

TWC-4

ESMERALDA

ISLAND OF REVOLUTION AND SUPERNATURAL
THREATS
(MAZTICA)



BY NICOLÁS CARRILLO-SANTARELLI



ESMERALDA

ISLAND OF REVOLUTION AND SUPERNATURAL THREATS

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“Even less is known of Maztica than of Kara-Tur. It is a land of forbidding natural barriers and hundreds of remote, reclusive cultures, most of whom are hostile to each other.”

– Forgotten Realms campaign setting (3e)

“The New World [...] Maztica [...] is almost as large as the Heartland and Kara-Tur combined”

– Realmspace (2e)

“Farther to the west [...] are untold, unknown lands beyond the Trackless Sea. Many explorers have visited such lands, and some have even returned, bearing tales that change [...] about exotic locales, from island chains that are the sites of countless shipwrecks, to fearsome feather-clad warriors, and vast continents that suddenly appeared where nothing –or something very much different- had rested only seasons prior”

– Sword Coast Adventurer’s Guide (5e)

INTRODUCTION

Esmeralda is an island inspired by the myths and dynamic history of South America. It is an island of many different cultures, but their shared story has led to one that is decidedly unique.

From the oppressive, but well-governed New Athkatla to the anarchical Five Independent Republics who won Independence; the native born to the enslaved Sons and Daughters of the Alligator, no culture is isolated and they have all been shaped by interaction with the others. In Esmeralda, roleplaying and inventive solutions prevail over hack-'n-slash here: legal arguments, romantic exploits (yes, if you've read García-Márquez, you know about it), social intrigue, espionage, nigh invincible mystical beings that can only be outsmarted or defeated by exorcism, the risks of arcane magic, miracles freely granted by the divine (as the DMG suggests), racism, wars of independence, rebellion, crime and poverty, civil war (as in Cordelliana), lost treasures and lands, native stories, invincible dangerous beings, dark spirits, the power of faith and piety, and impenetrable lands all define Esmeralda.

Esmeralda is a very large island located to the East of Lopango, whose problems are endless and whose need for heroes is dire. Apart from the lands of the Payit, it was the only one to be fully conquered by Amnians before the Spellplague: but its conquerors hated Cordell, were more pious and perverse sometimes. Welcome traveler, to lands where death is most likely, and where revenge, though it is foolish and sinful, abounds.

DMs and players are free to change things or use elements as inspiration. Many things are open and left for them to fill with details.

This is a South America-inspired campaign setting, and I hope you enjoy your adventures of liberation and struggles for justice there!

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

TWC-4 ESMERALDA – Island of Revolution and Spiritual Threats is a campaign sourcebook that can be used independently, or with the **Maztica Campaign Guide** (<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/171534/TWC1-The-Maztica-Campaign-Guide?term=maztica>). In this book you will find the history of the island, flavorful background stories, monsters, magic, classes, races and non-player characters.

It is assumed, but not required, that the reader is familiar with the Maztica Campaign Guide and/or the Maztica Campaign Set. Moreover, the spiritual ability provided here is expanded in another DMs Guild product: [Spiritual Struggles and Abilities](#), which if used supersedes the rules provided here. That product also provides a brief overview of a possible campaign arc set in Esmeralda and neighboring lands.

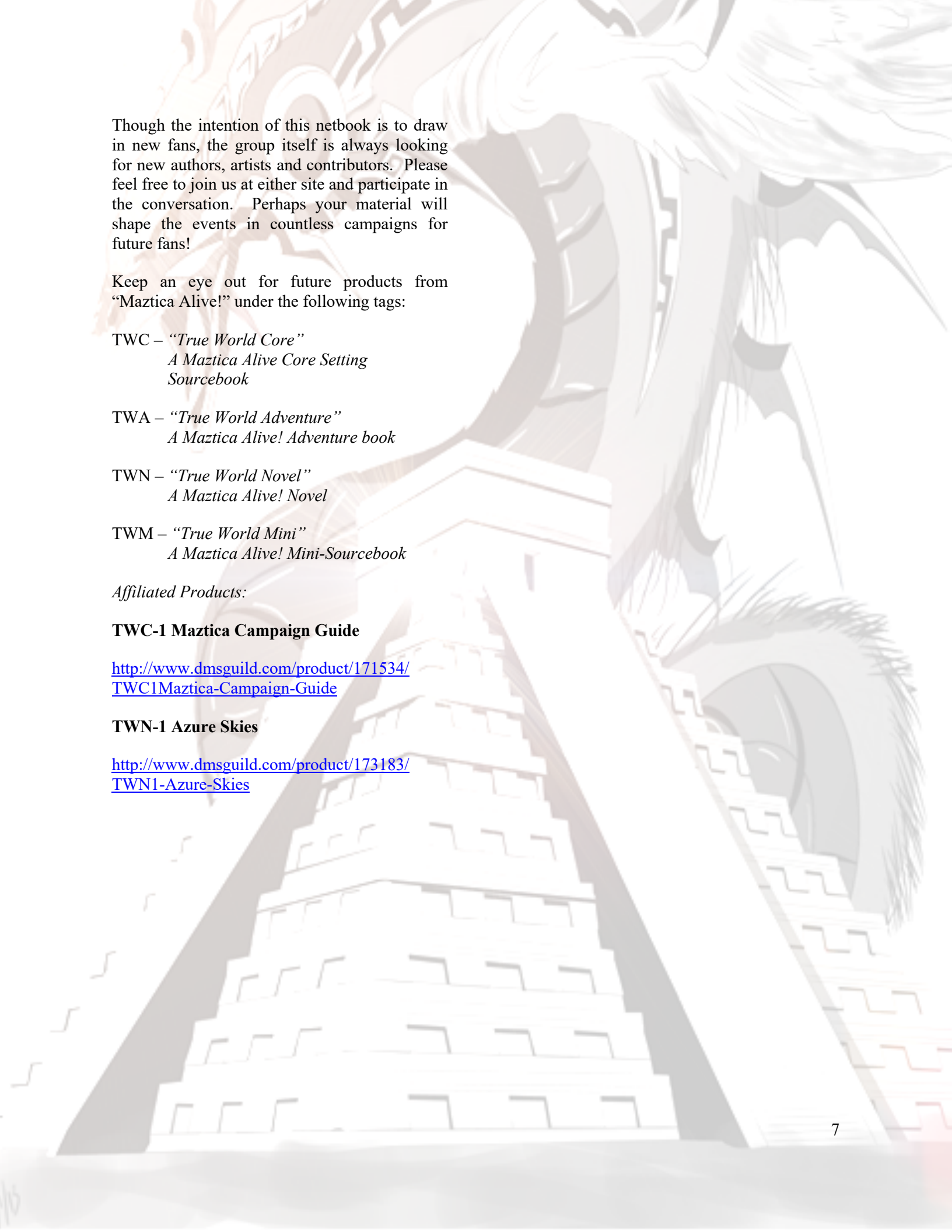
MAZTICA ALIVE!

In the 1990 Maztica Boxed Set, the name “Maztica Alive” was given to the game book designed solely for the dungeon master. In 2010, when a name was needed to represent the legion of remaining fans and the community that they were slowly forming, there was in truth no name that could have been more appropriate. Fittingly, this community began exactly two decades after the introduction of Maztica. “Maztica Alive!” therefore, has come to represent a growing community of game enthusiasts who are determined to see Maztica survive in each new game incarnation. Currently, the group is most active in the Yahoo Group of the same name. To join the group, simply follow the link provided:

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MazticaAlive/info>

Also, discussions are actively growing in the community known as The Piazza:

<http://thepiazza.org.uk/bb/index.php>

The background of the page features a large, stylized illustration. On the right side, a dragon with white and grey scales and a long, flowing mane is depicted. On the left side, a tall, white, stepped pyramid or ziggurat rises. The entire scene is set against a light, hazy background.

Though the intention of this netbook is to draw in new fans, the group itself is always looking for new authors, artists and contributors. Please feel free to join us at either site and participate in the conversation. Perhaps your material will shape the events in countless campaigns for future fans!

Keep an eye out for future products from “Maztica Alive!” under the following tags:

TWC – *“True World Core”*
A Maztica Alive Core Setting Sourcebook

TWA – *“True World Adventure”*
A Maztica Alive! Adventure book

TWN – *“True World Novel”*
A Maztica Alive! Novel

TWM – *“True World Mini”*
A Maztica Alive! Mini-Sourcebook

Affiliated Products:

TWC-1 Maztica Campaign Guide

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/171534/TWC1Maztica-Campaign-Guide>

TWN-1 Azure Skies

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/173183/TWN1-Azure-Skies>

UNDERSTANDING ESMERALDA

This section attempts to convey the feel of adventures and stories set in Esmeralda, which is part of Maztica. While it is an island allegedly to the West of mainland Maztica (although some claim that it is actually located to the East, between the mainland and Chult, and that location confusion arises from an effect of the mystical mists surrounding Esmeralda, as described in the History and Timeline section; moreover, the theft of Eye of Zalteco, present in Chult as described in *Tomb of Annihilation*, has many Zalteco priests and warlocks in a frenzy, some of whom may venture to Chult and be pursued by local foes), its culture definitely belongs to it and its history and facts have been determined by interaction of its peoples (plants and animals) with the mainland.

Therefore, short stories and inspiration material will be provided here.

SEVEN TALES OF ESMERALDA

It is late in the Esmeraldian jungle. Barely a ray dares to sift through the dense canopy above the two travelers. In Thorass, the prevalent Amnian language rather than in the common tongue for exchanges between Faerûnian nations, a man asks his guide whether they are close to the lost city, the one where the golden monkey is said to rest. Shoosh, his native counterpart says, continuing on a native language that is neither Nexalan nor Payit. This language is well understood by Pedro, who recoils in fear at the tales spun by Muchica. The dead bodies of Pedro's friends were all found with grievous and mysterious wounds in the camp, and he and Muchica are the sole survivors. Their wounds coincide with what Muchica tells about the mother of the mountains, a mysterious fey-like or ancestral being or spirit, Pedro knows not what, who kills any who dares intrude in the forests of her land, Esmeralda. Pedro grasps his

holy medal of Ilmater, a deity respected by Muchica because he has been taught the doctrine of the Triad rather than that of Ilmater as companion of Helm in protecting Faerûnians. The darkness is almost impenetrable now, and a fierce shriek tears through the jungle. Invincible, not killed by magic or weapons from the east or from the True World, the mother of the mountains is told to be. Suddenly, two green eyes can be seen, and the fate of Muchica and Pedro is bleak.

Simona leads a desperate band of freedom fighters, trying to sabotage the New Athkatlan barracks in order to bring freedom and independence to Heroika, the jewel of Esmeralda. She has spent the last five years of her life, her best, fighting for freedom from colonial rule. Rallying natives and descendants of Faerûnians to the cause of liberty from New Athkatlan tyranny, she has managed to participate in operations leading to the freedom of two of the free nations of Esmeralda. Yes, those nations have engaged in bitter disputes, she acknowledges. And yes, lawlessness reigns supreme in the free lands: something that the rich and secure New Athkatlans often invoke to deride her armies of rebels. But freedom is greater than security, she thinks as she prowls on the walled city, under the moon called Luna in these lands and Selûne in the lost land of her forebears. The waves crash against the walls as she approaches the fortress. Beggars interrupt her suddenly, and her demise comes not at the hands of a New Athkatlan soldier –something she would welcome as honorable– but at the tip of a dagger of a low criminal who seeks to steal her cloak.

Lardo smiles gladly. He not only has managed to defeat an important battalion of New Athkatlans but has also inflicted a serious wound to battalions of the so-called New Marsemberla Republic. Despising all who discriminated him due to his native and half-orc heritage based on social prejudice and the hateful New Athkatlan caste laws, he sought a better life in the four free Republics. Granted, natives welcomed him with open arms, but he never managed to get a decent

job in the mixed blood villages or in the capitals. Knowing of social inequality, racial discrimination and injustice, he joined the Claws of Azul, originally a band of pirates, seeking to give riches to impoverished natives. But plundering Republican or New Athkatlan riches was not enough. After a mutiny, he controlled the Claws and led them in a different direction: revolution. Let us seize power and topple the Republican dictator in Marsemberla, he convinced them to. And so began his career. Of course, many say he went astray: his troops engaged in child conscription, kidnapped and ransomed civilians, and did not respect the laws of war. To the hells with imperialistic laws! He said. Now, looking over the conquered camp, he strides decisively towards general Marsala's tent. Poor fool this Marsala, fighting for Republican laws. As he intends to kill her for refusing his advances, little does he know that his standard bearer has been bribed by a New Athkatlan spy and that the dagger of *espíritus* (of the native souls) that rests in his left hand hidden under his cloak will be his doom tonight. Yes, he was aware of New Athkatlan intervention after knowledge of the illicit narcotics Tardo traffics with to pay his armies. The hateful have conducted sabotage operations against him, but little did he know that the open and cold war between New Athkatlan tyranny or re-conquest efforts and the former colonized Republics was also aimed against the more than five guerrillas in the lands of the Republics: the Shining Tezca, the Claws of Azul (of course), the Eyes of Liberto and the rest.

Mákala Cimarrón runs for her life – and for her soul. Where can she find this shaman and at the same time flee from the cannibalistic sea halflings that pursue her. They can breathe underwater, for gods' sake! She recalls the day when, tired of lashes and beatings, she wept and tried to kill herself. The captive native elder Amaranta told her to resist, and of how the spirits of the land give natives a hand to thwart the ambitions of slavers. Mákala, being a Daughter of the Alligator, a race unknown before the departure of Esmeralda to the Three Realms (Abeir, the Realm of the *duendes*/Fae, and the land of night and spirits) and the return

to Toril, was enslaved along with her brothers and sisters by New Athkatlans due to her physical prowess. But after crying to the Moon Luna (not Selûne, as New Athkatlans call her), the Mother of the native peoples of Esmeralda, she was heard by a spirit of the forest. Enter into a pact with me, it said. Indeed, next morning, when her master tried to cut her tongue, the mystical flames that departed from her hands and burned him to his bones confirmed the suspicions that the spirits had heard her. But yet, the elder had not told her that magic was corrupted: its use was cursed, and everytime she did so she risked invoking a being from the Three Realms that now inhabited Esmeralda after the opening of the *puertas*, portals or gates. The shaman, of course, lives among the dreaded *duendes*: the diminutive beings called elves by the dreaded Athkatlans (whose superstitious fear of magic was confirmed) who flay all who trespass their lands hidden in the mists uninvited, or so the tales and corpses say. Fortunately, a *gnomo*, those mystical mediators who can cross to Esmeralda and the Three Realms, accompanies her and will vouch for her: as those *gnomos* do with all natives and mystical beings, serving as advocates.

The dispute could not be fiercer, and tempers flare. Two diplomatic delegations try to prevent open conflict and a resumption of hostilities. The Athkatlan delegation claims, of course, that it has titles that grant it sovereignty over the fifth Republic and native lands in the sacred mountain of *Nieve*, while the Cordelliana delegation defends its independence. The two international lawyers only agree to some extraditions and sending rebel war criminals to the War Tribunal. Their execution is expected, since genocide and mass murders are invoked in the indictment.

Esmeralda is a land of coffee and peasants, mostly. Those in the rich cities or in the crime-ridden slums think they are the center of the Universe, but little are they aware of how their settlements occupy but ten per-cent of Esmeraldian lands. Underwater cities, lost sunk vessels and cities hidden in the mists. Temples

were those shamans who enter become half-bats or half-jaguars, and much more is ignored by them. They think of them as mere myths, especially because of how mystical beings – monsters they call them- are not publicly seen by many (a consequence of their gift to hide themselves under an exorcist, shaman or someone with the True Eye seeks them). Of course, the wonder of the flying canoes in the Realm of the *duendes* or Fae is limited, insofar as they only appear in lands connected to the Realm of the Fae (such as the seas surrounding Esmeralda). This led some Lantanese refugees to the invention of caravels with firearms, but they are few indeed and mainly used in the war of conquest between New Athkatla and the Republics and between the Republics themselves. But in spite of heightened means of transportation, the jungles are still mysterious, off-reaches lands. The living huge fish, who even oppress the Sahuagin that humanoids so fear; the Anacondan empire; the piranha cabal; the underground tombs where mummified bodies plot a revenge, and much more is unheard of. Of course, gold abounds, and Marcello was fool enough to seek it. Only his piety saved him from the snares of the witches (hags).

How can the heretic religion thrive? Oscar wonders. The bishop of the official New Athkatlan theocratic religion, the Merciful Guardian, sincerely believes that Ilmater protects from suffering those who abide by law and order and the rule of the legitimate king, lord of the Esmeraldian lands. The queen, head of the Church, indeed laughs at the Republican anarchy: crime abounds, and superstition too. How can they ignore the holy protection of helm to focus on notions of social justice, even with a hybrid version of Tyr and Qotal supposedly being the companion of Ilmater. And Ilmater! Perverting his tenets led to revolution, independence and chaos. The public execution of preachers of the Merciful Justice, the Republican third world version of faith, who tried to convert New Athkatlans, is a holy duty. Of course, chaplain Cortázar secretly disagrees, and his belief in the Merciful Guardian faith does not lead him to hate or fear the Merciful Justice. He believes the two faiths can learn

from each other and coexist peacefully, but he knows he will never thrive this way. He will even be branded a traitor next year.

INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

Below you will find some movies and books that can inspire the feel and plots of Esmeraldian stories and adventures.

Narcos:¹ this Netflix series explores the sad story of cruel druglord Pablo Escobar and operations to catch him. Esmeralda is rife with the activities of druglords and crimelords who do not hesitate to kill and hurt innocents and civilians to profit. Campaigns can revolve around thwarting the plots of such criminals and detaining them.

Apocalypto:² this movie can inspire campaigns set in the Ancient Time, when the *inocentes* tried to escape from executioners devoted to Zaltec; adventures when characters try to flee or save innocents from the agents of the Pyramid of Bones; or games located in the Seven Islands surrounding Esmeralda, where mighty beings (the crocodile man, the lord of the dead, and others) persecute natives who find themselves abducted and brought there as sacrifices, or kidnapped and toyed with as some hunter animals play with their prey.

The Mission (and its Soundtrack):³ this film explores different approaches of people with a different religion or background to the native ones towards natives. Some of them seek to exploit them and others truly desire to help them. Moreover, political and international legal intrigue regarding attempts to colonize, depicted in the film, are a central problem of Esmeralda.

The Soundtrack of the film has some songs that portray the mood of the setting, especially

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2707408/>

² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0472043/>

³ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091530/>

“Ascunsion”, “Guarani”, “Refusal” and “Alone”.

Nostromo:⁴ Joseph Conrad’s masterpiece explores oppression by Latin American rulers, besides secession and rebellions that plagued the continent in the 19th and early 20th century. Much of Esmeralda is inspired in the land of Esmeralda, described in the book.

Beasts of No Nation:⁵ this film narrates the tragedy of child conscription and the cruel realities of war and non-state armed groups. Many of those groups, crimes and realities haunt Esmeralda.

Mitos colombianos (Colombian Myths), by Javier Ocampo: written in Spanish, this book provides many frightful Colombian myths, some of which inspired some of the supernatural threats of Esmeralda, which are also inspired by oral tradition on legends.

One Hundred Years of Solitude:⁶ this García-Márquez masterpiece narrates some armed conflicts and depicts South American customs and culture that can inspire your campaign (wonder about the pig-tailed nobles in New Athkatla? Well, here’s the inspiration).

Other García-Márquez books that are recommend are: *The Autumn of the Patriarch*⁷ (useful for Hinkalliano and Protectorate dictatorships, among others); *The General in His Labyrinth*⁸ (inspiration for the independence war

of Libertad); or *Of Love and Other Demons*⁹ (for the feel of Heroika, partly).

1984:¹⁰ what happens in Hinkalliano (former Argentum) and the Protectorate is well described in this dystopian tale by George Orwell.

Black Sails:¹¹ for a view on piracy in the seas surrounding Esmeralda.

DEFINING FEATURES

Esmeralda is not home to many Nexalan or Payit pyramids –a few built by mainland emigres exist, but many are hidden by means of illusions—, but rather boasts many underground tombs guarded by emerald-eyed statues. Cocoa and coffee were born here, and the land has spilled more blood than its Northern counterparts; not out of religious beliefs, but because of perverse politics – civil wars, conquest, wars of independence, guerrilla movements, and other political movements have killed the brethren of their members. But it is also a land of mystery, not only one of revolution. Candlekeep scholars would be baffled (one of them was, actually) by the very fact that Esmeralda is a place where Two Realms interact: that of the Fae or the *duendes* and the land of starless night. The Fae is not like your Victorian character, and is not European-like at all. Rather, the inhabitants of Esmeralda speak of the *duendes*, trickster and dangerous beings who strikingly resemble Esmeraldian *duendes*. They kidnap people, destroy homes, burn estates, and all for the sake of their wicked amusement. And the starless night: the spirits of the dead mourn around places where they hid riches, or when they were evil in life. They try to obtain forgiveness before entering the holy lands: indeed, there is a *purgatory* in those lands, as peasants and priests tell. Those peasants, mostly descendants of both Athkatlans

⁴ <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/115476.Nostromo>

⁵ a

⁶

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/320.One_Hundred_Years_of_Solitude

⁷

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23887.The_Autumn_of_the_Patriarch

⁸

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23884.The_General_in_His_Labyrinth

⁹

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23876.Of_Love_and_Other_Demons

¹⁰ <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5470.1984>

¹¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2375692/>

and natives, fear those beings, and their piety is tremendous.

Let us now look at some aspects that make Esmeralda unique:

1. Intrigue, mysteries, betrayal and dynamic social events: in addition to criminal and supernatural mysteries, shifting alliances between the Republics –between themselves or in terms of truces with the Empire or supernatural realms, even to the detriment of former ‘allies’— occur dynamically in response to shifting power balance and factors, often triggered by the PCs!

Collective storytelling: many villages and cities are young or recover from ongoing attacks and bombardment. Encourage PCs to use materials as Neverember’s Guide to Civilization, and others, for them to come up with the reconstruction or building of new villages, quarters, neighborhoods, etc.

Wondrous locations: due to planar shifting and influences, there may be inhabited or abandoned villages once belonging to mysterious beings from Abeir or elsewhere. Perhaps a shop or vessel close to PC quarters has mystical properties, as a bar in which a mermaid often sings or a ghost appears.

Wars, rebellion, loss and violence: as its nickname clearly indicates, this is a land of armed conflict, a land of revolution and war. No one is safe. An opinion given at one of the *cafés* to a friend will earn someone a death sentence if heard by someone who is politically opposed to it. Paranoia is something everyone knows, since no one can trust anyone. The trusted admiral may be demoted by someone who bribed the general or may be killed by the drug cartel of the Claws of Azul.

More than one hundred years ago, a war of independence began: tired of repression by the caste-based New Athkatlan empire (also called the Empire of the Dragon), some natives and ethnic Faerûnians waged a war of independence. Desperate it was, because of the might of the so-

called Dragon Empire, led then by King Felipe and his dragon advisor, Ibernu.

Waterdeep and Baldur’s Gate, tired of Amnian *de facto* monopoly on trade with Maztican goods and of suspected sinkings of their ships by Amnian Agents,¹² provided support to the rebels: first as ideological support, inspiration and formal recognition of the rebel nations as rightful States, which outraged Amn and was decried as intervention in the affairs of the Empire by foreign powers. In relation to this, the Helm faithful of Waterdeep,¹³ and later Amnian disciples of Ilmater (coming from Eshpurta, where his faith is popular¹⁴) began to inspire demands for freedom and, after questioning stringent and discriminatory deeds of some Amnian Helm followers against natives, ended up calling for revolution. The first demand of independence was made in a joint proclamation of the Ilmater and Helm bishops of Cordelliana (then province of New Athkatla). However, as for other means of assistance, the difficulty of using magic in Esmeralda, and the desire to use subtle secret means so as to not openly defy Amn and enter into a conflict with it, led to their contributions being mainly economic. This is when the rebels sought help from the Sythillisian Empire, led by monsters that had succeeded in seizing the Amnian city of Murann. The monsters helped turn the tide with their weapons and fell magic, but this weakened the Kukul protection on Esmeralda and opened up portals. After a bloody struggle, independence was won, but soon after, the new independent nation separated in different Republics. Recently, with the return of the land of Maztica, Esmeralda included, to Toril, queen Bella has appointed Morill, a seasoned veteran, as ‘pacifier’ of the rebel lands, with the function of re-conquering them. That is why the war of re-conquest, or assertion of independence, has begun anew.

¹² See Steven E. Schend, “Book two: Amn”, *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 61.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

MASS COMBAT IN ESMERALDA

Given the wars of re-conquest launched by New Athkatla (the Dragon Empire) and the efforts of the Republics to remain independent (or the Talaestan struggle to regain independence), mass combats frequently take place in Esmeraldian campaigns. Player characters can be generals or fighters, and the use of mass combat rules is encouraged. Some possibilities are the 5th edition *Unearthed Arcana: When Armies Clash* (available at http://media.wizards.com/2015/downloads/dnd/UA_Battlesystem.pdf) or the “Mass Combat” article at the DMs Guild (<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/172322/Mass-Combat>).



Warfare objects are found everywhere in Esmeralda, where armed conflicts continue

But violence is not only political: the cuckolded husband will kill the lover of his wife and enjoy doing so. Poor criminals will kill any who enter their seaside slums to take any riches, no matter how insignificant. Insecurity abounds everywhere except in New Athkatla. This kingdom, ruled by queen Bella, takes pleasure in the differences between itself and the rebel Republics which seceded from it. In terms of riches and security, it has no parallel in Esmeralda. But it is also a land based on a caste system, profiting from slavery of the Sons and Daughters of the *Caimán* or Alligator. Its beautiful capital of *Pintura* is unique. Think of it, you mortal, as a combination of Barcelona and Venice. A city crisscrossed by canals, dominated by palaces, next a transparent Caribbean-like sea, where artists make impressive masterpieces and where Bella appoints the duke who oversees it. This is a city, though, from where the war of re-conquest is planned, and from where the command to starve beautiful Esmeralda in a siege, a city struggling to gain independence, is given.

As sections on History and the Atlas will explain, Seven Provinces seceded from New Athkatla. Initially, they formed a single political body, the State of *Libertad*. However, political intrigue and personal ambitions of war leaders soon led to secession, and Seven Republics were formed. Afterwards, one Republic, Talaesta, was re-conquered, and another one, Tranaltar, will be razed and utterly destroyed by the Empire in a month (game time) after the start of the campaign. Crime-ridden or embroiled in civil war, as Cordelliana, these lands that fought for freedom are not peaceful at all. Yet, slavery was banned in it, and citizenship was granted to natives. The lands the Republics occupy are still called *Libertad*, and are located to the West.

2. Mystical monsters, portals, horror, True Sight and piety: another trait of Esmeralda is the fact that it is a land filled with mysteries. Throughout its history, several prominent Esmeraldian places were connected to either the Realm of the *Fae/duendes* or to the land of starless night. For centuries, stories were told of strange visitors, but they were not many as something prevented the portals from being fully opened. These *puertas*, however, were shattered with the Spellplague: like other Maztican lands, Esmeralda did go to Abeir, but unlike them did not stay there. The many and powerful portals, once shattered, made the land be transported to

the land of the *duendes* and then to the land of eternal or starless night, *la noche de los espíritus*. Once there, inhabitants of Esmeralda saw wonders such as flying canoes or undead, but only during their dreams: even if located in those planes, something prevented full intrusion by it's the denizens of those planes (the prayer of an exorcist of Ilmater or the rituals of native shamans, depending on who you ask). Once the land returned to Toril, however, something happened: beings heard of in stories, as the furry hand, the mother of the mountains, the witches (hags), the Fae, the gnomes, the undead, and others, entered and began to kill. Cases of possession were certified by exorcists of Ilmater, the Serene Face of Kiltzi, and Qotyr (a hybrid version of Qotal and Tyr prevalent in Esmeraldian imagery). While they are usually hidden from view and prowl only at night or in the forests or outskirts of inhabited places (depending on the creature), some speak about them and seek to protect the Esmeraldian peoples from them. Yet, they cannot be defeated by mere force. This is why a new ability exists: **piety (which is an additional ability)**, which is used to manage deadly interactions with those creatures. Pious peasants, saints indeed, have been known to avoid death at the hands of the immortal evil beings by fervently praying. Yet, direct banishments by non-exorcists are risky and discouraged by priests.

