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# *Nebula Obscura*

WORLDS OF RAVENLOFT



**A Ravenloft Netbook**

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## WORLDS OF RAVENLOFT

*A Ravenloft Netbook*  
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*Halfway up the stairs  
Isn't up,  
And isn't down.  
It isn't in the nursery,  
It isn't in the town.  
And all sorts of funny thoughts  
Run around my head:  
"It isn't really  
Anywhere!  
It's somewhere else  
Instead!"*

*-A. A. Milne*

*"When We Were Very Young" (1924)*



December 14, 156

Lake Zarovich, Barovia.

With a whiff of her flimsy nightgown, Meagan Rumwall ascended the stairway from Midway Haven's cartographic room to the hallway where the sleeping quarters were located. It had been an extraordinarily long day for her (even if the sun sets earlier at this time of the year), left alone to take charge of the Observatory, home of her order the Celestines, caring for visitors, manning the equipment, keeping stellar measurements and chart alignments constantly in check. Now she wanted nothing more than to lie down on her cotton-soft bed, snuggle beneath her scented covers and dream of endless winter snow.

A cold wind blew down from the Balinoks and settled over the Lake tonight. Meagan shivered in the resulting slight chill as she snuffed out the oil lamps while passing them on her way to her quarters. One by one the flames surrendered to her half-elfin breath, deepening the shadows behind her. Finally, with the intention of disrobing right there and then, darkness almost totally enveloped the Observatory...

So it came as a great surprise that Meagan saw a faint light glowing through the gaps of wood in the door leading to Druinor d'Yantra's locked room, even if he was away and wouldn't return to Barovia from Harmonia in Kartakass until the following week. Tightening the straps of her nightgown, her heart raced as she silently crept towards her lover's room, hearing muffled voices coming from inside. *Who in the world could these people be?* Meagan asked herself, grabbing a broomstick that Kirby left behind on the hallway three days ago. *Burglars? Creatures of the night? Or worse, voyeurs?*

She had a responsibility to perform, to defend the Observatory at all costs from any and all elements that would threaten their interests. After a few moments of silence Meagan gathered all her strength and used the thick broomstick to knock Druinor's oak door open.

Inside were four people, three men and a woman, sitting on whatever seemed convenient for them, wading through Druinor's collection of books and scrolls, which were all spread out on the bed and on the floor. Meagan gasped in surprise and anger at such a sight. *"You tell me*

*who you are or so help me I'll bust you all in half!"*

One of the intruders, a man with long brown hair and a monocle on his left eye, calmly replied back, "Now why in the world do you want twice as many of us?"

Not exactly amused by his witty reply, Meagan shoved the bludgeoning edge of the broomstick closer to his chest. She looked straight into his eyes, as if conveying a silent message that proclaimed *"you're funny, but I'll be laughing when I stick this up your—"*

"Please, madame, there's no need for violence," declared another of the intruders, who wore a neat silky suit, had generous specks of tiger-yellow on his hair and spoke with a most unusual accent, "I'm wholeheartedly sure we can resolve our differences peacefully through negotiation."

"Lord Arijani's right," nodded the third male, a young aristocrat with neat hair and a flair for the exotic, "look—I know this is a bit awkward for all of us, but I'm keen to agree that peace of mind will get our work done easier and faster."

Meagan knit her already tight brow, making her facial features even more human than elfin. *"Your work?"* she demanded. "I don't even know *who* you are and *why* you're rummaging through our private property. Now I suggest that *you* explain yourselves *right now* or I'll see to it that—gods forbid—Count Strahd hears all about this!" With the mention of Strahd, Lord of the Land, she shoved the broomstick even closer to the nearest man's chest, making all of them shudder at the threat.

"All right," remarked the first one, "my name's Dmitri. These are my colleagues, Mr. Gotten Grabmal, the fellow over there with the golden hair is Lord Arijani, and the lady's name is—"

"Megan Llewelyn," the woman interrupted, fixing the folds on her vestments as she stood up, "I...once gave your kind folk my thesis on the Hunadora wars."

Upon hearing the woman's name, Meagan slowly put down her improvised staff and nodded in recognition. "Yes, yes I remember you, but that was quite a bit long time ago."

Dmitri continued on. "Actually, we're colleagues and good friends of Mr. d'Yantra, we

know him personally from the Malodorous Goat Tavern back in Vallaki.”

“Uh-hmmm, so you’re the odd Goat Bar people Druinor keeps on talking about, especially you,” Maegan pointed a finger towards the odd man with the gold hair, “the one he calls Arijani—”

“*Lord Arijani, madame,*” he quickly interrupted, his deep-set eyes closing into slits, “I’m of noble birth and the least you could do is affirm my divine status!”

Rolling his eyes, Dmitri moved closer to whisper to the half-elf Celestine. “You’ll have to excuse him, he’s sort of, um...” To assert his point without Arijani overhearing, he covertly tapped his finger on the right side of his temple. “Yes, I get your drift,” Maegan agreed, “but that’s besides the point. You’re still not telling me what you’re all doing here besides making a mess out of Druinor’s room.”

“We were...invited. By Druinor himself,” answered Gotten, holding a piece of folded parchment, “he told us of your discovery in Ludendorf about the crazy monk and his journeys.”

“Brother Cargill and the *Navigaccio*?”

Gotten nodded. “Yes, yes, that’s it. He said we could come over anytime and study the documents you took.”

“And you chose *this* time, when I have the Observatory to myself. How splendid.” Maegan’s remark only generated shrugs and strange looks from the odd visitors. “Look, how did you even get in?”

Without taking her eyes off another piece of parchment, Megan the witch waved a hand towards Maegan the astrologer. “Oh, Druinor showed us how to work the Secret Brick.”

Unsure of how to react to this revelation, Maegan simply closed her eyes and put a hand on her forehead. “Marvelous,” she simply stated, half-spiritedly raising her hands in a gesture of surrender, “first, the Dining Room Table, now the Brick. I now have no idea how to keep this place burglar-proof, that’s for certain.”

Putting down what looked like Druinor’s *koro-tarokka* deck, Gotten gestured to Maegan in apologetic fashion. “Anyway, we’re terribly sorry that we came at such an inopportune time for you. If there’s anything we can do to make up for such an awkward intrusion...”

Maegan exhaled a delicious whiff of cold air from her lungs. “Well, for starters, you could share me what you’ve gleaned so far.”

“Of course, we’re always willing to share it to interested parties—”

“And *you* have to clean up the moment you’re done messing up the place.”

“You don’t need to worry about that,” Megan returned, “we promised to tidy up Mr. d’Yantra’s room before we leave.”

“I could stay here all weekend,” remarked Dmitri, who was now browsing through a small stack of crumpled sheets found under Druinor’s writing desk, “I mean, all this knowledge of new lands and places...what you have here is a treasure trove of wisdom.”

“Yes, indeed,” Maegan agreed, although reluctantly, “but *please* take into consideration that we only *borrowed* Brother Cargill’s documents.”

Lord Arijani nodded. “We understand, madame. All we desire is to obtain an understanding of what you’ve discovered.”

“And how’s that process going?”

In his excitement Dmitri dropped his monocle, but quickly put it back on as he examined the pieces of paper in his hand. “It’s fascinating, really, we’re very close in creating a model of this world’s geography.”

Maegan shook her head. “How can this world have a geography when there isn’t any stability in it to begin with?”

Dmitri gestured with his right hand rolled into a fist, his left enveloping it. “Think of it this way, Madame Rumwall: imagine a huge dark cloud floating in the ethers of space, with an infinitely loose density. Now, imagine a gaseous sphere at the center of that cloud, made up of the same material as the cloud, but this time with a tighter density than that which surrounds it—so tight, in fact, that it can actually hold solid and liquid matter together, much like the rinds of an grapefruit.”

Trying to make sense of this rather complex theory, Maegan postponed reacting verbally as Dmitri trotted on. “On the surface of that sphere are landmasses, floating like anchorless islands on a sea. Of course there *is* no stability in this world, since these landmasses are merely drifting along the sphere’s surface.

“Now you probably might be thinking why I chose a sphere to represent our world, which you might have guessed is what I’ve been talking about all along. We believe that there’s, um, a...hidden power pulling this world together into the smallest space you could fit within three dimensions. Call it a Demiurge or Deux Ex Machina, but It, or They, control this world, just

like how a collector takes care of her prized possessions.”

A few moments of silence and quiet analysis were all Maegan needed before she reeled herself back from confusion. “Alright... taking all that trivia I couldn’t understand, what I’m getting here is that...the world,” she was now gesturing big and slow with her hands, “is a gaseous, misty *sphere*...with lands floating upon it...controlled by unseen powers...which is drifting through a space filled with more clouds and mists...which in turn is drifting in yet *another* space filled with nothing but ether?”

The others nodded, listening intently with rapt attention at a layman’s attempt to express their theory.

Maegan folded her arms across her chest. “That is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard in my life.”

Gotten stood up in mild protest. “Oh now you certainly can’t dismiss years of intense and careful study just like that!”

“Years of intense study indeed,” Maegan said with a smirk, “I’m sure all that beer drinking can deem you worthy of a degree from the University of the Malodorous Goat. And whoever would think that the world is a *sphere*? That’s absolutely outlandish!”

Megan the Hedgewitch shrugged her shoulders back from the far corner of the room. “Well, it’s the only thing that could explain how Brother Cargill took more than half a century to travel from Ludendorf to Nevuchar Springs.”

“And...Druinor agrees with you?”

“Oh absolutely, madame,” instantly warbled Lord Arijani, “he only needed three mugs of meekulbrau to be convinced of our theory.”

“Alright, alright...besides the fact that you believe that the world is round and you made Druinor drunk just to validate your, uh, findings...what does all of this have to do with

Brother Cargill’s documents on undiscovered lands?”

“That’s where it gets pretty exciting,” remarked Gotten, his hands clutching a crumpled set of papers which looked like a journal of sorts, “we believe, yes, that the Mists surrounding our sphere set forth, um...*tendrils* into other worlds, pulling new lands and new peoples into our own. You can’t deny our own history, Madame Rumwall: first there was Barovia, then came the other nations, gift-wrapped in Mists!

“Dmitri said earlier that there are hidden powers, gods you may say, at work in our world. What we think now is that these landmasses are being pulled here by these same powers for a reason.”

Maegan’s interest was genuinely growing. “And that reason is...?”

“Well, now, look at the time!” Dmitri suddenly interrupted just as Gotten was about to answer Maegan’s question. “Madame Rumwall, I’m afraid we have to leave before the Bar shuts its doors on us for the night.”

With quick movements, Megan, Lord Arijani and Gotten barged out the door, ran through the hallway and scurried down into the kitchen where the Secret Brick could be found. Dmitri followed suit, but not before briskly shaking the half-elf’s dainty hands in a gesture of gratitude. “We’ll be back when Druinor returns, I promise.”

Silence returned to the building as Maegan heard the last creak of the Brick from downstairs. Bewilderment was written all over her face as she struggled to ask herself what was that all about. Then she turned back to Druinor’s clutter of a room, wondering who in the world would have to explain this mess to him when he comes back.



# Chamhok Mun

## *Banishment at the Other Side*

### *The Land*

Chamhok Mun is an enclave in the Mists with a temperate climate thirty-five miles from north to south, twenty from west to east. The domain is split into two different facets: to the north is the town of Haejong, which sits on lush, forested land. At the opposite end lies Ginjae, another town amidst a wasteland of rock and small, hardy plant life. Between the two seemingly different worlds is a massive solid wall of unknown building material measuring over forty feet high and just as thick, with an elaborately carved gate at its center.

**Landscape:** Haejong--Full ecology (temperate hills and forests), Ginjae--Sparse ecology (temperate hills).

### *Settlements*

Haejong (pop. 4000), Ginjae (pop. 1200).

### *The Folk*

**Population:** 10500. Humans 59%, Nagas 30%, Other 1%.

**Languages:** Hankuk Mal\*, Naga.

**Religions:** Omma Sup\* (see below).

In terms of inhabitants, Chamhok Mun is more than likely unique in the Land of Mists; a number of the domain's inhabitants are nagas, half-human, half-serpent creatures. These nagas, however, act much like humans and tend to be neat and tidy, keeping their black hair tied, their beards long but trimmed, their scant clothing simple yet folded in the right places. Unlike nagas in many other worlds, the naga folk of Chamhok Mun are civilized, and in many ways reflect and exude the traits of their human counterparts. Many of them in fact are benevolent and kind, but still retain their primordial, aberrant naga traits.

The folk of Chamhok Mun, both human and naga, find beauty and inspiration in the simplicity of life and nature around them. Like

most humanoid societies they are deeply familial, and they give respect to their elders (in many cases regardless of species).

Haejong's inhabitants tend to live as aristocrats, with numerous servants tending orchards and fields of rice. Ginjae's folk, on the other hand, do their own work, carving out a living in the wasteland that surrounds them. Both towns, however, believe in the industrious concept of *hongik inggan*, which teaches one to be useful for the greater good.

Both human and naga inhabitants worship the Crystal Serpent, which Chamhok Mun philosophers believe is a numinous ancestral spirit. In almost every household, a small female naga glass statue sits on an altar reserved for prayer.

### *Cultural Level*

Regardless of the separation and division of the domain, Chamhok Mun functions at an Oriental Classical Age (4) level of culture.

### *The Law*

Feudal hereditary aristocracy. Each of the two towns has its own hereditary governor, who controls his dominion as he sees fit. In Haejong, overseers make sure that things run smoothly, and infractions have their corresponding penalty or punishment. Ginjae is for all events and purposes a small monastic village amid a barren wilderness, ruled over by what everybody calls an abbess. She and her naga postulants try to make the best out of bad conditions through farming and mining.

It may not seem obvious at first, but Ginjae and Haejong are bitter rivals. Ever since the Mists came and took the land, the two settlements have been on some sort of civil conflict, sending people and magic across Chamhok Mun's dividing wall to attack each other. Hired bandits from Haejong raid Ginjae, stealing its produce and therefore making it even shoddier than it already is. Postulants from

Ginjae, on the other hand, pray for unusual phenomena to occur in Haejong, both for retaliation and to gain advantage in the rivalry.

