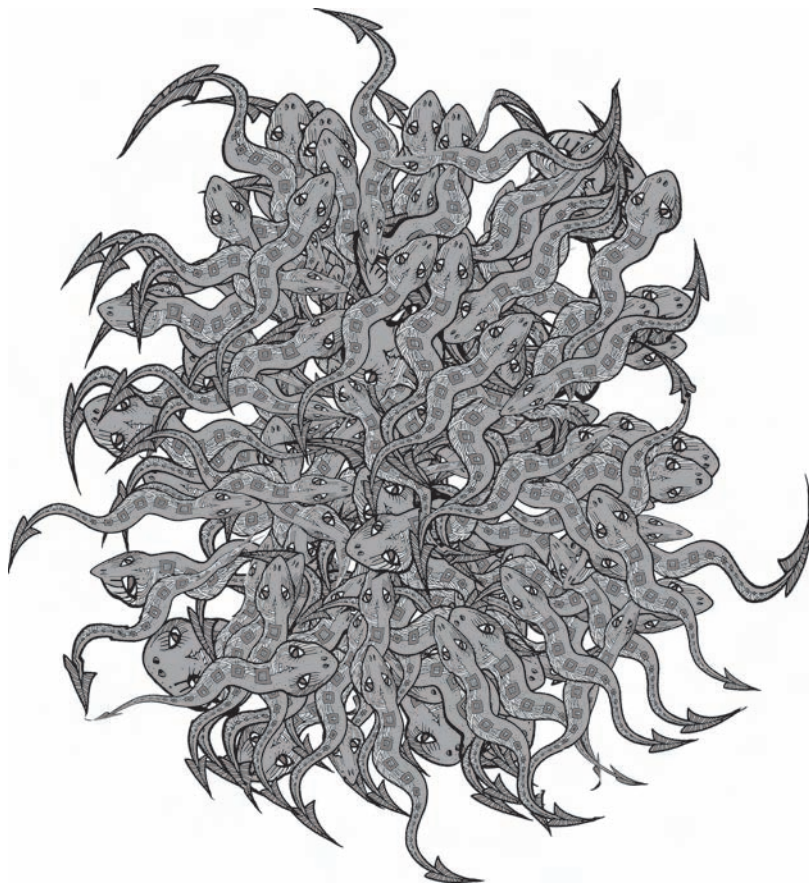


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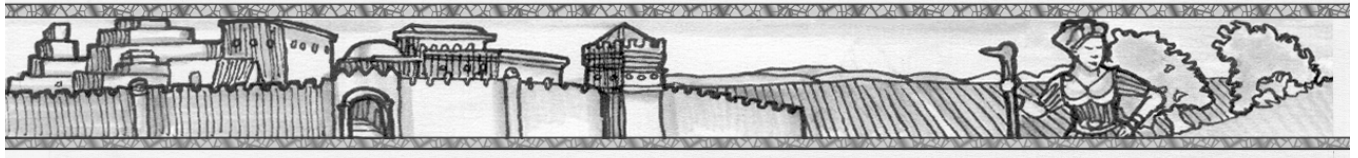
# ESROLIA THE LAND OF TEN THOUSAND GODDESSES

COMPILED NOTES ABOUT THE GREAT LAND OF ESROLIA



BY GREG STAFFORD  
AND JEFF RICHARD

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# - ESROLIA: THE LAND OF TEN THOUSAND GODDESSES -

COMPILED NOTES  
ABOUT THE GREAT LAND OF ESROLIA

BY GREG STAFFORD AND JEFF RICHARD

SPECIAL THANKS TO: SIMON BRAY, IAN COOPER, AND MARTIN HAWLEY

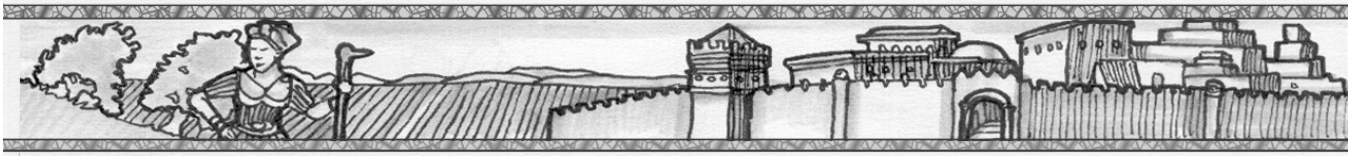
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*The pen of Lhankor Mhy wrote this book, and his blessing lies upon it and all who use it properly. But for anyone who profanes it, steals it, or copies its contents: may his eyes fall out, may his fingers grow gnarled, may his throat rasp, may his mind grow addled and may his back grow bent forever.*



## FOREWARD

*Esrolia, the Land of Ten Thousand Goddesses* is the latest compilation of notes and thoughts concerning the great land of Esrolia. This book contains some parts from previous publications, to be as inclusive on this subject as possible. Some of those articles have been updated here. Especially note the extensive changes to update "What My Mother Told Me" originally printed in *Heroquest Voices*. This book is divided into four parts:



***ESROLIA, Grainland*** is the first. This contains some general information about the land and peoples.

***LIFE BEGINS AT EZEL*** focuses in on the sacred center of Esrolia, Ezel, where the world was born and reborn.

***THE GREAT CITY*** is the largest portion, with maps, histories and information about Nochet, the greatest city in Esrolia, Kethaela and all the surrounding territories.

***OTHER ESROLIAN MATTERS*** has notes on other places, institutions and legends of the land.

The authors sincerely hope this is useful, and that you will enjoy it.

**GREG STAFFORD & JEFF RICHARD, MAY 2008**

**THIS IS THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS BOOK,  
DONE FOR THE TENTACLES DÉJÀ VU CONVENTION,  
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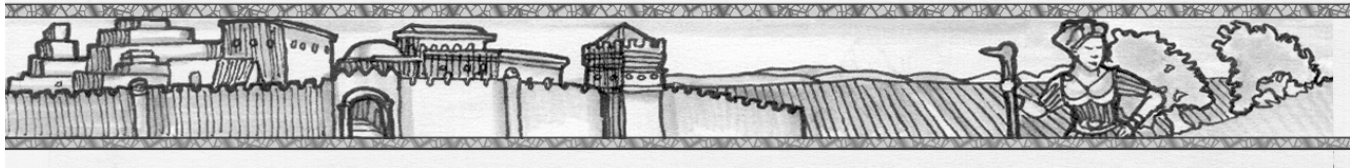
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## ESROLIA

### THE GRAINLAND

#### INTRODUCTION

Esrolia is the most populous and wealthy land of Kethaela, the region located approximately in the middle of Genertela's southern coast. Esrolia is a teeming land of rivers subdivided by numerous irrigation ditches.

Esrolia is world famous for its wealth and rule by women. No less important is its fame as a holy place, for at its core is Ezel, the most powerful center of worship for many earth deities. Pilgrims from across the world have been visiting it for centuries. Furthermore, the great sailor Dormal, who opened the accursed seas to ships once again, is from here.

The peoples of Esrolia separated themselves from their ancestral Orlanthings to protect themselves from war and evil. During prehistory they were protected by Ezkankekko, a demigod sometimes called the Only Old One. He oversaw a loose confederation of all the peoples around his Obsidian Palace on the Shadow Plateau. Approximately three centuries ago Lord Belintar slew Ezkankekko and became God King. Esrolia was politically united with the other peoples around the Choralinthor Bay. Just a generation ago he was assassinated while upon a magical quest for a new body, and Esrolia has since then been an independent "nation."

Esrolia is a populous and wealthy land. Its city of Nochet is a key trade center. Esrolia's strategic location has placed it, once again, at a hub of activity as new powers rise and vie for dominance. Its destiny in the upcoming Hero Wars lies in the hands of its people, rulers and goddesses.



#### CLIMATE, FLORA AND FAUNA

The climate of Nochet is semitropical with five distinct seasons. In Fire Season Esrolia is warm or hot, humid, and with mild winds that might come from any direction. North winds mark the harvesting Earth Season. In Darkness and Storm Season north winds are even cooler, and often bear cold rains.<sup>1</sup> In the Sea Season warm helerian storms bring abundant rain from the south west.

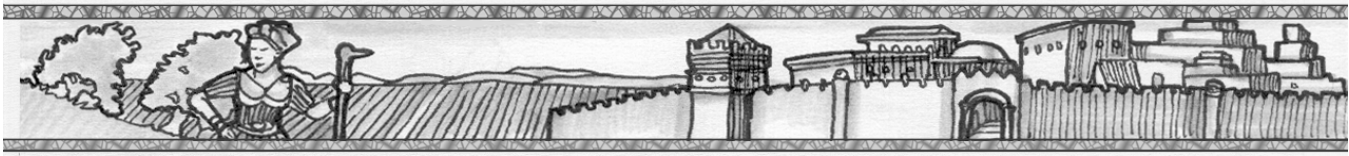
Nochet is verdant. It still had some large forests, and many small woods of semi-tropical and temperate trees and brush. Wild fields are lush with wild grasses. Agriculture is relatively easy on the well watered, fertile lands.

Domestic animals sometimes have difficulty in the warm, wet climate but the notable Esrolian breeds of sheep and cows are well adapted. Barnyard fowl are common, and every household has its sacred geese. Ubiquitous little wild lizards are found in every house, where they eat bugs and scorpions. Friendly snakes (a sacred and blessed animal to the Esrolians) eat pests and vermin. Dogs are kept, some trained and pampered special breeds, most are village curs generally ignored by everyone, and with packs of wild animals sometimes causing danger. Packs of wild pigs roam the streets at night, even in cities – some are sacred.

Esrolia has many right and colorful birds, including parrots, parakeets, doves, owls, kingfishers, vultures and various types of hawks. Hundreds of common types populate wilds and domestic areas. Most cities are not entirely hostile to the resident birds species, which live in eaves and rooftops.

Wild animals occupy the rough lands and forests. Bears and puma are the most common wild predators. In the fecund swamps and rivers swim the Esrolian alligator. The most legendary living creatures are uncommon animals that are often depicted in murals and sculptures. The Manirian lion still hunts in Longsi Land and amongst the Western Tribes. And feared by farmers is the field-burning Harbest, with a shell so hard spears bounce off it. The Harbest is so hot it just burns things by its presence and must burn things to eat them, but it can eat anything that is burnt.

<sup>1</sup> It almost never snows in Esrolia.



## GRANDMOTHERS AND QUEENS

*Esrolian society is organized by extended distaff families, sometimes called clans. Two hundred or so of these are enfranchised. These families compete for positions on the Grandmothers' Council, bicker for prerogatives, jealously guard every little gain they have, and consider progeny a blessing. They also rule over vast agricultural properties, cities, temples and unclassifiable institutions (Friends of the Otter, Lion Protectors, Selenche's Club, etc.). The properties they own or control overlap geographically across the whole land of Esrolia.*

### THE ESROLIAN GRANDMOTHERS

#### ONLY YOUR GRANDMOTHER CAN MAKE YOU DO SOMETHING.

Esrolia is a matriarchy (“mothers’ rule”) of the Grandmothers and not a gynecocracy (“women rule”).<sup>2</sup> The title “Grandmother” refers to the head of an Esrolian matrilineal family or clan. The Grandmother has absolute authority over the members of her family. She can approve or reject marriage, dispose of the personal property of the members, even sell family members into slavery or exile them. Among the members of the family, the Grandmother’s word is absolute and final. Even the Queens of the cities and the cult leaders acknowledge the authority of their Grandmother.

Esrolia is ruled by a council of stern old women who constantly scheme and plot to advance the wealth, status and power of their clans. The council has a highly developed scheme of etiquette and hierarchy, so the politics are outwardly polite, but the old Grandmothers fight to protect every right and bit of status that their clan has ever gained.

The Grandmother’s Council resolves disputes between families, between cities and with foreigners. The Council has existed in one form or another since before the Dawn. It is flexible enough that new families have joined, old ones have died off, procedures have been adapted or adopted to meet new challenges, and new ways of worship have been introduced. Stubbornly conservative, the Council successfully resisted Belintar’s efforts to reform it. It remains the real ruler of Esrolia, despite the presence of Belintar’s Governors and Deputies.

The Council is composed of all the clan Grandmothers – some 200 or more – who are routinely accompanied in meetings by their family advisors, called Grandhelpers. Regular meetings are held on the first day of each Season. Grandmothers must be present in person when the meeting opens, but often Grandhelpers remain while the matriarch returns home to settle local issues. The meetings commonly last from two to six weeks. The location rotates between a dozen sites on a schedule that was established by ancient tradition. Emergency meetings can be held at any time, and

though tradition requires only Grandhelpers at it, Grandmothers themselves commonly attend issues of importance. Locations for emergency meetings are determined by tradition, and are sites that will lend themselves to the issue. Thus issues of war meet at Nochet, which has the centers of most military cults. Issues of farming meet at Ezel, the cult center.

The Council reaches decision by consensus and not majority rule – members can vote Yes, No, Abstain or Refuse. If any Grandmother votes to Refuse a decision, the Council must continue to debate the issue. As a result, the meetings of the Council are tedious and everlasting. Esrolian men are glad they do not have to attend.

The Grandmothers’ Council is tenaciously conservative. Any Grandmother or faction that increases its status or power will find itself on the receiving end of a coalition of the other Grandmothers. There have been many attempts to break or weaken the power of the Grandmothers’ Council, but all rebellions against the rule of the Grandmothers have failed.

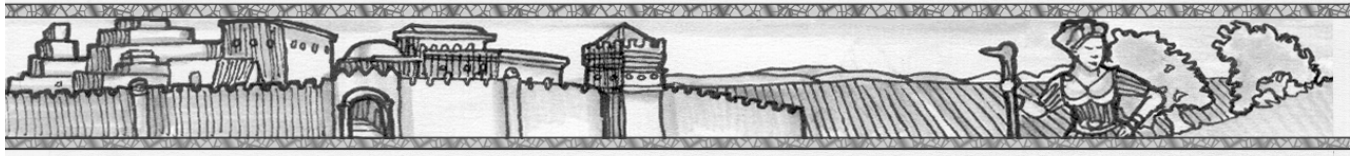
### QUEENS AND CITIES

Although Esrolia is primarily agricultural, it has a large urban population. Some 100,000 people live in Esrolian cities in 1621, about 10% of the total population. Cities are ruled by Queens, who are selected from among the traditional resident clans. Thus “Queen” is the title of the temporary ruler of an Esrolian city.

The Queen deals with judgments, outsiders, co-ordinating the residents and sacred issues concerning the whole city. The city Queen is not an absolute ruler (unlike the Grandmother is over her family), but presides over the council. Councils vary from city to city, but in general have representatives of the resident clans, merchant guilds, temples and other powerful native organizations. As is the Esrolian way, the city council reaches decision by consensus. Nonetheless, the Queen of a city is a powerful prize for any powerful Esrolian clan, for the Queen makes many decisions (such as which foreigners to allow into the city, where they live, prices for most imported goods, food distribution during shortages, etc.) decides when emergency meetings are to be held, determines agendas, breaks all tie votes. The struggles over the queenship of even the least important cities is intense.

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to rumors, Esrolian men are not “effeminate” or otherwise any less masculine than other Orlanthi men are. They are scared and intimidated by their Grandmothers, but then, so are most Esrolian women.





There are many competing interests in the larger cities, which the Queen and her council must try to reconcile. Some of these interests have no official representative – men and not women even lead some (such as foreigners, scribes, and mercenaries). As a result, the Queen and her council must closely oversee the city.

## ENFRANCHISED HOUSE

Families are the all-important organization of Esrolia. Loners do not last long. They have no physical protection or political support. Loners have no chance of worthwhile employment.<sup>3</sup>

Two types of families exist, enfranchised and client families. An Enfranchised House is an Esrolian clan headed by a Grandmother who is a member of the Grandmothers Council. The two hundred-plus Enfranchised Houses are the true powers of the land. Client families are numerous, but must attach themselves to the powerful if they wish to survive and, perhaps, even thrive. Almost three fourths of the current population of Esrolia belongs to client families.<sup>4</sup>

The enfranchised families determine the look, feel and actions of Esrolia. They share the same prehistoric Esrolian religion, culture, customs, and superstitions. Their tradition determines their architecture, fashion and most day to day practices. They are colorful, the center of all attention and action and so when people talk about Esrolia, they are talking about the enfranchised families. Everyone else follows them.

Identifying Families Differences between households are discernable by hairstyles and a variety of specific symbols that are often derived from specialties of the family.

Each Enfranchised House has its own distinctive hairstyle. These hairstyles are unique and often are quite elaborate. For instance, women of the Zirandarn household wear their hair stacked high in coils; those of the Farastar household have long bangs that hang down over their eyes but a shaved back of the head; and the Yelendar household shaves both sides of their head

Esrolian men are not so distinctively coiffured. Free men usually wear beards like the Heortlings, although fashionably shorter and neater than the Heortlings. Slaves and servants are usually shaved.

Many families hold monopolies to certain products or practices. Thus their most obvious outward signs are symbols of those unique presences. The Vulture Eagle family is one such, who alone in Esrolia wear the feathers of that bird, bear representations of it upon their clothing and skin, and command the creatures to their bidding.

Cosmetics are not limited by custom, save for the ritual features necessary for the many priestesseshoods in ceremony. Creams, perfumes and unguents kohl, lipstick and perfumed fragrances are made locally and imported.

## ENFORCED SIMILARITIES,

Clothing marks office and rank in Esrolia. Every official profession has its own specific style and color clothing, and each rank within that profession has some variant to mark it. This does not prevent additions to the uniform, and thus to a sophisticated eye clothing displays all the subtleties of rank, family and profession amidst the hierarchies of Esrolian society. Every visitor to Esrolia quickly recognizes the most obvious uniforms. Indeed, they ought to know before they visit which basic professions that they would be allowed to interact with.

All Enfranchised women have a basic shift of white, denoting the virtue of purity. The shift is usually colored too, and sometimes nearly invisible under overgarments whose elaboration more or less increases with rank.

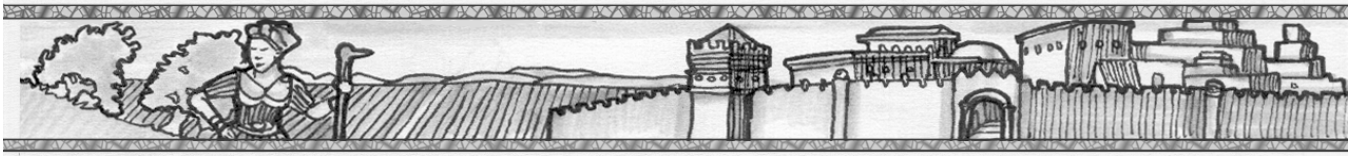
Trim on the hem and sleeves of this shift denote current occupations within the family, where a silver thread (or more) denotes mothers caring for young, green unspecified tasks, red engrailing indicates production (pottery, carving, etc.), yellow and red crenellated edges show trade and storage as their daily activity. Vertical blue stripes on the blouse denotes an official and formal Witness (often used to bear messages between families.) The ranking elite wear green with silver trim and the highest ranks wear various patterns of silver brocade. The “flowered green women” are the thanes of the Esrolian matriarchy. The trim and brocade often spells out words or even sentences in the Kanulvretan script.

Male dress shows similar signs of rank and importance. Slaves and servants are often naked to the waist and wear a sort of kilt. For slaves, a neck collar – a mere cord for most slaves, a silver collar or torque for valuable ones – marks their status. Free men wear long tunics like the Heortlings, but never wear trousers. The color and design of the tunic marks status.

Holy people have their own distinctive attire. For example, the Kitorings wore hooded black robes and masks. Many priestesses have distinctive robes that are open to the navel, leaving their breasts exposed. Esrolia is among them, and their costumes have short sleeves and layered flounced skirts. The priestesses of Imarja always have their goose-feathered cloak.

<sup>3</sup> These lost individuals collect in cities, part of the impoverished mob that is a permanent part of all urban settlements. Without even a chance of lawful employment, these loners live by criminal means.

<sup>4</sup> Client families are usually settled into traditional client subservience to a specific enfranchised household, a temple, sometimes to a city council. A portion of the client families, however, have a tradition of obligatory changing of loyalty every few years, or often according to immediate need and desire. Many of the families in newer professions (shipbuilding, pilots, etc.) are client to small organizations (the Temple of Dormal) are independent of local politics.



All Esrolians are tattooed for magical, social and legal purposes. Some runes are touched to cause magic, and many fertility oriented tattoos are customary. Families often have a unique tattoo, usually facial. Some people get special marks for honors, such as a military victory, voyage of note, unique business deal, establishment of an important site (new temple, new city, etc.) or for success at a unique or difficult heroquest.

### AN ESROLIAN NOBLE HOUSE

*Here is a description of the compound of a Nochet Enfranchised House from Greg Stafford's forthcoming novel **Ten-Women Well Loved**:*

"They approached the gate where he'd seen that many of the other commoners had entered. The watch commander, sitting in her high chair, wore pants, breastplate and a fan of gray and tan feathers that was like a sunburst behind her head, and she bore a sceptre with a great taloned foot on its end. The guards, mostly men, were similarly outfitted, without the head dress or sceptre but with spears, shields and swords. One of them glowed with a pulsing orange luminescence that was visible even in the morning sunlight, and as they passed he made gestures and signs at them, staring with squinted eyes. Palospar caught his breath anxiously, but they passed in without incident. Their guide, the witness, did not even pause or look aside, but led them into the courtyard beyond the gates.

The busy inner courtyard was clean and without murals to advertise the history of the residents to visitors, since anyone inside was deemed to already know who they were visiting. Only three statues decorated the area. The first was of a woman, double life size, draped in a dress like the local women. From her iconography—she held a lamb in one arm, a puppy in the other—Harmast recognized Vorela, the healer of animals who was the divine ancestress of this family. To her right, and only life sized, was a woman similarly clothed, whose outstretched right arm held a vulture eagle. This was surely Eskelinga, the human ancestress of this house. The third, also the size of a human, was the goose-footed goddess Imarja. However, this one, to the left of Vorela, was upon a four-sided pedestal that raised her so her feet were at the level of Vorela's head. She held her arms out straight before her, both her hands bent at the wrist to expose her rune-marked palms to grant benediction upon the visitors to the household.

The buildings were multi-storied, with peaked red tile roofs. They were brightly and tastefully colored. They approached one that was a pale green up the bottom of its first windows (which were on the second floor), then yellow above that, and then highlighted with a reddish earth tone on the eaves, around the windows and upon the wall that enclosed the stairway they approached."

### TRANSPORTATION

Commoners in Esrolia walk. To ride upon a horse is a sign of wealth and prestige. Ownership of these is not restricted, and anyone can ride. Some other beasts are used as steeds, but very rare so that the appearance of the bird-riding Augner clan<sup>5</sup> or the Inep clan<sup>6</sup> always creates a sensation.

Wagons and carts are used for bearing goods. Chariots are used by certain cults, by military officers and an elite unit, and are banned from many cities. The important, notable or wealthy of Nochet are transported by sedan chair. Two-person chairs can be used by almost anyone who can afford it, but for more than two the number of bearers is regulated. The chief rank is of the Queen (in her own city) and of Grandmothers, who are borne along by twelve sturdy men or women. Sedans are sometimes a bed or couch, and sometimes enclosed by curtains, sedan chairs are an important mark of a person's status. Divinities (in the form of their idols) are also carried around Nochet by sedan chair during public ceremonies.

### ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Nochet has set the examples of style for the whole of urban Esrolia. Most other cities imitate its style and custom.

Buildings in Nochet are built out of adobe or stone. Roofs are wood framed and covered with terracotta tiles. A few are up to three stories tall, but most are one or two. A few sacred structures are higher.

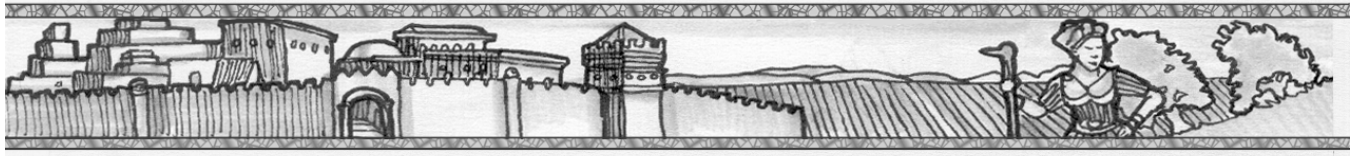
Courtyards are a mark of Esrolia. Even out in the countryside estates center around a courtyard. In the city, entry into important buildings is from within a courtyard; only common institutions (food vendors, many vendors, laundries) can be entered right from the street. Most streets of Nochet are lined with painted walls, with occasional doorways leading to the courtyards. A neighborhood's relative wealth can be gauged by the distance between these street doorways. The wealthy houses may have a single entryway for an entire block, while the poorer districts seem to be little more than parallel alleys.

Nochet is bright and vivid with color. Walls are routinely painted bright colors, and all but the most poor are trimmed with second color. Color mixing seems random: lime green, trimmed with orange along the top and around the large, strong wooden door; terra cotta red, trimmed with a light violet; forest green with crimson red trim; pale blue trimmed with sky blue; and so on.

Around the courtyards are shops, houses, and palaces. Placards above the doors mark what is inside. Leather good shops are marked with a boot, a bag, a belt and pouch; a food vendor by a bin of vegetables, and so on. Customarily,

<sup>5</sup> Riding upon their large, bipedal augners.

<sup>6</sup> Riding their unique Long-legged Cows.



the gate to a private courtyard has a rope which rings a bell to alert the porter.

Nochet is a city of art. Esrolia has a remarkable and well-developed artistic tradition for depicting the mythology and legends of the 10,000 gods and goddesses. The humblest wall will have graffiti-like scrawling. Temples are covered with friezes, paintings, mosaics and ornamental sculptures. Each of these paintings and carvings has its own symbolic meaning. Gods and goddesses, demons, serpents, dwarfs and dancers cavort among the nooks and pillars that form the temples' façade.

The illustrative style is without perspective, so everything is two dimensional. The figures are idealized, not individualized, so that all images of a goddesses look the same, save for differences that denote when a myth occurred. The importance of a figure is determined by their relative size. Divinities are always larger than mortals, queens are larger than their subjects, and grandmothers are larger than their children, and so on.

The mythic time of a sculpture or painting can be determined by things such as clothing. In the Green Age, all figures are naked. As the Ages progress, type, quantity and complexity of clothes increase until the Gods War, when many figures wear armor. Roughly detailed:



**Green Age** – all figures are naked.

**Stagnant Age** – few cloths, but items designate individuality and status. For example, Ernalda and her priestesses wear jewelry, her skirt and her divine crown, and Orlanth has his triple thunderbolt and crown of mastery.

**Storm Age** – weapons and armor.

**Darkness Age** – many figures are cowled and robed.

These artistic conventions are derived from the depictions of the divine at Ezel.

Wall murals depicting mythological or historical scenes are extremely common in Nochet. The murals are eye-catching and brightly colored, with depictions of gods and goddesses, heroes and demons, ancestors and other figures. Flora, fauna, and other aspects of nature are also pictured as backdrops in highly stylized forms.

One mural is especially popular in Nochet is of the franchised family acquiring the status from Imarja. The scenes vary widely in detail, but all show one or more commanding women with her back to a pile of warrior corpses and addressing a body of women and girls before her. The dominant women all have a word scroll issuing from their mouth. All of them hold in one hand a skein of thread or twine. All of them have a goose or distaff or other icon of Imarja hovering over their head, beneath them or behind them.

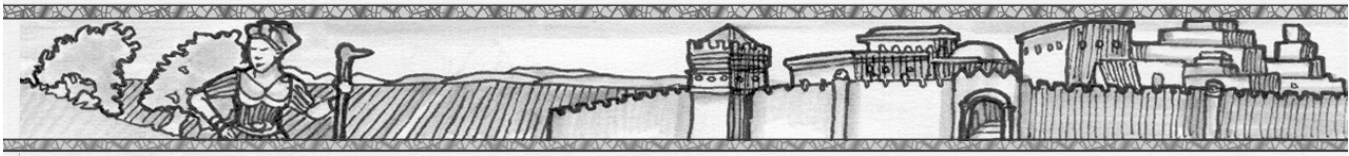
## MERCENARIES

Mercenaries are common in Esrolia. In the Dawn Age the Grandmothers council hired warriors to protect their land when the regular army was away fighting in Peloria. Afterwards some Grandmothers complained that their local forces “lacked the incentive to learn the arts of war, and were constantly beaten by smaller armies.” In such cases, mercenaries were hired again. Their effectiveness insured their durability.

These are not permanent standing armies, although some have a nearly permanent contract with the rulers. Between employments, the leaders disband their mercenaries, hiring them again as needed. Some mercenary units are well established and respected in Esrolia. Most revolve around a single war entity, but some have mixed troops. Among the permanent war gods are Humakti swords, Gorite axe women, Caladralander spearmen, Hedkorianth slingers and Exile mercenaries.

In times of need, the Grandmothers regularly employ other mercenaries. In addition to the types mentioned are Heortling weapon thanes, trolls from the Shadow Plateau or even Rokari knights.





## ESROLIAN MILITARY

*Esrolia has a professional standing army that is supported by mercenaries (when needed) and reinforced by local militias.*

### THE IRILLO HUNDREDS

Local defenses, the folk militia, are in every Esrolian city, town or village settled or resettled from Nochet during the First Age. These are a strictly local defensive militia called the Irillo Hundreds. An Irillo Hundred is approximately one hundred households. Geography determines membership of a Hundred, not kinship. The local free men bring what weapons and armor they own; in emergencies the cities traditionally provide a shield, leather helmet, club or spear for those too poor to provide their own. The Hundreds fight under the command of their chosen leader and the divine protection of the Irillo cult, although sometimes from another one of the Noble Brothers.

The Hundreds of North March and Longsi Land are unusual. They are skirmishers and slingers, and generally invoke Hedkoranth as their guardian war god.

### THE KIMANTORINGS

The regular army is called “the Kimantorings.” A temple and military barracks is found in even cities, all of them subservient to the ancestral temple in Nochet. The Kimantorings of Nochet serve “outside of the walls” of the cities. They are professional soldiers led by a soldier priest of Kimantor. They are armored, and armed with sling, spear and shield, plus a secondary side arm (club, axe, sword, etc.)

Ezkankekko founded the Kimantorings during the Darkness to take the fight against Chaos. They were originally his household warriors. In ancient days they were part of the overarching military command of Ezkankekko’s army,<sup>7</sup> and officers in the darkness were usually trolls from the Shadow Plateau. It is not incorrect to say that, in those days, the Kimantorings were the Kitori army. They called upon the terrible darkness powers in war, including the dread deities of Humakt, Babeester Gor and Zorak Zoran.

The Kimantorings also fought outside Esrolia. In the Dawn Age Lord Demon of Death led them deep into Peloria. Theyvora the Axe led them as part of the Unity Council Army of Defense when the Great Army of Restraint defeated them at the Battle of Night and Day. They later fought for Arkat and followed Arkat the Troll into Dorastor.

The Kimantorings were separated from the Shadow Plateau command in 578 after the Tax Slaughter. Instead of a leader appointed by Ezkankekko, the ranking lord, the Kimantor of Nochet, commanded them. The Kimantor enlisted or drafted troops via his temples from the seven

cities. They served for 25 years, and on retirement got grants of land provided by the Grandmother’s Council, usually in frontier lands. These settlements are the so-called “soldier clans” along the borders.

