

THE
LOST LANDS

TEHUATIL



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FROG GOD
GAMES

TEHUATIL

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ADVENTURES
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FROG GOD GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

The World of the Lost Lands setting book from **Frog God Games** vividly describes the northern continents of Akados and Libynos, but what lies south of the planet's equator remains a great mystery. Those who have traversed the treacherous seas separating the two hemispheres have occasionally come upon patches of dry land scattered across the great ocean that some cartographers collectively refer to as the Arkanos Islands. This sourcebook details one such place: Tehuatl (TE-Wal), the last remnant of the Altepetl Alliance, a Mesoamerican-themed civilization that once held dominion over a vast landmass thousands of years earlier. When the alliance collapsed and much of its territory sank beneath the waves, the survivors huddled in the depths of the earth for centuries until volcanic activity and ebbing tides reclaimed portions of the land from the receding oceans. The island's people who had spent ages confined atop the mountains and within their stony bellies finally traversed down the slopes and settled on the fertile earth left in the eruption's wake. Yet without any central authority to govern them, the resident humans known as the Aztlis descended into chaos and civil wars that raged for centuries.

After ages of turmoil, the island now stands divided along the boundaries of a manmade canal separating the Aztli Confederation, a loose alliance of four northern, human-dominated city-states, from their southern neighbors, the Poqozas, a half-elven, bohemian offshoot of their former Aztli brethren. However, unlike their ancient predecessor the Altepetl Alliance, these political and societal entities exert limited or no direct authority over those who dwell within their perceived territories. Rivalries, both old and new, frequently bubble back to the surface after long periods of dormancy while new enemies often emerge from the unlikely of places to make their mark on Tehuatl and potentially lay claim to a fiefdom of their own. The Aztlis who revel in their vibrant warrior culture relish the chance to face such challenges on the field of battle where victory and glory await the bravest among them. Despite the previously mentioned line of demarcation, the Aztlis and Poqozas share a common history along with many of the same allies and enemies including the elves, dwarves, gnolls, gnomes, goblinoids, halflings, and orcs. Friends and foes tend to be very fluid in Tehuatl as today's brothers-in-arms may very well be tomorrow's hated adversaries.

As you may have already gathered, *Tehuatl* draws much of its inspiration from pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, with the Aztecs being the primary source. These civilizations and their mythology may be very new to some and familiar to others. Furthermore, many names of the individuals and places described in

the book have their roots in Nahuatl, the language the Aztecs spoke and that roughly two million people use to this day. The **Overview of Tehuatl** chapter provides a pronunciation guide for this language, but you are free to speak the names, places, and words phonetically or however else you feel comfortable doing so. Despite these strong influences, Tehuatl is a fantasy setting inhabited by a diverse array of people and creatures that do not exist in the real world. Similarities may abound between fact and fiction, yet *Tehuatl* as presented here is about heroes and adventure in a context and environment different from the norm. Nonetheless, the island remains part of the Lost Lands' world even though great distances and treacherous ocean currents separate it from the peoples and places found in Akados and Libynos. Aztli culture, religion, and society dominate nearly all facets of life in Tehuatl, but pockets of immigrants from these far-off lands and other members of the Arkanos Islands still exist among the island's roughly four million humanoid inhabitants.

The opening sections of *Tehuatl* address the island's people, history, traditions, and faiths as well as a timeline of seminal events using the Imperial Record appearing in *The World of the Lost Lands* setting book as well as the Aztli Xiuhpohualli calendar system presented in the forthcoming **Overview of Tehuatl** chapter. The lack of immovable political borders allows this sourcebook's areas to be presented in chapters based upon geographical regions rather than nations or city-states. These sections discuss the island's biomes in greater detail and provide information on noteworthy settlements, locations, and sites as well as prevailing weather conditions, local fauna and flora, and features unique to the region. Tehuatl is much smaller than many renowned regions of the Lost Lands' campaign setting, with its landmass encompassing an area roughly equal to the Shengotha Plateau within the Stoneheart Mountains. Therefore, an event plaguing one portion of Tehuatl can easily affect the entire island, making potential threats much more existential than in the significantly larger northern continents and also placing a greater premium on heroes to preserve Tehuatl's fragile existence.

In the end, we leave it up to you to decide whether to leap headfirst into the mystical land of Tehuatl and immerse yourself in its pervasive culture or to incrementally introduce yourself into a realm unlike any you may have encountered in previous campaign settings. Regardless of how you choose to see this world, whether through the eyes of an indigenous person or a newcomer, we have the utmost confidence you will enjoy the incredible view!



TIMELINE OF TEHUATL

Imperial Record (I.R.)	Aztlí Xiuhpohualli (A.X.)	Event
-8125		Emperor Tlatoani Xicocoya of the Alteptel Alliance gains hegemony over the southern continent of Notos, including Tehuatl
-6643	1	Emperor Tlatoani Xicocoya and his Luminous Court of snake advisors revealed to be imposters posing as Aztlis; Jaguar Cuauhocolotl Yaoctéotl leads his soldiers in revolt against the unmasked emperor and his reptilian minions, sparking massive civil war
-6642	2	Tlatoani and his serpentine army (Emperor's Fangs) sweep through the city of Zuatl and slough the skin from 50,000 unarmed civilians in a single day; Yaoctéotl wins decisive victory over serpent army at Quaza
-6640	4	The great sorcerer Itztliteotl spearheads the counteroffensive against the Emperor's Fangs of Zuatl
-6635	9	Tlatoani and his Luminous Court unleash fire snakes to burn settlements and crops to the ground; Quiahuitl the druid conjures mighty storms to extinguish the flames
-6631	13	Zipe-Toteque, a survivor of the Zuatl massacre, flays the last of the Fangs of Zuatl; Notos' gnolls, goblinoids, and orcs joins forces with the emperor to reconquer much of Tlatoani's lost territory
-6627	17	The serpent army aided by hordes of humanoid allies expels the rebels from numerous cities and slays Yaoctéotl's Eagle Cuauhocolotls Tlaco and Calcatl as well as the 40,000 troops under their command
-6621	23	Nonotzali frees the city of Cuihzilo from serpent rule, devours the flesh of a snake sorcerer, and gains the ability to transform into a feathered serpent; Nonotzali's brother Itzcuin defeats gnoll army and drinks the blood of his dead foes, which turns him into a horrible monstrosity
-6617	27	Serpent advisor and spy Sthalos, disguised as an Aztlí, poisons 10,000 warriors, kills Jaguar Cuauhocolotl Ocoto, and nearly assassinates Yaoctéotl who cancels attacks until serpent infiltrators unmasked in every camp
-6610	34	Tlatoani and his serpent army score resounding victory at Eztlan; Yaoctéotl convinces previously neutral elves, gnomes, dwarves, and halflings to lend their support to the Aztlis after the defeat
-6604	40	High Priest Micoateotl animates an undead army from the remains of dead Aztlí warriors and marches to retake Eztlan; serpent defenders repel the attack but suffer heavy casualties
-6600	44	Yaoctéotl, Itztliteotl, and a company of dwarven miners infiltrate Eztlan through a network of tunnels dug beneath the city's walls; combined forces surprise and crush Tlatoani's army in protracted urban battle
-6597	47	Guided by Nonotzali, Yaoctéotl leads a surprise attack against a combined goblinoid and orc army on the grasslands of Huetetl; rebels destroy the goblinoids and orcs; Tlatoani and his remaining Fangs withdraw and flee back to their last remaining strongholds
-6596	48	The surviving members of the Luminous Court devise an escape plan to save themselves when the emperor falls; Tlatoani discovers their treachery, and the Luminous Court vanishes
-6593	51	Sensing imminent defeat, Tlatoani opens the Great Void and calls for reinforcements; gods of Boros hurl Tlatoani into the Great Void and seal it; catastrophic flood sweeps across the entirety of Notos, submerging almost the entire continent beneath the waves; survivors flee to the mountains and into the earth above the mountains; hero-gods transition from mortals to deities
-6432	212	Aztlis descend into the subterranean world they call the Coyonqui; first encounter the tsathars and drive them deeper underground
-6421	223	The first doodler draws a sketch on the Stonewall of Atinaqina
-5869	775	Itzcuin actively recruits gnoll worshippers; gnolls abandon their racial deity and adopt the persona of the chichicalpan or the "dog-god's bastards"
-5387	1257	War of the Coyonquel begins with the Aztlis fighting against the goblinoids and orcs in the deep recesses of the earth
-4732	1912	War of the Coyonquel ends in stalemate; long unofficial truce ensues
-3939	2705	The first tlemamacac ends; great comet streaks across the sky, filling Aztlis with fear and trepidation about another tlemamacac spent underground
-2555	4089	Aztlis make first contact with dwarves in the Coyonqui
-1675	5409	The second tlemamacac ends; Aztlis see visions of fire and ash, leading many to speculate their civilization's end is at hand
-355	6289	The stratovolcano Tepetzin erupts for seven months, adding millions of tons of rock and ash to the island, and reclaims large swaths of territory from the sea

Imperial Record (I.R.)	Aztli Xiuhpohualli (A.X.)	Event
-351	6293	Aztlis descend from the Tepepan Mountains and first settle regions of the Cepual Desert; dwarves remain within the mountain range
35	6678	Firebrand dwarves establish the city of Balandrur in the Tepepan Mountains
36	6679	Queen Quelaqui Iliafell and the elves arrive on the western shores of Tehuatl
287	6930	Aztlis' first encounter with gnomes in the Cuahtla Forest
320	6963	Gnomes found the settlement of Minnalín
971	7613	The town of Xacota is founded by Aztli explorers atop a plateau overlooking Mother Oceanus
974	7617	Aztli civil wars rage across the island among city-states and humanoid allies
1041	7684	Elves found the settlement of Ysanyarr and make Lord Yasyarr Tarothan its first ruler
1245	7888	Quimichen expands from a large town into a city under the guidance of its first king, Zopacotl
1450	8093	Tetzuahuetl wrests power from the council of nobles and becomes first king of Xacota
1470	8113	The third tlemamacac ends with visions of grandeur and destruction
1655	8298	Xacota and Quimichen clash for the first time
1772	8415	Dwarves establish the frontier outpost of Kurn Domladur
2261	8904	Ahuizotl and Xacotan army crush Quimichen, ending long war between rival city-states
2262	8905	Xacota brings the gnomish settlement of Minnalín under its hegemony
2263	8906	Xacota gains hegemony over the island of Tehuatl, ushers in the Days of Logs and Bricks as grand public works projects begin
2295	8938	Xacota expands the temples of Yaoctéotl and Itztliteotl
2365	9008	Tlacotins rebel in several cities across the island, killing nobles and demanding better treatment
2371	9014	Xacotan King Minatzo defeats tlacotin army but makes major reforms to the codes surrounding the treatment of tlacotins that remain to this day
2491	9134	Poles of Boros shift, forming ice sheet; eastern Tehuatl's shoreline expands into territory formerly part of Mother Oceanus, creating Izmállí Swamp and Tlococua Marsh
2563	9206	Nazarehtla abandons the Azhuitlico project
2594	9237	The town of Zoyoxica is founded
2632	9275	Xacota's King Ceohuatlan II commissions the construction of the city of Zacatl on the banks of the Temetzin River
2711	9354	Xacota founds and begins constructing the port city of Atenco
2777	9420	The Aztlis found the resort town of Mactli on the shore of Ouatulli Lake
2847	9490	Aztli engineers conduct first dredging operation at Ahuacua
2889	9532	Aztlis found the port city of Atahuato; start construction of pyramid temple dedicated to Yaoctéotls
2916	9559	Atoyapaca adds crushed quartz under pressurized conditions to olli, giving rise to Tehuatl's version of vulcanized rubber
2950	9593	Iohala and his family take control of agricultural product at Onacina
3002	9645	The elves found the city of Shammarra
3037	9680	The "Mushroom Revolt" takes root in southern Tehuatl as a small sect of Aztlis reject the high priests' authority and claim they commune directly with the hero-gods through the ingestion of psychedelic mushrooms
3040	9683	Aztli priests outlaw ingesting any mushroom, bringing the revolt to an end but laying groundwork for the future development of the Cult of Tlatlcolli
3065	9708	A dwarven prospector finds gold in the Cepual Desert; others quickly converge on the area that would become the city-state of Ixtla
3134	9777	Mazalli becomes high priestess of Tlatlcolli in Zacatl, begins gaining support for her political movement
3137	9780	Mazalli leads movement in Zacatl to refuse paying tribute to Xacota; city leaders refuse her petition and are assassinated; Zacatl's citizens proclaim themselves to be a new ethnicity known as Poqozas; Mazalli forges alliance with the elves; King Ciauhpoa leads Xacota army into Toctli Forest where the Poqozas and elves crush them and slay the king; Xacota's empire quickly collapses
3138	9781	Elves, gnomes, and dwarves declare independence; gnolls, orcs, and goblins engage in a series of bloody attacks against Aztli holdings known as the Nights of Sillu and Claw; monks from Xacota settle in the mountain stronghold of Aliqtana and establish library of written works salvaged from Xacota

Imperial Record (I.R.)	Aztli Xiuhpohualli (A.X.)	Event
3139	9782	Nonotzali walks among humanity and selects the site for the city of Tlazo, declares city-state as the capital of the Couatl Kingdom; Nonotzali uproots and destroys snake cult in Cepual Desert
3141	9784	Mazalli breaks ground, and construction of the Great Canal begins
3144	9787	Ixtla beats back the gnolls, ending the Nights of Sillu and Claw
3147	9790	The Great Canal dividing Tehuatl is completed; Mazalli dies under mysterious circumstances; Poqozas sink into lethargy and cede territory to the elves
3155	9798	Poqozas stumble upon the site of Mulla Chanacu and begin rites of passage to its underground caves
3165	9808	The Benevolence replaces Lord Alrand as Shammarra's ruler
3175	9818	After an uprising in the city of Mactli, the commoners force the nobles to agree to the Peace of the Bloody Uictli
3265	9908	Tomotomo races begin
3311	9954	The town of Hualcizen is founded
3323	9966	The mudflats of Yuri come into existence on the southern shore of the Caxcalli Grasslands
3325	9968	After years of sporadic negotiations, the city-states of Atenco, Ixtla, Mactli, and Tlazo agree to accords, giving birth to the Aztli Confederation
3329	9972	The Aztli Confederation sails warships into the Great Canal to negotiate a treaty granting the alliance access to the Great Canal; Aztli warship sinks after hitting Poqoza booby trap; parties agree to leasing arrangement
3330	9973	The Aztli Confederation begins construction of the three causeways spanning the Great Canal; the village of Tlahapina cursed and enters into an endless time loop
3348	9991	The Aztli Confederation completes the construction of the three causeways spanning the Great Canal
3364	10007	The first prisoners arrive at the peticalli of Olinoloz
3385	10028	Lord Jondor Tarothan becomes Lord of Ysanyarr
3431	10074	The renowned wizard Zapanaya ventures to the bottom of Mother Oceanus in search of fragments from Xihuitl, the comet that portended Xacota's downfall
3434	10077	Neucyo discovered in Octli
3442	10085	The Flood of Quiahuitl's Tears overflows the northern bank of the Great Canal and transforms portions of the Cuahtla Forest into the Yoaltica Ilaquilo
3445	10088	Aeson Fayrith Firebrand assumes control of Kurn Domladur
3447	10090	Tulitas arrive on the eastern shores and found Hana'aloa
3455	10098	Firebrand dwarves destroy Turew
3464	10107	Sea battle of Imacalli takes place; combined Aztli fleet defeats unknown foreign invaders
3465	10108	After six years of preparation, a consortium of elves and Poqozas open Yolqui, a zoo in the Toctli Forest
3474	10117	The town of Good Fortune opens for business
3483	10126	Grizzelda and bullywugs attack Zoyoxica; Aztlis prevail
3496	10139	The lizard people of Shassal and their cipatenhua allies from Tocamach slaughter 145 bullywugs in a pitched battle in the Izmali Swamp
3504	10147	Gnolls assault the city of Xicolti; residents and squadrons of bees repel the attack; kraken emerges from Mother Oceanus and attacks Atenco
3505	10148	Uolli founded at site of alternative latex source
3506	10149	Kirgis Wendrig builds Cuiateotl to honor Tsathogga
3508	10151	Traxxasso the goblin creates unholy sanctum in Node 226
3509	10152	Ixtla's army crushes the Aguar orc tribe in a fearsome battle; Tlazo naval captain Noncua absconds with the warship <i>Zaniyoca</i> and begins a life of piracy
3511	10154	The famed hero Ametatoto ventures into Tamazoli and is never seen again
3513	10156	Plulluump gains the title of Foul King of Goopy Muck and Sickening Mire as the boggard ruler of Blibleblup
3515	10158	Rodibreck Firebrand succeeds his father Uldibreck as king of the Firebrands
3517	10160	Current year

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY OF TEHUATL

Tehuatl's history begins with the appearance of the first protohumans on the southern continent of Notos at roughly the same time that they began to appear in the northern continents of Akados and Libynos. These early incarnations of primitive humanity were known as aluxes. The first of their kind, the aluxes of the first sun were brutish giants with limited sentience and bestial features. Despite their appearance, these fey creatures were pleasant and genial at first. However, the passage of time elicited their previously dormant and recessive penchants for violence and anger. Realizing their failure, the gods summoned great jaguar spirits to tear them to shreds and start anew, thus ending the era of the first sun. The aluxes of the second sun were frail and smaller than their earlier counterparts, but with gentle hearts. The gods successfully suppressed their penchant for violence yet left their naïve personalities and trusting minds vulnerable to deception. Once again, a trickster entity coaxed the anger from their souls and forced the gods to end the age of the second sun. The aluxes of the third sun were the most human in demeanor and intelligence, though they appeared more simian and animalistic than their predecessors. Once again, the displeased gods set about their ruination and ended the age of the third sun. Building upon the lessons they learned in their three previous attempts, the gods finally populated the whole of Notos with the race of people who would become known as humans.

Like the aluxes before them, humanity felt compelled to be among others of their kind. In time, families grew into villages, villages into towns, and then into cities and states. Yet while humans enjoyed the company of others who shared their ideals and beliefs, they took less kindly to those hailing from other parts of the continent who held differing values and traditions. Petty squabbles between these competing parties ultimately gave rise to war that ravaged the continent for centuries. Yet, unlike the preceding ages, the gods refused to interfere in

the affairs of men. Without divine intervention, one man saw an opportunity to unite the continent under one banner. The Immortal Sun Tlatoani Xicocoya, the founder and leader of the Altepetl Alliance, set about on his bold campaign to conquer the whole of Notos through war and diplomacy. After 241 years of conflict, Tlatoani finally succeeded at his grand endeavor.

For much of its early history, the landmass that would become the island of Tehuatl and the people who inhabited it, the Aztlis, seemed like a curious bystander, cautiously spectating from a safe distance while Emperor Tlatoani Xicocoya used his unique combination of cunning, intimidation, and brutality to hold the Altepetl Alliance together for more than 1,500 years. Although Tehuatl fell under the emperor's hegemony, the preoccupied ruler paid little attention to the remote, eastern outpost of his empire provided its annual tributes poured into his domain's lucrative coffers without incident. At its zenith, the rigid confederation of city-states dominated the whole of the southern continent of Notos. Normally, Tlatoani's extraordinarily long reign and immunity to age would certainly cast his lineage into question. However, the Aztlis believed the gods blessed them with a gift they called "moyotl," a spark of creative essence that could spontaneously imbue an Aztli with seemingly divine or supernatural powers. In almost all cases, the powers were only temporary, lasting just a few seconds during a moment of extreme crisis; yet in rare circumstances, the gods bestowed the benefits permanently. When Tlatoani displayed the ability to resist death for centuries, the Aztlis believed him to be one of the infrequent exceptions.

Despite wielding absolute power over every humanoid within his dominion, Tlatoani Xicocoya focused much of his divine power towards the task of gently steering the direction of his fellow Aztlis' culture and beliefs from afar while paying little attention to the other humanoid peoples under his control. This endeavor



proved more difficult than the Emperor expected. The Aztlis' strong moral compass allowed them to resist much of Tlatoani Xicocoya's baleful influence, though some elements of the Emperor's grand plan for the Aztlis' crept into their ethos over the passing centuries. Not surprisingly, the pockets of other humanoid peoples cohabiting the continent alongside the Aztlis greatly resented their human overlord and his outwardly favorable treatment towards his fellow humans. Those humanoids with the ability to migrate somewhere else often did so, fleeing for fabled lands presumably north of the equator. The other humanoid peoples who stayed behind in Notos, overtly expressed their displeasure by steadfastly refusing to incorporate Aztli traditions into their own cultural identity.

However, Tlatoani was more than he seemed. The undying emperor was not an Aztli whose moyotl granted him immortality. As suspicions arose about his true nature, two vassals, King Ometeque and Queen Omequal coaxed the truth out of their arrogant liege. In a rare moment of weakness, Tlatoani revealed his true nature to the startled pair as the physical manifestation of a malevolent deity surrounded by a retinue of wicked serpent creatures who served as his inner circle. Much to the Immortal Sun's surprise and horror, the courageous pair broadcast his private revelation to the whole of Notos, disseminating his secret far and wide throughout the land. When his subjects finally learned the awful truth about their ruler and his serpentine court, rebellion quickly swept across the land.

Heroes rose from among the people to lead the charge against the terrible threat. The great warrior Yaocoteotl raised an army and took to the field to wage war against the Immortal Sun and his minions. The cunning sorcerer Itztliteotl used his magic to gather intelligence and spy on the emperor, while the charismatic druid Quiahuitl wielded the might of the weather and summoned beasts to aid the nascent cause. Zipe-Toteque, Nonotzali and his brother Itzcuin, Micoateotl, and others stood alongside their counterparts to fight against the ascendant god and his reptilian underlings. After 50 years of conflict, victory seemed close at hand. Desperate and near defeat, Tlatoani attempted to open the Great Void to summon reinforcements from the depths of the netherworld. At this grave offense, the long quiescent gods of Boros finally took a pivotal direct action to stop the emperor. They hurled the vanquished Tlatoani and his remaining serpentine minions into the Great Void and sealed it, presumably destroying the wicked divine being and his wretched underlings in the process. However, the gods' intervention came at a terrible price. To prevent them from having to interfere again in the affairs of mortals as they had with the earlier aluxes, the angry gods submerged the entire contiguous continent of Notos beneath the waves, leaving portions of the remote landmass of Tehuatl along with a few other stragglers in remote corners of the southern hemisphere, isolated and alone.

Tehuatl survived the cataclysm, though not unscathed. The rising seas inundated the low-lying areas, leaving only the rugged foothills and mountains that sat atop a volcanic hotspot above water. The raging floods that swept across the land dragged millions of helpless souls to a watery grave at the bottom of the ocean while razing almost every structure to the ground. Led by their hero-gods, the calamity's few survivors retreated into the highest elevations that gave them access to the depths of the earth within catacombs of inactive lava tubes and desiccated magma chambers. They called their subterranean domain the Coyoqui. Here, the Aztlis were forced to forage in the caves for any edible organic material they could find. On rare occasions, they ventured back to the only swath of dry land left, the tallest mountaintops, hoping to scavenge food amid the lifeless rocks and stones littering the mountainsides and avoid aggressive competitors in the process. The surviving Aztlis who withstood the gods' wrath looked to the skies for meaning and purpose. Unwilling to forgive the gods of Boros for unleashing an apocalypse upon them, they turned to the heroes who defeated the emperor and ascended into the heavens as a new pantheon of deities.

The hero-gods' transition from mortals to deities occurred instantaneously, yet it took much longer for them to understand the nuances of the symbiotic relationship they had with the mortals who served them. During Tlatoani's reign, blood sacrifices were a common spectacle, presumably performed to cow the populace through fear and amuse the sadistic emperor. However, the Aztlis and the hero-gods came to learn their power through the Aztlis' encounters with the deranged servants of the Frog God Tsathogga in the depths of their dank, miserable world. Although the unified humans drove their reptilian adversaries deeper into the earth, their travails against the disgusting creatures changed their outlooks and those of the hero-gods. Despite outnumbering the reptilian monstrosities, the crazed creatures and their insane deity derived greater power from beseeching their foul god with offerings of blood and flesh, much like the Immortal Sun had done during the era of the Altepetl Alliance. At that moment, the Aztlis and their hero-gods came to a terrible understanding that they too could harness such energy through sacrifices, though each hero-god slowly realized that they each had different needs. While some feasted on flesh and blood, others coveted precious objects and other items.

Despite benefiting from the blessings of the hero-gods, the Aztlis remained confined to the island's highest peaks and the depths of the earth for approximately 6,250 years after this cataclysmic event. If life within the Coyoqui was not bad enough already, the Aztlis were unfortunately not alone in their misery. The

TEHUATL SENSITIVITY READING

This work of fiction is inspired by pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures and history, mainly the Aztec civilization. As such it does not claim to be authentic nor have the intent to misappropriate the narratives of the people of Mesoamerica.

When FGG approached me to review the text of this book, I immediately pointed out that although I am Latin American, and I do have research experience and knowledge in Latin American mythology, I am *not* part of the Mesoamerican cultures. I am Chilean, and our pre-Columbian cultures and people are distinct from those of the amazon, the northern Andes, or Mesoamerica. And that was a fear I had entering this book; that usual American perception that "Latin American" is a sufficient term to describe anything south of their southern border.

To my comfort, and for of those reading this book, it is not the case. The author constructs a fantasy setting inspired by a very specific timeframe and specific cultures and creates a fictionalized version of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican civilization that is both respectful and true to their source.

The author offers insight on decisions made through the book, and where conceptual compromises had to be made to fit this work into its larger setting, the people of Tehuatl did not receive the short end of the stick. In the few cases where cultural misappropriation or perpetuation of colonist ideas over indigenous people were present, the issues were worked on and no longer present.

Finally, I insisted on the addition of an "Appendix N"; a collection of source materials and complimentary works of fictions to accompany this book. I believe there is nothing wrong to be inspired by history and culture, even if it is not your own, but it is important to give recognition to the voices that currently hold the heritage of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica; their vision of their own culture and the stories they would like to tell. There is nothing worse than to claim to be authentic when you are an outsider.

orks, gnolls, goblinoids, and other aggressive humanoids — many of whom also served Tlatoani during his reign — delved into the earth alongside them, building profane temples to their wretched patrons in the deepest recesses. The close quarters required the Aztlis to fight against these hated foes for every inch of territory within this bleak, desolate world in the bellies of the stony behemoths that sheltered them from the floodwaters outside their domain. After fending off these wretched creatures for centuries on their own, the Aztlis were about to get some company.

The Aztlis had their first encounters with the dwarves roughly 6,000 years ago. The skilled miners and mountaineers traversed an arduous network of subterranean tunnels and caverns spanning thousands of miles before they reached the distant Tepepan Mountains. At first, the dwarves concealed their presence from the humans, but after several tentative exchanges, the parties reached a working alliance to focus their cooperative interests against their more pressing adversaries, the goblinoid, orcs, gnolls, and other monstrous entities surrounding them. At last, the dwarves finally added some desperately needed reinforcements and diversity to Tehuatl's previously homogenous human society. After spending centuries underground, the Aztlis seemed almost glad to cede the dankest subterranean realms to the dwarves who were content to battle against the humans' despised foes — the orcs and goblinoids — for underground supremacy. The humanoids made the best of their predicament, yet despite their innovations, their containment at these higher elevations stifled their population growth for more than six millennia until another disaster changed Tehuatl for the better.

For several weeks, tremors shook Tehuatl to its foundation as Tepetzin, its tallest peak, belched puffs of smoke and ash as if furiously coughing. Early one morning, the wheezing mountain finally could take no more. The bellowing stone giant erupted with savage fury and spewed lava down its slope, which caused the nearly 30,000 foot stratovolcano's top to crumble into a sprawling caldera. For the next seven months, Tepetzin discharged enough molten rock to expand Tehuatl's footprint into the sea, which had slowly and steadily receded as the frozen poles sequestered increasing volumes of water. The volcanic material and the accompanying earthquakes reshaped the island's topography, allowing dry land to retake territory previously ceded to the neighboring ocean. When Tepetzin finally simmered down and the earth cooled, the Aztlis descended from the mountains to reclaim the new land unexpectedly bequeathed to them after it cooled. The Aztlis regained what the volcano and the seas refused to give them by transplanting square pieces of

dry land on top of shallow bodies of water, transforming them into arable soil used for agricultural production.

During this formative period, the Aztlis initially founded villages and towns in the shadow of the mountains and then migrated into the surrounding wilderness as long-dormant grasses and trees took root in the fertile dirt around the Tepepan range. The animal population that had been bottled up and controlled in the mountains because of the limited available resources rapidly increased during this expansionistic period. With the island that would become Tehuatl on the ascendance, events in other parts of the world forever transformed the expanding landscape. Roughly 3,500 years ago, under the guidance of Queen Quelaqui Iliafell, a great wooden vessel hurriedly set sail from a distant harbor in search of a new homeland for its 240 elvish occupants. Fleeing the destruction of their forests, the ship's captain steered it south to the uncharted waters far from the turmoil unraveling the elves' former world. When the ship appeared on the horizon, the curious Aztli onlookers stared in wonder and fear at the gargantuan floating village approaching its shores. Despite their admiration and curiosity toward the newcomers, the first interactions between the elves and the Aztlis were openly hostile. The humans attacked, and the elves resisted. After several days of skirmishes, the elves established a tentative beachhead on the island's western shore. However, Queen Quelaqui knew she and her people could not repel a full-fledged Aztli army. Four months later, when 800 Aztli warriors approached the elvish stronghold on the edge of the Cuahtla Forest, the humans were dumbfounded to find a force of 1,000 elves waiting for them behind heavily fortified defenses. To this day, no one can explain where the elvish reinforcements came from, though their unexpected appearance and the strength of their battlements prompted the normally warmongering Aztlis to withdraw from the field and begrudgingly accept the elves' presence in Tehuatl.

Over the passing years, small populations of other humanoid races, such as gnomes, halflings, dragonborn, and even tieflings arrived on Tehuatl, yet these tiny groups largely remained in the island's shadows for the balance of its history. While survival at the higher elevations required the Aztlis to coexist if they hoped to fend off their aggressive orc, gnoll, and goblinoid neighbors, the improved living conditions, increased territory, and greater food supply in the burgeoning grasslands and forests removed the shackles of necessity, allowing long suppressed personal ambitions to surge to the forefront. Civil wars constantly raged among the Aztlis, forcing the dwarves, elves, gnomes, halflings, and members of other races to choose sides in the growing conflicts or get swept away by the more numerous Aztlis. The emboldened orcs, gnolls, and goblinoids seized the opportunity to capitalize on the divisiveness wracking their humanoid adversaries by staking their claim to the island's most coveted territory. The relentless skirmishes and minor battles between and among rival Aztli city-states and their monstrous humanoid adversaries persisted for the better part of the next 1,300 years with the tides of war constantly ebbing and flowing with minimal territorial gains on any side.

After more than 13 centuries of futile stalemates, the landscape of Tehuatl was about to dramatically change again. The legendary Aztli general and future king Ahuiztotl gained control of the city-state of Xacota, a sprawling metropolis on the northern coastline that had been locked in a bitter power struggle with the neighboring settlement of Quimichen for most of its long history. With the backing of his divine patron, Yaoctotl, Ahuiztotl used a series of complex and risky military maneuvers to finally crush Quimichen, bringing the city and much of southeastern Tehuatl into his fold. The determined Ahuiztotl refused to rest on his laurels despite gaining more ground than any Aztli leader before him. In a brilliant diplomatic move, the charismatic politician scored an even greater victory away from the battlefield when he forged an alliance with the dwarves, elves, and gnomes dwelling in the mountains and forests. He won their political, military, and economic support allowing them to settle on lands within his kingdom and retain the right to self-rule. In two short years, Ahuiztotl's integrated and cohesive army brought its numerous rivals to heel, while pushing the island's monstrous denizens and aggressive humanoids into isolated corners of Tehuatl. Unlike the agreement he brokered with the dwarves, elves, and gnomes, Ahuiztotl exacted an annual tribute of treasure and souls for Yaoctotl from the Aztli city-states he added to his hegemony in exchange for allowing the settlement's current leadership to retain a fair degree of autonomy over local affairs. Ahuiztotl's actions ushered in the Age of Xacota.

Under this union, the whole of Tehuatl fell under a lasting yet uneasy, tumultuous peace that endured for the next 874 years. Revolts periodically swept across the land during this restless period as subjugated city-states sometimes gauged the strength or weakness of a newly installed king. Unforeseen monstrous threats also reared their ugly heads on occasion when a fresh arrival to the island or a long-slumbering menace awoke from its lethargy to wreak havoc across the land. The bloodthirsty humanoids living along the edges of Xacota's holdings also intermittently tested the waters, launching raids into the heart of Aztli territory before being beaten back into their isolated strongholds. These monstrosities also acquired new sanctuaries when another global catastrophe beset the planet. Roughly two centuries after establishing its

dominance over the entire island, the planet's poles abruptly shifted. Although the sudden change barely affected Tehuatl's climate, the creation of more ice at the newly formed poles caused sea levels to drop, exposing the wetlands that became the Izmalli Swamp and Tlococua Marsh to sunlight for the first time in more than nine millennia. Within these steamy, waterlogged environments, new species of humanoids and animals found a home in Tehuatl.

Nonetheless, these deadly hazards, including the drastic alteration of the planet's alignment, never seriously threatened Xacota and the city-states under its dominion. Indeed, many Aztlis refer to this epoch as the Days of Logs and Bricks because of the grand scale of public works completed during this era. Mighty pyramids dedicated to the hero-gods soared into the heavens, while canals, aqueducts, causeways, and other massive engineering projects provided housing, water, and arable land for the masses. Artisans of all races — Aztlis, elves, dwarves, and gnomes — poured into these metropolises to erect and adorn these wondrous structures in addition to creating magnificent pieces of jewelry from valuable gemstones and precious metals. Despite the cities' emphasis on art, architecture, and religious devotion, the Aztlis maintained their warrior culture, using newfangled technology to improve the practicality and durability of their traditional armor and weaponry. No discipline ever lessened their taste for bloodshed on the battlefield or atop the sacrificial altar. The hero-gods who liberated the Aztlis from the ancient emperor demanded offerings of flesh and souls on a previously unprecedented scale. Their seemingly insatiable appetite for fresh victims was the primary impetus for Xacota's swift and spectacular downfall.

The seeds of rebellion finally took root in the southern city of Zacatl, where the Cult of Tlatcolli made its first appearance. The worshippers of this debauched deity of excess and vice grossly indulged in all worldly pleasures. They routinely partook in lewd, drunken feasts and raucous celebrations well into the night while squandering their money on the outcome of games of chance. They fervently believed life was too enjoyable to waste as a sacrifice to the aloof and apathetic gods. When the time came for Zacatl to pay its annual tribute to Xacota, Tlatcolli's followers petitioned the city's leaders to give the distant metropolis nothing. When Zacatl's rulers declined their proposal, the cult's wealthiest and most influential members assassinated Zacatl's overlord and his advisors in a masterfully orchestrated coup. In furtherance of their hatred for Xacota and its deities, they disavowed their Aztli heritage and declared themselves to be a unique ethnicity they named the Poqoza.

At the same time, either coincidentally or as a deliberate sign of the gods' displeasure, a comet streaked across the night sky and slammed into the water just off the coast of northern Tehuatl. The collision smashed the celestial object into minute fragments spread across a wide area, though its psychological impact far outweighed its tangible effects. The Poqozas who witnessed the accelerating object fall to earth interpreted its appearance as an affirmation from Tlatcolli, whereas King Ciauhpoa, Xacota's rash ruler, reached the opposite conclusion. He and his priests believed the comet signified the gods' displeasure with the Poqozas' actions. He ordered his clergy to sacrifice more victims from southern Tehuatl to appease the angry deities, while dispatching his army to crush the steadily growing uprising. Ciauhpoa's hasty decision to savagely butcher more people horribly backfired. The groundswell of resentment attracted more disenfranchised Aztlis to the Poqozas' cause. Mazalli, the Poqozas' leader, followed Ahuiztotl's earlier example and turned to the elves of southern Tehuatl for aid against Xacota. The elves had always admired the Aztlis' ingenuity and intelligence, yet the act of sacrificing humans to their pantheon of gods terribly disgusted them. Mazalli and the Cult of Tlatcolli vowed to end the gory practice forever if the elves lent them their support. After extensive internal deliberation, the elves agreed to Mazalli's terms. With their backing secured, the Poqoza army lured Ciauhpoa and his troops into the Toctli Forest, where the elves and Poqozas awaited them. The overconfident king and his warriors fell into the elves' traps concealed within the woodland's dense foliage. Amid the tangles of branches and vines, the Poqozas and their elven allies decimated the Xacotan army, slaying Ciauhpoa and his top commanders in a vicious bloodbath.

The king's death and the total annihilation of Xacota's formerly impressive military forces led to the city's practically instantaneous downfall. The fragile peace that prevailed across the whole of Tehuatl for centuries disintegrated within a matter of weeks. The rival city-states of the north vied against each other for territorial supremacy, while the self-proclaimed Poqozas in southern Tehuatl rapidly consolidated their stranglehold over the region, a development that greatly troubled the hero-gods who saw their popularity decline. To restore the people's faith, the feathered serpent Nonotzali descended from his lofty pinnacle in the heavens and walked among men for 40 days. His noble gesture reassured the Aztlis of the hero-gods' devotion to them, especially during their darkest hours. To demonstrate his commitment to the people, he founded the city of Tlazo and proclaimed it to be the centerpiece of the newly established Couatl Kingdom. Although the Aztlis would still rule the metropolis and surrounding area, the couatls, his personal minions, counseled their leaders and fought in the city's defense.

With the bonds of the Xacotan alliance in complete tatters, the elves, dwarves, and gnomes of northern Tehuatl capitalized on the Aztli's dysfunction and expanded their borders beyond their former holdings. King Nukroc Firebrand, the overlord of the dwarven Firebrand Clan, declared his kingdom's hegemony over the whole of the Tepepan Mountains and the surrounding foothills, while Lord Sornatay Tarothan, ruler of the elves, and Alstix Ungolt, the gnomish elder, followed suit across most of the Cuahltla Forest. Not to be outdone, the orcs, goblins, and hobgoblins carved out fiefdoms of their own in sparsely or uninhabited areas of Tehuatl bordering the various humanoid settlements. The gnolls, a longtime menace of the Aztli, were unwilling to just fill in the voids left in the wake of Xacota's demise. Nonotzali's brother, the devious Itzcuin, took a special interest in his distant canine brethren and urged them to wage a proxy war against the newly installed Couatl Kingdom. Surprisingly, the gnolls mustered several hundred Tozcas, the Aztli descendants of those who sided with Tlatoani against the hero-gods, and also gathered small bands of Aztli allies who remained apathetic toward the hero-gods and bristled at the notion of serving under the non-human minions of a deity they believe abandoned them. The gnolls lacked the couatls' magical firepower and strength, though their numerical superiority and embedded cells of Aztli spies and operatives partially compensated for these deficiencies. For the better part of the next two centuries, northern Tehuatl remained in a near constant state of unrest, while the rival Aztli city-states and humanoid kingdoms skirmished over their territorial holdings in northern Tehuatl. These bitter foes always kept a wary eye pointed toward the south where the upstart Poqozas had devised ambitious plans of their own.

Nonotzali's goodwill tour calmed frayed nerves and quelled disenfranchisement in northern Tehuatl, but the Poqozas remained unimpressed. While the couatls re-established some semblance of stability in their small corner north of the Tehuatl Isthmus, the Poqozas made their current feelings toward their former kin abundantly clear. They had no intentions of reconciling with the Aztli or returning into their religious fold. The determined Poqozas demonstrated their resolve to forever under their ties to the Aztli with a remarkable engineering feat. Over the next six years, they furiously dug a canal across the entire breadth of the isthmus at its narrowest point, creating a watery barrier designed to impede the progress of an approaching invasion force from the north and to serve as a symbolic gesture of their desire to divorce themselves from their Aztli past.

With this monumental task completed, the Poqozas' initial euphoria slowly subsided and gave way to the realization they were unprepared for the burdens of self-governing. After breaking away from Xacota's shackles, the hedonistic Cult of Tlatcolli never contemplated how to move forward as a people or a state. Mazalli, the leader who guided the Poqozas through their formative years, suddenly and tragically passed away almost immediately after her subjects completed her visionary canal. Rumors claimed agents of the hero-gods or one of the deities themselves poisoned Mazalli, though the aging woman had displayed subtle signs of illness for several months before her untimely death. Nonetheless, with no obvious heir to her crown or shared purpose after finishing their engineering marvel, the Poqozas settled into a state of shared, anarchic complacency. As a collective people, they achieved the bare minimum, procuring just enough food and provisions for daily survival while spending the balance of their days idle and directionless. With the lone exception of their wondrous canal, the Poqozas lacked the drive and motivation to erect the architectural marvels of their northern kin. The elves of the Toctli Forest who helped the Poqozas attain their independence took notice of their extremely lackadaisical attitude and capitalized on it. The opportunistic Lord Alrand and the elves under his command emerged from the forest and annexed portions of the fertile grasslands from the listless people who gladly ceded their territory for jewelry and other precious objects. In addition to the Poqozas' proclivity for overindulging in life's pleasures, the lithe and attractive elves instantly garnered attention from the men and women who were smitten by their beauty and charm. Within a few generations, some elven blood flowed through the veins of nearly every newborn Poqoza, especially among the nobility who frequently arranged marriages to further promote their political and economic interests. While the humanoids of northern Tehuatl bitterly fought for every scrap of land, the Poqozas in the south underwent a peaceful transition into a predominately half-elven domain that embraced elements of both societies. Although Tlatcolli remained their chief deity, the Poqozas indulged their numerous vices in moderation or recklessly binged after long periods of abstinence instead of continually engaging in wanton excess. The recalibration of their priorities once again reinvigorated their previously listless society.

With the Poqozas snapping out of their lethargy, the city-states and humanoids of northern Tehuatl finally tired of constant bloodshed after almost two centuries of endless warfare. Representatives of the Couatl Kingdom from Tlazo and the city-states of Atenco on the western coastline, Ixtla on the edge of the semiarid Cepual Desert, and Mactli in the central grasslands gathered together to hammer out the accords of the Aztli Confederation. Under the terms of the agreement, the four major metropolises pledged to work together to restore Aztli hegemony over northern Tehuatl, though the competing states still maintain some semblances of acting like separate fiefdoms rather than a

cohesive, integrated unit.

After setting their hostilities aside, the quartet added the remaining holdout cities, towns, and villages to the fold before turning toward recapturing territories lost to the other humanoid races during their long conflict. Fearful of engaging in another protracted struggle against a determined and numerically superior adversary, the Firebrand Clan acquiesced to paying the Aztli Confederation an annual tribute of precious metals and gems mined from the mountains in exchange for retaining self-rule over their current lands. The elves and gnomes reached similar accords shortly thereafter. These treaties restored the Aztli dominance over northern Tehuatl, though the four primary members of the confederation sometimes undermine the interests of the collective good for their personal benefit. Despite resolving the hostilities among themselves and the civilized humanoid races, the gnolls, orcs, and goblinoids stood in the way of total domination. With Itzcuin's support and the Tozcas' assistance, the gnolls posed the gravest threat to the Aztli Confederation and more specifically the Couatl Kingdom. Instead of openly fighting alongside the gnolls and their canine companions, the wily Tozcas kept a low-profile and lived within outlaw communities that would accept them. The orcs and goblinoids retreated deeper into the isolated foothills and mountains on the outskirts of the dwarven kingdom that serve as their bases of operations for forays into Aztli lands and Firebrand territory.

Despite the confederation's successes, one old wound stubbornly refused to heal — the injuries left by their old rivals, the Poqozas. In the two centuries since the disastrous Xacotan campaign, their now-distant cousins to the south had drastically changed from Aztli renegades to a distinct ethnicity predominately composed of half-elves who seamlessly blended their human and elven cultures. Although multiple generations had come and gone since the painful schism, the Poqozas exhibited no desire to reconcile with the Aztli or once again bow down to their despised hero-gods. The newly founded Aztli Confederation also displayed no outward signs of wishing for a reunion with their former brethren, but the Poqozas had something the young state desperately wanted — access to its valuable canal. While they were not a seafaring people who took advantage of their manmade obstacle for commercial purposes, the Poqozas were shrewd enough to see their counterpart's interest in opening up a trade route between their eastern and western ports as well as normalizing business and political relations with their southern neighbors.

The Poqozas realized they lacked the military might to defeat the Aztli if they wanted to forcibly take the canal, and not surprisingly, the Aztli also reached the same conclusion. However, the four primary members of the alliance differed on their approach to the Poqozas. The Couatl Kingdom believed it to be more prudent to reach an inexpensive, amicable settlement with their southern neighbors, while more aggressive members of the alliance felt it would be best to simply use the canal without the Poqozas' permission and see how they reacted. After weeks of deliberation, the Aztli settled on a compromise solution. They agreed to sail their warships into the canal and negotiate with the Poqozas from a position of strength. Sensing their northern counterparts would likely resort to such a tactic, laborers from southern Tehuatl lugged massive stones into the canal at predesignated spots to damage or sink ships unwittingly passing through these boobytrapped areas. When the supremely confident Aztli sailed into the canal, their flagship struck one of the concealed obstacles, causing it to helplessly list to its side in the shallow water. The Poqozas waiting onshore leapt into the water to rescue the ship's captain and its crew, who now faced the dire prospect of negotiating a fair and equitable settlement on their opponent's terms and territory. The Aztli ultimately agreed to pay the Poqozas a small annual tribute of precious gems and metals quarried from the Tepepan Mountains for unfettered access to the waterway and to use their engineering expertise to build three causeways spanning the obstacle at strategic locations. Aztli architects, artisans, and workers spent 18 years building the massive causeways that once again connected northern and southern Tehuatl. Intrigues abound on both sides of the span as each political entity sends covert agents across the bridge on a daily basis, in addition to importing and exporting all manner of legal and illegal goods.

The Aztli and Poqozas no longer advocate open warfare against each other, yet their differences remain unresolved. Some elements among the former people have given up on the quest to convert the latter back to the worship of the hero-gods as missionaries from the north periodically venture south to try their luck at bringing the pleasure-seeking Poqozas back into the traditional fold. To undermine their efforts, the Poqozas ship intoxicating cocoa beverages and other mind-altering substances north to loosen up their uptight neighbors on the other side of the canal. When not contending with their rival neighbors, both states must contend with internal dissent within their ranks as the Aztli Confederation frequently juggles the interests of its member city-states who rarely share the same opinions on most policy matters. On the other hand, the Poqozas often pay little attention to any important issues except when faced with imminent danger. They prefer basking in life's simple and extravagant pleasures instead of focusing on amassing more wealth and personal power.

CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF TEHUATL

From a geological standpoint, Tehuatl is a mere infant. When the gods of Boros devastated and submerged the balance of the southern continent beneath the waves, only the tallest peaks of the Tepepan Mountains survived. The island owes its rebirth to the new rock material expelled from Tehuatl's cluster of volcanoes and the receding waters sequestered near the poles from glacial expansion. As the lava, ash, and other debris cooled and hardened, it provided a fertile foundation of nutrient-rich ingredients to create rich topsoil able to support rebounding plant life long suppressed by the fallow earth atop the peaks. The return of lush greenery to the formerly desolate island also paved the way for a resurgence of fauna to the area as well, some of which were imported onto the island over the centuries by distant travelers. Grasslands flourished throughout most of the island's interior as periodic fires kept larger vegetation in check. Swamps and marshes formed along the coastline on the northern and eastern shores while a forest took root on the island's western edges.

From a cultural standpoint, Tehuatl is the last remaining bastion of the southern continent's Alpetetl Alliance. Although the hero-gods supplanted the empire's brutal ruler, the Aztli people who lived under his oppressive yoke remain the island's dominant people. In most places, their institutions and ideals reign supreme, yet in several corners of the island their societal values have either blended with other racial traditions or have been almost entirely supplanted by them. This is most true in the Tepepan Mountains, where the Firebrand dwarves hold firm sway over the towering peaks and in the depths below them, and to a lesser degree in the elven communities scattered across the Toctli Forest. Nonetheless, their presence is felt across the breadth of the island north of the Great Canal separating the Aztli Confederation's domain from the Poqozas and their humanoid allies. Despite these races' firm grip over their realms, monsters and other aggressive humanoids such as goblins, orcs, hobgoblins, and most especially gnolls periodically wreak havoc across the land.

WEATHER

Tehuatl's location in the tropics accounts for its above-average temperatures and rainfall. The warm ocean waters surrounding Tehuatl moderate its temperatures, keeping the island warm during the winter, while the constant influx of humidity pushed onshore by the prevailing winds retain heat and moisture. The damp air generates clouds and precipitation, which regulate the island's climate to prevent it from superheating into uninhabitable extremes during the summer months. The only exception is the Cepual Desert on the leeward side of the Tepepan Mountains. The rain shadow effect strips the moisture from the air passing over the peaks, leaving it warm and dry when it tumbles down the eastern slopes onto the expanse of sand and scrub. The semiarid desert gets scorching hot under the midday sun and then rapidly cools to occasionally bone-chilling lows during the lightless, overnight hours.

The high humidity also has a secondary effect on Tehuatl's industry. The omnipresence of moisture and water create an environment hostile to iron and steel, the primary components in most weapons and some armors produced in Akados and Libynos. To compound matters even further, deposits of ferrous metals are scarce on the island. The technological expertise required to forge steel exists in several corners of Tehuatl, most notably with the Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains and among the Tlotl communities scattered across the island. Yet, the Aztli and Poqozas favor weapons made from wood, stone, and occasionally bronze over iron and steel. Olli, a sturdy yet still flexible variant of vulcanized rubber, has allowed the island's armor makers to forgo traditional metallic components and replace them with the preceding technological wonder.

Despite the creation of a comparatively lightweight protective material, the island's pervasive heat and humidity take a toll on travelers and adventurers alike. As previously discussed, seasonal changes are moderate when compared to temperate climates. Temperatures remain fairly constant, but like most tropical environments, most parts of Tehuatl transition between a rainy and dry season with some variations based upon the area's proximity to the ocean and altitude. Because of its small size, the island's distinct biomes share the

same general climatological and ecological features. For instance, the Toctli Forest and the Cuahtla Forest may not experience the same weather at a given time but use the same chart to determine current conditions. You may use the following tables to simulate the daily weather conditions on the island.

SEMIARID DESERT

Running along the eastern edge of the Tepepan Mountains, the Cepual Desert is generally regarded as the island's least hospitable biome. Temperatures can occasionally soar into the triple digits during the brutally warm summer months and dip below freezing during the chilly winters. When the rains come, they typically arrive as downpours during the late spring and summer when the humidity increases, making life in the semiarid desert downright unpleasant.

TABLE 2-1: SEMIARID DESERT DAILY TEMPERATURE TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Baseline temperature^a	72°F	81°F	54°F	46°F
Daily high temperature^b	+4d8°	+4d6°	+4d8°	+4d6°
Daily low temperature^c	-2d8°	-2d6°	-2d8°	-2d8°

^a Add the variations from the daily high and low temperatures to the baseline.

^b Add the die rolls to the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.

^c Subtract the die rolls from the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.

TABLE 2-2: SEMIARID DESERT DAILY WEATHER TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Daily chance of rain (1d100)	01-08	01-20	01-05	—

TABLE 2-3: SEMIARID ARID DESERT DAILY HUMIDITY TABLE

Humidity Category (1d100)	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Comfortable	01-97	01-65	01-95	01-00
Humid	98-00	66-90	—	—
Muggy	—	91-00	—	—

FOREST AND SWAMPS

These wooded areas dominate most of Tehuatl's coastline, where the neighboring ocean inundates the land and generates ample precipitation to nourish the arboreal giants that tower over the forest floor. Temperatures remain constant throughout much of the year, hovering in the 80- to 90-degree range with little variation between the seasons and even the dark, overnight hours. The high-water vapor content in the air retains heat and also keeps the heat from spiraling out of control because the sun expends much of its radiant energy warming the water molecules in the air.

TABLE 2-4: FOREST AND SWAMP DAILY TEMPERATURE TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Baseline temperature^a	75°F	72°F	70°F	67°F
Daily high temperature^b	+4d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°
Daily low temperature^c	-1d6°	-1d4°	-1d6°	-1d4°

^a Add the variations from the daily high and low temperatures to the baseline.
^b Add the die rolls to the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.
^c Subtract the die rolls from the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.

TABLE 2-5: FOREST AND SWAMP DAILY WEATHER TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Daily chance of rain (1d100)	01-40	01-60	01-40	01-20

TABLE 2-6: FOREST AND SWAMP DAILY HUMIDITY TABLE

Humidity Category (1d100)	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Comfortable	01-20	—	—	01-40
Humid	21-80	01-20	01-25	41-85
Muggy	81-00	21-90	26-75	86-00
Oppressive	—	91-00	76-00	—

GRASSLANDS AND MARSHES

Generally confined to the island’s interior, Tehuatl’s grasslands and marshes are best described as hot and steamy. Rainfall is a regular occurrence, though precipitation usually falls as intermittent showers rather than prolonged storms. Despite occasionally purging moisture from the air, the grasslands and marshes are the island’s most humid biomes, especially during the stifling winters, which receive little relief from cooler temperatures.

TABLE 2-7: GRASSLAND AND MARSH DAILY TEMPERATURE TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Baseline temperature^a	82°F	86°F	82°F	78°F
Daily high temperature^b	+3d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°
Daily low temperature^c	-1d4°	-1d4°	-1d4°	-1d4°

^a Add the variations from the daily high and low temperatures to the baseline.
^b Add the die rolls to the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.
^c Subtract the die rolls from the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.

TABLE 2-8: GRASSLAND AND MARSH DAILY WEATHER TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Daily chance of rain (1d100)	01-40	01-10	01-60	01-80

TABLE 2-9: FOREST AND SWAMP DAILY HUMIDITY TABLE

Humidity Category (1d100)	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Muggy	—	01-30	—	—
Oppressive	01-40	31-80	01-40	01-50
Stifling	41-00	81-00	41-00	51-00

MOUNTAINS

Locked into the island’s interior, weather can change in the blink of an eye in the Tepepan Mountains. It is not uncommon for a bright, sunny day to rapidly transform into an overcast, rainy afternoon. Although located in the tropic zone, the highest peaks experience snowfall and often remain snow-covered throughout the year.

TABLE 2-10: TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS DAILY TEMPERATURE TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Baseline temperature^a	72°F	75°F	68°F	64°F
Daily high temperature^b	+3d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°	+3d6°
Daily low temperature^c	-2d6°	-2d6°	-2d6°	-2d6°

^a Add the variations from the daily high and low temperatures to the baseline. Subtract 3 °F from the baseline temperature for every 1,000 feet of altitude.
^b Add the die rolls to the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.
^c Subtract the die rolls from the baseline temperature. If the table generates the maximum result possible, roll another die and add the result to the total. If the table generates the lowest possible result, roll another die and subtract it from the result.

TABLE 2-11: TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS WEATHER TABLE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Daily chance of rain^a (1d100)	01-10	01-20	01-15	01-10

^a Consult the weather table every 1d10 hours while in the Tepepan Mountains
^b If the temperature is 32°F or less, the precipitation falls as snow

TABLE 2-12: TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS DAILY HUMIDITY TABLE

Humidity Category (1d100)	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Comfortable	01-70	01-60	01-80	01-90
Humid	71-00	61-00	81-00	91-00

ADJUDICATING THE EFFECTS OF HUMIDITY

Most game systems provide a mechanism or mechanic for dealing with the ravages of extreme heat and cold, yet few, if any, account for the debilitating effects high temperatures and humidity have on living creatures. Furthermore, humidity also affects inanimate objects, especially those containing iron, which is susceptible to rust. For these reasons, humanoids adventuring in Tehuatl's warm, humid climate typically refrain from wearing bulky armor made from iron components because of its vulnerability to rust and its added weight. When adjudicating the effects of humidity in your game, we recommend working within the existing game system to handle this topic rather than creating a new mechanic to address it. For instance, if objects can be damaged or must succeed on saving throws to avoid taking damage, rust either deals damage to the iron or steel object based upon the degree of humidity in the air or requires the object to succeed on a more difficult saving throw to resist developing rust on its surface. Likewise, high humidity may add a penalty to a saving throw against the effects of heat or require the creature to succeed on a saving throw to avoid becoming fatigued, exhausted, or something similar. The following section describes each humidity category and its possible impacts. While the humidity has an impact on iron regardless of the air temperatures, humidity only affects living creatures when combined with heat.

Comfortable: The humidity is within tolerable levels and has no debilitating effects on creatures or objects.

Humid: The moisture in the air reaches an uncomfortable level, but the effects are minor. An iron object subjected to prolonged exposure of 30 days or greater under these conditions may begin to show signs of rust without proper maintenance. Creatures mildly struggle to adjust to the humidity but any damage or debilitating impacts are minor. A low-level character would have little difficulty resisting these impacts.

Muggy: The moisture in the air is pervasive. An iron object left in the open may begin to rust after seven or more days of constant exposure without proper maintenance. The heat index increases dramatically, making it more difficult for living creatures to cope with the temperatures, potentially leading to fatigue or a similar effect. A low-level character would have some difficulty avoiding these effects.

Oppressive: The humidity is unbearable. An iron object exposed to these conditions may begin to show signs of rust within 1d4 days if not properly maintained. Creatures struggle mightily with the moisture, which could exhaust the creature or impose a similar effect. Low-level characters would have a hard time avoiding the detrimental effects of oppressive humidity, while mid-level characters would have moderate difficulty doing so.

Stifling: The moisture is inescapable. An iron object subjected to this condition for more than one day may begin to rust if not properly maintained. In addition to exhausting living creatures, stifling humidity may also deal damage. Low-level characters would struggle mightily to resist the effects of stifling humidity, while mid-level characters would find it challenging to resist the impacts of stifling humidity.

GEOGRAPHY

As the northernmost tip of the southern continent, Tehuatl sits at the convergence of the continental and oceanic tectonic plates as well as several significantly smaller plates juxtaposed around and between the two gargantuan pieces of the planet's crust. These potent seismic forces created an oddly-shaped subduction zone that gave rise to the Tepepan Mountains at the island's heart. For much of its formative history, the heat created by the colliding plates liquified the rocks and stones at the junction points between the tectonic plates and forced them toward the surface where they were expelled through volcanic activity. In prehistoric times, the Tepepan Mountains were significantly more volatile than today with almost daily eruptions at some location within the range and nearly constant tremors rocking the surface. Over the passing millennia as the plates shifted into more stable positions and the waters inundated nearly all of Notos after its destruction, the volcanism and seismic activity waned to its current levels, with infrequent eruptions and earthquakes occurring once or twice every century and major events roughly once every several thousand years. Nonetheless, vast quantities of stored energy lie in wait far below Tehuatl's surface. While the delicate balancing act appears stable for the moment, the ingredients for a titanic geological catastrophe are clearly present deep underground.

Although Tehuatl's residents greatly fear the sight of ash bellowing into the heavens from one of the Tepepan Mountains' angry peaks, volcanism's

happy product is rich, fertile soil. Indeed, the arable land closest to the mountains yields many coveted agricultural products renowned for their taste and desirable qualities. However, even the most productive earth cannot support most plant life without a reliable source of water. Rainfall deluging the Tepepan Mountains' western slopes along with melting snows cascade down the towering giants and flow into the surrounding grassland and forest as rivers and streams. In addition, wetlands still dominate the island's coasts, especially along its eastern shores where countless estuaries and inlets create a network of rivers, streams, and lakes that funnel into the island's interior. These low-lying areas soak up storm surge and torrential rains from the coastal storms that plague the island during the late summer and autumn months, preventing catastrophic floods from reaching the island's predominately dry interior, which also benefits from increases in elevation attributable to deposited volcanic materials and receding oceanwater sequestered at the poles.

Most of Tehuatl's humanoid and animal population is concentrated within the concentric bands of forests and grasslands encircling the Tepepan Mountains and the same biomes south of the Great Canal, while the swamps and marshes along the island's edges remain largely uninhabited and undeveloped. Rivers and lakes riddling the landscape in these interior areas facilitate transportation and also serve as the foundation for the Aztlis' chinampa system of farming, where builders relocate earth and soil into drying lake beds and other shallow bodies of water to lessen the need to irrigate already saturated land. Chinampas are also found in valleys and other naturally formed depressions where water may be only a few feet or even inches beneath the surface. In contrast to grasslands and forests elsewhere, Tehuatl's topography is rarely flat and uniform. Undulating hills, swales, plateaus, and caves riddle the landscape. The ground's prolonged exposure to seawater after Tlatoani's destruction and its volcanic reconstruction transformed the terrain on a localized basis.

FAUNA AND FLORA

As an isolated island sequestered away from much of the rest of the world, Tehuatl lacks the biodiversity found in distant Akados and Libynos. While its remoteness plays an important role in its comparatively lower amounts of biological variations, the island's climate and the saline waters surrounding and running through the landscape play a secondary part in its ecological development. The plants and animals that live here must adapt to its warmer temperatures, periodically extreme humidity, and the prevalence of saltwater around and throughout Tehuatl. Most creatures do so through a reduction in size, lessening the surface area of their bodies in contact with the moist air. Because of this adaptation, smaller animals and insects are found in abundance. On the other hand, the number of large predatory and herbivore species is remarkably small. Crocodiles, jaguars, and bears sit atop the food chain as the island's apex predators with cougars, wolves, coyotes, ocelots, dogs, foxes, raccoons, coatis, skunks, weasels, and otters occupying the rung beneath them. These carnivores feed on a bountiful supply of deer, tapirs, peccaries, rabbits, hares, monkeys, squirrels, rats, mice, gophers, pacas, agouties, porcupines, guinea pigs, frogs, salamanders, iguanas, opossums, sloths, anteaters, and armadillos. Meanwhile, bats, eagles, falcons, hawks, herons, and owls rule the treetops and skies where their aerial view of the landscape gives them a distinct advantage over their earthbound prey. The birds of prey and winged mammals hunt some of the preceding animals as well as their avian relatives including hummingbirds, parrots, finches, flycatchers, ducks, mockingbirds, parakeets, orioles, doves, cuckoos, wrens, woodpeckers, pigeons, turkeys, warblers, swifts, and tanagers. Oceanic predators such as killer whales, sharks, and seals rarely venture into Tehuatl's rivers and lakes, where crocodiles lurk beneath the surface and along the shores. Manatees and an assortment of other fish cohabitate these waters alongside the reptilian predators along with the region's unique indigenous species, the ilhuitecuani, a massive seal sometimes used to haul an apanimacal, a specially designed vehicle, across water and over land. Absent the preceding animal, Tehuatl has no conventional beasts of burden to work the fields or aid in transportation. Furthermore, the people of Tehuatl show little interest in domesticating wild animals for these or any other useful purpose. Turkeys and the island's hairless Xoloitzcuintli dogs are the most notable exceptions with scattered instances of other humanoid populations taming wild animals as livestock, mounts, or farmhands.

When discussing Tehuatl's flora, it is impossible to start the conversation without mentioning the staple crop that feeds much of the island's humanoid and animal population — maize. Tehuatl's humanoid population could not imagine a world without this cereal grain. Maize flourishes in the island's grasslands north and south of the Great Canal as well as on its numerous chinampas built atop bodies of water within the forests, swamps, marshes, and even its mountainous regions. Other staple crops include papaya trees, amaranth, fig trees, cacao trees, avocados, nopal, cassava, chia seeds, pineapples, potatoes, quinoa, squash,



beans, cactus, and tomatoes. In addition to these edible crops, the island also produces flavoring agents such as cinnamon, vanilla, chili peppers, and cilantro. While these grains, vegetables, and fruits are an essential part of most humanoids' daily diet, two other plant materials have also helped shape Tehuatl — the rubber tree and the morning glory. When the latex harvested from the rubber tree is added to the juice of the morning glory vine, it creates the flexible substance the Aztlis refer to as olli. When heated and combined with crushed quartz and other silica-based materials, olli becomes vulcanized, greatly increasing its strength and durability while maintaining much of its malleability. This technological advancement allowed the island's humanoid population to partially transition away from metallic armor to olli-based armor that provides roughly the same protection without the added weight and vulnerability to the elements.

The Aztlis and others use the plethora of flowering plants such as aloe, maguey, yucca, marigolds, dahlias, poinsettias, orchids, serpent head flowers, and sunflowers for decorations and medicinal purposes. Tehuatl's residents harvest the island's timber for a multitude of uses, including construction, tools, and weaponry. Its trees include those found in other parts of the Lost Lands: oak, palm, mangrove, cedar, and pine, with some more exotic arboreal species including acacia, ahuehuete, and the highly toxic manchineel tree. When ill, the island's humanoids pursue herbal remedies to cure disease, alleviate pain, or escape from the world for a while. These include sapodilla, lolliuqui, teonanacatl, moonflowers, tobacco, peyote, and salvia among others.

Obviously, the preceding list could not possibly be all-inclusive. As a general rule of thumb, any animal or plant found in the Americas before the year 1492 CE (Common Era) can, at your discretion, be found in Tehuatl, provided the animal inhabits or the plant grows in an environment identical or similar to one found in Tehuatl.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Tehuatl's economy relies heavily upon its agricultural production. Its numerous chinampas produce bountiful yields of maize, grains, vegetables, and fruit not found elsewhere in the Lost Lands. Fishermen along its shores haul in a bounty of crustaceans, including shrimp and crabs, though the Tulitas also hunt for whales and gargantuan fish in the waters off eastern Tehuatl, where they transform the animals' bones into scrimshaw art objects and harvest ambergris

from their intestinal tracts. The same, soggy shorelines also host isolated patches of peatland, which some residents harvest as a combustible fuel source.

The young island also boasts an impressive inventory of valuable commodities. The Firebrand dwarves in the Tepepan Mountains extract rich deposits of gold and silver ore buried within the peaks' stony walls and recesses. Copper, tin, and zinc also exist in great quantities within the mountains, though iron is in short supply across the island, with only a handful of known deposits scattered across the mountains and the neighboring desert. Even tinier pockets of mithral lie buried beneath the earth, making a discovery of the lightweight, rustproof metal exceedingly rare. Gemstones such as turquoise, jade, obsidian, amethyst, quartz, opal, and moonstone are frequently incorporated into jewelry and artwork.

TECHNOLOGY IN TEHUATL

Because of the island's small size in comparison to the rest of the Lost Lands, the people who reside here have deliberately or unintentionally shared their technologies with their close neighbors, giving rise to an eclectic inventory of scientific breakthroughs and inventions with varying sources of inspiration. Most straddle the boundaries between the Medieval and the Renaissance periods as described in *The World of the Lost Lands* from *Frog God Games* while some exceed it and others lag slightly behind those historical periods. The most provocative and impactful scientific advancement in Tehuatl is the Aztlis' development of vulcanized rubber, which they use to manufacture sturdy armor and weapons that are not as weighty as metal and also suffer no ill effects from long-term exposure to water, like iron and steel. Olli is the term used to describe the base rubber created by combining latex from certain trees with the juice of the morning glory vine to create the flexible material we know as rubber. When the Aztlis botanist Atoyapaca heated olli and added crushed quartz under pressurized conditions to the material, he discovered it hardened significantly and retained its desired shape without adding extra weight, making it a viable alternative to metal and other inflexible or overly cumbersome materials. The Aztlis predominately use the material to create armor and weapons, though it can also be incorporated for other practical applications such as rubber bands that could theoretically be used for tension in siege equipment, rubber-soled shoes for added comfort and protection, gaskets, and a sealant for ships.

CREATOR'S NOTE: DECISION RATIONALE

Obviously, Mesoamerican people never came into contact with fantastical races such as elves and dwarves in the real world who would have introduced previously unknown knowledge and innovative technologies to an already advanced civilization with a firm understanding of mathematics, astronomy, engineering, medicine, and other scientific disciplines. This altered version of reality required us to make compromises in some areas while still remaining true to the source material and the original vision for this corner of the Lost Lands' campaign setting. In this regard, we felt comfortable adding steel and other metals such as adamantite and mithral into the mix because the dwarves and elves would certainly possess the expertise to manufacture these articles and completely eliminating them would prevent characters from wearing heavy armor and wielding many popular weapons. However, the heat and humidity in Tehuatl limit their widespread usage, thus confining cumbersome metal armor and bulky equipment to the island's cooler and drier regions that are largely at the higher elevations and in the depths of the Tepepan Mountains where, not coincidentally, the Firebrand dwarves predominately reside. The humans of Tehuatl adapted to this challenge and enhanced the rubber of the Aztecs' time by developing vulcanization techniques that significantly hardened the material without adding significantly more weight and leaving it invulnerable to rust.

Likewise, the same limitations apply to the wheel, which the Aztecs knew of as demonstrated by its application in their toys, but proved impractical because of their environment. While the wheel is a known commodity in Tehuatl, it is rarely used because of the wet soil and mountainous terrain as well as the lack of beasts of burden and manpower to haul such vehicles long distances. In this regard, we felt that introducing horses and other commonly used work animals that were not indigenous to the Americas before 1492 CE would significantly change Tehuatl's flavor and add a non-Mesoamerican element to the world we were not seeking to incorporate into Tehuatl. However, this exclusion does not prohibit characters from using mounts, as several indigenous species, such as elk, could be suited for this purpose if the character has the ability to tame and train the animal for such a task. Therefore, while mounts and beasts of burden are not widespread, someone with the skill and charisma to domesticate a wild creature can do so. On the other hand, being an island world, the development of warships and merchant vessels powered by sails and oarsmen made sense from a logistical and tactical standpoint. Without an effective navy or fleet, the native inhabitants would be virtually powerless to stop an oceanic invasion force with only canoes and land-based troops and commercial enterprises would be unable to efficiently ship large quantities of goods long distances without impractically large teams of runners.

As a general rule of thumb, any invention found in Mesoamerica before 1492 CE also appears in Tehuatl along with imported technology from the elves, dwarves, Tlotls, and Tulitas — within reason. In the former case, these marvels include paper made from fig trees and in some cases maguey leaves, a greater understanding of sanitation than most contemporary cultures, medicines made from herbs and plants including agave sap, a natural antibiotic used to prevent wounds from becoming infected, and mirrors made from polished obsidian among others. The dwarves, elves, and Tlotls brought the art of steel manufacturing to the island along with other metallurgy advancements and some shipbuilding techniques that the Aztlis later adopted into their designs for oceanic vessels and warships. Some crude hydraulic-powered tools such as a waterwheel and similar devices also make sense if they only incorporate existing technologies into their design. However, later inventions including gunpowder, ironclad vessels, and steam power are not realistic or feasible additions to Tehuatl's level of technology.

TRANSPORTATION

Tehuatl is miniscule in comparison to the heartlands of Akados and Libynos. Nonetheless, the island has stretches of treacherous terrain, most notably within the Tepepan Mountains and several other largely pristine wilderness areas. The

animals used for riding and pulling vehicles are rare or nonexistent on the island. The island lacks the horses, donkeys, and other conventional beasts of burden normally found in the northern continent. Although it may be theoretically possible to ride a jaguar or another large animal, these wild creatures must be domesticated and extensively trained before such an attempt becomes feasible. Furthermore, Tehuatl's moist, tropical climate keeps the ground yielding or soggy for most of the year, which impedes wheeled vehicular traffic. At various points in the island's history, the Aztlis and other humanoid races experimented with wheeled vehicles, but their efforts always bogged down in the soft earth. While roads provide a solution to this problem, the Aztlis and others never made a concerted effort to building paved thoroughfares because floods and torrential downpours frequently damaged these trails or swept them away minutes after getting pummeled by angry raindrops.

Fortunately, copious volumes of water that stymie overland travel supply the rivers, lakes, and smaller bodies of water spread across Tehuatl. Residents use canoes and similar vessels to navigate these narrow and often shallow waterways that lack the depth to keep barges and mighty warships afloat. Because of these limitations, commercial traffic remains confined to the seas surrounding the island as well as the rivers and lakes broad and deep enough to avoid having the vessel run aground.

In circumstances where water travel is not possible, inhabitants usually travel by foot. They frequently use wooden support frames attached to their backs to carry goods overland, especially during long-distance journeys. Merchants often hire tlatemes, professional porters who specialize in lugging goods across arduous terrain for many miles. A handful of Aztlis and other humanoids domesticated rams and other large, surefooted animals to undertake these tasks, but the expenditures in time and expertise required to do so generally outweigh the benefits. It is simply easier to pay a commoner a few cacao beans to strap some items to his back and walk than to tame a wild animal and then bear the burden of feeding and caring for it when it is not working.

Tlatemes specialize in transporting goods for long distances, yet the Aztlis use athletic runners to carry messages across the island. Known as titlantlis, these couriers travel by foot and sea to deliver communications and written correspondence throughout Tehuatl. Tiltlantlis undergo rigorous training to carry out their important missions. In addition to using cardiovascular exercises to increase their stamina, they also learn hand-to-hand combat and must become expert swimmers. Tiltlantlis never travel on well-worn paths and known trails to lessen the risk of being ambushed by others lying in wait to rob them or intercept their critical communiques. Instead, these hardy men and women must race through untamed areas to deliver their information to another tiltlantli awaiting them at predetermined relay stations usually spaced between five and 10 miles apart depending upon the location's proximity to a major city or urban area. In remote, rural locales, relay stations are few and far between, which often forces the tiltlantli to run for two to three days before getting any relief.

LANGUAGE

When discussing languages in Tehuatl, the Aztli and Common tongues are interchangeable. Aztli is the most widely spoken language across the island. It is naturally the language of the Aztli Confederation and the Poqozas, while nearly every other humanoid race native to Tehuatl can speak at least a few phrases. The Common tongue spoken in Akados and Libynos differs from the Common tongue in Tehuatl, which is Aztli. Therefore, Tlotls who arrive on the island from somewhere else in the Lost Lands cannot successfully converse with Aztlis in the Common tongue and vice versa in the case of an Aztli who ventures to Akados or Libynos and attempts to speak with the inhabitants in his version of Common, which is Aztli.

The Aztli language began as a solely spoken tongue without an alphabet. Aztli authors used pictographs and symbols to depict proper names, ideas, concepts, events, or images, but these early works were a tentative step above crude cave paintings. Not surprisingly, the Immortal Sun Tlatoani Xicocoya stunted the development or growth of an alphabet out of fear that the Aztli people would use the newfound written medium to anonymously criticize their absolute ruler and easily communicate military plans with likeminded people opposed to his regime. His trepidation was well-founded as the hero-gods initially relied upon sketches and diagrams to convey complex messages that could be and frequently were misinterpreted. While the lack of an alphabet stymied their efforts to coordinate their activities, their dependence upon artwork and imagery gave them the inspiration to draw unflattering, cartoonish images of Tlatoani and his snake advisors that let them poke fun at the emperor in an easily-understood yet thought-provoking manner. Despite the advantages of producing humorous and outrageous propaganda through art, the hero-gods realized they needed a more reliable method of distributing

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The Aztecs spoke Nahuatl, a language still spoken in parts of Central America today. Throughout this work, we strived to maintain a delicate balance between remaining authentic to this tongue while not using or creating words that English-speaking people would likely have great difficulty reading or pronouncing. We could not avoid this in every case, though we endeavored to minimize it as much as possible. The following pronunciation guide is intended to help you properly pronounce the Nahuatl words and phrases that appear in this work. As a general rule of thumb, place the accent on the word's penultimate syllable. Except for the diphthongs appearing in the following table, two vowels written together belong to different syllables.

TABLE 2-13: NAHUATL PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

English Character	Nahuatl Pronunciation
A	Like the a in <i>father</i>
E	Like the e in <i>wet</i>
I	Like the i in <i>police</i>
O	Like the o in <i>vote</i>
U	Like the u in <i>chute</i>
Aa, ee, ii, oo, uu	Like the same vowel except held longer
C	Hard c as in <i>cut</i> when before a, o, or u; soft c as in <i>city</i> before e or i
Ch	Like the ch in <i>chart</i>
Cu	Like the qu in <i>queen</i>
H	Like the h in <i>hay</i>
Hu	Like the w in <i>weight</i>
L	Like the l in <i>light</i>
M	Like the m in <i>moon</i>
N	Like the n in <i>night</i>
P	Like the p in <i>pie</i>
Qu	Like the k in <i>key</i>
T	Like the t in <i>tie</i>
Tl	Like the l in <i>glue</i> except held slightly longer. There is no "T" sound in this combination.
Tz	Like the ts in <i>hats</i>
X	Like the sh in <i>fish</i>
Y	Like the y in <i>yes</i>
Z	Like the s in <i>sun</i>
Au	Like the ow in <i>now</i>
Ai	Like the word <i>eye</i>

written communication between themselves and the people they were fighting to liberate. They created a cipher system to overcome this obstacle. Coded symbols took the place of words, names, places, directions, distances, and other intelligence vital to coordinate military actions.

After defeating Tlatoani, the impetus for fully transitioning into a written language waned. While some of the ciphers retained their meaning after the hero-gods' ascendance into godhood, most faded into obscurity. However, their exposure to their humanoid neighbors reinvigorated their efforts to complete the process and fully adopt an alphabet. Although they based their alphabets on letters appearing in Common, Elvish, and Dwarvish script, they added several new letters to accommodate some of their strange sounds. The Aztli's alphabet consists of letters borrowed from Common and Dwarvish with seven completely new letters representing inflections and unusual pitches not found in either of the preceding scripts. The Poqozas still speak Aztli, but

their alphabet exclusively incorporates multiple letters borrowed from Elvish script with the addition of 14 new letters emulating tones and sounds also not found in the Elvish alphabet. Despite these linguistic advances, the use of the written language remains firmly in the domain of the nobility and the ranks of the clergy. Everyone is taught to read and write at an early age, though only the privileged use these skills after completing their education. Atrophy takes a toll on the fluency of most adults who probably never had a great need to read and write during their adult lifetimes.

