



Game Master's Screen

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The Explorer's Society

In 1586 Hierophant Julius IV contacted a man named Cameron MacCormick for a special favor. The MacCormick family had long been in good standing with the Vaticine church, and Cameron had attended the University in Castille, graduating in high standing.

Julius IV commissioned MacCormick to retrace the lives of the three prophets first-hand, beginning in their birthplaces and following the paths they walked. MacCormick's studies and travels were quite successful at first, yielding a wealth of scholarly material still in regular use in church teachings. But in June of 1587, while traveling through the hills south of Vodacce, MacCormick made a strange discovery. In the caverns, he found whole walls of amber encasing what appeared to be full suits of strange looking armor.

Initially, MacCormick attempted to explain his findings within the boundaries of the church's doctrine, identifying them as remnants of the Synchron civilization. However, he was unable to ignore certain obvious dissimilarities between his findings in Vodacce and the radically different sites he had encountered in Eisen only a few months earlier in his travels. The writing found in both locations looked nothing alike. The Eisen ruins relied on a pictographic form of communication, while inscriptions in Vodacce were in a fluid, curving script punctuated with dashes and dots. The great caverns of Eisen were huge, standing over a hundred feet high, with doorways more than 50' tall. The tunnels that MacCormick found in Vodacce were barely large enough for a man to move through in some places. And the 'armor suits' he found there looked large enough to fit a small man.

MacCormick had specialized in the study of biology at the University, as well as being an avid reader of history. What he encountered fired his imagination, rendering him unable to finish the Hierophant's request. He handed the task off to a close friend who had accompanied him on his travels, and with apologies to the Hierophant, MacCormick took his leave.

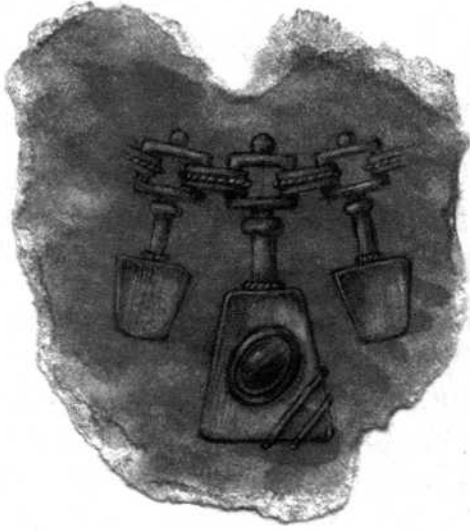
After a detailed study of the Vodacce caverns, MacCormick continued his search throughout Théah. He found similar caverns scattered through the hills east of Vodacce. He then moved westward, following the great river and looking for any additional evidence washed up by the seasonal rains. He offered large sums of money for genuine artifacts that could be brought to him. Many an eager peasant partook of his generosity, not always offering authentic materials. MacCormick soon expended his own fortune pursuing these new endeavors. His family, convinced his forays were folly, cut him off from the larger MacCormick fortune and from his inheritance.

Out of money but not yet out of hope or ambition, MacCormick contacted several of his closest colleagues from University. He asked for funding for his expeditions, promising in return true knowledge, and a place in history for his contributors. Of the 17 letters that MacCormick sent out, six answered that they would join him in his quest. The bulk of the funds came from MacCormick's closest and wealthiest friend, Allario Caligari.

MacCormick's other contributors were Alejandro Diega from Castille, Gern Luffwitz of Eisen, Darius Olaf of Vendel, and MacCormick's own sister Margaret, now Lady Margaret McOrin, a woman of means since her recent marriage. The only condition that MacCormick's contributors all remained firm on was that they be allowed to participate in his excavations.

With new funding, and consequently tools, manpower and to some extent respectability, the sextet formed the first incarnation of the Discoverer's Society, an elite group

The Explorer's Society



of self-declared adventurers on a quest for truth. For the better part of two years the fledgling society tried its wings, digging its way through Théah, buying entry where they couldn't barter it. Group members would sometimes work together. On other occasions, they would separate and continue their researches independently, even competitively. But one rule remained firm. Any evidence and all artifacts were turned over for examination by the whole society at the house of Darius Olaf, their newly appointed headquarters.

The arrangement went very well until late September, 1589. At this point, McCormick discovered that his close friend Caligari had been keeping and selling items found on his expeditions. Infuriated, MacCormick broke with Caligari, who withdrew his funding and many of his discoveries. Shortly thereafter Caligari formed his own teams of excavators to continue the search for artifacts and ruins. MacCormick disgustedly dubbed the new groups 'diggers' in disparaging reference to their grubbing for profit, and the name stuck.

Without Caligari's financial support, the Discoverer's Society began to founder. During the next five years Alejandro Diega was called home to take over responsibilities for his ailing father, weakening his ties to

the group. Darius Olaf found his trading ships on the receiving end of the unwelcome attention of raiders, diverting his attention and resources as well. The core group of the Society became MacCormick, his sister Margaret, and Gern Luffwitz. The three cut back the size of their digging teams to conserve the funds available to them. They dismissed most of the servants and assistants they traveled with, often venturing into new sites as a team of three.

The three developed a system that would become the basis of most dig teams. MacCormick would scout an area initially, to see if the site warranted further attention and to check for potential hazards. Once this was accomplished, the other two would join him. Margaret cataloged their findings and related them to earlier work. Gern, more versed in combat than either of the other two could ever hope to be, stood between them and danger. The group had long since learned that the sites they visited were as often as not the homes of creatures unlike any seen before.

The three continued their expeditions in this fashion for several years. Occasionally they would take on assistants, men and women as eager to know what lay beneath the mask of the Syrath as the remaining members of the Discoverer's Society.

In November 1597 Cameron MacCormick received word that his younger brother Albert, the beneficiary of their parents' estate, had died in a hunting accident. Once again the heir to the family fortune, MacCormick found himself both blessed and cursed. He now had the funds he required to continue his work, but with them came the responsibility to tend his family's property and business.

MacCormick returned to his family home in the winter of that year. As the weather warmed and MacCormick grew unbearably restless to continue his work, he came to a decision. Although he couldn't in good conscience leave his lands and duties, he could bring his passion to him. In early May 1598, MacCormick declared his familial



home the official University of the newly renamed Explorer's Society. He imported a vast library including the journals that he and his companions had painstakingly recorded over the years. He converted one wing of his home into a dormitory and another into a space for classes and research. Then MacCormick wrote letters, very similar to the ones he had sent out eight years earlier. He invited the original members of the Discoverer's Society, excepting Caligari, to do what he had and to open their homes to other adventurers seeking the truth of Théah's history.

They agreed, forming the first chapter houses of the Explorer's Society in Avalon, Vendel, Eisen and Castille. Each of these houses now holds its own library and museum as well as space for learning and research. In the years between then and the present, another house has opened in Montaigne under the watch of Etienne Deneuve. Any member of the Society can expect hospitality and if necessary, sanctuary, in any of these houses.

The Public Face

The credo of the Explorer's Society is to pursue the quest for knowledge and the truth of Theah's history with care and with honor. Its members spend long hours in study, face terrible dangers in the field, and turn over their findings in the name of knowledge, not profit. They know that the Surneth walked the shores and valleys of Théah before mankind was born, and they seek to learn all that they can about this older race so that men can reap the benefit of their wisdom and avoid the errors that presumably took them from the face of the world.

Although some of their findings conflict with established church doctrine, the Explorer's Society has a good relationship with the heads of the Vaticine faith, and is respected by most of the major governments and rulers of Theah's nations.

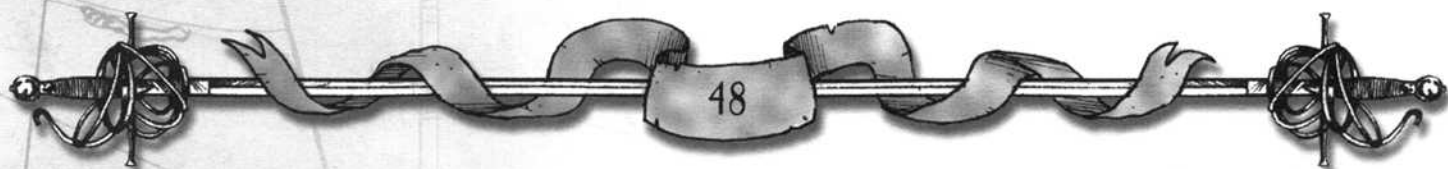
The Private Agenda

Behind the closed doors of the Explorers' chapter houses its members share different theories about Theah's history than the ones they publicly divulge. It has been known by the Society since its earliest days that more than one race existed before man, possibly at different ages, or perhaps sharing the world.