The Kimantorings got new orders never to leave Esrolia when Belintar took over. The Grandmothers designated them as Esrolian defenders. However, the Kimantor temples drafted more men, and assigned them to the Belintaran Regiments.

### THE BELINTARAN REGIMENTS

Belintar has appointed 11 military leaders - called “dukes” - to organize and command the armies of Esrolia. The Grandmothers Council approved Standard Bearers to receive the troops once drafted only for the Kimantorings. Now the units report to Belintar’s army hierarchy, not the Esrolian army. These units are generally militia similar to that of the Illiro’s Hundreds, but with training. Each Standard promotes from among its membership first to the “superior battalions,” and from that into the Select. The Select are elite warriors.

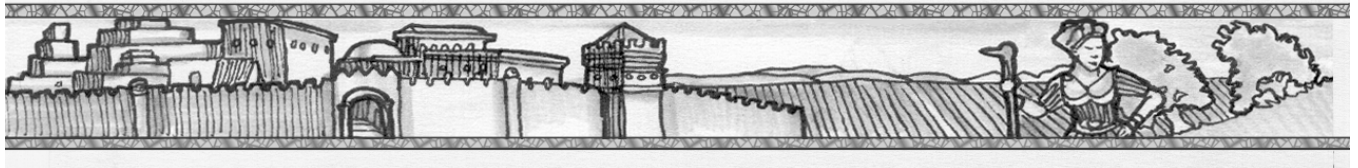
These forces are under the command of Belintar’s appointed commander. Since the death of the God-King these units have been disbanded, and many veterans drifted into the ranks of the home defense Esrolians instead.

### THE HOUSE GUARDS

Each Esrolian Enfranchised House has its own band of household bodyguards. These bands are equipped and led as per the traditions and resources of the House. They are fanatically loyal to the house and serve only them, not in the army.



<sup>7</sup> Also called the Unity Army.



## WHAT MY MOTHER TOLD ME

### WHO ARE YOU?

I am Imarjarin Seven-Shrines, I am your mother's sister, and you love me. I am matriarch of our prosperous and healthy household, a Priestess of Orenda, and a loyal follower of Grandmother Varadis of our great House Hulta.

### WHO ARE WE?

We are the Hultinga, the noble enfranchised family. Our home House of the City of Nochet. Our lineage is ancient and famous. Grandmother Hulta was at the Charter of Nochet. She wore this styled black wig, with the nineteen differences we know. So do we, and strangers call us the Black Haired Clan.

### WHAT MAKES US GREAT?

Imarja, the Great Goddess, does. She is the leader of the 10,000 goddesses and gods. Imarja made us one people in one land, saved us from destruction, and shows us the better way to live and protects us from the competitive hierarchy of male rulers whose errors nearly destroyed the world.

The Grandmothers' wisdom makes us great. The Nochet Compact established the Grandmother's Council as the absolute rulers of our people after the Sword and Helm War, when the men killed so many of our people we were doomed. Through the Grandmothers' wisdom we found that there *is* always another way.

Love makes us great: we are filled with compassion. A mother's love is the strongest thing in the world.

Fertility makes us great: our lands are rich and plentiful; our stores are full, and our children strong and healthy, all through the blessing of the Six Goddesses.

Community makes us great: we come together to talk and listen, to share and belong, and everyone is shown their place and knows their duties.

### WHERE DO WE LIVE?

Our land is called Esrolia because Esrola, the Earth Mother, lives here. We are the Daughters and Children of the Earth. We live in Nochet, the greatest city in the world and home of the Great Goddess. In bountiful Esrolia, the great-rivered land, are lush fields, glorious temples, a myriad of towns and cities and happy homes. To the east is Choralinthor Bay, who gives up his bounty in honor of the Goddesses. To the south is volcanic Caladraland whose gods warm the Goddesses; to the Northeast is Shadow Plateau who darkness protects them for love.

### HOW DO WE LIVE?

We are the noble leaders of the world. Our people are mostly farmers upon this vast patchwork of wheat, barley and oat fields. Where there are not fields there are orchards and vineyards of succulent fruit. Everybody's pantry is filled with good food, so every home is happy, and there is no need to squabble or go hungry.

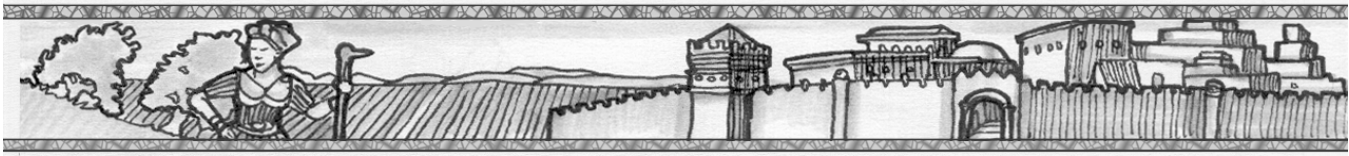
Women and men work together on the land, although it is the House who own the farms. We keep the men working hard on the land, which keeps their minds away from war and conflict: a well-worked man is a happy man. We are a peace-loving people: we are the great negotiators, and the Peace Rugs of Orventili are carried to every meeting, even in times of war. We always seek a peaceful solution to every argument; if two women cannot agree even after seven days of talking then they seek an arbiter to help their decision.

We Enfranchised Houses live properly like our ancestors did. We live in the Hulta House compound near the Sacred City. Our walled compound is the most beautiful in the city, and our inner courtyard is the meeting place for our people from land and sea. The important women of Hulta House live here, along with their immediate families, servants and bodyguards.

### WHAT IS NOCHET?

Nochet is the greatest and most important city in the world. It is the favorite resting place of Esrola, and it is the home of many thousands of gods and goddesses. Here Imarja gave us the Charter of Nochet, which governs divinities and mortals alike; here Imarja gave the Grandmothers the Compact of Nochet, which ended the rule of the Evil Kings. Since blessed Dormal performed the magical ritual the Opened the Seas some forty years ago, Nochet has grown tremendously. Thousands of people from the countryside have moved into Nochet, seeking work and opportunities. Foreigners from all over Glorantha reside in Nochet, with their strange customs and barbaric languages. The city is now crowded, with many newcomers packed together in poorly built tenements some five or more stories high. Many of the newcomers and foreigners have banded together into guilds that mimic the Enfranchised Houses.

Nochet is a holy city to all Glorantha and there are a thousand temples and shrines to the deities, spirits and essences that reside here. Our yearly calendar is organized around the proper times to worship, venerate and propitiate the gods, spirits, essences and our dead ancestors. The three greatest temples in Nochet are: the Temple of Great Mother Imarja (in the Sacred City), the temple to Esrola (within the



ancient enclosure of the Last Stand); and the Grace Temple, where Blessed Ernalda resides. They are guarded by Babeester Gor warrior women: do not cross them, for they are holy and deadly. Outside of the city are the Antones Estates; the great necropolis where our revered dead reside.

## WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO US?

Always obey your Grandmother! She is the embodiment of the Four Virtues of Imarja: Harmony, Filial Piety, Prudence, and Compassion. A good person must be good, fair, think of others and not be selfish. If you are virtuous, you remain close to the goddess and enjoy Her favor. The Four Virtues are the essential virtues of any civilized people. Barbarians such as the Entrulings, Heortlings, Dara Happans and Seshnegi rarely have the Four Virtues; as a result, they are cursed with Violence, Hubris, Recklessness and Cruelty.

## WHO RULES US?

Grandmother is Varadis, of House Hulta, rules us. She embodies the Four Virtues of Imarja and is so powerful that she could shatter your body or sear your soul with but a whisper. You are a free woman, and only your Grandmother can make you do something. Imarja's *Compact of Nochet* ended the violent rule of the Evil Kings and granted our Grandmothers absolute rule over the members of their families. The Grandmother will choose or approve of who you marry, dispose of all our property, reward the deserving and punish the erroneous, even unto exiling them or selling family members into slavery.

She is one of the Grandmothers Council. Each year, the Grandmothers of all the Enfranchised Houses gather in the Grandmothers' Council to resolve disputes between families, cities and foreigners. It decides by consensus. This is the most fair and equitable way to govern.

Queen Hendira, of House Norinel, rules Great Nochet City. Queens rule all cities. The Queen makes judgments, interacts with outsiders, and sacrifices to obtain the blessings of our immortals for the city and its inhabitants. The Queen is not an absolute ruler of her city (unlike the Grandmother of her family), but presides over the council of the city. As is the Esrolian way, the city council reaches decision by consensus. She has allied with the foreigner Warlord Fazzur to defend Nochet from the Helerites and to prevent the return of the Evil Kings.

For three centuries, Belintar, the God-King of Kethaela, protected Esrolia from outside foes and managed its relations with the other Sixths of Kethaela. Belintar appointed governors and dukes to manage His affairs in Kethaela. However, he has expired, for the Tournament of Masters of Luck and Death failed to result in a new incarnation and Belintar has not reappeared yet. Thus, Esrolia has no ruler.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GRANDMOTHER AND A GRANDMOTHER?

A woman whose children have had children of their own is a grandmother. She has absolute authority over her children and her children's children.

The term "Grandmother" denotes the head of an extended Enfranchised House, or what many rural folk call a "clan". The Grandmother of a House has absolute authority over all members of the House – even those who are grandmothers of their own family!

## WHAT IS EVIL?

Where the Four Virtues are good, their opposite is evil. Philosophers often call this chaos, which seeks to corrupt and pollute and destroy. The Evil Kings had none of the Four Virtues and were so evil they nearly destroyed the world. Nontraya the Taker is Evil; he sought to rule over a world that was neither alive nor dead.

## WHAT IS MY LOT IN LIFE?

You must work hard, respect others and do good things; for that, you will be remembered and blessed. Always remember to obey your Grandmother!

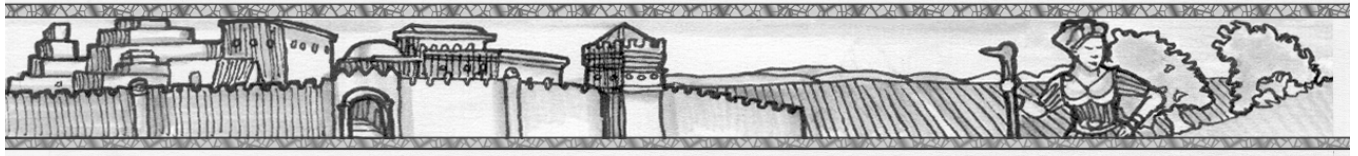
One day you will become a mother. Grandmother will determine who will be the fathers of your children. Maybe you will marry. Grandmother will choose a husband. It is possible that Uleria will send a man, or you will find a man who appeals to your senses. This is up to the goddesses to decide. If you are like me you will be successful, and you will be rewarded by the goddess with power, and by Grandmother with property to care for.

One day, if the Goddess chooses, you will become a grandmother; you will then become responsible for all your descendants, and will be subject only to the Grandmother of the House.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN?

Women are superior to men in every way. They are short tempered and prone to violence, selfish and unable to keep promises. That is why women are the leaders here, unlike those around us. Men are disposable, temporary and so short-lived. They love glory rather than true accomplishments.

Men are great workers, our lovers and devoted husbands, and we cherish them dearly. Just as we represent the Goddess, with our sense of community or love and care and our sensibility, so do they represent the Husband-Protectors, the gods that defended the Goddesses. They



fight for us if we cannot make peace, they lift us if we stumble, and they hold our hands when we need comfort.

What men are not is leaders: this has been proven a thousand times. They are too warlike at heart, their focus blurs, and they soon forget their charges.

## HOW DO WE DEAL WITH OTHERS?

We are loyal to House Hulta and obey Grandmother Varanis. The House protects us magically, politically, and physically. We love our families: they are the core of our lives and will be protected with all our strength. You may argue with your cousins and sisters, but these squabbles are always put aside when outsiders threaten any of us.

Nearly five thousand people are members of House Hulta. Some are nobles, like myself, who hold important positions in the House. Others are free folk descended from Hulta, being servants who work for the House or caretakers of our estates. Many client houses are dependent upon us, and we also have many slaves.

Friends are like family and should be treasured, but they do change and you can grow out of friendships. Cherish them while they last.

People from other Houses are protected by their House. You will often need to work with someone from another House; this is normal and governed by custom and common sense. If there is a dispute, the Grandmothers or the Queen will reach a compromise.

Newcomers and foreigners are more difficult. They rarely belong to a House and disputes can be difficult to resolve. They often do not understand our customs and lack the civilized virtues. However, they can be very useful, and so have always been with us, just not in such great numbers as now. There are so many folk in Esrolia that you must use caution, so hail them with Ernalda's Cheer to see if they are friendly. The bounty of Esrolia is great and her gifts attract foreign people to our villages and cities. If they come in peace, they are welcomed, but if they threaten you then call the hue and cry!

## WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES?

All strangers are our enemies until they prove themselves to be otherwise. Whoever seeks to disrupt our lives or to steal our bounty are our enemies. We are fortunate that our good sense and peaceful nature do not lead us into conflict, but even so to the west the Warlord Greymane encroaches upon our lands, raping, pillaging and tearing at our borders.

## WHO ARE MY DEITIES?

Esrolia is the land of Ten Thousand Goddesses, and you must go to Sacred Ezel to be able to see them all in one place. Everything is holy and everything has a deity, spirit or

essence associated with it. Your patron and other special goddesses will reveal themselves to you when it is time.

Among the ten thousand, some deities are much more important than others. Here are the most important. You will remember them from seeing them on their holy days.

## VORIA, GIRL

We worship Voria on Flower Day. Voria is the daughter of Ernalda. Everything that is newly born, fresh, or innocent comes from her. She is always a girl, unknowing and needing guidance and protection. Voria was the herald for Ernalda to tell of Her impending return when life returned to the world after the Great Darkness.

## ESROLA, EARTH MOTHER

We worship Esrola on Plow Day, and on Goose Day.

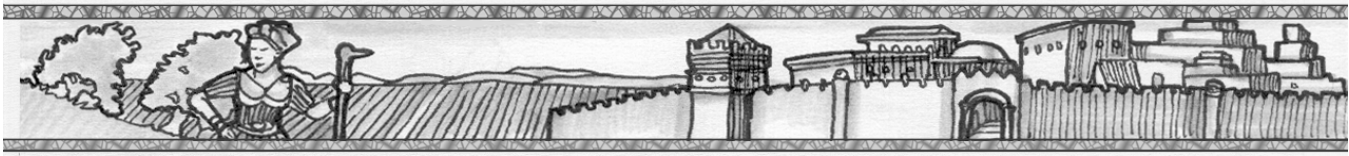
Great Esrola, holy Mother of us all, is the very fabric of the earth, and all people, animals and plants, and anything within or upon the earth, is her child. Among the other deities she is notably the mother of the Grain Goddesses: beloved Esra the Barley Mother, Pelora the Wheat Mother, Suchara the Rye Mother and Usara the Oat Mother. She is also mother of the Animal Mothers, who serve and feed us: Entra the Pig, Nevala the Sheep, Uralda the Cow and Isbarn the Goose Girl. She is the abundant bounty of the land and the great provider. She has had many lovers and many husbands; all protect her. We eat her.

## ERNALDA, GREAT GODDESS

We worship Ernalda on Honoring Day, Tool Day, Loom Day, Blessing Day, Wife Day, Together Day and Return Day. Ernalda is Queen and Grandmother of the immortals. She has had many lovers from among the gods, though Orlanth is her favorite. She has many children that are worshipped. Ernalda's actions shaped the created world, society and individual people.

Ernalda is the living power behind the world. She is so great the world would not exist without her. Ernalda is the power that animates the worlds, she is the cosmos. She is so great that we mortals cannot comprehend her. Priestesses can, and sometimes Ernalda Herself comes through to any of us. Mostly, though, Ernalda's power is manifest through the many Earth Goddesses who we worship to invoke Her magic. Furthermore, her acts of creation, whether it was making the first blanket or the first valley, are fraught with her presence and power. Society is based upon her manifestation as well.

When Ernalda died the entire world entered the Great Darkness, which was much worse than all the terrors that had preceded it. But she was only sleeping, and woke up again and brought life back to the cosmos. She is everywhere and everything.



### **BABEESTER GOR, DEFENDER**

We worship Babeester Gor on Babeester Day.

The Avenging Goddess was born from Ernalda's corpse. The newborn saw vultures about her and leapt up and killed them all. She was born Babeester Gor. She wept over her mother's death, but never wept again. She then took axe in hand to hunt down her family's murderers and take bloody vengeance. After Ernalda woke up

She is still the defender of the temples, guardian of the Goddesses and wrecker of revenge.

### **NORINEL, THE MOTHER OF THE CITY**

We worship Norinel on City Day.

Norinel is the Grand Queen, the founder of the city of Nochet. She was the wife of Kimantor and they had several children including the founders of clans. This is a day special to us, the residents of Nochet. Other cities celebrate their founders on this day, but in the country they have the Fool's Fair.

### **MARAN, DESTROYER**

We worship Maran on Shutting the Door Day.

Maran is the violent energy of the earth. She can create. Once she danced to create the valleys and hills, shaping the world. She bore by her lovers the beings called Quakebeasts. When the Quakebeasts were destroyed in the Gods War she stopped dancing and took revenge on her enemies, summoning earthquakes and destroying with abandon. That was when she became Maran Gor. She fought until everything was dead, including herself. In the caverns of the dead she rejoined Ernalda, and Maran moved the loom arm when Ernalda remade the world.

### **ASRELIA, GRANDMOTHER GIVER**

We worship Asrelia on Rest Day.

Asrelia was the first grandmother and Grandmother. She is the mother of the six great goddesses of the land, including Esrola and Ernalda. She is also the grandmother of plants and animals and fishes and birds and people. When she was old and tired she made Ernalda the next Grandmother and went to sleep in Ezel.

### **IMARJA, THE GREAT ONE, OUR SAVIOR**

We worship Imarja on Ancestor Day, and also on Goose Day, and on the three Days of The Charter.

Imarja is the wise mother who saves her children. When men warred she saved our ancestors to Nochet and gave them the Compact of Nochet to halt men's follies. She is the primal feminine force and the source of the Four Virtues. She lives at the Ancestor Temple, and so do her selected favorites.

### **HULTA, GREAT GRANDMOTHER**

We worship Hulta on Ancestor Day.

Hulta is an Original Ancestress. She was among the Grandmothers who received gifts of Familylands from the initial dividing of Esrolia. We remember all the great ancestresses at this time, and our family has many.

### **TY KORA TEK, QUEEN OF THE DEAD**

We worship Ty Kora Tek on Shroud Day.

Ty Kora Tek is Asrelia's shy sister. She always remained in the shadows, and no one even knows her actual name, just her title. After death came into the world it sent many souls into the shadows, where Ty Kora Tek dwelt. She aided and sheltered them, but she would not release them from her hold. She kept everything back from the world until Asrelia came to her and asked for life to be released. The twin sisters agreed to share everything between them.

### **ORENDARA, QUEEN**

Orendara is worshiped on Queen Day.

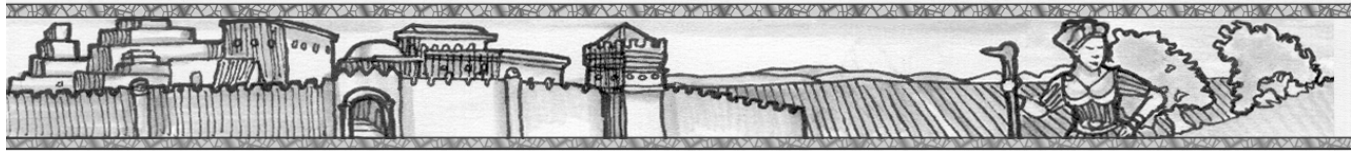
Orendara is the virgin-born daughter of Ernalda. She is the glue of society, for she provides the powers of being a leader and a follower.

### **ANA GOR, DEATH**

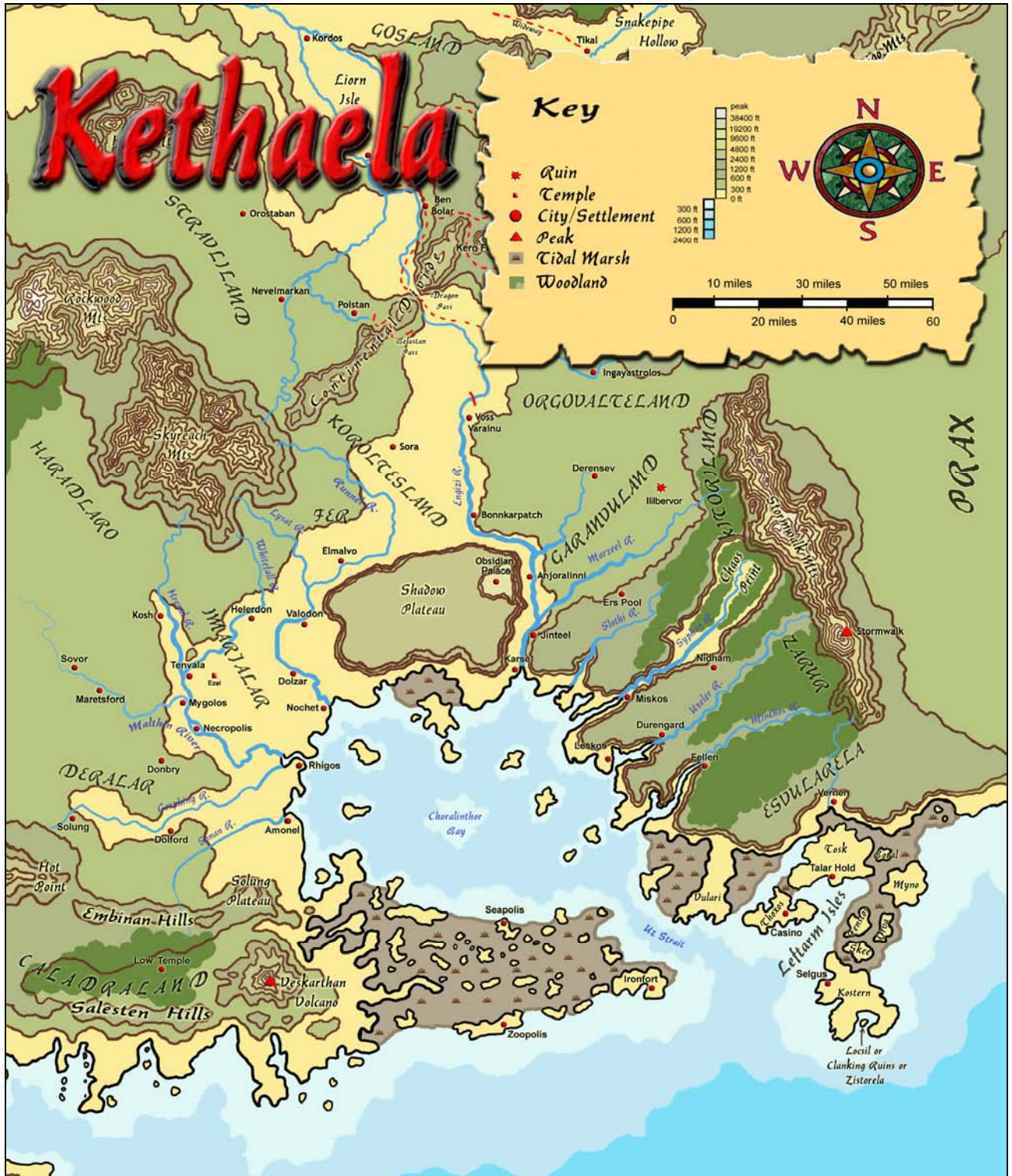
Ana Gor is death. Ana Gor spurted out with the gushing blood of the first murder. Ana Gor, Death, entered the world. She did nothing, but always the servant. Some gods loved using her to slay the world. Others sought to imprison, change, break or even kill her, but she always came back. She had become forever a part of the universe.

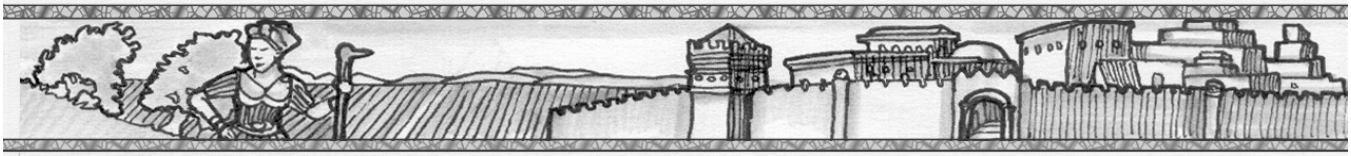
Ernalda once put her away. However, when the whole world of life became choked with death Ernalda released Ana Gor, and the living and dead were separated.





# MAP OF SECOND AGE KETHAELA





# LIFE BEGINS AT EZEL

**Sacred Ezel** is the holiest place in the world. Ezel<sup>8</sup> means “Her home.” It is also called Asrelia’s Hut, and at first indicated it was Asrelia’s home, since the Great Goddess used to live here with her daughters. Asrelia gave it to Ernalda who is now Grandmother and Queen of Ezel, so now it is Her home. Although all gods and goddesses are worshipped here, Ernalda has absolute authority over them all (through her Queen-Priestess, the Queen of Ezel). Within the sacred ground even the Great Grandmother’s Council, which rules all the peoples and lands of Esrolia, defer to the Queen-Priestess at Ezel.<sup>9</sup>

## EZEL, THE GREAT TEMPLE OF ERNALDA

*Ezel is located in the Delainan hills, about 25 miles north of the Megapolis Necropolis, and about 30 miles to the northwest of Nochet. The Delainan hills are rugged, largely unsuitable for farming and largely covered with the unusual Ianian Forest.<sup>10</sup> It has several types of tree and brush found nowhere else. Some of these provide fruits, nuts and spices that are native only here.*

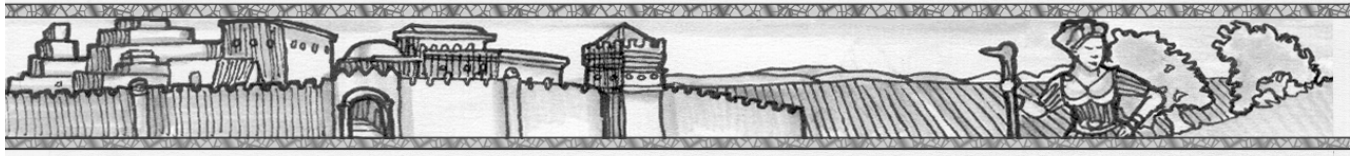


<sup>8</sup> The sacred place is known by many names: Ernalda, Temple, Great Temple, Earth Temple, and so on.

<sup>9</sup> The Queen-Priestesses of Ezel otherwise normally have very little political involvement in Esrolian affairs.

<sup>10</sup> Iania is the goddess of this forest.





## THE SACRED RING

The perimeter of Ezel is a square about five miles to the side. Four towers, called the Standing Guards, are at each corner. The Four Great Guards have temples and small standing armies in them. The perimeter is called the Sacred Ring.<sup>11</sup> Many temples and towns stand upon its edge. The towns house workers, priestesses, priests and pilgrims for the interior.<sup>12</sup> Entry into the Ring is forbidden without purification at one of the appropriate temples. Some 2000 people live around the Sacred Ring, serving the temple complex as priestesses and priests, servants, guards, etc. At any time there are hundreds, thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of pilgrims from across Esrolia and beyond. On major holy days, Ezel is more populous than most cities, with many thousands of worshippers.

Inside the Sacred Ring is the realm of the divine. Woods, gardens and fields, streams and ponds fill most of the area. Some are carefully tended, others utterly wild. This is the original Flower of Life. Fruits and flowers grow here throughout the year, and several food crops are found only within the Sacred Ring.

Animals, normally wild, live within. They harm none, save those so designated for harm by the goddesses who reside there. Anyone attacked or damaged receives it as a gift. When such a creature is needed for sacrifice they come tamely to the knife.

At the center is a mighty crater where the ten thousand goddesses and gods live. Twelve temples are there, waiting to dispense their blessings upon the pilgrims.

## TEMPLE OF TREASURES

The Temple of Treasures is the first stop for pilgrims. It is the most apparent feature of Ezel. It sits atop the cliffs south of the ravine. It requires the fewest preparations (purifications, sacrifices, etc.) to enter, and newcomers are always brought here. They are allowed to go to other temples only after they have offered sacrifices here, and proven themselves worthy to go on. The Temple of Treasures has altars dedicated to any deity who wishes to be honored here, and has many buildings sponsored by patrons. The central temple, the Golden Edifice, holds the gifts dedicated to the gods and goddesses of Ezel by wealthy donors and supplicants of the deities. Due to the generosity and piety of worshippers, the Golden Edifice is periodically filled with gold, silver, and other valuable gifts. But this edifice is largely a lure for outsiders, and pillagers have generally been content to plunder or destroy it. But

<sup>11</sup> "Ring," even though it is square shaped.

<sup>12</sup> Only a hundred or so priestesses live permanently within the temples or on the grounds, and there are some pilgrim quarters as well. The Queen-Priestess and her household live in the Store Room, a section of the Palace of the Universal Queen.

this temple is entirely superficial to the deeper purpose and power of Ezel.

The Great Staircase is the only known route from the Temple of Treasures down the cliff to the Sacred Home. It is just wide enough for a single person.

## SACRED HOME

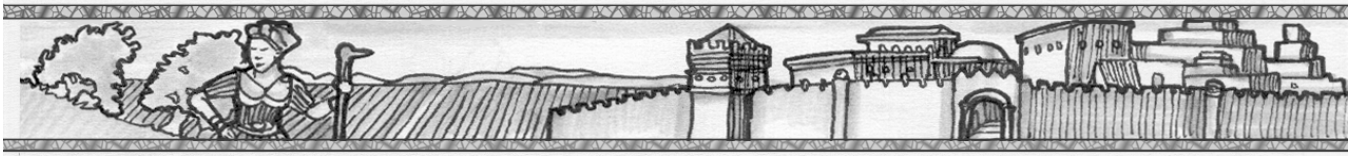
The center of Ezel is the Sacred Home, a great circular ravine about three quarters of a mile in diameter. Twelve temples are there. The Temple of Treasure, as mentioned, sits atop the ground, but the others are deep underground, with their entrances in the cliff face. The ravine is about a mile wide at its widest, and sits on a hillside, with the western cliff face much taller than the eastern. Nine of the eleven subterranean temples have entrances that face eastward. One faces southward, and one is an absolute vertical drop. The bottom of the ravine has Esrola's Pool. The surface of this pool does not rise or fall, but the depth of the pool varies depending upon the person testing it.

The Sacred Home is the true treasure, the spiritual core of the world. Here are The Eleven Wombs. These are caves that run deep through the basalt of the Delainan hills. Only one, the Temple of Asrelia, appears to be entirely natural. The others are shaped either by divine will or decorated with man-made carvings.



## THE PLAZA

The most noticeable temple is the Temple of Treasure, which is visible for miles all about. But the eleven most important temples are deep in the rock beneath the Temple of Treasure, facing out of the cliffs that are a three-quarters ring, horseshoe-shaped ravine that is 50 to 100 feet wide. The main temple complex faces east, and the interior of the ravine is surrounded by woods, gardens and fields that are dedicated to the gods and goddesses.



