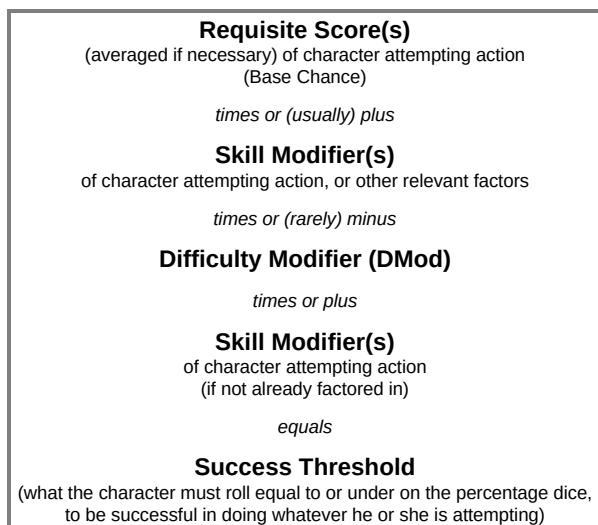
Example

If a character finds himself in jail and wants to escape by bending the bars of the cell apart, the chance of being successful will be based on the character's Strength requisite score.

As a general rule, the basic chance a character has of performing these actions is found by multiplying the relevant requisite score by 2 to 4 (giving what is termed the "base chance"), then factoring any modifiers that apply by multiplying the base chance by a *Difficulty Modifier*, hereafter referred to as a "DMod".

A DMod is a number, usually an integer but occasionally a fraction, which, when factored into the calculations shown below, modifies the relative chance of success a character has in performing the task. The formula is as follows:





In most cases, skill or situational modifiers are factored in prior to the base chance being multiplied by the Difficulty Modifier; there are a few exceptions to this principle, however. When the Referee rolls the dice, success or failure is usually* assessed as follows:

-If the dice roll is *equal to or under* the Success Threshold, the task is successfully completed (the lock opens, the rider gets in the saddle without falling off, etc.).
-If the dice roll is *higher than but less than twice* the Success Threshold, the attempt is a failure (the lock fails to open, the rider misses the saddle but is none the worse for wear, etc.).
-If the dice roll is *greater than twice* the Success Threshold, a serious failure has occurred and the character attempting the action may have harmed him/herself in some way. (E.g., the lock sets off a hidden booby trap, the rider falls on his head, etc.) In these cases, the Referee will usually perform a second dice roll to assess how severe any damage might be, according to the type of action being attempted.

Example

Ràmulmon the thief is hiding from the authorities after being surprised in the act of burglary, and from the first story window behind which he is crouching he sees a horse loosely tied to a nearby post. The player controlling Ràmulmon indicates to the Referee that his character will attempt to slide down the sloped roof of the building's front lobby, then jump into the saddle.

The relevant characteristic in this case is Ràmulmon's Agility score, and taking into account the relatively gentle slope of the front roof and the short distance from it to the saddle, the Referee assigns a DMod of 4 to the action as it falls within the category of a "Leap Downward".

Ràmulmon's Agility score is 15 and the Referee, in a lenient mood, allows him to apply his "Wallclimbing" skill (currently rated at 1.2) to the equation. However; there is a 10m. distance between the character and the horse which subtracts "1" for each metre Ràmulmon has to travel (see Agility below). The Success Threshold can be calculated as "62" $\{[(15 \text{ Agility}) \times (4 \text{ DMod})] \times (1.2 \text{ SMod})\} - (10 \text{ for } 10\text{m. distance})$.

Therefore:

-If the Referee rolls equal to or under 62 on the percentage dice, Ràmulmon lands successfully in the saddle.
-If the Referee rolls over 62 but under 124 (the latter result being impossible in this case), Ràmulmon misses the horse and the saddle but has somehow ended up on the ground with only his pride hurt. (Or, at the discretion of the Referee, if the dice roll is just over 60, perhaps he ends up on the horse facing backwards...)
-If there was some way a result of more than 124 was produced by the dice roll, there would be the possibility that Ràmulmon had sustained a serious injury in impacting with the ground.

* *Note:* A few specific types of actions, for example "Pickpocketing", have a more complicated set of interpretations of success and failure; for details on these see the rule sections involved.

2.10. Multiple-Character Actions

Different characters may, to a limited extent, aid each other in attempting certain kinds of tasks. If assistance is possible, the aiding characters must either have a higher score than the original character in the characteristic being used to find the Success Threshold, or they must possess a relevant skill where he does not.

Aid is factored in as follows: the characteristic of the first aiding character is added to that of the "original" character, before the Success Threshold is calculated. One half the characteristic score of the second aiding character is added to the total, one quarter of that of the third character, and so on.

Note that in most cases the participation of multiple actors will preclude the use of Skill Modifiers (since the Skill Modifier of one character cannot be used on another character), so it may prove more advantageous to have a single highly skilled character attempt an action rather than having a gang of amateurs "get in each other's way". Also, there are many actions that have special limits on the number of characters that can assist in them. For example, usually only two or three characters can attempt to force a normal sized door due to the amount of surface space the door has.

No matter what the Success Threshold of a given action turns out to be, there is almost always a small chance that something will go wrong at the last minute. This chance is equal to **five (5) per cent**, minus the DMod of the action being attempted.* Thus, if an action has a Success Threshold of "100" (e.g., any conceivable dice roll would normally succeed) and the DMod of the action is "1.5", there is an **unavoidable** 3.5 per cent chance that a mishap will occur. Fractions are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

A rough guide as to the relative DMods of different actions players will commonly attempt is given in the next section.

Note

This means, in practice, that actions with a DMod of 5 or greater have no minimum chance of failure.

2.11. DMod Penalties

Where an "inverse DMod penalty" is noted below, it is applied in this manner: An inverse penalty is one in which as the severity of the trait causing the penalty increases, the chance the character has of successfully completing the action decreases.

DMod related penalties have two varieties:

- **Multipliers**, where the Success Threshold in question is **multiplied by** the inverse penalty, e.g. Success Threshold of 87 x inverse penalty of 0.9 = 78.3 Success Threshold, and
- **Subtractions**, where the Success Threshold has the inverse penalty **subtracted from** it, e.g. Success Threshold of 87 x inverse penalty of 0.9 = 86.1 Success Threshold.

In most cases, if the penalty so caused reduces the Success Threshold to 0, then the action will **always** fail.

Example

Inebriation (drunkenness) causes an inverse DMod multiplier penalty equal to 0.1 for each 10 per cent inebriated the character is, so if the character is 10 per cent inebriated, he will multiply the Success Threshold he or she would otherwise have of completing whatever action he undertakes while "drunk" by 0.9; if the same character's level of inebriation increases to 20 per cent, he will suffer a 0.8 multiplier applied against his or her Success Threshold.

An "Proportional DMod benefit" is applied exactly as is a penalty as described above, except that each "step", the character's chances of completing the action increase rather than decrease.

Sometimes, an action will incur more than one inverse DMod penalty or benefit multiplier. When this happens, consider that the differences between each multiplier and "1" are first added together and then their sum is applied to the original chance (e.g., do not multiply one penalty by another).





Example

A character has a basic Success Threshold of striking a bullseye with a jar of paint of "50". He incurs a DMod penalty multiplier of "0.9" because of poor lighting and one of "0.7" because of high winds; however, he has plenty of time to aim, so the Referee grants a "1.2" beneficial multiplier. The final chance of success is calculated as follows:

- Starting with the penalty factors, the difference between "0.9" and "1" is "0.1"; the difference between "0.7" and "1" is "0.3". The cumulative difference to the player's disfavour is thus "0.4".
- For the time spent aiming benefit, the difference between "1.2" and "1" is "0.2" to the player's favour.
- The net difference between those factors to and against the player's favour is "0.2" [(0.1 + 0.3) - 0.2].
- The difference between "1" and "0.2" is "0.8"; therefore, the player multiplies his 50 basic Success Threshold by 0.8, ending with a final net chance of success of "40".

2.12. Untrained Action Penalty

A character with no training whatsoever in a skill normally needed to attempt an action, can still attempt to do so, but at a substantial penalty. In such cases, the regular DMod is multiplied by **0.25**; e.g., an action whose DMod would normally be "1.0" would thus have a DMod of "0.25", if attempted by an untrained character. Since the base chance of performing the action is always multiplied by the DMod, it can be seen that this will have the effect of making the action less likely to succeed.

2.13. The Frustration Factor

Given enough time and effort, many tasks that might seem beyond the reach of an ordinary character can be performed by anybody in *Shakhàn*. While this is not a negative feature in itself, there have to be some realistic limits (c.f., "Playing in Character") on how many separate times a fantasy character can attempt an action without becoming bored or frustrated. Experience has shown that in the absence of such a limitation, players can seriously unbalance the game by simply repeating an action with a low chance of success over and over again, until they finally "get lucky". Unless superseded by a more specific rule, therefore, the following limits apply to this factor:

- [**DMods 5 to 10**]: A player may attempt simple, unskilled actions (thread a needle, tie one's shoes) a number of times each hour equal to his or her Willpower requisite score (see below).
- [**DMods 3 to 4.99**]: A player may attempt ordinary actions (bargain in the market square, engage in prayers, set snares and traps in the woods) a number of times each day equal to his or her Willpower score.
- [**DMods 1 to 2.99**]: Complicated actions (picking locks, translating a difficult foreign language) may be attempted once per day for each two Willpower points a character has.
- [**DMods 0.5 to 0.99**]: Very involved and/or skilled work (disarm a booby trap, commune with one's deity, mix up a batch of a known magic elixir) may only be attempted once per day for each five Willpower points.
- [**DMods 0.01 to 0.49**]: The most dangerous and unusual actions a player could undertake (summon a Demon Lord, invent a new magical spell or potion, enchant a sword or wand) can be attempted but once each game week no matter how many Willpower points a character may have.

Note that especially in the latter cases, the practical problem of amassing the necessary materials and circumstances will limit repetitive actions by itself. The Referee is given authority to decide when to invoke these rules and when not to. A strict interpretation need not be applied, unless there is evidence that the players are abusing their privileges.

2.14. "Levels" and Game Quantifications

In *Shakhàn*, most major factors that affect the resolution of game actions are assigned a "Level", "Magnitude" or "Rank", running from zero upwards. These three terms are roughly equivalent in game parlance; a "Magnitude" commonly quantifies energy or force, while "Rank" usually refers to social status or skill-using ability.

Some Levels are only applicable in divisions running from zero to one hundred, while others have no real upper limit. Usually, a low rating indicates minimal presence of whatever is being measured (e.g., the noise is very soft, the plate isn't very durable, the magic-user is a rank novice), while a high rating indicates strength or advanced ability (e.g., the noise is deafening, the plate is as hard as diamond, the magic-user is a legendary wizard, etc.). Due to the varied natures of the many game entities that are quantified by Level, Rank or Magnitude, there is no one common scale against which the Levels of differing items can be compared; for example, a character with a magic-user Profession Level of "10" is really quite a senior wizard, while (say) a chair with a composition factor (a Level used to denote tensile strength, durability, etc.) of "10" is likely to break the first time someone sits in it.

In many cases, the Level a player or object in the game will have in one area will be directly related to, or will be derived from, one or more Levels he or it has in another area. For example, a magic-user's Energy Point Reserve is related to his or her Psychic Ability score and by his or her magic-user Profession Level.

It is important for both the players and the referee to remember that Levels are *merely a game convention to facilitate play*, and do not exist on the "real" world of Telostic. Thus, it would make as little sense for one character on Telostic to say to another, "what's your magic-user Profession Level" as it would for a doctor in real life to say to another, "what's your doctor Level". In certain cases, particularly with the more highly stratified occupations such as those of magic-users and the clergy, it is true that the formal titles characters on Telostic use to address each other do correspond closely to the Levels established in these rules, but this is for historical reasons and convenience only.

3. How to Manage the Game

Shakhàn contains a rich variety of mechanical and background rules and information. However, a few general comments should be made as to how the Referee should manage the flow of play, so that he or she can see the "forest" of an enjoyable game as opposed to the "trees" of individual rules.

3.1. Adventure Parties

The optimum number of "real" players who can be comfortably accommodated for a gaming session with a single Referee is up to him or her to decide. Experience has shown, however, that for most Referees, the maximum number is between three and six players. If the number of players is too small, it may be a waste of the Referee's time to run the game; if the group is too large, the Referee may not be able to give each player a reasonable amount of time and attention. If the adventure party is very experienced, well-organized and -disciplined, a well-prepared Referee may accommodate a couple more players, as he or she deems appropriate.

While there is, in theory, nothing in *Shakhàn* that would make it impossible for children to participate as players, the game is basically adult-oriented and was not intended for children below the age of about 13 to 15. This is partly because of subject material included dealing with controversial topics (for example sexual practices or the use of drugs), but is mainly because in the experience of the author, children below about 13 years of age rarely have a developed enough attention span- to say nothing of basic interpersonal manners – to avoid disrupting a group of adult players. If children *are* to be allowed to play *Shakhàn*, it is strongly recommended that they do so in groups of no more than four, under direct adult supervision.

3.2. Balancing Risk and Reward

Shakhàn, like most other role-playing games, can quickly become boring if personal or professional advancement is inordinately easy; this, indeed, has traditionally been so notable a problem that the role-playing industry has even evolved a term for it, the "Monty Haul" syndrome (named after the emcee of a popular TV game show where contestants gained valuable prizes with no effort or skill).

The Referee and players should both take note of the fact that Telostic is, relatively speaking, a rather magic- and cash- poor environment: it should be difficult for players to gain moderately powerful magical abilities or moderate amounts of money, and should be a real accomplishment to become a powerful priest, wizard, etc., or to become rich. This restriction is partly because "that's just how it is on Telostic", but also because of the need to keep a degree of challenge in the game. Conversely, do not make character survival inappropriately unlikely- players will not want to participate in a game where their characters are regularly killed with no chance of escape (the "Whoops, You're Dead" syndrome). Balancing these two contradictory imperatives is probably the most important, and difficult, task of a Referee.





Since many aspects of *Shakhàn* (for example, the Critical Damage system of Melee Combat) emphasize realism over giving characters an unrealistic chance of avoiding harm, as Referee you should warn new or inexperienced players if they are about to try something that could be dangerous or fatal. As players become more familiar with the nature of the game and its system of risks and rewards, you can gradually intervene less often, and let the players survive or die according to their own wits. Control over a character's destiny is, after all, one of the most interesting aspects of a role-playing game from the point of view of a player.

3.3. Guidelines For Referee Procedure

The primary responsibilities of the Referee are to, in consultation with the rules, tell the players what is happening to their fantasy characters, and to act out the personalities of non-player characters who are encountered during play. The latter responsibility requires considerable attention to details and, above all else, imagination. Try to envision yourself as the character in whose voice you are speaking and act and react in keeping with this imaginary character's personality and motives. Many Referees (including the author) have a tendency to play all non-player characters alike; this should be avoided if possible, as it lessens the believability of the fantasy setting.

As Referee, you will inevitably encounter situations— for example, a player is hired for an unusual mission not listed in the rules, and wishes to know his or her pay rate— which were not anticipated and for which there are no hard and fast rules. At other times, you will encounter rules or random check outcomes which do not seem to "fit" or which seem unfair (a frequently encountered example of the latter is a situation where a player character dies or is severely injured, due to a freak dice roll that the player managing the character could do little or nothing to avoid). Do not be afraid to innovate, in such circumstances; doing so is, after all, the main responsibility of a Referee. While you should execute the rules faithfully in most cases, you are not a slave to them and can over-rule them if necessary; always remember that the rules are not an end in of themselves, as goal of the game is for the players to enjoy themselves.

At the same time, do not give in to the pleadings of players where doing so seems inappropriate— for example, a character takes an action which gains him or her 100 Experience Points, and then the player managing the character argues that the action should have been worth 200. If you are not firm and do not stand by your rulings, the more aggressive and assertive players will gain unfair advantages over the more reasonable ones— and the game may well degenerate into unbelievability as characters become rich and powerful without any real effort. For most demands made by players, common sense is the best rule of thumb— ask yourself "just how likely could he or she get away with this as a 'real' person on Earth", and if the answer is "not likely", err on the side of caution and do not let the players bully or cajole you into changing your mind.

A very important aspect of this is recording what decision was taken, so that it can be referred to and used as a precedent later. Few things can upset and annoy players more than inconsistency in how the Referee makes and enforces his or her *ad hoc* rule judgments, especially where these have an influence on an important issue such as life or death or professional advancement.

As a general rule, players should not be able to infer information to which their characters would not have access, by observing how the Referee goes about his or her "real-life" duties of consulting charts and tables and so on. In particular, players should **not** be allowed to see the results of dice rolling conducted by the Referee, except perhaps in critical situations (for example a check for Divine Intervention) where a player needs to see for him or herself the outcome of an important check.

3.4. Time Management

One of the duties of the Referee is to maintain the mundane aspects of the game setting, for example local rumours, weather conditions and so on. By far the most important of these is keeping track of game time (e.g., time as passes on the imaginary world of Telostic, as opposed to "real" time spent between the Referee and players actually playing the game). A calendar and daily time record have been appended to this rules section to expedite this requirement.

Many of the limitations and rules in *Shakhàn* have been crafted with the assumption that characters have a finite amount of waking, active time in which to attempt actions. If the passage of game time is not carefully recorded, not only can these rules become inoperative, but the game can become illogical and confusing to play. Furthermore, the pace of daily life on Telostic is more leisurely than would be the case on 20th-Century Earth; this is partly due to crude methods of time-keeping, but is mainly because of cultural differences. A good rule of thumb to follow, here, is to force players (except, of course, in extraordinary circumstances such as while being hunted by the posse, in the Underworld, etc.) to adhere to the following schedule:

10 pm to 5 am:	Sleep (8 hours*)
5 am to 6 am:	Waking up, having breakfast, etc. (1 hour)
7 am to 12 noon:	Adventuring (in wilderness/Underworld) or exercise or learning of a skill (urban) (5 hours)
12 noon to 1 pm:	Lunch (1 hour)
1 pm to 6 pm:	Adventuring (in wilderness/Underworld) or exercise or learning of a skill on an intensive or "crash course" basis (otherwise relaxation) (urban) (5 hours)
6 pm to 7 pm:	Dinner (1 hour)
7pm to 10 pm:	Relaxation (drinking in a tavern or around the campfire, for example) (3 hours)

The most important factor to note here is that a character will normally have only **five (5)** hours per day to learn or exercise a skill; this may be extended to **ten (10)** hours per day if he or she has decided to drop almost everything else and concentrate on so doing. A player who wants his or her character to exceed this limit in the absence of some significant motivating factor (being executed if a job is not completed, for example) should be forced to pass a check at Willpower x 3 DMod each day.

A secondary factor related to time is where a single Referee has two or more adventure parties playing in his or her campaign, and one of these, possibly because it participates in the game more efficiently or frequently, becomes further advanced in game time than the other(s). In this case, the Referee should make it clear to the more advanced party that it is not to share foreknowledge of events that "haven't happened yet" with the less advanced party. A good rule to enforce to avoid this situation is to suspend play with the more advanced party, once it gets more than a game month ahead of the least advanced other party. This rule may be "bent" under special circumstances, for example where an adventure party is on a long voyage using a time scale (see below) that differs significantly from those of other parties, but if it is violated too often the characters of the less advanced parties may begin to get an unfair advantage over others.

* Note that a day on Telostic has 25 hours.

3.5. Regulating the Flow of Play

Although the details of the game mechanics of *Shakhàn* may be structured however the Referee deems fit, the rules, charts and tables given below are based on certain assumptions as to how the game will be "acted out". It is, therefore, probably a good idea to adopt these to provide a common point of reference.

3.5.1. The Decision-making Interval

The basic measure of time, character actions and game progress in *Shakhàn* is the "**turn**", sometimes referred to as a "time scale". A "turn" is here defined as a unit of real time (usually from one to five minutes, unless the Referee has to describe something complicated to the players, or the latter have to do something complex), during which the players indicate to the Referee what their characters will attempt to do within the context of the game. The term "**context**" denotes the adventure party's current surroundings, e.g. whether it is traveling through the streets of a city, exploring the wilderness, delving into the Underworld, or whatever.

A concept related to that of a turn is the "**decision-making interval**". This represents the amount of real time, as tracked by the Referee using his or her wristwatch, that the "real" players of the adventure party may spend in conference with each other while deciding what actions the party as a whole will undertake. The decision-making interval is a reflection of the fact that many actions in *Shakhàn* happen with little or no advance notice, in circumstances where collective decision-making is difficult or impossible. It is completely unrealistic— to say nothing of destructive of game balance— to allow players to have their adventure party act like perfectly coordinated, pre-programmed automatons who always pick the optimum strategy and tactics to deal with each situation. The Referee need not always hold the players to a literal interpretation of this rule, but should instead make it clear (for example at the start of a Melee Combat Resolution) that it is about to be invoked, and then should deal strictly with violations.





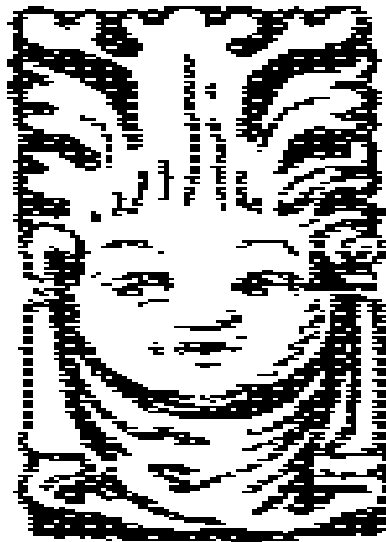
A player-character who cannot or will not clearly state his or her action intentions to the Referee within the specified decision-making interval **loses his or her ability to do so for the current turn**. The character's actions, in these cases, should be determined by the Referee randomly, as follows using 1D20: (1 to 8)– character vacillates and stands around aimlessly (except where this would be clearly hazardous to his or her life); (9 to 19)– the character takes some action (hiding in the corner, for example) other than the one the player intended; (20)– the character takes the action the player (in the opinion of the Referee) intended that he or she would take.

The designated party leader (only) may, at the discretion of the Referee, be awarded double the normal decision-making interval time allowance, in case he or she has to stipulate intended actions for non-player characters who might be part of the adventure party. This option should be agreed upon prior to the start of each session of play, to avoid disagreements.

3.5.2. Turn Duration by Game Context

The amount of game time (e.g., time as would be noted passing within the imaginary setting of Telostic) made up by each turn differs according to the context in which the player character adventure party finds itself. This both reflects the relatively different chances of notable events and is a compromise to avoid needless dice rolling and make the game playable. The game-time intervals of turns in different contexts are as follows:

- Melee (in Melee or Missile Combat) : One turn equals one Melee Round (5 game seconds). In this context, the decision-making interval is **ten (10)** seconds of real time. (*Exception*: See "Communication During Combat" in the Combat rules section.)
- Close-Quarters / Underworld (e.g. in a tavern, a merchant's shop, the Underworld, etc.) : One turn equals 5 game minutes. (This and the next variety are the two categories which should be used most frequently in *Shakhàn*.) The decision-making interval is **thirty (30)** seconds of real time. By default, one check is made for a possible random event each **three (3)** turns (15 game minutes) while at close quarters or in the Underworld; the default chance of a random event occurring is **twenty (20)** per cent (plus 5 for each Danger Level of the area, if in the Underworld or other dangerous area). If a random event is indicated, the Referee performs a check on the appropriate Random Event Table (in the Adventures rules section) to determine its type and effects.
- City (while traveling through the streets of a city or other habitation) : One turn equals 10 game minutes. The decision-making interval is **thirty (30)** seconds of real time. One check is made for a possible random event each **two (2)** turns (20 game minutes) while in the city; the chance of a random event occurring is **twenty (20)** per cent (plus 5 for each Danger Level of the area, if in a rough area such as the "bad side of town"). If a random event is indicated, the Referee performs a check on the City Random Event Table to determine its type and effects.
- Local / Hourly : (while outside a city but within 20 kilometres of it) : One turn equals one game hour (50 game minutes). The decision-making interval is **five (5)** minutes of real time. One check is made for a possible random event each **two (2)** turns (two game hours) while in local surroundings; the chance of a random event occurring is **ten (10)** per cent (plus 5 for each Danger Level of the area, if in a dangerous area such as one dominated by the "evil" Temples). If a random event is indicated, the Referee performs a check on the Wilderness Random Event Table to determine its type and effects.



- Remote / Daily : (while traveling in the wilderness or on a long trip) : One turn equals one game day (25 game hours). The decision-making interval for this, and all subsequent categories, is **ten (10)** minutes of real time. One check is made for a possible random event each turn while on a trip; the chance of a random event occurring is **twenty (20)** per cent (plus 5 for each Danger Level of the area, if in a wild, remote or dangerous area such as swamps or mountains). If a random event is indicated, the Referee performs a check on the Wilderness Random Event Table to determine its type and effects.
- Semi-Strategic / Weekly* : (while on a very long trip) : One turn equals one game week (5 game days).
- Strategic / Monthly* : (see note below) : One turn equals one game month (50 game days).
- Pre-Game : (normally used only when determining the life history of a character prior to the time it is first taken over by a player) : One turn equals five game years.

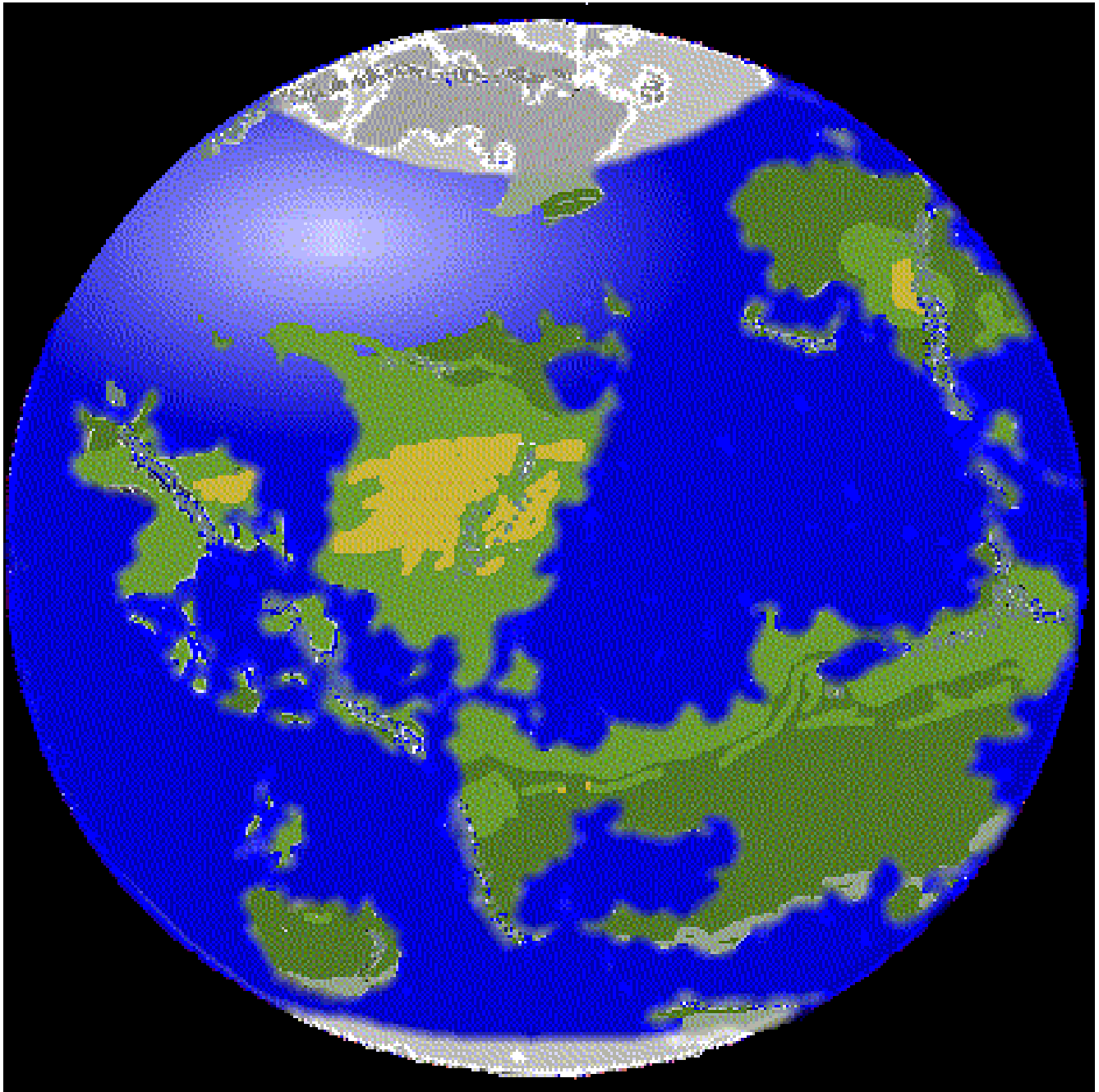
* *Note*: The "Semi-Strategic" and "Strategic" turn/time scales should rarely be used in *Shakhàn* and are primarily included for compatibility with the strategic "wargame" companion to this game, entitled *Strategic Telostician Campaign*.

3.6. Game Scale

Although a Referee is free to use any system of denoting sizes and distances that he or she feels comfortable with, a brief comment should be made on the default assumptions of game scale used in the maps and other playing aids that have been provided with *Shakhàn*. A square or hexagon, as used to delineate distances on a map, has the following sizes according to the entity it depicts:

A map of the Underworld or a building interior	1 square/hex = 5 metres
A city map	1 square/hex = 100 metres
A regional or wilderness map	1 square/hex = 20 kilometres (Note: This map scale is also the approximate scale used for <i>Strategic Telostician Campaign</i> .)





The Planet Telostic, with the continent Dsshàmikah in the foreground

4. Physical and Historical Setting

Shakàn has as its "scenario", in the sense of being the geographical region and historical time-period in which game actions take place, one relatively small part of the planet. This is the continent of *Ushù'í* between the *Mùya Ulàkh* (emWEE-ah oo-LAHK-eh, Ocean of Cold Swells) around the 45th north parallel to just south of the *Nàrhon Oblé* at approximately 25 degrees north latitude, and, in particular, the great Rocto-Ardæ Empire of the Golden Falcon in the centre of the continent to the north of the *Nòlan Oblé*. The current date is (by Rocto-Ardæ reckoning) 104 AU; the significance of this will be explained below.

Individual Referees and players are, of course, welcome to develop their own game settings elsewhere on Telostic, and, indeed, there is actually plenty of unexplored and "undeveloped" territory within or close to Roctien that can be used by a less adventurous Referee. It is probably best, however, for those new to the game to stick to the Rocto-Ardæ setting at first, if only to take advantage of the background material presented below in this book.





4.1. Telostic's Solar System

The Telostician solar system consists of fifteen major planets and their associated thirty-nine moons, all revolving around a widely-separated double star system. As might be expected, the mechanics of such a configuration are very complex, yet the system is remarkably (impossibly?) stable and, from the point of view of an observer on Telostic, at least, there are no extremes of environment caused by orbital eccentricities. There are also an unusual number of habitable planets in this system, many more so than the laws of probability would suggest.

Indeed, several of the major celestial bodies in this part of the galaxy seem to be under the influence of unknown forces that cause them to violate rules of orbital mechanics and the conservation of momentum, as if some sort of "unseen hand" were directing their every movement through the void. The simple folk would, of course, be content to attribute this to the powers of the Gods (a view that might be close to the truth), but it poses an almost insurmountable problem for serious astronomers, whose equations simply do not "add up". The reasons for this, and other similar anomalies, remain mysterious.

The centre of the Telostician system is a K0 series star with a mass 1.85 times that of Earth's sun and an absolute luminosity of 1.11, which inhabitants of Telostic call "The Day Sun"; it is this star that provides the bulk of the energy that powers the planet's climate. The Day Sun is orbited, on a highly inclined and elliptical pattern, by "The Night Sun", a class B9 blue-white dwarf with an absolute magnitude of 0.92. While the details of this relationship are irrelevant here, one of its side-effects plays a very important part on Telostic. Every 253 Telostician years, the orbit of the Night Sun positions it so that for about one month, it provides brilliant light (of about a third the brightness of the Day Sun) during what would normally be nighttime. The appearance of the Night Sun is calculable by the methods available to contemporary astronomy, and its coming is observed as a religious event everywhere on the planet.

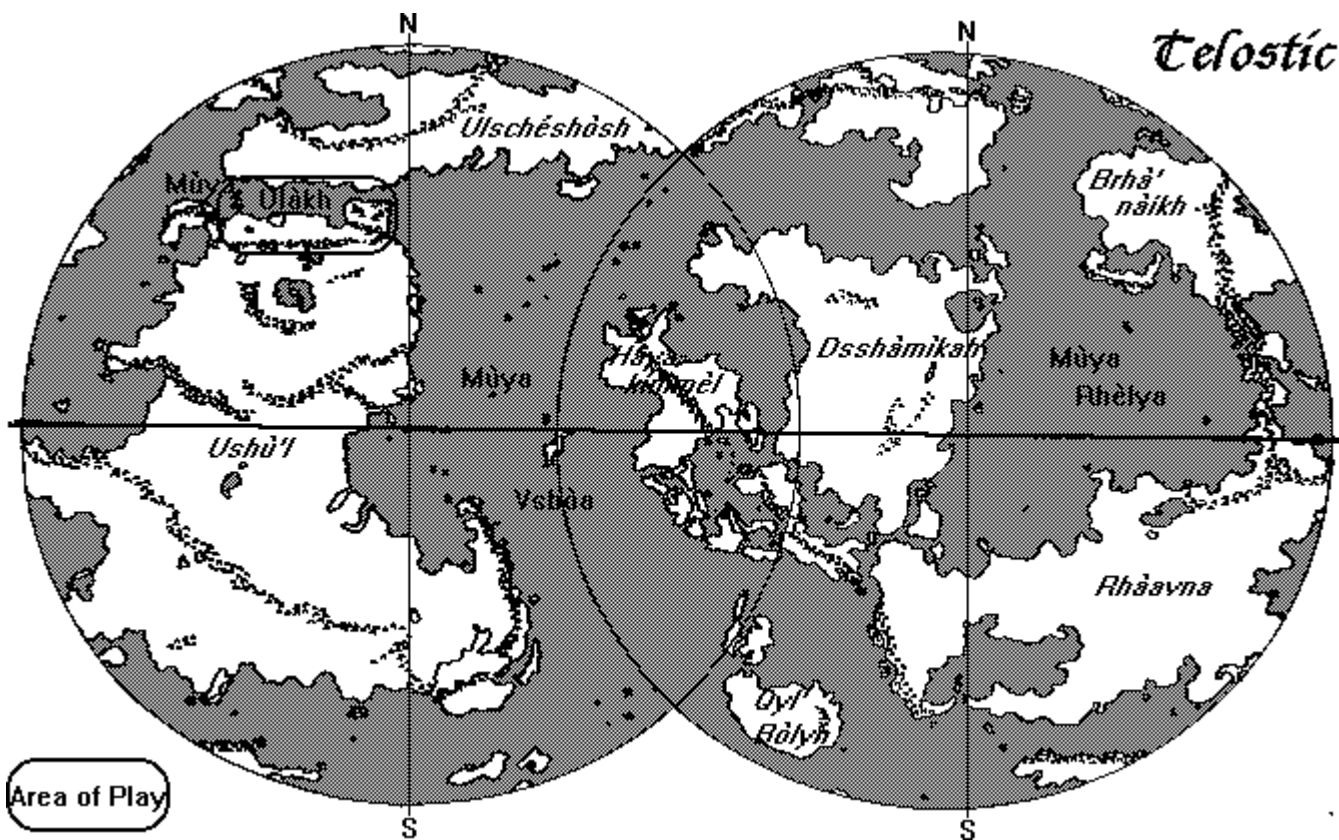
Even if accounted for separately, the energies radiated by the Day and Night Suns exceed those provided by Earth's sun. It follows, therefore, that for planets circling these stars to be habitable, the relevant orbits must be further from the centre and this is the case. Exact details as to the characteristics of the planets of the Telostician star system are given in an appendix at the end of this section.

4.2. The Planet Telostic

Compared to Earth, Telostic is slightly smaller, by about 255 km. equatorial diameter, and somewhat further from its star, by about 15,617 thousand kilometres; its mass and surface gravity, however, is approximately equal to that of Earth due to a slightly heavier crust and core.

Relatively speaking, Telostic has a rather cold climate compared to that of Earth, partly because of its greater orbital distance but also because its oceans comprise a lesser percentage of its surface area, about 55 per cent compared to Earth's 70 per cent. The lesser moderating effects of oceans on Telostic contributes to greater extremes of temperature between climatic regions. Although some areas along the equator can reach summer temperatures of 40-45° C., both poles have been known to drop to less than -29° C. in the depths of winter, and winter temperatures at 50 degrees north or south latitude are commonly in the 15-20° C. range. Tides and currents in the planet's oceans are more violent and complex than those of Earth because of the greater temperature variation and because Telostic is orbited by five moons, three of which are of substantial size and two of which possess breathable atmospheres.

Another factor that intensifies climatic variance is that Telostic's orbit around the Day Sun is significantly more elliptical than that of some of the other habitable planets. This latter feature has a special effect on ocean travel, as it has given rise to exceptionally violent storms where masses of cold and hot air and water collide; consequently, it is a brave navigator indeed who will attempt crossing wide expanses of any of the oceans.



The Planet Telostic





4.2.1. Continents

There are five major continental land masses, plus two subcontinental-sized and many smaller islands on Telostic. These do not have any universally-accepted names because there are only a very few intelligent sapient on the planet who are aware of their existence and locations, but for purposes of explanation, the names given by the Guild of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* (the Sages) of Roctien (see below) will be used here to describe them.

4.2.1.1. Ushù'l

This great continent, the largest on Telostic, dominates the western hemisphere, extending from approximately 60 degrees south latitude to about 45 degrees north. It is oriented on a north-south axis and includes a very wide variety of climates, ranging from almost uninhabitable subpolar regions in the extreme south to tropics around the equator. *Ushù'l* (oo-SHOO 'el) is divided into four main areas, two of which contain advanced civilizations, by its three major mountain ranges, named from north to south the *Nòlan Oblé* (noh-LANN AW-blay), the *Tchàlan Oblé* (teh CHALL-ann AW-blay) and the *Vhàman Oblé* (vHAMM-ann AW-blay).

In terms of vegetation, *Ushù'l* displays considerable diversity. The areas most suited to agriculture are those north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, those around the 40th south parallel in the east and the temperate areas to the south and west of the *Vhàman Oblé*. There is an almost impenetrable belt of dense, insect-ridden tropical jungle extending to about 10 degrees north and south latitude on either side of the equator, which bisects *Ushù'l* just south of the *Tchàlan Oblé*; to the north and south of the tropics a traveler finds vast expanses of semiarid steppes, giving way to desert in some places. One of these, a geological curiosity called the "Sulfurous Wastes of Xu" found to the west of the secondary but still formidable mountains of the *Nàrhon Oblé* (narr-HAWN AW-blay) around the 25th north parallel, is probably the most inhospitable place on the planet— nothing, not even the most primitive forms of life, can exist there for long.

These features, plus the hazardous nature of sea travel, have served to effectively isolate the two inhabited regions of *Ushù'l* from each other for several thousand years. As one of the two areas is the setting for the civilizations of this book, it is useful to give more detail to the extent of what would be known by the sages of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* about it and its counterpart in the south. There are, in fact, many more minor enclaves of sapient habitation on *Ushù'l* than can be remarked upon here, but those found below constitute the most important ones.

The northern civilizations found on *Ushù'l* are all located between the 25th and 45th north parallels. In the cold-temperate belt north of the *Nòlan Oblé* are, from west to east, the Empires of Javertien, Roctien and East Roctien; south of the mountains in the east-central part of the continent one finds the Meshonian Imperium, while the enigmatic and mysterious Realm of Sherdonèl exists on a large island in an inland sea almost equidistant from the oceans. The *Nàrhon Oblé* mark the southernmost extent of organized sapient life north of the equator, as around them extend the current Empires of Cantien and Trillia, along with the "extinct" Empire of Hà'àlàam.

Although they are all theoretically part of the same trading and population system, there are nevertheless great cultural and political differences between these Empires. In particular, the peoples found north of the *Nòlan Oblé* know very little about anything to the south of them; however, the reverse is not the case— the learned elites of great Làvy-Tvòn in Cantien are aware of events in the northern Empires, even if they are unable to influence them.

The second inhabited region in *Ushù'l*, situated north of the *Vhàman Oblé* approximately between 30 and 57 degrees south latitude, contains only two major Empires: Tmy'Imx (tehmai ELLmex) and Sunggulàya (soon-gool-Al-ah). Very little is known about these lands or their inhabitants in the north, save that the former is apparently some sort of a republic or democracy, and that the latter is a theocracy ruled by a hereditary coterie of priests of an indeterminate religion. Both Tmy'Imx and Sunggulàya, as near as can be determined, seem to be spread out over a considerably larger land area than would be the case for an Empire in the north. This may be because of lower agricultural productivity, or, perhaps, more room to expand without transgressing on another's borders.