Explorers have learned to determine the comparative age of their findings. For instance, soil and rock are found in layers. Remnants found in different layers most likely belong to different ages. So far only the remnants of one civilization at a time have been found in a single layer. One of the main goals of the Society is to find remnants of more than one group mingled together, sharing a layer. This would prove that not only did more than one race exist before mankind, but that they coexisted, possibly working in harmony.

This kind of theory is making the Society increasingly unpopular with the Inquisition, the primary organized power of the Vaticine church in contemporary times. The church, through the Inquisition, stands behind the idea that mankind is the pinnacle of Creation and that any earlier races were inferior, thus causing their disappearance. The idea that more than one race capable of intelligent thought and building might have worked in organized cooperation is deemed heretical under the present church order.

The Society is also aware of the existence of the 7th Sea. Although most of the people of Théah look upon the 7th Sea as a sailor's fable, the Society sees it as a real place, and one to be explored. Members of the Society's inner circle suspect that this mysterious 'place' may be integrally linked to the old races, and may even hold the secrets of where they went.





The Explorer's Society

The Society's Activities

Several dig sites are under regular excavation and examination across Théah. (These are detailed at the end of this chapter.) In addition to these standard sites, explorer teams constantly search out additional ruins, and their digs dot the continent from urban Montaigne to the hills of southern Vodacce at the edge of the Crescent Empire.

In addition to their continental exploration, the Society sends out yearly voyages to search out new continents and other lands. These convoys began four years ago and although no major land masses have been discovered yet, regular reports come back from these ships reporting the unique sea animals and smaller islands they have discovered.

The Society's Structure

The Society structures itself like an academic organization. It is led by a Headmaster, whose role and robe have been handed down since they were first worn by Cameron MacCormick. He is attended by a council of six senior members, elected by their peers. Below this are six ranks of Explorer, each named for one of the six known seas. Each rank is vouchsafed additional knowledge.

There is also a material benefit to rising in the ranks. Although all artifacts discovered are turned over to the Society, not all of them are needed for research. Once it has been determined that no more of a particular kind of item are needed for study, the extras are redistributed among the members, beginning with the highest ranks. Needless to say, some of these artifacts can be exceedingly useful once their original purpose has been discovered.

Members identify themselves as being from a particular sea when addressing other members. For instance, a beginning explorer will say that he "...is from the Trade

Sea." The ranks begin with the sea surrounding MacCormick's native Avalon and continue counter-clockwise around Théah. They are as follows.

The Trade Sea

Beginning explorers are part of the Trade Sea. They are largely responsible for their own equipment and accompany parties as assistants most of the time. First rank explorers are seldom allowed inside dig sites. Instead, they're responsible for cleaning and cataloging items that the more experienced members extract.

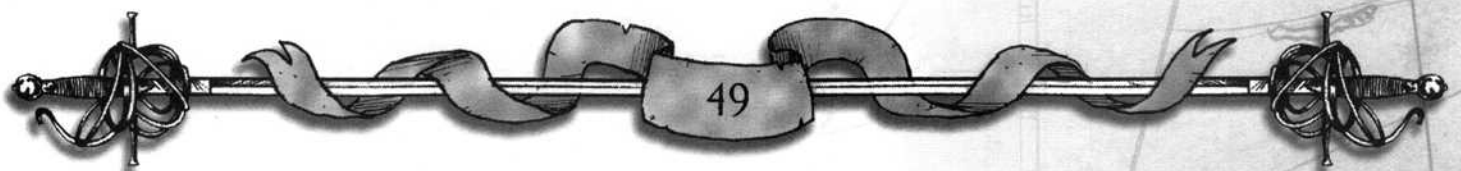
Their knowledge is equivalent to that of the average layman; for instance, they may still believe that only one race ever walked Théah before mankind. They're required to attend basic courses at the charter houses or to learn in the field from a tutor. These courses teach them the proper methods of recording their findings.

The Frothing Sea

After participating in several organized digs, an explorer advances to the next level. They're now allowed into the more secure portions of excavation sites. Also at this stage they may begin to receive the Explorers' 'unique' equipment, including a palm-sized globe made of a substance similar to quartz. If left in the sun, the globe will emit a soft light in darkness for half as much time as it was exposed to daylight. Frothing Sea explorers continue coursework, learning field techniques.

La Boca

At the third level, if they haven't figured it out already, they're told about the Society's belief that a number of older races existed. They're allowed to fully participate in excavations so long as at least one senior Explorer (Mirror or higher) is present. An explorer from La Boca can begin to receive credit for his own published works and journals. Most learning at this level is in a tutorial capacity. However, when not in the field, members of this rank spend time in independent research at the charter



houses finding out all that they can about their particular areas of expertise.

The Forbidden Sea

Explorers who have attained this level have crossed a threshold of sorts. Up to this point members are responsible for their own housing and income. Although a charter house will grant sanctuary in times of need, it won't support a lower ranked member indefinitely. Once an explorer has reached the rank of the Forbidden Sea he or she can choose to receive full boarding at a charter house, as well as having all of their necessary equipment provided. Most explorers repay part of this support by teaching introductory courses to newer members.

Explorers at this point are told about the Society's agenda to uncover research linking several of the older races together. So long as only one race's remnants can be found in a single location, the Society cannot prove that there was more than one race. Disputing scholars and the Inquisition espouse that the diversity is a result of one race developing over an indeterminate amount of time. However, if a mixed sampling of remnants can be discovered in the same location, the Society will have the evidence that multiple races did exist.

The Mirror

Explorers who have reached this level are deep in the midst of the Society and considered dedicated in the extreme. At this level, the Society reveals its theory that the 7th Sea is not only real, but a physical place that can potentially be visited, and may be connected to the older races and their unique magics/sciences.

The Corridors of Flame

Members who have reached this point are one step away from the inner sanctum. They have access to records and information regarding almost all of the Society's activities. At this stage members' dedication is deemed complete, and they are brought into the Council's confidence. The

very public voyages that the Society launches annually to look for new lands have a very different agenda. Instead of looking for new lands, they're searching for the 7th Sea. Since the first expedition went out four years ago, consisting of four boats and nearly 500 men, not one of them has sent back a single report.

Whether they've become lost in their quest or succeeded in it, the Society doesn't know. But they suspect that the 7th Sea may be more than a place: it may be a doorway. And if that doorway is where the older races left this world, then it's possible that that door could open again. This is the real reason for the Society's dedication to 'exploration abroad'. Members from the Corridors of Flame are responsible for constructing the fictional reports expected from those lost ships.





Reports of the Surneth

What follows is a series of articles from the Explorer Society regarding their theories and speculations on Surneth. While it may not be as straightforward as the previous sections, it does give a first-hand glimpse at what the Théans believe they are dealing with in those vast caverns and lost cities.

Presented by Headmaster Vincent Berndavore at the Annual Archaeological Conference in Carleon, Tertius 17, 1668.

Today is the tenth anniversary of the Explorer's Society, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made this decade so memorable. We have improved the fields of exploration, cartography, and world knowledge and made great discoveries in their sciences of chemistry, medicine, and mathematics, among others. I, for one, could not be more proud.

Though I have been the Headmaster of this Society for only five years, I would hope that all of you are as pleased with my work as I am with yours. The nation of Castille has been exploring with the blessing of the Vaticine Church for nearly fifty years, and they cannot claim half the accomplishments we can. So I say unabashedly congratulations, one and all.

Now, on to business.