It is important to stress that monsters are extraordinary; they are mighty, but frequently hide to attack in the dark. Many Fae and inhabitants of the land of eternal night possess an ability called the 'Shade', which disguises them as ordinary humans or demihumans. Some people, though, are born with True Sight or acquire it with the blessings of Tyr, Qotal or Ilmater, and can see monsters for what they are: even when they pretend to be humans trying to kidnap someone to take him to the jungles and eat them later!

3. A land of cultural exchanges: the background of every character must indicate his heritage: New Athkatlan, Native or Mixed. This has an impact on social interactions because of the role of **social ability**, different from charisma (better left to *don Juanes*, who abound in Esmeralda). Every character must choose

either the profession or persuade *skill*. Then, depending on his heritage, the character can attempt to influence social interactions: for instance, an imperial lawyer from New Athkatlan may try to convince Republican troops that some native ruins fall under Athkatlan sovereignty and, in exchange, they will not be attacked. When the two parties belong to the same heritage, the roll is made normally, an opposed check. But if the New Athkatlan lawyer told this to natives, these arguments would be utterly alien and hateful to them, and the roll would be made with disadvantage – that is, unless the lawyer shows the inevitability of the threats and their seriousness, case in which advantage can be made. A *feat* of inter-cultural relations would enable them to roll with advantage when contacting members of another heritage.

4. Lost wonders and unparalleled riches:

Unlike the natives of Nexal and Far Payit to the Northeast, and those of Lopango to the near East, Esmeraldian natives did not have huge or impressive architectural achievements. Moreover, they lacked strong armed forces and were thus initially easily conquered by New Athkatlan troops. However, their influence and power is a subtle one: with pacts with the people of the forests, and intermingling with others, they have managed to co-exist without being enslaved (unlike the poor Children of the *Caimán*/Alligator and cannibalistic tribes). Shamans from the natives have been able to become lycanthropes (jaguar or bat) when entering hidden shrines in the wilderness (not depending on the moon).

In those cases, though, they can see what happens in Esmeralda, but their bodies are physically transported either to the parallel Realm of the Fae or to the parallel land of eternal night, both of which are echoes (or sources?) of Esmeralda. The undead prowl; lakes of gold and *caciques* devoted to the Sun and Luna; hidden cities deep in the jungle; mysterious monsters and more have always existed in Esmeralda. After the return from Abeir and the shattering of the powerful Esmeraldian portals, the mysterious demigods of dread now walk in Esmeralda. And the flying canoes have a magic that has tinkered with by

some New Athkatlans to attempt to build flying caravels (only one was ever built, and was seized by pirates. It has not been seen again).

Tesoreros or treasure hunters, meanwhile, are peasants or natives who have a mystical connection to the land. Being attuned to it, they search for lost treasures or wonders with a spiritual relevance, such as objects which were offerings or heirlooms of restless spirits.

Additionally, it is rumored that hidden cities and temples connect Esmeralda with other dimensions, and that those who enter into them gain shapechanging and mystical abilities temporarily.

THE BIRTH OF ESMERALDA. WHY SO MUCH GOLD AND SO MANY EMERALDS?

Crafted by the loving hand of Kukul, god of gold among others,¹⁵ the father and benefactor of Esmeralda gave it more riches than any other land. His wife Maztica accepted and, to protect her husband's treasured land accepted that part of her separated from the mainland, thus giving birth to Esmeralda. Kukul adorned it with more gold than any other land, and gave it the precious 'huge' emeralds, only found here and after which the main island its called.

5. Factions and intrigue (secular, economic, political and religious): Esmeralda is a land of intrigue. Due to its political turmoil, armed groups and States vie for power and control of resources. Narcotics, unique golden objects, the most delicious cocoa and coffee, and lost artifacts of the age of the Fae are found and exported or smuggled to other Maztican lands (mainly Lopango, but also Nexal and Payit lands). This has led to the creation of State-sponsored and non-state groups, some secret (like the New Athkatlan *orden negra*, a group of spies, assassins and saboteurs), some open; paramilitary and guerrilla organizations; native

rebellion movements; *cimarrón* groups of freed slaves; and a hot dispute between the churches of the Golden Fist or the Protector, both centered on Helm but based on New Athkatla and the Protectorate Republic respectively. Schisms and religious intrigue abound. Some corporations, with more economic power than many Republics, also help natives and create employment, while others seek profit at the expense of others, hiring killers and defiling the land.

On the other hand, in the halls of Parliaments and the thrones of queen Bella and the dictator Protector, intrigues and gossipings and maneuverings to gain advantage over others ruthlessly abound. Martial laws and states of emergency are frequently adopted, and risks of state abuse and manipulation of the laws to favor some and oppress others are created because of the great powers those measures give. Yet, sometimes they are used to proportionately respond to menaces.

6. Fell and rare magic, and wondrous miracles: The Amnian fear of magic proved to be prophetic.¹⁶ The use of arcane magic in Esmeralda is a dangerous endeavor. Every time it is used, the caster risks his soul, body, and attracting one of the *inmortales* – the dreaded demigods. Yet, even the caster that has fallen the lowest can receive redemption at the hands of holy men. To cast arcane magic, *cimarróns* (escaped former slaves) and natives enter into pacts with the original inhabitants of the islands surrounding Esmeralda, the *archiduendes* (archfey), wicked and unpredictable beings. The diminutive elves and the mysterious gnomes are the only beings able to cast arcane magic without such pacts, either becoming studious or spontaneous casters (wizards or sorcerers).

Bards, called *juglares*, representatives and entertainers of a people who love parties and courtship, and who come from the coasts of

¹⁵ See Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 22.

¹⁶ Greenwood, Reynolds, Williams and Heinsoo, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (3e), 2001, at 153.

Esmeralda, channel the joy of the divinity, and can also cast magic, which can hurt the undead, for a curious reason. Still, not everyone has the *gift*, or the talent of music to enthrall.

Maztican Pluma and Hishna magic operates *normally and without any limitations* in the Maztican island of Esmeralda. Artificers and casters of sacrifice magic can also cast magic. The latter trigger their powers with human sacrifices and honor Zaltec, Tezca and Azul. The former use *fossils* found in the land, although extracting them weakens the land of Maztica and slowly corrupts it, because those fossils are seals that prevent mystical evil influences.

This is also a land of saints: the Ilmatari tradition of sainthood was well received, and a surprising number of native saints exist, which has lent support to the church of Ilmater. Qotyr, a deity thought to have aspects of Qotal and Tyr, and Ilmater have inspired natives who have led holy lives. Some of them are said to intercede in favor of men and women in peril and threatened by the *inmortales*. Relics of the saints and more abound in *Libertad* – but are despised in New Athkatla. Also, sometimes non-priests who are quite devout have received miraculous holy protection from fearsome and invincible undead or evil beings (the DMG support of unilaterally granted miracles is quite present in an Esmeralda campaign). That is why the piety ability is so relevant (and almost unheard of in New Athkatla, which excels in the social one). Peasants are quite devout and combine traditions of the *faith of old* (that which most natives still practice) and of new (Merciful Justice). Actually, native deities are perceived as *saints* of the Merciful Justice by many peasants, keeping with the tradition of respecting and honoring saints of the church of Ilmater. Of course, foul beings abound, and a priest with the *path of exorcism* is able to turn not only undead but also fiend beings and those spirits of the forest which are evil.

With Faerûnian arcane Mystra Weave magic impossible to use here, only the methods mentioned here, that tap other magical energies, serve. Still, those able to cast magic in those ways are *exceedingly rare*, and *most people*

think that magic is a myth or the privilege of only a few. The exception to this is artifice magic, due to the developments of arcane companies in Watilla and Tecnos, and the magic perceived by victims of Zaltec, Azul and Tezca sacrifice magic. Intriguingly, the Lord Protector of Helm in the Protectorate is a caster of sacrifice magic, taught to him in dreams by a skull artifact he has as a prized possession. This is how he turns political dissidents into mutant soldiers, but no one knows about them except “scientists” and trusted advisors and officers. Others who work on his project are murdered to avoid risks of their disclosure of information and whistleblowing.

DEAD MAGIC IN ALL OF ESMERALDA AND FIREPOWER (SORRY MYSTRA!)

While in Faerûn there are some dead magic areas where the use of magic is impossible,¹⁷ *all* of Esmeralda (but not the seven surrounding smaller islands) is a dead magic zone. This effect was created by Kukul: he foresaw the invasion of Cordell when crafting Esmeralda, and so desired to protect it especially from those invaders. Of course, he did not anticipate the use of firepower by Lantanese refugees (who, in turn, foresaw the disappearance of Lantan from Toril by studying astronomy), which allowed New Athkatlan colonization by giving invaders a tremendous advantage.

In spite of this, just as in Faerûn Shadow Weave users could cast magic in dead magic areas,¹⁸ *native magic* can be used with no limitations. So too can all Fae beings (gnomes and elves native to Esmeralda) handle the energy of the planes connected with Esmeralda to cast magic.

¹⁷ Greenwood, Reynolds, Williams and Heinsoo, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (3e), 2001, at 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The dragon Ibernu, while originally from Faerûn, had a mystical experience while supporting New Athkatla in exchange for promises of riches for his hoard in the richest land of Maztica: Esmeralda. This allowed him to use magic as well. Ibernu gathered many emeralds, only found here, and made other dragons he spoke with via magic jealous.

Finally, the intervention of the Sythillisian Empire created pockets where traditional Faerûnian magic can be used.

The Lantanese, horrified by the savagery against natives and their enslavement, founded a city of their own and declared it neutral territory: the Canton of New Lantan. However, both rebels and colonists plundered it to obtain fire-powered weapons, and the city is almost in ruins and trying to recover. Its magnificent towers are but rubble now.

Recently, a breakthrough discovery has been made: artifice magic can be used when powered with the dust of fossils found in Esmeralda, called the blood of the land by natives.

Apart from artifice, sacrificial magic, pluma and hishna magic, and priestly magic, the magic that flows in the veins of those who have the magic of the True Sun (see history of the dragon empire, below) can also cast magic unhindered.

A Candlekeep scholar once told that he came across a legend that said that Ao wanted to uphold Kukul's desire on Faerûnian magic here, especially barring Mystra's influence and the meddling of her chosen, which sometimes led to bad outcomes. By Ao's decree, any chosen of Mystra who steps in Esmeralda and *uses* magic to meddle in its affairs loses all powers while there and a full year thereafter. Due to this supreme divine ban, not even a *wish* can permit the use of arcane Faerûnian or Mystra magic in Esmeralda. This is an intentional gap in the weave that can *never* be sewn shut. In the surrounding smaller islands around Esmeralda, Faerûnian and *arcane* Weave (Mystra) magic operates normally, though.

7. The urbane and wild contrast, land of music and festivals, and unique locations:

Esmeraldian cities are impressive; capitals are huge, with slums in the *Libertad* Republics. Monuments and markets abound (Waukeen is quite revered in New Athkatla along with Sune, and a religion combining the two deities is quite popular there, defining many of its cultural traits). Underground crime and entertainment, theater, opera and more is ever-present. Yet small villages are not boring places: festivals and holy days abound, and dancing, music and storytelling is an ever-present feature of a suffering but remarkably happy people. Bards, who sing songs of joy and love, for a mysterious reason prevail over the mystical dangers and monsters in many narrations.

Not so far from them, mystical snowy mountains, impenetrable jungles, the desert of bones where dinosaur bones are said to become animate, rainbow-colored rivers with flying dolphins, ruins covered by vegetation, plantations, mountain ranges that crisscross the whole island, white sands and azure sea beaches, and unique fauna and flora all cover the island that would be a paradise but for the hell created by its people.

That being said, every Esmeraldian city or village, unlike those in Faerûn, is teeming with vegetation. Trees grow breaking through the pavement, hanging branches and leaves are found everywhere, and flowers decor every house and veranda. Fountains –the style and like of which was imported from mainland Maztica– grace the main squares and courtyards, and water abounds. Rivers and seas are plentiful. Moreover, the tallest waterfall in Toril can be found in Esmeralda. Beautiful estates or *haciendas* –coffee-producing, or even having drug cultivations– dot the countryside beyond cities and villages –almost always walled and fortified given the war and fear of the supernatural –in them, often States have no effective presence, and thus a benign or harsh ‘swift’ law takes place. In cities, developed legal systems exist, with punishments and legal defense expected –you may use the *Lawyers of Eberron* DMsGuild product as inspiration. A free city, that of Lantanese refugees, is a

technological wonder, but the population was decimated by factions seeking to obtain their weapons to either gain independence or stop the rebellion of the Republics.

A LUSH AND VERDANT LAND: THE CRADLE OF COFFEE AND CHOCOLATE

Esmeralda is lushier than the rest of Maztica. Only a small desert exists there, in the land of Watilla, and it was created by artifice magic and extracting its fuel; the desert of bones expands, and the weakening of seals preventing extraplanar evil influence has led to monsters from old tales suddenly appearing (remember that monsters are special and extraordinary, fearsome here) and to disappearances of rivers and starvation of its nomadic peoples. Esmeralda is the most biodiverse place in Faerûn. Orchids and myriad flowers; trees; diverse animals (including poisonous frogs which can kill those who merely touch them) live there. Its turquoise and multi-colored seas, with its whales and sea life, are an impressive sight that leaves visitors breathless.

Cocoa and chocolate beans originate from Esmeralda. Centuries ago, the Aarakocra took their seeds to the rest of Maztica in exchange for rare goods. Moreover, people consume them differently: Esmeraldians are fond of sweet flavors. Due to their sweet tooth, they brew their coffee and cocoa drinks with sugar cane, and the result is that, unlike in other Maztican lands, they drink not a bitter cocoa drink but rather chocolate and sweet coffee, often with milk.



Most of Esmeralda is still covered by vegetation

8. Racial questions and unfair situations: the races in Esmeralda are unique: elves are smaller

than halflings, wild and dangerous, being masters of magic. Aarakocrans are either peaceful or murderers, depending on the ancestral faction they *choose* to belong to (they do not always join that of their parents, who are sometimes divided as if in a Romeo and Juliet story). Changelings bred as assassins operate from New Athkatla or defect from it and help the revolution of independence. A unique species of gnomes dwells here, represented by mysterious beings that cross through the planes. Halfling tribes manage to maintain their isolated independence; and a unique species of dragonborn that resemble either crocodiles or snakes, originally from Abeir and a Savannah therein (which has come to Toril) which suffers a lot (and received the help of a saint from the Merciful Justice).

Many odious practices and attitudes exist in Esmeralda: discrimination based on race, sex, social class, and others, present opportunities and inspire claims of change.

INTEGRATION WITH MAINLAND MAZTICA

Esmeralda is an island of Maztica, which has several new threats after its temporary displacement to Abeir new untold dangers lie there (as is mentioned in the Tabaxi section of Volo's Guide to Monsters). Its peoples have faced challenges, and the economy of the island depends in part on contacts with the mainland, for trade or the supply of weapons or materials to the Republics. You can, for instance, say that materials vital for making weapons to be employed in the defence against the encroachments of the dragon empire, or of trade vital for the economy, has stopped all of a sudden. Characters may be sent on an expedition to find out why, navigating the treacherous waters and pirates surrounding the island, reaching a realm of Maztican traders, to find out they were enslaved by a new monster or other foe that eats some of them periodically in an ancient pyramid. To reach them, before they have to traverse a jungle, and paths have disappeared –combining exploration (the use of dehydration and other elements found in *Tomb*

of Annihilation regarding Chult is encouraged here, although in addition to humid, Esmeralda boasts many climates), combat and roleplaying when contacting others who can help. Savage threats emerge, and alliances must be established –perhaps when discovering that the Empire or its dragon has allied with or bargained with mainland creatures.

THE HAND OF DESTINY: ADVENTURE

AN ADVENTURE INTRODUCING ESMERALDA

BACKGROUND:

Salá is an island belonging to the (occupied) province of Talaesta. The island overlooks the city of Heroika, to which it has pledged its alliance. It has just declared its independence from the Dragon Empire, which seeks to reconquer it at all costs, sparing no civilian lives. The commander of the imperial forces, **Ajón Mazales**, is a vampire (vampire spawn) at the service of the queen, but is unable to enter the island because it is under the mystical protection of the hand of Azalé, a former exorcist declared as saint by the church of the Mother, called the Cathedral of the Sea (part of it overlooks the sea, and has a secret entrance activated by 'breaking' the trident of a statue of an undead monstrous mermaid thrall the evil water deity Azul, who was according to legends depicted in colorful mosaics and stained glass windows inside the Church, with the monster having been defeated by exorcists who imprisoned her long ago, thus protecting the island, according to religious texts). The limb that once belonged to the saint is located under the vault of the Cathedral of the Mother, the only church in the island, and prevents evil supernatural beings from entering it. Furthermore, (living) imperial troops cannot sail to the island, because all vessels sink mysteriously.

Mazales went to the oracle of **Tamá**, a fey witch (sea hag), which in dreams found out about a 'hand' in the 'holiest place of the accursed island' which is preventing the undead from entering the island. Moreover, the vampire learns that the island is a 'bridge' to the realm of

the Fae, and that the wood timbered from its trees has mystical properties that prevent the small vessels their fishermen navigate in from igniting in mysterious fey fires (operating outside the island, and thus outside of the ban on otherworldly magic and presences of the hand of the saint). Finding people to give invaders these vessels is strategically important for the imperial troops, although their small size makes a large-scale invasion difficult.

Monto, a drug trafficker who exports narcotics cultivated in the woods of the island, known by locals as the fog of tears (when the island was in the Feywild, it was subsumed in perpetual fog by fey who preyed on children, and the effect persists. Drug agents take advantage of the perpetual fog and maze-like qualities to hide there, with the woods being full of weird fireflies), met the vampire when he went to Talaesta (in the mainland of Esmeralda), and charmed him (supernaturally or otherwise) to find a way for the hand to be delivered to the witch outside of the island of Salá, since she knows a way to neutralize it with a dark ritual. In exchange for the promise of riches and a tacit imperial permit for his gang to traffic without retaliation, he agreed. The witch taught him the secrets of blood magic. Entering the island, he murdered a local police agent he had a grudge against, ate his heart and gained the power to cast magic (he is a wizard apprentice, who can also cast message, magic missile, sleep, and has 20 hit points).

STAGES OF THE ADVENTURE:

1. Set in motion

All of the islanders are worried and concerned about the apparent loss of the protection the island was under, with gossip saying that the evil Fae or undead can now enter Salá! This is because of a few corpses and murders with the taint of magic, one having no heart (in fact, the murders were perpetrated by Monto, who took advantage of his newly acquired magic to kill drug lords who were late in the payments of rackets, or shopkeepers who refused to pay

extortion money, and, of course, the police agent, **Jamai**, his public enemy, who denounced corruption and bribes in the agency).

Monto approaches the PCs, pretending to be a mystic with visions. He uses prestidigitation to prove his point (no other spellcasters, possibly aside from the PCs, are known of in the island, and this may be the first time they see magic).

Monto says his name is 'no one', and tells the PCs that in a dream he saw that the curse the island is under is due to the fact that imperial forces introduced a cursed hand of a lich underneath the cathedral. Of course, this is a lie. He tells PCs that if they bring the hand outside the island, they will be heroes saving countless lives of civilians, and will receive a divine blessing in the form of a supernatural powers.

If PCs are deceived and do so, they will enter the Cathedral. A secret door inside the bishop's study (not his bedroom) has it behind a statue of the saint, leading downstairs to the catacombs. You may use the map on the Orzhov Syndicate temple (from the Ravnica sourcebook) as inspiration. Upstairs, monks and a few guards are located. PCs cannot enter the holy recints beyond the praying area without authorization, but may end up doing so (whether they use stealth, obtain religious authorization, or combat—killing is an evil deed that may be reported, so the use of non-lethal damage is expected). Monto warns that they should tell no one, since there is a traitor in the church (another lie). The DM can roleplay haughty religious authorities that may seem suspicious (but are innocent of this).

Police records on the body of Jamai reveal his enmity with Monto, and PCs may find out about his alleged whereabouts in the fog of tears, according to police records. If they follow this path, and somehow gain authorization to the police barracks and to the morgue in which the corpse is found—guarded by an officer thought of by others as a drunkard—, PCs will find that his face has not features at all! Many suspect this is due to foul Fey magic—in truth, the face is covered by a thin layer used by the criminal cartels in order to erase traces of crimes, which

may be removed or replaced with medicine checks—fail by 5 or more, and the layer will be broken! If PCs should follow this course of investigation, they may also see the picture of the criminal Monto—looking quite similar to the 'mystic', aside from some bandages he wears in his head (Int or investigation check if there is suspicion, even passive ones, may be appropriate). There, PCs may overhear about how Monto decided to get the hand himself, and promises of riches! If so, a race before the criminal delivers the hand, and a chase in the church, may take place.

2. Retrieval of the hand

The hand is located in the crypt of the saint (detect magic may reveal the location, since it's the only magical item in the catacombs). The crypt's entrance has a trap: stepping on the entrance makes a cage rapidly descend upon PCs, with a poisonous gas being activated afterwards (use a complex trap from Xanathar's).

Entering the crypt, PCs find out that the Cathedral was built atop the ruins of a sunk native shrine, and that the hand rests underwater. The crypt opens onto a small room with pool leading undersea. It is guarded by ancient, almost decrepit wild elves (use goblin traits) that fight against intruders as guardians of the site, although they may be persuaded if PCs have found out about the risk and plan to take the hand elsewhere for its protection. The hand is deep below the sea in a tunnel under the crypt. If PCs breathe long enough, reaching part of the remains of the native shrine they will see a vision in which they turn into mantarays. They thus get a cloak of the manta ray, permitting a PC to swim far below to retrieve the hand.

Taking the hand without praying harms neutral or evil beings, and heals good aligned ones (cure wounds) the first time this takes place.

3. Delivery?

PCs may end up giving the hand to the witch (disguised) in the meeting place outside the island. If so, she cackles, shows her true form

and decides to kill and eat ‘the foolish ones’. If victorious, PCs may end up being persecuted and sought by different (rival) factions of the republics.

If PCs refuse or fail to deliver the hand (e.g. by leaving it in its original place), the (remaining members of) criminal drug gang persecute them. A siege of the cathedral takes place if the hand remains inside (the Church has defensive positions to fire arrows from). Criminals may be convicted of treason and war or ordinary crimes (as attacking a protected holy place) and sentenced by PCs themselves, who may be awarded official positions afterwards.

To leave the island, PCs must secure one of the canoes or small vessels (a *rowboat*, as found in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*, is the largest of vessels made with Salá wood with defensive properties, and not even imperial *Warships* can safely travel, unless somehow made in the future with such material) made with the wood of the island, perhaps asking fishermen (or if their background is appropriate, borrowing one).

If the hand is somehow lost and leaves the island, a supernatural attack takes place: the graveyards’ bodies rise as zombies! Returning it may end this threat, or organizing a defensive or attack strategy (maybe using mass combat rules) could also save the island from it.

4. Aftermath

If his plans are spoiled, the vampire seeks to foment an internal revolt, or to stir more crime for the citizens of the new ally of Heroika to ‘come to their senses’ and go back under the fold of the Dragon Empire (of course, he plans to carry out sacrifices and firing squads, to ‘teach a lesson’).

If the vampire’s plans succeed, PCs may now have to seek a way to bring the hand back, infiltrating the enemy, and placing it in a safe place, as the fortress of the island, or another idea. If the city is razed by the zombie plague (without the hand’s protection, anyone murdered by one becomes one due to contagion caused by the proximity to other planes), PCs could deliver

the hand to Heroika or another place. A few ghouls (from the corpses of formerly evil creatures) are also found.

HISTORY AND TIMELINE OF ESMERALDA

c. –31500 DR: witnessing a prophecy of invasion and defiling of the Maztican lands, Kukul secretly creates the island of Esmeralda and the surrounding nations supposed to protect it.

c. –31500 DR: Kukul creates the Aarakocra and places them in Esmeralda, hoping that they remain a peaceful people.

959: The Year of the Haunted Crew: The *Inocente* people is persecuted and slaughtered in mainland Maztica by followers of Zaltec. The two survivors are brought to safety to Esmeralda by Aarakocra.

963: The Year of the Deadly Duo: Azul tries to kill Sol and Luna in Esmeralda.

1364: The Year of the Wave: refugees from mainland Maztica, fleeing the Night of Wailing, reach Esmeralda. Warlike tribes settle the land and divide it among themselves.

1369: The Year of the Gauntlet: the Avatar of Tezca kills Sol, father of the *inocentes*. Amaranto, a native, receives part of his essence and begins his campaign to dominate or unite the other tribes and establish the Hinkalliano Empire.

1376: The Year of the Bent Blade: Amnians finally find out about Esmeralda, the richest land in rich Maztica. They easily conquer it, shattering the Hinkalliano Empire. Those who settle the lands seriously dislike the feudal system that Cordell established in Payit lands, favoring a more centralized model. The Hishnaliad, a secret cabal of assassins combining Hishna and Pluma traditions, is established, and will wreak havoc in Amn, Maztica and Esmeralda in the future.

1383: The Year of the Vindicated Warrior:

outbreak of the revolution. Rebels convince the Sythillisian Empire to provide assistance and the war of independence begins.

1399: The Year of the Fallen Friends: Simonus the Couatl defeats Ibernus the dragon but dies.

1402: The Year of the Exorcised Helm: the free land of Libertad is established, at long last seceding from New Athkatla.

1406: The Year of the Blackened Moon: due to different disagreements and rivalries, Libertad crumbles and separates in different Republics.

1487: The Year of the Rune Lords Triumphant: The International Tribunal is established and Watilla is formally recognized by New Athkatla in a treaty that also protects foreign investors.

1489: The Year of the Warrior Princess: Talaesta is reconquered by New Athkatla.

1491: The Year of the Scarlet Witch: Tranaltar is destroyed by New Athkatla.

ANCIENT TIMES

EXTERMINATION AND SALVATION

Esmeralda was originally home to and the birthplace of the Aarakocra, who come from Maztica indeed.¹⁹ This avian race was created by Kukul shortly after creating humankind. Saddened by the wickedness of his children, he crafted Aarakocra from the wind and the Earth of his mate Maztica, aspiring to breed a peaceful species. To provide this new race with a paradise apart from the land where human crimes were being committed, Kukul created *Esmeralda*, and

¹⁹ Brian R. James and Ed Greenwood, *The Grand History of the Realms*, 2007, at 73; <http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=12336>

in its prettiest bay laid the foundations of contemporary Heroika, a now besieged city and the jewel of Esmeralda.

The Aarakocra lived isolated, since *Kukul surrounded Esmeralda by mists*. Only by entering mystical hidden mists could one travel to the Western and large island of Esmeralda. Yet, humankind would play a significant and central role in Esmeralda.

When Zaltec convinced humankind through his priests to conduct sacrifices,²⁰ a great crime was conducted upon the lands of the True World to the East of Esmeralda: a people called the *Inocentes*, devoted to an aspect²¹ of Qotal called Bochica. Interestingly, just as some Mazticans depicted Qotal as bearded, so did the *Inocentes* describe Bochica as bearded.²² In spite of Qotal's slumber,²³ the faith in Bochica did not diminish in this people that refused to carry out sacrifices and managed to persuade many to refrain from them. So, angered and frustrated, a heinous order was given: kill every single *Inocente*.

A genocide took place; no matter where they hid, every inocente was found and killed in the most grievous way. While some historians think that genocides did not take place in Maztica,²⁴ this is an aspect intentionally forgotten in the True World. This came to be known as the Massacre of the Innocents in the lore of the Bochican people. This first genocide almost succeeded, but not fully: repentant for his sins, Qotal sought to amend his ways, and actually did not fully depart from the True World. He

spoke to the Aarakocra in dreams, and convinced them to save the two remaining *inocentes*: *Sol* and *Luna*. So, the avian beings embarked upon the quest and did find them and saved them from Zaltec assassins. Taking the boy and girl in their claws to Esmeralda, they taught them their peaceful ways.

However, Azul, ally of Zaltec, found out about the survivors. He is known for the beneficial aspects of the rains he sends,²⁵ but the one he sent to Esmeralda was a merciless and fierce one indeed. Frustrated by not finding out the exact location of the survivors and the children they had, he sent a deluge and endless rain to drown these beings who could not breathe underwater. Then, he gave power to some mainland halflings to breathe underwater and promised their tribes to rule Esmeralda in exchange for finding and killing the children of the *inocente* survivors.