One further comment is in order about *Ushù'l*, having to do with its relative affinity to the supernatural or psychic (to the unlettered, "magical") powers. In general, most of *Ushù'l* is a moderately "easy", "fertile" place for users of the Hidden Arts, in the sense that an accomplished sorcerer or priest can avail him or herself of supernatural energies when depleted. There are exceptions to this within the continent, where acts of magic are either impossible, for example in most of the central jungle belt, or in the extreme west south of the *Tchàlan Oblé*, or are unusually easy, for example on the Isle of Sherdonèl, in East Roctien, in *Sithhàlaso* south of the *Nòlan Oblé* and in central Sunggulàya. Generally, *Ushù'l* is neither the most nor the least hospitable area of Telostic as far as the powers of the Other Planes are concerned.

More brief comments will be made on the other continents of Telostic, partly in order to allow the Referee the opportunity to use them to develop his or her unique environments, but also because even the most learned sages of Roctien know almost nothing about them.

4.2.1.2. Rhàavna

This continent, situated almost entirely on an east-west axis south of the equator between 10 and 60 degrees south latitude, is second only to *Ushù'l* in land area. *Rhàavna* (rAV-nah) has only one major desert and is heavily forested over much of the rest of its land mass, due to its relatively consistent surface relief which encourages rainfall to be spread uniformly even in the distant interior. Despite its size, *Rhàavna* is thinly inhabited, particularly in its eastern parts, because much of its otherwise arable land lies too close to the southern polar regions to support cultivation. Also, its central wilds are thought to be the home of many unusual and dangerous beasts, a feature that has not encouraged exploration.

As one goes west, however, a few primitive cultures are found, until finally in the extreme west there appear many small sapient states in the tropical and subtropical zones around the southern shores of the *Mùya Rhèlya* (emWEE-ah erAYl-yah, Azure Ocean) and the eastern shores of the South *Mùya Vsbòà* (emWEE-ah vess-BOW-ah, Master of Oceans). Although these have attained quite an advanced level of civilization, in some ways more so than the states of northern *Ushù'l*, they are much less unified than the Empires found in some of the other continents.

A notable feature of the sapient cultures of *Rhàavna*, again in contrast to most of those of *Ushù'l*, is their tendency to be dominated or populated exclusively by one species type; in this area of the world, the humans, *Hàmyé*, *Bènlì*, *Arda* and others rule kingdoms made up only of their own kind, and do not grant citizenship or even residency to foreign races. This may in some way be related to the fact that the populated western parts of *Rhàavna* are the only known parts of the continent that allow the easy exercise of ultra-dimensional power; its western areas, in particular the forested interior plateau, are "barren" as far as magic is concerned.

4.2.1.3. Ulschëshòsh

The third-largest Telostician continent is the cold, forbidding land of *Ulschëshòsh* (OOL-sheh-shay-shohsh), found to the north and east of *Ushù'l* between 60 and 80 degrees north latitude. Due to its subpolar location, most of this region lies perpetually in the grip of an icy winter, with a stretch of boreal forest and tundra existing only on its southern shores facing *Ushù'l* and the North *Mùya Vsbòà*. It is bordered on the north by the usually-frozen *Mùya Ylasùy* (emWEE-ah ee-IASS-WEE, Ocean of Icy Crags), which separates it from the Lands of Yog-Rothe that encircle the north pole. According to legend, the latter realm is one of the occasional dwelling places of the evil goddess of ice and the frosty wastes— the legend, understandably, has never been tested...

Ulschëshòsh is a cruel land, inhabited currently by a few hardy nomadic tribes of sapient hunters and gatherers, plus other, more sinister (?) creatures who may be related to the long-extinct civilizations whose abandoned cities, now under ice, dot the interior. There is evidence that at least one point in the distant past, Telostic's climate was appreciably warmer than it is today, and *Ulschëshòsh*'s dead cultures, along with similar ones found in the southern polar areas, probably date from that period. It is not widely known whether or not *Ulschëshòsh* is a magically "weak" or "strong" area, although practitioners of the Hidden Arts tell of much power leaking between the stones of its many ruins.

4.2.1.4. Dsssh à m i k a h

For the most part this continent, the fourth-largest on the planet, is located on a north-south axis north of the equator, with only perhaps a quarter of it to the south.





Dsshàmikah (deh-sha-MY-kah) boasts a relatively hospitable climate and much arable land; these two features have caused it to be perhaps the most densely-populated region of Telostic, with nine sizable Empires, including three inhabited exclusively by sapient species found nowhere else, constantly competing with each other for land and power. Very little is known of these lands elsewhere, save that one of the Empires, that of the *Scorpoish*, seems to have played a role in the story of Hà'alàam of *Ushù'l* (see below). Most of the northern part of the continent is wooded, with deciduous forests predominating as one travels south to approximately the 40 degrees north parallel, where (except for in the eastern mountains, where the wooded areas extend further south) the tree line ends. The north-central parts of *Dsshàmikah* are mostly level, fertile plains well suited for cultivation; these continue almost to the equator, where the relief becomes somewhat greater and where subtropical jungles dominate.

Dsshàmikah, with the possible exception of two of the regions described below, contains some of the most magically powerful areas on Telostic. This has undoubtedly contributed to the enlightened and advanced status of civilization in parts of the continent, which in some areas has no peer anywhere else on the planet. Apart from their preoccupation with each other, it is an open question why the cultures of *Dsshàmikah* do not venture forth to explore and conquer new lands; it is, indeed, almost as if someone, or something, is actively preventing them (?) from doing so.

4.2.15. *Brhà'nàikh*

This landmass, situated entirely between 38 and 70 degrees north latitude, is the reputed home of the *Brhà*, a generic term encompassing several sapient species, all implacably hostile for unknown reasons to the other intelligent races found on Telostic. In temperature, *Brhà'nàikh* (berr-HA nAI-keh) is thought to be considerably warmer than its northern location would otherwise suggest, but its topography and interior ground cover, as well as any civilizations that might exist there, remain a mystery to the outside world. Very few of those foolish enough to set foot on its shores have ever been heard from again, and those who have escaped are usually reluctant to try their luck a second time.

Brhà'nàikh is known to have mighty sources of other-planar power, but their location and details, like most other things about the continent, are indeterminate.

4.2.16. *Hayakimmèl*

Subcontinental in size, this island extends from the equator to about the 25th parallel in the north and to about the 10th parallel in the south. *Hayakimmèl* (HAI-ya kee-MELL) is heavily wooded in all areas, with belts of tropical and subtropical jungle spreading out from the equator roughly 5 degrees in either direction; these are known to be inhabited by strange and dangerous beasts, clouds of insects and savage sapient tribes. Another navigational hazard is the propensity of the waters around the subcontinent to generate rapidly-appearing hurricanes.

There are fragmentary records that suggest that *Hayakimmèl* was, at one point in the far past, one of the centres of civilization on Telostic, and may, in some way, have been related to one of the polar cultures (?). All that remains now are extensive ruins at the north and south extremities of the island that seemingly "radiate" magical energy, an indication of how favourable the area is for those who know the Ancient Crafts.

4.2.17. *Qyl'Bòlyn*

This island subcontinent resides exclusively in the southern hemisphere between 40 and 60 degrees south latitude, to the west of *Rhàavna* and to the south of *Dsshàmikah* and *Hayakimmèl*. Little is known of *Qyl'Bòlyn* (keel BOH-linn), other than that much of it, in particular its northern region, seems to be habitable and that it possesses a fairly high mountain range near its eastern seacoast; this lack of information is perhaps attributable to the rough subpolar seas that surround most of its landmass, making maritime exploration a risky adventure. These waters have, furthermore, a bad reputation for harboring sea monsters and other pelagic hazards. Another possible reason the area has remained untraveller is that the continent's environment is rumoured to contain various unique diseases, most of which are apparently quickly fatal to unprotected explorers.

The types and ranges of civilizations, if any, inhabiting *Qyl'Bòlyn* are unknown to the outside world, as are its relative proclivities to the use of supernatural and magical energies.

4.2.18. The *Kolochim Archipelago*

Not strictly a continent but containing enough area to be noted here, this island system (similar in some ways to Indonesia on Earth) begins just south of *Hayakimmèl* near the equator and extends from there to approximately the 30th south parallel. Although the archipelago includes eleven islands of appreciable size, there are also thousands of smaller ones, mostly volcanic in origin; there are many active calderas in the chain, all covered in dense jungles and miasmal swamps. The temperature is uniformly hot, humid and oppressive, with frequent tropical storms and more rainfall than any other area on Telostic.

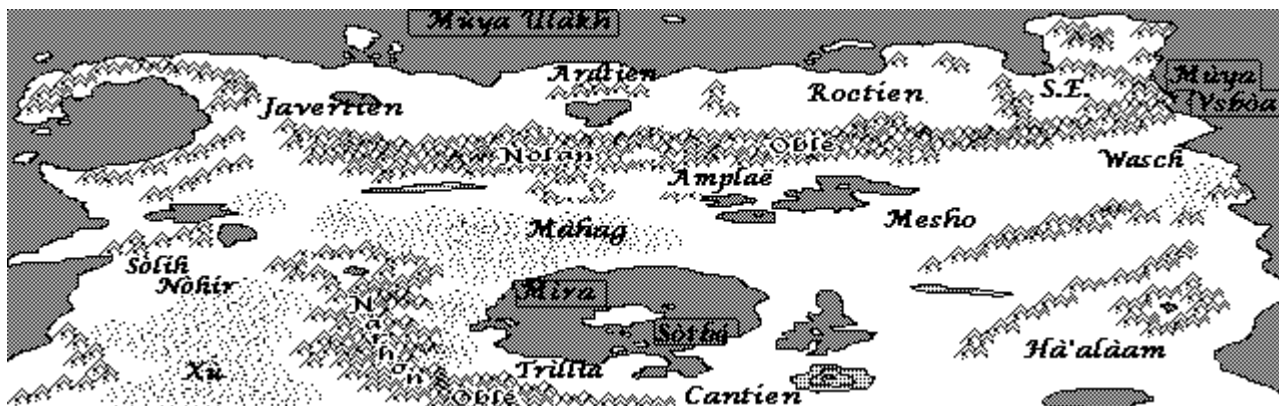
Many of the comments made about *Hayakimmèl* also pertain here; the islands of the *Kolochim* (koh-loh-CHEEM) system are presently sparsely populated by primitive and rather xenophobic tribes-creatures, who win a subsistence living by gathering vegetation and by hunting the region's often-dangerous wild beasts. There is one exception to this pattern: the southeastern extremity of the Isle of Ethéné closest to eastern *Rhàavna* is home to three fairly populous sapient kingdoms, who are, however, socially and culturally oriented more towards political and economic affairs on the latter continent.

The archipelago is notable for its many now-overgrown dead cities and ruin complexes, and, as is the case with parts of *Hayakimmèl*, some of these are so well-endowed with other-planar power that at times the jungles themselves seem animated with magical energy.

4.3. The History of Telostic

A perceptive observer, in considering some of the data, particularly that pertaining to ancient historical events or events in areas other than *Ushù'l*, in the sections that follow, will note that much detail is either incompletely explained or is absent altogether. This is as it should be, as the sages of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* are ignorant of much of Telostic's history and geography for reasons which may be inferred from the information below.

Note: The following information is secret and is not to be revealed to any player, since it is unknown even to the most senior scholars of Telostic; it is included for the use of the Referee **only**. It is also important to note that the prehistory given below can be modified at will, by a given Referee; it is, indeed, only one "interpretation" of Telostic's background.



Northern Ushù'l – the setting for Shakhàn





4.3.1. The "Forgotten Times"

It is the conceit of Humankind that Man (and Woman) is the pinnacle of evolutionary development. Whether or not this belief is true within the context of Earth, it is definitely not true on the interstellar scale—many, many intelligent civilizations have risen, dominated their respective environments for a time, and then vanished forever.

At least 100,000 Earth years ago*, Telostic was a marginally Earthlike planet near the centre of the Milky Way galaxy. Like most such planets in the galaxy, it had been visited from time to time by long-forgotten spacefaring races, time-travelers and those capable of interdimensional voyages— but finding little of interest, these left few traces of their comings and goings other than inscrutable inscriptions in the ruins which dot the planet.

Telostic, however was inhabited— by entities of pure thought, spirit and energy unlike any other life-form that mankind and the other spacefaring races had yet encountered. The Gods (Rocto-Ardae *Khulshamashii*, KOOL sham ASH shee) and Demons, for want of a better word, were perhaps the oldest** intelligence indigenous to the Telostician star system. They may have evolved on a planet other than Telostic (Aeosh, possibly) into the forms they then held, from lesser beings similar to humans even further ago, but this is just conjecture.

At least some of the Gods and Demons seem to have been capable of space travel, but why they did not use this ability to leave Telostic's star system and travel elsewhere is unknown. Perhaps they simply had no desire to do so, or perhaps they in fact did, but travelled to regions of the universe that were never visited by the mortal species. Although possessing great powers over matter and energy compared to individuals of the spacefaring races, the Gods and Demons were relatively few in number and, having freed themselves from the confines of mortal flesh as we know it, had no common frame of reference with which to communicate with mortal beings.

About 50,000 Earth years prior to the present (in Telostician time), the space fleets of mankind, the *Brhà* (burr-HAH, a dangerous and highly aggressive nonhumanoid species, actually an alliance of similar races, from the opposite arm of the Milky Way relative to that of Earth) and certain other species reached the Telostic star system. The details of who actually arrived first in Telostic's region of space are now lost in the mists of history, although some evidence suggests that the *Brhà* arrived somewhat later than most of the other races.

By this time, a sizable part of the Milky Way Galaxy had been explored and colonized owing to the advent of faster than light travel some thousand years prior. However, Telostic's system was far off the most commonly-traveled trade routes; even at top speed, it was more than twenty-eight years' travel distant from Earth. Its proximity to the galactic core's dangerous radiation, and strange, unexplainable navigational errors encountered when spacecraft approached the solar system's outer limits, made travel in the region hazardous. Telostic's system was, therefore, one of the last systems to be explored, and visits were few and far between.

To early spacefarers, Telostic must have appeared almost uninhabited, because it seemed populated only by two sapient species, the four-legged *Arda*, native to *Ushù'* and the smaller *Hàmyé*, another four-legged species found on *Dsshàmika*. These two closely related races, both apparently indigenous to Telostic, inhabited only a small portion of the planet and numbered but ten to twenty million creatures in total.

Despite having intelligence roughly on a par with mankind, the *Arda* and *Hàmyé* had not yet evolved civilizations past about the level of ancient Earth's Renaissance. They had, for example, built several large cities and had engaged in tentative attempts at wind- and steam-driven sea travel, but had not yet invented components of an industrial society such as the combustion engine or the telegraph. A few nation-states of the *Hàmyé* were somewhat ahead of the *Arda* in terms of civilization, but even they had not yet progressed past the pre-cybernetic age.

Although most documentary evidence of this is obviously now lost, it appears that while the *Hàmyé* and *Arda* were aware of the presence of "entities greater than them" on and around Telostic, the Gods and Demons did not figure prominently in their religious systems in the sense of being objects of worship. Quite the opposite, in fact: the legends of the *Hàmyé* and *Arda* spoke of being "liberated" from gigantic and totally malign supernatural beings by a protective monotheistic deity of some sort in ancient times.

These folk traditions were of considerable interest to the spacefaring races when they first arrived on Telostic, and latter-day sapientologists even coined a catchphrase for the beliefs: "The Cult of the Evil Past". By the time that contact was first initiated with the other races *Hàmyé* and *Arda* society had become quite secular, and the Gods and Demons were not universally accepted as even being real, so these traditions were treated as merely a noteworthy part of indigenous culture. As subsequent events were to show, this assumption was very wrong.

Some of the other planets in Telostic's solar system, as well as on other nearby star systems, had independently evolved sapient races, for example the *Arfò* on the planet Actain. None of these had yet developed into advanced technological societies, although a couple had progressed to about the level of early 20th-century Earth. Elsewhere, there appeared to be nothing but animals with, at best, semi-human intelligence.

Mankind and the *Brhà* had been intermittently at war for three hundred or more years by the time Telostic and its system were discovered. Although considerable enmity existed between the two races, there was at first not much interstellar combat in the Telostician system, because the ancient *Brhà* could not tolerate an atmosphere thick with oxygen and nitrogen. The *Brhà* settled on the planet Actain, whose environment was more to their liking, and enslaved the native *Arfò*, while humanity and some of its allies settled on Telostic.

There was little of substance to fight over, so battles were short and infrequent. Furthermore, the unwritten code of conduct that had developed over centuries of interstellar warfare prohibited the use of weapons of mass destruction. A city might be badly damaged by laser bursts from an orbiting spacecraft, for example, but it could not be destroyed completely by a fusion bomb, lest there be nothing left for the victor to conquer. Exceptions to these principles did exist to stain the history of the human-*Brhàic* war, but they were fortunately rare.

On Telostic itself, the primitive *Arda* and *Hàmyé* (in particular the latter— the diminutive *Hàmyé* had proven very good at adapting to high technology), at first looked in awe at the "newcomers", but quickly adapted to the much more advanced way of life. Still other well known spacefaring races, among them the *Bènlì*, the *Lhàashàa-àdyé*, the *Ca'ùna* and the *Granàyu*, settled other planets in the Telostician system, some overtly, some covertly. Some of the non-human species that had developed, or acquired, faster than light space flight were allied with humanity, finding the *Brhà*'s erratic and short-tempered style impossible to do business with. Most were neutral in the war, but a very few [the *Nràfug*, (enn-RAW-fugg) for example] were at least nominally allied with the *Brhà*.

It should be noted that the species listed above, as well as those known to the inhabitants not only of northern *Ushù'* and indeed the rest of modern Telostic, comprise only a small subset of the number that actually populated Telostic and its nearby star systems; the names and characteristics of most of these other intelligent species are now lost to history. Undoubtedly many races perished as a direct or indirect consequence of the events that were to follow (see below), but many others may still exist in some isolated enclave or on some far-off planet.

This state of affairs, for the most part quiet with a few eruptions of violence as humanity and the *Brhà* engaged in occasional raids on each other's settlements, lasted some two hundred years after the original exploration of the system. Mankind, the *Brhà* and the others examined the ancient ruins on their respective planets, wondered who or what had left them, and paid little attention to persistent reports of "hauntings" and other supernatural events as they gradually built up cities and transportation systems. An equilibrium of sorts had been reached, or so it seemed. Then all contact with the star systems outside Telostic stopped.

Neither humanity, nor the *Brhà*, nor any of the other sapient races then established in the Telostician star system, was ever able to determine why the supply ships from their respective home worlds stopped coming. There were hints of a victory for one side or another, or perhaps the entry of a terrible new mutual enemy into the war, but no hard evidence. Spacecraft capable of interstellar travel were dispatched in search of information, but these disappeared without a trace.

The cause of Telostic's isolation was, in fact, an interdiction on contact with the entire star system, imposed jointly by humanity and the *Brhà* after the Gods and Demons of Telostic had intervened to stop a battle between the two species' star fleets in interstellar space, some two light-years past the planet Zùlon.





Although enemies, both humanity and the *Brhà* perceived that the Gods of Telostic were a force beyond their mutual understanding, best left to its own devices. Humanity and its allies, and the *Brhà* and their allies, knew of dead civilizations whose encounters with superior beings had resulted, millennia ago, in the total destruction of the "lesser" species. It was, of course, a pity that the settlements in the Telostician system would have to be abandoned to their fate, whatever that might be – but Telostic's system was expendable, and this was preferable to the possibility of angering beings such as the Gods and Demons, whose motives were unknown but whose powers were undeniable. The interdict covered all space twenty light-years or less from Telostic's main sun, and it was respected not only by the two warring races but by the others as well.

As a sidenote, it is interesting to observe that in setting the boundary of the interdiction zone, the spacefaring races included not only the Telostician system but also several other, marginally explored star systems – a few of which were known to include habitable planets – that were close enough to have been reached even by spacecraft without normal deep-space travel capabilities. A few desperate, one-way attempts seem to have been made to travel to the nearby systems after the interdict and cataclysm (see below), but the ultimate outcomes of these voyages are now unknown. Another interesting facet of this period in Telostic's history is that the adherents of certain modern-day religions claim that some of the "lights in the night sky" – corresponding to the locations of some of the nearer star systems within the interdiction zone – are the dwelling-places of one or more of the Gods and/or Demons.

Eventually, the *Brhà* on Actain (or was it human forces from Telostic?) devised a plan to determine what had caused the break-off of communications with the outside star systems. Several of the remaining *Brhàic* spacecraft capable of interstellar travel were equipped with the most deadly weapons available and were ordered to fly in ever-widening circular orbits from Actain itself; anyone, or anything, disputing their transit was to be blasted from the sky, rules of warfare notwithstanding.

What happened next can only be guessed at. Apparently, the *Brhàic* space fleet encountered either one or more of the Gods, or one of the interdiction fleets, and became embroiled in a battle. Something— perhaps one of the forbidden "planet-wrecking" anti-matter bombs that the *Brhà* were rumoured to have retained a stockpile of— ? caused an outer-space explosion of catastrophic force. Huge solar flares erupted from both the Day and Night Suns; several planets were smashed into pieces and the orbits of most of the others were seriously disturbed. The atmospheres and biospheres of most of the planets were suddenly changed by massive bursts of radiation, and the civilized portions of the inhabited planets were almost completely devastated; the very spatio-temporal continuum seemed to buckle and warp. Strangely, explosions, earthquakes and other upheavals continued for some time after the initial shock wave from the detonation should have subsided. The surface of Telostic was affected as were the other planets— whole continents sank below the waves, new ones were pushed up and earthquakes, volcanoes and other geological disasters of unprecedented magnitude struck the planet.

The force of the explosion was such that the space fleets enforcing the interdiction zone reported, life in the Telostician system must have been extinguished— but the interdict remained to err on the side of caution. Whatever caused such destruction would be left alone until man, the *Brhà* and the others could address it as an equal. This was, perhaps, a case of *force majeure*, as now the outside galaxy's inhabitants discovered that someone, or something, was impenetrably barring **their** access to the Telostician system. Space-probes and other devices sent towards Telostic either disappeared or were instantly transported to the other side of the interdiction zone, yet Telostic's two suns, planets and other heavenly bodies were still clearly visible.

In fact, it had only been by the efforts of the surviving Gods and Demons – and also of the greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* (see Book "G") – that anything at all remained of Telostic and its star system. At first striving mightily, and mostly successfully, to stabilize the Telostician star system against the aftereffects of the explosion, the Gods, Demons and Watchers discovered that the shock of the blast on the fabric of space and time had opened rifts or "portals" to several previously unknown dimensions and universes. Some of the latter were inhabited by sapient entities, and for a brief time after the explosion until the Gods and Demons were able to limit access, Telostic's planets were again visited by an influx of immigrant beings. Most of the newly-arriving creatures were more or less on a par with mankind and the *Brhà*, but a few of the invaders were mighty, alien and hostile entities[†] on a par with the Gods and Demons themselves.

The first inhabitants of Telostic and its sister planets fought desperately to expel the "invading" deities, then struggled with one another over many issues, especially whether to allow the continued existence of the mortal races. Those wishing to allow the mortals to live and evolve seem to have won – but how permanent their victory was, remains to be seen. Telostic's Gods and Demons also found themselves transformed by the cataclysm; they were considerably more powerful than before, and were better able to communicate with the lesser races. However, most of the Gods had somehow been ejected into a number of parallel dimensions, which placed severe limits on the circumstances under which their powers could be used, and they now had the newly-arrived "alien" deities to contend with.

After what had just transpired, most of the Telostician system's eldest inhabitants actually wanted to have as little as possible to do with the mortal races. Some of these great beings, as well as a very few of the alien deities that the original Gods had not been able to wholly expel from Telostic's dimension, though, gained a taste for intervention in mortal affairs: these are the entities now termed "Gods" or "Demons" on Telostic.

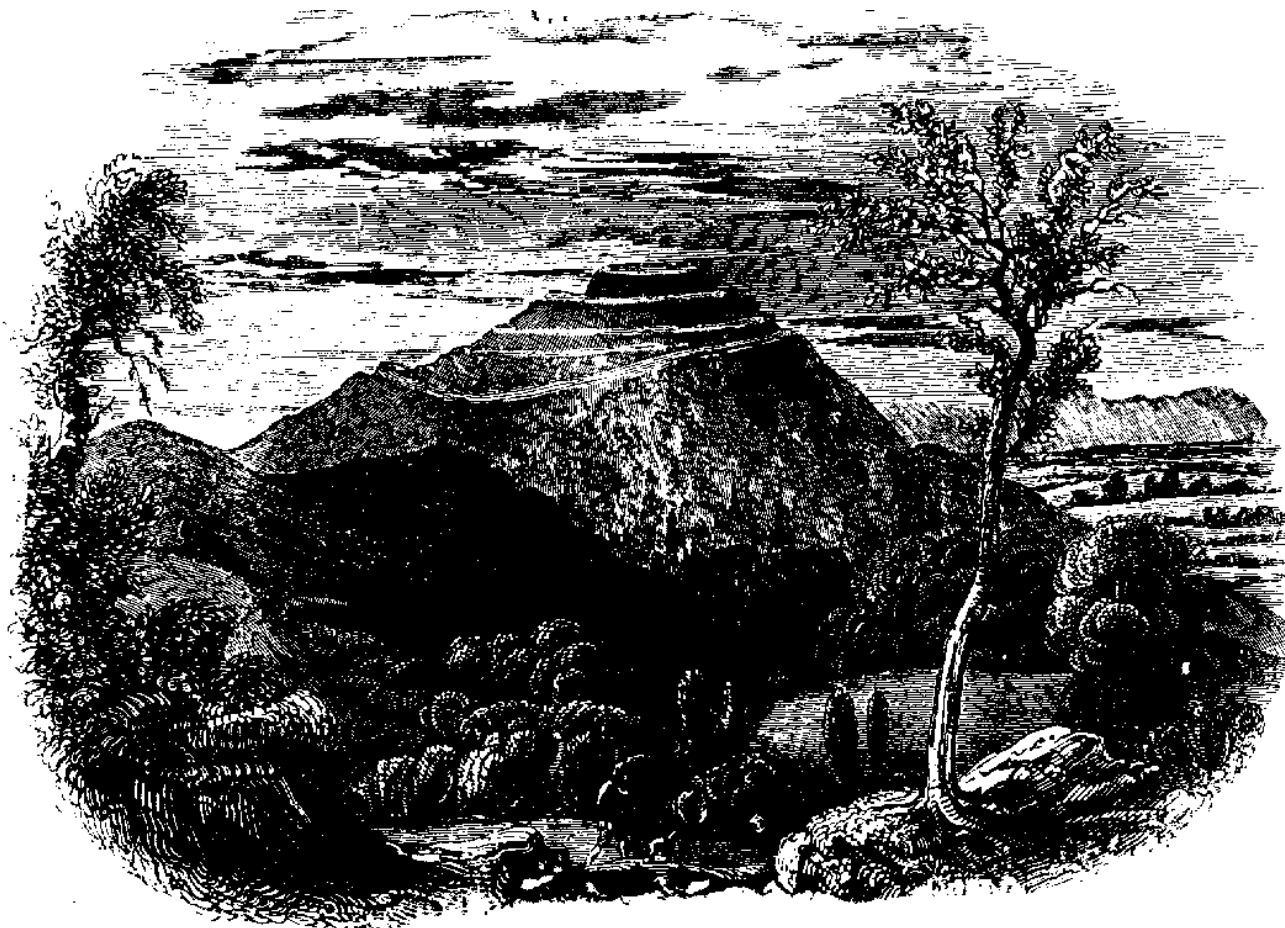
Meanwhile, the perhaps ten per cent of the original spacefaring colonists of the Telostician system who had survived the disaster, emerged to gaze on an environment radically different from the one they had come to know. Radiation, or some other similar force, had changed the physical characteristics of a few of the original spacefaring races. For example, the *Brhà* were now able to tolerate human-style atmospheres (although not, it seems, some of the diseases found in them), while other races were diminished or wiped out altogether. The *Brhà* found that their new abilities came at a steep price, as they had been done serious genetic damage by the cataclysm; their reproductive rate fell drastically and only the most stringent and ingenious measures ensured their survival as a species.

Furthermore, there were now a number of previously unknown intelligent species in Telostic's solar system, the result of the opening of the interdimensional "gates" mentioned above. All but a small fraction of the latter found themselves as trapped in the Telostician system as were its original mortal explorers, because for some unknown reason, most of the interdimensional nexus points allowing ingress to Telostic and the other planets made egress difficult or impossible. Some of the new races could not find habitable places to live and therefore quickly became extinct, but many settled on one or more of the planets in Telostic's system, resigned to whatever future fate had in store for them.

The few remaining spaceworthy starships that were dispatched to get help either disappeared altogether, or reported being repelled by a totally impenetrable "force field" enveloping the entire solar system. The *Brhà*, being one of the only races with an appreciable number of operative spacecraft of any type, used most of them on an invasion of Telostic, as most of Actain had become uninhabitable to them after the detonation. Most of the *Brhàic* fleet, carrying not only the *Brhà* themselves but the forefathers of modern Telostic's *Arô* as footservants, crash-landed on the continent now known as *Brhà'nàikh*, but it was a one-way mission and the *Brhàic* interstellar space fleet soon became useless. Being unaccustomed to the microbes that were omnipresent in Telostic's atmosphere, however, most of the invading *Brhà* died soon afterwards of diseases, and this problem troubles them up to the present day.

The physical infrastructure of the highly specialized technological societies of the Telostician system was in ruins, with little chance of complete repair. Although their natural resources had been largely unexploited, Telostic and its sister planets and moons had never been a major centre of interstellar manufacturing, and almost all of the industrial centres that might have made it possible to fully re-establish civilization had been destroyed. In spite of all these difficulties, after a short period needed to assess the damage, the intelligent mortal races of the Telostician system *did* manage to restore a semblance of the civilization from which they had just been cut off. While interstellar space flight was now nearly impossible, some traffic between the various planets and moons of the Telostician system was restored, interplanetary trade of a modest sort was resumed, and gradually, the lights of the great cities came back on, albeit at a fraction of their former glory.





Near the ruined Ebon Palace in eastern Roctien

For a period of perhaps three to five centuries, the societies of the Telostician system existed as a kind of self-contained "mini-cosmos", with travel outside the interdiction zone mysteriously barred and unbreachable even by the best technologies man and the other races could devise.†† Expeditions were dispatched to some of the nearer star systems within the interdiction zone; some of these may even have found habitable planets and started colonies, but the distances were too great to make regular travel practical with the types of spacecraft that could now be constructed, so gradually contact with the other systems was lost. Within Telostic's own solar system, the conflict between humanity and the *Brhà* was still theoretically in effect, but both sides had much more serious problems to confront than each other, and the conflict slowly degenerated into a kind of "cold war".

Why this second mini-flowering of the technological civilizations of Telostic's star system eventually withered and died is a mystery. One possible explanation is the exhaustion of certain rare elements needed as fuel for space propulsion; another is hopelessness at being cut off from the rest of the galaxy, while yet a third involves the slow degradation of planetary environments caused by increasing populations. Among all these theories, however, one in particular stands out.

Somehow, in a process that slowly waxed over the centuries, the dimension in which Telostic and its sister worlds were located started to drift between "realities". In the universe in which Telostic and Earth evolved civilizations, the laws of cause and effect favored technology over paranormal, or "magical" abilities. In other universes, the opposite was the case. Possibly as a lingering aftereffect of the explosion, the Telostician system began to drift from the former into the latter. This may or may not have been entirely caused by the Gods, Demons or other supernatural beings, but they do not appear to have attempted to stop it, if doing so was in fact within their powers.

By the time the spacefaring races had reached Telostic, the relatively simple industrial techniques that could, perhaps, have lifted the planet back to the level of late 20th-century Earth, had been long forgotten and abandoned in favour of far more advanced post-cybernetic technologies. Unfortunately, the post-cybernetic economy relied upon highly specialized supplies and materials, and these were precisely what was now unavailable. As complex technology gradually became more and more unreliable, the societies on Telostic and most of the other inhabited planets regressed; one by one, the cities were abandoned, the power-generating stations were allowed to run down, the starships were grounded because interest had been lost in communicating with other worlds, and the high technology that had caused the cataclysm became thought of as "evil".

More as a result of hopelessness than of lack of ingenuity, mankind and all the other races began to slip back into barbarism in the pursuit of survival. Pockets of resistance to an agrarian way of life became identified with the evils of a technology that had brought great suffering. One by one they disappeared, sometimes by violence but more often by disillusionment, as even the most modest attempts at re-establishing industry foundered due to critical shortages of raw materials and of "low-tech" engineering skills. This process did not happen at a uniform pace over the entire planetary system, and a few die-hard believers in the old ways left their prized technologies running "on auto-pilot", as they cast a last, sad glance at the sophisticated civilization they were leaving. Some of these machines still function after all the eons that have passed, although Telostic's modern inhabitants have long since lost the ability to understand and take advantage of them, of course.

The sense of futility at re-establishing progress, moreover, changed gradually over the long years to a sense of fear and dread. Human establishments moved further and further away from the shadowy towers of the ruined cities, until, after centuries or maybe millennia, the past had, save for a tiny handful of unrepentant scholars and for word of mouth legends, been forgotten entirely. A new Dark Ages, perhaps ten or twenty thousand years, fell over the Telostician system.





Yet, it is said, throughout this time and the millennia to follow, a tiny handful of semi-immortals, endowed with near-godlike powers, has attempted to keep the knowledge of Telostic's past, and the hope of its future, alive. These are the *Watchers* (see Book "G").

[*] The setting of *Shakhà n* in terms of contemporary human history may thus be considered to be far in the future, relative to 20th-Century Earth time scales. It should, however, be borne in mind that the cataclysm may well have disrupted the normal space-time continuum; so where the Telostician time/space dimension is, compared to that of 20th-Century Earth, is unknown. One theory, advanced by an early post-Cataclysm scholar named Tytus-Mènkos-Chorò, was based on observations of relative stellar positions; this held that Telostic's dimension had been thrown back by more than 200,000 years into the past. Since travel outside the restricted zone proved impossible, it was equally impossible to prove or disprove this theory, and in any event such hypotheses are far beyond the scientific abilities of "modern" Telostic's scholars.

[**] This is open to debate. A few teams of pre-Cataclysm *Bènlì* and *Hàmyé* archaeologists working in *Ulschéshòsh* and southern *Rhàavna* claimed to have discovered remnants of at least two different indigenous, technological societies from the distant prehistory of Telostic (over 75,000 and 340,000 Earth years prior to the then-current times, respectively). The little available evidence suggested that some kind of destructive war, perhaps a thermonuclear holocaust, had destroyed the more recent of these two civilizations; the cause of the earlier one's downfall was never clearly ascertained.

Fossilised body remains found at the sites of the 75,000 year-old civilization showed a distant relationship with the then-current *Hàmyé* and *Arda*, but there were no identifiable skeletons at all found around the older civilization's ruins – so what manner of creatures built and inhabited it was never determined. Interestingly, in the case of the more recent of the two lost civilizations, pre-Cataclysm archaeologists uncovered fragmentary depictions of battles between armies of quadrupedal humanoids (akin to the *Hàmyé* or some other similar species) and two gigantic, alien beings: one, a multi-limbed, ebon-black creature reminiscent of the "Ancient One of Nightmares" (see Book "D"), the other, a finned, fire-breathing, dinosaur-like monstrosity. (The latter two entities are, incidentally, only the most frequently-depicted such beings, but there appear to also have been others – for example a winged, multi-headed horror similar in some ways to the *Ràan Tsiyah* of ancient *Ushù'l* legend – perhaps these were Demons? But if so, how did they appear on Telostic prior to the Cataclysm?) Evidently, the inhabitants of this early culture lost the struggle, if this was, indeed, what caused their eventual downfall.

All of this research ended with the Cataclysm, of course, and if any of the archaeological sites involved survived that catastrophe, they have not been visited for many thousands of years.

[†] These are now referred to in the religious theories of *Ushù'l* as the "Removed Ones".

[††] Though this was of course not known, even a successful attempt to escape from the interdiction zone would have been to no avail. Some five hundred and fifty Earth years after the explosion, the human, *Brhàic*, *Khling*, *Ròm*, *Khàrdas* and almost all other star empires outside of Telostic's systems were infected and later annihilated by the *Web of Reticulum*, a parasitic species whose intelligence was in some ways greater than, but of a completely alien and incompatible nature to, that of the other races. With the possible exception of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, the nomadic, predatory *Fanged Howlers* are thought to have been the only semi-humanoid species to have withstood the *Web*'s two thousand year onslaught – and then only because of their vicious fighting abilities, small numbers and elusive habits. A small number of human space-ark ships are thought to have escaped this disaster, fleeing the Milky Way for other galaxies; the fate of the *Brhà*, or the other intelligent creatures for that matter, is unknown. As far as Telostic itself and its sister planets are concerned, the Gods and Demons may have simply deceived the *Web* into thinking the Telostician system was uninhabited, or perhaps they protected the star system from the *Web* by preventing contact with the outside star empires after the "infection" began.

Since the *Web of Reticulum* is a non-technological intelligence (despite this, it has a limited ability to use technology invented by others), any spacecraft that could now somehow contrive to leave the Telostician system would encounter a terribly dark, silent, cold and lonely galaxy full of time-worn ruins, some containing the *Web*'s dormant but still lethal spore-pods. The only spacefaring species that would ever be encountered (and the chances of this would be remote) is the *Fanged Howlers*, and they would be just as likely to regard a human or *Brhà* as a trophy as they would be to befriend the latter.

Note: Although most of the *Watchers* who found themselves outside the interdiction zone at the time of the Cataclysm, would have – at least for a time – been individually able to resist the *Web of Reticulum*, survival in such forlorn surroundings would have been an unhappy prospect. It appears that for this reason, virtually all of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* who had the means, chose to throw their lot in with humanity and are now far outside the galaxy. This was indeed fortunate for humans and their kindred species, because it was only by the self-sacrificing efforts of certain great *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, in titanic battles now lost to recorded memory, that the *Web* was held at bay long enough for the space-arks to make a clean getaway. Those few *Watchers* who were unlucky enough to be stranded within the Milky Way are now either dead or, perhaps, are sleeping in the special state of suspended animation that these great beings are known to exercise.

4.4. The Known History of *Ushù'l*

Recorded history on *Ushù'l*, at least insofar as certain partly deciphered languages are concerned, extends some 10,000 years into the past, although obviously the actual dating of such recondite and crumbling relics is highly suspect. There are hints, particularly on the Isle of Sherdonèl and in the timeworn ruins of an unknown civilization to the southwest of the *Vhàman Oblé*, of still older sapient cultures on the continent – but as yet, none have gained any meaningful insights as to their histories or inhabitants.

Some, particularly the more erudite savants of the Temple of *Vírya Nia*, Patroness of Knowledge and Philosophy, have concluded from this that at one time, Telostic had attained a level of technological and intellectual development that it now has only a small fraction of. Unfortunately, no-one knows what creatures may have been the owners of this civilization, but it is thought that their identity, and evidence of their fate, may be recorded in the ice-buried cities of frozen *Ulschéshòsh*. Based on admittedly fragmentary evidence, one faction of the Temple of *Nia* has formed the theory that the "Departure of the Ancients", as it is known, was in some way forced by the Gods that are now worshipped by the common folk. This is only one way of accounting for why such an advanced culture would disappear, but it does fit nicely into mythology and religious teachings.

The handful of explorers who have survived expeditions to and from the dead cities of lost eons have, in most cases, remarked upon evidence of some event, or series of events, of scorching energy and great violence having left its mark on the mute ruins. It may not have been the Gods Themselves who in fact did this, but They, along with a few other divine or supernatural entities, are the only known agency that could easily effect such a catastrophe. In any event, it certainly seems that at some point in its distant past, Telostic was much less oriented than it is today towards "magic", as the untrained have come to regard the exercise of psychic and supra-phenomenal mental powers, and more oriented towards advanced technology.

There is also a rather sinister twist to this theory that has gained popularity with many of the Temples – that Telostic's ancient technological civilizations were somehow "imposed upon" or "intruded into" what had previously been the unsullied realm the Gods had enjoyed since time immemorial on the planet's surface. If true, such arrogance on the part of mankind and, by implication, at least some of the other sapient races, would clearly justify the punishment the Gods might have inflicted upon Their swaggering and foolish mortal subjects. All of this is, of course, only speculation – but "however distorted be the viewing-glass, the light of Truth yet is discernible to those of reason", as is said by the learned of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak*...

A peculiar feature of history, as it is perceived by most students of the subject, is its division into "Ages", some spanning many thousands of years and some including but a few. The Ages are apparently meant to explain why some periods of history have witnessed many powerful acts of sorcery and the ascendancy of certain of the Gods, while others have been relatively magic-poor and dominated by other deities.

