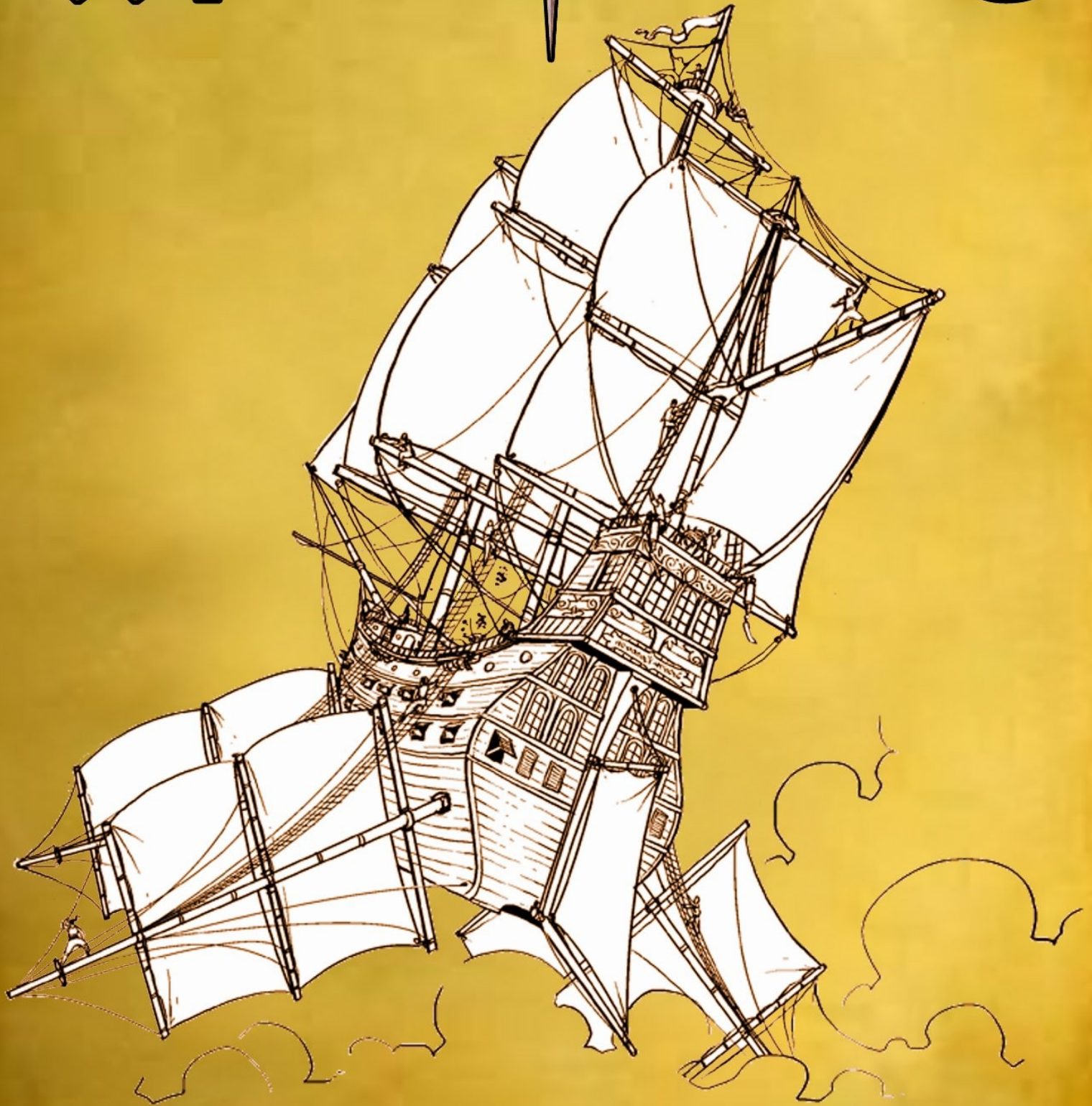


wyrm*stone



ALMANAC TY 109

WYRMSTONE ALMANAC TY 109

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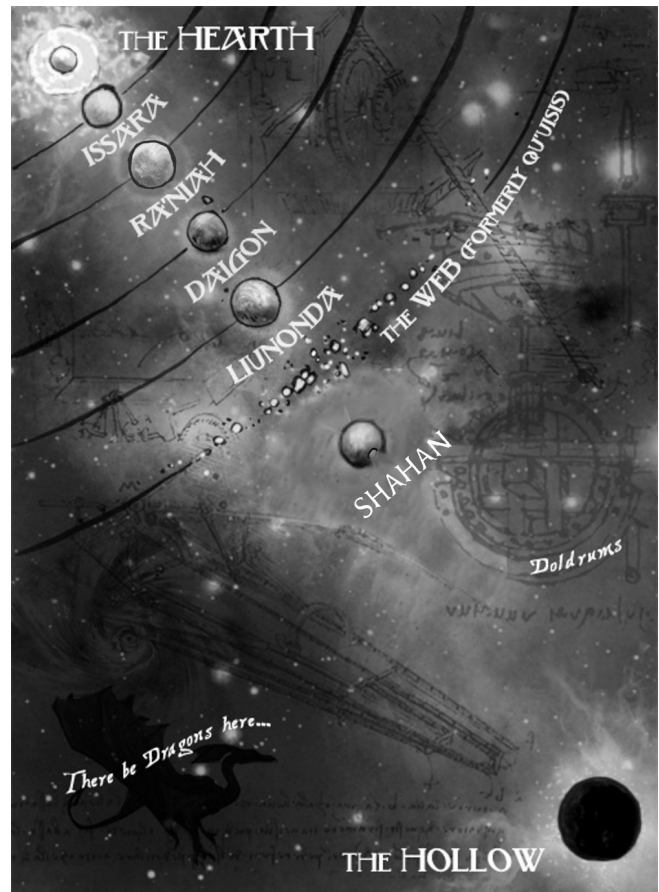
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THE WORLDS

With high sailing ships, adventure is everywhere! I am Anton Petrus, Rank II Student from noble order of Archivists in the Great Library of Panea. Years of training in the dusty halls of the library have lead up to this, my first great adventure as a Rank II Student! This expedition is slated to take over a year, and we are travelling to all of the major trade worlds. I am instructed to fill this journal with what I experience as an Archivist. My first entry is to cover the recorded mythos of the worlds:

Before the worlds were born, there was Mother and Father Sun. Much time passed with the Mother and Father Sun living in harmony, they created all the worlds, the people and the animals. However, all was not well between the Mother and the Father, and as time stretched on they grew apart. While apart they watched over their own worlds and the people flourishing therein. But Father Sun was not content. He coveted the happiness of Mother Sun and her worlds, and was jealous of the attention she paid and received from her creations, as well as the other deities ascending to live beside her.

