

Swords of the South

A Guide to Estalia



Design and Writing: Steve Darlington, Steve Dee, Steven Lewis,
Craig Oxbrow and Rick Wolf

Additional Material: Paul Adler, Alexander J Bateman, Claudio Cáceres,
Joe Coltman, Michael Congreve, David Graffam, Jude Hornborg,
Frank Cord Lohmann, Michael-Forest Meservy,
Elizabeth Verbraak, Johannes Wiegernick and Gareth Willcock

Translation: Wim van Gruisen

Development and Editing: Steve Darlington, Steve Dee

Line Editor: Andrea Maurizio Medici

Editing: Andrea Maurizio Medici, Rangdo

Proofreading: Llanwyre Laish, Karl-Henrik Malquist, Andrea Maurizio Medici,

Tim Nutting, Jason Painter and Steven Saunders

Art Director & Layout: Pieter Dewulf

Publisher: Jude Hornborg

WFRP Logo: Darius Hinks

Interior Art: Jon Shai & free art

Mosaic Map: Andrew Law

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This project began in 2009 when Black Industries/Green Ronin ceased production of the WFRP 2nd Edition line. However, extreme life circumstances of the head designer and developer caused the project to be stillborn despite much of the material being finished. A half-measure version exists on the internet as an attempt to fill the gap. This is the full version, or as close as we could get it, from everything submitted in 2009-2010, released in November of 2015. Apologies for the delay.

This project was part of a two-fold project, the sister book being a guide to Tilea, called Spears of the Maiden. That book and this can be found online here: <http://www.liberfanatica.net/Tilea-Estalia.html>



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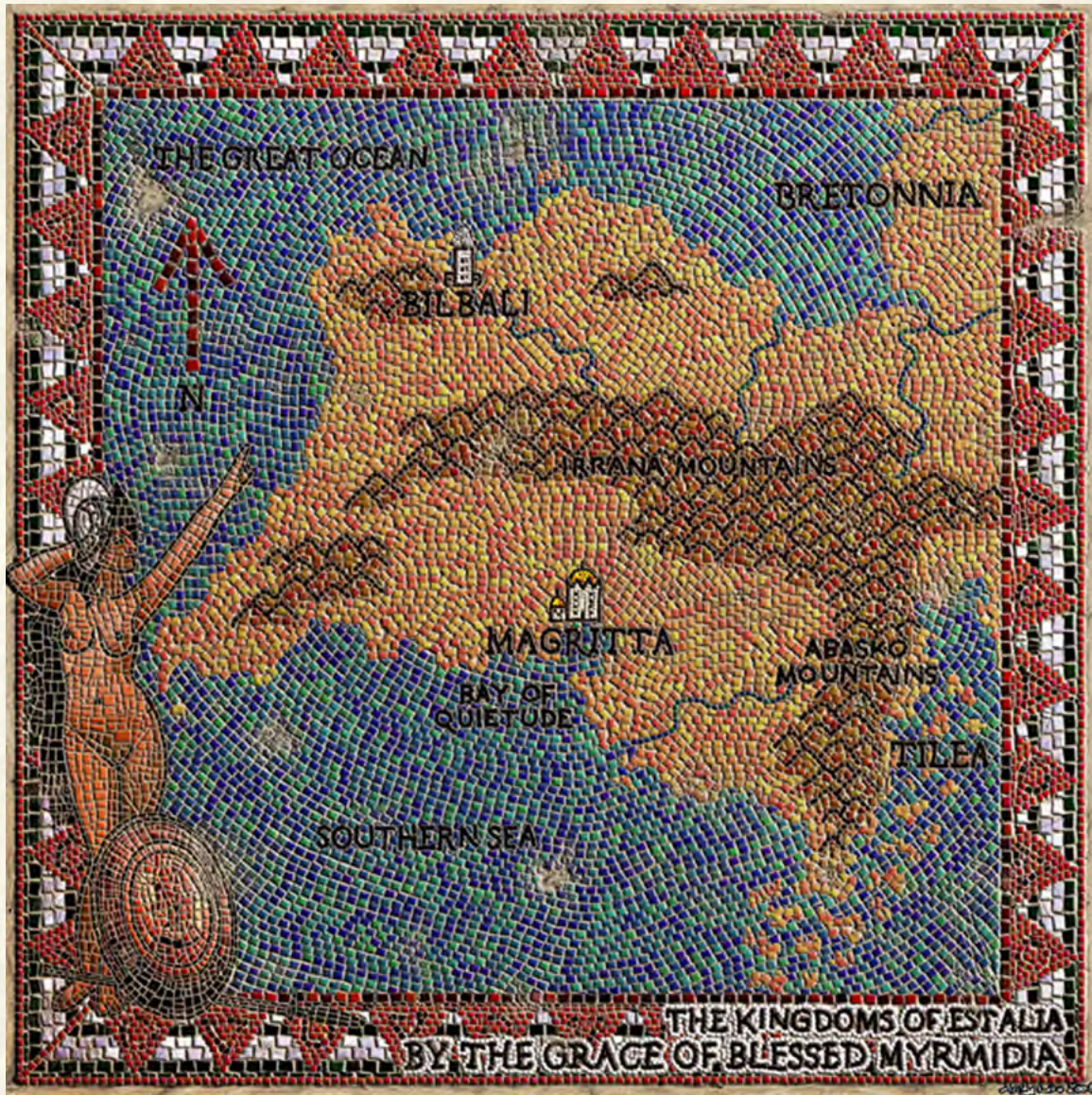
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The Lyre of the South

THE GREATEST POET THE OLD WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN AND WILL LIKELY EVER SEE IS THE ESTALIAN-BORN JACOPO TARRADASCH. HIS PLAYS ARE PERFORMED IN EVERY CITY AND TOWN ON THE CONTINENT AND HIS SONNETS USED TO WOO LADIES FOR CENTURIES. WE HAVE TAKEN OUR CHAPTER HEADING QUOTES FROM SOME OF HIS MORE FAMOUS WORKS, SO YOU, THE NEW SCHOLAR, CAN BEGIN TO APPRECIATE HIS GREAT WORKS. LIES ABOUT HIS OFT-ALLEGED TILEAN HERITAGE HAVE BEEN OBVIOUSLY OMITTED.

Introduction

The people of the Empire like to think they are the light of the Old World, their nation a bastion of learning between faith-bound Bretonnia and superstition-wracked Kislev. They think their city of Altdorf the very definition of cosmopolitan, a place so vast and so all-consuming that to but look out any window is to see all the Known World.

But if the citizens of Altdorf have never seen Estalia then they know nothing of the world, have seen nothing like true beauty, have felt nothing like true love.

The people of Estalia view their cold northern Empire neighbour as a land of shopkeepers and mathematicians, where the streets and houses are boxed and measured by laws and rules and the men and women likewise by morals and formalities and too many clothes; where the beer is warm and the women cold, instead of the right way around. As the popular Estalian joke goes “How might you tell a northerner from a Dwarf? Well, one is dour, miserly and rag-bearded, and the other is a Dwarf.”

The Estalians have no need to be dour - at least at first glance. Their land is bountiful with good food and wine. The sun shines brightly, the windswept hills dotted with windmills have a bare and serene beauty, its harbours glitter by the sunlit sea, the festivals are many and the music constant. Treasure fleets return often resplendent with jewels and gold and exotic wonders of faraway lands. The land is so rocky that hardly any Skaven burrow beneath and the threat of Chaos is cold and distant threat barely brought to mind.

But all is not wine and roses in Estalia. Its men and women are hot blooded; swift to anger, slow to forget and always ready to duel to the death. Swords are never far from hands and revenge is tasted far more often than justice. Vendettas are not forgotten and heretics are burned. The law is arbitrary and limited, and banditos roam the land, while faith runs deep and dark and the Inquisition knows no bounds. Estalia is truly not one kingdom but hundreds and as those kingdoms battle, borders shift and loyalties shift faster. A man's life can turn on a knifeblade, a city's fortune on a roll of the dice, a nation's supremacy on the whim of lady's fancy.

There are also dangers from without. Spies from Araby seek to recover their lost conquest. Dark elves raid harbours and ships at sea. Vampires stalk the barren hills and the city streets. Chimerae, manticores and wyverns stalk the mountains, as do orc and goblin tribes.

But the Estalians would have it no other way. Life is an adventure, a wild and unpredictable game of dice not a slow and boring chess match; an epic ballad of love and war, not a funeral dirge. Strike the chord and spill the wine and drive your courage to the sticking place, for life is to be lived while we have blood to live it. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die but today we live in Estalia, and the rest of the world, - to their great sadness - do not.

A Brief Disclaimer

The law and culture of Estalia have very narrow definitions of the role of women and the nature of gender and sexuality. The authors in no way endorse or encourage these ideas. Anyone trying to tell any gender what to do or where they belong should be strung up by their cojones.

Chapter I: The Land And Its Peoples

*"To him that travels, all lands are one
Except the land that calls him son"
All's Fell That's Drachonfells, Act 5, Scene 6*



Far to the south of the cold and benighted Empire of Sigmar lies another land, a land of wide open plains warmed by a gentle sun, bordered by perfect blue seas. This great southern peninsular has been spared the worst ravages of the Skaven, and knows little of Chaos. Here, magic is relatively safe, threats are distant and religious division is unknown under the overarching protection of the Maiden Myrmidia. Culture and scholarship bloom, and art, music and the pursuit of pleasure dominate over all. But without threats, the Kingdoms of Estalia have never needed to unite against an outside force and so remain forever fractured. Here, the enemy lies within, and the business of politics, war and even love is settled with knives in the darkness or blades at dawn. So every citizen must be a master swordsman if he hopes to live until his hair turns grey. Beware then, the people of the south, for they are quick to anger, slow to forget and their hands never leave their sword hilts - save only to drink their sweet lemon wine, or to kiss the hand of a passing beauty.

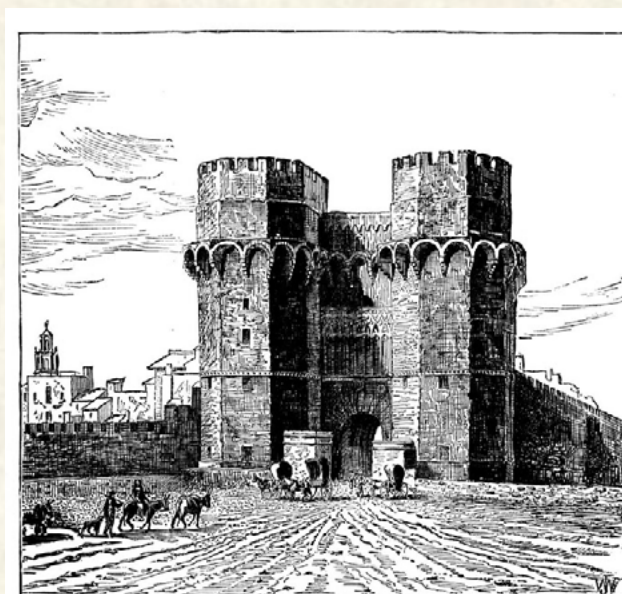
Principal Geography

The Estalian Kingdoms – and at any given moment, none can be sure just how many nations this may entail – are spread across the great south-western outcrop of the Old World. To its north east, it is bordered by Bretonnia, to its south east by the city states of the Tileans. To the north, south and west it is bordered only by the wild seas of the Great Western Ocean and the Southern Sea. The oceans have defined Estalian geography as much as its history, with the harsh sea winds stripping its coasts bare of life, but also blowing warm air north from the deserts of Araby. As such, the peninsular enjoys a warm temperate climate, arguably the most hospitable of anywhere in the Old World. The exceptions are the hot, dry weeks in the middle of summer when the Estalians seek respite from the wind and sun for much of the day.

Under the brisk winds and hot sun, the land of Estalia has become dry. Its coasts are primarily sharp cliffs with rocky hinterlands, and its interior is filled with tall mountains, bald hills and stony bluffs. In other places, the hills fall back to huge empty plains, both manmade and natural. Once, parts of Estalia were as forested as the Empire, but the huge demand for ships led to massive felling, creating even more plains and plateaus across the land. In some cases, this has even given way to desert-like areas, where only thin sagebrush survives in the sand. Although not true deserts like the deadly Arabyan sands to the south, an Empire visitor would find these desolate areas terrifyingly inhospitable.

In this rocky landscape, the soil is frequently poor and the fields do not grow the type of crops familiar to the northerners. The plains hold giant fields of wheat and other grains, while the bare hillsides grow small bushes of olives, onion vines and brassica. In the cooler north, orchards are common, and the oranges and lemons of Estalia are famous across the Old World.

The plains also hold herds of slender cattle and teams of tall, strong horses and hardy hill donkeys. Estalian horses are said to have Arabyan blood, making them the swiftest in the Old World. Couronnians would disagree, of course.



The Borders

Although the sea places a firm limit on Estalian ambition in three directions, its eastern borders are less clearly defined. Most Bretonnians take their border with the peninsular at the south branch of the Brienne River (the Seux-Brienne to the Bretons, La Trenza to the Estalians) but in the hills both the river and the border become poorly defined. A Bretonnian Lord of Carcassonne would not be surprised to find his domain included a few villages filled with Estalians, and Breton villagers are used to meeting with Estalian authorities. Neither side feels the need to enforce their borders and have let the situation continue, for the most amicably, as long as the peasants respect all authority that comes their way.

The south-eastern border is even more indistinct. Across the Abasko Mountains lies the city state of Tobaró. Near it lie several smaller city-states as well as other towns and villages which pledge allegiance to these urban epicentres. These are most definitely – and defiantly – independent settlements under Tilean control and any Estalian force foolish enough to forget that would taste the full force of their eastern cousins' wrath.

However, the mountains are deep and wild and refuse all delineation. Both sides claim their control extends to the other side of the mountain range, and the petty kingdoms high in those peaks are constantly waging tiny wars over national sovereignty and border protection. These feuds are fuelled by racial pride and many have existed for centuries - while others may have begun merely days ago when one shepherd moved his herd of sheep a few yards in the wrong direction. Centuries ago, a magnanimous prince of Tobaró said that any house that could see the Tilean Sea would be counted as Tilean but this only caused Estalian owners to erect large eastern walls and Tilean houses to acquire enormous steeples or powerful spyglasses. At times, the larger cities and states are drawn into these conflicts, causing the body count to skyrocket, but these are rare and short-lived. The narrow and deadly peaks and the lurking greenskin tribes between them have so far prevented protracted war, but the peaks are always claiming fresh lives.

Within the Estalian Kingdoms, borders are equally as fluid and poorly defined. There are over a dozen major kingdoms and more than a score of city-states on the peninsular and often times the border markers are little more than a line in the sand or a sign on a tree. Only a guide with expert knowledge can be sure which nation he finds himself in at any given time. Little wonder that travellers from the law-filled Empire sometimes refer to Estalia as the Land of Confusion.

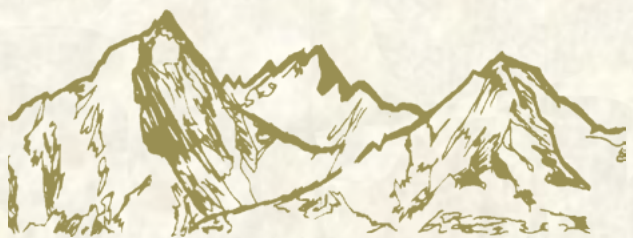
The Mountains

Although Estalia is most famous for its sweeping plains, it is its mountains that have most directed its history and politics. Sprawling across its centre from east to west are the mighty Irrana Mountains. This range divides the land between north and south, and this division marks the national character. Regardless of their kingdom allegiance, northerners will unite against the richer, more decadent southerners, while southerners scorn the wilder, more frivolous northerners – and both will heap scorn upon those primitive, rustic folk foolish enough to live in the middle.

There are few passes through the Irrana Mountains and their deep valleys hide countless dangers from bandits, rebels and monsters. Fierce greenskin tribes stake out their territories, and hordes of undead lurk in the dark caves. Deeper still are small skaven tunnel-empires, locked in deadly struggles with small, isolated dwarven karaks. Here too are remnants of the Abasko people, the ancient residents of the peninsular. They worship strange gods and use even stranger magics. The mountains also hide tiny kingdoms and even tinier villages, both of which may also display cultures and beliefs that are alien and unknown to the rest of the land.

Travel through the mountains is so slow and so dangerous that north-south travel is typically done instead by going around, either by boat or along the coastal roads. It is joked that it is quicker and safer to go from Magritta to Bilbali via Lustria than through the mountains – yet still the roads are not empty, as there is always the hope of gaining some time or some financial advantage.

The other major mountain range is the Abasko, running north-south along the eastern border. As the name suggests, these are an even greater haven for the Abasko people. Their villages exist in the gaps where the Estalians and Tileans cannot or will not go, on the narrow ledges of the most isolated peaks or in the most lonesome valleys, using their strange stilt-walking art of Salto del Pastor to get around. They have lived in these places, in the same way, for thousands of years, since before the coming of the Estalii, before even the fall of Tylos (see Chapter Two).



The Forests

Once covered in forest, now only two large woods remain in the peninsular. In the north-west lies the massive Pina Wood. Like the mountains nearby it is difficult to navigate and even more difficult to survive; trade routes divert around it and no nation claims dominion over it. This is because the wood remains an outpost of the Wood Elves, like the forest of Athel Loren to the north. Unlike their northern brothers, however, the elves of Pina Wood have withdrawn almost entirely from the world and offer no counsel or parley with the humans that surround them. All that the average Estalian knows is that those who go into Pina Wood come out forever changed – if they come out at all.

To the east lies Sombra Wood, the wood of shadows. Here there are few, if any, elves to be found. This wood is the domain of the undead. Estalia has long battled the walking dead and their dark masters, the vampires. The largest collection of their enemy currently lies waiting in the Sombra, using the dark forest to hide its numbers and prevent a great army from destroying them. At the head of this growing force sits a conclave of vampire lords commanding great depths of necromantic power. Soon enough they will make their move; Estalia's vampire wars are not yet ended.



The Sea

More than any other people of the Old World, the Estalians have conquered the seas. Their lands, therefore, do not end at the ocean's edge, and they claim conquest of several islands to the south and west, as well as several colonies in Lustria, Naggaroth and on the Vampire Coast. Many of these areas are also home to Tilean claims and conquests, sometimes very close by. Indeed, the Tileans claim that all of Lustria belongs to them (and this was once proclaimed holy writ by the Ultima Aquila) because it was first discovered by the Tilean Marco Colombo. The Estalians scoff at this, pointing out that first rarely means greatest, and the forays and settlements of such Estalian heroes as Lustros, Avarro and Aguerro more than entitles them to the entirety of the continent.

For the most part, however, these issues are purely theoretical, as neither nation has a navy of sufficient size, speed or power to defend their colonies, and most Estalian kings and queens only care about their distant dominions to the extent that they continue to provide gold, jewels or other treasures (see Material Culture, below).

The closer islands benefit from much greater protection, but are likewise more easily beset by pirates and Tilean interests, and trade with these hot southern ports is always a game of cat and mouse, as each port changes hands and allegiances as often as the wind changes direction.

The largest island in the Southern Sea is La Isla Atalaya. It is an Estalian nation state, built on the ruins of an ancient Elven citadel. Although fiercely anti-Tilean, it opens its harbours to any ship of neutral colours, and as such is a hotbed of intrigue known as the City of Whispers.

The elves of Ulthuan have of course taken note of the Estalian excursions across the oceans which they know so well and in many cases, over which they believe they have sole dominion. Even the most generous elf considers the Estalians dangerously naïve upstarts, travelling in places beyond their understanding and ability. Most importantly, they fear that the Estalians risk becoming unwitting allies or enslaved forces of their enemies, the dark elves of Naggaroth. This they cannot allow, so on top of all the other dangers of the oceans, the elves been known to attack human vessels on sight. To hamper travel, they are also reclaiming their ancient naval citadels, adding further to the chaos of the southern islands, and making it harder for Estalians to discern or care the difference between High and Dark elves.

They are of course correct that their Dark Elf cousins seek any route to gaining further mastery over the ocean and vengeance against the High Elves. On the sea, the pitch black slave arks of the Druchii are unmistakable, and their witchblade raiders known and feared for the way they prey on coastal towns, leaving only the old and frail behind. Estalians consider most elves their enemies, but the Black Raiders are hated with zeal and hunted to extinction.



The Cities

The mountains and plains of the interior are scattered with large towns and towering fortresses, but the only cities of any real size or import lie along Estalia's great coastline. A city without a port, it is said, is like a house without a door. Seaside Estalians typically mock their land-locked neighbours as being backward and uncultured—even if those they mock live but a mile from the coast.

Estalia's two most famous and by far largest cities are Bilbali and Magritta. These twin jewels both claim to be the unofficial (and at times, official) capitals of the peninsula, and the kings and queens of these cities are known throughout the Old World for their power, wealth and influence. Likewise any sailor worth his salt from Marienburg or Erengard knows a girl in Bilbali or Magritta.

Farewell and adieu to you girls of
Magritta
Farewell and adieu to you Magritta girls
I'm sorry for partin' but the sea has my
heart an'
There's a girl in Tobaró with fine golden
curls

Never love a sailor, my mama said to me
Never love a sailor, for they only love the
sea
Mama I'm sad to tell you, I loved a boy
from Bilbali
And now I'm sad to tell you of the gift
he's left me

Two entries in 'The Marienburger
Omnibus of Sea Shanties and Nautical
Verse'

Bilbali

Bilbali is the slightly smaller and poorer of the two cities, and has the slightly weaker military and naval forces; however, Bilbali more than makes up with this with its opulence and pageantry. It is sometimes called the City of Braggarts, for every Bilbalin will tell anyone within earshot of his city's glorious pre-eminence over all other cities in the world. Bilbali is also famous for its fantastic and frequent celebrations, and sailors are always happy to stay a few days in town for they almost guaranteed a grand party of some kind. Although Bilbali is cut off from Southern trade due to its northern location, it has its own Lustria colonies and trades frequently with Bretonnia and The Empire.

Indeed, so often do northerners come to Bilbali that the city is also dubbed the Gateway to Estalia.

Magritta

Larger and more fortified than its northern cousin, Magritta has to some a darker demeanour. But while Bilbali's towers are far from the sea, Magritta's mighty walls and great spires ascend straight up from the very edge of the perfectly calm Bay of Quietude to the great Temple of Myrmidia and Duke's Palace perched on the mighty hills above. The glistening white pearl in the oyster of the bay is almost blinding to look upon, but a blade's edge glimmers also. Within this city of faith and fortune, all power is held by merchant tyrants and the fury of the Inquisition—and neither is keen to share its power. It is a city riven—and often blood-soaked—by its devotion to two masters, and each day brings more pilgrims and more traders to add fuel to the fire, and that fire spreads out across the seas thanks to Magritta's enormous Armada of explorers and pirate-killers. Yet unlike the rambunctious ways of northern Bilbali, Magritta remains a city of gentlemen and scholars, of manners and etiquette, of high culture and exquisite art—not to mention more ale-houses than perhaps any other port in the world.

Estalian Relations

"Chaos? What is that? One of your northern superstitions?"

-Duke Pedro of Lysboa

It is difficult to characterise the Estalian view of other nations as their exposure to them is so varied. An inlander might have no idea of the existence of other nations, while a citizen of Magritta might converse with Norscans and Kislemites on a daily basis. Trade agreements can also have a vast effect on exposure to foreign nations: two towns may be separated by only a few miles but due to their trading agreements one may know Bretons well, the other Empire folk, and never the twain shall meet. The same goes for the multifarious kingdoms, with each having their own policies regarding and opinions of the rest of the Old World.

One thing all Estalians agree upon, however, is that their kingdoms are by far the greatest in the world.



Chapter I: The Land And Its Peoples

In general, Estalians see little difference between the folk of Bretonnia and those of the Empire. Both come from cold, wet, northern lands, where they insist on wearing ridiculous armour and fighting with ridiculously heavy weapons. They are also famously po-faced and dull, and given to always predicting the end of the world. Of the two, the Bretons are slightly preferable, because they understand chivalry, make good wine and have the good sense to worship a woman, even if the Lady is not a patch on the Maiden Myrmydia. The Bretons have also proved strong allies of the northern states in dealing with past incursions of Iron Orcs and the Skaven.

The southern Bretons usually return this respect, viewing the Estalians as something like their younger brothers. They feel the southern sun and lack of deadly enemies at all sides have made the Estalians soft and inattentive of the proper business of war. One day, perhaps, the Estalians will need to grow up, but for now the Bretons are happy to let them enjoy their innocence.

Men of the Empire are less patient, seeing the Estalians as foolishly naïve or frustratingly frivolous. Just as Kislevites resent the safety they provide the Empire, Empire warriors believe that the Estalian *joie de vivre* is only possible because of the Empire's efforts and sacrifices. Estalians are lampooned on the stage as being extremely soft-living, mindless, fat, slovenly and cowardly, preferring to lie about drunk or reading poetry instead of fighting. This lampooning stops however if they ever serve with Estalian mercenaries, who shore up their homeland's reputation with an unexpected courage, even when lacking strong Imperial armour. Empire folk are also surprised at how quickly an Estalian can go from languishing with wine, woman and song to charging into battle and back again. Then the northern soldiers wonder whether the hot sun makes all Estalians into madmen who must do everything to the extreme.

Estalians are quick to defend themselves against slurs, but they are forgiving of the northerner folk. To live in such a cold, wet, strife-ridden, Chaos-marked place makes them deserving of pity more than scorn. The Estalians however spare no wrath when it comes to their nearest neighbours, the Tileans. These two nations share a common ancestry, a border and many national characteristics, but most importantly they share an enmity for the other that edges on the pathological.

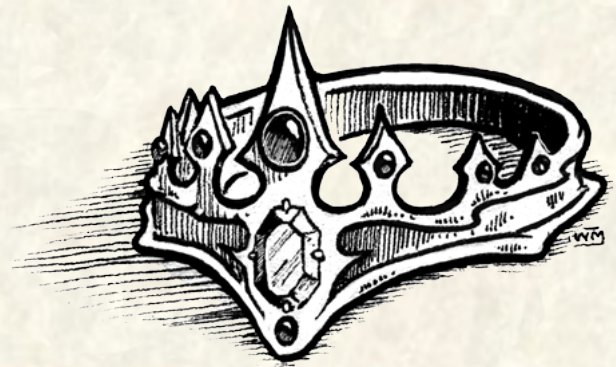
There is no real cause or event behind the enmity between Tileans and Estalians.

There is a great religious divide between the nations (see Faith, below) but that is more a result of the antagonism than a cause. Tileans and Estalians fight for the same reasons brothers fight: they are so similar, and live in such close proximity, that they seek every chance they can to find differences and faults in their counterpart. Estalians will accuse Tileans of such things as being thieves, cowards, shirkers, weaklings, fops, hypocrites, betrayers, bastards, homosexuals, necromancers, dog-lovers and women-beaters, and the Tilean litany in return will be much the same. The most iconic insult however stems from the Tilean's devotion to finance and trade. Although Estalians equally pursue trade supremacy, Tileans are seen as gold-hording bankers, who will backstab anyone to increase their coffers. The stereotyped Tilean captain sits in his cabin, effete stroking his piles of gold and paying off spies and traitors, instead of standing bravely at the prow in the fury of the storm. A 'Tilean promise' is something worth less than nothing, a 'Tilean oath' is something that lasts no time at all, and a 'Tilean bargain' is being paid to take a dive.

Tileans, in return, characterize Estalians as being too foolish, stubborn or romantic to know a good deal or a wise peace when they see one, preferring ever to fight or get drunk than to actually accomplish anything. On the theatre stages of Tilea, Estalians are sozzled berserkers, always tilting at windmills or charging into trouble.

For Estalians, the nadir of Tilean society and the confirmation of all their prejudices is Sartosa, the isle of pirates. The pirates' greed and lack of honour, in the Estalians' eyes, as well as their open worship of Ranald and Manann, mark them as criminals and heretics: in other words, archetypal Tileans. But for all the bluster, many an outlawed or exiled Estalian has made his or her home there, far from the grasp of the Inquisition.

The last and most unique Estalian relationship is with the land of Araby to the south. No other nation in the Old World has anything like the ties Estalia has with this alien land, and although their past history has involved terrible wars and religious genocide (on both sides), their relationship has evolved into a truce of mutual respect. As long as each party keeps its distance and never rattles its sabre, trade flows fast between the two nations, both of goods and ideas. Arabyan magic fills the courts of Estalian kings and Estalian steel is sold on the streets of Copher and Al-Haikk.



The Estalian People

“A Tilean seeks revenge in the morning; an Estalian will kill you right away.”
- Empire sailor’s proverb

Sigmar’s Empire is forever divided because it was formed from so many warring tribes. The Estalians have no such excuse.

Long before the time of Sigmar, the Reman Empire spread out across the southern parts of the Old World from the remnants of their capital, Tylos. The people of the east took the name Tylosans, while the people who journeyed west named themselves the Estali. At that time, the Abasko tribes lived in the mountains to the west, but these tribes were soon driven out or subsumed into the expanding Estali. Soon, the new tribe occupied the entire peninsula (apart from the remaining strongholds of the Elves). Almost immediately, they fragmented into hundreds of tiny nations, and the fighting has been going on ever since.

Lacking tribal identities, each Estali nation created its own, and soon enough, membership of and loyalty to these nations became the most important aspect of Estalian life. So it is that through the ages, the Estalians still champion loyalty and allegiance, and fight passionately to defend their nationhood.

Mass slaughter of their own tribesmen grew distasteful over time, however, so rules were set up for duelling and settling warfare through adjudication. Soon, borders and kings could change without the decimation of the populace, and Estalians learnt to accept such things.

Despite their pride, once the fighting was done, they rarely sought revenge. For most Estalians, to lose to the better man is no shame—as long as you showed the courage to fight.

With no deadly winters, and freed from the enemies that beset other nations, life in Estalia is not quite as cheap or short as it is in the north. As such, men came to care greatly about what stories were told about them as they grew old. Reputation and honour became sacred, and these too would be defended passionately. To this day, being accused of ill-doing in love, trade or war is an outrageous thing for an Estalian of any rank and demands a quick and violent answer: especially if it is true!

Outsider’s Views

“They dance more than Elves, fight more than Dwarfs, drink more than Kislevites and eat more than Halflings. That don’t leave them no time for working, I reckon.”

Dagmar Weissner, Averlander
Innkeeper

“The food, the wine, the women... merciful Shallya, my years as ambassador there were the best of my life. I curse the day the Emperor called me back to this sodding Reikland.”

Lord Georg Grossman,
Imperial Ambassador to the Court of
Bilbali (retired)

“They’re just like Tileans but have bigger moustaches, don’t they? No? Is it the Tileans who have the moustaches? Which ones have the stupid hats?”

Jurgen Hanse, Marienburg
Merchant

“Everything they do is heresy and degradation, and their cities stink of whores and criminals. If the orcs ever head south, we should leave the Damned to their fate.”

Sir Henri de Monminot, Bretonian Knight

“Pig-eyed, donkey-loving, egg-sucking sons of drunkards and whores! I kill any of them that dare to come in here, I tell you that for nothing!”

Enzo Marcoclio,
Tilean Mercenary

“They know how to hold a grudge. So that’s a start.”

Gurni Goldfindersson, Dwarfen
Shieldbreaker

Passion defines everything in Estalia. The people are not idiotic or suicidal, but they prefer action over thought and boldness over caution. Estalians never do anything by halves. They love with all their hearts promise all their strength and never eat or drink without filling themselves to bursting. To the Estalian, prudence and parsimony are signs of poverty, cowardice, disloyalty or weakness of conviction. He who holds back must be hedging his bets; he who saves his strength in a battle is keeping it to run away. Which is not to say the Estalians do not think of the future: they are always thinking of the future, which is why they must give their all today, at this moment. Better to die and have songs sung about your victory than to live with failure or dishonour.

Famous Estalians

The Empire's histories have, for the most part, ignored the accomplishments of Estalians, with only Tilean explorers such as Pirazzo and Marco Colombo gaining a mention in their works. Anyone mistaking these individuals for Estalians will be ferociously corrected, and the following names will likely then be discussed at length:

Vespucé Lustrós – although most historians will, if pushed, agree that Lustria is most likely named for the gold it possesses in seeming endless quantities (lustrós being the Estalian word for gold), there is some evidence that the name instead came from this eponymous Estalian navigator. His now half-mythical voyages led to the mapping of the entire southern continent, before he was lost somewhere north of Naggaroth.

Generale Henri Aguerro – Aguerro is also famed for his explorations into the Lustrian continent, but more for his conquests of the daemonic inhabitants than his skilful sailing. Nicknamed “El Lobo Hambre”—the starving wolf—Aguerro's thirst for conquest and slaughter is seemingly endless, and even to war-jaded Estalians, borders on the obscene. Yet his conquests have done more than anything else to ensure the gold and precious stones flow back east.

“Black Scarlet” – A “black woman” is one who kills her husband, and a “scarlet woman” is a prostitute, so this notorious pirate queen took both names to show her disdain for men and their world. Although reported dead many times, she always seems to be seen again.

Miguel Molino – A poet and a (poor) historian, Molino's works chronicled not just the past but the glorious times in which he lived. This history of the last century has become required reading in the scholams of the peninsula, and has done much to enshrine the believe

that Estalia is experiencing a great golden age which sets it apart from the benighted world around it.

Jacopo Tarradasch – Empire folk and Tileans believe the greatest playwright of the Old World was born in Tilea but Estalians know he was born in a village just inside their borders, and spent most of his formative years in Magritta, a belief they can prove by the fact that Estalia is mentioned three times more than Tilea in his collected works. Thus they claim him as their native son: Magrittan festivals celebrate “The Lyre,” as he is known, and his works are performed constantly across the nation. Some Empire travellers have heard translations of his work claimed as originals by one Willhelm Pikewaver, a travelling player from Marienburg, but any Estalian will reveal the truth of this plagiarism.

Non-Humans in Estalia

As there are so few forests in the Estalian lands, and because Elven mariners consider these southerners a threat, there are few Elves seen on the Estalian mainland. And as Elven attacks at sea become more common, those Elves that are seen are more and more likely to be regarded as untrustworthy, if not enemy spies. However, there is as yet no war and the ports trade with Elven vessels when the coin is good (and it usually is). Meanwhile, the Pina Wood and other smaller forests are home to Wood Elves, but they share their cousins' dim view of humans and keep to themselves far more than the Elves of the Empire.

Far from their empire in the World's Edge Mountains Dwarfs are also rare in Estalia but are not unknown nor unwelcome. Indeed, Dwarfs are feted: Estalians feel honoured to see a Dwarf so far from home, in a place known for Elves, and tend to admire Dwarves greatly. They see Dwarfs as having many of their own virtues: they enjoy fine (if, to their tongues, sour) beer, they love their women well, they take oaths, grudges and matters of the blood seriously, and they are always ready to fight. There are even a few famous tavern toasts to Dwarfs (“Longest beard drinks the deepest!” being the shortest) which most drinkers know and will cheer when any Dwarf enters the bar. And although the hills are not right for building karaks (which is also why there are fewer Skaven), the veins of iron and cuts of slate so common in that terrain means dwarven expertise is valued highly and paid handsomely.

The problem is, Dwarfs do not typically like Estalians. The southerners are too long-spoken, too frivolous and far too jolly for dwarven tastes—and far too interested in frivolities like fashion and style. They are much more at home in grimmer, northward parts like the Empire and Kislev.

They also know that the adulation of an acquaintance is nothing like the respect of a comrade, and that Estalian law is harshest to outsiders. Still, enough Dwarfs can withstand living among Estalians for small communities to appear in the all the large towns.

As in Tilea, Halflings enjoy a more celebrated status in the south than in the Empire. They are far less likely to be servants and many princes field whole regiments or orders of the little folk. Lumpin Crook's Fighting Cocks, the famous Empire regiment, often journeys south to fill its numbers with veteran Estalian Halflings. Halflings, with their love of all the gustatory arts, as both purveyors and consumers, rejoice in the palettes and ingredients open to them in the south. Halflings also love the emphasis on art and theatre, but because they so often end up as entertainers or hospitality workers they do find that, outside the army, this is how they are stereotyped. Halflings are seen as jesters, on and off the stage—loved and adored for being so comical, but not respected—after all, they are not true Estalians.

With word of the lovely climate and conditions reaching many Halflings in the Empire, the last century has seen an ever-growing migration south. As this happens, the new arrivals tell tales of the Empire, where a Halfling is an Imperial Elector, and Halfling judges make laws for Halfling guildsmen, and the Quinsberry Lodge supports every Halfling worker. The revolution is a long way from beginning but there is something in the wind of Estalian Halflings wanting to be more than just mascots and tokens, but will Halflings shirk their beloved comfort to take a stand, and can they ever be taken seriously in a land where joie de vivre is the highest virtue?

The Estalians have little knowledge of the Skaven. They do not live in denial like the Empire; rather their rocky nation seems to resist extensive tunnelling and the Ratmen are considered more of a Tilean problem. Only Tileans would make so many business deals they would end up dealing with such beasts. Mutants are almost entirely unknown as well. Chaos and its tainting influence do not seem to take root in the blessed hills, although giant beasts like minotaurs and dragon-ogres are not unknown in the terrifying peaks of the mountains, and collections of Beastmen lurk in the caves beneath—the ones not occupied by goblins, that is.

Vampires are more known in Estalia than perhaps anyone outside the blighted land of Sylvania. The horror of the War of Blood (see Chapter Two) has left the Estalians terrified of the vampires that may yet live among them. Vampire hunters are not shunned, and common sense defences such as garlic and daemonsbane plants are ubiquitous. Looking glasses are loved by ladies and men for more than just adjusting ones hairs—although that is also extremely important.

The Language

Estalians speak Estalian, a language derived from the ancient language which the Empire scholars know as Classical. Both the Tilean and Estalian tongues resemble the Classical language and each other, although each has their own idiosyncrasies due to the passage of time and the demands of culture. To the Empire ear, Tilean and Estalian are nigh-identical, and both travellers and scholars often get them confused. Although the Estalians and Tileans will deny it furiously, the languages are similar enough for a speaker of one to understand a speaker of the other, and there are few scholars who, after mastering one, do not master the other.

Estalian is not a difficult language to learn, but there are a few impediments. One thing visitors often have trouble with is that Estalian relies a lot on intonation. Questions are expressed not through a change of words, as in Reikspiel, but simply changing the tone of voice—a tone which may not be obvious to the visitor. Where an Empire person may say, "Are there orcs in the mountains?" an Estalian would simply say, "Orcs in the mountains?"

Another aspect of Estalian which northerners find confusing is that qualifiers such as adjectives and adverbs always come after the thing they are modifying. While Empire folk will refer to a beautiful woman or dark magic, Estalians would phrase such things as the woman who is beautiful, and the magic that is dark. Both of these are fairly easy to role-play, and can add a lot of atmosphere to Estalian games. This is also the key difference between Tilean and Estalian: Tileans always put their adjectives first, and a careless spy may make just such a mistake with his grammar.



An Estalian Lexicon

aficionado – one who enjoys or appreciates something with great passion, fervour and scholarship, be that thing wine, women, song, battle, the toreo or anything else. A high compliment.

ajenores – literally ‘foreigners’. Commonly used to mean enemies

bario – village or local area

barista – minor bureaucrat, taxman or some other annoying official

belleza – young lady, typically a romantic interest

bruja – someone who associates with vampires, hence also any traitor

bueno dios – good morning!

bueno pasaje – good bye! (literally ‘travel well’)

caballero – once this meant a member of the knightly orders, but nowadays it means a lower-ranked nobleman or titled landowner. Over centuries of breeding a caballero may one day rise to be hidalgo.

calla – street

campeo – champion. Often used ironically to mean an idiot, fool, or dead man, in the sense of one who takes on impossible causes guaranteed to fail or get him killed. Typical examples are defying a prince or the Inquisition.

castillo – castle. Torre (tower) is often used interchangeably, not least because most Estalian castles are tall and narrow watch-houses, as opposed to the sprawling manses of the north.

castro – a very old man, hence also a traveller who has seen much or a warrior who has fought many battles

caza blanca – the ‘white hunt’, politics and spying, the game of thrones, for the fairer skin of the wealthy. Also sometimes to hunt vampires, for their skin is the whitest of all.

colorado – literally ‘painted’, meaning one who paints his skin brown to fake having travelled far or marched long. Hence used for anyone trying to claim he is something he is not.

Costranova, El – the New World, Lustria, etc.

culo – an idiot or fool

cujo – crazy. When referring to a warrior, to be bloodthirsty or frenzied

custodes – officials, typically of church or state. The employers of baristas.

diestro – literally ‘skilled’, one trained in the blade. Not necessarily one of the Diestro career

dominar – ruler of a town or small province, the employer of custodes

luchador – pit-fighter, brawler

An Estalian Lexicon

guitarra – a stringed instrument not unlike a Bretonnian lute, but far louder. Played by guitarristas.

hidalgo – a nobleman

maestro – a great swordsman and/or lover and/or artist

mesizo – literally ‘mixed’. Used to describe the convoluted, confusing and strife-riddled nature of Estalian history, politics, religion, and, indeed, anything else. Typically said with a shrug, as if that explains everything

niño – young boy, or a warrior who has yet to see battle or find a woman. El niños are famously annoying.

Perplejores, El – ‘the mysteries’, the magical arts. Often shortened to el perples.

protégés – town guard, usually distinct from the vigilares

pueblo – people, usually the common people

puerta – gate or doorway, but also used to mean prison

puerto – bridge or port

puta – a prostitute

puto – a whoremonger, a terrible insult

rodadero – a cattle-man who rides a horse, rounding up his cows; hence, also a bounty hunter. Although, assassin is a better translation as most bounties are paid for the head, not the man.

solidaro – soldier

taverna – inn

vencor de molino – literally, defeater of windmills. A braggart or coward who wins by taking on something that can’t fight back, or arranges for that outcome (such as charging a man to a duel when he is due to ship out). Based on a madman they say haunts La Mesa.

viajero – literally ‘traveller’ but almost always used to mean warrior or a tough customer (the opposite of a nino)

vigilares – soldiers of the prince or kingdom charged with keeping the law between the cities, something akin to the Empire’s roadwardens

Estalian Religion

Unlike the Empire, Estalians are united in their worship of Myrmidia, their national goddess. However, they also recognise other deities that the Empire knows well, namely Morr, Verena and Shallya. These gods are seen not as separate entities but as part of Myrmidia's extended family, and worshipping them is included in worshipping her. Some priests specialise in the worship of Myrmidia's father, mother or sister, but they remain part of the Myrmidian priesthood. They consider the Empire very strange in their insistence on splitting gods up into individual cults and individual aspects, when, in truth, all great aspects are enshrined in the Maiden Myrmidia herself. She is no mere warrior god in Estalia—she embodies knowledge, strength, purity, courage, passion, wisdom and much more.

As it is more centralised, religion is also more organized and formal in Estalia than in the Empire. The cult and its traditions are integral to everyone's life, and hardly a single person will be found missing the weekly mass at their central duomo. All houses feature statues or symbols of the goddess, and there are very few among the secular population who do not wear her symbol around their neck, or carry her Battle Beads in their pocket, each bead recalling one of her great Battles, each with its own lesson for the faithful. Some may follow one of her family and be bedecked accordingly; others place special affection on one of Myrmidia's many Shieldmaidens and the virtue embodied by her, gaining faith and power from their particular devotion. Young boys and girls alike often take a God, Shieldmaiden, or Venerated Soul as their patron when they reach the age of ten, in a ceremony not unlike dooming in the Empire.

With much of the law changeable and the secular power scattered across the countless small kingdoms, final authority (at least in the south) is rooted in the church. Their word is law and their decrees almost always supported by the secular powers. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the actions of the Inquisition. This separate and secretive cult body is empowered to do whatever it takes to detect Chaos, dark magic, heresy, sedition, vampires and foreigners dwelling among all the people of the Estalian Kingdoms. Those foreigners who test the power of these black-robed priests are not long for this world. Mostly they work in secret, but men and women burn on their fires regularly, and they claim the continued safety of the land is proof enough that their actions are justified and their crusade successful—and, as with the rest of their actions—no-one has the power to dare question this.

Myrmidian priests have a unified look to them: simple dark brown robes and small round hats. Many are also accompanied by their signature bird, either in life or in the form of a pin or brooch: an eagle or hawk for Myrmidian purists, a vulture for those who worship her father more prominently, an owl for those who serve her mother and a dove or pigeon for followers of her sister. This is so common that many priests are talented falconers and large temples typically feature rookeries or the like for the sacred birds. In the north, Myrmidian priests are derided as “bird lovers” or “feather-brains”.

Estalian Superstition

Although the Myrmidian faith is omnipresent in the peninsula, superstition persists. Sailors and soldiers are especially superstitious, and there are few in the entire nation who are not one or the other, or close to one of them. The fear of vampires and the undead has also led to many superstitions to guard against them. A classic example of this is finger-pricking. This is a simple act where a sword blade or hairpin is used to prove that the blood in ones thumb or finger is flowing and red, not slow and yellow as in a zombie or black as in a vampire. Hedge wizards and witches often begin their rituals with prickings of themselves and their audience, and duels, oaths and ventures are often begun the same way; the original meaning of this security device long forgotten.

Another tradition which many have forgotten began as vampire protection is the wearing of scarves and neckerchiefs; in much of the nation it is considered both impolite and bad luck to expose one's neck in public. Estalians also typically make the sign of Myrmidia—a clenched fist touched to the chest—when they pass a graveyard, gibbet or crossroads, as restless souls may be lurking. The more superstitious do it whenever they meet a stranger or foreigner—just in case.

Sometimes, pricking goes further: soldiers and warriors often draw their own blood when swearing oaths or preparing for battle. These cuts are made on the hands, arms, chest or face. Some go so far as to cause actual scarification as the ultimate symbol of devotion or courage. Tattooing, a more elegant form of scarification is also popular, in many varieties and styles. A tattoo of an anchor ensures the bearer can never be lost at sea, a tattoo of a drawn blade indicates a search for vengeance and a tattoo of a vulture asks Father Morr to bear you painlessly into death. The more faithful or ostentatious tattoo more overt and elaborate symbols of their god, or their chosen Shieldmaiden (see Chapter Seven).

Estalians have many horror stories involving the forests and trees. Since most of their nation is free of such things, the forest has an alien and frightening quality, and those forests they do have are also home to dark forces. However, the legends have become somewhat more extemporaneous. It is considered bad luck to sleep alone in the shade of a tree. Likewise, others consider sleeping on grass to be bad luck, and need cold stone or a proper straw bed to be safe. Fires should never be lit within sight of the forest that provided the wood, or the trees may try to take back their own. Many sailors and soldiers distrust wooden weapons, believing that only steel or sharpened stone may be relied upon in battle.

One of the most persistent superstitions of Estalia is the beast known simply as the Black Dog. Others call him the Dog of Misery or Misfortune, and with good reason. It is said that any who see the dog will suffer a great accident or injury by the end of the day. The dog is usually only glimpsed at a distance, and descriptions of his breed vary, but he is always a hunting dog. Some say he is the size of a horse, others tell of him being small enough to hide in city alleys, but he is always black and short-nosed, and wearing an expression of ineffable sadness. Interestingly, in Kislev lore, there is a legendary figure called Misfortune who is described as a black shadow who causes things to be stolen or go missing. Some have likened him to Ranald, the Empire's God of Thieves.

Thanks to their suffering at the hands of black-faced Arabyans, the Estalians often consider dark skin to be the sign of an enemy. However, pale white skin is also associated with the horror of the vampire kings and queens and their undead servants (not to mention the foolish men of the north), so that colour is also shunned. A rosy glow or warm tan is considered the premium colour of health and trustworthiness: in order to get exactly the right tan, rich Estalians often go to a specially-built 'solarium' as part of their public baths. Poorer ones buy a make-up which is supposed to make pale skin look healthier and dark skin brighter, but often just makes them look orange. The ghostly white face powders used by northern women are considered hideous, and the plastered theatre clowns of the Empire look like terrifying monsters to Estalian folk.



Racism in Estalia

As the preferences for skin colour mentioned above would indicate, there is much racial division in Estalia, and from it stems a strong cultural emphasis on appearance. Those with too dark skin will be considered to be of Arabyan blood or sunburned peasant stock, those of too light or pallid skin may be considered of vampiric heritage (or a sluggard or a coward, shirking work or battle). Hairy, unkempt types are typically mountain folk, known for their primitive ways and dark sorcery. Being of impure blood is not just something that draws negative stigma and low social status; it can indeed bring down the hand of the law against you, and may even catch the attention of the Inquisition. In some kingdoms it is a crime in itself to be of impure blood (although a difficult one to prove) so everyone strives to remove any doubt of their true Estalian ancestry and look. This is one reason why fashion is so important: he who looks his best is simply less likely to be considered a criminal or a heretic. It is almost the reverse of Bretonnian sumptuary laws where only those of certain ranks may dress with flair; in Estalia a poor man with a good tailor can rise above a noble with an unfashionable ruff.

Material Culture

"Drink, for tomorrow we die—or the rum may run out. Either is terrible."

Capitan Iglesia, of the Mercato

Dress

Two of the crops that grow extremely well on the Estalian plains are cotton and flax, and as a result, cloth is something the Estalians have in abundance. They also have access to dyes that people of the Empire could not imagine: bright yellows and oranges from Araby spice, blood reds from their own roses and of course the new, incredible indigos from Lustria. As a result, Estalians—even some peasants!—wear the most outlandish, extensive and colourful costumes in the Old World. A northern stranger could easily mistake a common Estalian labourer for an entertainer or a merchant.



Any opportunity to add more material is seized upon and used to the utmost: men wear long capes with wide collars and have oversized lapels and folds on their doublets and pantaloons. Shoes are long-tipped and scarves are long-tasselled. Women wear skirts supported by enormous farthingales or enlarged with countless ruffles or waves. Ruffles also appear on sleeves and necklines, which are typically straight and high or complimented with a scarf. Among the wealthy, ruffs are preferred and they too are enormous. Wealthy women also have access to petticoats, corsets, undersleeves and other garments which would boggle the mind of a northern burgher. Although a typical Estalian peasant will wear a white or brown smock and a wide-brimmed hat while working in the fields to protect himself from the heat, the same peasant at a fiesta or even any special occasion will be wear not only far finer clothes than his Empire counterpart, but probably also many more items and layers. Should any of this threaten to droop or sag too much, the surfeit of Estalian cattle, sheep and goats makes leather and catgut elastic as equally common as cloth.

Of all items of costume, however, there are two that are indispensable and indisputably Estalian. The first is the cape. With warm days but cold nights the standard, and cool sea breezes whipping through sun-drenched streets, the Estalians need a garment that can accommodate temperature swings and the cape does this nicely. It also allows dramatic flourishes, the display of extraordinary stitchwork and embroidery, keeps off the rain squalls and most importantly, hides one's intent where needed. Whole dances, plays, systems of etiquette and of course, sword styles revolve around the cape.

The other indispensable item is of course the hat. Some rest during the day to avoid its harsh rays, but those who cannot protect themselves with a broad-brimmed hat. You can tell much about a man—or a lady—by the hat he or she wears. Nobles at the city courts compete for the most elaborate and extravagant hats, bearing the widest brims, the shiniest buckles and the longest feathers, while soldiers and sailors often never remove theirs for fear of terrible bad luck that must follow. Young boys often get a man's hat when they get their sword, and treat both just as seriously. Women are less keen on hats, for only a poor woman needs to go out in the sun often, but at special events they put men's hats to shame.

Priests of Myrmidia wear small hats in Estalia, if any. They are also easily spotted for being clean-shaven—as with their small hats this shows their rejection of common pleasures. Moustaches, beards, sideburns and all other varieties of facial hair are a lynchpin of Estalian fashion and culture. Like his hat, the cut of a man's facial hair can tell his colleagues, his opponent or his paramour everything about him, such as his wealth, his

status, his birthplace or his occupation. Having a fine and well-dressed beard or moustache is a matter of great pride and personal esteem. Estalia even has merchants who devote themselves solely to the art of dressing hairs, men who are nothing like the brutal barber-surgeons of the north lands.

Women, meanwhile, wear their hair long and unbound, shunning the tight pigtails or wound buns of the north. Kohl from Araby is favoured to highlight the eyes, and various other powders are preferred to make the skin glow. Although superstition typically demands the neck be covered with a ribbon or thin scarf, the warm climate encourages bare shoulders and short sleeves, not to mention skirts which rise near the knee, a sight rather shocking to many Empire nobles.

That is the traditional way of Estalian dress, but a colder wind has begun blowing lately. Inspired or perhaps intimidated by the ever-watchful Inquisition, some Estalians have begun to dress differently, in solid black, to demonstrate their sobriety and prudence. Men's ruffs remain white, but become small, tucked in to high collars and serving mainly to ensure the wearer's face does not look too vampirically pale against his doublet. Meanwhile, pious women cover their faces with veils (*matillas*) draped over tall head-dresses (*peinetas*). Sobriety and piety do not preclude subtle displays of wealth, of course, and these black ensembles are frequently of expensive Cathayan silk or intricately woven lace. The most expensive are not black at all but deep purple. Some authorities have introduced sumptuary laws, proscribing certain clothes to certain classes of people. Foreigners, in particular, need to be careful not to dare too much, lest they attract the attention of the proteges, vigilares, or worse, the Inquisition itself.

The Colour Purple

Prior to the discovery of the amazing indigo plant, purple dye could only be manufactured from certain obscure mushrooms grown in goblin-infested caves, or from the gizzards of the giant sand-clam.

Thus until recently (and still very much the case in the Empire), only the fabulously wealthy or highly titled could afford to wear the colour, and it was a clear sign of great power. With ships returning from Lustria stocked with the new purple flower, however, visitors to Estalia will be shocked and confused to see the colour everywhere. It is particularly popular with young women, always keen to have the newest fashions and styles—and thus also no longer impressed by the traditional overtures of uncultured soldiers or untraveled sailors.

This increasing class of more demanding women have been nicknamed "Indigo Girls" for their ubiquitous fashion choice.

Food and Drink

Compared to the Empire, Estalian cuisine is full of variety and complexity. Estalians often eat several different meats or vegetables in one dish. Estalians also favour “flat” foods: they shun soups, stews and pies for dishes served on plates where every part of the dinner is visible and accessible at once, or is even scattered over many plates. Eating out of deep bowls is considered something for Tileans or northern folk, for poor cooks who need to hide their ingredients.

They do however use bowls for sauces and wine, into which they dunk bread or their thin sausages (which, to Empire folk, are suspiciously lacking in blood or offal). Wine is the drink of choice with Estalian meals, although it is unlike any other wines in the Old World. The Estalians add fruit juices and the new-found sucre to the wines and then let them ferment, thus creating extremely sweet brandies and punches. The strongest of these is known as “port” because it is so favoured by sailors returning from sea. The sweetness of these wines causes many travellers (and indeed native Estalians) to drink to excess without realising it. Harder spirits with the typical kick northerners are used to include ozo, birra and the mysterious mesquila. Made from a plant found solely in the New World, a bottle of mesquila can cost as much as a small house, but the nobles who can afford it swear it has magical properties. A few secret clubs now exist to try to control access to this enigma.

The New World has of course had a gigantic effect on Estalian cuisine over the last millennium. New fruits, vegetables and game birds are brought over every year and the wealthiest nobles take pride in serving foods that no-one in the Old World have ever seen or tasted before. Nothing has had quite so much of an effect, however, as sucre, the sticky grey syrup made from Lustrian trees. This “black gold” as it is known to merchant sailors has added something heretofore unknown to the diets of any Old Worlde: sweetness. Combined with the discovery of the bitter but intriguing coco bean, the Estalians have invented the concept of dessert. The syrup is added to everything, though and sucre-filled dishes are eaten throughout the day. The greatest new craze is melting sucre and coco into a very thick sauce into which is dunked sweetened bread. Others are mixing creams and jellies with this sauce to make even more delicious concoctions. So far, only nobles and wealthy merchants can afford these luxuries often, but every person in a big port has tasted some kind of sweet and is keen for more.