Shrines, often to Ezel's many protective deities, stand at the porches of the caves. Most have elaborate facades with ornate statues on the cliff face. It is notable that several of these temples have more than one opening, of which the best-known is the South Porch of the Temple of Thirteen, which has four entries stacked atop each other. It is called the "jumping doorways," because people enter by leaping into them. The deities there confer greater blessings to people able to leap into the higher ones. Belintar was the last person to enter the uppermost, and 90% of people are content with the little hop needed for the lowest.

The temples are rarely dedicated to a specific goddess, but instead are associated with a particular event or series of events. Certain temple-chambers are often called "caves" or "wombs" of the various goddesses they are commonly associated with. Many temples are intertwined and connect, and all but two are somehow linked with the Six Daughters Temple. One of these chambers is the Barren Womb. It is said by the priestesses that before it is all over, Life will return to that corridor as well.

Just before the first Sunrise, Asrelia and her Six Daughters were joined by 287 more gods and goddesses to greet the Dawn. When the sun rose they remained in place, and are called the Goddesses of the Days. Many are the most beautiful of the images, reliefs and statues. Other images have appeared or been created since Time began. For example, several of the statues in the Temple of Queen of the Universe were carved by Sesarto. More recently, Belintar surprised the priestesses when he revealed his own image on the portico of the Temple of Light and Dark. This statue changes its appearance after each Tournament of the Masters of Luck and Death.

## THE TEMPLES

The interior of each temple is different, but some general observations hold true for them all.

The passageways for most have been shaped to be corridors and chambers of various sizes. These are elaborately decorated with sculptures or paintings. The deeper a person travels the more remarkable these become, so that in the depths are some that move even as the observer watches. The entities portrayed sometime speak to the pilgrims, and it is known that often entities step out of the wall to join a procession, lead or participate in a rite. Some fortunate people have actually entered into the art. Seremeseros did, and afterwards told his sister and children that he now lived "among the immortals, without care or suffering, thirst or hunger, day or night."

Many of these chambers seem to appear and disappear, depending upon the need or purity of the worshipper. The routes between suites sometimes change, and when the army of Lord Dorvis entered into them they became an impossible maze, filled with terrors.

Moving sunwise around the plaza from the south, where the Great Staircase the temples are: Multitudes, Six Sisters, Silence, Dead, Light and Dark, Universal Queen, The Thirteen, Serpents, Grandmother, Divine, Mountain, and, on the east side between Mountain and the Pool, the temple of Above. Offerings are often dropped into the Above temple.

## TEMPLE OF THE MULTITUDES

The Temple of Multitudes is dedicated to "All the gods and goddesses."<sup>13</sup> This includes enemy gods, for propitiatory worship (although not any chaos beings). However, not even all the Esrolian earth deities have altars here, as they number in the thousands. They are included in the collective.

## TEMPLE OF THE SIX SISTERS

Herein lie six identical great chambers, each dedicated to one of the goddesses, and through those, a single site of worship for them all, plus Asrelia their mother. At certain ceremonies the sky is visible overhead, though it is far underground. Many smaller suites are dedicated to the daughters and granddaughters of the Six Sisters and their lovers and consorts.

## TEMPLE OF SILENCE

We can say nothing of this.

## TEMPLE OF DEAD

This is a center of ancestor worship. One large room is capable of holding hundreds of people, but smaller family shrines are innumerable.

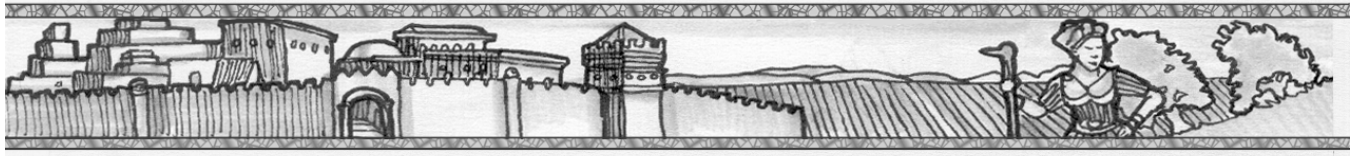
## TEMPLE OF LIGHT AND DARK

This is also sometimes called the Temple of Day and Night, or Summer and Winter, or Life and Death, or Hot and cold or any of numerous dualities.

## TEMPLE OF PALACE OF THE UNIVERSAL QUEEN

The grandest temple is the Palace of the Universal Queen where Ernalda was enthroned by the gods and goddesses as Queen of the Universe. This temple is the location of many public celebrations and rituals. The outer palace has an imposing four-story columned façade that leads underground to an ornate hundred-columned hall with huge sculpted panels and alcoves containing statues of the 600 Goddesses of the World. Although deep underground, each morning the entire hall is illuminated by the Dawn light that

<sup>13</sup> "All the gods and goddesses" includes essences and spirits as well.



flows through the hallways like water. Numerous corridors lead to sacred chambers, such as the famous cave of Harahara<sup>14</sup> (“beloved” and “beloved”) which centers upon a long rounded elliptical stone resting in a stone circle. The cave has many depictions of the goddess Hara and her lover Hara intertwined; some of the depictions are tender, others are highly erotic.

### TEMPLE OF THIRTEEN

The Temple of Thirteen is also called the Banquet of Ernalda. Ernalda gathered her companions for a feast to celebrate Life and Love: Orlanth, Heler, Elmal, Argan Argar, Esrola, Asrelia, Maran, Ty Kora Tek, Orane, Voria and Eumal. Ernalda revealed secrets of life and love to her companions in a meal that was filled with meaningful ritual and symbolism. Sacred feast are held here in the company of the Thirteen and the celebrants seek to gain insight into life and love. Twelve beautiful statues recline in a semicircle as if gathered for a feast, with Ernalda and Orlanth reclining together in the center. In the corner, there is an obscene statue of a grotesque and ugly dwarf.

### TEMPLE OF CAVE OF THE SERPENTS

The Cave of the Snakes is best known as the place where the Visionaries (sometimes “Sibyls”) of Enervi interpret the visions of Kev. They are one of several notable orders of priests and priestesses residing at Ezel. The Enervi Sibyls receive gifts both great and small from supplicants throughout Kethaela, Kerofinela and beyond. They foresaw the Sunstop, the coming of Arkat, confounded the God Learners and welcomed Belintar. Many traditions of augury and divination exist in Esrolia,<sup>15</sup> but the Enervi are the most prestigious of them all and are the most famous seers in the world.

### TEMPLE OF DIVINE

Unlike the others, this temple never changes its interior shape. The priestesses called “The Rungs of the Way” study it as a mystical path that leads to “that beyond All, beyond None.” Its temples include 32 deities, most of whom are worshipped elsewhere, such as Ernalda, Orlanth, Dehor and Sedenya.

### TEMPLE OF GRANDMOTHER

The oldest temple is the **Grandmother’s Cave** where Asrelia and, later, her Six Daughters came out of the earth. It is the second temple from the north. It has a single entrance way that opens into a large chamber, and three corridors that run from it. Each of those later splits into two corridors. From these six corridors a total of 36 various sacred chambers open up from the sides. One of the sacred chambers leads to the **Hidden Vault**, where Asrelia resides with her treasures.

### TEMPLE OF THE MOUNTAIN

This mountain-shaped temple is bedrock, but separated slightly from the crater wall. It is dedicated to the ancient deities of the Gloranthan Court, though the largest rooms to the ancient deities are largely empty. The peripheral chambers are active, however. Thus Kargan Tor’s temple is devoid of worship, but the temples of other war gods (which used to be preparatory chambers) are active. Since Uleria is the only goddess of the Gloranthan Court still living, this is sometimes also called Love mountain. From its peak worshippers can see distant Kero Fin, and sometimes the Spike.

### TEMPLE OF ABOVE

Towards the east side of the crater is the Above Temple. This is a vertical pit in the rocks. Thousands of birds—doves, parakeets and other tropical species—nest in holes in the sides of the hole. It is impossible to enter except by jumping, flying or being lowered by the birds themselves. Each year the birds have an election to see which species will rule them, and every year the parakeets win.

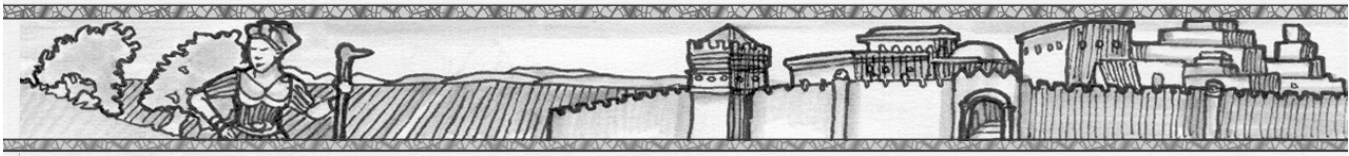
### WORSHIP AT EZEL

Ten thousand cults are actively worshipped at Ezel. Shrines to lesser gods and goddesses such as Estangus, Fethel Bay, Erdana, Bezarando and Dida can be found in one or more of the temples. There are many cults to gods, spirits or essences found only at Ezel. For example in the Second Age the cult of the Harpot Boar, a magical swine blessed by both Earth and Air, was extremely popular for a generation before fading away.

<sup>14</sup> Hara means “Beloved” and is a title that men use for Ernalda, Esrola, and Voria, and women use for Orlanth, Heler and Elmal. Orlanth’s presence is extremely powerful in this cave and here the priestesses offer sacrifices to Hara Orlanth on One Day.

<sup>15</sup> For example, in Nochet the honking of the sacred white geese are carefully interpreted by the priestesses of Imarja.





## EZEL IN HISTORY

### FIRST AGE

At the Dawn, the entire Esrolvuling population traveled to Ezel to worship. The daughters of Roitina performed the sacrifices that awakened the gods and goddesses at Ezel and acknowledge Ernalda as Queen of the Universe. The queen-priestesses supported the Unity and exchanged gifts annually with Ezkankekko. The priestesses were wooed by Heortling kings, and revered by all. The Destoran Contests<sup>16</sup> were celebrated; Voria came out of the Caves each year; and pilgrims came from as far away as Lakrene, Dari and even Dara Happa.

The Breaking of the Council brought terrible grief to the priestesses of Ezel, and the need to restore the lost Unity reached a peak in 375, when five times the population of Nochet came to Ezel to celebrate the New Life Beginnings. Even the Sun itself stopped, in awe of the Queen of the Universe. When the Golden Empire conquered the land, Palangio came as a conquering god. If he had come as a petitioner he would have been welcomed, but he fled before a single day had ended. Lokamayadon sought to woo the queen-priestess and marry Ernalda, but the Visionaries of Enervi refused. They had foreseen the coming of the King of Battles and his victories. In 433, Arkat and his companions paid their respects to the Queen of the Universe and received her blessings.<sup>17</sup>

### SECOND AGE

Ezel was a prize fought over by empires, warlords, mystics and rebels. The Treasury was plundered multiple times and utterly destroyed twice. Ezel struggled to remain separate from the wars and politics. At times it was subject to the EWF or the God Learners. Great Isgangdrang brought Ezel under the sway of the EWF by establishing a circle of guard posts entirely around the Sacred Ring to limit who could visit – and the draconic images in the Cave of Snakes crawled out prostrated themselves before the Perfect Uprising. Many draconic mystics took up residence at Ezel. In 841, Lord Dorvis of Slontos defiled the Sacred Ring and even intruded into the Caves, but was killed and his army died with him. The following year, Lord Great Burin returned and destroyed the armies of Slontos and took up residence at Ezel and established a School of the Unstruck Sound. He left Ezel in 877 and never returned.

<sup>16</sup> Athletic and poetic contests designed to please and woo the Goddess. The Contests are celebrated on dates determined by the Visionaries of Enervi. Prior to the Broken Council, they were held on average every five years. After the Broken Council they were held far less frequently.

<sup>17</sup> The priestesses of Ezel even received and blessed the Cursed One who had brought Arkat back from the dead.

Ezel was an enemy of the Zistorites (even when they were favored in Nochet) and when the New Unity Ring leaders sent offerings to Ezel the priestesses offered many blessings to the Unity Army. In 917 five times the population of Nochet gathered at Ezel to celebrate the Life Against Unlife festival, which empowered the deities to destroy the blasphemous Machine God and resulted in the Closing that destroyed the sorcerers.

Five times the population of Nochet came to Ezel to seek protection when the Great Cry went out. Their worship protected swatches of Esrolia, including Nochet, from the Devastation of the Vent with the Life Survive Fire and Flood rituals.

### ADJUSTMENT WARS

The Queen-Priestesses initially stayed neutral during the Adjustment Wars between the Hendrikings and the Grandmothers of Nochet. Hendriking kings and Nochet queens received the blessings of Ezel. However, c. 1075 the priestesses Ezel sent powerful curses against the Nochet Grandmothers for bringing violence and pain to the goddess Esrola for mere politics. Several queen-priestesses tried to negotiate an end to the Adjustment Wars, which appeared to have succeeded with the marriage of Queen Aranda of Nochet and King Finelvanth of the Hendrikings. A few years later, however, the Adjustment Wars exploded again. The Hendrikings were finally cast out of Esrolia by the Grandmothers circa 1170.

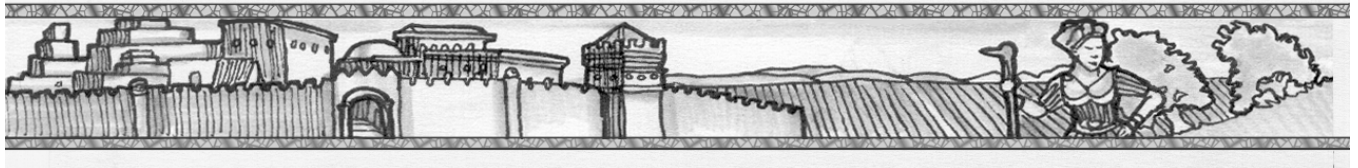
### THIRD AGE

A generation after the wars with the Hendrikings, peace was again disrupted by the False Imarjarin Rebellion. This time, however, the priestesses of Ezel firmly supported the Grandmothers and they refused to bless the Evil King.

The Visionaries of Enervi welcomed Belintar and his companions at the Temple of Light and Dark. To the amazement of the priestesses, he revealed that his own statue already protected the Temple.

Belintar went into the Barren Womb, prayed alone and in silence. After he came out there were six new goddesses standing outside. This six were the goddesses<sup>18</sup> of the Sixths of Kethaela, each of which reinforced the connection of their lands to Ezel and to Belintar. The goddess of the Sixth of Esrolia was a new daughter of the Ernalda (or sometimes Esrola) that nobody had ever seen before, but she escorted Belintar to the Palace of the Universal Queen.

<sup>18</sup> The goddess of Aran Derulia is an essence from the islands of God Forgot and had been sleeping since long before the Darkness. The entity of the Mirrosea is actually a spirit.



## MORE EZEL MYTHOLOGY

### DEAD POINT

Ernalda died, and the universe died with her. Her body was at a place called the Dead Point.

Ernalda had woven a tapestry that was a map, but Nontraya rotted it, making many parts held together only by threads. Nonetheless, her ghost-self<sup>19</sup> was enough to hold together a band of heroes.<sup>20</sup> They followed the map and brought its fragments to Ernalda at the Dead Point. That is where the gathered dead awaited the end of the world. Ernalda, with the fragments, made a new Net that we call the Great Compromise. She placed Ty Kora Tek in charge of keeping the dead in place, and Esrola in charge of keeping the living in their place. She sent King Harono back to the sky world, and set guardians of the four quarters. Then she sent Voria to tell the world she was returning.

This all happened at the Dead Point, which is the part of the world that woke first, when the first dim light rose in the east for the first sunrise.

### THE SACRED ROAD

The Sacred Road, or Road of the Dead begins at the Gate of Death temple on the South edge of the Sacred Ring. It leads to the Metropolis Necropolis<sup>21</sup> and from there on to Nochet. Pilgrims visiting Ezel must bath and purify themselves, then pass through the Gate of Death<sup>22</sup> to pass from the Sacred Road to the Sacred Ring. The God of the Gate<sup>23</sup> is there. Nearby is the village called Temple, which caters to mundane needs of the many pilgrims and worshippers that flock to Ezel.

Each year during Death Week of Darkness Season, the dead leave their necropoli to travel the Sacred Road. The Sacred Road becomes crowded with the dead who fill the road from Ezel to Nochet. Without the proper magical preparation, it becomes extremely dangerous to travel in Esrolia during that week. The dead feed themselves with food and drink placed at the many shrines that line the Sacred Road. Celebrations with music and dancing keep the dead amused and happy.

<sup>19</sup> Her Ghost-self. One of her souls, generally held to be the shadow/darkness self. By this story she had to recover her earth-self, of which she was primarily made.

<sup>20</sup> This band is, of course, the Lightbringers.

<sup>21</sup> The Sacred Road leads to the island of the Megapolis Necropolis but the final segment is submerged under water. The water has no effect on the dead who still leave the Necropolis and walk the Road, but it does tend to confine the undead denizens to the island.

<sup>22</sup> The Gate of Death is a major holy site to Humakt. Humakt is otherwise a minor figure within the Sacred Ring.

<sup>23</sup> Recognized as Humakt. He is *not* a defender of Ezel, but guards the boundary between the Road of the Dead and the Ring of Life.

### NONTRAYA AND THE UNDEAD EMPIRE

Nontraya the Taker and Waster is the enemy of Ernalda and the enemy of Life. He rides a great horned wolf and gives nothing to anyone. He was consumed with lust for Ernalda, seeking to take her away from everyone and deny her gift of Life to the world. She spurned him and her Beloved Husband cast him down into the Underworld. Nontraya swore vengeance and created the race of *talokan* demons to get his revenge.<sup>24</sup>

Nontraya swore to take Life away from Ernalda. When the sky fell in and the rivers flowed backwards, Nontraya broke the barriers that kept him and the other dead in the House of Owder. He made himself the Undead Emperor and led the Unliving Army, a horde of the dead, demons and monsters of the Underworld, to Ezel to take Ernalda away.

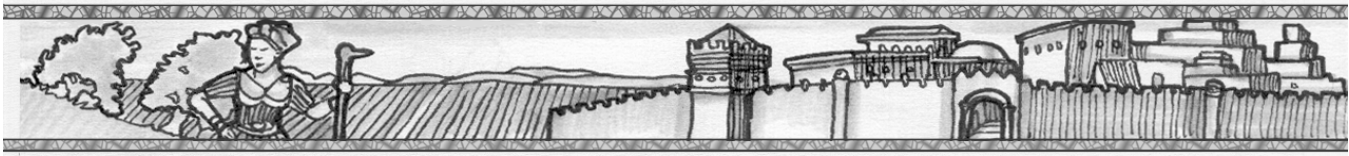
While the Undead Army was on the road to Ezel, they met a funeral procession that bore the covered body of Ernalda on a bier.<sup>25</sup> The crowd was all in shrouds, mourning and keening with a terrible racket of cymbals and horns. Nontraya suspected a trick, so he called forth all his *talokans* to witness for him. When he pulled back her shroud to inspect the evidence, he saw that Ernalda was truly a corpse. He left, and the mourners took the bier to Ty Kora Tek, who received the corpse and bore it across the threshold, then lifted her own shroud to look upon Ernalda.

She whispered the secret to the worshippers: “She sleeps, she is not dead.”

With that, Nontraya thought he had killed the Source of Life, but in fact he had failed. In the Underworld, Ernalda made a new Net that we call the Great Compromise. She placed Ty Kora Tek in charge of keeping the dead in place, and Esrola in charge of keeping the living in their place. She sent King Harono back to the sky world, and set guardians of the four quarters. Thus did the ghost of Ernalda, the Great Weaver, lead the Lifebringers onward and, in the end, saved the universe by being the mother of time.

<sup>24</sup> The *talokans* are Underworld demons who take many different shapes – some look like men, some look like beasts, some are scorpions, others have wings. They torment the dead and the denizens of the Underworld with lashes of scorpion tails and thereby whipped the Unliving Horde into action.

<sup>25</sup> On the Sacred Road of the Dead leading from the Korokava Necropolis to Ezel.



# THE GREAT CITY

Nochet is the Great City of Kethaela. Indeed, it is the greatest city for a thousand miles in all directions. Since the Opening it has grown huge, spilling out in all directions and enriching the whole of Kethaela. Here is a history of that city, starting from the earliest possible memories of humankind.

The “queen of Esrolian cities” is Nochet, the oldest and most populated city in Esrolia. During the Middle Sea Empire, Nochet numbered at least 100,000 people. After the Closing and Dragonkill the population of Nochet dropped to about 5,000. The arrival of the God-King was a blessing to the city and its population soon grew to 20,000. However, with the Opening of the Seas, Nochet has boomed, rapidly growing from 20,000 people to 100,000 in little more than a generation. Nochet now has a significant Esvularing and Western Malkioni minority (perhaps as many as 5,000 or more). By 1621, perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 residents are members of a Nochet Enfranchised House; another 40,000 residents are newcomers from elsewhere in Esrolia; and some 20,000 to 30,000 residents are of foreign origin.

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## MYTHS OF FOUNDATION

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### OUT OF HER HOUSE

Ezel is the holiest place in existence.

When the world was being born one family was the Earths, and Asrelia was one of the famous and powerful among them. Many people lived within her realms, and she gave generously. Trees, wild lands, fields—they all grew because Asrelia was alive. People, herds, wild animals—all lived in abundance in Asrelia’s land.

Asrelia lives at Ezel, “Her House.” It is where she raised her children, and where she works in her garden. Anyone can go and talk to her there.<sup>26</sup> At its earliest, it is a group of leaf frond huts.<sup>27</sup>

At Ezel, Asrelia lived with her six daughters.<sup>28</sup> They shaped the earth. Hills, rivers, crags and fields were all made by these girls.

The Six Daughters were often together, and they had their favorite places. They went to them many times, so their ancient innocence, purity and power imbued the spots. These include places like the Stags Battleground, the Broken Grass ground, the Talking Sinkhole, Wabo the Marsh, the island Graveland, Refuge Island, Top Top, Ashland and so on. Some of these became famous afterwards for other event, like the Open Circle, a dance ground where Syertus met and Ena met on midsummer, and where Erevelus was born in the following spring; or the Kitchen, which lies in

the valley between the halves of the hill that Veskarthan broke. The Flax Day festival<sup>29</sup> has always been held there.

Individuals imbued some places with power because of their acts there. The Blue Hill is where Esrola and Uroth met in secret to make love. Every year she bore a ram and a ewe, but never told who the father was. Mero saw them, and told everyone, but they refused to stop meeting.<sup>30</sup>

The holy places have sometimes disappeared as well. Veshkorgos took away the house of Lerena, and She Devourer ate the old Rolling Ground. After the Darkness no one has been able to find Pak’s Throne, the Elephant House, Redberry and many others.

Her House was one of the holy places. Asrelia lived here. It was holy when she lived, and when people discovered what sacrifices were,<sup>31</sup> they realized they were already giving sacrifices to the Old Lady. Like all the other holy places that existed in the Lazy Age, it acquired residents and grew. Like all holy places that existed in the Gods Wars, it was fortified.

When Asrelia was getting old, she called her daughters to her, and their daughters, and granddaughters, and so on so that someone from every generation and every family was present. She told them she was going to retire, and thereafter everyone must bring all the Eldest Decisions to her daughter, Ernalda. She then gave the house to Ernalda.

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<sup>29</sup> Flax Day. Aka Goose Day and Harvest Day. This is the harvest season festival.

<sup>30</sup> Now for the springtime rain celebration there the priest and priestess have sex in public and afterwards the rain clouds come.

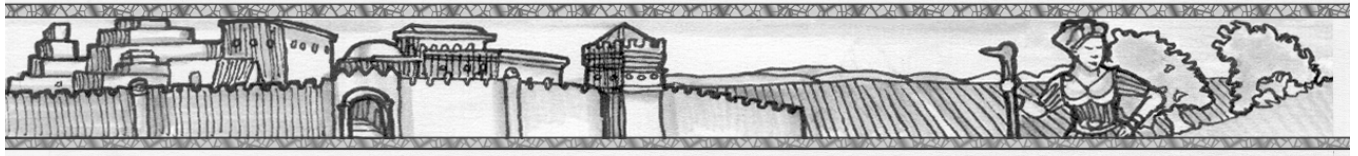
<sup>31</sup> “discovered what sacrifices were.” The point at which mortals and immortals became separate. Roitina the Ceremonialist showed that if people sacrificed to the gods, then magical power was returned. Also, the gods discovered they would not ever die. (This assumption was in error, as the Darkness proved. But for the hundred thousand generations from this moment to the late Gods War, gods could not die.)

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<sup>26</sup> To speak directly with Her, one must put in several hours of hard labor at Her Garden. If She thinks the visitor is lazy then they will speak only with one of Asrelia’s kinswoman.

<sup>27</sup> It is in the land which the Orlanthi call Sevid.

<sup>28</sup> The Six Daughters are a group, and are variously important separate. They are the goddesses Esrola, Maran, Ernalda, Dela, Orana and Delaina.



Like all the others that existed in the Darkness, it became a temple where worshippers could contact their deities. And like all the other places that existed, it contracted towards nothing at the end of the world. But Ezel was the Dead Point. That was because it was where the Great Creatrix slept. Asrelia slept there. Creator was dead; all existence was dead. Everyone had gotten together at the Dead Point to say goodbye to Asrelia. They were all crowded together into a little grass hut. Ernalda knelt beside the sleeping mat where her mother lay.

Unexpectedly, Asrelia looked up from her nap. The old lady looked up and said, "So nice of you all to visit. Ernalda, throw that rug over me would, you dear?"

It was threadbare, tattered, with fragments of a thought, an adventure, a being and other such exhausted concepts.<sup>32</sup> But Ernalda tucked it about her sweet mother, and said, "Good night, sweet mother." Asrelia turned over in her bed and became a corpse. Her life went out of her. The cosmos wept, as one.

"Oh, daughter," said the old lady, unexpectedly. Everyone paid attention. She was alive again! "You are awake now!" said the Old Lady. "Start a fire again, will you, and wake up the rest." Because Grandmother said to do this, Ernalda tried. She made the effort to do the impossible. However, as she prepared Ernalda realized she *was* awake now! She chanted the words, breathed upon the remains of the ashes, and a tiny flame burst out. Voria woke up then and put some kindling on the flame, and then Orlanth woke up and he put on fuel. Veskarthan woke then, and took over the duties of the fire while everyone else began to thaw. Elmal woke up, he woke his daughter, she opened the door, and he went out. The sun rose in the east. Asrelia's sister was there too, and she sorted out all the dead things and put them aside so Elmal would not be harming them.

Ezel, Her House, was the first place to wake up after the Dawn, and people gathered there first. Many had been hiding nearby, and Roitina's family received them to Ezel and instructed them on how to pray and perform sacrifices. The divine flocks and herds woke up here, and Asrelia's Garden was here, and Esrola's Field. Thus, the people had plenty of food and help, and Ezel was no longer a grass hut, but a spread of sacred ground surrounded by settlements.

It is the preeminent sacred ground, for life began here, ended here, and started again. The Mistress of the Universe speaks here. The force of Life is so great here that the most powerful warlords known, including Palangio<sup>33</sup> and Lord Dorvis<sup>34</sup> have been unable to affect it.

<sup>32</sup> This is the blanket that Orlanth brought to Ernalda.

<sup>33</sup> Conqueror of this land in the Dawn Age, during the Gbaji Wars. He was immensely powerful, and swore he would take from this place the Bed of Asrelia, a mat where the Creatrix slept. He wanted it for his meditation mat. He never got it, but instead went home empty handed. He said, "A

This place has been a thriving city since the Dawn. Sometimes people call it the Great Temple of Ernalda, the Field of Esrola and so on. To worshippers, this is simply Her Home.

## KENA HILL AND THE LANDSCAPE

One day, when the daughters were out playing, Esrola got tired and lay down for a while. Kena ["headrest," or pillow"] is the hill where she laid her head. "Grainland" [Esrolia] is where she napped. When she woke she said, "I dreamed that this was the land of grains." Where she had lain was ever blessed with an abundance of grain.

Several places lay close by Kena Hill. Those include:

Weepgrave, the burial place for Erevelus;<sup>35</sup>

Whipping Ground, where Herkool the son of Del was punished eight times<sup>36</sup>

Singing Ford, with the friendly rocks that helped people across the river<sup>37</sup>

Swapmeet, where Harst lived.<sup>38</sup>

Blackmaw, where the Grandmothers throw sacrifices to appease the angry goddess;<sup>39</sup>

Grace Temple, where Ernalda sat to hand out gifts before she went to visit the Emperor's House.<sup>40</sup>

## THE FIRST GRANDMOTHERS

Many of the enfranchised houses remember their ancestor from this period. These are the founders of the Original Houses. They are present when the first things were built. They are often the daughters of the goddesses, but not always. They are the people who appear in the subsequent tales.

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single night on the mat, with She who lies there now, was enough for me." The son of this union is Dejess, "lies," and especially lies concerning sexual prowess.

<sup>34</sup> War Lord of Slontos, who invaded the sanctuary with the sworn intent to rape the highest priestess. He was killed and his army died with him (cursed, some say; poisoned, say others)

<sup>35</sup> Erevelus. He was the union of a great love story, and he was one of the Beloved Sons of the earliest ages. He died, and his remains were put into a jar and buried. He is the first person inhumated and buried in the Nochet Necropolis. The other Beoved sons were Uveruso, who was cremated upon death; and Sorovo, who was put into a boat and went up the Lyksos River ("Owderian Way.")

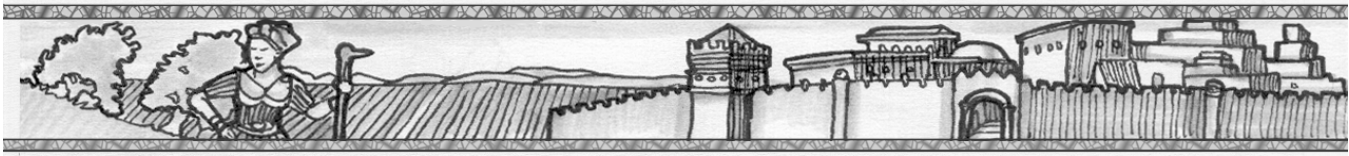
<sup>36</sup> Herkool is the troublemaker in the early stories. His actions provide the basis for much antisocial, an some criminal, behavior in Esrolian society.

<sup>37</sup> These were 20 rocks that could form a ford across any river. They were used a couple of times before being embedded in the Lyksos at Nochet. As the river moved over the ages the stones were moved too. However, they were lost in the Darkness.

<sup>38</sup> The "Old Market." Food rots more slowly there. This power has kept its original function intact, even after other larger, richer and more important markets have grown up.

<sup>39</sup> This is the door way to Ty Kora Tek's house. There is more on this place later.

<sup>40</sup> This is before she went to be the mistress of the Emperor. The women who lived there conferred the blessings, and even during the great Darkness, Lord Kimantor was blessed there.



## DIVIDING ESROLIA

The Six Peoples that settled in Esrolia divided the best farmlands among themselves. Familyland was appointed to measure and count the lands, and then the Grandmothers agreed to divide the lands between with a Gambling Stick Game. Lots were set as the stake, and the Six Throw Winner<sup>41</sup> got the plot for some of her families.