Many different stories have been documented telling what happened, but in the end the results are

clear. Father Sun's jealousy led to rage, and he consumed his own worlds and creations, becoming what we now know as the Hollow, a dark hole in the sky which can only be seen by an absence of light. Mother Sun continues to shine as the Hearth, providing warmth and love upon her creations.

This is, of course, a very simple explanation, for I would rather write about the worlds and their great diversity. There are six remaining worlds. Dusty, lost and forgotten tomes refer to more than these six, but the other worlds were consumed by the Hollow. All of the known worlds circle around the Hearth except for Shahan, it stays firmly in place between the Hearth and the Hollow.

The first world encountered when leaving the Hearth is Issara, covered with a rich, verdant, steaming jungle. There was a time long ago that Issara was a great power, led by a mighty Empire peopled of snake-men who called themselves Hothai. The Hothai have shared their world from the beginning with the Chimai, a ever-curious race of simian-men who have their own long history of both oppression by and warfare with the Hothai.

After Issara is Ra'niah, my home world! Here endless archipelagos spawn the best sailors alive, led by the Guild-States, exemplars of art, science, and culture. While Ra'niah is mostly home to a wide variety of Humans and Faló, Elf-blooded exiles from the Celestial Empire have a kingdom in the Court of the Jade Crown, and the seas are filled with many different water-nations of Tritons and Sauhagin ruled by Aboleth God-Kings.

Daigon can be found in the next circle after Ra'niah. This place is rumored to be the home world of Humans, but now it is covered in blasted wasteland ruled by Dragon Warlords. Those who survive on the surface of Daigon do so against great odds, and with much attrition. Circling Daigon is the infamous moon of Eyone, this is where dragons go to die, and is the only known place to harvest Wurmstone.

Next comes Liunonda, a forest world which is home of the mighty Elven Celestial Empire. This Empire is as old as time itself, never having fallen. There are other elven kingdoms on the world of Liunonda, but none anywhere rival the size, might and ceremony of the Celestial Empire.

After Liunonda is The Web. This jumbled assortment of floating isles was once the world of the Root Walkers and the Nar. Unfortunately, a centuries old conflict between the Nar and the Celestial Empire led to the destruction of the world once known as Qu'ulsis. Where once there was a complete world, now there is only a collection of small and large roughly shaped land masses known as The Web. Many

other worlds have Aether Islands which float above the surface; the remains of Qu'ulsis are all Aether Islands, and it is at these places scattered throughout the Web that the Nar and Root Walkers continue to live. What was once the oceans and seas of Qu'ulsis still circulate throughout the Web in an endless circle. Massive waterfalls from one isle to another, up and down and all the way around, following the circle that Qu'ulsis once traced around the Hearth. The lands close to the river are shrouded in mists and clouds and are verdant and farmed by the Rootwalkers. Those farther away become more desolate and desert like.

Last is the enigmatic world of Shahan. Once the seat of Dwarven power it is now occupied by the horrifying C'throu. Shahan is the home world of the Dwarves and Orcs. It is unique in that it does not circle the Hearth or the Hollow, but rather sits in a stable location between each sun. It does rotate, and such rotation has been measured by astronomers, but it's lack of circle is mystifying. Shahan is also a hollow world, with the inhabitants living on the inside instead of on the surface.

The worlds are in a Renaissance of sorts, a new period of enlightenment following the Age of the Plague. Nobody knows the cause of the incurable plague, but it sent the worlds into a spiral of death, darkness and insular behavior that caused much knowledge to be lost or forgotten and many civilizations to simply disappear. During the Age of the Plague trade was all but non-existent for ports were closed by fear of contagion. Two or so centuries ago the Guild States--building themselves from the collapsing Telman Empire--started establishing new trade routes across the worlds. While the Plague periodically appears from time to time, it is nowhere near as strong as it once was. There are brave new frontiers to rediscover, and the worlds are waking from a century long period of fear.

RA'NIAH TRAVELOGUE

We were attacked by pirates today, and it was amazing! Using the Wurmstone Astrolabe we port-gated to Ra'niah. Our arrival was high above the clouds, even the upper floating archipelagos were far below us--we were close one of the moons than the world! Like always the ship was at full-sail when we arrived, which was probably what saved us, for a pirate cutter suddenly was upon us. Before the ship could react the pirates fired their cannons and disabled two of our masts. A pitched battle followed as the pirates cast across lines and boarded our ship. I dare say we may not have survived because there was

another pirate ship further off the port side, but this stayed back instead of engaging. Honor among thieves, I suppose.

Eventually the lines were cut and we pushed back the pirates, those who were unfortunate to be left behind were tossed over the side, their fate is likely to starve to death floating in the void.

With one main sail and two canard sails damaged the ship was in desperate need of repair. We fled towards Ra'niah, and our journey was a frightening six days with patched sails and constantly watching the remaining pirate as it tailed us. Four days into our journey it gave up the pursuit and we eventually completed our controlled descent to the surface, steering towards the nearest safe spot to land, which happened to be the northern edge of the Falø islands.

The Falø

These tropical islands are scattered across the southern hemisphere in a roughly circular shape. The ship set down in a serene bay on one of the islands, and the sailors started effecting repairs. In no time at all a group of curious Falø tribesmen arrived.