## *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** Rice, peas, tea, silver, brass, opium, sandalwood, silk, salmon, citrus, snakeskin, furs, salt, emeralds.

**Coinage:** serpenteye (gp), serpentclaw (sp), serpentscale (cp).

## *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Fighter, cleric, druid, ranger, rogue.

**Skills:** Animal Empathy, Climb, Craft (calligraphy, sculpting, weaponsmithing, weaving), Gather Information, Hide, Knowledge (nature, religion), Listen, Move Silently, Profession (apothecary, farmer, herdsman, scribe), Read Lips, Spot, Wilderness Lore.

**Feats:** Ambidexterity, Back to the Wall, Expertise (plus derivatives), Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (scimitar).

## *Heol Jon-Woo*

### **DARKLORD OF CHAMHOK MUN**

**Dark Naga:** CR 9; Large Aberration; HD 9d8+12; hp 60; Init +2 (Dex); Spd. 40 ft.; AC (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk. sting +2 melee, bite +2 melee, masterwork scimitar +2 melee; sting 2d4+2 and poison, bite 1d4+1, masterwork scimitar 1d6+1; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft. (coiled)/10 ft.; SA Poison, Detect Thoughts, Spells; SQ Incorporeal, Poison Immunity, Guarded Thoughts, Charm Resistance; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +8, Wil +9; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16.

**Skills and Feats:** Bluff +11, Concentration +15, Gather Information +7, Hide +9, Intimidate +5, Listen +10, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +8, Spot +12; Alertness, Ambidexterity, Combat Casting, Dodge, Lightning Reflexes.

Heol Jon-Woo is the exact opposite of his benevolent naga counterparts in Chamhok Mun, and in many cases even different from many dark nagas. He supports an ebony cloth band on his balding head, while his black serpent scales smolder with an unusual fiery-red sheen.

## *Background*

To love, honor, and obey: the vows that unite two people together can also tear them both asunder. In the small lands of Chamhok Mun, love, honor and obedience became the driving force in the land's sorrowful fate.

Jin was the beautiful daughter of Haejong's governor, a carefree young woman who wanted nothing more than to break free from the rigidity of politics and follow her inner spiritual path. So much so that when she was presented in court on her seventeenth birthday, she refused her father's commands to marry an aging vizier from a neighboring kingdom.

Deep in her heart Jin wanted to become a nun, one who served the masses with compassion. Her ruthless father, however, would have none of that. If Jin would destroy her family's honor by not marrying the vizier, she would be taught a lesson and be banished into the barren wilderness south. This was exactly what happened, as Jin was pushed out from the lands of Haejong and left to fend for herself among the harsh rocks of the Ginjae wilderness.

Four days she wandered, eating tasteless leaves and drinking bitter water. As she teetered on the brink of death on the fifth day, weak from exhaustion and hunger, a *kirtan*, a traveling band of religious devotees, came to her aid and brought her to their cavern sanctuary.

Jin discovered that she had been brought to where she was happy: a spiritual haven out in the wilderness, where there was prayer and rejoicing all day and night. With open arms the abbess welcomed Jin into their congregation, and in time she became one of the faith's most avid devotees.

Word of Jin's piety reached Haejong, and the governor was as furious as ever; his daughter was alive, bringing "dishonor" to his clan by serving as a simple nun out in the desert. His mind blinded by anger, the governor thought of bringing Jin home by force and punishing the devotees who welcomed her into their fold.

In the middle of the night, he descended down into forgotten catacombs beneath his mansion. He read the potent glyphs written on the walls, knowing that by simply reciting such words he could master power no normal person could ever harness.

The sound of snakes' rattles burst forth from the darkness as the very air itself seemed to coalesce into something tangible. Within moments there was a huge creature coiled before the governor, a naga with fire for eyes and



smoldering coal for snake scales. To name a thing was to control it, so the governor gave his conjured monster one: Heol Jon-Woo. Heol's orders were clear: destroy the Ginjæe monastery and bring his daughter home.

A blood moon rose over Chamhok Mun that night as the dark naga slithered through Haejong's twisting streets, heading south towards remote Ginjæe. The people of the town cowered with fear behind their doors and windows as they saw the monster swiftly slide past their homes. In Ginjæe, meanwhile, oblivious to what came for them, the devotees continued on with their nightly prayers.

Serene chanting greeted the naga Heol as he stood tall at the unguarded entrance to the caverns. He entered with a ferocious bloodlust as he cast spells of fire and let the sanctuary burn.

The screams of the dying filled the fiery night sky. Jin was, unfortunately, one among those who died that night, although her body showed little sign of burns. Heol unceremoniously grabbed her body and headed back to Haejong. From the mountains surrounding Chamhok Mun, a visible Mist rolled down into the realm, mingling with the thick smoke that reeked of human flesh. Hidden powers have taken the land of the snake-worshippers as one of their own.

Upon seeing his daughter's body, the governor entered into a mad rage, blaming everything on the naga he had summoned. But his orders were not clear: he never mentioned if Jin were to be brought back alive. But dark powers, now in control over this sleepy realm, have given Heol a sinister will, so as the governor grabbed a spear and ran towards the monster, he in return simply plunged his scimitar into the governor's heart. With ruthlessness and fury that mirrored the governor's, Heol raised hell through the mansion.

The land had changed, and Chamhok Mun now bowed before a powerful new leader. With his newfound powers Heol summoned more of his kind to populate his realm and take the walking ilk as slaves. As his curse would have it, however, all those Heol had summoned

were sympathetic to the humans, and had decided to live among them as equals.

## Current Sketch

Were it not for Heol Jon-Woo killing him, the governor would have very likely been Chamhok Mun's lord. But the threads of the Fates unravel many surprises, even the hidden powers of the Dread Realms may be caught unawares. For his blind subservience to the governor before his death, and the bloodlust that followed in his wake, the Dark Powers granted this smoldering creature a domain of its own. Heol, however, enraged by the opposition of the other nagas, decided to abandon the governor's mansion for a more strategic location: between Haejong and Ginjæe. Since Chamhok Mun's

entry into the Mists, Heol has become less frenzied and more devious and cunning, killing only when needed and only with patient planning.

The wall between Haejong and Ginjæe is Heol's stronghold, created entirely of solidified snake venom that shines like smoky glass. Only the passageway through the wall is safe; anyone touching the wall itself must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or suffer 2d6 damage from poison per round. This can be treated as any other normal poison.

However, because of political rivalries, many of Chamhok Mun's people don't even know Heol Jon-Woo exists. Haejong's folk think that Ginjæe is a town of religious

fanatics, while Ginjæe in turn wants vengeance for the burning of its beloved sanctuary. Unknown by the inhabitants of both towns, all this hate and bickering only fuels the dark naga's lust for earthly power.

Heol's curse is distinct: his quest to populate Chamhok Mun with nagas is countered by the fact that all nagas he summons are pure-hearted and empathic to humans, be they inhabitants of either town.

## Combat

Heol Jon-Woo prefers to hide in the shadows, preferring to stay out of everyone's

### Omna Sup

The naga goddess worshipped by Chamhok Mun's population is neutral. Aside from the Crystal Serpent, her other titles include the Scaled Mother, the Queen Benefactress and She Who Heals with Venom. Most scholars in Chamhok Mun believe that Omna Sup was the first of their kind, and thus is worthy of respect and praise from her descendants. Furthermore, Chamhok Mun tradition holds that Omna Sup was born out of light and earth, and that her countless eggs gave life to the barren world. She is generally a nature goddess, but natives offer to her many attributes.

**Domains:** Earth, Knowledge, Plant, Strength, Water.

**Symbol:** Two crossed scimitars superimposed on a serpent swallowing its own tail (*ouroboros*).

**Favored Weapon:** Scimitar.

way and content to watch events from the background. However, when discovered and provoked, the dark naga can be a formidable opponent, employing his serpentine traits and fire spells as effective weapons.

### *Spell-like Abilities*

At will--*burning hands, produce flame*; 3/day--*wall of fire, fire seeds*; 1/day--*incendiary cloud*. These abilities function as the spells cast by a 14<sup>th</sup>-level cleric. All saves are at DC 14 where applicable.

### *Special Attacks*

**Poison (Ex):** Anyone stung by Heol Jon-Woo must make a Will save (DC16) or lapse into a deep, nightmare-haunted sleep for 2d4 rounds.

**Naga Summoning (Su):** Once a day Heol can summon a guardian naga from an unknown source beyond the Mists. The naga, however, will always have a good alignment and will immediately turn against the dark naga.

**Detect Thoughts (Su):** Heol Jon-Woo can continuously *detect thoughts* of anyone in Chamhok Mun as the spell cast by a 9<sup>th</sup>-level sorcerer (DC 15). This ability is always active.

### *Special Qualities*

**Incorporeal (Ex):** Heol Jon-Woo can become incorporeal at will. While in this state Heol can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better weapons, or magic with 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Heol can pass through solid objects at will, and his own attacks can pass through armor. In this state he can always move silently.

**Guarded Thoughts (Ex):** Heol Jon-Woo is immune to any form of mind reading.

**Charm Resistance (Ex):** Heol has a +2 racial bonus to saving throws against all charm effects.

**Poison Immunity (Ex):** Heol is immune to any poison.

### *Closing the Borders*

When Heol-Jon Woo wishes to seal Chamhok Mun, an overwhelming wall of sound similar to snakes rattling envelopes the domain. The rattling confuses and puts anyone trying to escape out of balance. Any person penetrating the wall of cacophony would ultimately find him or herself back in Chamhok Mun.

### *The Lair*

Heol Jon-Woo quietly watches the people of Chamhok Mun from the solid wall of venom that separates the domain, destroying any chance of peace or unity between Haejong and Ginjae. The wall itself, plus the only passageway that connects the two towns together, are both considered a rank 2 sinkhole of evil.

### *Between Two Rival Lands*

If by any chance Heol Jon-Woo is destroyed, his body immediately turns into a huge and heaving swarm of garter snakes. The borders remain open during this time, but Heol fully reforms to his naga shape by the next full moon. To destroy the curse that befell Chamhok Mun, the inhabitants of Haejong and Ginjae must be convinced to reconcile, which is never easy considering the deep rivalries that run between both towns. The sole passageway through the venom wall is considered neutral ground, and is constantly guarded by Heol Jon-Woo. Peace could only be settled in the short period of time when Heol is destroyed.



# Dur-Anea

## *Unwelcome Immortality in the Bond Between Heaven and Sea*

### **The Navigaccio** **June 17, 703 BC.**

**f**ourteen days, and still no sign of land... Brother Cargill stood on the ship's deck at port side, gazing emptily into the Mists that have finally settled on the surface of the sea. The distant voices and the eerie screams settled with the sinister, formless mass around them, and they remained just that. Voices and screams, nothing else.

Ever since abandoning the Order, Brother Cargill's wanderlust had yet to be fully sated. He had embarked on a journey almost no one in the Core would care to undertake, and he was in no mood to stop now. Nevuchar Springs, The Amber Wastes, Souragne, Huninfjord... no matter where this ship took him, there he would go. Now in his fifties, Brother Cargill's eyesight was blurring, his hair was thinning, and even his hearing had started to fail.

So much so that he even failed to hear the lookout's first shout from up the loft above.

"Sharp rocks ahead!!!"

From untold hundreds of miles away, Brother Cargill's mind came speeding back. *Overseer damn me!* he swore silently to himself. Straight-ahead for about three nautical miles, the Mists cleared a bit to reveal sharp, towering rocks rushing head on for the ship itself. Everyone on deck, including Brother Cargill stood motionlessly, terrified at the unearthly sight of rocks speeding towards the *Navigaccio*.

*Well, the monk thought briefly, at least looking for land won't be a problem after all...*

Just then, from deep beneath the depths came an unearthly sound, a deep moaning that created ripples on the water's surface and actually shook the ship's hull. It was a loud, guttural rumble, like the howl of an ancient, gigantic demon awakened from its slumber in its sunken city at the bottom of the sea.

As the deafening roar tore through the Misty air, Brother Cargill and the *Navigaccio*'s crew witnessed something even more bizarre: the rocky islet that came speeding toward them

slowly shifted its direction starboard side, away from the ship itself. Within a few more moments, both the rocks and the moan dissolved into the Mists as quickly and as ominously as they appeared.

For the next few moments, as the eerie silence of the Mists returned, everyone onboard the *Navigaccio* was too shocked to speak. As the spell lifted, Brother Cargill slowly but firmly returned back to his quarters, pulled out his quill pen, opened his journal and began to write.

*"June 17<sup>th</sup>. We encounter a most unusual sight, fifteen days at sea. An island, with its own free will and compass, travelling uncharted waters..."*

### *The Land*

Dur-Anea is a tiny, very ancient but most unusual Island of Terror, traveling in the farthest and darkest seas of the Demiplane of Dread. Its inhospitable surface area covers roughly two square miles, and any person who sets foot on the island can feel nothing but a vast sense of the island's primordial, archaic nature.

Travelers who have set foot on the island--and survived long enough to flee--tell of the ground littered with broken pottery and humanoid remains. Furthermore, hidden somewhere in Dur-Anea's stands a stepped temple ruin carved out of the jagged rocks. Anyone who tries to discover the age of the temple will discover that its construction even predates the creation of the Land of Mists.

**Landscape:** Sparse ecology (temperate hills).

### *Cultural Level*

Though Dur-Anea could be considered Savage (0), the ruined temple suggests a simple Bronze Age (2) cultural level in its undetermined past.

## Settlements

Dur-Anea has no current settlements to speak of.

## The Folk

**Population:** Unknown.

**Religion:** Unknown.

No outsider knows who or what exactly once inhabited the small land of Dur-Anea. Ruins and remains suggest an industrious, utopian race that worshipped a vast pantheon of laborer deities. If one studied further, one may even ascertain that this ideal civilization was destroyed in a cataclysm in its distant history.

