

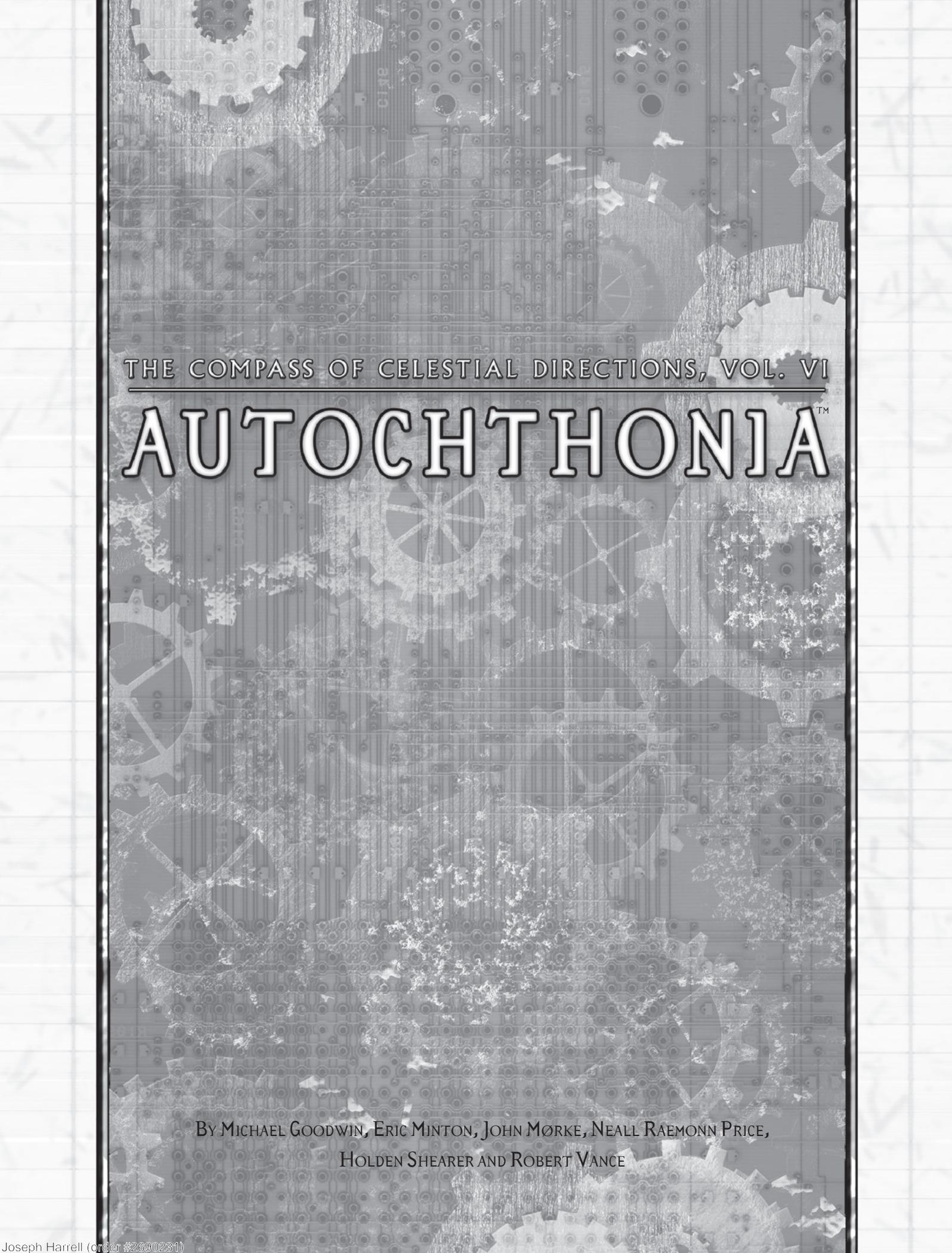
THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. VI

# AUTOCHTHONIA™



A SETTING  
BOOK FOR





THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. VI

# AUTOCHTHONIA™

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THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. VI

# AUTOCHTHONIA™

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# INTRODUCTION

*It is not to be done. The seepage has  
rotted out the curtain. The mesh  
is decayed. Loosen the flesh  
from the machine, build no more  
bridges. Through what air will you  
fly to span the continents? Let the words  
fall any way at all—that they may  
hit love aslant. It will be a rare  
visitation. They want to rescue too much,  
the flood has done its work.*  
—William Carlos Williams, “Paterson”

*Any sufficiently advanced technology is  
indistinguishable from magic.*  
—Arthur C Clarke

Hidden away in the folds of Elsewhere, Autochthonia is both a world and the living flesh of a Primordial. Millions of humans and spirits live in this vast tabernacle of brass, steam and industry, but their world is failing. Autochthon is sick, and the vast bellows and engines that

are his heart fall silent one by one. The Autochthonians and their mighty champions, the Alchemical Exalted, formulate desperate stratagems to save their world, even as they turn on one another for the precious resources to survive one more day.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. VI—Autochthonia** presents the Realm of Brass and Shadow as a fully playable setting for **Exalted** series. Whether as the backdrop for games revolving around the Alchemical Exalted, or as an alien frontier of Primordial secrets to entice Creation's Chosen, Autochthonia calls out for heroes.

## **Chapter One: The Realm of Brass and Shadow**

This chapter reveals the uncanny nature of Autochthonia and its people.

## **Chapter Two: First Among Equals**

Chapter Two examines Claslatt, Autochthonia's largest state; Yugash, the most reckless and desperate of Autochthonia's nations; and the recent apocalyptic conflict that set the stage for the end of the world.

## **Chapter Three: We Have Always Been at War**

This chapter focuses on three nations shaped by conflict—the mercenary state of Estasia; Sova, staggering in the wake of the Elemental War; and the embattled people of Nurad.

## **Chapter Four: The Widening Gyre**

Beset by cold, paranoia, and secrets, the nations of Kamak, Jarish, and Gulak are explored in this chapter—three ancient Autochthonian pillars that may soon come crashing down.

## **Chapter Five: Lamps in the Dark**

This chapter focuses on the rogue city-states of Xexas and Loran, situated at the farthest frontiers of Autochthonia. Isolated but faced with plentiful resources, they may be uniquely positioned to help save their world.

## **Chapter Six: The Reaches**

This chapter explores the inhuman and inhospitable vastness of the mechanical wastelands between Autochthonia's centers of human habitation, and the Primordial secrets hidden away within. It also examines the dreaded Blight Zones, horrid manifestations of Autochthon's sickness.

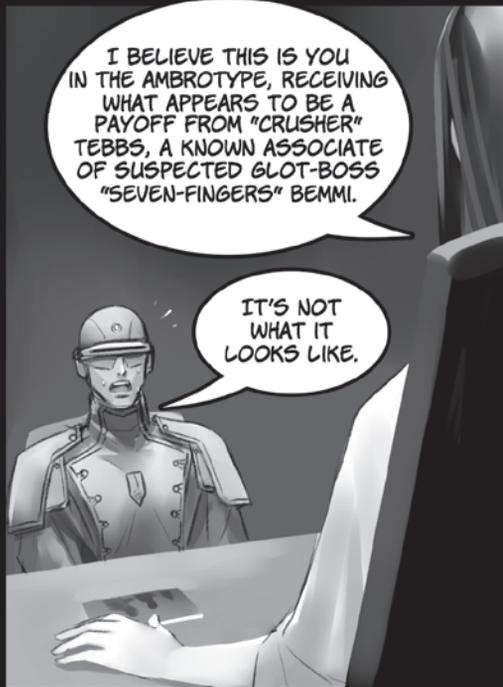
## **Chapter Seven: Man and Machine**

Autochthonia is a realm of gods, monsters, and heroes, a selection of which are detailed within this chapter. Additionally, it also offers a bevy of new mutations particularly suited to the gremlins which plague Autochthonia and labor to tear it down from within.



YOU SENT FOR ME, ADJUDICATOR XELLAN?

HM... OH YES. HAVE A SEAT, MAARTEN.



I BELIEVE THIS IS YOU IN THE AMBROTYPE, RECEIVING WHAT APPEARS TO BE A PAYOFF FROM "CRUSHER" TEBBS, A KNOWN ASSOCIATE OF SUSPECTED GLOT-BOSS "SEVEN-FINGERS" BEMMI.

IT'S NOT WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.



CHOOSE YOUR NEXT WORDS CAREFULLY, REGULATOR MAARTEN, BECAUSE INWARD JUSTICE OFFICERS ALREADY SEARCHED YOUR BERTH AND FOUND THIS.



I BELIEVE WE CAN TAKE THAT AS A CONFESSION, ADJUDICATOR XELLAN. REGULATORS, GET THIS SCUM OUT OF MY SIGHT.

WHILE I APPRECIATE THE AID, CHAMPION, I DON'T SEE WHY A SIMPLE CASE OF REGULATOR CORRUPTION SHOULD COMMAND YOUR INTEREST.



EASY...

THESE GLOTS ARE COUNTERFEIT.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE REALM OF BRASS AND SHADOW

The Unconquered Sun spoke: “Our creators recline in wicked splendor while we toil forever upon the slopes of a lonely mountain. Let us overthrow the Primordials, that we might take our leisure at the Games of Divinity. Let us take men and give them the favor of the gods, and use them as our champions against the Primordials.”

The outcast titan Autochthon overheard those words, and helped the gods execute their divine rebellion. But once his siblings had been slain or imprisoned, the Great Maker knew only fear. The reality of the Exalted transcended even his imagination, and the death-curses of his brethren still echoed in his ears. He knew not whence they might have taken root—but had his suspicions.

Fearful of the gods and their Chosen, Autochthon gathered up his faithful, and abducted many more humans besides. He filled himself with a supply of souls, and vanished into hiding beyond the world.

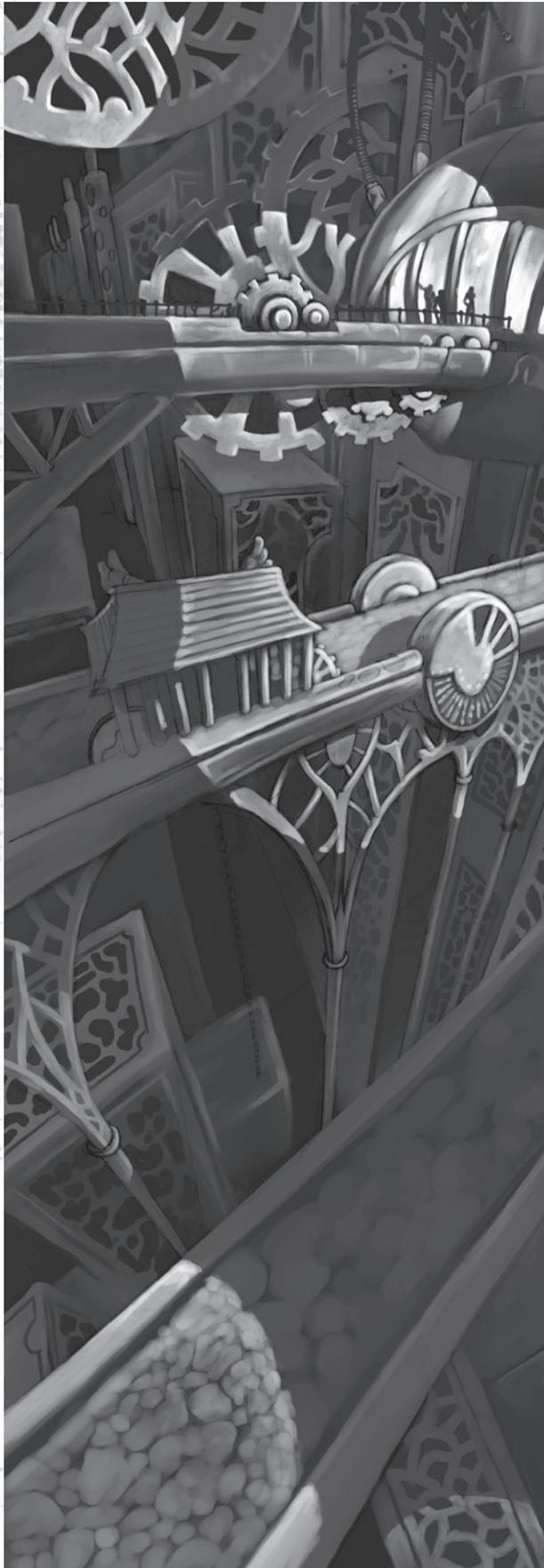
That was 4,879 years ago. The Machine God still hides Elsewhere, but not alone. The descendents of those

humans he took with him into exile have colonized his world-sized anatomy. They have formed eight mighty nations and a host of smaller settlements, and thrived within the body of a titan.

But now Autochthon is dying in his sleep. If he is not saved, the people of Autochthonia will die with him.

### AUTOCHTHONIA

The inhabitants of the Great Maker’s body call their world Autochthonia, and themselves Autochthonians. Autochthonia is a rough spheroid of unknown dimensions; no Autochthonian has ever pierced the outer shell of their world to attempt to measure it. The Machine God’s interior is much larger than his armored hull, in any case; his anatomy incorporates space-folding magic beyond the ken of any but the most erudite First Age savants. It’s enough to say that Autochthonia is vast beyond imagining, that entire Directions of Creation could disappear into it without difficulty. Autochthonians live



within the central core of their world, a region known as the Pole of Metal.

The living body of Autochthon is a nightmare world of brass, steam, and darkness. There is no sun, nor any central source of artificial light to replace it. Where the Machine God's body is not lightless, it is lit by vast coruscating arcs of electricity, or the roaring flames of the God Furnaces, or the weird glow of luminous minerals. The flesh of the Machine God is brass and steel and raw iron, hard-edged and unforgiving. His anatomy comprises countless miles of tunnels and corridors and crawlspaces, dotted with recessed chambers and foundries and maintenance docks. Sometimes catwalks and open floors make travel easy, but more often braided cables sprawl across the ground, conduits are stapled to walls and ceilings in thick bundles, brass plugs protrude from the floor to knee-height and valves from the ceiling at eye level, all at irregular intervals. Where it is not dangerously cramped, Autochthonia may open up to reveal cyclopean vistas—iron canyons which stretch for hundreds of miles, vanishing into darkness even under exposure to the most powerful lamps or anima flares. Open wells may run for leagues, traversable only by narrow stairs built into the walls, or by ladders, or by no obvious means at all, forcing explorers to climb or seek another route.

Silence is rare in Autochthonia; the Autochthonians claim the Great Maker sings to himself in his sleep. If the leaking hiss of steam cannot be heard, it's drowned out by the banging of pistons. Where lightning does not leap and crackle, there is the clanking cacophony of turning gears. And on the rare occasions when all of these sounds are absent, there is the ever-present creak-and-pop of Autochthon's body settling on its great hinges and flexors.

## THE AUTOCHTHONIANS

The majority of Autochthonia's inhabitants live in the cities and towns of eight enormous nations, each named after one of the eight heroes of antiquity who helped Autochthon prepare for his hibernation. These nations occupy relatively stable interstices between the vast organ-continents of the Pole of Metal, and their people have been steadily taming the surrounding areas for thousands of years. Unlike the nations of Creation, the Eight Nations do not occupy fixed geographic locations; the biotectonic cycles of Autochthon's body slowly but steadily move the nations on a drifting, erratic course through his anatomy. When two nations are in close proximity, they engage in trade, diplomacy, and sometimes war. When the tram cables attaching two nations separate and retract, that signals the end of relations for a time; travel to a distant nation through the Reaches is difficult and dangerous in the extreme, and usually only undertaken in emergencies or to carry out the business of the highest levels of government.

## THE MERITOCRACY OF SOULS

Souls are a limited resource in Autochthonia. The Eight Heroes are said to have gathered unique materials and helped Autochthon forge the Radiant Amphora of Celestial Accumulation, known more commonly as the Ewer of Souls. Then, they ventured to the legendary Well of Souls and filled it with 100,000,000 human souls to worship Autochthon in his exile.

Each soul in Autochthonia is tracked and tagged through the use of artifacts known as soulgems—a small gem implanted into the forehead of every infant born in the Eight Nations. An Autochthonian's soulgem captures his soul at the moment of death and imprints upon it a unique Essence signature that may be read when he next incarnates; the soul is then returned to the Great Maker that it might grant life to a newborn elsewhere in the Realm of Brass and Shadow. Upon birth, each infant of the Eight Nations is subjected to a soul examination. This allows Luminor technicians to examine the service record of that soul, stretching back for hundreds or even thousands of years. It is upon this record of service that an Autochthonian's lot in life is decided. Such is the nature of social mobility in the Realm of Brass and Shadow—excellence in one life may bring rewards in the next, while failure threatens demotion of later incarnations.

### SOUL SHORTAGE

Autochthon periodically consumes po souls to fuel critical processes within his body, shunting the now-separate hun soul into storage. As he is not equipped to create new po souls and a hun alone cannot grant life, this means that even as the population of the Eight Nations has risen throughout history, the total number of available souls has decreased. The two numbers are now meeting—the total population of Autochthonia is very nearly equal to the total number of available souls, and the Eight Nations are experiencing frequent stillbirths as infants are born without souls available for them.

## THE SOCIAL CASTES OF THE EIGHT NATIONS

Autochthonians are assigned a social caste shortly after birth, once their soul-record examination is complete. With only one exception, caste assignment is permanent; though there is substantial mobility within the ranks of a caste, only death and reincarnation may permit an Autochthonian to change castes.

Once, each of the Eight Nations used different social classifications, but after a series of devastating wars and international incidents, the social strata of the nations were

standardized at the Grand Conclave of 1991. Though there are some slight deviations even in the modern day (such as Estasia's Militat), the following social castes exist across the Octet.

### THE LUMPEN

The lowest of Autochthonians are the Lumpen. Unlike the other castes, no one is born Lumpen; one must earn that designation. An individual may be demoted to Lumpen status for a variety of reasons; the most common is accumulating too many minor infractions, such as excessive laziness, harming public morale, hoarding supplies, minor theft, starting fights, or otherwise engaging in repeated disruptive behavior. Other Lumpen are demoted because of adherence to minor heresies, single instances of serious theft, endangering their work shifts through drug addiction or intoxication, or, in the case of members of the Tripartite, for spectacular failure of important responsibilities.

Lumpen may be identified by three concentric rings tattooed around their soulgem; the color of the tattoos signifies the nature of their offenses. Lumpen are used for unpleasant, unskilled labor in Autochthonia, and work three shifts most days. They are housed in a nation's worst barracks, forbidden to own personal possessions or attend most public gatherings. They are not allowed to eat with members of other social castes. Autochthonians are rarely prosecuted for harassing the Lumpen in a variety of minor ways, though impairing a Lumpen's ability to work is a good way to join their ranks. Still, few will inform on an individual for beating a Lumpen in a dark alley, and so Lumpen tend to travel in groups for protection.

### SLAVES

Slaves are a sub-class of the Lumpen that even the outcasts of Autochthonian society regard with horror. Enslavement is a fate reserved for the worst criminals—serial rapists, mass murderers, arsonists, saboteurs, Voidbringers. A slave has his soulgem removed through a revocation ritual, and all but the slightest dregs of his soul are drawn out along with it. The result is an empty shell of a human being with a cratered hole in his forehead, much like a dream-eaten victim of the Fair Folk. Slaves are passive and pliant, going where bid and doing as ordered. Some particularly reviled criminals also have their tongues and noses removed as well, though they don't notice these mutilations.

Slaves are used for the most dangerous work in Autochthonia; they rarely survive longer than five years. They are quartered in their own pens, separate from other Lumpen—one of the few mercies Autochthonia extends to its outcasts. As slaves are incapable of speech, bells are tied to their necks and hands, that they may be heard moving in the dark.

### THE POPULAT

The Populat makes up 90 percent of the Eight Nations' population. These workers carry the fate of the Octet upon their backs; by the sweat of their brows and breath of their

## TIME IN AUTOCHTHONIA

Autochthonians divide their 25-hour days into five shifts, each lasting five hours. Shifts are named after the elements of lost Creation—Earth Shift starts the day, followed by Wood, Fire, Water, and finally Air Shift.

Autochthonia uses the same calendar as that of the Old Realm, but counts its years off from Year 0, the Dawn of Autochthonia. The current year is 4878 DA.

prayers, the Machine God lives on. Autochthonian culture is ultimately oriented around efficiently harnessing and directing the vast labor force of the Populat.

Most members of the Populat are *laborers*, the backbone of Autochthonia: the skilled and semi-skilled workers who toil in the factories and furnaces of the Eight Nations, from the lowliest lever-puller to the most exactly trained lift-inspector. Most of the industrial output in Autochthonia flows from laborer hands. Those who do not actively regulate the Maker's processes create the many tools and items necessary for basic Autochthonian life—wrenches, hammers, clothing, homes.

Those incapable of the strenuous work required of laborers are made *aides*. Aides hand out tools at the beginning of shifts and collect them when the shifts are done. They count stock, clean factories, and carry messages. A worker is usually made an aide due to age, injury, or pregnancy, and so the position is not generally stigmatized. An aide who appears outwardly young and healthy will raise questions and suspicions, however. The other major role of aides is to work in the crèches of Autochthonia, to raise and educate the young.

Laborers who display excellence or organizational skill may become *shift chiefs*, tasked with overseeing and harnessing the labor of entire factory shifts. Depending on the job in question, a shift chief may oversee anywhere from 20 to 200 workers. Shift chiefs must not only have a keen eye for the work going on in their factory, but an even stronger understanding of the people working for them. A shift chief is ultimately held responsible for his shift meeting quota and behaving responsibly, and so the best dedicate much of their time to increasing productivity and morale among their workers. Thunderous work-songs often echo forth from the depths of Autochthonian factories, timed and toned to turn the ringing of hammers and the pumping of bellows into a kind of music.

Above a factory's shift chiefs stands its *foreman*, the man in charge of the overall productivity and well-being of a factory. Foremen usually leave the running of shift crews and personnel issues to their shift chiefs, instead concerning

themselves with the state of the factory itself. A foreman's job is to make sure that all shifts perform satisfactorily, that tools are not disappearing, that the entire factory is meeting quota, that the factory's machinery is well-maintained, and that their factory is coordinating with other elements of a city's industry—a factory that turns out brass tubing must, after all, be sure that it produces no more nor less than the other factories of the city need, and must communicate how much stock it requires to do its own work.

*Supervisors* work with foremen to oversee an entire sector of local industry, such as “tool production,” “public sanitation,” or “construction.” Small towns may have as few as three supervisors, while the enormous metropolis of Thutot has 42. Most Autochthonian cities have about eight.

Above all local supervisors, each Autochthonian town and city has a single *director*, responsible for all of the industry within that municipality. Directors live lives of luxury comparable to mid-ranked members of the Tripartite, but have little free time to enjoy their station; they work three shifts a day, almost every day. A *sub-director* works the two shifts the director is off-duty, and is responsible for summoning the director in the case of an emergency. Directors are given a certain number of weeks of vacation time each year; while on vacation, a director is only obligated to work two shifts a day, ceding his usual third shift to the sub-director. These are often nervous times, as criminal elements attempt to take advantage of the perceived relaxation of national vigilance.

Standard dress for the Populat consists of color-coded tops, slacks and sometimes caps made of artificial textiles; the color arrangement indicates an individual's job and rank. Clothing is mass-produced and generally discarded to be cleaned and reused; individuals rarely own personal clothing. More specialized gear is distributed and collected as needed.

## THE TRIPARTITE

Autochthon handed down three sacred gifts to Creation, and thus to the people of Autochthonia: Doctrine, faith, and tools. These inspired the organizational basis of the ruling class of Autochthonia: the Olgotary oversees the governmental and bureaucratic necessities of each of the Eight Nations; the Theomachracy tends to the spiritual needs of the people; and the five Sodalities ensure that the sacred machinery of Autochthonia continues functioning as it should.

### TRIPARTITE ASSEMBLIES

Each Autochthonian town and city is overseen by a seven-member Tripartite Assembly consisting of one autocrat representing the Olgotary, one celebrant representing the Theomachracy, and a five-man Sodality Council formed up of the highest-ranking members of each of the five Sodalities. Tripartite Assemblies establish policy for their local municipality, settling issues by group vote. Each branch of the Tripartite has one vote, with the Sodality Council

## SOULGEMS AND CASTE

The Autochthonian castes are easily distinguishable by their different soulgems. Disguising one's soulgem as that of a different caste requires a special fake-soulgem cap and a difficulty 3 (Intelligence + Larceny) roll.

Caste	Soulgem Shape	Soulgem Cut	Soulgem Color
Populat	Round and polished	Cabochon	Black onyx
Olgotary	Rectangular cut	Emerald	Orange topaz
Theomachracy	Square cut	Square	Blue sapphire
Sodalities	Diamond shaped	Oval	Purple amethyst
Militat	Triangle cut	Trilliant	Red ruby

jointly deciding how to cast its vote through a separate internal vote.

At the apex of Autochthonian society, there exists in each nation a single National Tripartite Assembly, based in the national capital and consisting of a grand autocrat, high celebrant, and Great Sodality Council. These powerful men and women set the course of their entire nation, deciding matters of national policy, diplomacy, trade, and war.

## THE OLGOTARY

The Olgotary is the ultimate secular authority of Autochthonia, drafting and enforcing the laws of the Eight Nations. It is also the primary bureaucratic wing of the Tripartite, setting national policy in all matters of industry. Its authority is absolute save in matters of religion or the responsibilities of the Sodalities. The Olgotary is divided into four branches: plutarchs, regulators, adjudicators, and autocrats.

### PLUTARCHS

Plutarchs are the city planners, legislators, and clerks of Autochthonia. Senior plutarchs and their staff of juniors draft new laws and revise old ones when necessary, set local and national production schedules and timetables to be handed down to directors and supervisors, and travel to other nations to act as diplomats. They consider themselves the most important branch of the Tripartite, believing that without the efforts of the plutarchs Autochthonia would descend into chaos and anarchy overnight.

Plutarchs dress in ornate, multilayered togas of artificial leather when on the job and during formal occasions; the combination of color and trim describes a plutarch's function and rank.

### REGULATORS

Regulators are the law enforcement officers of Autochthonia. They have the authority to detain and arrest any Autochthonian at any time, from the crudest Lumpen to members of the National Tripartite Assembly themselves; as a result, most Autochthonians regard the regulators with some measure of fear.

Junior regulators patrol the towns and cities of the Octet, responding to disturbances and deterring crime with their simple visibility. More experienced or talented regulators may become detectives or covert intelligence operatives, investigating crime or suspected criminal conspiracies both overtly and in secret; regulators are among the few Autochthonians permitted to disguise their soulgems in order to gather undercover intelligence on members of other social castes. A few are assigned to the Division of Inward Justice, tasked with investigating their own fellow regulators. The manifest importance of Inward Justice's work does nothing to increase their popularity among their fellows.

Regulator uniforms consist of long coats of reinforced artificial leather with brass pins affixed to the left shoulder, and protective caps and visors. Inexperienced regulators carry some combination of a truncheon, short sword, and hand-held crossbow, while their more senior brethren earn the right to carry and use peacekeeping tools of their choice, such as the braided cables favored by members of the Flashing Wire Collective (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, p. 174).

### ADJUDICATORS

While the plutarchs draft the laws of Autochthonia, and the regulators catch criminals, the adjudicators enforce those laws. Autochthonians accused of crimes against the state are brought before an adjudicator or a panel of adjudicators, depending on the severity of their crime, their caste, and their status within that caste. The more powerful the individual and more terrible the crime, the greater the number and seniority of adjudicators called in to judge the case. Adjudicators are not simply the judges of Autochthonia; they are also its juries and its executioners.

In addition to acting as the final judicial mechanism of Autochthonia, the adjudicators are responsible for validating or rejecting new laws. Adjudicators are taught that laws must be fair, clear, and concise; when the plutarchs put forward proposed laws that fail to meet these standards, the adjudicators veto the law and send it back for additional revision.

Adjudicators dress in simple, severe togas of artificial leather, with no decoration to indicate rank. White togas are worn for most business, with black being reserved for executions and the formal return of rejected laws.

### AUTOCRATS

The Olgotary elects a single autocrat in each town and city of the Octet via secret ballot; length of term varies from nation to nation, but six years is the average. An autocrat's job is generally to resolve disputes between branches of the Olgotary, provide leadership in times of crisis, and present the Olgotary's needs to the leadership of the other branches of the Tripartite. Each nation also elects a single grand autocrat, who performs tasks similar to those of his lesser brethren on a national level. Only a nation's grand autocrat may present a proposal of war or truce to the National Tripartite Assembly.

### THE THEOMACHRACY

So speaks the *Tome of the Great Maker*: "Doubt begets apathy, apathy begets sloth, sloth begets chaos, and chaos begets death."

The Theomachracy fights a constant battle against indifference, heterodoxy, and existential malaise. Those who do not believe in or understand the self-evident divinity around them may refuse to work, and should such attitudes become widespread, they would quickly lead to the Great Maker's body purging humanity as a malfunctioning system. As Autochthonia's clergy, it is the responsibility of the Theomachracy to tend to the spiritual needs of their people and the Machine God. It is divided into four branches: lectors, preceptors, clerics, and celebrants.

### LECTORS

Lectors are charged with maintaining the morale and devotion of Autochthonia. Most lectors are assigned a specific ward or district of a town or city, which they come to know with an unsurpassed intimacy, while a few are instead charged with the spiritual well-being of departments of the Tripartite itself. Being a lector is a demanding job; the best act as a combination of preacher, psychologist, dramatist and comedian. It is not enough to simply thunder down reminders of impending doom from the pulpit should work cease; miserable individuals perform poor work, and so lectors are responsible for counseling individuals suffering from depression, loss, exhaustion, or who crises of faith, as well as promoting the morale and happiness of their congregation in general.

Lectors coordinate with talented members of their parish and with each other to stage talent shows, sporting events, circuses, and other forms of public entertainment, especially as rewards for shifts or districts that exceed quota. Many lectors are accomplished dramatists, musicians, or poets; creativity and talent for public performance are highly-valued skills, screened for and nurtured during a lector's early training. Lectors are generally the best-loved members of the Tripartite, and the most trusted.

Lectors wear thick, voluminous robes with wide, padded shoulders. They are given great latitude to personalize their clothing, and often affix numerous gear icons as patches or pins; some attempt to use this customization to grant themselves an elegance that demands respect, while other lectors adopt a clownish appearance to set people at ease.

### PRECEPTORS

Preceptors are inquisitors of Autochthonia. Tasked with locating and eradicating heresy, the preceptors are the most widely-feared caste in the Eight Nations. Their numbers are able to remain low—they are the smallest sub-branch of the Tripartite—because their authority is almost limitless.

Junior preceptors are attached to seniors as apprentices for a period lasting from five to fifteen years, after which time they become senior inquisitors themselves. A senior preceptor normally has between one and three junior apprentices at any given time. Apprentices carry only what authority their senior delegates to them, but the authority of senior preceptors is checked only by a city's Tripartite Assembly. Senior preceptors may venture anywhere within a municipality and question anyone they feel they have cause to; no doors are barred to them, no individual too lofty to be interrogated.

While this vast discretionary latitude is a cornerstone of the fearful reputation of the preceptors, most inquisitors find overwhelming intimidation to be a clumsy method of conducting investigations. They learn instead to work closely with local lectors, focusing on the most troubled and disturbed souls among a parish. Preceptors are not generally interested in minor, harmless heresy; if a good-lector bad-preceptor interview can nudge a member of the Populat back onto the path of truth, that is well and good; if not, they can be turned over to the regulators and adjudicators for judgment. Preceptors are more focused on rooting out networks of entrenched heresy, especially Voidbringers.

When not working undercover, preceptors dress in spotlessly white outfits similar to those of the regulators, adorned by a single interlocking gear icon worn over the heart.

### CLERICS

Clerics are the religious administrators of the Theomachracy, with three general areas of responsibility. First and foremost, they are clerks, overseeing the assignment and training of lectors and preceptors, scheduling feasts and celebrations, and otherwise seeing to the smooth running of the Theomachracy. They also act as the historians of Autochthonia in this capacity, maintaining extensive records of happenings within their municipality and Autochthonia in general.

Second, clerics are responsible for treating directly with the exmachina. Specially trained clerics venture into the Reaches to placate angry machine spirits, or venerate local divinities when it is appropriate to do so. They also ask the aid of Autochthon's devas upon occasion, when their nation is faced with troubles requiring greater magic

than its mortal inhabitants can muster. Although usually only specialists are sent to deal with spirits directly, all clerics *should* know how, and so many are well-versed in practical thaumaturgy.

Finally, clerics work together with their celebrant to establish matters of local and national doctrine, when new doctrinal decisions must be handed down. They also identify and catalogue new heresies brought to light by the preceptors, determining whether a particular heresy is minor, severe, or Voidbringer in nature. Their findings are passed on to the adjudicators for enforcement.

Clerics wear simple white robes beneath elaborate coats adorned with intricate patterns of interlocking gears.

### CELEBRANTS

Each town and city has a single celebrant who acts as the representative and mouth of the Theomachracy in general. Whereas autocrats tend to focus on advancing the aims of their municipality, celebrants tend to spend more of their time working with other celebrants within the same nation to ensure that the Theomachracy operates in a unified matter. Celebrants are selected from among a pool of nominated candidates by divine omen.

Each nation has a single high celebrant, as well, who represents the nation's Theomachracy in its National Tripartite Assembly, and who works with the high celebrants of other nations to maintain a general base level of orthodoxy within Autochthonia. Though not personally empowered to declare war, many Autochthonian wars have begun as the result of disagreements between the high celebrants of different nations.

## THE FIVE MAGNIFICENT SODALITIES OF PENULTIMATE TRUTH AND INTRANSIGENT GOSPEL

The Sodalities are much, much older than the current caste system of Autochthonia; their history goes back to the days before the Machine God's slumber, when Autochthon selected the greatest savants among his people and taught them the secret of Alchemical Exaltation. Those early savants formed the five Mechanicians' Guilds around themselves, and those Guilds were later redefined as the Sodalities.

The holy technicians and machinists of the Sodalities are known for being fractious, arrogant, intractable, and brilliant. They are utterly indispensable to the rest of Autochthonia, and they know it. Though the Sodalities guard their secrets jealously and constantly compete with one another for prestige, on the occasions they must work together, they are capable of bringing forth wonders without compare in the Realm of Brass and Shadow—most notably, the Alchemical Exalted themselves (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, pp. 25-27).

The Sodalities are known for their lack of cooperation with the regulators and preceptors, preferring to police and punish their own in baroque and inhumane ways. After mil-

lennia, the Olgotary and Theomachracy have largely given up trying to break them of this practice.

Sodalts conserve resources by dressing in the same clothes as the Populat, affixing pins and insignias in their signature color to transform the garb into Sodality uniforms.

### THE GLORIOUS LUMINORS OF THE BRILLIANT RAPTURE

Luminors are responsible for the creation of illumination, which they regard as a direct manifestation of the divinity of Autochthon. Autochthonians often roll their eyes at the elaborate, ostentatious rituals that Luminors conduct when lighting simple street lamps, or maintaining a city's Essence grid—at least until the grid fails and their city is cast into the absolute and impenetrable darkness that is the natural state of their world. Then they cry out to the Luminors for salvation. In most cities of the Octet, it is a serious crime for any individual to create light without the permission or assistance of a Luminor.

Luminors are also responsible for tracking souls between lives and assigning a soul to a social caste, a privilege which they abuse only occasionally. Finally, Luminors are the fire-fighters of Autochthonia, ensuring that flames remain in the God Furnaces and factories where they belong.

Luminors punish their own with the loss of sight, either by temporarily affixing blinders or arc protectors to the offender, or, in more serious cases, with the ruination of one or both eyes by exposure to blinding electric arcs. Their signature color is gold, and their magical material is orichalcum.

### THE ILLUSTRIOUS CONDUCTORS OF THE CONSECRATED VEINS

Conductors gather nutrients and other raw materials from the conduits that run throughout Autochthonia. They alone know how to properly examine and identify the many strange tubes and veins of the Machine God, and guard these methods savagely. They are also responsible for maintaining the pneumatic tram networks that connect Autochthonian towns and cities.

Conductors punish infractions against their Sodality with the loss of the ability to manipulate the world, ranging from thin cuts along the fingertips to a period with the hands encased in locking mittens, ranging up to the amputation of fingers or even entire hands for severe crimes. Their signature color is blue, and their magical material is starmetal.

### THE PIOUS HARVESTERS OF THE HALLOWED FLESH

Harvesters collect and recycle that which has failed—from broken machinery, to trash, to the bodies of the dead. They are also responsible for removing the soulgems of the dead and returning their souls to the Ewer. In addition to acting as recyclers, Harvesters prepare the nutrient slurry the Conductors gather, alchemically treating it to add flavor and texture; as such, they tend to be the Sodality most favored by the Populat, at least as long as the food is good.

Harvesters punish infractions against their order with the loss of speech, from simple forbiddances, to temporarily wiring an offender's mouth shut, to, at the extreme end, amputation of the tongue or pouring molten silver into a criminal's mouth. Their color is green, and their magical material is jade.

### THE PROLIFIC SCHOLARS OF THE FURNACE TRANSCENDENT

Scholars are the most skilled creators and inventors of Autochthonia. That which is broken, they repair, and that which they cannot repair they pass on to the Harvesters. They take the many raw products of the Populat and assemble them into complex items such as tram cars, arc protectors, repeating crossbows, mechanical lifts, and plumbing systems. Those who have managed to awaken their Essence also create simple industrial artifacts, and the most talented Scholars craft the wondrous Charms of the Alchemical Exalted.

Scholars inflict punishments by removing the offender's hearing, either by blocking the ears with putty or by mutilating them to various degrees. Extreme crimes may provoke the removal of one or both ears, or deafening by the insertion of hot pokers. Their color is black, and their magical material is soulsteel.

### THE METICULOUS SURGEONS OF THE BODY ELECTRIC

Surgeons assess the health of Autochthonia. In the case of its human population, this means that the Surgeons act as physicians, treating the sick and mending the wounded... and administering euthanasia via the Elixir of Rest to those who cannot be saved, or who become too frail with age to contribute to society in any manner.

In the case of the Machine God himself, Surgeons constantly roam about the cities and the Reaches examining the Maker's body for signs of defect or imminent breakdown, and then send their findings to the appropriate Sodality to be seen to. They are also responsible for the distribution of fluids within the Eight Nations, from the allocation of oil to the factories to the purification and distribution of clean water to the Populat.

### THE SEAL OF EIGHT DIVINITIES

Autochthonia is separated from Creation by the mystic Seal of Eight Divinities. This barrier is impermeable from Creation, but could be penetrated from within Autochthonia by sufficiently potent magic. Piercing the Seal would create a stable two-way portal between Autochthonia and the nation that created the breach—though the Octet cannot predict where in Creation this gateway might appear.

Crimes against the Surgeons are punished by loss of smell—blocking the nostrils with putty, or piercing the septum with a bronze rod and affixing clamps to hold the nostrils shut. In the case of truly heinous crimes, the entire nose is amputated. Their color is silver, and their magical material is moonsilver.

## AUTOCHTHONIAN LIFE

Autochthonians crave the same things as any other humans—food, shelter, love, comfort, purpose. The necessities of their world have driven them to satisfy those needs in a number of unique ways.

### OFF THE CLOCK

The average member of the Populat eats, sleeps, and relaxes in the company of his co-workers. In most nations, members of the Populat live in large communal barracks—depending on the affluence of the municipality and the rank of the workers, this ranges from open rooms full of crowded bunks which are shared between different individuals from shift-to-shift (a practice known as hot-bunking), to dormitory halls with movable partitioning to create a small degree of visual and auditory filtering. Privacy is a scarce commodity for members of the Populat, and few own more than a single box or chest of belongings—merit badges, customized tools, handkerchiefs, bits of art or mementos of loved ones. They share communal showers and bath houses, and eat together in huge cafeterias where individuals line up in shift-queues for water and processed nutrient paste dispensed from brass nozzles. Work shifts often form up ad-hoc teams for competitive sports, while individuals from different shifts within the same sector of industry might join together to form musical groups, poetry circles, or other recreational organizations.

Members of the Tripartite, by contrast, tend to work alone or in small task groups, and live in shared apartments or, for higher-ranking individuals, may even have their own living quarters. They eat alone or with friends in Tripartite-exclusive dining halls. Some own enough personal items to fill an apartment, including luxury clothing for their own use, beautiful artwork and curios, or even personal libraries.

### ROMANCE

Most Autochthonian nations have no institution analogous to marriage. Children are raised in communal crèches by trained caregivers, wet nurses, and educators; some nations, such as Yugash and Jarish, incentivize parental inclusion in the process of child-rearing, while others prefer children to be raised and trained primarily by the state. Because shift rotation, promotion, or reassignment could split individuals apart at any time, Autochthonians learn to regard brief, passionate affairs as the default state of romance; lovers separated by their duties to the larger community are a common feature of Autochthonian plays and histories.

Few nations place any stigma on recreational sex or homosexuality; polygamous relationships are common, but widely considered unlucky.



## RELIGION

The Octet shares a common, unifying religion that gives them purpose—they are born, labor, and die in worship of Autochthon, the Machine God, who provides them with everything from food to living space to life itself. Industrial labor in Autochthonia is heavily ritualized; machines are not simply oiled between shifts, they are anointed. Lever-pullers and stamp-press operators time their labor to ringing hymns sung out across the factory floor. Even the simple lighting of a street globe by the Luminors is prefaced with lengthy and ostentatious prayer, giving thanks to the Maker for providing light in the darkness.

After direct veneration of Autochthon, Autochthonians give thanks to the Divine Ministers, who are understood to be avatar-aspects of the sleeping Maker, and thus as worthy of veneration and obedience as Autochthon himself. They are normally instructed in such worship by the lectors, and each nation features a different array of holy days dedicated to various Ministers in their different aspects; the Populat has also developed a number of ad-hoc prayers that pass in and out of fashion when dealing with circumstances within

the direct domain of certain Ministers. Debok Moom is much praised by soldiers about to risk their lives, for example, while Kek'Tungsssha is constantly wreathed in a fluttering shroud of prayers from pregnant women.

Autochthonians do not generally venerate the subgods and divine subroutines beneath the Ministers unless led in such devotions by their lectors—there are simply too many spirits laboring to support the Maker for the Populat to be expected to keep track of them all. There are some exceptions—Espinoquae, for example, is popular among the Luminors, while Tinavak, the ministerial subroutine of freezing cold, is widely venerated in Kamak.

In general, Autochthonians are raised to regard Autochthon and his lesser manifestations with respect, love, and awe. The strangeness and power of the machine gods coupled with constant social reinforcement on the part of the Theomachracy helps keep this devotion genuine, as does the nature of Autochthonian life—the Realm of Brass and Shadow is a harsh and frightening place, where religion is often the best source of comfort available. And so the Au-

tochthonians worship the Machine God, positive that he hears them in his sleep and loves them in return.

The Tripartite expends tremendous amounts of energy reinforcing this outlook both among the Populat and its own ranks. Otherwise, people might begin to question the purpose of a life of unending labor in service to a vast, inscrutable

### URBAN HAZARDS

To the eyes of the Creation-born, Autochthonian towns and cities are hellish death-traps. Burning gases vent through grates alongside busy streets; narrow alleys run between walls of bone-chewing gears; flesh-melting jets of steam shriek overhead. Autochthonians are accustomed to navigating the deadly industrial environment that is their world, and clearly mark urban hazards with a series of simple, easily-visible glyphs that all citizens are taught as children; as a result, only the foolish and unwary risk injury.

Botched Athletics actions in Octet cities tend to have dire consequences: at best, an individual is looking at a nasty tumble onto a metal street; if unlucky, he might find himself entangled in one of the many environmental hazards described in Chapter Six.

alien force—and such questions lead down a path that ends in chaos, death, and the Void.

## THE TUNNEL FOLK

Some Autochthonians stand outside of the Eight Nations and their culture. The vast, winding expanses of the Reaches are also occupied by what citizens of the Octet refer to as tunnel folk—individuals and their descendents who have been cast out of the bastion of Autochthonian civilization, or who left of their own accord.

It is common knowledge that tunnel folk band together for mutual survival and protection in the hostile darkness of the Reaches, forming temporary bands or small tribes. As depicted in the tales of the lectors, the average tunnel community consists of a dozen or so miserable wretches in torn, oil-streaked rags, huddling around a gas flame in the bellowing darkness of the Reaches, covetously guarding a nutrient conduit from which they suck sustenance from the veins of the Maker. These parasites perform no useful work and give nothing back to the Machine God, and do little but shiver in the dark and wait to waylay civilized travelers—such feral tunnel tribes are common figures in Octet plays and histories.

The reality is more complex.

## TUNNEL TRIBES

Some tunnel folk *do* fit Octet propaganda, but these small, miserable groups represent the unlucky and the unsuccessful among the folk of the Reaches—or the outcasts among outcasts, driven away from larger communities. Small, nomadic tunnel tribes constantly live on the edge, moving from nutrient tap to nutrient tap as the Maker's bounty plays out or local spirits become intolerant of their presence. Because they have so little, they are often exactly as dangerous as the lectors' sermons suggest—when on the hunt for a fresh nutrient vein, few scruple at the thought of waylaying and eating other travelers.

The average lifespan of tunnel nomads is short—most are slain within a few years by machine spirits, environmental hazards, Octet travelers, or other tunnel folk.

## TUNNEL COMMUNES

There is one point upon which most tunnel folk agree with Octet doctrine—there is strength in numbers.

The most common form of tunnel community is the *commune*, a permanent or semi-permanent settlement situated at the junction of several power, nutrient, and water feeds, with buildings cobbled together out of scrap metal collected from the nearby Reaches, often protected by crude fortifications and mechanical traps. Communes resemble the smaller towns of the Octet, though they lack key elements that make them feel eerily empty, almost dead, to civilized visitors—there are usually no propaganda sheets plastering the walls, no pneumatic lifts or tram lines, no work queues, and most distressingly, they are quiet places. The thunder of industry does not drown out the sounds of the Reaches, for the tunnel folk work only for themselves.

Communes may be as small as a half-dozen tin huts behind a sheet-brass wall, or large enough to span an entire industrial junction, housing hundreds.

## TUNNEL LIFE

Survival in the communes is never certain, but neither is it a constant struggle simply to stay alive. Food is either available in abundance, or not at all—local spirits are normally a commune's greatest concern.

There are few former Tripartite members among the outcasts, with Sodalts being especially rare—the Sodalities covet their secrets too much to permit individuals to be sent into the dark with sacred, restricted knowledge, instead handling serious punishments internally. As a result, the general level of technical acumen among communes tends to be fairly low, with a few self-taught machinists and engineers being the best a group can usually manage. Additionally, because they come from outcast and renegade stock, tunnel folk are often disinclined to follow Octet religious dogma, even if the lack of technical expertise didn't make such devotions impossible.

Consequently, communes tend to center on safety and comfort—most labor is performed on an individual's

own behalf, or in service to more powerful members of the commune. Personal or family living quarters are common among the tunnel folk, and most constructive labor involves fortifying settlements, or the creation of clothing, weapons, or survival gear.

## TUNNEL GOVERNMENT

The tone and attitude of a commune is normally dictated by its leader (whose title is generally chief, boss, or nothing at all). Government is fairly simple—outside of a few odd democracies, a commune's leader is usually the person with enough muscular friends to control access to the town's nutrient taps.

Attitudes among communes vary wildly; a few are egalitarian would-be utopias which invite all comers, usually to their eventual detriment; some find themselves under the command of petty warlords, and spend themselves in meaningless turf wars with other communes or with the Octet. A few even fall under the sway of Voidbringer heresies. Most tunnel communes are somewhere in the middle, requiring that settlers have some valuable skill to contribute to the group, even if only a willingness to provide muscle or sexual favors for the commune's leader or one of his followers.

## COMMUNES AND THE OCTET

Senior Tripartite members are well aware of the realities of tunnel folk tribes and communes, and the Eight Nations make frequent use of the people of the Reaches. They make excellent guides through the shifting geography of the Maker's body, and are easily bought with trinkets from civilization, or strong-armed by superior force.

Tunnel folk, in turn, tend to loathe the Octet, viewing it with a mixture of jealousy and contempt. They despise the casual assumption of superiority displayed by visiting Octet explorers, eager to make use of the commune's hard-won expertise and then to forget they exist.

Even the most civil tunnel communes tend to have few qualms about robbing or raiding Octet expeditions or townships, if they think they can get away with it; the best amenities in a commune are normally the spoils of such raids or opportunistic muggings, and possessing Octet-made weapons and luxuries is a sign of status.

The Eight Nations have little use for such bravado, and less use for tunnel outcasts in general; when a commune's defiance has grown too bold, a township grown too large, or a tribe simply remained in residence for longer than the nation deems proper, it is common to send the regulators (sometimes backed by Alchemical Exalted) to destroy the offending settlement. Adults are slain or driven into the darkness of the Reaches, while children are captured and brought back, to be implanted with soulgems and properly civilized.

## VOIDBRINGERS

In a world precariously balanced between life and death, a world in which every next breath is a miracle, any

disruption to the natural order is an unforgivable evil. When one cog fails, the machine as a whole fails. The nations of Autochthonia use the term "Voidbringer" as a derogative epithet for all who undermine the health or society of the Realm of Brass and Shadow.

Holy texts and spoken doctrines speak of the "Voidbringer sect" as some kind of monolithic Anti-Sodality plotting against the world. All things of consequence must be organized. The notion that disparate Voidbringers cells could arise and flourish independently of one another is too horrific to imagine, challenging the root presumption of hierarchical power upon which all of Autochthonian society rests. If Voidbringers are a true and yet decentralized threat, then perhaps not all systems must be centralized to be effective. This is the greatest danger of the Voidbringers. They are a heresy whose existence speaks for itself, casting doubt upon the sanctity and infallibility of the necessary social order.

The end result of this paradox is a great and ever-widening disconnect between theoretical doctrine and implemented practice in society's response. At the core of Autochthonian philosophy is a notion that the Void is a threat that must lose because a devoted and hardworking society must triumph over any disorganized hazard. It is an oversimplified message calibrated for the lowest common denominators of its citizens, conveying the core truth that maintains morale and ensures a foundational belief that empowers leaders to exact nuanced policies the people cannot and need not understand.

Even as those in the highest echelons of power refute the success of the Void through dogmatic assertion that its threat derives from parody of righteous organization, those who must deal with Voidbringers in the field accept the realities of the situation and employ a range of tactics calibrated to their disparate foes. Practical implementations of institutional dogma acknowledge and even catalogue Voidbringer sects according to broad classifications of threat and optimal response.

## REFORMERS

Many Voidbringers would never apply that label to themselves. However, by the doctrines of the Tripartite, anyone who deviates from social norms brings unnecessary chaos and entropy into the functioning of society and the world—these they call Voidbringers.

Some look upon Autochthonian society and wish only to make it fairer and better for all citizens. They may have drastic reforms in mind like abolishing or restructuring the caste system. They may seek to accomplish such ends by fomenting rebellion or perpetrating terrorist acts against an oppressive state, though it is usually the people as a whole who suffer more than those in power from such rebellions. Reformers who visibly attack society seldom find much popularity for their cause.

Other reformers don't want to hurt anyone. They desire only the slightest of changes, perhaps a bit more praise and a bit less punishment with which to motivate the labor of

the Populat. Regardless of any good intentions, they are still enemies of the orthodoxy. Official doctrine posits their threat no less than the most freakish Voidbringer monsters. Only those whose position in society tasks them with social reform and maintenance may rightfully contemplate such policies, let alone seek to enact them. All change must come from within the system according to established protocols, or else that change presents a direct and unacceptable threat.

The Realm of Brass and Shadow is too complex and delicate of a system to tinker with variables for the sake of doing so. Any change must come from within as a result of careful deliberation and massive infrastructural endeavor. Any change enacted too quickly or too drastically could result in unforeseen variables and outcomes—chaos by any other name. Chaos is the Void. Chaos is death. In their misguided efforts to improve matters, reformers could kill everyone. So they must be stopped by whatever means necessary. Fortunately, most idealists who genuinely desire the good of the people can be made to see reason through reeducation. Only the most stubborn necessitate recycling. But in a world already so broken, “fixing” what isn’t broken cannot be tolerated.

### STORYTELLING

Reformers are easily and obviously the most sympathetic Voidbringers, especially as most espouse great enmity to the Void and all it stands for. They do not see themselves as the enemies of society, but rather as the visionaries who would guide it toward perfection in the ages to come. Most are misguided, unable to comprehend the complexities and necessities underlying seemingly unfair or inefficient policy decisions. They are neither privy to the information required to understand, nor brilliant enough to interpret that data and derive a cogent result from its myriad variables. Though they mean well, their efforts are bumbling at best. But there are others who are not fools, those blessed with insight beyond their station. Perhaps they are prophets of the Great Maker. Perhaps they are simply brilliant minds who vindicate the Machine God’s infatuation with humanity. It does not matter.

With would-be reformers, the question of who’s in the right and who’s wrong remains uncomfortably unresolved. Such figures challenge protagonist assumptions of rightful doctrine and offer new possibilities for the future of the Autochthonian people. One thing is certain. The present system is untenable in the long term, if only as a matter of resource management. Reforms must be made. The only question is who will guide those reforms and what changes will be made.

### PLOT HOOKS

- Someone is painting seditious graffiti on public buildings calling for democracy, yet the Alchemicals tasked with capturing the unknown artist have yet to succeed. How deep and widespread must the pro-vote conspiracy be to hide from the Exalted? Is society as a whole in danger?

- One of the nations has breached the Seal of Eight Divinities, and the influx of ideologies has stirred up increased dissent and dissatisfaction. Although most of the rabble-rousers have been captured and reeducated, one broke free after drawing the Second Breath as a Lunar. Now he could be anywhere—or anyone. How can society maintain order when its police cannot trust anyone? How far will the

### RELIGION AND POLITICS

Voidbringers need not be nihilistic heretics—or even heretics at all. The Octet has long applied the Voidbringer label to any group or idea it deems dangerous to national stability. Whether the subject is religious, philosophical or political is meaningless, although the Theomachracy applies purely political condemnations sparingly, to preserve its own credibility.

security measures go before the crackdown induces the very revolt the authorities sought to prevent?

### TRAITORS

“It is better to obey a wicked master than die,” reason some Voidbringers. They harbor no fervency of belief in a higher calling. They may even lament the masters they serve and the necessity that makes such slavery practical.

The Realm of Brass and Shadow is falling apart. Blight Zones spread like wasting sores, killing the vast world-body of the Reaches. Gremlins raid even into the heart of civilization, bolder year by year. Then there are the border communities razed to blood-spattered ruins of twisted metal, littered with broken bodies of the unfortunate and absent the missing bodies of those whose fate is best not considered.

Some citizens are too wise and perceptive for their own good. They hear the suppressed and unspoken truths between lines of propaganda. Knowing what they know, they weep because they are people and they want to live. To these, the Void beckons. Given the choice between death and slavery, traitors choose slavery. When the horrors come for them in chattering multitudes, the weak abase themselves and march into the Far Reaches. Others find themselves approached by Voidbringers more fervent than they, and surrender to the threats of these fanatics. Still others seek out dark masters, proactively offering their services as saboteurs and spies ahead of invasions so that they and their loved ones might be spared.

The fall from grace is rarely absolute and sudden. For every wretch groveling before an conquering Apostate with pleas for mercy, ten more start out rationalizing their deeds. Wrenches fall into factory machines all the time. Is it so much more then to ensure that the wrench which falls belongs to a hated rival who is fingered for the crime? And if the masters then demand a friend’s wrench falls into the gears, better a

friend get branded a traitor and face Soulsteel interrogation than feel a spike probing one's own brain. Rationalization is easy when the descent is gradual. Even demiurges enslaved in distant Blight Zones to upgrade their unholy masters can take dim solace that the soul-rending talons they assemble will pluck out a stranger's gem. To those in the deepest self-serving denial, people not known are barely people at all.

### STORYTELLING

Traitors are less sympathetic in some ways than nihilists, motivated by cowardice instead of courage. But their place is not simply minion or Fifth Column agent. It is easy to make grand declarations of principle. Autochthonian society is founded upon such statements. But people—real people—are rarely so principled. When faced with certain doom on the one hand and a chance to survive in misery on the other, many set aside principles. There is a reason that the only core unacceptable order shared by all characters in the game is "Die!" Even the Yoziis surrendered rather than suffer death, so traitors are in excellent company. Such characters explore the base and bleak realities of the human condition, the simplest and oldest of moral dilemmas.

### PLOT HOOKS

- The city's steel foundry has been compromised. A traitor has added one half of an alchemical reagent to all the steel produced for the past decade. A soon-to-be invading Apostate has the other half of the formula distilled in gas canisters. When the horde attacks, the gas will react to the tainted steel, dissolving weapons, walls and key mechanisms into toxic metal slurry. Can the heroes stop this plot before the onslaught, or will they fight a ragged guerilla war through the poisoned wreckage of a half-melted settlement?

- A citizen forced into treachery through blackmail has had enough and secretly approaches the authorities. Now the protagonists must carry out a sting to capture the leader of the Voidbringer cell.

- An abused slave has escaped from the secret Vats Complex of an Apostate. She says she knows the way back and can lead the heroes there. Can the trust her?

### NIHILISTS

Nihilists comprise the worst Voidbringers, those who knowingly seek the death of Autochthon. Some are indoctrinated by others at a young age or through force, arriving at their beliefs the same way that the populace derives more wholesome ideologies. Others suffer a lifetime of bitterness and broken dreams, realizing that the machine of society does not care for their wants or needs. Those who do not comply suffer until they reform and get with the program, perhaps broken in spirit but functional nonetheless. When the will does not break, then something else must give. Of course, some are simply insane, and it is no wonder that they should aspire to mad causes.

The orthodoxy of Autochthonia judges nihilists a great threat because they genuinely believe in their cause. For

them, the Void is not a means to an end or a deadly power they pragmatically obey. It is an ideal worth dedicating themselves to, a belief, and the only way to kill that belief is to shatter its vessels. Voidbringers motivated by nihilism can't be reasoned with, or to the extent they can, it is not worth the effort to do so or the risk of their heresy spreading. Only a policy of immediate and absolute extermination keeps society safe from such dangerous ideas. In this way, nihilists provide a peculiar gift to those who war with the Void, so frightening in their ideology that their very presence precludes the risk of public sympathy for less hostile cells. So it is that Alchemical enforcers seek out those who espouse

### SHINING TERRORS

The Seal of Eight Divinities keeps the Exalted of Creation from finding their way into the Realm of Brass and Shadow. The only Exalted within Autochthonia are his Champions, created as servant-guardians of the people from among their greatest souls. Apostates pervert this model, but they are still made in greatness and never know the bitterness of weakness. Even the flaws of broken Alchemicals are the flaws of the mighty, personalities writ large in moral failing and horror rather than helplessness.

In Creation, the cry of individuals asserting their destiny and dreams in the face of all odds brings the possibility of Solar, Lunar or even Abyssal Exaltation. Green Sun Princes arise from those who break under pressure, as mortals often do when set against the pitiless engine of society or the awesome might of the Exalted. With the Seals breached, the great may become greater, lifting Autochthonia to heights unimagined—or the downtrodden may rise under their own power, reforging or shattering their world with glory its natives cannot begin to conceive.

unforgivable beliefs and make gruesome examples of them, all for the greater good.

### STORYTELLING

Within an Autochthonian series, nihilist Voidbringers can present implacable, unreasoning enemies to be fought and annihilated. More complicated stories challenge the simplicity of such dichotomies. Is there a moral place for freedom in a world where freedom means everything spins out of control and dies? Must all good derive from the system, even when it is intrinsically totalitarian and unjust? Like Creation, Autochthonia is a world rife with tangled moral dilemmas and no easy answers.

Just because Voidbringers are dangerous doesn't invalidate their moral agency. Stories of nihilists are stories of faith, fundamentally layered with questions. In the absence of proof, protagonists must come to terms with what they believe and what they are willing to do in the name of those beliefs. This is true on all sides.

### PLOT HOOKS

- Explorers have brought back a five-metal obelisk from an uncharted area of the Reaches. The graven images upon it suggest that Autochthon created Blights to purge his systems of all imperfections, and that he will emerge from the rubble of himself a stronger and healthier titan. Is this simply a mad heresy, or a record of truths too dangerous for anyone to know?

- A prominent engineer-savant has discovered the secret of Autochthonian soulsteel and partially deciphered the language of the creatures trapped within that black ore. Now convinced that Great Maker plans to repeat this holocaust with humanity, she seeks to preemptively slay her god with terrorist acts and drive the people of Autochthonia to escape through the newly-opened Seal of Eight Divinities.

### MONSTERS

Some Voidbringers aren't people at all. Flesh is weak, and the Reaches are too unforgiving for anything weak to survive, to say nothing of the Blight Zones.

Slaves and pets of the Apostates must be as harsh as their surroundings to last any length of time, but in this and this alone, the Void is generous. Madness is one gift, removing the petty inhibitions of conscience or hope. Those stripped of their fundamental humanity embrace the destruction of Autochthon with a savagery easily matching the fiercest gremlins.

But there are other gifts, mutations that merge flesh and steel into something abhorrently neither. To those so mutilated, the pipes and blades and clacking, saw-toothed

pincers are empowerments and upgrades. When Apostates make war upon civilization, not all who march behind them were once gods and some few are so diseased that they might as well be. When a factory worker imagines a Voidbringer, such nightmares are the first thing to come to mind.

### STORYTELLING

Monstrous Voidbringers have little to offer stories besides brutal, unrelenting antagonists and combat encounters. Yet this quality also makes them a respite from the complex moral quandaries intrinsic to more human counterparts. When fighting monsters, protagonists can unleash their deadliest weapons without worrying that they should try to save or reeducate the unfortunate. Putting them out of their misery is the best thing that anyone can do for them. After a long game of politics and soul-searching, sometimes the best thing the Storyteller can offer is the chance to kick ass and not worry about names.

### PLOT HOOKS

- Mutilated corpses keep turning up in air ducts, supply closets other odd places. The killings seem random, but they could be part of a wider conspiracy. What thing is stalking them and why?

- Travelers encounter a village in the Reaches whose citizens seem healthy and sane enough. Unfortunately, the community is a lure and front for a body-modification prison beneath. Will the visitors catch on to the clues and realize something is wrong in time to escape, or will the cultists saw open their brains and make them one of the tribe?

- An assembly of Champions slays an Apostate in the Far Reaches, but now a cluster of Blightborn (see p. 125) want revenge. The mad genius children dare not face the Alchemicals in open combat, but strike indirectly with a maze of fiendish deathtraps. The heroes must navigate this labyrinth to find their way home.



## CHAPTER TWO

# FIRST AMONG EQUALS

Claslat stands as the largest and loudest Autochthonian nation. Based on its vast size and enormous wealth, its people claim a position of preeminence in the Octet—first among equals.

The upstart nation of Yugash is not nearly so large, but will not accept any position of inferiority without a fight. Long acknowledged as the boldest of the Eight Nations (and perhaps the most foolhardy), Yugash seeks to rebound from the catastrophic Elemental War to become the dominant force in Autochthonia.

Both nations reach out to seize whatever the future offers, heedless of the risks. Will their ambition save the Realm of Brass and Shadow, or hasten its demise?

### CLASLAT

Largest and greatest of the Eight Nations, mighty Claslat is the powerhouse that drives the Octet. Claslat's symbol is the smith's hammer—the tool that imparts shape

and meaning to that which is otherwise inert and useless. It was in Claslat that the Great Convocation of 1991 was held, in which the Eight Nations established the formal orthodoxy by which their societies have been ordered ever since. It is by the limitless output of Claslat's foundries and factories that the smaller nations of the Octet survive. It is by the boldness and genius of Claslat's vision that the Eight Nations have found progress, security, prosperity. These are the claims recited to young Claslati in their crèches and in the sermons of their lectors.

Now Autochthonia falters, and Claslat is left grasping for answers. Has the reach of the First Among Eight finally exceeded its grasp? Has its ambition outstripped its wisdom? Nothing has been forbidden and all things have been possible for Claslat for many centuries—will their bold vision save them in this time of crisis, or will the living of Claslat be cast into eternal night alongside their unquiet dead?

## LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPE

Claslat is organized into two basic geographic divisions—Central Claslat and Outer Claslat.

Central Claslat contains the nation's older settlements, including nine cities and countless towns. It is a single massive, low-ceilinged open cavity half the size of the Wavecrest Archipelago. Massive bearing races mark out natural roadways connecting Central Claslat's many habitations.

Outer Claslat is a series of smaller chambers adjoining Central Claslat, connected by tram lines. It contains over thirty towns and two cities, Kur and Anket. Much of Outer Claslat has sprawled into what were once considered the nation's Far Reaches. As a result, the Theomachracy is very powerful in Outer Claslat, as constant intercession from trained clerics is necessary to keep the wild devas of the national frontier in check.

## A FISTFUL OF GLOTS

Setting aside its massive scale and industrial power, Claslat is unique among the Eight Nations for one simple innovation—the glot.

Glots are bits of industrial scrap glass, cut and colored to certain specifications to indicate value by a bureau of the Olgotary, primarily within the control of the plutarchs, known as the Economicat. They were first invented just under three centuries ago, during a period of great national turmoil—Claslat had just weathered a number of high-profile requisition scandals involving ranking members of the Tripartite, including individuals as highly placed as the director of Harmegis and the celebrant of Kur.

The glot was conceived as a sop to soothe the outraged Populat—tokens awarded to individuals or work-shifts for exemplary performance, exceeding quota, or taking extra shifts above and beyond what the state asked. They could be turned back in to the state in exchange for certain amenities—better food, admittance to certain exclusive performances normally reserved for lower-ranking members of the Tripartite, or even (at exorbitant rates) additional relaxation shifts on the next weekly duty roster. With the Populat focused on working hard to play hard, Claslat began to regain its equilibrium.

And then people began exchanging their glots with one another before they made their way back to the state. Everything grew from there.

## THE GLASS MARKET

The majority of Autochthonia has no fixed monetary unit; the Octet instead traditionally relies on a rough barter economy, with goods and favors exchanged on an ad-hoc basis between individuals and even between nations—for example, the assistance of an Estasian Militat unit might be granted in exchange for anything from processed food to supplies of the magical materials to political considerations, while commerce on the smaller scale involves the exchange of anything from

alcohol to martial arts instruction, skilled labor to the recital of a poem.

With the Olgotary providing amenities for which glots could be redeemed at fixed value, they quickly became useful units of base currency—and as their value in this capacity became increasingly apparent, fewer and fewer glots made it back into the hands of the Olgotary.

Claslat's glot-based economics are known locally as the glass market, and they are largely unregulated. Around one-tenth of the Populat actively participates in the glass market, providing some manner of service with which to accumulate glots. The advertisements and service stalls of off-shift workers are an omnipresent sight in every city and town of the enormous nation, one that visitors generally find bizarre, unnerving, and intriguing.

The most visible facet of the glass market is made up of luxury items such as rat-fur gloves, paintings and sculptures, jewelry made from scrap industrial glass or gems, or stylish personal clothing assembled from cast-off trimmings. A mélange of powerful odors is also an integral component of the glass market experience—much of what can be found for sale is edible. The most basic glass market commodity is an extra ration or half-ration carried out from the cafeterias, sold at slightly less than the Olgotary-redemption market price, but a number of far more rare and delectable items can be found by the diligent and wealthy: home-stewed concoctions assembled from ingredients purchased elsewhere in the market, illicitly distilled alcoholic beverages of all kinds, wheels of cheese made from human breast milk—or milk fresh from the source, for those that know who to ask and how much to offer.

Those selling goods are outnumbered only by those offering services. A shopper at a glass market is constantly hailed by barbers offering to groom and style the passer-by in any way desired. Off-shift workers offer their skills at massage, at singing. Crude blue-painted depictions of Noi announce the availability of sex—over time, the prostitutes of Claslat have even evolved an informal code whereby the posture in which Noi is drawn announces the prostitute's gender, orientation, and acts offered. The size of the image also tends to announce a harlot's prices, as a practical matter—the richest prostitutes are able to secure the best advertising spaces, by one means or another.

Finally, gambling in all of its myriad forms—from sports betting to games of chance to games of skill—is the most lucrative area of the glass market, but also the most fiercely restricted.

## THE IDLE RICH

The glass market is almost wholly unregulated—obviously, no one advertises Void sermons on street corners or sells their services as an assassin openly, but otherwise, the market is permitted to regulate itself. But as the regulators are well aware, a hidden, more dangerous layer exists beneath the surface of the glot economy. That illegal goods

and services are offered in the shadows of the cities is no great surprise—such trade was conducted in barter before the introduction of glots. What is new is the rise of the illicitly wealthy among the Populat—the glot-bosses. Rather than offering goods or services, these ruthless individuals are in the business of overseeing the flow of glots through the markets. The most successful Claslati harlots, for example, are invariably in the pocket of a market boss, capable of paying cheap muscle to ensure his workers secure the best spaces in which to advertise themselves. The bosses take a cut from the harlots—and also from the various other sellers they’ve managed to bring under their umbrella. The most successful

bosses establish monopolies over certain goods and services within a city, running off or ruining anyone attempting to operate without their sanction. Gambling in any town or city is inevitably under the control of one or more bosses, often in active competition with one another.