4.4.1. The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*

The Age system also plays a part in the complicated and obscure legends of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* (kool-ahlgrenAHthee-ee)¹ or "They Who Watch the Many Planes", in the Telostician context. The *Watchers* are a group of nearly immortal, semi-divine sapient beings, most (but apparently not all) possessing an *Aablùshyé* (aw-ah BLOOsh yay) or "Pendant² of Ruling in Glory Over Reality", supposedly, some sort of extremely powerful magical or technological artifact. For more information on the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, please consult Book "G".

4.4.2. The First Age (The Unknown Years)

The First Age of *Ushù'l*'s history includes dates and events which are now lost in the mists of time. Much of what is said to have happened during this period is, obviously, highly speculative, and may be mere legend or conjecture.





During the First Age, and indeed most of history prior to about 3000 BU, the climate of *Ushù'l* north of the equator (in particular regions north of the *Nòlan Oblé*) appears to have been significantly colder and somewhat wetter than is now the case. During this period much of Mähag, for example, was more habitable than it is now, while conversely civilization lagged in the northern regions as the growing season was too short to sustain a large population. Temperatures seem to have started to increase, and precipitation to decrease, around the 30th century BU, although this trend may now be tapering off.

The First Age is said to have ended approximately with the fall of the Ancient Mahàgi Empire.

4.4.2.1. The Ebon Empire

Some ten thousand years ago, by modern reckoning, a female child (possibly more than one child— it appears that historians may have confused two or more different persons in the figure called "Thàelia"), possessing certain extremely unusual mental powers, was born to an impoverished rural family in what is now the island of Sherdonèl in the Great Sòtbarann Sea.

From the start, the girl displayed psychic abilities which, by the age of ten, had her left alone in the wilderness to die. Ten years later, the girl returned to her tribe fully grown, announcing herself to be the prophet of a deity she identified as *Virya Hé*, Mistress of Ebon Night (perhaps an archaic version of the modern Racto-Ardæ *Virya Hé*-Enriath, although this is uncertain – and there are aspects of the teachings of this ancient religion that are dramatically different from those of the modern Temple of mighty *Virya Hé*-Enriath; for example, it seems to have been opposed to human sacrifice, and bears more resemblance to certain modern faiths of the Racto-Ardæ *Khùl-Mhazàshii* than to the *Khùl-Nolgùn*). When challenged by the tribal chief, she turned the latter to stone with a wave of her hand, a feat which she was to repeat with fearsome effect several times in the future.

The priestess, later to be known as Thàelia the Great, established herself as the undisputed ruler of most of southern Sherdonèl, before her death around the age of forty-seven. Thàelia's age at death is one of the few facts about her that is known with any certainty – which is difficult to reconcile with other records that speak of her having been born around 10000 BU, nearly four hundred years earlier. Perhaps the name "Thàelia" was used in a dynastic sense and referred to an entire line of priestesses, rather than just to one person.

Far more important for historical purposes, however, was the establishment of the cult of Hé as the official religion of Thàelia's "empire". During the dynasty she founded, the religion began to keep the first written records of day to day events that are known to modern scholars. Unfortunately, few of these remain, but amongst those that are available, there is noted an event of great importance. In the seventh year of the reign of the one of Thàelia's descendants, thought by modern historians to have been around 9550 BU, a junior priestess of the church of Hé, whose name is now lost, is known to have been tortured and executed for claiming to have made contact with another deity. This being, giving its name as Ninia (neen-YAH), is believed to have been an ancient form of Nanyè (nan-YAY-eh), *Virya* of the Shining Blaze of Glory.

According to the story, the priestess had, furthermore, mentioned the existence of several other deities, ultra-powerful creatures of spirit and energy engaged in the struggle for the control of mankind's souls. Although these revelations were initially suppressed, they eventually leaked out of the upper levels of the church and engendered a religious schism which, after a prolonged period of bloody civil war, brought down the Ebon Empire. Fragmentary evidence remains that during certain of these conflicts, some of the deities Themselves, or more likely Their servitors, may have intervened directly in the fighting, particularly during the last phase which saw destructive forces unleashed that rendered large areas of Sherdonèl uninhabitable.

Two things, however, are clear: Some of the deities mentioned by the luckless junior priestess seem to have been removed from Telostic's dimension by the fighting. Of those that survived and who appear later, there appears to have been agreed upon some sort of a resolution or pact to forebear from intervening directly on Telostic's plane. This is by no means a hard and fast rule, as those foolish enough to anger the deities will learn to their sorrow, but generally, the Gods and Goddesses have apparently made up their minds to confront each other only under conditions removed from human ken.

After at least 400 years of uninterrupted rule (and possibly more than that – the records are unclear) the descendants of Thàelia saw her theocratic civilization crumble into obscurity, but not before the passionate followers of Hé and the other deities had fled devastated Sherdonèl in all directions, spreading their respective gospels to the rest of the sapient population of *Ushù'l*. What these prophets had in common was the realization that their aims, radically different though they were, could only be accomplished through the establishment of civilization and the codification of knowledge. It is not known with any certainty how many of the modern religions had their origins in the downfall of the Ebon Empire, nor if all who did thus originate have been accounted for.

4.4.2.2. Ancient Mähag

It was to be about one thousand years after the Ebon Empire that the next significant example of civilization was to arise, this time in the fertile savannas of what is now the centre of the Great Mahàgi Desert. In these times, it is thought, the Mahàgi region was mostly verdant and fertile, in contrast to its now-barren wastes.

The earliest records in northern *Ushù'l* tell of a great empire which dominated what is now the Great Inland Desert of Mähag to the south and west of the *Nòlan Oblé* and that empire's gradual rise to splendor over the span of some twelve hundred years. Mähag was known for many-turreted, graceful cities, mostly now buried forever beneath the desert alluvium and stern frontier fortifications and walls; remnants of some of these can still be seen, particularly in the foundations of many buildings of the modern Meshonian Imperium.

Inspired by the ambiguous and ascetic teachings of a religion similar to that of the modern deity *Væran On* (Master of Nothingness, Principle of Grey on Grey), there arose a crusading nomadic chieftain named Azi'ir, who in the space of less than fifteen years, had crushed his enemies and established the first dynasty of the great Mahàgi Empire. During Azi'ir's own life, the Mahàgi Empire expanded in every direction, and it established a "golden age" of literature and science. The earliest written records that are available in any quantity were written in the Archaic version of the Mahàgi script, and date to about the middle part of Azi'ir's life. Before the great Emperor had died, he had built cities with towers in the honour of his god that seemed to reach to the sky, the beginnings of a road system that partly survives today, and, most importantly, a stable society based on organized trade and the rule of law.

It may have been a coincidence that the early Mahàgi Empire was blessed by a succession of capable rulers, the first of which was Azi'ir's own son, Anvar. During Anvar's rule, and continuing for some four hundred years afterwards, the Mahàgi Empire expanded until it was checked by the evil realm of the Black Plains (evidently a force to be reckoned with, even at this early date— although who, or what, was in control of the Black Plains, is now unknown) in the far west and by barbarian tribes in the far east. The latter eventually proved to be so serious a problem that one of the later Mahàgi Emperors, Omhr XIII, laid the foundations of the Great Wall that now separates the Meshonian Empire from the wilds of the *Wäsch*.

All during the period of expansion, and during the nearly thousand years of stable civilization which were to follow, the Mahàgi Empire attained heights of culture and science which had not been seen since the original downfall of mankind, and which have seldom been seen since. Masterpieces of poetry and music became commonplace amongst the fare of the elite, and even the commoners shared in the spoils: the tribute that Mähag exacted from its far-flung provinces kept taxes low and food supplies plentiful. The motions of the planets and stars were analyzed, and a complicated, yet apparently accurate, system of astrology was derived from them. A measure of religious tolerance was also present, for, although the worship of Azi'ir's own deity was the most popular faith, the diversity of the Empire demanded the accommodation of those religions not obviously hostile to the goals of the state.

In the later years of the Empire, during the reign of Hâq-Shéhùr IX, that another event of cardinal importance happened. For thousands of years, men and the other sapient races had realized that they could draw upon the mystical powers of the deities and thus perform feats of "magic". In order to do this, however, almost complete personal and mental devotion to the deity concerned was necessary.





One day, a man of strange comportment and appearance appeared, seemingly from nowhere, at the court of the Emperor, and requested an audience with Hâq-Shéhûr. The request was denied, but as the court guards came to take the visitor away for the summary execution meted out to intruders, he pointed his index finger at them and loosed a lethal flash of lightning. Instantly the guards were reduced to charred heaps of dust, as were the next sixteen sent out to replace them. The stranger again requested an audience, which was this time hastily arranged, at which the fascinated Emperor watched the man perform magical feats which were not only far more powerful than anything his priests had been able to accomplish, but which were also of a type and flexibility unlike anything previously known.

Legends go on to say that this "magic-user" introduced himself as a Watcher, the leader of a group of sapientia who, with the aid of certain semi-demonic entities and ancient devices, had learned how to use "magic" completely of their own accord. His offer of service, supposedly needed by Mâhag against a threat now lost to the pages of history for a good fee was, understandably, quickly accepted. Thus was the mysterious and powerful Great Brotherhood of the *Antratschêldor-haii* first revealed to the world.

The reasons for the downfall of the Mahàgi Empire are still not clearly understood and are the subject of considerable debate in modern times. There are, of course, some factors which are relatively easy to identify. By about 7656 BU the Empire had overextended itself, particularly in its campaigns north of the *Nòlan Oblé*; the cream of the Mahàgi army was annihilated at what is now Vâlî-Pas around 7650 BU, and nature also played a part, destroying the Empire's agricultural base beginning about 7233 BU. Although these events were stressful to Mâhag, they were nothing that had not been overcome previously. Furthermore, and unlike many future Empires, there is no evidence to suggest that Mâhag's later Emperors and Empresses were significantly less capable or virtuous than their predecessors. Gradually, the Empire contracted and cut its losses in the more remote of its territories and protectorates, and in so doing was able to resist its eventual fall for another hundred and fifty or so years.

The end of the Empire was presaged by the wholesale rout Mâhag suffered at the hands of Hà'alâamite tribesmen at Trasvûu in about 7063 BU, but it was not until the devastating plagues suffered by the urban centres of the Empire later in that year that the desert began to close over the cities' tall, curved minarets. It has often been alleged, but never conclusively proved, that these plagues were the result of a curse or other supernatural attack – a charge that is certainly borne out by their exceptionally unpleasant symptoms. According to the few accounts that have survived the millennia, victims seemed to develop wounds which resembled the bites made by savage animals; death would invariably follow within a day or two of the appearance of these manifestations.

Almost immediately the Mahàgi cities fell silent and were shunned as places of evil and death. Within a hundred years, the Empire crumbled to nothingness. The ruins of some of the Mahàgi cities still exist, now nearly covered by the sands of the trackless wastes of the modern Great Mahàgi Desert and haunted, it is said, by the spirits of those who died in the plagues and possibly also by those that inflicted them.

4.4.2.3. The Post-Mahàgi Empire First Age

In the approximately 1500 years that separated the last years of the Mahàgi Empire from the first of its next great successor, there arose a number of petty kingdoms and minor Empires throughout the known world, some even appearing north of the *Nòlan Oblé* as roaming clerics finally began to make headway in bringing civilization to the barbarians. Too numerous to describe individually, mention should be made of two of these states.

The Kingdom of Elikar-Sânto, a medium-sized nation located at the far northern end of the *Wâsch*, is notable for its development of sea travel. Voyages of the violent and unpredictable Telostician oceans had been abandoned since the original downfall, but it now seems fairly certain that during the zenith of its development, Elikar-Sânto was able to establish maritime trade as far south as Rôned Hadin. It also may have sent at least one expedition to *Dsshâmika* or another of the unknown continents across the great eastern ocean. Another historically notable state which flourished during this interregnum was the "Heavenly Confederation of the Ever-Flowing Zin-Yîra", whose importance lies in the fact that it is the basis of the mighty Cantienese culture which would arise much later.

During this period, there also came to pass many subtle, yet significant, socio-economic changes which were to influence the later course of Telostician history. Unlike many other aspects of the old Mahàgi Empire, its system of trade and commerce did not die with Mâhag. In spite of myriad dangers encountered on the long trade routes between centres of population, merchants plied their businesses with increasing vigor. By roughly 6500 BU, land trade routes reached from north of the *Nòlan Oblé* all the way to Hà'alâam in the south, and from Mâchtily in the far west to Elikar-Sânto in the east. In a more sinister development, the shadow of the Black Plains, controlled by a now-unknown power, lengthened in the west and eventually claimed all the original lands of the Mahàgi Empire.

4.4.3. The Second Age (The Times of Mysteries)

The passing of the ancient Mahàgi Empire was followed by a five hundred year period now referred to as "The Age of Mysteries", also known as the "Second Age".

The Second Age is most widely known as the *Times of Mysteries* due to the influence of the God Ya-Epré, *Væran* of Astrology and the Mystic Arts. According to legend, some of the events which transpired during this period are held to have been set in motion by mighty Ya-Epré in an effort to mold the world of the future in His own image, one which "will find a place for all enemies in mutual annihilation" (?). During the Second Age, many of the legendary feats performed by the great magicians and warriors of antiquity occurred. Among these, modern scholars count the stories of:

-*Equirah*, a mighty sorcerer of what is now Mesho who constructed the first of the Three Towers of the Vortexes that still stand, mute and crumbling, in that land today (no-one knows who built the other two);
-*Qlânu-Lé'Hnâyû*, *Blue Son of Black Night*, a member of the *Khûl-Algrenâthi'i* who is said to have contested and vanquished a Demon to rescue his betrothed;
-the patron of thieves, *Bréhru*, who stole the fabled Twenty Shimmering Crowns from an now-unknown deity;
-the conjurer *Gnêtrûtha* and how he was forced to inflict those of his lineage with a unique curse, in order to gain immortality for himself;

and countless others.

The veracity of these tales is, of course, open to question, but it certainly seems that during this epoch Telostic was much more in the grip of magical power than it is today.

Another interesting series of events that allegedly occurred in the Times of Mysteries is the "finding" of many of the Pendants of Ruling in Glory Over Reality by beings now known as the *Khûl-Algrenâthi'i*; it is said that the Age saw three ordinary sapientia become Watchers by discovering, quite by accident, *Còs Nchòsti* ("Invisible Pendant"), *Còs Njwma* ("Pendant of Orange") and *Còs Oradwàuy* ("Pendant of the Deep Sea Blue") in the years from 6074 to 5656 BU.

The Second Age was, in historical terms, a fairly brief period, but it produced many notable and spectacular events up until it declined around the 5th Old (e.g. BU) millennium.

4.4.3.1. Amplaë

Written descriptions now available of the legends of the Age of Mysteries were almost all recorded by scholars of the Empire of Amplaë, a small state located just south of the central *Nòlan Oblé* that perished in the "Fourth Cataclysm", a series of disastrous seismic events, in 5617 BU. Amplaë was unusual in that it was apparently dominated by magic-users and other dabblers in the supernatural. In particular, it is in this Empire that the first certain evidence is found of worship on *Ushû'i* of modern forms of the Gods, mighty interdimensional beings of inscrutable motivation whose fortunately infrequent interventions on Telostic's plane require respect and devotion by the lesser races. There is substantial reason to believe that mankind's first contact with these same powerful entities predated the Empire of Amplaë by thousands of years, but no firm proof of this now remains.

Amplaë was the seat of a religion obsessed with astrology and fortune telling. The deity most involved in this is thought by many historians to have been an ancient representation of the modern Rocto-Ardæ *Væran* Ya-Epré, Master of Magic and the Planes.





4.4.3.2. The Oshànt KhùlShamashèl

It is said that the greatest priest of Amplaë, Fzù-ai-Agròn-é-Asé-Agràia-òn-Ma'Tkòrpu XXII, wrote a complete and accurate account of all the events that would befall Telostic "until the mighty Gods and those whose power is craft shall meet in the final struggle" (?). This tome is, unfortunately, now lost, but fragments of it can be seen in the Third Archive of the Vasadràya Collection in the Imperial Museum in Sanite, Mesho. A companion work to the above, also allegedly recorded by Ma'Tkòrpu, deals with the details of the Gods Themselves.

Much more of this, the *Oshànt KhùlShamashèl* ("Holy Book of Our Divine Masters"), has survived to the present day, albeit in somewhat corrupted and abridged form. It is said to have originally comprised 256 folios of 24 verses each; of these, most modern versions contain no more than 180 folios with a few secret copies including up to 216).

The *Oshànt KhùlShamashèl* identifies 18 major deities and numerous lesser supernatural beings, grouping Them in various categories according to Their philosophies and the order in which They came into being in the universe. How Ma'Tkòrpu, or whoever assisted him in writing the Holy Book, gained insight into these matters is not known, although curiously credit for having discovered many obscure details is given to "the wise bearer of the Crystal Pendant"(?).

4.4.3.3. Heshiga

Another Second Age culture worthy of note is that of the Heshigan (heh-SHEE-gann) Empire, which dominated an area in extreme north-west *Ushù'l* now sunk beneath the cold waters of the Bight of Heshiga on the *Mùya Ssòlh* (Ocean of Tempests).

Heshiga, a state founded and dominated by the *Arda* and *Hàmyé*, is remembered partly for its advanced arts and sciences, second in development, it is thought, only to ancient Mähag. It is also known because its few surviving records tell of wars its armies fought with the dark forces of the "Black Plains".

In these now-crumbling scrolls and tablets, the scribes of Heshiga describe the rise of "a noxious peril which feeds on the antithesis of souls (?), whose shadow darkens even the bright-illuminated desert" and the desperate thousand-year struggle of their Empire to drive it back from whence it came. As near as can be deduced from the fragmentary evidence now available, the "Black Plains" were an isolated area of south-west Mähag totally enclosed by the tangled forests of the *Solih Nohir* (Woods of Shadow), one of several regions associated even today with evil spirits and other dangerous supernatural entities. It is a mystery how this area could have raised an army of any appreciable size, considering that it is a shunned, barren wasteland where one finds only grotesquely misshapen trees and malodorous, disease-ridden water. Either the Black Plains must have had quite a different environment in years gone by, or some other agency must have mustered its war-legions.

Heshiga appears to have been only partly successful in its own battles against its enemy, but a rescue force it sent to the aid of the desperately outnumbered army of ParaMesho (a minor kingdom) was instrumental in aiding the ParaMeshonians in a miraculous rout and dispersal of the Dark Forces at the Battle of the Scarlet-Hued Tower outside the city of Tangritta in 5567 BU. According to modern reckoning, this event marked the ending of the Ages of Mysteries, although it was not the last time history would hear of the Forces of Shadow.

The Heshigan Empire itself lasted longer than the Second Age, enjoying a long period of peace and prosperity after the vanquishment of the Black Plains; it remained intact, if somewhat aloof from the rest of the civilized world, until sinking beneath the waves in 4627 BU. It is thought that Heshiga's eventual demise was in some way connected with a series of wars it later fought against the *Brhà*, who are thought to have invaded from *Brhà'nàikh* around 5194 BU during the reign of Empress Khràidai Aima'a VII. This event is notable as the first known report of these fearsome and merciless creatures having arrived in *Ushù'l*.

The word "*Brhà*" is known in almost every language and refers to several races of intelligent and dangerous sapient creatures that are ferociously hostile to (as far as is known) all the races that coexist with each other on *Ushù'l*. The *Brhà* are, fortunately, quite rare in most of the populated parts of the continent, and they seem to be fatally vulnerable to various diseases that cause the other species only minor discomfort.

4.4.4. The Third Age (The "Quiet Years")

The period lasting from the Battle of the Tower to the rise of the First Meshonian Imperium is called the "Third Age" or the "Quiet Years".

The latter description does not, as might be inferred, denote real tranquillity, as the known world encountered its expected share of wars, natural disasters and so on. Rather, this period experienced a gradual but severe reduction in the effectiveness of "magic", particularly when compared to the previous Age of Mysteries. Why this occurred is not clear, but the accessibility of power from the Planes Beyond is known to have waxed and waned over the centuries, and the Third Age appears to have been one of the least magically-influenced periods in the history of *Ushù'l*.

The Third Age was not dominated by a small number of great empires as had been the Age of Mysteries and Ancient Mähag. Instead, it was a period that saw the slow spread of civilization from the areas between the *Nàrhn* and *Nòlan Oblé* to outlying regions. This was hastened by the caravans of the *Vhàl-V'àvna* (or, "Ancient and Fraternal Society of Commerce"). The existence of this association, which today has considerable political and economic power in almost all the modern states, was formally declared in the city of Gemba Amplaë in 5043 BU in the *Hàl-Bé-Miykàli* ("Code of Honourable Profit").

The *Vhàl-V'àvna* in theory represents all who gain their daily bread from trade, particularly if carried out by means of travel. It has some of the characteristics both of a trade guild and a secret society, and is almost unique in being a non-governmental, non-religious organization with an ability to exercise power and influence across the borders of states and empires. (The only other groups that have anywhere near this type of power are the Brotherhoods of the *Anratschèldor-haii* and the priesthoods, and the former at least tend to remain aloof from the affairs of state.) The *Vhàl-V'àvna* is also one of the oldest agencies of civilization on *Ushù'l*, and although knowledge of this time is now lost, its early history may predate even that of the Third Age.

Aside from its effects on trade, the *Vhàl-V'àvna* left another mark on history during the Quiet Years, namely the construction of the first of the great "Ways" (the term is similar to the Latin *via* or French *voie*) that now link most of *Ushù'l*'s major empires. These flagstone and macadam highways [Rocto-Ardæ "*muysùikh*" (mwèe-SWEE-keh)], usually about 18 metres wide and raised two to three metres from ground level, were originally devised to provide a reliable surface to support the wheels wagons drawn by the common *Felitsma*-beast (a yaklike herbivore, too slow to ride into battle but good at tasks of heavy burden). In later years, they were expanded to include regular waypoints where traveling caravans could find provisions and a measure of protection from bandits. Unfortunately, fragmentation of political authority had made the latter an intermittent affair at the best of times.

Most of the Ways were laid down along trade routes already well-traveled by caravan-merchants, while others were pushed forward to connect isolated pockets of civilization. Interestingly, a few Ways seem to have been made to go in directions containing no organized sapient habitations at all. If one explores the ruins of one of these today, it is often possible to find evidence that the road was apparently built on top of a much older thoroughfare made partly of some metallic substance. These routes have a bad reputation, however, and some of them are thought cursed. The amount of manpower, capital and time it must have taken to construct even the lesser Ways, several of which, at least during their most advanced state around 3413 BU, extended thousands of kilometres from one end to another, can well be imagined. It now seems strange that an organization such as the *Vhàl-V'àvna*, with no overt coercive authority could have accomplished such a feat. How and why this was possible remains lost to history, but it is noteworthy that several of the kingdoms through whose lands the Ways were built seem to have been unusually cooperative in the venture, even to the point of conscripting subjects to labour on their construction and upkeep.

Later in the Third Age (around 2492 BU), membership in the *Vhàl-V'àvna* was suddenly made punishable by death in many contemporary states. This has led to speculation that some sort of a plot on the part of the Guild's leadership to control political leaders had been uncovered. The ban against the *Vhàl-V'àvna* is still in effect in some empires, but it is now rarely observed.

The Quiet Years lasted over three thousand long years, and during this period, the sapient races almost ceased to believe in the powers of the outer planes; many of the events of the two previous Ages came to be regarded as fables and mythology. Many kingdoms and empires rose and fell during the Third Age; the details of most of these, while interesting, must be omitted here for reasons of space. A few cultures and events of this period, however, bear commenting on.

4.4.4.1. Ascòrcan

It is during the Third Age that history first records the existence of a significant political unit north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, the city-state of Ascòrcan in the foothills of the mountains to the southwest of what is now Roctien.





Ascòrcan is thought to have originated as a trading post established by Amplaë around 5765 BU during the Second Age, but it languished in obscurity under a series of satraps and minor kings until the ascension of Rcrshédab VI in 4620 BU. Something of an adventurer, Rcrshédab is said to have gained the throne after returning from an Underworld labyrinth with a device of great power, using it to slay his rivals, along with half his own clan, at a feast. This item may have been a Pendant, or an artifice of technology— it is unfortunately now lost, probably buried in the ruins of the old Ascòrcanian High Palace some ten kilometres from the present site of Ascòrcan city.

Rcrshédab and his successors, devout followers of a deity believed to have been an archaic representation of *Væran Rssa-Urutàngk* (Shadowed Master of War and Destruction), subsequently launched a crusade to exterminate tribesmen harassing trade on the Way from Ascòrcan city to the Dondré-Halo Pass in the central *Nòlan Oblé*. His armies not only won a series of bloody but complete victories, but also were able to extend Ascòrcan's fiefdoms far to the north and east. Progress in the west was checked by the nascent Ardaë Imperium, however (see below).

Ascòrcan's rise to dominance over the rest of the surrounding region was slow, due primarily to low population density: at this point, most of what is now Roctien, though fertile and well suited to cultivation, was still forested and had to be cleared to be farmed. By 3816 BU under Trhùlob XX it had, with the aid of the *Vhâl-V'àvna*, extended the Dondré-Halo Way as far north as the Bight of Roctien, founding the port city of Hànnriot.

Although it cannot be said to have made any notable advances in the physical or mystical arts and sciences, the Ascòrcanian Empire (so proclaimed by Ulémetash I in 3735 BU) was to prove one of history's longer-lived and more successful states, as it dominated all the lands of the north from the *Mira* (Sea) Mgòria in the west to almost as far east as the foothills of the *Jmòjae Oblé* in the extreme east for some 1248 years.

During its early reign, Ascòrcan was essentially unopposed except for isolated pockets of bandits and barbarians, but in the 32nd century BU (the exact dates are unclear) its armies made contact and soon clashed with another Empire devoted to a deity of the *Khùl-Nolgùn*, that of Bvhé-ym-Dlgò pledged to the worship of the Crusher of Feeble Wills (probably the modern *Væran H'òngg-hélé*, Principle of Brutality and Hatred). The inevitable wars between Ascòrcan and Bvhé-ym-Dlgò raged for centuries, resulting in the eventual decline of both Empires as fanatics pledged to the cruel military codes of the *Khùl-Nolgùn* staged atrocities from west to east. These "Wars of the Shaded Banners" are historically noteworthy in that they mark the first evidence of the emergence of the human ethnic groups that now dominate modern Roctien.

Unlike its enemy, however, Ascòrcan did not disappear as a political entity after being exhausted by the long wars in the thick forests of eastern Roctien, although in 2485 BU its ruler Ethlédab III was forced to allow the secession of the western provinces of Ontars and Khàpitas, the Empire's last external holding. While conquered and reconquered several times in the years to come, Ascòrcan to this day retains its own culture and political independence.

For reasons of space and brevity, a few words on the states of the Third Age south of the *Nòlan Oblé* must suffice here.

4.4.4.2. The Third Age in the South

Since the downfall of the Mahàgi and Amplaë Empires, three main centres of civilization established themselves south of the great mountain range separating them from Javertien, Roctien and the other northern areas; these are (north to south) Mescho, Sherdonèl and Cantien-Trillia. There is substantial evidence to suggest that all three of these regions were settled and "cultured" much earlier than the start of the Quiet Years, but the exact details of this are not well known north of the mountains.

4.4.4.3. Mescho

Mescho claims to be descended directly from ancient Mähag, but it seems more likely it is the offspring of two now-dead states of some importance in the lands around the fertile lowlands of the mighty River Vòlcar. These are the Parétapylian Empire, which ruled the area from around 4366 to 3900 BU [there are many ruins created during this state's reign, among them the Great Wall of Parétàpys V ("the Eternal") that stretches all the way from Lake Mescho to the *Fàmil Oblé*], and the later and less important Parameshonian Empire centered on Lake Mescho that existed from 2863 to about 2333 BU.

Although there is much cultivable land and a favourable climate for many leagues past the Mescho region's borders, the states that developed in the Vòlcar Valley, including modern Mescho itself, had surprisingly little competition from or contact with other Empires. They therefore evolved unique patterns of development during the Third Age; in particular, several places, for example the *Nlànu-Rax-Uwéhm* or "Hills of Hiding", where legend has it the *Hàmyé* of Mescho escaped persecution by a long-forgotten king, became populated entirely by individual nonhuman races whose descendants are still dominant locally.

4.4.4.4. Sherdonèl

Little is known of the past of Sherdonèl, other than that the island was populated and had seen several empires rise and fall, prior to 3638 BU. In this year, references begin to appear to a ruler calling himself "Nàuclop-Hèmem". This leader (it is not clear whether he was an Emperor in the modern sense, or merely some other kind of political figure) is said to have controlled a culture called the "Third Empire", gaining fame by a decree, still widely observed on the Shrouded Isle, that all citizens past the age of majority should shave their heads bald.

The next recordings are more certain: Canto-Trillian histories tell of hundreds of years of intermittent wars between a variety of Empires on Sherdonèl and those of the Cantienese mainland. In particular, Sherdonèl battled the ancient Empire of Ròned Hadin, whose high-walled capital was even then one of the two largest cities in the known world along with teeming Làvy-Tvòn, from the years 3049 to 2035 BU. Through all of this time, Sherdonèl was unusual for a Third Age civilization in that it clung to its dalliance with the supernatural, remaining a land of mighty wizards and inexplicable occurrences. This may account for why it was not overrun by the numerically vastly superior Cantienese armies, even after having lost control of the *Mira Sòtbhé* (Bondless Southern Sea).

4.4.4.5. Cantien and Trillia

It is believed that Cantien and its western neighbor Trillia were highly advanced empires as long ago as in the Second Age, but definite proof of this exists solely in the museums of the modern empires of the region. The legends of the Watchers mention the area, and another well-known semi-apocryphal event of ancient Cantien has to do with the "Falling of the Heavens".

Around 5576 BU, it is claimed, "the Gods flung half the sky onto the earth, that it might bear witness to Their ineffable powers". Something impressive did undoubtedly happen at this time, for the stela of an otherwise unattested ruler called "Mù-Cho V" of Làvy-Tvòn record that a junior priest of "The One of Conflagrations" (?), while exploring in the Bàsican Forest to the far southeast, had come across a huge crater which was initially mistaken for a volcano. Its centre contained a strange, cylindrical metal object which, when entered, revealed the bodies of vaguely humanoid creatures in very unusual clothing. The "Pillar of the Crater", as it came to be known, was avoided after this period, since the priest and his exploring companions fell victim to a strange wasting illness shortly after their voyage, as did all those who subsequently visited the area...

4.4.5. The Fourth Age

For Future Release. The Fourth Age saw the rise of several of the modern Empires, and in terms of northern *Ushù'l*, those of first Ardtien and then Roctien. Ardtien, or the "Ardaë Imperium", was established around 4000 BU in what is known the "Land of the Guardian Kings", and is notable for having been one of the relatively few successful states to have been created and ruled by a non-human species: in this case the *Vss-Arda* or "Scarlet-Arda" of the lands bordering on the *Mira* Mgòria. The Ardaë Imperium ruled this region for over 1900 years until it finally collapsed into disunity about 2100 years prior to current times, but unlike many other Empires it did not, for the most part, attempt to expand much past its original borders, being checked by Ascòrcan in the east and various warlike principalities in the west. The modern Roctienae Imperium itself, meanwhile, is actually a relatively young Empire, having been founded by the semi-legendary Dégas I (c. 2015?- c. 1965? BU) about 2000 years prior to the present.

More information on the Fourth Age will be provided in an upcoming addendum to *Shakhàn*; however, interested readers are advised to consult the *Rulers of Roctien* document which is available from the *Shakhàn* World Wide Website, as this includes detailed descriptions of historical events from the founding of the Rocto-Ardae Imperium to the present date.

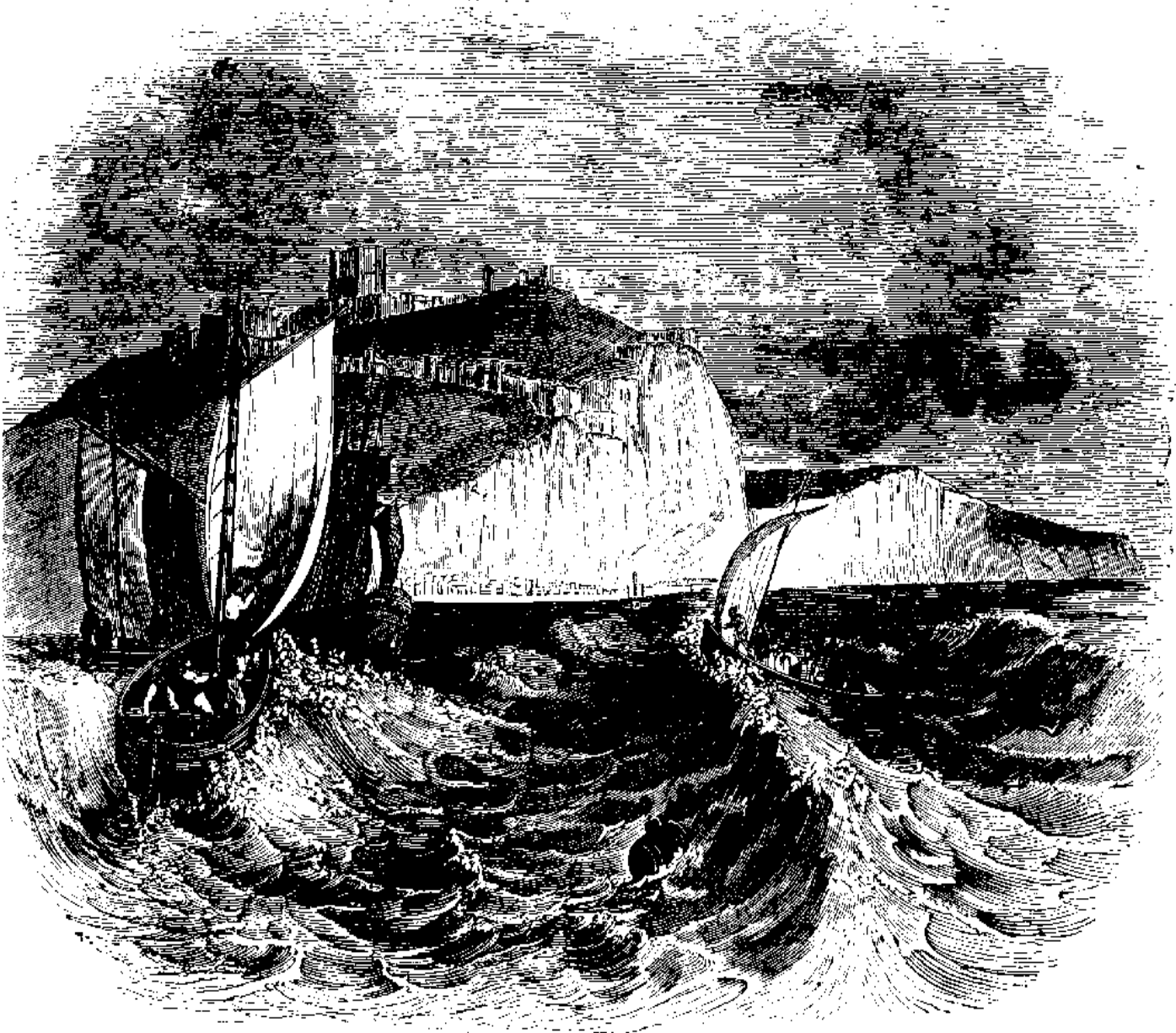




4.4.6. The Fifth Age (The Epoch Of the Six Empires)

This era, the last before the pivotal Great Council of the Watchers in Arconia (the event which marks for the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* the transitional point between the Old and New reckonings of time), represents the period during which most of the great Empires ruling the civilized portions of *Ushù'l* rose to their present glory. During the Fifth Age, the influence of Ascòrcan and Ardtien was finally supplanted by that of the First Rocto-Ardæ Imperium. Further south, the Meshonian Empire continued its Fourth Age expansion against little serious opposition, while in the extreme south history was witness to the rebirth of Làvy-Tvòn and Trillia as an independent power counterpoised against the cultures of Sherdonèl and Cantien, the latter of these being the heir to the former conquests of Rònd Hadin.

Though many of these regimes rose to power in times before the Fifth Age, it was only during this period that all were able to establish themselves in some semblance of the forms they hold today. This was accomplished, as one might expect, by much devastating warfare as the Empires strove to expand and eliminate local opposition. While these conflicts did cause a great deal of suffering (the long-fought war between East and west Roctien being perhaps the best example of this), they were never able to seriously set back the advance of civilization. Despite the greater concentration of power of the Emperors, the various Guilds and fraternal societies common to all Empires continued to grow and prosper.



Typically rough seas in the Bight of Roctien near Rài'Inéa





Perhaps more than any other period of time since the end of the Times of Mysteries, the Fifth Age marked the return of the supernatural as a major force upon the course of history. For the most part, this was manifested in the reawakening of the powers belonging and allied to the *Khùl-Nolgùn* in East Roctien and the Black Plains, but it also showed itself in "legendary" events performed by wizards and adventurers of the epoch. For some reason, mankind and its sapient associates proved extremely successful during the Fifth Age at unearthing and utilizing the powerful magical relics of bygone times. The most important example of this was the finding of the later Pendants, but many other less noted artifacts were also recovered.

The re-emergence of the supernatural, in particular, the actions of the Watchers and the stirrings in the Towers of the Vortexes, is thought by some to be in accordance with predictions made by the Temple of Ya-Epré during the Second Age— but it may simply be due to better record keeping. In any case, many of the mysterious events of the Fifth Age have influenced mankind's present political and religious orientation, and some are thought to still be unfolding in modern times.

4.5. Historic Dates and Events

A partial chronology of the most notable events and dates which make up the history of sapient civilization, as it is currently understood by the wisest of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* of Telostic, is given below. The reader will, of course, note that the chronology leaves out many less important dates and events, in the interests of brevity. In particular, the intricately involved and often obscurely motivated influences of the Gods and their mortal and immortal followers have been edited to minimum. Also, the events noted pertain almost exclusively to happenings on, or near, the northern parts of the continent of *Ushù'l*; undoubtedly the scholars of at least some of the other inhabited continents of the planet have their own histories, but these are outside the scope of the chronicle.

For the sake of clarity, all dates have been expressed in Unification Reckoning as either Before ("BU") or After ("AU") the semi-legendary Second Union of the Watchers in the town of Arconia in northeastern Mähag. This is, of course, despite the fact that the establishment of Unification Reckoning is, relatively, a "recent" invention. Many dates in the chronicle are of necessity uncertain, particularly those pertaining to events before the rise of the Ancient Empire of Mähag. Before this period, scholars have found it very difficult to cross-reference the fragmentary records they possess with known sources of translation and dating, this problem being exacerbated by the dearth of knowledge about the meaning of scripts and languages which pre-date those of the Ancient Mähagi Empire.

4.5.1. Historical Chronicle of Northern *Ushù'l*

(c. 25000 BU) Traditional date of the rising up of Man and the other sapient species from the Void. According to some legends, the *Brhà* and mankind were the two sister races of the dawning of intelligent life on Telostic, and for a time dwelt together in peace.

(c. 23000 BU) **The First Cataclysm:** The outbreak of war between the *Brhà* and the other races on Telostic leaves the face of the planet in ruins, as only the hand of the immortal Gods is able to prevent its total destruction. The legendary Leaving of the First Ones to the Skies occurs during this period.

(c. 22600-c. 10300 BU) Civilization on Telostic regresses into barbarism as the old ways are lost and forgotten.

(c. 10000 BU) Traditional birthdate of Thàelia the Great, the first High Priestess and eldest prophet of the goddess Hé. (Note: Either this date must be much too early or Thàelia must have lived to a fantastically old age, as records exist of her having been publicly identified over four hundred years later.)

(c. 9693 BU) Thàelia the Great founds the Ebon Empire on the island of Sherdonèl. The Empire becomes the first centre of real civilization seen on the continent of *Ushù'l* for many thousands of years and is the first time in history the existence of one of the modern Gods is revealed.

(c. 9500 BU) **The Revelation of the Immortal Host** leads to the Second Cataclysm which destroys the Ebon Empire, and, it is thought, much of the rest of the populated parts of *Ushù'l*, since tradition holds that during this period the mighty Gods Themselves fought each other while dwelling on the face of Telostic. The survivors of the destruction are, however, able to escape into the wilderness and spread the word of knowledge to the rest of the sentient races.

(c. 9000 BU) According to legend, at about this time the god *Nù U Dèshùl*, thought to be an ancient representation of either Za-R'hàak or Hnélo-Tràniss, gives the gift of writing and civilization to the peoples of the continent of *Dssshàmikah*. This is notable in that it is one of the very few events recorded in the histories of *Ushù'l* that concern another continent.

(c. 8666 BU) Traditional birthdate of Azi'r I and the founding of the Old Mähagi Empire along with the first decipherable written records.

(8526 BU) The reign of Omhr XIII sees the Ancient Mähagi Empire at its height. The building of what later comes to be known as the Great Wall of Mesho is begun during Omhr's reign.