## The Law

No government. However, travelers may still sense that Dur-Anea is still under a harsh, despotic rule by an unseen leader.

## Trade and Diplomacy

**Resources (not exploited):** gold, copper, coal, lapis lazuli, clay, incense.

**Coinage:** None.

Dur-Anea has no trade and diplomacy, although travelers may on occasion scavenge the few treasures that litter the island.

## Native Characters

Seemingly devoid of all life, Dur-Anea has no native characters to speak of.

## Narmu-Shurpak

### DARKLORD OF DUR-ANEA

**Annunaki:** CR 11; Medium-size outsider (law); HD 11d6; hp 49; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 20 (+4 natural, +4 Dexterity, +2 leather armor); Atk +8/+3 melee (khopesh sword 1d6+4); SA Celestial Smite; SQ Domain Dominion, Immortality; AL LE; Save Fort +12, Ref +5, Wil +5; Str 20, Dex 19, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 17.

**Skills and Feats:** Animal Empathy +3, Balance +8, Climb +9, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +7, Handle Animal +15, Hide +9, Intimidate +8, Jump +6, Knowledge (nature) +7, Move Silently +5, Profession (laborer) +12, Ride +10, Sense Motive +4, Wilderness Lore +5; Alertness, Great Fortitude, Improved Unarmed Strike, Ride-by Attack, Trample.

**Signature Possessions:** Khopesh Sword +2.

Narmu-Shurpak is an *annunaki*, a race of outsiders whose sole purpose is to become slaves of the gods. In all aspects he looks human, but his skin seems to gleam with a faint copper color. His clean-shaven face and glowing, silver-gray eyes reveal his outsider heritage, while a large dragon tattoo on his left shoulder brands him as a laborer.

With the exception of the extremely few travelers who have set eyes on Dur-Anea, Narmu-Shurpak is the only one who knows of the land's secret:

Dura-Anea rests on the back of a colossal sea turtle.

## Background

Narmu-Shurpak's divine lords took care of a young world, where the earthly races roamed wild in jungles and forests, untamed along with the beasts of the earth, the monsters of the deep, and the birds of the sky. The gods were patient: in time, when the world was ripe enough for these races to exploit its wealth, then they can shape their own destinies as they will.

For the moment, however, the gods would be custodians of this world, so upon it they sent countless legions of their servants: *igigi*, who with their heavenly vehicles filtered the noxious skies and purified the poisonous seas; and *annunaki*, who with their lumbering juggernauts and mechanisms tamed the restless earth and illuminated the dark ocean depths.

One of the *annunaki*, Narmu-Shurpak, was given authority to oversee the development of the depth's giants: the whales, the leviathans, the giant turtles, the great winged mantas. In time he grew to love these creatures, even taking one of the colossal turtles as a faithful aquatic pet, an animal friend. With the height and girth of a small hill, this huge creature that swam the turbulent waters was affectionately named Dur-Anea, the Bond between Heaven and Sea.

## Defying the Will of the Gods

Narmu-Shurpak's bond with Dur-Anea, however, would not last long. Far beyond the blue sky, where the huge *Shem* boats floated in the bleak void, the great gods decreed that even if other worlds harbored such marvelous and awesome beings, the great giants of the deep would not be allowed to thrive in this fledgling planet. Therefore, all those that still lived must

be destroyed. All the *annunaki* were tasked by the gods to carry out this divine act.

Dur-Anea grimly yet contentedly surrendered its will to the divine decree. The great turtle welcomed death; after all, it was now in the twilight of its years, and was ready to plunge to the ocean's bottom.

Narmu-Shurpak, however, would never let Dur-Anea die. Although he knew most of his *annunaki* comrades by name and by face, it was only with Dur-Anea that he felt a deep, familial connection. In blind, seething anger, Narmu-Shurpak decided to defy his celestial superiors.

Using a vehicle stolen from a reckless *igigi*, Narmu-Shurpak quietly ascended beyond the sphere of the planet into the floating boat of Enlil, the god of life, and stole a flame from the Furnace of Immortality. In his haste to escape, however, Narmu-Shurpak broke a mirror that held the young world's creative essences. As the *annunaki* returned to the world, shards of broken glass followed him, falling earthward.

### *Life Amidst Death*

Chaos broke loose. Just as Narmu-Shurpak let the heavenly mirror shatter into a thousand pieces, the fabric of this young world broke into disorder. The gods could do nothing but weep and watch from a safe distance as millennia of careful creation collapsed before their very eyes. In deep sorrow they quickly fled the dying planet in search of one where they could begin life again. Legions of *annunaki* and *igigi* alike perished in the great cataclysm. In the ensuing destruction, the world was stripped of all life...

All life except for two.

As the first death throes of the planet came, Narmu-Shurpak immolated himself and Dur-Anea using the stolen Flame of Immortality. Old and tired, the great turtle let out a loud cry of lamentation, denied a well-deserved death after hundreds of years of life. Narmu-Shurpak, however, felt only a proud triumph: in his heart he felt that no god could ever break the bond between him and his loyal "steed."

### *At Cataclius*

For hundreds of agonizing years afterwards, the *annunaki* and the turtle roamed the lifeless seas of the shattered world, in vain trying to find even the tiniest spark of life.

One day, a vessel that could travel across the crystal spheres of the phlogiston descended upon the dead world. The innocent

crew of this ship spotted a small island on the endless gray sea, and landed their craft on its rocky surface.

They could hear nothing in their minds but a telepathic plea to destroy the island itself. In fear, they quickly boarded their vessel and tried to flee the world entirely.

They never made it. Fearing that the gods have returned to sunder him from Dur-Anea, Narmu-Shurpak frantically slaughtered the visitors and tore their vessel apart. The silence of solitude returned, as Narmu-Shurpak directed old, tired Dur-Anea into a think bank of Mists.

### *Current Sketch*

The great turtle Dur-Anea now wanders the seas of Ravenloft, desiring nothing more than to be put out of its misery. The huge turtle, however, is helpless against its *annunaki* master, who since time immemorial has never learned how to let go.

Centuries of isolation have brought paranoia to Narmu-Shurpak, who now thinks that each visitor to Dur-Anea is an emissary of the forgotten gods, who long ago issued the decree to kill his beloved living island. He has become obsessive with Dur-Anea, never wanting the great turtle to be ever separated from him again; this is, of course, the curse of the Dark Powers on the *annunaki*.

### *Combat*

Whenever visitors to Dur-Anea arrive, Narmu-Shurpak hides out of sight, studying their every move. Nevertheless, it would be hard for him to hide his wrath whenever he thinks that the visitors are "divine emissaries" who wish to destroy Dur-Anea. This premature thinking on his part almost always gets the best of him.

### *Special Attack*

**Celestial Smite (Su):** As an *annunaki*, Narmu-Shurpak can sacrifice his strength to give a powerful blow to any opponent or obstacle. Narmu-Shurpak can decrease any number of Strength levels to increase the damage dealt by his attack bonus by that same number. His Strength total however cannot go below five levels, and it takes five rounds for him to regain 1d4 Strength levels.

## *Special Qualities*

**Domain Dominion (Su):** Narmu-Shurpak has complete control over Dur-Anea. This does not apply to mental thoughts projected by the giant turtle.

**Immortality (Su):** As a result of bathing in the Flame of Immortality, Narmu-Shurpak does not age or cannot die.

## *Closing the Borders*

Dur-Anea has no known borders, so visitors cannot be supernaturally held against their will by Narmu-Shurpak. However, Dur-Anea's cryptic mental pleas, depending on whatever the turtle wants them to do, may keep visitors on the island.

## *The Lair*

The whole living island of Dur-Anea is Narmu-Shurpak's lair. His unnatural and inhumane control over a beautiful yet frail creature has rendered everything on the island above water as a rank 2 sinkhole of evil.

## *Breaking Immortal Bonds*

To destroy Narmu-Shurpak's obsessive hold over the living island, one must go underwater, into the mouth of the beast, and find within the vast cavern of its shell a faint spark of the Flame of Immortality. This must then be taken to the temple at the surface where the flame eventually dies down in exactly eight rounds. Once the Flame is extinguished, both turtle and *annunaki* are rendered mortal, and visitors have another ten rounds to leave Dur-Anea before it plunges deep beneath the waters to its death.



# Hiva Motu

## Bliss and Ecstasy at the Portal of Death

**R**are is the traveler who ventures into the tropics of the Demiplane and lives to tell the tale. Rarer still is the traveler who discovers lands beyond what are perceived as the ends of the world, where only the roiling Mists loom forth. Here Hiva Motu hides, tucked away where dragons be, a string of islands lost in the swirl of uncharted, endless gray seas.

### The Land

Made up of twelve islands, Hiva Motu is extremely remote. From any known landmass in Ravenloft, reaching Hiva Motu would take at least fifteen days on boat traveling through endless ocean. A mild storm greets any vessel on the last day, until eventually the Mists would part to reveal a wide expanse of blue sea, with volcanic islands looming in the distance.

Each of the islands seems primitive, even prehistoric, made up of steep mountain peaks and deep, emerald-green valleys. Waves lash out against jagged coastal cliffs, while steam hisses out from thermal vents. Hiva Motu is molded continuously out of fire: on some of the islands, rivers of molten lava called *pahoehoe* flow smoothly into the sea, incinerating everything in its path while creating new land in the process.

Life is lush and abundant on Hiva Motu, where groves of palm and coconut trees tower unnaturally into the sky. Rampant growths of vines and reeds blanket much of the land, while flowers such as lilies and hibiscus add color to Hiva Motu's savage beauty. Birds with strange songs and curious plumes further add to the realm's mystique.

The most obvious evidences of intelligent habitation on Hiva Motu are the *moai*,

black stone giants randomly raised all over the island chain. Their round yet angular faces stare sternly out into the restless ocean beyond.

**Landscape:** Full Ecology (warm aquatic, forests, hills and mountains).

### Cultural Level

Hiva Motu functions at a Bronze Age (2) cultural level.

### Settlements

Oa Nepunai (pop. 2300), Kati-kapua (pop. 900), Hiva Touhenua (pop. 650).

### The Folk

**Population:** 7500. Humans 99%, Other 1%.

**Languages:** Oa\*.

**Religion:** Mana\*.

The Hiva people are a hardy folk, with fair to dark skin, long straight hair and medium build. Men are usually tall and muscular, and sport a multitude of tattoos on their bodies as signs of strength and honor. Women are known to never cut their hair for the span of a lifetime, although they also decorate their skin with small tattoos. The Hiva people wear garments made of reeds and cotton, and frequently even decorate

themselves with fresh flowers. Jewelry is rarely, if ever, worn by even nobles of high rank, although some folk tend to wear beads and wristbands made out of cowry shells and obsidian.

As with many cultures in remote places, the Hiva people are suspicious of strangers from other lands. Visitors are often met with fierce

### The Rhythmic Ascendance

The Rhythmic Ascendance is one of the longest Mistways known, taking around fifteen days travel from Sri Raji to Hiva Motu. Its name comes from the rhythmic pounding of drums that can constantly be heard in the distance once the Mists envelope the ship. Leaving Sri Raji, the pounding is accompanied by sitar music; this is replaced by fierce chanting as Hiva Motu nears.

**Direction:** Northeastern Sri Raji-Southern Hiva Motu (Moderate Reliability, One-way).

warriors who chant and holler songs of war to intimidate and hopefully drive these foreigners away. Once the trust of strangers is earned, however, the Hiva people are known to be overly kind and devoted to their new friends.

The Hiva people believe in the concept of *mana*, a sort of spiritual energy that interconnects all of nature like a spider's web. To the Hiva, *mana* is beyond the polarities of good and evil, order and chaos; it simply exists.

In its entirety, visitors would find Hiva Motu a place so peaceful that some find it almost disturbing.

## *The Law*

Utopian monarchy. Hiva Motu is a single kingdom currently ruled by King Tongariki in Oa Nepunai. He is a benevolent ruler, one who thankfully does not collect taxes, although he frequently demands tribute from visitors, which he soon distributes to his people.

Hiva Motu's settlements are too small and too peaceful to require true militias. Ever since the civil wars ended years ago there has really been no reason to continue the art of warfare in such a beautiful land. Nevertheless, ceremonial warriors volunteer themselves to the monarchy just in case hostility erupts from beyond the island chain.

## *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** Coconuts, shellfish, tuna, eggs, dyes, pineapples, obsidian, birds, cut flowers, mollusks, mangoes.

**Coinage:** None. Trade in Hiva Motu is conducted through barter, although three cowry shells (which are used as coins) are equal in value to one gold piece.

At present, Hiva Motu has extremely little contact with other cultures, although it sporadically trades with distant domains such as Sri Raji.

## *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Fighter, ranger, druid, cleric, paladin.

**Skills:** Animal Empathy, Appraise, Climb, Craft (sculpture, weaponsmithing), Handle Animal, Hide, Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility and royalty), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (chant, dance, drums), Profession (farmer, herdsman), Sense Motive, Spot, Swim, Wilderness Lore.

**Feats:** Ambidexterity, Courage, Expertise (plus derivatives), Improved Unarmed Strike (plus derivatives), Voice of Wrath, Weapon Focus (blowgun, dagger, throwing spear).

## *Kapo-Wairua*

### **DARKLORD OF HIVA MOTU**

**Akuatele:** CR 9; Medium-size outsider; HD 9d8+12; hp 73; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 50 ft.; AC 19 (-1 size, +5 Dex, +5 natural); Atk +10/+5 melee (slam 2d6+3); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.; SA Detect Thoughts, Mana Drain; SQ Outsider, Overwhelming Essence, Alternate Form, DR 15/+1; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +12, Wil +3; Str 16, Dex 21, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 14.

**Skills and Feats:** Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +8, Heal +5, Knowledge (nature) +7, Listen +12, Spot +12; Dodge, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (slam).