Rumors abound as to what the glot-bosses do with their wealth. Most use their vast capital to live in as much luxury as they can acquire—Populat workers pretending to the rank and privilege of the Tripartite. The most successful bosses funnel their wealth into excessive purchase of off-shifts—rumor has it that a few ride the crest of a wave of glots so vast that they no longer work at all, paying others to take

### CLOTHING MAKES THE MAN; MEN MAKE A NATION

All Eight Nations have heavy production industries to create the parts, equipment, and accessories necessary to bolster society and keep their cities running. Because Claslat has the largest and most expansive industrial production, any description of industry in Claslat can be applied to the other member nations of the Octet. However, even the most familiar of Autochthonian industries involve elements which would seem bizarre to the Creation-born—take, for example, textiles, for which Claslat is the leading producer and exporter among the Octet.

One of the major staple products of Autochthonian society is linen. But because Autochthonia has no plants, the harvesting of naturally-occurring “flax” is quite different in Autochthonia than it is in Creation. Nations that are particularly strident in their pursuit of values which please Domadamod often receive visions of places within the Reaches where this material can be harvested. The process involves locating a special type of cable in the Maker’s body which is coated in a myelin sheath. When this is opened and stripped, the fibers harvested are identical to flax. The cables are then gummed up and eventually the sheathe regenerates, allowing for seasonal gathering.

Linen in Autochthonia is used, among other things, to make handkerchiefs. The average Claslati Populat worker has as many as eight of her own handkerchiefs, for wiping oil off her hands and off dipsticks, as well as for the more conventional uses. Linen goods are a sign of status throughout Autochthonia. High-ranking members of the Tripartite sleep on linen sheets and deck their tables with linen cloth. Particularly heroic and prized workers of the Populat are often presented with neckerchiefs and bandannas of linen, often designed and embroidered with their initials. Shift captains in any manufactory also have a plain white linen cloth with a hole in it called a mukshi. This cloth is used in case of a fatal accident on the work-site: the shift boss places the mukshi over the deceased’s face, with the hole poised over her soulgem, leaving it exposed. This act is considered to give the dead some form of dignity, as many Autochthonians believe that the spirit within the soulgem may be able to see out from her corpse, and would otherwise be traumatized by seeing her friends and co-workers staring down on her dead face.

Artificial silk is also extremely important to Autochthonians. Unlike Creation-born, the people of Autochthonia do not have silk-worms. Instead they must rely on maintenance spirits found in air ducts and exhaust vents in the deep Reaches. Called dwaries, these simple gods come in several different forms. Some are simply mindless puffballs that go up and down ducts and through gears, clearing grit and sediment from the Great Maker’s tracts, while others are crab-like, with magnetic legs and brush appendages. To avoid creating complications in the Machine God’s internal systems, the Autochthonians are careful only to shave half the bristles from any one dwary, allowing it to continue its maintenance functions. Dwaries regenerate half their silk in just under one month. Accordingly, the Autochthonians harvest silk in different sectors of the Reaches each month. In a similar way, “cotton” is harvested from the manes of distinctly dangerous lion-like elementals of metal called romaju.

Silk is used in Autochthonia for many of the same things it is used for in Creation. High-ranking Tripartite women sometimes have elaborate gowns made of silk, while many of Claslat’s famous signs are woven from silk and hung in frames on the walls of buildings, and on posts along the streets of her towns. Cotton is used for more rugged clothing, typically for Populat laborers and Sodalt mechanics. The Autochthonians have mastered the weaving of twill, and denim is a major feature in the Autochthonian work-apparel.

all of their shifts so that they can concentrate on regulating the glass market according to their whims.

Such a notion is shocking, disgusting, almost heretical—and, at present, entirely legal.

## THE CENTROPOLIS OF HARMEGIS

The gender of Claslat's capital remains unknown. *Harowing Meteoric Aegis*, like the hero Claslat before it, is referenced in the nation's oldest histories as both male and female, and more frequently in gender-neutral terms. Owing to this ambiguity, the Claslati have dubbed their capital the centropolis.

Unlike most other nations, Claslat's capital is also its smallest city—a dense, spiral nest of heavy industry and heavier worship. Harmegis is structured in three slowly rotating rings. The lowest ring is known colloquially as the Maker's Anvil—a vast, thundering series of interconnected foundries primarily dedicated to producing raw building materials and construction tools, which are exported to the other towns and cities of Claslat. Harmegis has never expressed an interest in expanding beyond its current boundaries, instead making its purpose the growth and expansion of the rest of the nation. The barracks of the Populat are situated between the manufactories where giant steel girders roll out one after another, where nails spill into vast drums by the thousands, where rivets are pressed one after another every day—so compacted is the Maker's Anvil that most workers sleep less than five hundred paces from their place of labor. Starmetal coils and baffles rise above the factories of the Anvil, piercing the ever-present smog layer above the lowest ring—these are the wondrous Municipal Charm known as the Resonant Chorus. The Chorus carries most of the thunderous, impossible clamor of the district up and away into the sky, channeling and redirecting it into the empty air above the city. Without this innovation, most of the workers in the Anvil would have been deafened long ago.

The city's second ring, elevated above and surrounding the Anvil district, is known as the Maker's Hammer. This is the domain of the Olgotary and Sodalities. Here the Harvesters process nutrient slurry for the consumption of the city, the plutarchs draw up their plans, the Prolific Scholars tend the city's Vats Complex, and the ruling elite of Harmegis may always look down over the cauldron of industry that is their life's responsibility.

The third and smallest ring of the city is known as the Maker's Eye—set high above Anvil and Hammer that the Maker might measure the work of his forge and imbue it with purpose. The Maker's Eye is little more than a thin starmetal ring studded with amphitheatres and cathedrals, and it is the domain of the Theomachracy. Every citizen of Harmegis ascends to the Eye at least once a week on starmetal pneumatic lifts, carried briefly through the undiminished cacophony of the Resonant Chorus, to look down full sweep of the city's holy works and know that they are a part of it.

## THE FIRST HERO

Unlike most Autochthonians, when the Eight Heroes died, their bodies were not processed. Jarish's body, for example, was encased in crystal, which was later cut into a massive soulgem and placed near the core of the Metropolis of Jast; in the case of Claslat and certain other heroes, their bodies were cast into semi-articulated sarcophagi. These encasements were drilled into their bones and wired into their flesh and the flesh of the Great Maker alike, metal shells cast snugly over their bodies and sealed. The sarcophagi were placed in specially-formed recesses, where they were connected to Autochthon by great bundles of hydraulics and cables, and starmetal nerves that were wired directly into their brains. Each sarcophagus featured a visage of the deceased, a mask so real it was like looking at the Alchemical each hero would eventually become. More eerily, each mask opened on the actual eyes of the dead hero, preserved by special chemical lenses so that they would peer out at the living world forever, offering the Theomachracy windows to their departed souls for generations to come, and allowing the wise and the holy to draw inspiration from the unerring gaze of Autochthonia's first true heroes. For thousands of years, these sacred receptacles have been used to channel prayers to the Divine Ministers, and to attune listeners to the distant piston-and-hammerfall voice of Autochthon, so that they might know his will.

The body of Claslat is one of the most well-known and public remains of the Eight Heroes. It is visited by thousands of pilgrims each year, where it rests in a shrine attached to the largest cathedral in Harmegis. While Claslat's sarcophagus is one of the most accessible, the remains of the other Eight Heroes are far more restricted, or hidden from the public entirely, or even lost.

There is a heretical legend surrounding the remains of Claslat. For centuries, or so the story goes, the Claslati Theomachrats would speak with Claslat's corpse, and it would respond to them in a hollow, metallic voice that nonetheless sounded like the living Claslat. According to the legend, the corpse's speech was very simple; it could only answer basic questions, and only occasionally—for the very act of contemplation drained whatever spark motivated the speaker—but it provided answers that only Claslat could have possibly known. Moreover, the corpse would only answer the questions of those it recognized from long hours of prayer and contemplation before the cadaver's preserved, unblinking eyes.

In more embellished versions of the tale, the sarcophagus could swivel at the hips (the pelvis and the legs being fixed, bent; Claslat's sarcophagus sits upon an iron throne) so that Claslat could face and address those it wished to answer—even addressing frequent petitioners by name. This would cause the hydraulics to hiss with red steam, as if the very blood of the corpse was being used to power the autoseance.

In recent years, the tale has evolved a new twist. Some time ago, or so they say, Claslat simply ceased to speak. Perhaps the last of her knowledge has been exhausted, or the last of her blood spent on her final testimony—or perhaps Claslat has become ashamed of her people, and her silence expresses disapproval.

## THE PATROPOLIS OF ARAT

The Soulsteel Caste warrior *Arms and Armor Triumphant* is often considered the greatest fighter Claslat has ever produced—the standard against which all militant Alchemicals must compare themselves, and strive to match or exceed. *Arms and Armor's* transformation into the patropolis of Arat has not in any way diminished his enthusiasm for militant endeavor or the art of war—it has simply broadened the ancient hero's perspective. An army may march on its stomach, and fight by sagacious stratagem, but when the marching and planning are done, it triumphs by the power of its weapons. So proclaims the city.

Arat is Claslat's largest city, and is typical of the nation in all the ways small, holy, contemplative Harmegis is not. Observed from atop its highest buildings, Arat is a sea of light pushing back the eternal darkness of the Realm of Brass and Shadow. Great towering blocks of iron-faced tenements push up out of the press and bustle of the city,

their fronts decorated with gaudy banners and luminescent paints. Signs and blandishments have been affixed to the sides of the patropolis's buildings, and alleys glow like lurid arteries where off-shift factory workers have set up tents and shops to display their wares and talents. The towers of the Tripartite wear different colors, no less bright or loud lest they be lost among the visual din, although their signs exhort the workers to piety and productivity, rather than advertising skill at massage, games of chance, or the availability of cheap sex.

Down on the street, the experience of Arat is far more immediate—almost panic-inducing in visitors from nations such as Jarish and Kamak. Over half a million mortals call the patropolis home, and the number of off-shift workers crowding the streets at any time exceeds the total population of some Yugashi, Sovan, and Estasian cities. The Luminors have little power in Arat, for every street and building is aglow with luminous paints and brightly-colored dyes—the eye is drowned in a prolonged scream of primary hues.

The folk of Arat consider the state of their city to be a sign of life and progress. They pity visitors who cannot accept the quickened pace of Claslat and adjust—or, seeing their discomfort, take advantage of them. Many pilgrims who visit Claslat return home destitute, their few meager possessions bartered away in the game pits, pleasure houses,



and unregulated markets of Arat or one of the enormous nation's other great cities.

### CRIME AND PRIDE IN CROSSBOW CITY

The true face of Arat cannot be seen from either its towers or its streets. Arat's major industry is not noise or pride or advertisement—Arat is a vast weapons manufactory, perhaps the largest in Autochthonia, rivaled only by the divine war-forges of Debok Moom. No other Claslati city or town produces swords, crossbows, pikes, bolas, armor, or artifact war machines—the entire nation is supplied by the output of Arat, and in years of peace, Claslat makes a tidy profit outfitting other nations with the product of the city's foundries, which are widely believed to be imbued with the killing intent of the patropolis itself, bringing luck in battle.

The patropolis of Arat has a higher violent crime rate than any other region of Claslat—possibly higher than anywhere else in the Octet. Weapons go missing from the assembly lines with worrying regularity in Arat, and rare indeed is the Populat barracks without a wrist-mounted crossbow or short sword hidden somewhere inside of it. In the city's lower levels, certain dormitories closely resemble armed camps, as work-shifts reorganize themselves into gangs. The least ambitious gangs simply seek to control commerce in their sector, extorting tithes from those who attempt to sell goods and services to residents. More dangerous groups are generally organized under the leadership of a glot-boss, and attempt to challenge neighboring gangs for control of

commerce within multiple city-sectors or establish dominance over an industry throughout the municipality. The regulators find themselves outnumbered and often unwelcome when attempting to intervene in gang warfare, and many accept gifts and favors from certain work-gangs in exchange for turning a blind eye to their activities.

### THE OLD CITY

Arat is no sentimentalist—he loves that which is new and has no use for that which is old, obsolete, or outdated. The patropolis is a great, ever-growing stack, built on top of the ancient and abandoned layers of its history. Its modern, neon-drenched streets and factories and dormitories are constructed over the rusting, sinking remnants of older districts and abandoned, obsolete Municipal Charms. The people of Arat know the uppermost levels of this obsolete warren as the Old City, where the Lumpen and the poorest of the Populat labor in stinking mills to produce rubber sheeting, mix dyes, and attend to the least prestigious aspects of the city's industry. Each decade more and more of these ancient, decrepit factories are closed down, their workers moved up to newer strata of the patropolis. Sometimes they simply become too dangerous to work in, or collapse entirely mid-shift; at other times they are phased out according to the civic plans of the plutarchs, sealed with holy wards and left to congregations of rats and shadows.

Additional strata of Arat exist beneath the Old City—layers of which the majority of the city's inhabitants are entirely unaware. Arat is not only the largest city in Claslat, it is also among the oldest—the patropolis has been rushing toward a brighter future and discarding its outdated past for thousands of years, permitting disused districts to sink down into the foundation upon which the patropolis rests. There are dozens of lightless, abandoned layers that even the plutarchs have largely forgotten, which perform no labor and house no workers... at least, not officially. Much of ancient Arat has completely collapsed—a useless tangle of tumbled girders and broken concrete, impossible to navigate—but even at the deepest layers, some of the designs of the Prolific Scholars yet endure—abandoned, un-powered Municipal Charms designed to outlast time itself lean near ancient manufactories whose foundations still hold up groaning, crumbling roofs.

The regulators patrol the Old City infrequently and the abandoned strata not at all. Because of this, the city's abandoned layers have accumulated a growing population of exiles and tunnel transients. Diverting power and nutrient slurry from the upper city, these vagrants contribute nothing to Arat's industry. Old City work crews tell stories of the hideous, Essence-twisted mutants that dwell in the darkness beneath the patropolis (mostly but not entirely false), and these have traditionally served to protect the strata folk from scrutiny. In recent decades, however, certain lower city work crews have taken to trading amenities from above with the tunnel folk for useful tools salvaged from the

### THE MUNIFACTORY

While the entire city is dedicated to building the weapons of war, the Munifactory is the pride of Arat—a great, black, undecorated and unpainted fortified bunker pushing up from the city's middle to uppermost layers. This is the fastness of the Prolific Scholars of the Furnace Transcendent, who are favored above all other elements of the Tripartite by Arat, and the personal domain of the Orichalcum Caste colossus *Flames Dancing on the Battlefield*. The Munifactory is Arat's artifact workshop, a massive Municipal Charm devoted to the expedient manufacture of military wonders that rivals the earliest workshops of militant First Age Twilights. The lower levels of the Munifactory are given over to the methodical, ritualized production of daiklaves, assault crossbows, light power armor, and an array of expendable military wonders designed for use by non-Essence channelers. The Munifactory's newer, higher levels are devoted to experimental new designs and the personal workshops of resident Alchemicals given leave to study and contribute to *Flames Dancing's* great military think-tank.

## FEEDING A NATION

Claslat boasts the largest non-military workforce in Autochthonia, with over 90% of its population directly employed in a production-based sector. A nation as large as Claslat must produce enormous amounts of food in order to meet the demands of its hungry workers. But when it comes to food, production is something of a misnomer. Like most Autochthonians, the Claslati food stores are stocked by the Harvesters, who carefully tap the nutrient veins throughout Claslat in order to feed her people. In many cases, this food amounts to a mush or paste, generally called slurry, which the workers of Autochthonia eat in great commerce-cathedrals called refectories.

Refectories are generally longer than wide, with high, flowing ceilings, and ample lighting. They are considered holy places, and as such are semi-formal environments; workers must wait in line to enter the dining hall. Outside the hall, they must remain stone silent, in contemplation of Autochthon. As they cross the threshold into the refectory, a customary prayer of thanks to the Maker is spoken. Once inside, the refectory is much like a great cafeteria, with service lines and rows of tables. Here workers may sit where they please and are allowed to converse openly with one another, so long as they maintain a decorum befitting a place that is both holy—a place of communion—but also a place of relaxation.

Autochthonian cuisine may seem bland to the Creation-born, but the Autochthonians have a great interest in their food, especially in Claslat, which is the largest producer and exporter of foods in Autochthonia. Claslat's refectory-technicians—chiefly members of the Harvesters—picked up thaumaturgical food-preparation techniques from Jarishite gourmets hundreds of years ago. These techniques allow Claslati kitcheners to turn the different types of slurry into a variety of foods. One particular procedure converts the nutrients into a grainy flour-like substance which can be used to make several kinds of bread. Another involves hardening a certain kind of slurry over a live flame from one of Autochthon's capillaries until it becomes a greasy jelly that makes a stock for many kinds of soups. Yet another refines multiple different kinds of slurry into a powder and syrup mix that, when baked, becomes a jerky-like substance called kampui, an energizing meat-snack that is immensely popular across the whole of Autochthonia.

Claslat boasts the largest number of workers devoted strictly to the development and production of slurry into more distinct food substances. There are hundreds of thaumaturgically-produced grains, soups, and even meats, and the Claslati Harvesters have perfected the preparation of these products into practical meals—nutritious, easily prepared, and easy to ship as well as store. Ironically, Claslat exports more processed foods than it actually consumes, with the bulk of its refectories serving mostly basic, lightly-processed mush on six out of seven days of the week, and more elaborate meals on the seventh day and on Autochthonian holidays.

abandoned layers of the patropolis. Foolishly, some of this barter includes weapons, and some of the tunnel tribes have become emboldened enough to raid the Old City for more weapons, food, supplies, and whatever else takes their fancy. There are portions of Arat where Old City work gangs openly war in the streets with vagrants from below the patropolis for control of a few grimy, obsolete factory blocks, or even for their very survival—some of the tales claim at least one tribe of underdwellers has turned to cannibalism... or worse, Void worship.

## THE METROPOLIS OF JANDIS

Jandis is heralded in Claslati sermons as the Furnace Unlimited—the reason for this moniker can be seen even from the towers of Arat, better than a hundred miles away, as a crimson glow on the horizon. Jandis is a single-level jade metropolis sunk into a deep pit near the middle of Central Claslat, its outer rim an orderly stack of apartment buildings shouldering up a ring of Populat barracks. The city's center is a massive open-pit furnace, with industries suspended overhead on vast adamant chains. Rivers of raw ore flow into Jandis

from across Claslat and roll back out as basic and finished product—bar stock, bed frames, gears, spanners, springs, all the basic necessities of Autochthonian life.

Jandis was the first Claslati city to open a Gladiate arena, and its spectacles remain the most renowned in the nation—when foreigners hear the word “Gladiate,” they generally picture the fantastic crystal-floored Jandis Coliseum, combatants illuminated by the roaring flames of the God Furnace below.

## CINSHAN

Part of neither Central nor Outer Claslat, the town of Cinshan is threaded through the walls of the dividing layer between the two halves of the nation. Cinshan acts as a major transshipment hub, with 182 tram lines routing through the town. Here cargo is loaded, unloaded, inspected, and often tampered with, while passengers switch tram lines to reach their destinations.

The town is quiet and subdued compared to the rest of Claslat, a great multi-layered maze of white-painted corridors and small, seven-sided rooms—every ceiling in Cinshan has

one slanted corner; no one is sure why. Its multitude of doors and enclosed, obscure chambers are perfect for clandestine meetings. Combined with its location, this makes Cinshan the beating heart of the Claslati black market.

## THE DEAD GEARS

When an Autochthonian dies, his soulgem is removed and taken to the Psychopomp Gears of the Transmodal Essence Recombinator, so that his soul may rejoin Autochthon and be reborn one day. The Recombinator is a gigantic compactor-like bulkhead of soulsteel and jade at the center of a network of 'dead gears'—clusters of gears that do not naturally turn as others do, but sit silently, awaiting the coming of new dead. These gears can be found throughout the Realm of Brass and Shadow, woven even into the fabric of Autochthonian cities. Workers do not speak or act idly around them.

When a soulgem is committed to the Psychopomp Gears through the ritual known as Winding the Amphora, the death gates respond, opening up as the ghost rises from its soulgem and is dragged into the blackness beyond the light and life of the world he once knew. This is the only time that the dead gears turn, when winding open the gates of death to admit a new soul into the unknown reaches beyond life.

While the Psychopomp Gears handle the souls of the dead, the Pious Harvesters of the Hallowed Flesh deal with the mortal husk left by the deceased. The Harvesters take the dead to processing stations adjacent to great aqueducts found throughout Autochthonia, where the bodies are carefully treated, their liquids drained and converted to water that flows into the pumps and water mains of Octet towns and cities. What remains is then placed on a conveyer belt and sprayed with a number of enzymes tapped from veins near the aqueducts by the Conductors. This treatment dissolves the corpse into a substance which is then fed into an open artery that connects to the nutrient veins that feed Autochthonia.

The people of Autochthonia are fully aware that their flesh and blood will one day be broken down into the food and water that will nourish the living bodies of other workers. Lectors describe this as the final service, and speak glowingly of how each Autochthonian supports his people in death as in life. Most Autochthonians take pride and comfort from such notions...but not all.

## THE RESURRECTIONISTS

The Eight Nations each scramble to find some answer to Autochthonia's universal and deepening resource crisis. But this is not the only shortage facing the Octet—even if a new source of magical materials is uncovered, there still remains the fact that Autochthon has run out of excess souls.

A cabal of powerful, influential Claslati heretics have found an answer, or so they believe.

Death, the Resurrectionists believe, is wasteful, made necessary only by the ravages of age upon body and mind.

Without those factors, the skill of workers would only rise with time, increasing the work-efficiency of every individual. Moreover, the increasing resource demands of Claslats are based upon its soaring population; were the material shortage to be solved, Claslats could do its duty to maintain the Great Maker's health given its current population level.

The solution, then, is zero population growth—and zero population loss.

## THE UNDYING

Thus far, the Resurrectionists exclusively consist of members of the Tripartite—primarily Sodalts, with the heaviest representation from among the Meticulous Surgeons and Harvesters. However, the conspiracy also includes a number of plutarchs, clerics, and one preceptor. Most are middle-aged—their philosophy is easier to sell, they believe, to those who are past the prime of their lives.

All are dead.

The Resurrectionists use a newly-discovered thaumaturgical procedure to commit ritual suicide, but block passage out of the cadaver and into the soulgem. The soulgem's spiritual gravity holds the soul in place, preventing it from being drawn to the Radiant Amphora, but the ritual prevents the soul from being absorbed completely into the gem. The result is a walking, thinking, speaking corpse. Additional applied thaumaturgy holds off the touch of decay, while the expert talents of the group's Surgeons serve to repair any damage suffered by their cadavers—the Resurrectionists no longer heal on their own.

By their own best estimates, the Resurrectionists believe they will be able to live indefinitely. True, incidental wear and tear will eventually take a toll on their bodies, but they are confident that once the Prolific Scholars fully support their plans for Claslats, much of the weakness of deathly flesh can be replaced with the purity of brass and iron.

The Resurrectionists are slow and careful in their recruitment, exclusively targeting the useful and powerful. Eventually, they know they will have to go public with their great plan to save Claslats, and there will be opposition; by then, they hope to already be running the nation. They are based primarily in Harmegis, where the group is preparing to make an offer to the city's Populat director; but they also have significant cells in the metropoli of Jandis, Turon and Goll, and the patropolis of Kur. They have only a few agents in Arat at present.

## THE PRICE OF IMMORTALITY

Two things stand in the way of the Resurrectionists' agenda.

First, they are technically an abomination against the cycle of souls that is the cornerstone of Autochthonian religion—and quick to resort to murder when their recruitment efforts fail, as well. Were their conspiracy to be discovered prematurely, it would be classed as a Voidbringer cult of the worst sort and dealt with accordingly.

### NEW THAUMATURGICAL PROCEDURE: ROBBING THE DEAD GEARS

*The Art of the Dead* (2, Intelligence, 3, three days): This ritual lies at the heart of the Resurrectionist heresy, and is used to induct new members into the cult. Robbing the Dead Gears begins with its subject imbibing a variant of the Elixir of Rest, specially prepared by the ritualist; rather than immediate and painless euthanasia, this toxin sends the body to the brink of death and then finishes it off slowly, over the course of three days. During this time, the ritualist anoints the body with industrial oils mixed with blood, and packs the soulgem in imperfect clays left over and rejected from the creation of Alchemical Exalted.

At the end of the third day, if successful, the subject rises from his bier to take his place among the new Claslati elite. If not, the elixir finishes killing him and his soul passes into his soulgem normally.

The Resurrected, as subjects of the procedure call themselves, are effectively a kind of nemissary permanently bound to their corpse by its soulgem. They need not breathe, sleep, or attend to the other biological necessities of life. Like the ghosts they are, the Resurrected have Passions and Fetters, and may learn Arcanoi, though their corporeal state and the nature of Autochthonia renders many ghostly arts useless. The Resurrected poorly comprehend their undead status, and few have progressed to anything more than vestigial development of ghostly magic.

Second, the Resurrectionists have no better understanding of ghostly existence than anyone else in Autochthonia. They have not secured eternal life, but eternal death. The emotions and agendas of the Resurrectionists are the exaggerated passion-plays of ghosts, not the organic motivations of the living. Moreover, unlike normal ghosts, the Resurrectionists have not been properly severed from their po souls. The longer their bodies amble about in a grotesque parody of life, the greater the rage of the trapped and impotent po soul becomes. This darkness seeps up to infect the hun soul that drives the body; over time, the Resurrected become increasingly short-tempered, morbid, and vicious as their animal soul becomes an imprisoned hungry ghost. Though they are 'clean' at first, at some inevitable point after their rebirth—perhaps three months, perhaps three decades, the speed of an individual's degeneration is unpredictable—the Resurrected eventually begin to register to Axiomatic Charms as creatures of the Void.

## CLASLAT AND CREATION

Though aware that other nations are examining the option of turning to lost Creation for resources, Claslat has diverted little of its national resources to researching its world of origin or the Seal of Eight Divinities.

Spies are much cheaper.

Claslat has inserted the legendary Moonsilver Caste operative *Seven Eyes Unblinking* into Yugash with the objective of keeping tabs on Project Razor and reporting back all pertinent findings via the Vision Transmitting Protocol. The Alchemical has successfully infiltrated to the deepest levels of the project, and has ensured that Claslat is very nearly as up to date on Seal-breaching research as Yugash itself is.

While Claslat first regarded Yugash's great national push toward exodus as a piece of heretical folly, attitudes have shifted over the past two years as theoretical models gained momentum and the smaller nation continued to allocate staggering amounts of resources to its research team in Ot. Claslat's National Tripartite Assembly now considers Project Razor a serious problem—if Yugash finally cracks the problem of the Seal, they must *not* be permitted to leave Autochthonia to return with who-knows-what wealth or destructive power from the lands of mythic history. Should Project Razor grow close to completion, *Seven Eyes* is under orders to begin subtle sabotage work to cause delays until a backup Assembly can arrive. At that point Project Razor will be utterly demolished, and as much research as possible carried back to Claslat so that the First Among Eight can attempt its own breach of the Seal.

## YUGASH

Throughout its long history, the people of Yugash have lived and died by their skill at plumbing the Reaches. Because their lives are balanced on the success of every infiltration into the roaring dark, and because the death rate of these operations are so high, the Yugashi are protective of everything they have, paid for as it is in blood and souls. Workers who burn away their shifts pulling levers and fixing machinery know that their lives are so easy because of those who sold their last breath in the Reaches to find the resources needed to keep their nation running.

This lifestyle of living on the edge of life and death—and consistently winning—is the source of Yugash's famous national pride; Yugashi believe that, even above the rest of the Octet, they are especially blessed by Autochthon. It was this attitude that helped lead to the Elemental War.

## THE ELEMENTAL WAR

The greatest event of historical significance in almost 5,000 years of Yugashi history happened only nine years ago.

By 4869 DA, Sova faced a crisis of unparalleled proportions. Their stores of the Magical Materials were almost entirely depleted. Sova beseeched Yugash to share its re-

sources, but Yugash rebuffed the most ardent and humble appeals alike, giving the Sovans no explanation for their refusal to render aid. In reality, Yugash had recently seen a string of failed expeditions into the Reaches. In one instance, an entire survey force had been lost. In another, they uncovered a Blight Zone where they expected an abundance of raw materials. They waged and won a two month war against an army of gremlins, only to find that the area had been stripped clean. So when Sova came to Yugash seeking assistance or at least trade, Yugash found itself facing the same shortages. The Yugashi, perpetually defensive of their resources, feared the consequences of admitting such weakness. Tensions escalated, with Sova's communiqués growing ever more urgent; Yugash steadfastly rejected all offers of future recompense.

Eventually, tragedy struck: Ixut tapped too deeply into Autochthon's resources and drew a massive autoimmune response from the Great Maker's body, destroying the city. Sova's surviving people were stunned: a major center of culture, commerce, and national identity had collapsed into ruins before their very eyes. Sova blamed Yugash and went to war.

## A HISTORY OF HORRORS

The great war between Sova and Yugash lasted two long, brutal years. It was called the Elemental War for two reasons.

The first owed to concerns about the future. Both Sova and Yugash suffered massive losses of life, and the damage to both territories was horrific and severe. The leaders of the Eight Nations felt that calling it the Sovan-Yugashi War would make it impossible for future generations to put the conflict behind them—particularly considering the number of departed heroes and heroines of both nations that would eventually be reborn throughout the Octet.

The second reason was that both nations began overwhelming strip-mining and salvaging operations which drove the local elementals mad. By the end of the first year of the war, both Sova and Yugash were under attack by the avatars of Autochthon's wrath. Squadrons of lapidaries rained down on both sides; bolt kites fanned out across the cities, raining down deadly arcs on men and machinery around the clock; cogwheel dragons, slag behemoths and gezlaks roared and thundered through towns, mauling citizens and destroying buildings. Nor were mortals their only targets; spirits of different elements clashed as well, the cities of the warring states their battlegrounds.

Soon cataclysms began to strike both nations: quakes rocked the cities, collapsing tunnels and burying entire towns; magnetic storms ripped through the Reaches and stripped entire valleys, spilling mountains of detritus on towns and burying tunnel folk communes in avalanches of torn and sundered steel.



Autochthon's body seemed to be in revolt. Quakes were a frequent occurrence, their epicenters inevitably somewhere in the Sova and Yugash regions. As the war progressed, members of the Octet became convinced that the war between Yugash and Sova would bring about the destruction of Autochthonia. Many felt that the fates of the two nations were sealed. It became impossible for the remaining nations to stay uninvolved; while some sued for peace, others sent teams in to evacuate Sovan and Yugashi citizens. Small military dispatches even tried to forcibly separate the combatants, but soon withdrew from these tactics, worried that it might cause their own nations to be drawn into the war. A Yugashi statesman named Kerok famously rebuked Gulak's attempt at policing, telling their grand autocrat: "Declare war or stand down." The message was delivered on the back of a three-year-old petition from Sova for material aid.

## WAR'S END

The two nations began to separate in the final months of the war. The movements were not steady and gradual, as Autochthonians were used to, but spastic; the nations would drift apart, and then careen closer together. Their borders began to turn, their masses to shift and rotate, as if the nations had become slow hurricanes of steel spiraling themselves out of existence. But they went on existing, and the death tolls continued to rise.

Yugash, hard-pressed and losing ground, sent an Alchemical assembly accompanied by a number of the nation's best salvagers on a secret mission far behind enemy lines, to the ruins of Ixut. When the armies of Sova found that the main tram line was the only route that had not been collapsed or blockaded, they marched with Estasian mercenary forces toward the metropolis of Kadar. The Estasians warned of a trap, and they were correct.

The soulgems of hundreds of Sovan dead had been excavated from the ruins of Ixut, and placed in the walls, floor, and ceilings along the final march toward Kadar. They'd been prepared by the Luminors such that the spirits within rose up to beseech the Sovan soldiers in tones of anguish and despair. The Sovans were awestruck, horrified, confounded. Their will to fight collapsed at once, and in that instant, the Yugashi were upon them. In one final, desperate offensive, the Yugashi ignored the Estasians, pouring everything they had into the Sovan forces. The Sovans suffered catastrophic losses; hundreds were slain, thousands surrendered, and the rest of their armies fell back toward Sova. In one stroke, the Sovans were defeated.

The Yugashi exhausted their last effort in this strike. They could only watch as the Estasians marched on toward the capital of Kadar. There, highest-ranking of the Venator—the general of the Estasian regulars—addressed the grand autocrat of Yugash with reproach. The Venator had never before seen such a tactic deployed; even within the Militat's exhaustive tactical annals, soulgems remained sacrosanct. To profane them in such a fashion was heresy of the worst

kind. In his disdain for the stratagem, there was little sympathy... but some appreciation. It had won the Yugashi the final and most decisive battle. The Estasians then assured the Yugashi that they would be leaving. As their employers had fled the field, and the nations were parting, they were no longer under contract. Thus, the war between Yugash and Sova ended.

## THE ONES THEY LEFT BEHIND

Great quakes accompanied the parting of the nations, and the awful, deafening sound of metal wailing as layers ground in unnatural ways. There were horrendous clanks and bangs as subterranean engines knocked and exploded. At times, entire towns were wiped out by clouds of superhot steam venting up from cracks in the world. In some places the nations fractured and broke apart, leaving pieces behind.

On one of these pieces was the town of Ilyensa, a Yugashi settlement and military redoubt. Built into a natural crevasse between two mammoth girders and backed on three sides by impenetrable walls of iron and steel, its iconic walled and gated front was the first stop for pilgrims venturing into Kadar from faraway places. Yugashi who were lucky enough to have drifted away with the rest of the nation rallied for weeks to send reinforcements to the missing settlement's relief, but there was no manpower to spare, and anyone sent back would be as surely lost as Ilyensa given the rate of national drift. The Populat were urged to return to their work stations and try to turn their grief into the joy of servicing the Great Maker as best they could.

Left alone and adrift in the Great Maker's body, Ilyensa found itself far behind the lines of the retreating Sovans. The Ilyensans kept the Sovan military at bay for a full month after the town had been declared lost, believing that Yugash would send a Champion to save them.

In the end the only Alchemical who appeared was Sovan, and he ripped down the gates of Ilyensa. By the time the bloodlust of the Sovans had been sated, the town had little more than 100 defenders left, all prisoners of war. Of these, many were beaten and raped. All were imprisoned in a makeshift prison erected by their conquerors; it was expected that they would all become Lumpen slaves in a Sovan manglery.

Instead, the holdouts were separated into groups and marched to the Sovan command post. There the Sovan Champion *Precision of Silence* showed them surveillance images he had recorded of Yugash. Through his Charms they saw and heard Yugash announcing their deaths while they were still fighting. They saw their own nation give up on them. Then *Precision of Silence* sent them back to their cells to think on what they had seen.

It was the first step in a program to reeducate the holdouts of Ilyensa. They are being brainwashed, trained to hate the nation that abandoned them. In time, they will be sent back home as heroes, lost souls miraculously found—saved by the will of the Great Maker—and returned to Yugash

safe and sound. And from within, the holdouts of Ilyensa will bring Yugash to its knees. Of course, there are the Alchemical heroes of Yugash to contend with... and the holdouts themselves, many of whom have proved resistant to the worst of the Soulsteel Caste's Charms. But the Sovans are in no hurry. The tectonicians say that it will be another three to seven years before Sova and Yugash are reunited. What a reunion it will be.

## POSTWAR YUGASH

After the war, Yugash continued to drift for almost a year, before finally settling in a great wilderness of giant hanging cables and towering brass antennae playing catch with bolts of lightning. The Yugashi, devastated by the war, had hoped to find an abundance of materials to begin repairing and rebuilding their cities and towns. The national agenda had been set: the Sodalities had estimated that Yugash had a seven to ten year reprieve from fighting, after which they would drift back into range with Sova. They set their caps to exploring every inch of the new Reaches, to harvest as much as they could for the good of Yugash. Their military would need to be rearmed, rebuilt, and retrained. Yugash began to militarize. They intended to win the war the Sovans had forced upon them. But their infrastructure had been devastated, their cities practically crying out in pain, and badly in need of repair. They knew that if they did not meet with wild, incredible success in the Reaches, they would not survive a second encounter with Sova.

Things only got worse from there. The Reaches, as hostile as ever, yielded no easy or abundant resources. The Yugashi harvested everything they could, and when they took too much, they found themselves in bitter battle with local exmachina. Yugash, which had previously survived by having twenty times as many expedition teams as any other nation—almost a sixth of the entire Populat—found itself forced to commit even more manpower to keeping its cities running, replacing needed materials with the twin resources of labor and prayer.

## THINGS FALL APART

During the war, Yugash's population dropped from 4.2 million to just under 3.4 million. Urged on by the Olgotary and Theomachracy, who assured the Yugashi that it was both patriotic and holy, the people dedicated themselves to procreation. For a time, Yugash's material decline loosened its grip on the hearts of the people. The suicide rate dropped significantly, as did the number of citations issued for public drunkenness. Sex was a diversion and a release from the horrific torments of war, and the terror of the unknown. The sight of women swelling up with new life filled the hearts of the Populat with renewed hope.

Then the children started birthing dead, and the people of Yugash ground their teeth and fell deeper into despair. Many cursed Autochthon. The people of Yugash toiled hard and yet saw no end to their own suffering. The Populat grew

angry. Dereliction of duty became a common crime, which left many of Yugash's factories frightfully undermanned. More problematic was the increase in both murder and suicide. It became such an issue that the Olgotary began to revoke and enslave anyone who failed at a suicide attempt, forcing them to the lines and levers that had been abandoned. The situation grew more hopeless by the day.

## FOR LOVE AND COUNTRY

At the highest national level, the strategy is simple: If Autochthon is running out of souls, it is in Yugash's best interest to secure as many of the few that remain as possible.

Yugash has never had a formal institution of marriage. Since the end of the Elemental War, however, they have instituted a policy known as the birthbond—parents may drop a certain number of work shifts per week, instead spending that time at the crèches together with their children. The Olgotary believes that closer family bonds will raise national morale and produce more motivated workers in the difficult times ahead, and with shift quotas climbing, the potential to avoid some of the omnipresent overtime labor makes childbirth attractive.

Additionally, the Theomachracy has recently begun peppering its sermons and plays with anti-homosexual propaganda, portraying same-sex couples as selfish and derelict in their reproductive duty to the nation. The regulators have grown lax in their investigation of crimes against childless individuals known to prefer the company of their own gender.

## THE PROPHET APPEARS

A Populat veteran, Sirin of Het, came to prominence as a result of a deep Reaches expedition. Salvaging in an area far beyond the safe return distance, half the group was carried off by flesh-eating elementals, including its leaders. Hopelessly lost, the remaining crew would have wandered until their eventual deaths had it not been for Sirin, whose tracking skills and instincts allowed him to guide the team back to Yugash with an abundance of desperately-needed supplies.

This would have merely made Sirin a hero; what made him a wonder was his claim that his autolabe went haywire out in the Reaches, and briefly locked onto the Godhead; and that his expedition only made it back safely because he followed the path to the Godhead until the route became impassable, at which point Kadmek appeared and opened a road back to Yugash. Sirin's tale boosted the morale of a people who had believed their god had abandoned them. Even more important than the tale of a direct intervention

from a Divine Minister, however, was Sirin's insistence that he had found a way to the Pole of Crystal.

Certain that he could locate the Mind of the Maker, Sirin rallied to get the Tripartite to fund another expedition into the Reaches, promising that he would find the Godhead and lead Yugash out of despair. The Theomachracy, recognizing that the people would react poorly if they punished Sirin, took him aside and tried to convince him to revise his story, while the adjudicators suggested that if he stirred up the people any further, he would be locked away where they could not hear him.

Rather than backing down, Sirin embroidered divine gear symbols on his jacket and began to preach about the promise and hope for Yugash. Sirin proposed that the people of Yugash hadn't been proactive enough. They had just been accepting survival by the gifts of Autochthon, but he surmised that invention was the greater part of faith, doctrine, and tools, and that it was the people's duty to think around the problems that tools, doctrine, and the gamble of faith-driven expeditions into the Reaches could not solve. If there was nothing to salvage where they were, they needed to move. They needed go where they could survive. Autochthon, he insisted, did not bring them to this place simply to die. The Machine God didn't choose people simply to throw them away, so their demise could never be a part of his designs.

"For all our toil and prayer, we are not getting our due. Something is wrong," said Sirin. "So we must find the Godhead, so that we might awaken Autochthon and ask him."

It was not long before the regulators showed up to arrest him, but when they did, his eyes and soulgem began to glow, his face was all-over patterns of glowing circuits, and he spoke in the code-language of the custodians. Sirin's transformation was seen by thousands of people, who had come to listen to him talk. The regulators who had been sent to claim him now refused to arrest him. An Alchemical stepped in, and Sirin peacefully surrendered. But on the back of Sirin's revelation and subsequent display of holy tell, his incarceration stirred a furor across Yugash. The people began to debate Sirin's words, and the sentiment grew ever stronger: even if the idea of a trip to the Godhead seemed impossible, Sirin's words had inspired a new (and wildly heretical) confidence in the Yugashi people. They would serve their god by serving themselves. Only by the survival of Yugash, could Autochthon also be saved.

## REVOLUTION

Faced with the threat of riots across the nation, the Tripartite calmed the people by recognizing the miracle Sirin had displayed, and taking the unprecedented measure of proposing his honorary canonization into the Theomachracy—with the Populat on the verge of open revolt, it was deemed less damaging to Yugash to acknowledge the self-evident holiness of the prophet and admit that the Luminors had mistakenly assigned him to the wrong caste, than to have their society turned upside-down by a

Populat adventurer. Though the bending of caste boundaries outraged traditionalist Theomachrats, this announcement helped to restore order among the workers. When the Tripartite announced that they were granting Sirin permission to lead a bigger, better equipped expedition into the Reaches, morale in Yugash skyrocketed. Production levels rose as the Populat burned bright with new hope. Even members of all branches of the Tripartite, and a number of Champions found themselves enraptured by the vision of Yugash glimpsed in the words of Sirin.

Just before the great expedition, Sirin was to be fitted with a new soulgem in league with his new station. It was, in theory, a simple procedure, and Sirin himself was young and strong. So when he died in the operation, Yugash was devastated anew. A great pall of grief settled over the people—they felt as saddened as if they had lost a Champion in battle with the Void. The bitter sadness turned to outrage when the plutarchs, relieved, cancelled the expedition to the Reaches. Riots exploded across the nation as the Populat was suddenly convinced that Sirin had been murdered. Much of Yugash's remaining military and many of its regulators joined the upheaval. Even a number of Yugash's Champions clashed beamklaves in the midst of the chaos. The shocking turn of events eventually led to a great putsch by a young and ambitious statesman named Kerok, a follower of Sirin's ideology, who killed or imprisoned those members of the Tripartite who had persecuted the prophet, pinning his murder on their heads.

From a pulpit in the chamber of the National Tripartite Assembly hall, Kerok demanded truth and justice across Yugash, while directing a gigantic inquisition that would turn the nation upside down overnight. After the smoke cleared, Kerok, his dogma heavily inspired by Sirin's speeches, was voted in as the new grand autocrat of Yugash. But rather than lead the people to the Godhead, Kerok made it his business to prepare them for an even greater sojourn—a return to Creation.

## LIFE ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE

One of the Maker's ancient creations awakened during the Elemental War—the behemoth known as the Goragash. Possessed of an indestructible body of adamant and clay, a great iron maw and massive gears for spines, the Goragash was only defeated when the patropolis of Ot's entire Essence grid was routed through an incomplete and untested superweapon—the Magnanimous Disperser Array. A burst of multi-phased Essence ripped a mile-long stretch of Autochthonia straight out of existence, banishing the ruined strip to another location in Elsewhere, and the Goragash along with it. The Municipal weapon fed back disastrously and the city was nearly lost.

During the reconstruction of Ot, the Scholars discovered a spatial distortion in and around the city's Essence grid. After studying the anomaly, they shared their findings with the other Sodalities, and together came to the certain

conclusion: they could use the distortion to open a gateway to Creation.

Grand autocrat Kerok does not know the path to the Godhead. Sirin of Het's autolabe vanished after his death, preventing anyone from ever retracing the fateful steps that led him to his alleged encounter with a Divine Minister. Uncertain of the outcome of such a journey, Kerok knew that his only chance to birth a new and more powerful Yugash would be to give the people Sirin's hope—that there was something more than a life of toil and pain. Long before Kerok announced his intention to use the Scholars' discovery to breach through to Creation, the hearts of the Yugashi people had already fled Autochthonia.

By virtue of spies and the Vision Transmitting Protocol, word of Yugash's intention eventually reached the other seven nations. The plans of Yugash sounded like the last gasp of a desperate, war-ravaged people, who were seeing their own doom ahead of them—a long winter in an unknown and alien stretch of the Reaches. And yet the possibilities of their success cannot be discounted.

Kerok believes that all the supplies his people will ever need can be found in Creation. This belief is not unfounded—he has spent thousands of hours studying passages in the *Tome of the Great Maker* which speak of Creation. However, it was the discovery of artifacts from Creation which sealed Kerok's decision on the matter. Studying clues encrypted in the *Tome*, Kerok was able to locate some of the first Solar-engineered magitech, hidden deep within the Reaches.

Some of these were wind turbines, used to draw the Essence of the air element from gusts of wind and convert it into an element more familiar to Autochthonia—lightning. These the grand autocrat had erected in a massive tunnel near Kadar, where the breath of the Maker was known to travel at more than 200 miles per hour. Also recovered were a number of giant batteries containing flywheels that could turn at twice the speed of sound. By linking these wondrous Solar mechanisms together, the Yugashi were able to generate enough raw Essence to power down a third of Kadar's Essence generators, allowing the city to run on a vastly reduced resource budget.

This crucial reprieve then allowed Kerok to divert more seasoned workers away from the factories and into the Reaches. But now the Yugashi focus shifts away from the discovery of raw materials, and to the location of mystic artifacts brought over from Creation. To that end, Yugashi adventurers have been combing the Eight Nations to find any piece of Creation that might further empower Yugash, or lead their people to the promised land.

### A NATIONAL FERVOR

The people of Yugash live in the ruins of a war they did not want. The efforts to rebuild exceed their ability to pay homage to the Great Maker, and so they struggle at every quarter just to survive. But Yugash is experiencing a sudden resurgence from an unexpected source: pilgrims. Thousands

### INTO THE UNKNOWN

While Yugash has made its intent to return to Creation public knowledge, *all* of the Eight Nations are researching a means to breach the Seal of Eight Divinities; the rest of the Octet has simply chosen not to trumpet its contemplations to all and sundry.

Ultimately, it is deliberately left up to Storytellers to determine which of the Eight Nations—if any—first successfully breach the Seal. Project Razor is presented here as a race toward the future rather than a *fait accompli*—many stories of industrial espionage, sabotage, and daring discovery still remain to be told.

To most Autochthonians, Creation is an obscure and distant idea; some even believe it to be fictional, nothing more than metaphor or religious parable. To the extent that their ancient records can offer up information about that lost world of genesis, they will lead the Autochthonians to expect a magically advanced monoculture ruled over by a group of incredibly powerful “sunlit heroes” known as the Solar Exalted.

of pilgrims from across the Octet have journeyed to Yugash. Most of these are tunnel folk, but some are Populat workers who were inspired by the tales of Sirin, or have longed in their hearts for an end to the maddening burden of constant slavery to what seems like a doomed god who has also doomed his people. This infusion of pilgrims has replenished the Yugashi workforce, and brought an influx of new trade to the nation, as it has begun selling citizenship and entrance to all comers. The new blood has helped to strengthen Yugash and has given it further cause to pursue the end-goal of an exodus.

But it has also increased paranoia in the people. Yugash now markets itself as a land of adventurers, and the nation which will almost certainly breach through to Creation. The influx they draw from other nations helps to fuel their trade and their factories and their prayer-powered conductors, but they are also faced with the dangerous ideas and cultural influence of outsiders, and are becoming more and more worried that Sovans may try to infiltrate their society and commit some act of horrific sabotage. The Yugashi have begun to screen all immigrants to root out spies, in addition to charging labor or tribute fees for entrance into the nation. Despite these measures, Yugash considers to see a steady trickle of pilgrims who are eager to make the journey to Creation.

### A NATION IN DRIFT

Unlike some other nations, Yugash is not situated in a segment of the Maker's anatomy with many large, open spaces.

Its towns and cities are tucked into narrow, claustrophobic cysts in Autochthon's vast muscular system, connected by an intricate network of primary and secondary tram lines.

Where the location of various towns and cities within the other nations is fairly fixed, Yugash's internal geography stays in constant, if fairly predictable, drift. Paradoxically, this makes restricting travel within the nation exceedingly easy, as the trams are the only reliable means of transit between settlements. A trip from Het to the town of Jakul takes a mere hour by tram, but may easily take four days on foot, all of them spent trekking through winding access corridors, climbing up and down service ladders, and squeezing through forests of churning rocker-arms and slamming pistons.

While the nation once considered its internal Reaches relatively 'tamed,' this is no longer the case. Feral elementals, left over from the War, still lurk in the darkness between the towns and cities; and Yugash has developed an enormous population of transients, exiles, and tunnel folk, drawn in by rumors of Project Razor, many of whom squat in the ducts and tunnels.

## THE PATROPOLIS OF OT

The second-largest city in Yugash suffered much in the Elemental War, but has rebounded tremendously since being chosen as the site of Project Razor.

Ot is comprised of three ring-shaped layers, stacked one atop another, pierced by a massive central trunk of veins and conduits. The city acts as an ancillary vascular system for the Great Maker, routing precious fluids and waste materials throughout the Machine God's body. This makes Ot naturally wealthy in water, oil, and other necessary resources, but also a dangerous place to live; four centuries ago a main artery in the city's trunk ruptured, flooding three districts of the second tier with molten silver.

The lower tier historically acts as the city's primary residential district, home to tens of thousands of Populat workers. It is now heavily overcrowded, and a collection of shanty towns and glorified tunnel communes have popped up on the city's outskirts. The regulators are hard-pressed to maintain order in the bustling lower tier, which spills over with unwashed tunnel folk, Claslati con men, and opportunistic adventurers from Gulak, Kamak, and Estasia.

The middle tier is now the city's primary industrial district, as well as its seat of government. Its lift tubes are heavily guarded by regulator squads, who screen out undesirables from the lower tier. The second tier is also where most of the city's Tripartite and its handful of Alchemical Exalted keep their residences.

The upper tier of Ot, once dominated by warehouses and light industry, has become a heavily fortified staging area for the planned exodus into Creation. Most lift tubes have been blocked off, restricting access to the level, and its security is regularly examined by *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon*.

## REMNANTS OF THE WAR

Before Sova and Yugash separated, a massive quake caused the two nations to slide together, their base-masses colliding with a tremendous impact that flattened entire towns. Only the thick steel and brass layers of Autochthon's flesh kept the people of both nations from being obliterated by the impact. As the two masses collided, their bases twisted together at the borders, causing two sections of the Great Maker to grind together and tear away. Two border towns, Romos (Sova) and Autrama (Yugash) piled over and under each other, producing massive casualties.

Buildings which did not collapse tunneled under and caved those above them. Tunnels slammed through the sides of towers, and structures of all types fused together. Streets tore through architecture and one another, turning the city into a tour of destruction. And when the nations drifted away, the miserable pile that was Romos and Autrama was ripped free of both and became a huge drifting island, a jagged scar of ruins called Romos-Autrama.

That was seven years ago. The nations have long since abandoned all interest in the ruins. They do not realize that there were survivors of the collision—*many* survivors. Thousands of soldiers and citizens from both towns survived what must have seemed like the end of their world, only to find themselves driven face to face with their enemies. This, while Yugashi saw their work- and bed-mates pulled dead from the debris of Sovan buildings, and while Sovans pulled dead children from beneath Yugashi towers that had fallen on their nurseries.

For the survivors of Romos-Autrama, the war has never ended. The two factions vie for control of the ruins with all the unyielding tenacity of hatred. They fight from apartment to apartment, in and out of the ruins, through tunnels, under and over streets. The combat is fierce, deadly, and seemingly with no other purpose than to see the other side dead. Both factions trade control of entire districts on a semi-monthly basis. Children born in the ruins are not growing up in service to the Great Maker, but rather to a distant nation they have never seen, which has forgotten they exist. Others have also come to the ruins—tunnel folk, runaways, and ruins expeditions have all found their way into Romos-Autrama and become trapped there by the fighting, or embroiled in it.

## PROJECT RAZOR

Life in the patropolis of Ot has one focal point at present, the hinge around which everything turns: Project Razor, the plan to return to Creation. The city's industry is dedicated to preparing supplies for the journey, the city's upper tier has become a training-grounds and storehouse for the planned journey, and what were once factories have been converted to research labs, where the wondrous Municipal Charm that will unlock the Seal of Eight Divinities is still being developed.

This is a point that preys on Yugash's National Tripartite Assembly—the Charm is still not ready. While Kerok assures the nation that its design is impeccable and it is simply a matter of assembling the complex wonder, the truth is that the Charm is still being designed—the intricacies of the Seal have not yet been defeated. If Kerok's gamble is wrong and Yugash is unable to breach the Seal before it returns to contact with the rest of the Octet, there will be no time or resources remaining to pursue an alternate stratagem, and Yugash will likely face its doom.

And so, bit by bit, more and more national resources, already badly depleted, are allocated to Project Razor. If Yugash is not the first to breach the Seal, it is unlikely to remain solvent long enough to be second.

## THE METROPOLIS OF HET

The metropolis of Het has distanced herself from the heresy of the Yugash exodus. The smallest of the four cities of Yugash, Het greatly valued the adventurer Sirin. But the regulators of Het were warned by a Surgeon—too late—that Sirin would be killed by a fellow Surgeon with ties to the statesman Kerok. Even more alarming, when the Sodalities of Het obtained Sirin's soulgem, they found that his soul wasn't in it, having already been given to the Psychopomp Gears before his ghost could be interrogated. Since that time, Het's leaders have cast a doubtful eye toward Kerok's leadership, and their attitude has penetrated through to the citizenry of the metropolis, who find themselves the uncomfortable minority in a nation that adores the new grand autocrat.

While Het's withdrawal from Yugash's new national initiative is based in a sense of justice, her citizens' objections are driven by theology and practicality. Perhaps, the Hetites murmur, it is unwise to bet the survival of the nation on a perilous journey to a mysterious world which just might be fictional.

## OUT WITH THE NEW, IN WITH THE OLD

As the last bastion of conservatism in Yugash, Het's citizens are experiencing a revival of those customs which are most distinctly and characteristically Yugashi. For example, where many citizens throughout the rest of Yugash have begun to grow out their hair in emulation of the new grand autocrat, the Populat of Het keeps its hair trimmed very short, or even shaves it entirely. This

is according to old Yugashi custom, in which long hair is a sign of great experience and proven responsibility (a practical custom when long hair mixed with inattention can easily result in a citizen's head being crushed in a factory's gears).

Yugashi lectors, as one of the few castes which perform little manual labor, often grow out their nails to outrageous lengths as a sign of status; this has given rise to the performance art known as light dancing, in which the lector adorns her nails with luminous paints. These are used to trace intricate and breathtaking afterimages through the air in darkened amphitheatres (long-haired lectors often throw their entire body into the performance, using their flying hair to add fluttering bars of shadow to the performance). There is no commonly-accepted code of meaning to either patterns or colors in light dancing, and so the art form is highly interpretive and personal; Het's lectors have found that these qualities make it an excellent medium through which to openly criticize the new government and its policies.

## THE PATROPOLIS OF KERETH

Constructed along an almost 45-degree slope, Kereth is a soulsteel patropolis of right angles: high buildings with severe lines, grid-streets, and long black-and-red banners dominate the landscape. Its people are characterized as quiet but serene; spy-eyes peer down from atop the city's buildings, while observation drones drift through his boulevards, always watching, making Kereth one of the safest places in the Octet.

With its population much reduced and the Reaches seemingly barren of bounty, all of this has changed. The youngest of Yugash's four cities recently entered a state of dormancy; the Luminors cannot stoke his light grid to more than a fitful glow, and the factory machinery wheezes and gasps where workers labor furiously to keep Kereth alive. The street cars gather dust, unpowered, forcing laborers to trudge uphill to work. Extra shifts have been imposed, and all citizens are expected to spend their free time in redoubled prayer.

Discussion of Ixut has been forbidden by the Theomachracy, but the Sovan city's doom is on the mind of every worker in Kereth, and often on their lips—the city's eyes have been closed for months and the regulators are not accustomed to working without Kereth's aid. As its citizens wait for a miracle, the clocks run down, the gauges drop month by month, and the shadows darken in the sleeping city.

## THE GRAND METROPOLIS OF KADAR

The grand metropolis of Kadar is Yugash's capital, and claims to be the oldest city in the Realm of Brass and Shadow (a claim contested by Gulak's capital, Thutot; it is an ongoing source of irritation for Yugash that the rest of the Octet considers Thutot's claim to hold more legitimacy). Nine

times the size of Ot, Kadar serves as the nation's shipping hub and the seat of its political power.

Like Ot, the ancient metropolis is laid out in a series of giant, open discs stacked atop one another, linked by both modern pneumatic lift tubes and ancient access ladders bolted to massive support pillars. Unlike Ot, Kadar totals six tiers in height, and its discs are better than three times the width of the younger patropolis; also unlike Ot, which is a Jade Caste industrial patropolis, Kadar is a moonsilver city of graceful, soaring towers, many of which pierce through two or even three of its stacks; the city's beauty is a source of great pride for Yugash, and in less isolated and more peaceful days, Kadar was a popular pilgrimage site among young romantics from the rest of the Octet.

The metropolis remains in significant turmoil in the wake of Kerok's rise to power, rife with factionalism and secrets. The regulators and preceptors are at the verge of exhaustion—they constantly discover evidence of secret meetings, clandestine communication, and well-hidden conspiracies. These are generally political cliques and alliances forming among the ranks of Kerok's supporters, anti-Kerok elements of the Tripartite, old-guard groups clinging to power, old-guard groups reaching out to Kerok's supporters in secret, disillusioned public adherents of the new order fleeing back to traditionalist factions, and a hundred other permutations of public officials consolidating alliances, changing alliances, or spying on rival alliances. Trying to locate dangerous criminal conspiracies and heresies in the morass is maddening.

Kadar presently has the odd distinction of having one of the worst safety records in the entire Octet—but only

for members of the Tripartite. "Politics make men clumsy," goes the Populat joke, trotted out whenever a plutarch or lector 'accidentally' falls off a catwalk, tumbles into a set of factory gears, or locks himself in a factory just before it is scoured with cleansing steam.

## YUGASHI OF NOTE

### YEVEL, CELEBRANT OF OT

An intellectual and idealist, Yevel is fascinated by the theological mysteries of Creation. Where Kerok is focused on the excursion as a cure to Yugash's material shortages, Yevel is absorbed in questions of the soul—whether the Creation-born possess them, and how they might be added to the Design of Autochthon, primarily. These musings leave the celebrant uneasy, as he knows Kerok well enough to realize that the grand autocrat will stop at nothing to advance Yugash's fortunes.

### UNHESITATINGLY LOYAL WEAPON

#### DEFENDER OF YUGASH, ORICHALCUM CASTE OF KADAR

Among the most decorated heroes of the Elemental War, *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon* is both a peerless soldier and a religious ultraconservative. She is staunchly opposed to Project Razor, believing that Yugash has no right to undo the Seal of Eight Divinities without explicit sanction by the Divine Ministers. However, *Weapon's* loyalty to the state is even more absolute than her religious convictions, and so she has voiced her misgivings to no one. Although normally a citizen of Kadar, she is currently stationed in Ot, overseeing general security for Project Razor.





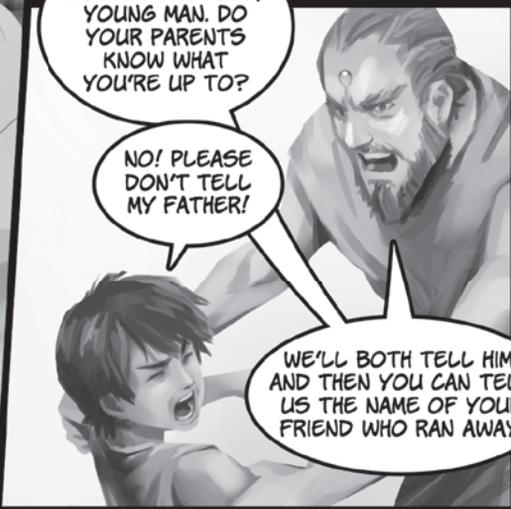
THIS IS THE LIFE.

INDEED IT IS, MY FRIEND. INDEED IT IS.



AHA! I KNEW IT WASN'T RATS GETTING INTO MY FRUIT.

RUN FOR IT!



YOU ARE IN A LOT OF TROUBLE, YOUNG MAN. DO YOUR PARENTS KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO?

NO! PLEASE DON'T TELL MY FATHER!

WE'LL BOTH TELL HIM, AND THEN YOU CAN TELL US THE NAME OF YOUR FRIEND WHO RAN AWAY.



LISTEN, BOY. YOU HAVE TO RUN. RUN TO OUR COUSINS IN THE SPARKING REACHES.

BUT MY FAMILY!

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR THEM. BUT A CHAMPION, TIRELESS FREEDOM ADVOCATE, LIVES AMONGST THEM. SEEK HER OUT. BRING HER BACK. RUN!



GREAT MAKER, PRESERVE US.

# CHAPTER THREE

## WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT WAR

Though the Eight Nations share a caste system, common religion, and certain level of cultural orthodoxy, peace and cooperation remain precious commodities in the Realm of Brass and Shadow. The history of Autochthonia is one scribed in blood, flame and steel, and three of its mighty nations are still defined by the violence and cataclysm of war.

Estasia approaches existence as a great and never-ending battlefield upon which its people must prove themselves again and again, though their dreams of glory are repeatedly stymied by the combined might of their neighbors; Nurad grapples against the encroaching Blight for its very existence, steadily dismantling a history of art and beauty to obtain the raw materials needed to combat its own demise; and Sova, long torn by internal feuds, reels in the wake of the Elemental War and redefines itself according to its new national scars.

### ESTASIA

It would be a simplification to say that all of Estasia is the result of one Exalt's dream, yet *Luminous Exarch* has undoubtedly touched every element of Estasian society. Though *Exarch* abandoned the Unity War—the dream of a conquest to make Autochthonia as one—his nation never truly did, and no one Exalt could ever bring a prideful sneer to the lips of generations of soldiers. Home to the only standing army in Autochthonia, Estasia is possessed of a nationalistic pride and military discipline that has weathered the tempering of burning cities and an identity reforged again and again.

### LAYOUT

Estasia's motion, a wide circuit around the Pole of Metal, constantly takes the nation near the elemental poles. The rapidity of movement causes a great cooling effect, result-



ing in dropping temperatures and a pervasive, perpetual fog rolling across frosted and cracked sub-plates to cling to low-valley settlements. The temperature never drops so low as to become inhospitable, but it remains uncomfortable to the populace—only Kamak is colder. The nation's high-ceiling chambers collect condensation, which drops down constantly in a torrential downpour offering only brief respites. Canyon-like trenches of pipes and corridors lay carved into huge plains of metal and crystal. It is inside these trenches the towns and tram lines of Estasia exist, fighting one another for space and heat and refuge from the damp. Cities break the surface, rising high above the trenches; massive tenement blocks stacked atop one another beside great waterfalls, tall towers topped with spiraled minarets sluicing off the constant water. The cities are shining reflections across the plains and lakes of stagnant water, their sisters and brothers a dim light on the horizon. Few large settlements exist outside of Estasia's cities, the largest being Militat training camps and staging areas to access international tubes and the Reaches. Those settlements defy a long history of annihilation by revanchist Octet armies.

Militat sergeants demand their charges perform push-ups in the ever-present inclement weather; training techniques and technology have long since moved past such a primitive practice, but it is considered a vital element of the Estasian experience. In many ways, this belief is the nation in microcosm—Estasia is doing push-ups in the rain, forever.

## HISTORY

Estasia herself was a diplomat, warrior and adventurer at a time when Creation was savage and untamed. Adopted into the Tiger Warrior army of a vassal of the Solar Queen, she abandoned that charge to help a titan escape doom, charging through the greatest mortal adventure Creation had ever seen. She never forgot her training or her former masters, and spread tales of them into her old age in the new world her people found themselves in.

Estasia returned to lead her people to greatness, reborn as *Luminous Exarch*, the Twice-Exalted. Free of the constraint of mortality, the Champion remembered not only his past life as Estasia, but as a Solar Exalt during the Primordial War, killed in the closing days of the epoch. *Exarch's* Eidolon was not a quiet and humanizing hum of gentle impulses, but a thunderous clarion of manifest destiny. Within a few short years, he had forged his people into a nomadic army, bent on conquest.

## THE UNITY WAR

A simple concept—all of Autochthonia serving the Alchemical Exalted, with *Exarch* as a Champion-Prince, first among equals. As all of Creation was united under one Queen with lesser heroes as vassals, so too would Autochthonia be united under one Prince—and his was the right to rule, as the only soul who had earned Exaltation twice. Under his guidance, the first castes were formed, assigned according to

aptitude and ability: Drudge for menial work, Administrate to oversee them, and the Militat for his grand dream.

Though the Militat performed admirably in battle, they did not know how to adequately rule a conquered settlement. Suffering from widespread logistical problems—having focused so much energy on creating and training an army, Estasia's production base was inadequate to the task of supplying them—the newly-bloodied Militat also succumbed to horrific communication failures. The structure *Exarch* envisioned shattered almost immediately, the army becoming a disorganized horde in larger battles.

Estasians learned a lesson they would be forced to relearn many, many times hence: their armies could never hope to defeat a united Octet, no matter how fervently they trained. Thankfully, Estasia moved away from the other nations before the coalition could press the advantage. With an aftermath of thousands dead and the physical integrity of the eight cities degrading from lack of maintenance, the Unity War's First Campaign came to an end. Repeated attempts during the Second Campaign were hampered by both the growing defenses of enemy cities and the Estasian Champions' passive-aggressive defiance of *Exarch's* dream.

The Third Campaign, or Golden Era, began in 350 DA with *Exarch's* abandonment of the War and restructuring of Estasian society. Stepping down in favor of an Administrate council, Estasia realized they could not conquer their neighbors, but believed themselves to remain the finest nation in the Octet—the fruits of their neighbors belonged to them by rights. With *Exarch's* blessing, Estasia became a reaver state, raiding nations in short-term international wars.

By the time of the conclave in 1991 DA, Estasia stood on the brink of destruction. Culturally stratified for centuries, their ignoring of long-term infrastructure for offensive capability coupled with successful counterattacks by the Octet left many cities (including the ascended *Exarch*) in ruins. The conclave's ceasefire came as a blessing, allowing Estasia to shed their attitude of folly. The Fourth Campaign, or Wise Era, began in 1995 DA with an international non-aggression pact. No more would Estasia raid solely for their own benefit; instead, nations would contract the Militat out to act as a trump card in international wars. The conclave further allowed the Militat a separate caste and soulgem shape; their official rank in Autochthonia's soul hierarchy placed them slightly above the Populat. The caste even kept the sobriquet Clerics of Debok Moom, much to the annoyance of the Theomachracy.

The Fifth Campaign, or Analepsis Era, began in 3890 DA with the annexation of Gulak. Though the annexation failed, Estasians perceived this failure as one of Jarishite leadership. The ancient philosophy of the Unity War sung once more from Lux's lectors, and Estasia declared the non-aggression pact void, touching off an intense international war lasting nearly four centuries. Estasia tried twice more to conquer nations, finding limited success in Sova and Clasat; yet each time, they were ultimately repelled. The Sixth Campaign is the

Modern Era, where the contract state has been re-established in the wake of the disastrous previous epoch.

### CONTRACT STATE

The Unity War is a distant but powerful memory. Estasia has not conducted a full-scale raiding war in nearly five centuries, but the fires of burning cities cast a long shadow into the present. Fear of the Militat—and more specifically, Estasian aggression—still runs rampant throughout the Octet. Centuries of warfare and concentration on the Militat have left Estasia woefully inept at gathering resources, with little in the way of industrial capability and material stockpiles.

The solution is quintessentially Estasian: go to war.