The games were very serious, and the Grandmothers asked Fairness, Justice and Keeneye to be judges.<sup>42</sup> Herkool tried to bribe one of them but failed, Tereen threatened one to no avail, and poison failed to hurt any of them. The judges were very stern and serious after that. No one cheated, and all participants agreed upon the results.<sup>43</sup>

## THE FIRST NOCHET

People and creatures had lived in the area for uncounted generations. Settlements clustered at or near the holy places. Everyone knew his or her priority and prestige. In some places, the people prospered so much that their settlements grew to each other's territory. People quarreled about their rights, and it was unnerving. Grandmothers met, but could not decide.

One day a little goose girl came to their council, a child. No one knew her. She said, "The answer to your problems is in the egg in the pillow." Then she disappeared. It was plainly a sign, so some of the women went to the hill called the Pillow, and there they found an egg. They dressed as geese to huddle with it and keep it warm. At last it hatched, and inside were the signs of the Scribe, all mixed together. When the women finally sorted the symbols out properly, they formed the **Charter of Law**. They laid the symbols out around the base of the hill for everyone to see<sup>44</sup>.

This named the Families for the Urban Grandmothers, and set into writing many traditions, and made choices where traditions conflicted, to decide which one of them to use. It also acknowledged many traditional rights of families to places and rites. They kept their ancient responsibilities and prerogatives for their shrines. The members of the family on Goose Hill were the supreme arbiters, the High Judges of the organization.

The collective word for everyone in the *Charter of Law* was *Nochet*. The "Place of Nochet" eventually became the city of Nochet.

## CHARTER OF LAW

Gods, spirits and peoples have always lived here. They grew and multiplied, and claimed each other's rights and privileges. Grandmothers met but could not agree with each other. The gods demanded things that the lesser beings could not provide. They quarreled and feuded with each other and brought death and war into the world. Imarja saw this, and, to end the strife, showed all the *Charter of Law*. The *Charter* details how men and gods are to cooperate; it assigned shrines and privileges to specific tribes and families; and set forth the rites and rituals by which the gods are to be placated and appeased. The *Charter* also sets forth law governing the divine and spirit beings.

A divine document, the *Charter* does not purport govern human society other than assigning shrines and prerogatives to certain families and tribes. Indeed, philosophers hold that all who have resided in Nochet have obeyed the *Charter* – be they Vingkotling kings, Esvularing grandmothers, trolls, Dara Happan mystics and even God Learners. The *Charter* is written with the signs of the magical Orenvulvretan script (which the barbarians ignorantly call "stone scratching). Although there is a traditional ordering of the Orenvulvretan characters, this is only a convenience and not the "true" arrangement (which is likely determined by the Elasa Secrets). During the Second Age, various God Learner sorcerers were fascinated by the *Charter of Law* and sought to understand its secrets, but they were all killed by Kestinelmal and his followers.

## GOOSE HILL

There was a hill in Esrolia called Goose Hill<sup>45</sup>. It was not part of any plot, but sat where four plots of land met. Four tribes, the Delaeo, Oranaeo<sup>46</sup>, Evaeo and Delainaeo, shared those lands. After Voriof and Uroth<sup>47</sup> were castrated then Nevela was obedient to her caretakers. Sheep were everywhere. All four tribes wanted to graze their herds on the slopes, and they ate it bare except for the top, which was always growing. Everyone wanted that place. It did not take long until the Three Bad Men<sup>48</sup> of the tribes were ready to fight over it.

The Grandmothers met to discuss it, but could not decide among themselves. That is when Isbarn came to them for the first time. She said she could judge it, honestly and justly, and save the peace. The Grandmothers agreed, and Isbarn said that none of them would have it, but she would, forever, because it was fair and just.

<sup>41</sup> Six throw winner. The Esrolian version of the game has six different methods of throwing the gambling sticks. Whomever among the contestants wins one of each of the six types is the "six-throw winner."

<sup>42</sup> Three neutral judges, in accordance with the rules of the game.

<sup>43</sup> This is the official line, but in fact several of these results are still contested, and often by claims that the winner somehow cheated.

<sup>44</sup> High stone slabs with ancient, barely decipherable marks upon them. Lhankor Mhy was the Scribe of the Charter and it was written in the magical Orenvulvretan script.

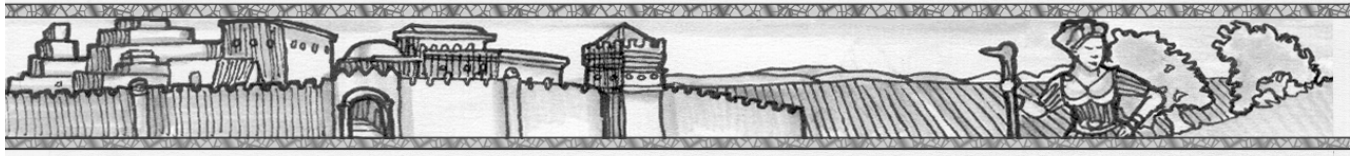
<sup>45</sup> Several tales tell how the goose moved there. In one she is called Isbarn, another she is Goosegirl and the third, Imarja. This is the Pillow.

<sup>46</sup> Children of Orane, i.e. the Durevings.

<sup>47</sup> Voriof and Uroth are both ram gods.

<sup>48</sup> Three Bad Men, named elsewhere as Herkool, Kodig and Elaliol.





The Axe Man<sup>49</sup> said that was nonsense and killed her. He chopped off her head in one blow. Now there were four Bad Men, and they began fighting. The head of the goose spoke and cursed them all, and their families.

After that, sheep began dying everywhere,<sup>50</sup> and people began to starve. An old lady appeared among them, sometimes with meat to sell, and she asked for nothing except that, one day when she asked, they would say something good and ruthless about her. She came more and more often, and fed everyone that she could. Everyone was happy.

One day the old lady went to Goose Hill, where there was seated the Most Bad Man<sup>51</sup>. She went to him and she said, "Sir, you are mighty, but this isn't the place where might holds sway. We have the civilized virtues here too."

"Nonsense," he said, and swung his axe. But he missed and fell to the ground before the old lady. When she put a foot on him, it was with the weight of a thousand people.

Most Bad Man called for his people to help him, and a thousand people came to see the ruckus. He demanded that they help, but instead the Old Lady asked if anyone had a bad thing to say about her, and everyone said something good.

She lifted her foot from Most Bad Man and he leapt up. The thousand people cheered when they saw him stand up and he was surprised. "We don't want to kill you," said the Old Lady, "But you have to be civilized."

"I'll try," he said, and everyone cheered again.

"And what of this hill here?" asked the Old Lady. "What do you want to do with it?"

"I took this hill by force. I killed a kind woman to have it. In truth, if I could, I would give it back to the goose goddess. But since she is gone, I will let you decide what to do with it," he said.

"No, your wish will be true," said the goddess, and she revealed her true form to be that of Isbarn. "I am back here because it is right and just," she said, "and these thousand civilized people are the ones who brought me back with their sacrifices." She took up residence on that hill, with a few women to wait on her. She made many judgments from there, and directed many good exchanges. After that she was called Imarja.

## THE WATERS

Nochet sits at the place where two waters meet.<sup>52</sup>

When the world was still young and innocent, the god Faralinthor was wandering the land. He had many in his entourage, and among them was Irinioori. In the land of Sevid Irinioori saw a beautiful woman on a hilltop and he fell in love with her. After much courting and gift giving Ranana came down to him, and they made great love. Their wedding bed is called Endana, and it is underwater now.<sup>53</sup>

When Faralinthor was put to sleep his horde retreated, and of course Irinioori went too. Ranana made Irinioori (high water mark ) promise to visit her every week. He didn't always do that, but he always tried to, and so the waters often surged back into those valleys. Later on, when the warrior sea gods and storm gods made a truce, he led Choralinthor back to here.

Lyksos was a friend to Imarja, and when the monsters came he agreed to help to defend her if her people would sacrifice to the river. One time, when the uz came in force, he rushed upon them and bore them all out to sea. He made the Southern Channel that way, and protected the city from that direction during the Storm Age.

## IMARJA

First existed only Fortune, initially without form but fraught with self-born Intention. This formed itself into a sphere of Purpose, and this sphere floated high into the air and filled that void with Meaning. The sphere hatched, and from that egg came Imarja.

There existed only a great vast ocean, covered in places with the thick green scum. Within the deep sea rested an egg, soft like a frog's egg. It rose to the surface and rested among the green scum, where it hatched and Prefeminine swam in the scum, feeding. At last, it broke through the scum, then looked out and saw the emptiness overhead. It felt sad at this bareness, created around itself a hard shell and rose up into the void. Once there is hatched itself open and emerged as the beautiful goddess Imarja. With thoughts, she made dry and solid places on the water. With words, she created plants that covered the land and sea. With gestures, she made animals that lived in the sea, on land and over it, in the air. With movement, she created beings to recognize and worship her.

Imarja was a great grey goose that flew through the void. She grew weary and wished to rest, so she thought to

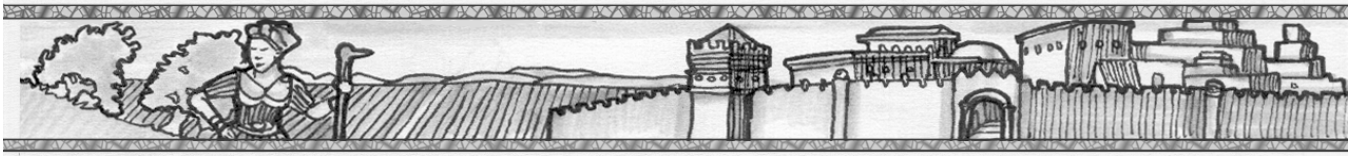
<sup>49</sup> Probably the warrior named Tereen ("Chosen of Ter")

<sup>50</sup> There is an implication that this was due to the curse, which others deny. It is just as likely that this was brought about by the wars of the Storm Age, or some other large-scale disaster.

<sup>51</sup> The story indicates that this was the victor of the fight at Goose Hill. Other sources name him Terliol ("Blessed of Ter"), the grandson of Tereen. Still other sources name him as Kodig.

<sup>52</sup> The water and land have a turbulent mythology here. A hundred different tales recall events from a dozen or more times that the waters lapped at this land in violent floods, fierce assaults, gentle rising and in tentative rising and falling waves. These are always endured by Esrola, destroyed by Maran, repelled by Ernaldia or absorbed and placed into the landscape by Imarja. The maps show the differences in shoreline for different periods.

<sup>53</sup> Not far from the mouth of the river at Nochet.



herself, "I will make a place to set down." Below her, a vast, limitless sea appeared and she glided down to swim upon it. She grew lonely and thought, "I need a companion," and there appeared from her thought **Bokumarade**, the Gander, which is the land. She then spoke aloud and said, "That is a beautiful place, but I'll make it useful," and there appeared upon it all the kinds of plants that have ever been known. When she came up upon that land she settled upon it, made herself a place there amidst it, with it she became full of eggs so she settled and laid a clutch. Out of those hatched creatures, some of which remained on land, some of which rose into the air and some of which went into the sea. At last she taught some of those beings to recognize her, and they worshipped her and made sacrifice, and they are the peoples of Imarja, some with two legs, some with wings, some with four legs, some with fins, some with no legs at all. Those are the sacred beings.

One day her three favorite daughters came to Imarja. They spoke.

"Grandmother, we are having an argument," they said. "We cannot agree on what you look like." She asked them to describe her, and truly enough, none of them truly saw her.

"Here is what I will do," she told them. "From now on I will appear to each of you and instruct you in a house that you have made. Each day I will come to one house to teach and share myself with you. The purpose of this is to know how to come to me, and make the true sacrifice, which is the sacrifice of Self and of Life. Then one day we will meet again, and have this conversation, and when you all three agree on what I look like then all will be well again."

So they did this, and many of their people came to listen and speak and study and make sacrifices. The houses were the House of Shape, the House of Form and the House of Appearance.

Some of the people did not understand any of this. They got together and decided to make a new house, where the three of them could work together for the ends of understanding the true sacrifice. They called this the Other House. There they sacrificed Life to Self, and Self to Life, and as a result they made some new tools, and some new ideas, and some new powers. Thus, they thought that they understood everything. After perfecting their techniques, they went to Imarja where she sat on her nest to show her.

"No, no," said the Grandmother, "That is not correct." But the three of argued their point, but she denied it, and so then they were so enraged that they finally got an idea. "We'll sacrifice *your* Life," they said, "and *your* Self!" And they seized her, and they used their new tools and ideas and powers and they killed Imarja. They ate her flesh. They were filled with a great power and an inner light they had not known before, and they called themselves Immortals. They went to their brethren.

"Look at us!" said the Immortals. "We know the secret now!"

They were so bright that they made the rest of the world dark, and this frightened everyone so that they fled from them. This angered the Immortals so much that they chased after them and once they had captured everyone, they forced them to make prayers and sacrifices to them, so that they had worshippers.

That is what made the God War. That is what made the Darkness. That is what made Death. That is what made Chaos.

## THE BIRTHS OF ORENDARA

Once Orlanth challenged the right of Ernalda to command her subjects.

"Only men can rule," he said.

"There is always another way," said Ernalda, and went off alone. Alone in the bush, she meditated upon the power of conception, and in that manner became pregnant. She gave birth to a beautiful daughter who she named Orendara. On her neck shone a bright torque. People call her the "Virgin-Conceived Queen."

When she was named Orendara rose and went to where some people were discussing what to do. They were arguing, and several of the men were already brandishing weapons at each other. Orendara went among the women and spoke to them, and then them to the center of the assembly circle.

"There is always another way," she said, "And I will tell you what they are."

Even the men were impressed and listened, and afterwards they also agreed that Orendara was not only as good a leader as Orlanth, but that she also had more right to rule than he did, for she was pure sovereignty, born pure of the goddess of Creation, while Orlanth was only Her bed-husband.

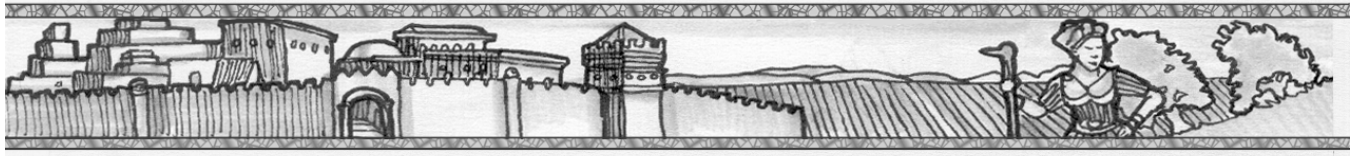
After that the wise people had Queens, not kings.

Orendara was killed during the Gods War and buried in the Dead Point, in Esrolia. The goose women went to the grave and performed the proper meditation, and Orendara was born again. Thus the Grandmothers kept their people together, even in hiding, during the evil times.

## SWORD AND HELM SAGA

This is the epic saga of the Vingkotlings and a tragic tale of heroic struggle and courageous death. There are dozens of variations of the Sword and Helm saga - almost every tribe has their own true version. However, the basic theme is always the same.

King Rastagar of the Kodigvari and king of the Vingkotlings is the greatest war leader of the Vingkotlings and gathers around him a band of heroes. However, he is



flawed man who insults his wife and feuds with his own council. His wife and the Warlord plot to bring down the proud king. They betray the king and take from him the two symbols of Vingkotling royalty - the magic Sword and Helm that bring victory to their rightful wearers.

The saga culminates in the Last Royal Betrayal, where enemies kill King Rastagar and the royal house of the Vingkotlings, along with many others. Details vary. The king musters the army to defend the Heortling lands from an army of chaos, and at the last moment, a segment of the army deserts and leaves the rest to be slaughtered.

No survivors of the Kodigvari dynasty survived.

After the Last Royal Betrayal, the gods were dead, so the widows contacted the goddess Imarja. They gathered the scattered bits of her power that were drifting about. Imarja showed the women the grave of Orendara, and they brought her back to life. This empowered the Grandmothers and enabled them to lead their people to survive the Darkness.

## THE ESROLIAN GRANDMOTHERS

The Esrolian women seized power for their “own protection,” after the *Sword and Helm Saga*. Most of the Grandmothers are widows from the battle.

The women gathered and wove a basket to hold life, a blanket to preserve family, and instructed the men to raise a fence to protect property. They then divided the world between the “nine times nine best women,” who were the first Grandmothers. For a short time, they lived in bliss and harmony, hidden away from the troubles of the world. Then the Seventy-one Grievances came.

## THE 71 GRIEVANCES

The Great Darkness descends upon the First Grandmothers with devastation, loss and horror. Losses are huge - fully two thirds of the Grandmothers. The poem says:

*Twenty to chaos, gone forever;  
Twenty to Death, the eternal Grievances;  
Ten to Darkness, gone below;  
Three to Evil, best left gone.  
Eighteen sleeping, resting, hiding.  
Survivors: thrice nine families for the Dawn.*

## THE PACT WITH EZKANKEKKO, THE ONLY OLD ONE

The Imarjan Peoples struggled against chaos and darkness, at first considering them both the same force. However, after **Enveri Inside** returned to them, they acknowledged their own Dark Powers, and fared much better against the chaos things. This led to their alliance to, and obedience to, Ezkankekko. Afterwards their lands were relatively stable and they survived the Darkness.

## IMARJA AND THE EIGHTEEN RETURN

At the end of the Silver Age some of the Grandmothers of Grief returned. People thought they were dead, destroyed or disappeared but they turned out to have only been sleeping.

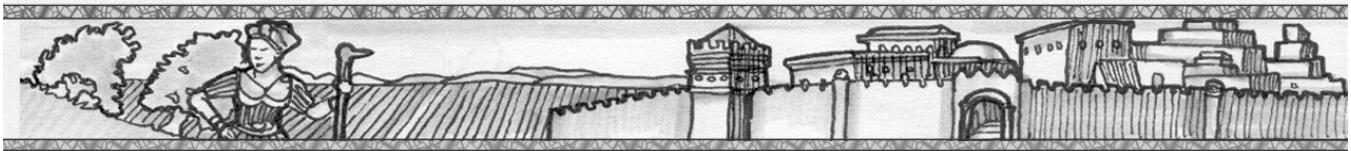
Urvarna and Demarath began this process; two people who were attracted to each other but sensed that their relationship could be deeper than it was. They were friends, even sexual partners, but they sought deeper love. Their discontent irritated their neighbors and kinfolk who were having a difficult enough time just getting by. The couple set off, bearing the light and the dark in their pouches, and they found the Great Stone. They went into it, and they found their way past the dangers there. **Tereneel, the Little Voice**, promised them a gift greater than each other if they survived this. The trials separated them, but each determined to go on anyway. Urvarna found **Gelstarn**, the Beloved; and Demarath found **Serumtha**, the Lover. The pair had been sleeping, but once awakened these Grandmothers brought the two together again. They returned to their people, and they taught to them the rites of Awakening. When they performed these ceremonies the Eighteen Awakened Powers returned to the people.

“The Great Grandmother took us to her womb,” they said, “in the warmth and comfort of safety. We saw Imarja there, and now we remember what we had lost. We slept and have come home now to bring to you the blessings of old.”

They brought seed and stock for food and goods, and their contributions were the main reason that Esrolia was relatively healthy when the sun rose once again.

The Eighteen led the Ascending Rituals that transformed the Great Stone to be the Golden Egg that rose into the sky and ended the Darkness.

Now the quests of Urvarna and Demarath provide the structure for the initiation myths for Esrolian people. After they become adults, they are qualified to undergo the rites to learn the powers of the gods.



## THE GOLDEN EGG

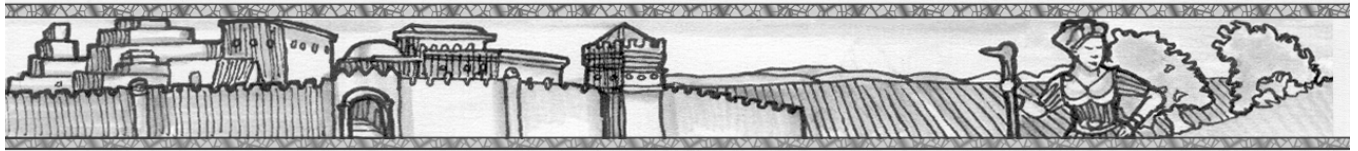
To Esrolians the sun is the Golden Egg. The sky is the Nest of Imarja.

When the sun first appeared at the Dawn followers of the New Eighteen hailed it as the blessing of Imarja, and they offered it sacrifices and prayers as it wheeled overhead. They were not distressed when it set, for this was its hatching, and after that the blessings flowed from the gifts that the eighteen had brought. Seeds sprouted, young were born, waters flowed and other bounty came to the Esrolians.

## THE SINGING STONES FORD

In the old days these forded the Lyksos in many of its forms. The Caretakers fed them, sang to them, and moved them when it was necessary. They were lost in the darkness when Nontraya took them as a necklace. They are gone.

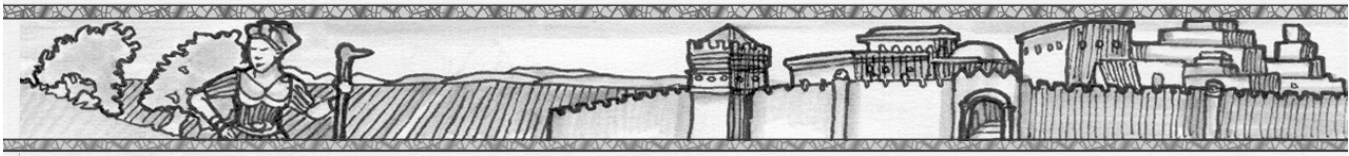




## MAP OF GREEN AGE NOCHET







## NOCHET IN STORM AND DARKNESS

### THE FIRST WAR

There was a tribe called the Ono that lived above the city. The king there, Harono, once day looked down and saw the Lady Drero and wanted her for his queen. He ordered his warriors to go and bring her to him. They went out, but they were defeated in a fight by the Noble Brothers<sup>54</sup> of the city. Then the king decided to go himself, and so he raised an army and went.

The Noble Brothers resisted, but they could not hold against the king's power. He closed in on the city, but even without defenders it protected itself with an invisible wall. King Harono could not enter.

At last, he stopped trying and drew up his army to salute the city.

"Your Virtue protects you," he said<sup>55</sup>, "and on recognition of that I will also use my own virtue to protect you." So Harono became the protector of the lands outside the city of Nochet and remained so until he was cast down by Kodig.

### THE SECOND WAR

There was a tribe called the Storm Lords that lived to the north and above the land. One of their kings lived in Esrola. He was belligerent and uncivilized, and one time he disagreed with Grandmother Marele. When she didn't answer her door to him, he started to break down her house. Before he finished his job the Noble Brothers overpowered him, and threw him out of the country.

Many times he came back, and sometimes he took over the city. He was always ejected. Sometimes other warlords

<sup>54</sup> Noble Brothers. A collective term for the war gods who serve the goddess and defend Nochet.

<sup>55</sup> Defender Virtue. Great Imarja is a good goddess, and she loves her people so much she will not let them go far from her in life or in death. She lives in her nest, not in some distant world. When her people die they do not go away, but go to her hill and remain there. The residents can speak with their ancestors regularly, who remain nearby as long as anyone remembers them. Some people think her hill is haunted, or the land of the dead. It is simply Imarja's realm. The magnitude of the person determines the power of his or her presence, and the magnitude is measured by how closely they followed Imarja's ethics of the Four Virtues: Harmony, Filial Piety, Prudence, and Compassion. They must be good, fair, think of others and not be selfish. If they are virtuous, their presence is great. The Four Virtues are also called the "civilized virtues" or the "city virtues". These people look to the welfare of their living in. They offer advice to individuals, and they provide blessings for families. They also aid in the defense of the city with their magic and power. Sometimes they lend this to leaders, but often they man the walls or fly overhead snapping at spirits and casting spiritual javelins against invaders. They can come in strength, and their presence almost always surprises and distresses anyone who tries to conquer the city. When King Harono said, "Your Virtue protects you," he was referring to these powerful spiritual entities, as well as the magic defense that a strong city can have.

took over the city for a while. But the city was too valuable to destroy. Its virtue protected out.

King Kodig, after making terrible sacrifices, convinced his god Orlanth to bring his celestial army to attack Nochet.

The Good King Harono came with his army, golden spear points gleaming, to stop Orlanth. "This is a place of virtue," said the defender.

"I have none of your virtue<sup>56</sup>," said Orlanth and the armies clashed. Harono was slain and thrown down, and his army with him. The Noble Brothers came to resist him. The duels were savage, and though many storm heroes were thrown down, there were far too few Noble Brothers.

"I have come to destroy your city," said Orlanth.

The goddess Ernalda, who is a wise speaker among the council, knew what to do with this wild god. She boldly went and spoke to him, and though many of his henchmen tried to handle her and her entourage, Ernalda protected them and many of the gods were hurt.

She promised Orlanth two things: a night with her, and his own home, if he would just do what she asked him to do. He could not resist. They performed the Quick Husband Marriage, and they spent the night together, and both of them agreed it was a pleasant night. The next day Orlanth went off against the invaders and smashed them all. Then Ernalda sent him to his new home, which was at Kerofin Mountain. That way he was also removed from the land.<sup>57</sup>

Ernalda taught the wild god the good things of life, and when he calmed himself he became a wiser god, thanks to Ernalda. The two were well-matched and worked in harmony. No one objected to calling them Queen and King. After much time the Ernalda convinced the Grandmothers Council to allow Orlanth to one of the Noble Brothers. He built a house<sup>58</sup> north of where most people lived.

### THE THIRD WAR

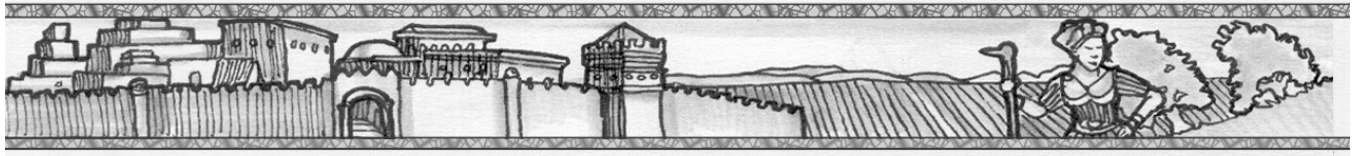
Enemies assailed the realm of Ernalda and Orlanth. Best efforts at defense eventually were ineffective. Orlanth ordered the defense of the key cities of the land. Master Brakti led the effort, and the walls are called Brakti's Walls.

The main events of the Third War are related in the story of Irillo.

<sup>56</sup> Unrecorded in this Esrolian story is the rest of the quote, recorded in Orlanthi sources. "I have none of your city virtues, but bring equality, liberation and change to your doorstep."

<sup>57</sup> Other Esrolian stories do acknowledge the co-regency of Orlanth and Ernalda.

<sup>58</sup> That is, his carpenter built a temple.



## GOOD DEFENDER IRILLO

Rastagar was still angry at his sister, and he used his position as war leader to bring together all the men of the four peoples. He taught them all to use weapons, and then he gave them such a speech that they were all ready to kill their enemies. Then he went to meet the foes, but they were not nearby at all, but far away and the army marched so far away that they did not know where they were. Then they had a battle, and most of them were killed. Only a few escaped, and they did not know their way home. Only Rastagar and Irillo knew their way, because Rastagar's father was from there, and Irillo's sister-in-law.

They got home and both of them had some new followers, but each had only a few of the men from their homeland. The Grandmothers scolded Rastagar severely, but he got angry and threatened them with his sword. Irillo defended the women, the chieftains fought, and their men, until all the men were dead.

Then the women started to fight each other. Four battles erupted. Then a great goose flew overhead, circled, and landed among them. It was the goddess Imarja, and she proposed the Nochet Compact to the families. Everyone agreed. The women ruled, and agreed to keep men from positions of central authority and great power.<sup>59</sup>

The people from all across the whole area about Nochet moved in together to one place. Imarja got the stone people out of the volcano<sup>60</sup> and they built tall and stout walls where the people lived. The women had another generation, and many of those were boys, but men did not raise most of them. They are the Esrolian men.

The walls and the virtue of the civilized people protected the fortress for many generations. It did not matter when the sun fell down, or when the sea stood still, or when the winter came and blanketed the land with ice. What did matter were the demons that came.

No one had ever seen those things before, and one time one of them got over the walls. It did terrible things before it was killed. Then it happened again, and again.

One day Irillo came to the gates. Everyone knew him and they were astonished to see a dead man. But he said, "I am still here, in the Dead Land, but what you don't know is that you are too. There will be legions of demons coming to take the city soon, to tear your hearts out and sup upon your souls. But you are my people, and I am still civilized, and my virtue is still true. Let me defend our city, and you will be safe."

The Grandmothers deliberated for months. Then one day a demon came to attack the city, and Irillo killed it. After that a thousand citizens came to the Grandmothers, and they agreed with the people. They let Irillo in, and he defended the city.

When the demons came ten at a time, Irillo could stop them, but then they began to come eleven at a time and they got in among the civilized people. It was terrible, and the Grandmothers admonished Irillo. "It is not due to any shortcoming," he said. "They are too many. But here is what I can do. If you let me bring some friends into the city, they will help. You don't even have to give them full citizenship. They'll be happy to be here and fight for us."

So the Grandmothers deliberated again. When they learned that an army with twelve demons was on its way they agreed unanimously and Irillo summoned some of his friends to the city. They were all given houses, and they defended the city even unto their deaths. After they died their followers made alters and sacrificed to these heroes, and they are now the defenders of the city and the land. They are called the Noble Brothers, and they all obey Irillo, who obeys the Grandmothers.

In the endless winter the food ran out. Everyone was starving. Then flocks of geese came from the heights, and they were talking and said, "Eat me." So the people did, and they survived. Everyone knew that Imarja did that.

## NOCHET COMPACT

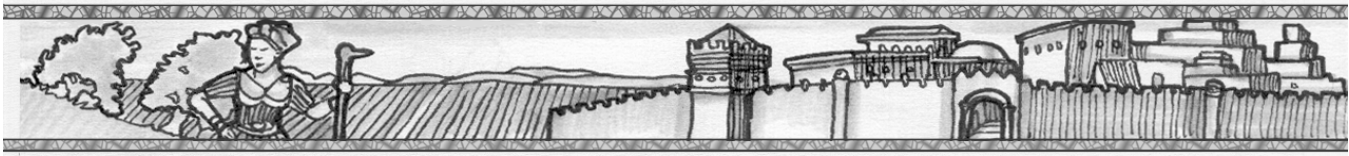
After the Horror of Rastagar, the goddess Imarja once again revealed herself to the Grandmothers and inspired them with the *Nochet Compact*. Unlike the *Charter of Law*, the *Nochet Compact* deals with human society – specifically, the Esrolvulings. The Compact grants the Grandmothers absolute authority over the members of her clan. The Grandmothers are given the power to approve or reject marriage, dispose of the personal property of her kin, even sell family members into slavery or exile them. The *Nochet Compact* establishes the Grandmother's Council to resolve disputes between families and outsiders. Other provisions deal with marriage (wife has more status and property than the husband, who moves to his wife's house and the children belong to the wife's clan); with funeral rites; and so on. The *Nochet Compact* is the basis of Esrolian law.