(c. 8333 BU) The influence of a deity now thought to be an ancient representation of the dreaded Nameless One is felt for the first time in the Black Plains in southwestern Mähag. During this same period, both *Motnat'tà* and *Sagòst* legends claim, the two races were settled "from the lights in the sky", arriving in their present homelands of *Mòtnat-Guëa* and *Sithalàsso* to check the spread of the dark force inhabiting the Black Plains.

(7696 BU) Amplaë is first settled on the Edict of Sàdr VII of Mähag.

(7484 BU) The first of the Elders of the *Antratschëldor-haii* performs for Hâq-Shëhùr IX of Mähag and thus is revealed to the world. It is thought that the Users of the Hidden Arts originated much earlier; however, this is the first recorded event of their presence.

(7149 BU) The Mähagi army suffers its first major defeat in thousands of years at the hands of Roctiennae barbarians at what is now the city of Vâli-Pas. The event presages the decline and fall of the Empire as a whole.

(7063 BU) Mähag is routed by Hà'alàamite tribesmen at the disastrous Battle of Trasvùu, in which the Hà'alàamites are aided by the Demons *Keetla-Hilxa* and *Uyashtë-é*. Later in the same year, the **Third Cataclysm** occurs as the great cities of Mähag are attacked by the Curse of the Bite of the Invisible Ones.

(7029 BU) The lands of Mähag are abandoned by sapient civilization, marking the final downfall of the Ancient Mähagi Empire.

(c. 6333 BU) Rise and height of the Hà'alàamite culture of the south-east.

(6153 BU) Anglarth Shao'-Tòa the Red Eyed, Chieftain of Drálka, returns from a raid into Hà'alàam and gives the news of the Flight of the Hà'alàamites.

(6074 BU) Còs *Nchòsti*, the "Invisible Pendant", is found by Yi-Sah Wà Pé Mi'i in what later becomes known of as Rahax in southern Cantien. Pe-Mi'i later disappears under mysterious circumstances, but the event marks the first known appearance of one of the Pendants of the Watchers.

(c. 6033 BU) A great sorcerer thought to have been named Equirah constructs the first of the Towers of the Vortexes in the lands between the rivers Tàkkar and Mëshar in Mesho. Equirah establishes a kingdom in the area which lasts only a few short years, but in that time makes contact with a deity later identified as mighty *Bssiro*, Incandescent Master of the Consuming Flame.

Some time after the reported death of Equirah in 5956 BU, a second Tower is raised within sight of the first, but details of its purpose, owner, and construction remain hidden.

(5891 BU) Birthdate of Qlànu-Lé'Hnâyü, Blue Son of Black Night. Qlànu-Lé'Hnâyü, a mercenary general and warrior hero, founds the Empire of Amplaë in the city of Gemba Amplaë several years after its sack by evil bandits in 5881 BU; he also is the subject of many legends and folk tales. According to many accounts he was a member of the lesser branch of the Watchers, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*.

It is told that during his life, Qlànu-Lé'Hnâyü fought and defeated the Great Demon *Hhènglah*, Wielder of the Mace of Brown and *Vòrin* of the Sixth Plane of Existence, and that he travelled to the Insensate Realm of *Zòbgnàra* in order to return his wife Alaisha Le Hnyu from the rest of the departed.





Qlanu is said to have been buried in the Ebon Block of Hna-Amplaë underneath the capital city of the Amplaë Empire, and the tomb has in spite of numerous robbery attempts remained inviolate to the present day.

(5883 BU) After many hundreds of years of gradual migration from IstArdia, the Ardaic lands of Stéamm and Nahzé unite to form the kingdom of Sadlù. Although Sadlù never expands past the area encircled by the *Mònt Oblé*, its existence is important in the sense that it forms the location of the first publicly noted Council of the *Antratschêldor-haii*; at the Council, legends say, the Fathers of the *Chàngalà* were expelled from the Brotherhoods.

Some time late in the same year (5817 BU), the world undergoes a series of devastating earthquakes, tsunami, and hurricanes, and these are thought to have had a connection with the actions of the Fathers of the *Chàngalà* after the Council.

(c. 5866 BU) The *Lepré* race, a reptilian sapient species present since the rise of civilisation in the First Age, begins to be affected by a strange disease which eliminates almost all. Those *Lepré* left unaffected are mutated, and gain many unusual psychic and magical powers.

(5846 BU) The adventurer Brêhru discovers the Labyrinth of Meph-El, an underground complex of immense size thought to have been a remnant of civilisation from pre- First Cataclysm times. The Labyrinth is inhabited by *Nhàathis* the Flaming One, thought to have been a cult god of the semi-demonic *Enhûûv*, from whom Brêhru steals the Twenty Shimmering Crowns; in the ensuing pursuit, both deity and mortal become removed from sapient knowledge. One legend holds that *Nhàathis* follows his prey still in Planes unknown, and the outlines of the two can be seen in a constellation in the northern winter night sky.

(c. 5766 BU) The first signs of civilisation north of the *Nòlan Oblé* for thousands of years emerge with the founding of the city of Ascôrcan in southwestern Roctien. Originally a trading post established by Amplaë, Ascôrcan is soon taken over by the devotees of a deity calling itself *Rssa-Urûg*; this forms the first publicly noted revelation of the existence of the "evil" God of War.

(c. 5710 BU) The Tower of Kôloc is built south of the *Sòmit Oblé*, rising to tower over what is now known as the *Pai-Nyôgg-Shkâa* or "Haunted Plain". A legend connected with the gigantic structure, standing, as far as can accurately be measured, more than fourteen hundred metres above the ground, tells of its manufacture by the Great Demon *Dojiru* for the arch-wizard Gnêtrûtha. According to the legend, Gnêtrûtha pledged the souls of all of his lineage up to and including the first of his line to come into the command of the Demon in exchange for the building of the Tower. It is thought by some that certain of the noble families of the modern Meshonian Empire may be descended from Gnêtrûtha, a fact sure to prove unsettling to any new Emperor...

Though at least the lower and more accessible parts of the Tower are now in considerable disrepair, it is greatly feared and is avoided by all but the most brave or foolish of adventurers.

(5672 BU) A searing blast of fire and light annihilates all life in the mountain ringed land of Minor Sslûmdah in the *Nòlan Oblé*, inhabited at the time by a state founded by a curious offshoot of the *Antratschêldor-haii*, called the *Nochal-sheamh*, devoted to performing feats of magic with technological devices. The area becomes poisoned and instantly lethal for over a thousand years, and remains a lifeless salt flat even to the present day. It is still dangerous to travel through Minor Sslûmdah, as travellers entering the region often develop mysterious wasting illnesses some time after leaving it.

The disaster was immortalised in the epic poem "Aaerûtha Sha'mtéka ("The Million Laments of Ten Thousand Souls"), composed by the Amplaë poetess Tdrûpya ai Bhrâshchem é Khulâiéya ôñ Mnâsho in 5564 BU.

(5640 BU) Còs *Nwûma*, the "Orange Pendant", is found by Orhon Sermilê Briles Torômê Erôpop du Pvâncchep of the town of Weltor on the island of Sherdonêl. Orhon travels to Cantien, where he briefly (5636-5633 BU) becomes the ruler of the city of Kee'Ha, renaming it Lâvy-Tvôn before disappearing and heading north to the then small city of Hôcis in what is now Mesho.

After a little more than a year in Hôcis, Orhon encounters Khnohorod ai Braschem e Nhrava on Dperumu, holder of Còs *Jjônci* (the "Green Pendant") and the two disappear, not to be seen again until the Great Union in Arconia thousands of years later.

(c. 5633-4627 BU) **Rise of the Heshigan Empire** in the far west of the continent.

This Empire, thought to have been founded originally by the *Arda* and *Hâmýé*, inherited much of the culture of ancient Mâhag and became famous for the heights it attained in the area of science and technology. Indeed, of all the post-First Cataclysm cultures, Heshiga is seems to have come closest to understanding the basics of the technology once achieved on Telostic. Disaster struck in 4627 BU, when, at the height of its expansion as far east as the *Arth Oblé*, the Empire was rent by several titanic earthquakes and submerged beneath the seas.

The area of the central Heshigan Empire now lies thousands of metres below the surface of the Gulf of Heshiga, a cold and stormy sea washing on the shores of *Ushûf* at the Eonâa Desert.

(5639 BU) Birthdate of Fzû-ai-Agrôn-é-Asé-Agrâia-ôn-Ma'Tkôrpu XXII, later to become the eldest mortal cleric of Ya-Epré of his age and the greatest astrologer and soothsayer of the entire Second Age. Ma'Tkôrpu XXII developed the most complete set of predictions of the future ever designed. Although most of these are apparently now lost, fragments are said to remain in the Third Archive of the Vasadrâya Collection in the Royal Museum in Sanite.

On his deathbed in 5567 BU, Ma'Tkôrpu announced the end of the Times of Mysteries, and this announcement has generally been taken as authoritative.

(5617 BU) **The Fourth Cataclysm:** A series of disastrous seismic events (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, *tsunami*, etc.) sweep the length and breadth of the inhabited world.

These catastrophes cause the downfall of the Amplaë Empire, and cause the sinking of the land bridge between South and North *Ulschêshôsh*; further south, they cause horrific fires in Lâvy-Tvôn, levelling the city, and reveal the Xâmbar and Depêneg Depressions as the Underworld subsides. Though hundreds of thousands of lives are lost in the Fourth Cataclysm, the destruction is not complete in the sense that civilisation is not eliminated.

The doctrines of some Temples, in particular, those of Ro'sènnpâdr and Nanyê, contain legends to the effect that the Cataclysm was caused by a clash between several of the evil deities and mighty *Væran* On (Master of Nothingness and Insensate Grey), but these have never been substantiated.

(5612 BU) The third Tower of the Vortexes appears in the Mèshar-Tàkkar interfluvium in southern Mesho. Details as to its construction and purpose remain unknown, due to the disappearance of all those who venture too close to it, but in 5604 BU the barbarian chieftain Tûpor-bolh ut Djâku claims to have overheard the name "Gnêtrûtha" in an adventure in an Underworld labyrinth nearby. Tûpor dies soon afterwards as a result of a strange disease, and his body disappears mysteriously.

(5580 BU) Còs *Oradwâuy*, the "Sea Blue Pendant", is found by Vônkhai ai Vlûkor é Drôthia on Villoc of Lôdua-Naai, a town in Mesho walled in 5656 BU by Zslemech XVIII of Amplaë. Unlike previous Watchers, Vônkhai does not lead an extraordinary life for most of the time she possesses the Pendant; instead, she keeps the fact of its possession secret. In 5570 BU, she disappears on a mission to aid a friend reported lost near the Tower of Kôloc.

(c. 5575-c. 4660 BU) Population in the areas north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, particularly in the Ardtien and Roctien areas, grows substantially due to the slow spread of civilisation and the clearing of the forests which cover much of the land. The growth is augmented by migration from the lands bordering the Great Inland Desert as the sands from the barren wastes encroach upon the Mahâgi farmlands north of the Tàkkar River.

(5573 BU) A great drought strikes Cantien. Thousands die of starvation in and around the Aillâla Fields.

(5571 BU) **The War and Battle of the Tower:** A dark force, thought to be in some way connected with the Temple of It of No Name, arises in the Black Plains and sends its armies ravaging across the land. The "Black Legions", as they are called, consist mainly of bizarrely mutated *L'aqu-âlu*, *Hnâhhu* and undead creatures, and after a trek directly through the Great Inland Desert they reach the populated farmlands of Amplaë and Mesho.

After laying waste to most of Amplaë, the Black Legions travel southeast and establish a base at Trâlsvil, reinfesting the city with the darkness earlier destroyed by the Amplaë Empire; from here, they slowly gather force and plague the surrounding lands for nine years.





In 5567 BU, a huge Black army sets out to ravage Mesho, but it is met at the city of Tangritta by a hodgepodge army of Parameshonian regulars, local militia conscripts, and foreign mercenaries. The battle is fought within a mile of the Scarlet Hued Tower (the First of the Three Towers of the Vortexes), from which at the height of combat a deadly bolt of lightning issues, striking the Black general dead.

This, the Battle of the Tower, is traditionally considered to mark the end of the Second Age.

(5389 BU) A Roctiennae fisherman, one Nfézu Bshah-Rargôfu by name, finds what he describes as "a pretty necklace" in his nets while doing his daily work in what later becomes known as the Bight of Roctien. The "necklace", thought by modern scholars to have been one of the Pendants of the Watchers, remains a family heirloom for over two hundred years and then is taken by a great-grandson of Rargôfu's in 5266 BU. Its history after this point is not known.

(c. 4981 BU) At about this time, the existence of the *Skròno* race in the *Sòmit Oblé* becomes known to civilisation.

(c. 4866 BU) Said to have been imported from a mythical Empire across the *Estsé Mag-Schlösch* (Great Eastern Ocean), the habit of "snorting" the drug *S'bràa* becomes widespread in the civilised world.

(4842 BU) **The Union at Vané:** It is rumoured that in this year, the Watchers and their attendants held a meeting in the small town of Vané between the Great Devot Trench and the western *Nòlan Oblé*. The subject of the Union, and its conclusions (if any) are unknown, as is the identity of those Watchers who may have attended.

(4627 BU) **The Doom of Heshiga:** The noble and cultured Heshigan Empire is sunk beneath the waves by a seismic disaster of epic proportions in the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Eshtga'âl LXI, its survivors migrating to the north and east.

(4621 BU) Rcrshédab V of Ascòrcan embarks on a military campaign against barbarians and bandits in the heavily wooded parts of the Conjunction Lands, so named due to the meeting of the brown soils of modern Javertien and the black soils of modern Roctien in the area. Though the campaign is on the whole a failure, it is notable in that at its height Ascòrcan, now and independent city-empire, establishes the great modern city of Vòina as a military base at the Lower Asca-Karathé-Amrétha river interfluve.

(4488-4484 BU) Alg-chom thà-pàvnu of *Ulschéshòsh* drives the *Brhà* out of what is now East Roctien with the aid of a small mercenary army and the Temple of the Renouncement of Warmth, thought to have been an archaic representation of the deity *Yog-Ròthe*. He crowns himself *Wrk-khò* ("Vanquisher of the Beasts") I, and founds the city of Bvhé-ym-Dlgò (modern Mvù) at the site of the final battle of the campaign.

(c. 4400 BU) At about this time armourers and metalworkers in the city of Ròned Hadin relearn the lost art of working *guhàdar* into useable items, primarily weapons and armour. The metal remains an extremely scarce commodity, however, and almost all of its sources originate from the melting down of artifacts passed down from antiquity. As a consequence, *guhàdar* tends to be used less as a metal of construction in its own right than as a "stiffener" used to alloy other metals, particularly bronze which remains the main material of which arms and armour are made.

(4262 BU) Heshigan refugees found the city of Smt-Amtigüé in what is now Javertien.

(4176 BU) Birth of KcPhéla IV ("Mistress of the Fifteen Black Acts") of Ascòrcan.

(c. 4066-c. 3466 BU) The population of the areas north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, particularly in Ardtien and Roctien, increases dramatically as the *Vhàl-V'ávna* start to clear parts of the great forests covering the land and establish trading posts on the banks of the great rivers found there.

(4009 BU) The island of Euròra in the seas north of Ardtien is settled by a race of thick-haired, short *Ca'ùna*. From whence the *Ca'ùna* came is not recorded, but legends of the Temple of the Raging Deep (*Wròb-Riàhya*) tell of them being "cast up from beneath the waves, in fulfilment of the bargain *Vòrin Rheméstau* made with the One of the Coldest Depths" (?)

(3975 BU) Birth of Nmécharàron-na-FzuTaryehazz in the small fishing town of Pùsnis in what is now Roctien. Nmécharàron is to become the greatest poet and playwright of the Third Age, and his works of "Mclingu Zayàyi'ima" ("the Fallen House of Amplaë") and "Réharùmen Kel-Laglászà" ("the Comedy of the Emperor's Secret") have survived and are popular today.

(3913 BU) The city of Thélésban in what is now Roctien is founded by the *Vhàl-V'ávna* and the Temple of the Spring Flood (Hadda-Làtonn).

(3852 BU) Mt. Owàra in southwestern Javertien erupts, accompanied by several major earthquakes; in spite of the amount of damage caused to the surrounding area, including a major forest fire in the Hòiat Forest, relatively light human casualties are inflicted.

(3836-3816 BU) With the aid of the Ascòrcanian city-empire, the *Vhàl-V'ávna* extend the Dondré-Halo Way north along the Lower River of the Sentinel as far north as the port city of Hânriot. There are, however, frequent clashes between the two authorities as to the delegation of taxing and patrolling powers.

(3801 BU) The Schism of the Castle of the Heavens: Due to a doctrinal dispute, the exact nature of which has still not been made completely clear to the public, the Temples of Ro'sènnpàdr and Nanyë sever relations with each other. This situation of mutual hostility remains unchanged for over two hundred years, lasting until the Great Conclave of Lòdua-Nàai in 3548 BU, and it occasionally erupts into open violence (cf. the "Red Courtyard Massacre" perpetrated by Nanyèlish fanatics in 3677 BU at Arconia). While it continues, the influence of the *Khùl-Nolgùn* waxes.

(3792 BU) The Javvré warrior Aèhon-dur-Liéhu slays the great *Chàngalà "Oiràmìcar"* in front of the Aigon Caves in the *Aiagione Oblé*, and according to rumour gains a huge treasure in so doing.

(3786 BU) The cities of Khàpitas and Ontars in Ardtien are settled by Ascòrcan, on the edict of Scravib XXX. During the excavations effected for the construction of the latter city, a *é'èsh-* (foretelling)-stone slab dating apparently from the Times of Mysteries is uncovered, and from it the prophecy is read that the settling of Ontars will eventually be the downfall of Ascòrcan, as "the dominion of the rule of power freely given shall overcome that of the Dark of the Foot of the Great Mountains".

Some scholars have opined that this omen was fulfilled in the absorption of Ascòrcan by the Ardae Empire in 2410 BU, but others believe that its meaning is deeper than this and that it has yet to come about in full. The stone, so far as is known, is thought to still be in the possession of Ascòrcan, residing somewhere inside the vaults of the Fortress of Shedàn III.

(c. 3710-3702 BU) **The Ravages of the Brhà:** The *Brhà* emerge from the forests of almost all of the known world to engage in a eight-year campaign of destruction and massacre. The only areas which escape serious damage during this period are Sherdonèl and for some unknown reason East Roctien and the Black Plains. In the rest of the civilised world many thousands are slaughtered by the implacable *Brhà*: Arconia and Elikar-Sànto are burnt to the ground along with most of their inhabitants, while Ascòrcan, En-Parètàpys, Maurdocadia, Làvy-Tvòn and Ròned Hadin almost suffer the same fate. By the end of the infestation, humankind and its sapient allies begin to cause the *Brhà* several notable reverses on the battlefield (in particular, the Battle of Ahélae Plain north of the Maurdoc Hills in 3703 BU), but the invasion seems to wane more due to the effects of certain diseases not previously known to affect the creatures.

As a direct result of the depredations of these years, the populations of the unaffected areas increase considerably.

(3680 BU) The *Vhàl-V'ávna* found the city of Arlinga on the bluff in the eastern Arrénian Plain of Ardtien.

(3667 BU) The Battle of the Nèvan Marsh: Ascòrcanian expansion northward under Rcrshédab-vhai LXV checked by the Swamp-*Hàmyé* of the Son-Gba'à Tribe.

(3413 BU) The *Vhàl-V'ávna* complete the last of the Ways built during the Third Age. These are the Brùnlán/Mesho-Amplaë Way linking Amplaë and Mesho, the Pez-Ackhàd Way East linking Mesho and Elikar-Sànto and the great Ariti-Javvré Way linking western Roctien and Javertien as far west as Smt-Amtigüé. Although the workmanship on these later Ways is not up to the standard set by the earlier ones, it is still sufficient to greatly facilitate travel and trade— even if allowance is made for the danger, increasing in magnitude near the end of the Third Age, of banditry and the multiplicity of road tolls to be met as the traveller passes through the boundaries of the many different kingdoms controlling sections of the Way being traversed.

(3386 BU) The Battle of Chekh: An army from the city-state of Bvhé-ym-Dlgò under Wrk-Lashàruu IV crushes a barbarian *L'aqu-àlu* army on the shores of the Gulf of Nèth. The outcome of the battle assures Bvhé-ym-Dlgò titular control of all the lands between the River D'Uryogg (then known as the River Ym-Harkàshuu) and the *Thith Oblé*, but the thinly-populated nature of the area prompts Wrk-Lashàruu to extend actual control only as far as the south bank of the River Vhà, then known as the River Lkà-Ltìmuu.





(3364 BU) The existence of the Pass of Pez-Ackhàd, a treacherous but nonetheless relatively easily traversable mountain pass in the eastern *Nòlan Oblé*, is discovered by a Mahàgi caravan-merchant driven off the *Chèshia-ta-Kàri* by bandits. Although it is not known at the time, and even today is not known to the public, the Pass of Pez-Ackhàd lies within a very short distance of the famed Ringgar Vaults.

(3337 BU) The city of Bàrria on the Isle of Barrònem north of the Bight of Roctien is thought to have first been settled by fishermen from northern Roctien.

(c. 3333-c. 3296 BU) **The Years of Fire:** Due, it is thought, to the alignment the Sun of the Day and the Sun of the Night in an unfavourable House, the temperature in the known world and possibly elsewhere as well increases dramatically, as both suns regularly appear during daytime hours. This occurrence causes droughts and ruined crops in all areas as the heat from the sky relentlessly pours down; strangely, however, many coastal areas are flooded as the level of the oceans climbs for some reason.

During this period, the southern parts of Cantien become so hot as to be almost uninhabitable and there are reports of enormous fires raging in the Bàsican Forests, while the more northerly regions such as Roctien and Javertien conversely become more suited for settlement. As a consequence there is a migration northwards on a vast scale. Although the Years of Fire cause much suffering, the effects of the heat prove to be containable and in any event the period lasts for a relatively short amount of time.

As a result of the Years, a schism develops in the Temple of the Incandescent Flame (Bssiro) when the world is not consumed according to the Millenarian doctrine of the Temple's ruling *Dssé-Bsà* ("Flame of the Day Thrice Seen Ten") sect, and the split thus caused is not resolved for at least four hundred years (the exact date of the religion's reunification is, like many other facts concerning the Temple of the Flame, known to outsiders in approximation only...)

(c. 3311 BU) *Hlòn* weaponsmiths dwelling under the western *Nòlan Oblé* (?) forge the Great Blades *Makùkh* ("Fang of the Dragon") and *Chemhàil* ("Foe-Sunderer"). It is thought that these weapons are made at the request of an unknown hero of the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr, in fulfilment of a quest to eliminate the One of the Three Chords of Death (?).

(3299 BU) The Battle of the Reddened Bay (also known as the Battle of the Alio Landing): The *Arda* of the barbarian Ag-Arren tribe are repulsed by the *Ca'ùna* of Cristov Bay as they attempt to cross the Lower Matàr-Nath River in northern Javertien. The battle is notable in that it marks the first recorded use of mounted combat since the fall of the Amplaë Empire.

(3290 BU) The famous master sage Dròthia-àih-Rhòré-é-Alé-Tu-Hnàkla-òn-Vjampìha publishes the first conclusive work on the languages and scripts of the *Brhà*, the Tu-ù Dèrha héBrhàn Zé-é Leihà "Thoughts of One Scholar On the *Brhà* (and his) Prose". This is still considered one of the most authoritative tomes on the subject, although it leaves many questions unanswered and suffers from difficulties of translation. There is evidence that *Brhàic* languages and scripts have, like those of other races, evolved and changed over the centuries, so those parts of the book which may once have been correct will probably be of little use with modern *Brhàic* written messages.

There are thought to be no more than six copies of this book in existence nowadays, one of which is known to be located in the Treasury of the Tower of the Golden Falcon in the city of Ouut-Nèwar, capital of the Rocto-Ardæ Empire.

(3280 BU) **Birth of Yàssvill I** ("the Lord of the Gallant"), founder of the Order of the *Padrulàilh*. The Order, formed in Yàssvill's kingdom of Sanite-Nmrèz in 3269 BU, preaches strict adherence to the teachings of the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr and is open only to male warriors who renounce all worldly desires and travel constantly, seeking to rid the world of "evil", meaning, in most cases, Temples and/or followers of the *Khùl-Nolgùn*. The success of this idea inspires many similar religious fighting sects even amongst some of the less "martial" Temples: cf. The Order of the Tides of Doom of the Temple of Hadda-Làtonn and the Brotherhood of Supernatural Valour of the Temple of Ya-Epré, and it outlasts Yàssvill himself who is poisoned by the hirelings of a rival noble clan in 3258 BU.

(3252 BU) Swèrto of Jao'é begins his fourteen-year campaign to bring the Word of the Eternal Moon to Uàva. By 3238 BU, he has converted almost half the population of the island to the worship of the Temple of *Tshé-Ailh'é*, an archaic form of the modern Temple of *J'Ralrishé-Slé*.

(3221-3193 BU) **Wars of the Shaded Banners:** The city-empires of Ascòrcan and Bvhé-ym-Dlgò, both attempting to expand in the rapidly developing central Roctiennæ area, clash repeatedly over a period of some twenty-eight years. The Wars, so named due to the sponsorship of each of the two city-empires by a different deity of the *Khùl-Nolgùn* (Rsa-Urutangk in the case of Ascòrcan and H'òngg-hélé, then being worshipped in its Shaker of the Feeble aspect, in the case of Bvhé-ym-Dlgò), are an intermittent affair marked by many temporary truces and ceasefires, and cause much more damage to the contested regions than they do to either belligerent.

There are, however, several ghastly massacres recorded, most of which are perpetrated by the forces of Ascòrcan, one notable exception being the liquidation of the Ascòrcanian Eighth Army after the Battle of the Issànian Forest in 3221 BU, a feature of conflicts dominated by the military codes of the *Khùl-Nolgùn*. Eventually, following its defeat by the army of Olmùshedàn X at Asòrus Bridge in 3193 BU, Bvhé-ym-Dlgò is forced to concede Ascòrcan rulership of Roctien west of the *Jmòjæ Oblé*, but native resistance in these areas to its oppressive taxation policies leads to the contraction of Ascòrcanian control to the lands west of the River of the Sentinel.

Historically, the Wars of the Shaded Banners prove noteworthy in that they mark the high point of Ascòrcanian military prowess, and in that they provide the first recorded evidence of the emergence of the West-Roctiennæ peoples as distinct ethnic groups, particularly the Moròshi centred around Hailònia and the Hânrioti on the south coast of the Bight of Roctien.

(3211 BU) As part of a rearmament programme, Bvhé-ym-Dlgò founds the Legion of the Walls of Darkness. The event is notable in that this Legion, the oldest in the known world, still exists today in the modern East Roctiennæ Empire under the name of the Legion of the Ebon Wall of Mvù.

(3200 BU) The Elders of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* make official the use of the *Saalmàic* ("Craft-Written") script for the records of the Guild. From this point on, virtually all the material composed by or for the Guild of the Scholars and Sages is written in this script, with the possible exception of that using languages whose phonetics are completely incompatible. Although it has undergone certain minor changes in stroke-form and accent-classification (mainly, the addition of several new letters signifying phonemes later encountered), the *Saalmàic* script is still used as the official character set of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak*.

(c. 3072 BU) Gold is discovered in the eastern *Uàva Oblé* in Javertien, leading to the settlement of Aml-Sentain in 9201 BU.

(c. 3049 BU) At about this time, the influence of the Temple of Tiryé-Habéla begins to supplant that of the Temple of Rssa-Urutangk in the court of Olmùshedàn XXIV of Ascòrcan. It should, for the sake of clarity, be noted that during the Third Age the Goddess Tiryé-Habéla revealed herself to the world in the Aspect of the Shaper of Time, and not in Her present Aspect of the Mistress of Fine Martial-Arts Personified.

(c. 3040 BU) The tomb of Lkliss IV of Ascòrcan is completed in the eastern *Nòlan Oblé*, just north of Major Sslùmdah.

(c. 3006 BU) The *Hlòn* of the western *Nòlan Oblé* (?) forge the Great Blade *Zràiesshé* ("Nemesis of Purple Vengeance"), allegedly under the orders of the Temple of Za-R'hàak.

(c. 2966-c. 2813 BU) *Ulschéshòsh* barbarians contest and finally suppress a major uprising by the *Brhà*. The fighting is particularly bloody on *Ulsché*-occupied islands in the Great Sea Inlet.

(2918 BU) The Battle of Airé: A tribe of barbarian *Shelèggi* / *L'aqu-àlu* and *Ri'im* / *Hnàhhu* defeats the army of the Javvré Protector of the Western Reach, and lays claim to the western half of Arbasàyanæ. The barbarian army is lead by one Chu-Ultho the Mighty, a *L'aqu-àlu* chieftain said by eyewitness accounts to have been more than ten metres tall(!).

(2904 BU) **The Union Under the Earth:** In this year, the Watchers are thought to have held a meeting in the lowest parts of the Great Depènég Depression in Hà'alàam. Although one report states that the subject of the meeting was the prevention of the "bringing to earth" of a war then being fought between two (unnamed, though modern scholars believe one to have been the deity now known as Nanyè) Gods, this is difficult to accept. Also, it is claimed that eight (?) of the Watchers were present at the time. Another source speaks of the efforts of the Watchers to "control" (?) the immortal Gods; however, the ideograph used may mean "communicate with" rather than "control", when used in this context.

Of the many exploration parties which have subsequently set off to survey the site of the Union, none have returned, but the members of these parties may yet not be dead (?)





(2880 BU) The Temple of *Tshé-Ailh'é* on Uàva outlaws the worship of all other religions on that island and all others of the western Group, thus establishing the first theocratic state ever controlled by a Temple belonging to the *Khùl-Mhazàshii*. The rule of the Priests of *Tshé-Ailh'é* is to last some 276 years, until it is overthrown by a force of *Ulschëshòsh* barbarian raiders in the Great Sack of 2604 BU.

(2875 BU) The Fiefdoms of Ascòrcan are redistributed on the edict of Emperor Colùth XV, causing a minor, and unsuccessful, rebellion.

(2841 BU) A plague of the *Dabàatha-Rqnùha* strikes Bvhé-ym-Dlgò, causing the downfall of the city-Empire in 2839 BU and the reversion of most of East Roctien to barbarism. Some outposts of civilisation remain, however, notably those on the southern coasts of the Gulf of Nèth and those maintained by the Temple of H'ongg-hélé in the far southeast.

(2791 BU) The Old version of the *Thélésdellian* script is adopted as official on the edict of Orùshedab VIII of Ascòrcan. Although supplanted by its *Thalla-Thélésdellian* derivative in Ascòrcan itself in the second millennium BU, the Old *Thélésdellian* script remains in ceremonial use in most Roctiennae areas west of the River of the Sentinel today.

(2782 BU) The city of Asòrus in extreme eastern Roctien is divided into four quarters, each of which is controlled by one of the city's ruling noble clans. Since two of these, the Rhnàk and Ta-Vòncà clans (respectively) allow the establishment of Temples devoted to the *Khùl-Nolgùn* and to the *Khùl-Tlassù* in the quarters they control, day-to-day life during the period of the rule of the four quarters is often marked by religious riots and religiously-inspired murders. The rule of Asòrus by the oligarchy of the clans proves a long one, however, and lasts until the city is destroyed by fire in 2207 BU.

(2751 BU) Orùshedab X of Ascòrcan is overthrown by a military *coup* lead by high-ranking officer dissatisfied with leniency shown towards the leaders of a nationalist rebellion uncovered in Ontars. The new rulers of the city-empire murder most of Orùshedab's Lhàpssen clan and establish a military dictatorship known as the "Kingdom of the Reverberating Axe", an entity which rules Ascòrcan for only four years; in 2749 BU, it is itself toppled in a bloodless *coup d'état* lead by one of its former members. This general, one Shòvos-Kchai-Mrùr-Blàllish, crowns himself Emperor Borohùth I, and founds the Blàllishé Dynasty which is to rule Ascòrcan for some three hundred and fifty uninterrupted years.

(2738 BU) Eàrno-dur-Threshènullah, Protector of Javertien, disappears without a trace while travelling in the southwestern edges of the Hòiat Forest. It is rumoured that he has been abducted by the *Brhà*, but the rumour is never proven true or false as Eàrno is never seen again.

(c. 2716 BU) The medicinal qualities of the body and byproducts of the *Schòn*-turtle become known to the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak*, allegedly through the discovery and translation of an Old Mahàgi tract dealing with natural remedies. The use of this animal remains controversial, however, as it is considered sacred to the Temple of Hadda-Làtonn, and it is therefore placed under the interdict in many of those areas in which the Temple possesses influence.

(2702 BU) A great cold wave strikes most of East Roctien and freezes the Gulf of Nèth for the first time in recorded history.

(c. 2666-c. 2533 BU) The population of Ascòrcan and its surrounding areas increases, largely due to migrations of settlers from Amplaë and other areas south of the *Nòlan Oblé*.

(2658 BU) Birth of Wylia-sùr-Méhruk, famous Javvré playwright and author of the first of the rhymed sonnets later to become the most popular form of Javvré artistic prose.

(c. 2643 BU) Traffic in the previously forbidden *Ssòl-Hléia* drug is made legal in most parts of Javertien. This liberalisation leads to the growth and maturation of Javertien as the main exporter of *Ssòl-Hléia* to the rest of the civilised world.

(2634 BU) The Blàllishé Dynasty of Ascòrcan is overthrown by a *coup* lead by Bròntis-Olchai-Mrùr-Gmmàhsu (later Gmùredab I) of the rival Gmmàhlsa clan.

(c. 2633 BU) Most of the barbarian tribes of South *Ulschëshòsh* adopt the system of trial by combat for use in determining new leaders. Under this system, all claimants of the chieftainship of a tribe gather on the field of battle the day after the death of the old chief, and engage in ritual combat until only one stands. The custom is said to have been initiated by one Gùlh the OakenChested, a warrior much respected amongst the barbarians of the north for his heroic battles against the *Brhà*.

(2627 BU) The city of Hédà is settled in southwestern Javertien by the Temples of Ro'sènnpàdr and Nìà.



Rural human peasant and hut from central Roctien

(2607 BU) The Temple of *Tshé-Ailh'é* of Uàva is overthrown by barbarians from *Ulschëshòsh* and pirates from Nàsryu in an orgy of rape, pillage and destruction. Although some of the devotees of the former Uàvan civilisation prove able to secrete themselves in the more remote parts of the western islands (in particular, on the Isle of Môm), for many years after this Great Sack Uàva and its neighbours gain a dark reputation as a bandit and pirate headquarters.

(c. 2590 BU) At about this time, the last members of the *Scorcpòish* race disappear from the known world. The *Scorcpòish*, vaguely insectoid and highly intelligent creatures thought to have been distantly related to the *Motnat'tà*, inhabited the Maudoc Forest and the East *Sprth Oblé* in southern Mahàg. Their culture, so far as is known, is thought to have revolved around a hive-like society.

The reason for the disappearance of this race remains unknown, but one account tells of "bargains made with the Great One of (unintelligible), which causeth the noble race... be transported Dssh-A-Mikah (?)" Some scholars have identified the *Scorcpòish* and the ancient Dwellers Under the *Nòlan Oblé* as one and the same, but this has yet to be conclusively proved.

(2580 BU) In an attempt to placate the local population, Gmùcredab VIII of Ascòrcan lowers taxes to a fraction of their former size in Ontars and Khàpitas. While the move is successful insofar as the conquered territories are concerned, it heightens resentment as the measure is not applied elsewhere.

(c. 2566 BU) The Order of the Black Wolf of the Temple of Rssa-Urutàngk is founded in Asòrus in East Roctien.

(2559 BU) A great earthquake strikes Bàrria Island north of the Bight of Roctien. Casualties are few, however, due to the thin population of the area.

(c. 2550 BU) The *Hlòn* of the *Nòlan Oblé* reconstruct and re-forge (?) the Great Suit of body armour *Arrèch* ("Citadel of Invulnerability"). The Suit, reportedly endowed with many different magical powers and made of almost pure *guhàdar*, passes into the ownership of the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr which puts it to as yet unknown uses.





(2486 BU) Ontars and Khàpitas secede from Ascòrcan in protest of a new tax placed upon the sale of liquor, *Ssòl-Hléia*, and other stimulants and depressants. Despite the best efforts of the Ascorcànian army under Ethédab III to suppress the insurrection, losses prove so great as to make the re-establishment of control effectively impossible, and in 2485 BU, Ascòrcan withdraws its claim to the two city-states. As a result, Ethédab's Gmmàhlsi clan is overthrown in a plot thought to have been organized by the Temple of Rssa-Urutàngk, and control of Ontars and Khàpitas passes into the hands of the *Mh-Lklàa* (Republican) Party.

(2467 BU) The city-state of Khréalu (modern Ga'Bryàal) begins to clear the forests in eastern West Roctien, and in so doing lays down the East Way. Though little more than a dirt path at the time, the Way is later developed into a viable trade route.

(c. 2466 BU) The Labyrinth of Aèlla in the middle part of the *Tùrkar Oblé* is discovered by an as-yet unknown adventurer.

(2455-2454 BU) Barbarians from *Ulscheshòsh* stage a series of raids into East Roctien. During one of these forays, they loot and burn the city of Akhlà.

(2440 BU) The Battle of the Ghènschan Bridge: Ascorcànian troops under Rahàia II repel an invasion force sent by Khàpitas to claim the lands between Vòina and the Upper Karathé Rivers. The battle is a decisive victory for Ascòrcan, and highlights Rahàia's place as one of the few female rulers in Ascorcànian history to successfully lead an army into battle.

(2410 BU) Birth of Szaiai-in-Rinba-en-Eüddyé-yashù-Milha-Wzéha, first of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* to complete a definitive study of the known world's religions and cults. In this work, the *Chla Ma-Hi'ira*, *Vhémhi*, *Chlòch Ta-Villha Za-à AhélMa Mhagaàlga'a* ("Religions of the World, Their Sects and the Dark Secrets Thereof"), the author makes the first notes pertaining to the changing aspects of the deities.

Thought by modern scholars to have in some way been able to draw on the secret internal records of some of the Temples of the *Khùl-Mhazàshii* (Szaiai was born into the priestly class devoted to the Temple of Unending Grey), the work is still used as a sourcebook today even though its contents are known to be out of date. There are thought to be no more than four copies of the *Chla Ma-Hi'ira* in existence nowadays, one for sure located in the Fifth Archive of the Vasadràya Collection in the Royal Palace in Sanite, Mesho.

(2399 BU) A military *coup* lead by nationalist elements of the civil guard takes control of Arlinga. The *putsch* is secretly aided by the Ascorcànian secret police (the "Black Arm"), in the hope of being able to turn Arlinga against Ontars and Khàpitas.

(2394 BU) The *Brhà* stage a series of small-scale attacks on Pùsnis and the surrounding area.

(2293 BU) The correct form of the Archaic (or Old) form of the Javvré script is encoded by a convention of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* and the *Vhàl-V'àvna* held in the city of Smt-Amigüé. Prior to this time, most written records in Javertien have been kept in a variety of local and imported scripts, or in an unofficial "Common Javvré" codification which is in fact a loosely adopted variant of the *Thélésdellian* script.

Although in years to come many irregular letters are added to the Old Javvré list, it remains in general use into modern times until replaced by the New version of the Common Javvré script in 968 BU.

(2278 BU) Birth of Ekensédab VI ("Blood-Drinker") of Ascòrcan, said to have secretly worshipped the One of No Name or some other "forbidden" religion.

(2274 BU) A *coup* lead by the *Mh-Lklàa* of Ontars overthrows the Pùsnian Dynasty of Gyard-Yss. The new rulers of the city-state, after perfunctory consultations, amalgamate Gyard-Yss with Ontars and Khàpitas under the name of the "Empire of Mgòrian Citizens". This move causes great alarm in Ascòrcan, which (understandably) sees the new nation as a dangerous military threat. However, the formidable barrier of the Upper Karathé River makes a quick pre-emptive strike impossible and the Ascorcànian Emperor Esènsédab V is forced to look on with impotence at the rise of the western menace. Primarily made up of individuals of the *Arda* race, the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens is unusual in that it is more or less democratic in its political makeup, and it lays the foundation for the later Ardae Empire of the Fourth Age.

(2267 BU) A comet appears in the sky during the summer of this year. The event is widely believed to have been the cause of several disastrous earthquakes in Hà'alàam as well as a severe crop failure in central West Roctien. Elsewhere, it is said to have foretold the deaths of Emperors Nlauclop-Ki'irh II of Sherdonèl and of Di-Msé VIII of Ròned Hadin. The coming of the comet lends credibility to the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* of Lávya-Tvòn, who predicted its arrival fifteen years earlier.

(2256 BU) The famous West Roctienae playwright Rhémos-Nem Nhàkra-Kuryésva of the city-state of Asòrus completes his masterwork, the "Nlào Var-Ma Mànpkun Achatdràmma" ("House of the Seven Kings Clan"). The play, said to have been partially based on certain prophecies dating from the Second Age pertaining to the lineage of Rocto-Ardæ nobility, is popular in west Roctien today amongst the ruling and upper classes.