Many *inocentes* died. Desperate, they pleaded to the heavens, beseeching for salvation. And so, Bochica/Qotal, thought to have departed from the True World, heard their prayers. The first Miracle in Esmeralda took place: the rains stopped by divine intervention that Azul could not prevent, an eternal rainbow²⁶ (which can still be seen at the Northern tip of Esmeralda, at the end of which a land of holy men is said to exist) appeared, and Bochica himself came down to the island to guide his people to safer lands in the South.²⁷ The Northern tip of Esmeralda was forever scarred (and called the Land of Anguish), with lava coming to the Earth, volcanoes constantly spilling forth fiery and lava, horrid monsters appearing, poisonous

²⁰ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 11.

²¹ Let us remember that Maztican deities have many different aspects known by multiple names. See Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 20.

²² Something similar happened in our own Earth regarding Bochica and Quetzalcoatl. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bochica>

²³ See footnote 3, *supra*.

²⁴ Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, at 26.

²⁶ Interestingly, this tale of the cease of a deluge with the appearance of a rainbow is not taken from Biblical narrations. The pre-columbian peoples of South America had a similar story in the narrations of Bochica. See Cecilia Guzmán-Lamprea and Cecilia Lamprea-de Guzmán, *Algunas Leyendas, Mitos y Crónicas Colombianos*, 2015.

²⁷ In Mainland Maztica Qotal has led peoples to safety, such as after the night of wailing. See Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 14.

water found everywhere and more dangers. Qotal or another being is said to have erected a huge Rock Wall to prevent entrance to the Southern lands. South of the wall, vegetation grew without limits. Nests of Aarakocran guardians stand on the wall to perpetually guard from Northern invasions of monsters and to inform Southern settlers if the evil beings ever cross from the Northern land of fire and deadly water where the waves are intelligent and kill on sight along with weresharks.

The natives began to go South, guided in dreams by Bochica. However, with Esmeralda being the greenest, lushest and most bio diverse Maztican land, they found frogs so poisonous that touching them killed instantly, and fruits were often poisonous, so many almost died of starvation. Still, they kept their faith in Qotal and offered him the gold they found everywhere in this land. Pleased, one day when they were in a dangerous jungle and threw golden carvings and offerings to the river, they saw that it fell to the ground as corn, and so no longer were hungry.



Close to the *Fuente de vida*, a peaceful land where hunger and disease do not exist is rumored to exist

After the long exodus, the *inocente* people reached a high plateau at the center of Esmeralda and settled it. Once they reached this place, Bochica/Qotal vanished, promising his protection and that of a friendly foreign deity in future darker times that would come. In the

place where Bochica vanished a beautiful waterfall that plunged down appeared, with crystalline waters that healed all of those who drank from it. This was called the fountain of life or the *Fuente de vida* in Thorass. After the history of warfare, humanity ceased to deserve reaching the place, because of a hidden power: those who drank the water became temporarily immune to man-made weapons, and could attempt to subjugate others unjustly.

FUENTE DE VIDA

The *f fuente* is lost, but could perhaps be found. It is similar to the Maztican *Fountain of the Gods*, described in the Campaign set.²⁸ If someone drinks from it, she can gain immortality, visions, or other abilities. The three parents of *Libertad* are rumored to have found it.

Threats would not end there, though: humiliated, Azul asked Tezca to help him, and help him did he centuries later, when the *Hinkalliano* Empire prevented his slaughter of the Esmeraldian peoples.

Sol and *Luna*, the parents of the Esmeraldian natives, were immortal due to a gift granted by Qotal. That is why they would become the first targets of Tezca...

THE SECRET ANCIENT HISTORY OF ESMERALDIAN LANDS

Esmeralda, my friend, is surrounded by seven smaller islands, six of which are covered in mists and most often unseen. Their shapes are strange, and those with True Sight who see them are regarded as madmen who will end up in the asylum of “desesperación”, where many veterans of the wars of independence that began before the dreaded spellplague began.

²⁸ Douglas Niles, *Maztica Alive*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 26.

Those islands do exist, let me tell you. What is more, they are dangerous indeed: five of them were inhabited long before Kukul created Esmeralda in their midst. Actually, the duende Fae and the undead think that he did so to prevent others from coming to the island, since terrible mighty beings lived there and would prevent anyone from coming to the island in the center. Save for the Seventh Island that can be seen and is regarded as a deadly and nigh inescapable multinational prison island (Gorgana), where a jail has been constructed to imprison war criminals (the island of the 'Gorgon', where a powerful medusa turns captives to stone), the remaining six were ruled each by an archfey, one of them evil beyond imagination. His sisters and brothers killed him, but his dark soul resisted to abandon the idea of revenge and turned his island into a land of undead. So the first dark portal to the Eternal night was born. The remaining Fae fled from his wrath, and the elder, Nevado, lord of eternal winter, erected a huge mountain in the center of Esmeralda. So high it was that he built his citadel at the top, and covered the mountain in snow. The snow still remains. Tyrannical he became, and was dethroned and banished to the land of the duendes. There, he plots his return, which seems imminent now that the barriers between the planes were broken.

Kukul banished the remaining fey siblings to their islands, which were transported to the plane of the fey. Yet, with the Spellplague, those lands attracted Esmeralda, each in turn, to their plane, in order to be located next to it again. That is why with the return of Maztica to Toril from Abeir a different story is told. With Esmeralda, after Abeir it went to the land of the dead and those of the Fae, but the mighty Kukul protection prevented its inhabitants from knowing so. Now, hidden behind mists, the surrounding islands are back in Toril, and each of them is ruled by mysterious beings from the Three Realms: Abeir, land of the duendes and the eternal night, place of weeping and the dead.

- Should you decide to play adventures in the Ancient Times, possibilities include fleeing from genocidares in mainland Maztica and reaching the Aarakocra who will save the *inocentes*; escaping from the Wrath of Azul; or playing as an Aarakocra who will save *inocentes*.²⁹

INVASIONS AND EMPIRE

The *inocentes*, in their newfound land, soon lost their faith after the disappearance of Qotal. They found gold plentiful, and erected buildings made of it, including the great *Dorado* city. However, they had not sown grains and had no mayz. The elders repented and gave up many of the golden objects they crafted, throwing it to the river in honor of Qotal. That gold became mayz again, and the natives were fed and nourished. This was because just as Qotal/Bochica gave mayz to natives in mainland Maztica,³⁰ he heard their prayers and gave it to them again in the Esmeraldian mountains and plains.³¹

²⁹ The Aarakocra statistics, should you desire to play one, are found in: the free (!) *Elemental Evil Player's Companion* (5th edition), which you can get at [dndclassics.com](http://www.dndclassics.com/product/145542/Elemental-Evil-Players-Companion-5e) (<http://www.dndclassics.com/product/145542/Elemental-Evil-Players-Companion-5e>)

³⁰ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 8.

³¹ Something similar is told to have happened in South America. See Cecilia Guzmán-Lamprea and Cecilia Lamprea-de Guzmán, *Algunas Leyendas, Mitos y Crónicas Colombianos*, 2015.

**FOOD FOR GOLD, THE NIGHTMARE OF
NEW ATHKATLA! (CANTRIP)**

Native priests of Qotal and druids of Maztica have a cantrip to turn gold into mayz, whose origins are described above (which is very useful when traversing jungles where every fruit is poisonous for humans, by the way). One of the reasons why the Dragon Empire gave up one of its provinces (Talaesta) at the beginning of the wars of independence was because of a peaceful rebellion in which impoverished native Faerûnians claimed to the crown that the war taxes impoverished them and wars made food scarce. A clever priest of Qotal, a slave called Tukul, gathered other slaves and turned all of the viceroy's outpost's gold into corn! The Viceroy feared that his other riches would become food and so secretly gave up the small province in exchange for his remaining gold being spared.

The *inocente* people were peaceful, and lived uneventful but happy lives for centuries. This, of course, was to change. The first great upheaval was caused by the Night of Wailing in Nexal.³² Many refugees³³ fled from danger, and some of them, instead of reaching Tukan, arrived in Esmeralda. However, some but not all Nexalans converted to the faith of Qotal.³⁴ Some still worshipped Zaltec, and they were prevalent among refugees who reached Esmeralda. It is said that they were permitted passage either because Kukul was dead and could not prevent it or because it would be cruel to let them suffer and die. In any case, they were repelled from Lopango and were forced to reach Esmeralda.

The new arrivals were quite different from the *inocentes*. Warlike, they dominated the *inocentes* and divided themselves in four opposed tribes who vied for power and prominence. They even conducted ritual war and

sacrifices, but respected the *inocentes* out of fear that the gods would punish them if they harmed them. This is when Azul saw his chance and asked Tezca to avenge him and wipe out the *inocentes*.

Sol and *Luna* led their sons to the highest plateau, Nevado, and were carried there by the Aarakocra. With ethnic Nexalans unwilling to hurt them and being unable to reach the peaks in any case, Tezca began to torch the central mountain range. Formerly, it was all covered in snow, but now that snow melted. Only the peak of Nevado retained its snow, and only because of the magic of the Fae Lord Nevado who had ruled from there (see the secret ancient history, above). Fire rained down from the skies, and many Aarakocra died while in flight. Some thought that they had chosen the weak and wrong side, and joined Tezca as his priests, with the vow to kill the *inocentes*. Most Aarakocra remained faithful to the tenets of Kukul, though. One fateful night, the highest Aarakocran priest of Tezca found *Sol* and *Luna*. They had drunk from the *Fuente de vida*, and could not be killed by ordinary means. The priest was seriously wounded by the Aarakocran bodyguards of *Sol* and *Luna* but, before dying, invoked the avatar of Tezca.

Tezca's avatar killed *Sol*, but before attacking his wife *Luna* she was taken to the heavens by Qotal. This is when the *moon* was first seen in Esmeralda.

Sol died fighting, and *Sol's* essence was spread all over Esmeralda. The most honest and just of the leaders of Esmeralda, an ethnic Nexalan called Amaranto who refused and prohibited sacrifices, and who had decreed the protection and respect of the *inocentes* who received his people when in need, received his essence, the essence of the 'True Sun'. He was thus called the benefactor Sun, who protected from Tezca, and would establish the Hinkalliano Empire.

Some among those who received the essence of the True Sun, mostly native chieftains and their marital or extramarital descendants, speculated or dreamt that it was Intiri, the Natican deity of the Sun and supreme benefactor, originally from

³² Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 43.

³³ Ibid.; Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 14.

³⁴ Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 24.

the land of Lopango, to the South East of Esmeralda.³⁵ Others rebut this claim, however.

THE AARAKOCRAN CIVIL WAR ENDURES

Ever since the previous events, the Aarakocra communities in Esmeralda have been divided and combat each other: the Kukul faction, led by druids of Maztica the wife of their benefactor, and the Tezca one, led by fire-using sorcerers who can cast magic because of their pact with Tezca.

Amaranto defeated all the three other Nexalan tribes in spite of the inferior numbers and power of his troops, and married a daughter of *Luna*, an ethnic *inocente*. He then founded the Hinkalliano empire, named after the tribe he led, uniting all peoples under his beneficent rule.

The inocentes were granted autonomy and moved to current-era Cordelliana lands, where they were not governed by the Hinkalliano Empire but left alone.

Amaranto had magical powers because of the essence of *Sol* he received, and defeated Tezcan forces after uniting the inhabitants of Esmeralda. His successor inherited his magic and were appointed as emperors of Esmeralda.

THE TAINT OF TEZCA: DARK MAGIC OR THE DARK BLESSING

It is said that someone else received the essence of *Sol*: Kumaru, a Nexalan general and covert priest of Tezca. When he was killed for refusing to bow down before Amaranto, the magic he received was passed on to others. However, that essence was tainted by the rays of Tezca and is known as the Dark Sun's blessing. It is rumored to give magical abilities to those who inherit it, but whether this tale is true or not remains a mystery.

COLONIZATION

Amnian settlers in Payit kept hearing tales about the richest lands in Maztica, supposedly in an island to the West of the mainland. Two generals who hated Cordell and regarded him as a brute with luck he did not deserve procured authorization by the Council of Six in Amn to find out if stories were true and reign as Viceroy in lands they eventually conquered. Curiously, they despised the Council as well, since a lover they both had was unjustly imprisoned and they blamed the faceless Council members. In their opinion, the Council served its purpose after the trade wars but a return to monarchy,³⁶ a strong one like the one they desired to impose in New Athkatla, was necessary for the true glory of Amn to shine.

So, they reached Esmeralda. Despite being heavily armed and bringing many troops, they were defeated once and again because of the magical power of the 'True Sun' emperor and his children. Desperate and seeing the great riches of the land, one of them, an evil warlock, convinced a dragon called Ibernus (more on him is found below) to help him. With his aid, he conquered the lands, killed the True Sun and all his children, and then murdered the other general, self-proclaiming him king of the

³⁵ See Jon Hild, *Lopango – Land of the Sacred Sun*, pp. 13-14, available at: <http://www.dmsguild.com/product/174537/TWC2-Lopango--Land-of-the-Sacred-Sun>

³⁶ Regarding the end of monarchy in Amn, see: Steven E. Schend, "Book two: Amn", *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 18.

Dragon Empire of New Athkatla, which he regarded as being no vassal of Amn but a new nation or power.

THE INHERITORS OF THE TRUE SUN (MAGIC 'BACKGROUND') AND THEIR PERSECUTION

When the True Sun emperor and his children were massacred while sleeping by Ibernu the dragon, their magical essence, not constrained by dead magic limitations, was received in other bodies. That is why some people secretly have the innate ability to cast magic without their learning how to do so or having a pact. They often hide their powers because some natives think that by killing them they gain their powers.

Those with True Sun blood have a shimmering chest. More on this is found in section 'Game Mechanics, Races and Classes in Esmeralda'. Characters who choose the True Sun Heir Background (Haunted one, from *Curse of Strahd*) have received the essence of *Sol* and the True Sun emperor. Receiving the spark makes them as marked by the evil beings of Esmeralda (Zaltec or other evil Maztican deities, primordial spain as giants roaming the lands, trickster fey, etc.), who appeared once to them.

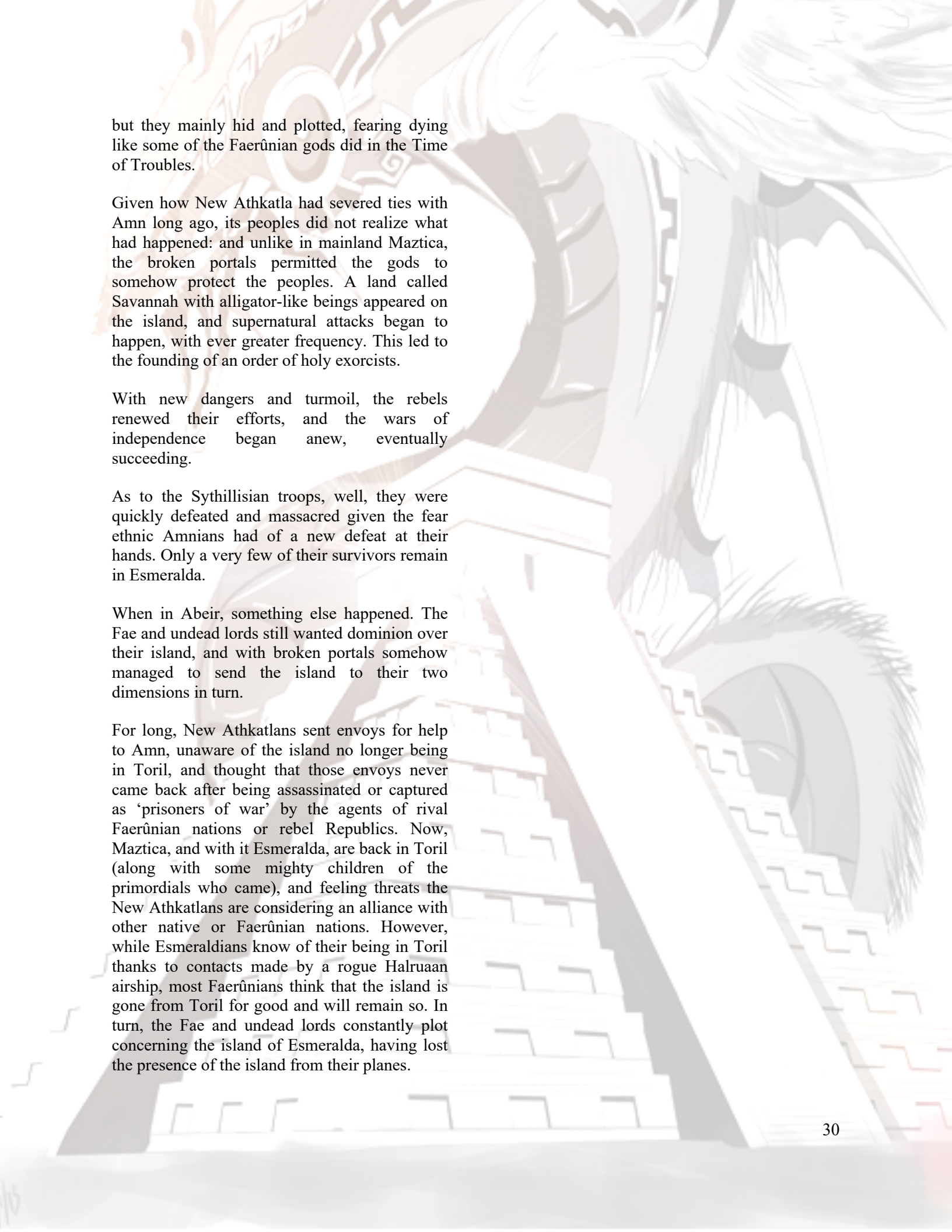
REVOLUTION

New Athkatla ruled with caste laws (see below in the New Athkatla section) for decades, until some religious and secular ethnic Amnian leaders rejected the injustice of the system and joined forces with natives and descendants of native and Amnian marriages to eventually found a new nation State: the Republic of Libertad, which later on fragmented into six Republics (one of which was later reconquered by the New Athkatlan Empire) after a cruel and senseless civil war. Zaltec was meanwhile strengthened... (see point 1 of section "Seven defining traits and features of Esmeralda, above) and section "An overview of Esmeraldian lands, plots, conspiracies, faiths and States", below) - needless to say, adventures set at this time may involve participating in the fight for independence-.

However, before independence was fully achieved, and because of its weaker forces and armament, the rebels asked for help from different Faerûnian powers: Waterdeep and Baldur's Gate gave money and some weapons, but travel distances and hurdles made such help unreliable and insufficient. Desperate, they contacted the Sythillisian Empire, whose ogre magi lords had managed to separate Amnian territories and rule over them. The ogres, happy to help, sent monstrous agents of their own, but this had a terrible effect. Kukul had placed barriers on the island of Esmeralda, preventing portals from being opened. However, once the monsters began to massacre New Athkatlan troops using magic of pacts with evil beings, the protection on the portals or doors were broken: Fae and undead began to enter into Esmeralda, and planned to conquer it. But something terrible happened — the Spellplague came, and Esmeralda, along with all of Maztica, was transported from Toril to the mysterious land of Abeir, and afterwards to the parallel planes. Its people, for some reason, saw some new creatures but did not realize about the travel to another world.

Moreover, unlike in mainland Maztica,³⁷ the good aligned gods did not fall silent in Esmeralda, and sacrificial magic still operated: the opening of many gates allowed angelical messengers of the gods to provide priestly magic, which is rare since only a few have sufficient faith. Thus, Devas and other angels permitted to channel priestly magic (on these beings, see the 5th edition SRD and the 5th edition *Monster Manual*). Additionally, Tyr was never perceived as having died in Esmeralda, which is strange. So, after the Sundering, he was not regarded as having returned but as having always remained. His servants have been mighty exorcists, and worked quite hard while Esmeralda was in the other worlds and dimensions different from Toril. Zaltec and evil deities also operated in Esmeralda, albeit at a risk: their avatars were forced to roam the land,

³⁷ Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, p. 14.



but they mainly hid and plotted, fearing dying like some of the Faerûnian gods did in the Time of Troubles.

Given how New Athkatla had severed ties with Amn long ago, its peoples did not realize what had happened: and unlike in mainland Maztica, the broken portals permitted the gods to somehow protect the peoples. A land called Savannah with alligator-like beings appeared on the island, and supernatural attacks began to happen, with ever greater frequency. This led to the founding of an order of holy exorcists.

With new dangers and turmoil, the rebels renewed their efforts, and the wars of independence began anew, eventually succeeding.

As to the Sythillisian troops, well, they were quickly defeated and massacred given the fear ethnic Amnians had of a new defeat at their hands. Only a very few of their survivors remain in Esmeralda.

When in Abeir, something else happened. The Fae and undead lords still wanted dominion over their island, and with broken portals somehow managed to send the island to their two dimensions in turn.

For long, New Athkatlans sent envoys for help to Amn, unaware of the island no longer being in Toril, and thought that those envoys never came back after being assassinated or captured as 'prisoners of war' by the agents of rival Faerûnian nations or rebel Republics. Now, Maztica, and with it Esmeralda, are back in Toril (along with some mighty children of the primordials who came), and feeling threats the New Athkatlans are considering an alliance with other native or Faerûnian nations. However, while Esmeraldians know of their being in Toril thanks to contacts made by a rogue Halruaan airship, most Faerûnians think that the island is gone from Toril for good and will remain so. In turn, the Fae and undead lords constantly plot concerning the island of Esmeralda, having lost the presence of the island from their planes.

ATLAS OF ESMERALDA

By Kunza of Tukan³⁸

Dear Friend. Our beloved nation, devoted to Qotal and from whom so much we, unworthy ones, have learned, gave us so much that I desired to see why an island as rich as Esmeralda, whose peoples originally followed our beloved Qotal (albeit with a different aspect and name, Bochica), is such a chaotic land plagued by war and death at the hands of fellow human beings. Perhaps this was the influence of the dreaded New Athkatla, the Dragon Empire all Mazticans fear as much as Nexal, or perhaps a curse of the heavens, I knew not. So curious, I embarked on one of the mythical flying canoes that some of those *duendes* have to travel to Esmeralda, and saw many wonders. I briefly described to you what I saw about the land and how I was almost enslaved by a New Athkatlan witch. By the grace of Qotal I escaped, and befriended curious natives who follow Ilmater and 'Qotyr', a combination of

Qotal and an alien god, Tyr. Interestingly, they say that Tyr was blind in the barbarous Eastern lands, but that upon seeing the horrors and injustice wrought against the natives the god saw that justice cannot be blind but must see injustices and all truth and protect the oppressed. So, the suffering of the natives returned his sight and he followed the merciful Ilmater, whom we natives respect.

I: LANGUAGES AND CULTURE OF ESMERALDA

AND (THE LACK OF) LITERACY

Nexalan and Thorass are the dominant languages in Esmeralda. Minorities speak other languages and so do the elites (who use common), and frequently communities do not understand each other. This is a source of intrigue indeed.

As to the prominence of Nexalan among natives, it is explained because of the historical migration of Nexalans fleeing from the night of wailing and the later dominance of the Hinkalliano Empire by ethnic Nexalans. They did not formally impose their tongue, but their use emerged spontaneously due to the need for communication. Isolated native communities and tribes speak their own tongue (e.g. water halflings, who still speak the language mainland Maztican halflings use).

Ethnic Faerûnians, peasants and nobles alike (or the rich and military elites in the Republics, where both nobility and slavery been abolished), speak Thorass, while the ruling bodies in New Athkatla use the Faerûnian common to stand apart, but can speak Thorass perfectly. New Athkatlan nobles speak in a fancy, affected and

³⁸ On Tukan, see Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, at 24 (available at: <http://www.dmsguild.com/product/171534/TWC1Maztica-Campaign-Guide>)

posh way to distinguish themselves from all others and Republican ‘scum’. Some cultivated people in the Republics also speak common. Not everyone is literate, though. This is a pernicious heritage of some of the caste laws, which restricted access to education. This is slowly beginning to change in the Republics. Hence, not everyone reads and/or writes. The use of Thorass is due to the fact that it is a language with a prevalent use in Amn,³⁹ something that made it the *de facto* language in the True World by colonists. Paradoxically, everyone else regards the New Athkatlan accent as harsh and their speakers as rude who swear all the time. It is true: others speak more melodically. Yet, New Athkatlans are a happy and sensual lot: they often sing impromptu and have raucous parties, but are proud of their achievements and belittle the “anarchic” rebel provinces they refuse to call Republics. Curiously, the economic and political elites of the Republics sometimes emulate the New Athkatlan accent to distinguish themselves from the ‘ordinary populace.’ A few New Athkatlans remained in the free Republics after their independence, with some of them working as private tutors or teachers, some even as professors in the University of Cordelliana. Some of them are despised and sometimes lynched, with others having befriended the Republicans and being respected. Hinkalliano fire squads kill these ‘foreigners’ on sight, but they are almost always welcome in Cordelliana.

Some ethnic Nexalans, on the other hand, do write their symbols on paper, as their ancestors did.⁴⁰

The children of the Alligator, in turn, speak an Abeir language of theirs: *caiman*. Both slaves and escaped maroons employ it to conceal their communications from New Athkatlan ‘masters’ and prevent their uncovering their plots for freedom or revenge. Moreover, when speaking in the Thorass tongue of their (former or current)

masters they use slangs comprehensible only to them to avoid discovery of their plans to escape from enslavement or be recaptured by bounty hunters, concealing the location of their villages, especially in the Savannah. This ‘language’ is called ‘Slaves’ Cant’. Alligator children who reveal those terms are thus expelled from their communities or worst, and regarded as putting them all at risk.

II: THE STATES OF ESMERALDA: OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL DOMAINS

Dear Poshtlina, the inhabitants of the land are mostly neither native nor Faerûnian, but a mixed breed. They thus resist the barbarous illnesses much better and have more joy than the Eastern ones. The best of both worlds rests in them, but also the worst of them. Not all of the island has been claimed by the different States, and they want to colonize ‘unsettled’ lands, which we know belong to the gods and to tribes. The following are the main States...

New Athkatla and the Republics carve the land of Esmeralda among themselves, but the truth is that most of the land within their borders is uninhabited and covered in wilderness. Some tribes have never had contact with the “outsiders” from the East (Faerûn), ignore their languages and fiercely defend their lands. New Athkatla controls its territory in a way much more effective than its Republican counterparts, though.

³⁹ See Steven E. Schend, “Book two: Amn”, *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 14.

NEW ATHKATLA

'THE DRAGON EMPIRE' (REALM)

Political Lore

Ruled by queen Bella, New Athkatla occupies all of the Northeastern peninsula of Esmeralda, which is a very large island. Below the queen are the Three Viceroys, two of whom administer North and South Athkatla, respectively, with the third one (the Viceroy 'of glory') being in charge of 'reconquering' the lands.

Unlike other Esmeraldian lands and political bodies, New Athkatla is secure and stable. Crime does not have a foothold there and money flows. New Athkatlans deride the 'Republics' for their problems, internal conflicts and anarchy, and many even from those Republics long for the lost safety. New Athkatlan authorities rule with an iron fist, though, but they refer to it as the golden gauntlet of prosperity.

New Athkatlan cities are beautiful to behold: full of art and commerce, with innovation and impressive architecture, as with Pintura, its capital and seat of the throne of emeralds. In the countryside, New Athkatla is dotted with castles and fortresses of Faerûnian style, which are used for military purposes.

New Athkatlans like to show the wealth they have (if so) dressing fancy and elegantly and using jewels and make up, including males.

The city of *Tecnos* is a city with a formerly incipient and now developing steam technology and artifice magic, having steamboats and a certain Steampunk feel, due to the magitech obtained by artifice magic thanks to resources and fossils extracted by two companies incorporated in Tecnos –which oppose each other subtly and with intrigue (more on this is explained in the Watilla section).

Prominent aspects of New Athkatla are described below.

The Viceroy of Glory, 'the Pacifier' (NPC)

The former third Viceroy, called the Viceroy of 'Glory', was assassinated by a jaguar knight⁴¹ from mainland Maztica called *Colmillo*. Colmillo was recruited by Muchi, a former rebel general who had defeated the New Athkatlan armies in a decisive battle that prevented re-colonization of the Republic of Watilla, mostly led by natives, who are the majority there, and devoted to the goddess Watil⁴².

Unbeknownst to the rebel armies, *Colmillo* belonged to the Hishnaliad, a secret faction of assassins that was born in Esmeralda the moment the Faerûnians invaded it.