The Falø are a small rudimentary and superstitious people, living in primitive circumstances on the Falø isles. But do not under estimate them. The Falø people are very tough and are quite comfortable with their primitive lifestyle. Many tribes practice ritual tattooing and scarification, giving their warriors a unique and disturbing look. Falø battle war cries are legendary, and surprisingly intimidating given the size of the Falø themselves. Warriors in full panoply, worked into a furious berserker rage, are truly frightening. Falø warriors tend to wear little armor, and carry weapons constructed of materials other than metal.

The Falø also practice a tradition of religious magic that involves an extremely complex hierarchy

of powerful spirits who must be regularly appeased. This Mauloo tradition is the only form of magic practiced by the Falø, and those who do not practice Mauloo view any magic practitioners with suspicion and fearful reverence; although they still participate in the many forms of superstition that is tied to the Mauloo magic. The Falø magics are respected and powerful, not to be mocked.

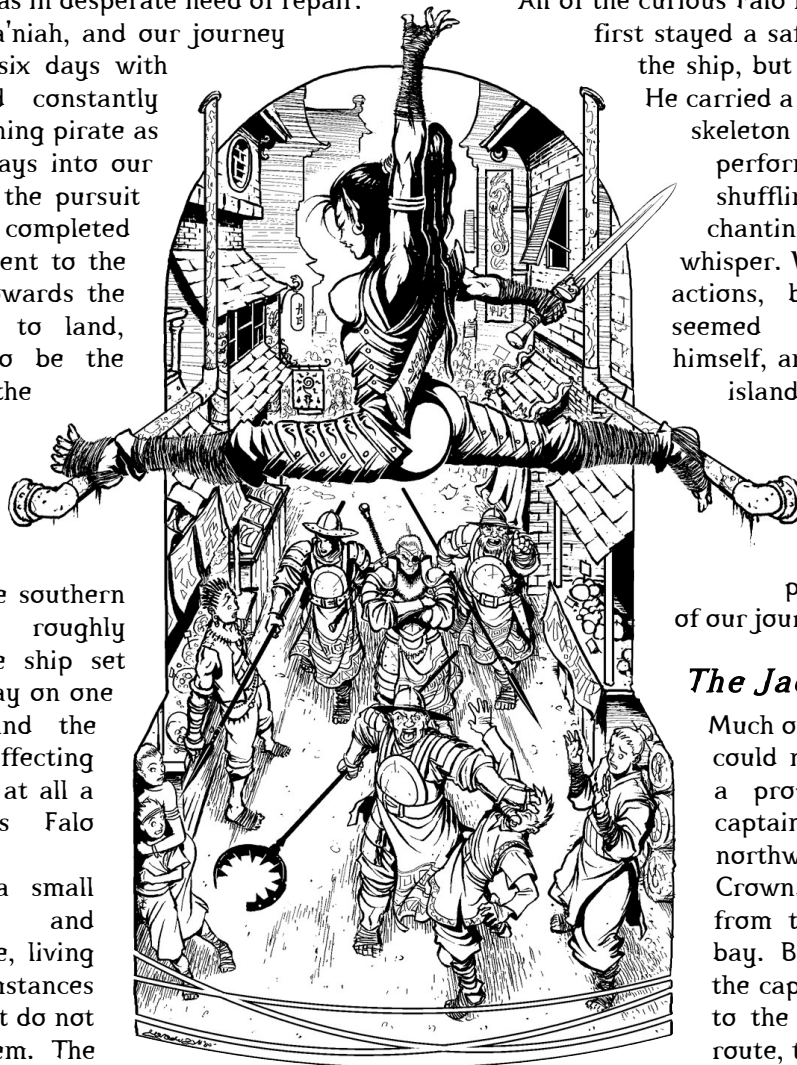
All of the curious Falø islanders that arrived at first stayed a safe distance from us and the ship, but then a shaman arrived. He carried a tall staff with a monkey skeleton attached and performed a ritualistic shuffling along the shore while chanting in a low gravelly whisper. We were not sure of his actions, but when finished he seemed quite satisfied with himself, and afterwards all of the islanders were eager to meet and trade with us. It was a great opportunity to restock the ships supplies, and prepare for the next leg of our journey.

The Jade Crown

Much of the damage to the ship could not be repaired without a proper shipyard, so the captain decided to sail northward to Sai in the Jade Crown. Our approach was from the south, across Tiger bay. Because of our damage the captain kept our ship close to the surface, and from this route, the city does not appear

slowly grows until it is suddenly stretching across the horizon.

Sai is, of course, the largest trading port on Raniah, but it is difficult to describe the sight of it. In the words of Master Othius, it is a great sprawling mass. The entire Tiger Bay region is prone to earthquakes, which have reportedly destroyed, or partially destroyed, much of the city in the past. Because of this, large portions of Sai seem to have been built with little planning. While some of the bigger structures are built of timbers and stone, most common homes are constructed largely of light wood



and paper. Even on our approach from the air it was difficult to discern any rational pattern to the streets. The Court of the Jade Crown has a murky history, starting back during a time when the Celestial Empire had a policy to terminate human and elf-blooded children when they were discovered. Many helped sneak adult and child elf-blooded including some dragons. These exiles formed their own kingdom on Ra'niah, separate from the Celestial Empire.

The Court of the Jade Crown is a strange study in contrast. The modern Court is closer to a republic than a kingdom, although only those who are members of the noble houses may participate. The Court is ruled by the Senshuken, the only person who is granted the right to wear the Jade Crown and sit upon the Dragon Throne in Liaul. There is no dynastic succession for the wearer of the Jade Crown, and this person has historically been elected from all the different noble houses depending upon their strengths and weaknesses at the time of election. The Senshuken is elected for life, or until the Court decides to revoke the position.