(c. 2263 BU) At about this time, some sources say, the power or perhaps knowledge of many of the Brotherhoods of the *Anratscheldor-haii* increases substantially in some way. Historians differ as to the nature and significance of this event: from the available evidence, it would seem that around this time the users of the Hidden Arts came across an ancient tome revealing the features of a number of new magical spells and incantations. The power so derived is apparently shared by all of the Brotherhoods, though certain of these gain more by it than others.

(2231 BU) Several volcanic peaks in the part of the *Nòlan Oblé* to the west of the Dondré-Halo Pass erupt and spew ash over much of northern Mähag. The event is thought to be connected with the actions of the Third Watcher against the Dweller Under the Crimson-Topped Mountain (?).

(2199 BU) The Battle of Mys Drùmya: Javvré forces under Kar-Eòforn VIII, Protector of the West, defeat the *L'aqu-àlu* and *Hnàhhu* of western Arbasàyanæ in an engagement that prevents barbarianism from overrunning all of Javertien. Kar-Eòforn is carried off the field of battle dead, but later (2175 BU) he is seen in the Dondré-Halo Pass in mortal combat with the Dragon *Ssiarah*; some take this as proof of his status as the ninth of the Watchers (?), but others maintain that it is merely the result of the application of certain powerful incantations of the Brotherhood of the *Fàanel-Féléodji* to him prior to the joining of combat.

(2198 BU) The Arlingan autocracy is overthrown with the help of the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens. The move is watched with apprehension in Ascòrcan, but there is little that city-state can do to prevent it.

(2196 BU) A series of violent earthquakes shake the extreme eastern *Nòlan Oblé*, causing serious damage to southern East Roctien. Some time after this, several settlements to the north and south of the eastern *Nòlan Oblé* are attacked and badly damaged by one or more huge Demons freed by the earthquake; for about the next five years these creatures fight each other in the lands of the Wàsch, causing much devastation. After about 2165 BU these mighty creatures are not heard of, but what happened to them is lost to history.

(2189 BU) The Battle of Tsré: An attempt by the forces of the city-state of Khu'Ram (modern Càth-Sin) to occupy certain lightly populated areas west of the River of the Sentinel is bloodily repulsed by Ascorcànian forces under Chemrùshedab II. The outcome of this engagement, in which the Ascorcànian army is outnumbered three to one (the main body of the Ascorcànian forces being tied up guarding against the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens in the east), wins Chemrùshedab the reputation of one of the greatest military tacticians of his nation's early history.

(2177 BU) An *é'esh*-stone whose message deals with how a deity removed from sapient knowledge before the coming of the Ancient Mahàgi Empire is to reappear, is unearthed from the Labyrinth of Meph-El. Shortly after the stone arrives in Ascòrcan, the city is enveloped in a strange, dense fog, during which the relic mysteriously disappears. A legend later to become popular explains this as the "two great servitors of cold Yog-Ròthe and blood-encaked Rssa-Urutàngk, come to recover the key to the Prison of the Fearsome One of the Endless Labyrinth" (?). According to this legend, the *é'esh*-stone has now found its way back to Meph-El, and resides somewhere in the lower reaches of the Labyrinth's dark passages.

(c. 2166 BU) Early versions of the crossbow are used in the Arrènian Plains in skirmishes between Arlinga and pirates from Nàsryu. Although the newly-invented weapon quickly becomes popular in most of the areas north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, its use remains rare south of the mountains due to the availability of the superior Mahàgi longbow.

(2158 BU) The Upper Karathé overflows its banks, flooding much of Vòina and the Conjunction Lands.

(2157 BU) The leaders of the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens extend the franchise to townsmen of the lower classes.

(c. 2150 BU) The Tower of the Yellow Eye is built on a mountain peak in the centre of the Isle of Nàsryu. Its owner and inhabitants are unknown, but the Tower remains in fairly good repair during most of the rest of the Third Age. It is avoided by the pirates and barbarians who make the island their home.





(2144 BU) The city-state Khré-Emlu in eastern west Roctien begins to pave the East Way. This project, accomplished with the brutal exploitation of many conscript slaves and serfs, earns Khré-Emlu the sobriquet "Builder of Ways Paved With Men's Bones".

(c. 2140 BU) The psychedelic qualities of the drug *Unchga-lé* are discovered in northern Ardtien. The drug, synthesised from a berry which grows only on the coast of the great northern sea, is soon established as one of the main commercial exports of the Arrénian Plains.

(2130 BU) The Colosseum at Smt-Amtigüé in Javertien is completed. It soon becomes famed as a staging area for gladiatorial combats and attracts the participation of many barbarian warriors whose tribes inhabit the Hôiat Forest.

(c. 2117 BU) An evil force begins to find its way into the russet sands of the Depression of Red Teardrops in East Roctien. This is not recognised for many years after the event, however.

(2106 BU) Birth of Slàhk-Foh XX ("the Titanic"), *L'aqu-àlu* King of western Arbasàyanae, said to have stood eleven and one-half metres tall during his prime.

(2100 BU) Erkarn XVI, Protector of the West, is crippled by a partially-successful assassination attempt carried out by the *Ssôchar-al-Alàmanarck* allegedly on the orders of Clan Tola'O, whose leader is a rival for the post of Protector. The move causes a schism amongst the semi-independent fiefs of Javertien, as the west's city-states align themselves with Tola'O or Erkarn's own Clan Smtà-Athéa.

(c. 2100 BU) An unknown group of master artificers (possibly, but not necessarily, the *Hlôn* of the *Nôlan Oblé*) creates the Great Blade *Nhondûuuro* ("Black Gloombringer") for the Temple of Rssa-Urutângk, which at about the same time creates the Society of the Black Mace (a religious fighting order set up to combat the power of the *Padrulâilh*).

(2094 BU) The Second Battle of the Ghènschan Bridge: Ascòrcanian forces under Chemrùshedab-Urluh XI repulse a poorly-organised raid by the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens into the eastern half of the Conjunction Lands.

(2089-2063 BU) **The First Javvré Civil War:** Tensions within the highly polarised fief structure of the civilised parts of Javertien explode in a bloody internecine conflict lasting some twenty-six years.

The war, which devastates much of eastern Javertien and sends many refugees streaming eastward into the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens, sees the forces allied to Clan Tola'O and to Smta-Athéa clash at the Battles of the Sholian Canal, Nnània, the Kabvâian Hills and the East Bank of the Aférar River. In the main, these clashes prove inconclusive, but the drain in manpower they inflict affects the more lightly-populated clans allied to Tola'O more seriously than those allied to Smta-Athéa.

In 2073 BU, the forces of Smta-Athéa are badly beaten at the Battle of Ivador, but the victory turns out to be a Pyrrhic one for Sarrdû-kur-Oszor (the head of Clan Tola'O) whose army is forced to double-march to the east to head off an invasion from the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens.

In 2072 BU, after crushing the Mgòrian forces at the Battle of the Gyardian Marsh, the army of Tola'O marches west, pillaging as it goes until it reaches and besieges Smt-Amtigüé. The city holds out for nine months, but collapses in 2071 BU after the failure of a Smta-Athéan relief force to break the siege. During the sack of Smt-Amtigüé, the city is burnt to the ground and sees every second one of its male citizens above the age of ten put to the sword on the express orders of Sarrdû.

Demoralised by the loss of their capital city, the clans allied to Smta-Athéa sue for peace one by one, although the war is not officially declared over until the final surrender of Erkarn XVII of Smta-Athéa after his defeat in the Battle of the Hylpian Plain in 2063 BU.

As a result of the First Javvré Civil War, Sarrdû takes the title of Protector of the West, but his reign proves a short one as he dies of the Spotted Death in 2060 BU and is incapable of consolidating power into his own offices and away from those of other Javvré noble clans.

(2085 BU) The Battle of the Brown Mountain: An army allied to the Temple of H'ongg-hélé in southern East Roctien defeats a force of *L'aqu-àlu* and *Nhàhhu* barbarians. The outcome of the battle results in the spreading of the power of the Temple of the Black Cudgel over much of East Roctien.

(c. 2083 BU) A group of master artificers, almost certainly the *Hlôn* of the *Nôlan Oblé*, fashions the Great Blade *Nhônzenai* ("Dark Crystal") for the Temple of Rssa-Urutângk.

(2081 BU) The city of Aêrus in northeastern West Roctien is settled by expatriates from Asòrus and Khré-Ehlu. As the terminus of the paved part of the East Way, Aêrus prospers economically, and it soon becomes a centre of trade with the fishing villages which populate the northern seacoast of West Roctien.

(c. 2072 BU) The Dragon *Tar-Ancléôe* makes its first appearance in the Dondré-Halo Pass, terrorising traffic traversing the *Nôlan Oblé* and reducing communications between north and south to a trickle. The fearsome creature continues its depredations until 2034 BU, when it is slain by the *Sagòst* after attempting to ravage *Sithalâsso*. According to legend, its hoard included *Côs Rhòdlu* ("Pendant of Granite") and this artifact was recovered by its vanquishers.

(c. 2066 BU) The Great Blade *Oiràmh* ("Cleave of Protections") is forged by an unknown group of master artificers. It is thought, though not proven, that the Blade is one of the few never created by the *Hlôn*.

(2067 BU) On the edict of Chemrùshedab-Urluh XIV, the Ascòrcanian Empire adopts as official the *Bjr'Bhéan* ("Star-Set") calendar. The revised calendar, having eight months of sixty-three days each, proves highly popular north of the *Nôlan Oblé* and within the next seven hundred years becomes almost universally accepted in Roctien, Ardtien and Javertien.

Its popularity south of the mountains is less widespread, with most of the civilisations to the south preferring to continue with the *Bjr-Epréhul* ("Servant of the Stars of Destiny") calendar established by the Temple of Ya-Epré during the Second Age. The new calendar is to remain in large-scale use in the northern regions until the downfall of the Ardae Empire (1013 BU), when it is replaced by a variety of locally designed imitations.

(2055 BU) An attempted uprising by the *Mh-Lklâa* in Ascòrcan is put down with brutal harshness by Chemrùshedab-Urluh XIV. The severe response to the insurrection leads to the breakoff of diplomatic relations between Ascòrcan and the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens. In the same year, membership in the *Mh-Lklâa* is outlawed by the *Padrulâilh* in Arconia, and public worship of the *Khûl-Nolgûn* is declared a capital crime.

(2044 BU) The famous Javvré playwright Eléthia-vun-Salkôh composes her masterwork *Amméa Chel-Javvréhuman Mita Era Lathila-Dhrûva* ("A Tale of the Sad War Amongst the Families of Javertien"), one of the first literary works of note to be written in the Old Javvré script.

(2040 BU) An artificially engineered food shortage brought about by renegade factions of the *Vhâl-V'ávna* causes much hardship in Ontars and Khâpitas. The event further strains relations between the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens and Ascòrcan, whose forces are widely but incorrectly assumed in the affected areas of having been behind the plot. Those actually responsible are thought to have secretly been tortured to death by the guild police of the *Vhâl-V'ávna* somewhere around 2038 BU.

(c. 2036 BU) *Ròaon* ("Holder of the Symbol of Demise") (?) establishes him/himself as the ruler of the nearly-deserted (by living beings, at least) Depression of Red Teardrops in East Roctien. In so doing, he is forced to face and defeat the locally powerful Temple of H'ongg-Hélé; this he accomplishes readily with the aid of That Which Brings Death From the Snows (?). *Ròaon's* victory goes almost unnoted in the rest of the civilised world.

(2036 BU) A disastrous earthquake, one of the most powerful and destructive in recorded history apart from those encountered during the Fourth Cataclysm, strikes the northern subcontinent as far west as the terminus of the *Aiagôné Oblé* and as far east as the *Jmòjae Oblé*. The tremors kill thousands and inflict severe damage to virtually every city within the affected area; particularly hard hit is central west Roctien which is near the epicentre of the disturbance. Although heavy damage is inflicted on both Empires, the quake proves in the long run more of a handicap to Ascòrcan than to the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens, as the former's smaller population base is strained to the limit in paying for repairs. This is, however, at first partly offset by the death of the entire Mgòrian Senate, caught in session at the height of the upheavals and crushed beneath the collapsing Green Palace (its traditional meeting place in the centre of the city of Ontars).

(c. 2033 BU) The Great Blade *Fvùvòron* ("Icicle of Silver") is crafted by the *Hlôn* of the *Nôlan Oblé*, allegedly for the Temple of Tiryé-Habéla. This is uncertain, since it does not match the Aspect taken by this Goddess during the Third Age.

(2017 BU) Chemrùshedab-Urluh XVI ("Overthrower of the Black") of Ascòrcan outlaws the Temple of Rssa-Urutângk and several other Temples of the *Khûl-Nolgûn*, substituting in their place the worship of Tiryé-Habéla as the official religion of the Empire. The move prompts an immediate rebellion which is crushed with the customary severity, the Emperor having previously co-opted the support of the army by promises of an attack on the independent kingdoms of west Roctien.





Phalanx of Imperial infantry (Superior-grade Legion) as at the Battle of Asòrus

After this point, the Temples of the *Khùl-Nolgùn* go "underground" in Ascòrcan, although their influence continues to be great.

(2000-1995 BU) The War of the Western Bank: Under severe pressure from the armed forces and well past the prime of his life, Chemrùshedab-Urlùh XVI launches a campaign of military aggression in west Roctien aimed at gaining control of the area for Ascòrcan. While initially successful, the plan ultimately turns into a disastrous failure as the natives refuse to stage conventional battles and bleed Chemrùshedab's army of occupation white through guerilla warfare. The Ascòrcanian army, resorting more and more to the use of terror to control the conquered territories (at the height of the campaign, extending over most of the populated lands to the west and south of the meetingplace of the River of the Sentinel and the River Nèva), eventually take effective control over the Empire.

In 1999 BU, members of a disgruntled army faction murder the Emperor and his entire family at a banquet. The subsequent ruler, Uhltekib I, is little more than a puppet of the armed forces, but after his assassination by the *Ssòchar-al-Alàmanarck* in 1996 BU (thought by modern scholars to have been partially funded by the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens) while touring the city of Vài-Pas, even the most diehard cliques in the military establishment become convinced that the occupation is not worth the cost.

The Ascòrcanian forces thus pull out of their erstwhile possessions in 1995 BU. Their departure is widely regarded as the beginning of the downfall of Ascòrcan as a major power and it gives much encouragement to the designs of the *Mh-Lklàa* in the vacated areas.

(c. 2000 BU) An *éësh*-stone apparently containing a message pertaining to the locations of several "lost" Pendants (of these, it is thought that three have been discovered in later times) is washed up (?) on the shores of the Strait of Fysa in modern Roctien after a storm. The stone is said to have passed through Aèrus, and then much later (c. 900 BU) to have been formed into what is now the foundation of the Tower of the Golden Falcon in modern Ouut-Nèwar. Whether it still resides there is unknown, but an account of its finding and early travels is available at the Guild of the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* in Aèrus.

(1996 BU) An attempted *coup* by the *Padrulàilh* in the Empire of Mgòrian Citizens is foiled at the last moment, allegedly with the aid of certain Temples of the *Khùl-Mhazàshii*. The event leads to the suppression of the Temples of Ro'sènnpàdr and Nanyè in the Empire and to a purge of the army of *Padrulàilhe* fellow travellers.

(1460 BU) Aillé III of Roctien is slain in the Issànian Forest by the Dragon *Nssùmah*. He is succeeded by his half-cousin Aillé IV, a dissolute lover of high living thought to have secretly been a follower of the Temple of the Rotted One.

4.5.2. Recent History of the Rocto-Ardæ Empire

The Referee can find below a synopsis of recent events in the Empire of the Golden Falcon, the political state which now rules Roctien. Roctien's past history, of course, goes much further back than the ascent of Clan Gav'Osché, but the events prior to the "Fourth Civil War" are *For Future Release* and will be detailed in a future supplement to *Shakhàn*.

4.5.2.1. The Fourth Civil War (183-101)

As a result of the unfortunate death of Nlàzur XI, the elders of Clan Convra publicly accused both the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr and the leaders of the three other most powerful clans of having deliberately administered a lethal dose of *Adàja* to the late Emperor.

The accusation was hotly rejected and was followed, in late Phèrn-Rôya of the same year, by the fracturing of the Imperial army and the declaration of the Fourth Civil War. Although this internecine warfare placed Roctien in a position of almost total vulnerability to an attack by the Shadowed Empire, for reasons that are still being debated none ever came; consequently the Fourth Civil War was to drag on, with intermittent truces as the clans jockeyed for position, for over eighty long years until the year 101 BU.

4.5.2.2. The Gav'Osché Dynasty (101 BU - 108 AU)

In 101 BU, Clan Gav'Osché, an ancient family claiming descent both from Dégas III and the early Temples of Ro'sènnpàdr and Tiryé-Hàbela via the Codex of Noble Houses, ascended to the Throne of the Falcon after the chaos of the Fourth Civil War. Although this clan had never previously controlled the throne, it had frequently maintained members within the highest circles of power, and had the decided advantage of not being tainted with the misdeeds of previous Emperors or Empresses. Under other circumstances, the other great families would probably have violently protested this deviation from rulership tradition; unfortunately, few of the other clans were in much of a position to do so, as almost all their qualified candidates had been killed or incapacitated in the Civil War.

With the possible exception of the latest Empress, Gàlài III, all of the recent rulers Clan Gav'Osché has given the Imperium have proved wise and capable, albeit with considerably different personal characteristics.

4.5.2.3. Gàlàadr I (101-91) "The Good Rod"

An Emperor whose ascension is considered to have ushered in the "modern" era of Rocto-Ardæ history, Gàlàadr, already past his prime upon coming to power, unfortunately ruled only ten years before his death of the *Chròdr-na-Ondra* in late 91 BU.

During his reign the Imperium was quiet, having exhausted itself of fighting in the long Fourth Civil War. Although by now the Shadowed Empire was emerging from its self-imposed isolation and a few skirmishes were fought between the Army of the Falcon and the Army of Shadows, East Roctien did not yet have either the wherewithal or the inclination to launch a major offensive.

Gàlàadr's actions were largely confined to restoration of the economy after the war, a task of which he accomplished much during his short tenure. By about 92 BU the Empire, with the notable exception of the southeastern fiefs, was again mostly prosperous.

An unusual feature of the reign of this Emperor and of his successor Gàlàadr II, is the number of rumours and legends of the doings of the Watchers, "wizards", "demons" and other similar beings that arose in the roughly 75 years after about 100 BU. Most of these stories are unverifiable because they are set south of the *Nòlan Oblé*, and several legends are similar to tales of the Second Age. It certainly does seem, however, that during this period supernatural events of some kind were much more common than they had been for many years before.

4.5.2.4. Gàlàadr II (91-70) "Adventurer"

An intelligent and resourceful Emperor who proved a dangerous foe to his many rivals, Gàlàadr II was the second in the line of competent rulers placed on the Throne of the Falcon by Clan Gav'Osché. A half-brother of Gàlàadr I, he was a relatively young 40 years of age when the former Emperor died in 91 BU.





Little is known about Galàadr's early life; it is said that he was a proficient user of both religious and non-religious "magic" (?), but later renounced membership in the *Antratscheldor-haii*, if he had in fact ever belonged to the Brotherhoods of the Hidden Arts. As a young man he is reported to have had many adventures, in particular two trips to *Ulschëshosh*, where he lived for a time in one of the hardy barbarian tribes of the *Thith Oblé* that form the northern border of the Shadowed Empire. After this, he is thought to have carried out several dangerous missions for the Imperial secret police, including a few expeditions to the Underworld.

Galàadr's first major challenge upon coming to power was a large-scale attack launched by the Shadowed Empire in 89 BU. This offensive, unusual in that it was opened by an amphibious assault against Fiefs Rûsa, Riha and Pàra-Rusa, caused a number of bloody battles in northeastern Roctien, but was stopped at the Siege of Aerus in 87 BU. The East Roctiennae navy, meanwhile, was largely destroyed by the actions of the brilliant Imperial Admiral Khràinos-Tsò-Myr-Rihi and Galàadr himself, at the Battle of the Red Iceberg later in the same year. After this point, the war on the eastern front degenerated into its familiar pattern of small-scale battles and hit-and-run attacks.

Galàadr's problems were not over, however; the *Padrulàilh*, with the tacit support of the Temples of both Ro'sènnpàdr and Nanyë, sensed a vacuum of power in Oûut-Nèwar and attempted a *coup* on the same day (50 Jàx) as the Battle of the Red Iceberg. Conditions were confused in the capital for about two weeks after this treachery, but just as the *Padrulàilh* was about to consolidate its control over the army and the government, Galàadr and his Guards Cavalry Corps suddenly appeared and crashed the gates. (How the Emperor was able to show up at exactly the wrong time for the *Padrulàilh* has never been explained. It has been suggested that Galàadr used some of his old magical abilities to perform this miraculous appearance, but it seems just as likely that the conspirators thought his army was still tied up against the East Roctiennae hundreds of kilometers away, so they did not take the precautions they otherwise would have.)

Upon seeing the Emperor, most of the Legions that had supported the *coup* again pledged their loyalty to Galàadr and the uprising dissipated, with most of its leaders riding in haste for sanctuary in western Javertien.

From this point until the end of his reign in 70 BU, Galàadr was content to methodically purge the army of dissident elements and to curtail the power of the Temples. He had considerable success in both these endeavours, although because of the threat from East Roctien and because some of his favorite generals were followers of this deity, he was not able to completely eliminate the political and secular influence of the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr in the army and society.

It was during this period that Roctien's current orientation in favour of the *Khùl-Mhazàshii* over the *Khùl-Tlassù* was largely formed. Of the Temples of the *Khùl-Tlassù* other than that of *Vèran* Ro'sènnpàdr, few except that of *Virya* Fèttian-lthé had much real power, and the followers of the Gentle *Virya* of Harvests were disinclined to intervene much in the affairs of state. The Temple of great Tiryé-Hàbela, conversely, gained strength especially in the army, and the Temples of avaricious Ba'altshavùu, lewd Kikiri and watery Hadda-Latonn all also became more popular throughout the Imperium.

Galàadr is said to have died in the winter of 70 BU of old wounds, but it now seems that he was instead the victim of a curse of eternal sleep inflicted by unknown enemies; his animate but comatose body was encased in a specially sealed tomb deep underneath Oûut-Nèwar, where it still sleeps in an ageless trance today. An interesting side-note to this is that even though the Shadowed Empire controlled Oûut-Nèwar from about 55 to 75 AU, it either made no attempt to disturb Galàadr's tomb, or was unable to do so. Considering the supernatural powers available to the Empire of Shadows, if the latter is the case Galàadr's tomb must be protected by mighty enchantments or guardians indeed.

4.5.2.5. Galàadr III (70-15) "Mighty Father of the Realm"

A stout, jovial figure famous for his love of food and revelry, this Emperor ruled successfully for many long years. He is also remembered for a turbulent personal life, having married and divorced five times during his reign; by the time of his death, the Imperial Court at Oûut-Nèwar counted among it three of Galàadr's surviving wives (he had one executed on suspicion, apparently justified, of her having been planning to poison him on behalf of Clan Kèpsha) and seventeen acknowledged children. (Polygamy has been legal in Roctien throughout its history, but it is frowned upon by some religions and is uncommon in the upper classes: most Emperors and Empresses have had only one "official" consort.)

During Galàadr's time in power, the upper ranks of the Imperial bureaucracy were staffed exclusively with ministers loyal to Clan Gav'Osché, but the lower ranks of the civil service were run almost completely on the "merit system" and there were few administrative problems. Economically, the Imperium sometimes groaned under the weight of the taxes that Galàadr's efficient tax-collectors gathered with great diligence, but Roctien was prosperous and could generally afford what was assessed of it.

The Imperial army was allocated a modest expansion program to meet the threat of the Shadowed Empire, but there was little real warfare other than the Battle of the Eastern Vâyagh in the autumn of 50 BU, in which the Imperial XVIIIrd Army repelled an East Roctiennae surprise attack on Mâsilov with heavy casualties.

Although no stranger to orgies and other pleasures of his office, Galàadr was not a fool or wastrel and he had a keen talent for both politics and administration. He was also quite willing to use both the army and the *Talons of the Falcon*, as the Rocto-Ardæ secret police were known, to stamp out dissent and rebellion, but fortunately this was not needed frequently. One exception was the aftermath of the execution of his second wife Lady Taràsha-Myr-Tsò-Kepshira for treason in 64 BU; some three quarters of the noble court of Fief Kèp-Kèp were either imprisoned, banished or executed, allegedly for complicity in the plot.

Despite such occasional displays of harshness to rivals, the common folk of the Empire regarded Galàadr with considerable respect and affection, since most of his actions towards the lower classes, even those in the remote parts of the Imperium, were openhanded and indulgent. His death of complications of obesity and old age in early 15 BU was therefore met with much sadness in all of Roctien.

4.5.2.6. Galàadr IV (15-1) "Whose Gaze Chastens"

Upon the death of Galàadr III there transpired a four-month period of instability, as the various political and religious factions in Oûut-Nèwar identified with the former Emperor's three living wives maneuvered for power. The faction associated with Galàadr III's second wife, Lady Chaitàla of Thélésban, and, importantly, with some of the religions of the *Khùl-Mhazàshii*, finally gained the upper hand in Uhrack of 15 BU, and proclaimed the eldest of her six children, Lord Melàrchko, as Emperor Galàadr IV.

It is said that Melàrchko may not in fact have been Galàadr III's real offspring—Lady Chaitàla is thought to have had several lovers during her marriage to the former Emperor, although, if this is true, Chaitàla wisely kept the names and details a closely guarded secret.

In many ways Galàadr IV was almost the exact opposite of his putative father. A spare, almost humorless figure with a dislike of public ceremony and a strong ascetic streak, he rarely appeared in public, and for much of his reign rumours circulated that the Emperor was either ill or uninterested in managing the government. This was untrue; while Galàadr certainly did spend much of his time on personal tasks that have not yet been revealed, he was, in fact, preoccupied with a careful balancing act in rewarding the many other offspring of Galàadr III with posts in the bureaucracy and army. These moves did not endear him to the generals of the High Command Council, but there was little the army commanders could do about it. Since their defeat roughly 40 years earlier, the leaders of the Shadowed Empire had not made a major venture outside their borders, and thus the Army of the Falcon had little to do other than maintaining law and order within the Imperium.

Otherwise, his reign is remembered as having been considerably less enjoyable than was that of his predecessor, especially for the common folk, as the Emperor ended Galàadr III's practice of tax relief for the indigent and many of the former Emperor's publicly-funded festivals. The laws were applied fairly, however, and by around 3 BU Roctien's state coffers were fuller than at any time in recent memory.

Near the end of Galàadr IV's time in power, there are hints of increasing subversion of an "unearthly" (?) nature emanating from the Empire of Shadows, and in the fifteenth year of Galàadr's reign the Emperor and much of his personal staff secretly and suddenly left Oûut-Nèwar for a "meeting of the great leaders of all the world to discuss the menace", supposedly held somewhere in or south of the central *Nòlan Oblé*. He appears not to have returned from this trip, although accounts differ as to exactly what fate befell him and his entourage. One story tells of him having abdicated in favour of the latter Galàadr V at this meeting; whether or not this is true, in Jàx of 1 BU Clan Gav'Osché declared him lost and announced his replacement by a high noble from one of clan Gav'Osché's secondary branches, who took the name Galàadr V.

4.5.2.7. Galàadr V (1 BU - 1 AU) "Watcher-Friend"

A mysterious figure despite the relative recency of his reign, this Emperor was apparently a child of Galàadr III's third wife Sataisha and was a priest or user of the Hidden Arts by vocation. The Edict of Arcane Prohibition, while seemingly applicable here, was made moot by the brevity of Galàadr's time in power.





A tall, gaunt man already well past middle age with a flowing silver beard, Galàadr V was only seen in public twice prior to the Year of the Unification, during his reign from Jàx of 1 BU to Khèpp of 1 AU.

In Bègj of the Year of Unification (0 BU/AU), he traveled south of the *Nòlan Oblé* to Arconia, close by which the Grand Council of the Watchers allegedly took place. He was not seen again in Roctien, although control of the Throne of the Falcon was not officially ceded to his cousin Gàlmaar-Myr-Tsò-Gav'Osché until a year later. Clan Gav'Osché tried to keep his disappearance a secret from the population, and did so for about two months, after which rumours of a vacuum in the seat of power began to circulate.

Few records exist of Galàadr's actions or policies while he was Emperor. Either little was written down, which would be quite unusual considering that extensive histories have been kept for other recent Emperors, or someone or something has deliberately attempted to obscure them in Galàadr's case.

4.5.2.8. Galàadr VI (1-20 AU) "The Weasel"

The former Gàlmaar-Myr-Tsò-Gav'Osché and one of the youngest offspring of the latter Galàadr III's first wife, Lady Kasàida of Cath-Sin, this Emperor took the throne in early 1 AU after the disappearance of Galàadr V a year earlier. Gàlmaar's ascension took place in a climate of increasing tension, as Clan Gav'Osché began to fear a move on the part of one or more of the other titled clans to advance a candidate for Emperor. Short, lumpish and with an unusually high-pitched voice, Galàadr was an unimpressive physical figure in his late forties upon coming to the throne. He was, however, highly intelligent, and in particular was very good at political intrigue, with a ruthless streak where his own interests and those of Clan Gav'Osché were concerned.

These skills proved useful at defusing a major crisis that occurred very early in his reign, as the Imperium's internal discipline had begun to dissipate during the interregnum after Galàadr V's final trip. Galàadr had scarcely held power for a full year, when there was a sudden mass uprising of the urban lower classes called the "Society of the Sharpened Stick", ostensibly led by one Sùkhros-Nhàkra-Nhàloh-Haiian, the self-styled "Piper of the Poor". The rebellion was similar in some ways to the "Cult of the Prophet" that had been the undoing of Benhana XXV some seven hundred years earlier, except that it was secular, rather than sectarian, in nature, and that it was much more effectively handled.

Sùkhros, a demagogue with a near-hypnotic ability to arouse crowds, was of unclear parentage, having arrived in Roctien in the port of Pusnis some five years prior to Galàadr's ascension. Some histories tell of him having been a renegade member of the *Antratschêldor-haii*, others claim he was a defrocked priest, while the most credible have him as the leader of an espionage ring funded by the Shadowed Empire. Whatever the truth to his early history, by 2 AU he had organized a large-scale underground movement devoted to the overthrow of the noble classes, in favour of what he termed "the loving tyranny of the simple folk".

What Sùkhros may have meant by this slogan is still the subject of debate, but based on his later actions, he most likely simply meant to install himself as dictator of the Imperium. While Sùkhros' own charismatic presence was vital to the movement's control over its adherents, there are hints that "something else" was in fact funding and guiding the Society's actions. Conspiracy theories regarding this persist to the present day; some of the most popular candidates are the *Mh-Lklàa*, the *Vhàl-Vàvna* or one of the many underground religious cults found in the central Imperium. The truth of this is impossible to determine, but notably, during the crisis Galàadr was, at one point or another, able to gain the assistance of both the *Mh-Lklàa* and the *Vhàl-Vàvna* against the Society. It certainly seems unlikely that these groups would knowingly aid in the elimination of a movement which they had started or supported.

In early Otchéyàyn of 2 AU, a series of destructive riots, theoretically caused by the execution of a beggar convicted of insulting the *Wéznú* of Fief Convràssa (but, in all likelihood, carefully planned in advance), broke out in Ruhbats'Aland, Cónversion, Pùsnis, Zeikàz, Arthega and Ssàta. Notably, it had little following further east than the western border of Fief Dumòrok. Initially, the army tried to put down the uprising, but the scale of the revolt defied all attempts to suppress it by conventional means. On Galàadr's orders, the army then withdrew from the affected cities, in which chaos and a total breakdown of law and order reigned for approximately the next two months.

In S-Tsèrack of 2 AU, the Emperor offered to meet Sùkhros-Nhàkra-Nhàloh-Haiian in a neutral location, specifically on a barge anchored in the midst of the lower River of the Sentinel, to discuss the situation. In Oûut-Nèwar, itself already showing signs of an incipient revolt, the noble classes and also Clan Gav'Osché were shocked at this apparent pliability, but in fact, all was going according to a plan Galàadr had decided upon.

Galàadr's problem was that he needed to eliminate the "Piper of the Poor", but this had to be done in a way that would divide, rather than inflame, Sùkhros' followers. Shortly after the initial rebellion, the Emperor had determined, via contacts established by the Imperial secret police, that both the *Mh-Lklàa* and the *Vhàl-Vàvna* were privately disturbed by the success of the Society of the Sharpened Stick. This was for practical, rather than doctrinal reasons. The two former groups might have been happy to see problems being caused for the upper classes, but they were even more unhappy by these difficulties having been caused by a movement from their own ranks, over which they had little, if any, control.

To prove his good faith, Galàadr allowed an elder of rival Clan Convra to captain the boat carrying Sùkhros out to the barge, but shortly after reaching mid-stream, a tragic "accident" occurred as the "Piper's" boat suddenly capsized and sank; Sùkhros' body was never found, a testament to the efficiency of the assassins controlled by the *Mh-Lklàa* and *Vhàl-Vàvna*. Under other circumstances, such treachery would undoubtedly have enraged the rebellion's followers and spread the unrest yet further. Now, however, the second phase of the Emperor's plan came into effect. Galàadr, professing disgust at the murder, staged a highly public series of show trials "proving" the culpability of Clan Convra in the affair, while the *Mh-Lklàa* staged several counter-uprisings in the cities controlled by the Society of the Sharpened Stick. These actions not only confused and divided the loyalties of the now-decapitated Society's followers, but also allowed Galàadr to handily rid himself of many senior members of his most powerful rival clan. Finally, in late 2 AU, by prior arrangement, the *Mh-Lklàa* ended its rebellions, urging the urban poor to "cease and regroup, that our children may one day live out our dreams".

One by one, the rebellious cities surrendered, but the Imperial army, acting on strict orders from the Emperor, did not engage in mass reprisals (except, notably, in Ssata, which was retaken by the Illrd Corps dominated by the *Padrulàilh*: as punishment, the Illrd Corps was exiled to border duty in Fief Thelesdura until the great war some twenty-seven years later). This did not mean that Galàadr took the remaining threat lightly, as over the next five years, he had the *Talons of the Falcon* assassinate or kidnap and imprison over thirty of the Society's second-tier leaders—taking care, of course, not to harm anyone whose safety was requested by the *Mh-Lklàa*.

By the middle of the next year, central Roctien had almost reverted to complete stability. The uprising's most long-lasting effect was that from this point to the end of his reign, Galàadr had to allow the *Mh-Lklàa* and *Vhàl-Vàvna* almost complete immunity from the oppression they had come to expect from the Imperial police forces, although they wisely did not test this tolerance too far.

The next fifteen years of Galàadr VI's reign were outwardly peaceful and quiet, as the Emperor methodically played the noble families of Oûut-Nèwar off against one another, all the while increasing Clan Gav'Osché's control over the secret police and army. His skills at economic management were a poor second to his political abilities, a fact that became evident in the drought of 11-12 AU. However, Galàadr had the luxury of a large financial surplus left by his two immediate predecessors, and he used this when needed to purchase grain for the most badly affected regions. Other than for a border incident with Prin'Ql in 9 AU and several campaigns conducted against bandits in the Pass of Dondré Halo around 14 AU, there was little military activity during Galàadr's time on the throne, as the Shadowed Empire remained in seclusion. Near the end of the second decade AU, however, rumours started to circulate of ominous plans being made east of the *Jmòjae Oblé*. Preoccupied as he was with internal security, there was little the Emperor chose to do about this, although he kept Roctien's eastern defenses strong—too strong, perhaps, as later historians have criticized his tactic of positioning too many of the Imperium's best units far to the east, where they were vulnerable to being outflanked or overrun.

Despite Galàadr's low personal attractiveness, he was never short of consorts (both "legal" and otherwise), and upon his death of the *Chròdr-na-Ondra*, to which the males of Clan Gav'Osché seem to be vulnerable, in late 20 AU he left behind two wives and eight legitimate children. One of these, Lord Enshènetu, was to ascend to the throne and become one of the most famous of modern Roctien's leaders.

4.5.2.9. Galàadr -Ban-A ta (Galàadr VII) (20-49) "King of Mighty Times"

Remembered primarily as a great military leader whose fortunes did not leave much time for attention to domestic affairs, this Emperor, the first son of Galàadr VI, ascended the Throne of the Falcon in 20 AU upon the death of his father. A short but massively-built man with penetrating blue eyes, he spent most of his youth as a foot-soldier in the Imperial army; by his twentieth birthday, he had already won fame for bravery fighting bandits in the central *Nòlan Oblé*.





In the summer of 28 AU the central Empire suffered a major crop failure causing much discontent. (It has since been suggested that the failure may, in fact, have been the result of a curse inflicted by the priests of sinister Baab-B'bôgg; whatever the cause, it virtually wiped out grain production to the east of the River of the Sentinel.) Galàadr-Ban-Ata, having inherited his father's disinterest in economics, did what he could to lessen the impact of this natural disaster by expending the remnants of the Imperium's reserve coinage, but by this time so little remained that he was able to only partially mitigate the suffering of the peasantry. This problem, serious though it seemed, was of minor importance compared to what was next to come.

Having left orders not to be disturbed from the vacation he was taking at the time in the *Irvine Oblé*, Galàadr was not promptly warned of large troop movements in East Roctien. These were the portent of (29th Bègg 29 AU) the Second War of Black and White Scythes (29-35 AU), started by a massive East Roctiennae attack on the Imperial army's positions in the west *Jmôjae Oblé*. The Imperial forces, most of which were surprised in static positions and which were instantly isolated from the command structure, fell back in disarray and lost most of these regions, excepting Fief Gava-Vsboa, which fortunately held as an island of the Imperium in the sea of the Empire of Shadows.

By Vhùnuhrack of the same year, the Dark forces had thrown the Imperial army back to south of the river Omvra'amion in the north, and past Morok Fief in the east. In 30 AU, Roctien suffered serious defeats in the battles of South Kne'e (13 Bègg) and Za-Hyla (45 Khèpp). In S-Tsèrack, the treachery of Lord Tuto-Tsò-Myr Goshal was revealed, as that *Wézu* convinced his ancestral homelands of Fiefs Vâyagh, Rom, Snios and Kne'e to join the enemy. In the Battle of the Gates of Thélésban (20-25 of Jàx 33 AU), Galàadr-Ban-Ata himself was badly wounded and was left with a noticeable limp whenever he walked.

Apart from Galàadr's own abilities, it was another natural disaster that was to turn the tide of the war in Roctien's favour. The Great Plague of the *Daabàtha-Rqnùha* struck most of Roctien and East Roctien from Otchéyàyn to Phèrn-Rôya of 34 AU, causing turmoil in East Roctien that weakened its ability to pursue the war. Galàadr-Ban-Ata ordered an attack in early 35 AU, and at first encountered heavy resistance but triumphed in the Battle of Eastern Ekra on the 40th of Khèpp 35 AU. From Nahadjarone to Lhòrentayn of 35 AU, Galàadr-Ban-Ata's armies marched through and pillaged the western parts of East Roctien. Galàadr appointed his nephew and favorite heir, Galàadr-Ben, as regent of the new eastern possessions. This unfortunate viceroys was later (11 Otchéyàyn 37 AU) found dead in bed, evidently poisoned by his local High Chancellor, one Gohten-Myr-Tsò-Gaufelh, who disappeared soon afterwards. Many stories have subsequently appeared as to how this occurred [one even suggests that "Gohten" was the dread *Vòrin Roaon* in disguise(!)], but the loss greatly saddened Galàadr and he became a virtual recluse for the next ten years.

In late 48 AU, Roctien was treacherously attacked by the Kingdom of Khàpitasi. Galàadr reacted forcefully to this threat and shattered the best of the Khapitasi army in the Battle of the Green River Trail (44 Phèrn-Rôya 49 AU), but the price was dear as the Emperor himself was fatally wounded. His passing brought to the throne one of the greatest of Roctien's rulers (see below).

4.5.2.10. Gàina I (49-88) "The Glorious"

The first daughter of Galàadr-Ban-Ata, Gaiina I is fondly remembered as one of the Imperium's most heroic and long-reigning leaders. Despite a lack of formal military and economic training, she was victorious in some of the most desperate wars ever experienced. A junior priestess devoted to a demigod of mighty Ro'sènnpàdr, she was renowned for her striking physical beauty—in particular, light reddish-brown and white hair, unusual for a human female of Roctien; emulating Gàina's appearance is fashionable in Oûut-Nèwar even today.

In spite of the Codification of Divine Separateness, Gàina was forced to assume the Throne in 49 AU at the age of 16 after the untimely death of her father in Phèrn-Rôya of that year. She was immediately forced to preside over an Imperium in crisis, as in 50 AU the Shadowed Empire, using, it is said, the aid of demons and other sinister supernatural allies, attacked and inflicted several disastrous defeats on the Imperial army. By 52 AU the Imperial capital had to be moved to Vòina as Roctien had lost all of the territory to the east of the Lower River of the Sentinel.