The former Viceroy managed to capture Muchi and enslave him. Then, as revenge he mutilated and blinded Muchi. As you know, the original inhabitants of Maztica can train parrots and macaws,⁴³ which abound in Esmeralda. Muchi talked to a macaw and sent him Eastward. That parrot eventually reached the homeland and told a regimen of jaguar knights what had befallen its master. Enraged, *Colmillo* killed the former Viceroy of Glory.

⁴¹ The jaguar knight ranger archetype for *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th edition is described in: Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, pp. 52-53.

⁴² See Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 31.

⁴³ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 53.

SKILL: ANIMAL HANDLING IN MAZTICA TO DELIVER (SECRET OR NOT SO SECRET) MESSAGES OVER DISTANCES

Natives or those Natives teach can use the 5th edition Animal Handling skill to train parrots and macaws to fly to someone or somewhere and deliver voice messages. This has been often used in the wars of independence against New Athkatla and in Republican civil wars. New Athkatlan forces are baffled because natives refuse to teach them about this, so they often kill birds on sight. Their superior ownership of horses and horsemanship allows New Athkatlans to use the aforementioned skill to train horses to deliver messages, though, something that non-New Athkatlan breeds do not do.

Curiously, this made things worse for natives and ethnic Faerûnians living in independent Republics, because the new Viceroy is a ruthless man. Morill is known as the ‘pacifier’ of what New Athkatla sees not as independent States but as rebel provinces.

Morill (male human fighter 18) has fought in different battles against the Republics, and executes all rebel leaders because he has been appointed as judge prosecutor of the state of emergency. He can decree and decide on issues concerning the wars of independence, and recently recaptured *Talaesta*. Morill seeks to reconquer the other rebel ‘provinces’, and is besieging the city of Heroika, starving its population.

Currently, New Athkatla and Morill himself have *no* intentions of reconquering Watilla: economic dependence is enough for them and suffices since they get what they want without military expenditure. It is the only Republic they recognize as “sovereign” and independent, in the bilateral treaty of Pacem (New Athkatla would have no compunction breaching it should selfish national interests dictate so for the realist Empire).

The Fall of Tranaltar: one month after the campaign begins, the men led by Morill will

raze to the ground the Republic of Tranaltar with a secret weapon stolen from Renacida. The weapon was unique and destroyed in the process, and its creator is on the run. Tranaltar was in the process of acquiring Renacida-made weapons after entering into a treaty and customary law with it, and remains of technological-magical artifacts are scattered in the ruins.

The fall will deal a serious blow to the hopes of a lasting independence for the Republics. Talaesta was the strongest one by far and the reunification dream was about to come true in a federation centered on Talaesta.

Talaesta, the Land of Chains and Despair (subjugated province, former Republic)

Talaesta was the first province to secede from New Athkatla and the first one to be reconquered. It will be seen if others have its same fate in the future.

Talaesta is built on a plateau that oversees the bay of Heroika, a free city under siege. It is from Talaesta that Morill forces conduct the attack.

Talaesta is a land rich in coffee, and birds abound there: macaws and parrots. However, the faith of Qotal has been forbidden by the Martial Law enacted by Morill, who considers it as a seed of rebellion. Anyone practicing the faith is accused of treason and executed by the *Faceless Tribunal*.

Talaesta has a special place in the hearts and minds of New Athkatlan and its monarchs. It was the first land under their rule in Esmeralda, and joined freely with the conquerors. Its natives resented some injustices of the Hinkalliano Empire, which hated them for being the last Nexalan tribe they dominated. Its natives were afforded greater rights than others by the conquerors (although they were not treated as equals) and their leader, a female chieftain, named Talaesta, helped them translate (remember, translation magic did not work without the weave) and conquer the inhabitants of the island at a time the Faerûnians were not making any progress and were suffering heavy

losses. She was concubine of the first Kind of New Athkatla. Therefore, New Athkatlans have regarded them as ungrateful and betrayers since their independence and resistance to reconquest, and have been especially harsh with them. Firing squads killing at night at alleged freedom fighters remind the citizens so.

The Faceless Tribunal (organization) and Changelings (race)

The Faceless Tribunal has ‘jurisdiction’ to operate everywhere in Esmeralda. The Republics, of course, argue that its activities outside New Athkatla violate international law because of its being an abusive overreach in independent lands.

The Tribunal is composed of the so-called inquisitors, who have authority given by the monarch to prosecute and implement the law directly and without the need of Trial. It suffices that they consider an accusation proven by any means. This is why they often abuse and extract ‘confessions’ by torture. Its members have an interesting ability: they are *Changelings*. These are beings with the ability to change their features, facial ones included.

With this ability, the Faceless Tribunal members often disguise themselves to mislead and convince others to join the rebellion. Then, when others acquiesce, they condemn them and kill them at once.

But what is the origin of these beings, whose official attire is a black cloak and a silver mask (Venetian style) that covers even the eyes? The wars of independence.

When New Athkatla saw that it was losing the war (after the Couatl Simonus, a Republican general, seriously wounded Ibernu the dragon), it asked Amn for help. Knowing that this war was being lost because of its being guerrilla warfare, the Council of Six in Amn ordered experimentation with mating doppelgangers and human prisoners. Thus were Changelings born, and they were raised in the jails where their human parents were imprisoned so as to make

them ruthless beings who would show no mercy towards the rebel provinces in Esmeralda.

A (very) few Changelings have defected and joined the Republican forces. They are treated as elite agents in the current wars.

Information on the Changeling race for Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition can be found in the *Eberron* Unearthed Arcana document found here: http://media.wizards.com/2015/downloads/dnd/UA_Eberron_v1.pdf

The Caste Laws for the Preservation of Purity, the Mad Nobility, and the Origin of Dissent

New Athkatla was founded by people who personally despised Cordell but agreed with the brutal treatment against the natives.

At first, the government of the conquered Esmeraldian lands was similar to the one prevalent in Payit, with landlords who had “mastership” over natives”.⁴⁴ However, as years passed, they saw that the Payit land experienced intermingling of natives and Amnians and that “purity” was lost. Indeed, New Amn ceased to have a distinct Amnian ethnicity but rather mixed blood abounded.⁴⁵

Afraid that something similar may befall in New Athkatla, especially because of the lust of the colonists and the beauty of the natives, harsh caste laws were introduced by King Moncho; only “pure” Faerûnians could be nobles, join the priesthood, or own lands

Many daughters and sons of nobles resented this and began to harbor resentment and a desire of justice. They thought that support of the natives was crucial to gain independence, and so leaflets on freedom began to circulate.

⁴⁴ Douglas Niles, *Maztica Alive*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 30.

⁴⁵ Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, at 18, 21.

The pure blood laws had many pernicious effects, including madness. Since so few “pure blooded” families existed, eventually people began to marry close relatives and siblings. Every so often, the offspring of those marriages had the tail of a pig, another bizarre feature or, worse, madness.

Some of the cruelest rulers and nobles of New Athkatla suffer from this, which leads them to savagery and being bloodthirsty or having deformities. The current queen, Bella, is called in whispers the ‘insane queen’, and rightly so: she drinks from the blood of rebels (native and Faerûnian or mixed blood alike) every night and bathes in it. She collects the heads of rebel leaders, and she has sex with elite members of the Faceless Tribunal to breed ‘royal’ Changelings who serve as her bodyguards. This is called the Bastard Guard (composed of ten level 8 changelings), and is the most efficient military body. Some whisper that late king Marcellus was killed by the queen upon her discovering that he had a native mistress. Crown prince Jotarión, her son, is a pure blooded Amnian though.

Ibernu the Dragon, ‘Serpent of Death’ and Simonus the Couatl, ‘Father of Freedom’, ‘Serpent of Liberty’

While he has delusions of grandeur, queen Bella treats him as a mere weapon. Ibernu hails from Faerûn, and came to Esmeralda with promises of riches only found in Esmeralda to help with conquest. His ruthless killing of natives and killing of Hinku lord Tupi led to the surrender of the Hinkalliano Empire as a whole overnight. For years, resentment of the Caste laws and the enactment of laws allowing slavery led to nowhere because of fear of the dragon, ‘the serpent of Death’, who stifled all dissent with its fangs and poison. Ibernu is an Ancient Green Dragon, who often hid below the Esmeraldian seas and rivers and exhaled poison on tribes while they slept, or poisoned rivers next to rebel encampments –it may be that other dragons, apart from the few present Maztican rain dragons, will be attracted to the riches of Esmeralda to increase their hoards in the future

—or perhaps some polymorphed or concealed are already in the island.

Ibernu managed to ensure New Athkatlan supremacy, that is, until Simonus came: this happened when Esmeralda was in Abeir. One night, a woman wept for the death of his son, Narin, who was killed by the Faceless Tribunal merely for publishing a book on fundamental rights of women and men and calling for democracy in New Athkatla. The heavens heard him, and Qotal, not present in Esmeralda since it was in Abeir, sent Simonus the Couatl to right wrongs. Simonus the Couatl began to inspire freedom by sending messages with his Dream spell and shapechanging ability. He taught them that the heavens would protect them (and indeed they would! Ilmater and Qotal had made a pact against further oppression by New Athkatla!).

Soon, the ‘silent army’ marched at night against the palace in the capital of New Athkatla, and captured queen Berna. The dragon Ibernu attempted to kill and swallow the fighters but was seriously wounded by Simonus. At the brink of death, Ibernu fled to recover but first managed to kill the Couatl, and has fully recovered a month ago, which pleases Morill. Simonus made a sacrifice, because he knew that he would fall to the might of Ibernu.

Spies Abroad and Fall of the Empire from Within

With its sights on the rebel Republics (except Watilla), the Empire of New Athkatla prepares to fight foreign troops. However, the greatest risk comes from hidden cells within: the Anarchist alliance. A group of Anarchists seeks to overthrow the queen and abolish monarchy.

While the Empire of New Athkatla hires and sends saboteurs and spies to further its interests and weaken its enemies abroad, those cells, hidden underground, are an unknown threat.

On the other hand, the highly centralized New Athkatla may have sown the seeds of its demise or secession of territories. In order to fight the rebels and try to reconquer territories, a royal decree authorized some noble families to hire

armies on the condition that they are not mercenaries (mercenaries are directly hired by the crown to fight abroad, and include traitors from the Republics lured by gold, wealth or other promises).

Some of those nobles have been granted titles and the nation may perhaps undergo a transformation into a Feudal system or a semi-Feudal one. Many nobles resent the decree of emergency, under which the queen centralizes legislative, executive and judicial powers, which she delegates to some “enforcers”, as faceless judges, some of whom are changelings.

The nobles intrigue, especially Allean irten’Hamark. She descends from a noble Tethyrian lineage who was almost wiped out by protesters after the Ten Black Days of Eleint⁴⁶ and whose survivors found refuge in wealthy Amn. She seeks greater freedom and more powers when ruling the lands under her command, desiring a return to the original feudal system that Cordell long ago implanted in Maztica (Payit lands).⁴⁷ A civil war may or may not be brewing.

Another schemer is lord Halthomn, who rules from his fortress of Lockurah, bordering rebel lands. Most of his sons, fierce warriors, were killed by rebels and his fortress was put in flames. Some whisper that the corpses of his sons walk at night, perhaps animated by a mad scientist he hires; that he flays natives and foreigners captured by bounty hunters he sends to the Republics, and that he delights in their suffering.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

New Athkatla holds a terrible secret: its queen is a vampire, who feasts in the blood of the living prisoners. She is unaware of her true nature, however.

⁴⁶ Steven E. Schend, “Book one: Tethyr”, *Lands of Intrigue*.

⁴⁷ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 69.

New Athkatlan people are unaware of why people disappear or sometimes die of unexplained causes: Fae and undead lords and their minions explain this. They are especially attracted to this Empire’s lands for some unknown.

However, the Empire is ill suited to face those supernatural threats: it persecutes other faiths and the exorcists of Deo, Ilmater, Tyr or Qotal. It regards every faith different from the Golden Fist as superstitious, fanatic, barbarous and uncivilized or corrupted; and its religion is much more secular, by attaching more importance to the temporary aspects that make New Athkatla great: its riches (Waukeen), might (Helm and his protection) and beauty and pleasure (Sune). Priests of those faiths must hide or are executed as treasonous and instigators or revolt (it does not help that many priests inspired the independence wars). Some families hide those priests in priest holes in their homes, at risk of being branded as traitors as well.

THE FREE REPUBLICS

AND THE LANDS UNDER SIEGE: THE LAND OF LIBERTAD

“Free from the imperialistic and racist yoke at last, free at last my brothers and sisters! No longer oppressed by tyranny and discrimination. Our lives are ours to shape, with no sword pointing at our throats. Liberty at last!”
Chant on the eve of the Final Battle of Independence, at Dragon Turtle Bridge

The first serious attempt to carve independence took place after the ‘merciless day’. Ethnic New Athkatlan teenagers who had copied and secretly distributed Narin’s book ‘on freedom’ were playing the Maztican Ball Game⁴⁸ with native friends and with monks of Ilmater in a village in Talaesta when troops of Helm began to kill

⁴⁸ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 65.

everyone in the village because of rebellion, treason and endangering security.

Tired of oppression and injustice, and stirred by the death of Narin, three New Athkatlan international lawyers and barristers (the ‘parents of Liberty’) considered that the situation was unjust and unbearable. They resigned in protest and traveled to the wilderness to learn from native wisdom. Then, abandoning the faith of Helm and protection of the Realm they so despised, they embraced the faith of Ilmater in solidarity with suffering natives and mixed bloods. It is rumored that their piety and justice made them worthy of finding the *Fuente de vida* (see sidebar, *supra*). They found great wisdom and, with Ibernú gone for now, organized the rebellion.

NOT HISTORY, GAME PLOTS!

With New Athkatla recovering and trying to reconquer lands it lost, similar events and crimes take place frequently. Players can try to thwart and prevent them.

They gained freedom for the new State of *Libertad* and, except for Sanz, the only woman among the ‘parents of freedom’, died soon after. *Libertad* fragmented soon after, and after a bitter civil war seven Republics were initially formed—with shifting alliances, through treaties or custom, and shifting enmities and rivalries—. Talaesta was reconquered months ago, and so six Republics remain (described below).

Moreover, Tranaltar, the most important Republic, will be destroyed one month after the campaign begins. This is a tragedy that will shock and make the people of the Republics despair: Tranaltar was the strongest Republic, which had defeated many New Athkatlan armies. Shortly before the beginning of the campaign, Tranaltar convened a summit to gather all the independent Republics in a federation. Delegates were convened two months after the beginning of the campaign, and were willing to accept. However, using a secret weapon stolen from Renacida, Tranaltar will be utterly obliterated. Tranaltar had also provided

support and intelligence for the Republics to check and combat insurgency within, and this loss will empower the rebels in Argentum, thus enabling them to seize power and found Hinkalliano.

Curiously, all of the places described below began as or self-describe as Republics. Obviously, some of them are not technically Republics: the “Protectorate”, for instance, is a dictatorship; and Cordelliana struggles between Republicanism and Monarchy. Once the junta overthrows the government of Argentum, the dictatorship of Hinkalliano will be a totalitarian, dystopian State.

Watilla, Cordelliana, Argentum (before it becomes Hinkalliano), and Felicità have Parliaments; and the city of Heroika is ruled by the Lady Protector, Santzi (a Couatl of Qotal disguised as a human female), and her advisors.

HORSES AND LLAMAS IN MAZTICA... AND CENTAURS?

While in mainland Maztica horses died because of a virus,⁴⁹ such virus never reached Esmeralda, separated by the seas. This explains why in the wars of independence and the civil war of Libertad horses were employed in combat. Moreover, native Esmeraldians are quite skilled in horsemanship, but not as much as New Athkatlans. The New Athkatlan cavalry is deadly and feared, and their warriors excel in horseback combat. The section on rules, backgrounds and skills explains how this is translated into game mechanics.

⁴⁹ Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, at 22.

As for Centaurs, this is due to Fae influence. During conflicts, horse rider heroes of battles were described by singers and in anthems, narrations as hymns as being *one* with their horses in both Royalist and Rebel bands. Their prowess and ability to turn the tides of battles when infantry was failing were praised. Well, in one particular battle of independence of Libertad (Liberty) Republic, the best elite horse rider soldiers of both the Republican and Royalist sides clashed fiercely. Coincidentally, this happened in a moment and in a place where a portal to the Realm of the *duendes* (Fae) opened up. Instantly, all of them turned into centaurs (native and non-native, female and male alike). They could breed among themselves.

That being said, Llamas are present throughout Esmeralda, and are very skilled at climbing. For this reason, many natives, especially rebel ones, ride them when escalating the many high peaks of the mountain ranges that crisscross Esmeralda, reaching their enclaves and outposts where those of Faerûnian descent cannot easily find them.

The architecture, music and food of the ‘free lands’ is hybrid, which makes it quite innovative and pleasant. Native, Faerûnian and demihuman flavors and styles combine to form a unique result which, for critic tastes, is better than the one experienced without such contacts.

All the flags and banners of the Republic include the image of the Couatl Simonus, called the father of freedom or the Serpent of Liberty. He is also mentioned in all anthems of the Republics. Children are scared when told stories of the evil Ibernus, an evil spirit that many wrongly believe dead, something that allows New Athkatla to have a surprise factor.

Gallosa (NPC): or, rather, *Maestro Gallosa*. This picturesque individual, hailing from Cordelliana, is a hopeless romantic whose amorous or adventurous boasts have led him to trouble. Still, he is the most famous cartographer, historian and even tourist guide of the island, although not necessarily the most reliable one. He claims to know about hidden

mystical relics and to have had a great grandfather who was a distant cousin to a so-called Volo...

WATILLA

REPUBLIC WITH MINERALS NEEDED FOR ARTIFICE MAGIC; WITH CORPORATE COMPLICITY WITH PARAMILITARIES; AND RACIAL TENSIONS

Political Lore

Watilla, named after Watil, goddess of plants, because of its verdant lands, is inhabited mostly by natives. Originally, though, ethnic Amnians ruled because it was considered that they were the most literate. However, the desire of riches led to permitting New Athkatlan corporations operating there to extract riches. These corporations began to convince the ruler to expropriate native lands to permit extraction of rich minerals and *fossils* needed for artifice magic (see Seven Defining Traits of Esmeralda, above) Watilla is the richest land in those goods.

With native opposition, the ruler only renewed licenses to operate to two rival companies, hoping that they countered each other. However, they funded paramilitary groups to kill natives opposed to their operations.

Recently, Yusu, a native whose parents hail from Payit,⁵⁰ has risen in the plains of Watilla. Natives are beginning to call him a Revered Counselor. He is organizing a march to the capital to be appointed as ruler and topple current Governor General Ineptus.

Corporations and Paramilitaries: The two rival corporations still operating in Watilla are the *West Esmeraldian Company* and *Prosperity, Inc.* They hire saboteurs and fund paramilitary groups, whom they pay very well, to sabotage operations of the rival company and to attack

⁵⁰ See Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, pp. 18, 21-22.

natives who oppose their operations, which natives consider desecrate their lands. Players can pretend to work for them to thwart their plots. Both companies have many more resources than Watilla, and the Republic is seriously indebted to them, which gives them great leverage and influence on the laws that Parliament enacts.

West Esmeraldian Company is especially worrisome: it has secretly hired a private army and convinced some mixed blood peasants that the natives who oppose their operations are unfair and attach more importance to their attachment to the land based on “superstition” rather than to employment and opportunities to stop being poor. Thus, the agents of the company are purposefully fuelling racial resentment between communities. Additionally, they are becoming a force to be reckoned with and a parallel State, providing services. New Athkatlan politicians are willing to use force to pressurize for Watilla to pay its debts to the company in the future.

Mysterious Disappearances, Undead and the Desecration of the Land: Sadly, while unknown to the public, the materials and methods used to extract *fossils* in Watilla involve the use of *sacrificial magic*. Not because it is required, but because it yields greater results. Sacrificial magic is actually used by Zaltec priests allied with the companies: they involve the sacrifice of human beings, which explains why mysteriously people disappear from villages in Watilla. Rivers have begun to turn red, however, and rains are more frequent than ever, because the good gods are crying, some say. Strange undead beings whose chests are open and whose hearts are missing arise from the land and haunt it at night. They seem to be organized and led by a mysterious shadow.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

Watilla is the land to which a group of Aarakocra druids, called the Cleansing Claws, has paid the most attention. People from the companies turn up dead with mysterious markings, and graffiti appear on walls warning

the “invaders” to leave. Those who drink from rivers sometimes die from poison.

On the other hand, the land is being destroyed by the extraction of fossils, and remains of long ago dead animals appear and rampage, destroying everything on sight before being stopped, *if* stopped.

HEROIKA

THE FREE CITY, THE JEWEL OF
ESMERALDA, THE BESIEGED CITY

Political Lore

Heroika is the prettiest city not under New Athkatlan dominion. It is a coastal city surrounded by walls. Its houses have verandas with flowers and a beautiful cathedral to the Merciful Justice is found in its main square. Secret chapels to evil, neutral and good aligned Maztican deities, some abandoned and some recently built and still attended to, can be found within the city walls, even in the sewers. Natives are usually servants (but not slaves) or have a low income. Many have become peasants in the only field next to the city which has not fallen under Imperial dominion.

Heroika as an infamous past, though: because of its location in the most strategic bay in Esmeralda, it became a slave market. When the sons and daughters of the Alligator were discovered after Maztica were sent to Abeir, they were enslaved because of their superior abilities and work capacity. Employing heightened artifice weapons, New Athkatlans sold them to feudal lords all over the kingdom from here when the city was still under its rule.

When the revolution of the Republic of Libertad began, Heroika joined its ranks and outlawed slavery (it helped that former slaves were promised freedom in exchange for fighting for independence). While royalist forces were initially expelled, the city has not been fully freed. It has always been under siege, and the population survived thanks to fishing in underground sea channels created by an ancient

Sahuagin population, whose ruins harbor dangerous relics.

When Morill was appointed third Viceroy, he began a fierce and reinforced invasion to recapture the greatest city lost to New Athkatla. Not only famine but also epidemics abound, because of contaminated and spoil food. Some have begun to send trained macaws to ask for Aarakocran or foreign help.

Currently, agents of both independentist and royalist factions try to infiltrate and weaken or support the rebel forces, and murders usually take place. Ambassadors and diplomats are allowed entry to try to negotiate either peaceful reincorporation into New Athkatla or greater commitment to the war of independence. International lawyers of the Republics and New Athkatla often fiercely debate whether the city is truly free or rightly falls under New Athkatlan sovereignty.

Because of the effects of war, most of the population is impoverished and crime has reached its peak. Mafias decide much of what happens in the city, and overprice food and goods that make it into the city.



The colorful streets of Heroika, the Jewel of Esmeralda, and the Cathedral of St. Claviera

Above the city, on a mount that overlooks the walls surrounding Heroika, rests Fort Endurance, where Lady Protector Santzi, a female general of the defense who is actually a shapechanged Couatl, guides the defense of the city. The surrounding fields that once belonged to it were long ago lost and now are under Talaesta jurisdiction. This fortress is the one from which, years ago, New Athkatlan troops soundly defeated a joint Waterdhavian and Balduran invasion. Now, it may be the only hope of securing freedom and repelling the hated invaders. Or maybe a treaty or submission will be signed there. Heroes or the lack of them may determine what befalls the jewel of Esmeralda, Heroika. In the course of the campaign, the city walls will briefly fall to royalists, be liberated, and so on.

A group of ethnic Amnians is the richest one in the city. They renounced to their nobility titles but treat others superciliously and still see themselves as superior to others.

Heroikans have a great sense of humor, in spite of all their suffering, and tell many jokes to everyone under all circumstances. They are also famous for their love affairs and gallantry.

On the city walls and Fort Endurance are many cannons, which Heroika bought (and stole) from Renacida (Lantan Reborn). One of the northern beaches of the city is called the Golden Beach, since it is full of golden and shining butterflies. Some legends say that this beach is where Qotal once rested and fell asleep after guiding the *Inocentes* to safety. Qotal was known for his love of free butterflies in mainland Maztica (Maztica Campaign Set, A Journey to the True World, at 10), and it is rumored that when he fell asleep he dreamed of a beautiful city in the future, and imagined many things of what Heroika could be. After waking up, the butterflies appeared in the beach, and then he left. It is said that capturing one of them is a sacrilege, but some try to do it because it is rumored that they can be companions or materials to conduct mighty rituals. Others say that they remember the dream of Qotal and vie amongst themselves to shape what will happen in Esmeralda. One could thus help some of them

if one enters the region of dreams in the Land of the Fae connected to this beach.

Heroika constantly faces pirate raids, but its strategic sea defense has, until now, managed to their sound defeat time and over again. Maybe in its weakened state pirated will be emboldened, and their chances of success are greater than ever.



Fort Endurance

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

Heroika has a supernatural benefactor. At the (short) time of the New Athkatlan or Dragon Empire's domination of the city while in Abeir, when the children of the Alligator were being enslaved, a New Athkatlan priest of Ilmater rejected slavery and the mistreatment of those new slaves. He, called (St.) Clavierd, advocated for their release, tended to them, healed them and helped them as they could. He was beloved by the children of the Alligator, and after his passing has interceded to protect the people from supernatural hordes. Those who pray for his intercession often receive his blessings, as miraculous curations or exorcisms.

On the other hand, this is also the land of the Alligator: the children of the Alligator, originally from Abeir, are the offspring of the Alligator or *Caiman*, who was originally human.

He was a lascivious being who always wanted to see Maztican naked women (once they arrived in Abeir) bathing in the rivers, so he contacted a shaman to allow him to convert into an alligator. The shaman did give him potions to do so, but moved by his passions he forgot to fully drink the reversal antidote after seeing women in his alligator state, spilling part of it. So, he never fully reverted to human form, and his head remained that of a crocodile and his body scaled. However, he managed to kidnap or seduce many and have children with them, and those children retained his shape.

Outraged by the enslavement of his children, this mighty being, empowered by a Titan in Abeir, stalks the sewers of Heroika, killing many he perceives as ethnic Amnians, and cannot be defeated by simple weapons. He is a drunkard and still kidnaps people, and devours or maims people for fun.

Caiman (Alligator) was granted three mystic abilities while in Abeir: he can both grant superior intelligence to ordinary animals and ask them to do his bid (usually dogs turn up against their masters, killing them) and revenge plots. He can also attempt to shapechange humans and humanoids into half-crocodile beings. An elixir that can reverse this process can be made with a plant only known to a few tribes who are located deep in the Esmeraldian jungles. Finally, *Caiman* can also animate the bodies of deceased children of the Alligator or invoke their restless spirits to haunt the living. *Caiman* received the curse of immortality, so he cannot be permanently killed and has attempted (and failed at) suicide several times, tormented for his many crimes and misdeeds.

With the supernatural infestation in the nights of Heroika, a small contingent of priests accused those who were kind to formers slaves and the many people living in the slums. These fanatics, exacerbated with the invasion and siege of the city, founded an Inquisition: the people of Heroika surprisingly support it, given exacerbated passions and the suffering they have had. They see inquisitors as saviors or defenders. Lady Protector Santzi's predecessor was unpopular due to her refusal to allow the

Inquisition's operations, and ended up killed by her own bodyguards after their relatives had been killed by undead bodies of those who died of starvation in the siege. A reluctant Santzi now views the Inquisition as a lesser evil that helps to protect the city internally while her Guard combat the external aggressors.

ARGENTUM

ALSO KNOWN AS HINKALLIANO, THE REMNANTS OF THE 'GREAT' EMPIRE

Political Lore

The borders of the Republic of Argentum correspond to what was the central province and seat of power of the Hinkalliano Empire. Many ruins hidden by vegetal outgrowths and pits are concealed in this land and harbor mystical secrets and unique riches.

While the cities of Argentum have a magnificent architecture envied even by New Athkatlans (it was one of the wealthiest and most cultivated provinces before secession), the outskirts and neighboring lands of the cities of the Republic of Argentum can be described as either plains or Andean, populated by many riders and hunters. A few plains and many mountains are found here, and the population is evenly divided in native Mazticans (who retain their customs but combining them with devotion to Ilmater) and mixed Maztican-Amnians. This was the last Republic to gain independence, and the one closest to New Athkatla. This explains the paranoia of the people and the fear of reprisals by troops under the command of Morill.

A self-proclaimed National Liberation Movement guerrilla, called the Shining Tezca, is an important force in Argentum. They consider that *Sol's* legacy is one of weakness and that New Athkatlans and all related to them must be expelled. They embrace the idea that Tezca came to teach and protect, and receive the aid of Tezcan Aarakocra.