CURRENCY

No single authority issues currency in Tehuatl. The island's non-Aztli humanoids largely conduct financial transactions using coins they minted from precious metals typical of economies in Akados and Libynos. In this case, the coin's value is solely based upon the metal's worth and not an intangible value from the issuer. Although not produced by the Aztli, these coins are in wide circulation through Tehuatl and are recognized everywhere. However, trade generally involves the direct exchange of goods and services between two or more parties rather than witnessing any money changing hands. On those occasions where hard currency comes into play, the Aztli Confederation uses three forms of accepted currency — xocolati, quachtli, and tahateras. Xocolati are cacao beans, which are generally worth the equivalent of 1 silver piece with a modest degree of fluctuation that never exceeds more than 2 sp for a single cacao bean or 1 sp for two cacao beans. Quachtli is a specially woven piece of rare white cotton valued as the equivalent of 20 gp. Although some of its worth derives from its components and the expertise needed to craft quachtli, the item's true value comes from its representation as a symbol of the Aztli Confederation's favor and goodwill. Trading with quachtli implies the owner's close association with important and powerful members of the Aztli Confederation. In the eyes of most Tehuatl residents, it is the equivalent of name dropping that you are a personal friend and ally of an exceptionally important person within the Aztli Confederation. Only a small handful of people have the skill and expertise to weave quachtlis, and all of them serve at the behest of the Aztli Confederation. Anyone who attempts to use a counterfeit quachtli in an Aztli marketplace faces severe consequences from the Aztli authorities, up to and including death. Telling the difference between the genuine article and a fake can be difficult for a novice unfamiliar with handling transactions using quachtlis. Only the merchant class usually conducts transactions using quachtlis. Out of the confederation's sphere of influence, a quachtli's value decreases to the equal of 5 gp. The last type of currency, the tahateras are wedge-shaped coins minted from thin pieces of polished copper. Aztli's universally refer to the tahateras as uictli money because of their resemblance to the common planting stick. As expected, these coins are worth 1 cp regardless of where the owner uses them.

THE AZTLI CONFEDERATION

Formed from the smoldering remnants of Xacota's spectacular demise and the Poqozas' schism, the political entity known as the Aztli Confederation is a loose alliance among the island's four major Aztli city-states — Atenco, Ixtla, Mactli, and Tlazo. On the surface, the partners appear to function as cooperative equals, yet behind the scenes, each local authority jockey for position among their counterparts in endless political intrigues involving arranged marriages between scions, trade agreements, and acquisition of tribute from settlements under the quartet's hegemony. The confederation holds sway over all the lands north of the Great Canal, though the level of influence in an area depends upon its value and proximity to one of the alliance's power centers. The Aztli Confederation never exerts direct rule over the settlements and people outside its immediate borders. In exchange for local autonomy, the Aztli Confederation demands tributes from communities within its domain. These offerings include useful commodities indigenous to the locale such as fresh produce, maize, livestock, gems, timber, herbs, and precious metals.

However, the most prized tributes are living creatures offered as sacrifices to the Aztli's deities. Some communities gladly hand over criminals, undesirables, and captives for summary execution, while others reluctantly pluck unfortunate souls from the ranks of the poor and downtrodden to satisfy their rulers' thirst for blood. Each individual city-state handles the assessment and exactment of tributes from the settlements under their jurisdiction as agreed to by the four members at the beginning of each tonalpoahualli (calendar year). While location is the first and foremost consideration in this determination, many settlements occupy "gray" areas roughly equidistant from two or more city-states or are so far away from any city-state that location becomes virtually irrelevant. Although

most communities falling into the preceding category are simply rolled over year after year to maintain continuity in the region, the negotiations about lucrative settlements leads to intense political wrangling involving the four members and representatives from the settlement being discussed. The Aztli Confederation desires stability and the veneer of unity, yet when riches and souls are at stake, the internal players sometimes cast pragmatism aside in favor of personal interest. Officials and even prominent citizens occasionally offer to marry their sons or daughters to a local ruler's children to cement a permanent relationship with the ruling family and, by extension, the community at large. Despite their professed autonomy, the competing city-states frequently meddle in the affairs of others by inserting agents and loyalists into strategic positions within the local establishments. Pochtecas play a key role in these clandestine affairs. These charismatic merchants gather intelligence for their masters while using their wares to expand their influence over an area and gain valuable allies. When negotiations, bribes, and personal favors fall short of resolving a city-state's jurisdiction over a specific area, the members often settle their disputes in a variety of unique ways, including by deciding the outcome based upon the winner of an ullamaliztli match between an elite team of ullamalonis from each of the city-states involved in the dispute or by staging a small scale battle between warriors chosen from the rival camps.

In the event of all-out warfare, the Aztli Confederation can field a fearsome army to enforce its edicts and punish those refusing to capitulate to their leaders' demands. Its leaders wisely integrated soldiers and officers from each of the four member states into a single force under the joint command of four generals chosen from each of the city-states. The army generally has roughly 40,000 troops, and it can, if necessary, muster another 106,000 warriors from the ranks of its citizens to complement its full-time professionals. The Aztli Confederation's military forces are extremely hierarchal with jaguar and eagle warriors making up its lowest ranks. Jaguar and eagle cuauhocolotls, members of an elite military order, fight at the head of the army alongside their warrior counterparts. Specialized units including the barbarians known as the "shorn ones" and the elite omati warriors also fight in conjunction with and alongside the main infantry columns. In addition to its ground forces, the Aztli Confederation also boasts an impressive fleet of twenty warships manned by roughly 2,600 sailors and soldiers. These vessels predominately patrol the Great Canal, the island's largest rivers, and the ocean waters surrounding the island. Another 4,100 mariners take to the smaller bodies of water aboard specially designed streamlined canoes equipped with alder wood rams. Despite traveling aboard some of the island's grandest ships, the Aztli who take to the seas are typically perceived as being less honorable and prestigious than their land-based counterparts in the eyes of their leaders and fellow citizens. This notion often forces the city-states to conscript men and women into its navy, leading to low morale and some incompetence among its ranks. Nonetheless, the creation of a fleet in a necessary evil in a land completely surrounded by water.

Unity on the battlefield rarely extends to other arenas. Each city-state governs its citizens and vassals differently. While the laws generally coincide with widely accepted Aztli ideals and morality, their interpretation and enforcement vary greatly among the rivals as well as their application to citizens within its boundaries and people in communities under its tributary jurisdiction. Some regimes enforce a strict code of ethics with harsh punishments for transgressions, while other adopt laxer standards with uneven disciplines for committing a wide variety of offenses. Likewise, all members of the Aztli Confederation venerate Tehuatl's hero-gods yet the priesthoods of each deity often determine the gods' pecking order within the city-state's religious hierarchy. As an old Aztli saying professes, "The taller the temple, the greater the stature."

AZTLI SOCIETY

Aztli society draws a distinct boundary between nobility and commoners. Because the hero-gods originated from the ranks of mortals, their surviving family members immediately transcended into the ruling elite. They and their descendants received the title *coconeteotl*, or children of the gods. The Aztlis kept meticulous genealogical records to confirm their lineage to at least one hero-god. Although thousands of years have passed since the deities' ascendance into divinity, many *coconeteotls* can recite the names of hundreds of deceased ancestors from memory. The *coconeteotls* are the highest strata of Aztli society, and in Poqoza society if the individual shares lineage with Tlatlcoalli. Naturally, most members of the *coconeteotl* class serve their distant ancestor as members of their priesthood and as other skilled professionals who build temples and other wondrous objects to honor them.

Although the *coconeteotls* enjoy the benefits of rank, wealth, and privilege from their exalted status, they rarely occupy positions of secular authority within

the Aztlis' political structure. These duties frequently fall to the *quichtic*, a class of nobility who gained their social status through legendary accomplishments on the battlefield. The title of *quichtic* is passed down to the warrior's direct descendants from one generation to the next with one important caveat — his or her descendants must also distinguish themselves in combat, though not necessarily to the degree of the original recipient. For this reason, many *quichtics* belong to one of the Aztlis' Cuauhocolotl military orders or elite fighting units. The third and final rank of nobility is the *tlahtoh* class. These members of nobility acquired their status through great achievements in other fields such as astronomy, architecture, art, engineering, mathematics, medicine, or any other suitable discipline. However, a *quichtic* or *conocoteotl* must confer the title of *tlahtoh* onto the individual to gain this status. The person keeps the title of *tlahtoh* for life. For future generations, each child of a current *tlahtoh* must either provide a service for the nobleperson or that person's family who granted the *tlahtoh* or pay that family a sum of 10 *quachtlis* to retain that individual's noble status. Therefore, it is entirely possible that some children of a *tlahtoh* remain *tlahtohs* while others return to the status of commoners.

Pochtecas, the Aztlis' merchant class, straddle the line between nobility and commoner. Although they can afford the trappings of nobility, they do not enjoy all of its privileges. While they freely interact and move among society's elite, their children attend school alongside commoners' sons and daughters.

Like most societies, commoners make up the bulk of the Aztli population, though they are also further subdivided based upon a person's profession, such as craftsperson, farmer, hunter, laborer, teacher, or warrior. The Aztlis have a more enlightened attitude than most cultures regarding the rigors of maintaining the home and raising children, which they hold in the highest esteem. There is no true hierarchy among the commoners, yet some professions look unfavorably on others based upon the individual or group's personal biases. While a commoner can never ascend into the rank of *coconeteotl*, a commoner may become a *quichtic* or a *tlahtoh*. For most, the path to betterment in stature lies with compulsory education that the Aztli Confederation offers to every child free of charge.

The children of nobility attend the *calmecac*, which is rigidly segregated according to gender. Young boys receive rigorous martial training along with an advanced curriculum of arts, literature, sciences, law, and religion. The *calmecac* is intentionally designed to groom these aspiring scions for leadership positions within the Aztlis' religious, political, and military hierarchy. Girls benefit from the same advanced programs as the boys, though they substitute performing arts and housekeeping in place of military training. In many cases, students' parents play matchmaker within the *calmecac*, pairing up their sons and daughters with potential spouses who could potentially raise their status even higher.

Commoners' children attend the *telpochcalli*, where they learn how to read and write the Aztli language as well as receive instruction about the island's history, the hero-gods, and the arts. Although boys and girls attend the same school, their educations deviate after these core subjects. Boys receive combat training, while girls are instructed about child care and duties associated with the home. Exceptions are occasionally made for a girl who can physically compete with the boys. A young man with a rare talent for tasks associated with the home may attend class with the girls during that segment of the class. Likewise, if a commoner demonstrates exceptional aptitude in a field of study, that child may be transferred to the *calmecac* for further instruction in that area of expertise.

Despite the differences between the two institutions, education gives a commoner a chance to ascend into the nobility. The *tlacotin* generally have no chance to do so. The *tlacotins* are Tehuatl's slave class, though in many cases, indentured servitude provides a more accurate description. None are born as a *tlacotin*. Some willingly become a *tlacotin* to repay a crushing debt, usually incurred from gambling losses. Others are forced into slavery after being taken prisoner or as an alternative form of punishment for a variety of criminal offenses. In rare instances, indebted parents may sell a child into slavery in exchange for their debt being forgiven. Despite their lowly status, owners are required to feed, clothe, and provide adequate shelter to their *tlacotins* or risk running afoul of the law.

These basic protections aside, a *tlacotin* can be severely disciplined for laziness, showing disrespect, or similar transgressions. A local court (see **Law**) must ultimately adjudicate these matters, but the punishments meted out to a guilty slave are brutally harsh. A slave who strikes or plots against his owner always finds his way onto a slab on a sacrificial altar or meets a ghastly end in another equally cruel manner. Nonetheless, a *tlacotin* can gain freedom by escaping from the owner's lands or the owner's sight while moving through a crowd. However, if an escape attempt fails, the owner can affix a long wooden collar around the *tlacotin's* neck to foil future escape attempts or lawfully offer the *tlacotin* for sacrifice. *Tlacotins* never receive a third chance at freedom. A botched second attempt universally ends in capital punishment. Loyal and devoted *tlacotins* are often freed from service upon their owner's death, though the deceased owner can bequeath a *tlacotin* to his or her heirs. In similar

fashion, a tlacotin can also gain freedom by marrying a widowed owner, an event that happens with frequent regularity in Aztli society. However, a tlacotin liberated in this manner cannot gain a title by marrying a nobleperson. They are instead elevated back to commoner status, which also prevent the former tlacotin from inheriting the spouse's land (see **Law**).

LAW

Aztli justice is swift and stern. Capital punishment awaits an offender who commits almost any violent crime, theft, or an act that disgraces the perpetrator or the victim. Minor infractions may require the guilty party to pay restitution to the aggrieved party or suffer another form of humiliation, such as having one's head shaved, home destroyed, spouse and children removed from the offender's home, be sentenced to a term in the peticalli (penitentiary), or become a tlacotin (see **Society**). The Aztlis determine guilt or innocence in local courts known as cometzals. At least three nobles sit in judgment along with a priest of Nonotzali who serves as an administrator and advisor over the proceedings. This religious figure generally assesses the credibility of any testimony heard during the course of the trial as well as counseling the panel about the nuances of the law affecting the case and ensuring the judges maintain their neutrality.

Impartiality is considered a hallmark of the Aztli court system. Commoners and even tlacotins believe the Aztli legal system to be fair and unbiased, which Nonotzali promised all Aztlis when he walked among mortals centuries ago. His involvement gave rise to the practice of having one of his priests oversee judicial affairs and report any irregularities to the civil authorities who are empowered to overturn a verdict based upon a flawed interpretation of the law or a tainted panel of judges. The accused may defend himself or herself throughout the trial or appoint a representative such as an older family member or in some cases a priest to present the case to the judges. The accuser, on the other hand, cannot delegate the task of trying the case to another individual. In a case prosecuted by the civic authorities, a quichtic who investigated the matter also functions as the prosecutor.

The judges must unanimously agree on the verdict and sentence. If they cannot reach a consensus, the accused is presumed innocent and set free. The preceding rules apply to commoners and tlacotins. When pursuing a criminal

or civil matter involving a nobleperson, the panel expands to five members who may not be related to or have a close personal relationship with any party involved in the case. The Aztlis hold their nobles to higher standards of behavior than commoners and tlacotins. Therefore, any punishment meted out by the court is always harsher than that inflicted upon a commoner.

Conversely, property laws greatly favor the nobility. While everyone is allowed to own personal property, only the upper class can acquire land. The commoners who work the land or live on the property must in turn pay the owner a percentage of their annual profits from their usage of the land. Rather than calculating a true percentage, most landowners simply assess a figure based upon a predetermined formula corresponding to the amount of land leased to the tenants and how they used the land. Farmers generally offer the landowner agricultural products as payment for their use of the land, while a craftsman may give the lessor something he manufactured or a monetary fee as rent. If there is a dispute about the amount of payment due, the owner or tenant may bring the matter to the cometzal for resolution.

However, most disagreements about proper payments involve ahuanimes (prostitutes) and their clients. The world's oldest profession is legal and revered in Aztli and Poqoza society as these men and women are encouraged to boost the morale of soldiers, participate in religious festivals, and serve as priestesses of Cualliteotl. In addition to the ahuanime's obvious talents and comeliness, an ahuanime is also a master of song, dance, poetry, storytelling, and remarkable cooking. More so than anything else, an ahuanime is respected as an entertainer. Even when interacting with a nobleperson in a cometzal proceeding, the judges greatly respect rather than look down upon an ahuanime during a dispute about payment. Indeed, shortchanging an ahuanime is greatly frowned upon in Aztli society and dealt with harshly by the courts that can and sometimes do censure an offender by forcing that individual, even if it is a nobleperson, to serve as a tlacotin to the ahuanime for a finite period of time depending upon the circumstances pertaining to the dispute.

NON-AZTLI SOCIETIES

The Aztlis have controlled every corner of Tehuatl at some point in their long and storied history. In some cases, such as the Tepepan Mountains, their



AZTLI CALENDAR

The Aztlis and their forebears maintained two calendars that run concurrently. The tonalpohualli is a sacred calendar marking religious festivals with some astrological inclinations. The calendar consists of two primary components — 20 13-day months known as matlacatl and 20 day signs that correspond to the 20 matlacatl. The matlacatl and day signs run in a sequence starting with the first matlacatl and the first day sign, which are the same. To simplify the process, think of the matlacatl and the day signs numerically. For instance, during the first matlacatl, the day signs are 1 through 13, so you can express them as 1–1, 1–2, and so on until you reach 1–13. Therefore, the first day of every year is 1–1, which is “Cipactli, Cipactli” (see the following table). The second day is “Cipactli, Ehecatl.” For the next matlacatl, the matlacatl and day sign pick up where the previous month left off, so the first day sign in the second matlacatl is expressed as 14–14 or “Ocelotl, Ocelotl.” The next day would then be 14–15 (“Ocelotl, Cuahutli”) until the pattern wraps around to the beginning. In all instances, the matlacatl and the first day sign in that matlacatl are always the same. The pattern continues until the tonalpohualli returns to “Cipactli, Cipactli” 260 days later. The following table provides the numerical assignment for each matlacatl and day sign.

TABLE 2-1: MATLACATL AND DAY SIGNS

Number	Matlacatl/ Day Sign	Significance	Deity
1	Cipactli (crocodile)	New beginnings	Zipe-Toteque
2	Ehecatl (wind)	Change approaches	Nonotzali
3	Calli (house)	Family and friends	Omequatl (deceased)
4	Cuetzpalin (lizard)	Wariness	Itztliteotl
5	Coatl (serpent)	Battle	Yaocteutl
6	Miquiztli (death)	Remembrance	Notonatiuh
7	Mazatl (deer)	Hunting	Tlatlama
8	Tochtli (rabbit)	Service	Tlatcolli
9	Atl (water)	Purification	Atoyatl
10	Itzcuintli (dog)	Fidelity	Itzcuin
11	Ozomahtli (monkey)	Creation	Ometequa (deceased)
12	Malinalli (grass)	Maize	Tonacayotl
13	Acatl (reed)	Acceptance	Zipe-Toteque
14	Ocelotl (jaguar)	Valor	Yaocteutl
15	Cuahutli (eagle)	Freedom	Nonotzali
16	Cozacacuauhtli (vulture)	Fortune	Itztliteotl
17	Olin (earthquake)	Steadfastness	Contlati
18	Tecpatl (flint knife)	Selflessness	Micoateotl
19	Quiyahuitl (rain)	Travel	Quiahuitl
20	Xochitl (flower)	Beauty	Cualliteotl

The Aztlis exclusively use the tonalpohualli to mark their sacred calendar. However, all humanoid communities in Tehuatl rely upon the xiuhpohualli to track the days and seasons. This 365-day calendar has eighteen months known as xopactli with 20 days per month that use the same day signs as the tonalpohualli. The calendar also includes five unnamed days associated with bad luck and misfortune. Residents typically mark the beginning of each xopactli with a feast or festival, a tradition carried over into the non-Aztlis and Poqoza humanoid communities across the island. Tehuatl’s xiuhpohualli begins on the vernal equinox. The following table lists the xopactli in chronological order. The days signs can be found in the preceding Table 2–1.

influence was fleeting. In other cases, their prolonged dominance profoundly impacted the culture. Naturally, the Poqozas, who share common Aztli heritage, closely mirror most aspects of Aztli society and law with some egalitarian modifications. Coconeteotls descending from Tlatcolli are celebrated within the community, but they must generally make their own mark in the world to gain an exalted status rather than having it thrust upon them by birthright. In addition, tlahotls are much more common in Poqoza society than quichtics because the Poqozas place more emphasis on great achievements in disciplines other than killing people on the battlefield. Despite this enlightened posture, the institution of slavery is common in many Poqoza settlements and largely stems from their love of gambling. Most people who become tladotins do so to repay debts they incurred when their wagering luck turned cold and they could no longer pay their creditors.

Tehuatl’s elves, dwarves, gnomes, and halflings also retain some vestiges of nobility gained through birthright, but the delineation between common people and the upper classes blurs in many communities. Personal wealth and shrewd politicking carry more weight in these settlements than an unearned title. Likewise, the other humanoid races living alongside the Aztlis have incorporated some of the Aztlis’ best practices into their own cultures. The notion of justice being blind to power and influence has seeped into almost every other society in Tehuatl. Many people have adopted their legal reforms and safeguards against bias, while omitting their propensity for routinely handing down brutal punishments for minor indiscretions. The Poqozas outlawed capital punishment long ago, while most other races have steadily phased out these extreme measures and replaced them with imprisonment and banishment for the gravest offenses.

AZTLI ASTRONOMY

Throughout their history, the Aztlis believe the movements of the celestial bodies govern fate. Their ability to witness these omens and portents hidden in the motion of the stars and planets derives from their advanced knowledge of astronomy. Years of observation and mathematical calculations have proven to them that this world, which they refer to as Tlalticpac, is a sphere that revolves around the closest and most visible star, Notonatiuh, the sun where the god of the same name dwells. The Aztlis also know this planet is substantially larger than their tiny corner, leading most scholars to the conclusion that other landmasses also exist in other parts of Tlalticpac, though the distances separating them from Tehuatl are almost too vast to calculate. Of course, the migration from peoples from these remote lands confirm these conclusions, though even these individuals known as Tlotls cannot accurately assess the size and scale of their homeland.

While the sun, Notonatiuh, is the most prominent heavenly object in the daytime sky, two moons rule the night sky. The bigger and brighter of this pair is Narrah, which the Aztlis refer to as Ihueltiuh. This satellite reflects enough light from the sun to make it visible on most evenings and even bask the earth in pale moonlight. Craters and other impact marks riddle Ihueltiuh’s surface, causing many Aztlis to speculate that the hero-gods or even more ancient deities predating their ascendance destroyed this presumably lifeless world at some point in the distant past for some long-forgotten transgression or other sin. Other tales speculate that some monsters migrated here from Ihueltiuh just before its annihilation. The smaller and darker of the two moons is Sybil, which the Aztlis refer to as Inhueltiuh. This dim, virtually lightless satellite proves extremely difficult to spot in the night sky because its purplish hue blends in with the blackness surrounding it. However, when Inhueltiuh is full, it appears as a blue-black dot in the sky. On those rare occasions when both moons are simultaneously full, the Aztlis tread lightly for they fear the event as a portent of the hero-gods’ anger with their mortal servants.

In addition to the sun and moons, the Aztlis closely track the movement of the stars, which they accurately plot on their journey across the heavens. Like most other cultures, the Aztlis cluster these pinpoints of light into constellations or other symbols that hold religious significance for them. These constellations mirror those described in other parts of the world as discussed in *The World of the Lost Lands* campaign setting book from **Frog God Games**. However, the Aztlis assign different names and importance to these stellar designs that are imported onto their calendars to catalog the seasons and religious festivals.

TABLE 2-2: XIUHPHUALLI XOPACTLI

Number	Name	Meaning
1	Atica	Rite of spring, optimism
2	Tlacaxipe	Fertility, weddings, courtship
3	Tozoz	Rain festivals
4	Tozoztli	Good weather
5	Toxcatl	Dancing, sacrifice
6	Etzal	Maize and bean festival
7	Tecuilhuit	Games of chance, gambling, good luck
8	Tecuilhuitonti	Ullamaloni
9	Tlaxochi	Flowers, recently departed
10	Xocotl	Ancestral dead
11	Ochpani	Cleansing the home, releasing ill will
12	Teotleco	Hero-gods
13	Tepeil	Tepepan Mountains, the earth
14	Quecholli	Hunting
15	Panquetzal	Warriors, women who died in childbirth
16	Atemoztli	Receding ocean waters
17	Tilitl	Children
18	Izcalli	Rebirth
19 ^a	Nemontemi	

^a This xopactli has only 5 days.

The tonalpohualli and the xiuhpohualli run concurrently, though they conjoin once every 52 years. The Aztlis consider the convergence of these cycles, known as the tlemamacac, to be an auspicious day with long-lasting consequences for the balance of that cycle. If it begins with a catastrophic event or a fortuitous occurrence, the Aztlis believe the good or bad luck sets the tone for the balance of the tlemamacac. Naturally, the passing of 52 tlemamacacs, which takes 2,704 years, is of even greater significance. Aztlis approach such days with dread and apprehension as prophecies suggest the coming of a new sun, which portends the end of the world as they know it and the rebirth of the universe. Fortunately for the Aztlis, the next convergence is not scheduled to take place for another 657 years.

CHAPTER THREE: PEOPLE OF TEHUATL

Although Tehuatl has fewer ethnicities than a metropolitan area in Akados or Libynos, its racial diversity is a far cry from its origins. When the continent of Notos began its first tentative steps toward civilization, its human population consisted solely of one ethnicity with a shared language — the people who would later become known as the Aztlis. These men and women were the humanoid founders and citizens of the Altepetl Alliance, which dominated the continent roughly 12,000 years ago. Although they developed different regional customs over the passing generations and spoke a curious dialect that may have sounded strange yet understandable to their counterparts, all Aztlis bore the same physical characteristics with only minor variations. For nearly all of its existence, the Altepetl Alliance consisted solely of these human subjects. Elves, dwarves, gnomes, and halflings were the stuff of legends, but no one in Notos and especially the remote outpost of Tehuatl had ever seen one of these fabled races.

As the cataclysm's lone survivors, the Aztlis grew obsessed with fate and destiny, especially during the centuries they spent underground while the sea covered most of the island. During their long exile from the surface world, the human inhabitants battled against their old orcish, gnoll, and goblinoid foes for additional subterranean territory while also fending off hosts of bizarre monsters they never before dreamed of in the hidden recesses far below the surface. Their first encounter with a rival humanoid race occurred approximately 6,000 years ago when a band of dwarven explorers from the northern continents trespassed into their lightless domain. In a remarkable surprise, the normally warlike Aztlis exercised tremendous caution during their early interactions with the dwarves. The rationale for adopting a wait-and-see attitude remains speculative, though present-day Aztlis generally believe their ancestors were under the impression that their god Zipe-Toteque had sent the dwarves to aid them as demonstrated by the dwarves' goldsmithing and silversmithing skills. The dwarves were unaware of this alleged perception, though they certainly took advantage of the Aztlis' fascination with gold and silver ornamental pieces. However, in time, the two peoples forged a working alliance born out of mutual respect for each culture rather than true friendship.

Other human races from distant lands have also arrived on Tehuatl's shores at various points throughout the island's history. However, unlike the dwarves' appearance, these intrepid explorers trickled onto the island in fits and spurts. The first Tultitas migrated to Tehuatl after spying the clouds of ash from Tepetzin's eruption. They interpreted the sight as an omen beckoning her worshippers to venture to their goddess Pele's newest holy site. Over the course of several years, they took to their canoes and ventured onto the open ocean in the hopes of reaching their intended destination. When the first Tultita pilgrims arrived in Tehuatl, they established a cluster of tiny fishing villages on the outskirts of the island's largely uninhabited and feral swamps.

Humans from Akados and Libynos also occasionally made it to the island's remote shores. Many arrived by accident after being shipwrecked in the treacherous waters surrounding Tehuatl or landed on the beach after getting lost while searching for new shipping lanes. Several others reputedly came to Tehuatl by magical means. Unlike typical settlers searching for a new home, these explorers were accomplished sailors, priests, and spellcasters rather than farmers, laborers, and fishermen. They had the wherewithal to avoid detection when necessary and forcibly resist when confronted. Nonetheless, in the end, these individuals ultimately came to an acceptable arrangement with the Aztlis to prevent further bloodshed while recognizing the dominant human population's authority over their little corners and niches of the island.

In contrast to the dwarves and humans who arrived in Tehuatl with little or no fanfare, the island's elves made an immediate and lasting impression on the Aztlis when their ship first appeared on the horizon. Hostilities immediately broke out between the factions, but the elves proved their resilience. Over time, they carved out kingdoms of their own in the island's forests and played a huge role in one of Tehuatl's seminal events — the showdown between the city-state of Xacota and the Cult of Tlatcolli. In the end, the elves masterfully played their hand in not only crushing the Aztli army in the Toctli Forest but also in indirectly spreading their influence through the integration of their people with the race that would become the Poqozas.

MEN AND MONSTERS

The Aztlis outnumber all other humanoid races combined, with the Poqozas limping in as an easily beaten second. Their numerical superiority combined with their ferociousness and ingenuity give them the military might to control more territory than their rivals, though their inability to establish a unified central government diminishes some of their hegemony. On the surface, the Aztli Confederation appears to be a single entity, but constant squabbling and intrigues among the four key players weakens its power. Nonetheless, the other humanoid races inhabiting Tehuatl fall in line behind the Aztlis. These people exercise varying degrees of autonomy over their own affairs depending upon their proximity to an Aztli city-state and the resources they control. A distant village in a forsaken swamp barely merits a second glance from the island's overlords, while a bustling trade center a stone's throw from a large metropolis falls almost completely under the local power's yoke.

Despite the Aztlis' dominance over the island's political affairs, Tehuatl's other humanoid races have carved out their own niches and even played kingmaker on various occasions. In the most famous instance, an alliance between the elves of the Toctli Forest and the followers of the Cult of Tlatcolli gave rise to the people now known as the Poqozas. At other times, the dwarves, elves, gnomes, and others have lent their support to each other or their human neighbors to combat a monstrous threat or repel an onslaught of gnolls, goblinoids, or orcs seeking to expand their territory into lands falling under their dominion. Despite the periodic animosity among Tehuatl's humanity, these conflicts are generally caused by political strife or religious differences instead of racial considerations. The Aztlis undoubtedly have a chip on their shoulders, believing the sacrifices they made to topple the Immortal Sun Tlatoani Xicocoya warrant them special consideration. However, they base their attitude regarding their position in the island's hierarchy upon the price they paid in blood for freedom from Tlatoani and continued survival rather than a belief in their inherent superiority. If any innate hatred exists within humanoid settlements, it is squarely aimed at their ancient foes — the gnolls, goblinoids, and orcs — who have menaced their communities ever since the Immortal Sun's fall thousands of years earlier.

With the preceding considerations in mind, the following sections describe the peoples of Tehuatl in greater detail, focusing upon their history on the island, the regions they inhabit, and their characteristics when different from members of their races found in other areas of the Lost Lands.

AZTLI

The story of Tehuatl always begins and likely ends with the people known as the Aztlis. They led the struggle against Tlatoani, and the heroes among them ascended into godhood after their remarkable victory. Throughout their formative history, they were found throughout the southern continent of Notos and by extension, every corner of the island of Tehuatl. However, the cataclysm that followed Tlatoani's defeat nearly destroyed their entire civilization and confined them to a small northern outpost at the tip of their former homeland. Nonetheless, the Aztlis claimed hegemony over this remote island until their confrontation with the Poqozas, who still have some Aztli blood flowing through their veins, significantly diminished their numbers south of the Great Canal separating the two factions. From a visual standpoint, the typical Aztli is a human who has olive to light brown skin, hair ranging from jet black to light brown, round eyes with brown irises, wide noses, strong chins, and slightly elongated earlobes. Facial hair is extremely rare among the Aztlis, and most insert earplugs into their droopy earlobes. They have lithe, athletic builds, though they are shorter than average compared to humans from Akados and Libynos.

Life in the Aztli world revolves around the home. Theirs is a largely agrarian society where the husbands and fathers are the heads of the household, but their authority is not absolute nor unquestioned. The men of the house are expected to fight in the military, hunt for fresh meat, and provide enough

food and income to feed, clothe, and shelter its members. Young boys receive compulsory education from an early age, though the curriculum varies based upon the family's social status. The scions of wealthy families attend schools offering advanced subject matter such as architecture, mathematics, astronomy, and engineering, while every burgeoning teenager receives military training and agricultural instruction. The ideals of exhibiting courage and skill on the battlefield are ingrained into every Aztli boy from an early age. Girls also benefit from compulsory education, albeit with a narrower focus. Blossoming young women are generally taught to master the skills needed to maintain a household, which include farming, cooking, sewing, and other tasks necessary to keep the family clothed and fed. Nonetheless, exceptionally talented girls from prominent families can distinguish themselves in the fields usually reserved for the sons of influential and powerful parents. Children, regardless of gender, are expected to respect and obey their elders, especially parents and older family members as well as political and religious figures.

Family may be first and foremost in their lives, but their faith is undoubtedly a close second. The Aztlis personally witnessed that it is possible for an ordinary mortal to become a deity. While only a few Aztlis realistically believe such a fate awaits them, the potential for being eternally elevated into the heavens as a divine being gives many Aztlis a greater sense of personal connection to their young pantheon. The rigors of daily life demand a tremendous amount of time and attention, yet Aztlis incorporate their beliefs into their work and play. They express their devotion to the gods through a variety of mediums that include painting, sculpture, jewelry, song, dance, sports, and even mundane daily tasks. Their willingness to give to their hero-gods seemingly knows no bounds as demonstrated by their performance of grisly sacrificial rites to satisfy the demands of some members of their divine pantheon. These gruesome spectacles typically occur atop the apex of their grand temples, which can soar hundreds of feet above the ground. As these ghastly ceremonies suggest, the Aztlis take life and death with the utmost seriousness.

CIPATENHUAS

When the poles suddenly shifted more than 1,000 years ago, the abrupt change in climate forced the cipatenhuas to look elsewhere for a home. After several years of searching across Mother Oceanus, the humanoids spotted the

emerging wetlands along Tehuatl's eastern shore. According to legend, when these people appeared on the surf, a gargantuan sea serpent with crocodilian, fish, and frog features swam at their vanguard, leading them ashore. However, Itztliteotl confronted the mighty beast and barred the monster from entering their realm. In return, the creature they called Cipactli attacked Itztliteotl and bit off one of his feet. The enraged hero-god immediately retaliated and slew the monstrosity and forever barred its charges from setting foot on dry land again. Itztliteotl's curse confined the cipatenhuas to the swamp and marsh on the island's eastern shore, where they could always keep at least one foot on waterlogged moist soil. As recompense for the sea serpent's transgression, most of these humanoids venerate Itztliteotl who spared their race from certain doom when they arrived in Tehuatl. The more aggressive minority pay nominal homage to Tsathogga, whom they associate with Cipactli. Despite their bloodthirsty nature, these sentient humanoids cannot fully accept the tenets of the demented Frog God and its inane servants, causing them to keep these beings at arm's length rather than wholeheartedly embrace them.

Standing as tall as the average man, these humanoids have ridged, reptilian skin; short arms with prehensile, clawed hands; vestigial armored tails; stubby, powerful legs; and crocodilian heads with a slightly protruding, elongated snout; and a typical humanoid forehead with two eyes set just beneath their brows. Cipatenhuas are muscular and hairless and possess remarkable dexterity for creatures who appear bulky and rigid. They are natural-born swimmers who can hold their breath for extended periods of time but must return to the surface to draw air into their lungs. Cipatenhuas reach maturity between 14 and 16 years of age, and most reach the venerable age of 100 with a handful of hale individuals making it all the way to 200.

DWARVES

The dwarves predate the arrival of any other significant humanoid race, though they remained confined to the caverns and tunnels beneath and within the Tepepan Mountains for much of their early history. The intrepid explorers arrived here more than 6,000 years ago after traversing thousands of miles of divergent subterranean passages and chambers connecting the remote island to fabled locations inside the northern continents. During the early stages of this initial migration, the dwarves kept their distance from the Aztlis whom



they considered arrogant and aggressive. After a few tentative diplomatic exchanges between the two factions, the dwarves and Aztlis agreed to focus their attention on their common enemies — the orcs, gnolls, and goblinoids — instead of each other. When Tepetzin’s eruption and the receding seas expanded the island’s landmass, the dwarves finally emerged from their self-imposed isolation and moved into the depths of the earth the Aztlis previously inhabited before their return to the surface world. These territorial dwarves, who dubbed themselves the Firebrand clan, claimed the whole of the Tepepan Mountains as their domain, an assertion the Aztlis and other humanoids showed little interest in disputing while the dwarves occupied their time fighting against the hated orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, and other monstrous denizens to increase their sphere of influence. Most dwarves spend their days among their kin in subterranean settlements and surface communities carved into the existing rockface. The most adventurous of their lot venture out of the mountains and make their way into the human cities surrounding them, where they make a living as metalworkers, stone masons, and artisans.

Because their territorial ambitions rarely, if ever, overlap, the dwarves and the Aztlis have remained tepid allies for centuries. The Firebrands show little appetite for the humans’ bloodlust, but the pair have shared some of their technological secrets over the years. The dwarves taught the Aztlis how to forge steel and bronze. The Aztlis took the process one step further by devising a means of adding sulfur or quartz during the creation of rubber to give birth to vulcanized rubber, perhaps their greatest scientific advancement. Some dwarves have even adopted the Aztli god Zipe-Toteque as part of their pantheon, dubbing him Xotite. Despite their veneration for the deity, none of them is willing to sacrifice gold or silver to the brooding divine being. The dwarves of Tehuatl are a rugged breed who believe people, rather than gods, determine their destiny. They are physically stout with broad shoulders, barrel chests, and thick legs. Despite their stocky build, they are taller than most dwarves from the northern continents. Their lengthy history spent underground has made their skin paler, while their hair and eyes display sparse pigmentation. Most have white or gray hair along with gray or hazel eyes.

ELVES

Roughly 35 centuries ago, Tehuatl’s elves established a foothold on the island’s western shore and never looked back. Over the course of several generations, they gained control over large swaths of the Cuahtla Forest and later expanded their influence into the Toctli Forest where they established an alliance with the Aztlis who would later become the Poqozas — their half-elven kin. The island’s elvish population remains largely confined to its forests within small villages and towns dotting the landscape, though several clusters of elves strike out from the forest and live among the neighboring peoples, including the Aztlis. Needless to say, the elves have a warmer relationship with the Poqozas who share the same outlook toward the hero-gods’ ghastly rituals as well as some of their lineage than the more demanding Aztlis.

In this rough and tumble world, the elves of Tehuatl tend to be gruffer and less refined than their counterparts from the northern hemisphere. Although they retain many of the same traditions and gods as well as speaking the same language as their ancestors, most appear more feral than the high elves typically encountered in civilized elven strongholds. Their complexion ranges from bronze to copper with olive-colored undertones. Hair and eye colors trend toward the darker hues, with black and brown being the most common hair colors while brown and dark green are the most prevalent eye colors. Elves with blond or red hair stand out in any elven community, though their unusual shades garner great interest from prospective suitors. The island’s elves are generally more intuitive than intelligent and better attuned to fighting in their natural environment than wielding magic. With the Aztlis firmly in charge of nearly all of Tehuatl’s major cities and metropolises, the elves dwell within the sanctity of the wilderness where they can retain their cultural and religious identity with little realistic fear of Aztli intervention.

GIANTS

Many Aztlis believe the giants who lumber across Tehuatl are the remnants of the aluxes of the first sun, the primordial humanoids who first inhabited the southern continents long before the age of men. Whether the notion is true or not remains a topic of hot debate, but there is no dispute that giants currently walk the earth in several incarnations. They appear as the ogres who dominate Hrawrg, the trolls who roam the hills and valleys, the hill giants who lumber around the Tepepan Mountains, the stone giants who burrow into the depths of the island’s peaks, the fire giants who inhabit the island’s volcanoes, the cloud

giants who dwell on the mountaintops and clouds above them, and the rare storm giants who race across the grasslands. Despite their enormous size and power, giants predominately take a back seat to the more numerous humanoids who keep their larger kin at arm’s length, confining them to their small niches scattered around the island. Some live alongside others of their kin, while others cast their lot with Tehuatl’s other humanoid populations, such as hill giants and ogres allying themselves with orcs or goblinoids. In a similar vein, some giants seek an inroad into Tehuatl’s power hierarchy by aligning with one of the Aztli gods. The most noteworthy of these groups are the small sects of fire giants who venerate Contlati, the humans’ fire deity, within his volcanic sanctums. Isolated instances of cloud giants and storm giants worshipping Quiahuitl also circulate across the island.

GNOLLS

The dark god Itzcuin’s affinity for these monstrous canine humanoids makes them formidable adversaries for the Aztlis and any other humanoid who runs afoul of them. Indeed, many of the bestial creatures refer to themselves in broken Aztli as the chichicalpan, which roughly translates into “the dog-god’s bastards,” an acknowledgement of their allegiance to the vile deity. Although they lack the numerical strength and military sophistication to displace the humans from their perch atop Tehuatl’s hierarchy, they can pose a significant threat to an individual city-state or undermanned stretch of wilderness. While the goblinoids and orcs typically hide in subterranean lairs or hard-to-reach locations, the brazen gnolls live out in the open, establishing villages and strongholds in the sprawling grasslands north and south of the Great Canal. The gnolls’ Aztli and Poqoza neighbors always keep a wary eye on the settlements, which are the sites of frequent skirmishes between the warring parties. Both sides act as the aggressors in these conflicts, giving young warriors the opportunity to display their courage in battle. Many human residents secretly fear that Itzcuin’s human agents already walk among them. They believe these infiltrators endeavor to destroy the community from within by posing as corrupt priests of respectable deities or government officials. To date, no one has verified this popular conspiracy theory, though the lack of evidence does nothing to diminish its prevalence especially among grassland communities near a gnoll stronghold.

GNOMES

No one can say for certain when or where the first gnomes arrived on Tehuatl. The first documented account dates back 3,230 years ago when an elvish chronicler reported sharing an evening meal with a company of 11 humanoids he described as sprite-like men and women with a zest for life and a fascination for all things mechanical. Because the young elf had never seen a gnome before, he presumed these individuals matched their description. Within a few years after this sighting, several small, isolated gnome villages suddenly and inexplicably appeared within the Cuahtla Forest. The gnomes have never explained the curious circumstances surrounding their spontaneous appearance in Tehuatl, though the Aztlis and elves presume the sly beings used their illusory magic to conceal their presence for several generations until they mustered enough numbers to establish a sufficient foothold in the island’s interior forest.

Gnomish settlements generally work together to achieve common goals yet they never recognize any central authority over their actions. Community elders usually wield tremendous economic and political power over their fellow citizens, but the carefree humanoids frequently do as they please regardless of what anyone else tells them. Some gnomes live among the elves cohabiting the woodlands alongside them, while others leave their ancestral villages for the Aztlis’ big cities, where they find ample work as jewelers, tinkers, and artisans. Despite being in high demand, many gnomish sculptors and artists refuse to work on architectural and engineering projects associated with Aztli religious rites. The fun-loving gnomes believe it is possible to simultaneously coexist with their humanoid neighbors and not condone their gruesome rituals. On the other hand, gnomes enjoy spending time among the Poqozas whom they feel have mastered the nuance of having a good time.

GOBLINOIDS

Goblins and hobgoblins have plagued Tehuatl’s residents long before the Immortal Sun claimed hegemony over the whole southern continent. Pesky goblinoid harass travelers, raid villages, burn crops, and spread mischief like

wildfire at every opportunity. Their larger, militaristic cousins are more akin to their Aztli adversaries. Their fearsome war machine rambles across Tehuatl and even spreads out across the oceans surrounding the island. For much of their early history, the Aztlis and their goblinoid foes fiercely battled for every edible morsel and each parcel of habitable tunnel in the miserable, underground domain known as Coyonqui. After the Aztlis' liberation from their subterranean hell, their rivalry with the goblinoids continued. Today, the goblins predominately occupy the Tepepan Mountains, putting them in direct contact with another ancient foe — the Firebrand dwarves. The hobgoblins' territory overlaps with the lands belonging to their lesser kin, though they have their sights set on grander goals. They plan on expanding their influence beyond the foreboding peaks to take their fight into the heart of Tehuatl. Some Aztlis believe the hobgoblins seek to reinforce their numbers with recruits drawn from other parts of the world beyond the ocean surrounding their island.

HALF-ORCS

Half-orcs have been in Tehuatl since the beginning. Humans typically shun them, while most orcish communities view them as weaklings. Their childhoods are brutal ordeals that few survive. The handful who do have it no easier as adults. Never fully accepted by either of their parents' races, half-orcs in Tehuatl burn with rage, a trait some Aztli communities use to their advantage. Because they are usually stronger and harder than their human counterparts, half-orcs make effective shock troops in practically any army. Tehuatl's orcish tribes badly mistreat most half-orcs, but those who better resemble their human parent may serve their orcish kin as spies or act as go-betweens for the orcs and humans. These exceptions aside, the majority of half-orcs live in deplorable conditions among their orcish brethren in the island's mountainous regions or in subterranean complexes located in more habitable areas. Rumors speak of an exclusively half-orc village named Minax tucked away somewhere in either the Tepepan Mountains or the Cepual Desert. To date, no one has ever confirmed these tales, yet the lack of evidence does not stop others from trying to find it.

HALFLINGS

These jovial humanoids dwell in portions of the island's forests where they cohabitate alongside elves, gnomes, and humans. Their migration to Tehuatl occurred in waves over the last few thousand years, though they typically tagged along with migrants belonging to another humanoid race rather than traveled to the island of their own accord. After setting foot in Tehuatl, the vast majority of these industrious humanoids integrated into existing communities. While there are a handful of tiny homogenous halfling settlements scattered throughout the woods, most recognize it is better for them to live among other humanoids than in a purely halfling society, which would be militarily overmatched by many of the larger people and monsters dwelling around them. The industrious halflings seamlessly blend into their surroundings, where they lead quiet, largely anonymous lives tending to their fields and spend their downtime enjoying the company of their families. Halflings prefer leading a pastoral existence in rural areas over the hustle and bustle of urban life. Simplicity takes precedence in their world as they express no desire to meddle in other people's political affairs or to establish an autonomous kingdom of their own.

Although they refrain from taking leadership roles within their community, halflings make their voices heard by relaying their sentiments through their established network of friends and associates. Elders wield tremendous influence in this regard as they often speak on behalf of their younger counterparts. Their spokespeople try to avoid conflict whenever avoidable. Their adversaries sometimes foolishly mistake their acquiescence for weakness, though foes who make this grave error quickly learn that halflings never back down when right is on their side. For this reason, halflings never associate with Aztlis who play an active role in the sacrifice of other people and even some animals they deem to be companions rather than livestock.

ORCS

Tehuatl's first orcs arrived long before the hero-gods' ascendance and have seemingly been on the move ever since. These humanoids lead a nomadic lifestyle, always loitering on the fringes of civilization waiting for an opportune moment to strike a vulnerable settlement before venturing on to their next

prospective target. At the present time, three large orc tribes pose the greatest danger to the Aztlis' hegemony in the region. The Kraguezz Tribe operates along the western edge of the Cepual Desert where they indiscriminately prey upon human and dwarf settlements in the area and the neighboring Tepepan Mountains. Having lost faith in their orcish deity, the desperate Kraguezz orcs fell under the sway of Itztliteotl, the master trickster. The Aguar Tribe roams across the Caya Grasslands, sowing death and destruction wherever they go, while the Zaggirrack Tribe, the smallest of the trio, worship the Aztli beast god Quamaxotz. They inhabit the dreary Tlococua Marsh, which they use as a base of operations to launch periodic raids against Poqoza settlements and travelers foolish enough to enter the bleak wetland. Scores of minor tribes numbering fewer than 100 individuals also inhabit Tehuatl, though these lesser players rely more heavily upon thievery and scavenging to survive than plundering established settlements defended by seasoned warriors. On rare occasions, these squabbling groups band together to defend themselves against a humanoid army or join forces to attack a lucrative site. But in the end, petty rivalries and jealousy always fracture these loose alliances within weeks or even days of their creation with one exception. The newly formed Grezz Family who cohabitates the Tlococua Marsh alongside the Zaggirrack tribe has shifted its sights from traditional humanoid targets towards a new quarry — the malevolent tsathars whom they consider the source of all corruption in Tehuatl.

POQOZAS

During their brief history on the island, the Poqozas transitioned from directionless, hedonistic into a clever, industrious people who indulge in every pleasure life has to offer. An offshoot of the Aztlis and the elves, they stand united in their worship of Tlatlcolli, and their rejection of the Aztli gods' demand for blood. Although once only separated by ideology, their military alliance with the neighboring elves from the nearby forests transformed the Poqozas from full-fledged Aztlis into half-elves with more Aztli lineage than elvish heritage. They exude a rugged appearance with faces seemingly carved from a wooden knot on an ancient tree. Their skin tones vary between a light gold to a deep brown with traces of other, seemingly mismatched colors woven onto their flesh. Like their human ancestors, their hair is overwhelming black or brown, though a small minority feature blond or reddish highlights that appear more prominently in the moustaches and beards of Poqoza men who exhibit the unusual feature. Their eyes and ears are distinctly elvish in shape and size, while their irises skew heavily toward brown with hazel and green being the rare exceptions. Wiry is the best word to describe their physiques. Surprisingly, they are slightly taller than their Aztli counterparts, making them roughly equal in height to humans from other parts of the Lost Lands.

The Poqozas predominately inhabit the grasslands and forests south of the Great Canal they erected to separate themselves from their former Aztli brethren. Although they stand united in their worship of Tlatlcolli and the rejection of their kin's gruesome sacrificial rites, their political structure emulates that of their cousins. Their lands are dominated by city-states and regional kingdoms who exert little real authority over the settlements and communities under their domain. Their hallmark self-sufficiency makes them suspicious of sprawling, organized institutions, which prevents them from unifying under a single banner. Fortunately for the Poqozas, they have far less taste for war than their northern neighbors, which helps keep disputes from escalating into violent conflicts between neighboring states within their dominion. They prefer negotiating a solution to their differences, often with the assistance of a hallucinogenic agent or numerous jars of pulque than spilling blood, the very act that caused their schism in the first place. Nonetheless, Poqozas never back down from a fight when left with no other reasonable choice.

Their hostile attitudes toward their northern neighbors have also softened over the years, though tensions still remain. Aztlis traveling through Poqoza territory get a lukewarm reception from their southern neighbors who never forget their former kin's taste for blood. Visitors who embrace their local traditions and sample their intoxicating wares make fast friends with the adventurous half-elves. Poqozas who migrate north of the Great Canal in search of opportunities in their ancestral homeland are almost always greeted by suspicious glances and stoic faces at every turn. It takes a great deal of diplomacy for an Aztli to warm up to a guest whose ancestors turned their backs on the hero-gods responsible for their freedom from Tlatoani's oppressive yoke. Yet throughout their history, the Poqozas have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to nearly every circumstance. Tehuatl's residents often quip that, "A situation is only impossible if a Poqoza cannot talk or charm his way out of it."

TLOTLS

Whether they arrived here intentionally from a distant land or accidentally through no fault of their own, the indigenous human population applies the term Tlotl to immigrants and their descendants hailing from Akados and Libynos. Most Tlotls have been on the island for many generations as the largest wave of migration occurred shortly after Tehuatl's reclamation from the sea but long after its war of liberation against Tlatoani. While the Aztlis or Poqozas belong to a distinct race or ethnicity, the Tlotls are an amalgamation of multiple foreign peoples originating in diverse lands across the northern continents. Over time, their cultural identities blended together yet remained distinct from the majority Aztli population. Integration among the Tlotls and the native peoples has been a slow process hampered by both sides' intransigence regarding their religious beliefs. Most Tlotls find the Aztlis' sacrificial rites revolting and disgusting, while the Aztlis cannot venerate gods who never lifted a finger to aid them during their war of liberation. Nonetheless, every Tlotl whose ancestors arrived here more than two generations ago has at least some Aztli lineage in their family tree.

The Tlotls still speak a variant of the Common tongue from their former homelands, though most can also speak conversational Aztli. In addition to retaining their culture and religious identities, the Tlotls also keep their proprietary technologies. They use the geologically young island's meager supplies of iron ore to manufacture steel, predominately for weapons and armor. The Tlotls keep the formula and techniques for making the durable metal a closely guarded secret despite their fellow humanoids' overall disinterest in duplicating their technology. As in the case of the Firebrand dwarves who also produce steel products, both ethnicities believe metal weapons are too susceptible to rust in the warm, humid climate, while armor crafted from the material is too heavy and bulky for the heat while remaining vulnerable to the same, corrosive chemical reaction.

TOZCAS

Not every Aztli supported the hero-gods during the struggle against Tlatoani. Some remained loyal to the Immortal Sun for a host of reasons — complacency, fear, greed, or to curry favor among others. When the hero-gods prevailed, those Aztlis who stood against them faced an uncertain day of reckoning from the victors. Without hesitation, Yaoctotl and his fellow deities unanimously agreed to curse them and their descendants for eternity. While their outward appearances were unchanged, their tongues became forked and they spoke with a terrible hissing sound. Not surprisingly, the Aztlis who fought beside the hero-gods exacted their own measure of revenge against the traitorous humans who fought to keep them under Tlatoani's yoke. The bloody reprisal drove the Tozcas underground, both literally and figuratively. The few who escaped the Aztlis' wrath retreated into caves dug out of the sides of the foreboding mountains and into the dismal swamps. Over time, their complexion turned pale and ruddier, while they grew shorter and stockier. Ostracized from their former brethren, the people who became the Tozcas continued to pray and offer sacrifices to their former emperor whom they believed miraculously heard their petitions. According to Tozca legends, Tlatoani can still communicate with his followers, though he is reputedly encased inside a vault of solid ice in a distant land far north of Tehuatl.

The surviving Tozcas avoid contact with the dominant Aztlis as their altered physical characteristics make them easier to recognize. Hostilities remain high between the Tozcas and the Aztlis. Likewise, the Poqozas, their offshoot cousins, have no love lost for the people who would help keep them under the emperor's oppressive thumb. The remaining Tozcas predominately dwell in the caves and foothills of the Tepepan Mountains and in the marshes and swamps along Tehuatl's eastern shores. Educated guesses peg their total numbers at 2,500 Tozcas scattered among several small communities in remote, isolated locales. Many rumors suggest the Tozcas have forged alliances of necessity with the orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, and other monstrous beings cohabitating the same regions.

TULITAS

Most Tulitas are newcomers to Tehuatl, arriving here from the Razor after social and political upheaval disrupted their homeland. When these more recent migrants arrived on the island's shores, they were surprised to encounter tiny colonies of their kin who had migrated here centuries earlier in pursuit of coveted fishing holes or after being washed ashore during a shipwreck. Some Tulita elders even claim their god Pele led them here on a religious pilgrimage. Regardless of why they came, these seafaring people predominately reside on Tehuatl's coasts, carving out a living off the sea. They share many of the same traits and characteristics as the Aztlis, leading some to suggest they share a common ancestor in their distant past. They have a dark olive complexion, black to dark brown hair and eyes along with lean yet muscular physiques. They are slightly taller than the average human, giving them a decided height advantage over their Aztli counterparts.

The Tulitas tend to inhabit the wetland areas the Aztlis and Poqozas find undesirable, which greatly lessens the potential for conflict between these people. Not surprisingly, the Poqozas are more accepting of the Tulitas than the Aztlis, though their tolerance is more attributable to their love of the Tulitas' hallucinogenic herbs than a statement about their xenophobia. Nonetheless, the Tulitas can generally freely mingle among the Aztlis or Poqozas with little fear of persecution or reprisal except when a local Tulita village has not met the Aztlis' demands for tribute. In that case, the unfortunate wayward Tulita may pay the ultimate price for not paying the Aztlis in full.

OTHER RACES

The peoples described in the preceding section do not represent an exclusive list of Tehuatl's humanoid inhabitants. More exotic races such as dragonborn, tieflings, and others can be found on the island, though their numbers are so insignificant that they likely arrived here individually or in small groups via magical means or through another unconventional method. The Aztlis surprisingly give tremendous respect to humanoids with celestial, draconic, fey, or fiendish lineage or those who exhibit traits consistent with the preceding creature types. They practically treat them with a sense of awe, with many of their kin fawning over them as if they were celebrities or authority figures. Conversely, the Aztlis offer a tepid welcome to humanoid races who look similar to themselves, while giving a hostile reception to creatures with a monstrous appearance. Humanoids falling into the latter category typically dwell in isolated wilderness locations far from major population centers, where the Aztlis could potentially use them to appease their bloodthirsty gods. The humans coexist well enough with people in the former group, though integration among the different people tends to be a slow, laborious process drawn out over several generations.

CHAPTER FOUR: EQUIPMENT OF TEHUATL

The people of Tecoxo rarely sit still, physically or mentally. Their intellectual curiosity inspires them to constantly search for knowledge, while their ingenuity allows them to apply their newfound discoveries to aid them in their endeavors. A miniscule handful of technological advances are predominately confined to small corners of the island for various reasons, but the overwhelming majority of groundbreaking inventions spread across Tecoxo at breakneck speeds as local artisans and scholars devise innovative ways to enhance the original creation. The following chapter presents a broad overview of these wondrous devices ranging from armor, weapons, clothing, gear, and, of course magic items.

NEW ARMOR

Steel and heavy armor fare poorly in Tecoxo's humid, semitropical climate. Over time, frequent rainfall and the moisture in the air take a toll on the ferrous metal's durability. Magical equipment such as *elven chain* and *dwarven plate* ignores the ravages of rust, but being encapsulated within a thick shell of metal on a hot, sticky afternoon under the sun's relentless glare feels like a hellish torment. The island's weather conditions and environment generally lead most warriors to value flexibility and comfort over maximizing protection. Of course, some individuals choose the latter options, most notably the Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains, the elves who still prefer chain shirts, and the Tlotls who closely guard the secrets of forging steel. Nonetheless, the bulk of the new armor and shields presented in the following section adheres to the principles of providing lightweight defensive options without compromising stealth and mobility.

LIGHT ARMOR

This defensive equipment typically consists of thin, flexible material stitched together in layers to provide stopping power against projectiles and sharp implements as well as deadening the impact of bludgeoning weapons that strike the armor.

Ichcahuipilli. This two-inch-thick light armor resembles a vest designed to protect the wearer's torso from the neck to the hips against arrows and sharp blades. It consists of layers of cotton and vegetable fiber stitched together in a network of interconnected diamond-shaped patterns and then soaked in brine or another saline solution to harden the materials.

Tlahuiztli. Made from cotton or linen supplemented by hide or leather, this light armor covers the wearer's arms and legs and is worn over the ichcahuipilli. Unlike the basic undercoat, the tlahuiztli almost always boasts elaborate decorative features such as feathers, dyes, and other ornamental accoutrements. The armor's intricate and beautiful designs flaunt the wearer's wealth and status, giving the wearer advantage on Charisma checks made when interacting with nonhostile Aztlis. The tlahuiztli presented in **Table 4-1** incorporates the underlying ichcahuipilli in its cost, weight, and game statistics.

MEDIUM ARMOR

Protective gear falling into this category provides added defense at the expense of mobility. Supple materials are generally combined with more rigid, durable components to allow the wearer to better fend off attacks while not bogging him down with overly heavy gear.

Cipacahuipilli. This unusual armor follows the basic schematics for creating ichcahuipilli armor with a few modifications. Surprisingly, this medium armor is thinner than its lighter counterpart, but the flat pieces of hide and bone strategically sewn into the fabric adequately compensate for its lesser thickness. The armor's name comes from the flat sections of crocodile vertebrae and hide stitched into the material at vulnerable spots to improve toughness without adding tremendous weight and bulkiness. Most

KEEP IT SIMPLE OR REALISTIC?

The following sections present new armor and weapons that share many similarities yet have some noteworthy differences from commonly found armor and weapons. You have two options when dealing with the new armor and weapons presented here. You can choose to keep this section simple by retaining the descriptive entries for the armor and weapons while assigning them the same game statistics and costs as existing armor and weapons. If you opt for the simple choice, the equivalent existing item appears as the last entry in **Tables 4-1** and **4-2**.

importantly, the armor's lack of metallic pieces or parts makes it immune to rust and suitable for druids.

Olli. Armor smiths combine latex and the juice from a morning glory vine to create a flexible and resilient material resembling modern rubber. Although typically used to create the tlatchli, clever innovators use the durable substance to protect warriors from injury. The lightweight suit includes a jacket and leggings. An inner and outer lining of breathable linen provides added comfort. Because it is made from plant-based products, druids are permitted to wear olli, and it is immune to rust.

HEAVY ARMOR

Those willing to sacrifice mobility and comfort for added protection ultimately turn to heavy armor. This category of defensive equipment covers the entire body with hard, sturdy materials with the strength to deflect projectiles and even powerful blows from a melee weapon.

Ollixalli. One day, Atoyapaca, an innovative botanist and renowned jeweler heated olli and combined it with ground quartz to enhance its strength. His bold experiment exceeded his wildest expectations, leading others to follow in its footsteps by adding other silica-based and sulfurous components to the liquified olli mixture. The delicate and laborious process of creating ollixalli is a tightly guarded secret confined to those who have the technical expertise and specialized equipment required to set the ollixalli mold. Unlike conventional heavy armor, a suit of ollixalli consists of a lightweight jacket and pants that protect the torso and limbs. Ollixalli has no metal components, making it suitable for druids and immune to rust. While wearing ollixalli armor, you do not have disadvantage on Constitution saving throws made against the effects of extreme heat. Because of the specialized training and equipment needed to create ollixalli, the armor remains extremely expensive and rare.

TABLE 4-1: TEHUATL ARMOR

Armor	Cost	Weight	Equivalent
Light Armor			
Ichcahuipilli	15 gp	4 lbs.	padded
Tlahuiztli	200 gp	6 lbs.	studded leather
Medium Armor			
Cipacahuipilli	35 gp	15 lbs.	hide
Olli	75 gp	12 lbs.	chain shirt
Heavy Armor			
Ollixalli	1,000 gp	25 lbs.	chain mail

NEW WEAPONS

The lack of iron and steel has never hampered the island's weapon designers. The craftsmen who build implements of war emphasize creativity over components. Used properly, wood, stone, and other natural materials can be deadlier than a metal sword. Obsidian, a viciously sharp volcanic glass, takes a prominent role in this arms race. Its edges are keener than any steel blade, allowing the hard, brittle material to slice through flesh and bone with surgical precision. Yet achieving this incredible cutting edge also makes obsidian vulnerable to fracturing when it comes into contact with a hard object. Despite these breakthroughs, some of Tecoxo's inhabitants, most notably the Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains, still place their trust in the forge's molten steel.

Atlatl. This easily made wooden device uses javelins for ammunition. To use this javelin launcher, you must place the javelin's butt into a cup, groove, or spur at the top of the atlatl. With your forearm perpendicular to your arm and the atlatl and javelin both parallel to the ground, you let the javelin rest atop your fingers while you hold the atlatl's base in the palm of your hand. When you are ready to release the javelin, you fling your forearm and wrist forward, which in turn pushes the javelin out of your hand toward the intended target.

Itztopilli. This axe has a wooden haft with a bronze head fitted into a groove built into the haft. The head is long and narrow, and its cutting surface is only slightly wider than the axe's flat back. The itztopilli's versatile design allows you to hack into flesh as well as chop wood with remarkable accuracy and comparable ease.

Macuahuitl. Made from hardwood such as oak, this weapon resembles a long, flat paddle with obsidian or flint chips embedded into the weapon's edges. The insertion of these incredibly sharp stones gives the weapon unmatched cutting power at the cost of increased fragility.

Ollitlacotl. This hardened rubber club is difficult to manufacture yet greatly valued among Aztli warriors for its lightweight punching power. Because of its unusual components and unique feel, the weapon requires more skill and training to wield than an ordinary club.

Ollitztli. Almost identical in its size, shape, and general appearance to the ollitlacotl, this vicious weapon has an important added enhancement over its similar counterpart. When the olli starts to harden yet retains some malleability, the makers embed obsidian slivers into the weapon, riddling its surface with dozens of slightly raised spikes that puncture flesh like fine needles. Unlike the macuahuitl, which uses obsidian chips to form a contiguous edge, only tiny slivers of obsidian protrude above the weapon's surface, giving it a rough texture akin to a vine covered in tiny, fine-yet-rigid needles. Although the weapon lacks the ability to rip through flesh and bone like the macuahuitl, the tiny needles excel at delivering poison to a victim.

Tecpatl. Carved from flint or obsidian, this double-edged knife has a pointed tip and a decorative wooden, stone, or mosaic handle. Although an effective, close-quarters combat weapon, the tecpatl is predominately used in religious rites and revered for its multitude of symbolic roles.

Tepoztopilli. This polearm has two components: a five- to six-foot-long wooden shaft carved from a single piece of wood and an oblong wooden head attached to the end of the shaft. The head ends in a sharp point, and like the macuahuitl, obsidian fragments are glued into grooves cut into the head to increase its deadly cutting power.

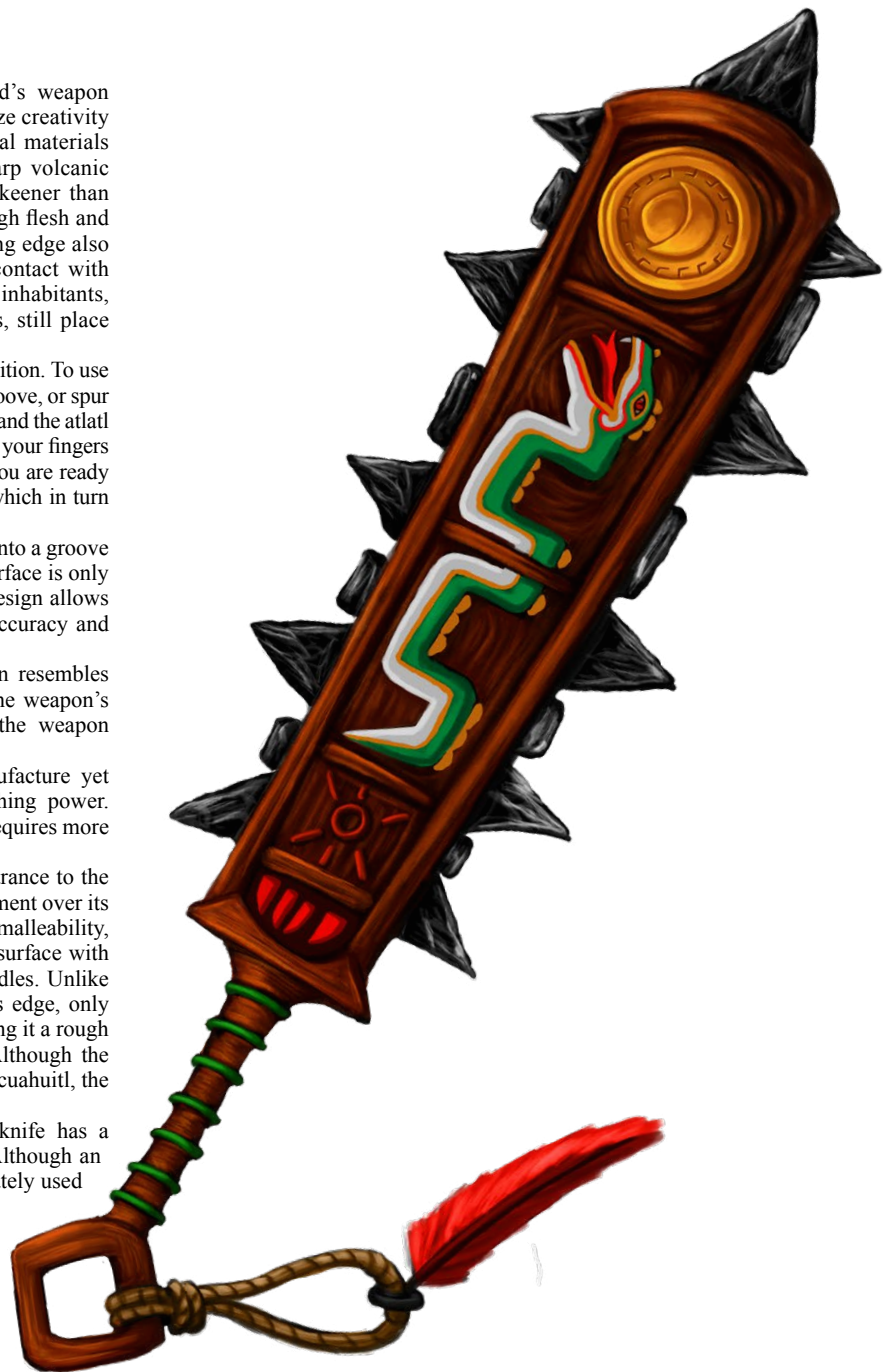


TABLE 4-2: TEHUATL WEAPONS

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Weight	Equivalent
Simple Melee Weapons				
Itztopilli	4 gp	1d6 slashing	2 lbs.	Handaxe
Tecpatl	2 gp	1d4 piercing	1 lb.	Dagger
Simple Ranged Weapon				
Atlatl	1 sp	—	1 lb.	Ammunition (range 60/240), Javelin
Martial Melee Weapons				
Macuahuitl	10 gp	1d8 slashing	2 lbs.	Longsword
Ollitlacotl	35 gp	1d6 bludgeoning	1 lb.	Mace
Ollitztli	40 gp	1d6 piercing	1 lb.	Morningstar
Tepoztopilli	25 gp	1d10 slashing	6 lbs.	Halberd

ADVENTURING GEAR

Like their armor and weaponry, Tecoxo's adventurers capitalize on the ingredients at hand to create potent concoctions and wondrous instruments to give adventurers more than a fighting chance in a dangerous world. These tools of the trade incorporate the designers' understanding of botany, astronomy, mathematics, and other scientific disciplines into these creations.

TABLE 4-3: TEHUATL ADVENTURING GEAR

Item	Cost	Weight
Coanenepilli (vial)	50 gp	—
Cuitlapan	3 gp	5 lbs.
Kindling sticks	1 cp	1 lb.
Uictli	2 gp	5 lbs.

Coanenepilli. A creature can use an action to apply or administer this salve to an injury or wound that dealt poison damage. If the salve is applied to the target creature before the end of the target's next turn after taking the poison damage, the target regains 2d6 hit points. The creature cannot regain more hit points that it took from the poison damage during its last turn.

Cuitlapan. Primarily used to carry heavy loads long distances, this device consists of a wooden frame slung over your back. A cord affixed to the frame is then wrapped around your waist to keep the load secure, while a second strap loops just above your forehead for added balance. The cuitlapan has a volume of 1–1/2 cubic feet, and a weight capacity of 50 pounds of gear.

Kindling Sticks. Without steel, most people use kindling sticks to start a fire. There are enough sticks in the kit to start 10 fires.

Uictli. The wedge-shaped wooden or bronze blade attached to the end of this five-foot-long wooden pole is used to burrow into the earth to till, remove, or carve irrigation channels through soil and loose stone.

MOUNTS AND VEHICLES

Beasts of burden are few and far between in Tecoxo, while wheeled vehicles are merely an oddity. Its people have undertaken little effort to domesticate the wild animals roaming across the island. Despite taming turkeys, ducks, and dogs, none of these creatures has the strength or stamina to haul wagons or carry large loads of goods long distances. Instead of expediting travel across Tecoxo, heavy wagons would constantly get bogged down in mud and standing water. Furthermore, the island's small size in comparison to Akados and Libynos does not create tremendous need or demand for a transportation

network stretching across thousands of miles. Instead, commerce centers around the island's numerous waterways, including the Great Canal separating the Aztlis from the Poqozas. While most of Tecoxo's residents haul goods by canoe or by foot when traveling overland, there are some circumstances where people turn to a novel solution. Although not domesticated, the ilhuitecuani, a massive member of the pinniped family, can be used to lug an apanimacal, a hybrid aquatic-land craft across relatively flat and stable ground. The following mount and waterborne vehicles are available throughout Tecoxo:

Acalli. This large vessel made from spruce wood measures 10 feet across and 75 feet in length from its upturned bow to stern. The waterborne vehicle can accommodate a combination of up to 60 passengers or three tons of goods. It takes a crew of six to 10 oarsmen to propel the vessel.

Apanimacal. The apanimacal combines several technologies to create a vehicle suitable for aquatic and land travel. The sleek vehicle is 30 feet long and 10 feet wide with an elevated deck atop its cargo hold and a tapered bow and stern. It can accommodate a combination of up to 20 passengers and 3,000 pounds of goods. It takes a crew of four to operate the vehicle. Its hull is completely flat, which allows it to float on the water or be pulled across the ground as if it were a sled. Some models have a series of ski-like rails that can be attached to the vessel's undercarriage while it is still underwater. The apanimacal is always propelled by an ilhuitecuani tethered to its bow.

Canoe. Carved out of the trunk of a single tree, this waterborne vehicle has an upturned bow and stern and is 15 feet long. It can accommodate three passengers, including its driver, or transport the equivalent weight in goods. The driver propels the vehicle with a long pole or paddle.

Ilhuitecuani. At a weight of nearly 5,000 pounds and almost 20 feet long, the massive ilhuitecuani looks more like a whale than an enormous member of the seal family. This carnivorous wild animal can be temporarily tamed or at least placated with abundant quantities of food — roughly 100 pounds of meat per day — and the proper coaxing. The ilhuitecuani is predominately used to haul the hybrid land-water vehicle known as the **apanimacal** (see above).

TABLE 4-4: MOUNT

Item	Cost	Land Speed	Swim Speed	Carrying Capacity
Ilhuitecuani	175 gp	20 ft.	40 ft.	800 lbs.

TABLE 4-5: WATERBORNE VEHICLES

Item	Cost	Speed
Acalli	4,000 gp	1 mph
Apanimacal	1,500 gp	2 mph on flat land or water
Canoe	150 gp	1–1/2 mph

CHAPTER FIVE: FAITHS OF TEHUATL

Religion plays a critical role in the lives of most residents in Tehuatl, especially among the Aztlis. For the most part, the island's nonhuman inhabitants venerate the same deities as their counterparts in Akados and Libynos, though their exposure to the Aztlis' hero-gods and the Poqozas' deity, Tlatcolli, has led some non-humans to acknowledge or even openly worship a handful of their deities. Unlike most pantheons, the hero-gods cannot take credit for the island's creation or for breathing life into its inhabitants. When the gods of Boros vanquished the Immortal Sun Tlatoani and his serpent advisors, the hero-gods who led the revolt against him and his minions filled the divine void left in his wake.

IN THE BEGINNING

Roughly 20,000 years ago, the humans who followed the aluxes and created the first, formative states in Notos recognized the value of combining politics with religion. They realized it was easier to exert secular power by attributing its derivation from spiritual beings. Like most formative societies, these early worshippers venerated various aspects of nature, including the sun, the stars, certain animals, and special plants. From their humble beginnings, the erstwhile faiths took shape as they developed unique dogmas and practices intended to reflect their spiritual ideals. From an organizational standpoint, their priests and followers began to establish their congregations into formal institutions dedicated to paying proper homage to their rapidly expanding pantheon of gods and supernatural beings. As the ranks of worshippers increased, the churches' coffers proportionally swelled. In time, the men and women at the helms of these religious entities came to another wondrous epiphany: Why pay tribute to an intangible, apathetic deity when you can venerate a living god in your midst? Within a few generations, the heads of state and faith became one and the same. Temporal and divine authority were now firmly consolidated into a singular source of worldly might. This development ultimately paved the way for the rise of an infinitely ambitious political figure who aspired to dominate an entire continent, and in due time, the whole world, including distant Akados and Libynos.

His arrival came with the pageantry associated with a raucous festival. While rival city-states engaged in petty wars over worthless scraps of land or overblown squabbles, the cunning and devious newcomer Tlatoani Xicocoya wielded his silver tongue more deftly than a grizzled veteran swung his trusty macuahuitl. His grandiose promises, hyperbolic boasts, magnetic charisma, and occasional displays of personal strength and magical power cowed friends and foes alike. Within the span of three short decades, his diplomatic efforts subjugated numerous small city-states under his heel as he transformed them from independent governments into vassal states almost completely under his direct control. He dubbed his burgeoning political creation the Altepetl Alliance, though there could be no mistaking the entity as a willing partnership among friends. Instead, the energetic union functioned as an empire with Tlatoani Xicocoya as its absolute ruler.

Despite his tireless efforts and burdensome schedule, the alliance's undisputed leader never grew weary nor seemingly aged a single day. Many other would be god-kings and emperors ascended the throne in numerous kingdoms and city's states throughout Notos, yet within several years or a few decades, their mortality caught up with them as the passing years and boundless stress took a toll on their withering bodies. During their lifetimes, these visionary pioneers sought to establish a lasting legacy for themselves and the dynasty poised to take up their mantle after their death. Yet, Tlatoani Xicocoya defied the ravages of time. He demonstrated no signs of slowing down with the passing years and instead grew bolder and more ruthless as more territory fell under his sway. As decades turned into centuries, it became blatantly apparent that Tlatoani Xicocoya was no ordinary man. He was, indeed, a true god-king, presumably the first of his kind. It took him 241 years after emerging on the scene to completely subjugate all of Notos under the control of the Altepetl Alliance and to stand atop its throne as Tlatoani Xicocoya, the Immortal Sun, where he officially became the continent's supreme political and religious authority.

With his conquests complete, Tlatoani Xicocoya, the undisputed emperor of the Altepetl Alliance, tightened and consolidated his grip on power. He

appointed a retinue of officials known as the Luminous Court to preside over the affairs of mortals while he basked in the glory of his divinity. With Notos under his total mastery, the depraved Tlatoani indulged his inherently diabolical cravings for blood and human flesh. The numerous temples erected in his honor slowly transformed from places of worship into the sites of gory human sacrifices and sickening cannibalistic feasts. To satisfy Tlatoani's growing lust for carnage, the masterful manipulator pitted the city-states under his command against one another in endless wars to divert their attention away from his excesses and also to procure more victims for the disgusting rituals conducted at his behest. The ghastly spectacles continued unabated for the next 1,500 years as earthly rivals vied for titular power under the emperor's dominion until a startling revelation set in motion the chains of events leading to Tlatoani's undoing and the cataclysm that befell Notos.

RISE OF THE HERO-GODS

The circumstances surrounding the unmasking of the Immortal Sun's true identity are remarkably consistent despite the passage of more than 10,000 years since the seminal event. According to legend, King Ometequa and Queen Omequatl, the figurehead rulers of the lost Kingdom of Neltliliztli, accidentally discovered the ruse. According to the tale, the monarchs surreptitiously learned of Tlatoani's deception after overhearing a conversation between him and a member of his Luminous Court. When they confronted the arrogant Tlatoani with the truth that he was not a man blessed with the gift of moyotl but a demon lord disguised as a deity, the bombastic emperor acknowledged the truth and went one step further by boasting that the members of his Luminous Court were actually demonic serpents masquerading as men. Naturally, the virtually omnipotent Tlatoani believed his secret would never reach the masses, but the wise king and queen magically transmitted their message to numerous contacts spread throughout Notos. When he realized his error, the irate emperor and his serpent minions butchered the pair in horrific fashion by removing their still beating hearts from their chests. Most Aztlis consider King Ometequa and Queen Omequatl to be the first and the greatest of the hero-gods because their foresight and terrible sacrifice lit the entire continent ablaze. Literally minutes after their revelation became public, heroes from all corners of Notos rose up in revolt against the malevolent demonic being and his abyssal servants.