First and foremost, I must again stress the number of damaged artifacts we receive every year. I cannot help but wonder if our techniques in the field are not too aggressive, or if the work is done too quickly. These items are our future, and should be treated with the proper care at all times. In addition, please note that many of our Directors have pointed to the mercenaries we have been hiring for protection over the last two years as part of the cause for this problem. Please observe caution when hiring such individuals.

The newest order of business this year must be our considered response to the sudden interest of the Church of the Prophets

in our work. Since the death of the Hierophant, they have become more active in their appraisal of our activities, and on at least a few occasions, directly interfered with a project's success. Also, several items have been confiscated by the Inquisition, who claim that they are of "religious importance."

I wish all of you to know that the Explorer's Society has made this their top priority for 1668 and beyond. Though we must still adhere to their rules and especially their borders, we will by no means stand idly by while they deny us access to our own finds. Nor will we tolerate the incarceration of our representatives, or the blatant hindrance of our efforts abroad. When we have more information to afford you on this matter, additional meetings will be convened. Until then, please report any abuses of Inquisition power directly to your coordinators.

So, without further ado, I present to you the summary reports of our current field researchers, and their finds.

Enjoy.

The following sections are highlights from the report presented to those at the Archaeological Conference.

Speculation on the Setines

Annual Progress Report

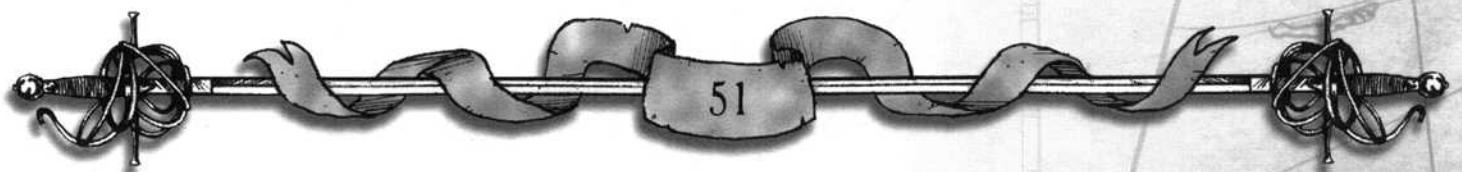
Dr. Jules von Gregor

Scientific Advisor

Hello good sir,

As I write these words and consider the ramifications of the enclosed material, I cannot help but wonder why you have chosen to include it in the Conference presentation. I do not suppose to question your judgment in this matter, but I am quite concerned at the possible directions our research could take after this information is released. Those unprepared for it may very well scurry back into their ignorant hovels and cast our fledgling scientific community adrift. Other may simply decide that nothing else matters.

We cannot take that chance.





Please reconsider your inclusion of this material. It is dangerous. As the research is not yet complete, we cannot make accurate assessments of the present data, and my personal opinion is that its presentation will cause friction with various powers in Théah, particularly the Vaticines, who could hinder our progress in other areas as well. Ultimately, however, you can rest assured that I will bow to your superior interests.

As always, I am your obedient servant,

Dr. von Gregor

Our first encounter with the beings we refer to (for lack of a more accurate term, and for reasons I will relate below) as “Setines” occurred late in the year 1664, shortly after the annual migration of the bocca through Castille and Vodacce along the Great River. In their wake, they had left great patches of upturned soil, which the farmers of both countries were working feverishly to cover before the winter snows arrived.

Within the hole left behind by one of these patches, the remains of a single being were found. The bones were unlike anything the Castilian farmer who owned the land had ever seen before, and so he dug out what he could and contacted us in the spring. Unfortunately, the bones had been badly damaged by the bocca, and subsequent digs in the same site recovered no new evidence to determine what the thing could have been.

Initially, my dig team and I thought that the being was the result of some form of occult tampering with the human form. It was slightly larger than even an outsized human. Its skull was grossly malformed, with a forward protrusion reminiscent of a snout or beak of some sort. The most remarkable thing about it, however, was the growth of what appeared to be frail wings from just below its shoulder blades.

These growths were the most heavily damaged part of the find, and we spent several months attempting to piece them back together in their original composition. I can only hope that our efforts have provided us with a close-

to-correct abstract, though with our lack of other samples for comparison until very recently, we cannot be sure yet. The “wingspan” of this first set of remains measured just over four yards in length by our calculations.

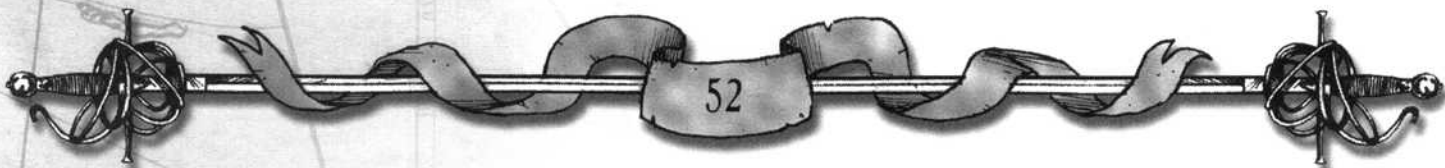
Needless to say, we were all intrigued.

We spent the next year conducting additional research on the being and scouring the Castilian countryside and Vodacce winelands for additional specimens. During this time, our only additional discovery was that the bones of the creature were mostly hollow and very brittle, like those of some smaller birds. Though we contested the Society’s resulting decision that it was an aberration not worth additional time and money, we were overruled. My team was split up and sent to new digs across Théah, and I was ordered back to my post as Scientific Advisor for the continent.

For two years, I continued with the coordination of digs and performed my regular duties without further incident. Last year, however, while working with Father Butolli at one of his Eisen locations, I found something that I believed was relevant to the “Setine” project. It was another set of remains (these only providing a partial corpse) that – while much larger and of a radically different body structure than the last – had the same type of hollow bone configuration.

Immediately contacting the Society about the find, my request for an investigation of the Setines was again flatly rejected. But this time, I would not be stifled that easily. I contacted my associates from the former dig site and asked them to keep an eye peeled for additional remnants of what I was coming to believe were an entirely new race which lived upon Théah in the far-distant past.

Much to my surprise, reports began flooding in over the following months of skeletons recovered within digs across southern continental Théah, previously unidentifiable, all with the same hollow bones. Few remained fully intact, but there were both males and





The Explorer's Society

females, some with wings and some without. They varied greatly in size and shape, ranging from something approximating humanity to immense and distorted beasts over twelve feet in height and apparently built to walk on all fours like a dog or bear.

But the most startling new find was what appeared to be armor modeled after the style and make of that worn by our predecessors in the Old Republic. Some of these suits were obviously useless to humans, being far too large and sometimes even form-fitted to ten-foot monsters with grossly bulbous barrel-chests and gnarled legs. By late last year, we had recovered two full suits and nearly a dozen individual pieces.

The Society could no longer ignore these finds. They brought my old team back together at the start of this year and cleared our docket. We have been working around the clock ever since, attempting to make up for lost time, and piece together the truth of these lost beings.

My greatest fear since that time has been this report. While I can be nothing short of truthful herein about my suppositions, I do not believe that we have enough evidence to support any claim. I have just received a letter from my former colleague, Father Butolli, which I have included for your perusal. It relates that another of the Setines has been discovered on the smallest island in the Vodacce Keys, which is owned by the Villanova family.

The importance of this particular sample is that it reportedly exhibits traits from both the male and female genders, as well as being roughly androgynous in shape and size when compared to our former finds. I believe this Setine may present the Project with a unique opportunity to piece together the common denominator between the existing samples. Unfortunately, Mr. Villanova seems hesitant to release the specimen for some as yet undetermined reason.

Now, with regards to the theory that Director Carleon has requested for the Conference, I can only repeat that these speculations are premature in the extreme. Please consider them unsubstantiated until further evidence to support them has been retrieved.

The members of the Setine Project team believe that our civilization was preceded by another: a vast collective of races held or forced together by an as yet unknown element, and that the element was the Setines themselves. Their remains have been found in nearly every dig on continental Théah, proving that the only place these beings did not roam was (perhaps) the far Isles of Thalusia and Syrne.