The largest number of people with Light or Dark True Sun magic (see the respective sidebar above) is found in Argentum. People combine

believes in native and Faerûnian deities, and those who secretly long for the lost gods of old dabble in dangerous practices that may open up portals to dangerous beings. An aspect of Zaltec, *Revolución*, has appeared to leaders of the Shining Tezca.

Dynamism in the Campaign, Short-Term

Future Events: Shortly after the campaign begins, The Shining Tezca will seize power, dissolving parliament and executing all politicians. It will impose a ban on private property and prepare hostilities against New Athkatla or neighbors who have taken some of its ancient territories.

The new government will rename the land **Hinkalliano** and change its flag (eliminating the Couatl from it and replacing it with an image of Zaltec). It will be a totalitarian and police State full of secret agents and snitch. The rebel government will execute those it deems as conservatives and reactionaries, beheading or flaying them in public events where they are insulted. Those who doze off or are drowsy in their long speeches, or are deemed "non-revolutionaries" or "culturally Easterners" will be killed or sent to re-education or (worse) concentration and execution camps. Statues and effigies or Amnians or rich people will be burned; non-revolutionaries will be expelled or worse (tortured, to extract confessions of fellows). The land will be ruled by the Junta, a group of six generals who will be Supreme judges, legislators and executive authorities; and whose government will be secretly and fearfully called 'the reign of terror'. They are all merciless and will prepare for an expansion and exportation of revolution. They will also outlaw private property. The junta is led by a Supreme Leader (currently, comrade Tobacco), and those who displease him are executed with cannon shots.

The Supreme Leader is a half-orc, which explains much of his resentment against non-rebels. In all of Esmeralda, after the waves of Nexalan migration, some monstrous and mutated beings from the Night of Wailing pursued, certainly. However, many more were desperate and horrified at their transformations,

and were desperate to reach a land where they did not scare anyone. They were even outraged at Zaltec and blamed him for what befell them.

Well, not being welcome, many orcs gave in to savagery and attacked villagers. Persecuted by the Hinkalliano Empire, they hid in villages and were almost exterminated. Later, the New Athkatlan Empire led campaigns to wipe them out, and sometimes the monsters retaliated. In one of those events, a New Athkatlan lady was kidnapped and became pregnant of an orc. Some say she fell in love with him, others doubt it. Whatever the truth, the son was a genius being: Umchalyu (half-orc, intelligence 18), better known as Comrade Tobacco. Perhaps one of the brightest brains in all of Esmeralda, he taught himself to read and write, law and economics. Still, he was scorned and rejected by everyone except by the Shining Tezca, whose members thought that the Night of Wailing brought forth beings that could expel the hated Faerûnian invaders who perverted the land and customs of the True World. Umchalyu, with resentment, ascended in the ranks and became the Supreme Leader Comrade.

Everyone inhabiting Hinkalliano will be obliged to call fellow beings ‘comrade’ and to tell on non-revolutionaries. The population of a whole province was massacred for wanting to secede and establish an independent democracy. Everyone is paranoid and afraid to speak his mind or even to think! Given the *use of sacrificial magic* by ‘thought police comrades’ to *read thoughts*. Will this regime of constant tortures fall? Peacefully?

The Junta hates the Protectorate and its ‘Lord Protector’, whom they consider the embodiment of all that is wrong of Eastern customs. The feeling is mutual. The two dictatorships will more likely than not conflict with each other before than with New Athkatla. It *may* (or not) happen that the Junta decides to clash with the Protectorate before dealing with the New Athkatlan Empire. Or maybe hatred for the imperialists will prevail. Time, the Junta (and possibly spies) will tell.

Rebel Group: The Shining Tezca (future Junta of Hinkalliano), and the Conquest of *all* of Esmeralda: the Shining Tezca seeks native purity and a return to an idealized golden age. They denounce the Republics for not being revolutionary enough and retaining private property, which they regard as alien since it is a concept brought by Faerûnians that was unknown to native Mazticans.⁵¹

The Shining Tezca conducts raids against the government and kidnaps merchants, conducts arson and burns buildings with Faerûnian or mixed style architecture, and seeks to overthrow the government and impose a communal and native system.

Needless to say, many natives and non-natives oppose the group, which kills and kidnaps civilians, conscript children, and secretly seeks to invoke beings from other dimensions in order to plan an attack on New Athkatla before they have any ideas of reconquest.

The Shining Tezca adopted its name honoring the fierce native deity who invaded the land long ago, is led by a woman who talks with an aspect and avatar of Zaltec called Liberator, who plans to gain a foothold in the land. Zaltec may well defeat the dragon Ibernu, and the fact that Hinkalliano has the largest population in Esmeralda may lead to an attempt to conquer and have dominion over all of Esmeralda if they succeed to first destroy New Athkatla, which the group may. Liberator says that property belongs to no one but to the ‘people’, who he represents. Some bodies of those executed by the Shining Tezca group are given to mysterious cloaked figures with ebony hands and wooden masks who claim to be the spirits of former rebels. Actually, they are servants of Zaltec who take the bodies to enlarge the ‘Pyramid of Bones’, located deep in the jungles surrounding Hinkalliano.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

⁵¹ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 47.

The Shining Tezca, believing that its members are the heirs of the true inheritors of this land, has sought to recover lost secrets of the natives. This has led to a discovery of sacrificial magic. When people see executions of “reactionaries” with axes that behead, they fail to see that the executioner whispers arcane words and that the blades are made of the same stone of the knives used by Zaltec priests long ago. The comrades’ hate is fueled by the evil magic, and they become ever more bloodthirsty.

THE RISK OF SACRIFICIAL MAGIC

There is a risk when someone uses sacrificial magic that he will lose his mind (Sanity score check), but instead of becoming afraid he may become an evil, insane or corrupted being. Many of the leaders of the Shining Tezca and Hinkalliano have fallen to this fate.

GUARDIÁN

THE PROTECTORATE OF GUARDIÁN, A
DICTATORSHIP WITH MUTANT
MONSTERS AND TRAGIC SOLDIERS

Political Lore

Guardián Heroicus (fighter 10), ‘Lord Protector of the Republican Values and True Democracy’, a populist tyrant, treats this land as his estate and personal property, and its people as its servants. Originally called Marsemberla, it has been renamed the Protectorate of Guardián Liberator of the Promised Land by him.

Marsemberla was a fierce land home to the Halfling tribes, who could breathe underwater and build their houses on stilts over the Calm Inner Sea. They fiercely resisted conquest by New Athkatla and many preferred suicide to submission. Later, proud native generals fought against white invaders and were convinced to abandon the struggle in exchange for the promise that they could rule over their tribes but swear fealty to the monarch of New Athkatla.

Marsemberla thus had a military tradition, and many military geniuses of the war of revolution come from there.

Ten years ago, something happened. Threatened with invasion by the Third Viceroy, Parliament granted power to Guardián appointing him as general, who had fought with the Shining Tezca in Hinkalliano to support rebellion. Guardián soon conducted a coup d’état against the prime minister and dissolved Parliament, calling them weaklings and neo-colonists. Then, he began to rule by decree and self-proclaimed as dictator for life. Formally he is an advisor and soldier under the command of Marionett, the ‘head of government’, who is but a puppet (actually, he is dead, his zombie corpse is decorated and put perfume on and shown in events and processions as if he were alive. The Lord ‘Protector’ killed him years ago when he complained of a weakened democracy).

With his delusions, Guardián believes himself as a messenger sent by Helm, and considers that the Republics failed because of embracing the weak and pitiful Ilmater and Tyr. He persecutes political opponents and has armed supporters. He engages in debauchery every single day. His land, once rich with an economy now seriously hurt, is not one Morill wants to reconquer yet. Dissident groups seeking true freedom seek to end the reign of Guardián.

Guardián believes in his ‘divine mandate’ because ‘his’ land does not know the anarchy and lawlessness of Cordelliana, and because a skull of a long ago dead (Tezca) Aarakocra, called Auch, convinces him of his divine mandate. Of course, he has told no one about this, because they are not worthy. The Auch skull is an artifact which empowers the Protector to cast sacrifice magic without the required sacrifices as long as he talks with it at night. This power allows him to turn dissidents into mindless mutations as secret soldiers hidden in factories and underground. The Lord Protector thinks that Helm is the one giving him powers.

Guardián’s success is not hard to explain, though. Before his ascent to power, the land of Marsemberla was embroiled in a bitter conflict

that other Republics took advantage of, where half of its population died. Afterwards, and losing territories to the other Republics, the civil war continued. Faithful of Helm were killed and perceived as traitors on sight by fanatic Tyrans or Qotal faithful. Guardián, raised in the army as an officer sworn to Helm, ended all of this: his battalion defeated each of the five armies, and gave security to the land. Sure, the economy is not doing well, but no more murders (by non-state forces, of course) have been conducted. Still, people are afraid because of frequent raids to find dissidents, defectors and narcotics and food smuggled from Cordelliana, where it abounds (since food is scarce here which such a ruined economy damaged by the 'Lord Protector').

The Lord Protector is obsessed with creating paradise on the True World, which for him requires perfectly obedient (to the point of being mindless) citizens. He ordered experimenting with political dissidents. This has led to the creation of mutations and monsters who serve as his soldiers.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

The use of the Auch skull has awakened its spirit, who invokes beings from the land of the eternal night to the Protectorate. On the other hand, the mutations created by experiments inspired by it and ordered by the Lord Protector are physically hideous but empowered beings (some have wings, some claws, and so on) that constitute the best fighters and soldiers of all of Esmeralda, New Athkatla included. They are kept in secret, but suffer torments at what they perceive as a lost humanity. They will fight to the end, having nothing to lose.

CORDELLIANA

FAILED STATE, DUBBED THE 'TRUE REPUBLIC OF LAW'

Political Lore

Cordelliana baffles everyone. This land where condors fly is ruled by a President that only has power over a few of the many cities and villages

of his realm. This is due to the fact that, as supposed home of the fabled land of Dorado, different non-state groups seek to dominate lands rich in resources and to advance their policies. As a result, the official agents of the Republic led by the President and civilians are constantly attacked by rebel groups. What was once the most promising land and the pride of the Esmeraldian Republics because of its liberal laws of democracy (and, later, of enlightened Parliamentary Monarchy) now lies in ruins. The State has no actual power over rural areas, and lords are arming groups to counter the guerrillas, but at the same time these paramilitary groups engage in serious crimes.

The people of Cordelliana, civilian or not, are under constant attack from criminal and rebel groups. The realm often crackdowns on suspects, and the population is often displaced and suffers from persecution by many factions. Still, they have hope that one day theirs may be the land of dreams.

The main problem of Cordelliana (named after Cordell, ironically in spite of how despised he was by New Athkatlans) is the fact that its rich soil produces powerful narcotics. Drug cartels gain fortunes with its trade, and plan to sell it even as far away as recently rediscovered Faerûn., where they may conduct kidnappings, raids and terrorist attacks if encountered. They also sell former feudal lords as slaves to pirate islands and enclaves or, to their delight, to New Athkatlans.

On the other hand, when the Republican forces lost control over vast swaths of the territory to Hinkalliano inspired rebels who desire to abolish private property. Some nostalgic souls thought that this loss was due to lenient norms and long for a monarchic restoration and stricter measures, albeit not under the hated New Athkatlan rule: some have thus funded and created secret paramilitary groups. Due to their pressure, Parliament invited a Tethyrian noble (Treo Alemander) and crowned him. The new rich revolted, though, by arguing that he was a foreign conqueror, and the king was overthrown—unbeknownst to most, the leader of the revolt was a merchant called Krin Mantrus, whose

family hails from Tethyr and aspires to become the protector (or king) of the commonwealth.

Some royalist forces loyal to the Alemanders remain and seek to restore the monarchy. Some may be swayed among peasants, who suffer attacks by lawlessness the most.

THE HOUSES OF ALEMANDER AND MANTRUS –MAGICAL TALENTS AND POLITICAL TURMOIL.

The throne of the Monarch Protector, now empty, sits in an abandoned fortress in Cordelliana, now surrounded by a tropical jungle. The sword of light (a holy avenger) rests there, and a prophecy claims will someday be claimed by the monarch to come in a time of peril to restore the monarchy. Many have attempted to claim it, but have died, since the sword kills all non-lawful good who do not come from a Tethyrian noble lineage.

Members of the houses of Alemander and Mantrus hide their identity, because many shamans seek their blood to power mighty blood magic and commoners or merchants regard them as would-be-tyrants. Whether it is because of an ancient pact or some other reason as wild or innate talents (see Ed Greenwood presents Elminster's Forgotten Realms –the Art, Chapter 6– and Volo's Guide to All Things Magical), all members of those houses can cast spells since they are born, and some have remarkable similar traits, as golden eyes or mystical tattoos which they conceal for the aforementioned reasons.

Long ago, a treaty entered into between Waterdeep, Tethyr, Amn and Calimshan stated that a Tethyrian house (the treaty has gone missing, and there is debate as to whether it is the Alemander or the Mantrus line) would be entitled to rule all of Esmeralda. The International and War Arbitral Tribunal has even said that were a legitimate heir found, he would be protector of a Confederation in Esmeralda, respecting the sovereignty of all Republics and the Empire and, for some lawyers as ethnic Amnian and subject of the Dragon Empire (and citizen of Argentum) Vitorus, even of the natives, which upsets his fellow nationals.

The magical talents of those houses, for some reason, is unhindered in Esmeralda. Heirs may seek to hide, profit with their talents, seek power to pacify the lands and respect freedom, or out of selfish tyrant reasons. Some say that recent political turmoil in Tethyr may lead some there to find the heirs in Esmeralda in order to become monarch(s). One such possible NPC may be (DM decision) Engelhard, who has fled to Herioka's vicinities. He hails from Tethyr and his whole family was murdered by a rival merchant who wanted to take over their noble titles. Engelhart fled to Maztica to find riches with which to fire a mercenary army to ouster and execute the traitor, but changed his views and decided to fight for justice in Esmeralda against the Empire in defense of freedom. He is a cleric of the war domain, following Tyr.

The different drug cartels create serious problems: they fund and organize hitmen and crime in the villages and cities, and frequently bomb Republican barracks, kidnap and attack magistrates, judges and State agents, killing civilians in the process. Everyone is in fear. The most powerful of those cartels has even defeated some of the rebel groups, preventing their gaining power, and is led by a merciless man dubbed the Nameless, who always eludes capture and smuggles and deals with narcotics.

The landscapes of Cordelliana are quite pleasant: it is located in the center of Esmeralda, and so boasts most of the mountains of the island, including Nevado, next to the sea. Coffee plantations dot its landscapes, but also do *borrachon* ones in its forests. The temperature is mild throughout the year.

Theater, Dancehalls, Arts and Secret (War)

Messages: In times of the New Athkatlan empire, the province of Cordelliana was renowned for its performing arts and theater –it even hosted an Opera house: circuses, dances, plays were quite popular and top-notch there, and people all over Esmeralda (some say even mainland Maztica) went to be in the audience. The tradition still remains, and theater and music

houses are a thing. Shows range from cheap to fancy and expensive, and some whisper that in the independence wars and current conflicts secret messages have been sung or recited during plays. Even New Athkatlans admire their arts and pay to go there (and copy plays!). The happiest tunes and the best dances (and dancers) of Esmeralda hail from Cordelliana, combining the best of all cultures.

While they exist throughout Esmeralda, New Athkatla included, Cordelliana hosts the largest number of 'Dancehalls' in the island. Rum flows freely in them while patrons revel dancing to the rhythm of sensual tropical music. People party quite frequently and reverently, allocating part of their income to do so faithfully and engaging in romantic affairs (licit or not). Some adventures have begun as romantic affairs in the land.

Slavery was quickly forbidden since independence, and there is the highest degree of racial harmony, toleration and mixed couples.

Lawyers are almost revered here, and both rebels and the government and the areas they control are governed by many and complex standards, principles and rules.

Cordellianan peasants are very pious (not so the rulers and members of Parliament) followers of the Merciful Justice and its two main deities or faces of the divinity: Ilmater and Tyr. The people is mocked at as boring "saints" by more secularized nations or those with a less fervently religious faith, as New Athkatlans or members of the Protectorate.

It is also worth noting that Cordellianan territories host the survivors of the *inocente* peoples. These natives have recently began to fervently embrace the faith of the Serene face of Kiltzi (see Religions and Faiths of Esmeralda, below).

The Claws of Azul and Borrachon (Narcotic): this is the most powerful drug cartel at large, and a force to be reckoned with in all of Esmeralda, since it has carried out murders and crimes beyond the borders of Cordelliana. Led by the

Nameless, it seeks to control trade of *borrachon*, a powerful narcotic (saving throw DC 15, which can be failed on purpose. On failure, pleasure and hallucinations are experienced and all checks are made with disadvantage) that some claim has supernatural effects. The Claws began as a pirate group that gave spoils to poor peasants, and so claims that its members are a group that protects peasants and natives from abuses, giving money and weapons to the poor, thus deterring eventual New Athkatlan invasions, but their record is poor because of how much suffering they have caused with mass murders, killings and bombs. Of course, now many civilians have been given terrible arms. The Nameless (Tiefling, Warlock 15, whose levels may increase as the campaign moves on) is a man whose sins led to a horrific transformation: it is whispered (no one dares to mention it aloud for fear of displeasing the crime lord and being tortured or flayed by him) that the divine, weeping for his many murders and hideous crimes against fellow human beings and the Heaven, transformed him so that everyone could see him for what he was: he has horns, a long tail and reddish skin. Before his transformation, he bedded many women, and continues to do so, but has become infertile. The children he had before work as his "eyes" and lieutenants, and he is always on the run for a great reward awaits he who captures him. An elite squad of soldiers and detectives, 'Untouchables', has been created in Cordelliana to catch or kill him.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

Cordelliana is specially connected to the Realm of the Fae. This explains tales of hags, called witches in these lands, and Fae kidnapping, making mischief, or hurting people, especially children. Such tales are true. Moreover, the Mother of the Mountains, while having the power of bilocation and being able to be present anywhere in Esmeralda, has a special fondness for the land *occupied* by Cordelliana. Given the piety of the people, many exorcists operate from here. The natives are also very pious, and tend to be left alone by the Fae.

FELICITÀ

LAND OF JOY, PLAQUED BY
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS AND SOCIAL
INJUSTICE

Political Lore

Felicità is a land that seems perfect on the surface: it is not burdened by internal strife or petty dictators, and it is the most remote from New Athkatla. Beautiful beaches surround its coasts and small islands, and festivities in honor of the saints of Ilmater (remember that his church has many saints)⁵² take place very frequently. Music sounds in every corner and people dance at a whim, and natives, ethnic Faerûnians and former slaves intermingle and treat each other as equals.

The big problems of *Felicità* are a threat from the graves, corruption, crime and social inequality: most of the population is extremely poor, with no access to the satisfaction of basic needs, and live in slums where crime lords reign supreme and the Republic does not reach. Or dare to. Fancy mafias pull the strings of government and merchants alike in posh places, and bribery and corruption are key to politics too frequently. Detectives and parliamentary investigators try to deal with these problems, but their corpses are eventually and frequently seen downriver. Political lords are frequently corrupt, even financing illicit activities.

THUGS AND CRIMINALS ARE STRONG
AND FEARSOME INDEED! AND THE
RISE OF VIGILANTES.

Due to their frequent struggles and fights among gangs or muggers, criminals are usually, *at least*, level 3 or 4 fighters or rogues. This is typical of but not exclusive in *Felicità*. This explains why they are widely feared, even by the police, and why people often rush to reach their homes or a safe place after sunset in crime-ridden cities and villages. Criminal gangs, of which there is an excess and have bitter and unreasonable rivalries, are often heavily armed, vicious and merciless, but sometimes unarmored. Some vigilantes have sprung up in places against them.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

Were it not for their piety and faith, and the intercession of the Saints of Ilmater, this land would be doomed. It is next to the Unclaimed Lands, a wilderness where evil demigods prowl, such as the Mother of the Mountains. Every time a hunter or harvester goes to the mountains, his family weeps. At night, wails terrorize children. This is a frontier place, with very few “cities” and dotted with many (very) small villages. As a result of its dangers and faith, this is the land of exorcists. Happy singers try to “haunt” undead with their joy, and priests rebuke and banish undead. Ages ago, the Hinkalliano Empire dominated these lands. That empire used to mummify its main lords in this region. It is believed by some that one of those corpses has been animated because of interaction with other dimensions and that a mummy lord, pronouncing whose name may invoke him (reason why no one dares to pronounce or learn it), seeks to kill all the living “invaders”, “trespassers” or alien “intruders” in Hinkalliano lands.

The mummy lord, whose name is not known, desired to be known, thought of or even whispered (Manchú), commands an army of mummies who were old warriors of the Hinkalliano empire. All they want is vengeance and the blood of those foreigners whose very presence ‘sullies’ their sacred land. The lord has

⁵² Greenwood, Reynolds, Williams and Heinsoo, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (3e), 2001, at 242.

the statistics of a mummy lord (5th edition Systems Reference Document (SRD), available at: <https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/systems-reference-document-srd>), but can only be truly defeated and banished to the land of the dead who finally rest at peace if his spiritual hit points (double the amount of his ordinary hit points) reach -10. Fully hurting him with ordinary hit points only incapacitates him for one hour (his 'short rest'), after which he wakes up with one third of his maximum hit points. After his 8 hours 'long rest' his hit points are fully recovered.

RENACIDA

LANTAN REBORN (LAND OF FIREPOWER AND TECHNOLOGICAL WONDERS; CURRENTLY BEING REBUILT AND MOSTLY PLUNDERED AND RUBBLE)

Political Lore

Before Lantan disappeared from Toril due to the Spellplague, some of its scientists and artificers saw the skies and investigated tremors and changes in the earth and seas. They foresaw that something terrible would befall Lantan, but they were branded as lunatics. They convinced some, and embarked on a voyage to safer lands. Paradoxically, they reached Esmeralda, a land that would also be transported to Abeir just as Lantan would be. More so, it would be eventually sent to two other planes.

The rich minerals and resources of the land, unknown in Faerûn, had some special properties (chemical and otherwise) that permitted groundbreaking discoveries: so, soon the New Lantanese made impressive inventions never seen before. Faced with attacks from beasts in the land they settled, they further developed gunpowder. Soon, their arsenal was impressive, which was the doom of the city called Lantan Reborn: the rebels and royalists plundered it many times to acquire weapons. Tired of the advantage it provided to rebels, the Dragon Empire once razed it to the ground.

Rubble fills most of the city, but its industrial inhabitants are trying to recover. Seriously decimated, they use machines to reconstruct a place they now call *Renacida*, which means Reborn in Thorass.

Renacida is located next to a great lake. Before the destruction of the city by the Empire, the Lantanese had built facilities over it and mysterious devices that travel underwater, to conduct experiments there. The greatest inventions and discoveries took place there, and this was the place first destroyed by the Dragon Empire, in a surprise attack to prevent defense with the Lantanese weapons. This explains why it is rumored that beneath the waters of the lake are tools and instruments that, while in unfinished state, could determine the fate of Esmeralda by providing the greatest power and knowledge to those who acquire it.

Spiritual and Hidden Lore

The reason why the Lantanese themselves do not search in the lake is because a terrible Fae water being has established itself here... or so is told. People also fear disquieting the spirits of those who died here. Another theory, which may prove to be true, is that the Lantanese did know about the imminent New Athkatlan attack and prepared to release powerful energies and weapons, but they misfired. This may explain the almost utter destruction of Lantan Reborn. If such weapon is acquired and perfected, it would be possible to eliminate whole villages and cities with one use. Of course, provided that such weapon *does* exist (DM's call).

On the other hand, the Lantanese have been secretly receiving envoys from the island of Lantan, whose inhabitants mysteriously know about how Esmeralda has also returned to Toril, and have erected an underground portion of the city with laboratories and mighty defenses, where dangerous projects are being concocted.

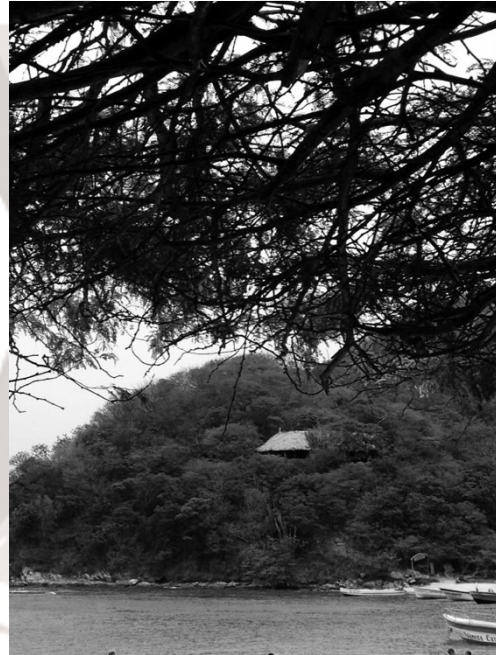
NATIVE REALMS AND 'FREE' LANDS

THE WATERS OF ESMERALDA, AND 'UNSETTLED' LANDS

Natives in Esmeralda do not have large realms of their own, and their large numbers and intermingling in the Republics has led them to life in mixed societies.

A few isolated tribes (intentionally or because of living in remote previously uncommunicated lands) retain their independence, and kill invaders. They include many demihuman groups. They are briefly described below.

Curiously, for all their fight for freedom, the Republics (and New Athkatla) are expansionistic. Were it not for their fearsome monsters, they would seek to annex or colonize the seven surrounding smaller islands. Eventually they will try, citing a notion of 'preemptive self-defense' some international lawyers criticize but which hawkish diplomats embrace. The different Republics and the Empire also claim legal sovereignty over 'unsettled' lands, to extract resources. Some of those lands, of course, were inhabited centuries ago by natives (original settlers, Aaracokra or Nexalan refugees), but some were not. A race for territorial domination is beginning.



Many native villages are hidden and found deep inside jungles or next to hidden coasts

"Cimarrón" Maroon Enclaves, and the Savannah: the children of the Alligator were enslaved by New Athkatlans and sold in Heroika when Maztica was transported to Abeir. Many of them defied their "masters" and escaped to freedom. Under New Athkatlan laws, they remain being slaves and may be harshly punished. They must also be returned to their owners, and many bounty hunters pursue them. These escaped *cimarróns* of the Alligator form closed and hidden communities, training and constantly on the move. Some plot revenges, others aim to reach the Republics, and a new leader is talking of founding an Alligator Republic, called *Rebeldía*. This foundling land is being ruled with an iron fist, and the leader is frequently replaced by another one killed by a political rival who deems him too weak to protect them properly. They still use the language they spoke in in Abeir: *caiman*.

Many maroons have fled to the Savannah, to the South West of the island. The Savannah is a relatively new part of the island, joined to it by a strait (the Strait of the Alligator): it first appeared when Esmeralda and Maztica were sent to Abeir, and was a place where many

children of the Alligator lived: this lush land with swamps, crocodiles, jungles, jaguars and wildlife was dominated by tribes whose chieftains waged war against each other for territorial domination of crops and for (perverted) “glory”. Chunka was the most powerful of those warlords, a strategic and military genius.

When the New Athkatlans found about their physical prowess, they exploited the rivalry between Children of the Alligator tribes, supporting their clashes to weaken their tribes. Once so weakened, they engaged in an invasion of the Savannah to enslave them. Victory was almost impossible and only possible due to the intervention of Ibernu the dragon, since the Savannah was dominated by mighty and terrific beings regarded as demigods, who slumbered and were wakened by the invasion. Once victorious, the New Athkatlans enslaved the Children of the Alligator, razing and torching their villages.

Those who have gained freedom have returned there and tried to carve up a unified nation of mutual defense, but ancient rivalries still boil and are relevant, at least subconsciously. Such ‘nation’ (still nascent) is called *Rebeldia*, and is led by a couple. The spouses belong each to a tribe that hated the other, and are called Natsuri and Hellenka (dragonborns, F7). They are conducting rituals to try to awaken the defeated protectors of the land who were defeated by Ibernu some time ago, and who was seriously wounded by Simonus the Couatl.