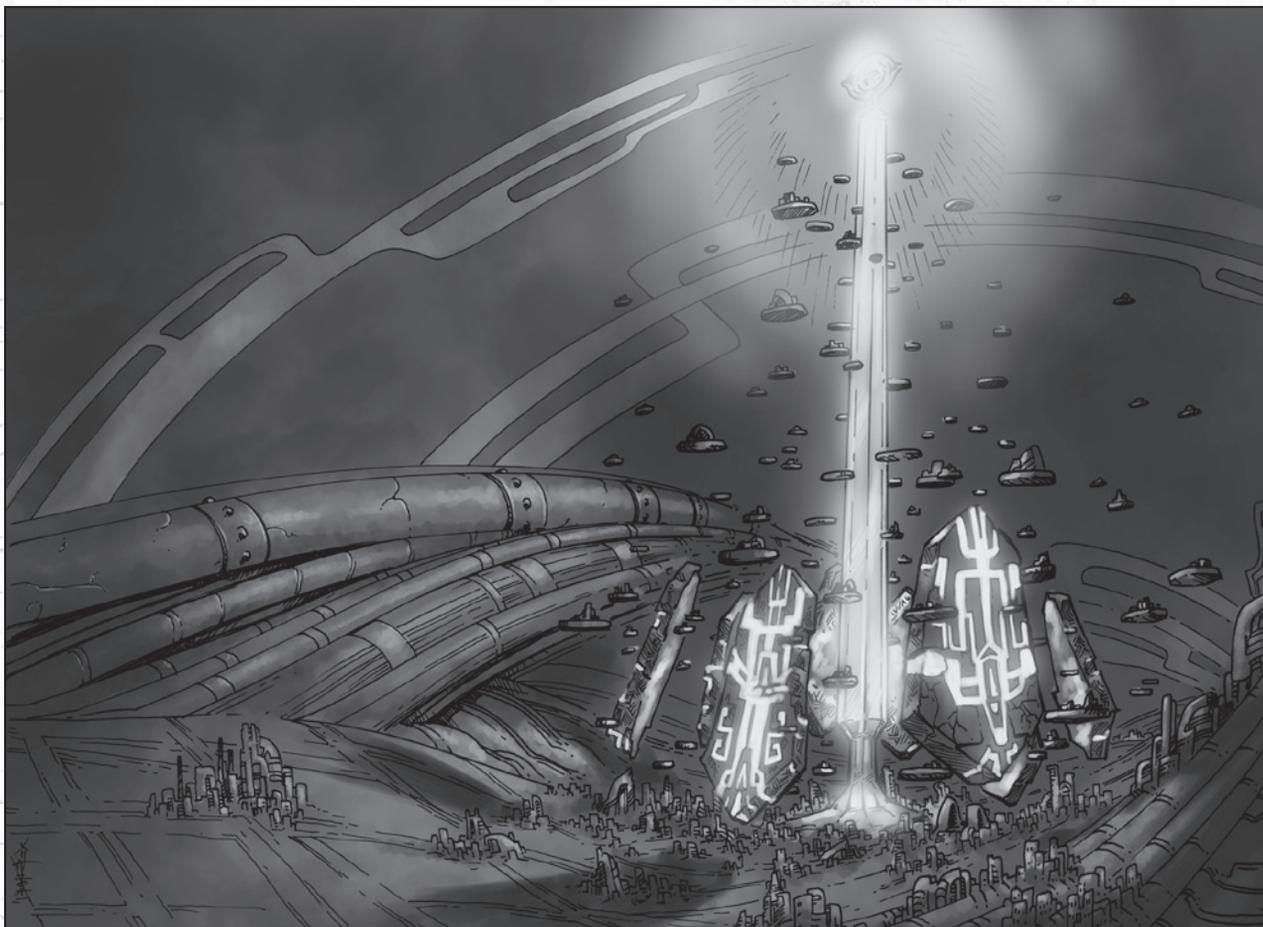
Should two or more entities be in dispute, and should that dispute threaten to grow violent, Estasia's Olgotary solicits bids to intervene and make war on behalf of one side or the other, ending conflicts in exchange for a minimum stipend of resources and right to keep roughly half the worth of plunder. Most such conflicts are international, though the Militat has accepted private contracts from Sodalities of rival cities seeking a leg up on their rivals, heterodox Theomachracies accusing one another of heresy, and Sovan families or Gulaki clades who simply cannot stand one another. At any one time, Estasia has dozens of open contracts, ranging from skirmishes involving a few dozen soldiers to international wars. The Militat abides by contracts with mercenary profes-

sionalism; after all, their nation depends on them keeping their oaths. In this way Estasia fuels their war machine and keeps technological pace with the rest of the Octet.

Resource shortages and biotectonic drift have made contracts more difficult to come by. Though the Militat is highly skilled at rapid and long-range Reach traversal, swift transport is costly and returns on such journeys rarely make up for the investment. In times of austerity, Estasians pride themselves on well-developed—albeit stolen—recycling technologies, surpassing many other nations in the Octet. They also fall back on sweeping raids through the Reaches, annihilating settlements and tunnel folk to reave resources. Even small-scale skirmishes against other nations are not unheard of, though Estasians are careful not to engage in war on multiple fronts or cause too-egregious incidents. Many contracts require forgiveness of past Estasian transgressions, so the Militat thinks little of raiding today those whom they will help tomorrow.

### A MARTIAL RACE

The youth of Estasia dreams of the glorious battles of the Militat. Even other castes value discipline, physical prowess and Valor, considering these the pinnacle of aspiration. Visitors often note a pervasive atmosphere of subtle intimidation: an Estasian tendency to puff one's chest out, gesticulate



fiercely, drop shoulders or clench fists when arguing. Working songs are alarmingly bellicose, and the Populat display gaudy medals and ribbons—denoting exceptional efficiency, organization, or production—on smartly-cut garments. Populat young and old smile and salute Militate marching through the streets, and the Militate salute right back, marching to larger meals and better quarters than those who consider themselves lucky to have encountered a hero today.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

Estasian families are much like the rest of Autochthonia, though parents take great pride in a son or daughter born Militat. Castes here remain as rigid as anywhere else, but nationalism is forever in high favor, so there is little stigma attached to marrying outside one's caste. Children are raised in communal crèches until puberty, then separated and educated according to caste. This early solidarity helps to maintain the close pride of Estasian society. There's little stigma attached to homosexuality, but there is strong social pressure to "settle down" with one of the opposite sex.

Relationships between Militat are strictly forbidden; this prohibition is made palatable by the sex appeal enjoyed by Militate within Estasia. Female Militate are required to file for permission to breed several months in advance, and can expect to be sent back to Cidon on training duty for the gestation period. Love and sex have no place on the battlefield, and a family is acceptable only within the confines of the homeland. This attitude does not prohibit soldiers from inquiring into foreign loves, so long as they are willing to break off the relationship when Estasia calls. Many a lector's ballad has touched on the difficulty and tragedy inherent in doing so. Foreigners who embrace Estasian Virtues are welcomed, but taboos against maintaining an outside cultural identity prohibit un-Estasian expression in any but the most secluded of circumstances. All foreigners must pass a rigorous immigration process if they wish to become Estasian; whether or not this is more difficult than love overcoming the innate sense of superiority, few can say. Consequently, immigration to Estasia remains limited.

## PASSION PLAYS

In the Time of Glory, the Four Virtues had been recognized as holy elements of the cosmos, perfectly embodied by the Unconquered Sun. *Exarch* determined that a superior Drudge caste could only be formed in adherence to the Virtues; despite only half-remembering early treatises on the subject, he commissioned works of art that glorified the militaristic Virtues of Conviction and Valor, so that the Drudge would toil more gladly in service to the Militat.

Modern Estasian art—that which has not been stolen from other countries and mocked to support Estasian nationalism—exists to glorify these Virtuous ideals. After thousands of years of refinement, such displays are subtle, highly abstract depictions of Virtue; a statue of a soldier is considered a crude representation of Valor, whereas the Grieving Militat—a statue of a soldier with a hardened face

marred by grief over the blood on his hands—is considered a national icon, a sophisticated depiction of the struggle between Conviction and Compassion. Indeed, Estasians consider the interplay between Conviction and Compassion, Valor and Temperance—the so-called Warring Virtues—to be high art. Lectors put on elaborately overwrought plays where all four Virtues mix, judging the relative superiority of each. The Last of the Rodent Cavaliers, a famous poem, laments the final charge of the doomed rats' riders who placed Valor above their Temperance and drove the species into extinction through battle losses during the Fifth Campaign. Traditionally, Conviction and Valor are considered the ideals, in accordance with *Exarch's* mandate—the call to war and the needs of Estasia are considered intertwined.

Estasians consider public and open displays of Virtue to be worthy of emulation as long as this does not inhibit one's duty. Honesty is held as paramount and a fundamental element of respect. Some of Estasia's less-popular philosophers have judged this national obsession with wearing one's heart on the cuff to be a subtle rebellion against the longstanding Alchemical influence in society. Estasia's Champions are encouraged to display their Virtues just as the people do. Many find that these displays help to maintain a healthy Clarity.

## CUISINE, DRUGS AND RECREATION

Militate have taken a liking to foreign cuisine over centuries of claiming food stores by conquest; the menu of Estasia is nearly as cosmopolitan as Gulak. Elaborate hookahs holding vaporized ethanol and more exotic inhaled drugs are popular with soldiers and civilians alike, often smoked over a meal; Estasian automats are obscured by hazes of smoke and the din of conversation. Lectors put on frequent plays for the Populat, glorifying battles, heroes and the broken dream of the Unity War. Such plays serve a double purpose of keeping the Populat supporting the military apparatus and keeping alive the faint hope that Estasia may someday bring the Octet together as one.

## RELIGION

The Philosophy of Unity has long been considered heretical by Theomachratic orthodoxy, albeit heresy that is persistent in Estasian society. Prior to the Third Campaign and the homogenization of Autochthonian orthodoxy, it was not uncommon to see puttaras, six-tiered platforms dedicated to individual Alchemical heroes, decorated with artful arrangements of scrap metal and rat-tallow candles. The idea of Alchemical superiority is one that synergizes well with the prevalent attitude of hero-worship; similarly, the easy prowess of the Champions appeals to the Estasian ideal of might making right. Preceptors (and, occasionally, the Adamant Caste) have stamped out numerous cults of veneration over the course of Estasia's history, but they scurry and multiply like cockroaches in the darkness. In the Fifth Campaign, the Militat refused to besiege Thutot during the

Jarish-Estasian occupation, leading to a decimation of their ranks by infuriated Venatore and contributing significantly to the failure of the entire endeavor. Adjudicator justice is swift and brutal, and like the rest of Estasia, conducted with a distinct military air.

## GOVERNMENT

Since the Disharmonious Rebellion of the Fifth Campaign, no Estasian outside the regulators, preceptors, Vicar or Militat are legally allowed any training with weapons, aside from bare-fisted practice of martial arts. In the past, the Militat trained Populat levies as a rough sort of home guard, but this is no longer the case. Yet Estasian society has not adapted well to this change, being so focused on physical might as a measure of one's worth. Regulators must regularly break up the fight clubs that spring up in factories between shifts.

There are few Lumpen in this hard nation. Instead of using tattoos to mark social outcasts, citizens who violate minor regulations are flogged or flayed, then ordered to perform particularly dangerous duties; successful completion means the stigma of their offense is removed. Exile does not exist in Estasia; throughout the centuries, the leaders of the nation have never ruled out conquering other nations with a cultural victory, and they have long feared that casting off their criminals on a foreign nation would irreparably obviate that option. Those who would normally face exile for their crimes are soul-broken, forced to become slaves to the state. Estasia's non-aggression pacts do not cover extradition; many a criminal has simply fled the nation prior to the discovery of the enormity of their crimes.

## THE PATROPOLIS OF LUX, THE ILLUMINATED CAPITAL

Were Lux solid, he would resemble an octagonal pyramid, his eight sides studded with minarets, sloping streets and thousands of landing platforms. The patropolis, like the Alchemical that preceded it, favors splendor over simplicity. The patropolis's eight sides—each a thick polyhedral wedge—float thousands of feet apart, orbiting a slender spire of pure orichalcum miles above Estasia's chill metal expanses. The spire houses the core systems of Lux, wirelessly transmitting power to the Municipal Charms of the wedges; they also broadcast several audio stations, hosted by various animating intelligences within the spire and by avatar-fragments of Lux himself.

Having grown separately for millennia, no facet of the pyramid is precisely alike, and they would not fit together were Lux to attempt joining them. One wedge is visibly smaller than the others, having been destroyed, scavenged and rebuilt over centuries. No walkways or tram tubes connect the wedges; instead, paramagnetic beams extend from the spire to gently hurl individuals and cargo from specially-marked ports on one side to another. This curious feature has defined much of Estasian fashion—besides the expected

sharp-cut military style, clothing tends towards sleek outfits studded with pouches, sealed pockets and belt loops. The patropolis himself boasts that he has never dropped anyone, though he allows individuals he disapproves of to experience brief moments of free-fall to remind them just whom they inhabit. Rumors of broken corpses littering the plain around Lux pervade Estasian culture.

In the final years of warfare before the conclave in 1991 DA, saboteurs damaged the core spire of Lux, preventing the patropolis from properly committing to the city's defensive Charms and allowing a Jarishite army to march. Undeterred, the patropolis dropped an orbiting wedge on them as they dared to approach his spire. The battle-standards, soulgems and uniforms recovered from the corpses of the destroyed army were ensconced in a museum on another wedge. Over the next few centuries, plundered national treasures from each of the Octet became represented in public museums on other sides, subject to explicit mockery from the citizens of Lux. The items traditionally await a healthy ransom of resources from other nations, but they serve in the meantime as a salve for Estasia's wounded pride. Today, the Wedge-That-Fell continues to be rebuilt, albeit slowly—Estasians are a people who look to the past, and the Fell is a highly-visible symbol of Estasian might, in its own way. The Halls of the Conquered are a significant site of tourism within Estasia; visitors are encouraged to leave graffiti and derogatory remarks around the heritage of other nations.

Like the Militat, Lux itself consumes a notable amount of Estasia's total national resources. The geomancy necessary to support Lux's broadcasting and paramagnetic lift web is highly consumptive. Lux is inefficient in his splendor, but the patropolis is a hypocritical display tolerated in a nation that prides itself on austerity. Like the Alchemical Exalted as a whole, Lux is an emotional outlet for Estasia, the most efficient implementation of an inherently inefficient design, an intense focus on a golden promise for the future.

## NOTABLE CITIZENTRY

### SEBAST, SUPREME AUTOCRAT

A tall man with long, golden hair, Sebast is both autocrat of Lux and supreme autocrat of Estasia. He deems himself vestigial in both roles. As caretaker of a largely autonomous city, Sebast is acutely aware that the Alchemical refuses to release control of himself to the populace; as caretaker of the nation, he cannot take actions disapproved of by the regulator strategoi, who maintain a status quo rapidly becoming untenable. He might be less upset were he not a man of Conviction, but he is such a man, an iconoclast in the finest Estasian tradition. Sebast dreams of a cultural conquest, where his nation's values of austerity prove the solution to Autochthonia's resource crisis. Such grand dreams are nothing besides the Unity War of old, and the entirety of Estasian culture is focused on the Valor in the superiority of the Militat. Aware of the deep irony of how the two lauded

Virtues have trapped his nation, Sebast is considering solutions from outside Estasia, in the form of foreign nationals. In his darkest thoughts, he ponders the ramifications of destroying his beloved nation in order to save it.

### RAMAHU, MILITAT EVERYMAN

Every scale of the Militat has one—the heart of the team, the soldier who knows everyone’s name, someone equal parts lector and chaplain and warrior. Ramahu numbers in their ranks, without a doubt: a gregarious fellow, ready with a smile or a bawdy story or a recipe for rat stew that beats anything you’ve ever tasted. It’s a lie. For almost two millennia, *Instantaneous Transmission of Judgment* has been the eyes and ears of the Ministers within the Militat, a hidden blade pressed at the throat of the legacy of the most dangerous and deluded Champion of the original eight. Every decade, his identity perishes in a spectacular manner, and a new soldier surfaces nearby. After two thousand years, camaraderie has warped the mission of the Operative. He no longer has it in him to accurately report to the Ministers the danger Estasia’s consumptive philosophy poses to Autochthon, and will act decisively to protect his adopted brethren.

### HONOR-BOUND ODALISQUE, ORICHALCUM CASTE OF CIDON

It is considered the highest honor to train under *Odalisque*; for generations, her purview has been tactical analysis, teaching stratagems both innovative and time-tested to Militate and Venatore. When a student answers a question incorrectly, a tendrill snakes out of the Exalt, tipped with a superheated die stamp that sears the poor pupil with a glyph indicating his specific folly. Having a great number of glyphs causes one to be mocked and ridiculed for their lack of tactical acumen, but none escape the die of *Odalisque*. Her pupils have been marked for glory, and a majority of them have gone on to grace the Evocat.

## THE MILITAT

In much of Autochthonia, “careersoldier” is a misnomer. Armies are assembled from citizen levies; the Populat are allowed to volunteer for militia training during free hours in exchange for greater freedoms and more rations. They’re provided with mass-produced weaponry and commanded by regulators, most of whom have seen little combat. They defer to Alchemicals with battle experience and ancient tactical manuals. Their wars are crude, brutal affairs.

The Militat outshine these pale armies. Their march is the seasoned lockstep of a lifetime of work, not a few hours of scavenged training after a day monitoring pressure valves. Their trilliant-cut soulgems are bright as blood. Theirs is a caste born for battle; they are the Clerics of Debok Moom, the mortal lords of war in Autochthonia, with a storied history stretching back to the dawn of the nations. Hardened by millennia of combat, the modern Militat is perhaps the most elite fighting force the Octet has ever seen. It is lamentable

## LOCUST WARRIORS

Should Estasia breach the Seal of Eight Divinities, Creation will doubtlessly suffer a brutal Locust Crusade—until the Exalted get involved. The Militat make a poor occupying force, but they excel at lightning raids; rather than conquering cities and reworking their basic structure to facilitate a steady material flow, they will simply plunder. If allied with the Jadeborn, the two find their battle tactics to be astonishingly synergistic. They are not prepared for the setbacks. Creation’s Exalted fight with powers and tactics Militat have never seen or trained for. Estasia’s finest can learn to fight open-terrain battles with losses and practice, but no amount of training can prepare them to walk into a Dragon-Vortex Attack or face an invincible Solar blademaster capable of dispatching entire Assemblies. Even specialized mortal armies can beat the Militat at their own game of highly-trained, highly-mobile forces; nations such as Lookshy or the Marukani can force them to a stalemate. A more likely scenario would be Estasia allowing another nation to breach the Seal, then breaking their longtime code of conduct to besiege the breaching metropolis, reaving Creation-wrought resources and forcing the nation into a war on two fronts. The Militat have trained in Autochthonian battle tactics for millennia; venturing away from an area of strength and certainty makes little sense to Estasian sensibilities.

that so much of their fighting prowess is focused on other nations rather than the threats of the Reaches.

## THE CASTE

The Militat caste (pl: Militate, collectively: the Militat) is not only a collection of martial souls, but a conglomeration of disparate groups oriented around the caste itself, the spotlight of Estasian society. Virtually every interest group within Estasia has a hand within the Militat, though it might be fairer to say the opposite is true. In the modern era, the Militat consists of not only the caste, but elite soldiers called Evocat (pl. Evocate, collectively: the Evocat) and the regulators, called Venator, who act as an officer corps (pl. Venatore, collectively: the Venator). The Sodalities, recognizing the importance and autonomy of the caste but unwilling to give up power, train a Vicar (pl: Vicare, collectively: the Vicar), to work alongside the Militat.

The vast majority of the Militat consists of what Creation would consider to be medium infantry, though Estasia makes much finer distinctions than that. Infiltration, subterfuge and espionage are generally conducted by Champion As-

## CHAMPIONS OF WAR

Estasia's social structure allows Alchemical Exalted to join the Militat regardless of talent or previous caste association. Roughly half of Estasia's Chosen have done so, allowing the caste to field a great number of combat-outfitted Champions. Despite this, they're rarely assigned a controlling role and generally do not engage enemy levies. The most dangerous threat to Militate are opposing Champions, as mortals are no match for Essence-based weaponry or weaving. Militat Exalted are deployed in the vanguard alongside the greenest troops; Charm Arrays tend towards high-mobility assault configurations, designed to blow past blockades and formations to directly engage enemy Exalted. This allows the mortal armies to clash on an even footing—a clash the Militat is likely to win by dint of superior troops. This Champion-neutralizing strategy often begins long before the battle, with infiltrators attempting to assassinate or disable known weavers and warriors.

semblies or, more rarely, Militate hand-picked for the task by the Venator.

## THE GUNS OF ESTASIA

The glorious days of the Rodent Cavaliers are over, the famed riding rats having passed into extinction. Where Valor has failed the Militat, technology makes up the difference. Today, the heirs of the Cavaliers are one-man skimmercraft mounting Essence shock pikes; their fleet ensures the Militat dominates the battlefield in all three dimensions.

Estasian battledress differs significantly from the repurposed regulator uniforms of artificial leather used by other armies. A reinforced, broad-shouldered upper buff jacket displays a few armored plates; a skirt of thin metal and thick material turns away blows while allowing for maximum mobility. Signal relays have wide, reflective dishes mounted on their jackets and tall banners adorning their uniforms; Evocate are allowed battledress or powered armor of white reflective material and crested helms.

Estasian military equipment is considered perfect, cast in ancient factories from dies crafted centuries ago with painstaking care. Much of the equipment finds perfection improved upon by Elemental Benedictions (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, p. 187), depending on mission parameters, deployment circumstances and individual preference. Though much of Estasia's military support technology is proprietary, the nation has taken to importing great numbers of weaponry from the patropolis of Arat (see p. 25), including the Essence cannons issued to heavy arms units and power armor issued to veteran and

special units. But these are simply tools; Estasian battle doctrine teaches that the strength of an army is in the warrior, not in the weapon.

## AGOGE

Every Militat fights. Every one.

Militate begin training shortly after weaning, when they make the transition to specialized rations treated with synthetic hormones that promote muscle development. Their selection comes earlier; Militat souls are culled from the same pool as the Populat, as the caste values traits of obedience and perfection through repetition. At the same time an infant is spiked with a soulgem, Vicar Surgeons implant a tiny jewel in the skull behind the left ear, which acts as a base for encrypted transceiver installations later in life.

Though educated in the same crèche as children of all castes, Militate are separated even before the Populat-Tripartite divide, singled out for historical classes and grueling physical trials. Weapons training only comes after an individual's thirteenth birthday, when society deems them mature enough to comprehend the deadly power of the Essence cannon or crossbow. A Militat's first weapon comes with a solemn, private ceremony: they receive a sword or crossbow that has already shed blood, along with a kiss and a punch from an elder Militat. The kiss shows the young Militat the rich rewards society showers upon them; the punch reminds them such treasures do not come freely.

Militat cadets travel to the metropolis of Cidon, where they train in frigid lakes and the ubiquitous torrential downpours. Leading sorties against polar mutants and tunnel folk grants them a taste of battle first-hand. Frequent surgeries install various minor biothaumaturgical enhancements, conditioned muscle responses, and subvocalized communication technologies into the young Militat. They learn the codes of war, and it is said that a Militat is not trained until they know the philosophy of Unity. Only after six years spent in Cidon are they considered ready for assignment into Militat battalions, assimilated into the caste proper.

Elders of the caste who are unable to maintain the grueling physical demands of soldiering find great solace in acting as aides to lectors, galvanizing Populat youth with glorious tales of war and Estasian superiority. Like many elderly of Authochthonia, there is no shame in being unable to keep up physically, so long as service is maintained spiritually.

## PACIFISM

Outright refusal to soldier occurs infrequently at best. Physicality enters into the situation only rarely; Estasian surgical techniques and developmental biology have enabled the caste to normalize physiology at a relatively high level of athletic performance. It is not a question of being unable to soldier, but refusing to. Militate are indoctrinated from birth to accept war and battle as their birthright, and after five millennia the training regimens are nothing short of exhaustively comprehensive, capable of breaking down a

huge variety of child psychologies and reforging them into a warrior's soul. Even those iconoclasts who prove resistant to authority have made superior—if unorthodox—tacticians in the codices, provided they're granted sufficient freedom to pursue their own path.

Stubborn would-be pacifists have their uses, depending on the nature of their objection. All armies require logistical officers, cooks, attaches and camp guards. The vast majority considers assignation of these duties to be an insult—and rightly so—but occasionally those placed in mainly non-combatative roles are purposed for such. There is a certain idealism to be found in defense of others, an edification of courage possessed in knowing one may fight rather than one must fight. If Militate are unwilling to accept the blatantly mercenary role of the caste, the Venator urges them to find guardianship of a caravan or bivouac more to their liking. Such occupations are hardly bloodless—they will still be, on occasion, called from the reserves—but they risk neither philosophical resistance nor the danger of a resolve broken on the battlefield.

The most ardent souls must display a true Conviction of spirit, one which Estasia cannot ignore without outright hypocrisy. The exceedingly rare members of the caste who will not participate in army actions are encouraged to emigrate, particularly to Gulak or Clasat, nations with whom Estasia enjoys close ties and who harbor communities of expatriates who chose Compassion and Temperance over Conviction and Valor. If they refuse to emigrate, they find themselves ostracized in a society that refuses to banish them. Often, they make their way out to join the tunnel folk on the fringes of Estasia. And if they are accidentally lanced by cavalier skiffs during a raid on the tunnels, it is regarded as a deeply unfortunate tragedy, for surely the Militat would never target their wayward fellows.

## THE EVOCAT

After years of service and travel between dozens of cities, and after demonstrating their courage in contract and campaign alike, Militate are given the opportunity to join the elite of the caste. This is an honor granted not by the Venator, but by Evocate, who choose the finest and most cunning soldiers to join the elite. Their training regimen exhausts even the most excessively-drilled Militat; lessons on strategy and philosophy fill the life of an off-duty warrior. Many receive training to refine their senses down to enlightened instinct, resulting in a dramatic improvement in combat prowess. Many Evocat awaken their Essence. They are accorded a stark-white uniform, and many eschew the service ribbons and pins beyond denotation of rank—recording their various accolades would take up half the buff jacket.

## THE TRIPARTITE

Tripartate from other nations express shock at how bold Militate are, but after five millennia Estasia considers the Militat a de facto fourth wing of the Tripartite. The Ologotary respectfully disagrees. Both they and the Sodal-

ities have representatives inside the caste; historically, the Theomachracy has deeply protested the Militat's organic monopoly on armed conflict, citing the role of the preceptors as enforcers of religious orthodoxy, and has long denounced the Unity War as borderline heresy. Three hundred years ago, tensions came to a head during the Disharmonious Rebellion, consuming Estasia in waves of fervor and pitting much of the religious Populat and the Theomachracy against the largely secular Militat, who had long been of the belief that they were the blessed of Debok Moom and largely above Autochthonian orthodoxy. The Theomachracy attempted to overthrow the government and install their high celebrant as supreme autocrat. The preceptors and Populat, armed though they were, were no match for the Militat. Most of the leaders of the revolt were executed; the top clerics and several celebrants were exiled into the Reaches (and subsequently hunted down). Yet resentment still simmers today; though lectors are occasionally grudgingly repurposed as battlefield chaplains, the Theomachracy refuses a significant presence in the Militat.

Inside the Ologotary and the Sodalities, there is significant strife between those chosen to serve with the Militat and those chosen to secure the homeland. Service with the Militat means glory and respect; service in Estasia means a lifetime of hearing the Populat give that glory and respect to others. Though equal rank and privileges are afforded to the regulators and Sodalities regardless of service, there persists a pervasive stigma in the Populat that those who didn't make the Venator or the Vicar simply couldn't cut it. This insinuation infuriates Estasian regulators and Sodalts, generating a rivalry that persists even in the highest echelons of power.

## THE VENATOR

Exarch learned his lesson well; unlike a Solar general, he had no Dragon-Blooded officers to relay his orders and edify his troops. He solved this by taking the best and brightest from the newly-formed Administrate caste and teaching them what he knew of war, creating a corps of officers and leaders to aid him in his conquests. Until the conclave that solidified the castes, the Venator were part of the Militat, hero-generals transferred from the Administrate when they showed talent at troop logistics and strategic insight. Little has changed after the homogenization of Autochthonian orthodoxy. During regulator aptitude testing, students are examined for strategic insight and other elements that make for leaders of men. The Ologotary proclaims the testing process to be fair, with no favoritism in the decision of whom is chosen for standard regulator duty versus whom is chosen for the Venator. This is a suspiciously specific denial. In truth, there is a great deal of corruption in the choosing, and the Luminors who make the decisions live their lives rather comfortably. This can have great repercussions for decades to come; as the leaders of the Militat and members of the Ologotary, the Venator hold enormous

power and influence. The ranks of the autocracy are almost universally former generals, who may owe their status to a food stipend or sexual favor decades earlier.

### THE VICAR

Unwilling to cede power and prestige to the Militat, the Sodalities in Estasia have evolved alongside the military apparatus. The Sodalities enjoy the roles of specialists within a battalion, defending their niche in Autochthonian society. Vicar Luminors string up lamps in a temporary base camp; Conductors range outward guarded by Militat squads, tapping conduits and ensuring supply lines keep flowing so that Harvesters may prepare an evening's rations.

Inside the caste, the lines between Sodalt and Militat blur considerably. Of the Sodalities involved in the Militat, the Surgeons and the Conductors have both seen their roles diminish greatly compared to the unquestioned authority enjoyed by guilds of other nations. Every Militat is required to have an extensive knowledge of Reaches and urban travel, as well as knowledge of basic first aid and ambulance protocols; many veterans are familiar with the logistics in setting up supply lines and have accompanied enough Conductors to recognize conduits suitable for emergency tapping. The Surgeons, at least, still have a monopoly on battlefield surgery. Luminors and Harvesters exist largely independently of the caste. Scholars find their workload lessened dramatically by training soldiers to aid in maintenance of power armor, aerial skiffs or storm hammers. It is a state of affairs that has long infuriated the Estasian Sodalt leadership, but the Populat celebrate their war heroes, and the Sodalities reap benefits by association.

### RANKS

Unlike the regulator officer corps, Militate are not organized by abstract rank, but by experience. The most inexperienced of them are marched in the vanguard, where they face the fiercest defense. Those that survive the brutal culling of several engagements can expect to be recognized as veterans, and as such, eventually be considered for the Evocat. Most are simply content to march in the middle. The Evocat march in last, only if other Militate fail to meet battle objectives. This practice is not merely a matter of rewarding elite soldiers for their service; it allows the Militat to hold the best warriors in reserve, so that the enemy will be forced to battle the pride of Estasia weakened by previous waves. Other nations struggle to turn flanks in Autochthonia's tight corridors and tram bottlenecks, hewing to traditional tactics of placing their finest soldiers and Champions in the forefront of an assault. Conversely, the Militat, experts in Reach traversal, position their forces for coordinated and varied urban offensives.

Instilled from early childhood, the discipline of Militate is near absolute. In combat, they obey every order without question; as such, the Venator can use any mix of Militate as skirmishers and still retain order in the ranks. In the past,

discipline was enforced by decimations and the commanded murder of pet rats in childhood, but no longer. The modern Militat has progressed to the point where such techniques are seen as crude at best (and rats are a precious commodity in the modern era).

Tactically, the Militat excels at closing fast into melee, breaking the enemy's Conviction with their Valor. The caste relies on speed and skill to win the day. History has proven the Militat to be far better suited at taking positions than holding them, due at least in part to the emphasis on mobility. When they do adopt camps, fortifications are largely temporary; to create a permanent defensive structure in the volatile Reaches or the uncertain politics of a foreign nation is tantamount to lining up rats for the slaughter.

### HARDER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER

How do you beat a dedicated military in a world where nobody has time to train? Historically, three flaws have kept the Militat from fulfilling *Exarch's* dream: brittle discipline, the impregnability of municipalities and the threat of powerful, numerous opponents. Militate are trained to obey their superiors in all things and not to think for themselves, making them slow to adapt to changing battlefield conditions without constant guidance. If Venatore and Evocate are eliminated and the chain of command disrupted, entire forces are left in severe danger of collapsing into a leaderless rout; with less experienced troops unable to step up and take command of the situation, the army swiftly becomes disoriented and confused. This weakness is well-known, accepted as a trade-off for unsurpassed discipline. The second is the sheer defensive might of Alchemical cities; the mortal Militat is no match for Charms the size of city blocks. The third is the gamble on Militat Champions being able to neutralize extreme threats; if facing an opponent too strong for a mortal to fight but too numerous for a Champion to beat in a timely manner, such as a horde of gremlins, the Militat is looking at heavy mortal losses. Modern times have given way to a fourth, more insidious threat—the strategy's fundamental reliance on replenishment of numbers lost in battle. With Autochthonia's drop in live births, the traditional culling is rapidly ceasing to be a viable tactic. A schism is currently developing among Venatore, between the innovative tacticians who recognize this problem and the traditionalist strategoi who cleave to 5,000 years of tradition.

## NURAD

Airships and aircars cruise the night skies of Nurad, their searchlights like golden needles stabbing downward into the dark. At zenith, the sky-piercing metropolis of Wisant glows like a dying moon. Cities and towns flicker below like scattered embers—sparks from the frozen flame of Perygra, the dead city entombed in crystal. A few more sparks vanish every night. Darkness looms.

Once the greatest of the progressive nations, Nurad pushed the boundaries of what could and should be done by the people of the Machine God. Its Sodalities educated the Populat, reconstructed rice from a single grain and pigs from a sere knuckle-bone using the Genesis Arts, 'improved' mortals with prosthetics and biogenetic enhancements, and crafted advanced material intelligences equaling the agents of the Great Maker. Nurad's rise was legendary. So was its fall. It took thousands of years for the stigma of the Perygra disaster to fade. Now, as Nurad creeps closer to the horror of the Blight, that shame returns. Many citizens feel Nurad is being punished for past sins. Some believe they must work and pray harder to atone for their ancestors' deeds. Others embrace their doom, surrendering to the Void.

Nurad has turned its back on both the past and the future. Appalled by the consequences of their theurgic experimentation, its people chose stasis, rejecting progress in favor of safe, comfortable stagnation. Now, faced by the destructive, corruptive power of the Blight, they must rise from their stupor and act.

### LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPE

Physically, Nurad is the most open of the Eight Nations. Almost all of Nurad lies within one especially large oblate spheroidal chamber almost a hundred miles in diameter and thirty miles high. Dozens of mile-wide columns, festooned with conduits and crawling with living machines, pierce layers of wispy clouds to support the distant dome of the sky-ceiling.

The floor of the nation-chamber is a labyrinthine landscape of metal domes, ridges, valleys and mesas. When the rains come, flash floods transform canyons into canals and depressions into lakes. Forests of steam vents throng with flocks of vaporous elementals; freestanding spires serve as airship docking posts. At the chamber's rim, the floor rises toward verticality in ever-steepening terraces of brass, copper, bronze and steel.

Nurad's movement through the Reaches often brings it adjacent to the Pole of Steam. For days or weeks, the air grows hot and muggy, and the upper atmosphere boils with thunderheads that drizzle a constant warm rain or flare up into sudden typhoons. Then Nurad moves on, and monsoon season gives way to cool, dry air and wefts of cirrus clouds.

Where the various component chambers of other nations are in constant subtle flux, drifting toward and away from each other in accordance with Autochthon's theoseismology,

Nurad's geography is fixed. This protects the nation from earthquakes and other instabilities. Structures rise taller and thinner; trams follow more elegant lines, not needing anti-quake safety features to bulk them out. Economic planners can calculate travel times precisely, maximizing the efficiency of intra-national trade and giving Nurad an unrivaled distribution network.

Three of Nurad's major cities stand near the nation's periphery. Pneumatic trams and monorails run between these cities, with spur lines branching away toward towns and infrastructural sites—many of which are now all but deserted as a result of the resource crisis. Funiculars lead up into the high edge-terraces; elevators climb support columns to outposts located miles above ground level. A few trams even extend to the center of the chamber, carrying researchers and pilgrims to the crystal-encased ruin of Perygra.

Nurad's fourth major city, Wisant, hangs suspended from the faraway sky-ceiling. So remote is it from the lands below that it appears as nothing more than a distant light, its fluctuations marking shift-transitions and bringing an echo of day and night to the entire nation.

### HISTORY

The founder Nurad gathered her disciples among the nomads of the Southeast. They passed through three of Autochthon's great nation-chambers before finding one sufficiently spacious for their temperament. There they spread across the virgin metal landscape, founding towns and exploring the marvels of the Machine God's body.

Upon Nurad's death, her soul was reborn into the Orichalcum Caste Alchemical *Perfected Hydraulic Grace*. Magnificent and austere, *Grace* had little concern for governance, which she left to the Five Mechanics' Guilds. She focused instead on the study of Essence manipulation and the theotechnical underpinnings of the Great Maker, knowledge she used to construct sophisticated factories and cities for her people.

*Grace* ascended to metropolitan status in 622 DA. After decades of communing with the Guilds and devising advanced Municipal Charms to aid them, she withdrew from the world into the recursive mathematical dreams of Clarity. Lacking an overarching governing ideology, her Alchemical successors had their hands full dealing with the distractions of war and a dangerously independent-minded populace.

The Conclave in 1991 DA led to a generation of strife as the Guilds—now the Sodalities—chafed over losing authority to the "know-nothings" of the Olgotary, many of whom had been Guild members more talented in administration than theurgy. But after the transition, Nurad's fusion of efficient bureaucracy, social drive toward progress and new channels of communication to other nations' Sodalities proved fruitful, opening up new fields of thaumaturgy and theurgic science. In this, the First Progressive Era, Nurad's Sodalities mastered the so-called Elder Arts—Genesis crafting, biothaumaturgical prosthetics, material intelligences, mind-to-machine



links and other innovations. Nurad became a wonderland of ecological and cybernetic magic: a place of gardens and farms where Creation's flora and fauna thrived, where man-made automata labored on behalf of mortals, and where people communicated with one another and with Perygra herself by thought alone.

In 2309 DA, Perygra was destroyed by a theurgic experiment gone horribly wrong. The shaken Tripartite split over what to do next. Some sought only to regulate theotechnical research; others fearfully struggled to roll back the work of the entire era. The reactionaries won amid riots, coup attempts and a civil war that demolished centuries of infrastructure and purged all official records of the Elder Arts.

In the subsequent Silent Millennium, theotechnical research was banned and manufacturing restricted to products extant at the time of the Conclave. The reconstructed plant and animal species were purged; citizens with engineered mutations were largely sterilized. Some progressive-minded citizens left for other nations—primarily Gulak, but also Claslat, Sova and Yugash—while others formed hidden research cells, often under the aegis of supportive cities.

The Second Progressive Era began in 3633 DA with the ascension of Wisant, whose progressive views were akin to Perygra's. Strife between progressives and traditionalists cut short this new flowering of innovation; Wisant rejected the National Tripartite Assembly's research ban for several

theotechnical fields, sparking the Shattered Lamp War of 3850-3855 DA (Wisant lost). Afterwards, repeated raids by Estasia, Gulak and Sova left the weakened nation destitute. Nurad has spent the last millennium recuperating, only for its resources to be swallowed by the approaching Blight.

## CULTURE

The folk of other nations view the Nuradi as stolid and phlegmatic. Their garments are plain, even severe; their cuisine is simple, concerned more with ritual than flavor or texture. But with the resource crisis hurting morale, some cities are making changes. New clothing combines cheaper materials with brighter colors and extravagant cuts. Nutrient paste is laced with unfamiliar flavors and vivid coloring agents.

Nuradi sports make use of the nation's wide-open spaces. By and large, the Nuradi are hardy and athletic, and those with a taste for fitness prefer to exercise out of doors. Popular activities include terrace climbing, hang-gliding, and aircar and watercraft regattas—though vehicular races dwindle as racing craft are refitted for more important tasks, sold to other nations or stripped for parts. These sports serve the secondary function of putting more eyes on the areas outside Nurad's cities and towns, increasing the likelihood that problems—conduit leaks, raids by foreign nations and tunnel people, or even gremlin incursions—will be spotted early.

Detecting trouble in the midst of a race earns the athlete more acclaim than victory.

In addition to spectacles produced by the lectors, Nurad's Sodalities arrange festivals to showcase the wonders of their arts. The Harvester Festival is the best-loved of these events, as attendees may partake of all manner of unusual foodstuffs, but there are always those drawn to displays of the peculiar and esoteric devices that other Sodalities demonstrate at their respective events. Each festival is accompanied by a mystery play focusing on its Sodality's duties and role in Autochthonian life.

Noteworthy elements of Nuradi urban architecture include tall airship-docking spires, gaslamp streetlights, open courtyards to catch Wissant's light and cisterns to gather rain. Courtyards contain rock gardens of gravel and sand left over from Shastari stone-carving. Artificial waterfalls feed into tranquil meditation pools. Sadly, most of these have run dry.

### NURADI NOMADS

The labyrinthine landscape of Nurad's vast nation-cavern has allowed nomadic bands to thrive at various points in the nation's history. This was prevalent thousands of years ago, when several of the tribes that had followed the founder Nurad sought to maintain their old way of life, but governmental efforts to maximize prayer productivity have suppressed their numbers and independence.

Some of those original tribes remain extant, coming and going between the wild parts of Nurad and the nearer Reaches. They are known as gateway people to differentiate them from the tunnel folk. Some of their bands retain a continuity of culture going back thousands of years. Gateway people view themselves as a breed apart, superior to their sedentary cousins in Nurad's cities and towns. They often steal from towns or dismantle parts of Nurad's landscape and flee to the Reaches with their loot, then return to Nurad when resources grow scarce or wild machines become too dangerous.

Gateway culture is distinctive in many ways. They maintain long oral histories which they recite in their rituals. They give little heed to traditional Autochthonian dogma; most worship a trinity of Domadamod, Noi and Ku. Many tribes use naturally formed gears, cogs and similar components as a sort of found money. Called biawat, this sacral currency is usually sewn onto ritual garments that are exchanged or transferred, such as wedding robes, pact-forming sashes and funereal shrouds.

New nomad groups crop up in the wake of wars and disasters as the dispossessed wander into the nation's wild places to live off of what they can tap from its conduits. This lifestyle is far safer than that of the tunnel people, but it's frowned upon by the Tripartite Assemblies. These bands rarely last long; once things get back to normal, most of their members desire to return to society, and those who don't are easily dealt with by the regulators.

In Nuradi art, nomads serve as a symbol for the nation's strong and self-sufficient roots, as well as the wild streak that good Autochthonians must suppress. They are noteworthy subjects of music and theater; they also crop up as symbolic figures in patriotic posters and other visual art.

### PORTRAITS OF RUST

Nurad has a long artistic history, with museums full of religious and secular artwork encompassing five millennia of aesthetic development. But Nurad's leaders are so desperate to appear in control of the resource crisis that they have ordered the Harvesters to recycle it all. Graceful antique mechanisms are put back into service, only to burn out within days. Mosaics are stripped of fragments of valuable metals. Paintings are torn from their frames. Air recyclers preserving ancient, decaying materials are removed. Even lamps have been confiscated, smothering exhibits in darkness.

New visual art—both official posters exhorting the people toward strength and efficiency, and graffiti of every stripe—is caught in an expressionist phase. Images are distorted; portraits show their subjects in the grip of powerful emotions.

In the performing arts, music and performance grow ever more exaggerated. Drama has given way to melodrama, comedy to farce, tragedy to *grand guignol*. Lectors now experiment with minimalism simply to catch an over-stimulated audience's attention.

The nation's signature musical instrument, the pyrophone, is suffering a precipitous decline in use. Because its metal components and flammable gases both have other applications, many have already been dismantled and recycled. Others have been refitted as steam organs. Also popular are various stringed and brass instruments, as well as several percussive instruments made of glass or crystal.

### RELIGION AND POLICY

In matters both spiritual and secular, Nurad stands poised on a fulcrum. Where Jarish looks backward and Yugash forward, Nurad has swung between those poles over the centuries.

The founder Nurad spoke in glowing terms of the power of theotechnical progress. Reincarnated as *Perfected Hydraulic Grace*, and then as the city Perygra, she continued to expound upon the need to move forward, to become greater, to achieve more. Her words were written into the nation's *Tome of the Great Maker*, defining her nation's theological development.

In the wake of the Perygra disaster, fears ran high among Nurad's people, as did the desire to do something—anything—about what had happened. A coalition of high-ranking clerics collaborated on revisions to the *Tome of the Great Maker*, issuing new commandments regarding the inherent sinfulness of progress and of meddling with those arts that seemed most perilous.

Many in the Tripartite called this a betrayal of Nurad's ambitions; that the lesson was to avoid such errors while

advancing further on the road of progress, and to abandon that progress meant Perygra had died in vain. And as weeks turned into months and years, the nation's people wanted things to return to normal. In response, many sections excised from the *Tome of the Great Maker* were quietly restored—but without removing the reactionary chapters that had replaced them.

This compromise satisfied no one. Nonetheless, it has persisted through millennia of revisions and reconciliations, with the nation tilting between progressive and reactionary extremes. Some elements of the nation maintain such tendencies consistently. In particular, Nurad's clannish, insular Sodalities remain irreligious and secular, haunted by a heretical adherence to the nation's old progressive attitudes.

### THE ELEEMOSYNARY

Few in number, the Eleemosynary—a Theomachric sub-caste unique to Nurad—symbolize the generosity of the Great Maker. Their ordained task is to pray and give thanks to Autochthon in every waking moment. They are mendicants, contributing nothing but their devotion, wearing cast-off garments and eating only such food as has been discarded as inferior from the factories or set aside for them by pious citizens. The current resource crunch has made the plutarchs reassess the worth of the Eleemosynary, but what can be done with a whole group of adults with no obviously useful skills?

### THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

Nurad's government lacks the central authority found in other nations. Though it has a National Tripartite Assembly, that body holds little power. Each city prefers to go its own way and make its own decisions, jealously reserving control over the people and resources under its jurisdiction. This makes it difficult for the national body to enforce its decisions. A similar weakness has spread within individual city governments in recent years as local officials—plutarchs, directors, supervisors—feud over increasingly limited resources.

Corruption becomes more extensive as resources decline. With personal possessions and privileges growing scarcer, those in positions of power—from directors and autocrats down to lowly shift chiefs—can dole them out as bribes to get what they want. Likewise, officials can extort services from their colleagues as *quid pro quo* for their support. This can be selfish, but is more often the work of loyal managers desperate to see that their resource-starved departments fulfill their responsibilities.

Law enforcement grows stricter as the Olgotary struggles with dwindling resources and the unfamiliar scourge of

unemployment—the latter stemming from eliminated social roles and towns cannibalized for resources. The regulators have been given more power to help maintain order. Citizens are now exiled for acts which would once have called for a slap on the wrist—unless they can bribe the regulators or adjudicators. Most lower-level Olgotary members hate enforcing these new rules, but their superiors point to the cruel mathematics of Nurad's increasing poverty.

### STRUGGLING SODALITIES

Promising Populat children are “apprenticed” to the Sodalities. Known as vocants, they don't rise in caste, but they receive additional technical training to better aid their Sodalt mentors. This training and political patronage helps them rise above their less educated peers, such that vocants count disproportionately toward Nurad's complement of foremen, supervisors and directors. But these loyalties can be troublesome. As each vocant learns from and supports a single Sodality, political feuds between Sodalities can spread into the general labor force.

The Harvesters have gained power and prestige in Nurad since the resource crisis began. Responsible for recycling, they're now recycling everything that isn't nailed down. Their rise is at the expense of the Conductors, whose job of tapping half-empty conduits and mining moribund metal veins is difficult enough without having their resources redirected to Harvester operations. Citizens murmur that the Conductors are inept or in league with rival nations—or with the Void itself.

Both Conductors and Harvesters are debating whether to brevet vocants into their ranks to add manpower for resource gathering. The proposal is unpopular—most Theomachrats claim it smacks of heresy, while many Sodalts find it insulting. It also raises the question of whether these vocants would de-breveted after the crisis—making Populat members privy to Sodality secrets—or if they would be formally elevated into the Tripartite.

### EMPTY STOMACHS

Rationing grows ever more widespread. The Populat are down to two small meals a day, and even the leaders of the Tripartite have cut back on old extravagances. Meat-rat herds are being slaughtered due to caloric inefficiency; factories are retooled to create inferior goods requiring marginally smaller raw material inputs. All but the most important artifacts can no longer be constructed for lack of Magical Materials.

In recent years, the Theomachracy has decreed more and more days of fasting. This is ostensibly to purify the nation of its sins and to better focus the people's prayers on the Great Maker. In fact, the aim of these fast days is to better stretch out the nation's dwindling food supply. Not only does this help ration food, but it makes abstinence into a virtue for a troubled people.

The plutarchs and Harvesters are discussing institutionalized cannibalism. Instead of recycling the bodies of their dead—which distributes the nutrients throughout the

Eight Nations—they'll add their meat directly to the food supply. Proposals to hunt tunnel people for their meat are being quietly circulated.

Alcohol and drug use are increasing throughout the nation. This causes a bevy of problems; not only do drugs reduce worker efficiency and lead to violent crime, but drug-making processes are woefully inefficient uses of Nurad's dwindling resources.

Nurad's plutarchs have slashed the nation's planned birth rate in a desperate effort to have fewer non-working mouths to feed. Contraceptive drugs, prophylactics and abortifacients have been made broadly available, while harsh punishments have been decreed for women who bring a third child to term.

The National Tripartite Assembly is negotiating with Gulak to export some of Nurad's excess population to alleviate resource shortages. This is a difficult thing to arrange; Gulak has its own problems, and Nurad wishes to evacuate its least efficient—and least marketable—workers. And even if the trade goes through, how is the nation to decide who stays and who goes, or to enforce its wishes in the matter?

### VIOLENT PROSPECTS

With nearby natural resources declining, Nurad has been forced to send mining expeditions deeper into the Reaches. This has been bloody, especially given the abundance of gremlin activity, and has prompted a search for other options.

The National Tripartite Assembly has considered moving to a wartime economy and raiding nearby nations for resources. This would allow troops in the field to forage for nutrient conduits—thus reducing the strain on Nurad's own food supply—and reduce the nation's appearance of vulnerability in the face of invasion from Sova. But the prospect of full-scale war is daunting, and the resources to establish a viable army may no longer exist.

A more likely plan is to raze and recycle the shantytowns of neighboring tunnel folk and gateway people. These exiles are more accessible than other nations, with far fewer defenses and no allies. And the shantytowns will be destroyed by gremlins soon enough, so why let their resources go to waste?

But the most promising solution—if it may be called that—remains a secret. The leaders of Nurad's ground-level cities have met covertly to discuss seizing resources from Wisant, which has more advanced theotechnology and better access to conduits and mineral wealth than the rest of the nation. Wisant has donated resources to the other cities, but its reserves still exceed those of Nurad's other cities combined.

### SCIENCES OF THE MACHINE GOD

Of Nurad's many peculiar technologies, none is as well-known or as atmospheric as its air fleet. This includes both airships—rigid dirigibles filled with lighter-than-air

### PROJECT RAZOR IN NURAD

Nurad is desperate for new sources of raw materials to sustain itself against the Blight. It cannot spare any significant military investment, however. Any intrusion into Creation will be based more on stealth or trade than invasion. Sadly, this leaves a Nuradi breakthrough vulnerable to counter-intrusion from Creation itself. Should Nurad establish peaceful relations with those on the opposite side of the gate, it is likely to be conquered by Estasia and used as a staging area for raids on its erstwhile otherworldly trading partners.

gas and propelled by small Essence impellers—and the smaller aircars, vehicles that fly by Essence alone, such as shaft speeders and aerial skiffs (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, pp. 215-216). Recently, many of these vehicles have been broken down for recycling or sold to other nations.

Essence-powered lamps are used in airship spotlights and in the signal lamps that cities and towns employ for near-instantaneous point-to-point communication over long distances. Signal lamp code also exists as a written language; this is sometimes encoded using knots tied in cord.

Flammable gases extracted by chemical processes are used for many purposes. Streets and houses are lit by gas lamps of copper and glass; gas boilers generate steam for industrial purposes and to heat residential areas; food is cooked on gas ranges.

Where other nations reject the use of automata, Nurad has long employed sapient devices as scouts, guardians and advisors, even designing felinoid mouser-machines to hunt vermin. But with the availability of the Magical Materials at low ebb, Nurad's automata are being demolished and recycled—even those that are self-aware.

Perhaps the most fantastical relic of Progressive Age theotechnology is *ironfruit*. Designed to emulate Creation's vegetation, these mindless quasi-automata insinuate metallic 'roots' into water, oil and nutrient slurry conduits and sprout synthetic 'fruit': sugary, nutritious food nodules prepackaged in edible casings. Unfortunately, ironfruit wastes much of the slurry's precious caloric value. Harvesters are culling ironfruit throughout Nurad, putting them at odds with townsfolk and nomads alike.

### THE BLIGHT

Choked with rust and smog and slime, pulsing with disorder, the tumorous Blight Zones throb at the edges of the world, deep in the Far Reaches where no mortal goes. These Essence-starved domains of mad machines and Void-touched Alchemicals are a threat to the Machine God, but pose little danger to the Eight Nations.

Except for Nurad.

The nation now moves on a great arc through a little-traveled fringe of the Pole of Metal. Hundreds of miles ahead, directly in its path, Alchemical scouts have discovered a massive Blight Zone, one large enough to engulf all of Nurad within its twisted bowels. Worse, the zone has metastasized, spreading an array of smaller Blights around it. Some conduits passing through these zones run dry, cutting off supplies to the nation's cities and towns. Others are contaminated, disgorging poisonous fluids and tainted Essence when tapped. And this is only the beginning; in ten years at most, Nurad will brush the edge of the Blight Zone itself.

The malignant intelligences within the Blight Zone are well aware of Nurad's proximity. Even now, gremlins and Apostates creep through Nurad's wilderness. Some have infiltrated her cities and towns. They have begun their campaign against the nation's stability—the first step toward her subjugation to and absorption by the nightmare of the Void.

Cults of Ku have sprung up throughout the nation as Nuradi beg the Divine Minister of decay and endings to spare them from the horrors of the blight. Ku may be the subgod best suited to defend Nurad against the perils it faces. However, it is only a small step for cultists to turn their prayers to the Void itself and its Apostate apostles.

## VOIDBRINGERS IN NURAD

### *COLD SILENCE COURIER*

*Courier* has long since shed all illusions of mortality. Only her face—that lovely, passionless mask—remains human. All else is filigree, a skeleton of starmetal wound about with moonsilver veins full of oil and blood. She is stealthy as a spider, a shadow, a long-forgotten memory. She moves through the heart of a city and is not seen. She whispers poisoned words into mortal ears; they hear only their own inner voices repeating her instructions. She steals secrets and soulgems with equal, inscrutable ease. No one has ever found her. Perhaps no one ever will.

### *OPENER OF THE CRIMSON CIRCUIT*

*Opener* is a monster. His long, lean frame is an amalgam of tarnished moonsilver and hirsute, tumorous meat. His oil-black eyes glitter as he peers from ventilation grilles and sewage grates in search of the perfect prey. He strikes in a savage blur of motion, tearing away great hunks of flesh with his rusty soulsteel fangs. It pleases him to trace gruesome, hateful messages in his victims' gore, the better to demoralize mortal citizens and stir their Champions to careless wrath.

## WISANT, THE CITY ABOVE

Wisant pierces the ceiling of Nurad from above like the point of a spear hurled by the Unconquered Sun. The metropolis is a mile-long stalactite of orichalcum and steel, her thousands of lamps and crystal windows blazing like gemstones. What look from afar as hair-thin parallel lines, like

fine etchings on some prince's ornament, are serried ranks of balconies from which her people can see all of Nurad spread below. Dozens of docking spurs jut from Wisant's golden surface, each a berth for airships and aircars. An adamant globe glows at the city's uttermost tip, shifting colors as it phase-cycles throughout the five shifts of the Autochthonian day. The globe burns hot gold during first shift, moving down the spectrum to pale red, orange, cold blue and finally a mellow silver during fifth shift, before pulsing back to full brilliance to mark the beginning of a new day. The Nuradi refer to the bright phases as day and the dimmer shifts as night, borrowing the old terms from Jarish.

The city's interior extends far above Nurad's ceiling. Vertical and near-vertical shafts, ringed with lights and webbed with walkways, stretch up and down into the distance. Windows and balconies line residential shafts, providing a sense of openness and space. Columns of light run through them from top to bottom, sharing the city's day-night cycle. Higher up in Wisant's superstructure, industrial shafts crawl with machines. Enormous brass and steel gearworks spin and whirr; hammers clang; noise and smoke fill the murky air.

A pulsing beat thrums through the walls and floor near the bronze outer shell of the Theovascular Core Pump. Sixty yards in diameter, ringed by catwalks where attentive Conductors and Surgeons tend flashing prayer consoles, this Municipal Charm calibrates liquid and gas pressure in the hundreds of conduits running through it. Supplies of clean air, fresh water, steam and helium remain strong. Others sometimes run thinly or intermittently, causing the Core to emit horrid grinding, thudding noises or an asthmatic whine.

More dramatic is the Infinite Luminance Engine. Hanging at the city's lowest point, this Municipal Charm is a construct of blindingly brilliant crystal and orichalcum locked in a globe of adamant. It transforms raw Essence into light; this light is shunted upward to crystalline nodes deep in the Reaches, presumably to serve some function in Autochthon's nervous system. Surplus light is stored in vast crystalline capacitors; this is vented out of the city to illuminate the nation-cavern, creating Nurad's day and night. But as the nation's Essence flows dwindle, the light dims and fades for hours at a time.

Just above the Engine is the Collegium of Divine Incandescence, the administrative and research hub for the Glorious Luminors of the Brilliant Rapture. This Sodality has deep roots in Nurad, and the Infinite Luminance Engine inspires awe among the nation's citizens that Luminors elsewhere can only envy. Those who train at the Collegium acquire the deep understanding of theotechnical principles required to tend the Engine; they also work in tandem with Scholars to devise artifacts incorporating crystal or light.

Aircar and airship manufacture and maintenance are centered here. The Theovascular Core Pump supplies lighter-than-air gases; Wisant's Conductors and Scholars are expert in extracting and refining rare ores used to create feathersteel. These aerial vessels are mounted with powerful

lamps—especially those used by the regulators, whose spotlights pin down fleeing criminals.

## NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

### JERAK, LUMINOR HIGH COUNCILOR OF NURAD

Weathered, white-haired Jerak has the leathery skin that results from six decades of exposure to powerful sources of luminiferous Essence. Stern and intense, he is dedicated to his nation, his city and his Sodality, and to his patron Espinoquae (see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals*, p. 57) most of all. Along with certain other high-ranking Luminors, he has forged a pact with the subroutine, arranging for Espinoquae to create a number of god-blooded children and assigning those children to be Luminors themselves. Jerak knows the plan is deeply heretical, but Nurad lacks the resources to produce more Alchemicals and he hopes a god-blooded cadre will fill the gap.

### MAJRA, ADJUDICATOR

This fiery young adjudicator is foremost among those using exile as the universal punishment for all crimes. He sees this as an unpleasant but pragmatic way to reduce the impact of the food shortages to come. Majra's sense of honor may prove his undoing; he treats Tripartite members—and even Champions!—who come before him with the same strictness as the Populat, accepting neither bribes nor threats.

## SHASTAR, THE CITY OF STONE

Old, slow Shastar spreads his ashen arms wide along the shores of the Dir Reservoir at Nurad's trailing edge. Where his white jade cliffs—gray now with soot—descend into the oily water, a hundred wharves reach forth to offer sanctuary to the ships that crisscross the reservoir, carrying passengers and cargo to and from the towns situated on the islands of the Dir and on the far shore.

As Shastar grows with the passing years, he stretches farther and farther along the edges of the reservoir. The city on his shoulders grows with him. It is a dark and gloomy thing, this second city: a city of black stone, its towers pressing close to one another, blocking out the distant glimmer of Wisant's light. Steam rises from vents in its worn pavements, shrouding the streets in a perpetual fog that disperses the light of the gas lamps into a dull, unfocused glow.

With Perygra long since dead, Shastar is the oldest city in Nurad and capital of its National Tripartite Assembly. He is a city of extremes; the nation's most powerful and influential citizens live and work here in luxury, while the Lumpen and much of the Populat dwell in the shabbiest parts of the Upper City, in overgrown stone heaps where Shastar's eyes and services do not reach.

Chimneys belch clouds of soot from the buried soulsteel mass of the Lithic Condensation Engine. This Municipal Charm filters sediment from Autochthon's conduits and compacts it into blocks of a durable, fine-grained black substance that Autochthonians call 'stone.' It's employed

as building material throughout Shastar and occasionally shipped elsewhere to construct grandiose façades. The finest grades are used for sculpture; leftover fragments are pulverized to serve as an industrial abrasive.

Even deeper, in the belly of Shastar, dwells a great pounding machine that makes the entire city quiver like a living thing. This is the Red Jade Piston Array, a forest of massive cylinders as tall and thick as redwood trunks that pump with terrible speed and force, raising such clamor that workers wear protective gear to prevent permanent deafness. The seals at their bases intermittently emit enormous blasts of steam. They are part of a vast engine buried beneath the city, its kinetic forces facilitating the nation's movement through the body of Autochthon.

## NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

### DANSORA, GRAND AUTOCRAT OF NURAD

This great barrel of a man was once a regulator, and he retains the grim, paranoid caution common among that subcaste. He plans ruthlessly for the worst, taking little account of the needs of individuals when the nation itself is in peril. But his longstanding distrust for the plutarchs puts his plans at risk. He has surrounded himself with regulator and adjudicator advisors who, like him, cannot speak the language of economics. A pragmatist at heart, Dansora will eventually come to grips with his hostility, but by then it may be too late.

### LAKTOR, FOREMAN

Well-loved by the shift chiefs and workers in her care, Laktor is a powerfully built middle-aged woman who swears like a sailor. She typically supervises the dark shifts in a nutrient paste factory in the Upper City. Over the past several months, she has assembled a crude still and siphoned off nutrient slurry to distil illicit booze for her workers. This has kept productivity and morale high, but at the cost of irreplaceable calories.

## XEFIN, THE CAGE

The prison-metropolis Xefin is a lesser, specialized Alchemical installation, as is possessed in ones and twos by several of the Octet Nations.

Formerly the Starmetal Caste *Executor of the Fixed Interval*, Xefin lies beyond the outer skin of Nurad, miles above its floor. She is accessible only via a heavily-guarded tram terminus and an equally well-defended airship docking post. Those who would enter or leave without authorization must travel for miles through the Reaches.

Xefin herself spreads out in a single disk-shaped layer. Structures webbed with bridges and catwalks rise in a radial pattern around a broad plaza dominated by a burnished central spire. At the top of the spire, broad flanges cage a blaze of blue flame enfolding a sliver of lightless black: this is Xefin's Panoptic Crux, whose gaze penetrates everywhere within her dominion.

The structures themselves are symmetrical, built along clean lines. Both exterior and interior surfaces are covered with subtle, intricate geometric mandalas, many of which exert a hypnotic fascination upon onlookers. The effect is calming.

Only a handful of people live here, mostly prisoners. They cover the full range of Lumpen criminals; most are social misfits, but some have committed more serious offenses—including heinous deeds warranting soul-mutilating slavery. But Xefin is experimenting with alternatives to the usual procedures of Octet law. Volunteers accept internment here not as punishment, but for rehabilitation.

The rest of the city's inhabitants are regulators acting as prison guards, Harvesters and Luminors (and their vocant aides) performing their usual tasks, or Surgeons laboring endlessly to correct the minds of internees using drugs, psychological techniques, surgery and thaumaturgy.

Xefin herself, who remains fully aware and involved, provides direct assistance to her staff. She multitasks to communicate simultaneously with dozens of prisoners in their cells at any given time, both to assess and to adjust their states of mind.

All this is more than mere rehabilitation. Xefin sees individuality as a defect, one which offers a foothold for the Void, and desires a more deeply hierarchical and structured society than even Autochthonia provides. She believes her research will provide the key to change human nature. In the meantime, she occupies herself with the problem of Voidbringer cults by programming internees as sleeper agents and returning them to the general population. She hopes when Nurad reaches the Blight, this will provide an avenue for counterattack against the Voidbringer incursion.

## OTHER LOCALES

### PERYGRA, THE CORPSE IN CRYSTAL

The ruin of Perygra smolders at the heart of Nurad like the embers of a dream. Its crystal prison burns with refracted rainbow fire during the day; at night it gleams coldly from within, lit by ancient Essence discharges still trapped in the crystal. The city itself is broken, its great gleaming engines and bright orichalcum domes shattered by the impossible pressures of its confinement. And yet, in a cruel jest, thousands of citizens caught in the glassy stuff remain preserved across the millennia, their terror as visible as at the instant of their deaths.

Small by modern standards, Perygra was among the largest and most sophisticated metropoli of its time. Abetted by progressive plutarchs and clerics, her Sodalts surpassed all others in thaumaturgic and theurgic advancement, achieving things only seen in the High First Age of Creation. Nurad became a wonder of magitechology, alive with reverse-engineered ecosystems of Creation's plants and animals and with tools invested with more-than-human intellect. Many of today's common artifacts and Charms were first devised in Perygra,

their designs still unsurpassed after three thousand years.

Then the Perygrans went too far. With the city's consent, they devised a Municipal Charm to link the metropolis directly with the ineffable mind of Autochthon, the Godhead itself. They meant no harm—they sought to learn, not to manipulate or control—but this made no difference. In touching the mind of the Machine God, they inflamed the Primordial's immune system. The Charm's crystalline heart spread like fire to engulf the entire city.

For millennia, the Nuradi treated Perygra as a sacred thing, both tomb and divine warning. Now, though, the resource crisis has driven the National Tripartite to sanction recycling operations. The Harvesters fear that damaging the crystal may draw another immune response. Fortunately, there are a few places where fragments of the city structure jut out of the crystal. Harvester teams are tunneling in through those spurs of debris. Once they dig deep enough to establish secondary mining bases inside the city proper, the process should speed up considerably.

### BETTER LEFT BURIED

Perygra is a ruin, but it's an almost perfectly preserved ruin. Countless magitech devices and memory crystals lie there for the taking, as advanced as anything to be found today—and a few reach beyond, into fields that even Yugash's theotechnical wizards scarcely understand. This could be a boon to Nurad—or a disaster. Who knows what ancient experiments the Harvesters might inadvertently reactivate in their labors? Another immune response from the Machine God could be even more devastating than the first, and Nurad is in no shape to face a new catastrophe.

### GNEBTHEX

Though dead in most respects, Perygra has a single living inhabitant. This is Gnebthex, a puissant Ministerial Subroutine of Ku, whose portfolios include Forbidden Knowledge and Memorials of Dreadful Events. Drawn by Perygra's doom, the immaterial spirit passed unhindered through the crystal barrier and established a sanctum at the ruin's heart—a reflection of a dead laboratory from the First Progressive Age. There he obsesses over those thaumaturgical arts and theurgic sciences banned throughout Autochthonia.

Gnebthex manifests clad in patchwork armor of corroded metal, filaments of smoke rising from its joints. The red light flickering beneath his visor is his true form: a glowing whirlwind of proscribed text that is terrible for the literate to look upon. He has an Essence of 7; his Virtues are Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 3 and Valor 2.

Though his affairs take him far and wide throughout Autochthon, gathering information and placing certain methodologies under Ku's interdict and seal, Gnebtex prefers to remain in his sanctum. He has only just learned of the effort to recycle the dead city. He is not pleased.

## WINDCOIL POST

Three miles centerward and twenty-two miles clockwise of Shastar stands one of the mile-thick pillars that support Nurad's sky. Six miles up, where the air grows thin, clouds scud by underfoot and the ground can be seen far, far below, an aircar docking post juts out from a broad, rust-streaked ledge. There, nestled among tinweb tangles and copperpede nests, is the entrance to Windcoil Post, a cloistered research facility for the Prolific Scholars of the Furnace Transcendent.

Past the airlock at the entryway—where a tooth-jarring subsonic hum wards off fix beetles—a long, twisting tunnel leads to a warren of narrow, white-painted corridors linking rooms packed tight with machinery and thaumaturgical gear. At any given time, roughly a dozen Scholars labor with minds and hands to test the boundaries of Nuradi theotechnology. They devise prototypes of artifacts and Charms, perform cryptic experiments with raw Essence, and pore over records of research from the First Progressive Age.

The outpost was established during the First Progressive Age as a seismological measuring station. Since then, it has served many purposes: a communications relay, an arsenal, a hermitage for eremitic clerics. It has been used as a cache many times over the millennia, and many of its compartments and chambers remain hidden, full of secrets and relics waiting to be rediscovered.

In order to combat the resource drought of the approaching blight, some Scholars dabble in esoteric—and perhaps dangerous—fields of knowledge. Their remote location within the confines of Nurad itself protects their work from foreign raiders; a hundred yards of lead and steel protect Nurad from catastrophe should their efforts prove disastrous, containing whatever terrible energies or monstrous entities their experiments might unleash. In the meantime, they live and work in isolation, visited monthly by a supply-laden aircar piloted by heavily armed regulators.

## BISORUM, ADMINISTRATOR-SCHOLAR

Most staff at Windcoil Post are rotated out after shifts lasting between three months and a year. But Site Administrator Bisorum has labored there for five years with no relief. Having deciphered hints about the Elder Arts embedded in scholarly texts, she is using them to reinvent those forbidden sciences. She hopes to achieve a breakthrough that will help Nurad weather the resource crisis, but she's far more likely to unleash some new horror upon her nation.

## YEREKA NUR

Three hundred buildings perch on a high terrace by the nation's outer wall. They're old but well-maintained,

fronted with bricks of black Shastar stone, their slanted roofs tiled with blue-green ceramic. When one looks out over the glittering lands below, a bundle of conduits runs past to the left, providing easy access to water and nutrient slurry; the red-and-silver mass of the ore refinery stands to the right, thudding with industry. Behind, a brace of regulators stands by a massive hatch in the cavern wall. At shift change, they and their replacements open the hatch to allow the miners and their guard-escort to file in and out. Many greetings are exchanged; these are neighbors, one and all.

For all their dedication and comradeship, a pall hangs over the people and their town. Their home is at the forward edge of the nation's glacial movement through Autochthon. They are the closest to the Blight. Each year, they bring back less ore—and fewer of their friends and family. Every shift bears danger.

Yereka Nur is one of dozens of mining towns built at Nurad's edge. Founded close to a thousand years ago, it is primitive by the standards of Autochthonia's cities. But to the eyes of the Creation-born—were one present to see—it would seem a marvel of engineering. Its buildings contain internal plumbing, Essence-powered lamps, temperature regulators and other simple civilized amenities.