The entity the Hiva Motu folk know as Kapo-Wairua is an akuatele, literally a "spirit of the sky," that manifests as an imposing man or woman surrounded by an almost divine aura. Kapo-Wairua's true form, however, is that of a humanoid with transparent skin, revealing a latticework of luminous purple-blue veins.

## *Background*

Even before the Misty Waters claimed the realm as its own, Hiva Motu was already isolated, a small string of islands on a distant, oceanic world known only as Tangaroa, the Realm of Storms. Back then, however, the seas brought only misery and fear. No part of any island was safe from Tangaroa's perpetual wrath; the beaches were uninhabitable as angry waves battered the rocky coastlines. People tried fleeing to the hills, but rain always fell down in torrents, resulting in landslides and mudflows. Mountaintops were not safe either, as lightning endlessly fell down from the rumbling, stormy skies. In those extremely rare times when the skies were relatively quiet, the sun was but a sickly disk hidden behind a screen of gray clouds.

Worse, however, the scattered tribes of Hiva Motu were at war. In a realm where land was a precious commodity amidst the endless tempests, only the strongest survived. The island tribes sent hundreds of warriors to their deaths in battles raged amidst the fury of the elements.



Things changed forever when the stormy clouds opened up to receive a large ball of light that fell to earth on the far island of Ahu Ueneku. A faint boom and a bright light could be heard as far away as Oa Nepunai, the largest island. No one dared to go to Ahu Ueneku immediately afterwards; to the Hiva, the stormy skies were the harbinger of evil and suffering. When roguish warriors were brave enough to explore the island, however, they found a severely injured human amidst a blasted landscape of burnt coconut trees and overturned stones. They knew of the ancient legends of the *akuatele*, nameless beings from beyond the thundering clouds, beyond even the hidden sun. With reverence they picked up the wounded creature and returned to Oa Nepunai. For ten days and nights, shamans and nurses took care of the *akuatele*. It neither spoke, nor moved its limbs; only its listless eyes and gurgled breathing gave any hint of life.

On the tenth night, as thunder boomed in the heavens, a woman was alone tending to the dying spirit. It came as a surprise as she watched the *akuatele* move its left hand and touch her own, but by then it was too late. She fell down unconscious on the ground, in the state of oblivion between life and death itself.

That night, the *akuatele* dreamt for the first time. It was a strange, new sensation, one he liked very much. Never in his life as a spirit from beyond did he experience such ecstasy, such peace, bliss and impossibility. His form began to coalesce and to heal, the nurse's near-death experiences feeding his own essences. The next morning, as the angry clouds of Tangaroa began to dissipate for the first time to reveal the sun's shining disk, the *akuatele* was strong enough to stand upright. At his feet lay his healer, dead from bliss. But by then, the death was overshadowed by his influence spreading all over the island chain: the civil wars have finally ceased as an indescribable peace settled into each person. The natives finally welcomed their ward not as a feared entity from the stormy skies, but as a heavenly messenger of peace. Deep within his mind, however, he wanted to take his mortal pain away, to experience more of these ecstatic dreams.

### *Usurpers of an Island Paradise*

Years passed, and the tempest-tossed landscape of Hiva Motu was transformed. Wildflowers grew on towering cliff faces and jagged peaks, while deep-green forests of palm and coconut

covered the sandy beaches. Birds of countless colors added song and beauty to this burgeoning paradise. Rivals in the old civil wars united together in peace to form a single, monarchical government. The ancient art of building *moai* was revived, and now they stood watching with listless eyes on mountain slopes, beach cliffs and extinct volcanic craters.

The *akuatele* himself was granted a plot of land where he can roam free until he could find a way to return to his heavenly abode: the entire island of Ahu Ueneku. But here in his isolation, he still sought the true bliss he first experienced those stormy nights when he fell from the heavens. People still fear entering Ahu Ueneku, the Island of Rainbows where heaven connects with earth and sea. On rare instances, however, brave souls would venture into the island and exploit its wealth; they eventually became the victims of the *akuatele*'s addiction to dreams. Everyone else was too pacified to even notice the disappearances.

In every paradise, there would always be destroyers of the peace. One day, an enraged group of seven male youths burned down a hut, killing three elderly people in the process. No one knew why they did such an unspeakable act, but most believed it was because of jealousy of wealth and wisdom. It was the first true breach of order in the islands after the wars, and no one, not even the King, knew how to deal with this crime. The monarch decided to bring them to the *akuatele*, the messenger of peace; perhaps the spirit of the heavens knew how to settle this.

With an entourage of twenty ceremonial warriors, the rogue band was brought to Ahu Ueneku. The *akuatele*, of course, was delighted to have them all on his island, for this meant more dreams for him to revel in; by this time he had not dreamt in over three months. The warriors explained the series of events that led them to come to the island; obsessed with gathering dreams, the *akuatele* hastily provided a new law for the Hiva to follow: all who broke the islands' peaceful ways were to be brought to Ahu Ueneku for "holistic healing." With just a mere touch to everyone gathered save for one, he commenced harvesting their spiritual energies to satisfy his hunger for dreams. The lone warrior was spared, watching with curiosity at the spirit's actions: to her, it was as if the *akuatele* had snatched and melded their souls into unity with him. *Kapo Wairua*, she whispered, *Snatcher of Souls*. Spared by his actions, she was to spread his heavenly decree to the island kingdom.

Crimson dusk set over the islands as the warrior-woman sailed back alone on the longboat to Oa Nepunai. She still wondered how the *akuatele* would heal the lawbreakers, even feeling a twinge of fear as a screen of darkness enveloped all of Hiva Motu.

All fears were quickly forgotten as the morning broke, bringing with it a new order to a peaceable kingdom. The youths and the warriors on Ahu Ueneku were dead, but as far as the rest of Hiva Motu was concerned they were still undergoing intense “holistic healing.” Utopian life as they knew it went on, but at the expense of being pulled into a darker Dread Realm, caused by a spirit of the skies eternally hungry for the dreams of men.

### *Current Sketch*

After that dread night when the band of youths and warriors were drained of mana, natives named the *akuatele* Kapo-Wairua, meaning Snatcher of Souls. His powers allow the rest to be blind about what really happens on Ahu Ueneku once “lawbreakers” are sent to its shores. After a few days, the Hiva, numbed by an overwhelming sense of peace and ecstasy, completely forget the identities of the lawbreakers.

On Ahu Ueneku itself, Kapo-Wairua has completely put returning to his celestial abode out of the question. He is addicted to dreams, a wonderful sensation none of his kind can experience, and he believes that humans provide an infinite supply. Hidden away from human eyes on the island is an open-air chamber made of stone; within the chamber are dozens of soft coconut-leaf cots where lie the bodies of the dead and dying, victims of a spirit’s unquenchable craving. His addiction is in itself the vicious curse beset on him by the Dark Powers of the Dread Realms.

### *Combat*

The *akuatele* does not need to engage in combat; his Overwhelming Essence sees to it that no one takes up arms against him. If the aura fails, as it has done a few times in the past to a few people, Kapo-Wairua can easily use his other abilities to subdue his opponents.

### *Special Attacks*

**Detect Thoughts (Sp):** Kapo-Wairua can continuously detect thoughts as the spell cast

by a 15th-level sorcerer (save DC 12). He can suppress and resume this ability as a free action.

**Mana Drain (Su):** Kapo-Wairua feeds on the spiritual energy of others. In order to feed, the victim must simply be touched by the *akuatele* (grapple check by Kapo-Wairua). He or she must then make a Will save (DC 18) or fall into a trance. This trance places the victim into a blissful near-death state, and his or her spiritual energy is used to keep Kapo-Wairua satiated. After a prolonged period, however, death ultimately claims him or her. During this trance period the victim loses 1d3 Constitution points each hour unless he or she is forcibly awakened.

### *Special Qualities*

**Outsider (Ex):** As an *akuatele*, Kapo-Wairua has darkvision 60 ft., is immune to poisons, charm or polymorphing, and is not subject to critical hits or mind-influencing effects.

**Overwhelming Essence (Su):** Kapo-Wairua’s aura stretches all over the islands and surrounding sea of Hiva Motu; within this aura any intelligent creature feels he or she lives in an idyllic paradise, and will at all costs refuse to leave. Any visitor entering Hiva Motu must effectively roll for a Will save (DC 10+Wis modifier) or be enthralled by this aura. This is a mind-affecting charm ability.

**Alternate Form (Ex):** As a being of pure energy, Kapo-Wairua can take the tangible form of any human on Hiva Motu, although his skin would always faintly glow with a bluish-purple tinge.

### *The Lair*

The island of Ahu Ueneku, the farthest island in Hiva Motu, is Kapo-Wairua’s lair, gifted to him by the Hiva themselves. His addiction to dreams and his treatment of humans, however, has turned this beautiful Island of Rainbows into a rank 3 sinkhole of evil.

### *Closing the Borders*

Kapo-Wairua has no control over the borders of Hiva Motu; however, his Overwhelming Essence makes sure that only a few can ever leave the island kingdom.



# Sanzhou Grove

## *I Think That I Shall Never See...*

*"Be that as it may, if my time arrives and I be sacrificed to the Forest, my soul would never be bound. For even if my mortal essence becomes one with the verdant misery that surrounds you, I become what sustains you and your hope for survival. In this little way, I stab at the vicious heart of Sanzhou."*

**--last written words of Qing Xuliao,  
Scribe of Sanzhou.**

### *The Land*

Sanzhou Grove is a mountainous, forested land, 80 miles in diameter. Evergreens, oaks, acorns and sturdy bamboo cover the landscape. Each season, spectacular bursts of color create a painting-perfect, ideal view that leaves the senses stunned and reeling. The misty rains and the distant thunder of spring blend with the light greens of the forest, while the wild summer sun turns the wood into an endless cathedral of cascading light. The autumn clouds mirror the yellows and reds of dying leaves, while a white winter snow could blanket the evergreens in a shimmering carpet. In much older times, Sanzhou was part of a much larger realm called the Xi'anlin Mountains, which in turn was cradled within the vast Yinshi Empire.

**Landscape:** Full ecology (temperate hills, forests and mountains).

### *Settlements*

Nanlu (pop. 1400), Ch'a Zhen (pop. 900).

### *The Folk*

**Population:** 3000. Humans 75%, Other 25%.

**Language:** Xi'an\*.

**Religion:** The Celestial Gardens\*.

The mostly-human folk of this domain are what could only be called Oriental: slanted eyes, thin yet strong frames, and straight raven-

black hair. The folk of Sanzhou prefer to live simple lives; common industries include agriculture, tea cultivation and homemade art. Their livelihoods are completely dependent on the forest around them; the irony is that the forest itself is the cause of their fears and miseries. Although they openly welcome visitors into their small homes, the native folk never speak freely of Sanzhou Grove's true nature for fear of attracting the vicious fey-folk that inhabit the forest.

### *Cultural Level*

Sanzhou Grove's cultural level could mildly be described as Oriental Dark Ages (5), as shown by many native folks' expertise in agriculture and craftsmanship. However, traces of a long-past Oriental Classical Age (4) are present everywhere: scattered all across the forested domain are stone ruins of a once-grandiose empire.

### *The Law*

Independent tribal theocracy. Each hamlet has an autonomous system of government, administered by either an elder chief or a cleric. Although each settlement has a formidable night watch, security is tight especially at nighttime.

There is, however, one grim, unifying law common to all who live in Sanzhou Grove, the law that allows human settlements to live within the forest. The Pact of Zhi Yang is more explicitly detailed below.

### *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** Tea, rice, citrus, silk, peaches, poultry, paper, porcelain, rice wine.

**Coinage:** Brass Mirror (gp), Opal Eye (sp), Glass Tear (cp).

## *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Ranger, monk, rogue, druid, bard.

**Skills:** Craft (basketweaving, bowmaking, calligraphy, weaponsmithing, weaving), Diplomacy, Knowledge (nature, nobility and royalty), Perform (chant, drama, harp, flute, storytelling), Profession (brewer, farmer, fisher, scribe), Swim, Use Rope.

**Feats:** Expertise (plus derivatives), Haunted, Improved Unarmed Strike (plus derivatives), Reincarnated, Two-Weapon Fighting (plus derivatives).

Reflecting the simplicity of the peoples of Sanzhou Grove, the only available player races include only humans, elves and half-elves. Clerics are devoted to the Pact of Zhi Yang no matter how reluctant they may be, as such they are not available as player characters.

Additionally, Sanzhou rangers and druids can summon their own mount, just as paladins are able to do so.

## *Zhi Yang*

### **DARKLORD OF SANZHOU GROVE**

**Evil Treant:** CR 11; Huge Plant; HD 8d8+35 (93 hp); AI NE; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18 (-2 size, +10 natural); Atk. 4 slams +6 melee; SA Animate Trees, Rustle, Improved Grab, Vengeful Germination; SQ Plant, Tremorsense, Regeneration, Weaknesses; Save Fort +9, Ref +5, Wil +7; Str 19, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 11.

**Skills & Feats:** Animal Empathy +9, Hide +14, Knowledge (nature) +11, Listen +6, Wilderness Lore +10; Alertness, Toughness.

Zhi Yang is an evil treant in the shape of a huge acorn tree, rooted deep within twisting wood of Sanzhou Grove. Her gray branches are gnarled and rough, while her serrated leaves are deadly to the touch. From certain angles, Zhi Yang's trunk has the distinct shape of a voluptuous woman, attracting many a foolish man to her evil endeavors.

## *Background*

In times long forgotten, long before the Yinshi Dynasty, in a world of walled cities and mighty kings, there was only the forest of Sanzhou. No human foot treaded upon its soft soil, no human voice penetrated its silent song.

Only the twitter of birds, the nimble dance of deer, and the tender laughter of fairies gently broke Sanzhou's peace.

But the tranquility of the woodland was tenuous, for this patch of paradise lay in a great battlefield of warring clans and kingdoms. On a dark autumn morning, legions of armed warriors marched down from the Eastern Steppes, while raiders from the West, with the fabled *fire-powder* in their arsenal, advanced in strict order to greet their brutal enemy. The two factions met in the wood between, and the fury of death broke loose from its chains. Armies clashed wrathfully as trumpets of war forever broke the peace of the forest. Sanzhou was ripped of its lush beauty, its mossy soil drenched in the blood of warriors, its sylvan wisdom tainted with death. In the end, as the civil wars gave way to the mighty Yinshi Empire, smoldering fires and rotting trees were all that remained in Sanzhou.