There are four probable reasons for the Setines' prolific presence, as follows:

- 1) They were a slave race, exploited by the others.
- 2) They were a servitor race, working together with the others.
- 3) They were a guide race, subtly or overtly influencing the others.
- 4) They were a ruler race, suppressing or enslaving the others.

This last theory is the most favored at present, given the beings' obvious strengths and incredible adaptability.

The Syrne Isles

Annual Progress Report
Professor Joseph McTavish
Isle of Syrne Site Director

To Headmaster Carleon,

This has been another outstanding year for the Explorer's Guild here on the Isle of Syrne. We have completed the clearing away of vegetation from Site A and commenced a careful study of its interior from top to bottom, and the initial survey and removal of debris from sites B and C proceeds on



schedule. In response to your request for a summary of our discoveries and theories for the Archaeological Conference, I have prepared a short presentation for your use. Please see enclosed. As always, it is a pleasure working with you.

Your Loyal Assistant,

Professor Joseph McTavish

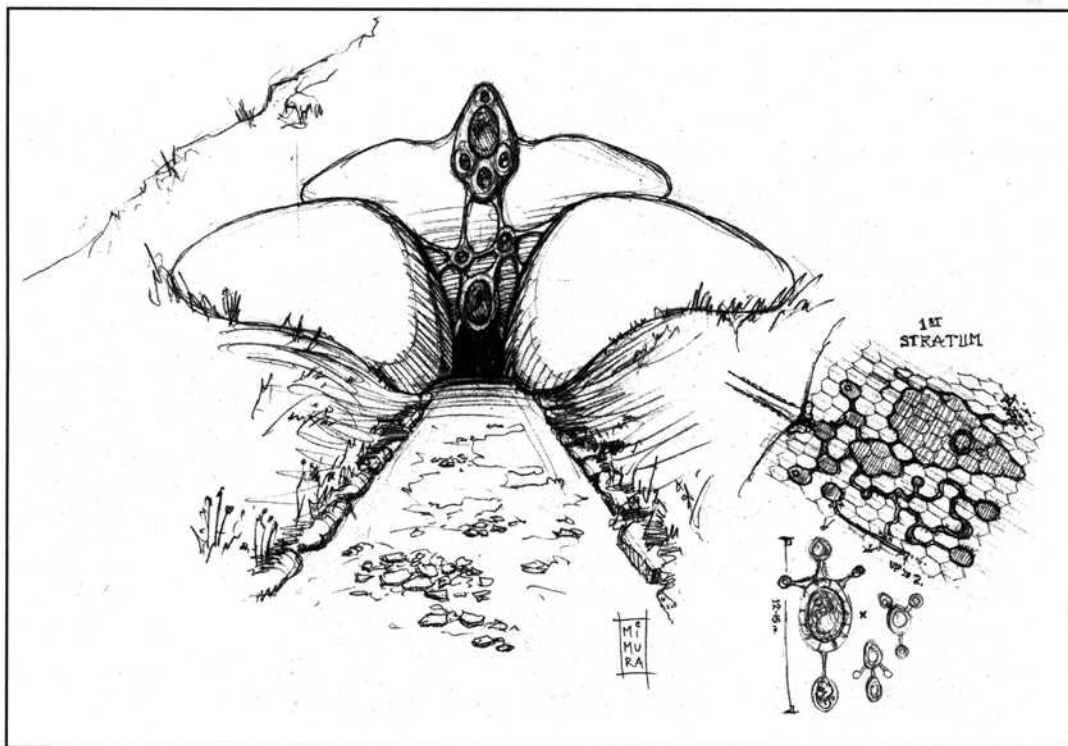
The Isle of Syrne runs fifteen miles from its northernmost point to its southernmost point, and five miles from its westernmost point to its easternmost point. It is located near the Median, approximately 300 miles west of Castille. It possesses a warm, humid climate year-round, and thus far we have discovered three sites that we are researching. The island is primarily inhabited by the charming aspreys, though recent years have shown a sharp decline in their numbers, and there is growing concern for the race's survival. Besides the aspreys, there are a number of small, seafaring birds that they feed on, as well as crabs and other common seashore life. The vegetation is lush and thick, and has presented us with the problem of clearing it away from any sites we wish to investigate. In addition, there are large patches of sea rose that flourish near the island which provide an important supplement to our diet. Located on the island are two large volcanoes, jokingly named "Captain Johnson" and "Councilman Bernard", after two rather hot-headed individuals who were involved in the early stages of the dig site's history. These two volcanoes have thus far done nothing but smoke and rumble occasionally. In the center of the isle we discovered a wide, deep lake filled with hot, almost scalding water. We refer to it as Terra's Blood. Captain Johnson and Councilman Bernard are located on the southwest and northeast sides of Terra's Blood, respectively. That should provide you with some idea of the island's layout.

Before we move into what we have discovered, let us examine the difficulties of conducting digs on the isle: as they say, bad news before good. The waters near Syrne are infested with pirates: both the so-called Sea Dogs and

the Brotherhood of the Coast have attacked our ships while they were ferrying cargo back and forth from Théah. Next, there is the constant worry that one of the two volcanoes on the island may erupt at any time, destroying years of effort. When you add to this the flooding found at two of the three sites as well as the virulent diseases that fester in the jungle here, you are presented with a complex puzzle to solve. Thankfully, we have thus far had no significant pirate activity on Syrne itself, but the threat has always loomed over us, since this island was once the haunt of the famous Captain Rogers himself. As a matter of fact, we are forced to chase off at least two expeditions a year that wish to thoughtlessly dig up the island following rumors of buried treasure. The Captain's long habitation of Syrne adds one final complication to our task. Every time we discover an artifact, we must ascertain whether it is simply a remnant from the pirates, or if it represents an actual scientific discovery. Enough doom and gloom for now, however. Let us discuss happier subjects.

We have made marked progress in researching the Syrne sites these past seven years. We have discovered three primary sites that we are conducting digs at. We refer to them as sites A, B, and C, in order of discovery.

Site A is located deep within the jungle to the northwest of Terra's Blood, approximately one mile from the ocean's shore. It was brought to our attention by a group of sailors who had landed on the island in search of Roger's treasure (in retrospect, perhaps we owe him a debt of gratitude for basing his activities on the island). At first sight, it appeared to be a tall, narrow stone structure with strange markings above its single entryway, but after we removed the vegetation, we found it to be an enormous building. The entire building is covered in a grid of lines, and appears to be laid out lengthwise along a line extending to magnetic north. Each square formed by the grid is exactly 10 ½ inches tall by 10 ½ inches wide. Measuring the building, we found that it was



door opens to the north. Moreover, it has sunken part-way into the ground, filling up with mud and debris that we have been removing as we go. We have not yet reached the center of the building in order to ascertain whether or not there is a duplicate white cube there.

Site C was found on a submerged island in the center of Terra's Blood. The water is approximately three feet deep, and as mentioned before almost scalding to the touch. In addition, it appears to

exactly 32 of these units tall, 128 units long, and 64 units wide. Inside are row upon row of rounded rocks. These are one unit high, two units wide, and eight units long, the exact height and width of the single door leading into the building from the south. In each row are eight rocks. At the very center of the structure we found a small white featureless cube that exactly fit the measurements of the squares inscribed on the wall. When we attempted to move the cube, we found it to be attached to the floor in some manner. The building is lit by sunlight shining in through apertures two units high and two units wide spaced along the ceiling and covered in some hard, clear substance that resists our attempts to break it. We are uncertain what the structure signifies, but we are fairly certain that it has some sort of religious significance.

Site B is located to the southeast of Terra's Blood, approximately one mile from the ocean's shore. It is a mirror, down to the exact detail, of Site A, at least from what we can tell by what we have uncovered. However, whereas site A's single door opens to the south, site B's

contain great quantities of sulfur, which leaves a thick yellow crust on anything submerged in the lake for very long, such as the ruins themselves. Work on site C has gone very slowly due to the discomfort of working the site for very long and to the concealing properties of the thick sulfurous crust, which has to be painstakingly scraped away. However, we have counted the buildings at site C, which number 127, and we have determined that they are laid out along a rigid grid aligned to magnetic north. In the building at the center of the city, we discovered an unusual thing: a small raised grid, 8 squares by 8 squares. On the grid were an assortment of variously colored, featureless cubes, all the same size. There were eight each of black and white, and two each of red, blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, gray and brown. While we have yet to figure out its purpose, one of the men studying the device invented "Squares", a game that has become surprisingly popular.