Domestic Estalian food also has plenty to startle the foreigner. Their dry hills provide olives, legumes and nuts and vast quantities of citrus fruits and sweet melons,

as well as spices and herbs that will not grow in the cold north. From Araby come even more spices, both the exotic such as saffron and turmeric, and vast quantities of the more familiar black pepper and rock salt. As a result, even the peasant food of the south is full of enough spice to make a proud Ulrican’s eyes water, and a Tilean turn up his nose at so much excess. In typical fashion, however, the Estalians take huge amounts of pride in how ridiculously spicy, sour or sweet their foods are, and seek out such sensations with the same passion they seek wine, women and song.

Architecture

Estalia’s hills are full of stone, from hard granite to dusty chalk to sharp slate. As such, Estalian houses are almost universally made of stone. Stone holds the day’s heat into the cold night and the night’s cool into the day, making it perfect for the climate. Houses also have an open design to catch warming sun or cooling breezes, and often have rooms without a ceiling. Poorer houses that cannot afford to wall in such areas simply have tables, chairs and even beds outside, something foreigners find most strange.

More shocking though is for their Breton neighbours to see peasants living in stone houses. In Bretonnia, it is forbidden for any peasant to build with stone, under punishment of death. More than one passing knight has mistaken a common taverna for a nobleman’s house because of its construction, and more than one have executed the owners for their crime.

City buildings are similarly made of stone and so often tower three or four storeys where their Empire counterparts only manage two. Trademen have their workshops on the ground floor and sleep in the space above, although in summer especially a lot of life is led outdoors, in the streets and public squares: Estalian streets are rarely empty and usually noisy. Wealthy houses are built around a courtyard and have windows facing inwards rather than outside. This windowlessness would give their exteriors a fortress-like appearance if wealthy townsmen did not use these facades to demonstrate their wealth with expensive ‘trampantojo’ murals and sculptures boasting of their business successes or charitable and religious efforts.



Music, Art and Science

Although the Tileans might disagree, there is no nation in the Old World where the artistic pursuits are as championed as they are in Estalia. Unlike the Empire, however, they tend to shun theatrical productions and travelling circuses for more intimate art forms. Poets are particularly prized, with the new broadsheets allowing them to publish their works across whole towns or even principalities. Balladeers and guitarristas are equally famed, and anyone with musical skill will find himself welcomed with open arms in any village in the land. They can also be guaranteed free food and board if they play in the plaza or taverna. As wanderers and libertines, they are looked on suspiciously by the Inquisition, but the black-robed moral watchmen have not dared to move against the guitarristas in any numbers yet. Music and poetry are considered the premium foods of love, and beaus will slave over creating their own works or pay highly for professionals to create or perform for them. Of course, it is not just love that must have its songs—there are songs for duels, births, deaths, weddings, funerals, wars, festivals, crimes and punishments. Most everything in Estalia, it seems, has musical accompaniment.

Painting and sketching are the two other great art forms of choice in the kingdoms. Again, thanks to the dyes and oils available from Lustria and Araby, new palettes and styles are being explored and Estalian paintings are famous for their vividness and often blinding use of colour. Meanwhile, sketchers pursue more and more naturalistic works, which is where the art coincides with science. This, and the need for more and more accurate navigation has allowed this fledgling field to achieve a prominence far beyond what it has in the Empire. Although the eldritch manipulations of Gold Magic is still mistrusted, the art of studying nature and examining mathematics is believed to be beneficial even when it doesn't automatically lead to faster boats or bigger guns. Medicine, alchemy and optics march on towards new marvels and discoveries every day, albeit all the time under the watchful eyes and tight reins of an increasingly suspicious Inquisition, ever-ready to annihilate anything that even hints of heresy. And with good reason—even the casual observer has noticed how many scientists have given way to temptation and started worshipping false gods or studying forbidden rites, and gives thanks that the Inquisition is there to protect them.

El Toreo

Perhaps nothing is so emblematic of the poetic and courageous spirit of the Estalians as this, their national sport. The Estalians play many sports, and all of them are full of grandeur, pageantry and blood, but none has all three to the level of the toreo. A wild and ferocious bull is led into a ring, whereupon lone men with swords attempt to enrage it to a killing frenzy by poking it with darts and small spears, then distract it with flashes of their capes. The aim is for the torero to come as close as possible to being torn to pieces by the frenzied bull without actually being injured. The bulls are not stupid, however, and quickly learn to ignore the cape and gore the human poking them. Just as this happens, the torero slides under the horns and stabs the bull in the neck, killing it. Again, the torero must judge risk, for to get to the throat he must risk being torn apart; a less risky stroke hits the lungs or just the loose flesh of the shoulders and the bull needs more strokes to kill. The crowd is the sole judge of a torero's performance: if they believe he has taken great risks, they will applaud and perhaps throw flowers, if they found him cowardly or dull, they will boo and perhaps throw stones. The audience believes they deserve the best possible show because they also take a risk— all too often the enraged bull charges into the stands, seeking easier prey.

There are countless variations of the toreo. Sometimes, the human is on horseback and uses a lance, making his strikes stronger but adding the difficulty of controlling the horse. In some places, this sport uses more men against the giant bulls known as los diablos. In the mountains, horrible Chaos minotaurs are sometimes used, in what is believed to be the original form of the sport. Dwarfs, who understand what it is to prove their worth by taking insane risks, are said to be great fans of the activity, and a few have even become great toreros. The greatest toreros become celebrities in their home nation and may even tour the kingdoms or dine with their king or queen. Certainly after proving himself in the ring, triumphant torero has no lack of female admirers.

The Abaskos

The Estalian Kingdoms are populated by the descendants of the Estalii, the first tribe to populate the area after the fall of the Reman Empire. In the Irrana and Abasko mountains and the deeper forests there remains a society descended from an even older people: the Abaskos. Separate from the Estalians, they have their own language, laws, customs and faith, a fact which often bring them into conflict with the nations of which they now find themselves members.

The Abaskos tend to be shorter and hairier than the Estalians, although that may be simply a measure to survive the winter cold in the high mountains. They are keenly adapted to this terrain, and can navigate and traverse the most vertiginous peaks with an accuracy and speed that Estalians find mind-boggling and possibly supernatural. Superstitious or religious Estalians often suspect the Abaskos of being witches or the harbours of vampires. This is more than just a disdain for their more subsistence-based culture: Abaskos religion centres around plant worship, similar to some of the ancient nature cults of the Empire. Each Abasko village contains a sacred sapling, and Abasko priests claim to commune with plants for wisdom and guidance. There are even stories of blood sacrifices being made to the sacred trees, but this is probably just a myth.

Most Estalian princes have never had a reason to eradicate or bring to heel the Abasko villages in their nations. However, the Inquisition takes a dim view of the heresy of the mountain men, and more than once have directed the secular authorities to support them in their pogroms into the mountains. The Abaskos are good at hiding however, and are not too proud to disguise either themselves or their religion until the priests leave again or the soldiers get tired of trying to manoeuvre in the peaks. More subtle priests of the Maiden have declared the trees sacred to Myrmidia, and included their worship into their rituals.



A Strange Turn

Sir Gilbert urged his mount into the dreary looking village. The roads here were terrible, and he had a hard time believing this was the route to Bilbali. The pedlars he had passed had been quite emphatic that this was the right road, however, but then again, they had been emphatic that the sun was indeed shining very brightly that day, and that their wine was made from the Myrmedia's own vineyards. There was nothing they had not been emphatic about, he mused.

At last he reached what looked like an inn. Crude emblems were painted on the door. Typical peasant superstition, thought Gilbert, of the kind he had seen throughout the Old World. The knight banged his gauntleted fist on the door. For a moment, no-one answered, and Sir Gilbert sighed, deeply and with a great weariness of soul. He raised his hand to knock again when the door burst inward. Already swinging, his metal fist collided with a red and bulbous nose, knocking its owner back into the taverna, sprawling on the ground. In a moment, the man was up again, his cape swirling around him and his hat snatched before it had finished spinning. Laughter echoed behind him in the full bar.

"I am Sir Gilbert de Arnaud, Knight—" was as far as he got before the flushed Estalian poked a steeled finger into his breastplate. "Silence, outlander! I do not care who you are! You have dared to accost the most exalted personage of Diego Eduardo della Condorro de Magnifico, and I demand restitution!"

The speech was fast and garbled equally by alcohol and the enormous whiskers which seemed to swallow the man's mouth, but by the stance of the man, Sir Gilbert understood that the man wished to duel. Normally he would only duel at the behest of a king or a maiden, but after a day's hard riding through the hot sun, he was in no mood to brook this peasant's insolence. Blood would be welcome, and the thin blades of Estalian men were no match for his knightly ways. With one motion, he drew his steel, dismounted, and made the sign of the Lady—without ever taking his eyes off his enemy.

His opponent returned the fierce gaze, and his hands shot behind his head, loosing leather straps and bringing forth what must be, Sir Gilbert thought, a sword so massive no man could lift it. Then the gaudily dressed drunkard threw back his cloak with a flourish, producing not a sword but some kind of minstrel's instrument, akin to a gigantic lute. His enemy strummed a powerful chord and produced an insult so fast and florid Sir Gilbert lost all sense of its meaning, but the expansive gestures indicated it was something to do with the size of his manhood, and the enormous wave of laughter from the taverna confirmed that he was being mocked most ingloriously by this lowly peasant. Confused, enraged and insulted beyond belief, Sir Gilbert raised his sword above his head, determined to end this farce in a moment. But the battle cry died on his lips as the Estalian darted forward within his reach and he suddenly felt cold steel find a gap in his armour and nestle against his most precious possessions. The knight froze, helpless and confused.

"Welcome to Estalia, mi amigo" the minstrel whispered in his ear. Then he pulled the knight into a close embrace and kissed him firm on the lips like a long lost friend. Inside the inn the laughter turned into riotous applause.



Chapter II: The History of Estalia

*"History is written in blood, and so
Estalians have more of it, and more woe"*
Twelfth Wight, Act 4, Scene 1



The Estalians claim that they are descendants from the first Human civilisation in the Old World, which flourished in a time when the Elder races of Elf and Dwarf were still friends. It is a foolish man that suggests otherwise to an Estalian, for it is a slight against his and the family's honour.

The Rise and Fall of Tylos

The history of the people of the Kingdoms of Estalia begins almost four and a half thousand years ago, when the Belthani, a peaceful people that worshipped the earth, were forced to move northwards away from growing oppression by other tribes in ancient Khemri. The Belthani migrated into the lands of the Old World, which had, at that time, been largely tamed by the Elves and Dwarfs.

In the southern Old World, one tribe of Belthani caught the interest of the Elves in the region who decided to help advance the Belthani's level of technology and understanding of the world. The tribe, with the help of the Elves, turned their fledgling settlement into the first Human city in the Old World, somewhere in what is now northern Tilea. However, shortly after the city was established, the Elves became embroiled in a devastating war against the Dwarfs. Forced to turn towards their own defences, the Elves left the Humans to manage for themselves. Soon afterward a wandering Dwarf clan established contact with the city. Even though they could clearly see an Elven influence, the Dwarfs started a trading partnership with the city and eventually settled there.

Over the next two hundred years the city expanded greatly thanks to the help of the Dwarfs, and work began on a great temple to Tylos, the God of the city and its peoples. Legend says that the Goddess Myrmidia—the god of Civilisation, Art and Beauty—decried the temple, seeing it as a terrible waste of effort and resources, for its conceived size was far beyond the resources of the city to create, and even appeared in the city to express her opinion. She called the tower proof of Tylos' vanity and warned that doom would follow its construction, but neither the gods nor the people would hear her. Thus she abandoned Tylos and took matters into her own hands.

Shortly before the temple's completion, a young Priestess of Myrmidia received a vision that showed the city's destruction. She convinced a number of families to leave and head west, where a promised land awaited them. Not long after their departure, upon completion of the great temple, the city was destroyed by a terrible catastrophe, as fire fell from the sky and burned the city to ashes. The followers of Myrmidia's prophet knew then the Goddess had saved them, and raised her above all others in their faith.

The Promised Land

Those that chose to leave the City of Tylos before its destruction were led by the Priestess of Myrmidia towards the setting sun, in search of the Gods that had once walked amongst mankind. They travelled west, making the perilous crossing over the Abasko Mountain range and into the lands now known as the Estalian Kingdoms. Estalian religion and folklore have several tales of this time, and perhaps the most well-known concerns a Prince of Tylos that discovered a rich vein of silver in the mountains and attempted to settle the people there. While the settlement lasted for several years, it was constantly plagued by attacks from a monstrous Minotaur. The young Prince left the safety of the village to lead the Minotaur away from his people, deeper into the maze of what is the Abasko Mountains. This ancient myth could explain the origin of the torero, the sport where a torero teases a bull with a red cloak, before putting it to death.

Having safely completed the perilous mountain crossing, the refugees discovered a rich and fertile land. Since the Elves had already left this part of the Old World, beaten back by the Dwarfs to defend other colonies further to the north, the Estalians chose to settle within the Elf ruins they found. Around -1600 IC, they established the city of Magritta in the remains of the ancient Elven city of Astar. Amongst the ruins they found a casket made of gold. On its lid a golden eagle wreathed in flames. The refugees took this as a sign that they had in fact reached their promised land and chose the site as their home.

Chapter II: The History of Estalia

They named the site after the prophetess who had first had the vision of escape: *magra* means “thin”, and the journey had worn the young girl to nothing but skin and bone. Legends say she did not eat for her entire journey, as she was carried on by the will of Myrmidia herself. Histories of the time also record that the girl did not die, but upon the finding of the chest, was gathered up in Myrmidia’s arms, and became her first Shieldmaiden. For her devotion to her faith, she was renamed Debera, or Duty, and made the patron maiden of the city.

Around this new city, clearly blessed by the Goddess herself, the settlers began to consolidate into a new nation. Within 200 years most of the peninsula was ruled from the city of Magritta. Those few tribes that resisted were pushed northwards or into the wilderness or mountains. It seemed as though no army could stand against those chosen by the Goddess Myrmidia. Such was the prestige of these new settlers that every modern noble from the Estalian Kingdoms claims to be a descendant from the original refugees from Tylos, rather than the few smaller nations they absorbed upon their arrival.



War and Strife

The new kingdom’s stability did not last. In approximately -1300 IC the land was split into two after General Lucius Verenas led his Reman Legions to conquer the lands south of the Irrana Mountains. The city of Magritta was besieged for a whole year before it fell and was sacked by the legions; its treasures stolen and taken back to the capital of the Reman Empire, Remas. While the south became a Province of Remas, the northern lands fell into turmoil. Without leadership from Magritta the rulers in the north were unable to unite under a strong leader and reclaim the south. In the next two centuries Reman control extended further north, even into the lands of what would become Bretonnia. These northern lands were seen as frontier lands by the Remans, infested with pagan tribes that still worshipped the earth.

During this time many Reman traders travelled into the lands between the Grey Mountains and the World’s Edge Mountains, in order to trade with the new tribes that were arriving from the east. They took with them Priests so that they could start to civilise the savage tribes they encountered, a fact that many Imperial scholars of today largely dispute. However, the expansion of the Reman Empire was not to last. The Nehekharan Empire now controlled most of the modern lands of the Border Princes and was mounting expeditions into the future lands of Sigmar’s Empire. This meant that Remas needed to keep most of its forces in the east of its Empire. The downfall of Remas did not however come due to an invasion from Nehekhar, but from the dead. In -1157 IC, the dead began to rise from the earth all across the southern Old World. At the same time, the great Nehekhar Empire crumbled and the Reman Empire began to tear itself apart. Thousands of people fled the cities—homes to the largest burial sites—to escape the Undead menace.

With the Reman Empire tearing itself apart, the Bretonni people, a tribe that had not long ago moved into the northern lands beyond the Grey Mountains, took advantage of the situation and migrated south into what is now modern day Bretonnia. The Reman colonies and the more primitive tribes within the lands where displaced, forced to move further south, either back to their original homelands or into the Irrana Mountains to be slaughtered by the Orcs that now resided there.

In the wake of the Reman retreat several small kingdoms established themselves within what would become the Estalian peninsula, situated away from the previous major settlements. The magic that had originally animated the Undead declined, but there remained a fear of cities and any neighbouring people that could harbour the undead. Thus each nation became hostile and isolationist, seeing all outsiders as a threat. Meanwhile, thanks to the natural barriers of the mountains, most of the peninsula was safe from the Greenskin and Undead tides. With no common cause to unite them, the kingdoms remained fragmented and scattered, fighting amongst themselves.

The Origin of the Estalian name

The original name can be translated as ‘Stranger from the East’ which in the Classical Tongue is Estalienus (Est = East and Alienus = Stranger), now known more simply as Estalians.

Stephan Wellech, Professor at the University of Altdorf

Unification

Then a miracle occurred which would unite Estalia and make it strong once more. In Magritta, a child was born that was Myrmidia made flesh, although this was not known to the church at the time. She was born to common folk and given the name Macaria Medina. For reasons unknown she was abandoned by her parents and instead raised by her aunt and uncle on a farm. At a young age she was sold into an arranged marriage with a Tilean trader, and taken to land she did not know. In Tilea she was treated with contempt and abused by her husband, her body sold to the highest bidder. This suffering turned Macaria from a peaceful shy girl into a force against injustice. When she was unwilling to accept such treatment any longer she rose up, took a ceremonial spear from her husband's collection and thrust it into his abdomen. Escaping into the countryside, she became an outlaw. Her charismatic nature and dedication to righting the wrongs of the world led others quickly to her cause.

She returned home to the nation of her birth, where she was welcomed with open arms. However, she soon saw similar injustices she had suffered happening on the streets of the town of her birth. She spoke out against this, demanding that the church act to stop such crimes. However the church was powerless to act while all the resources of Magritta went to protecting it from her enemies. The young maiden resolved then to unify the land once again. She revealed her holy nature and took her true name of the Goddess. Taking up her bandit army that had followed her exploits and the newly faithful who had realised her true divinity, the Maiden Myrmidia waged war outwards from Magritta to re-conquer Estalia.

The war lasted six years, and although there was great loss of life, this is seen as a glorious liberation for Estalia. Myrmidia's generals overturned corrupt, tyrannical princes, destroyed the vestiges of the Remans and the undead, re-established trade between the kingdoms and brought light and learning to the terrified peoples. Many cities eagerly welcomed her armies and joined her forces immediately they arrived. Her battles too, expressed her beliefs and teachings, celebrating mercy, justice and wisdom, and spreading her faith all the while. These battles and their lessons from the Book of War, Myrmidia's holiest of books.

The task was not finished with the unification of Estalia, however. Next the now enormous army of the west turned to conquer the Tileans to the east. Myrmidia believed that the Tileans also clung too hard to their divisive and isolationist ways, leading them into oppression and suffering. The army that crossed the Abasko Mountains was the largest military advance in the history of humanity, complete with elephants from Araby and vast war machines of Myrmidian science.

In the face of this, and Myrmidia's strategic genius, the conquest of Tilea took only another six years. Soon, every mile from Lysboa to Strigos, from the Grey Mountains to the coast of Araby, was united under Myrmidia's banner. The empire of her faith was larger and stronger than Sigmar's, and certainly more united in its fervent adoration for its beautiful warrior queen.

But the victory was terribly short-lived. In triumph, Myrmidia returned to the city of Magritta to be crowned Queen in her golden Temple. On the day of her coronation she was struck down by a poisoned dart while in deep prayer before the High Altar. The assassin was found to be a mad Tilean, and the Estalian faithful demanded that the Tileans be subjugated for the insult. The proud Tileans argued they had been framed, that the spy was an outside agent sent to foment discord. Whatever the case, they would never agree to being slaves to foreign rulers without Myrmidia as queen. Indeed, the rulers of the Tilean city-states argued they had sworn all their oaths to Bellona Myrmidia and no-one else, so they were now null and void. Soon enough, many Estalian princes said the same. The great new nation that took a dozen years to build tore itself apart in what seemed like moments, and its people were filled with anguish for the loss of what their uncrowned Queen had achieved.

While she lay dying, Myrmidia demanded she be laid on a bower and sent across the Great Western Ocean. As she reached the horizon her body and spirit are taken up into the heavens to once again join the Gods, as she predicted in her last words. The holy texts also say that when the time is right, the goddess will return to unite Estalia once again.

The Time of Woes

With the collapse of the nation and the reestablishment of the old Kingdoms, Estalia returned to an age of darkness. From the beginning of the first century (under the Calenda della Verena, or CV, established from the death of Myrmidia) the Estalian Kingdoms along the coast were raided by Lord Settra and his Undead fleet numerous times over numerous centuries, decimating Estalia's sea trade. There were also other enemies at sea. Many legends of this time say that the people of Estalia were punished by the Gods for not protecting Myrmidia's new nation. The dark kindred of the Elves that once helped Mankind came in the night to steal away their people, to the degree that entire villages disappeared overnight.

While the Kingdoms along the coastline suffered in the first half of the millennium, the second half brought a new menace from within. Greenskins poured unchecked across the lands of Estalia, raiding at will and killing all that they met. From these havens they spread out, destroying everything in their path.

During this dark time only the cities of Magritta and Bilbali seemed to be safe havens against the raiders—and even they were not untouched. When the sea raiders had enough slaves and turned away, yet another menace arrived that was interested in both worldly goods and slaves. Arriving from the north in crude vessels called Dragonships came the Norse Raiders. So bold was their nature that in one raid they attacked the northern city of Bilbali, and stole the great golden bell that had rung in the harbour tower for the past five hundred years, placed there by Myrmidia herself. Today it sits in the Kislev town of Erengrad, much to the chagrin of the Bilbalins.

The second millennium saw an influx of refugees from the lands of the Empire, escaping the Skaven menace that was trying to enslave them, but they brought the Black Plague with them. While the Estalian people helped the refugees as much as they could, hundreds began to die from starvation and plague. Fearful that, unless military aid was sent north to the Empire, the number of refugees would swamp what resources the Estalian Kingdoms could give, a small force of men marched to help those still fighting in the Empire against the Skaven, a fight that would last a decade. To this day, there are Wissenlanders and Averlanders who remember their debt to their southern saviours.

Over the next few centuries the Kingdoms of Estalia finally began to prosper. A steady devotion to improving their naval forces and seaside fortresses had at last led to their coasts being safe once more. This then allowed the nations' armies to get the orc raiders under some kind of control. It also permitted the Estalians to begin to travel the seas again and trade with their neighbours. After their successful employment in the north, many of the lords continued to hire out their forces—armies and navies—to the nobles of the Empire, to help rebuild the county and fight in the numerous civil wars that raged there throughout this time. The various knightly orders of the Maiden used these exchanges to expand into the north, and fill their numbers with new members and new fighting techniques.



The Arabyan Invasion and the Crusades

With many of the fighting men of the Estalian Kingdoms away in the Empire, the Skaven saw a chance for revenge. They convinced the Sultan Jaffar of Araby that the Kingdoms of Estalia would be a future threat to his rule and that if he was to strike first, his rule would never falter. In 1369 CV (1448 IC) the Sultan's forces landed in the south of the Estalian peninsula and quickly laid siege to the city of Magritta, while enslaving the local rural population. The various Estalian Kingdoms were slow to react to the invasion, and so one by one the Kingdoms began to fall again. The Sultan's forces marched north, enslaving the people and tearing down what they saw as heretical temples. Too weak to field an effective force against the Sultan's army the northern Kingdoms rallied to Bilbali, the largest remaining kingdom, and began a guerrilla style war against the ever encroaching enemy which lasted eight long years. With the Sultan's forces slowed, but still marching north, hope was only restored when a Bretonnian army (who were fearful that their lands would next be under attack) and a smaller Imperial force arrived as rescuers.

Over the following decade the lands of the Estalian Kingdoms were reclaimed by the larger force from the north and east and resistance fighters from within Estalia. However as the Sultan's forces withdrew they put many towns to the torch and captured the people, sending them back to the lands of Araby as spoils of war. The armies of the Old World became incensed at the treatment of the Estalians and took oaths that the Arabyans would feel their wrath. They began to put to death any Arabyan they encountered, until the Sultan realised that he could not defend against such hate and would have to withdraw completely. He commanded his forces to leave, but one rebellious sheikh, named Emir Wazar or "Emir the Cruel", refused to move his troops from the city of Magritta. A contingent of Knights was despatched to lay siege—a siege which would last for another long eight years. The majority of the armies of the Old World continued their blood hunt, waiting in and around Magritta as a fleet was prepared to sail the forces to Araby. Some Bretonnian Knights had little patience to wait and instead began the long march south through the wild lands of the Border Princes and Badlands, leading to other Wars of Errantry, as the Bretonnians call them.

So focussed were the foreigners on crossing the ocean that the liberated Estalians called them "cruçados"—an Estalian word meaning those who travel as passengers on a boat. The Bretons thought the word meant liberators, and took it as their own, labelling themselves the Crusaders.

A Crusader Saying:

Araby is easy to find: you come to where the men speak Estalian and continue until they speak something else.

Sir Gottfried, Baron of Wissenland

In 1392 CV (1471 IC) the crusading armies of the Old World finally defeated Sultan Jaffar in the Battle of El Haikk in Araby. The majority of Bretonnians, having fulfilled their oaths, turned for home, but others felt that the Arabyans needed further lessons and the Crusade continued. Over a period of 600 years numerous new Crusades are launched from the Old World against Araby, in the pursuit of revenge, treasure or new lands. Most of the Crusaders departed from the harbours of Estalia and Tilea, bringing much wealth to the lands and the opening of new trade routes. The Estalians became even more proficient at ship building and sailing, and began a race with Tilea to conquer the world by sea. Over the next five centuries, the countryside of Estalia was almost entirely denuded of forest to build their new navies, which would soon have far farther to travel than Araby.

In 1413 CV (1492 IC), a Tilean sailor called Marco Colombo discovered Lustria, the new world across the Great Western Ocean. Within a decade, every nation in the Old World heard the rumours of vast cities made from gold and jewels hidden in those foreign jungles, and rushed to join the race across the sea. Neither Estalia nor Tilea could match the military strength of their neighbours but only they had sufficient navigation and ship-building skills to ensure safe passage. Both nations grew extremely rich from selling their services. Eventually, the other nations could not sustain their military excursions and Lustria was, for the most part, abandoned to the southerners again. A kind of cold war developed between the few Estalian and Tilean settlements that managed to survive in the jungle, which became a war of commerce back home.

Meanwhile, Estalia was being re-built in its newfound freedom and wealth. The Temple of Myrmidia, keen to re-establish itself after the Arabyan pogroms (and perhaps influenced by the Arabyan's worship of a single God), began to push the notion that Myrmidia was Queen of the Gods and that all other Gods should be worshipped beneath her. Over the six hundred year period of the Crusades, the Temple of Myrmidia led the rebuilding of many of the temples throughout the land, often converting them to temples dedicated to the Goddess, with side chapels for the other faiths.

This new movement also helped the Cult deal with the influences brought back by the south-bound crusaders, as their foreign gods did not need to be denied as non-existent, but simply recognised as beneath the greatest Goddess of them all.

Although the Crusades took place over six hundred years, there were several quiet moments within this period when no Crusade was being launched or prepared. It was during one of these quiet periods, in the year 1750 IC, that the foul Vampire Nourgul the Necrarch launched an attack from his stronghold in Sombra Wood, a war later known as the War of Blood. Although Estalia was and is no stranger to the Vampire menace, Nourgul's armies were vast and his sorcery terrible. With no Crusader forces currently stationed in the land and much of their own soldiers fighting the snake-men across the sea, the Kingdoms once again struggled to remain free. The Vampire was only stopped after he successfully entered the Temple of Myrmidia in Magritta to claim the holy book, the Tome of Wisdom. The Undead forces crumbled to the ground for no apparent reason and the Vampire's ashes were found next to the ancient Tome. What the foul Vampire had in mind for the Tome of Wisdom is still a mystery, but from this moment on, faith in the Goddess and the safety of the Kingdoms became united in the mind of the Estalian people.

By Fire and Sword

Towards the end of the second millennium many religions blamed the use of sorcery for the evils of the Old World. The people of the Estalian Kingdoms were no different, having witnessed the foul sorcery performed by Arabyan Wizards and the raising of the dead by Vampires (which continued to decimate the lands of the north). Since the Cult of Myrmidia was now by far the most powerful of all the southern cults, having slowly converted the other faiths to aspects of the Goddess, the people looked to the priests for salvation.

The leaders of the Cult took advantage of these fears to unite the Kingdoms of Estalia under the leadership of La Aquila Ultima, the head of the Cult of Myrmidia, who effectively became the leader of all the different Kingdoms. In order to protect the lands from all threats of Arabyan sorcery, necromancy and other deviance, the Temple established its own military, uniting its various Templar orders into a centrally controlled force, answerable only to the Aquila Ultima. Soon this was augmented with a more subtle policing force dedicated to finding the more hidden threats to the Kingdoms. Called the Inquisition, it was tasked in hunting down those tainted by necromancy and Chaos and putting to the sword any that would stand against the Temple's views. The Vampire Wars and the Great War against Chaos in the north gave the Temple of Myrmidia plenty of opportunities to quell any fears or doubts that the people had about the new order.

The Conquered

Technically speaking, the Estalian Kingdoms have been conquered from outside at least twice: by the Remans and by the Arabyans. They've also suffered almost total conquest under the threat of Settra the Lich King and then the vampire Nourgul. This leads many Empire scholars and warriors to label Estalia as a helpless nation, and thus her soldiers and sailors as cowards and weaklings, from a country of lovers and poets, not fighters. It is however only Estalia's divisive nature that makes it so vulnerable to outside attacks, and those mercenaries who serve in the Empire quickly repair that reputation when they demonstrate just how fierce and deadly they can be.

Empire and Tilean rulers also enjoy highlighting the fact that the Temple controls the nation, making the individual Kings merely puppets or lapdogs in effect. This they also take as a sign of Estalian weakness, with even their kings lacking absolute power. Indeed, King Carlos IV of Magritta is mockingly dubbed "the puppet king" by outsiders. The kings of Estalia have no rejoinder to this insult, because they indeed do chafe under the control of the Inquisition. They take solace, however, in the great many faults of their neighbours that they lack—the poor food, the lack of culture and the terrible manners, to name but a few.

The Present

As magic has gained legitimacy in the Empire and Tilea, the Cult of Myrmidia has recently—and grudgingly—begun to allow the practice of Magic once more. However those that do follow this path are very closely monitored and many have been known to disappear into the night never to be seen again. The growth of the Sciences is a way to regulate this practice—although outside the great cities the old village witches have no time for that nonsense. While the Cult of Myrmidia controls the various Kingdoms throughout the land to some degree, the Kings and Princes of the land still make war upon each other, using the slightest dishonour to avenge a half-forgotten grievance made centuries ago. The land flourishes from trade routes, including to the New World, with much of its gold finding its way to the coffers of the



A Timeline of the Kingdoms of Estalia

The Kingdoms of Estalia start their calendar from the unification of the lands of Tilea and Estalia by the Goddess Myrmedia, whom they believe once walked amongst them in the flesh. The calendar is called the Verenan Calendar (il Caldenda della Verena; or CV) and its start date is that of when Myrmedia was to be crowned Queen. To convert to Imperial dates, add 79 years.

CV -1700

The ancestors of the nobility of the Kingdoms of Estalia leave the City of Tylos, following a Priestess of Myrmedia who has foreseen Tylos's destruction.

CV -1400

A primitive Estalian nation is ruled from the city of Magritta; those tribes that resist are pushed north or into the Abasko Mountains.

CV -1300

The southern lands of Estalia become a Province of the Reman Empire.

CV -1072

The dead rise up across the known world; thousands flee the cities away from the Undead menace.

CV -1000

The Bretonni tribe enter the frontier lands of the Reman Empire, driving away both the locals and Reman colonies. The Estalian peninsula splits into several Kingdoms.

CV -150

Under increasing pressure from the Bretonni and Greenskin tribes, the Estalians finally reclaim the cities of old. Four kingdoms arise as the most powerful: Tigarre, Obregon, Cantonia and Astarios.

CV 0 (IC 79)

The lands of Tilea and Estalia are united into one nation by Macaria Medina, now seen as the Goddess Myrmedia in the flesh. On the day of her coronation in Magritta, she is assassinated by an unknown assailant and the nation breaks apart again into several individual Kingdoms.

CV 100 - 451

The Undead Lord Settra and the Dark Elves of Naggaroth raid the coastlines of the Southern Old World for slaves; numerous towns and villages disappear.

CV 745

The golden bell of Bilbali is stolen by Norse Raiders.

CV 1037

Refuges from the Empire come to the Estalian Kingdoms to escape from enslavement by the Skaven; however in their escape they bring the Black Plague with them.

CV 1050-1350

Estalian mercenaries fight in the civil wars of the Empire, bringing much wealth to their Dons.

CV 1369

The Kingdoms of Estalia are invaded by Arabyan forces led by Sultan Jaffar, once they are defeated and pushed out of the Old World by a combined army from several Old World nations; many set out on a Crusade to liberate those Estalians taken as slaves to Araby.

CV 1390

The city of Magritta is finally free from Arabyan control as the last sheikh, Emir the Cruel, is defeated by the Knights of the Blazing Sun and their allies.

CV 1672

The Vampire Nourgul the Necrarch launches an attack on the southern Kingdoms of Estalia, in what is known as the War of Blood.

CV 1914

Religious pressures bring bloody repression of sorcery in the Old World. The Cult of Myrmedia begins to increase its influence as the people come to her for salvation after the wars against Araby and the Undead.

CV 2222

The Great War against Chaos in the north allows the Temple of Myrmedia to expand its control over other faiths.

CV 2429

Queen Juana del Roja crowned in Bilbali. The celebrations last an entire year.

CV 2442

The young and handsome King Carlos IV takes the throne in Magritta, and announces he is looking for a bride—even one from outside Estalia. Nobles from around the Old World flock to the city.

CV 2443 (IC 2522)

Current Day

Chapter III: Politics of Estalia

*“Love is all the fire of Myrmidia – and as strong,
For like the maiden, it lingers not so long”
Orcthello, Act 2, Scene 2*



Estalia is a collection of independent kingdoms, duchies and principalities. There is no central authority to which each owes its allegiance. Each is governed by its own absolute ruler. Within their own kingdom, every ruler is sovereign and, at first glance at least, the structure appears feudal: each king, queen, duke or duchess is drawn from that state's own aristocracy and all are assisted in their rule by the nobility of that domain.

Unlike Tilea, full scale open warfare between these various states is unusual, although bloodshed in border disputes is relatively frequent. Instead, the Estalian kingdoms rely heavily on the subtler—but equally dangerous—arts of diplomacy (and espionage) to form political alliances. Estalians take sworn oaths extremely seriously in both their personal and political lives. An oath of allegiance between monarchs is regarded as permanently binding. As a consequence, such oaths are rarely given, and when they are, are carefully worded so that the exact consequences are fully known. Such oaths bind only the ruler who gives them, however. When a new ruler ascends to the throne there is often a period of frantic negotiation and diplomacy as old allegiances and commitments have to be renewed.

Potentially more binding relationships between the various noble houses are often secured through marriage. These bonds allow junior noble houses (including the rulers of less powerful states) to assure themselves of the patronage of a more powerful family. As a result, the most powerful noble houses can build up a web of sponsorship and patronage that extends over most of the peninsula. Estalians are passionate people, however, and political expediency is not always matched by their

emotions. Powerful alliances can be swept away by an illicit affair. Estalian noble fathers are always particularly protective of their daughters' honour and often, it is said, more for their own ends than out of love. Conversely, sometimes politics have forced the aristocracy apart when their passions would have brought them together. The Tragic Ballad of Arturo and Frederica, for instance, tells the story of two noble lovers compelled to divorce when their families' oaths of allegiance forced them into conflict.

When armies do take to the field to dispute between the various Estalian kingdoms, they tend to engage in feints and sallies, intended to force tactical advantages, rather than engage the enemy. This is seen as in keeping with the prevailing doctrine of Myrmidian tactics. The two great exceptions to this, are conflicts with the infidel and work as mercenaries in foreign lands. For Estalians the former can mean anything from the Iron Orcs that inhabit parts of the north of the land, to the Arabyans across the sea to the south, to the Bretonnians who fail to honour Myrmidia. As regards the latter, Estalian mercenary regiments can be seen in action in Tilea, the Border Princes and even on the side of Arabyan princes in the internecine wars of that land. On these occasions, faith in the goddess Myrmidia requires the Estalians to show their true mettle and, when battle is joined, it is in deadly earnest.

The power of belief in Myrmidia is the greatest centralising focus for the Estalian kingdoms. The Mother Temple of Myrmidia exerts a greater influence throughout the land than any other cult in any other land in the Old World. All but the most fanatical Sigmarites in the Empire would be shocked, were the degree of power and influence wielded by their cult the same as that of Myrmidians in Estalia. Virtually all religious worship, of all permitted gods, is filtered through the Temple of Myrmidia.

Given the effective monopoly on religious expression that it has, it is hardly surprising that every kingdom, no matter how powerful, is to some extent beholden to the power of the Temple. For those rulers deemed insufficiently pious, the Myrmidia's high pontiff, La Aguila Ultima, can order excommunication from the faith and even withdraw the holy power of the priests from the entire kingdom. Even without resorting to such extreme measures the Temple exerts huge influence, as many of a ruler's ablest and most enthusiastic ministers are also priests of Estalia's great cult.

Generally, the Temple favours a policy of binding the Estalian kingdoms ever closer together and consolidating power in Estalia's most important and orthodox states.

This, of course, often conflicts with the fiercely independent and proud nature of many of the kingdoms' nobility.

Those gods and faiths disapproved of by the cult of Myrmidia are seen as heretical. These are investigated by—and ruthlessly rooted out by—Myrmidia's Holy Inquisition. This institution was founded in the aftermath of the reconquista—the Myrmidian crusade to free Estalia from the Arabyans who had invaded and settled it. Its function was initially to discover those whose faith had become corrupted by the beliefs of the Arabyans and to ensure that those who remained after the Arabian caliphs had withdrawn from the land had properly (re)converted to Myrmidia. Over time, however, the Inquisition changed into the Temple's greatest weapon in enforcing its religious doctrine. Inevitably, it also allows the Temple to exert political pressure on those whose policies it disapproves of.

Conflict between the Temple and the secular powers of the land, found in the nobility of each mini-state, is therefore inevitable. Although every Estalian nobleman and woman sees him or herself as a true child of the Temple, they have their own desires, inclinations or designs for political advantage that sometimes are not always approved of by the Temple. In Magritta, for instance, the ruling merchant alliance desires as little control as possible over life in their city, to better encourage the spending of money. As a result, trade has boomed and the city grown rich. But the High Temple of Myrmidia, based in the same city, strongly disapproves of such a laissez faire attitude. In the end, a stalemate is normally achieved. The Temple lacks the political and military might to enforce all of its views on the nobility (not without losing its political might in the wealthiest of cities) and must content itself with merely restraining what it sees as the worst excesses. The rulers of the various kingdoms take whatever victories they can, and return to following the faithful line. Cunning agents on both sides watch constantly for a chance to shift the power more dramatically in their favour.

"These are my lands. I rule here. Not any priest. You can look for heresies all you want, you'll not find any who aren't true sons of Myrmidia in my lands. But you cannot tell me what I should do and who I can keep in my court and who I cannot. I am lord here as my father before me."

*Duke Marsilio di Avilia,
one-time ruler of Zaraguz, to Father
General Mendoza of the Myrmidian
Temple*

"We are the nation that Holy Myrmidia chose as her people. It is our destiny to fulfil her plan: to be united and to reconquer her empire. Only through Her grace can we achieve this. And only through Her temple are we united. It is only right that Her temple, ah..., guides our princes, when they err."

*Esteban Montoya, Priest of
Myrmidia, servant of the Inquisition
and torturer of Duke Marsilio*

The Nobility

Estalian society has no shortage of men and women who claim—and exploit—noble status. In part, this is because the substantial middle and merchant class of the Empire and Tilea does not exist to the same extent in Estalia or rather because it is swallowed by the swollen ranks of the minor nobility: the hidalgos and caballeros. In part this is because the reconquista movement led to the ennoblement of many new families to rule newly recaptured lands. In addition, the plethora of kingdoms and principalities, each of which claims the right to recognise nobility with so-called letters of nobility, makes it very easy for someone of means to fake a noble genealogy and get it confirmed by a king in return for a 'service' in money.

Most important of the nobles of Estalia are the rulers of Estalia's various independent and semi-independent states, their immediate families and a few other powerful families within each state. Of these, the rulers of the most powerful states in Estalia—Queen Juana and Prince-Consort Carlos of Bilbali, and King Carlos IV of Magritta and his council—are the most important. Their influence is felt throughout the entire peninsula. Not only does the power and wealth of the states they rule mean that the other kingdoms, duchies and principalities that make up Estalia have felt the need to ally themselves to one or both, but the rulers of many of the states have noble titles within these larger, more powerful states. The Duke of Tarrocco, for instance, is also the Prince of Besalú (a principality now entirely within the dominion of Magritta), holds a further three titles as a count and has five titles as hidalgo of many small holdings dotted throughout eastern Estalia.

Chapter III: Politics of Estalia

This is why he dubs himself Emperor, although others with similar lands and titles do not do the same.

The Estalian nobility traditionally saw themselves as the proud guardians of their lands and faith. The noble class was originally concerned firstly with the art of warfare and with the management of the land captured second. Any other distraction was dishonourable in their minds, much as the traditional Bretonnian noble scorns all concerns beyond chivalry, horsemanship and the ruling of the peasantry. This remains the case for the wide class of poor nobles, who find themselves turning to mercenary work, banditry or adventuring to make a living without resorting to peasant occupations.

After the fall of the last Arabyan caliphate, however, the importance of war as a noble pursuit began to decline for those who could afford something more. Greed and venality saw to it that many began to take an interest in the clearly profitable trading ventures that Estalian seamen began to undertake. The Estalian nobility now effectively dominate the merchant interests of the country. Most do not do so directly, however. For many of the older and more important families, close involvement in trade of any sort is still seen as deeply distasteful. In the inland kingdoms this is felt particularly strongly and, perhaps, explains why these kingdoms have never challenged the power and wealth of the ports of Bilbali and Magritta. Only in Magritta does the nobility so openly flaunt its involvement in the highly lucrative New World trade.

Elsewhere, nobles rely on the *hidalgo* families that they are connected to. These families of lesser nobility are often sponsored by more powerful clans and—where these relationships are close—marriage between the *hidalgo* and older families are common. The lesser nobility bring the wealth of their trading and commercial ventures, the older families, rank and status. Other members of the nobility become simply patrons to the merchants or sailing masters who run the actual venture. Oaths are sworn by both the noble patron and venture's master. The noble will provide the money necessary to undertake the voyage and receives a substantial share (typically at least 90%) of any profit in return. Vast sums of money are potentially available when voyages to the lands of Ind and Cathay return laden with silks and spices or from the New World with gold, chocolate, tobacco or sugar. Such voyages are fraught with dangers, of course. Many ships that set out to make the trip do not return, lost to the seas, and several ancient noble houses have bankrupted themselves investing recklessly, forced to sell their titles or marry into those who were more successful. The return on just one successful trip is enough, however, to justify such risks.

The risk of mercantile investment does however make Estalian nobility an even more fluid state, with families rising and falling or buying and selling their title in just a few generations. Compared to the Empire—and especially Bretonnia—Estalian nobility is more a state of mind than a sacred birthright. It is therefore important to act noble once one has attained (or hopes to attain) such a rank to show respect to the title, so even the newest-ennobled merchants will practise principles of *noblesse oblige* and act as patrons to the arts. In some cases, behaviour alone may ennoble someone: a twist of history or a grand and selfless act may earn someone a noble nickname, such as Captain or Duke, and the title will carry currency despite being entirely unofficial. In Estalia, noble is as noble does.



Hidalgos and Caballeros

Those claiming these two titles comprise the vast bulk of the Estalian nobility. The titles might be translated roughly as 'gentleman' or 'esquire', respectively. In many countries, such as the Empire, they would not be considered strictly part of the nobility. Traditionally, they have been the lowest levels of the ruling class, managing the country's lands and acting as horse masters and warriors for the major noble families. More recently, they have formed the basis of Estalia's major merchant class either on their own behalf or as proxies for the nobles to whom they themselves owe fealty. This is because, given the opportunities for great wealth that trade brings, they have chosen to invest in merchant schemes themselves or because those who already have mercantile interests have swiftly bought their way into the minor nobility and gentry. Others have diversified into business opportunities that only their noble status allows them, but which more established nobles would disdain, such as tax farming.

Their status as nobles, and the privileges it brings, is strongly marked in Estalian society and these markers are theoretically enforced in a number of ways. Sumptuary laws, designed distinguish those of noble birth from those that are not, are common, and many Estalian states and cities only officially allow those of noble heritage to carry swords. But both rules are more often broken and enforced. Sell-swords, rogues and villains commonly claim the status of caballero even when they are not. Likewise a man with the right tailor will be treated as a noble, and in many cases will get away with it—better that than allowing a real noble with bad fashion drag the standard down.

Many hidalgo and caballero families are newcomers to the nobility. All, however, go to great lengths to seek to prove that they are descended from an ancient line of Estalian blood. That they have what is called, 'purity of blood' (*limpieza de sangre*). This causes particular problems, of course, for those of base blood or those who converted after the fall of the Arabyan caliphates in order to continue to live in Estalia (*conversos*). Many create extensive but entirely fictitious family trees to show descent—legitimate or otherwise—from some important historical personage in order to try and bolster their claim to nobility. Many an adventurer can find work on treasure hunts or wild goose chases to prove or disprove an obscure element of family history, or be sent to kill those with contradicting claims.

Juan Mastromo Barea, Hidalgo and merchant

The Barea family are some of the most successful of the families that have recently made their way into the Estalian nobility. Over time, they have tried their hand at a variety of different trades and businesses. Six generations ago the family had a small tanning business. Since then they have been moneylenders, traders, merchants, tax collectors and ship owners before finally buying their way into the nobility. Juan Mastromo Barea, the family's current ruthless head, has successfully invested in a number of New World trading schemes bringing yet greater wealth to the family coffers. He has invested in a plantation farm on one of the islands close to the coast of Lustria and his second son, Javier, has travelled out to manage it. Here he hopes to grow vast crops of sugar cane—one of the most lucrative of all trades, particularly now sugar dainties have become popular as a sign of conspicuous consumption for the very rich throughout the Old World. Unfortunately, the islands' unofficial name of the Plague Islands has proven accurate and most of the workers have died. Barea has recently begun investigating other sources of workers. Greenskins have proven utterly impossible to tame sufficiently to work on the plantation. He is currently attempting to negotiate with the Duke of Magritta to buy condemned prisoners, but so far the Magrittans have decided to keep them to work as galley rowers. He is open to any other ideas—however illegal, strange or taboo—that might increase his profit.

As well as trading interests, much of the aristocracy uses its influence to control the important civic posts in the towns and cities (where their sales flow). In the major cities, such as Magritta or Bayona, the capital of the kingdom of Cabria, huge sums are spent in bribes by the major nobles to ensure that members of their families become chief constable, city clerk or magistrate. In the far south, posts on the Municipal Water Board are some of the most important, given their power to divert the city's primary water supply. See Chapter Four for more on these civic roles.

Where a greater distance is required between the holder of the office and the noble house, allied hidalgo and caballero families are used to influence such bodies. Sometimes the disputes over which family, or which family's proxies, gain a particular post become so bitter that they result in bloodshed on the streets with citizens loyal to one particular noble house rioting with those who support another contender. Twenty-three years ago, the dispute as to who was to become the next Clerk to the Under-Magistrate of the town of Ordino threatened to provoke a major war when one candidate was supported by the rulers of Badajoz whilst his opponent was supported by the King of Bilbali. Both rulers sent forces of soldiers loyal to them to encourage the citizenry of the town to support the correct man for the post.

Only the convenient death of the elderly Clerk to the Town Council—allowing both candidates to take a post—during a pitched battle stopped the conflict spreading and the town being razed to the ground.

All the Estalian nobility take great pride in patronage of the arts. The poorest hidalgo running the meanest scrubland farm will still keep a musician to play for him and his family and have a painted devotional icon to worship before. Those who are most successful spend great sums on hiring the very greatest artists that they can, building new squares in their city or erecting monuments to their ancestors, their houses are full of music and objets d'art, perhaps of elven or Lustrian origin. Many travelling minstrels and artists find their way to Estalia, confident of a good reception for their art, as every noble will happily pay for the latest Bretonnian quadrille or Tilean quickstep to be played and danced in his home, and fine tales from other lands told to entertain his household. Some claim that this makes guitarristas and minstrels into the best spies and couriers, but to say such in their presence is grounds for an immediate duel for the slight on their honour, a duel which the guitarrista will often win...

The Arts of War

Warfare is still regarded as an important part of the noble's role. Rulers are still expected to lead their forces into battle and it is a matter of pride that they are always present during any important conflict to encourage their men. Much of the practical business of soldiery is now given over to professional soldiers, however. This is partly due to the influence of the cult of Myrmidia, which regards sound tactical sense as more important than high birth, and partly down to the demand for mercenaries created by the Estalian kingdoms' neighbours, the Tilean City States.

Estalians have been at the forefront of using new tactics in battle. They have recently pioneered the use of mounted pistols in battle, known as *herruelos*, and combining pikemen with crossbowmen or pistoliers in single formations known as *tercios*. Other innovations include drilling hand-gunners and pistoliers in large blocks to produce a rolling bank of fire, called the *caracole*. The fearsome output of the *caracole* can rival even that of the furious organ gun. Estalia does not yet have the mass production and engineering scholarship to produce the ubiquity of such things as the organ gun or hellstorm battery in their military formations. Even pistols and rifles are in shorter supply in the south—they have the steel and the powder but not the nation-wide industry. On the other hand, individual nobles encourage their patronised artists to master the places where art, mathematics and alchemy intersect with warfare, so you are more likely to see unique items on the battlefield, things unheard of not just in the Empire but the next Estalian Kingdom as well. It is said that the lords of Los Cabos have a working sea-copter they can bring to naval battles, and the armies of the mountain citadel of Pajenas are joined by men in amazing flying suits armed with bombs to drop.

More traditional fighting arts tend to be kept alive by the *maestranza*—the elite bodyguard of the ruler of an Estalian kingdom. Generally comprised of the best, or best connected, warriors in the country, these individuals are not only trained in the use of all the latest innovations but also in the martial traditions of their particular kingdom. These traditions often reflect the particular idiosyncrasies not only of the particular kingdom, but also its ruling house. The *Maestranza* of Badajoz, for instance, are noted for their skills in fighting from horseback, trick riding and the fact that their horses are trained to do ceremonial dances to pipe music, something that was once notably exploited by the army of Magritta during battle. In the northern kingdoms, they train their armies around lance charges like their Bretonnian neighbours.

One more thing that is practically unique in Old World martial arts is the Estalian use of criminals as soldiers. Crimes are often published with debts, and debts can be worked off in public service in the dominar's armies.

These *hombres villanos* as they are known do sometimes escape and return to their lives of bandits now with greater weaponry, but others realize that the regular meals of the barracks are better than life on the run. The *villanos* are easily spotted by their shabby appearance and even shabbier discipline but what they lack in training they more than make up for in their violent experience and murderous glee. Like everything in Estalia, it is a regional taste: some rulers swear by them, others disdain them. But few would ever rule out hiring them for that one special job, and everyone knows the legend of Los Siete Sucio, the seven ragged criminals who saved the kingdoms from the Dark Elf invasion.

Conflicts with Other Nations

Relations between the Estalian kingdoms and most other Old World nations are based mainly on trade, but trade and war are two sides of the same coin. Only Bretonnia and Tilea border Estalia and Estalians have frequently strained relations with both. The greatest tension is, of course, between neighbouring Estalian kingdoms, but, quite unlike the Tilean cities, Estalian states retain a degree of unanimity in the face of foreigners. This is largely a legacy of their past; however dreadful other Estalians might be they are still more understandable than other cultures. Two rival Estalian nations may have had their forces fighting each other for generations, but the two will come together in a moment, with great camaraderie and brotherhood, if there are foreigners to be slaughtered.

Otherwise, Estalia's connection to the rest of the world is by the sea. Estalia seamen regularly cross the Tilean Sea and Black Gulf to Tilea, the Border Princes and Barak Varr, the Middle Sea up to Bretonnia and Marienburg, the Southern Ocean to Araby and sometimes onto the Southlands and the New Coast. More recently, the profits of journeys to the New World and Lustria or Ind and Cathay have tempted them to make ever longer voyages, despite the dangers involved. The Elves of Ulthuan have done their best to discourage such lengthy trading missions, hoping to keep their ancient stranglehold on such trade, through a mixture of intimidation, economic sanctions and the outright sinking of ships or capturing of cargo. None of these tactics has been very successful.

Closer sea voyages can sometimes seem almost as risky since the Southern Ocean and Tilean Sea are thick with pirates. Not only does the Pirate Principedom of Sartosa harbour a nest of desperate buccaneers, but the rocky islands that lie along Estalia's eastern coast and south of the city of Tobaro give them further shelter. As most are uninhabited or only by a few scattered fishing communities, and many have rocky shores with hidden reefs, these make perfect hideaways for those who wish avoid the attention of the Estalian kingdoms or Tilean City States.

Chapter III: Politics of Estalia

But even more feared are the Arabyan Emirates and Caliphates that provide bases for corsairs, notably Lashiek and Arjijil. Whilst Stromfels-worshipping pirates of Sartosa might force captives to walk the plank, the corsairs would not waste anyone they capture. Instead they are taken back to their home ports where, if they are lucky, they might be ransomed. Otherwise, they are sold as slaves. Many an Estalian sailor's greatest fear is that they will end up chained to an oar in an Arabyan galley or working deep in a mine until they die of exhaustion.

In an attempt to combat these piratical activities, many of the Estalian kingdoms employ ships to seek out and destroy pirates and hire privateers to do the same. Most notably Bilbali and Magritta are determined hunters of pirates and ruthlessly sink any hostile ship that they find. Taxes paid for the galleys and galleons employed in this task are the one sort that all Estalian merchants happily pay for; whilst Tilean Cities also suffer from the deprivations of pirates, Estalians always accuse them of paying bribes to go after Estalian colours. Without doubt, because of the way Estalian merchant voyages are funded, the activities of pirates hit them hardest; one ship lost might be a devastating blow to the Estalian who owned or funded it, but likely be barely noticed by the great Tilean merchant concerns.

In general, Estalian dealings with both Tileans and Arabyans are professional, if not friendly. To the Estalians, whilst they are trading partners and sometime allies, the Tileans are insufferably arrogant in their assertions that they are the oldest civilisation in the Old World, when Estalians reasonably realise that they were truly the first land settled by humans. The fact that Tileans maintain that theirs was Myrmidia's homeland is more evidence of their ludicrously boastful and possibly deceitful natures. Their failure to properly worship the goddess in the Estalian manner is, for the truly devout, deeply worrying.

Tobarans are, exceptionally, well liked in most of Estalia, perhaps because their city is located on the Estalian peninsula. Tobaran dockyards have often been pressed into service for the benefit of Magritta's damaged pirate hunting warships when unable to limp back to their home port, for instance. The Princes of Mendora have, on the other hand, traditionally claimed the city as part of their dominion. The fact that the Abasko Mountains form a barrier between their two lands and that Tobarro was an independent Tilean state before the creation of the current Principality of Mendora tends to undermine the strength of the claim—but not much. Outside Mendora, any Tilean travelling in Estalia will often claim (if he can bear the stain on his pride) to be Tobaran, as many Estalians know that Tobarans are the best of a bad bunch.

By contrast, Miragliano, as a traditional enemy of Tobarro, often clashes with Estalian ships in Southern Sea. The Miraglianese embody the stereotypical attributes of Tileans in Estalian eyes: the city's association with disease and Ratmen just confirms any prejudices.