The Seas of Esmeralda, Halfling enclaves, Piracy and Privateering: The pristine, unspoiled and beautiful beyond description waters surrounding Esmeralda are treacherous and dangerous. Not only because of its many sharks, Sahuagin and other beings, which makes travel to the island difficult (but not impossible for strong crews and clever sailors) except when using the flying canoes, but also, because of piracy. The many riches and emeralds of the island attract pirates like a magnet. Curiously, piracy was spawned by New Athkatla. This was because when the rebellion and wars of independence began, the Empire gave letters of

marque, authorizing privateers to attack “Republican” vessels and take their riches, paying a percentage to the crown. The Republican forces did the same, and some of the crews decided that it was better to keep all of the plunder and profits. Many pirate groups exist, some of which have allied in a tenuous organization called the Sails of Azul, whose supreme Captain is frequently replaced by a challenger who beats (and kills) him in a duel. Privateering is still (secretly) sponsored by different factions, especially hiring slaves and citizens (or subjects) of enemy nations.

Pirates in Esmeralda are cruel and desperate since they know they will be executed if captured. The international laws of Maztica, developed in Esmeralda, regard pirates as *hostis humani generis*,⁵³ or enemies of mankind, and any State that captures them is entitled to prosecute and sanction them: they can even be tried *in absentia*, and actions against them are regarded as falling under universal jurisdiction.

It is worth mentioning that the Republics suffer the most from piracy: when they belonged to the Empire, its fleet protected the land from pirates who tried to plunder the island from mainland Maztica. Actually, the Empire warned that the Republics, young and untrained as they would be, would be quite vulnerable to pirates without its protection. This proved to be true, and the Republics are struggling to create and train strong fleets of their own.

The Seas of Esmeralda beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast of the Realms are regarded as international waters, and so not as part of the territory of any of them. They are regulated by the customary law of the sea.

Pirates tend to hide in rocks and very small islands (not the so-called Seven Mystical – larger— islands) full of palm trees and caves and their hideouts.

⁵³

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hostis_humani_generis

Some children of the alligator (reskinned Dragonborn) join pirate ranks since they are treated as brothers there and have a chance of both getting coin and hurting New Athkatlans or Republicans who despise their race.

On the seas of Esmeralda a magnificent view can be seen: in some calm waters surrounded by rocks, the native fierce halflings that breathe underwater and their Triton allies have erected beautiful but terrifying and multicolored Stilt houses, adorned with the skulls of those who have tried to approach them.

Finally, next to Esmeralda, somewhere beneath its seas, lies an outpost of the terrible Itzcali Realm of the sahuagin Sea People.⁵⁴ They often conduct raids to sink galleons of New Athkatla or the Republics and seize their golden riches, especially if they are crafts of the natives, which for some reason are used to invoke evil beings by the sea people. They claim to be the true children of Azul and to carry out his will and word. Eventually, one sahuagin could repent and try to warn the surface folk of a plot to invade them and finish what Azul once began. Or maybe he will be killed before he does.

MYSTERIOUS LOCATIONS

DOMAINS OF DEMIGODS, WONDROUS AND MYSTERIOUS LOCATIONS

Realm of the *Duendes* and Land of Eternal Night



The Fae, or Children of Glorana, are only concerned with playing with mortals, whom they regard as toys

For some mysterious reason, when Kukul decided to create Esmeralda and Maztica gave birth to it, given its beauty, two ancient sibling demigods, as old as Kukul and Maztica themselves, had their attention caught by the island for two different reasons. They were Glorana and Nocturno. Glorana was as wild and beautiful as the jungles of Esmeralda, while Nocturno was as terrifying as the night that fell on the land when stars and the moon had yet not been allowed to grace the Esmeraldian night. Glorana. Yet, they did nothing but wait. When Kukul placed the Aarakocra in the island, Glorana wanted to play with and torment them, making them their playthings. Nocturno desired nothing but to send them to oblivion or to turn them to dust and make their bones scare any who dared to enter into the land he claimed as his. But Kukul allowed nothing of this. The lord of the stars brightened the night sky, banishing the siblings to their original planes, where they ruled. Then, he placed strong barriers against the planes. While eventually a son of Glorana came to Esmeralda, the lord Nevado who brought about an ice age and his brothers and sisters, he was eventually overthrown and Glorana was unable to reach the island.

⁵⁴ Tim Beach, *Gold & Glory*, 1992, p. 10.

As we know, the plane barriers were broken down when the agents of the Sythillisian Empire's monstrous agents came to support the rebel Republicans. Now, zones linked to those two planes, called bridges, exist in some parts of Esmeralda: its coasts are connected with Glorana's realm, the Realm of the Fae, empowering flying canoes. The depths of forests and jungles often are connected with Nocturno's Land of Eternal night, making terrible undead creatures pray upon the living. Coincidentally, those jungles harbor the richest ruins and treasures in the island.

Both the Realm of the Fae and the land of Eternal Night are planes parallel to Esmeralda: they are identical to it, but are spiritual lands twisted and different from Esmeralda in curious and often frightful ways. Some consider that the Realm of the Fae is located within the Feywild, and that the land of Eternal Night is within the Shadowfell.

Realm of the Fae: this is a land of stories and legends. Fae lords rule over the land under lady Glorana's laws of fun, which permit torturing and abusing mortals. Glorana is a twisted being with a perverted sense of pleasure, and her harem is full of mad beings who have lust their minds. Some of the Fae kidnap the living to have them as servants. The Realm of the Fae is a land where legends come true: every tale ever told by an elder to grandchildren is born in this land, albeit sometimes in a perverted way. When and where the land is connected with Esmeralda, wondrous things that are only imagined may come true.

Many of the Fae sometimes decide not to kidnap mortals but to torment them: they often pellet roofs of houses to scare children and make them think undead are attacking. They fire bushes, wail or make sounds to stop the hearts of passersby, or disguise as monstrosities. Yet, it is Fae who do all of that, for their amusement: they especially enjoy when someone dies of a heart attack due to their scares. They change their appearance with but a thought, and love to appear in scary and horrible ways.

Fae are frightened of piety, for a reason: true faith can banish or wound them just as undead. They are also vulnerable to 'true joy', happiness with is not abusive. Some bards channel this energy and frustrate Fae, but not many do.

It is said that some honorable Fae exist, having repented and renounced to their fell magic. Maybe this is a lie to deceive the unwary into trusting them before betraying them, maybe not.

Finally, the souls of the living are said to sometimes travel to this land of the Feywild when they dream, either to receive prophecies or when a Fae manages to toy with their souls. If they suffer in that land, their mortal bodies may remain inert in the material plane! Exorcists can attempt to bring the soul back. In the Feywild or Realm of the Fae, the only abilities that can prevail are intelligence and piety, but to use the former characters must realize that imagination is a great weapon of theirs and they must challenge the intelligence of beings who are almost embodied dreams and sentient landscapes and rivers, etc.

The Land of Eternal Night or Land of the Dead: this is a land of the restless spirits who do not rest in peace. Originally, no one lived in this land but Nocturno, its lord. However, he hated the living, and when wars began to occur many evil souls were his to claim. He brought them into this land, turning them into horrible creatures that haunt the living. No one has gone to this land and come back. There may be a way to go there or be captured into this land while still being alive, but no one knows how. Some shamans rumor or gloat that Nocturno has struck an alliance with the deity Supai from Lopango and will slay all hated "pale invaders" who desecrate the land.

The Pyramid of Bones: unlike mainland Maztica, Esmeralda does not boast pyramids, which were not built even after Nexalan migrations. There is one exception, though, and is not in plain sight or known about at large: the Pyramid of Bones.

This structure is entirely built of corpses of those deceased in the many wars, and atop it rests an altar to Zaltec, called the *laughter of Zaltec*.

The name is appropriate: in spite of how much Amnians despised the deity, their actions, wars and the bloody struggles in Esmeralda have greatly empowered Zaltec. People may not invoke him expressly, but every act of violence and cruelty in any of the many wars and armed struggles in Esmeralda fuels his energy. Currently only an alliance between Ilmater and Qotal or the will of Deo (for monotheists) checks his strength, which grows daily.

The pyramid of Zaltec is the name not only of the structure, but also of the surrounding area: located deep in a jungle and well hidden, the surrounding animals and vegetation are foul: twisted, poisonous, corrupted. The land is covered with a fetid smell and a hazy fog. It is impenetrable due to a wall of thorns covering all of it, but there is one way to access it: underground tunnels occupied by perverse beings and monsters. The pyramid is ruled by a mysterious being who may well be an avatar of Zaltec or a powerful priest of his. He is served by the lords of Ashes, a group of undead priests whose only remains are skeletal.

Dragon Turtle Bay: this is perhaps the only *known* (as of yet) place in Toril where dragon turtles mate, and is located in a bay inaccessible by land due to thick poisonous vegetation and animals and the lack of food in the adjacent jungle. By sea, boats are usually destroyed by dragon turtles who feel that their offspring is at peril.

Dragon turtles swim around Esmeralda and the nearby islands with certain frequency. This explains why it is so difficult to reach it without flying canoes. When the Nexalan migration of refugees came to the island after the Night of Wailing, it is whispered that Qotal sent the dragon turtles into a deep slumber for them to reach the island in their ordinary canoes.

The Flying Canoes: the Fae, desiring to capture bodies and souls of the living, allowed many to travel to Esmeralda in spite of the perils of its

seas. Thus, they put their magical dust on some native canoes, empowering them to float in full moon nights and only in places connected to the plane of the Fae. Often, those who arrived were kidnapped by the Fae at once. Some of them escaped from the Realm of the Fae and warned the living. The Escapees brought dust with them, empowering other canoes and preventing their capture by Fae canoes. The escapees also taught about songs and rhymes that the capricious Fae cannot tolerate and which banish them. This explains why bards (*juglares*) are often at charge of guiding the canoes, since their song keeps the Fae at bay. Those songs only operate in lands connected to the portals to the Realm of the Fae (plane), since it temporarily shuts them. Singing them is risky though: without that connection, the canoes cannot float and stop floating.

The Palaces of Stone (Underground Indian Tombs): in some places in Esmeralda, huge statues of natives with fangs, wings or other animal features can be found. Sometimes, beneath those places lie tombs or underground estates of the natives of this land. They are rumored to hide riches but also vengeful spirits and guardian golems.

f. The Land of Anguish or the Fiery North and the Infinite Rock Wall: The lands north of the huge Rock Wall guarded by Tabaxi who live in empty Aarakocran nests left by an Aarakocran tribe wiped out long ago is a dangerous land. Full of volcanoes, lava and mutated beings, not even the Fae dare go there. It is rumored that a bitter Azul avatar was imprisoned here by Qotal under a volcano, punishing the lord of water with a fire prison; while an avatar of Tezca's is imprisoned under a frozen lake. Still, this land may hold secrets, and if ever the avatars manage to break their shackles they may wake the mysterious beings and spirits who sleep here to conduct a campaign of destruction which may be unstoppable, flooding all of Esmeralda and perhaps mainland Maztica as Azul originally intended. The essences of *Sol* and *Luna*, the progenitors of the *inocente* natives, however, is rumored to be able to counter this evil influence, but who knows. The Tabaxi tribe originally hail from mainland Maztica, and were called upon by the Aarakocran sentinels and guards to help

them to spot any intrusion south of the Wall by the evil spirits who roam the Fiery North. A Tabaxi tribe accepted and reached the land only to see all of the Aarakocra who requested their help dead –needless to say, some Tabaxi moved elsewhere within Esmeralda, and among them lives a prominent one, a famous retired bard called Zuami de Payit, originally from mainland Maztica and once kidnapped by drow in the underground tunnels connecting it to Faerûn.

The Tabaxi undertook an oath to the Cat deity they revere to keep guarding the land, as prophecies foretold that if the Wall is breached eventually all of Maztica would enter a period of mourning and loss. When Esmeralda touched Abeir, the Wall was weakened and has begun to crack. Mysterious things are seen as of late in the Wall, and some tabaxi have suffered serious curses or else. This explains why some have been going to Faerûn, fleeing from what they call the doom of Maztica. This may explain why some tabaxi, originally from Maztica, have been fleeing to Faerûn, yet they “say little of why that has changed, though rumors persist of strange happenings in” Maztica (Volo’s Guide to Monsters, at 115).

Hidden Treasures: This is a land of riches, beyond the fortunes amassed by Ibernu the dragon or the Nameless in Cordelliana. First, the jungles hide lost temples that are nigh invisible with overgrown vines and vegetation, guarded by devices and traps. Those temples may have priceless gilded relics. The lakes guard the gold thrown by natives to honor Qotal; and spirits of the deceased who hid treasures underground lest they are taken by guerrillas or cartels appear next to clues about the whereabouts of those treasures. The supernatural and the political are linked.

Haunts and Sanctuaries: The many armed conflicts and violent deaths taint some places, haunted until (if) exorcised. On the other hand, the places touched by saints, such as St. Claviedr, protect from supernatural evil, ban evil beings and are even said to heal if one has enough faith (Piety roll).

Elven enclaves: Deep in some jungles live strange beings: wild elves. Unlike those found in mainland Maztica,⁵⁵ some of the wild elves of Esmeralda are diminutive: half the size of a Halfling –the others are as tall as mainland wild elves. Yet, they walk in an incredibly fast way, as fast as medium size creatures. They were once full Fae, but Maztica decided that they should not pervert the land of her husband. She made them lose their nature of dreams and tales and make them one with the Earth, and so they embody the Earth: their skin looks like sand, dirt or leaves, and their hair like grass. They do have pointed ears and an impetuous character: they represent the wildness of nature, and so act like the thunder, the strong river or a typhoon. They hate humans and kill on sight those who find their villages, which are blended with the nature. Why they do so is a mystery, but some say that these villages hold a key to harnessing nature’s destructive powers. They never attack and even fear Aarakocra, strangely. Perhaps because of a Kukul decree of old.

No one knows this, not even in faraway Candlekeep, but Esmeraldian wild elves are the ancestors of mainland Maztica’s wild elves, similar to Faerûnian ones but having a distinct culture and language.⁵⁶ Like mainland Maztican ones, Esmeraldian wild savage elves are fierce and attack humans.⁵⁷

Gorgana and the other Seven Mystical Islands: aside from smaller islands and rocks, surrounding Esmeralda are seven mysterious large islands that were once part of Abeir, the Realm of the Fae and the land of Eternal Night and came back to Toril along with Esmeralda once the Spellplague effects were exhausted or reverted. They are covered in mists and completely unseen, except one: Gorgana.

⁵⁵ Steven E. Schend, “Book two: Amn”, *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ On this behavior, see Tim Beach, *Gold & Glory*, 1992, p. 10.

The six hidden islands are ruled by fearsome monsters or demigods, Fae, Titan, Twisted or Undead. They are strange lands where some Esmeraldians have been taken as slaves or sacrifice, perhaps when its denizens try to make their lands return to their original planes with evil rituals.

Gorgana, on the other hand, is perfectly seen: it is an inhospitable and inaccessible land ruled by a Medusa queen who preys on the living. It is used as a multinational prison island, to dispose of war criminals.

How so? In spite of their mutual hatred, both New Athkatla and the Republics considered that some conduct was (openly) unacceptable (but sometimes secretly conducted or encouraged by spies) even in times of armed conflict and outrageous. To settle a dispute about a serious accusation of genocide against the Dragon Empire, an arbitral International and War Tribunal was constituted. After settling the dispute, dismissing the claims, it was decided to keep it. The Tribunal has tried many individuals accused of war crimes, and those who are convicted are sent to the island in boats, tied and alone. If they manage to reach the island alive, they often have no hope but to become stone when looking at the eyes of the mistress of this island.

The sons of the Condors: high in the peaks of the mountain ranges that crisscross Esmeralda some native tribes live in peace while engaging in martial training and drills, preparing either for defending their outposts or eventually attacking the ones who “stole” their lands. The call themselves the sons of the Condors, and reach their high “lost cities” by Llama or by becoming Condors. Just like mainland Mazticans have Eagle knights, a Hishnaliad spell allows natives to turn into condors and fly so high that they can reach these cities: these shapechangers are called the Condor agents, and some magical talismans (of which there are more than those in mainland

Maztica)⁵⁸ allow them to adopt this form. They believe that they are guided by the great Condor spirit, whose totem protects all of their villages. They communicate with other distant villages with mystical smoke signals.

The hidden temples: when the conflicts between invading Nexalan tribes took place in Esmeralda, and thanks to their studies in the *observatories* they built after being instructed to do so by natives from distant Payit (Maztica Alive! Book, p. 15; A Journey to the True World book, p. 50), some of their spiritual leaders and shamans found out about the connection between Esmeralda and other planes in some spots in the island (some of those planar gates are fixed, while some move), but realized that they were somehow sealed but the respective seals would or could break (by Kukul).

An elder priest from the Eagle tribe of the Azuposi nation to the north of mainland Maztica (see John Nephew and Jonathan Tweet, *City of Gold*, 1992, pp. 8, 24) who wandered through its lands and once reached the Maztican island of Esmeralda, called Lunthu, was fascinated with tales of the experiments in the observatories in the island and taught their shamans how to contact and travel to other planes like the Azoposi do with the Astral plane (John Nephew and Jonathan Tweet, *City of Gold*, 1992, at 24), and how by knowing the true names of its mighty inhabitants and their avatars they could call them and request their help (cf. John Nephew and Jonathan Tweet, *City of Gold*, 1992, pp. 23-24, A6).

With this knowledge, the Esmeraldian shamans contacted the alien beings from the lands of the Fae and the Eternal Night, being the ones with major influence over Esmeralda, through rituals, and entered into pacts with some mighty supernatural beings from them (some tricked them to be able to infiltrate the island thanks to the breaking of the seals of the planar gates), allowing the shamans to open up the gates just

⁵⁸ Douglas Niles, *A Journey to the True World*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, pp. 72-73.

barely for them to travel there. Since the two surrounding planes (land of Eternal Night and Realm of the *duendes*) were parallel to the land, in the sense that they are twisted versions of it from where all of Esmeralda can be seen, the shamans accepted to allow their bodies to be transformed so that they could circumvent the seals and travel to the lands, where they could see what happens in Esmeralda and travel to it in dreams or at night. The condition was that they serve as agents of the extraplanar beings when so requested. To be able to do this, the shamans (warlocks) erected purposefully built temples that could channel energies. Then, they hid them in mists with a spell provided by the Supernatural Lords. This way, enemies could not find them. A few shamans erected temples to console the spirit of the dead and convey messages between living and dead. The temples still exist, albeit frequently hidden. A True Sight check or dispel magic must be used to find them.

Shamans (warlocks) who are located in such temples can enter the parallel planes, automatically being shapechanged into either half-bats (connection with land of Eternal Night) or half-jaguars (if the temple is connected with the Realm of the Fae or *duendes*). This happens because the spirit of the Bat or Jaguar archetype, present in the land of Eternal Night or the Realm of the Fae, respectively, merges with part of their souls. Every warlock (shaman, see Rules below) who opens such portal with a ritual is transformed, cannot physically or magically attack while in the other world(s) but can see weird messages and what happens in Esmeralda in a blurred way.

Moreover, anyone who falls asleep in the vicinity of the temples or a shaman or warlock with a pact or tie to one of the supernatural beings of the planes may be contacted by one of those beings, as happens to the north of mainland Maztica (John Nephew and Jonathan Tweet, *City of Gold*, 1992, at 24).



Lost Temples hold the key to travel to other lands or to channel mysterious powers

The Lost Pyramid and *Llanto*: the Land of Tears and Revenge (domain of dread): The current pyramid of bones is the second to exist in Esmeralda. Years ago, a disgruntled shaman called Serpentus, whose entire tribe was killed by New Athkatlans, began to stalk, kidnap and kill New Athkatlan civilians one by one. Since this took place in the crossroads of nations, in a place used as a battlefield where many civilians had been attacked (which prompted the Tribunal to prosecute some), no one suspected about Serpentus and his hatred of all ‘white folk’.

Over the years, after eating their flesh, he erected a small pyramid with their bones. Enslaving some New Athkatlans, he tortured them, but the pyramid has vanished ever since. Some suspect things, but legends fail to tell the truth. The shaman, captives and the land where the pyramid was located were all sent to Ravenloft. If someone commits a serious evil deed in the proximity of the place where the original pyramid of bones was located, or on the contrary banishes a supernatural being with great piety, there is a chance that they may be transported to the pocket domain in Ravenloft. The more serious the evil act is or the greater the pious feat, the greater the risk. The DM should roll a percentile dice, beginning at 10 percent and increasing the likelihood of transport the more serious or wondrous the behavior. The only way in which escape from that pocket is

possible is either by permanently defeating its dark lord or by preventing the possibility of using sacrificial magic there for a full week with a great exorcism and preventing any sacrifice by Serpentus or his undead or werebeast minions.

The mists surrounding the pocket are impenetrable, even for Vistani, and those who venture forth lose their hearts: literally, dying instantly and empowering Serpentus's sacrificial magic and enlarging his pyramid of bones (PCs always see someone trying to escape and suffer this fate, and as they approach they feel as if their hearts were trying to leave their bodies, fainting before dying. Only in cases of repeated attempts should a Constitution saving throw be rolled, with death on a failure and prolonged catatonic state on a success).

The sacrifices Serpentus conducts are horrific and people die of fear before his knives strike the victims. The rituals he conducts in pure rage and revenge against the innocent are too gruesome, even for Zalteco standards. Being persecuted by him after witnessing what this undead creature of pure hatred has done to others is utterly horrific.

Llanto: the Land of Tears and Revenge: Located in the domains of dread, this is a largely rural and mountainous area where people have lost hope. No native bards of joy can be found here.

Since the land was once connected to the Realm of the Fae, people have an unusually high fertility. Thus, Serpentus the undead dark lord has fresh victims. People live in fear, hiding in their thatched houses and fearing the sounds, shrills and cries at night. People seek to placate the Fae, when actually Serpentus kidnaps innocents to sacrifice them in his hidden pyramid. Their souls become ghosts and stalk the living. People usually do not actually see anything amiss, but they do feel something odd. Mutilated corpses appear every now and then, but people think this is because of the wars of independence and reconquest – which exist in Toril, not here. Serpentus is insane and immortal in his undead state, which is a curse for him being the last of his tribe. He lives atop his

pyramid of bones, which ever grows and has inner hallways and tunnels. He broods and wails in rage and despair, unable to join his brethren in the afterlife and knowing that he is the last scion and survivor of a lineage that traces back to Nexal and managed to fight New Athkatla for decades, before being wiped out by its forces and a Viceroy.

Natives of “weaker” tribes are spared or used as his “priests” by Serpentus: he deems himself (wrongly) a demigod, but those who make pacts with him gain warlock powers.

The presence of the pyramid is a secret, unknown by the civilians and all living inhabitants of the land, soldiers of the different factions fighting in the land -save for the captives to be executed.

The forests of the land are full of were-jaguars and werewolves, and disappearances continue to occur. People live in fear and the night is full of horrors.

Planar Traps and Gates: in places where wars have been cruel and atrocities committed, the seals between planes have been especially broken. If someone enters into those lands, they will begin to perceive alterations: either dead trees and animals or fantastical things, depending on whether there is a connection to the land of Eternal Night or the Realm of the Fae. Venturing closer will trap the unwary traveler, who will be sucked into the parallel dimensions.

The Ruins of Tranaltar: once utterly destroyed, no one will dare go to the ruins of Tranaltar, for all who do will be mutated or die from some noxious gases and energies. A shaman will find some herbs which, if chewed, may give a chance of withstanding the sources of illness.

III: THE HISHNALIAD AND OTHER FACTIONS, GROUPS, AND CONSPIRACIES

The Shields of Freedom (multi-faith and multi-ethnic paladin order devoted to ensuring the independence of the Republics):

When Simonus was still alive, he gathered a group of the noblest souls who wanted to make Narin's dream of liberty and equality come true. He trained them as the 'Shields of Freedom', a brotherhood of errant paladins tasked with protecting the innocent from slavery or attempts of colonization, and to ensure the freedom of the nascent State of Libertad. After the dissolution of Libertad into the Six (now Five, given the reconquest of Talaesta) Republics, the brotherhood's members were abject, since their nations now sent them to spy on and sabotage each other. They renounced to national alliances and still dream of a unified Libertad. They have become more secretive, however, heeding Simonus teaching of being holy but shrewd and sly. New members are invited by a dying brother or sister, and carry out secret operations aimed to ensure the remaining freedom and eventual union of the Republics from Imperial threats. They receive supernatural abilities upon becoming members.

The Holy Order of Exorcists: Given the extraplanar and evil haunts and attacks against the mortals, the Just Flame, the Brotherhood of Mercy and the servants of Qotal appointed exorcists, as described below in the section on religion.

The International and War Arbitral Tribunal: (war criminals, border disputes, etc.):

This Tribunal (see the subsection on Gorgana, above) settles territorial and inter-State disputes, and tries those accused of war crimes. Additionally, an amendment to the Treaty that constituted the Tribunal, entered into by Watilla and New Athkatla, grant competence and jurisdiction for the tribunal to settle investment disputes between Watilla and the foreign

companies operating therein. Surprising everyone, some native chieftains have come forth before the Tribunal, arguing that the nations have *usurped* their original lands (the *inocentes* think that some of their tribes were once invaders too) and breached treaties with their tribes –the nations regard those instruments as *non-legal* agreements-.

The Brotherhood of Intiri: some among the native chieftains that have petitioned before the Tribunal (see the previous paragraph) have secretly established an alliance with the plans of forming a confederation of native tribes. The group is composed exclusively of chieftains with the True Sun powers, who regard themselves as blessed by Intiri, a Sun deity from Lopango who, in their opinion, has protected the land from Tezca, who they regard as the False Sun. They are secretly petitioning Huamanpallpa, the greatest sun-priest in Lopango,⁵⁹ to consider the nation they eventually form as a vassal Natican land in exchange for help in overthrowing the 'white' and 'mixed blood' invaders and 'defilers' of the island of Esmeralda. The sun-priests are seriously considering this, since the Esmeraldians know how to deal with supernatural entities, which have been increasingly plaguing Lopango. Furthermore, some speculate that King Je'ra'krik⁶⁰ was animated after his death by an Esmeraldian supernatural being to prey on Naticans, whose deities barred Tezca and other evil northern Maztican deities from operating there. Additionally, some Naticans fear an eventual invasion by New Athkatla, and see advantage in helping Esmeraldian natives weakening this Empire from the inside.

The Cleansing Claws: These druids, devoted to Tezca, consider that the law must be purified from non-Aarakocrans, as Kukul supposedly originally wanted. They poison waters, kill humans and carry out evil deeds in order to "purge" nature and the land.

⁵⁹ See Jon Hild, *Lopango – Land of the Sacred Sun*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The Hishnaliad: the Hishnaliad is a secretive group and a total mystery. It was founded by some natives who had a vision when the Faerûnians sailed to Esmeralda. Guided by a mysterious Condor, they went to the highest places in Esmeralda, where they waited. Furious at the conquest of their land, they delved in rituals with narcotics and opioids and eventually developed a form of magic that combines Hishna and Pluma: the Hishnaliad. Armed with this knowledge, and combining the deadly and subtle magics, they trained some assassins. Many deaths of Faerûnians, thought to be the product of diseases, was actually attributable to them. Mysterious curses suffered by the foreigners were created by them.

Before the Spellplague, the Hishnaliad sent agents to mainland Maztica and Faerûn, where they trained other Mazticans and gave “presents” to Faerûnian rulers and museums: actually cursed relics. Many deaths and suffering in Faerûn lies at the hands of these vengeful beings. Some of these agents still live in Faerûn, and some of their greatest revenges have been the assassination of members of the Council of Six and plagues in Amn. The leaders of Amn cover their faces, so people are not supposed to know about their identity.⁶¹ The Hishnaliad spells allowed them to develop a technique to find out that identity, and they have effectively assassinated many of them over time. The fact that their faces is not known prevents most Amnians from knowing about this, but the leaders of Amn have always feared suffering the same fate of many of their peers: these attacks persist, and the Hishnaliad, whom Amnians and the Council know nothing about, are secretly to blame.

On the other hand, during the Sundering a plague of locusts ravaged Amn.⁶² The Hishnaliad invoked it, and managed to bring an aspect of Zaltec into Faerûn for revenge purposes.

Without being aware of this, the Hishnaliad is opposed by those who follow the faith of the Serene face of Kiltzi, whose goddess opposes the cult of assassins and taught the same magical tradition handled by the Hishnaliad to her followers: she does this because Hishnaliad actions secretly empower Zaltec.

With the outbreak of the wars of independence, the Hishnaliad leaders argued about training non-pure-natives or not, and a split took place.