## NORINEL AND KIMANTOR

This conversation took place on the first morning after the first frost. Things had already been bad, with food shortages, illnesses, fighting, and difficulty keeping sacred things clean. So the family met, and everyone had her say. It was clear. Afterwards Grandmother spoke and said, "She needs to have children."

<sup>59</sup> The Horror of Rastagar. The Esrolians in general and the Nochetites in particular cherish a special dislike—loathing might work better—of the power-seeking Kodigvari. That family epitomizes the selfishness that the urban virtue shunts. Much of the wordage in their *Nochet Compact* focuses on those men's evils, and emphasizes the need to maintain a collective for the city's members.

<sup>60</sup> Mostali, renowned builders. They are the servants of Veskarthan.



Dungaria ([“Mother of the Widow”] agreed. “Daughter, you need to have children. We’re old and feeble, and we will work every day and get by, but we need more young hearty helpers to do the hard and dangerous things. If you don’t have children, we’ll all fall into the bottomless pit soon.”

Her brother said, “Norinel, I married Zuleno because you said to, and now I am saying you ought to marry.”

Now, ordinarily this would not be a problem, but this time the suitor had never been seen. He wasn’t chaotic, but he was of the night and darkness, and never seen. He was Kimantor, “the Man You Cannot See.” Norinel was her mother’s daughter, and so had had several husbands and/or lovers. One of them was even notoriously ugly, another cruel. Yet Norinel had stood back from the courtship of Kimantor.

“All my family commands me,” she said. “I can only concur.”

When Kimantor came for the wedding he wore armored boots, sculpted body armor and a mask that had the features of a very handsome man. Over his shoulders flowed a long cloak of gray feathers, with a hood. Four Darkmen stood around him, each holding a post up, and on those four posts hung a piece of the night time sky that had been ripped down. It covered Kimantor and his underworld family with a thick shadow.

The marriage ceremony, witnessed by both families, was held at night. It was a lavish affair, and paid for by Kimantor’s mother, save for the knife used to prick fingers for the Blood Oath. Grandmother made that and it was worth all the food that Kimantor’s family brought. Everyone was hungry in those days, and thousands of people came to eat. They were all fed, because Kimantor had a bucket from which he could pour as much porridge as he wanted, as long as he was true to all oaths taken.

The mating rite was also held at night, and Kimantor took off his cloak and his armor and mask and boots. Norinel knew how to use her hands and she found the shape to be wonderful and promising. “Well,” she thought, “this is duty,” and disrobed herself. The lovers experienced a True Night, and a Forever Night.<sup>61</sup> Afterwards she asked to see his true form. He refused. She was unhappy.

“Don’t you trust me?” she asked. “Isn’t it worth it to keep me here?”

“We agreed to this,” he said. Of course there was a marriage oath, even though it was for the One Night Marriage. The agreement said that he did not have to reveal

his form, and she could leave anytime she wanted. So he didn’t reveal himself. His oath was good, because his porridge bucket still worked.

Norinel, though, did not leave. After all, the one night had not been unpleasant, and she knew she would bear a child. She knew it would be good for Kimantor to hold his newborn child. So she stayed. However, although they touched, they did not engage.

Norinel was always a little bit angry at Kimantor because she couldn’t see him. One day she politely asked him to reveal himself. He refused. She cajoled. He refused. She teased him.

“We agreed to this,” he said.

She offered to trade secrets, joked, and was hurt deeply.

“We agreed to this,” he said.

Then she insisted, begged, and finally ‘required’ that he show himself.

“We agreed to this,” he said. She was so angry she said she would no longer set her hands upon him. But she did not leave him. Their marriage vows stood true, and Kimantor regularly visited, though she was cold to him.

In the middle of winter, Norinel went into labor, and her mother and grandmother and sister and aunt and niece all came to help. Born then was Delargara,<sup>62</sup> and everyone celebrated, and then to the astonishment of everyone (even the mother) came a twin, who was a boy and was named Desdel [“surprise”].<sup>63</sup>

Norinel had a beautiful nut grove on the outskirts of her farm. It had a hundred trees, and each of them was a different kind of nut. That grove fed a hundred people. One day the Head Demons came with axes, and they began cutting them down. She said, “Someone ought to protect those people”

“Do you mean me, wife?” asked Kimantor.

“Someone,” she said. So Kimantor got his weapons and he called his drummer and his horn men<sup>64</sup>. He sent around the Black Arrow. Ten of his men came.

“Ten?” questioned Norinel.

“They are enough.” And they were. The demons were surprised and ran off, Most of the grove was preserved.

But when he came home she said, “You needed ten men?” And she shrugged.

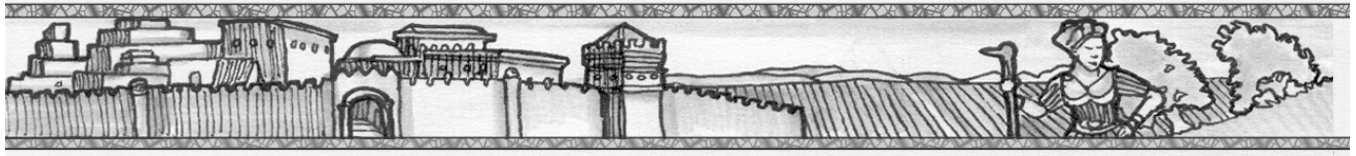
The next year The Neck Demons came, and there was a war party of them. They rode upon the long-legged elephants, and they stopped to pillage at the village where pots were made. Norinel said, “Someone needs to protect those people.”

<sup>61</sup> Full and True nights. These are references to a Ulerian Night. Uleria is the goddess of love and desire in all its aspects. She is multifaceted, and her daughters are each one form of desire. In the Ulerian Sense, a True Night means a night of tremendous erotic pleasure, and a Forever Night means that a child was born. [NOTE: We should have a Temple to Uleria (or her daughters) in Nochet.]

<sup>62</sup> The Obedient Daughter.

<sup>63</sup> Desdel is the Founder of a family who oversees the priesthood in Nochet dedicated to Kimantor (Ezkankkko).

<sup>64</sup> His drum and his horn. This is a formulaic term for troll armies. Drums and horns convey commands to the army. Also with them would be the bodyguard, messengers and so on.



“Do you mean me, wife?” asked Kimantor.

“Someone,” she said. So Kimantor got his weapons and called his drummer and horn, and this time one hundred men and the sorcerer named Argaku came to the muster. They met in bloody battle where Kimantor proved his true worth as he dealt death left and right. Kimantor destroyed the Neck Demons, and made their internal parts into amulets that repelled their kind.

But when he came home Norinel said, “You needed one hundred men, and a magician?” And she shrugged, and ordered a serving girl to go to his bed when he asked it.

The next year a small army of Shoulder Demons came. They rode on the terrible bear bulls, and this time came all the way to the walls of Norinel’s farm. Norinel said, “Someone needs to protect these people.”

“Do you mean me, wife?” asked Kimantor. That was when Kimantor’s sister took Norinel aside.

“Dear sister,” she said, “You can ask for no one, someone, or anyone and my brother will leap to serve you. He’s great and victorious, and he’ll crush them. But those demons will also come back again and again, and he’ll go out there and vanquish them every time, but always at that price he’s showed you. Every time the demons come, he’ll need ten times as many to defeat them. So count the number of people you have, and see how long you’ll last. But someday—and I see you did the math, you know it’s SOON-- soon my dear brother won’t have enough men to answer the muster, and then those things will come over your walls. His people will die defending your people, and he’ll die defending you. And what will be your fate in the tentacles of the demons? You imagine it, I dare not.

“But why are you so bitter to him? You had a Uleria night. You have two good children. He is a Shadow Man, but has that kinship [i.e. Darkness] obscured his dedication to you? He loves you, and though we had always heard you people thought you were better than us, he agreed to this marriage. He’s been surprised by his love for you! And yet, you have only these bland words for him?”

“Here’s the truth,” said Norinel, “that I’ll tell you, my husband’s sister. “I didn’t want to marry him, but did because I had to.”

“Well, he has 1000 warriors waiting outside, and also the sorcerer Argaku and I’ll tell you that the sorcerer’s sister, Ukagra is here too. They’re going into battle and they’ll die to save your miserable little farm here. Next are the Chest Demons, right? They’ll come again. Those Foot Demons, they will be powerful enough to march on the Sky world. Before that, I’ll sacrifice my own life to save you, because my brother Kimantor loves you so.

“But the End is here, because the world’s broken. Without Harmony, the world is ending.”

“What needs be done?” asked Norinel.

“The simplest thing, and the happier thing, is for you to just acknowledge the Virtue here. He’s done no harm. He serves you. But you are blocking out the important things, and stripping this good man of his power.”

“Bring in the Three Judges,” said Norinel. They came, and they spoke. She told them, “You can open or close your eyes.”<sup>65</sup> They all went back into the room where her husband waited.

“Do you mean me, wife?” asked Kimantor, again.

“Yes, Son of Exchange,” she said, “Yes, my husband; I mean you. I hope you will go and crush these foes, and then I hope you’ll come home to me afterwards. I’ll be your wife, and love you too.”

“Then I’ll do it.” He took her shoulders in his hands. “If I don’t return,” he said, “Your brother is your protector.”<sup>66</sup> They held each other close. It felt very, very good. “If I fail, I will greet you Underground.”<sup>67</sup> And he turned to the 1000 warriors, and to the sorcery twins and he said, “Protect my wife and children if I fail. Duty calls.”

And, fully armed, he went outside among the monster armies. He, all alone, defeated the foe. This warrior, Kimantor, knew where the invaders were weakest, and on this occasion walked amidst their priests’ and killed them all. Kimantor knew how to kill at close quarters, and the Chaos Lords didn’t know how to defend themselves. Kimantor slew the leaders.

The horde of the enemy army rushed to the slaughter ground and surrounded him. They stood around him in a circle. Kimantor, armed and afire with his hero glow, said, “I have a thousand more like me,” he said, to the foes. “Look around you at what I did alone, as I call them.” And he called them. The gate to the farm opened and the army and the twin sorcerers showed themselves. No more was needed. The enemy all fled.

The Poised Army, and the twins, looked to their Lord, Kimantor who was the Lord of Virtue and of love! Two thousand and seven eyes asked, “What guidance?”

“Kill them all,” said Kimantor. “Run them down from behind. Remember *Kimantor’s orders*.<sup>68</sup>”

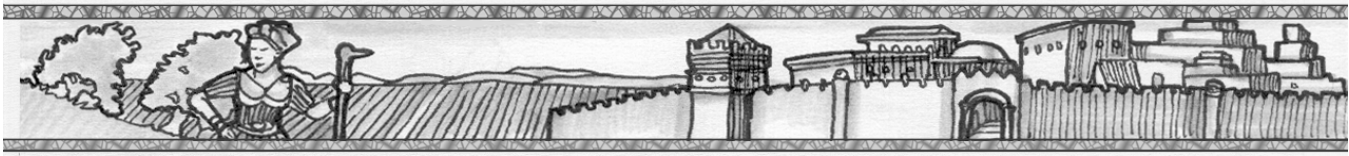
That victory was just the first. Kimantor and Norinel, working together, were invincible. They persevered and even expanded, replanting the nut grove with the ten remain types. But Kimantor never had to send his thousand men

<sup>65</sup> Open or close your eyes. These are two formal methods of legal witnessing. “Open eyes” means the actual words and deeds will be documented, while “closed eyes” is using magical perceptions.

<sup>66</sup> One of the legal code phrases for inheritance. Esrolia would, by this statement, return to the family she had come from. She would take back her dowry, etc.

<sup>67</sup> Greet you Underground. A standard poetic phrase meaning “I’ll be dead first, and meet you.”

<sup>68</sup> *Kimantor’s Orders*, aka “How to deal with chaos.” A set of simple instructions on how to discover chaos, run from chaos, and report chaos to your leader.



and the twins” into battle. A new attack [Gut Demons], another [Kidney Demons], one more [Pelvis Demons], and these things rode upon Horse Mountains! Kimantor alone held them back. Kimantor and his companions held back all foes from the homelands.

## THE BATTLE OF NOCHET

The demon army was limitless, and the hordes came again and again.<sup>69</sup> Yet, as long as Norinel and Kimantor worked together they survived. “Loving Husband,” she said, as she armed him, “Summon the War Lord to drive off our foes.” The War Lord would come and surround Kimantor with his power, and the enemy was defeated.

The Diligent Workers<sup>70</sup> worked day and night to feed their honorable mother. Dear Mother fed Kimantor and the rest of the family. They lived in safety and, although often hungry, did not die of hunger. And when they ate goose meat, they knew they were in the presence of the Protectress.<sup>71</sup>

Lord Kimantor was called the Protector. He was cloaked in goose feathers, and he wore the Armor of Night.

One time the War Lord did not come when Kimantor summoned him. Norinel was alarmed and began to wail, for she feared that this would be the end of her beloved Kimantor without the god’s protection. Lord Kimantor was not alarmed.

Kimantor was a great warrior in this grim period. But he was also wily—he always knew a way to escape and, significantly, was assisted by the vast frigid landscape of the dead world<sup>72</sup>. The chaos demons wounded him, yet Lord Kimantor still got home. Demons captured him, but Lord Kimantor managed to escape. Once, even, the demons dismembered him, but Lord Kimantor got back.<sup>73</sup> He survived, led others, resisted and defeated the forces of chaos throughout the area.

“We need to survive this time,” he said, “Not to win.” And he explained his plan, which Norinel agreed to. They took one third of everything they valued, and they burned it in a fire, giving it to the invisible powers. They took one third and used it as bait, to draw the enemy into a trap. Then they took the last third and they put it upon their backs, and they set off across the winter land to go to the

Great Fortress.<sup>74</sup> The journey was dangerous, but Kimantor got his wife to safety.

In the fortress Lord Kimantor courageously fought his way into the temple of the missing god. He took the clothes and weapons of the missing god and tried them on. They fit perfectly. He got allies and friends, and after great preparations he led them against the enemy. He was called Lord Victory Nightbrother.

When all was ready Lord Victory Nightbrother summoned his chiefs, and they summoned their armies. Everyone was there: uz, aldryami, humans, dragonewts, mostali, flying people and even the Lord of Gold.

Lord Victory Nightbrother made use of the night, because he was kinsman to it. The evil ones had made the night horrible, but it was not friendly to them. Darkness was friend to Lord Victory Nightbrother and his armies. Even when the last of the gods had fallen and the worlds collapsed into each other, the darkness, cold and shadow resisted, then fought against the monsters and their chaos. Lord Victory Nightbrother was one of those resisting.

So Lord Victory Nightbrother marched to Nochet. The enemy couldn’t stand against the organized army. They fell back. But a few of the monsters liked being in the remains of the city. They fought. The Lord Victory Nightbrother and his forces engaged and destroyed them with shadow and fire. The Battle of Nochet ended chaotic presence in Esrolia. The Purifiers spread across the countryside.

When Lord Victory Nightbrother and his wife came to the city, they discovered that some people were there. They came out from where they had hidden. They were the Survivors, and the *Book of Survivors* records all of them. Most of them came down from Goose Hill where the Great Keeper,<sup>75</sup> who is All in One, had kept her people. But some other families came too, out from the swamp, from inside the places of power, and one family even crawled out of Blackmaw. The Grandmothers of the Survivors and the Liberators met and they confirmed that the Charter was intact. The people began to rebuild among into the ruins. Thus the city survived.

Lord Victory Nightbrother restored the temples to Esrola and Argan Argar. He offered them sacrifices and after a time his parents both returned. They had Voria with them, too, and the world began to grow.

Norinel is now called the Mother of the City.

They swept off the Trade Plaza.<sup>76</sup> His father’s sons<sup>77</sup> set up booths for trade. They also moved all corpses to the Necropolis.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Thigh and Knee Demons, to reveal the secrets here.

<sup>70</sup> Diligent Workers. The Old Diligents are Deru, Danu and Aru (a wild bean, a wild root and a wild tree fruit, none of which need little light to grow.)

<sup>71</sup> Hence the modern custom of ritual fasting to commemorate ancestral deeds, and goose meat sanctified as suitable only for sacred times.

<sup>72</sup> This is because, of course, Argan Argar was of the kin of the Darkness that ruled the world.

<sup>73</sup> “From the dead lands the dead came back, the lifeless transcended, the dead land turned upside down and none can ever now life from death.”

<sup>74</sup> Great Fortress. Aka the Shadow Plateau, where Kimantor’s father lived.

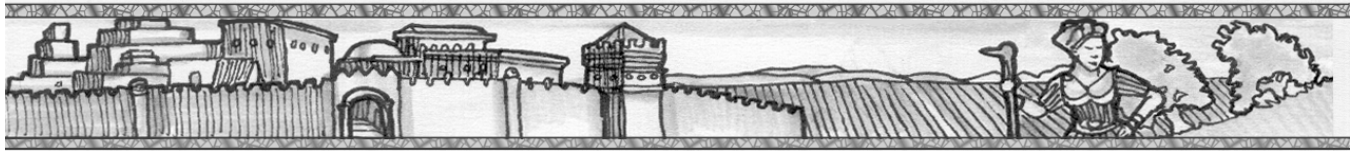
<sup>75</sup> Great Keeper. Imarja.

<sup>76</sup> In fact they took control of the sacred oversight on the market.

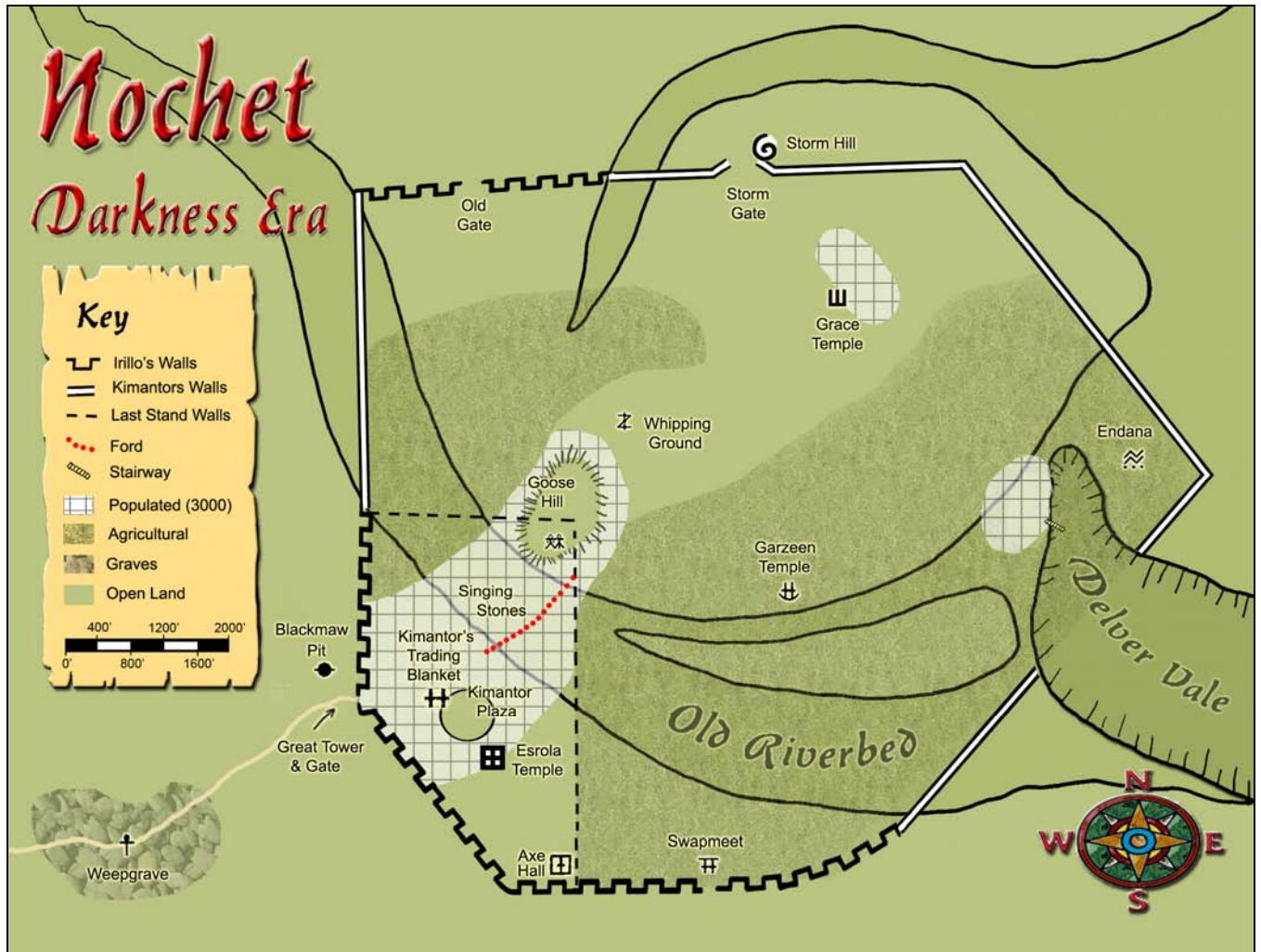
<sup>77</sup> “his fathers sons” here means traders. These sections indicate the establishment of regular, and regulated, trade.

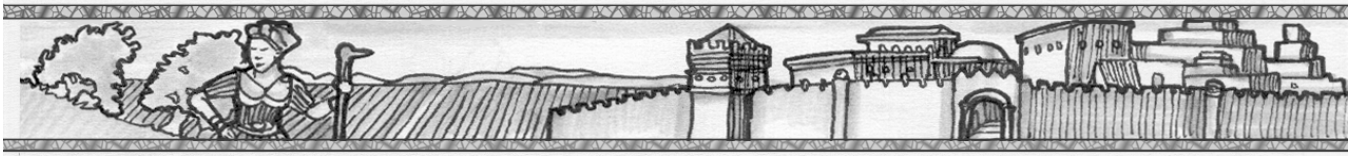
<sup>78</sup> Little necropolis. The mortuary.





## MAP OF DARKNESS ERA NOCHET





## THE SILVER AGE

*The fortune and security of Nochet reached a new height in the time of Merngala the Great Queen.*

*The years during her lifetime are called the Silver Age. This is approximately the time between the first light in the east and the first sunrise.*

*Many great people were active at this time, and they are called the Silver Age Heroes.*

### THE SILVER AGE

When the Eighteen Grandmothers had taught people how to see Imarja again, and to make the proper prayers and the proper sacrifices of Life and Self, then the Golden Egg of Life came again. They each formed a favorite being who would help the many people to find their way. They formed the Silver Age Heroes, who guided the folk and made the world good again.

### MERNGALA, THE GREAT QUEEN

All women are equals,<sup>79</sup> but sometimes one is imbued with such great power of Imarja that she does immense deeds, and stands out among equals. They are the Great Queens, and Merngala is one.

Queen Grandmother Merngala was one of many wise and powerful women of Nochet, but so decisive were her insights, and so powerful her actions, that her contemporary Grandmothers are practically overshadowed. Even after the Secret Eight struck against her,<sup>80</sup> so great is her fame that we do not know those rebels' names.

1. Youth
2. Early success – Filial Court
3. Big (city) Growth Period – Vogarth
4. The Splendor – The Wall, The Great Square, The Harbor
5. The Young Men
6. The Granddaughters

### SESTARTO THE ARTIST

Sestarto the Artist shaped the Landscape to create Ageless Beauty. He made the Farfalls, the Dance Scene of Painted Valleys, the Three Faces of the Crags, and the Walls of Veseularin. His sculptures became more and more realistic as he worked, for as he said, "I am just the vessel of my lord's creation, as these are mine." Once he made a statue in human shape. That was Ahrela, the Most Wanted, the Desired. For several centuries the statue was worshipped because everyone was seduced by it, and everyone was sure it was Uleria. Ahrela is still among us.

### PANAXLES THE ARCHITECT.

Panaxles the Architecht was the great builder of the period. He made<sup>81</sup> the palace of the queen and other famous buildings.

Panaxles and Sestarto were always rivals. First they were friendly with each other, but their friendship grew strained. In these contests Panaxles always won, for his creations were handsome and useful. Then Sestarto called for the Contest of the Needle.

They were competing for the attention of Serzeen, a woman of great charm and renown. Sestarto had her be the sole judge in their contest, and she chose Sestarto. In a rage, Panaxles killed the artist, and then in a fit of regret, himself.

### KALOPS

Kalops is the Sacrifice, another Esrolian hero. He gave his very life to his land. His story is the first historical sacrifice. He gave his life to animate the Victory Spirit that inspired the troops at the Battle of Henderel, where the dog men were defeated and destroyed to the last creature.

### VOGARTH

Vogarth is also called Big Man. He is a huge, strong and generally kind man, but noted as much for his dull mind as his great power. He was from the land of Usedri, and was the strongest man in the world

"It is not secret. Everyone knows me. I am Vogarth the Big Man,

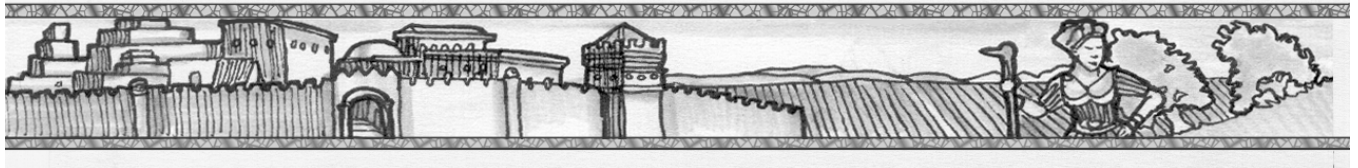
He did many great deeds. The Big Man was always ready to engage in challenges of strength. Some He threw the dragon ship up onto Shadow Plateau, and the trolls ate the Waertagi. Another time he challenged Jeri Babo, called the Immovable Person, and pushed him off his chosen place. A huge stone giant once came and threatened Ezkankekko, who called for Vogarth's help. He came running and cracked that stone giant with his hammer, and saved the troll king.

Another time he carried the wondrous Living Stone Tree from the Footprint to Queen Merngala's house. She took him as her husband-protector for a while, and he is the father of her triplets.

<sup>79</sup> All women are equals, or rather, (in the eyes of Great Imarja) all women (of Esrolian blood) are equal (though tradition grants to elders the duty of respect, and to grandmothers, the duty of obedience.)

<sup>80</sup> The Rebellion of the Eight was a reactionary backlash against the power and popularity of Merngala.

<sup>81</sup> He "made" the large structures in that he planned and led in the construction.



## NOCHET IN HARMAST'S TIME

*Here are the stories and background concerning the city of Nochet, and especially its development, as it was about the time of Harmast (around 411 ST at the end of the Theyaling Age).*

### WHEN THE UPLAND MEN CAME

The Esrolian people were relatively untouched by the teachings of the Theyalan Lifebringers. They had their own worthy tales of survival, and thus they welcomed the newcomers but did not fall under their sway. They acknowledged the gods and goddesses, and worshipped some, but only in the Esrolian fashion. The Lifebringers passed onward west, bringing their teachings to the sorry savages who lived farther on.

### THE RULE OF PALANGIO THE BRIGHT LORD

The World Council of Friends came to Esrolia with mixed intentions. They wished to rule it, and even to conquer it if need be. The forces were led by Palangio, the son of Nysalor, the White Light. He came with bluster and threats, but the Grandmothers met in council and returned to him with peace and plenty. They did not give up their respect and offerings to Ezkanekko and his shadow people. They explained to Palangio that to do so would cast them into its trollish maw, and when he disbelieved them, they showed him a horrifying vision that convinced even the Bright Lord of its truth.

But they had also offered to Palangio the tribute in goods, food and warriors that he demanded. The Bright Lord was hesitant, but on orders from his father, he finally obeyed. Palangio was the overlord of Esrolia for many years after that though he was absent and had governors at first, then his many sons, to oversee for him there.

When Great Arkat came to Esrolia with his conquering army The Visionaries of Enervi foresaw what would occur. Many Grandmothers secretly helped the invader while others outwardly supporting the empire of Nysalor. Civil war broke out, however this aided Arkat more than the empire and, after his army came, they settled the issue. The Grandmothers who had helped Gbaji came to their senses and the civil disputes ceased.

Peace again came to Esrolia, as everyone wished.

### PLACES OF NOTE

#### AEOL CHURCH

The Waertagi rule the oceans, but the closed sea of the Choralinthor has boat people, fishermen and their like, who regularly sail upon and across it. Communication between the different peoples around the Choralinthor was well established. The boat people often ferried representatives

and traders between them. During the first century, even the people who lived outside the coasts of the Choralinthor became known in Nochet.

A colony from Esvulari settled in Nochet sometime in the first century. They built a small church dedicated to Holy Aeol. But when they wanted to build a larger edifice, to deal with their larger resident population, they had to build outside of the city. Their priests found a patch of ground to the south of the city that was unclaimed by any Grandmother. "Let them live among the dead," said the Council (though at that time it was only near the local necropolis).

The Aeol church was the only significant Malkioni religion in the region, though it was always a tiny minority in Nochet.<sup>82</sup> Missionaries, merchants and refugees of similar faiths sometimes reached Nochet from distant Slontos, but never managed for establish a colony or meaningful church beyond a handful of hard-core believers.

#### ANTONES ESTATE

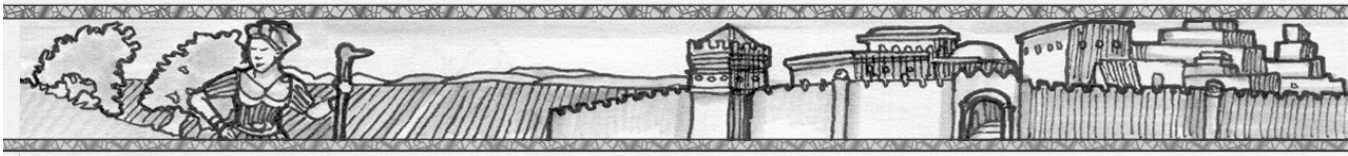
West of the city is a vast burial ground that is often called the Necropolis, or "City of the Dead." It began at Weepgrave, where the first dead person was interred with burial rites. Nearby was erected a different form of dealing with corpses—the funeral byre of Barntar. Since nothing was left of the burnt bodies afterwards, the funeral pyre area did not grow in area. But more and more people were buried, and the grave yard began to spread. It eventually surrounded the Barntar Pyre, and so the practitioners of immolation removed the site to Storm Temple.

A vast cemetery accumulated as the generations of people of Nochet were buried. When the world ended these bodies, bereft of souls, rose. The dead formed armies that assaulted the living. The defenders always threw them back. At last Lord Victory Nightbrother sent them all back to their graves,<sup>83</sup> and instituted the ceremonies to keep them there. He named a Keeper of the Fields of the Dead to maintain the rites to keep them there.

Antones was the first person set in charge of the necropolis. No single family oversaw it, but only Antones and the people he chose. No one is born into that priesthood, and almost anyone can be allowed in. This became the Cult of Antones, the Lord of the Cemetery. They oversee all the funeral rites for the Necropolis.

<sup>82</sup> Or indeed, anywhere outside of Esvularia.

<sup>83</sup> He brought from Goose Hill some of the souls for these bodies, and rejoined them, and the bodies died again properly. Then the others, as if now able to discern between life and death, also went to their graves.



