

The Mythic Cataclysm

Only a few fragments of folk memory still exist of The Time of Darkness, a time when the hills rose up, the seas walked the land, flame spouted from the brazen mouths of the mountains, and the stars went out forever. Tékumel and its solar system fell, or were thrust, through a warp in the fabric of space-time itself, into a pocket dimension in which no other matter existed.

SOURCES

No records exist for this period.

The reasons for this terrible catastrophe can only be guessed, but for a time the survival of life hung by the slenderest of threads. Dazed and shocked, the survivors looked up into the black emptiness of the night sky and despaired. Communications and commerce were gone; cities sprawled in ruins, new lands rose from the oceans, while others sank beneath the waves. The machines of former times became great prizes and assumed an air of wonder and of sanctity, and one by one the lights went out, bringing about a darkness which was not only of the skies and the cities but of the mind ...

The Ssú and the Hlüss also suffered in the cataclysm, but as the planet stabilized once more they began to see it as a blessing. The Old Races exulted and dreamed dreams of reclaiming their world, but they did not reckon with mankind's more rapid birthrate or with his genius for military action. In the end, mankind and his allies still held the greater part of the planet—remote mountain ranges, distant island archipelagoes and expanses of windswept tundra became the domain of the Old Races.

Mankind's other foes prospered as well—the pallid Hlutrgú spilled out into the coastal swamplands and had to be driven back in a long series of brutal and bloody wars; the sinuous Nyaggá built their undersea cities and troubled no one except for an occasional raid; the Shunned Ones sealed themselves in domed cities filled with noxious gases more to their liking; the insect-like Hokún pretended to cooperate with man for a time, warred with him, enslaved him, ruled him as gods, and were eventually defeated by him. The Mihállí went about their strange affairs as usual, but eventually a king of one of the cities of the Latter Times so lusted after the imagined treasures of their underground city that he unleashed one of the last planetary bombs upon it, destroying not only most of the Mihállí but himself and his people.

Mankind's allies began to drift into enclaves of their own. The heatloving Shén spread along the equator, the Páchi Léi and the Péi Chói into forest regions, the Tinalíya and the Pygmy Folk into mountainous regions, the Swamp Folk and the Ahoggyá into the bogs and swamps of the coastal lowlands, the Urenén to the southern polar regions, the Hláka to high mountain eyries; each race to climes reminiscent of their lost planets.

Slowly Tékumel's inhabitants began to learn the techniques of agriculture and a less technological way of life. Man and nonhuman alike survived and eventually prospered again. It is said—although it is not known for certain—that the Time of Darkness lasted for more than fifty centuries.