In the immediate aftermath, a long, vicious, and bloody civil war erupted in every land as some city-states stayed loyal to the emperor out of fear or incompetence, while others assembled vast armies to fight against Tlatoani and his complement of serpentine, Aztli, and diabolical allies including demons he summoned from the Abyss to stand at his side. The titanic struggle raged for nearly 50 years with millions of casualties on both sides. After five decades of struggle, the fabled general Yaocteoatl, his sorcerous counterpart Itztliteotl, the learned Nonotzali, the stoic druid Quiahuitl, the enigmatic warlock Micoateotl, and the cunning Zipe-Toteque stood on the precipice of victory. With imminent defeat looming, Tlatoani attempted the unthinkable — opening a portal into the Great Void beyond this world to call for reinforcements. After five decades of being ambivalent bystanders during the civil war, the formerly impartial gods of Boros finally interfered in the destructive affair. They hurled Tlatoani Xicocoya and his serpent minions into the Great Void and sealed the breach shut, ridding Notos of its Immortal Sun. However, their intercession came with dread consequence. The angry gods loathe direct involvement in the affairs of mortals while simultaneously desiring to erase the stain of Tlatoani Xicocoya and his wicked minions from the world forever. They laid waste to nearly all of Notos, deluging almost the entire landmass beneath the waves. Only a few scattered parcels of land, including Tehuatl, survived the onslaught as tiny islands scattered across Mother Oceanus.

Dry land was not the only casualty. Many of the heroes who valiantly battled against the emperor and his underlings also perished in the calamity. The shattered people, including the heroes who lived through the horrific conflict, were left to pick up the handful of remaining pieces and to try to rebuild a new world in the aftermath of the devastation. In their desperation, they naturally turned to the same men and women who led them in the civil war against the demonic Tlatoani and his serpent advisors. Although these

heroes appeared the same, something had changed for them. Whether it was the influx of energy from the opening and closing of the Great Void, Tlatoani's banishment, or a lasting gift from the gods of Boros' unexpected appearance, they experienced a sudden surge of divine power rushing into their formerly mortal bodies. Their injuries instantly and mysteriously vanished, their aging, which had been largely temporarily suspended through magical means, stopped, and they immediately felt a conduit connecting them to their human followers.

Yaoctotl, the group's unofficial leader and most heralded warrior of the conflict, assumed what many believed to be his rightful place at the head of the newly formed pantheon of gods. Despite being granted virtually omnipotent power, the recently installed deities slowly came to the realization that their divinity came at an exacting price. Like their predecessor Tlatoani, the hero-gods came to the stark conclusion that their very survival depended upon receiving sacrifices from their worshippers, a terrifying fact driven home by their people's early encounters with the tsathars and their demonic deity. These offerings took different forms based upon each individual's role during their mortal lives, and the portfolio of interests each oversees in their new existence. Much to his dismay, Yaoctotl, the god of war and the sun, discovered he required freshly spilt blood to maintain his divinity and to cause the sun to rise each morning. Likewise, the other heroes of the revolt, such as Zipe-Toteque, came to similar profound epiphanies. Over the course of the next several thousand years, while Tehuatl and its residents struggled to keep their proverbial heads above water, the worship of the hero-gods evolved. Some ghastly rites from the era of Tlatoani made an unwelcome reappearance on the island to satisfy several deities' seemingly insatiable appetite for animal and humanoid victims, while other gods needed more mundane offerings such as maize, precious metals, and artwork to maintain their status among this group of immortal beings.

THE AZTLI PANTHEON

The deities making up the Aztli pantheon emulate a dysfunctional family more than a unified collective of nearly omnipotent beings. Without a common enemy to fight, individual relationships borne out of conflict focused on a single goal can easily fray in the absence of a shared purpose. Disagreements and rivalries suppressed during the revolt against Tlatoani rushed to the forefront as each individual jockeyed for position and worshippers in a volatile hierarchy with opposing interests and bold personalities. Despite these competing priorities and political machinations, Yaoctotl, the tactician who commanded the rebel forces on the battlefield against the emperor and his minions, also saw his exalted status carry over into his immortal existence as the pantheon's primary deity and tacit leader. Tehuatl's martial culture naturally gravitated toward the deity who embodied its militaristic ideals and warrior principles celebrating courage, determination, and the revered never-surrender attitude. Every Aztli boy and man venerates the god of war, while every settlement has at least one shrine or temple dedicated to him.

It is impossible to dispute Yaoctotl's position as the apex deity in the Aztli pantheon. Nonetheless, the group's supreme god exerts little control or even influence over the other members of his adopted family. Without firm oversight from the top down, his subordinates constantly scheme against each other for a better spot in the heavenly pecking order. Itztliteotl, the renowned sorcerer from the war against Tlatoani, usually fills the role of resident troublemaker among the gods. Along with Nonotzali, Quiahuitl, and Zipe-Toteque, he occupies the next tier of important deities just beneath Yaoctotl. Although firmly rooted in the upper echelon of the Aztli pantheon, the treacherous Itztliteotl frequently devises ingenious ruses designed to trick his divine counterparts into getting caught in an embarrassing situation or to lower that deity's station within the otherwise rigid hierarchy.

These plays aside, deities largely depend, at a minimum, upon offerings from their worshippers to maintain their divinity, and to secondarily increase their personal might. The Aztli's complex calendar system amply accommodates these needs. Because they are largely an agrarian society, the Aztlis use a 365-day calendar known as the xihpohualli to track the solar year and seasonal changes. The calendar divides the solar year into 18 months of 20 days with five extra days associated with bad luck. The Aztlis use this calendar to celebrate festivals associated with cosmic events such as the seasonal equinoxes and solstices as well as planting and harvesting seasons. The Aztlis then incorporate a second, 260-day calendar known as the tonalpohualli into their time-measurement system, much like two connected gears turning the hands on a clock face. This sacred calendar dedicates each day to the worship of a specific god with concurrent designations determining whether the celebratory day coincides with a specific rite, ritual, or festival. The scope and scale of these events naturally depends upon the community's

THE ROLE OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice was an integral component of religious rites for centuries throughout Mesoamerica. Great civilizations including the Mayans, the Olmecs, the Toltecs, and of course, the Aztecs, paid tributes of blood and treasure to their vast pantheons of deities. Priests and worshippers offered the gods various items ranging from mundane objects such as bushels of maize and cacao beans to valuable objects that included precious gemstones and metals. Yet these trinkets paled in comparison to the most coveted sacrifice of all — fresh blood. Some of the life-sustaining liquid came from animals associated with the deity or from the opened veins of the divine beings' clergy members, but unwilling human sacrifices account for a significant percentage of blood spilled in honor of the gods. Mesoamerican people believed the gods sacrificed themselves to create the world and the humans who populated it. Therefore, it seemed only fitting for human beings to reciprocate the deed for the heavenly entities who gave their lives for humanity.

The historical and archaeological records confirm the Aztecs and earlier Mesoamerican societies performed human sacrifices in a variety of grisly and cruel fashions. Some individuals willingly volunteered to be sacrificed to the gods to receive their just rewards in the afterlife or to wallow in luxury and debauchery for a year before paying the ultimate price for such indulgences. Nonetheless, captured warriors and tributes from conquered foes made up a substantial majority of the victims whose lives ended on a sacrificial slab or in a temple's hallowed sanctum. While human sacrifice is firmly rooted in religious beliefs, historical evidence suggests the Aztecs and others secondarily used the gruesome practice to sow terror among enemy civilians and to intimidate prospective military foes. The scope and scale of human sacrifices remain a subject of intense debate among historians and archaeologists. Although there is conclusive evidence confirming the Aztecs engaged in the practice, the frequency of and number of people killed in this manner remains uncertain.

Despite the Aztecs' numerous accomplishments including instituting compulsory education, their incredible architectural achievements, and wondrous technological advances, there is no sugarcoating the horrific reality of this cruel act. Deliberately murdering another human being is never a "good" deed regardless of the intended purpose for doing so or the individual's sincere religious faith. Based upon the preceding rationale, we discourage characters from actively taking part in human sacrifices or gaining any tangible game benefits from participating in such religious rites. While the hero-gods of Tehuatl also demand sacrifices of treasure and blood, human sacrifice in this campaign setting is best kept as an event occurring in the background rather than highlighted in the forefront of society. Failing to provide the gods with the offerings they need manifests itself on a societal level and not on an individual basis. The gods neither reward nor punish a single individual or even a small group of individuals for giving them the blood they crave nor for withholding it from them. Unlike the Aztec pantheon, the hero-gods of Tehuatl did not create humanity, though they still sacrificed one of their own to expel the emperor from the continent. Therefore, several of Tehuatl's deities, most notably Yaoctotl, require blood, but the majority of their gods do not. The preceding guidelines aside, you have the final say on how to handle this topic in the game.

size and the god's significance within the pantheon's hierarchy. A ceremony honoring a minor deity in a small village may consist of a brief prayer or meager sacrifice to the divine being. On the other hand, a feast honoring a major deity in a large city is likely to be a grand spectacle attracting visitors from distant communities to partake in the raucous occasion, which may span the length of several days or even longer.

For a deity's ambitions to come to fruition, they must ultimately rely upon the competence and charisma of the men and women who devote their lives to appeasing these distant, aloof masters. The priests and priestesses who dedicate themselves to their divine patrons know that the omnipotent beings they serve require much more than apathetic prayers and feigned loyalty — they demand sacrifices ranging from mundane objects to the utterly abominable. Whether it



reflects a lasting vestige of Tlatoani's regime or residual energy from the closing of the Great Void, the hero-gods of Tehuatl ultimately wither and perish without these critical offerings. Priests and communities who meet the deity's demands likely appease their divine benefactor, while those who fail to deliver may suffer the wrath of an angry god. As previously discussed, the effects of satisfying the deity's appetite for sacrifices or failing to comply with their demands are applied on a macro level rather than a micro level. Gods do not reward or punish individuals, groups, or even small communities. A divine entity's benevolence or malevolence diffuses across a broad spectrum of the population.

YAOCTEOTL, THE FATHER OF THE AZTLIS, GOD OF THE SUN AND WAR

Domain: Light, War
Symbol: A hummingbird
Alignment: Neutral

No deity has made a greater mark on Aztli society and culture than its heroic leader Yaocteutl, the god of war and the sun. He seemed destined for greatness from birth, as numerous legends claim he emerged from the womb cloaked in a radiant, yellow hue while he reached out his right hand to grab hold of his father's javelin. He demonstrated his martial prowess on the battlefield countless times during the prolonged war against Tlatoani, as his superior military tactics and overall command of any situation always won the day against the emperor's numerically greater forces. Legends claim he possessed the personal magnetism to rally a lone soldier to hold back thousands of onrushing enemies. After propelling his armies to victory against the disguised demon lord, Yaocteutl ascended into the heavens and took his rightful place within a grand palace inside the heart of the burning sun. He guides the roiling star across the sky on its daily journey. The souls of the bravest warriors and of women who died in childbirth accompany him in his paradise in the form of resplendent hummingbirds. Indeed, Yaocteutl appears as a muscular human with blue skin and patches of hummingbird feathers protruding from the skin on his head and left leg as well as his trademark feature of a blue-green hummingbird helmet protecting his head. He wields a shield covered in feathers in his left arm; in his right arm he carries a flaming atlatl that is shaped into the likeness of a coiled serpent that many believe he can animate into a living, blue snake.

Although most revered by soldiers and expectant mothers, virtually every Aztli pays at least nominal homage to the hero-god who led the revolt against Tlatoani and freed their people from the Immortal Sun's morally corrupt regime. They celebrate Huitzilpochtli's exploits during a monthlong festival at the end of the tonalpohualli with dances, songs, and extravagant parades where captured enemy prisoners are dragged through the streets. Races featuring animals and humans as well as the Aztli ball game, ullamalitzli, are common features of these festivities along with gambling on the outcome of these contests. The festival culminates with the temple's high priest offering hummingbirds to the god of war followed by ritualistically sacrificing captured prisoners to Yaocteutl.

CREATOR'S NOTE

Mesoamerican people worshipped a multitude of gods throughout their storied history. Some were directly borrowed or copied from an earlier civilization, while others underwent minor alterations so they could be repackaged for a different audience. The Aztecs venerated and celebrated hundreds of gods governing almost every facet of their lives, regardless of how minute or outwardly inconsequential. Recreating their gigantic assembly of gods in its entirety would introduce more new deities into the Lost Lands Campaign Setting than every other Lost Lands product combined! Because of these constraints, the hero-gods presented here represent a greatly scaled-down version of their enormous pantheon. Furthermore, several deities were changed, altered, or combined into one entity to create a streamlined variation of the exceedingly complicated Aztec religion. Of course, you are free to add an omitted Mesoamerican deity to world of Tehuatl.

MICOATEOTL, LORD OF MIQUITO, GOD OF THE DEAD AND THE UNDERWORLD

Domain: Tezhauitl
Symbol: Skull with eyeballs
Alignment: Neutral evil

Micoateotl played a pivotal role in the hero-gods' struggle against the emperor and his snake advisors. At the onset of the conflict, the mercurial warlock entered into a bargain with a mysterious entity he believed to be an omnipotent time traveler. His association with this strange being gave him crucial insight about Tlatoani's plans and his advisors' whereabouts. Yet, the warlock's prescience came with a heavy price. After the hero-gods' ascendance, the once-handsome Micoateotl instantly aged hundreds of years, transforming him into his current state as a skeletal figure with a toothy skull and bulging eyes. He wears a headdress made from owl feathers and a necklace crafted from human eyeballs. His sickening appearance caused the formerly vain man to retreat into Miquito (see the forthcoming section *Aztli Cosmology*), the land of the dead, where he and his wife Mictecacihuatl, who underwent a similar transformation, preside over the underworld. They dwell in a meager cottage in the bleakest portion of Miquito. Despite his emaciated appearance, the Lord of the Dead has a ravenous appetite for human flesh. He periodically leaves his home to devour the meat from any unfortunate souls who cross his path. To help curb his hunger, his small retinue of priests and worshippers offer him human sacrifices and engage in ritual cannibalism.

Micoateotl's clergy presides over all funerary rituals. The size and scope of these festivities depends upon the decedent's station in life and the manner of their death. A nobleman who died in battle receives a grandiose celebration culminating in the sacrifice of one or more prisoners of war and a ravenous feast of the victims' flesh. A commoner succumbing to old age is wrapped in paper and set ablaze with little fanfare. Although all Aztlis pay homage to the Lord of the Dead and his clergy, his most devout followers are people who have tragically lost loved ones under dishonorable circumstances. They hope their service to the underworld's ruler can ease the decedent's arduous journey into the afterlife.

NONOTZALI, THE FEATHERED SERPENT, GOD OF THE AIR AND KNOWLEDGE

Domain(s): Knowledge, Tezhauitl
Symbol: A conch horn
Alignment: Lawful neutral

If Yaocteutl is considered the brawn behind the Aztlis' revolt against Tlatoani, then Nonotzali, the Feathered Serpent, would certainly have to be deemed the brains of the operation. The god of the air, knowledge, artisans, and merchants used his intellect and his sagacity to predict the emperor's actions and formulate a magnificent response to them. In addition to relying upon his genius, the astute wizard wielded an impressive repertoire of spells and incantations that he could further draw upon for guidance and occasionally impromptu allies. He frequently thwarted the machinations of Tlatoani's serpent advisors by infiltrating their ranks in the guise of a serpentine creature. In time, Nonotzali abandoned his human likeness and permanently adopted his appearance as a feathered couatl with red, yellow, and green plumage adorned with a conch shell breastplate across his chest. Not surprisingly, he became the patron god of the Couatl Kingdom in Tehuatl, though he is venerated in nearly every Aztli settlement across the island. Artisans, craftsmen, merchants, including the pochtecas, and those searching for knowledge hold the Feathered Serpent in the highest esteem. These individuals endeavor to distinguish themselves during their mortal lifetimes by crafting wondrous objects, amassing great wealth, designing spectacular architectural wonders, or making a groundbreaking scientific discovery. Those who reach one of the preceding lofty goals spend the afterlife in Nonotzali's company within his immense

repository of knowledge on the surface of the brightest planet in the heavens. The interior of the Feathered Serpent's gargantuan, pyramid-shaped library resembles an intricate honeycomb containing numerous compartments storing artworks, scrolls, books, and other objects intended to impart knowledge and learning to future generations.

To help his devotees achieve this promised reward, his priests double as teachers in many *calmecacs* and learning institutions throughout Tehuatl in addition to individually tutoring the most promising students. When not occupied with these tasks, Nonotzali's priests offer their god artworks, objects, and other items demonstrating the creator's mastery of their craft. During the holidays, they sacrifice magical scrolls and books to their deity in the sanctums of their temples, which are often located on school grounds in almost all of Tehuatl's settlements. Nonotzali's priests have a contentious relationship with Itztliteotl and his followers, largely because of the latter's repeated attempts to tease or trick Nonotzali into committing a humiliating faux-pas. Nonetheless, his clergy reserved their greatest enmity for their god's disreputable twin brother, Itzcuin, who exhibits a more bestial nature than his cerebral sibling.

ITZTLITEOTL, THE SMOKING MIRROR, GOD OF THE NIGHT AND SORCERY

Domain(s): Nagual, Trickery

Symbol: An obsidian disc

Alignment: Chaotic evil

A masterful deceiver, Itztliteotl is the god of obsidian, the night, and sorcery. During the hero-gods' struggle against Tlatoani, the great sorcerer Itztliteotl worked in tandem with his magic-wielding counterpart Nonotzali. Despite their shared interest in the mystical arts, Itztliteotl resented Nonotzali's keen mind and dogged work ethic along with his greater arsenal of incantations. For the sake of their own survival, the crafty sorcerer suppressed his baleful inclinations until he ascended into godhood after triumphing against the emperor and his underlings. When the conflict ended, Itztliteotl came to the stark realization that he enjoyed turmoil over tranquility. He found peaceful coexistence with his fellow deities terribly dull. He took fiendish delight pulling cruel pranks on his adversaries, especially Nonotzali, and in creating elaborate ruses to humiliate his foes. In furtherance of this end, Itztliteotl's priests harass Nonotzali's clergy at every turn through acts of sabotage and disruption rather than engaging them in open warfare. Sorcerers, warlocks, and those who ply their nefarious trades under the cover of darkness venerate the conniving deity. While these dubious associations would normally relegate the gods and his worshippers to the fringes of society, Itztliteotl is also the patron of royalty, presumably implying that these powerful individuals also partake in immoral acts to retain their hold on authority. His connection to Aztli nobility ensures the presence of one of his temples in every Aztli city. Atop these grandiose structures, his clerics offer their deity sacrifices of obsidian or other valuable items they and their followers swindled, stole, and absconded with from others. Once per year, Itztliteotl's priests choose a prisoner or willing volunteer whom they believe emulates his noblest traits or appearance. For the next year, the imposter basks in luxury, surrounded by courtesans while indulging in grandiose feasts. One year after his or her selection, the individual is sacrificed to Itztliteotl at sundown, when a new imposter is then selected to take the former's place for the following year.

Itztliteotl appears as a lithe, dark-skinned man with a horizontal yellow stripe across his face and a serpent in place of his right foot. He wears an obsidian disc around his neck and a turquoise mask across his eyes. He can also assume the form of a jaguar. Itztliteotl resides in an obsidian palace on the dark side of a moon orbiting the planet. When night falls upon the world, he sometimes streaks across the sky in a manner akin to a comet or meteor hurtling toward the surface.

QUIAHUITL, THE BRINGER OF RAIN, GOD OF RAIN AND EARTHLY FERTILITY

Domain: Nature, Tempest

Symbol: Marigold

Alignment: Neutral

From atop his sacred mountain on a remote island somewhere in the ocean surrounding Tehuatl, the god of rain and earthly fertility, surveys the skies and the ground beneath this holy stronghold known as Quiahuitlan. A druid during his mortal existence, Quiahuitl rallied the animals, beasts and the weather against Tlatoani and his insidious minions. He used the birds of the air and the fish in the seas as spies, and the domain's largest predators as fearsome shock troops. On several occasions, Quiahuitl conjured a mighty storm to delay or impede enemy soldiers or bombard the hero-gods' foes with lightning bolts and deafening peals of thunder. When the conflict ended, the introverted druid retreated to the top of the highest surviving peak where he settled down with his wife Atoyatl in peaceful solitude sheltered from the tempests ravaging the earth below his elevated abode. Quiahuitl exhibits an aloof attitude toward humanity and his divine counterparts as exemplified by his lonely existence on an isolated mountaintop. While some might label his demeanor as callous and uncaring, Quiahuitl endeavors to exude an aura of impassiveness and impartiality. He unleashes the life-giving rains and fierce storms upon the world because he deems them to be acts of necessity rather than impulsiveness. Despite being a deity, Quiahuitl believes he and his fellow gods will also face a day of reckoning in the same manner as the wicked emperor they banished centuries earlier. However, until that moment comes, he vows to carry out his solemn duty to water the earth with precious droplets of what he deems to be his tears.

Although his temples are commonly found in most Aztli settlements, his most sacred places of worship are located in mountain caves and summits, when feasible. At these holy locales, his priests offer their patron gifts of marigolds, heron feathers, seashells, pearls, and maize. During the four annual festivals, his clergy sacrifices a jaguar to Quiahuitl. Farmers, animal caretakers, druids, and rangers frequently partake in these ceremonies along with a small contingent of elves from Tehuatl's forests and Poqozas who also pay homage to Quiahuitl without considering themselves to be formal worshippers. His iconography depicts him as a humanoid with blue skin, disc-shaped eyes, and fangs in his mouth. He holds a maize stalk in one hand and a lightning bolt in the other. After death, his most devout priests and worshippers may ascend into the heavens to join him and his spouse in Quiahuitlan along with the spirits of those who drowned in the oceans and seas.

ZIPE-TOTEQUE, THE FLAYED ONE, GOD OF REBIRTH AND METALWORKERS

Domain: Life, Nature

Symbol: A golden mask

Alignment: Neutral

Zipe-Toteque, the Flayed One, is the god of rebirth, vegetation, disease, goldsmiths, and silversmiths. On more than one occasion, the god sacrificed his own mortal life to save others, only to be raised from the dead afterward. Despite his noble purpose, the wily rogue often perished attempting to steal gold or silver from Tlatoani's treasury to support the hero-gods' cause while fortuitously enriching himself in the process. His frequent brushes with death and resurrection as well as his affinity for amassing precious metals naturally led him to become the patron deity of renewal and metalworkers when he ascended into godhood. His diverse portfolio of interests generates followers from among the ranks of agricultural workers who depend upon the annual rebirth of their staple crops and craftsmen who transform raw ore into objects of rare beauty. Because of his affinity for the forge, a handful of dwarves and Tlotls also venerate Zipe-Toteque, though they refer to him as Xotite. Zipe-Toteque dwells in a golden cavern deep below the surface where many believe his subterranean lair connects to other fabled locales in Akados and Libynos. Dwarven legends claim that explorers fleeing from the Shengotha Plateau in distant Akados discovered his underground abode on their journey through the tunnels leading to Tehuatl, though many dismiss these tales as the products of overactive imaginations.



These doubts aside, worshippers remain steadfast in their conviction that those who craft magnificent gold and silver objects or master the gory technique of removing a victim's skin in one complete piece join their divine benefactor in his fabled workshop in the planet's depths for eternity after their earthly demise.

In his domain, the god appears as a hairless man encased by multiple layers of overlapping skin covered with festering pustules. His shrines and temples are constructed underground, whenever possible, in homage to the builders' divine master. They usually consist of a large, open cavern containing numerous niches to hold silver and gold figurines depicting Zipe-Toteque holding maize seeds in his outstretched hand. These statues are typically adorned with a miniature cloak made from flayed human skin draped across the artwork's shoulders. Throughout most of the year, Zipe-Toteque demands sacrifices of gold and silver from his priests and followers to allow last year's crops to return to life in the spring. On the vernal equinox, he thirsts for blood. His priests must flay the skin from sacrificial victims killed in mock battles and wear the grisly trophy for 20 days before devouring the cooked flesh. His followers and clergy firmly attest this ghastly ritual is necessary to ensure the rebirth of dormant seeds buried in the ground.

QUAMAXOTZ, THE WINGED BEAST, GOD OF BATS AND LYCANTHROPES

Domain: War

Symbol: A bat wing

Alignment: Chaotic evil

The Lord of Bats is a sinister relic from Tlatoani's reign. Like its patron beast, Quamaxotz and his followers congregate in the shadows, where they remain safely out of sight. Indeed, Quamaxotz owes his survival to this trait as he and his worshippers never posed enough of a threat to the emperor's hegemony to warrant a direct confrontation with the erstwhile deity. When the hero-gods deposed Tlatoani, Quamaxotz took a tentative step out of his

comfort zone to make a greater mark on Tehuatl. He forged tentative alliances with the evil humanoids cohabitating the subterranean abscesses alongside his rodent kin. Although his efforts made few direct inroads, his attempt paid off in other ways. While his target audience gave him a lukewarm reception, intelligent bats and bat-like creatures fell under his sway along with humanoid cabals of burglars, assassins, plotters, and conspirators seeking to usurp political or religious authority from others. His worshippers usually meet in concealed underground chambers or in isolated dark caves for midnight rituals of blood feasts and sacrifices. These remote sites ideally suit his clergy of lycanthrope priests predominately composed of werabats in wilderness locations and wererats in urban settings. Like his worshippers' gathering areas, the god dwells in a dank cavern beneath the planet's southern pole. In his dreary abode, he appears as a furry humanoid with a bat head and wings attached to his disproportionately long arms.

TONACAYOTL, LORD OF MAIZE, GOD OF MAIZE

Domain: Light, Nature

Symbol: An ear of maize

Alignment: Neutral good

The people of Tehuatl depend upon maize for their survival. The nutrient-rich crop plays a critical role in their society, and Tonacayotl, the god of maize, stands at the forefront. During the revolt, Tonacayotl kept the Aztlis and their troops well-fed through the conflict. The gifted farmer and planner procured ample quantities of maize and other dried foods from every village, town, and city and stored these supplies for future use in concealed granaries scattered throughout the land. He cleverly hid these structures in underground depots or disguised them as ordinary homes or forbidden shrines during the five-decade-long conflict. His efforts proved so invaluable that the hero-gods granted him a place in the heavens even though he never raised a weapon in battle.

Immediately after Tlatoani's defeat, the meticulously organized quartermaster assumed his new role as the god of maize. The humble deity has no permanent home, and instead wanders through the maize fields healing sick plants and keeping pests at bay. During his travels, he appears as a lithe young man with yellow skin and hair made from maize fibers. He carries a dried maize stalk in one hand and wears a cloak spun from maize stems and leaves. Worshipers celebrate the lord of maize during planting and harvesting ceremonies with elaborate, raucous musical and dance performances. At harvest time, every family leaves an ear of maize for each family member outside their door as a symbol of their gratitude. The maize remains there until the start of the planting ceremony the following spring. Tonacayotl's nomadic nature carries over to his priests. His clerics establish no formal temples, and instead wander across the land helping worshippers tend, plant, and harvest maize. Some also join the druidic circle known as the Circle of Maize (see **Class Options**).

ATOYATL, THE JADE SKIRT, GODDESS OF RIVERS AND SEAS

Domain: Life, Light, Tempest

Symbol: Jade

Alignment: Chaotic good

As her portfolio would suggest, the goddess of rivers, seas, and bodies of collected water is also the wife of Quiahuitl, the god of rain. She resides with her husband in his mountaintop abode of Quiahuitlan. Although she appears as an Aztli woman wearing a blue and white headdress with a shawl and skirt decorated with tassels, many legends suggest she was a water spirit who aided the hero-gods during a time of great need. The stories specify few details about her interactions with the gods other than to imply that she stood side by side with Quiahuitl during the rebellion and repeatedly placed herself in great peril throughout the decades-long struggle against Tlatoani. From her home high above the seas, she casts her eyes to the open waters where she keeps an intent watch on the men and women traveling along those waterways. Not surprisingly, sailors, fisherman, and many others who earn their livelihoods from the sea venerate the occasionally temperamental goddess who uses violent storms to express her displeasure. Despite her intermittent outbursts, Atoyatl presides over the sacred duty of childbirth, making her the patron deity of pregnant women, midwives, and children, especially infants. In her former capacity, her clergy builds her minimalist temples and shrines along the shores of rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans. During her five annual festivals, her priests leap into the water where they emulate the swimming motions of fish, frogs, and other small marine animals in lieu of offering her sacrifices. Mariners partaking in long oceanic journeys often drop small pieces of jade, her favored gemstone, into the briny deep to ensure fair weather and calm seas throughout their arduous trek. In her latter role as the patron deity of expectant mothers, Atoyatl's priests usually double as midwives. After giving birth, a cleric removes a tiny piece of flesh from the newborn and burns it as a sacrifice to the periodically volatile goddess. If she accepts the offering, the deity protects mother and child from harm until the woman recovers from the harrowing ordeal of bringing a living soul into the world.

TLATLAMA, THE PREDATOR, GOD OF THE HUNT

Domain: Nature

Symbol: Javelin

Alignment: Neutral

From the moment he could stand upright, Tlatlama, an orphaned Aztli child reared by a jaguar, learned how to stalk, ambush, and kill his prey. While the feral youngster had little regard for his extended human family who abandoned him shortly after his parents' death, the astute boy's adopted feline mother wisely taught him to mistrust and fear snakes. Faced with the choice of acquiescing to Tlatoani and his serpent minions or standing alongside the hero-gods, Tlatlama let go of his long-standing grudges and joined his human counterparts. The natural born ranger soon became known as the Jaguar Spirit because of his abilities to move through dense vegetation without being seen nor heard. During the conflict, he performed countless reconnaissance

missions behind enemy lines in addition to foraging for fresh game to feed Yaocoteotl's army. When the war finally ended, the daring ranger ascended into the heavens as the god of the hunt. In this capacity, Tlatlama oversees all activities associated with the hunt from his feral wilderness home on a distant celestial body. The Aztlis celebrate Tlatlama during a 20-day festival that has special significance for the adolescent boys participating in their first hunt. These young men always offer their first kill as a sacrifice to Tlatlama to ensure future bountiful hunts for themselves and their families. Although hunting is a year-round activity among the Aztlis, Tlatlama's prominence within the pantheon declines significantly when his festival ends. Only those people who rely almost exclusively on procuring fresh meat for survival venerate him as their primary deity. In contrast to most other deities in the Aztli pantheon, his shrines and temples are more numerous in small, backwater communities than in large settlements. The clergy serving in these houses of worship are typically rangers in their own right as are some of the god's followers. Tlatlama appears as a strapping humanoid with a black mask over his eyes and red and black horizontal stripes covering his torso and limbs. He always wears lightweight clothing intended to blend in with his surroundings along with his iconic bow and arrow, javelin, and a net for carrying dead game. Those who excel at swiftly and mercifully killing their quarry join him and his bestial companions for eternity in the dense, alien forest where he resides.

NOTONATIUH, LORD OF THE EAST, GOD OF THE SUN

Domain: Light, War

Symbol: A solar disc

Alignment: Lawful neutral

Although Yaocoteotl is associated with the sun's daily journey across the sky, Notonatiuh is the physical embodiment of the sun. During his mortal life, his bravery and holiness earned him an eternal place in the heavens. According to contemporary accounts, the righteous hero Notonatiuh stood before an army of shambling corpses led by a serpentine necromancer in Tlatoani's service. In the face of these enemies, the heroic Aztli martyred himself by transforming into a ball of radiant energy that destroyed the undead legions, their serpent leader, and ultimately himself. Micoateotl restored the fallen Notonatiuh to life after the conflict when he assumed his role as the manifestation of the Aztli sun. However, his resurrection came with a terrible price for the world. As he sacrificed himself to vanquish evil, the newly risen sun god demanded the same from his subjects. Every night at dusk, Notonatiuh's priests offer a sacrifice to their deity. On most occasions, they give him a gold object or eagle feather. However, when the moon glows red, only a human sacrifice can coax the melancholy sun god to rise the next morning. While most temples and shrines are built to accommodate worshippers' needs, those buildings dedicated to Notonatiuh follow a predetermined plan. His primary temples appear at the easternmost and westernmost points in Tehuatl as well as the location where the sun reaches its apex in the journey across the island. The Summer Solstice, when the sun makes its longest appearance in the sky is Notonatiuh's holiest day, while the Winter Solstice, when the Sun makes its briefest journey across the heavens doubles as a day of mourning for Notonatiuh's clergy and worshippers.

Notonatiuh dwells in the sun's fiery core. He appears as a red-skinned, burly man with an eagle headdress, talons in place of his hands and feet, and a bright, yellow shield strapped to his muscular arm. Dutiful priests and devotees who distinguish themselves during their lifetimes join him in the afterlife within the roiling star's plasma core. Popular belief claims that these souls appear for a few days or weeks as blotchy spots on the sun before disappearing altogether.

CONTLATI, LORD OF FIRE, GOD OF THE FLAMES AND VOLCANOES

Domain: Tempest

Symbol: Turquoise

Alignment: Lawful neutral

Tehuatl owes its existence to the molten rock roiling deep underground. This fiery stew that bubbled up to the surface rebuilt the largely submerged island

after the great cataclysm that destroyed the whole of Notos. This convenient fact is never lost on Conlati, the Aztli lord of fire and the patron deity of the druids belonging to the Circle of the Fault. Conlati differed from his fellow hero-gods in the respect that he was dragged into the conflict against Tlatoani instead of volunteering for the unenviable assignment. The ascetic hermit was content to spend his days in solemn introspection pondering the mysteries of the cosmos within the secure, isolated confines of his mountain cave dug into the side of a dormant volcano. However, when the emperor's snake advisors roused the slumbering stony giant from its sleep, the formerly impassive Conlati also rumbled to life. Wielding the might of the flames around him, the once-peaceful man released the conflagration burning within his soul upon his newfound enemies. He incinerated Tlatoani's minions in a ball of searing heat, giving rise to his place as the lord of fire in the Aztli pantheon.

The god appears as a strapping young man with soot-covered, blistered red skin, a golden chest plate, a turquoise mask, and conch shells dangling from a necklace resting atop his armor. He always holds a piece of flint in one hand and the mamalhuatzin, the fire sticks, in his other hand. Conlati dwells in the underbelly of Mount Tepetzin, though he sometimes takes up temporary residence in the heart of a distant star. The deity has few temples or shrines devoted solely to his worship other than an ancient shrine at the base of Mount Tepetzin in the Tepepan Mountains. Instead, every Aztli home keeps a sacred fire burning at all times inside their abode to acknowledge Conlati's presence. The priests serving at his ceremonial sites offer their divine benefactor shards of turquoise on a monthly basis. Young soldiers also traditionally burn flesh stripped from the bodies of their first vanquished foe as an offering to the lord of fire. Oddly, many pochtecas also venerate Conlati, though the religious connection between these merchants and the god remains unclear. In a development that outwardly makes more sense, rumors persist that a tiny sect of red dragons also pay homage to him and are even occasionally willing to sacrifice a portion of their treasure hoard to enter into his good graces.

CUALLITEOTL, THE SACRED MAIDEN, GODDESS OF FERTILITY AND BEAUTY

Domain: Life

Symbol: Butterfly

Alignment: Neutral good

Cualliteotl, the goddess of fertility, beauty, and the crafts is the most beloved deity among Aztli women. Blessed with a keen mind, bubbly personality, and an affinity for the arts — both fine and magical — the gorgeous entertainer, socialite, and spy proved herself to be an invaluable asset during the protracted war against Tlatoani. She frequently relayed crucial messages among the hero-gods and used her charm and comeliness to compromise the emperor's agents as well as to gather vital intelligence about planned military and political missions. In addition to her personal efforts, the cunning Cualliteotl recruited an extensive network of operatives to advance the hero-gods' goals across the continent. When she and her counterparts finally prevailed, the attractive bard assumed her rightful place among the wizards and warriors who won the day against Tlatoani. The goddess appears as an alluring young woman with flowing black hair, flawless skin, and an athletic shapely figure. She wears clothing made from the finest fabrics decorated with fresh flower petals while butterflies and birds flit about her head. As the patron deity of crafts associated with the home, such as textile production and child rearing, as well as the creation of luxury items, the women of nearly every Aztli household keep her in the highest regard. Her clergy is exclusively female, and they often wear sacramental garb accentuating their sensuality. Her temples and shrines resemble exclusive homes with meticulously chosen artistic décor. Religious rites double as social occasions where Cualliteotl's worshippers gather to sing, dance, and recite poetry while indulging their remaining senses on samplings of exotic foods, perfumes, clothing, and aphrodisiacs. The souls of those who excel in these endeavors join her in the afterlife in her spectacular estate built atop a magical cloud in the heavens.

Despite her association with the more genteel aspects of Aztli life, the goddess has a scornful side as well. Her priestesses and worshippers take their vows of matrimony and some binding contracts with the utmost seriousness. They gleefully sacrifice husbands caught in an adulterous act, those who physically abuse one of her worshippers, and anyone who refuses to pay a prostitute for a liaison. In the absence of any such transgressors, Cualliteotl basks in offerings of fine linens, handcrafted jewelry, and flowers, especially marigolds, which are sacred to her.

ITZCUIN, THE TWIN GUIDE, GOD OF MONSTROSITIES

Domain: Nagual

Symbol: A dog

Alignment: Neutral evil

From the moment he was born, Itzcuin, the twin brother of Nonotzali, felt cheated. While his sibling rose to prominence during the clash against Tlatoani because of his sharp mind and acumen for learning, Itzcuin believed he got the short end of the stick when his fellow hero-gods gave him the menial task of domesticating canines to serve as guards who could sniff out the emperor's disguised snake advisors and malevolent spirits. Although he succeeded at the endeavor and ascended into divinity along with his brother and their companions at the end of the war, Itzcuin chafed over the accolades lauded on Nonotzali and the minor role given to him during the conflict. His ire only increased when the hero-gods designated him to serve as a psychopomp escorting souls through Miquito, which in his irrational mind seemed too close to a human master walking his dog. In an act of spite, Itzcuin changed his appearance into that of a man with a dark, hairless, canine face, empty eye sockets, backward-pointing feet, and a wooden death whistle attached to a strand of muscle fiber dangling around his neck. To relieve himself of his underworldly burden, he delegated the task of guiding the recently departed through Miquito to a decedent's animal companion who was to be sacrificed during the person's funeral. From that moment on, he and his followers devote their lives to avenging the slights Nonotzali and, by extension, the other hero-gods have heaped upon Itzcuin and his worshippers. Because of his initial association with the afterlife, the god has some dominion over death, which attracts worshippers from the ranks of assassins, death cultists, and other nihilists seeking to unravel the universe. Unlike nearly all other Aztli gods, very few people openly worship Itzcuin. Instead, his clerics and supporters secretly venerate their deity in secluded wilderness locales or in underground structures typically referred to as "dens." In addition to his human followers, the deity has also made some traction recruiting gnolls, lycanthropes associated with canines such as werewolves and werecoyotes, and other monstrous beings to his cause, especially those with canine heritage and traits.

AZTLI COSMOLOGY

Before Tlatoani's demise, the Aztlis had no real concept of an afterlife. In furtherance of his grand scheme, the deceitful emperor dangled the prospect of everlasting life to anyone who willingly served him, but he and his ministry never elaborated about the rewards awaiting his faithful followers. Instead, the Immortal Sun simply assumed everyone wanted to live forever regardless of what awaited them for the remainder of eternity. Having seen the best and worst of humanity during their revolt, the hero-gods vowed to do better than their predecessor. Their ascendance created a sea change for souls transitioning into the afterlife. While the fiendish Tlatoani never perceived death as something awaiting him, the hero-gods were not blessed with such a luxury. They began their existences as ordinary mortals fighting an epic war against the emperor and his snake advisors. Their divergent clergymen generally agree that the hero-gods absorbed the residual energy seeping out of the Great Void that the gods of Boros opened to expel the emperor. Although they achieved godhood through this momentous event, the pantheon remains strongly tethered to the mortal world. Miquito, the land of the dead ruled by Micoateotl, borders Tehuatl in several spots, though these locations are presumably located far below the surface or in other hard-to-reach transitional locales scattered throughout Tehuatl and the universe at large. Spirits transition from their earthly existence into this version of the netherworld. Indeed, throughout history, several heroes have descended into Miquito to visit the spirit of a deceased loved one or even to successfully return the person to the realm of the living.

In geographic terms, Miquito consists of two distinct regions formed into concentric rings. The outer boundary is known as the Deathly Mountains. This enormous range boasts fierce winds that constantly buffet the rocky peaks, which resemble small moons more than the stony behemoths of the mortal world. Tunnels and passages carved into the mountains' rock faces grant the souls of the departed respite against the wicked currents of air and allow them safe passage into the interior region where a massive forest populated by gargantuan trees hundreds of miles tall and jaguars the size of elephants await the deceased on their journey to their final destination known as the Place of Rest. For the Aztlis and their hero-gods, the mountains represent the island's first line of defense

against the terrible cataclysm that swallowed the balance of their continent after the gods' intervention against the emperor. As in the case of the mountains, the lush greenery symbolizes the land's rebirth after its collapse into the sea centuries earlier. This locale is accessible only by climbing down the mighty tree, Tlallihuecauhuitl, or finding the secret entrance into its trunk. The arduous trek often lasts for years or even decades, though psychopomps appearing as dogs may assist the spirits along the way if the deeds during the person's mortal lifetime warranted their intervention. The living can also lend a helping hand to the dead by pledging their services to the gods. Surprisingly, the deceased gain no benefits from offering sacrifices in their name, as such offerings are solely reserved to venerate the gods rather than aid a deceased mortal. The petitioner's activities usually encompass performing midwifing duties, tending to the sick and elderly, educating children, and other tasks intended to improve the community or alleviate the suffering of others.

Souls who reach the Place of Rest discover a vast field dotted with lakes, streams, and food staples such as maize, squash, and pumpkins. When each soul arrives in the Place of Rest, Micoateotl, the overlord of the domain, assigns that person a task to perform to benefit the gods. Many tend to the fields, even though none of the spirits dwelling here require nourishment. Others idle away their time creating wondrous works of art celebrating the hero-gods and their accomplishments. The remainder attend to a diverse array of tasks completed for the betterment of the gods. Unfortunately, the lord of the dead sports an insatiable appetite for human flesh. When the urge to eat overcomes him, Micoateotl feasts on the souls inhabiting his realm. Those devoured in this manner retain their consciousness and identity while their physical manifestation slowly and painfully regenerates over the course of several months. For this reason, many Aztlis aspire to escape this fate and earn their place of honor in Ilhuicac, the Aztli version of paradise.

Ilhuicac represents a concept more than functioning as a contiguous location. Although it still borders the mortal world, each individual god and the deity's worthiest worshippers occupy a different place in the heavens among the numerous celestial bodies. Warriors who died in battle and those who willingly offered themselves for sacrifice to Yaocoteotl accompany the sun when it rises in the east until it sets in the west. Women who died in childbirth greet the sun for the nightly portion of its daily journey, remaining with the enormous star until it returns to the horizon the following morning. In the interim, these souls flit about Yaocoteotl's palace as hummingbirds. Likewise, those who made tremendous personal sacrifices to achieve great deeds falling into another deity's portfolio also gain entry into Ilhuicac. For instance, scholars who devoted their lives to intellectual pursuits and shared their treasures with Nonotzali join him in the afterlife.

The promise of a great reward in the afterlife has a profound effect on the Aztlis' psyche. While Tlatoani merely offered eternal life to his loyal supporters, the hero-gods gave their worshippers the realistic prospect of avoiding languishing in perpetuity within the bleak depths of Miquito toiling away at a designated task. The ability to distinguish oneself from other worshippers through great deeds and pious devotion and attain paradise among the gods makes religion critically vital to the Aztli people. Most importantly, the hero-gods walked among the Aztli people as mortals, making them more relatable to the average person than a divine being who never experienced their struggles firsthand or never even set foot in their world. Life, like their calendar, revolves around the Aztli pantheon and their notions of what awaits those who further the hero-gods' interests in the next world.

POQOZA RELIGION

When the Poqozas abandoned their Aztli heritage and turned to Tlaltcolli for guidance and salvation, they adopted a new cosmology to replace their former worldview. Over the course of several generations, their concepts about life and the finality of death evolved in a manner that blurred the barrier between them. They dispensed with the notions of an afterlife, an underworld, and paradise and transitioned to the ideology that the body's mortal demise opens the door to the soul's continued existence in an ethereal domain that coexists alongside the world of the living. The Poqozas call this state of being Mihiyotzin. According to their belief system, they enter Mihiyotzin by re-experiencing the moment of their greatest pleasure during their earthly lifetime. Children and those individuals who were unable to indulge their senses because of mental or physical limitations partake on a journey into an alternate universe where they regain a physical body and experience the world anew before they too transition into the Mihiyotzin. While this arrangement would seem to be a simple proposition of wantonly engaging in every vice imaginable, those who do so run the risk of spending the balance of eternity in a perpetual stupor instead of blissful enjoyment as the Mihiyotzin recaptures what they perceive to be their ideal moment in time, which can be a risky

proposition for someone hopelessly addicted to pulque or another substance.

Although the Poqoza formally turned their backs on the hero-gods, many of Tlaltcolli's worshippers incorporate some remnants of their ancestors' religious practices and traditions into their own faith. While the mere thought of performing a sacrifice of any type is strictly taboo, mariners frequently toss a shard of jade or another precious gemstone into the sea before any naval excursion. Ancient war dances praising Yaocoteotl can also be found throughout their culture, yet the Poqoza intentionally alter the choreographed steps to ensure the movements deviate from the original. Despite having a few vestigial remnants associated with their former existence as devout Aztlis, the Poqoza fervently worship just one deity — Tlaltcolli

TLATLCOILLI, THE DECADENT, GOD OF ALCOHOL, SIN, AND VICE

Domain: Life, Tezhauitl

Symbol: White rabbit

Alignment: Chaotic neutral

Every deity in the Aztli pantheon cemented a place within the gods' complex hierarchy through their mortal deeds. Tlaltcolli is the lone exception to this otherwise unwavering rule. Despite the Aztlis' efforts to glorify battle and heroic deaths, the protracted war against Tlatoani took a tremendous psychological toll on soldiers who spent their entire adult lifetimes watching their family, friends, and countrymen die while doing the same to their enemies. To momentarily escape these horrific images, many of the men and women who fought against the emperor used psychotropic agents, alcohol, and other vices to temporarily numb their emotional and physical pain. The earthly Tlaltcolli provided these diversions to the struggle's unsung and largely anonymous heroes. When their efforts finally paid off in Tlatoani's defeat, the procurer of sin and excess miraculously joined the other hero-gods in the heavens, despite their frequent complaints about the purveyor of iniquity. At first, the constantly inebriated and crass Tlaltcolli kept to himself, whiling his days and fortune away in a drunken stupor surrounded by courtesans and unsavory characters. As he watched his small band of followers emulate his example to enjoy the life to the fullest from the heavens, he came to the profound epiphany that taking life to grant life presented a dizzying paradox. Through visions, he immediately forbade his priests and followers to partake in the gruesome practice of human and even animal sacrifices to appease him or with greater consequence, any other deity who demanded blood. Tlaltcolli's edict placed him in direct conflict with the most influential members of the Aztli pantheon, especially Yaocoteotl who depended upon blood offerings for his own survival. The schism that followed gave rise to the Poqozas who became an entirely separate race from their former Aztli brethren.

Tlaltcolli appears as a young man with a handsome face, wiry physique, unkempt hair, and long, upright rabbit ears. He reeks of pulque, though he is renowned for his inhuman vitality. The deity resides in a garish palace decorated with graphic sexual images and fountains with provocative statues of naked or partially dressed men and women flowing with pulque and honey wine. To join him in the afterlife, his worshippers must spread mirth and mayhem without causing any real harm, which proves harder to achieve than it would seem at first glance. Nonetheless, his priests and followers have partially tempered their appetite for excess over the past several centuries and adopted the revised mantra of seeking pleasure over pain without falling into idleness. Each priest conducts rituals celebrating only one of the god's five aspects: gluttony, drunkenness, gambling, lust, and impulsiveness. Only the tlamacazqui, the deity's chief priest, may oversee ceremonies involving all five of Tlaltcolli's aspects. Therefore, one priest may revel in the joys of intoxication, while another may run games of chance.

Unlike most clerical hierarchies in Aztli society, priests and priestesses hold equal sway within the faith. Religious ceremonies honoring Tlaltcolli greatly resemble garish soirees featuring copious amounts of food, alcohol, gambling, and romantic trysts with loud and often frenetic music playing in the background while some partygoers perform suggestive dances. Most Aztlis gasp in horror at these lewd rites, but the lascivious god's followers view their counterparts' gory sacrificial rituals with even greater disgust. As the Poqozas frequently and sarcastically quip, "a night of vomiting is less disgusting than a minute of bleeding on an altar."

OTHER FAITHS

The Aztli pantheon and Tlatcolli are the island's dominant religious figures, though a handful of other divine beings also make a minor mark on Tehuatl. While the Aztlis may tolerate the worship of other gods on their island, the indulgence comes at a dreadful price. Because of their gods' demands for sacrifices, the Aztlis believe it is only fair that everyone — believers and non-believers alike — share the burden of giving the hero-gods who liberated everyone in Tehuatl the blood they need to ensure the island's continued survival. This ghastly arrangement causes the other human ethnicities and humanoid races to keep a prison population on hand to meet the Aztlis' demands to maintain their religious freedom. Most grudgingly hand over convicted criminals, captured prisoners from minor squabbles, and political undesirables to satisfy the hero-gods' appetite for their gruesome rituals. Indeed, many powerful and influential people have rid themselves of their rivals, spurned lovers, and individuals who know too much for their own good in this murderous fashion throughout the island's history. However, when there is no one readily available for tribute, the Aztlis forcibly takes someone from the community to meet their requirements.

These considerations aside, religions from beyond Tehuatl's shores also boast some followers on the island. The Tultas residing in the small coastal communities along the northern and eastern shores venerate Mother Pele, whom they exported from their homeland in the Razor. Despite their loyalty to the deity, many also believe the Aztli god Contlati may be her consort or her son, prompting many to worship him as well. The Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains retain their pantheon of gods from Akados and Libynos. Dwarfater remains firmly entrenched as their supreme deity, though a few dwarves also worship a variant of the Aztli god Zipe-Toteque. The elves of the Toctli Forest remain steadfast to their pantheon of gods, yet their close relationship and shared lineage with the Poqozas cause many of them to incorporate Tlatcolli and the Poqoza cosmology into their belief system. Tsathogga, the dreaded Frog God, has made some inroads among the cipatenhuas who outwardly worship Itztliteotl after he cursed their race when their leader, the great sea serpent Cipactli bit off the hero-god's right foot. Some sects of tlotsl also venerate the disgusting demon lord, but his worship remains confined to remote corners of the island concentrated in its swamps and marshes. Likewise, the minor populations of other humanoid races continue to venerate the deities associated with their respective races with some reluctant respect granted to the Aztlis' gods.

The one notable exception to these rules are the aggressive humanoid races such as the gnolls, goblinoids, and orcs. As previously discussed, Itzcuin holds sway over the dog-like gnolls. The militaristic hobgoblins naturally gravitate toward Yaoctteotl, the Aztlis' god of war, while their mischievous-yet-still-cruel smaller cousins, the goblins, pay some homage to Itztliteotl. Meanwhile, some of the island's orcs fall in line with the beast god Quamaxotz or the devious Itztliteotl, though they still conform to some rites and rituals associated with older orcish gods.



CHAPTER SIX: CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS

LAY OF THE LAND

Tehuatl is an island of extremes. It soars to dizzying heights in the Tepepan Mountains and sinks to abysmal lows in the swamps and marshes along its eastern coastline. Although significantly smaller than the giant continents to its north, diversity rules the comparatively tiny enclave in the southern hemisphere. Semitropical forests dominate the western coastline and wrap around the imposing mountain range in Tehuatl's heart. Grasslands stretch across the island's southern interior and also form a concentric band around the imposing peaks, which are an environment unto themselves. These stony behemoths cast an intimidating shadow on the semiarid desert lying to their east. Streams, brooks, rivers, and lakes crisscross the landscape, carving the island into smaller fiefdoms and transitional biomes.

Nature is not the only entity that has changed Tehuatl's composition. Humanity and other creatures have shaped the island's fortunes for better and for worse. Sprawling cities, spectacular monuments, grandiose engineering feats, and other manmade activities have left their indelible mark on its terrain and history. Savage battles between competing armies of gods and men have leveled structures and ravaged the landscape beyond recognition. Yet through all its struggles and hardships, Tehuatl survives. The land rejuvenates, the people rebound, the animals recover, and the plants return to begin the cycle anew. What awaits is a journey across a vibrant landscape teeming with incredible people, wondrous sites, and storied history that makes the island utterly unique to explore.

These chapters provide an overview of each region followed by detailed writeups of noteworthy locales within that particular biome. The entries appearing after each heading describe the region's weather consultation table, the baseline temperature deviation, and the relative humidity deviation. These items apply to the tables found in the **Overview of Tehuatl** chapter. These modifiers are either applied to the baselines for temperature or the 1d100 rolls made to determine the daily weather and relative humidity. The end of each broad overview also provides a table to determine the chances of encountering a settlement in each hex or square within that region. These tables are not intended to indicate the exact number or absence of settlements in a particular location but to indicate whether the characters come across one during their travels through that hex or square.

CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS

Overview Weather Table: Grassland and Marsh
Baseline Temperature Deviation: -1d4+1 °F
Daily Weather Deviation: -1d10 chance of rain
Relative Humidity Deviation: -1d10

The Caxcalli Grasslands is the largest biome south of the Great Canal. Bordered by the Toctli Forest to the west and north and the Tlococua Marsh to its east, the Caxcalli Grasslands' southern shore grants direct access to the sea. Much of the Poqozas' food supply comes from this region as the other environments under their domain are less conducive to widespread agriculture. Maize grows well in the rich soil along with other cereal grains including amaranth, chia seeds, and quinoa along with a host of other staple fruits and vegetables including beans, chili peppers, pineapples, squash, and sweet potatoes. In addition, the Poqozas harvest numerous herbs and mushrooms with hallucinogenic and psychedelic properties that they predominately use to commune with their deity Tlatlcolli. The bountiful greenery is more than sufficient to sate the appetites of its endemic herbivores such as deer, capybaras, rats, mice, prairie dogs, anteaters, rabbits, hares, and pacas among others. Cougars and wolves are the dominant predators in the Caxcalli Grasslands, though they must compete with birds of prey such as hawks, falcons, and eagles, as well as land-based competitors including coyotes, foxes, and ocelots.

Farther from the equator than its northern counterpart, the Caxcalli Grasslands are cooler and slightly drier than their northern counterpart. Although still warm, the biome is more akin to a temperate prairie than a semitropical savannah with tall grasses dominating the vegetation and sparse clusters of trees sprinkled throughout the region. The moderate reduction in heat allows the habitat to retain more water. While the Caxcalli Grasslands experience distinct wet and dry seasons, less precipitation is lost to evaporation than in a hot environment. Rivers, lakes, streams, and ponds are scattered throughout the region with Moyome Lake being the largest such body of water in Tehuatl. The Poqozas and other humanoid inhabitants cultivated huge swaths of territory for farmland, often converting shallow or drying lakebeds and riverbeds into chinampas.

The Caxcalli Grasslands' expansive resources allow settlements to flourish throughout the region. The metropolis of Zacatl, the Poqozas' unofficial capital, ranks foremost among these communities. Many perceive the grand city as the hub of Poqoza culture and society. Poqoza cities, towns, and villages dot the landscape, though they must sometimes compete against less scrupulous humanoids for resources. Gnolls and small bands of orcs also roam the plains searching for game and settlements to pillage. Each hex in the region encompasses a 400-square-mile area. While traveling through the Caxcalli Grasslands, you may consult the following table to determine whether a settlement is in that locale.

TABLE 6-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS

d20	Settlement Found
1-3	No settlement
4-8	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
9-14	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
15-17	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)
18	Large town (20d100 + 1,500 residents with permanent structures)
19-20	Make 1d3 additional rolls on this table

TABLE 6-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS

d20	Demographics
1-6	Poqoza-dominated settlement
7-15	Mixed community with Poqoza majority
16-17	Mixed community with no majority (elves and Poqozas)
18-19	Gnoll community with 4d10% humanoid slaves (No large town; small town instead)
20	Orc community (No small town or large town; village instead)

EEI

The grasses grow at strange angles and bend into odd shapes around a perplexing depression in the ground. Most people agree the bizarre formation dates to the period when Tehuatl sat at the bottom of the ocean covered in water. Steps cut from undersea stones descend into a 66-foot-wide hollow at one-foot intervals until reaching a depth of six feet. An incredibly intense heat source burned a symmetrical triangle of three scorch marks onto the stony floor of the hollow. Each side of the three triangles measures three feet, and the edges of the fiery impressions appear to have partially melted the stone, carving deep grooves onto its surface as if cut with a chisel or other precise instrument. An image of a tall, thin humanoid with no nose and wedged gills



in place of ears adorns the center of each triangle. The creatures have webbed hands and feet with three fingers and three toes on each appendage. Reptilian skulls from a large crocodilian-like beast were apparently intentionally placed at each corner of the depression.

Druids and scholars who examined the humanoid drawings and fleshless heads cannot associate them with any known humanoid, animal, or monster, but the skulls' size and configuration suggest the creature walked on all fours and likely measured approximately 15 feet in length from snout to tail. Moreover, the creature's bones appear thick yet flexible, implying the creature was accustomed to the tremendous pressure encountered at extreme depths, though only a character with knowledge of the sea and nature would draw that inference from examining the skull. At the moment, the site is a mere curiosity as no one has experienced any inexplicable sensations or occurrences while exploring at Eei. However, the handful of daring souls who cast divination spells to learn additional details about its history or origins immediately experienced vivid hallucinations and visions of an undersea city encased in thick glass.

HAMACHI

Although almost all of Moyome lies within the welcoming confines of the Caxcalli Grasslands, the massive lake partially extends into the neighboring Tlococua Marsh. The narrow band of land surrounding Moyome including the section that bleeds over into the wetland provides a welcoming sanctuary for thousands of different bird species. The avian animals use the strip of territory known as Hamachi as a breeding ground, watering hole, and safe haven from aerial and land-based predators. While Hamachi may offer the birds refuge from some foes, the region is not off-limits to the Poqozas and other humanoids inhabiting the area. Nonetheless, the two-legged hunters exercise great care when pursuing prey into the Hamachi as they are careful not to disturb delicate breeding grounds or undertake any actions that could harm the next generation of winged prey.

Humanoid hunters primarily trek into Hamachi on a quest for food, but feathers are also a valuable commodity within Poqoza and Aztli communities, especially those plucked from a noble bird without harming it. While the plumage harvested from a slain bird retains its monetary value and can be used for ritualistic purposes, the Poqozas and Aztlis believe a feather garnered from a living bird has greater mystical energy and prestige because the living creature's moyotl still empowers the feathery extension of itself. A majority of priests and elders believe Hamachi is the best locale in Tehuatl to retrieve feathers as hundreds of different bird species all gather in the same general area, making it much easier to find the most diverse array of feathers without extensive travel. Numerous varieties of macaws, parakeets, parrots, avocets, quail, swifts, chachalacas, and many other types of birds thrive in this avian paradise. While most ordinary birds pose no realistic danger to humanoids, some monstrous avian creatures can throw a scare into the stoutest adventurers. Some Poqozas claim to have witnessed clubneks, corpse rooks, and the dreaded cockatrices building nests within Hamachi's secure confines. The news of cockatrices infiltrating the sanctuary has raised alarms in the surrounding towns and villages. A hunting party recently spotted a petrified coyote several miles outside of Hamachi, while a farmer just found a stone deer in his fields.

IACHACINA

On those rare occasions when prolonged drought grips the land, this cluster of small freshwater ponds miraculously never evaporate or dry out despite the heat and aridity. Located on the far western border of the tallgrass near the Toctli Forest, these well-stocked pools teem with fish even in the darkest hours when nearly all other water sources have vanished from the land. Nonetheless, Iachacina cannot escape unscathed. The pools shrink considerably, even during a normal dry season. On average, they contract to a fraction of their usual size, typically reaching a maximum width of three feet. Despite the decrease in visible surface area, the pools retain their depth, where it is typically at least 10 feet to the bottom. Although still viable, the extreme overcrowding strains the food supply to the point of collapse, killing many fish that eventually float to the surface where they rot and emit a pungent stench that attracts hungry scavengers who eagerly devour the smorgasbord of carrion littering the Iachacina.

A network of interconnected underground springs feeds this oasis. Some of the fish retreat to the small flooded tunnels beneath the surface to ride out the dry season or drought and wait for the rains to return to the grasslands. Some Poqozas specialize at coaxing these famished fish from their hiding

places and luring them closer to the surface using their fingers as fresh bait. When the fish grabs hold of the angler's digit, the fisherman then tries to wrap its remaining fingers around the fish's head and wrestle it out of the water. Unfortunately, some fishermen find out the hard way that snapping turtles also inhabit these muddy waters as well. Many Poqozas who use this technique are missing at least a portion of one finger. Villagers who spot anyone sporting the telltale signs of this fishing technique refer to the unfortunate angler as an "Imamichi," which loosely translates as the person who fed the turtles.

While attaining food is generally foremost on the minds of those who fish in the Iachacina, there is also an unfounded belief that an ancient turtle lurks in the muddy tunnels beneath the pools. The tales claim the beast eluded a powerful priest of Tlatlama during a ceremonial hunt that took place centuries earlier. Impressed by the normally sluggish creature's guile and cunning, the cleric beseeched his deity to grant the turtle immortality and the ability to commune directly with the lord of the hunt. The latter ability has led some individuals to seek out the turtle to obtain vital information.

MOYOME

Far and away the largest lake in Tehuatl, the vaguely round body of freshwater has an average diameter of 50 miles and straddles the boundary between the Caxcalli Grasslands and the Tlococua Marsh. In most spots along the lakeshore, a bather can walk into the water for approximately one-half mile before the water reaches shoulder height on the average man. After that gradual descent, the lake's depth increases substantially. Although unconfirmed, Poqoza mariners believe the bottom is almost two miles beneath the surface, especially near and around the lake's center. However, much of the lake and its floor remain unexplored and enigmatic. What the Poqozas do know from the historical accounts is that the lake existed during the time of the hero-gods, as scholars have discovered extensive sketches and artistic depictions of Moyome dating back to the time of the hero-gods' rebellion.

Today, Moyome's calm waters see little commercial traffic. Fishermen dwelling in small villages along the lakeshore paddle nimble canoes into and just beyond its shallows, yet they avoid rowing farther beyond into the great unknown. Merchant vessels from larger settlements along and near the lakeshore occasionally make the unnerving trek across Moyome. Although the lake is typically serene and easy to navigate, the gentle waters of Moyome sometimes take a violent turn for the worst. Seiches, oscillating waves caused by an underwater disturbance occasionally rock the lake's shores, tossing moored boats around like children's toys. For sailors at sea, the derecho may be the most feared natural phenomenon on the lake. Strong vertical winds can damage ships and conjure potent waves with the potential to capsize the vessel. Yet mariners fear more than natural forces on Moyome. Seasoned sailors report seeing merrows in deeper waters, while lizard people and swamp trolls hunt near the shorelines, especially within the confines of the Tlococua Marsh.

While disasters at sea are rare on Moyome, the prospect of sinking beneath the waves into a watery grave two miles below the surface unnerves captains and crewmembers alike. Worse still, what rests on the bottom of Moyome remains a great unknown. Old sea shanties speak of bloated, waterlogged corpses scuttling across the lake floor like lobsters feeding on carrion. Older tales claim that strange serpentine creatures created an undersea stronghold long before the hero-gods led their revolt and the seas swallowed up most of Tehuatl. Other stories convey rumors of twisted and deranged aquatic beings taking up residence at the bottom of Moyome when it was a deep-sea trench during its lengthy submersion beneath the ocean. According to the latter myths, this accursed race constructed bizarre shrines and other structures dedicated to their demented gods or fallen ancestors. The occasional discovery of a sculpted piece of coral or painted crustacean shell that washes ashore lends some credence to the preceding fables.

MULLA CHANACU

A trip to Mulla Chanacu, located almost dead smack at the center of the Caxcalli Grasslands, is a rite of passage for all teenage Poqozas on their way to adulthood. At first glance, the locale appears ordinary with tall grasses dominating the landscape for as far as the eye can see. However, closer examination reveals numerous undulations and small hills, for at its core, the Mulla Chanacu is a network of subterranean passages and chambers teeming with shori huasca, a psychedelic fungus. When ingested, the organic material leads the child on a transcendental journey of self-discovery. The fungus takes the youngster by the hand and guides them toward their next stage in life by unveiling their latent talents and passions. After spending several days or



weeks at the remote site ingesting the strange mushroom or engaging in other equally insightful indulgences, the young man or woman emerges from the caverns of Mulla Chanacu a changed person. Whether of noble descent or a commoner, these new adults understand their purpose in life and where they fit in Tlatcolli's grand scheme of the universe. In Poqoza society, one's profession or strata is almost as important as their social stature. Some people leave Mulla Chanacu content in the knowledge they were intended to be thalus (farmers). Others recognize their skills as thayana (hunters), while contemplative individuals understand they were born to be alaxpachas (thinkers).

When the Aztlis still ruled over the Caxcalli Grasslands, a team of prominent naturalists ventured to Mulla Chanacu to study its unusual properties. They left the location perplexed and divided. Some believed the prolonged exposure to seawater created the honeycomb of underground tunnels and rooms, while others attributed their design to unnatural forces. The origins of shori huasca also remained a subject of intense debate, though no one had the courage at the time to sample a few bites of the unusual substance. Mulla Chanacu only rose to prominence after the Poqozas attained independence and embarked on their age of experimentalism. While Poqozas have been coming here for years, there is a fragmented yet growing urgency to obtain a better understanding about Mulla Chanacu's origins and its relationship to the fungus that draws teenagers here, especially in light of strange encounters in the depths of the Mulla Chanacu. For more details, see the companion adventure *Rider on the Storm*.

ONACINA

This deep valley near the center of the Caxcalli Grasslands proved to be a wondrous find for the first Aztlis who settled the region after the waters receded. The people emerging from the Tepepan Mountains accidentally stumbled upon this magnificent haven in the early phases of their exploration and stared in awe at its beauty and diversity. The fertile soil seemed to defy earthly expectations as plants took root and flourished in practically every tiny speck of dirt scattered across the roughly circular, one-square-mile area. Much to their astonishment, potatoes of various colors flourished at the bases of cacao trees that are not normally found in grassland areas. Adding to their

confoundment was the fact that the valley resembled an inverted funnel with tiered terraces rather than smooth angles. The odd configuration greatly benefitted the founders yet also gave the impression that the location had been deliberately sculpted in this manner instead of being created by natural forces.

Regardless of the forces behind its creation, one family methodically took charge of Onacina's agricultural production. Through hook and by crook, Iohala, the family's noble patriarch and his three, vicious sociopathic sons muscled his rivals out of the valley and monopolized the potato and cacao business in the area. At the height of their commercial empire, Iohala's potatoes and cacao were the rage in Xacota. The advent of the Cult of Tlatcolli and the schism between the Aztlis and Poqozas dampened the family's financial fortunes. However, prior to the separation, Iohala's descendants successfully transitioned from brutal cutthroats and thugs into respectable noblepersons. The family retooled its operations and began cultivating psychedelic herbs and mushrooms to cater to its new market for these goods. Today, only the oldest and most history-minded Poqozas remember the ignominious family's sins from the distant past. This generation celebrates the family for employing a massive workforce to harvest, package, transport, and market its products to all points south of the Great Canal. The family stamps their logo, a depiction of a "judging eye above a balanced scale" onto every shipping carton or package containing their goods.

ROMMPF

Ruler: Argheg

Government: Autocracy

Population: 19,442 (15,086 gnolls, 2,553 Poqozas, 802 half-orcs, 461 elves, 255 Tozcas, 203 Tlotls, 45 tieflings, 37 lizard people)

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconian, Elvish, Gnoll, Orc

Resources: Agriculture, slaves

When the Aztlis relinquished control of the Caxcalli Grasslands after the fall of Xacota, the opportunistic gnolls swooped in to take advantage of their

human adversary's dysfunction. Under the guidance of their cruel chieftain Hoowoll, the biome's gnolls abandoned their nomadic ways and established a permanent stronghold in the heart of Poqoza territory. The impressive fortification boasts imposing earthworks, flooded canals, and other defensive structures designed to repel an offensive while giving the gnolls a secure base of operations to use for their assaults on villages, towns, and even cities throughout the region. For now, Rommpf's gnolls seem content to plunder settlements and lug their spoils back to Rommpf rather than engage in a war of conquest across the Caxcalli Grasslands. Their current chieftain Argheg appears satisfied with this arrangement for the moment. He finds the task of governing and maintaining control over his unruly gnom subjects to be utterly exhausting, leaving him to wonder how much more difficult his job would be if he added the bohemian Poqozas and stoic elves to the mix. Although none of his direct subordinates dream of empire building either, he has no doubt some of his underlings covet a greater share of the treasure and the prestige and fringe benefits that goes along with it.

In addition to keeping a tight leash on his howling gnom counterparts, Argheg also welcomes Tozcas, half-orcs, and other humanoid outcasts into his fold. He uses these people as spies to gather intelligence and information about settlements outside of Rommpf's protective walls. But they also serve a secondary purpose: In return for his protection, he clandestinely directs the most talented covert operatives to keep tabs on his gnom rivals within Rommpf as well. The conniving Argheg handsomely pays these agents for their services, yet despite bestowing his favors upon these individuals, his fellow gnolls treat them as second-class citizens. Nonetheless, the throngs of humanoid slaves within the encampment would gladly trade places with them in a heartbeat. Several thousand Poqozas and hundreds of elves serve their canine masters under the most deplorable conditions. The gnolls ensconced in crude huts and ramshackle structures lead a luxurious lifestyle in comparison to their oppressed captives who sleep out in the open in the grass, where they eat all manner of worms and bugs just to awaken the next morning to another horrendous day under the gnolls' brutal oversight. Most slaves die within one year of their capture, and only nine have lived in Rommpf for more than five years. Many slaves recognize the gravity of their situation within days of their arrival, making rebellions a commonplace occurrence. For their part, the gnolls appear to encourage these uprisings, which allow them to mercilessly pummel their overmatched opponents with no realistic chance of defeat.

The gnolls' slaves tirelessly work the fields inside Rommpf's barriers, growing maize, pineapples, potatoes, squash, and sweet potatoes as well as raising domesticated turkeys for their masters' consumption. Gnolls never enjoy chomping on fruits and vegetables, but they would rather eat greens than starve like their slaves who must scrounge for insects and larvae dug out of the ground. The gnolls execute any slave who eats a single kernel of maize or a scrap of meat destined for their table. The gnolls supplement their diet of grains and plants with turkey, slaughtered slaves, and game animals captured by their hunting parties who scour the Caxcalli Grasslands for deer, pronghorns, tapirs, capybaras, and even monsters.

Now entering his 13th year as chieftain after succeeding his predecessor Borw who died in the ill-fated attack against the Poqoza city of Xicotli, the aging Argheg realizes he is not getting any younger, and his time may soon be at hand if he lets his guard down for even a moment. Fortunately for him, he maintains a strong relationship with Rempf, Itzcuin's high priest who also inherited his position after the failed assault. The gnolls' god has less animosity for Tlatcolli and his followers than the Aztli hero-gods, which slightly blunts their enthusiasm for exacting revenge against Xicotli and its squadrons of angry bees. They have exercised great care in not repeating that dreaded mistake, prompting them to focus their attention on easier yet less lucrative targets. In this vein, his gnolls predominately target merchants and undefended settlements. Argheg is also expanding his slaving operations to include Mulla Chanacu, where he believes intoxicated Poqoza teenagers would make easy marks. However, much to his surprise, his first raiding party failed to return from the site despite leaving Rommpf almost one week ago. Naturally, Argheg keeps his tongue still about the unexpected development, though he ruminates about dispatching another group in the next few days to investigate their fate and procure more slaves.

TEMETZIN RIVER

Running from the Great Canal, through the city of Zacatl and then across the breadth of the Caxcalli Grasslands to the ocean, the Temetzin River is the lifeblood of the habitat, where it branches off into multiple tributaries that deliver the life-giving fluid to numerous Poqoza settlements scattered throughout the area. The Poqozas incorporated the Temetzin River into the Great Canal's construction though a portion of the river north of the canal

spills over into the Cuahtla Forest before petering out 15 miles inland. Merchant vessels and canoes clog the broad, deep waterway in the sections near the Poqozas' major metropolis before loosening up farther away from the city. Zacatl's docks on the river resemble a bustling depot with ships and canoes continually mooring and disembarking from its piers. Near the city, the river widens to 115 feet across and 16 feet deep. From there, it slowly narrows to an average of 60 feet though it deepens as well to a maximum depth of 80 feet. The river is generally calm except during rainy season when it swells from runoff pouring down the plateaus surrounding the river just south of the Great Canal.

In addition to facilitating maritime traffic and personal watercraft, Temetzin's waters are well stocked with fish, including bass, catfish, chub, and shellfish. While large-scale fishing operations account for some of the catches that make it to market, many small villages lining the riverbanks rely upon the consistent supply of seafood to help feed their residents along with staple food crops that thrive in the moist, fertile soil. Despite its critical importance to the Poqozas, the Temetzin River has a checkered history. Merrows are known to inhabit its deepest reaches and occasionally swim to the surface to turn an unwary angler into bait. River trolls occasionally surface to hunt fishermen or villagers who stray too close to the water's edge. Most ominously, an ancient legend claims that Quiahuitl and Atoyatl imprisoned an aquatic demon in an underwater complex somewhere in the Temetzin River's murky depths. Those daring souls who attempted to locate the hidden prison either never returned or came back stark-raving mad. Whether these insane people ever truly found the complex remains debatable, but what is undeniable is that someone or something transformed courageous heroes into babbling lunatics.

TLAHAPINA

Ruler: Atihari

Government: Matriarchy

Population: 391 (356 Poqoza, 31 aquatic elves, 4 Tulitas)

Languages: Common, Elvish, Tulita

Resources: Seafood

Built along a peaceful inlet on the southern shore of the Caxcalli Grasslands, Tlahapina began its existence as an unassuming fishing village of Poqozas living among a small band of aquatic elves and Tulitas. These humble men and women harvested mussels and caught shrimp in the bountiful waters just offshore for what seemed like countless generations. Content with their plentiful catches, the villagers refrained from venturing farther out to sea in search of larger and more dangerous hauls until a young, reckless captain named Ipaqana ignored the peril and steered his boat into uncharted waters. There, he met the sea witch Jararpana. The captain swooned over the rare beauty and felt compelled to profess his undying love to her and ask her to marry him. Jararpana rebuffed his advances, which angered the impetuous young man who expressed his displeasure by spearfishing her pet barracuda and hacking her garden to pieces. Although unable to physically stop him from committing his acts of vandalism, she had a far worse fate in mind for Ipaqana and his humanoid kin. That evening, she performed an ancient, forbidden rite that opened a misty gate into another uninhabited realm. However, Jararpana's ritual was not intended or designed to capture an entire village in its wispy vapors. Under this insurmountable strain, the magic buckled and warped, bending back upon itself and placing the settlement under a befuddling curse. Although the sea witch's plan did not come to fruition as she envisioned, the damage she caused proved worse than should could have imagined. Jararpana moved onto deeper waters, satisfied in the knowledge she had taught the villagers of Tlahapina an unforgettable lesson even though it differed from what she intended.

Every night from just before sundown until just past dawn a supernatural fog rolls in from the ocean. While in the midst of the mist, Tlahapina exists in Tehuatl. When the sun burns off the mist, the village shifts to an alternate realm. Outsiders spending the night in a comfortable inn awaken on a lonely beach. Conversations abruptly stop in midsentence as the speaker and listener transition into the other plane. Even Paj, the village dog, runs off into the mist and disappears, only to reappear when the fog returns that evening. Worse yet, the villagers of Tlahapina roughly experience the same day over and over again in perpetuity. Being stuck in an endless loop has driven some inhabitants mad, forcing their fellow villagers to confine them against their will to outbuildings during the night while plying them with drink to quiet their frayed nerves.

Atihari, the village's current leader, has grown weary of reliving the same day ad infinitum and longs for death. By her calculations, the village has been stuck in this loop for 187 years. She assumed leadership of the village after her predecessor committed suicide by running into the surf and drowning, a death

he relives each morning. Visitors to Tlahapina first see the fires cutting through the misty fog from poles high above their heads. At one time, the lights warned sailors where the water's edge lay and where to return during the night. Now they lure in travelers to help Atihari end her and her charges' torment. Villagers greet visitors with great interest, directing them to meet with their leader or with Ipaqana, the sea captain who spends his nights eternally snookered in the village's den of iniquity — The Daughter of the Sea, where most other residents gather every evening when the village returns to Tehuatl. Songs and laughter generated inside ultimately spill out into the inlet beyond its welcoming doors.

Unfortunately, guests also find themselves drawn into Tlahapina's curse, as those who leave during the evening while the village exists in Tehuatl always return to the alternate domain when morning comes. Naturally, most believe that only Jararpana can undo the curse plaguing the village, but her current whereabouts and disposition are unknown. Atihari is even willing to part with her magical spear, which has been a family heirloom for generations, as recompense for anyone who can break the curse imprisoning her and her friends. Of course, extremely potent magic capable of bending reality or altering time could also restore balance to the village, but no one here has the might to wield such mystical power.

TOXANA

In the northeastern corner of the Caxcalli Grasslands, a vast complex of geothermal vents bore into the planet's roiling interior where the immense outward pressure pushes superheated water and steam up to 100 feet into the air. The vapors exude a caustic stench similar to chlorine, but have no known toxic effects on animals or humans dwelling in the region. On the other hand, the boiling hot liquid that falls back to the ground scorches any plant life that attempts to take root in the warm fallow earth. Lichen may be the only organisms flourishing under these harsh conditions where they grab hold of the carbonate left behind around where the hot water cools and seeps back into the ground.