The Court also practices near-total racial equality within itself. Nearly any creature can go through the steps to join a noble house. If accepted, they must swear fealty only to that noble house, take on house colors and trappings, and then they are a member of the nation. While most noble houses are led by the descendants of the original human and elf-blooded stock from Liunonda, there are notable houses that are not.

In spite of this seemingly open society in terms of fealty, members of the Court of the Jade Crown see themselves as superior to all other societies they encounter. They believe that their ways, which they feel are dragon-taught and ancestor-directed, are the true ways of doing things. Others are to be pitied for their ignorance.

For instance, the House of the Twice Gold Dragons is entirely elven, comprised mostly of more recent Celestial Empire expatriates. The House of Tiger and the House of Silver Heron are almost entirely human, and led by humans who call themselves Sennyō to differentiate themselves from the Tzu Pan of the Celestial Empire, who they closely resemble.

Luskani Dominion

Our planned Journey to Ra'niah was to stop at Telma and Vevonne, but the pirate encounter has thrown us off course. While we could sail westward over Luskani and stop at Vevonne in short order, the captain has decided to avoid the hostile Luskani.

The Luskani are on the western side of the same continent as the Jade Crown, their territories

separated by a large mountain range.

The Luskani Dominion was originally a province of the Telman Empire, and was renown as being the most militaristic. Many of the Telman Empire's greatest generals came from Luskani. When the Empire was shaken by the week of sundering where the Emperor and his family was murdered, the Luskani were the first to step forward and claim the throne. The Luskani consider themselves the only remaining remnants of the true Telman Empire, and the Luskani people insist upon a rigorous Telman cultural purity that is more true to the ancient Telman way than modern Telma. For the citizens, loyalty to the Luskani state and the original Telman traditions is very important.

There is a common practice within the Luskani Dominion to use slaves and Animus, a unique form of undead which are fiercely loyal, do not decay, and are regarded as indistinguishable from common servants and slaves. The people of Luskani consider being turned into an Animus as a positive thing, and often families are well remunerated when a deceased is selected to become an Animus.

There are always seditious rumors about a nations leaders, and Luskani is no different. Dating even back to the week of sundering there was suspicion that the Luskani were behind the coup. There is also speculation that Emperor Xathis and the entire Anhault dynasty maintain their hold of the throne through the use of harrowed powers.

The Luskani maintain a fierce military presence, and have accepted many refugee Orcs from Shahan into their Legions. They frequently skirmish with the Jade Crown, Galen and Vevonne.

Liir

In our long eastward journey we stopped at the city of Kelswick on the emerald island of Liir. The Liir are a bit more simple than most of the current Guild-States, and have long resisted incursion. They maintain a clan structure with no central government. This would appear to be ripe for the picking, but many past invaders have learned that while the Liirish may fight among themselves, they are fiercely loyal to each other when it comes to external threats.

These red-headed people have a lilting brogue language of their own. They are a passionate people who are quick to anger, quick to forgive, and they have a love for festivals and recreation. A classic Liirish custom is called the Ramble. These happen in most villages once or twice a week, with the house offered for the rambler's gathering rotating unofficially through the village over time. Larger Rambles happen monthly in the village center.

Kelswick is a city that rolls across many hills with a assortment of tightly packed small two-story stone buildings in the center and spreading out with a variety of village style houses all around its periphery. It is in the lands of clan Mel'keene. There are few cities in Liir, but of them Kelswick is notable as the seat of the high king. While there has never been a high king in recorded history, Kelswick will be the seat of power should there ever be another.

Grune

From Liir we sailed east, and midway on our journey I was finally able to see the legendary cursed shores of Grune. The forest has created a dense gnarled canopy that spreads across all but the farthest hyperborean reaches of Grune. Very few venture to this land, although there are many legends about ancient civilizations that once resided within its shores. There were times over the years when one ruler or another tried to claim the wild lands of Grune for his own. These errant settlements lasted little longer than a generation. In every story the tale always ends when a traveler arrives to find the villages vacant with no sign of what transpired.

The oldest legend says that long before the arrival of highsailing there was once a mighty empire on Grune, its great capital resting somewhere past the gelid and snow-capped mountains, deep at the heart of the now dark and marauding forest. Now all that can be seen from sea are a few ruined settlements near the cliff edges, the bleached and pocked stones hoary monuments to the many people who have tried to discover the secrets beyond.

The Telman Regency

At one time the Telman Empire controlled much of Ra'niah and dominated trade across most of the worlds. Laws passed by the Telman senate reverberated even outside the courts of Telman influence. Now all that is left is the original land of Telma, ruled by the High Telman Church. There are many metropolitan cities in the isle of Telma, and most notable is the city the isle is named for. It sprawls from horizon to horizon, rolling across many hills in the vestra river valley. The multi-storied buildings are largely of stone construction with massive public-works projects all across the city including aqueducts, parks and a few coliseums. The old Telman senate is one of the notable palace-like structures with forests of broad columns and a large auditorium.

Unfortunately, the government that once held sway over so much of Ra'niah is no more. The week of sundering was over three hundred years ago, when

the entire Imperial line was exterminated in a horrifying and short-lived coup followed by a week of claimants battling in the streets of Telma. The empire fractured at this time and even though a new emperor was named, his claim was tenuous at best. Nearly five years of civil war followed while the empire tore itself apart. The civil war ended when the Prelate of the High Telman church, Honorable II, called in the Prelatal Guard and declared martial law. He then summoned an assembly of lictorii and other high officials in both the government and the church, and presented the Proclamatia Regencia that he received from the gods themselves. There was to be no successor to the Imperial Throne. Instead, the High Telman church would hold the throne in regency until such time as the gods saw fit to bring forth a true and unassailable successor.

Ever since the day of the Proclamatia Regencia, the church has controlled what remains of the Telman Empire. After the declaration, all of the provinces declared their own leadership and independence from Telma. Regardless, the High Telman church remains in control of Telma to this day, the Imperial throne cared for and left carefully empty, awaiting the day that the gods will once again restore the Empire.