The relationship with Remas is almost entirely defined by the competing claims of Estalia and Tilea to be the home of the Myrmidian religion. Although the Magrittan temple is theoretically superior to all others, the Reman temple maintains that it should be seen as the senior body and the Aquila Ultima (or Ultima Aquila, as the Tileans ridiculously phrase it) resides there. Every Estalian feels the need to assert the opposite and the argument frequently leads to high tempers and bloodshed. That said, as one of the homes of the Myrmidian faith, there is a good deal of contact between the city of Remas and the Estalian Kingdoms. The Holy Temple of Myrmidia in Remas is one of the pilgrimages regularly undertaken by Estalians (third only in popularity to the High Temple in Magritta and the Cathedral of Santa Gabriela in Bilbali) and many Estalian priests study for a year in Remas in a vain attempt to heal the rift between the Estalian and Tilean wings of the cult. Typically they return with an even greater hatred for Tileans than their fellows at home

Luccini, the last of the major trade rivals for Estalia in Tilea, is somewhat forgiven for its foreign ways for its assistance in the fight against the Sartosan pirates. Living as close as they do to Sartosa, the deprivations of the pirate city are keenly felt by Luccinians and they have often combined with Estalian pirate hunters to track down buccaneers who have proved particularly troublesome. Some Luccinian sailors are almost brave enough to be called Estalian.

The Arabyans have never been fully forgiven for the invasion of Estalia and the scar on Estalian honour that that caused. But, like the Tileans, they are useful trading partners. In the case of the Arabyans, the relationship goes further, however, for many of the Estalian states have repeatedly sought to directly influence the politics of the Emirates and Caliphates. Often a desire to see an Emir or a Caliph who is more sympathetic to their interests has led to an Estalian Kingdom offering aid to a pretender to a throne or refuge to a deposed ruler. Fifty years ago, for instance, the King of Lysboa, Hernando XI, marched at the head of a large force deep into the Arabyan desert in support of the claim of the Emir of Martek to lands claimed by the city of Al-Haikk. They met at the Battle of the Three Kings. Lysboa has never fully recovered from the disaster and the loss of its king to the Sultan of Al-Haikk. At the moment, the one-time Caliph of Martek, Jemul Al Bathani resides in Magritta, a guest of the Duke, surrounded by his few remaining loyal Janissary guards.

Heraldry

Heraldry in Estalia is a serious matter. Only members of the nobility are allowed to bear coats of arms—but as mentioned, the nobility is porous and defined more in the act than the actuality. Each of the ruling Estalian princes has appointed a King of Arms, *rey de armas* in Estalian, to oversee that the restriction to nobles is being upheld—but humans cannot be everywhere and are open to bribes. In theory, a newcomer to the aristocracy must have their coat of arms approved by the *rey de armas*. In the larger kingdoms, the *rey de armas* is typically a hereditary position, while the actual heraldic work is left to assistants known as *heraldos*. Artists and tailors can gain wealth and fame working as *heraldos*, with some becoming known for their particular style or *forte*.

As elsewhere, one inherits the arms of one's father. In Estalia, however, women are accorded more importance than in other parts of the Old World, and for this reason Estalian nobles display their maternal as well as paternal ancestry. This often results in a massively complex coat of arms. Commonly, a coat of arms is thus divided into four fields: (i) in the top left field one carries his or her own arms (that is, the same as one's father's); (ii) in the top right field the arms of one's mother; (iii) in the bottom left field the arms of one's father's mother; and (iv) in the bottom right field the arms of one's mother's father. Other equally complex arrangements also exist.

For the recently appointed *hidalgos* and *caballeros* this can be a big problem, as their parents and grandparents were not all nobles and, hence, did not bear arms. Technically, the relevant fields of the coat of arms should then be left black. Few new nobles are, of course, content with such a blatant display of their humble background. It has become good business for dubious historians and outright charlatans to provide new nobles with fanciful documentation of the superior achievements and coat of arms for their grandparents.

A special honour can be bestowed by a device known as an *escutcheon* by a king. This is a small shield at the centre of the larger shield signifying some great service to the monarch. These are much craved by the ambitious who desperately want to advance in the hierarchy. So much so that new nobles will pay handsomely for adventurers to perform such deeds as long as they ensure the credit comes to the noble. Adventurers on this secret task are referred to as "Agents of Shield".



Mercenaries

Estalian princes pride themselves on their armies and their *vigilares* (see the next chapter) and typically keep them in good stead no matter the likelihood of war. As such, most princes realize the costs of doing so can be defrayed by hiring their armies out to other nations, both within Estalia and without. So it is that in the Empire and further north, the average citizen most commonly meets Estalians who are travelling mercenaries (or the other wanderers, the *diestros* who seek to make their legends and gain extra training). Estalian mercenary bands have fought in battles across the entire time and geographical span of the Old World, many passing into history, if not legend. Here are a few names an Empire historian would know, although to an Estalian, if they are not of his kingdom he may not know of them, or care.

Braganza's Besiegers — famous for besieging the Tilean city of Miragliano when the siege lasted over five years and even the rats died out and men had to eat each other.

Voland's Venators — these expert hunters trained in the jungles of Lustria to become unrivalled at commando tactics.

Bronzino's Galloper Guns — Generalissimo Bronzino taught his men to race horses at top speed while still firing with something near accuracy—which requires both hands leaving none for the reins. The Generalissimo is dead now but the unit persists, always seeking new members who are willing to risk the high death rate of the training.

Birdmen of Catrazza — Another unit still extant, they train for mountain combat where their glide-costumes allow them to swoop like birds upon their enemies.

Al Muktar's Desert Dogs — Founded by Arabyan villanos, the Desert Dogs have since added some Estalians to their numbers but remain their fierce disdain for the nation that is not their true home. Yet they will fight with ferocity if the price is right.

Ricco's Republican Guard — The Republican Guard is as long gone as the Republic which birthed it—if it even existed (historians disagree). Centuries later this strange company of men swears to its ancient laws and fights for its ancient honour, and vet their members with extreme rituals.

The Alcatani Fellowship — This semi-secret order of cadets and soldiers is not really a mercenary company, but a fraternal order, linking warriors across kingdoms and even across the Old World. Like the Knights of Magritta (see *Shades of Empire*) they aren't always clear about their mission but if convinced to lend their services they can gather wherever they are needed, with sufficient time.

Chapter IV: The Law of Estalia

*“The law layeth pon the land, why,
Like the rested rustic, and—I warrant
Has as many fleas.”
As You Pike It, Act 1, Scene 6*



Compared to their northern cousins in the Empire, the Estalian people have a far simpler view of law and order. Their laws can still be harsh and strict, often extremely so, but to the Estalians, the law is akin to the weather. The hot winds of summer can strip a field bare and chafe a man's skin to the bone, but there is nothing that can be done about it—except getting out of the worst of it. The law of Estalia is equally cruel and arbitrary but something to be endured, not questioned; avoided but not argued. The Estalians find the very idea of lawyers and judges, as they appear in the Empire, to be frivolous—a sure sign of soft living and inveterate cowardice.

Laws of City and State

At the lowest level, the laws of Estalia are determined by the city governors, or dominars. In larger cities, many dominari create special positions for keepers of the law, captains of the watch or chiefs of security, but this is entirely up to each ruler, and even then, these captains remain completely subservient to the dominar and must execute whatever laws their dominar chooses to enact.

The position of dominar is not elected. Officially, dominari are appointed by the prince or king of the state, but most rulers are content to allow the title to be passed down through family, or however else tradition may dictate. In many cases, of course, the dominar of the largest town is also the ruler of the state. Here again the prince may rule his city unassisted, or may appoint a dominar to handle civic matters while he rules the entire land. In the case of the twin colossi of Bilbali and Magritta, the fortune of the city eclipses all other concerns, and thus the rulers of those states concern themselves almost entirely with urban issues.

The princes and princesses of Estalia—the rulers of its many nations—are determined by blood and marriage. Estalians typically come from large families, and to avoid rivalry, most princes award the title of dominar in each of their cities to their brothers, sisters, cousins and nephews, who in turn create positions for their relatives. Thus the power of a dominar is not measured in the size or wealth of his city, but how closely related he is to the prince of the state. Of course, it is not unheard of for a prince to give his nearest brother power over the tiniest village or most remote tower as a way of weakening a rival, punishing old insults or simply putting a pain in the royal backside as far away as possible.

Likewise, a very distant relative may be put in charge of a powerful city to ensure that the city remains respectful, because the brother's wife's cousin ruling it is always striving to ingratiate himself further with his prince.

In theory, the ruling dominar can make anything legal or illegal, but it is impractical for them to constantly re-establish such a list with each new ascension to the throne. As a result, most towns and cities have a town charter. This document establishes the basic restrictions under which the citizens must operate, detailing such things as taxes, tolls, curfews and rules of decorum and public behaviour. When the dominar wishes to change the charter, he simply issues a proclamation to that effect and posts it by the town gates or at the town hall (or yunta). Said rules take effect immediately, and changes can happen extremely rapidly. There is a famous folk tale of Carlos the pedlar who entered Diamanterra with five pesos for a drink and five pesos to pay the toll to leave the city. As he enjoyed his wine, however, the dominar increased the toll to ten pesos, leaving him stuck in the city. As the tale lengthens, every time the pedlar procures his fee to leave, the toll rises again, and he ends up spending his entire life in the town, a perpetual victim of the fickle nature of Estalian law.

Although Estalians have no true lawyers, there are plenty of ways to affect the laws that the dominar chooses to make. The common business of the wealthiest and more prominent families of any town is to petition and influence the dominar and the various subordinate officials he has installed to ensure that the laws favour their family and their businesses to the utmost. Particularly successful families may even acquire positions under the dominar, positions they can then pass on to their children. Those who engage in these constant intrigues spend most of their days at the town hall, so are said to be playing the “game of yunta”.

To men of the Empire, those who play this game resemble lawyers, especially in how fiercely and underhandedly they scrap for victory. The difference is they have neither the mandate nor any interest in serving the common man, nor any sense of justice. The game of yunta is for nobles, not criminals.

The laws of the charter and the dominar are enforced by the men of the city guard—the proteges. These men are typically chosen for their extreme attention to detail, and their shameless glee at enforcing those details as brutally as possible. Although they are typically strict in interpretation of the law, the proteges are also famous for their arbitrary and whimsical nature in its enforcement. Another folk song tells of two identical twins, one of whom is found guilty of having his nose too long and condemned to die in prison, while the other is treated to free wine and food by the friendly guardsmen who swear to always be his brother.

Bribery is also rife amongst the proteges as they would always rather be drinking and whoring than policing. However, since the most common punishment for breaking the law is a fine, most dominars or jefes de proteges (captains of the guard) demand that their guardsmen bring in a minimum amount of money each day, ensuring that at least some of the fines and/or bribes levied make it to the city's coffers, instead of the proteges' purse.

If the fine cannot be paid, there are plenty of alternatives for paying off the debt. The proteges always need someone to do unpleasant or unwelcome jobs around the watchhouse, from scrubbing the floors to carrying their bags to even serving in their numbers. Many a career in public service begins with a fine that cannot be paid. In some cases, criminals with great fines to pay (or great imprisonments to work off) can be indentured to their city's legalities for life, or be forced into its armed forces. See Chapter Three for more on these *hombres villanos*.

Sentences that are not fines are typically imprisonment, hanging or more brutal procedures, all carried out as swiftly as possible by the guards who apprehend the criminal—often on the very spot where the arrest is made. Like their Empire cousins, the Estalians enjoy a good public show, however, and no town square lacks a set of stocks or manacles for hosting public punishments. These can range from the purely humiliating such as throwing fruit, right up to a hundred and fifty lashes with the cat o' nine tails, not to mention other, more creative pursuits involving torture, branding and scarification. Some of this is done with a simple whip or red-hot poker but science is blooming in Estalia and there are tortures such as being forced to grasp a hot or electrified copper ball, drinking from a scalding kettle, the scorpion-mail-shirt and the ever popular weasel-codpiece.

Similar creativity abounds in execution methods. There are intricate new devices of increasing weights, rising blades or wild animals. But the old ways never go out of style. Crucifixion is used, and skeleton-adorned crosses are a common sight on lonely hilltops, and every crossroads in the peninsula has a gallows and noose at the ready, and which sees frequent use. As another song says, the swordsmith, the bartender and the hangman are the three who will never want for work.

Mother Verena's Wisdom

The Goddess Verena (sometimes known as Vereşa) is known in Estalia, but she has a different nature in the south than the one her Empire faithful know. She is the Maiden Myrmidia's mother, and as such not as powerful as the Maiden herself. She is usually in charge of knowledge more than law or justice; Myrmidia of course is the determiner of all that is right, just and honourable. But Verena remembers the laws that are about records and duties that are more civic than personal. A soldier seeking his due pension would invoke Verena that the records remember him and the dominars keep their word. A noble wishing to trade on a shared heritage of long ago will ask Verena's eyes to scan her book to remember promises past.



Laws of the Princes

Above the individual dominars sits the king, queen, prince or princess (or in one obscure case, Emperor) of the land. This august individual may also make her own laws and hand them down to the dominars. The laws of the princes apply to the entire kingdom: the cities and the farms and all wildernesses between. These laws are enforced by the Prince's Guards or vigilares. The proteges are expected to enforce the rules of the land above those of their city, however as the dominar is close and the prince is typically far away, this is a rule more often breached than observed. Indeed, it is not unheard of for pitched battles in the streets to occur between the vigilares and the proteges, each trying to follow their particular orders.

In the main, though, the vigilares patrol the countryside between the towns. Their targets are bandits, rebels and lawless mountain men who prey upon travellers. Unlike the Empire, however, Estalia is not a particularly wild place. Towns are large and the mild climate and dry soil means the surrounding farms extend far from the walls. There is little dark forest or wild hills between settlements, nor Greenskins or Beastmen to hide in them. As such, Estalia needs no Roadwardens and outside of the deep mountain passes (or a full-scale war between nations), vigilares spend less time maintaining the security of the roads than challenging the limits of their jurisdiction by pursuing criminals over the border and proving that they are far more skilled than the vigilares of their neighbouring prince. Deadly duels of honour and pride are a regular feature at borderside tavernas, and an Estalian guard is ten times as likely to be killed by a fellow Estalian than any outsider or monstrous opponent.

Borders in Estalia are as important as they are numerous. The laws of the prince only extend as far as his particular nation. Just as a criminal may avoid being punished for breaking a city law by fleeing its walls, fleeing the nation will remove one from the consequences of ones deeds therein—or at least in theory. The other reason that vigilares frequent border tavernas is they will often find the border-runners they are seeking, relaxing in theoretical safety. The graver the crime, the higher the bounty the dominar, prince or family will place on the criminal's head, and parties both official and unofficial will cross more than one border to acquire these or simply take revenge. Thus when vigilares aren't fighting over pride, they are fighting over the fate of some criminal. For the nation where the criminal has sought refuge, this is a deeply personal issue of pride and sovereignty; for the nation he has run from, this is a deeply personal issue of honour and justice. Swords are drawn fast, and blood flows quick and deep—and more than one rogue has escaped the noose in the battles over jurisdiction.

"A man may be my brother, in flesh, in spirit, in arms, in all the ways that matter—but if he touches my woman, I kill him where he stands. And that is all there is of law."

Garetto Guillano, Diestro of Septa Sorista

"The only law that matters is the Maiden's, for it is Her will made fact. And in truth, it needs no terce or codex, for it is inscribed upon our hearts."

La Aquila Ultima, to King Carlos IV of Magritta

"Now we are past that hilltop, we are across the border! Nobody can touch us anymore! We're free men! Free!"
Iorgo Juna, last words

Women

Women are sacred in Estalian culture, and have special protections under the law. Striking a woman is a crime punishable by imprisonment at the very least, although it may be ameliorated by circumstance. To strike your own wife is less a crime, to do it at home likewise. To strike an unmarried woman in the street is considered akin to rape, and is repaid by savage corporal punishment, in full public view. Even after the scars from the whips heal, anyone convicted of such a crime is shunned by society. The Estalians have no time for a man who feels the need to strike, imprison, steal from or even insult a woman. They feel that the ways of nations like the Empire and Bretonnia, where women are often little more than property, are incredibly barbaric, not to mention indicative of the poorly skilled lovers who live there. The act of rape (something often never even reported in the Empire) is punishable by nothing short of public hanging, and any diestro worth his salt will gleefully ride down and murder a fleeing rapist, though it take weeks to track him down in the mountains. Where death is not the sentence, extreme crimes like this usually lend themselves to brandings, so that no matter where the criminal runs his sins will be borne before him.

Of course, there are plenty of unscrupulous, vindictive, nefarious and criminal Estalian women, many of whom are aware that the laws of the land ensure they will never be brought to justice or indeed any account for their viperous behaviour. As the song says, there is no blade so sharp as a woman's tongue, no pain so deep as a woman's cruelty, no battle so lost as to fight a woman's will, and the men of the Empire consider Estalian women to be distastefully impudent and distressingly overbearing.

Types of Laws

Unless they are a merchant, or a frequent traveller dealing with tolls, an Estalian will most often come into contact with the law in its capacity of controlling public behaviour and debauchery. For both mercantile and religious reasons (see below), most towns have strict laws on when, where and how alcohol may be sold and consumed. Similar restrictions apply to gambling, fighting, duelling, loitering and even singing and dancing. The enthused Tilean visitor will find it strange that his hot-blooded hosts suddenly cease their fiestas and return home to their beds at a seemingly arbitrary toll of the bell, but to the Estalian, sleep, prayer and duty to one's home are things to be pursued with equal passion as wine, women and song. Of course, plenty have their own view on how many hours to spend on these matters, and the proteges make nightly fortunes from those who linger late upon the streets.

Sumptuary laws are becoming more commonplace, although they lack the dramatic divide between rich and poor seen among the Bretons. In general, these are used to simply emphasise wealth and influence, with those most connected to the dominar convincing him to outlaw certain cuts or colours for those not in his favour. Strangers passing through towns may be told that nobody but those of a certain family may wear red, or that all cloaks must be less than four feet long, lest they hide evil intent (an accusation that those citizens above reproach may ignore). In the larger cities, seamstresses and cloth-merchants make a fine living working by the city gates, as new arrivals may find themselves desperate for new attire to avoid an outrageous fine. Of course, many Estalians are so proud of their fashion they would rather take the fine, or even duel with the guards than remove or alter the offending item.

Perhaps the most important laws in Estalia are the ones involving duelling. Duelling is entirely legal, as long as a few small conditions are met. The duel must have at least two witnesses, who will swear that the duel was clearly challenged, and neither man was murdered unawares. Said witnesses are supposed to be unaligned with the men in question, or for one to be aligned with each combatant, to ensure the witnessing is fair and unbiased. Typically, those who swear to the duel will also act as the duellists' seconds, if the duel does not take place immediately.

A duel begins with one man challenging another for a perceived insult or grudge. At such a time, any stakes on the outcome are declared as well, and any conditions on the duel itself. It is possible to refuse or alter a challenge, but it must be done immediately. Any man who swears to a duel and then rescinds from it or fails to send a second in his place is considered to have lost any item or argument at stake, as well as all his honour. Like a criminal, such a coward would be shunned from society and tavernas, and probably forced to leave town. To refuse a duel at the time it is offered is far less socially devastating, but can also be a sign of cowardice or weakness, and few proud diestros can bear such a mark on their character. Although most duels are fought to first blood or until one opponent cries *merce!* deaths both accidental and declared are common. Duelling is therefore an effective way for the wealthy or the skilled to legally murder their rivals. Any *hidalgo* or *ricos* playing the game of *yunta* will always travel with a highly skilled (and expensive) swordsman to act as his second, ensuring he walks away from his duels mostly victorious and always unharmed. Many warriors and adventures turn to these roles for coin, and it is not uncommon for two great friends from the battlefield to end up, when the wars end and the pesos are few, trying to kill each other at the whim of rich owners playing political games with hired blood.

Again, pity the Estalian, for he is most often slain by his brother and his countryman, and not by the orc, the Beastmen or the foreigner.

Laws of the Church

Although there is much overlap across principalities, there is no unified principle of Estalian law, as it comes from the princes. There is however another body whose will can and does proscribe the law across the entire collection of kingdoms: the black-cloaked, eagle-eyed Myrmidian church.

The church's power is not infinite, but it is entrenched and its edicts are inviolate. Rare is a prince so powerful he can afford to contradict his bishops and cardinals nor is any prince so secure that he does not fear the cloaked hand of the Inquisition whispering to his subjects or neighbours. An inquisitor would need a great deal of power to declare a prince a heretic (and thus forfeit of any right to rule), but it is not unheard of. Therefore, whether due to true faith or real fear, the laws of the church are the laws of all the princes, all the dominars and all the peoples of Estalia.

The deep and intricate canon of church law is however mostly directed at its own priesthood. Where it interacts with the common man is in its determination of what is heretical and what is merely sinful.

The former is generally of the most import to the church, and commands the most support from civil authorities. However by maintaining interest and control over the legalities of the latter, the church ensures its power and influence is felt at every level of society.

The most common heretical crime is the worship of false gods. This is considered a crime against the Maiden regardless of whether the god is an innocent peasant superstition or a terrible Ruinous Powers of Chaos, although in the case of the latter the church will pursue the crime with its utmost terrifying zeal. The Inquisition focuses most of its energies on rooting out hidden and powerful cults, in the courts, the cities and the larger towns, so although arcane peasant faiths are still a crime, they typically go unpunished. Likewise those who worship Myrmidia in any divergent or proscribed fashions are more often than not outside the interest of the Inquisition, as long as their political power is small. Unlike to the proteges, peccadillos are of little interest to the Inquisition.

It is far more worrying, to their eyes, that people would step away from faith as a whole than worship incorrectly. Thus it is that the Inquisition takes a role in monitoring and prescribing the state of Estalian morality. Laws of curfew, zoning, dress and public merriment are backed up by the assertion that, in excess, the wonders of wine and song can lead men away from proper deference to the Maiden and her mother church. Far more dangerous, however, are the wiles of women.

The church has, in the last few decades, been particularly vocal about the dangers of the seductive pleasures of the flesh, and has worked tirelessly to limit and restrict the access the common man has to them. Prostitution is outlawed across the peninsula, and the church encourages the proteges of every city to be vigilant in enforcing this. So virulent has the church's crusade been against "professional" women that at times it even overrules Estalian gallantry, and men can now humiliate or strike prostitutes without great fear of consequence.

The church has gone further too, outlawing acts or performances that could be considered lascivious or enticing towards sexual thoughts. This includes several types of dancing, many festival rituals and any taverna where the waitresses bare too much of their shoulders, calves or bellies. Just as with the fines of the proteges, it is often up to the whims of the town priests as to which venues and activities are appropriate, and which are deplorably sinful. In one town, the single addition of castanets to a dance routine may make it the gateway to damnation, in another guardsmen may measure every dancer's skirt (and any splits in it) to ensure it meets the strict demands of local church law.

Such laws can quickly extend to the entire population, producing more restrictive versions of sumptuary laws, designed to ensure that even a passing woman on the street cannot turn a man's thoughts to lust with her rising hemline or unbound hair.

The Old World's Greatest Lovers

It is well known across the Old World that the laws of Estalia forbid both taking a woman by any force at all, and acquiring one with coin. This implies to the world that the men of Estalia can only bring a woman to their beds by wooing them with words, songs and heroic deeds, and has cemented their reputation as the paramours par excellence of the continent—although many a Tilean would disagree. Due to this reputation, many Estalians take pride in their laws, and mock, degrade and even shun those who break them. To be called a whoremonger—a puto or a pachero—is to imply a man lacks the ability to woo, and is a terrible insult, one demanding either apology or a swift lesson with steel.

This pogrom against the expression of the female form has caused a lot of strife and even bloodshed. Church conclaves have been called to evaluate every event on the program at the local taverna, and more than one innocent young mountain girl dancing the fiesta rondo just as her mother and grandmother taught her has been burnt for her wanton behaviour. At the same time bishops in Bilbali pay handsomely for the proteges to ignore certain whore-houses where holy men "take confession" on a regular basis.

Further confusion lies in the fact that Myrmidia is most certainly a goddess of art and artists. Until recently the church has had little against the presentment of the naked female form in their icons, paintings and stained glass windows. As such, the church is forced to allow such processes to continue, and the larger cities are now filled with "art clubs" where young men—passionate about their artistic training—may paint and sketch the various models provided by the establishment. Science too, is holy to Myrmidia, and the study of the anatomical form is extremely popular in Magritta and Bilbali, with even illiterate sailors keen to attend lectures and hands-on demonstrations.

Those running schools and galleries, both legitimate and otherwise, will regularly find themselves scrutinised by the black robed priests to ensure their work remains entirely holy, and the ability to impersonate an artist or physician is now a highly prized one in the underside of Estalian cities.

The punishment for breaking the church's laws almost never involves fines. Women are imprisoned, branded and sometimes tortured; the men seduced by or profiting from them are beaten, maimed or executed. Still, there is much money to be made, and the salacious industries have only thrived since being driven underground.

It is not just the anatomical sciences which are scrutinized by the Inquisition. The church is adamant that every aspect of this popular new study meet their moral standards and not lead men away from their faith. Students of physics and chemistry are examined almost as closely as the doctors and dancers of the realm, lest they proclaim some heresy. More than one brave explorer of the unknown has had his tongue cut out or been imprisoned for life because his conclusions were too distant from the word of the Goddess, or because his interrogator just didn't understand them. More than one scientist has pondered the fact that they might as well trade in flesh, as they would be under the exact same level of scrutiny and risk, but make ten times the coin.

The Inquisition makes no apology or compensation for any inconveniences it may cause. It is in the business of saving souls; scientific progress and artistic merit—and indeed a few human lives—are minor considerations in the face of such a holy mission.

Laws of the Abasko

The Abasko people have their own laws, separate from Estalian law, although rarely in conflict. Nor do the Abasko find any frequent reason to object to coming under the laws of the peninsula, although they do find the long litanies of finable offences a sign of flatlander insanity. The Abasko do have heretical faiths, however: they trace their origins back before the coming of the Estalii tribes, and their worship of ancient trees is definitely an insult to the Maiden. However, few clergymen would wish to declare outright war against the cunning mountain folk, so for the moment the church turns a blind eye, and in return the wiser Abasko don't mention their forest shrines when the Blackrobes are visiting. Rumour has it however, that the Aquila Hembre of Bilbali is looking for an excuse to begin a pogrom to cleanse this blasphemy once and for all.



Chapter V: The Countless Kingdoms



*"I would not beard your grace as to suggest
My maiden strides more glory-clad to battle
Than your Sigmar. But when war's weary work
Is done, e'en gods turn to country matters."
Troll's Slayer's Lost, Act 3, Scene 3*

Welcome to the Estalian Kingdoms. Many have tried to forge them into one country. None have succeeded.

Each of the following entries covers a separate kingdom, with its own rulers, laws, traditions and even currency—some with their own dialect as well. They all have their own specialities and benefit from trade with other nations in Estalia and often beyond, but most of them could survive in isolation. Bilbali, Magritta, Estrema and Badajoz trade daily with a number of other kingdoms, and all benefit from diplomatic connections with their rivals, but their fierce navies can fend off attacks from belligerent neighbours. Zatifa entertains students from all over the peninsula, and La Mesa stands or falls on its grain trade, but each has its own small armies and other sources of food and income. Even tiny Lysboa has a navy and sufficient farmland to scrape by in the hardest of years. Carrona and La Isla Atalaya are essentially too small and isolated to exist for a sustained period without trade, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

And yet, each of them is recognisably part of Estalia as a whole. Connections and ties go back millennia, for good or ill. Borders have been drawn and redrawn with warfare and diplomacy, and one family might have cousins in a dozen kingdoms. They may not need each other, but as a whole they do depend on one another.





Badajoz

Quick Data

Official Name: Most Royal Kingdom Of Badajoz

Ruler: Philippe IV de Los Cabos

Government: Prince's court, supported by Hidalgo landowners

Capital: Los Cabos

Free Towns: Nerja

Major exports: Shipbuilding, salt and pickled fish, shellfish, pearls, angora, wool, leather

Heraldry: Three ships with white sails in a red field under a golden half sun.

The Land And Its People

The southwestern edge of the Estalian peninsula is hot, dusty and inhospitable. Most of the people of Badajoz cling to the coast, where the fishing fleets and oyster nets support the principality's tenuous economy. In the centuries since the first Crusades many of its harbour forts have fallen into disuse, and fishing, shipbuilding and trade with neighbouring kingdoms keep the subjects of the Throne of Pearls well fed. Goatherds and drovers work in the reddish Miramar Hills and the dusty plains encircling them, coming to town to trade meat and wools for fresh and dried fish.

Seat of power for the kingdom is Los Cabos, a city renowned for its mariners since Reman times and a strategic point that every invading army and navy has fought over for just as long. Legend has it that Myrmidia herself founded the city, the first ship launched from the bay being carved by the maiden goddess herself from a single Encina Oak tree.

The great explorer Vespuce Lustrus was a son of Los Cabos. The explorer's second voyage set out from the city aboard Badajozian ships. To this day the Lustrian Treasure Fleet uses the bay as a winter berth, helping to defend the coast from Sangria pirates and Araby corsairs drawn by the wealth flowing through the city. The Pearl of the Western Seas attracts many adventurous spirits as it revels in its richest years since the first Crusade.

This success has also reinvigorated Nerja, the chartered free town to the northeast of Los Cabos known for its salt and pickled fish, and San Pedro del Sur, a market town in the foothills of the Miramars and a place of pilgrimage due to its healing spring, known as the Tears of the Little Sister.

"The Throne of Pearls, city of wonders! You can keep Magritta, it's got too many hills anyway."

Cristóbal Villalobos, shipwright

"Behold the Asustar, the greatest pearl ever found, centre of the crown jewels, to be worn whence our most noble prince takes a wife."

Condesa Violeta Della Sur Della Shallya, social climber

"The Maiden General herself was the first to sail from this bay, sirs. We defend this land with no less ferocity."

Dolorada Della Charybdim, pirate hunter

"They build good boats, I grant them that."

Marco Colombo, Tilean explorer

Adventure Hooks

I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In

The Treasure Fleet is due to return in days, augurs and carrier pigeons confirming that it has left La Isla Atalaya. The city is in a rush to make ready for a grand festival welcoming the conquering heroes' home. And, naturally, pirates and pirate hunters alike wait to make the first move. In the midst of all this, the captain of the harbour watch is found murdered. Suspicion falls on agents of the Sangria pirates, and the city swings from hysteria to paranoia. Who killed the captain and to what cause?

A Chill In The Water

All along the Costa del Sur there have been strange reports of fishermen and shipwrights disappearing by night. Then one of them manages to stumble into a dockside taverna, clutching his side and ranting of men with the heads of trout attacking with tridents and nets. Is any of this true? And if so, what do the sea folk want with men? And what does the Kraken have to do with it?



Bilbali

Quick Data

Official Name: The Most Blessed Kingdom Of Bilbali
 Ruler: Queen Juana della Roja
 Government: Feudal with a privy council
 Capital: Bilbali
 Free Towns: Barboza, Borgas
 Major exports: Salt fish, grain, boatbuilding, timber, wine, iron ore
 Heraldry: A golden lion rampant on a fiery red field

The Land And Its People

The kingdom of Bilbali is temperate and coastal, known for its fishing and extensive vineyards. Under Queen Juana's rule, the people appear industrious, since farmers' markets in Bilbali bring large dividends. The divide between town and country is sharp, with the citizens of Bilbali seen as almost a separate people, eating the produce of the country and giving little back but coin. Long ago, when the ancient state of Tigarre fell to pieces, its lords settled in the north and some of those outside the city use the ancient name of Tigarre of their kingdom, to better distinguish themselves from the city folk.

Much of the inner kingdom was once forest, but the needs of war have seen most trees felled for boatbuilding and sale as well as to make way for fields and vines, a situation that slowly starves the land of the moisture it needs to grow the vines. Forested estates preserved for hunting are targets for poachers as game runs scarce. In the heartlands the overburdened fields give way to dusty plains and hungry peasants talk of revolt. Pina Wood so far remains untouched for fear of reprisals from those that dwell within, and there are whispers of shadowy figures taking revenge against merchants who profit from the fallen forests. Meanwhile more boats are always needed.

The other free towns marking the borders of the kingdom, Barboza and Borgas, are bustling centres of trade with the kingdom's neighbours. Their dominars are keenly aware of their provincial status, and occupy themselves with trade, diplomacy and civic protection. While "the big city" is famed for its fencers, Barboza is respected as home to the best musketeers on the north coast, with years of practice in fending off pirates and invaders.

For details on the city itself, see Chapter Six.

*"The lion lives on an empty plain."
 Common saying in the Ferot Hills*

*"Most of the children always go to the big city. The smart ones come back."
 Juan del Valjuan, Feroti vintner*

*"If anything, the Bilbalin peasant is even surlier than the Bilbalin citizen. This is because the citizen is always busy and the peasant never wants to be."
 Agathe de Soeurs Pâles, Bretonnian wine merchant*

*"The Queen is wise and fair. Wise enough not to go to war with the Magrittes, fair enough to keep us armed just in case."
 Tancredo Del Tarmos, bargee*

Adventure Hooks

Pleno Verano Murders

The Pleno Verano festival, celebrated in the villages along the River Tarmos, is a time to show off the summer crop and to try the previous year's wine. Vintners and wine merchants travel many leagues to secure new varieties and flavours for their wealthy customers. When a rare grape vine is stolen, every trader is at each other's throats, and every dirty trick will be pulled to settle the score and acquire the rare ingredient for their own vats.

Watchers In The Woods

Travellers continue to be frightened off the road south by shadowy figures hiding in the woods, striking at the convoys of wine merchants and taxmen. Although pretending to be the mysterious wood elves, they are in fact simply clever bandits making the most of an old legend. However, when the characters are sent to deliver justice, the real legends make their appearance, causing time, space and identities to shift as the fey and the real collide.



Cabria

Quick Data

Official Name: The Holy Kingdom of Cabria
 Ruler: King Alonso II, aka Alonso de Gordo
 Government: Feudal
 Capital: Diamanterra
 Free Towns: San Luis
 Major exports: Salt fish, grain, stone, coal, beef and leather
 Heraldry: Halved, red sun on a yellow field left, white helmet on a black field right

The Land And Its People

The north western corner of the Estalian peninsula is home to the Kingdom of Cabria, where warm winds from the Great Western Ocean provide rich and fertile farming and grazing on the low Céfiro Hills and the surrounding plains, while also forcing large, hard waves across the northern Costa Tiburon.

The coast is lined with Crusader forts looking out onto the waters, and a few looking east towards the border with Bilbali. Today many of them serve as lighthouses, their watchfires guiding ships around the edge of the peninsula.

The crashing surf and riptides combine with unseen reefs to make for a difficult sailing, and the coast is an ideal base for wreckers. Organised gangs build pyres to lure trading ships onto the rocks, with accomplices on the shore ready to kill any survivors before dragging the cargo into their caves.

As a response to this threat to legal business, San Luis is the base of the Coast Guard, a division of the Watch dedicated to foiling the wreckers. This doughty troop of fighters works to protect lighthouses from saboteurs and rides out by night to battle the murderous crews.



"It's a blessed land, is Cabria. Warm breezes, rich farming, long glistening beaches..."

Palmira de Pasa, innkeeper

"Long nights gazing out at the sea, the chill air warmed only by the watchfires. Lovely coast, but by the Maiden it makes a man lonely. And then there are the Sirens..."

Guil De Tierra Portuaria, lighthouse keeper

"The wreckers are nothing but murderous dogs. If I had my way I'd shove them into their own fires."

Chuy Barbanegra, first mate of the merchantman Santa Sahaguno

Adventure Hooks

Cattle Call

One of the largest hidalgo farmers on the east coast of the Holy Kingdom has been troubled by cattle thieves of late. Investigations reveal that the cattle aren't being stolen but simply killed in secret, as the first step in a Bilbalin attempt to expand their borders by starving out their neighbours. Presenting such an accusation against such a powerful neighbour will require incontrovertible proof, however—something that might be very hard to acquire.

The Wrecking Crew

Travelling aboard a trading ship, the characters see a watchfire guiding the vessel suddenly go out. Trapped without a harbour, someone has to set off in a rowboat to find out what has happened. Was it a wrecker fire just extinguished by the Coast Guard, or was it a real beacon extinguished by wreckers? Or is there a third party in the game, lurking in the tunnels beneath the cliffs, hungry for blood?

Cantonia

Quick Data

Official Name: The Most August Kingdom Of Cantonia
 Ruler: King Maximiano Del Sabio Del Justiciar, Maximiano XVII
 Government: Feudal, with a supporting Senate
 Capital: Vizcaya
 Free Towns: Azuara, Graus, Guanair
 Major exports: lumber, stone, grain, angora
 Heraldry: Black diagonal stripe on white, with a red and yellow check border.

The Land And Its People

Cantonia is as ancient as Astarios, Campanola or Perrochez. Unlike those near-legendary kingdoms, it remains recognisably the same. Cantonia has struck its own path, ignoring the other Estalian Kingdoms as much as possible, and turned inwards. In effect, it has closed its borders to the advance of time.

King Maximiano claims to be a descent from a Reman regional governor, and most of Cantonia's ruling families trace their ancestry back millennia to the original Senate that broke away from the ailing Empire. Since then, proud tradition has ossified into arcane ritual and the ruling elite are eccentric and often badly inbred, while the people are still treated much as they would have been under Reman governance.

During the Crusades the ruling Senate declared themselves neutral and allowed the rampaging Arabyan and Bretonnian armies free passage through their lands, while they protected their cities with equal violence against both sides. This view of outsiders remains largely unchanged millennia later. While Vizcaya is a working port and Azuara is a thoroughfare for those heading into the Irranas, the citizens outside of the trading quarters look down on visitors with open disdain.

Other traditions have also festered, growing past the point of logic with each successive generation. The ancient laws are harsh enough, but more have been added over the millennia, and punishments and executions are many and inventive. Suspicion of magic fostered during the fall of Remas and compounded by the magical battles of the early Crusades means that spellcasting of any kind is illegal, punishable by drowning while sewn into a sack with two hungry dogs.

Dwarfs are forbidden to enter Vizcaya with weapons or armour on penalty of having their beards set on fire, as a result of a Dwarf having killed a Senator who refused to pay a mercenary contract four hundred and nineteen years ago. There are laws governing the colours you can wear, on which days of the week you can sing in public, and how many fingers should be removed from a thief depending on the value of goods stolen. And these are just some of the better known examples—it is possible to break myriad age-old laws without realising it, and if the courts want to find a way to punish you, there is bound to be precedent somewhere.

But even a land as unyielding as Cantonia cannot remain unchanged forever, and its ruling Senate sees the Estalian Kingdoms change around it, developing in strength due to stability, trade, and the wealth of the Lustrian colonies, and there are some in the Senate who find this attractive. Particularly if a stronger, unified Estalia were to bow to the wisdom of their ancient ways.

"For three thousand years have we kept this vigil, the light of knowledge in dark ages of warfare and madness. Now all of the Kingdoms stand ready to receive our teachings once more."

Leocadio Del Sabio Del Senado, Senator

"The ships come in, bearing their pestilent mongrel crews carrying little of use or value. Were it my choice, we would raze the port and have done with them all."

Adriánus Del Justiciar Del Equidad, warehouse owner

"The King and the Senate know best—they have ruled fair for thirty centuries, so they must know what they're doing."

Baudelio, dockworker

Adventure Hooks

Tried And Tested

Travelling through Vizcaya, the characters' ship is held up in customs. The first mate has refused to pay a fine for singing on a Verenes, and the characters disembark to assist him. This results in them breaking several more ancient laws that demand a trial by ordeal. Can they find a way around this, or will the executioner earn a new pair of boots in the morning?

The Glory That Was

Mercenaries from throughout the Irrana region swarm towards Azuara, as it seems that an army is forming. The daily rate is good and the promised spoils would be enough to live high on the hog for over a year. The only nagging question is what this army is for, but there are plenty willing to let that go unanswered. Have Maximiano and his Senate finally decided to bring the old laws to the feuding Irrana Kingdoms by conquest?

Carrona

Quick Data

Official Name: The Kingdom Of Carrona
 Ruler: King Álvaro del Cazador
 Government: Feudal, supported by hidalgo landowners and the priests of Morr
 Capital: Reas
 Free Towns: Cebreros, Siernos, Llaqueno
 Major exports: stone, coal, earthenware, wine, angora, wool, prophecies
 Heraldry: Lightning over a grey gate between two red mountains, on a black field.

The Land And Its People

A narrow valley winding between the western spurs of the Irrana mountains, Carrona is a small kingdom that has often served as a buffer against invasions from the north-east and the Iron Orcs of the Mountains themselves. Warm air from La Mesa clashes with the cold mountain winds, creating a stormy climate, so much so that the banner of the kingdom depicts lightning over a gate between two mountains.

The strategic importance of the pass led the Black Guard of Morr to build a high watchtower monastery in the Irrana after the Araby invasion, although some joke that the thunder attracted them as well. The brooding Torre Oscura looks down over the citadel and the domed monastery, home to Augurs and Oracles of Morr. This has made it a place of pilgrimage for many seeking knowledge of the future and of Death's great plan, consulted by lone travellers as well as generals and royals of allied lands. A small industry of soothsayers and palmists circles the central market of Reas, tapping in to the overwhelming demand for foreknowledge and, most often, reassurance.



*"The land is hard, but it is home to us."
 Mateo Del Eamba, shepherd*

*"You cannot cheat death."
 Caridad della Caza, Oracle of Morr*

*"Long days and nights of hard riding, and then they could hardly be said to have made us welcome. An entire kingdom of grim-faced old miseries. Ghastly."
 Gilles De Parravon, Bretonnian Knight of the Fifth Crusade*

*"A good country for storms."
 Lady Magritte von Wittgenstein, Imperial noblewoman and scientific prodigy*

Adventure Hooks

Some Might Call That A Bad Sign

Resting in Reas as they pass through the Irranas, one of the characters goes to see a fortune teller. As she assures him that the split in his life line is a good sign, a young Augur of Morr bursts into the tent and contradicts the palmist's entire spiel, accurately predicts an odd event that happens an hour later—and that the adventurers have to travel to Montañas tomorrow and prevent a Daemon being summoned, or everyone in the kingdom will die within a week. Before she can tell the characters any more, she is dragged away by the city watch for prognosticating without a licence, and the temple's authorities pull her back to seclusion, claiming it is for her own safety.

Riders In Black

In Cebreros to help trade spices, the characters see five of the Black Guard ride by, guarding a boy in his early teens. Everyone around seems baffled, not having heard that the knights were even in the area, much less any reason for them to have captured or decided to protect a local youth. When the boy escapes his dowdy guardians and joins the characters, the tight-tipped Black Guard will stop at nothing to get him back, as will the vampire queen who considers the boy her son.

Estrema

Quick Data

Official Name: The Grand Principality of Estrema
 Ruler: Princess Rafaela the Most Wise
 Government: Feudal
 Capital: Muros
 Free Towns: Verin
 Major exports: Livestock, salt meat, leather goods, timber, fruit
 Heraldry: Quartered: gold arm holding a scimitar on red field top left, black and white diamonds top right, white rose on black field bottom left, black dagger on red field bottom right

The Land And Its People

Between the Piña Woods and the Miramar Hills lies Estrema, the western plain. The soil is hard to till and so the former march kingdom is home to more drovers than farmers. The business of raising cattle has taken some time to recover from a protracted civil war between supporters of Principessa Rafaela and her half-brother, Rafael the Unforgiving, which ended with his fortress being burned to the ground and his supporters fleeing.

The Jinettes grew from the herdsmen into a class of professional warrior, fighting rebels and hunting brigands with their long spears as well as bringing down rogue cattle with their shorter javelins. Young Jinettes test their skills against bulls, riding and even running against them, enclosing the narrow streets of the otherwise-peaceful market town of Juego Idota and letting the herd loose. Estrema versions of the toreo are also unlike any else in Estalia.

As the kingdom falls more under the control of the royal house and the Principessa's supporting Dons, the plains host ever more drovers and herds of cattle, pushing goatherds and shepherds further north and west, and the kingdom now increasingly encroaches on the Elf-haunted Piña Wood.



"This is a hard land. It breeds hard people, people who give nothing away. Harder with every season, it seems."
 Maribel Della Baquero, farmer

"Principessa Rafaela is most wise. We are not the sort to question her. Her own bastard brother was not fit to do that, so who are we?"
 Don Bolivar Del Rio Oscuro Del Pasto Blanco, hidalgo and cattle owner

"Who cares who won the war, so long as I can run the bulls?"
 López, Jinette

"Too much blood on the ground, too many people thirsty for more. And now we step into the woods, and do you think we will be welcomed?"
 Friar Sacerdote Verdú, Priest

Adventure Hooks

The Magnificent Bunch

Jinettes serving one of Rafaela's supporters threaten a Miramar village of shepherds and farmers whose Don supported Rafael, seeking to seize the village's land for their cattle. The village folk beseech the characters to protect their tiny village, but if they do so, they will make an enemy forever of Rafaela. A diplomatic retreat might be the better option, but the people have lived here for generations and are too proud to depart.

Kurnoss' Labyrinth

A clearing in Piña Wood near the castle of a hidalgo is the site of an ancient Reman maze, said to be a scene of Old Faith worship even to this day. When the hidalgo's step-daughter disappears, a servant reports seeing her exploring the labyrinth, and her writing slate is filled with strange spiral drawings and depictions of a humanoid figure with curved horns. The priests say she must be burned as a witch once found, for she has become a child of the wood. Only solving the Labyrinth will reveal the answer.

La Isla Atalaya

Quick Data

Official Name: La Isla Atalaya

Ruler: Mayor Hebao Andrejo of Puerto Del Atalaya

Government: Trade guild

Capital: Puerto Del Atalaya

Free Towns: None

Major exports: Salt and pickled fish, oysters and shellfish, pearls, shipbuilding and repairs

Heraldry: Three silver fish leaping out of blue water on a white field

The Land And Its People

A small rocky outcrop surrounded by white beaches, La Isla Atalaya was home to an Elven outpost for millennia before the coming of men. The original fortress still guards the harbour of Puerto Del Atalaya, its winding corridors blending with the caves rising through the rock to the lookout posts at the summit. The remaining stone is notoriously hard to work, and the port is largely unchanged, a relic of a bygone age still in use because of its strategic position.

Abandoned during the War of the Beard, it was re-colonised by Sea Elves centuries later and remains in use to this day. Currently it is home to a cosmopolitan trading port, visited by fleets sailing to and from Lustria and Araby as well as the Estalian kingdoms and other lands of the Old World. Most notably, the Sea Elves remain here in large numbers, and would certainly dispute that the land belongs to any Estalian king. Those of other nations also enjoy the essentially neutral status of the island.

The Isla is governed by expediency and mercantile agreement, and the colony exists only because the trade winds demand it. Although there is no central authority, this is not a wild place. Every traveller is keen to preserve the quiet independence of the island, where men of any flag can talk and trade in peace. As such, diplomacy and espionage seem as common as trade in the taverns and hostleries ringing the harbour in the shadow of the fortress.



"They call it the City of Whispers. And not because of the way the wind whistles through the arrow slits in the old fort."

David del Héctor de Los Cabos, captain of the Lustrian Treasure Fleet

"This has been our safe harbour long down the centuries. Now we are glad to welcome the other races as they travel across the great blue ocean. Well, most of us are, at least."

Ilandirl Pearlfisher, captain of the Sea Elf vessel White Wake

"I love it here. Always people coming and going, new sails on the horizon, a new catch of oysters and someone new to impress with me pearls."

Chimo Del Perla, pearl diver

"They come and they go and they leave behind nothing but funny-looking coins. Look at this one, who's this supposed to be, got his beard pointing two ways? Ah well, don't suppose it matters long's it's silver."

Alba Della Crescencia, sailmaker

Adventure Hooks

Curse Of The Red Pearl

A pearl diver runs into town, carrying a blood red pearl the size of a man's eye. He claims that there are dozens of them offshore—a location that soon proves to be near a centuries-lost entrance into the tunnels under the ancient Elven fortress, a cave network none have seen since the Age of Wonders. What secrets did the High Elves leave behind, and what will the Sea Elves do to ensure they remain secret? And why are the waters rising so fast?

Careless Whispers

When an Arabyan kills a Tilean in a bar brawl, the Tilean's powerful relatives demand that his Magrattan associates enact law and order on their island. Keen for the deal to go through, troops from the mainland arrive and start hunting down the criminal. The Arabyans reject this weight-throwing entirely and draw battle lines. Nobody wants to see the peace of the Isla destroyed—or do they?

Never Trust A Monkey

The monkey's tail flicked across the dusty tiles, leaving a trail behind like a snake. It chattered madly, one eye rolling around to view the rabble that filled the taverna. It hopped twice in place, as if dancing a jig. Then with a mad leap it flew onto the game table and began to dance in earnest. Screeching and whooping it ran around in a circle, stamping up and down on the cards, scattering bets, knocking over cups of blood-orange wine. Finally, it circled round into the middle and whooped as it chased its own tail, spinning around and around like a pinwheel, hopping back and forth between feet before at last collecting both of them in its front paws and collapsing into a puddle of fur. Then with a whoop it jumped up again and tossed off its fez and pointed to it, screeching again. The eyepatched elf in the corner laughed and clapped his hands and threw in the first coin. Most knew the game but the tables of La Isla Atalaya were always full of travellers and newcomers and they had never even known a monkey before, let alone a dancing one. When the silver finished falling, the eyepatched Elf stepped forward and scooped up the fez, bowing his head up and down in thanks. The monkey, knowing what was next, galloped up his master's arm and was rewarded with an olive. It chattered with glee as the busker replaced its fez and swept away to find new marks.

With a foetid belch, Alonzo slid his chair back flush with the table and pointed a stubby finger at the elf opposite him. Astaran stared down at the cards he'd been dealt and back at Alonzo. "I'm out this round" he said, waving his hands above his cards like a conjurer. Alonzo smirked, a flicker of drool running from his pudgy lips and angled his finger around the table at the next player, a tall Norscan who kept moving his cards back and forth in his hand as if that would make them transform into better ones. A bid was made, and the wagering continued, Alonzo keeping time with his finger turning like a ticking clock. When he came to bet, he licked his fingers like he always did, and thumbed his cards like the edge of a knife. He licked his lips with greed and called the bet. Another line of drool slipped over his lips, as if he could taste his winnings already. Alonzo rubbed his thumb across his chin, smearing grease into the drool, and when he pulled his hand back, noticed the blackness. By then it was too late—his tongue had already tripled in size and gorged his throat with black sludge. Two more players hit the floor second later, their hands swollen into hideous mitts, the poison working its way greedily up their arms. The Norscan, giant that he was, managed to draw his sword and cross to the monkey trainer, but he had no strength left to bring his weapon down. He did however provide the perfect distraction for Astaran to slide his blade through the monkey-trainer's throat from behind. The blade stuck out like a bizarre second tongue as the body went limp beneath it. Blood soaked the stones. The puddle quickly swallowed the monkey's corpse, the poison that it had carried on its feet to the cards now burning its limbs away to a horrid grey dust.

Parasco took the blade from his elven master as always and began to polish it fastidiously with his silken kerchief. "However did you know not to touch the cards, oh maestro?" Parasco asked without looking up. Astaran smiled with only a hint of grimness. "It is as the old saying of the islands goes, Parasco. Never trust a monkey."

La Isla de Sangre

Quick Data

Official Name: La Isla de Sangre
 Ruler: Jacobo Ladrón, Governor of Puerto Sangria
 Government: Civil court
 Capital: Puerto Sangria
 Free Towns: : Puerto de Sol
 Major exports: Boatbuilding, salt fish, piracy
 Heraldry: A red ship against a silver backdrop

The Land And Its People

Guarding the Estalian coast is La Isla de Sangre, first occupied during the expansion of the Reman Empire over a millennium ago. Following the fall of the Empire, La Isla was an independent fishing port until the Arabyan conquest. Puerto Sangria was held by a warrior sheikh until Crusaders sailing from Badajoz took the port by force—but in truth neither he nor the Crusaders were the main power in the Island of Blood.

The Silver Cliffs became the roost of Malok during the Crusades. The mighty dragon left the mountains of Araby following a convoy of ships and taking his fill every night. He claimed to have settled in the region because the sea air agreed with him. Malok made his nest here for over five centuries until an armada of twenty pirate crews besieged the Silver Cliffs with full cannon, destroying a number of caves and a watchtower, and Malok has not been seen since.

Today, La Isla's most famous wildlife is a large cliffside colony of Razorbills who defend their nests fiercely against all invaders, including gulls and egg-hunting locals. These also attract scholars who can often be seen sketching the birds in flight.

The port is still thriving, with explorers and traders heading to Lustria taking over from the dwindling but still active Pirates of de Sangre, known for their red dragon flags and figureheads. Scholars and fortune hunters rub shoulders with street urchins and thieves in the shadow of the line of disused pirate watchtowers. And everyone, everywhere, watches the cliffs, wondering if Malok will awaken today.



"This is a golden land of opportunity and adventure. Savvy?"
 Governor Jacobo Ladrón

"A useful waystation for a journey to the southern New World. Try to keep your men on board as much as possible, however."
 Vespuce Lustrós, Captain of the Santa Furia

"Watch the Razorbills. If they ever leave all together, it means we have to slay the dragon."
 Catalina Del Tramoto, scholar

"Bloody pirates!"
 Guillermo Villalobos, Black Lion of the Costa Tiburon, pirate hunter

Adventure Hooks

Something Shiny In The Silver Cliffs

Centuries have passed since the dragon Malok was driven from the island, and in all that time no-one has found his hoard. The Cliffs are treacherous, honeycombed with caves home to territorial Razorbills and worse, and with hidden gaps and weak spots, but somewhere inside is a king's ransom of unseen treasures. Finding it is one thing. Getting out of town with it alive is something else entirely.

Why Is The Rum Gone?

A fight spills out of a pirate taverna over the apparent poisoning of one ship's captain. But members of seven different pirate crews were in The King's Skull at the time and they all have their motives, so the whole of Puerto Sangria could soon live up to its name rather too well unless the culprit is found. Travelling outsiders with no crew of their own are press-ganged into solving the mystery satisfactorily, and doing so might just earn the solvers a seat at the Pirates' Council

Lysboa

Quick Data

Official Name: The Kingdom Of Lysboa and Ancient Obregon

Ruler: King Valerio De Ramiro, Shield Of The People

Government: Royal council

Capital: Jaraiz

Free Towns: : Puerto Galtar

Major exports: Timber, boatbuilding, salt fish, grain, wine, fruit

Heraldry: Halved: red hand holding a dagger on a yellow field, three red roses on a green field

The Land And Its People

Sandwiched between Estrema and Badajoz is the tiny Kingdom of Lysboa. Even counting the scattered islands off the coast, held since the Crusades and mostly little more than storm harbours or grazing land for goats, it is the smallest of the mainland kingdoms of the peninsula. However, due to its position its ships form a substantial part of the Lustrian Treasure Fleet that sets out annually. Its ships are small but swift, built to thread through reefs and chains of islands. As its colonies strengthen, King Valerio and his council plumb the proceeds of its treasures into shipbuilding and imports, and quietly into armaments. Sometimes, it is the smallest blade that strikes the most terrible blow.

Lysboa contains some of the oldest family names in the peninsula, some claiming to have ruled unbroken since before the crowning of Myrmidia. They are too provincial; however, to turn this heritage into political power over other kingdoms, but it informs much of Lysboan pride and fashion. Even their wines seem older than any others.



"Yes, we have strong neighbours on all sides except the sea. Therefore, we must expand our reach across the waves and to the lands beyond."

*Don Baudelio Del Amyrmidia
D'Eligio, royal councillor*

"My ancestors fought in the Crusades to keep Lysboa free, we're not about to let the Bilbalins or Cabos take over."

Ana Della Piña, orchard overseer

"Bloody Cabosis coming up here with their two-mast sloops, thinking they impress anybody..."

Ruy Del Siete Dedos, Shipwright

"The broken coast makes for decent navigators and better climbers."