Although beautiful to behold, Toxana is a 104-square-mile wasteland devoid of greenery save for an occasional stubborn tree or shrub hanging on for dear life to the foaming, baked earth. The only people who venture here and ultimately reside amid the geysers are a resilient colony of humanoids suffering from incurable diseases, such as metastatic cancer, tuberculosis, leprosy, and malaria. None of them can explain why they traveled here, and their convoluted rationales for being here suggest instinct drove them to venture to this remote locale. At dawn, each individual partakes in what appears to be an overtly painful and potentially suicidal ritual of bathing in the scolding waters rich with minerals and sulfur. Although still obviously suffering from their ailments based upon their clear presentation of symptoms, there are several Poqozas among this population who are reputedly more than 150 years old as well as a wizened elf who predates the Age of Xacota. However, these folks appear to be the exception. The significant majority of Toxana's diseased residents die within days of their arrival, despite following the same protocols and regimens as their elderly counterparts.

XICOTLI

Ruler: Queen Arcerynn

Government: Monarchy

Population: 43,228 (36,354 Poqozas, 5,721 elves, 689 halflings, 255 Aztlis, 209 gnomes)

Languages: Common, Elvish, Gnome, Halfling

Resources: Bees, honey

Parks, courtyards, and botanical gardens teeming with manicured grasses, flowering plants, pruned fruit trees, and a multitude of vegetables make Xicotli the least densely populated city in all of Tehuatl. Its grounds encompass more than 1,400 square miles of territory nurtured by four aqueducts channeling fresh water into the city from Moyome and three much smaller bodies of water closer to and surrounding the sprawling metropolis. The first feature to capture visitors' attention is not the sights but the pervasive buzzing sound humming through the air. The drone comes from the millions or possibly even billions of honeybees flitting about Xicotli to fertilize its numerous plants. Although many hives are wild, the Poqozas and some elves living here are expert beekeepers with enormous apiaries spread out across hundreds of acres, thus accounting for the settlement's reputation as the City of Bees. Most queens and their colonies remain here, but some beekeepers export their hives to farms and other large-scale agricultural centers requiring the insects'

assistance to pollinate their flowering plants.

Nearly all of Xicotli's wild bees fall into the category of "solitary" bees, which are broken down into four primary species: leaf-cutter bees, carpenter bees, alkali bees, and digger bees. None of these insects produce honey, though the four species exhibit distinctly different behaviors. Leaf-cutters are found on small pods of wadded grasses with webbed stalks sturdy enough to support the nest above the ground. The bee thins out the grass in a 20-foot radius from the cluster of pods. Leaf-cutters angrily buzz around intruders, but rarely sting. Carpenter bees act similarly, but are much larger at a whopping three inches long. These bees bore holes into wood where they leave their larva to hatch, and then die after sealing the hole with nutrients. Carpenters are also usually harmless to people, yet they their loud drone can be intimidating. Alkali bees live in loose soil, where they burrow into the ground to lay their eggs. An alkaline pheromone that irritates mammalian skin covers their exoskeleton, yet they are not aggressive and sting only when cornered or threatened. Digger bees stand out for their ornery dispositions. They staunchly defend their territory against any trespasser, even forfeiting their own lives to protect their larvae. They live in the soil and are known to chase intruders for up to one-quarter mile before finally relenting. Although their stingers detach from their abdomens like all other species, these bees have perfected a technique of painfully jabbing their enemies with their pointed barb two or three times before sinking the stinger into the victim's skin to pump it full of venom. When a target submerges its entire body underwater, digger bees have reportedly waited for up to three minutes before flying back to their nest.

By comparison, the honey bees native to Tehuatl are industrious and stingless. Xicotli's beekeepers manage roughly 400,000 hives that produce up to 20,000 tons of honey each year. Of course, the honey's tastes and properties depend heavily upon the flowers the bees pollinate. Many flowers blossoming in Xicotli cater to the Poqozas' tastes for intoxicants, and honey derived from these psychoactive plants exhibit the same traits. Never unwilling to turn over a new leaf, some Poqozas up the ante and drink fermented beverages made from these types of honey, which intensifies the euphoria they convey. Honey purveyors and shops catering to serving food and beverages containing the sweet ingredient line the busier streets and canals that wind their way across the city square and to the remoter regions of Xicotli.

Even Xicotli's connoisseurs could never come close to consuming these quantities of honey in a single year. The majority of its domestic production is exported elsewhere including Zacatl and a host of Poqoza and elvish settlements south of the Great Canal with small shipments bound for Aztli communities north of the Great Canal. Like the insects their economy depends upon, Xicotli is a matriarchal society ruled by Poqoza Queen Arcerynn and her three daughters. Her elvish consort Elyn Traylim, wields no political power whatsoever as the crown's figurehead king. Although only a second-generation half-elf with three Aztli grandparents and one elvish grandmother, Arcerynn and her children embrace their elvish heritage significantly more than their Aztli lineage, which they consider a blight upon the world. Despite these harsh feelings, she and the merchants at her disposal express no qualms adding Aztli cities and towns to their expanding customer base. The queen waxes poetic about her admiration for elvish ideals and culture, but she devoutly worships Tlatcolli and embraces the Poqozas' hedonistic lifestyle. Instead of being aloof and impassionate, she freely mingles with her subjects on a regular basis, stopping to chat with the workers in an apiary while leisurely strolling through a garden or sharing a honey-flavored, alcoholic drink with someone she just met.

Nonetheless, the queen and her princesses are not dreamers. They recognize that potential dangers surround them, and they are prepared to fight them at a moment's notice. In addition to calling upon its citizens to defend their city, Arcerynn also keeps a secret weapon in storage. Over the last several generations, her beekeepers have bred and trained swarms of ferocious digger bees to attack their enemies. They house these insects in artificially created greenhouses underneath the city, using long, ceramic tubes lined with dirt as homes for the bees. In times of war, the keepers place stoppers in the easily breakable tubes to use them as thrown weapons that the Poqozas call "bee-bombs." In addition to these improvised items, Xicotli also has squadrons of giant bees in their deadly arsenal of tricks. The queen has unleashed these savage insects only once to repel a large-scale gnoll assault 13 years ago. On that occasion, the gnolls literally and figuratively felt Xicotli's sting, likely causing them never to return for a re-engagement with the city's terrifying bees.

YURI

Where the ocean laps up onto the sandy reaches of the dunes on Tehuatl's southernmost shore lie the mud flats of Yuri. Although this natural feature is more commonly associated with the Tlococua Marsh farther east, this tidal wetland has been a mainstay of the Caxcalli Grasslands for the last 194 years.

While mudflats are typically created by the ebb and flow of the tides, Yuri can trace its origins to strong coastal winds that push water from the shallows back into the ocean. The cause for the abrupt shift and intensification in these ocean breezes remain a scientific mystery, leading some to speculate a supernatural explanation. It is likely not a coincidence that a sudden change in the winds' speed and direction roughly coincided with the unexpected appearance of an ominous, presumably Tlotl ship, on the horizon off the southern beach. Presumably fueled by Nonotzali, the potent swirling breeze kept the vessel at bay and whipped the waves into a frenzy, pushing the boat farther and farther out to sea where it presumably sailed back from where it came or met a watery end at the bottom of the ocean.

During the dry season, the flecks and stubbles of grass turn brown and the earth hardens into a crispy surface riddled with fissures and caked dirt that breaks away into a fine dust dancing aloft with the prevailing winds. When the rainy season returns, the flats quickly soften and transform into a soupy goo across a narrow band that stretches for 38 miles. Quicksand and pliant mud ensnare animals and careless humanoids who traverse across the treacherous morass. Some who escape swear the terrain seems to consciously work against them to prevent the survivors from eluding its earthy grasp. One or two accounts even claim the mud coalesced and transformed into an enormous wave that washed over the hapless traveler like an engorged tidal wave. Some Poqoza elders and sorcerers speculate an elemental force may be at work in Yuri, clandestinely acting at the behest of Nonotzali who still defends southern Tehuatl despite the Poqozas' attitudes toward him. Others suggest another entity may guide these actions for a currently undetermined purpose.

ZACATL

Ruler: Oanoc

Government: Council

Population: 105,221 (99,049 Poqozas, 3,642 elves, 934 Aztlis, 502 gnomes, 427 halflings, 315 Tultitas, 289 Tlotls, 63 dwarves)

Languages: Common, Elvish, Gnome, Halfling, Tultita, Dwarven

Resources: Maize, artwork, pulque, gambling

Strategically positioned three miles south of a bend in the Great Canal, the sparkling city of Zacatl is the Poqozas' de facto capital even though the title carries no political ramifications. While built upon an Aztli foundation, Zacatl has its own unique flair combining architectural elements from its human past with its half-elven present. The Poqozas repurposed step pyramid temples dedicated to the hero-gods into luxury residences with terraced gardens as balconies and soaring stone bridges connecting the structures' apexes with others around it. To enhance the aesthetics, the Poqozas converted the open spaces between the former temples into courtyards, public parks, and canals using water diverted from the Great Canal to facilitate travel through Zacatl. The city draws its drinking water supplies from two aquifers on the city's outskirts and the Temetzin River running southeast to the ocean. In addition to meeting the city's drinking and irrigation demands, the Temetzin River also gives Zacatl a convenient outlet to the rest of the island, a fortuitous fact that gave rise to Zacatl's development during the Days of Logs and Bricks.

HISTORY AND PEOPLE

Seeking to establish a stronger footprint in the south, Xacota's King Ceohuatlan II founded the settlement of Zacatl on the banks of the strategic Temetzin River during the height of the Days of Logs and Bricks. Zacatl began as a military installation where it housed the kingdom's rapid deployment forces and served as a training facility and communication hub dispatching messengers to relay vital information throughout the region. The outpost originally relied upon imports to feed its troops and contingent of couriers. The growing costs of maintaining a state of constant readiness prompted the king to offer commoners the opportunity to work the land at a low rate. Farming families throughout the area jumped at the chance to settle along the river's banks at a noteworthy discount. The influx of agricultural laborers gave the installation self-sufficiency and over time allowed the settlement's merchants to export surpluses of food to other parts of Tehuatl.

At first, Zacatl's symbiotic relationship between the army garrison and its farmers worked well. The warriors protected the civilians from monsters and most importantly, the gnolls. The field hands grew enough maize and other food staples to feed the soldiers who gradually became the minority as more people streamed into the city and the original farmers started families of their own. Zacatl steadily transitioned from a military town into a largely agrarian society, where its people

venerated the hero-gods with Yaoctotl being foremost among them. However, a new force began to arise among the populace as a previously minor hero-god became more prevalent and popular among Zacatl's masses. Tlatcolli, the god of vice and excess, formerly served as a cautionary tale about the wages of sin, yet his followers put a new spin on his worship. Life, they posited, is a fleeting, pleasure-seeking journey. The gift is too precious to squander on blood sacrifices to the hero-gods whose debts had been repaid hundreds of times over in lifeless corpses. The Cult of Tlatcolli as they became known advocated abandoning the practice of human sacrifice, a heresy that angered many in Zacatl's armed forces. Nonetheless, the message resonated with some influential leaders who found the appalling rituals to be utterly wasteful and sickening.

When Tonapoza, Zacatl's chief general and ruler of Zacatl, demanded sacrifices for distant Xacota, the vocal members of the Cult of Tlatcolli petitioned their city to offer nothing to the bloodthirsty king and his warmongering god. Tonapoza's refusal to grant their petition sealed his fate. The burgeoning rebellion's leader Mazalli and her conspirators assassinated Tonapoza and his closest lieutenants, eliminating their most immediate threat. Yet the army still remained. In what became known as the Flight of the Hummingbirds, Mazalli and her advisors offered the warriors a choice: Join them and embrace Tlatcolli or slink back to King Ciauhpoa. Many stayed, though not enough to withstand Xacota's full wrath if and when the monarch and his legions returned to crush the nascent revolt. With the revolution in full swing, the followers of Tlatcolli declared themselves members of a new ethnicity — the Poqozas. Yet, Mazalli knew the enraged king would come to Zacatl to confront the upstarts and bring their movement to a crashing halt. She forged an alliance with the elves of the Tactli Forest and with their help, they destroyed the king's army and ended the era of Xacotan hegemony.

With Xacota gone, Zacatl entered into a surreal haze of wild debauchery under Tlatcolli's self-indulgent influence. Social order completely broke down while nearly everyone spent their days and nights in an intoxicated stupor or on a psychedelic trip. People did barely enough to survive, though Mazalli still had enough force of will to inspire her citizens to build a lasting marvel signifying their independence. The Great Canal dividing the Aztlis from the Poqozas became an enduring legacy to the sea change that deluged Tehuatl. The grand structure also represented the final vestiges of Mazalli's influence as the uprising's leader suddenly and tragically passed away under mysterious circumstances within weeks after the waterway's completion.

In the aftermath of her death, Zacatl plunged into an age of chaos and lethargy. The elves who aided them during their struggle against the king emerged from the forest and annexed large swaths of the surrounding grasslands from the besotted humans. The metropolis and its civic institutions languished for decades from neglect and disinterest, but the people rapidly evolved into something entirely new. The elves and Aztlis freely comingled, truly transforming the Poqozas from a human offshoot in name only into a half-elven melting pot within the span of just a few generations. The infusion of elven ideals and culture helped stunt the crazed excesses and recalibrate the Poqozas to find a healthy equilibrium between living life to the fullest and maintaining a sense of purpose. The Poqozas snapped out of their mental fog and began to actively proselytize the whole of southern Tehuatl to adopt Tlatcolli as their god and abandon any remaining vestiges of loyalty to the Aztli hero-gods and even any elven deities.

Zacatl became the Poqozas' unofficial capital yet without tributes from the surrounding villages and towns, Zacatl needed revenue to revive and expand its crumbling infrastructure. Fortuitously for them, the newly formed Aztli Confederation wanted maritime access to the Great Canal. After several fits and starts, the Aztlis agreed to pay the Poqozas an annual fee of precious metals and stone for access to the strategic waterway, simultaneously satisfying both parties' needs in one fell swoop. The influx of cash allowed Zacatl to pay for significant upgrades in its public works that now synthesized facets of their original Aztli heritage and their newly incorporated elven blood.

The Poqozas who make up an overwhelming percentage of Zacatl's population technically classify as half-elves yet most remain more Aztli than elven in terms of their physiques, facial features, and general appearance. Some elves also reside within Zacatl along with small pockets of Aztlis who remained, Tlotls, Tultitas, gnomes, and halflings. Despite their typically tolerant attitudes toward outsiders and distaste for bloodshed, half-orcs, dragonborn, tieflings, and gnolls are not welcome in Zacatl. Although they are not forcibly expelled or blocked from entering the metropolis, the Poqozas treat them with deliberate indifference.

RELIGION

As the birthplace of the Cult of Tlatcolli, it goes without saying that his worship dominates religious life in Zacatl. Tlatcolli's high priest, the

DIPLOMACY

The lack of a centralized Poqoza state does not diminish Zacatl's role as the unofficial leader and spokesperson for their people. The city has strong ties to the smaller settlements spread across southern Tehuatl rooted in their economic and religious relationships rather than political capital. The tlamacazqui, Tlatcolli's chief priest, functions more as a prestigious ambassador or celebrity during his travels throughout southern Tehuatl. He spends several days or weeks in each settlement imbibing local brews, eating regional fare, and bedding romantic partners who catch his or her eye. Indeed, by last count, Huiazatolli, the current tlamacazqui, has officially recognized seven sons and nine daughters as his rightful offspring, though everyone suspects he has dozens or even hundreds more children scattered across southern Tehuatl. It is true that the tlamacazqui is not formally one of Zacatl's government officials, though nearly all of Tlatcolli's worshippers consider him one. In that regard, Huiazatolli promotes Zacatl's commercial and religious interests though he refrains on commenting about political and social issues. Instead, his interactions predominately focus on indulging in one or more vices with his deity's worshippers.

The task of forging official relationships with the Poqoza villages in southern Tehuatl falls to the city's independent merchants who advocate on behalf of Zacatl's business interests, and its cadre of official ambassadors who cement political and military pacts among neighboring settlements. Zacatl finds ample space on the market shelves for many of its domestically produced goods, while the smaller communities scattered across the Caxcalli Grasslands and Toctli Forests look to Zacatl for protection against the Aztli Confederation, the gnolls, and other monstrous threats that occasionally plague their lands. Through its diligent efforts, the metropolis has created a patchwork of mutual defense treaties and commercial pacts with these allies to strengthen Zacatl's influence in the region without feeling too intrusive or sacrificing the individual communities' autonomy. However, whenever Zacatl asks for something, it is almost guaranteed to get it.

Zacatl's interactions with its Aztli and elvish counterparts prove more complicated. The Aztli Confederation maintains some diplomatic presence in Zacatl as well as southern Tehuatl's larger settlements, but the parties mostly focus their attention on the Great Canal's maintenance and payment for its usage. Although the Great Canal technically belongs to all Poqozas, the city of Zacatl almost singlehandedly financed and built the monumental waterway. In recognition of this fact, the city distributes only a miniscule amount of its proceeds among other towns and villages who nominally contributed to the initial investment. Zacatl constantly monitors activities north of the Great Canal through its agents disseminated in the Aztli Confederation's four member city-states. Poqozas who have retained their Aztli traits typically take up the assignment of spying on the alliance with greater attention on dysfunctional Mactli and the more assertive Atenco and Ixtla.

Despite a shared heritage, Zacatl only enjoys a cordial relationship with the elven cities and towns on their side of the Great Canal. While neither side is openly hostile to the other, genuine warmth appears to be lacking from both parties. The elves and Poqozas pledge to fight together against their traditional foes and have effectively done so on several occasions in the past. However, necessity rather than friendship governs their relationship.

GOVERNMENT

In the minds of many Poqozas, society only needs a few small doses of authority to survive. The tlamacazqui may be Zacatl's spiritual leader, but his absenteeism and hedonistic lifestyle prevent him from exercising any coherent political control over the city. The task of administering daily life in the city falls to the oanoc, who must be nominated for the position by at least 100 citizens who share no blood relationship with the potential candidate. All nominations must be made before the end of the next full xopactli after the vacancy arose. The day after the nominations close, the respective parties gather in the city's central courtyard known as the pepenaya. Here, each participant stands shoulder to shoulder on the starting line and simultaneously walk 20 rods, at which point the person must drink a jug of pulque. The process continues until only the last person left standing earns the illustrious title of oanoc. Needless to say, the contest often fails to select the most qualified person for the position. Fortunately, the oanoc is mostly a figurehead who typically delegates most leadership duties to the analoya, a cadre of six people chosen from among the ranks of the coconeteotls who descend from the line of Tlatcolli. Because of their noble heritage, these individuals always own at least some property and wield a modicum of influence within the city, though most rank among Zacatl's wealthiest citizens.

Throughout Zacatl's history, some oanocs have tried to overstep their bounds and assert more control over life in the city. Nobility is not a prerequisite for

tlamacazqui who represents the deity's five aspects, and his acolytes razed the bloodstained temple of Yaoctéotl and rebuilt the labyrinthian temple of Tlatcolli where it formerly stood. In stark contrast to the typical house of worship, this confusing complex features dozens of rooms and chambers for communing with the lecherous deity in almost every imaginable way. Pulque, peyote, and psychedelic mushrooms as well as other vices freely flow through the partially underground structure under the tlamacazqui's guidance and oversight. The title of tlamacazqui is a hereditary one handed down to the eldest male child or female child if there are no male heirs. While being officially acknowledged as the tlamacazqui's son or daughter carries a measure of prestige, only the offspring near the top of the pecking order receives any significant attention.

As for other faiths, someone well acquainted with Zacatl can locate a small shrine devoted to an elven god, but it is impossible to find anything openly dedicated to an Aztli deity in the city. Some Poqozas may still have a soft spot in their hearts for Cualliteotl as well as Atoyatl. However, such feelings must be internalized. Openly professing faith in an Aztli deity warrants an immediate and permanent banishment from the city.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

If Tehuatl has a "sin city," Zacatl is it. While most permanent residents occasionally indulge in the settlement's carnival-like atmosphere, its businesses and industries cater to the throngs of visitors who swell into the city during Tlatcolli's monthly festivals. Up to 10,000 guests pour onto the streets to partake in the mad party of alcohol, hallucinogens, tobacco, gambling, and of course, sex. Gaming halls featuring insect and small animal races, brothels, pulque bars, and drug dens surround the temple of Tlatcolli that contains all the same vices and more. Entertainers of all types roam this district or set up shop in one of Zacatl's many establishments. Musicians, dancers, magicians, poets, soothsayers, and acrobats dazzle spectators with impromptu performances and scheduled shows. Every festival culminates with an ullamaliztli tournament that attracts several thousand fans who wager on the outcomes. Fortunately for the participants, the contests are not lethal, though anyone caught fixing a match gets their heads shaved and a tattoo of a monkey's buttocks seared onto their bare forehead as a permanent brand of humiliation. To compound the offender's misery, Tlatcolli's followers regularly hurl garbage and worse at anyone displaying the ultimate badge of shame.

Hospitality and leisure are Zacatl's hallmarks but not its only commercial endeavors. Its farmers produce surplus harvests of maize, beans, cilantro, and chili peppers that they export to other communities south of the Great Canal and to limited markets within the Aztli Confederation. Zacatl also boasts an impressive number of skilled artisans and craftsmen specializing in jewelry, sculpture, masonry, and painting. Nearly every man and woman wear ear spools, nose rings, and lip plugs. Because of the dearth of precious metals and stones in southern Tehuatl, the Poqozas import these raw materials from Ixtla or dwarven traders from the Tepepan Mountains. In addition to adorning their bodies with the latest fashions, the city's elite greatly prize artwork and often decorate their luxurious homes with tile mosaics, statues, and wall art made in Zacatl. Indeed, many young, aspiring artists practically make a pilgrimage to the city to study under its illustrious masters while sometimes getting caught up in its bohemian lifestyle.

Although the Poqozas lack any centralized government, Zacatl is the sparkplug for the territory's economic engine. Most manufacturers south of the Great Canal bring their wares to market in Zacatl's massive marketplace along the docks of the Temetzin River. Likewise, most wholesalers also venture here to purchase provisions and exotic goods for sale back home. Zacatl's open air bazaar resembles the free-for-all style of its raunchier districts. No product is illegal or frowned upon in the city, including the sale of tlacotins or the long-term rental of an ahuanime (see **Overview of Tehuatl**). In the case of the tlacotin, the buyer technically purchases the slave's debt, typically at a discount, from its current owner who receives a lump sum payment in exchange for the tlacotin's service. Because the new owner bought the tlacotin at a lesser price than the person's original debt, the tlacotin's length of service also decreases in accordance with the cost. An ahuanime who strikes a deal with a prospective client in Zacatl essentially moves into the individual's home for a contracted period of time, often residing alongside the person's spouse, children, and extended family. While this arrangement would almost certainly cause much distress among the Aztlis, the Poqozas view the ahuanime as a welcome guest who often forges a lasting bond with the family even after the term ends. Only the wealthy can typically afford such an expensive business proposition. Furthermore, the ahuanime population is roughly evenly split among men and women, as wealthy husbands and wives may enter into one of these agreements.

becoming an oanoc. Therefore, commoners can use the office to gain far more stature than they probably could progressing through normal channels. In the most infamous incident, Cohuatinio anointed himself as Zacatl's king, a brash move that the analoya quickly set right. Later that evening, the analoya relieved their upstart oanoc of his beloved manhood, leaving him a broken shell of his former self. Quixati, the current oanoc, recognizes his limits and works within them to amass fame and personal wealth from his exalted status. He periodically makes decrees and edicts that outwardly display his power and might, though he never says anything without first gaining the analoya's permission to do so. For their part, the analoya make sure the business of government gets done but remains in the background, largely unseen by the populace. Zacatl passively polices its citizens, only intervening in cases involving bloodshed or blatant acts of fraud, especially against society's most vulnerable people. The city uses a security force of 320 officers they refer to as the *tix*, which literally translates as "the one who is the eye." Although armed, the *tix* function more as roaming magistrates who settle disputes and investigate violent acts in real time within the community rather than addressing the problem after the fact.

For a city renowned for its crazed excesses, Zacatl's public servants admirably maintain the urban hub's infrastructure and keep the city's public works nearly spotless. Zacatl's citizens can drink and carouse to unimaginable heights, but everyone also feels a moral obligation to leave their city the way they found it. In a ritual known as the *Yoatzinco*, last night's partiers who left a mess in their wake are compelled to clean up after their festivities the following day. The community supports and welcomes the gesture as the good deed usually earns the typically hungover worker a tasty, sweet treat from a satisfied onlooker. The same gesture is also expected when someone damages property during a wild night out on the town, though repairing masonry or wood often requires the skilled assistance of an artisan who receives a small payment from the guilty offender.

MILITARY

The Poqozas have a different approach to combat than their Aztli kin. They favor mobility, stealth, and ranged attacks over personal heroism. The Poqoza and a small number of elves who serve in Zacatl's armed forces typically wear light fabric or leather armor, wield longbows and slings, and undergo extensive swimming training and a rigorous physical endurance regimen. A corps of 629 engineers and 350 specialized reconnaissance troops complement the 7,200 strong regular army, along with another 11,520 citizen-soldier reserves who can be mustered during a civil emergency. The Poqozas moderately rely upon the Great Canal as a natural barrier against an Aztli invasion, while spreading most of their forces on the western, southern, and eastern outskirts of the city. Zacatl inserts much of its special forces into the Caxcalli Grasslands to conduct covert operations against the gnolls that inhabit the region and have grown more brazen in their assaults over the years.

Zacatl also maintains a small navy of six acallis and 43 canoes deployed along the Temetzin River and the Great Canal. The ships protect the Poqozas' mercantile interests as well as transport soldiers and supplies to remote corners of southern Tehuatl. The vessels under Zacatl's command frequently work in tandem with its special forces and amphibious units on dangerous missions in Aztli territory or within the heart of gnoll country.

MAJOR THREATS

Zacatl has two major threats on different fronts. The Aztli Confederation always looms north of the Great Canal, though tensions between the two sides have simmered down over the years. The gnolls who inhabit the grasslands around them present a significant danger to the Poqozas and their city. Firmly in league with the treacherous Itzcuin, the humanoids have made some inroads winning hobgoblin and orc allies to their cause. Rumors also speak of a mysterious Storm Rider who has swept across the Caxcalli Grasslands with greater frequency over the past several years.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CAYA GRASSLANDS

Overview Weather Table: Grassland and Marsh

Baseline Temperature Deviation: +1d4 °F north, east, and west of the Tepepan Mountains)

Daily Weather Deviation: +1d10 chance of rain

Relative Humidity Deviation: +1d10

If the Aztli Confederation has a heartland, the Caya Grasslands are it. Forming a concentric band around the ominous Tepepan Mountains, the largely semitropical savannah is ideally suited for supporting grasses, cereal grains, and non-woody plant life. The biome strikes a workable balance between its clearly delineated wet and dry seasons, which provide enough rainfall and moisture to supply humanoid communities and vegetation with sufficient water supplies without inundating the rich earth beneath standing water. The abundance of edible greenery allows the environment to support herds of herbivores. Deer, pronghorns, and several other antelope species graze on the lush grasses, while smaller mammals such as peccaries, rabbits, hares, rats, mice, gophers, prairie dogs, pacas, agouties, porcupines, guinea pigs, and armadillos keep a low-profile while using the tall grasses for camouflage and cover. Cougars, bears, and ocelots along with large canine, avian, and rodent predators such as wolves, falcons, and raccoons search for prey in the dense grasses. The absence of trees and most shrubs gives grasses an opportunity to take center stage. The portions of the Caya Grasslands south, west, and east of the Tepepan Mountains are slightly warmer than the section of the grasslands north of the grand peaks. Maize flourishes in much of the Caya Grasslands, especially in its slightly cooler region south of the Tepepan Mountains, where it can reach staggering heights along with amaranth, chia seeds, and mesquite.

The Caya Grasslands experience two distinct seasons: the wet season and the dry season. The wet season begins in mid-autumn, peaks in winter, and then slows down in mid-spring when the dry season takes over until the cycle begins again. The dry season is most pronounced in the swath of the grasslands east of the Tepepan Mountains where the residual rain shadow effect that created the neighboring Cepual Desert keeps the air drier than in other portions of the grasslands. Regardless of season, temperatures remain consistently warm throughout the year with almost no variation at all, though the areas south of the Tepepan Mountains are slightly cooler than normal.

The Caya Grasslands' favorable growing conditions facilitate the development of large settlements within the savannah. The legendary metropolis of Xacota that dominated Tehuatl for almost 900 years was found here along with the current Aztli Confederation city-state of Mactli. Numerous smaller communities also dot the landscape, with the Aztlis being the dominant people in nearly all of these settlements. However, the gnolls have established some footholds in the grasslands, though they hardly coexist with their Aztli neighbors. While the gnolls continue to pay at least a nominal tribute to the Aztli Confederation, the humans do not undertake any great efforts to annihilate them from the grasslands. When they have attempted to destroy the gnolls, the cagey humanoids scatter and move elsewhere. The Aztlis have adopted the philosophy that they would rather keep them intact and monitor their activities in a few locations rather than let them disperse and melt away into the background where they cannot keep a wary eye on them. Nonetheless, skirmishes between the gnolls and Aztlis occur on a regular basis as young warriors from both races aspire to prove their worth and demonstrate their bravery on the battlefield.

TABLE 7-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE CAYA GRASSLANDS

d20	Settlement Found
1-3	No settlement
4-6	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
7-12	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
13-16	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)

d20	Settlement Found
17-18	Large town (20d100 + 1,500 residents with permanent structures)
19-20	Make 1d3 additional rolls on this table

TABLE 7-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE CAYA GRASSLANDS

d20	Demographics
1-10	Aztli-dominated settlement
11-15	Mixed community with Aztli majority
16-17	Mixed community with no majority (Aztlis and other humanoids)
18-19	Gnoll community with 2d10% humanoid slaves (no large town; small town instead)
20	Orc community (no small town or large town; village instead)

AGUAR ORCS

Ruler: Gorogg

Government: Autocracy

Population: 3,860 (3,860 orcs)

Languages: Orc

Resources: None

Most of Tehuatl's orcs compensate for their lack of numbers with unbridled savagery and aggression. The orcs belonging to the Aguar tribe stand out even among their peers for their sickening brutality. When these nomadic humanoids assault a settlement, they systemically dismantle it piece by piece. The concept of attacking a community, stealing its treasure, and quickly leaving the scene of the crime eludes them. When the Aguar orcs descend upon a village, they burn everything in sight and mercilessly slaughter every man, woman, and child they encounter until they leave nothing alive or standing. The Aguars expect the Aztlis to retaliate for their atrocities, which forces them to remain constantly on the move. They rarely stay in the same spot more than a few days before moving elsewhere. Although the tribe operates predominately in the Caya Grasslands north and east of the Tepepan Mountains, the orcs frequently seek sanctuary inside the caves and tunnels riddling the mountain range. However, necessity occasionally forces them to pitch their tents and bedrolls in the tall grasses for several days while hoping to elude Aztli patrols.

While some orcs now worship Aztli gods such as Quamaxotz, the Aguar orcs remain loyal to Grotaag despite his apparently limited influence in the region. Aztli scholars suspect they feel a compulsive need to dial up their violence several notches in a seemingly futile effort to capture their god's interest or gain his favor in a land he may not even know exists. Gorogg, the tribe's chieftain, is the engineer driving the crazy train. He is slightly undersized for an orc and has a noticeable limp he acquired during his teenage years from an Aztli warrior's spear, which may further fuel his hatred of his human adversaries. Yet Gorogg has no love lost for the gnolls either, though he occasionally cooperates with the goblinoids and giants who inhabit the nearby Tepepan Mountains. Despite his physical challenges, the Aguars' chieftain is supremely confident, clever, and ruthless. He seemingly has a sixth sense for rooting out traitors in his company and thwarting their plots before they can enact them. Just like his Aztli adversaries, Gorogg leaves no stones unturned when dealing with enemies among his own people.

Unfortunately for Gorogg, anger alone cannot win the day. On those rare instances when he and his army battle against the forces of Tlazo or Ixtla, the Aztlis decisively beat the overmatched orcs into bloody pulps and cause them to flee the field and regroup for battle another day. The orcs last tried their luck against Ixtla's army eight years ago with terrible results. The cohesive humans

CENTRAL TEHUATL



lost 248 men and women that day while the orcs suffered 922 casualties. While the crushing defeat would normally dissuade a wise commander from committing the same mistake again, the loss only whet Gorogg's appetite for revenge even further. For the last nine months, the orc chieftain has made some inroads brokering an alliance with the giants of Hrawrg, a wild and unruly settlement in the neighboring Tepepan Mountains. He firmly believes that a company of these frightening behemoths marching alongside his orcs would change the tide of battle against the Aztlis in his favor. Despite making some progress in this endeavor, the ogres who control Hrawrg are only showing tepid support for his grandiose ambitions at the moment. Until the orcs can prove themselves in a toe-to-toe fight with the Aztlis, the ogres are unwilling to lend their aid to a futile endeavor and risk redirecting the Aztlis' and even the Firebrand dwarves' wrath toward them.

COMATL RIVER

The broad yet shallow Comatl River begins its journey in the Tepepan Mountains, where runoff from the mountains coalesces and then sets off on a leisurely trek across the Cepual Desert, Caya Grasslands, and Cuahlla Forest before spilling into the Izmali Swamp and eventually draining into Mother Oceanus. During the sojourn's final leg, the river splinters into numerous tributaries near the shoreline while its freshwater mingles with seawater from the neighboring ocean. At that point, locals simply refer to the entire tangle of waterways as the Comatl River rather than bestowing a unique name to each tributary, though some residents differentiate the smaller branches from the larger ones by referring to the former as the Elcomatl River, which roughly translates as the "little Comatl River."

Despite its strategic location, which takes it close to the major city-state of Ixtla and across a vast swath of the Caya Grasslands, the river is largely underutilized but not without good reasons. With an average depth of 6 feet and numerous underwater obstacles along the riverbed, navigating the Comatl's treacherous waters proves challenging even for a nimble craft, such as a canoe. The large stones and other immovable objects littering the river bottom compound the difficulties that the hundreds of cataracts also pose along the way from the tall peaks to the sparkling ocean. The people who dwell in villages and towns along the riverbanks choose land adjacent to prime fishing spots and navigable stretches of the river that rarely extend more than 5 miles in any direction. In addition to the logistical headaches of traversing the Comatl, the residents who draw water from the river gripe about its metallic taste and strange odor that seem impervious to any homespun remedies. Those brave souls who can stomach the taste and smell find the water refreshing and physically harmless, but a small handful experience odd, disturbing dreams that they attribute to the unknown contaminant tainting the Comatl. Plants and animals exposed to the water suffer no known ill effects from the water, leading most inhabitants to use the Comatl for irrigation and livestock use while they draw potable water from other nearby sources bereft of the unusual properties that befoul the Comatl's drinking supply.

DROOMPH

Ruler: Grumff

Government: Autocracy

Population: 10,429 (8,068 gnolls, 1,722 Aztlis, 393 half-orcs, 168 Poqozas, 78 lizard people)

Languages: Common, Gnoll, Orc

Resources: Armor, weapons

Tehuatl's gnolls have posed the greatest threat to the Aztlis for much of their history. The Aztli Confederation has launched several offensives since its inception to crush the gnolls. While the humans have almost universally triumphed in these battles, winning the war against their hated foes has remained elusive. The gnolls excel at dispersing after defeat and later regrouping somewhere else. Droomph exemplifies this philosophy. Although it is currently a place in the Caya Grasslands, the gnolls only establish temporary settlements rather than laying down permanent roots in a particular spot. Transient structures made from wood, leather, furs, and other readily available materials riddle the landscape across a four-square-mile area at the juncture of two small rivers where deer and other game animals routinely congregate to drink water or escape other predators. Using this strategic spot as a base, the gnolls routinely harass passing merchants and Aztli settlements. They periodically engage in bloody skirmishes with troops

from Atenco and Mactli who patrol the grasslands surrounding the makeshift community, though the complacent soldiers from the latter city-state seem less enthusiastic about fighting the gnolls than their ferocious counterparts from Atenco.

The gnolls of Tehuatl differ from their counterparts in the northern continents and many other worlds in the regard that they associate with coyotes instead of hyenas who are not found in Tehuatl. The consensus believes Itzcuin played a significant role affiliating the island's gnolls with the resident coyotes, making them wilier and more cunning than their kin elsewhere. Indeed, hundreds or perhaps even thousands of coyotes travel alongside their humanoid masters on cooperative hunts or into combat against the Aztlis and their other enemies including lizard people from the swamps and marshes, goblinoids, orcs, and any other creatures who cross their paths. Droomph's burly leader Grumff spearheads his people's charge against their foes. The hefty gnoll stands almost two feet taller than his underlings, giving him the leverage to bully his subordinates and rule through intimidation and force of will. He always fights alongside Proww, his tribe's high priest of Itzcuin who utterly loathes the Aztlis and their god Nonotzali. In furtherance of this goal, Grumff and Proww summon beasts of Itzcuin (see **Appendix A** from the companion adventure book) and demonic minions to spread the vile god's tyranny and hatred throughout the region. Although not terribly bright, the pair fears unleashing the full might of the Aztli war machine upon them and their people. The gnolls prefer engaging their human adversaries in small skirmishes and raids where they can procure supplies, provisions, and slaves without provoking a coordinated response from the alliance.

The gnolls scrounge up enough food and gear for the tribe members to keep their hunger at bay and to meet their basic necessities. Pilfered armor, weapons, and magic items come at a premium along with salvaged metals and raw ores, which they convert into bronze, iron, and steel armaments. Although they have mastered the secrets of forging steel, the gnolls prefer traveling and fighting light rather than wearing bulky, metallic armor that slows them down and subjects them to the withering humidity. Every gnoll male, female, and child is outfitted with a suit of armor and at least one weapon and is expected to fight.

The same cannot be said for the gnolls' numerous slaves who lead miserable and frequently short lives in brutal captivity eking by on scraps of food and clothing. The lazy, vicious humanoids capture these unfortunate souls during their exploits in the villages and towns surrounding their transient settlement and drag them back to Droomph where they eke out a sad existence endlessly toiling under the gnolls' oppressive yoke. Some desperately try to escape their bonds, figuring a swift death is a better alternative than a brief life of servitude. Unfortunately, the vast majority are recaptured within minutes of their attempt. As punishment, Proww offers these terrified humanoids as sacrifices to Itzcuin by roasting them alive over a slow-burning flame and having his god's follower ritually devour their cooked flesh and bones.

FROWL

Ruler: King Powl

Government: Monarchy

Population: 2,380 (2,182 gnolls, 198 Aztlis)

Languages: Gnoll, Common

Resources: Turkey, venison

During Nonotzali's journey across Tehuatl, the beneficent hero-god crossed paths with six gnolls on a hunting expedition in the Caya Grasslands. Tension filled the air as the six humanoids sized up their lone adversary disguised as an ordinary man. The man's calm demeanor and welcoming grin perplexed the gnolls who were accustomed to Aztlis immediately girding for a fight. The deity spoke to the startled humanoids in a gentle voice that resembled a light, cool breeze, reassuring them he meant no harm and would greatly enjoy a pleasant conversation with them over a shared meal. Completely puzzled by this odd behavior, the quizzical gnolls tentatively sat on the ground, where they spoke at length with Nonotzali who still concealed his true identity yet successfully convinced them to abandon the teachings of his devious twin Itzcuin and embrace a better existence as his followers. Swayed by his arguments, the enthusiastic gnolls returned to their village and spread Nonotzali's message among their brethren. Within weeks, Frowl's residents destroyed their shrine to Itzcuin and erected a new one in his twin sibling's honor, cementing a long-standing though sometimes fragile allegiance with Tlazo's Aztli population.

Frowl's gnolls may share a common faith with Tlazo's residents, but their mutual devotion to the Feathered Serpent cannot erase misgivings and suspicions on both sides of the equation. For these reasons, the town boasts significant fortifications including earthworks, wooden palisades, and trenches

to thwart an attack from the Aztlis and gnolls still loyal to Itzcuin. Indeed, the alliance's greatest test occurred roughly one century ago when 1,400 gnolls bored down on Frowl and threatened to bring the settlement and its residents back into Itzcuin's fold. The outlook looked bleak until Aztli reinforcements from Tlazo arrived in the nick of time to bolster Frowl's lines and ultimately rout the overwhelmed attackers and save the day.

The town's current ruler, King Powl deftly uses the memory of this battle to redirect any wayward gnolls under his command back onto the straight and narrow. He and his entourage including his high priest Browf benefit from their cozy relationship with the Aztli delegation who resides within Frowl. While he remains in Tlazo's good graces, the giant metropolis promotes his people's economic and social interests. The pochtecas who set up shop within Frowl import exotic goods and delicacies unheard of in almost every other gnoll settlement in Tehuatl, while the gnoll residents sell them abundant quantities of meat procured from their stores of livestock as well as fresh game animals from the surrounding grasslands. Nonetheless, Frowl is still a hotbed of intrigue as Itzcuin's gnoll servants frequently attempt to infiltrate the town and sow discord among the residents in the hopes they overthrow King Powl and restore Itzcuin's control over the settlement and his prodigal children. The astute Powl has his own network of spies and informants within Frowl to root out and expose the troublemakers whom he happily hands over to the Aztlis to fulfill his community's tributary obligation to Tlazo.

HIILAMATI

Ruler: High Priest Nitlahuica

Government: Theocracy

Population: 23,896 (19,354 Aztlis, 1,740 elves, 1,299 dwarves, 975 gnomes, 431 Poqozas, 97 dragonborn)

Languages: Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnome

Resources: Fine arts, gold, hospitality, lime, maize, silver

When the sun sets in the west, the Tepepan Mountains cast their ominous shadow over Hiilamati's macabre décor as if someone threw a funeral pall over the city, which is an apropos metaphor for a settlement that revels in and celebrates the dead. In keeping with this spirit, the city is the Aztli center of worship for the hero-god of death, Micoateotl, whose step pyramid temple outshines all others. Vibrant paintings of skeletal figures engaged in everyday activities adorn almost every wall in Hiilamati, while limestone statues and sculpture of the gruesome skeletal god are seemingly everywhere. They can be found in front of homes, at the center of foundations, atop buildings, and throughout the sprawling temple complex that also serves as a mausoleum for those wishing to have their mortal bodies spend eternity with their beloved deity in his inner sanctum.

Despite the chilling scenery adorning Hiilamati, the city itself rivals any other in Tehuatl for its natural beauty and cleanliness. Being on the windward side of the mountains, which provide a spectacular backdrop to the city's distinct architecture with eerie acute angles and strange contours, the metropolis benefits from the rain shadow effect as copious amounts of rainfall pellet this side of the mountain and funnel into the channels and canals that deliver water into and through Hiilamati. The persistent demand for art attracts artisans to the settlement in droves, including elves, gnomes, and halflings from the neighboring forest whose consciences freely allow them to work here because the community's priests rarely, if ever, offer the hero-gods any living sacrifices. The dominant Aztli population who resides here has no reservations whatsoever about engaging in the ghastly practice. They simply perceive it to be unnecessary considering Micoateotl presides over the needs of the dearly departed rather than the living.

While the city may be consumed with the imagery of death, the people must still go about the business of living. While outsiders typically find work as artisans, many of the majority Aztlis grow crops on chinampas built atop the excess runoff from the streams and brooks flowing down the Tepepan Mountains. Alternatively, some Aztlis and dwarves from the nearby mountain range pan these same waterways searching for gold, silver, and precious metals transported by the sediment rich liquid. Although many citizens toil in enterprises geared toward enhancing people's lives and satisfying the basic requirements for survival, Hiilamati's main industry focuses on catering to the needs of the dead and those who venture here to partake in their funerary rituals.

The surviving family members of deceased Aztli noblepersons make the pilgrimage to the city to give their loved one a proper tribute and hopefully celebrate the person's ascension into Ilhuicac or aid them in reaching the Aztli Place of Rest for those who must travel through Miquito. There are

no prohibitions barring commoners from participating in the city's death ceremonies, yet no one from the decedent's family is allowed to transport the dead person's body to Hiilamati for interment or cremation. That task must be delegated to a team of three porters known as quicuiz who have special dispensation from Micoateotl's priests to transport the dead to their final resting places. The family must pay each of these porters one quachtli to undertake this service, placing the cost of such festivities beyond the economic reach of nearly every commoner. For those privileged elite who can afford such luxuries, the celebration of the deceased person's life can be a subdued yet heartwarming affair with limited guests and moderate frills or a grand festival with hundreds or even thousands of fellow attendees depending upon the person's stature within a community and the family's political influence and financial resources. To add to the extravagant spectacle, some families go to the extreme length of hiring chocas, professional mourners who loudly wail, blubber, and emit choreographed emotional outbursts that better emulate a melodramatic tragic play than a spontaneous outpouring of grief. Most Aztlis, especially those who choose the laidback approach, elect to cremate their loved one's body, whereas the extremely wealthy usually opt to be interred in a mausoleum within the religious structure.

The temple of Micoateotl presides over these events and nearly every other aspect of life in Hiilamati. The temple's current high priest Nitlahuica rules the city, micromanaging its operations down to the last, precise detail. His underlings find his perfectionism too overbearing and demanding, yet he knows the city's guests expect nothing but the best to commemorate their fallen heroes during this time of tremendous stress and anxiety. Nitlahuica uses this trait during his negotiations with the delegates from the Aztli Confederation regarding Hiilamati's annual tribute. Throughout these discussions, he emphasizes his city's importance in the spiritual lives of the alliance's most powerful and influential members, using this inconvenient fact as leverage for brokering a better deal for him and the city. Indeed, the current emissaries from Tlazo think so highly of Nitlahuica that they consider Hiilamati to be an unofficial member of the Aztli Confederation. For his part, the high priest can raise an army of 1,765 warriors armed with leather armor, slings, and clubs to defend the metropolis against aggressors and contribute to the Aztli Confederation's cause in an emergency. Aztli command and comprise most of Hiilamati's military forces with a few segregated companies of dwarves and elves complementing the Aztli units. Despite his preparedness, recent developments weigh heavily upon Nitlahuica's mind. The corpse of a feared and reportedly evil spellcaster who allegedly bargained with an infernal power disappeared from her crypt in the mausoleum. The high priest's acolytes believe someone stole the dead body to destroy it, but Nitlahuica thinks otherwise. He fears someone or something may try to restore the allegedly wicked woman back to life or she orchestrated her own death for an even more nefarious purpose.

MACHACTO RIVER

Rolling down the northern face of the Tepepan Mountains, the Machacto River runs across the width of the Caya Grasslands before entering the Cuahltla Forest and emptying into the ocean. The waterway follows a meandering course through the grasslands, diverging at numerous points to feed the small tributaries that branch off in multiple directions where they flow through villages and towns whose residents often build chinampas on the broad yet shallow banks. The twisting channels that guide the waterflow make the Machacto impossible to navigate for any vessel larger than a canoe. Cataracts near the river's origin point in the Tepepan Mountains crush large ships into splinters while shallow sections further inland punch holes into the hull of any boat with a draft greater than three feet. However, in some spots, the river's abrupt turns seem to defy gravity, implying a manmade or supernatural change in the waterway's course. One location known as the Cipactlan garners the most attention from explorers and adventurers alike. In this stretch of the river, the Machacto flows uphill along a steep, broad bank before returning to a perfectly natural course. The site confounds engineers and mariners who have mounted dozens of expeditions to explain the strange occurrence, including conducting extensive surveys, intrusive digs, and even building dams and canals to divert the waterflow without success. In the end, the water always overflows its banks and returns to its anomalous route as if an invisible hand guided it there. Ancient legends claim an accursed tomb built to honor a sentient crocodile beast of great power and evil once stood on the site, giving credence to the idea that the hero-gods or another potent supernatural entity deliberately altered the river's flow to conceal its exact location. Rumors claim that the dormant creature can be raised back to life on Cipactli, Cipactli, which is the first day of the tonalpoahualli (see **Overview of Tehuatl**).

MACTLI

Ruler: Xiutico

Government: Council

Population: 86,523 (83,752 Aztlis, 1,023 Poqozas, 602 Tultitas, 510 dwarves, 322 gnomes, 152 elves, 88 halflings, 60 dragonborn, 14 Tlotls)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Tultita

Resources: Maize, squash, tomatoes, potatoes, tobacco, and other agricultural products

The city of Mactli encompasses approximately 60 square miles of territory along the edges of Ouatulli Lake straddling the boundary between the Caya Grasslands and the Cuahtla Forest. Mactli is a major agricultural center as its fertile soil supports a diverse group of staple food crops including maize, tomatoes, potatoes, squash, and numerous varieties of beans. It is a largely agrarian society, where the commoners who work the expansive fields vastly outnumber the nobles, but the balance of power weighs heavily in the nobles' favor. The people who farm the land lead simple lives in small mud-brick or wooden huts on the chinampas or on vast tracts of ground stretching along the lakeshore. Mactli feels more like an oversized village than a metropolitan center as the majority of its population is scattered across a wide, mostly rural area. Because of the city's odd configuration along an extended lakeshore, it can take several days to walk from the community's western edge to its eastern outskirts. Most people take to the waters of Ouatulli Lake to get from one place to another within Mactli rather than trudge on a long hike across cultivated land with few discernable paths. Naturally, centrally located property is considerably more desirable and valuable than parcels of land on the eastern and western edges. Civic buildings, public works, and the marketplace are concentrated in a comparatively tiny section of Mactli where its founders built the first luxury compounds that gave birth to the settlement that would eventually transform into a member city-state of the Aztli Confederation.

HISTORY AND PEOPLE

Situated along the banks of Ouatulli Lake, the picturesque town of Mactli began as a resort destination for Xacota's rich and famous. Its scenic views of the Ouatulli and lush greenery made it the best-kept secret in Tehuatl as few people outside of an elite inner circle even knew of its existence. To accommodate its wealthy and influential visitors, Xacota's king erected wondrously furnished lakeside palaces and villas fit for a monarch. Mactli thrived for 360 years as a hidden oasis in the Caya Grasslands until Xacota's abrupt downfall. In the aftermath of its collapse, many of its important officials and military commanders fled to Mactli along with their retinues of servants and staff. Within the span of a year, Mactli's population increased tenfold from 200 residents to 2,000. Building began in earnest as new homes and other institutions practically sprang up overnight. With the secret out of the bag, other displaced Aztlis made their way to Mactli where they settled on the grasslands outside of the city center and established sprawling farms.

Over the next few decades, Mactli continued to swell exponentially as families grew and new migrants entered the city searching for a better life amid the chaos surrounding them. Although Xacota had fallen years earlier, its former elite and their descendants assumed the mantle of leadership and presided over the city as if it were their own plaything. During this formative period, Mactli's hidden oligarchy ruled the settlement from the shadows, issuing orders and decrees enforced by the former generals and officers cobbled together from the remnants of Xacota's disbanded military. If nothing else, the city's rulers greatly resented the influx of commoners swamping the resort they considered their hidden paradise. Consumed with their sense of entitlement and privilege, Mactli's oligarchy made its most ill-fated decision to date: It banned all commoners from setting foot in any parcel of land less than 20 tlalquahuitls (8.2 feet or 2.5 meters) from the shores of Ouatulli.

At first, many commoners ignored the prohibition with no consequence other than quizzical stares and gaping mouths. However, when Mactli's militaristic police force started to enforce the regulation, the people immediately retaliated. Riots broke out throughout the city as the oligarchy's better-armed and trained soldiers squared off against the outmatched yet numerically



superior commoners wielding farming implements and wooden clubs. After six weeks of pitched battles, the masses wore out their exhausted opponents, forcing significant concessions from Mactli's defeated nobles. While they could not strip the coconeteotls of their titles because of their birthright, all other nobles lost their social status and became commoners. Furthermore, while commoners could still not formally own land, any family who lived and worked on a parcel of land for more than 50 years would be allowed to remain there for a nominal annual fee and could not be removed without a proper judicial order. The truce naturally rescinded the regulation that touched off the unrest in the first place and implemented significant political reforms. The remaining nobles were forced to share power with the commoners in an accord they dubbed "The Peace of the Bloody Uictli." Under this arrangement, a council of elders made up of three elected noblepersons and four elected commoners over the age of 40 govern the city along with the high priestess of Atoyatl and the revolt's leader, Mayapoyotl. Known as the Xiutico, the body of elected legislators held their offices for life unless a supermajority of six current members agreed to remove an individual member for just cause. However, the high priestess and Mayapoyotl could not be ousted from the council. Under the agreement, Mayapoyotl's position as the headman of the council would either be passed down to his eldest direct descendent, regardless of gender, or he or his successor could alternatively appoint someone else to take his place. If there is no appointed successor, succession always reverts to the eldest member of his ancestral line.

Under the Xiutico's guidance, the city greatly expanded as many commoners converted shallow portions of Ouatulli into fertile chinampas as well as extending their farmland deeper into the outlying Caya Grasslands. Its booming agricultural yields found an ideal trade partner in the city-state of Ixtla who desperately needed reliable sources of maize, vegetables, and grain to feed its growing population as well. Gold, silver, copper, and other precious metals poured into the city, increasing its prosperity as its yields and formidable military forces captured the attention and interest of distant Atenco and Tlazo who were seeking to form an alliance to restore Aztli hegemony over the whole of Tehuatl. After much deliberation, the city-state joined the alliance by a unanimous vote, largely at the behest of Tepeliuhqui, the council's headman.

Mactli is an almost exclusively Aztli city with small conclaves of Poqozas, Tultitas, and a mix of other races sequestered in small corners of the city. These tiny communities predominately serve as trading outposts for their respective peoples on the island as the Poqozas import goods from the south, while the Tultitas transport oceanic products into the city via the Omehual River, which runs from Ouatulli to the ocean. Aztli architecture and culture dominates the city as evidenced by the fabulous terraced villas and palaces lining the shoreline along the lake as well as some new clusters of exclusive residences at the mouth of the Omehual on the Ouatulli's eastern bank. Despite the reforms enacted after the uprising, Mactli still has a disproportionately high level of wealth disparity between the nobles and the commoners who enjoy a modest lifestyle compared to the extravagant habits of their rich counterparts. The difference can be easily seen in the luxurious, multilevel residences and boutiques bordering the lakeshore and the humble, crowded apartment complexes and tiny cottages where the commoners live.

RELIGION

Being a lakeshore city, it only makes sense that its people venerate Atoyatl, the goddess of collected bodies of water, as their primary deity. Her grandiose, open-air temple lies at the edge of the Ouatulli. Wondrous fountains, seashells, and other treasures from the lake adorn the complex's walls and ceilings, while tile mosaics depicting the goddess decorate its spacious floors. During her festivals, thousands of devout worshippers wade their feet or bathe in the Ouatulli's warm, refreshing waters while offering the goddess a trinket previously plucked from the lake or the neighboring river. Naturally, Atoyatl's husband Quiahuitl also enjoys tremendous popularity among the citizens as his temple is the only one to rival hers in terms of size and opulence. Temples dedicated to the Aztlis' major gods are spread throughout the city, while shrines devoted to lesser deities require some effort to locate.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Mactli is likely the maize basket of Tehuatl. Its fertile fields yield roughly 50,000 tons of maize every year along with impressive quantities of other valuable crops. Much of its produce gets shipped off to Ixtla via canoes traversing several different tributary rivers carving a circuitous path through

the Caya Grasslands. Despite the relatively smooth sailing from a logistical standpoint, gnolls, orcs, bandits, and other monstrous denizens add to the difficulty of safely transporting these lucrative agricultural products to distant markets. In addition to sending its excess crops to its fellow Aztli Confederation member, Mactli exports tobacco to Tultita and Poqoza villages along the coastline and south of the Great Canal, using the Omehual River as a gateway to the ocean. To ensure the steady flow of goods to their respective peoples, the Poqozas and Tultitas maintain a small yet noteworthy population of emigrants within Mactli to facilitate these transactions with their friends and family back home.

After maize, Mactli's farmers plant tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, potatoes, and tobacco as well as harvesting herbs grown in manicured gardens on the grounds around their homes. Although food staples account for a high percentage of their agricultural output, many farmers also grow specialty plants such as cilantro and chili peppers that are predominately used as flavoring agents. While not produced in anywhere near the same quantities as maize, some farmers have been experimenting with creating intensely spicy versions of these products for their own personal use along with growing herbs for medicinal uses.

Although lands worked by the commoners produce the vast majority of Mactli's crops, the city's nobles reap nearly all of the profits. While most commoners fall within the lease exception forged in the accord they reached with the nobles many years earlier, subsequent laws allow commoners only to sell their excess goods to licensed wholesale agricultural brokers within the city who purchase the products at steep discounts and then resell them to interests based in other settlements across the island. Not surprisingly, nobles hold all 64 of the licenses, allowing these fortunate few to rake in obscene amounts of precious metals from Ixtla as well as other goods, services, and currency from their other trading partners. In response to this disturbing trend, some of Mactli's commoners now raise just enough food to feed their families and pay their nominal rental fee to the nobleperson who owns the land rather than receiving virtually no additional recompense for their efforts. Alternatively, some clandestinely grow tiny quantities of lucrative products such as intensely hot chili peppers and medicinal herbs that they attempt to sell on the black market for a better price than they would ever receive from a licensed broker. Known among the populace as the "Fallow Revolt," the burgeoning movement has accrued enough followers to force the nobles who make a killing from this business model to take notice of their steadily dwindling revenue. Resolving the matter now resides in the hands of the Xiutico, which remains pragmatic yet also increasingly corrupt as bribes now influence the voting patterns of several of the commoner's entrenched representatives.

DIPLOMACY

Many villages, towns, and even the major city of Ixtla depend upon Mactli's crops for their very survival, an inconvenient fact never lost on the metropolis' shrewd representatives. While they have a cordial relationship with each of these entities, business always comes first for bottom-line oriented Mactli. Nowhere is this more evident than how they handle the delegation from Ixtla that depends heavily upon their agricultural resources to meet their food needs. Whenever the two parties come to a loggerhead over a mutually desirable settlement for tributes, Mactli's ambassadors subtly hint at the possibility of an unforeseeable and uncontrollable delay in food shipments. In most cases, the temperamental residents of Ixtla back down and acquiesce to Mactli's demands.

Their dealings with Atenco and Tlazo, the other two members of the Aztli Confederation, are less straightforward. Atenco's representatives are indifferent toward Mactli. They do not dislike them, but they still view Mactli's proposals with healthy skepticism. Tlazo's emissaries, on the other hand, generally see through Mactli's underhanded machinations, treating them as if a parent caught a guilty child attempting to lie his way out of the problem. Because Mactli's interests generally reflect those of its wealthy nobles rather than its citizens as a whole, their goals are overwhelmingly focused on increasing the revenues streaming to its privileged classes through favorable trade agreements. Because of the distances separating these partners, their economic interactions are very limited.

Mactli handles business negotiations well, but its attempts to bring the gnolls and other aggressive humanoid to heel fail miserably. Mactli is less assertive about using its armies to beat back the gnolls and other monstrous adversaries than it is about sending out its formidable retinue of pochtecas to drum up new clients in remote or distant sections of the Caya Grasslands or Cuahla Forest. In fact, pochtecas serve as merchants, ambassadors, and spies during their travels throughout the region. While they may gather some

intelligence about monstrous activities, their primary goal is to keep an eye out for merchants from Ixtla trying to make inroads in their territory and establish a social network to pull in prospective business elsewhere.

GOVERNMENT

Mactli's system of government began with the best intentions, but incompetence and corruption ultimately crept into the mix, making it a dysfunctional and elitist mess. Although the commoners' arrangement allowed them to hold the upper hand for some time, complacency eventually took hold. Under the accord hammered out during the "Peace of the Bloody Uictli" uprising (see the preceding **History and People** section), the commoners elected four representatives out of the nine total members of the Xiutico ruling council in addition to having a descendant or appointee of the revolt's leader and the high priestess of Atoyatl, giving the commoners the potential for a six-to-three supermajority of the Xiutico. Yet the best laid plans rarely function as envisioned. The idealism of the rebellion's early days yielded to business as usual as the commoners' representatives soon realized their political power barely improved their daily lives. While the nobles may have been on the outside looking in during the Xiutico's formative years, their massive hauls of gold and silver could buy incredible amounts of good will and loyalty. A handful of precious metals quickly turned the minority into the majority as the council's nobles plied their commoner counterparts with lucrative bribes to lure them into the fold. Although some elected representatives remain true to their roots, the nobles know it takes only two to shift the united balance of power into their favor even without taking into consideration the two remaining permanent members.

Under its current composition, the Xiutico is not foolish enough to outwardly display the graft permeating its core. The council makes minor, token gestures to make it appear that they work on behalf of the commoners, yet their true loyalties lie with increasing the nobles' already substantial wealth. They placate the people's concerns by meeting their basic needs and adding in a little extra from time to time to ingratiate themselves to the voters. Unfortunately for the commoners, three of their representatives are less than 50 years of age and are firmly under the nobles' control. Their only steadfast voice, Chalatiuhlti, is approaching 70 and has resigned herself to the fact that her younger peers have sold themselves to the nobles for their personal benefit. Her opposition is now confined to an occasional impassioned speech to her fellow commoners about the power of one's personal convictions — but to no avail.

For now, the commoners who make up a vast majority of Mactli's population remain largely content with their lifestyle though pockets of resistance keep springing up throughout the city as many of its more astute citizens recognize the compromised men and women standing behind the curtain. The quietly simmering Fallow Revolt has made some inroads weakening the nobles' financial strength, but their political power remains largely unchecked while everyone has enough food and pulque to feed their families and numb their minds. Behind the scenes, Chalatiuhlti fomented the fires of rebellion among her commoner brethren who are in the formulative stages of devising ways to publicly expose their corrupt officials as the nobles' skills and demand reforms. However, until the populace starts to suffer significant effects firsthand, their efforts are unlikely to gain much traction and will remain as fringe movements.

MILITARY

Mactli fields an army like the rest of the Aztli Confederation, but it places little emphasis on its battle readiness and training. The city met its perfect match for its supreme commander as Tenopan, its Prufrockian leader from Tlazo, tirelessly vacillates over the force's next action or, more accurately, inaction. Cozy in this lackadaisical arrangement, the officers and frontline soldiers from other cities slowly acquiesced into a state of utter disinterest as nearly all of Mactli's 9,640 strong army has settled into a state of listlessness within the city proper. While other members of the Aztli Confederation vigorously patrol their surroundings, the Xiutico halfheartedly sends out fewer than 1,000 troops to actively monitor its holdings within the Caya Grasslands and Cuahtla Forest. Instead of spending its vast resources to properly equip its soldiers, Mactli's 8,000 infantry men and women wield a tecpatl and sling while wearing crude armor fashioned from leather or locally obtained hide. Its 1,600 officers are only marginally better outfitted with macuahuitls, bows, and prototype armor crafted from olli.

Mactli's navy is fortunately in better shape to promote its mercantile interests in far-flung ports of call. It has five warships usually docked on

Ouatulli and another 63 canoes plus three acallis traversing the navigable rivers connected to its portside lake. Its sail-powered warships carry a crew of 30 sailors and another 120 soldiers under tight yet manageable quarters. Each vessel wields an intimidating bronze ram at its bow and a division of skilled archers capable of launching several volleys of arrows per minute at an enemy ship. On several occasions, Mactli's leaders dispatched its naval forces to intercept gnolls and hobgoblin raiders threatening the city's security. Although mostly confined to navigating the narrow and sometimes shallow waterways within the region, embattled citizens were happier to see sails on the horizon than a ragtag band of disinterested soldiers coming to their rescue. While most Aztlis consider their mariners to be a step below their foot soldiers on the prestige scale, Mactli's residents wisely revere their naval forces over their apathetic army.

MAJOR THREATS

It is difficult to decide whether Mactli's gravest dangers lie inside its walls or in the wilderness surrounding the city. Its internal strife and rampant cynicism make it a fertile breeding ground for a violent uprising or a repressive counterstrike. The constant infighting also leaves the city vulnerable to a large-scale gnoll assault or a devastating attack by a monstrous foe lurking somewhere in the Caya Grasslands. Rumors speak of a temple devoted to a demonic entity hidden somewhere in the savannah or forests near Mactli. Other tales insist that a slumbering army of wahuapas, sentient maizefolk disguised as ordinary plants, waits to ensnare the unwary and take back the land for their bloodthirsty plant kin. Mactli constantly seeks adventurers to deal with these menaces and many other minor nuisances plaguing their traveling merchants and nobles.

Ouatulli Lake

It may be impossible to overstate Ouatulli Lake's natural beauty. Its calm, serene waters have attracted visitors for centuries, which made its shores into a must-see destination for Xacota's rich and powerful. Whether gazing lazily across its placid surface, gingerly dipping an exposed toe into its warm, refreshing waters, casting a fishing line into its bountiful depths teeming with bass, or paddling atop the clear, blue liquid, Ouatulli Lake offers at least a little bit of something for everyone. The Aztlis believe Ouatulli peers into the soul, giving the viewer a glimpse of the paradise that awaits those who join Atoyatl in the afterlife. Indeed, her followers descend upon the lake in droves to soak in its soothing water during the goddess's festivals.

The large lake straddles the boundary between the Caya Grasslands and the Cuahtla Forest, though more than three-quarters of Ouatulli's 730 square miles firmly resides within the former biome. The kidney bean-shaped lake reaches a maximum depth of 134 feet near its center, though lake visitors can usually wade up to 200 feet from shore and still be in waist-deep water. The whiskers of a catfish swimming along the bottom occasionally brush against the bather's ankle or calf, while smooth, contoured stones provide a comfortable surface for the explorer's bare feet while strolling through the water. People walking in Ouatulli must keep a vigilant watch for canoes, as the watercraft are the most reliable means of transportation across the city of Mactli. Larger vessels also depart from Mactli's docks on their way across Ouatulli toward the Omehual River, which ultimately connects the lake port to the ocean.

QUIMICHEN

For hundreds of years, the city-state of Quimichen rivaled Xacota's might and prestige. The two great powers engaged in a simmering struggle that lasted for centuries until Ahuitzotl's armies destroyed their enemy and Quimichen's people in horrific fashion. He and the warriors under his command engaged in depraved acts of brutality designed to make an example of the metropolis and its people. They mercilessly slaughtered nearly the entire population and smashed every building into rubble, dismantling their foundations and spreading salt on its arable land to make it fallow. Today, Quimichen's remnants consist of loose stones, warped scraps of wood, and random objects dropped by its dying or fleeing inhabitants. Some who walk these forsaken grounds still claim to hear the occasional bloodcurdling screams of innocent women and children being hacked into pieces by Ahuitzotl's underlings endeavoring to maximize the shock value of their hideous atrocities.

Ahuitzotl combed through every stone, brick, and piece of wood to ensure nothing of value escaped his avaricious grasp, yet stories of concealed

subterranean complexes and hidden treasures endure to this day. During its heyday, the city of Quimichen revered Micoateotl and his temple served as the final resting place for many of Tehuatl's most illustrious and wealthiest citizens. Many believe the priests interred some of these individuals in subterranean tombs underneath the holy site, yet the Xacotan army never found an entrance or other evidence suggesting there was any veracity to these stories. Tales also say that some of Quimichen's elite saw the tide of battle turning against them and their fellow countrymen, causing them to also hide their worldly riches and darkest secrets in underground chambers connected to their homes. Although Ahuitzotl and his minions located some clandestine caches of gemstones, gold, and an occasional magic item, a pervasive belief remains that many of these cavities and abscesses in the earth remained undetected. Some scholars also spoke of a valuable codex that disappeared during Quimichen's final days. Last seen in the hands of Huehuatineo, a renowned ticitl (physician), the renowned compilation of medical research contained a plethora of herbal remedies along with diagrams and instructions regarding intricate surgical procedures. Multiple accounts from the event confirm Huehuatineo's death, yet none recount finding the codex in his possession when he died.

THE SWALES

By and large, the Caya Grasslands are uniformly flat with mild gradations and gentle slopes. The region known as The Swales bucks the pervasive trend. This section of the savannah west of the Tepepan Mountains resembles a massive six-tiered terrace measuring 1-1/2 miles in length and 200 feet between steps that descend roughly 20 feet at a remarkably consistent 45-degree angle. Grass and other vegetation thoroughly cover every inch of The Swales and appear to grow normally. Likewise, the soil throughout the area looks like earth from anywhere else in the Caya Grasslands. Scholars, curiosity seekers, and treasure hunters have attempted to excavate the anomaly on several occasions. However, after unearthing the first 10 feet of dirt and loose stones, the laborers hit an impenetrable layer of unusual bedrock apparently fused with metallic veins of unknown origin. Conventional means failed to breach the formidable barrier and magical attempts to circumvent it also failed. There is no historical or anecdotal recordation of The Swales' existence before Tehuatl's submergence beneath the sea. Therefore, the prevailing theory contends that the anomaly can most likely be attributed to actions performed while seawater covered the region. The Swales' purpose or what it hides remains a mystery, but what cannot be denied is that someone or something expended tremendous effort to create or shape it.

TEOTLACHCO

For 17 xopactli out of the year, the tlatachi courts of Teotlachco sit idle and unused. Only a handful of commoners remain behind to maintain and protect the stone structures from damage and vandals. A small contingent of players may also be found practicing on the courts during the hiatus. However, when the xopactli of Tecuilhuit (see **Overview of Tehuatl**) rolls around, Teotlachco roars to life. Thousands of Aztlis from every corner of Tehuatl and even many Poqozas trek across the grasslands to participate in the annual Hatzalama, otherwise known as the Tournament of Champions. Each member of the Aztli Confederation fields at least one team for the grand event while some smaller settlements also bring their best players to the competition. Teotlachco has six outer tlatachi courts and one central court where thousands of spectators gather to watch and wager on the raucous festivities.

While many fans passionately cheer for their hometown team, gambling fuels the carnival-like atmosphere surrounding the games. Thousands of cacao beans, gold coins, and other forms of currency change hands throughout the course of the 20-day extravaganza that ultimately culminates with the final match. The Aztlis take the integrity of the contests very seriously, as several teams have rigged matches in the past to gain an unfair betting advantage against their competitors. In some Aztli villages, the organizers use a "death tile" to help ensure that no one intentionally loses a match. Using this method, the captain of the losing team must draw a random tile from a sealed bag. If the chosen tile contains the death symbol, the entire team is sacrificed. The Aztlis rightly believe the fear of potentially dying discourages teams from tanking matches. However, the Poqozas and an occasional team of elves and dwarves refuse to participate in the tournament under these conditions. To safeguard the games, Aztli sorcerers and wizards magically probe the contestants' minds and use spells to interrogate them before and after the match to ensure their compliance with the rules of fair play. Any player or team caught fixing a game is immediately sentenced to a lengthy term in an Aztli peticalli, which many believe to be a worse fate than a hasty execution.



XACOTA

For nearly a thousand years, it was impossible to speak of Tehuatl without mentioning the city-state of Xacota. Under the brilliant leadership of King Ahuiztotl the metropolis catapulted from just one of several kingdoms vying for power to attaining undisputed control over the entire island. Xacota's tale has humble origins, much like many other rags to riches stories. Aztli explorers descending from the Tepepan Mountains founded the settlement of Xacota atop an uneven yet sprawling plateau on the northern edge of the Caya Grasslands. Maize, avocados, tomatoes, squash, and other staple food crops flourished in the fertile soil, while rainwater drenching the settlement funneled down channels and into a deep, circular lake at the base of the plateau. With these crucial natural resources in place, more Aztlis migrated from the rugged mountains and harsh forests to start new lives in the burgeoning community.

After spending thousands of years pent up in the tiny Coyonqui within the neighboring mountains, the newfound space felt liberating as people were no longer fiercely competing against their neighbors for tiny scraps of territory in a harsh environment. However, as the population swelled and resources increased, territorial ambitions once again reasserted themselves. Xacota was no exception under its first king, Tetzuhuetl, who attained power through a bloodless coup that stripped the ruling council of nobles of their power and granted it to him and his descendants. Tetzuhuetl was a noble in his own right, a coconeteotl descendant of Itztliteotl blessed with a glib tongue, alarming charisma, and a shrewd cunning. Playing to his fellow noblepersons' sense of elitism, he reassured them that they would still retain a crucial and influential role in his regime. He vigorously argued that concentrating political might in one voice would streamline decision-making authority and allow the city to quickly adapt to a rapidly changing world. To demonstrate this premise, King Tetzuhuetl embarked on his bold campaign to first expand Xacota's reach to its corner of the Caya Grasslands and then slowly extend its tendrils into the Cuahtla Forest and beyond. The enthusiastic citizen-soldiers under his command swiftly annexed large swaths of land nearly unopposed and exacted tributes from the communities now under its purview. Vast riches poured into Xacota's treasuries, appeasing the uneasy nobles and instantly making King Tetzuhuetl one of the island's wealthiest men. Although a descendant of Itztliteotl, the astute monarch also heaped the spoils of war on the priests of Yaoctotl, who worked hand in hand with the militaristic king to further Xacota's empire building. When Tetzuhuetl died 27 years after ascending the throne, his kingdom encompassed roughly 15,000 square miles of territory with almost 123,000 people under his jurisdiction.

However, rivals also began their upward trajectory, foremost among these being Quimichen, a powerful city-state due south in the same grasslands. For centuries, the two enemies engaged in a ferocious stalemate with both sides waging war through proxy allies and engaging in brief yet bloody skirmishes along the way. Despite the protracted enmity, neither side appeared willing to commit to an all-out war until one man changed the equation — Ahuiztotl. The heir to Xacota's throne, Ahuiztotl took command of the city-state's army at the age of 23 with only one intention on his mind: destroying Quimichen and bringing the whole of Tehuatl to its knees. Ahuiztotl began his campaign with a series of surprise maneuvers. He dispensed with the small-scale battles and proxy fights that previously defined the rivals' military struggles and instead attacked major outposts and command centers under the cover of darkness with assistance from the sorcerers attached to each unit. One by one, he stealthily eliminated Quimichen's outer defenses, cut off its communication and supply lines, and converted its besieged friends into his allies. In six short months, Ahuiztotl and his troops surrounded Quimichen, outnumbering its defenders five to one. Surrender would not be an option for Ahuiztotl. He wanted to utterly crush Quimichen and send a message to every other rival in Tehuatl. He and Xacota were not stopping here. They intended to bring every enemy to heel and unite the island under one pamitl (banner). In a violent, bloody battle that lasted three days, Ahuiztotl accomplished every goal. He rooted out every fiber of resistance in Quimichen and offered 10 consecutive days of sacrifices to Yaoctotl and Itztliteotl, putting the rest of Tehuatl on notice that the same outcome awaited them as well.

Within two years after his campaign against Quimichen, Ahuiztotl gained fealty from every Aztli city-state with only minor skirmishes and brokered alliances with the island's non-Aztli humanoids. He incorporated Aztlis from other city-states into Xacota's integrated army and set about the task of pushing the gnolls, orcs, and goblinoids into remote locales across Tehuatl. During an epoch known as the Days of Logs and Bricks, Xacota implemented an ambitious public works initiative, building countless causeways, aqueducts, temples, pyramids, palaces, monuments, courtyards, parks, and other countless structures. Although revolts and uprisings periodically erupted, Xacota kept these episodes in check, diffusing the situations with diplomatic efforts or

military force when necessary. Yet, 874 years after the Age of Xacota began, one rebellion refused to quietly disappear. The Cult of Tlatlcolli in the south-central city of Zacatl demanded its leaders refuse to pay their annual tribute to distant Xacota. When Zacatl's leaders declined the offer, the rebels forcibly removed them from office and followed through on the Cult of Tlatlcolli's demands.

The reigning monarch, King Ciauhpoa, an impulsive young man, immediately marched his army out of the city and toward Zacatl. However, instead of marching directly toward the city, Mazalli, the revolt's leader, lured the king and his army into a trap in the nearby Toctli Forest where Mazalli and her new elvish allies awaited them. In the dense foliage, the camouflaged rebels lobbed volleys of arrows while Xacota's forces fell prey to numerous snares and concealed pits that slowed their movement to a crawl. In the confusion, the elves and Poqozas swarmed the stunned Aztli soldiers and hacked them to pieces. King Ciauhpoa and his general fell that day, leaving Xacota momentarily leaderless.

When the disastrous news reached the city, it threw Xacota into panic and upheaval. Ciauhpoa had two children, twin identical brothers named Itiach and Micca, who were mere children when their father died. Under normal circumstances, an adult regent would rule in the eldest minor's stead, but the 11-year old siblings' relationship posed a unique challenge. No one knew for certain who was older, Itiach or Micca, because there was no way to tell the children apart when they were infants. Most believed Itiach emerged from his mother's womb first, but even Ciauhpoa's distraught wife could not answer that question with absolute certainty. With no clear line of succession, two camps quickly emerged to resolve the burning question. The followers of Itztliteotl, including the city's coconeteotls who descended from his line, rallied behind Itiach who held their deity in higher regard. The temperamental Micca garnered his support from Yaoctotl's priests who admired the boy's martial prowess and skill. The long-simmering tensions between these contentious factions had finally bubbled to the surface in the political arena.

With the turmoil in the capital brewing, opportunistic city-states who long chafed under Xacota's yoke believed their time was at hand. After Zacatl declared its independence, the people now called the Poqozas expanded their influence beyond Zacatl and into the neighboring Aztli cities, towns, and villages, while the elves, gnomes, halflings, and dwarves also unburdened themselves from Xacota's shackles. With the kingdom's fearsome army in tatters, the seeds of rebellion quickly took root across the breadth of Tehuatl.

With their kingdom coming apart at the seams before their very eyes, the followers of Yaoctotl and Itztliteotl realized they needed to act quickly to repair the damage and restore normalcy to the city and beyond. The urgency spurred both sides to take swift and ultimately calamitous actions. Without Xacota's mighty war machine to back them up, Micca and his proteges mustered the city guard to their cause to quickly capture Itiach and offer him to their deity. In response to this anticipated action, Itztliteotl's chief sorcerer Nahuahuitl, like Tlatoani had done centuries earlier, felt compelled to summon reinforcements from beyond the island to his aid. In an instant, the Aztlis' greatest horror emerged from the magical circle — a tzitzimitl. The terrifying divine being immediately slew Nahuahuitl and spread its misery throughout the city. The mere sight of the skeletal female figure with four legs and macabre clothing appearing during the nemontemi (see **Overview of Tehuatl**) sowed widespread fear among the populace as the stars apparently aligned against them. The already despondent citizens immediately fled their homes and ran for their lives, leaving their worldly possessions behind in a mad dash to escape the coming onslaught.