The artifacts that we have discovered vary in size and shape, but most of them seem to possess a magnetic attraction. Many produce odd humming noises when held, and one very odd device floated up away into the sky when we disturbed it. Strange magnetic disturbances on the island periodically cause every compass on the island to reverse its magnetic poles, and swivel around to point in the opposite direction. With the next disturbance, the compasses return to normal. Worst of all, several workers have been burned by scalding hot steam when investigating buildings at site C, forcing us to increase our safety precautions.

Analyzing the information we have on the Syrnych, which admittedly is little enough, they must have been about 6–7 feet tall and 1–2 feet wide, since their doors are of approximately that size. It does not seem unreasonable that they might have resembled a larger variety of the asprey, which would give them the appropriate dimensions. In addition, they placed the number 2 throughout the ruins, raised to its various powers: 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128. Presumably, it must have been of some great importance to their culture, though we are unsure exactly what.

Since the Director asked me for my best theory concerning how all the dig sites are related, I must add that I am currently of the opinion that the Syrnych race started out as primitive creatures similar to large aspreys, then later in their reign developed some technique that let them change their form, which led to the divergent forms of their race that we have discovered at the various dig sites. I believe that in each instance, as they moved to a new home, they assumed a different form and a style of building that fit their new environment. How else could so many creatures of different shapes live in peace, when mankind, which has only a single form, cannot maintain a peace lasting more than a dozen years?

The Thalusion Isles

Annual Progress Report
Lord Archibald Dunnet
Thalusion Isles Lead Site Director

Dear Vincent,

How are you, my old friend? The wife and children are well, I trust. Did you receive that bottle of Felice I sent you for your anniversary? The digs here on the Thalusion Isles have been disgorging their mysteries to us faster than I had dared hope, although there have been some slight problems with the exploration of the amber caves. Nonetheless, I feel that this year has been our best ever, and I know in my bones that we are very close to unraveling the mysteries of the Thalusion Syrnych. I have enclosed the report you desired for the Conference. I hope it is sufficient for your purposes.

Your Friend,

Lord Archibald Dunnet

The Thalusions are a chain of islands located to the far west of Avalon. There are eleven islands in all, running from the northwest to the southeast. Due to limited manpower, we have only been able to thoroughly explore three of them. The others remain largely a mystery to us for reasons I shall explain momentarily. The three islands that we have explored are named Grimorias, Alvara and Stark, after some of our most esteemed colleagues and forefathers. They are, respectively, the second, seventh, and tenth islands in the chain, starting from the northwest. They possess a temperate climate, although the winters get chilly. The islands were only discovered three years ago by a lost fisherman, but already we have learned a great deal about them. They possess an incredible variety of insect life seen nowhere else on Théah. Most of these creatures are harmless, if sometimes inconvenient. There are a few dangerous specimens as well, but again, I'll get to that in a moment. Each island is topped by a mountain. These range from Mouse Hill, at a mere 500 feet tall, to the mighty Mt. Re, which we

estimate to be no less than 15,000 feet tall. Our estimates are somewhat hampered by the perpetual fog of clouds that clings to the sides of several of the taller mountains. However, it was at the base of the smallest mountain, Mouse Hill, which is located on Stark Isle, that we made our greatest breakthrough. Following the remnants of an unusual road, we found a vast network of caverns that honeycombed the hill, and led us deep underground. The caverns were entirely without sharp edges, being almost perfectly rounded. More incredibly, they are completely lined with amber! If even a small portion of the amber here was mined and sold, it would destroy the amber market forever. Needless to say, we have kept the export of amber from the isles carefully regulated. Thus far, we have mapped only a small section of the grottos.

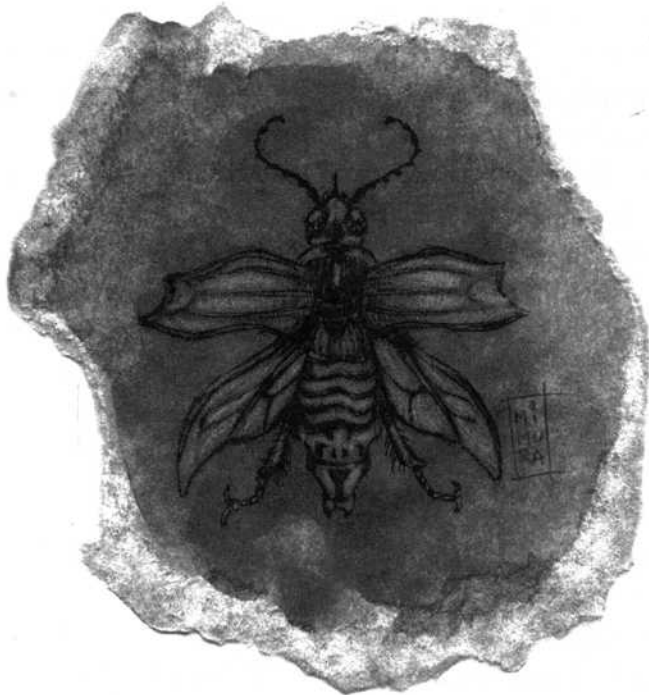
This brings me to the difficulties of the task at hand. The length of underground expeditions is limited by the food and light that the men can carry with them. We have, to our misfortune, been victims of mysterious explosions in

the caverns. In addition, men have simply laid down and died, for no apparent reason. If that wasn't bad enough, there are hideous insects the size of your fist found in the caves that can kill with a bite, and unstable areas that can collapse without warning. When we attempted to land on any of the islands that we are not currently exploring, great swarms of insects attacked us, and we were forced to flee back to our ship. I would like to land a small party on one of these isles dressed in heavy cloth and armed with torches to drive away the insects, but thus far no volunteers are forthcoming. If the Headmaster had not forbidden it, I would go myself.

The rewards that are uncovered on these isles are just as great as the dangers, which make the Thalussian Isles a gold mine of knowledge for men daring enough to face their threats. On Grimorias Isle we have found pieces of road in many places, particularly concentrated around three cavern entrances, which we have named "The Abyss", "Martin's Doom", and "No Man's Cave." If these names seem somewhat dramatic, it is because Grimorias is the most dangerous of the explored isles. When we were exploring the Abyss, we lost five men to an unexpected collapse of the floor. They were dropped into a chasm which we have been unable to explore due to its great depth, and I was forced to forbid further exploration in that cavern entrance.

Martin's Doom was where we discovered the first of the insects we refer to as ten-second scarabs, the name alluding to the amount of time a bitten explorer has left to live. As you might perhaps guess by the cavern's name, a young explorer named Martin was the first to discover this property of the scarab's bite.

Lastly, No Man's Cave is so named because of the extraordinary fear it has elicited from the explorers on the island. Periodically, strange lights can be seen glowing from within the cave. When one group of six explorers dared its depths, they never returned, except for one poor man who came crawling back to the entrance before he



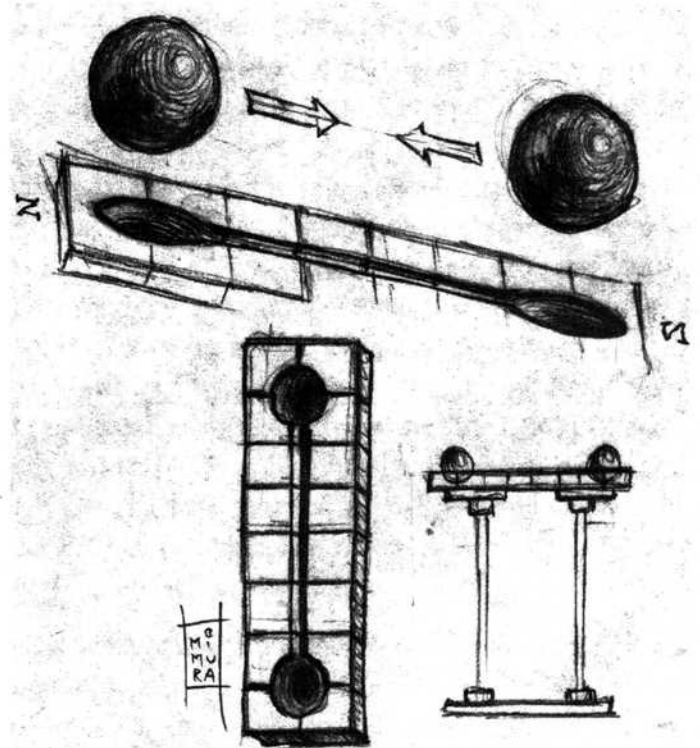


died. His skin was a charred mess, as if he had been burnt horribly. Since then, no one has ventured into its depths. It must be stressed that these sacrifices are inevitable in the pursuit of knowledge, and these men knew what they were getting into when they signed up for this assignment. The Explorer's Guild has provided their families with an ample pension from the amber mined in the caverns.