Vespuce Lustris, Captain of the Santa Furia

Adventure Hooks

Missing The Boat

The new flagship of the Lysboan Fleet, the Myrmidia Bendecida, stood proud in the docks of Puerto Galtar until tonight. Now it is burning, and the city is in uproar. Enemy agents, servants of the Ruinous Powers, vampires and Daemons are all blamed, but who is truly responsible? And can someone "borrow" a replacement from Badajoz before the tide turns and millions of financed pesos are lost forever?

Scion Sigh Again

A Lysboan hidalgo with no heir discovers his grandfather had a liaison with a peasant girl and there may be a child. The characters are hired to find the last scion of the family line, but nearby landowners keen for a larger piece of the smallest pie would rather see that the characters do not succeed. Of course, even if they manage to find her, the young scion may have no interest in noble titles, preferring the simple life of a Jinette. Can they convince her otherwise long enough to get back and get paid?

Magritta

Quick Data

Official Name: The Most Blessed Kingdom Of Magritta
 Ruler: Carlos IV of the House of Torrosa
 Government: Feudal
 Capital: Magritta or Torrosa, depending on who you listen to
 Free Towns: : Jávea
 Major exports: Shipbuilding, salt and pickled fish, linen and silk, spices, wine
 Heraldry: Gold falcon gripping a silver fish in its claws on a blue field

The Land And Its People

Magritta is a kingdom divided. Its capital city, which now bears the name of the kingdom itself, is essentially a free town ruled by a council of mercantile hidalgos, while the King holds court in a palace on the hills to the north of Torrosa, miles from the recognised capital. And as further division, it is the seat of power for the Temple of Myrmidia through the Kingdoms of Estalia.

The current King, Carlos IV, is more interested than most in seeing Magritta united again, due in no small part to the wealth of the Lustrian Treasure Fleet and the merchantmen in “the bastard port”. However, he has some doubts as to how to proceed. To this end, he is at work on raising and equipping an army. Meanwhile, he has also sent his nephew, second in line to the throne, to meet with several eligible daughters of leading figures within the Consulado who might consider changing their title to “Duque”.

His court and other noble families keep to their estates, occupying themselves with hunts, dances, and other diversions. Those less at ease with their virtual exile prefer gossip, petty intrigues and social one-upmanship, each hoping to be Carlos’ favourite the moment Magritta is united back under the king. And of course, rumours of the practice of dark arts and propitiation of gods other than Lady Myrmidia spread whenever the wealthy entertain themselves behind closed doors. Some rumours are no doubt part of the gossip. Some almost certainly are not.

Meanwhile, the Temple and its Inquisition spreads through the kingdom of Magritta, and beyond to its neighbours, giving the kingdom a more spiritual feel than its neighbours. Beyond the bases of the duelling power structures, the Most Blessed Kingdom is home to small fishing towns and fertile farmland in a crescent surrounding the great Bay of Quietude, each watched over carefully by dutiful priests. It is perhaps the quietest life in all of Estalia.

For details of the city, see Chapter Six.

“Ah, Magritta, a beautiful and powerful city with something vaguely resembling a country attached.”

*Jaime Del Aprendiz,
Consulado*

“Magritta is the kingdom. Soon, the people of Magritta will see that. All of them.”

*Luciana Della Bucha, agent
of King Carlos IV*

“King or Counsellor, all answer to Her commands.”

*Friar Anastas, Inquisitor of
Myrmidia*

“If you’re going to take over someone’s house and live in it, you should probably not let him and his family leave in peace. Sooner or later, he’ll call the Watch. Or come back himself and slit your throat while you sleep in his bed.”

Gil, burglar

Adventure Hooks

On The Block

Ships heading to Magritta from the west find themselves assailed by rather more pirates than is usual for this time of year. Is it a coincidence that the damaged ships are best able to make harbour in Torrosa? Or that this follows the king’s nephew being rebuffed by the daughter of a leading merchant who uses that route? Mother Temple does not want a war between the King and the hidalgos—not yet, anyway—and will look to delicate agents to find evidence of the truth before hostilities escalate.

Bring Me My Spear, O Clouds Unfold

Rumours spread of a new prophet of Myrmidia in the country, gathering followers and speaking out against the methods of Inquisition. The Consulado and the court in exile each suspect the other of trying to weaken the Temple and doubtless gearing up to blame their rivals. And all the while, the stories grow, suggesting that the prophet is a virgin orphan girl with golden hair—and the fiery halo of Myrmidia herself walking the world again.

Mendora

Quick Data

Official Name: The United Kingdom of Mendora and Alhabra

Ruler: King Ector del Cuerno

Government: Feudal

Capital: Almagora

Free Towns: : Chelvén, Solsona

Major exports: angora, wool and woollen goods, pickled fish

Heraldry: Vertical halved, three gold lions on a blue field left, red and black diagonal striping right

The Land And Its People

Mendora, the southernmost of the Estalian kingdoms, claims a stretch of coast from Almagora to Sitges, former capital of Alhabra. Beyond that are dusty plains and encroaching deserts in the shadow of the Abasko Mountains. During the Crusades, the Arabyans held the land from the outset, with both sides building forts and digging in for years on end. The fortified city of Solsona still controls the Tobaró Road and River Eboro leading to the Tramoto Pass and the border with Tilea.

The only fertile and hospitable land in the region lies south of the River Riaza, where low hills provide grazing for sheep and goats. The drovers have mastered a technique known as Salto del Pastor, polevaulting from rock to rock and sliding down their poles to keep up with the mountain goats in the Abasko foothills. It also proves useful against the bandits and goblinoid ruffians lingering in the hills, especially as the bandoleros have grown ever bolder and more organised in recent years. There are stories of entire villages bullied into serving the bandits' increasingly unreasonable demands.

The central desert is home now only to animals, outlaws and ghosts, lurking in ruins of Crusade forts and farms abandoned to the encroaching sands. Trading caravans keep to the Cuerno road in the shadows of the hills, because the great lizards of the desert cannot burrow underneath them. They know to avoid the ruins, despite tales of lost Templar treasures—and only the most foolish follow legends of an ancient Reman city buried in the sands, undisturbed for over two thousand years.



"We are the forgotten people of Estalia, too far from the western ocean for the riches of Lustria, too hot for the Inquisitors to trouble us. And I like it well enough that way."

*Maribel Del Revelo,
Roadwarden*

"I have all you need in life—strong hands and a stout stick."

*Elian Amarre, master of
Salto del Pastor*

"We demand bread, drink and gold, or we shoot your sheep and eat your women!"

Tercero, Bandolero

"Too many have died in these lands. Morr's bastard brother has made a home here, I think."

*Lorenzo Del Viajero,
caravan master*

Adventure Hooks

The Thickness Of Blood

A priest returning from his training in Magritta hires some travelling adventurers to escort him safely home. Expecting a hero's welcome when he returns to his extremely remote desert village, he suspects foul play when his family all but ignores him. The truth is that they are desperate to hide their ancient Arabyan heritage, something the now-fanatical member of the Inquisition must report to his superiors for possible extermination. If the adventurers discover the truth, can they convince a son to leave his home for good, or will he be forced to choose between his god and his family?

The Lost City

A caravan disappeared two months ago, but now a survivor has been found, raving about finding a city of white stone and untouched palaces filled with jewels. Most dismiss this as sunstroke boiling his brain, but there are enough foolhardy souls willing to investigate. And too few voices asking why an entire Reman city would be abandoned with riches for the taking and food still on the tables...

La Mesa

Quick Data

Official Name: La Mesa Grande et Verde
 Ruler: Prince Santos de Patricio del Molena
 Government: Feudal
 Capital: Molena
 Free Towns: : None
 Major exports: Grain, fruit, wine, honey, cotton, beef and leather
 Heraldry: Quartered red, black and white check, yellow and white

The Land And Its People

La Mesa is the heartland and breadbasket of the Estalian Kingdoms. Farms owned by hidalgo Dons and their subjects stretch for miles. The wind off the Irranas, warmed by the sun to a pleasant breeze, drives the great windmills which grind the corn.

Mesa folk by and large show a relaxed attitude to life, enjoying lengthy siestas in the heat of the day and large meals in the cool of the evening. The largest population of Halflings in the peninsula can be found here, which should indicate the pace and focus of life here quite well.

One notable exception to this is the notorious Hidalgo knight Don Lupe del Alfredo de Molena de l'Altamente Inverosímil, known for raising peasant armies against invading forces of goblins, orcs and giants who sometimes prove to exist. Most people view his antics with polite detachment, apart from the Windmill Owners' Guild who have lost a large amount of money due to his attacks on "ogres".



"The rain in Estalia falls mainly on my head."

*Traditional song
(polite version)*

"Oh yes, very nice here. Great orchards and vineyards. Humans are a bit too excitable sometimes, though."

*Paquita Manzanas, Halfling
windmill repairwoman*

"Fear no further, good maiden, for I shall save you from this ruinous fiend!"

Don Lupe del Alfredo de Molena de l'Altamente Inverosímil, shortly before being sued for criminal damage to a mill

"I began work on a play about the life and adventures of Don Inverosímil, but I had trouble with the funding. Apparently the same backers who funded my play about the vampire princess saving the Empire couldn't believe it."

Detlef Sierck, Imperial playwright

Adventure Hooks

A Plague On Both Your Houses

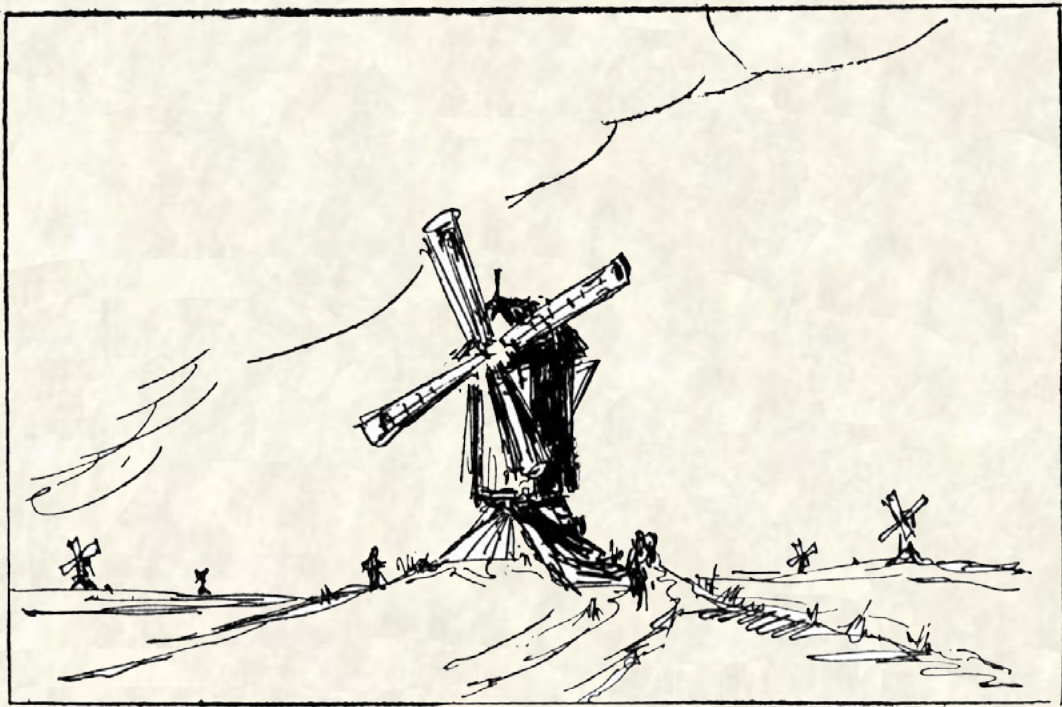
The summer crop of apples looks very promising, and the farmers are ready to put on quite a show at the market fair, when tragedy strikes. Insects descend on the orchards around Molena, seemingly from nowhere, devouring the season's hard-grown produce. How could this have happened? Did someone send them here on purpose? And why? Surely the competition for best batch of apples isn't that fierce, is it?

My Destiny Calls And I Go

A wealthy farm owner's son has run off to join Don Inverosímil's latest damn fool idealistic crusade, this time heading for the lower southern Irranas in pursuit of "the ferocious Night Goblins". His family would like him returned safe and well, the father adding that "Don l'Altamente Inverosímil falling off a mountain would be an added bonus". It would be callous to kill a harmless old knight, but when his insanity leads them further and further into endless caverns and the supplies run low, treachery breeds

The Valley of Windmills

While La Mesa is known for its windmills, the infamous Valley is far away, deep in the Abasko Mountains, bordering upon Oretano. Centuries ago, the visionary (and possibly insane) King Don Furno Esparo erected these massive structures on the tops of narrow peaks to feed his village below on fresh bread. That explanation is the one he gave to history, but it doesn't explain why the towers were so immensely tall, or why the village and the mills were abandoned within a generation. Now these rickety spires stand alone and empty, but still creaking and turning in the wind. Strange lights occasionally burn atop them, glowing green in the distance, and shadows of ratmen are sometimes seen silhouetted against those lamps. As yet, nobody has dared answer the riddle of the Valley— or at least, nobody who has dared has returned alive.



Navarre

Quick Data

Official Name: The Thrice-Blessed Kingdom Of Navarre
 Ruler: King Evaristo Del Espadachín
 Government: Feudal, supported by a federation of guilds
 Capital: Alquézaro
 Free Towns: : None
 Major exports: Wine and grapes, apples, honey, salt and dried fish, horse breeding
 Heraldry: Halved—a yellow wolf on a blue field upper, three white circles on a red field lower

The Land And Its People

Circling the western coast of the Golfo di Bidouze, Navarre sits between Bilbali and Bretonnia, and some would argue that it only exists apart from the former because of its ties to the latter—and vice versa. Its capital Alquézaro is a major hub of trade with the Bretonnians, who first forged links with the kingdom during the Second Crusade, travelling directly here from Brionne when Cantonia closed its borders and making their northern base there when Bilbali's rulers swore to fight on alone. Many of its smaller ports retain a distinctly Bretonnian look to their defences to this day, and shrines to the Lady can be found in many harbours.

Navarre's long coast has long been a centre of horse breeding, so that tall grey Navarrese chargers are prized by jousting Bretonnian knights for their speed and courage. This further strengthens ties between the nations, and is not unknown for the son of a hidalgo to travel to Brionne or Bordeaux to prove his worth in the summer tournaments. King Evaristo himself earned his reputation as a swordsman in the lists, and his second son, Infante Valentín, is known to joust under assumed names, having to change his guise and arms every time he is discovered so that his opponents will not concede immediately.

Adventure Hooks

A Plague On Both Your Houses

The bimonthly horse market in the fields surrounding Alquézaro attracts breeders, riders from many of the surrounding kingdoms, Bretonnian knights and agents of noble families. It is the reason that haggling over political deals is sometimes known as "horse trading" in the Estalian courts. So when the stallion expected to fetch the highest price of the market is stolen, the list of suspects is about as long as the list of groups attending. The anxious breeders want their prize returned, drawing the characters into the confusing world of the stud trade, coats being dyed as a disguise and the importance of looking horses in the mouth.

Bad Apples

Harvesting a crop needs workers, and poor travellers appreciate the pay and the perks of picking apples for a few weeks of the year. However, this can attract those looking for a free ride, and so many penniless strangers all working together under the summer sun mean that tempers can easily shorten. Add the ready availability of fresh wine, and you see why the orchardeers keep a few guards around just in case. So when two young men of poor means both take a shine to the grove owner's daughter, their fellow labourers would do well to keep them apart and act as go-betweens, the better to avoid bloodshed. Can the charac-

"They say the first time a child sees a Navarrese stallion, they wonder if it might be a unicorn that gave its horn away. And that the Blessed Maiden rode a white Navarre charger into battle with the armies of night. I don't know about that, but I do know that the Queen of Bilbali's carriage is drawn by four white Navarrese, and that they like apples."

Donna Natalia De La Carreras, hidalgo horse breeder

"We are near as damn it a province of two countries. No wonder the king practices with his sword every day, we're a wine dispute away from being the setting for a private war."

Melchor, scribe

"The Navarrese are fine hosts to a vagabond such as myself, the finest and wisest of a cultured and passionate people. I was honoured to ride against the heir to their throne myself. Their horses are powerful, their swords swift, their wine sweet, their daughters most amiable... but their peasants are ridiculously spoilt."

Sir Édouard De Colville, Bretonnian knight errant

Oretano

Quick Data

Official Name: The Grande Mountain Passage Of The Oretano

Ruler: Queen Piedad Della Pacifica

Government: Feudal through regional governors

Capital: Sitges

Free Towns: : Fantasporto

Major exports: : Stone, iron ore, silver

Heraldry: Halved vertically, black and yellow diamonds left, red arm holding a hammer on a white field right

The Land And Its People

Oretano was founded during the Crusades as a stronghold in the Abasko Mountains. It now encompasses the mountainous kingdom from which it takes its name, and the former trader kingdom of Tigarre. Tigarre was sacked by the Bretonnians after the Seventh Crusade fell into debt with their shipbuilders, servants of the Doge of Pavona. The Doge considered Tigarre an annoying rival, and suggested an easy way the Bretonnians could pay their debt.

The spine of the Abasko Mountains changed hands repeatedly over the decades that followed, until the Arabyans departed Fools Point leaving a region pockmarked with iron and silver mines and isolated castles built to defend its shifting borders. Today, some of the fortresses remain in use—high towers observing Tilea on one side and the other Estalian Kingdoms on the other—while Oretano's main source of trade is found deep in the mines and quarries. Sitges marble is much in demand, as is Fantasporto silver. Merchants come to haggle the price in the markets of Sitges, the one low-lying city of the Kingdom, but for many of their wares it is a seller's market, and for the rest the governors ensure that the visitors enjoy their stay. Thus, Sitges has become known for its summer festival of arts and entertainments, where musicians compete with fireworks to make the most noise and theatre troupes try to match their spectacle.



"Had they known about the silver, they wouldn't have been so quick to kill Tigarre."

*Don Macario Amanecer,
regional governor*

"Stone goes out, wine comes in. Anyone would think the lowlanders didn't have ground to stand on, much less a way to put a roof over their heads, but I'm not complaining."

Cebrián Choque, quarryman

"Sitges always puts on a good show."

Adela Calurosa, fire-eater

"I suppose we should be relieved that so few of their mines cave in."

Snorri Longshield, Dwarf engineer

Adventure Hooks

Rocky Mountains High

If someone wishes to avoid the Tramoto Pass or Fools Point, the Abasko Mountains of Oretano provide the only way of travelling from southern Estalia to southern Tilea, but it makes for hard travelling and should not be attempted without guides and guards to hand. Both are well paid for their troubles—perhaps too well for the average traveller's liking. A crafty merchant has spotted a chance for discount guides to make a killing, and will hire the first bunch of adventurers he can to get his business up and running. But the proud guides of the mountains won't enjoy the new competition at all—and there are reasons the guides are well paid in the first place.

Silence is Silver

During the Sitges summer festival, competition for various commodities sometimes turns to violence, but a silver merchant being stabbed to death by a blade stolen in the middle of a sword-swallowing act is a first. It provides a good dozen suspects, and the sword-swallower will be unable to name the assassin until his throat heals. Of course, he may not live long enough for that to happen...

Tarrocco

Quick Data

Official Name: The Ancient Empire of Tarrocco and Astarios
 Ruler: Emperor Federico III of the house of Tarro
 Government: Feudal regency
 Capital: Ubrique
 Free Towns: : Belmoz
 Major exports: : Salt fish, spices, linen, silk
 Heraldry: Bisected black and white fields with a hawk rampant in the upper right corner

The Land And Its People

Tarrocco skirts the southern coast of Estalia, a long line of open harbours and soft beaches. It was the first to be conquered by the Arabyans and the last to be retaken by the Crusaders, won by treaty rather than invasion. To this day there is a significant Araby populace. The closeness of Inquisitorial Magritta has seen more of the Arabyans move away over the years, but the minarets of their temples can still be seen in the skyline of Belmoz and they can be heard hawking their wares almost every day in the markets of Ubrique.

The nine-year-old Emperor Federico follows the advice of his mother Queen Angélica, descended from the royal family of the ancient (and purportedly elf-blooded) kingdom of Astarios. She counsels diplomacy with the Arabyans, having lost a husband and two brothers to conflict with a sheikh and unwilling to see her son follow them into the Maiden's arms, while also doing her best to maintain good relations with Mother Temple and her agents.



"Perhaps some day we won't have to keep one eye on the coast as well as the other on the road, all the while glancing back at Magritta."
 Milagros Della Roja,
 Alboran Vigilar

"Our child king and his Astari mother will see us all under the boots of the Inquisition afore the year is out!"
 Juan de Tobaró, Doomsayer

"The Emperor's great. He's the best at conkers in the whole country!"
 Hujo, street urchin

"Pretty coastline and very helpful people, all told."
 Ahmed the Red, Araby spice merchant

Adventure Hooks

Blood Royal

With a child for an Emperor and his foreign mother holding the reins of power, Tarrocco is an open invitation for pretenders to the throne. The latest claims to be a cousin of Federico the Second newly returned from fighting Arab Assassins to the south of Khemri. The adventurers are among those caught up in his campaign as it gains momentum along the Alboran Road and soon approaches open conflict with the young king's knights. Proof of the pretender's claim—or lack of it—might force the issue into slaughter or surrender.

Monkey's Business

While bartering for linen in the Araby quarter of Belmoz, the characters see a hue-and-cry pursuing... a monkey in a fez. With uncanny intelligence, it eludes all pursuit, even apparently opening doors and picking locks. Is it simply a thief of shiny objects, does it work for a sorcerer of some kind, or are the stories of a kingdom of monkeys hidden in the Southland jungles true, with this one being a spy on a vital mission?

Zaraguz

Quick Data

Official Name: The City State of Zaraguz
 Ruler: Patriarch Heliodoro
 Government: Effectively feudal
 Capital: Zaraguz
 Free Towns: none
 Major exports: timber, stone, iron ore, coal
 Heraldry: A black tower on a red field

The Land And Its People

The city of Zaraguz was once the northernmost outpost of the Kingdom of Tigarre. Its duque declared it independent when the Seventh Crusade destroyed Tigarre to settle a debt over shipbuilding. Zaraguz managed to remain apart from the ruined kingdom as later Crusades rebuilt, redrew, dissolved and refunded it. And it remains independent to this day.

A fortified city straddling the River Eboro and on the edge of the dark Sombra Wood in the shadow of the towering Abaskos and Irranas, Zaraguz is well positioned to exist apart from its neighbours, as it has for centuries. A system of Patriarchs chosen by and from the most powerful families in the city ensures that its economy continues to run smoothly and that it maintains healthy trade with the kingdoms that it sits apart from. Even so, Zaraguz's neighbours see most its people as aloof, insular and most likely insane.

Sombra Wood

Unlike the Empire, most of Estalia is empty plains, not dark, dangerous forest. Pina Wood and Sombra Wood are the two exceptions. While Pina is rumoured to hold the bright-eyed fey, red eyed vampires lurk in the darkness of the Sombra. After the defeat of the Necrarch prince Nourgul, no kingdom had the strength to kill his undead forces back to their roots in the shadows of Sombra—it was a task left to the next generation, or the Temple. While the Inquisitors and the acolytes of Morr do their best to detect the Lahmian vampires that lurk in polite society, the Necrarch stronghold of Sombra has not been left empty, and the Necrarchs work best when left alone to plot and scheme. Whoever holds Nourgul's tower now has had a long time to study his master's lore, raise another army and correct the prince's mistakes. All he needs now is the right moment to strike.

"They say we are mad. I say can they meet with their king, or even see him every week? Here, we have no king, our Patriarch is no more than a village headman."

Leocadio Del Eboro, logging impresario

"If we wanted, we could conquer Zatifa in a season. If we wanted."

Prudencio Del Roldán, soldier

"We have all we need, and more. Let the kings and queens come to us, shall we?"

Sofronio De Lasombra, charcoal burner

"Would anyone notice if the shadows of the woods swallowed them whole? Not for a month, at least."

Don Lucio Del Mateo, Mayor

Adventure Hooks

Dead in the Water

Loggers floating timber down the river to Gualcazar find a body face down at a bend in the flow—a body wearing the livery of one of the ruling families. The characters hear of this as the lumbermen discuss what to do with it. The plot thickens when somebody recognises the dead man as a person who went missing centuries before. It seems dark magic may be at work in Sombra Wood.

Never a story of more woe

The Patriarch's daughter runs off with the son of a visiting diplomat. He offers a reward for her safe return. The heir to the current ruling family joining another country could call the city state's viability into question, and so even the patriarch's rivals would like her returned, although they less particular as to whether she comes back alive, as long as she remains unwed.

Zatifa

Quick Data

Official Name: The Holy Kingdom of Zatifa

Ruler: King Ernesto Puente Eboro

Government: Senate

Capital: Gualcazar

Free Towns: : none

Major exports: : Bookbinding, printing, glassware, wine, sugar and honey

Heraldry: A purple field with an open white book in the upper left quadrant, a golden hand on the right half

The Land And Its People

Zatifa is a small kingdom north of the Mendora plains, which carried on almost entirely unmolested throughout the Crusades and the years since. However, some centuries ago, heir to the throne Prince Ildefonso was orphaned in a border war and essentially raised by his tutor, becoming a uniquely learned young man. The Scholar Prince ordered that Zatifa become a seat of learning, and set about building the renowned University of Gualcazar.

Today, in the midst of a peaceful, largely rural kingdom with lush vineyards and large apiaries, Gualcazar is rivalled on the Southern Sea only by the Pavona Collegio in Tilea, drawing scholarly children from the finest and noblest families in the Kingdoms, and attracting brilliant minds to teach, research and invigilate there. Centuries of genius have contributed to the reputation, architecture and landmarks of the city and the kingdom as a whole, and clever students from all backgrounds are drawn to the idyllic riverside Puente Eboro campuses. It is possible to see the heir to the throne of Lysboa or Cabria debating Classical theatre with the daughter of a Tarroccan merchant.

Unfortunately, even guarantees of safety cannot entirely ensure that the rich and powerful, or the poor but brilliant, are entirely safe. Some say that the politics of the Peninsula for the next generation are played out in the Puente Eboro.

Worse yet, as any seat of learning will, it also attracts those who seek knowledge for darker purposes. Vampires dwell in the hidden underground libraries, and a group of students and tutors dedicate their nights to hunting down the unholy Necrarchs who seek to usurp the city of learning.

"This is the greatest scholarly city in the Old World. Despite what those Pavona dogs think. We'll see who wins the boat race next year!"

Jacinto De Silvio, rower

"Knowledge creates and draws in secrets, mysteries, things that we should research and consider before taking action."

Guillermo del Arboleda, tutor of the Physical Sciences

"There are vampires. We should kill them."

Melisende De Matorral De Niro, student of Classical Linguistics and vampire hunter

"The Known World is definitely doomed."

Enrique Miguel Exquerra de Molena, Invigilator in history and classical studies

Adventure Hooks

The Puente Eboro Four

A group of clever students have been recruited by agents of a rival kingdom to spy on the heir to their own land. While they have little to report, the scandal of revealing this could damage the University's reputation, and helping to conceal it could lead to the spies going on to positions of power. The Dons of the University would like a third option...

Gualcazar by Night

A college town with vampires lurking underneath trying to take over the world is really bound to see conflict. Throw in rich and powerful people as targets for the undead, and ancient lore hidden in the massive college libraries, and trouble is sure to follow. Thankfully, the mortals have an edge when one of their number is discovered to be an heir to the power of the Andanti, an ancient Estalian line of vampire hunters.

The Lustrian Colonies

“A filthy, barbarous land full of lunatics and monsters. It’s worse than Tilea on a festival day.”

Vespuce Lustras, Captain of the Santa Furia

The great experiment in Estalian colonisation, the Lustrian Treasure Fleets contain ships under a number of flags. Most hail from Magritta, Badajoz and Lysboa, allies in southern expansion, while Bilbali, Cabria and Navarre more often send their own northwards on a separate route. The Estalian Main is the Kingdoms in miniature, with ports ruled by representatives of individual kingdoms and reflecting their characters and antipathies. You are more likely to meet local tribesmen, Tilean mercenaries, Bretonnian treasure-hunters or even Norse hirelings on the Magrittian island of Santa Myrmidia than Bilbalins, who cluster in their own port of Puerto Regal on the next island along.

Braver explorers and more desperate merchants press onwards into the small Estalian harbours that abut the lush jungles of mainland Lustria, seeking its fabled golden cities. Lustria is an inhospitable land, covered in a dense, steaming jungle, inhabited by creatures ranging from tiny insects to enormous thunder reptiles and under the constant watch of an ancient race of lizard folk who are as mysterious and deadly and as jealous of their territory as the Ulthuan Elves. But there are treasures worth claiming in this deadly land, and those bold enough to seek it.

Puerto Aqui is the largest foothold Estalia has managed to gain on Lustria, and serves as the de facto centre of government on that side of the ocean, or at least that’s what it tells the other colonies. With an extensive harbour and even shipwrights, it currently struggles to maintain a tight stranglehold on the trade routes back to Estalia. As Puerto Aqui is the only place large ships, especially the galleons of the Treasure Fleets, can properly dock it is the prime place to load and unload cargo. Naturally hampered by the high cliffs that surround the harbour on three sides, Puerto Aqui is kept relatively small and heavily reliant upon supplies from the homeland. Yet the view is always fantastic, the drink flows freely, and as long as one pays the bribes the time until your vessel is loaded with sugars, rare woods, and spice, can be spent quite pleasantly. Many adventurous visitors to Lustrian shores can easily pick up work if they have talent with even elementary cartography or orientation, as decent maps of the Lustrian interior are avidly sought.

Of course, there are those that find the steep prices and aggressive control Puerto Aqui exerts to be too irritating to deal with. The other primary colony the Estalians have established is further to the south, and runs a much more freewheeling port. Officially called Costa Grande, named in a drunken fit of boasting by its founder, it has become affectionately known as El Aguilito, the Little Eagle, in fond memory of home. Run by an oligarchy of sinister merchants, privateers and pirates, El Aguilito promises a freedom from the strictures and hefty taxes imposed by Puerto Aqui. Although the Little Eagle cannot compete with the facilities offered by its big brother, those who run the show know never to ask questions and to always trade with whoever docks. It is almost definite the Lustrian creatures that were taken home and then managed to escape were loaded at El Aguilito. Two particularly potent rums are also exported from here, as well as illicit items “liberated” from the other inhabitants of these lands, be they lizard, rat, elf, human, or... other.

Puerto Aqui often attempts to organise some small amount of control over El Aguilito by sending raiding ships to damage their harbour “by accidental docking” or sending word of the most offensive individuals back home to try to ensure their arrest should they set foot in Estalia. El Aguilito responds in kind by tipping off the disreputable individuals as to important shipping leaving from the large ports, sending spies to spread discord, or sending word to Estalia of corruption and abuse of authority in order to weaken Puerto Aqui’s home support.

However much the two ports may jostle for control, both are glad that the control of the Church and Her Inquisition is a good deal less. That does not mean that there isn’t a presence in Lustria, however. Founded by missionaries who seek to spread the word of the Maiden to distant shores, Las Vargas is a small and dour colony, thoroughly opposed to the wanton excesses they see in the other two. But what really sets quiet little Las Vargas apart is that they actively wish to engage the Lizardmen, believing that they have Myrmidia in their hearts, and just need to know her words. While others see the Lizardmen as an unknowable, ever-watchful and wrathful presence in the shadows, Las Vargas sends missionaries out to contact them. It is no surprise that no missionary has returned with a claim of having met a Lizardmen. Many, of course, do not return at all.

The faithful of Las Vargas are not the only ones that seek the Lizardmen. For it is said that the primitive Lizardmen make all things out of pure gold, treating it like clay or paper to make their tools and books with scant regard of its true worth. Indeed, a man who could brave the dangers of the Lustrian jungle and retrieve even a single piece of jewellery from these savages could return to Estalian shores to find himself owning his home town. Those who know better warn of the stealth and poisoned darts of the smaller Lizardmen, the strength and fury of the larger ones with their glass axes somehow stronger than Dwarfen steel. And that's not to mention the hordes of poisonous insects, the lizards the size of lions that shoot razor-sharp spines from their backs, and yet bigger ones that could tear an Araby elephant in half. Yet the lure of unimaginable wealth waiting to be retrieved from vine-covered Temple-City ruins calls to many adventurous, and avaricious, hearts.

One threat exists. Rumours persist of vampires and ratmen seen deep in the jungle. Beneath volcanos they say black lizards dwell made out fire itself. There are tales of jaguar gods and jaguar women. And on a mist-shrouded island on the great river Amaxon there lives the Koka-Kalim, in a village on stilts, half on land, half on water. They are a tribe of mighty warrior women who protect their lands from the encroachment of any male, led by the fierce Rigg the Avenger. They are said to be immortal, and given mighty strength and berzerker rage by the ingestion of a curious dark and bubbling potion they call Ke-ku-kol-ah. If the drug is what makes them so fierce, it is invaluable and dozens of Estalians have come and tried to barter for samples, or steal it, but so far with no luck. Both the two Estalian ports have tried to simulate the potion using the Ke-ku berries, and sell their concoctions at a huge mark-up claiming the beverage is genuine and potent. Each port claims that theirs is the superior product, but few outside observers agree that there is much difference.

And there are stranger stories still, of giant frogs that walk like men that lizard tribes worship as gods descended from the heavens. These, surely, are the ravings of madmen suffering from too much sun.

The Irrana Kingdoms

*"They say that every man in Estalia styles himself a king of his own tiny kingdom. That is only a slight exaggeration of the truth."
Bertoldo Cicinello di Viadaza, consul to the Tilean court*

The Irrana Mountains are home to a number of kingdoms, principalities, free cities and other lands. Some have recognisable borders, marked out by valleys and peaks within the range, while others expand, contract and disappear with each year's run of bloodshed.

Some perhaps only exist in the minds of their rulers. Five of the more static are listed below, but there are always more.

Aragones

Official Name: The Kingdom Of Aragones
Ruler: King Sergio IV
Government: Feudal
Capital: Pajena
Free Towns: Rufferto
Major exports: Stone, coal, angora, leather

Aragones formed around Pajena, a fortress town in a low pass which was isolated enough to survive the Crusades untouched while much of the land around was laid waste. Since then it has expanded slightly, while always concentrating on holding defensible positions. It is a small kingdom full of suspicious people, ever watchful for attacks by its Irrana neighbours and the untrustworthy Cantonians.

Correleone

Official Name: The Most Grand Kingdom Of Correleone
Ruler: King Alejandro de Pachino
Government: Feudal, supported by patrons from the leading families
Capital: Serpicio
Free Towns: None
Major exports: Wine and grapes, stone, coal, gunpowder

Formerly a province of the destroyed kingdom of Tigarre, Correleone is a petty kingdom with some valuable and dangerous exports. Conflicts over these resources have earned the land a reputation for violence and skulduggery. The throne has changed hands a dozen times in the last two decades, with each king before Alejandro's father meeting a violent end. The first to succeed to the throne without taking it by force, most fear that the young king will not last long. However, several likely rivals to the throne were assassinated within hours of his ascension, so he might endure despite their concerns.

Ragaños

Official Name: Ragaños
 Ruler: Prince Mariano De Bava
 Government: Feudal
 Capital: Ragaños
 Free Towns: None
 Major exports: Stone

Ragaños, once capital of a small kingdom, is an independent city trapped between the high eastern mountains and the haunted Sombra Woods. Rumour tells of deals struck with the undead that lurk in the dark forests, ensuring that the people are left in peace in exchange for a tithe of blood and bodies. Certainly, few visitors come and go and those that return tell of a city with gates barred and shutters locked well in advance of nightfall, and the Sword of Myrmidia displayed prominently on almost every door.

Tsurge Leones

Official Name: The Fair And Benevolent Republic Of Tsurge Leones
 Ruler: Aemiliano Del Brutto
 Government: Tyranny
 Capital: Durango
 Free Towns: Trinites, Nihilos
 Major exports: Wine, mercenaries, despair

The desolate mountains and high plains of Tsurge Leones have fallen into anarchy since the assassination of the last rightful king decades ago, and this lawless land is prey to bandoleros, human and otherwise. Durango, known as The City Of Lost Souls, is home to the most brutal and feared warlord, a former mercenary who indulges his every whim freely. The people hope that the Brute will drink himself to death sooner rather than later, for no-one remains with the courage to challenge him. Even now, a bounty the people cannot really pay is posted on his head, in hopes that it will attract someone willing to take him on.



Chapter VI: The Cities

*“A city is like a woman, as I shall tell:
they have their gates and high battlements,
and all are cursed and all know compliments,
and some spear-guarded and some do trade withal,
and some are polished and others now fading walls
and some be-thronged with visitors all day,
and some are honest — or so tis what they say
and all men who leave them, be he tight or soak
in penury and misery, an’ with his willsprit broke”*
The Merry Wives of Wizards, Act 2, Scene 3



Although composed of countless kingdoms, visitors and locals alike know Estalia first and foremost by her two cities. These two pillars, one north, one south, hold forth all the wonders and majesty of the southern peninsular. Their populations dwarf that of all other towns and cities, as do their power, influence and their great reach across the land and sea, throughout the Worlds both Old and New. The wealth of the world comes to Estalia through her twin capitals, and often goes no further—but this is no loss, for there are few in Estalia who have not at least once journeyed to one of its urban centres to taste its wonders. So it is no disrespect to the multifaceted nation to say that to know its capitals is to know the whole land, for on their streets you may see all Estalia, sometimes in just one afternoon.

Bilbali

*“I wouldst rather be imprisoned in thine arms
than walk a free man in any city ‘pon this
earth
Save perhaps Bilbali, where I have good
standing at several houses”*
*Two Gentlemen of Sartosa, Act 3,
Scene 3*

To the people of Bilbali, it is plain to see that they embody all that is best and greatest of the Estalian Kingdoms, if not the world. Their sailors and soldiers are said to be the bravest in the world. Their ships are the finest in human craftsmanship, forging across the vast oceans to the jungles of Lustria and Ind. From their hills flows the ore that forges the strongest blades in the Old World. Bilbali never fully fell to the Arabyan conquistadors, nor to the vampire kings or Breton raiders. Ferocious pride is the stock and trade of its citizens, and perhaps it is justified, for the city is replete with glory and the glorious. But their ferocity is fuel for dark passions and lurking madness, and pride always comes before the fall.

*“If the Estalii are the lion, then we are his
terrible roar.”*
Queen Juana della Roja

*“Their sailors are so good because if they
stay alive, they get to go home to that
beautiful city again. If the money lasted, I
can’t imagine anyone would ever leave.”*
*Friar Begel, “My Travels in the
South”*

*“To hear them talk, you think no other
Estalian ever held a blade nor dwarf ever
made one. Ridiculous, of course, but be
careful of scoffing too loudly—I got the
scar above my eye last time I made that
mistake.”*
*Diederick Nieman, Captain of
the Ingrid*

*“All eyes there watch outward, to the sea,
and upward, to the Queen. So no eyes see
me, and my brethren, as we move between
them. Sometimes, mortals make it too
easy.”*
El Djen-Djan, Vampire

History

Although not the first city to be founded on the peninsular by the settlers from the west, it was one of the fastest to grow. The hills on its coast and to its back provided natural defences, while the wide river, thick forest and bountiful sea provided plentiful resources. However, as the city grew, those resources decreased. The rodents of the river still provided fine furs, the woods provided strong trees for hulls and masts and the mountains flowed forth iron, copper, slate and clay, but after the first few centuries, there were no longer plains and fields to grow crops or raise cattle in amounts sufficient to feed the exploding city. It became clear that the future of Bilbali would lie in trade and in conquest: at sea or by sword. The principality expanded south, quickly extending into the southern mountains and conquering the Abasko state therein. The victory, however, was never complete, and to this day the men of those peaks vie for more and more freedom for their still-believed independent state. Expanding west the Bilbalins met and destroyed the kingdoms of Pechonez and Campanola and was only stopped in their conquest by the march east of the Ironskin Orks. The battles to keep these nations pacified raged for centuries, and to this day many northern towns spit at the mention of Bilbalins, considering them the worst kind of tyrants and aggressors.

The bloodshed was finally slowed with the arrival of more powerful ships and the discovery of the New World (1492 IC). The age of sail began and Bilbali took a central role. While the southern Magrittans had fast access to the countless trade routes with Tilea, Araby and the Southlands, Bilbali was the sole port of call for northern trade, to the burgeoning Bretonnia and Empire. When the Empire collapsed into prolonged civil war a few centuries later, it was only through trade with Bilbali that the northern states maintained their forces and kept them armed. To this day, the men of Marienburg sometimes call a sword a "Bilbi". Lacking competition with their Tilean neighbours also allowed Bilbalin fleets to be more successful with their journeys across the Great Western Ocean, plundering Lustria and Naggaroath alike for precious metals and exotic jewels.

Bilbali's economic strength and land area were further increased in the aftermath of the devastating Arabyan conquest. The rest of Estalia fell under the Arabyan onslaught, and paid dearly in throwing off the yoke of the invaders. However, the march of elephants and camels never quite pierced the mountains, and with access to military support from the sea, Bilbali was able to shake off the minimal occupying forces faster than any of the other states. When the tide turned and the Breton Crusaders arrived, the armies of Bilbali had suffered the least damage, and the generals of Bilbali were at the forefront of the reclamation.

It was at this time that Bilbalins began anointing themselves as the saviours of the land and thus the rightful rulers of all the Kingdoms. This was never a very popular view in the south. Or indeed anywhere outside of Bilbali.

Queen Juana continues to make this claim, although not as loudly as some of her ancestors. With the ascendant Mother Temple and her Inquisition being based in Magritta, Bilbali is for the first time in centuries taking orders from her southern rival. The tight reigns of the Inquisition does much to stem civil and external wars, while the elves seem to be doing more and more to restrict trade across the western ocean. Bilbali thus finds itself losing its traditional sources of power and wealth. Much of their land is now a dustbowl from deforestation (or other, darker events) and Bilbali has generally relied on its wealth to buy the food it needs. With Magritta's rise, Bilbali is making concessions and retreats for the first time since the Crusades. No Bilbalin can easily stomach such injuries to their pride, and blame for the situation flies thick and fast. Revolution fomented against the rulers in every level of society, from the wealthiest nobles to the lowest gutter-scum, while the Queen herself ponders the consequences of war to establish her total absolute (and divinely appointed) dominance over the entire peninsular.

To be a Bilbalin is to never take a step backwards from a challenge; to stand brash, unbowed and defiant; to roar loud and let the world tremble at the sound of it. The Estalian peninsular is not at all a stranger to civil strife and border wars, but something much bigger and far more destructive is stirring in the proud streets of this shining jewel. When it wakes, the entire Old World will feel the shockwaves.

Sayings of Bilbali

"At sea or sword"—Who knows where. Comes from the general fate of missing or dead men, they have either gone to sea (or died there) or joined the army (or died fighting in its ranks).

"Only lions roar"—bragging is rarely without substance.

"Like a Magrittan maiden"—that which does not exist

The Shape of the City

Bilbali is a city somewhat divided, and not just by the Suenos, the river which winds through it. The city proper sits half a mile downstream from the great harbour. The long gently arcing harbour edges around a wave-tossed bay, the only break in the rocky, cliff-shadowed coastline that runs away east and west. To the east of the boardwalks towers the Acantilado Del Locos, its sheer grey face honeycombed with countless cave-mouths that hide more than just bats and razorbills.

Between the port and the city snakes a thin corridor of tavernas, bordellos and stores known as Pedlar's Row. Those who live and work here make it their sole mission to remove every penny from an arriving sailor before he has a chance to reach the shops and cafes of the main city. Fiery, criminal and often violent competition exists between the proprietors of Pedlar's Row, with each trying to be the first and most attractive sight to greet a tired sailor's eyes. Many proprietors even leave their stalls or employ street-walkers to capture attention, so that walking pedlar's row is like running a gauntlet of proffered merchandise and shouted services, and only the fiercest or fastest arrive in town with their purse intact.

Those who make it beyond Pedlar's Row will come into the city through its northern gate, set in its thick sandstone walls. The city has recently grown beyond these military protections, but continues to use the warm orange walls for ornament and sculpture. Indeed, the city is absolutely bedecked with ornamental structures. Due to the abundance of all kinds of metals and stones in the mountains, and even more precious metals arriving by sea, Bilbali is overrun with unusual architecture, some of it stunningly beautiful; others simply stunningly odd. With each new military triumph or trade bonanza, either a new building is erected to honour the general or sponsor, or a park or square is established to hold their statue. Thanks to the mild southern climate Bilbali is also as famous for its verdant and numerous parks as the elaborate pinnacles above them.

The profusion of parks and squares makes the streets hard to navigate, as the streets seem to spiral towards each landmark. Despite its constant trade industry, the city is not one suited to the rapid travel of carts and horses, or anyone in a hurry. There is indeed only one bridge, in the southern end of the city, when the banks finally come too close to allow any more ships to dock. Although the city extends beyond the so-called Ultimo Puente, or final bridge, many consider anything south of it to be lesser than the rest of the city. The river itself is as cherished as Bilbali's parks as a site for celebration and relaxation, and is always dotted with small craft.

Equally popular are the wide sandy beaches, or playas, on either side. The visitor to Bilbali is forced to wonder which came first: did the city have so many celebrations it created a thousand places to hold them, or did they simply create their seemingly endless series of holidays to fill their excess of plazas de populi?

As the city extends south towards the Ultimo Puente, the roads slowly slope upwards, and the denizens also become wealthier. Partly this is because of logistics: the wealthier merchant can afford to travel further to the markets and docks, but it also corresponds to proximity to the Palazio Splendido and the towering Catedral of Santa Gabriela. In the eyes of the Queen and Aquila Alta Hembre, Ultimo Puente does indeed mark the end of all that matters. Down the hill, these lords can survey, resplendent before them, all that is greatest of Bilbali, greatest city in the known world. And what lies behind is irrelevant.

Important Locations

The Timbre Tormenta

In the centre of the harbour is a small circular island just big enough to hold the Timbre Tormenta—the Bell of Storms. This large brass bell atop a rickety copper stand is the sole storm warning and navigation device in the harbour, and if it failed on a stormy night, Bilbali's fortunes could be destroyed in a stroke. However, the difficulty of actually landing on the rock prevents regular maintenance. The precarious position also protects it from sabotage, although many sailors swear they have seen lights and shadows underneath it, late at night. Even more strangely, nobody can remember where the bell came from, or why it has strange triangular glyphs cut into either side. The original bell, the Timbre Luce, was placed there by Myrmidia herself, but was stolen centuries later by Norse raiders. Many adventurous types in Bilbali's port taverns talk of manning an expedition to retrieve it.

Rueda Del Morta

The Rueda Del Morta's name is not just an affectation. This rough sailor's taverna does indeed possess a wheel of death: a giant water wheel cuts through the pier, with room inside for two men to stand, if they step fast enough to keep their balance on the sea-slick steps. The sailors of Bilbali are famed for their courage and inside the Rueda, they can prove it in single, bloody combat. The current reigning champion (and special drawcard) of the Rueda is the so-called "Man-Dragon of the Jucata".

A gigantic humanoid lizard complete with claws that can tear a man's arms off and a scaly skin that seems to shed damage as a duck sheds water, there are few who can last the required three minutes in the wheel against him. The prize is immense for those who do, however, and the anger of the regular attendees grows with each Man-Dragon victory, so there is no end to those willing to try, or plans on how they might find a way to succeed.

The Shipyards

Bilbali's harbour is small compared to the truly gigantic ports of Marienberg and Erengrad in the north. The same cannot be said of its shipyards. Bilbali has the resources, the workforce and the technical skill to make what are arguably the best transport, exploration and war ships in the Old World. Certainly they are the strongest and best armed, bristling with cannons of the finest Djurango iron, and cut with sails of the strongest Barbozan canvas. Despite these powerful ships, however, the sea remains incredibly deadly, and the demand for new vessels never ends. The hammers of the shipyards are never silent, the forges never cold and the wagons of supplies arrive all day and night. Ensuring that the work goes ahead at maximum pace is not easy, as the gigantic ships and their surrounding scaffolding are often homes for vermin, thieves and unnatural beasts, while the convoys to and from the hills are regularly targeted by raiders, solitary vampires and the occasional greenskin pack. Since most shipbuilding is funded by merchant sailors it is not blessed by protection from the state: there are few laws to protect its workers, and fewer proteges or vigiles interested in enacting them. There are also plenty of business rivals keen to sabotage certain projects, or protect their own. Adventurers can find easy work at the yards, although more than a few have fallen to their death between the half-completed decks, or been prey to those things which hunt within them.

El Septicalle

The area known as "the Seven Streets" is the old town of Bilbali, encasing the seven streets that were the extent of the original settlement. For most of the history of the city, this has been a poor area but since the city has expanded beyond its walls the poor now live there, and the newly rich clamour to reinvigorate this ancient neighbourhood. This has led to some of Bilbali's wealthiest merchants living in hollowed-out ruins that lack their own well or privy. But the connection to ancient Bilbalin history is enough to sustain the new tenants, as are the continuing rumours and legends of great treasures and secrets left undiscovered from centuries past, now hiding perhaps behind a single layer of plaster or wood.

Playa Grande

Playa Grande is the largest beach in the city, and throughout the summer is full of people enjoying the sun, the sand and of late, even the waters of the blue Suenos. The shore is also crowded with pavilions and stalls for those who tire of the sun, but few do: rich and poor, local and tourist alike enjoy taking to the water wearing clothes so indecent they would shock Countess Emmanuelle. The fashion standards of this popular new pastime have led to the beach gaining another purpose, too. It being almost impossible to secrete even the smallest dagger in a bathing costume, a state of political détente can exist on the Playa. In a city where politics is soaked in blood, this provides a vital safe ground for discussions, and more politics is discussed on any given sunny day on the Playa than in a month at the palace, all under the veil of joyous waterside frolics. Even the Queen herself has been known to come down to the water's edge in her sedan chair, although it remains as yet unclear whether she enjoys the activity or simply needs the political vantage point. The only people who do not swim are the staunch clerics of Myrmidia. With Mother Temple decrying any form of indecency, the priests take a dim view of the bathing fad. As yet Aquila Hembre lacks sufficient power to outlaw the practice, but his sermons are becoming increasingly critical of the activity, and it would only take a few public incidents of immorality to transform his rhetoric into proclamation. In the meantime, the fortunes of many are made and lost on the golden sand, and the common epithet of those who have been soundly out-manoeuvred there is that they hate the Playa, not the game.

New Talent: Fire-Blooded

Bilbalins are naturally arrogant and tactless, but there are some among them who take this to greater heights. This trait, known as being "fire-blooded", is always accompanied by thick, blood-red hair. Queen Juana gets her nickname "Della Roja" because she clearly possesses this characteristic. The Fire-Blooded are enormously fierce and cannot be argued with or persuaded upon any manner but are also all too often known to go mad. Characters with the Fire-Blooded Talent may add +20% to their Willpower for all Tests to resist all Charm or Intimidation attempts, but suffer -10% to any Willpower Tests made to resist gaining a disorder due to an Insanity Point increase. Any Character born in Bilbali may exchange one of their starting Talents for Fire-Blooded.

Bilbali Books

Bilbali is like unto a steamtank of salesmanship but it deals so primarily in its staples of wine, women, jewels and sucre that the little things are often forgotten. Manuscripts, for example, are not the common trade of the Bilbalin streets. Yet sometimes they can be the most valuable things of all.

Those who would seek such knowledge should come to Bilbali Books, but they must bring great wit and courage, for the shop is not designed to be friendly. Their collections of books is wide-ranging but totally unorganized and sorting through the roof-high piles and twisted shelves is a skill of both physical and mental dexterity. What's more, the proprietor Don Bernardo Negres, is a wild-eyed lunatic, known to accuse his customers of being daemons sent to kill him. More than once he has leapt unannounced upon people entering his store, attempting to put them in a sack to send back to Chaos Wastes. His assistant is no better: the gigantic hairy fool with a mountain-man's beard does little besides chuckle to himself and claims to be part troll—and smells bad enough for it to be true. Buying books there is always an adventure, but if it is treasure maps or ancient diaries that are sought, there is simply no equal, and the “quirky” staff do help keep other treasure-hunters away.

El Lustriador

Caza Blanca means “the white hunt”. To a sailor, this means whaling, searching for the white plume that indicates one of the great mammals has surfaced. In the underworld of Bilbali, the white hunt is a slang term for the assassination of royalty, and by extension, the political machinations that are built on and around the practice. As Queen Juana is the royal most targeted for assassination in Estalia, if not the entire Old World, the Caza Blanca is played constantly and ardently in her city. The proteges do little to stop it, assuming they could—all they can do is round up the usual suspects of ne'er-do-wells, a group to which any assassin would never belong. So the deaths continue, and Ricardo Arnaz, the proprietor of El Lustriador, will be damned if he isn't going to make money from it.

On the surface, El Lustriador appears to be a popular taverna with a slightly seedy reputation; wealthy enough to pay off the proteges so it can provide gambling and whores and contraband whisky to those willing to pay the prices. The real business takes place upstairs, where the rich and powerful of the city don't simply plan assassinations, but bet heavily on their outcomes. Odds are given not just on whether the target lives or dies come the morning, but also how far the assassin gets within the palace, how he gains entry, the method chosen for the killing, and how, if ever, he is eventually stopped.

It is considered cheating to arrange your own assassination, but paying others to foil one you bet against is perfectly legal by the group's standards.

When politics fails to provide such games to wager upon, the gamblers rely on Ricardo to provide ne'er-do-wells and treasure-hunters with grand and elusive goals to pursue. The group particularly enjoy giving tasks to travelling adventurers, for such people are wildly unpredictable and touched by some strange hand of Fate, making the gambling extremely exciting.

The Bloody Lawn

Like every Estalian city, Bilbali is overburdened with sword-fighting schools, each with their own techniques and own grand masters at their head. It is thus no great surprise that two of them should overlook one of the many lush parks of the city. However, close neighbours make sharp rivals, and the centuries have only further inflamed and indentured the terrible rivalry that grips these two academies. The result is the Placa Del Aventura is now known as the Bloody Lawn.

To the north is the Escula Dellaluna, a school which focuses on flashy strikes and misdirection. To the south is the Collegio Classico, which believes in a regimented and formal system drawn from battlefield drills. Each evening, when classes finish, the students of both schools spill out into the tavernas around the lawn to do what students do after classes. Naturally this leads to boasting and grandstanding, and soon enough there are blades drawn and blood spilled. A brave son of Estalia dies about once or twice a month on the Lawn, but nobody seems inclined to do anything to stop it. Both schools are so entrenched in their rivalry they would consider it the gravest dishonour to urge their students towards restraint, and the taverna owners know that every battle brings a good crowd. Indeed, on a quiet night the baristas have been known to throw veiled insults or orchestrate “accidents” to ensure their clientele gets an exciting show.

The Dellaluna is run by “Ramirez” Callodonnoso, a dwarf who has changed his name and adopted a ridiculous accent in order to prove his true allegiance to Bilbali rather than his karak or dwarfen race. The insistence on wearing bright red clothing and ostrich feathers in his hat is less understood. His different build led him to develop all sorts of exotic fighting styles, including fighting “dirty”, and he teaches this flexible approach to all his students. El Collegio Classico is headed by Inigo Zurdo. Inigo studied swordplay obsessively from the moment he could hold a blade and knows every style and every manoeuvre ever performed in the peninsular. That Ramirez occasionally defeats him with raw cunning cuts Inigo to the core, and drives him back to evermore relentless training and relentless drinking, dreaming of the next encounter.

The White Hunt

She moved in a way he had never seen before.

Her fingers stroked the night breeze that was blowing through the taverna courtyard as if she were running them through its hair. Her arms rose and fell in curves, begging for an embrace. As she turned, her split skirt frothed like foam around her calves, concealing and revealing dimpled knees and smooth tanned thighs.