After the loss of Galàadr-Ban-Ata's two sons, Galàadr-Ban-Oah and Galàadr-Ban-Essah at the Battle of Ssa-Newir (19 Phèrn-Rôya 73 AU), there followed the Campaign of the Peril of the West (74-81 AU), in which the Imperial capital of Vòina itself was besieged from 30 Nahàdjaronyé to 49 Phèrn-Rôya 76 AU.

In the Battle of Glorious Revenge (49-50 Phèrn-Rôya 76 AU), the siege of Vòina was broken and the East Roctiennae army shattered, by a large relief force sent from Javertien. This was the result of Gaiina's earlier assistance to Protector Orh III of Javertien, who, with the help of the Temple of Ro'sènnpàdr, overthrew the usurper Dòm-Ra in the Javré Restoration (6 Vhùnuhrack/Rhine 73 AU). It is said that the relief force numbered among it six or more of the fabled Watchers, but this has never been decisively proven. For the first time in recent memory, Roctien's ability to use "magic" on the field of battle exceeded that of its eastern enemy. From 77 to 80 AU, the Imperial armies, their morale restored, retook Oûut-Nèwar and the western fiefs in the Clearing of the Sacred West campaign, followed by mostly successful battles in the eastern fiefs, culminating with the retaking of Kèprica after a seven-month siege in 81 AU.

Central Roctien had been laid waste by the war, and Gàina called a halt to the offensive in late 82 AU with the Shadowed Empire mostly, but not completely, driven out of west Roctien. From 83 to 88 AU she concentrated on rebuilding the Imperium's devastated cities and infrastructure, a task which she accomplished much of prior to her death. On another note, Gàina's reign is remembered for the appearance of great *Virya Fèttian-lthé Herself* in Ascòrcan City in Bègg of 86 BU; the spot on which the Goddess is said to have walked is now surrounded by a large temple to Her honour.

Gaiina I took ill and died on 1 Jàx 88 AU of an old and mysterious wound suffered in magical combat during the Battle of Glorious Revenge. Her passing was met with great grief among the citizenry, which had come to regard her almost as a deity. Gàina's body was laid to rest in a huge tomb in the mountains northeast of Vòina; however, perhaps due to the legends of her association with the Watchers, rumours persist that she has risen and joined her divine comrades (?).

4.5.2.11. Gàliai I (88-91) "The Fated"

The eldest heir of the lesser branch of Clan Gav'Osché and a warrior-priestess devoted to valiant *Virya Tiryé-Hàbela*, Gàliai assumed leadership of the Empire upon the death of her cousin Gàina in 88 AU. Although an intelligent and resourceful ruler who showed considerable promise, she preferred the life of a warrior to that of Empress and her reign was a short one.

Gàliai was slain in 91 AU at the Battle of the North Bank after her Glorious Legion of the Queen of Battles (XVIIInd Imperial Heavy Infantry), which was then garrisoning the city of Paslatz in Fief Phònsé, was surprised by a much larger raiding force sent by the Shadowed Empire. The Glorious Legion, as is the custom of formations pledged to mighty Tiryé-Hàbela, fought to the death and was almost completely eliminated as a result of this battle, but Paslatz was held long enough for an Imperial relief force to arrive and win a great victory over the East Roctiennae. Before she fell, Gàliai herself and her three shield-maidens are said to have almost single-handedly held the north entrance to the Bridge of the Fast-Flowing Amion for almost a whole hour, against enormous odds and sinister magical opponents.

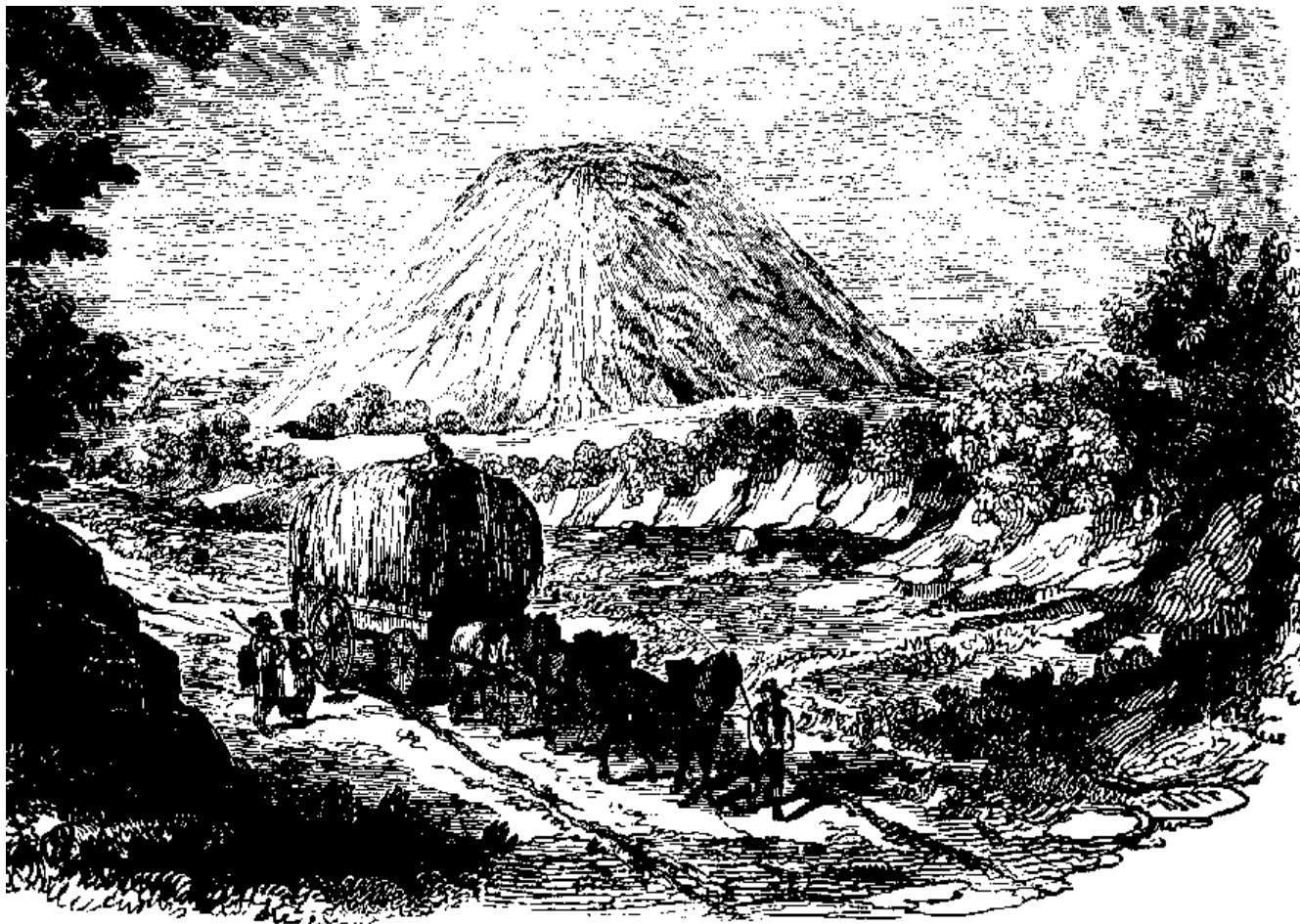
After her body was recovered, Gàliai was laid to rest in a great white tomb outside the Temple of Tiryé-Hàbela in Oûut-Nèwar. The anniversary of the Battle of the North Bank (6 Uhrack) is celebrated today in some parts of the Empire as a religious holiday by adherents of *Virya Tiryé-Hàbela*.

4.5.2.12. Gàliai II (91-102) "Silverhair"

Another female Empress and the younger sister of Gàliai I, Gàliai II was notable for her physical attractiveness, especially tresses of long, silver-grey hair. She ascended to the Throne of the Falcon at the age of 22, upon the death of the latter Empress in the Battle of the North Bank.

Although theoretically pledged to the Temple of Tiryé-Hàbela and thus to the *Khùl-Mhazàshii* as was her elder sister, Gàliai formed a close relationship with the Temple of *Væran* Ro'sènnpàdr and concluded an alliance, the terms of which have never been made public, between the two martial religions in 93 AU. The alliance allowed her to re-initiate the campaign to liberate the eastern fiefs that Gàina I had postponed some ten years earlier, and early in her reign the Shadowed Empire was finally thrown out of Roctien at the Third Battle of the Gates of Asòrus (11-14 Otchéyàyn 94 AU).





Merchant-caravan heading through Fief Phonsé towards Aèrus

Gàliai was content to stop at the traditional border between east and west Roctien at the Bridge of the Dark Horizon on the Lower Asòrus River, however, and although from 94 AU to the end of her reign there were occasional battles with the Shadowed Empire, there was nothing of the scale or gravity encountered a few years earlier.

In the west, Gàliai launched the Campaign of Bright-Burning Retribution against Ontars and Khàpitas after the *Mh-Lklàa* overthrew Turthor IX of Khàpitas in Uhrack of 101 AU. This led to clashes with Ascòrcan which feared the Imperium's hegemony, but the crisis was defused by the Treaty of the West, which formalized Roctiennae and Ascòrcanian spheres of influence in the western border areas in 102 AU.

Gàliai II passed from memory in Uhrack, 102 AU, after Oùut-Nèwar was struck by a brief but virulent plague of the dread *Daabàtha-Rqnùha*, which killed her along with several thousand of the city's inhabitants. Although her name is remembered with reverence in Roctien, a less positive aspect of Gàliai's reign is the growth in factional and regional tensions caused by her necessary preoccupation with military affairs on the eastern front. Had Gàliai II lived longer, she might have been able to reign in the powerful *Wéznu* and noble clans, but these centrifugal tendencies are now causing the Imperium severe problems.

4.5.2.13. Gàliai III (102-) "Crone of the West"

Gàliai III, the sister of Gàliai II, was 62 years old and in poor health when first she took over the Throne of the Golden Falcon, upon her younger sister's death near the end of 102 AU. Gàliai had never intended to become Empress— she did not consider herself fit for the position, and had intended to live out her life as a nun-sage devoted to *Virya Nia*— but the untimely death of Gàliai II and the lack of a more suitable heir on the part of her Clan forced her to take the Throne. She has never married, although there have been rumours of trysts with some of the elders of Clan Gav'Osché, in particular Lord Telètho who is a distant cousin.

The economy is in relatively good shape and the centuries-old struggle with the Shadowed Empire of East Roctien continues, with the military situation in a stalemate. In this, the pattern of many years of war past is repeated, as superior Rocto-Ardæ generalship and particularly Legion morale offset greater numbers of East Roctiennae troops. Aside from occasional border disputes with Ascòrcan and Prin'Ql, there is no appreciable military threat from the west, which leaves the Imperial army largely able to devote its resources to holding the Empire of Shadows at bay.





On the political front, Lord *Ràan* (King) Chargo-Myr-Psak-Keptyassi, is a well-known public figure as the *Wéznú* of Fief Kep-Kep, and is known to have serious reservations about Gàliall III's handling of the Imperium. He has narrowly escaped assassination attempts that are widely believed to have been initiated by Clan Gav/Osché. Many of the other great clans are known to harbor designs on the throne, but so far they have been kept in check by the Imperium's efficient secret police, the "Talons of the Falcon". The Temples, meanwhile, are mostly preoccupied with internal matters, although a few of them have lately been again campaigning for the imposition of a theocracy of the *Khùl-Tlassù*. This agitation does not appear to be having much of an effect, judging from the attitudes in the streets and in the army.

Other than for these factors, the Imperium is relatively quiet at this point in Gàliall's reign. But, perhaps soon the Gods of War will again resume their march... or maybe the gentle hand of *Virya Fértian-lthé*, Mother of the Peasants, will impose many more years of placidity and good harvests. In any event, it is a good time for exploring the exciting world of northern *Ushù'l* on a personal scale... and, who knows? A bold character may change the course of history! Let the adventure begin!

4.6. The Lands of Northern *Ushù'l*

Telostic has many populated areas suitable as the setting for a game such as *Shakhàn*. However, for purposes of practicality only one region, specifically that of the cold-temperate region north of the *Nòlan Oblé* mountains on the *Ushù'l* continent, has been selected. Individual Referees are, of course, allowed (and encouraged) to develop campaigns in other regions, so long as they are aware that as supplemental material is made available on other areas, such "home brew" campaigns will become divergent from the official "reality" of Telostic.

There are three great empires and the fragments of a fourth north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, which forms the southern border of each: these are, in roughly descending order of size and military strength,

- Roctien,
- Javertien,
- East Roctien and
- the remains of Ardtien.

Brief comments will be made about each empire and region, but first a few general characteristics will be noted.

4.6.1. Topology, Vegetation and Climate

The area covered by the northern empires extends about three thousand kilometres (roughly the distance from Paris to Moscow) from the western parts of Javertien to East Roctien's eastern frontier; the distance from the foothills of the *Nòlan Oblé* in the south to the northern seashore varies from place to place, but averages about five to seven hundred kilometres.

Topographically, the terrain is diverse, with most land area made up by gently rolling plains, but ranges of moderately high mountains exist between East and west Roctien, between Roctien and Ardtien, between northern and southern Ardtien, and also in extreme western Javertien. An important terrain characteristic is that much of the most arable, and therefore heavily populated, land is close to the banks of the great rivers that exist in all regions.

Unlike many other parts of Telostic, there are no real deserts in this region. Most of the land, particularly that near or in the mountains, is heavily forested with *Ushù'l*'s deciduous *Dadòga* (dad-OH-gah) and *Ismàiah* (EES-mAl-ah) trees, although numerous species of conifers also exist, especially in the colder and more alpine areas. Even in relatively "civilized" areas like central Roctien or Javertien, no more than about 60 per cent of the land has been completely cleared, and this per centage drops dramatically in outlying areas and in the wilderness.

The climate of northern *Ushù'l* is characterized by long (typically lasting about four to four and a half months of Telostic's ten-month year) and sometimes bitterly cold winters, warm, pleasant summers and a short autumn and springtime. In the wintertime, temperatures in the coldest areas can reach as low as -40° C., while summer highs rarely exceed 33° C.. Aside from occasional cyclical droughts, rainfall is usually adequate to sustain life and agriculture.

4.6.2. Social and Technological Development

In terms of overall socio-economic development, all of *Ushù'l*'s northern empires and, for that matter, most of the southern ones as well, would rank somewhat above that of Earth's Roman Empire. However, their political structures vary significantly from that of Earth's historic empires. Roctien and Javertien, for example, are much more "feudal" in outlook than ancient Rome, Greece, China or Egypt were, and East Roctien is a theocratic / necromantic dictatorship quite unlike anything ever found on Earth.

Technologically, the northern empires are roughly equivalent to the highest level of development achieved on Earth prior to the Renaissance, although the way in which science and technology have evolved has been considerably different due to Telostic's history and the presence of "magic". The fine arts, inter-state commerce, astronomy and astrology, alchemy, metallurgy, archaeology, linguistics, "magical" and psychic ability and certain types of communications are all much better developed in (say) Roctien than they were in the Roman Empire. However, compared to ancient Earth, many other types of economic technology have fared poorly, at least in northern *Ushù'l*: included in this category would be seafaring, mechanical artifice, engineering, long-distance transportation, physics, mathematics, anatomy, biology, non-religious philosophy, political theory and, perhaps most importantly, the "scientific method".

A good deal of this is attributable to the presence of supernatural powers, e.g. "magic": effects that could be attained on Earth only by means of technology, are frequently available on Telostic simply by performing the appropriate magical incantation. Furthermore, the techniques needed for acquisition and transmission of magical knowledge are profoundly different from, and frequently antagonistic with, those needed to develop and transmit technological or scientific knowledge. "Magic" is, by definition, not subject to scientific study; its exercise requires innate psychic abilities that vary tremendously from individual to individual, and its effects sometimes violate physical laws (such as creating food or water, or even an animate being, out of "nothing", for example). All of this means that Telostician proponents of scientific thinking, as it is known on Earth, must compete with a proven and effective, but non-rational, way of "getting things done". Not surprisingly, their success has been very limited.

Most of Telostic's societies, themselves carrying the burden of tens of thousands of years of evolution, discourage speculation and "free-thinking", and are as backward-looking as were Earth's empires forward-looking; there is a subtle but real sense of inferiority felt by almost all modern inhabitants of the northern empires, when comparing themselves to their ancestors. The few scholars on Telostic who are interested in knowledge for knowledge's sake, most often devote themselves to archaeology or other disciplines that can reveal information on Telostic's past. Very seldom will one attempt the type of scientific inquiry of a Leonardo da Vinci or even an Archimedes—so great were the supposed achievements of Telostic's past inhabitants, that it usually appears more profitable to uncover their works than to invent one's own.

4.6.3. The Racial and Species Balance

Humans make up from 60 to 80 per cent of the sapient population of those parts of northern *Ushù'l* that are the subject of *Shakhàn*. The reason for this is unclear; possibly, it is the result of historical factors such as migration, or it may be due to biological considerations such as a faster birthrate or greater average number of offspring.

Human families in Roctien, Ardtien, Javertien and East Roctien are larger than those of most other intelligent inhabitants of the area. Of the nonhuman species, the *Bènlì*, *Arda* and *Lhàashàà-àdyé* (in that order) rank behind humanity in terms both of average family and overall population size. The other sapient races represent only a small fraction of the population of northern *Ushù'l*, no more than fifteen per cent at most. Perhaps because of this, all of the known Emperors and Empresses of Roctien, and those of most of the surrounding regions, have come from the human and *Bènlì* races—although the *Arda* and *Lhàashàà-àdyé* are also fairly well represented in the noble classes.





In this context, comment should be made on the subject of intra-species tolerance. Paradoxically, considering the sometimes high levels of tension between humans (and near-humans) of northern *Ushù*'s various ethnic groups, there is comparatively little distrust between sapient of the more "common" intelligent races. For example, a *Bènlì* or *Arda* citizen belonging to (say) the Central Roctiennae ethnic group will usually consider himself or herself a Central Roctiennae first and a *Bènlì* or *Arda* *per se* second. For this reason, there are few species-based barriers to the social advancement of the common races; indeed, beings of the *Bènlì*, *Arda*, *Lhàashàà-àdyé* and, less frequently, *Hàmýé* or *Ca'ùna*, species are found in the upper levels of society roughly in proportion to their numbers in the population at large. Three races, the *Apnié*, *Ri'im/Hnàhhu* and *Shélèggi/L'àqu-àlu*, are somewhat less accepted: because of unusual physiological characteristics, while not subject to any official legal sanction, they are distrusted by most other sapient and tend to be quietly passed over or ignored when candidates for a promotion or high position. This is normally of little consequence, because all these three types of creatures are found only in small numbers where other sapient congregate.

This relative tolerance does not, however, extend to many of the "unusual" intelligent species that occasionally travel through northern *Ushù*'. Some races, for example the insectoid *Artò* and *Motnat'tà*, the froglike *Agàk*, the arboreal *Skròno* and *Granàyu* and the reptilian *Nika'Khàdra* (known as *Ttòlta* in the north) and *Hoyoté-Gò*, though not actually persecuted unless they travel completely unescorted, are so rare in the northern empires that they are sometimes feared by the ignorant, or may even be imprisoned for display as "strange monsters from afar". Meanwhile, the presence of the other-dimensional *Lepré* and *Sagòst* and the dragon-like *Chàngalà* is prohibited in civilised regions—these creatures are vulnerable both to legal oppression and possible murder by the mob, which believes (with some justification) that the *Lepré*, *Sagòst* and *Chàngalà* frequently engage in unpredictable and destructive actions. The shape-changing capability of the *Chàngalà* gives this race some ability to evade these strictures, but nonetheless a *Chàngalà* living anywhere close to a settlement of the more common sapient is forced to lead a furtive and largely solitary existence.

Finally, the fearsome *Enhù'uv*, the sinister "undead" *Mêm-Uhùryo* and, of course, the *Brhà*, are subject to immediate pursuit and destruction in almost all of northern *Ushù*'. The one partial exception to this is East Roctien, where it is whispered, there are areas in which a few of the less malevolent of the *Mêm-Uhùryo* are allowed to survive, although even here these frightful beings do not go out of their way to advertise their presence.

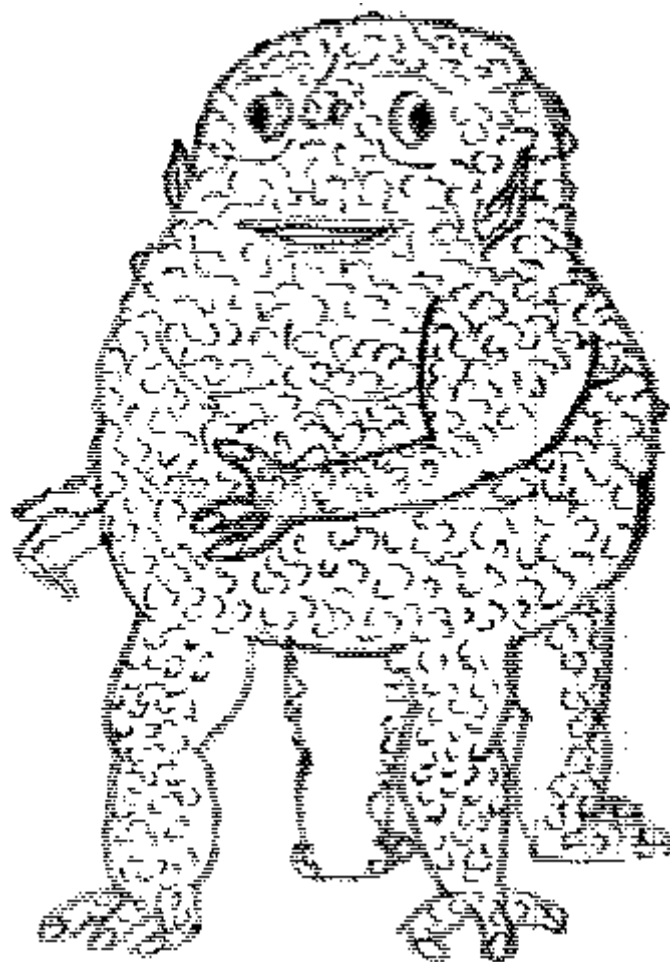
4.6.4. Ethnic Groups and Cultures

There is no single "Rocto-Ardæ culture" in the same sense as there is for (say) the Meshonian or Javvré Empires, due to Roctien's physical size and ethnic diversity. It is therefore relevant to comment on the sizes and customs of the different human population groups that make up the Empire and their often-strained relationships with each other.

The largest ethnic group in Roctien is the Great Roctiennae, a Rocto-CathSinnian speaking people concentrated around the west side of the fertile Sentinel River Lowlands and the capital at Oüt-Nèwar, though there exists a secondary concentration of respectable size centred around the southeastern city of Ga'Bryàl. The high-cheekboned Great Roctiennae are smug in their historical dominance of high positions in the Empire, going back all the way to its founding more than two thousands years ago under the storied Dégas I. They can also boast that the current Empress, Gàlai III ("the Crone of the West") is counted among their numbers. For all of this, however, the power of the Great Roctiennae decreases rapidly in the eastern portions of the Imperium, where they are only a small minority of the local population, and their grip on power is often resented in these regions.

There is also one other Rocto-CathSinnian speaking ethnic group whose presence should be noted. This is the West Roctiennae, confined in a cul-de-sac formed by the west side of the River of the Sentinel and the north side of River Neva, with the port city of Pùsnis as its capital. In most respects culturally similar to their Great Roctiennae cousins, the West Roctiennae have frequently supported the claims of their southern kintred to the Throne of the Falcon, although they have themselves had several ruling dynasties.

The Hanriòtis, a seafaring people populating not only the southeastern shores of the Bight of Roctien but also much of the large Isle of Bària (BARR-ee-ah) north of the Bight, speak their own language but are otherwise much like the Great Roctiennae in custom and dress, if a bit more conservative and set in their ways on average. Their current leader, the *Wéznù* Dartho-Myr-Tsò-Hehra'm of Fief Hannasàli, is thought to have supported Gàlai III's rule over the Empire, and has gained much control over the actions of the Imperial Navy as a result. Recently, this paid off in the move of the naval headquarters from Pùsnis to Hanriòt, a move that did not please *Wéznù* Nato-Tsò-Tsò-Hehra'm of Pùsnis and Fief Rap-Pùmu.



A diminutive Hàmyé of the western Roctien region

The main opposition to Great Roctiennae power in historical times from inside the Empire's reaches has come from the Central Roctiennae ethnic group, an Aerùsian dialect-speaking population centred around the city of Kèprica in Fief Kep-Kep. Shorter and more rounded of feature than their western counterparts, the Central Roctiennae comprise what is probably the second largest ethnic group in Roctien, with honourable mention to the Aerùsians. They are more spread out than the Great Roctiennae, and this has usually prevented them from working together in a unified manner for political purposes. The most notable leader to come from this ethnic group in modern times is the redoubtable Chargo-Myr-Psàk-Keptyàssi, the current *Wéznù* of Fief Kep-Kep.

Even more dispersed geographically are the Aerùsians, speaking the tongue of the great northeastern city of Aerùs in Fief Pàra-Rùsa. The humans and *Bènlì* of this group are on average even more squat of form than are the Central Roctiennae, and indeed have been said to have been more closely related to the peoples of the western parts of the Shadowed Empire of East Roctien than to any of the other "western" groups. Perhaps the most eminent of the leaders of the Aerùsians is the great warrior and *Sadòrzu* (General) Ketàiso-Tsò-Tsò-Arihenhh, *Wéznù* of the trading city of Aerùs and of Fief Riha; Ketàiso and his warlike clansmen, the Sons of Clan Rihi, have valiantly defended the Imperium against many threats from the east. About Roctien's many smaller ethnic groups, only a few brief comments need be made.

On the extreme west near the border with the minor kingdoms of disunified Ardtien, lie the regions of the Ariti-Voinians and Ascòrcanians. These are tall, spare peoples, speaking dialects of the Ascòrcanian language family that are closely related to each other but only loosely related to Rocto-CathSinnian. These groups have in modern times only rarely posed difficulties to those seated on the Throne of the Falcon, but this has recently been belied by the actions of Shédan III, "Emperor" of Ascòrcan.





Elsewhere, in the central Empire there exist the small cultures of the Moròshis, the East-Moròshis and the Jeglùrsis; of these, the first two speak a heavily inflected version of Rocto-CathSinnian, while the latter, isolated in a small pocket just to the east of the city of Ròlon (ROW-lawn), speaks a dialect of the Thélésbanné language also popular with the Central Roctiennae of the area. None of these groups are overly fond of rule from Oûut-Nëwar, but their populations are small compared to those of the Great and Central Roctiennae, so the smaller ethnic groups have generally had to accept the dictates of the central government.

As might be expected, this system has had the side-effect that from time to time, additions and subtractions to the lengths of the months of the year will cause, for example, a month normally associated with the spring to in fact fall into the autumn or summer. This is fortunately rare, and is avoided wherever possible by the Amyé-Lé-Sàachak a'lé Zhumàra (ahm-YAY-lay-SAA-chak ah-eeYAY-djoo-MAR-ahh), in other words, the astrologers of the Sages" Guild. Indeed, the accuracy of this form of calendar, descended almost unchanged since the Times of Mysteries of the Third Age, has been so good as to lead some to suggest that an unseen presence (the Gods, probably) is deliberately regularizing the planetary orbit.



As the day comes to an end, a peasant-woman in central Roctien cleans the steps leading into her clan-hut

Much simpler considerations dominate the life of the average Imperial citizen, for whom the year is essentially divided into the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter.

The spring is usually recognized by the start of the Rites of Spring festival for the goddess Fèttian-lthé on the first day of the month of Jâx (jaks), itself the ninth month of the year counting from the first day of Bègj (BED-jeh) in high summer. Jâx and Phèrn-Rôya (fern-ROY-ah) are both spring planting months, in which countless peasant farmers plant seed for the fall harvest. Temperatures are moderate, with a good deal of rain on the northern seacoasts, while further inland spring conditions normally stay below freezing until well into late Phèrn-Rôya.

The Rites of Passing of Time, a holdover from the Third Age in which Virya Tiryé-Habéla was the Mistress of the Eternal Hourglass, from the first to third days of Bègj mark the official beginning of summer and of the new year. It is now that the really intensive cultivation begins, with the last remnants of frost disappearing from the foothills of the Nòlan Oblé. Also, Bègj, the second month Otchéyây (AWT-shay-yAI-enn) and the third month Khèpp (kh-AYepp) are the main campaigning season, in which armies may march and fight. (It is usually much too cold to do much serious manoeuvring in the dead of winter, and the use of the army in the spring or autumn can interrupt planting and harvesting with disastrous effects on the

food supply.) Temperatures in late Bègj and early Otchéyây can reach up to about 35° Celsius in the interior but are normally lower on the coasts.

The fourth month, Nahàdjarònyé (nah-had-jar-AWN-yay) and the fifth month, S-Tsèrack (ess-tess-EAR-ahk), make up the autumn. Crops are generally harvested from the day after the Festival of the Harvest, sacred to Fèttian-lthé and falling on the 44th of Nahàdjarònyé, to the day before the Festival of the Last Bushel, also sacred to merciful Fèttian-lthé and falling on the 46th of S-Tsèrack. Temperatures are similar to those of the spring, with the first frosts coming to inland regions around the 50th of S-Tsèrack.

The three months of Lhòrentayn (leh-HOAR-an-tAlen), Uhrack (OOH-rak) and Vhùnuhrack (vehUN-oohrak), together comprise the sometimes bitterly cold winter of northern Ushù'l. The first quarter of Lhòrentayn is usually moderate, with the last few leaves falling off the Dadôga and Ismàiah (EES-mAI-ah) trees. Thereafter, however, temperatures drop rapidly and the first snows, which can drift up to three metres deep in a strong blizzard, come no later than the start of the Blessed Week of White Virtue, a festival sacred to mighty Ro'sènnpàdr from the 16th to the 20th of Lhòrentayn.

4.6.5. Seasons and the Calendar

The comings and goings of the seasons are a great influence on citizens of northern Ushù'l, living as they do in an agrarian society.

Although the current Bj'R'Hàiah'èdoi (bedj-er-HEY-ah aydoy) "Star of the Recent Age" calendar, numbering its years from the Year of the Great Union in Arconia, has supplanted the earlier Bj'R'Hàiah (bedj-er-HAY-ah) "Star of the Age" calendar established by Dégas IV in 1901 BU, the structure of its days, weeks and months has stayed intact. The calendar* has an unusually regular structure, with ten months each divided into ten five-day weeks; thus, there are fifty days in each month. Each day is divided into twenty-five hours of fifty minutes each. Obviously, a calendar of this type runs the risk of becoming seriously inaccurate over the passing of time, and in order to avoid this, the astrologers at the Court of the Falcon have been empowered to add or subtract days to each month to make corrections. Such modifications, the result of great amounts of calculations and plots of the heavenly bodies, are posted at the start of each year on a huge banner affixed to the outer wall of the Fortress of the Imperium for all to see, and for couriers to announce to the far provinces.





In some parts of the Empire, temperatures can go as low as 40° below zero Celsius in the depths of winter, but temperatures of between minus and plus 20° are more common. Although the Bight of Roctien most often stays ice-free even in such conditions, its straits and many of the great inland rivers are often solidly frozen. This feature has proved sorely tempting to many ambitious generals in the past, since it allows their armies to cross rivers that in the spring, summer or autumn would provide their enemies a safe refuge. The problem is, of course, that should an unexpected thaw come, the advancing army can be stranded in hostile territory, with no supply route and nowhere to retreat.

* A simplified version of the Telostician calendar is appended to the Adventure rules section, for time tracking and keeping purposes.

4.6.6. Common Foods and Livestock

About one out of every three farmers of northern *Ushù'l* is able to keep poultry, usually the reptile-like *Mngàshaa* (menn-GASH-ahh) beast, a toothed bird that lays one to three leathery eggs once each two weeks, or perhaps one to five head of livestock. The most common livestock animals are the *Edùhh*-beast that is used both for meat and for clothing furs, or, more frequently, the *Fefitsma* (fef-EET-smah) beast, a yaklike herbivore, often used as a beast of burden, whose females yield about a two litres of rich, creamy milk each five days.

Vegetable and grain crops used as staples vary widely throughout the Imperium according to climatic and soil conditions. *Fé'i* (fay-EE), a hardy wheat-like cereal used to make unleavened *Charhéah* (char-HAY-ahh) bread, predominates in the drier inland and upland regions, while elsewhere vegetable crops such as squash, maize and black-green *Charéppa* (char-AY-pah) root are more popular. Roctien also has several species of flowering trees whose fruit are both eaten in season and preserved for future use.

Where possible, diets are often supplemented by catches of the slow-moving *Haddòikh* (hadd-OY-keh) fish, a catfish-like piscine that can be speared by a trained fisherman. Unfortunately, the use of many freshwater streams and rivers is reserved for those of high station, except during the "Holiday of the Fullest Flowing", sacred to the god Hadda-Làtonn in the late spring. In coastal regions, of course, fish of many kinds form the main dish at most meals, but even here (except to an extent in the relatively sheltered Bight of Roctien), dangerous sea conditions in the winter months forces reliance on other foods.

Indeed, as one Rocto-Ardæ saying goes, "he who eats loudly in the summer shall starve quietly in the winter". Thus, most peasants strive to store their summer root-cellar with what little they can spare in the summer and autumn to tide them over the lean winter months. These meagre reserves often do not prove sufficient, and in such cases are sometimes supplemented by disbursements from the local *Wéznú's* granaries at a very low price. Or, even if the Lord Duke's silos are exhausted, peasants can obtain food for survival from the independent grain merchants of the *Vhâl-Vávna*, at whatever price the market will bear.

As is the case with most other features of peasant life, standards of building construction are simple with minimal consideration given to comfort or privacy. The materials used to build farmers' huts vary from area to area. Coarse-grained *Dadòga* (dad-OH-gahh) wood is preferred in heavily forested areas (mostly mountain uplands and foothills, though sizeable stands exist just to the west of Ròlon in the Issànian Forest in central Roctien), while reinforced clay brick with wooden supports is the standard elsewhere. Most Roctiennae lower-class dwellings are circular in design, with, if size permits, a central living area surrounded by several outer rooms. Because of cold temperatures in the winter, windows are usually small or are omitted altogether, and are sealed from the outside environment by thick mats specially treated to resist moisture. Ground-level floors are normally made of *Dadòga*-wood planks, raised about a third of a metre from ground level. This is necessary so as not to be in direct contact with the cold earth in the winter; chairs and stools are rarely used within the house, the inhabitants preferring instead to sit cross-legged on the floor when eating or performing other social activities.

In one or two regions, notably Fiefs Máv-Mevùra (mavv-may-VOO-rah) and Gvànótang (guh-VAN-oh-TANG) in the east-central highlands, a fair number of habitations are built in "dugouts" burrowed into the earth, but the practise is not very widespread, partly due to the danger of flooding, but also because the underground is associated with certain illegal "evil" religions.

4.6.7. Clans and Family Life

The life of a peasant of northern *Ushù'l* and, indeed, of most others not of noble birth, revolves around his or her clan.

The word "clan" actually has two different translations in the Rocto-CathSinnian language. One, *vùla* (VOO-lah), means literally, "family" or "close relatives", in other words one's father, mother, siblings, grandparents and, depending on the region, aunts, uncles and cousins. The other, *vulàssa* (voo-LASS-ahh), means "group of relatives" or "lineage group" in a more general sense. This includes cousins twice removed, members of an ethnic, linguistic or cultural group with which one holds kinship or allegiance, or even occasionally one's neighbours of the local *Vesnesha* (vayz-NAY-shah), one's prefecture or township if it is a tightly-knit community made up by only one ethnic group. A citizen, particularly in the upper classes where political marriages are common, may thus actually belong only to one *vùla*, but may have debts or allegiances to several *vulàssa*. Regardless of this, clan ties are far and away the most important social influence in Roctien.

From the time a new Rocto-Ardæ citizen is born, he or she will spend at least one day, known as the *Mrarùsha Vùlska* (mrAROO-shah VOOl-skaa) or "Day of Togetherness" of rest each two weeks, more frequently in winter when there is less work to be done in the fields, in the large hut his clan keeps for this occasion and for other clan business such as storage of records and or heirlooms, if any. During such visits, there is, of course, the usual gossip of local events and horseplay by children, with a few side-trips to the clan-huts of other families, since in most regions clan-huts are usually located together in one spot to facilitate visiting. There follows general talk and greetings, but the high point of the day comes in the early evening. When dusk approaches, there is first a communal dinner to which each household contributes what it can spare and at which all clan-members are welcome— a practice which has, in the past, done much to lessen the effects of hunger in years of bad harvests.

Upon the end of the meal follows a benediction, given by a priest if possible and by the clan elder if none is available, to the glory of whichever of the deities the clan follows, most often *Vírya Fèttian-lthé* (FAYf-tee-ahn EETHay), the Generous Mother of Fertility and Harvests, but occasionally mighty *Tiriyé-Habéla* (TEER-yay ha-BAY-lah), Goddess of War and patron deity of the Imperium and the Empress herself. Obviously, there are many other gods and goddesses worshipped by specific clans, but the two noted above are the most popular in most parts of Roctien.

After suitable prayers, all gather around for the "main event". This is the telling of sagas and legends, often sung or chanted in poetic verse, by the clan-elders. The subjects of these legends vary from time to time, but they usually have to do with ancestors, great events of the past or religious themes or parables. These sessions frequently extend late into the wee hours of the morning, long after the young have fallen asleep in the arms of their parents, and they give all present a sense of belonging, of being a necessary and valuable part of the overall scheme of things. This is perhaps to be expected, if one considers that even many peasant clans can trace their ancestries back over two thousand years, to the times before the great *Dégas I* and the founding of the modern Imperium.

More impressive still is the fact that most lineage records exist only in oral tradition, since most citizens of Roctien cannot read or write. A position of great respect is thus the *Vulàmh Damàiah* (VOOl-ammh dam-AIAh) or "Family Speaker", the elder who has memorised and who can recite the names of all those of his line, as far back as communal memory allows.

Clan allegiances are strongest in the lower and upper classes and weakest in the townsman class, the urbanised environment tending to weaken bonds with the ancestral clans based in the countryside, and in the priestly class, in which allegiances to the Temple concerned are often placed above those to the family. In outlying areas, however, particularly the heavily wooded foothills of the *Nòlan Oblé*, the loyalties of the natives to their *vùla* are so strong as to make rule from afar difficult or impossible, as many Imperial tax collectors have discovered when attempting to repossess belongings from an impecunious clan member.

4.6.8. Marriage Customs

Despite the closeness of clan ties, most marriages are arranged with eligible parties from neighbouring families of similar religious and ethnic orientation, the exception to this being the upper class, where political marriages with almost anyone are common. Families are quite large, numbering from four to twelve depending on the species involved, being largest with human and *Bènlí* pairings and smallest among the *Lhàashàà-àdyé*. Newly-wed couples usually stay with the male spouse's parents until at least one, preferably two, male children are born.

It is relevant to note, in this context, that cross-species matings are uncommon in Roctien, being discouraged both by social custom and by some Imperial laws. The one exception to this is found in human-*Bènlí* households as these are the only intra-species couplings legally allowed, as well as the only ones that can reliably produce offspring. There are a very few matings between humans, or *Bènlí*, and *Lhàashàà-àdyé*; although these are technically illegal they are usually not persecuted, but they are rare because it appears to be nearly impossible for them





to have children. Sexual relationships between humans and other sapient races, for example the *Ca'ùna*, *Arda* or *Ri'im*, are always sterile and are subject to severe social and legal sanctions in most parts of Roctien.

4.6.9. Succession and Inheritance

Most cultures north of the *Nòlan Oblé* are patrilineal; bloodlines, and inheritances, accrue in their entirety to the eldest surviving male heir of the deceased. Tradition dictates that such an inheritor must provide for the care of his mother, his sisters and his brothers, in that order; grandparents actually rank ahead of the mother, but are sometimes taken care of by the clanhead. There is, however, no specific legal obligation to do this.

Because land holdings, the most reliable symbol of social standing in the Empire, fall intact to the eldest heir, estates are usually not divided into unproductively small sections upon the owner's demise. On the other hand, it is undeniable that since other heirs may receive nothing, there are sometimes bitter internecine feuds in Rocto-Ardae families when an elder dies and even a few murders, especially in the middle and upper classes where there is proportionately more to gain or lose.

4.6.10. Social Classes

The rurally-oriented, agrarian economies of the empires of northern *Ushù'l* have produced a highly stratified society in each of the northern empires, to a greater or lesser degree: Javertien is most so, Roctien and East Roctien somewhat less so, while in Ardtien conditions vary from kingdom to kingdom. Most of the population consists of rural tenant peasant farmers, who are "free" in the sense that they cannot be bought or sold as can be a slave, but who do not own the land on which they grow subsistence crops. Usually, land used for farming is rented from a local noble family, but occasionally, particularly in East Roctien, it is leased directly from the Imperial state.