The tzitzimitl's arrival also signaled the end of Xacota's political wrangling. Outraged at being called to partake in a succession dispute over a mortal throne, the irate goddess took personal delight settling the score with Itiach, Micca, and their supporters. Not only did she savagely butcher every individual even remotely connected with the conflict, she also devoured their flesh in an orgiastic feast of flesh and bone, leaving Xacota's power base in ruins, its society in utter freefall, and its remaining people racing to get away from the now accursed place. By the end of that xopactli (see **Overview of Tehuatl**), the grand city of 195,000 residents stood almost completely empty. Its wondrous pyramid temples, spacious palatial residences, parks, courtyards, marketplaces, and buildings fell into neglect and disrepair as only a handful of daring inhabitants snuck into the city to retrieve whatever belongings they could and then leave Xacota forever without anyone or anything noticing their presence. Crops rotted in the fields, while wild plants and animals steadily reclaimed the abandoned metropolis.

Although seemingly lifeless and deserted, adventurers and thieves who later returned to Xacota to search the city for loot rarely escaped with their lives. Those who ventured into the temples of Itztliteotl and Yaoctotl looking for the riches allegedly stashed in their rumored treasuries and inner sanctums met stiff, insurmountable resistance from hosts of undead guardians and mindless constructs built to protect these objects from robbers. Others believed that the

portal or magic that unleashed the tzitzimil on an unsuspecting world remains at least intermittently active as some claim to have seen the cihuateteo roaming the complexes as well as other abominations associated with the hero-gods and fiends from the netherworld. Nonetheless, legends speaking of an obsidian mirror personally made by Itztliteotl being hidden within the temple dedicated to him and a fabled macuahuitl once wielded in battle by Yaoctéotl inspire adventurers to pursue the acquisition of these rumored divine artifacts despite the likelihood of encountering creatures and beings who defy imagination.

While these prime locales remained largely unexplored and undisturbed, monsters have made some incursions in Xacota's outskirts where they inhabit partially ruined structures and overgrown fields. Gnolls and ogres cohabit dilapidated farm residences, storage buildings, and animal pens around the city's crumbling aqueducts and causeways. Goblinoids including goblins, hobgoblins, and even bugbears muscled their way into modest accommodations on the city's edges. Individual creatures and small enclaves of creatures periodically roam the grounds as well, though they take care to avoid the larger clusters of humanoids as well as the otherworldly and undead abominations who still congregate around the temples, palaces, and other locales of greater interest to the typical adventurer.



CHAPTER EIGHT: CEPUAL DESERT

Overview Weather Table: Semiarid desert

Baseline Temperature Deviation: —

Daily Weather Deviation: —

Relative Humidity Deviation: —

Located on the leeward side of the Tepepan Mountains, the Cepual Desert wraps along the eastern edge of the neighboring mountain range like a hemispheric concentric ring bordered by the Caya Grasslands to the east. When the waters finally receded, the semiarid desert tucked under the tall peaks' broad shadow left the disappointed Aztlis and other humanoid inhabitants unimpressed. The scarce water supplies and scorching temperatures made the dusty, nearly lifeless expanse of hard gravel and sand practically uninhabitable. As the tides ebbed and more fertile ground came to light, nearly all of Tehuatl's humanoids looked elsewhere for a home, leaving the barren Cepual Desert to play the role of jilted bride. Yet some people and creatures decided to brave the elements and settle in this rugged domain despite the obstacles. The brutal conditions gave some of the surviving Tozcas a safe refuge from their Aztli persecutors. Likewise, some fauna and flora adapted well to an environment mostly devoid of the island's fiercest predators. While jaguars and cougars still roam across the desolate landscape, their numbers are fewer than in regions with dense vegetation. Coyotes and foxes appear in more abundant quantities, along with snakes, lizards, tortoises, prairie dogs, mule deer, pronghorns, tarantulas, and bats. These animals scrape by on a diet of insects and scrub vegetation including a wide variety of cacti. Because peyote cactus flourishes only in the semiarid Cepual Desert, some Poqozas brave the trek through Aztli Confederation territory to harvest the plant and bring it back south across the Great Canal. However, most acquire the cacti from Aztli traders on the causeways spanning the manmade waterway. Mesquite, acacia, and ocotillo trees are also spread across the landscape. Streams and rivers originating in the Tepepan Mountains deliver water to the parched vegetation as well as occasionally transport deposits of precious metals and other commodities from this source.

The Cepual Desert owes its existence to the rain shadow effect. When warm, moist air rolls into Tehuatl from its western shore, the air ascends up the mountainside before rolling down the opposite side of the mountain. However, gravity inhibits the flow of air molecules as they move farther away from the planet's surface, causing the air to cool and release its excess moisture as rain. When the air reaches the mountaintop, it is chilly and dry. Although the air once again warms during its descent toward the ground, it never regains its moisture, which makes the desert hot and arid. While temperatures in the Cepual Desert rarely reach the blistering extremes encountered in a hot and dry desert, the heat can be oppressive, especially during the spring and summer. Increased humidity and occasional rain accompany the higher temperatures, making the Cepual Desert downright miserable. Autumn and winter see more moderate weather with temperatures generally remaining warm yet comfortable because of the low humidity during these seasons. The absence of water and moisture make steel less susceptible to rust while venturing through the semiarid desert, but the additional burden of wearing heavy metal armor offsets the preceding benefit to some degree.

Ixtla is the only major settlement in the Cepual Desert. This city-state member of the Aztli Confederation lies close to the arid terrain's more hospitable neighbor, the Caya Grasslands. Outside of this lone exception, the desert's communities are small, isolated, and usually not welcoming to strangers. The rugged people who live here frequently chose to disappear into anonymity of their own accord. When found, they rarely take kindly to the unforeseen intrusion.

TABLE 8-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE CEPUAL DESERT

d20	Settlement Found
1–8	No settlement
9–14	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
15–18	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)

d20	Settlement Found
19–20	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 8-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE CEPUAL DESERT

d20	Demographics
1–8	Aztli-dominated settlement
9–12	Mixed community with Aztli majority
13–14	Mixed community with no majority (Aztlis, dwarves, Poqozas)
15	Mixed community with dwarven majority
16	Mixed community with Poqoza majority
17	Gnoll community (no small town; village instead)
18	Tozca community (no small town; village instead)
19–20	Orc community (no small town; village instead)

ATEZTECATL

Tucked into the northwestern corner of the Cepual Desert is a low-lying basin renowned for its pristine waters. Runoff from the neighboring Tepepan Mountains seeps into the sere earth and becomes groundwater that eventually re-emerges 73 miles from the desert's edge in a sparkling oasis surrounded by shrubs and short cacti. Several hundred gallons of water funnel through underground channels and into the massive, crater-like depression every hour to replenish precious liquid lost to evaporation from the scorching midday sun. The animals that inhabit this dusty land frequently gather at this isolated watering hole to hydrate, often bringing predators such as coyotes and foxes into close contact with their smaller, less aggressive prey. Many Aztlis attribute this peaceful coexistence to Atoyatl whom they believe takes a personal interest in the picturesque site as demonstrated by the bronze patina statue of her at the oasis' center. Her and her husband Quiahuitl's followers occasionally visit Ateztecatl to offer a fleck of jade or pearl to the deities.

However, religious pilgrimages account for just some of the visitors who make the arduous trek across the gravelly desert to the wondrous spring. A tiny minority come to the locale to marvel at its breathtaking scenery, but the balance venture to Ateztecatl to try their luck at Atoyatl's challenge. According to legend, those who gain the goddess's favor through a noteworthy sacrifice of jade or reciting a valorous deed performed in her name fall into a trance where the deity bestows a vision to that person of a lost treasure from the time of the hero-gods. Naturally, adventurers make up an overwhelming percentage of the travelers who brave the Cepual Desert for their chance at glory and to obtain a beloved goddess's blessing. There are 23 documented instances of heroes embarking on quests at Atoyatl's behest, though only six survived to claim their spectacular prizes. Some laid claim to artifacts and relics from the rebellion while others discovered legendary objects thought to have vanished from existence countless centuries earlier.

CITLITICH

Jackrabbits have a special significance for Poqozas. The animal's long, broad ears resemble those of their lone deity, Tlatcolli. Although north of the Great Canal, a substantial number of Poqozas venture across their manmade barrier into Ixtla before partaking in the next leg of their spiritual quest: a journey to Citlitoch 61 miles northwest of the grand city-state. On first examination, this barren patch of semiarid desert blends into the otherwise monotonous background of cacti, gravelly earth, and patches of scrub vegetation. However, a little patience and a keen eye presents the first glimpse of the region's endemic inhabitants, an exceedingly rare and unusual species of brown jackrabbits



with white stripes. The animals do not appear sentient and cannot speak, yet Ahuicateo's worshippers who make the trek to Citlitoch swear the jackrabbits point them in the direction of hallucinogenic cacti and other psychoactive plants in the 10-square-mile region where the jackrabbits dig their burrows. After indulging in the consumption or inhalation of these substances, many Poqozas recall having lengthy conversations with the beasts during their intense stupors. As Tlatcolli's mediums, the rodents impart knowledge and insight about all manner of subjects to their enraptured audience who can recite the discussion's details with exacting precision. Not surprisingly, other humanoids dismiss these farfetched claims as the ramblings of inebriated people in a self-induced stupor.

While many Poqozas can recollect these out-of-body experiences, there are only three purported instances of a pilgrim participating in the teoteyotl. In these mythical tales, a man-sized rabbit leads a disciple into the stem of a massive cactus plant that opens into a corkscrew portal descending deep beneath the ground. There, in the depths of the earth, Tlatcolli conducts a personal audience with the individual who joins the bohemian deity on a weeklong, mind-bending, transcendental trip through space and time. Even the most accepting Poqozas doubt the veracity of such stories because the alleged participant's memory remains fuzzy for weeks and even months after supposedly returning to the real world. The only proof that lends any credence to the legend is the appearance of a mysterious, highly detailed tattoo of a giant, colorful rabbit on the person's back that could have only been drawn by a virtuoso artist beyond the ability of perhaps any mortal.

IPACONOYTL

Ruler: None

Government: Anarchy

Population: 923 (262 Tozcas, 245 half-orcs, 175 tieflings, 98 Aztlis, 62 Poqozas, 45 dwarves, 36 dragonborn)

Languages: Common, Orc, Abyssal, Dwarven

Resources: Gold, silver, cactus, peyote

The Cepual Desert keeps many secrets, and Ipaconoytl may be the worst of them. Located in the heart of the gravel-strewn, arid landscape, this isolated

settlement teems with people who want to remain anonymous. Many believe Ipaconoytl is either the inspiration for the legendary half-orc community of Minax, or it could be Minax with another name. Desperate humanoids unwelcome in their own homelands for personal and legal reasons can find safe haven from their tormentors in Ipaconoytl, though in this case, the remedy may be worse than the disease. In this town, everyone looks out for number one. There are no laws and no semblances of civilization. Children are scarce, and few people live long enough to reach their golden years. An ill-chosen word or an unintentional glance frequently escalates into a lethal brawl. A rocky mound known as Omítl Tepetl, which loosely translates as "bone hill," provides ample testimony to the pervasive violence that almost constantly rocks Ipaconoytl. Residents pile fresh corpses on top of this festering heap on the outskirts of town, haphazardly covering the dead with loose stones and gravel. Decaying hands, feet, and skulls are plainly visible, and some rise from the makeshift graves to once again plague the living after death.

No one knows for certain who founded Ipaconoytl or the exact circumstances surrounding its creation, but many believe Tozcas fleeing Aztli retribution settled on this desolate spot thousands of years ago. From these humble origins, Ipaconoytl slowly developed, though perpetual turmoil and quick tempers regulate the population growth. Roughly half of the town's residents were born here, and of that percentage, almost all of them are Tozcas or half-orcs. The rest migrated to Ipaconoytl from somewhere else for reasons they typically keep to themselves. Like their rationales for coming to the town, most people lead solitary lives on individual tracts of land scattered across a wide area almost as large as a major city. Although the town falls under Ixtla's jurisdiction and begrudgingly pays the city-state their annual tribute in precious metals and gemstones scrounged from the earth, the other facets of Aztli hegemony, such as nobility and property laws carry no weight in Ipaconoytl. There are no town squares, civic institutions, or other hallmarks of a traditional society in the settlement. The only semblance of mutual cooperation is a massive common house where residents gather to drink locally distilled pulque and other fermented beverages. Locals also use the shared gathering place to meet with Poqoza merchants who buy peyote, one of the area's most abundant commodities. These visitors tread carefully during their brief stay in the hardscrabble town, exchanging maize and other food

staples for the indigenous cacti. Passing adventurers sometimes stop here to purchase provisions or get a night's rest, though most find Ipaconoytl to be more dangerous than their intended destination.

IXTLA

Ruler: Nahuatzil

Government: Ixtlatati

Population: 57,208 (51,802 Aztlis, 2,834 dwarves, 1,135 Poqozas, 505 elves, 464 gnomes, 271 halflings, 108 dragonborn, 89 Tlotls)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Elvish, Gnome, Halfling

Resources: Gold, silver, copper, cacti products

Nestled on the eastern edge of the Cepul Desert, close to the western boundary of the neighboring Caya Grasslands, the small village of Ixtla served as a waystation for travelers venturing to and from the Tepepan Mountains to the fertile grasslands. Ixtla's first residents survived on water extracted from the numerous cacti surrounding their home and a diet of rabbits, hares, and other small rodents. Today, Ixtla relies almost exclusively upon three aquifers scattered throughout the city to meet its residents' hydration needs, though it depends heavily upon maize and other food staples purchased from other communities to sustain its population. Water is almost exclusively reserved for drinking, with gravel streets taking the place of the canals found in other Aztlis cities. With little wood in the immediate vicinity, Ixtla's architects construct homes and temples from stone or mudbricks. Although the city lacks the natural resources found in other urban centers, its abundant supplies of gold, silver, and other commodities extracted from the earth give it the purchasing power to feed its citizens, import necessary goods, and equip its fearsome army, making it a charter member of the Aztlis Confederation.

HISTORY AND PEOPLE

Ixtla's fortunes abruptly changed 452 years ago, when Torkom Firebrand, a dwarf merchant and speculator found a three-pound gold nugget in a dried creek bed. He kept his find a secret for many days while he secretly combed the area searching for more ore to add to his already impressive collection. However, once he made the mistake of showing his remarkable piece of metal to his brother Jommac, the news quickly spread through the village and into the surrounding area. Within weeks, dwarves from the Tepepan Mountains poured into the formerly sleepy supply depot by the hundreds, while Aztlis from nearby towns and villages also rushed to Ixtla to try their luck at unearthing gold in the rural outpost. Obviously, the overwhelmed village of 104 residents could not accommodate the sudden influx of treasure hunters racing into their community. In short order, civic order broke down. With nowhere to live and not enough food to meet their demands, the dwarves and Aztlis squabbling over territorial claims and scant resources quickly came to blows. Initially, dwarven steel prevailed over Aztlis wood and stone until the oppressive heat tilted the playing field into the Aztlis' favor. The exhausted and profusely sweating dwarves realized they could not withstand the sweltering temperatures and the Aztlis' determination. They proposed a truce, which the Aztlis accepted under the condition the Aztlis would draw the line evenly dividing the settlement's territory between the armed adversaries. The dwarves reluctantly agreed to their terms, with the Aztlis surprisingly giving the dwarves the rich ground where Torkom discovered the chunk of gold that set the mad rush into motion. Ecstatic at their good fortune and what they perceived to be the Aztlis' miscalculation, the dwarves praised their newfound Aztlis allies and gladly settled into their territorial arrangement.

The Aztlis had a trick up their sleeves. Although experts at quarrying gold and silver from stone in the mountains and underground caverns, the dwarves were less informed about locating and retrieving the precious metals from aboveground sources. Indeed, the dwarves stumbled upon three aquifers that would later quench the burgeoning community's incessant thirst, but the metals they coveted eluded them. In their eagerness to follow in Torkom's lucky footsteps, they failed to acknowledge that Torkom pulled his prize from the remains of an evaporated waterway that predominately ran through the section of Ixtla that the Aztlis controlled. Within months, the giddy dwarves slowly came to the realization they had received the short end of this stick. While they were pulling tiny scraps of gold and an occasional chunk of silver from the dry ground, their Aztlis counterparts were mining several pounds of gold nuggets per day. After several frustrating years, many of Ixtla's dwarves abandoned the site and retreated back to the mountains with the knowledge that the Aztlis had taken them for a ride.

The Aztlis on the other hand were riding high. Miners were pulling almost unprecedented amounts of gold and silver out of the region, making Ixtla the best investment opportunity for Xacota. The small village steadily expanded into a town and then into a bustling city under Xacota's aegis. Despite falling under Xacota's hegemony, Ixtla retained its frontier roots and mentality. Accustomed to life in an inhospitable desert, the citizens were rougher around the edges than their cosmopolitan counterparts in Xacota. Ixtla's nasty streak paid dividends in the aftermath of Xacota's unexpected and disastrous demise.

When Xacota collapsed, Ixtla came into the crosshairs of an opportunistic adversary, the gnolls of the Caya Grasslands. Spurred on by their devious deity Itzcuin, the gnolls launched a series of blistering attacks known as the Nights of Sillu and Claw (see *Gargoyle Pet Sematary* in the accompanying Tehuatl adventure book for more details). They swept across wide swaths of the grasslands, butchering and sacrificing hundreds of Aztlis in a sickening orgy of blood and violence. When the wave reached the outskirts of Ixtla, the ferocious Aztlis and the smaller dwarven community who had remained here were ready for their hated foes. After six years of near-constant warfare and a prolonged siege, Ixtla withstood the onslaught and drove Itzcuin's deranged minions back into the Caya Grasslands.

In the aftermath of the protected battle and with Xacota out of the picture, the self-sufficient people of Ixtla had to set about the task of governing themselves. In typical Ixtla fashion, the residents turned to the one institution who saved them from the gnolls — their military. Zometzu, the brutal yet brilliant otami who led the struggle against the gnolls became the overwhelmingly popular choice to lead Ixtla. Zometzu accepted the prestigious honor, lauding him with the title "ixtlatati," translated loosely as the "father of Ixtla." When he died, some clamored for his oldest son, Ametzucoyatl, to succeed him. Others strongly protested, believing that the title could only be earned in battle instead of bloodline. The latter faction prevailed. Therefore, when a leader passes away, Ixtla holds a tournament style trial by combat to determine his or her successor. Individual combats continue until one party yields or dies.

The title of ixtlatati is open to any citizen. In the roughly four centuries since its independence from Xacota, 36 Aztlis men, five Aztlis women, and one dwarf have attained rulership over Ixtla. Despite being dominated by Aztlis, some facets of dwarven culture have seeped into the collective consciousness, especially during Glalrat Firebrand's controversial and often tumultuous twenty-two-year reign as Ixtlatati. At several points during his leadership, he mulled breaking away from the Aztlis Confederation and declaring the city as an extension of the Firebrand dwarves' kingdom. In the end, saner heads prevailed, and while his influence incorporated aspects of dwarven art, architecture, and storytelling into the zeitgeist during this period, the city remains distinctly Aztlis in almost all facets of life. Nahuatzil, Glalrat's able successor and the current ixtlatati, has held the position unchallenged for 13 years.

RELIGION

Being almost synonymous with gold and silver, Zipe-Toteque, the Aztlis patron of metalworkers and rebirth is the most widely celebrated and worshipped deity in the city. Most dwarves venerate the god, though they refer to him as Xotite while refraining from what they perceive to be some of the more barbarous elements of his religious rituals. Nonetheless, Ixtla practically shuts down during festivals honoring the god where worshippers litter the city's streets with maize husks, seed pods, and other plant materials associated with rebirth. At the height of the ceremony, the presiding ixtlatati presents an offering of a one-pound gold bar to the temple of Zipe-Toteque's high priest as the city's gift to its divine benefactor. Keeping with Ixtla's martial spirit, the temple of Yaocteotl also occupies a place of significance within the metropolis. Lesser shrines to the other hero-gods can be found in alcoves and niches throughout the city and surrounding countryside. Makeshift memorials dedicated to Tlatcolli as well as the dwarven and non-Aztlis religions are kept predominately out of sight and can be located only with some guidance from locals familiar with the out of the way spots.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Despite being landlocked on the edge of a semiarid desert, Ixtla's plentiful inventories of gold, silver, and copper ore capture the attention of numerous partners from far and wide. The city exchanges its commodities with the Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains who offer the Aztlis gemstones, salt, and tin in return for the precious metals. Because there are no waterways connecting the trading partners, dwarven and Aztlis merchants



must brave the arduous trek across the Cepual Desert and a leg of the journey into the Tepepan Mountains to deliver their goods. To facilitate traffic moving in both directions, Ixtla built well-defended and supplied rest stations at 10-mile intervals along the way. Despite this contingency, orc raiders from the Kraguezz Tribe are a constant menace to commerce traveling in both directions. The bold raiders attack infrequently, but when they succeed, they typically target the most lucrative shipments, causing them to literally and figuratively strike gold. The Aztlis and dwarves occasionally experiment with using wheeled vehicles to accelerate these journeys and outrun the orcs, but the slog through the mountains' narrow passes and uneven terrain and the lack of any surefooted, suitable beasts to pull these machines negate the benefits of lugging merchandise in such a manner across the comparatively flat and frequently dry, gravelly soil found in the Cepual Desert.

While the same sturdy earth may facilitate travel, it miserably fails at growing food. Instead, Ixtla must import nearly all of its food supplies from the Aztli villages and towns surrounding it. The Aztlis use their abundant supplies of gold, silver, and copper to pay for bushels of maize, tomatoes, squash, potatoes, and other local staple crops. Less scrupulous merchants obtain the same products by bartering with them for peyote and other psychedelics found in their native environment. The artery of small rivers, streams, and lakes in the grassland make it easier to deliver these provisions by canoe on the smaller bodies of water and by ship in the deeper and more navigable waterways. Ixtla trades extensively with Mactli, its closest Aztli Confederation neighbor roughly 100 miles to the southeast, though it also has business ties to a number of communities in the grasslands. In addition to trading with established settlements, Ixtla also purchases game animals such as deer and tapirs from renowned, nomadic hunters who bring their kills or quarry to Ixtla's seasonal markets that sporadically pop up across the savannah. The scarcity of meat supplies imported into Ixtla makes it a luxury reserved for the city's wealthiest citizens.

The Poqozas also have a small yet sizable presence here, which can be attributed to their love of psychedelic cacti and other plants indigenous only to semiarid deserts. When not engaged in harvesting these botanical products for

exportation and sale south of the Great Canal, the Poqozas go into the Cepual Desert on weeklong vision quests where they ingest various hallucinogenic substances to commune with their god, Tlatlcolli. The Aztlis tolerate the Poqozas' behavior as long as they engage in such activities in the privacy of their homes or in remote locales far from curious Aztli children.

Ixtla owes its existence to its fortuitous location near rich deposits of gold, silver, and copper. Mining is its forte, as roughly half of its residents are employed in the industry. Because of the abundance of these commodities in the city, most Aztlis conduct financial transactions using raw ore or metallic coins minted from these materials rather than cacao beans or quachtlis, which are extremely rare in Ixtla. The artisan class specializes in crafting jewelry, sculptures, and other decorative pieces from these coveted precious metals. Armaments are also a major player in Ixtla's economy. Its craftsmen manufacture armor made from steel, bronze, olli, and more commonplace components such as leather, fabric, and hide, including skin harvested from slain dragons. Weaponsmiths also forge metallic daggers, swords, and maces as well as lethal devices made from wood and stone. While many produce the gear for Ixtla's armed forces, they also export some to other Aztli Confederation members and even the Poqozas to the south. Periodic reports also suggest some manufacturers also sell this equipment to the gnolls based upon eyewitness accounts of seeing their warriors wearing armor presumably made in one of Ixtla's foundries.

DIPLOMACY

Ixtla's diplomacy mirrors the demeanor of its people: brash, fearless, and rugged. Its representatives pull no punches when interacting with other communities and often say things or act in ways others find uncivilized or inappropriate. "Impatience is a virtue because those who wait in the desert get burned," is a common axiom repeated by most people in the city. When it

comes time for the city's emissaries to collect tributes from their neighbors, excuses for failing to remit what is due fall on deaf ears. Ixtla shows no mercy in this regard, taking what it demands by force when necessary. Their crudeness and often uncouth behavior rankle some of their fellow Aztli Confederation members, especially those from dignified and stoic Tlazo who frequently cringe during conversions with their louder and unrestrained counterparts from Ixtla. The city's personality may clash most with that of Tlazo, but its fiercest rivals are its closest neighbor, Mactli. The two city-states vie for tributes from the same pool of candidates, which causes some friction between the competitors even though their cozy business relationships extend back to the period before the creation of the Aztli Confederation. Despite their outward prickliness, Ixtla's willingness to act quickly and decisively makes it a valuable partner among the quartet. Most military leaders and rank-and-file soldiers from Ixtla instill fear and discipline among their counterparts from other Aztli cities.

Ixtla city's leaders and residents are forthright and truthful with rare exceptions. When an ixtlatati makes a pledge, it is a guarantee. Those willing to look past the rough exterior encounter genuine people who speak their minds but know the true meaning of empathy under the right circumstances. When someone is in need, they lend a helping hand without hesitation. This approach serves Ixtla well as communities familiar with the city's leadership and its citizens know they have a partner they can trust even though they can act in a rash, heavy-handed manner from time to time. Ixtla knows it cannot allow its supply lines to be disrupted. Therefore, it ensures that the settlements that export food and other essentials to the metropolis must be allowed to do so without hindrance or interference from others, most notably the gnolls of the Caya Grasslands as well as other prospective thieves and monsters. This stark reality helps to ensure the safety of communities who interact with Ixtla on a recurrent basis.

GOVERNMENT

Combat prowess is revered in Ixtla, which explains its method for determining the city's next ixtlatati. The people of Ixtla expect and respect only strong, decisive leaders, even if they sometimes justifiably drop the ball. In their eyes, hesitation is a sure sign of weakness. However, incompetence is not well-received either. Their mantra can be summarized best with this statement: If you cannot make the right choice quickly, more time is not going to help you. The title of ixtlatati is a lifetime appointment, but others may challenge the current ixtlatati to a new trial by combat under the right circumstance. To do so, the candidate must present a case to an army general chosen from each of the Aztli Confederation's member city-states explaining his or her reasons for raising the challenge and what steps the contender would take to improve the situation. This body known as the coatecuhtli must unanimously concur with the challenge's validity before proceeding to the trial by combat stage. To avoid political meddling and limit frivolous claims, if three or more generals find the case to be without merit, the person raising the objection meets a swift and merciless end at the temple of Zipe-Toteque. The coatecuhtli has only approved two cases for trial by combat with the last occurring during Glalrat Firebrand's tenure. Although Glalrat prevailed in the contest, he learned a valuable lesson that dispelled any further thought of leaving the Aztli Confederation for greener pastures with the Firebrand dwarves.

The ixtlatati's primary role is to protect the city from external threats and to secure its vast repository of precious metals that are allegedly stored in a subterranean vault beneath the temple of Yaocoteotl where the city's leader and his cabinet live. Nahuatzil has performed both functions admirably, providing much-needed stability after Glalrat's contentious reign. Although he can appropriately take full credit for fulfilling the former task, he has virtually nothing to do with completing the latter duty. According to legend, the undead Zometzu guards the treasure along with a contingent of constructs and incorporeal spirits under his command. Some speculate he is a vampire; others insist he may be a lich; and the remainder assert he is something almost entirely unknown. Regardless of the tales' veracity, none has ever successfully confirmed or penetrated Ixtla's treasury.

True to its frontier origins, citizens find the notion of involving government in their personal conflicts to be unconscionable. Seeking redress for grievances within Ixtla's limited civic authorities feels out of character for the city's independent-minded residents who typically resent government interference in their personal affairs. Despite their reservations, some egregious matters require involvement from a higher authority. When not fighting its adversaries, the military forces imbedded in Ixtla keep the peace and prosecute serious crimes such as murder, rape, and other violent offenses. The members who form the coatecuhtli also preside over local judicial matters. Being the straight

shooters that they are, the four judges tell the accused how they see the issue before the trial gets started, which gives the person the opportunity to confess and suffer a lesser penalty. If the individual rebuffs their overt suggestion to accept their proposed resolution, they figuratively lay the law down upon the transgressor, sentencing them to death. Although the outcome may be predetermined, the offender still has the opportunity to mitigate the penalty down to a swift, merciful death or further anger the court, forcing them to hand down a gruesome and utterly agonizing demise.

MILITARY

Ixtla's citizenry chafe at the idea that the commander of their integrated forces hails from Mactli, yet during his six-year tenure in the city, Etlaltican has demonstrated his competency on multiple occasions. He earned their grudging respect in the grueling campaign against a combined orc and gnoll army that menaced Ixtla's supply lines three years ago. The militaristic settlement boasts a highly capable force of 9,430 lightly armored soldiers who value speed and courage over strength of arms. As the dwarves learned during their opening battles with the Aztlis, the high temperatures and oppressive humidity favor lightweight, mobile units over slow, heavily encumbered troops who must contend with the elements and the enemy. More than half of Ixtla's ground forces wield ranged weapons including atlatls. Its infantry carries clubs and spears, while its officers usually wear armor crafted from olli and swing itztopillis. Only isolated units occupy the Cepual Desert. The bulk of Ixtla's 2,450 troops stationed outside of the city proper are garrisoned in towns and villages spread across much of the Caya Grasslands, with several rapid-response strike teams inserted into the western desert to combat the orcs. Because it is landlocked, Ixtla has no formal navy. Nonetheless, its citizens can muster a flotilla of 28 canoes that can accommodate up to four individuals. While no dwarves formally serve in Ixtla's integrated armed forces, these citizens created their own 350-strong auxiliary heavy infantry unit that stands at the ready to defend Ixtla against its adversaries.

MAJOR THREATS

No other member of the Aztli Confederation has faced off against Itzcuin and his despised gnolls more than Ixtla. The gnolls remain a constant threat to Ixtla along with the Krarguezz tribe of orcs who primarily operate on the desert's western edges, far from the Aztli city-state. Many believe some dwarves still loyal to Glalrat and the Firebrand cause endeavor to put another dwarf into the role of ixtlatati to further their clan's ambitions and forever break the Aztli Confederation. So far, no one has dared to challenge Nahuatzil, though as he nears 50 years of age, the masterful yet aging ruler may have lost a few steps. While there are undoubtedly several dwarves who would relish an opportunity to square off against the slowing Nahuatzil, none can likely provide a suitable justification to get past the coatecuhtli's demanding standards. In addition to taking Nahuatzil's throne, others aspire to plunder its lucrative treasury. Rumors intermittently circulate throughout the city claiming that a daring band of thieves from the Razor have formulated a devious plan to rob the vault and abscond with Ixtla's repository of gold, silver, and copper. According to these popular stories, the gang includes several lycanthropes who could supposedly slip past the guardians undetected and escape from the secure facility with a legendary haul of loot. To date, there is no evidence to substantiate the rumors. Nonetheless, they persist throughout Ixtla.

KRARGUEZZ ORCS

Ruler: Grozka

Government: Autocracy

Population: 3,674 (3,584 orcs, 52 Tozcas, 20 trolls, 18 ogres)

Languages: Common, Giant, Orc

Resources: None

When the waters receded, the first parcels of new land lay along the western edge of the Cepual Desert. In their haste to claim any patch of earth after centuries of forced sequestration, the Aztlis descended from the mountains and established a series of villages and towns on the hot, dusty soil. While they were initially grateful for this scorched earth, the ebbing tide revealed even greater treasures further in the distance, causing the settlers to abandon their homes and move to greener pastures beyond the semiarid wasteland. The

Aztlis' loss became the orcs' gain as the Krarguezz tribe quickly claimed the desolation for their own, a declaration few cared to refute or challenge. For much of their existence, the nomadic orcs moved from one deserted settlement to the next, cursing their lot in life while scrounging for scraps of food and any other valuables they could find in a bleak, miserable world. When their god Grotaa failed to answer their cries, the dwindling members of the Krarguezz tribe lost faith in their ancestral deity. In their desperation, they turned to a new god, who appeared to them as a sleek jaguar descending from the mountains. The wily Itztliteotl seduced the despondent orcs and assured them better days lie ahead, but only if they placed their faith in him. The skeptical orcs reluctantly acquiesced, though their hatred for the Aztlis filled them with misgiving. Yet, after centuries of merely scraping by, their luck was about to suddenly and fortuitously change just as Itztliteotl had promised.

The discovery of gold near Ixtla set a chain of events into motion that altered the trajectory of the Krarguezz orcs. The influx of dwarven prospectors venturing from the Tepepan Mountains toward the Aztlis city were easy pickings for the brutal humanoids who also brought a handful of trolls into the fold to share in the spoils. The increase in commercial traffic between the Firebrands and the Aztlis created a boon for the opportunistic orcs who rapidly filled their coffers with gold and other valuable commodities including food. Naturally, more resources produced more orcs as their numbers swelled threefold in five years from roughly 200 to 600, along with a contingent of trolls and a stray ogre or two filling out their ranks. A chance encounter saved the tribe from extinction and set it on its current path as feared raiders of the western Cepual Desert.

Today, the more than 3,500 strong band of orcs, trolls, and ogres roams their territory, though they must constantly dodge Aztlis troops from Ixtla who pursue them at every turn. Fortunately for the orcs, the logistical difficulties of dispatching thousands of troops to scour the desert looking for an evasive enemy prove virtually impossible to overcome. Nonetheless, the determined Aztlis refuse to let the orcs move about the desert unscathed. Six lightly armored and equipped mobile units of 50 to 100 warriors and Cuauhocelotls operate throughout the Cepual Desert with the sole mission of tracking down and slaughtering any orcs they see on sight. While these strike forces take their toll on the Krarguezz orcs, they realistically only keep their numbers in check instead of making a serious dent in their overall strength. The dwarves also retaliate against the orcs whenever possible, yet they are even more reluctant to unleash a full-scale assault into the hot, steamy desert against an adversary willing to give up significant ground for temporary shelter. The dwarves adopt a wholly different yet equally effective approach to dealing with the orcs than their human business partners. They dispatch adventurers disguised as merchants to lure the marauders into a carefully orchestrated ambush. Although the orcs sometimes do not take or fall for the bait, the hell the dwarves inflict on them when they make the wrong choice gives the Firebrands great satisfaction and usually leads the orcs to temporarily pause their raiding activities and regroup.

Under the leadership of their current chieftain, Grozka, the orcs repeatedly slip back and forth between the Cepual Desert and the Tepepan Mountains where they commandeer shipments of goods passing between Ixtla and the Firebrand dwarves. The orcs choose their targets carefully. To aid them in this endeavor, they enlisted several Tozcas to infiltrate the Aztlis ranks and assess the value of each planned shipment. Grozka abides by the philosophy that he would rather attack one or two predetermined targets of great worth over a month's time than take his chances at assaulting more targets on a regular basis and run the risk of acquiring practically nothing of use or run into a band of powerful adventurers. Grozka always consults with his trusted high priest of Itztliteotl Murgh before approving his plans for another assault. The rationale for the Aztlis god building a relationship with Tehuatl's orcs remains murky and unclear, especially when the Aztlis in Ixtla also worship the Smoking Mirror. Some Aztlis speculate the deity the orcs venerate may not be Itztliteotl at all and is an imposter instead. Indeed, Itztliteotl's mighty high priest in Ixtla swears his divine master disavows any knowledge of the orcs. Others, especially the priesthood of Nonotzali, dismiss these denials, believing they are just another ruse perpetrated by the ultimate prankster for his own amusement. Suspicion also points to a troll or even giant deity who uses the foolish orcs to unwittingly advance its own agenda in the region. The trolls' strong influence over Grozka and Murgh and the advancement of their own causes lend credence to this theory. Speculation abounds in some learned circles that an Akadonian god uses the Krarguezz orcs to meddle in the affairs of a distant land to see what trouble it can stir up far from home.

NOCHTLI

Cacti represent a substantial majority of the plants that can survive in an environment with limited water supplies. These green natural wonders are the

dominant flora in the Cepual Desert, and none are more renowned than those found in a roughly 705-square-mile swath of the region known as Nochtli. The cacti throughout this area display odd properties. Their shapes resemble those of upright humanoids complete with bifurcated roots and their leaves positioned as if they were displaying hand gestures. Although there are no eyewitness accounts of anyone seeing the plants uproot themselves and move elsewhere, some observers swear the plants appear to have shifted around between visits, occupying spots closer to or further away from neighboring plants. There are also scattered reports about people hearing low, inexplicable humming sounds while traveling through the area, leading explorers to speculate that the plants were actively communicating with each other. There are no known attacks against anyone passing through Nochtli, which is a popular destination for botanists and herbalists seeking some of the desert's most potent hallucinogens and edible cacti. However, people venturing here say the puzzling activities have significantly increased over the last few years.

OCTLI

Ruler: Cuahuatate

Government: Aztlis Confederation

Population: 3,418 (2,142 Aztlis, 827 Poqozas, 449 dwarves)

Languages: Common, Dwarven

Resources: Neucyo (see below), maguey, hospitality

The town of Octli stands within one mile of a frequently used trade route connecting the city of Ixtla with the Firebrand dwarves of the neighboring Tepepan Mountains. The settlement began as a minor rest station along the way, yet over time the community slowly and steadily expanded because of two fortuitous discoveries — an underground water source and a new distillation technique for maguey. Although the Aztlis and Poqozas have a fondness for pulque, most other people think it tastes and smells disgusting. Two Poqoza brothers who took up residence in Octli started experimenting with different fermentation methods to cut down on its milky consistency yet retain much of its flavor. After years of trial and error, they settled on cooking the plants' leaves over hot stones and then distilling the juice from its leaves to produce a clear spirit they called neucyo. The alcoholic beverage better resembles modern tequila than traditional pulque. To increase the drink's intensity and intoxicating effects, they added a sprinkling of dried and crushed tlapoyomatli (Mexican wormwood) leaves to the mix. Eighty-three years later, three neucyo distilleries sprang up in Octli where they produce the drink for passing merchants and select customers in major cities throughout Tehuatl.

The process for making, distilling, and aging neucyo is laborious, slow, and requires tremendous expertise only gained through years of experience. Despite some innovations, the town's three operating distilleries only release roughly 6,500 gallons of neucyo per year to customers. The competition is fierce as the owners of all three production facilities descend from the liquor's founders. Business disagreements and salacious affairs within the family and the greater community led to the original partnership's dissolution and bad blood between the siblings' descendants. Despite being second cousins, the three distillery owners, Altecatl, Milincalli, and Zulma, and their extended families have not spoken nor intentionally seen each other for years. Whenever they unexpectedly encounter one of their rival family members, each party quickly looks away and deliberately walks in the other direction. Zulma operates the largest and most profitable of the three distilleries alongside her Aztlis husband Eohuatec, and their three children. The majority agree that Altecatl makes the tastiest neucyo, but the acerbic loner's prickly personality inhibits his customer base and his inability to work alongside others significantly diminishes his production capacity. Milincalli along with his wife and children take a more laidback approach to life and business, distilling quality neucyo at their leisure.

While neucyo changed Octli's character, the settlement still remains a rest station under Ixtla's supervision and the Aztlis Confederation's jurisdiction. Cuahuatate, an eagle Cuauhocelotl from Ixtla, governs the town with the assistance of 100 warriors and 10 engineers under his command. They safeguard the community's underground water supply as well as keep the peace between the town's rival factions and visiting merchants passing through the region on their way to and from Ixtla. Although renowned for neucyo, few residents work in the industry. Most people lead simple lives as farmers raising maguey and other cacti on small tracts of land leased from Ixtla's nobles or provide goods and services to traders and visitors passing through the region.

Rumors claim the original brothers owe neucyo's creation to an otherworldly entity who offered them the recipe in exchange for their eternal servitude. There is no proof to confirm the tale, though the siblings died under highly unusual and suspicious circumstances. The older brother died a horrific death from gangrene after pricking his finger on a maguey leaf's thorn, while



the younger man perished during a localized dust storm that only engulfed his residence. In addition to these strange events, the current distillery owners along with their friends, employees, and extended family members occasionally scheme against each other to gain the upper hand.

UOLLI

Ruler: Tlototino

Government: Ixtlatati (direct control of Ixtla)

Population: 429 (429 Aztlis)

Languages: Common

Resources: Latex

The Aztlis and Poqozas obtain the vast majority of latex to craft olli from the ubiquitous olicuahuitl tree, better known as the rubber tree, which can be found in abundance throughout the Cuahtla and Toctli forests. Prolonged skin contact with olli very rarely has any detrimental effects, but some people develop a severe allergic reaction to the latex derived from this source, which can be especially problematic for a warrior wearing armor or wielding a weapon crafted from this substance. To solve this dilemma, Ixtla dispatched Zamotin, one of its most renowned druids and botanists into the wilderness 18 years ago to find an alternative, hypoallergenic latex source. After six years of searching and experimentation, the naturalist found a desert shrub just 40 miles from his home city that fit the bill. He dubbed the plant uolli, and the village that grew up around its cultivation and harvesting followed suit and adopted the same name.

Zamotin proved to be far better at studying plants than managing people. In less than one year, the able botanist nearly bankrupted the endeavor as the naïve administrator performed no oversight over his subordinates who mismanaged the business' accounts or brazenly embezzled money from the town's coffers. In a rare move, the city of Ixtla terminated Zamotin for gross incompetence and appointed an administrator who reports directly to the metropolis's ixtlatati, who exercises airtight control over the settlement. The current administrator Tlatotino carefully vets every field hand, who largely consist of former soldiers who are too old or too injured to keep fighting, but can still work. Everyone who lives in Uolli is sworn to secrecy, an edict enforced by the 100 warriors stationed here throughout the year who run the village like a top-secret military installation. These soldiers are not part of the city's regular military and are instead clandestinely recruited by the ixtlatati who chooses them from among the metropolis's calmecacs and noble families before they are old enough to serve in Ixtla's standing army. Movement into and out of the settlement is highly restricted. Guards stationed on the outskirts of Uolli turn away all visitors, travelers, and merchants attempting to enter the community except those authorized by the ixtlatati to deliver food and other supplies to the isolated compound. Likewise, most residents are also prohibited from leaving the village

without Tlatotino's express permission, and even then, he grants the privilege only to a handful of the most trusted and faithful residents. Ixtla's leadership refuses to even acknowledge the village's existence and has never told their fellow members in the Aztli Confederation about the latex-producing shrub and the research they are performing on the plant.

The rationale for the cloak-and-dagger intrigue surrounding Uolli defies an easy explanation. While a hypoallergenic latex is certainly advantageous, it hardly seems like a gamechanger in the balance of power between the four-member city-states of the Aztli Confederation or in the city's battle against the orcs or gnolls who cohabitate the desert. The smaller shrubs can produce only a fraction of the latex that can be harvested from a large tree over its lengthy lifetime, which would prevent Uolli alone from being able to meet Tehuatl's demand for the raw material. One factor that may play a role in this stance is the change in Ixtla's leadership. When Zamotin began his journey, the dwarf Glalrat Firebrand held the title of ixtlatati. When his quest ended, Nahuatzil had regained the post for the Aztlis. The cloak of secrecy enveloping the remote settlement may reside in Nahuatzil's understanding that deliberately sharing the knowledge with more than a handful of people exponentially increases the chances of it leaking not just to Ixtla's allies but more importantly, to its many enemies.

XALPIT

Gravel, loose stones, dust, and fallow soil cover much of the Cepual Desert's surface, but this 1,355-square-mile triangular-shaped area in the desert's southwestern corner features a vast sea of fine sand formed into crescent dunes. Plants and water are virtually non-existent, and only a handful of small, hardy mammals and reptiles inhabit the region. After the fall of Xacota, a vile snake cult took root in this remote corner of the desert. The group's leader, a fanatical warlock, struck a bargain with an entity she believed to be a surviving member of the Luminous Court that served Tlatoani thousands of years earlier. When news of the heretical cult reached Nonotzali's ears during his sojourn throughout Tehuatl, the angry hero-god had to act forcefully and decisively. He summoned mighty winds stronger than a raging tornado to lift the cabal's sacred temple off its foundation and pulverize it and its occupants into lifeless dust. Although the furious god had razed the unholy site and erased it from memory, some believed the group's leader escaped the deity's judgment and still wanders the swirling dunes searching for a remnant or relic from her disintegrated sanctum. Legends suggest she seeks a diadem crafted from python fangs with a magical red agate at its center. She wore the jewelry atop her scaled head until the hero-god's cyclone removed it from its rightful place and scattered it into the sands. Like her temple, Nonotzali scrubbed her name from history. None have ever seen her, though grooves cut into the sand dunes suggest she slithers across Xalpit on her belly and burrows through the granular material.

CHAPTER NINE: CUAHTLA FOREST

Overview Weather Table: Forest and Swamp

Baseline Temperature Deviation: +1d4 °F (north, south, and east of the Tepepan Mountains)

Daily Weather Deviation: +1d10 chance of rain (west of the Tepepan Mountains), –1d10 chance of rain east of the Tepepan Mountains

Relative Humidity Deviation: –1d10

This semitropical forest forms a concentric ring around the Tepepan Mountains in northern Tehuatl, reaching its widest points along the island's northern and western boundaries as well as the Great Canal to the south. While inhabited by elves, halflings, gnomes, and smaller populations of other humanoid races, the Aztlis consider the Cuahtla Forest an integral part of their homeland as it contains two member city-states of the Aztli Confederation: Atenco on the southwestern coastline a few leagues north of the Great Canal, and Tlazo located on the northern shore bordering the ocean. Indeed, the Aztlis literally make their mark throughout the woodlands in the form of hundreds of minor shrines and statues dedicated to the hero-gods that they intentionally scattered throughout the Cuahtla Forest to acknowledge their dominance over the territory north of the Great Canal. Despite the Aztlis' omnipresent symbols of power, the elves under the guidance of Lord Jondor Tarothan still consider themselves to be a separate and distinct kingdom from their human neighbors whom they simultaneously admire for their ingenuity, strong moral code, and familial emphasis yet detest for their sickening religious rituals. While Lord Jondor Tarothan enjoys the privileges of self-autonomy over his kingdom, his annual tribute payments to the Aztli Confederation confirm that his human neighbors hold the upper hand in their political relationship.

The Cuahtla Forest is more developed than the Toctli Forest, its southern counterpart. After descending from the neighboring mountains, the Aztlis immediately set about the task of transforming the waterlogged forest floor into chinampas. In many cases, the Aztlis felled trees and even redirected waterways to complete the metamorphosis from untamed land into arable land suitable for farming. In response to the humanoid incursion, the indigenous wildlife retreated into the forest's interior sections, led by its most fearsome animals: bears, jaguars, and crocodiles. The predators' larger quarry such as deer and tapirs mostly followed suit. Canine hunters such as wolves, coyotes, and foxes descend from the foothills and mountains to encroach on the forest's edges in pursuit of their next meal. However, many smaller native mammals such as the ample rodent population and its colorful assortment of birds live within and on the outskirts of many humanoid settlements. It is also not uncommon to wake up to the frightening sight of a tarantula's eight eyes staring back at the horrified person. Nonetheless, of these creatures, the Cuahtla Forest's humanoid inhabitants domesticated only turkeys and dogs.

Although technically classified as a semitropical forest, moderating breezes off the ocean partially suppress temperatures along and near coastal regions, making them more comfortable than interior sections far from any large body of water. Mangrove trees and other saltwater tolerant tree and plant species dominate the beachfront areas and the estuaries farther inland from the shoreline. Chaca, breadnut, and sapodilla trees also grow in saline soil as well as in more fertile earth found in the forest's interior.

TABLE 9-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE CUAHTLA FOREST

d20	Settlement Found
1–4	No settlement
5–6	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
7–12	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
13–16	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)
17–18	Large town (20d100 + 1,500 residents with permanent structures)
19–20	Make 1d3 additional rolls on this table

TABLE 9-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE CUAHTLA FOREST

d20	Demographics
1–5	Aztli-dominated settlement
6–10	Mixed community with Aztli majority
11–14	Mixed community with no majority (elves, halflings, gnomes, and Aztlis)
15–16	Mixed community with elvish majority
17–18	Elf-dominated settlement
19	Mixed community with gnome majority (no large town; small town instead)
20	Mixed community with halfling majority (no large town; small town instead)

ATENCO

Rulers: Headman Tlatzocuhlti and Otzoamma, high priest of Yaoctectl

Government: Oligarchy

Population: 73,398 (68,074 Aztlis, 2,353 elves, 1,211 dwarves, 720 halflings, 531 gnomes, 305 Poqozas, 204 dragonborn)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Elvish, Gnome, Halfling

Resources: Maize, textiles, timber

Eight hundred and six years ago, Xacota's king dispatched the renowned explorer Zamacotl into the Cuahtla Forest to locate an ideal site to build a port city on the western coast of central Tehuatl. After spending four months surveying the landscape for a suitable location, Zamacotl stumbled upon an elevated plateau five miles from the shore surrounded by a network of channels. The elevation and brackish waterways offered a safe harbor and facilitated the movement of vessels through the untamed forest that would later become Atenco. Two months after his initial survey, engineers arrived at the plateau and were faced with an immediate problem Zamacotl overlooked — the lack of fresh drinking water. To overcome this deficiency, the king commissioned the construction of an aqueduct diverting water from Lake Oyocoza 16 miles away. From these humble roots, Atenco quickly expanded from a bustling seaport into a sprawling metropolis in the span of 40 years. Today, Atenco stretches across four barrier islands and the mainland where most of its permanent structures are located.

HISTORY AND PEOPLE

Founded during Xacota's heyday, the city of Atenco began its existence under the fallen kingdom's hegemony. Zamacotl administered the settlement during its initial construction phase as he approved plans to cultivate the largely treeless barrier islands for farmland and connect the outposts to the mainland portion of the city using the preexisting brackish channels and manmade causeways. During this opening phase, Zamacotl and his team of architects, engineers, and laborers directed their energy toward the docks, piers, and warehouses that would power the new community's economy. On its wharfs, Atenco's shipbuilders set about the daunting task of building a merchant fleet to transport goods around the island and a flotilla of warships to protect them. Of course, the demands for skilled workers attracted thousands of Aztlis from the surrounding countryside. Within two years, Atenco's population swelled to 6,000 people working in a variety of primary and ancillary industries to support the new community.

Atenco flourished during this period, though it also suffered the growing pains associated with a newfound settlement. Periodic food and housing shortages sparked uprisings among discontent residents, though the unrest usually petered out within a few days as emergency measures addressed the inhabitants' grievances. In response to these concerns, Xacota's king

delegated resolving these matters to an appointed headman. The king entrusted this official with the authority to take whatever measures he or she deemed necessary to rectify the problems, though Xacota's monarch retained rulership over Atenco. However, this arrangement would have far-reaching and unanticipated consequences in the years to come, though during these formative years, the headman's role was more ceremonial than practical as Atenco improved and further developed its infrastructure.

Atenco's metamorphosis from a thriving port to a major player in Tehuatl's politics began with Xacota's rapid and catastrophic demise. In the chaos that ensued, Atenco's astute Headman Pazqueca capitalized on his fortuitous stroke of luck. He swiftly made an emergency declaration proclaiming himself as the city's supreme administrator until further notice. Pazqueca's edict rankled the feathers of the city's high priests who demanded an immediate audience with the brazen upstart. Tensions were high from the onset, yet the cagey headman convinced the clergy of his sound intentions and ensured he would stay out of their affairs and keep the engines of business humming. Nonetheless, Axomalatl, Yaoctotl's high priest required one, important concession from Pazqueca before he acquiesced — Axomalatl and his successors would select the head of Atenco's army and navy. Pazqueca reluctantly agreed as Atenco transitioned to a fully autonomous city-state.

Pazqueca's honeymoon was short-lived. Weeks after hammering out the power-sharing agreement, a horde of goblins and hobgoblins launched an offensive against the city. Although outnumbered, Atenco's armed forces were up to the challenge. Under the leadership of Tloxatoci, Atenco's first appointed general, the military repelled the goblinoid advance and strengthened its grip on the surrounding countryside. Pazqueca reached a mutual defense pact with the Cuahtla Forest's elvish king and secured the peace for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the schism with the Poqozas and their subsequent construction of the Great Canal enhanced Atenco's position in Tehuatl's hierarchy. The city's strategic location near the manmade waterway increased its prominence on the island, making Atenco a prime target for membership in the Aztli Confederation.

As a founding partner in the alliance, Atenco is overwhelmingly an Aztli city. The Aztlis' cultural and religious stamps are everywhere. Despite being a port city, more than half of its permanent residents live on the barrier islands where they earn a living farming the land, catching fish and mollusks from the brackish waters, or raising domesticated ducks and turkeys for consumption. The balance of Atenco's population lives on the mainland where they engage in a variety of commercial endeavors ranging from wholesaling to shipbuilding. Nearly all of Atenco's non-Aztli residents live in packed neighborhoods and enclaves scattered throughout the urban hub. Most people dwell among others of their own kind, but everyone is free to move about the city. Civic officials encourage integration, which is making some inroads among the Aztlis, Poqozas, and elves who call Atenco their home.

RELIGION

The temple of Yaoctotl wields tremendous influence in all Aztli communities, but none more so than in Atenco. Because of the city's unusual power-sharing agreement, the god's high priest has the right to appoint the commander of its military forces, giving him an important say on all political as well as religious matters. Indeed, the massive temple of Yaoctotl occupies a preeminent position in Atenco adjacent to the headman's seat of power in neighboring Iacona Palace. Atenco is the epicenter for all festivals honoring the Aztlis' chief deity. Temples dedicated to Quiahuitl, Nonotzali, Itztliteotl, and Zipe-Toteque are also found on the mainland portion of the city, while shrines devoted to Tonacayotl, Tlatlama, and Micoateotl thrive on the barrier islands. Yaoctotl's involvement in Atenco's political arena increases the citizens' devotion to the gods. The Aztlis tolerate the worship of non-Aztli faiths within Atenco, including Tlatcolli, though they frown upon ostentatious displays of religion devotion dedicated to any divine being who is not among their pantheon. There is a growing body of evidence that werewolves and werecoyotes who infiltrated the city secretly worship Itzcuin in the wilderness areas outside the city.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Atenco's easy access to the open ocean through the Quannaq River and the Great Canal gives it a nearly insurmountable logistical advantage over its rival trading partners. To facilitate commerce, Atenco's docks can simultaneously accommodate 10 merchant vessels as well as 50 canoes and rowboats. The city ships large quantities of locally produced maize, ducks, and turkeys to Tlazo

and the elvish settlement of Ysanyarr in southern Tehuatl as well as to smaller markets in the island's interior. Atenco's traders import precious metals, gemstones, and granite from the Tepepan Mountains with some clandestine shipments of illicit goods from Poqoza merchants south of the Great Canal. The legal commodities are readily available for sale in Atenco's bustling marketplace along the mainland shore facing the barrier islands. Farmers and merchants alike gather here to sell their wares to prospective buyers from throughout Tehuatl. Newcomers to the city's fabled bazaar compare the fierce competition between the vendors to an intense ullamaloni match between hated rivals. Shouting matches, verbal threats, and fistfights break out almost constantly though many customers believe the peddlers stage these confrontations to attract more eyes to their stall or storefront. Whether real or fake, many visitors consider a trip to Atenco's docks to be more entertaining than the liveliest festival they have ever seen.

Gamesmanship aside, bargains abound for those who know where to find them. In addition to growing food staples, Atenco's households also produce some of Tehuatl's finest clothing, cookware, furniture, and other sundry items at remarkably low prices. Surprisingly, these textiles are very popular in Ysanyarr where the majority elf population marvels at the stitchery and other fine details woven into the materials. The metropolis also manufactures maritime gear, and its expansive marina provides a full range of shipbuilding equipment and repair facilities. Although most vessels are designed and built for war, the city also crafts merchant vessels and the occasional pleasure craft for Tehuatl's rich and powerful. Of course, constructing these wooden vessels requires large supplies of freshly hewn timber harvested from the forest surrounding the city. The cut trees are then then corded together and pulled downriver for use on Atenco's wharfs or transported to other markets adjoined to the river. Ysanyarr is a popular destination for Atenco's timber as the elves are master carpenters who simultaneously loathe despoiling the pristine wilderness surrounding their homes. While Ysanyarr may enjoy many of Atenco's handiworks and raw goods, Tlazo is its largest trading partner. The agricultural powerhouse ships large quantities of maize, grain, and vegetables to its northern neighbor with lesser quantities of these same products being sent to Ixtla via a circuitous overland route. The port city also exports many of its other goods, including timber, to the elven communities on the western shores of the Toctli forest and the Poqoza settlements on the southern side of the island.

DIPLOMACY

Atenco collects tributes from numerous small towns and villages in the southern part of the Cuahtla Forest north of the Great Canal as well as in large swaths of the Caya Grasslands and the southwestern quadrant of the Tepepan Mountains. The city also administers the Ichichta causeway on the western side of the Poqozas' manmade waterway. Atenco is the only Aztli city to oversee a settlement, albeit a small one, in Poqoza territory just south of Ichichta. Atenco's envoys in these areas never mince words. They approach every situation with blunt honesty, spelling out their demands in no uncertain terms. Much of their directness stems from the potent influence that the temple of Yaoctotl exerts over its politics. The Aztlis' chief deity takes what he wants, and his disciples are no different. Unlike the old adage, Atenco gladly takes prisoners when dealing with its subject communities, though these captives never return to their homelands.

Atenco's delegates have a chip on their shoulders when interacting with their fellow members of the Aztli Confederation. They resent being viewed as Tlazo's uncouth junior partner in the Cuahtla Forest. The city's representatives are quick to point out that they stand closest to the frontline with the Poqozas. Atenco's rivalry with Tlazo sometimes clouds its judgment, causing the city's negotiators to overextend themselves when vying for tributes solely out of a desire to beat Tlazo regardless of the impracticalities or cost. In stark contrast, Atenco seems apathetic toward Ixtla and Mactli. Its only complaint lies with the fact that its generals as well as its elite soldiers believe their counterparts lack their fighting spirit and enthusiasm for battle. The soldiers from Ixtla chuckle at this notion and counter that Atenco's troops seem more interested in personal glory than achieving victory. Mactli's residents also outwardly scoff at the idea but internally acknowledge the astuteness of such observations.

GOVERNMENT

Pazqueca's bold gambit set the stage for Atenco's government after Xacota's spectacular collapse. Under his power-sharing arrangement, the city's headman, which became a hereditary post, governs over all of Atenco's civil institutions. Meanwhile, the high priest of Yaoctotl appoints the supreme commander of



its army, a benefit blunted by the integrated nature of the Aztli Confederation's military forces. Nonetheless, the current high priest Otzoamma carefully mulled his decision and made a wise choice in a no-nonsense general from Ixtla named Xilitl. His choice enjoys tremendous popularity among the rank-and-file including the soldiers and officers hailing from Atenco itself. The cagey Otzoamma blatantly reminds Tlatzacuhlti, Atenco's current headman, of this inconvenient fact. The youthful Tlatzacuhlti fails to grasp the significance of Otzoamma's close ties to Atenco's military, while the lustful teenager occupies much of his time trying to find a suitable wife largely through trial and error. These distractions force the energetic young man to rely heavily upon advice from the calpoalli, a body of 10 elected representatives chosen from each of the city's 10 districts. Of course, some of these individuals often serve their best interests and not the city's as a whole. While dysfunction has not fully taken hold, the lack of public services in some corners of Atenco has spurred some grumbling from neglected farmers and commercial interests unfairly harmed by well-connected rivals. Many citizens now refer to Hozaquetzo, the representative from the city's busiest wharf district, as Atenco's "backbone" because of his tremendous influence over the otherwise preoccupied headman. In furtherance of his ambitions, his young daughter Izacoyatl seems poised to surge to the forefront of Tlatzacuhlti's suitors.

However, the average citizen is far removed from these twisted machinations and power struggles. Their interactions with Atenco's civic institutions are seen in the maintenance of its infrastructure, which is generally reliable with a few exceptions and their ability to seek redress for grievances in the metropolis's court system. Although the headman serves as the supreme justice, 20 elders appointed by the members of the calpoalli preside over legal matters. These officers adjudicate the outcomes of civil and criminal cases that the civilians under their jurisdiction bring before them. Atenco depends upon its military forces to patrol the streets, and its senior officers to investigate and prosecute violent offenses.

MILITARY

The city's military forces include generals, officers, and soldiers from Atenco as well as the Aztli Confederation's three other city-states. The army's leader

and top general Xilitl hails from Ixtla. He leads a force of 8,730 foot soldiers, archers, slingers, and engineers equipped with olli armor and wooden shields. Atenco's military is renowned for its heroism in the face of peril, though critics also hint that Atenco's fighting spirit derives from a narcissistic craving for attention and validation. The city's warriors also receive extensive swimming lessons in addition to their combat training. Most of the force is deployed in and around Atenco proper, including the city's barrier islands, while roughly 1,500 troops patrol the outlying areas surrounding the city or are garrisoned in the towns and villages under Atenco's aegis.

As a maritime power, Atenco boasts an impressive fleet of nine warships equipped with bronze rams and three masts. Manned by a crew of 20 oarsmen and 20 sailors, each vessel can accommodate 70 marines armed with flaming arrows, slings, and clubs in grand style. These large yet nimble ships have the seaworthiness to withstand storms on the open seas while maintaining the dexterity to navigate some of the hairpin turns in the channels and rivers around Atenco. In a remarkable innovation, the city's shipbuilders incorporated layers of olli into the vessels' hulls to increase their flexibility without sacrificing durability. In a pinch, sailors have used the gooey material to temporarily repair breaches and leaks. From an offensive standpoint, the ships also have crude artillery pieces: a winched turret that fires an obsidian tipped harpoon with bronze barbs up to 150 feet. The weapons are still prototypes, but early tests seem promising.

MAJOR THREATS

Atenco's ineffective headman leaves a leadership void that internal and external foes seek to exploit. Naturally, his subordinates Otzoamma and Hozaquetzo are more than happy to step into the breach to enhance their influence and personal interests. Neither party openly advocates ousting the headman from his position, but more radical elements among Atenco's mercantile class have clandestinely called for such an action. This secretive cabal known as the Itzquachi, or the suffocating cloth, supposedly gets aid and assistance from Ysanyarr. The gnolls from the Caya Grasslands always pose a threat to the Aztli city-states of northern Tehuatl along with the other aggressive goblinoids. As the city-state closest to the Great Canal, Atenco

takes it upon itself to vigilantly patrol the banks of the manmade waterway for Poqoza spies, smugglers, and raiding parties attempting to infiltrate their closely guarded territory. Roving bands of harpies and boggard villages also pose a significant threat to travelers passing through uncharted woodlands outside of Atenco.

Atenco's fleet keeps a wary eye toward the sea since an unexpected invasion 13 years earlier. A massive kraken emerged from the deep and destroyed two warships and devoured at least 100 citizens before Atenco's military forces drove it back into the depths. The waves have remained quiet since they bubbled up more than a decade ago, yet isolated reports of fresh sightings of gargantuan tentacles and the unusual fishman trickle ashore from time to time.

ICNOYOTL

During the hegemony of Xacota, pilgrims from throughout Tehuatl ventured to the village of Icnoyotl to pay homage to King Ahuizotl, the great ruler who ushered in the Age of Xacota. However, after the great metropolis fell into ruin, the Aztlis neglected to venerate the man who led their people to unprecedented heights. Within his small yet grandiose tomb, the outraged monarch refused to idly watch his empire crumble to dust. His steadfast determination stirred his slumbering soul to anger as Micoateotl allowed the long-dead king to return to his mortal body to restore order where chaos now reigned. In a frightening display of power, Ahuizotl razed his pyramid tomb from the confines of his golden coffin and returned to the world of men as a despicable undead monstrosity. Adorned in his turquoise death mask, Ahuizotl's shambling skeleton vainly attempted to resurrect the empire he forged centuries earlier to no avail. While some wished to see Xacota restored to its former glory, many Aztlis were glad to see the crumbling kingdom turn to dust, much like its first king. While the righteous hero Tlanextli longed to see order restored to the world, he could not, in good conscience, bow to the demands of an undead master. At his urging, he cobbled together a band of fellow adventurers and followers to destroy the undead scourge forever. Tlanextli and many of his companions fell that fateful day, yet they still accomplished their sacred mission to rid the island of its undead former master.

Since this great battle, Icnoyotl has remained silent and forgotten. The sundered stones from Ahuizotl's tomb still litter the fallow earth where nothing ever grows. Animals shun the locale, and humanoid who draw near feel an unholy dread fill their souls. While no signs of Ahuizotl remain, his gold coffin and death mask remain undiscovered. In addition to these treasures, many believe the avaricious king also took many of his earthly possessions with him to the grave. According to legend, he appointed his high priest of Itztliteotl to bury the objects beneath his tomb, but whether the covetous cleric obeyed his king's final wish remains uncertain. Several expeditions have attempted to excavate the



area, but the precise location of Ahuizotl's tomb remains elusive. The few who dared to disturb this unhallowed ground never stayed too long as fear got the better of them, causing these intrepid souls to abandon their task and flee for their lives.

ITAMOYA

Crossroads hold a special significance for the Aztlis. Although there are no formal roads in the traditional sense in Tehuatl, crude paths and trails are easy to find around settlements and other points of interest. Itamoya may be the most notorious place where these thoroughfares intersect. At this lonely spot, a long-forgotten route from ancient Xacota meets a more recent yet still remote highway leading from Tlazo to the abandoned village of Icnoyotl (see **Icnoyotl**) in the northern part of the Cuahtla Forest. Even the bravest Cuauhcoyotls fear to tread in this dread location for the handful of courageous souls who ventured here were never the same again. On those rare occasions where they could speak, their inane babbling continually repeated warnings about terrifying winged demons circling around the isolated locale. Those who heard the tales associated these monsters with the cihuateteo, the monstrous spirits of women who died in childbirth. Some claim that their Aztli ancestors attempted to appease these horrific apparitions with gold offerings and blood sacrifices, but the hateful creatures refused to relent. Instead, they savagely tore the petitioners to shreds and added their undead numbers to their vile cabal. The warnings and grim stories are still not enough to discourage adventurers from trying their luck against these cruel monsters who purportedly have amassed a hoard of riches from their predecessors who failed to accomplish the same deed.

LAKE OYOCOZA

A great aqueduct connects this massive freshwater lake to the bustling metropolis of Atenco 16 miles away. Made entirely from worked stone, the crucial, manmade channel funnels potable water from the slightly elevated lake into the city where it is distributed to residents and farmers for their drinking and agricultural needs. Atenco's dependency upon Lake Oyocoza makes it a prime target for saboteurs and adversaries who aspire to destroy this vital conduit or otherwise render it useless to the city's inhabitants. The lake covers a roughly 60-square-mile area, making it realistically impossible to contaminate the enormous body of water. However, the lake and aqueduct remain vulnerable to attack. To counteract this persistent threat, more than 200 specially trained axolotls occupy defensive positions on the manmade structure itself as well as the swampy terrain surrounding it. In addition, Atenco permanently stations 32 canoes manned by roughly 100 marines on the lake to complement one of its mighty warships that constantly patrols Lake Oyocoza's placid waters. In a pinch, these nimble craft can navigate the aqueduct's broad yet shallow water to aid in the structure's defense. Several settlements also line the lake's shores, providing additional Aztli eyes and ears to keep watch and defend Atenco's critical water supply. The residents of these small villages and towns subsist on a diet of fish hauled from the lake's bountiful waters and food staple crops grown in chinampas built atop the lake's shallowest edges.

MINNALIN

Ruler: The Grinning Teeth

Government: Gerontocracy

Population: 2,810 (2,602 gnomes, 128 Aztlis, 80 elves)

Languages: Gnome, Elvish, Common

Resources: Gadgets, ale, beer, mead

In the grand scheme of the Cuahtla Forest, the small, gnomish town of Minnalín is just a bit player. The Aztli and even elvish settlements exude far greater reach into the woodlands than this tiny, bucolic community of farmers and tinkers. Minnalín may not be renowned for its architecture or feared for its mighty army, yet as the site of the gnomes' first permanent settlement in Tehuatl, it holds a special place in the hearts of many proud gnomes who call the island home. Indeed, many consider a trip to Minnalín to be a required pilgrimage to view the historical location where Joslin Stunman first announced his people's arrival to the bemused Aztlis who had never seen one of his kind before he and 63 of his relatives and close friends revealed themselves. The first humans to lay

eyes on Joslin and his kin raced back to their village to gather reinforcements. When the force of 102 Aztli warriors returned the following morning, their bemusement transformed into disbelief as the gnomes' numbers had grown fourfold practically overnight. In addition to seemingly multiplying out of thin air, the gnomes greeted their Aztli visitors with prankish booby traps to dissuade them from attacking without overly angering them. The speechless humans who fell prey to their devices watched in dismay while the jovial gnomes danced and sang songs to entertain their annoyed guests.

After this initial puzzling encounter, the Aztlis and the elves, who met the gnomes in a similar manner, gave the curious humanoids a wide berth. Minnalín steadily grew into a hub of entrepreneurial activity focused on developing pioneering gadgets and tools. Yet, after several thousand years of relative isolation, Xacota's gaze cast its eyes toward the bustling community within the Cuahtla Forest. This time, the determined Aztlis were better prepared for their gnomish subjects. In addition to dispatching its warriors, the city also sent a dozen warlocks and sorcerers in league with Itztliteotl to bring the upstart settlement to heel. Outgunned and outnumbered, the gnomes wisely acquiesced to Xacota's demands for tribute, which they happily provided in the form of wacky contraptions with moving parts, gears, and round balls that quickly caught the Aztlis' fancy despite having no practical use. Within a few short years, the novelty items found their way into Aztli high society and have remained a prominent fixture in many Aztli homes.

Today, Minnalín remains a city of thinkers, innovators, and entertainers. The town falls under Tlazo's jurisdiction, which favors the gnomish citizens who admire its couatl advisors for their wisdom and insight. Being forest dwellers, the gnomish architects incorporated the trees and vegetation into their architecture, using the trunks as support beams for their homes and the canopies for roofs. Many residents keep treetop gardens outside their windows, which the nimble inhabitants reach by climbing spiral stairs built into the trunks. Despite the proliferation of arboreal homes, Minnalín's largest structures were constructed at ground level, including the town's centerpiece, the church of Dre'uian the Lame. Smaller shrines dedicated to other gnomish gods including Iskardar and Kittail Hillcaller also occupy prominent locations within the community. To protect these institutions and the settlement's residents, the gnomish elders who govern the city keep a force of 170 soldiers at the ready to repel invaders. Tlazo also maintains a small garrison of 60 jaguar warriors who shockingly fight alongside their gnomish counterparts against their common foes. The two factions generally cooperate with each other with the Aztlis never interfering with the gnomes' rights to self-govern.

The gnomes dislike the taste of maize, turkey, and most other Aztli food and drink staples. They prefer feasting on wild mushrooms, tomatoes, pumpkins, and the occasional deer they hunt in the forest as well as partaking in ale, beer, and mead instead of pulque, which they find disgusting. Although everyone grows some food on their property or in their household gardens, only half of the town's inhabitants are solely farmers. The remainder operate workshops or own their own businesses, such as taverns, inns catering to gnomes visiting family members, textile shops, and storefronts. Minnalín's council of five elders known as the Grinning Teeth regulate these trades and oversee the town's public works and services using small fees collected from every business operating within the town. Elevation to membership in the Grinning Teeth is automatically granted to the five oldest members of the community who were born in Minnalín.

OMEHUAL RIVER

Fed by the nourishing waters of Ouatulli Lake, the Omehual River offers the city of Mactli a gateway to the ocean. The lazy waterway is more than up to the critical task of facilitating the passage of large ships and vessels through its broad banks and deep riverbed. Although the river poses no significant logistical challenges to commercial traffic, its wooded banks grant pirates and raiders ample cover and camouflage when attacking passing watercraft. Gnolls and hobgoblins periodically menace merchant ships making their way to and from Mactli, though the city's naval presence on the waterway helps to discourage these assaults. Nonetheless, scattered reports claim the two rivals now work together under the banner of a group called the Snarling Dog, leading the Aztlis to presume the gnolls converted their orcish counterparts into Itzcuin's minions as well. The allure of treasure and the opportunity to pound Aztli skulls proves too great a temptation for the aggressive humanoids to let slip through their greedy fingers. Despite the bandit activity, the river banks are hardly uninhabited, as multiple Aztli villages flourish along the Omehual close to its source, while Tulita enclaves inhabit the areas near the ocean.

OMIEX

Foul stench is normally associated with festering wetlands, but this 226-square-mile swath of evergreens exudes a stink exponentially worse than a fetid bog or fen. The reason remains a mystery, though some curious finds in the almost universally avoided patch of trees and shrubs may offer a plausible theory. Adventurers traipsing through the area occasionally stumble upon a solid, waxy substance just beneath the soil that bears a striking resemblance to ambergris. However, the material retains its rancid smell after removing it from the dirt and its odor only gets worse with age rather than improving. The Aztlis refer to it as omiex, which accounts for the name ascribed to the area. Omiex captures the attention of scavengers, especially corporeal undead who dig up the ground looking for a piece of the oddly sweet tasting goop. Despite the palatable flavor, even the living dead forcibly vomit omiex out of their systems within a few minutes after ingesting it. Still, the abominations inexplicably venture here to dine on the grotesque meal despite the unpleasant aftereffects.

ONACATOYA RIVER

Freshwater from rains and melting snows pelting the Tepepan Mountains flows down the slopes through the Caya Grasslands and then into the Cuahtla Forest before ending its 132-mile journey at the ocean on the island's western edge. The slow-moving waterway has an average width of 80 feet and an average depth of 30 feet with some shallows and deeper sections intervening along the course of its journey. The Onacatoya serves as a vital trade conduit for the city of Ysanyarr, allowing the elf community to import and export goods and provisions across the ocean in addition to connecting them to the Firebrand dwarves of the Tepepan Mountains. Aztli ships transport food and other vital necessities to Ysanyarr through the oceanic corridor, while the dwarves periodically ship precious metals and gemstones to Ysanyarr in exchange for finished goods. Although generally safe, the Onacatoya teems with quippers and snakes who quickly attack anyone who falls into the river or purposely swims in it. Those who opt for the latter choice usually do so to search the riverbed for the wooden remains of the *Quiloz*, an allegedly treasure-laden Aztli vessel that sunk in these waters three decades earlier. The stories claim that gold and silver extracted from the Tepepan Mountains weighed down the vessel, causing it to sink somewhere between Ysanyarr and the Caya Grasslands. No one survived the shipwreck. However, several days later, the discovery of half-eaten waterlogged bodies that had been dragged ashore suggested humanoid involvement in the ship's disappearance. Many believe the shipwreck to be the handiwork of one of the river's amphibious humanoid inhabitants.

QUANNAQA RIVER

The Aztli city-state of Atenco considers this vital conduit a central part of its domain. The waterway connects the metropolis to the ocean and the Tepepan Mountains where its waters begin. Along the way, it passes through the Cuahtla Forest, the Caya Grasslands, and the Cepual Desert, making stops in small villages at narrow bends in its twisting path. For much of its opening leg, the Quannaqa delivers freshwater from the peaks to thirsty settlers until turning brackish as it mingles with ocean water around Atenco's barrier islands. The river's depth and width vary wildly, ranging from approximately 10 feet in width in some sections to roughly 100 feet wide in others. Likewise, its depth changes abruptly, going from 10 feet deep at its shallowest point to 75 feet at its deepest. Although the areas around Atenco are relatively safe, portions of the Quannaqa River teem with bestial plesiosaurs in its broadest and deepest spots with predatory cats hunting for prey in forested areas. Atoyatl's priests and worshippers offer the goddess seashells and other treasures to protect them from these horrors while traveling along this river. In addition to their divine assistance, Atenco's navy periodically patrols the waterway in conjunction with defending a cargo-laden merchant vessel sailing to or from the city. Pirates and monstrous humanoids frequently commandeer undefended small boats and canoes venturing along the river. On some occasions, they ransom the captured crew back to their families. Other times, they mercilessly butcher them, steal their possessions, and dump their corpses into the river where some rise from their watery graves as undead monstrosities bent on seeking revenge.

TEOCUA

Eerie glowing lights and other strange phenomena plague this lonely expanse of woodland in the southern Cuahtla Forest. Locals refer to the 682-square-mile area as the Teocua, loosely translated as the "Tree Realm." Sentient plants such as treants and shambling mounds walk the land along with a complement of malevolent and beneficent fey creatures. The region is completely devoid of any humanoid settlements, but animals can be found in abundance within the secluded domain. Indeed, few humanoids ever venture here with the exception of Tlatlama's followers who consider it a badge of honor to complete a successful hunt within this patch of intelligent trees and plants. The handful of visitors who periodically trek here believe Teocua conceals vestiges of people and civilizations who dwelled here thousands of years before the first Aztli set foot in Tehuatl before it was even an island. Glimpses of protohumans and unusual figurines of primitive humanoids are occasionally unearthed during these expeditions, though not enough evidence has been discovered to support these conjectures. Some villagers also believe the region to be the home of a monstrous fey hunter who sometimes leaves its secure lair in its quest for humanoid blood. The witnesses to these rare events claim to have seen a winged beast with an Aztli face and bestial features gnawing on the meat and bones of a fresh kill before retreating to its feral domain within the Teocua.

TLAZO

Ruler: Temochtiani Upotaqui

Government: Council

Population: 109,525 (105,887 Aztlis, 1,924 dwarves, 802 elves, 523 gnomes, 320 halflings, 69 Poqozas)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Elvish

Resources: Maize, textiles, olli

After the fall of Xacota, Tehuatl fell into disarray. To quell frayed nerves and restore order, the hero-god Nonotzali descended from the heavens to walk among the world of men. In his efforts to regain the shaken faith of his followers, the deity helped his worshippers lay down the foundations of a new kingdom that would surpass Xacota in its justness and enlightenment. He found the ideal site for this shining jewel in the island's northwestern corner. Under his guidance, the rejuvenated Aztli coalesced in the region where they built the city of Tlazo on a dried lake bed four miles from the ocean. Before returning to his divine realm, the compassionate deity entrusted his loyal couatl servants to assist with the metropolis's construction and development. Within six years of cutting the first stone, Tlazo's population swelled to 20,000 people who migrated here in search of a better life amid the chaos in a settlement blessed by a revered hero-god.