Bloodlust and hate, however, were the means by which an evil would take root and grow in the desolate forest. From out of the corrupted soil grew a seedling, a young acorn with leaves as sharp as knives. It gained sentience, and called itself Zhi Yang, the Resplendent. As the years passed and Sanzhou was forgotten, the acorn's malicious influence began to spread. Born out of hate, death and vengeance, she called out to other sylvan spirits, to help re-seed Sanzhou and reincarnate the ancient woodland. Deceived by Zhi Yang's angelic whisper, thousands of fey creatures descended upon the old battleground and proclaimed it their new home. At the middle of it all stood the acorn tree, proclaiming herself the lord of Sanzhou Grove.

As Sanzhou's second genesis blossomed forth, peaceful humans wandered into the growing grove and settled there as well. The fey, however, now corrupted by Zhi Yang's influence, seethed in anger at these creatures that once destroyed their pristine homes long ago. But the acorn tree was patient; she knew that their vengeance would have its own time and place. Soon more of the humans arrived and created settlements in the forest. These humans saw potential in this wilderness, and they began exploiting Sanzhou's natural wealth.

## *Wrath of an Acorn Tree*

The fog was low one morning when the village of Ch'a Zhen sent woodcutters to clear a tract of forestland for farming. Feyfolk followed the cutters through Sanzhou's twisting paths,

hiding among bushes and branches. As they reached their destination, one of the younger cutters wielded his axe and struck the first blow on the trunk of an evergreen tree. No sooner did his axe strike the elm that a collective cry of pain and anger thundered throughout Sanzhou Grove. Most of the woodcutters fled in terror, but the young one who dealt the first blow carried on, unfazed by the sylvan hate that now overwhelmed him. His thoughts were solely focused on cutting the elm's trunk; he was a human, and he would never bow down to the forest's "inferior spirits." His grip on the axe tightened as he chopped faster, while the elm that towered over him started to bend. Finally, after what seemed like ages, the woodcutter's chopping succeeded; the elm slowly tilted. In mere moments, the tree fell to earth with a huge crash that rivaled the fairies' maddening screams.

Suddenly, the forest fell silent, save for the chirping of little birds in the distance. The woodcutter viewed his work, axe in hand. Confident that nothing would happen to him, he turned around and started to walk home—only to be met by a huge acorn tree with a terrifying face on its curvaceous trunk. Zhi Yang, with a wrath none of her kind could ever match, grabbed the woodcutter and forced her cones into his mouth. His pleas of terror turned to screams of agonizing pain as the cones grew into seedlings that germinated within his body, tearing him asunder, giving life to hideous death. Within short moments, a new acorn tree grew where an elm was cut in its prime.

Vengeance had been served, but Zhi Yang lusted for more. For every tree that suffered and died in the ancient wars that ripped through Sanzhou, three human lives would pay the price. With a taste for blood, Zhi Yang turned her sights on Ch'a Zhen and Nanlu.

A hundred innocent lives were taken that fateful day, and a hundred more trees grew in Sanzhou, before Zhi Yang and her feyfolk minions granted "mercy" on the settlers. Nothing can protect the villagers forever; they knew that more lives would be taken if Zhi Yang's wishes were not properly honored. As the acorn left for the forest's deeper parts, a cold mist rolled down from the mountainside and claimed Sanzhou Grove for the Dread Realms.

### *Current Sketch*

As the days pass in Sanzhou Grove, the forest actually grows larger by a number of trees.

The evil treant darklord demands tribute through the Pact of Zhi Yang: for every tree cut and for every bush uprooted, three human lives must pay. Zhi Yang's faerie minions act as enforcers of this contract, while the villages' clerics serve as unwilling human enforcers.

Zhi Yang's ultimate goal is to get rid of humans from Sanzhou Grove, but her curse nullifies her desires; the Mists take settlers from beyond the Dread Realms into Sanzhou, keeping a constant population of humans in check. In this way an uneasy balance is set between the ever-growing forest and the humans who exploit its wealth.

### *Combat*

Zhi Yang prefers peace and tranquility deep within Sanzhou's inaccessible parts. Though she can move from one place to another, she stays rooted in one spot, preferring to send her corrupted feyfolk servants to do her dirty work elsewhere. She would attack fiercely, however, if a large or powerful contingent of human intruders challenges her sovereignty.

### *Special Attacks*

**Animate Trees (Sp):** Zhi Yang can animate and control four trees at a time within 180 feet at will, particularly those trees which Zhi Yang created using her Vengeful Germination ability. It takes a full round for a normal tree to uproot itself. Thereafter it moves at a speed of 10 and fights as an evil treant in all respects. Animated trees lose their ability to move if Zhi Yang is incapacitated or moves out of range. The ability is otherwise similar to *liveoak* as cast by a 12th-level druid.

**Rustle (Su):** Zhi Yang's knife-edged leaves emulate the harmonious music of chimes blown in the wind. Anyone within 30 feet of Zhi Yang must make a successful Will save (DC 16) or be *charmed*, drifting obliviously towards Zhi Yang. This is a mind affecting ability. A victim within 5 feet of the tree's maw area stands there and offers no resistance to Zhi Yang's attacks.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** If Zhi Yang hits an opponent, she can grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

**Vengeful Germination (Su):** When Zhi Yang makes a successful Improved Grab, the victim must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be implanted by Zhi Yang's acorn-like seeds. Zhi Yang then quickly buries her victim into the ground where the seeds start germinating,

dealing 2d6 damage to the victim per round. When the victim is drained of all hit points, both the body and the germinating seeds travel beneath the ground, developing into a full-grown evergreen tree in 3d6 turns somewhere else in the Grove.

### *Special Qualities*

**Plant Traits (Ex):** Zhi Yang is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. The tree is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. Zhi Yang has low-light vision to a range of 30 feet.

**Tremorsense (Ex):** Zhi Yang can automatically sense the location of anything within 100 feet that is in contact with the ground.

**Regeneration (Ex):** As long as Zhi Yang is left alone, she can regenerate 1d8 hit points a round, and can regrow lost limbs, bark and leaves within a day.

**Weaknesses (Ex):** Zhi Yang takes double damage from fire and electricity.

### *Closing the Borders*

When Zhi Yang wishes to seal Sanzhou Grove, gnarled and twisted brambles, tree trunks, vines and branches form a huge trellis around the domain. Climbing or chopping one's way through the thick borders is virtually impossible, while any magic cast on the wall would instantly be nullified.

### *The Lair*

Deep within Sanzhou Grove is a mile-wide clearing, surrounded by tall and sturdy acorn trees. Zhi Yang frequents this clearing, as this was the place of her germination generations ago. When Nanlu and Ch'a Zhen are forced to send their ilk to be sacrificed to the treant, this is where the victims are led. Such brutality against humanity has turned Zhi Yang's "temple" into a rank 3 sinkhole of evil.

### *An Acorn's Demise*

No human has ever directly confronted the vicious Zhi Yang, although scholars think that it may be possible to destroy her by simply cutting her down. In truth, Zhi Yang's vengeance reaches beyond physical boundaries; by cutting her down, one of her acorn seeds would immediately germinate, develop into a full-grown acorn treant in 2d6 days, and continue her evil reign.

To completely destroy Zhi Yang, one of her live acorn cones must be tended for with genuine love, away from Zhi Yang's immediate knowledge. It takes thirty days for the seed to germinate and grow into a full-grown good-aligned treant, which must have the ability to combat and destroy Zhi Yang. Once Zhi Yang is killed by one or more good treants grown from one of her own acorns, Sanzhou Grove disappears from Ravenloft, or merges with another similar domain.



# Session Road

## *On the Street Where You Live*

In the Land of Mists, domains can be as large as a nation, or as small as a single room. Myths of these so-called "pocket domains" abound in the Land, from the ruby reality on the dagger Aggarath, to the fabled ship *Endurance*, and even the shifting yet controlled theatrical realities of Scaena. They act as tendrils of terror reaching out beyond Ravenloft, caressing other worlds with an icy touch. Beware then, of Session Road, for you may never know when it comes, or even when it leaves.

### *The Land*

Session Road is a floating domain that wanders the cities of Ravenloft and beyond; it can as easily appear in Port-a-Lucine as it can appear in Greyhawk, Waterdeep or Tyr. Without warning it could blend into a city as a main street, linger for an indefinite time, and then disappear into the Misty night as quietly as it emerges. No one can predict its arrival; when Session Road appears, ordinary people who wander along it see it as part of *their* city, a part of *their* history and heritage. When it disappears, they usually don't remember it ever even existed.

Even as its reality shifts, Session Road keeps a shell of its true identity intact. The Road itself is four miles long, with strong buildings on either side, except where other roads and streets intersect.

**Landscape:** Sparse ecology (settled area, climate varies according to surrounding environs).

### *Cultural Level*

Session Road's cultural level varies accordingly depending on where it emerges next; it readily adapts to its host city's appearance and edification. However, this domain's level can never go below the Classical Age (4).

### *Landmarks*

Regardless of Session Road's shifting appearances and cultural levels, it still retains certain landmarks that make it unique among any other domain.

#### **The Stone Tree**

The Stone Tree marks where Session Road begins. It is a thirty-foot high edifice shaped like a pine tree, sitting on a granite base, and decorated with small stone cherubs, all carved with weeping postures.

#### **Azotea**

The Azotea is a building constructed in such a way that its façade is composed purely of balconies and verandas. In Classical Age domains it would appear as a wooden structure covered in grapevines, while Renaissance Age domains would give it an adobe face with pillars. Regardless of levels, most people would recognize this building as a place where performers and bards converge and commune.

#### **Patria**

Located just across the Azotea, the Patria is a gray building with blue highlights, housing two taverns and a hospice. No one really knows what the rest of the building is for, but once in its history Patria was known as a place of knowledge and forgotten lore. People who come seeking these secrets, such as wizards and sorcerers, venture into Patria's unexplored hallways, and many never come back.

#### **Porta Vaga**

Just beside the Patria is a wide stucco-colored building that serves as a marketplace, bazaar or trading port, again depending on Session Road's current cultural level. Large torches blaze atop unreachable balconies where clerics of a forgotten religion peer down at the heaving masses. This decadent market is haven for thieves and rogues.

## Corazon

Aptly named because of its strategic location, the Corazon is a large building at the heart of Session Road. Its architecture suggests great antiquity, yet it houses notable landmarks such as the Scrolled Pillar Tavern, the Silver and Steel Armory, and the Sisters of Healing. Local legend also suggests that within its ancient halls lurks an assassin's guild, hiding wealth beyond mortal measure.

## Antipolo

Like the Corazon, the small Antipolo building suggests architecture from a grandiose, long-forgotten age. As far as it is known, the Antipolo only has one resident: an aged woman with a mean streak, who has seen the world through the eyes of fear and terror. Somewhere within Antipolo's cramped, claustrophobic hallways lies her huge stack of books detailing Session Road and its world of origin, its history and its fate.

## The Stairway of Fog

Between Antipolo and Corazon lies yet another ancient structure: a tall stone stairway leading up to a bank of fog, which visitors would summarily (and maybe even foolishly) conclude as Session Road's Misty Border. No one knows what lies beyond the fogbank, and those who have attempted to climb up beyond the fog have never returned.

## The Mido

This building is located at the foot of Session Road, right beside a small, forested park half an acre wide. The Mido is built entirely of wood, and if one looked closely the beams aren't even held together by nails or ropes. Such holistic architecture would make it an obvious hospice for druids, rangers and others of their ilk, seemingly home in a progressive, urban setting.

## The Unfinished Building

Just across from Patria, behind the Stone Tree, sits a huge building under construction yet fallen into decay. Beams and ropes lie unused; in Renaissance cultures, rusty scaffolds would seem to embrace the half-finished structure. Construction equipment lies around waiting for workers who would never arrive. For some strange reason, most people would never go into this building's premises.

## *The Folk*

**Population:** 300. Humans 100%; at any given time Session Road would have from 350 to 800 people wandering its streets.

**Languages:** Common\*, Metropolitan.

**Religion:** Metropolitan\*.

Few people would recognize who Session Road's natives are and who aren't. The discerning eye, however, would locate these natives by their fatalistic, fearful demeanor. Many of Session Road's natives are its shop owners and storekeepers, who never seem to leave the confines of their Road home. They always accept outsiders; after all they are traders by heart. Inasmuch as they wear the powerful, dynamic suits that reflect their trades, one could always feel an aura of fear and tension in the air whenever one is with these people.

Session Road's inhabitants have no religion; however, they all still adhere to a forgotten faith known only as the Metropolitan, a small pantheon of urban deities who look after such aspects of life as trade, wealth, education and household maintenance. Since the few remaining clerics of the Metropolitan faith are aloof and unreachable, it would be hard for natives to explain how this aspect works in their lives, only that these deities have to be recognized so as not to anger them.

## *Settlements*

Session Road is by itself a settlement.

## *The Law*

Mercantile bureaucracy. Shops and stores are monitored over by a bureau of tax and tariff collectors, seeing to it that trade happens smoothly and perfectly. Every month a transparent account must be made by each of these trading centers in order to sort out discrepancies in trade.

Session Road has no known political government aside from this mercantile system. However, elderly shop owners still speak of a "hidden baron," a sort of underworld magnate who monitors everybody's movements along the Road.

## *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** Jewelry, furniture, spirits, knowledge, clothing, leather goods, usury, culture.



**Coinage:** Variable. Session Road's coinage adapts to the coinage of the city it blends into. If no coinage is available then barter is used.

Most people would recognize Session Road as one of a certain city's "main streets," where merchants from different places can converge and do business, regardless of products. Starvation is not a real concern, but corruption is a serious problem that Session Road's tax collectors constantly deal with.