The ancient usage and custom is unchanged now, but the area is larger. Within it family areas are marked off, but it has no houses, residences or homes. It has only tombs, sepulchers, cenotaphs, crypts, mausoleums, graves and the occasional memorial and garden. Roads traverse it, and many more paths. Under the guidance and protection of the Antonos cult people can visit their ancestors, or other famous personages to make offerings to them.

Large scale regular annual ceremonies are regularly held.<sup>84</sup> Several days each year are spent placating the dead at Antonos Estate - and a ritual delegation is sent to the Great Necropolis some thirty miles away. On Ancestor Day<sup>85</sup> the souls of the dead and long-dead wander around the city. When they find a descendant who has insufficient Filial Piety, the ancestors whip him. If someone has blasphemed the ancestors, then they are severely beaten, and sometimes dragged unwillingly to be with their ancestors!

### AXE TEMPLE

While Ernalda slept a great, sentient axe hovered about her resting place, destroying anything that threatened the beautiful sleeping goddess. The people offered sacrifices to it, and fierce women received magical powers from it in return. One of them, Bloody Dira, offered her entire self to the Axe, and became a part of it. She made an altar inside Irillio's Walls, at a weak spot in the defenses. Bloody Dira is still there, the guardian of the temple of Babeester Gor. This is a frightful place for a frightful goddess, and anyone who is not a member of the cult generally avoids the square.

### BLACKMAW AND THE TOWER

Blackmaw is a large pit that leads to the Underworld. Its mouth is on top of a mound, so you have to walk up before you can go down it. Several families used to live inside the pit in the earliest ages, and often came out for visits or were visited by the Six Sisters and their friends. When trouble began, many of the residents were seen to be Bruisers, for they weren't afraid to fight to help their friends. As the fighting got worse, other residents were recognized as the Biters, the Rippers and the Destroyers. The Bruisers were always friendly to people of the city, but those that came afterwards were not so consistent.<sup>86</sup>

The first Lookover Tower was made by Irillo. From its top guards could see down into the pit from afar, and they would shoot arrows from the Great Bow at anything that came out. During the Darkness the tower was destroyed,

but Kimantor rebuilt it later.. He put the Repulsion Bolt there, a magical weapon whose pulse sent the foes reeling back into their pits. This was also destroyed.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, Lord Victory Nightbrother built it again. He made the base of his tower to be the widest one ever, and each year the responsible family put another layer of stones one foot taller around its entire perimeter. They had to do that until no foes came from the pit. The tower is now over 300 feet tall, and on the vast roof are mounted the Great Bow and the Repulsion Bolt. Upon the occasions when things have attempted to come out, these have driven them back.

### CHORALINTHOR TEMPLE

There is a small temple to Choralinthor, considered to be unimportant here.

### CITADEL

When Lord Victory Nightbrother came to Nochet only one part of the ancient walls still stood, and that was the Lookout Gate and a short stretch of walls to either side. The great tower had fallen, but that fragment of the old wall still held back a vast horde of the dead that stood waiting, patiently, beyond it.<sup>88</sup> Lord Victory Nightbrother went out among the dead, and he sent them back to from whence they had come. Forever afterwards, the realms of the living and the dead were separate. However, other kinds of enemy armies still roamed the land, and some of the lord's own allies were even getting rebellious. To defend against those Lord Victory Nightbrother built new walls around the temple to Esrola, where the Diligent Workers hid. Also inside the walls was the house of Irillo, where the defenders of the gate lived. Then Lord Victory Nightbrother built Kimantor's Armory, another barracks wherein was the temple to Kimantor.

Those are the two armies of Nochet: that of Irillo to defend the city itself, and that of Kimantor to fight outside the walls as well.

In those dire times things were all mixed up, including land and sea. Most of the land all around the citadel was marsh, with streams that changed course, and whose listless currents flowed any which way. Several scrawny clans had survived on the high points, and especially on those that were also ancient places of power. When the citadel was built most of them moved in for safety, and even the recalcitrant took refuge inside its walls in dire times.

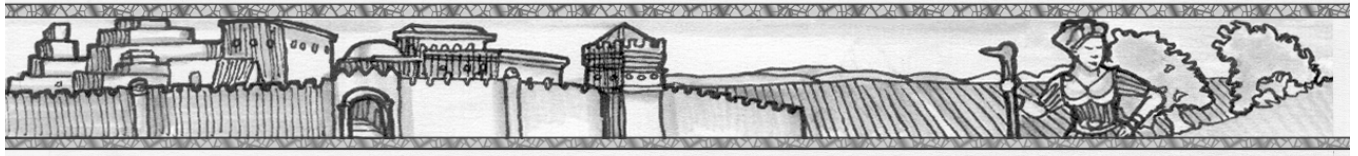
<sup>84</sup> On one of the four days after Shroud Day (Dark Season, illusion Week, Freeze Day) families send delegations to the Necropolis to assuage the restless dead. They leave at sunset and return at dawn.

<sup>85</sup> Ancestor Day is (Dark/Death week/Wild day).

<sup>86</sup> There are two types of denizens there, the good ones from the old days and the later ones, who are said (by the old residents) to be invaders, usurpers. "They came up from below."

<sup>87</sup> By foes from elsewhere, not from the Pit (i.e.-chaos).

<sup>88</sup> Very few of the dead had been able to enter the city by any route other than the gate. The ones who did no need to go through the gate had done so long before Lord Victory Nightbrother came to Nochet.



## DIROS TEMPLE(S)

On top of Diros Hill is the Altar of the Oar (C7). It is where Diros planted his oar when he landed here and showed people how to make boats. The Family of the Oar controls this holy place. But that's not on the shore now. Now two other temples are used. One is at the best docking spot, at Fisherman's Square, and the other in the marsh to the south.

## EXCHANGE AND RENEW TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

The Great Square is the major marketplace where merchants and customers from across continents meet. The god Argan Argar, the Lord of Exchange, the "great exchanger", oversees this. At first, he simply organized parties of uz that ran through the darkness to bring goods from one place to another.<sup>89</sup> Kimantor unrolled the trading blanket and told everyone the new rules, and Argan Argar sat upon the blanket to oversee business on the Great Square. That blanket is now where the High Priest of Argan Argar sits, in his temple that is in the center of the east side of the Square.

## EXECUTION SQUARE

When inequalities and violence began, the Good Times turned into the Bad Times. Bad Man was punished here, at the Whipping Ground, and every afterwards so has every other offender. It is now also the place of the public stocks, hangings, hand and foot chopplings, etc.

## FILIAL SQUARE

"It is the family that holds the world together," said Merngala. "We are here because of our families who came before, and we will thrive with our kin."

She instituted regular pilgrimages to the Filial Island. The special people that were there<sup>90</sup> seemed to know everyone. They ate goose all the time, although only the priestesses from there could kill the creatures for food. The geese were also like watch dogs in a normal camp, and honked to warn of invaders, intruders or even just strangers. Several times in its past the Filial Hill had been defended by an army of geese.

After the first time that she visited Filial Hill, Queen Merngala forbade anyone in her family to eat goose without the permission of the women of that house. The peoples many pilgrimages and offerings at filial Hill proved that revealed that ancestors of many of the citadel dwellers were at Filial Hill. They set up family altars.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Some say that Heort's family was one of these groups.

<sup>90</sup> Special people. That is, the dead who reside at Filial Hill.

<sup>91</sup> In fact, many of these altars were much older than Merngala. The story exaggerates here.

When the Panaxales the Builder first came to the city Merngala commissioned him to make a temple here. He had no relatives there, but he discovered the grave of the Visiting Uncle, and it is there that visitors to the temple make offerings. This building was his first in Nochet, and is simple in design, but effective. Now, to visit it, worshippers wander at time through enclosed corridors, with side rooms; and at other times over wide roofless areas dotted with the tables where families meet to share food with their Ancestors.

## FISHERMAN DOCKS

The many people of the Rightarm Isles come here to trade their goods. Piers have been thrust along the shoreline to facilitate their landing.

## GARZEEN TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

Garzeen is an old tribal god for some families on the Great Square. They insisted that their ancestor should have his part in this business, and a grand home on the square. The god now has certain rights to inspect goods, and has certain regular rites too.

## GATES

The city can be entered by any of these gates. Each is well guarded by fortified towers, stout doors and magical guardians.

- River Gate
- Filial Gate
- Lookover Gate
- Antonestan Gate
- Harst Gate

## GREAT HOUSES

The Great Families live in large enclosed mansions. This is one group of them.

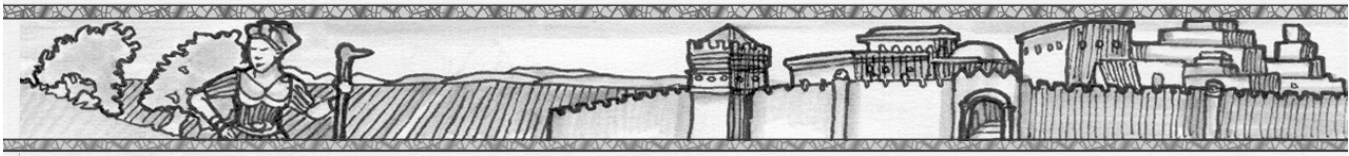
## GREAT SQUARE

"We need to have a center of our splendor, and it will be here," said the Great Queen Merngala.

She knew which goddesses were concerned with people, and she planned to make a place to honor those goddesses and gods. The Great Goddess Imarja instructed her, and she did what she had to do. She made the sacrifices and marked the temple perimeters with the blood of the sacred dinner. Panaxles came and laid down the flagstones of the court, and then erected the temples there, each under the guidance of the presiding holy family who would live there.

There was an artist named Sestarto too, and he came when he heard of this project. He made the statue in the





square of the Great Mother, and of the two beside her. When everything was done the woman named Serzeen<sup>92</sup> judged the statue to be more beautiful than the square, with all its temples.

Panaxles the Architect was so angry at this that he killed Sestarto out of jealousy. Afterwards Panaxles was so overcome with grief and self-recrimination that he slew himself. Temples:

- Our Great Mother, Imarja.
- Lord of Night.
- Argan Argar
- Garzeen
- Six Sisters
- Sky Voice, Harono

### GREAT WHEEL HOUSE (E7)

In the earliest times, the God of Change made a mill here, worked by giants. They changed grain into flour. It was a hand mill, for the giants; but they went away because people made too much noise. Afterwards it was an ox mill for the people who used it. The stone is no longer here because the Bindites quarreled with other families and refused to work it. Ernalda destroyed them for breaking the ancient oath, but the wheel broke too.

This house is broken and abandoned, but too strong to be destroyed. It is huge, built for the giants. Sometimes hordes of homeless people find refuge in there and sometimes only strange spirits, a family of unique animals, a sea of purple water with denizens. A jungle was in there for almost four years. It is poorly maintained, like a great ruin haunted by ghosts. There is nothing of value there.

### GRACE TEMPLE

Grace Temple is where the Blessing Goddess resides.<sup>93</sup> A large priestesshood oversees it, and the temple is also a school for priestesses in general. It is renowned throughout Esrolia, and rivals the Great Temple. Of note is that the Great Temple priestesses often scorn the Grace Ladies, but the Grace Ladies have kind words for their disparagers. "They are still young," say the elders of Grace.

### GREAT HOSPITAL

The great and kind Goddess of All Healing resides here. She established this edifice and custom in the time of Irillo, to succor and aid the wounded and ill. It is perhaps the greatest temple to Chalana Arroy in the world. Its priestesses are called the Sisters of Mercy.

<sup>92</sup> Serzeen is a title for "judge". We know this was actually Vulrenelia, the woman that the two men were fighting over. Sestarto modeled his statue of Imarja on her.

<sup>93</sup> An especially benevolent form of Ernalda.

### GREAT LIBRARY

The Great Library of Nochet is also called the Great Temple of Lhankor Mhy and is located at Redstone Square. The god has been present since the earliest times. He recorded the original Charter and Contract, and kept copies in his house. The god's son, Ephikhor the Librarian, took care of this house in the Gods Age, and is still the keeper of it.

This building is built in the traditional Y-shape, and has a grand scriptorium and reading room. It houses one of the greatest collections of written documents in the world. In the First Age, most of the documents were written on scrolls in the Murnulvretan script (called "cat-scratching" by the Heortlings"), although many other scripts can be found. In the Second Age, because of increased contact with Justeli scholars, added many codexes. Nearly all documents are vellum, though many scholars prefer the imported papyrus from the distant north. The Library has spilled over to include several buildings.

### LYKSOS TEMPLE

The great river Lykos is an old friend of the city. The temple here, outside of the city walls, is where the lady Ero used to meet with the river god. Their son and daughter were the first priest and priestess of the river cult.

### NIGHT TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

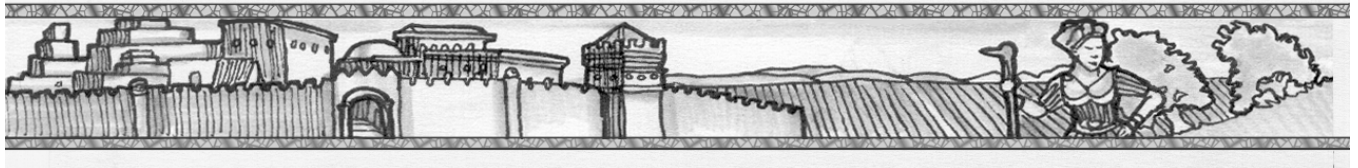
The Queen of Night<sup>94</sup> is Xentha. Her temple is in the rear of the Great Square, directly behind that of Imarja, which largely conceals this from within the plaza. It is squat, low and of black stone, and is largely underground. Regular propitiatory sacrifices are offered to her at the mouth of the temple.

This was destroyed by Palangio during his kingship here. Nothing was built upon the site immediately afterwards.

### NOBLE BROTHERS TEMPLES

"All these Young Men," said the Great Old Queen, "Shall have their own temples." In that way the Noble Brothers cults were institutionalized, and placed under control of the Queen of the city. These are all men's cults approved by Great Queen Merngala. They have written charters. These are quite different from cult to cult in many particulars, but all require subservience to the Most Noble Aunt. The oaths for this are strong, punishments severe. (However, see also the Storm Temple write up for an exception). These gods, once complex, now just provide troops for the army. The gods here are:

<sup>94</sup> His rune is a square with a diagonal line from corner to corner, and a darkness rune in the center.



- **Deresagar**, “son of Argan Argar,” ranks of spearmen, but especially trolls
- **Nolerianmar**, “son of Elmal,” horsemen
- **Harasarl**, Orlanthi-type warriors
- **Helamakt**, swordsmen
- **Kalavan**, “Veskarthan’s son,” with spears of flame
- **Tenderos**, the Copper Warrior
- **Tersh**, the Archer
- **Yelmalio**

### OUR GREAT MOTHER TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

Our Great Mother Imarja, is the central temple of the Great Square. It reaches upward, yet is open to observers in a beautiful example of the Panaxales style. The Living Goddess stands on stone outside of it. Sestarto the great artist carved and enlivened her. The priestesses here are of the ancient Norinel family.

### PANAXLES WALL

“I would like a wall, handsome but effective, to surround the splendor of the new city,” she said. Panaxles, who had seen the same vision that night, said, “I will do it.” And he did.

Panaxales’ Wall enclosed a bend in the river, which became the core of old Nochet.

### SACRED WAY

The main street of Nochet is this wide boulevard connecting Great Square with Filial Square.

The Way, sometimes also called the Way of the Dead, continues for thirty miles all the way to Great Necropolis and then on to the Great Temple Ezel. It is paved with stone and has shrines and statues and tombs along its entire length. This road is generally filled with religious festivals, celebrations, processions of gods and goddesses, etc.

### SIX SISTERS TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

The Six Sisters have a grand temple on the Great Square. They have never left, really. When Panaxles made this temple for them the idols and talking rocks were brought here. The marvelous Sestarites<sup>95</sup> then made the Six Sisters that everyone sees when they enter the temple. These are many statues and populated it.

<sup>95</sup> Sestarites. students of Sestar, who promulgated their master’s work across the square. These are the famous “living statues” that everyone mentions about the square. They are far more alive than most idols, so that even monks from the One God of the west feel their gaze. Initiates and devotees, of course, receive much more.

### SOCIETY ROW

Here are many of the family mansions of many of the ruling families of Nochet and Esrolia. They are each a large walled enclosure housing the key personnel of the family. Each family also owns other buildings about the city, and also many lands across Esrolia. The number of buildings and lands varies with the fortunes of the family.

### SKY VOICE TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

Harono the Sky King has a temple on the Great Square. He is King of the Messengers, and is used primarily now to send messages and offerings to the distant stars. This is the largest temple to the sky beings in the city.

### STORM TEMPLE

The Storm<sup>96</sup> Temple stands upon a prominent height north of Grace, at a bend in the river. The prominence of the hill has made the shaped the bend, not the river. This mound has always been dry even when the river and sea both flood.

This is the Temple of the Storm God, the dangerous god. Esrolians do not speak his name, but call him by one of three other names instead. The Storm Cult is permitted to exist because it is so ancient, but its members are scorned by Esrolian society because they are dirty, lazy people of vice. They do not fit into normal society. Furthermore, they are willing to welcome outsiders in.

The residents of this shifty quarter of town often say this is the temple of Orlanth. They mouth the words as if they were rolling dung around in it. But this isn’t his temple. Lord Victory Nightbrother banished Orlanth from here. The Grandmothers asked it, and he did it, and forbade Orlanth to come here. Therefore, Orlanth is never here.

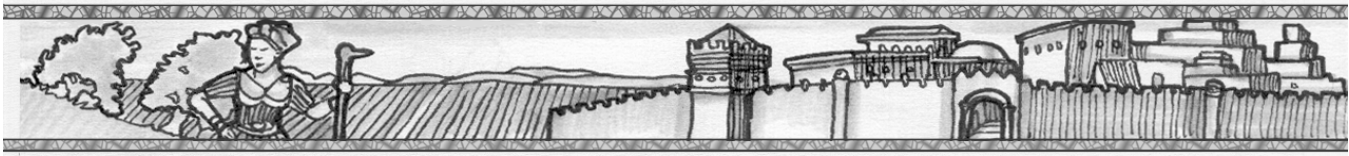
Three gods reside here. They are followers of the wicked god Orlanth. They have many ceremonies here. Each of those deities has his own temple upon one of the hillsides. On the fourth side is a ruined temple, where Orlanth was once worshipped.<sup>97</sup>

The widest known and most popular is Besengen.<sup>98</sup> He is a simple god, prone to errors and trying to fix them. His temple is a wooden structure on the east side of the hill. It

<sup>96</sup> The grandmothers use several terms for Orlanth, generally trying to avoid his name. others include Overgod, By using only epithets they (seek to) diminish his presence.

<sup>97</sup> Despite the statements made here, this is the Orlanth Temple. It used to be the family site of the Kodigvari. They work to deny or block out all the Kodigvari influences, and as such is shunned by the Esrolians. The knowledgeable people know this is true, but work to conceal it.

<sup>98</sup> It is derived from “that Big Guy over there.” This name is used in the “nearschool” storytelling method, where the deities are highly personified and motivations often even describe why something occurs. These include many ribald tales as well, and are the favorites among the lowest classes of the city. In the most popular stories Besengen is like your favorite aunt’s loudmouth alcoholic husband. He’s disliked, but tolerated, even though no one really understands what your aunt sees in the jerk.



holds the idol and sacred tools of worship, and these are rought out for the rites.

Second is Sarl. Sarl first came and was one of the Noble Brothers who defend the city. In his love story with Ernalda he is called Harasarl, and in the stories about her many husbands he is Husband Number One. He is a loyal and obedient husband, a terrific lover and good father to his children. When Orlanth comes to attack the city, Harasarl flies up into the air and drives him and his minions off, so the city has never suffered the full wrath of Orlanth's crushing assault. His temple is on the south side of the hill, and is a large square building with an open roof. Buildings around the outside of the walls house the priests and other workers at this temple.

Then there is Darkarl, the Outsider. He is the god of herdsman, and thus of thieves. Darkarl was the grandfather of Kodig, who was Grandfather of Rastagar the Destroyer. Everyone knows that he hid out on this hill, and he still has a hidey-hole there. A stone building houses a group of warriors on the west side. They are there to keep the thieves from emerging, and from going in there to hide.<sup>99</sup>

This temple has a most curious wall surrounding its sacred ground. The ramparts are on the outside, and the battlements face inward to the temple. Erinalartha, about whom many clever tales are told, did this. When the Orlanth priest asked to make walls around his temple after the Fish Riots<sup>100</sup> Queen Erinalartha agreed, and offered to build it and pay for it herself. Suspicious, the priest said he'd agree, but he would lay down the requirements for the wall. She agreed, but when it was built, the temple was confined by it. The priest was angry, but the deal was done.

This temple site includes the crematorium where the storm worshippers are burned.<sup>101</sup>

## STORMWALL

The last public works project of Panaxles was a low wall built to exclude the northern part of the city, where lived worshippers of the Storm Temple. Ten two-faced statues were spaced along it, and the two Dog Guards stood by the single gate in and out. The Low Wall was more of a marker than an actual defense work. Despite periodic efforts to make the residents thereabouts conform to city laws, they were always an unruly lot. It was common for outsiders to disrupt the city by inflaming the residents of Northside with liquor and bad words. Their subsequent rioting would destroy parts of the city and cause general mayhem.

Elemara finally ordered the wall laid down, and collected the Wall Tax to pay for it. At first it was just to keep out the rioters, but when the quarter rebelled and allowed the Waertagi to land their armies there the wall was reinforced to be a strong defensive barrier. Northtown lies outside the central city now.

## VESKARTHAN TEMPLE, GREAT SQUARE

The Great Fire is an old friend to Esrola. This temple has three altars around it. One is to burn offerings to the fire gods, the other to make offerings to other gods, and the third to burn the dead.

## VESKARTHANAL

Amongst the cults found in the city of Nochet is the "Caladralander" cult of Veskathan the Great Devourer, the great volcano god of the Vent. Near the central market is a small open space, called the Veskathanal, with a fire-altar open to the sky. Here the Great Devourer is appeased, for Veskathan is accountable for dangers from fires, which threaten crops and granaries during the scorching days of summer. The priests of Veskathan protect the grain through propitiation of the fire. On his high holy day in Fire Season, small live fishes, "in place of human souls" are sacrificed to Veskathan in his fire. Few initiate to Veskathan but during Fire Season many sacrifices are offered to him so that the Great Devourer might be satisfied. Each year, offerings and gifts are sent from Esrolia to the High Temple of the Vent to appease the Great Devourer and his fire-scarred Caladralander priests.

## VULTURE-EAGLE TOWER

This is the residence of one of the minor houses of the land, noted for its very tall tower whose top houses the famous vulture-eagles. They are famous for their interaction with Harmast.

## WAERTAGI PIERS

Two long docks reached far out into the waters to where the visiting Waertagi ships could anchor. Their greatest ships are of too great a draft to come any closer. Only Waertagi ships and boats may use these piers. Wagons ran up and down the docks, bearing trade goods.

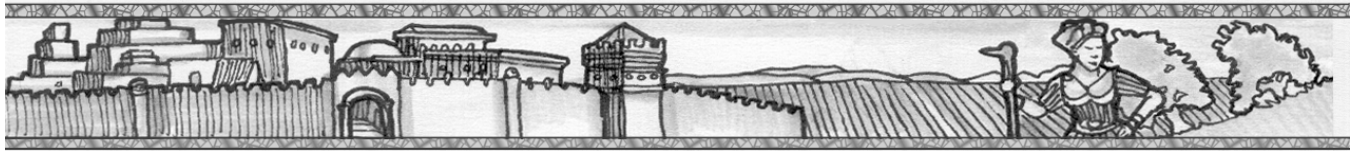
## XENTHA TEMPLE

See Night Temple

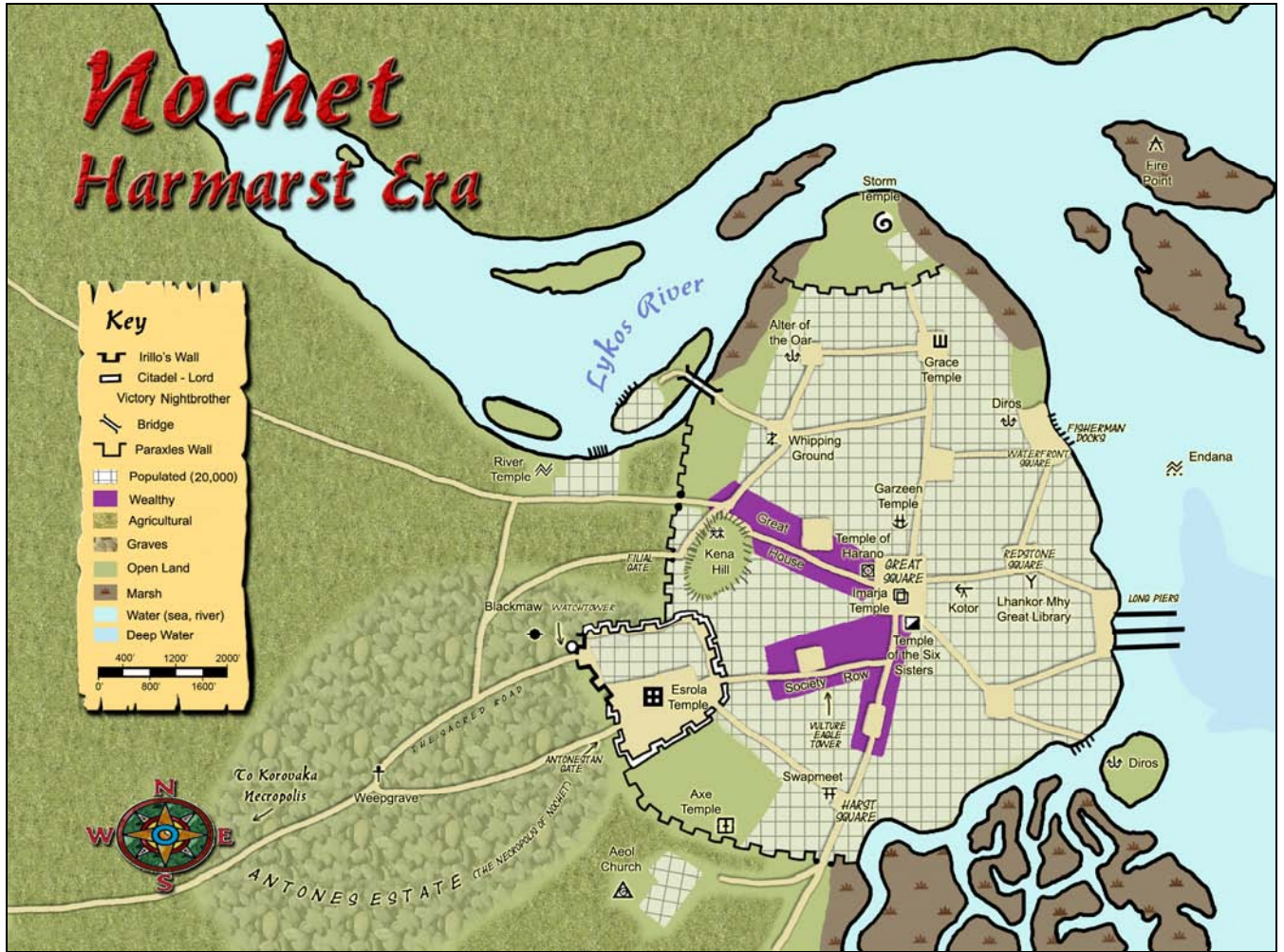
<sup>99</sup> Not a person in Nochet thinks they would do such a job, and most suspect these warriors to be the thieves.

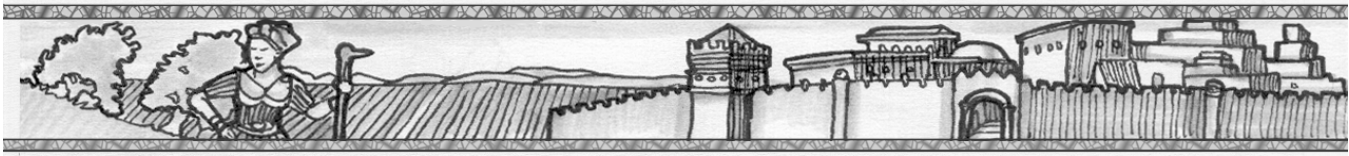
<sup>100</sup> Fish Riots, during which the temple was nearly destroyed.

<sup>101</sup> More than anything else, Orlanth's funerary rites mark his worshippers as outsiders in Nochet, as their dead are denied a place in the Necropolis and in the communal ancestor rites of Nochet.



## MAP OF NOCHET IN HARMARST'S TIME



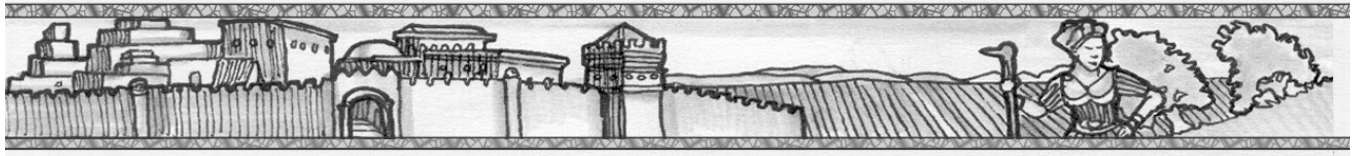


## NOCHET, SECOND AGE

### HISTORY - SECOND AGE TIMELINE

- 646** Abiding Book appears in Jrustela
- 660** (circa). Flagships of Doom raid Kethaela
- 718** Tanian's Victory
- 780** Scholarly Riot in Nochet against the Malkioni. These are provoked by missionaries of the Abiding Book trying to convert commoners, who receive instruction from the Imajarans and turn on the new comers
- 789-805** In a series of military and magical campaigns, the Middle Sea Empire conquers Slontos, destroys Loper Peoples, drives out draconic influences and imposes Makanism and the Abiding Book. Dissidents and refugees from Slontos flee and many take refuge in Nochet.
- 790 (circa)** God Learners contact the Ingareens in God Forgot, and persuade them to construct Locsil, the Clanking City
- 795 (circa)** Hadalinor, the "Sea Duke," pillages Esrolia and ravages the waterfront of Nochet, Rhigos, Karst and other ports. In response, the Sea Wall is built to protect the city from the sea. His attacks are finally stopped when the Choralinthor triolini aid the defenders. (during the reign of Emperor Svagad)
- 803 (circa)** Martien de Lukae appointed Archduke of Slontos by Emperor Svagad.
- 805** School of the White Room founded in Slontos at Pythos.
- 808 (circa)** The Red Fleet enters the Choralinthor. The triolini, prepared against them in advance, attempt to destroy the fleet as they have done before, but the enemy magic is stronger and the triolini are devastated. The fleet sails to Nochet, blasts down the sea wall, and its army storms ashore, burnings temples (whose guardians fail in their duty) and then carry off great riches and hundreds of slaves. (during the reign of Emperor Modos)
- 816** A great army, led by Duke Martien of Slontos, invades and conquers Kotorland. They remain in possession of the land for many years.
- 817** Duke Martien of Slontos then invades Esrolia, pillaging and taking thousands of slaves. He lays siege to Nochet, and is stopped because he violates the Nochet sacred ground of the dead, who rise up and destroy his army. But even his smaller forces, occupying other cities, retain possession of much of the land.
- 818 (circa)** Duke Orogerlant extends his conquest of Esrolia, and a powerful force marches north from Esvular and ravages Heortland. Some forces from Dragon Pass (during the reign of Emperor Miglos) intervene, and the duke sends major magical attacks and powerful raiding forces against the uplands. Dragons retaliate and cause widespread destruction across Heortland and Esrolia. Nochet suffers destruction called the Airborne Fires.
- 818-825** Seven Hurricane Years. In addition to the draconic forces of the Airborne Fires, the EWF rallies the storm worshipers to their cause and they send a devastating storm upon their foes for seven years in a row. The earliest ones reach Slontos, and sometimes beyond, but the God Learners work their own magic, and the seventh storm ravages Esrolia, but no more. A powerful back blow destroys many of the storm worshippers and their draconic allies.
- 826** The traditionalists in Nochet convince the population that their suffering comes from the occupying enemy. Scholarly Riots in Nochet are directed against God Learners, distracting them. A draconic army invades from the north, clearing much of Esrolia and forcing a withdrawal from Nochet. The Grandmothers welcome the draconic army to protect them from the God Learners. However, natural antipathy against the dragons causes resentment, and their occupation is never easy.
- 835** White Room elevated by the Holy Mountain Presence Review Board to status of University.
- 838** Martien called to the fleet of Emperor Brailaich and promoted. Surnestor appointed provisional Duke of Slontos.
- 840** Slontos invades Esrolia again. The fighting is fierce, and for a time, a stalemate.
- 842** Esrolia is overrun by Slontos and the God Learners. The attack is led by General Zamodos (Dorvis was one of his subcommanders). The westerners call this one of the "Krijalki Wars," using a name originally describing the wars against Arkat. Rather than be taken in assault, Nochet surrenders to Dorvis. The westerners are largely successful, until a major counteroffensive led by Lord Great Burin. He brings the dead of the EWF back to life, and at the Battle of Derovan drives the forces of Slontos back.
- 849** The Goddess Switch causes widespread famine in Esrolia. The Dragon Lords, busy elsewhere, are unable to maintain their hold and Esrolia regains its independence. Over the next 30 years many minor outbreaks of violence occur. Both God Learner and Draconic elements gain strength in parts of the land, and in Nochet.