One thing of interest with Telma City is its necropolis. The city is so large and so sprawling that there is an imperial decree that all dead must be managed by the Imperial Morticians society, an adjunct to the Holy Regency. This society keeps a tight grip on the necropolis which is rumored to sprawl in passages and chambers throughout the underneath of all Telma City.

Veromani

Sun-drenched Veromani was long the jewel of the Telman Empire. Many lictors from Telma itself kept second, and sometimes third, households within its borders, away from the bustle of the Imperial seat. Unwilling to surrender any of the "civilized" comforts they were accustomed to, these lictors brought with them scholars, artisans, powerful mages, and builders. In several places, particularly avant-garde Telman designers used entire towns as architectural playgrounds, building cities of dazzling genius.

As a result of its past place in the Empire, modern Veromani boasts some of the most impressive architecture and decoration on Ra'niah. Every major city has something about which to boast, be it a university, a cathedral, an opera house, an entire neighborhood, a palazzo, an observatory, or even just a wondrous fountain.

Most curious is the concept of Sprezzatura proliferated by the gentlemen of Veromani.

Sprezzatura holds that whatever a gentleman does must be presented as effortless, even if extremely taxing, and he must always gently decline praise for his works, no matter how important. When a Veromani gentleman does something impressive and is complimented for it, he will likely shrug and say simply "Sprezzatura", by which he means "it is nothing".

The government of Veromani is very intriguing. It is ruled by a doge, who is selected from among a large body of electors via a staggeringly complicated process of blind lots and quasi-democratic voting. This process is meant to eliminate corruption within the government, but in practice has only made it more widespread. Beneath the doge is a dizzying labyrinth of functionaries, secretaries, seneschals, and servants, who administer Veromani's daily needs.

Vevonne

At the height of the Telman Empire, Vevonne competed directly against Veromani for the unofficial title of most favored province. Many lictors established second or third households in Vevonne, especially along the southern edges of both Vevonne, a region which to this day produces some of the best wine grapes in all the worlds. Those lictors brought with them their Telman niceties, including artists and scholars.

Since the decline of Telma, Vevonne has sought to portray itself as the seat of culture, learning, art, and sophistication. The nation continues to compete directly with Veromani for distinction in this regard. Every city of Vevonne has some sort of claim to fame, be it the widely respected Universite Corlisienne or the massive cathedral at Troyoul. Everything in Vevonne is considered somehow better than everything anywhere else, and this mindset extends throughout all of Vevonne's social strata. The Vevonne accent has been purposefully exaggerated for so long it has become normal, and other people who cannot follow Vevonne conversation are considered unrefined.

Artifice is a major factor in the Vevonne mindset. The philosophy of artifice holds that the true measure of intelligence lies in a being's ability to create new and unique things with ingredients provided by the natural world. Perhaps the most obvious application of artifice, however, lies in Vevonne gunpowder, which is more powerful and refined than that created anywhere else. This has only fueled Artificers belief in what they are doing. To this end, they have also become major proponents in the art of physics, although many magical scientists scoff at these more clunky and less reliable methods.

Vevonne is ruled by a king, who is served directly by a half-dozen grand dukes and four dukes, who are in turn followed by innumerable barons, marquis, baronets, marquesses, lord mayors, and so forth. The court of Vevonne defines the term opulent, and always occupies the very pinnacle of culture and fashion. Though taste is for the observer to determine, I am particularly not fond of the affection of wearing wigs and pointed shoes.

Daigon Travelogue

Our journey has brought us to the world of Daigon. It is a cursed land. Desiccated hills and dunes cover nearly all of what is left of Daigon. We approached from air, and most of the land was obscured by dust storms. Those people who live in this barren wasteland must do so by sheer force of will or they are forsaken, as anybody who can has already found voyage to better places.

Legend says Daigon was once home to a vibrant human civilization, but now it is ruled by Dragons. There are feral tribes and exiles who wander the surface, but only under the guiding eye of a Dragon Warlord. Few want to visit Daigon, and only the insane want to stay.

Our expedition is here because a new city has been unearthed by the eternal winds that scour the surface. Traders from across all the worlds are descending on Daigon, hoping for a glimpse of the enigmatic past of this world.

These ruins were monitored by Simbasha, a notoriously harsh Gold Dragon Warlord and his tribes. We arrived and even from a distance it was easy to see Simbasha. Perched on a plateau overlooking the city, his cavillous eyes were quick to note faults among his followers. The ruins had people crawling over them, and we were sent to a section where people wrapped in layers of protective cloth offered relics to trade.

This land is hotter than a furnace. The air I breathe is stifling, and everybody walks with their faces covered. While Master Othius traded for artifacts I spent time among the Tribesmen of Daigon. Apparently there are many independent nomads who wander the scalding surface, and this excavation was cause for a gathering to trade. I was surprised to learn that there were tribes not directly ruled by Dragons, although these are smaller groups with little power and no lands to call their own.

I returned to a ship busy with activity. We were setting sail, even with the Hollow night upon us. There was a dust storm rising, and the captain was eager to be aloft. We sailed above the storm and headed northward to the Citadel of Akhtis.

It took us nearly three weeks of sailing. As we proceeded north the air slowly lost its oven-like heat, until we were so far north the light of the Hearth never diminished and there was no night. Her healing glow is dimly visible at all times. This is the reason Akhtis is known as the Twilight City.

Normally the northern and southern region of a world is encrusted with ice and snow, but on Daigon the land merely becomes slightly tame. Some patches of olive-drab foliage could be seen as we approached Akhtis. This walled citadel is said to be older than any other occupied human city. It is built from the copper brown colored stones of the area upon a massive pyramid shaped hill with four flat sides. At its apex is the monolith of Akhtis, a massive obelisk with no known entrance.

Pennants snapped from the hundreds of spires dotting the citadel's fortifications, and I dare say my heart swelled with the impressive statement it made. The Citadel is massive, presenting a perilous profile against the dangers of Daigon and showing that people can persevere.