The Blight Zone hurts Yereka Nur in many ways. Conduits—nutrient slurry and water for the people, oil and Essence for the refinery—flow weakly and can go dry for hours at a stretch. On one occasion, the nutrient taps spat forth streams of pus; the Conductors hope not to see that episode repeated. Meanwhile, the routes into the Reaches are spattered with lesser Blight Zones crawling with gremlins. Ore taken from blighted areas is tainted; feeding the stuff to the refinery results in clouds of corrosive smoke and darkened, oily-looking metals with a tendency to crack and rust. The townsfolk claim that anything made from tainted ore is cursed to bring misfortune.

A handful of gremlin-taken miners and tappers have found their way back. These unfortunates return partially gremlinized, with corrupted biomechanical components replacing various parts of their bodies. No one knows what to do with them.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

Since the disasters of the First Progressive Era, Nurad has rarely acted aggressively against the rest of the Octet. This is often seen as a sign of weakness, resulting in several invasions by rival nations over the centuries. The Nuradi have acquitted themselves ably in their own defense, willingly surrendering to agreeable terms but fighting to the bitter end when presented with unacceptable conditions.

Other than offering its surplus citizenry to Gulak, the National Tripartite Assembly has proved unwilling to ask other nations for assistance. This is partly a matter of pride, and partly fear of showing weakness. The Tripartite knows that worse times are yet to come. They will wait until things

are at their worst, when they have sunk into the depths of the Blight Zone, before they beg for aid that may only be given once—if at all.

Nurad's foreign trade remains strong. The nation's remaining raw materials go toward manufacturing goods for export: fine stonework, crystal lenses, aircars and airships, and various small, elegant mechanical and theotechnical devices. Extant equipment formerly used by Nurad's people, such as much of its own airship fleet, is also being sold. Not only does this bring in much-needed supplies of food, but now the maintenance costs are somebody else's problem.

## HEROES OF THE STATE

The people of Nurad view their Champions in a pragmatic and secular light, as heroes to a people in desperate need of their aid. Lacking the resources to make more Alchemicals, those they do have are especially precious to them.

Nurad's Champions have little time for non-military duties, as the nation is in constant danger. Common tasks include fighting gremlins in the Reaches, thwarting attacks on towns at the nation's edge, guarding Harvester and Conductor expeditions, escorting caravans, investigating damaged conduits and erratic or missing subgods and elementals, and tracking down Apostate infiltrators.

In violation of a fundamental tenet of Autochthonian religion, Nurad is experimenting with state-sanctioned Alchemical cults, the better to strengthen its Champions to combat the blight and its Apostate agents.

### MAGNANIMOUS RADIANT SERVITOR

#### SHINING HERO, ORICHALCUM CASTE OF WISANT

Compassionate and courageous, *Servitor* came from wealthy Claslat centuries ago during the dark years after the Shattered Lamp War to aid a nation in far greater need than her own. Her selfless valor has since made her among the best-known and best-loved of Wisant's Champions. But her Clarity has grown with time and age. Those in her charge are becoming aware of the coldness in her mien, the distance in her heart.

### DEFIANCE-EXCISING RAZOR

#### SHADOW REGULATOR, SOULSTEEL CASTE OF SHASTAR

This driven young Exalt has dedicated herself to guarding Shastar against corruption. She stalks the dark places of the Upper City where Shastar himself cannot see. There she hunts intruding gremlins and pursues the faint, elusive trails of Apostates. She also apprehends rabble-rousers, confiscates hoarded goods and destroys illicit drugs and their factories, acts which win her little acclaim with the hungry, discontented Populat.

## SOVA

Sova has always been on the brink, haunted by ghosts. Once, massive mining skiffs deployed into twisted shafts of brass and iron, lancing beam siphons down into val-

leys glowing cherry-red in the darkness. Essence shields shimmered electric blue against the heat of a molten river of orichalcum, separating miners from a roasting death. Prayer consoles received the murmured devotions of the criminal and the desperate aboard the platforms, keeping the rigs aloft by sheer adoration.

The cities between the great smelters were calmer, but no less deadly. The breathing room afforded by a heretical municipal technology allowed the wholesale clearing of cramped community living spaces in favor of food courts livened by fountains of liquid Essence, jade statues dedicated to Sova's progressive glory, and opulent plazas. Yet generations of vicious political and personal infighting amongst lineages stretching back to the dawn of the nation has left the population inured to bloodshed, willing to yield to violent impulses when pressed.

For the last century, there has been a middle ground. Dubbed conurbation by the populace, it is a science that allows for remote socketing of Municipal Charms outside a main metropolitan area, crossing into the dark and hot places of the nation, linking towns and cities together and allowing comfortable habitation for all, not just city-dwellers. Conurbation has resulted in an expansion of the non-city community unseen in Autochthonian society. Called exurbs, and boasting a vastly higher population than a "normal" Octet town, these communities range outwards from and between Sovan cities, housing people whose numbers often exceed that of municipalities of other nations.

Today, the prayer consoles glow a sallow yellow as miners despair at the dismal harvest of the mining rigs, whereas generation before they shone a soothing green. The molten rivers surface few lines of pure orichalcum amidst the orange-glowing slag. The fountains are cracked and dry, the statues pulled down for raw materials, the opulent plazas encrusted with propaganda posters, and the food courts are packed with rows of regulators, their truncheons falling on riotous youth. Conurbations experience rolling blackouts, exposing their populace to the horror of the bright spaces between cities.

### LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPE

Sova is the third most populous nation in Autochthonia, and geographically the smallest; unlike other nations, it possesses a warm atmosphere, some of which is inhospitable to human life. The nation rests in a dense expanse of metal, pierced by dozens of titanic hollow vertical shafts, each of which ranges from a half-mile to a mile wide and tens of miles deep. Sova's historical riches stem from vast pools of the Magical Materials that lie molten in the depths of the shafts.

Elegant columns spiral alongside the shafts, granting them a winding, spiked look. Twisting paths lead to smaller, cooler tunnels between the shafts, where the Sovans build cities and exurbs. The tunnels themselves are heat-stressed metal, porous with the appearance of rotted and mined-out rock, usually cramped with low ceilings. The pervasive calidity is further intensified by cramped conditions; the nation's

habitable area is but a tiny sliver compared to Claslat or Yugash. The sultry troposphere and teeming life of the nation leave Sova uncomfortably hot.

Sovan cities are close affairs, packed tight to accommodate Sova's famous fecundity. Far less populous are the siphon-towns that hang above the fiery abysses of the shafts, serving as docking ports for mining skiffs. But the nation's chief feature—and, perhaps, its doom—is a unique experiment in Autochthonian municipal technology. Exurbs are sprawling urban areas without an Alchemical municipal core; what would be the dark places between cities in other nations are instead filled with homes and factories. Visitors walk the cities and exurbs drenched in sweat, surrounded by open-air plazas and ceiling-scraping ziggurats honeycombed with apartments and dorms, with native Sovans nearly naked in comparison. At least, they used to—Sova has few visitors in the days since Ixut.

## HISTORY

The Sova's birth name is lost to history; he was a pathfinder and warlord in the days after the War, ruling in the vast swatches of southern Creation outside the purview of the nascent Exalted. Generations had existed free from Dragon King rule, and even the all-encompassing scope of the War left untouched lands where tribes could congregate. He saw the destiny of peoples bent to Exalted will, and valued these unsullied tribes. They titled him Sova—"father" in High Holy Speech—as he forged eighty-six tribes together into one nation under Autochthon, the only being not adamantly opposed to his flouting the Mandate of Heaven. When his own offspring became a Sunlit Hero, the Sova feared he would make a gift of the tribes to the Queen of Ochre Fountain—or worse, break them in a futile attempt to usurp her throne.

Thus, his impetus for joining the greatest adventure mortals had ever seen. The tribes gathered their belongings and raised their arms to accept the hungry maw of the titan. The Sova died the day the Seal of Eight Divinities closed, his mission complete. Shortly thereafter, the eighty-six tribes were the first in Autochthonia to experience a succession crisis, arguing over whom was to become the new Sova—candidates included the Sova's war leader, his chief planner, and his charismatic mortal daughter. The crisis quickly grew heated, and the nation erupted into civil war for the first time.

Exaltation did little to stop the fighting, other than turning the hot war cold again. Before the Sova—reincarnated as *Inspiring Monument of Virtue*—could quell the unrest, three tribes had fallen to the crude blades of their neighbors, with many more on the brink of destruction. Horrified, the Executive again united the tribes, most of whom deferred immediately to their leader of old, save three who refused her divinity. *Monument* was forced to annihilate two of them, exiling the third and largest tribe into the Reaches her nation slid through.

The Dawn Era saw the formation of the Caucus, a forum where inter-tribal grievances could be aired separate from the maintenance of Autochthonia. The elected head of the Caucus took the title of Sova, a tradition that continues even now. The Era also saw the first siphon-towns, which used crude tubes to pump materials from the shafts. *Monument* worked tirelessly on behalf of the people, but a desire to maintain her humanity kept the Exalt from progressing with the rapidity of Gulak or Yugash's progenitors.

The Era of Strife arose when Sovan pride over their idiosyncracies grew impassioned, then inflamed. Feuds formed in this era persist to modern times. By 1997 DA, several factions had grown dissatisfied with the reorganization of Sovan society post-Conclave. Forming an armed coalition within the Caucus, they staged a coup d'etat, killing the current Sova and touching off a civil war. The Reconstruction Era followed the end of forty years of continual terror, where the streets of Imtu steamed with heated blood and mining skiffs were repurposed into mobile attack platforms. Chiefly, it featured a rebuilding of Sovan manufacture damaged in the civil wars, and a broad expansion of the siphon-settlements.

By the Modern Era, Sova's multitudes strained the psychology of the inhabitants to the breaking point. A feud developed with Yugash when the two nations came into trading distance and discovered the other researching similar Municipal Charms and sociological techniques. Each trumpeted their achievements over the successes of their newfound rival. For nearly a century, Sovan technology and society experienced a boom period, invigorated by competition and spurred by the higher quality of life in Yugash.

All of that changed in 4840 DA, when Ixut synchronized the first Lined Power Distribution Chakra with a substation many kilometers away, providing power and emergency shielding for a siphon-town during a caldera eruption. With that dramatic rescue, the Sova declared the beginning of the Conurbation Era.

### THE SPRAWL

Put simply, conurbation technology allows for remote socketing of Alchemical Municipal Charms. Normal Charms have an installation radius of (Essence/2) miles from an Alchemical's soulgem; at a cost of increased committed Essence during installation, and a greater consumption of resources, conurbation Charms extend this radius by a factor of 10.

### CONURBATION

All of Sova's cities possess the same weather-filtering Municipal Charms as Kamak or Estasia, allowing them to maintain a comfortable temperature despite the horrific heat. Sova's siphon-towns were not so lucky; no technology could make the heat of the shafts bearable for more than

a few months at a time until the Reconstruction Era, and even then, the towns were enclosed, claustrophobic affairs of heavy machinery and refrigerant tanks.

Sova hailed conurbation as a tremendous breakthrough, allowing full colonization of areas closer to the great shafts. Against vehement protests from the Theomachy, the Caucus and the Assembly approved full conurbation for three Sovan cities. Subsequent Municipal Charms created a network fueled by elemental cores, allowing Charms to be maintained at great distances from the city-Exalt. Though Sovans were largely unwilling to admit it, conurbation has drained their nation's resources, locking them into a spiral of increasing resource debt. The siphon-towns on the edges of the shafts enjoy greater safety than ever before, but their yield declines even as costs increase.

Yet conurbation has been fully embraced, with many factories and critical Charms moved out to the exurbs to relieve population pressure on the cities. Before conurbation, dormitories were forced to hot-bunk three shifts constantly, personal privacy was a fevered dream and suffering was abundant; now, children of the Tripartite are afforded their own rooms. Sova's economy can not bear the excision of township infrastructure any more than Sovan pride can withstand the despair of citizens deprived of their people's greatest innovation.

## THE ELEMENTAL WAR

Nine years ago, fully half of the conurbation network abruptly ceased to function. Within hours, refugees began filtering into Imtu, decrying the horrors that had befallen Ixut. For weeks, fire and chaos ruled the trams to the heart of conurbation, isolating much of Sova from vital resources and denying regulators the opportunity to secure the city. Even Greater Ixut knew little of the horrors consuming their progenitor city. It took a month for the truth to filter out, but that truth shocked Sova: Ixut, heart of conurbation and the pride of the Sovan people, had died, taking 800,000 citizens and seven Champions with it in the chaos.

In prior months, Sova had experienced rolling shut-downs due to unexpected resource scarcities, exacerbated by the demands of conurbation. Finding their mining to be insufficient for their needs, they demanded imports from both Gulak and Yugash. The former acquiesced, but the latter denied the request altogether and raised crippling trade tariffs. In the aftermath of Ixut, Sovan shock turned quickly to grief, then to anger. The Populat were furious, first with both their leaders and Yugash, for letting trade politicking and prosperity propaganda cause the death of a city. With the rapid election of a charismatic new Sova, national anger became solely focused on Yugash. The Caucus declared a formal vendetta, and the National Tripartite Assembly unanimously voted for a war of vengeance.

The resulting conflict—known as the Elemental War, due not only to the resources involved but due to the persistent autoimmune attacks from spirits both armies suffered

in the wake of Ixut—lasted two years. Fueled by a crusader's zeal, Sova ranged deep into Yugashi territory, crippling Ot with a protracted siege and mounting a bloody assault on Kadar itself. Ultimately, the war only ended when Yugash moved away from Sova, with a long-distance conflict being too costly for either nation and the Expeditionary Force significantly harrowed from traversing 2,500 miles of the Reaches on foot to return home.

In the wake of the War, Sovan life has been redefined by paranoia and jingoism. Anything remotely Yugashi has been purged from the society, including clothing styles and foreign dyes, methods of food preparation and a particular species of Yugashi rat, gleefully hunted by children let out from their education crèches for the occasion. Now, the leisure generation and the pious of the nation individually threaten Sova's order. The long-simmering tensions on every level of Sovan society threaten to explode with each fall of a regulator's truncheon.

## SOCIETY

As the saying goes, a Sovan is like a steam vent; you don't want to be near the exhaust of either. Touch on the wrong subject, insult a Sovan's family or belittle their accomplishments, and bloody retribution follows.

Sova focuses on familial relations to a degree unseen in any Octet state save Kamak. Beneath a thick layer of inculcated civility lies a fierce pride in one's family and tribal identity. Here, the castes that define so much of Autochthonian society are themselves subservient to bonds of blood and honor—families and Families contain members of every caste.

## FAMILY

Small metal icons of famous family members, ascended to near-deific status in regard, are carried on the wrists of every Sovan. The only remnant of their tribal past, family—nuclear and extended—is considered all-important. The crèche system seen elsewhere in Autochthonia never truly took hold in this nation of tribes. Relatively few Populat and Tripartite claim no familial membership; even those that disdain the complex webs of feud and vendetta still trace their descent. As a result, the Caucus—arbiter of family feuds within Sovan society—holds enormous influence.

Sovans name place surname before given, reflecting their primary descent from the eighty-six tribes conquered by the Sova. It is considered impolite to address a Sovan by their surname or given name alone, and Sovans are nothing if not impeccably polite, even as they are prone to impolitic fits. Close proximity and sweltering heat ensures these exceptional manners; Sovan speech is precisely phrased in Old Realm and Formal Autochthonic.

Fathers and mothers hold dominion over their children, and limited authority over cousins and siblings; usually, the eldest surviving member of the families holds a great deal of power. A few tribes even cleave to polyamorous marriages

and communal families—rare, but not unheard of. Family members feel a fierce pride in the placement of children to prestigious positions. Within the dynastic structure itself, lineage and bloodline traditionally take precedence. Even a storied autocrat cowers in fear of his tyrannical Populat mother. Face within the extended family is all-important, as is the presentation of a unified front to the society entire. Tripartite children and lesser cousins are expected to defer to the wisdom and opinions of the elders who worked so hard to bring them into the world. Elders match the youth of marriageable age to appropriate families, and no aspect of a young person's life goes untouched by the hand of their family—an autocrat's position is expected to be used in a nepotistic fashion, while ancient feuds manifest in the educational crèches. Even Lumpen and slaves are still family, though they bring tremendous disgrace on those who sired them, and for many such the mining skiffs represent their last hope at redemption.

The current count of Great Families in the Caucas—those who still claim descent from a tribe united by the Sova—stands at an inauspicious fifty-nine, having dwindled over the years due to assimilation into other clans, annihilation in civil wars and simple attrition. No less than five Families have emigrated wholesale to Gulak, and that nation's willingness to provide asylum for refugee dynasties has transformed a number of civil wars into international conflicts.

## VENDETTA

It is well and good that Sovans are polite, for only blood and victory may wash away the stain of insult upon one's honor. The close-knit nature of Sovan family politics ensures allies at one's back, if an argument turns violent; enmity finds expression not in harsh words, but in bloody duels. The current concept of the state possessing a monopoly on the legitimate use of force through regulators is a modern one, largely born and enforced out of the generation that arose during the conurbation diaspora. For millennia, Sovans have declared vendetta on one another, a blood feud that can involve dozens, if not hundreds, of family members from entire coalitions of rival dynasties. In theory, duels are not to be taken outside the individuals experiencing a conflict, but for centuries family members have made it their business to personalize a sibling or cousin's difficulties.

The Sovan desire to satisfy vendetta is immensely troublesome, considering the need to have a full prayer crew on a mining skiff. Sovans have turned to formalized martial duels and teams of combatants in sports in order to address their societal need for vengeance. Many branches of martial arts have found root in the exurbs, with idle youth spending much of their day practicing katas; teams of families compete in elaborate ballgames, slamming into one another with barely-restrained hostility. When Sovans challenge one another to a formal duel, they're strongly encouraged to resolve their differences on the field of sport.



Both forms of combat are expected to resolve the vendetta, but rarely do. The offending party is still there, possibly none the worse for wear. Outward expressions of antagonism are strongly prohibited after resolution of vendetta, which makes successive feuds rage ever hotter. With endemic nepotism and few ways to permanently resolve feuds, only decisions-by-Caucus are truly binding—the reason behind the Caucus's formation.

### MALKI

The reverence for family does not end with death. Deep within Imtu, in the stronghold of every family, austere rooms sit in a funereal air, half-evaporated libations and icons scattered before walls with row upon row of death masks. At the center of each room, a flickering screen with an unresolved human face stares eternally at the offerings. Incense and other vaporized intoxicants waft through the air, partially obscuring the screens and filling the room with a smoky haze. Elder and youth alike inhale deeply and bow before the screen, begging the wisdom of their ancestors.

These are *malki* – gestalt identities of the leaders and great personalities of the families. In the earliest days, an elder of the tribes would consume hallucinogenic toxins and fall into a deep coma, a relic dreamstone from Creation absorbing their fevered mindset. These dreams, the tribes believed, contained powerful portents and vivid impressions of the elder's personality and beliefs. The modern era is not so crude; each stronghold contains an adaptive material intelligence that absorbs the personality and thoughts of the resident clan elders, recording them and formulating an identity that is capable of dispensing advice on virtually any topic in accordance with the long-held, slow-changing beliefs of the tribes. Indeed, use of *malki* has slowed social progression, as elders rely on the wisdom of those who came before. Particularly verbose or strong-willed individuals may stand out amidst *malki* identities, the face on the screen briefly resolving itself into the image of the ancestor, speaking with their voice and tone on a topic they cared about in life. Though they hold no official legal authority over the processes of Sova—and are considered little more than horrid ghouls by the rest of the Octet—their synthesized opinions carry the weight of law among Sovans.

### THE MINING SKIFFS

In the earliest days of Sova, heroes traversed the tunnels between shafts, building crude siphon pipes and vacuum devices to garner Magical Materials from the molten basins of the cylinders. Even with the advent of the municipal era, the practice of mining was no less dangerous. Siphon-towns exist on the very edges of the cylinders, their field-insulated catwalks stretching out over horizons of molten metal and bottomless pits of flame, connecting enormous flanged spires lined with webs of the Magical Materials, their deep points glowing white-hot. Fleets of mining skiffs cruise daily below this death zone, where flesh melts from bone, to extract vital minerals from the separating cauldrons of the cylinders. The

### THOSE LEFT BEHIND

What happens to *malki* of the families who leave Sova? It is a tremendous disgrace to leave behind the ancient, cracked dreamstones and data cores that hold the combined personality of one's entire lineage. On the other hand, dragging massive, frozen Essence cores across the Reaches is an almost impossible task. The destruction of *malki* in civil wars has actually precipitated more than one family's exit from the nation. Some *malki* have been appropriated by rival families, where they serve as reluctant advisors, secretly wishing for the destruction of the family that annihilated their own. Still others lie abandoned in sprawling Imtu, flickering and babbling in their madness, the bones of their descendants around them. And at least one *malki* made the journey to Gulak, where it sits deep within the clade's tenement, manipulating its descendants with a political zeal the cosmopolitan nation is unused to.

settlements themselves are vast complexes of pipes and tubing obscured by rolling fog, gangways crossing above them. Water is pumped here and vented out into the Reaches to keep the temperature down, and other pipes siphon off flammable gases to heat production plants further away from the siphon-settlements. Often, the humidity is enough to choke workers, but they dare not remove their protective gear; in case of a pinpoint leak, the heat is enough to amputate and cauterize a stray limb in a rose-colored burst of steam.

For much of Sovan history, the nation has exported magical materials—primarily orichalcum and jade—purified by the heat of the shafts. Other exotic elements pulled from molten pools supplemented these exports, complemented by imports of food, uncontaminated water, and other Magical Materials less present in the molten rivers.

Floating from suspended platforms extending from siphon towns, the skiffs descend to the molten bottom of the shafts, using paramagnetic beams to sift through and gather precious Magical Materials. Amidst the roar of bubbling metal and hissing of gases, miners—clad in chillsuits woven with blue jade fibers—mouth silent prayers.

The skiffs rely on a complex power system of elemental cores to keep them aloft, and energize the shields—at least, for those crewed by loyal, honorable Populat miners. Penal skiffs, full of the black sheep of society and the Lumpen, are generally older and in far worse repair. Bereft of elemental cores to keep the shields alive, they utilize prayer-receiving devices to supplement Essence flow for the heat shields. If the heat shields fail due to insufficient piety or user error, the skiff—and its resources—can be remotely recovered,

albeit at a loss of all hands. The survival of the crew is their own prerogative.

## GOVERNMENT

The National Tripartite Assembly of Sova is subject, at least in part, to the parliament of families known as the Caucus. Election into the Caucus is considered a family matter—each abiding by their own customs of nomination—but the fifty-nine families each have a representative (called a genarch) in the government who is traditionally excused from other caste duties. As the Olgotary and the Theomachracy are nominally above partisan familial politics, the Caucus is a forum in which grievances beyond sport and vendetta may be voiced. It is here that the systemic power imbalances in Sovan society are addressed.

The Great Sodality Council, high celebrant and grand autocrat of Sova hold power alongside the elected leader of the Caucus, who possesses the title of *the Sova*, claiming unbroken authority from the national founder. In truth, such authority has been broken numerous times (even as recently as a century prior, when two families refused to acknowledge the Sova's authority on the issue of conurbation and split the Caucus to appoint their own Sovas), but appearance is paramount for ceremonial purposes. They do not cast votes in the National Tripartite Assembly, but may exercise a veto for any policy that has less than unanimous majority. Elected to a repeatable term of six years, the Sova is considered a family position rather than a societal one, and as such any caste may be elected. Some famed Sovas have even been of the Populat caste (and one charismatic Lumpen rogue), but pressure from other aspects of Autochthonian society have influenced the Caucus over the years. Traditionally, the pool of candidates is generated from chief executives of the Olgotary or Theomachracy. In modern times, celebrants and autocrats are considered to be simply better at navigating the complex interlocking politics of centuries-old feuds between families and coalitions. The current Sova, Jacoren Dyson, was an autocrat. Elected in the days after Ixut, this white-haired fireplug of a man fancies himself more demagogue than leader. He deeply enjoys stirring the nest of cockroaches Sova has become.

The loss of Ixut has inflamed long-simmering hatreds and passion in society. Immigration has been largely halted, and all visitors to the nation are harassed and watched by regulators. The Olgotary is largely in a state of flux; younger adjudicators have been reassigned to the regulators, leaving application of the law to the elders. Even these adjudicator-regulators default back to their original caste training, dispensing summary justice without regard to proper procedure. Regulators have adopted the masked identity of the adjudicators; dark hoods and goggles render accusations of simmering family hatreds as *undoubtedly* baseless. Despite the lie, regulator teams often supplement their numbers with assistants recruited from Populat family members. Slowly but

surely, certain families are manipulating the Olgotary into a tight grip on Sovan society.

Besides monitoring the activities of any outsiders in Sova, the regulators have also stepped up their surveillance of their own populace, and many members of the Populat watch each other carefully for signs of potential treason—the rewards for uncovering disloyalty or anti-Olgotary plots, especially among the Theomachracy, are substantial. Sova has become a closed circuit, with trade slowing to a crawl, even from Sova's perennial ally Gulak. Foreign trade is now considered unreliable and increasingly suspect, and the siphon-towns are under greater pressures than ever. The destruction of Ixut and the increased security measures have severely impacted Sova's economy, and entire exurbs have been shut down in order to conserve precious resources, causing the overseers in those towns to flood the cities with bellicose exurbians. The increased poverty, crowding and deprivation have only served to fuel the nation's growing xenophobia and inflame already-heightened tensions.

## RELIGION

The *Tome of the Great Maker* is quite clear on the matter, at least to Sovan interpretation: Champions are meant to serve the people of Autochthonia, never to rule over them. This faith—shaped largely from synoptic gospels of the Sova and maintained by consistently conservative clerics, but not unique to the nation by any means—is reinforced by the natural inclinations of the Exalted. The belief is ultimately a double-edged sword, however, as it implicitly acknowledges the role of the Champions in defending the Octet from the daunting challenge of survival in the Pole of Metal. Reinforced by the inhospitable nation, Sovan doctrine kept people in the cities for millennia, while the efforts of Champions kept them safe from clerical disdain.

The Theomachracy held enormous power in Sova until recently. To the guardians of dogma in Sova, conurbation was not a panacea for the nation's social ills, but an alluring trap of sin. Suffering and work was holy to the Great Maker and an acceptable social outlet for black sheep and degenerates, yet conurbation would allow the dangerous and risky job of prospecting to become mundane. Worse, Autochthon's holy plan for the people to inhabit their Champions was clearly spelled out in the *Tome of the Great Maker*, which made Sova's path not merely economically and socially unsound but blasphemous.

Feverish performances from lectors, publicly crying out the perils of ignoring the Maker's wishes to a gathered crowd of Populat; pious workers sabotaging the first Charms' construction, throwing themselves bodily into machinery; clerics holding meetings with high-ranking plutarchs, exchanging quiet warnings of doom and fire; an openly thuggish display of preceptor might, assaulting otherwise peaceful rallies supporting conurbation (and assassinating the Sova after the legislation passed)—none of it stopped the conurbation Charms from being added to the noetic archive. Publicly

defeated, the Theomachracy never stopped fighting against the technology, even as their cries of doom became hollow. Over the next century, their power declined dramatically, but now it is poised to make a dramatic comeback, as exurbs grow darker and people turn to the time-honored teachings spilling from *malki* lips.

### DENYING THE DEAD GEARS

The belief that the memories of the dead reside within the flesh and blood of one's descendents is deeply rooted in Sova's tribal past. Even before Lethe's sundering, many of the Eighty-Six practiced ritual cannibalism to retain the memories and strength of their ancestors. When the Seal of Eight Divinities blocked the newly-created ghosts of tribal elders from entering Autochthonia with their descendants, the dogmas of mnemophagia once again came into vogue.

This heresy is treasured by the Sovan Theomachracy even now, millennia later. Nothing but fragmentary, blurry memories survive the Ewer, and souls display a personality only vaguely similar to previous incarnations. Thus, Sovan reason, memories must be passed down through blood at conception, and retained in the flesh after the soul departs. Though the *malki* preserve the words and actions of family elders, their innermost thoughts and emotions are preserved in a different manner.

### RATS AND REMEMBRANCE

Thaumaturgically-bred for the purpose, the fecund honeyrats roam the hot under-places of Sova, consuming petroleum byproducts and various exotic chemicals missed by recycling technologies. Inside the honeyrat's heat-resistant flesh, the chemicals fuse into a sticky-sweet acidic substance, not unlike the long-gone samples of honey Sovans carried from Creation. The rat's abdomen swells with this honey-like substance, rendering the rodent a vivid orange-gold and leaving it largely immobile inside vast warrens of wire and tubing, nestled between the cities of Sova. There, they are easy prey for Harvesters, who gingerly comb the warrens with buckets and wicked-looking syringes, manually extracting the substance from the rat's glands before setting the relieved animal free again. The honey-substitute is a rare and treasured delicacy in the Sovan diet and was an incredibly valuable export in the days before Ixut, but a slim majority of it goes to the tombs of the ancestors.

The corpse recycling stations, ubiquitous throughout much of Autochthonia, are here used only for the young or dishonored dead, those Sovans whose memories and spirits are not worth preserving. Instead, the Harvesters inter deceased family elders in tremendous catacombs, depositing honored ancestors into great sarcophagi inscribed with date of death, lineage and celebrated accomplishments.

The Harvesters replace the fluid in the veins of the dead with golden rat honey, enveloping the corpse in the sarcophagus. Over a century's course, the flesh and bones of the ancestor are converted into a deliciously sweet confection, opened on the centennial anniversary of death and consumed

by the family's current elders and family prodigies in a private but joyous ceremony called *Mitlan-Cinerea*—"Remembrance Day" in High Holy Speech. Any Sovans over sixteen years of age who have not attended a ceremony are traditionally invited; *Mitlan-Cinerea* is considered a coming-of-age event, the first time a youth is truly *welcomed* into the family rather than *accepted* by mere accident of birth. Other nations disapprove of this practice—in a time of scarcity, *Mitlan-Cinerea* is seen as possessive hoarding.

### FASHION AND RECREATION

Centuries of hot-bunking and heat have obliterated traditional notions of modesty in Sova; fashion in the steamy clime trends towards machined cloth kilts and extensive piercings, with loose items held in packs and bags. With so much exposed skin, tattooing—of both standard and bioluminescent ink—is common, pictorial glyphs richly describing an individual's accomplishments, immediate and extended family, and even caste and political affiliations. Many families, expect a Sovan man or woman to receive appropriate markers signifying important events in their lives, such as the birth of a child or the death of a significant other.

Sovan food tends towards extreme spiciness; in the hot nation, citizens value the sweating reaction such spices produce, much to the chagrin of visitors. The engineered spice goes beyond all but the harshest of peppers from Creation. Spiced and fried cockroach shells are baked with nutrient slurry to form traditional Sovan dishes. Indeed, cockroaches comprise a much higher percentage of the diet here than in the rest of the Octet, rats being unwilling to tolerate the extreme heat in much of the nation.

Recreational hallucinogens have been prized for millennia, even before the journey to Autochthonia—along with the thousands of relics from the time before the Sova, stores of dried mushrooms were carried into the Maker's maw. Absent the *malki* and mellification, hallucination is the preferred method of communing with one's ancestors, and the preferred method of ripping away the veil of consciousness to see what seethes beneath. These have long since given way to narcotic enemas, alchemically derived from careful study of the irreplaceable mushroom samples and dispensed in public houses run by Surgeons. Young and old alike writhe on cots, sweating and babbling, communing with subgods and memories of ancestors gleaned from their own bodies. Despite the presence of Surgeons, narcotic hallucinations are illegal—*malki* are the sole state-sponsored method of communion—but the houses are widely tolerated by many in the conservative Caucus.

### THE PATROPOLIS OF IXUT

Sova is among the most populous nations of Autochthonia, but it is small, and everyone knows someone who lost a loved one to Ixut. Technology changed the Sovan people, allowing them to embrace their long-suffering national pride with new dignity, with the patropolis standing as the



shining model of progress. This embrace came with a loss, first of humility and then of lives. Driven to destruction by the lack of resources, Ixut has become a place of mourning, a ghost-haunted ruin. More than that, Ixut has become a symbol of all that is wrong in Sova—a festering sore on the esteem of a prideful people.

### IXUT-AS-IT-WAS

In life, Ixut lived in one of the largest tunnel-chambers between the Sovan shafts. The city was three gargantuan plates elevated one above the other, encircling a thick central spire with elevator and tube trams linking the structure into the exurb surrounding it. Networks of maintenance platforms were suspended below the plates. Streets and corridors stretched over the surface of the rings, connecting the above-air buildings with the honeycomb of structures within. Based at a critical juncture of resources and transport, Ixut was remade into the metaphorical heart of the conurbation projects, and ultimately boasted a conurbation population exceeding many cities of other nations.

### DEAD IXUT

On a calm day, if the air is right, you can hear the thunder of Dead Ixut. In the Ixut conurbation, it is a constant cacophony. A swirling black cloud of vaporized soulsteel surrounds the plates, churned by ruined air-recycling Municipal Charms. Metallic particles grind against one another, occasionally generating titanic bolts of crimson lightning.

Between claps of thunder, the wailing of the soulsteel fills the air with a sonorous requiem. For the past decade, it has been a Sovan tradition to make pilgrimage to the ruins of Dead Ixut and stand for a day screaming with the soulsteel, harmonizing the cries of the living and the dead. Occasionally, a slender pillar of pale green light flickers up from the great spire at the center of the city. It pleases the living to believe they have something to do with this.

Blight Zones dot the city, warring with the Alchemical and Autochthonian Essence still flowing through the geomantic reservoirs. Necromantic taint oozes through the city's power grid. Municipal Charms crouch as ruined, fused hulks of magical materials, or stand half-functional—a morbid testament to Sovan ingenuity—roaring to life whenever their capacitors respire enough to maintain a brief charge. Gremlins stalk the city corridors, battling Ixut's strange Colossi as they comb the city on unknowable missions.

The destruction is less thorough in the middle areas of the city; there are intact corpses and soulgems alike, including the soulgems of three Champions who sought to rally defenses in the final moments of the city's life. The ghosts of the dead roam the lowest plate, ignorant of who and what they are. The entire city is blocked off with a high makeshift wall made of rent pipes and sheet metal, created by Sova's Champions to contain the city's unknown horrors during the early days of Dead Ixut.

### IXUT'S FATE

No one knows what happened to cause the destruction of the city, and the tortured ghost of the Alchemical certainly isn't lucid enough to explain. The most plausible theories have been listed below, though it is left up to the Storyteller to determine the truth of the matter.

- **Autochthon Did It:** Ixut's strain on Autochthon's Essence flow caused the sleeping titan to awaken and lash out in mindless pain. In his hunger, he forcibly overrode the Ewer's mechanisms and tore the po souls of the populace from their still-living bodies, condemning their hun souls to wander the ruined streets of the city. Faced with a dearth of Essence, the Alchemical was unable to fully energize the Perfected Omniphysical Aegis Grid, resulting in fatal damage by the Maker's direct assault. Ixut's current Blight Zones and the presence of defensive drones seem to support a severe and fatal anaphylactic reaction.

- **The Adamant Caste Did It:** Ixut's destruction happened over the course of hours and days, not moments, though the city quarantined itself in the first minutes of the disaster. Witnesses in Greater Ixut reported the discharge of Essence Pulse Cannons and Municipal-grade weaponry, but otherwise their stories have little in common. Conflicting accounts and grades of weaponry used suggest the presence of Adamant opponents to those who know the truth of the caste's existence. Whether they acted alone or on the unconscious whim of their lords, none can say, though most Divine Ministers would react with horror at the death of a Champion.

- **Mog Did It:** Ixut reached beyond his station to support deeply heretical theotechnology. Mog has been known to physically rebuke cities he feels have eschewed their role as Champions, personally or through a destroyer assault, though he has never outright annihilated a city. This would mean an Alchemical disabled the city's defenses and wove the Retribution of Mog protocol, causing the Minster to remove the offending patropolis. This places the blame of the city's death squarely on a single individual's shoulders—usually a Yugashi Champion, in Sovan propaganda. It is for this reason that this theory is popular despite its utter absurdity.

## THINGS TO DO IN IXUT WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

Autochthonia's standard reincarnation system has broken down in Dead Ixut. The Ewer failed to properly lock the dying souls of the Autochthonian citizens. Most of these souls were destroyed in the final conflagration, soulforged on the spot and vaporized to join the great cloud that swirls screaming about the plates. The remaining ghosts are confused, frightened by their new state, incorporeal to the few living explorers who brave Dead Ixut. Comprised mainly of Populat ghosts, most lack the education to fully grasp what has happened to them, and have simply chosen to continue the work they did in life as best they can—operating ruined machinery, performing maintenance on half-functional Municipal Charms, avoiding the Shadows of Ixut and attempting to commune with the deceased Champion's spirit. Due to the novelty of their condition, they lack all but the most basic of Arcanoi. Despite everything, they remain loyal Sovans. This will doubtless aid the Alchemicals who come to finally put Dead Ixut to rest—for the Champions lack the Charms and the experience to deal with the restless dead.

## IXUT CONURBATION

Surrounding Ixut like a great floor-to-ceiling ring with a radius of twenty miles is Greater Ixut, once most splendid of the exurbs. Unlike most exurbs—which are, literally, glorified towns—Greater Ixut has grown up around the progenitor municipality, and is at once representative and atypical of conurbation. The streets of the exurb have no ceilings but the high one of the chamber, superheated air waving above. Before Ixut, their streets shone with light that rendered the illuminated indefatigable, and their air was pure and clean, thanks to Municipal Charms scattered throughout the exurb. Now, those Charms are little more than hunks of fused Magical Materials on darkened, smog-ridden streets, grim monuments to the exurb's lost glory in the wavering hot air. Other cities have long devoted their resources to keep Ixut's conurbation alive; after nine years, goodwill has worn dangerously thin.

Like all conurbations, Greater Ixut is led by an overseer, a type of specialized autocrat. Ixut's proper autocrat had the singular misfortune to be outside his city when it died. Since Ixut, the autocrat and overseer have been involved in a quiet, if fierce, bureaucratic cold war over whether the extremely limited relief funding should go to maintaining the costly (and possibly unsalvageable) exurb, or the daunting task of dismantling the dead patropolis. Their

bureaucratic infighting has effectively split the Olgotary within the conurbation.

Politicians make promises to the overseer and people of the conurbation; "Remember Ixut!" is on the lips of every citizen levy training for war. Every year, proposals for the recovery of soulgems and the salvage of crucially-needed magical materials arise, and every year they are shot down for one reason or another. The reasons include lack of manpower, resources, the horrific weather and gremlin problems, the rumors of strange beings now inhabiting city. But with those rejections, nine years and counting, comes the promise that someday Ixut will be restored and Sova's wounds will heal.

The promises are hollow. Bureaucrats may argue over the best way to salvage the disaster, but the fact remains: Ixut serves the nation in death as a symbol of betrayal, a focus for the feelings of victimization. Dead Ixut allows Sova to once again embrace their pride, not as innovators but as martyrs. Sova is defined now by pain; to alleviate that pain means robbing Sova of their identity once more.

## IMTU, MONUMENT TO GLORY

Built into the hardened slag of a cold, dead shaft, Imtu is not only the national capital, but the heart of Sovan culture—and the seat of every dynasty of prominence. Enormous cylinders of jade, etched with stories-high pictographic murals depicting Sova's founding, stretch between the walls of the shaft, criss-crossing it from top to bottom. The tall, thin buildings of Imtu stretch vertically from and between these horizontal columns, threading between ore formations repurposed into glittering arcologies. Trams and air traffic suffuse the shaft with a soft glow, cloaking the city in dim light during every shift. The highest buildings pierce the top of the cylinder, boring straight out of the nation and serving as a series of ports and security checkpoints for immigrants. It is difficult for visitors to grasp the entire city laid out below them, as they drop from the checkpoints in adamant-bottomed levitating trams; more than once, an invasion of the city has been halted when Imtu simply removed the checkpoints with explosives, letting invaders plummet miles to their deaths.

Every family of worth maintains a stronghold in Imtu, a place where they may gather their dynasties. The residences of those who have been annihilated or who have abandoned Sova are considered cursed, walled off by thick slabs of jade and soulsteel, their *malki* left to advise the rats.

As the seat of the National Assembly and the Caucus, Imtu has also become a host for near-constant protests and demonstrations. Demagogue-inflamed true believers want war with Yugash, an influx of people to the cities and an immediate end to conurbation. Meanwhile, satisfied exurbanites want more resources allocated to their system. For nearly a decade, the city's regulators have been taxed to the limit in keeping order, despite new recruits from the Olgotary.

## TOWNS IN AUTOCHTHONIA

Sova does not have a monopoly on towns; in fact, conurbation has rendered Sovan towns highly atypical of Autochthonian civil structure. In Autochthonian nomenclature, a town is defined as a settlement without an Alchemical municipal core; hence, it is a settlement deprived of the myriad benefits of Municipal Charms. Some contain little more than a dozen people, while conurbations exceed the populations of some cities. Most modern towns in Autochthonia are built on a strategic pass or vital resource mine, such as a particularly rich system of conduit taps or an efficacious pressure-valve monitoring site. They possess proprietary technologies far cruder than those found in cities—prefabricated modular buildings, plumbing and water purifiers, food synthesizers, entertainment centers, educational creches. Power is maintained by huge banks of Essence capacitors and loaned elemental cores. Certainly, town-dwellers are more comfortable than the tunnel folk, yet their lives are measurably more stressful than those of their urban counterparts. Without a Rat-Slaying Electrification Grid, vermin are a constant menace, and entire towns have been wiped out by gremlin custodians without the Perfected Omniphysical Aegis Grid to defend their homes. Stereotypes of town-dwellers play up a simplistic, bumpkin interpretation of those outside civilizations, but there is a kernel of truth in this viewpoint, as town-dwellers rarely have the time for the leisure of their cousins. Yet for that, they can be startlingly cosmopolitan, as their vulnerability goes both ways—town-dwellers have frequent contact with subgods and custodians of every stripe, and they are the ones who trade most frequently with polar mutants. However, for the most part, the lives of town-dwellers are devoid of the glitz and easy comfort that Municipal technologies afford. Their world is harder, greyer and plainer.

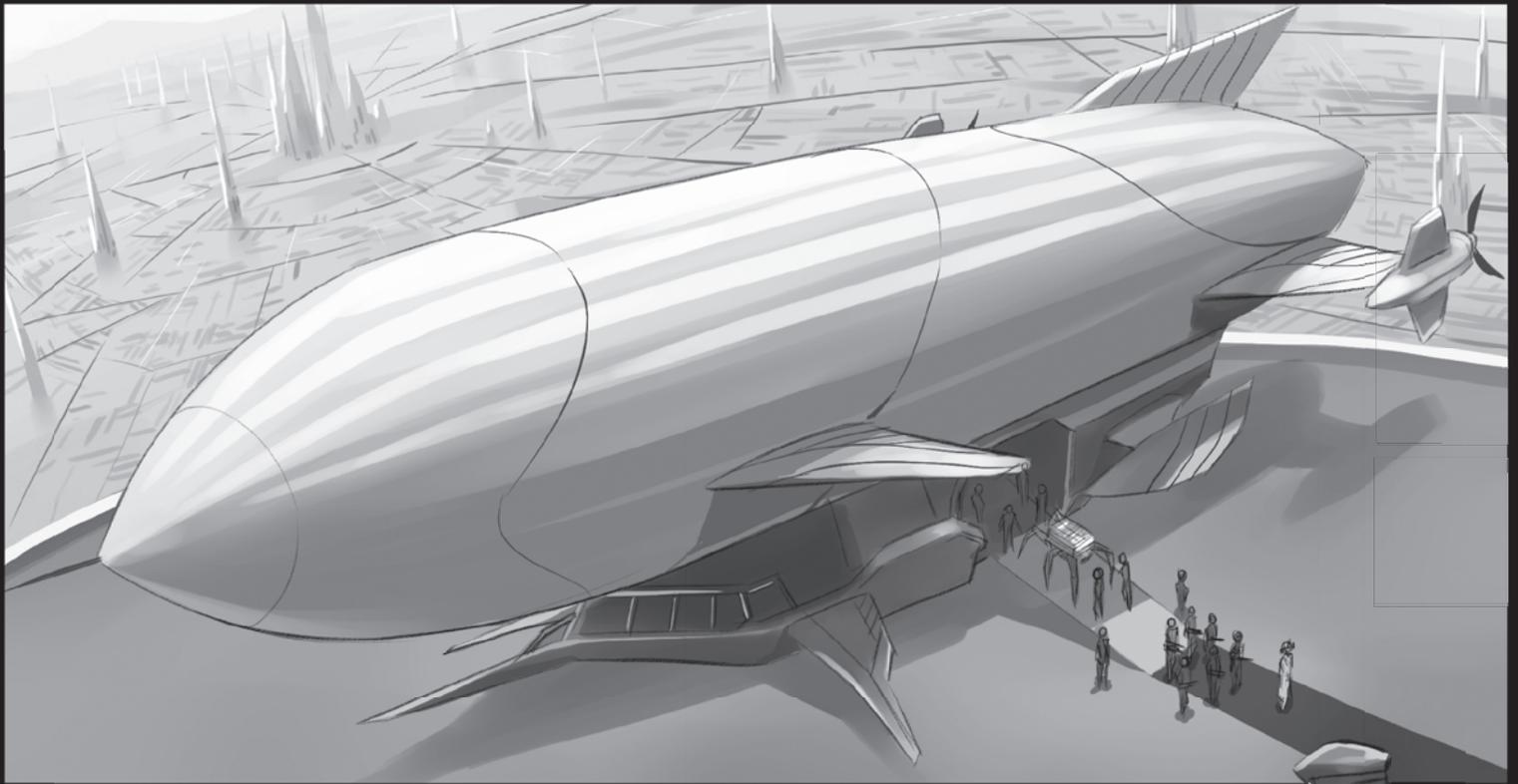
## FOREIGN RELATIONS

In the wake of Ixut, regulators ensure that all visitors to Sova are severely questioned, ostensibly to prevent Yugashi spies from entering the nation. It is obvious to any visitor, however, that Sova is repurposing their dwindling resources towards a war effort. The nation has pressured several high-profile Alchemicals into undergoing retrofit as Colossi, the funding of which hampers recovery efforts in Ixut and the rest of the nation. The Assembly has also severed all but the most formal of ties with Gulak, long considered to be the staunchest ally of the fractured tribes. Gulak has suffered Sova's raids and petty pride in the past, but they do not truly comprehend the growing desperation of the Sovan people.

Sovans have also mapped out current tram tube lines to Yugash and Nurad, leading intelligence experts in those nations to fear an invasion (or retribution, in Yugash's case). Any conflict Sova engages in would be very costly, but potentially very profitable from plunder, and perhaps the Sovan spirit would benefit from a short victorious war, but the Olgotary is playing its cards close to the chest for the moment. Unbeknownst to Sova, the nation is due to move within close proximity of the Kamaki plate in the near future. War is all but assured when this is discovered, as Kamak presents too inviting a target to pass up.

## PATH TO CREATION

Though Sova has donated many of its tribal artifacts to Thutot over the millennia in exchange for tithes and resources, it has the most *replicated* relics of Creation of any nation in the Octet, forged anew from copies made in the nation's tribal past—various pot designs, woven baskets, and items indicative of a pre-Exalted culture. Yet these relics carry no real memory of the world of blue skies beyond the Seal. What does survive in the national memory is the reason the Sova led them from Creation—fear of the Sunlit Heroes and the mind-shattering magics they command. Sova loathes Yugash, but when word reaches them of Project Razor—if it has not already—it will likely touch on the deep sense of antipathy and rivalry that Sova has so long embraced. Provided they have not already encountered Kamak, Sova may dedicate all of their remaining resources, absent bureaucratic and nepotistic jockeying, to breaching the Seal.



GREETINGS, FIRST CITIZENS OF THULOT. I AM HONORED TO BE INVITED HERE AMONG YOU.

YOU ARE TOO KIND, CHAMPION. IT IS WE WHO ARE OVERJOYED TO GREET EMISSARIES FROM SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GULAK ONCE FEARED LOST. HOW FAIRS XEXAS?

LIFE HASN'T BEEN EASY, BUT WE'RE BLESSED WITH A SURPLUS WE'D GLADLY SHARE WITH THULOT. WE ONLY ASK YOU TO PERMIT SOME OF OUR FOLK TO EMIGRATE HERE.

OF COURSE. THE CITIZENS OF XEXAS ARE OUR KIN, AND WE WELCOME THEM AND THE GIFTS THEY BRING.

AND A PRIVATE AUDIENCE WITH THE AKUMYO.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE WIDENING GYRE

The Eight Nations are ancient beyond reckoning; their history reaches back in an uninterrupted chain to the earliest days of the First Age. They've outlasted the Old Realm, the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, and the reign of the Scarlet Empress—combined. In their hearts, most Autochthonians believe the Octet will stand forever.

In truth, Autochthonia teeters on the brink of disaster. Three of its nations still present the appearance of invulnerability, proud and permanent pillars which could never topple, but this is an illusion. The pillars are rocking as the Great Maker's sickness worsens, and without heroic action, the long histories of wealthy Kamak, holy Jarish, and cosmopolitan Gulak may soon come to an end.

### KAMAK

A funicular as large as an apartment block hums softly as it descends a precipitous eighty-degree slope of ice-crusting brass and steel. Its cloaked Populat passengers sit in warm, comfortable booths, lowering their muffling scarves to sip from mugs of hot kaff as they peer out through the funicular's

broad, tinted windows. Outside, beams of light leap from the funicular's lamps to illuminate the veils of snow falling from above. Blue flashes flicker distantly, their source hidden in the icy mists—lightning, perhaps, or a firefight with Estasian raiders.

Of all the Eight Nations, Kamak may fall farthest from the norm. Its orbit through the Reaches is the most eccentric, taking it into the coldest zones of the Pole of Metal; this also gives it access to the largest deposits of the magical materials outside of Xexas and Loran, making it the richest nation in the Octet. The Kamaki are a people of extremes, ruled by their code of privacy in public, while privately obsessed with family and romantic love. They are an uncouth enigma to the other nations, isolated by wealth and pride. But they cannot survive alone. Kamak must come to terms with the changing world or fall with it.

### LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPE

Where other nations are comprised of rounded or tubular chambers that run parallel or perpendicular to gravity,

Kamak's chambers are both unusually shaped and laid at odd angles, like a fistful of three-dimensional puzzle pieces tossed into a jumbled heap. Shapes range from regular polyhedra to kinked and twisted tubes to amorphous, irregular spaces. Sizes likewise vary, with shafts fifty miles long situated alongside cysts less than a mile in diameter. Their conjunctions often lead to mild temblors.

Flat horizontal surfaces rarely occur naturally in Kamak. Most of those which exist have been engineered into that shape over the millennia. Some of the nation's settlements stand atop slick metal summits or saddle-back ridges; others cling to narrow ledges or jut out from escarpments. Still others are spread across multiple ledges or outcroppings, connected by swaying metal bridges. But most lie embedded within the nation's walls: networks of corridors and chambers built of concrete and steel, tucked away from the cold and the winds and the stark cliffs and chasms.

Sophisticated trams and funicular lines run across the icy slopes and through miles of illuminated tunnels, steam rising from their heated tracks. Obelisks of red jade three meters tall, their surfaces inlaid with convoluted thaumaturgical sigils of orichalcum, hover above settlements and stopping points, emitting zones of warmth to stave off the encircling cold.

## WEATHER

Kamak is the coldest of the Eight Nations. Its course through the Reaches takes it through areas whose temperature often drops well below freezing. When combined with water vapor ejected from steam conduits, this makes it the only nation whose larger chambers are subject to snowfall.

Unlike Creation, Kamak has no regular seasonal cycle. Temperatures change erratically as the nation moves through the body of the Machine God. Nonetheless, its people divide its climactic variations into three seasons. "Warm season" encompasses those times when the temperature is above freezing. Sometimes these periods are actually warm, or even hot, but they never last for more than a few months. "Snow season" encompasses times when the air is cold and dry; breath steams in the air, while frost crackles on metal and glass. Worst is "ice season," when rime and freezing rain encrust every exposed surface with ice.

In settled areas and along thoroughfares, red jade obelisks and steam conduits are employed to alleviate the worst of the cold. Surfaces that need to be kept free of ice—such as tram tracks, walkways, stairs, ladder rungs, door frames, and the like—are typically warmed with an Essence-charged mesh of red jade alloy embedded in a layer of corrugated artificial rubber.

## HISTORY

The founder Kamak was a hunter, a warrior, a traveler and an adventurer. He was not a leader. While his peers led tribes of followers and disciples to new homes, he and his handful of companions gathered those hapless mortals whom the Maker had snatched against their will. While he

## SWARMING WEATHER

The nation's irregular cycle of freezing and thawing damages exposed surfaces—whether concrete, metal, rubber or plastic—by broadening existing cracks and fissures. As a result, fix beetles and other biomechanoids are more prevalent here than in other nations. They boil out from the Reaches just after significant temperature changes, swarming into Kamak's nation-chambers to repair damaged surfaces and subsystems, and are often so agitated that they can overcome minor wards against their presence. Kamak's townsfolk know to stay indoors in swarming weather. Whenever possible, Kamaki regulators lure invaders into contact with biomechanoid swarms, and Octet generals know that a protracted siege of a Kamaki city risks being caught by swarming weather.

organized his ragtag band, the other founders claimed the choicest nation-chambers. Many of Kamak's followers trickled away as he sought a refuge; still more left after he found it, dismayed by its vertiginous proportions.

In the following decades, the new nation suffered from civil unrest. Renegade bands rejected his authority, dispersing the population into small, scattered towns. Upon his death, neighboring nations were quick to lay siege to the nascent state. Only the appearance of its first Champion, the founder's soul-successor *Transient Emancipator*, spared it from conquest and assimilation.

When the nations split apart to drift through the Reaches, Kamak's course took it far from the others, out into the cold places at the edge of the Pole of Metal. Unprepared, the Kamaki people suffered terribly. Thousands died of exposure; others were afflicted by frostbite or perished in accidents on ice-slicked metal. Dangerous biomechanoids and fractious elementals took their own toll.

Then the Conductor's Guild discovered the great veins of the Magical Materials that lay hidden in the cold Reaches. With such resources at hand, Kamak could manufacture more new Alchemicals. Better, it could trade with the other nations for all its needs: food, tools, surplus workers to take advantage of its new resources. In this Era of Expansion, Kamak generated vast surpluses and increased its population and manufacturing capacity.

Other nations sought to win Kamak's riches with military might. When paying tribute only inspired further attacks and the nation's Alchemical guardians proved insufficient, the nation's leadership dug deep into Magical Material reserves to build more Champions—enough to outnumber those in service to any other nation.

In 821 DA, while *Transient Emancipator* was abroad, several young Champions declared a coup d'etat. This

began the nation's brief Age of Exalted Ascendancy. The newly established Alchemical Assembly, untouched by Clarity, initially seemed an able governing body. But within a generation, schisms between Champions tore the Assembly asunder. The leaders of the body were assassinated, presumably by one another, and the survivors divided Kamak between them into individual cantons. (Unknown to history, this was largely the work of the Adamant Caste, fulfilling their silent duty to keep Alchemicals from power.)

The cantons suffered greatly over the next few decades, individually unable to defend against raiders. Within a century of the Alchemical Assembly's founding, Kamak had reunited under a single mortal government.

Aside from Estasian campaigns and other invasions, Kamak's later history has been relatively sedate. The First Progressive Era passed quietly; Kamak suffered no great disasters, so while its Sodalities throttled back on research to avoid suffering the same fate as Nurad, they continued building advanced automatons and other magitechnology. Revolutionary groups have also sent the nation into turmoil every few centuries; one such group succeeded in 2993 DA, leading to the Communal Revolution under the authority of its short-lived Populat Communal Council. But Kamak remains largely above the strife that so often embroils the rest of the Octet.

## AN ICY FACADE

Kamak architecture is plain and subdued. Metal and concrete are left bare or painted in muted grays and blues. Structures go unadorned except for essential informational glyphs and simple, understated architectural motifs—stylized gears, huge bronze masks depicting the austere, emotionless visage of the Maker, and the like. The propaganda posters and murals found in other nations are conspicuously absent. Only the ubiquitous red jade obelisks splash the scene with color. There are exceptions, such as grandiose administrative buildings and ostentatiously ornamented Sodality chapterhouses. But most Kamaki facades convey little and conceal much.

The same applies to the public face of the Kamaki people themselves. In public spaces, they wear dark, heavy garments even in the rare spates of warm weather. Sleeves are worn long enough to cover the wearer's gloved hands; hats are large and shapeless, covering most of the traditional Kamaki hair-braids. Collars are trimmed with fur; boots are massive, with detachable cleats for icy weather. Most importantly, the lower part of the face is always hidden behind a voluminous scarf or half-mask, exposing only the eyes and soulgem.

## THESE SILENT CITIES

This secretive quality extends to all features of Kamaki public life. Privacy—an alien concept in most of Autoch-



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thonia—is all-important here. Citizens generally avoid one another in public so as not to intrude. When they must interact in public, they speak softly, as loud speech is considered crass. Much is conveyed by body language: subtle gestures and postures that mean little to outsiders but speak volumes to a native. Public personal space is quite large, such that coming within arm's reach of anyone but immediate family is deeply offensive. Prying questions are never asked, while circumlocutions are employed to avoid using proper names where someone might overhear.

Noise is inevitable in cities and workplaces, but machinery is fitted with sound-damping baffles to minimize noise pollution. Commuters hear only the groan of distant engines, the faint hiss of pneumatic trams and the muted chiming of the shift-change gongs. Citizens known to labor in noisy environments suffer some social stigma, as though the clamor of the workplace clings to them like a bad odor.

## INNER WARMTH

Entering a Kamaki dormitory commune is like going from night into day. The interior of a commune is a warm, brightly lit place, painted in vivid colors not to be seen outdoors. Furniture is ornate; floors are covered with plush carpet or elaborate parquet tile; walls are hung with jewel-toned reproductions of great paintings and murals from across the Octet.

The Kamaki are as open in private as they are withdrawn in public. At home or in the workplace, away from inquisitive eyes, they can show their faces, smile and laugh, consume intoxicants and play games. Their personal space contracts markedly in private, permitting easy, intimate contact among co-workers, friends, neighbors and family. Indoor clothing is lighter and more brightly colored, marked with intricate patterns and precious metal embroidery.

## RULES OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is vitally important in Kamak. Other than Sova, this is the only nation where travelers risk death from exposure. As a result, a citizen may sometimes have to admit a stranger to her home to save their life. The Kamaki have evolved elaborate social customs over the millennia to deal with such situations.

Any guest in the home is escorted first to the *hearthgem*—a fist-sized mass of red jade set into the base of a wall niche, its flat upper surface radiating as much heat as a small fire. The guest is offered food and drink, an overture which is rude to decline. The meal is then warmed atop the hearthgem. Only after it has been served can any sort of business proceed.

Petitioning someone for hospitality is distinctly uncomfortable for many Kamaki. No matter the need, intruding on another's private space—or having another intrude upon it—goes against the grain of their upbringing and culture. "Vethem's Solace," a classic song in the lector's repertoire, narrates a traveler's death as she, unwilling to trouble the

## THE COMMUNE

Kamak's wealth and luxury is apparent in its distribution of living space. Rather than being crammed by the dozens into cramped barracks, the rank and file of the Populat dwell in *dormitory communes*. A commune is a block of four apartments surrounding a central courtyard. Each two-room apartment is as large as that inhabited by foremen or shift chiefs in other nations, and may accommodate anywhere from four to eight people, depending on their status.

The courtyard itself is a shared space for spending time with one's neighbors and for local social and religious events. Even larger than any of the surrounding apartments, its walls blaze with vivid murals and its floor shines with bright mosaics. Communal property shared by everyone living in the commune, such as small vehicles, snow shovels, cleaning equipment and emergency food and water storage tanks, are placed in small sheds at the corners.

Social outcasts among the Lumpen are reassigned from their communes to special Lumpen-only public dormitories. There they experience the lack of privacy—both from being crowded in with their peers and from being surveilled by animating intelligences and regulators—that is normal to the Populat in other nations.

strangers who live in an unfamiliar commune, succumbs to the elements just outside the commune's door.

Of course, not everyone is thus troubled. Invoking the hospitality rule to maliciously intrude on a stranger's—or enemy's—privacy is a crime punishable by ostracism among the Lumpen.

## CUISINE

Kamaki cuisine tastes strange to visitors from other nations. It is heavy and fatty, often with strong acidic or salty notes, and is invariably served hot. Moreover, despite its overall high quality—the wealthy nation imports Gulaki master chefs to train its food handlers—the food sometimes has faint metallic or chemical undertones. This arises from long-term storage of nutrient slurry in holding tanks before processing; slurry conduits have been known to freeze solid when the nation passes through the very coldest parts of the Reaches, making it necessary to preserve large amounts of slurry to ward off the possibility of famine.

Meals are accompanied by water, flavored dilutions of ethanol, or *kaff*—a beverage whose recipe dates back thousands of years. Reminiscent of Southern coffee, *kaff* is a dark, sludgy, bitter drink consisting of boiling water brewed with powdered triple-roasted nutrient paste and laced with trace amounts of synthetic cocaine. It is occasionally

consumed in other nations, but only in Kamak is it traditionally blended with rat lard and salt, a savory combination that provides warmth and energy—not to mention soothing chapped lips.

## DINING IN KAMAK

Kamak's eateries are as luxurious as its accommodations. Public commissaries are smaller and cozier than those in other nations, resembling coffeehouses more than cafeterias. Food is procured from banks of automats and consumed at small booths, allowing citizens to dine with a minimum of social interaction while observing adjoining corridors or avenues through windows of one-way glass.

Mochi and beverages, dispensed in self-heating containers, are available from vending machines in isolated areas. This gives travelers opportunity to eat and drink when weather impedes their journey. The use of such machines is on an honor system, though regulators have been known to surveil the devices to stop vandals, while preceptors do the same to harangue gluttons.

Private dining is an option for Tripartite and Populat alike. In early Kamak, people could easily and unexpectedly be trapped in their own homes by snowfall or when ice sealed their windows and doors, leaving them unable to access the community's food stores. As a result, it became traditional to keep a small supply of food in the home. Even the lowest among the Populat has three days' worth of preserved food and water at the commune, along with a pot or samovar in which to prepare it. Amateur chefs may requisition packets of synthetic flavoring agents for personal use.

## THE ARTS

Singing and chanting are the most common sorts of Kamaki music, but instruments are used on occasion. Drums are beaten outdoors to keep time in work groups; though audible at long distance, the sound is pitched low enough not to be intrusive. Indoors or in communal courtyards, stringed instruments may be played softly.

Storytelling and music are slow, sonorous and utterly formalized. Many tales and songs have remained unchanged across thousands of years. This has anchored their discourse against change, making the Kamaki dialect sound archaic and stilted to other Autochthonians, closer to Old Realm.

Dancing is only performed indoors and in communal courtyards. Certain traditional dances are performed solely between husband and wife, and they are passed down to one's children. Those who do not master the dances in childhood can ask for training from their lectors.

## MARRIAGE

Personal relationships are lauded in Kamak in a manner alien to most of the other nations. Marriage—between members of the same or opposite genders—is a sacred union, said to mirror the relationship and love between mortals and the Great Maker. Wedding vows have the support of law; spouses can easily and effectively petition to share an apart-

ment, and their superiors cannot reassign them to different locales or schedule them for incompatible work shifts.

Marriage is a deeply personal bond, but it is a part of public life. Wedding vows are traditionally performed in the couple's shared commune courtyard in front of their combined social circles. Afterwards, each spouse is tattooed upon the temple—a spot that's always visible, even when dressed for outdoors—with an elaborate double knot symbolizing their relationship.

All citizens are expected to marry at some point in their lives. To be unwed past the age of thirty suggests a flaw in one's character; unwed citizens face a glass ceiling, and all high-ranking individuals are married or widowed. For unmarried citizens, celibacy is less dishonorable than serial monogamy, and cheating on an unwed partner results in becoming a social outcast. Adultery is punishable by exile, while divorce is forbidden. Citizens in unhappy marriages receive counseling from their lectors. It's not uncommon for a bereaved spouse to remarry after a year of mourning.

Champions are not obligated to marry as mortals do. This does not prevent them from trying. Occasionally an Alchemical marries a mortal, only to watch him or her wither with age over the decades. Still, there's much to be said for the benefits of such a love. Marriages between two Alchemicals have traditionally gone far more poorly. There are few things more painful to a Champion than for one's spouse to succumb to Clarity.

Kamak takes an extremely dim view of false wedding vows taken just because workers don't want to be relocated or reassigned. The couple to be wed must provide evidence of their union to the officiating lector. A child conceived by opposite-sex spouses constitutes automatic proof of commitment. Same-sex couples lack this option for obvious reasons. (Marriage has little impact on Kamaki child-rearing practices; offspring are raised in communal crèches as normal.)

Foreigners rarely understand the significance of Kamaki marriage. Most see it as a decadent practice, one both absurd and grotesque, in which individuals put their personal interests ahead of the needs of the state and the Machine God.

## GOVERNMENT

In times of peace and plenty, Kamak's National Tripartite Assembly is a largely ceremonial body. Individual cities and towns are left to their own devices, comfortable in the knowledge that resources are plentiful and each locale knows best how to handle its own problems. But when war or some other disaster looms, individual Assemblies are quick to collaborate with one another and with the National Assembly. Unfortunately, the National Assembly's traditional hands-off attitude means that its members are rarely experienced enough in coordinating the engines of state to act effectively in such times of crisis.

On a more local level, Kamaki government tends toward conservatism. The plutarchs, who are as dominant here as elsewhere, have a schizophrenic relationship with

the Sodalities. Resources are funneled toward Sodality research projects, but the fruits of those projects cannot be put into production without jumping through countless hoops. Many new technologies are never pursued at all, or are manufactured only for export to less risk-averse nations like Claslát or Gulak.

## RELIGION

The folk of Kamak disdain religious pomp as unseemly. They reject elaborate ritual in favor of simple, spontaneous preaching and worship. Their temples are modest structures, as austere on the inside as the nation's other structures are on the outside. Masks and statuary representing the Maker and his Ministers, vibrantly forged from the Magical Materials, stand out all the more against such a stark backdrop.

Many urban temples contain sensory deprivation tanks. Theomachrats use them for meditation, dwelling on questions of doctrine and the needs of their community while floating amidst silent warmth. Particularly troubled parishioners may receive dispensation to employ the tanks as well.

Religious festivals in Kamak are colloquial, intimate and brief. This spares lectors the time, effort and expense that their counterparts elsewhere spend on preparing for a handful of elaborate spectacles. Instead, they render a large number of sermons, musical recitals and other unpretentious performances, many of which are presented in the courtyards of individual communes.

Preceptors are empowered to violate the privacy code in the course of their duties. Not only can they worm their way into a citizen's social circle under false pretenses, but they can approach and question citizens in public—an act deeply humiliating to the Kamaki. The lectors teach that this is a sacred obligation which the preceptors wield as champions of orthodoxy, but this message doesn't always sink in.

Kamak's cleric-savants have more sway over their divine contacts than elsewhere, as they can call upon the nation's incredible resources to offer bribes worthy of a subgod. Many Scholar and Luminor workshops are dedicated wholly toward constructing elaborate trinkets with which to win the favor of important elementals and ministerial subroutines.

### BENDING THE BOW

The bow is the most prominent devotional symbol of the nation's founder. Beyond its role in religious ritual, the weapon comes in and out of style every few centuries; today, many younger Tripartites employ archery as a meditative technique. Mundane bows are manufactured from synthetics; regulator-generals carry ceremonial soulsteel powerbows. Still, the crossbow—a simple weapon requiring little training—sees much more extensive use.

## TECHNOLOGISTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

While Kamak as a whole is relatively conservative, its Sodalities are a hotbed of research. The nation's vast wealth affords its Sodality chapterhouses access to the most advanced theotechnical instruments in the Octet.

## THE SODALITIES

The Conductors are lauded for their harsh, dangerous work in obtaining Kamak's riches. They bear the brunt of the cold—against which they have developed highly sophisticated cold-weather gear—and the Reaches' most monstrous inhabitants. The Conductors are also responsible for transit in Kamak; in addition to trams and other vehicles, they manage the Populat work teams that keep traffic routes clear of snow, ice and slush. Lastly, they are treasured for tending the steam conduits that give Kamak much of its precious heat.

Given the dangers of Kamak life—glacial cold, steep slippery surfaces, plagues of machines, and so forth—the Surgeons are highly valued. They have mastered treatments for frostbite and hypothermia far superior to the techniques practiced in Creation's North, and most people know someone who owes life and limb to a Surgeon's skill. Cross-caste relationships with Surgeons are as widespread as those with lectors.

The Scholars are as well-regarded here as elsewhere in the Octet. Kamak is more heavily manufacturing-oriented than many nations, putting much of the Populat in close contact with the Scholars. Likewise, their venturing out into Kamak's especially hazardous Reaches to perform repairs demonstrates their valor. Nonetheless, their actions bring them less acclaim than their peers among the Conductors and the Surgeons.