## *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Aristocrat, commoner, adept, expert, warrior.

**Skills:** Appraise, Craft (any), Diplomacy, Gather Information, Handle Animal, Innuendo, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcana, nature, Ravenloft), Perform (any), Sense Motive.

**Feats:** Blind-Fight, Improved Unarmed Strike (plus derivatives), Quick Draw, Skill Focus (Sense Motive).

There are no native player characters from Session Road.

## *Henry C. Essem*

### **DARKLORD OF SESSION ROAD**

**Male human Ari9:** CR 9; Medium-size humanoid (5'11"); HD 9d8; hp 65; Init +6 (+4 Improved Initiative, +2 Dexterity); AC 12 (+2 Dexterity); Spd. 30 ft.; Atk. +6/+1 melee, +2 (1d4, masterwork dagger); SA Blow of Force, Blanket of Shadows; SQ Eyes of Night, Undying Soul; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Wil +6; Str 9 Dex 15, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 13, Cha 11.

**Skills and Feats:** Appraise +10, Bluff +8, Diplomacy +8, Disguise +3, Forgery +6, Gather Information +11, Innuendo +5, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (all skills) +8, Listen +7, Perform (speech) +9, Read Lips +5, Sense Motive+5, Speak Language +4, Spot +9; Ambidexterity, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Run, Skill Focus (Sense Motive).

Henry C. Essem is a gaunt old man with a balding head and bloodshot eyes. His features are elongated and weak, and is usually seen walking with a cane. As with Session Road's shifting appearances, his clothing style also shifts, though he always appears wearing clothes from past eras.

## *Background*

Session Road was once a central road located in a city not unlike any that could be found in any Prime Material World. It was a nexus of trade and commerce; there was always something for everybody at all times of the day.

On Session Road's upper area (for it was once situated on a gentle slope), there was a large building called the Pines Hostel, where travelers of all sorts could find haven. Its location was strategic; all of the city could easily access the place, and was also used as a reference point for figuring out directions.

One fateful day, however, an explosion in the Hostel's kitchens resulted in the whole building burning to the ground. Hundreds of lives were lost in the blaze; in honor of those who perished, the people of Session Road's city built a stone tree in the shape of a pine as a memorial. Furthermore, the large grounds of the Hostel were turned into hallowed ground, a sort of park where lay the ashes and the remains of the dead. With the Hostel's owner gone, the people of Session Road claimed the grounds as their own, as a part of their heritage.

Many years passed, and pine trees grew tall and proud among the ruins. Although the pain of the disaster slowly lifted and disappeared, the memory still remained, as it should have been. But, of course, there were those who wished to completely forget the past.

An extremely wealthy entrepreneur from another city, named Henry C. Essem, offered the folk of Session Road a huge amount of money one day, in exchange for the grounds of the Hostel; in its place would rise a massive edifice made entirely for amusement and commerce. No matter how large the wealth Essem put forth in the negotiations, Session Road's folk refused. Their convictions were clear: this ground was hallowed ground, and therefore would never be desecrated.

Being the greedy businessman that he was, however, Essem still lusted for the grounds due to its location and potential for limitless trade. Ignoring the whims of Session Road's folk altogether, Essem proceeded directly to the city council and defended his side; after all, he knew that the city itself was in dire need of income and funds for its sagging trade and industry, and all help was welcome. With great reluctance the city agreed, amid angry protests in the streets.

### *Fiat Appropri*

Almost immediately, work began at the Hostel's grounds. Woodcutters arrived in droves and cut down the mighty copse of pine trees that were the land's namesake. Session Road's people watched with sad resignation as sacred earth mixed with the ashes of the dead was upturned, relocated, and even used as bricks. Half of the hill upon which Pines Hostel once stood was carved out and flattened.

The building's completion was not even halfway, but construction never really pushed through smoothly. Almost everyday there were mysterious reports of accidents in the area; of persons falling from certain heights, of equipment mysteriously disappearing and reappearing in other locations, of serious injuries among workers. Session Road's shopkeepers agreed that the spirits of the dead were seeking vengeance for this desecration of their final resting place. Even the workers themselves began believing these supernatural rumors, knowing that the next victims could be them.

Essem, however, had a different view: he believed that resisters sympathetic to the shopkeepers' stand were sabotaging work on his grandiose building. Without even presenting adequate proof, he blamed a woman named Juanita de Guia, a staunch opponent of Essem's massive project. She was known to hold mid-nightly candle vigils with other people in front of the Hostel's upturned grounds, lamenting the destruction of their beloved piece of sanctuary. Although Juanita truthfully and vehemently denied sabotage, Essem was never convinced.

As the huge building reached completion, with the Road in full protest of this landmark, led by Juanita and her courageous defiance, Essem decided he had had enough. If in business competition was not enough, then elimination was necessary.

The night before the opening, a hundred or so of the resisters, including Juanita, set up their nightly silent protest. As midnight approached, Juanita stood up, faced the building, and quietly raced a fist into the air, a symbol of defiance. Just then, an arrow flew straight from behind the shadows and struck Juanita squarely on her chest. There was chaos as the arrow was followed by another, and another. The screams of fear and death crept to the shopkeepers down along the Road, who could do nothing against the one person who had it all. Within moments twenty people had been killed as Henry C. Essem watched the carnage from a high window.

He never cared about human life in the first place; all he wanted was fame and profit, and he could as easily dispose the assassins he hired as their victims.

After the bloodshed, a cold midnight mist settled upon the building and upon Session Road. The Dark Powers of a misty state of mind have taken notice of Essem's actions, and decided to claim him and the adjoining lands as their own.

### *Vengeance, Within and Without*

The night could have ended there and then, but Essem was about to confront his darkest nightmares.

As he turned away from the window, a shiver crawled up his body as malicious laughter echoed throughout the building. No sooner had the laughing ceased when dozens of ghostly figures appeared in front of Essem, who immediately froze in fear. The spirits of the dead, just like the peoples of Session Road, wanted vengeance, for the desecration of their burial grounds. Essem watched with bloodshot eyes as his majestic building gradually fell into ruin, as if Time itself had slowed down for him to view the decay. Night shift workers and hired assassins ran for their lives out of the structure and into the misty night, leaving Essem alone in his crumbling edifice.

By morning, Session Road was wrapped in the thickest fog its folk have ever seen. The ominous Mists never lifted until mid-afternoon, when they found both themselves and their beloved Road in the middle of a strange city named Martira Bay.

### *Current Sketch*

As the new baron of Session Road, Essem wants nothing more than to reconstruct his towering building, no matter how much resistance confronts him. Even as he laments his squalid existence in his unfinished edifice, he still remains greedy at heart, for wealth, power and fame. He imposes high taxes upon the peoples of the Road, controlling the prices of commodities as he sees fit. His curse, however, is to be forever tormented by the fact that his building will never face completion; whenever he attempts to complete even just a single hallway, the tormented spirits of those who perished in Pines Hostel's fire would sabotage his work, along with protest action from Session Road itself.

## *Combat*

Henry C. Essem's paranoia has gradually worsened as spirits and the occasional saboteurs continue to invade his crumbling building. Because of this, he uses his abilities sparingly whenever he catches anyone entering the structure's premises.

## *Special Attacks*

**Blow of Force (Ex):** If Essem makes a successful unarmed melee attack, his opponent must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) or take damage equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$ its HD total, rounded down.

**Blanket of Shadows (Su):** Once a day on each person, Essem can cloud another person's mind using the dankness of his ruined edifice. The victim must make a Will save (DC 12) or become Panicked as claustrophobia overwhelms him and he tries to flee the building. He ultimately finds himself being lured back into the hands of Essem.

## *Special Qualities*

**Eyes of Night (Su):** Essem has the ability to see through the eyes of any one person on Session Road.

**Undying Soul (Su):** If Essem is somehow reduced to 0 or less hit points, his life essence disperses throughout Session Road in the form of a thick fog that instantly isolates the Road, whichever city it may be. His body and soul reform in the unfinished building within 1d4 days. In the interim period between his apparent death and gradual reformation, the borders of Session Road remain open.

## *Closing the Borders*

When Henry C. Essem wishes to close Session Road's borders, a thick fog envelopes

the whole city where Session Road is currently in. Anybody who flees Session Road would get lost in the fog and eventually find himself back along the Road. Note that this ability does not apply to any other road or avenue in the host city, although Essem's fog can go beyond Session Road's limits.

## *The Lair*

The unfinished building, once the beautiful Pines Hostel, serves as Henry C. Essem's lair. The desecration of hallowed ground and the murder of resisters have turned this already-wretched place into a rank 2 sinkhole of evil.

## *Road Rage*

Despite any and all attempts to destroy Essem and his building, they both return back bringing misery and hopelessness to Session Road's shopkeepers and visitors. No amount of exorcism can put the Hostel's ghosts into eternal rest, nor could any weapon or equipment destroy the towering structure.

However, the mercantile de Guias, landowners of the Azotea, are not giving up the fight to avenge the brutal death of one of their own. Only the death of Essem at the hands of a de Guia can end the cycle of misery along the Road, and only if Essem's soul could be contained in an arcane container and buried beneath the Stone Tree. Session Road then becomes a permanent fixture in the city where it sits on, and Henry C. Essem's blasphemous excuse for business would be reduced to rubble and be overgrown by weeds and pine seedlings.



# Ukhu Pacha

## *Shadow of the Sun: A Bastion of the Holy Empire*

*They lost their gods, they lost their smile  
They cried for help for the last time.  
Liberty was turning into chains  
But all the white men said  
That's the cross of changes.*

**-Silent Warrior  
Enigma**

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**T**he sky was an opalescent blue as the funeral march wound its way up the snowy face of Paripetl, the Holy Mountain. The sounds of the wind, the rhythmic pounding of drums and the perpetual cries of mourners broke the majestic silence of the landscape, and although the noontime sun was glaring from high above, everyone in the procession shivered in the altitude's icy cold.

Queen Aya had been a wise ruler; under her royal banner the boundaries of Ukhu Pacha stretched throughout the known world. All over the kingdom cities of stone were built in her honor, and everyone basked in varying degrees of wealth and opulence. But although her gentleness and wisdom knew no boundaries, the same could not be said for her body, for she was frail and prone to sickness. A spider's bite proved fatal, and the empire slowly waited in agony as healers could do nothing to save her.

The queen's sole heir, fifteen-year old Hualatelpec, had been chosen as the new king. The burdened responsibility of ruling a powerful nation nearly overwhelmed him as he led the procession up Paripetl. There, he knew, he must perform the ritual of passage, the ceremony that would catapult his revered mother's soul into the eternal realm of the Hummingbird God.

Sage branches were lit as the procession reached the summit. As the remains of his mother were reverently wrapped and put inside a funerary basket, Hualatelpec raised his arms up towards the sky and called upon the Hummingbird God.

From the blinding light of the sun itself, a fiery streak fell down from the sky into the plateau of Intihuaman, the Solar Abode. Taking

it as a favorable omen from the Hummingbird God, the young king immediately sent sacred warriors into the plateau. Indeed, Hualatelpec was under the Hummingbird God's favor... but at what cost?

Ten sunrises later, the warriors returned to T'Chaco, the Holy City, and reported what they witnessed. On the night that they arrived the fires from the sky still burned in Intihuaman-- fires which were hot enough to carve a new figure on the barren earth. The glyph formed was that of a spider, facing the rising sun. To the royal household, the spider was a grave warning of death and desolation. Would the sun finally cease to rule the skies? Would the ancient ancestors revolt and leave the land forever? Would conquerors from foreign lands invade the sacred mountains and burn the temples to the ground? No one knew for sure.

The young king Hualatelpec had a dark future ordained ahead, and in his inexperienced hands laid the fate of a whole culture.

### *The Land*

Ukhu Pacha is an extremely distant mountainous land consisting of barren plateaus, icy peaks and ruined mountaintop cities. Deep canyons and desert plateaus define the realm's arid emptiness. Rain is scarce, but winter brings cool winds and even occasional snow from distant mountains. The land itself is seventy miles wide, with the Misty Border appearing as a low-lying fog in the distance. A mountain range cuts along Ukhu Pacha's eastern border, effectively cutting any travel.

Wildlife is scarce on the barren earth of Ukhu Pacha; condors and vultures span the skies in search of prey down below, while llamas, vicuñas and alpacas forage for small plants along the foggy foothills. Insects and other creeping invertebrates crawl and fly rampant and brazen through the desert rocks. In those few places where plant life is lush, wildcats such as panthers and pumas stalk their prey amongst twisting vines and fallen logs.

At the western side of the domain lies what inhabitants call Intihuaman, "The Solar Abode," a barren plateau thirty miles wide. Nothing much on this plateau can be seen from the ground, but from the air the land teems with geometric figures and huge animal glyphs. Only a select few know exactly who creates these formations, and these few are not willing to give away their closely guarded secrets.

Sometimes, the arid air of Ukhu Pacha carries with it the sounds of panpipes and beating drums, indicating the presence of a fatalistic yet hardy folk who live off the land. In many places, especially where habitation is nonexistent, the countless bones of Ukhu Pacha's dead lie scattered among the rocks and dunes, crumbling away as time weathers them by.

**Landscape:** Sparse ecology (warm hills and plains, cold hills and mountains).

## *Cultural Level*

The native folk of Ukhu Pacha function at a Bronze Age (2) cultural level; however, the land's new controllers, natives of the Holy Empire, come from a mighty homeland with a Chivalric (8) cultural level.

## *Settlements*

T'Chaco (pop. 7500), Cucho-Aya (pop. 5000), Paripet (pop. 750).