The people of Akhtis wear colored clothing and are quick with wit and a smile, although you get the sense that underneath this smile lies a soul hardened by the harsh lands of Daigon. The upper class men and women of the city have also taken to painting their faces with bright blues, golds and reds with solid black outlines around their eyes.

The Akhtians were very friendly to our expedition, and we were invited to stay at a Lords' house, Drachm Neophon, who is an old friend of Master Othius. The Drachm are the four lords of the city of Akhtis. Each lord rules one face of the pyramid citadel, and together they manage the overall defenses against the marauding tribes of Daigon.

Drachm Neophon has six daughters. While they were always covered in diaphanous veils and silken robes during our stay, my mind was wild with imagination for their lavender eyes hinted at an inner fire that intrigued me! I attempted to talk with them several times, but my many endeavors were usually cut short with only a few words. Then there was

Chione. She did speak with me, and oh the things she had to say! We started meeting at secret places throughout the Drachm's palace, until we were discovered by the servants. Unfortunately after this the expedition's stay was abruptly ended and we departed in the morning.

Liunonda Travelogue

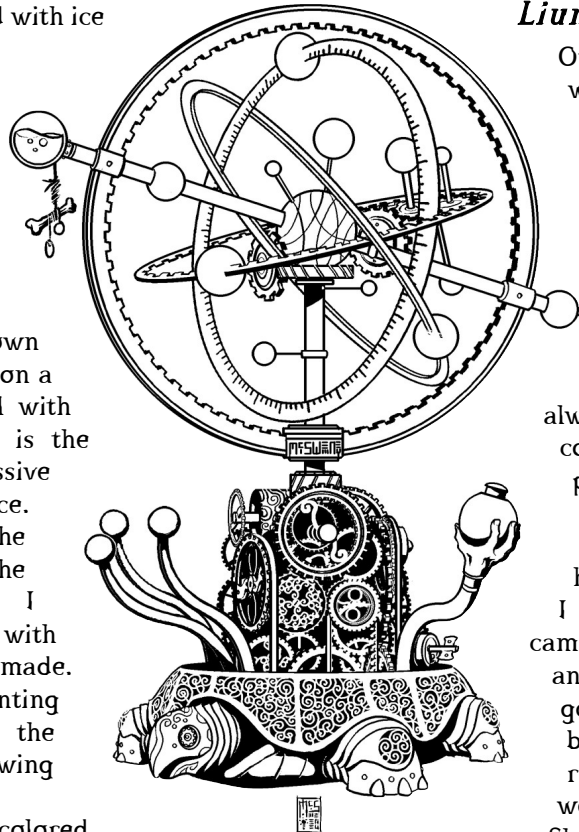
Our port-gate arrival at Liunonda was definitely low and close, in the clouds and on the night side. Normally navigators setup the port-gate so that there is a day or so descent because arriving so close to any world is quite dangerous. Using a wyrmstone astrolabe is not an easy thing, and its results are not always accurate, and the worlds are constantly moving, so it is possible to port into the middle of a world! After our arrival the captain certainly had some harsh words for the navigator.

I was below decks, but quickly came aloft because of the shouting, and what a sight to behold! Our good ship *Corvus* descended, breaking through the clouds to reveal how fortunate we actually were. Almost directly below us

was Shuzeng, center of the entire Celestial Empire. The light of thousands of city lamps, fires and torches illuminated the city so we could see it shimmer and glow, even from our height, sprawling across the countryside.

At the very center of this sparkling sight was a gap... a slight diminishing of the lights. They were not as numerous, and the area covered quite a sizable preserve. This was, I learned, the Forbidden City, home of the Celestials, the royal bloodline of the Celestial Empire. There are very few Celestials, perhaps only a thousand overall. All but the Celestials are forbidden from entering this inner city. I have never seen a Celestial, but they are described as unearthly in nearly every respect, with pale flawless skin and jet black luminescent hair.

All of the other elves of the Celestial Empire are known as Scions, not elves (it was explained to me that elves are the uncivilized cousins, the Abhainn Nations, who live outside the empire). Scions have a variety of dark hair colors and vibrant green eyes. Even more numerous in the Celestial Empire than



Scions are the Tzu Pan. Tzu Pan are best described as human, although they share many of the characteristics of the Scions. They also have dark hair, although their eyes vary in color and they do not share the pointed ears of the elves. Tzu Pan are fiercely dedicated to the Celestial Empire, and make up the bulk of the working class, along with many Scions.

It is very curious to me that Scions and Tzu Pan are citizens of the Celestial Empire, yet they do not allow other humans to become citizens. The Celestial Empire is quite strict about racial purity, which is why the Lhao--half-blooded mixing of the Tzu Pan and Scions--are outcast from the Celestial Empire. This is, in fact, part of the reason for the founding of the Jade Crown on Ra'niah.

Our stay in Shuzeng was longer than we planned because our fortuitous arrival trimmed nearly a week

off our journey. During our stay in this fabulous city that never seems to sleep I was able to learn much about the people. I even came to know several locals who enjoyed our company; one was Lien. She was a beautifully fierce Scion explorer I met at a Tea House. Lien has mastered the art of combat with and without weapons. She invited me to spar and I must say I was humbled on my first attempt, so I took her offering to teach me more!

Despite the many distractions in Shuzeng I tried to learn more about Liunonda. The world is covered in sprawling forests. Although the Celestial Empire claims sovereignty over the entire world, there are other elven nations including the Abhainn Nations. Unfortunately, I was never privy to meet one of these other elves. I hear they look quite different, with a wide variety of hair, eye and skin colors. I tried to learn more about them from Lien but she found my interest in them humorous, and was not forthcoming with more information.