HISTORY AND PEOPLE

To say that Tlazo grew by leaps and bounds would be a colossal understatement. However, when a hero-god intervenes in the affairs of mortals, anything is possible. Displaced Aztlis from far and wide converged on the fledgling settlement with the hopes of resurrecting Aztli dominance over the island or simply to seek refuge from the anarchy around them. Tlazo rapidly exploded during its early years. Its hard-working, new residents put their noses to the grindstone and transformed the goey muck and the surrounding woodlands into arable farmland. Nonotzali's involvement naturally prompted most to look to his priests and the couatls for guidance and leadership. However, the hero-god forbade his servants from holding political or religious office and commanded them to function solely as counselors to the city's Aztli rulers. Instead, the scholarly deity looked to the wisest of his citizens to rule in his stead. In this regard, the temple of Nonotzali established the Academy of Arts, Knowledge, and Magic to gather the collected learning of the Aztlis together and encourage further study in a variety of diverse disciplines. These accomplished scholars then choose a leader from among their ranks to serve as the temochtiani, "the teacher," who acts as Tlazo's leader with input from his or her couatl advisors.

Despite Nonotzali's direct intervention and his celestial aides' oversight, the transition of power from a deity to a mortal did not go unchallenged. Tlazo's warriors bristled at the notion of taking commands from someone who never set foot on the battlefield or raised a macuahuitl to any enemy. In what began known as the Tecpatl Uprising, a group of otamis stormed the academy and

confronted Xacpezo, Tlazo's first temochtiani. They placed their daggers to his chest and demanded he explain why they should acknowledge his authority over them. According to legend, Xacpezo calmly rationalized that strength of mind always prevails over strength of hand. The warrior with the keener wit disarms the soldier with the sharper blade. It is keenness of thought that triumphs over weakness of body, for it is possible to kill a man, but not an idea. With those words, the otamis lowered their tecpatls and accepted Xacpezo as the city's rightful ruler.

Since Xacpezo's ascension, nine men and three women have attained the title of temochtiani, though most refer to Tlazo's domain as the Couatl Kingdom despite the fact that they play no direct role governing the city's largely Aztli population. Some elves, dwarves, gnomes, halflings, and others migrated into Tlazo where they carved out a living as artisans working on the city's vast public works or as contractors commissioned by private parties. Regardless of race, Tlazo's people live by one overriding mantra: "Think it through before you do." Their penchant for deliberating over mundane matters frustrates visitors accustomed to quick answers, but residents apply this philosophy to everything they do regardless of how trivial. Because of this trait, life in Tlazo moves at a slower pace than other Aztli cities, yet once someone puts their mind to something, that individual sees the task through to its conclusion. While things may not get done quickly enough to satisfy some people, they are almost always done thoroughly and correctly.

RELIGION

It goes without saying that the Feathered Serpent Nonotzali, Tlazo's founder, is the city's patron deity. His grand step pyramid temple stands atop the exact spot where the god stood when he surveyed the landscape centuries earlier and towers over every nearby building including the adjacent Academy of Arts, Knowledge, and Magic. Festivals honoring Nonotzali shut down the city while his followers blow their death whistles and perform songs and dances in his honor. Temples dedicated to Yaocteutl, Quiahuatl, Itztliteotl, and Zipe-Toteque stand at each corner of the city's meticulously designed grid system at a point corresponding to one of the cardinal directions. Places of worship for the other Aztli deities can also be found throughout Tlazo in addition to churches and temples honoring non-Aztli deities. Furthermore, the city's dwarves pay homage to Zipe-Toteque, though they refuse to partake in or directly witness any of his ghastly rites. The elvish community also shows their respect for Nonotzali by offering artworks and codices as sacrifices to the deity. Although he has no formal temple, many revere the city's mausoleum on the outskirts of Tlazo as Micoateotl's sacred sanctum. Because the city is built atop a former lake bed, the corpses of the dead are either interred whole for those who died a noble death in battle or childbirth, while the remains of anyone who succumbed to old age or disease are typically cremated at the site.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Within 10 years of its founding, Tlazo's engineers and laborers built a series of canals and locks linking the urban center and its watery thoroughfares with the ocean four miles to the north. Tlazo's rich earth produces great yields of maize, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, and beans that merchants export by ship to coastal ports throughout Tehuatl and by overland routes to interior destinations. While agricultural products account for its commercial bread and butter, the city's dwarven foundries produce some of Tehuatl's finest steel and metalworks using ore quarried from the Tepepan Mountains. Likewise, Aztlis and other humanoid botanists and chemists affiliated with the Academy of Arts, Knowledge, and Magic concoct unique and wondrous herbal remedies that include experimental varieties of oli that have household and military applications. Tlazo stands at the forefront of medical research and causes many patients to trek to Tlazo for treatment in the academy's groundbreaking hospital wing. The city's sprawling botanical gardens on the urban hub's outskirts supply the academy's medical facilities with its medicinal plants. Merchants export surplus quantities of vanilla, passion flowers, and other exotic plants to markets in local towns and villages.

Tlazo also boasts a robust textile industry. Its looms weave much of Tehuatl's finest clothing, including the quachtlis that are used as currency throughout the Aztli Confederation. While these precisely crafted pieces of cloth are made to exacting specifications under close governmental supervision, the vast majority of finished goods are made in ordinary homes by seamstresses who mastered their craft in school and at home.

DIPLOMACY

In true Tlazo fashion, its government officials and envoys carry themselves with the utmost decorum and reserve. Someone from Tlazo always chooses his or her words very carefully for they are masters of subtlety and nuance. According to legend, Xacpezo once deliberated for six minutes when asked to name his wife's most admirable trait. Upotaqui, the city's current temochtiani and his ministers approach any negotiation or even informal dialogue with precise language, but their stoic demeanor sometimes infuriates impassioned friends and enemies alike. Delegates from the Aztli Confederation's other member city-states, especially those from Ixtla, decry their parental demeanor during their interactions. Some muse that their seemingly infinite patience is just a stalling tactic designed to wear down antsy counterparts. Upotaqui counters that his introspective thought process allows him to analyze an issue from multiple perspectives rather than see it just through his potentially biased eyes.

The couatls, Nonotzali's celestial emissaries, also represent Tlazo in a number of important matters involving the Aztli Confederation or the city-state's external adversaries, especially in the city's dealings with its southern neighbors, the elves of Ysanyarr. Over the years, the couatls have made peace overtures to the various goblinoids, orcs, and gnolls dwelling within the Cuahltla Forest with varying degrees of success. While the serpentine beings have hammered out some short-term accords with the goblinoids and orcs, the gnolls rebuffed their diplomatic missions out of hand. The fanatical servants of Nonotzali's devious twin, Itzcuin, would never entertain the notion of settling their scores with the god's despised sibling. In addition to forging relationships within Tehuatl, Tlazo's couatl counselors use their innate magical abilities to communicate with contacts throughout the Lost Lands. Although their outreaches are still in their infancy stage, the couatls believe their work will pay future dividends as they seek to negotiate trade agreements with distant partners or simply share knowledge with scholars from Akados and Libynos.

GOVERNMENT

Guided by its divine founder's hand, Tlazo envisions itself as a beacon of learning and understanding. Nothing reflects this ideal better than its elected head of state, the temochtiani. Chosen by and from among the scholars at the Academy of Arts, Knowledge, and Magic, the person usually represents the city's best and brightest — with an emphasis on "usually." Despite the noble ideals, these elections are not solely merit-based and rely upon politicking. While many capable leaders have demonstrated an aptitude for governing and wooing supporters, a handful were skilled campaigners and inept or corrupt leaders. The last of these gained the title just seven years ago. The poseur Cuemzo the Jovial brazenly used his office to enrich his personal fortunes at Tlazo's expense. Fortunately, his reign lasted only 274 days until his mysterious "disappearance" that many rightfully attributed to the intervention of his four astute and righteous counselors. Upotaqui, the current temochtiani, succeeded his dishonest predecessor and immediately set about the task of undoing his errors. Although the temochtiani rules alone, he receives advice and guidance from his four couatl counselors: Aztomi, Ciuhatlan, Maizatu, and Tlatalan. Known as the Wings of the Wind, the celestial quartet serves as the temochtiani's subordinates, though as history has shown or at least implies, they are willing to take drastic actions when a temochtiani steps too far out of line. The Wings of the Wind oversee the city's day-to-day administration at the behest of the temochtiani. To ensure accountability, the couatls established a rigid hierarchy of officials who answer directly to them about the administration of the city's civic institutions ranging from its sanitation department to its construction division. Tlazo's government tackles problems in the same manner that its citizens approach matters in their daily lives. Responses to crises may trend on the slow side, but Tlazo generally solves more issues in one calculated fell swoop rather than resorting to trial and error. No institution enjoys a better reputation in this regard than the judicial system. By right, any citizen may request that the temochtiani hear his case. He is authorized by law to delegate the matter only to a member of the Wings of the Wind for judgment who also serve as magistrates along with appointed members from the academy. Legal decisions take time, yet the exacting attention to detail in the written decision clearly spells out the author's logical thought process and the individual's work ethic.

MILITARY

Tlazo emphasizes thought over action. Its military also abides by this philosophy. Exuacuahlti, a cleric of Yaocoteotl and shrewd tactician, aptly commands the city's military forces. Born and raised in Atenco, he quickly embraced the city's way of life and adopted much of its thinking into his own. While most Aztli soldiers itch at the chance to display their courage and skill, Exuacuahlti bides his time and carefully studies his foes before committing his forces to battle. His generals and officers from Atenco, Ixtla, and Mactli dislike his tactics yet cannot argue with his success. His ground force of 12,650 warriors includes infantry troops armed with spears and macuahuitls, auxiliaries equipped with longbows, blowguns, and slings, and lightly armored scouts and reconnaissance troops. Tlazo's armies share the same similarities as its partners in the Aztli Confederation. They are fully integrated with generals and officers hailing from the other three city-states. Most of Tlazo's professional army lives in barracks on the city's outskirts, though roughly 2,000 soldiers patrol the surrounding wilderness or are stationed in smaller Aztli villages and towns scattered throughout the island's northwestern quadrant. In addition to the men and women under arms, the city can muster another 15,000 to 20,000 able-bodied adults to fight alongside its formal military. Fortunately, Tlazo has never activated its citizen-soldiers during its history.

As a coastal city, Tlazo maintains a navy of six full-fledged warships powered by magical internal engines pioneered at the academy. Only Upotaqui, the couatls, and its inventor knows its inner workings, but some suspect constructs move the device's olli belts and wooden fans. Regardless of how they operate, the lack of oarsmen frees up more space on the vessel for its 140 marines. Tlazo focuses its maritime interest on its fleet of 132 canoes that can accommodate four warriors. These ships patrol the rivers and streams connected to Tlazo.

MAJOR THREATS

Tlazo's academy has made many major technological and mystical breakthroughs during its illustrious history, discoveries that hosts of creatures would love to steal or duplicate for their own nefarious purposes. Security in the research facilities is extremely tight, with construct guards and a host of deadly mechanical and magical traps to deter thieves. Nonetheless, robbers attempt to break into the complex at least once a year. Rumors also claim that some members have sold proprietary secrets to the highest bidder. From a monstrous standpoint, several green dragons make their homes in the forest around Tlazo. Treants also inhabit the woods along with the resident fey, orcs, goblinoids, and gnolls. Legends also speak of a wizard who lost an election for temochtiani and retreated into the forest, where he continued his bizarre magical experiments. In many of these tales, he rose from the grave after death to pursue his studies as a member of the dreaded undead.

YSANYARR

Ruler: Lord Jondor Tarothan

Government: Monarchy

Population: 34,008 (29,674 elves, 2,802 Aztlis, 683 gnomes, 343 halflings, 201 dwarves, 105 Tultitas, 86 Poqozas, 67 dragonborn, 47 Tlotls)

Languages: Elven, Common, Gnome, Halfling, Dwarven

Resources: Agriculture, artwork, pottery

Within the walls and towers of his grand palace, Lord Jondor Tarothan imagines an idyllic world where he rules his city without Aztli intervention. His people's perpetual foes always keep a steely gaze on the aloof elf brooding over his plight as an absolute ruler who lacks the power to rule his realm in the absolute manner he envisions. The Aztli delegation from Tlazo, which lies 74 miles north of Ysanyarr, gives the elf leader unfettered authority to do so as he pleases within the 30-foot-high stone walls of his home city short of failing to remit his annual tribute to the Aztli Confederation. He is even free to exact punishment against an Aztli with the caveat that he must have just cause for doing so. Despite his seemingly free rein over Ysanyarr, Lord Jondor still broods about his dilemma of being an elvish lord chafed by an Aztli yoke.

In his 132 years as the city's undisputed monarch, the metropolis has expanded its territory to roughly 60 square miles to accommodate a population that has tripled over that span. Tehuatl's elves are wilder and more feral than most encountered in the Lost Lands, yet their demeanors are not reflected in

the metropolis's wondrous architecture that begrudgingly borrowed some elements from Aztli designs. Multi-storied stone buildings decorated with dazzling artwork and seemingly carved from single blocks of limestone create a curved grid-like network of cobblestone avenues and wide thoroughfares that better resemble mosaics than paved roads. The streets are a secondary means of transportation within the city. Its true fortunes lie with the Onacatoya River that funnels water down from the Tepepan Mountains, granting the community access to the ocean 12 miles from its doorstep. Although the citizens produce sizable harvests of maize, potatoes, squash, and other vegetables on its tracts of arable land, its people still depend upon food imported from other parts of the island to meet its increasing demands. Naturally, the Aztli delegation from Tlazo along with its retinue of pochtecas are more than happy to oblige Ysanyarr's needs with food staples from its bountiful supplies.

Ysanyarr's refined architectural appearance belies the frenetic pace that courses through the city. The people of Ysanyarr work hard throughout the year, whether they are tilling its fields, unloading containers off its bustling docks, foraging for food in the surrounding forest, or hustling potential customers for new business. The town's skilled craftsmen produce some of Tehuatl's finest artworks and pottery pieces in their busy studios, often at the commission of wealthy Aztlis or elves from settlements across the island. Noblemen frequently brag about owning a painting, sculpture, or amphora made in one of Ysanyarr's legendary studios. In this vein, its people have a contagious, can-do attitude they partially adopted from the Aztlis' stringent work ethic. Instead of complaining about their predicament, citizens power through the problems of day-to-day life, an outlook that fails to rub off on Ysanyarr's capable yet pouty ruler. When presented with a dilemma, they would much rather fix it themselves than rely upon haughty Lord Jondor Tarothan to come to their rescue. On the flip side of this positive outlook, some segments of the city's elvish population also exude an undercurrent of racial superiority during their interactions with the other races who cohabit the city alongside them. The elves who adopt this viewpoint do so subtly, acting as stern parents attempting to modify the behavior of their misguided, petulant children. These biases are currently confined to a small minority, though the numbers are slowly yet steadily growing as a byproduct of Lord Jondor's resentment for paying tributes to the Aztli Confederation and the mere presence of their delegation in a city he considers his own.

Ysanyarr's ruler vents his frustrations in his approach toward maintaining law and order within the city's formidable, defensive walls. His enforcement of the edicts he and his forebears wrote are best described as whimsical. His mood and personal tastes carry more weight in his courts of law than the circumstances and severity of the offense. He takes giddy delight punishing Aztlis who run afoul of the law, yet adopts an air of resignation when forced to pass judgment on a fellow elf whom he treats more leniently than others. Fortunately for the accused, few cases ever reach his disinterested ears. The city's 60 magistrates, all of elvish descent, adjudicate almost every legal matter within Ysanyarr in a generally fair manner. They rely upon the vigilance of the metropolis's force of 165 constables to keep the peace within its imposing walls. In an emergency, Lord Jondor can muster 1,780 foot soldiers, archers, engineers, and magic-users to deal with practically any contingency, including an attack from the Aztli Confederation which would force the city to mobilize every man and woman of fighting age regardless of their training. During his people's last brief encounter with the Aztli war machine, the elves felt their human neighbors' sting and quickly realized they stood little chance of defeating a highly determined and cohesive enemy. Lord Jondor's father Voron wisely sued for peace and agreed to the Aztlis' demands for tribute in exchange for retaining his throne and autonomy.

Despite Jondor's machinations and suspicions, the Aztli delegation from Tlazo keeps a low-profile in the city at the advice of its astute ambassador, the couatl Cuehotez. For their part, the Aztlis discreetly snicker at Jondor's expense. They view him as an undisciplined, temperamental child, yet they greatly admire the tenacity of his elvish subjects. Nonetheless, Cuehotez and his minions constantly gather intelligence about the fickle lord and his inner circle. Likewise, Jondor reciprocates the Aztlis' efforts, though his operatives lack the direction and expertise of their human counterparts.

CHAPTER TEN: THE GREAT CANAL

Overview Weather Table: Forest and Swamp

Baseline Temperature Deviation: -1d3 °F

Daily Weather Deviation: —

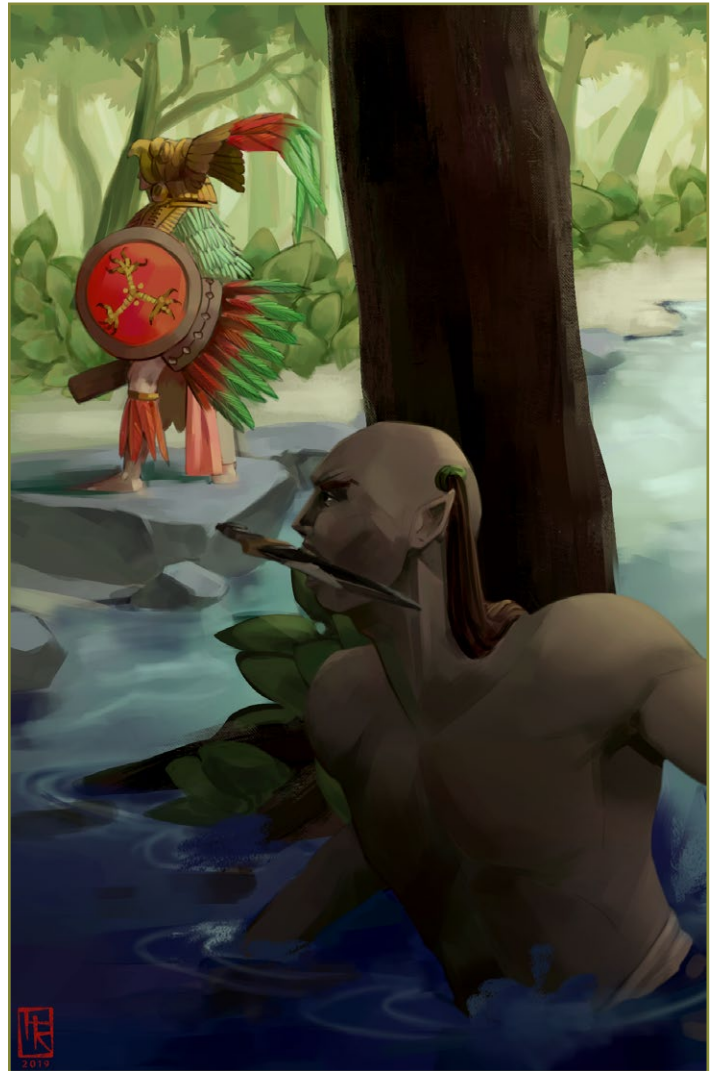
Relative Humidity Deviation: —

Built 371 years ago, the engineering marvel known simply as the Great Canal has become Tehuatl's most valuable manmade asset and a vital travel conduit over time. Sprung from the mind of the great Poqoza leader Mazalli, the wondrous creation took six years to build at the expense of hundreds of lives and nearly the entire Poqoza treasury at the time. The Great Canal's initial purposes were threefold: to serve as a formidable defensive military barrier; to clearly delineate Poqoza territory from Aztli territory; and as an ideological statement confirming the Poqozas' desire to forever extricate themselves from Aztli rule. Of course, complications beset these noble intentions. Most importantly, the architects built the structure with feasibility and expeditiousness in mind rather than trying to encapsulate areas loyal to the Poqozas' cause. The canal uprooted residents on both sides — Aztlis south of the intended route who refused to abandon the bulk of the hero-gods, and Poqozas north of the canal who realized their continued survival depended upon being alongside their fellow Poqozas. The upheaval led to numerous skirmishes along the way between the warring sides that plagued construction and forced multiple deviations from the planned route to circumvent raging warzones. Despite these obstacles and delays, the canal's dimensions remain remarkably universal throughout the span with widths ranging between 50 and 60 feet with an average depth of 10 feet. While the Aztlis and Poqozas both refer to the manmade structure as the Great Canal, they call the water flowing through it the Acaotilihuei.

During its formative years, the warring sides adopted a trial-and-error approach toward the imposing obstacle. Each side would swim or paddle across the canal on boats to see how much resistance they would meet on the other side. In response to these incursions, each side beefed up its personnel to ward off the next wave of trespassers. Over time, the spectacle became a choreographed game of hide-and-seek as the same enemies encountered each other multiple times over the course of several consecutive days. When the novelty wore off, the two sides settled into a protracted period where the canal became a buffer zone separating the firmly entrenched adversaries. Both sides also made several attempts to dig tunnels beneath the canal, but by all accounts, both sides publicly agreed these endeavors ultimately failed. Nonetheless, some rumors persist about secret passages that burrow underneath the canal.

The Great Canal's next phase of development commenced when the Aztlis and Poqozas recognized its potential as a gateway for trade. Of course, the two hostile factions resorted to gamesmanship to broker a deal. For their part, the Aztli Confederation sent their warships into the canal to display their military might to force the Poqozas to capitulate to their demands for free unfettered access to the waterway the Poqozas had labored to build. The Poqozas' natural mistrust of their northern neighbors and intelligence gathered from their network of spies suggested the Aztlis would resort to such a bold and somewhat predictable tactic. To counteract them, the Poqozas booby-trapped sections of the canal. Their plan worked to perfection as the Aztli Confederation's flagship ran aground, tearing an irreparable hole in its hull, and marooning the crew. At the Couatl Kingdom's urging, the confederation agreed to pay the Poqozas an annual tribute for unrestricted access to the waterway along with the right to build three grand causeways across the barrier. The broad causeways contain luxurious homes and shops peddling wares from northern and southern Tehuatl.

Ezhuacoza, the largest of the causeways stretches across the canal roughly at its midway point. Measuring 200 feet across, Ezhuacoza features apartments, shops, a luxurious garden, a small zoo, and most controversially, a temple dedicated to Atoyatl. While the Poqozas have no direct animosity toward the largely benevolent Aztli goddess, the mere presence of an Aztli temple rankles most Poqozas who venture across the causeway. On an average day, 200 people cross the bridge to venture into the neighboring towns of Huitzineo on the northern side or Cotza on the southern side. Most foot traffic from the island's interior funnels into this site rather than the two secondary



causeways: Ixchicta on the western edge of the canal and Azuato on the eastern edge of the canal. The latter causeways' close proximity to the ocean surrounding the island diminishes merchant traffic on these spans. Farmers, laborers, and visitors make up the bulk of pedestrians, as these individuals sell their crops and their services to customers on the opposite side of the canal. These causeways are less developed than Ezhuacoza, with an average width of 60 feet and a more modest selection of boutiques, tenement complexes, and administrative buildings.

TABLE 10-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE GREAT CANAL

d20	Settlement Found
1-6	No settlement
7-14	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
15-18	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
19-20	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 10-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE GREAT CANAL (NORTH SIDE)

d20	Demographics
1-15	Aztli-dominated settlement
16-20	Mixed community with Aztli majority

TABLE 10-3: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE GREAT CANAL (SOUTH SIDE)

d20	Demographics
1-15	Poqoza-dominated settlement
16-20	Mixed community with Poqoza majority

AZUATO

The elevated causeway on the eastern side of the Great Canal is 60 feet wide and reaches an apex of 80 feet above the water's surface to accommodate watercraft that occasionally sail down the Acaotilihuei toward the ocean six miles away. Of the 327 people who live on Azuato, the overwhelming majority of them own or work at an establishment catering to maritime goods and services or find employment as sea captains and sailors. Azuato has an integrated population of Poqozas, Aztlis, and Tultas, the latter of whom engage in fishing and whaling. The causeway boasts an impressive system of pulleys and winches to suspend massive catches above the water for processing after the Tultas and some Aztli and Poqoza fishing boats drop off their hauls for processing. Of course, the disposal of waste products in the waterway gives the Acaotilihuei a foul smell in this region. Locals refer to this stretch of the Great Canal as Cipactlihuato, loosely translated as "crocodile path" because the discarded offal attracts the hungry reptilian beasts in droves. The architects later added steep walls and other protective barriers to prevent the ravenous animals from gaining access to the causeway itself and wreaking havoc on defenseless civilians. As an added measure, the elevated walled walkways leading to the causeway stretch more than one mile away from the canal's banks to further deter the predators from feasting on pedestrians crossing the bridge. Despite the precautionary efforts, the land surrounding Azuato remains sparsely populated. Wholesalers and fishmongers who frequent Azuato do so by sea and rarely stay here for longer than absolutely necessary. Some sailors claim an even more fearsome aquatic monster has established a lair in a nearby offshoot from the Great Canal. For now, the creature seems content to feed on whale and fish scraps, but several crewmembers swear to have recently seen a massive fin protruding from the water a few miles downstream from the causeway.

COTZA

Ruler: None

Government: Anarchy

Population: 922 (782 Poqozas, 99 Aztlis, 41 elves)

Languages: Common, Elven **Resources:** Trade, vice

The small town of Cotza better resembles an unruly frontier outpost than a thriving community. The settlement is almost exclusively Poqozas with a handful of elf and Aztli citizens interspersed among them. Surprisingly, the Poqozas do not maintain any organized military force within Cotza. However, it is not undefended. Rumors claim the Poqozas maintain an arsenal of powdered, dried psychedelic mushrooms they could deploy to stop the most determined army dead in its stoned tracks. The presence of several powerful Poqoza druids lends credence to the stories about the mysterious yet untested weapon. In a pinch, these men and women could call upon animal and fey reinforcements to bolster their ranks.

Absent its resident druids and the priesthood of Tlatcolli, Cotza's residents bristle at the notion of civic authority. Instead, the community polices itself with mixed results. Public intoxication, lewdness, and other acts of vice are tolerated until the situation threatens to devolve into violence. At that point, Cotza's citizens reluctantly intervene in the matter to diffuse the tensions. In addition to its permanent inhabitants, the town also has a recurring transient population of merchants, traders, and adventurers who number in the hundreds at any given time. Many of these visitors conduct their business on the causeway or in Huitzineo on the opposite side of the span. When not engaged in commercial endeavors, they spend their days frequenting the town's pulque taverns, brothels, and other assorted dens of iniquity scattered around Cotza in search of an evasive good time. It is not unusual for an Aztli guest to descend into a haze of sin and debauchery that leads them never to

return to their homeland north of the Great Canal. The Poqozas refer to the Aztli expatriate community as the Tlactica. While most welcome their prodigal cousins into the fold, some believe they are really Aztli spies masquerading as community members to gather intelligence for their distant masters. Tales of the Huitztlitl from neighboring Huitzineo fuel this speculation among the Poqozas.

EZHUACOZA

Ruler: Aztli Confederation

Government: Oligarchy

Population: 732 (668 Aztlis, 33 Poqozas, 31 elves)

Languages: Common, Elven

Resources: Trade

The Great Canal's grand central causeway functions as a full-fledged settlement too. Roughly 730 people of predominately Aztli lineage live and work in Ezhuacoza, which falls under the Aztlis' jurisdiction with support from the military barracks located in neighboring Huitzineo on the northern side of the canal. Ezhuacoza is the epicenter of trade between the Aztlis and Poqozas. Aztlis and a handful of dwarven and gnomish merchants sell salt, precious metals, and gemstones quarried from the Tepepan Mountains to the Poqozas in exchange for rare herbs, flowers, grains, pulque, and an assortment of illicit goods. Security is tight on the bridge as Aztli soldiers and Cuauhocolotls keep vigilant watch over the bridge to foil saboteurs seeking to harm or destroy the structure. Extremists on both sides of the span have attempted to sever the vital trade artery on several occasions to settle old scores or reassert their desire to prevent one side from spreading their influence to the other side. The temple of Atoyatl seems to be the focal point for the Poqozas who resent the Aztli goddess's presence, while the Aztlis fear the infiltration of addictive substances they believe would undermine their rigidly ordered society. In another development, the Aztli guards securing the causeway are actively investigating a growing rash of mysterious disappearances and the discovery of several mangled corpses on both sides of the canal. They suspect the attacks originate from the water because of the slimy footprints and small pools of water found close to the corpses.

HUITZINEO

Ruler: Aztli Confederation

Government: Oligarchy

Population: 2,449 (2,298 Aztlis, 130 Poqozas, 21 elves)

Languages: Common, Elven

Resources: Trade, gear

During its heyday, Huitzineo's population swelled to over 10,000 people, which naturally included laborers, artisans, and engineers tasked with building the stone span stretching across the Great Canal, while the neighboring causeway's construction was in full swing. After its completion, Huitzineo's permanent residents fell by three-quarters and have steadily remained at roughly 2,500 souls of almost exclusively Aztli descent. Aztli Confederation delegates from Atenco and Ixtla oversee Huitzineo's daily activities along with a contingent of 200 foot soldiers, archers, and Cuauhocolotls who patrol the settlement and the nearby causeway. Naturally, Huitzineo's access to the causeway and the Great Canal attract merchants and pochtecas from the Aztli Confederation to trade goods with the Poqozas and other settlements along the Great Canal's shores. Indeed, Huitzineo's wharf stretches nearly one-quarter mile along the edge of the Acaotilihuei with warehouses and docking facilities to accommodate vessels venturing to and from Huitzineo. The influx of travelers into the cosmopolitan community make it a popular destination or mustering point for adventurers seeking opportunities for fame and fortune throughout the region. Most explorers consider the temple of Cualliteotl to be the hotbed for rumors and intrigues within town while several permanently established pochtecas cater to their needs with provisions, gear, and, on occasions, a piece of magical equipment. Tlotzameca is generally recognized as Huitzineo's premier purveyor of adventuring needs that he procures from both sides of the Great Canal through his extensive network of Aztli, elvish, and Poqoza contacts. For the most part, the Aztli Confederation's representatives turn a blind eye to shady deals and unscrupulous vendors unless they directly impact the alliance's security. The soldiers under their command randomly search mostly non-Aztli visitors for illicit goods, keeping a keen lookout for psychoactive plants, alcohol, and strangely exotic foods. While the Aztlis do not openly display their disdain for their southern kin, they express their displeasure in subtler ways. Cualliteotl's temple may be the hub for information, but Huitzineo's seat of power resides

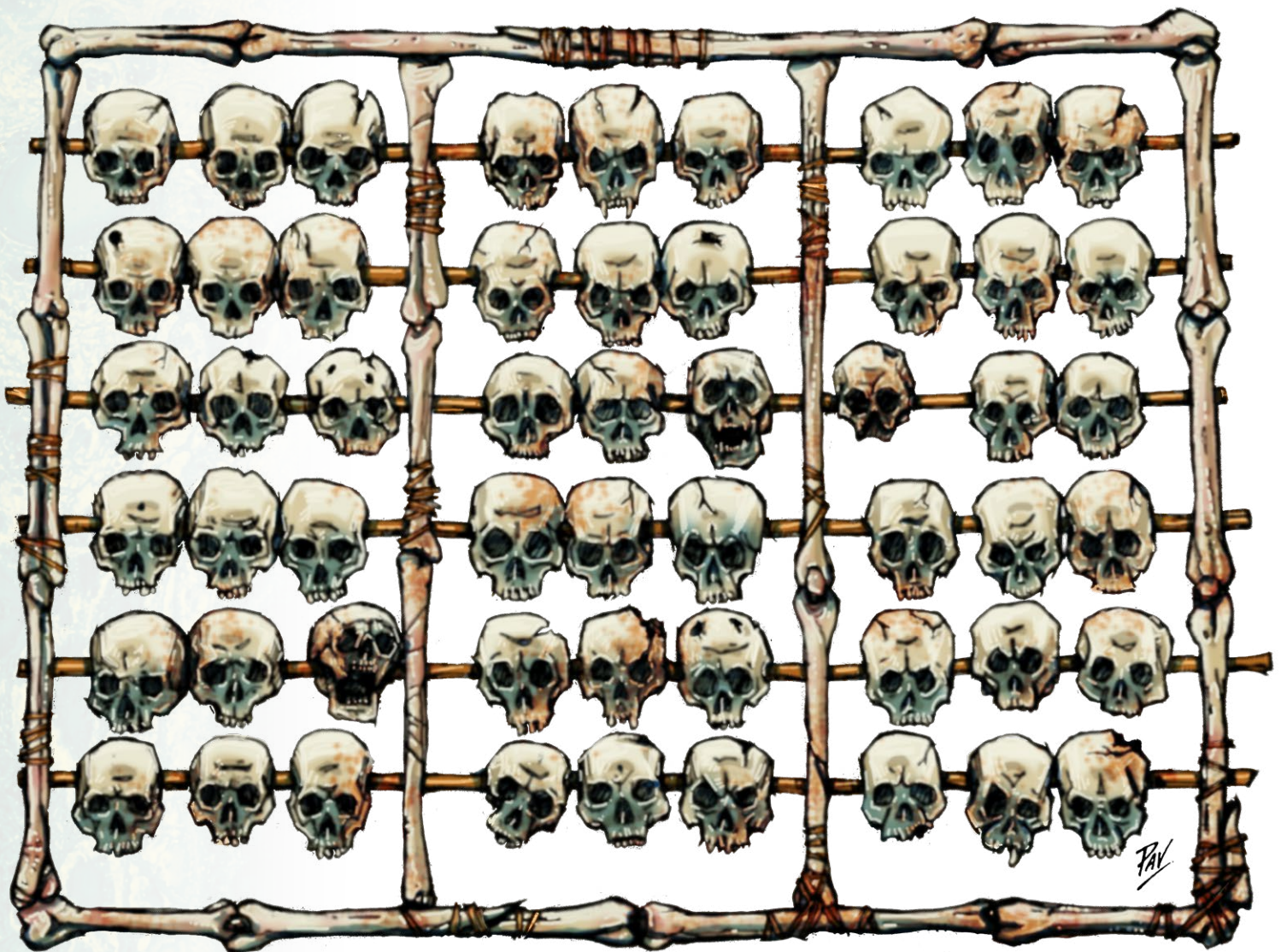
firmly within the temple of Yaoctotl where its priests offer bloody sacrifices to the Aztlis' chief deity in sight of Poqoza territory. To further press the point to the Poqozas, the Aztlis erected a tzompantli — a wooden rack to display skulls — on the temple's apex in full view of anyone on either side of the Great Canal. The Aztlis finally added more insult to injury by staging ullanaliztli games in a court at the temple's base, which entices Poqoza gamblers to wager on the contest's outcome in the shadow of this gruesome display.

While most of the Aztli hierarchy is content to take these nuanced jobs at the Poqozas, some more extreme elements occupy positions of power and influence within Huitzineo. A secretive cabal known as Huiteztli operates within the community. They occasionally trick Poqozas and elves into a compromising situation that they later use to extort their assistance with promoting Aztli causes. Although the group's leadership and members remain unidentified, most believe at least several priests of Yaoctotl direct or at least assist in the group's clandestine activities.

IXCHICTA

This stone causeway stretching across the western side of the Great Canal is the smallest of the three spans. Located 29 miles from the island's

western coastline along the northern edge of the Toctli Forest, Ixchicta has an average width of 50 feet and measures a meager 100 feet in length. Four massive wooden posts cut from ahuehuete trees were sunk into the Great Canal's riverbed to support the structure that reaches an apex of 50 feet above the water's surface. Steep granite staircases on each bank of the Great Canal grant access to the causeway proper, where 430 Aztli, Poqoza, and elvish carpenters and artisans predominately manufacture and sell decorative objects carved from local timber and silver jewelry set with local gemstones. Ixchicta's skilled craftsmen fuse Aztli and elvish techniques to produce many of the island's most coveted artistic pieces. Nobles from across Tehuatl often venture here to purchase Ixchicta's products for religious festivals, weddings, and as gifts to commemorate a special occasion. In addition to the permanent residents living on the causeway itself, some urban sprawl has spilled over onto both sides of the canal. The Aztli representatives from Atenco oversee the extended community, including the portions of Ixchicta on the southern bank, which rankles the Poqozas, elves, and canal's tiny halfling community, though not enough to motivate them to take any action to stop it. Ixchicta's spillover onto the mainland consists of farms, and a sprawling shipyard complex where Aztli engineers build the apanimacal, an amphibious sledged vehicle typically pulled through water and overland by an ilhuitecuani, a massive seal. They produce the vessels for the Aztli Confederation and wealthy nobles on both sides of the Great Canal.



CHAPTER ELEVEN: IZMALLI SWAMP

Overview Weather Table: Forest and Swamp

Baseline Temperature Deviation: +1d4 °F

Daily Weather Deviation: +2d10% chance of rain

Relative Humidity Deviation: +2d10%

A long, yet comparatively narrow strip of saltwater swamp stretches from the northern central portion of the island and then wraps around its eastern shore before petering out close to the central coast. Streams and rivers form a network of channels that carve the hot, steamy wetland into pieces. In addition to the permanent bodies of water, surge from the neighboring ocean pushes the tide inland, periodically inundating large portions of the flooded woodlands with copious volumes of standing water. The introduction of sediments and other nutrients from the oceanic currents creates fertile soil in the Izmalli Swamp, but deluges of saltwater inhibit the growth of most staple food crops and make for an inhospitable environment. Indeed, humanoid settlements are generally limited to coastal regions and a small number of communities situated near stable supplies of freshwater. Aztlis and Tultitas are generally the only two peoples who brave the elements to live in the harsh Izmalli Swamp alongside crocodilian hunters, feline predators, lizard people, and other aquatic humanoids not commonly associated with Aztli civilization, though all of these inhabitants take a back seat to the land's apex predator, the black dragon. The habitat supports a diverse array of amphibians, including frogs and toads, lizards, snakes, ducks, and other animals that take well to water. Insects breed at an accelerated pace in the warm, brackish water that functions as the perfect petri dish for their ravenous larvae. The saline water significantly limits the biome's flora as only those plants that can tolerate the high salt content can survive in the Izmalli Swamp. Mangrove trees and shrubs are the dominant plant species throughout the wetland.

Seasonal changes are barely noticeable; thus heat and humidity are constant nemeses throughout the year. Rainfall is most frequent during the spring and summer when the moisture in the air builds to unbearable levels. In addition to the water falling from the skies, coastal storms funnel ocean water inland, saturating the earth throughout the majority of the conventional growing season. Some communities adapt to the overflowing water by elevating their homes above the ground or building them atop mounds. Conventional agriculture faces many challenges in this grueling environment, forcing most people who live here to rely heavily upon fishing and foraging for food. Standing water inhibits construction and cultivating food crops, but it allows humanoids with canoes to easily and quickly travel across the saturated terrain searching for fish, crustaceans, and wild fruits and berries ripe for the taking. Despite these abundant resources, no settlements larger than a small town exist throughout the whole of the interior Izmalli Swamp. While firmly within the Aztli Confederation's territory, the alliance's delegations and merchants rarely venture here other than to collect tributes or to investigate potential new markets for their wares.

TABLE 10-4: SETTLEMENTS IN THE IZMALLI SWAMP

d20	Settlement Found
1-8	No settlement
9-16	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
17-19	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
20	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 10-5: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE IZMALLI SWAMP

d20	Demographics
1-5	Aztli-dominated settlement
6-10	Mixed community with Aztli majority
11-14	Mixed community with no majority (Aztlis, Tultitas)
15	Mixed community with Tultita majority

d20	Demographics
16	Cipatenhua community (no small town; village instead)
17-18	Lizard people community (no small town; village instead)
19	Boggard community (no small town; village instead)
20	Tsathar community (no small town; village instead)

AZHUITLICO RIVER

Hairpin turns, rapids, and cataracts extend throughout the length of this treacherous serpentine river that winds a twisting, narrow, and circuitous path across the northern Izmalli Swamp. Although it crosses paths with numerous other waterways on its difficult journey, the river maintains its salinity every step of the way. The muddy saltwater river balloons to a width of one mile in some spots and then constricts to being 20 feet across in other stretches. Likewise, its depth can reach 125 feet in isolated locales to being a shallow waterway that can be measured in inches instead of feet in other places. Its waters turn brackish in areas where it intersects with freshwater rivers, streams, and lakes, but it eventually regains its salinity shortly after combining its contents with those of another waterway. The Azhuitlico River is practically unnavigable in most areas as its sharp bends and shallow channels cause vessels larger than a canoe to run aground or suffer a hull breach after slamming into an object on the riverbed.

Despite the preceding obstacles, one ambitious man dreamed of bending the river to his will. The Aztli engineer and architect Nazarehta embarked on a titanic project to construct a series of dams, gates, and locks to increase the river's depth in shallow areas and widen the riverbanks close to the waterway's acute turns. Xacota financed the ambitious endeavor and provided the visionary Nazarehta with 1,400 tlacotins to see the effort to fruition. However, the blistering heat, fatigue, and disease exacted a heavy toll on the bright engineer and his crew. After four years of frustrating logistical and budgetary setbacks, the Azhuitlico River finally forced Nazarehta and Xacota to surrender. The legacies of their monumental dedication are still visible today as ancient foundations and channels serve as lasting proof of their spectacular ambitions. Popular folklore claims Nazarehta never gave up on his dream. Visitors claim they occasionally see the restless spirit of the Aztli genius meticulously surveying the landscape to calculate the ideal spot to place a masonry wall or dig a channel through the muck and mire. While the incorporeal ghost is in no danger of sinking into the morass, travelers must pay close attention to their surroundings. Pluff mud — commonly known as quicksand — further plagues the Azhuitlico River banks and ensnares the unwary in its silky grasp.

ETOCATL

Eight small streams originate around an oval patch of oddly dry land near the center of the Izmalli Swamp. While the wilderness surrounding the anomalous area remains feral and untamed, and the rains continue to saturate the ground, these seven acres of earth remain firm and show no signs of inundation. Indeed, ahuehete trees normally not found in saltwater wetlands thrive in this unusual soil and nowhere else throughout the whole of the Izmalli Swamp. The locale's ageless inhabitant is the likely cause for this strange phenomenon. Sixty years ago, the misanthropic Aztli druid Etoctatl ventured here to avoid people all together. The miserable swamp offered him the isolation he craved and the company of animals, but he loathed the oppressive humidity and precipitation that plagued the region. He uses his potent repertoire of spells and magical gear to keep his residence significantly cooler and drier than the surrounding area. His prolonged lifespan is less easily explained. Although magic can account for slowing the aging process, some



believe the druid chose this exact location for another reason — it contains a pool of water that can grant eternal life. How it formed and how he found this alleged marvel also remain a mystery. Many have tried to find it over the years, but Etocatl's network of plant and animal spies sniff out the trespassers long before they arrive on his doorstep. On rare occasions, Etocatl grants an audience to a fellow druid or a creature with a profound interest in nature to discuss their observations and exchange theories and hypotheses about these subjects. His guests confirm the existence of a pristine pool of water on the grounds, but none can validate whether its refreshing waters grant eternal life or suppress the aging process.

HANA'ALOA

Ruler: Queen Kalania

Government: Monarchy

Population: 1,582 (1,294 Tultas, 288 Aztlis)

Languages: Tulita, Common

Resources: Whaling, fishing, ducks

Fleeing turmoil in their homeland, eight canoes left the Razor Coast 70 years ago and fled toward a mythical island far from home. Six of these vessels arrived on Tehuatl's shores several weeks later, where they founded a community in a sweltering woodland very similar to the place where they had started their journey. From these humble beginnings, the Tultas incorporated the surrounding wetlands into a thriving fishing and whaling village that grew as more Tultas discovered the hidden gem through contacts with the original settlers. The community went unnoticed for six years as the Aztlis rarely ventured into the untamed swamp, yet a chance encounter with a passing warship from Mactli exposed the Tultas' secret hideaway to the world. Not surprisingly, the Aztlis' first encounter with the villagers erupted into armed conflict as 40 Aztli marines stormed the beach and engaged in a bloody hand-to-hand struggle with the Tultas whom the Aztlis noted looked much like them with a few minor variations. The Tultas beat back the Aztlis yet sustained terrible casualties during the brief yet violent conflict. While they may have temporarily won the day at an awful cost in lives, the villagers knew their adversaries would soon return with more men and ships. Realizing they could not fight an entire Aztli army, the Tultas sued for peace when two warships and 150 soldiers appeared off their shores just one month later. Under the leadership of King Kamamoyo, the Tultas agreed to the Aztlis' terms for annual tribute, though they refused to hand over any of their people to the island's dominant power. Instead, they offered to give their fellow humans, one ton of meat per year in perpetuity. The skeptical Aztlis accepted the Tultas' terms, though they were certain they would have to exact their demands in human flesh rather than animal meat. However, much to their stunned disbelief, the Tultas delivered on their promise in spades, handing over two massive tuna. The shocked Aztli delegation gladly returned to Mactli with their haul in tow.

Hana'aloa now stretches across two miles of sandy beach on the outer edge of the Izmalli Swamp. The town's close proximity to the water leaves it vulnerable to the powerful coastal storms that occasionally come ashore. This cruel reality forces the Tultas and resident Aztlis who migrated here after their people's introduction to the immigrants to primarily dwell in portable or temporary shelters made from wood, leather, dried leaves, and other handy materials. The only permanent structure is a sturdy, stone temple dedicated to the Tultas' sea deity Quell. The building has weathered many tempests over the last six decades and remains a beacon of hope for the people who set out to sea every morning to earn a livelihood. Whaling, fishing, turtle hunting, and pearl diving are dangerous yet lucrative professions in Hana'aloa and elsewhere. The men and women who take to their canoes and paddle out into the open waters sometimes fail to return. Yet the rewards outweigh the dangers. A single whale can feed the entire town for months, while the animal's byproducts, ivory and ambergris, make for valuable commodities the Tultas can trade with Aztli merchants who periodically come ashore to barter with the residents. The bounty of the sea allows the town's residents to avoid traveling inland away from the ocean breezes that keep the residents cool and the bloodsucking insects at bay.

Nonetheless, the swamp's horrors occasionally escape their confines and venture onto the beach. The cipatenuas, Tehuatl's indigenous reptilian humanoids who resemble upright crocodiles (detailed in *Maize and Monsters*), launch periodic raids against Hana'aloa and then retreat to their dank stink holes deep within the Izmalli Swamp. Over the last several years, merrows have also increased their activities against Hana'aloa, capsizing the villagers' canoes, stealing their catches, and drowning their divers. Those who survive the attacks and make it back to town swear the merrows appear to be

looking for something they believe the Tultas might possess. According to current gossip, a teenage Aztli boy who was pearl diving with his Tulita friend discovered a glowing, green pearl in a previously abandoned oyster bed. The two boys and the rare find disappeared hours after they showed their prize to several other friends and an elderly fisherman who also vanished shortly before the teenagers.

INTLAOCOL

Dense undergrowth and imposing trees surround an ominous lake 10 miles from the northeastern shore. Locals refer to the dismal body of water teeming with mosquito larvae, leeches, and other pests as Intlaocol, a word used to describe intense sorrow. The vaguely kidney bean-shaped lake is 11 miles long and five miles wide though it narrows to only two miles in width near its center. Travelers avow they can smell its sickening stench miles away along with hearing ominous sounds and seeing creepy sights warning trespassers to steer clear of the frightening place. Some believe Tehuatl's ancient, immortal ruler hurled the mangled corpses of his enemies and former friends into the shallow pool of nauseating filth. Cynics counter that the lake only formed after this portion of Tehuatl emerged from its submergence beneath the ocean, making it impossible to have been Tlatoani's dumping site. The popular consensus has coalesced around the theory that a local headman who loathed his masters in Xacota mercilessly butchered the city-state's representatives after its fall and hurled their decapitated bodies, which he weighted down with heavy stones, into the lake. Regardless of its disputed origins, everyone generally agrees that shambling corpses, horrifying serpentine monsters, and other deranged abominations freely roam the lakeshore and its environs. Rumors also speak of a terrifying, otherworldly beast that allegedly lives in the crumbling ruins of a palatial villa that formerly occupied a small island in the center of the lake.

MACUEXCO

Streams, brooks, and ponds compacted into a small area dice this section of the Izmalli Swamp into hundreds of hummocks and islands. Cypress trees combine with mangrove shrubs and trees to create brutal thickets that make it nearly impossible to move more than a few feet without hacking away at overhanging branches and vegetation. While not hospitable to bipedal humanoids, the terrain provides a fertile breeding ground for aquatic beasts, particularly snakes that can slither or swim through the tightest spaces. The fabled Quicohuatl ranks foremost among these scaly creatures. Purportedly 70 feet long and weighing nearly half a ton, the gargantuan constrictor snake that inhabits these murky waters can snap a canoe into splinters with a flick of its mighty tail or pulverize an adult man's bones in seconds. Although no one has seen the creature in years, most believe the ancient serpent still lives somewhere in the depths of the cloudy water it calls home. Its offspring also inhabit the region, though none of its alleged children even remotely approach Quicohuatl's size or cunning.

OLINOLOZ

For the Aztlis, imprisonment is solely intended to punish, not rehabilitate. Endemic violence, disease, malnutrition, and abuse run rampant in the Aztli prison system. By nearly everyone's standards, Olinoloz is the harshest and most dangerous of the Aztli Confederation's peticallis (penitentiaries). The Aztlis intentionally constructed Olinoloz near a stagnant, freshwater lake bearing the same name that teems with bloodsucking, disease-bearing pests. Because it is the only water supply offered to the prisoners, many convicts are terribly sickened or die from deadly pathogens lurking in the water. Those with the fortitude to weather this hardship must also deal with the wickedly oppressive heat and humidity that plague the region. To add insult to injury, the builders felled the surrounding trees to offer the inmates no respite from the scorching midday sun.

Aztli judges send offenders to the peticalli to serve a finite term, yet only a handful survive long enough to outlast their sentence. In most societies, prisoners spend their days confined within the bars or walls of a locked cell or an enclosed room. The Aztlis afford their convicts more freedom of movement, allowing them to roam inside the high wooden palisades or stone walls surrounding the open-air compound without impediment. Guards armed with slings and bows keep vigilant watch from the safety of the rampart erected above the peticalli floor, where they occasionally pelt prisoners with

SHASSAL

Ruler: King Crookedfang

Government: Monarchy

Population: 1,769 (1,205 lizard people, 382 Tozcas, 105 cipatenhuas, 77 sahuagins)

Languages: Draconic, Common, Sahuagin

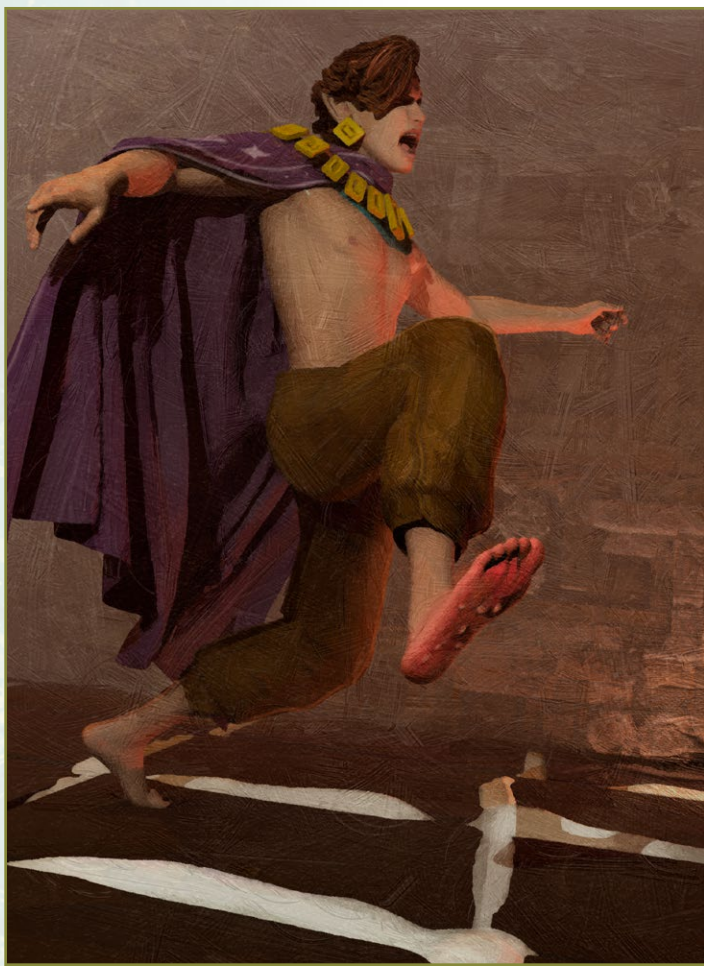
Resources: Fish, bone jewelry

From his miserable stronghold a meager 20 miles from the loose boundary between the Caya Grasslands and his forsaken home in the heart of his foul, sweltering swamp, King Crookedfang presides over his ragtag band of lizard people, Tozcas, cipatenhuas, and the members of a sahuagin colony. The monarch broods atop his coral throne within his palatial hut that sits on a broad hummock surrounded by a crisscrossing network of streams functioning as crude moats. Humanoids of all persuasions have courted the king over the years to gain his favor in their territorial endeavors, yet he has rebuffed every overture of friendship with a dismissive wave of his bone club above his head. The Aztli Confederation believes they have cowed him into submission because his annual tributes arrive like clockwork. Unbeknownst to his human adversaries, the lizard king believes the Aztlis are performing him a favor by ridding him of his internal enemies, most notably members of his own family and Tozcas who overstep their bounds. Yearly payments aside, the potent alliance and its Aztli citizens give King Crookedfang and his minions a wide berth. The lizard people are better suited for life and war in the wretched swamp than most creatures, a fact never lost on other humanoids, including the gnolls and boggards who have learned this lesson the hard way on multiple occasions.

Shassal stretches across thousands of acres of forsaken swampland. Most inhabitants dwell on hummocks in ramshackle huts and lean-tos or in crude structures using the tree trunks and vegetation to support their weight. The saltwater and corrosive soil are not conducive to agriculture. Therefore, residents must resort to foraging, fishing, and hunting to survive in this challenging environment. In this endeavor, they must compete against crocodiles, jaguars, and other monstrous beings who scour the same rugged ground for limited resources. Shassal's hunting parties typically trudge through the wilderness for days or weeks at a time, combing the swamp and the neighboring grasslands for game, with deer and small crocodiles as their prime targets, though humanoids may also find their way onto the menu when all else fails. The sahuagins also take to the sea in search of food, yet they behave more like guests than permanent residents. These aquatic visitors seem to have an ulterior motive for coexisting with King Crookedfang and his underlings. They share only scraps from their kills with the lizard people, which irks Shassal's ruler, but not enough to cause him to expel the sahuagins just yet. The cipatenhuas who reside in Shassal feel a kinship to the lizard people who better resemble them than the Tozcas or the sahuagins. The crocodilian humanoids have demonstrated their willingness to fight alongside the man they call king without hesitation, earning them his respect and the good will of his people. The Tozcas live among the lizard people out of desperation rather than choice. They generally keep to themselves, interacting with their fellow townspeople as little as humanly possible. Despite their intentional social distancing, the Tozcas nonetheless consider themselves part of the greater community. They admire and respect King Crookedfang and are willing to fight alongside him and his people, which is likely a far cry from the sahuagins, who would almost undoubtedly slink back into the sea when faced with adversity.

TAMAZOLI

Only a few places in the world defy explanation and inherently exude fear, yet Tamazoli is one of those rare exceptions. From the moment a living or even an undead creature sets foot on this location's unholy ground, it becomes obvious that something is horribly amiss here. In a festering swamp teeming with rampant vegetation and the persistent drone of flying pests, it is impossible to imagine an enclave where nothing grows nor stirs. However, Tamazoli feels thoroughly lifeless and accursed. It is a four-square-mile mire of stagnant water and malodorous mud utterly devoid of plants and animals. Despite the absence of a tree canopy, eternal twilight cloaks the land even when the sun reaches its apex in the heavens. The swamp's foulest and most malevolent denizens would rather perish than enter this terrifying swath of deadly wetlands. Legends swear that a creature born here instantly dies though not of seemingly natural causes. Someone, or more apropos, something, immediately pulls the soul out of the unfortunate being's body and condemns



stones and arrows to relieve them of the tedium of their duties. From these secure posts, Olinoloz's defenders periodically throw food and other supplies down to the ground, forcing the prisoners to scramble against each other to grab their share of these provisions. On rare occasions, the guards drop jars of pulque and tobacco into the yard. An outsider could perceive the guards' sudden generosity as an act of mercy, but they truly have an ulterior motive. Alcohol and tobacco offer prisoners temporary relief from Olinoloz's hellish conditions. The fierce competition for these scant resources causes savage brawls to break out on the prison floor between bitter rivals desperate to escape the drudgery and terror of daily life. Meanwhile, the amused guards cheer and wager on the outcomes of these brutal fights.

The hierarchy among the prisoners bears some similarities and striking differences to Aztli society at large. Not surprisingly, the commoners and tlacotins who make up the bulk of the prison population take out their pent-up rage and frustration against the noblepersons incarcerated alongside them. Titles cease to exist on the peticalli floor. It is survival of the fittest as those with military training and experience fare best, though clever and crafty individuals offer formidable opposition to those relying on brute strength alone. Regardless of everyone's situation, escape is foremost on almost every prisoner's mind. To date, only 12 men and women, who are housed together, have succeeded at the near impossible endeavor over the last three centuries since Olinoloz's construction. Oddly, the Aztlis never pursue escaped fugitives unless the individual harms a guard in the process. In their minds, anyone who liberates themselves from the prison deserves their freedom.

Visitors are a rare sight in Olinoloz, but the occasional adventurer sometimes travels here to obtain information from a specific prisoner or to hear the latest gossip circulating within the penitentiary walls. Of course, the guards disarm everyone who enters the compound and bind their hands to prevent them from casting most spells. A priest or sorcerer among the staff interrogates the visitor and magically probes their mind to discern if they came here to liberate a prisoner. If they are satisfied about the person's intentions, the individual assumes all risks before being granted entrance into Olinoloz. The guards take no actions to safeguard the person or to rescue them if the prisoners attack the visitor.

its wretched spirit to damnation within its disgusting belly forever. A horrific fate awaits those who already escaped their mother's wombs and meet their doom in this forsaken section of the Izmalli Swamp.

Silence and stillness almost always grip Tamazoli. Only the sounds of rainfall striking water and an occasional loud, trilling croak that emulates death itself shatter the near perpetual quiet that falls upon Tamazoli. Worse yet, the baleful influence appears to be spreading. Each day, outwardly healthy trees, shrubs, and greenery on Tamazoli's edges abruptly wither and die. Insects and larvae buzzing about the neighboring waters suddenly stop droning and sink to the bottom of the water or fall to the ground stone dead. Whatever dwells here appears to be expanding its slimy clutches deeper into the Izmalli Swamp. Six years ago, the stalwart hero Ametatoto dared to wade into Tamazoli to confront and denounce the evil plaguing this realm. Four paces after entering the locale, he let fly a bloodcurdling scream after his macuahuitl tore into something fleshy within the swamp. A moment later, the thrashing stopped, his voice went cold, and a sickening belch erupted from the darkness. All presumed Ametatoto had been lost. Unsubstantiated tales say that tsathars freely pass through Tamazoli and occasionally gather here to perform some deranged ritual to honor whatever inhabits the area, indicating whatever dwells here may be in league with their insane master.

TEOHUACAN

Ruler: High Priest Mintocho

Government: Theocracy

Population: 1,102 (982 Aztlis, 51 elves, 43 halflings, 26 gnomes)

Languages: Common, Elvish, Halfling, Gnome

Resources: Fish, maize, avocados

Aztli migrants from Ixtla founded Teohuacan on a drying lake bed. Local legends credit Teohuacan's birth to the visions of Caxto, an elderly priest of Quiahuitl. The tale claims the god directed his emissary to erect a temple in his honor on this site in his final, vivid dream before passing onto the next world. Like many other Aztli communities, its ingenious builders used chinampas to lay the groundwork for their burgeoning settlement in a marginally hospitable land. Aztlis make up a significant majority of the population with a few pockets of elves, gnomes, and halflings living among their human counterparts. Most lead a frugal existence living off the land, where they harvest maize, tomatoes, avocados, and squash in their gardens while supplementing their diets with fish harvested from the nearby waterways as well as water fowl and other domesticated birds such as chickens and turkeys.

Jurisdiction over legal, economic, and military matters falls on High Priest Mintocho, the only coconeteotl descendant of Quiahuitl, who serves as the town's spiritual and political ruler. He and his retinue of priests and warriors reside in large residences just outside the sacred temple of Quiahuitl. His underlings primarily function as temple guards enforcing the temple's edicts and moral code throughout Teohuacan rather than serving as the backbone for a professional army. Every adult male in Teohuacan has some martial combat training. Therefore, these citizen-soldiers make up the vast majority of Teohuacan's military forces, though the jaguar warriors associated with the temple typically lead the town's citizens into battle. The temple currently serves as the town's seat of power, but most activity centers around the bustling marketplace. Business is usually brisk in Teohuacan's open-air shops that sell their goods to visitors from smaller villages and towns in the region. Local farmers, trappers, and hunters sell their products from makeshift stands, while professional traders dealing in exotic goods such as cacao, agave, and rare bird feathers occupy permanent stalls within the marketplace. However, the current gossip centers around strange activities in the town's calmecac, which is described in the adventure *The Re-education of Coyotl* that can be found in the accompanying adventure book.

TOCAMACH

Ruler: King Ugrong

Government: Monarchy

Population: 1,485 (1,349 cipatenhuas, 91 lizard people, 45 Tultitas)

Languages: Aquan, Draconic, Tultita

Resources: Fish, game

Because of the curse Itztliteotl levied upon them, the people known as the cipatenhuas can never set foot on dry land, which confines them to the island's wetlands and aquatic habitats. With this restriction forefront in their minds, the cipatenhuas who founded Tocamach built their settlement along the banks

of a small river four miles from the eastern shore, where the ground remains saturated throughout the year within easy reach of several reliable fishing holes. Not particularly adept at agricultural endeavors or fond of vegetables and grains, the community's residents almost exclusively subsist on a diet of fish, shellfish, and game animals with small quantities of wild fruits and berries to give some balance to their otherwise carnivorous fare. Despite their fearsome appearance and deserved reputation for hunting and fighting prowess, the cipatenhuas are not outwardly expansionistic or antagonistic toward their humanoid and monstrous neighbors. However, they are very territorial and vigorously defend the parcel of land they consider to be theirs against all comers, especially against the boggards and tsathars, whom they despise and attack on sight. The cipatenhuas grudgingly respect the lizard people and Tultitas who cohabitate their environment and have accepted some of them into their community, but trespassers must devise a means to quickly placate the residents with gifts of food or have previously established a relationship with the cipatenhuas, as is the case with the Aztli delegation from Ixtla that travels to the remote town to collect its annual tribute.

King Ugrong has ruled the tribe for 14 years with the able counsel of Fruuzz, his high priest who maintains good relations with the Aztlis who share a common deity with them. Nonetheless, the high priest's devotion to Itztliteotl is borne more out of fear and obligation rather than a genuine love for the trickster. He and his followers view their religious responsibilities as an unwelcome chore that demands they give unnecessary recompense to a god who has no true interest in their wellbeing and appears to gain sick pleasure from receiving fealty from a people he wrongfully cursed, at least in their collective mindset. Yet they still go through the motions of offering Itztliteotl his cherished obsidian and fresh blood on certain occasions, which they enjoy giving when it comes from a captured boggard or tsathar.

King Ugrong and his people dwell in temporary crude huts they fashion from tree branches and vegetation to provide some shelter during the rainy season, though most members are content to lie in the mud or within an abscess dug into the side of the river or a pond. King Ugrong, his three mates, and his eight children are the only individuals who live in a permanent structure made from stones and wood. The Aztli delegation from Ixtla helped the cipatenhuas build the home 73 years earlier as a symbol of their mutual cooperation and their assistance keeping the boggards and tsathars in check. The lizard people and Tultitas who also live in Tocamach prefer more conventional accommodations than their fellow inhabitants, which are found along the town's outskirts. The living arrangements between these humanoids and the cipatenhuas evolved from the former's ability to walk atop dry land, giving them a far greater range of movement than their counterparts who cannot stand on soil that is not waterlogged. The lizard people and Tultitas keep tabs on the activities of their brethren who worship Tsathogga as well as their archenemies who also inhabit the swamp. At the moment, King Ugrong and Fruuzz fear some of their fellow townspeople have abandoned Itztliteotl and now pay homage to the deranged Frog God based upon the sudden influx of frogs and toads into the waterways surrounding their community. The much larger crocodiles that live in those same rivers and streams seem hesitant to approach or attack the invasive amphibians who remain confined to the outer edges of their territory, but appear to be making inroads deeper into their habitat.

ZOYOXICA

Ruler: High Priestess Eztlapoca

Government: Theocracy

Population: 4,829 (4,645 Aztlis, 96 Tultitas, 88 Tlotlis)

Languages: Common, Tultita

Resources: Maize, chilis, avocados, pumpkins, timber

Throughout its 923-year history, the town of Zoyoxica has witnessed its inordinate share of ebbs and flows. Portions of the settlement have been destroyed and rebuilt 10 times after being flattened by high winds, floods, and violence, while prolonged droughts have thinned out the population on several occasions. Nonetheless, abandoning the site never crossed the determined citizens' collective minds. They steadfastly resolved not just to replace fallen structures but to improve them, which gives the town an ununiform appearance with new construction interspersed among dilapidated buildings desperately needing an update. The town occupies both banks of the Azhuitlico River on its longest navigable stretch measuring 64 miles. Three arched stone causeways connect the two sides with the nobility and civic institutions found on the western bank and commoners' residences on the elevated eastern bank where expansive mounds erected 40 feet above sea level allow the residents to plant food crops unable to normally survive in soil inundated by saltwater.

Zoyoxica owes its configuration to the imagination of King Tloxica, an ancient monarch of Xacota. He established the town in this remote location to serve as a secondary command center for the kingdom's leadership to continue governmental operations if a calamity befell Xacota. Development of these vital infrastructure components began on the river's west bank as laborers constructed palaces, villas, military barracks, and administration buildings befitting royalty as well as a temple of Itztliteotl to watch over Xacota's monarchs during such potentially troubling times. Despite extensive preparations for executing Tloxica's contingency plan, only a handful of city officials and wealthy elite fled to Zoyoxica after Xacota's rapid descent into anarchy and chaos. With no further support from Xacota, the nobles who inhabited the town's western bank offered the land on the town's eastern bank to commoners. The farmers who arrived in Zoyoxica quickly realized the saltwater seeping up to the surface prohibited them from farming the land in its current state. However, they devised an ingenious solution to the problem. They transplanted the dirt and earth from the ground and placed it on the reinforced roofs of the emergency shelters built on the eastern bank. Because the soil would no longer be in contact with the saltwater saturated ground, the persistent rains would eventually wash the salt content out of the soil making the formerly saline soaked dirt into arable ground.

Tloxica chose the site of his emergency capital based upon strategic concerns rather than scientific data. Zoyoxica straddles a navigable river, which gives it access to supplies and facilitates troop movement in the event of an attack. However, the low-lying location the king selected is susceptible to flooding and falling trees during a potent windstorm. Because no sources of freshwater are in the region, citizens must depend exclusively upon rainwater for their drinking and irrigation needs, which increases Zoyoxica's vulnerability to droughts. Nonetheless, the town has survived these natural disasters and more, including a coordinated assault 34 years ago by the green hag Grizzelda and a company of boggard underlings accompanied by a host of giant frogs and toads under their command. Only the heroism and martial prowess of the town's otamies and the divine intervention of Itztliteotl's high priest sorcerer beat back the invaders and saved Zoyoxica from certain doom.

Etzlapoca, the heroine from that fateful day, now rules the settlement as her forebears did before her. Because of Itztliteotl's association with the royal family, the god's religious leaders seamlessly transitioned into their roles as political leaders as well, though wealthy noblepersons still exert tremendous influence over the middle-aged high priestess. In the 34 years following Etzlapoca's ascendance, Zoyoxica has enjoyed unparalleled prosperity and stability. Its farmers produce high yields of maize, chilis, avocados, and pumpkins that they export to other much smaller communities downriver. Ixtla's merchants visit the town to purchase water-resistant timber along with the settlement's diverse mix of agricultural goods. Levees and bulwarks installed along the riverbanks and other strategic locations have significantly diminished the threat of flooding, while earthwork defenses serve as a bulwark against another overland invasion. However, the superstitious Aztlis believe their long streak of good fortune is ultimately bound to reverse itself in calamitous fashion. Rumors of boggards massing in the east as well as strange talk of sentient maize creatures keep the people's optimism in check. To stave off such misfortune, Etzlapoca has dramatically stepped up her sacrifices to the town's divine benefactor, offering the god gifts of obsidian, jaguars, and even her own blood to help stave off such disasters.



CHAPTER TWELVE: MOTHER OCEANUS

Water covers nearly the entire whole of the planet's southern hemisphere with the exception of several chains of islands northern chroniclers refer to as the Arkanos Islands. Tehuatl is one of these isolated landmasses adrift in this seemingly endless sea. However, Tehuatl began its existence as a contiguous peninsula connected to the continent of Notos rather than an autonomous island. Mother Oceanus, sometimes also called the Southern Ocean once claimed nearly all of Tehuatl for its own, as much of its forests and grasslands slumbered beneath the waves, waiting for their opportunity to greet the sun again. The sequestration of water at the chilling poles and volcanic activity in the Tepepan Mountains added new land to the existing landmass and subtracted water to give the island its current shape and configuration. Despite the progress made on both fronts, portions of the former landmass still lie under the sea, waiting for undersea explorers to discover. Parts of Tehuatl's landmass carry lasting reminders of their time spent beneath Mother Oceanus as some bear the telltale natural scars of their prolonged exposure to saltwater and the elements, while others brandish signs of underwater habitation by animals and aquatic creatures, both bestial and sentient.

The waters surrounding Tehuatl are saline and choppy to say the least. Only the most experienced and daring sailors brave the ocean's harsh waters to make the arduous sea journey to others ports of call in the Southern Ocean and points beyond in the northern continents. Storms seem to emerge from nowhere and rile up the waves into foaming, horizontal cylinders of angry water known to smash even the mightiest wooden warships into shattered splinters. To add to the logistical difficulties, there are no known maps of Mother Oceanus. Mariners measure distances by days of travel and rely upon the celestial bodies for navigation points. Seasoned captains speak of a current they call "The Whale's Back." This anomalous jet of water thumbs its nose at the laws of nature and functions much like a conveyor belt shuttling ships through a narrow corridor from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere at astonishing speed. Despite centuries of searching, no skipper has ever discovered a similar current traveling in the other direction, making the trip from the northern hemisphere to Tehuatl much easier than the return voyage.

In addition to dealing with logistical headaches and natural hazards associated with oceanic travel, numerous aquatic beings and monsters inhabit the untamed waters. Locathah, merfolk, merrows, tritons, sea elves, sahuagin, sea hags, sea witches, and bestial predators frequently harass passing ships, while tales of krakens, giant squid, and bizarre creatures apparently crafted from nightmares also prowl the deep waters for prey. Because of these dangers, most commercial ships engaged in trade rarely stray far from the coast when traveling from one part of the island to another.

AMILOTETL

Ruler: Drog Coralshaper
Government: Monarchy
Population: 945 (945 merfolk)
Languages: Aquan, Common
Resources: Coral, fish

In 35-foot-deep waters 12 miles northeast of the Great Canal, the remnants of the ancient Aztli town Amilotetl lie on the ocean floor. Although the flood swept away the settlement's human occupants, its buildings survived much of the cataclysm intact, allowing its underwater occupants to fortuitously move into their new home without barely lifting a finger. Merfolk have now inhabited the locale for countless generations, though the corrosive effects of saltwater take a toll on the brick and mortar and cause the structural integrity to fail in spots. To countermand these issues, the merfolk grow coral in the breaches and gaps to strengthen the overall structure and to maintain its contiguity even though at this point nearly the entire village consists of coral repairs resting upon Aztli foundations now covered beneath layers of silt and sediment. Faint rays of sunlight permeate their undersea realm during the day, bathing Amilotetl in a pale twilight. When the sun sets, bioluminescent marine creatures contained in the glass receptacle part of a streetlamp type device illuminate their otherwise lightless world in an eerie, phosphorescent glow.

Over the course of the merfolk's long history in the region, their civilization has mirrored the tides' continuous ebb and flow. Their fortunes peak and then fall in a

recurring yet irregular cycle that generally coincides with the rise and decline of the other aquatic creatures who cohabitate the same area. The sahuagins are the merfolk's long-time adversaries. Over the span of several hundred generations, the hated foes have battled for territory and each race's very survival in a never-ending war that has claimed thousands of lives and left each side on the precipice of total collapse on at least a few occasions. In the current iteration of this conflict, the merfolk under Drog Coralshaper's brilliant leadership have the upper hand on the sahuagins. In their last battle, 145 merfolk routed a force of 88 sahuagins in devastating fashion, slaughtering 60 of their troops and driving the remainder into a chaotic retreat. With their settlement and territory presumably secure, the merfolk turn their eyes toward annexing other pieces of Mother Oceanus into their growing kingdom. Most notably, they seek to extend their burgeoning empire closer to shore but doing so requires them to expel a vicious coven of sea hags who dabble in sorcery and witchcraft. The merfolk and surface dwellers call them the "The Brine Sisters." The trio has plagued sailors and the merfolk for years with their devious ploys and magical powers.

King Drog Coralshaper, the 878th ruler of his line, now enters his 15th year of governance with grand ambitions. During the early years of his reign, he oversaw a massive civic renovation project that almost completely remade an Aztli step pyramid tomb into his terraced coral palace along with the refurbishing of numerous residential buildings and an outer courtyard sculpted with coral and stones from the ocean floor. Under his supervision, the merfolk also grew coral into an enclosed pen where they capture fish and toss them into the encaged area for later consumption. His infrastructure improvements paved the way for his later military agenda, which included defeating the sahuagins and now turns toward eradicating the hags and also investigating a previously unseen menace of a massive, floating temple that recently appeared offshore.

Despite his success and popularity, some merfolk believe Drog's eyes have wandered too far from their homeland. They want him to wipe out the sahuagins once and for all instead of fighting for a swath of ocean floor they neither covet nor need. The dissenters keep these opinions to themselves for fear of retribution from Drog's most vocal and fanatical loyalists who have steadily adopted frighteningly disturbing views about merfolk racial superiority that help fuel their blind devotion to their king. Fearful of alienating his staunchest supporters, the monarch walks a delicate tightrope between mildly disavowing this ideology in public and acting in a manner that suggests these views guide his actions. He knows this faction will eventually demand following through on his campaign against the sahuagins, but for now he thinks he can successfully placate them with new conquests against these monstrous foes.

CUAHUE

The Izmali Swamp provides an ideal habitat for manatees who gravitate toward flooded, saline mangrove forests. The large marine mammals thrive on a diet of leaves and roots they dig up from the sea floor and generally have little to fear from natural predators because of their tremendous size. When not congregating around the mouths of rivers or shallow beaches, these beasts typically paddle their massive bodies six miles off the island's northeastern coast to visit an underwater circular domed structure of undetermined origin. Sculpted entirely out of coral, the aquatic animals are instinctively drawn to the strange, multifloored complex adorned with bas-relief sculptures of manatees carved into the walls, while vertical chutes and horizontal corridors grant the animals access to the spherical chambers scattered throughout the compound. A primordial urge beckons the creatures to routinely make a pilgrimage to the site the Aztlis refer to as Cuahue, which lies on the ocean floor 80 feet below the water's surface.

On a good day when the tides ebb, Cuahue's hemispherical apex almost protrudes through the water's surface. Humanoid architects who have visited and studied the locale speculate its designers crafted the strange edifice from a singular block of coral over the period of many years and perhaps even centuries. The absence of steps and other devices that allow humanoids to climb vertical surfaces strongly infers it was intended to accommodate aquatic animals who could easily swim through its wide tunnels and steep inclines and not lose their footing. The manatees who navigate their way through Cuahue momentarily pause at each sculpture and gently tap the carving with their

extended flipper. The animal then repeats the process at every station as it presumably engages in silent reflection.

The questions surrounding Cuahue's construction and purpose remain compelling mysteries. Members of the academy in Tlazo theorize that a sentient race or species of manatees created the structure to commemorate their achievements and celebrate their cultural legacy. The lack of chisel marks and sharp edges suggest the gently curved and rounded sculptures were likely made by repeated blows with a broad, flat instrument similar or identical to a manatee flipper. Intelligent marine animals other than manatees also venture to the site on occasion, but their visits appear to coincide with travel elsewhere instead of being motivated by a compulsion. The manatees tolerate other animals, but they block the entrances and exits whenever humanoids approach. Although the gentle animals do not attack, they get in the humanoid trespassers' way as much as possible, nudging them with their noses or gently slapping them with their flippers or tails. When a humanoid intruder attacks, the manatees fight back with unbridled fury, battering the interloper until the person successfully flees or dies. Humanoids who survive a tour through Cuahue claim to have experienced visions of manatees occupying coral thrones passing judgment on an aquatic, protohuman race in an underwater palace.

IMACALLI

Despite the proliferation of warships among Tehuatl's navies, large-scale battles at sea are a rarity. Of these conflicts, one stands out above all others — the naval engagement at Imacalli. During this test of the Aztli Confederation's seafaring might, the city-states of Atenco, Mactli, and Tlazo amassed a fleet of 22 warships to set sail against a foreign flotilla of 16 ships from an unknown land who mysteriously appeared off Tehuatl's western coast within sight of its verdant shorelines. After three days of pitched conflict, the Aztlis proved their worth as its vessels sank 12 enemy boats and damaged the rest of the enemy fleet, forcing them to presumably limp back home never to try their luck again. Nonetheless, the combat took a heavy toll on the combined Aztli navies as they lost nine warships and more than 1,000 sailors in the slugfest with the adversary they never identified or knew.