In this context, it is relevant to note a feature of personal nomenclature in the Roctien/Ardtien area, including Ascòrcan and most of East Roctien. Because of how Rocto-Ardae names are constructed, a citizen's approximate social class can easily be determined by the components of his or her name, if the individual in question cares to be truthful in giving this information. The first word in a name is the person's "given" name which identifies him or her uniquely; the second and third names correspond to the social standings of the person's father and mother respectively, while the fourth and last name is that of his or her clan or family. The social identifier words are as follows, in ascending order of hierarchy:

Lower-Class Identifiers

- *Ròn* (RAWN) ("the humble", e.g. a slave or outcaste)
- *Lòn* (LAWN) ("son of the provider", e.g. a peasant or serf)

Townsmen-Class Identifiers

- *Nhàkra* (nhAHKrah) ("the crafted", e.g. a townsman or worker)
- *Nhalòh* (nhah-OHH) ("the gainful", e.g. a merchant or shopkeeper)
- *Haddà* (had-DAH) ("the swell-rider", e.g. a sailor or fisherman)
- *Tar-Al* (tarr-ALL) ("the warlike", e.g. a warrior or soldier)

Priestly-Class Identifiers

- *Psàk* (pssAHK) ("the reverent", e.g. a priest or cleric)

Upper-Class Identifiers

- *Fàrand* (FAHR-ahnd) ("the gentle", e.g. a minor noble or landholder)
- *Tsò* (tssOHH) ("the highborn", e.g. a noble or major landholder)
- *Na-Télà* (nahh-TAYlahh) ("the excellent", e.g. a high noble)
- *Myr* (MEER) or *Mzùr* (emmZOOR) ("the mighty", e.g. upper nobility or a member of the royal family)

In most parts of the Empire it is not technically illegal to exaggerate one's social background by giving a false identifier, but doing so is considered rude and uncultured and it is rarely attempted. Of course, misrepresenting oneself as a noble is a serious crime carrying very stiff penalties; anyone doing so had better have a good disguise, or a quick means of escape if discovered!

The lowest stratum of Rocto-Ardae society is not the peasantry. Rather, it is made up of society's "failures"—the unfortunate flotsam and jetsam, exiled from peasant or other clans for various reasons, that have gravitated to the miserable existence of the urban slum environment. Usually identified by the middle name *Ròn*, individuals of this "urban scum" class make their livings, such as they may be, by a combination of begging, crime and occasionally prostitution or other antisocial activities. From time to time, such outcasts are able to rise to the upper levels of the many Rocto-Ardae criminal societies, but generally their lives are nasty, brutish and short. In any case, they are not representative of the circumstances of bulk of the Imperium's population.

The bulk of the population is made up by the peasantry, the hard-working plebian class that supports Roctien's primarily agrarian economy. Of the approximately five million people and other sapient living in the Empire from its western border regions to the frontier with the Shadowed Empire, roughly forty-seven per cent, or somewhat over two million, are rural peasants living more than ten kilometres from a major city. A large portion (about seventy per cent) of those living closer to or in urbanized regions are also peasant farmers. These sturdy folk live their lives out quietly from generation to generation, passing unnoticed through the annals of history; however, since they make up the largest part of the Imperium's society, comment should be made about their lifestyles and customs.

The average Rocto-Ardae rural peasant is not a slave and cannot be bought or sold, but he does not own title to the land he tills from one hour past dawn in the morning to one hour before dusk in the evening. That right, and many others, is the privilege of the land-owner, most often the *Wéznú* of the fief in question, but sometimes a lesser noble or even a local "gentleman". The amount of freedom granted the peasantry varies considerably within the Imperium, being greatest in the forested regions in the foothills of the *Nòlan Oblé* and weakest in the central lowlands.

The peasant is, in fact, bound to the land: he (or she—females are frequently employed in the fields alongside their mates) is in most jurisdictions legally required to till the lands in which he was born, unless he can afford to buy them from the land-owner, an almost impossible task since the land-owner is not required to sell, even in the unlikely event that the peasant can scrape enough money together for a reasonable offer. Despite this, there are ways in which an enterprising commoner can arrange to escape his or her station on the farm. The right to leave the *Tséyà-Roetimé* (tsay-YAH roktee-MAY, "obligation of the provider") must automatically be granted if an individual is accepted into the priesthood of a legally recognized religion, and if one is lucky enough to be admitted into a legally recognized guild, or the Army, the right to sue for escape in front of an Imperial judge, usually with the help of the legal staff of the institution involved, is gained. Of course, it can be quite difficult to be admitted into a guild or the Army in the first place, but that is another story...

The standard of living of a peasant varies, as one might expect, according to overall economic and agricultural conditions, but it is usually sufficient to assure an adequate, if spartan, existence. This presupposes that the Empire is not undergoing one of the terrible plagues or famines that have periodically caused great hardship. The most recent of these, the so-called "Autumn of the Stillborn Calf" of 97 AU, resulted in the death of about fifteen per cent of the population in the fertile Sentinel River Lowlands, as a result of a disastrous livestock disease. Cash income, mostly derived from sales of specialty crops such as the mildly narcotic *Pré-Sngàra* (pray-singARRah) leaf, is limited to between 50 and 100 copper pieces, of which about twenty-five per cent is usually taken by government taxes per year. Little of this income need be spent on food, most of which is grown and consumed on intensively cultivated "free" plots for the peasant's own use. As is often the case with highly class-structured societies, these "free" gardens have been estimated to produce almost thirty per cent of the food Roctien consumes, even though they comprise at most about five per cent of the arable land.

Among the 20 to 40 per cent of the population not devoted to the rural agrarian economy, one finds several smaller social classes with various levels of influence. There is no "middle class" in northern *Ushù'l*, but there is a sizable class of urban shopkeepers and artisans, mostly organized into guilds and trade organizations according to their areas of specialization: glassblower, liveryman, blacksmith, innkeeper, etc.. The urban bourgeoisie of northern *Ushù'l* leads a precarious existence because its economic power is sometimes seen by the upper classes as a threat to their hold on society, while the rural peasantry resents its higher standard of living and disdainful attitude towards "our poor cousins in the country".





All of the northern empires have a priestly class made up of clerics from the officially tolerated religions, and while the priestly class represents a small absolute number of citizens, it usually has disproportionate levels of influence in society; indeed, in East Roctien, the strength of the sinister religions of the *Khùl-Nolgun* (khol-knowll-GUNN, "Those of the Dark") is such that the state is in fact a theocracy. As one travels west, however, the religions tend to have less power, to the point where in western Javertien they have little real influence on either social or political affairs.

Real political power in northern *Ushù'l* actually rests with the upper, or "noble", social classes, comprising perhaps up to five per cent of the population in Roctien and less elsewhere. The power of the nobility varies from region to region. In Javertien, the "Protector of the Western Realm", as the ruler of the Javvré state is known, is little more than the most powerful feudal lord, with the loyalty of the other noble fiefdoms always suspect, particularly where matters of taxation or commerce are concerned. In Ardtien, the noble families are typically less powerful, since they command much smaller fiefdoms, while Roctien has oscillated throughout history between periods of strong, almost dictatorial, central Imperial government and periods of Javvré-style noble oligarchies. East Roctien forms a partial exception to this: the hierarchies of the main three dark religions are, in effect, the nobility of this state, although a substantial conventional upper class is still present.

Regardless of the distribution of power between the noble or religious factions, however, all of the northern empires except Ardtien maintain standing armies and police forces loyal to the overall leader and to the central government (as opposed to a particular family or fiefdom), have a basically uniform code of laws and personal conduct, and consider themselves a single, unified state.

4.6.11. The Townsman Class

The first social class one encounters in Roctien moving up from the "peasant" and "urban scum" classes, is the townsman or merchant class, comprising perhaps fifteen per cent of society as a whole. The percentage is higher, as one might expect, in the cities; the countryside contains almost exclusively the very rich and the very poor with little in between.

This level of society is primarily made up by those who work for a wage in the great cities of the Empire, but it is in fact a very heterogeneous grouping, also including those not of noble birth serving in (or retired from) the Imperial army, skilled craftsmen, fishermen owning their own boats, transient merchants operating travelling caravans, actors and other entertainers, "soldiers of fortune" and many others. Whatever respect a member of the townsman class might have in society is largely a function of his or her wealth and fame, since the class as a whole does not provide a stable role-model for life as would be the case for a serf or a nobleman.

For this reason, it would be a mistake to characterize the townsman class as a clearly defined level of society. It is, rather, a place for individuals who are going, or who hope to go, from one of the other levels of society to yet another; usually this is upward mobility, but there are a few failed nobles or other "black sheep" planning to regain their former status.

At the other end of the scale, there is a large number of lower-class townsmen, usually serfs who have found some way to escape the *Tséyà-Roctimé*, toiling away under the supervision of some master in the illusory hope of bettering themselves still further. Finally, there are in terms of social status, though not really a "class" in the normal sense of the word, in the townsman stratum, those professions that are largely outside the mainstream of society, but which are at the same time strong enough to at least partially resist the authority of the state: these are the Knowers of the Hidden Arts or *Anratschêldor-haii*, the Knowers of Many Wisdoms or *Amyé-Lé-Sâachak* and even some "underground" organizations such as the Thieves' Guild of the *Pyazé-em-Hhêmhh-em-Ggômig* or the sinister Guild of the Poisoned Blade or *Ssôchar-al-Alâmanarck*.

As with most civilisations on Telostic, power in Roctien is mostly derived from land ownership, particularly ownership of land suitable for farming, and from rulership over one's fellows. For this reason, and because of the ferocious resistance of the nobility to "social climbing", successful members of the townsman class in the Empire often become embittered by the invisible barriers erected by the upper classes against those who, however wealthy, attempt to rise to the top levels of the social hierarchy. Indeed, a well-to-do merchant who already owns substantial plots of land may even find himself prohibited by the local *Wéznû* from obtaining any more, so as to keep the merchant from acquiring a title and perhaps later becoming a political or economic threat.

This snobbery has, undoubtedly, done much to further the cause of the *Mh-Lklâa* (muhh-lakLAHH, or Republican Party, a pseudo-democratic underground group of townsmen that advocates dangerous ideas such as voting privileges for those of wealth as well as those of gentle birth) in the ranks of the townsmen class. Unfortunately, savage repression by the nobility and unquestioning, stolid conservatism on the part of the rural peasantry, has made the task of the Republicans of Roctien a largely futile and dangerous one over the long run.

4.6.12. The Guilds

The guilds are almost exclusively urban and townsman-class in orientation, and, except for the branch of the *Vhâl-Vâvna* representing caravan-merchants, whose business and therefore power is concentrated on questions of roads and trade routes, their operations and influence have little to do with the life of the bulk of the rural population. From time to time, the grain-merchants of the *Vhâl-Vâvna* do extensive business with the peasant class, but this is the exception rather than the rule since it is usually confined to times of famine. Indeed, the upper classes usually strive at all costs to contain the power of the guilds in the cities, where management is more easily performed; the reason should be obvious, but in particular the nobility is determined to check the spread of the *Mh-Lklâa*.

The power of the guilds is much less in Roctien than in some other parts of the known world, particularly Amplâe and western Mahag, in which the absence of strong state authority has produced city-states virtually run by the guilds and their proxies. On the whole, however, the guilds are relatively stronger in the Imperium than in East Roctien or Javertien; throughout Roctien, nobles must pay attention to the wishes of the elders of the trades and professions, but the degree of guild power varies considerably, being strongest in those areas that are populated by the Great Roctiennae and in the west, and weakest in the eastern and outlying fiefs.

Most of all, the upper classes must heed the word of Lord Jrêsho-Nhalôh-Fàrand-Rengamârri, Highest Elder of the *Vhâl-Vâvna*, whose interdict upon trade with a disfavoured noble can often mean economic disaster. As might be expected, the relationship between Lord Jrêsho and the Divine Empress is a delicate one, with both parties apprehensive about each other's motives and actions. At the moment, neither the Lord Elder nor Gâliai can afford to provoke a clash due to preoccupations with problems elsewhere, but there is no guarantee of amicable relations in the long run.

Rocto-Ardæ history contains examples of many persecutions and much civil strife when past Emperors and Empresses have come to loggerheads with the Elders of the Guilds. The issue is complicated by the known affinity of many of the *Vhâl-Vâvna* for the *Mh-Lklâa* and for trade relations with the hostile Shadowed Empire; conversely, the support, both political and financial, of the Merchants' Guild is highly valued by much of the upper nobility, including several clans currently supporting the Empress that are known to have rival claims on the Throne of the Falcon.

The structures of the guilds and trade organizations vary due to the broad range of occupations they deal with, but some general comments pertaining to all of them are nevertheless possible. Most guilds have an overall organizational system that includes all the cities of the Imperium, and all similar businesses within each city; thus, for example, all bakers operating in the city of Zeikâz are directly responsible to the Bakers' Guild of Zeikâz, which is in turn responsible to the Guild's Elder Council, which, from its current seat in Oûut-Nêwar, oversees all bakers in Roctien.

The degree to which each guild "polices" the activities of its members, and of others, is not uniform and differs from product to product. Rules are most strict in highly skilled trades such as gem-cutting, and loosest in the more ordinary occupations such as fishmongering or the sale of general goods. Except in a few rare cases, there are few standards as to the quality or workmanship of goods produced by guild-members ("let the buyer beware"), but all guilds are zealous in persecuting those who unduly cut prices or, worse, who open for business without a license and without paying guild dues. Most of the really serious enforcement of guild regulations is left to the operatives of the *Vhâl-Vâvna*, to which all the other organizations are ultimately responsible. A traveller would be well advised to seek out the advice of the Merchants' Guild, before attempting to set up a business, since unauthorised entrepreneurs have been known to suffer many "accidents", including sometimes the loss of life and limb, for "bucking the system"!

Meetings of guild Elder Councils are normally held biannually, immediately before spring planting and immediately after the fall harvest, but may be called on one month's notice if an issue requiring prompt actions arises.





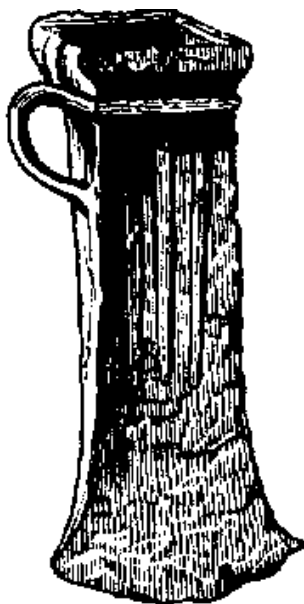
Entry into a guild is usually restricted to the offspring of someone already holding membership, although exceptions are sometimes made to those offering sufficient "inducements" to the official record-keepers, or upon the (rare) edict of the Elders, the local *Wéznu* or the Empress herself. Most citizens believe, incorrectly, that this practise is designed by the guild Elders to make membership strictly hereditary. In fact, the restriction is more a construct of the upper classes and of the Imperial state, than it is of the guilds themselves; the goal of the nobility, in this case, is both to discourage immigration into the already crowded cities and to restrict the power of the guilds by curtailing the size of their membership.

The enforcement of this rule, as one might expect, varies considerably, and an enterprising newcomer may indeed find one or two guilds willing to "look the other way" and add a new name to the membership lists— for a small fee, of course. This is especially true of the *Vhâl-V'géshe* (vhal-veh-GAY-shah) or "Adventurers" Guild", a loose association of mercenaries, soldiers of fortune and other freebooters famous for accepting into its ranks almost anyone not a publicly recognized criminal. As might be expected, this guild is unpopular with the *Wéznu* of many provinces, and its offices do not exist in all cities.

Dues are paid each month and range from one to fifteen per cent of gross revenues. A portion of this is, however, automatically put into an escrow account in the individual merchant's name in the Palace of the Realm. The money so derived is held in trust as insurance for creditors, in case the business in question collapses. Any non-apprentice member of a guild is, in theory, entitled to cast a vote on guild policy at either of the Elder Councils of the year, but in practise, the expense of travelling and accommodation usually restrict this privilege to the rich and powerful.

4.6.13. The Priestly Class

The priestly class of the Empire, made up by the many priests, clerics, temple soldiers and religious functionaries of Roctien's twenty-four known religions (both "legal" and "underground"), is the other social group whose status falls between that of the peasantry and the nobility.



Crude woodsmens' axe-head from Fief Ròm

On the whole, modern Roctien is not as heavily dominated by the Temples as are some other states, or as it itself once was— certainly Ascòrcan, and possibly the predecessors of modern Roctien, seem to have been partly founded by some of the "evil" faiths. Religion is, however, an important part of all societies and in this the Empire of the Falcon is no exception. Just how much social status one derives from being a priest depends upon how popular the religion is, and how high up in its temple organization one stands. For some religions, a High Priest can be one of the most powerful individuals in the Imperium. A good example of this is Her August Holiness the *S'Ohr* (ess-ORE or Elder Matriarch) Lady Gàitha-Psàk-Psàk-Tssàisso, head of the official state religion of mighty Tiryé-Habéla. For others, for example an acolyte of one of the many illegal faiths, it can be almost as good as one's life to be discovered.

4.6.14. Personal Dress and Appearance

Standards of personal clothing and jewelry vary to an extent between persons of different ethnic groups; costumes and decoration tend to be more elaborate in the Imperium's western regions, in particular those west of the River of the Sentinel. However, all standards of dress are most heavily influenced by climatic considerations. Roctien has a rather cold climate, with temperatures almost always well below freezing in the three winter months and with relatively cool summers, especially near the seacoasts and mountains. Therefore, most of the Imperium's citizens take no chances with exposure or frostbite in their unheated huts and other residences, preferring to stay well "bundled-up".

Ordinary members of society, males and females alike, usually wear hooded robes of specially-prepared skins taken from the *Edùhh*-beast, a piglike animal with soft, downy fur, adding extra layers and undergarments in cold weather. A Roctienae citizen of any importance will also have a combination harness and belt made of *Edùhh*-leather laminate, often decorated to show personal identity and social status, upon which will be hung a small purse for carrying money and perhaps a larger pouch for miscellaneous personal items or a wineskin.

In theory, only the upper classes and the military are allowed to openly carry weapons in most "civilised" areas of the Empire, but in practice, a traveller will often encounter individuals of all stations in society who have secreted an item for self-defence somewhere on their persons, usually a version of the *Heèla*-dagger favoured by the great Thieves' Guild of the *Pyazé-em-Hhèmh-em-Ggòmlg*. The penalty for getting caught at this without a good excuse is confiscation of the weapon and twenty lashes; however, this sanction is rarely imposed unless one is apprehended using the weapon in the act of a crime or in combat within city limits, in which cases much more severe punishments can be meted out if blood is drawn.

Usually, while a citizen's approximate social standing will be indicated by the elaborateness and nature of the decorations on his or her harness and belt, the colour of the rest of the garments will be the soft brownish-grey that is the natural tint of the *Edùhh*-beast. There is, however, an exception to this practice. The clothes of individuals belonging to the numerous "specialist" professions found within the Empire, for example the less secretive of the *Anratschèldor-haii* (the Knowers of the Hidden Arts) or the *Amyé-Lé-Sàachak* (the Knowers of Many Wisdoms), as well as those of the various "legal" religions (e.g. those belonging to religions officially sanctioned or tolerated by the state) are normally coloured and decorated, sometimes in gaudy fashion, so as to denote their occupations. Sometimes, this decoration also shows one's rank within the profession, although it would take a trained eye to discern such fine distinctions.

This custom is not enforced by law in most parts of Roctien, save by the Temples and Guilds themselves, but it is a common one. Not all specialist characters, of course, advertise their occupations in this way— for example a priest of one of the many "underground" religions, or a member of the Thieves' Guild, would normally disguise his or her occupation and would appear the same as any normal citizen of their own race and social class.

Most humans in the Roctien area have a whitish-tan skin colour, somewhat lighter in shade than is commonly the case in regions south of the *Nòlan Oblé*; hair is usually reddish-brown and straight, eyes are normally brown or black and are set on elongated facial features. (These characteristics are also typical of the *Bènl*i of Roctien and Ardten.) As always, there are many exceptions to this rule. As one travels further west, the lighter are skin shades and hair colours, with a much higher proportion of blue and grey eyes. Even so, very few Rocto-Ardæ humans are blondes in the true sense, certainly many fewer than would be the case in western Ardten or Javertien.





Prevailing standards of personal beauty have changed dramatically in northern *Ushù'l* throughout the centuries, but the following characteristics are considered desirable in modern Roctien. Males wear their hair to about collar-height and rarely go clean-shaven, although beards are usually kept neat and relatively close to the cheek; an alternative style has the hair somewhat longer and kept together in a braid by a copper or bronze clasp. Hairstyles are longer and considerably more elaborate on females, particularly in the western regions, and a thin waistline is thought desirable in the west as well. In the lands to the east of Kèprica, by contrast, a more "generous" figure is the goal of human and *Bènlì* females, since it is taken as a sign of good health and reproductive fertility.

Of the nonhuman races, variations are too many to be noted here, except to remark on the presence of the *Scarlet-Arda* of the western border regions around *Vòina* and *Khàpitas*: this subspecies of the *Arda* race, the descendants of the now-dead *Ardae* Empire, exhibits a bright red body colour unlike that found on *Arda* anywhere else in the known parts of *Ushù'l*.

4.6.15. Monetary Systems

There are three commonly accepted systems of currency in northern *Ushù'l*, one for Javertien, one for regions east of eastern Javertien and western Ardtien, and a third used as a "fall-back" when one of the two main systems cannot be agreed upon. It should be noted that the vast majority of the population will never see even one of the higher denominations of coinage; most transactions everywhere except in the Temples and in the upper classes are usually conducted in the lowest, least valuable type of currency. Indeed, a person who attempts to purchase items with a very valuable coin may attract undesirable attention from thieves, and is sure to have his currency checked for authenticity and proper metal weights. Another factor to consider is that there is no concept of "currency markets" in northern *Ushù'l*: a traveller with a large portion of his or her wealth invested in coinage from one region, may find himself or herself completely penurious upon arriving in a region using a different system.

In such cases, a moneylender, or a temple devoted to *Vòrin* Szò'ò'chènn must be located so that one's funds can be converted into the local currency. Unfortunately, these institutions are notorious for their lack of ethical business practices and they may charge a foreigner a transaction fee of as much as twenty-five per cent, although five to ten per cent is more common. For this reason, many travellers and others who must frequently sell goods outside familiar territory prefer to keep their funds in *Déa* (DAY-ahh) (see below).

The Javvré system, encountered in Javertien itself and in a few of the states of western Ardtien and Arbasàyanæ, uses the *M'antarà* (emm-ann-tar-AH), a very small coin made out of almost pure gold, as its official standard of exchange. One *M'antarà* equals three silver-gold alloy *Hochtàa* (hoh-cheh-TAA), 1750 silver-copper alloy *Kéuna* (kay-OO-nah), or 3500 copper *Essében* (AY-say-benn). There are also two other Javvré coins which, though still officially part of the monetary system, are so highly denominated as to be almost never used in normal transactions: these are the gold-gühadar alloy *Saarât* (szahr-AHTT), which is worth five *M'antarà*, and the pure gühadar *Aachròa* (ahh-chah-ROW-ah), worth fifty (!) *M'antarà*.

As might be expected, actual use of the *M'antarà* is quite rare in monetary transactions, and the de facto standard of exchange is the *Kéuna*. For purposes of comparison, one *M'antarà* equals approximately one hundred *Déa*.

The Rocto-Ardae system predominates elsewhere north of the *Nòlan Oblé*; this has the *Ogròn* (oh-GROW-en), a medium-sized coin of one part copper to four parts silver alloy, as its standard of currency. One *Ogròn* equals ten copper-silver alloy *Afhivé* (ahf-HEE-vay) or one hundred copper *Samà* (samm-AHH); higher-denominated coins include the silver *Yagàr* (yagg-ARR), which is worth two *Ogròn*, and the silver-gold alloy *Anogròn* (ahn-oh-GROW-en), worth ten *Ogròn*. As in Javertien, the coin actually used in most fiscal transactions is the less valuable *Afhivé*, although unlike the *M'antarà* in Javertien the *Ogròn* is used for some affairs. As of the last fixing, one *Ogròn* was officially worth approximately one-half of a *Déa*.

Because of the complexity of these, and previous, regional currency systems, a "universal" standard of coinage was invented thousands of years ago by the caravan-merchants of the *Vhàl-Vàvna*: this is the pure silver *Déa*, a small, irregularly-inscribed coin that forms the basis of exchange when another coin cannot be agreed upon.

A variety of laws designed to give rulers more complete control over the economy, discourage use of the *Déa* in most of the northern empires (for example, taxes in Roctien and East Roctien must be paid in the "native" *Ogròn* rather than in *Déa*), but it is still widely accepted in person-to-person transactions. This may partly be due to the fact that the metallurgical purity of the *Déa* is strictly enforced by the *Vhàl-Vàvna*, who hold a monopoly on its minting; attempts to enrich oneself by debasing this coin have usually resulted in the injury or "disappearance" of the guilty parties, at least those of them who have been caught by the *Vhàl-Vàvna*'s guild police. Counterfeiting money of any kind is, of course, a capital crime in all three of the great empires of northern *Ushù'l*.

4.6.16. The Economy

Javertien, the remnants of Ardtien, Roctien and East Roctien all have primarily agrarian economies, with 60 to 80 per cent of all inhabitants involved in some way or another in growing or handling foodstuffs.

Although there is much arable land north of the *Nòlan Oblé* and it is intensively cultivated, the growing season is rather short and farming methods remain primitive. There are no modern fertilizers, so farmers rely on the ancient methods of animal manure and crop rotation to keep soils fertile. The economies of all the northern empires are therefore dominated by the vital need to produce and store enough grain [*Fé'i* (fay-EE), a wheatlike cereal, is the most common ingredient in the average diet] to feed the ever-burgeoning population, as well as to leave adequate reserves to last through the long, cold winters typical of the area. Crop failures, or manmade disasters such as warfare in food-growing regions, usually result in famines with terrible loss of life due to starvation.

4.6.17. Theories of Governance

While many different forms of government have existed throughout the history of the region [one modern state in central Ardtien, Ontars (AWN-tarz) is, nominally at least, a "republic", although its real internal power structure is much the same as its neighbors], in none of the three major empires does the rulership of the elite rely upon the consent of the governed masses. The noble families and Emperors of Javertien, Ardtien and Roctien, and the priesthoods of East Roctien, rule at least partly with brute force: there are no votes or elections, rebellions are put down harshly and there is little or no leave granted to publicly criticize the actions of one's leaders.

It should not, however, be thought that the average citizens of the northern empires regard themselves as "oppressed", except perhaps when, during a famine or religious persecution for example, living conditions become too tenuous. Despite the most diligent efforts of the *Mh-Lkàa* (meh-likLAAH, "Republican Party"), political awareness in northern *Ushù'l* (and most other regions of Telostic for that matter) is at a very low level; most inhabitants, rural peasants in particular, are inclined to accept their lot as having been pre-ordained by the Gods, by fate, or whatever.

While political theories such as democracy, and economic theories such as capitalism, do exist, they are understood by only a very small fraction of society. Even then, they are usually thought of in the same frame of mind as would be abstract theories of mathematics, religion or cosmology— an interesting intellectual exercise, but of little use in the "real world".

4.7. States of Northern Ushù'l

4.7.1. Roctien

Roctien is the largest, wealthiest and most powerful state north of the mountains, stretching from its perpetually strife-beset border in the east with East Roctien in the *Jmòjæ* (jeh-MOE-jai) *Oblé*, to the *Müya Ulàkh* on the north, to its borders with the disunited kingdoms of Ardtien and Ascorcan in the west. It has much arable land, particularly surrounding the five great rivers that delineate its interior regions, and as of the last census (100 AU) controlled a population of around three million inhabitants.

While undoubtedly the strongest northern empire, Roctien has oscillated throughout history between strong Imperial governments and weaker coalition regimes crafted by its powerful noble families, a tendency which has weakened it in constant wars with East Roctien. Its current leader is *Mzùra* (emZOOrah, "Empress") Gàlìai (gAHll-yai) III "the Crone", latest in the line of succession of the great Gav'Osché (gav-OHss-chay) clan, dating back several hundred years.

There are no serious military problems for Roctien on its northern and southern borders. This is because in the south, the forbidding peaks of the Central *Nòlan Oblé* effectively bar large-scale troop movements, while in the north, the frigid and stormy waters of the *Müya Ulàkh* prevent all but a few intrepid pirates and adventurers from threatening the Empire's northern provinces. Furthermore, even were the *Nòlan Oblé* not there to block the marching of armies, the closest unified empire to Roctien in the south is that of Mesho, a thousand kilometres away.





Strategically, Roctien is the pre-eminent military power north of the *Nòlan Oblé*. The skills and courage of the better Legions of the Army of the Golden Falcon are known throughout the northern regions, and often in the past this reputation alone has won "bloodless victories" for the Rocto-Ardæ. The Imperium is not without its rivals, however, and it is relevant to comment on some of these here.

4.7.1.1. Regions of Roctien

Since from time immemorial the military affairs of Rocto-Ardæ kings and Emperors have been influenced by the lay of the land, it is important to note the layout of the relevant geographic features of the Imperium.

To generalize, Roctien is perhaps best described as a land of plains and rolling hills bordered on three sides by mountain ranges of widely varying impassability. It is comparatively much less heavily forested and of more regular elevation than is Javertien or East Roctien, and indeed contains more easily farmable land than either of those two Empires. Regionally, the Imperium is usually divided into six main areas.

The most fertile and heavily populated area, the "**Central Heartland**", is centered around the middle to lower reaches of the River of the Sentinel, although its borders extend to the River Omvra'Amion in the north, to the province of Fàsta (FASST-ah) in the east, to the province of Thélésdūra (Thel-ess-DOO-rah) in the south and as far as the province of Brèlter-El (ber-el-ter AYL) to the immediate west of Oûut-Nèwar.

The topography of the Central Heartland is, as one might expect, almost uniformly flat with an occasional outcrop of low hills or a small stand of woods. Most of the remaining woodlands in this region are protected by Imperial edict against use as fuel or construction supplies and are kept as hunting grounds for the highly placed. While food crops can be grown almost anywhere in this area, the land is most productive in the river floodplains from Oûut-Nèwar in the west to about Hailônia (haiLOWnee-ah) in the east, past which topsoil becomes progressively thinner.

This region is economically far and away the most important in Roctien and its loss spells certain loss of the throne for rulers, yet it is difficult to defend due to its size and divided ethnic loyalties. For this reason, the Imperium has chosen to place its largest permanent military bases at strategic locations in the Heartland where, using the great paved roads for which Roctien is famous, its Legions can be quickly moved to meet an invasion from any quarter. The usual stationings of the Legions are well enough known that, should one be moved in the absence of a clear military need, rumours are sure to arise as to the Emperor's level of trust in the *Wéznû* of the province being "visited". The largest single concentration of Legions has thus been kept in recent times in and around the city of Kèprica, where its capabilities serve the dual purpose of covering the eastern border and of keeping watch on the activities of Lord Chàrgo.

Most inhabitants of the Central Heartland can speak Rocto-CathSinnian to some degree, but local dialects remain entrenched with many ethnic subgroups, particularly those conversing in Thélésbanné (thell-ess-BAN-NAY) in the south-central regions. Physical features typical of humans of the Heartland include high cheekbones, light or reddish-brown hair and an occasional set of blue or grey eyes.

The second most productive region of the Imperium is known as the "**Realm of the NorthWest**"; this encompasses all the lands from the border with Prin'Ql in the west to the lower River of the Sentinel in the east, bounded by the Straits of Sòn (TSAWnn) in the north and the River Nèva in the south.

The Realm of the NorthWest is physically perhaps the flattest and most regular part of the Empire, having very few stands of trees or indeed features of any sort. Much of the Realm is just above sea level and there are frequent floods in the spring in the Sentinel River lowlands. Mostly populated by the West Roctiennae, this area includes some excellent farmland, particularly around the Mouths of the Sentinel, but supports fewer rural settlements than one might otherwise expect. This is partly explained by the importance of fishing to the local economy, the northern seacoast being dotted by many small ports. Winter comes later here than most other parts of Roctien owing to the proximity of the sea, but conversely breezes from the northern oceans tend to make summers cooler than in inland areas.

Linguistically, those inhabiting this area are much like those of the Central Heartland, except that towards the seacoast the Hanriòti (hanREEohtee) language predominates. In appearance, the West Roctiennae peoples of the Realm of the NorthWest are similar to their central cousins, except that they are somewhat taller and lighter of complexion.

One of the largest regions of Roctien is likewise bordered on the north by the sea, only in the case of these "**Northern Provinces**" the seacoast faces not the relatively sheltered Bight of Roctien but the cold and violent northern oceans themselves.

The coasts of the Northern Provinces, running from the Straits of Fysa (fAl-sah) in the west to Asòrus in the far east and delimited by River Omvra'Amion in the south, are therefore probably among the coldest parts of the Imperium in the depths of winter. In further contrast to the Realm of the NorthWest, the land bordering the sea drops off rapidly, resulting in high and rocky cliffs with few natural coves or places of shelter. These extreme temperatures have not discouraged the short, dark Aerùsian and Central Roctiennae inhabitants of the Northern Provinces from attempting to till its lands, but yields are relatively smaller than those found further south, not only because of the cold, but also due to poorer soils.

There is greater topographical relief here than in the above two regions; although by and large the land is still easily traversible, it rises in elevation in Réléonid (ray-lay-OH-nid), south Cò'a'asté (koh-ah ASSTay) and Phonsé (fon-SAY) provinces to form respectively the West and East *Jmòjae Oblé* Outcrops. These are true mountains, though much lower than those of the main parts of the *Jmòjae* and *Nòlan Oblé*, and have become well-known to travelers as the hiding places of bandits preying on traffic on the Ra'Inéa-Asòrus road. Another feature to be avoided is the Phònsan Marsh, a large swamp found between Phonsé and Pàra-Rusa (PARah roosah) provinces.

As might be deduced from the presence of the city of Aèrus in their domain, the Northern Provinces conduct business almost exclusively in the Aerùsian language, although in their western parts Rocto-CathSinnian is a common alternative.

The region in Roctien closest to the *Jmòjae Oblé* is called "**The Eastern Highland**", almost uniformly comprised of the mountains and their associated foothills.

The Eastern Highland is traditionally held to include all lands east of the Central Heartland and west of the indistinct mountain border with East Roctien; its southern and northern boundaries are marked by the upstream reaches of River Ga'Bryàl and by the Cào Hills respectively.

This area is rather less important militarily than its proximity to East Roctien would suggest, inasmuch as the *Jmòjae Oblé* forms an effective barrier against large-scale invasions, if not infiltration and the occasional small-scale skirmish between border patrols. Only the most foolhardy of generals would attempt to take a fully-equipped army over the rugged terrain of the central *Jmòjae* mountains, to say nothing of the problem of providing a secure supply line if any survived the trip. For this reason, most invasions from or towards East Roctien have in the past come through the narrow Dònrai (DAWN-rai) Gap between the *Jmòjae Oblé* and the Gulf of Nèth.

Nevertheless, the Eastern Highland is usually well patrolled by the Imperium's legions, particularly in those provinces traversed by the East Road and its many fortified way stations; bandits abound in the more remote reaches of the mountain barrier, and the Empire has a political interest in "showing the flag", reassuring the border provinces that their special defense needs have not gone unnoticed.

Except in its westernmost parts, the land in this region is not suited for farming and yields are meager, a problem made more challenging by very low winter temperatures and a short growing season. The economy in the Eastern Highland is therefore structured somewhat differently than is commonly the case elsewhere in Roctien: the base of income is almost evenly split between agriculture and other activities, particularly forestry. As a consequence of this, more of the population is made up by freedmen, giving rise to a less stratified social structure. This, and the fact that the Imperium is dominated by the ethnically different Great Roctiennae, has caused resentment and rebellion when the mighty of Oûut-Nèwar have attempted to impose their authority on the independent-minded easterners.

Those living in the Eastern Highland are mostly Central Roctiennae and Aerùsian in ethnic background; the local languages is a dialect of Aerùsian, almost 'pure' in the northern parts of the Highland but containing progressively more words borrowed from Rocto-CathSinnian as one goes further south.

Somewhat further south, also on the Imperium's eastern border but below the River Ga'Bryàl, lie the "**Southeast Provinces**". [These are traditionally taken to be the provinces of Vàyagh (VAYRyagh), Ròm (RHAWmm), Kné-E (nay-AY) and Snios (SNEEohz).] The topography of this area is very similar to that of the Eastern Highland, albeit even more rugged and somewhat more heavily forested.





The Southeast Provinces are regarded as a backwater by most of the rest of the Imperium, because of their relative isolation and the sparsity of their population. The local economy is mainly based on forestry as opposed to farming, due to rocky and very unproductive soils. Partly because of this isolation, this region is probably the least closely-integrated one of the Empire, and it has a long history of rebellion and poor relations with Oûut-Nêwar. This is partly because the Southeast Provinces have never figured highly in power politics within Roctien and tend to be overlooked in military campaigns as not worth the use of an army. They thus are rarely "pacified" in the normal sense of the word and regular local Imperial garrison is a small one that does little to enforce central authority.

The language spoken in the Southeast Provinces is a mixture of Rocto-CathSinnian and Aerûsian in almost equal quantities incomprehensible to all but a native speaker. It is used by natives mostly of Central Roctiennae stock, who are physically among the shortest and most hirsute of the Empire. A common joke in Roctien is that human females of the Southeast Provinces are really short male *Apnié*— needless to say, it is wise not to repeat this witticism while traveling through the area!

The last of the major regions of the Imperium is that of the "**Realm of Vöina**", i.e. those provinces southwest and west of the *Irviné Oblé* (erVEEnay awBLAY) (usually assumed to include Vomûva (vawmOOvah), Telâvoson (tel-lah-VOH-sawn), Aritûi (arr-it-TOOey), Hzulonz (hezOOLawnz), Erâib (eeRALb) and (geographically at least) the satellite state of Ascôrcan (AZKORKann)). The soils of the area are generally fertile, particularly those near the River Nôfa-Karathé and the region is densely populated, particularly along the Road of Old Ardrien that serves as the primary thoroughfare between Roctien and Javertien.

The economy generally follows the same agricultural patterns as elsewhere in the Imperium, except that the presence of the Road makes trade somewhat more important than is the case elsewhere. Another difference is that the revenues of some of the provinces in the Realms of Vöina are augmented to an unusual degree by mining; this is especially true of Ascôrcan, rumoured to be exploiting several very rich gemstone deposits in the foothills of the *Nôlan Oblé*.

This is an ethnically diverse area. Its eastern parts are made up primarily of Rocto-CathSinnian-speaking Great Roctiennae, but as one goes west the composition rapidly changes, first to the Ariti-Ascôrcànians speaking various Ascôrcànian dialects, then to the Voinians centered around the former Imperial capital near the western border with Ontars and Khâpitas. For the most part, the humans of these regions are taller, thinner and of lighter hair and eye colour than those found elsewhere in the Imperium. The western part of the Realm of Vöina also has an ethnic feature unique in the Imperium in the presence of the nonhuman *Arda* as the dominant racial group; around Vöina, for example, the *Arda* outnumber humans by a ratio of almost two to one.

4.7.1.2. Rivers of Roctien

The terrain of the "civilized" part of Roctien is intersected by eight great rivers, which have had a significant impact on the history of the entire region. These are, from west to east:

River Nôfa-Karathé (NO-fah karaTHAY), flowing south to north from the central *Nôlan Oblé* through the wooded lowlands of the Conversion Lands to merge northeast of Khâpitas with River Nêva (see below). This river is considered the traditional boundary between Roctien and Ardrien and is safely navigable for about half its length, south of the city of Vöina.

River Nêva (NAYvah), flowing west to east and considered the southern border of the lands of the West Roctiennae. This is a broad and slow-moving river for most of its length, but traffic must beware of the miasmal Sôn (SAWan) Marsh just downstream of the Nêva-Karathé confluence; this area is widely known as a place of sandbars, disease and worse(?) during the summer months.

River Ba'âk is the smallest of the great rivers, flowing north from the high crags of the *Nôlan Oblé* to Cónversion (KAWNver-sawn) Lake. Although too wide to be easily crossed, River Ba'âk is too treacherous and fast-flowing to be of much use for transportation. Its upper reaches are, however, of note as a favored spring ceremony place for priests devoted to *Væran Hadda-Làtonn*, White-Foamed Master of the Flowing Flood.

The River of the Sentinel, into which most others flow and that which marks the border between West and Central Roctien. This mighty river, like River Ba'âk, starts its course high in the *Nôlan Oblé*, flowing south to north from the great mountains into Cónversion Lake; north of this point, the River of the Sentinel broadens and deepens until (after having been joined by the River of the Star and then the River Ga'Bryâl) its lower reaches are over four kilometres wide.