Shahan Travelogue

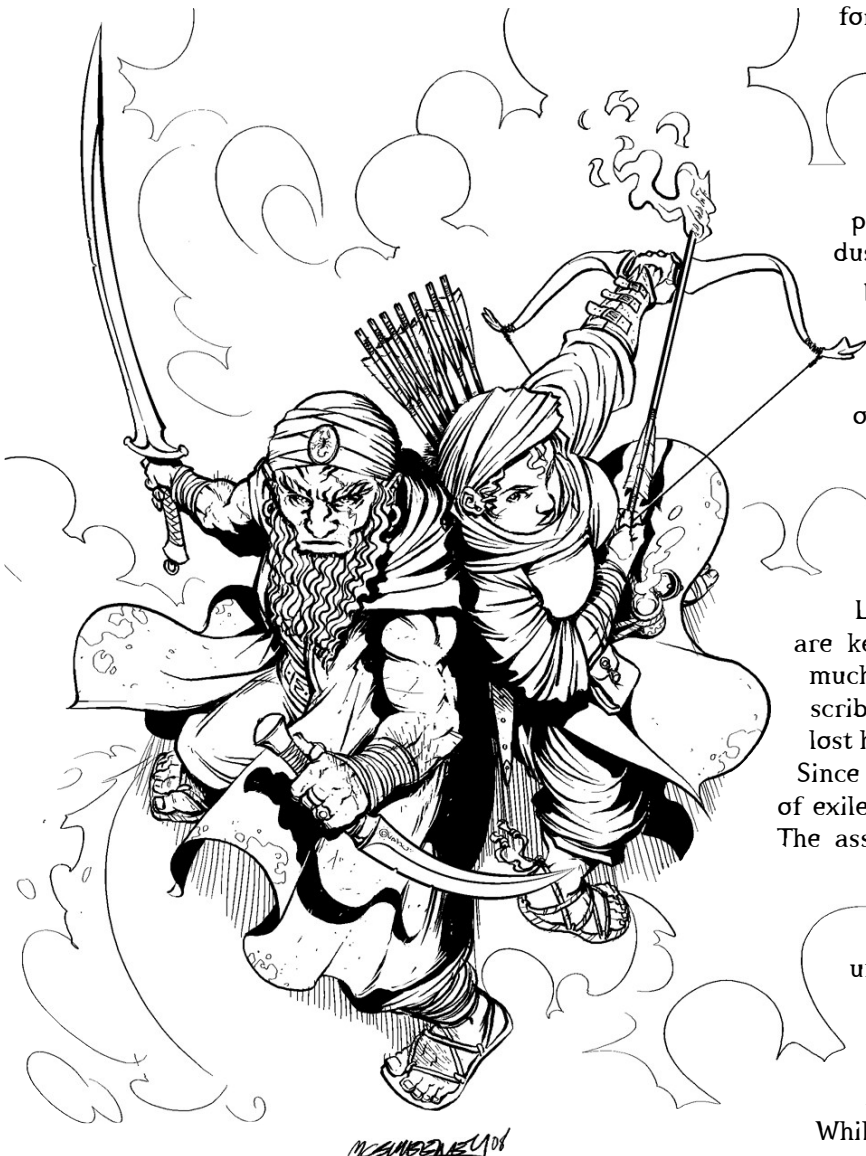
We are voyaging deep into the Web. This is a dangerous and long part of our voyage, for our port-gate deposited us on The Web's periphery near the desolate desert isles where dust clouds blow from isle to isle. In order to provide a complete compilation of the worlds I have taken this opportunity to learn and write about Shahan, since we are fortunately not scheduled to visit Shahan on this expedition.

Shahan is occupied by the frightening C'thrau, its original Dwarf and Orc occupants scattered to the other worlds.

Rakhshan is our ship's first mate, and he is an old dwarven Shahani Longroader. The Longroaders are a small faction of Shahani who are keenly dedicated to retaking Shahan. It took much effort to get Rakhshan to open up to me, a scribe, but in the end he was happy to discuss his lost homeland.

Since the occupation of Shahan there are two types of exiled dwarves: the Assimilated, and the Shahani. The assimilated are those who have forsaken their homeland and integrated into the local culture. Rakhshan had a very low opinion of the Assimilated. From what I understand, the Longroaders are an even more zealous part of the Shahani, refusing to even stay in one place for too long lest it appear they are giving up on the journey back to Shahan.

While the Dwarves were the ruling class on



Shahan, the Orcs were the worker class. Rakhshan had little to say about Orcs, other than many of them resettled into Luskani on Ra'niah.

Shahan is a world unlike any others we know as it is hollow. The exterior of the world is a nearly lifeless wasteland, all crags and craters, but great openings at the poles grant access within. Hanging in the "sky" at the very center of Shahan's interior is what Shahani refer to as the Holy Forge, a burning sphere several miles across, atop a small temple complex; the appearance of the Holy Forge is not unlike a chalice on which is balanced a sun, of sorts. The Holy Forge provides light across the inner surface of the world where the Dwarves have lived for time immemorial. The Holy Forge dims and brightens regularly, and these periods correspond to a day period and a night period, though even at midnight Shahan's lands are not truly dark.

Rakhshan was on Shahan when the fearsome C'thrau invaded, fifty years ago. He told me about the invasion in a quiet husky voice, as if even speaking their names might invoke their power. They gave no mercy, and Shahan was lost within weeks. Nobody knows where the C'thrau came from, they just arrived in their own high sailing ships and decimated the Dwarven fleet. As they entered Shahan and flooded across the cities, the dwarven ships still able to fly were packed with refugees and port-gated away from Shahan.

Rakhshan was not one of the refugees. He stayed behind to slow the progress of the invading C'thrau, giving time for the refugees to make their escape. When their defenses fell he and his companions retreated to Derinku, a lower city deep in the mantle of Shahan. This city was once more of a criminal locale, but with the arrival of the C'thrau its location has become a guarded secret, and it still is in the hands of the Dwarves, one of the last footholds on Shahan.