## *The Folk*

**Population:** 25000. Humans 95%, Other 5%.

**Languages:** Runa Simi\*, Turonite.

**Religion:** Matherion\*, The Hummingbird God.

The pureblood peoples of Ukhu Pacha are a short yet burly people who have highly adapted to their barren and mountainous land. To adapt to such a harsh environment they weave simple yet intricately designed clothes made out of cotton and vicuña wool. Many of them make out a living mainly as farmers and llama herders, and they have a great distrust towards outsiders, who they find "curious-looking." The Ukhu Pachans are above all a deeply religious and industrious folk; to them, time is endless and cyclic, measured not in days or weeks but in celestial alignments and seasons. The *quipu*, a simple mathematical instrument made of knotted strands of rope, is for them used to count the number of days before the next harvest, the next

solstice, or other auspicious events. Much of Ukhu Pacha's rocky land can hardly support cereals; as a solution to this, farmers often create an intricate and lengthy series of wooden aqueducts that carry water from the icy mountaintops to enrich their fields.

The non-natives, on the other hand, come from an expansionist and militaristic Holy Empire. They are taller than the natives, having fairer skin and smoother hair. As conquerors they live lavishly, exploiting the wealth of the land they have dominated, prancing in opulence while their captives silently serve and toil away in resignation. They came with a new god, Matherion in the aspect of Divine Child, the imperial symbol of innocence and purity; hardly the aspects shown by the foreigners who worship such an uncorrupted being.

Though nearly all of Ukhu Pacha's pureblood people now worship this aspect of Matherion, they still see in him the archetypal image of the ancient Hummingbird God, born of the Coricancha, the Heavenly Solar Temple.

Officially, the pantheistic ancestral worship of Ukhu Pacha is outlawed, but old habits die hard among the Ukhu Pachans, who still practice an Imperial version of the *Intiraymi*. This primeval ceremony was once the grandest ritual of the land, honoring through pageantry the rebirth of the Hummingbird God during the Winter Solstice. Now, the name of the god has changed, but *Intiraymi*'s purpose remains the same: to celebrate deliverance from darkness into new light.

Besides the Hummingbird God, ancestor worship is common among the natives, though this too is banned under the new Imperial government. Before the invaders came, dead relatives were often mummified and put in special temples, where their corpses were treated with utmost respect and reverence. Now, however, "corpse-worship," as the conquerors call it, is an underground practice, and those caught participating in it risk being taken to the Imperial government's labor camps.

## *The Law*

Formerly imperial theocratic regency, shifting to militaristic despotism. Before the Holy Empire arrived at Ukhu Pacha's borders, the whole land was ruled from T'Chaco by a theocratic monarchy. After the conquest, however, a governor-general by the name of Guenevira Blanco was appointed by the Emperor to oversee matters in the new colony. Her

reputation as a natural-born ruler and propagandist is famous and widely known throughout Ukhu Pacha, and no one would even dare doubt her decision-making skills. Although she is not by heart a ruthless person, she is still feared among pureblood natives. To show her “leniency” towards the conquered, she has even allowed the ancient ways of life to continue undisturbed, as long as tribute is paid and the “pagan religions” are not practiced. Failure to meet these demands often result in dire consequences, such as arson, pillaging and indefinite imprisonment in harsh conditions.

## *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** gold, silver, potatoes, wool, culture, llamas, goats, guano.

**Coinage:** child (cp), mother (sp), father (gp).

Ukhu Pacha rarely trades with other domains, although its proximity to other domains of the Holy Empire may open it up even more to the world at large. In spite of this, trade is regulated in such a way that imports of anything regarding religion and politics are banned, or given only to non-natives. Blanco figures that such regulations would help delay, if not prevent, a peasant uprising.

## *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Bard, cleric, druid, fighter, paladin, ranger, rogue, sorcerer.

**Skills:** Alchemy, Animal Empathy, Climb, Craft (basketmaking, pottery, sculpture, weaponsmithing, weaving), Handle Animal, Knowledge (arcana, nobility and royalty, religion), Perform (chant, dance, drums, flute), Profession (farmer, herdsman, herbalist, teamster), Wilderness Lore.

**Feats:** Back to the Wall, Dodge (plus derivatives), Jaded, Skill Focus (Wilderness Lore), Run.

## *Governor Guenevira Blanco*

### **DARKLORD OF UKHU PACHA**

**Female human Ftr11:** CR 11; Medium-size humanoid (5'8"); HD 11d10; hp 67; Init +4 (Dex); AC 14 (Dex); Spd. 30 ft.; Atk. +7/+4 melee, +3 (1d6+4; 17-20/x2 +2 *rapier*); SA Inflict Weakness, Sundering Repose; SQ Fear Aura, SR 12, DR 10/+1; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +6, Wil +6; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 18.

**Skills and Feats:** Climb +12, Craft (weaponsmithing) +11, Diplomacy +8, Handle Animal +9, Jump +13, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +10, Knowledge (religion) +8, Move Silently +4, Sense Motive +7, Swim +11; Blind Fight, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (rapier), Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Disarm, Power Attack, Sunder.

The governor of Ukhu Pacha is a tall and beautiful woman, with long, hazel brown hair usually tied to a ponytail behind her back. She rarely wears armor, preferring to use the Imperial garments of someone befitting her position, but she is never seen without a necklace bearing Matherion's holy symbol. She moves and speaks like a powerful aristocrat, and almost never reveals her true emotions to others around her.

## *Background*

They came with power and might; invaders from the southeast, wearing armor wrought of gold and bearing magic sticks that belched forth fire and death. Some walked on foot trailing each other like ants, while some rode on large animals that looked like dogs yet brayed with the voice of thunder. Like locusts in a swarm the conquerors took control of the far-flung villages, pillaging the fields and killing resistors all in the name of their new god.

Everyday, news of the invaders' strengthening gains reached T'Chaco. The shamans could do nothing, and the sacred warriors were losing their hold on an agitated population. Whoever the invaders were, they were far too powerful to battle.

In the end, as the city became surrounded, the young king's advisors came to a difficult conclusion: T'Chaco had to fall to the enemy, but the monarchy had to survive. Under cover of moonless night Hualatelpec was ushered away across a river to the mountains beyond.

By morning, the Holy City of T'Chaco had fallen to the enemy. Where once burned the golden fires of the Coricancha now arose the banner of the Holy Empire from beyond. A proud figure led the triumphant armies to the royal palace, her brown hair tied behind her back and her iron will as impenetrable as her golden armor. Guenevira Blanco stood on the steps of the palace and raised her sword, which was followed by a thunderous cry of victory from the army which she had led. By the grace of her god

Matherion, Blanco proclaimed herself lord overseer and defender of the faith of the Imperial Colony of Ukhu Pacha.

Beyond the reach of the invaders, on a hidden mountaintop town known as Cucho-Aya, another celebration took place. Here on this lonely peak beyond the clouds, amidst the sounds of horns, gongs and panpipes, King Hualatelpec rekindled the fires of the Coricancha and established the stronghold of the old monarchy. From this remote citadel he issued a proclamation to the enslaved peoples below the cloud line: the monarchy is alive, the old ways must continue, and the ancestors must still be revered.

In T'Chaco, Blanco also issued her first decree: that the old religious tradition of "corpse-worship" must be replaced by the new "civilized" funeral ways. Those who resisted would be taken away into special penal mining camps in the foothills. Having no choice in the matter, the native peoples bowed to this proclamation, yet their inner hope was constantly rekindled by secret messages from their exiled king.

### *Desecration*

Soon enough, rumors and speculations of ancestor worship reached the governor's palace. In response, Blanco sent scouts and spies to several villages and towns to confirm these reports. They returned a few days later, confirming that indeed many of the native peoples still revered their dead and hid them in secret altars.

But what piqued Blanco's curiosity was the report of one of her most trusted spies. According to the agent, messages of resistance against the Imperial government were being spread to the masses from a secret mountain town where their former king resided. When asked exactly where this stronghold was located, not one of the natives dared to speak.

Blanco, having discovered a flaw in her governance, decided to act swiftly. She sent out agents and soldiers, to scour the land and confiscate the sacred corpses, wherever they may be found. They were not to be damaged or destroyed, but they all were to be taken back to T'Chaco.

As expected, there was resistance from the natives as the mummified remains of their loved ones were taken away back to the capital. At the same time, speculated messengers of the king were arrested and taken to T'Chaco as well.

By the time the soldiers had finished their duties, tens of thousands of mummy bundles were piled up in front of the governor's palace.

With a flair for the spectacular, Blanco called upon T'Chaco's populace to congregate at dusk at the palace. They in turn were greeted by an awesome sight: ancestral remains put one on top of the other, staring back at them beyond time and death. Preventing any of them from touching the mummies, however, was a formidable flank of strong Imperial guards.

Blanco emerged from behind the palace doors, rapier in hand. "You see before you," she told those who gathered, "your loved ones, your ancestors, your elders. I understand that you all yearn for the old ways, the old system of things." She gently caressed one of the mummy bundles as if it were one of her own.

"But times change," she remarked further, "people change." She turned to the populace with fiery eyes. "Tell me—where is your king?"

Stunned by the power of her voice, the gathered simply stood. Never would they tell any invader where their young ruler lies safe.

For a few moments, Blanco waited for an answer that would never arrive. "Very well," she said softly, nodding her head. She raised her hand and, turning to the guards surrounding her, gave the signal.

Within an instant a ring of fire engulfed the huge pile of mummies; some soldiers even started hacking away at the bundles with their swords and axes. The natives, restrained by the soldiers' might, could do nothing but weep and scream and lament the desecration of their sacred dead, their most precious legacy from the past.

Blanco stood quietly, watching the mummies burn and dissolve into ashes. She may have found her own weakness, but she has also found theirs. Ecstatic over the grim spectacle in front of her, she never noticed the dome of smoke enveloping the city and her domain as unseen powers took Ukhu Pacha into a sinister realm.

The fires burned through the night. When dawn finally arrived, the palace grounds were still smoldering with the remains of the dead. However, where mummies once rested there now stood four whole armies of Imperial soldiers, ready to search the four corners of Ukhu Pacha for Hualatelpec's stronghold. Blanco was determined to look for this secret town, and would risk everything, even the lives of those she held dominion over, to destroy this resistance to her rule.

## *Current Sketch*

Guenevira Blanco is a patient woman who still retains the cold composure of her office, no matter how much she and her troops are cursed to never find the royal stronghold of T'Chaco. To many, the steep and icy mountain passes are simply inaccessible. Whenever one of her armies attempts to climb a suspected location, the air becomes dramatically thinner with the rise in altitude; oxygen deprivation eventually leads the conquerors to retreat back down to the mountain's base.

Meanwhile, the search for usurpers continues. Villages are regularly raided, and torn of their sacred dead. Any ancestral corpse found being used for worship is simply hacked to pieces or burned to ashes, disregarding their sacredness to the native people. Killings are rarely done, under Blanco's strict orders; she wants the natives to watch while their dead are desecrated.

Privately, Blanco suffers from a much personal torment: spirits of the corpses she has desecrated come to her in her dreams, mocking her rulership of Ukhu Pacha. This, of course, spawns yet another vicious cycle of greater resolve for her to look for Cucho-Aya and other mummies to destroy.

## *Combat*

Blanco is a highly skilled fighter in the field as well as in the Imperial Court, although she hardly now ever goes to battle except in special circumstances.

## *Special Attacks*

**Inflict Weakness (Su):** With but a touch, Blanco can inflict a supernatural weakness upon her victims. The target must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be unable to do anything for two rounds. The victim simply collapses on the ground writhing in pain that has no source.

**Sundering Repose (Su):** Also with just her touch, and with the strength of her will, Blanco can reduce any nonmagical human remains to ashes in a single round. This does not apply to undead or to magically reanimated corpses, which occasionally appear in Ukhu Pacha; in these special cases Blanco must attempt a Will save (DC 14) to apply this power on even one of these creatures.

## *Special Qualities*

**Fear Aura (Su):** Blanco has a 20-foot aura of fear around her, whose effects are similar to the spell of the same name. No one but King Hualatelpec himself is immune to this aura.

## *The Lair*

Blanco rules Ukhu Pacha from where the king once held office: the royal palace of T'Chaco, where the Coricancha once burned free for all of the kingdom to see. Now the flame has been extinguished, and sacred dead are now almost every day being sent to the palace to be destroyed without prejudice or respect for culture and native religion. This mass desecration has transformed this once-sacred place to a rank 3 sinkhole of evil.

## *Closing the Borders*

When Blanco wants to seal Ukhu Pacha, the air along the borders transforms into a thick wall of noxious smoke. Anyone trying to penetrate this border immediately takes in 3d6 damage per two rounds (no save).

## *Fires of the Coricancha*

The only way for anyone to end Blanco's cultural brainwashing is to burn her with a flame from the sacred fires of the Coricancha. This means that the flame itself must be taken from the cauldron in the stronghold of Cucho-Aya and be carefully tended until the right time arrives; no easy task, since many fires usually burn out as one descends through the moist level of the cloud line. If and when Blanco burns, her body is then transformed into a mummy corpse, which must not be destroyed but put into a sacred place where it would be revered as an ancestral ruler. Destroying the mummy will not break the curse; if so, her living body would reform within three days, and the flame of the Coricancha would die down until someone reattempts to get a flame from Cucho-Aya.





## Notes and Credits

After nearly a year of wracking my brains out, I finally produced *Nebula Obscura*. It's been a great year...well, great, if you don't count that bomb threat that put me off for about a month. J

My most sincere apologies go out to Paul Corrish, since I didn't lump in his domain Gemetzel which was also supposed to come out here. I promise that it'll appear along with his other creation, Shinumi-Yama, in the third installment of Worlds of Ravenloft.

## Chamhok Mun

This article is dedicated to the hundreds of South Korean expats who have unofficially proclaimed the city where I live in as "New Seoul." Their delicious kimchi will never be a foreign delicacy again.

## Dur-Anea

With Dur-Anea I decided to have fun with various crazy concepts that have been percolating in my head recently. Narmu-Shurpak is basically like a kid who can't get over the fact that his dog has to be "put to sleep" because it's terminally ill. There's also a bit of "Spelljammer" thrown in, plus the concept of a "living island," something that slammed into me one day while reading Zecharia Sitchin's "The Twelfth Planet." Take note, however, that even if the domain was inspired by "Al-Qadim's" zaratans, Dur-Anea isn't one of them. Also, I intentionally didn't provide stats for Dur-Anea itself; the main focus I think should be on Namru-Shurpak alone.