The Luminors are as pompous here as anywhere. Nonetheless, the populace recognizes and respects their maintenance of warmth-giving devices such as hearthgems, heat lamps and the ever-present red jade obelisks. The public is less aware of the squabbling between Luminors and Conductors over their respective roles in staving off the cold.

The Harvesters are at the bottom of Kamak's Sodality hierarchy. Kamak recycles, but it has less *need* to do so than other nations. Kamak sees its Harvesters more as trash-gatherers and corpse-disposers than anything else.

## AUTOMATONS

Self-willed machines remain in use here; while they're staggeringly expensive to craft and maintain, Kamak is wealthy enough to shoulder the expense. Automatons are forbidden to perform any sort of prayerful work which, when done by mortals, directs Essence to the Machine God. Nonetheless, they may still fulfill other tasks, such as food service, entertainment, sentinel duty and combat. Simpler, non-sentient machines—what Creation's savants call golems—are also employed for tasks suited to their more limited abilities.

Like other Kamaki devices, automatons are typically driven by clockworks, bottled lightning or steam. Also like other Kamaki devices, they incorporate sophisticated sound

## TOMINIC

Designed as a method of medium-distance communication for Conductor survey teams in the Reaches, *tominic* is a system for sending messages by tapping on pipes. Over the centuries, this language of single- and double-taps has insinuated itself through Kamaki society to the point where most people are fluent in its use. Citizens knock on exposed water-pipes to communicate with neighbors in the next commune over; children learn to pass messages along the pipes in their crèches.

baffles, reducing the noises of their inner workings to a gentle hum or hiss. The more sapient the automaton, the more the Kamaki see it as a person with regard to their sense of personal space.

General information on animate constructs may be found in **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, pages 94-98.

## PROSTHETICS

Kamak's prosthetic technology is comparable to that of Nurad at its height—or even Creation's Age of Dreams. Sophisticated artificial limbs are common among those maimed in the course of their duties. Their construction requires large quantities of Magical Materials. Starmetal channels motor impulses to moonsilver musculature, which is itself anchored to bones of jade. Adamant fibers draw in sensory impressions; specks of soulsteel act as pain receptors. The whole is powered by a matrix of orichalcum.

These prostheses, along with other artificial organs, are equivalent to the Prosthetics of Clockwork Elegance employed in Creation's First Age. Rules for these devices may be found in **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age**, page 71.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The nation's route takes it past veins of the Magical Materials more massive than any in the vicinity of the rest of the Octet. But these are by no means its only resources. Other precious minerals, such as gemstones, frozen lightning, exotic metals and metalloids (such as antimony, illudium, primum and voracite), and even the rare clays required to manufacture the Alchemical Exalted can be found in the cold places at the nation's edge.

The Conductors also harvest a wide range of useful materials from the region's autochthonous entities. These include bristlefur, a mass of soft furry bristles harvested from caterpillar-like pipe-cleaning elementals and used as a cheap substitute for rat fur; yeglum, a temperature-sensitive adhesive extracted from the webbing of arachnoid elementals;

and trasu, a suede-like fabric made from the hides of certain elementals and biomechanoids, worn by Kamak's plutarchs and adjudicators instead of artificial leather.

## RATS!

Kamak has a long and storied history with rats, having bred countless new species for various purposes. The giant Ein rat, a plump beast the size of a donkey, is farmed for meat, fat, fur, leather and sinew. The giant Trantec rat—a leaner animal—is used to carry heavy loads and to pull sleds in snow season. When cold weather draws feral rats into the warmth of inhabited areas, terrier-rats root them out. And trained watch-rats help guard entrances to the Reaches against intruders.

Most peculiar is the pet rat. While pet rats occasionally come into fashion in other nations, they're always intended to somehow wring greater efficiency out of the populace—such as Claslat's "productivity rats," which increase efficiency by making their keepers happy, only to be euthanized if they cause any drop in productivity. But in wealthy Kamak, there's no ulterior motive. Their pet rats serve only to make their owners happy. Kamak has no dearth of resources; none of its own people will suffer if a bit of food is wasted on a creature that provides no direct benefit to the state.

## CRACKS IN THE ICE

On the surface, Kamak appears strong and stable. Its cities are wealthy, its people well-fed, its defenses strong. But it is a troubled nation, and many of its troubles run deep.

## CABALS

The privacy code provides shelter for all manner of conspiracies. These tend to be small things: ensuring that a hated shift chief meets with an "accident," for example, or an old boys' network whose members work to get one another promoted to higher rank. But there are true secret societies hidden beneath the surface of Kamak's social order.

The upper strata of Kamaki society are rife with fifth column operations, the result of intrigues by unscrupulous foreign officials aiming to funnel more of Kamak's wealth to their own nations. Foremen "accidentally" dispatch more valuable goods than planned as part of trade cargo, while mid-ranking Olgotarchs disclose schedules and routes for international cargo deliveries. Rarely is this the result of outright bribery; more often, citizens bargain for intervals of safety for their home settlements at the rest of the nation's expense.

The *One Tier Movement* wants to make the Populat socially and politically equal to the Tripartite, with full representation in the Tripartite Assembly. As Autochthonian history shows no records of such an event occurring peacefully, the One Tiers are preparing for a violent revolution, in the hope that their efforts will succeed quickly enough that the Champions will accept the new regime as a *fait accompli*.

The *Disciples of Mog* are a heretical cult. Frustrated and enraged by Kamak's inability to do more than fend off mil-

lennia of attacks by the Militat, the Disciples pray to Mog for the utter annihilation of Estasia. Mog's opinions regarding this cult are not on record, but conclusions may be drawn from Estasia's continued existence.

### ISOLATION

Kamak rarely connects to more than one other nation at any given time. It often drifts alone for months or years, as Yugash now does. This offers some protection; the nation is rarely in close proximity to jealous rivals or bands of tunnel people. On the flip side, this leaves Kamak unable to rely on trade or support from its peers in times of crisis.

The nations that most often come into conjunction with Kamak are Gulak and Estasia, as these three states all move through the colder parts of the Reaches. The former is a major trade partner; the latter, a scourge. All too often, the richest nation in the Octet finds itself at the mercy of the most aggressive and mercenary.

### CHAINS OF SILVER, FETTERS OF GOLD

The people of Kamak don't see themselves as rich. They see the folk of other nations as poor. This is when they think of others at all—they are as parochial as any people, and they are more distant from other nations than is common even among the widely-distributed nations of the Octet. They are serene in their solitude and their pride.

Kamak is inextricably tied to the troubles that its riches bring. Rival nations seek to acquire more than their fair share, either by force or by subterfuge. But there's a more pervasive problem. Kamak has built its economy and its culture around its massive surpluses, and those surpluses are dwindling. Austerity is the least of its worries; its wealth is its bulwark, and when it can no longer buy off its rivals, it will fall before them.

### EIN, THE WEB

Hanging in midair where a dozen mile-wide diagonal shafts come together, the metropolis of Ein resembles a starmetal egg snared in a steelweaver's web. It's anchored by slim, graceful buttresses that stretch out in all directions, with pneumatic trams and funiculars gliding silently atop them. Cables strung alongside crackle a brilliant blue as they carry lightning to and fro. In cold weather, the lightning burns frost away amid gouts of steam. Yards-long icicles gather underneath the buttresses and beneath the city-heart. Every so often, an icicle breaks free with a thunderous crack and plunges into the freezing fog that swirls through the abyss below.

Ein is the nation's heart and its monument. As rich as the rest of the nation is, Ein is richer. Corridors are wider and brighter; housing is larger and better-appointed. The architecture is less subdued, more intricate, more baroque, with every façade gilded with flamboyant glyphs made from magical materials. Personal vehicles and automatons are more prevalent and more impressively built. Even the food is of higher quality, being prepared by Gulaki-trained chefs in a variety of styles.

The people of Ein are more cosmopolitan than their fellow Kamaki. Their speech is quicker and peppered with foreign expressions. Some of them talk to one another outdoors, occasionally even coming within arm's reach of one another. The most daring and decadent young people wear mesh scarves in public that are positively see-through. Kamaki elsewhere hold such behavior to be arrogant and shameful.

The city's Sodality chapterhouses are a hotbed of technical inquiry. Surgeons from across Autochthonia come here to study prosthetics design and implantation, while Scholars practice the craft of automaton design.

When Ein herself needs to act on the world, she opens the metal irises of her Synthetic Agent Assembly Sequencers to unleash swarms of remotely controlled biomechanoids—crystal flies, fix beetles, steelweavers and the like—programmed to do her bidding. They repair damage and perform maintenance, but in times of strife make an effective weapon.

At Ein's core is her Lightning Regulation Matrix. Coronas of blue-white sparks crackle around massive coils of orichalcum and starmetal, which are themselves wound about rotating shafts of crystal and white jade. Webs of copper mesh protect the workers attending the Matrix's prayer consoles from stray levinbolts. This Municipal Charm normalizes the flow of electricity through Kamak's lightning conduits, preventing dangerous energy build-up without interfering with the Maker's neural pulses.

Near the city's center is the Garden of Creation. It is among the greatest wonders of the Eight Nations, made in imitation of the pre-Autochthonian landscapes described in ancient texts and seen in relic dreamstones. Beneath a domed ceiling of lapis lazuli set with twin lamps of orichalcum and moonsilver, beds of vibrant-hued flowers sway amid a sward of viridian grass. Dragonflies buzz lazily through the air; rabbits and foxes peer from the shadows of an emerald-leaved hedge. These things are not real—the flora and fauna are cunning simulacra handcrafted from metal and enamel, nothing more—but to a people who have not touched the earth or seen the sky for 5,000 years, they are a marvel beyond compare or understanding.

### NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

#### KEDEMNA, POPULAT DIRECTOR OF EIN

A charismatic, energetic man just shy of middle age, Kedemna is well-loved by Ein's Populat. Compassionate and driven, he works hard to ensure that Ein runs smoothly and that his people share in the city's wealth. His greatest character flaw is carnal in nature; he is a philanderer in a nation that abhors any breach of marriage vows. Now, a blackmailer has threatened to reveal his affairs unless he provides certain valuable state secrets.

#### TUK'TANORN, MASTER SURGEON

Despising the business of exile as both wasteful and cruel—even murderous, given the dangers of the cold

Reaches—Tuk'tanorn has dedicated herself to devising a cerebral implant that can be used to rehabilitate criminals. Her encephalic web, a lacework of moonsilver alloyed with starmetal and soulsteel, irreversibly alters the recipient's personality, compelling him or her to eschew undesired behavior and act in accordance with the mores of Kamaki society. Her prototypes seem to be having the desired effect on their test subjects, and Ein's Tripartite Assembly is ready to approve their use.

## TRANTEC, THE BLACK HEIGHT

The immense, gloomy nation-chamber that contains the patropolis of Trantec is over fifty miles long, eight miles wide and nearly three miles high. Its brass-webbed steel floor follows a shallow grade that is deeply etched and grooved. Conduits run along many of these grooves; others are beds for running water in warm weather—or thick with ice when the cold comes.

The patropolis himself rises from the slope to the distant chamber roof as a vast, twisted pillar of dull black metal threaded with a dimly-glowing matrix of dark red jade. A handful of airships travel to and from his high-altitude docking posts, serving in turn as cargo vessels, rescue boats and sentinels. His mile-thick wings sweep out to either side, forming a rampart extending from one wall of the chamber to the other. These wings hum with power and industry as they tap the hundreds of conduits running through the chamber. This power is supplemented in warm season as meltwater spins turbines linked to hydroenergetic dynamos.

Trantec was the last of the founders' soul-successors to take root and ascend to patropolitan status. Long before then, Ein had become the first Kamaki city and the nation's undisputed capital. Even now, Trantec is not content to rest; one of his avatars is always abroad in Kamak or the Reaches, exploring.

As is common among soulsteel cities, Trantec's many eyes and animating intelligences survey every public space within his bounds. But aside from tracking signs of danger—the smell of blood, the heat of flame, the clamor of breakage or screams—he does not intrude upon the interiors of the communes, leaving his people a measure of privacy.

All of Kamak's cities possess Municipal Charms to filter out the effects of weather, maintaining a comfortable interior temperature no matter how cold it becomes outside. Trantec takes this a step further with his Thermal Metafocus Node, a submodule that allows him to project heat anywhere within line of sight. While he usually employs this effect to melt unwanted snow and ice, it doubles as a potent military tool capable of hurling bolts of incandescent flame from his inlay of red jade.

Buried among Trantec's foundations is the Ephemeron Storage Manifold, a Municipal Charm that serves as a buffer for those of the Machine God's memories and dreams that spill over from the Pole of Crystal. This rugose warren of crystal-lined chambers is lined with thousands of lacework

spheres of blue and black jade flecked with moonsilver and starmetal. Some are as small as a closed fist, others as large as an airship. Within each sphere, monochrome images waver as though seen through water. These depict events from Autochthonia's history—and before, including visions of the Time of Glory that can shatter a mortal mind. These ephemera possess supernatural vitality; should spheres be shattered or the Charm deattuned, caged memories may escape their prisons and wreak havoc in the real world.

Two miles up, accessible via high-speed paramagnetic lifts, a huge plaza holds the Motherhouse of the Illustrious Conductors of the Consecrated Veins, whose extravagant façade is constructed entirely of the Six Magical Materials. The founder Kamak is said to have been the creator and first leader of the Conductors, making his soul-successor the Sodality's natural home. The Motherhouse is the heart of the Conductors' administration, the repository for all of its records from throughout the Eight Nations and all of its charts of the Reaches.

## NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

### FOVEK, AUTOCRAT OF TRANTEC

As a young adjudicator, Fovek was on board a former autocrat's airship when it was downed by saboteurs. The Surgeons saved her life at the cost of replacing mangled limbs and organs—including a lobe of her brain—with prosthetic devices. Now she is more machine than human. Her wife has stood by her through all the years since then, but she worries as Fovek grows colder and more distant, as though suffering an Alchemical's Clarity.

### AVRI, PLUTARCH-CONSUL

Handsome and clever, Avri is among the youngest ever to rise to his current rank as a chief among the plutarchs and an advisor to the autocrat of Trantec. Unfortunately, he is not quite clever or experienced enough to master his duties. As the spouse of *Excellent Inquisitive Analyst*, he has been promoted beyond his competence, and while she's certain he will grow into the needs of his post, he isn't quite there yet. *Analyst* has been helping her husband in subtle ways, but as Kamak's troubles grow, she will be less and less available to support him.

## OTHER LOCALES

### IDASNA, GROUND ZERO FOR THE COLDHEART PLAGUE

Tucked away in a tunnel network between two of the nation's irregular chambers, Idasna—like many other Autochthonian towns—has no exterior structures. The settlement consists of several dozen rooms of various sizes and shapes linked by a maze of confined corridors. A vertical shaft lined with conduits runs through the middle of the town; at one of the town's edges, the corridors debouch onto catwalks running along one wall of a huge space packed full of thaumetabolic engines lined with prayer consoles. The

town's public areas are painted in bland, forgettable shades of ivory and pale blue, in sharp contrast to the vivid colors found inside its communes.

But for all that Idasna looks like a typical Kamaki town, it is not. Something has gone wrong with its citizens. Outside their homes, they are as cold and distant as might be expected in Kamak. But inside their communes, where they should be open and animated, they're still cold and distant. Aloof. Empty. There is something missing from the people of Idasna, something essentially human that has been taken from them. Worse, though, is that people from elsewhere in Kamak who visit Idasna as a part of their duties are likewise coming back *changed*.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

On a state level, Kamak has many friends. Everyone wants a part of the nation's mineral wealth and will trade any number of things—or people—to acquire a share. Even those who don't need more Magical Materials foresee a future need to petition Kamak for aid, and raiding Kamak would complicate such negotiations. And who, other than Estasia, wants to antagonize a nation that can afford to hire the Militat? For its own part, Kamak has no interest in assaulting its fellows, so it strives to remain neutral, its foreign policy never rising beyond the level of trade sanctions.

On an individual level, foreigners deride Kamak's people as lazy, effete and decadent. The Kamaki obsession with privacy comes across as arrogance, while their subdued religious practices suggest an atheistic streak. Most military proceedings directed at Kamak are supported by the attacker's Theomachracy, whose zealous ire overcomes the merely pragmatic drawbacks of such an invasion.

## PROJECT GATEWAY

Of all the Eight Nations, Kamak seemingly has the least need to open a path to Creation. While its intake of Magical Materials has declined slightly, it still has more than enough to sustain itself for the foreseeable future. But this isn't enough to fulfill the steadily increasing needs of its trading partners. If said partners decide to take matters into their own hands, Kamak cannot fend them all off alone. Access to another world's wealth can give the nation enough resources to supply the rest of the Octet, either in trade or as tribute. And failing that, Creation provides a bolt-hole should Kamak be invaded and annexed.

## HEROES OF THE STATE

Whereas Alchemicals in larger nations are rarely-seen figures, Kamak's surfeit of Champions combines with its low population to render them commonplace. They are viewed with respect but not awe. Most citizens interact with an Alchemical sooner or later; many Tripartite members have close—or even intimate—contact with various Champions. Relations between mortals and Exalted occur on a more equal footing here than elsewhere in the Octet.

## EXCELLENT INQUISITIVE ANALYST

### HAUNTED INCARNATION, STARMETAL CASTE OF TRANTEC

*Analyst's* previous incarnation was that of Radura, a tiny research patropolis in an isolated corner of Kamak. Eight years ago, Radura unexpectedly destroyed himself and his scientist-citizens in a conflagration of lightning and raw Essence. The devastation was thorough; only Radura's soulgem survived, heavily scarred but intact. *Analyst* cannot recall the end of Radura's life nor the cause of his suicide. Dwelling on her opaque past, she grows more troubled with each passing day. Was Radura acting to save Kamak from a disaster his researcher-citizens were about to unwittingly unleash? Or did he go mad—and if so, might *Analyst* share his madness?

## BRILLIANCE IN SHADOW

### LIVING GHOST, ADAMANT CASTE OF KAMAK'S REACHES

Five hundred years is a long time for the Adamant Caste to stave off Clarity. Once the bane of gremlins and rogue elementals in the Far Reaches, *Brilliance* has spent most of the past century in the vicinity of Kamak. He walks among the tunnel people in the guise of a friendly Conductor or an exiled Lumpen peddler; in Kamak's cities, he takes on many faces and forms. But he cannot be himself, and his loneliness is a wall of ice that he cannot pierce or break.

## JARISH

Jarish is the smallest nation of the Octet, and in many ways, the weakest. For nearly 5,000 years, the definition of progress in Jarish has changed little. Where other nations have been driven by the expansion of towns, architecture, tools, and material acquisition, progress in Jarish has been nearly transparent, driven by the gears of faith rather than the cogs of industry. At a glance, Jarish might seem a backwater. It is a rustic place, hundreds of years behind the trend.

Jarishites compensate for what they lack through a backbreaking, labor-intensive work ethic that exceeds even the industrial juggernaut of Claslat. More importantly, they win their critics over with faith that is both unerring and unyielding, and a devotion to the Machine God that has not been seen elsewhere since before Autochthon lapsed into slumber. More than anywhere else in the Realm of Brass and Shadow, the people of Jarish walk with Autochthon, living as if he were still with them. Transcending death, they work amongst and draw upon the bodies and souls of their ancestors in a great communion that fuels the religious fervor of the nation.

## THE LAND OF THE FAITHFUL

It is said that Jarishite faith is such that a mortal may step into the grinding gears of an engine to save his crew from a fatal leak and come out unscathed. It is a power over, and rapport with the machine-body that is miraculous and holy. Jarishite romance is such that they live amongst the souls of their fallen lovers and vanished ancestors, who

dwelling in their tools and their factories and in the lives of the exmachina. They live and work in the shadows of old heroes, completing a cycle of love—of each other, of the Maker—toil, and veneration that makes Jarish legendary throughout Autochthonia.

In Jarish, faith and romance are one in the same. Autochthonian legend holds that even if a Jarishite should be cut, his blood will sing of his great and unending love. And though their nation has been rocked to its foundation by tragedy and disaster several times throughout history, their love has not wavered. Though Jarish is the smallest and the weakest of the Eight Nations, for the dauntless courage of their faith, many have come to consider Jarish the heart of Autochthonia.

What will the Octet do, should that heart cease to beat?

## IN THE BEGINNING

Originally Jarish was not a nation, but a young woman. A priestess of Autochthon, Jarish had such communion with the Maker that she could move through the Reaches unarmed and alone and without fear of death. Jarish was a great inspirer of the people, and worked many miraculous thaumaturgies that drew sustenance from the body of the Machine God. She pressed the Autochthonian people to see the gifts of Autochthon as an irrevocable whole, rather than three separate conditions. To wit, she exhorted the people to use faith in their construction as much as they used tools. Those whose hearts were seized by her words became her followers; their descendants are the Jarishites now living in Jast and Qune.

Like the other Eight Heroes, the benisons of the Great Maker kept Jarish young beyond her time. But in 38 DA, the priestess gave up her life to save her people from an erupting cell. While workers put thousands of people in jeopardy trying to construct tools that would abate the crisis, Jarish marched into the eye of the storm, armed with nothing but her belief in Autochthon. Putting herself between her city-tribe and a flow of crystal magma, Jarish raised her hands and stilled the crystal flow, hardening it in an instant—but not before it flowed over her body, entombing her in transparent crystal and ending her life.

Now Jarish, who had always extolled the virtue of sacrifice, was an example of her teachings, and her entombed corpse, highly visible in a shard of glowing crystal on a precipice above the city, was an everlasting reminder of the lesson she had sought to teach. The followers of Jarish, both miserable with their loss and sickened by their inability to remove the corpse of their holy leader from the crystal flow, were yet driven to follow her example, pouring all of their devotion into their faith. Seeing past the physical failing of tools, they understood, more than ever, the message of Jarish: that, with the right devotion, the Maker's gifts were not divorceable from one another.

## THE SOUL OF A NATION

The Jarishites began to develop a greater understanding of the machine-body, even as the followers of other nations invented weapons and raised manufactories over regions of the realm they had tamed. Where her neighbors began to conquer the world, Jarish had begun to commune with it. Yet they had no tools, nor any work by faith which could safely remove their founder's body from the crystal flow. Her beautiful form was frozen forever in the height of vivacious youth, suspended above them in the grip of her sacrifice.

That was, until Autochthon aided her people in the completion of their first Alchemical. 22 years had passed since the death of Jarish, and thoughts on how to best serve the Maker were veering. The Machine God himself was becoming more distant, and speaking only to the divine machinists, and even to them his words were growing more cryptic and even unintelligible. Without their leader, the people of Jarish began to lose heart. Their connection to the Great Maker became more tenuous, and schisms erupted over how to best follow the teachings of their fallen principal. Even as the first Champion was being constructed, the people weren't sure about using Autochthon's most divine material substances to do something so unprecedented and severe. Such resources could be used to repair life support systems, to placate the Machine God's subroutines, and to transform hazardous wastelands into sustaining vistas.

When the Alchemical called *Jubilant Evangelist* awakened, critics, doubters, and believers alike fell into a singular, breathless silence. She looked up at the frozen crystal flow and her first words were, "Who is she?" The nearest machinist, of the order that would one day become the Luminors, explained that, though Jarish's soul had been drawn from her body, the thickness of the cocoon of crystal around her had lessened the transition; and that while *Jubilant Evangelist* now held the soul of Jarish, part of her Essence yet remained within the crystal encasing the priestess high above.

"I know," said *Evangelist*. "I can feel her."

When *Jubilant Evangelist* climbed up to the crystal flow and looked into the eyes of her former incarnation, she felt the priestess's exhaustion and relief. *I'm glad you're here*, Jarish seemed to say. *Evangelist* nodded. *I'll get you out of there*, that look said.

Jarish's hands were raised before her in supplication, not defiance. She had died appeasing the spirit of the eruption. *Evangelist* knew this as both instinct and fact, both her memories and her cunning investigative Charms leading her in the direction of the malfunctioning subroutine that had threatened the tribe of Jarish many years ago. She also knew that Jarish's own body was the thaumaturgical wedge that was holding the dam shut. If she removed the priestess's sacrificial body, the disaster might only repeat itself. The Alchemical's first act was to quietly lobotomize the minor god who had caused the disaster, and then use her beamklave to carefully cut the massive crystal wedge containing the

body of Jarish free of the crystal flow. When she carried the body of her progenitor down from the precipice, death did not come to the people of Jarish. Their faith was restored and renewed.

With *Jubilant Evangelist*, the Alchemical reincarnation of their beloved Jarish amongst them, the people gained such hope that none of the uncertainty, darkness, or cataclysm that may befall them would ever be able to rend them asunder. *Jubilant Evangelist* had the crystal containing Jarish hidden from view. Later it was carved into a giant soulgem, placed in a setting which was resonant with Evangelist's own, so that her spirit would feel whole. The history of Jarish began there, with the completion of the first Alchemical.

## THE HAMMERS OF OUR FATHERS

Jarish is the least materially progressive of the Eight Nations: its tools do not advance from year to year, nor does the architecture of its towns. Crossing into Jarish is like walking into Autochthonia's past. In Jarishite towns, buildings constructed centuries ago are still in use; they have not been torn down and stripped for parts, as is the practice with other nations, but remain as a testament to the craftsmanship standards of yesteryear.

The manufactories of Jarish use basic and outdated tools, the newest of which are from Claslat and Yugash, and were showing their age 40 years ago. The workers themselves carry tools which were hand-crafted by machinists, as opposed to the greater Autochthonian practice of mass-production in assembly mills. In Jarish, such an extravagance is not possible, for the machinery the Jarishites employ taxes the nation's energy budget to the extreme, forcing them to use machines only for the most vital and irreproducible work, like large scale drilling, mining, and pipe setting, and running the hydraulic pistons that pound out the massive frames the Jarishites use to brace, jack, and lift entire layers of Autochthon's steel flesh so that they might prospect in his veins.

## JARISH IN PROFILE

Located at a joint of iron and brass half the size of the Hundred Kingdoms, Jarish is a pinprick embedded in a mountainous cavern of metal with little easy access to the parts of the Great Maker which are composed of the magical materials. Because of this, Jarish has never had a wealth of resources. Much of its history has depended on the frugality and conservatism of its people. At a glance, one might expect Jarish to be a poor, hobbled nation of jumped-up tunnel dwellers; in reality, Jarish is a respectably wealthy nation. It has been their non-reliance on physical tools which has helped the Jarishites cope with a crippling lack of natural resources. Through advanced thaumaturgical procedures and cooperation with the exmachina, the Jarishites enjoy productivity levels which keep their cities and towns fully powered, with energy stored away for times of crisis, and allows

## THE LIGHT OBELISK

An enormous wonder of crystal, adamant, orichalcum and moonsilver hangs high above the Jarish cavity. This light obelisk was crafted by *Jubilant Evangelist* and *Quixotic Dulcinea* in the twilight years of the Founding Era, based on ancient passages in the *Tome of the Great Maker* which *Evangelist* found particularly inspirational—they spoke of day and night, of sun and moon, and of the bond between the champions of the two. The obelisk is powered by prayer, diverting a bit of the massive rush of Essence that boils up from the settlements below each day. It provides Jarish with light and a measure to mark the passage of time: each day the obelisk shines with a bright, golden light for two and a half shifts, and then darkens to produce a dim, silvery radiance for another two and a half.

Borrowing the language of lost Creation, the Jarishites call these cycles day and night. Unlike Nurad, which also enjoys a cyclical national light source, the Jarishites arrange their social activities around the light obelisk; work occurs around the clock, of course, but it is considered most appropriate to engage in public recreation, sports, and artistic recital in the day; night is a time for poetry, private recreation, artistic creation, and sexual liaisons. Other nations consider Jarish's tendency to organize time around this dual cycle odd, at best.

them to produce the parts necessary to keep Autochthon's surrounding functions from breaking down.

Jarish is a massive-scale producer, of scope-intensity unmatched in the Eight Nations. If Jarish were as large as Claslat, it would produce nearly three times the goods. Because it is so much smaller, the gross product of richer nations like Claslat and Kamak dwarfs that of Jarish. Indeed, much of what is produced in Jarish is also consumed in Jarish; many say that its main export is faith.

However, in times of trouble, its manufactories are legendary for their production ratings. Other nations often hire the use of Jarish's factories to produce needed parts, textiles, and weaponry, outsourcing work to the tiny nation because the people of Jarish work with a singular, almost suicidal zeal, finishing mass-production projects in record time.

That they are able to do this without the aid of more advanced machinery has not escaped the notice of the other nations. Many plutarchs of the Octet consider it both a charity and a pious duty to find reasons to do business with Jarish. Rendering more practical aid—in the form of updated tools—has proven difficult. Many times throughout history, diplomats of the Eight Nations have been dissuaded from

lavishing Jarish with gifts of updated machinery, because the use of such boons goes against what Jarishites believe in. Their work emphasizes Autochthon's gifts as a whole, never giving credit to any particular tool.

Jarishites believe that their work is the Maker's work, and that his genius flows through their hands, so that the work they do is divine. In this way, the tools they use to solve problems, adjust the Maker's vital functions, and partake in creative miracles are likened unto divine artifacts, and not easily interchangeable or thrown away, not even when newer or better models come along. The Jarishites go so far as to install the soulgems of great machinists and workers from ages gone by into the very tools they once used, imbuing them with the wisdom and piety of the nation's most heroic builders and problem solvers. This is the secret behind some of the more complex rituals of Jarishite construction and engineering, and what aids them in the ease of their mass-production.

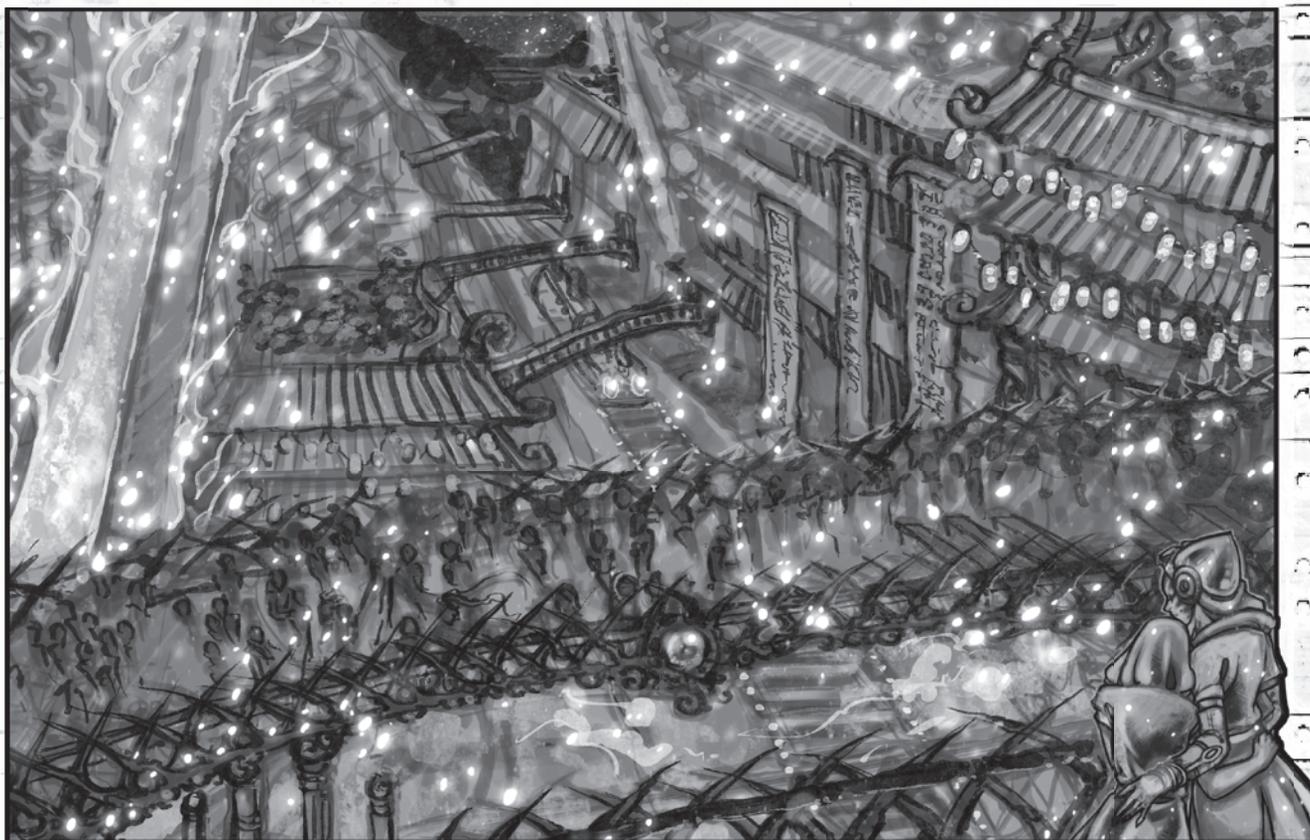
Jarishite workers make few mistakes, stay on task, and work diligently and restlessly, driven by the voices of their forefathers. When Jarishites say they would like gifts of the magical materials more than new tools, the other nations understand (and feel the same way). When the Jarishites say they would equally appreciate the other nations' visitors to join them in making tribute to the Great Maker, the veracity of such a statement might be doubted should it have originated anywhere else. Jarish is the least materially focused of the Eight Nations, with a belief in the

providence of Autochthon that goes beyond even the need for orichalcum or jade.

## THE HEART OF THE PEOPLE

The people of Jarish have long been known for their ardent faith and romantic zeal. These elements have combined to make a people of incredible passion. Jarishites are taught to be like poet-engineers, seeing meaning, beauty, and love in all that they do. They approach work shifts and sexual assignations with the same intensity. When Jarishites produce children, the man is the supplier, the woman the body-factory. Ever the supplicant, he concentrates the same love, care, and dedication to her pleasure as he would to servicing the gears that keep the Great Maker alive. He does this in faith of the child that will be born. When pregnant, the Jarishite woman cannot help but feel her connection to the Machine God, for she has become the body which contains and supports life, engendered by the diligence of a man who is both paramour and slave. Together, they strive for the same thing: the continuance of life. In this regard—in every regard—their union brings them closer to the Great Maker.

Love does not exist purely for the making of children, however, and Jarish could hardly be considered romantic if lovers connected only for practical or religious reasons. Homosexuality is not uncommon in Jarish, and regardless of orientation, Jarishites are taught that the pursuit of love will bring them closer to the Machine God. Wooing the object of one's affections is an art; keeping love alive, exciting,



and new, is a labor as intensive as any in Autochthonia. By loving and being loved, the Jarishites claim, one wakes up with new resolve, able to face any challenge and withstand any measure of toil. Without the ability to feel love, the Jarishites believe they cannot properly care for the systems that keep Autochthon alive. The empathy they feel for their dying god is the channel for the genius magic that puts them ahead of the biggest and most advanced productions in Autochthonia. Romance, then, is not a distraction, but rather a pursuit which brings the Jarishites closer to their god. The fervent dedication they are able to heap on one another bolsters, magnifies, and reinstates their ability to feel for the Maker.

### LOVE AND SACRIFICE

Ever since the death of their founder, Jarishites have known that part of their power comes from sacrifice. Hard work, the loss of limbs and life on assembly lines and to the threats of the Reaches are just part of that martyrdom. Jarishites know that love is a sacrifice—that only by the surrender of one's heart can one ever truly appreciate the scope of Autochthon's situation, and only through that appreciation can one's faith be sufficient move heedlessly through grinding gears and acid sprays, to touch live arc streams and walk through fire to save the ones they love.

In contrast, the very same dedication to the Machine God that gives them fingers so deft they can replace the assembly machines of Claslat makes them experts in the pursuit of carnal joy. The same artistic minds and tongues that make the sermons of Jarish's lectors unsurpassed within the Octet also produce endless streams of erotic poetry and artwork (a significant and well-known national export, to the confusion of more conservative nations). The Jarishites know their business well. They are people of heartfelt dedication to all things.

Jarishite attitudes begin with Jarish the heroine, who sacrificed herself that her people might live. "Without sacrifice," Jarish once said, "nothing worth having can ever be gained. The only freedom we have is our love for one another. Our love for Autochthon is without condition." She became the ultimate example of her words. But the romantic ideal would not bind itself to the subject of sacrifice until later, with the advent of the Champion *Quixotic Dulcinea*. She had been the heroine Lastine, mortal lover of *Jubilant Evangelist* who, in the prime of her life, submitted to euthanasia so that she might save *Evangelist* from "an affliction of lethargy" which had caused her to withdraw from humanity, leaving the people of Jarish lonely and frightened. When *Jubilant Evangelist* became the metropolis of Jast, leaving *Quixotic Dulcinea* behind as the sole Champion of Jarish, the Moon-silver Caste vowed to duplicate her ascension with all the haste she could muster.

Centuries later, aged and in the throes of Clarity, *Dulcinea* emerged from her cloister to announce that she would not abandon the people of Jarish; that she would

remain with them as their protector until a new Champion could be Exalted. She then went on to dance with her mortal lover, the hero Merek, on the final night of Sparkmoon. The elegance with which she danced, in contrast with the crippling pain she felt at trying to understand mortal love, broke the hearts of thousands. For *Quixotic Dulcinea* was now the "twice-love sacrifice:" as Lastine, she had given up everything for *Jubilant Evangelist*; as a Champion of Autochthonia, she was giving up her love for Jast to keep safe her people. As she danced with her lover, she could no longer fully understand—either her love for Merek, or the love she felt for *Evangelist*, which was tearing her apart. Struggling with Clarity, all she had left to her was duty. The people of Jarish saw this and were stricken with the tragedy of it. The romance of *Quixotic Dulcinea* has forever emblazoned itself into culture of the Jarishite people.

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Despite the Jarishite emphasis on romance, the nation has no equivalent to the institution of marriage. Jarishite lovers may be forcibly parted by the state as its necessities demand their promotion or relocation, the better to serve the needs of their people. This is considered only right; sacrifice of the self for the good of the many is the highest expression of love, albeit a tragic one. Lovers separated by duty, whose pain is eventually transformed into joy upon realizing the good their suffering has produced, are the subject of many famous Jarishite plays and parables.

### LIFE AMONG THE FAITHFUL

The people of Jarish live in the shadows of heroic titanicities, and work amongst the ghosts of history. All around them, Autochthon's factory-mitochondria and productive cells—his industrial organs—work miracles of production, proving that their god still endures. At every turn, the people of Jarish are confronted by the legacy of heroes and legends—in the soulgem-enhanced tools of legendary workers, and in the presence of Alchemicals past (in sculpted-anima displays in city squares) and present. Three extra shift breaks per day are dedicated to praying to Autochthon-by-Noi, causing the great light obelisk over Qune to flare, giving the nation light to work by. Thus the Jarishites see the power and proof of their faith. By night, they are presided over by the distant pinprick of a person-sized soulgem atop Jast's National Tripartite Assembly tower, in which the form of a woman is frozen forever in supplication.

Jarish is famous among the Octet for its greatest holiday, Sparkmoon, a three night affair in the month of Ascending



Air. Held mostly in Qune, Sparkmoon is an appreciation of a year of hard work and dedication, a time during which the Jarishites uncharacteristically reduce their shift operations to a bare minimum, slowing production and devoting serious time to only the most vital of operations, so that everyone has a chance to attend. On the three nights of Sparkmoon, there are great dances on Qune's famous Promenade, a platform of moonsilver and steel at the beginning of a tramway that leads all the way to Nurad. During these dances, lovers are seduced, reproductive bonds are consecrated, and the people venerate the subgods and each other. The final night of Sparkmoon always sees the largest attendance, as people from across Autochthonia show up to dance, and to see the great light obelisk momentarily flare as it completes its yearly recalibration. This flaring causes motonic fireflies to fill the air, turning the Promenade into a sea of stars. During this time, *Dulcinea* turns down her lights, withdrawing her natural bioluminescence, and lets the people dance to the sound of pipe and drum and string while the fireflies orbit and gavotte around the dance floor.

While visitors from other nations find Sparkmoon to be breathtaking, even heartbreaking, the Jarishites pursue the rest of their year with the same zest that they revel in Sparkmoon. Jarishites are raised to believe that the opportunity to work, sacrifice, and love are rewards equal to any holiday. Their interests lie, therefore, in the ability to go on loving and working—and making whatever sacrifices are necessary in the pursuit of that goal. It is a simplistic but powerful view.

### AT ONE WITH THE MAKER

The suicide rate in Jarish is low, but the average euthanasia age is almost ten years younger than the Autochthonian average. This is partially because the Jarishites depend so much on the hardiness of youth in both love and work, but also because their lifestyles leave them with little fear of death. The Psychopomp Gears of the Transmodal Essence Recombinator, they believe, are not the doorways to a possible final ending; rather, they see the chance of being consumed by the Great Maker as an opportunity to be reborn as something other than human. Jarishites believe that their souls—the ones that sometimes fail to make it into newborn babies—become the spark powering the gods of Autochthonia, the mechanical spirit-laborers who surround and permeate Jarish. The clerics of Jarish have learned, through long practice, to commune with these beings with a much higher rate of success and safety than that enjoyed by any other Octet nation. Their success in this matter only furthers their belief that they have an inherent, mimetic connection to the souls of the Great Maker.

One famous example of this connection can be seen in the Jarishite relationship with the vicious and highly lethal mylkwelder. These elementals live in colonies throughout the Reaches, where they crawl over nests of slag, arc welding them with torches built into their jaws. Mylkwelders aren't

particularly aggressive—when they forage for metals, away from the nest, they will ignore the presence of humans. However, a mortal who stumbles into the vicinity of a mylkwelder nest faces grave peril, as the mechanical arachnids will grasp and dismember a person, welding their limbs and torsos into the slag nests they tend.

Mylkwelders and their nests are generally exterminated when found anywhere near settlements of the other nations. When encountered in the Reaches, expeditions take care to mark the boundaries of the nests for future expeditions, if they don't have the time or the manpower to eliminate the beasts. The Jarishites, however, live in close vicinity to the largest mylkwelder colonies in Autochthonia. Long ago, the Jarishites discovered that, despite the nonsense of their slag nests, the mylkwelders were genius welders. So the Jarishites devised a pulley system that would allow them to safely send any piece of material they needed a weld on into the nests of the mylkwelders. What they pulled out would be perfectly welded, unfailingly and every time. Though the Jarishites have made a number of thaumaturgical advances which allows their productivity to be incredibly high, one of the essential staples of Jarishite production has always been cooperation with, rather than combat against, the lesser autonomous functions of the Machine God, whom many Jarishites believe contain the souls of their fallen brothers and sisters.

### TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Jarishites enjoy an especially tight-knit culture, even by Octet standards; they are raised to regard their co-workers as family, to honor their ancestors, and to love ferociously.

It doesn't work for everyone. Jarish has its share of introverts, oddities, and bitter hearts. Not everyone can meet the expectation of personal sacrifice and move on with grace and dignity, nor do all Jarishites wish to invite their nation into their heart. In Jarish, there are many who understand all too well that the warm center of a crowd can be the loneliest and coldest place in the world.

The nation has an unfortunate tendency to produce alienation in its outsiders just as powerful as the sense of community in the rest of its citizens. Being unhappy and unfulfilled is bad; feeling that way when everyone else seems to be joyous and fulfilled is *so much worse*. As a result, Jarish has the dubious distinction of having harbored as many Voidbringer sects in its history as Claslat and Gulak combined. They consider this a trial from Autochthon, and take pride in their consistent triumph over the forces of discord, without examining the reason those trials are so frequent.

## ARROWS OF THE FAITHFUL

The Jarishite people are not inherently warlike, and due to the weakness of the nation, Jarish tries to keep out of conflict as much as possible. However, they do produce weaponry in order to prevent the alternative. One of the most profound strictures in the *Tome of the Great Maker* condemns those who would use the same tools which are used to service the body of Autochthon to commit murder. The cunning boltguns, staplers, and rivet-punchers Autochthonians use in their daily work would make excellent improvised weaponry, if put to military use. Jarish won't allow it, and can likely be counted on to produce crossbows, bolts, and swords *en masse* simply to prevent that particular heresy. Jarish harbors only a single exception to their rule: after *Blade of the Apostate* ravaged the nation in 3566DA, it became acceptable for a factory worker to use such a tool to kill gremlins, or other servants of the Void. The stricture against knowingly carrying such tools into battle, regardless of the opponent, still remains, but Jarishite workers are under no further spiritual obligation to let themselves be helplessly slaughtered because they do not carry weapons to work.

## THE NATION KEEPS GOD, GOD KEEPS THE NATION

The Octet considers Jarish to be blessed by Autochthon; the fact that it has moved fewer times, and over less distance than any other nation among the Eight is testament to this. The people of Jarish seem to exude a faith that lives and burns in the heart of everything they touch. "Faith like a Jarishite," is a phrase used by Autochthonians to describe a person who puts himself at risk without thought of consequence, trusting his fate, good or ill, to the will of the Great Maker.

Because of Jarish's material weakness coupled with its peerless faith and unmatched work ethic, the rest of Autochthonia cannot help but admire the smallest nation of the Octet. That Jarish is blessed is taken almost for granted. As such, the other seven nations discourage one another from making militant advances toward the tiny nation. Jarish is protected on all sides by its Autochthonian allies. When a threat rises to endanger the whole of Autochthonia, concerned eyes will be turned toward Jarish, so that the cataclysm wrought by Viator of Nullspace may not be repeated. They do this because Jarish is an example to the Eight Nations—of how fragile and tenuous their lives are, and how powerful faith is.

## HOPE'S SHINING BRIDGE — THE METROPOLI OF JAST AND QUNE

By 550DA, the tribe of Jarish had expanded as far across its great open shelf as it could. There it met with an impassible chasm, impossibly deep and more than a mile wide. The fissure had marked the driftward edge of the Jarish territory since time out of mind, and, having expanded to natural borders in every other direction,

## OF AUTOCHTHON (THE MACHINE GOD)

After having wandered lost for one small forever, the tribe of dreamers found themselves no closer to the Shining Answer than before. They looked to Cecelyne's books for a clue, but her diagnosis was the same as it had been for the last thousand-thousand centuries: they must keep moving. Surely Adrián's star had not led them astray! They were on the path of a prophecy. Yet still, they were lost. Then one amongst them emerged with a plan. He was a great builder of things, who set to work on a vast bridge.

"Where should a bridge go that we should want to follow?" questioned the All Shadow.

"Nowhere," said the Machine God.

At first, the Primordials saw no wisdom in this. But when the Bridge to Nowhere was completed, they realized that they were no longer lost. "Curious. How could such a thing be?" wondered Szoreny. But She Who Lives in Her Name knew the answer: they need only watch the bridge: where it went, they should not go. As long as they were not going nowhere, they could only arrive in a place which held some meaning.

And so the tribe of dreamers continued on, no longer lost.

the nation seemed destined to remain forever as a small knit-work of towns. Though they could see across the chasm to a great open cavity, they had not the means to cross the gap.

In those days, the heart of the people beat in the life of *Jubilant Evangelist*. But their Champion had withdrawn. Her inspiring assembly-line sermons could invigorate workers such that they needed no rest, nor any food; her scriptures were their repast. But now *Evangelist* rarely left her cloister, and when she spoke to the people, the tone was gone from her voice. They could no longer sense the gushing abundance of her love. Many feared that she was dying. Lastine, the mortal lover of *Jubilant Evangelist*, became *Quixotic Dulcinea*, who strove to guide the Champion back to her people.

She succeeded, and for a time, *Jubilant Evangelist's* Clarity abated, and she held her final and most legendary sermon to the people of Jarish. From an undisclosed location, her voice was heard in every parish of the Jarishite territory. In it, she proclaimed that Jarish would expand across the chasm, to a promised land of raw materials. They need only believe, work hard, and have patience. Then she said her final goodbye, and signed off. It was the last time her voice would ever be heard.

## THE GOLDEN SPAN

From *Evangelist's* retreat came the glorious golden city of Jast. A great bridge-city over two miles long and a half-mile wide, Jast flies over the abyss between Old and New Jarish. It is a mighty arc with four mighty towers rising from the apex of its bow. Both its gigantic rails and its spacious deck support hundreds of naturally-occurring structures: apartments, warehouses, power stations, and most of all, factory-cathedrals. The center of the deck is the Jast Strip, the most famous highway in Autochthonia. The Jast Strip runs from Old to New Jarish. In the past, it travelled through the western Reaches to Gulak and the eastern Reaches to Nurad. Now those nations are out of alignment with the great road, but when they cycle back into place, main roads in those nations lead, almost without deviation, to Jarish—a miracle unique in all of in Autochthonia.

The rails of Jast fly from her towers to her base. Trams run along the rails and beneath the city's main highway, aiding commuters in their trek across the city. Those in the lower trams can see down into the crystal flow that fills the chasm; those who ride the upper rails can see dizzily far by the glow of the light obelisk—few vantages within civilized Autochthonia provide enough light to enjoy such a view. Expeditions from as far away as Claslat and Kamak have, at times, ventured into the great fissure that begins or ends the chasm under Jast, and have been able to see the glow of the golden bridge city from as far as 300 miles away.

### GOING HOME

Should desperation drive Jarish to breach the Seal of Eight Divinities, conquest will be the last thing on its mind. The tiny nation regards Creation as a holy land shrouded in myths of golden heroes and would first seek aid from the Creation-born. They have no conception of the morass of fallen empires and warring factions that Creation has become.

That said, Jarishites are neither stupid nor gullible—just disastrously uninformed. Should Jarish be the first nation to pierce the Seal, it is also possible that certain other nations (Sova and Nurad are especially likely) will overcome their religious inhibitions and attack, seeking to claim whatever resources Jarish has gained in the world beyond. It is thus possible the nation might enact a breach in partnership with Estasia.

### MARKS OF TRIBULATION

Visitors to Jast will notice giant nodes of crystal that encrust two of her four towers, several of her piers, her larger buildings, and her approach from the New Jast side of the

chasm. These are scars of the destruction once wrought upon the glorious city. In the present day, the crystals have been hollowed out and converted into outbuildings and temples, flawlessly integrated into the superstructure of the mighty metropolis. But in 3972, they were meant to be Jast's tomb.

Three years earlier—999 years ago—the terror called Viator of Nullspace emerged from “the farthest point opposite to the mind of the Maker” and began to ravage the Octet. For three years, Jarish mostly evaded the ravages, although they sent food, medicine, weaponry, and even their own Champions to aid their stricken brethren. Then the Viator of Nullspace turned its attentions toward Jarish; in short order nearly every Jarishite town was razed to the ground. Jast drew most of her people into her mighty orichalcum gates, which closed on either side of the bridge, sealing the people in towers and cathedrals forged of unbreakable metal and faith.

Outraged, the Viator of Nullspace destroyed the supports holding up Jast, and plunged it into the abyss. It then destroyed a nearby cell, releasing a flood of liquid crystal into the chasm which washed over the city in an instant; Jast and her inhabitants were considered lost. Then it afflicted Qune with a quake so severe the city sank into a fissure. Gremlinized destroyers followed, and the population of Qune was nearly wiped out.

The Dread Gear's masterstroke proved its undoing; the destruction of Jarish and apparent murder of its metropoli served to unite the Eight Nations as nothing else had. A massive coalition hounded Viator into the Far Reaches, and there put an end to it two years later. During those battles, an international rescue expedition ventured into the ruins of Jarish.

Upon arriving at the site of the carnage, the Sovan Soulsteel Caste, *Relentless Scourge*, detected movement from within the crystal flow—miraculously, impossibly, the people of Jarish were still alive inside Jast.

The foreign Champions, along with the few local heroes to have survived the siege of Qune, then labored to raise Jast from the depths of the crystal flow. *March of the Millions* (Yugash), *Glory of the Faithful* (Gulak), *Vigilant Steel Warden* (Kamak), *Ten Thousand Songs* (Claslat) and *Relentless Scourge* (Sova) were the Alchemicals who saved Jast. Their heroics are commemorated in the Walk of Saviors, a district of the present-day metropolis that boasts light-based projections of each of those immortal Champions. When the Saviors raised Jast, they found that the city had ensconced herself in a cocoon of golden crystal, protecting her people from the raw flow. In the years that followed, Jast would be restored, its cocoon shattered away, its ends restored to their bases, and its columns sunk deeper than before, and its towers flying high. It wears its scars with pride, a testament to the strength of the least among the Eight Nations.

## A METROPOLITAN ROMANCE

The metropolis of Qune, once situated on the New Jarish side of Jast, also went through changes. The city was half-submerged, and within a decade, it disappeared underground completely. When it re-emerged, it did so at the point of the rupture Viator of Nullspace had caused to the cell wall. There Qune went through a second metamorphosis, shedding her old structures and consuming her essential core, rebuilding herself into a new and superior city. Under the shine of the light obelisk, Qune was reborn as a dam over the crystal fissure. Regulating the flow of liquid crystal through her Municipal Charms, Qune then began to spin the crystal into gleaming towers with great transparent streets that wound in and out of her spires, turning the metropolis into a multilayered crown of spires and winding roads over a mighty dam.

Rivers of liquid crystal flow through the lowest districts of Qune, while at the highest there is the Promenade, a platform of moonsilver and steel surrounded by purple-blue transparent spires, which connects the rest of Qune to the precipice on which New Jarish stands. By day, Qune is directly under the glow of the light obelisk; by night, light stored up in its crystal spires gives the city a bioluminescent glow, tinged silver by its moonsilver base. Qune's blazing radiance can be seen from the nearer districts of Jast, making that side of the bridge a premiere destination for lovers, and the location of the apartments of Jast's highest-ranking officials. Qune is widely considered the most romantic city in the Octet, and a pilgrimage destination for newlywed Kamaki and Sovans.

## NOTEWORTHY INDIVIDUALS

### MELET, HIGH CELEBRANT OF JARISH

Short, friendly, and famous for her open smile, Melet's warm demeanor hides a bleak and pragmatic mind. A former preceptor, she has used her disarming appearance as a weapon against the state's enemies for better than thirty years, and continues to do so now, in the realm of international religious politics.

Melet is confident in the competence of her Theomachratic underlings, and so lets the lectors primarily administrate themselves. Her present concern is with the impending death of the Machine God, and keeping her nation from devouring itself in a panic. She believes the Theomachracy cannot deny the Maker's failing health for much longer, and is working with the high celebrants of the other seven nations to devise a revised Autochthonian history she hopes will focus the Populat and keep morale high. This history posits three epochs corresponding to the Maker's gifts; the first epoch was the age of tools, when the Autochthonians tamed their environment; the second was the age of doctrine, when the Octet assumed its current, orthodox cultural outline. Now the world is entering the age of faith, when the peoples of the Eight Nations must hold together in the face of the

## IT IS COMING

Jarish has a long and peculiar relationship with the Void. Its cities and towns are deeply riddled with Voidbringer cults. The first known Apostate appeared in Jast. Gremlin attacks on its outlying towns are common in these days, as the Blight Zones spread through the Maker's body.

Some theorize that Jarish is located on an inherent point of instability in the Maker's anatomy, that the Divine Ministers guided the tribe of Jarish to this place to act as guardians against the Void beyond. This theory has gained credence in recent years; strange spatial disturbances have begun to appear in the near Reaches around the small nation, and even within its outer towns. These white rifts have a scaled, tessellating aspect to them; they hurt the eyes to look upon, registering a null impression upon the mind. To date, none have persisted for more than a few hours after being discovered. Machinery is known to experience greater failure rates after the appearance of a nearby rift.

Although high-ranking members of the Tripartite know better, most Jarishite citizens believe Viator of Nullspace was destroyed by the international coalition that hunted it down. It was not, instead being sealed away in what the Champions who fought it believed to be the Void itself. What nobody in Jarish has yet realized is that these anomalies are the outer edges of the Viator's prison, pushing against the boundaries of the real. Perhaps they are a sign of Autochthon's failing health... or an impending masterstroke by the Minister of Wrath from within its place of exile.

Maker's greatest test; should they prevail, paradise awaits on the other side.

Melet knows this fabrication will solve nothing in and of itself, but a lifetime of witnessing the results of faith turned black and sour has convinced her that it is prerequisite to any serious solution. The societies of men, she knows, are far more fragile than the body of a titan.

### CALCULUS OF WAR, ADAMANT INVESTIGATOR

Moving through the outer towns of Jarish in the guise of a mendicant lector, *Calculus of War* has come to the smallest of the Eight Nations to investigate its spatial disturbances. The tessellated rifts are not exclusive to Jarish; they have been appearing throughout the Far Reaches for years, particularly in those Blight Zones closest to the spot where Viator of Nullspace was banished, and where the *Colossus Eyes and Wings of the Multitude* met a mysterious and untimely demise less than a century ago.

*Calculus* believes the Dread Gear is gaining the power to reach outside of its dimensional prison, but the Divine Ministers are hard-pressed to prosecute their already ongoing wars in the Blights. They will not allocate destroyers or precious Operatives to chase a monster long faded into the annals of history—not unless *Calculus* can produce some tangible proof of the Viator's return.

## GULAK

Artificial incense and synthetic spices. Bustling urban plazas packed with polyethnic crowds, their jostling sleeves tinkling with icons, their coats marked with the sigils of their clades. Endogamous towns whose walls are strung with machine-stamped prayer strips that flutter like war banners. Raucous religious festivals where millennia-old reliquaries are paraded through the streets. Shrines of a dozen denominations piled atop one another like wedding gifts. A temple prostitute clad in skintight silver and bioluminescent body paint. Philosopher-aristocrats gathered in an atrium of plastic and bronze, listening to the words of the master beneath a stylized jade tree.

This is Gulak.

Though homogeneous by Creation's standards, the Eight Nations contain countless subcultures, creeds and ethnic groups. Gulak alone encompasses more such groups than all the others combined. It's a crazy-quilt of peoples drawn together by the promise of freedom and stitched into one society by millennia of history. This admixture has formed a cosmopolitan nation with a wealth of cultural and scholastic resources. It's also created a nation riven by social fault lines, lacking conviction and weakened by decadence and corruption. Gulak's people must pull together and climb out of their rut of self-satisfied complacency if they're to survive the dark times to come.

## LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPE

Gulak is contained within a cluster of over a hundred spherical chambers gathered like a bunch of grapes. These chambers are generally two to five miles in diameter, and even the largest—the central chamber containing the metropolis of Thutot—is less than thirty miles across. Seven other major cities are located at the nation's edges, either within their own sizable chambers or embedded into the nation-cyst's outer wall.

Most of Gulak's smaller chambers contain a single town apiece. These are connected to the nation's cities by a looping network of pneumatic trams. Vast artworks cover the walls and ceilings of these chambers: conduits daubed with luminescent paint to form elaborate glowing filigree; bas-relief gearworks picked out in gold leaf; mosaics of colored mirrors that shimmer like the sea; artificial waterfalls flanked by swirling patterns meant to evoke the legendary "foliage" of Creation.

The small size and curved walls of the town-chambers requires efficient use of space. Streets become stairs as they

run up the sloping floors of a town, then give way to elevators going still higher. Balconies jut out from structures set in the upper walls and ceiling. Towers rise dozens of stories into the air, their upper levels linked by covered bridges of glass and steel.

## HISTORY

The founder Gulak was a priestess of Autochthon: a scholar, artist, dreamer and thaumaturge. She gathered her followers in Creation's South from castes known for sensuality, artistry and inquisitive minds. These adapted earnestly to their new environment, laboring to better recreate their world of origin.

Her soul-successor, the Starmetal Caste Alchemical *Thousand-Handed Triumphant Ordinator*, combined inhuman brilliance with intuitive mastery of Essence to discover the secret of metropolitan ascension. Yugash's *Kaleidoscopic Armiger* ascended around the same time, but where the folk of Yugash took that as a wonder, the Gulaki saw Thutot as a miracle, and they spread word of her with passion and fire.

Foreign pilgrims quickly began visiting Thutot in great numbers. When foreign Theomachrats visited, Gulak charged hefty fees of their home nations. These were often paid in religious relics to be stored in Thutot, making the city even more appealing to pilgrims.

The final centuries of the second millennium, called the Seven Wars Era, hit Gulak especially hard. Other nations sought to conquer Thutot and seize her relics. While the holy city itself never fell to invasion, other cities and towns were ravaged and Thutot's people suffered under sieges and Alchemical-led raids. Population decimated and infrastructure ruined, Gulak threw its efforts into gathering the international Conclave of 1991 DA to build a lasting peace.

While other nations reached new heights of theotechnical advancement over the following centuries, Gulak spent what its people call the First Refinement Era rebuilding war-torn infrastructure. In doing so, it avoided the cataclysms of that era, like the destruction of the metropolis of Perygra and the rise of reactionary regimes. Gulak took in refugees from both horrors. Some evacuee bands built towns in Gulak's hinterlands to emulate their former homes. Others settled in or around cities, integrating with Gulak's native folk.

Gulaki society settled into a stable equilibrium from around 2400-3600 DA. During this Integrative Era, the growing nation struggled to absorb its immigrant populations. Theotechnical advancement was stymied by fears of theurgic disaster. Culturally, however, Gulak was a ferment of activity. Xenophilic artists, engineers and artisans found inspiration in the works of the immigrant clades, resulting in regular flowerings of new aesthetic and philosophical movements.

The era was also marked by spasms of internal strife, such as the Mo-Thu Schism of 2724 DA, where Thutish reactionaries angered by widespread acceptance of foreign mores repudiated the National Tripartite Assembly, resulting in a century of intermittent civil war.

In 3690, incensed by Gulak's relic-raids and proud heterodoxy, Jarish annexed Gulak with Estasian aid. But the complexities of the Gulaki body politic proved too much for Jarish, which maintained order only by hiring the Estasian Militat as an ill-fitted police force. Resurgent Gulaki resistance expelled the invaders within a decade.

Gulaki historians call the last millennium the Second Refinement Era. An increasing population and a willingness to adapt successful policies from other nations has led to an upswing in Gulak's wealth and prosperity.

## A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

Gulak has been a melting pot for millennia. Its people have always loved complexity and diversity; they pride themselves on melding the best ideas and traditions of the Octet into a superior whole. Their artistic tradition incorporates elements from every other, as does their cuisine. Even their language is polyglot: while all Autochthonia shares a single tongue, each nation has its own accents, slang and jargon, and Gulak absorbs them all.

But the Gulaki aren't as open as they like to think. Those who don't assimilate remain on the outskirts of society, living in monocultural town-enclaves and urban ghettos. Even the most gifted of these minorities rarely break through the glass ceiling into high-ranking positions held by members of more cosmopolitan elements of Gulaki society.

## CLADES

There are dozens of distinct cultural groups, or *clades*, in Gulak. Some derive from the Southerners who accompanied the founder Gulak into the body of the Great Maker; these form the backbone of Gulaki society. Most, however, originated with immigrant bands from other nations who brought their traditions with them.

Each clade has evolved in its own direction over time. Citizens whose forebears arrived from the same city centuries or millennia apart often regard one another with more suspicion than do those with entirely unrelated origins, as their similarities throw their few differences into stark relief.

The insularity of the clades affords their members a measure of privacy rarely found outside of the ranks of the regulators or the citizens of Kamak. While one's habits and shortcomings may become common gossip within the precincts of a town or district, members of one's clade will not share such details with strangers.

## REPRESENTATIVE CLADES

Sixteen Old Clades claim descent from the founder Gulak and her inner circle. They remain entrenched in the nation's leadership positions; between them they comprise perhaps a third of Gulak's population, but well over half of the nation's high-ranking Populat and Tripartite officials. Their ranks include the Rarata, famed for their stubbornness and their prevalence among Thutot's clerics and preceptors; the Kedar, known for their intricate cuisine and for congenital

ailments rendering much of their Populat unfit for manual labor; and the Amarasi, renowned for their generosity, geniality and eccentric religious practices.

The ancestors of the Yotiban and the Yoticar came from the patropolis of Ot in Yugash. But while the Yotiban immigrated over the past millennium and are well-integrated into Gulaki society, the Yoticar formed isolationist enclaves when they arrived three thousand years ago. The Yoticar can be recognized by their overly wide belts and the rankbraids in their hair, but they're most set apart by their custom of raising their own children in a nuclear family structure rather than in communal crèches. Other Gulaki view them as overly individualistic and lacking in social graces, with an unhealthy tendency toward personal ambition.

The Sahima derive from Estasian pacifists who've immigrated over the past three millennia. Knowledgeable Gulaki do not mistake their pacifism for weakness. Their culture values drive and resolution, giving them a leg up in the nation's stultified hierarchy. Sahima hold prominent posts in both the Tripartite and the Populat, giving them many favors to draw upon to inconvenience anyone who crosses a member of the clade. They are known for their curiosity regarding the religious beliefs of others and their practice of "soft" defensive martial arts.

The Vepea originated with a band of tunnel people that were accepted into Gulak in exchange for their aid during the Jarishite-Estasian Annexation. They are a secretive clade, unfriendly toward outsiders, speaking their own nigh-indecipherable argot. Vepean costume is dark and concealing, with the face covered by a filter mask when out of doors. Stealing from outsiders is a rite of passage for their youth, one which their regulators have proven unwilling to combat. Vepea traveling outside of their own enclaves often find themselves accused of criminal behavior.

### CLADE-NAMES

Autochthonian families don't fulfill the same social roles that they do in Creation, and Autochthonians don't take on family names. In Gulak, clades fill the role of family or clan. Members of Gulak's Tripartite precede their personal names with the name of their clade. The Populat of some clades do this as well; in other clades, they are not considered worthy of sharing their clade's name with their own.

## THE URBAN/PROVINCIAL DIVIDE

Gulak exhibits a clear split in attitudes between its cosmopolitan cities and its parochial towns. While members of many clades rub shoulders in each of the nation's cities,



most towns are provincial enclaves populated by citizens of a single clade. Their city-dwelling cousins unfairly view these towns as hotbeds of impoverished ignorance and clannish, loutish prejudice. In return, many town-dwellers see the cities as cesspools of affluent decadence whose inhabitants lack all conviction.

### CLOTHING AND ORNAMENTATION

At first glance, Gulak is more sartorially diverse than any other nation, drawing on a wide range of fashions. But this diversity conceals a certain rigidity; whereas the folk of nations like Yugash or Claslat may show individual senses of fashion, each Gulaki clade and sect has its own traditional apparel. Nonetheless, there are overall cultural trends at work.

The native Gulaki have always favored heavy, intricately patterned garments. Gulak's air tends to be cool, though never so cold as wintry Kamak. For this reason, long-sleeved coats are typically worn along with trousers and boots. The traditional Gulaki coat bears on its back a bold insignia indicating the symbol of the wearer's clade. Forehead-revealing turbans and Sindhi caps are common headgear.

Citizens commonly wear all sorts of religious paraphernalia appropriate to their personal creeds: medallions, amulets, icons, prayer beads and the like. Likewise, Tripartite members associated with paradigmatic schools may wear images indicative of their philosophical outlooks. As with the clade symbol, these items help like-minded Gulaki find one another in their nation's crowded cities.

In formal situations, such as official meetings and religious rituals, the Gulaki denote subtle gradations in rank through the use of *okina*, or "sub-stones." These outward-pointing triangles or ovals of glassy material are pasted to the forehead around the soulgem. Those of the lowest rank wear a single downward-pointing *okina*; these increase in angle and number at higher ranks, with members of the National Assembly wearing starbursts of *okina* wholly encircling their soulgems.

Tattoos are common. They serve ritual functions within certain clades and heterodox sects. Others use them as vehicles for self-expression; tattoos are one of the few things one can hold on to in a society with little room for private property.

### THE ARTS

Even before Autochthon's departure from Creation, the peoples who would follow the founder Gulak were known for their artistic propensities. Cross-pollination from immigrants and pilgrims has only intensified their absorption with the arts. Lectors are more numerous and more esteemed here than in other nations, and their training in creative fields often takes precedence over their religious education.

Virtually every style of art—whether visual, literary or performing—to be found elsewhere in Autochthonia is

practiced here. Indeed, some artistic fashions now extinct elsewhere remain alive in Gulak's conservatories. Nonetheless, certain styles remain predominant, drawing on ancient Gulaki modes. In visual art as in costume, jewel-bright tones abound, as do intricate knotwork and lavish detail. Music is heterophonic and prone to improvisation; the theremin is especially popular.

Gulaki art tends to be sacral in nature, as opposed to the ideological, statist art favored in places like Estasia and Yugash. Mystery plays are especially popular, being a key component of Gulak's constant stream of religious festivals.

### CUISINE

The gastronomy of Gulak exceeds that of other nations in breadth and complexity. By taking in peoples from the other seven nations, Gulak absorbed both the immigrants' regional delicacies and the techniques needed to create them, and their sophisticated chemical industry allows them to reproduce them all. Whole new culinary arts have flowered and withered here over the millennia. Now Gulak is acknowledged as the gourmet center of Autochthonia. Harvesters come from every nation to study the art and industry of cookery under Gulak's master culinarians.

Here, complex foods are not solely the domain of the Tripartite. Even the lowest of the urban Populat need eat nutrient paste only rarely. Visiting pilgrims from the other seven nations—not to mention members of Gulak's countless heterodox sects—require a vast selection of festival foods, from noodles, soups and dumplings to rock candy, mochi and jelly sweets, and Populat aides hawk such delicacies from roving carts to any who want them. Overindulgence remains a sin, but it is more common and less aggressively censured than elsewhere.

Meat-eating is more common in Gulak than anywhere outside Claslat. Dozens of varieties of rat are bred by various clades for size, flavor and texture. Fat-tailed strains are especially prized. Cage-raised cockroaches are also delicacies; candied roaches are served whole, or the meat may be fried, steamed or smoked. Cockroach carapaces are pureed to thicken bisques.

### RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

Gulak's heterogeneous society, pulling from multiple religious and historical sources, allows for a number of family structures and sexual groupings. Many sects approve of—or even encourage—homosexuality; others favor polyamory in various configurations. Most Gulaki try to show tolerance toward alien sexual mores. Visitors are rarely so accepting. Many pilgrims venerate Thutot while deriding her citizens as deviants and libertines.

An ancient tradition peculiar to orthodox Gulaki sects is that of shekeda, or sacred intercourse. As a rite of passage into adulthood and full responsibility, each young lector (known here as a shekedavi) anoints himself or herself with luminescent body paint and dances in a temple courtyard

until approached by an interested citizen. The two retire to a divan within a curtained shrine to Kek'Tungsssha or Noi, there to perform the sacred act.

Lectors may remain shekedavi if they wish. Lectors agree that post-coital conversation with lay partners is edifying in regards to the true thoughts and feelings of the citizenry. Most concede, however, that the primary appeal of shekeda is sensual in nature.

## SPORT

Gulak's various factions use the formalized contest of sport to vent their opprobrium at one another. Most members of the Populat—and the Tripartite, for that matter—attend sporting exhibitions, while the regulators keep watch at all such games to suppress outbreaks of rowdy violence.

Gulaki sport is almost entirely team-based. Activities include races of running, climbing and swimming; ball games; games of skill; wrestling; formalized mock combat; and fights or races between trained rats. Teams are mustered both geographically by towns and urban districts, and ideologically by clades, sects and schools.

## RELIGION

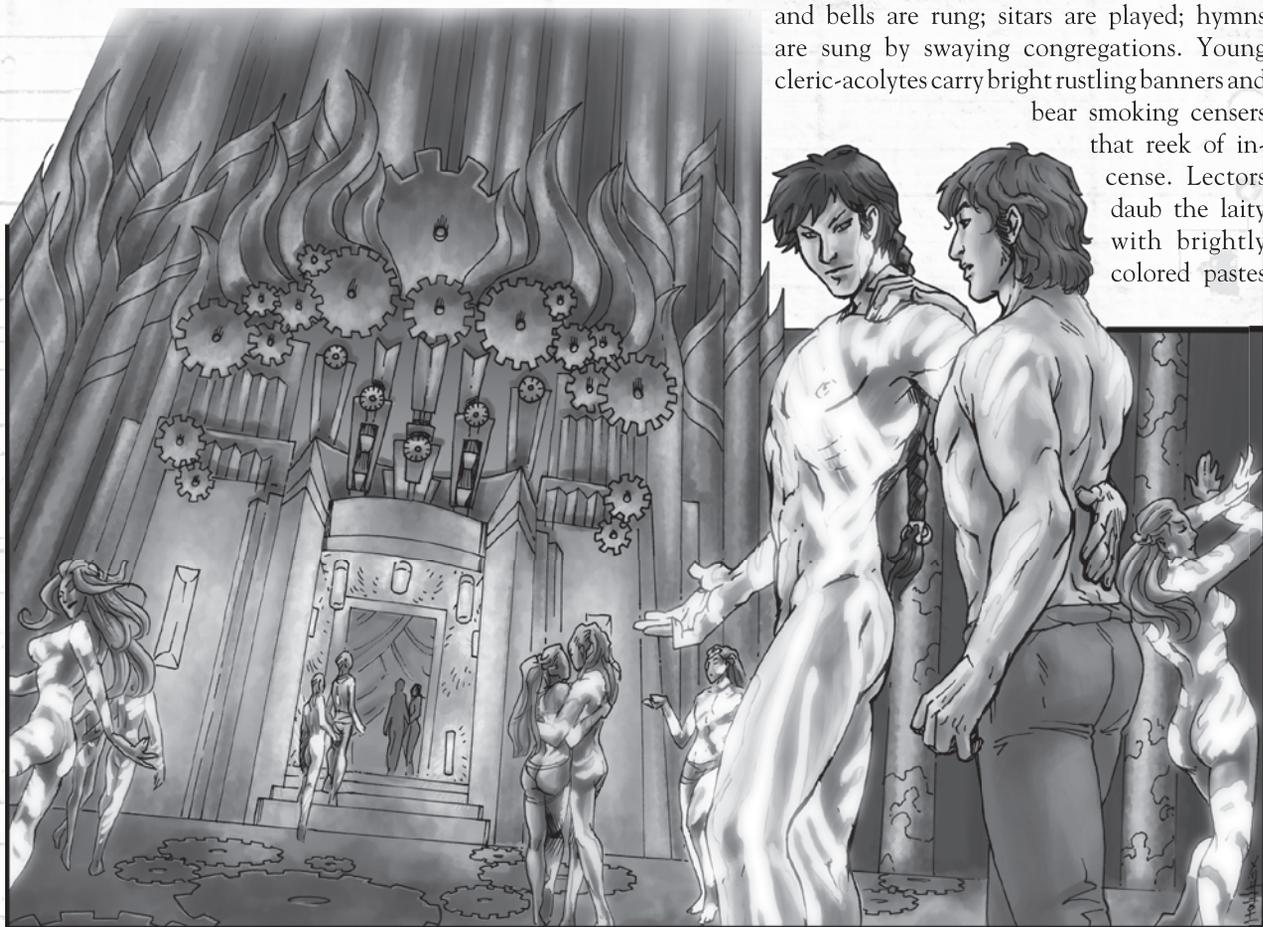
Unsurprisingly for a nation built largely upon the pilgrim trade, Gulak is deeply devout. But that doesn't mean its people are intolerant. Millennia of constant exposure

to other denominations, combined with several religiously motivated wars—including civil wars—have left the Gulaki open-minded in religious matters and averse to sectarian strife. Many enjoy debating the validity and worth of one another's creeds. Visitors are encouraged to join in such debate as long as they do not cross the line into harassment or proselytization.

Gulaki orthodoxy states that the Divine Ministers are not merely servants or agents of the Great Maker, but hypostases: eight distinct personae that share in and partake of the nature and powers of Autochthon himself. Thus, in their worship they focus more on the Ministers than do the folk of other nations. Kadmek and Runel are especially beloved. Images of the Divine Ministers appear throughout their fanes, while factories turn out a stream of subgod icons: tiny metal charms that citizens sew onto their sleeves or leave as offerings at the nation's many wayside shrines.

Unlike more secular nations, life in Gulak is full of sacraments. Rituals are performed at every major step in a citizen's life, from a child's birth to the commitment of his mortal remains to the recycling conduits. Other sacraments include the implantation of the soulgem and its removal; achieving sexual maturity; gaining promotions; attending religious festivals and going off to war.

Like so much else in Gulaki culture, religious services and sacraments are feasts for the senses. Gongs and bells are rung; sitars are played; hymns are sung by swaying congregations. Young cleric-acolytes carry bright rustling banners and bear smoking censers that reek of incense. Lectors daub the laity with brightly colored pastes



infused with aromatic oils, then present them with a taste of sacred liquor in a chalice of jade.

### MATTERS OF ORTHODOXY

Gulak's clerics face more complicated tasks than their counterparts in other nations. Religious teaching, assemblages and festivals vary not only from city to city, but from district to district and from town to town. The clerics meet regularly to discuss doctrine, to ensure that each individual sect remains within the (admittedly broad) bounds of Gulaki orthodoxy. Many are rotated into liaison positions with preceptors, lectors and visiting clerics from other nations.

Normally, clerics are the most important and powerful branch of the Theomachracy. In Gulak, the lectors have more pull than usual because of their importance to the pilgrim trade; the plutarchs value their activities, which bring resources into the nation. The nation also has an unusually large number of preceptors because of the exceptionally heterodox nature of Gulaki religion. Thus, the clerics must compromise more here than elsewhere.

Unorthodox beliefs are examined by a council of eight *legates*—clerics chosen by their nations' respective high celebrants—to determine whether they are heretical. This council meets triennially in Thutot. Its decisions are not binding; a nation's Theomachracy may indict a belief as heretical even if the rest of the council deems it within the bounds of orthodoxy. On the other hand, Gulak's liberal clerics will not find a belief heretical if even one other nation considers it orthodox.

### HETERODOX SECTS

While Gulak is as strict as any nation in investigating and punishing heresy, its clerics tolerate a far broader range of creeds. One cannot punish a pilgrim visiting Thutot for following her home nation's orthodoxy! Likewise, several immigrant clades still adhere to something resembling the religious traditions extant in their homelands at the time of their departure. In allowing such openness to alternative views, Gulak has created an environment rife with heterodox sects—denominations at odds with orthodox religious mores, but not so variant as to be deemed heretical. A handful of these sects are sketched out below.

As much a paradigmatic school as a sect, the *Jahashites* are a millennia-old fusion of immigrant creeds. They take their name from Jahash, named in the *Tome of the Great Maker* as the first child born in Autochthonia, and see it as their holy duty to bear as many children as they can to better serve the Great Maker. Their ancestors left their home nations when their excessive breeding interfered with the plutarchs' long-term economic plans. Gulak fares no better; families are limited to a maximum of four children—a restriction Jahashites often break, to the regulators' chagrin—and the Tripartite is debating stricter limits. Many Jahashites view the resource crisis as a punish-

ment sent by Autochthon for insufficient reproduction, inducing them to redouble their efforts.

Tracing their lineage back to a heretical Yugashi sect from the first millennium, the *Aeonists* posit—based on an interpretation of a millennia-old research study into Autochthon's Essence flows—that the immortal Machine God goes through eras of wakefulness and rest, and that he is now entering a resting cycle wherein his Essence ebbs and the world's conscious order yields to dreamlike irrationality. This chaotic era will last many human lifetimes, but when it ends it will give way to a new age of reason and bounty. With the wisdom of the Tripartite and the guidance of the Champions, humankind will outlast the dark times and see the coming rebirth.

The heretical creed of the *Soterics* posits that Autochthon consists of two parts: a finite, fallible material world—the Machine God—and an infinite, infallible spiritual world—the Godhead. When the Machine God falters and fails, everyone will die, but the souls of those who live virtuously will enter the Godhead to live eternally. Despite the Soterics' noble intent, the preceptors treat them as they would any other Voidbringer sect.

### RELICS

The nation of Gulak—and especially the city of Thutot—is full of relics. Some were donated by pilgrims, others purchased from other nations, but many were stolen in raids. Relics are treasured in Gulak; just as Thutot herself is blessed, so too are other ancient things blessed by the Machine God. Of relics from within Autochthon, some are valued for their historical significance: a fragment of a destroyed Alchemical slain four millennia ago, or a thread from the garment of the Founder Claslat. Others are treasured for their connection to the Great Maker: chrism from the Elemental Pole of Oil, or metal shavings from Kek'tungsssha's frame.

Other relics originated in Creation, having been brought to Autochthon with the realm's first mortal inhabitants. These include fragments of plant and animal matter preserved in crystal; firsthand illustrations and carvings of Creation's flora, fauna, landscapes and celestial bodies; and ancient audio recordings of the first Autochthonians emulating Creation's songs and the sounds of its beasts. The most precious relics are a handful of dreamstones holding dreams of Creation, and a yasal crystal containing an unknown spirit—god, elemental or demon—used as an oracle by Gulak's Theomachracy.

### GOVERNMENT

The fault lines that run through all of Gulak are at their most dramatic in the upper ranks of both the Populat and the Tripartite. Entrenched factionalization has resulted the most corrupt government in the Octet.

Advancement to the upper ranks of one's caste depends largely on nepotism. This is less a matter of blood than it is

### THE CRYSTAL TRAP

Gulak's ancient yasal crystal holds an alien spirit calling itself Akumyo. If, in your game, Gulak is attempting to breach the Seal of Eight Divinities (an unlikely matter, given Gulak's trade-based economy, though a heterodox sect or paradigmatic school might sponsor a private venture for its own reasons), Akumyo professes knowledge of the barriers between realms of existence—knowledge that could give Gulak a massive advantage in the race to pierce the Seal. But if the spirit lies, then accepting its aid might result in the Seal opening on a place entirely other than Creation...

offaction, as high-ranking members of both the Populat and the Tripartite typically promote underlings who share their clade or sect backgrounds or their political and philosophical ideals, resulting in tightly knit factionalized subgroups. This situation is not universal within Gulak, but it is regrettably common. This results in high-ranking officials not always being the best-suited to their jobs. And with few dissenting opinions present in staff meetings, there's little to discourage groupthink and grand, ill-considered strategies.

If there's a bright side to this, it's that Gulak's regulators are not as clannish as those of other nations, as the nation's various fracture lines run through the regulators as well, preventing them from presenting a united front to other elements of the Olgotary.

While corruption is endemic in Gulak, it is not permitted to endanger the people. Regulators only turn a blind eye to nepotism when the newly promoted are competent to perform their new roles. It can only happen at all because of the clannishness of the clades; a bungler or paramour promoted beyond his or her station by a high-ranking patron may not be known to others outside of their clade, allowing them to conceal the true nature of the situation. This works more effectively in towns than in cities. Uncovering an incompetent supervisor or sub-director in an outlying town is a serious scandal, one that recurs every few years.

The hierarchy of Gulak's Theomachy is more convoluted than in other nations. Each sect has an assembly of lectors, clerics and preceptors dedicated to its own congregants. The most highly-ranked members of the various sects form a conclave that elects each city's celebrant. By long-standing tradition, the orthodox Gulaki leaders have three votes each, assuring that each city's celebrant—and, too, the nation's high celebrant—is almost always orthodox.

Thutot is the unquestioned center of Gulaki religious and political life. Both the grand autocrat and the high

### WEALTH WITHOUT MONEY

Even with little private property and no money, Gulaki society is quite competitive. One cannot buy a better apartment or finer clothes or a private vehicle, but all of those things come with promotion, so the pressure to improve one's station—either to have these things for their own sake or to keep ahead of the neighbors—is intense. This competitive element increases productivity, offsetting to some extent the corrupting effects of nepotism.

Insofar as currency exists, it is in the form of favors. Citizens make deals for patronage, owing debts to their patrons in exchange for promotion. These clients then use what influence they have to support their patrons, covering up their patrons' dealings and indiscretions.

celebrant live and work there. As to the Great Councilors of the Sodalities, the leadership of the Harvesters is traditionally seated in Mogera. Other cities have greater or lesser claims on the other Great Councilor positions.

### PARADIGMATIC SCHOOLS

Tripartite members in Gulak with shared philosophical outlooks unite into *paradigmatic schools* to guide Tripartite policy—both local and national—down desired avenues. Their existence is officially viewed as a vent for reformist impulses, ensuring that such urges remain both visible and controllable by regulators and preceptors. Dozens of these schools ferment throughout Gulak's Tripartite; some comprise but a handful of members in a single town or city, while others encompass thousands of followers well-versed in their mysteries.

Since only the Tripartite can set policy, only citizens in the Tripartite can belong to these schools. Members of the Populat may agree with one school or the other, and a few can even act as muscle or sounding-boards for school members, but they can't actually be involved in the schools themselves.

The most influential of these philosophies is the *Iatric School*, whose precepts are said to trace back to Gulak herself. The credo of this reactionary movement is that the work of the Great Maker cannot be improved upon, and so the greatest good is to maintain that perfection: to heal the sick, repair that which is broken and operate the Machine God's systems at full capacity. Progress is frivolity, they say: a waste of resources that might have gone toward maintenance, and thus a crime against Autochthon.

Rival to the Iatrics is the equally well-pedigreed *Adunatic School*. The Adunatics see Autochthonian society as an ever-growing benison to the Machine God, aiding their Primordial host through their commerce, labor and prayers. It



is their belief that the greater the number of Autochthonian cities, the more widely they are spread and the more trade runs between them, the better for the health of the Maker. To oppose or harm trade and growth, they say, is a crime against Autochthon.

A distant third, its adherents claiming descent from Nuradi ideals imported during the Silent Millennium, is the deeply progressive *Steganist School*. According to the Steganists, Autochthon's body overflows with wonders and marvels, and he brought their ancestors from long-lost Creation to unravel his mysteries. They consider it their sacred duty to understand, to investigate, to discover and to invent. To do no more than what was done by those who came before them, they say, is a waste of their gifts and a crime against Autochthon.

## CASTE VARIATIONS

Religion and art are focal points of Gulaki culture. It is no surprise that their caste structure diverges from Autochthonian orthodoxy in related matters.

## REACH GUIDES

A branch of Gulak's Conductors are trained specifically to escort parties of pilgrims through the Reaches, bringing them safely from currently-inaccessible nations to Thutot and back again. Not only must these guides be exhaustively well-traveled, but they must also be sufficiently knowledgeable in theology to discuss religious topics with the pilgrims they're escorting for the seasons of travel they'll spend together. This is a volunteer role—a rare thing in Autochthonia. Reach guides are typically either young and adventurous or old and pious.

## DOCENTS

Tripartite children serve as guides to bands of pilgrims visiting the cities of Gulak. This provides the youths with invaluable experience. During their years as docents, they get an on-site view of every aspect of the city's layout and function, and they also get a better understanding of the visitors that regularly come through their city. But they have an ulterior purpose. It is their responsibility to spy on the pilgrims in their charge on behalf of the preceptors, remaining ever alert for expressions of heresy.

## SOUL TRANSMIGRATION

Once per year, a member of the Populat who demonstrates great artistic talent is breveted into the Theomachracy as a lector. This is considered to be a great honor. An annual ceremony is conducted to this effect in the artist's home city or town, and lectors from across Gulak travel to attend and bear witness. Upon her death, such an artist's soul is transferred into a new soulgem appropriate to the Theomachracy. This tradition has resulted in at least one Jarishite holy war, due to this "pollution" affecting Autochthonia's soul reserves as a whole, not just Gulak.

## THUTOT, THE FIRST CITY

Thutot is a spiderweb, an intricate filigree of starmetal and steel, a sparkling rainbow-tinged mandala. Her delicate spires rise like needles through webs of causeways and bridges, their elongated windows shining with inner light. Where other cities are claustrophobic, Thutot seems even larger from within. Her open plan reveals new vistas at every turn: steeples and minarets, arches and buttresses, plazas and amphitheatres. And people are everywhere—commuting, working, praying, or merely gaping at this miracle of the Machine God.

Though Thutot's structure is airy and spare, it still makes efficient use of space. The tallest towers stretch upward for thousands of yards. Monorail routes crisscross the gaps between structures; high-ranking Tripartite members employ aircars for even swifter transportation. Stellate pod-chambers, designed to provide additional housing or work space without requiring the construction of new buildings, cluster like glittering burrs along the flanks of towers and hang suspended from the undersides of railways.

Thutot is rife with religion. Pilgrims from throughout Autochthonia converge on the city; their parties gawk reverently from every colonnade and breezeway. Young Theomachrats come from across Gulak for advanced training in theology and thaumaturgy, and they gather and chatter as young people are wont to do. The passage of visiting elder clerics is more dramatic: they move through the city amid great pomp, escorted by regulator honor guards. Lectors put on impromptu artistic performances, ambushing passersby with art and wonder. Harmonies of prayer echo from towers of worship; shrines to every subroutine glitter on all sides, draped with fistfuls of icons and ropes of prayer beads.

Carillons hang in each of Thutot's towers. Their music forms a code her citizens know well. Each melody has its meaning, allowing natives to distinguish shift changes from festival days, or a welcome to a visiting Alchemical from an industrial fire.

When the people hear five equally spaced ascending notes, they look to the skies with both caution and wonder, for this indicates that Thutot has invoked one of her signature Municipal Charms, the Omnifold Paramagnetic Focus. This Charm allows the metropolis to move any number of inanimate objects at will. Cargoes in the city fly about, seemingly of their own accord; structures disintegrate into individual components that swoop glittering through the air to reassemble at new locations. This Charm is a terror in battle, allowing Thutot to fling invaders about or shred them with waves of hurtling metal.

Sequestered inside a lacework dome near the heart of the city is an Elemental Crystal Ganglion. This Municipal Charm is a three-dimensional web of faceted glowing crystal, its vertices swollen into shining crystalline masses. Brighter lights flash and pulse through it faster than the eye

can see. The ganglion serves as one of the Machine God's distributed nerve centers.

## NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

### RARATA SERNASHA, HIGH CELEBRANT OF GULAK

The elderly leader of Gulak's religious establishment is a politician to the core. She has always portrayed herself as a moderate voice, a peacemaker approachable by members of all sects and factions. Now, with unorthodox elements rising in stature in the Theomachracy, she leverages her reputation to play her political opponents against one another, setting reformists against reformists, radicals against reactionaries. These tactics keep the peace, but only so long as she personally acts as the fulcrum. When she passes on—which will be soon—her webs will unravel, and it will fall to others to deal with the consequences.

### TAL TAUSH, HARVESTER GURU

Ten years ago, Taush—a rising star among the Harvesters—accepted an invitation to join the Divine Minister Domadamod in its industrial tabernacle complex in the Far Reaches. Now he has returned to Thutot, wiser and more knowledgeable in the ways of the Machine God. He is no preacher, but when others come to him to ask about his experiences, he does his best to answer. And his answers are not encouraging. He speaks forthrightly of how even Domadamod the Eternal sees an end to Autochthon's resources, of how even recycling is not enough. And the preceptors and clerics wonder: can the truth be heresy?

## MOGERA, THE GATEWAY OF GULAK

Unlike the spiderweb towers of Thutot, the moonsilver patropolis of Mogera comprises a single shining structure. A score of tram terminals, their rounded walls bright as mirrors, spill forth from the silver mass of the city's main body like the limbs of a nautilus reaching out from its shell. Most of Mogera is invisible from outside, however; the city has burrowed into the wall of its cyst-chamber and grown out into the body of Autochthon proper.

Countless curving corridors twist and interweave like veins through Mogera's innards, no two entirely alike, following no obvious logic in their layout and structure. Domed courtyards and plazas bulge throughout the labyrinth. These have ceilings ablaze with artificial light, walls lined with multi-level mezzanines and floors broad enough to contain masses of smaller structures. There are no navigable grids of corridors; Mogera's layout is intuitive to natives but inscrutable to visitors, who easily become lost without guidance.

Mogera is no mass of soulless metal. Indeed, the marks of humanity are everywhere upon him. Bright banners flap and crackle in the updraft from his vents. Posters for sporting events and lector-performed artistic pieces are pasted haphazardly over his walls. Savory odors rise from hawkers' carts laden with noodles and dumplings. And the people!

Swarming and chattering, visitors and natives alike pack the city's courtyards and corridors with moving bodies.

Industry in Mogera centers around the Thousand Elixirs Crucible. This Municipal Charm, a colossal mass of pipes and vats constructed from black and green jade, transmutes the liquids flowing through Autochthon's conduits into innumerable alchemical reagents used in manufacturing and food processing. As a result, Mogera is an Autochthon-wide center for the Harvesters, whose finest culinary technicians study here, and for the Scholars and Surgeons, who employ Crucible-derived reagents in their alchemical researches. Workers wear filter masks to block the stench that fill the Crucible and ooze into nearby city sectors.

Moonsilver pipes and soulsteel heating elements run through the red, blue and black jade tangle of the Petroleaginous Nutriment Synthesis Engine, which supplies additional foodstuffs to crowded Gulak by transforming oil into edible goo. This goo requires further processing to make it palatable, but it's little different from nutrient slurry in that regard. Petroleum reserves seem adequate thus far, but Gulak's plutarchs are already planning against the possibility of oil shortages in the near future.

## NOTEWORTHY CITIZENS

### YALI VEKTIAT, CONDUCTOR COUNCILOR OF MOGERA

Graying at the temples despite only being in her early forties, Vektiat is a lean, stern woman known for her keen intellect, her reliability and her utter lack of humor. Born to an ethnically Sovan clade, she feels bound by blood and honor to the relatives in Sova to whom she has fed information throughout her career. Like her fellows in the Coalescence school, she believes all Autochthonia would benefit from being joined under one orthodoxy and one rule. But as word comes to use her position to secure a route through the Reaches for Sovan forces to invade Gulak, she wonders if such unity would be worth the cost.

### RUVONA, POPULAT ARTIST

This middle-aged shift chief has devised dozens of new inspirational songs over the years to uplift her crew's morale. In recognition of her artistic gifts, the lectors have chosen to brevet her among their number. She has refused this honor, however, seeing such caste-breaking as a violation of her creed. Worse, she has refused it publicly, causing the lectors great loss of face.

## OTHER LOCALES

### SATA KA'EST

Two massive conduit bundles, each wide as a city block, pass through a three-mile-diameter chamber. One cuts across horizontally; the other rises vertically from the carpet of manmade structures forming the town of Sata Ka'est. The bundles meet at the center of the chamber in a snarl of junctions and valves that constantly hiss with

jets of steam. That snarl crawls with Populat workers, as do the stairways, ladders and elevators that link the snarl with the town below.

Sata Ka'est was founded by the Sahima clade when their pacifist forebears emigrated from Estasia. As the Sahima refuse to use lethal force, regulators of other clades have traditionally been assigned here. The two groups maintain an uneasy coexistence, with the Sahima resenting their protectors and the regulators viewing their hosts as feckless. A few rare Sahima do become regulators, though this puts them at odds with the traditions and beliefs of their kin.

### MULA CARVAKA, THE DIVINE MACHINE

The Divine Machine hovers at the center of a brass-walled chamber one mile in diameter. Nine hundred feet tall, one hundred wide and forty thick, it is composed of burnished indigo metal laced with the Six Magical Materials. Susurrant Essence flows writhe through the air just above its surface; these occasionally discharge into the chamber wall with blinding, deafening flares. Twenty-five cylindrical pedestals lined with prayer consoles rest on the floor of the chamber. They are connected to the Machine by braided starmetal cables that ripple loosely overhead with the snaky, dreamlike motion of long hair drifting in underwater currents.

At the dawn of Gulaki history, the Rarata clade claimed the honor of tending Mula Carvaka. It is their holiest place; Populat workers are ritually purified before they approach the prayer consoles, and a Rarata preceptor with theotechnical training is always on hand to supervise the sacred work. Entering the chamber for other purposes is forbidden.

The National Tripartite Assembly has humored the Rarata for millennia. But people are agitated over the resource crisis and recent Estasian and Sovan jingoism, and the Assembly deems it unwise to press the latest wave of immigrants into close quarters in Gulak's crowded cities. They have zoned the periphery of the Machine's chamber for residential use by Sovan expatriates. The Rarata are reacting poorly to this indignity.

### FOREIGN RELATIONS

Other nations, from Estasia to Jarish, raid Gulak surprisingly often. Gulak's surfeit of portable riches—from luxury goods to religious relics—makes this very profitable. Meanwhile, the nation's heterogeneous populace doesn't always close ranks against raiders; towns may withhold aid from disliked neighbors—recent immigrants, rival ethnic enclaves or heterodox communes—until the invaders have already left. And Gulak's immigrant clades really do contain a few spies and saboteurs—by no means as many as its more xenophobic citizens fear, but enough to give marauders aid.

Nonetheless, Gulak gets along well with most other nations most of the time. Its people have no religious or

### SAHIMA AMAT, THE GULAKI MESSIAH

Six years ago, a child was born in Sata Ka'est with shining eyes and hair like crystal thread. Her father was Kadmek, Divine Minister of the Grand Design, most praised of subgods. As beautiful as her divine parent, the girl is steadily growing into Kadmek's other aspects—serenity, wisdom and prophecy. Many of the Sahima worship Amat as a goddess despite her reminders that worship is due only to the Great Maker and his ministers. Others, both inside and outside her clade, are eyeing her for possible political uses.

political axes to grind with their neighbors, and while a little raiding this way or that is tolerable, full-on international strife hurts the pilgrim trade. Overall, the status quo suits Gulak just fine. Good times for everyone mean better times for Gulak.

Foreign trade supplies much of Gulak's wealth. The nation's exports include a variety of chemicals used in industry, assorted refined and specialty foodstuffs, trained food preparation specialists, a range of weapons such as explosive-tipped crossbow bolts and military-grade gas weapons, and jewelry and artistic pieces for high-ranking Tripartite members. In exchange, they receive supplies of Magical Materials and other valuable substances, along with experts in various fields.

Also key to Gulak's prosperity is the pilgrim trade. Pilgrims come not just to see Thutot, but to visit the nation's vast collection of relics—arguably larger than Jarish's, and much easier for foreigners to access. The other nations are charged fees to see that their pilgrims receive food, shelter and access to Gulak's many religious museums and libraries.

### NURADI INFLUX

Nurad is negotiating to export a sizable percentage—perhaps 10 to 20 percent—of its excess population to Gulak. Gulak's xenophobes don't want more foreigners, while its pragmatists worry that taking on too many people will accelerate their nation's descent into poverty, especially as the imported workers are likely to be the most unhealthy and unproductive. But Nurad's humanitarian crisis is incontrovertible, making the request difficult for compassionate Gulaki plutarchs to refuse.

## HEROES OF THE STATE

In such a heterogeneous nation as Gulak, it's unsurprising that opinions regarding Alchemicals are mixed. For the most part, however, they're treated as angels more than as heroes. Though mortals are forbidden to worship the Exalted, their attitudes are worshipful; they have been known to beseech their Champions for blessings.

Like its mortal population, Gulak draws no small number of its Champions from other nations. Some are newly fledged Alchemicals who find their core ideologies at odds with the nations that gave them birth. Others are older beings who feel that their homelands' evolving mores have passed them by. Gulak is always willing to give such Alchemicals a home, and its people see immigrant Champions as wise rather than fickle.

### *BLISSFUL JADE ARTISAN*

*AGENT OF CHANGE, JADE CASTE OF MOGERA*

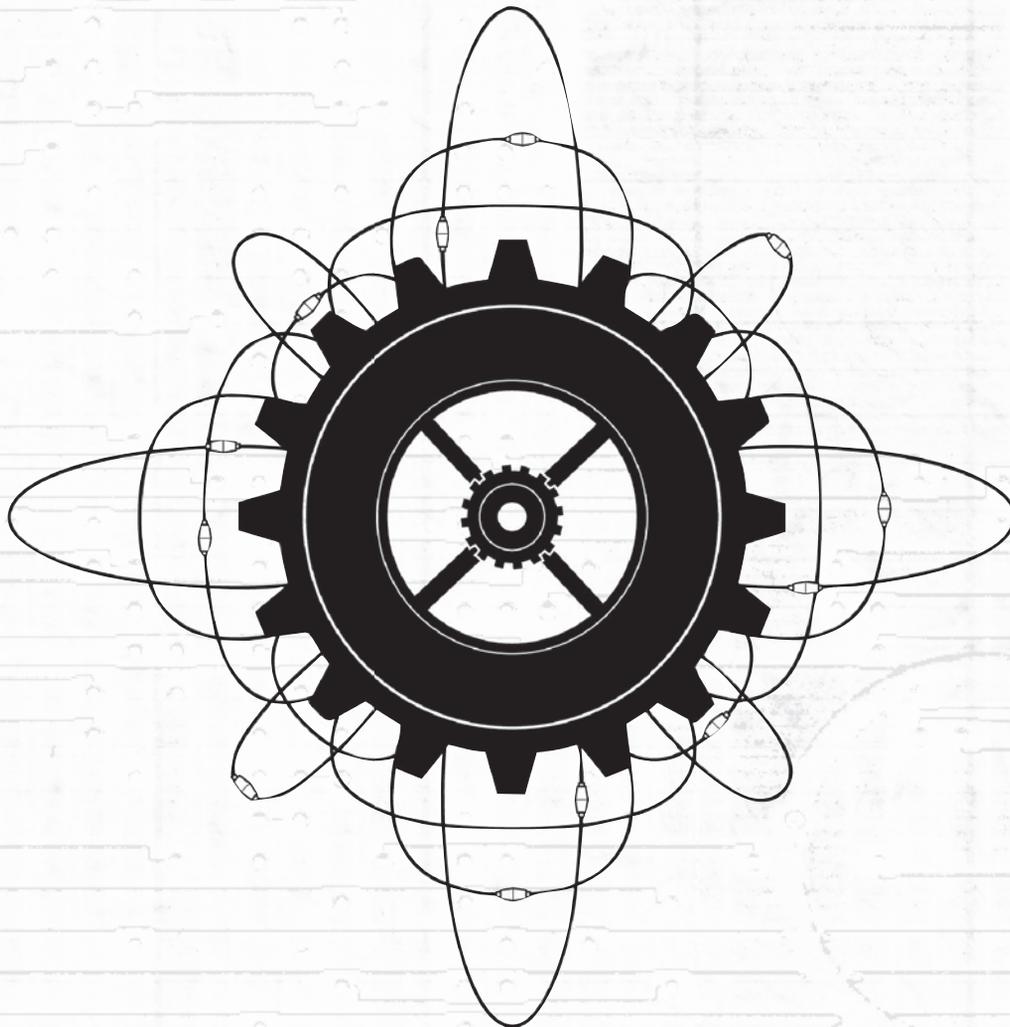
Dissatisfied with the corruption endemic in Gulak's government, this reformist Champion applies

social pressure within Mogera's Tripartite to make advancement more meritocratic. Emboldened by early successes, *Artisan* is laying groundwork to manipulate the National Tripartite Assembly into establishing a more democratic system of government. Should she move forward with her reforms, Moonsilver and Soulsteel Caste Alchemicals will be sent to investigate her activities and to determine whether she needs to be dealt with—or whether she's right.

### *CENSORIOUS PRINCIPLE*

*HONORARY PRECEPTOR,  
MOONSILVER CASTE OF THUTOT*

*Principle's* primary task is to scrutinize the city's philosophical schools and religious sects for heresy. He possesses a deep and subtle intellect and a sardonic wit, neither of which sees much play in his work; after all, if a spy wishes not to be noticed, it's best not to be noteworthy. Tiring of mild-mannered masquerades, he's injecting more life and drama into the roles he assumes.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# LAMPS IN THE DARK

The Octet wallows in its own mythology. Eight Heroes—Eight Nations—blessed by Autochthon, living within the bodies of his Champions, favored above the wretches who huddle in the darkness of the Reaches.

The far-flung cities of Loran and Xexas, outposts of Octet culture at the frontiers of Autochthonia, challenge such assumptions.

When an Alchemical evolves into a new city, she follows signs from Autochthon himself, transmitted by the Divine Ministers, to find the site of her apotheosis. In 4066 DA, two heroes, *Luteous Ancress* of Claslat and *Exegetical Abraxas* of Gulak, followed the omens of the Ministers deeper into the Reaches than any Autochthonian had ventured in living memory, all the way to the opposite ends of the world. There they have formed pockets of civilization at the greatest extremes of the Maker's anatomy—the Poles of Oil and Smoke. For what purpose did the Divine Ministers lead the two Alchemicals and their people so far from home? Each city is certain it has a destiny to fulfill on these strange

frontiers—but not if the dangers of their new home destroy them first.

## THE METROPOLIS OF LORAN

Though rooted in the upper strata of the Pole of Metal, the majority of the metropolis of Loran extends up into the Pole of Oil—a titanic reservoir filling the upper hemisphere of the Great Maker's body, vast as the Great Western Ocean of Creation. Viewed from outside, Loran appears a series of shining gold-silver domes and bubbles connected by tubular scaffolding and flexible tram tunnels. Its people, the Loranei, style themselves the greatest mariners of Autochthonia—but they have begun to doubt their ability to survive and thrive in isolation from the Octet. The murky expanses of the Pole of Oil grow more turbulent and troubled by the year, and while this wild frontier is still abundant in resources to be found and exploited, it is even more abundant in danger, from tainted oil flows to sleek and hungry aquatic gremlins.

Still, the Loranei are a fiercely independent people—especially by Autochthonian standards. Wildcatters, oil miners, and explorers of a strange and endless sea, the Loranei will look first to themselves to produce the heroes they need, before they stoop to beg for aid from foreign powers.

### THE FOUNDATION

The city rests on the roof of the Pole of Metal—a hardened plate studded with access ports through which oil is drawn from and returned to the Pole. Few power veins or nutrient tubes run through this portion of the Maker's body—it is primarily a thick, armored layer of the titan's flesh, powerful enough to separate the crushing weight of an ocean of oil from the rest of his body. As such, very little of Loran extends down into the Pole of Metal—there are rarely more than two access hatches within the city.

### THE NAUTILUS DISTRICT

Loran's central and largest dome has a curving, spiral appearance. This is the Nautilus district, with the Tripartite Assembly Hall at the center of the spiral. Loran's key infrastructural elements are focused in the outer rings of the Nautilus—power generation, food and water purification, the workshops of the Prolific Scholars, as well as the city's single Vats Complex, currently unpowered and shuttered. Spirals and shell motifs dominate the district's architecture, with most buildings at least three stories tall, featuring conical exterior staircases for access. The district is separated by a series curving of moonsilver walls, which give the dome its distinct spiral appearance from outside; in an emergency, nictitating Essence shutters divide the area into 23 separate, insulated cells, preventing the complete loss of the city core in the event of a breach.

### FLUIDIC AGITATION COMBINES

Two great, arching municipal Charms dominate the fourth and eighth cells of the Nautilus District, pressing against the roof of Loran's dome. These unique wonders were once *Ancess's* Fluidic Impeller Drive; in the centuries since the city's founding they have been massively expanded and retrofitted by the Prolific Scholars, and their maintenance and operation requires the constant labor of a force of 800 Populat workers.

After the Respiration Reclamation Systems of the city's second cell, the maintenance of the Fluidic Agitation Combines is considered most important to Loran's continued survival. When in operation, these miracles of industry stimulate the Essence flows of the oil around the city, allowing Loran to uproot herself and move through the Pole of Oil, later resettling in more resource-rich environments. Without the Fluidic Agitation Combines, the city could not steer during such migrations, and would be carried away at the whim of the Pole's currents.

### THE OUTER WARDS

The flexible, tubular moonsilver scaffolding of seven tram lines stretch out from the outer ring of the Nautilus district, leading to the three grounded domes and four floating spheres of the metropolis's outer wards. The grounded cars are propelled by a series of pressurized oil locks, while the floating wards are reached by lift cars moved by air pressure. Most of the city's heavy industries are located in the outer wards—raw material construction, textile manufacture, and the other basic essentials of Autochthonian life originate in these outlying regions.

### THE DRY DOCKS

In the beginning, the city possessed only a single, grounded outer dome, which served as the jumping-off point for all explorations into the Pole of Oil. Loran has expanded in the centuries since, and its oldest satellite arm is now known as the First Ward, or the dry docks.

These days, the First Ward is completely given over to the metropolis's dockyards, where a force of Populat workers and Prolific Scholars design, build, and repair the city's submersible fleet. Aside from the docks, the First Ward is notable for its many prominently displayed bits of salvaged oilcraft dating back to the city's early years. The First Warders are a proud lot, well aware that the city could neither survive nor thrive without the machines they build and service.

### THE ARSENAL

The first of the city's floating wards, known as the Arsenal, is unusual for an Autochthonian city in that it contains very little industry. Instead, it serves as the storage site for the Oil Fleet. Currently composed of fifteen light scout submersibles, eight heavy cargo haulers, and five combat submersibles, the Oil Fleet is the beating heart of Loran, the crews of its oilcraft the most celebrated heroes of the state.

The Arsenal is primarily dominated by docking berths for the Oil Fleet, and features an elaborate series of oil locks that permit the ward to be partially flooded—a necessity to bring the oilcraft in and out of dock. The ward's Populat residents are almost wholly devoted to servicing and performing routine maintenance on the city's oilships; due to the sensitive nature of the Arsenal, it also sees heavier regulator patrols than any other portion of Loran.

### THE SEVENTH WARD

Ward Seven, a floating ward, is the most recent and most advanced addition to the metropolis. A crowning achievement of the Prolific Scholars, the entirety of the ward is a single mighty Municipal Charm known as the Remote Biosupport Complex.

When the city uproots itself and travels, her tram tunnels contract, drawing the outer wards in to be cradled against the Nautilus district for both stability and protection. Ward Seven is the exception; it is capable of sealing itself, decoupling from its tram tube, and being towed by a massive custom-designed submersible known as the *Great Cachalot*.

The *Cachalot* normally docks atop Ward Seven when not in operation, as it is far too large to actually enter any of the metropolis's interior docks.

The inhabitants of Ward Seven live in slightly larger and more private accommodations than the rest of the city; Populat laborers are housed in long, narrow dormitory blocks, with permanent oilcloth walls separating two-room, three-person apartments—luxury far beyond what most Populat will ever see. These accommodations are compensation for the great danger of living in Ward Seven, which spends more time separated from the rest of the city than attached to it. During the city's migrations, Ward Seven acts as a forward sensory bundle. It performs deep scans on the bed of the Pole, looking for the next nutrient-power nexus; when Loran is stationary, the *Great Cachalot* tows the ward deep into the Pole, where it serves as a remote dock and emergency support station for the Oil Fleet.

## A MURKY FRONTIER

Loran enjoys a greater abundance of natural resources than any other settlement in Autochthonia—but must brave a dangerous and unforgiving environment to reach them.

## CHASING THE CURRENTS

The majority of the Pole is filled with semi-opaque, amber oil, which all of the city's wards are capable of straining and filtering through special sections of its moonsilver shell. But the Pole also contains vast currents of rare and special oil, much-desired by the Loranei; jet-black stream-

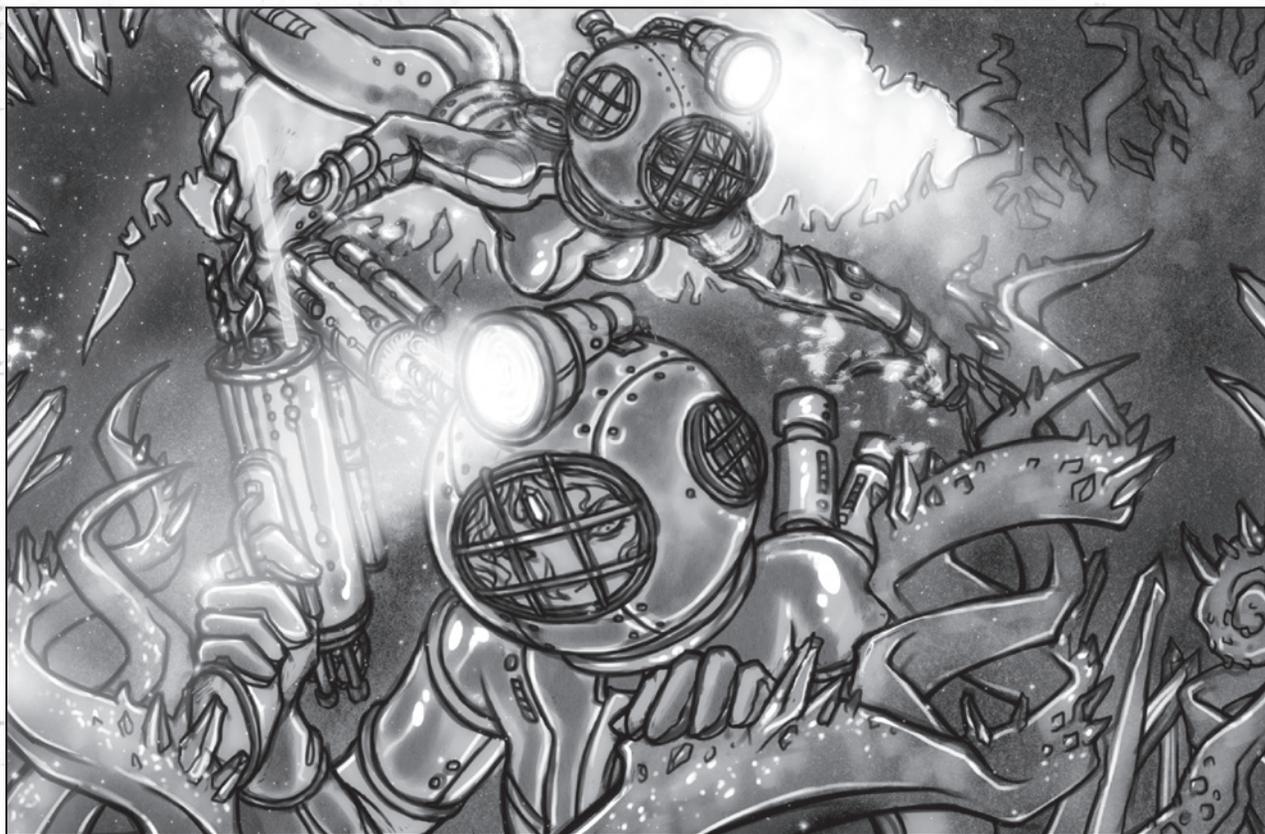
ers of flamedrip, which burns as liquid fire, power the city's foundries, while other oil streams have alchemical properties used in industries as diverse as Charm construction, textile dye, paint production, food preparation, leather manufacture, dome repair, and submersible maintenance.

Sometimes the Loranei locate stable currents of rare and valuable oils near the city, ferried between ducts-ports within the Pole; more often, they are discovered floating through the Pole as great amorphous blobs, waiting to be discovered by a refinery-whale or other aquatic custodian for processing. Wildcatting such free-floating oil finds is a dangerous business; the Pole's exmachina are not encoded to acknowledge the presence of humans, and if a refinery-whale discovers an oil strike while the Loranei are working it, it inevitably uses its sonic distress Charms to summon armored destroyers to drive the intruders away.

More disturbingly yet, the Loranei have begun to discover great Void-tainted oil clouds in the last few decades—amorphous Blight Zones drifting through the Pole. Product drawn from such corrupted currents fouls the city's systems and corrodes the submersibles that haul it back; worse yet, custodians that attempt to process the oil are at risk of being infected, and some of the larger drifting blights have become the home of sonar-equipped gremlins perfectly adapted to hunting in the lightless murk.

## A CITY CANNOT LIVE ON OIL ALONE

While Loran has no difficulty securing more than enough oil for its needs, other materials are harder to come



by. Standard Reaches mining is difficult due to the thickness of the plate the city rests upon; few man-sized access tunnels permit access to the Pole of Metal, and fewer still will permit the passage of cargo trams loaded with material for the city. Thus, the Loranei are forced to prospect for raw materials inside the Pole.

While some salvage can always be obtained from the shells of destroyed custodians littering the bed of the oil-sea, the city is best served by locating nanocoral beds—massive artificial reefs formed of extrusions of elemental crystal into the Pole, cemented together by elementals known as reef masons. The dense compactions of elemental Essence found at these sites agitates the bedrock-plate the reef rests upon, and older reefs often include organic inclusions of metal—the brass and steel of Autochthon's flesh grows up into the reef, forming great twisting crystal-studded plinths and pillars which regulate and direct the flow of oil currents through the Pole.

Nanocoral beds are vital to Loran because their Essence concentration also leads to the formation of the magical materials—jade and adamant are abundant in dense thickets of crystal extrusions, while soulsteel plating can be found on the upper reaches of current-control spires, and moonsilver fronds wave at the base of the beds. Starmetal must be carefully mined from the reef's interior, without drawing a defensive response from the brass krakens that frequently prune the beds with their long, flexible sonic cutters.

Orichalcum is the only magical material that does not naturally occur in nanocoral reefs; the city must endure the difficulties of the Pole of Metal to obtain any of that vital substance at all.

## THE PATROPOLIS OF XEXAS

Xexas hangs down from the ceiling of the Pole of Smoke, a vertical city descending like a soulsteel stiletto into the heart of the perpetual toxic storms that roil through the lowest point of the Great Maker's anatomy. Viewed on approach, the city seems to be a vast black inverted citadel, a series of thin spires dangling precariously above a yawning empty void of churning smoke and corrosive fog, its dangling peaks and fins shrouded in miasma and crackling with electric discharges.

The city's people are a practical, aggressive, and sometimes fatalistic sort. The Pole of Smoke promises the city nothing but hardship, and never fails to deliver. Still, great rewards beckon for those willing and able to brave the dangers of Xexan life—like its sister city, Loran, the inhabitants of Xexas enjoy a bounty of raw materials unlike anything available to the Eight Nations... if only they dare go forth and claim them.

## THE VERTICAL CITY

The heart of the city is the primary spire known as the Citadel District—forty tightly-stacked levels of brass-and-iron decks, smoky and dim. Seen from outside, the

## THE GREAT LURE

Neighborless Loran is starved for trade; they have made a few sporadic mass-exchanges with passing Octet nations over the last few centuries, but these have been hectic, problematic affairs, thanks in large part to the difficulty inherent in simply locating the drifting metropolis.

The Prolific Scholars believe they have devised a solution—a massive, bell-like municipal Charm which they propose to attach to the upper dome of the city. The Radiant Autosynchronous Beacon, as they have named the proposed structure, would register on all manner of known Autochthonian tracking technology, revealing itself even to autolabels that have never been attuned to it. This, the Scholars believe, will make stable trade with the Octet an ongoing possibility.

Unfortunately, the nature of the Beacon would also draw hostile exmachina to Loran in great numbers—the delicate sensors of gremlin and destroyer alike would register the Beacon as easily as the devices of the Eight Nations. As a result, construction has not yet begun on the device, nor is it likely to so long as Loran has no Alchemical Exalted to protect it.

Citadel District looks like a massive cathedral spire hung upside-down from the soulsteel-reinforced ceiling of the Pole. From within, it is a gloomy maze of ladders, spiral staircases, and pressurized lift-tubes carrying the Popul up and down between the city's various dormitories and factories.

Xexas is a boom town, and this has brought it problems. The city's population is expanding at a faster rate than the physical dimensions of the Citadel District—a situation which would normally result in pilgrims founding a new town on the patropolis's outskirts. Because this is impossible in Xexas, space is at a premium. Thus, the most productive or lucky workers, as well as those working in top-priority industries such as zeppelin construction or storm-suit fabrication, sleep in long, narrow barracks featuring triple-stacked bunks lacking sufficient head-space to sit up while resting; lower-class workers are forced to hot-bunk in hammocks strung between whichever portions of the spire's superstructure are sufficiently solid and immobile to support them. Xexans have learned to ignore and navigate around off-shift workers sleeping between tram support struts, in the air above narrow alleys, or in the corners of factories. Light sleepers do not fare well.

The Tripartite is little better off—only the city's Tripartite Assembly members enjoy the privilege of living alone;

even the most senior members of the Xexan elite share quarter-floors of tenements with one or two peers, while junior Sodalts and plutarchs may be crammed five or six into a four-room apartment.

The Citadel District features a number of open wells used to transport large cargo up and down through the city's layers, but is otherwise narrow and claustrophobic, as much interior space as possible covered in decking. The only buildings with high ceilings are factories containing large machinery. Because the city is so densely structured, it is also dark, even by Autochthonian standards—there is little open space for light to shine through, and so the patropolis must be strung with a prodigious number of lamps and light beacons; for this reason, the Luminors enjoy great power in Xexas.

The Citadel District contains all of Xexas's heavy industry—textiles, weapon manufacture, equipment construction. Elaborate vent systems carry the smoke of the city's forges and foundries away and expel it into the Pole beyond; teams of Scholars and regulators patrol key areas of this venting system constantly. Should it fail, the city must bring its industry to a halt or choke to death.

## THE STORM SPIRES

Branching off at a distance from the Citadel District are four narrow, downturned spines. These are the Storm Spires, the most dangerous places in Xexas.

The lower reaches of the Spires are uninhabited and uninhabitable, save for a few heavily insulated maintenance ducts. Essence agitators and storm turbines howl within the spines, attracting Essence from the savage upper reaches of the Pole. Lightning constantly crackles between the tines of the Storm Spires, occasionally leaping to the lowermost point of the Citadel in massive kilomote surges. The Storm Spires are the city's respiration system, generating power from wind and lightning and chemicals absorbed from the Pole's omnipresent fog. Thanks to the Storm Spires, Xexas's Essence reservoir has not dropped below one-third capacity in over 200 years.

The upper regions of the Spires feature an intricate network of jutting fans of chemical-resistant artificial leather arranged around semicircular docking platforms. These are the docks where the city's scavenger fleet anchors its zeppelins, and the storm-shroud hoods may be extended to completely enclose zeppelins to permit time-consuming maintenance or repair work.

The Spires have no permanent inhabitants—their small interior dormitories are intended for the use of maintenance crews performing marathon repair sessions when multiple craft dock with damage at the same time (not an uncommon occurrence). In general, Xexans consider the Storm Spires to be incredibly dangerous places, exposed as they are to the vicious winds and corrosive fog of the Pole. Even passing from the Citadel to one of the Spires is a harrowing experience—transit between districts is only possible either

via zeppelin, or across enclosed catwalks reaching between the Spires or between a Spire and the Citadel. While workers are protected from the Pole's influence inside these transit tubes, small, reinforced portholes provide a clear view of the swarming, lightning-lit darkness outside, and the storm winds cause the tubes to tremble and sway—an intentional design feature to prevent powerful storms from ripping the tubes loose, but disconcerting nonetheless.

## A SCAVENGER'S LIFE

Directly beneath Xexas, separated by miles of storm-tossed, choking air, is the surface of the Pole of Smoke—the scrap pile where destroyed and defective elements of the Great Maker's body are cast away, to eventually be rendered down into a pure Essence slurry by the potent acid rains of the Pole. While it is rare to find anything in the mountains of scrap and refuse that still functions, almost everything is *useful* to the people of Xexas—broken machinery can be stripped for usable parts, or melted down and cast into new forms entirely. Great shattered cogs faced in orichalcum and jade protrude from plains of twisted copper tubing and the hulks of dead custodians. Sheets of rippling artificial leather twist in the storm winds, partially burned or torn—the Xexans melt this back down into its original oil base and reconstruct it upon their industrial presses. Starmetal and soulsteel glint on the induction spines of prowling gremlins. Oil waits in the guts of slain cargo whales, their remains passed down all the way from the distant Pole of Oil to be discarded upon mountains of refuse.

In this landscape of ruin and wreckage, the Xexans see opportunity... and danger.

## THE SCAVENGER FLEET

Studding each of the Storm Spires, massive brass docking clamps and retractable acid shields protect the greatest of Xexan national treasures—the zeppelins of the scavenger fleet. Made of feathersteel and acid-resistant oil-canvas, these vessels act as the city's lifeline, connecting it to the toxic scrap-heap hell of the Pole far below.

The scavenger fleet is an organization crossing caste boundaries. Plutarchs hand down salvage-priority quotas, Harvesters transform ruined scrap into useful raw materials for the city's industry, and Scholars design the zeppelins—but these are merely the bureaucratic and infrastructural apparatus of the fleet. Its true heroes are the men and women who crew the vessels into the perpetual toxic haze of the Pole, and descend to fill their ships' holds from the scrap mountains and blasted plains far below.

A zeppelin's active crew normally consists of fifteen to thirty Populat crewmen and salvagers, up to a dozen regulator marines, a Surgeon, and a pair of Scholars tasked with performing emergency repairs on the zeppelin should it come under distress during an operation. These are the ship's salvage crew, and they alone are given leave to wear the broken-gear pin. Salvage crewmen are the heroes of Xe-

xas, braving the dangers of storm, gremlin, and ashbreather mutant to supply the city with the raw materials which fuel its industry and life. Even members of the Tripartite will stand aside for a lowly Populat salvager when he passes in the tight, dark corridors of the hanging city.

Aside from these accolades, the only other compensation the city can afford to offer its heroes is the memorial wall. This massive soulsteel plate rings the inner hull of the city on its 39<sup>th</sup> deck, just above the Tripartite Assembly Hall, and is inscribed with the name and caste of every scavenger to have died in the line of duty. It is expected that the plate will have to be extended up into the city's 38<sup>th</sup> deck within the next five years—a salvager's life is fast, exciting, and usually short; if gremlins, acid rain, polar mutants, unstable mountains of scrap, and violent storms do not kill a salvager, the strain of regular exposure to the Pole eventually finishes the job.

Salvagers wear alchemically-treated flight leathers, breath filters, and goggles at all times when working, but some degree of exposure to the toxic atmosphere of the Pole is inevitable. Jagged metal tears protective clothing; workers pull off their gloves for delicate work during salvage operations; acid rain collects in collars, drips into boots, or simply clings to a worker's gear while he doffs it after a mission. Salvagers must even sometimes pull down their breath masks to be heard at the height of a storm. In the end, the salvage crews are prone to a number of medical conditions—early-onset arthritis, numbness of extremities, and especially a wide variety of cancers. The Meticulous Surgeons continue to research better means of combating the effects of exposure to the Pole.

## THE QUARANTINE LAYER

Xexans avoid foraging in the Reaches above their home as much as possible. The Pole of Smoke is the intentional repository for all things broken and tainted within the body of the Great Maker, and as such, the presence of gremlins in the Pole, while not *desired*, is to be expected. As a result, the level of the Pole of Metal directly above Xexas is known to the Divine Ministers as the Quarantine Layer—a twisting maze of reinforced bulkheads with access points to the upper layers few and far between, patrolled by ferocious destroyers and other militant devas, none of which are encoded to recognize or permit the presence of humans.

## A CALL FOR HEROES

Xexas and Loran lack only one feature common to all Octet member-states—Champions. Both cities have functioning Vats Complexes, but it has taken them centuries to stabilize and fortify themselves against the dangers of their extreme environments, and then to build sufficient surplus stocks of the magical materials.

## DESTROYER BAITING

Despite vociferous protests from the Xexan Theomachy, the scavenger fleet has devised one somewhat reliable method for navigating the Quarantine Layer—destroyer baiting.

Reinforced and thaumaturgically warded soulsteel cages hang beneath the Storm Spires, containing gremlins captured from the surface of the Pole at great risk and usually great cost in human life. When the Xexans absolutely must access the upper Reaches, they haul the gremlin cages up and leave them in the Quarantine Layer, locks set to open on a time delay. This provides a short window during which a team can attempt to breach the Quarantine Layer's security—so long as they move away from where they left the gremlins, they're guaranteed to avoid the densest concentration of destroyers, as the militant custodians converge on the point of infection. None of the gremlins used as bait have yet managed to evade the destroyers and escape into the upper Reaches or Xexas, as far as anyone knows.

With signs of distress from the Maker's body growing by the day, both cities believe the time has come for heroes, and each prepares to Exalt a full assembly of Alchemicals.

Primarily, Loran seeks defenders; its oil fleet is a poor match for the more powerful gremlins hunting in the lightless depths of the Pole of Oil. Moreover, they hope that the Exalted might be able to reach accords with the strange, hostile exmachina of the polar reaches, which still regard the drifting metropolis as an alien threat.

Xexas holds no hope of compromise with its environment; the spirits of the scrap plains below are mad and vicious, and the destroyers of the Quarantine Layer beyond parley. The hanging city instead seeks Champions to extend its influence beyond the confines of the Pole of Smoke. The Xexans believe that only the Exalted can forge a permanent bridgehead through the Quarantine Layer, reconnecting their city with the rest of the Octet. Once contact is re-established, the scavenger fleet could reap a much greater bounty from the Pole below with Exalted aid, catapulting Xexas to the heights of power and prominence among the Eight Nations.

Or, perhaps, making it a target—the Xexans have little idea how dire the situation has grown above, or how easily they could become, not saviors, but the spoils of desperate conquest.



FLY FASTER! YOUR  
CLOCKWORK ARACHNIDS  
WON'T SLOW THAT BRUTE  
FOR LONG.

Don't worry.  
Nothing can  
stop us now.



YOU MISSED,  
ABOMINATION.



**BOOM!**

INTERESTING  
THEORY.

Damn! I'm TOO LATE.

## CHAPTER SIX

# THE REACHES

The Realm of Brass and Shadow is the world-body of a Primordial, a great congeries of machines too vast and complex for any denizens to fully catalogue or explore. Human life is welcome insofar as it sustains the Great Maker in his exile through prayer and industrial labor. For their service, the inhabitants of Autochthonia receive the blessings of fresh air and the privilege of tapping veins rich in nutrients and clean water. Yet this fragile symbiosis comprises the tiniest fraction of the titan's anatomy, an incidental inclusion permitted to thrive within the interstices of the Great Maker's organ-continent.

The world as a whole dwarfs the comprehension of its denizens by unknown orders of magnitude. Out beyond the cities and adjoining settlements marking the borders of civilization, the Realm of Brass and Shadow sprawls in twisting labyrinths of living metal. These are the Reaches, the great unknown that beckons to explorers and inventors. Within these chambers spans the entirety of wonder that comprises great Autochthon.

## POLE OF METAL

When the natives of Autochthonia imagine their world, most can only conceive of the largest and most inhabitable of its polar regions. The alternatives are simply too far away and strange to consider, even if the component elements that comprise them exist in less concentrated form throughout the toroidal expanse of the titan's metallic innards. Thus, the Pole of Metal serves as the default identity of the Realm of Brass and Shadow. Its Reaches are those Reaches known to humanity.

The vast diffusion of alloys that comprise the Pole of Metal provides a strata of stability analogous to earth in the Gaian Elemental schema. Just as soil provides a verdant home in which wood may root above the raging conflagrations of volcanic depths, so too does the infinite machinery provide settings for countless crystal matrices and conductive circuit paths for blazing arcs of lightning. The Pole of Metal is unique among elemental poles for lacking

any central radiating point that expresses the purity of its aspect, providing definition through ubiquity.

The appearance of the Reaches combines qualities of caves and factories, with tunnels ranging from needle-slender pipes to corridors so wide and tall they disappear from view with an illusion of empty sky. These tunnels connect chambers, and such spaces may be empty or home to any scale of machinery. Motifs of steam-powered clockwork and sizzling circuits predominate, but some places are strangely barren with glass-slick floors or miles of grating suspended over rivers of molten slag. All possible permutations of the elements that compose the Great Maker see some manifestation in the Reaches.

## RISKS

The Reaches are grossly unsafe for human travelers. Autochthon never intended for his human colonists to wander freely throughout his innards and deliberately chose to leave vast tracts of his inner self inhospitable. He did not go out of his way to fortify himself against intruders—at least in most places—reasoning that the fragility of human bodies would pen them in those areas where they could not harm him. As for the Alchemical Exalted, he assumed the requisite heroism of their souls predisposed them to caution and responsibility. Should that fail, the Adamant Caste could rectify matters.

He underestimated the danger of Exalted curiosity. Moreover, his own imagination never conceived that Champions might fall prey to his endemic sickness. Such mistakes have contributed immensely to his declining health.

## NAVIGATION

The body of Autochthon exists in constant flux, divided into drifting organ-continents that grind upon one another in perpetual cataclysms of biotectonic force. Each nation resides upon one of these elastic plates, keeping all its cities in roughly the same proximity and configuration. Early settlements wisely congregated in areas of relative geological stability, as leaders correctly determined that this would promote social stability. Only once has a continent broken asunder in recorded history, costing the nation of Yugash a small strip of adjoining border-towns that vanished into the Far Reaches. The ceaseless motion of the continents ensures that the Octet can only estimate their proximity to one another and then only in useless linear distances uncorrelated to the span of mazes dividing them. Maps are but snapshots in time, artistic monuments of sacred alignments and the cleverness of explorers. Even the most genius among the Alchemicals remain stymied by the profundity of variables needed for accurate world modeling.

So it is that the people of Autochthonia accept the unknowability of their god and focus chiefly on reliable retracing of their steps. Finding distant places can approach the impossible, but with the right technology, scouts can at least hope to find their way home.

Heretics can blast tunnels with artifact weapons and powerful Exalted Charms to create shortcuts, but this sends a clarion to the Great Maker's immune system. At best, such distress calls bring the fury of exmachina destroyers. At worst, the Adamant Caste mobilizes for holy war. Weaving protocols can sometimes rearrange geography more gently; this is tolerated so long as it disrupts nothing critical. Rare teleportation magic usually works, although some zones have wards against this kind of travel.

Dematerializing is less invasive, but much of the Great Maker's body straddles all states of material reality and bars spirits as readily as flesh. Where this is not so, it is by design, threading his anatomy with "solid" tunnels that provide pathways for his devas. These hidden paths are usually guarded against intruders lacking proper authorization.

Ultimately, the dynamic architecture of the Realm of Brass and Shadow precludes the sorts of planned odysseys commonplace in Creation. Autochthonian travelers must be bold and quick-witted, certain only that the great unknown lies down every hall. Going forward often requires backtracking in avoidance of hazards or in search of a passable tunnel. Locations a mere mile apart may require a hundred mile journey.

## YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

The layout of Autochthonia boggles the mind. The place is a three dimensional dungeon maze filled with trap-like hazards and myriad denizens inimical to human and Exalted life. If this wasn't enough, the whole thing is a puzzle-box that routinely obviates known paths, and walls that aren't outright indestructible require siege-scale artillery to breach.

What this means for Storytellers is that distances are effectively arbitrary, rather than using the navigational guidelines suggested on pages 266-267 of **Exalted**. The artificial landscape makes everything as near or far as plot demands. If it serves the story to have travelers luck out and find a relatively unimpeded corridor between their origin and destination, so be it. In such cases, travel is little worse than "As the Crow Flies" (*Absolute Calculated Distance* in Autochthonic parlance). If explorers must make their way through a perilous gauntlet of industrial nightmare for a month to cross a seemingly simple expanse, this is no less plausible. Sometimes travel becomes nigh-impossible, such as when blast shields suddenly descend and cut one section off from another. Within these variations lie infinite stories of daring, adventure and horror.

## TRAMS

Most Autochthonians take great pains to avoid journeys through the Reaches whenever possible. Fortunately, the network of intercity pneumatic trams extends the basic transportation network found in most urban areas, allowing passengers and cargo to flow between population centers.

Intracity trams function via pneumatic pressure, sucking forward and pushing from behind. Those oriented vertically serve as elevators, while horizontal positioning allows passengers to move between buildings or complexes. Some trams even have spherical weighted cars that can freely rotate along multiple gimbaled mounts, allowing them to move at any angle without tipping passengers over.

In addition to providing efficient movement across the large distances spanned by older metropoli and patropoli, intracity trams serve as security bottlenecks, restricting access to a limited number of fixed entrances requiring keys, biometric analysis via Municipal Charms or physical screenings as prerequisites of entry. Intracity trams may reach speeds as high as 50 miles per hour, though most never travel along straight paths long enough to reach such speeds.

Intercity cargo trams scale up the design of intracity models. The vast majority possess small pilot cabins that maintain life support in the airless arterial highways of the Reaches, but many cargo bays deliberately lack such amenities as a basic security feature to deter mortal stowaways. Such deterrence is only somewhat effective, as stolen breath masks aren't that hard to come by. There's also a matter of efficiency, as life support systems add unnecessary weight for trams that exclusively carry inanimate cargo.

By contrast, passenger trams have pressurized cabins and sparse, often uncomfortably cramped seating. Security precautions screen all passengers to minimize unauthorized transit, but skilled saboteurs and spies can often penetrate basic checkpoints. When higher class passengers must travel, they do so with greater comfort and greater security.

Both cargo and passenger trams utilize combination drive systems, relying on basic pneumatic engines near and within cities. Once they reach the airless highway arteries, paramagnetic impulse drives engage and rapidly accelerate the vehicles up to 200 miles per hour (or even faster when augmented by Alchemical Charms). The multi-lane transit arteries also accommodate frequent exmachina travelers, many dematerialized to pass through trams and avoid collisions.

Although most cities within a nation maintain reliable tram lines to one another, those on opposite ends must sometimes make intermediary stops at closer cities between them. This leapfrog approach is almost always needed for international travel.

As biotectonic drift rearranges the geography of Autochthonia, tram lines stretched too far abruptly retract and close. Fortunately, history only holds three recorded instances of tram retraction coinciding with actual tran-

sit. In two of those incidents, the pilot managed to divert course and arrived days later via indirect routes. All in all, trams are the safest way to travel. Upwards of ten months of transit may be required to cross the most distant cities of the Octet, but this is a far cry from the decades travelers on foot would spend crossing the same expanse.

Tram operation uses the Sail Ability. Pilots unfamiliar with these conveyances suffer a -2 internal penalty until they spend (5 - their Sail rating) weeks practicing with the controls. Along fixed paths, rolls aren't required, as operating the controls is as simple as pushing the right sequence of buttons to initiate departure and let the extremely simplistic animating intelligence follow the track. However, tram AIs are woefully unsuited to handling the dynamic piloting conditions of arterial highways (average difficulty 2-4); all attempts to empower AIs for intercity navigation have proven catastrophically unreliable and/or prohibitively expensive.

## DARKNESS

Light varies in the Reaches, rarely exceeding the brightness of the full moon in Creation except in the presence of naked electrical arcs and smelting furnaces. Most places are lightless or nearly so, forcing travelers who cannot see in the dark to bring their own sources of illumination. Should such light go out, travelers risk falling off a ledge, walking into rapidly whirring cogs or some equally unpleasant fate.

Darkness alone does not account for poor visibility conditions in some parts of the Reaches. Heavy smoke belches from foundries in choking clouds, while sizzling chemical cisterns emit noxious plumes that sometimes precipitate before the ventilation fans can draw them away for processing. Where pollutants contaminate the sacred chemistry of the Great Maker, soot-black opaque fog bubbles forth and hisses as it clogs eyes and engines alike.