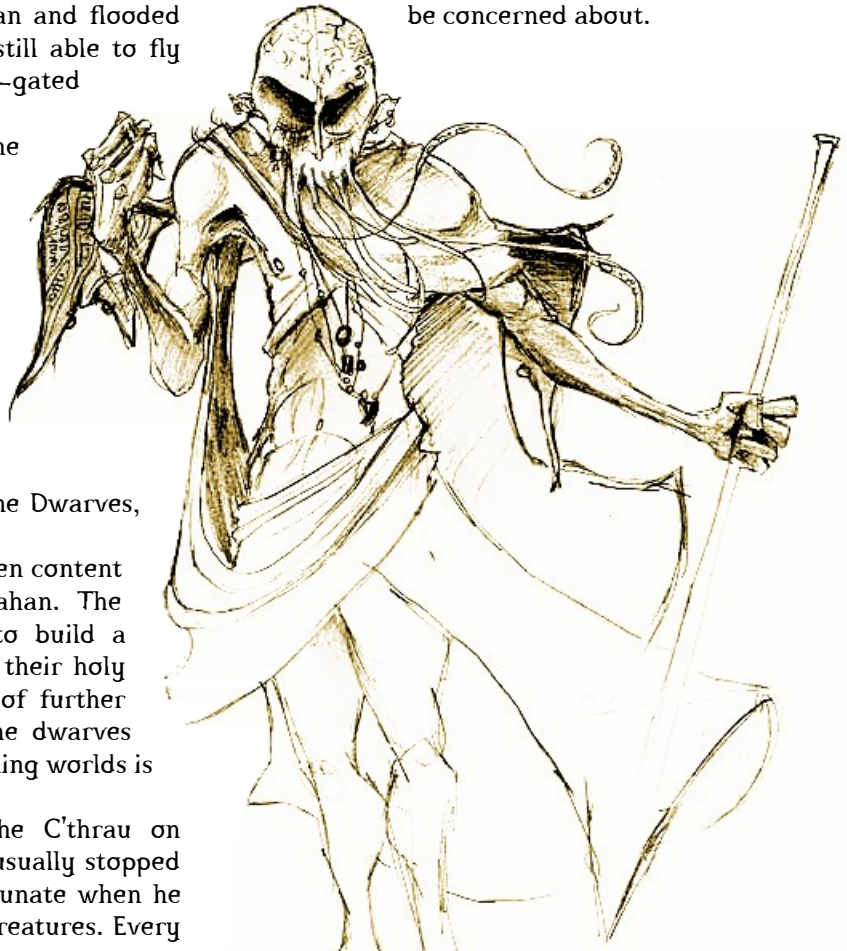
Since that time the C'thrau have been content to strengthen their position on Shahan. The dwarves in exile continually work to build a multi-world military force to retake their holy land. However, few take the threat of further C'thrau invasion seriously, despite the dwarves believe that invasion across the remaining worlds is imminent.

I asked Rakhshan to describe the C'thrau on several occasions, and when I did he usually stopped talking about anything. So I was fortunate when he did finally decided to describe these creatures. Every

time he saw them they were wearing silken robes covering their hairless emaciated bodies. The head of a C'thrau is horribly elongated, highlighting their lack of eyes, dropping down to end with a mouth that is surrounded by a mass of tentacles. They have powerful mental powers, and use these powers in place of their eyes. They are also eerily quiet, communicating directly to people's minds instead of with a spoken language, and that is if you can even understand them! Many are known to have become insane, just by having a C'thrau try to talk to them.

They have short stubby wings that may have been used for flight in some primordial incarnation, but are now simply used for decoration and vanity among their disturbing and alien culture. Many paint their wings in strange patterns, and piercings of the thin wing-leather are not uncommon. C'thrau adorn themselves with vast quantities of jewelry, some of which has been looted from Shahani treasuries, but much of which is as alien in design as they themselves are.

After hearing the late-night stories from Rakhshan of the horrors of the C'thrau, I am a believer in their danger. This is certainly something the rest of the worlds should be concerned about.



Qu'ulsis and The Web

We are on a long voyage to Xamolxis, the last bastion city of the Nar nestled deep in the Web.

What was once a world is now a broad assortment of floating land masses of varying size, remnants of the original world Qu'ulsis destroyed in a centuries old battle with the Celestial Empire. This world was home to the Nar and the Root Walkers; now The Web is their home where they cling to life, working amongst themselves as well as the Nar for precious resources.

I am excited to finally see the endless river! This fabled river is made up of the oceans of Qu'ulsis, circulating around the hearth in an endless cycle, simply amazing!

Stories and rumors abound of the ancient riches of Qu'ulsis that are now simply floating in the void, waiting to be found again. But the Web has many dangers. The Echo are an especially horrifying type of Nar that are a mix of religious zealot and kill-crazed cannibal. They maraud through the Web, killing everyone they find, wearing skins, piercing themselves, and lashing corpses to their ships. There are very few survivors of Echo attacks.

We have a Nar, Amqt, traveling with us on this journey. From him and Jarek, who has been to Xamolxis before, I have been able to learn a little bit about the Nar. Jarek claims the city is alien and familiar all at once. It is on a larger island-sized land-mass which features a lake.

I am especially looking forward to the architecture of the Nar. Amqt describes their buildings as fairly baroque in style, large, airy and designed to bring white light throughout the structure. They are ornately gilded with silver and other white metals. Heavy semiology and iconography can be found throughout the structures, laced as religious symbols in decorations and design as well as scenes depicting important aspects of their religious history.

The Nar firmly believe in a very grounded sense of right, wrong and justice. They always seek vengeance if cheated, and since they expect the same in kind, they act accordingly. It seems to me a workable philosophy: so long as no one is cheated, everyone goes away happy. Semiology and Iconography from their religion is throughout their buildings and clothing. All Nar wear the star of Qu'ulsis, the eight pointed star missing one point. This same star can be found designed within filigree and knot work for all of their artistic designs.

Our voyage has been going for two weeks now and the crew is getting jumpy, I have even heard some of them talking of The Echo, despite the captain

forbidding such talk.

Rakhshan informed me that he thinks we are being followed, and that I should carry a weapon with me at all times. While he has not been able to ascertain the nationality of the ship shadowing us, this causes him even greater concern.