On the isle of Alvara, we have found two entrances into caverns, which we have named "The Fiery Winds" and "Leon's Place." The Fiery Winds was the cave in which we first encountered the mysterious explosions that sometimes decimate entire explorer parties. We lost twelve men in that first instance, and have since restricted the size of expeditions to eight to avoid losing so many good explorers at once.

Leon's Place is a small cave that doesn't go very far into the mountain. Apparently a Vodacce sailor named Leon lived in this cave for several years after being shipwrecked on the isle some 60 years prior to our arrival. It is from his diary that we learned of several insects to avoid. Leon, because of his meticulous style of note-taking, probably saved dozens of men's lives. The diary ends with an entry stating that he had finished building a raft and stocking it with food, and that he was going to attempt to sail off these isles. Although I have made a point of checking historical documents in every country I have visited, I have yet to find any evidence that suggests Leon survived the journey. For the sake of the men whose lives he had saved with his notes, we sent his diary home to his native Vodacce to be buried in lieu of a body, and erected a small memorial to him in the cave in which he dwelled for so long.

The smallest of the isles, Stark, has ironically revealed the most about the Thalussian Syrneath to us. It was the first isle explored and contains only one cave entrance, which we have named "The Great Hall." There are few of the dangers that seem to infest the other cavern entrances.



The cave goes up into Mouse Hill, branching into many small, empty rooms. Then it splits into two primary corridors. The left corridor leads to an enormous amphitheater of some sort. The walls are pocked with holes leading half way up to the ceiling. The holes are three inches in diameter and spaced thirty inches apart. At the top of the ceiling is an enormous crystal which peeks out of the top of the mountain and diffuses light throughout the room, lighting the amphitheater during the day. When we attempted to follow the right corridor, one of the men touched a lens mounted on one of these walls, which promptly exploded, taking the corridor and three men with it. Since then, the men have been under strict orders not to touch any lenses they encounter.

If it were not for the miraculous nature of the artifacts we continue to unearth from the caverns, I would abandon the dig without a second thought. However, we have found strange devices that float in the air without any obvious support, artifacts that are capable of genuinely





The Explorer's Society

frightening acts of destruction, and most importantly, examples of Surneth writing. I hope to someday gather enough of their writing to decipher their language, which could unlock their secrets, giving mankind powers it can only dream of. Ironically, the nobles who help to fund the dig are only interested in certain decorative pieces of a hard material that we occasionally dig out of the walls. These trinkets often wind up as jewelry or decorative (but ineffectual) armor. We find enough samples of this material that, like the amber itself, I do not feel any contrition in selling it to fund our efforts here and at the other digs.

As for my personal theories about the Thalussian Surneth, and the Surneth in general, the Headmaster is quite familiar with them, but I will repeat them here at his request. I believe that the Thalussian Surneth were approximately the size of humans and possessed eyes that were very sensitive to light, hence their choice to live underground. Due to the presence of the amphitheater, I believe that the Thalussian Isles were the capital of a great Surneth council. Judging by the reports made by my colleagues from the other dig sites, I find it hard to credit that a single race constructed all these vastly different buildings, and the only way they could have maintained the peace between such different races was by bowing to the wisdom of a council of representatives.

Finally, I would like to ask the assembly at the Archaeology Conference to observe a moment of silence while the Headmaster reads the names of those men who sacrificed their lives here on the Thalussian Isles: Alms, Armister, Baker, Bernard, Bertrand, Caster, Craige, Daviau, Dumont, Franklin, Gerald, Heileger, Indigo, Jones, Keller, Layalis, Martin, O'Riley, Perr, Roark, Sakes, Stevens, Thane, Traener, Ulwin, von Haffe, Wester, and, of course, our mysterious benefactor, Leon. May the Prophets guide them and hold them near.

The Home Front

Annual Progress Report
Father Andre Butolli
Domestic Sites Coordinator

Prophets preserve you, my son.

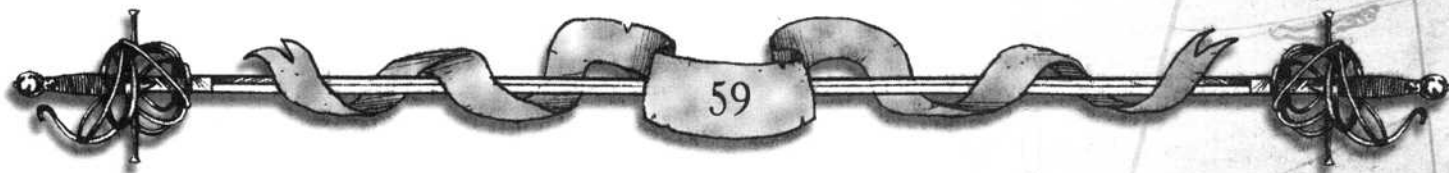
Even after an entire year in the position, I am still gratified that you would allow an old priest such as myself to coordinate the digs on continental Théah. It is a great deal of responsibility, but a job that I greatly enjoy. I pray I will be equal to the task. There are so many things to do; so many details that cannot be overlooked. Sometimes I wonder if any man is capable of the task. But fear not. As long as you continue to place your faith in me, I will perform my job to the best of my ability. Please find enclosed the report you wished me to write in preparation for the Conference. I wish I could attend, but my duties here are unrelenting.

Your Servant,

Father Andre Butolli

There are two primary efforts taking place on continental Théah: one in Montaigne, and one in Eisen. I will address them separately.

It is a well known fact that many of the larger Montaigne cities are built on strange foundations. One need only glance at some of their more unusual architecture to see that no human hand ever fashioned those buildings. Unfortunately, so many people have lived in those buildings for so many years that anything of value there has long since been lost, stolen, or destroyed. However, many of the Montaigne sewers are built by the same race that built the fantastic buildings up above: one of the Surneth races. Rather typically, the Montaignes have buried this vital information, knowledge that could unlock the Great Puzzle itself, under an enormous pile of garbage. The sewers underneath Charouse are our main dig site in Montaigne. They are known as "Little Vodacce" and they are inhabited by several dozen