**865 (circa)** Draconic uprising tries to take over the land again. A force from the north comes to assist, and lays siege to Nochet. They march over the Antones Estate, and when the dead rise the dragon magic causes them to burst, including those still underground. The ancient citadel is destroyed. After fighting against the hordes of darkness that keep coming out of the Blackmaw, the dragons withdraw. They leave only some governing forces, without any military to back them. When many of those leaders reject the dragon way, the land is again independent. The cycle begins anew.

**859-870 (circa)** the Zistorites settle in Kethaela

**886** Scholarly Riots against God Learners

**900 (circa)** Population of Nochet more than 100,000.

**907-917** Machine Wars

**907** Two Year Winter

**907** Siege of Zistorwal begun

**917** Zistorwal falls

**917** Esrolia devastated by Windless Typhoon (Heortland undamaged)

**930** Closing strike Seshnela

**935** Closing comes to Kethaela

**1000 (circa)** King Orstevin of the Hendrikings pays trolls and Esrolians to attack EWF as part of the Hidden Alliance.

**1035 to 1050 (circa)** King Andrin of the Hendrikings sends his brothers with an army to seize parts of Esrolia. Through cleverness, marriage and, sometimes, conquest they control the coastal cities of Rhigos and Amonel. An effort to take Nochet by treachery, however, results in the death of two of Andrin's brother and hundreds of their best men.

**1051** The "Devastation of the Vent". Angry Veskarthan, coughed a poisonous cloud that drifted southwest over Slontos. Waves of lava flowed from the lower parts of the volcano out to sea. A huge wave rolled over both arms of the southern islands and destroyed most of the manmade things at sea level. Lesser waves washed across the Mirrorsea, so that the seven deadly waves flooded all the cities around the Choralinthor .. Nochet, like most of the land, suffered terribly. The troubles of the dragon and god learner wars had weakened the goddess of the land and the guardians of the city. The eruption, ash cloud and subsequent famines brought the city low. Without the naval traffic of previous centuries the populace diminished as people dispersed to the countryside.

**1055** Andrar of the Hendrikings supplies many warriors for the Hendriking lords of the Esrolian cities. The Hendrikings conquer most of Esrolia.

**1075** The Grandmothers of Nochet launch a magical attack channeled through the farming cults of Esrolia, for which they had prepared for many years. Esrolia hit by brutal famine. The Esrola Wars begin.

**1077** King Davisin captured by Esrolians.

**1080** Ezel priestesses curse Grandmothers of Nochet. Ghost army from Necropolis attacks Nochet. Esrola Wars end. King Berevenos rules the Lost Lands.

## EARLY GROWTH

The city underwent some significant changes during the Imperial Age. The destruction of the Waertagi opened up a great trade by sea, and soon many ships bearing goods from afar visited Esrolia. The population of Nochet grew dramatically, reaching some 100,000 residents in the century before the Closing.

One not shown on the map is the vertical rise, precipitated by the increase in population that was confined due to the extent of the Antones Estate. Forenes, the city across the river and named after its founder, was sprawling and populous (but see the note on it, below).

## THE OUTSIDER WAR

These are tales of how Esrolia dealt with being the cockpit of conflict between the Middle Sea Empire and the EWF. Both sides occupied, but never fully conquered or took over, Esrolia. The Grandmothers and Queens managed to co-opt the rulers appointed by the foreigners. The Esrolians call the Second Age, the 'little God War'.

These stories tend to illustrate the ice-cold pragmatism of the Grandmothers when dealing with foreigners and tend to conclude with purges of those same foreigners at the order of the Grandmothers when the opportunity arrives.

## THE BRIGHTLIGHT EVENT

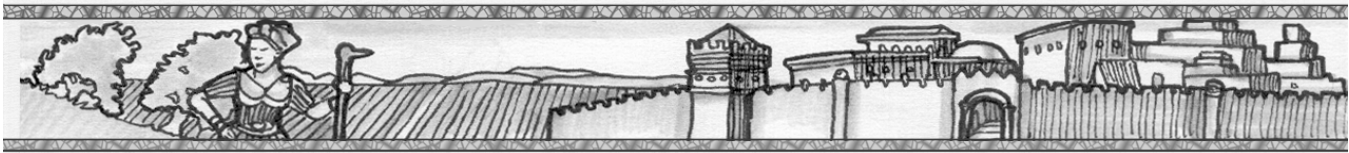
This is a story of the cult of Yelmalio in Esrolia. It is also called the Story of Orenda and Nansin.

In the time of the dragons the lords of Dragon Pass granted property to the warriors of the god Tharkantus. This god was a son of the White Light, and was widely worshipped in the north. Their leader was named Nansin, and was from a city called Vanx.

Imarja visited Orenda, who was called the Young Queen. She said, "You have saved yourself thus far, but now is the time." Orenda's own family were rightful holders of the land where the Tharkantus temple was being built.

Orenda got together her rightful procession, collected divine gifts of gold and sky, and went to where Nansin had his temple.

"She is shrewd and lewd," wrote the priests of the Sun Dome. "It is impossible for any man to keep his admiration for her hidden. But her overt advances upon our lord, and



of her hand maids and servants upon others in the temple, that I feel she ought to be banished forever. If she were not so beautiful, I would order her killed instead of banished, for such is her danger to us.” Lord Nansis resisted her advances enough times to be a gentleman, but she had herself cloaked in the Robes of Harono<sup>102</sup> and was the sky itself. The union was made in heaven, as they say, as sky was joined to the sun.

Orenda and Nansis, with his many armies and allies, conquered all the foes of the Haronon Robe Clan. They seized many lands, took over cities and generally destroyed all the significant foes of the clan. They destroyed everyone who opposed them, especially noting a legion of wyvens, a company of god learner soldiers and 5,000 “children of the earth.”

Orenda then fulfilled her promise to her lover, and wed him and made him King of Esrolia. His officers married priestesses, and his men married ladies. That night in their wedding beds these men were fed to Imarja. They were all murdered and set afire, or else burst into flame first and died that way. The entire city of Hesterneo was burnt to the foundations. A band of household guards took over the former temple site and made a temple to the gorite Goddesses.

Ever since, the Esrolians have loathed Tharkantus, who is now called Yemalio. They know Elmal is the rightful holder of the Sun Power. The Grandmothers have often backed the Elmal warriors to maintain their claim against foreign interlopers.

## WHEN THE BAD HANDERS DESTROYED THE REDWEAVE FAMILY

This story commemorates when the Esrolian Grandmothers hired violent and dangerous men to destroy another Grandmother ... and got away with it.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GOD LEARNERS IN NOCHET

There lived in the great city of Nochet a school of philosophers; magicians who were more clever than wise. They directed the Grandmothers when they were present, generally by communicating only through the Queens. This proved their undoing, of course, since the Queens were not the true rulers no matter what the philosophers said, demanded or thought.

<sup>102</sup> That is, they were made by Sky Beings. This set of garments appears often in the history of seducers. The sky powers are normally noted for their chastity, and these gowns are said to have “removed every last stitch of sexuality from heaven.” Esrolians calculate this to mean this dress is the *reason* there is not lewdness in the sky world.

One time when their leader demanded obedience Vulesarvia, leader of the Visionaries of Enervi, showed to him and his key followers what she had seen about the secret workings of the universe. In the vision the God Learners first saw their truths confirmed, then denied, then negated. This so confounded them that they were unable to function clearly, and they gave orders, countermanded them and cancelled them all in the same document.

Kestenelmal was the bright egg man who led 112 chosen followers to the temples, laboratories and houses of the God Learners and killed them all in three days of bloodshed.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GOD LEARNERS OUTSIDE OF NOCHET

Varimarja was the spokesperson who made offers to the Rainbow Overlord, a fierce dragon leader. Their agreement was in secret at first, even after Nochet was cleaned of the Slontos foreigners. When their child was born, Akkamaragan the Scintillator, the secret would not be concealed. Akkamaragan grew to adulthood in five days and stood upon the western tower gates and gave forth his great cry. At that hidden forces from among the peoples rose up and began fighting the invaders from Slontos. Shortly afterwards dragons from Dragon Pass swept down and destroyed the rest of the trespassers.

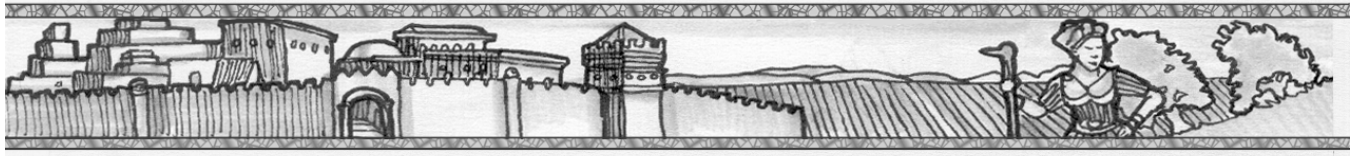
The Scintillator mated with a daughter of each of the Grandmothers, planning to have a demigoddess daughter with each. Then he burrowed into the earth and disappeared. However, his plan did not work, and only 32 daughters were born of his seed. Some of those were famous, others infamous. The most powerful was the family of the Redweave.

## URBAN DESTRUCTION

Nochet suffered several large scale devastations during the terrible Imperial Age. Twice dragons wrought widespread ruin, one a God Learner fleet bombarded the city, and another time the Slontos army spent months leveling the buildings.

Esrolia was the scene of much intense fighting between the God Learners, coming either from Slontos or by sea; and the EWF. Nochet, as the central point of population and economics, was a special target. It was invaded and occupied at different times by both sides, and under both circumstances was attacked and severely damaged. In between, factions supporting both sides fought against each other, and also against the natives, who in their turn fought for independence.

Each time it seemed to establish itself with stability and order a new invasion or civil war destroyed the peace. Great



parts of the city were destroyed, but each time city managed to rebuild itself, at least until the Ruin.

Regrettably, the great events were all destruction, or survivals caused by them.

Without the naval traffic of previous centuries the populace diminished as people dispersed to the countryside.

## 1051, VESKARTHAN'S REVENGE

Veskarthan was tortured by everyone for centuries. The resident dwarfs were forced by circumstance to increase their work and this troubled Veskarthan. Furthermore, his people were often enslaved, and his very worship was disrupted by the worship of Caladra & Aurelion.

Veskarthan erupted. The focus of the devastation was directed toward Slontos, but the kick back shook all of Kethaela. A ten foot tall wave passed through Esrolia, knocking down almost everything, followed by smaller ripples. Nochet, like most of the land, suffered terribly. The troubles of the dragon and god learner wars had weakened the goddess of the land and the guardians of the city. The eruption, ash cloud and subsequent famines brought the whole land low. More people abandoned the once great city. It was the lowest that the city would sink.

## PLACES OF NOTE

### AEOL CATHEDRAL

Influx of foreigners spurs the growth of several other Malkioni churches. When Makanism<sup>103</sup> took over Slontos dissidents from every other form of Malkionism fled, and many took refuge in Nochet. Their struggle against each other wreaked havoc.

For a time the Church of Arkat established peace among them, and coordinated all the others in resistance to Makanism. However, Church of Black Arkat was exterminated by the Righteous Nochet Crusade when Slontos first took over the coastal lands of Esrolia.

For a long period the Aeolian Church, considered "native" to Nochet, was the religious leader of all Malkioni in Nochet. The first Bishops of Nochet date from this time, and were of the Aeolian Church. They were a minority religion at best, without a widespread base. Rivalries weakened the bishop, who was replaced for a time by an Atoxic bishop. But the Orthodox Abiding Book church got so many converts and settlers that at last it took over. Several churches were established in the city and nearby cities, even in the face of Pagan opposition. However, by the end of the Imperial Age the Orthodox god learner church was fragmented by its own quarrels, and many smaller churches became established (congregations of up to 500 or so).

## ANTONES ESTATE

The extensive cemetery grew even larger, extending from the Harst Gate in the south to the river, in the north. When Duke Martien and his Slontos army invaded Esrolia they tried to approach the city over the necropolis, and on the third night of their siege the dead rose and destroyed most of the invaders.

A similar attempt against a draconic army resulted in the Bursting Graves as draconic magic disrupted the worlds of the living and dead.

## FORENES

The city across the river mouth from Nochet was a sprawling mass of houses and warehouses, businesses and markets. It had several of its own sacred sites, and for a while seemed as though it might rival Nochet as the leading city at the mouth of the Lysos. However, it was never properly fortified, and incursions of dragons or Slontos forces largely destroyed it.

## HARBOR, NEW

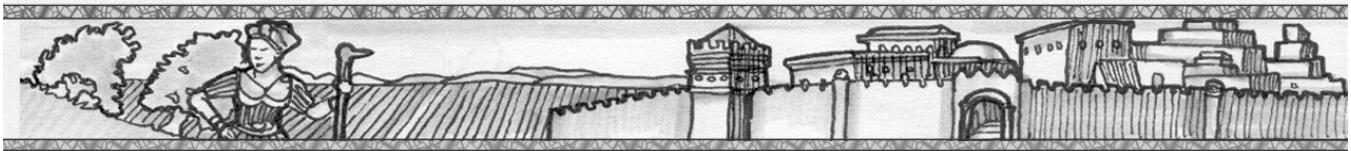
The old Waetagi docks were used for years by other ships, but when the first God Learner fleet entered the harbor they burned them to the waterline. The sailing hazard of the underwater piers remained for a long time until the Grandmothers paid the Trioloni to remove them. The Waterside Allies, a group of families, banded together to plan and finance a new harbor and docks for the influx of trade.

Darmerngala was a sorceress. With the Waterside allies she went to the shoreline one day, and allied with the Ranana, and they made Irinioori come. The sorceress put the god in an airy net, and this made the Choralinthor itself come forth. Then they all made terms, and in the end the gods got their Seasonal Presents, and a way was always available to each to the city from the sea. These sacrifices are made over the place called the Sea Bed, where Ranana and Irinioori live in happiness.

## HARBOR (OLD)

The "harbor" to the south of the city was the same old fishing village that had been there for centuries. However, the families that were cut out of the New harbor by the Waterfront Alliance often used it for their own trading. This was a source of contention, in which the fishermen were often the victims in the middle. But they would just sail out into the marsh and withhold their fish from everyone until they were invited back again.

<sup>103</sup> The religion of the Abiding Book.



### ISSARIES TEMPLE, HARBOR SQUARE

When the New Harbor was made the Great Merchant Forang Fortune cast bones to see who ought to oversee it. The runes said, three times without ambiguity, Issaries. The Temple ground was sanctified at the harbor, and the great statue walked here from Kerofinela (the little ones were added later).

### RIVERWALL

Later on defensive walls was built along the riverside in many places. It is set back from the river, where the ground is stable.

### ULERIA TEMPLE

After Harmast...<sup>104</sup>

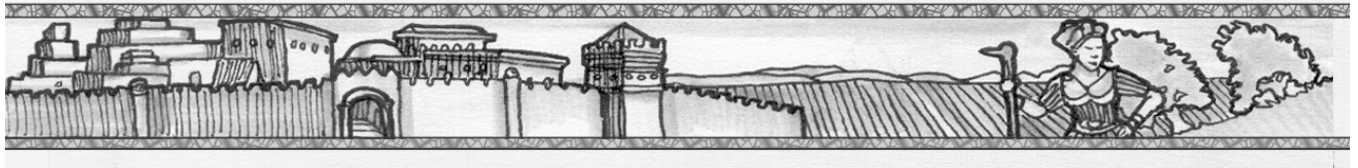
### VIRTUE GATES

Ceremony to go through all of them in one day. The Panaxales Wall is broken by several gates:

- Harmony Gate
- Filial Piety Gate
- Prudence Gate
- Compassion Gate



<sup>104</sup> Here the text fragment ends and perhaps was destroyed.



## THIRD AGE NOCHET

### HISTORY

For some time the city of Rhigos bypassed Nochet for size and importance. Nochet was reduced to less than 5000 people at the end of the Grandmothers Wars. However, soon many families sent their Grandmothers back here, for the sake of Traditions. Old holy places were uncovered, artifacts unearthed, and temples rebuilt.

Holy peoples heroquested to discover the ancient city, and great effort was spent to rebuild it according to its former form.

Belintar reinstated many ancient ways and contributed to the reconstruction of the city. His guidance was accurate and surprised many people, making their acceptance of him easier. The city recovered under Belintar, and the population grew to about 20,000 residents in a generation or two.

After Dormal departed from this city it began to grow rapidly in prestige and wealth, and after the Opening became widespread many people preferred Nochet over all other cities, and it exploded in population. Many people were foreigners this time. By 1621, the population of Nochet is more than 100,000 people.

### THIRD AGE TIMELINE

- 1120** Dragonkill. Following the Dragonkill, Kethaela is in turmoil. Hendriking warlords are thrown into turmoil with the death of the Hendriking king. Trolls appear in force throughout Esrolia, demanding tribute.
- 1125** Grandmothers of Esrolia unite at Nochet and reclaim half of the Lost Lands.
- 1145 to 1148 (circa)** Hendriking hero Finelvanth the Flyer re-conquers the Lost Lands. Peace is negotiated between the Hendrikings and the Grandmothers with the marriage of Finelvanth and Queen Aranda of Nochet.
- 1149** Finelvanth acclaimed King of the Hendrikings.
- 1155** Finelvanth betrays Queen Aranda and is divorced and cursed by the priestesses of Ezel.
- 1155-1168** Aranda's War ravages Esrolia, but ultimately the Hendrikings are completely driven out. The key turning point is in 1166 when the Hendriking chiefs of Rhigos betray King Finelvanth and acclaim Erinsulva as queen of Rhigos. Population of Nochet reduced to less than 5000.
- 1170** Caselain the Traveler arrives in Rhigos bearing the offer of Trade Allegiance from the Western Tribes. Over the next four centuries, Rhigos is enriched by the Merchant Princes of Maniria and surpasses Nochet in size and wealth.

**1247-1250** Rebellion of the False Imarjarin.

**1313** **Belintar the Stranger**, his origins unknown, swam ashore to the Rightarm Island of Sindpaper. He began a five-year struggle, which ended with Belintar deposing Ezkankekko in 1318.

**1336** Belintar showed signs of age and disease, and the first Tournament of Luck and Death resulted in his divine soul inhabiting a new body, formerly belonging to Sethtalar, his Right Hand Speaker.

**1580** **Dormal the Sailor** left Nochet and performed the Opening of the Seas, lifting the 650-year ban on oceanic sailing.

**1605** Lunar defeated by armies of Belintar at the Building Wall Battle.

**1616** Evil Year in Kethaela. Belintar's body dies and the Master's of Luck and Death fail to produce a successor. The Kethaelan navy is destroyed by Wolf Pirates. The Kethaelan army is defeated by Entrulings invaders led by the warlord Greymane.

### THE DESPOTISM OF THE GRANDMOTHERS

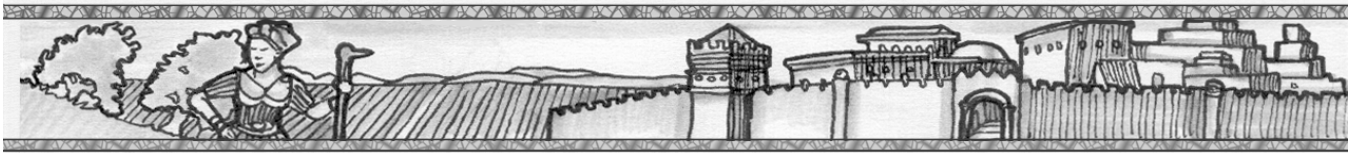
After the Dragonkill, the Esrolian Grandmothers reestablish absolute rule by the Grandmothers Council and the city Queens. After centuries of dealing with powerful foreign overlords, conquerors and allies, the Grandmothers strongly reestablish their matriarchy as the sole ruler of Esrolia.

Over time the harshness disappeared, in part because some clans decided to take a kinder line towards the clients and outsiders. Yet the early yers after the end of the dragons is still remembered as a particularly harsh time.

### 1247 – THE REBELLION OF THE FALSE IMARJARIN

The False Imarjarin was a man given a woman's name by his abusive grandmother. He grew up to be a strong and violent man who suffered many abuses from his grandmother – his name, the loss of the treasure he fairly won, the rejection of his love marriage and finally he was sold into slavery by his grandmother. The False Imarjarin rallied his fellow shepherders, allied with foreigners and mercenaries, and threatened to make himself King of his clan. His rebellion was wildly successful at first. His mobs had some kind of magic that frightened enfranchised women into inaction. His rebellion eventually failed, as rebellions invariable do, when he was betrayed by his best friend (who valued sex more than rebellion).





### 1313 – BELINTAR THE GOD KING

The story of Belintar is too well known to have to repeat here. Belintar reinstated many ancient ways and this contributed to the reconstruction of the city. He financed rebuilding temples and markets. His guidance was accurate and surprised many people, making their acceptance of him easier. Nochet recovered and its population grew to 20,000.

The city was further enhanced when many of the families shifted their home to Nochet after Belintar's favor began to enrich it.

### 1580 – DORMAL

In 1580 Dormal the Sailor completed the testing of his newly-made ship that was based upon long-lost plans. More importantly, he held the vision of the magical act that would appease the gods of the sea and overcome left Closing. He sailed from Nochet and successfully performed the Opening of the Seas, lifting the 650-year ban on oceanic sailing.

At first, many people from the nearby places that had seen Dormal and his ship flocked to Nochet to learn the technology and knowledge. Then they came from farther and farther away. Ever since then Nochet has harbored the affection of all sailors, who see it as the birthplace of their profession. This has contributed greatly to the huge success of Nochet as a port city.

Even after Dormal departed from this city Nochet grew rapidly in prestige and wealth, and after the Opening became widespread many people preferred Nochet over all other cities. The population of Nochet exploded, as it became the richest and greatest city of coastal Genertela. Many people were foreigners this time. By 1621, Nochet has more than 100,000 residents.

### 1616 – THE EVIL YEAR

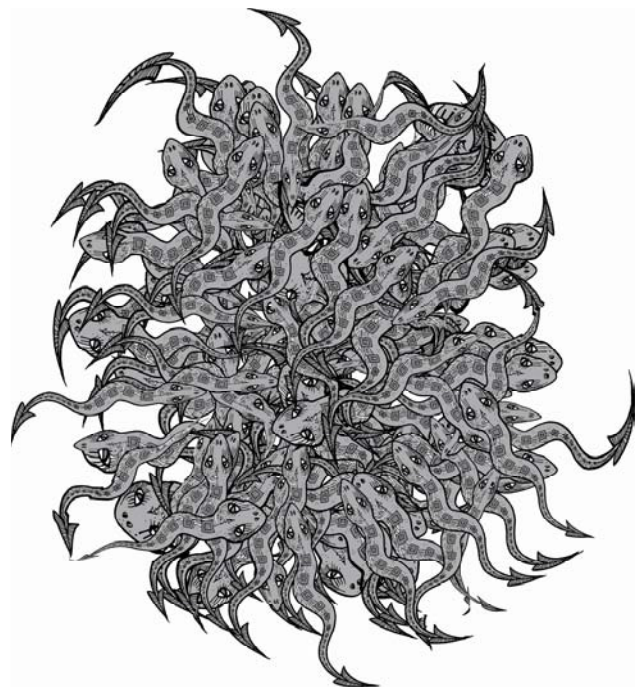
1616 was the Evil Year. For three centuries, the God-King blessed Kethaela with unity, peace, and prosperity. He appointed governors and their deputies, generals and dukes. His wisdom ensured justice and his magical rituals ensured fertility and prosperity. As had happened 21 times previously, the mortal body of Belintar expired in Fire Season of 1616. The next day select individuals throughout the Holy County discovered or otherwise realized that they were part of the Masters of Luck and Death. They acquired the proper accoutrements, and commenced the rites to prove they were worthy of eternal bliss.

The rites of the Masters of Luck and Death did not produce an immediate winner. This was not a matter of great concern since this often occurred with the Masters of Luck of Death - indeed, once the rites took nearly a full year to complete. The claims by some of the early losers that unknown red-clad intruders had defeated them caused little worry outside of those who always prophesize doom.

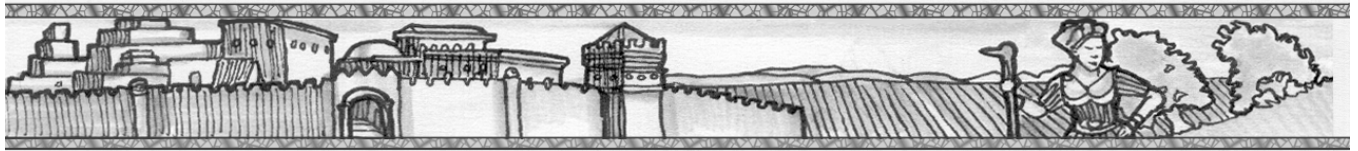
However, soon after the disappearance of Belintar, the savage Entrulings<sup>105</sup> destroyed the armies and navies of Kethaela. People placed all their hopes and prayers with the Masters of Luck and Death, but the each of the candidates failed after being by red-clad intruders. The few that nearly completed the ritual reported encountering a Living Goddess - beautiful, terrible, garbed in red, with harp and jeweled sword - who blocked every path to Belintar. The Masters of Luck and Death had failed.

### HERO WARS

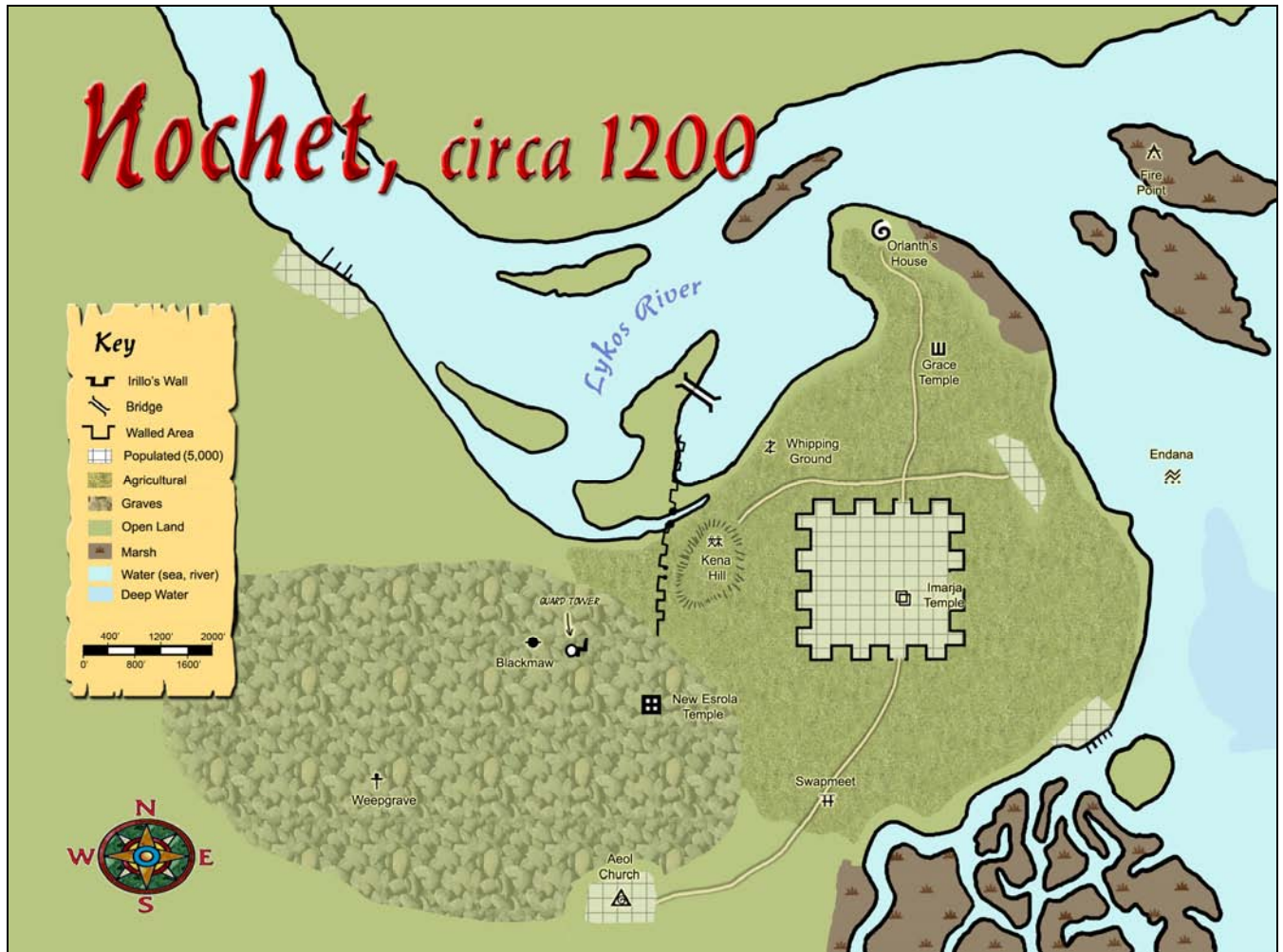
The future is unknown. At this time a struggle between the Warm Earth alliance and the Red Earth alliance led up to the Battle of Pennel Ford. History is yet to be made.