Even to those who do not normally worship *Væran Hadda-Làtonn*, this river has almost sacred status, since its waters serve to transport the bulk of heavy goods sent from one part of the Empire to another and yield bountiful harvests of *Hadôikh*-fish. Strategically, the River of the Sentinel has another important attribute: it is the only economically important river to have an outlet to the sea (the Bight of Roctien) and is the only one never to completely freeze, even in the depths of winter.

The River of the Star, which starts as a stream in the southern heights of the *Jmôjae Oblé* in the far east, joining the River of the Sentinel at the city of Ssâta just north of Cónversion Lake. This river first becomes navigable in Naslû (nah-SLOO) province in the east after having flowed about a third of its length; however, the heaviest traffic occurs between the ports of Thélésban and Ssâta where the depth and breadth is more appropriate to large vessels.

It is said the River of the Star was named by *Væran Hadda-Làtonn*, who empowered that when looking due southeast from the highest towers of the Imperial Redoubt at Oûut-Nêwar, radiant *Ha'z'lâ* (HA-slah) (the brightest star in the Roctiennae spring sky), shines directly over the reaches of the River on the 6th of Jâx each year, marking the Festival of the Flood. Other explanations about the name do exist, but this one is the most widely accepted.

Another great waterway is *River Ga'Bryâl*, another tributary of, and second in size only to, the River of the Sentinel. This river begins its course high in the southern *Jmôjae Oblé* about fifty kilometres north of the source of the Star, and follows a roughly parallel course to empty into the River of the Sentinel at the city of Arthêga (ARtheegah).

River Ga'Bryâl irrigates some of the richest farmlands of the Imperium, and its lower reaches between Hailônia and Arthêga are generally considered the geopolitical centre of Roctien. Like the River of the Star, this river becomes navigable in Naslû province; unlike its southern counterpart, there is extensive riverine traffic for almost all its remaining length. This is in part because of the greater number of cities located on or close to River Ga'Bryâl, in part because it offers more direct access to the lower reaches of the River of the Sentinel and hence the sea.

River Omvra'Amion (OMMvrah-AHmee-onn), flowing northwest from the peaks of the Northwest Outcrop of the *Jmôjae Oblé* in Gvânotang province, through the North Lingra Gap into the North Lake, thence into the Bight of Roctien at the port city of Rai'Inéa (rAI-inAYah). This is the northernmost of the great rivers and is navigable only for a relatively short distance west of the North Lake. It is thus of negligible importance economically, but is notable in that it forms the traditional (and strategic) boundary between Roctien's North Coast provinces and those of the central farmlands.

Although narrow for most of its course, River Omvra'Amion is swift and treacherous enough, flowing for the most part through deep gorges, to provide a difficult barrier to cross with an army, to say nothing of establishing a cross-river supply line. Practically speaking, its course tends to channel attacks launched southwards from the North Coast through the eastern Cæo (KAI-oh) Hills, e.g. to the east of River Omvra'Amion's source. The upper reaches of this river are favored in much the same way as are those of River Ba'âk by the faithful of *Væran Hadda-Làtonn*, and similar religious ceremonies can occasionally be found in them in the springtime.

River Caëri (KAI-ree) is the last of the strategically important rivers of Roctien, a fast-flowing mountain river originating in the central *Jmôjae Oblé*, traveling almost due north to the Gulf of Nêth (NAYth) that connects East Roctien with the northern seas.

Large ships can use River Caëri only for a very short distance downstream of the city of Asôrus, and even this meager capacity is little used due to the paucity of sea traffic on the Gulf of Nêth. Unlike the Bight of Roctien, the Gulf is not sheltered from the wild gales of the northern high seas and is consequently unsafe to sail upon even in the summer months; during winter, icebergs and enormous storms make such travel little short of suicidal.

The main significance of River Caëri is political in that it marks the historical boundary between the Realms of West and East Roctien, although it does form a barrier of sorts against invasions from either direction. This pales in comparison, however, with the much more effective barrier formed by the *Jmôjae Oblé* itself.

4.7.2. Javertien

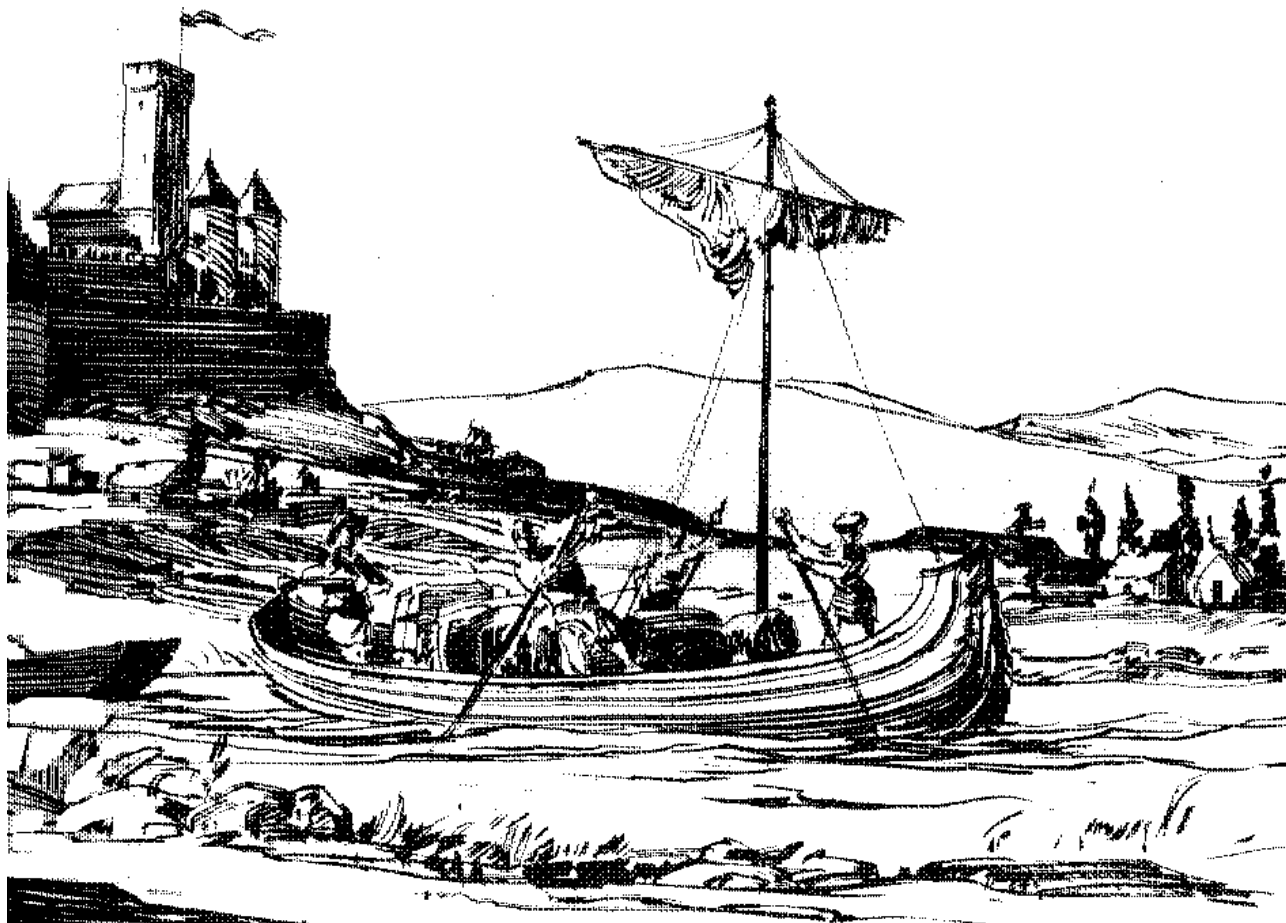
The westernmost of the great northern states is that of Javertien, a semi-feudal empire famous for the horsemanship of its army and the relative stability of its system of government. The Javré Empire, as it is known, extends from poorly-defined western frontiers with the wild lands of Heshiga, to the northern sea, to its border with the "Land of the Guardian Kings" and disunited Ardrien in the east.





Further clouding the picture is that fragmentary historical records from thousands of years ago are known to contain references to an East Roctiennae leader, thought to have been a priest or necromancer of some sort, called "*Ròäon*". There are also legends of an evil, semi-supernatural figure named "*Ròäon*" from ancient Mähag in the lands to the far southwest of the *Nòlan Oblé*, but these tales are from an age even further removed from the present than the accounts noted above.

The northernmost of these, the "Green Empire of Prin'Ql", is a semi-independent satellite state of the Empire, presided over by King Hjæssab II. The Green Empire's northern boundary is marked by the seacoast of the *Müya Ulàkh*, while it borders with Javertien in the west and Roctien in the east. Ethnically, the Yginsis that make up the largest part of the Prin'qlé population are closest to the Wròibi peoples that live around the Lower Matàr-Nath River in eastern Javertien; the common tongue spoken in Prin'Ql is therefore Arrènian, a language quite unlike most found in Roctien.



A riverine scene near Ssàta on the River of the Sentinel

Common sense dictates that these beings (who, legends claim, fought against and were eventually defeated by the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* or "Watchers") cannot in any way be related to anyone still alive today.

Whatever the truth, the very mention of *Ròäon*'s name strikes fear into the common folk of both East Roctien and the Empire of the Golden Falcon. The *Vòrin* is, furthermore, never seen in public so his real form and habits are almost completely unknown – yet, his existence and power is very much in evidence, particularly when his rulership is challenged by the foolish.

4.7.4. Disunited Ardtien

4.7.4.1. Prin'Ql

Roctien's western reaches border on several relatively weak and politically disorganized "Empires", more accurately described as rump-kingdoms.

Prin'Ql maintains its own borders and army and collects its own taxes, but is dependent upon the Rocto-Ardæ navy for seaward protection. For this reason, and because it has in the past granted Imperial legions the right of free passage, Prin'Ql is not much esteemed among nations, and there exists in its few cities a resentful nationalist faction plotting Hjæssab's overthrow. Rumours have it that the King's efforts to stamp out this insurrection have been aided by Empress Gàliai's secret police, but these are denied by both Prin'Ql and Roctien.

4.7.4.2. Khàpitas

Somewhat further south running along the Empire's western border the traveler will find the "Radiescent Empire of Khàpitas" (KAPetASS), an autocracy in a perpetual state of near-chaos due to the destabilizing influence of the *Mh-Lklàa* (see below) and to repeated invasions by its neighbors, in particular Ascòrcan, which professes historical claims on much of Khàpitas' territory.





This state has had a chequered history in the recent past, having been the scene of a bloody civil war from 2 Uhrack 101 AU (when the then-Emperor, Tùrthor IX, was deposed by a coup engineered by the *Mh-Lklàa* and supported by the renegade democratic state of Ontars) to 9 Jàx of 102 AU when a local noble was, with the help of the Roctiennae and Ascòrcàian armies, crowned Tùrthor X and restored to the Khatàsi throne. The reasons behind these events are very complex, but to simplify, elements of the *Mh-Lklàa*, striving to extend their influence eastward, took advantage of an artificial famine staged by the *Vhàl-V'ávna* to depose the elder Tùrthor. The resulting Republican regime alarmed the Empire and the other surrounding states by its mere existence, but even more so by its harboring of dissident groups from Roctien and by its open countenancing of smuggling and avoidance of Imperial taxes.

At this point, Khàpitas was simultaneously invaded by both Roctien and Ascòrcan; the Khatàsi-Republican armies disintegrated and it appeared the nation would be absorbed by its two main opponents, but on the 28th of S-Tsèrack 102 AU Ascòrcàian and Rocto-Ardæ troops clashed at the Battle of the West Bank of the Karathé River over rival claims to Khatàsi territory. War between Ascòrcan and the Empire was averted later in 102 AU by the Treaty of the West, in which both invading powers agreed to withdraw and leave Tùrthor X in power as a client leader.

A factor favoring the decision to de-escalate was the possibility of intervention by the Javvré Empire, which was not happy with the possibility that it would find Roctiennae troops closer to its borders after the latter had crushed Khàpitas as a buffer state. So far, this strategy has apparently worked (Tùrthor is still on the throne), but his power within his realm is scant and there is not much law and order in Khàpitas. The smuggling in particular has continued almost unabated, even if it is carried out undercover.

The Khatàsi army is the laughingstock of the northern world, being barely able to enforce Tùrthor's authority over the numerous tribes of bandits that inhabit the forests and swamps along the River Nôfa, but the kingdom's borders have not been encroached upon recently due to the Treaty of the West. Whether this taboo will remain with time, remains to be seen.

Ethnically, the Khatàsis are most closely related to the Ascòrcàians, although they speak Khàpitas-Vòinian, a language more closely related to Rocto-CathSinnian than the tongues of Ascòrcan and its ilk.

4.7.4.3. Ontars

Another western kingdom the Rocto-Ardæ Imperium must deal with is the renegade state of the Republic of Ontars (onTARSS). This entity, which lies immediately to the west of Khàpitas along the heavily traveled Road of Old Ardtien connecting Roctien and Ardtien, is a pariah amongst the nations of the north due to its unique form of government: a loosely-organized plutocracy openly dominated by the *Mh-Lklàa* (Muhh LakIAH, the "Party of Merit", e.g. the Republican Party).

Ontars is thus despised less because of its military power (minimal, though threat enough to Khàpitas) than because of the example it represents, namely that of a viable alternative to aristocratic or feudal rule; as such, it is a state constantly under suspicion of fomenting rebellion and unrest in its more "conventional" neighbor states. These are: Khàpitas to the immediate east and Prin'QI to the north across the *Alagoné Oblé*, Gyard'Yss ("Land of the Guardian Kings") to the west along the Road of Old Ardtien, and The Kingdom of Mgor to the south across the Northern Inland Sea.

It is certainly true that the ideology of the *Mh-Lklàa*, and by extension that of the republic as a whole, is hostile to the states that surround it, but the need to survive has tended to over-rule military or subversive adventurism in the past. In part, this is due to the uniqueness of the Ontiarsi political structure.

In theory, Ontars is ruled by a body called the *Mh-Guuyà-L'Mh'à* (the "Party of All Parties", i.e. the Supreme State Council), a sort of legislative assembly with five hundred permanent members (a hundred each for the peasantry, the Guilds, the Temples, the aristocracy, and a hundred elected by popular vote. There is also an "inner sanctum" made up of one speaker appointed by each group to represent them in the day to day implementation of policies established by the Council. In practice, the state is controlled by the money and, if need be, secret police and mercenary warriors, of the *Vhàl-V'ávna*, who see to it that the excesses of democracy (in particular, that part of it concerned with the peasantry) do not "get out of hand".

What is unique about this situation is that except in time of war, Ontars has no "king" or "ruler" in the commonly accepted sense of the word, a practice which has often bedeviled foreign heads of state as they have found no single person with whom to negotiate treaties or threaten hostilities. Indeed, in some respects, particularly criminal law and the maintenance of public order, Ontars gives the outward appearance of being even more chaotic and disorganized than Khàpitas. This is deceptive—a traveler who gains the displeasure of the *Vhàl-V'ávna*, or of one of the many powerful bandit clans that are based in this state, will find out very soon that some laws, even if unwritten, are enforced here!

As has previously been mentioned, the hand of the Ontiarsi government is widely believed to have been behind the coup of 2 Uhrack 101 AU that overthrew Khàpitas' Tùrthor IX, plunging Khàpitas and indeed most of central Ardtien into war. During the war, Ontars was invaded and pillaged by both the Empire and Ascòrcan and was utterly defeated on the battlefield; however, it was not permanently occupied. There were several reasons that this transpired. Foremost among these were the Rocto-Ascòrcàian Treaty of the West and the preoccupation of both Ascòrcan and the Empire with the situation in Khàpitas, but it is rumoured that the *Vhàl-V'ávna* brought pressure to bear upon Shedàn III of Ascòrcan to withdraw. It is certainly true that Ontars has proved a difficult state for conquering Empires to hold, over the years; it has seen several spectacular peasant revolts while under occupation, and constant guerrilla warfare has usually persuaded great powers that it is not worth the effort.

One reason for this fierce resistance is the area's unique ethnic composition. The majority of the population in central Ardtien is not human but made up of the four-legged *Vs-Arda* (vssARDA, the "Scarlet-Arda"). These sapient, and the Ontiarsi humans who make up much of the remainder of the peasantry, speak a highly-inflected dialect of the Arrènian language unintelligible to all save themselves and the Yginis.

Most members of the middle and, such as they may be, upper classes, conversely, speak a wide variety of Javvré- and Rocto-CathSinnian- related tongues, the most popular being a dialect of Khàpitas-Voinian. This riot of tongues and races has made the Ontars region difficult for invaders to administer. As scant bureaucratic infrastructure is already in place, it can be almost impossible to do an accurate census and collect adequate taxes without taking everything and causing starvation – which, it must be noted, some conquerors, particularly the Ascòrcàians, have proved quite willing to do.

The current foreign policy situation finds Ontars in a period of relative calm. Relations with its neighbors remain (as always) strained but correct, with the possible exception of Khàpitas: partly as a result of fear of the *Mh-Lklàa*, and partly under pressure from Ascòrcan and the Empire, Tùrthor X closed the border and broke off diplomatic relations on 2 Nahadjarónyé 104 AU. As far as the Rocto-Ardæ Imperium is concerned, Ontars represents a political nuisance but does serve to cause dissension among the Empire's western neighbors, thus keeping them from uniting to gain at the Imperium's expense. It is thought, however, that senior factions of the Imperial army, particularly those associated with the *Padrulàilh*, are offended that a 'democratic' state is allowed to exist and proclaim its opposition to the heaven-sent social order.

So far, these groups have not been able to convince the Empress to violate the Treaty of the West and "put things right" in Ontars, especially since the troops are needed more on the eastern front, but whether a future Emperor or Empress will prove so restrained remains to be seen.

4.7.4.4. Ascòrcan

The relationship Roctien holds with its one remaining border state, that of Ascòrcan, Realm of Shedàn III, is a complicated one.

Perhaps the most "independent" of the smaller kingdoms, Ascòrcan's history and sense of self-identity goes back thousands of years. Indeed, some scholars maintain that its history is longer than that of the Imperium itself, and some hold further that the founders of old Ascòrcan were responsible for establishing civilization north of the *Nòlan Oblé*. Politically, Ascòrcan is in theory structured much like Roctien itself, with his Radiance Emperor Shedàn III having ruled continuously since 1 Phèrn-Rôya 40 AU; in practice, the state is more of a kingdom than an empire, with much more power concentrated in the royal court and much less independence on the part of the nobility.





Militarily, Ascòrcan is of course no match for Roctien, should the Golden Empire devote sufficient resources to the former's defeat on the field of battle; yet, for various reasons, and in spite of frequent proposals from the less temperate in the Supreme War Council of the Golden Falcon, this has failed to transpire. While clearly a secondary power, given good generalship Ascòrcan and its army are large and proficient enough to cause the Imperium problems; furthermore, the walls and defenses of its capital city *Hella Ascòrcanara* (hel-LAH AzkorkanARah, "City of Ascòrcan") have been extensively rebuilt since the disastrous fire of 47 Vhùnuhrack 95 AU, and would be difficult to take without a long siege that would tie down a large portion of Roctien's valuable sapper Legions.

That the two states have avoided a showdown in the recent past is undoubtedly partly due to the skill of Ascòrcan's venerable High Ambassador Lord Nézo-Psèl-Tsò-Plèn to the Court of the Falcon, but also due to the Imperium's pressing military commitments elsewhere, particularly on the eastern border.

Another consideration that has dissuaded the Imperium from attempting to return Ascòrcan to the status of a fief is that hostilities would close, or at least interrupt trade on, the economically important Road of Old Ardtien leading to Javertien in the west and on the mountain passes of the Dondré-Hàlo Way, the only major trade route connecting Roctien with the exotic and little-known world south of the *Nòlan Oblé*. For its part, Ascòrcan is understandably reluctant to push the Empire too far, and does face the separate military problem of controlling bandits based in the foothills of the *Nòlan Oblé* and Nòfa River Lowlands.

In his younger years, Shedàn established a reputation as a skillful player on the international scene and as an at least competent domestic ruler, but his faculties (both mental and physical) are thought to be on the wane. How relations with the Rocto-Ardæ Imperium will be affected when his last candle is burnt is difficult to tell, due to political intrigues within the Ascòrcanian court too complex to detail here.

The heir apparent is Crown Prince Orldlis, recently returned after a long and mysterious departure. Orldlis' leanings are not publicly known, not only because of his absence from the scene but because he is rumoured to be more interested in lavish entertainment, often of an indecent nature, than the affairs of state. The situation is complicated by the presence of *Kakàrku* (kahKARKoo, "Lord High Chancellor") Lord Claudys-Tsò-Tso-V'Lampen, Shedàn's most trusted adviser, rumoured gaining power and influence as the Emperor ages. An unusual character in many respects, V'Lampen has only recently assumed the post of *Kakàrku*, but his Bènli heritage and phenomenal intelligence have already attracted attention and not a little resentment and fear.

As has previously been noted, Ascòrcan's foreign policy has mostly been directed by attempts to claim *territoria irredentia* in Khàpitas and Ontars, but so far this has had little success due to the opposition of the Imperium and the historic enmity between the native peoples of those lands and Ascòrcanians. More recently, rumours have arisen of a drastic increase in the size of Shedàn's army and even of possible moves on one or more of the Empire's southern provinces, most likely Aritüi (ar-it-TOOEY) or Telàvoson (tel-AH-voson) due to linguistic affinities. This, of course, would probably mean open war with the Imperium and is thus thought improbable while Shedàn, known as a man of his word, still lives.

How Ascòrcan will finance this military expansion remains to be seen, as does the question of how to deal with the great Roctiennae fortification of the Western Redoubt at Vòina (VOY-nah). This great edifice was constructed many centuries ago, but was doubled in size and strength in a panic during the Second War of Black and White Scythes (28-94 AU), when it was needed as the temporary Imperial capital after Oüt-Nèwar was occupied by the East Roctiennae.

Other rumours have hinted at possible alliances between Ascòrcan and unspecified powers hostile to Roctien, but these are little more than conjecture at the present time.





4.8. Appendix - The Telostician Star System

The table below lists astrophysical details of the Telostic system. Planets capable of normal human habitation are noted "HABITABLE".

4.8.1. The Terrestrial System (comparison)

Planet Name	Equatorial Diameter	Environment	Orbital Distance	Apparent Colour	Apparent Visual Magnitude	Astrological / Magical Influence
Sol (the Sun)	1,332,669	G2 star	(n/a)	yellow	-26.7	---
Mercury	4,466	airless	43,991	grey	-1.8	---
Venus	11,719	heat/pressure	104,185	yellow	-4.4	love
Earth	12,193	HABITABLE	145,462	blue	(n/a)	---
the Moon	3,326	airless	(n/a)	grey	-11.2	---
Mars	6,375	H! (air/cold)	238,330	red	-2.8	war
Jupiter	133,826	gas giant	780,333	yellow	-2.5	leadership
Pluto	5,390	airless	7,084,000	yellow	12.7	---

4.8.2. The Telostician System (suns and planets closest to them)

Planet Name	Equatorial Diameter	Environment	Orbital Distance	Apparent Colour	Apparent Visual Magnitude	Astrological / Magical Influence
The Day Sun	43,466,285	K0 star	(n/a)	orange-white	-25.5	light, knowledge
The Night Sun	958,223	B9 star	(n/a)	blue-white	- 9.7*	magic, mystery, dreams
Tèien-ai	4,620	airless, heat	62,380	grey	- 2.1	(unknown)
Té'en	5,231	lethal atmos.	88,570	brown	- 2.2	fertility, birth
Finèfh	9,754	H! (heat)	101,140	sand	- 5.0	(unknown)
Accèlerom	20,729	H! (heat)	112,996	ochre	- 5.3	strength, male
Nété'n	9,876	HABITABLE	125,756	blue	- 3.7	joy, success
Can'n	8,838	HABITABLE	140,898	dark	- 2.4	Karenn-R'Lache, green, animals

4.8.3. Telostic and its moons

Planet Name	Equatorial Diameter	Environment	Orbital Distance	Apparent Colour	Apparent Visual Magnitude	Astrological / Magical Influence
Telostic	11,938	HABITABLE	161,179	blue- green	(n/a)	---
Moon of Shadira	1,192	(H!) thin air	(n/a)	silver-grey	-5.6	J'ralrishe-Sle, the wilds
"Silvery Lady"	756	airless	(n/a)	silver	-0.5	love, the female
Hejèthro	6,441	HABITABLE	(n/a)	olive-green	-12.8	Kikiri, sexuality
Uòlnm	503	airless	(n/a)	slate-grey	-1.3	On, time, mystery
Jchvèz	2,365	lethal atmos.	(n/a)	violet	5.8	Hé-Enriath., insanity

4.8.4. Planets further from Day Sun than Telostic

Planet Name	Equatorial Diameter	Environment	Orbital Distance	Apparent Colour	Apparent Visual Magnitude	Astrological / Magical Influence
Actain	6,003	H! (air/cold)	180,845	red	-1.7	conflict, war
Banàli	5,977	H! (air/cold)	207,120	orange-red	1.7	Bssiro, action
Aeosh	22,049	H! (cold)	233,963	yellow	-2.6	fate, change
Sé'lé	10,430	frozen	299,612	white	-2.0	problems, trials
Gazéa	140,552	gas giant	407,344	blue-green	-2.4	leaders, ideas, decisions
Adhi	41,272	gas giant	1,970,002	green	6.2	B'aab-Bbogg, diseases
Byzad	50,245	gas giant	5,394,722	deep blue	9.5	oceans, depths
Zùlon	4,010	airless	8,693,257	dark grey	13.1	death, the Underworld

* This apparent magnitude refers to the normal brightness of the Night Sun; when at the closest point of its 253-year orbit, the Night Sun has a magnitude of -22.5.

- An entry of "H!" for a planet or moon's environment indicates that the body in question is partly habitable, or has habitable regions, but has other areas (or seasons) in which the 'normal' Telostician humanoid species would survive only with extreme difficulty.





-Under "Influences", a remark is made on what astrological factor of a person's life is deemed to be affected by the position of the body in question, when he or she is born; where a proper name appears in this column, it indicates the name of the Rocto-Ardae deity associated with the object.
-All distances are given in kilometres (thousands of kilometres for orbital distance); "Magnitude" refers to the apparent visual magnitude, e.g., the brightness, of the object when seen from Earth or Telostic. As the number increases, the harder a heavenly body is to see- the limit for a normal unaided human eye being approximately magnitude 6.
-The characteristics of moons are listed for Earth and Telostic – those of the other planets, while interesting, must be omitted here for reasons of space.

Appendix – Game Maps

The edition of *Shakhàn* which you are reading contains basic maps of the regions of northern *Ushù'l* in which play will take place; future additions to the game will include more detailed and sophisticated maps and floorplans. The maps currently provided are (in order):

-A political / fief map of the Rocto-Ardae Imperium, covering the regions between the eastern borders of Ardtien and the western borders of the Shadowed Empire;
-A political / fief map of the Shadowed Empire and the eastern *Nòlan Oblé*;
-A political / fief map of the Javvré Empire and the far western regions;
-An overhead street-plan map of the city of Ròlon in the central Rocto-Ardae Imperium (it is here that an adventure party should begin play, unless the Referee wants to take it upon him or herself to create a street-plan map of another settlement); and
-A colour hex / terrain map (hexagon scale approximately 20 kilometres from hexside to hexside) of Roctien; this is essentially identical to that used by *Strategic Telostician Campaign* and should be used when an adventure party wants to explore the wilderness.

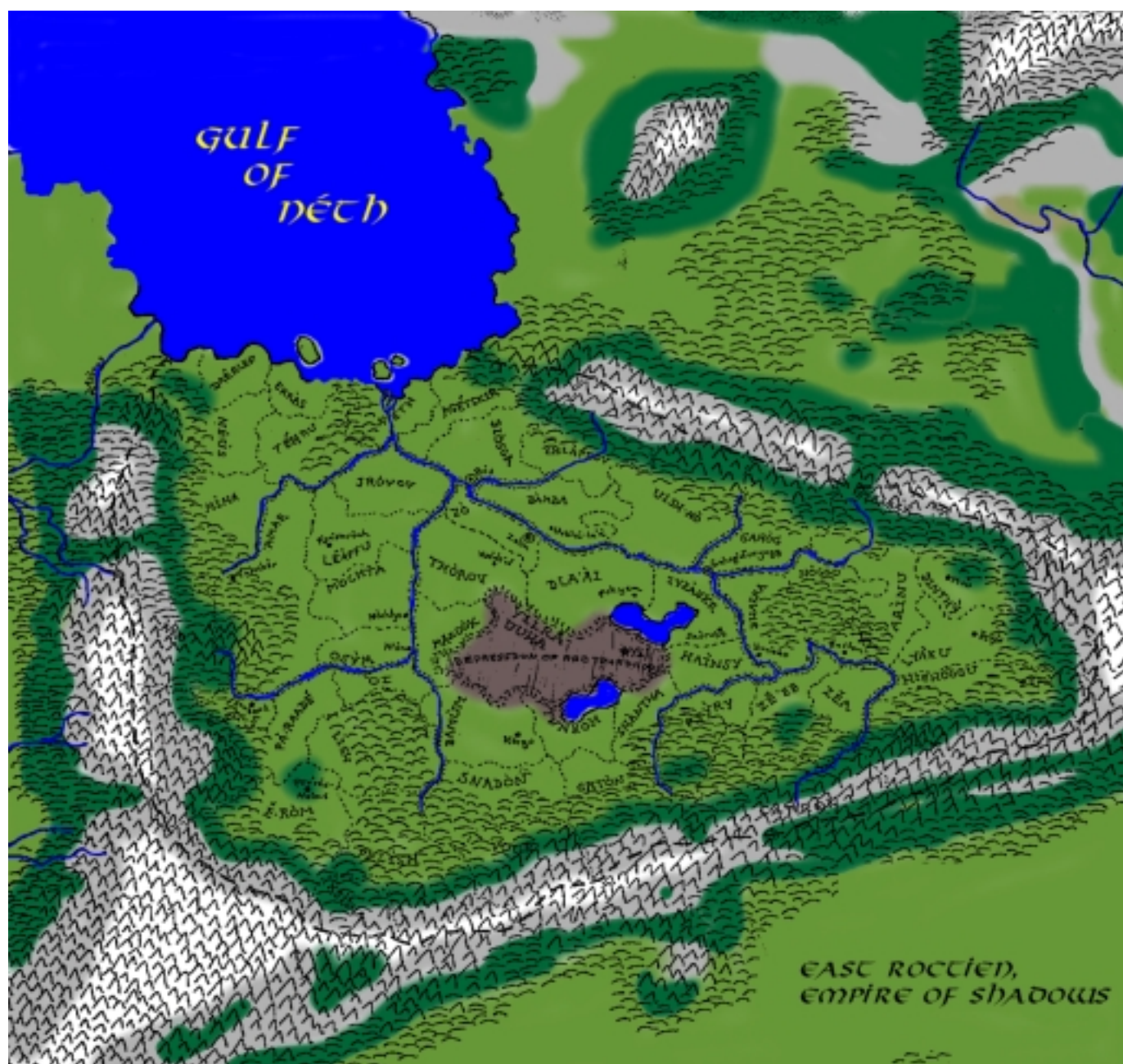
A key to the map of Ròlon is given below; the Referee is free to change or add to it as he or she sees fit.

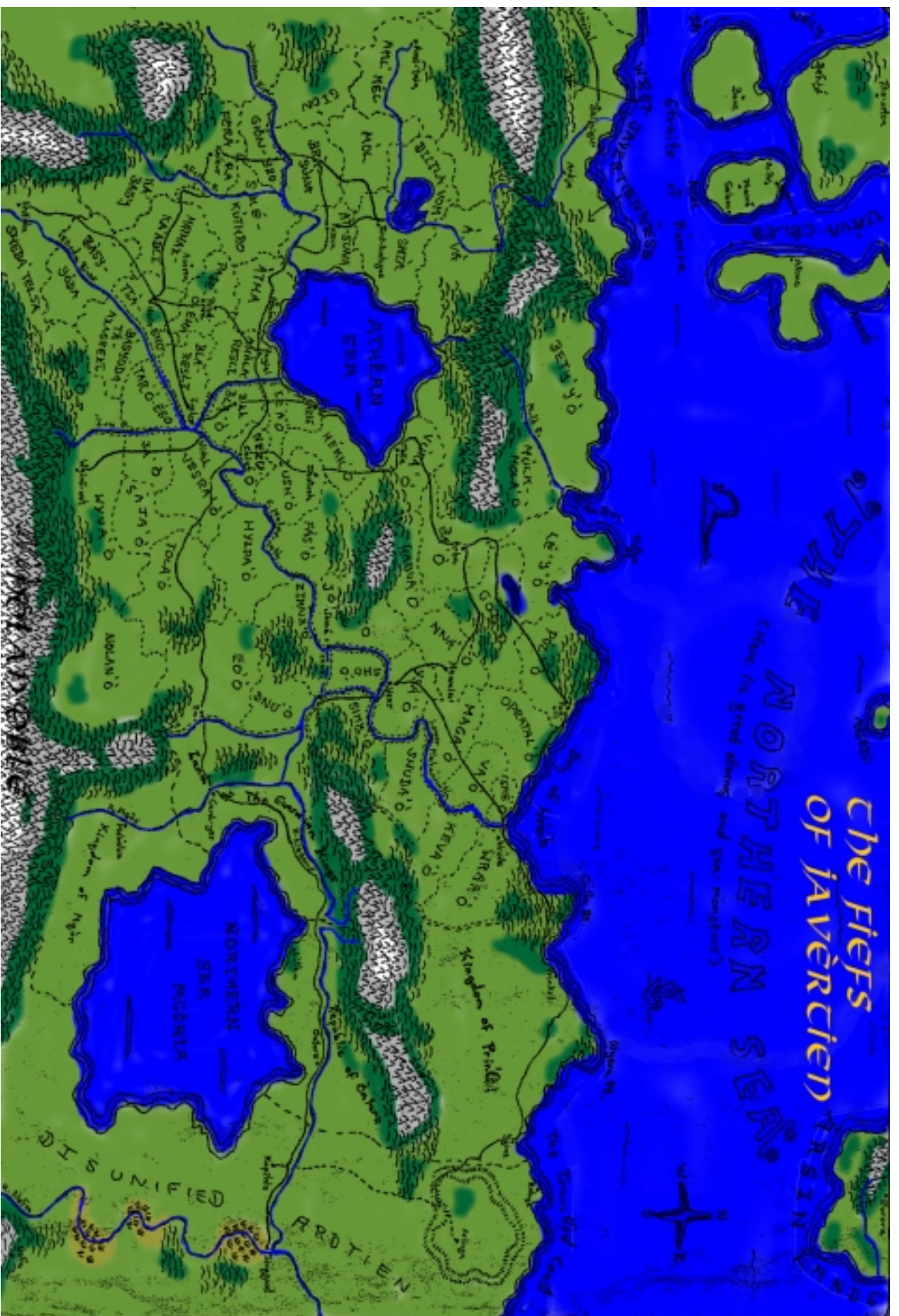
- 1.....*The Fattened Bird* public-house; prices– moderate; quality– good; a popular inn among central Roctien's merchant classes.
- 2.....Apothecary; prices– high; quality– high.
- 3.....*The Jeweled Harness* high-class house of prostitution; prices– high; quality– high; this establishment has a close relationship with the local Temple of Kikiri (building 06) and is very discreet behind its high walls (although there are many secret entrances); its basements are also reputed to be a hangout for the local Thieves' Guild.
- 4.....Warehouses, small shoppes, etc.
- 5.....Sanctuary of the *Anratschèldor-haii*, jointly run by the *Mahkàilh* and the *Chélé-Avài*. Appears from the outside to be a merchant's villa.
- 6.....Temple of perverse *Væran* / *Virya* Kikiri.
- 7.....Temple of *Virya* Tiryé-Habéla, Goddess of War.
- 8.....Temple of gentle *Virya* Fèttian-Ithé, Goddess of the Harvest.
- 9.....Temple of opulent *Væran* Bà'altschavùu.
- 10.....Temple of multi-coloured *Væran* Henns.
- 11.....Temple of wise *Virya* Nia.
- 12.....*The Green Tankard* public-house; prices– low; quality– low; this is the most well-frequented bar of the lower classes of Ròlon.
- 13.....Armoury; prices– moderate to high; quality– average to good; purchase of certain types of edged weapons here (and at other armouries in Ròlon) requires a certificate from the state.
- 14.....Hall of Imperial Justice; this is the local courthouse and is the main seat of the local bureaucracy, concerning itself with land titles, permits, taxation and so on. It has an extensive system of jail cells underneath; public executions are handled in Highborn Square.
- 15.....Villa of the Mayor of Ròlon. The *Wéznú* (Duke) of Fief Rolòni stays here when he is not at his huge country estate, some three kilometres to the north.
- 16.....The Gardens of Fief Rolòni; this area is a very nicely-kept botanical garden, and is well-patrolled; it also houses a barracks of soldiers who guard the Mayor's villa (building 15).
- 17.....Compound of the Imperial Army; houses senior military staff and has a large jail underground.
- 18.....The Imperial Granaries; kept here to ensure a supply of food if the city is besieged (although, this has not happened in this part of Roctien for many years); unauthorized trespass in this area is a serious offense and it is well patrolled.
- 19.....General-goods store; prices – low to moderate; quality – moderate to good.

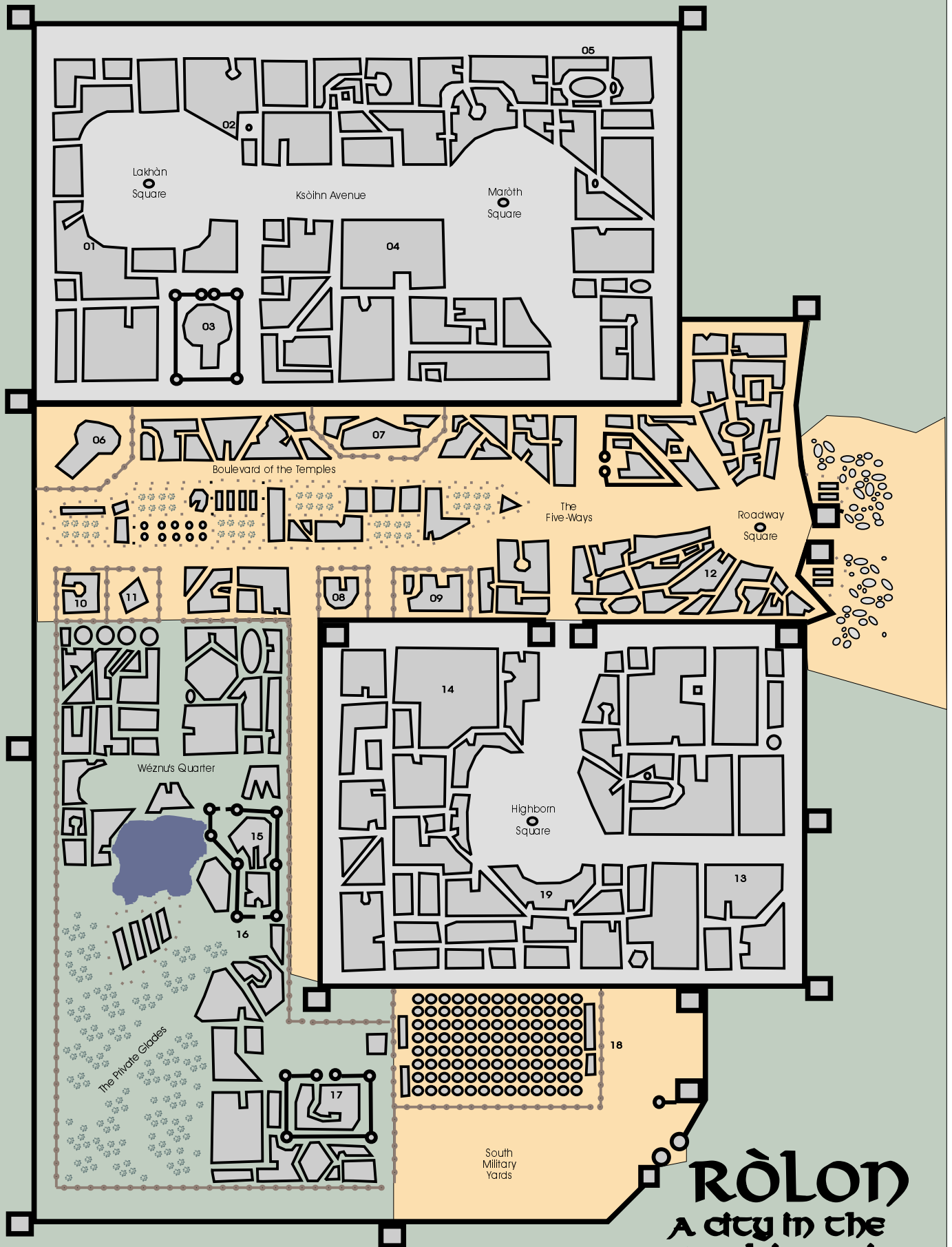












RÒLON

A city in the
CENTRAL IMPERIUM