He wondered how they'd gotten so brown and his mind spun with images of her searching for shellfish in the rockpools on the beach by the city, her skirt hems tucked into her waistband. Or sprawling on the sand wearing even less... In a shadowed corner near the stage, Esteban suppressed a groan and wrenched his mind back to reality. Dancing girls were not what he was here for.

His master had returned from Araby under great secrecy. Salvadore dela Parseto had been compelled to break his exile due to the present, disgraceful circumstances (in the privacy of his head, Esteban spat at the thought of Salvadore's profligate brother-in-law) but the dangers were been enormous.

The large crowd filling the courtyard cheered as the dancing girl finished in a flurry of skirts and twirling limbs. Esteban was momentarily distracted once more. He had very few vices—drink dulled the senses, food was to sustain rather than to indulge in. But women—oh, the beautiful creatures. And it had been a long time since he'd seen Estalian women.

Her smile was for him; he knew it. The way she looked through her lashes into the cheering crowd, sliding her eyes from one to another before resting on him. How she shook her hair over her almost bare shoulders and tilted her head back to bask in the adoration streaming from the crowd.

The taverna-keeper strode past them onto the stage, announcing in his hearty voice the delicious food and wine laid out on the tables at the back for all to enjoy. Laughing and chattering, with some more persistent men showering compliments on her, the throng left the dancing girl and moved towards their repast.

"Esteban," his master murmured. "We must go, if we are to make our rendezvous."

The bodyguard nodded. The pair kept the stage at their backs as they followed the gentle flow of the crowd. All that was needed was to get to the small door leading to the walled orchard and his master would meet those who could help him in his revolución...

The scent of wild rose filled the air around him and his head automatically turned. The dancing girl was descending from the stage, her skirt offering tantalising glimpses of what lay underneath as she did. There were still a fair number of people milling about and she had to slide past him to wend her way through, pushing her body against his. Her hair glowed and the green enamelled bird nestled there glistened in the torchlight. She smiled coyly through long dark lashes and Esteban felt his face break into the self-assured smile that always charmed the young ladies.

There was a wet sound and an intake of breath from his master.

Esteban's head snapped towards him as Salvadore began to sag, clutching his side. Both men's gaze turned downwards. The hilt of the dagger was beautifully engraved and if it hadn't been protruding from the upper ribs of his master, Esteban was sure he would have admired its craftsmanship. What filled his mind now was its frightening accuracy.

Blood seeped through Salvadore's fingers, leeching from his face and he raised his stricken eyes to his impotent protector. "Esteban—" he whispered, his legs giving out. "No!"

Esteban seized hold of him and lowered him to the ground. Frantically looking around them, he saw nothing but the crowd still moving steadily towards the banquet, only looks of curiosity being thrown towards the pair on the ground. The dancing girl had vanished along with her damned scent.

"Esteban... beware..."

"Someone calls the proteges!" he screamed. A murmur rose, growing in agitation and alarm as babbling people knelt down beside him and tried ineffectually to help. "Master—"

"Esteban... beware... the green... green... eagle..."

His master's eyes rolled back and Esteban felt his spirit leave his body. The shouting of the crowd, the loud commands of the arriving proteges all faded to nothing as he stared at the corpse in his arms. His eyes fell to the dagger, now tacky with drying blood.

Beneath the red smears, he could make out an eagle in green enamel.

Ramirez, by comparison, drinks before he fights, to better fire his more desperate and ferocious style. Between warm wine and hot blood, the death toll continues to skyrocket.

Galleria Del Arté Y Maravilla Y Fenomonico

Many of the great works of art produced in the city are displayed in the city streets—or are part of them. The Gallery of Art, Wonder and Phenomena holds the rest. This immense gallery is across the square from the palace and is frequently visited by the Queen, who is also an ardent patron of the arts, even funding more than just portraits of herself or buildings for her family. The Queen in fact encourages the exotic and the avant-garde, both in subject matter and style, which means that works that the Empire would consider distasteful, illogical and even heretical can find pride of place. The lurid works of Girardi del Vors hang here, including the early sketches of his final, gore-soaked piece, *A Grim Feast* (see the *Tome of Corruption* for more on this)—and the museum would pay highly for the return of the final work. There is also Dari's *Jirafi Di Inferno*, said to be painted from life during Dari's voyage to the Chaos Wastes. Another key piece is the haunting *Generica*. Although said to be “of nothing at all”, those who regard the strange markings of *Generica* for too long find themselves weeping uncontrollably, scrabbling at the eyes to stop the tears, a testament to the sheer emotional power of the work.

The marvels and phenomena galleries include all manner of mechanical devices, inventions and triumphs of science and design, ranging from the latest in skin-pleasing upholstery to the world's oldest pickled ham. As the exciting world of scientifica sweeps the nation, here you will also find sedan chairs that travel on steam-powered legs, the automatic chicken plucker and the flame-shooting *Inferno Pistol*. Nautical technology is also here, including a demonstration of the *Twin-Timing* experiment. This experiment is so far the greatest step towards solving the immense problems of navigation caused by the inability of clocks and compasses to work in the wild and magically potent waters of the Great Western Ocean. Twin brothers are linked using a magical binding spell, then one is sent across the sea while the other remains under observation at the Galleria. Each day, at a certain time, the twin in Bilbali is injured mildly with a knife, with the spell causing the one at sea also shows the injury, allowing perfect time calculation on board the ship in question. Of course, sometimes a simply knife cut is not sufficient, and to be sure of success, the scientists have been known to increase the stimulation—in the name of science, of course.

There are also collections of the strange and exotic, collections which are dominated with artefacts from the New World.

These include mummified and stuffed corpses of the bizarre Lizardmen, and many of the holy relics, magical artefacts and ancient texts of their culture. Nobody can yet understand the childish scribblings on them but examining wizards agree that they possess some primitive magical power (astounding for such a degenerate race). Living plants and animals are also kept here, in glasshouses and terrariums. One room hosts an aviary the size of a chapel, holding thousands of unique birds with plumages in all the colours of the rainbow. Many of these die due to the weather or inappropriate diet, but they are then moved onto the cabinets of stuffed animals, of which there are hundreds. Other birds have become transformed by their new situation. The numnum in particular has become popular as a pet for nobles, shedding its once sleek wading form to become fat and clumsy, and its name comes from the Estalian word for jester (*nummeno*). Indeed, it has been remarked that the numnum has not only forgotten how to fly but has forgotten it has forgotten, leading to many of them to be found leaping out of trees or from hacienda windows, only to plummet ungracefully (and injuriously) to the ground. More than one gardener at the palace has been seriously injured by a plummeting numnum, but the Queen dotes on them, and has shown herself willing to execute anyone who harms her precious pets.

The collection is extensive but extremely well catalogued by dedicated civil servants and passionate academics. To date, only one truly notable piece has gone missing: the captured Lizardmen slave brought back by the explorer Conrado, who used to stand proudly in the centre foyer. Alas, his captors mistook his calm demeanour for an acceptance of his fate, and loosened his chains. They were repaid for their kindness with the insult of his murderous escape. Both the Queen and the museum would pay a king's ransom to have their special exhibit returned.

to better fire his more desperate and ferocious style. Between warm wine and hot blood, the death toll continues to skyrocket.

The Two Carlos

Strangers to Estalian politics often slip up over the fact that it has two Carlos in positions of power. The first is King Carlos IV, ruler of Magritta (or not, depending on who you ask), a long-bearded fellow of some age. The second is Prince Carlos, husband and consort to Queen Juana, a young buck with no beard and raven-black hair in a widow's peak. Originally, the Queen chose not to elevate the Prince to King lest people assume he was ranked above her. However this situation leads foreigners to infer that her Prince Carlos is less important than the southern King Carlos, so she is looking for some way out of this. Naming herself Empress Juana would be ideal, and she is looking for some fresh conquest to justify this. In the meantime, a Bilbalin or Magrittian who has his Carlos confused by another will respond with typical Estalian fury.

El Palazzo Splendido

It is tradition for each new monarch of Bilbali to add a new extension to the already large and elaborate palace. Thanks to the surfeit of precious metals coming from the mountains and across the sea, and the encouraging climate of local artists, each new addition is more lavish, ornate and glided than the last. This has created a building that both blinds the eyes with its gleaming wealth and boggles the mind with its changing, discordant designs. Many a visiting noble (or late-night assassin) has found themselves at a loss at how to enter a given wing or trapped in a corridor after a wrong turn. It is because of this that the most of the day-to-day politics of the realm is conducted on the playas or indeed, at the Temple del Santiago across the calle. It is also one reason why most official functions are hosted outside of the palace: in the stunning water gardens behind, in the Campo Del Moro square that sits in front of its grand entrance, or any of the many parks around the upper city. The other reason for these many outside occasions is of course the famously fabulous Estalian weather, which permits both day and night celebrations all year round. So much of courtly life happens outdoors in Estalia that in less clement and more barbaric nations, Queen Juana is dubbed the “Outdoor Queen”. Queen Juana wears this moniker with pride however, for other countries are not as blessed as Estalia, and must be pitied for it.

The House of the Scorpion

Bilbali is a city of masques; nothing is what it seems. The House of the Scorpion appears to be a swordfighting school and gentlemen’s club for young caballeros. Behind this, however, is a dedication not just to the art of the sword, but something more visceral, more pure. At this house, they worship the art of murder, and its master, the God Khaine.

It is no great step for a man obsessed with mastering the art of battle to become consumed with the art of delivering death. Indeed, many of the House’s faithful see no distinction at all. To them, the rest of the city’s bladesmen have some strange mental impediment making them unable to see that swordfighting and killing are the same thing, especially since many Estalian schools have rather flexible rules regarding honourable fighting. Likewise, those loyal to the Scorpion do not learn assassination techniques such as the use of daggers or poison—they focus only on the sword. The difference is the goals of their training, and the obedience of their faith. So dedicated are the members of the House that they will kill anyone they are ordered to, even their own relatives, seeing the target as nothing more than a test and sacred rite. This perfectly suits the secret masters of the House, who are High Elf mariners from the island of Ulthuan.

The High Elves refuse to let the newcomers have any true command of the oceans, and having a loyal army of killers in Bilbali is a cornerstone in their plans to ensure this. Other houses, with different names, exist across Estalia and Tilea, but Bilbali’s is the largest, and by far the most dangerous.

Magritta

*“In northern Kislev do we take our scene;
Where women art warm as the weather cold
As the very opposite of far Magritta”
Teclis Androgynous, Act 1, Scene 1*

Estalian mariners call her “the shimmering pearl in a stone shell”. The shell is the stony-beached bay secluded beyond the twin headlands of Pilaes di Mari, known as the Bay of Quietude, for its sheltered waters are both deep and unnervingly still. Even when winter storms rage in the southern sea, there is barely a ripple of recognition in the bay. At its centre sits the pearl: the city of Magritta. Due to the fierce sun and cool waters, the city first embraces the observer as a hazy vision of gleaming white architecture and terracotta roofs. Closer still the gilded spires of the Grand Temple of Myrmidia appear, dominating the city skyline. As ships draw into harbour this vision is replaced with a more realistic scene of the great port: gritty, bustling and loud.

Centuries of trade have made Magrittans cosmopolitan, but no less Estalian. In contrast to what they see as the uncultured north, citizens are relaxed, friendly and welcoming to new visitors and new ideas. Foreign traders coined the adage that “Visiting Marienburg is prudent, Magritta a pleasure”, and the thriving markets and tavernas are testament to this. Naturally, Magrittans cherish this reputation and will go to great lengths to preserve it, mindful that it is coveted by a handful of other maritime states. To this end Magritta employs diplomacy across the seas and where necessary deploys the Armada, her feared war fleet, to crush her foes.

History

The annals of the cult of Myrmidia record that a relic known as the Aegis Solar or Sun Shield was discovered on what became Mount Escudo. Here the first stone of Myrmidia’s temple were laid.

Whether the legend is true or not, Myrmidia could not have chosen a better location to set a city. Poised on the high mountain, it can see all attackers coming, and rain down destruction upon them. In its sheltered bay and at the mouth of the Turia River, Magritta thrived, trading the goods of the Estalian interior with elsewhere and feeding its population the fruits of the calm sea.

Chapter VI: The Cities

The bay made a perfect shipyards and Magritta's navy grew alongside its city—a navy used often to ensure Magritta's trade vessels reached their ports unharmed, for the sea lanes of the Old World has always been hotly contested.

As its caravels navigated the coasts of the southlands and Araby, trade and the city flourished. This attracted envious attention from the south where the Arabyan caliphs had also been growing in power and ambition. Initially Magritta bore the brunt of the Caliphs forces and to the dismay of the hopelessly outnumbered defenders, the noble dynasty fled north at the first signs of battle. Besieged for eight long years, the city was then taken in inches, and, by some accounts, never broken as a handful of Templars refused to yield the inner bastion of cells beneath the Temple. Outside, however, the city was ruled by the sheik Emir Wazar, also known as Emir the Cruel. To this day Magrittans spit at the mention of the name of that hated invader.

When the Arabyans were repelled, Magrittan merchant captains made fortunes ferrying vengeful knights to Araby on crusades. These captains went on to form the Consulado, a powerful guild to protect and regulate their interests. The returning monarchy was unable to ignore this shift in power and Magritta endured three tense centuries of rule by 'Los Treces' an informal triumvirate of King, Church and Consulado. By the fourth century of this rule tensions had broken out into open conflict between the Monarchy and the Consulado culminating in 1751 with the Captain's Revolt. The ship-owners backed by their captains turned their cannon on the Alcazar Palace practically levelling a quarter of the city and forcing the Magrittan monarchs to retreat to their hinterland haciendas and relinquish control to what they dubbed a 'rabble of merchant hidalgos'.

Ultimately the lot of the average Magrittan did not change. They traded a blue-blooded elite for a wealthy one but there was peace and the Consulado ruled with a fiscal prudence lost on the monarchs. The 'rabble' issued in the new era known as Ouverto; a period of openness which saw patronage of arts and innovation and an influx of foreigners. This policy was ultimately checked by the rise of the Inquisition and the discovery of a Slaaneshi sect thriving in Myrmidia's holy city. The razing of La Rana by Inquisitors marked the beginning of this policy, and the firm re-establishment of the temple's hand in the running of the city. The Inquisition gained favour however by crushing corruption amongst the wealthy. They also ensured that all the ships of the Consulado obeyed the Rules of Sea Trade and were licensed to the city and its powers. Those that did not were branded as pirates, and so Magritta's now-famous vendetta against these criminals began in earnest.

Today the city maintains a massive fleet of its own, dedicated to protecting the city and its interests—mainly through hunting down pirates wherever they can be found. They also believe in enforcing their trade treaties with steel and gunpowder. Should a Tilean or Araby ship of any decent size tries to slip past the Bay of Quietude without making port and paying due, they will almost certainly discover a Magrittan war galley off their bow, directing them to correct their mistake immediately. Again, failure to uphold Magritta's Rules is the same as piracy, and pirates are given no quarter. Some traders are good enough sailors to avoid the bigger, slower Estalian ships. Most don't push their luck.

Meanwhile Magritta's licensed merchant captains race the Tilean rivals far afield. Each year they sail further into the unknown, seeking greater and greater conquest and the trade goods it provides. At present the most famous is Captain Mercantez, a veteran of numerous bold expeditions. Word has been recently received that he has reached Koto, a city in the state of Nippon. This news has created a buzz in taverns across the city, especially as the last rumour was that he had sailed over the edge of the world.

"It is clear as to me now as my first day at the Convent. When Giovanna first saw the Temple she fell to her knees and wept. So you understand; from that moment, Magritta's primacy was assured."

Capitana Sofia, Shield-Maiden of the Eagle Legion

"Gather round please! Behold the first and last bastion of the civilised world! The priests claim that if the temple were ever to fall, the lands of men will disappear under a tide of darkness..."

Inigio Raul, Old City Guide to band of pilgrims

"When upon I clasped eyes upon this work of the manlings, this fortress of strength and skill I thought unto myself: what next? Shall they grow beards and mine gold?"

Lozemaster Margrim of Barak Varr in "Voyages in the Southern Sea"

"Marienburg always wants to make sure she comes out ahead in any trade, but in Magritta, they worship money in a much more ecumenical fashion. And the whores are exquisite. Just don't go beyond the wall, boys."

Rurik the Rotten, Ship's Bosun

"The enemy can do the most damage inside your battlements—so it is here, even in Myrmidia's great fortress, that we must be the most vigilant."

Aquila Negra Tanja Torqueda, of the Inquisition

"Of all Estalia, this place is the most Tilean. It's so civilised I can almost stand to use the privies."
Tilean Bladesman Mario Hermanio, moments before being killed

Politics

Though the official head of the City State remains the King Carlos IV of Magritta anyone from the city or beyond can testify that control of port itself lies in the hands of the men who have driven its success: the Merchant-Captains.

These figures are shipping magnates at the head of wealthy merchant or noble families. They own their vessels outright and have the ability to fund the trading expeditions that bring riches back into port. A handful of the most powerful of these oligarchs sit on the Consulado, a merchant's guild-cum-council, where they hold real political influence and tend to municipal affairs. Currently three individuals stand apart from their peers; Don Lorenzo De Calamarra of the ancient shipbuilding dynasty, Don Balthazar Alfarez whose exclusive Arabyan contacts pay handsomely and the ruthless Dona Ximenesa Cadena who, it is claimed, poisoned her own father to hasten her succession.

However neither King nor Consulado can match the power and popularity held by the Cult of Myrmidia. Put simply, without the Temple there might be no Magritta. The *Templa Ultima* intervenes rarely in the affairs of state or trade but at such times when they choose to do so it invariably alters the history of the City. Some liken Magritta to being a beast with two heads, one of faith and one of trade. However pilgrims and scholars come bearing trade, and trade gold fill the chests of Mother Temple; in Magritta, the two heads work well together.

The sole recent exception is the Inquisition's decision to make prostitution illegal. So far the city has worn the loss of income and found loopholes, but it chafes under the regulation. Should the Temple or the Consulado push the issue further, the city might discover the danger of a two-headed beast fighting itself.

"Upon this land is my Temple. No blood shall be spilt here."

Translation of the ancient inscription on the Aegis Solar

The Shape of the City

Twin Peaks

As it enters the Bay of Quietude the river Turia curves its way between two promontories on which Magritta is built upon. The low bulk on the western bank is the holy Mount Escudo, atop which sits the Grand Temple and two thirds of the cities' districts, known as barrios, surround it.

This is the ancient core of the city and its spiritual heart. Spanning the river, the great bridge of *Puerta Nagari* connects—almost a hundred feet above the river—high Escudo with the eastern barrios which are in turn overshadowed by the opposing peak of *El Alcazar*; the royalist fortress once both the winter residence of the King and the home of the Duke. Crumbling and overgrown, the Alcazar has become a metaphor for the fate of the monarchy. The fine bleached stone villas and orange groves that surround the castle are also quiet now. The high nobility have completely vanished from the city, only to be remembered in street names and on the lips of storytellers in tavernas.

Below the peaks the cities are a maze—literally—of high walls and gated courtyards, joined by narrow "portos". With a long history of fending off invaders from without and social climbers from within, the city's barrios and districts were barred to outsiders with stone and wrought iron, and this legacy remains even when the purpose of a city zone has long changed. The narrow paths and circuitous routes this has created make cart traffic impossible in most of the city, and foot-traffic a slow crawl the long way around. Clever urchins or street denizens can make a fair trade by selling their services as guides, wall-hoppers or renting out tunnels or crannies to those wishing to take the short-cut. In Magritta, to do something "pass wall" means to take the most direct and forceful route, and more than one love story deals with paramours miles apart by road (and stature) but inches apart but for a slender wall of ochre stone.

All the roads and alleys wind down to the largest wall of all, which separates the city like a dam from the surging tides that crowd the enormous curved harbour. Magrittans who have seen Marienburg consider it vulgar how that northern city mixes docks and warehouses with all other business and pleasure throughout its city streets. There is a place for everything in Magritta—although, as always, there is some traffic that runs pass wall.

Portos, Plazas and Pathways

The Harbour Wall

Magritta's longest thoroughfare, the *Calle Del Mar*, runs for several leagues along the seafront heavily trafficked with carts and mules. Running parallel to it is the harbour wall, separating *Atrazanas*, the sprawling docklands, from the rest of the city. The wall is barely 8 feet and contains numerous hatches and side doors onto the other side but its role is ensure bulk goods ferried to warehouses are taxed as they arrive.

To this end Consulado bailiffs patrol the parapet seeking to thwart innumerable, and often ingenious, schemes to circumvent the levy.

They are overseen by the city's proteges who idly train their pistols on any potential troublemakers. Two main gates lead into the Plaza Mercado; the Gate of Oils and the Gate of Charcoals.

Plaza Mercado

The great market place is a vast paved square just within the harbour wall and is flanked by two tall obelisks covered in outlandish hieroglyphs that were brought back as trophies from Araby. Rich in aroma, colour, race and tongues it is the first port of call for all traders and visitors arriving by ship; a bustle of peoples and wares from all over the Old World and beyond. Each morning hundreds of stalls populate the square but it is so large they rarely fill it. In the evenings as the temperature falls, the plaza becomes a forest of bobbing lights as the lanterns of hundreds of food vendors' stalls sway in the sea breeze. Dusk brings a carnival atmosphere as acrobats, musicians and jesters do their best to earn an excellent or two by entertaining diners.

Plaza Mercado also has a more grisly function. Just before dawn condemned men endure the slow row boat journey from incarceration in Torre des Moscas to the executioners block set up in the square.

The View From There

That morning he had seen the oyster.

The Concha Del Mari, the Bahi De Serena, the Orstro Del Oro, the Mari Magnifico—the Ocean Shell, the Bay of Quietude, the Golden Oyster, the Glorious Sea—there were a dozen more names for it, and none of them did it justice. Brother Joppi had spent his entire life living in the city, looking out from the white-marble towers of the seminary, had seen the bay glistening and shining but until now, until that morning, he had not known its true beauty. They had left Atalaya just after Matins, long before the dawn had broken and as they had come into the harbour the sun was near its zenith. Its rays hit the centre of that horse-shoe bay like a skystone from the Maiden Above herself, scattering light like a bomba through a stained-glass window. Arriving from the south, the deep blue ocean behind, the full ring of the city curling around them, the effect was nothing like it was seen from the other side. The songs told of men who, upon seeing such a sight, feel to their knees and wept at the glory of the Maiden and the city that held Her highest. Joppi had been born quiet and small—his mother had dubbed him Scorro, the mouse—so he had neither the knees for dropping nor the chest for great sobs. But all the silly-seeming songs were suddenly proved true in that midday light, and his heart had swollen so much at the sight, and the majesty of the Maiden he felt, that he felt he might crack in two. Unbidden, unnoticed, tears limned in his eyes and listed down his cheeks, forming two pillars around his mouth, now forced into a single round circle. In strange symmetry, the tear lines were like the giant Pilaes, the high narrow cliffs that curved around that incredible bay, and his moon-like mouth was like the bay itself; a perfect circle of silent wonder.

The Luccinnian Wall

Built by hard grey stone ferried down from the Iranna, the stone cordon segregating Barrio Santa from the rest of Magritta has stood for over two millennia. Despite extensive damage during the Arabyan siege of the city it remains an impressive fortification, riddled with old passages and rooms. Its four grand towers have long since been abandoned but two have been reclaimed and restored under their new occupants, the college of Astronomy and the Guild of Fire-smiths.

One particular section of the wall has a myriad of carved and painted stone faces, said to be those of Myrmedia's Shield-maidens, heroes and her temple's greatest servants. Traditionally short prayers or offerings are pushed into the orifices of the relevant figure in the hope they are answered with a boon. However, time and cannon and rain have made it far from easy to be sure who each figure is supposed to be.

There are three gates leading through the wall into Barrio Santa; Nagari Gate and Valor Gate lead from La Rana and Artesano respectively. Both old and battle scarred, their huge bronze doors emblazoned with the eagle seal of Myrmedia, they were eternally sealed by the Aguila Ultima's holy magic during the Arabyan siege. Entry via side doors is guarded day and night by a pair of solemn looking Templars of the Righteous Shield. In contrast, the doors of the third Gate of Champions leading from Plaza Mercado are wide open and stuck fast. Every year on Maidensday teams of mighty bulls are tethered to the each side but never succeed in gaining an inch. This ritual over, the beasts are led up the steps of the palm-lined Aguilata to the Plaza D'Armas where they are sacrificed in the name of the Maiden.

Sayings of Magritta

*“to the hairs before the hat”
preparation must be done if success
is to be achieved*

*“like water for chocolate”
to get a great deal, as if selling
water for precious cocoa beans*

*“like a Bilbalin scholar”
that which does not exist*

City Districts

Atrazanas

Stretching the length of the city's southern half the docks are Magritta's lifeblood. Caravels and carracks, galleons and barks, naos, junks and dhows, all manner of vessels are moored amongst a seemingly endless bristle of wharves and jetties. From dusk until dawn they are congested with sailors, merchants, porters and travellers. After dusk, when the gates to the of the harbour wall are sealed it quickly becomes deserted save for drinking haunts such as La Sirena, The Azana and The Sartosan's Folly where brawls are commonplace due to the potency of the rum sold there.

At the eastern end of the docks are the great shipyards of the Calamarra family. Their double dry dock is the only one of its type in the nation (and possibly the Old World) and due to their influence, contracts are inevitably awarded here for Armada warships. However Casa Calamarra's key trade is in pickled fish and it owns more fishing ships than the entire fleets of other coastal cities. Each day a small army of stevedores load thousands of barrels bearing their distinctive Octopus and Ship's Wheel stamp for export. Don Lorenzo recently invited the city's finest inventors to build a powered crane, offering a small fortune to the strongest and most efficient device. At present there are no less than six experimental cranes under construction and a team of Rodeleros (see below) has been hired to discourage any saboteurs.

To the far west, on an outcrop just off shore is the dread Torre des Moscas. Its once grey stone dirtied, legend has it that the tower got its name when it was used to quarantine plague victims, and a swarm of flies hung over the tower like a mist. Today the tower is used as a prison. The bodies of executed pirates, picked to the bone by gulls, adorn the darkened walls serving as a reminder of how Magritta treats her enemies.

Barrio Santa

Myrmidian legend holds that it took over one hundred years to build the Grand Temple on Mount Escudo. Thus by the time it was finished a small town had already sprung up around it and as the city and cult grew this came to house a small and permanent religious community. Estalian monarchs, grandees and generals paid handsomely to build tombs, chapels and shrines here. Upon his death in 530 the Prince of Luccinni even saw fit to leave his entire fortune to pay for a great wall to protect the Temple. Such was the concentration of shrines in the district it became known as Barrio Santa; the holy district or district of saints.

Over the centuries successive Aquila Ultimas have gained numerous concessions from the Consulado amounting to ultimate temporal power over the area. Strict Myrmidian Law is enforced by Templars throughout the district; most notably, the sale of alcohol is prohibited. Tradition runs high and Barrio Santa is almost exclusively the domain of pilgrims, novitiates, soldiers and resident clergy—and the occasional pious merchant. The atmosphere is passive, the ancient stone streets and spiritual ambience make for a heady presence.

Scattered around the streets are Chapter Houses of the numerous Knightly and Monastic Orders, as well as Collegia, Seminaries and other ecclesiastical buildings. The most renown is the Myrmidian Military Academy. Tall, classical columns surround a spacious sanded quadrangle. The ring of clashing steel can often be heard from outside as students are put through their paces in the training arena.

Pilgrims reaching the centre of the district walk out onto Plaza D'Armas from which point the Grand Temple of Myrmidia rises above the visitor in all its magnificent splendour. One of the wonders of the Old World the Temple, replete with gilded dome and its accompanying quartet of spear like spires pointing to the heavens, is home to the Aguila Ultima and a multitude of Myrmidian Orders.

The five hundred and fifty five glistening marble steps—the Escalera Purifica—that lead up from the Plaza to the Temple are riven by a long crack. Supposedly where the statue of Myrmidia fell upon and killed Emir the Cruel, molten gold was poured in to fill the damage and there is nearly always a throng of pilgrims gathered around, stroking the polished surface to receive a blessing. Visitors enter the Temple via the Hall of Warriors, one of four great naves branching off the centre, where they are greeted by friezes telling the story of the goddess. The central colossal domed roof, by far the largest in the Old World is all the more extraordinary given it was gilded almost a thousand years ago. At the centre of this vast rotunda lies the Aegis Solar, the cults' most holy relic, known more commonly as the Sun Shield. A solid gold disc some 8 feet in diameter it is adorned with a stylised image of a blazing sun, archaic text etched around the rim.

History records that Nourgul the Necrarch, at the head of his army, reached the inner chapel of the Temple, only to then vanish, his army crumbling to dust at the same moment. The Temple teaches that the ancient vampire was destroyed when he touched the Aegis Solar, or perhaps the pages of Bellona Myrmidia, open on the lectern. But there is another story that says that Nourgul was not destroyed but simply overcome, and he lies in waiting, buried beneath the Temple, for his revenge.

Perhaps Barrio Santa's greatest treasure is not any of art or architecture but the wealth of knowledge stored in its great library. Attached to the Scholam Ultima, where all the great Atlas were trained, the library has been collecting information for more than a thousand years, and because of Myrmidia's debt to her wisdom-loving mother, this information includes the secular and even, in some secret sections, the profane. So vast is the library, however, that there soon became no room to study within it, leading the Temple to create the Old World's first borrowing library. Technically, only cultists of the Temple are supposed to borrow books, but library cards have been granted to other individuals under special circumstances. With the growth of Artes Mechanica, the demand for books has been rising greatly, and copies are often shared between friends and acquaintances. This has inevitably led to books being lost or misplaced, but this is not something the temple takes lightly. Stealing a book is after all a violation of canon law, and there is a whole section of the Inquisition dedicated to ensuring that the library collection remains intact.

Adarvejo

Home to the largest Arabyan community outside the caliphates, Adarvejo comprises a sizable quarter behind the docks where the Arabyan mode holds sway. The result is a confusing but colourful web of canopied streets and tented passages. The residents, clad in exotic robes and turbans, barter their goods in harsh tongues. Visitors would be forgiven for thinking they were in the heart of an Arabyan city. Of course there are commodities for sale here not easily obtained elsewhere; ivory, perfumes, spices and silks to name but a few. Highly regarded is Kemal's Curios, a certain antique emporium whose proprietor is said to sell enchanted rope from master sorcerers in Copher. However, so far, interested buyers, having heard the tale, never seem to be able to find their way back there. They say you can only find the store when you aren't looking for it.

La Rana

La Rana runs east of the river furthest from the waterfront. This is a ramshackle barrio of seedy vigour and free-ranging poultry and its winding alleys are home to merchants of every kind of produce and of every stripe of morality. Built on low lying land it tends to flood in high tide seasons and the district is named after the amphibians that plague cellars and warehouses during such times. La Rana is famous for its 'cultural pursuits', which take place in the small theatres throughout the district, constantly entertaining merchants and mariners alike. It's the city's worst kept secret that these playhouses are in fact brothels. In addition many double as fronts for smuggling operations run by the Zamora Cartel which specialises in cosmetic and narcotic wares.

Artesano

A compact barrio north of the docks and immediately south of Barrio Santa, the ancient alleys of Artesano are home to a collection of emporiums and artisans linked to the nautical trade, cartography and alchemy. Magritta is a good market for outlandish ingredients and the exotic goods that end their journey there attract interest from buyers from afar. One street attracts more interest than most. L'Avenida Des Tiradors runs against the Luccinnian Wall and is lined with strange emporiums and workshops, many of them built into the honeycomb of rooms and passages within the wall itself. The alley has its fair share to charlatans but this is the birthplace of the 'Artes Mechanica', which some call science and the Inquisition watches askance. Their current particular target is the Blackened Tower, home to the Guild of Fire-Smiths. Clad in their Amianto armour and eerie glazed-ceramic masks, their secretive existence has placed them under suspicion. However as long as they continue to engineer flame-ships and incendiary weapons for the Armada, the Consulado ensure they escape persecution.

'Mechanica' is a new trend that applies not only to devices but also to learning and scholarship, seeking to apply to the Maiden's natural world a set of laws like those of geometry and alchemy. Again, the Inquisition watches fiercely, but many of the Temple (particularly the Scholam) have both the scholarship and spiritual interest to follow this trend. Of particular appeal is using the new laws in the arts of sketching and painting, and artists and painting schools are now found on almost every plaza in Artesano. Of course, in some dens the artist's models have been known to do more than just pose, if the price is right, allowing the enterprising merchant yet another way to avoid the ban on prostitution (see Chapter Four).

Round the corner from the Guild of Navigators is the Terra Termina. The taverna is filled with memorabilia from various legendary voyages and since it is tradition for captains and officers setting off on new expeditions to spend their last night drinking here, the atmosphere is always one of nervous excitement.

Barrio Renga

Although the Empire and Bretonnia have their tall galleys, originally and still today they are known in Magritta as poor sailors—"riosas", river men, unsuited to the terrible forces of the sea, and better for Bilbalins to deal with. The very first mercenaries and sell-sails who came to Magritta were Norsemen and Kislveites from Erengard, and this barrio draws its name from an Estalian mangling of that city's name. Rengado has come to mean "northerner" and through a porto in Adravejo lies the small district where such folk stay when visiting the town. Some have been "visiting" permanently for generations, but will always be Rengado because of their white skin and yellow hair. Empire folk are common now here too, and you can get good blood sausage and Dwarfen beer. Cross cultural mixes thrive, and there is even a Schola Renga duelling style, which combines Estalian style with the heavy blades and double-handed axes of the north.

Puento Torre

When the Consulado first began to establish themselves, the powers of Magritta hit back by declaring all land on the east bank of Turia to be property of the King, and all on the west property of the Temple. The Consulado rebelled by occupying the bridges, building vast houses and minor turrets on there to defend themselves. Puento Torre is the largest of these, although it is not anything that northerners would still consider a bridge, for it runs almost half a mile along the river and is thronged with more and more houses each year, for proximity to the fast-flowing Turia ensures a cleaner house and the envy of your neighbours. It gets so dark under the enormous bridges that those who run the river barges—of which there is a constant run, bringing all of Estalia's produce to the docks to be shipped—are known as cuevos or cavemen. Some of the underclass even live under the massive bridges, eking out a life hiding from the sun, in hammocks hung from the rivets, while the rising middle classes compete just as furiously for space above.

The truly wealthy, however—and the members of the Consulado—now live on the northern side of the two mountains, particularly Mount Escudo. There they erect their own spires, partly so they can keep one eye on the seas they command, but mostly so they can rival the spires of the Temple, and continue to play the game of one-upmanship against the other head of the beast.

As the rules of Mechanica allow for higher and higher towers to stand, this gives the Inquisition yet another reason to frown upon this new process—although others in the Temple are considering utilising these new forms to build a tower so grand it will end the battle once and for all.

New Talent: Literary

It is one thing to be a scholar. It is quite another to be one in the greatest city of scholarship in the entire world. The average Magrittan student has access to more books than the most scholarly Altdorfer would see in a lifetime, as well as personal stories from those who have seen every corner of the world with their own eyes. The sheer quality of such an education is thus above and beyond all others, and characters with this talent gain +10 to all Academic Knowledge skills. Any Character raised in Magritta may exchange one of their starting Talents for Literary.

Alcazar and the Plaza Militares

The Palace Alcazar remains empty, for those allied with King Carlos would never see it claimed by another, and those against him like to leave it as a reminder of how the city treats kings. The palace has since fallen into silent ruin, claimed by plants and birds, and with pieces of its grandeur appropriated for other houses. So has that which surrounds it—the usual orbit of a palace: immense military barracks and weapons stores, great meeting rooms and magnificent guest halls, museums and court houses, and the giant parade square that stood in the middle of them all. Yet nothing lies unused in a city so big as Magritta. The palace remains forbidden and still guarded but the poorest of the city—those who work the docks, or in La Rana or for the Temple—have made their home amongst the marble stones. Long halls of broken mirrors and stripped gilding now house hundreds of families, and the Plaza Militares holds the tent-city Night Market, where those who have worked sunup to sundown moving goods at the docks can spend their wages on simpler produce.

Here too you will find the Dwarfs of Magritta, for they find the stone comforting, and have made their own tunnels under the Plaza. Some wonder if those tunnels have encountered the secret passageways rumoured to be under the palace, leading to possibly long forgotten treasure vaults. So far neither man nor dwarf has found such things, or if they have, they've kept it to themselves.

The Eyrie

Just once, almost two hundred years ago, a drunk Estalian captain made the mistake of demanding an Elven ship follow the Rules of the Sea, firing across their bow to get their attention. Since then, the Eyrie has existed. The small Elven temple-cum-residence was constructed from marble atop the eastern Pilari de Mari, hence its nickname in the town below. The place is never empty, and lights burn in its almond-shaped windows every night. Most of the time, the Elven envoys that are resident deign to walk down and bring their issues before the Consulado on human turf, but always with the unspoken assumption that they are under no obligation to make such a gesture. Once a year, they allow promising wizards to make the climb to the Eyrie and petition for further scholarship. Almost all climb back down again empty handed.

Rodelero duellists excel in the art of fighting with the sword and buckler. This style of fighting originated in Magritta whose marines found the smaller buckler suited the confined nature of fighting during boarding actions. The Rodelero weapon of choice is the falchion or falcata; a one handed, single-edged blade which widens to its point.

The Rodelero Duelling School is situated an ancient villa just off shore. The villa is known as La Casa De La Piedro Pez, after the gargoye set above the entrance depicting a falcon clutching a fish in its claws. Unlike other schools the duellists live an austere existence preferring practice to philandering and take a keen and active interest in the cities' defence. As talented swordsmen they often form a specialist unit in the armies of Estalia, and in Magritta they feature as an assault troop on Armada ships.

With the falcon symbol replicated on their bandanas and sashes, a Rodeleros' attire reflects their maritime origins, causing the other well-heeled schools to dismiss them as 'well-dressed pirates'. In return, Rodeleros take pleasure in challenging opponents to duel in 'Mannan's Maze', an area of treacherous wharves and rotting gangways which they know like better than anyone else. Ultimately, one needs to be the better swordsman or a competent swimmer.

Chapter VII: The Maiden Myrmidia

*"Trust the Maiden, when in doubt or fear
Trust more, my son, in her shield and spear."
A Middenheimer Knight's Scream, Act 1, Scene 3*



Many Old Worlders outside the Estalian Kingdoms think that the only god worshipped by in Estalia is Myrmidia. There is much truth in this. She is honoured universally within the peninsula. To virtually all Estalians, it would be hard to comprehend not worshipping the goddess who, they believe, chose to be born as one of them and led them to their greatest achievements. Myrmidia is, for the Estalians, far more than just a goddess of warfare. She embodies all the virtues of human endeavour and civilisation, from horticulture to the arts. Myrmidian priests are to be found in all but the smallest settlements, whilst priests of any other faith are rarely seen. In much of Estalia, their presence would be remarkable and, in many areas, unknown.

But Estalia is not purely monotheistic. Other gods are known and followed. The Temple of Myrmidia is properly known as the Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família—Myrmidia and the Divine Family. It honours not simply their patron goddess but also her family: Morr, her father; Verena, her mother; and Shallya, her sister. The priests of Myrmidia's Temple are expected to fulfil the same roles that priests of Morr, Verena and Shallya would take in other parts of the Old World. Some conduct funerary rites, some keep libraries, and some tend to those who have become sick and infirm. Other priests serve Myrmidia in ways that are akin to how other gods are worshipped in the Empire: those who worship her aspect of the Wanderer patrol the wilds like priests of Taal, those who worship her the primacy of her last journey over the sea may bless a ship exactly like a priest of Manaán. None of these see themselves as any less the followers of Myrmidia because of this, however. Her priests, and indeed almost all Estalians, see these as simply being aspects of their worship of the main goddess. They do not ignore Myrmidia's family, to do so would be sacrilegious, but, in the minds of Estalians, all other gods are subsidiary to their patron goddess. This attitude, of course, can come as something of a shock to priests of other deities who visit the Estalian kingdoms who find devotions made to their god almost entirely subsumed within the worship of Myrmidia and their cults virtually non-existent.

The Maiden mastered all the arts of war, for they came naturally to her. None were fiercer, none braver, none more desirous of fame and victory and none more deserving in the heat of battle.

But at that time she knew nothing else. So her mother spoke to her; from her mother, she gained knowledge to act wisely, so that her bravery would not be squandered. Then her father spoke to her; from her father, she learnt of death, so that she knew the consequences of her actions. Lastly, her sister spoke with her; and with her sister she saw mercy, to temper her fierceness and tend for those who were wounded.

And the Maiden was complete.

*Bellona Myrmidia,
'Before Mortality'*

The temples of Myrmidia reflect the fact that not only the single goddess is worshipped in them. Fashions and architectural styles have changed over the ages, but most of the temples of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família have separate shrines for devotions to Morr, Verena and Shallya. Commonly, there are side chapels to Verena and Shallya, while a Morr gate opens to a staircase leading into the basement where a chapel to Morr is found with crypts around it.

New Career: Falconer

Other temples have different, more extravagant, ways of showing their devotions to the different gods. Eagle towers (Torre Aquila), where Myrmidia's blessed animal, the Royal Eagle or Aquila Real, is kept, are common to many of Myrmidia's temples in the southern Old World. Bilbali's great Temple del Santiago has a huge Eagle Tower, smaller towers where ravens and owls (sacred to Morr and Verena) live and an ornate dovecote for Shallya. Other temples have similar towers for the sacred birds of Myrmidia's family, and priests dedicated to their care.

The monks of Neustra Dama de Caratrazza de Benamaquex, in the kingdom of Estrema, are particularly famous for their devotion to the divine birds, their monastery dominated by aviaries and a natural eyrie in the cliff face that juts out over the smaller, and less impressive, human habitation. The vulture here replaces the raven as Morr's sacred bird, as it often does in the southern and arid parts of Estalia.

This tendency amongst the Estalian priests has led to them becoming known by the derogatory term 'cadge priests' or 'cadgers', after the frames for birds to perch on that falconers use to carry birds around. Tileans, intent on demeaning them, are particularly fond of calling them this.

Falconry is a popular sport amongst the nobility and wealthy of the Old World. The actual task of breeding, training and caring for them, however, is regarded by all but a few as terribly tiresome. It requires great care and patience to breed, raise and tame any bird, and getting them to take a hood, follow a lure and return without a tie requires far more effort than getting a hound to follow a scent. Falconers are thus true craftsmen and look down on other, more casual animal trainers, and typically find their services high in demand by the high and mighty. For the priesthood of Myrmidia in Estalia, caring for birds is often part of their training, and those particularly adept at it will sometimes devote themselves entirely to the task. The birds are sometimes kept simply for devotional purposes but most priests of any substantial rank also partake in hunting with the birds. Others wear them at official events or use them in sacred rites; in all cases the precision of the falconer is indispensable.

—Falconer Advance Scheme—

| | | | | | | | |
|----|------|----|----|------|------|----|------|
| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
| - | +10% | - | - | +15% | +20% | - | +15% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| - | +1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Falconers and the Cult of Myrmidia

Estalian priests often learn to care for the sacred birds of Myrmidia and her family during their initiation. Many continue to care for the birds as their priestly careers develop. Not only is this seen as a devotional act in itself but it is also a useful meditative task. The behaviour of the birds is often scrutinised for clues as to the nature of the gods themselves and their current moods and desires. Unusual activities by the birds are monitored by the Bird Master of the temple where the birds are kept, passing what information he or she can divine from it on to the high priest.

As a result, any characters who are Initiates or priests of any rank within the cult of Myrmidia in Estalia may learn the skill Animal Care for 100 xp. Additionally, they may also learn to become Falconers, experts in the arts of caring for birds, and birds of prey in particular—it should be considered a career exit for Myrmidian Initiates.

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Theology) or Academic Knowledge (Genealogy/Heraldry), Animal Care, Animal Training, Concealment, Outdoor Survival, Perception, Scale Sheer Surface, Set Trap, Silent Move, Trade (Falconer)

Talents: Acute Hearing, Excellent Vision, Rover

Trappings: Bird of Prey (Eagle, Falcon, Merlin or Hawk) with Hood, Leather Jerkin, Stout Leather Gauntlet, Lure on a Rope, Cadge for carrying birds, Knife, Animal Trap, Large Collection of Interesting Scars

Career Entries: Animal Trainer (Career Companion), Charcoal Burner, Hunter, Initiate (Cult of Myrmidia only), Noble, Priest (Cult of Myrmidia only), Servant, Woodsman

Career Exits: Animal Trainer (Career Companion), Entertainer, Hunter, Initiate (Cult of Myrmidia only), Steward

The Maiden Mother

For Estalians their patron goddess is not only their chief deity, she is their inspiration, their protector and their constant comfort against the world's travails. In the north of the Old World, Myrmidia is often seen simply as vengeful warrior, skilled in tactics and the arts of war. Estalians know there is much more to her than that. Her knowledge of strategy is only a part of the skills and talents she fosters. She is a goddess of civilisation and a patron of handicrafts, science and endeavour. She is the mother of the Estalian peoples and their constant queen.

These attitudes are formed by the regularly retold wealth of stories associated with the goddess. The most important of these form the basis of the priests' sermons to the faithful and are re-enacted by the guilds as Mystery Plays at fiestas and on holy days. Others are sung as popular ballads and some form part of the folktales of the common people. Because these stories commonly tell of Myrmidia's deeds whilst on earth, they are generally linked to specific locations, mostly in Estalia, where the goddess was at the time. Estalians know that they tread directly where the goddess herself once stood. Events of particular importance from Myrmidia's life have led to thriving pilgrimage routes to the places associated with the stories. Even in small villages, unknown to the wider world, travellers will regularly find thriving traditions that the goddess stayed there when she passed through and villagers will delight in pointing out where exactly her blessed feet touched the earth.

The goddess that emerges from the stories—and the holy books of Myrmidia, at least in the Estalian versions—is one of a strong and determined ruler. She's proud, intelligent, graceful and witty, enthusiastic, scornful of those that are unwilling to strive for themselves, respectful of proper tradition: a picture of many of the virtues that Estalians like to see in themselves.

The Shieldmaidens of Myrmidia

Worship of the Shieldmaidens is little known outside the homelands of the cult of Myrmidia in Tilea and, especially, Estalia. They occupy a role somewhere between genuine sub-cults of Myrmidia, reflecting particular aspects of the main goddess, and the veneration of individuals who have shown themselves particularly holy in life (see Venerated Souls in Tome of Salvation). The names of many of the Shieldmaidens are known from the great Bellona Myrmidia, the holy text of Myrmidia's life story, where many have their own life stories fully set out in individual books.

Other less important Shieldmaidens' stories are set out in the various apocrypha to the main text. Some locally venerated Shieldmaidens are entirely unknown elsewhere and appear only in the traditions of a particular temple. Certain Verenans have speculated that many local cults may well have been subsumed within the Temple of Myrmidia by the adoption of a minor deity as one of the Shieldmaidens.

In the Empire the sub-cult of 'Fury' has had some success, but there Fury is seen by many as simply as an aspect of Myrmidia. In fact, Fury (known as Fures) was one of the chief Shieldmaidens to the goddess during her time on earth. She was a legendary heroine and follower of the goddess, noted for the terrible, brutal anger of her fighting style. After her death, fighting goblins in the Abasko Mountains, an order was founded in her name, its chief temple located at the site of Fures death. The Order has grown into one of the more important of the lesser orders of the Myrmidian Temple. Its recent expansion into the Empire makes it unique, but there are many other minor orders associated with various Shieldmaidens to Myrmidia in Estalia. A list of some of the more famous Shieldmaidens (there are hundreds) is in the next chapter. Side chapels to the many Shieldmaidens of Myrmidia, either collectively or individually, are common in many temples.

Each Shieldmaiden has her own holy day that is kept by those who specially honour her and there is a day of celebration devoted to all of the Shieldmaidens towards the end of the year. Often scenes from their life stories are played out in the streets and contests of arms are traditional.

Religious Quotes

"The Maiden is magnanimous in her mercy. That's why this one still has one good kneecap and most of his fingers."
Juan Torres, Inquisitor

"Love is for men. The spear is my heart now."
Ginetta Alusso-Hulo, Templar of Ubrique

"They call her the little sister Shallya, but she's really the Lady of the Trees"
Enoccio Eijo, Abasko wiseman

"Prayers are for the weak, the helpless and the vanquished. It would be unseemly for me to pray to the Maiden, in the face of all her glory"
Aquila Alta Hembre

"When I was little I fell into the well so I prayed to most holy Fugina and Myrmidia sent her Shieldmaiden to help me, and now I wear her symbol around my neck and kiss it every day, and I name my daughter in her honour. If you kiss it too, you will be safe in the mines tomorrow."
Ipena Nostodomoce-Sanjo, Widow of Montesa

The Organisation of the Temple

At the head of the cult of Myrmidia in Estalia, and indeed the whole Old World, is La Aquila Ultima, high priest of the temple in Magritta. Beneath the Aquila Ultima are the High Eagles, or Aquilae Alta. These are the high priests of the main temple of the area. Currently, there are three High Eagles in the Estalian kingdoms, including La Aquila Ultima. The other two are currently based at Bilbali and ancient Ubrique, but in the past the location of the third High Eagle has varied. Beneath these Aquilae Alta are the Aquilae, or Eagles, the chief priests of the most important temple in each of the Estalian kingdoms. Each of these controls the smaller shrines and temples within their diocese. Collectively, these priests control the Temple's business. Within each of their sees the Aquila Alta is the highest ranking priest and the highest authority on all matters of faith. Theoretically, an appeal to the Aquila Ultima could overrule a decision of one of the Aquilae Alta. With its strong martial background, however, the Temple of Myrmidia would not generally countenance any such appeal: the decision of the commander on the ground is final and soldiers are expected to carry out their orders, and respect the chain of command.

In theory, the Aquila Ultima in Magritta is free to pronounce on any matters of faith and policy and see their orders carried out by all Myrmidians, whatever their opinion of the faith. In reality, this rarely happens. The last time that the Magrattan temple issued a command to every Myrmidian was in the crusade against the Arabyan invaders who threatened to conquer all of Estalia. Since then the Aquila Ultima has used their influence as Commander of the Faith in less all-consuming ways, through their temples and agents. Generally, the Estalian temples have always followed the Aquila Ultima's direction. The threat of excommunication has persuaded Estalia's lay leaders to fall into line as well. Some temples and rulers of Tilea have proved less pliable, however.

The Estalian Myrmidian Temple believes strongly that it is part of their goddesses plan for her chosen people, the Estalians, which they should be united—as one kingdom—as, of course, they were under Myrmidia's rule. To this end, previous Aquilae Ultima have attempted to use their influence to further lasting alliances and marriage contracts between the ruling houses of the Estalian kingdoms, often with the aim of eventually reducing independent kingdoms to vassal states to more powerful ones when more than one kingdom is inherited by the same heir.

They have often sought to recruit the Aquila of other dioceses to back their plans. At times, they have had great success. Not only do priests often act as trusted advisors to the secular rulers but the Temple exerts huge influence over every stratum of society. They sanctify marriages, consecrate the dead and oaths sworn in their presence have the force of law and can create law—they are a constant presence in everyday life and few would want to feel the Temple's displeasure. The rulers of Estalia's kingdoms know that it was a priest of the Sacred Family that placed the crown on their head and it is by Myrmidia's continued grace that they rule.

Sometimes, however, Aquilae have feared the reduction of the kingdom that they serve to a vassal state to a more powerful one would reduce their influence and have supported local rulers in defiance. The fact that the Aquila Ultima is based in Magritta has also tended to undermine their policy. They have often been seen, particularly by the Bilbalin Temple, as little more than mouthpieces for the Magrattan king. There can be little doubt that in the past this has been the case. In the twenty-third century, King Felipe the Bold held the Aquila Ultima captive in his own temple for fifteen years and forced the high priest to issue pronouncements that backed his various claims for sovereignty over other Estalian princes. During this period the rift between the temple in Bilbali and the temple in Magritta grew so bad that the Aquila Alta in Bilbali refused to recognise the Aquila Ultima any longer. Today, the Aquila Ultima maintains her independence from the Magrattan throne fiercely, backed by significant numbers of Myrmidian Templars, but the Bilbalin Aquila Alta still remains an important alternative source of power in the Estalian temple.

Titles in the Temple of Myrmidia

To the outsider the titles of the Temple of Myrmidia can be confusing. Almost all are variations on the title 'Eagle', Aquila in Estalian, and the uninitiated might be forgiven for not knowing whether a First Eagle (Aquila Prima) was a higher or lower rank than the Aquila Lanza (literally, Lance Eagle).

In fact the Aquila Prima is merely senior initiate whilst the Aquila Lanza is one of the highest ranking priests in the Order of the Eagle in Estalia. A list of some of the more commonly encountered priestly titles is given below:

Aquila Prima: a senior initiate and the rank required before anyone can progress further in the cult. First only in the sense that this is the first Eagle title any member of the cult bears.

Aquila Protege: also known as the 'Spearguards', these form the bulk of the priesthood.

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Aquila Maestro: a teacher of novices, who raises young “fledglings” to be Aquilae Primes.

Aquila Capitân: generally a senior priest at a particular temple or monastery, akin to an abbot.

Aquila Commandante: either the high priest of a temple or important cult site, or part of the senior staff of one of the higher ranked priests.

Aquila Noce: The highest priest of a city, or kingdom, the “named” priest.

Aquila Custodes: A changeable term that refers to the highest ranking Aquila in a kingdom, or at a certain place or involving a certain group, but not important enough to be an Alta. For example, the kingdoms in the mountains are so small that rather than deal with individual Noces and Commandantes will address their concerns to the Custodes del Irrana.

Aquila Lanza: Theoretically, this title refers to a priest in charge of the Temple’s armies, but as this can refer to the entire Temple’s armies (as it did under the crusades), or the armies of an entire warrior kingdom, or the warriors of a temple that has long since disbanded such forces, Lanza can be used changeably like Custodes. It can be way of granting privilege without power, which some resent, but also without duty, which some enjoy.

Aquila Alta: the senior high priest of any large area or important kingdom. Some have been known to dub themselves ‘Aquila Grande’, but most see this as a sign of vanity and take pride in the unadorned title of Eagle.

Aquila Ultima: the highest ranked priest of the entire cult.

In an attempt to by-pass these problems, the many Aquilae all meet every year at annual conclaves, known as the Collegia Aquilae. At these, they discuss matters of faith and attempt to agree the Temple’s policy. The intention is that the Temple should be able to resolve its disagreements through discussion and debate. In truth, the debates tend to resolve little; behind the scenes politicking generally resolves any contentious issues. As the debates are always chaired by the Aquila Ultima, a second priest from the Magrittan temple stands in the stead of the Aquila Noce of Magritta, which gives the see of Magritta significant extra power. The location of the conclave shifts from see to see each year. They do have a useful function in terms of confirming the cultural and doctrinal ties between the different arms of the Estalian Temple.

The current Aquila Ultima is Isabella Giovanni. Her appointment has caused controversy, due largely to her Tilean nationality. The Tilean attitude towards religion differs significantly to that of the Estalian kingdoms. Myrmidia is an important goddess in the Tilean city states, but there is no tradition of worshipping her family as part of Myrmidia’s cult. In Tilea, the cults Morr, Verena and Shallya are all fully independent. Many in the Estalian Temple fear that the new Aquila Ultima will encourage the growth of these as separate cults within the Estalian kingdoms and undermine the power of the Temple as the almost sole interpreters of the divine will of the gods within the peninsular.

Isabella Giovanni, meanwhile, has set about trying to heal the rift between the Estalian branch of the Myrmidian faith and the Tilean. The persistent dispute between the two as to where Myrmidia was born as a mortal has led to constant ill feeling between the two branches of the faith. In an attempt to resolve the issue she has set up a special commission to inquire into the matter. Scholars from both nations have been recruited and agents sent to every temple library, ancient shrine and monastery within the faith to recover or copy anything that might cast light on the question. To head the enquiry a Verenan from outside both Tilea and Estalia was appointed, Jeremiah of Nuln, in order to ensure impartiality. The use of an Imperial priest of a different faith has caused a degree of disquiet in some quarters, though, particularly from the Aquila Alta of Bilbali.