<sup>105</sup> The Entrulings are a savage race of animal people who once lived peacefully under the rule of the Trader Princes, but now seek only war, rapine, and plunder under their Lord of War.



## MAP OF NOCHET, CIRCA 1200



### PLACES OF NOTE

#### ANTONES ESTATE

The grave yard was reduced in size again, to its original boundaries. Belintar had a new gate built to the west of the New Esrola Temple called the Gates of Life and Death.

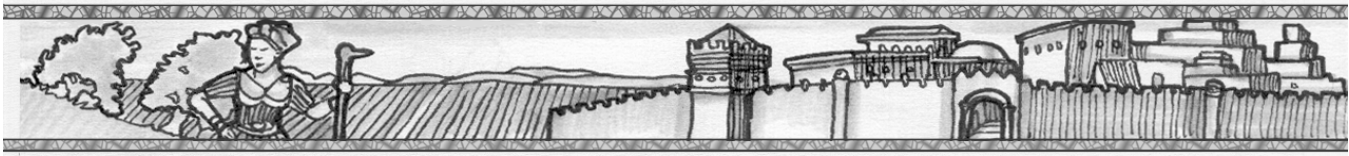
#### BELINTAR'S WALLS

Belintar built new walls from the Lykos to the Diros marsh. These walls were built over the ruins of the ancient walls of Irillo and Kimintor.

#### DORMAL TEMPLE

This Temple was built after many people had reproduced his miraculous methods of sailing the hostile seas. Some proposed to replace the Issaries Temple that had diminished much since the seas were Closed. But instead a new temple, more traditional, was built on the Harbor Square.

It is relatively modest, for it never has large crowds worshipping there, nor a public holiday. Instead it is visited by captains before they set sail, by merchants with ships at sea, and by others who are about to set off on any perilous voyage (even over land). But though modest in size, it is beautifully decorated and lavishly adorned by the many great donations from grateful worshippers.



### NEW ESROLA TEMPLE

The old Esrola Temple was badly damaged during the Grandmothers Wars and a new temple was built outside of the Sacred City on the site of the old. The new temple is both above and below ground and surrounded by a sacred field and garden.

In the later Third Age, the New Temple is within Belintar's Walls near the Gate of Life and Death. The area quickly became built-up, and a wall was built to enclose the sacred fields and garden.

### ISSARIES TEMPLE, HARBOR SQUARE

The Issaries Temple is still on the Harbor Square, facing the Choralinthor. The Issaries Temple itself is large, and the entire side of the building facing the harbor is open, and almost three stories tall (one of the tallest buildings in Nochet). Within structure is a massive statue of Goldentongue, 30' tall; and his two sons, each 10' tall. The three altars before the statues are constantly busy. Within the other three walls of the temple are three floors of modest rooms. The lowest floor is for administering the market square and temple. The others are leased out to merchants who might set up a shop, or a branch of their shop which is elsewhere, or an office to discuss business, or whatever else they wish to do there.

### GREAT LIBRARY

The Great Library and its contents were moved into the walled area of the Sacred City during the Adjustment Wars. The holdings of the Library survived remarkably intact despite the Ruin and the wars. The scribes of Lhankor Mhy carefully preserved hundreds of thousands of volumes including a large collection of Jrusteli and Auld Wyrnish volumes. Until Belintar constructed the Final Information Library at the City of Wonders (by insisting that the Great Libraries each provide him with copies of all texts - thus managing to combine the collections of several Lhankor Mhy libraries) - the Great Library was indisputably the greatest library in Glorantha.

### LYKSOS TEMPLE

The River gained tremendously in prestige and power after Belintar cut the New River to divert the Creekstream River to flow into it. The Temple was rebuilt in grandeur, thanks to Belintar's finances.

### RIVERSIDE PORT

Following the Opening, a new, defensible harbor and port was constructed inside the mouth of the Lykos River. Much larger than the Second Age port, the Riverside Port is an important base of the Kethaela fleet.

### SACRED CITY

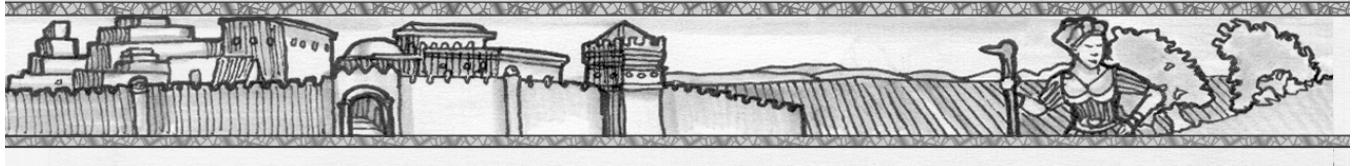
During the difficult years from the end of the Second Age until the coming of Belintar, many of the temples, palaces and residences were fortified in what became known as the Sacred City of Nochet. With the recovery of the city, this area became the province of the Queen and the priestesses of Imarja.

### TEMPLE OF THE FOUR VIRTUES.

The civic duties of the city was reinforced with the new temple. This is where the essences of the Four Virtues are worshipped.







# OTHER ESROLIAN MATTERS

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## THE CITIES OF THE DEAD

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### ESROLIAN ANCESTRAL WORSHIP

All Esrolians are acutely aware of their ancestors. Families pray to their ancestors daily or when any small problem arises. And the ancestors answer. Weekly and even daily rites can be done for the ancestors, and specialized rites used whether the ancestors are angry or happy.

Every Esrolian city, town and village has its own graveyard where they bury and care for the dead. They hold banquets for the dead, and offer them food, drink, oil, perfume, flowers, rich goods and music. The dead are housed in tombs, given monuments and offered regular sacrifices. Properly cared for, the dead continue to protect the interests of their family. Improperly cared for, and the dead will return to the land of the living, causing diseases and untimely death, or far far worse things. Ancestor Day (the Esrolian Day of the Dead) culminates a week of ceremonies during which the dead walk the Sacred Road of the Dead and their ancestral cities.

### OWDERIA, MEGAPOLIS NECROPOLIS.

In the days when people first started to die the event was a mystery. Owder told them what to do. The kin of the relatives did what they had been told and sent the corpses on their way to the House of the Dead. One method was to put the bodies into a boat and launch it to sea or upon the river. This was called the Owderian Way, because Owder instructed people on it.

The Owderian boats floated over the waters bearing their silent treasure, always going to the House of the Dead. There the bodies were treated with unguents and oils and laid into glorious mausoleums where the dead would be worshipped and honored.

Those were the day when the rivers still flowed uphill. Thousands of dead from all over the world came to Owderia, often called the Megapolis Necropolis. The boats were stopped at Korovaka, upon what is now the Malthin River, and the bodies interred according to whatever method the priests there commanded. This was a vast area

was covered with graves, memorials, monuments, mausoleums and carnal fields. Here and there were the houses of the Keepers of the Dead. The souls of the dead stayed there. Owderia was the house that those who enter cannot leave, where they dwell in darkness and have only the food, drink and gifts their kin bring them. The Owderian practices were necessary to keep the dead satisfied and sustained in the Underworld.

This stability vanished when the rivers reversed their flow.<sup>106</sup> The living stopped feeding their dead, and the dead grew angry at the living. It was especially horrible because all the goddesses were going away as well. Esrola slept. Ernalda was murdered by Her Enemy. Asrelia was kidnapped. Even Imarja laid only one egg at a time.

Then the sky fell in, and the dead walked among the living. There was no separation between any of the worlds anymore. Gods, essences, the dead, spirits, sky creatures—all were mixed. The Undead Empire ruled everything. Ghosts, corpses, spirits and monsters roamed the world.

Owderia is also called Korovaka, and the Dead Point.

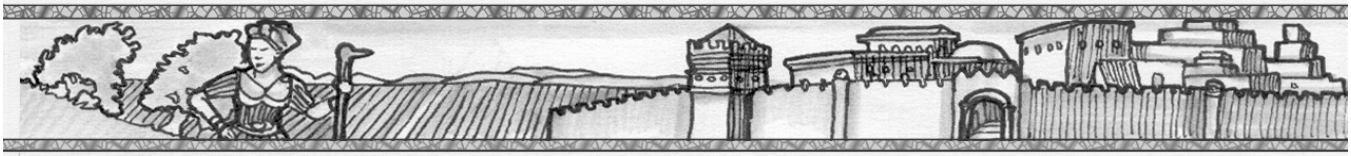
### KOROVAKA, GREAT CITY OF THE DEAD

Upriver from Rhigos lies Esrolia's greatest necropolis, Korovaka. This is a large island on Bakana lake, on the malthin River, and is the remains of the place once called Owderia. The Keepers of the Dead, an order of priestesses from Ezel, regularly lead worship and offer sacrifices at Korovaka to keep that great multitude of the dead happy.

When the dead and living were separated the goddess Ty Kora Tek brought the dead back to their cities – the necropolis – and set guardians to make sure they don't leave the cities of the dead, as long as the living keep the dead satisfied and sustained through funerary rites and ancestor worship.

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<sup>106</sup> After the Spike was destroyed, i.e. The start of the Great Darkness.



At Korovaka Nontraya broke the barriers between the living and the dead. His Undead Empire flooded over the world and he was Emperor until Lord Victory Nightbringer and his Unity Army defeated the monsters and their chaos. The dead returned to Korovaka but the demons continued to molest the living until Vogarth Big Man dammed the Malthin River and flooded the Sacred Road and the other approaches to Korovaka. Now Korovaka is surrounded by stagnant pools and marsh, while Vogarth's Bend is a part of the living river.

The island is covered with hundreds of thousands of tombs, mausoleums, monuments, crypts, sarcophagi, and other buildings of the dead. Even though nobody sends their dead to Korovaka anymore, it is still growing in population. Some claim to have even seen new tombs appear.

## KENA HILL

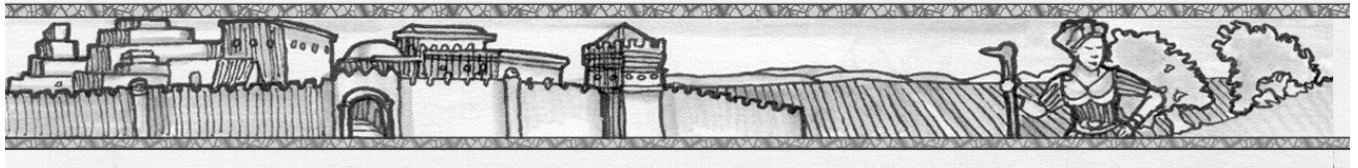
Kena Hill, the hill of Imarja, is another home of the dead, though this is not as emphasized as the great graveyards outside the city and at Korovaka. But people with kin there can go and have a good chance to converse with them at will.<sup>107</sup>



Simon  
Boyd 2008

<sup>107</sup> Actually, it gets more and more difficult for an individual to communicate directly with any one ancestor here. Thus communication is saved for important occasions.






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## PEDESTAL

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*About ten miles south of Nochet is the town of Pedestal, named after Belintar's Pedestal - the great magical pillar that dominates the skyline. It is a large settlement, with a grand temple to Belintar and buildings for his many servants and officers in Esrolia. Here is where the Uniting Bridge sets itself when the Pharaoh is going to visit Esrolia, or a person of importance is summoned to the City of Wonders.*

### BELINTAR RAISES THE PEDESTAL

After the priestesses of Ezel recognized him as the Living God and offered sacrifices, Belintar proceeded down the Sacred Road. There he was hailed as King of the Living by the living and the dead. In Nochet, he took the accoutrements of Kimantor after offering gifts to his rival and was acclaimed as the Immortal Protector of the City.

Belintar left Nochet and traveled south until he got to a rocky cliff that overlooked the Mirrorsea. He said, "here I shall ascend to my city." A great six-sided column of stone grew underneath him and lifted him up. The column was

topped with a six-headed capital, symbolizing the Sixths of Kethaela, the Six Elements, Six Forms and the Six Beasts.

Belintar spoke again, although none could understand his words. From the center of the Mirrorsea, a rainbow extended to the column and then to the amazement of all, slowly descended to earth. As the rainbow descended, it took material form, becoming an ornately decorated stone bridge with a thousand arches and with one end at the base of the column. He gently glided down from the top of the column and walked on the now-solid bridge towards the center of the Mirrorsea.

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## RHIGOS

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### PRE HISTORY

Rhigos was originally the home of Delainaeo, one of the four tribes that met at Nochet. Rhigos was abandoned in the Darkness and the few heirs of the Delainaeo sought shelter in Nochet.

### DAWN AGE

Migrants from Nochet resettled Rhigos in the early First Age and the Compact of Nochet binds them still.

### THE SECOND AGE

In the Second Age, Rhigos was the most significant town outside of Nochet. Rhigos came under the occasional rule of Slontos and the EWF, following Nochet.

Between 1035 ST and 1050 ST, King Andrin the Conqueror sent his brothers with an army to seize parts of Esrolia, and through cleverness, marriage, and sometimes conquest they Hendrikings gained control of Rhigos and Amonel. These two cities became the core of the Hendriking kingdoms of Esrolia – called the Adjusted Lands – and were ruled by a dynasty of Orlanthi kings who warred with Nochet.

### THIRD AGE

The Orlanthi kings rule Rhigos until 1166 ST when the Hendriking chiefs of Rhigos betrayed King Finelvanth and acclaimed Erinsulva as queen of Rhigos. Erinsulva was acceptable to the Hendriking thanes and they kept some of their power and property.

In 1170 ST, Caselain the Traveler arrived in Rhigos bearing the offer of Trade Allegiance from the Western Tribes to Queen Erinsulva. When the trade road from Bastis was completed, Rhigos was enriched by the Merchant Princes of Maniria and surpassed Nochet in size and wealth.

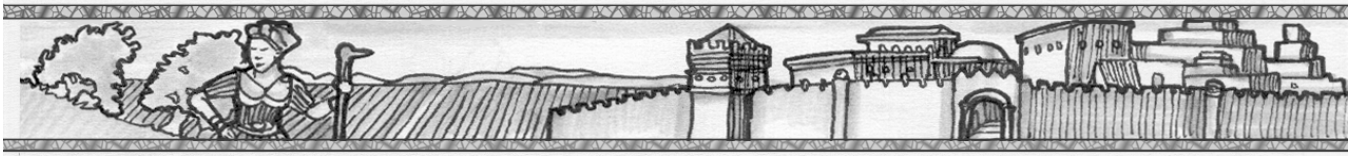
When Belintar swam ashore and went to Nochet, he helped rebuild it. During most of the Holy Country period, Rhigos maintained its position as the economic center but Nochet dominated as the political and religious center. This changed with the Opening of the Seas.

For some time the city of Rhigos bypassed Nochet for size and importance. However, soon many families sent their Grandmothers back to Nochet, for the sake of Traditions and the power of Rhigos declined.

With the Opening the fate of Rhigos diminished, the city had always looked to the Western Tribes and did not take advantage of the Opening. By 1600 ST, the population of Nochet more than doubled as many left Rhigos to seek their fame and place in the thriving neighboring metropolis. By 1620 ST, the steady decline of Rhigos continued as the influence of the Trader Princes declined.

### THE DEMIVIERGE

The Demivierge of Rhigos is the current Queen of the city, she came to power in 1610 ST and is sexually promiscuous and yet still a virgin. She is a priestess of Delain, the patron goddess of Rhigos and epitome of purity and self-restraint. The title of Demivierge is not a hereditary title, but a nickname applied to the current Queen, who despite her ritual virginity is widely known to be a hedonist who loves the carnal pleasure of men and women.



## OTHER ESROLIAN TOPICS

### THE ESROLIAN GRANDMOTHERS AND VINGKOT

Vingkot and his royal sons are held with particular dread by the Esrolian Grandmothers. In Esrolian legend the Vingkotlings in general, and the Kodigvari in particular, are blamed for all mishaps in the world. It has long been feared that Vingkot's sons would return and reclaim their lands, bringing Darkness and doom in their wake. These fears were nearly realized when Harmast the Kodigvari brought the Destroyer to Esrolia and devastated the land with his endless war. Despite this, there have been periodic efforts by ambitious and dangerous men to offer sacrifice to Vingkot. Such efforts have always been brutally repressed by the Grandmothers.



### ORLANTH AND ESROLIA

Orlanth is the "Shadow Aspect" of the Esrolian Grandmothers. Orlanth is always present in Esrolian rituals and myths – Orlanth is inextricably linked to the Allmother. No one in Esrolia would claim that their Ernalda is different from the Ernalda of Hendrikiland, Dragon Pass or Tarsh.

The Good Goddess is the source of all good in the land. Orlanth is *only* violent, turbulent, cruel, and extremely dangerous. The same is true about his followers. Thus Orlanth must be placated but he can't be allowed to reestablish his kingdom. This is a source of much psychological insecurity on the part of the Grandmothers.

### THE GOD LEARNER SURVIVORS OF ESROLIA

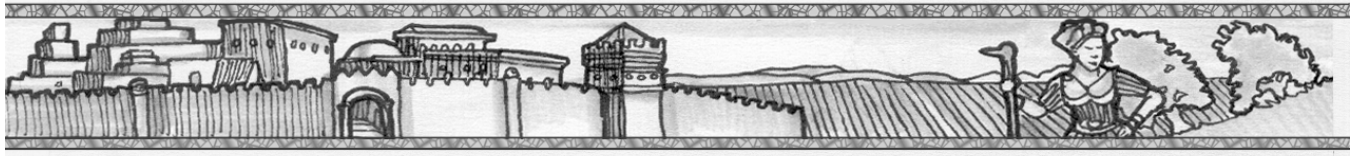
There are several tales of God Learner Survivors of Esrolia. One such story is that of the Green Horses, the deArn household (their coat of arms was the green horse) who surrendered and promised to convert, forgetting their old ways, and entered into the "Eight-generation trial period." They weren't from Nochet but a nearby city. The family included many God Learner practices in its life. They were largely driven out of Nochet in the civil wars before Belintar came, but are allowed to be there as long as they are not under a roof. The family is powerful in western Esrolia.

Another is the Nochet family of de Baur, which insinuated itself into the Middle Sea Empire hierarchy and whose members had variously held both Deputy Governor and Advocate Positions, and once even Viscount. They later turned traitor against their own people and opened the "new wall" in Nochet to let the Humakti in, and were rewarded with the Wheatstraw Farms, but whose men were never fully trusted by anyone afterwards. So large and widespread was this family that it broke into parts during the civil wars in Esrolia. Thus some members survived.

### HUMAN SACRIFICE IN ESROLIA

During times of great danger, the Grandmothers have sacrificed men to Imarja according to the rites of Ana Gor. Ernalda and her priestesses abhor the practice, but when times are difficult enough, the Imarja Grandmothers will nonetheless order it done.

The first man sacrificed by the Grandmothers was King Rastagar. Male sacrifice was regular in the Darkness, and helped the Esrolians survive the end of the world. The optimism, peace and plenty of the First Age ended the practice, but during the Gbaji Wars the Grandmothers resorted again to male sacrifice to deal with the destruction



caused by Arkat and his followers. During the Second Age, male sacrifice was regular. In the Third Age, Belintar put an end to the practice when he became God-King.

At various times the Grandmothers have sacrificed high and holy men, select individuals, and sometimes hecatombs of people, especially including prisoners, slaves and foreigners. Around 1060, the Grandmothers' performed Enfergor's Cleansing and sacrificed every foreign male that could be rounded up to protect Esrolia from the Devastation of the Vent.

With the demise of the God-King, many believe it is only a matter of time before the Grandmothers again sacrifice men.

## THE ONLY OLD ONE

The Only Old One was a distant overseer of the peoples of Kethaela. In the Darkness, the people of Kethaela made ancient agreements with the Only Old One that helped them survive the Darkness. The Only Old One always honored these ancient agreements and insisted upon their enforcement. These agreements were very contractual and required that the people of Kethaela continue to make the ancient and traditional gifts and sacrifices to the Only Old One.

The Only Old One had immense prestige and authority, but ancient agreements circumscribed his actual jurisdiction. If something is not within the scope of the ancient agreement between the Only Old One and the ancestor of a particular people, then the Only Old One has no involvement in it. Amongst the Hendrikings, the traditional gifts and sacrifices offered to the Only Old One was recognized as ceremonially part of the pact between Heort and the Only Old One that enabled victory over Chaos at the Unity Battle.

Many Orlanthi traditionalists (and trolls) still hate Belintar for killing the ancient ally of Unity. They fear that Belintar's actions threaten to bring the return of Chaos and Darkness.

## ORIGINS OF BELINTAR

Nobody knows who Belintar was and where he came from, although there are many stories and theories. Some claim that he was the Golden Age ruler of Kethaela, from before the Vingkotlings and the Only Old One, returned to his land. Others claim that he was the destroyer of the Middle Sea Empire and came to protect the people of Kethaela.

When Belintar arrived, nobody knew who he was or initially believed his claims, but Belintar proved that he was God-King of Kethaela. He did not accomplish this through a regular procession of heroquests, but instead, he went and tempted the many peoples of Kethaela to his rule and then incited them to rebel and then help destroy the Only Old

One. This process involved revelations by and about Belintar, remarkable appearances, magical contests, and lots of violence and war, as well as occasional surprises that were not what was expected.

## SHEPHERDS AND HUNTERS

Esrolia is a densely settled agricultural land. Shepherds practice transhumance, moving their flocks from the lowlands of North and South Esrolia into the hills of Longsi Land and the North March. Shepherds form something of a male subculture on the fringes of civilization. They worship Orlanth and Heler and have a reputation for being troublemakers and bandits. They are often villains in popular stories.

Esrolia has no wilderness to support large game animals and so has few full-time hunters, those that are have low-status as rabbit or squirrel catchers.

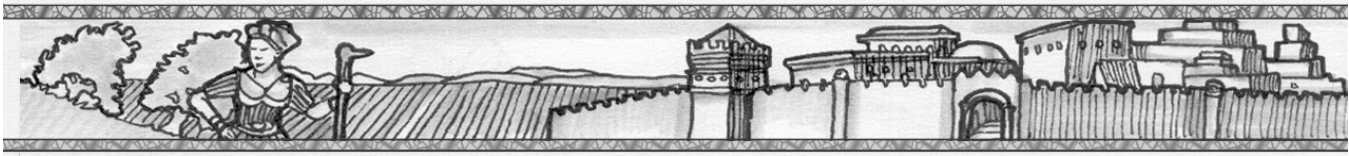
## RIGHT ARM ISLANDERS

The Rightarm folk supplied sailors to the Middle Sea Empire, but not ships. Other than Deputies and Advocates appointed by the Empire to oversee them and coordinate the supply of sailors and fish, the Rightarm folk had no political unity beyond the fishing village.

## ATROXIC CHURCH

Ethilrist and his followers are members of a sect of Malkionism called the Atroxic Church. St. Atrox was a witness of the betrayal of Malkion. He taught the way to salvation through strict obedience to the Law and perseverance in adversity. His writings form *The Book of Betrayal and Murder*. It was a military order in Slontos during the Imperial Age.

The church in Black Horse County is its last remnant of the sect, and worshippers are considered heretics by most of the Malkioni sects of the West. Followers of the sect are strict fundamentalists, and penance forms a large part of their worship. All men were doomed by the murder of Malkion, and only through harsh trials can their souls be saved. Alcohol is forbidden to members of the Church, as are other pleasures of the flesh. Hair is cropped to a stubble, beards are forbidden, even colorful clothing is outlawed. Flagellants are considered holy, and other forms of self-inflicted torture are seen as ways to purge impious thoughts from the body by mortifying the flesh; hair shirts are common. Although not a wizard or liturgist, Ethilrist is the ultimate head of the church, as well as the ruler of Black Horse County. The Archbishop of Muse Roost is the ecclesiastical head of the Church and of Black Horse County, but is subordinate to Ethilrist.



## THE CLAY POT AND SPOON SHRINES

There are those that till the fields, have homes over their heads and families to care for them and there are those that do not. When Nontraya the Taker passed by through a village of good people, he left some survivors who were broken, homeless and destitute. They were not dead, nor undead, but had no one left in the world and could not belong to anyone. They were called the Loners, or the Lost Ones. They came to Ernalda, seeking life. There was little food left in the granary, so she sent her daughter Benkesta amongst the villages to see what she could find. Benkesta was well loved and so each person she met gave her a few grains, or a shred of dried meat until she had too much to

carry. She stopped and there was established her first shrine. The Lost Ones came to her. There she first gave a blessing to the donors, for their gifts. Then she gave each of the Loners a clay pot and bone spoon marked with her symbols and fed them. They were no longer lost, and belonged to her, Benkesta's Many. Eight more times Benkesta made her walk and then stopped, until nine shrines were made in total. Today there are only seven, one fell into ruin because there was no starvation at that time, the other was lost to Nontraya's greed. Any who is without kin, unable to work or homeless may carry a Clay Pot and Spoon and go to her shrines to find help from the Walking Priestesses of Benkesta.

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## THE SHADOWLANDS

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### THE KITORI

In the Darkness, we were all Kitori. The Kitori thrived in the Unity Council days. The term "Kitori" was used broadly in the Silver Age and in the Dawn Age. The Heortling king was often called King of the Kitori, though in accuracy he was a King Among the Kitori. For many people the Kitori were synonymous with the Unity Council.

During the period of the High Council of the Lands of Genertela, the Kitori were increasingly associated with just Kethaela and the Heortling kings were rarely called "Kitori".

Following the Battle of Night and Day and the Bright Empire's conquest of Kethaela, the surviving supporters of the old Unity Council fled into the dark corners of the world. With the arrival of Arkat, these Kitori flocked to Arkat - but this time as a distinct people: the Kitori. They served Arkat and many of them learned the mysteries he taught. But they were no longer synonymous with the Heortlings or the Esrolians or the other peoples of Kethaela and Kerofinela. And with the Tax Revolt, they were dismissed from Ezkankekkko's service and once again forced to seek shelter in the shadow.

### THE SECRETS OF THE DARKNESS

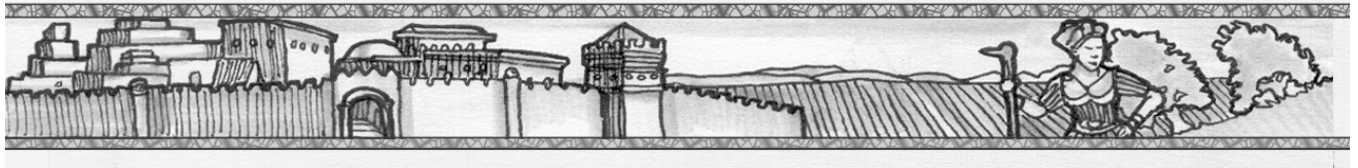
There is great power in the Darkness – and the Darkness holds the secrets of the Underworld. During the Great Darkness, Ezkankekkko – a powerful Darkness entity - offered his protection and friendship in exchange for tribute and acknowledgement. He offered more as well - Ezkankekkko offered to teach people the secrets of the Darkness so that they could survive in the Darkness.

Few people took up this second offer until Varzor Kitor accepted and learned at the feet of Ezkankekkko the deepest secrets of the darkness. Varzor then taught others –

humans, dragonewts, wind children, and anyone else who would learn - how to pray, make sacrifices and learn these secrets. Kitor's followers learned prayers that halt uz, dehoru and anything born of the Underworld (as long as it is of the dark). They learned the secrets of the darkness of night and the darkness after death. These initiates of the Darkness formed a separate people who – regardless of their origin – were called the Kitori.

Ezkankekkko greatly favored the Kitori and allowed them to reside with him in the Palace of Black Glass. Ezkankekkko made the Kitori his envoys to the peoples of Kethaela and Kerofinela and gave them the privilege of collecting the Shadow Tribute – tribute owed to Ezkankekkko from every tribe, settlement and group in Kethaela and Kerofinela for their survival in the Great Darkness. The tribute was not onerous and was fixed by ancient tradition. Failure to pay the Shadow Tribute meant swift and deadly retribution from the Kitori – and because failure to pay was oathbreaking, the guardians and tribal gods would not protect the community.

The peoples subject to the Shadow Tribute were called the Shadowlands or sometimes the Kitori Empire. It was an empire of tribute-collection, without governors, government, central laws or rule. The tribes and cities paid the tribute owed Ezkankekkko and Ezkankekkko offered them protection from the Darkness – especially the Darkness creatures loyal to him: the many thousands of uz of the Shadow Plateau and in the handful of uz trading posts. The Shadowlands coexisted and overlapped with other kingdoms and empires – the Heortling kings and high kings, the Esrolian Grandmothers, the Arstolan Forest and the Gemborg dwarves. But all acknowledged Ezkankekkko's sacred authority: a carefully circumscribed and ceremony authority, but authority nonetheless.



The Kitori were the most visible representative of Ezkanekko's authority, and they were commonly called the "Shadowlords". They wore distinctive garb so that all knew their status: black fur-lined cloak and hood, leaden mask, and ebon spear; and they were often accompanied by trolls or even more frightening darkness entities. Feared and respected as sorcerers and magicians, many viewed the Kitori as the rulers of Kethaela.



## THE SHADOW TRIBUTE

The Shadow Tribute was an Equal Exchange. The peoples of the Shadowlands paid the Shadow Tribute to Ezkanekko and, in exchange, Ezkanekko gave them magical protection, military support, and rich gifts to the leaders of the communities. At the Equal Exchange Market, the Kitori gathered part of the Shadow Tribute and traded it to the merchants who gathered there. In this way the Shadow Tribute coordinated trade in the Shadowlands and helped bind the people together in Unity. In this way, Ezkanekko's gifts always exactly matched the tribute he demanded.

## THE ERZILANANG LIST

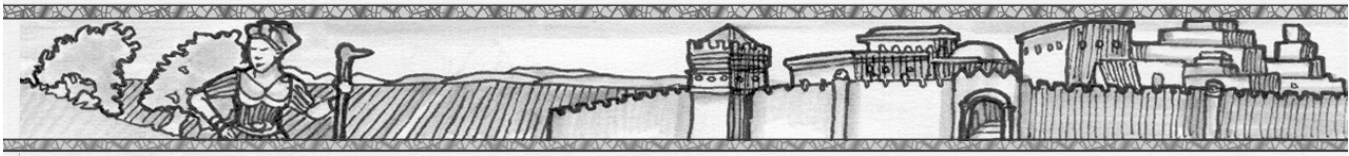
When Norasuntha was Queen of Nochet, she asked Erzilanang to calculate the Shadow Tribute paid by the various tribes of the Shadowlands. He came up with the following list, calculated in *pockets*<sup>108</sup>:

Arstola aldryami	15
Gemborg mostali	10
Ingareens	2
Aramites	2
Karkudja	4
Endakings	2
Esrolvuli	34
Garanvuli	2
Pig Hollow	4
Pelaskites	2
Koroltes	5
Ulaninstead	6
Sedenorvuli	3
Wind Children	1
Other Heortlings	23

This gave a total of 115 *pockets* worth of tribute each year. It must be presumed that the Equal Exchange was also worth 115 *pockets*.

<sup>108</sup> The *pocket* is a very imprecise unit of measurement and sometimes called *stomach*, *skin* or *pot*. Each tribe has its own size of *pocket*, but the Kitori always knew which size was correct for which tribe.






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