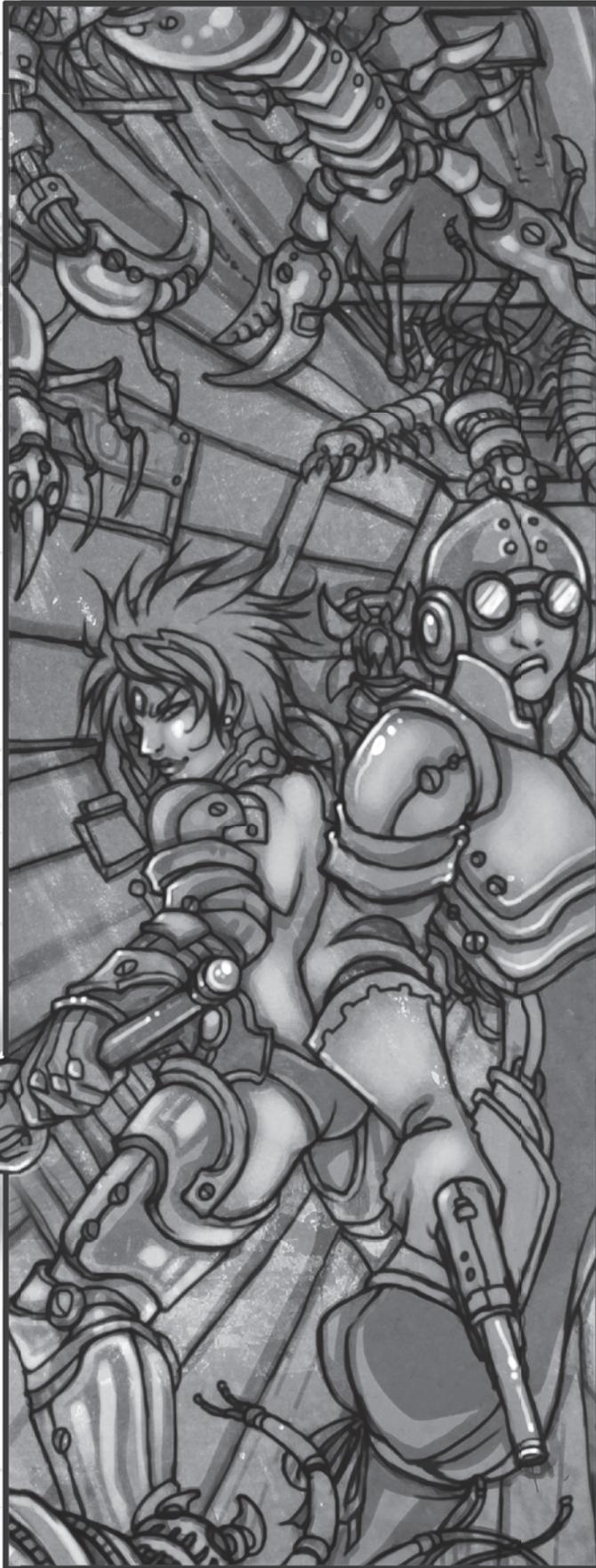
## UNYIELDING SURFACES

The hard, irregular and often sharp nature of metal terrain seldom poses an immediate danger with gentle contact, though metal floors and grates offer those who travel barefoot ample opportunities for lacerations and broken toes (1B damage per botched Athletics roll). Victims hurled into the walls by powerful Knockback effects or who suffer injurious falls usually face lethal damage rather than bashing. The number of opportunities for long falls means clumsy or unaware children seldom reach maturity.

## HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

The following is not an exhaustive list of the physical dangers posed to Reaches travelers, but covers the most common ways the unwary and unfortunate perish.

Some hazards list an Evasion rating. Characters capable of taking dodge actions automatically avoid the hazard while their Dodge DV matches or exceeds the listed Evasion rating. Taking actions that penalize Dodge DV below the safe value results in immediate and recurring exposure to the



hazard at its usual interval until the defense returns to a safe value. Evasion ratings marked with a "P" tag indicate that a Parry DV capable of deflecting the hazard's damage type also offers protection.

*Example:* Excessively Righteous Blossom has Dodge DV7 and is walking through an area wracked with Evasion 6 Lightning Arcs. While able to dodge, he nimbly avoids each sparking bolt as though the hazard were not present. When a gremlin jumps at him, he foolishly swings three times in a flurry of blows. With the second attack, he drops to DV 5, and so he must reflexively resolve exposure to the hazard. At that point, the hazard is treated as any other and resolves simultaneously with that second blow. Without a perfect dodge or parry, he must deal with the Trauma rating as best he can. With an interval of one action, the lightning doesn't strike again until his next action, meaning his DV refreshes first and he's safe again unless his actions render him vulnerable.

**Extreme Pressure:** Some areas rapidly fluctuate in atmospheric pressure, abruptly crushing or bursting those caught in the shift. Other areas wall off different pressure zones with invisible electrostatic barriers so that anyone crossing them experiences the differential. However it happens, the effect is a one-time or recurring hazard as appropriate with (Damage 3B/action; Trauma 3).

**Lightning Arcs:** Sizzling bolts of energy spark from various machines, stunning or frying anything caught in their path (Damage 5B/action; Trauma 4L; Evasion 6).

**Steam Jets:** Geysers of steam vent the pneumatic pressure of titanic engines, either in singular bursts or constant jets. Smaller plumes can be avoided. (Damage 2L/action; Trauma 3L; Evasion 4/none).

**Crushing/Slicing Machinery:** Whirling blades and grinding gears are among the many mechanical elements that can tear a man asunder (Damage 5L/action; Trauma 4; Evasion 5P).

**Caustic Chemicals:** Sprays of pressurized acid sometimes leak from defective reservoirs, while other cisterns hold entire lakes of corrosive chemicals. spurts can be avoided; immersion not so much (Damage 5L/action; Trauma 5; Evasion 3/none).

**Hypercold:** Some regions can freeze a man solid in seconds and shatter his corpse like blown glass. This may be due to cryogen exposure or the ambient temperature necessary for accelerated neuroconductivity (Damage 1L/action; Trauma 5L).

**Triggered Hazards:** Some hazards are not continuous, but rather become dangerous only as a reaction to particular stimuli. Sometimes, this is just a matter of defined area, such as lightning arcs that only lash out when something (or someone) conductive draws near to an exposed circuit. In other cases, the triggers are more complex. For instance, Null-Mote

Zones blaze as a bonfire for an hour whenever ignited by any spent motes or artifact powers activated within their unstable geomancy. Some rare variants of these areas only burn those who have spent motes in the past hour, making them highly-coveted by tunnel folk looking for an edge against gremlins and Champions alike.

**Disease:** Sickness is far less of an issue in Autochthonia than Creation, one of the few hazards natives needn't fear quite so much. Although the profusion of hazardous chemicals isn't exactly clean, it is fairly sterile. Moreover, the absence of conventional gods includes disease spirits and thereby precludes most plague vectors. Altogether, this provides +2 bonus dice to resist all Sickness effects within the Reaches (save for Blight Zones). Settlements do not enjoy this bonus, since the profusion of inhabitants carries unsanitary risks mitigated only with Municipal public health Charms.

## TOXINS

Many Autochthonian chemicals are toxic to human physiology. Mild poisons are simply irritating, resulting in itching, intoxication, immediate bowel movements or a rash. Anyone who gets sprayed by a broken conduit and walks away with such symptoms can count himself fortunate. Many more toxins carry a death sentence absent exceptional and immediate magical aid. Some victims waste away as their innards metabolize heavy metals or transmogrify into the same, while others perish immediately as they cough out melted lungs or vomit the necrotized remnants of their viscera.

The Chemical Fog Generator (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, p. 129) provides rules for ongoing toxic hazards common to Autochthonia, including irritating vapors (i.e. basic chemical fog), tear gas and nerve gas. As errata to that Charm, when one dose runs its course, the toxic fog doesn't impose another dose until the poison's interval has passed. Further, the damage for basic smoke and tear gas is 2B/hour and 2B/action, respectively. This means that someone breathing smoke suffers one interval of damage immediately and another after an hour, resolving that first dose. Continued exposure doesn't inflict the second dose until an hour passes.

Not all Autochthonian vapors actually impede visibility like smoke, though most have a distinctive visual tinge and scent that gives warning to the wary. Especially deadly areas present subtle toxicity akin to those produced by a Clandestine Toxin System. Immersion in toxic liquids follows the same rules, only affecting those who swallow sputtering mouthfuls as they drown. Other common toxin variants are listed below as submodules for the Chemical Fog Generator.

**Contact Toxin Formulation** (Strength 3, Essence 4, 3xp): By paying an extra two mote surcharge during activation, the toxic properties of the gas are absorbed through contact exposure as though victims were breathing it. Only airtight

armor-like encounter suits allows victims to effectively "hold their breath" as a defense.

**Mortal Suppression Mist** (Contact Toxin Formulation, 1xp): A contact gas deployed by the Charm may be specially formulated with each activation so that it only affects mortals.

**Spirit Toxin Formulae** (Contact Toxin Formulation, 3xp): Contact toxin gasses produced by the Charm affect dematerialized spirits, making them effective against gremlins and aggressive exmachina.

**Psychogenic Gas** (Perception 3): This rainbow-hued vapor is physically harmless (no actual damage), but highly debilitating due to a combination of random sensory attenuation and hallucinations. Some even find the experience pleasant, if mentally fatiguing: (2\*/day, 3, —/—, -5).

**Sense-Destroying Gas** (Tear Gas, Essence 3, 3xp): This gas functions like tear gas, but anyone reduced to Incapacitated suffers a Crippling injury that destroys one type of sensory organ, inducing blindness, deafness, numbness (reduce wound penalties by -1, but making it impossible to perceive tactile stimuli for overall -1 internal penalty to all non-reflexive physical actions), or total loss of smell/taste. Repurchase of this submodule allows the gas to destroy each of the selected senses. Such injuries are permanent for mortals, but Exalted and other magical beings heal lost sensory function after one day.

**Technomorphic Carcinogen Gas** (Essence 4): This tarry Voidtech fume is speckled with blood red sparks and burns horribly when breathed. It functions like Sense-Destroying Gas above, but instead of wiping out senses as victims reach Incapacitated, the choking vapor induces rapid Voidtech cancer as a Shaping effect. This confers one permanent mutation chosen when the submodule is acquired, all of which display the visual aesthetics of Voidtech and must be entirely physical in nature (i.e. no Essence Channeler, Gremlin Syndrome, etc.). Victims who already possess the mutation to its maximum Stackable limits or who cannot acquire that trait are immune to the particular formulation. Variant gasses past the first cost only 1xp, broadening the range of mutations Void Lords may choose to inflict.

**Transmutational Catalyst Gas** (Nerve Gas, 1xp): This silver-gray toxin has the same statistics as nerve gas, but only affects beings composed of actual flesh (Alchemicals are immune). Anti-Shaping magic also stops the toxin, as it kills by converting the victim's body into a statue composed of various non-precious alloys (worth Resources 3 for a human-sized cadaver). Another submodule variant catalyzes the tissue into a ruddy gas, ultimately vaporizing the resultant corpses without a trace.

## VACUUM/UNBREATHABLE GAS

Not all areas of the Reaches have breathable air. Sometimes this is due to outright vacuum (which may be coupled with catastrophic depressurization as explained above). In other areas, the gas that fills the space is poisonous (see toxins

above) or inert and unbreathable. Regardless, suffocation begins as soon as characters enter such a region, making long stretches of these areas impassable to mortals without breath mask artifacts, encounter suits or similar protection.

### SUBMERGED REGIONS

Some parts of the Reaches are filled with liquids. This presents the same risks of suffocation as vacuum, often coupled with the added risks of poisoning and other hazards depending on the composition of the fluid. For instance, anyone dunked in a powerful solvent faces immersion in an acid bath, repeated doses of toxins and drowning all at once. As if this wasn't bad enough, many of the liquids of Autochthonia are fully opaque.

### SURVIVING AUTOCHTHONIA

The Survival ability is no less useful in the Realm of Brass and Shadow just because the terrain is artificial. All Survival rolls suffer a -3 internal penalty for non-natives until they have spent a month acclimating to the conditions and retraining their skills with extensive practice. The reverse is also true for Autochthonian explorers in Creation, as well as explorers in any truly foreign realms of existence, such as Exalted wandering among the alien horrors of the Demon City.

*Page numbers listed beside the task refer to Exalted.*

**Predicting Weather (134):** In general, weather patterns are so constant within Autochthonia that this task is difficulty 1. Predictions are still important, however, as mechanical weather is no less dangerous than natural weather. Unmonitored boilers might vent dangerous steam clouds at regular intervals, while chemical condensing chambers precipitate poisonous droplets from mile-high ceilings and other areas change temperatures radically as different mechanisms engage and release. Matters are far more chaotic in the Pole of Smoke, where maelstroms of acid rain can erupt out of nowhere and anticipating them is a matter of life and death (difficulty 3).

**Foraging (139):** This task involves tapping the Great Maker's veins for clean water and nutrient slurry. Failure is automatic without tools (i.e. sharp probes or weapons) and a minimum competency of Survival 2+. Providing for oneself is never automatic; a threshold success must be allocated to the task. The difficulty depends on proximity to civilization: 1 in a city, 2 in a town, 3 in the Reaches, 4 in the Far Reaches and 5 in the partially-functioning areas of Blight Zones (see p. 120). Characters lacking either Survival 5+ or a specialty in Conduit Tapping (a secret jealously guarded by the Conductors) suffer a -2 external penalty. In the other Elemental Poles and Blight Zones lacking functional machinery, no functioning conduits may be found and foraging is impossible. Some exceptions exist, such as the limited storage tanks inside whale-refineries within the Pole of Oil, nourishing settlers who tap them until they run dry. Failure means the character finds nothing useful, but unleashes nothing dangerous. A botch means

### HOW FAR IS FAR?

Autochthonians speak of the Reaches and the Far Reaches as though they were arranged in neat concentric tiers, with each city surrounded by a buffer zone of moderately dangerous Reaches in which the resident machine gods and biomechanoids mostly ignore travelers and anyone moderately wary and well-prepared can hope to travel safely. Although most citizens aren't quite so naïve as to imagine an actual line demarking the transition to the Far Reaches, the two regions occupy very different conceptual space.

The Far Reaches are the true wild frontier, full of weird and strange things—most inordinately deadly. Blight Zones fester here. Even healthy denizens are hostile or skittish, and any extended stay is an invitation for a messy demise at the vise-claws of creatures utterly alien and unforgiving. While the popular depiction of the Far Reaches isn't far off the mark, the idea that it's "out there" somewhere safely far away is a comforting fiction.

In general, the Far Reaches are dozens and more likely hundreds of miles away from any city, down from the thousands separating them in the early years of Autochthonia. Yet some terrain properly deemed the Far Reaches can be found scant miles from urban areas. With the constant flux of biotectonic drift, no one can really be sure without exploring, mapping, and frequently remapping to prevent obsolescence. It is little comfort that most explorers don't have to question whether they are in the Reaches or the Far Reaches; the scope and density of hazards generally makes that abundantly clear.

tapping something bad, resulting in exposure to whatever environmental hazard(s) the Storyteller selects.

**Medical Foraging (129, 152):** The chemicals needed to provide medical treatment do not commonly flow outside of cities. Where they can be found at all, foraging uses the same rules as tapping for food at +2 difficulty.

**Endure Wilderness (139):** The places where cities root and settlers establish towns are generally selected for their amenability to human life, precluding the need for exposure checks. Most parts of the Reaches continue this temperate climate. Only the minority of regions possessing extremes of temperature, thin or bad air, toxins or caustic chemicals require checks at difficulty 3-6 to avoid the consequences of exposure. Unlike Creation, there is no correlation between foraging difficulties and the difficulty to endure the terrain.

**Tracking (140):** Following others and avoiding trackers uses the same overall rules as Creation, but trackers suffer a -1 external penalty on all rolls due to the higher immutability of terrain (e.g. footprints can't generally leave indentations in metal). The lack of illumination in most of the Reaches is equivalent to night conditions.

## ECOLOGY

The Reaches within the Pole of Metal rival Creation for the diversity and strangeness of its ecology. Visitors to this world may not recognize the life that surrounds them, seeing only a wasteland of metal and sterile chemicals. Natives understand that the thrum and cry of life is omnipresent.

## FLORA

Although barren of organic flora, the Reaches are no wasteland. Crystalline inclusions grow rampant like plants or fungi. Vast spires replace the trunks of trees, crowned with mineral extrusions resembling fronds and leaves but for their unyielding firmness. Veins of strange alloys and living cables grow like tangled kudzu in other places, covering walls in ropy masses akin to the most overgrown jungles of Creation.

## ORGANIC FAUNA

The rats and cockroaches that came into exile with humanity do not flourish apart from it, as even these tenacious scavengers find little to sustain them. Colonies that defy expectation tap conduits with relentless gnawing until life-giving oases burst forth. In other places, adaptive mutations make the scavengers hardier, such as roaches whose probing antennae draw sustenance from errant sparks and iron-toothed rats that suck oil from the Great Maker's veins like bloated, hairy ticks.

Human beings and those who were once human comprise the remainder of flesh-based organisms. While tunnel folk (see p. 16) comprise the majority, they are not alone. Some mad hermits dwell in solitude or small family groups like humans who escaped their Dragon King overseers in the Time of Glory—they pose little threat to armed travelers, but ambush the unwary with cannibalistic fury when given the chance.

Then there are the anomalies, mutants so far removed from their progenitor species or interbred with equally degenerate life as to be unrecognizable. It is not unthinkable to turn a corner in some far-off and forgotten corridor and come face-to-face with a vast, chitin-covered rat with buzzing wings and glittering eyes above a mouth still human enough to scream.

## EXMACHINA

Most fauna within the Pole of Metal is both mechanical and divine. Chapter two of the **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals** covers these machine spirits in greater detail. The exmachina are the body of Autochthon made manifest within him in pantheonic splendor, devas

crafted for specific purposes and supremely specialized to those ends.

Most of these spirits appear reminiscent of arthropods and/or cephalopods with six legs and a head protruding from a central body. Where other anatomical templates serve better, function defines form. Though the vast majority of exmachina span a diameter of 1-12 feet, the outliers flit about like jeweled mosquitoes or barely squeeze through mile-wide corridors, scraping the walls clean with thunderous shrieks of grinding metal. Many function like gods and demons, existing in a default immaterial state. Lesser counterparts with strictly material duties correlate more to elementals, solid absent use of the Dematerialize Charm.

To human observers, most of the exmachina seem to assume a caretaker role for the machinery of the Reaches, and so most are called custodians. In areas near human settlements, these spirits are indifferent to intruders unless they are interfered with or perceive a threat to their charges. Tapping veins is generally acceptable, but blasting through walls brings the wrath of roaring, saw-toothed warrior spirits called destroyers.

As travelers leave familiar areas, the behavior of custodians turns more violent. Eventually, intruders find themselves enemies of nature itself, as all things flee or give battle in accordance with their design. Where this is not immediately so, indifference may mean an inaudible distress beacon has summoned the destroyers or the custodians are doing something so critically important they cannot stop for any reason. It may even be that an explorer stumbles upon a place the Great Maker meant for humans to find, but what are the odds of that?

## ELEMENTALS

The nature and status of elementals within the Realm of Brass and Shadow is addressed in detail on pages 64-74 of **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**. Like the exmachina, Autochthonian elementals live within the Reaches as native inhabitants and do not find the terrain nearly as hazardous as mortals. The Great Maker's concentrated Essence spawns elementals as an indirect byproduct of existence, rather than expressing some part of the Primordial. Elementals perform useful world-sustaining functions because it is their nature to do so rather than because they are programmed for obedience to the hierarchy of the Divine Ministers.

Because of these differences, elementals offer a broader range of encounter possibilities than other spirits. Machine gods are gods in form, but often machines in outlook. Their capacity and/or willingness to interact with travelers is limited to simple responses like attack, flee and ignore. By contrast, elementals act as individuals and communities. The intelligent ones can bargain or threaten or even offer friendship. Even bestial elementals can be domesticated or disturbed without risking divine sanction.

## EXMACHINA EXPLAINED

As a Primordial, Autochthon exists as the sum of his Charms, made physically manifest through his *jouten* (physical bodies) and spiritually expressed as a pantheon of devas. The world-body of Autochthonia is his most important *jouten*, as it simultaneously contains all other bodies and maintains the shroud of Elsewhere into which the titan banished himself.

Other known bodies of the Great Maker include a construct in the likeness of an advanced Six-Metal Alchemical and the giant mechanical behemoth that harvested Creation for human colonists during the Primordial's exodus. These and other unknown forms slumber within heavily-armored crystalline storage silos encysted within the Pole of Crystal. Should any of these bodies face spiritual destruction at the hands of the Chosen, Autochthon will perish as he collapses fully into death as the Engine of Extinction.

Stunted and sickly by comparison to his siblings, the Great Maker radiates only nine Third Circle devas. He has transformed all of these, collapsing the Second Circle souls of the Eight Divine Ministers so that they cannot individually create subsidiary spirits. Instead, the Machine God's souls may collectively tap into their shared wellspring of progenitive might to construct specialized subgods equivalent in power to Second Circle devas. All of Autochthon's component souls retain the power to fashion the least of machine gods as needed, programming mass-produced models for specific custodial functions. Each of these are effectively First Circle devas.

Far more radically, Autochthon heavily modified his own fetich, excising the deva's free will and grafting the resultant lobotomized thought processor directly into the centrality of Autochthonia. He did this in the Time of Glory after giving the Jadeborn purpose for the third time, realizing he needed better understanding of how his creations thought. The resultant artifact-organ is the Godhead itself, a place where Autochthon can artificially think outside of his own limits (at reduced competency), enabling more nuanced tactics and meaningful communication with lesser beings.

The Core conjoins Autochthon's fetich with the purest expression of his consciousness, a focused opposition against the growing Voidtech cancer degrading his Charms and threatening him with the impossibility of mortality. The death of the Core would inflict fetich death upon Autochthon, transforming him into a new Primordial with marginal thematic overlap. Of the heart sacrificed to create this great cognizance engine, all data resides within the memory of the Core itself. It long ago purged such secrets from the recollection of his other souls.

## BIOMECHANOIDS

Although independently-animated automata artifacts would seem to be a natural fit into the artificial ecology of Autochthonia, they are actually quite rare outside of the war machines developed and fielded by the Divine Minister Debok Moom. Although infinitely more efficient as laborers than mere human beings, such artifacts cannot emulate the prayers embedded in the labor of mankind and yield no sustenance for the Great Maker through their work. That the Machine God frowns on mechanized labor is an irony not lost on some Theomachrats, though the doctrine is generally presented as proof of humanity's intrinsic value.

The exmachina eschew true automata for different reasons, viewing the resources requisite to such self-powered entities as wasted. It's far more efficient to craft equivalent entities as inert frames in which specialized exmachina receive implantation as animating intelligences. The resulting biomechanoids are functionally automata and golems (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, p. 59). All life and Essence they generate provides a battery for the frame, making them no longer truly alive. This also

precludes Essence pools and Charms and restricts them to the simplest behavioral programming (manifest in the absence of Virtues).

Within the spiritual hierarchy of Autochthonia, biomechanoids are tools rather than entities in their own right. Even the lowliest custodian receives more dignity and consideration, as a biomechanoid's animating spirit is tied to its shell and perishes when that shell breaks down.

From the perspective of human and Exalted travelers, there is little difference between narrow-minded exmachina and biomechanoids. Both appear as mechanical entities which react to intruders in exacting accordance with programming. Fortunately, when that programming proves hostile, biomechanoids are seldom more dangerous than wild animals in Creation.

## DRONES

As discussed on pages 76-77 of **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, drones are a fusion of exmachina and human. Unlike the joining of automata bodies with divine consciousness to create biomechanoids, drone unions are temporary. However, there are similarities in the process.

For the duration of possession, the spirit does not exist as a distinct entity, but rather as a set of powers and irresistible directives conferred upon the host.

Drones are holy beings, but their existence as “independent” agents of the gods leaves the Olgotary uncomfortable. It’s hard to argue with a prophet, and so society treats them like an oyster treats an irritant in its body, giving them beautiful temple-quarters and isolating them from the sensitive Populat as much as possible. Fortunately, a good many drones care as little for humanity as the spirits that create them. Instead, they often minister to the tunnel folk, ensuring that faith does not degrade in the absence of proper civilization. In other cases, drones are demiurges called to service in the secret Adamant caste cities and fortified by possession so that they might arrive safely. Wandering drones in the Reaches invariably have a mission, and wise travelers leave them to it.

### IDIOSYNCRATIC ENTITIES

Even in a world designed to operate by orderly precepts, some things do not neatly fit into hierarchies of purpose or taxonomy. The Great Maker is first and foremost an inventor, and his hands have given life to untold multitudes of beings from the dawn of time and up until his slumber. So deeply embedded is this urge that he likely creates as he dreams, stirring fitfully now and again to fashion some new species or progenitor behemoth in hidden laboratories scattered throughout the Reaches.

The Realm of Brass and Shadow is home to many behemoths not beholden to the Divine Ministers and yet protected by the same geas that wards his souls against internecine warfare. Thus, the mightiest of exmachina can only gnash their mechanical teeth in sparking frustration and authorize repairs when such creatures prove troublesome and destructive. Still, the progeny of the Great Maker’s hand are not wicked so much as they are devoid of purpose and given to wandering in search of one. In this, their pilgrimages trace the steps of other creations Autochthon made incomplete and forgot.

While some of the unique denizens of Autochthonia possess flesh or an approximation thereof, others are entirely mechanical and some span the two. Not all have their genesis with the Great Maker himself. A few are the unholy offspring of Voidtech genesis wombs, birthed by Apostates as living weapons and sometimes discarded experiments. Though pitiable, their origins make them inherently monstrous and valid prey for destroyers.

### REWARDS

With all the hazards and monsters lurking outside the cities, why would an explorer ever dare to venture outside? Why would any of the tunnel folk stray one step farther into the darkness than they absolutely must? Why would the Exalted stray from their charges and in what way do such odysseys fit their duty as Champions of the people?

Answers vary, but the most common motivations are addressed below.

### MINING

As in Creation, resources in the Realm of Brass and Shadow are effectively finite and ever in demand. Cities mine the areas in which they root themselves with their Municipal Charms, securing access to all surrounding deposits of chemicals, magical materials and raw ores from which to fabricate the miracles that sustain society. Through their hub connections to wide-bore conduits, the patropoli and metropoli can gather resources from caches and reservoirs hundreds or even thousands of miles distant, but the flow of these supplies remains subject to disruption by biotectonic events, interference by Reaches denizens or any number of other factors too numerous to list.

It always serves the interests of the state to ensure redundant supply chains. Accordingly, teams of state-sponsored prospectors routinely venture into the Reaches in search of valuable goods. Sometimes this means personally ferrying treasure back home. Other times, they must connect to their city’s intake currents via delicate conduit splicing, typically guarded and supervised by young Alchemicals.

### TRADE

Mining does not correct all supply shortfalls. Autochthonian resources are not equally distributed, meaning that cities prosper most by trading surpluses with one another across national and even international lines. Some theologians have theorized the inequitable distribution of resources is part of the Great Maker’s Design, a necessary chaos to force collaboration across divergent social structures for mutual benefit and synergistic alliance.

Although much trade utilizes dependable tram lines, the connections between different nations sporadically close as associated organ-continent drift apart. Seeking out new connections and laying the foundations of new tram lines is an industrial endeavor requiring significant capital and manpower investment, but the rewards of trade mandate such enterprises. Caravans taking the long way may travel for months to bridge distant nations, bringing desperately-needed or exotic goods to faraway lands.

### INTERNATIONAL WAR

When trade fails, war often follows. Invasion forces can travel some of the way by trams, but this ensures that their attack route can be anticipated and interdicted. Nothing ends a border skirmish quite so abruptly as rigging an electrical node to flash-cook the inbound army so that their smoking bodies may be unpacked and recycled. Consequently, prudent military commanders move their units through the Reaches, sacrificing speed in the name of surprise. Units can often avoid or minimize many of the dangers small groups of travelers face, particularly with regard to hostile beings.

## HOLY WAR

Not all wars pit the Eight Nations against one another. Other conquests enforce the hegemony of the social order as pogroms against the tunnel folk, ensuring the eradication of competition for resources and occasional population boosts through captured and reeducated children. Still more wars concern themselves with preemptive defense, scouring neighboring Blight Zones clean of gremlin infestations with fire and steel.

The children of the Void give no quarter and the citizens of Autochthonia return the favor. Victory must be absolute or else the contagion recurs. Since Blight Zones represent the deadliest regions of Autochthonia, casualties always run high on both sides, but it is better that some die so that the state endures. Moreover, in this conflict alone, no moral gray troubles the combatants. They fight not only for themselves, but to save their sleeping god. Nothing can be holier.

## PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is a common feature of Octet culture—all of the Eight Nations have established provisions for workers to journey to distant holy sites to express their devotion to the Maker and enrich themselves. The vast majority of these pilgrims travel primarily by tram, or along well-marked pilgrims' roads stretching through the middle of foreign nations. Their journeys keep them far from the dangers of unmapped Reaches travel.

On the other hand, some citizens find themselves drawn into the unknown by the clarion of their faith, so moved they cannot wait for the vagaries of biotectonics to establish proper tram connections. Others go in accordance with state interests, missionaries sent to bring disaster relief under military escort or as pilgrims accompanying trade delegations. A few step outside the social order to answer the call of distant spirits or the stirrings of demiurgic genius within them.

Idiosyncratic pilgrims present a conundrum to the Tripartite, as the leaders dare not offend the Great Maker. Thus, these holy men are always free to leave, but they must accept and return to the responsibilities of their proper station if they come back.

## DARK REFUGE

When Alchemicals sicken and contract Gremlin Syndrome, they are swiftly found out and destroyed. That is the official stance of the Olgotary. In truth, some Apostates linger undetected as saboteur monsters, discovered only when long-planned atrocities reach fruition. Others realize the precariousness of their double lives and reason that the Reaches—and the Blight Zones within—offer a haven in which to pursue their apotheosis. Void Lords may disappear without a trace, or mark their departure with some cataclysmic distraction to give themselves a head start on the inevitable pursuers. Voidbringer cultists sometimes ape

this journey, seeking mad slavery to the gods of chaos and entropy that trouble their dreams.

## TRUTH

Autochthonia is full of mysteries, many predating humanity. The realm is both world and god, a titan of such unfathomable complexity that an entire pantheon of spirits exists to express his inner conflicts. Yet he sickens and dies. How is this possible? Are the rumors of a sixth caste of Alchemicals true? Do their glass towers stand in judgment of humanity? Is the Core merely a theological conceit, or could a hero stand before the Godhead and wake the sleeping world? For those who journey in search of answers, the only question is what questions they dare to ask.

## BIZARRE WONDERS

Overall, the Reaches are effectively one massive worldscape of metal and industry. Even so, the Pole of Metal contains rare and wondrous deviations, places and phenomena that do not correlate at all to the expectations of awed explorers who encounter them. What follows is only the barest sampling of these treasures, intended both as plot hooks for stories and inspiration for Storyteller-devised anomalies.

## THE SHADOW NATION

Ghosts aren't a naturally-occurring phenomenon anywhere, but this is particularly true within Autochthonia, where the invention and widespread use of soulgems virtually assures that all souls recycle in a harmonious manner. Even those who die without soulgems find themselves drawn directly into the Radiant Amphora of Celestial Accumulation (despite doctrine indicating they are lost forever to the Void).

The people of Autochthonia would be surprised by just how many ghosts dwell within the Pole of Metal, bound in holding tanks in the most remote machine complexes (see *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals*, p. 22). These spirits are the excess hun souls for which Autochthon no longer has sufficient po souls to yield viable newborns. Year by year, their numbers swell and more infants die stillborn.

The tanks form a ninth nation, or at least a parody of a nation. In place of a living patropolis, a colossal six-metal statue of Autochthon's Alchemical likeness stands taller than most mountains upon and within the featureless fog of indeterminate dimensional space. It is far larger than the exterior geometry of the tanks could possibly encompass. The many hundreds of "Charm slots" of the statue's body glitter with irregular factory complexes crushed upon one another like finely-articulated plates of body armor crossed with coral reefs. High above, the icon's cracked and mangled head stares down with the asymmetrical gaze of judging right eye and gaping left socket.

Within the grim factories adorning the statue, the dead toil endlessly under the direction of fearsome exmachina

overseers. The levers they pull and buttons they push are attached to nothing and serve no actual purpose, existing only so that the labor produces a small drizzle of prayers to feed the Great Maker. The yield is nowhere near what equivalent mortals could produce, but waste is inefficient and the Divine Ministers abhor inefficiency.

This is not what Autochthon intended. The factories serve as backup systems recording the blueprints and operative mechanics for every key function lost to the creeping infection of Blight Zones. As more systems fall, new factories pile atop the old, waiting to energize and catalyze internal restoration systems. The Divine Ministers could not understand this plan, seeing only the simple calculus that the systems were inhabited by creatures of the Void and such beings must not be trusted. In their rigidity, the Great Maker's souls have disconnected the very systems most critical to halting the Engine of Extinction. A hero that could reverse this tragedy would be a savior to the living and dead alike.

The shadow nation holds the worst dystopia of the Realm of Brass and Shadow, all shadow and no brass. Their labor goes unrewarded, and worse, they are kept from accomplishing the very task that could give their existence meaning. This is enforced not only by destroyers, but a restraint system that induces amnesia, blocking the dead from accessing their memories of any time before arriving in the tanks. Disabling these systems would induce mass revelations of agony and clarity as the dead recall their lives, deaths and the pain of having their lower souls devoured. A great crusade of retribution might follow such a deed.

Those seeking less horrific outcomes might come to the tanks to reinitialize core systems in fulfillment of prophecy or demiurgic directives. It might come as a shock to find those systems crammed together as ghostly relics of their destroyed selves, to say nothing of the theological bombshell of the listless inhabitants, but great heroes do not let anything so trivial as the complete restructuring of their faith stand in the way of saving their god. Selective disabling of the amnesia devices might yield a cadre of some of the greatest engineers who ever lived in the history of the Eight Nations, pitting this unlikely strike force of living and dead against the dogma of the nation's masters in a race to decide the future of the entire realm.

### NAMELESS ONES REBORN

Several times in recent history, mutilated explorers have stumbled from the Far Reaches with hysterical accounts of gray-skinned humanoids with triangular heads and gaping black eyes. The descriptions sound suspiciously like the faces that occasionally press themselves against the surfaces of Autochthonian soulsteel, known to Octet scholars as the Nameless Ones (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, p. 213). Even the most learned of these savants can say little more of the vanished race, save that Autochthon's second people

(the Jadeborn) called them Ereta'een, a Rocktongue word meaning "Enigma People."

With so little to go on and no reliable witnesses of living Nameless Ones, the people of Autochthonia do not yet fear the wild tales. It is far more likely that explorers were simply driven mad—it happens all the time. If such accounts hold any truth, then it may be that the Nameless Ones have returned, recreated by the Great Maker's slumbering guilt at the obliteration of his first people. If so, it cannot be long before the reborn creatures seek to reclaim the souls of their ancestors from the black ore in which they were imprisoned. And what of the Soulsteel Caste themselves, whose very bodies stand as monuments to that prehistoric holocaust?

### DEMOMORPHIC ANALYTICS ENCLOSURE

There is a great zoo hidden in the Reaches, a winding helix of 12,167 glass cubes eight feet in each dimension, empty of all features and furnishings and nigh-impenetrable. In each box lives a single spirit. Some are First Circle devas of enemy Primordials captured at the close of the War. Others are early First Circle demons of the Yozi. Those too large to fit within such spaces endure painful metaspatial compression. The Great Maker assembled the menagerie to extrapolate properties of the soul hierarchies that spawned them, part of the meticulous preparation that went into restructuring his own devas for exile.

The occupants are long since mad from boredom and isolation, and so they repeatedly kill themselves in new ways, seeking release not only in death but in avoidance of the monotony of their suicide. They find little release, however, as the cages force the Essence of their occupants to reform one minute later. Study of these creatures helped Autochthon design his present soul hierarchy, and the moving sidewalk that glides beside them allows visitors to hear lingering echoes of the titan's own chilling observations of the captives (assuming the listeners understand Old Realm).

If somehow freed, the spirits could offer firsthand accounts of the Yozi's binding, information that might assist in subduing other Primordials or guiding heretical Infernal Exalted in designing their own pantheons. It may even be that the remembered surrender oaths might give clues to the specific clauses the Yozi perceive as weak points, allowing heroes to preempt the titans' mad and likely futile plots for release.

### THE MONOLITH GARDEN

Although he betrayed his siblings, Autochthon was not beyond caring for them. As in so much else he made, the Exalted surpassed his expectations. He designed the Chosen to punish and slay his fellow titans for endlessly tormenting him, but his revenge did not play out like his fantasies. The massacres were brutal—the screams of imploding pantheons haunt him and perhaps they always will. For all his pride at the greatness of his work, he cannot help but feel some

guilt at the cost of victory. That guilt is manifest in the Monolith Garden, a cathedral space located near the roof of the Pole of Smoke.

A single hexagonal spire of basalt inset with soulsteel runes stands at the center of the chamber, tapering to a point halfway to the ceiling. It is nearly three-quarters of a mile tall and over a hundred yards across at the base. Each rune screams softly, each in a different key, tens of thousands of notes of agony tuned to form a harmony of absolute despair and regret. This is an unnatural Emotion effect inducing those feelings in all who can hear within the chamber unless they pay one Willpower per minute to resist.

Scattered across the floor around the spire lie thousands of metal statues, not of the Primordials cast into the Labyrinth, but those wonders and creatures that delighted Autochthon most among all the dead titans made. Here, the forms of behemoths and beasts and palaces and primeval mountains and things so strange they hurt to look upon stand as memorials to the Neverborn. It is the best and humblest tribute the Great Maker could give to those who were also great makers.

Besides offering a bizarre glimpse of the Time of Glory, the Monolith Garden provides invaluable insight for epic crafters looking to recreate the depicted wonders. The statues aren't simply bits of metal. Everything Autochthon remembers about the works lies encoded in the subtleties of their design. How to glean those mysteries is a mystery unto itself.

### TERRASTATIC REPLICATOR ZONE

Somewhere in the Reaches, an explorer might open an access door and find herself in another world. A blue sky appears above with a hellishly bright golden light arcing lazily across the firmament in pursuit of a colder silver lantern. There are grassy plains and trees lush with fruit, winding rivers and even a central rocky mountain surrounded by rolling foothills. In all, it is an alien vista beyond the wildest imaginings of any Autochthonian. No animals or spirits mar this primeval paradise. It is also not Creation, but rather a biome laboratory to model and remember the properties of the world the Great Maker helped forge.

Spanning almost eighty miles across, the laboratory exists in a separate fold within Elsewhere not unlike the Poles of Lightning and Steam. A dome of impervious adamant encloses the perimeter like Yu-Shan. What visitors do not realize—could not possibly realize—is the Thing in the Mountain. A powerful ishvara of the Fair Folk slumbers within the stone, an enemy the Great Maker subdued at the dawn of time. Brutally calcified and yet waking, it steadily grows in power. Soon, it shall burst forth in Unshaped glory and dissolve the garden in a blaze of chaos, a world-rending typhoon among Wyld storms. It has done this before. Then, as before, the engines of order that sustain the place will engage and push it back, enclose it in rock and bring life to the land. Every iteration is beautiful and distinct. Those

engines are failing, however. When they can no longer push back the chaos, what might such a King of the Void do?

No particular legends of Autochthon's paradise garden exist to guide travelers, so discovery of the workshop almost invariably comes as epic serendipity. Assuming there is sufficient time before the mountain bursts, the nation that finds it can be expected to set up navigational beacons and begin rigorous resource extraction, possibly culminating in the revolutionary development of viable hydroponic agriculture. If the alien vista can be tied to Creation through cross-referenced mythological apocrypha, the discovery may accelerate plans to open the Seal of Eight Divinities and could provide a staging ground on which to prepare for new battle tactics appropriate to the strange new world. Conversely, if the eruption of the mountain interrupts the foraging operation after realizing the link to Creation, the discoverers may misinterpret the disaster and conclude the Seals must remain intact for the safety of Autochthonia.

## OTHER ELEMENTAL POLES

The rough torus of the Elemental Pole of Metal enfolds the delicate sphere of the Elemental Pole of Crystal, capped on top by the hemisphere of the Pole of Oil and below by the symmetrical bowl of the Pole of Smoke. Folded through varying phases of Elsewhere, the metaspatial body of the Great Maker simultaneously encompasses the cylindrical Poles of Steam and Lightning, connected to the main mass by portal-ducts and batteries of rift-circuits.

Altogether, the body of Autochthonia forms a shape loosely analogous to a sphere, yet it is larger on the inside than the outside and encompasses numerous higher dimensions of space packed into recursive infinitudes of Essence and form. By design, this geometry borders on incomprehensible. Just as a singular soul woefully fails to express the nuances of Primordial existence, so too does the human experience of space fail to understand the magnitude of titanic *jouten*. Autochthon could pack himself into a two foot wide orb or expand to blot out the whole of Creation's sky and his absolute volume would remain unchanged.

The Great Maker uses his Poles as embodied axioms, the idealized and quantized form of the six elements comprising all parts of his body. Each pole encompasses multiple organs, acting in concert as the titan's ailing metabolism. The Pole of Metal forms his flesh, from the warded mile-thick skin of his outer shell to the most intricate mechanisms of his innards. The specialized "tissue" of the Pole of Crystal serves as his brain and control nexus, sending and receiving signals through the nervous system mapped by the Pole of Lightning and the dynamo reactors at its heart.

Aspects of the circulatory system span three poles. Lightning provides the fastest vector by which the Machine God redistributes his empowering motes. Meanwhile, the Pole of Steam maintains the pressure and energy to keep pneumatic machine components operational. Finally, the Pole of Oil shares elements of circulation, endocrine and

immune systems. Most of its secretions provide lubrication, fuel and catalysts for key alchemies. Other oils bind to dangerous chemicals so they can be transported and processed elsewhere. To the degree Autochthon has an actual heart as humans use the term, it exists in the complex of pumps and baffles that line the floor of his northern pole.

While all of the Great Maker's systems show signs of his illness, the Pole of Smoke shows the most severe symptoms. It is both stomach and lungs, constantly digesting the waste of his other systems in torrents of powerful solvents. The semi-pure raw materials that result allow him to heal wounds and expand his physiogeography. Meanwhile, the vaporized effluvia of this consumption constantly dirties the bellow-pumps that cycle gasses through the Primordial's body.

Whereas the Machine God's pre-exile self choked and coughed intermittently as he spoke, the slumbering titan can no longer exhale except as a rasping wheeze choked with pollution. If not for the combined life support of all Municipal Charms scrubbing Autochthon's respiratory pathways, the entire Pole of Smoke would collapse into a Blight Zone and kill him in a matter of weeks. This stands in stark contrast to healthier systems that benefit from human and Exalted labor, but could still function independently at reduced efficiency (for the time being). Because the Divine Ministers cannot predict the next system that will collapse due to illness, they have deemed all life support initiatives critical duties and expect every city to meet augured production quotas.

## POLE OF CRYSTAL

In the center of Autochthonia lies the most critical juncture of Great Maker's anatomy, the smallest of his elemental poles and yet the repository of his consciousness. Inasmuch as Autochthonia replicates the universe in microcosm, the Pole of Crystal is a heaven to rival Yu-Shan in size and beauty. Structurally, it appears as a sphere-like object mimicking the exterior of Autochthonia in scale miniature, filled by many millions of distinct mineral inclusions and open spaces arranged in intricate patterns of demiorganic growth and mechanistic symmetry. All the colors of the rainbow lie strewn among these shards, aglow with surging lightning as they sing the chiming chorus of transdivine cognition.

None of the Eight Nations know the way to the Pole of Crystal, chiefly because it is so far removed from the organ-continents of the Octet that navigating to its hallowed vaults is nigh-impossible. This is no accident. Autochthon left no easy routes for humans to find and meddle with his brain. But he did leave paths, fraught with hideous danger to try the might, cunning and bravery of Champions who might one day need communion with him.

## ADAMANT CASTE

Away from the prying eyes of the Octet, the Pole of Crystal provides a haven for the Sixth Caste to train and

rest between missions. Operatives are born of the adamant that comprises the bedrock of the Core, given life by the Great Maker's holiest designs. When remoteness and a fierce gauntlet do not deter explorers, it falls upon the Blessed of Kadmek to protect Autochthon's secrets by whatever means necessary.

The gleaming spires of the Five Blessed Theopoli further bejewel the landscape with greater light and greater wonder, interconnected like a small nation by a series of extremely rapid tram tunnels. Four of these cities host embassy-tabernacles for a pair of specific Divine Ministers. Within these Ministerial Theopoli, the Machine God's souls reveal his will in their allotted rotation of communion hours, assigning missions to their Adamant Caste attendants. The hush of empty glass hallways stands in stark contrast to the bustle of human cities, but their reverent quiet belies the constant activity of exmachina carrying out Municipal Charm maintenance and other tasks delegated by their superiors. The only humans permitted within the Ministerial Theopoli are alchemical demiurges serving as acolyte-attendants to the Operatives. No more than a hundred citizens enjoy this extraordinary privilege per city, and generally half are Anointed Ones uplifted from local glass walker tribes (see p. 124).

## THE GODHEAD

At the center of the Pole of Crystal lies the Godhead, the amalgamated divine Core that is both fetich and central repository of the Great Maker's will. In this great torus chamber, forests of ores and gems glitter for miles in all directions around the central pillar. Incalculable thought lightning blazes upon the tesseract ceiling of the Design, booming and crackling as chattering hordes of Design Weavers spin the firmament. Ozone hangs thick in the air, perfumed by the smoke of circuit faults like the incense of sacred offerings.

Anyone seeking to rouse the titan must do so from within the central pillar of this Axiomatic Basilica. This echoing chamber is off limits by joint decree of the Divine Ministers and supremely well-defended, awaiting the conjunction of desperate times and desperate heroes brave enough to defy the gods for a higher purpose.

## DENIZENS

The Pole of Crystal houses the mightiest of the exmachina and the lonely citadels of the Adamant Caste. Gremlins do not darken the structure's hallowed passages, all of which function at such transcendent efficiency that elementals need not maintain them. As the last part of Autochthon where everything works properly, the central Pole retains none of the elementals it spawns. Instead, these spirits distribute throughout the Pole of Metal as needed.

The Pole of Crystal's ecology is wholly dedicated to caring for the sleeping Core, drawing the aid of untold thousands of attendant custodians of all sorts and many legions of destroyer guards. Everything present is so critical

## THE THEOPOLIS OF OM

Long ago, the youngest city Om bore the somber designation *Omnideific Martyr*, an Operative created to command the last stands of custodian militias in response to gremlin invasion. Beholden to all Ministers, she served as an emergency resource manager in the war on the Void. When defeat was certain, the Adamant Caste general arrived and led her forces to annihilation, taking out as many of the enemy as possible. Only at the last would she disappear and withdraw to await her next mission.

The doomed bravery of *Omnideific Martyr's* troops inspired her, but it also wore down her gentle soul. When she finally reached an age where she could give up her toil and root in the Pole of Crystal, she consecrated herself directly to the Core. The Divine Ministers accepted this decision, but saw no purpose in populating her streets with their servants. To ease her loneliness and keep her Charms operating at peak efficiency, Om sent her avatar to guide a band of wandering missionaries to her halls and gave them shelter.

The descendants of those pilgrims have multiplied and thrived in the generations since, venerating Autochthon through rites broadcast by Om. They only barely understand the grace in which they reside, as many suffer amnesia and memory distortion from regular exposure to Om's anima. Only the demiurges among them perceive with absolute clarity, serving as shaman-mediators to help the colonists attend their city's needs and remember which buildings are dangerous. Soon, Om plans to Exalt her first assembly of Alchemicals, answerable through her to the recorded dictates of the silent Core. She believes it is long past time that someone watched the watchers.

to the Great Maker's being that he dares not permit unauthorized visitors access. Only with Autochthon's consent (either directly or through the proxy of the Divine Ministers) may visitors gain free reign to explore. Even the resident glass walker tribes tread carefully, keenly aware that the exmachina tolerate them only so long as they do not trouble the divine hierarchy.

## HAZARDS

The environment of the Pole of Crystal does not deviate substantially from the Reaches of the Pole of Metal. The hazards that do exist are considerably more deadly and strategically-deployed, as many are intentional defense systems rather than merely dangerous "natural" environs.

**Razorshard Pods:** When unauthorized intruders enter a forbidden tunnel, animate pods in the walls grow and launch a constant barrage of crystal blades. Interior surfaces reabsorb razors that miss their target (Damage 6L/action; Trauma 3; Evasion 8P).

**Cognitive Surge:** Flashes of thought sizzle in accordance with every concept and whim, sporadically lighting up the Pole of Crystal with glorious incandescence. Thankfully, the danger quickly moves on as the Great Maker's dreams wander to some other part of his brain (Damage 5A/minute; Trauma 3L; Evasion 1)

**Thought Lightning:** Arcing bolts of infinite radiance split the air and dance upon the metadimensional folds of the Design, blasting down to strike the crystalline flora of the Godhead (Damage 10A/action; Trauma 5L; Evasion 10 [15 for creatures of the Void]).

## POLES OF LIGHTNING AND STEAM

The twin engines that power Autochthonia exist within separate sanctum rifts in Elsewhere, linked back to the main body of the titan through many thousands of portal circuits and metadimensional pneumatic pumps. The two tall cylinders of the reactor Poles are the least hospitable regions of Autochthonia for organic life, though the specifics of the hazards vary.

In the Pole of Lightning, churning dynamos along the walls rotate in opposing stacked rings, each adorned with spires that conduct the constant world-searing arcs to the appropriate circuits to fuel the Great Maker's neuroelectric grid. Lightning does not strike everywhere at once, but the omnipresent risk of sudden vaporization keeps away most intruders.

By contrast, the Pole of Steam is roughly a quarter filled with high-pressure water kept boiling by lightning arcs flashing through their depths. Anything not instantly flash-fried by the scalding sea must further contend with city-smashing pressure and typhoon whirlpools of pneumatic currents. The steam atop this sea is only marginally less pressurized and scalding, but still more than capable of crushing and cooking anyone caught in it.

## DENIZENS

A diverse assortment of exmachina, elementals and biomechanoids populate the Poles of Lightning and Steam, each respectively customized for survival in their extreme climates. These regions are so inhospitable that their denizens have no default programming to attack intruders; the assumption is that anything which isn't killed in a matter of moments probably belongs.

Some natives of the Pole of Lightning boast total immunity to the burning arcs that crash through their habitat, but most are exceedingly nimble creatures whose defensive reflexes allow them to sidestep the bolts with inches to spare. The gremlins that infest this area are power-hungry parasites that mangle emitter rods and sink their pronged

chelicerae into any untended junction box they can find. While most humans cannot hope to survive more than a few minutes in the open, the mutant arcspawn (see p. 122) are dexterous enough to travel through the Pole of Lightning and find cave-like refuge in the shielded relay vaults scattered throughout.

The great churning sea of the Pole of Steam is home to vast swarms of jellyfish-like creatures that maintain the health of their environment by servicing machinery and devouring toxic impurities for further processing elsewhere. Gremlin versions of these tentacled custodians grow irregularly as colossal hydras with dozens of mouths and hundreds of barbed tendrils. Every healthy spirit slain by these monsters becomes part of its killer, its anatomy fused to the tangled ends of forked tentacles and puppeteered as prosthetic organs. Steamblooded mutants created by exposure to the region (see p. 125) do not live in the ocean itself, but rather in the sauna-like archipelagos of cooling facilities tethered to the walls. These complexes use blue jade refrigeration rods to extract drinkable water, some of which is mixed with poisonous chemicals and predigested by synthetic biocrystalline coral elementals to produce nutrient slurry.

## HAZARDS

As previously described, the Poles of Lightning and Steam are highly dangerous locales, even for many of the native inhabitants. Low-power lightning and intense pressure duplicates hazards explained on page 106.

**Elemental Lightning:** The bolts of Essence arcing across the dynamos throughout the Pole of Lightning do not strike everywhere at once, but these bolts can vaporize magical materials and some could annihilate an entire city in a single flash. Staying away from large open areas is the best assurance against being struck (Damage 30A/[irregular intervals no shorter than one action]; Trauma 10L; Evasion 7).

**Sea of Steam:** Direct exposure to the boiling sea kills via a combination of heat and pressure, so characters must have immunity to both types of hazard in order to swim around without harm (Damage 6L/action; Trauma 8). Even those with appropriate immunities must contend with drowning and the associated penalties for trying to swim in a perpetual hurricane-force tempest. Above the sea, the slight drop in pressure and temperature changes the hazard to (Damage 4L/action; Trauma 6) and doesn't prompt automatic drowning.

## POLE OF OIL

The chemical ocean of the Pole of Oil is the single-largest body of liquid within Autochthonia, encompassing a fifth of the world's total volume. Most of the oil is relatively pure, existing as a viscous amber-tinted liquid. Encountering different colors or opacity indicates the presence of other chemicals, sometimes as catalytic currents and often as pollutants.

## PORTAL-JUMPING

The mechanisms that distribute steam and recycle water also provide shortcuts through which steamblooded families navigate Autochthonia. Without these portals, each colony would remain trapped in its own processor-island, unable to survive a moment in the sea outside their home. With them, they travel the world and maintain a small black market economy throughout much of the Octet.

Each portal links to a single destination somewhere in the Realm of Brass and Shadow as a two-way connection, bridging the intervening space through induced adjacency. The destinations shuffle occasionally when recalibrated by biotectonic drift, so regular travel is the only way to keep current on the state of the network. Portals also do not go everywhere, as their placement is based on the autonomic needs of pneumatic systems rather than the convenience of would-be travelers.

Teleportation is not as simple as finding the right pipe and jumping in. The portal only opens for matter moving at the right speed and trajectory, so a wrong move means travelers enter the actual vein system they leaped into. Mercifully, death comes swiftly inside the high-speed airless veins of pressurized system (Damage 6L/action; Trauma 4L). With training, portal jumpers only face brief scalding before emerging at the distant destination point (Damage 2L; Trauma 4L).

Recognizing a safe steam portal for what it is requires a difficulty 6 (Intelligence + Survival) roll. Those with a specialty in Steam Portals reduce this to difficulty 3. Steamblooded guard this specialty as a family secret and do not teach outsiders. There is no way to know where a portal goes without trying it out, but a successful roll determines the destination is somewhere a human could survive. Engaging the portal mechanism requires a (Wits + Athletics) roll at the same difficulties as identifying one, including the benefits of appropriate specialization. It is possible to engage a portal leading to a deadly location if the mechanism is engaged without verifying its safety.

Portal circuits to and from the Pole of Lightning work similarly, but "riding the lightning" is much harder to accomplish. The base difficulty for gauging safety and using the system is 10, reduced to 5 for those with a specialty in Lightning Portals. Failure to jump correctly means the character is electrocuted by a massive surge of power and cannot avoid it via evasion (Damage 20L; Trauma 3).

While the entire ocean system churns constantly as a result of thermal imbalances and continuous chemical reactions, surface tension “walls” between areas of highly-divergent substances can sometimes maintain semi-stable seas for years or even decades.

## DENIZENS

With virtually no breathable air and composed of substances ranging from mildly irritating to instantly lethal, the lightless Pole of Oil is extremely hostile to organic life. Temperatures vary widely in places, but most of the oceans share the bitter cold of Creation’s benthic depths. Accordingly, free-swimming denizens require adaptations to breathe oil as air, consume toxic chemicals for food, withstand intense pressure and navigate the lightless currents. There are *things* that do all this, wretches warped by the Void into eyeless, bleached monstrosities with razor-edged fins and gaping maws that scream echolocation clicks into the murk. Above these mutant parasites, gremlins combining features of sharks and cephalopods dominate the seas as roving super-predators.

By contrast, the spiritual ecology of the Pole of Oil matches the diversity found elsewhere in Autochthonia. Large ovoid custodians reminiscent of whales serve as mobile refineries, imbibing raw chemicals and storing processed goods in holding bladders. When these fill, the creatures dock with seafloor towers or drop sealed pods for retrieval by myriads of crab-like tenders waiting below. Smaller custodians scout for suitable materials in wide-ranging schools, reporting back to a single base factory or scattered transmission buoys.

Less hideous organic life endures in the same fashion as residents of the Pole of Steam, hiding out in air-filled towers rising from the ocean floor and establishing ramshackle arcologies tethered to the Pole of Metal. Braver colonies live nomadic lives aboard refinery whales. Clever colonists learn to jury-rig their host, gaining limited control over a few systems (like navigation). Often, they are merely passengers, praying their home will dock for air and nutrients before supplies runs out. Most inhabitants are oilkin mutants (see p. 125), still closely resembling their parent species while adapted to better handle the toxins that inevitably leak into their stale air. Only the inhabitants of Loran (see Chapter Five) enjoy full protection from the mutagenic Essence that would otherwise add the city’s populace to the ranks of the oilkin.

## HAZARDS

Setting aside the chemicals that can liquefy bone or transmute flesh into explosive resin in the blink of an eye, there isn’t a single drop of the Pole of Oil that is actually good for humans to drink or go swimming in. Of far more pressing concern is the near absence of air, water and food.

**Toxicity:** Exposure to the basic oil that predominantly fills the pole is treated like the default smoke cloud from a Chemical Fog Generator enhanced via Mortal Suppression

Mist (see p. 107). Anyone foolish enough to drink a mouthful of the stuff suffers as per a dose of nerve gas.

**Explosive Drifts:** Most of the oil contained in the pole cannot burn in the absence of air, preventing sparks from igniting massive blasts of incendiary force. However, some chemicals streaming through the ocean present exactly this hazard. Although seemingly inert, their opacity impairs visibility like heavy fog. Any fire, spark or other ignition event within them causes a one-time hazard with (Damage 10L, Trauma 5L) to everything within 10 yards of the cloud. This holocaust consumes the drift utterly, along with whatever the bright blast vaporized. Such explosions can be seen as flashes in the dark from up to 50 miles in basic oil and heard out to twice that radius.

## POLE OF SMOKE

Although Autochthonia is a spherical world, the primary vector of gravity does not orient toward the core. Instead, that force pushes everything down from the Pole of Oil through the Pole of Metal, gradually filtering all refuse and waste products to fall into the vast junkyard hell of the Pole of Smoke beneath. The bowl occupies a fifth of the titan body’s volume, the largest open space in the entire realm. Thick fog banks cover the sky in choking toxic fumes, dozens and sometimes hundreds of miles thick. Long spires pierce the murk from the machinery above like jagged inverted skyscrapers.

Far below lies a seemingly endless plain of broken metal, torn scraps of artificial rubber, glass shards and other industrial waste. Thousands of chutes in the ceiling empty this detritus onto the cratered hell, building irregular towers of garbage that would climb to the sky if underground seas of acid did not constantly dissolve the lowest layers. While the barrage of falling junk is more or less constant, the clouds also give frequent rise to sizzling typhoons and maelstroms that pour acid rain onto the cratered ruins below. These solvents pool in lakes and eventually drain through smoking tunnels leading down into the sea. Lightning and pyroclastic hail accompany the worst of these storms.

Immense veins of varicolored jade climb the walls like so much ivy, pumping the slurry of raw materials extracted by solvent digestion back up into healthier parts of Autochthonia. The peristaltic undulations of these wide pipes makes the background waver like a desert mirage even in the rare moments where the smoke clears enough to see that far.

Not all wreckage melts, of course. Countless artifacts lie mixed in with the rubble, some broken but many not. Furthermore, the junkyard itself offers such a glorious abundance of resources that it could end the shortages of the Octet if only there were some way to reliably transport it. Were Xexas to develop stable trade routes, it could become the seed of a new nation and likely the dominant economic power in Autochthonia.



Some visitors don't come as prospectors, but as crusaders. The Pole of Smoke holds the front lines of the war against the Void, so forces loyal to the Great Maker find no shortage of enemies to destroy. More than one Alchemical strategist has theorized that a cure for the Machine God's sickness must begin with total genocide of all gremlins infesting the titan's lungs.

## DENIZENS

The Pole of Smoke is a place of endless and absolute ruin in a constant cycle of destruction and renewal. The sickness that ravages the Great Maker afflicts all of his body, but nowhere is the power of chaos and entropy more immediately evident. Whatever the pole might once have been like at the dawn of time, now it is a scoured wasteland inimical to all life.

This is not to say that the Pole of Smoke lacks inhabitants, only that the Great Maker never intended to populate it. The fact that anything endures such conditions without losing all hope and greeting the rain is a testament to life's tenacity. Were the Machine God awake, perhaps he might find some distant hope in the example.

Humans cannot realistically survive a week breathing the poisoned air of the Pole of Smoke, and that's assuming they avoid low-hanging clouds or open pits belching fumes as deadly as nerve gas. While the city of Xexas filters its air enough that inhabitants only suffer respiratory illness at 5% above Octet levels, citizens planning to leave the

sealed urban complex for more than a few hours bring along breath mask artifacts or full encounter suits. Even with a reliable air supply, travelers must also contend with the absence of nutrient veins and the resulting need to carry sufficient food and water.

Only the ashbreather mutants (see p. 123) and their monstrous offshoots avoid these issues with adaptations that let them eat metal scrap and breathe smoke. Many cockroaches and rats possess similar or even more extensive mutations, allowing them to thrive in the junkyard wilderness.

Mortals sometimes fall into waste pipes and find themselves flushed all the way down to the Pole of Smoke. However, those that don't die en route typically splatter on sharpened rubble at terminal velocity after several miles of free-fall. Spirits and biomechanoids are often hardier, giving them a chance to limp away from the craters in which they landed and begin a new life in the wastes. Those that don't flee their entry craters risk being eaten alive by roving ashbreathers or tortured by gremlins until they break and embrace the Void.

Arrivals typically join existing colonies of displaced and unfortunate spirits, dwelling in shanty towns assembled from available scrap until the rains melt the roofs and the residents must start over. There isn't much hope for lost gods, as the hierarchy of the Divine Ministers does not waste resources on rescue missions for anything less than one of their direct vassals. Escape is possible, but difficult

enough that it's regarded as more of a legend than a realistic goal. The social orders created in the shantytowns parody the order of the Great Maker's pantheons, placing the strong above the weak with a rigidity that would make Cecelyne proud.

More gremlins live in the Pole of Smoke than in any single Blight Zone, organized into competing scavenger clans that prey upon healthy spirits when they can and war with one another when such prey is scarce. Given that gremlins outnumber such prey three to one, civil war is fairly commonplace. Cloudbursts interrupt these conflicts, sending all sides scurrying for shelter before they are annihilated.

It can sometimes prove difficult to distinguish smoke elementals spawned by the pole from the gremlins infesting it, as they tend toward monstrous and dangerous forms. On the whole, while individual elementals are often more dangerous than any gremlin, the gremlin hordes present a much greater risk due to numbers and sheer viciousness. There is little love between the two types of monsters, as smoke elementals embody physical symptoms of Autochthon's malady rather than his madness.

## HAZARDS

The Pole of Smoke is a horrible place full of vile monsters, savage mutants and embittered lost gods. These are not its greatest dangers. Virtually all meteorological activity is dangerous, ranging from merely murderous to unimaginable cataclysms. The only saving grace is that storms are frequent but not omnipresent. This, coupled with the ready availability of durable scrap with which to create a shelter (or find existing shelter) ensures that inhabitants who keep an eye on the skies can usually avoid being melted.

Human travelers must also contend with the fact that the air is bad where it's breathable and likely to boil a traveler's lungs into pink foam where it isn't. Then too, the only edible materials to be found are the bodies of mutants. As if this wasn't enough, the junkpile landmass that covers the pole is highly unstable, prone to sudden sinkholes and frequent earthquakes. In short, the Pole of Smoke is a hellish landscape that humans can only briefly visit and even Champions require precautions and toughness Charms for extended stays.

**Bad Air:** Taking a deep breath in the Pole of Smoke burns the throat and lungs, prompting frequent coughing and a persistent headache. This is a toxic gas (2L/day, 3L, —, -1).

**Acid Rain:** When the clouds drizzle, denizens of the Pole of Smoke do their best to bundle up and minimize time spent in the open (Damage 1L/10 minutes [1L/hour if heavily protected by garments, though this destroys non-magical attire after three hours], Trauma 3). As the rains pick up force, they match the statistics of an acid bath. A monsoon duplicates a casting of Rain of Doom (see **Exalted**, p. 256)

## BLIGHT ZONES

Where Autochthon's sickness has taken root, the mechanical topography grows still and broken, overtaken with catastrophic malfunction, rust and an overall breakdown of the realm. Blight Zones are the bastions of the Void, where the Engine of Extinction holds sway and the Great Maker's systems have perished. Gremlins lair in these unhallowed tumors, ever-hungry and eager to spread their pain to other exmachina. From tentative scouting to marauding and then full-scale invasion, the hordes of broken gods wreak their ceaseless pattern of havoc and devastation. Accordingly, Blight Zones are the front-line battlegrounds where loyal followers of Autochthon bring the fight to the enemy, purging his embodied sickness with fire and steel.

As a traveler enters a Blight, machines gradually display subtle and then overt malfunctions. Arcs sputter and suddenly go out like windblown candles, flickering back to life seconds or minutes later. Gears slip and grind or fail to turn. A fine patina of rust dusts out-of-the-way corners long before it paints entire surfaces like spattered bloodstains. The scent of burnt wires mingles with decay and a distinct staleness to the air. Broken and gutted machines show where gremlins have dismantled the landscape and torn out random mazes of tunnels in which to creep and ambush intruders.

Within long-tainted areas, technomorphic cysts mutate barely-functioning machines into something worse. Frequently, this introduces organic components like broken pipes that drip bile and leathery walls of flesh threaded in a tangled circuitboard of wires. A row of capacitors could transform into beating hearts gripped in metal barbs. Those Blight Zones that remain strictly mechanical assume organic aesthetics, growing tumors of twisted metal fused with jagged crystalline cancers. Pumps contract with peristalsis and bulbous expansion, oozing sludge-like blacktog into unholy mechanisms of infinite complexity.

In extreme cases, physical laws may even degrade, bending gravity in random vectors or creating oscillating adjacency between different locations. Most fearsomely, some Blight Zones seem haunted by an impersonal malevolence that actively turns the landscape's features against invaders and picks them off as gruesomely as possible.

## DENIZENS

As an area begins to suffer from Void taint, gremlins from other blight zones increasingly invade. Their mission is simple: destroy key machines and devour or convert all custodians found attempting repairs. Battles with destroyers and other guardians are frequent and brutal. If the Great Maker's defenders prevail, the forces of the Void gradually reduce the frequency of their attacks as they scout in search of softer targets. Repairs may take months or years, but eventually the area returns to normal. More rarely, counter-

invasions exterminate the infestation outright as a prelude to healing. Such victories are costly and rare.

When the divine hierarchy calculates that loss is inevitable, they cut their losses and fall back to safer terrain. This leaves the gremlins their prize, which they desecrate and vandalize in an orgy of celebration before converting it into a staging area for the next incursion. Gremlins vary from solitary monsters to highly social hive predators, but the latter are far more common. The strong dominate the weak in a pyramid scheme of suffering. The weakest do not last long.

A few Blight Zones contain Voidbringer colonies, but these are rare. Most gremlins cannot differentiate those who worship the Void from those who don't, and so would-be colonists run a strong risk of sudden annihilation from the spirits they worship. Blightborn (see p. 125) and women pregnant with these mutants do not run this risk, so some women deliberately impregnate themselves on a continual basis as a matter of survival.

Voidbringer colonies with an Apostate master run less risk of indiscriminate mass slaughter, but at the cost of monstrous oppression. Void Lords are not kind masters, and they primarily view mortals as cultists and slave labor. Those rare few who share in their master's malice may receive Voidtech upgrades, mutating them into maddened cybernetic shock-troops. Alternately, cross-breeding with gremlins produces colonies of vile technomorphic god-blooded. With their powerful Charms, Apostates can easily force their will upon existing gremlin hives and have little to fear besides each other.

## HAZARDS

While gremlins, blightborn and the occasional Apostates pose the greatest danger to intruders brave or foolish enough to enter a Blight Zone, these monsters are not the only hazards. The machinery of the Pole of Metal is dangerous enough when working correctly, let alone when malfunctioning. Fallen wires that seem dead may suddenly spark to life, electrocuting anyone standing on the floor. Rust-weakened bulkheads can suddenly give way, exploding from the buildup of pneumatic pressure. In short, anything that is dangerous elsewhere in Autochthonia gets worse when the Void overtakes it.

**Depleted Essence:** The one consistent feature of all Blight Zones is the total absence of available notes to respire with rest or meditation. Beings capable of perceiving the flow of Essence directly see only empty darkness where the whorls of power and geomantic currents should flow. Other sources of Essence recovery function normally. Some gremlins recharge in the healthy areas immediately surrounding their home, while others subsist entirely on what they can steal as parasites and predators.

**Variable Features:** The Void expresses chaos as much as entropy, meaning there are almost as many permutations of Blight Zones as Blight Zones. Some induce madness, while others heal cripples by seeding their wounds with unholy technomorphic grafts. Even veterans cannot really know what to expect when they attack a Blight Zone apart from the obvious conclusion that the area will be bad and full of surprises.

## GREMLINS AND CREATURES OF THE VOID

Like Apostates, gremlins are exmachina who have contracted the Gremlin Syndrome mutation and thus possess a Dissonance track. While this may not make them immediately monstrous, the absence of non-violent human interaction causes Dissonance to accumulate until it caps out and the spirits become absolute monsters. There are many ways that spirits can gain this malady, but most involve ongoing torture and physical maiming until they break and succumb to their tormentors' madness. Many develop the Void Submission Charm (below). Mortals may also rarely acquire this condition, though Alchemical Demiurges are completely immune to infection as an extra benefit of their enlightenment.