## Hiva Motu

This domain was inspired by an episode of the science-fiction series *Earth: Final Conflict*, where the ruling alien race rounded up humans from all around Earth to sustain their divine "Commonality." Hiva Motu itself was inspired by a blend of the cultures of the Maori, Tahiti, the Marquesas, Hawaii, Fiji, Micronesia, Samoa and Easter Island.

## Sanzhou Grove

This domain is an offshoot of another domain I created for the Navigaccio some time ago: it was once part of Xi'anlin, the Chinese-style domain I hoped would be a replacement for the "official" Chinese style Ravenloft domain of I'Cath. Turns out that Xi'anlin's darklord was too innocently tragic to deserve such an evil status. Sanzhou Grove, hopefully, rectifies this predicament.

Much as Arthur C. Clarke's "2010" does not exactly follow the events in "2001: A Space Odyssey," Sanzhou Grove in this rendition doesn't wholly conform to the timeline of Xi'anlin; in no way did Xi'anlin's Sanzhou Grove exist in the middle of a battlefield. Here I admit I've hit a snag, but with a little bit of timeline tweaking one can easily harmonize the two domains together.

## Session Road

I have a quirk for Ravenloft pocket domains, and Session Road is just one of a few I've made up so far, among them an oil painting, a domain that appears only in winter, and a "City in a Bottle." No city is safe from Session Road; as far as knowledge goes it is now bidding its time as a main street in Baguio, a city in the Philippines.

The article is my personal protest against an eyesore that is a humongous mall now being built at the top of Session Road.

## Ukhu Pacha

This is the fourth article on the expansion of Ryan Naylor's "Holy Empire," which was introduced in the Kargatane's Book of Shadows article "Mictlan." My inspiration comes from my fascination with the Inca culture that once spread throughout Peru and Chile, as well as my fascination with the mystery of the Nazca lines. To those not in the know, the Nazca plateau in Peru is host to a flurry of straight lines and huge earth-drawings in the shape of animals hundreds of feet long. The mystery of the Nazca lines comes from the fact that they could only be seen from the air, prompting researchers such as Erik von Daniken (Chariots of the Gods?) to conclude that they were created with the assistance of ancient astronauts. However, more serious scholars such as Maria Rieche have postulated that the Nazca lines are ritualistic in purpose.



## Worlds of Ravenloft 3

The third (and probably final) installment of Midway Haven's "Worlds of Ravenloft" series will introduce more new exotic domains hidden within the Mists of the Dread Realms. The domains which have made it to the final list of eight or nine include revised editions of Paul Corrish's Gemetzel (Ethiopia) and Shinumi-Yama (Hokkaido), Issutôq (Alaska), Meza Chimindu (Hopi) and Deeper Troezen (Dark Atlantis). An optimistically-calculated release date would be mid-2003.



# Tjukuba

## *A New Perspective on the Nightmare Lands*

**Author's remarks:** *Midway Haven is not constricted to the basic rules of Ravenloft gaming; throughout its existence it has made some alterations for the ease of its players and Dungeon Masters, bringing the not-so-familiar into something more worldly, but no less horrifying.*

*Which brings me to the Nightmare Lands, the formless and ever-changing realm of bad dreams, waiting for the next Ravenloft sleeper to enter its mad reality. With apologies to the people who created this dimension of nightmares, I have infused (for this time alone) a long-neglected culture into its framework: the Australian Aboriginal culture, which somehow fits well into the Nightmare Land's concept of dreams. The Dreaming Land of Tjukuba doesn't quite mirror the Nightmare Land in some basic aspects, in part because it seems rather hard for me to referee a land with no definite map; with this version I hope that I could infuse something familiar and definite for the curious. Complete game rules and information about the Nightmare Lands are available in **Ravenloft: The Nightmare Lands Boxed Set** from TSR.*

*Read on then, for here, where dreams come alive, the Nightmare Court rules supreme, and one step off the dreaming tracks would quicken your descent into the maddening depths of your worst nightmares...*

**L**ong ago, in the time before time, the timeless time, the Dreaming Land was silent, flat and formless. But from within the mists They came, and walked throughout the land. In the course of their meanderings They created the landscape, the Dreaming Land we now know.

*They left their tracks on the surface of the land, They made fires, They camped, They fought, They foraged, and They conducted their own rituals. Everything They left and disposed, They added to the Dreaming Land we now know.*

*Then They returned back into the mists, turning their works into rock, and plant, and tree, and floating dream. Then we appeared, for we are Their dreams. It is we who keep the Dreaming alive. This land is our land, and is a part of ourselves. We are inseparable from the Dreaming Land, we know its language, its Dreaming, and its voice. This is the Dreaming Land we now know.*

**--Song of Kuchapiri,  
Abber Shaman of the Serpent's Tracks**

### *The Land*

Beyond the waking world of the Dread Realms lies a half-world where dreams are etched on dry rocks and barks of trees. It is a nebulous reality where the clear skies are deep purple-blue, and the sun lies forever low on the flat horizon. Colossal rocks eroded by the elements grow out from the endless plains, casting great and frightful shadows on the flat landscape. Drifting plains, some over a mile wide, float through the dark skies like whales in an ocean. When one wanders this barren dimension, the shadows themselves come alive in the half-light, playing tricks on the feeble mind. Primitive chanting and the alien sounds of bullroarers and didgeridoos permeate the dry air. Here, in the Dreaming Land many call Tjukuba, anything is possible, even one's greatest dreams and nightmares.

**Landscape:** Sparse ecology (warm plains).

### *Ned*

Deep within the dream-wilderness of Tjukuba lies a small frontier town seemingly devoid of all life, save for the scavenging dingoes that prowl its deserted streets. The native Abber nomads call this place a *jungaburra*, a place where lost spirits linger. No one knows the true name of this apparently misplaced

habitation, but crude signposts weathered by time and dust would call this forbidding location Nod. Here in this ghost town buildings lie abandoned, waiting for the sands of the desert to reclaim it back as its own.

It is unknown who once lived here, walked its streets and danced in its halls; most say that Nod's people all left in haste, gone with the shifting sands and howling winds of this eerie reality. But sometimes, just sometimes, tall shadows move at the corner of one's eye, and the whispering patter of human footsteps seems to follow the unwilling visitor around.

### *The Ring of Dreams*

Also somewhere in the trackless terrain of the Dreaming Lands lies *Toogoolawah*, the Ring of Dreams, a collection of large rocks inscribed with thousands of aboriginal earth drawings, all seemingly glowing with their own inner light. Whole scenarios appear in these seemingly random drawings, each one opening a gateway to an individual dream or nightmare.

### *Cultural Level*

The Abber Nomads, eking out a living in this desolate dreamscape, exist at a Stone Age (1) level of culture, but Nod was once a town with Renaissance (9) influences.

### *The Folk*

**Population:** 15000. Humans 85%, Other 15%.

**Languages:** Abber\*.

**Religion:** The Dreaming\*.

The vast, shifting expanse of Tjukuba is home to thousands of scattered indigenous people called the Abber nomads, the only folk who could easily and safely navigate the Dreaming Land. Most, if not all, have dark skin, rotund bodies and curly hair. They are a simplistic, nomadic folk, never taking more from the land than what they need, tempered by the fleeting dreams that surround them. They wear little clothing, preferring to paint their dark bodies with bright spots and lines made from natural dyes. Their bond with the land is so tight, they can actually blend in with the contours, shapes and shadows of the landscape around them.

The Abbers are a race consumed by wanderlust; they travel throughout Tjukuba by way of "dreaming tracks." These roads are

invisible to non-Abbers, and each has its own ritual, song and story. In a sense they are symbolic, embedded in both the landscape and in the minds of the nomads themselves. To travel these roads the Abbers employ talismans called *churingas*, which are sort of like compasses that help navigate one along the correct dreaming track. It is widely known throughout the Abbers that losing one's way through the maddening dreamscape of Tjukuba can lead to insanity, and increases the possibility of non-Abbers to never leave the Dreaming Lands.

Abber nomads have a religion that may seem incomprehensible to dreamers; their spirituality is bound to their wanderings, to the land, its "Dreaming" and its hidden lords.

Besides the Abbers themselves, there are other people who wander Tjukuba, all of them dreamers stranded in the Dreaming Lands without a clue. Some of these dreamers have lost their way amongst the dreaming tracks that crisscross the earth, and have begun their descent into madness.

### *The Law*

Independent nomadic settlements. There is little or no government among the Abber, although tribal boundaries can be subtly discovered by way of a tribe's dreaming tracks: where the "Dreaming" stories of one track end and others begin, therein lies the boundary.

### *Trade and Diplomacy*

**Resources:** Inapplicable. Almost anything that comes out of Tjukuba dissolves upon one's awakening.

**Coinage:** None.

### *Native Characters*

**Classes:** Fighter, ranger.

**Skills:** Animal Empathy, Craft (painting, weaponsmithing), Disguise, Hide, Knowledge (local), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (chant, dance), Search, Spot, Wilderness Lore.

**Feats:** Alertness, Courage, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (boomerang), Jaded, Point Blank Shot.

### *The Churinga*

Abber nomads carry these small talismans with them at all times. They can be

made from any material, be it bark, stone or animal skin, but they can only be made by Abber shamans. Etched on these talismans are strange markings with coils, dots and crooked lines, sometimes even a see-through animal or plant. No two *churingas* are ever alike.

A simple Dreaming song or dance activates the *churinga*'s power: to expose a dreaming track specific to the purpose of the talisman itself. The dreaming track is visible for 10 rounds, before it finally disappears from view. A totally different Dreaming song or dance specific to the person's current location must then be performed to reactivate the *churinga*.

### *The Nightmare Court*

The absolute rulers of the Dreaming Lands are the Nightmare Court, a motley collection of numinous, powerful and dangerously evil entities made entirely from the essences of dreams. Only six are elaborately described in Tjukuba's reality, although many more may be hidden from perception. Each member of the Court has his or her own song, ritual and dreaming track. Oblivious to their true nature however, the Abbers see them as merely a part of the true Dreaming. The Court, fortunately, rarely meddle in the affairs of dreamers in the Dreaming Lands.

The Nightmare Court's power is not limited to dreamers from Ravenloft alone; Tjukuba's proximity to the ethereal Plane of Dreams assures that dreamers from across the multiverse would feel the Court's maddening caress.

### *Carragundi: The Nightmare Man*

Carragundi is a hooded entity wrapped in thousands upon thousands of black, furry spiders. His body is entirely covered in this living veil, save for his eyes that glow with deep crimson, and his arms that look more bony than fleshy. The Nightmare Man spends much of his time wandering a collection of large, eroded rocks called *Uluru*, crafting rock paintings and glyphs. Abbers believe, however, that Carragundi is cursed to have no Dreaming, and therefore resorts to borrowing and manipulating the Dreaming of others. This manifests through the fact that his paintings are left unfinished, and dissolve easily into the ethers.

### *Jarapiri: The Rainbow Serpent*

Abber glyphs picture Jarapiri as a huge, venomous coral snake with different bands of colors adorning its scales. Jarapiri's eyes glow with a sinister red, while its mouth is curled into a malicious smile. It does not actually speak, but can send out thoughts and ideas from the formations of color emerging from its scales. Jarapiri is interested specifically in dreams that involve jealousy and mistrust; it can sow suspicion and paranoia among the dreamscapes it controls.

### *Mullonga the Witch*

Mullonga manifests as an old aboriginal crone with extremely dark skin, sitting on an anthill, holding a eucalyptus staff upon which hang dozens of "bush babies," or honey-pot ants. Thirteen floating, moaning human heads form a ring around Mullonga's anthill.

The witch's frail figure hides the fact that she is a powerful wizard who sows fear and terror upon anyone she meets.

### *The Changing Man*

Abber rock paintings and Dreaming songs depict the so-called Changing Man as a tall imp with slit-eyes, pointed ears and a vaporous aura. He is an extremely chaotic being who delights in confusion and disorder, preferring to stay in the Dreaming Lands' drifting meadows, raining down filth and misery on unsuspecting dreamers below.

### *Lumeah the Sleeper*

Somewhere near Nod lies a clear waterhole beneath which an aboriginal man forever sleeps. The Court member that Abbers call Lumeah sleeps with his right eye open and left eye closed, holding a spear in his left hand. Although he never moves from his watery slumber, he can send whispery thoughts throughout the land. Dreams of failure and humiliation feed Lumeah's strength, giving rise to dreams of embarrassment, inadequacy and frustration.

### *The Ghost Dancer*

The Ghost Dancer is a tragic figure in the eyes of the Abber nomads. Her beautiful form is covered in blood, and her spidersilk veil is tattered and worn out. She knows every Dreaming song and track in Tjukuba, and

manifests dancing to ethereal, disembodied chants. She never speaks, letting her enigmatic movements express her sentiments. The Ghost Dancer draws her power from dreams of guilt and shame.

## *The Clinic for the Mentally Distressed*

The ghost town of Nod is not entirely abandoned: somewhere in its sand-covered streets lies the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed, manned by a certain Dr. Gregorian Illhousen and his staff of eighteen, including his lovely assistant Nurse Caroline Dinwiddy. All of these people, not to mention sixty-two mental patients, have been physically drawn to the Dreaming Lands through the wills of the Nightmare Court, and are now unable to leave. They have all so far survived the crushing madness of Tjukuba by employing *churingas* left by wandering Abber nomads.

Recently, Dr. Illhousen and Nurse Caroline were forced to leave the Clinic and to explore and to fend for themselves out in the vastness of Tjukuba, as some patients and a few staff members alike began showing symptoms of obsessive-compulsive violence. They have, probably because of the land around them, fallen in love, despite the fact that he is twice her age. Caroline is pregnant, and they now frantically search more than ever to find a way out of Tjukuba, befriending the Abbers and learning their Dreaming ways, hoping that their baby would not be born in a place of nightmares.