The offshoot of the Hishnaliad that decided to train half-blood and ethnic Faerûnian rebels to support independence did this to weaken what they saw as the greatest evil: New Athkatla. They thus formed the Hishnadrinn, a group that depends on some Hishnaliad elders. The Hishnadrinn was a secret group whose agents became known as the sicarius, who conducted political assassinations of traitors and New Athkatlans. After some successes in securing a tenuous independence, some Hishnadrinn members used their talents to help criminal and drug cartels, developing the bombs that ravage Cordelliana and killing people for money. They are disavowed by the official Hishnadrinn, which perceives them as petty criminals. To survive persecution, they formed gangs, which are a plague in some of the Republics.

The upper echelon of the Hishnaliad, both members that live in mainland Maztica and Esmeralda and in Faerûn, is aware that Maztica and Faerûn are once again in the same place: Toril.

The Hishnaliad have provided support to Mazticans who have inflicted attacks on Amn in the past. For instance, they provided magical and material assistance to the stingers who attacked to demand repayment of the riches plundered from Maztica and the Tlincalli who opened a gate and sent their agents to the underdark below

⁶¹ Steven E. Schend, “Book two: Amn”, *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 7.

⁶² *Sword Coast Adventurer’s Guide*, 2015

Amn to attack that realm.⁶³ The Hishnaliad actually provided inspiration of those operations.

Spies, mercenaries and saboteurs: Every nation, without exception, has secret agents abroad. They also, apart from their own official armies, sometimes hire mercenaries or non-state groups or agents and send them to carry out black operations secretly or openly, depending on whether they want to intimidate or desire to avoid the conduct being traced back to them. Still, in these cases the International Arbitral Tribunal has condemned those operations as wrongful acts of the respective State.

IV: RELIGION AND FAITHS

Exorcists belong to a special order in one of the four main non-evil faiths and religious orders in Esmeralda: the Brotherhood of Mercy (which regards deities as aspects of a superior god, with Ilmater being his prevalent dimension) and the Just Flame (like the previous one, but focusing on Justice). They both belong to the same Church: the Merciful Justice. Another faith is that of the Guardian (with regard Helm's mission of protecting and guardianship as supreme), which in turn has two variations: the Golden Fist (official faith in New Athkatla) and the Protector. Another faith is the Peaceful Wind (native faith, focusing on Qotal). The Merciful Justice resembles the mainland Maztican Cult of Hunab-Kuum⁶⁴ in the sense that many of its followers believe in a single divine being with the faces of Tyr and Ilmater, although some still cling to the idea that they are allied divine beings, now in alliance with Qotal. A certain tension exists between these differing views on faith.

However, just as the aforementioned Cult evolved due to unique mainland events, the

Esmeraldian version has a different focus: a single Church that includes the orders of the Just Flame and the Brotherhood of Mercy, with Mercy and Justice being regarded as two sides of the same divine being (the faces being called Tyr and Ilmater). Sometimes, Qotal is regarded as an interpretation of Ilmater by the natives; while others consider that Qotal is either a third face or a saint servant of the divine being, which is called Deo.

For many (not all) natives, Qotal reigns supreme. While the original human settlers referred to him as Bochica, and the name is still used by the innocents (located mostly in Cordelliana, which was autonomous and not under subjection to the Hinkalliano Empire), most natives nowadays refer to him as Qotal.

The non-Athkatlan and non-native faiths are often monotheistic, and regard traditional gods as either angels or demons (depending on alignment), as myths or representations/allegories of certain realities, or as lesser beings. Others retain a polytheistic viewpoint, including those who revere Faerûnian or native deities. Zaltec is always regarded by those good aligned (or neutral) faiths as a devil lord.

Concerning those with polytheist beliefs, some natives and maroons consider that Zaltec is the rightful divine lord: his decreed wars long ago were mere necessary sacrifices and preparations in order to prepare and train Mazticans to overthrow the white invaders that would come and did come from the East. Interestingly, some are devoted to an *aspect* of Zaltec⁶⁵ without knowing who they are really adoring. They call him *Revolución*, who avenges and rights wrongs against slaves and natives through violent means that are "deserved". They think that Justice as understood by the Merciful Justice is a weak perversion that favors and suits non-native elites and prevents true social justice from being achieved. They call themselves the servants of

⁶³ Brian R. James and Ed Greenwood, *The Grand History of the Realms*, 2007, pp. 147, 156.

⁶⁴ See Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, at 37.

⁶⁵ On aspects of Maztican deities, see Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 20.

faith of an impersonal energy that empowers *Revolución* and all his faithful (in name or deed even without formally paying him homage). His faithful believe that *Revolución* is the offspring of Zaltec and Kiltzi, Maztican goddess of love. They depict him as a handsome womanizer who rights wrongs and defends the oppressed while legitimately killing non-ethnic Mazticans.

The Golden Fist is the official religion of New Athkatla. It is based on the supremacy of Helm as guardian of the nation with more typical Amnian deities, namely Sune and Waukeen, as consorts. The sustenance and help of those deities, in their opinion, explains prosperity, security and beauty of life in New Athkatla amidst such a savage and chaotic world as Maztica. This combination of deities is logical: after all, militaristic and lawful oriented faiths in Amn were traditionally limited to the city of Eshpurta,⁶⁶ whereas Waukeen and Sune were highly praised elsewhere in that Faerûnian nation.

The Servant of the Guardian, the official (and mandatory) faith in the Protectorate is a perversion of that New Athkatlan church, and is regarded as a heresy by it. The faith of the Servant regards the Lord Protector as the messenger of the Golden Fist deities. The martial and resistance traditions of Marsemberla, in turn, make its inhabitants regard the New Athkatlan official church and the monarch, its 'head' (title at which they laugh) as an anachronistic and imperialistic cult, especially because it was historically proven that such church once denied that natives (except Talaestans) had souls, thus justifying one genocide with the dragon at a point New Athkatlans were about to be expelled from the island. An Ilmatari monk and scholar, Casas, challenged that doctrine and convinced the emperor to stop the genocide (which helps explain, among other reasons such as their charitable acts, the popularity of Ilmater among natives).

The church of Ilmater, in turn, founded an organization, the Red Hands, as a neutral (in conflict) entity to provide humanitarian assistance and verify and persuade that international law is respected. Players can belong to it and risk their lives to help others in operations during wars.

Some Aarakocran druidic factions, called the Cleansing Claws, decide to remove all humanity from the island, at whatever cost: poisoning rivers and food or directly killing people. They see them as a stain in the land and corrupting it...

It is also worth noting that a recent cult has been born: ***the Church of the Mother, also known as the Serene face of Kiltzi***. This is a peaceful and very interesting faith that preaches that injustice of the Empire must be fought but with non-violence. It is very popular among the *Inocente* natives given their peaceful habits and traditions and the suffering they see war causes. It is currently led by a woman named Karamcha, a chosen, whose death has been decreed or asked in exchange for rewards by many groups and States. What is not known about this belief is its origin: grieving for the many wars and cruelty in Esmeralda, a foreign goddess, Eldath, desired to come and teach its population on gentler ways. Eldath went to Esmeralda, but learning about this the Maztican goddess Kiltzi decided to take up the peace portfolio and prevent another invasion as that of Helm, being wary. To avoid the conflict to determine who would be goddess of peace in the land,⁶⁷ and consistent with her outlook, Eldath gave up. Upon the return of Esmeralda and all of Maztica to Toril with the Sundering, Kiltzi found out about how a Chosen of Ilmater rose against genasi and genie lords who oppressed people in Calimshan in a nonviolent way⁶⁸; and she decided to empower a Maztican woman, Karamcha, to do something similar and convince people to *oppose* injustice but peacefully and demanding respect for the

⁶⁶ Steven E. Schend, "Book two: Amn", *Lands of Intrigue*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ See Julia Martin and Eric L. Boyd, *Faiths and Avatars*, 1996, p. 4.

⁶⁸ See *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*, 2015.

natives who are so often despised even in the Republics. Yet, aware of the might of bloodthirsty deities as Zaltec, Kiltzi asked Eldath for help, now convinced of her benign attitudes. Allied, they manifested to some natives in the avatar form of beautiful kind twin women, Serene Eldath and Kiltzi, who claim to be the benign adoptive mothers of the people of the land, and have protected many of them from attacks and the onslaught of some primordial spawn and sent dreams to Ilmater exorcists to aid the people. The cult has been fiercely attacked due to Zaltec's corruption of hearts and soul when instilling envy and hatred, since he has undergone a decrease in power with the growth of a movement of peace and nonviolence which still does not renounce to demanding justice. The Serene face of Kiltzi has an interesting twist: they developed the notion of self-defence and just war, considered sometimes by the Tribunal when prosecuting those who instigate armed conflicts. The Serene Face members say that sometimes peace is disrupted by others and it is then necessary to protect the victims; but also say that just peace demands more than just abstaining from violence. When proportionate and indispensable, then acts against aggressors are seen as morally permissible and required for those in charge of the protection of the innocent. This explains, to some, why some followers of the Serene Face practice the Hishnaliad Arcane Tradition, which includes lethal or offensive abilities related to Hishna and not only have Pluma spells. The Serene face cult is growing and being passionately adopted by the so-called children, those who embrace it. Shrines are flourishing, and apart from an overwhelming number of native converts, some ethnic Faerûnians are embracing the faith of the mothers as well.

New Athkatla is proud and views itself as favored by the divinity. It boasts huge and lavish cathedrals. Similar architecture is not found in the Republics, which were abandoned by politicians when colonized by the Dragon Empire. They have, at most, medium-sized temples and churches in the cities, but every village, no matter how small, has a small church and shrines and chapels are found in roads between them.

Factions, Schisms and Religious Clashes

In Esmeralda, schisms, inter-religious and intra-faith conflicts abound. The faithful of the Merciful Justice hotly brand other fellow faithful heretics if they think that Ilmater and Tyr (and Qotal) are deities or merely faces or saints of Deo. Those who favor Helm attack other faiths, especially those who have a different view of Helm (e.g. non-Golden Fist followers). The Inquisition views native deities as demons (to the dismay of Lady Protector Santzi in Heroika). And natives view those who follow Eastern gods as Pagan invaders who defile not only the land but also its spiritual realm. Religious persecution, intolerance and clashes often underlie some armed conflicts.

The church of the Golden Fist despises native faiths, and created tales as that according to which when Kiltzi saw Sune's beauty, she died of jealousy.

Hidden shrines of Zaltec, Azul and Tezca can be found throughout the land, and they attract supernatural beings and fiends, among other risks. Furthermore, some of the primordial spawn are walking embodiments of nightmares resembling those deities, and some have even mentioned that they are their agents (whether this is true or not remains to be seen). The Kukillu, whose main headquarters are found in an impenetrable island next to Esmeralda, is a fish-like being that from time to time captures humanoids in his giant fishing net to later devour them, and those who worship him have magical nets to capture victims and sacrifice them later by drowning them and prevent so the wrath or being attacked by Kukillu. They are led by warlocks.

V: SUPERNATURAL BEINGS AND THE ELDERS OF ABEIR

As someone familiar with Maztica once commented,⁶⁹ Maztica (not only its mainland) is home “to a dazzling number of deities”, some being “less powerful” gods. Many of them fled to Esmeralda when the mainland Mazticans abandoned their faith after the night of Wailing and Amnian invasions. Fearing their disappearance and oblivion, they established their abodes in the material plane. Other powerful beings, Supernatural Lords (not all of which are really rulers) came from the parallel planes when Esmeralda was within them, and remained in Esmeralda after the Sundering. Among them, many were mere legends that scared children, and now are a real threat.

Some (not even most) prominent Supernatural Lords and Demigods, and monsters, their haunts and goals, are the following:

Mother of the Mountains: She is a huge creature with a human shape, covered in leaves and dirt, with disheveled hair and eyes made of stone. The Mother hates all who intrude in the wilderness, especially non-ethnic Maztican hunters and gatherers. Whenever they stray somewhat far from civilization, signs of natural disasters precede her coming: hurricanes, deluges, etc. Those who survive her natural attacks and face her risk losing their sanities or lives when being chewed by this huge creature who embodies the mountains.

The Mother has a horrific stench that causes retching, is covered by tree limbs that entangle, and everyone who sees her and fails a sanity check loses their mind.

Anywhere in a mount or mountain is the lair of the mother. Thus, she has lair actions anywhere in such places, relative to the forces of nature present there.

The Mother has 300 ordinary hit points. If reduced to 0, she is absorbed in the soil and resurfaces after 10 rounds. Her Spiritual Hit Points amount to 400. If someone significantly reduces her Spiritual Hit Points (see below on rules about them) and prays or sings a song of true joy (bards), succeeding at a Piety check of DC of 25 (20 for Exorcists) the Mother is banished for one week and cannot appear to the succeeding individual within six months. If reduced to 0 Spiritual Hit Points, the magic of Kukul will engulf her and send her back to the Realm of the Fae, from where she must escape from a spiritual prison before ever being allowed to return.

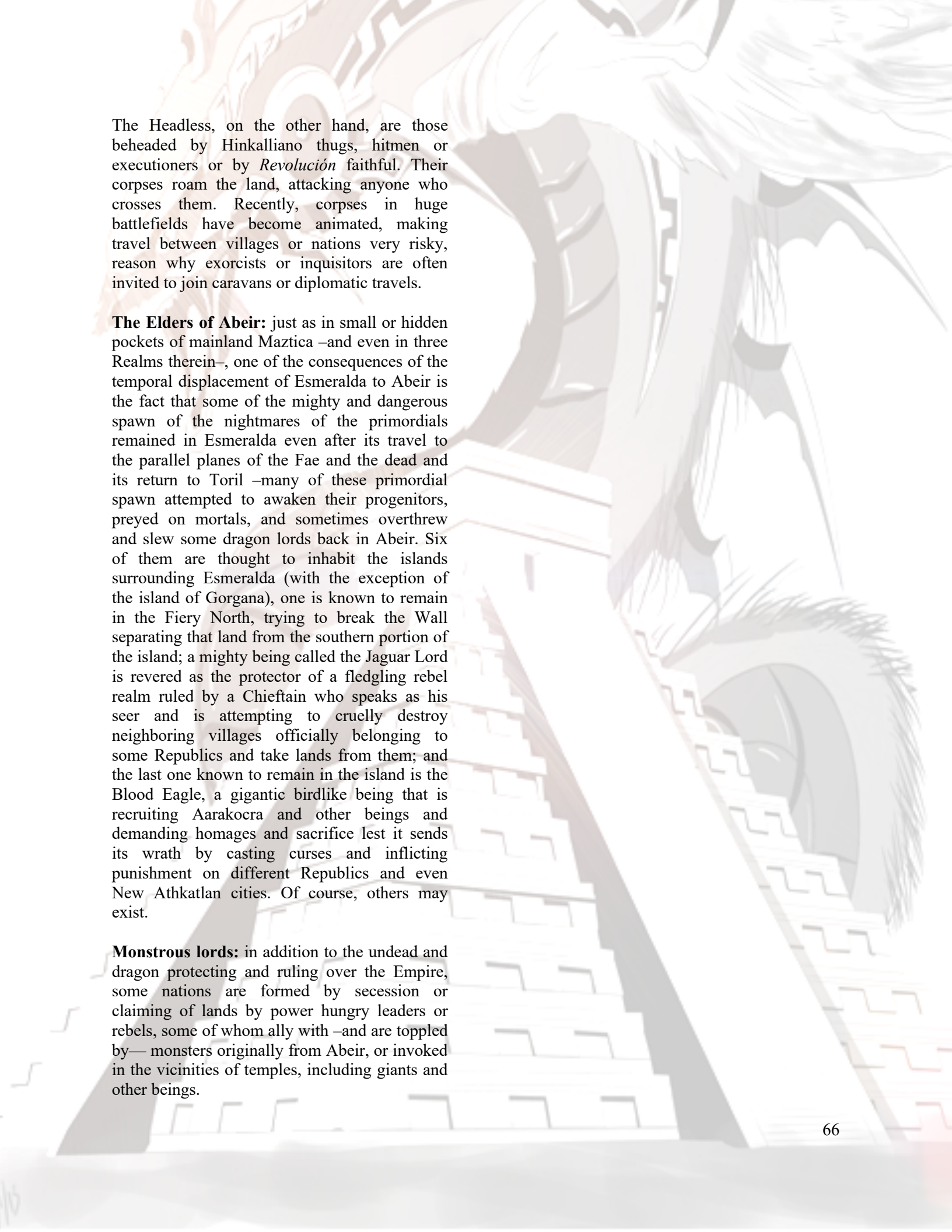
The Wailers and Headless: In the many armed conflicts of Esmeralda, many civilians and victims have been hurt. One of the connections between the war and spiritual struggles of the island is the creation of Wailers or Headless.

Some people greatly suffer for the deaths of their close of kin and commit suicide, kill innocent or do desperate or evil things. Their restless spirits, still consumed by pain, remain attached to the land in denial and refusing to accept what befell them. Their ghosts wander the lands, crying at night and tormenting the living. They often mistake the living for the relatives they once lost, and seek to take them with them to the underworld.

The first Wailer was a Maztican whose elder sons died when repelling New Athkatlan invaders. Before seeing the same happen to the smaller children, she killed all of them. This is the First Wailer. After killing her children in a night aligned with the land of Eternal Night, Nocturno, its lord, rejoicing at the tragedy convinced her to jump from a cliff to her death, later raising her as an evil spirit. She has 150 Spiritual Hit Points (the same number of ordinary hit points, which if reduced to 0 merely stun her for 5 rounds). On the other hand, she has all of the 5th edition Banshee abilities, but those who fail against her Wail die instantly, constructs included (they are shattered).

She mistakes every living humanoid for one of her children, and she seeks to kill them to be “reunited” with them. Those killed by her become lesser wailers, i.e. Banshees.

⁶⁹ Douglas Niles, *Gods & Battles*, in *Maztica Campaign Set*, 1991, at 20



The Headless, on the other hand, are those beheaded by Hinkalliano thugs, hitmen or executioners or by *Revolución* faithful. Their corpses roam the land, attacking anyone who crosses them. Recently, corpses in huge battlefields have become animated, making travel between villages or nations very risky, reason why exorcists or inquisitors are often invited to join caravans or diplomatic travels.

The Elders of Abeir: just as in small or hidden pockets of mainland Maztica –and even in three Realms therein–, one of the consequences of the temporal displacement of Esmeralda to Abeir is the fact that some of the mighty and dangerous spawn of the nightmares of the primordials remained in Esmeralda even after its travel to the parallel planes of the Fae and the dead and its return to Toril –many of these primordial spawn attempted to awaken their progenitors, preyed on mortals, and sometimes overthrew and slew some dragon lords back in Abeir. Six of them are thought to inhabit the islands surrounding Esmeralda (with the exception of the island of Gorgana), one is known to remain in the Fiery North, trying to break the Wall separating that land from the southern portion of the island; a mighty being called the Jaguar Lord is revered as the protector of a fledgling rebel realm ruled by a Chieftain who speaks as his seer and is attempting to cruelly destroy neighboring villages officially belonging to some Republics and take lands from them; and the last one known to remain in the island is the Blood Eagle, a gigantic birdlike being that is recruiting Aarakocra and other beings and demanding homages and sacrifice lest it sends its wrath by casting curses and inflicting punishment on different Republics and even New Athkatlan cities. Of course, others may exist.

Monstrous lords: in addition to the undead and dragon protecting and ruling over the Empire, some nations are formed by secession or claiming of lands by power hungry leaders or rebels, some of whom ally with –and are toppled by– monsters originally from Abeir, or invoked in the vicinities of temples, including giants and other beings.

ESMERALDIAN GAME MECHANICS

SUGGESTION: DIFFICULT HEALING

To reflect the grittiness and harshness of the land and its peoples, it is suggested that healer kits –composed with local herbs with properties known to natives to the land, or of holy oils made by certain churches— are required for healing to take place during short rests, with short rests lasting for 8 hours (Gritty realism and Healer's Kit Dependency variant rules found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

WILD MAGIC

Whenever spells are cast in the vicinities of ancient underground temples –of the bat, jaguar, etc.—, given the portals to other planes therein, wild magic effects take place –use, e.g. tables as the one from Gnomegarde in the Dragon of Icespire Peak adventure, perhaps including more dangerous results, depending on the alignment of the beings which can be contacted from the portal.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Due to the fact that many lands and paths are abandoned or feared due to the legends about cruel supernatural beings, and portals to other whimsical or dangerous planes and dimensions, random encounters may often take place and be potentially deadly. You may use the ones from the Tomb of Annihilation adventure.

SANITY ABILITY

SUPERNATURAL EVIL LORDS AND THE FATE OF SOULS OF THOSE WHO COMMIT EVIL DEEDS

Due to the supernatural beings of evil nature who secretly prowl in Esmeralda, adventurers are likely to meet them sooner or later. Those beings are behind many of the wars in Esmeralda: Zaltec grows stronger with each conflict, and many evil lords whisper in the minds of warlords and guerrilla leaders, convincing them to commit heinous acts without them knowing, just for the pleasure of evil and because, in Esmeralda, the souls of beings who commit horrible acts and die are devoured by the being that has an archetype that more closely resembles the evil deeds the person engaged in the most while alive.

Moreover, evil and dangerous demigods walk in the jungles and forests, such as the Mother of the Mountains, and besides killing on sight those who see her and survive often become insane because of the things they see in her eyes and horrible visage.

As a consequence, the **Sanity score** described on page 265 of the 5th edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* is always used in Esmeralda. It comes into play when contacting monsters who are Fae lords, Undead lords or Evil demigods who appear as they are: either because they discard their Shade disguise or because a character has True Sight and sees them for what they are.

Note that not all of those lords are equally powerful: the word lord designates a hierarchy or special standing, but some lords lord over lower lords.

On the other hand, whenever someone does a terrible deed or casts sacrificial magic, the character also must make a sanity score: on failure, the character begins to lose his mercy and humanity and his mind becomes ever more that of a cruel and bloodthirsty being.

EXORCISM (SPIRITUAL ATTACKS & HIT POINTS), HONOR SCORE; AND VARIANT PIETY ABILITY SCORE; AND MAGIC CASTING TIED TO BACKGROUNDS OR ELSE, AS TRUE SUN HEIR POWERS BASED ON A FEAT (ALTERNATIVE TO BACKGROUND)

When a character is created, regardless of level (even at level 1), players must *choose* one out of three abilities a character will have: the Piety Score, the Honor Score (described in pages 264-265 of the 5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide) or the True Sun Heir (see the 'The inheritors of the True Sun (background) and their persecution' sidebar).

Given the ban on magic cast by mortals allegedly decreed by Ao (which may, or not, be the actual explanation), those individuals with access to magic can cast it due to having received sparks from the True Sun or having been once kidnapped or touched by Fey or other supernatural beings. You may use, for instance, 'The Enchanted' PDF from the DMsGuild.

Alternatively, those who choose the True Sun Heir powers feat have a 'Dragonmark' feat mentioned in the *Eberron: Rising from the Last War* sourcebook (it may be acquired afterwards, with a character receiving a spark). 'Feytouched'—beings with some Fey link—or those blessed by the divine may also cast magic—the latter divine magic, the former arcane one.

While Esmeralda is a land of faith, and thus devotion to the divine is central (except in a few cases), those with true adherence to the divine are few. Some monsters are *immune* to all

damage of either nonmagical or magical attacks, and can only be 'dispelled' or rebuked—sent to their home plane, or even 'destroyed' in order to be tormented in the afterlife—by means of overcoming this immunity, called 'spiritual immunity'. Creatures with it can only be hurt either if their spiritual hit points reach zero, or if the immunity is lifted. To do so, you may award something akin to *inspiration*, called *spiritual inspiration*. It is very rare, and DMs should only award it for extremely selfless or good deeds. Only good aligned PCs or NPCs behaving good and not evil or neutral may have it. Spending such a point eliminates the spiritual immunity of monsters for an encounter. Clerics and paladins with the 'acolyte' background can choose to have been trained as exorcists, swapping or exchanging their background feature for the capacity to inflict damage and automatically overcome spiritual immunity whenever they attack through magical or nonmagical means, or when allies they cast supportive magic on attack the respective monster, e.g. those benefiting from a bless spell cast on them by the respective cleric or paladin.

Alternatively, in relation to spiritual hit points, you may use a 'Piety' score. Characters with the Piety score have an ability that is relevant when dealing with evil supernatural lords. This ability allows players to do one of two things: they have advantage when rolling Sanity or Horror Checks (5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide, pages 264-265) if they succeed a Piety ability check; and they can inflict spiritual damage to those monsters. For them to do this, they have to describe why they affect the monsters: e.g. a bard that says that his musical abilities depict joy and bravery even in the face of evil beings, laughing at them; a priest whose faith in a supreme benevolent god convinces him that evil beings are not really powerful. In those cases, they must succeed in a Piety ability check (DC depends on the situation and being they face, as determined by the DM). If they succeed, they roll damage as normal (even when using martial or ranged weapons) but only inflict *half* (round down) of the rolled damage if they use cleric or bard abilities or *one third* (round down) of the rolled damage if they use weapons, provided that those weapons or ammunition have been

immersed in holy water or blessed by an Exorcist. Such damage is called spiritual damage (see below), since normal magical or physical damage does nothing to evil supernatural lords. Both the effects of such immersion or blessing last for *one day* (of course, new blessings or immersions can be done with the same effect). Much more so than Wisdom. Piety measures true faith and devotion. High checks also serve to ask for *miracles* and divine *help* (at the DMs discretion). This is not spellcasting, this is much more than that and the effects depend on the situation and divine decision. In a land as dangerous as this, it is helpful that the divine is merciful.

Piety also serves to see through the *Shade*, i.e. disguise or invisibility of supernatural lords. The DM rolls an opposed (thus passive) check between the supernatural lord's Charisma and the characters' (with this ability score) Piety. More on this is described below.

Additionally, when in contact with relics of saints or holy places, a Piety roll which succeeds may bring boons (e.g. healing, or divine help brought about by the intercession of the saints before the divine, as determined by the DM).

Characters with the Honor Ability Score use it as described in the 5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide. Moreover, the ability has additional uses in Esmeralda: they know more about other cultures (native, Amnian, Republican or mixed), and so know what offends and provokes their rulers. They can also roll *legal checks*, to persuade that an attack violates the law or armed conflict (e.g. that an attack cannot be carried out by the enemy against you today because this is a Sacred Day; or that someone is protected from direct attacks as a civilian); that a given territory belongs to another people as its rightful sovereigns; or that someone is innocent, guilty or has no responsibility for insulting another culture because of ignorance or another circumstance precluding wrongfulness, among others. Of course, there are *opposed legal checks*: e.g. when New Athkatlan and Republican international lawyers argue which realm has dominion over a given disputed territory; or when convincing a judge of the

International Tribunal if someone is a war criminal or not.

They can also roll *social checks*, to deal in a respectful (honest or hypocritical) way with other cultures, nations or societies and know what is allowed, forbidden, frowned upon and applauded there.

Characters with the Investigation, History (both based on intelligence) or Performance (Charisma) skills can add their proficiency bonus depending on circumstances, e.g. in a trial a showy performance can sway the judges.

Using the *Variant* 'skills with different abilities rule shown in the 5th edition SRD, sometimes the performance test requires the use of the *Intelligence ability instead of the Charisma one*, because it will then allude to professional performance when conducting research or properly constructing and innovative or difficult legal argument (e.g. on who is sovereign by law even when the judge initially is reluctant to admit it), which requires clear conceptualization, expression and understanding.

ESMERALDIAN EXORCIST (PRIEST)

AND MONSTERS WITH SPIRITUAL HIT POINTS AND SPIRITUAL ARMOR CLASS

Exorcists belong to a special order in one of the non-evil faiths and religious orders in Esmeralda: the Brotherhood of Mercy; the Just Flame; the Serene Face of Kiltzi faithful; the Protectors; or the Peaceful Wind (see Religion and Faiths of Maztica, above). Not every priest or monk priest of those orders is an exorcist: the bishops (or spiritual leader for natives) only appoints some and grants them the powers to combat supernatural evil. This is due to the madness that often afflicts contact with evil supernatural monsters (referred to below).

Exorcists are quite important for a reason: some monsters (Fae lords, undead lords and evil demigods) cannot be defeated by weapons or ordinary magic, only by 'Piety'. They have

spiritual hit points and spiritual armor class, but not ordinary hit points. Only by reducing the former will they be defeated and banished from this world.

Exorcists always have the 'Piety' ability for free, and they can choose to roll an ability check called "spiritual attack" once per round. The level of the exorcist determines the spiritual damage roll of such attack. They also have some special spells that allow them to inflict spiritual damage.