In addition to the Aquilae who run the various dioceses of the Temple, there are two with very different positions. The first of these is the Aquila Lanza. The Aquila Lanza was first created at the beginning of the crusades as a commander for various additional forces that flooded to the defence of the Estalia and the Myrmidian Temple. It was his special responsibility to command these religious warriors during the reconquista. As the Arabyans were gradually pushed out of Estalia, and the other Aquilae Alta returned to the business of internal politicking and managing their dioceses, the Aquila Lanza was solely left with the responsibility for managing the war.



These days, the Aquila Lanza continues the traditional role of taking the battle to Myrmidia's enemies. Although crusading forces returned from Araby centuries ago, there are still crusader outposts off the coast of Araby which wage war against Arabyan corsairs. Additionally, the Myrmidian Temple has launched wars against the greenskin menace in the north of the Estalian peninsular and, recently, into the wild lands of the Border Princes. The current Aquila Lanza Suprema is Arturo Leocanto. He has recently been successful in recruiting a number of Bilbalin tercios to his forces. He looks forward to the chance to use these, the most modern of Estalian troops. Note that the Lanza look after regular troops who are servant to the Temple, but are not Templars, who are a separate (and more autonomous group).

The other is the Aquila Escudo, currently Ricardo Lupe, the head of the dreaded Inquisition.

Cardinal Hembre

The current Aquila Alta of the Bilbalin Temple is Cardinal Hembre. His strict and devout parents aimed to give their child an inspiring first name, Cardinal, as in central and foundational. Many now joke, that it reflects his own opinion of himself: always someone of the greatest importance. He has developed something of a reputation as a firebrand and a moraliser.

His recent sermons praising the traditions of the Estalian Temple have been seen by many as a warning to, or attack on, the policies of the Aquila Ultima. There seems little doubt that he views the Aquila Ultima as lax on issues of morality—"but then what else can one expect of a Tilean?", as he has been known to remark to those closest to him. Other sermons denouncing excesses and luxury have not always endeared him to the local nobility.

Hembre is enormously vain and self-important but he is not an idiot. He would not be making overtures to position himself as the moral authority of the peninsular if he did not have plans in place to back it up when needed.

The Holy Inquisition

'Every tercio faces indiscipline. It has its officers and its provosts to ensure that those who make trouble or who undermine the unit's morale are dealt with. Society is no different. We are Estalia's provost marshals and we do not shrink from our duty.'

Julia de Yecla, Inquisitor of the Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Familia

Beyond the normal structure of the Temple is the Holy Inquisition of Myrmidia. It is charged with preserving and maintaining the strength and faith of the Estalian people, rooting out those who might undermine it. The name of the Inquisition is feared throughout the Estalian kingdoms.

It operates above the rule of the secular powers and it has dragged nobles and princes off to face its racks and fires in the past as well as common men and women. It operates beyond the power of the normal High Eagles and has investigated allegations of heretical beliefs within the Temple itself. Its leader, the Aquila Escudo, is answerable only to La Aquila Ultima herself. It is said to have informers and agents in every strata of society, in every city, town and village. It is said that the reports they provide to the Inquisitors are so detailed, that the Inquisition's records are better than any king's census.

Even outside Estalia, the Estalian Inquisition is known of and feared. Its infamy has spread far and wide as an example of terrible religious power. That it spreads beyond the borders of individual kingdoms and can apparently act with impunity against whoever it wishes, has contributed to its dreadful reputation. No matter what the fear caused by the Witchhunters of the Empire, its inhabitants still see themselves as lucky by comparison to those that are guarded from heresy by the Inquisition of Myrmidia. The very reputation of the Inquisition has done much to slow the growth of the cult of Myrmidia elsewhere in the Old World.

Some suggest that its reputation is exaggerated, its power less than the stories put about. They are wrong. The Inquisition is truly a body to be feared. Its informers and spies are, in fact, everywhere. Few Estalians would dare conceal anything from any priest of the Temple, let alone an Inquisitor, and many willing volunteer information about their neighbours. It is beyond the reach of civic law, and none know how many Estalians, from all over the peninsula, are dragged away to its dungeons every year.

In the imagination of many outside Estalia, the Inquisition's victims are quietly spirited away, tortured and are never seen again.

Chapter VII: The Maiden Myrmidia

For some, this will be their fate, but, generally, it will be to provide a public lesson on the power of the Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família. Those that emerge from the prisons of the inquisition do so at great annual fiestas, known as *auto da fe*. They are paraded through the streets of the cities, publicly begging for forgiveness for their sins and heresies. Those whose errors are seen as minor might be forced to wear sackcloth, whipped or branded with a hot iron, as common criminals are, before being returned to what is left of their normal lives, a permanent walking reminder of the Inquisition's power. For those whose sins are too great, their journey through the city streets will be to huge pyres or stakes piled high with faggots, where, after an enforced repentance, they are burnt for the sake of their souls. Such events tend to draw great crowds. In many parts of Estalia, they are combined with other religious fiestas, ensuring that the faithful have no excuse not to watch.

Some in the Empire imagine that the Inquisition is very much like the Witchhunters of the cult of Sigmar, hunting down magic users and those corrupted by Chaos. In fact, such activities comprise a relatively small part of their work. Located so far from the Chaos Wastes, such matters seem much less pressing in the Estalian kingdoms. Far fewer children are born warped by its dark power or mutate in later life and fewer witches and hedgewizards live where the winds of magic blow less strongly. The Inquisitors of Myrmidia might still investigate such matters if they discover them, but only as a part of their wider duties. For the Inquisition sees itself quite simply as the guardian of the entire Estalian people.

This is a role that the Inquisition has performed for centuries. The threats faced by Estalia have changed over the years and the Inquisition has shifted to meet new ones as they have arisen, repositioning itself as guardian of the Estalian peoples and seeing its power grow with each new challenge.

The Inquisition's first incarnation was founded in the aftermath of the final expulsion of Arabyans from the Estalian peninsula. Although this was a time of great celebration for the Estalians, there were also many who were concerned. The numbers of Estalians who had remained unconquered in Estalia was tiny—only a few kingdoms had successfully held out. For those who came from the conquered kingdoms, the choice had been stark: accept exile or Arabyan rulers. Much of the nobility chose exile, many families fleeing to Tilea, Bretonnia or the Border Princes. For many of the common folk this was not practical and they continued to live as they always did with new masters. By the time the southern kingdoms were retaken many of the Estalian inhabitants had been influenced by their Arabyan masters.

Many had been forced to honour the Arabyan god, even if they kept true to the faith of Myrmidia and her family in their hearts. And while the Arabyan Emirs and Caliphs departed, there were some who had arrived with the Arabyans who had no desire to leave their homes. The returning Estalian nobility, backed by the Myrmidian Temple, chose to force many of the Arabyans out of their towns and cities. Swept up in nationalist fervour, they wished to see an Estalia only for Estalians, Myrmidia's chosen people back in their own land. But separating out those who were truly Estalian, but had remained under the Arabyans, and those who were in fact Arabyan by blood or by allegiance was sometimes hard. Many true Estalians had lost any records of their families they once had and many Arabyans who wished to remain created new ones. Some rulers realised that, without the people who lived there now, their lands would become empty and unworkable—they could not force the Arabyans out. So many were allowed to convert to, or back to, Myrmidiaism. Those who did so were known as 'converso'. In return for leaving the Arabyan god and customs they would be allowed to live where they had always lived.

But this solution did not meet with universal approval. The Myrmidian Temple was concerned that there would be many who would not be truly converted, who might secretly hold true to Arabyan ways, just as many of the now 'liberated' claimed that they had continued to hold true to Estalian beliefs regardless of their rulers' wishes. They feared, even, that some might seek to overthrow the rightful rule of the Estalian princes, rebelling or acting as fifth columnists for some future invasion. These fears were compounded by the fact that many of those who were crusaders had pursued the Arabyans into Araby itself, leaving the kingdoms without their battle-hardened warriors. Even Estalia's newly returned nobility caused concern, for some had picked up new attitudes towards religion in their exile.

The Aquila Lanza and La Aquila Ultima decided to found an Inquisition in response. It was charged with investigating, by whatever means necessary, any allegations of Arabyan sympathy, political unrest and failure to properly honour the goddess of Estalia and her family. A new Aquila Alta was appointed to head it—a hard-headed, tough Templar called Jaime Lopez. He set about his task with an iron will, appointing Inquisitors and recruiting agents. He took over the onetime crusader castle of Avilla, now safely located in the kingdom of Lysboa, a relic of the reconquista. Here he established the notorious headquarters of the organisation, where those deemed the greatest threats or most difficult prisoners are still taken by the Inquisition. There was no rebellion, no uprising of converso Arabyans. Lopez claimed this as a sign of his success and the Aquilae Alta agreed.

The institution, perhaps unsurprisingly, was never popular. As fears of a converso uprising disappeared, so support for the Inquisition began to wane.

The kings, princes and dukes of the Estalian kingdoms resented the fact that the Inquisition fell entirely outside their laws and the Aquilae of the Temple felt threatened by anybody that could discipline their priests, or even them. Never large, the Inquisition's numbers reduced to little more than a handful. The Inquisition might quite easily have passed into history.

The attack of Nourgul the Necrach on Estalia was a shock as much to the psyche of the Estalian peoples as to its unprepared defenders. The horror of seeing the bodies of fallen Estalians transformed into inhuman conquerors stunned those who saw it forever. The terrible dangers posed by necromantic magic and vampires were made all too fearfully clear. People looked to the Temple to protect them. Its Templars were often at the forefront of the battle against Nourgul's forces but were too few to stop them. Beyond those directly affected by Nourgul's army, a wave of panic swept through the country. After Nourgul's end and the collapse of the corpse horde bound to him, another fear spread through the people—that such events might reoccur. Vampires and necromancers might slip all too easily through society, unnoticed, passing themselves off as ordinary Estalians. A power that could investigate such matters, which transcended the domains of individual rulers and kings and could track its quarry no matter where it fled in the peninsula, practiced at uncovering secrets and what lay concealed in the hearts of others, was needed. The Aquila Escudo stepped forward and offered the services of the Inquisition. The uncovering of a series of notable apparent allies of the Necrach, corrupted by venality or the lure of power, confirmed by their confessions, some even without the rack to help loosen their tongues, showed the Inquisition's effectiveness. Estalia was grateful to its black cloaked protectors as never before. Funds and recruits began to expand the Inquisition and the body, in something like its current form, was born.

Today, the Inquisition is still obsessed by many of the same concerns. Whilst the fear of a new invasion by Arabyans has disappeared and the menace of vampirism apparently diminished, the Inquisition has continued to monitor Estalia's people. The Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família has been able to appoint itself the judge of what beliefs are permissible for those who are Estalian and even what it is to be an Estalian. It is the Inquisition who enforces this. The moral right to do so springs from the generally unquestioned assumption of every Estalian that they are Myrmidia's chosen people. Her people must obey her laws, the Temple preaches.

Most also believe, that only those that are wholly Estalian by descent can be Myrmidia's chosen people.

Over the centuries since its foundation, the Inquisition has uncovered evidence of those who have clung steadfastly to the traditions of Araby. It has used these incidents to whip up fear of the converso families. Many have been forced out of their homes by the righteous anger of their neighbours, no matter how harmless they have appeared. Those that remain conceal their origins in order to avoid native bigotry and discriminatory laws. This in turn has led to the Inquisition investigating families whose origins they consider impure. Often knowledge that a family has sought to cover up its past is simply held by the Inquisition; at least until there is some need to use it.

Several successful merchants and minor nobles have faced scandal and shame when it became known that they, or their ancestors, had lied about their origins. A reputation for honest dealing can be ruined by the lie or an ancient lineage of noble blood shown to be a shabby concoction and business deals and marriage contracts are often cancelled. It is rumoured that information held by the Inquisition about the backgrounds of some Estalia's greatest families has been passed to certain Aquilae, faced by particularly intransigent princes, to aid them in their duties to the Mother Temple of counselling and persuading secular rulers.

Others whose families have not come from Estalia have also found themselves targeted. One-time Strigany families in particular have suffered, their people's connections to legends of vampires adding to the fear of their foreign blood. Popular fears are kept alive by the traditional pageants in several parts of Estalia that celebrate the end of the War of Blood with the dunking of a character known as 'the Strigany' in the village pond. Some of Strigany families have given up their traditional life and settled in the eastern kingdoms, but this has not stopped some being expelled from the villages where they may have lived for several generations. Followers of other cults native to their homelands, or parent's homelands, might find themselves under investigation for failing to pay sufficient honour to the goddess. Where the doctrine of a cult is perceived as conflicting with that of the Myrmidian Temple or is disapproved of by them, this is particularly so.

The range of matters that might bring one to the attention of the Inquisition is enormously wide and rather vaguely defined. It is, perhaps, unsurprising then that enforcement is somewhat erratic—the organisation is a victim of its own success at information gathering. Given the constant reports and information passed to the Inquisition by its various sources, from paid spies to citizens keen on ingratiating themselves, only a small amount of it can be properly assessed at any time. Most is simply filed. Instead, the Inquisitors tend to concentrate on particular issues—looking for evidence of a particular set of religious beliefs in their area, for instance—or on particular individuals who the Inquisition finds politically useful or inconvenient.

Brujería, Magic, Chaos and the Inquisition

Brujería is the Estalian name for witchcraft, or any eccentric or less traditional use of El Perplejores, the sanctioned magical arts. Unlike the Empire, this does not always carry the suggestion of corruption in the minds of everyone. Estalia has never suffered from the numbers of witches or hedgewizards (brujas and brujos in Estalian) that more northern countries have, nor did Dwarf culture, with its distrust of magic use, influence Estalians in the way that it did the Empire.

The Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Familia has encouraged a less tolerant attitude. They point to the dangers inherent in the art of sorcery and suggest that all magic other than that granted to them is unholy. Whilst they have had some success, the prevalence of court sorcerers and enchanters serving the various Estalian kings, princes and dukes eventually undermined any serious effort at banning all magic use. Nevertheless, those without the protection of—or some might say oversight and scrutiny of—the nobility have been persecuted and driven underground. Certain practices, such as aquelarre, the meeting of witches to worship goats and perform rituals, are banned by both the religious and secular authorities. Necromancy is particularly reviled, after the horror of the War of Blood, and its practitioners are ruthless and tirelessly hunted wherever they appear.

Estalia is generally less menaced by the twisting powers of Chaos than its northern neighbours. There are still those that will perform vile rituals in the name of proscribed gods. The task of uncovering these cultists falls on the Inquisition and any inquisitor will seek out and destroy any guilty of such behaviour. There is, however, a small group of inquisitors who dedicate themselves solely to this task. They said to call themselves 'the Heart of the Temple'. The existence of this group is almost completely unknown outside the Inquisition itself, but they are said to report solely to the Aquila Escudo and La Aquila Ultima.

With magic that is "off text" under constant scrutiny, the idea of independent magical colleges existing as in the Empire never took off. Most magicians in Estalia work for their local king or prince, and train apprentices personally. A young peasant in the rough mountains who shows magical ability to a passing caravan could find himself the next day a guest (albeit a minor, unimportant one) in his prince's castle.

One of the main reasons for this is that there are a very limited number of actual inquisitors (as opposed to agents); only a few in any given kingdom at any time. Despite their power, recruitment is slow so as to maintain strict dependability. Only priests of proven ability and commitment to the Temple are considered suitable for the Inquisition. Some will have distinguished careers as warriors behind them; others have shown a gift for the uncovering of mysteries or for the use of particular political skills to achieve success. In theory, at least, all must have strongly orthodox beliefs. Few match these requirements. It is not unknown for self-serving and corrupt individuals to become Inquisitors, despite their vetting. When this happens, it often leads to scandal. Inquisitor Boniface Lorca is still remembered with some horror in Cabria, where he was Chief Inquisitor for ten years. In his time in the kingdom he used his position to blackmail most of the important merchants and nobility into making significant extra 'donations to the Temple', which he put towards an extensive palacio for himself, had his illegitimate daughter made a Countess and assassinated a political rival whilst he was at prayer. His time in charge came to an end when he finally overreached himself by trying to force one of the Duke of Gromaz's daughter's into becoming his mistress. In order to do this he arrested the woman's husband and held him for over a year accused of heresy. Unfortunately, the Duke was personally friendly with two of the Aquilae Alta who petitioned to have Lorca removed. The Inquisitor of Cabria still benefits from a beautiful palacio, however. Events such as these have led the hierarchy of the Temple to be ever more cautious before appointing new Inquisitors. This shortage of inquisitors leads to each individual inquisitor having greater freedom of action which, ironically, leads to ever greater opportunities for individual and idiosyncratic interpretations of their role.

The Archives

The Inquisition's main archive is at their traditional headquarters at Avilla. Here whole towers are said to be given over to storing a huge cache of files. The index itself runs through multiple volumes. In this vast repository of information are records from all over Estalia. Intimate details of the day to day lives of small townships, may be hundreds of years ago, rub shoulders with the transcripts of the questioning and inevitable confessions of suspects held by the Inquisition. All are carefully recorded and lovingly collated. Half-forgotten heresies, the tortures, deaths and, on occasion, crusades that were needed to expunge them, can be found on cracking parchment and tinder dry scrolls. Odd incidents and unexplained events, written down for future reference are to be found here too.

This great accumulation of knowledge has not entirely been left to moulder. The faithful and cunning know that there is nothing new under the Estalian sun. New challenges may be met with old tools. Records of old events dusted off to explain new incidents that challenge the knowledge or wisdom of the Temple guardians. These files are generally known after the priest who first demonstrated their usefulness and created the first catalogue system used to this day, Xavier Vulparo, or sometimes just by his first initial which marks files he filed himself.

The Blessed Order of True Insight

The Order of True Insight is another autonomous body within the Temple, falling outside the control of the normal Aquilae. This is a reflection of its unique position within the cult, for its members are the cult's seers and seeresses, consulted by wise commanders before any campaign. Unlike the rest of the Old World, where the cult of Morr provides oracles, in Estalia, almost all religious oracles are given by the seers of this order. The augurs of Corrona are an exception, as followers primarily of Morr they say their visions come from the father. But officially, they are regarded simply as a sub-order of the Blessed Order of True Insight.

Oracles are normally given by the chief prophetess at the order's main monastery at Arties, high in the Irrana Mountains. Other seers then interpret her gnomic utterances into more intelligible prophecies. Legend tells how it was founded after an eagle, the symbol of Myrmidia, and a raven, sacred to Morr, led members of the order to its location. Over the centuries the monastery has become rich on the donations of those seeking its divinations, a wealth that successive Aquilae Ultima are said to have eyed with envy. Other members of the order have a peripatetic existence—moving from place to place bringing the gift of prophecy with them. Sometimes these are groups of three women, known as Parcae, and are said to be particularly powerful oracles. Young children are taken to them to have their future told and sometimes they are known to choose the child's patron Shieldmaiden. All wandering seers are highly honoured by the communities they visit, but most are grateful to see those who can reach, touch and maybe influence their fates move on, once they have foretold the future.

The Order of the Righteous Spear

The Order of the Righteous Spear, and its many affiliated sister orders, are the Templars of the cult of Myrmidia. They have many castles and monasteries scattered throughout not only Estalia but also many of the various islands and outposts that fall within Estalian influence.

Juan Franco Frederico (usually just known as Franco) is the current Glorious Leader (El Lider Glorioso) of the order. He is the chief commander of all the Templar orders throughout the Old World and owes allegiance solely to the Aquila Ultima. Their primary headquarters is in Magritta, close to the heart of the cult, but they also maintain a massive fortress complex at the Castle of Mirador in Tarrocco, with a huge arsenal and their reserve troops.

Conflict between the order and the rest of the cult is far from unknown. Recently, tension has flared between the Order of the Righteous Spear and the Aquila Lanza Suprema, Arturo Leocanto. Troops loyal to the Aquila Lanza who had become involved in a border dispute with Tobarro received a crushing defeat at the hands of mercenaries hired by the Tilean city state, in particular the noted female condottiere and Templar of Myrmidia, Bradamante Menfra. Leocanto was incensed at the defeat and demanded that Frederico reprimand his subordinate, something he has conspicuously failed to do. Instead, he has rewarded Menfra for her efforts. Leocanto has appealed to the Aquila Ultima. It is not known what she will do. Some suspect that she will side with Menfra, as a fellow Tilean, others that she will take the opportunity to clip the wings of the over powerful Glorious Leader.

Movements and Extremes of Faith

Within the Temple there are a variety of attitudes and approaches towards matters both spiritual and temporal. This is unsurprising, given that, within the Temple there are already priests with particular affinities to any of the Divine Four. Additionally, there are certain other movements, political and religious views that a significant body of the faithful subscribe to. Many of these movements are widely accepted as respectable, sometimes reflecting basic assumptions of many Estalians.

Unifiers

For many devout Myrmidians, the lesson of their goddess's life is that Estalia should be united as a single nation, as they were under her. The decline of the Estalian people and their lack of influence in the rest of the Old World are all due to their inability to unite. For some within the faith, all other political aims—all values, all life—are secondary to the need to reunite the myriad states of modern Estalia.

Crusaders and Proselytisers

For others, the need to spread the glory of Myrmidia and her holy works to new lands is pre-eminent.

They point to the goddess's life where she succeeded in uniting Estalia and Tilea behind her and, but for her cruel death, would doubtless have conquered further lands and bringing civilisation and her faith with her. To them the great task of the Temple is to continue this. This tends to take one of two forms, sometimes combined. The first is the duty to continue the crusade, launched centuries ago against the invaders of Araby, the great enemies of the faith. Funds are raised for the Templar bastions that maintain a tenuous toehold on or off the coast of Araby. Devout young warriors sign up for the holy orders in order to carry the fight against them and also against the non-human creatures that haunt the more remote corners of Estalia; the continued reconquista, as it is sometimes called.

Others, often those less militarily inclined, act as missionaries for the second duty, to spread the word of faith in Myrmidia and her family. In the past, missions to the rest of the Old World have been regularly dispatched; the Border Princes remains an important recruiting ground for the Myrmidian faith, where her message of unity, strength in arms and peaceful order seems particularly attractive. Those that have sought to recruit followers in Bretonnia and the Empire have met with less success. The Estalian insistence on the primacy of Myrmidia coupled with the strong national cults of the Lady and Sigmar, respectively, has led to much resistance to the message. Many have had to accept the need to follow the lead of the more successful, more subtle Tilean proselytisers, something that sticks in the craw of the proud Estalians. Few have made any attempt to convert the wild Kislevites: with its biting cold winters and barbaric customs, it is an unappealing prospect. With the increased number of Old World colonies, however, these missions have spread further and further abroad. Lustrian outposts often have Myrmidian priests, missions to the Southlands have founded Temples on its coast and recently a mission to Ind is said to have established itself. Their success in recruiting worshippers among the local populations has been mixed.

Proper Worship and False Gods

Estalians have a unique approach to the worship of Myrmidia and her family. There are those who regard it as uniquely correct. They regard the attitude of other nations, including Tileans, as at best, insufficiently pious and at worst sacrilege. To some a failure to acknowledge Myrmidia as the greatest goddess verges on heresy. The view of Myrmidia simply as a warrior goddess, is an insult to the complexity of the true faith, and the world needs to be cleansed of this idea and its adherents.

Most Estalians have some sympathy with this view. It is generally seen, when given its fullest expression, as extreme.

Nevertheless, many highly placed Inquisitors and Templars are said to privately subscribe to it.

Pantheists

Just as there are those that see the Estalian manner of worship of Myrmidia as the primary goddess as the only way to properly honour her, there are others who believe that the approach is mistaken. They worry that those gods who are neglected or relegated to a mere subsidiary role may take offence and abandon the Estalians, or might withhold their blessings. Understandably, many of those who subscribe to such a view have often been influenced by foreigners, spent time abroad or are more deeply committed to one of Myrmidia's family than most of the priesthood. The fact that there is, as yet, no evidence of divine calamity ensures that theirs remains a minority voice. Nevertheless, it is clearly only because there are those who speak up for the sometimes overlooked gods that this has not occurred.

Myrmidia's Mortality

It is a central tenet of the Myrmidian dogma that the goddess was born as a mortal and died as one. It is also believed that Myrmidia was a god before she descended to become an Estalian and walk among her people. These two beliefs have sparked a vigorous debate that lasted centuries.

If Myrmidia was a god before she became a mortal and continued with her divine life after she had died in this world then, the scholar Padre Roberto pointed out, she was never truly mortal at all. An important part of the Myrmidian story, the goddess' oneness with humanity and her sacrifices, become meaningless, his followers suggest. Meanwhile, Madre Melina of Bilbali argued that the fact of Myrmidia's mortality meant that the goddess could not have existed as a divine presence before her incarnation in this world. Myrmidia was an ordinary Estalian ascended to godhead, in the view of Madre Melina's pupils. These two schools of thought argued ferociously on the subject, leaving traditional debates about the numbers of angels on pinheads and the knowledge of sparrows flying through halls looking distinctly boring. An attempt to settle the matter resulted in the decision of the Council of Bayona. Myrmidia, they declared, was simultaneously both divine and mortal. Whilst this has not satisfied either side, the threat of heresy that hangs over anyone who argues against the decision has quietened debate somewhat—at least in public. Fervent extremists cling to heresy like dust to the traveller.

Venerated Souls

The Temple of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família specially honours many individuals who proved themselves particularly holy in life.

Religious Sayings

'Her Chosen People'—the Estalian People; a phrase often used around Tileans, in order to annoy them.

'The Divine Four'—Myrmidia, Morr, Verena and Shallya; also used as an oath 'By the Four!'

'Nobody expects the Estalian Inquisition'—an ironic phrase, because they are so omnipresent. Used to comment on people who complain about something anyone could have foreseen, or that which happens with depressing regularity e.g. "He swore he would leave Bilbali without getting robbed, but then, nobody expects the Estalian Inquisition".

Very often these are heroes of the reconquista and crusades. Small shrines to those who gave their lives in the battle to retake Estalia can be found in many temples. Often these record the names of relatives of the local nobles and may be utterly unknown outside the immediate vicinity. Others though reflect less martial aspects of Myrmidia or of her family. Apart from Morr, this is the one place men appear in the holy canon.

Example Venerated Souls

San Imperata de Ayala Furiosa

Imperata Ayala was a trusted companion of the King of Lysboa but became best known for the role she played in the battle for the Kingdoms of Cabria and La Mesa. Her love of leading from the front and seeking out the fiercest fighting in any battle gained her the name 'Furiosa', saying she had temporarily become the eponymous Shieldmaiden incarnate. She led the Estalian forces at the bloody siege of Calatrava when that citadel finally fell. She then commanded the defence of Almagro when an Arabyan counteroffensive led to the castle being cut off. She received a mortal wound whilst in personal charge of an action on the walls. Legend has it her body was strapped to her horse and led the remaining knights out on a final sally as she expired. Some are suspicious of this story's veracity, but Calatrava does a roaring trade in tourists keen to borrow some of her courage by buying remains of her corpse.

San Petro Alas

The story of Alas suggest he was given all the wisdom of Myrmidia, the knowledge of Verena, the foresight of Morr and the skill with medicine of Shallya, making him the greatest scholar the peninsular has ever known, certainly in the world of medicine. The college at Pejena from which he graduated has a statue of him sitting on the college walls as he did every day, studying furiously and claiming to be waiting for Myrmidia to return so he could heal her wounds. Although popular with surgeons and students of anatomy, others wonder if the story of him seeing Myrmidia come to fetch him from the walls as he died was invented post-facto to counter ruins of grave robbing and necromancy.

The Religious Year: Fiestas and Celebrations

In most of the Old World, followers of Myrmidia do not keep any particular holy days to honour their goddess, making sacrifices when appropriate, such as the start and end of a campaign. This reflects the fact that, outside Estalia and Tilea, the cult is almost exclusively military. This is not true in the south. In the Estalian kingdoms, Myrmidia's sphere of influence includes every aspect of human activity and holy days connected to the goddess's cult are as frequent as those of other cults elsewhere. Estalia is famed, in fact, for having an excess (to foreign eyes) of holy days, which is why some characterise them as being lazy or frivolous.

The Estalian year is peppered with fiestas. These festivals never failed to draw crowds onto the streets of every town in the land. Often Estalians will dress in costume; take part in huge processions or stage morality plays at these events. Sometimes they appear to be mainly secular events, a fair or carnival, but for those taking part, the blessing of Myrmidia or her family are essential and are always sought. Always popular are the toreo, where the matador uses his skill to outwit and outfight the more powerful bull—a perfect example of everything that Myrmidia admires. Some fiestas are national events, occurring in every town in every kingdom in Estalia, others may be specific to a particular town or village.

The Great Fiestas and the Verenan Calendar

Virtually all Estalians celebrate certain festivals, in the same way that there are certain festivals that are universally marked within the Empire. Some of these are the same: Witching Night (*Il noche Brujería*) and the Night of Mystery (*Il noche misterio*) are marked in Estalia just as in the rest of the Old World.

Some of the most important festivals are set out below.

All are given their dates in the calendar used in the Estalian Kingdoms. This is the Verenan Calendar, which is also used in the Tilean City States. It divides the year into sixteen months, each of twenty-five days. These are based on the phases of the moon Mannslieb, known as *Occiodiveren* in the southern Old World. Unlike the Imperial Calendar, the Verenan Calendar includes the intercalary days, such as Witching Night and the Night of Mystery, in its months. According to ancient legend, the phases of the twin moons are based on Morr's shadow moving across them as he busies himself at work tending the dead. When both moons shine (Witching Night and Night of Mystery) Morr lies exhausted and Myrmidia must attend him at his bedside—which means anything could happen, since both gods are distracted.

Officially, each month is numbered (*Primero, Segundo, Tercero* and so on) but many of the months are often known by a variety of other names, sometimes after the events that take place in them, other gods or heavenly bodies. The illustration opposite sets out how each month equates to the Imperial Calendar of the Empire. Each month is then sub-divided into five weeks of five days. In Estalia, the days are known as *Verenes* (after Verena), *Mores* (after Morr), *Shallyes* (after Shallya), *Myrmides* (after Myrmidia) and *Domingo* (the Temple Day). The naming of the first day of the week after Myrmidia's mother reflects the fact that it is common for the Myrmidian Temple to begin each week with a prayer for understanding, just as Verenans do throughout the Old World.

"In nomine Verena, Morra, Shallya et Myrmidia, entregare duos illuminato, perspicaco, mercio et domino vencero. En gracia donnasancta."

*(In the name of Verena, Morr, Shallya and Myrmidia, grant us knowledge, insight, compassion and great victory, thank the Maiden.)
Common Myrmidian Benediction, delivered in Classical Tongue*

The Temple has, over the centuries, imposed (and later rescinded in some cases) various rules in relation to what can and cannot be done on any particular day. No flesh from any four footed or winged animal can be consumed on Myrmides, for instance, which largely explains the popularity of salted fish in the Estalian diet and, the poet and philosopher Gustavo Marques Alfau suggested, the unpopularity of gryphon and dragon meat. Every Estalian is expected to attend worship on Domingo (although most in fact attend more frequently than once a week). The fact that everyone is forced to attend on Domingo, however, means that these services often turn into an excuse to promenade dressed in one's finest clothing on the way to, from and, indeed, in the temple.

The Major Festivals

Witching Night (Il noche Brujería)

Sacred to Morr throughout the Old World, this marks the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. In Estalia, it is marked by priests of Myrmidia and Morr, tasked to watch over things until the gods return from their rest. Magicians and followers of the dark arts also celebrate this day, taking advantage of the way the winds of magic blow more strongly, even down to the southern Old World.

New Year's Day

The first day of the first month. Prayers are offered to Myrmidia and her mother, Verena, asking for wisdom, justice and skill in all endeavours in the year ahead.

Rebirth (18th day of Primero)

The change from winter into spring is celebrated by the Estalians as the date of Myrmidia's birth as a mortal. Thanks are given for the coming of new life and small spiced cakes are traditionally baked. Often, corn dolls, representing the goddess, made from last year's harvest are ploughed back into the earth by farmers on this day to ensure the goddess's favour for their efforts. Huge religious processions are organised in every town, with hooded acolytes of the goddess carrying silver or gilded reliquaries, icons and candles through the streets.

Festival of Mice and Moths (Spring Equinox)

Marked by fiestas in which Estalian men, women and children of all ages and rank dress up as mice, moths and other pests in order to eat and drink long into the evening, this festival has its origins in the need to annually beat out carpets and clothes to get rid of moths and sweep houses out to clear away anything that might attract vermin. Many of these more traditional activities are still carried out on this day. Generally, the blessing of the goddess Myrmidia is sought to keep pests, vermin and ill-luck away for the rest of the year. In some places, the priest and locals hold small processions where they bash drums and blow trumpets around the town or village boundaries in the hopes of scaring mice and malign spirits away. In one or two more remote villages, prayers are offered directly to spirits of the mice and moths that they leave the village alone.

Deliverance (24th day of Quinto)

The festival of Myrmidians and Arabyans (Fiesta de Myrmidios y Arbyanos) is a celebration of the expulsion of the infidel from Estalia in the 14th century. Pageants are held the length and breadth of the peninsula, with participants taking the parts of Estalians and Arabyans in mock battles. Brightly coloured costumes are worn, often with ribbons tied around them, and blunted swords used. Music is played and the battles themselves are very often intricate dances.

Summer Solstice

Marked by processions and bull fights which go on late into the night in most Estalian communities. Huge puppet models of giants carried on a frame that entirely covers the man carrying them often lead the processions. In some communities this, the shortest night of the year, is when they celebrate the defeat of Nourgul the Necrach. Costumed performers take on the role of Nourgul and his various minions, dressed in skeleton outfits or as decaying zombies. A young woman is chosen to play the part of Myrmidia, who during the course of the night releases those playing the undead by touching them. As first light breaks, the person playing the character of Nourgul peels off his mask and everyone is revealed as their normal selves.

Night of Masks

The eighth night of the eighth month, the Night of Masks is halfway between the Solstice and the Night of Mystery. It is traditional throughout Estalia to hold masques on this night. For the affluent, these are complex affairs, masked balls, sometimes with extraordinary costumes produced at great expense. For the less well off, anything might be pressed into service to disguise one's appearance. The night is particularly popular with storytellers who often tell of romantic encounters between princes and paupers, oaths of friendship sworn between deadly enemies, friendships ripped apart or comic misunderstandings of all kinds by masked participants at the dances that go on until morning.

Night of Mystery (Il noche misterio)

As in the rest of the Old World, Myrmidia's father is honoured. It is supposed to be particularly auspicious to cast auguries on this day, as Verena watches over the world in place of her weary husband.

Festival of Lights and Fires (Autumn Equinox)

As the year turns, there is a late autumn celebration of the year and its bounty. Portions of the year's earnings or crop are traditionally donated to the Temple at this time. In those parts where corn dolls are ploughed into the earth at Rebirth, the last sheaf of wheat cut is made into a figurine of Myrmidia. In the evening, huge bonfires are lit and flaming brands put outside every house. Sometimes the Inquisition has been known to reserve its largest auto da fé, when heretics are burned, for this festival.

Dias del Toros

A common festival, which falls on different dates in different towns and cities but usually occurs during the autumn. On this day, bulls are paraded through the town's streets to the accompaniment of local bands. Sometimes coloured ribbons are tied to their horns and banners carried alongside them. In other towns, the bulls are set free and left to run through the town, whilst the young men attempt to out run, and often out leap, the bulls' sharp horns. Often *toreos* are held at the end of the day. The blood of the bulls killed by the matadors is thought to ensure fertility in the year ahead. Children are often conceived on this night, but whether that is due to it being propitious or to the amount of wine consumed, few could say.

Day of the Shieldmaidens (9th of Diez y Seis, the sixteenth month)

As well as commonly honouring individual shield maidens on different days, Estalians have a major festival where all the innumerable Shieldmaidens of Myrmidia are celebrated. Attendance for worship at the temple is compulsory and a special meal of salted pork is prepared. Traditionally, martial competitions are held on this day. The Queen of Bilbali sponsors one of the most prestigious jousts and tourneys in Estalia, which regularly draws competitors from Bretonnia and around the Old World. Other towns hold wrestling competitions and some hire pit fighters for civic displays.

Maiden's End (Winter Equinox)

For the Estalians, the mid-winter festival is the time when they mourn the passing of Myrmidia and the old year. Curses are poured on the assassin who killed the goddess in her mortal form. The culmination of the day is a procession by the priest of Myrmidia to the nearest high point to mark the setting of the midwinter sun and the promise of returning life from then on. Candles are carried by all participants on the way back to the temple.

Other Cults and Other Gods in Estalia

The Temple Of Myrmidia y la Sagrada Família would like to believe that it has a complete religious monopoly on belief in the Estalian Kingdoms. It monitors all other cults operating within the peninsula with ever suspicious eyes, watching for any behaviour it deems inappropriate. Even the few priests of apparently allied cults, such as Verenans or Morrrites, find their activities watched and scrutinised. Despite this, worship of other gods occurs, sometimes openly, sometimes disguised or incorporated in the worship of Myrmidia or one of her Shieldmaidens and sometimes in secret.

Mannan

The sea god is worshipped by sailors and those tied to the sea throughout the Old World with so much connection to the sea and trade, his worship has trickled into Estalian ports, especially in the north and on the islands. To the average Estalian, however, Mannan remains a strange and foreign god. His ancient and widespread worship in Tilea, often under the name Mathann, has not spread to Estalia. As ever, the worship of Myrmidia is commonly substituted in her aspect as Myrmidia of the Stars, which venerates Myrmidia ascendant to the heavens after her death, and worships her as a guide to navigation. Others ascribe ocean travel to Myrmidia of the Last Journey, worshipping safe travel over a calm ocean just as her bier was carried westward.

Sometimes however, Manann asserts himself. With so many foreign sailors, they need a place to worship their god and the desire to make sailors stay in nearby inns and spend more money has trumped the desire to keep a pure faith, which is why ports tolerate temples to the sea god. The Manannite temple in Magritta is so large it has started attracting locals simply by its stature, causing the Inquisition to worry.

In many cases, however, the two gods are worshipped side by side, sometimes in the same temple even, or at least a short walk from one to the other. Manann is the god who controls the oceans, the other as the goddess who provides the skill to survive them. Reconciling this with Myrmidian faith teaches that Manann is Morr's wayward, intemperate, oft-forgotten brother. He fills in work taking souls that Morr cannot reach when they sink below the sea. This is definitely heresy, but if the Manannites still pray at Temple, the Inquisition usually has bigger fish to fry (like servants of Stromfels). Eventually, however, such laxity towards adding members to The Sacred Family is bad for business and encourages polytheism

Some in the church are desperate for an excuse to clamp down hard on Manann-worship and redress the balance in their favour.

Mórr and Verena

Honoured as Myrmidia's father and mother, these two have virtually no separate cults of their own. The occasional occurrences of those who believe one or the other deserves ascendancy or who acquire a version of their god more like the Empire appearance does occur, but tends to fairly quickly be reabsorbed back into the mainstream faith. Some Morrrites and Verenans do leave their posts in the Mother Church or focus their lives entirely around the service of one god, but this is rare and still within the realm of the church's practices. Specialist temples and small orders exist for those who study the mother or the father, on the understanding that such things will also illuminate their blessed child.

Morrrites with the Myrmidian church are in charge of funeral rites as the Empire, but the rocky soil makes the Empire tradition of burial less popular. More preferred are above-ground crypts, especially in the cities, where whole necropolises of crypts can exist, staffed by wandering Morrrites with no duties in the central church. In the mountains and hills, air burials are common. Bodies are left on wooden platforms high above the ground and away from wolves and other scavengers. Instead, the birds of Morr, the raven and the vulture, pick the bones clean. Generally, these bones are collected from the platforms in annual ceremonies, presided over by a priest of Myrmidia, before being laid to rest in a communal ossuary. In other places, a morbid fear of vampirism has led to widespread cremation of the dead.

Verenans preserve church and city records and in small towns act as reeves and notaries. They also function as librarians and school teachers just as they do in the Empire, and a visitor from the north will find the temples of Mother Verena resemble his ones at home very closely—full of books and students, although in some cases with more of a feel of an alchemist's laboratory than they might expect. Verena in Estalia does not however dispense justice or the law, and is almost never depicted with the sword she carries in the north. There are some Verenans though who feel that Myrmidia's "busy schedule" means she misses some injustices and cannot be expected to ensure treaties and promises are correctly followed. Some of these act within the church to keep a check on these things. Others act outside the church and the law. There is a secret sect of ladies who call themselves the Carabina, the "screech owls" who stalk the wilds sending justice to criminals who think they have escaped—but also balancing the scales when they feel a criminal has been unjustly served, freeing prisoners or harming or robbing accusers. This is a new threat, possibly caused by northern agitators, and the Inquisition would do anything to snuff it out before it grows.

The Reman Gods

Fragments from the ancient times of Tylos and the Reman Empire record many gods, each with a variety of different names. In this confusion, however, Estalian scholars have divined a primitive understanding of the Sagrada Família. Remans noted four gods as the Virtues of Just War: Shallya for Mercy, Verena for Tactics, Mor-Khan (the late Morr) for Skill—or Deadliness—and Marilia (clearly Myrmidia) for Honour. Some readings record the Goddess of Honour as Marileo—that is, as a male. Many take to suggest that Myrmidia can appear as whichever sex as she prefers the better to lead her people. Other scholars simply blame faulty copying of the ancient original texts. Interestingly, just as in the Empire, it is Shallya who is described as becoming mortal to learn of her people's plight, never Marilia. Some heresies suggest that aspects of Myrmidia have been borrowed from Shallya's faith, or worse yet, that the two goddesses are simply different versions of the same story.

O Prospero

A god—perhaps—of merchants and trade. Opinion is divided among Verenans and scholars of such matters as to whether he is divine, and if so, how he fits into the Divine Family. Essentially, the god is the equivalent of Handrich in the Empire and Mercopio in Tilea; he acquired his new name from the first words of the Tilean prayer invoking his blessing. Certain scholars have suggested that the entire cult was imported by merchants with links to Tilea or Marienburg. Certainly, worship of O Prospero is confined to the merchant class and primarily to those with trading links outside Estalia. Worship of O Prospero is generally seen as compatible with that of Myrmidia and the Divine Family, as a representation of a specialised aspect of their grace—worshippers are clearly just asking for the family to bless their financial initiatives. Another way this faith is subsumed is by the church elevating the profile of Prosperra, the Shieldmaiden of Thrift and Abundance. It is not heresy, therefore—just a misspelling.

Ranald

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Black Dog of Misfortune has something of Ranald's role in Estalian myth, also echoed in the Bretonnian legend of Reynaldo the thieving fox. But the common folk also talk of other figures which overlap with this northern thief. There is Locci, the god of trickery and betrayal, of which more below. Il Senor del Picaro—the Lord of Rogues—is a folk figure invoked by many of those seeking ill-gotten gains or lying to gain a lady's graces. The Tileans worship Ranald as Ranaldo and in eastern states and Magritta, the Lord of Rogues or Locci often acquire this name. This is definitely heretical, and symbols of Ranald are grounds for Inquisitorial action to whatever extreme they feel necessary.

Usually the Myrmidian Temple is content that the secular authorities enforce a ban his worship, for his worship has been a crime in most kingdoms for millennia. However, state backing lets zealous inquisitors use great civic resources to hunt down Ranaldian cults. In the process they usually topple organized crime gangs which work out well for kings and priests alike. Indeed, notorious thieves and gangsters are often tried as "Ranaldites" (it makes it easier to have them burnt) and the phrase "Ranaldo's gifts" means stolen merchandise. A weary trader may deliver his packages to its buyer with the assertion that it is all there, minus "Ranald's due".

The legends of Ranald told in Tilea and elsewhere are quite well known in Estalia, which helps encourage the community to hate and fear him. Particularly famous is Ranald tricking Shallya into making him immortal, which they see as taking advantage of a woman (not to mention a goddess). The simple fact that the Tileans worship this god ensures worship of Ranald stays rare, and likewise keeps disdain for Tileans high. The two deserve each other's, is the thought—thievish, ragged, conniving woman-cheaters, the pair.

The Mysterious Death of Nourgul

Every child knows the story of how Nourgul the Necrarch, the vampire king, had conquered all of Magritta but, upon entering her holy temple in that city, was immediately turned to dust by her holy light. A heretical version of that story tells of a brave son of Ranald—a tomb robber by trade—who, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, slew Nourgul with a lengthy recitation of the vampire's own story of lengthy unlife until the daylight crept in and struck the Necrarch down. A similar, Myrmidian tale suggests that a Ranaldian thief probing a long-forgotten temple was to blame for Nourgul's awakening in the first place. A third tale keeps the Ranaldian saviour but has him redeemed by his actions, and convert to Myrmidia afterwards, realizing his errantry into sin. The truth, if any, behind all this, will doubtless never be known.

Shallya

There are sick and injured and poor and downtrodden individuals everywhere. The need for the grace of the sister of Myrmidia is felt as strongly in Estalia as elsewhere. Of course, she is primarily worshipped as part of the Divine Four, but recently there have been a number of Shallyan Missions: priests from Bretonnia who have set about bringing the religion to the peoples of the Estalian kingdoms independently. These are disapproved of, but given that they appear relatively benign none have taken action against them. Priests of Myrmidia and her family have tended to be grateful to them for easing their burden in tending to the sick and poor. If the independent Shallya worshippers become more powerful and begin to gain independent worshippers this attitude might change.

Generally, Shallya is seen as a goddess for those who have not managed to receive the blessings of Myrmidia. She is prayed to intervene on behalf of those who are least

fortunate, often as an intermediary or intercessor between the worshipper and another member of her family whose aid is required. Not all those who worship her in this way are poor or ill. Many have the goddess of mercy as a personal patron and there are private shrines for families to pray for her intercession in many wealthy houses.

“Myrmidia helps the strong become stronger. Shallya helps the weak become strong in the first.”
Aquila Alta Hembre

Nature Cults

The worship of Taal and Rhya is almost unknown in Estalia. There are, however, other nature cults in Estalia. The most prominent of these is the goddess Iseza, who is sometimes combined with the Divine Four in worship in rural parts, particularly in the north—western kingdoms. She is often regarded as the grandmother of Myrmidia and fulfils a role not unlike that of Rhya in the Empire. Sometimes it is suggested that Iseza is simply another name for Verena and that she and Morr are responsible of the fertility of the land, controlling as they do life and death and being the parents of Myrmidia. Again, this is heresy in theory but in practice if it keeps farmers and their wives in pews in the wild interior, it is tolerated. There is a town called Nicola, however, in the northern mountains that has concluded that if all the family came from Iseza than she is the mightiest, and as such venerates old women. So strong is their devotion that as soon as men give their wives a child, they are slaughtered and burnt in enormous wooden cages.

Canne and Locci

In the Empire, Canne is known as Khaine and worshipped by assassins and murderers. In Estalia, his worship is often twinned with that of Locci. Where Canne is the crazed killer who froths, tears and shreds, Locci hides in the darkness until his prey's back is turned, then bites once, and lets his poisonous fangs do the rest. Lore of these dark twins is found on the ancient ruins left across or buried under the Estalian landscape, and their worship has spread among the underclasses of the land, with Locci taking some of the role that Ranald, as patron of the poor and disposed, takes in the Empire. This is something true Ranaldians regard with horror as Locci is cruel, perverse and violent, very much unlike their God. In the honour-soaked culture of Estalia, however, there are many who seek to rebel, and Locci's preference for poison and backstabbing is becoming increasingly popular. Likewise, Canne favours victory and deadliness by any means over honour or swordsmanship, so has wide appeal to those seeking an alternative fighting style, or who have been oft-insulted by a well-schooled bladesman. Thus the cult of Canne and Locci, or as it is also known the Wolf and the Snake, grows in popularity, with its meetings in dark ruins now turning into schools for murder and discord, with no end of eager students. So intent is the Inquisition in simply destroying any trace of heresy that they rarely pause long enough to discover the details of any individual kind and so this new cult continues to flourish.

The Dark Gods

Everywhere there are those that turn to the worship of the Gods of Chaos: Khorne, Slaanesh, Tzeentch and Nurgle. Such cults are naturally prohibited throughout Estalia, due in no small measure to the Temple of Myrmidia's hatred of them. Its priests and inquisitors are sworn to root out those who worship such gods. In truth, however, most Estalians assume that the worship of such gods does not occur in their blessed part of the Old World. In large part they are right, but even here, beneath the sun-kissed streets and whitewashed walls, there are those who turn cellars into charnel houses or worse in the depraved rites of their gods and daemons.

Chapter VIII: The Maiden's Miracles

*"She waits for you in her Shieldmaidens bower
Though more shield than maiden, 'pon this hour."
Much Ado About Snotlings, Act 4, Scene 1*



When Initiates reach the rank of a full priest—an Aquila Protege or higher—they typically choose a form of their goddess to worship. The Maiden walked many paths during her time on the earth and her journeys and deeds have been divided into certain aspects and facets. Each is only a fragment of the great whole of Myrmidia, but by focussing on one of her noble aspects, the priest may greater embodying that quality. So too, does the Maiden grant spells based on her many aspects.

Estalian clergy may choose any of the ten following Divine Lore to learn when they become Priests. These are only the most popular of her aspects; there are many more. They may even learn a Lore of Verena, Morr or Shallya without leaving the Myrmidian priesthood, worshipping the extended family without sacrificing their faith in the Maiden. However only one Lore may be chosen and new spells can only be gained with the New Spell Talent (see the box below).

In the Empire, where Myrmidia is known only as a warrior goddess, they know only her lore as the Captain, the Commander and the Wrathful, something the Estalians see as very limited and myopic. Many Estalians also have trouble grasping the strongly polytheistic world of the Empire: why have a god for every little thing when Myrmidia is the god of all? In fact, some scholars have noted spells akin to those of Morr and Verena being cast by Myrmidians, and even spells of Taal and Ranald being known by those who worship Myrmidia the Wanderer. To Estalians, this proves the Empire folk are childish, having to dress up aspects of Myrmidia in antlers so the woodsmen can pretend to have their own god; to the Empire folk the Myrmidians are trying to stuff everything under one name whether it fits or not. Heretical thinkers wonder if all the spells are the same and the gods only dressings added by man, and that the dressings vary just as costumes do between lands. Such thinkers are typically burned very quickly on exceedingly hot pyres.



Chapter VIII: The Maiden's Miracles

Estalians may study Myrmidia's aspect of a Captain, a Commander or a deliverer of Wrath (see Tome of Salvation). Other aspects of the Goddess include:

- Myrmidia the Beautiful, representing Myrmidia's gift for craftsmanship and the arts. Myrmidia taught that a beautiful weapon is a more deadly one, and a beautified nation is a proud one. Devotees of this aspect, the Beatines, learn spells of music, dance and crafting, and aim to spread beauty wherever they go. Most of them learn a craft or an art, if not several, and act as travelling minstrels, trading their beatification for food and shelter. Others advise whole towns on architecture or other civic works.
- Myrmidia the Brave teaches courage and fortitude in all things. All those who know fear and suffering pray to Myrmidia the Brave to give them strength to see things through. Shallya may save, but it is Myrmidia the Brave who gives them courage to wait for Shallya's answer. Devotees of the Brave Maiden are known for their unflinching courage and their tendency to always take the lead. Some consider them rash and dangerous as a result. The Valorites get on well with the Kislevite sons of Tor.
- Myrmidia of the Last Journey is the very last part of the goddess' life, where she journeyed west on the boat that would bear her to the horizon and thence up to the heavens. Those who worship the Last Journey do not intrude on Father Morr's domain, however; they instead seek that all should reach their destination on calm seas and safe roads, although seas tend to be their primary focus. Most Journeyers spend their lives at sea, but unlike Manannites are expected to work as hard as the rest of their crew.
- Myrmidia the Lightbringer is the aspect of the goddess who illuminates and enlightens the world. She is different from Verena, because Verena holds knowledge and records, and deals with the minutiae of laws and strictures. The Lightbringer represents the granting of knowledge and insight, and the illumination of all the peoples in the world, towards a better nation as Myrmidia wished. Lightbringers aim to teach someone something at least once a day.
- Myrmidia the Merciful is very close to Shallya, but as with the Lightbringer and Verena, the differences are important. Shallya is the goddess of kindness; she gives life. Myrmidia the Merciful prevents the loss of life with her sword and her shield, sparing both her enemies and her allies. She is the temperance of Myrmidia's wrath, the arm that holds back the blade when it is necessary, and knows that a good surrender is better than a great decimation. Mercines favour restraint in battle and in everything they do.
- Myrmidia the Pure stands for the core principles of Myrmidia's Bellona Lexus, the rules of battle. She values honour and respect and truth above all, and strives for all combat to be noble and fair. With their emphasis on just battle and a just life, Purists get on well with Verenans—but besides that, they have few friends. Even the most noble Myrmidian priest finds the Purists a bit tiresome after a while.
- Myrmidia the Seer has many facets: she has her father's ability to see oracles, her mother's insight and her own gift for foresight and great vision. She is the eagle that soars high and sees all coming; and looks low and sees the tiniest truth hidden amongst the lies. Not all Seers are great oracles: there are many things that can be seen and their future glimpses are often little more than instinct and danger sense. But when the blades come down, that's more than enough.
- Myrmidia of the Shining Stars is very close to Myrmidia the Seer: she too sees the future for is not our fate written in the stars? When Myrmidia ascended to heaven after her assassination she placed her form above the land so all would know she watched over them still. Those who venerate the Maiden of the Stars see fates ahead but also know how to find their way, on land, but especially on sea. Like those of the Last Journey, she is often found employed on ships.
- Myrmidia the Wanderer is—to the Wanderers who follow her, at least—the true face of the maiden. For whether she was fighting or illuminating or seeing, she was always travelling, often miles and miles a day, for months at a time. Legend has it she walked every yard of Estalia in her brief time, and fanatical Wanderers try to do the same. The Wanderers are the humblest order, shunning wealth and homes, always on the road like their goddess and mixing with the common folk. Many people, including their fellow Myrmidians, consider them annoying beggars but the Wanderers don't seem to care.

Spell Lists

| Myrmidia the Beautiful | Myrmidia the Brave | Myrmidia the Captain | Myrmidia the Commander | Myrmidia the Lightbringer |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Apprentice to Master | Face of Empena | Dismay Foe | Command the Legion | Beacon in the Tempest |
| Beautify Object | Fear No Blade | Inspired Leadership | Eagle's Vision | Gift of Scripture |
| Craftsman's Muse | Hold the Line | Quick Strike | Inspired Leadership | Inspired Leadership |
| For Morr to Weep and Shallya to Smile | Intrepid Strike | Shield of Myrmidia | Shield of Myrmidia | Master of All |
| Song of Heart's Keening | Martyr | Skill of Combat | Shieldmaiden's Devotion | Owl's Wisdom |
| The Roaring Dragon with the Piercing Tail | Shieldmaiden's Devotion | Spear of Myrmidia | Skill of Combat | The Blind Maiden |

| Myrmidia the Merciful | Myrmidia the Pure | Myrmidia the Seer | Myrmidia the Wanderer | Myrmidia the Wrathful |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Arms of the Sister | Arena of Reckoning | Blade for Blade | Eagle's Vision | Blazing Sun |
| Boon of Surrender | Honourable Combat | Danger Foreseen | Lesson of Senera | Dismay Foe |
| Healing Burst | Oath of the Spear | Find the Weakness | Lord of the Wild | Fury's Call |
| Share the Suffering | Spare the Innocents | Glimpse Ahead | Myrmidia's March | Quick Strike |
| Sleep of Death | Spear of Myrmidia | Tale of the Battle | Myrmidia's Rest | Spear of Myrmidia |
| Westward Call | Vestment of Purity | Vision of Morr | Perfect Empathy | Vengeful Wrath |

| Myrmidia of the Last Journey | Myrmidia of the Shining Stars |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Beacon in the Tempest | Find the Path |
| Blessed Voyage | Fisherman's Eye |
| Blessing of the Albatross | Guiding Dream |
| Burgher's Acquisition | Map the Heavens |
| Lesson of Serena | Signs in the Stars |
| River's Blessing | Starless Night |

Spells in italics are found in the core rulebook or Tome of Salvation. Other spells are listed below.