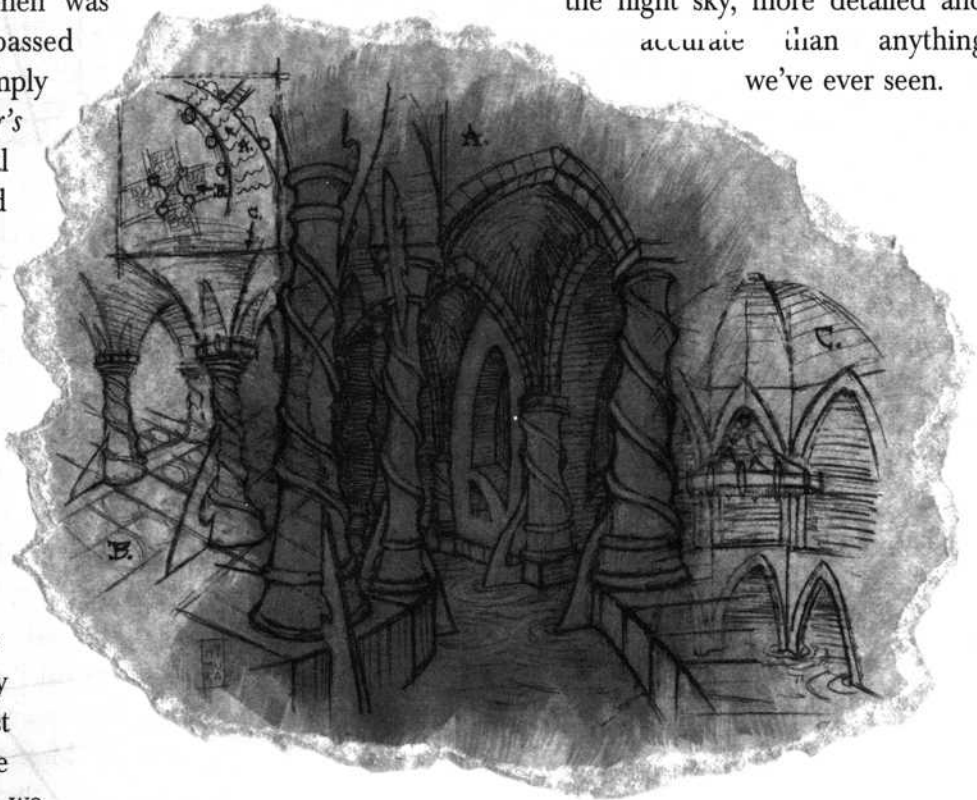


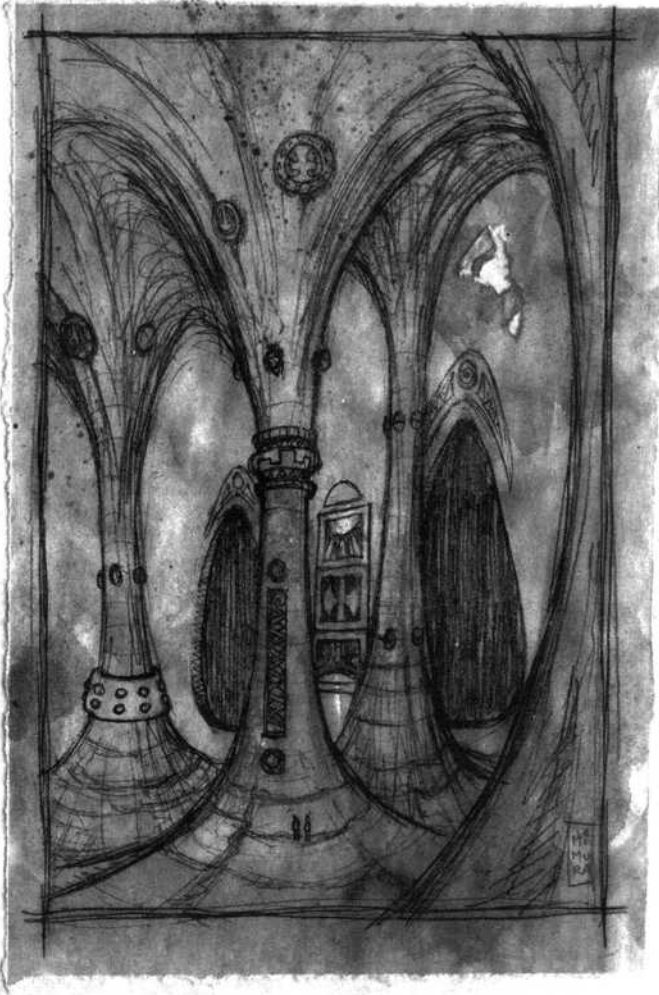
homeless Montaigne beggars who have been forced off the streets and now jokingly refer to themselves as “Sewer Hunters” in imitation of the famous Eisen Monster Hunters. These men and women have been instrumental in our researches, serving as guides to the dizzying maze of tunnels below the city. They have told our team that when the Montaignes began to dig sewers under Charouse they broke through into a complex series of passages, and, instead of exploring them or sealing them up, decided to save themselves the effort and used them as the sewer.

This brings me to the logistical difficulties of carrying on an archaeological dig in the Montaigne sewers when not only will the Montaignes not assist us, but they in fact seem determined to thwart our every effort. Their officials harass our workers; their townsfolk drive us from the town when we emerge from the sewers; the Emperor has sent guards into the sewers to drive off the Sewer Hunters; and once, one of our men was executed when the Emperor passed downwind of him after a dig simply because he had offended *l'Empereur's* nostrils! Clearly, these are not ideal conditions. If the aboveground situation weren't bad enough, the sewers themselves are dangerous. There are bizarre creatures in some of the less traveled sections of the sewers that are known to be dangerous to men. Even when our men are not assaulted by these things, they must dig in moving water, somehow attempting to sift the Montaigne trash from the Syrneath remnants, all the while worrying about the unhealthy conditions under which they must work. It seems incredible that we have recovered anything at all. Still, we

continue our efforts in the hopes that we may find some essential piece of the puzzle that will bring everything together for us.

One of our greatest discoveries seemed to be a gift from Theus Himself. As one of our teams prepared to enter the sewers at night (so as to better remain unnoticed by the city guard), their torches caught a silver glint in the water. Investigating more closely, they found a small metallic globe. When held in the hand, it pulled the holder in a certain direction. Curious, the team followed the globe through the sewers, mapping as they went. It led them to a dark spherical room with a transparent bridge crossing its center. Embedded in the walls around them was a fantastic assortment of gemstones and jewels. One of the team members had some experience in astronomy, and noticed that some of the formations on the wall resembled constellations in the sky. Since then, we have discovered that indeed the room appears to be a map of the night sky, more detailed and accurate than anything we've ever seen.





Besides this incredible find, we've also discovered samples of Syrneth writing, and, rarest of all, certain devices that would appear to be weapons built for creatures very much like humans. One of these, a glove-like device that killed anything its wearer touched with it, was so dangerous that we've been forced to hide it away to keep it out of the hands of the Emperor. Only days after we found the thing, his men were poking around our headquarters in Charouse, looking for something. I hate to think what he wants with it.

In Eisen, we've had much less success than in Montaigne. Only one of the Eisenfürsten has allowed us to examine any of the ruins there: Nicklaus Trägue of Freiburg. He

allowed our team to not only tour the Wachturm, an obvious remnant of a Syrneth society, he also took them to visit a series of caves carved into a remote hill. The caves contained paintings of what appeared to be drachen using tools and standing upright, as men do. This would seem to be a fanciful notion, given the reputed size of the drachen, and one of our team members mentioned that point to the Prince. In response, Trägue took them to an enormous room, one that was far too big to have ever been built by humans. The team reported to me that, "Standing there in that room, with the roof arching high over our heads like the sky itself, we were prepared to believe that drachen had built it. In fact, if one of the beasts had emerged from a side passage and invited us to tea, not one of us would have been particularly surprised."

My teams are coming to believe that the Montaigne sewers contain the remnants of a very advanced race. They had a great reverence for the heavens, and they must have been a very peaceful race, for a more violent race would surely have destroyed themselves utterly had they possessed the weapons we have discovered under the streets of Charouse. I am unconvinced that the dragons of legend were responsible for the ruins in Eisen. As any student of anatomy could tell you, the remains of the dragons we have found thus far lack even the most basic grasping appendages, which are required for the development of intelligence. As for my theories regarding Syrneth history, I must state that I am inclined to agree with Dr. von Gregor's Setine theory. That one race built all the various ruins we have found seems utterly preposterous to me. The philosophies represented by their styles of architecture alone are so varied as to be utterly alien to one another. Moreover, the thought that all these races lived in peace without some ruling body standing watch over them is so incredible as to be scientifically unsupportable.

Black Market Artifacts

Annual Progress Report

Professor Andrea Galia

Explorer's Guild Black Market Collection Agent

Sirs,

I have sent no formal report with this letter. I apologize for this, but I have never shared the taste for minutiae that so many of my colleagues seem to possess. Rather, I prefer to speak in my own words, without unnecessary embellishments. If my colleagues choose to think less of me because of this, then so be it.