Exorcists are described below:

They are like clerics described in the 5th edition Systems Reference Document (SRD), available at:

<https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/systems-reference-document-srd>, with the following changes:

- ❖ The "Turn Undead" effect of Channel Divinity (gained at level 2) also allows them to "Turn Fiends".
- ❖ They have the Piety Ability Score for free (usually, since many clerics are socially among the most learned and cultivated individuals –and among the few literate, besides Hinkalliano rebels and a handful of others- in Esmeralda, leads them to pursue scholarly careers or studies and so many choose the Honor Ability Score to have Legal and social Knowledge and checks).
- ❖ If they pass a Piety ability check against evil lords, and they use a priestly spell or ability, they inflict full spiritual damage equal to the damage roll they obtained. If they use weapons they inflict half (spiritual) damage (round down) of their damage rolls.
- ❖ They can bless weapons and ammunition so that they inflict damage to evil lords if a Piety test succeeds when attacking by the attacker. They can bless weapons (and bullets, etc.) they touch as a bonus action. Such blessing allows to hurt spiritual hit points of evil beings, as described

above, and this empowerment lasts for one day.

- ❖ Exorcists of Ilmater, Tyr or Qotal (or the Merciful Justice) must have a Lawful Good or Neutral Good alignment. The exception is that of Inquisitors (originally from Heroika, but the Inquisition order has begun to be replicated elsewhere), which are either Neutral or Lawful Neutral.
- ❖ They have True Sight.
- ❖ They can dispel or counterspell sacrificial magic (there are no other means to do so, save for miracles).
- ❖ They are never proficient with heavy armor, unlike the ordinary cleric.
- ❖ They never acquire the Disciple of life ability to make healing spells more effective.
- ❖ They never acquire the Supreme Healing ability described for the cleric.
- ❖ Exorcists always have the Sacred Flame cantrip and a version of it called Cleansing Flame. Cleansing Flame only inflicts Spiritual Damage, never affecting ordinary hit points. The damage increases exactly as the Sacred Flame cantrip does (1d8 initially, 2d8 at 5th level, 3d8 at 11th level and 4d8 at 17th level).

Many may think that exorcists are only relevant here in Esmeralda, which is *wrong*: with portals opened, evil lords (demigods, Fae lords and Undead lords) may attempt to go elsewhere in Maztica or Toril at large: and Mystra magic is useless against them (even the wish spell is useless! New heroes, not famous beings in the world, are needed!). Only spiritual damage affects them, which requires either the Piety ability or those of an Exorcist.

FIREARMS

As described in the heading '**Renacida: Lantan reborn**', with their creativeness and pushed by the need to survive in a land where Faerûnian magic was not only unreliable but useless, Lantanese refugees developed advanced

firearms (Renaissance style), the creation of which was encouraged by rulers of the different armies at war given the effectiveness of traditional Faerûnian magic in Esmeralda and the *scarcity* of those who could cast magic allowed in this island with different natures. Also, to counter Zaltec agents who did use sacrificial magic.

The use of firearms follows the rules described in pages 267-268 of the Dungeon Master's Guide (5th edition), with two caveats: only Renaissance weapons of this sort exist in the island; and characters can decide that they have proficiency in them in two cases: a) if they choose the Veteran of war background; or b) they exchange that proficiency giving up another weapon proficiency. Characters with the Fighter class in Esmeralda receive this proficiency for free.

Moreover, given artifice magic and fossil energy, as described in this book, both the Alchemist and the Gunsmith Artificer specializations are found across Esmeralda (see *Unearthed Arcana: Artificer*, available at: https://media.wizards.com/2016/dnd/downloads/1_UA_Artificer_20170109.pdf).

ALIEN GUNS AND OBJECTS?

Legends whisper that an alien Realmspace civilization came down to Hinkalliano territory, and that, perhaps, superior technology and weapons can be found. Who knows, only strange drawings that can only be seen from the highest mountains in the Valley of Netssca may be the only clue... (DM's discretion)

While there are no Spelljammer vessels from Esmeralda, a certain magical resource and a prophecy has attracted Realmspace civilizations for long... unfortunately, among the interested are the illithid from Glyth,⁷⁰ who have stolen spider monkeys⁷¹ from Esmeraldian jungles in the past...

Due to innovations produced by war and the desire to have an advantage over the (internal or external) enemy, some have specialized in the use of firepower. Thus, there are a few snipers and Gunslingers in Esmeralda. Characters can thus choose the Gunslinger Martial Archetype for Fighters, available here: <http://www.dmsguild.com/product/170778/Gunslinger-Martial-Archetype-for-Fighters>

MAGIC

The Hishnaliad: Arcane tradition

There is a third Maztican arcane tradition apart from Hishna and Pluma magic:⁷² the Hishnaliad. Those who belong to the Hishnaliad, Hishnadrinn, Sicarius and to the Serene face of Kiltzi. Those who choose this arcane tradition are able to cast both Hishna and Pluma spells. When they reach 2nd, 6th, 10th and 14th level they must choose whether they gain a Hishna or Pluma ability, and cannot change their choice (e.g. Pluma or Hishna magic Savant, Mighty Leaper or Light as a Feather, and so on. See the 5th edition Maztica Campaign Guide available at the Dungeon Master's Guild for details on these abilities).

SACRIFICIAL MAGIC AND ARTIFICE

Sacrificial magic

⁷⁰ See Dale "Slade" Henson, *Realmspace*, 1991, pp. 40-41.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jon Hild, *The Maztica Campaign Guide 5th Edition*, pp. 56-57.

Anyone who pays homage to Zaltec, Tezca or Azul can attempt sacrificial magic. They do this by consecrating an altar to one of them (any object atop which someone can be killed suffices) by praying for one hour. Then, if they plunge a sacrificial knife through any human or humanoid's victim knife, and drink at least a drop of their blood, they gain the ability to cast sacrificial magic.

Sacrificial magic permits their recipients to cast any wizard, warlock or sorcerer spell. Thus, characters that choose one of those classes and do that operate as normal, because they are using the *sacrificial weave* (the normal weave is non-existent here). After the ritual, the caster can cast magic for one week.

If the victim is a True Sun Heir (see the inheritors of the True Sun (magic feat) and their persecution sidebar), the ritual allows the user to cast magic for one year.

If the ritual is conducted in the Pyramid of Bones, regardless of who the victim is, the caster can cast magic for six months additional to the normal time he would be able to cast in.

Apart from what is described above, blood mages can conduct ritual sacrifices to release powerful forces with terrible effects, such as: invoking an evil supernatural lord; killing someone from afar; and other evil deeds. This requires casting rituals and not ordinary spells. They are described in secret parchments.

Queen Bella, head of the Athkatlan church of the Golden Fist, is unaware of the fact that her powers are due to intuitive casting of sacrificial magic, and so that she is actually serving Zaltec.

With the first sacrifice and use of magic, the caster's body changes: the faint shape of a white skull appears on his back. Only atonement by Qotal or Deo for repentant and redeemed casters of this magic can eliminate this sign. Without such holy and divine forgiveness, the souls of casters go to eternal torment in the mouth of Zaltec, Azul or Tezca, depending on who his patron was.

As indicated above (see Hinkalliano), when sacrificial magic is used, the caster must pass a sanity score or gradually become more bloodthirsty.

Artifice magic (and the emergence of a desert and of dinosaurs)

If *fossil* fuel is extracted from Esmeralda (it abounds in Watilla but can be found in other places where it is less common) and placed in a medallion or talisman, its holder, provided he knows how to handle the energy of the world, can cast artifice magic. The ability to cast spells in this way lasts until the fossil energy stored in the medallion is exhausted: usually one month, but some talismans permit greater storage.

The corporations *West Esmeraldian Company* and *Prosperity, Inc.* have rich fossil resources, and its factories and soldiers are equipped with artifice effects to protect them and allow them to do impressive things, such as having hovering platforms to search for fossil oil. Natives call their abilities and constructions *magitech*. The companies are bitter rivals, and frequently hire secret agents and saboteurs to destroy rival facilities (where hideous experiments are often conducted) or steal corporate secrets. These agents also act against the population sometimes, and are used by companies so that misdeeds cannot be traced back to them. They are sometimes sent abroad, to obtain resources, permits, mercenaries or authorizations in other countries.

However, the extraction of fossils eliminates vegetation from a radius around the place of extraction over time. Thus, the desert of bones was born. Intriguingly, the remains of dinosaurs, which were deep below the earth that was removed in excavations to extract fossils, have sometimes become animate because of the residuum of magical techniques used to extract fossils in Watilla. Sometimes they are bony remains, but in at least one case a dinosaur with flesh became alive.

Sadly, the desert of bones is located in a land whose name honors Watil, goddess of vegetation. Now, in parts of a land that has had

abundant fruit, animals, rivers and water for centuries, some children are starving now. The cantrip “food for gold” (see sidebar, above) does not work in the desert of bones.

The official take on artificers is found in *Eberron: Rising from the Last War* –although you may wish to use alternative rules on artificers, which can be used for artifice magic in Esmeralda.

HERO (ACTION) POINTS

Esmeraldian characters have Hero points (as described on page 264 of the 5th edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*) or in the *Eberron Unearthed* Arcana document (http://media.wizards.com/2015/downloads/dnd/UA_Eberron_v1.pdf).

The DM will authorize their use, however, in each case if they are satisfied that the player provides a convincing and colorful description of how an initial failure turned into success (e.g. the target thought he was lying, but by invoking his noble heritage he changed his mind; the character falls through a chasm, only to find a root he hangs from at the last minute!).

MASS COMBAT

Due to frequent struggles with rebel groups or neighboring nations, players are expected to defend Heroika or repel an invasion from the Dragon Empire; to invade a stronghold of the Claws of Azul or else. As mentioned in a Sidebar above, the use of rules on mass combat found in the DMs Guild, *Unearthed Arcana* or elsewhere is encouraged and expected to fully portray an Esmeraldian game.

TROPICAL DISEASES

The diversity in fauna and flora not only has risks of poison or predators, but also create the risk of contagion of diseases when bitten by mosquitoes, snakes and spiders in the jungles and wilderness. When bitten by a given species of mosquitoes (or other creatures), characters

must succeed a DC15 Constitution saving throw. In a failure, they contract the Green Fever, and their skin turns a pale green hue. Constant weakening and vomiting is suffered, and players have disadvantage on every single roll until cured. Medicine is only created by obtaining a special flower found in jungles infested by those same mosquitoes.

TRUE SIGHT AND THE 'SHADE'

Supernatural lords and creatures originally from the Realm of the Fae or the land of Eternal Night, and those cursed and created by them, thought at first that tormenting and conquering Esmeraldians would be an easy feat. However, they experienced how women and men of faith and their divine protectors thwarted their plans and even finally defeated some of their own. Moreover, exorcists closed some of the portals forever. *Some* of those who remained or desired to continue plotting changed their minds and opted for subtlety and surreptitious ways. Evolution made them develop an ability to conceal their nature but not their energy (reason why detect evil, for instance, works), to either change shape (not only adopting a humanoid form but also that of plants, etc.) or become invisible: this is called the Shade. Some mortals, however, were imbued with the power of True Sight to see through this or develop this when ordained as exorcists or inquisitors.

Those mortals with True Sight (i.e. the ‘inheritors of the True Sun’, see feat in a sidebar above, or exorcists and inquisitors) have advantage when seeing through the disguise.

Seeing a Fae or undead lord for what they are is an ability check contest. The supernatural beings roll charisma, and mortals wisdom. If mortals are not actively trying to see through the veil, they roll with disadvantage and the roll is made by the DM secretly. Those with True Sight, namely exorcists, never have such disadvantage. Moreover, when actively trying to see, if they

concentrate for one round, they roll with advantage.

The nature of the Shade varies: it is based on charm for Fae, and on negative energies for undead lords. All fear the inquisition and exorcists, which have dealt serious blows in the past against some supernatural lords (many inquisitors and exorcists have fallen in this spiritual struggle, of course).

RACE AND CLASS NOTES

Available races (more may appear):

Humans are the prevalent race in Esmeraldian villages and cities, and they are afraid of other races, considering them supernatural embodiments or evil or danger out of superstition. Other races tend to live in secluded villages. The halflings who live in stilt houses close to the coastal villages are an exception, though, given their closeness to human villages, but they are isolationist and refuse to enter into contact with them. They often clash with human neighbors, since the latter think their stilt houses and villages are within their territorial seas and thus under their sovereignty, but fear of the supernatural prevents humans from encroaching much on their houses, since the halflings claim they are the children of a primordial spawn. Races found throughout Esmeralda include the following:

- Elves: diminutive beings, as described above.
- Aarakocra (use the stats found in the Elemental Evil Player's Companion (5th edition)).
- Tabaxi (feline humanoids descendants of a tribe from mainland Maztica), from the Volo's Guide to Monsters (see the Fiery North or the Rock Wall in the Mysterious Locations subsection).
- Centaurs (see the sidebar on page 31)
- Changelings (see the New Athkatla entry)

- Gnomes: these mysterious Fae beings have shapes that make them seem as part of nature (gnomes have advantage at hiding in the forests or in places with much vegetation). Some think they are spirits, and the natives treat them with reverence as mediators who contribute to settle disputes.
 - Supay gnomes (from the Lopango – Land of the Sacred Sun book available at the DMsGuild): some have traveled to Esmeralda, attracted by its connection to the Land of Eternal Night, also known as the Land of the Dead, and the islan's many undead supernatural beings. It is believed that the deity Supai they revere visits or resides in that plane, i.e. in part of the Shadowfell.
- Halflings: Esmeraldian halflings can breathe underwater, but do not have the Naturally Stealthy or the Lucky (reroll natural 1s) feature. One option is to use the Triton race from Volo's Guide to Monsters –notice that such Tritons also live in the surrounding waters. Due to their agility, they move as medium size creatures despite their small halfling size.
- Sahuagin
- Children of the Alligator: are Dragonborn in stats, although physically they are like scaly green humans with alligator heads. Their breath weapons consist in a roar that has the effect chosen by the player at character creation; and instead of Draconic they know their own *caiman* language (the prevalent Abeir language in the place where Esmeralda appeared before going to the Realms of the Fae, the land of Eternal Night and returning to Toril). The Draconic Ancestry is actually the influence of the founder of their tribe and their guardian animal spirit (such spirits remain in Abeir): e.g. instead of Green Dragon ancestry, it would be the

totem of the King poisonous snake. Use jungle animal and spirits inspiration.

- Tabaxi: these feline humanoids live deep in the jungles and forests of Esmeralda, and their skin and hair resembles that of Pumas. Use the abilities from the Volo's Guide to Monsters.
- Other races: due to the portals found across the land, jungles and untracked lands inside Esmeralda, and creatures originally from Abeir, feel free and encouraged to use rarely encountered races, or those from Chult, as grungs, tortles, Volo's Guide to Monsters ones, and more.

Classes (only the ones with a given relevant twist are mentioned):

- Bards: they channel the force of Joy. When playing or singing tropical music they usually sing to love or to feats in battles where their co-nationals participated. For some unknown reason, evil supernatural beings, undead or not, cannot stand the force of Happiness and Joy and the fact that someone expresses and feels them when also facing them.
- Warlocks: shamans in Esmeralda work as warlocks. They enter into agreements with natural or supernatural lords. Warlock patrons are either the fiend (Zaltec, Azul, Tezca or Nocturno or another lord from the land of Eternal Night), as described in the 5th edition SRD; or the Archfey (PHB). It is rumored that some contacted mysterious beings in Abeir and have entered into unknown and weird pacts with them (patron The Great Old One, PHB).
- Gunslinger Martial Archetype: see above in the Firearms entry.
- Rogues: the use of the Inquisitive, as presented by Wizards of the Coast in an Unearthed Arcana article ('Gothic Heroes') is suggested, insofar as it captures the existence of investigators in lands as crime-ridden as Esmeraldan nations. The information on this rogue

archetype can be found here: <http://dnd.wizards.com/sites/default/files/media/upload/articles/UA%20Gothic%20Characters.pdf>

BACKGROUNDS AND SKILLS

Below are some backgrounds that can encourage roleplaying in Esmeralda and transmit its feel and tone. The skills and abilities are those of the original D&D backgrounds, unless otherwise stated, and the tone must be adjusted as described below: thus, it is mostly a reskinning effort. Players and DMs can come up with additional backgrounds.

- **Politician (Republics), Enforcer (Dictatorships) or Noble (New Athkatla):** the background is basically the one presented in the 5th edition D&D Basic Rules (<http://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/basicrules>). For Politicians of the Democratic Republics (Members of Parliament, Judges or agents of the Government), depict commoners as seeking their favor and thus pleasing them, others trying to gain their favor or else. In Hinkalliano and the Protectorate, agents of the Junta, leader or ruling party are the Enforcers of State power, and everyone fears them. Playing an Enforcer who repents could be interesting.
- **Veteran:** those who fought in the many armed conflicts (and retired for whatever reason, as being done with armed conflict or end of service). They use the Soldier background described in the 5th edition D&D Basic Rules, and can exchange their Military Rank Feature for proficiency with Firearms (see page 267 of the Dungeon Master's Guide).
- **Underground missionary:** priests of faiths forbidden in the places where they

operate (e.g. priests of the Merciful Justice who hide in New Athkatla) to help their flock use the Acolyte background (5th edition SRD), and the Shelter the Faithful Feature is predicated of those who secretly follow the same faith. They often identify each other through secret songs, messages or signs that authorities mistake for ordinary communication (verbal or not). They can shelter in priest holes or in underground temples, where priests are more willing to assist even when there is a hazard.

- **Bounty hunter, Spy, Corporate agent (see the Watilla entry for explanation on them) or privateer:** those hired by the State or corporations to find people, evidence or conduct secret or even black operations use the Criminal background (5th edition D&D Basic Rules), adapted (in lore and feel) to better fit this mood and the official (sometimes publicly denied) affiliation (which may brand him as a criminal in enemy groups or nations). The very PHB suggests Spy as an alternative background to the Criminal one.
- **Investigator or Vigilante:** detectives who combat crime in the slums and cities in Esmeralda use the Sage background (5th edition D&D Basic Rules), although adjusted, so that instead of the Researcher Feature they can access legal and criminal information and are more adept at gathering evidence (advantage on pertinent Wisdom rolls).
- **Fae escapee or maroon:** those who escape from human or Fae slave masters use the Urchin background (5th edition PHB/Player's Handbook), adapting its lore. Maroons know city *and* wilderness secrets on maroon enclaves; while Fae escapees know about supernatural traps that send people to other planes and can learn from rivers and trees, who may warn them about possible Fae intrusions.
- **Inquisitor:** inquisitors (from Heroika or

elsewhere, see the Heroika and Exorcist entries) use the Guild Artisan background (5th edition PHB). Rather than artisan tools, they have proficiency with torture tools. Moreover, they do have political *and* religious power: some people see them as saviors, others fear the fact that anyone could be branded a heretic and face the consequences. The Insight and Persuasion skills help them in their investigations, and Insight can be used and is relevant also regarding supernatural lore.

- **Wilderness scout, explorer or wanderer:** natives or explorers who travel deserts, jungles and the wilderness and know its secrets, being able to locate its hidden temples and treasures use the Outlander (5th edition *Player's Handbook*) background.
- **Skills:** as mentioned above, New Athkatlans can use the Animal Handling skill to train horses and send them with messages, while natives can do the same with parrots and macaws (who could be trained to steal or bite as well). New Athkatlans with the skill, if they as a bonus action succeed at a Dexterity DC 15 check, also can gain advantage in their next attack roll, when fighting from horseback. Their cavalry is feared for a reason. After or before the attack they can move (on horseback) only at one third of the normal movement. Moreover, this advantage can be gained only twice per combat, and if the DC fails it is exhausted.

MAGIC ITEMS AND SPELLS

Food for gold (cantrip and 1st level divine spell): when cast as a cantrip, the caster turns gold no larger than his fist into corn. If cast as a 1st level spell, by pointing at a gold no larger than a Llama, priests of Qotal or other benign Maztican gods turn that gold into mayz (the same weight and mass). This spell does not work

in the Desert of bones. When cast as a 3rd level spell, they can turn steel weapons into corn if the holder of the weapon fails a dexterity saving throw. This has permitted Esmeraldians, for instance, to slowly, with repeated castings, turn a whole wall of gold into corn, as happened in Talaesta by slaves led by Tukul; or to defeat large Faerûnian armies by rendering their “weapons” useless.

Kukul’s punishment (1th level arcane [hishna and pluma] spell): if the target of this spell fails a wisdom saving throw, it is unable to cast any spell the next round. If the spell is cast at higher levels, the target is unable to cast spells for a number of rounds equal to the level at which the spell is cast (2 rounds if the spell is cast at 2nd level, 3 rounds if cast at 3rd level and so on). This spell was developed in Esmeralda by the Hishnaliad (or taught by the great Condor to them, depending on who you ask) and later taught elsewhere in Maztica to help mainland Mazticans deal with Faerûnians. It proved to be quite effective. It is both a pluma and hishna spell.

Cantrip Cleansing Flame: as described in the Exorcist entry.

Artifact The book of Freedom: the book on liberty written by Narin, who was executed for drafting it, was blessed by Qotal and Ilmater. Those who have it can inspire members of the Republics to set their differences aside. It has

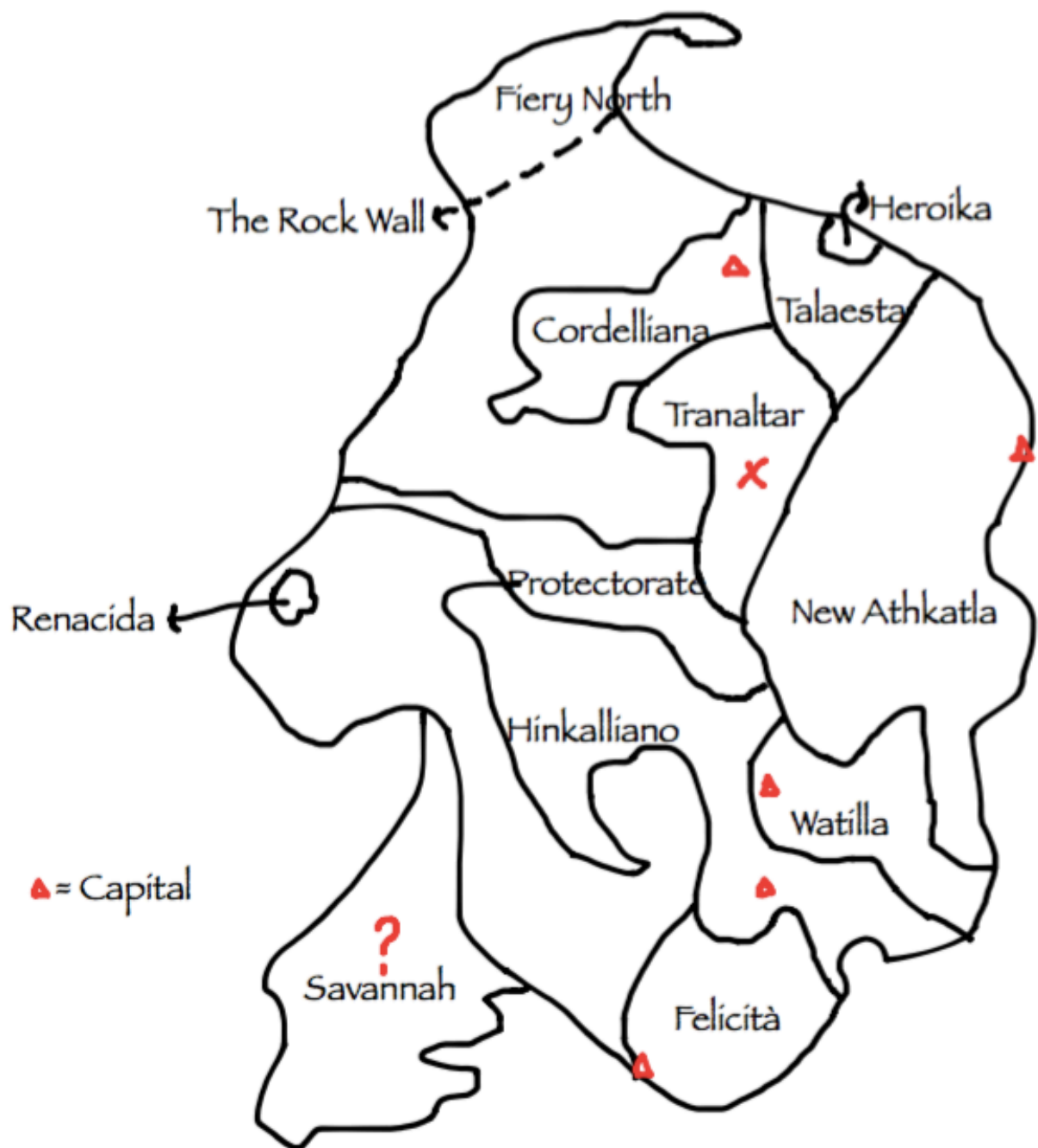
been lost since the Republican forces committed abuses.

Artifact the Fang of Simonus: when injuring Ibernú the Dragon, a fang of Simonus fell to the Earth and became a sword. It is a Holy Avenger sword (see the 5th edition Systems Reference Document, SRD) that also has the properties of a Sword of Sharpness and a Sword of Wounding. The Junta in Hinkalliano steals this sword from a Marsemberla (Protectorate) museum during the campaign.

The Skull of Auch: this skull is a prison for the soul of Auch, an Aarakocran priest of Tezca who tried to kill Sol and Luna. He persuades the wielder that he is a divine messenger, and subtly manipulates him to get rid of humanity in the island or to hurt and pervert it. If spoken to at night, the skull allows the casting of Sacrificial Magic for the following day, without the committing of any sacrifice or the risks of casting it. It is currently possessed by the Lord Protector Heroicus.

Ward of Esmeralda: this 7th level spell is described in the ‘Fang and Feathers’ book (available at: <http://www.dmsguild.com/product/174719/TWM2-Feathers-and-Fangs--A-Book-of-Spells-for-the-True-World>)

Map of Esmeralda



ESMERALDA, AN ISLAND WHERE SEVERAL REPUBLICS SECEDED FROM A RACIST EMPIRE STILL ATTEMPTING TO RECONQUER THE LANDS IT LOST - INDEPENDENT REPUBLICS NOW FACING TERRORIST THREATS AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME; AN ISLAND WHERE RESTLESS SPIRITS AND FAE THREATEN MORTALS; WHERE FAERÛNIAN MAGIC IS NOT RELIABLE AND FIREARMS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED; WHERE AN INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL IS SPIED UPON WHEN TRYING TO DELIVER JUSTICE AMID ARMED CONFLICTS; WHERE PIRATES PLUNDER THE SEAS AND PRIVATEERS FIGHT THE PROXY WARS OF NATIONS; WHERE LOST AND HIDDEN TEMPLES CONNECT TO OTHER WORLDS OR EMPOWER SHAMANS; THE BIRTHPLACE OF AARAKOCRA; WHERE VIGILANTES ARE BORN AND DIE EVERYDAY IN THE SLUMS OR MANSIONS; WHERE BESIEGED CITIES FACE DEATH OR GLORY; AND WHERE SACRIFICIAL MAGIC TORMENTS THE LIVING AND EXORCISTS FIGHT AGAINST THE SUPERNATURAL AND SCHISMS. IT IS A LAND OF LOST WONDERS, SECRETS AND PERIL.

THE BOOK INCLUDES THE OVERVIEW OF THIS MAZTICAN ISLAND, ITS PEOPLES AND NATIONS; THE RULES OF SACRIFICIAL MAGIC; THE ESMERALDIAN EXORCIST CLASS; BACKGROUNDS AND MORE TO PLAY IN THIS ISLAND TO THE WEST OF MAZTICA, IN THE FORGOTTEN REALMS. A DOMAIN

OF DREAD ORIGINALLY FROM ESMERALDA IS ALSO DESCRIBED IN THE BOOK.

NEW MECHANICS INCLUDE THE NOTION OF SPIRITUAL HIT POINTS, ATTACKS AND ARMOR CLASS: SOME MYSTICAL BEINGS CANNOT BE HURT BY SPELLS OR WEAPONS, BUT ONLY BY THE DEEDS AND FAITH OF PIOUS SOULS.

FIND OUT ABOUT THE HISHNALIAD: A CABAL OF ASSASSINS WHO HAVE CARRIED OUT ATTACKS AGAINST FAERÛNIANS... AND CONTINUE TO DO SO IN THEIR OWN LAND.

THIS BOOK IS 73 PAGES LONG.