Apprentice to Master

Casting Number: 12
 Casting Time: Special
 Duration: Special
 Range: You
 Ingredient: A tool used to build a great temple (+2)
 Description: As part of the casting of this spell, you must watch another individual creating something using a Perform or Trade skill. Until the next sunrise, you gain the skill you observed. You may use this skill as many times as your Magic characteristic, then the knowledge fades from your hands.

Arena of Reckoning

Casting Number: 14
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: Instant
 Range: Touch
 Ingredients: A circlet of gold (+2)
 Description: When you cast this spell, you and one target are locked in combat to the death. An immovable magical aura rises surrounding only the two of you (just enough to cover your two squares with about a foot of give around)—any others that might be caught are flung out. Aside from a Dispel spell, the aura remains totally impenetrable to anything and anyone until either you or the target are dead.

Arms of the Sister

Casting Number: 10
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds)
 Range: You
 Ingredients: A broken arrow (+1)
 Description: When you strike, you strike with the arms of Shallya, Myrmidia's merciful sister. When striking to Stun, you automatically succeed on the Strength test. If you strike to wound while the spell is in effect, it immediately ends.

Beacon in the Tempest

Casting Number: 9
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds)
 Range: 24 yards (12 squares)
 Ingredients: An owl's beak (+1)
 Description: While Myrmidia's faithful command soldiers, they must also look to those who cannot fight. All allies within range can hear your voice as clearly as if they were standing next to you, and can understand you whatever language they speak. Your voice sounds calming and wise, and those who hear it gain a +10% bonus to Willpower tests to resist Intimidate tests, and Fear or Terror effects for the next hour.

Beautify Object

Casting Number: 9
 Casting Time: Half action
 Duration: 1 hour/Magic
 Range: Touch
 Ingredients: A paintbrush (+1)
 Description: You apply a beautifier's eye and hand to one object you nominate. The object's Craftsmanship goes up one level (Poor to Common, Common to Good, Good to Best). You may Beautify as many objects as your Magic characteristic. Weapons enhanced in this manner gain the standard bonuses. However, Myrmidia frowns upon deception for profit and any attempt to sell items enhanced by this spell cause the glamour to immediately vanish and the deception to be revealed.

Blade for Blade

Casting Number: 10
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 minute
 Range: You
 Ingredients: A silvered blade (+2)
 Description: When you cast this spell you can see the attacks of your enemies coming towards you as if in slow motion. You may parry as many times per round as your Magic characteristic. You may still only parry once per attack.

Boon of Surrender

Casting Number: 15

Casting Time: Half Action

Duration: Instant

Range: 24 yards

Ingredients: A ring of silver (+2)

Description: When you cast this spell, you demand that your enemies surrender (making Charm or Command tests as the GM directs). All enemies you can see within range of the spell who cease fighting immediately heal 1d10 Wounds. They also cease to be Frightened, Terrified or subject to frenzy if they were previously. Those who do not surrender suffer -10% on their next WS or BS roll. For the next hour, if the subjects of the spell attack or direct harm towards you or a number of your allies equal to your Magic characteristic, the subject loses 1d0 Wounds.

Craftsman's Muse

Casting Number: 7

Casting Time: Half action

Duration: 1 hour/until triggered

Range: Touch/You

Ingredients: A stylus (+1)

Description: You summon the artistic mastery that is Myrmidia's to bestow, and pass it into your hands or those of one you touch. The target gains +30% on their next Perform or Trade Test.

Danger Foreseen

Casting Number: 14

Casting Time: Full Action

Duration: 1 hour per Magic Characteristic

Range: You

Ingredient: A shield that saved a life in battle (+2)

Description: For the duration of this spell, you can sense the threat of battle no matter what its source. You cannot be taken by surprise.

Face of Empena

Casting Number: 8

Casting Time: Half Action

Duration: 1 hour/Magic

Range: Touch (You)

Ingredients: A ring of iron (+1)

Description: Empena was a Shieldmaiden who stood at her guard post all through the coldest winter the Estalian Mountains had ever seen, and never shivered. To wear her face is to show no emotion. While under this spell, nobody may discern your true intents or feelings or thoughts through examining you (but they may check for other evidence, of course). No Perception test can perceive your true motives, nor can they penetrate your Disguise if you also succeed on such a test. Under magical scrutiny, you must win an Opposed Channelling test to maintain your illusion. You may still be required to make Charm tests while using this spell, as not betraying a lie is not the same as convincing others of its truth. You do gain +10% to such tests however.

Fear No Blade

Casting Number: 6

Casting Time: Half Action

Duration: 1 round/Magic

Range: You

Ingredients: A ring of copper (+1)

Description: Under the effects of this spell, you lose not just your fear but your sense of self preservation as well. This allows you to close upon your opponent much faster and much nearer than any sane combatant would, opening up opportunities others would never find. You gain +20% to your Weapon Skill. However, by lunging so close to the blade, your opponents gain +1 to damage on all their hits.

Find the Path

Casting Number: 13

Casting Time: 2 Full Actions

Duration: Permanent

Range: You

Description: You instantly know the route to take to get wherever you are when you cast the spell to somewhere familiar to you, assuming that place is within an hour's travel. If it is further away, you will instead simply get a general idea of which direction to travel.

Find the Weakness

Casting Number: 7
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 round/Magic
 Range: Touch (You)
 Ingredient: A rusted blade (+1)
 Description: The target of this spell becomes expert in finding the weaknesses in his enemy's defences. For the duration, he gains +20% to his WS or BS when using the Aim action, instead of +10%. If the target also has Sharpshooter or Focussed Strike (see Night's Dark Masters), the bonus rises to +30% for the appropriate attacks. You can only benefit from one casting of this spell at a time.

For Morr to Weep And Shallya to Smile

Casting Number: 14
 Casting Time: 10 minutes
 Duration: 1 hour/Magic
 Range: You
 Ingredient: A felt mask (+1)
 Description: For the duration of this spell, your performances tear at the heartstrings of all who listen to them. Any Perform tests made by you (and as many allies as your Magic characteristic) while the spell is in effect automatically succeed with three degrees of success. An audience of up to 1d10 people per your Magic characteristic will be reduced to weeping with joy or sorrow at the result. This provides +30% to subsequent Fellowship Tests with the audience members, and all members of the audience must pass a Hard (-20%) Will Power Test to cause or direct any harm or disadvantage towards any of the performers. The effects fade after a few hours.

Gift of Scripture

Casting Number: 7
 Casting Time: Half action
 Duration: 1 hour/Magic
 Range: Touch
 Ingredients: A piece of parchment bearing script (+1)
 Description: All should be able to read Myrmidia's words, and with this spell, they can. The target gains the Read/Write skill for the duration of the spell.

Healing Burst

Casting Number: 12
 Casting Time: Full Action
 Duration: Instant
 Range: You (large template)
 Ingredients: A broken sword (+2)
 Description: Centre the large target on yourself. Those affected, friend or foe, except for you gain 2 Wounds.

Hold the Line

Casting Number: 13
 Casting Time: Full Action
 Duration: See description
 Range: See description
 Ingredients: A spear that killed an ally of yours (+2)
 Description: Using the haft of the spear, you draw a 20-yard line in the ground. As long as you and all allies you can see remain on one side of the line, they gain +10% to their Will Power and their Toughness. Enemies must make a successful Will Power test to cross the line, but may attack across it normally. If the line is not a circle, the spell will also fade if you move more than ten yards from it. Otherwise, it fades at the next sunrise or sunset.

Honorable Combat

Casting Number: 17
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds) or until broken
 Range: You (large template)
 Ingredients: A circlet of silver (+2)
 Description: Centre the large template on yourself. All enemies affected must make a Hard (-20%) Will Power test or feel driven to fight at "fair odds". This means they can only engage you and your allies one-on-one. The GM may decide that significantly smaller or weaker opponents (rats, Snotlings) may attack in larger numbers. This spell ends immediately if you or any of your allies initiate uneven odds. Again, the GM may decide that large or powerful opponents (giants, dragons) need not be fought one-on-one.

Intrepid Strike

Casting Number: 12
 Casting Time: Full Action
 Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds)
 Range: You
 Ingredients: A charm engraved with a sun (+2)
 Description: Leaping into the front line is now your forte. When you Charge, you may make two attacks on your target.

Lesson of Senera

Casting Number: 9
 Casting Time: Half Action
 Duration: 1 minute
 Range: Touch (You)
 Ingredients: A duck's feather (+1)
 Description: Senera was the Shieldmaiden of the Mountains, who taught Myrmidia to fight in any terrain. The target of this spell suffers no penalties to their Weapon Skill, Ballistic Skill or Agility test due to difficult terrain or conditions. This includes environmental conditions such as rain or snow, and the tossing of a ship, but not darkness.

Map of the Heavens

Casting Number: 4
 Casting Time: Full Action
 Duration: 10 minutes per Magic Characteristic
 Range: You
 Ingredient: A star map (+1)
 Description: You gain +20% to all Navigation Tests as long as you can see the sky, even if you are in a completely unfamiliar place.

Master of All

Casting Number: 14
 Casting Time: 1 minute
 Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds)/Magic
 Range: You
 Ingredients: An owl's claw (+1)
 Description: The Goddess lets you understand even that which lies outside your studies. For the duration of the spell, you gain one Academic Knowledge skill of your choice. You may cast Owl's Wisdom while Master of All is at work.

Myrmidia's March

Casting Number: 11
 Casting Time: Full Action
 Duration: See description
 Range: See description
 Ingredients: A kingfisher's feather (+1)
 Description: You and up to ten allies you can see may travel as if unhampered even if conditions would normally indicate the terrain as hampering. The spell lasts for one minute per Magic characteristic for local movement, or one hour per Magic characteristic for overland movement. It only affects long-term travel; it does not change how far anyone may move on a round-by-round basis.

Myrmidia's Rest

Casting Number: 4
 Casting Time: 1 minute
 Duration: 8 hours
 Range: 24 yards
 Ingredients: A nightingale's feather (+1)
 Description: You and all allies you can see can get eight hours good sleep no matter what the weather or terrain or noise level or light level, and wake feeling refreshed and strong. You must actually lie still for the eight hours and sleep for some of the time. This spell only guarantees that such rest is as good as if you were sleeping in a palace featherbed.

Oath of the Spear

Casting Number: 13
 Casting Time: One minute
 Duration: 24 hours / Magic
 Range: Touch
 Ingredients: A written text of the oath (+2)
 Description: You and the target swear an oath, each promising something of approximately equal worth (such as not to harm the other). The target must do so of his own free will, and be aware of the spell's casting. If you or he breaks the vow, the breaker immediately suffers a Strength 8 hit to the body that ignores armour.

Share the Suffering

Casting Number: 6

Casting Time: Full Action

Duration: Instant

Range: Touch

Ingredients: A drop of your blood (+2)

Description: The target immediately regains half of their lost wounds. You immediately lose the amount of wounds healed on the target.

Signs in the Stars

Casting Number: 20

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Duration: 1 hour

Range: Special

Ingredients: A vial of ink made from eagle's blood (+3)

Description: A new star appears to twinkle in the sky in a place you wish to put it. It can be seen for hundreds of miles, and thus can be used to send vital communications over long distances, although recipients must typically make an Academic Knowledge (Astronomy) Test to identify the change and interpret its meaning. It can also be used to intimidate and frighten enemies, as there is a legend of a Witchling Star which rises when dark fates abide. Likewise it could give situational bonuses to attempts to persuade others of Myrmidia's anger, blessing or consent. This spell can never be cast more than once a night, and messing with the maiden's stars for frivolous reasons is extremely frowned upon.

Song of the Heart's Keening

Casting Number: 19

Casting Time: 1 minute (6 rounds)

Duration: Instant

Range: Touch

Ingredients: A Best Quality instrument (+2)

Description: In casting this spell, you must also make a Perform skill check. If it also succeeds, your performance is so inspiring and heart-rending it grants inner peace to one target. They lose 1d5 Insanity Points. Alternatively, you may sing a song that speaks of all the darkness in the soul of your target. They gain 1d5 Insanity Points.

A subject can only ever gain or lose Insanity from your casting of this spell once in their lifetime, but several High Priests of Morr could remove Insanity from a troubled mind entirely.

Spare the Innocents

Casting Number: 8

Casting Time: Full Action

Duration: 1 round/Magic

Range: Touch

Ingredients: A dove's feather (+1)

Description: Enemies must make a Will Power Test to attack the target. The spell ends if the target attacks or acts in a hostile fashion (feigning an attack, taunting etc).

Starless Night

Casting Number: 9

Casting Time: 2 Full Actions

Duration: 1 minute per Magic Characteristic

Range: Special

Ingredient: A falcon's hood (+1)

Description: The sky above an area up to a hundred yards square grows very dark, as stars dim and the moon goes behind a cloud. During the day this has no visible effect, during the night it makes all vision-based Perception tests one degree more difficult. It also decreases the maximum vision distance of light sources (and Night Vision) by 4 yards (2 squares). Those making stealth checks receive a +10% bonus.

Tale of Battle

Casting Number: 14

Casting Time: 1 minute

Duration: Instant

Range: Sight

Ingredients: The eye of a big cat (+2)

Description: You become aware of all the battles that have taken place in the area in which you are standing, over the last year. You know how many fought on each side, how many casualties each side took and who eventually won the day. You also gain a sense of how they fought and their respective skills in battle. Beyond that you do not know who fought or who they fought for. Battles more than a month old may require a Channelling test to view clearly (GM's call).

The Roaring Dragon With The Piercing Tail

Casting Number: 9

Casting Time: Full Action

Duration: 1 minute (6 rounds)/Magic

Range: Special

Ingredients: A handful of flash powder (lit when the spell is cast) (+2)

Description: The Bellona Myrmidia tells of the legend of the roaring dragon with the piercing tail—a metaphor for how Myrmidia distracted her enemies at the front while attacking in the rear. In casting this spell, you must also make an Easy (+20%) Perform or Charm Test. If it is also successful, your enemies immediately fix all their attention on you and your performance. All allies you can see (at casting) gain +30% to their Concealment and Move Silently Tests for the duration of the spell.

Westward Call

Casting Number: 8

Casting Time: Full Action

Duration: Instant

Range: Touch/Special

Ingredients: A charm engraved with a moon (+2)

Description: The boat to the west bore Myrmidia away as she lay dying. This spell can only be cast on someone about to die, whether from disease, age or, if in battle, if they have been damaged sufficiently so that they are using the Sudden Death critical rules. The target dies instantly, calmly and painlessly. The corpse is preserved from decomposition and is immune from Necromancy for the next 24 hours. This spell can also be cast on a target who is not dying, as long as the target is yourself. Myrmidian priests sometimes use this to avoid capture or torture.

Blessing of the Shieldmaidens

At the age of ten, many young Myrmidians have their "First Flight", when they are presented at the temple to their Aquila Prima. For those who wish to enter the faith, this marks the beginning of their training, but for others it is simply a baptism into the adult world. In both cases, many chicos or chicas take at this time a Shieldmaiden as their patron. The maiden they choose will be their protector and guide for the rest of their life.

The choice is not made lightly but it is not always made by the novitiate either: sometimes the Shieldmaidens are simply doled out by the Aquila Prima or Aquila Maestro.

Others may have their Shieldmaiden revealed (to them or their Prima) in a sacred vision or mysterious event.

During character generation, human Estalians may take a Shieldmaiden as their patron. If they wish, they may also sacrifice one of their Random Talents to acquire the Talent of their Patron as described below (or roll randomly). Shieldmaiden patrons can also be acquired later in life after a dramatic religious experience. The appropriate Talent may then be acquired by spending 100 XP as normal.

The following table lists just a few of the very long list of Shieldmaidens mentioned in the Bellona Myrmidia and other tales. Others are possible

| Roll | Patron | Domain | Talent Granted |
|-------|----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 01-04 | Agane | Torture and Suffering | Strong-Minded |
| 05-08 | Avera | Reflexes and Anticipation | Lightning Reflexes |
| 09-12 | Cavaria | Sapping and Infiltration | Tunnel Rat |
| 13-16 | Cena | Counting and Estimation | Super Numerate |
| 17-20 | Corteja | Propriety and Grooming | Etiquette |
| 21-24 | Debera | Duty and Service | Coolheaded |
| 25-28 | Domino | Authority and Command | Menacing |
| 29-32 | Empena | Endurance and Perseverance | Very Resilient |
| 33-36 | Fermeja | Health and Hygiene | Resistance to Disease |
| 37-40 | Fortuna | Luck and Risk-Taking | Luck |
| 41-44 | Fugina | Escape and Resistance | Contortionist |
| 45-48 | Furiosa | Fury and Destruction | Very Strong |
| 49-52 | Gloria | Triumph and Victory | Suave |
| 53-56 | Lecia | Written Codes and Laws | Savvy |
| 57-60 | Mensaja | Messages and Communications | Linguistics |
| 61-64 | Montesa | Horses and Chariots | Trick Riding |
| 65-68 | Noceso | Stealth and Hiding | Rover |
| 69-72 | Optilla | Farseeing and Accuracy | Excellent Vision |
| 73-76 | Pinta | Artistry and Design | Artistic |
| 77-80 | Senera | Wilderness and Travel | Orientation |
| 81-84 | Silvia | Cities and Fortresses | Alley Cat |
| 85-88 | Valeria | Courage and Defiance | Stout-Hearted |
| 89-92 | Varasa | Trust and Alliances | Schemer |
| 93-96 | Vigasa | Defence and Protection | Hardy |
| 97-00 | Vittoria | Speed and Manoeuvring | Fleet Footed |

Chapter IX : Characters and Careers



*"I say I know this fellow well enough -
or least, I know his moustache."
The Taming of the Squig, Act 1, Scene 1*

In many ways, the men and women (and other citizens) of Estalia are much like the people of the Empire, Bretonnia, or even (perish the thought) Tilea. Creating an Estalian character follows most of the same procedures as in the WFRP rulebook. Where the system differs you will find those rules and tables here.

Racial Features

Life in the sunny south is very different to the brutish north. The Estalians are no strangers to gossip but their social interactions also depend on feuds and battles hundreds of years old. So widespread is the art of the blade too, that all manner of men and women have the skill. Human racial features should be replaced with the following:

Skills: Common Knowledge (Estalia), Academic Knowledge (Genealogy and Heraldry) or Gossip, Speak Language (Estalian)

Talents: If human, 2 random talents (roll twice on Table 2-4: Random Talents in WFRP (page 19) or 1 random talent from the same table and Specialist Weapon Group (Fencing). Fencing is such a common hobby that almost all receive some training in it.

Background Charts

Height and Weight are as for Empire humans.

Table 9-1: Hair Colour

| Roll | Hair Colour |
|------|-------------|
| 1 | Yellow |
| 2 | Ginger |
| 3 | Red |
| 4 | Auburn |
| 5 | Brown |
| 6 | Dark Brown |
| 7 | Black |
| 8 | Pitch Black |
| 9 | Blue-Black |
| 10 | Silver |

Table 9-2: Eye Colour

| Roll | Eye Colour |
|------|---------------|
| 1 | Ice Blue |
| 2 | Deep Blue |
| 3 | Yellow Green |
| 4 | Emerald Green |
| 5 | Hazel |
| 6 | Red-Brown |
| 7 | Light Brown |
| 8 | Dark Brown |
| 9 | Indigo |
| 10 | Violet |

FACIAL HAIR TYPES



Table 9-3: Moustache

There is much that marks a true Estalian gentleman: some swear by the cut of their cape, others by the filigree on their sword-hilt, still others the length of the feather in their hat, or the shine of the buckle that holds it. But every man over the age of twelve wears a moustache, and prides himself on it. The wearing of a fine moustache is a matter of honour in the Estalian kingdoms, and there is no insult so grave as to insult a man's hairs or how he dresses them.

Male Estalian PCs may roll or choose a moustache from the following table. Estalian women may also roll on the table, but more typically prefer to shave, wax or bleach—and may also roll on the next table for how they wear their hair.

| Roll | Style | Description |
|---------|------------|--|
| 01 – 08 | Caballero | The popular standard on which everything is based. A straight, slightly waxed moustache of moderate thickness. The points turn slightly up at the edges. |
| 09 – 12 | Toro | As a Caballero but with the ends more pointed and turned higher. |
| 13 – 16 | Pancho | As the Toro, but the points turn down, making the wearer appear pensive. |
| 17 – 20 | Walrusso | As the Pancho, but thicker and droopier. Also called the “Strainer”. |
| 21 – 24 | Scripto | A very thin, very straight line high under the nose, like an ink smudge from a pen. |
| 25 – 28 | Bilbalin | Thin like a Scripto but in two distinct line, angled downwards from the nose. |
| 29 – 32 | Ladyfriend | As the Bilbalin but the gap in the middle is very wide, so only the corners of the lips are haired. |
| 33 – 36 | Nosebrush | A narrow (about one inch) but thick fuzz under the nose. |
| 37 – 40 | Scrubbo | Like the Nosebrush but about three inches wide and nuzzling the lip. |
| 41 – 44 | Swabbo | Like the Scrubbo but extending far over the lip. Also called the Watergate. |
| 45 – 48 | Soldero | Long thin hairs standing straight like soldiers all along the top lip. |
| 49 – 52 | Royale | The Cabellero is grown wide and, using wax and grease, pulled far to the sides of the face and peaked. |
| 53 – 56 | Imperio | Like the Royale, but the ends are curled or swirled. |
| 57 – 60 | Horseshoe | A Pancho that runs down the sides of the lips to the chin, like an upside down horseshoe. |
| 61 – 64 | Goat | A Caballero with a small chin-beard below. May or may not be connect like the Horseshoe. |
| 65 – 68 | Magrittan | Like the Goat but the beard extends further below the chin, and rises up to the bottom lip. |
| 69 – 72 | Sailor | A Magrittan with a full beard, ear to ear. |
| 73 – 76 | Tickler | A Ladyfriend with a chinbeard below. |
| 77 – 80 | Malleo | A Caballero above a narrow vertical stripe of beard below the lip, creating a hammer shape. |
| 81 – 84 | Halfling | A Caballero that joins sideburns. |
| 85 – 88 | Griffoni | As the Royale or the Imperio, but the beard is waxed and curled as well. |
| 89 – 92 | Bandido | A full beard that grows up to the cheekbones, like a bandit's mask. Often left half-shaven. |
| 93 – 96 | Strappo | A full beard with no moustache. |
| 97 – 99 | Nudo | Either by choice (a priest) or a curse of birth, you wear no beard. Some may doubt your manhood as a result. |
| 100 | Mountain | Due to some curse of birth, your hair grows patchily in strange spots and odd lengths. People will think you insane, foolish or cursed if you do not shave or tend it. |

Table 9-4: Hair Style

Generally a braid begins at the top of the head and weaves the entire hair; a plait begins lower, with only the hair below the ear line. Countless styles are possible, as well as placements and angles, this table is but a tiny selection. Men tend to wear their hair short or even-haired.

| Roll | Hairstyle | Description |
|------|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Fishtail plait | Only the lowest hairs are platted, in very tight formation |
| 2 | Loose plait | A thickly platted style that hangs freely |
| 3 | Northern braid | A tight braid that starts at the brow |
| 4 | Curled Plait | A plait or plaits is curled into a bun or buns. |
| 5 | Bar Plait | A thin tight plait is pinned in a line across the hair. |
| 6 | Plait Ponytail | The hair is pinched with a band, then the remained platted |
| 7 | Waterfall braid | A band binds the hair loosely around neck level |
| 8 | Ponytail braid | The top of the hair is braided half way, the rest hangs loose |
| 9 | Inside out braid | The Northern braid done in reverse |
| 10 | Conquistador roll | Hot cylinders are used to mould the hair into high wavy hills |

Table 9-5: Blood Curse

Estalians do not have Dooming ceremonies—they are less suspicious people than those of the benighted Empire. However, they certainly do believe that a person's blood—his family line—carries with it an almost inescapable curse to mimic the behaviour and attributes of his ancestors. Decide whose blood was stronger, your mother or your fathers, and then roll to see what curse came with it. Or roll twice for the curse you inherited from each parent.

Estalians often choose a Shieldmaiden to rule over their life, see Chapter Eight.

| Roll | Blood Curse |
|----------|-----------------|
| 01 – 03 | Ambitious |
| 04 – 06 | Arrogant |
| 07 – 09 | Betrayed |
| 10 – 12 | Boastful |
| 13 – 15 | Brutal |
| 16 – 18 | Contrary |
| 19 – 21 | Cowardly |
| 22 – 24 | Credulous |
| 25 – 27 | Cruel |
| 28 – 30 | Debtor |
| 31 – 33 | Disfigured |
| 34 – 36 | Dishonourable |
| 37 – 39 | Faltering |
| 40 – 42 | Forgotten |
| 43 – 45 | Glutton or Sot |
| 46 – 48 | Greedy |
| 49 – 51 | Hesitant |
| 52 – 54 | Imprudent |
| 55 – 57 | Impudent |
| 58 – 60 | Luckless |
| 61 – 63 | Mendacious |
| 64 – 66 | Morose |
| 67 – 69 | Niggardly |
| 70 – 72 | Obsessed |
| 73 – 75 | Obstinate |
| 76 – 78 | Petty |
| 79 – 81 | Prattler |
| 82 – 84 | Rake or Trollop |
| 85 – 87 | Reckless |
| 88 – 90 | Seditious |
| 91 – 93 | Slovenly |
| 94 – 95 | Unloved |
| 96 – 97 | Vain |
| 98 – 100 | Vengeful |

Table 9-6: Headwear

The sun beats down hard in Estalia, and the hat is ubiquitous among men. Women who cannot afford a parasol or closed sedan chair may also cover their heads. Roll 1d10 or choose your style below.

| Roll | Headwear for Men | Headwear for Ladies |
|------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Bandanna or Scarf | Bonnet |
| 2 | Beret or Bonnet | Band |
| 3 | Bicorne or Tricorne | Fascinator |
| 4 | Boater or Porkpie | Hood |
| 5 | Bowler or Berretina | Peaked |
| 6 | Chullo or Fez | Scarf |
| 7 | Cordobes or Chupalla | Snood |
| 8 | Fedora or Panama | Tiara |
| 9 | Target or Slouch | Veil |
| 10 | Special or None | Special or None |

Table 9-7: Feather

Men and women alike adorn their headwear, buckles or jewellery with exotic feathers, sometimes used to express subtle codes.

| Roll | Hat Feather | Possible Meaning |
|------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Peacock | Handsome/Beautiful |
| 2 | Grouse | Honourable |
| 3 | Griffon | Fearless |
| 4 | Hippogriff | Deadly |
| 5 | Ostrich | Strong |
| 6 | Pheasant | Steadfast |
| 7 | Hawk | Swift |
| 8 | Eagle | Clever |
| 9 | Teradon | Well Travelled |
| 10 | Bird of Paradise | Seductive |

*indicates a new career in this book.

**Could be a Caballero or a Hidalgo, although the former, in Estalia, might also fall to powerful Burghers or wealthy Tradesmen. Likewise those in the noble career might not fit the Empire sense of that word until they reach Courtier. Border Courtier or similar heights The WFRP career system cannot necessarily capture the social complexities of Estalian nobility.

Table 9-8: Career

| Roll | Career |
|-------|--------------------------|
| 01 | Agitator |
| 02 | Apprentice Wizard |
| 03-04 | Bailiff |
| 05-06 | Barber-Surgeon |
| 07-09 | Bounty Hunter (Rodolero) |
| 10-12 | Burgher (Dominar) |
| 13-14 | Cadet |
| 15 | Coachman |
| 16-23 | Diestro |
| 24-26 | Entertainer |
| 27 | Falconer* |
| 28-31 | Fisherman |
| 32-33 | Hunter |
| 34-40 | Initiate |
| 41 | Jailer |
| 42-43 | Jinete* |
| 44-45 | Marine |
| 46 | Messenger |
| 47 | Miner |
| 48-49 | Noble** |
| 50 | Outlaw |
| 51-53 | Peasant |
| 54-55 | Pikeman* |
| 56 | Pit Fighter (Luchador) |
| 57 | Rat Catcher |
| 58-59 | Roadwarden (Vigilares) |
| 60-62 | Rogue |
| 63-64 | Scribe |
| 65-69 | Seaman |
| 70-71 | Servant |
| 72-73 | Smuggler |
| 74-76 | Soldier |
| 77-79 | Student |
| 80-83 | Swordhand* |
| 84-85 | Thief |
| 86 | Tomb Robber |
| 87-88 | Torero* |
| 89-92 | Tradesman |
| 93-94 | Vagabond |
| 95 | Valet |
| 96-97 | Watchman (Proteges) |
| 98 | Woodsmen |
| 99-00 | Zealot |

Optional Rules : Your Lord's Title

Estalian has more kings, queens, lords, ladies, princes, princesses, duques, duqesses, condes and vicondes, grandees, marquees and principese it can be hard to keep them all straight. As such, almost every head of state in the land gains a nickname or appellation. Players can use this to generate the name of their current ruler, and GMs can use it to produce rulers on demand.

| Roll | Appellation |
|------|----------------------------------|
| 01 | The Very Old |
| 02 | The Fat |
| 03 | The Bald |
| 04 | The Beautiful |
| 05 | The Younger |
| 06 | The Hideous |
| 07 | The Virginal |
| 08 | The Source of All Light |
| 09 | The Treasure of the Earth |
| 10 | The Giant of the Stones |
| 11 | Of the Mountains and the Valleys |
| 12 | The Sailor |
| 13 | The Sky-borne |
| 14 | The Shining Star |
| 15 | The Furious |
| 16 | The Morning Sun |
| 17 | The Great Architect |
| 18 | The Felon |
| 19 | The Most Indeed Holy |
| 20 | The Farmer |
| 21 | The Hermit |
| 22 | The Grand and Opulent |
| 23 | Of the Distant Shores |
| 24 | Of the Sad Fates |
| 25 | The Barren |
| 26 | The Mad |
| 27 | The Cursed |
| 28 | The Lance-Struck |
| 29 | The Profligate |
| 30 | The Death Of Vampires |
| 31 | The Dark |
| 32 | The Cowardly |
| 33 | The Betrayed |
| 34 | The Arabyan |
| 35 | The North-Born |
| 36 | The Strange |
| 37 | The Orc-Hammer |
| 38 | The Green |

| Roll | Appellation |
|------|---------------------------------|
| 39 | Of The Gall-Bladder |
| 40 | The Sickly |
| 41 | The Desired By All |
| 42 | The Restorer Of Liberty |
| 43 | The Citizen Most High |
| 44 | Of Great and Noble Learning |
| 45 | The Foolish |
| 46 | The Fortunate |
| 47 | The Virile |
| 47 | The Universal Spider |
| 49 | The Intemperate |
| 50 | The Mighty Octopus |
| 51 | The Loud |
| 52 | Of the Blaring Trumpet |
| 53 | The Cannibal |
| 54 | The Shiny |
| 55 | The Lackhanded |
| 56 | The Forgotten |
| 57 | The Oily |
| 58 | The Infant |
| 59 | The Pustulent |
| 60 | The Father/Mother of the People |
| 61 | The Wayward and Wandering |
| 62 | The Wicked |
| 63 | The Aromatic |
| 64 | The Confused |
| 65 | Of the Firmness |
| 66 | The Curly |
| 67 | The Chaste |
| 68 | The Elbow-High |
| 69 | The Lazy |
| 70 | The Stammerer |
| 71 | The Simple |
| 72 | The Whorish |
| 73 | The Bearer of All the World |
| 74 | Of the Elven Heart |
| 75 | Of the Skimbleshanks |
| 76 | Of the Long Beard |

| Roll | Appellation |
|------|-----------------------|
| 77 | The Quarreller |
| 78 | The Posthumous |
| 79 | The Twice-Born |
| 80 | The Drunk |
| 81 | The Enormous |
| 82 | The Well-Endowed |
| 83 | The Vexed |
| 84 | Of the Great Bellow |
| 85 | The Fashionable |
| 86 | The Tanglefooted |
| 87 | The Hunchbacked |
| 88 | The Mutant |
| 89 | Of the Tiny Shoes |
| 90 | The Wizard-Burner |
| 91 | The Dwarf-Lover |
| 92 | The Hat-Hater |
| 93 | The Horse-Eater |
| 94 | The Lily Of the Field |
| 95 | The Donkey-Eared |
| 96 | The Blood-drinker |
| 97 | The Nude |
| 98 | The Asleep |
| 99 | The Stampede |
| 100 | Of The Plummeting |

Estalian Careers

Swords of the South contains the following new careers. Most are very specific to the Estalian Kingdoms and players not adventuring in those lands should ask their GM for permission before taking these careers for their characters—but otherwise there are no rules restrictions beyond the standard rules.

New Basic Careers: Falconer, Jinete, Pikeman, Swordhand, Torero

New Advanced Careers: Guitarrista, Inquisitor, Maestro, Maestro Verdadero Myrmidon, Tercio

—Falconer—

Falconry is a popular sport amongst the nobility and wealthy of the Old World. The actual task of breeding, training and caring for them, however, is regarded by all but a few as terribly tiresome. It requires great care and patience to breed, raise and tame any bird, and getting them to take a hood, follow a lure and return without a tie requires far more effort than getting a hound to follow a scent. Falconers are thus true craftsmen and look down on other, more casual animal trainers, and typically find their services high in demand by the high and mighty. For the priesthood of Myrmidia in Estalia, caring for birds is often part of their training, and those particularly adept at it will sometimes devote themselves entirely to the task. The birds are sometimes kept simply for devotional purposes but most priests of any substantial rank also partake in hunting with the birds. Others wear them at official events or use them in sacred rites; in all cases the precision of the falconer is indispensable.

—Falconer Advance Scheme—

| | | | | | | | |
|----|------|----|----|------|------|----|------|
| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
| - | +10% | - | - | +15% | +20% | - | +15% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| - | +1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Theology) or Academic Knowledge (Genealogy/Heraldry), Animal Care, Animal Training, Concealment, Outdoor Survival, Perception, Scale Sheer Surface, Set Trap, Silent Move, Trade (Falconer)
Talents: Acute Hearing, Excellent Vision, Rover

Trappings: Bird of Prey (Eagle, Falcon, Merlin or Hawk) with Hood, Leather Jerkin, Stout Leather Gauntlet, Lure on a Rope, Cadge for carrying birds, Knife, Animal Trap, Large Collection of Interesting Scars

Career Entries: Animal Trainer (Career Companion), Charcoal Burner, Hunter, Initiate (Cult of Myrmidia only), Noble, Priest (Cult of Myrmidia only), Servant, Woodsman
Career Exits: Animal Trainer (Career Companion), Entertainer, Hunter, Initiate (Cult of Myrmidia only), Steward

—Jinete —

The first Jinetes were herdsman and drovers, drafted as light cavalry to fight in the Reconquista. From these humble origins rose a proud tradition of professional soldiers, and most noble houses in Estalia today have an Escuadrilla of Jinetes under their banner. Jinetes fight as skirmishers, harassing massed infantry or formations of slower, heavier cavalry with hails of Javelins or engaging missile infantry or disorganized formations with sword and shield in daring cavalry charges. They have little taste for the mundane, unglamorous responsibilities of light cavalry (like scouting or foraging), leaving these to the armies' Outriders. Instead, they constantly try to outdo each other in daring feats of horsemanship, daredevilry and sheer bravado, both on and off the battlefield, and in both realms spend lavishly on fantastic and outlandish costume. To them, it's all just a means of getting the attention and favour of the Maiden Myrmidia.

—Jinete Advance Scheme—

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|------|----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
| +5% | +10% | - | +5% | +5% | +5% | - | +5% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| - | +2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Animal Care, Charm, Common Knowledge (Estalia), Consume Alcohol, Dodge Blow, Ride, Secret Language (Battle Tongue), Speak Language (Estalian)

Talents: Quick Draw, Stout-Hearted, Sure Shot, Trick Riding

Trappings: Light Armour (Plate Helmet and Leather Jack), Shield, Saddle Case w/ 8 Javelins, 10 Yards of Rope, Light Warhorse with Saddle and Harness, one set of Best Craftsmanship Clothes

Career Entries: Militiaman, Outrider, Soldier, Torero

Career Exits: Estalian Diestro, Mercenary, Noble, Pistolier, Sergeant, Tercio, Vagabond, Veteran

— Pikeman —

— Swordhand —

The north is no stranger to the halberd and the spear but the units of men bearing twenty-foot long heavy polearms that destroy cavalry are idiosyncratic of the south. Tilean and Estalian armies, both mercenary and state, use them as standard, and many a famous Pikemen mercenary company has wandered for far distant lands in search of better pay, spreading the fearsome reputation. In Tilea, pikemen are something akin to diestros: famous for their bravery, the security they provide and their wide travel. Thus Estalian pikemen pride themselves on being elite so they may exceed the reputation of their neighbours. This and their reputation for typically facing down cavalry charges and artillery strikes makes them feel above regular infantry, who in turn see them as cowards too scared to fight a man face to face. Many a tavern brawl has been between swordsman and pikeman.

Swordhands are to the Estalians much like what the squire is to the knights of the north. In Estalia, not just diestros but all types of young men and women study and live by their sword, and may have need of a swordhand to help. At a young age, even six or seven, boys and girls will find any kind of Viajero and become their swordhand (much to their parents relief at not having another mouth to feed, but fear that they have chosen some hopeless drunk the child has covered in false honour). Their official tasks are to carry their master's sword when he does not, bring it to him when a duel begins, and to polish and sharpen it for him every night, but duties can also extend to every duty required of a servant or dogsbody. Jokes do abound about Swordhands polishing more than just swords—but such jokes are not made in front of Swordhands, for they all soon become Viajeros and would take their revenge.

—Pikeman Advance Scheme—

—Swordhand Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| +10% | - | +10% | +5% | +5% | - | +5% | +10% |

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|----|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| +10% | - | +5% | - | +5% | +5% | +5% | +5% |

| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
|----|----|----|----|---|-----|----|----|
| +1 | +1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
|---|----|----|----|---|-----|----|----|
| - | +2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Genealogy/Heraldry) or Common Knowledge (Estalia), Animal Care or Gamble, Dodge Blow, Gossip or Haggle, Ride or Drive, Perception or Search, Secret Language (Battle Tongue), Speak Language (Estalian)
Talents: Disarm or Quick Draw, Specialist Weapon Group (Two-handed), Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Injure, Strike to Stun

Skills: Animal Care or Drive, Common Knowledge (Estalia), Dodge Blow, Evaluate or Heal, Gossip or Search, Navigation or Outdoor Survival, Perception, Speak Language (Estalian), Trade (Cook)

Trappings: Light Armour (Plate Helmet and Leather Jack), Estalian Pike*, Shield

Talents: Etiquette or Flee!, Orientation or Seasoned Traveler, Specialist Weapon Group (Fencing)

Career Entries: Mercenary, Militiaman, Soldier, Watchman
Career Exits: Bodyguard, Bounty Hunter, Outlaw, Sergeant, Tercio, Veteran

Trappings: Fencing weapon (Foil or Rapier), Light Armour (Leather Jack), Shield, one set of Good Craftsmanship Clothing

*Rules for the Pike are described in the Old World Armory; if you do not have a copy simply use the rules for Spear.

Careers Entries: Camp Follower, Peasant, Servant

Careers Exits: Bodyguard, Camp Follower, Estalian Diestro, Herald, Servant, Squire, Student, Thief, Veteran

— Torero —

The Torero is the main star on the toreo performances. They fight the toros (bulls) in a deadly and defying act everyone else would consider insane. The bull fight it is more like an acting performance than a simple slaughter; if the Torero kills the bulls too quickly and safely the audience surly be disappointed. Because of that, they must perform a deadly dance with the bull, risking their lives in every move, teasing their beast adversary till it is the right time to kill it, gaining the crowd admiration and love. A good Torero could be as famous and renowned as a good imperial actor or minor hero, and the career opens doors into every rank and realm of society.

—Torero Advance Scheme—

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|----|------|-----|------|------|
| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
| +5% | +5% | +5% | - | +10% | - | +10% | +10% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| - | +2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Charm, Common Knowledge (Estalia), Doge Blow, Perform (Corrida de Torea), Perform (Actor) or Ride, Speak Language (Estalian)

Talents: Coolheaded or Stout-Hearted, Etiquette, Flee! or Lightning Reflexes, Quick Draw, Strike to Injure

Trappings: One set of Best Craftsmanship Torero Clothes, Duelling Cape, Perfume or Cologne, 1d10 Bandarillhas (use stats for Javelins), Bull's ear, horn or hoof trophy

Careers Entries: Entertainer, Estalian Diestro, Pit Fighter

Careers Exits: Charlatan, Border Courtier, Duellist, Entertainer, Estalian Diestro, Noble, Pit Fighter

—Guitarrista (Advanced) —

The guitarras origins lie in the Arabyan version of the lute, the zitar, which were left abandoned when the occupiers were removed. Keen to chronicle their lost history in verse and song but unwilling to use the weapon of their conquerors they added two strings to create what soon would become their national instrument. Although many Estalians from all walks of life may endeavour to play the guitarra, there are those few who dedicate their lives to the perfection of the art, much as the Diestro does with swordplay. In fact, when two or more Guitarristas meet and play, they often engage in what is called a Duello del Alma, or duel of the soul, as the musicians bare their hearts to their audience through their music. Guitarristas travel far and collect tales and histories as they go, so they are no strangers to duels of swords either, but though they sing often of oaths and promises their life is almost always devoted to nothing but music and the road. Few other than the very old settle down in one place, a fact that makes them all the more alluring, especially to young Señioritas, much to the frustration of the young ladies' fathers.

—Guitarrista Advance Scheme—

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|----|------|------|------|------|------|
| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
| +10% | +5% | - | +10% | +10% | +10% | +10% | +20% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| - | +4 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (History), Charm or Intimidate, Common Knowledge (Estalia), Common Knowledge (any two), Disguise or Gossip, Gamble or Haggle, Navigation, Outdoor Survival, Perception, Performer (Musician), Performer (Singer or Storyteller), Read/Write, Ride or Swim, Speak Language (any two)

Talents: Acute Hearing, Ambidextrous or Lightning Reflexes, Etiquette, Luck or Sixth Sense, Perfect Pitch (see New Talents, below), Public Speaking, Savvy or Suave, Specialist Weapon Group (Fencing), Streetwise

Trappings: Good quality Guitarra, One set of Good Quality clothes, Broken Heart or Palpable Ennui

Career Entries: Entertainer, Courtier, Minstrel

Career Exits: Agitator, Courtier, Estalian Diestro, Explorer, Messenger, Minstrel, Outlaw

— Inquisitor (Advanced) —

The Inquisitors of Estalia are unique in the priestly classes of the Old World. They can command authority like an Abbot, yet rarely take a directional role. They command respect like an Anointed Priest, but do not seek out the public light. They strike fear like a Templar, but wield no weapons except, perhaps, the thumbscrew and the rack. They have enormous power, unfettered reach and a vast remit to find heresy in any form in any place, but they must act in relative secrecy and solitude, with all the paranoia of a spymaster but without the comforting madness of the flagellant. Their victims, however, would never pity them.

—Inquisitor Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| +10% | +10% | +5% | +10% | +10% | +20% | +35% | +25% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| +1 | +6 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Magic), Academic Knowledge (Necromancy), Academic Knowledge (Theology), Charm, Common Knowledge (any one), Gossip, Intimidate, Heal, Perception, Read/Write, Search, Silent Move, Speak Language (any one), Speak Language (Classical), Torture

Talents: Coolheaded, Menacing, Schemer, Streetwise, Strike to Injure, Strong-Minded, Surgery, Unsettling

Trappings: Blessed Water, Dark robes, Manacles, Medium Armour (Full Mail Armour), Religious relic of Myrmedia, Torture devices, Writing Kit, 10 Yards of Rope, Burning Passion For Rooting Out Heresy

Careers Entries: Abbot (Myrmedia only), Anointed Priest (Myrmedia only), Flagellant, Interrogator, Scholar, Spy

Careers Exits: High Priest, Politician, Vampire Hunter, Witch Hunter

—Maestro (Advanced) —

Many Diestros find that they are not content with a mere proficiency in the true art and noble science of Maestro Figueroa, and set out to obtain more comprehensive understanding of the science behind the sword. Studying under Maestros of the sword, often in the academias, or fencing schools, they grow in both academic knowledge and martial skill until they become Maestros in their own right. During and after this process, they often travel, learning the noble science from many Maestros, and some travel to Tilea, Bretonnia or across the Old World for a different perspective. Because of their mastery of both swordplay and science, they are often brought to court to educate nobles and their sons, and are frequently employed to provide lessons for students facing duels or judicial challenges. In times of need, Maestros may even be sent out to fight Estalia's most dangerous adversaries.

—Maestro Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| +25% | - | +10% | +10% | +20% | +15% | +5% | +15% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| +1 | +4 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Science), Academic Knowledge (Any One), Dodge Blow, Read/Write, Speak Language (Estalian), Intimidate, Perception, Secret Language (Destreza)

Talents: Destreza Gestures (Choose two), Lightning Reflexes or Quick Draw, Strike to Stun or Strike to Injure, Disarm or Swashbuckler, Specialist Weapon Group (Parrying)

Trappings: Best Quality Rapier or Foil or Epee, Main Gauche, Set of Best Craftsmanship Clothes, healing draught, several books on la Destreza, Intriguing Scar(s)

Career Entries: Cadet, Estalian Diestro, Duellist

Career Exits: Border Courtier, Highwayman, Knight, Maestro Verdadero, Scholar, Sergeant, Spy

— Maestro Verdadero (Advanced) —

Scattered throughout Estalia are academies where the art of swordsmanship is taught. These academies are often run by a Maestro Verdadero—a Maestro of vast experience and skill who has studied extensively and has earned the right to operate an academia and train other Maestros. Unlike their students Maestros Verdaderos are familiar with not only the work of Figueroa, but also of several other important Maestros, including Figueroa’s own teacher, Maestro Castaneta. Maestros Verdaderos are not only masters of the sword with few peers, they are also capable of great scholarly work and research, and many choose to write extensively on la Destreza (and also on non-martial subjects). One particularly prolific author of books on la Destreza is Maestro Enarmãez, whose works frequently disparage the other Maestros in his home city of Belmoz in not-so-subtle ways.

—Maestro Verdadero Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|----|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| +40% | - | +15% | +15% | +25% | +20% | +15% | +20% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| +2 | +6 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Any Two), Dodge Blow, Read/Write, Speak Language (Estalian), Speak Language (Classical), Perception, Secret Language (Destreza)

Talents: Destreza Gestures (Choose two), Lightning Parry or Ambidextrous

Trappings: Several Best Quality fencing weapons, Fencing Academy with 2d10 students, large library containing 1d10 of your own volumes, Abiding Despair for the Younger Generation

Career Entries: Maestro

Career Exits: Assassin, Captain, Champion, Courtier

—Myrmidon (Advanced) —

The Maiden has her Templars, but such is her reach into every day life that there are those who pledge their battle to Her without being members of the Church. They do typically dwell in large towers usually close to temples and decorated with religious devotion, however, and foreigners are naturally confused. They often work with the church as well, guarding priests, pilgrimages or holy sites. Others work as enforcers or honour guards for Hidalgos, or seek fame in the upper realms of gladiatorial battles, far removed from the savagery of Empire pit fights. Myrmidons do however shun armour and most weapons, preferring to wrestle or use short blades, or exotic weapons like flails, nets or whips—anything that requires special training and long devotion

—Myrmidon Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|----|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|
| +20% | - | +20% | +10% | +20% | - | +20% | - |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| +1 | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Theology), Dodge Blow, Secret Language (Battle Tongue), Speak Language (Estalian)

Talents: Coolheaded, Disarm or Strike Mighty Blow, Specialist Weapon Group (Parrying or Two-handed), Specialist Weapon Group (Entangling or Flail), Strike to Injure, Wrestling

Trappings: A Treatise on Sparring and Wrestling, Three Best Quality Weapons, Religious Symbol of Myrmidia

Career Entries: Knight, Maestro, Pit Fighter, Veteran

Career Exits: Champion, Judicial Champion, Initiate (Cult of Myrmidia Only), Sergeant

— Tercio (Advanced) —

The Estalians have developed the pikeman into the perfect infantryman, in the form of the tercio. Disciplined, fearless and highly skilled in the arts of pike, sword, javelin, buckler, and firearms, the tercio makes for a formidable foe on the battlefield. They are also highly sought-after mercenaries, although lords who train tercios will pay very well to keep them at home and loyal to their crown. So Tercios wander less, but their numbers are often drawn from non-Estalians, as they like to learn to use all styles of weapons and indeed learn how to beat the charges of Bretonnian knights, Empire cannon and Norscan fury. Tercios are often tercios for life, and the bonds of those in the same unit (or square as they are known) are never forgotten.

—Tercio Advance Scheme—

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | WP | Fel |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| +20% | +20% | +10% | +20% | +10% | +10% | +25% | - |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| +1 | +6 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Skills: Common Knowledge (Estalia), Dodge Blow, Gamble or Hagggle, Heal, Intimidate, Secret Language (Battle Tongue)

Talents: Lightning Parry, Master Gunner, Mighty Shot, Quick Draw, Specialist Weapon Group (Gunpowder), Specialist Weapon Group (Parrying), Specialist Weapon Group (Two-handed), Stout-Hearted, Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Injure

Trappings: Medium Armour (Full Leather Armour, Breastplate, Plate Helmet), Estalian Pike* or Halberd, Pistol or Firearm, Main Gauche or Buckler or 2 Javelins, Bottle of Best Craftsmanship Wine, Lucky Charm

Career Entries: Pikeman, Soldier

Career Exits: Captain, Duellist, Sergeant, Judicial Champion, Veteran

*Rules for the Pike are described in the Old World Armory p32; if you do not have a copy simply use the rules for Spear.

New Talents — Collected

A selection of New Talents appear elsewhere in the book, we collect them here again for your convenience.

New Talent: Fire-Blooded

You may add +20% to Willpower Tests to resist Charm or Intimidation attempts, but suffer -10% to any Willpower Tests made to resist gaining a disorder due to an Insanity Point increase. Any Character raised in Bilbali or its surrounds may exchange one of their starting Talents for Fire-Blooded.

New Talent: Literary

Your education is such that you gain +10% to all Academic Knowledge Tests. Any Character raised in Magritta or its surrounds may exchange one of their starting Talents for Literary.

New Talent: Magical Theorist

Having studied the art of science and mathematics you know how well theory and planning can help grasp the strangeness of both the natural and arcane world. Each morning, you may spend one hour studying the theory of a number of spells up to your Magic Characteristic. When casting those spells and only those spells over the next day, you may ignore one die rolled when spellcasting as a way of avoiding Tzeentch's Curse. In this way a quadruple becomes a triple, a triple becomes a double, and a double causes no Curse to occur. The ignored die may not be added to your casting total. You may substitute Magical Theorist for Channelling in any Wizard Career. You may never possess both Magical Theorist and Channelling; it is one or the other.

New Talent: Perfect Pitch

You have a perfect ear for music. You gain +10% bonus to Performer (Musician) and Performer (Singer) Skill Tests and +10% to Evaluate and Hagggle tests regarding musical instruments. You can also learn a song simply by hearing it.

Narrative Naval Battles

With nautical expeditions so much a part of Estalian life, you may wish to simulate naval combat. The following rules can be combined with those provided in the Career Compendium to do so.

Every round of naval combat lasts about 10 minutes. A fleet commander must spend a Half Action issuing orders, and select his fleet's tactic:

Manoeuvres: The fleet seeks to achieve a superior position whilst avoiding major damage.

Engagement: The fleet turns broadsides to the enemy and fires cannons.

Evasion: The fleet attempts to disengage or break through a blockade.

Boarding: The fleet closes with enemy ships to deploy marines.

Commanders with the Academic Knowledge (Strategy & Tactics) skill may know their opponent's tactic before choosing theirs. If both commanders have the skill, an Opposed Test determines who must choose first (ties mean "no advantage"). Once tactics have been selected, each commander rolls a Command Test and consults the table for results. The result before the slash is applied if the Command Test was passed, otherwise the second result is applied. The results are applied to both ships/commanders. Damage dealing is resolved before disengagement.

| Commander Tactic | Enemy Tactic | | | |
|------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| | Manoeuvres | Engagement | Evasion | Boarding |
| Manoeuvres | +10% / -10% | +20% / -- | +20% / -20% | +10% / -- |
| Engagement | 10% / 2% | 20% / 5% | 5% / 1% | 40% / 20% |
| Evasion | 30% / 10% | 60% / 20% | 100% / 100% | 40% / -- |
| Boarding | 10% / -- | 40% / 20% | 20% / -- | 50% / 25% |

Manoeuvres = modifier to your next round's Command Test
 Engagement = inflict Hull Points equal to the listed percentage of your fleet's guns

Evasion = % chance of evading the enemy

Boarding = inflict Casualty Points equal to the listed percentage of your fleet's marines, and lose Casualty Points equal to 1d10% of the enemy fleet's marines

Each fleet has a number of Hull Points equal to its total guns (see Shades of Empire). Casualty Points are equal to the fleet's total number of fighting men. Offensive firepower degrades as damage is taken. The GM may decide exactly how damage is distributed among ships and crews.

The Art of Fencing — La Destreza Verdadera

Estalians call it the "true art". More than poetry, more than lovemaking, the greatest art of the Estalian peninsular is mastering the sword. Every one of caballero level or above (and many more below) wears a narrow blade at his hip—or her hip, for the sword is just as in fashion with the ladies. The emphasis on skill rather than pure strength makes it an equalizer, and allows the commoner to face off against a great hidalgo. The class struggle of Estalia is sometimes fought in bloody duels where neither money nor ancient heritage can save you.

Although the history of fencing is fiercely debated between Estalia and Tilea, from a range of issues covering who created the first fencing school to which favoured style was developed in which country, there can be no doubt that Master Figueroa of Estalia was the first to apply the latest scientific theories to his swordplay. These new techniques revolutionised the art of swordplay, creating a system that is known today as fencing.

Master Figueroa's pupils in the art of fencing spread these new techniques across the southern lands of Estalia and Tilea, and over time made subtle changes to the original system to better favour their own particular style. In all the major settlements of the southern lands a school can be found that teaches a particular style of the art of fencing, and the largest have several schools that compete between each other for the honour of being labelled the best style. In order to achieve this without too much bloodletting a system of rules was set in place, so that pupils could hone their skills in 'friendly' competitions. Although a number of duels are still fought to the death over matters of honour between feuding schools and even in-fighting amongst students of a school.

Schools and Tournaments

A number of different schools of fencing have come and gone over the years, though the teachings of Master Figueroa have remained a firm favourite.

The various different styles of fencing are typically known by the surnames of the fencing scholar that created it, other than Master Figueroa's teachings which are known as the classical style and is represented by the Estalian Diestro career (see WFRP page 38 and TCC page 69). The other styles use the classical form as a template, but distinguish themselves by focusing on an alternative form not found within the classical, as such a Talent within the Estalian Diestro career is substituted by the Talent that defines the particular style.

There are a number of different formats to tournaments, and there are both individual and team competitions which may comprise of the use of all three fencing swords or as a specific challenge, such as the *Épée* Challenge. Unlike most other lands, the Estalian Kingdoms allow women to compete, but they are generally separated from the men in high-level tournaments. Mixed-gender tournaments are more commonplace at lower-level events, such as between individual fencing schools or as an in-school event. There are two types of event, individual and team, with the individual event comprising of two parts, the pools and the direct eliminations.

New Weapon: Épée

The Épée was developed for use in tournaments as primarily a thrusting weapon that would inflict as little damage as possible, due to its highly flexible blade. It is therefore rarely seen outside of fencing schools, as most armours will block its thrusts. Still, there are those who find ways to make it deadly, especially in unarmoured situations.