In the 53 years since the monumental fight, salvagers have naturally tried their luck at retrieving artifacts, relics, and treasures from the timber carcasses littering the ocean floor 205 feet below in the briny deep. In the absence of any visual landmarks, the task of simply finding the site off the western coast in dark, murky waters poses enough of a challenge to dissuade most individuals from trying to locate the remains of individual ships scattered across a 300-square-mile area between 10 and 16 miles off the coast. For the handful of intrepid explorers who have the fortitude and skills needed to locate a shipwreck beneath the waves, they learn that getting there is only half the struggle. They must then devise a means of safely reaching the sea bottom without getting lost, crushed by the extreme pressure, or suffering from decompression sickness during the

ascent to the surface. Despite these hazards, adventurers have recovered some loot from the ocean floor over the years. Divers retrieved bags of metallic coins minted by a presumably foreign authority, scraps of paper, jewelry, maritime gear, and other seafaring equipment, along with the personal belongings of the sailors and mariners who went down with their ships. Of course, some of the dead put up a fight before handing over their treasures. The bloated, waterlogged corpses of drowned sailors roam the ocean floor and challenge anyone who disturbs their watery graves.

Despite several successful expeditions to the ocean floor, roughly 80 percent of the sunken ships still retain their riches and secrets. Salvaging activity has decreased since Imacalli first captured adventurers' imaginations, though expeditions still take place. However, the operations have grown more sophisticated and come better prepared and equipped than the nascent free-for-alls that took place in the days and months immediately after the naval conflict. Precautions obviously increase the odds for success, but the abominations haunting the bottom of the sea also evolved over time. Sea shanties sing bawdy verses about a ghostly captain who has rallied the undead mariners from both sides into a formidable fighting force intent on defending their aquatic territory against fortune-hunting landlubbers. The songs also speak of a flock of seagulls who constantly circle around Imacalli. It seems farfetched to connect the seabirds to the undead spirit affectionately known as the Spectral Skipper in the ditties, yet it is difficult to deny some link may exist between the unlikely partners.

TEMIMILTIC

On a cloudless evening, an observer standing on the island's southwestern shore looking out to sea can sometimes see an eerie, phosphorescent light emanating from an unseen location eight miles from the beach in 90-foot-deep water. Throughout the centuries, brave men and women have taken to the sea to investigate the strange glow that is visible only when the sun sets and the skies are clear. When they arrive at the site, they are surprised to see what appears to be the apex of a massive, stone pillar capped by an enclosed, nearly translucent pyramid-shaped object made from obsidian. An unknown energy source concealed inside the object constantly pulsates at regular intervals. What is even more perplexing about Temimiltic is the fact that the stones and mortar holding the structure together appear to be unscathed after thousands of years of being immersed in corrosive saltwater and that the normally fragile obsidian encasement has resisted every attempt to batter it open with potent magic and powerful blows. If an entrance to Temimiltic exists, no one has found it yet, but not for lack of trying.

If the structure has a conventional door, adventurers and scholars accustomed to studying such matters believe it is likely to be found at Temimiltic's base, which sits at least 90 feet below the water's surface, presumably underneath thick layers of silt and sediment. These same experts also debate its purpose. The Tlotls believe it to be an ancient lighthouse that stood on the beach prior to its submersion after



the great cataclysm. Some speculate it is an abandoned observatory that the Aztlis' ancestors used to discover celestial objects and map out the stars. Others surmise Temimilctic to be a beacon transmitting signals to an unknown and unseen receiver. A new theory piggybacks on the previous suggestion, implying the hero-gods used the site to quickly send coded messages hidden in the frequency and length of the pulses to their distant counterparts. If the latter idea holds true, the structure is likely hundreds of feet tall, implying that reaching the base would require excavating several hundred feet of accumulated silt and sediment.

TACAMICHEN

Among Mother Oceanus' animal inhabitants, the orca deserves the lofty title of apex predator. These intelligent marine mammals who belong to and are the largest members of the dolphin family cooperatively hunt in pods, which are highly social groups of maternally related animals. Despite their enormous size, fearsome bite, and cunning, the beasts rarely target humanoids on the open seas, but one family of these aquatic predators that inhabits the waters surrounding Tehuatl set their sights on more than just ordinary people. They exclusively target individuals with an innate link to mystical energy, including those hailing from aquatic races or monsters who inhabit their undersea domain. While most animals respond to the sounds of a thrashing fish or the cries of an injured beast, these creatures instinctively detect magic and are drawn to it in the same manner as insects fluttering around a light source. To compound the mystery and suggest someone else plays an unseen hand in their exploits, the beasts brandish the symbol of a skeletal hand on each side of their dorsal fins. Logic would dictate that the animals were not born with the exquisitely detailed, colorful mark on their fins or put it there themselves.

The pod's members, whom sailors who have seen them firsthand call the Tlacamichen, also display obvious sentience as their language of clicks, whistles, and calls have all the hallmarks of complete sentences or thoughts. Indeed, the orcas engage in lengthy conversations among themselves followed by strategically sound and highly coordinated actions that presumably evolved from these sophisticated, verbal exchanges. The beasts have deliberately and stealthily capsized ships on several occasions, tossing the crew and occupants into the churning waters. In the strangest behavior of all, an orca then singles out an inherent spellcaster from among the flailing victims and entraps the creature in its mouth while another pod mate cups its enormous lips around the individual's respiratory orifices and pushes air into its lungs during a terrifying journey presumably headed to the bottom of the ocean. None has ever returned from this harrowing ordeal, but no evidence confirms the victims' demise either. Incredibly, magical attempts to communicate with the abducted individual succeed, implying the person is still alive. However, details gleaned from these fleeting interactions are scarce and cryptic, as the captive's thought process feels jumbled and incoherent. The confusion cannot mask a few fleeting images of a horrific, skeletal half-man/half-whale being sitting atop a crude throne made from humanoid femur bones and vertebrae in what appears to be a sunken Aztli pyramid somewhere beneath the ocean. Ancient legends and myths offer no clues about the bizarre creature's origins, though some have deduced the animal's name may imply an unforeseen connection to its similar namesake, Orcus, the demon prince of the undead. So far, this theory remains firmly rooted in the realm of speculation.

XIHUITL

For the Aztlis, celestial events harbinger earthly events. When Xacota's King Ciahupoa watched a comet streak across the night sky and slam into the waters off the shore of northern Tehuatl, he interpreted the heavenly traveler's appearance to be a telltale sign of the hero-gods' displeasure over the actions of the Cult of Tlatcolli in Zacatl. To rectify the situation and appease his angry deities, the monarch assembled his army and marched south to his doom in the Toctli Forest. Likewise, the comet itself suffered a similar fate when it crashed into Mother Oceanus and split into fragments of rock, ice, and frozen gases. The comet known as Xihuitl proved to be relatively small for a wandering chunk of cosmic debris and caused little disruption in the massive ocean, yet its historical impact proved far greater than the force released by its collision with the planet. Nonetheless, a small yet determined segment of Aztli priests and devout worshippers endeavor to find even the tiniest piece of space rock that they believe the hero-gods personally sculpted to express their anger at the wayward people who would become the Poqozas.

The crash site located approximately eight miles offshore roughly due north of Xacota is naturally difficult to find and even harder to explore beneath 245 feet of saline oceanwater. To compound matters even more, ice and frozen gases accounted for much of the object's mass, and these components either melted shortly after impact or dissipated into the atmosphere. Aztli astronomers speculate

that only a few ounces of rock or metal survived the crash and are scattered across the ocean floor in particles so minute it would be virtually impossible to find these specks of dust beneath layers of silt in the pitched blackness on the ocean floor. Despite these outwardly insurmountable obstacles, every year a handful of daring souls still embark on this fool's errand to sniff out a tiny pebble amid a sea of sediments and debris. Those who participate in this perilous endeavor consider their quest a religious pilgrimage to physically touch a minute particle that rested in the hands of the hero-gods and signaled the end of what some consider to be Tehuatl's golden age. Indeed, a mere speck of rock or metal from the comet would likely fetch a king's ransom from a wealthy collector or a powerful entity who believes the comet possesses unharnessed magical powers.

While the allure of selling such a valuable treasure piques the interest of adventurers willing and able to dive to the ocean floor in search of this elusive prize, many also grudgingly acknowledge the object may possess some mystical properties as well. Its seminal role in changing the course of the island's history leads many scholars to put some stock in this theory. There are some practitioners of magic who firmly believe the comet has the ability to alter time and fate, though the extent of its ability to do so remains unknown. The only evidence supporting this conjecture comes from the renowned wizard Zapanaya's expedition 86 years ago when he ventured to the bottom of the ocean for what he swore was an hour and re-emerged three days later. Although he left Xihuitl emptyhanded, his strange tale encouraged others to follow in his footsteps with far less success if they even survived the descent to the ocean floor.

ZANIYOCA

Eight years ago, Noncua, the captain of the warship *Zaniyoca*, left Tlazo's harbor with a crew of 30 and 120 marines onboard and never looked back. Armed with the latest technological marvel he called the monacatzli, an instrument of his own design, Noncua sailed the high seas as a privateer praying on any vessel that crossed his path on Mother Oceanus. Noncua's marvelous invention is an extreme modification of an ordinary teponaztli, a horizontal log drum. The operator places the elongated percussion instrument in the water and gently strikes its sensitized skin with an olli mallet to create a sound and pressure wave. If the wave never returns, the operator turns in a different direction and repeats the process until the operator sees or feels a returning wave hit the drum's skin. When that takes place, the person using the monacatzli senses there is another object, likely another ship, in that direction, giving the *Zaniyoca* advance warning of a potential target or pursuer. In addition to this breakthrough, the *Zaniyoca* also boasts impressive armaments, including obsidian-tipped bronze projectiles propelled by crude hydraulic powered launchers and a hull reinforced with thin layers of olli to stop or slow enemy missile fire directed at the ship itself.

Despite two decades of loyal service to the Aztli Confederation, Noncua's abrupt resignation of his commission and departure from the city-state caught the temochtiani and his couatl advisors totally off-guard. Although some described the captain as being arrogant, bold, or self-absorbed, no one imagined he would abscond with one of Tlazo's warships to pursue a dangerous life of piracy. Naturally, Tlazo dispatched a task force of three warships to find the *Zaniyoca* and return the vessel and its mutinous captain and crew back to Tlazo. After eight months of exhaustive searches and near misses, the exhausted fleet sailed back to port without their quarry. Wisely, Noncua and his followers steered their vessel into uncharted waters beyond the range of the Aztli Confederation until the domestic situation died down and they could sail back to Mother Oceanus undetected. During this prolonged hiatus, the *Zaniyoca* blazed a trail into the waters of the northern continents where they commandeered and plundered 16 ships over the course of a four-year period before making their way back to Tehuatl's shores to target more familiar prey.

Today, Noncua is the most feared pirate on Mother Oceanus. He and his merciless band of cutthroats now include roughly 40 Tlotls among their numbers and 20 Tultitas who replaced deceased members of his original crew and soldiers. Under his skilled command, the *Zaniyoca* predominately targets merchant vessels bound for distant ports of call rather than prowling the waters close to the island's shorelines. Nonetheless, Noncua occasionally breaks this rule when one of his loyal subordinates learns of a treasure-laded vessel during his or her time on shore leave. While the *Zaniyoca* obviously cannot dock in a major city or other well-traveled locale, its captain and sailors occasionally venture into small towns and villages to stock up on provisions and gossip before embarking on their next exploits. Some stories also claim Noncua and his minions bury treasure in remote spots during these brief forays onto land. Other rumors suggest the pirates conceal their booty on tiny, undiscovered islands scattered across Mother Oceanus, but most people put more stock in the former tales over the latter. What everyone can agree upon are the facts that Noncua has amassed an enormous fortune during his privateer career and any loot left behind is well guarded by traps, guardians, or a combination of both.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS

Overview Weather Table: Mountains

Baseline Temperature Deviation: —

Daily Weather Deviation: +2d10% chance of rain in the western half, -2d10% in the eastern half

Relative Humidity Deviation: +1d10 in the western half, -1d10 in the eastern half

Tehuatl owes its survival to the majestic peaks that kept their stony heads above water when the gods unleashed their fury upon the whole of the southern continent thousands of years ago. Some of these tower monstrosities reach heights in excess of 20,000 feet, yet these giants are the exceptions rather than the rule. The summits of most peaks in the range average around 14,000 feet in elevation, though the island's stratovolcanoes and shield volcanoes tend to stand taller than the non-volcanic mountains. For much of the island's early history, its humanoid, plant, animal, and monstrous inhabitants were confined to the mountaintops and the caverns and lava tubes that bored into the earth. The tight quarters kept populations low as the competing entities squabbled and fought over the domain's limited resources. When Tepetzin erupted and the waters receded, Tehuatl's landmass expanded dramatically. The long-sequestered humanoids, beasts, and animals left their isolation and settled on more fertile terrain in the mountains' shadows. Today, the Firebrand dwarves cohabitate the region with some Aztlis, orcs, goblinoids, giants, Tozcas, and other monstrous inhabitants who filled the void when the bulk of the humanoids departed. Although most animals abandoned the Tepepan Mountains for greener pastures, some stayed behind and flourished in the less-congested domain. These include species of deer, bears, coyotes, rattlesnakes, wolves, prairie dogs, cacomistles, cougars, foxes, badgers, peccaries, squirrels, skunks, lizards, and coatis. Winged animals include bats, warblers, jays, mockingbirds, hawks, quetzals, woodpeckers, condors, and eagles. The indigenous flora includes breadnut trees, shrubs, sapodilla trees, gumbo trees, cacti, pines, oaks, and cedars.

The weather in the Tepepan Mountains can be varied and unpredictable. Precipitation falls more frequently on the western, windward side of the mountain, while rainfall is scarce on the eastern slopes. However, storms can erupt at a moment's notice when an isolated patch of warm, moist air collides with cold, dry air at the higher elevations. The winds routinely howl through the canyons and exposed mountaintops, reaching dizzying speeds in some locations that rival those of potent hurricanes and even tornadoes. Naturally, the winds whip the hardest at the highest altitudes, which also experience the coldest temperatures in Tehuatl as evidenced by the snowcaps that coat the summits of the island's tallest peaks. The mountains' lower foothills and valleys remain warm throughout the year, but as the landmasses climb higher above the surface, a gradual cooldown accompanies them on their ascent. Evergreen, montane forests flourish at the lower elevations before yielding to shrubs, grasses, and terrain more akin to a semiarid desert than a semitropical environment.

In the absence of widespread agriculture, most mountain settlements at the higher elevations exist entirely underground where the populations survive on alternate food sources such as lichens, fungi, and other plants and animals that thrive in virtually lightless environments. Balandrur, the stronghold of the Firebrand dwarves, ranks foremost among these subterranean cities. The handful of larger, surface humanoid communities primarily take root in the low-lying valleys where the temperatures are more moderate, water is generally plentiful, and the terrain is conducive to some agricultural production. The Aztli Confederation still demands its tributes from the dwarves and the other humanoid inhabitants who reside within the range. The four member city-states divide the region roughly equally as each extends its reach into the Tepepan Mountains with varying degrees of success. Ixtla has the most luck exacting its spoils from the dwarves and aggressive humanoids who live here, while Mactli seems willing to take whatever it can get from the mountainous inhabitants. The Tepepan Mountains also teem with abandoned ruins, both those where the former inhabitants left of their own accord and those where the previous occupants were forcibly expelled or literally ran for their lives.

TABLE 12-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS

d20	Settlement Found
1-5	No settlement
6-8	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
9-14	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
15-18	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)
19	Large town (20d100 + 1,500 residents with permanent structures)
20	Make 1d3 additional rolls on this table

TABLE 12-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS

d20	Demographics
1-3	Aztli-dominated settlement
4-6	Mixed community with Aztli majority
7	Mixed community with no majority (Aztlis and dwarves)
8-12	Dwarf-dominated settlement
13-16	Mixed community with dwarven majority
17	Orc community (no small town or large town; village instead)
18	Ogre community (no small town or large town; village instead)
19	Goblin community (no large town; small town instead)
20	Hobgoblin community (no large town; small town instead)

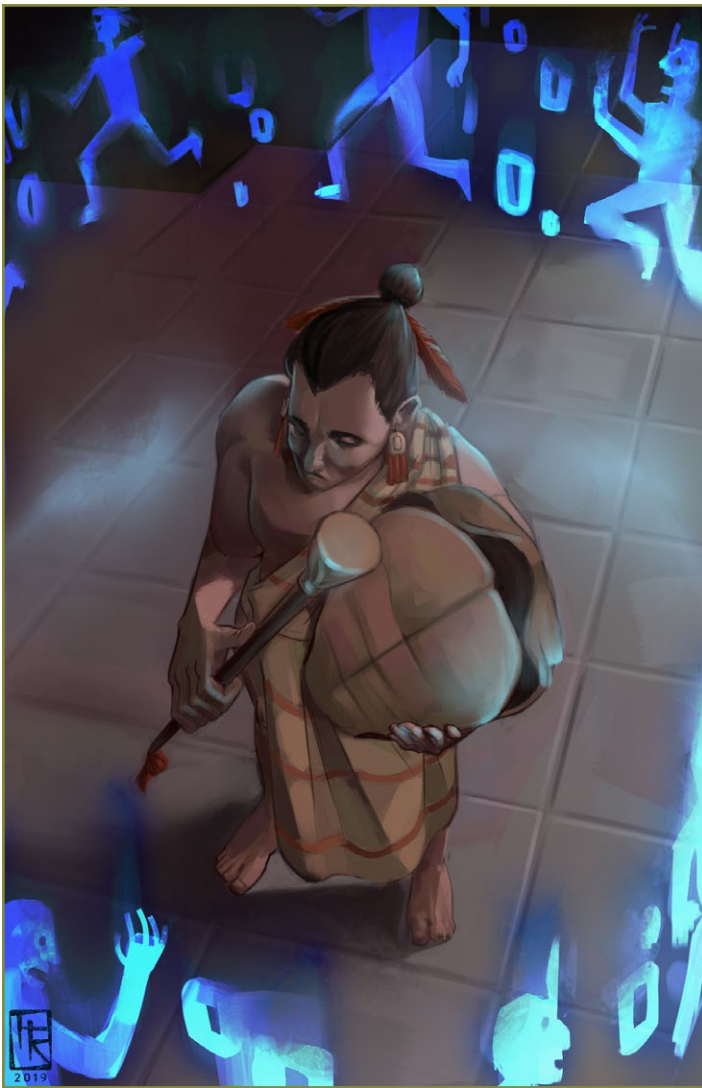
ALIQTANA

The search for knowledge can take scholars to many places, and Aliqtana, also known as the Temple of the Four Winds of Ehecatl, may rank foremost among them. Perched atop the plateaued summit of Ehecataqa, a 6,845-foot-tall mountain just beyond the foothills in the western Tepepan Mountains, Aliqtana is one of the largest repositories of knowledge and lore in Tehuatl. Aztli monks who fled Xacota with hundreds of codices and scrolls founded and built the sanctuary less than one year after the city's utter collapse. While most architects would not build a structure without any protection from the ferocious winds howling through the mountains, the monks deliberately chose this spot because Nonotzali directed them to do so while he walked among mortals. Ehecatl, one of the god's trusted couatls, aids the monks in their search for the truth and wisdom contained in the collection's numerous manuscripts. The immortal celestial frequently consults with his four counterparts in Tlazo on esoteric matters they refrain from discussing with their human colleagues. Surprisingly, Aliqtana and the academy in Tlazo have very different inventories with little overlap, thus motivating both institutions to temporarily borrow the other's works for extended periods of reflection and study.

Because of its isolated locale, getting to Aliqtana proves rather difficult. The path leading from Ehecataqa's base is narrow, winding, and precarious. It requires several harrowing leaps to circumvent gaps or obstacles in the way or adept mountain climbing skills to bypass these barriers altogether. Visitors who reach the summit encounter an unexpected curiosity — Ehecatl's apparently domesticated ocelot who receives royal treatment including three manservants solely devoted to satisfying the animal's every whim, including scheduled play times and orchestrated hunts. The odd relationship makes little sense, though some speculate the feline named Calla may indeed be a reincarnated monk or another celestial visitor in disguise. The fact that Calla has lived here for

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more than a century immediately dispels any ideas that she is an ordinary cat. She also has a strong affinity for a monk named Tona who gravitates toward amassing occult masterpieces. The pair sometimes sit side by side for hours leafing through the weathered, maguery pages of ancient tomes and dabbling in bizarre subject matter about the cosmos and the nature of reality.

ATINAQINA

Ruler: Amixtatia

Government: Theocracy

Population: 4,345 (1,508 Aztli, 622 Poqozas, 413 elves, 371 halflings, 334 gnomes, 318 dwarves, 205 dragonborn, 140 Tlotls, 120 Tulitas, 115 tieflings, 102 Tozcas, 49 orcs, 48 gnolls)

Languages: Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnoll, Gnome, Halfling, Infernal, Orc

Resources: Arts, entertainment

When the Aztlis remained sequestered in the Tepepan Mountains after the calamitous flood overran the lowlands, the people made the best of their existence. While most doodled aimlessly on the peaks' interior stone surface to pass the lazy hours away, the most talented of their lot took the primitive cave art to the next level as exemplified by the 10,000-year old paintings adorning the walls in the caverns of Matzuetto, a 10,755-foot tall peak in the central Tepepan Mountains. Over time, the graffiti grew more elaborate as amateur storytellers, poets, and artists chronicled the history of the Aztli people onto a virtually permanent medium. Most Aztlis descended from their mountainous prisons when the waters finally receded, but the humans who took up residence in the shadow of Matzuetto remained to pursue their art. After 100 centuries of nonstop drawing, painting, sculpting, and chiseling,

the settlement of Atinaqina became a haven for Aztli dreamers and thinkers who longed to add their story, vision, and experiences to the grand exhibit the residents call the Stonewall.

In time, the passion poured out into the artwork imbued the whole of the Stonewall with mystical energy that beckons creative souls of all races to venture to the remote locale to collaborate with fellow masters of their day and contribute to the achievements of their remarkable predecessors. Those who heed the siren's call hail from all races across the island. Although Aztlis make up a majority of Atinaqina's residents, Poqozas, elves, gnomes, halflings, dragonborn, and other peoples normally shunned in mixed company are welcome to partake in the magical extravaganza alongside their fellow artisans. The renowned gnoll fingerpainter Grouwl, who would normally meet a swift and ignominious end in an Aztli settlement, is one of the town's most popular and celebrated figures, along with Ruzgor, the rock-sculpting orc, and Pozzdruel, a tiefling painter beloved for her use of unique chiaroscuro techniques. The truly gifted people who visit the Stonewall swear the artwork and poetry move them and tell a story, yet the tales they tell vary from person to person. Some attribute these visions to Poqoza psychedelic mushrooms and other intoxicants, which are easy to find in Atinaqina compared to most other communities in Aztli territory.

Visual artists and writers are not the only performers who venture to Atinaqina. The orchestra of the Amphitheater of Atinaqina gathers during every lunar apogee and perigee and on solar equinoxes in an effort to outdo the group's last performance, which are usually spontaneous "jam" sessions of percussion and wind instruments mixed with song and dance. Musicians come and go, but most long for just one opportunity to play alongside the legendary Tlaqacha whom they consider the living embodiment of his people's music. An Aztli through and through, the elderly man incredibly just turned 111 years old and can still put on a spectacle that attracts audience members from hundreds of miles away. Many come from hundreds of miles away to experience the quarterly shows performed at the amphitheater, which is cut right from the mountain's rock face.

Amixtatia, the high priestess of Cualliteotl tries to maintain order as best she can within the settlement. Most of Atinaqina's population is transient, with visitors staying for several months or years at a time before heading home. Few people live their entire lives in the town before moving on and heading elsewhere to restart a "normal" life. Seismic activity in the region periodically razes any permanent structures erected in the valley 2,000 feet beneath the summit, which prompts most inhabitants to leave rather than rebuild when these tremors rock the area. Those who choose the latter course of action construct their new homes atop the old foundation, creating a honeycomb network of passages and forgotten chambers beneath the current buildings and streets. Those who opt to stay here for a prolonged period typically live in the bohemian cluster of cave dwellings cut into the mountainside, though some prefer to take up residence in one of the less expensive yet vulnerable freestanding apartments in the valley. Wild amaranth and quinoa grow in abundance alongside these structures while an assortment of small game animals and elk live among the grasses.

The Stonewall may provide a medium for artists, but it also serves as a defensive barrier against invasion. The massive structure spills out from the mountain caves, down the slopes, and then encircles the entire valley, spanning a total distance of 24 miles. The 10-foot-high barrier is strategically placed adjacent to steep escarpments and other natural obstacles to make the manmade wall even more challenging to breach. Ixtla lies closer to Atinaqina, but the forthright ambassadors of that city find it impossible to deal the residents here. Instead, the town appropriately falls under Tlazo's jurisdiction as its contingent of diplomats appreciate the creativity that spawned Atinaqina. While most Aztlis dismiss the community of artists and musicians as harmless dreamers, the couatls recognize the powerful magic that surges through the Stonewall. Although predominately used to inspire others to look inside themselves and find their creative juices, they fear it could be a deadly weapon in the wrong hands. The celestials believe someone could harness its power to spawn a dangerous hive mind that could potentially control thousands of receptive minds.

BALANDRUR

Ruler: King Rodibreck Firebrand

Government: Monarchy

Population: 39,682 (39,598 dwarves, 84 Aztlis)

Languages: Dwarven, Common

Resources: Gold, silver, copper, tin, coal, shale, salt

Accessible through two heavily guarded and well-defended mountain portals carved into the southern face of Mount Bralandur, or Huento as the

Aztlis call it, the dwarven city of Balandrur is the undisputed seat of power for the Firebrand dwarves who inhabit the whole of the Tepepan Mountains. While not officially designated as their capital, the clan's newly crowned King Rodibreck Firebrand now occupies the throne granting him lordship over his fellow clan members throughout the Tepepan Mountains. Established 3,482 years ago, Balandrur is the most populous dwarven settlement in all Tehuatl. It proudly features innovative dwarven architectural styles where its master craftspeople incorporate the existing stone into their manmade structures in spectacular and provocative ways. A small portion of the settlement that spills out into the valley beneath Mount Bralandur demonstrates their ingenuity. The dwarves refer to the site as the Gathering Place. In this outdoor marketplace and hospitality center consisting of sturdy yet unremarkable stone structures, dwarven merchants, traders, and ambassadors meet with their counterparts from the Aztli Confederation, Poqozas from south of the Great Canal, and delegations belonging to other humanoid races, including the elves, gnomes, and halflings. Balandrur's dwarves conduct their business in this outdoor bazaar trading precious metals, gemstones, tin, shale, coal, and other commodities quarried from the mountains as well as manufactured products such as steel armor, weapons, jewelry, and other fine goods in exchange for agricultural goods, meat, textiles, vulcanized olli, and some of the same finished materials as the dwarves. Visitors who establish a personal relationship with the dwarves after winning their trust may receive an invitation to enter the city proper. At the end of each business day, usually at least an hour before sundown, the dwarves who operate open stands pack their wares and retreat back into the mountain. Those who own permanent shops also close down for the day, but keep their merchandise behind sturdily locked and often magically protected doors. Not surprisingly, gnolls, orcs, goblinoids, and other monstrous creatures who attempt to visit the Gathering Place receive a rude welcome from the dwarven patrols assigned to the area. If a raised axe fails to drive the message home, a volley of bolts from a line of crossbowmen is almost certain to make the dwarves' point abundantly clear.

Beyond the mighty outer gates, Balandrur opens into a fantastical realm of wide, stone streets with vaulted arches, pointed spires, bas-relief sculptures, chiseled statues, and wondrous mosaics inlaid with precious stones, gems, and metals. The city is almost exclusively dwarven with the lone exception being the most Aztli-populated quarter featuring the temple of Zipe-Toteque, or Xotite as the dwarves refer to the human god. The structure is also the only one with any Aztli influence, though the dwarves modified the multi-tiered step pyramid to better accommodate their tastes by adding decorative artwork to its exterior celebrating the dwarves' mastery of gold and silver production. Although each structure rests upon its own foundation and its ceiling is not incorporated into the roof of the natural caverns, the architects used portions of the walls as buttresses to support their building's suspended ceiling. Balandrur's centerpiece is undoubtedly the royal palace where King Rodibreck lives, and he and his court preside over the clan's affairs throughout the Tepepan Mountains. The Aztli delegation from Atenco, who won the right to claim tributes from Balandrur, also occupies a wing within the palace. For centuries, the humans have had a tepid alliance with the dwarves. They share a mutual admiration for each other's cultures and achievements as well as many common enemies, yet the dwarves cannot completely overlook some of the Aztlis' unsavory practices, while the Aztlis find their counterparts' lust for material wealth unsettling.

The youthful Rodibreck rules over a kingdom he gained just two years ago from his venerable father Uldibreck. Desperate to produce a male heir, the elderly monarch married Queen Eldabella who was more than 250 years his junior at the time, yet Eldabella delivered what his former spouse, the popular Brundalla, could not — a son. Uldibreck and the young Eldabella — along with the entire kingdom — celebrated Rodibreck's birth, but many older dwarves and those who loved Brundalla tempered their enthusiasm for what they considered a purely political and social union rather than the close personal bond between Uldibreck and Brundalla. The latter couple's three daughters earned widespread praise and admiration from an adoring public who practically adopted the trio of fun-loving children as their own and were now subtly encouraged to discard them and accept an infant into their lives. Although Rodibreck obviously could not control the events surrounding his entrance into the world, a mild undercurrent of resentment follows him everywhere. This unfortunate circumstance tempers Rodibreck's attitudes toward his fellow dwarves who keep their negative attitudes toward their king quiet while openly denouncing his father for dissolving his parents' marriage solely to spawn a male heir when the Firebrands would have happily accepted a queen or even a king from Uldibreck's extended family.

Of course, the Firebrand dwarves' potential loss is the Aztlis' opportunistic gain. Mimatiqui, the ambassador from Atenco, plays both sides of the fence in this situation. He outwardly placates Rodibreck's distress over the public's continued adulation toward the matriarchal Brundalla and her daughters, while subtly suggesting that the Aztli people would never hold such an

unthinkable grudge against an innocent child. In this regard, Mimatiqui also encourages the dwarven monarch to place his faith in the Aztli god Zipe-Toteque, or Xotite as the dwarves refer to him, instead of their traditional deity Dwerfater. The persuasive Aztli's words intrigue the troubled king, who feels slightly betrayed by the chatter and banter taking place behind closed doors and his royal back. Nonetheless, Uldibreck taught his son to never place his own or someone else's interest ahead of his own people, a lesson the old man seemed to forget in his later years. Rodibreck respects and admires the astute Mimatiqui, yet his loyalties, for now, still reside with his dwarven counselors, especially the venerable Durdreck Firebrand, his diplomatic uncle who acted like his surrogate father throughout his childhood. At his urging, the king now directs much of his energies toward fighting against the dwarves' ancient enemies throughout the Tepepan Mountains. In the last two years, Rodibreck and his forces have won several minor yet inspiring engagements against the hobgoblins and orcs as well as eradicating several monstrous threats in the neighboring peaks and foothills. These triumphs rallied the dwarves behind their sovereign and galvanized his support among some of his skeptics. Despite these efforts, the whispering persists in those circles fiercely devoted to Brundalla.

Fortunately for Rodibreck, the intrigue swirling around his parents' marriage barely extends beyond Balandrur's walls. His extended family members who serve as his vassals in the communities scattered throughout the Tepepan Mountains fully support him and the crown. These outlying towns and villages depend upon Balandrur's assistance to fend off threats to their very survival. Like the weather, things can quickly change for the worse in the tumultuous Tepepan Mountains. Rodibreck wisely responded to their pleas in times of crisis, which bolstered his standing among his subordinates and earned him the good will of dwarven visitors who travel to Balandrur. The dwarves have 3,150 trained professional soldiers at their disposal to rapidly address any developing situation under their jurisdiction. While most remained stationed in Balandrur to defend the king and his unofficial capital, roughly 1,200 of these heavily armed troops can respond to a problem in a remote locale within three days or less. They do so by traveling through the highways of subterranean passages connecting the city with multiple destinations across the region. Of course, some of these corridors require nearly constant monitoring because they occasionally intersect with unexplored tunnels, while the domain's other underground inhabitants — hobgoblins, goblins, orcs, ogres, minotaurs, and grimlocks, as well as other indigenous monstrous denizens who lurk in the depths below the earth — use the others. Rumors persist about salamander nobles and their efrete masters who reside in the magma chambers of Tepepan's active volcanoes. More obscure tales describe otherworldly encounters with strange, seemingly alien creatures and ruins in the range's darkest recesses. Recent reports of seismic activity in the area surrounding Tepetzin currently trouble King Rodibreck, as he and his advisors fear the mountain or something inside the dormant volcano may be stirring to life. While the shield volcano may not pose an imminent danger to Balandrur, an eruption or unnatural disaster would greatly impact his kingdom's holdings in the region and ultimately affect the entire island. Despite the persistent rumblings and rumors, his spies claim the magma chamber remains empty and there are no signs of monstrous or humanoid activity within the mountain itself.

While the preceding concerns weigh heavily on the king, most people in Balandrur occupy their minds with thoughts of improving their own lots in life rather than worrying about matters well outside their purview. Being a subterranean city, mining fuels its economy and feeds its people. Many of the city's residents work in the tunnels and passages beneath their feet, chiseling tin, copper, and salt out of the earth while hoping to strike a vein of more precious metals or dislodge a gemstone from a piece of ore. While some toil in the depths of the earth, skilled craftspeople transform these raw materials into wonderful pieces of jewelry, weapons and armor. The products that the dwarves themselves do not use ultimately find their way to the Gathering Place outside the main gates. Although the dwarves grow mushrooms and other edible fungi in vast chambers below the mountain, the metropolis heavily relies upon grains and vegetables imported from the surface world. The dwarves trade some of the riches of the mountains and their handiworks for the bounties of the fields. Aztli merchants are their main trading partners, though dwarven merchants also barter goods with Poqoza traders who offer mushrooms of a different variety, elves from the neighboring forests who covet mithral and other rarities, and the gnomes and halflings who prefer gadgets and other curiosities. While gold, silver, and mithral may be the big-ticket items, the mundane commodities of tin, copper, salt, and coal are the bread and butter that feed the masses.

While the people are content, King Rodibreck's reign appears secure. However, in addition to the controversy of his father's actions, some within his court believe his relationship with the Aztlis and most notably Atenco's ambassador Mimatiqui is getting too cozy for their liking. However, no one in his inner circle wants to risk provoking a war with the military juggernaut. In



lieu of expelling Mimatiqui or withholding the city's tribute to the powerful alliance, some members of his court have been discreetly spreading lies about the Aztli delegate among the populace and resurrecting an old, discredited rumor claiming Mimatiqui attempted to seduce Rodibreck's widowed mother to gain greater favor with her son. Although some of these malicious tales have reached the king's ear, he gives them the same credence he applies to the dwarves' stories about his father — none. Rodibreck may pay these rumors no mind, yet the same may not be said for Mimatiqui and the Aztlis when they discover the slanderous statements. The people of Atenco despise gossip, and they do not take kindly to disparaging comments about their leaders, leading some to fear that a day of reckoning may be at hand for those stirring up trouble within Balandrur.

DARL

Ruler: Queen Ruva Firebrand

Government: Feudal (owes fealty to Balandrur)

Population: 14,045 (8,523 dwarves, 3,256 Aztlis, 1,214 gnomes, 683 halflings, 369 elves)

Languages: Dwarven, Common, Elvish, Gnome, Halfling

Resources: Iron, jewels, lime, sculpture

Most dwarven settlements scattered throughout the Tepepan Mountains have made a conscious effort to maintain their racial identity while still accepting Aztli hegemony. The small city of Darl represents a rare exception. In the mind of its current ruler, Queen Ruva Firebrand, first cousin of current king Rodibreck Firebrand, the future is now. She staunchly believes integration is a fortuitous inevitability in a rapidly evolving world and that embracing and adopting traditions and ideas from other cultures can only improve the dwarves' standing throughout the region. It is no coincidence that Ruva spends much of her time discussing philosophy and other intellectual topics with Miateteo, Tlazo's emissary to the city of Darl. Their close relationship leads some to speculate their fondness for each other may be more than platonic, but Ruva's independence and devotion to her extended family keeps these outlandish and unfounded tales on society's fringes. An important factor that plays a key role in Ruva's outlook is the vast distance separating her from her kin. Nestled in a mountain valley at the northwestern edge of the Tepepan Mountains, Darl would be hard pressed to remain in the range and be farther away from Balandrur than it already is.

Dwarven architecture and artistry account for the majority of Darl's fine arts, but many elements of Aztli painting techniques, music, song, and masonry make a noticeable impression on the city's public and private works, with smaller influences from the other humanoid races who cohabitate the settlement alongside the dwarves. Darl also adopted Aztli agricultural innovations as the humans taught the dwarves to build chinampas and cultivate maize on a shallow lake bed on the settlement's edge. Although the dwarves have failed to develop an enthusiastic taste for Aztli culinary fare such as tamales, tortillas, and other masa flour products, they more readily adopt to their hunting strategies and love for flavoring agents, including salt, cilantro, and chili peppers. They also took a shining to the Aztlis' ball game, ullamalitzli, and their adoration for wagering on the matches' outcomes. The gnomes, halflings, and elves also make an impact on dwarven society to a lesser degree than the more numerous humans who dwell in Darl. Despite the overt efforts to encourage diversity, the various humanoid races freely mingle among each other during the day, yet retreat to the security of the homogenous enclaves when moonlight basks the lands in its pale glow.

Mutual admiration aside, Ruva and her people detest the Aztlis' horrific religious ceremonies. To express their disgust for the savage rites, she explicitly bans the humans from depicting these rituals in any artistic medium or even mentioning the pantheon's bloodthirsty members in public. Worshipping an Aztli god, including the dwarven variation of Xotite, is expressly forbidden in Darl. Conversely, she applies no restrictions to venerating elvish, gnomish, or halfling deities, and sometimes even partakes in joining her fellow non-dwarven citizens during festivals celebrating their holidays or commemorating other important events. Surprisingly, most Aztlis harbor no ill will against Ruva for her draconian stance toward the profession of their faith. The humans recognize grisly sacrifices, regardless of the reason, may not be everyone's cup of warm cacao, especially those who fail to recognize or understand their significance.

Despite the city's level of inclusion, traditional dwarven industries primarily fuel Darl's economy. The city owes its founding to the rich deposits of iron ore in the peaks and valleys surrounding the sprawling settlement that encompasses 2,250 acres. The community's foundries seemingly operate day and night to produce what many experts consider to be Tehuatl's finest steel. Dwarven sculptors toiling in their studios craft wondrous bronze, marble, and limestone

statues that spark the imagination and dazzle the senses. Jewelers combine precious metals and captivating gemstones to fashion brooches, earrings, rings, necklaces, and other decorative articles fit for royalty. The city enjoys lucrative business relationships with Tlazo as well as the elves of Ysanyarr and the gnomes of Minnalín in the Cuahtla Forest.

Darl's tolerance toward other people and cultures makes some of its citizens' extreme xenophobia seem more disheartening than in most other settlements where it is much more commonplace. While many emulate Ruva's acceptance of those different than themselves, some corners of Darl harbor deep-seated mistrust and hatred for other races. It would seem logical that the majority of the resentment would be directed at the dwarves' Aztli overlords, but surprisingly the city's smallest minority receives the most heat. Dislike for the elves runs deep in some dwarven families, though the origins for the intense loathing defy explanation in this part of the world. Ruva and her inner circle believe these attitudes about the elves are misdirected from their drow elf cousins who allegedly inhabit the subterranean tunnels and chambers beneath Darl. Legends claim these humanoids dwell in the ruins of an abandoned city far below the earth. Although no one from Darl has ever claimed to have seen a drow elf, ancient Aztli myths speak of the herogods' encounters with humanoid tarantulas in the bowels of the Tepepan Mountains. Ruva ponders whether it would be prudent to send 20 volunteers from her integrated force of 685 fighting men and women to dispel these stories once and for all.

HRAWRG (OGRETOWN)

Ruler: The Sepultudre (the seven oni)

Government: Kratocracy "might makes right"

Population: 668 (460 ogres, 85 hill giants, 50 Aztlis, 36 Tozcas, 24 dwarves, 7 oni, 4 stone giants, 2 frost giants)

Languages: Giant, Common, Dwarven

Resources: Gold, information, silver

Perhaps because of the residents' enormous size, the settlement of Hrawrg exists both inside the exhausted lava tubes and magma chambers within Ahueteto, a 17,450-foot dormant stratovolcano, and along the mountain's exterior slope and into the valley beneath it. The interior portions of Hrawrg have been retrofitted to accommodate the huge inhabitants, while the sprawling stone buildings outside have been specifically designed for oversized occupants and visitors alike. The tunnels burrowing into the mountains also connect to other settlements in this region of the Tepepan Mountains as the town falls under Ixtla's jurisdiction. Despite towering over the much smaller Aztli representatives, the ogres and giants who dwell in Hrawrg have come to respect and fear the bold humans who never back down from a challenge no matter how daunting. Each year, Hrawrg offers the Aztlis 10 pounds of gold and 100 pounds of silver extracted from Ahueteto's engorged belly as tribute, though the Aztlis happily convert the value of a captured gnoll or orc to the equivalent of one pound of gold or 10 pounds of silver.

Despite being ruled by a septet of onis known as the Sepultudre and predominately catering to giants and their kin, Hrawrg often serves as a gateway for adventurers delving farther into the Tepepan Mountains. These onis make it their business to keep close tabs on everyone's comings and goings within and through Hrawrg, as they take a cut from all business transactions taking place under or even close to their area of jurisdiction. Buyers and sellers refer to the payments as the "greedy finger." The onis' skim presumably offers customers protection while conducting their shady business and also keeps the Aztli Confederation off their backs. The Sepultudre conduct constant surveillance over their holdings, including using their abilities to charm other creatures to intrude on conversations and unnecessarily pry into the personal and private affairs of anyone they encounter. The onis gather every evening to collaborate and compile the intelligence into a centralized stockpile of data and information. Lacking any moral scruples, the Sepultudre gladly sells these details to anyone willing to pay their exorbitant prices.

Because of the giants' connections to different races and locations within the range, Hrawrg provides a strong launching point for heroes to gather rumors and intelligence, sell and purchase illicit goods, or hire impressive muscle for a trek into the peaks beyond the settlement. However, some people also venture here to disappear from sight as well. Forgers, cutthroats, and ruffians of all stripes pass through Hrawrg on a daily basis, though anyone heading here is warned to keep their wits about them at all times and pray to their deities that they make it through the night unscathed. Established in a locale as far from Balandrur as possible, this hub of activity never sleeps. Ogres, humans, and various other races constantly engage in nefarious deals in the backrooms of grimy pubs along Gurr Street. This main boulevard stretches 1,000 yards from

The Bulging Eye, the first pub seen when approaching from the main road, to WulfCurr, a string of warehouses and storage vaults dug into the solid granite under the mountain.

Everyone, including Aztli visitors, speak Giant here, especially at first meetings. When a citizen of Hrawrg becomes well-acquainted with someone, they might slip into Common tongue to conduct business. Ogretown has only one simple rule: No one speaks of what transpires or was discussed in Hrawrg to anyone who was not a party to the transaction, event, or conversation. Those with loose lips suffer the most gruesome and humiliating punishment of all, having their tongue pulled out of their mouth by a member of the Sepultudre. Hrawrg's citizens refer to the discipline as the "flailing lips." Those who suffer this fate always leave Ogretown shortly thereafter. Some wisely leave of their own accord, never to return or speak of their ordeal for whatever time they have left in this world. The foolish individuals who opt to stay meet an ignominious end somewhere on Gurr Street or, worse still, end up as tribute to the Aztli delegation for a meeting with a sacrificial altar.

KULGAN AND OTIMPO

Ruler: Talif Tar (Kulgan), Tohn Tar (Otimpo)

Government: Autocracy (Tar family)

Population: Kulgan: 1,433 (952 hobgoblins, 189 Aztlis, 177 dwarves, 93 gnomes, 22 Tozcas); Otimpo: 861 (556 hobgoblins, 107 dwarves, 96 Aztlis, 73 gnomes, 29 Tozcas)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Gnome, Goblin

Resources: Coal, gemstones, gold, shale

A rare, calm 14-mile stretch of the Tomotomo connects the subterranean hobgoblin communities of Kulgan, which is downriver, to Otimpo, which sits upriver. The latter settlement is a hellish mining town where slave laborers work exhausting 12-hour shifts performing the backbreaking job of extracting shale and coal from the rock with the occasional hobgoblin elation of striking a cache of gemstones or a vein of gold. Tohn Tar, the younger cousin, runs the mining operation at Otimpo with a ruthless fist. Descended from the heinous, militaristic Telen Tar, who led the hobgoblins in their brief dalliance with the gnolls during the Nights of Sillu and Claw, Tohn always carries a riding crop as if he were a distinguished aristocrat. He uses the cruel instrument on anyone who displeases him, beating them repeatedly until the wounds caused by the vicious weapon resemble two T's across the individual's back or chest. He always travels with at least one of the 13 dukes who enforce his edicts and keep the mines continually functioning day and night. When not accompanying Tohn, the dukes freely move about the complex, instilling their brand of harsh discipline on any slave they deem to be derelict in their duties.

The slaves lug any coal or shale they retrieve to a docking bay where they package the raw materials and ship them downriver by boat to Kulgan where another team of slaves at that location unloads the containers and distributes them to their subterranean business contacts. The Tars always burn their symbol of a stylized "X" onto the wooden surface of every container they sell. Kulgan's master, Talif Tar, the older cousin, runs the distribution end of the enterprise with a defter approach. He works his slaves hard and wields a free hand punishing them when he deems it necessary, but he exercises a modicum of restraint in the way he treats his slaves. A trio of handsomely paid hobgoblin assassins works as his personal bodyguards, especially when he travels to meet with current and prospective clients or feels the need to quietly silence a rebellious slave or hobgoblin troublemaker.

On those rare occasions when the relatives meet, Tohn chastises his cousin Talif for being too soft, an accusation he rebuffs out of hand. Talif considers himself an entrepreneur. He perceives his cousin as a depraved sadist who takes more delight in exacting pain than amassing a personal fortune. To that end, Talif pockets roughly half the gold and gemstones that reach his town, siphoning them off through his shady network of business associates that stretches as far away as Mactli. The remainder of the precious goods, shale, and coal find their way to dwarven customers throughout the Tepepan Mountains and Tlotl metalworkers who use the material to forge steel in their foundries. When Talif's team finishes emptying the boxes of their contents, he returns the empty containers back to Otimpo under the watchful eye of a crotchety hobgoblin shaman named Goldtooth who grouses and complains throughout the journey back upriver. She uses her magic to assist the small vessel's crew during the return journey to have the containers refilled.

KULM

This huge expanse of underground passages and rooms fills the bellies of two side-by-side mountains that were likely extinct shield volcanoes. The complex's tunnels and chambers cover at least one square mile of ground several hundred feet below the earth. While natural causes can account for some of the arteries boring through the stone, a terrible magical experiment gone awry must be credited with creating the vast majority of subterranean abscesses based upon their unusual shapes and configurations. In the immediate aftermath of the great cataclysm, an imaginative Aztli druid and his sorcerer understudies attempted to replicate Tehuatl's lush forests in the lightless recesses beneath the mountain to restore the fading hopes of his melancholy queen and her despondent family. He and his team tried to transform the bioluminescent algae growing on the moist, warm walls into the building blocks for the trees and greenery of the former world so they could once again flourish even in the absence of any light source. Yet instead of igniting a spark of new life, the potent transmutation magic shaped the algae into fossilized wood, creating a petrified forest instead of the living one the queen and her family desired more than anything else in their unfamiliar, bleak surroundings. Robbed of her last chance to romp in her beloved forests, the queen sank into an irretrievable depression that caused her and her subjects to lose their zest for life and tragically wither and die from sheer sadness.

After they departed this dismal world for the next, a wandering band of grimlocks stumbled upon the practically unbreakable trees and the decomposing corpses of the monarch and her people. Enamored with the petrified wood, the grimlocks took up residence here and made the stronghold their own. Over the thousands of years since the queen's demise, the grimlocks have done the unthinkable and overpopulated the spacious underground complex. Although the blind inhabitants cannot see the trees' artistic qualities, their enhanced sense of touch allows them to run their fingers across their odd surface, instilling a sense of awe in the unsophisticated monsters. Despite the passage of time, the tale of the druid and his queen resonates through the ages, especially among adventurers who are intrigued about the society's presumably lost treasures that the queen supposedly stored in a giant-sized, heart-shaped wooden box hidden somewhere within the subterranean network.

KURN DOMLADUR

Ruler: Lord Aeson Fayrith Firebrand

Government: Feudal (owes fealty to Balandrur)

Population: 18,892 (18,539 dwarves, 353 Aztlis)

Languages: Dwarven, Common

Resources: Copper, elk, salt, tin

Lord Aeson Fayrith Firebrand oversees perhaps the most organized community in the Tepepan Mountains, though the contrary rang true for most of Kurn Domladur's long history. Founded as a dwarven military outpost roughly 100 miles northwest of Tepetzin, Kurn Domladur developed a well-earned reputation for being the Firebrand clan's dumping ground where they sent misfits, troublemakers, and petty criminals to fight against the equally unruly humanoids and monsters who inhabited the area. Fortunately for the dwarves, the undisciplined and unmotivated soldiers seemed to enjoy taking out their frustrations and angst on their people's sworn enemies, making the lackadaisical bunch into antiheroes among their extended kin. Despite their military success, the powers that be in distant Balandrur resented the adulation being heaped upon a band of miscreants who enjoyed being the charming rebel darlings of the Firebrand clan. Kurn Domladur's "Brutal Bruisers" as they came to be known, learned over time that fame can come with a hefty price tag.

The initial euphoria of hobnobbing with dwarven celebrities enticed a motley crew of smitten admirers to leave Balandrur behind and start fresh in a remote outpost at the edge of the frontier, where orc raiders and goblinoid slavers are part of the regular routine. Some never made it to their destination as they either died at the hands of the orcs or lived out the remainder of their wretched existence as the goblinoids' minions. Yet, the majority who did survive the journey established businesses and livelihoods to cater to the needs of their beloved heroes. In less than a decade, Kurn Domladur's population increased sevenfold from 300 men at arms and their attendants to a large town with more than 2,000 souls. Drunken revelry, loose morals, and needless violence plagued the dwarven settlement, which more closely resembled the carnival-like atmosphere of a Poqoza city than a regimented military installation. Although the Firebrands still ruled the roost, everyone focused their attention on their next buzz or tryst. The Brutal Bruisers who

skyrocketed the outpost into the stratosphere still knocked their foes' heads clean from their bodies, but the years of hard living and senseless killings now took a heavy toll on their weary minds and battered bodies. The adoring fans who fell in love with this charismatic cast of fun-loving characters watched in dismay while each of their crestfallen idols tragically paid the fates back for a decade of wanton excess. Detrick Firebrand, the group's spiritual leader, slit his leathery wrists with his greataxe, while his fellow Bruisers aspirated on their own vomit, painfully withered away from sexually transmitted diseases or fatty livers reportedly the size of a young dwarven child, or followed in their inspiration's footsteps down the path of suicide.

After its fleeting golden age, Kurn Domladur settled into a state of complacent lethargy. New settlers continued to trudge into the community that slowly grew from a trading and military outpost into a full-fledged large town. Impressive stone fortifications and intimidating outer walls surrounded the homes, businesses, farmland, and pastures that sprouted up in the broad, flat valley with three mountain passes granting access to the outside world beyond its secure defenses. As the town became more self-sufficient and less reliant on supplies from distant Balandrur, some dwarves left the family farms and pastures to extract minerals out of the nearby mountain halls and peaks. The miners of Kurn Domladur retrieve and process roughly 240 tons of salt, 80 tons of tin, and several thousand pounds of copper each year along with an occasional rich vein of gold, silver, or mithral. Despite its transition from a garrison into a traditional community, the citizens retained their rough-and-tumble demeanors and their disdain for civic institutions designed to constrain their freedom. These attitudes persisted for nearly all of its 1,745-year history until a dynamic new leader assumed lordship over the rowdy dwarven town.

Seventy-two years ago, Aeson Fayrith Firebrand strode into town and nothing has been the same in Kurn Domladur since that fateful day. Born into royalty as the second cousin, twice removed, of then King Uldibreck Firebrand, Aeson grew up with a chip on his broad shoulders. He excelled in his studies as a youth and proved his bravery and tactical genius on the battlefield throughout his adolescence and early adulthood. His victory over an orcish army at the Battle of Ungadur cemented his military legacy forever. Exhausted from a prolonged forced march and outnumbered four to one, the headstrong Aeson rallied his tired and frightened soldiers into action and ultimately history. The impressed king offered Aeson any assignment of his choosing after his magnificent triumph. Much to the monarch's shock, the bold Aeson Fayrith asked for the lordship over the disreputable Kurn Domladur, a post typically viewed as a punishment rather than a perk. Under his able command and guidance, the new lord transformed the town into a model dwarven community where timetables run like clockwork, public works are immaculately clean, and everyone exudes politeness to friends and strangers alike. Businesses and establishments open at dawn and close at dusk except for drinking houses, which close at midnight and prohibit serving each guest more than one drink per hour, though barkeeps take some liberties with the exact definition of one "drink."

From the confines of his formidable keep in the middle of a vast field where herds of elk leisurely graze, Lord Aeson Fayrith Firebrand presides over a fiefdom stretching across 6,200 square miles of terrain that includes the 20 square miles that comprise Kurn Domladur proper. He commands a fighting force of 740 dwarven warriors clad in chain mail armor and equipped with crossbows, axes, and sturdy steel shields. These soldiers defend the town and its surroundings from the pervasive orcs, goblinoids, gnolls, and monstrous denizens who threaten Kurn Domladur on a recurring basis. Aeson is a shrewd military commander and dwarven legend, but he struggles in his dealings with the Aztli Confederation's delegation from Ixtla. The city's outspoken human emissary Cepuaco baffles the structured dwarf who cannot figure out whether Cepuaco's curtness is a ploy or an accurate reflection of his true personality. The acerbic Aztli cares nothing about his dwarven subordinate's opinion of him. His sole concern lies with procuring Ixtla's annual tribute of salt, tin, and elk from Kurn Domladur. To enforce his alliance's will, the no-nonsense dignitary stations 100 Aztli warriors and 10 eagle Cuauhocolotls in the town to ostensibly bolster the settlement's defense forces, though the dwarves and humans have never conducted a joint mission together.

Nearly all of Kurn Domladur's citizens rightly credit Aeson with changing the town for the better from its lawless and wild origins, but some recalcitrant dwarves complain he went too far in reforming the settlement into a lifeless monastery. It only takes a single ale or mead to coax the word "castrate" out their pouty lips. The burgeoning resistance movement refers to themselves as The Bruiser Brothers in homage to the town's original celebrities. Not surprisingly, the dwarves who belong to the group direct most of their gripes toward Cepuaco and the Aztlis, blaming the human outsiders for locking down the community and exerting too much of their prudish influence on their dwarven kin. In addition to this potential threat, the dwarves delving into

the nearby mountains recently unearthed an ancient door made entirely from scrimshaw bearing strange runes on its surface. At an altitude of only 4,780 feet, the structure likely dates to the period when the mountain sat beneath the ocean, though who created it and why remains a mystery. Eerie sounds and phosphorescent lights peeking out from the cracks beneath the floor caused the miners who discovered it to drop their chisels and run for dear life, never to look back or return.

NEPALTA

At an elevation of 12,158 feet, the freshwater lake of Nepalta is the only body of water in Tehuatl whose surface regularly freezes, though the transition from liquid to solid rarely lasts more than a handful of days. Cradled within the contours of a circular ring of peaks, Nepalta reaches a maximum depth of a whopping 823 feet and encompasses a surface area of 370 square miles. The sights of soaring peaks and crystal blue water make for panoramic views and spectacular scenery, yet the remote locale teems with unseen dangers. The dwarves and Aztlis living in the mountainside villages beneath the lake occasionally venture to the lakeside to catch the oversized catfish, axolotls, and trout, yet even adults find it difficult to muster the courage to trek to the bountiful lake. Because of its extreme altitude, Nepalta never sank beneath the ocean and is the only body of water in Tehuatl that predates the tidal wave that ravaged the entire continent. In a sense, Nepalta resembles a time capsule of Tehuatl's past, before Tlatoani fell and the hero-gods rose to replace him. However, the lake aptly demonstrates that nostalgia often obscures the truth about the past.

With the hero-gods seemingly on the verge of victory, seven traitorous snake advisors gathered on the shores of Nepalta to devise an escape plan. The counselors correctly deduced their opponents and perhaps even the gods of Boros would closely monitor extradimensional travel. Therefore, the traitors concocted an idea to build a hidden sanctuary in Nepalta's murky depths where they could ride out the proverbial storm and re-emerge after the victors got their spoils. To protect their concealed stronghold, the advisors called upon one of their own, a deep hunter sea serpent, to stand guard over their clandestine hideaway. Although the sea serpent performed its designated task as directed, its seven brethren were more negligent in their duties. Against the odds, they successfully constructed their underwater complex, but when the time came to retreat into it, they were in for a rude awakening. Somehow, their desperate master discovered their devious plan and hunted them down across the breadth of the world. What ultimately became of the snake advisors remains undetermined, yet the deep hunter sea serpent and its descendants survived and eventually thrived in the chilly waters of Nepalta. Fortunately, for surface dwellers, the monstrous beasts typically swim near the lake's deep bottom where geothermal vents flood the lowest depths with warm water, which they prefer. Attacks against fishermen are extremely rare, but the mere threat of the creature convinces most prospective anglers to look elsewhere for the catch of the day.

Nonetheless, over the centuries, numerous adventurers have come to Nepalta to try their luck at finding and infiltrating the snake advisors' presumably undisturbed and treasure-laden refuge. None has ever accessed or even located the structure at the bottom of the lake, and of those who undertook the harrowing search, only a lucky handful even returned. The lack of success over the course of several thousand years has moderately dampened enthusiasm for the perilous endeavor, yet at least once every decade someone dreams of accomplishing the seemingly impossible. Until then, what really lies on the bottom of Nepalta remains a closely guarded secret that even the hero-gods never dared to unravel.

NODE 226

Ruler: Traxxasso

Government: Magocracy

Population: 5,006 (4,009 goblins, 443 dwarves, 389 Aztlis, 104 Tozcas, 61 hobgoblins)

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Goblin

Resources: Copper

Goblins fancy themselves to be experts in many things, but astronomy appears a discipline not well suited for their abilities and talents. Nonetheless, the goblins dabble in the pseudoscience of finding and triangulating the precise locations of ley lines running across the length and breadth of Tehuatl. The goblins, under their leader Traxxasso, believe celestial travelers created these points to serve as



transmission lines to send magical energy from the cosmos to specific locales across the island where they coalesce within their settlement that they renamed Node 226. An inherent messiah complex compels Traxxasso, a potent yet unhinged goblin warlock, to actively proselytize others to the belief that he communes with a godlike extraterrestrial entity who has chosen him to lead the goblins to unprecedented greatness and supplant the Aztlis as the island's dominant humanoid race. In furtherance of this overly ambitious goal, he and his cult's acolytes cast spells into the nodes at daily intervals in spots where the lines supposedly breach the surface. Whether their efforts have accomplished anything at all remains debatable, though Traxxasso seems convinced that his moment is soon at hand.

To demonstrate his mystical power, the goblin leader constructed a wondrous sanctum in the heart of Mehatzin, an 8,455-foot mountain in the southwestern corner of the Tepepan range. A scintillating black quartz crystal four times the size of an average goblin sits atop an inverted, convex altar in the center of a massive chamber with interlocking copper lines imbedded into the stone floor, walls, and ceiling. Crackling bolts of energy dance around between the central crystal and the network of copper lines scattered throughout the unholy site the goblins refer to as the Node. The spectacular light show and dazzling visual display enthrall the goblins who practically worship their messianic leader. Goblins who can wield magic offer half their meager wealth to the crystal as recompense for bestowing the Node's power upon the caster. The goblins are willing to part with their limited possessions because the Node apparently imbues an unnatural number of goblins with latent magical power.

Despite Traxxasso's delusions of grandeur, the goblin's subterranean community avoids almost all scrutiny from the region's other humanoid races and monsters alike. The goblins deliberately keep a low profile by limiting their exposure to the surface world. For sustenance, the goblins hunt bats and rats for meat and gather tubers in their foul caverns to feed their citizens and to give them the strength and energy to visit the Node once each day. The goblins also keep numerous humanoid slaves on hand to scrounge for food and to perform the tribe's menial tasks such as butchering, cleaning, and cooking whatever meat they or the goblins procure in their daily travels. When the hunts prove unsuccessful, an unfortunate slave must make up for the protein deficiency, which gives the goblins' humanoid slaves added incentive to find something to eat instead of ending up on their masters' dinner plates.

On those occasions when a Nodite, as they call themselves, encounters outsiders trespassing in their territory, the patrol's embedded sorcerer magically notifies their superior about the intruders. Within minutes, the goblins mount a counteroffensive against the interlopers, attacking them in

waves from multiple directions within the cramped and crowded tunnels and passageways that connect the chambers to each other. Traxxasso quickly learns of any incursion, which prompts him to use his divination magic to locate and assess the threat. The goblin leader knows the complex's layout like the back of his mutated third hand, which dangles from an arm attached to his left side from a conjoined, parasitic twin. A nose, maw, and single, sleepy, over-sized eye emerge from the upper edge of his belly on the left side of his deformed rib cage. Traxxasso feeds his "brother" four times daily and experiences deranged mental impulses from his twin's twisted, primitive brain if he is more than a few minutes late for a meal.

TEPETZIN

Rising to a staggering height of 24,735 feet, this mighty, dormant shield volcano towers over the smaller cinder cone and shield volcanoes surrounding it. The gargantuan behemoth covers 3,100 square miles of territory and has a maximum width of 82 miles. It sits atop a hotspot in the planet's crust, which triggered the massive eruption that added millions of tons of molten rock to the island and caused Tepetzin's summit to collapse, giving rise to the massive caldera that lies 5,560 feet lower than its original summit. The mountain smoldered for roughly seven months before it inexplicably fell silent almost as abruptly as it stirred to life. The Aztli god of fire, Contlati, generally receives credit for lighting the spark for this destructive yet also seminal event that expanded Tehuatl's footprint into areas previously submerged beneath the waves. To commemorate his actions, his priests and followers built one of the few temples dedicated to him at the base of the mountain, wherein the god presumably dwells in the mountain's smoldering belly surrounded by the deceased spirits of his most devout worshippers. The sacred site has remained continuously active longer than any other religious location on the island. Although the volcano's magma chamber and lava tubes remain empty, a roiling cylindrical shaft of molten stone in the temple's inner sanctum serves as its centerpiece, beckoning the faithful to make one pilgrimage to the holy flame at least once during their lifetime.

Tepetzin undoubtedly has the potential to devastate the whole of the Tepepan Mountains, yet while it remains silent, the inorganic matter pushed to the surface eons ago also gives rise to the island's most fertile soil. The priests who tend to the temple's interior also grow Tehuatl's most succulent tomatoes in this rich earth. Indeed, some Aztlis and even Poqozas undertake the trek to

the remote mountain to bring these lustrous fruits back to their homelands, though Contlati's priests only accept turquoise as payment for the delicious fruits. They decline any other form of recompense for the tomatoes and refuse to haggle over their price or barter them in exchange for other goods.

While Aztli priests certainly maintain and operate the temple for the god's human worshippers, rumors persist that other creatures who venerate the heat of the flame and the power of the volcano also pay homage to the deity, with red dragons being foremost among these contenders. Other legends claim that a cabal of salamanders who dwell below the planet's mantle venerate the fiery lord of volcanoes. Over the last few months, Tepetzin has experienced an undeniable uptick in seismic activity. The tremors are sporadic and mild, and Contlati's priests have confirmed that magma has not pushed toward the surface or re-entered the volcano's empty chambers or the lava tubes, suggesting there is no imminent danger of another catastrophic eruption in the near future. Nonetheless, the development greatly concerns the temple's high priest Tlecoco who regularly communes with his divine master, although Contlati has remained silent despite persistent pleas for guidance on the matter. Tlecoco usually never wavers in his faith, yet somewhere in his tormented mind, he fears that Contlati may have shifted his favor toward the tiny yet feared segment of his non-humanoid worshippers.

TOMOTOMO

This long, chilly river twists and corkscrews underground through the Tepepan Mountains. Because of its unusual path through solid rock, only a few genuine maps accurately detail its route through the range's subterranean rock and stone. Most of the maps in circulation are inaccurate forgeries of the originals or just plain old wrong. The river is treacherous for most of its length, especially around the tight hairpin turns and steep drops. Despite the hazards, some travelers use their magical abilities to safely navigate the river's perilous spots to quickly move through the mountains via the waterway rather than spend considerably more time walking through non-circuitous tunnels and passages. In addition to its inherent dangers, many monstrous inhabitants incorporate portions of the river into their territory. These creatures frequently hunt and fish in the river, catching crayfish and albino carp that swim in the lightless, frigid waters. Legends claim a venerable crayfish has grown so large that it got stuck in a contorted section of the river, duplicating the effects of a makeshift dam. While it has not created an impenetrable seal, its presence significantly diminished the current and flow of water in the affected portion. Humanoids predominately use the waterway to facilitate travel, but some Firebrand dwarves endeavor to put the river to work for industrial purposes. They are attempting to harness the swift current to turn the cogs of a gristmill and a hydraulic-powered hammer to beat iron into long beams of a uniform size.

The Firebrand dwarves also use the river for a competitive diversion. The clan's members race metallic bobsled-like vehicles supported by an undercarriage with two sharp, bladed edges through a deadly course of sharp descents, modest inclines, and nearly perpendicular slopes. The exhilaration of pushing these machines to their limits exceeds all expectations but the sport comes with tremendous dangers. Injuries are common, while at least one death has occurred in the annual event every year since it first began 252 years ago. The only requirements to participate are to bring your courage and your own vehicle to the competition. No outsider has ever won, but a select handful of Aztli's have tried. However, most humans are content to watch and wager on the outcome, leaving what they perceive to be insanity to the daredevil dwarves.

TUREW

A marvel of technology and mystical power, Turew once produced clockwork automatons and animated objects for a rival clan of dwarves who tried to neutralize the Firebrand's numerical superiority using machines and constructs. These unusual dwarves, whose names were lost in the conflict, hailed from a distant land, presumably somewhere in one of the northern continents. While there were no more than 50 of them when they first appeared, they hoped their advanced gadgetry and strange building materials would give them the firepower to establish their own foothold in the Tepepan Mountains. At their zenith of their power, the factory of Turew manufactured four automatons or animated objects per day. Some were created to serve as frontline troops or war machines, while others were intended to perform ancillary duties to support the military effort. When the Firebrand dwarves discovered the intruders, they brought down the full might of their magical powers and weapons onto the upstarts, blasting them and their infernal machines with a hail of acid and smashing their metal robots with adamantine axes and hammers. In less than an hour, the Firebrands turned their formidable opponents and their industrial complex into a heap of twisted, corroding metal and sundered flesh and bone. Only the factory's innovative designer escaped the conflagration along with his plans for a terrifying machine capable of unleashing epic destruction upon the world.

Sixty-two years have passed since the Firebrand dwarves reduced the cavern's contents into a warped scrap heap. The victors salvaged the carnage for useful metal and component parts, but they expressed no desire to incorporate their challengers' technology into their own designs. All that remains now are pockets of debris: belts, pulleys, cogs, gears, and other spare parts. The massive support beams that hold up the ceiling remain. The Firebrands forgot about the neglected cave long ago, but mysterious sounds emanating from the factory and glimpses of metallic dwarves moving about the subterranean tunnels suggest its eccentric creator, Chagt Throckton, reactivated the factory with the intent of finally bringing his dreadnaught of steel and flame to life.

Overview Weather Table: Grassland and Marsh

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: TLOCOCUA MARSH

Baseline Temperature Deviation: $-1d4+1$ °F
Daily Weather Deviation: $+1d10\%$ chance of rain
Relative Humidity Deviation: $+1d10$

This festering hellhole of marshland stretches along the island's eastern coast immediately south of the Great Canal and extends farther south until it reaches the bottom tip of Tehuatl. The pervasive tides wash nutrients ashore, pushing them onto the goeey surface where reeds, grasses, sedges, and other soft-stemmed vegetation that can survive in a brackish environment flourish. The habitat is ideally suited as a nursery for many ocean- and river-dwelling fish along with bottom-feeding species that feast on the debris and organic matter pushed ashore by the tides or forced downriver by the current. However, most humanoid adapt to the inhospitable wetland less successfully than marine species, though lizard people and amphibious humanoid races such as the sahuagin have colonized portions of the Tlococua Marsh at various points in time. Yet even they fear some of the marsh's most horrifying denizens. Among these are giant crocodiles that slog through the muck seeking prey as well as the marsh's resident black dragons, hydras, and other abominations that take up residence in the malodorous area. These vicious creatures inhabit the wetland alongside aquatic animals such as ducks, otters, frogs, salamanders, rats, mice, iguanas, opossums, and herons that frequent the shores and rivers.

The neighboring ocean and the high moisture content keeps the humidity oppressively high and the temperatures consistently sweltering. The marsh experiences a rainy season and a dry season, though the ground generally remains damp and soggy throughout the year, even when the precipitation decreases. Runoff from the wet season in the neighboring Caxcalli Grasslands surges downhill into the lower-lying marsh, which absorbs some of the excess water before draining it and the rainfall it receives into the neighboring ocean. The sections of the marsh closest to the ocean are brackish, but the rivers farther upstream contain freshwater. Despite the abundant supplies of potable water throughout the region, the Poqozas and Tulitas generally shun the Tlococua Marsh for several reasons. Disease-carrying pests such as ticks, mosquitoes, flies, and small mammals are pervasive throughout the marsh. In addition, travel through the high grasses and shallow waterways proves exceptionally challenging, even for a lightweight canoe or fleet-footed person. Most importantly, the marsh's fearsome reputation dissuades the average person from entering the forsaken wetland and even makes adventurers think twice before setting foot in this unforgiving domain.

TABLE 13-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE TLOCOCUA MARSH

d20	Settlement Found
1-8	No settlement
8-14	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
15-18	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
19-20	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 13-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE TLOCOCUA MARSH

d20	Demographics
1-6	Poqoza-dominated settlement
7-10	Mixed community with Poqoza majority
11-12	Mixed community with no majority (Poqozas and Tulitas)
13-14	Mixed community with Tulita majority
15-16	Tulita-dominated settlement
17	Lizard people settlement (no small town; village instead)
18	Cipatenhua settlement (no small town; village instead)

d20	Demographics
19	Boggard settlement (no small town; village instead)
20	Tozca-dominated settlement (no small town; village instead)

AHUACUA

There is a place on the eastern shore of the Tlococua Marsh that has intrigued adventurers for centuries. It is a strange sliver of marshland that appears ordinary to the untrained eye, yet over the years, those who paw through the muck with their bare hands or push an uictli into the yielding soil sometimes pull out curious objects from the goo that form part of a currently undecipherable riddle. Patina-coated cribbing spikes, waterlogged wooden planks, curiously arranged stones, odd coins of unknown origin, strips of textiles, and ceramic plates account for just some of the oddities found in the mud. While Ahuacua seems to blend seamlessly into its surroundings, druids, rangers, and others with a comprehensive understanding of nature notice the telltale signs of its manmade origins. The standing water here is deeper than in surrounding areas, even though the land mass it completely inundated is more elevated than the wetlands neighboring it. During the Days of Logs and Bricks, Aztli engineers attempted to solve the puzzle by dredging the marsh and building temporary dams to prevent seawater from seeping back into Ahuacua, but their labors proved fruitless. The water they bailed into the ocean flowed right back into the unnatural marsh as quickly as they could drain it. Despite finding tantalizing clues suggesting something of great value remained hidden in the marsh, four years of futility and 28 deaths from indeterminate causes forced Xacota to abandon the project. In the years since their failed attempt, private enterprises have tried to succeed where Xacota failed, with even worse results.

The allure of finding a wondrous treasure propels many reckless fortune seekers to venture to Ahuacua in their quest for riches, but solving the puzzle ranks foremost in the minds of scholars and historians seeking elusive answers to the curious stretch of foul wetlands. Based upon the items retrieved from the dirt, experts generally believe someone deliberately sank and buried a ship in a temporary harbor or inlet that the designers then filled with earth to conceal the vessel. This theory also coincides with widespread Aztli myths describing a foreign crew who came ashore and dug a massive trench in the area that seemingly vanished within days of its presumed completion. According to this legend, a potent curse protects the area, as evidenced by the odd circumstances surrounding the deaths of numerous workers and treasure hunters involved in the salvaging operation.

No organized expeditions currently operate in Ahuacua, but adventurers frequent the locale on a regular basis. Rather than using manpower or engineering knowledge to excavate the marsh, they usually rely upon heroism and magic to succeed where so many others failed before them. These techniques have made some progress with divination spells, all but confirming the presence of a sunken vessel and revealing vague allusions to the ship's hold containing something of incalculable value, but these insights have not gotten them any closer to recovering the loot. Even when potent spells lower the water table or move huge quantities of earth, something inexplicable always seems to spontaneously happen to derail the process. In one instance, a rogue wave swept away several heroes and pushed water back into the dry cavity, even though the seas had been deathly still for hours beforehand. On another horrifying occasion, the mud coalesced into fearsome monsters that forced the adventurers to run for their lives, just as some members of the party caught a fleeting glimpse of a radiant, pulsating purplish light emanating from a presumed opening a few inches below the muck. When the group returned the following morning to make another attempt, they found the earth replenished and their progress completely undone.

SOUTHEASTERN TEHUATL

1 Square - 20 Miles



ATOYAXALLI

Tall, lush grasses, reeds, and sedges flourish at the confluence of two minor rivers 20 miles from the eastern shoreline. Herons, ducks, and other water fowl congregate at one of the Tlococua Marsh's few picturesque sites. The beautiful scenery conceals a puzzling mystery. Four red coral statues carved into the likeness of a demonic fish head seemingly transplanted onto a lobster-like body hide behind and beneath the dense, green vegetation. The bizarre, eight-foot-tall sculptures are positioned in spots corresponding with celestial alignments across a 1,600-square-foot area. The coral is not indigenous to the region, and the typically brittle material inexplicably resists erosion and retains its coloration despite prolonged exposure to sunlight. Although the flora and fauna thrive throughout the general area, a partially exposed gray boulder appears to repel all animals and stifle plant growth around it with one odd exception: crustaceans. Hundreds of native and exotic crabs, crayfish, and lobsters congregate around the oblong gray slab to mate and lay their eggs. The stone sits within the boundaries of an imaginary rectangle connecting all four statues where the rivers meet, though its exact position does not appear to follow any discernable geometric pattern associated with the statues or conform to any astronomical object. Furthermore, its origins are also undetermined as there are no similar rocks found anywhere on the island or in the coastal waters. Some visitors claim that the stone emits a faint white glow on moonlit nights, yet the significance of this phenomenon also remains a mystery.

BLIBLEBLUP

Ruler: Foul King of Gooley Muck and Sickening Mire Plulluump

Government: Autocracy

Population: 824 (818 boggards, 6 sea hags)

Languages: Boggard, Common, Draconic

Resources: None

Amid the disgusting stench of decomposing vegetation and rotting corpses, the Foul King of Gooley Muck and Sickening Mire Plulluump presides over his marshy empire from atop his perch on a muddy dolomite throne in the depths of a submerged cave carved out of the limestone. The depraved monarch rules over a fetid, subterranean kingdom of damp passages and chambers teeming with filth and intrigue. Although Plulluump is enormous by boggard standards, reaching a height of almost eight feet, his intimidating size fails to dissuade the contenders and pretenders who constantly vie for the throne he acquired only four years earlier. Some hail from the ranks of his boggard vassals who hold elaborate noble titles much like their sovereign, while others seek to acquire a higher status on their climb to the top. Rivals must carefully plan their ascendance to the throne, ensuring they amass crucial allies and avoid making the wrong enemies along the way. The wily Plulluump excels at sniffing out internal plots before they unfold. An unsuccessful schemer always meets a horrific and ghastly death, including what the monstrous beings refer to as the "drying." After a savage flogging, the king leaves the unfortunate creature outdoors to bake and desiccate in the midday sun, which fatally dehydrates the victim while the parched open wounds cause excruciating pain.

Plulluump and his boggard minions venture to the surface only during rainstorms or in areas where they can remain in constant contact with water. Fortunately, their patch of the marsh teems with brooks, streams, and ponds to facilitate their movement through the area. They also need not look far for other races to bully, intimidate, and plunder. They take fiendish delight capturing and torturing lizard people whom Plulluump considers an inferior species of reptilian humanoid. The boggards also harass the marsh's Poqoza and Tulita villages, preferably abducting wayward travelers and lone individuals rather than attacking armed soldiers or large groups of people. Like the Aztlis, the monstrous humanoids usually take prisoners, but for different reasons. Plulluump and his lords revel in the spectacle of watching a captive beg and plead for his life, especially if the unfortunate victim can offer the king and court something of great value in exchange for mercy, which he may be inclined to grant if the fickle monarch finds the creature's petition sufficiently flattering and dramatic.

To meet the demands of his hungry followers, the king and his court constantly explore new avenues to expand their hunting grounds to meet the demands of his ravenous people. His advance scouts ride atop giant frogs in their search for prey, while he deploys the community's sea hags to spy on humanoid villages to survey them for potential weaknesses. The boggards left behind grab fish right out of the waterways around their home or forage for meat and berries in the surrounding wilderness. Divers also poke around the

silt and sediment in their quest for shellfish and other bottom feeders. After gathering his intelligence, King Plulluump believes nearby Poqoza and lizard people villages may be ripe for the taking, though he also obsesses about locating a legendary lost relic from Quiahuitl's past he thinks is hidden in a now-submerged audience hall from the days of the hero-gods' rebellion. He bases his hunch on the discovery of ancient Aztli paintings depicting the mortal deity found on a cavern wall in an underground complex near the surface that he is convinced predates Quiahuitl's ascent into divinity.