When blight zones, Voidtech and other Void-related sources inflict technomorphic mutations on a character, the victim does not instantly become a creature of the Void. That label only applies if to those who develop Gremlin Syndrome or possess more total points of Void mutations than their (Willpower + Essence). Once a mutant qualifies as a creature of the Void, that mutant doesn't count as human company for the purposes of reducing Clarity or Dissonance.

**Void Submission** (Essence 1; Keywords: Void): A gremlin with this permanent Charm forfeits a self-directed Motivation to become a conduit for the Void. Where all members of a gremlin tribe possess this Charm, they operate as savage, splintered hive minds that fight with one another as frequently as they combine into larger hordes. The Storyteller can reassign the gremlin's Motivation at will, provided it contributes in some way to the ultimate goal of killing Autochthon and creating the Engine of Extinction.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# MAN AND MACHINE

### POLAR MUTANTS

While the Pole of Metal is too diffuse to warp the biology of its inhabitants, the smaller geography of other Poles focuses ambient motic fields to extreme levels. Even so, rare human visitors are more likely to die in the face of elemental radiation than mutate. Only extended inhabitation over (Stamina + Willpower) years or (mother's Stamina + Willpower) months of prenatal exposure leads to the mutations described below. Two members of these races can also breed true with one another, or cross-breed with other types to produce hybrids with some or all of both parents' traits. Mutations listed without explanation can be found in **Exalted**, beginning on page 288. Polar mutations only alter flesh-and-blood life (i.e. humans, rats and cockroaches); Alchemicals aren't affected.

### ARCSPAWN

The Pole of Lightning borders on uninhabitable, not only for the obvious hazard of metal-vaporizing lightning strikes

coruscating through most areas, but also the scarcity of nutrient veins. What few human colonies exist are small tribes of mutants lairing in shielded junction boxes, sending out their strongest warrior-gatherers through portals into the Reaches of the Pole of Metal to bring back food and supplies.

Fortunately, arcspawn need only half the food and water of normal humans as a result of partially-metabolizing the ionizing radiance of their home. Away from such conditions, their bodies struggle to keep up and require much more food. This hunger alone would make them unwelcome in the Octet, even if they did not also give away their heritage with strangely lithe bodies and uniquely-patterned bioluminescent skin. There is unmistakable beauty to the way these delicate creatures bob and pirouette between surging arcs of plasma without getting struck, but it is a strange beauty abhorrent to the orthodoxy of the Eight Nations.

#### Mutations (0 points)

*Arcspawn Body (Pox)*: This mutation encompasses the race's distinctive elongated limbs and sudden twitchy

movements in the presence of lightning, as well as natural subdermal bioluminescence organs. The pattern of electricity-hued lights toggles between torch brightness and complete suppression as a reflexive action.

*Lightning Metabolism (Pox):* Arcspawn need 50% less food and water while within the Pole of Lightning. They require 50% more sustenance away from this energy source. Percentage is based on a normal human's dietary needs.

*Arc Dancer (Blight):* Arcspawn add a bonus of their (Wits + Perception) to their Dodge DV for the purposes of avoiding an electrical hazard through its Evasion rating. The bonus also applies as extra dice to activate electrical portals (see p. 117). Finally, attacks based on the element of lightning are never unexpected; they intuitively feel the air sizzle in warning just before the flash.

*Fragile (Debility):* For all their agility, arcspawn aren't durable. Their delicate bones break easily, applying half of all bashing levels suffered in step 10 as lethal damage instead (rounded down).

*Frail (Deficiency):* Arcspawn can't have Stamina 3+, either during character creation or in play.

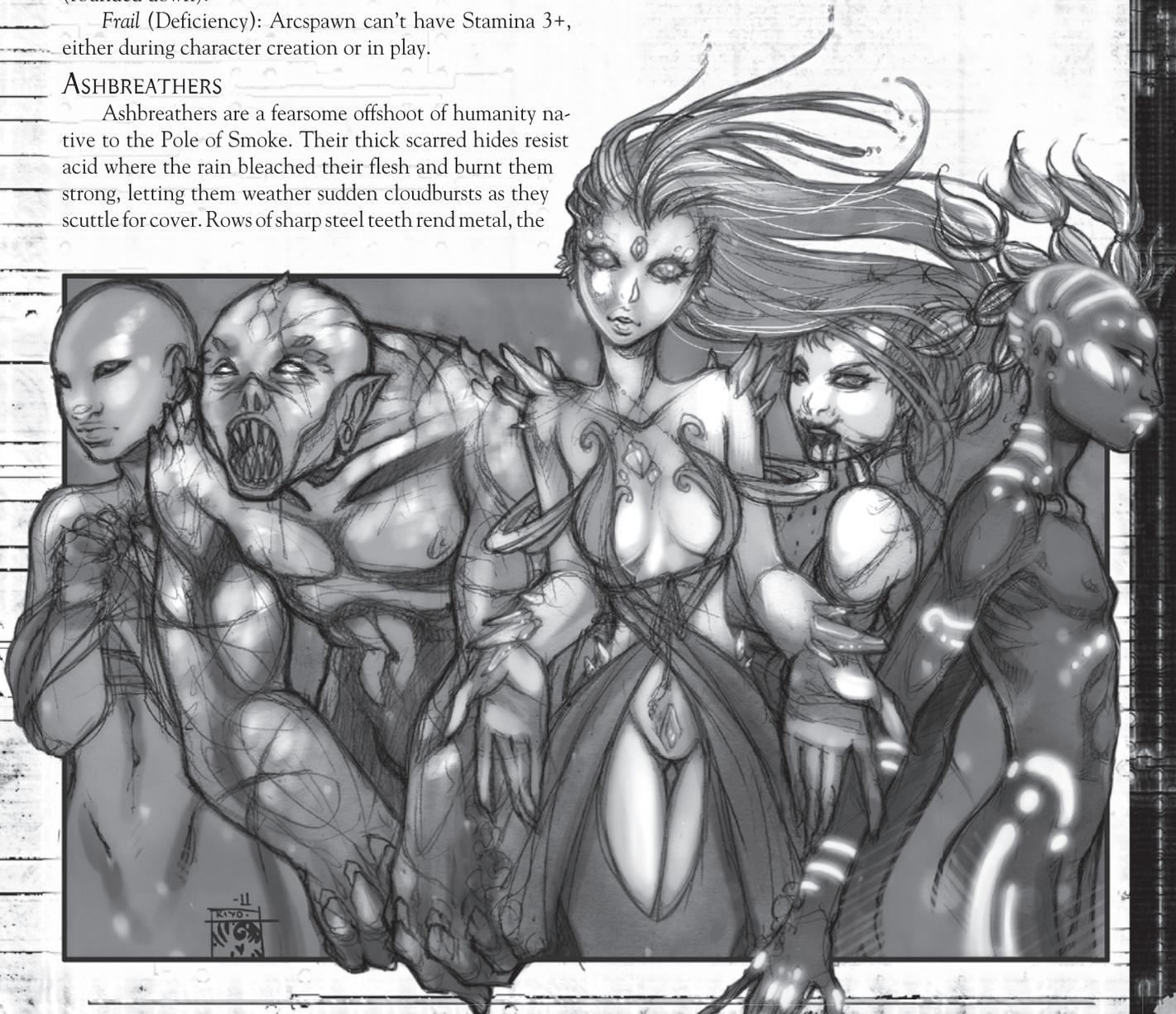
## ASHBREATHERS

Ashbreathers are a fearsome offshoot of humanity native to the Pole of Smoke. Their thick scarred hides resist acid where the rain bleached their flesh and burnt them strong, letting them weather sudden cloudbursts as they scuttle for cover. Rows of sharp steel teeth rend metal, the

only food their toxic gullets can process. Although magical materials are too hard to eat, the Essence-infused bodies of exmachina offer a rare and coveted delicacy.

Ashbreathers breathe poisoned smoke as pure air and slowly choke in clean air, a fact that has largely confined them to the brutal landfill that spawned them. They roam the Pole of Smoke in nomadic tribes, sheltering in makeshift shanty towns made of local scrap. Their hunters stalk weak and damaged spirits lost in the junkyard, though they can subsist on a bitter diet of gnawed wreckage during lean times.

Ashbreather tribes intermittently war and trade with Xexas, but they are not tolerated within the city. Scavenger crews operate on a rotating-roster system in order to limit time spent outside the safety of the city's protective Charms. On the rare occasions that dental inspections reveal teeth darkening with steel, the afflicted are exiled and somberly added to the city's memorial wall.



## RACIAL TEMPLATES

When a living being becomes a polar mutant, they immediately gain all of the drawbacks and advantages of their new state and cannot take these traits piecemeal. Similarly, it is not normally possible to buy off negative mutations associated with these templates by spending experience. The Storyteller can permit special exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis for heroic characters as concept-defining events, like a legendary Arcspawn martial artist whose grueling training regimen hardens her bones.

Beings that are born (hatched, spawned, etc.) with a racial template rather than having it imposed on them outside the womb (egg, vat, etc.) consider their mutations innate traits. Effects that remove mutations cannot remove these traits, as they are part of the creature's default state rather than a modification of it. For instance, a djala cannot be grown larger by excising mutations from it, while someone shrunk by Wyld exposure can. Ultimately, the Storyteller arbitrates what is an actual mutation rather than an intrinsic quality modeled with mutation rules.

**Mutations:** (0 points):

*Fangs* (Pox), *Scarred Hide* (Pox; As *Fur*), *Diet* (Debility; Metal/Exmachina)

*Acid Resistance* (Pox): Ashbreathers add half their (Stamina + Resistance) as bonus successes (rounded down) to all rolls to resist corrosion-based hazards.

*Poison Lungs* (Pox): Per their name, ashbreathers can breathe the thickest and deadliest of fumes as if it were the cleanest of air, ignoring all environmental, suffocation or poison-related harm. Clean air is treated as water for the purpose of suffocation, save that all intervals are one hour rather than 30 seconds.

*Hungry* (Deficiency): Ashbreather metabolisms need 25% more food. Starvation penalties occur in half the time, measuring their interval in half days rather than days. They suffer a -1 internal penalty to gather food with Survival, though this doesn't typically matter in their native environment.

*Hunger Frenzy* (Deficiency): While hungry enough to suffer penalties, ashbreathers must make (difficulty 2) Temperance checks whenever presented with food. Failure means they must gorge themselves until satiation, attacking anyone who gets in their way like partially-controlled Berserk Anger (see *Exalted*, p. 105).

## RUIN-EATERS

The worst mutated tribes of ashbreathers add the following mutations (zero point difference): Large (Pox), Tusks

(Affliction replaces Fangs; +2L damage to bite), Thick Skin (Pox adds +2L/2B to basic Scarred Hide bonuses)

*Night Vision* (Pox): The faceted red eyes of ruin-eaters see in darkness as though lit by the full moon. In conditions as bright as the full moon, they see like daylight.

*Short Life* (Deformity): The superior bodies of ruin-eaters quickly wear out, halving their lifespan.

## RENTERS

Ashbreathers who eat gremlins as the main part of their diet for a month must make a (difficulty 2) Willpower roll. On a failure, they acquire the ruin-eater template (if they didn't have it already), plus the following:

**Mutations** (0 points): *Enhanced Sight* (Pox), *Enhanced Hearing* (Pox), *Exalted Healing* (Affliction; Rencers heal like the Chosen) and *Gremlin Syndrome* (Deformity)

## GLASS WALKERS

Few humans find their way to the Pole of Crystal, and even these live on the periphery of its splendors for fear of giving offense to the mighty exmachina who dwell nearest to the slumbering Core. The glass walkers are a peculiarly beautiful race with glittering fiber-optic hair, bright jeweled eyes and organic mineral studs growing from each chakra. They live an ascetic existence communing with Autochthon, yet not really understanding his nature any better for that crude communion. The primitive crystal clans are quick to attack intruders who fail to show proper deference to the holy land on which they live.

After (Willpower rating) years, the mineral growths on adolescent glass walkers spread over their flesh as an articulated second skin that hums and chimes in accordance with the unknowable beauty of Autochthon's somnolent genius. The soft inner music is at once fulfilling and addictive, keeping mature members from venturing into the cold silence beyond their native pole.

Some adults experience the song of the Great Maker more fully and become alchemical demiurges as they age. These Anointed Ones receive invitation to attend the Adamant Caste and labor in the glittering paradise fortresses of the Chosen, preparing the miracles with which the Servitors of Autochthon enact the will of the Divine Ministers. For security reasons, memories of this glorious educated servitude receive cleansing in death so that future lives cannot recall time spent among the legendary Caste.

**Basic Mutations** (0 points): *Jeweled Hide* (Pox; As *Fur*)

*Dream Dependency* (Deficiency): Glass walkers add one die on Conviction rolls to recover Willpower while in their native Pole of Crystal, but this minor perk is more than offset by the -2 external penalty they suffer on such rolls away from the comforting emanations of their god.

**Stage Two Mutations** (0 points): *Crystal Spur Knuckles* (Pox; as *Claws*), *Pole Addiction* (Debility; as *Wyld Addiction*, but ties them to their native pole and doesn't compel deeper exploration), *Armored Hide* (Blight; replaces *Jeweled Hide*)

*Dream-Bound* (Debility; replaces *Dream Dependency*): The bonus and penalty to recover Willpower in and outside of their native pole increase to +2 and -5, respectively.

## OILKIN

Seemingly normal in outward appearance, oilkin have black sticky blood that smells faintly of tar and greasy, rainbow-sheen sweat that is slippery like industrial lubricants. Their physiochemical adaptations make them more resistant to toxins and other chemical hazards, but they are dependent on drinking oil. Thus, they must still stick to living in air-filled biomechanoids and custodians or the jury-rigged arcologies of sealed factories jutting up from the ocean floor, intermittently traveling down into the Pole of Metal to forage or trade.

Prejudice against the oilkin is less intense than other polar mutants face, chiefly due to the lack of obvious external signifiers. A surprising number live in the lowest rungs of Loran society, descended from tunnel tribes integrated into the populace during the city's origin pilgrimage. Others picked up the mutations as a result of a lifetime spent working outside the safety of Loran's life-support Charms. Given how dirty such jobs are, some mutants go unnoticed for years, while others remain officially ignored so long as they keep their condition to themselves.

### Mutations (0 points)

*Chemical Resistance* (Pox): Oilkin add half their (Stamina + Resistance) as bonus successes (rounded down) on all rolls to resist the effects of exposure to hazardous chemicals or poisons, as well as rolls to hold their breath. This doesn't help against poisons created by living beings, like animal venom or plant toxins. The mutation makes oilkin blood a viscous black substance, as revealed by most non-bashing damage.

*Oil Sweat* (Pox): Whenever oilkin overheat, fail a Valor check or choose to sweat in a stressful situation, their skin oozes an iridescent slippery secretion that provides a -1 external penalty on efforts to grapple them (unless absorbed by thick clothing). Until cleaned, the secretions are distinctly inhuman.

*Oil Thirst* (Debility): Oilkin drink oil instead of water to stave off thirst, requiring 50% more fluid per day than normal humans. They cannot suffer harm from drinking any oil substance, regardless of its toxicity or usual caustic properties. Oils extracted from plants or rendered fat suffice.

## STEAMBLOODED

The Pole of Steam is even harder to survive than the Pole of Lightning, inasmuch as most of it is filled with a boiling sea. However, there are also condensation engines that protrude into the Pole, in which the close proximity of industrial coolants keeps temperatures down to mere sauna levels. Small tribes of steamblooded dwell in these engine complexes, traveling by way of portal ducts that metaspatially connect the survivable archipelago of subsystems.

Steamblooded appear mostly human, but with hairless skin that has an unnatural plastic smoothness to it. This is

easily concealed with clothing. Additionally, all wounds that bleed foam and hiss with the sound of escaping pressure. The mutants are fonts of limitless vigor and quickly regenerate from scalding, at the tragic cost of halving their lifespan as overtaxed metabolisms burn out. Steamblooded tunnel folk use their secret knowledge of Autochthonia's portal ducts to evade the Octet and maintain a limited black market between cities. To say that all steamblooded vagrants are thieves and capitalists is a stereotype, but the epithets apply more often than not.

**Mutations** (0 points): *Inhuman Skin* (Pox; As *Fur*), *Short Life* (Deformity)

*Scald Regeneration* (Affliction): Steamblooded subtract 2 levels from post-soak damage suffered in step 7 when injured by scalding. Prevented damage is cosmetically applied, but heals away in the span of an action. As a price, all bleeding foams and hisses inhumanly.

*Inexhaustible* (Affliction): These mutants never suffer fatigue from any non-magical source. The steamblooded variant of this mutation also precludes the ability to sleep or need for such. They can only recover Willpower by other means.

*Cold Sensitivity* (Deficiency): Steamblooded need warmth, adding +1 to the difficulty of Survival in cold climates and +2 to the difficulty to resist cold-based environmental hazards.

## BLIGHTBORN

Some regions desecrated by the Void contain a mutagenic radiance that can warp unborn children. Each week of prenatal exposure prompts a (difficulty 1) Essence roll for the mother, with failure resulting in corruption of her unborn offspring. Adults are not naturally vulnerable to this transformation, though powerful Apostates have demonstrated Voidtech Charms capable of inflicting the state to promote minions and torture prisoners.

Blightborn appear mostly human, enough to fool the ignorant masses. Their slightly enlarged skulls, angular faces and oversized eyes faintly resemble the tortured fossils of Nameless Ones found in soulsteel, prompting unnerved double-takes from savants who catch a glimpse out of their peripheral vision. Blightborn eyes burn red in the dark—the secondary ocular-tumors responsible also extend needle-thin spikes into the skull, branching out into a forest of barbed circuits that augment thought even as they shred all sanity.

The known danger of conceiving blightborn children has prompted policies forbidding pregnant women from entering Blight Zones as combatants or scouts. In the interest of deterring Voidbringers mad enough to try, only Tripartite leaders know the rationale behind these laws. For the Populat, it's enough to say that Void energies can complicate pregnancies.

Blightborn draw their first breath with full awareness of their world, already more intelligent than most adults. The shrieking song of the Engine of Extinction hums within their

minds, urging them to birth its abomination as it birthed them. This shared music draws them together, gathering them in vicious think-tanks of sociopathic tinkers that attend Apostates as acolytes. Some fallen Champions flee to the Far Reaches and take refuge in Blight Zones, only to find their prophetic slaves waiting for them with jury-rigged Vats and armories of horrific Charms ready to install.

**Mutations** (0 points): *Night Vision* (Pox), *Gremlin Syndrome* (Deformity)

*Eerie Glow* (Deficiency): Blightborn suffer a -1 external penalty to Stealth while in the dark due to glowing red eyes. The penalty also applies to social attacks against non-creatures of the Void who can see the unnatural light.

*Void Attunement* (Debility): Blightborn mentally intuit instructions from the Engine of Extinction. The Storyteller controls when these horrid visions occur and what information they reveal. Some glimpses rewrite the mutants' Motivation as an irresistible Servitude effect, directing them to whatever Storyteller-defined task best serves the Void. Common duties involve journeying to specific locations (thereby gathering these mutants), building Vats and serving Apostates. While blightborn effectively lack self-determination, they receive one perk. Gremlins recognize them on sight and do not attack them unless externally compelled or in self-defense. Women pregnant with blightborn also receive this protection. Only mortals can possess this mutation.

*Broken Demiurge* (Abomination): The blightborn's connection to Autochthon's diseased brilliance enables them to function as crude demiurges whenever five or more of them labor together. This damaged knowledge does not let them create new Alchemicals and prevents them from installing non-Voidtech Charms/submodules in an Alchemical without Gremlin Syndrome. They are considered to have a rating of 5 in all Craft Abilities for performing their demiurge duties and can design new Charms in their makeshift Vats without aid of an Alchemical city, but can't apply this Craft intuition to other endeavors. Only mortals with Gremlin Syndrome can possess this mutation.

#### NEW CHARM:

#### ABSTRACT BODY CRYSTALLIZATION

**Cost:** —; **Mins:** Essence 1; **Type:** Permanent

**Keywords:** Native

**Duration:** Permanent

Gods and demons with this Charm condense their spiritual bodies into a shell of mass, existing in a naturally material state (much like elementals). Should they wish to become immaterial, they must learn and use the Dematerialize Charm. This Charm is common among weaker exmachina, but few gods or demons outside Autochthonia possess it.

## THE VOID-EATEN

### GREMLIN CUSTODIAN

As the Great Maker's sickness worsens, the Void metastasizes throughout his soul hierarchy. Machine gods that once preserved Autochthon's inner workings turn against him, shattering gears and devouring vital components in a consumptive rage. Gremlin spirits rarely have any higher goal than the mad destructive instincts that arise from their tainted nature, unless brought under the command of an Apostate.

These traits are representative of a gremlin exmachina of significant power, capable of threatening a lone Champion or mobbing an Assembly in swarms. Storytellers can customize them by changing their mutations, Charms, or Essence rating.

**Motivation:** Destroy Autochthon.

**Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 6

**Virtues:** Automaton

**Abilities:** Athletics 4 (Breaking Machines +3), Awareness 5, Dodge 4, Integrity 4, Martial Arts 7 (Bite +3), Presence 2 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 5, Stealth 6, Survival 5

**Backgrounds:** Cult 2

**Mutations:** Gremlin Syndrome, Extra Legs (x3), Machine Mind, Void Adaption

#### Charms

*Abstract Body Crystallization*

*Bane Weapon*—Against ungremlinized exmachina.

*Dematerialize*—65 motes to dematerialize.

*Essence Bite*—Lethal damage only.

*Essence Plethora* (x5)

*Inurement*—Protection against Lightning, Metal, and Steam effects.

*Landscape Travel*—Climb up metal surfaces without regard for gravity.

*Measure the Wind*—Assess automatons, exmachina, and Alchemicals.

*Meat of Broken Flesh*—Against exmachina.

*Ox-Body Technique* (x3)

*Principle of Motion*—8 actions banked.

*Reserve of Will* (x3)

*Sabotage*—Machines and exmachina only.

*Sheathing the Material Form*—Draws in scrap metal and rubble to form a protective carapace.

*Spice of Custodial Delectation*—Machines being destroyed.

*First (Ability) Excellency*—Athletics, Martial Arts

*Second (Ability) Excellency*—Stealth

**Join Battle:** 11

#### Attacks:

Bite: Speed 5, Accuracy 15, Damage 11L, Parry DV 8, Rate 2  
Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 12, Damage 8B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 22L/26B (Voidtech Carapace 18L/18B)

**Hardness:** 12L/12B  
**Health Levels:** -0/-1x9/-2x8/-4/Incap  
**Dodge DV:** 7    **Willpower:** 8 (11 points)  
**Essence:** 5    **Personal Essence:** 140  
**Other Notes:** None

### GREMLIN BIOMECHANOID

Biomechanoids and golems are as vulnerable to Gremlin Syndrome as humans and machine gods. Degenerative thought-patterns slowly degrade their encoded sentience and machine logic, perverting them to the purposes of the Void. As gremlinization progresses, their mechanical components begin to extrude organic matter, chitinous membranes and fleshy tumors. A fully evolved gremlin-automaton is monstrous amalgamation of meat and machine, its oculars glowing a dim predatory red.

These traits represent a wide range of gremlins, and can be customized for different variations. While most will not threaten a Champion, they can menace even the strongest mortal heroes or serve as minions for an Apostate or gremlinized machine spirit.

**Motivation:** Destroy and consume all non-gremlin life.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Virtues:** Automaton

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Martial Arts 4, Resistance 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2

**Mutations:** All gremlin biomechanoids have the Gremlin Syndrome and Void Adaptation mutations. Storytellers can customize them with additional mutations, such as the packages below:

*Gremlin Scout:* Armored Hide, Chameleon, Enhanced Sense (Sight, Hearing), Greater Natural Missile (Punch), Penetrating Strike (Punch), Small, Talons, Wings

*Void Golem:* Armored Hide, Disturbing Visage, Extra Arms (x2), Large, Penetrating Strike (Punch), Talons

*Submersible Hunter:* Armored Hide, Gills, Large, Talons, Tentacles (x2), Toxin (x2)

**Join Battle:** 5

**Attacks:**

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 4B, Parry DV 5, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 7B, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 4B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 13L/15B (Transorganic Carapace +10L/10B)

**Hardness:** 5L/5B

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 5    **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 2

**Other Notes:** As automatons, gremlin biomechanoids do not sleep, breathe, or become fatigued, and are considered to be magical beings. Poisons and Sicknesses cannot affect them. Their minds are artificial, as per the Machine Mind mutation (see p. 131).

### FALLEN IXUT

Ixut's destruction numbers among the greatest catastrophes in modern Autochthonian history, an unthinkable breach of the natural order. The spirits of the dead wander among the city's ruins, unable to return to the Ewer of Souls, while hungry ghosts stalk through gas-choked tunnels and the wreckage of Municipal Charms. At the center of it all is Ixut's ghost, a towering plasmic emanation half-bound within his cracked soulgem, doomed to an eternity of impotent suffering.

Ixut cycles through awareness and quiescence. His eerie green luminance casts the whole city in dim light and disturbing shadows, sending ghosts scuttling to find shelter amid the industrial graveyard. At times, the plasm of his cyclopean form manifests a face, a pitiful inhuman mask that gapes out at any who dare the ruins. Despite the horror of the dead city, the ghost holds no real malevolence. He is instead tormented by confusion, not knowing what has happened to the city that he once was.

The ghost's death-Essence is incompatible with the geomantic grid that powered his former Municipal Charms. He is capable only of using ghostly Arcanoi, primarily Charms that create illusions, ward or observe his fetters, and control hungry ghosts. However, he cannot move from the ruined core of the patropolis, nor can he materialize or take any physical actions. Instead, he must create the grotesque amalgams of ghost and machine called the Shadows of Ixut.

Creating one of these servitors is an ordeal for the ghost. He must mutilate his dormant po soul, extracting a fragment and imbuing it into one of the Colossus bodies of the city's Avatar-Launching Silos. Each Shadow created exhausts Ixut's limited supply of Colossus-bodies, and further degrades his maimed po. Worse still, the heretical fusion of ghost and machine opens the ghost's mind to the Void every time he performs it, if only for a moment. Eventually, he will create one Shadow too many, and fall to the madness of Gremlin Syndrome.

### SHADOWS OF IXUT

**Motivation:** Chosen by Ixut's ghost, often "Investigate the ruins of Ixut" or "Defend Ixut's ruins against intruders."

**Attributes:** Strength 12, Dexterity 10, Stamina 12, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 7, Intelligence 2, Wits 7

**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 5, Valor 5

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Awareness 6, Dodge 5, Integrity 4, Martial Arts 8 (Clinch +3), Presence 5 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 8, Stealth 2

**Essence Powers**

The Colossus husks used to create Shadows of Ixut still have a frayed sympathetic attunement to the Avatar-Launching Silo used to create them. Exploiting this attunement, Shadows are capable of tapping into the geomantic grid of fallen Ixut and manipulating the barely-standing remains of

its Municipals Charms. Though they cannot truly use these Charms, they can manipulate their malfunctions to employ the following Essence powers, as well as any others which the Storyteller might wish to grant them.

**Broken Circuit Misfire**—A Shadow can pay five motes as a Speed 5 action to send a surge of lightning Essence through the city's Rat-Slaying Electrification Grid (this action cannot be flurried). An arc of lightning surges upwards from any point in the city within one hundred yards of the Shadow, an instantaneous environmental hazard with Damage 5L, Trauma 5. This lightning arc has a radius of up to twenty yards and stretches up to one hundred yards high.

**Omniscient Machine Network**—Shunting its senses through the tattered Elemental Crystal Ganglion of Ixut, a Shadow can perceive any point within the ruins as though it stood there. Shifting between vantage points within the city requires a miscellaneous action. While observing other locations, the Shadow can act normally, but suffers the penalties of blindness.

**Necromechanical Regeneration**—While within Ixut's ruins, a Shadow heals two levels of non-aggravated damage each action tick, tapping the city's Infrastructural Upkeep Grid. Attacks against it cannot deal more levels of damage than the attacker's (Essence x 2). It loses this healing and defense if its mote pool is completely depleted, or its Incapacitated health level is filled with lethal damage.

**Join Battle:** 13

**Attacks:**

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 19, Damage 12L, Parry DV 10, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 18, Damage 15L, Parry DV 8, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 23, Damage 12B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

**Soak:** 30L/35B (Armor Plating 21L/23B)

**Hardness:** 15L/15B

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x8/-2x8/-4x4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 11    **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 7    **Personal Essence:** 70

## THE VIATOR OF NULLSPACE

Across the Eight Nations, laborers huddled around their workstations still whisper of the devastating god-machine they call the Bringer of Death, the Dread Gear, or the Minister of Wrath. Only in the archives of the Tripartite is the truth laid bare. 999 years ago, the Viator of Nullspace laid genocidal siege to Autochthonia, massacring its peoples. The massive engine of war stood twelve feet tall, armored in a spiked carapace of soulsteel, starmetal, and black jade, and the obsidian beamklave that extruded from its left hand cut down Alchemical Exalted and subgods alike. Cracked soulgems embedded in its torso glisten menacingly, ripped from the heads of slaughtered Champions.

But Exalted power and heroic self-sacrifice proved enough to defeat the Viator, sealing it back in the nullspace,

a conceptual realm that exists only where Autochthon's dreams and nightmares spill out into the inchoate void of Elsewhere. But the ur-destroyer cannot be contained by its void-cage forever. The last time it emerged into the Realm of Brass and Shadows, its ambitions were nothing less than titanomachy—once all within Autochthonia were dead, the Viator planned to forge them into a great soulsteel wedge with which to tear loose the Core, harvesting the mind of the Maker and casting the rest of Autochthon's diseased being into oblivion.

Long exile has driven it to a new purpose. After centuries of exile, the Viator encountered another being exploring the conceptual edge of the nullspace—a vast serpent of emptiness and shadows. The Viator struggled with the exploring titan, in the end perfectly sealing the nullspace in an attempt to trap it—but the serpent's mastery of the art of escape proved peerless, and it fled. In its inadvertent defense of Autochthonia, the Viator learned of the Yozis. It felt Autochthon's suffering at their hands, saw their cosmic power.

Now, the Dread Gear ceaselessly turns its power against its prison, seeking once more to open a rift into the Realm of Brass and Shadows. When it erupts forth in triumph, the world will once again suffer its wrath—but this time, the Viator has a new plan to save Autochthon. It will descend upon the Divine Ministers and remake them through gruesome surgeries, fashioning them into demonic engines like itself. The blood of slaughtered Autochthonians will grease the spiked gears of churning prayer wheels, and their dying voices will sing prayers to their new god. The cities will be rebuilt into a mandala of war. Through the mutilation of his soul hierarchy and the sacrifice of his populace, the Viator of Nullspace will transform Autochthon, fashioning him into a vampiric god-monster of consumption and cannibalistic predation.

On the day when the Great Maker rises again, the skies of Malfeas will burn with new fire, as the massive Uran-drills of the Bleeding Engine's tendrils come down from the sky and burrow deep into the crust of the Demon City.

**Motivation:** Scourge away the civilization of the Eight Nations, and remake Autochthon as a monstrous Primordial predator.

**Attributes:** Strength 16, Dexterity 10, Stamina 16, Charisma 8, Manipulation 8, Appearance 0, Perception 10, Intelligence 8, Wits 10

**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 5

**Abilities:** Archery 10 (Chakra Points +3), Athletics 10, Awareness 6, Dodge 6, Integrity 10, Lore 6 (Stolen Memories +3), Martial Arts 10 (Crippling Attacks +3), Melee 10 (Dismemberment +3), Occult 6 (Primordial Metaphysics +3), Performance 8, Presence 8 (Intimidation +3), Resistance 10, War 6

**Charms:** The Viator of Nullspace is capable of using a wide array of Spirit Charms, almost all of which are All-Encompassing. It lacks any Charms for possessing other

characters or objects, shapechanging, predicting the future, or blessing others. The Viator has a Second Excellency for all Abilities, and a full nine purchases of Essence Plethora, Ox-Body Technique, and Reserve of Will. Materializing costs it 95 motes. It also possesses a number of unique panoply Charms, some of which are listed below. Other panoply Charms are capable of disrupting the Essence flows that power Municipal Charms, mentally controlling destroyers and weaker exmachina, and other blasphemous feats.

*Consumptive Divinity Void*—As a creature of death, the Viator is incapable of respiring motes normally within Autochthonia. However, it gains a single mote each time it kills a living being. Against Primordials, their demons and devas, and the Alchemical Exalted, each successful attack also drains a single mote for each level of lethal or aggravated damage inflicted, which is restored to the Viator's mote pool. Within Blight Zones, the Viator respirees ten motes each hour, siphoning Essence from nullspace where the conceptual boundaries of Autochthonia are at their weakest.

*Dread Gear Fortification*—Should a single attack or environmental hazard deal enough damage to the Viator to fill all its health levels of a certain type (-1, -2, and so on), any damage beyond that amount is prevented. Poison and Sickness effects cannot damage it beyond its -1 health levels. All Shaping effects the Viator suffers are terminated at the end of each scene; Shaping that would instantly destroy it is negated, instead causing the Dread Gear to suffer only a single level of aggravated damage.

*Encoded Genocide Patterns*—The Viator cannot be argued with, treating all natural mental influence as unacceptable orders. Unnatural influence never costs it more than three Willpower to resist. Influence that aligns with its Motivation bypasses this defense.

*Panopticon Lens*—The blood-red sphere of the Viator's eye replicates all the benefits of the following Optical Enhancement submodules: Cross-Phase Scanners, Essence Sight Oculars, Flash Shutters, Light-Intensification Filters, Mass-Penetrating Scan, Telescopic Lens, and Thermal Vision (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals**, page 158). The lens can also fire pulses of disintegrating essence, detailed in the Viator's attacks.

*Reality-Shredding Cascade*—Reality seems to ripple and waver around the Viator of Nullspace, maimed by its very presence. This aura of spatial distortion is a Shaping environmental hazard that extends up to five hundred yards from the Viator, with Damage 5L/action, Trauma 4.



The Viator can suppress or resume this aura as a miscellaneous action.

*Unfolding Nullspace Portal*—The Viator can warp space around itself in a blinding display of impossible geometry and rippling white tesseracts. It may pay five motes to teleport to any point it can see within five hundred yards as a miscellaneous action (only one such action can be included in a flurry). It can also pay nine motes in Step 2 of an attack to reflexively teleport in this way, perfectly dodging even if the attack is undodgeable. A surcharge of one Willpower extends this defense to one tick, letting the Viator teleport after each new attack. As an action taking one long tick, the Viator may attempt to teleport to any point in the Pole of Metal that it is familiar with for a cost of 75 motes, 3 Willpower, vanishing at the end of the tick. If it takes any damage before the long tick ends, this long-range teleportation fails; the Viator may use no other Charms while teleporting in this fashion.

*Unholy Eidolon*—Alchemical Exalted who die at the Viator's hands suffer ultimate desecration, their soulgems and memories absorbed by the destroyer. Whenever the Viator invokes this stolen knowledge as part of a stunt—for instance, navigating a metropolis by calling up memories of its design, or intimidating an Alchemical by recounting the dying thoughts of a fellow Champion—it converts all stunt dice to successes. Stunted social attacks are considered unnatural mental influence and cost three Willpower to resist.

### APOCALYPTIC ORIGINS

The origins of the Viator of Nullspace remain an unsolved mystery. It might be a forbidden Divine Minister, or a misbegotten artifact of destruction forged in Autochthon's wrath. Perhaps it is a temporally splintered hekatonkire-soul of the Neverborn that the Great Maker might one day become, or a hideous amalgam of po souls ripped from Alchemical Exalted lost in the Far Reaches. Some thought it a Void Lord, but the manic zeal with which it destroyed Apostates and gremlins the last time it was free suggests this is not so. It claims to have been hand-crafted by Autochthon.

Mechanically, the Viator is a spirit of extreme power, comparable to a Third Circle demon, with certain traits disturbingly suggestive of Alchemical origins. It is not affected by Axiomatic or Holy magic, although it is a creature of death. Individual Storytellers who have picked a specific origin for the Viator are encouraged to alter these details and its other traits to fit their decision for their own games.

**Join Battle:** 16

**Attacks:**

Obsidian Beamklave Armature\*: Speed 5, Accuracy 23, Damage 28L, Parry DV 12, Rate 3

Ocular Essence Cannon: Speed 6, Accuracy -2, Damage 30L, Rate 1, Range 125, Rate 1

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 26, Damage 16L, Parry DV —, Rate 1

\*See *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Alchemicals*, page 210 for beam weapon traits. The Viator need not pay to attune to or deploy the beamklave armature; it is a natural extension of itself.

**Soak:** 32L/40B (Five-Metal Bulwark 24L/24B)

**Hardness:** 15L/15B

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x16/-2x15/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 13    **Willpower:** 10 (19 points)

**Essence:** 9    **Essence Pool:** 230

### NEW MUTATIONS

#### POXES

*Hyper-Awareness:* The mutant's sensory cortex is covered in neurological growths or enhanced by cybernetic upgrades, giving it an uncanny sense for hidden dangers. The mutant is always treated as being actively wary for detecting unexpected attacks (see *Exalted*, p. 155), adding a single die on all rolls to detect ambushes and never suffering penalties on such rolls for being distracted.

*Programmed Imperative:* Automaton with this mental mutation create a single Intimacy that represents a subsidiary set of programming in addition to that of their Motivation. This Intimacy can be maintained despite their automaton mentality and cannot be eroded, changed or removed by any means. Mental influence that is opposed by the Intimacy is considered an unacceptable order. Only automatons (or characters with the Machine Mind mutation) can benefit from this mutation. This mutation can be purchased multiple times.

*Void Adaptation:* Technorganic desecration spreads across the mutant's body, adapting to the deadly hazards of Blights by growing cystic external organs and mechanized augmentations. Characters with this mutation reduce any penalties they suffer from being in a Blight Zone by a single point, and are immune to any mundane environmental hazards found in Blight Zones. They add two automatic successes on all rolls made to survive or forage for food in a Blight. Mutants that are not creatures of the Void gain no benefits from this mutation.

#### AFFLICTIONS

*Disturbing Visage:* The mutant's physical appearance is somehow hideous or horrifying. Mutated gremlins may have bodies that are asymmetrical in ways that hurt the eyes, while organic mutants may appear monstrously deformed. Characters that engage the mutant in battle suffer a -1 external penalty on all attack rolls against it

out of fear unless they have Dodge MDV 8+ (two Willpower resists this natural influence for one scene). In social combat, they are treated as having base Appearance 0 for determining the penalties they inflict on other characters' MDVs—not necessarily because they are ugly, but because of the sheer horror of their appearance (see **Exalted**, page 172).

**Natural Missile:** One of the mutant's non-clinching natural attacks can be used at range, gaining Range 10. He might fire regenerating bone claws from his fist, shoot beams of Essence from his palms, or launch missile pods from ports built into his legs. Ranged attacks are made with Thrown, and are not considered unarmed for Martial Arts Charms. Taken as a blight called Greater Natural Missile, the mutation grants the weapon Range 50, and uses Archery rather than Thrown.

**Spinnerets:** The mutant can excrete sticky silk, synthetic adhesives, or some other web-like material. It can spray other characters with webbing to trap them, treated as an attack with a lasso, net, or bola that it can make no more than once per action tick. It can also fire a webline up to (Stamina x 10) yards as a miscellaneous action, which it can then use as though it were a securely-attached rope of perfect quality. After a scene in which the mutant uses this webbing, it must wait an hour before it can produce any more. Characters with the Argent Weaver Art Charm instead reduce the base cost to use it to zero motes.

## BLIGHTS

**Mesmerizing Gaze:** The mutant may pay a point of Willpower whenever it makes a social attack against a single character, causing its eyes (optical sensors, etc.) to glow in an Obvious pattern of luminous colors. If the target of the social attack makes eye contact with the mutant, they treat the social attack as unnatural mental influence. Essence-users can pay three motes to activate this mutation in lieu of Willpower. Taken as an abomination called Greater Mesmerizing Gaze, this mutation can enhance social attacks against multiple targets.

**Penetrating Strike:** One of the mutant's natural attacks gains the Piercing tag. It might mutate into a technorganic weapon able to rip through armor, or grow barbs of bone or chitin that puncture and piece armor.

## ABOMINATIONS

**Machine Mind:** Characters with this mutation become little more than organic automatons. They fail all Virtue rolls and are considered to have a single dot in all Virtues unless acting to fulfill their Motivations, in which case they succeed all Virtue rolls and have effective ratings of 5. In addition, they lose the capacity to form Intimacies, and lose all extant Intimacies. They regain a point of Willpower every hour, but no longer regain Willpower from sleep. Exalted cannot possess this mutation.

## NEW PROCEDURE

**Engineer Machine Graft** (3, Intelligence, 6, One month): This lengthy and expensive procedure of the Science of Bioenhancement creates mechanical grafts and prosthetics that can replicate the effects of any mutation that is entirely physical in nature (at the Storyteller's discretion). As with other procedures that create prosthetics, its Resources cost cannot be waived by spending Essence. Once finished, a machine graft must be installed using either the Implantation or Nerve-Muscle Graft procedures, granting the recipient the appropriate mutation as a Training effect.

## MORTAL HEROES

### DAKKON

Dakkon's long life has been marked by the highest Estasian virtues. His career as a regulator has seen great triumphs, from his famous arrest of an entire hundred-man Voidbringer cult to his rescue of Lux's autocrat from a monstrous gremlin-spirit. Such victories are responsible for his promotion to command over all regulator forces within the patropolis of Lux.

He is equally renowned for his martial arts prowess. Many Estasian soldiers and regulators have trained in the Five-Dragon and Live Wire styles under his instruction, and his skill rivals that of the greatest mortal masters of martial arts, such as Luk War-Saint of Jarish or Sova's legendary Inspector. His striking appearance makes him well-known, even to the Populat on the streets—few regulators sport a pair of mechanical limbs, fight with electrified chains, or have gone completely bald. Black-skinned and tall, Dakkon still boasts an impressive physique despite his age.

But great deeds are not enough for Dakkon. In his old age and growing wisdom, he despises Estasia's rapacious philosophy in the aftermath of the Elemental War between Sova and Yugash. His vision now is one of unity and peace, not martial glory. As a master of Live Wire style, Dakkon is well-versed in the history of the Flashing Wire Collective, once an international brotherhood of martially-skilled regulators. Now, the Collective is little more than a dueling club fraught with nationalist tensions—but Dakkon hopes restore the greatest of Autochthonian international endeavors to its former glory, inspiring the Eight Nations to unite in cooperation and mutual defense.

**Motivation:** Bring unity and order to the Eight Nations by reviving the Flashing Wire Collective.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Virtues:** Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

**Abilities:** Awareness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 4, Integrity 3 (Resisting Prejudice +2), Investigation 3 (Crimes +3), Linguistics 1 (Native: Autochthonic; Militat Signalcode), Lore 3, *Martial Arts* 5 (Live Wire Style +3), Melee 3, Occult 3, Performance 2, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Survival 3 (Tracking +2), War 1 (Coordinating Attacks +2)

**Backgrounds:** Allies (Former Students) 3, Backing (Regulators) 3, Class 4, Contacts (Informants and Fellow Martial Artists) 3

**Mutations:** Extra Arms

#### Charms

Dakkon has mastered all Charms of Five-Dragon style and Live Wire style that he qualifies for. He has learned Biting Scourge style, Thousand-Faceted Warrior style, and Stalwart Iron Hero style up to their Form-type Charms.

**Join Battle:** 6

#### Attacks:

Perfect Straight Sword: Speed 4, Accuracy 14, Damage 7L, Parry DV 6, Rate 4

Perfect Whips (3): Speed 5, Accuracy 16, Damage 9B, Parry DV 7, Rate 2, Tags D, R

**Soak:** 16L/17B (Perfect Superheavy Plate 14L/14B)

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 5

**Willpower:** 8

**Essence:** 3

**Personal Essence:** 26 (30)

**Committed Essence:** 4

**Other Notes:** None

## RATS

Rats are ubiquitous throughout the habitable zones of the Realm of Brass and Shadows, thriving in countless varieties of species. Rat-Slaying Electrification Grids keep urban rat populations small, but the vermin have no less a presence in Autochthonia than its human inhabitants. While some urban Autochthonians regard rats with the same distaste as Creation-dwelling people would (and given the threat of gremlinized rats, this is not without cause), it is not uncommon for societal elites to keep a rat as pet in certain nations. Some Tripartite members raise capybara-sized ratkine for their meat, milk, and pelts, luxuries whose wastefulness makes them clear status symbols. Wild rats can chew through metal piping to reach veins of nutrient paste, and the species has evolved a sense for avoiding hazardous conduits (they do not automatically fail foraging rolls without tools). Many tribes of tunnel people use tamed rats as a way of finding food, especially prizing bioluminescent glow-rats.

## MARTIAL ARTS IN AUTOCHTHONIA

Autochthon's exile came long after the development of the supernatural martial arts in Creation, and the enlightened masters he brought with him served as sifus for the people huddled in the Pole of Metal. Many styles, Terrestrial and Celestial, persist in the modern era, from Flame and Stone to Five-Dragon (which, contrary to Dynastic propaganda, significantly predates the invention of the Immaculate Styles).

Today, martial arts culture flourishes in Autochthonia. They promote health and mental focus amongst students, so every nation encourages the Populat to practice mundane arts during their limited free time. It's not unusual for members of the Populat or the younger Sodalts to be trained in Martial Arts and related Abilities. Sova uses formalized martial arts duels and wrestling as a release valve for societal tension; Kamak, as an exercise in finding internal comfort; Yugash, as a competitive sport. Potential students must obtain waivers to be released from their duties, and are subject to being drafted into citizen levies during wartime. Numerous schools have grown large enough to have cadet branches in other nations, resulting in intense international rivalries.

## PRODUCTIVITY RATS

Productivity rats are a bizarre quirk of Autochthonian industry. Rats that have been thaumaturgically bred for cleanliness and appearance are caged in the workrooms of child laborers, acting as pets and mascots. Children have a better work ethic in a factory with a productivity rat, cheered by its puppy-like appearance and antics. Unfortunately, in the face of extreme scarcity, these rats are only useful if this improved morale outweighs the resources needed to feed and maintain them. Should a work shift fail to perform, their rat will be painlessly euthanized.

## TERRIER-RATS

Terrier-rats stand as large as a cat or small dog, bred for size and intelligence over centuries. Most hunt wild vermin in cities or herd ratkine, but regulators have taken to using these rat-hounds on patrol in cities wealthy enough to maintain them. Estasia trains terrier-rats for battle in a few

Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/Wits/Will	Health Levels	Attacks (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Rat	1/2/2	2/2/3/3	-0/-1/-2/-4/1	Bite: 5/2/1L/1	1/0L/2B
Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Conduit Tapping +1)					

small war-kennels, with vicious results. Terrier-rats have the base traits of a rat, but also have the Armored Hide, Giant, and Talons mutations, as well as Dexterity 3, Martial Arts 3 and Dodge 4.

### GREMLIN RATS

Wild rats that wander into blight zones or are unfortunate enough to be the subject of an Apostate's experimentations may be corrupted by gremlin syndrome. These mutated rats pose little threat on their own, but are often massed in swarms by Apostates or gremlin custodians for raids on Autochthonian cities. Gremlin rats have the Gremlin Syndrome, Machine Mind, and Void Adaptation mutations, and up to ten points of other mutations chosen by the Storyteller. Some have enhanced traits as a terrier-rat. They have the Motivation "consume organic matter."

### ALCHEMICAL EXALTED

#### CHARM LOAD-OUTS

The Charms listed below do not represent the complete panoplies of these Champions, but instead sample installations that they might use for specific tasks. The Storyteller should feel free to customize these load-outs or add new Charms to their panoplies as he sees fit. Charms that are marked with a \* or \*\* are all part of a single array.

### MAGNANIMOUS RADIANT SERVITOR

When Claslat commissioned *Magnanimous Radiant Servitor*, they expected a bold and brilliant Champion, a charismatic orator or a tactical supergenius. What walked out from the vats was entirely different. Her first efforts at political leadership and artifact engineering were met with dismay—not for a lack of skill, but a lack of satisfaction. She felt a great empathy for all Autochthonia, a love that transcended politics or mechanical tinkering. Her compassion brought her to a conclusion tantamount to treason—she chose to abandon Claslat, and pledge herself to the service of Nurad.

*Servitor*, in her rising Clarity, saw the decision as perfectly reasonable. How could she do greater service to Autochthonia than to aid its most embattled nation? Claslat's Tripartite understood differently. Only by the efforts of *Servitor* and several other Alchemical diplomats was full-out war averted, concluding a treaty that leased the Archon to Nurad in exchange for continuing payments to Claslat that will stretch for decades.

The Orichalcum Caste now acts as something of a free agent in Nurad. While she is much loved by the populace, the Tripartite recognizes the foolishness of entrusting

critical duties into the hands of a potential double agent. Instead, she is given leave to do what she deems best in the nation's self-interest, guided by unwavering Clarity and a compassionate nature. For now, she has chosen to police the city of Wisant, defending it from gremlin incursions, preaching the Maker's dogma, and optimizing its Charms to help supply other metropoli with vital resources. As the best-supplied and most advanced city in Nurad, it is the ideal starting point for uplifting the rest of the nation to the same level.

**Motivation:** Guide and help Nurad through its times of scarcity and danger.

**Caste:** Orichalcum

**Anima Banner:** Crimson lightning streaks out behind her in a luminous ribbon of power.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3, Perception 3 (Labor 5), Intelligence 4 (Labor 5), Wits 5

**Virtues:** Compassion 5, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Earth) 3 (Civic Engineering +3), Craft (Fire) 5, Dodge 2, Integrity 4 (Incorrigible +3), Lore 4, Martial Arts 5 (Defending Civilians +2), Occult 4, Performance 3, Presence 2, Resistance 1, War 2

**Backgrounds:** Artifact 2, Backing (Theomachracy) 2, Class 3

**Charm Slots:** Dedicated 16, General 4

#### Charms

**Combat Load-Out:** 1st Dexterity Augmentation\*, 2nd Stamina Augmentation\*, 2nd Perception Augmentation\*, Essence Irradiation Corona\* (Optimized Trauma Upgrade), Parabolic Leap Overcharger Device\*, Personal Gravity Manipulation Apparatus\*, Piston-Driven Megaton Hammer\* (Optimized Demolition Vibration), Plasma Thruster Assembly\* (Travel Efficiency Upgrade, Tactical Flight Upgrade), Shockwave Driver Barrage\*\* (Collision Magnitude Upgrade x5, Gravitational Impact Hammer, Momentum Pulse Overcharger), Accelerated Response System\* (Parry), Casualty-Minimizing Equation\* (Aegis of the Populart, Parallel Defensive Geometry), Recursive Fractal Targeting Calculations\*, Alloyed Reinforcement of Flesh (Tireless Pneumatic Musculature), Gear-Driven Reflex Automation\*, Subcutaneous Armor Plating (x3), Transitory Invulnerability Engine\* (Compassion Flaw), Aim-Calibrating Sensors\* (Install 14m)

**Labor Load-Out:** 4th Perception Augmentation (x2), 4th Intelligence Augmentation, Hydraulic Musculature Reinforcement, Dynamic Reaction Enhancement System (Thought as Action Node), Alloyed Reinforcement of Flesh (Tireless Pneumatic Musculature), Synergy-Promoting Upgrade\*\* (Communal Supremacy), Clarified Data Assimilator\*\*, Creator Fugue Construction Engines, Incomparable Efficiency Upgrade, Omnitool Implant (Install 9m)

**Join Battle:** 9

**Attacks:**

Smashfist Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 11B, Parry DV 7, Rate 3

Smashfist Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 11, Damage 10B, Parry DV -, Rate 2

**Soak:** 20L/22B (Combat 26L/31B) (Superheavy Plate 17L/17B)

**Hardness:** 11L/11B (Combat 14L/17B)

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x2/-2x7/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 5      **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 5

**Personal Essence:** 25      **Peripheral Essence:** 51 (65)

**Committed Essence:** 14

**Other Notes:** *Servitor's* Artifact rating provides a pair of orichalcum smashfists and orichalcum superheavy plate.

**VOICE OF AUTHORITY**

*Voice of Authority* loves being a Champion. Nothing thrills him like brawling with gremlin machine-cannibals in a steam-choked service tunnel, or dueling an Apostate on the lip of an electrified essence vent. Gremlin hunting is both a sacred mission and a delightful recreation for him, and the Sentinel does it extremely well. He stopped keeping track of his kill-count shortly after his first Essence upgrade (not that this has stopped the weekly printing of propaganda posters with the latest count), and now numbers only his fights with Apostates. He has fought menacing rogue Exalts such as *Clambering Horror Mechanism* and *Ultimatum of Shadows* to a standstill more than once, and has successfully killed Apostates with the aid of his assembly.

When not defending Gulak from the Apostate menace, *Voice* enjoys the benefits of his celebrity. Infamous for high-profile seductions of junior Tripartite members and neophyte Alchemicals in scandalous debauches, he takes equal pleasure showing off for state-sponsored parades and festivals. Such occasions stoke his considerable ego, helping him regain his humanity after long solitary missions into the reaches. Popular as he is in Gulak, most of its Champions and senior Tripartite members regard him with a grudging resentment—while he may be effective, his self-assured arrogance and habit of creatively interpreting his orders have made few friends.

**Motivation:** Fight and destroy the menaces of the Void; look good in the process.

**Caste:** Soulsteel

**Anima Banner:** Ebon shadows and glaring white lights cast a larger-than-life silhouette of the Sentinel, which mirrors his actions with stylized movements.

**Attributes:** *Strength* 4, *Dexterity* 5, *Stamina* 3, *Charisma* 4, *Manipulation* 5, *Appearance* 5 (Social 7), *Perception* 4 (Combat 5), *Intelligence* 2, *Wits* 3

**Virtues:** *Compassion* 3, *Conviction* 3, *Temperance* 1, *Valor* 5

**Abilities:** *Archery* 5 (Essence Pulse Cannon +3), *Athletics* 2 (Impressive Stunts +3), *Awareness* 4, *Dodge* 4, *Integrity* 3, *Lore* 1, *Martial Arts* 5 (Gyroscopic Chakram +2), *Occult* 1 (The Void +3), *Performance* 5, *Presence* 5, *Resistance* 2, *Socialize* 3, *Stealth* 2, *Survival* 2 (Tracking +3)

**Backgrounds:** *Artifact* 3, *Contacts* 4, *Eidolon* 3, *Class* 5

**Charm Slots:** Dedicated 12, General 4

**Charms:**

**Combat Load-Out:** 1st *Dexterity Augmentation\**, 4th *Stamina Augmentation*, 4th *Perception Augmentation*, *Essence Irradiation Corona\** (Optimized Trauma Upgrade, Field Stabilization Fins, Motonic Reactor Discharge), *Paramagnetic Tether Beam*, *All-Inclusive Targeting Calculations\**, *Cortex Acceleration Module\**, *Exoskeletal Armor Plating (x3)*, *Transitory Invulnerability Engine\**, *Aim-Calibrating Sensors\** (Inward Focus Refractor, Void Hunter Reticule), *Anticipatory Simulation Processor\** (Syntax-Modeling Subroutine), *Optical Enhancement (Cross-Phase Scanner, Flash Shutters, Motion-Tracking Targeting Glance, Tactical Analysis Engrams, Thermal Vision, Ultraperipheral Awareness)*, *Transcendent Multimodal Artifact Matrix (Crawlspace Creeping Unit, Essence Pulse Cannon)* (Install 13m)

**Social Load-Out:** 2nd *Charisma Augmentation\*\**, 2nd *Manipulation Augmentation\*\**, 4th *Appearance Augmentation (x2)*, *Patriotism-Provoking Display\*\**, *Unconditional Imperative Programming\*\** (Champion's Compelling Assertion), *Rogue Cell Isolation Protocols\*\** (Emotional Irrelevance Systems), *Pheromone Regulation Systems*, *Unobtrusive Repartee Baffles*, *Thousandfold Courtesan Calculations (Synthetic Bliss Engrams)*, *Optical Enhancement (As Above)*, (Install 10m)

**Permanently Installed:** *Perfected Lotus Matrix* (Install 2m)

**Thousand Wounds Gear Style:** Up to Form (including appropriate Combos)

**Join Battle:** 7

**Attacks:**

**Essence Pulse Cannon:** Speed 6, Accuracy 15, Damage 10L/15B, Rate 3, Range 100, Tags F, P

**Gremlinslayer:** Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 5L, Rate 3, Range 90

**Soak:** 16L/19B (Combat 25L/31B) (Soulsteel Articulated Plate +14L/16B)

**Hardness:** 9L/9B (Combat 15L/18B)

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x2/-2x6/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 6      **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 4

**Personal Essence:** 22      **Peripheral Essence:** 49 (60)

**Committed Essence:** 11

**Other Notes:** In addition to his soulsteel armor and his signature gyroscopic chakram, *Gremlinslayer*, *Voice* also possesses a soulsteel Trinket of Dignified Conduct for formal social occasions (and seduction attempts). He has *Contacts* among both the *Populat* and *Tripartite*.

## HERALD OF THE BLACK ENGINE

*Herald of the Black Engine* admires himself as a social engineer of sorts. His modus operandi of infiltration, sabotage, and assassination may be more visceral than the methods of the Starmetal Caste, but his ambition is none the lesser for it. Unlike other Apostates who seek the annihilation of the Eight Nations, *Herald* desires to corrupt them, recreating Autochthonian society in a form that can survive and prosper once the Great Maker has been destroyed, and the Engine of Extinction is born from his corpse.

Despite his Apostolic betrayal of the Great Maker, *Herald* considers himself benevolent. As a secret operative of the Adamant Caste, he was tasked by Domadamod with ensuring the survival of Autochthonia by any means necessary, hunting down Apostates and policing the Champions of the Octet. But the more he saw of gremlins and Blight Zones, the more he understood of the Great Maker's sickness. Autochthon's death is inevitable—but the Octet might still survive. So *Herald* set himself to a grim new purpose, hiding his corruption from the Divine Ministers and his fellow Adamant Castes with powerful Voidtech Charms.

Now he walks among the cities of the Eight Nations in disguise, the savior of a dying world. He spreads Voidbringer heresies, assassinates Champions and high-placed Tripartite members, and sabotages Municipal Charms. Disguising magic constantly masks his appearance behind countless faces of every gender and class—only when he moves to assassinate an enemy does he reveal the lithe crystalline form that is his true shape, veins of oil-black ichor and meaty tendrils tracing through the adamant of his body.

**Motivation:** Corrupt the Eight Nations into a society more suited to the future of the Engine of Extinction.

**Caste:** Adamant

**Anima Banner:** The air around him fractures into a shimmering sequence of geometric forms and fractal shapes, slowly degrading into fuzzy static as they cycle through the sequence.

**Attributes:** *Strength* 3 (Assassination 5), *Dexterity* 5 (Assassination 7), *Stamina* 3, *Charisma* 2, *Manipulation* 5 (Infiltration 7), *Appearance* 5 (Infiltration 7), *Perception* 3 (Assassination 4), *Intelligence* 5, *Wits* 3

**Virtues:** *Compassion* 2, *Conviction* 5, *Temperance* 2, *Valor* 3

**Abilities:** *Athletics* 2, *Awareness* 3 (Join Battle +3), *Dodge* 4, *Integrity* 4, *Lore* 2, *Melee* 4 (Swords +3), *Performance* 5 (Corrupting Mortals +3), *Presence* 5 (Lies +3), *Resistance* 2, *Stealth* 4, *Socialize* 4

**Backgrounds:** *Artifact* 3, *Backing* 2, *Contacts* 2, *Mentor* 3

**Mutations:** Gremlin Syndrome

**Charm Slots:** Dedicated 10, General 4

**Charms:**

*Assassination Load-Out:* 4th Strength Augmentation (x2), 1st Dexterity Augmentation\*, 4th Dexterity Augmentation (x2), 4th Perception Augmentation, Essence Irradiation

*Corona\** (Optimized Trauma Upgrade, Field Stabilization Fins), *Piston-Driven Megaton Hammer\** (Chaoentropic Rending System), *Accelerated Response System\** (Parry), *Impenetrable Repulsor Field\**, *Recursive Fractal Targeting Calculations\**, *Optical Shroud* (Dynamic Cloaking Module x5, *Essence Veil*, *Maximized Ambush Processor*, *Sense-Countering Upgrades* x2), *Aim-Calibrating Sensors\**, *Anticipatory Simulation Processor\** (Install 14m)

*Infiltration Load-Out:* 2nd Manipulation Augmentation\*, 4th Manipulation Augmentation (x2), 4th Appearance Augmentation (x2), *Empathy Simulation Engine*, *Identity Recalibration Signal*, *Personality Override Spike*, *Rogue Cell Isolation Protocols\** (Emotional Irrelevance Systems, *Entropic Psyche Scar*), *Transcendent Brutality Program\** (Taint-Imprinting Agony Inducers), *Unobtrusive Repartee Baffles*, *Subsidiary Personality Implant* (Install 12m)

*Permanently Installed:* *Auxiliary Essence Storage Unit* (x4), *Transorganic Desecration Cyst* (Retromorphic Dynamic Physiology), *Husk-Sculpting Apparatus* (Biochemical Synthesizers, *Essence-Warping Anatomy*, *Identity Distortion Mirage*, *Self-Sculpt*, *Vocal Modulator Field*), *Integrated Artifact Transmogripher* (Deep Cover Mode, *Essence-Muting Baffles*, *Machine-Cyst Concealment*), *Hideous Void Panoply*

**Join Battle:** 9

**Attacks:**

*Soul Needle:* Speed 4, Accuracy 16, Damage 7L, Parry DV 10, Rate 3, Tags P (Accuracy 18, Damage 8L, Parry DV 11 with *Assassination Load-Out*)

**Soak:** 19L/20B (Adamant Superheavy Plate +17L/17B)

**Hardness:** 10L/10B

**Health Levels:** -0/-1x2/-2x6/-4/Incap

**Dodge DV:** 9 (Assassination 10) **Willpower:** 10

**Essence:** 4

**Personal Essence:** 22 **Peripheral Essence:** 82 (100)

**Committed Essence:** 18

**Other Notes:** *Herald's* Artifacts include the adamant reaver daiklave *Soul Needle* and a soulsteel thunderbolt shield, *Black Diamond*. He wears adamant superheavy plate on assassination missions. His Mentor, Backing, and Contacts come from Domadamod.

## NEW CHARMS

### SHOCKWAVE DRIVER BARRAGE

**Cost:** 2m [1m]; **Mins:** Strength 2, Essence 2;

**Type:** Supplemental

**Keywords:** Combo-OK, Knockback

**Duration:** Instant

**Prerequisite Charms:** Any Strength Augmentation

Oscillating bands of orichalcum wrap around the Alchemical's fists, magnifying the force of his blows. Attacks supplemented by this Charm automatically inflict knockback on a successful hit (see *Exalted*, page 153). Impact causes the flung character to take one die of damage for every yard



he would have otherwise traveled (maximum 25 dice). The damage is usually bashing, although collisions with especially hazardous obstacles may cause lethal damage.

#### Submodules

*Collision Magnitude Upgrade* (Strength 3, 1xp): Each purchase of this submodule adds five yards to the knockback distance of this Charm. The Alchemical can purchase it up to (Essence) times.

*Momentum Pulse Overcharger* (4xp): If the Alchemical uses this Charm to supplement attacks in a flurry, he can choose to delay the knockback until the end of his last flurried action, stacking the knockback of all attacks enhanced by this Charm.

*Gravitational Impact Hammer* (Strength 4, Essence 3): For a three-mote surcharge, the Alchemical can knock his foes downwards, rather than flinging them away. Doing so causes them to suffer damage as usual for a collision.

#### CASUALTY-MINIMIZING EQUATION

**Cost:** 3m [1m]; **Mins:** Dexterity 3, Essence 2;

**Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)

**Keywords:** Combo-OK

**Duration:** Instant

**Prerequisite Charms:** Any Dexterity Augmentation

A reactive processor wired into the Alchemical's sensory cortex controls magnetized servos and gyroscopic swivels in her joints, deploying them in defensive configurations to protect those around the Champion. The Alchemical can

activate this Charm to reflexively take a Defend Other action. He cannot do so if he is already protecting a character with Defend Other.

#### Submodules

*Aegis of the Populat* (3xp): Activating this Charm to protect a mortal cost zero motes. With Essence 4, other activations are discounted to two motes.

*Parallel Defensive Geometry* (Dexterity 4): The Alchemical can activate this Charm even if he's already using a Defend Other action, to a maximum of (lower of Dexterity or Wits) simultaneous Defend Other actions. Defend Other actions to protect mortals do not count towards this limit.

#### GEAR-DRIVEN REFLEX AUTOMATION

**Cost:** 4m [1m]; **Mins:** Dexterity 4, Essence 2;

**Type:** Reflexive (Step 9)

**Keywords:** Combo-OK, Counterattack, Obvious

**Duration:** Instant

**Prerequisite Charms:** Any Dexterity Augmentation

Motorized gears of moonsilver are installed along the Alchemical's forearms, wired into his Dexterity Augmentation with starmetal circuitry. When the Alchemical is attacked, this precision assembly overrides his conscious motor control, letting him strike back with clockwork precision. The Alchemical can use this Charm to make a counterattack in response to any attack made against him at close combat range. He can make the counterattack using any appropriate combat Ability.

### Submodules

*Crossfire Targeting Sensors*: The Alchemical can activate this Charm in response to ranged attacks, allowing him to make a counterattack with a ranged weapon of his own.

*Perfected Clockwork Reflex Mechanism* (Wits 4, Essence 3): The Alchemical can pay a two-mote surcharge to extend this Charm's duration to one tick, letting him respond to all valid triggers with a counterattack during that time.

### CORTEX ACCELERATION MODULE

**Cost:** 4m [1m]; **Mins:** Wits 3, Essence 2;

**Type:** Supplemental

**Keywords:** Combo-Basic, Internal

**Duration:** Instant

**Prerequisite Charms:** Any Perception or Wits Augmentation

Six jade cylinders are surgically implanted in the Alchemical's occipital lobe, each one housing a chemical pump filled with synthetic neurostimulants. When the Charm is activated, these chemicals flood the Champion's brain, making time seem to stand still for him as his perception hyper-accelerates. This Charm can enhance any Join Battle, Join Debate, or Join War roll, adding the lower of (Perception or Wits) automatic successes to the roll.

The Champion's distorted perception of the flow of time allows him to plan out his first move, adding a single additional die to the first attack or social attack he makes in that scene. This bonus is not considered dice from Charms, but dice from Aiming or Monologuing, as appropriate. The Alchemical must make the attack on his first action to receive this bonus.

### Submodules

*Hyperfocus Concentration* (4xp): The bonus on the Alchemical's first attack increases to two dice. If he received more successes on the initiative roll than any other character, the bonus instead rises to three dice.

*Sustained Release Formula* (Essence 3, 4xp): If the Alchemical makes a flurry of attacks or social attacks as his first action in a scene, the dice bonus from this Charm applies to all of them.

### NEW SUBMODULES

*Motonic Reactor Discharge* (Strength 4, Essence 4): The Alchemical's Essence Irradiation Corona gains the Stackable keyword, and can be activated up to (Essence / 2) times to enhance a single attack.

*Void Hunter Reticule* (Perception 3, Essence 3, 4xp): Aim-Calibrating Sensors upgraded with this Axiomatic

submodule convert all Aim dice to automatic successes on attacks against creatures of the Void.

*Champion's Compelling Assertion*: Social attacks against un-Exalted members of a social group the Alchemical belongs to are undodgeable when supplemented by the Champion's Unconditional Imperative Programming.

*Synthetic Bliss Engrams* (Essence 3, 4xp): The Alchemical's Thousandfold Courtesan Calculations enhance any post-coitus social attack meant to build an Intimacy of lust or infatuation towards him, causing the target to automatically form the Intimacy if he fails to defend or resist, no matter how high his Conviction.

*Syntax-Modeling Subroutine*: The Alchemical can activate Anticipatory Simulation Processor to defend against mental influences, removing the unexpected tag from them or negating onslaught and coordinated attack penalties.

*Tactical Analysis Engrams* (Wits 3): The Alchemical's Optical Enhancement allows him to discern the Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, and Thrown ratings of any character that he can perceive, calling up a visual read-out displaying a relative assessment of their combat capabilities. He also learns any specialties that they have in those Abilities. A second purchase of this submodule adds War to the list of Abilities the Alchemical can detect, and reveals the Drill, Endurance, Might, and Morale of any unit he can perceive in mass combat.

### NEW VOIDTECH SUBMODULES

*Entropic Psyche Scar* (Manipulation 4, Essence 3): Successful use of Rogue Cell Isolation Protocols corrupted by this submodule allows the Apostate to redefine the emotional context of an Intimacy, rather than removing it. He can choose any context he desires, so long as the resultant Intimacy opposes either the social customs of the target's native culture or the dogma of the Great Maker.

*Machine-Cyst Concealment* (4xp): The Alchemical can activate his Integrated Artifact Transmogriifier to disguise his Void Charms, rather than internalizing them. Alchemical Charms corrupted by Voidtech submodules revert to their normal appearance, while Void-keyworded Charms are rendered seemingly mechanical in nature. Activating an Obvious Void Charm still reveals its true nature, and this concealment is overcome by any effect which bypasses the usual effect of Integrated Artifact Transmogriifier. If the Alchemical conceals all of his installed Void Charms, then his nature as an Apostate cannot be detected by any means.

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