Épée: Cost 10 gc, Enc 25, Group Fencing, Dmg SB-4, Qualities Fast, Precise, Defensive Avail Rare

In pools, fencers are divided into groups of equal numbers and every fencer is given the chance to fence every other fencer in their pool once. After the pools are finished, the fencers are given a ranking or "seed", compared to all other fencers in the competition, based primarily on the percentage of bouts won, then based secondarily on the difference between touches they scored and the touches they received. Once the rankings have been determined the direct elimination round starts. Fencers are sorted into a table of some power of 2 (16, 32, 64, etc) based on how many people are competing.

Due to the fact that is highly unlikely for the number of fencers to be exactly a power of two, the fencers with the best results are given byes or the bottom seeded fencers are eliminated. Typically no one has to fence for third place (the exception is if the tournament is a qualifying competition with limited slots for continuation). Instead, two bronze medals are awarded to the losers of the semi-final round. Team competitions are similar to the pool system used by individuals, except that the team fights as a whole, with each fencer having to fence each member of the opposite team, and their points are collectively grouped together. Team competitions involve events of three fencers, with a fourth fencer allowed as a substitute in case of injury (though this can only be used once).

In tournaments all fencers wear protective clothes and the blade must only touch your opponent, any blood that is spilt by an individual will see either themselves or their team knocked out of the competition. A match generally last for 3 minutes (18 Rounds) and the fencer with the highest number of touches against their opponent wins the match. The areas of the body that are counted as being scored against depend upon the blade being used in the event.

Épée: Head, Arms, Torso, and Legs

Foil: Torso

Rapier: Head, Arms, Torso

Alternative Styles

The Diestro career in the core rulebook reflects the skills acquired by classical students of Figueroa's school. These are the most numerous so to Empire eyes the "standard" Diestro. In Estalia, each Diestro is unique, and may have come from any of the following schools.

| Roll | Alternative Diestro Style |
|------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Barceló |
| 2 | Casanova |
| 3 | De La Vega |
| 4 | De Macedu |
| 5 | Esteven |
| 6 | Garcia |
| 7 | Lopez |
| 8 | Mendoza |
| 9 | Montero |
| 10 | Valladres |

Barceló

It is said that of all of Master Figueroa's original pupils, Master Alejandro Barceló was the most courageous of all. Legends say that he was an exceptional fighter that showed no fear in the face of extreme adversity. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Stout-Hearted.

Casanova

Master Manuel Casanova excelled in tournament fighting, by developing methods to win quickly with minimal injury. A favoured tactic was to disarm an opponent and force a concession. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Disarm.

De La Vega

Amongst all fencers Master Diego de la Vega believed in protocol and for diligently following the rules of fencing, and in never injuring an opponent unintentionally. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Strike to Stun.

De Macedu

This style was developed from the teachings of Master Fabio de Macedu, whom is said to have once been a drinker and brawler before learning the art of fencing. Although the art of fencing helped to curb his wayward behaviour, he took what he learnt from the streets and applied them to his style of fencing. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Street Fighting.

Estevan

Rather than use the off-hand for balance, as Master Figueroa advocated, Master Claudius Estevan proposed it should be used for defence and as such always used a weapon in his secondary hand. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Specialist Weapon Group (Parrying).

Garcia

Master Armando Garcia believed that an opponent should be overwhelmed with superior swordplay, but that a fencer should be prepared to fend off a lucky strike that might get past his defences at any time. In order to prepare for such a strike his pupils are taught to hone the speed of their reflexes each day. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Lightning Reflexes.

López

Master Fidel López was well known in the Court of Magritta as a man with the morals of a common dog and a philanderer. However, his charming and seductive techniques are known to have bedded many a courtier and if rumour is correct even Queen Juana. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Suave.

Mendoza

Master Flavio Mendoza is said to have been Master Figueroa's favoured pupil, and was known to have a natural flare with the sword. Coming from Bilbali, he approached the art of fencing with what is seen as typical northerners no nonsense approach. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Warrior Born.

Montero

Although it is common practise for the art of fencing to be taught in established schools, Master Rafael Montero believed that experience should be gained outside of the safety of a school, roughing it in the countryside. You may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Hardy.

Valladares

The art of fencing involves not just skilled swordplay, but boastful taunts designed to anger your opponent so that they make a mistake. Master Armando Valladares used breathing techniques to lessen the chance of losing control; as such you may substitute the Talent Strike Mighty Blow for Cool-headed.

Pursuing The Art

Many an Estalian dallies with being a Diestro over their lives. Those with the patience and discipline to pursue it further become Maestros, and then, possibly, Maestros Verdaderos. The advances provided by these two careers are discussed in the Career section above but both careers provide access to Destreza Gestures—two in the Maestro Career and a further two in Maestro Verdadero. These are purchased with experience exactly like Talents, but have unique effects, specific to your style and school of fencing.

Diestros are commonplace so wherever they learn will be influenced by one of the ten styles above of Figueroa's teachings. As they advance, the true idiosyncrasies of their schooling will be revealed, and these are as unique as fingerprints. Once you know a man's sword-style, you will know his teacher, and thus where he grew up and the smells outside his bedside window. Rather than provide a series of schools to choose from, and thus do an injustice to the incredible variety and personal flair of Estalian fencing, we instead provide a series of Gestures (roll or choose from table 9: Destreza Gestures on page 126). The four you choose from reflect the nature of your schooling. Players and GMs are encourage to come up with background and colour to explain their suite of powers. GMs may also allow players who have completed the Maestro Verdadero career to create their own gestures, and indeed, from thence, their own schools.

All the Gestures listed in the table only apply if you fight with an epee, foil or rapier. The moment you arm yourself with anything else, they cease to work.

Table 9: Destreza Gestures

| Roll | Style | Gesture |
|-------|-------------|--|
| 01-03 | Alert | With your sword drawn, You gain +10% to all Dodge tests. |
| 04-06 | Bold | If you win Initiative, your opponent can only take a Half Action in the first round of combat. |
| 07-08 | Challenging | One opponent you can see must make a Will Power Test. If he fails, he suffers -20% to all tests if he attacks anyone but you. |
| 09-11 | Commanding | One adjacent opponent cannot move away from you until you or he is dead, or you relinquish your Command over him. You may only command one opponent at a time. |
| 12-14 | Controlling | Your Attacks gain the Snare Quality. |
| 15-17 | Cruel | You gain +20% when taking the Aim action. |
| 16-19 | Deceptive | You gain +20% to all Feint attempts. |
| 20-22 | Eager | You can end a Run with a Charge Attack. |
| 23-25 | Elusive | You may Dodge up to five times per round. |
| 26-29 | Explosive | In a Swift or Standard Attack, you may make one extra attack, but if you do, all your attacks are at -10% to hit. |
| 30-32 | Fearless | You may re-roll a failed All-Out Attack (but not one which is dodged or parried). |
| 33-35 | Flamboyant | You may use your Fellowship to make Feint, Disarm, Dodge or Parry tests. |
| 36-37 | Furious | You may Charge even if your opponent is 1 square away. |
| 38-41 | Gallant | You gain +20% to the Strength test when attempting to Strike to Stun. |

| Roll | Style | Gesture |
|-------|------------|---|
| 42-45 | Insightful | You gain +10% to all Parry attempts. |
| 46-49 | Lively | When executing a successful Manoeuvre Action, your opponent moves 4 yards (2 squares). |
| 50-52 | Lunging | You can attack targets up to 2 yards away without closing on them. This cannot be combined with Sweeping. |
| 53-56 | Mocking | One adjacent opponent suffers -20% to attempts to Dodge and Parry until he is killed or the combat ends. You can only mock one opponent at a time. |
| 57-59 | Nimble | Before or after making a Standard Attack action, you may move 2 yards (1 square) or Stand/Mount as a free action. |
| 60-61 | Passionate | You have the Menacing talent while armed. |
| 62-63 | Pressing | On a damaging hit, your opponent moves back 2 yards (1 square). You advance with him. |
| 64-66 | Prudent | You may Withdraw as a Half Action. |
| 67-69 | Quick | You gain +30% to all Initiative rolls. |
| 70-72 | Resolute | You may use your Will Power to make Feint, Disarm, Dodge or Parry tests. |
| 73-75 | Sneaky | On a successful Int or Fel test, you may gain surprise on a opponent even if they can see you. |
| 76-79 | Stylish | If you deal a critical wound or defeat an opponent in the sight of others, you gain +30% to all Fellowship Tests in that local area for the next twenty four hours. |
| 80-81 | Sweeping | When using a Swift Attack, you may Attack every opponent adjacent to you, up to a maximum of five. You must only attack each opponent once. |
| 82-84 | Tactical | You may use your Intelligence to make Feint, Disarm, Dodge or Parry tests |
| 85-88 | Thrusting | Your attacks gain the Armour Piercing Quality. |

Table 9: Destreza Gestures

| Roll | Style | Gesture |
|-------|------------|---|
| 89-91 | Unyielding | You gain +30% to resist being Manoeuvred by an opponent. |
| 92-94 | Vicious | After you deal a critical wound or defeat an opponent, all characters within 2 yards (1 square) must make a Will Power Test or become Frightened. |
| 95-97 | Vigilant | You may Parry up to five times per round, as long as you can parry at all. |
| 98-99 | Vengeful | Your attacks gain the Impact Quality if your target has previously wounded you. |
| 100 | Watchful | As long as your weapon is drawn, you can never be surprised. |

Example School: The Fandango School teaches its students the Deceptive, Lively, Lunging and Prudent Gestures. It is a school based on movement and footwork, moving forward and back and keeping the enemy at a careful distance. Its practitioners acquire a measured, dance-like step in duels, pacing around their opponents in an almost hypnotic way, and staring at them with a grim, humourless demeanour.

Appendix : An Estalian Bestiary

Great Cats

“Now, I understand why me old father used to tell me to always look back when on the road. These Linces are treacherous creatures, eh?”
 — *Tiago Esperanza, Tilean Merchant*

“The Bretons hunt deer, the Empires hunt foxes. We hunt leopoles that hunt us in return, with razor sharp claws and muscles of steel. There are times when no insult is necessary.”
 — *Fidel Invido, Hidalgo of San Panteras*

The plains and hills of Estalia are a perfect habitat for the great felines, where their quick sprint and stealthy camouflage grants them full advantage while looking for food. Many Estalian nobles go out hunting such animals and the successful ones proudly wear leopard hide over their shoulders. Many hidalgos chose a big cat to feature on their banners and badges, revering them for their agility, beauty or majesty.

Examples of big cats include lynxes, leopards, panther, lions and pumas. The following stats are for a leopard or panther, the most common beast in the mountains. For lions, add the Very Strong and Very Tough Talents and 3 wounds. For smaller cats, subtract 3 wounds and reduce Strength and Toughness by 10.

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 36% | 0% | 36% | 45% | 52% | 25% | 36% | 35% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 1 | 17 | 3 | 4 | 6 | - | - | |

Skills: Concealment, Dodge Blow, Follow Trail, Perception, Scale Sheer Surface, Silent Move, Swim

Talents: Bear Hug (see Realm of the Ice Queen), Strike to Injure, Strike to Stun.

Traits: Keen Senses, Natural Weapons (Claws), Unsettling

Camouflage: The natural hide pattern of a great cat grants it +20% to Concealment Tests in the appropriate environments.

Pounce: Great Cats are incredible jumpers, and can use this as a devastating attack where they place their whole weight at once upon one unlucky foe. After a successful Charge attack by a great cat, the victim must make a Toughness Test or fall prone. If they fall, they also count as being grappled by the beast.

Armour: None.

Armour Points: Head: 0 Body: 0 Arms:0 Legs: 0

Weapons: Claws and fangs

Slaughter Margin: Average.



Giant Bull

"I do happen to have the head of one sitting over my fireplace. If you'd join me for a cup of wine, I can show it to you."

Tiago Esperanza, Tilean Merchant

"The damned Ox was bigger than my coach. The only reason I'm still alive is because I fell unconscious after it rammed the wagon and I hit my head when it toppled. The noble and his bodyguards tried to fight or run and the thing caught them and you don't want to know in how many parts we found 'em. The wagon? Total loss."

Magdalena Maria Donnafellana, Linces Coaches

There are fearsome bulls of great size across the peninsular—beasts taller than men with the fury of lions. Then there are the Giant Bulls. These beasts stand over twelve feet tall and are as strong as the giants of legend by whom they were raised. The bulls are solitary creatures, and are rarely seen and only aggressive when threatened—but if a human wanders into their territory in rutting season, he may not live to regret it. Some nobles have tried to hunt them for sport, while others try to bring them down (or distract them by hiring itinerant adventurers to dress in lurid clothing to lead the bulls away) to protect their regular cattle. The giant bulls occasionally search for a domestic herd to procreate with a strong female. When it impregnates one, it tags along with the herd until the calf is born in a labour that kills the mother, and then leaves with its child, to roam the wilds once more. No giant cows have ever been seen.

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 43% | 0% | 62% | 66% | 31% | 21% | 38% | 11% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 3 | 21 | 6 | 6 | 8 | - | - | |

Skills: None

Talents: Frightening, Unstoppable Blows, Will of Iron.

Traits: Fearless, Natural Weapons (Hooves, Horns), Keen Senses, Ramming, Terrible Charge

Ramming: The Giant Bull can easily knock opponents away. On a successful charge attack, for each 2 damage points the Bull deals before discounting armour and toughness, the opponent is knocked back one yard.

An agility test is required to remain standing after the attack, with -10% for each yard travelled.

Terrible Charge: When charging, Giant Bulls gain the Terrifying quality and its Horns gain the Armour Piercing and Impact quality.

Armour: Thick hide.

Armour Points: Head: 1 Body: 1 Arms: 1 Legs: 1

Weapons: Hooves, Horns

Slaughter Margin: Hard.



Jungle Bugs

"Paquito! Bring me another notation book! I just emptied my boots and I believe I found another dozen species!"

Atten Burro, Explorer for the Badajoz Bankers Consortium

"I still smile at the memory of Don Rojas's twisted corpse and the thought of the harbour lass who sold me the jar containing Jenero's Wandering Liver Beetle, and of the yards of thick gauze I soon after affixed upon all my windows."

Don Alejandro Galan, the new Lord de Oliveira

The steaming, impenetrable jungles of Lustria are a competitive breeding pit for the most dangerous and vicious insects in the world, and they have found equal homes in the crates and cloths and shipholds—and flesh—of the visitors.

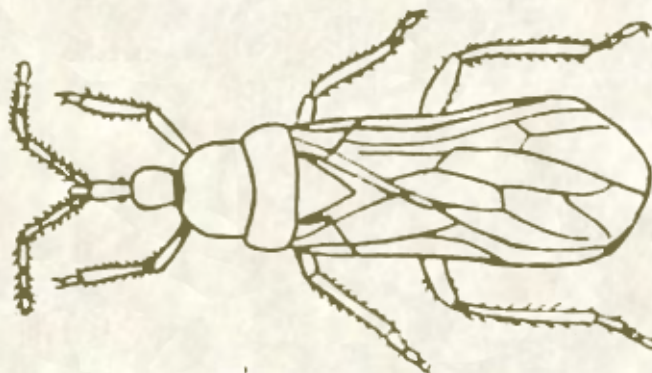
Appendix : An Estalian Bestiary

Many hibernate or lay eggs in sacks and can provide a nasty surprise to a merchant even hundreds of miles from a port—or make it to Estalian shores and spread like wildfire whichever way the wind or their host takes them. The scholars who study Lustria are fascinated that the insects seem to have absolutely endless variation, but with one unifying feature: some kind of terrifying defence mechanism, typically fatal or extremely painful to the victim, and usually both. As such they are prized by assassins even more than they are by universities.

Use the tables below to name your own deadly creatures. See the rules below for how Behaviour effects their abilities. Note that this entry is for a single insect, because they can be up to the size of a cat. Others attack in Swarms (see the Swarm template in Tome of Corruption).

| Roll | Descriptor (see table two) | Behaviour | Noun | Type |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Discoverer | Creeping | Wart | Worm |
| 2 | Discoverer | Screaming | Fire | Horn |
| 3 | Colour | Humming | Heart | Beetle |
| 4 | Colour | Burrowing | Death | Fly |
| 5 | Size | Darting | Blood | Piercer |
| 6 | Size | Reclusive | Night | Locust |
| 7 | Location | Jumping | Sun | Wasp |
| 8 | Location | Obstinate | Grave | Spider |
| 9 | Appearance | Startling | Lung | Tick |
| 0 | Appearance | Thronging | Trouser | Mantis |

| Roll | Discoverer | Colour | Size | Location | Appearance |
|------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | Villaria's | Yellow | Tiny | Common | Horned |
| 2 | de Menia's | Black | Children's | Western | Spined |
| 3 | Lagunar's | Blue | Lesser | Eastern | Laced |
| 4 | Molpeceres' | Red | Standard | Subterranean | Armoured |
| 5 | Cacara's | Green | Greater | Nocturnal | Graceful |
| 6 | Prieto's | Speckled | Giant | Marshland | Flat-headed |
| 7 | Aguerro's | Iridescent | Colossal | Arboreal | Splendid |
| 8 | del Torre's | Striped | Goliath | Parasitic | Patient |
| 9 | Begel's | Pallid | Titan | Ear-seeking | False |
| 0 | Myrmidia's | Golden | Legendary | Inescapable | Zealous |



| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 30% | 0% | 2% | 9% | 40% | 5% | 15% | 5% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | - | - | |

Skills: Concealment, Perception, Silent Move

Talents: Hoverer, Keen Senses, Natural Weapons (Mandibles)

Traits: Argh It's On My Leg, Small but Venomous Bug, Too Many Legs, Variation

Argh It's On My Leg: Jungle Bugs can climb on any surface, moving at their movement speed. If a Jungle Bug makes a successful Silent Move test or if it deals damage to its target, it may move into its target's space, gaining +20% to further Weapon Skill Tests against that target. Attacking a Bug on your own body incurs a -10% penalty to Weapon Skill Tests.

Small but Venomous Bug: Jungle Bug attacks ignore Armour, but only do SB-4 damage (maximum 1) — this is a change to how its Natural Weapons Talent works. If damage is dealt, you may either improvise a poison attack (see page 122 in the core rulebook for ideas) or the target must make a Hard (-10%) Toughness check or lose an additional 1 Wound every round for the next 1d5 rounds, as they are tormented in agony. Subsequent bites start subsequent agonies.

Too Many Legs: Jungle Bugs do not have any kind of understandable anatomy. Use the Sudden Death Critical Tables for these creatures.

Variation: In order to reflect the huge differences between each type of horrifying critter, the GM may elect to use the table below to help in making life that much more unpleasant for the bugs' victims.

- **Creeping:** Gains +20% to Concealment and Silent Move checks, and +20% to attacks when it has not been observed.
- **Screaming:** Gains the Frightening Talent.
- **Humming:** Any target who fails the check against the Small but Venomous Bug poison falls asleep and if not violently awoken (such as through taking damage) before the end of the random duration, they must make a Challenging (-20%) Willpower test or die.
- **Burrowing:** Loses Hoverer Talent, but their Mandibles gains the Impact Quality and damage has no maximum.
- **Darting:** Gains +1 Movement, +10% Agility and the Dodge Blow skill

- **Reclusive:** Targets who fail their Toughness Bonus as per Small but Venomous Bug ability must make a Toughness check each turn they suffer or lose 2 additional Wounds
- **Jumping:** Once per round, if the Jungle Bug hits a target, it may immediately move to and make an additional attack on another target within its move distance

• **Obstinate:** When killed, this Bug secretes a sticky ooze (automatically hitting someone in its space, and/or its attacker if killed with a melee weapon). The ooze can only be removed with alcohol or an equally powerful solvent, and stinks terribly. The victim and anyone within two squares (4 yards) of the victim must make a Willpower Test or suffer -20% to all Characteristics on their Main Profile. Whether they make the Willpower Test or not, they also suffer -10% to all Perception tests based on smell.

• **Startling:** Targets attacked by the Jungle Bug are reduced to one half-action for their next round.

• **Thronging:** 1d10 rounds after attacking, a Swarm of these pests arrive.

Armour: None.

Armour Points: - Body: 0

Weapons: Mandibles

Slaughter Margin: Routine

Komo Lizard

“Now, listen to me, eh? It is typical of you northlings to strut around like ‘oh, I know everything, I can go anywhere!’ You’re wrong, eh. You don’t know those hills....They are evil, eh.”

Ricardo Sanchez, Mountain Guide

“A damned lizard! Can you believe these people? They are so spoiled for their distance from the wastes, that they start fearing damned lizards. Chaos knocks on our doors and we face them with faith and bravery, while the Estalians lock themselves at night, fearing some overgrown newt!”

Brother Hagen Falkenheim, Sigmarite

Priest

The Komo Lizards are great reptilian carnivores, reaching over 9 feet in length and 4 feet in height, which feed on meat and carrion, through all the wild areas of central Estalia. They inhabit hilly territories and fight each other for the dominance over a region, which is kept by the victorious male and his harem. The lizards dig their burrows on the darkest part of the hills, generally among thick vegetation, but they spend most afternoons on the highest spots of the geological formation, where they can bath in the hot Estalian sun and keep watch over their territories.

Kraken

Feeding on carcasses makes the Komo Lizards' jaws a pit of infection and disease and the bacteria in their saliva often kills those who survive the attack. Komo's usually bite their prey and then retreat to higher ground or their caves, waiting for the victim to die from the infection.

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 38% | 0% | 45% | 52% | 37% | 15% | 36% | 19% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 2 | 17 | 4 | 5 | 5 | - | - | |

Skills: Climbing, Follow Trail, Perception, Silent Move

Talents: Natural Weapons, Scales, Resistance to Poison, Resistance to Disease, Keen Senses, Flee!

Traits: Infectious Bite, Patient Hunter, Scales

Infectious bite: Any creature bitten by a komo lizard must succeed on a Challenging (-10%) Toughness test or lose 1 Wound per hour until it reaches 0. At this point another Toughness test is made. If the victim succeeds, nothing more will happen. If this roll is failed, the victim falls unconscious and will die in 1d10 hours. A successful Heal test (with a +10% bonus if the healer has the Surgery talent) can cut out the infection and stop the loss. If this is done before the target falls unconscious, it causes the loss of one further Wound. If it is done after the latter stage has begun, it causes a critical hit to the location of the bite.

Patient Hunter: The komo is a patient hunter that uses camouflage. Thanks to its slow metabolism, it can wait days for prey to stumble upon it, while it lies perfectly still on a rock face, its scales camouflaging it perfectly with the stones beneath. Anyone approaching a komo without being aware they are in komo territory must make a Hard (-20%) Perception test or trip over the beast. This gives the komo a surprise attack.

Scales: The komo lizard's hard scales give it two Armour Points in each location.

Armour: None

Armour Points: Head: 2 Body: 2 Arms: 2 Legs: 2

Weapons: Claws and Teeth.

Slaughter Margin: Average.

"Foul creature, hear me words! I'm a servant of mighty Manann! His anger is righteous and his power is furious! It is in his domains that you dwell, Oh Kraken! It is in his waters that you hunt, Oh Kraken! It is under his vigilant eyes that you sleep and swim and eat, Oh Kraken! And know that, if you are unforgiving, Manann is ten times more and, should you harm this most faithful follower of Manann, ten times you'll be cursed and, in his domains you shall be smitten down, oh Kraken, and you shall sink to the dark bottoms of his realm!"

Manannite Prayer Chant

"How do we survive their attacks? Foolish man, we have learnt long ago to simply not be attacked in the first place. That is the only sure protection. If you wish to know how to not be attacked... perhaps you should just give up now and leave the oceans to us true masters."

High Navigator Caswin of Hoeth

For millennia, the Krakens have ruled the seas, unchallenged by beast, sentient race or natural phenomena. Gargantuan creatures, the Krakens are the most dangerous predators of the waters, strong enough to turnover and sink anything short of an Imperial Greatship. Its main body can reach up to 15 yards and each of its eight minor tentacles can easily reach twice that size. Two other tentacles are even stronger and longer than the rest, serving as the creature's main limbs which end in barbed hooks that catch onto ships and never let go. The colour of the kraken's hide varies, depending on the region of the ocean it inhabits, the most common being the bluish-gray at the coasts of Tilea, Estalia and the Border Princes, the blackish-yellow between the Old World and Ulthuan and, finally, the blackish-red variant, which dwells at the Sea of Claws and can sometimes bear fearsome mutations.

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|--------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 43% | 0% | 91% | 62% | 35% | 19% | 53% | 1% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 4 | 90(86) | 9 | 6 | 1(8) | - | - | |

Skills: Perception +20%, Swim +20%

Talents: Natural Weapons (Hooked Tentacles, Beak), Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Stun, Terrifying, Unstoppable Blows, Wrestling

Traits: Tentacles

Tentacles: The Krakens seldom show their bodies during a combat, preferring to hug the sides of ships with some of their tentacles and attack with the rest of them. The attacking tentacles are not designed to lash above water, so have the **Slow** and **Improvised Weapon** quality. Each tentacle has 86 wounds. If two of its tentacles are destroyed, it must make a **Will Power** test for each subsequent attack it receives, in order to not flee the battle. The tentacles can also perform grapples, after which they tend to throw the grappled victim into the sea. This does the same damage as a tentacle slap (as well as stranding the victim). **Tentacle Slam:** The kraken may also choose to hold the boat with most of its tentacles and attack with the others in unison. This counts as an attack against a stationary object (the boat) so hits automatically and does double damage. This can split small boats in half.

Alternatively the Krakens may choose to capsize the whole boat at once. This requires five successful **Strength** tests in a row, each modified by the size of the vessel and the strength of its sails (GM's call). If the kraken makes these rolls, the boat is pulled below, shattering into splinters under the pressure. Anyone left on board must make an **Hard (-20%) Strength Test** or be pulled down too, to instant death.

Armour: None (Thick Rubbery Skin)
Armour Points: Head: 2 Body: 4 Legs: 4
Weapons: Tentacles
Slaughter Margin: Impossible

Mermaids

“Hah, I thought only the Bretonnians feared wet ladies.”

Jann Shimmidt, Empire Knight (Insane)

“It was only a punch to my nose, by the ship's carpenter that I did not jump to seek them, like many of the other sailors did. From that day on, I started believing all the stories about mermaids. The good ones and the bad.”

Ignacio, Priest of Manann

The seafolk, more commonly known as mermaids, are aquatic sea creatures that are said to draw men and women to the sea and drag them down to feed on them. The mermaid song is a powerful spell that only the strongest of will can resist. Sometimes, though, the seafolk are said to help humans, taking them back near their boats or the shore. The reason for this is not clear ; maybe the human is favoured by Manann, or maybe the creature just wasn't hungry on that specific occasion.

The Mermaids appear to be beautiful young women and men, with sculpted human bodies that end at the waist, from where a huge scaly caudal fin takes over.

| WS | BS | S | T | Ag | Int | Wil | Fel |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 31% | 31% | 35% | 36% | 45% | 42% | 38% | 39% |
| A | W | SB | TB | M | Mag | IP | FP |
| 1 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 1(6) | - | - | |

Skills: Charm, Perception, Performer (Singer) +20%, Speak Language (Elven), Swimming +20%

Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws)

Traits: Half-Fish, Mermaid Song

Mermaid Song: The seafolk can (as a half action) sing with angelic voices, putting whoever hears it into a trance that compels them to dive into the sea and join the seafolk forever. Anyone with 10 yards (5 squares) who hears the song must pass a normal **Will Power Test** or be charmed for 1d10 rounds. When charmed they cannot be compelled to take any actions but cannot act in a way to harm the singers. They may still act to protect themselves but make all tests at -10% penalty due to doziness.

Half Fish: Having a caudal fin fit on its side, a Mermaid has a movement of 6 underwater. It also possesses gills and does not need air to breathe.

Armour: None (Scales)
Armour Points: Head: 0 Body: 0 Arms:0 Legs: 1
Weapons: Claws
Slaughter Margin: Easy



The Gift of Song

by Steve Dee

Rico watched as ruby-red wine poured from the jug into the waiting cups, filling them to the top and leaving glistening splashes running down the sides. The men at the table drank greedily, leaving shining flecks on their moustaches. Rico licked his cracked lips and dreamt of the taste. It had been a day since he had last drank, and that had been only still stream water.

He licked his lips again as another sight caught his eyes: two young women bringing fresh jugs to the table, their bare peasant legs flashing between their black skirts in a way that would have the preachers of Magritta calling for the fire and tongs. He could hear their laughter, although he did not understand the joke: he must be well into La Mesa now, where the men spoke a dialect rough as the mountains, and his city ears could make no sense of it. The girls drank too, and he watched their lips with twin hungers, and dreamt of twin tastes.

It had been months now since he had seen a woman up close. He missed sweet wine, and fresh bread, and warm fire, and even the crazed flash of a duel, all of these. But none of them so much as his missed women. Not to serenade or seduce, just to see them, to be around them, their fragrant perfumes, their flowing hair, their easy laughter. Just be near a woman: that was the essence of freedom.

Not that he was any slouch when it came to seduction. He spoke well for a sailor, and he could handle a sword better than most marines. He was not handsome, but his battle scars set him well, spoke of his courage and his service, and his beard, even after weeks without a barber, was thick and lustrous. But now, he would never have a chance to seduce a lady, or even make one smile. Upon his cheek was the burned V, for violador—rapist—and that meant he could never speak to anyone again. It itched every night as the cold seeped into the hot scar and stung every morning as fresh hairs pulled on the puckered flesh. It was half a year since the branding, and still it throbbed and cracked and made his eyes water. And for the rest of his life, it would mark him as the worst kind of criminal except a coward. No hombre would share his table, no mercado give him work, and no seniorita would let him kiss her hand, not ever again.

And for what? Because he had slapped Ilena in the streets. He had returned from eighteen months at sea to find her in the arms of the Lucarre boy, despite him saving all his shore money up to buy her the silken ribbons she so adored. The Lucarre lad was a stinking peasant shopboy; he'd killed him first, perhaps too easily, for after that his blood was still fired, still hungry for restitution and revenge. He'd cursed her and her whole sex, and pushed her away when she begged him to forgive her. She'd fallen down in the dirt and everyone had seen. And the custodes had branded him the next day.

It was another woman, too, who had landed him where he was now—half-starved and all exhausted, trying to cross five hundred miles to the mountains without a horse or blanket or waterskin or even a sword. Only whores would touch him now, and after he'd saved every penny he'd somehow picked the one taverna in the city that was about to be shut down by the custodes that very night. Presumably due to some powermongering by the Inquisition—he had seen the monsignor desperately slipping away, tying up his cassock as he went. Whoring was illegal for men and women, so the quick-thinking seniorita between his legs had screamed rape when she saw the soldiers burst into the salon. He'd had no time to grab anything but his pants as he had leapt out the window and run off into the night.

No doubt they had seen his V and marked him for a repeat offender, a fine prize for any proteges or vigilares to bring to the gibbet, because hoof-beats had hounded him all the way to the city walls. Without supplies, without a plan, he had leapt over them and ran and ran and ran, praying to the Maiden and all her family for whatever angels she could spare to grant him wings.

That was three days ago. Either angels or fear had given wings to his feet and he had made it far north, into the dry desert of La Mesa. So far, he had not met any more soldiers, but only because he had taken care to stay out of every village, taverna and outpost he had spied on the horizon.

That was less help the further north he went however, as the last few trees thinned out and the hills gave way to the endless plains of wheat and oilseed—a soldier on horseback could see for twenty miles in all directions, and a lone man without a horse would definitely warrant further investigation.

That was why he had, for the moment, abandoned his wild walking and crept close to the taverna by the cattle farm. His plan was to get to the mountains, for in those wild, rustic hills all chase would be lost and a wild man might grow his hair long to hide his face. There were mines too, and from what he heard the life of a miner was harsh enough that there was no time or energy to curse your fellow digger. It was a good plan, but if he was going to live long enough to reach those peaks, he desperately needed food and drink and a blanket or a cloak. And a sword in case he met anyone on the way. And now that he could no longer hide in the wild, there was no risk in creeping close.

But perhaps all for nought. Although it was only early morning, the taverna was bustling with people. He'd had only a moment to grab a saddle blanket from the back palisade before men had come to break their fast in the crisp morning air. Strong churro had been followed by sweet wine, then a sweet smelling omelet stuffed with mushrooms and spicy ground beef. Rico had been raised above a ristorante and knew all too well the wonders of food and despite all his years eating slop and tack at sea, he never lost his amour for it. Lying flat in the grass he was close enough to smell every spice and his eyes watered with a third hunger.

The crowds did not thin as the breakfast hour past but soon enough he saw a new chance; among the risers was a coach party, heading west. They might take him closer to the mountains; if not, they might have plenty worth stealing. Stealing, in fact, seemed the best option of all, as the servants were bustling back and forth with chests and boxes. Big chests, he saw, as he craned his head as far as he could through the grass. Big chests meant big money. Something definitely worth stealing.

He didn't have much time; the coach would not delay long no matter who their master was. Looking around for inspiration, he saw it instantly, and his feet were rushing him through the paddock before the idea was even finished.

Not far down hill from the taverna was a tiny lake for the cattle. Heedless of being spied by the diners he pushed through the dozy cows and splashed into it. With the hard-earned skill of a sailor, his teeth tore into the muslin of the blanket. A start, and then with a wrench, it was in two. One half he tore again and again, making strips. Again with a sailor's dexterity he wove them in and out, splashed them in the water and pulled hard. In but ten minutes, he had made a strong rope. Now, he knew, came the hard part.

He made his way slowly through the grass towards the palisade. In the next field, standing alone was his goal: a large redbacked bull, munching with a kind of godlike patience on his cud. Living by the sea, and poor, Rico had seen only a few proper toreos in his life, but every boy in the square knew the form from the time he could run. Now, it would be his time to try his hand in the ring. With great care, he crawled through the fence. The bull turned with matching slowness but with no loss of menace, regarding Rico with a dull stare. For a moment, the two froze in a tableau, both unsure whether to run. Then with a shake, the bull bent down to pull grass anew, and Rico exhaled.

Like a tightrope walker at a carnivale he walked one foot in front of the other, step by shaking step, in a long arc. His heart beat was pounding in his ears, which also craned for any sound. As his eyes stared at the bull's enormous hoofs padding the ground, he swore he could hear shouts from the taverna behind him, shouts of him being discovered or the coach leaving. Time, he knew, was desperately running out, yet he could not hurry, not with the terrible beast eyeing him again. And now, now he stood directly between the beast and the bar, he had to catch those terrible eyes in full.

Without taking his eyes from the beast, he pulled the half of the blanket from inside his sleeve. Bright yellow threads and scarlet braid caught the morning sun. The bull twitched, excited. With a flick of his wrist, he unrolled it to full length. The bull blinked and snorted.

With his other hand, Rico gripped the makeshift rope tight. At sea, he had learnt the art of taking a beating from a rope flail—how to roll your back at just the right second to save the flesh from breaking. As he'd risen in ranks, he'd learnt too how to whip so the bosun smiled to hear the crack, but only the lightest ends hit the skin of the fellow tied to the yardarm. He could place a rough coil of bowline on a mayfly's nose if he was asked. It was no spear or sword, but it would have to do. His gaze unbroken, he tilted the yellow blanket towards the ground with his right hand. And with his left, a savage flick of his wrist sent the wet rope burning across the bull's nose.

With a roar as much as scream as shout the bull jumped forward. Rico stumbled, half fell and felt his pants fill with warm wetness. He couldn't believe a thing ten times his weight could move so fast. And it hadn't even looked at the damn blanket. Thinking quickly, Rico hid the rope behind the curtain of cloth, and rose it up high. He waved it back and forth, till the bull's eyes followed it. Underneath, his knuckles tightened again around the rope, and then with another crack, he split the bull's soft black nose.

The horns went up and came down with terrible force. As much in panic as with will, Rico's arm dropped to the side and the horns bore down further, following the bright blanket. Rico realised he was on his knees again, and threw himself backwards, rolling through the dust. As he did so, the blanket flew the other way, and the bull took another gigantic leap forward. Rico felt the ground shake when those hooves hit the soil. But he smiled, because it was working—the horns had followed the blanket, not him.

He rolled back and grabbed the blanket off the ground. Struggling up and peddling backwards he held it high, like a pennant, and the horns curved up, trying to catch the flying target. Rico laughed with mad glee as the deadly horns missed him entirely, the bull mesmerised by the flash of colour. The bull snorted in fury, and shook wildly. Rico doubled back, almost tripping, but held his ground. The bull stepped after him, sizing up its prey, uncertain as why and how it moved so fast. Rico stared back into those eyes, feeling more alive than in any battle. His heart beat like a battle-drum, loud and angry. Dimly he could hear shouts now, from behind. He had been spotted, no doubt, but more, he was near. It was almost over. One or two more passes. He could definitely live through one or two more.

He ran back four steps, waving the blanket wildly. The bull obligingly followed, rising to a trot that Rico realised too late would effortlessly become a charge. He tossed the blanket down and dropped prone. Turning, he saw he was in trouble—the bull had caught the blanket on its left horn and pulled it high. Triumphantly, it rammed the horn back into the soil, tearing the blanket further. As it rose again, Rico saw a chance, and took it, whipping his rope from under him and hitting the blanket, not the bull. It tore all the way, flew free of the rough horns and blew towards the fence. With a roar the bull leapt—Rico clearly saw all four hooves off the ground—and impaled the woollen remnant into the wood.

Splinters flew as the bull worked its horn free. Its anger grew as it did, its huge feet driving up dirt clouds as it pulled back and forth. Sliding along the dirt away from those terrible horns, Rico breathed dust but didn't care. He had no time left; the shouts had become determined, angry; people knew they were in danger, that some madman was working the bull into a frenzy. Nothing for it now but to hope the beast went forward, and left him alive. He saw his target, pulled his arm around and struck with terrible accuracy. The speeding knot tore across the bull's hanging manhood, ripping skin in a strike that would have felled a giant. The bull bellowed a cry of incomprehensible rage and leapt through the fence. Its back legs flew out as it did, and a hoof smashed into a Rico's head. For a second, everything went black.

The Estalians have many proverbs involving a wild bull, but none do them justice. It has no logic, no pattern, no comprehension. It is only destruction, unknowable, uncontrollable, unavoidable. The outside tables were smashed to splinters in a second. Screams from men and women echoed. A woman falling back into the kitchen threw her purple table cloth, and the bull lunged with desperate rage. The masonry door frame exploded into dust at the thunderous impact. Smashing stone with its skull, however, slowed the monster down a pace, and also tore its left horn, leaving it hanging low and bloody.

In agony the bull tried to retreat, but trapped in the door it couldn't turn. It threw itself sideways, crashing its head back through the wall a second time. It righted, or tried to right, leapt forth again, and with a hideous snap its back left leg severed as it failed to clear the stone ruins that were left of the back wall. But not even this could stop it. It saw a gold-braided waist coat flash on the poor soldier on the ground, and it drove its one good horn home. The man died instantly: the weight alone exploded his heart before he even felt the gashing of his flesh. Blood gushed from him like a ripe persimmon.

Fresh for more revenge, the bull lashed left and right, slashing at skin and muslin and wood, leaping like a demented frog to favour its useless leg. Blood and sparks and splinters followed those terrible swoops. A brave fool with a harness had his arm torn apart as those razor sharp horns came across. A second later they arced back again and tore his jaw off his face.

Then came the blades. With one leg gone, it couldn't spin fast enough to hold them back. A crowded taverna found almost two dozen swordmen, and they cut and tore at its flanks. It rolled and lurched, destroying all that was left of the patio, tearing down the supports that held the trellis above. Even lame and half-horned, it tore flesh and smashed bone even as it ground wood to dust, stone to powder. Soon enough though, it realised it could not stop the attacks on its rear quarters. With a last fearful shoulder roll to clear the way, it strutted forward into a rocking run for the pasture, its broken leg trailing back and forth as its hips swung wildly to support the limp. When it reached the fence, it fell down and died.

It was more than half an hour before anyone thought of anything but the bull, and by then Rico was three miles down the road. He'd found his feet even before he'd regained his sight and blinked into brightness to find himself sprinting in primarily the right direction—past the house and straight for the road. Not a soul had remained to guard the now almost fully laden coach, but Rico hadn't taken any chances. He'd grabbed the two largest chests—surely the most valuable—and a slingbag of wine and made for the stables as if the bull was behind him. He found a young plains mustang, fast as lightning he rightly guessed, tore its reign from the tie-beam and beat its flank bloody down the morning road, the chests tight under his arms.

Rico was no horseman. The mustang knew it too, and did its best to ride Rico off with its speed. He held on for grim death, pulling the reins until the steed's gums burned as hot as his thighs. After half an hour the horse gave up the struggle and charged off the road straight into the nearest stream. By then Rico had neither the strength nor will to stop it. In fact, he welcomed it, for he was dry with the terror of it all. He unhitched his feet from the brass stirrups and dropped into the river like a stone.

He lay unmoving for a full ten minutes, until the hammering in his head stopped and he could breath without his chest aching. The horse too had calmed, and had snuffled at him with annoyance and walked downstream in search of fresh clover. He let it go. They would be on his tail soon enough, but for the moment, for one sweet moment, he could rest and enjoy the cool water and the hope of what he would find in the chests. Slowly he peeled off his filthy clothes, wrung them out and laid them on the rock. The chests were large and bulky, and that spoke of likely clothes and boots, if not weapons—and the latter could get him the former, no doubt. He let himself laugh, and it came out like a cannon roar as he swam to inspect his prizes where they had fallen.

Despair came like a cannon blow a few minutes later. The big chest was as empty as a cavern, holding only a single treasure—a fine oakwood guitarra, with strap and music notes. The second was full, but of masques and costumes, and a tiny lute, and jars of greasepaint. Entertainers. Minstrels! He wanted food, and boots and swords, not—not—not Maiden-whoring minstrels!

He swore and kicked the ground and tore at his bare chest with his dirty nails and fell to his knees as the anger turned into sobs of exhaustion and despair, coming out thick and wet like molasses from his throat. Salty tears poured down his nose and cheeks until they burned his brand like hot fire. It was that brought him back to his senses, the pain forcing him to pack cool mud on the wound until the throbbing eased. But still he had no will to move.

His thighs were red, raw from the ride, his palms cut from the leather, his fingers and shoulders locked into a rictus of exhaustion. His forehead, he only now realised, had been torn open by the bull's hoof, and ached whenever he closed his eyes. And it had been three days now since he had eaten—he'd spent his last dinner money on that damned whore. He stared at the horse chewing grass and wondered if a man could live on such things. He'd eaten worse at sea. But he'd heard of men going mad from eating grass, their tongues and lips bright green as they frothed and shook to death. No, not grass.

He thought about eating the mustang, assuming of course that he could kill it, and gut it, and strip it... and he was still without a sword. Too much damn work, and then he would be stuck wherever he now was with once again nothing but his legs to carry him. Lucky horse, he thought—if I could carry a man for a day, I might be given oats and water, not thrown in prison because of some brand on my face. That was what he needed—some way to earn a coin. With just a handful, he could buy a meal. With two handfuls, he could play some dice and win a sword. With a sword and a meal, why—he could take on the world again. All he needed was a handful. He looked at the horse again. He was exhausted now, but maybe he could pull a plough or hoist a barn in the morning. If he could find a farm, he could find something he could do. Or sell or hire the horse to do something else. Lucky horse, he thought again—a brand on it only made it more valuable. Of course, he'd have to paint over this brand if he wanted to...

Once again, he found himself running before the idea was finished. Three hats, no use. Two domino masques—useless. And then there it was: some kind of bird shape, with the beaked mouth low enough to cover his entire cheek. He laughed again, and it came out choked and tearful with exhaustion, but with no less triumph.

That night, ten miles away, Capo the Cockerel arrived at the taverna of Escudora Esperoza, a tiny town with nothing to recommend it. The servidorina he met first told them they were so small a town that no minstrels had visited them for years. Rico—now hidden under the mask and the few feathers he had added to it to complete the illusion smiled to himself and thanks the Maiden the girl's mother was still fetching water. By the time the matrona returned, he was eating good beef chorizo in pepper sauce and drinking yeasty ozo—and without ever playing a note.

The mask made it hard to get the fork up to his mouth, but—as he told the servidorina at length, the Cockerel did not reveal his true face until the end of his show. Underneath the mask a layer of red greasepaint hid the scar somewhat, but the sweat would rinse it off over time, and he would not take the chance. The girl accepted his ridiculous pageantry with wide-eyed wonder; her mother had simply grunted with admonishment and taken away the wine bottle. "More," she'd said, "after a song."

His mother had taught him to play, long, long ago, in the hostel above the ristorante, before he was thirteen. After that, he was old enough to go to sea and he had rushed to it. But—as his mother had said then, he recalled—a boy never forgets his first lessons. Unprompted, his fingers curled into familiar positions, and he croaked out one of the old soldier songs. It wasn't much, but with a flourish he blamed his travels and exhaustion, and the young girl applauded and then the rest of the taverna joined in. With another grunt, her mother filled his glass, and he thanked the Maiden for his mother.

And the rest was simply the art of the silver tongue. Before Ilena, before the brand, he had wooed his share of señoritas by the dockyards and any sailor keen to rise to the ranks of the whipper rather than the whipped knew what to say to the bosun and how to say it. Yes, Rico could weave a tale very well, and what began as a litany of excuses for his poor performance and dire need for food to ensure a greater performance on the morrow became the performance itself. In a small town, tales are worth more than music, and he soon earned another glass of wine as the fire was restocked and more folk gathered to see the marvel—the man dressed like a cockerel who crowed of the paradise islands and ocean wonders. Beneath the mask, Rico's smile grew wider and wider, and he even dared to pass a bag around, asking—with the great humility only a master tale-teller can muster—for what few coins his audience might have. He was aiming low, but he was still disappointed with the collection—eight coppers and a bent nail from the bobbing idiot who clapped at every pause—but it was something. And, as he begun another tale, he ordered drinks for everyone.

The grunting matrona knew her role in such proceedings well enough, bringing him his free cup for ensuring all the others paid.

The night wore on. The wine seeped deep inside him, and the fire-warmth curled in from the outside. Together they found the cracks and crevices which he thought might never be warm, or sated, or hopeful again, and filled him. For the first time in his long vigil, he relaxed and let himself truly feel the weariness in his bones. Then there was another round, and the weariness left too, and the boy who had juggled knives below decks for bets crawled back into Rico's head. He asked for a whip, and—coin-bag at the ready for another collection—promised them the grandest tricks he could conceive. They grumbled, but when he took the pipe from the old man's mouth their hands went for the coin purses. This was a night no one in Escudora Esperanza would ever forget, and this time they'd pay more than coppers for it.

And then the door burst open, and it all ended again, in another sudden blow. Framed in darkness at the door were the unmistakable helmets of the vigilares, the police of the roads and farmlands. Rico froze, his tongue dead in his mouth like a bell without a clapper, his hands locked like he had the palsy. For a second it seemed like time had stopped, or that the leader of the band was deliberately holding the moment, smiling to see his prey twist in the snare...

... and then they entered as if nothing had happened.

There were four of them, tired, sweaty and dusty from riding. They called for wine and meat and for the next half-hour all the action in the taverna surrounded them, as the matrona fussed over them and the folk asked questions about the road. Rico found his movement and desperately fell into the background. Behind the masque sweat poured down his face that had nothing to do with the heat. It mixed with the greasepaint and dragged a red stain across his neck. Meanwhile, he watched them. The jefe of the troupe of four moved through the handful of people that had just been his audience, shaking hands and asking names—clearly he was a stranger here, too. Not a good sign—they would be less swayed by the local folk's admiration for him. Meanwhile, the same admiration was already making him a target—every time the jefe shook a hand the shaker pointed towards Rico with a smile, and the jefe followed the gaze, and nodded. Rico saw those eyes and recognized the look of every bosun he'd ever served under—they were the eyes of a man who knew how to hunt other men, wherever they hid.

Rico glanced at the door, then towards the kitchen. Neither would be reached without being spotted, in a small place like this. Still, if he had another distraction—there were horses now, and even tired ones would buy him some time. Or perhaps he could simply hide himself in plain sight—drop the bottle near him and pretend to be drunk. No, too risky, he concluded—they might take off his masque in an attempt to make him comfortable, and then he'd be in irons or the flames by morning. A distraction then—alcohol, in the fire? It was dangerous—he'd as likely ignite himself—but he had nothing else. Unless—unless...

"Ho!" the shout was boisterous; authority mixed with complete joy. "Look at this, jefe!" The vigilare across the room was holding up his guitarra, having scooped it up from the bench where he'd left it to play his whip games. The jefe was up to standing in a moment, his eyes glistening. "A guitarra? Here? And such a fine one!" he added, taking it and holding it close. "So your tale teller is also a minstrel?" he asked the old man with the pipe to whom he'd been speaking to mostly since his arrival. "Bring forth the fine fellow! We must have a song!"

Rico froze again, feeling nothing move but a thick greasy dollop of sweat sliding past his eye and pooling into the ragged trough of his scar. The jefe didn't seem to notice, and came towards him, holding up the guitarra. Rico choked into voice, going down again his list of reasons he could not sing—exhaustion, his throat after telling so many tales—but they all died as the jefe closed in, and Rico saw nothing except those dark, hungry eyes, those bosun eyes, the eyes of a hunter that would not be denied. "A song," he said simply, and there was all the power in the world behind the words. Rico swallowed on a dry throat, nodded, tried to smile, and took the guitarra.

As he backed up and sat down, the jefe kept his eyes on Rico, those same hungry eyes, and a smile twitched under his toros moustache. At that, Rico began to really panic. He wondered if they knew who he was already, or at least suspected. He was a stranger, his face was covered... yes, he was three days from the city but a bounty might have been set for a double-rapist, and there was no prize so small a vigilare would ignore it. Cold terror crept through Rico's veins, flushing out all the warmth he'd gained, and his fingers seemed to creak in protest as he bent them back into place around the neck of the instrument.

Rico closed his eyes, trying to remember his lessons, trying to forget the cold, hungry stare of the jefe, trying to forget the vigilares and the taverna and just remember his songs, a song, any song, because all he needed was one good song and he might stay free, and not go back in irons to the Tower, and be branded again, at best. He might sleep tonight on straw instead of stone, and in the morning reach the feet of the mountains, and be safe. All he needed was a song to put the jefe's suspicions to rest, and cheer the heart of his men. For that—yes, a soldier's song. His mother had sung one to him, but he had never quite mastered it. It had clapping in the chorus, though, and maybe the audience would carry it.

Rico opened his eyes and put the guitarra aside. "Apologies, senores," he said with another bow, "I will sing but I do not quite recall how to play this one, but it is a song I think our new guests will most enjoy." Rico shut his eyes again, glad the mask would hide it as he looked back in his mind, back to those days above the ristorante, back to the sound of his mother's soulful voice above the alleyways. And he began to sing.

It was an old song, about the men coming home from battle. It had a drummer's beat to it, and by the time he hit the second chorus, the whole crowd had joined him. Each verse came back to him as he sang, the memory suddenly as fresh as the day he learnt it. Opening his eyes, he saw the matrona bringing more drinks to the vigilares and felt his heart beat finally slow, felt his blood warm again, his muscles relax. He began to move and approximate a kind of dance, and that boy who juggled knives and danced with killer bulls woke up again. As quickly as he ran out of verses he had already decided to keep singing and add his own, turning each chorus into an excuse to drink, drink, drink, hoping the soldiers and everyone else would soon be too drunk to care about anything. And so the song went on, growing louder and more jubilant as it went. It was a soldier's song, after all, with pain and suffering, yes, but still joyful to be coming home.

The song took the whole taverna into its aura, and carried them along, and he was now so exhausted with terror and fret, Rico let it take him too. He began to add more personal verses, finding rhymes about the hell of serving at sea, of the cruelty of the bosuns and the indifference of captains, and got a rising cheer from his audience when he suggested those were always in their cabins with their cabin-boys when danger reared its head. He pressed home the advantage, and kept on singing about salacious matters—of welcoming whores who raise their prices for every weeping sore upon their thighs, and faithless women who don't even have the honour of faking tears upon their eyes when a sailor returns back to them to find another in their bed, and all promises forgotten that were made of maidenhead, and of dominars so petty and laws so black and white, and their custodes all so weak-willed, blown on wind-breaths like a kite, who would clap a man in irons for an act so pure and just, and mark his cheek forever with a burning piece of rust, and cast him out eternal to die down in a ditch, for ever having dallied with a faithless little...

...and his words hit his ears too late, and he stuttered and stopped, and that made his error undoubtedly clear. He spun, looking for the jefe, and found him just as the tall vigilare grabbed him by the shirt and tore off the masque. For a second, there was nothing but Rico and those hungry bosun's eyes, and the slight smirk under the toros moustache. Rico tried to panic, to run, the door was just a few feet from him but he found his feet were leaden anchors. He had nothing left to fight with.

It was only after two of the vigilares grabbed his arms that some kind of memory kicked in, and he started struggling. It was all he could think to do, although now he had no plan and couldn't imagine breaking free of the cold fingers that seemed stronger than manacles around his biceps.

Court was set up in the courtyard. The last vigilare lit the torches as he was dragged on his knees into the centre. A few customers crowded the door, but none ventured outside. This was vigilare business, and they turned back to their own lives now the songs were over. Rico sagged like a sandbag between the two guards who held him, his head flopped forward on his chest, his eyes closed, his breathing slow. It was over now, he figured. What was next was a long walk in manacles back to town for a bounty, but at least it was an end to the running, and the starving, and the terror.

But fear is a well that never runs dry. Rico discovered this when he looked up at the clang of iron from the door way. Silhouetted in the doorway was the jefe, the flames of the fire inside glowing orange, and in his hand, like a twisted daemon's tail, was a black rod with a burning red tip. And then the fear came back, slowly at first but rising and rising like a coming earthquake that seemed to never end. His whole body shook and the two large men pushed all their weight down, driving him to the floor, and still could not hold him still. A long low call came from his mouth, not even a scream or a shout, just one long moan of uncontained panic, broken only by rocking, spastic sobs that twisted his entire chest. His legs shot out as if he could run. But there was no escape, and no stopping the jefe. He stepped closer and closer, bringing up the iron bar as he did, until the end was level with his eyes. Heated from the coals, it burned bright as a lamplight, yellow sparks flitting off into the darkness beyond that hard face and those bosun eyes.

Rico began to scream. Spit and bile spattered from his throat. He already knew the pain of it, and to dread it again was a fear so absolute it felt like it was tearing him apart. But the two men held him, and the third came to help. The last had been raised on a pig farm, and with a calm and practised skill, pinned Rico's head completely still between his legs. Despite all his strength and all his wild panic he at last found he couldn't move. All he could was scream and soon his throat was ragged and his breath ran to a blood-soaked hiss. And in the silence, the jefe whispered as he took the last step close.

"This," he said, his bosun's eyes for the first time showing something other than hunger, "is for the song." And the brand came down like a hammer.

Rico made a noise like a dying daemon. The sound came first, then pure white pain blanking everything. He felt like he was a lit torch, his whole face consumed in fire. With some unknown vestige of pure animal terror he let that fire devour him, burning along his muscles, finding new strength. He pushed up and felt the lock on his neck give. Suddenly, there was a flash of hope, and it hit his terror like a match to gunpowder. The manacles on his arms slipped. Strong men went flying. And Rico ran and ran and ran, ran like a maddened bull, ran like a daemon driven, ran into the night like a spark from a fire.

The Shallyans found him next morning, half drowned in an icy river. The ice saved his life, as the wound did not fester, although he spent a week raving on a pallet as the burn bubbled, popped with pus and dried to a shrivelled sac. It was only a month later, when the bandages finally came off and he was walking again, that he realised his luck had begun long before the healing sisters had found him. Staring in the sacred fountain, he saw the old V was gone, twisted with one hot stab into an unreadable squiggle. When it knitted, it might even be mistaken for a powder burn or a poorly seared sword-scar. And through the clouded memory of that night, he heard the words of the jefe echo, and he wondered about the things that might move a man's heart.

"This", the jefe had said, "is for the song"...