CUANINTLI

The Tlococua Marsh's longest river has its origins on Moyome's northeastern shore where it performs a tedious slog along the wetland's western edge before turning abruptly inland and then emptying its contents into Mother Oceanus at the island's southeastern tip. Cuanintli is broad yet shallow for most of its slow-moving journey with a maximum width of 120 feet during the opening leg of its trek and an average width of 65 feet for the balance of its run. Cuanintli's deepest point is a meager nine feet, though the river has an average depth of five feet. The freshwater river is largely devoid of crocodiles until its contents mix with saline waters near its junction with the ocean. However, it is more renowned for its anomalous feline residents, the dark-coated jaguars who prowl its shores.

None can be sure if natural selection or unnatural manipulation played a central role in determining the big cats' coloration, but there is no uncertainty about the predators' success in the region. During their travels, humanoids canoeing along the Cuanintli see the normally reclusive beasts fairly regularly as they prowl along the water's edge or hide among the vegetation waiting for an ideal opportunity to pounce on an unsuspecting victim. Their swimming prowess and the water's shallowness give them a distinct advantage when hunting their typically smaller prey. Despite their prevalence in the area, there are only six verified attacks against humans over the last century, which adds to the mystery about the perplexing felines. Some Poqozas believe the animals are the nagual servants of Itztliteotl who use their bestial disguises to spy on the renegade half-elves on the hero-gods' behalf in their covert attempt to win back their prodigal children. A handful of sightings claim to have witnessed the jaguars using their paws to handle tools and their claws to carve symbols and pictographs on exposed stone and wooden surfaces. If true, these observations would naturally support the preceding theory.

CUIATEOTL

Ruler: Kirgis Wendrig

Government: Theocracy

Population: 118 (39 Tlots, 28 tsathars, 21 Poqozas, 17 Tulitas, 13 cipatenhuas)

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Tsathar, Tulita

Resources: None

Tiny even by the Tlococua Marsh's standards, Cuiateotl distinguishes itself in a more ominous manner than an ordinary settlement. The inhabitants of this dank, subterranean complex containing sinister, waterlogged tunnels, passages, and chambers worship a foul entity imported to Tehuatl from a distant land. The Tlots who founded this community brought their wicked entity, Tsathogga, the Frog God, with them to the island along with his vicious servants, the tsathars. Far from the prying eyes of the tribute-hungry Aztli Confederation and the oblivious Poqozas, this burgeoning colony of deranged humanoid and monstrous worshippers venerate their demented deity in the seclusion of a desolate marsh surrounded by the ubiquitous animals that coalesce around the area. Kirgis Wendrig, the community's high priest, founded the temple compound only nine years ago, and in that short time, he and his band of 27 followers recruited their fellow immigrants from Akados and several families of inebriated and disgruntled Poqozas, Tulitas, and cipatenhuas to their insidious cause.

Kirgis and his minions spent four years building the foul stone sanctuary beneath the muck using a combination of magic and brute strength. Despite their efforts, water constantly seeps through the mortar cracks to cover the floor and walls in disgusting, slimy mud and rotting vegetation. Within these underground confines, Tsathogga's underlings perform grotesque and horrifying rituals and sacrifices that would make even the most jaded Aztli high priest cringe in disgust. Having established a foothold for his divine patron in Tehuatl, the Frog God's human representative has dabbled in the diabolical art of summoning demons to this world to serve him. Kirgis firmly

believes he needs just a few more fiendish servants to expand his influence beyond his unholy sanctuary and challenge the hero-gods' stranglehold over the island's religious hierarchy.

GREZZ FAMILY

Ruler: Grezz

Government: Autocracy

Population: 320 (264 orcs, 40 half-orcs, 16 lizard people)

Languages: Orc, Draconic

Resources: None

Twelve years ago, the grizzled orcish warrior Grezz gathered together a loyal assembly of followers and embarked on a bold mission — to eradicate Tsothogga's minions from Tehuatl. Based in the dreary Tlococua Marsh where the Frog God's diabolical worshippers conduct their foul rites, Grezz and his underlings work cooperatively with some of the wetland's other peoples to rid tsathars from their land and forever stop the demonic prince's baleful influence from spreading across Tehuatl. In his worldview, evil is a corrupting force that flows like water from a wellspring and seeps into the earth, ruining everything it touches. The only way to truly destroy evil is to eliminate it at the source, which he believes to be Tsothogga.

Grezz and his warriors primarily live off the land, foraging for food and living in temporary camps while they mercilessly hunt their reclusive quarry. However, lizard people, cipatenhua, and Poqoza settlements familiar with Grezz and his purpose offer him and his people refuge for several days or weeks during their tireless trek across the marsh. Some of these residents even volunteer to tag along with the orcish commander and his faithful band, though most find it impossible to keep up with his grueling marches and dangerous endeavors for more than a few days, leaving them exhausted for the laborious slog back home. The marsh's humanoid inhabitants greatly admire Grezz and his cohorts for their herculean efforts to wipe out the tsathars and forever remove their diabolical stain from the land.

HUALCITZEN

Ruler: Cemelle

Government: Republic

Population: 1,729 (1,507 Poqozas, 113 Tulas, 72 cipatenhuas, 37 Tlots)

Languages: Common, Tulita

Resources: Amaranth, honey, mallows, shellfish, tomatoes

The Poqozas are a curious, adventurous lot, and the small town of Hualcizen owes its creation to this inherent trait. The community was founded roughly 206 years ago by a band of explorers searching for a fabled psychedelic species of mallow purportedly found in the Tlococua Marsh. Although their efforts to find the plant failed, the quintet stumbled upon a fertile delta less than 20 miles from the coast that defied the marsh's typically inhospitable conditions and could be conducive to farming. Buoyed by the opportunity to lay claim to their own stake of land, the commoners returned to their homes, gathered their families and friends together, and set off into the Tlococua Marsh to start life anew. The first few years proved more challenging than expected as unexpected trespassers placed their competing bids for the apparently ownerless property. Boggard gatecrashers, ferocious crocodiles, and rodent scavengers harassed Hualcizen's citizens on a regular basis. Yet the fledgling community persevered with the infusion of a small band of cipatenhuas who quelled the anger of their crocodilian kin. Despite the hardships, the settlement slowly yet steadily grew as other Poqozas from the Caxcalli Grasslands and Tulas from small, coastal fishing villages joined them, swelling the town's ranks and making it the largest humanoid community in the Tlococua Marsh.

Survival occupied the minds of Hualcizen's pioneers for the first few years of their newfound odyssey, yet as the community took roots and their precarious situation stabilized, the settlement's five founders had to turn their attention to dealing with getting everyone on the same page in terms of governing the town. Commoners created, built, and developed Hualcizen without any aid or assistance from the Poqozas' coconeteotls. In the absence of any noblepersons, the quintet bestowed the Aztli title of tlahtoh upon themselves, a bold action that fueled resentment among some people who felt their fellow commoners had betrayed their trust by granting themselves nobility as if they were still Aztlis. Discontent gave rise to anger, pushing the town toward a violent uprising. To quell the rapidly fraying nerves, the five self-proclaimed tlahtohs

struck a bargain with their disgruntled constituents. They declared that their titles were not hereditary and would be awarded upon their death to an elected citizen who could not have a blood or marital relationship to the decedent. As the original founders died off, the ruling council abandoned the term tlahtoh and renamed the group the Cemelle. The arrangement has remained in place to this day with the Tulita Kaw'ai becoming the first of his people to earn the prestigious honor.

Life in Hualcizen remains hard and dangerous even with the political advancements. Residents farm the land, growing mallows, amaranth, and cherry tomatoes in the damp soil. They supplement their diet with wild honey, bass and other freshwater fish harvested from the neighboring rivers, and the ingenious shellfish farms the Poqozas built underwater to cultivate mussels, oysters, and crayfish for their tasty stews. Despite being in the middle of a wetland, Hualcizen typically only floods once per year. The citizens adapted to the annual inconvenience by building their homes up to one-half mile away from the riverbanks. Because of the lack of wood, residents predominately live in humble abodes made from mud-bricks and vegetation on slightly elevated ground to further mitigate the damaging effects of the yearly overflows.

Natural hazards are not the only perils Hualcizen faces on a recurring basis. Aggressive humanoids and foul monsters sometimes also wash ashore. Boggards pose a regular menace, as do crocodiles, sea hags, and undead horrors. To combat these foes, the Cemelle trains and oversees a fighting force of 128 men and women to defend the town against their adversaries. Although most are skilled in the art of war and wield longbows and clubs, the unit also includes eight spellcasters: five sorcerers and wizards in addition to three priests of Tlatcolli who attend to his worshippers' needs in the town's large temple. These brave warriors and magic wielders fear a greater terror awaits them in the near future. Ominous sightings of a large, winged black reptile circling the skies overhead has the town on edge, with many fearing the beast to be a juvenile yet still deadly black dragon whom they believe has established a lair only a few miles from their settlement. If true, Hualcizen's existence may depend on intervention from adventurers up to the tall task.

IXTAMA

The Poqozas bask in all of life's pleasures, and good food is no exception. Poqoza and Tulita villagers in the region paddle their canoes into this expansive junction where numerous streams and brooks flow together into this small freshwater lake filled with reeds. The site teems with bugs of all varieties, but the fishermen who trek here search for only one of these creatures in the murky waters: the chiltic crayfish, which are nearly impossible to find anywhere else in Tehuatl but here. The hunters use their uictli to unearth stones and other materials in the shallows where the ruddy red crustaceans typically hide and then deposit the captured shellfish into a clay pot or other suitable container. When cooked in a stew, the crayfish's normally succulent, sweet meat also has a bite of spicy heat that the Poqozas and Tulas greatly enjoy. More importantly though, small quantities of toxins found in roughly 10 percent of the animals' bodies deliver a brief yet potent feeling of euphoria without any harmful side effects. Of course, finding the elusive crayfish with this special property usually requires the diner to eat copious amounts of the stew, a practice the Poqozas and Tulas laughingly refer to as "full belly high."

Other than the risks of contracting a pest-borne disease, the dangers of traveling to and fishing in its waters are low in comparison to performing other endeavors in the perilous Tlococua Marsh, making the risks worth the rewards. However, disturbing eyewitness accounts say that nine-foot-tall, upright crustaceans that the fishermen call "crabmen" lurk in the reeds where they monitor the humanoids' activities. The unusual creatures have not attacked anyone yet nor made their presence obviously known as they conceal themselves among the abundant vegetation while carefully watching Ixtama's visitors from a safe distance. The Tulas, who have some familiarity with these unusual creatures, affirm they typically reside in the oceans and coastal regions, which leads them to believe something is pushing them farther inland or that they may be searching for something in the area. On those occasions where they attempted to converse with a crabman, they have received only hisses and clicks in response to their overtures.

MIMICAPOLI

Trees are an anomaly in the Tlococua Marsh. Experienced marsh travelers who slog across the gooey earth to explore the wetland's inner recesses are stumped to come upon these unexpected residents among the greenery, for their presence is hardly natural. The Mimicapoli encompasses a general area of 400

square miles where the strange woody plants apparently take root, though they are oddly never found in the same place more than once. Nefarious individuals and sadistic creatures often dump the lifeless bodies of their victims onto this sinister patch of ground in the hopes that the creatures masquerading as trees devour the evidence of their underhanded deeds. Even the boggards and lizard people avoid trespassing in Mimicapoli after losing many of their kin to the devious bog creepers who lure unsuspecting travelers into their slimy domain. Although indigenous to marshes and swamps, the monsters cannot be found anywhere else in Tehuatl except for this isolated locale.

Tales of these creatures date back centuries and in that entire time there are no indications that they have ever strayed beyond their apparently self-defined boundaries of the Mimicapoli. The bog creepers' affinity for this place defies easy explanation, though folklore claims the Aztli goddess Atoyatl cursed the monsters for despoiling the waters of a beloved stream with an innocent child's blood. Despite the dangers, some teenage Poqozas and lizard people warriors consider traversing across portions of the Mimicapoli a rite of passage into manhood or to attain an exalted status within a humanoid tribe. Many successfully run the gauntlet and escape with their lives, though some are tragically less fortunate as the devious plants prove nimbler and swifter than expected.

MOTOTOLOA

Whenever the moon, Ihueltiuh, turns blood red, a malodorous clearing in Tlococua Marsh plays host to the island's most macabre and grotesque event. The wetland's covens of hags gather beneath the stars to participate in a disgusting feast, where they sample stews, casseroles, and other dishes made from butchered humanoids. Massive, elevated stone slabs weighing several thousand pounds apiece function as crude tables for the spectacle, while the grisly chefs cook their meals over open and enclosed flames in the traditional Aztli xoctli. In typical, cruel hag fashion, the covens typically bring their bound or otherwise restrained captives to the dinner party to bask in watching their prey's horrified facial expressions. The vicious monstrosities always season and tenderize their victims before hacking them into edible chunks

of meat while still alive, forcing the mortified humanoid to helplessly watch while they prepare severed chunks of their own flesh for their consumption. Muscle tissue may satisfy the hags' hunger, but the savage creatures prefer the texture and flavor of fresh organs more. After pecking on morsels of stewed, roasted, and braised meat and bone, they finally turn their full attention to the murderous main course. In unison, the hags disembowel these tortured souls and rip their internal organs from their chests and abdomens and place them in a hot xoctli or skewer them rotisserie style. The hags then gorge themselves until their protruding bellies cannot stand another bloody bite.

The celebration lasts until the wee hours of the next morning, when the fattened monsters finally rouse themselves from their lethargic slumber to return to their hideous lairs throughout the Tlococua Marsh. Throughout the feast, the vain chefs compare the quality of their dishes with their competitors, commenting at length about topics such as the proper amount of slow torment, the flesh's elasticity, and the fat marbling content of their victims. The clandestine festivities may be among the region's worst-kept secrets. Over the years, adventurers and others have attempted to break up the party and rescue abducted loved ones from the hags' voracious claws yet to no avail. In the end, these daring heroes also find their way onto the menu, though not without a fight. Each time Tehuatl's astronomers predict an imminent blood moon, wise marsh residents always travel in groups and never venture out after sunset. When they return home, doors are always securely locked, and they take turns keeping watch to avoid finding their way into a searing xoctli.

NEZCATAYOTL

Uxata, a sullen young woman with an angelic voice, rhythm in her feet, and a song in her heart found liberation from life's burdens only through music. When melancholy took hold of her, the talented entertainer walked alongside the edge of a lonely yet pristine stream a few paces away from her tiny village, performing sorrowful dirges to express her unhappiness. One day while strolling near a crystal blue stream, an alluring voice called out to her, imploring her to join him for a duet in the marsh. Despite her trepidation, his beautiful words overpowered her inhibitions. She removed her sandals and



waded barefoot through the water to meet the creature tempting her. To her surprise, she traveled more than a mile through the chilly stream before finally coming face to face with the being who enraptured her. There, in the middle of a pond, stood an upright coyote with human hands and feet holding an ayotl in his bestial arms.

The anthropomorphic figure applauded her as she approached, complimenting her on her impressive abilities. The coyote then gently and rhythmically tapped his fingers on the skin of his ayotl, asking her to join him in a song and dance. Uxata shuddered at the thought, yet the wily coyote persisted and ultimately cajoled her into singing and dancing alongside the trickster fey as he masterfully tapped his graceful hands on the ayotl. When finished, the sly god realized he had met a rare talent whose abilities matched his own. With a wave of his hand, music suddenly filled the air and has remained at Nezcayatoytl ever since that fateful day. Performers and entertainers who venture to the site instantly feel a connection to one of the Tlococua Marsh's few bright spots amid the prevailing darkness. According to legend, Uxata and Huehuecoyotl suddenly materialize whenever a musician or entertainer captures their fancy. More than four centuries have passed since the duet last performed in the pond, and in that time, six men and women have left Nezcayatoytl with a wondrous magical instrument in hand as a gift from an appreciative hero-god.

YOYOLITON

The stagnant freshwater in this tightly packed cluster of ponds and small lakes provides a veritable breeding ground for all manner of insects and other vermin. While no one has had the temerity to fully count the individual bodies of water spanning roughly 246 acres of soggy marshland dominated by sedges and reeds, the handful of explorers who ventured here and safely returned estimated there to be at least 624 fully enclosed pools of standing water in the area. Swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, gnats, biting flies, and midges swirl around the region throughout the course of the day, especially shortly after dawn and just before dusk when insect activity ramps up to their highest levels. Others such as ticks lie in wait on reeds, sedges, and other vegetation where they hope to hitch a ride on an animal or creature that passes too close to their hiding spots. The tumult dies down after sunset, though any light source instantaneously draws a crowd. In addition to the tiny nuisances buzzing and crawling throughout the area, giant versions of these airborne and ground-based pests also roam through the area, attacking anything and everything in

sight with malicious intent. While the ecological conditions are undoubtedly conducive to the permeation of insects inundating this isolated corner of the marsh, the lack of any natural predators around the ponds to keep their runaway populations under control suggests something unnatural may also be at work here. Isolated reports claim that a cabal of demonic, insectoid creatures exert their baleful influence over their kin and keep their adversaries at bay. In one instance, the Poqoza ranger Metzcalqui described an encounter he had with a cockroach-like beast who towered over him and addled his mind with magic. Fortunately for him, the beast could not fly, which allowed him to escape the monstrosity's clutches without inflicting a scratch on its chitinous body.

ZINACAN

The karst landscape in this desolate neck of the Tlococua Marsh gave rise to a network of caves riddling the landscape. Thousands or perhaps even millions of bats inhabit these subterranean chambers, making it the perfect location for the Zaggirack tribe of orcs to build their shrine to Quamaxotz, the tribe's patron deity. In these dank hollows, the vicious humanoids perform their ghastly rites, offering fresh souls and other trinkets to the mostly forsaken and forgotten deity. While the orcs worship their vile deity here, they lead a nomadic lifestyle, pillaging and raiding nearby settlements in the Tlococua Marsh and the Caxcalli Grasslands. Nonetheless, they typically leave a small complement of guards and a priest behind to protect the sacred site from defilers and other races seeking to destroy it. The Poqozas have no love for Quamaxotz, whom they revile even more than the Aztlis' hero-gods because of the wicked deity's association with Tlatoani. The Poqozas and even the lizard people have raised several expeditions to locate the shrine and root out the orcs once and for all, but the marauders have a knack for slipping through the net before their pursuers can cinch it tight. Their enemies believe the orcs travel among werabats and other lycanthropes who gather intelligence about their prospective targets while masquerading as humanoids. By most estimates, the orcs can muster roughly 1,000 warriors, though they are almost never in the same place at the same time. The majority travels with their chieftain Girgamman with the balance spread throughout the region hunting for food or forcibly taking it from others.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: TOCTLI FOREST

Overview Weather Table: Forest and Swamp

Baseline Temperature Deviation: -1d4 °F

Daily Weather Deviation: -1d10 chance of rain

Relative Humidity Deviation: -1d10%

Running along the western edge of the island mostly south of the Great Canal, the Toctli Forest has long been the domain of the elves since their first ship appeared off Tehuatl's shores more than 3,000 years ago. Before the elves' unexpected arrival, the feral woodlands were largely uninhabited save for a handful of scattered Aztli settlements near the shoreline. The elves greatly expanded their footprint within the forest after their resounding victory against the invading Aztlis. The elves largely live off the land with many community members leading a semi-nomadic lifestyle moving to several preordained locations over the course of the year. Despite the elves' presence, the Toctli Forest remains largely pristine, making it an inviting environment for the abundant wildlife that call the region home. Jaguars and crocodiles sit atop its natural ecosystem. These large arboreal and aquatic predators feast on deer, rabbits, monkeys, tapirs, ducks, turkeys, and other prey animals lurking within the forest. Insects thrive in the warm, moist habitat as well. Mosquitoes plague the forest's inhabitants, forcing residents to apply insect-resistant balms and lotions to keep the disease-carrying pests at bay. Ticks and leeches also feast on warm-blooded creatures though they are less prevalent and deadlier than the flying menaces. The predominate tree species include elms, mahogany, and kapoks with at least 50 other deciduous trees sharing their space with these woody giants.

Being a semitropical forest, the region experiences consistently warm temperatures throughout the year with only slight cooling during the winter and overnight hours. The heat and humidity quickly ramp up with the advent of spring, which is the forest's hottest season. Summer ushers in frequent monsoons and utterly oppressive humidity that makes even a short jaunt brutally uncomfortable. The moisture keeps the potential for forest fires at a minimum. Indeed, the elves have documented only four blazes over the course of their long history within the Toctli Forest. The excess rainfall funnels off into numerous ponds, streams, lakes, and rivers crisscrossing the entire forest. The network of small waterways facilitates travel and trade through the region and beyond, including intersecting with stretches of the Great Canal. Settlements naturally spring up along the banks of these bodies of water. The elves who inhabit these communities usually incorporate the surrounding vegetation into their architecture, using the trees as beams to support their elevated, arboreal structures. The notion of felling trees to make room for arable land and homes holds no appeal for humanoid who admire and cherish nature. Therefore, their settlements rely on fishing, foraging, and hunting for sustenance, which keeps their community sizes comparatively lower than typical humanoid villages and towns. On the other hand, the Poqozas who inhabit the Toctli Forest use their chinampa system to turn shallow lakes, bogs, and other low-lying wetlands into fertile soil that can support agriculture to feed the hungry masses. However, the specifications needed to find an ideal site to build their manmade landmasses lessen the number of Poqoza communities in the forest.

Although settlements make their mark on the Toctli Forest, much of the woodlands remains feral and untamed. Numerous plant creatures, both malevolent and benign, dwell within the uncharted wilderness, though even they steer a wide berth around the lairs of the Toctli's feared green dragons that reside in territories almost universally avoided by the humanoid inhabitants. The undead spirits of Aztli warriors killed during the conflict with the elves and Poqozas also haunt the land. Living Aztli spies and reconnaissance teams make occasionally forays into the Toctli Forest to monitor the activities and technologies of their former foes. Whether visiting its settlements or exploring the backwoods, the region features some of Tehuatl's most captivating locations and most frightening inhabitants.

TABLE 14-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE TOCTLI FOREST

d20	Settlement Found
1-6	No settlement
7-12	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)

d20	Settlement Found
13-16	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)
17-19	Small town (10d100 + 500 residents with permanent structures)
20	Large town (20d100 + 1,500 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 14-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE TOCTLI FOREST

d20	Demographics
1-5	Elf-dominated settlement
6-9	Mixed community with elf majority
10-12	Mixed community with no majority (elves, gnomes, halflings, Poqozas)
13-15	Poqoza-dominated settlement
16-17	Mixed community with Poqoza majority
18	Gnome-dominated settled
19	Mixed community with gnome majority
20	Mixed community with halfling majority

ATAHUATO

Ruler: Remarce Celestene and Chalquetzal

Government: Oligarchy

Population: 19,673 (10,101 elves, 8,924 Poqozas, 293 gnomes, 178 halflings, 102 Aztlis, 55 Tultitas, and 20 Tlotls)

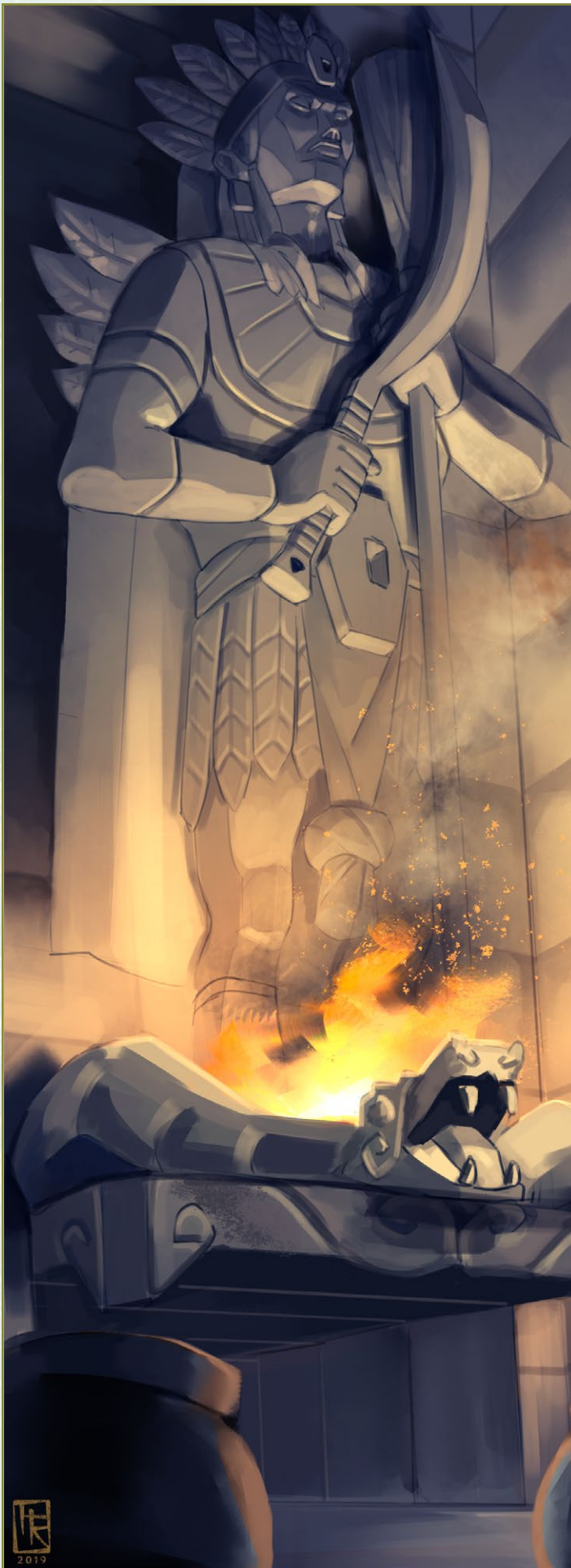
Languages: Elven, Common

Resources: Agriculture

The Toctli Forest's largest settlement encompasses roughly 30 square miles of sandy beach, estuaries, and chinampas along the island's southwestern coastline. Formerly an Aztli port city, the elves and Poqozas added their own architectural and cultural touches to the metropolis, though it still retains its Aztli flavor as evidenced by its grandest structure — a repurposed pyramid temple of Yaoctotl that has been converted into a center of worship for Tlatcolli's followers. The city is roughly split between elves and Poqozas with smaller pockets of gnomes, halflings, and an assortment of other peoples, including a minor enclave of Aztli who remained in Atahuato for generations after their ancestors abandoned it.

Its strategic location on the western shore and network of interconnected waterways make it an ideal site for a bustling port that serves as the region's economic hub. Traders from throughout Tehuatl and distant lands on Mother Oceanus import and export exotic goods on its busy wharfs. Fishing vessels are also a constant sight as they troll the surrounding waters for crustaceans, fish, giant squids, whales, and even monstrous catches from the briny deep. The bulk of the population lives on the chinampas built atop the shallow lagoons and ponds surrounding the thriving city market. Farmers dwelling on these fertile lands raise turkeys for consumption and produce vast quantities of maize, squash, tomatoes, and other vegetables to feed the settlement's inhabitants. The influx of people and products gives the city a cosmopolitan flair, though the clash of cultures can also lead to heated disagreements and the occasional donnybrook. In addition, Atahuato's merchants are renowned for being tough negotiators, which adds more fuel to the fires of discontent in the streets and on the piers. For the most part, the city's administrators generally employ a hands-off approach toward minor incidents and petty squabbles unless the problem has the potential to mushroom into a bigger conflict.

Atahuato's ruling oligarchy has strong ties to the mercantile and maritime industries that power its surging economy. Governance is routed in personal



wealth and influence more so than along racial boundaries. The community's most powerful person, Remarce Celestene, a middle-aged male elf, sits atop a massive fortune of seaside real estate and a fleet of merchant ships. For liquid assets, he turns to Chalquetzal, his ambitious Poqoza paramour, who exports cacao, tobacco, and maize throughout the Aztli Confederation and remote ports of call. The pair, along with a rotating cast of four to 10 noblepersons, effectively control Atahuato, though they theoretically answer to the elvish god Darach-Albith's high priest who serves as the city's figurehead religious and political authority. Holoma, the current high priest, tries to maintain some semblance of temporal power to avoid being relegated to mere puppet status, but in the end, Remarce and Chalquetzal along with their haughty counterparts hold the power of the purse. To counteract their influence over Atahuato, Holoma has tried to cultivate an alliance with the Poqoza priests of Tlatcolli who currently show no interest in upsetting the status quo by getting involved in local politics. With that possible avenue seemingly closed off, she now recruits new converts while encouraging existing worshippers to recommit to their faith, placing their devotion to Darach-Albith above their desire for worldly gains. The effort has delivered mixed results, with some taking her overtures sincerely to heart and others going to fanatical extremes to express their piety, while the majority appears lackluster in their support for her daring initiative.

Even the city's naval force of four warships and 14 longboats technically under Holoma's command respond only to orders from Remarce and Chalquetzal, who pay their captains and mates handsomely for their loyalty. Roughly 630 sailors of Elvish and Poqoza descent sail the high seas, protecting their merchant fleet from pirates and monstrosities on the waves and in the rivers. On land, Atahuato can field an army of 730 foot soldiers, archers, and engineers supplemented by roughly 2,100 trained citizens. The city's defenses include booby-trapped chinampas on the settlement's edges along with several moats and 20-foot-high earthenworks. The gnolls from the neighboring Caxcalli Grasslands represent the community's greatest external enemy, though they always cast a wary eye toward the Great Canal to monitor the Aztlis' activities north of the boundary.

EZHUITOTE

Ruler: High Priest Tochtque

Government: Council

Population: 9,734 (8,629 Poqozas, 728 elves, 201 Aztlis, 91 Tlotls, and 85 gnomes)

Languages: Common, Elven, Gnome

Resources: Copper, lime, salt, silver, tin

The Poqozas consider this sprawling settlement built atop 12 ponds and a small lake bed to be their crown jewel of the Toctli Forest. The community's centerpiece is a spectacular four-tiered granite pyramid temple dedicated to Tlatcolli. The complex contains a pulque distillery, an indoor greenhouse of psychoactive plants powered by an intricate system of light distribution and water filtration combining elements of magic and advanced technology, a medicinal wing, and a research laboratory dedicated to botany, chemistry, and biology experiments. Although the academic interests would normally fall under Nonotzali's banner, the priests of Tlatcolli expanded their portfolio to include these intellectual endeavors. Some claim the Poqozas dabble in primitive forms of biological and chemical weaponry as a deterrent against the Aztlis' and gnolls' aggression and as a subtle warning to anyone else with hostile intentions toward them.

As an added slight to their northern neighbors, Ezhuitote hosts the largest annual celebration honoring the Poqozas' victory over the Aztlis. Known as Cualtzonalli, which roughly translates to "beautiful day," the Poqozas celebrate the occasion in their traditional fashion with drunken debauchery and mad revelry that can last for weeks. The settlement's population swells to roughly 15,000 individuals at the festival's height as the Poqozas and some elves from communities throughout the Toctli Forest and portions of the Caxcalli Grasslands join in the fun. Visitors typically stay with relatives and friends, though some people also open their doors to strangers in exchange for pulque or other intoxicating and hallucinogenic substances.

Tochtque — the third son of the Tlamacazqui, the supreme priest of Tlatcolli — is charged with the impossible task of corralling the chaos into something barely manageable. The young man relies heavily upon the counsel of his four elected headmen who oversee each of the town's quadrants. These officials rely upon an armed contingent of 169 trained soldiers known as the polozuillots, which roughly translates as "gatecrashers," to enforce any semblance of order within the large town. Laws are laxly enforced in town until someone gets injured or there is a high likelihood of a situation escalating into a major brawl. Alcohol and drugs usually play a huge role during these incidents, so the polozuillots' protocol is to apprehend the individuals involved and give them an opportunity to gain their faculties in a holding cell within the temple's interior. When not engaged in policing activities, the polozuillots double as Ezhuitote's

military force, though, in a bind, Tochtque expects up to 2,300 able-bodied men and women to take up arms to defend their settlement against any invasion.

When not engaged in madcap hijinks, the town's residents spend their days farming the land, hunting for game, or fishing in the streams and ponds scattered throughout Ezhuítote. Some also delve into the earth to explore the limestone caverns beneath the ground that contain deposits of salt, tin, copper, and silver as well as exotic fungi and lichens with unusual properties. Unfortunately for daring prospectors, the caverns are rarely uninhabited. Strange creatures and monsters also occupy these subterranean chambers. Legends about reptilian beasts and alien-looking humanoids are the most prevalent folklore about these underground horrors, while lesser-known stories speak of undead abominations and primordial monstrosities. Nonetheless, the intrepid men and women who risk their lives in this perilous endeavor retrieve enough metals and minerals to make Ezhuítote a major player in the commodities trade. Aztlí pochtecas are a mainstay in the town's marketplace, flooding its merchants with currency and goods imported from north of the Great Canal as well as intrigues and schemes to further the Aztlí Confederation's goals in the region.

GOOD FORTUNE

Ruler: Even and Odd Fickletoe

Government: Ruling Family

Population: 827 (426 halflings, 105 Poqozas, 78 dragonborn, 60 tieflings, 59 half-ores, 40 elves, 30 Aztlis, and 29 gnolls)

Languages: Common, Elven, Halfling

Resources: Gambling

Ever the opportunists, Tehuatl's ambitious halflings know a good thing when they see it. Strategically located less than three miles south of the Great Canal and four miles from the western edge of the Caxcalli Grasslands, Good Fortune is a halfling-dominated town catering to one industry: gambling. Six halfling-owned and managed gaming parlors operate around the clock to cater to the Poqozas' and Aztlis' love of wagering. The idea to build the town sprang from Dari Fickletoe's exuberant imagination. A clever halfling with deep pockets, a gregarious personality, and an absentee conscience, Dari constructed the town's buildings and communal guest houses on the backs of Aztlí and Poqoza laborers indebted to him after inexplicable strings of bad luck. Two years after conception, Good Fortune opened for business and nothing has been the same since its arrival.

Dari, who passed away 11 years ago, left the town's administration to his son Even and his daughter Odd along with their spouses and children. The Fickletoes are no longer actively involved or have any ownership in Good Fortune's six gaming halls. Instead, they collect a percentage of gambling revenues from the current operators. The Fickletoes keep at least one family member at the establishment to monitor the gaming hall's income and to ensure no one cheats them out of their fair share. Blood may be thicker than water, but every Fickletoe takes a little extra for themselves on the side to ignore some proceeds skimmed off the top. The Fickletoes use the gaming hall revenue to pay for civil services, which include a force of 162 seasoned officers to keep the peace among the town's often intoxicated and sometimes unruly patrons as well as to deter any thieves attempting to steal from or cheat the gaming halls.

Although halflings account for roughly half of Good Fortune's permanent residents, Poqozas, dragonborn, half-ores, tieflings, and even a handful of gnolls with varying amounts of fighting or military experience make up the security detail. Needless to say, some of these officers can be more unhinged than an inebriated gambler, but the Fickletoes believe the mere threat of overzealousness goes a long way toward keeping the town's visitors and inhabitants in line. Despite their best efforts, Good Fortune is the place to go for illicit activities, shady characters, and all types of sin and vice.

HILAYA RIVER

This broad, winding river meanders a circuitous path through the Toctli Forest. The shallow waterway with an average depth of four feet and a maximum width of 20 feet has treacherous rapids too dangerous to navigate any watercraft larger than a canoe. Daredevil elves and Poqozas in the prime of their naïve youth frequently race each other over a predetermined course featuring the river's most treacherous cataracts and sharpest turns. Although no one officially sanctions the crazy stunt, the participants refer to the contest as Hell on the Hilaya. The winner receives a golden necklace with a paddle-shaped medallion that is donated to the organizers by an unknown benefactor. Prestige, acclaim, and glory accompany the victor for the rest of the year, but the stakes could not be higher for the racers who risk life and limb for a chance to become the Devil's Master, the title

awarded to the champion. The Poqozas' involvement in this affair ensures that gambling plays a central role in the festivities, which naturally leads to some accusations of race fixing among the disgruntled losers.

In stark contrast, the humanoids who leisurely traverse the river on canoes to admire the breathtaking scenery often do so while dropping a line or net into the freshwaters teeming with fish and crustaceans. Despite the spectacular views and abundance of seafood, this gentler section of the river is also home to merrows and Izachiató, a sea hag said to have been a powerful, fallen priestess of Cualliteotl who compared her beauty to the goddess's and used her magic to disguise herself as another man's wife. Although she lives alone, this solitary sea hag uses her priestly might to make her much stronger than her average kin. Many believe the disgraced cleric offended her former deity again by embezzling treasures from the goddess's temple and hiding them in her sickening lair beneath the water's surface.

IXNENATL

Ixnental's refreshing waters and its natural springs make it a must-see destination for the Toctli Forest's well-heeled citizens. The forest's larger settlements offer the most pampered clients guided trips to the lake and latemes to carry their luggage to and from the site. Each year, at least 1,000 visitors from southern Tehuatl descend upon the sleepy, 10-square-mile lake discreetly tucked within a bucolic stretch of the forest. Twenty longhouses built along the shore stand at the ready to accommodate the rush of admirers waiting to set their eyes on Ixnental's spectacular beauty and relax their troubles away in one of its 14 warm springs. Canoes and fishing gear are also available for those who wish to angle for tasty bass in the 30-foot-deep water fed by numerous streams and brooks funneling freshwater runoff into the low-lying basin.

Three elvish druidic brothers maintain Ixnental and keep bestial and monstrous predators at bay, even though they have no ownership rights to the property and are not paid to do so. The Glynfaren siblings, Iolardin, Lafarian, and Resnik, take it upon themselves to upkeep the lake and its amenities for its influential guests. In their minds, their most important and burdensome task is suppressing the mosquito and leech population, especially during the warm, humid summer months. They use a variety of natural, homemade insecticide compounds that pose no health risks to the fauna and flora that live around the lake and in its waters to accomplish this daunting feat. Although few guests see the three men during their stay, most visitors leave the druids a gift for their services. The brothers have a fondness for Poqoza tamales and tortillas as well as elvish meads and wine, though they strongly dislike pulque while occasionally indulging in psychedelic mushrooms.

Despite their safeguards and vigilance, the Glynfarens cannot guarantee everyone's safety throughout their stay. Every decade or so, a crocodile or jaguar claims an unfortunate victim, while an accidental drowning occurs at least once a year. Telling ghost stories about the unlucky soul is a popular yet morbid tradition at Ixnental, though some claim to have seen apparitions and other strange phenomenon shortly after someone meets a sad, tragic end in such an otherwise beautiful place.

MAUHQUE

Famous for its ancient ahuehuate trees, some of which measure 40 feet in diameter, the Mauhque Grove would be a popular destination if not for its loathsome reputation as a meeting place for nefarious cabals. Local residents claim Aztlis loyal to their gods perform grisly sacrifices within the densely wooded area. Rumors also circulate about xenophobic elf conclaves that gather here to offer captives to fey creatures bonded to the arboreal giants. Whatever the truth, one fact is disputable: It is almost impossible to walk through the Mauhque without running across the festering remains of some unfortunate creature who met its doom in this section of the forest. For a place synonymous with death, the Mauhque teems with some forms of life, most notably insects, birds, and monkeys, which are found in abundance. Legends say many of these beasts speak a rudimentary dialect of Aztlí, indicating some connection between the animals and the people who once dominated these lands.

QUITLACATL

The fine arts play an important role in the lives of the elves and Poqozas. Their mutual interest in music, song, art, and dance inspired the races to erect a grand stage to showcase these disciplines for their enjoyment. The stage at Quitlacatl stands inside the Toctli Forest just two miles west of the Caxcalli Grasslands and within less than a day's walk from the settlement of Good Fortune, which

provides alternate entertainment and housing for visitors and performers alike. The unusual amphitheater incorporates elements of the terrain and natural environment by placing the main stage in a depression at the center of a copse of trees that serve as support beams for rows of benches accommodating audience members. Despite the spatial limitations, Quitlacaatl can comfortably house roughly 1,000 guests, though observers sarcastically refer to the benches in the highest rows as the “canopy seats.” Nonetheless, elves and Poqozas revel in the spectacle of experiencing dramatic plays, exhilarating choreography, choruses of enchanting voices, and visual presentations in a magnificent outdoor setting. The company of acrobats, actors, artists, and musicians hold performances on the first day of each xopactli. The entertainment season always ends with a rousing rendition to commemorate the races’ triumph over King Ciauhpoa and his army in this very forest. Set to frenetic background music, the production features hundreds of dancers simulating combat maneuvers and acrobats leaping from tree limbs while attached to harnesses with olli tethers. While the elves and Poqozas thoroughly enjoy the recreation of their historical victory, the handful of Aztli in attendance bristle at the comical and often foolish depiction of Xacota’s king and his soldiers, portraying them as dimwitted brutes. Over the years, Aztli protesters have attempted to disrupt the performance, only to be heckled down by the elves and Poqozas in attendance. To avoid further intrusions, Quitlacaatl has stepped up its security protocols involving the production of *The Triumph of Toctli*.

SHAMMARRA

Ruler: The Benevolence

Government: Ruling Council

Population: 14,417 (13,201 elves, 523 Poqozas, 327 gnomes, 198 halfings, 82 dragonborn, 58 Aztlis, and 28 Tlotls)

Languages: Elven, Common, Gnome

Resources: Fish, herbs, pearls

Nestled four miles from the island’s western coastline, Shammarra is a marvel of elven ingenuity and beauty. The sprawling settlement of treetop homes, elevated buildings, and rope bridges stretches across 520 acres of tropical forest populated by kapoks and elms. Multiple streams and brooks crisscross the landscape where they function as thoroughfares swiftly moving traffic across and through the large town. The community’s access to Tehuatl’s waterways allows its merchants to easily import grain and other agricultural products from the neighboring Caxcalli Grasslands and sea ports across the island. Fish, game, and wild fruits foraged from the surrounding wilderness as well as herbs and vegetables grown in gardens constructed atop the strongest tree limbs supplement the residents’ food supply. The elves who make up the sizable majority of Shammarra’s population live in self-sufficient family units in communal properties. Most residents own at least one small canoe that they use to get around town, travel to a prime fishing hole, or venture out into the outskirts to hunt prey animals. In addition to its private flotilla, Shammarra also boasts a naval force of 28 war canoes equipped with wooden rams that are large enough to accommodate two oarsmen and four warriors armed with bows and grappling equipment. The jewel of Shammarra’s fleet is *The Merciful*, a warship intended as a deliberate jab at their Aztli rivals to the north. The heavily reinforced wooden sailing vessel with a mithral-plated ram requires a crew of 20 mariners to operate and can comfortably carry 130 elven bowmen and infantry. Rumors of the ship being armed with “fire sticks” have persisted for years, but most believe the ship’s pyrotechnics displays are the handiwork of its complement of sorcerers who wield illusory and evocation magic.

Shammarra undeniably sports a distinctly elvish character, yet the settlement is not strictly homogenous. Small enclaves of gnomes, halfings, Poqozas, and a handful of humanoids with more exotic origins also reside among their elven neighbors. An Aztli delegation from Tlazo maintains an embassy on the outskirts of town that naturally serves as the wellspring for numerous intrigues within Shammarra. Many citizens believe Poqoza traders smuggle illegal substances into the Aztli compound, while Aztli pochtecas distribute some of the immoral wares including magical components and ingredients harvested from sacrificed animals and humanoids to Shammarra’s less-scrupulous practitioners of magic.

A seven-person council known as the Benevolence governs Shammarra’s affairs. They replaced the town’s former ruler, Lord Alrand, whom many considered too tyrannical for their tastes despite his successful annexation of portions of the Caxcalli Grasslands. The Poqozas ultimately sealed his fate when they emerged from their stupor and retook their former homeland, capturing Lord Alrand in the process. The elves who would become the Benevolence quietly paid his ransom and locked him away for safekeeping, where he remained until his death 26 years ago. The group now has six permanent elven members and one 10-year member chosen by lottery from

among the community’s non-elvish population as a means of giving a limited voice to Shammarra’s minorities.

A company of 300 citizen-soldiers called the Righteous Hands enforce the Benevolence’s edicts with varying degrees of rigidity. Violent crimes and offenses against society’s most vulnerable residents are severely punished while minor transgressions are typically resolved with a stern warning along with an order to seek penance at a temple of Darach-Albith or Malonas. Non-worshippers of either elvish deity are instead required to make a monetary donation to either of the temples. The Benevolence tolerates most other faiths as evidenced by the shrines dedicated to Tlatcolli and other racial deities. However, the Benevolence strictly forbids the worship of any Aztli deity within their town. Nonetheless, a handful of residents familiar with Aztli religion and customs secretly defy the order to pay clandestine homage to Quiahuitl and his wife to spare their community from the wrath of the sea and secondarily, the Aztlis themselves.

THE SPRING

Dense clusters of trees and ground vegetation cover an isolated tract of spooky wilderness bereft of any standing water that includes an eponymous spring. The rarely visited and frequently shunned parcel of earth earned its moniker from the event that took place here rather than any natural feature. On this ground, the elves of the Toctli Forest along with the followers of Tlatcolli crushed King Ciauhpoa and his Aztli army, paving the way for the creation of the Poqoza people in addition to causing the downfall of Xacota. Conservative estimates suggest that the overly confident king lost at least 9,000 men that fateful day, marking the Aztlis’ costliest and most humiliating defeat in their history. Scavengers scour this forsaken land in a misguided attempt to unearth souvenirs, artifacts, and relics left behind in the aftermath of that battle. None ever leave emptyhanded, provided of course that they make it back home at all. The wound to the Aztlis’ warrior psyche proved so grave and terrible that even death could not stanch it. Many rose from their shallow, unmarked graves intact as walking corpses while numerous others resumed their existence as unearthly spirits doomed to ruminate over their embarrassing loss. They take their revenge upon the living who occasionally ignore the ominous warning about the Spring to try to recover what they believe to be unguarded loot. Like the trap the elves sprang on the Aztlis centuries earlier, foolish treasure hunters usually meet the same ghastly fate.

TOLZATLI

No place in the Toctli Forest is more shunned by humanoids and monsters alike than the mysterious basalt statues of Tolzatli. The crude, frightening sculptures of weeping octopi, squids, and other deep-sea creatures were likely carved while this portion of Tehuatl sat beneath the waves. Indeed, the artwork displays an alien style inconsistent with Aztli designs or those of any known civilization in the region, which adds credence to the popular belief that they may not be of this world. Tolzatli’s centerpiece attraction is a bizarre rendition of a three-eyed fish with a toothy maw whose tail lies buried under the soft earth. The few adventurers who have ever returned from an excursion to the site swear they felt the ground beneath them moving as if the stony beast’s mighty tail were thrashing around far below the surface. However, no one lingers long enough to examine the stony beasts. Within minutes of arriving, terrifying thoughts and images crowd the spectator’s befuddled mind. In their delirium, the handful of visitors claim that scaly, incorporeal amphibious creatures suddenly emerged from the statues and slaughtered the rest of their companies. The proliferation of these cautionary tales dissuades most adventurers from trying their luck here, yet some muster the courage to test the veracity of these stories — often with disastrous results.

XOXOCUETZPALI

Many parts of the Toctli Forest remain largely unexplored for good reason. Xoxocuetzpali likely ranks first and foremost among them. Evergreen trees flourish in this isolated neck of the woods where few humanoids dare to tread for the beast after whom the area is named dwells within a twisting complex of tightly packed trees and vegetation above the surface. Thickets and hordes of birds and small mammals thrive in this area, where they serve as the ancient green dragon’s eyes and ears.

When extreme hunger or the desire to amass more treasure compel Xoxocuetzpali to venture out from her lair, the gargantuan reptile’s fluttering wings duplicate the winds of a powerful hurricane, bending mighty trunks and branches to the breaking point. Over the centuries, the conniving green dragon



has proposed alliances to the elves and Poqozas to enlist her aid to expand their territories or to settle old scores with the Aztlis and gnolls, but their leaders wisely rebuff her overtures. Twelve hundred years of broken promises and traitorous acts confirm her inherent treachery. Xoxocuetzpali has switched sides in the middle of a battle more than once during her fabled history, though she has at least spread out the misery among multiple parties. Nonetheless, she periodically reaches out to fringe elements in both groups or the island's more aggressive humanoids to gauge their interest in one of her countless schemes. Weary of her tireless plotting, the elves and Poqozas dispatched Zoyoqui, an experienced warlock and his band of adventurers into Xoxocuetzpali to rid the island of the meddlesome dragon. Two months later, their severed heads fell from the skies above Atahuato, effectively dashing any hopes of eradicating her from the Toctli Forest. For the elves and Poqozas alike, this section of the forest remains strictly off limits.

YOLQUI

In one of Tehuatl's rare joint ventures, a consortium of elves from Shammarra and Poqozas from Ezhuitote combined forces to finance, build, manage, and oversee a spectacular zoo complex that spans 6,450 acres of pristine or manicured forest. After six years of planning, construction, and procurement, Yolqui finally opened for business 52 years ago and has been a smash hit ever since, making its owners insanely wealthy. Yolqui's "caretakers" as they are called travel to the major cities and towns throughout the Toctli Forest as well as the neighboring Caxcalli Grasslands to lead an expedition from that location to Yolqui. Throughout the course of this journey, a party of 10 trained warriors accompany the tourists to defend them and the caretakers from the natural and monstrous hazards along the way.

When the visitors arrive at the site, they are taken to one of 150 lodge houses scattered across the property for one week of guided group tours across the entire property along with a savory meal plan and other nature-oriented activities such as hikes in the surrounding forest and nightly entertainment focused on the host's interactions with the zoo's trained animals that perform choreographed routines with their humanoid masters. The cost for this complete package starts at 250 cacao beans or gold pieces and can reach a staggering 1,000 cacao beans or gold pieces for all the bells and whistles. These prices are outside the reach of most elves and Poqozas, making this trip a luxury only the wealthy can reasonably afford.

Not surprisingly, the big cat exhibit and the exotic bird aviary enjoy the most popularity among the public. Jaguars, ocelots, and cougars freely roam within a 2,000-acre enclosure surrounded by a 10-foot-high stone wall riddled with small

eye slits that allow viewers to safely peer into the habitat without endangering themselves. The zookeepers also prune the trees away from the barrier to prevent one of the big cats from climbing a tree and leaping over the obstacle to freedom. To simulate their natural environment, Yolqui's staff releases captive prey animals into the felines' confines to keep them mentally stimulated and well fed. The aviary features a less controlled environment as parrots, parakeets, wild turkeys, eagles, owls, and macaws freely fly throughout an expansive swath of pristine forest and return to the zoo for their daily, easy meal. Spectators are free to walk about the exhibit without hindrance or any other barriers.

Yolqui also sponsors an aquatic habitat featuring otters, frogs, toads, freshwater fish, crustaceans, and small mammals in addition to a reptile compound with turtles, miniature caimans, lizards, iguanas, and salamanders, an insect domain, a pristine forest section with monkeys and other arboreal dwellers, and a canine habitat for coyotes, foxes, and wolves, which is also surrounded by a less-imposing stone wall. On an average day, roughly 200 visitors walk through the zoo and participate in its nonstop whirlwind of activities. In addition to those who travel here with Yolqui's caretakers, some guests from as far away as Tlazo and Ixtla venture to the zoo of their own accord. Taking proper care of the humanoid visitors and animal residents requires a staff of 224 people including the caretakers and their escorts who are frequently in transit along with trained employees who feed the beasts, maintain their enclosures, prepare meals, perform housekeeping duties, and protect the occupants from external dangers.

Despite these massive expenditures, Yolqui still reaps a handsome profit for its owners, but the business also faces many challenges. Placating the guests' conflicting personalities and egos exhausts the employees, who must also look after the health and safety of the animals under their care. Poachers are a continual menace, especially among the exotic birds and big cats. Inebriated guests occasionally climb over the walls and into the enclosures in a foolish attempt to pet the big cats or canines or to swim among the small yet still dangerous caimans. While the guest is almost always at fault, the odd fatality also sours prospective clients considering an expensive trip to Yolqui. The zoo is predominately geared toward enlightenment and entertainment, but there are hushed whispers among some circles that the establishment's owners have a more sinister ulterior motive for their lucrative enterprise. Although still in the realm of wild conspiracy theories, rumors circulate that the owners have trained the horde of beasts for some nefarious purpose known only to themselves. They suspect they intend to use the animals as assassins sent to kill an unsuspecting customer, as spies to gather intelligence for someone, or plan to release them into the wild to wreak havoc on the otherwise pristine Toctli Forest.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: YOALTICA ILAQUILOZ

Overview Weather Table: Forest and Swamp

Baseline Temperature Deviation: —

Daily Weather Deviation: —

Relative Humidity Deviation: —

The island's smallest biome, the Yoaltica Ilaquiloiz is a manmade habitat created 75 years ago when the Flood of Quiahuitl's Tears ravaged the coastline and overwhelmed 20 miles of the Great Canal's northern wall, causing the excess water to spill over and permanently flood the southeastern quadrant of the Cuahutla Forest. During its formation, the saltwater from the ocean poured into the low-lying coastal basin where it continued to flow inland until it reached a semicircular band of small foothills that finally stopped its progress, while dunes and cliffs along the beachfront allowed some overflow to drain from the area into the ocean while also containing the runover in other areas. The region now encompasses a roughly 4,000-square-mile region where warm weather and high humidity plague the Yoaltica Ilaquiloiz throughout the year.

In the immediate aftermath of this cataclysmic event, the saline water killed off much of the flora unable to survive in an aquatic environment or thrive in corrosive ocean water. Over time, some plants rebounded while other species better suited for the new conditions moved into the region and took root in the deep, soggy soil. Lizard people and tsathars from the neighboring Tlococua Marsh also migrated north of the canal and established a foothold in the wild, unruly area. The Aztlis and other humanoids never attempted to re-establish settlements lost during the flood, as the superstitious humans firmly believed Quiahuitl intentionally cursed this area, which was already sparsely inhabited before its widespread destruction because of its reputation for concealing a wicked temple that predated the hero-gods.

Indeed, bad luck appears to follow any who dare to venture into the feral Yoaltica Ilaquiloiz, for only a handful of intrepid adventurers ever return. The region falls under the dominion of the Aztli Confederation and more specifically the city-state of Mactli. When dealing with the barbarous humanoids who dwell within the Yoaltica Ilaquiloiz, the rewards of gaining revenue and retaining prestige outweigh the risks of trudging into the swamp and extracting payment from recalcitrant humanoids, especially the tsathar, whom they deem to be heretics. (The following locales appear in the *Daughter of the Drowned Serpent* adventure found in the accompanying adventure book.)

TABLE 15-1: SETTLEMENTS IN THE YOALTICA ILAQUILOZ

d20	Settlement Found
1-8	No settlement
9-16	Transient settlement (10d10 nomads with lean-tos, tents, and temporary shelters)
17-20	Village (5d100 residents with permanent structures)

TABLE 15-2: SETTLEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE YOALTICA ILAQUILOZ

d20	Demographics
1-6	Lizard people-dominated settlement
7-12	Tsathar-dominated settlement
13-16	Cipatenhua-dominated settlement
17-20	Aztli-dominated settlement

NECOCYAOTL

When the Cult of Tlatcolli declared its independence from the Aztlis' hero-gods, the worshippers of the little-known hero-god Necocyaotl faced a quandary. They felt the more prominent hero-gods and their followers never gave them and the minor deity they venerated the respect they deserved, while the adherents of the newfound faith seemed too disjointed and undisciplined to successfully effectuate their proposed schism. During the struggle, both factions

vigorously courted the warrior-priests who served Necocyaotl and occupied strategic ground. After weighing their options, the clergy decided to take neither side and instead enforce their neutrality while tensions simmered around them. Ostracized by their Aztli brethren and the Poqozas alike, Necocyaotl and his underlings became bitter isolationists who savagely defended their territory against their former countrymen.

Although they more than held their own in battle during these chaotic times, they could not withstand the raging flood that engulfed them and their temple, which sank into the mud. Rather than succumb to drowning or relinquish their territory to their hated neighbors, legends claim the god's priests and followers committed suicide or entered into an unholy pact to emerge from the grave as hideous undead monstrosities who swore to defend their stronghold for all eternity. The temple's exact location has been lost to history as the muck and debris concealed the entrance, but those who travel in the locale's vicinity swear they saw mummified corpses shambling through the mire.

QUIZOLOA

Thousands of years of exposure to seawater before its re-emergence on land left the once grand city of Quizolooa in shambles. Its second encounter with onrushing floodwaters reduced it to ruins and contorted the rejuvenated trees and vegetation into twisted masses of wood and vines. The metropolis flourished during Tlatoani's reign as it served as an important religious center in the northernmost outpost of his empire. The civil war damaged significant portions of the settlement, razing many buildings to the ground, though the step pyramids celebrating the Immortal Sun withstood the initial onslaught. As the conflict neared its conclusion, the hero-gods practically demolished the remaining monuments dedicated to their hated adversary brick by brick. The cataclysm that followed virtually sealed Quizolooa's fate.

Yet even the gods' wrath failed to completely erase the city from memory. When the waters receded, some deranged cultists returned to the site and attempted the futile task of rebuilding, only to see their hopes dashed when a manmade disaster washed them and almost all of their labors from existence. Only a massive yet abandoned tower is all that remains of the formerly grandiose community. Rumors also claim that a grander and more ominous lost temple shares some correlation with this fearsome structure.

APPENDIX A: PERSONAL NAMES

First names hold significant meaning among the Aztlis and Poqozas. Parents jointly decide their infant's name with some input from extended family members and important people, though random events can also influence this lifelong decision. Aztlis have no surnames and instead use their birth day, birth month, or both in its place see the **Overview of Tehuatl** for details

about the Aztli calendar). Commoners who attain nobility during their lifetime almost always add their title as well. Although most Poqozas follow the same guidelines, some retain an elvish first name, surname, or both. The following table lists the most common Aztli names found in Tehuatl.

TABLE A-1: COMMON NAMES IN TEHUATL

Name	Meaning	Gender
Acalan	Boat	Male
Acatl	Reed	Male
Ahuatzi	Oak	Male
Ahuic	Stream	Female
Amoxtli	Book	Female
Anacaona	Flower	Female
Apozanolotl	Purity	Female
Atl	Water	Neutral
Atlacamoni	Storm	Female
Atlatonin	Mother	Female
Atzi	Rain	Female
Chalchihuitlcue	Jade	Female
Chantico	Home	Female
Chicahua	Strength	Male
Chimalli	Shield	Male
Chimalma	Shield	Female
Chipahua	Cleanliness	Female
Citlalee	Star	Male
Citlalic	Star	Female
Cozamalotl	Rainbow	Female
Cuallea	Good	Neutral
Cuetzpallea	Lizard	Male
Cuicatl	Song	Female
Etapalli	Wing	Neutral
Huitzilin	Hummingbird	Male
Ichnoyotl	Friendship	Neutral
Ichtacka	Secret	Male
Ihuicatl	Sky	Neutral
Ilhicamina	Archer	Male
Itotia	Dance	Male
Itzli	Obsidian	Male
Itzpapalotl	Butterfly	Female
Ixtli	Face	Neutral
Izel	Unique	Neutral
Mahuizoh	Glorious	Male

Name	Meaning	Gender
Mazatl	Deer	Neutral
Metztli	Night	Neutral
Milintica	Fire	Male
Mizquixual	Paint	Female
Namacuix	King	Male
Necahual	Survivor	Female
Necalli	Battle	Male
Neenetl	Doll	Female
Nochehuatl	Constant	Male
Nochtli	Pear	Female
Nopaltzin	Cactus	Male
Ocotlan	Pine	Male
Ohtli	Road	Neutral
Patli	Medicine	Neutral
Quetzalli	Feather	Female
Tayanna	Gift	Female
Tenoch	Fruit	Male
Teoxihuitl	Turquoise	Male
Tlacaelel	Hero	Male
Tlanextic	Dawn	Male
Tochtlea	Rabbit	Male
Toltecatl	Creativity	Neutral
Tonalnan	Light	Female
Tupac	Warrior	Male
Xiloxoch	Flower	Female
Xipilli	Prince	Male
Xiuhcoatl	Comet	Neutral
Xoco	Youngest	Female
Yaotl	War	Neutral
Yarezi	Love	Female
Zeltzin	Delicate	Female
Zipactonal	Harmony	Male
Zolin	Quail	Male
Zuma	Anger	Male
Zyanya	Forever	Female

APPENDIX B: ENCOUNTER TABLES

CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS ENCOUNTERS

Check at random times twice per day of travel or rest in the Caxcalli Grasslands. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-1: CAXCALLI GRASSLANDS ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Creature
1–10	Antelope (deer)
11–15	Centaur
16–25	Cougar
26–30	Coyote
31–35	Eagle
36–40	Ghoul
41–45	Gnoll
46–50	Orc
51–55	Poqozas
56–60	Rabbit
61–65	Rat
66–70	Skeleton
71–75	Snake (constrictor)
76–80	Snake (poisonous)
81–85	Vulture
86–90	Wight
91–95	Wraith
96–00	Zombie

CAYA GRASSLANDS ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time once per day of travel or rest in the Caya Grasslands. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-2: CAYA GRASSLANDS ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Creature
1–10	Antelope (deer)
11–15	Aztlis
16–20	Bear
21–25	Cougar
26–30	Coyote
31–35	Ghoul
36–40	Giant spider
41–45	Gnoll
46–50	Goblin
51–55	Hobgoblin
56–60	Orc
61–65	Porcupine

1d100	Creature
66–70	Rabbit
71–75	Rat
76–80	Skeleton
81–85	Werewolf
86–90	Wight
91–95	Wolf
96–00	Zombie

CEPUAL DESERT ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time once per day of travel or rest in the Cepual Desert. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-3: CEPUAL DESERT ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
1–10	Aztlis
11–20	Bat
21–25	Cougar
26–35	Coyote
36–40	Dwarf
46–50	Ghoul
51–55	Gnoll
56–65	Mummy
66–75	Orc
76–80	Skeleton
81–85	Wight
86–90	Wraith
91–00	Zombie

CUAHTLA FOREST ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time twice per day of travel or rest in the Cuahtla Forest. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-4: CUAHTLA FOREST ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01–05	Antelope (deer)
06–10	Aztlis
11–15	Bear
16–20	Couatl
21–25	Coyote
26–30	Crocodile
31–35	Eagle
36–40	Elves
41–45	Gnoll

1d100	Encounter
46–50	Gnome
51–55	Goblin
56–60	Halfling
61–65	Hobgoblin
66–70	Jaguar
71–75	Orc
76–80	Snake (constrictor)
81–85	Snake (poisonous)
86–90	Tapir
91–95	Werewolf
96–00	Wolf

GREAT CANAL ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time twice per day of travel or rest in the waters of and the land surrounding the Great Canal. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-5: GREAT CANAL ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01–10	Aztlis
11–15	Bear
16–20	Chuul
21–30	Crocodile
31–35	Frog
36–40	Gnoll
41–45	Harpy
46–55	Jaguar
56–60	Lizard people
61–70	Poqozas
71–75	Shambling mound
76–80	Skeleton
81–85	Snake (constrictor)
86–90	Snake (poisonous)
91–95	Will-o'-wisp
96–00	Zombie

IZMALLI SWAMP ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time three times per day of travel or rest in the waters of and the land within the Izmalli Swamp. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-6: IZMALLI SWAMP ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01–05	Aztlis
06–10	Black dragon
11–15	Boggard
16–20	Chuul
21–25	Cipatenhua
26–35	Crocodile
36–40	Frog

1d100	Encounter
41–45	Green Hag
46–50	Harpy
51–60	Jaguar
61–65	Lizard people
66–70	Mummy
71–75	Shambling mound
76–80	Snake (constrictor)
81–85	Snake (poisonous)
86–90	Stirge
91–95	Tsathar
96–00	Will-o'-wisp

MOTHER OCEANUS ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time once per day of travel or rest in the waters of and the coastline bordering Mother Oceanus. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-7: MOTHER OCEANUS ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01–05	Aztli warship
06–10	Chuul
11–20	Crocodile
21–25	Frog
26–30	Kraken
31–35	Locathah
36–40	Manatee
41–45	Merfolk
46–50	Merrow
51–55	Quipper
56–60	Orca
61–65	Sahuagin
66–70	Sea elf
71–75	Sea hag
76–85	Shark
86–90	Squid
91–95	Triton
96–00	Whale

TEPEPAN MOUNTAIN ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time twice per day of travel or rest within the Tepepan Mountains. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-8: TEPEPAN MOUNTAINS ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01–05	Aztlis
06–15	Bear
16–20	Cougar
21–25	Coyote
26–30	Deer

TOCTLI FOREST ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time twice per day of travel or rest in the Toctli Forest. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-10: TOCTLI FOREST ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01-05	Antelope (deer)
06-10	Bear
11-20	Elves
21-25	Gnoll
26-30	Goblin
31-35	Halfling
36-40	Hobgoblin
41-50	Jaguar
51-55	Orc
56-60	Shambling mound
61-65	Skeleton
66-70	Snake (constrictor)
71-75	Snake (poisonous)
76-80	Tapir
81-85	Werewolf
86-90	Wight
91-95	Wolf
96-00	Zombie

YOALTICA ILAQUILOZ ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time three times per day of travel or rest in the waters of and the land within the Yoaltica Ilaquilo. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-11: YOALTICA ILAQUILOZ ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01-05	Boggard
06-10	Chuul
11-15	Cipatenhua
16-25	Crocodile
26-30	Frog
31-35	Green Hag
36-40	Harpy
41-50	Jaguar
51-60	Lizard people
61-65	Mummy
66-70	Shambling mound
71-75	Snake (constrictor)
76-80	Snake (poisonous)
81-90	Tsathar
91-95	Will-o'-wisp
96-00	Zombie

1d100 Encounter

31-35	Dwarves
36-40	Eagle
41-45	Elk
46-50	Gnoll
51-55	Gnome
56-60	Hill giant
61-65	Ogre
66-75	Troll
76-80	Werewolf
81-90	Wolf
91-00	Zombie

TLOCOCUA MARSH ENCOUNTERS

Check at a random time three times per day of travel or rest in the waters of and the land within the Tlococua Marsh. If you roll a 1 on a d4, an encounter occurs. If an encounter takes place, roll on the following table to determine its nature.

TABLE B-9: TLOCOCUA MARSH ENCOUNTERS

1d100	Encounter
01-05	Black dragon
06-10	Boggard
11-15	Chuul
16-20	Cipatenhua
21-25	Crocodile
26-30	Frog
31-35	Gnoll
36-40	Green Hag
41-45	Harpy
46-55	Jaguar
56-60	Lizard people
61-65	Mummy
66-70	Poqozas
71-75	Shambling mound
76-80	Snake (constrictor)
81-85	Snake (poisonous)
86-90	Stirge
91-95	Tsathar
96-00	Will-o'-wisp

APPENDIX C: PSYCHOACTIVE PLANTS AND ALCOHOL

The archaeological and historical accounts confirm the Aztecs and many other Mesoamerican civilizations used psychoactive plants such as mushrooms and peyote to attain altered states of consciousness. Priests, healers, and the nobility predominately ingested or smoked these substances to gain insight on a patient's illness, to interpret omens, or to prophesize the future. In Tehuatl, the Aztli Confederation regulates these psychotropic agents, deeming them necessary for medicinal, religious, and military purposes only, though enforcement of these edicts varies greatly. In a pinch, Aztli ticitls (physicians) use these plants to quickly deaden intense pain or calm a hysterical patient. Priests and worshippers also use psychoactive plants to communicate with their gods, interpret portents, or see glimpses of the future. Rumors claim a significant number of Aztli army officers and soldiers heavily depend on the psychoactive agents to reinvalidate them and remove their fear in battle while also dulling the psychological trauma of regularly meeting out and seeing death firsthand. There is no doubt some Aztli warriors use the psychoactive plants for the preceding purposes, but the scope and scale of their usage remains unknown.

It is technically illegal for anyone who is not a nobleperson or an active member of a city-state's armed forces to possess any plants classified as a psychoactive, including salvia, morning glory seeds, peyote, and some species of the datura plant. After the events of the "Mushroom Revolt" almost 500 years earlier, no one regardless of social status or influence can legally possess psychedelic mushrooms in any territory under the Aztli Confederation's hegemony, and those who run afoul of this edict face a lengthy stay in a peticalli at a minimum. Nonetheless, it is not uncommon to find a small cache of psychoactive substances safely tucked away in people's homes, especially in regions beyond the boundaries of the large cities and towns where enforcement is far laxer to say the least. However, Aztlis almost never carry these substances on their person or even use them for recreational purposes. Indeed, most people greatly fear experimenting with these psychoactive agents because of the vivid and sometimes terrifying visions they produce. Instead, most Aztlis resort to taking these substances to reach an altered state of consciousness only when faced with an imminent lifechanging decision or during times of great stress.

The Poqozas' attitude toward psychoactive substances presents a stark contrast to their Aztli neighbors. Their judgmental Aztli cousins may characterize their usage as excessive, which the Poqozas vehemently deny. Instead, they prefer the term "experimental" to describe their outlook toward these plants. Their culture encourages people to constantly broaden their horizons in multiple endeavors, including trying new foods and exotic ingredients, participating in new physical activities and meeting new people, and of course, pushing their senses to their absolute limits. The half-elves believe the plants have the ability to allow them to participate in a transcendental experience with Tlatcolli on the rare occasions when the deity is otherwise unoccupied or wishes to impart a message of great importance to the worshipper. Unfortunately, these journeys are rare, and most ordinary Poqozas are unlikely to experience more than one such trip during their lifetimes. Although the Poqozas openly use psychoactive plants on a recurring basis, family members take swift and decisive action when they believe a friend or family member may be indulging in what they perceive to be too much of a good thing. Counteractive steps to halt and treat the addiction include intensive counseling from one of Tlatcolli's priests, herbal remedies to wean the person off the substances or alleviate the symptoms of detoxification, and

permanent abstention from using psychoactive plants with ongoing medical and therapeutic support from their families, the priesthood, and the community at large.

The Aztecs had a complex and contradictory relationship with alcohol. On one hand, there are documented instances of secular authorities forbidding or restricting alcohol intake while severely punishing anyone exhibiting public drunkenness. Conversely the consumption of pulque and other alcoholic beverages was an integral part of many familial celebratory rites and religious ceremonies where intoxication granted the believer spiritual insight and transcendental experiences that were impossible to attain while sober. The Aztecs and their Mesoamerican predecessors clearly recognized alcohol's detrimental effects to personal and public health when abused, but also valued its mystical properties that presumably brought worshippers closer to their gods or gave people a momentary respite from the rigors of everyday life and the horrors they may have witnessed on the battlefield.

In Tehuatl, the Aztli Confederation relies on peer pressure and family counseling to rein in an individual's excessive alcohol consumption rather than taking punitive civil actions against the offender except in cases where the person's inebriation causes them to behave in a disrespectful manner leading to a public outcry, such as performing a lewd act in a sacred temple. Most parents, especially commoners, strictly forbid their children from drinking alcohol outside of a religious or familial setting while living under their roof, whereas, the elderly, those Aztlis 70 years of age and older, are practically encouraged to imbibe a few cups of pulque each day to maintain their spirits and grant them a favorable disposition. The only formal regulatory action the Aztli Confederation takes regarding the purchase, sale, or distribution of alcohol is the imposition of the tequitia, a monetary, import tariff that the Aztli Confederation imposes on any alcohol transported into their territory from south of the Great Canal or ports of call outside of Tehuatl. The tequitia follows no set formula and is computed as a guesstimate by a delegate of each of the four major city-states stationed at the causeways stretching across the Great Canal and the ports scattered around northern Tehuatl. The tequitia serves two purposes — to limit the influx of alcohol into the Aztli Confederation, which some influential citizens see as an affront to Aztli moral values, and to also generate added revenue for the Aztli Confederation's coffers. Needless to say, the desire to avoid paying the tequitia has transformed smuggling from an art form into a science. There have been several documented instances of pulque leaking out of a tlachtli ball during an ullamaliztli match when the smuggler forgot to exchange balls before the match. In reality, few traders actually pay the tequitia, and even in those rare cases when they do, the merchant can usually bribe the official enough to adequately soften the financial blow.

When given a choice, the Poqozas prefer using psychoactive plants over alcohol, though the ability to mass produce alcoholic beverages makes them more readily available and less expensive than their rarer psychoactive counterparts. They correctly realize excessive alcohol consumption is deadlier than smoking, ingesting, or drinking too many psychoactive plants, though they still pose significant dangers. As in the case of psychoactive plants, concerned Poqoza friends and family members offer the individual treatment and help them on the road to recovery. Poqozas who refrain from using psychoactive plants and alcohol sometimes branch out into experimenting with cacao mixtures and in some cases, pushing their taste buds to unprecedented heights with superhot chili peppers.

APPENDIX D: MAJOR AZTLI & POQOZA HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS

Festivals and feasts always take place at the beginning of each matlacatl on the tonalpoahualli and each xopactli on the xiuhpohualli. The holidays listed are in addition to the preceding festivals.

TABLE D-1: TONALPOHUALLI FESTIVALS

Date	Festival
Coatl, Ocelotl	<i>Yaoc Festival:</i> Staged fights, weaponry displays, and other demonstrations of martial prowess take place during this festival that exalts great victories on the battlefield and remembers those who valorously died in battle. The community's warriors parade through town wearing their armor and decorative accoutrements while holding their fearsome weapons to the delight of the crowds. Musicians and dancers walk alongside the troops, playing inspirational songs and feverishly blaring their death whistles throughout the procession. While the Aztlis raucously celebrate the holiday over a period of several days, the Yaoc Festival has fallen out of favor with the Poqozas, who stage a subdued and surprisingly solemn event mourning their battlefield losses.
Miquiztli, Tecpatl	<i>Mimicque Festival:</i> Macabre pageantry, raucous wailing, and fasting are the hallmarks associated with the day when the Aztlis and Poqozas remember the recently departed. Despite the solemnity of the occasion, everyone seems to be in a jovial mood as the decedent's family and friends recount tales of their valorous and humorous deeds in a celebratory, carnival-like atmosphere that can last for several days.
Xochitl, Calli	<i>Chontzin Festival:</i> This festival celebrates every individual's inner and outer beauty. Aztlis and Poqozas display their inner beauty by performing acts of generosity and selflessness for others, preferably strangers. Everyone wears their best clothing, paints their faces bright colors, and adorns their hair with fresh flowers for this happy occasion. The celebration culminates with a midnight feast accompanied by dancing, singing, and music.

TABLE D-2: XIUHPOHUALLI FESTIVALS

Date	Festival
Teotleco, Cuahutli	<i>Zacuallotl Festival:</i> Aztlis and Poqozas celebrate the hero-gods' victory and commemorate the lives lost during the rebellion and the subsequent destruction of their ancestor's world. The festival mixes joy with sadness as participants wear colorful costumes depicting a hero-god associated with their birth day sign or month while indulging in song, dancing, and feasting until the moon Ihueltiuh becomes visible in the night sky. When this occurs, the frivolity abruptly ends, and the celebrants solemnly process back to their homes in absolute silence.
Tepeil, Olin	<i>Quiza Festival:</i> Thousands of years ago, the volcano Tepetzin erupted with tremendous fury and hurled millions of tons of rock, ash, and debris into the skies and down its slopes. Over the next seven months, the volcano's anger expanded the island's landmass, finally allowing the Aztlis confined to the Tepepan Mountains to resettle the fertile soil in the peak's imposing shadows. Aztlis and Poqozas alike boisterously mark the occasion with wild revelry and fire-themed entertainment that includes dancers, jugglers, singers, and magicians who masterfully command the flames to the crowd's ravenous delight.

APPENDIX E: COMMON NAME AND PLACE PRONUNCIATIONS

The following table provides the proper pronunciation for the most common proper names and places appearing in this sourcebook.

Name/Place	Pronunciation	Name/Place	Pronunciation
Atenco	a-TEN-coh	Omequatl	Om-E-Kal
Atoyatl	A-TOY-al	Quamaxotz	Ka-MA-shots
Aztli	AS-lee	Quiahuitl	Kee-A-weel
Caxcalli	Kash-KAL-lee	Poqoza	Poh-QUOH-sa
Caya	KA-ya	Tehuatl	TE-Wal
Cepual	Sep-U-al	Tepepan	Tep-E-pan
Cipatenhua	See-pat-EN-wa	Tlatlama	Lal-A-ma
Contlati	Con-LA-tee	Tlatlcolli	Lal-CO-lee
Cuahtla	QUAH-la	Tlatoani Xicocoya	Lat-oh-An-ee Seek-oh-COH-ya
Cualliteotl	Qual-lee-TE-ol	Tlazo	LA-soh
Ilhuicac	Il-WEE-kak	Tlococua	Lohk-oh-U-a
Itzcuin	ITS-queen	Tlotl	LOHL
Itztliteotl	Its-le-TE-ol	Toctli	TOHK-lee
Ixtla	ISH-la	Tonacayotl	To-na-KAY-ol
Izmalli	Is-MAL-lee	Tonalpohualli	Toh-nal-poh-WAL-lee
Mactli	MAK-lee	Tozca	TOS-ka
Mazalli	Mas-AL-lee	Xacota	Sha-COH-ta
Micoateotl	Mee-co-a-TE-ol	Xiuhpohualli	Shee-uh-poh-WAL-lee
Miquito	Mee-KEE-to	Yaocteotl	Ya-ok-TE-ol
Nonotzali	No-nots-A-lee	Yoaltica Ilaquiloiz	Yoh-al-TEE-ca Eel-a-KEE-los
Notonatiuh	No-ton-a-TEE-uh	Zacatl	SA-kall
Ometequa	Om-e-TE-ka	Zipe-Toteque	SEE-pe tot-E-ke

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TEHUATL

The World of the Lost Lands setting book from Frog God Games vividly describes the northern continents of Akados and Libynos, but what lies south of the planet's equator remains a great mystery. Those who have traversed the treacherous seas separating the two hemispheres have occasionally come upon patches of dry land scattered across the great ocean that some cartographers collectively refer to as the Arkanos Islands. This sourcebook details one such place: Tehuatl (TE-Wal), the last remnant of the Altepetl Alliance, a Mesoamerican-themed civilization that once held dominion over a vast landmass thousands of years earlier. When the alliance collapsed and much of its territory sank beneath the waves, the survivors huddled in the depths of the earth for centuries until volcanic activity and ebbing tides reclaimed portions of the land from the receding oceans.



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