I would like to speak primarily of three artifacts that have come into my possession within the last year. Although whether or not they are of Surneth make is in doubt, I firmly believe that these objects are just as deserving of study as anything the Surneth ever created. In fact, the objects seem rather too new to be made by the Surneth. I instead believe that their place of origin is the land of Cathay. I'll explain my reasoning for each artifact as I go.

The first artifact was acquired from an Ussuran trader who had found no use for this unusual object. It was nothing more than a bracelet, but it had strange writing on it, writing of the sort that we have come to associate with the people of Cathay. I took a fondness to the bracelet, and, for lack of a better way to determine what, if anything, it did, began wearing it on a daily basis. One night, I was meeting with a contact of mine concerning a supposed Surneth artifact that turned out to be nothing more than a rather fancifully designed hatpin of Montaigne design. I was warming myself next to the hearth when an atrociously careless barmaid bumped into me and knocked me into the fire. However, not only was I not burned by the fire, my clothing wasn't even singed! Retiring to a more private place, I determined through experimentation that wearing the bracelet protected me from being burned by flames. I daresay more than one scholar would have benefited from the bracelet during a visit by the Inquisition. My reasoning that the artifact is Cathayan is simple. 1) It has Cathayan writing on

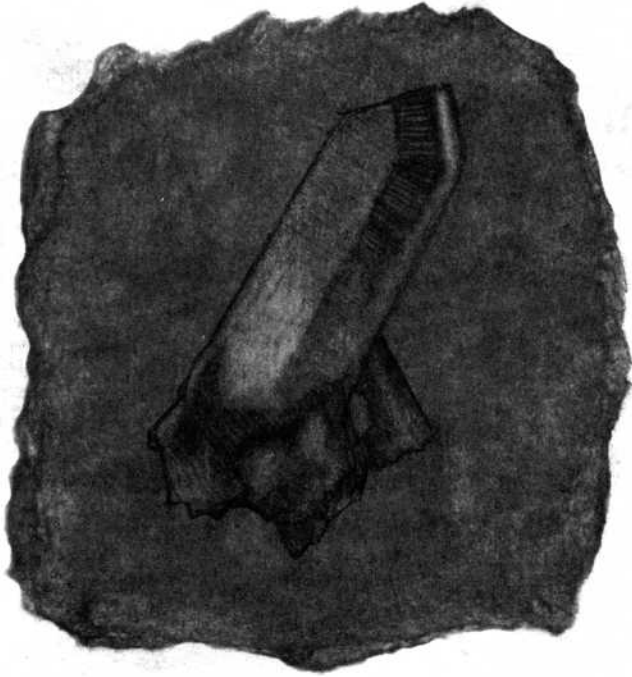
it, and 2) It possesses protective properties against fire, something I'm sure the Cathayans have mastered.

The next artifact came into my hands from a street peddler in Vodacce. It is nothing more than a frame of wood with some silk stretched across it and a string tied to it. However, when the string is held in windy conditions, the frame and fabric float up into the sky in the most extraordinary way. Written on the fabric is a single letter that I believe to be of Cathayan origin. As the device pulls upwards with a good deal of force, I must wonder if a big enough frame could carry aloft a person. If so, that would truly be something remarkable to see.

The last artifact I wish to tell you of is the most unusual. It is nothing more than a flat stone with text upon it, and yet I feel it may be the most important discovery of all time. I recognize at least a portion of the text as Cathayan writing. However, there are at least two other languages on the stone, both of which are known to me. One of them is represented at the ruins on the island of Syrne on the walls there. The other is a text that an Avalon friend of mine identified as writing that is in fact in use by the Sidhe. If any of these three



languages can be deciphered, the stone could provide the key to the other two, which would surely be an accomplishment unprecedented in archaeology.



New Prospects and Conclusion

Annual Progress Report – Addendum

Professor Andrea Galia

Explorer's Guild Black Market Collection Agent

Sirs,

I have been asked to elaborate here about a situation I find most distressing. As long as those insufferable Vaticines continue their ban upon Crescent and Cathay trade items, the scientific community will be the ones who pay the price. There are wonders of history hidden away in these “infidel countries” that would completely revolutionize modern thought, and we must not allow faith to stand in the way of the progress we could achieve with them! My reasons follow.

In the spring of 1667, my contacts in the Vodacce black market obtained for me an item of unusual design. It looked

like a series of animal bladders sewn together into a ring, with the center hole approximately nineteen inches in diameter. The bladders had been cured and had a texture much like leather, and were partially filled with a pale green fluid. On the inside of the bladders, there was a white, viscous compound that clung to anything it touched with incredible strength.

The morning after we examined the item, everyone who had touched the compound was dead, apparently having passed in their sleep. Of the rest, anyone who had had extensive contact with the fluid also died within a week. Given the chance to examine these people throughout their prolonged debility provided us with a great deal of information about the ailment. It was as if their bodies began to slow down at first gradually, and then more and more quickly. By the third day, most were unable to feed themselves or even sit up. Nothing we or the Castilian herbalists did was effective.

I make no pretense of being objective on this point. My husband was among those who never awakened. His work is well known to all of you, I am sure, so I will not elaborate on his loss here. But I will comment that I did not participate in the initial study, being preoccupied with other matters at the time, and that I was scheduled to do so the next morning. I feel personally responsible for Norman's death, and the deaths of all seventeen members of the team that worked with the bladder-ring, and my report is understandably colored by this fact.

Further experimentation with the compound and fluid determined that they were both of similar design, the former being a more concentrated version of the latter. Both are deadly toxins, purposefully sewn into the bladder-ring for a purpose I have yet to determine.

Another object I must note here is the sliver of red gemstone that has come to be known as “Legion's Spike.” Though I am sure that all of you know of the item, I will repeat its description here for posterity. It is a simple jagged sliver of red crystal that looks very much like ruby. Its edges are sharp, but its most outstanding feature is a reflective surface in which a

large number of people have claimed to see images more beautiful than they can describe.

Many who have looked into the stone have been interviewed and asked what they saw, though most have been unable to describe their visions. The images vary from one subject to the next, we are sure, and they are always the most fabulous sights imaginable. I myself have looked into the Spike's depths and found within a vista of colors and images that, apart, are likely meaningless. The memory of them together, however, has been the source for more dreams of fantasy and joy than I can relate.

Of course, there have been the well-documented side effects of such exposure. Melody Charmers of Avalon has not stopped screaming for two years, and Molokai Breslow Komunuw, the Ussuran tradesman, spent one full month silent and unmoving before slaughtering a family of twelve and their visitors in Vodacce. There are countless other lesser-known incidents of altered personality and various "episodes."

I, like most others in the Explorer's Society, had assumed that Legion's Spike was a unique artifact, and that with its recovery and confinement the threat was over. But in recent months I have come to understand that there is another red jewel of the same type – this one a full, uncut stone the size of a human fist – among the treasures of one of the Vodacce Princes, which came (against the edicts of the Church) across the eastern mountains. I have not been able to confirm this, but should the rumor be true, we may have a large problem on our hands. Not only would such an artifact be priceless (and therefore in high demand), if it is of the same class of stone we have seen before, it could be incredibly dangerous to everyone who sees it.

The importance of these finds is in their effect upon the human body. If either of these items were constructed by the Crescents or the Cathay, then these "infidels" have knowledge of medicine and the workings of our bodies far beyond our own. If not, if these things predate the cultures that currently occupy the East, then our organization is the most qualified for the prospect of seeking that knowledge out. Either way, the

Church has no right to impose embargoes on these artifacts or to refuse us access to the countries they came from.

I do not presume to support any theory of the old world, other civilizations or races, or even the nature of these artifacts we are recovering across the globe. Gentlemen, our place is not to make these decisions yet. It is to continue the search. To do that, we are going to have to move past the outdated notions of religious distinction and political boundaries when conducting our surveys. I beg of you, please, to consider my suggestion that we begin a campaign against such restrictions. Until we do, the Explorer's Society will continue to fumble around in the dark with an unsheathed sword.

Someday we may stumble, and spear ourselves dead.

Thank you.

Professor Andrea Galia

